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SUMMER 1987 • VOL. XI NO. 1&2

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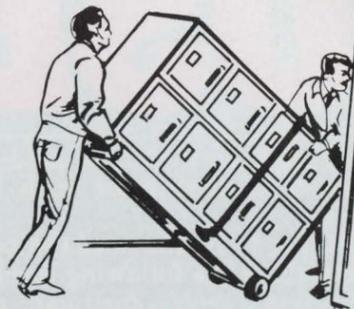
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DESIGN

Bryan Gee, Chris Reed

CONTRIBUTORS

Bruce Barber, Sara Diamond, Sheila Goldgrab,
Isobel Harry, Leila Heath, Clifton Joseph,
Gary Kibbins, Joel Kumove, Laureen Marchand,
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PHOTOGRAPHS & ILLUSTRATIONS

Robert Bean, Dennis Day, Justin Hall, Tony
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Lynne Fernie/Type A

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Delta Web Graphics, Scarborough

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LETTERS

Spinning Wheels

THANKS BUT NO THANKS FOR Varda Burstyn's "Porn Again" (*FUSE*, Spring 1987). Thanks for the facts it gave about the new developments on the censorship front but no thanks for the senseless trash of anti-pornography feminists.

For the record: I have never said that pornography is the theory, rape is the practice. Robin Morgan said it something like ten years ago and feminist work on pornography has blossomed since then. My own view is that pornography is the practice, women are its victims. Pornography is defined here as the sexually explicit subordination of women in pictures and in words. It is produced through systems of gross exploitation and consumed in ways that maintain women's subordination. I am not working on a video with Denise Guardian. I have never said anything so simplistic as "pornography causes violence;" my study is designed to uncover how pornography is used. My views are not "already formed" and over the past ten years my writings on the subject have shown change, even retraction.

Having said all that, let me comment on Burstyn's perceptions of the political landscape. Burstyn believes that anti-censorship feminism arrived too little too late to foil the impact of monolithic anti-pornography feminism. I think she's wrong about why the anti-censorship movement hasn't turned the tide. The reason why the anti-censorship forces haven't moved women away from anti-pornography positions is because anti-censorship politics have been articulated by patronizing activists like Burstyn who think theirs is the only sophisticated politic around (hence the use of that odious term "reductionist" to describe

radical feminism), who support the sometimes flattering but usually false notion that all of us can be reduced to one term (hence MacKinnon equals Cole who equals Dworkin who equals Barlow) and who refuse to believe women who describe painful experiences of being made into pornography and having pornography forced on them.

As long as Burstyn keeps this up, her analysis of the state, her meticulous research on censorship excess and her important promotion of alternative visions will wind up being a pathetic waste of time and the anti-censorship movement will just keep spinning its wheels.

—Susan G. Cole
Toronto, Ontario



Illustration by Tony Hamilton

Filthy Games

VARDA BURSTYN AND GARY Kinsman in their articles on the new censorship laws, were quite right that we must emphasize what *will be censored* under these new laws (and is already, under the old ones) and not let the discussion stray into fake social science ("having these laws on the books is going to alter the way people behave") and general moralism ("what this law says is *right*, so having it must be *right*"). It never hurts to be reminded of the political nature of all laws, and to be informed about the political use of would-be 'progressive' issues.

The effect of censoring sex (which has a long, ignominious, *political* history) will be to turf out talk about the sexually marginal *instead* of protecting women and children from violence. After all, punishing people after the fact is hardly the same as preventing the problem in the first place.

This is government by Public Opinion Poll, where questions are framed in order to get as many people to agree as possible. Questions or ideas that avoid drawing people together on the basis of common interests have no existence in our political arenas.

People asking questions about our society, or who believe we can make a better world, are X-ed out in advance from having our ideas discussed or even reported on and thus taken to people in other parts of society. But the whole notion of *political* movements, whose interests are to create a better world, gets turfed out as well. And politics remain framed in bureaucrat's and manager's terms, occasionally alleviated by a short season of moral outrage (such as the Anti-Porn Feminist crest days Burstyn describes).

continued page 4

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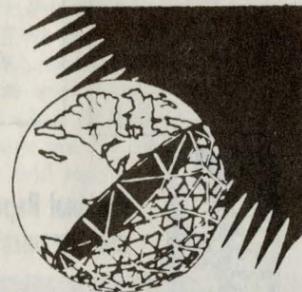
But 'Porn' is not a moral issue any more than sexism is. They are *political* issues. And if some impassioned young feminists think making them moral issues 'too,' adds to the importance and justice of the feminist position, they are mistaken. Burstyn refers to the arrival of MacKinnon-type Anti-Porn politics in Canada in the mid-80s, and I have seen the effect of it on women I grew up with (I'm 25). One Christmas I came back from art school in California to find that a bunch of my formerly highly conformist high school friends had turned into what they took to be red-hot feminists. That should be a 'good thing,' but these women were never exposed to left wing or socialist politics, never really came to question the social order, and never made a commitment to opposing the dominant social institutions. They immersed themselves in bureaucratic campus politics and used the ideas coming in from the Anti-Porn movement as truisms to stand for, not theories to examine, and it all fit in very well with the traditional social science method and world view they were learning. I mean, geez, once people went off to universities, which are Adult Formation Zones (middle class sector), and got exposed to (shock!) *socialism* and how the world *really* works; one would think they would become radicals because they were Pissed Off! — not because they were good at statistics.

Of course this is a sad story, because of what was lost: young women who could have become part of, at least, a Canadian liberal sensibility promoting those great liberal causes that make life under capitalism that much easier — the welfare state, freedom of expression, etc., instead of becoming mouth-pieces for reaction. But *they* lost the chance to become part of a less politically and emotionally restricted social world. The ones I know seem quite well innoculated against radical ideas. (Partly because the previous 'generation' of left politics hadn't and doesn't convey them sufficiently to us young ones.) My young feminist friends *know* what the problem is; they *know* what they're going to do about it. Any kind of general questioning or state of

uncertainty is not what they signed on for, not what they ever wanted.

Where MacKinnon and Dworkin play their filthy games in the U.S., there is a big civil liberties lobby and sensibility as well as other feminists with access to the means of communication to counter the Anti-Porn influence. Up here their easy-to-eat intellectual conformity and easy-to-make alliances with government and reactionary forces have had a relatively free run at dominating feminist consciousness. It's an unpleasant era and I hope Burstyn's right, that it's on the ebb. But Canadian feminism will remain skewed for some time to come.

—Conn Suits
Toronto, Ontario



Credit Due

RE: "LISTENING IN" BY DOT TUER (Spring 1987, Vol. X, No. 6).

Dot Tuer mentions only briefly the fact that Oliver Kellhammer's installation *Ear to the World* was combined with a week-long series of workshops, an evening lecture by media critic Herb Schiller and a panel discussion.

When Paul Petro came to the Electronic Art Committee at A Space with a proposal to present "World Information Order," the decision was made to combine his proposal with Kellhammer's installation.

Credit must be given to Paul for his contribution to the success of this week-long event.

— Nancy Paterson
for the Electronic Arts Committee
A Space, Toronto

ERRATA

The following are corrections to text that was inadvertently bungled in Varda Burstyn's "Porn Again: Feeling the Heat of Censorship" (*FUSE*, Vol. X, No. 6).

p. 14, col. 1: In the fall of 1986, Mrs. Jones was appointed by the one-and-a-half-year-old Liberal government as successor to Mary Brown,...

p. 18, col. 1-2: But so far, there's no coordination or collective strategizing, and only the loosest form of informal, individual consultation between local groups.

p. 18, col. 2: ...coming month. Another meeting, following the reach-out, was held on April 16.

Our apologies to the author and our readers.

Miscredited: In "A History of Toronto's Anti-Apartheid Movement, 1921-1986 (Part Two)," the photo of the 1975 ALD Parade on p. 27 should have been credited to photographer Roger McTair.

We apologize for the error.

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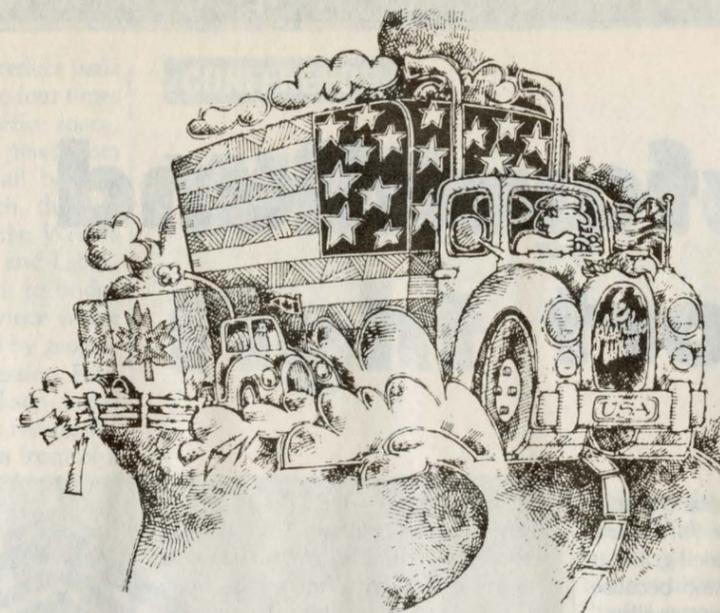
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Robert White, *President, CAW-Canada*

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CULTURE

Newfoundland Report

ST. JOHN'S — Newfoundland's only arts publication, *Arts in formation* was denied a Canada Council grant at the jury's most recent session because of what it called "insufficient quality."

The three-and-a-half-year-old magazine had received Council funding since its inception. Although the amount, \$6,000, was low, it was a vital part of their funding as it was used for honaria for writers, photographers, and graphic artists.

Arts in formation had received warnings about the level of production work and their wide-ranging interpretation of their mandate to focus on "Newfoundland culture." The editorial collective decided this could include the Labrador Innus' struggle against low level flying, which disturbed their traditional lifestyles, and unemployment culture in a province where only forty per cent of the people have full-time jobs.

The decision was still unexpected. Two staff members, Gerry Porter and Joan Sullivan, met with Council representative Luc Jutras during the recent Canadian Periodical Publishers' Association meeting to discuss the decision. They pointed out that Council funding was supposedly in place to lessen the impact of market economics on small magazines, and that many of the production techniques the jury apparently wanted from the magazine were either unavailable in Newfoundland or four times more expensive than in Toronto.

Jutras promised to visit the magazine before the next session.

Although a provincial government job development grant and some funding from the local arts council will keep them going until August, they have no funding on line after that.



Photo: Justin Hall

CONFERENCE

Willing to Fight

Meanwhile, they plan to reduce issue frequency of the magazine to four times a year and give up their office space, perhaps permanently. The news from the arts community isn't all bad. A writers conference in March, the first such gathering, produced the Writers Alliance of Newfoundland and Labrador. The Alliance will work to bridge information gaps in a province where writers are as much isolated by geography as by their chosen profession. Freelance writer Lawrence Jackson urged writers to continue, to "stop feeling like an imposter when you sit in front of a typewriter, brazen it out. Writing is a portable trade, all you need is a pencil, some paper, persistence, and preferably a working spouse."

Bill Gough, author of *Maud's House*, proclaimed Newfoundland was "on the verge of the greatest renaissance of writing Canada has ever seen."

There was also good news for publishers. The Newfoundland government has decided to tender some of their lucrative textbook proposals solely to local publishers. Previously these were snapped up by large mainland publishers, which could provide books they already had on their shelves. Not only did this hurt the local publishers, it also resulted in some strange information being passed on to students. One textbook defined an iceberg as a "small bird that visits Newfoundland in the spring." Clyde Rose of Breakwater Books predicted that the decision would have "repercussions across the country."

In theatre, the Resource Centre for the Arts continued its community theatre series with *Ntesinian (Our Land)*. The small, artist-run theatre which rose to a national profile with collectives like *Terras de Balcahau*, stages a community production each year. Two actors, including Mary Walsh of CODCO theatre fame, spent several weeks in Innu hunting camps with four Innu actors writing the show. *Ntesinian* toured to both critical acclaim and some backlash from the business community of Goose Bay, which is anxious to attract a NATO military base there. Charles Tomlinson, the new animateur of RCA, plans the next community stage production to focus on the safety of offshore trawler workers.

Gerry Porter
Joan Sullivan

NOVA SCOTIA — Artists who are members of Canadian Artists Representation, artists affiliated with other organizations and others who are entirely unaffiliated, joined forces at Church Point, Nova Scotia, May 21-23, to give expression to their resolve that Canada's artists have a strategic profession in Canadian society, and must take control of their own future. CARFAC hosted the three-day symposium, under the banner Action Now!, at Université Ste.-Anne, and with assistance from the Canada Council's Atlantic Project Fund, and the Nova Scotia Department of Culture, Recreation and Fitness, brought together artists from across Canada, from the Yukon and the Northwest Territories to Newfoundland, to face common problems and solutions.

CARFAC

Although the symposium's panels ranged from copyright to the role of the Department of Communications' Advisory Committee on Culture, the conference's hottest sessions proved to be on federal pornography legislation and exhibition rights for artists. If the positions taken by this group are an indication, fighting for change will continue to take up a large part of the Canadian artist's time.

These two major discussions produced two equally important resolutions: 1) that Canadian artists oppose censorship, and will do everything in their power to block the passing of the pornography bill, and 2) that CARFAC take whatever steps necessary to

facilitate the creation of a publicly funded Public Use Commission which would pay exhibition and related fees to every artist who exhibits in a publicly funded space in Canada. The effects of both resolutions will be broadly felt.

Other sessions ended with both formal and informal expressions of intention: to do a major overhaul on the CARFAC fee schedule so that it more accurately reflects the cost to artists of exhibiting; to recognize the importance of fair treatment of artists rather than "special" status; to adopt the position of the Writers' Union of Canada that abstract statements should come after cheques; to step up attempts to persuade artists to hold out for contracts and galleries to accept them; to continue to support the primary distribution of Canadian cultural product by its creators and oppose unfair application of tax laws.

An early session called the State of the Provinces Address, given by CARFAC Provincial Representatives, showed that across the country artists are dealing with cutbacks, government insensitivity and the need for attentive monitoring of funding agencies, legislative bodies and educational and exhibiting institutions. We spend more and more time protecting our interests, which takes effective time from work. Our strengths are being dissipated in survival issues; lobbying is a way of life. The rest of the symposium showed that artists are willing to continue to fight, and will do so until they can live and work in situations which are only appropriate to the importance of the work they do.

Laureen Marchand
Provincial Representative
CARFAC Saskatchewan

VIDEO

Choice Epic

TORONTO — *Struggle for Choice* is the first documentary video on the struggle for reproductive choice in Canada from the 1969 repeal of the Federal anti-abortion laws to the present struggle to maintain the Morgentaler clinics in Toronto and Winnipeg.

Video and audio interviews, archival footage of the labour and women's movements and photos of events and demonstrations were uncovered and assembled to piece together a history of abortion and women's health services in Canada.

The video, by Nancy Nicol and Janis Lundman, uncovers the history of the Abortion Caravan of 1971 which called for free abortion on demand, and organized a cross-country driving tour to publicize the issue with the slogan "Smash Capitalism." This radical women's movement declared war on the Canadian government and caused a closure of Parliament for the first time.

The video emphasizes the gravity of the problem for working class women attempting to gain control over their bodies. Reproductive freedom of choice remains an illusion as women's health services are cut back by provincial governments across the country. Interviews with women in small communities such as Smithers, B.C., where Right to Life groups are strong and women's health facilities are few and under attack, are a reminder that for most Canadian women in 1987 who live outside an urban centre, are working class, and not English speaking, access to abortions is still not possible.

The video looks at the social, political and economic context in which the Women's Movement has waged its fight



Photo: Susan Stewart

Production stills from the making of *Struggle for Choice*.

Photo: Susan Stewart

LITIGATION

Vagabonds

for reproductive choice. Major gains in access to abortions were won in Québec in the 1970s. These victories were achieved by a confident Women's Movement fighting within the context of broad social upheaval led by Québécois workers in the trade unions. In 1972 one of the largest general strikes in Canadian history was organized by provincial government workers (largely women) in the Fédération des employés de services publics inc. (CSN). In the next few years of radical labour and nationalist struggle, slogans such as "Droit d'avortement libre et gratuit — Free abortion on demand" were raised by many feminists and trade unionists. The Morgentaler clinics opened in Montreal in 1973, and in 1978 a clinic providing free abortion on demand was established in the CSN building in Québec City. The Québécois National Coalition for Free Abortion on Demand (CNALG) and government health care workers began to provide free abortion on demand in local community clinics.

The video's director Nancy Nicol takes a controversial stand by criticizing what she sees as the "legalistic" strategy adopted by the Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics (OCAC) in defence of the Morgentaler clinic. "At the centre of Morgentaler's campaign is a tremendous faith that the state and the judicial system will yield the reform of the judicial law despite years of prosecution at the hands of the state and its courts." Her view is that freedom of choice cannot exist without decent jobs, access to universal health care, and day care.

Only by building a strong working class movement can this take place. "Only such a movement can redress the continued prosecution of the doctors by the state and push on to provide services for all women," the video's narrator states. She also criticizes the NDP for giving "verbal support" for abortion while prosecuting the Winnipeg clinic.

Nancy Nicol's position has met with angry criticism from many in the women's movement who view the legal fight as part of the building of a broader movement for choice.

Struggle for Choice is 5 half-hour videotapes that can be rented from V/tape in Toronto.

Sheila Goldgrab
Joel Kumove

VANCOUVER — The final act in Paul Wong versus the Vancouver Art Gallery took place on April 30th in the B.C. courts. Wong had filed another breach of contract action against the gallery based on verbal discussions with then-acting programme coordinator Scott Watson about the possibility of an exhibition. The discussion occurred immediately upon the departure of Joanne Birnie-Danzker, the gallery's previous director and appeared to herald a cooling off of the agonizing battle between Wong and the gallery that followed the 1984 cancellation of *Confused, Sexual Views*.

The 1987 discussions with Wong were terminated by the gallery board's executive because the artist and gallery were still involved in appeal proceedings of the previous court case. The offer and retraction opened barely-healed wounds for Wong who respond-

ed with the second suit against the gallery. The gallery in turn has served the artist with a bill for the costs of the first case (which were awarded to them).

The second action was heard by Judge Gibbs, the same magistrate who presided over the first case against Rombout and the gallery. He dismissed the second case, chastised the artist and again awarded costs to the gallery.

While Wong may be out of court and deeply in debt, the issues of artists' contractual rights with galleries in Canada are not yet resolved. Without question, others will face the same problems around commissioned work being cancelled as has Wong. Let's hope that future organization by artists will win contractual rights providing recourse to such a drawn-out and painful route through the court system.

Sara Diamond

JOB OPENING POSITION OF COORDINATOR

A SPACE IS SEEKING APPLICATIONS FOR THE POSITION OF COORDINATOR. AS A MULTI-DISCIPLINARY, COMMUNITY-ORIENTED CENTRE, WE HAVE A COMMITMENT TO FORGING LINKS WITH NON-MAINSTREAM COMMUNITIES OF ART INTEREST.

INTERESTED APPLICANTS SHOULD DEMONSTRATE EXPERIENCE IN COMMUNITY-BASED ISSUES AND HAVE A BROAD KNOWLEDGE OF CONTEMPORARY CANADIAN CULTURE AND ART. A THOROUGH KNOWLEDGE OF CORPORATE FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND COMPUTERIZED SYSTEMS IS REQUISITE.

PLEASE SEND RESUMES AND A LIST OF REFERENCES TO:

A SPACE
PERSONNEL COMMITTEE

ALL APPLICATIONS MUST BE RECEIVED ON OR BEFORE AUGUST 15, 1987.

A Space

183 Bathurst Street, 2nd Floor, Toronto, Ontario, Canada
(416) 364-3227 M5T 2R7

VIDEO NEWS

Kim Tomczak

THE A.F.I. (THE AMERICAN FILM Institute) is looking for video works by Canadians on or around the subject of sexuality. Contact: Bill Horrigan at A.F.I., 2021 North Western Avenue, P.O. Box 27999, Los Angeles, California 90027, U.S.A. The A.F.I. is the institute responsible for the NATIONAL VIDEO FESTIVAL.

THE TENTH ANNIVERSARY TOKYO VIDEO FESTIVAL is coming up. The deadline for entries is September 10, 1987. Categories include: General, Art Inspired, and "Video Letter Exchange." Video Letter Exchange is defined as "... compositions that explore the possibilities of video as a means of two way communication." Entries must be under 20 minutes in length and may be on VHS, BETA or 3/4". For more information contact: JVC Company of America, 41 Slater Drive, Elmwood Park, New Jersey 07407, U.S.A. — Attn: Tokyo Video Festival.

PUBLIC ACCESS, THE COLLECTIVE of artists and writers responsible for the electronic billboard project entitled "Some Uncertain Signs" is on the move again. This time they have organized a video wall project at a shopping mall in Mississauga (a suburb of Toronto). The video wall consisting of a matrix of 36 video monitors, entitled The Lunatic of One Idea will feature the work of the following artists: Chris Martin, Su Rynard, Dennis Day, John Greyson, Rosemary Heather, Thomas Taylor, Vera Frenkel, Eldon Garnet, Laura Mulvey, Kass Banning, Ian Murray, Nancy Paterson, Victor Burgin, Kryzstof Wodiczko, Michael Lasovich, Christian Morrison, Paulette Phillips and Geoffrey Shea. "The Lunatic of One Idea" runs from August 31 to December 31, 1987 at Square One Shopping Centre in Mississauga, Ontario.



Still from *Astroturf* by Michael Balsler.



Still from *Pleasure* by Rowley Mossop.

PRODUCERS IN TORONTO HAVE found a cost effective way of premiering their work by organizing collective screenings. Costs such as publicity and equipment rental may be shared and a wider audience is often generated this way. Two such screenings recently were ANOTHER WORLD (Five Video Premieres by Gay Men) featuring George Growshaw, David Maclean, David McIntosh, Rowley Mossop, and Michael Balsler and FOUR NEW VIDEO TAPES (By Toronto Based Artists) featuring Rhonda Abrams, Dennis Day, Tess Payne, and Su Rynard.

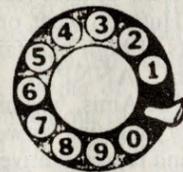
BILL C-54, KNOWN AS THE PORN BILL needs to be stopped. If you need info to base your opposition on, contact: CRTV, P.O. Box 69376, Stn. K, Vancouver, B.C., V5K 4W6 (604) 876-4786 or: OAAG, 439 Wellington St. W., Toronto, Ontario M5V 1E7, (416) 598-0714 or Coalition Against Bill C-54, 566 Palmerston Avenue, Toronto, Ontario M6G 2P7 (416) 536-6581. Or write directly to the Hon. Ray Hnatyshyn, Minister of Justice, Sixth Floor Registry, 239 Wellington St., Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0H8.

THE 2ND INTERNATIONAL VIDEO WEEK will take place in Geneva, Switzerland in the Fall of 87. This year's Video Week will feature a retrospective of videotapes by Marcel Odenbach (West Germany) and Gary Hill (USA) as well as an international video competition. The deadline for entering the festival is very soon. Entries should be in Geneva by August 15, 1987. All genres of video are accepted, but tapes must be submitted on 3/4" cassettes. NTSC, PAL or SECAM video standards are acceptable and the videotapes may be in any language. Contact the organizing committee: Andre Iten, Simon Lamunier or Emmanuelle Mack at St-Gervais Maison des Jeunes et de la Culture, 5 rue du Temple, 1201 Geneva Switzerland. Tel: (022) 32 20 60.

FOR UP TO DATE INFORMATION about video festivals, distributors, reports and reviews you should subscribe to Video Guide. This essential tabloid format periodical is published 5 times a year and an annual subscription costs only \$10. Please note Video Guide's new address — 1160 Hamilton Street, Vancouver, B.C. V6B 2S2 Tel. (604) 688-4336. Video Guide is also on the look for articles. Contact Managing Editor Shawn Preus for details.

Stills courtesy of Vitape.

HOT LINE



This column is an attempt to de-privilege producer gossip, some workaday grief, and organizational information. For an artist-critic and editor of a state-funded magazine, such commentaries invariably create a conflict of interest. I am heartened to imagine that American poet/activist Gil Scott-Heron would find humour in this by saying: "Conflict of interest? Damn right! Their conflicts — our interests!"

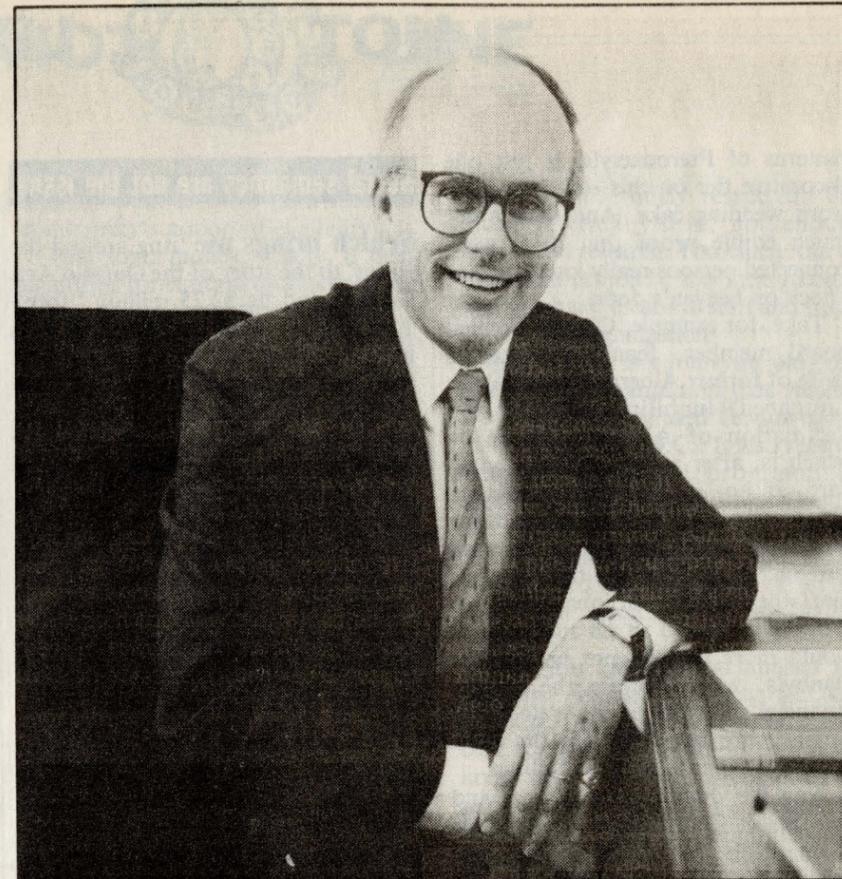


Photo of Christopher Woolten courtesy of the Ontario Arts Council

Unveiling the O.A.C.'s new Volkswagen
Mayworks 2
Computer Art or What?
There's A Space For Us
Brother Black Is Back

HOW MANY ARTISTS WILL FIT INTO A VOLKSWAGEN?

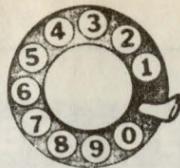
Funding agencies have always had problems with 'popular' and 'industrial' forms of contemporary art. While it's true that professional artists have received funding to produce intermittent projects such as fanzines, videodiscs, vinyl records, artists' television, etc., there has been no collaborative long-term rationalization of how to allow for the autonomous development of our immense contemporary cultural resources.

Part of the problem has been the arts funding agencies' marriage to an outdated political mandate, which allows them to reward and stimulate "excellence in the arts." In twelve years I

have never heard one jury member apply the adjective "excellent" when favourably supporting an application.

In reality, the "visual arts" section — historically used to incorporate projects which otherwise don't have a category — has created a bizarre relationship between producing clients, arts-funding administrators and bureaucrats who are forever caught between a rock (the clients) and a hard place (their government-appointed board of directors). That the latter well-heeled elite know as much about the contemporary struggle of artists (or anyone with a below-poverty level income) as they do about the migratory

Clive Robertson



patterns of Pterodactyls, is just one decorative tier on this stale, window-worn wedding cake. And there's not much edible proof that these well-connected persons really know how to knock on heaven's door.

Take, for example, Canada Council board member, Jeanne Loughheed's (wife of former Alberta Premier Peter Lougheed) inability to affect the decimation of Alberta Culture — which is, after all, in her own backyard, if not in her own immediate jurisdiction. It's not a comfortable experience watching appointees and bureaucrats fluffing the fight for our rent/work money, our jobs. The token artists who get to sit on such boards would more usefully not be the Ken Danby's, who illustrate the narrow financial successes of the system, but artists who can articulate the more common experience of its failings.

Both the Ontario Arts Council and the Canada Council have questionable mechanisms for getting input and political strategy suggestions from the various communities of producers and their representative organizations. These get-togethers/soundings/consultative committees invariably have agendas that have been set by 'the host'; and worse, 'the invited' are often called in to ratify decisions that have already been made. This method fails because it denies equity, disallows untried paths of formal negotiation, and, over time, increases the client's (be it individual, organization or association) suspicions and mistrust. (Which is exactly what happened with the setting up of the Canada Council's Media Arts Section.)

What appears to stop the pot from boiling over and messing up the stove, is the practice of spreading money around so that the most visible artists and organizations are kept, if not happy, at least occupied and cautious about demanding structural redistribution of funding. The pragmatic and mostly cynical 'reward strategy' is never entirely operative, because even in this time when the educated middle class have returned to pampering their mediated lifestyles, artists, when pushed, continue to value principles over careers and promised rewards.

Social semantics are not the issue.

Which brings me 'ring around the roses' to the story of the Ontario Arts Council and its \$2.25 million "folk" fund. Chris Wooten, the O.A.C.'s newly-appointed Director brought from Vancouver a desire to see money going to forms of contemporary art normally devalued as being "folk" or "popular." This would include contemporary native arts, Caribbean-Canadian arts, South American-Canadian and Asian-Canadian work. (A counter-rumour has it that the new programme is a directive from the Ministry of Citizenship and Culture applying a little multicultural grease to an electorate expected to vote sometime this fall.)

The programme, to be unveiled in September, would allocate \$250,000 to assist the "development of management expertise" with a further \$1 million a year (for two years) to be spent on eligible projects. A quick two-week study was conducted by Gary Crystal (of Vancouver Folk Festival fame) with a further study beginning in July from an O.A.C. committee composed of "board members, staff, and outside consultants."

Preceding yet paralleling this development, there has been an increase in artists' collective demands for catch-up 'affirmative action' (see *FUSE*, *Working Odds*, April 1987), along with a related series of proposals from ANNPAC, the Independent Artists Union, and CARO on matters including equitable funding for women, native artists, artists of colour and artists living outside of Toronto. Add to this VAO (Visual Arts Ontario) and OAAG's (Ontario Association of Art Galleries) dissatisfaction with the "arbitrary approach in how money is given out by the Visual Arts Office" (advisors giving evaluations over the phone; the anonymity of advisors after the process is complete), and you have majority disapproval from all responsible visual arts services and representative organizations. Visual Arts Ontario, which only receives 4% of its funding from the O.A.C., even has suggestions from among its 3000 mem-

bers that it take the invisible funding policy matter up with the provincial ombudsman, to initiate an inquiry into how O.A.C. visual arts funding is allocated.

During the last twelve months, O.A.C. officers Nancy Hushion (Visual Arts) and Judy Gouin (Video, Film, Photography) have made various public and private statements to the effect that the O.A.C. already services artists of different racial and ethnic backgrounds, women artists, and artists living in different Ontario regions.

Nancy Hushion went one step further in acts of both bad faith and bad judgement. ANNPAC Managing Director, Ric Amis, was invited to an introductory meeting between the new Director and representatives from Ontario's visual arts organizations. At the appointed time, when Director Chris Wooten called for questions or comments, Amis reportedly voiced the opinion of Ontario artists, artists organizations, and artist-representative organizations by saying that there is a strong concern about the inequitable distribution of O.A.C. funding throughout the province. (While ANNPAC has yet to do a study on artist-run spaces, their research on O.A.C. funding for projects and material assistance found that 85% of the money stayed in Toronto.)

Following the meeting, Hushion called the Ontario ANNPAC rep and asked for a letter of apology for Amis' "offending remarks." The offence is that ANNPAC, the IAU, CARO, VAO and other organizations hold diametrically different opinions from the internal O.A.C. staff on the fairness of existing funding policies. Hushion took it upon herself to displace Amis at the subsequent 'sounding' on the new folk art programme. Amis was replaced by the Ontario ANNPAC rep, Nataley Nagy.

FUSE called the new director, Mr. Chris Wooten to get information on the imminent 'folk' programme. Yes, the programme is on. And while not wishing to create too many advanced expectations, yes, the programme "will identify excellence in areas of multicultural, folk and popular cultural activities." Does this mean

that we can expect to see, for example, funding of Canadian-Caribbean projects for records, books, theatre, video? "Yes."

FUSE also spoke with artist/poet Lillian Allen, one of the persons contacted for the Gary Crystal survey. Allen reiterated her concerns: "It's not a lot of money and we don't wish to be ghettoized into this new programme, we want equal access to all the other programmes." Allen did not want the programme to further "the structuralized racism which excludes, from the Canadian cultural consciousness, people of colour." Allen further pointed out that artists of colour within her own community who have become visible, "have worked twenty times as hard as anyone else, and in future that cannot be expected as a norm." Allen also recommended that "cultural development officers from within the various communities

identify what is there (and meet the community's notion of eligibility)."

That some money, finally, is being identified for cultural productions that currently exist without funding is welcome news. That such a programme develop into long-term operations money is going to be essential. That it's entirely possible that the "folk" projects will have to go through the already problematic system of adjudication is of some significant concern. Who will be the "outside consultants"? As there aren't many existing representative organizations founded and controlled by artists of colour, will the O.A.C. seek the advice of other organizations that don't currently represent such artists? (Which is what is already happening.) Or will the O.A.C. beef up its own staff to include members from the racial groupings who will be submitting proposals? ●

Photo: Dennis Day



Interior shot of Toronto's Inter/Access.

"NO MONEY!"?

Though by no means a unique case, I/A (Inter/Access, previously known as Toronto Community Videotex), a non-profit computer-based art access centre,

was seemingly cut off from the Canada Council's Media Arts Section when its annual funding allocation dropped from \$25,000 to zip.

The Integrated Media division of the larger Media Arts Section (that administers video, film, photography, holography, computer-related art sub-

sidies) is not widely respected. Too much internal vision; not enough client/field research. Too much 'can we support a project?'; too little recognition of what it means to start and stop a user-access organization.

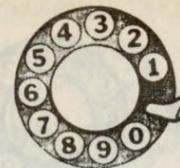
Inter/Access is a four-year old bona fide service organization that recently received \$40,000 of used Telidon equipment from the D.O.C.. It also receives administration and programming monies from the Ontario Arts Council and project monies from the Toronto Arts Council and Metro Toronto. I/A also assisted the launching of an independent electronic art magazine, *Nexpress*.

This year Inter/Access applied for the same amount of money, \$25,000, only this time chose to earmark it as core funding. Big problem. We don't know what to do with the application said the jury. There's no money for operations said the Section's administrators.

Saying there's no money is like saying there's no sex. Isn't the economy booming (in Ontario), or is that just banker-talk? Isn't 'developing technology and R&D' a linch-pin in our industrial strategy or was it a makeshift diaper-pin? What was the Integrated Media Section set up for if it could not follow through on its promises? Why (again) make artists' organizations bear the brunt of Council's internal fund-allocation politics?

Members of Inter/Access met with Council representatives and were told the organization can come up with a project application of \$15,000. No application forms. No jury. The reason offered for disallowing funds was that they would have to take the money away from other organizations.

Inter/Access is a solid organization that has plans to save all past computer-generated work made on equipment that is now obsolete. Look for artist-in-residence programmes, more state-of-the-art workshops, public screenings of work, etc.... Membership is \$50 per annum. Equipment available includes MacPlus, Amiga, Norpak, IBM AT/XT, Apple II Plus, Atari. (For more information call (416) 535-8601.) ●



MAYWORKS 2

The second annual "festival of working people and the arts" took place in Toronto, May 1st - 10th in no less than 22 locations and with the support of 33 labour organizations: from the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) and the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) to rank and file support from locals such as Communications and Electrical Workers of Canada, Local 25.

Also on board, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, were the Ontario Arts Council, the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Culture, the City of Toronto Arts Council, the National Film Board, the Department of Communications: Cultural Initiatives Programme, and the Canada Council. The D.O.C., for example, attempted to extricate themselves from a promise of \$10,000, and only after strenuous lobbying from various labour and arts heavies was \$7000 forthcoming. The Ontario Ministry of Culture and

Citizenship upped its contribution from \$12,000 to \$15,000 to offset the shortfall making a total budget of \$80,000.

Mayworks is the brainchild of artist Catherine Macleod, with advice and assistance from progressive unionist D'Arcy Martin (Education Director, CWC). The ambitious festival, this year co-ordinated by Sue Ditta, is still not without its teething problems. The same segment of the cultural community that looks at labour with hopeful eyes, still sees Mayworks as taking temporary responsibility for cultural programming one week out of fifty-two.

Down on much-maligned Queen St., Mayworks' visibility was limited to eight banners, four retail window-works and Labour-specific exhibitions at A Space and Partisan, all much welcome but existing programming that already happens two or three times a year. Ditto for the music, video, film and theatre programmes.

Another problem, not so far

avoidable, has been booking active arts-spaces without knowing if the funding will come to support the programming — which places the artists-workers in increased levels of financial insecurity which they could well do without.

In a Labour-Arts post-festival evaluation meeting, these concerns and others were brought to the attention of the Mayworks board. This year's labour fundraiser Ed Seymour suggested, as did others, that the festival be organized earlier in the year with more profile. Seymour observed that efforts be directed to the progressive unions who, as expected, support Mayworks — those being CAW, CUPE, OPSEU, CWC, the Steelworkers, and PSAC. Carole Conde, a member of this year's Mayworks board, suggested that the festival was limiting itself by continuing a tradition of "lefty artists talking to lefty unionists" instead of introducing work into the shop or plant floor. Karl Beveridge, a member of the Arts & Media Committee, Labour Council of Metro Toronto proposed artist-in-residency programmes at the workplace and suggested that both artists and labour should be careful not to patronize one another.

Gayle Hurmuses, a photographer and member of CAW Local 303, pointed out that art produced by members of any union's local could and should be exhibited. Hurmuses also reiterated her union's recognition of artists' economic rights. In a lighter vein, with autoworkers producing art as secondary employment, the 'professionals' around the room silently wondered if they were to be expected to produce cars?

Jose Kaufman from Partisan asked if Mayworks shouldn't choose a theme around which work could be created, while meeting participants from the CWC told of auctioning art at their local to raise their contribution to Mayworks.

All in all, nothing but good is going to come from Mayworks assisting a socialization process and collaborative projects between full-time artists and full-time unionized working people. ●



Mayworks poster by Barbara Klunder.

THERE'S A SPACE FOR US

A Space, externally credited as the "most progressive" artist-controlled organization in Toronto (and one of three remaining membership-controlled artist spaces), moved ahead one more notch at a recent members' meeting (June 10th). Well-known across the country for its implementation of a decentralized programming committee structure, (see also *Artviews*, Spring 1987) the membership was duly shocked to hear of a staff member being fired by senior staff who called in the police following an informal job-grievance dispute.

A Space, which underwent major shifts in political administration both in 1978 and 1982 (reported in *FUSE/Centerfold*), had not caught up with clear procedures to handle recurring job tensions and burnouts with a management/personnel committee structure in lieu of actual unionization of staff.

Adding to the confusion, during a month-long investigation process, was an abrupt eviction notice to A Space's tenants: Women's Art Resource Centre, Emma Productions, and the Toronto office of the Independent Artists Union.

While tensions were as high as in 1978 or 1982, the issues were dealt with by the membership in a civil and calm manner resulting in quashing the eviction notices and reinstating the fired employee — all by a large majority vote. The senior co-ordinators, Doug Sigurdson and Michael Banger stood by their actions and resigned prior to the members' meeting. Though there had been historic tensions between the board of directors and the staff, the co-ordinators acted within the existing authority to hire and fire staff.

What makes these incidents of public value is the increased need for such non-profit artist organizations in times of more artists, less money and less jobs to work out equitable contracts and grievance procedures where-in staff, artists and volunteer labour

achieve a working balance of power, respect and remuneration. The fact that most artist-run organizations do not have democratically elected boards, nor democratic and decentralized programming policies, adds to the pressures of Toronto's artistic working environment.

A Space continues as a vital organization that is determined to put its democratic cultural theories into practice and thereby deserves support and increased active membership. (\$15/annum for both voting and programming rights. Call (416) 364-3227.) ●

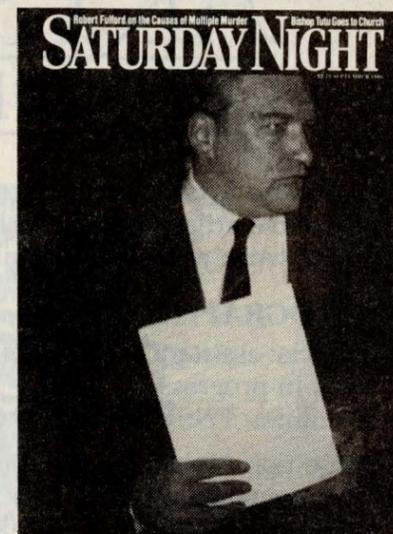
BROTHER BLACK IS BACK.

Why was there so much shock that Conrad Black purchased *Saturday Night*? Black, regular columnist for the *Globe & Mail's* "Report on Business," purchased the blue-blooded periodical from Dascon, a holding company jointly owned by the *Globe & Mail's* Editor-in-Chief, Norman Webster, his brother William and sister Mary Gallagher. Since Dascon refurbished *Saturday Night*, its appearance and editorial thrust has been aimed at the same upper middle-class market occupied by the *Globe & Mail's* own *Toronto* magazine.

Black is also the owner of *The Daily Telegraph*, a paper favoured by the pet-loving British. Dull to read, the ever-resourceful Brits buy the paper as litterbox-liner — supposedly because their privately educated felines and canines quickly nod off while reading the same on their toilets.

Saturday Night is also an active member of the Canadian Periodical Publishers' Association (CPPA) and we look forward to Brother Black giving us trade workshops on how we can efficiently cut back on our under-paid staff.

Now that Mr. Conrad has *Saturday Night*, *FUSE* is patiently awaiting a phone-call from the ever-competitive Bassetts who just might be in the market for a cultural newsmagazine. Of course they'd have to change the



Collage by FUSE.

"OK, John (Fraser) I won't interfere editorially, but remember we both promised Maggie a column. We'll use a damn pseudonym if necessary..."

name. Odds on favourite is 'Mac-Profit.'

But the penultimate word should go to Michael Enright, news director for CBC who was quoted in a *G&M* article by Liam Lacey as saying: "Conrad Black has always reminded me of Richard Nixon; now they've both had their Saturday Night massacres. But if owning his own magazine will keep him out of print, then he'll have done us all a favour."

With Chrysler selling used cars as new ones, and with kiddiporn coming out of UNICEF, don't be surprised if the new *Saturday Night* includes Maggie Thatcher's guest columns on privatizing thought, the National Citizens Coalition's fashion supplement on hand-washable military uniforms, Vander Zalm's op.ed feature on dead flower-arranging, and — so that *Saturday Night* can qualify for arts funding (sorry, 'industrial development') — the mystical and concrete poetry of Messers Mulrone and Crosbie. ●

Clive Robertson

ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL

The Ontario Arts Council offers grants to professional artists who are residents of Ontario, working in the following media:

PHOTOGRAPHY

- Projects: assistance for new projects or work-in-progress.
Deadlines: February 1, August 15
- Exhibition Assistance: towards the cost of an upcoming exhibition.
Deadlines: February 15, April 15, June 15, August 15, October 15, December 15

VIDEO

- to assist with the production of original video art.
Deadlines: February 1, August 15

ELECTRONIC MEDIA

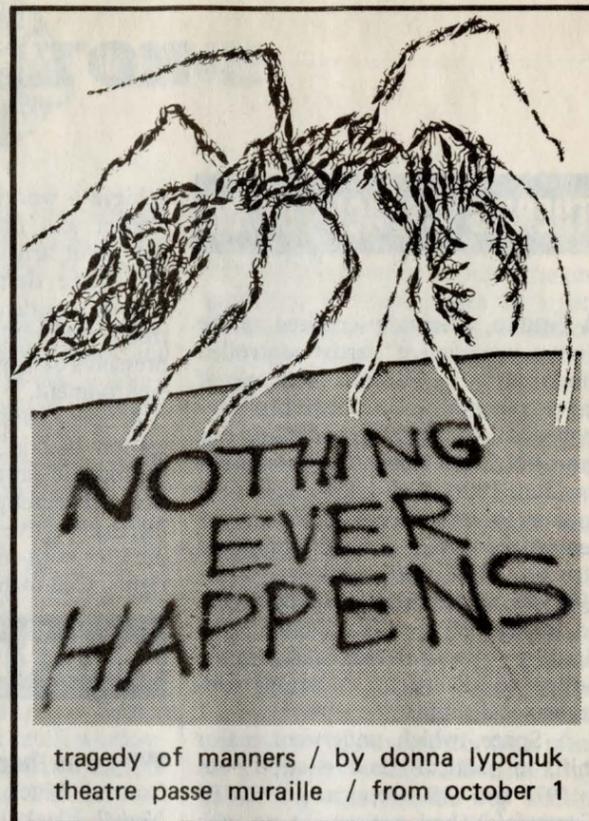
- to facilitate creation of works of art using electronic media; to facilitate research of potential significant benefit to the arts community into the creative possibilities of electronic media.
Deadlines: May 1, December 1

FILM

- to assist with the production of documentary, dramatic, animated or experimental films.
Deadlines: April 1, November 1

For information and application forms, contact:

Film, Photography and Video Office
ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL
151 Bloor Street West
Suite 500
Toronto, Ontario
M5S 1T6
(416) 961-1660



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ASIAN NEW WORLD VIDEO

image from series poster

THE POSTER ADVERTISING ASIAN NEW WORLD PORTRAYS AN ATTRACTIVE IMAGE OF BABIES AND TECHNOLOGY APPROPRIATED FROM A PEOPLES' REPUBLIC OF CHINA PROPAGANDA PLACARD. THE CHERUBIC FIGURES PLAYFULLY HOLD CAMERAS AND LOOK OUT INVITINGLY AT THE VIEWER. THE SET IS AN OPTIMISTIC VIEW THAT THE WORKS ON DISPLAY WILL BE PROGRESSIVE, INNOCENT AND FULL OF LIFE. ONE SHOULD NOT BE FOOLED BY THE POSTER, HOWEVER. THIS SERIES IS ABOUT ALIENATION.

by *Elsbeth Sage*

The reality of the works chosen is highlighted by the introductory remarks made to me by Paul Wong, one of the curators. He stated that he was not interested in speaking to a white audience in answer to my questioning the limited curatorial base of Asian-only producers and directors. ('Asian' was defined by the curators in terms of race not geography.) He felt this was a necessary exclusion, to showcase works that are often overlooked or unnoticed in the sea of 'white' artists who dominate the video world. It gave me pause to think that this regressive and exclusive attitude was perhaps

necessary and helpful. On the other hand, perhaps the curator was being less than honest in saying he was not trying to address a white audience, when in fact that audience was his primary focus.

The structure for the series, outlined by curators Karen Henry and Paul Wong, had a dual purpose. According to Wong it was "through efforts such as this video series that we will broaden the current media arts network to be more inclusive and they in turn will include us." Yet this attempt to become part of an existing network must be done, according to

Henry, in a "way to alleviate stereotypes by actively participating in a dialogue of difference in which distinct realities have a voice." A fine line to draw and one at which the series was moderately successful.

The 18 videotapes chosen were divided into four categories: "Identities," "Bitter Fruits," "Recent Past" and "Modern Myth and Ritual." The series was shown over four consecutive nights in programmes that varied in length from 82 to 100 minutes. It was possible to attend one or all four screenings and not lose the context because the categories were only loosely related.

The first category, "Identities," was about being visible in a dominant white culture. In Valerie Soe's tape *All Orientals Look The Same*, ridiculing that racist statement, and Richard Fung's *Orientations*, differences were shown as based on race rather than culture. The racial distinction meant pain. In Rii Kan-zaki's *Mochi Tsuko*, on making mochi (Japanese rice cakes), the cultural distinction was celebrated. In ritualized ceremony in Hawaii participants retain their culture and pass it on to the children. This sort of contradiction was evident throughout the series. One of self-denial and shame hand in hand with a cultural chauvinism that celebrates privately.

In "Bitter Fruits" we entered the world of Chinese cafes and laundries, the economic backbones of the first Asian communities. From the funny, optimistic Benetton-ad view of inter-racial fraternization of Tony Chan's *Chinese Cafes in Rural Saskatchewan* to the much more serious and realistic view of Yuet-fung Ho's *Eight Pound Livelihood*, the audience is left with mixed emotions. The lingering impression is of the street interviews in Ho's tape, where the question was posed, "Why do Chinese do laundries?" The answer, freely given by more than one of the interviewees, "Because that's all they know how to do I guess." Both tapes, in dealing with the common occupations of new Asian immigrants, bring out the glaring dichotomy of a bachelor society (after the 1923 Exclusion Act in Canada Chinese men were forbidden from bringing their families with them), and Chinese men were forced to do 'women's work' in a society that allowed them no female contact.

The final tape in "Bitter Fruits," *Montgomery's Boat People* by S. Nakasako and V. DiGirolamo, dealt with the newest immigrants and how government-imposed racism in restricting where and how these people can ply their traditional fishing livelihood has had to become much more clever and far less obvious. The new regulations cannot restrict the boat people based on race as the 1800's legislation did. The present-day racist attitude is covered up in an argument about the types of net used by the



Photo: Paul Wong

Still from *Chinese Cafes in Rural Saskatchewan* by Tony Chan.

Vietnamese and environmental issues. This is necessary, in the words of one of the non-Asian fishermen interviewed, "Because those people catch too much fish."

All of the tapes in the third category "Recent Past" were overshadowed by the gravity of Keiko Tsuno's *Invisible Citizens: Japanese Americans*. Although this category included two other strong tapes, such as Nam June Paik's *Guadalcanal Requiem*, (which the curators referred to as "a landmark work of contemporary documentary art"), the sheer emotional drain of Tsuno's tape made it the focus.

Like the historical perspective on the Exclusion Acts covered by many of the tapes in this series, the issue of the Japanese internment cannot be mentioned too many times. The injustice is highlighted by the stories of two members of the 442nd Battalion (an all-Japanese U.S. army

unit that suffered terrible losses in WW2). Done in John Alpert-style verité (and with the involvement of DCTV), we confront the human toll of internment face on. One of the survivors interviewed lost his sight, the other lost both legs. Yet they bear no malice to the system/state that did not thank them for their sacrifices. They justify why the American citizens of Japanese origin cooperated with internment. They state repeatedly that it was "to prove our loyalty to the U.S.," "it was our bit for the war effort" and "we wanted to be good Americans." The issue is made all the more painful as illustrated in the final portion of the tape because, unlike the many other injustices of WW2, this particular episode of internment is still not publicly recognized as a wrong.

It was almost with relief that one attended the last night's screening of "Modern Myth and



Photo: Paul Wong

Still from *Guadalcanal Requiem* by Nam June Paik.



Photo: Paul Wong

Still from *Ati Ati Han* by Marlin Oliveros.

Ritual," which included the "video art tapes" (Wong). We were finally shown work by artists who just happened to be Asian. None of their work, with the possible exception of Nam June Paik's *Bye Bye Kipling* touched on the issues of the three previous categories. The curators were correct to end the series this way. It was time to lighten up.

"Modern Myth and Ritual" began with the sensuous, conceptual piece by Ruby Trully, *The Journey*, where she slowly laid out several eggs on a sheet of black plastic, while intoning quietly "I always knew I would have to go back one day." The tape ended with the eggs being crushed under her closely-viewed bare feet. *Ati Ati Han* by Marlin Oliveros (one of the best tapes received judging by audience response), provided a personal document of the fall of Ferdinand Marcos in 1986. Instead of documenting the tur-

bulence in the street, Oliveros shot an intimate, emotional and physical look at one small celebration in Manila's Luneta Park. Men and boys with their bodies painted green danced to the drum beat associated with some private ritual.

With the exception of the last category in this series, the underlying theme is one of pain, suffering and self-denial. Each work in turn looks at the confusion and misunderstanding brought on by cultural displacement. The human element is very strong. The curators are right to point out, just as the tapes do, that "a hybrid has emerged that is just as tough, just as clever and just as assertive." It is an unfortunate testament to society that this development had to be a reactionary one.

The artistic merit of the works varies considerably, a not surprising fact with the curatorial requirement of being Asian as a basis.



Photo: Paul Wong

Still from *Bye Bye Kipling* by Nam June Paik.

This meant that all types of productions were included. Hence we have, in the same night's programme, the slick, 'state-of-the-art' work by Nam June Paik, *Bye Bye Kipling*, and the first tape, rock-video style, of Fumiko Kiyooka. The two works would never have been put together in a forum that linked them by some other consideration. At the same time, there was work which was clearly 'art for art's sake,' with any message being of secondary importance, juxtaposed with tapes in the NFB and DCTV documentary style where the message was basic and artistic quality incidental. An added dimension for visual appreciation was to take the works off the monitor (with the exception of one 2-channel piece), and show them on a large screen.

There was no question of the success of the series as a video screening. Three of the four nights were shown to a full house. There was obvious interest in the subject, by both the participating artists (the curators received far more tapes than they could possibly screen), and the audience. The dialogue and profile of an "Asian New World" consciousness was apparent. Coupled with the strong educational value of the works, the curators were justified to speak of an *Asian New World II*. Clearly, there are people willing to deal with the tough and often painful questions raised by this series. There is a demonstrated desire to go beyond and deal with the curators' summation that "the ethnic reality has little voice or presence beyond its cultural ghettoization as an exotic heritage."

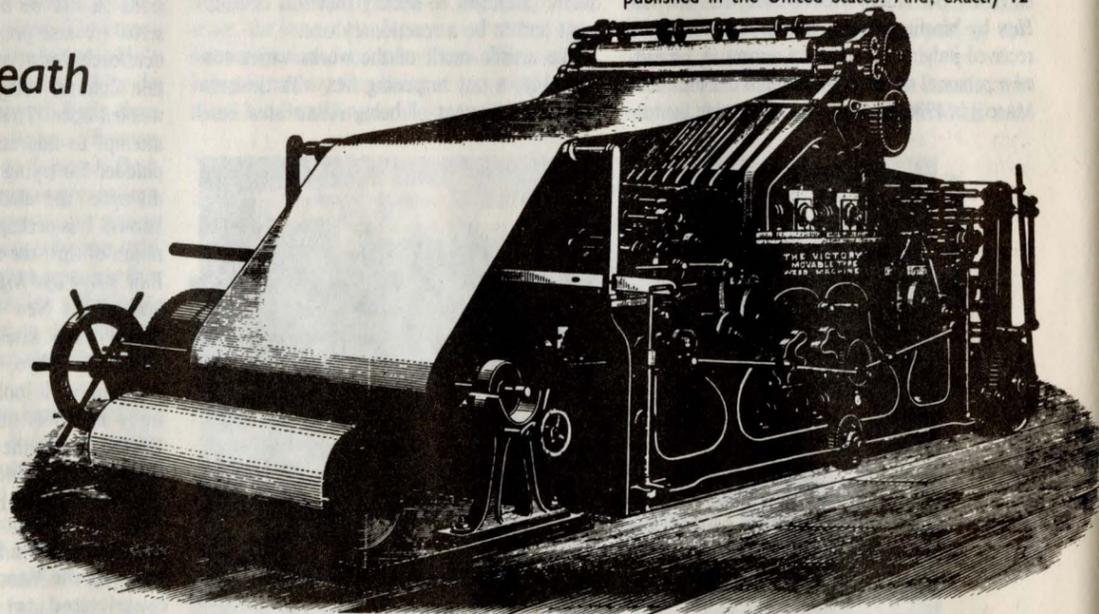
The complex problem of how this should be done, whether a distinction between submissions should be based on race, as with this series (reverse prejudice to redress past injustices/exclusions), versus an attempt to maintain cultural integrity through other means, was left open. This series, while not the first to attempt to address this issue, should be applauded for trying. The point here is to create dialogue, the method to achieve that is unknown. It is perhaps no accident that, in recognition of this, the series ended with Nam June Paik's *Bye Bye Kipling*. In it, Dick Cavett, the host of the New York portion of the NYC/Seoul/Tokyo satellite link-up, said to Issey Miyake in Tokyo, "I have no idea what you've just said but it looked like you meant it." The irony here was that Miyake was speaking in English, we as the audience heard and understood him, but Dick Cavett did not. Technical problems? I somehow doubt it. ●

Elsbeth Sage is a freelance writer and critic active in the Vancouver arts scene. She has contributed to *Vanguard* and *Cinema Canada*, and as co-founder of the non-profit society *On Edge*, has mounted co-productions with the *Western Front* and *Video In*.

BLACK INK

An Historical Critique of Ontario's Black Press

by Leila Heath



In 1970 there were some two hundred ethnic publications in Canada, one with a continuous life of eighty years, thirty-five in the Ukranian language alone. In Canada's history there were 23 Black publications, with only 3 surviving 1970. The average life of the publications had been less than two years.¹

That was Robin Wink's terse assessment of the impact of Black newspapers in Canada nearly two decades ago. A Yale University historian, Winks had uncovered a wealth of information about the first Black presses but was hardly able to predict the proliferation of newspaper organs that would begin to address the great number of Caribbean immigrants that would arrive here between the late sixties and the early eighties. This article will review some of the materials Winks and other historians have uncovered about the pioneering Black presses. It will also attempt to pick up where Professor Winks left off by examining the current crop of Black-owned newspapers. Why were they created? How have their owners and journalists defined Black journalism? And what future might these newspaper organs have?

But first, let's see what Robin Winks and his historian colleagues found out about the early Black presses. Canada's pioneering Black-owned newspapers rolled off the presses in the 1840s and 1850s. Over a hundred years after the arrival of the first African slave in New France. A decade and a half after the first Black newspaper was published in the United States. And, exactly 12

WHILE THE 1850s marked the tumultuous beginnings of the fugitive slave press in Canada, it would take another hundred years before the current crop of Black newspapers would emerge. Several important factors coincided, contributing to their emergence: an unprecedented wave of Afro-Caribbean immigrants to Ontario; the euphoric rise of Black cultural nationalism worldwide and the escalating civil rights struggle south of the border.

years after the Emancipation Proclamation ended slavery in Britain and throughout her colonies.

Ironically, these early newspapers were not the work of Canada's original Blacks (ex-slaves) but American fugitives seeking refuge on Canadian soil. These three pioneering newspapers: *The British American* (March 1845); *Voice of the Fugitive* (1851-1857); and *The Provincial Freeman* (1853-1857) would become the first to chronicle the collective histories of south western Ontario's Black population in those two decades of the mid-nineteenth century.

That these publications had short, precarious histories should tell us something about the communities from which they emanated and to which they were directed. Professor Robin Winks of Yale University's History Department provides some clues in his book, *The Blacks in Canada*: "The fugitive Negro sought out his own kind increasingly as time passed, scorning the descendants of the Loyalist and slave Negroes."² Furthermore, Winks wrote, "Negro communities were too transient, readership too small, levels of education too low, advertizers too few, subscribers too faithless, the competition from other English-language newspapers too great for survival."³

Despite their rather short life-spans, these early newspapers were more than simple "propaganda sheets" aimed at rallying runaways to settle in Canada. Not only were these organs abolitionist in persuasion but more importantly, they came to reflect the early developments of two distinct ideological camps among free-thinking Blacks in the New World: the segregationist versus the integrationist.

Printing only one month's issue, *The British American* was the shortest printing of the three. Henry Bibb, fugitive, abolitionist, founder, publisher and editor of *Voice of the Fugitive*, a bi-monthly, was the self-styled segregationist. Mary Ann Shadd, a once fulltime editor of *The Provincial Freeman*, a weekly, was the staunch integrationist. Shadd was a free Black, educator, journalist, anti-slavery crusader and recruiter in the Union Army.

It was these two pioneering newspaper editors who would set the tone of Black presses in Canada. That their efforts have been largely forgotten,

overlooked or omitted in most Canadian history books says a great deal about what place Blacks have been accorded in Canadian society. Whatever the reasons for these omissions, it appears history seems to have been kinder to Mary Ann Shadd and her publication, *The Provincial Freeman*. And one wonders why?

In his book, *The Freedom-Seekers: Blacks in Early Canada*, Canadian sociologist and historian Dr. Daniel G. Hill refers to Shadd as the *The Provincial's* "most colourful writer." Hill also calls that newspaper the "more militant" of the two. It is important to note that Dr. Hill is a leading human rights advocate, a respected sociologist, a prominent and celebrated Black Canadian historian. Whether Dr. Hill is guilty of revisionism or an over-zealous appreciation of Shadd's ideological views is not clear.

Writing a decade earlier, Professor Winks was less effusive, though he admitted *The Provincial* was the better publication. "Better" here meaning "more professionally" put together. Winks wrote: "Some of the papers were well-edited; indeed *Provincial Freeman*, published between 1853 and 1858, was as good as any weekly in Canada West..."⁴ A white American historian, Professor Winks appears considerably less generous in his appraisal of Shadd's ability as a writer. For though he called her "a vigorous, honest and outspoken" editor, he thought little of Shadd's eloquence. A point, one might say that is highly subjective, debatable and quite possibly irrelevant.

Just who were Henry Bibb and Mary Ann Shadd? And why would they become pioneers of Black newspaper publishing in Canada? Ordinarily, these questions should be easy to answer but they aren't. This is partly due to incomplete historical evidence. However, this writer would like to engage in some deductive reasoning and creative speculation.

It is possible that *The Provincial's* assimilationist thrust made it more palatable to white abolitionists and those "wealthy, coloured citizens"

¹Shadd was one of several editors of *The Provincial Freeman*. Its founder and editor in name only was the notable fugitive slave Samuel Ringgold Ward. Ward never wrote for the paper but spent most of his time travelling through Britain raising funds for various Black causes.

eager to become fully accepted by whites. We do know that Shadd was a writer and educator at a time when there were few competently trained Black teachers. Prior to leaving America for Canada West, she had taught school in New York and New Jersey. She would resume teaching at a private school in Windsor from 1851-1853. Shadd was forced to resign her post because of a public scandal involving the concealing of funds she had received for the school's operation. It was her arch rival Henry Bibb who would leak that damaging story in his newspaper.

In addition to her teaching and editorship of *The Provincial*, Shadd authored several pamphlets including: "Hints to the Coloured People of the North" (1849) in which she is said to have underscored the importance of Black self-sufficiency; "A Plea for Emigration: Or Notes of Canada West in its moral, social and political aspects with suggestions respecting Mexico, West Indies and Vancouver Island" (1852); and "A Voice from Harper's Ferry" which documented abolitionist John Brown's ill-fated raid in West Virginia in 1862.

Both Shadd and Bibb were members of the Anti-Slavery Society of Canada. Quite possibly Shadd's membership in this organization may have helped introduce the newspaper into more integrated circles. At one time, *The Provincial* became the official printer of the Chatham Town Council. That was in 1855.

Another point that should not be overlooked is personal longevity. Mary Ann Shadd outlived Henry Bibb. When a fire damaged Bibb's printing shop in 1853, the business never fully recovered. He died the following year amid charges of fraud and unscrupulous solicitation. *The Provincial* folded three years later with Shadd's return to America where she became a recruiter in the Union Army. After the war, she became a school principal and later a lawyer. Historians know all this about Mary Shadd because her letters and unpublished manuscripts are in the public archives. Even to this day, the Shadd clan remains an important Black Canadian family in Buxton, Ontario. Mary Ann Shadd's name was recently immortalized with the opening of a new public school in the Scarborough Board of Education.

Voice of the Fugitive editor Henry Bibb, on

the other hand, left no such body of literary works. In June 1852, he published and distributed "The Anti-Slavery Harp," a collection of anti-slavery songs. Besides his editorship of the newspaper, Bibb's only other known writing was autobiographical and aptly entitled: "Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, An American Slave." In this autobiographical account, the Kentucky-born ex-slave turned editor-publisher must have told of his half-a-dozen successful escapes from slave-masters and his extensive travels from Michigan to Pennsylvania on behalf of the anti-slavery cause. By Henry Bibb's own admission, he had been "educated in the school of adversity, whips and chains."⁵ But rather than squash his determination to be free, this seems only to have spurred him on.

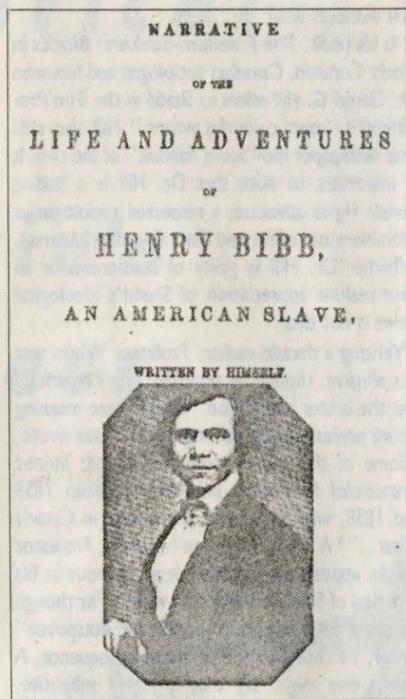
On arriving in Canada West in 1851, Bibb and his wife Mary opened a school in Sandwich. The facilities although less than adequate provided minimal education to the area's Black children, who were not allowed admission into the common schools. But it was probably Henry Bibb's humanitarian endeavours in another area that had caused him the gravest problems. His involvement with the Refugee Home Society, a land purchase and colonization scheme targeting fugitives and which he aggressively promoted through his paper, made him Shadd's arch enemy. Shadd opposed the scheme in principle since she did not support the creation of segregated Black communities. In fact, she would go to great lengths to prove that Bibb was engaged in fraud, not fugitive-directed benevolence.

These accusations severely damaged Bibb's reputation and that of his newspaper. But it seems, he might have paid an even heavier penalty. History has not been kind to Henry Bibb. While Yale University historian Jason Silverman calls Bibb's *Voice of the Fugitive* the publisher's "greatest accomplishment," Dr. Hill pointed to his questionable motives. "Certainly, he (Bibb) seems to have been a strangely contradictory man. He was hard-working, but aggressive, devoted to the cause of Black freedom, but willing to defraud the very people he worked to help. It is certain," continues Hill, "that he believed that Black refugees would stay in Canada for only a short time and would return 'home' to the U.S.A. when conditions there improved. This belief may have tempted Bibb and others to provide for their own future at the expense of their fellows."⁶

Dr. Hill does convict Henry Bibb, but the historian also praises him. "Bibb's energies were lost at the very height of the fugitive slave movement to Canada, but his newspaper had done much by documenting the history of the refugees along the Detroit frontier."⁷ Vindication? Maybe. In spite of how historians have interpreted Bibb's or Shadd's words or actions, one point cannot be

over-emphasized: their publishing efforts have left tangible written legacies. Whether historians, school trustees, teachers, intellectuals, writers and students will use this historical evidence to glean a sense of Black life in Canada West during the mid-nineteenth century remains to be seen.

Mary Ann Shadd and Henry Bibb were trail-blazers. But they were also very much influenced by their times. In his article entitled: "'We shall be heard!' The Development of the Fugitive Press in Canada," author Jason Silverman says Bibb was quite likely emulating his American contemporaries like reformer and publishing pioneer Frederick Douglass,⁸ and John Brown Russwurm.



Courtesy of Metro Toronto Reference Library

Acknowledged as the first Black newspaper woman in North America, Shadd may also have been the first woman publisher of a newspaper in Canada. She was obviously aware of the enormity of what she had accomplished, for in her final article as editor, Shadd penned: "To coloured Women we have a word — we have broken the Editorial Ice whether willingly or not for your class in America, so go to editing as many of you who are willing and able as soon as you may, if you think you are ready."⁸ It would take a century before Shadd's North American predecessors would heed her challenge.

⁸ Douglass' newspaper was called *North Star*. It was published sometime during the late 1840s. John Brown Russwurm published the first Black newspaper in New York in 1827. It was called *Freedom's Journal*.

The mid-nineteenth century was a time of fervent anti-slavery sentiment in America. When the American Congress passed the notorious Fugitive Slave Act in 1850, neither runaways like Henry Bibb nor freemen like Mary Ann Shadd were safe. The new law meant that either could be hunted like an animal and returned to an injured master or the auction block. Neither Bibb nor Shadd relished this fate. So they fled to Canada following the "North Star." They must have used the clandestine pathway of the legendary Underground Railroad. While historical accounts do vary as to the exact number of American fugitive slaves who boarded this fictitious railcar northwards, estimates range from 40,000 to 60,000.

For those fleeing American slavery, the image of Canada as a safe haven had been firmly etched in their psyches. Bibb and Shadd were no exception. They too must have fled with the spirit of these words from an anti-slavery poem of the era on their lips and in their hearts:

I'm on my way to Canada,
That cold and dreary land,
The dire effects of slavery
I can no longer stand...
Farewell, old master,
Don't come after me,
I'm on my way to Canada
Where coloured men are free.⁹

Canada was indeed a haven but as many fugitives would discover, they would have to wage their own struggles in order to be accepted. The fact is, as a colony of Britain, Canada West had had slaves. Though slavery did not flourish here as it had in the southern plantations, abolished as it was a generation earlier than in America, Professor Robin Winks notes: "Black people have been a part of the Canadian story from the seventeenth century, yet most historians have tended to study merely the several thousand fugitives who sought refuge 'under the Lion's paw' in the years before the American Civil War."¹⁰

Winks' documentation of the presence of slaves in New France as early as 1628 make for compelling reading. Regrettably, no such history texts were part of this writer's high school curriculum during the mid-seventies. Increasingly, however, the works of a new generation of historians on both sides of the border are rectifying this unpardonable omission.

According to Winks' accounts, the practice of slavery went on freely in Canada. But a harsh and unyielding climate resulted in slaves being primarily used as domestics and general labourers. Canada's slaveholders were not plantation owners but rich merchants, influential governors and members of the clergy.

Provincial Freeman.

DEVOTED TO ANTI-SLAVERY, TEMPERANCE, AND GENERAL LITERATURE.

VOLUME I

TORONTO, CANADA WEST, SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 1854.

NUMBER 26

PROSPECTUS
OF THE
PROVINCIAL FREEMAN.

Trut in God and Perseverance.

FACTS.

What Family Government is.

What Family Government is.

What Family Government is.

What Family Government is.

To the original slave population would come those who followed their Loyalist masters here after the American Revolution. The fugitives would come later. With the arrival of more runaways Winks says "small knots of Negro settlements"¹¹ appeared along the border. Since there are no records that the original Blacks had their own newspapers, it's to the existing white-owned press that we must turn to get a sense of how the fugitives were greeted.

This 1851 editorial from the *Toronto Colonist* provides an illustrative sampling. It stated bluntly, "We feel that they are coming rather too fast for the good of the province. People may talk about the horrors of slavery as much as they choose; but fugitive slaves are by no means a desirable class of immigrants for Canada, especially when they come in large numbers."¹² Sounds familiar? This editor proposed a poll tax to be levied on the head of every fugitive.

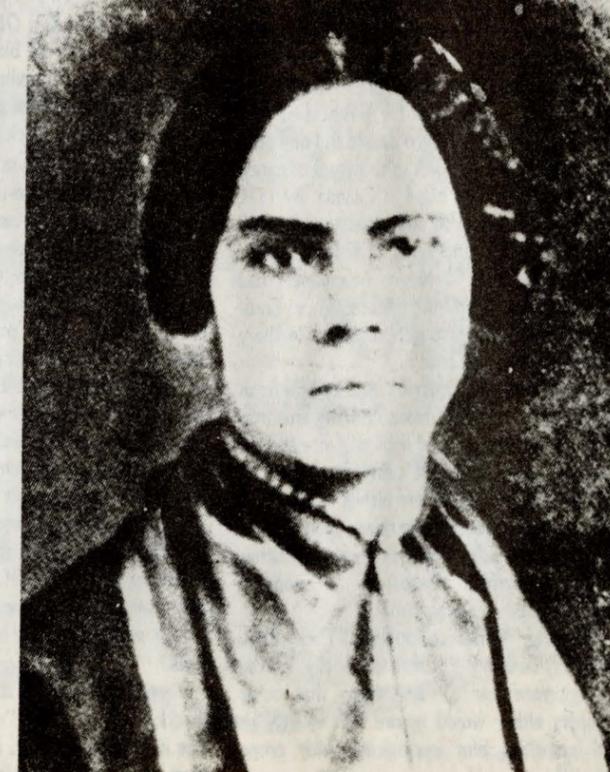
Another publication, the *Canada Oak* of Sandwich offered this surefire solution: "a speedy return to the United States, all Negroes or coloured male or female, quadroon, mulatto, sambos, half breeds or mules or conglomerates in the Penitentiary, Lunatic Asylum or other public institutions."¹³ Still another white-owned press, the *Hamilton Spectator* criticized both runaways and their white Canadian supporters.

In their defense, publications like the *Brantford Expositor* printed the odd rebuttal by an inflamed Black or a white abolitionist. But these opportunities were rare. And so, the anti-fugitive "negrophobia and vicious racist propaganda"¹⁴ continued unabated in the white press.

The early Black newspapers founded by fugitives here were primarily anti-slavery publications. Unlike their counterparts in the United States, whose editors had to wrestle with a nation divided over the issue of slavery, Bibb and Shadd published in a country where Blacks were no longer slaves but where racial superiority and subservience were still very much a part of the social fabric.

So along with its detailed reports of the advances of life in Canada for the fugitive, *The Voice* and *The Provincial* levelled an unrelenting attack against injustices directed at members of their communities. Jason Silverman notes that these pioneering publications, "...provided a vehicle for the catharsis of blacks, much as the white press did for its readers.... A Spokesman for the fugitives, the two papers expressed black aspirations for equality in an articulate and compelling manner. In addition, the black press successfully administered to the fugitives' desire for news about black events."¹⁵

LEFT:
Henry Bibb, founder
of *Voice of the Fugitive*



RIGHT:
Mary Ann Shadd,
first Black woman
publisher in Canada
and founder of *The Provincial Freeman*.

Reproduced from *The Freedom-Seekers* by Daniel G. Hill, Book Society of Canada, 1981.

VOICE OF THE FUGITIVE.

SANDWICH, C. W., AUGUST 13, 1851.

have been widely quoted in the Northern abolitionist press. He had agents in many important American cities including Syracuse, Pittsburgh, Michigan, Ohio, New York, New Hampshire and Pennsylvania.

A suspicious fire damaged Bibb's printing shop in 1853 and the business never fully recovered. *The Provincial* continued publishing until just prior to the outbreak of the American Civil War, when Shadd returned 'home' to a nation on the verge of war. When Abraham Lincoln passed the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, he declared it a War Measures policy. Soon after, a hundred thousand fugitives enlisted in the Union Army to fight their former masters.

With that exodus back to America, went the impetus for an independent Black-owned newspaper publishing sector in Canada. As publishing pioneers, Henry Bibb and Mary Ann Shadd forged newspapers in a country where freedom was promised but never truly realized. They may have failed to educate their public on the importance of maintaining a Black press but by finally "breaking the editorial ice" they would avail themselves of the rights and privileges of a free press.

Other Black-owned newspapers came and went over the next century but as Professor Winks explains, it was in the United States that these presses would evolve into big businesses. "By 1899 there were three Negro dailies and one hundred and thirty-six weeklies in the United States; at the time there were none in Canada. By 1921 there were four hundred and ninety-two Negro journals in the U.S. and again none in Canada... By 1950 at least 2,700 Negro newspapers had been founded in the United States since *Freedom's Journal* was first published, while there had been thirteen in Canada..."¹⁶

Many of these successful Black American publishers were eager to expand northwards into what remained an untapped market. Since the latter part of the nineteenth century to the late 1950s, Blacks in Canada were either unwilling or unable to create a comparable newspaper publishing sector. During this period, they turned either to white mainstream newspapers or imported Black publications from abroad.

As Professor Winks concluded: "They (Black newspapers) survived, if barely and briefly, on the quite legitimate fear of the Negro that other newspapers either would ignore him entirely or would associate him exclusively with crime reports."¹⁷

A Critical Analysis of the Contemporary Black Press in Ontario

WHILE THE 1850s marked the tumultuous beginnings of the fugitive slave press in Canada, it would take another hundred years before the current crop of Black newspapers would emerge. Several important factors coincided, contributing to their emergence: an unprecedented wave of Afro-Caribbean immigrants to Ontario; the euphoric rise of Black cultural nationalism worldwide and the escalating civil rights struggle south of the border.

True, there was a smattering of Black newspapers published in Canada in the interim, but as Professor Robin Winks notes in his book, *The Blacks in Canada*, one weekly, — *Contrast* — was first to designate itself as a distinctly "Black" instead of "Negro" press. In so doing, that organ (incidentally, it grew out of a then-existing monthly, the *West Indian Observer*) pledged on its masthead to "serve the Black community coast to coast." Prior to this, militancy, activism and race consciousness were never as clearly and consistently promoted in the Black press in Canada.

Yet, given the times in which that publication was founded, it is easy to understand why it would both claim for itself and earn from others, the title of "trailblazer" and "something of an institution, gaining prominence for its stubborn defence of Black rights." Today, however, Lionel Gayle, *Contrast's* current editor, prefers to rationalize the newspaper's less confrontational style. Gayle, who has covered such stories as the riots in Brixton in July 1981, the founding meeting of the Citizen Independent Review of Police Activities (CIRPA), the founding meeting of the Organization for Caribbean Canadian initiatives to get a re-zoning of property in Vaughan Township, and the Grenada Invasion, has had an on-again, off-again association with the newspaper since 1981. He says many rights have been won by Blacks here and *Contrast* can now turn its attention to the business of reporting the news.

There are many who strongly oppose this new direction of the once "trailblazing" newspaper. One is Elizabeth Escobar, a former editor at *Contrast*, now turned self-styled entrepreneur. Escobar

runs a restaurant on Toronto's eastside. Formerly Debra Clark, Escobar is only one of an illustrious stream of Blacks whose lives would become intimately intertwined with the 18-year-old institution. Among them: Barbadian newspaper publisher Harold Hoyte; novelist Austin Clark; Jamaican Senator Olivia Grange Walker and her brother CBC television journalist Hamlin Grange, and activist, journalist and broadcaster Norman 'Otis' Richmond.

Calling the current crop of Black newspapers "irrelevant," "ridiculous," and "ineffective," Escobar dismisses those who argue a Black press can survive and be relevant without being confrontational and hard-hitting. Such views aren't as popular today as they once were. Escobar doesn't care to be popular. She says simply and forcefully, "I don't think we have a Black press in Canada. And, the lack of a relevant Black press only serves to keep us powerless. Our community needs information if it is to act as a whole." Another former *Contrast* journalist, Norman 'Otis' Richmond, puts it this way: "Back then (the early 70s) activists and activism inside the Black press wasn't considered weird." An Afro-American, Richmond slipped into Canada in 1967. He came here like many others dodging the draft. Richmond's long association with *Contrast* has made him possibly the only journalist/columnist to have consistently made a living here within the Black press. His example is an eloquent one that says a great deal about Black newspaper publishing and the viability of Black journalists within this sector.

A 1984 copy of *Black Pages*, a mimeographed, stapled directory of Toronto's Black community listed six newspapers serving their readership, a population estimated at between 80,000 and 350,000.¹⁸ These included: *Contrast*, no longer a "Black" publication but referred to then as "West Indian." Both *Share* and *Pride* targeted a "Black and West Indian" readership, while *The Indo-Caribbean World*, a bi-weekly, claims to serve the "East and West Indian community." *The Researcher* is the final entry and professes to "encourage and strengthen multiculturalism through studies in economics, education, society and government."

Another source, the *Black Directory*, published by the Black Secretariat, an agency aimed at helping other organizations run more efficiently provides about a dozen more listings. The 1986 edition of the Directory lists other publications within the Black community: *Equality Newspaper*, *The Echo*, *Spear Magazine*, *City News Multi-*

CONTRAST

cultural and *Our Lives*, which calls itself "Canada's first Black women's newspaper." Two other Black women's publications not listed with either of these directories are: *Tiger Lily* and *Excellence*. They target overlapping readerships: "Women of Colour" and "Black and Caribbean Women" respectively. Both these women's magazines, the former published five times a year and the latter ten times per year, are the fledgling enterprises of two of Toronto's Caribbean-born publishers. Ann Wallace publishes *Tiger Lily* and has been operating her own publishing company for some time. *Excellence's* publisher is none other than Arnold Auguste, the man responsible for *Share*, a weekly, now into its ninth year.

If diversification is a sign of prosperity, then clearly publishers Ann Wallace and Arnold Auguste must be doing something right. So why is Elizabeth Escobar so upset? And why is Norman 'Otis' Richmond having quiet reminiscences of a time that once was in the Black press?

It's a natural reaction to conclude that the sudden proliferation of Black newspapers is a good thing. A sign of willingness to engage in debate and discussion; investigation and analysis from a Black perspective. Truth is, of sixteen persons interviewed, the overwhelming majority found these news-

papers and magazines lacking in their reporting and investigation of stories, in their analysis of events and trends, and in their ability to challenge, advocate and interpret contemporary reality.

The proliferation of small weekly and monthly Black newspapers could be confirming something else. It is generally agreed, that of radio, television and newsprint, the latter remains, by far, the most accessible means of mass communication in terms of skills required and costs of reproduction. So relatively speaking, launching a newspaper is still the cheapest investment of the three. Increasingly however, keeping a publication going is becoming more difficult. There are some who believe that the sheer economics of newspaper publishing has served to make the press in general, and the Black press in particular, not only more vulnerable, but more complacent, less challenging and less relevant to its readers.

In the heady days of the late 60s and 70s, many assumed that the activism and advocacy roles of Black newspapers were intrinsic to these organs. There were those who criticized *Contrast* back then. Some dismissed it as simply not radical enough. Few questioned its stance. Yet, like many of the city's young Black radicals of the era, Elizabeth Escobar says it was rage, anger and frustration

that drew her to *Contrast*.

A fifth generation Black Canadian, Escobar says that, unlike the Caribbean immigrants who arrived here in the 60s and 70s, she had lived here through the 30s, 40s and 50s. Through those years, a young Escobar would attend segregated schools, work for minimum wage and would quite likely have been stuck in the welfare system if her rage had not found an outlet. Escobar says she first channelled her anger through the Black Students' Union of Centennial College. Her protests drew the attention of the dailies, where she made headlines. Eventually, it spilled over into the Black community and onto the pages of its leading newspaper. "In 1969, I was the paper. Al (Alfred Hamilton, the paper's founding owner/publisher) wrote the editorials. I did all the writing," she tells me proudly and in a tone many would find too self-assured. Escobar will tell you many still find her intimidating. She really couldn't care less. And says so.

After two separate stints at *Contrast*, first when the newspaper was founded and again in the early 80s, a disenchanted Escobar decided to pack it all in. She and Hamilton had a serious parting of the ways when he tried to restrict her freedom as editor. There were other factors as well. But mostly, she says, "The civil rights movement has never



From the pages of *Contrast*, early 1970s.

taken root here. Most of the radicals were driven out; went underground or accepted senatorships." With this she laughs, a heartless chuckle.

And, as if silencing the radical elements wasn't enough, Escobar says, "The final straw came when the greater community said we were irrelevant, that we didn't allow them to communicate calmly with those who held power." It was at this point she says that she started to think about "covering my ass and making some money for my retirement." During the course of my interviews, there were to be many variations to the Elizabeth Escobar theme: unbridled, relentless dedication to a Black community via its press that invariably turns to burnout and mostly disenchantment.

Historically, the Black press beginning with the fugitive and anti-slavery newspapers, has always had a mission. Whether it must fulfill this mission in order to be considered a Black press is what reporter Andrea Stevens attempted to analyse in her article entitled: "The Ethnic Media: A Mission or a Business — A Look at the Toronto Black Press." Written in 1983 and published in *Currents*, the official organ of the Urban Alliance on Race Relations, Stevens observed that: "Contrast refuses to see that the community has outgrown the responses of the sixties and may now be ready to critically examine itself and the institutions that serve it..."¹⁹ Currently working as a journalist with the CBC's Halifax bureau, Stevens then made this assessment: "At present the paper cannot afford the personnel necessary to accurately document events and social trends that affect the community so it is content to spout off half-baked and sometimes inaccurate reports in the guise of serving the community."

The issue of mission versus entrepreneurship is one that has dogged the Black press since its inception. To date, Andrea Stevens has been the only working journalist to examine in any detail this complex dichotomy. Her conclusions should have encouraged Black newspaper publishers to re-examine their publications' mandates to serve a largely immigrant population, still struggling to find their way in Canadian society. From all appearances, Stevens' reflections have not been heeded.

In fact, some say the Black press may have taken a few ideological steps backwards. Take *Share* newspaper as an example. Wilson Head, sociologist and past President of the Urban Alliance on Race Relations says, "Share can't decide what it is." Head is referring to that publication's controversial distinction involving "Black and West Indian" readers/communities. Lawyer and activist Charles Roach simply says *Share's* publishers either don't understand that the need to create such a division is a holdover from the Caribbean's colonial past or they don't understand that the word "Black" is a political term. Says Roach, "The paper just wants to be less political."

"Yes, we were criticized when we made the distinction between Blacks and West Indians," *Share's*

Managing editor Jules Elder tells me. It's a muggy weekday afternoon and Elder has begged off an hour to discuss his much-maligned newspaper. His boss, publisher Arnold Auguste is abroad on business. "The fact of the matter is not all Blacks are West Indians and not all West Indians are Black," he explains. The Caribbean archipelago is made up primarily of Blacks, East Indians, Chinese and Whites. "As a business, we didn't create this market, it was here," says Elder making one final pitch to convince. Strategically, this has proved to be a sound marketing decision, since the newspaper can now actively pursue merchants, both Black and West Indian.

There are many who love taking pot shots at *Share* if only to ridicule its "positive coverage" approach to Black journalism. Elder is used to deflecting detractors. "Share is a business," he tells me convincingly. If commissioned market surveys can be trusted, *Share* leads the pack by a margin of two to one, when it comes to measuring readership. "We don't operate on grants from anybody," continues Elder proudly. "We operate solely on advertisement. There are no fairy godfathers to give us money. And, because of this, we have to operate efficiently."

From all accounts, *Share's* formula seems to be working. In its nine years of publication, the paper has gone from a weekly, 12-page, 5,000 copies run to a current circulation of 25,000 at almost three times its original size. Generally, the Canadian Advertising Rates and Data (CARD), a monthly publication considered the bible of the nation's advertizing industry, lists "ethnic" newspapers in either of the official languages in a community or consumer section. It is rare that CARD lists small publications when it is difficult to verify its circulation. And in turn, circulation figures are usually based on the amount of advertizing dollars a publication can generate.

Many may criticize *Share's* commitment to "positive coverage" or "good news" journalism, but few will debate its commercial success. Bromley Armstrong is a Board Member with the Ontario Labour Relations Board and he understands and commends *Share* on realizing that a newspaper cannot succeed without developing its advertizing base. Says Armstrong, whose own newspaper, *The Islander*, was sold to *Contrast* in August 1977 (after what he describes as five laborious years of publishing it), "In order for these small publications to survive, their owners have to devise a way to have the facilities of the paper function so that more income can be generated."

Share has obviously learned to do this. Several years ago publisher Auguste flexed his muscles by launching three new editions: a national, a Montreal and a mid-week. He has since discontinued all three, preferring to diversify with a glossy "Black and Caribbean Women's" magazine. Not

bad for an upstart who decided he didn't like how his former boss, publisher Al Hamilton was running *Contrast*. Auguste set out to do better and within nine years, he has done just that.

As newspapers which are freely distributed, *Share* and *Contrast* must depend almost entirely on advertizing. Most of this comes from small Black businesses, which for the most part do not consider advertizing a priority. *Globe and Mail* reporter Gail Lem was the first mainstream journalist to investigate this fundamental aspect of Black newspaper publishing for that daily. Under the headline: "Black press vies for advertizing," Lem stated candidly, "...when (*Contrast*) publisher Denham Jolly stripped the 25-cent cover price off the paper last summer (1983), he was acknowledging a new reality facing Toronto's 'black press.' The move to free distribution was, in fact, just one more salvo in a media war that has gripped the 'black press'...Beneath the veneer of prosperity suggested by the recent proliferation of publications is a gritty undercurrent, a vicious jockeying for advertizing and market share that has at time descended to the level of bitter personal attacks." That's putting it lightly.

While some view the proliferation of more small Black publications as contributing to a further splitting of the advertizing pie, Charles Roach raises other more troublesome concerns. He says, "Part of the simple economics of newspaper publishing is to keep the presses rolling. But what happens if an advertizer is consistently sold two full pages of a newspaper? To what degree can that paper's editorial content be truly its own?"

To the suggestion that a main financial backer may be partially responsible for *Share's* success, Elder is indignant. "I consider that an insult," he replies. Adding firmly, "There are no silent partners. We work hard here. Why should we always have to defend our success? *Share* has never compromised editorially. No advertizers are calling the shots around here."

That's not what others say or even what is widely rumoured. Charles Roach tells of at least one former Black newspaper publisher who confided to him that when an editorial had taken a position in direct conflict with an advertizer's interests, ads were lifted, accounts did get closed. Akua Benjamin agrees. She says this covert restriction of the Black press becomes even more insidious when it comes to government advertizing.

"Government is let off the hook a lot," she says, pointing to the frequency of such advertizements. The federal government's budget alone went from \$80,000 to \$500,000 between 1969 and 1982. Furthermore, during the 1977-78 fiscal year, over a million and a quarter dollars were spent by eight federal departments on government advertizing directed at so-called "ethnic periodicals." This kind of real, tangible financial

Photo courtesy of Share



Arnold Auguste, founder of *Share*.

support in the form of ads from the Multiculturalism Directorate and the Department of Employment and Immigration could certainly cloud judgement if not severely impair it.

Economics aside, what are other members of Toronto's Black community saying about the Black press? Ken Johnson, a teacher with the East York Board of Education doesn't believe in mincing his words. "I absolutely don't have any respect for *Share's* 'good news' reporting. The paper doesn't lead. It should be stepping on toes, providing hard-hitting investigative journalism." Johnson's suggestion? How about embarrassing the Black press into re-assuming its responsibility.

Saying he was among those who grew up in *Contrast's* shadow, Hamlin Grange wants to see less "rewrites" and "scalped stories" in the Black press. He believes qualitative improvements in content could be made if more capital went towards paying writers and concentrating on design. Grange says there is no doubt that *Contrast* once served Toronto's Black community well by venting its anger and showing up instances "where society has wronged us. Today," continues Grange, "the Black press has misread and misjudged its audience. The Buppies (Black urban professionals) do not want to be reminded that they are victims. There's a real 'I'm okay, You're okay' mentality out there."

Everyone is concerned it seems. But as Akua Benjamin puts it, "of those dissatisfied, nobody

seems to have the skill, talent or money to turn their sentiments into something concrete." Charles Roach concurs, "For there to be a truly independent Black newspaper, it would have to be an organ of a group for whom advertizing would not be a concern." Norman 'Otis' Richmond, noted columnist and activist, also shares these feelings. "If a (Black) publication was to come out once a month with a hard-hitting editorial policy...it might work. But it would with time be competing with all these 'free papers.' The will and the desire seems to be there, but the reality is that advertizing has become such a force that most existing organs in the community have preferred to capitulate."

Roach and Benjamin agree on still another point. They say the current complacent mood within the Black press is one that is generalized throughout society. "We are living in a right wing reactionary period and our presses have simply abdicated their responsibility to truly represent the community," concludes Benjamin. Roach says, "The mood is definitely less confrontational. And what with the plethora of government bodies from Mayors' Race Relations Committees to Human Rights Commissions, there is a sense that they are listening. This has done a lot to make the Black press feel that everything is okay."

On the question of where the Black press is going, a comment of Charles Roach comes to mind. "In an ideal community we wouldn't need a Black

press. But as long as the mainstream media continues to engage in racism by exclusion, people will want to express themselves through their own organs — no matter how disparate and incomplete that information is." On the other hand, maybe history will prove W.E.B. Dubois wrong when he said, "Race would be the most compelling issue of the twentieth century."

Already however, these presses have evolved from strictly nationalist tabloids intent on keeping newly arrived immigrants from the Caribbean in touch with their homeland, to presses that have sensed the need for us to struggle for racial equality, to the present. Here, essentially, the contemporary Black press has chosen to reflect the times rather than comment on them or attempt to provide analyses and interpretations that could help us to better understand the powerful social and political forces at work.

An emerging Black women, women of colour and feminist Black women's press, though still in its infancy, is already adding the dimension of sexuality and feminism to the accepted issue of race. Is this a "red herring" as someone said or simply "following on the coat-tail of a movement?" Or might it be the first real attempt for those dissatisfied with a parochial, chauvinistic Black press to stand up and be heard? ●

Leila Heath is a writer and broadcaster living in Toronto.

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Interviews from the 6th International Book Fair of Radical Black and Third World Books Bradford, April 1987

Clifton Joseph talks with Ali Hussein, Vusi Mchunu, Jean Giddons, Linton Kwesi Johnson, and Mervyn Morris.

THE SIXTH INTERNATIONAL BOOK FAIR OF RADICAL BLACK AND THIRD WORLD BOOKS was organized by Radical Black British publishers/booksellers New Beacon Books, Bogle-L'Ouverture, Race Today, Griot International, and Education for Liberation Books, and was held from March 17 to April 5, 1987 in the English cities of Manchester, London, and Bradford. Like its predecessors, the Fair brought together a "serious" rich mix of poets, writers, political figures, booksellers, bookbuyers, unions, publishers, distributors, and audience for three "dynamite" weeks of forums, performances, speeches, films, theatre, "heavy" discussions and much more. In his invitation to the Book Fair, Director John La Rose, publisher of New Beacon Books, observed that:

Interviews transcribed by Margaret Christakos

The major issues raised at previous forums of the Book Fair and Book Fair Festival — "Resurgence or Barbarism," "1984 & After," "Southern Africa," "India: The Crisis to Come," "Nkrumah: Twenty Years After," "New Technology, The Working Day & Cultural Creativity," "Popular Theatre," "The Novel, The Tale & The Short Story," and the related cultural and social issues — indicate the seriousness and solidity of the direction the Book Fair movement has taken. The Sixth International Book Fair will focus on "The Movement for Social Change" and on the cultural vision which underpins the search through literature and art, for a profound reordering and humanizing of existence.

This year the Book Fair was officially opened in London by Kenyan novelist, playwright, literary, political, and social critic Ngugi Wa Thiong'o (*Petals of Blood, Devil on the Cross, Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary, Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*) and participants included people from the Caribbean, Africa, North America and Europe. Some of the forums included "Artistic Creativity and Social Change," "The State of Radical Black and Third World Publishing," "The Women's Movement and Social Change in the Indian Subcontinent," "Transition to Socialism: Building Socialist Societies, Advances and Difficulties," "Protracted Struggle for Workers' and Peoples' Struggles," and "The Development of Asian Theatre in Britain."

In addition to the forums, etc., the two crowning aspects of the Book Fair's format have been the actual Book Fair section, with the buying and selling of books, which took place at Camden Town Hall in London; and the ever popular night of International Poetry. The former is a massive assemblage of new hard-to-find titles from participating publishers, bookstores and writers. The reading event presents an international roster of excellent poets which in other years has included Mikey Smith, Oku Onuora, Amiri Baraka, Sonia Sanchez, Toronto's "De Dub Poets" (Lillian Allen, Clifton Joseph, and Devon Haughton), Okut P'Bitek, John Agard, and Valerie Bloom. This year the line-up consisted of Mongane Serote, Pedro Pietri, Claribel Alegria, Mervyn Morris and Canadians Clifton Joseph and Ahndri Zhina-Mandiela. Ntozake Shange was scheduled but did not read.

The interviews that follow were done in Bradford during the last week of the Book Fair!

Clifton Joseph: How many years has the International Book Fair of Radical Black and Third World Books been here in Bradford?

Ali Hussein: Bradford has been a venue for the Book Fair for three years. The first Book Fair that was held here was in 1985. And we said then that Bradford is going to become one of the permanent sites for the Book Fair. We hope to maintain it in the future.

Clifton Joseph: Has it been progressing? Do you think that this third year is moving forward in relation to the formation of Griot Books International?

Ali Hussein: Definitely. Absolutely. That's an important element, an important indication that we are developing. When we started three years ago the first thing that it encouraged us to do — because there is a very large Black community in West Yorkshire here — was to develop a book service out of the first Book Fair in '85. We developed a book service to schools where Black children are and to libraries where there are Black communities who in fact make use of Black literature that comes through the Book Fair from Africa, from Asia, North America, Latin America and the Caribbean. And in three years we have seen the point in maintaining that. Of course this year we have opened bookshop premises as Griot International Books. We are becoming part of the organizing committee as booksellers and we hope next year that we will be publishing as well. So that's another development that will obviously follow from the bookshop.

Clifton Joseph: Yeah, it sounds like a whole lot of steady positive movement and I congratulate you really, for doing this, and it seems like something that will continue.

I'm moving over here trying to get one or two more interviews ... gonna talk with Abdul Alkalimat.

You've been to most of the events in Manchester and London, and also here in Bradford. What are your impressions of this Book Fair?

Abdul Alkalimat: If Star Wars exists, we experienced it over the past three weeks! That's my comment.

Clifton Joseph: (Moving over to another interview) Come give me your bio quickly.

Vusi Mchunu: I'm an Azanian, and a poet and a writer. I live in West Berlin and work with a group of poets and



Reproduced from Book Fair Catalogue

ALI HUSSEIN

writers called African Writers Association. And I came to the Book Fair here for the second time now. Especially for reasons of taking up contact with other poets, writers, activists.

Clifton Joseph: And you find that this has been fruitful?

Vusi Mchunu: It has been quite fruitful, mainly because I also met and got to know new voices this time. You know, people from Canada and other areas. And also the level of discussion was very informative, analytical, and also very deep at some points. I mean, the main thing this time was creativity and social change, which is like a question what role do poets/writers play in the movement for social change and I found the whole exchange which went on, especially in London, very inspiring. Also, for the first time, I got a chance to come up so far away



LEFT:
Scene from production by Tara Arts Group, an Indian theatre company.

from London to the north here to Bradford, and since I've been here, we saw a play on the Amritsar massacre by an Indian theatre group called Tara Arts Group — a very inspiring play done by three women and it was a very tight unit, powerfully presented, with a lot of impressive theatrical effects. Also, the discussions on Friday and the play which you saw last night from Amiri Baraka, *Dutchman*, were impressive. The most important activities have been the private talks which have been going on during the whole Book Fair. You know, informal exchanges, people getting to know one another and talking about so many issues. I find that more inspiring and sort of mind-opening.

Clifton Joseph: In your own poetry, watching you in performance tonight, you seem to move in that area where music meets poetry meets drama, where your poetry is very musical and theatrical, and at the same time socially progressive. I hear you have a play coming out sometime, opening up in West Germany in the fall.

Vusi Mchunu: Yeah, well, this just simply indicates that I'm part of African creativity, which never separates the various forms of art, theatre, music, poetry, song, movement. You find all that combined in most performances. So, as a poet, it's like when I'm doing those chants, I hear those voices. I hear the singing which is back in me, which is behind me, and I'm exchanging with people. So it involves all these forms. And the rhythm for me is like the music is in with the rhythm of life, it's always there and we are part of it. When you compose a poem, you compose a poem within that rhythm, and the voices are there, the chants are there, the militant song is there. That is why you find it using a lot of chants which actually stem from some of the oral poets which have been in our subcontinent for a very long period of time. And even today one can still find people who can recite a lot of history through poetry and music and this is a kind of tradition that we base our work on. But we try to introduce new forms, because we're using the English language. I live in West

Germany and for me language has been a problem in the sense that I view language as merely a tool for communication, to get across, to meet people. I struggle with the German language to twist it and put in these rhythms. Same with the French language and so on — I'm not afraid of these things.

Clifton Joseph: The idea of orality and African cultural norms is coming out, even in the West, cause you have dub poetry, you have jazz poetry which you refer to in one of your poems. Do you find a problem in terms of working with actual musicians? Do you find that you have to make concessions as a poet — how does the whole musical thing work when you actually begin to deal with musicians, or do you?

Vusi Mchunu: Well, I've worked with some musicians, especially drummers from West Africa, Ghana to be specific, and I found it was a, it was a very inspiring experience to try and put some of the chanting — "Now is the time to speak your mind, now is the time to speak your mind," you see — you get this accompaniment of drums, it has been very inspiring. Especially when, at times, it really breaks out into song. But I think that definitely one as a poet should always be conscious of the fact that you are using this medium, poetry, to get across the message, and at times the tendency will be for music to take over the rhythm and the whole message to the detriment of the content of the poetry. So this is the kind of thing which one must always be careful of when one is involved with musicians and performing poetry.

Clifton Joseph: Thank you very much. I have to move on now to Jean Giddons, who did a stunning performance here, presented as a sort of old feminist, old miner's daughter (laughter) it's so relative, it's so very relative — let's say someone who... Let me ask you a few questions anyway before I garble up an introduction!

How long have you been doing this kind of poetry? Is it poetry that comes specifically out of the miners' struggle, or were you writing before that?

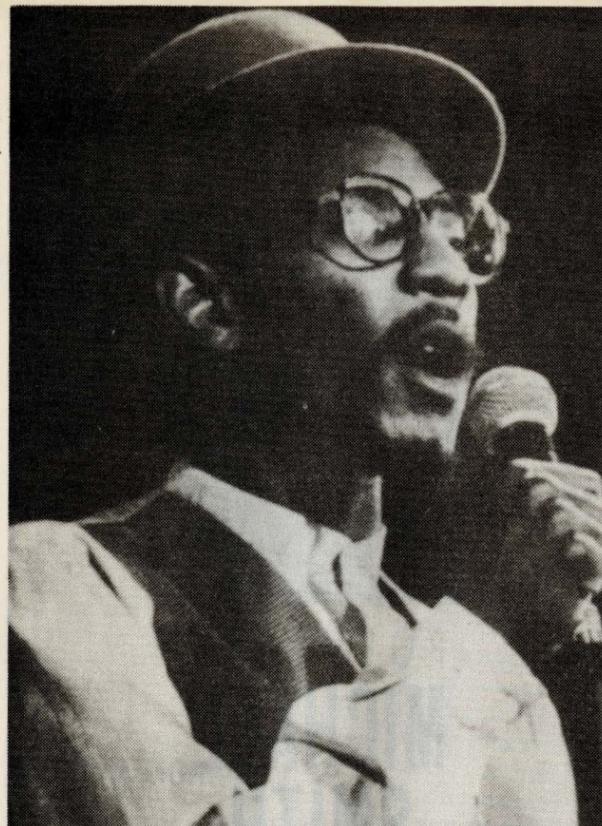


Photo: Julian Stapleton

LINTON KWESI JOHNSON

Jean Giddons: I've always written poetry. I've always been one of those weirdos that thinks in rhyme, or wants to put things down on paper but to be quite honest, nobody ever took it seriously, and it's taken me all this time to take it seriously myself.

Clifton Joseph: Now, just give me a quick bio on yourself.

Jean Giddons: Well, I've only ever had one book published, and that came out of the miners' strike. That was *Striking Stuff*. I was born in the house that I'm living in now in Cappox, a village outside Leeds in Yorkshire. When the strike was on, I was very active. I took me two youngest sons and worked at the pit. I'm a member of Women Against Pit Closures, and although we don't do much now about shutting pits, we're involved in things like anti-apartheid and non-intervention in the Pacific, and all these kinds of things.

Clifton Joseph: What is your connection to and what did you think of this Book Fair, its third year here in the north of England.

Jean Giddons: I came here by accident; a mutual friend asked me to come when the miners' strike was on and the funny thing about it was I lived in the village where everybody was white, minded their own business, went to work, and if they went to a pub on the weekend that was their social life. And I came here and I felt delightful! I've come to the conclusion that no matter where you're born, or what age you are, what class you're born into, it's who you identify with that's important. And I identify with this lot.

Clifton Joseph: That's good, because you identify yourself clearly in your poetry as a staunch, working class woman.

What are your thoughts on the ending of the miners' strike and the miners' situation as it is now? These towns that are now like ghost towns in terms of employment, etcetera.

Jean Giddons: Well, obviously, it's very sad. I think it was inevitable. When people were talking about winning and losing to be quite honest I never thought that we'd win, because it wasn't in their plans to let us win. But you see you can't unlearn things you've learned. And it just came at the right time for me, because I was sort of free to go off and do my own thing, and I found out what my own thing is. Now a lot of women have gone back into their homes to bring the children up, but you see they'll bring the children up differently. Because they have seen something different.

I realize now how little I knew about anything before, for instance, I would never have agreed with some of the terrible things that are happening in the world, but I never felt that it was anything to do with me, and I felt totally powerless to do anything about it anyway. But now I'm not sure — I think if everybody felt like I do now then we would have some power to do something about it.

Clifton Joseph: More power to the people. Thank you very much.... Linton, just a brief, brief thing. You're part of the Race Today Collective and one of the original organizers of the Book Fair.

I was here in '83, and it seems that there's been much progress even in terms of more people thinking about the Book Fair, and it's moved to Manchester, it's moved to Bradford. Do you see it continuing, what are your thoughts now?

Linton Kwesi Johnson: Well, after five Book Fairs, this is the sixth, it's now an established institution, and a very important one at that. The only one of its kind that I know of anywhere in the world — an important meeting place for radical and revolutionary ideas, art and culture, discussion and debate about ideas which could help us in our struggle for freedom, for socialism. The fact that it's expanded from London to Bradford and Manchester means that it is growing and becoming a national, as well as an international, festival.

Clifton Joseph: Yes, because I see that you've spawned, or you've at least been some sort of influence in this upcoming First Caribbean Book Fair in Trinidad in June-July of '87.

Linton Kwesi Johnson: The oil field workers' trade union in Trinidad and Tobago has always been a participant in the Book Fair and they've always worked closely with us. And I suppose they were inspired by what was happening in England, and felt that something similar was required in the Caribbean and they've therefore taken an important initiative.

Clifton Joseph: So things are moving on. I want to thank you very much, man, that was a stunning performance here today.

Linton Kwesi Johnson: Thank you too, you were very hot yourself. (laughter)

Clifton Joseph: Mervyn, just basically give me a current update on your biography.

Mervyn Morris: I suppose the main thing I've done recently, apart from writing a few articles, particularly a few introductions, is the editing of a collection of poems by the late Mikey Smith called *It A Come*, published by Race Today Collective, late last year, end of October. I gather it's doing quite well in Britain. It's not on sale yet in Jamaica but I hope it will be soon. Mikey Smith was an outstanding dub poet and performer, and he was killed a few years ago in a terrible incident in Jamaica in Stony Hill.

Clifton Joseph: How do you resolve hearing Mikey Smith's poetry with that technical process of moving it from there to the page?

Mervyn Morris: That was immense fun for me. It's something I really enjoyed because what I was doing there was fundamentally different from what I have done for and with people who are actually alive. Because one of the major restrictions was that I was determined not to change anything, so that everything that is there, there is warrant for in typescript, a hand-written manuscript, photocopy, or voice recording — everything.

The Mikey Smith book was simply a matter of listening to the voice carefully and trying to set out the stuff on to the page in a way that reflected as accurately as I could make it, or as pointedly, what the voice, the basic rhythms, were.

Clifton Joseph: This will probably help to expose more of Mikey's talent to the general community.

Mervyn Morris: Oh yes, I'm quite sure of that, you know, there's no need to pretend not to be sure of that. The point is that the few texts of Mikey's that existed before the book were in some cases very difficult to read, and in other cases, had plain mistakes in them. And what this book does is make what he's saying easier to receive, certainly through the eye, and it will be a complement to listening to him on recordings. I'm sure it will serve him well. In any case, it's the only book of his work that exists, and it's already doing well, which I would expect.

Clifton Joseph: You've also edited Miss Lou's *Collected Poems*, and I saw that it was available in Toronto.

Mervyn Morris: Yes, but I think that was before I saw you last. *Selected Poems*, by Louise Bennett, is an academic edition; it's intended to be of help to people who are students of her work.

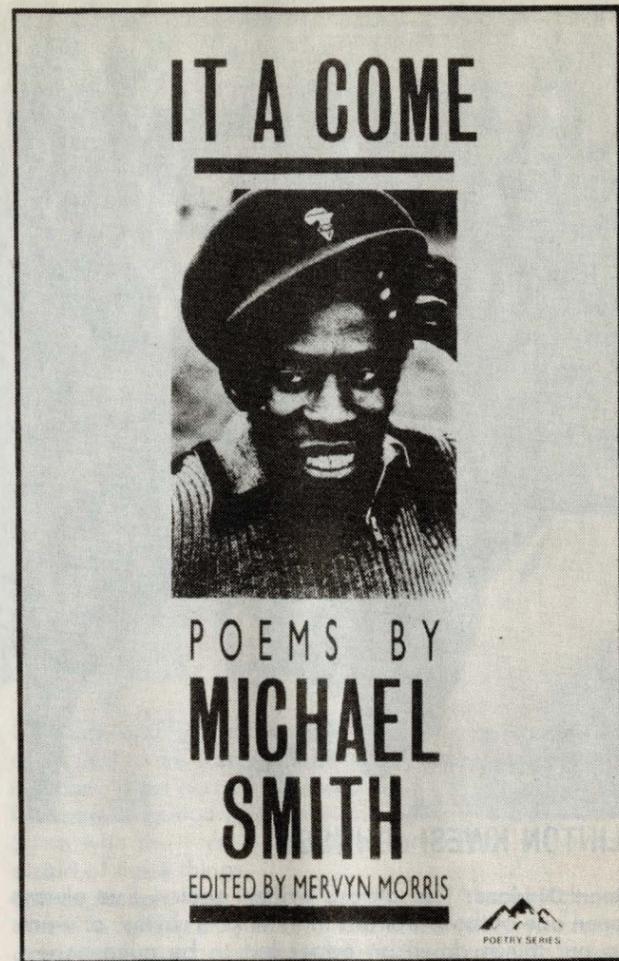
Clifton Joseph: Miss Lou had her 50th anniversary in Toronto about a year ago.

Just to shift the mood slightly, to the literary scene in Jamaica. We've seen of course the internationalization of dub poetry with Mikey Smith, with Linton, with Oku, and Breeze who is here now in England. Lorna Goodison just won the Commonwealth Prize.

Mervyn Morris: No, she won it for the Americas, for the Regions, she didn't win the overall prize.

Clifton Joseph: So what in your assessment are some of the things happening in books, literature, in the Jamaican environment, the poetry especially.

Mervyn Morris: I guess the biggest thing really is the emergence of Lorna Goodison, who is clearly a major poet, and whose second book *I Am Becoming My Mother* has made quite an impact, certainly on people who read poetry in the Caribbean, as well as in other places, par-



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ticularly the UK and even America. Lorna is currently at the Bunting Institute, which is attached to Radcliffe College, I think. It's in Boston. And she's doing quite a lot of reading in good company, and I think she's very highly regarded at the moment. She was on a fellowship for a year, that comes to an end I think round about May or June. I don't know what she'll be doing next.

Clifton Joseph: What about the local poetry scene, particularly the spring-offs, or local dub poetry?

Mervyn Morris: Even with the names you've mentioned, dub poetry has never been as popular in Jamaica as it is in the UK. Mikey Smith was comparatively unknown in Jamaica. Even now, people who you'd think would know better are surprised to hear the levels of his reputation abroad. The same thing goes for Oku Onuora, and the same thing goes for Linton Kwesi Johnson. There will be an interview with Linton, which I did some years ago, published in the next *Jamaica Journal*. In introducing that we had to make this explicit point that Linton Johnson is better known in the UK and the United States and Europe than he is in Jamaica where he was born. Linton was nominated for a Grammy this year, and that I think brought him to the attention of some Jamaicans who of course are fed by the wire services. So I don't think you could expect anything very major in dub poetry in the Jamaican context. A couple of other names are worth mentioning though. One is, of course, Jean 'Binta' Breeze, whom you have already mentioned — who left us

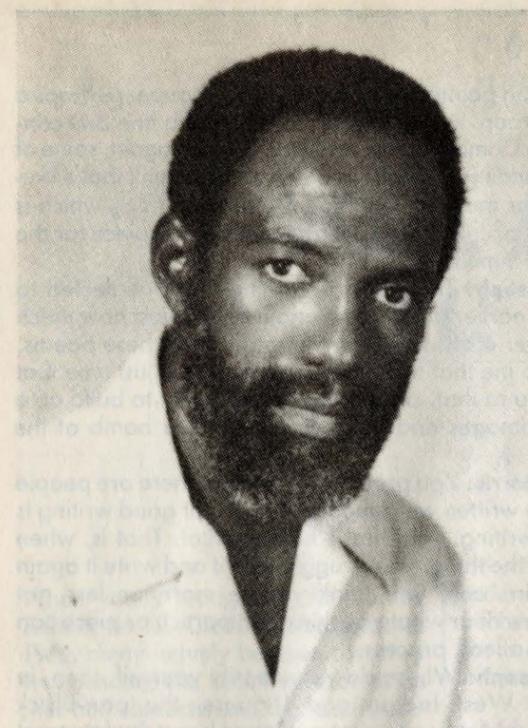


Photo: Bryan Studios from Shadowboxing, New Beacon Books, 1979.

MERVYN MORRIS

in Jamaica now and is working in London. In my view she is the most outstanding dub performer alive. The discipline and the expert care with which her performances are prepared, is really something, a model. The only person who might've competed with her for performing force would have been perhaps Mikey at his best, and he's not available any more. Breeze is teaching in London, teaching drama, and she's very much involved in the poetry circuit. She's all over the place reading, and Race Today Collective intends to bring out a collection of Breeze poems sometime later this year. The dub poets most prominent now are a group called Poets in Unity, led by Tomlin Ellis, who also works at the JBC (Jamaica Broadcasting Corporation). They include Anita Stewart, Malakai Smith, who is away at the moment — he's in Miami for a while and he may or may not return to the group, he's a policeman. And the talent that I personally like best of the four that form the group at the moment, is Shaka Brian — Glenville Brian, I think his name is officially, but everybody calls him Shaka — who's a strong performer and also a talented poet. One of the things that he has done, I hope, will become a kind of dub classic: it's a love poem to a Black woman and begins with the word "titilating" — but separated and repeated, you know — "ti-ti, ti-ti, ti-ti" — several times and so on, it really works. His rhythms are very strong, and I think it's a good thing.

That group has actually been greatly helped by their musical advisor, a fellow name of Tommy Ricketts who is obviously a good singer, a professional singer. I saw them performing at a concert in commemoration of Soweto. An anti-apartheid concert, and they were very strong. Particularly strong in that they were given an excellent musical frame, and everything they did in their short set connected very closely with the theme of the evening. One of the things about Poets in Unity is that

they are a group that performs but they are also very much involved in teaching. They are sometimes involved in workshop situations, not necessarily anything to do with poetry, but to do with whatever you like, mental health, for example, and they try to prepare themselves in a way that will relate to the topic in which they've been asked to be involved.

There are of course a number of more conventional poets who have been operating there for some time and are writing well. And we're promised publication by some of them soon. Pamela Mordecai will be one of those — she and her husband Martin are starting a small publishing firm which intends to bring out a few books of poetry in the next few months. As far as I'm aware the books are going to be by Gloria Escoffrey, Edward Ball ... Edward Ball is a professor of English at the MONA Campus of the University of the West Indies. He's a very fine poet and he's an outstanding reader of poetry. I think as a poet he's been underrated so far, and I think the book will make that clear. Gloria Escoffrey is one of Jamaica's senior, and outstanding, painters, who has been painting since the late 1930s or 1940s and who has been writing good poetry since that time. She used to publish in the journal *BIM*, she's also an art critic, and a teacher of English and art. Her collection, which I've seen in proof, is called "Loggerhead," after a bird that she talks about quite a lot in the collection. And there's to be a collection also by Pam Mordecai. I suppose, embarrassing as it is, one might mention that the next issue of *Focus* should appear this year; the last one appeared in 1983, an anthology of contemporary Jamaican writing. The reason why it's embarrassing to mention it is that the material was collected from 1984, and has not yet appeared. I'm told that it will be out this year. The publishers have had the copy since August of 1984, and when we harass them they give us one story after another.

Clifton Joseph: I wanted to ask you about the state of West Indian publishing in relation to something like this Book Fair, and about the First Caribbean Peoples' Book Fair in Trinidad in June-July of this year.

Mervyn Morris: I don't know much about Caribbean publishing in general because as you know we're a bit more divided up than we should be. I suppose there are some new ventures in Jamaica that might give us some hope, one of them I have mentioned. It's more a matter of journals — they've actually founded an association of journal editors — and a few of these journals do in fact publish poetry, though they don't publish books. The ones that come to mind, I can't promise you that this is a comprehensive list, would include a journal of the Creative Arts Centre called *Arts Review*, which I helped to found some years ago. It's been sporadic, but it comes out every so often. There's also *Pathways*, a journal of the Department of English which is edited by Victor Chang in our department. *Caribbean Quarterly*, of course, which is an established journal which sometimes publishes poetry. Savacou seems virtually to have disappeared, but there is a publishing house, that's where I work night-shifting, Savacou Cooperative, which has been bringing out books of poetry. One of the latest ones was by A.L. Hendricks, a very good senior Caribbean poet, and

they've also published a collection of short stories by Hazel D. Campbell who did *Rag Doll & Other Stories*. Lorna Goodison is one of the outstanding figures to have emerged comparatively recently. The other one who would undoubtedly be in everybody's book is Olive Senior, who is the editor of *Jamaica Journal* and Head of the Institute of Jamaica Publications. She's a good poet whose book of poems, *Talking of Trees*, appeared about a year ago. Certainly one of the significant books by what I call, in contradistinction to the dub poets, one of the conventional poets. But what's absolutely outstanding, and you can see this is already acquiring a rapid reputation internationally, is her book of short stories called *Summer Lightning*, published by Longman last year. Now that book, in the opinion of many of us, is quite probably as distinguished as any first book of prose to come from the Caribbean, when you realize that we're setting that up against *In The Castle Of My Skin* by George Lamming, *The Mystic Masseur* by V.S. Naipaul, and *The Brightest Sun* by Samuel Selvon...

Clifton Joseph: You're speaking tough competition!

Mervyn Morris: Yes, it's a very fine book, and it's very accessible. Some of it is very funny. It is a brilliant collection of short stories which we have little doubt will be widely recognized as that. She was prominently featured in the Conference of Commonwealth Writers in London last October. She and Lorna were prominently featured, and there have been interviews that have begun to appear helping people to understand some of the background to the work.

Clifton Joseph: What struck me was that you have now a second or even a third generation of Black publishing. There is a whole lot of Black publishing in London now.

Mervyn Morris: Yes, and I haven't quite gotten to the bottom of it, to understand how it survives. That's really what I'm interested in. I'm well aware of the need for it, I'm glad it exists. But when I hear publishers talking about the problems, I'm not sure I have yet understood whether these newish Black firms will be viable, will survive for long. One of them, Pluto Press, has been taken over by Alison and Busby.

Clifton Joseph: So I guess that's the rigours of the publishing movement, really.

Something about Carifesta. The last Carifesta was in Barbados, when was it?

Mervyn Morris: 1981, I think.

Clifton Joseph: Do you have any idea what's happening with Carifesta?

Mervyn Morris: There was an announcement that the next one would be held in Jamaica. It also suggested it would be this year. That is clearly no longer likely. There's been a certain lack of enthusiasm among the governments.

Although I've been to Carifesta and enjoyed it immensely, I think the same amount of money could be spent on the same general purposes with a series of smaller festivals where the artists actually had a chance to talk to each other. This doesn't happen much at Carifesta because of the whole pat schedule that you have. What I would like to see would be a whole series of mini-conferences where, for example, you'd have a writers' conference, say, in Antigua, and you'd invite one or two

outstanding painters, perhaps a dance troupe, perhaps a theatre group. Another year you'd have a fine arts conference in Dominica, say, and you'd invite, again, some of the outstanding artists from other areas. I think that's likely to be far more fruitful than the one big thing which is like a kind of cultural circus, a kind of display piece for the host government.

Clifton Joseph: There was one thing that I neglected to deal with earlier and I saw it again here, is just how much of a master craftsman you are, man, with these poems. Explain to me that technical process, or is it just time that brings you to that, or practice — the ability to build up a series of images and then, almost drop a bomb at the end!

Mervyn Morris: You probably know that there are people who have written well who have said that good writing is about rewriting. And that's fundamental. That is, when you write the thing, you struggle with it and write it again and again, until you think you've more or less got somewhere near what you think that particular piece can bear. It's a long process.

Clifton Joseph: Where do you identify yourself, then, in terms of West Indian and I guess, the pan-Black literature, because you are, as far as I know the foremost cat who can deal with, and who has been able to interpret, dub poetry, right, that whole oral base form that reggae inspired.

Mervyn Morris: Not so much. I notice I'm getting labelled with that but it's not really true. It's true in one sense in that I have reacted to various dub poets and they have found it helpful. But it's never been a programme. It's been something that has started in the same informal way that they have contacted other people who could help them. I know they've talked with Dennis Scott, who especially when he was at the Jamaica School of Drama, was immensely helpful to various people. They've talked with Eddy Brathwaite from time to time, some of them have talked with Eddy Ball. The one I suppose whom I was closest to over an extended period would have been Oku Onuora, and it is largely through him that Mikey Smith decided to ask me to help. He was not someone whom I knew particularly well when he asked me to actually help him put some stuff together. And most of the rest has been accidental.

When people ask me to look at their stuff, I usually try to tell them what I actually think, and I'm not sure everybody does that. I'm not in the 'business' of encouraging people, I never have been, which may be one of the reasons why some of them find it helpful. Because if you're talking about what it is you think won't work, at the same time as you are talking about what it is you think is working, the people have something to really respond to instead of being encouraged in a general way. ●

Clifton Joseph is a dub poet, political activist, and occasionally a journalist, who lives and works in Toronto. He performed at the Sixth International Book Fair of Radical Black and Third World Books in 1983 and 1987.

Hard, Harder, Hardest: B.C. Writches Again

SARA DIAMOND

When voters brought in Bill Vander Zalm's Social Credit government in 1986, many naively believed that they were ending the social confrontation that had characterized the administration of Bill Bennett. Despite Vander Zalm's notorious reputation for extemporaneous personal opinion and right-wing social ideals, many in B.C. bought the new premier's populist and initially conciliatory style. But not for long. First came the premier's stance on issues of sexuality (opposing birth control, AIDS education and abortion) and now the government's latest initiative: a full-scale assault on the rights of trade unionists and teachers.

Like the 1983 wave of legislation, Bill 19 and 20 threaten a permanent restructuring of "the social contract" — setting labour laws back in some instances to Depression standards. They severely restrict the ability of unions to organize, negotiate contracts, support their members and assist other unionists. The Teaching Profession Act dismantles the B.C. Teacher's Federation and takes away teachers' power to police their own profession.

Bill 19, The Industrial Labour Relations Reform Act, would "overturn most significant labour law decisions reached by the Labour Relations Board for the past ten years" (Cliff Andstein, BCFL). It's as though the Minister Lyall Hanson went through every decision in favour of labour made by the previous Labour Relations Board and rewrote the law to insure that it could never be made again! The laws are similar to the Quebec Padlock Law (also a Bill 19!) which curtailed freedom of speech and organization in the 1950s in Quebec,

under the Duplessis government.

The list of elements in Bill 19 reinforces a sense of its potential destructive impact:

- Most important is the Industrial Disputes Resolution Branch. This agency will have at its helm Ed Peck, who has been administering provincial wage controls. It will have the right to end a strike after 28 days and impose an arbitrated settlement. It

NEWS & VIEWS FROM THE WEST

will be able to impose a 40 day cooling off period in a dispute. It can force a vote on the company's last offer. It can act on its own or when Cabinet defines a dispute as hurtful to the economy or social stability of the province. This is reminiscent of the War Measures Act.

- Employers are now exempt from having to bargain technological change issues.

- Companies can set up parallel non-union companies ("double-breasting") to bid for contracts and to escape contracts.

- Unions can no longer discipline members. Employees who do not want to pay dues can give the money to charity.

- Employers can communicate directly

with their employees and bypass the union if they prefer (this is true when organizing, contract negotiations or grievances are happening).

- There is no allied or related picketing (this severely limits the ability of unions to picket anywhere but the specific plant or office where the dispute is occurring and makes illegal any form of flying picket or information picket).

- Successor rights are virtually removed (this means that companies simply have to declare bankruptcy or transfer title and then set up again to escape their union).

- Jobs of strikebreakers are protected and they are given a vote on contract offers.

- "Hot" or "unfair" goods declarations are illegal, again threatening solidarity actions by other unions.

- Employers are given the right to fire without cause (even if contract language specifies a process re: firing).

- Companies have the right to sue unions for damages caused by a strike. Unions cannot sue companies.

- Unions cannot take a strike vote until bargaining has broken down.

- Companies no longer have to hire union apprentices or trainees, making closed shops a thing of the past.

- Union workers can no longer refuse

to work alongside non-union workers. Employers can bypass union hiring halls to hire non-union, again undermining the closed shop.

- Decertification of unions is made easier.

- Employers have access to all internal votes on issues in the union so they know where dissent or support lies. Unions must now submit all internal financial records to the IRC. Employers have no such demand on their confidential records.

The Teaching Profession Act creates an autocratic college which can remove teachers' licenses. There is no due process — after 5 complaints about a teacher, any three college members can decide to eject a teacher from the profession. Teachers lose their benefits, sick leave provisions, grievance procedure re: firing. Principals, vice-principals and administrators, previously members of the BCTF are now excluded and recategorized as management. Teachers lose control over curriculum development and methods. These functions are transferred to the Department of Education. Finally, local teachers' unions are allowed but not federated bodies.

While not directly an assault on the cultural sector, the laws will make life difficult for those cultural workers who are organized and who work for such institutions as the Vancouver Art Gallery or the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra. The union that certifies the Art Gallery faced a tough contract struggle this year as the administration tried to wrest the right to contract out all forms of bargaining unit work from it. The Vancouver Symphony Orchestra workers were locked out for months last year, bearing the brunt of cutbacks and mismanagement. For example, in the VAG situation, the employer could simply have waited out negotiations, waited for a strike vote, locked out the workers and then waited out a back-to-work order and imposed settlement, all the while refusing to move on their demands.

The new law will strongly discourage non-union artists who work for smaller galleries or independently from organizing. Efforts to include artists into the federal labour code have been less than successful, sug-

gesting that should artists want to organize they would have to do so under provincial law. Need I say more? The impact of Bill 20 on education, including art education, will be pronounced, for it has been teachers who have defended the continuation of cultural curriculum in the face of a government that perceives culture as a waste of money.

By driving down the standard of living of organized working people, the government will directly effect the on-the-job conditions of unorganized workers. Most artists survive through



secondary employment — the ability and incentive to unionize service sector and other jobs will be minimized with the new law in place. This labour legislation is the prerequisite to another massive wave of privatizations. Next on the agenda is medical care — Minister of Health Dueck is seriously considering moving hospitals into the private sector. And it's no surprise that immediately after the legislation was introduced the Vancouver International Airport was put on the market. The B.C. government intends to buy it and set up a free enterprise zone there — selling contracts to international firms employing only non-union labour.

The labour movement in B.C. faces an uphill battle. The leadership of the B.C. Federation of Labour has been pressured into a no compromise ("dump the bill") stance by a rank and file who are still cynical after the Solidarity compromise of Kelowna in 1983. Community groups share some of this skepticism and labour may be unable to

mobilize large numbers outside its own ranks in its defense. The fightback has begun however. Unions are boycotting all joint government-management boards with the exception of Workers' Compensation. They will not collaborate with the new Industrial Relations Council if the law passes. Teachers have braved public disfavour and struck for one day and are currently carrying on an instruction-only campaign, throwing grad dances all over the province into chaos. Unions have recently joined them in an overtime ban and work-to-rule campaign. Public rallies have brought out tens of thousands of union members.

Votes throughout the province indicated that there is more than 90% opposition to the laws in the labour movement and 97% amongst teachers. Vander Zalm, whose public face has been that leaders would complain but the rank and file would support his hard measures, may have to check his research data.

On June 1, the trade union movement conducted a successful one-day general strike. It shut down government services, colleges, schools and transportation; suspended all but essential health care, and closed down all unionized industry. A *Vancouver Sun* poll showed that most B.C. residents opposed the bill and that supporters in the plants on strike were almost evenly divided.

The government retaliated with Attorney General Brian Smith issuing a precedent-setting injunction which sought a gag order on any criticism of government platforms by the press or labour. He defined the strike call as conspiracy to overthrow the provincial government through violence and called for further protests against Bills 19 and 20 to be banned.

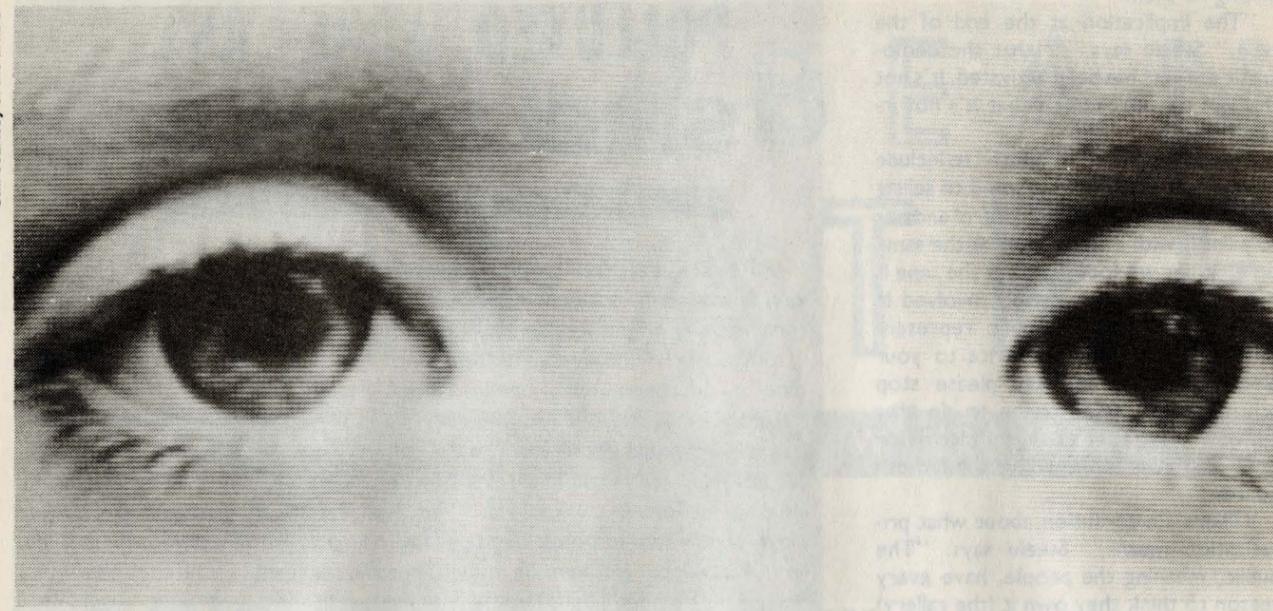
On June 10, Supreme Court Justice K.E. Meredith struck down the injunctions in court. The same day an opinion poll showed overwhelming public opposition to the bills, and support for either withdrawal or a cooling off period by the government. Meanwhile the Vander Zalm regime sticks to its guns. The legislation will soon be passed and a protracted struggle against it will continue. Stay tuned, as British Columbia gears up to another high-pitched battle.

Sara Diamond

Reproduced from postcard issued by the B.C. Provincial Council of Carpenters.

PRIVATE EYES

Still courtesy of the artists.



a review by **ELIZABETH SCHRODER**

Private Eyes, a new videotape by Lisa Steele and Kim Tomczak is not a take-off on a detective movie, but then again... *Private Eyes* confronts the issue of the public vs. the private, the perfect setup for mystery and intrigue.

The scenario is the takeover of the Canadian Gallery of Art by corporate sponsorship. It appears as though many sponsors are involved but as our newswoman untangles the scam, we learn that one corporation has controlling interest in all the other corporate sponsors, making the Canadian Gallery of Art the largest private gallery in the world.

Newswoman Kellie Marlowe (played by Kellie Marlowe) reports on the takeover of the Canadian Gallery of Art (played by the Vancouver Art Gallery) for Private Vision TV. She asks the curatorial assistant Buffy Yates (Sara Diamond), "What does curatorial autonomy mean?" As Steele says, "you'd never have a newscaster saying that. It's not in their vocabulary." But say it she does, as she reports on the events like it was the Meech Lake Accord, accompanied by flashy/trashy graphics. Buffy starts to question the seemingly natural order in which the gallery is taken over while the story is broadcast to the artists as they

work in their studios.

Phyllis Hardwick (Doris Shadbolt), the good art curator, is left out of the takeover. She hears about it like everyone else, on her TV, and is confronted by her own failure to have any lasting effect on the gallery.

In the meantime Buffy and Kellie have slipped off to the washroom. Kellie hesitates in front of the washroom door before entering. The logo of the triangle-shaped woman confronts her along with the word "public" while behind the door we observe that unequivocal and unpublic act — the lesbian pick up.

As Steele says, she and Kim Tomczak were taking off from the public vs. private economic debate as well as from the whole discourse around sexuality. "The state is constructing itself and continuing to reproduce itself and at this point, it's in the state's best interest to muddle those two things. It can pass oppressive laws that actually infringe greatly on individual freedoms in the name of the public good."

Meanwhile back in the corporate boardroom the bureaucratic chief speaks directly to the camera, like an advertisement for controlling interests. He tells the tale of his first purchase of a work of art at a

tender age. And, he bought Canadian. The small investment grew and grew, letting us know that art's not just good taste, it's also good business. The text-over reads, "is this a hoax, are you scared?" The usage of language by our corporate pal, his suit and especially the shiny desk that reflects his image are so perfect that one is left wondering, "is this the real thing?"

In other corners of this prestigious institution new artists are being chosen for a show by the way they dress, their politics and their culinary habits.

Newswoman Kellie Marlowe digs a little deeper into this mess, only to find Private Vision TV's corporate connections to the gallery. She is subsequently fired for her efforts.

In the end (unfortunately Buffy and Kellie don't run off together), Kellie starts to re-evaluate what the arts are all about, and Buffy gets a promotion which includes some curatorial pull. Some of the artists, still watching the newscast in their studios, have been elected to the gallery's board of directors. Other artists are on the Artists Union governing body that partially funds the gallery. We are not told how all this happens but the message is clear, somehow the artists

take the power that they know should belong to them.

"The implication at the end of the tape," Steele says, "is that the democratic process has been activated. It's not that it's not all bad, it's that it's not irreversible."

Tomczak says, "We wanted to include the current conservative trend of selling off institutions to private control and not to paint it with a black brush at the same time. What we focused on in the tape is that you could get actively involved in these institutions as public representatives, just as you can write to your elected officials and say please stop privatization. We're trying to do that with our tape. That's an agenda item (for the tape). Get involved, get on those boards."

"There's a confusion about what privatization means," Steele says. "The public, meaning the people, have every reason to think they own it (the gallery) already and suddenly it's being sold back not to them, but to the people with money. Privatization is the pressure of capital on the government. The government is absolutely giving in to these interests and not holding out for the good of the public."

Steele admits that a lot of artists disagree with the ideas in this tape, thinking instead that privatization of galleries is the wave of the future. On the other hand Tomczak says, "Some people say it seems insidious whereas it seemed normal before. There are decisions being made, it's not a natural order — this is a policy, this is a trend, this is a trendy thing."

As *Private Eyes* says, "privatization has become trendy."

Although *Private Eyes* was premiered at the Harbourfront's new gallery, the Power Plant, both Tomczak and Steele emphasized that it was not made specifically for that context. Tomczak admits though, not without some pleasure, that it's "quite ironic." Tomczak and Steele feel it will help carry through some of the debate which has been generated by the opening of the Power Plant.

Private Eyes was also screened at the Rex Hotel on June 25th, and is distributed through Vtape. ●

Elizabeth Schroder is a video artist and critic living in Toronto.

POLLUTED LAKE ART SMELLS BAD

HARBOURFRONT, Toronto's controversial lakeside development, didn't take too long to worsen its rock-bottom reputation with the opening of a new \$4.6 million contemporary art gallery, the Power Plant. The Power Plant itself houses a number of spaces with historically-inspired names like the Royal Le Page Gallery, the Canadian Tire Education Centre, and the Fleck Clerestory.

In the wink of an eye, Harbourfront (the non-profit corporation which had soaked up millions of public dollars to create a legitimate public village for recreational and cultural enjoyment) was "taken over" by developers and corporate ad men. Most insulting to Toronto's taxpayers is the flowering of an expensive residential playground where corporate bums and fashion-framed art can meld in mutual flattery. A developer's dream: an instant Yorkville, Gastown or St. Denis. New condominiums changed hands three or four times in their first year of operation. The potential to construct a new neighbourhood/community was out. The synthetically-created tide of speculation was in.

Power Plant opened on May Day accompanied by a 12-page advertising supplement in NOW titled "A New Home For The Art Of Our Time." Loudly boasting their new-found corporate sponsors (who contribute a mere 5% of the total budget) the supplement gave space to Roots corporation, the opening exhibition sponsors who were quoted as saying: "We've always given people modern classic design in a way of dressing they can relate to. In a sense the Power Plant approaches leading-edge art in the same spirit: contemporary, yet non-intimidating and approachable."

The Power Plant (increasingly identified by its watery initials: Pee Pee) did, however, hear the disgruntlement of those local artists and critics whose job it has been to produce Toronto's shoestring (not shoe-sponsored) "leading edge" art. A panel discussion ("Re/Viewing: Reflections in the Mirror") was put together by P.P. following the opening of the "non-intimidating" exhibit Toronto: A Play of History. The forum took place May 27th, with panelists Jeanne Randolph (moderator), Lisa Steele, David Clarkson, Michael Cartmell and Dot Tuer.

The transcripts of the panelists' contributions are very enlightening for anyone interested in privatization, curatorship, and the essential difference between public galleries and community/artist-run spaces. (It should be noted that these transcripts were initially gathered and distributed by the panelists, who also absorbed the costs. They are now available through Fuse for \$1.50 including postage.)

As Dot Tuer said, "...the 'new' Power Plant gallery at Harbourfront is not for artists, nor for a Toronto art community, nor for the people of Toronto. It caters to an imaginary abstraction called the 'public.' It employs advertising (about the gallery and not the art inside) and spoonfeeding to target this imaginary gallop poll of the pluralistic viewer. Its purpose, however, is not to inform this 'public' but to legitimize corporations as the benefactors of culture, and luxury development as a public service, through a smoke-and-mirrors approach to history, politics, art and ideology."

Clive Robertson

CARIBBEAN THEATRE

BEATS OUT A NEW RHYTHM

REGGAE + THEATRE = MELLO DRAMA

AS FAR AS CARIBBEAN DRAMA IN TORONTO IS CONCERNED 1987 WILL BE REMEMBERED AS A TIME WHEN QUALITY POPULAR JAMAICAN-CANADIAN THEATRE EXPLODED ON THE SCENE IN A SIGNIFICANT WAY. THE INTENTION HERE IS TO APPLY A MAGNIFYING LENS TO THREE PRODUCTIONS *BIG YARD I AND II* AND *BREAKOUT*.

by Klive Walker

THE LINK between reggae music, film and theatre is neither new, unusual nor confined to Jamaican or Caribbean productions. American director Jonathan Demme's *Something Wild*, a film which uses reggae as 90% of its soundtrack, is but the latest proof of this. In particular, reggae bands like Third World, Steel Pulse and Chalice have always sought to bring a theatrical mode to their concert performances. Jimmy Cliff has successfully crossed into film through the classic *The Harder They Come*, *Bongo Man* and the recent Hollywood production *Club Paradise*. Most of the dub poets have been trained

in drama and exhibit this skill in performing their poetry with or without reggae music. The late Jamaican dub poet Michael Smith was captured on film in a British production for television by Linton Kwesi Johnson. The film contains dramatization and concert excerpts on location in London and is titled *Upon Westminster Bridge*. Here in Toronto our own Lillian Allen is also a playwright; recently her play *One Bedroom With Dignity* was performed as a work in progress. All the aforementioned productions operated within an atmosphere of reggae music.



Reggae Musical

THE JAMAICAN artists' community in Toronto continues this trend of linking together various art forms but always in a unique Caribbean-Canadian way. *Breakout*, written and produced by Masani Montague, is an excellent example of an effort to allow theatre and reggae to intersect. It is probably the first attempt at doing a reggae musical in Canada. The music, all original material, is significant not only because of its quality and relevance but also because it was composed by one of the pioneers of Canadian reggae, percussionist Quammie Williams (formerly of Truths and Rights, and Lillian Allen's musical unit).

In the true tradition of the musical, *Breakout* contains some breathtaking choreography crafted by Vivienne Scarlett, who as a performer in the production

gave vitality to many of the songs with her righteous vocals.

Breakout is a skillfully written story set in Toronto about three Black "immigrant" inmates struggling to decide whether to attempt an escape from prison. The story line suggests that all are innocent. Essentially, the three main characters are torn between breaking out of incarceration or remaining in prison to fight the system of injustice until they have served their respective terms.

The Vivienne Scarlett character exemplifies a figure of reason, pragmatism and common sense exhorting the prisoner who is her brother to remain firm spiritually and to build a new life after release.

This production has certainly broken new ground in this city and reflects the fact that no "Chinese walls" separate various Caribbean art forms.

Big Yard

THE TWO *BIG YARD* plays have touched a sensitive nerve within the Caribbean-Canadian community. This is evident not only in the capacity audiences to which the productions played but also in the participatory reaction by the viewers. Indeed, these productions have had an impact on the non-mainstream theatre community, which will now have to see Caribbean theatre as part and parcel of the Canadian cultural fabric rather than as novel or foreign. Even the mainstream media has been forced to deliver (albeit limited) coverage of *Big Yard Part II*.

The director of both *Big Yard* plays, Ahdri Zhina Mandiela suggests that the plays were aimed at attracting different types of audiences by the way in which the story was constructed. Zhina points out that the productions spoke not only to Jamaicans living in Canada, but to Canadians in general, to those Jamaicans here who return home every year, and finally, those Jamaicans who have never left their homeland.

In this regard the two excellent scripts by Devon Haughton contain a character named "Mr. White," a white Canadian teacher who is a Rastafarian living and working in Jamaica, where the entire story takes place. While the Mr. White character is by no means a central one, it is significant in that it speaks volumes about "Canadian immigration" in reverse. As writer Haughton observes, characters like Mr. White seek non-material spiritual upliftment in their sojourn in Jamaica to embrace Rastafari, while Jamaicans are attracted to Canada for educational and economic uplift.

The *Big Yard* plays are not concerned exclusively with migration but with holding the pulse of the day to day life in a Jamaican tenement yard or ghetto situation. The first *Big Yard* production in particular is more than just a comedy, it is a first cousin to Spike Lee's film *She's Gotta Have It* in that one laughs many times because the situations are authentic and familiar. The setting and character interactions in *Big Yard* are not contrived but are vignettes of life, a virtual déjà vu. The sensitive direction of Ahdri Zhina and the chemistry between the actors who portrayed the main characters — Daisy, the female mechanic, Spotlight, the tough, street-smart 'bad man', and Merle, the intelligent, quarrelsome higgler — come across as being quite authentic. Haughton makes it clear that the characters dictated



MASANI MONTAGUE

Masani Montague is an outstanding Rastafarian lioness. Masani is well known as one of the key organizers of the International Rasta Conferences held in Toronto in 1982 and Jamaica in 1983. She is also known as one of the prime movers of the Kulcha Jam festivals of 1985 and 1986 here in Toronto. These conferences and festivals organized, discussed and showcased Rastafarian arts, crafts, theology, social beliefs and culture.

It is not surprising then, that Masani sees the medium of theatre as a vehicle for Rasta expression and a means to deal with issues and problems affecting Black people. While Masani adheres to the principles of Rastafari, her vision and activities are broader than the Rastafarian community. Masani, over the years has been active in the Universal African Improvement Association, a Black inmates programme that counsels prisoners, and in several Black youth groups.

Her activities in the Black community have provided Masani with ample material with which to organize scripts for many plays. At present she is in the process of completing a trilogy, the first two parts of which have already seen the light of day. The first, *Up On Eglinton* directed by Ahdri Zhina was staged in 1985. The second, which had a brief run earlier this year, was titled *Breakout*. The third in the series is to be put on stage by year's end. Masani, a developing and talented playwright, with a diploma in journalism from Humber College, is currently majoring in creative writing at York University, and will be a force to contend with in Caribbean theatre in this city.



DEVON HAUGHTON

Devon Haughton's introduction to performance came as a result of his practice of dub poetry, which if not always dramatized must be vocalized to be properly understood. The "umbilical cord" connection between Jamaican "patois" poetry and theatre became obvious to Haughton when in 1977 he returned to Jamaica and attended the Jamaica School of Drama. At the school, he ran into three other poet-cum-dramatists, who were to become leading dub poets nationally and internationally — Mutabaruka, Oku Onuora (then Orlando Wong) and the late Michael (Mikey) Smith. Seeing his prestigious classmates doing drama and also continuing their poetry influenced Haughton to tread both artistic paths.

Haughton was coached and guided by significant individuals in Jamaican theatre while at the Drama School. Famous Jamaican playwright Dennis Scott was one such beacon. Haughton also cites Charmaine Hemmings, who played the principal role on a long-running radio soap opera, as teaching him a great deal.

Haughton, who returned to Canada revitalized and anchored in his indigenous culture, saw no conflict in seeking more formal dramatic training as well as developing his craft as a poet.

In addition to attending Humber College, Leah Postluns Theatre and the Banff School of Fine Arts, Haughton, together with Lillian Allen and Clifton Joseph, spearheaded the Canadian dub poetry movement. This artistic groundwork paved the way to experiences gained in the heat of performance. On the one hand Haughton appeared on television programmes such as C.B.C.'s *Seeing Things* and C.T.V.'s *The Campbells* to name two, and numerous stage productions including an award-winning production with Black Theatre Canada. On the other hand the young playwright has toured extensively with De Dub Poets as well as as a solo poet in Canada, Jamaica, the United States and Europe.

The scripting and production of the successful plays *Big Yard I* and *II* are but two more significant milestones in a young and promising career.



AHDRI ZHINA MANDIELA

While one is awestruck at the obvious stylized quality of one of the best Black directors in the city, it is not obvious that Ahdri Zhina has had no formal training as a director. Zhina, though, did have some education in drama which could not be called informal.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s while attending York University as a psychology major, Zhina took part in Caribbean Theatre workshops with children from kindergarten to grade 6 in a programme funded by the Ontario Arts Council. This period also saw Zhina developing and showcasing her performance poetry. Zhina, who has never been taught how to direct, did get drama coaching from Amah Harris, former director of Black Theatre Canada and now founder and artistic director of Theatre in the Rough.

During this early phase of her development, Ahdri Zhina, while nurturing her art as performer, dancer and choreographer, was first employed at Black Theatre Canada as an administrative assistant and thereafter went rapidly from being stage manager to performer. Wearing these different organizational and artistic caps gave Zhina a less superficial and more all-sided view of the theatre world.

A pivotal juncture in Zhina's growth came during 1983-1984, when she returned to Jamaica to explore her talents and to ground herself in Caribbean cultural traditions, past and present, at the root. Zhina became involved with the Graduate Theatre Company (G.T.C.) — a section of the Jamaica School of Drama — and taught classes in dance and drama. In the summer of 1983 Zhina toured with the G.T.C.'s production *Sufferer's Song* throughout the Caribbean.

The major commercial venture undertaken by Zhina while in Jamaica came in the form of a principal acting role in Ginger Knight's production *Whiplash*. This sojourn into Jamaican popular theatre was sobering for Zhina in many ways, despite the fact that the play and her performance garnered critical and popular acclaim on the island. Zhina preferred the quality of the G.T.C. to the pop of *Whiplash* and returned to Canada determined to show that quality and popular art can co-exist. In order to accomplish this, Zhina realized she had to be at the helm of the productions with which she would be involved, thus directing became the logical step for her. The success of *Please Do Not Adjust Your Set* and *Big Yard I* and *II* have heralded the arrival of a director with vibrant and creative talent, whose quality work should rise to the top.

Profiles by Klive Walker

the path of the story, the plot did not define the characters. This approach has worked for Haughton partly because he has lived in a tenement yard and he wanted to show that while there was a lot of conflict, anger and oppression in the ghetto community there also existed unity, love and the determination to fight for one's rights. In order to achieve this non-superficial view Haughton's characters had to be three-dimensional.

Haughton states that the basis for the character of Daisy was the Jamaican mother. A strong-willed woman with fierce determination, a woman who was independent without having a conscious feminist viewpoint, Daisy is not only capable of doing a so-called "man's job" (auto mechanic) but also of operating it as her own business. Ahdri Zhina was able to bring out the subtleties in all the characters and with Daisy one sees a woman who provides comfort, advice and trust to those in the yard and one who sets an example in rising above her humble origins.

While the script originally used Merle as the focal point, the director realized very quickly that the character to propel the story was Daisy. However, Zhina points out that the role of Merle had to be further developed. This character's defense mechanism was to go on the attack and cuss out friend and foe alike at the drop of a hat. Zhina combined these features with a more sensitive aspect to the character's personality that would more skillfully allow an audience to understand the motivation of Merle.

The street-wise Spotlamp was given similar treatment as this character's flashy and arrogant demeanor was tempered with carefully measured doses of humility.

The dialogue of the productions is thoroughly Jamaican in style and content, containing many of the idiosyncrasies and rhythm of what can no longer be called a "dialect" or "patois" but a language with all the attendant characteristics. The *Big Yard* plays exude what Louise Bennett, the Godmother of the Jamaican grassroots oral and written tradition has observed, that the Jamaican language is not just a means of communication but a unique and colourful means of cultural expression. Haughton deserves high marks for penning such witty, amusing and at times dramatic scripts using the current nuances and terms of the language. Ahdri Zhina develops a pace and rhythm in both plays which are amazingly compatible with the scripts. *Big Yard Part I* which is more of a comedy-drama has a slower, deliberate pace, while the sequel is more of a com-



edy and moves with a speed more in tune with its quick-tongued Jamaican characters. There is no formula at work here, Zhina simply does not repeat herself.

Another intriguing aspect of the production is the body language, which is very important in theatre, but which takes on a new meaning in a Caribbean production, since Caribbean body movements contain a rhythm of their own. Again, Ahdri Zhina rises to the occasion with obvious assistance from a very talented cast. Zhina's background in dance may be a factor in the quality of this aspect of the work. The audience sees a compatibility between spoken work and body movement.

Ahdri Zhina states emphatically that: "One of the reasons why I refuse to be trained as a director is that I think it will mar my Caribbean sensibilities." She goes on to point out that even in works that she has directed that are not thematically

Caribbean, her own particular rhythm, which happens to be Caribbean-influenced will inevitably be stamped on the production.

One of the key factors that sets Zhina and Haughton apart from others who work in popular Caribbean theatre is their insistence on professionalism, quality and polish, without diluting their basic material.

Both of these talented and creative artists are not content to remain in the underground theatre movement but are intent on gaining access to a mainstream audience while not adopting mainstream standards and approaches but retaining their own principles and art. ●

Klive Walker is a reggae researcher and writer who uses the Jamaican origins of reggae to focus on the music's international impact. He lives and works in Toronto.

THE LANGUAGE OF Big Yard

by Isobel Harry

The queue outside the Jamaican-Canadian Centre on Dupont Street was restless, buzzing, and dressed well-kris. Inside the small auditorium, the just-so Jamaican mood was set as mingling continued until curtain time, now 30 minutes past the stated hour. Children tore up the place, adults chatted and passively gazed at glassed-in displays of a flag of Jamaica, photos of past and present Prime Ministers, some crafts. Soon everyone sat down, the lights dimmed, and we sat facing three small shacks each with a step in front of a door, in a semi-circle facing a water cistern and spigot. We had entered *Big Yard, Part Two*.

Devon Haughton, dub poet, playwright and author of *Big Yard, Parts One and Two*, as well as of one book of poetry entitled *Roots an' Culture* (1983), and recording artist (*De Dub Poets*, 1984) was raised in Spanish Town, Jamaica, near Kingston. Spanish Town was one of the earliest known towns on the island, founded by the first Spanish colonizers in the 1500s and was the first capital, until 1752. Today, the only government there is Michael Manley's "provisional, unofficial" opposition party that he formed in protest after excluding himself from what he called Prime Minister Seaga's "illegal" election call. Tourists don't stop in Spanish Town. Devon was "street wise at 8 or 9 years old," gambling at poker and dominoes, betting on horses in a gang of fifteen kids who also put on shows in the streets. They used paint cans for drums, "fish-line" guitars, and sang, danced, and acted for money. "Then we would go and buy one big bread and butter!"

In *Big Yard*, "all the characters are real," says the author, who also adds that his writing comes from remembering the people and experiences of his past, and in accurately reproducing the unique language of his native land. His first aim with his plays has been to reach the West Indian community in Toronto with his message of pride in the culture by creating modern folk figures who dwell in one-room "jump-to-de-corner" shacks, always aspiring to the greener pastures known as "farrin," the foreign land.

In *Big Yard, Part Two*, Honest Ed's is Mecca "in a farrin," where reside all the practical, inexpensive household items that can only be bought in Jamaica, if they can be found at all, at many times the North American cost. Merle (Peter Williams) has about twenty items for sale in his cupboard-like "shop," but since he's gotten "more farrin stuff," he's gotten "boasty": every morning he dusts off each little packet, handling each box of Tampax, each jar of Horlicks with the care of someone who knows the true value of the precious commodities. Daisy (Sandra Lee) receives an Honest Ed's bag from her Jamaican-Canadian boyfriend Lynval (Donald Carr) who is coming "from farrin." In the final scene, two out of the three inhabitants of *Big Yard* pledge to join boyfriend or girlfriend "in a farrin"; the only one remaining in the yard is a white Rastafarian, Mr. White (Cliff Makinson), who has come "from farrin" because for him Jamaica epitomizes his own green pastures.

Devon Haughton uses the irony within this situation to make *Big Yard* relevant in Canada. He knows both sides of the immigrant story.

At the School of Drama, he met some of Jamaica's best and strongest voices in the evolution of Jamaican language in the cultural form of spoken poetry known as dub. Dub poetry opens the audience's ears to the "assonance-dissonance," the metaphor, the rhyme, the tonalities, the pacing, the humour, "the cheerful defiance of many niceties of traditional English grammar," the beauty of the particular mix of African and English, formerly known as patois or dialect, now increasingly known as the Jamaican language, or Jamaica talk.

In developing *Big Yard*, Haughton read *Jamaica Talk*, the authoritative study of the language by Frederic G. Cassidy which was first published in Jamaica in 1961, and he collected some old-time sayings and proverbs. Haughton also added some modern 'dj style' songs, current expressions, jokes, and political references. As Cassidy says in his introduction: "language...is infinitely multiform, highly variable, ever on the change so long as

MERLE: ... ALL DEM WAAN FI KNOW IS DAT YUH COM FROM FARRIN OR HAVE TIES WID FARRIN, DEN DEM WAAN FI BREED FI YUH AND JOIN YUH EENNA FARRIN AN DEM DOAN WAAN WORK EITHER, DEM RATHER FI SI DUNG AN WAIT PON DE POSTMAN FE COME WID A GREEN SLIP CAUSE DAT IS REGISTER LETTER WID MONEY FROM FARRIN.

Excerpt from original script *Big Yard II* by Devon Haughton.

it is alive."* Haughton appreciates that the language was mostly developed in tenement yards and it is this underrated creation that he highlights in *Big Yard*.

It is not as though speaking this populist, evolved language is even so much as acceptable in 'polite society' in Jamaica, for it is not. The parents of one of the actors in *Big Yard*, themselves 'middle-class,' were horrified at the language used by their well-educated offspring and stalked out of the play without comment. It is considered vulgar by many to speak anything but the Queen's English, as though born and bred a stone's throw from Buckingham Palace.

Though Haughton feels it is important for Canadians to understand West Indians, he first wanted to communicate to other West Indians where they came from, and from the reaction of the audience to *Big Yard, Part Two*, he has succeeded. The audience was flinging itself about in the aisles, shouting encouragement to the actors, giving them better lines, explaining what was really going on to each other, and laughing like crazy. Everybody had something to say and you didn't have to be on stage to say it.

This is exactly the kind of participation the creator of *Big Yard* loves to see because it means that the people are relating to the characters, their simplicity, their courage, their inventiveness, their ambition, and liking them (and perhaps themselves) more. "Most West Indians can identify with the tenement yard, but I want to show the Jamaicans who've been here 20 years what their heritage is, what they have in their country, which includes their language. That's why I don't want to water it down."

Edward Brathwaite calls this audience participation "total expression": "The oral tradition...demands not only the griot but the audience to complete the community: the noise and sounds that the maker makes are responded to by the audience and are returned to him. Hence we have the creation of a continuum where meaning truly resides. And this *total expression* comes about because people be in the open air, because people live in conditions of poverty ('unhouselled') because they come from a historical experience where they had to rely on their very *breath* rather than on paraphernalia like books and museums and machines."***

The impeccable comedic timing wrought by director Ahdri Zhina delineated perfectly the naturalistic, conversational, intimate mood of *Big Yard, Part Two*. The costumes by Gailsie Stewart were excellent descriptions of the characters' pretensions, station in life, and worldly appreciation of the latest fashions: no gold chain, no Rasta T-shirt, no meaning in a can of evaporated milk eluded Stewart! The actors, including the very funny Len Nelson as Spotlamp, Denise Harrison as Ophelia, Roy Plummer as Mr. Richards, and Oliver Harriot as Percy, performed in a low-key way, occasionally breaking into the frantic descriptions, vexations and "boderations" of normal daily life, always enhanced by each character's own personal acquired social 'style.'

About 6,000 people saw *Big Yard, Part One*, and possibly more saw *Part Two*. Haughton says that this kind of turnout is almost unknown in West Indian theatre in Canada. This is because, he adds, the plays chosen by Black theatres here don't relate well to the community. He says they are alienated from the community because "they don't approach the community. Younger people have ideas about theatre now, but they have no outlet for these ideas, as they aren't given a chance." So playwrights like Haughton have gone independent, and produce plays that are popular and very well attended.

Devon Haughton's next play will try to reach the Canadian community more, both through location (it will be set in Canada), and through "modifications" that he says he will make to the Jamaican language to make it more accessible to those who do not understand it. These modifications will be Haughton's attempt at "crossover" and could further the impact of Caribbean theatre in bridging the communication gap between two co-existing cultures. ●

Isobel Harry

* *Jamaica Talk, Three Hundred Years of the English Language in Jamaica*, by Frederic G. Cassidy, published by MacMillan Caribbean, London, 1961.

** *History of the Voice, The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry*, by Edward Kamau Brathwaite, published by New Beacon Books, London and Port of Spain, 1984.

The SICK BUTTERFLY

South Africa's War Against Children

by Marlene Nourbese Philip

Illustrations this article by TONY HAMILTON

Life nowadays is like a sick butterfly. To many of us it is not worth living when it is like this.... They little kids don't understand why they have been put in jail.

Bothale (12)

When I am old I would like to have a wife and to children a boy and a girl and a big house and to dogs and freedom.

Moagi (8)

Two Dogs and Freedom — Children of the Township Speak Out is the title of the book from which these two excerpts come. The book arose out of an English lesson during the 1985 South African emergency, and the children whose thoughts and feelings about the emergency appear in the book are between the ages of 8 and 15. They attended the Open School, an extra-mural cultural and educational project in Johannesburg, and it was the intensity of the children's feelings and thoughts that persuaded the school to publish their work.

The book was originally banned on the grounds that it contained "twisted and dangerous images of happenings in

South Africa." It was considered a threat against the state because it was "aimed at an adult market. It hopes to evoke sympathy for township school children. It portrays them as suffering because of mass oppression....The book undermines *white confidence in the morality of the law*"¹ (my emphasis). On appeal the ban was lifted.

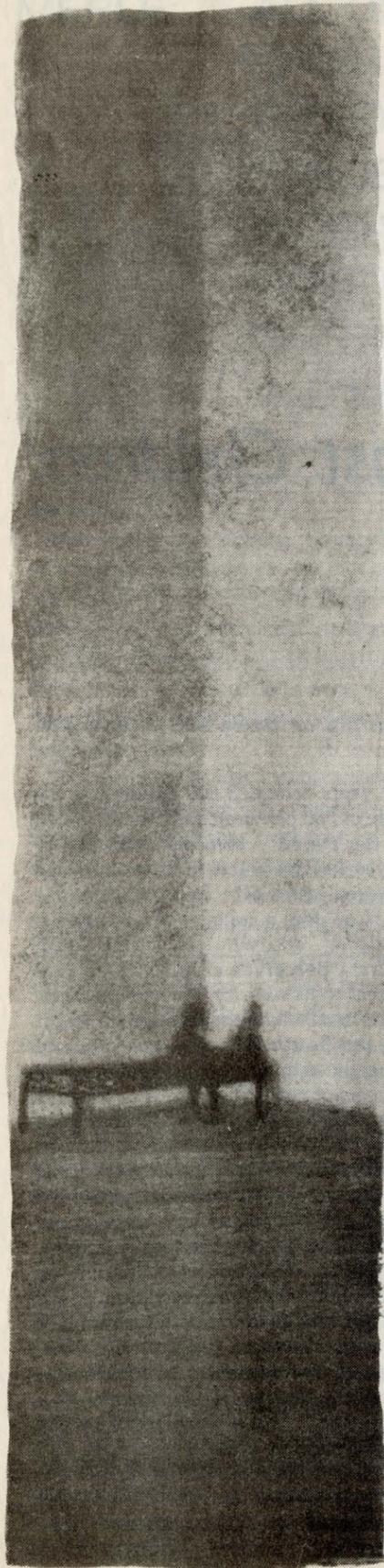
Black children in South Africa have traditionally suffered the fallout from the war against their parents which has resulted for them in poor nutrition, inadequate housing, substandard schooling and economic exploitation. The last few years, however, have seen a new development — the brutal attack by the state against children and young people. In 1982 eight children under 18 were detained by the state; in 1984, nine; in 1986 more than 2,000 under 16 were detained, and these only in the emergency areas. According to statistics collected by the Detainees' Parents Support Committee (DPSC), in the five months after the June 12, 1986 emergency, some 22,000 people were detained and 40% of those were under

¹Report of the Detainees' Parents Support Committee (DPSC). Unless otherwise identified, all quotations are from this document.

18 years of age. 8,800 children at the rate of 250 per week had been detained in this period — some as young as 8 or 9 years of age and in at least one documented case a baby four months old.

How does a state wage war against children, and why? Is it that South Africa perceives children as a real threat to its security, and are we therefore to conclude that the armed might of the South African state is truly threatened by children as young as 8 or 9 years of age? What does this tell us, if we need to know more, about such a state? And on the other side — how do children lay aside what we have come to think of as childhood to come to the flash point of taking on a state whose brutality they have been weaned upon.

Is this an aberration of childhood, or more accurate a manifestation of the potential of children, than the rampant consumerism and political sloth displayed by Western youth? Or is it merely reflective of the urgency of a situation? These were some of the questions that crossed my mind as I tried to make sense of the figures and statistics quoted above — as I read the writings of the young authors of *Two Dogs and Freedom*. What is child-



hood? Should children be protected from war at all costs, or should they be allowed to take the course of their lives into their own hands as Black South African children have done. It had not been the first time these thoughts had occurred to me. I entertained them when, in 1976, I read of the June 16 massacre in Soweto that indiscriminately and wantonly killed school children who were only claiming what was theirs by right — their land and a right to determine their future and that of their children. In "The News at Nine," a poem, I then wrote of "a child meeting bullets with books/...striking a deathly bargain/blood for being/...." I entertained these thoughts again during the crisis of Maurice Bishop's government in Grenada that sent school children marching to the airport to close it. I wrote then in a still unnamed poem of "the child who takes to the street/following a pied piper intent on revenge/the child who cannot spell/the act of commitment or courage it intends/a small body outgrown by the idea...who says childhood was not meant for this?" Once again I entertain these thoughts as I read of this war against children and how cheaply Black life is held, not only there but throughout the world. I consider my own Black children and wonder how much state power it would take to blow them away, lose them or destroy their minds.

As a parent I am both profoundly disturbed and drawn to the phenomenon of children at war, or involved in war, either as victims or on behalf of the state which, to my mind, is another form of victimization. Protection, guidance and education — love: war undermines and subverts all these parental functions; it undermines the overall confidence of those who produce life and wish to nurture it to fruition. Here in the West, where we have to date been fortunate or cunning enough to avoid war and armed struggle, childhood is a luxury. The most challenging event white parents face is the extended 'agony' of adolescence and all that that encompasses (and it can be a severely destructive period for both parent and child). There is also the spectre of youth unemployment. Black parents have the added problems of police harassment and pernicious racism that undermine their children's sense of worth. Comparison is odious, but laid

alongside the challenges facing their Black counterparts in South Africa, Western children and young people are comfortably off. My comparison, however, is not merely for the sake of comparison, and to say that South African children are worse off than their Western counterparts doesn't advance anything. What it does do for me is heighten the two extreme examples of what childhood might be all about, and much as I abhor the society which seduces its young people with false claims of advertisement and suggests no greater aim for them than making money, having a good lifestyle and drinking the right kind of beer, I am as disturbed by a society that forces its children to abandon childhood and enter the arena of war.

Childhood as we know it in the West is a relatively recent phenomenon. In Greek literature children were used primarily as props, and similarly in the Judeo-Christian tradition, although in the latter case the distinguishing mark was the existence of a soul, even in the littlest child. Jesus Christ may have suffered the little children to come unto him, but up to the 1400s, and with the exception of the Madonna and child, children do not appear in literature. Protection of the child for itself was not a clearly recognized value in the West, and for the most part children were considered miniature adults with even their clothing being a replica of adult clothing. Consider also the Fifth Crusade in 1212 known as the Children's Crusade: thousands of young people from France and Germany set out to free the Holy Land from the infidel, only to be lost, shipwrecked or sold into slavery.

With the coming of the Industrial Revolution in the eighteenth century, working class child labour would become a way of life, while fortunes made for the middle and upper classes would guarantee their children the cossetting and protection denied others. It is only as we get into the twentieth century that society begins to accept that children require protection from economic exploitation, and to recognize that childhood is an experience of significance and to be valued. Psychoanalytic theory validates that the child is the father and mother of the man and the woman and legislation 'protecting' the child and establishing compulsory education for the child begins to enter



the statute books of most Western countries. Compare this history of childhood, albeit abbreviated, with what Graham Greene observes in the 1930s as he travelled through Western Liberia:

Love, it has been said, was invented in Europe by the troubadours, but it existed here without the trappings of civilization. They were tender towards their children (I seldom heard a crying child, unless at the sight of a white face, and never saw one beaten).

Belfast, Cambodia, Viet Nam, Iran, Palestine, Lebanon — by no means an exhaustive list, but these are some of

the countries that come to mind when the issue of children at war arises for me. In Belfast children were and are, I presume, still involved in partisan strife more as extensions of their parents' struggles. When these children became the focus of the media their involvement in these struggles was presented within the context of them growing up surrounded by tension, hostilities and strife as an everyday aspect of life.

In Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge drafted children into their death squads which were directed against all intellectuals and as often as not against

other children. In his book, *Children of War*,² Roger Rosenblatt describes a young Cambodian girl in a refugee camp drawing pictures of a portable guillotine she was forced to use against other children who refused to work. The bizarre aspect of this mutilating war was that the Khmer Rouge believed it was purging the country of corruption and preparing children for a better life.

As in all war zones, Vietnamese children suffered the terrorism, guerilla raids and bombing that was a part of that war. There was no evidence that children were used or singled out as a group in any particular way.

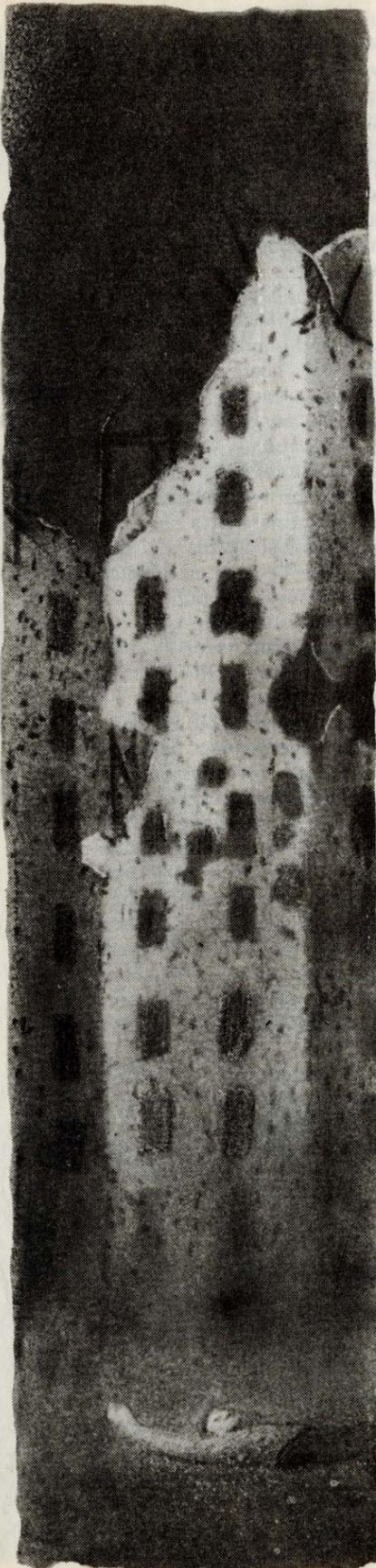
In Lebanon, children, women and old people comprise the majority in the Palestinian refugee camps; bombing raids against these camps, such as those against Shatila and Sabra must therefore be seen as directed against those groups. The public reason given by Israel for these raids is that the camps harbour terrorists, and whether or not we accept this reason, what is significant here is that there is no stated policy of singling out women or children as targets of war. Some may argue that it is moot whether or not it matters what the stated policy is, if the result is the same — the killing of children.

In Iran, the state encourages young boys — some as young as 13 or 14 — to volunteer to fight against Iraq. In the West, the drafting of young teen-age children into the army would be considered an abuse of the child; in Iran however the children and their parents believe they are only doing their duty to Allah.

The situation in South Africa differs from all of the above examples. There the full force of the state is brought to bear in a protracted period of attack against virtually all Black children in the townships and no place is sacrosanct — not the home, not the school.

What has singled out South African children has been the role they have come to play as students in South African politics. It is this involvement in politics in an organized way that presents another picture of childhood than the one we have grown accustomed to. The DPSC report cites, among others, the following reasons for their involvement: their energy; national oppression being more effective in con-

²Anchor Press/Doubleday, Garden City, New York, 1983.



trolling parents than youth; that police measures are less relevant for children; that young people do not have the burden of familial responsibilities; and their idealism and courage — as probably only the young can sustain.

Children often show a readiness to endure everything for their beliefs, especially when their detention memories are no longer debilitary to them. The small luxuries of life, although they are enjoyed tremendously when available, do not consume their attention. Children are prepared to deny all sorts of privileges and comforts for 'the struggle.' They will work tirelessly at organizing their communities and see it as a great honour to simply be involved in working for a better future for all.

The Bantu Education act has become the focus of much of the organization by students. This act prescribes that the African should be educated to "meet the demands which the economic life of South Africa will impose upon him." The cornerstone of these educational policies was the precept that the African had to be taught from childhood that "equality with the Europeans (was) not for them." Their advocacy and organization as students against the educational policies as contained in this act has singled them out as targets in June 1976, and again in 1985, 1986, and 1987. The impact of student organization has been such that "the adults who felt rejected by them 10 years ago, look to them now for direction in many communal matters, and increasingly consult them over decisions to be taken."

The campaign of state terror against children has been indiscriminate with 'non-involved' non-activist children being as vulnerable to arrest and detention as activists and organizers. The list of abuses by the state against Black children is long, and it details how the 'protector' of children, the state, has become the abuser of children — South Africa does have child protection legislation. Random detention of children; the torture of children in detention including threats of necklacing; the bombing of homes of children; failure to inform families, legal guardians or lawyers of the arrest and detention of children; unsanitary, overcrowded conditions in detention; inadequate medical attention in detention (there have been reports of children cutting

out bullets themselves rather than going to seek medical aid); lack of adequate food in detention; very little or no exercise; incarceration with adults, sometimes criminals; random shootings (against children) by the armed forces as well as vigilantes at funeral vigils, or on their way to and from school or shops. These are but a sample of the documented activities by the South African government in its war against its children. Parents are often so confused and distressed at the disappearance of their children and their inability to find them that many express relief at finding them in the morgues. It puts an end to the endless bureaucratic red tape that confounds their search, not to mention the expense of lawyers.

This regime that seeks to uphold "the morality of the law" has imprisoned an 11-year-old boy, Fanie Goduka, for 57 days. While in prison Fanie, who was picked up while sheltering himself from the rain, was assaulted by police officers, black and white: "They kicked me with their big boots...they kicked me all over. They only stopped when my tooth came out."

In Soweto, an entire high school of some 1,200 students was arrested, herded into trucks and taken away. In the Northern Orange Free State police and defence forces occupied a school and carried out beatings with the sjambok. "As soon as the siren sounds to end break, they immediately proceed to start whipping people into the classrooms. In another instance an entire family including two babies, four and seven months old respectively, as well as a three-year-old was arrested and held for a day.

The DPSC report identifies three aims of this war against children: to obtain confessions, to obtain information on others, and general terrorism. And to some degree, the state does succeed for the effect of its methods reverberates throughout the communities: children go on the run, fearing either imprisonment or for the safety of their homes; families become even more fragmented; stress is increased on family members and not least of all is the effect on the children themselves. Depression and anxiety are the two broad categories their symptoms cluster around. On the less negative side, the DPSC has noted that in some



cases the family unit and wider community has been strengthened by the incarceration of children. One father's way of coping with the disappearance of his children is to widen his parental responsibility:

There are so many of these children. We do not know where our children are. Therefore we must help any child that we find and try to give them some of the things that they can no longer get from their parents. We must give them food, shelter, and love. Maybe in another place it will be my child that is getting this, so I must give to those I find. We all must.

This has been but an extremely abbreviated account of how the South African government has set about to further ravage its Black population. President Botha has recently decided to extend the state of emergency, promising to fight the 'terrorists' in South Africa and claiming his God-given moral authority to do so. This from a man responsible for actions such as those described above. Life is indeed a very sick butterfly when words like morality are bandied about in this context. If ever South Africa retained a scintilla of morality, it has now absolutely and irrevocably abnegated it by taking its war to the children. "It becomes a crime against humanity when children are involved.... There is no justification for a war against children" (*Toronto Star*, June 3, 1987). So testified Eli Wiesel, Nobel peace laureate before the court trying Klaus Barbie for the murder of 44 Jewish children. How astonishing the silence (and perhaps not so astonishing) that has greeted the persecution and incarceration of some 8,800 children in South Africa.

Personal attachment, emotional stability and permanency of educational influence were the three elements identified by Anna Freud in her work, *War and Children*,³ as essential in preventing psychological malformations. With the possible exception of the first requirement, none of these needs are being met for Black South African children, and undoubtedly South Africa will reap the harvest of this brutal sowing for a long time to come. One thing we may be certain of is that state terrorism of the

type described above is bound to leave an indelible mark on the society as a whole.

I don't know if we have learnt any more about childhood from the experiences of Black South African children. These children who have taken on the brunt of the hippos, the tear gas, the bullets and sjamboks have done what they had to do and sacrificed a childhood to guarantee a future of some dignity and failing that, death. To attempt to maintain traditional distinctions in the face of Botha's regime is irrelevant, for the state has always warred against the children, albeit in more subtle ways, by depriving them of adequate nutrition, housing and schooling; of their parents and their families and more than anything else of their land. What the children have done is brought that war from the shadows into the open and this is probably very much in the tradition of childhood — of the child's ability to articulate, often to the embarrassment of adults, *exactly* what it is they experience, observe or feel. All sorts of adages and aphorisms come to mind: "Out of the mouth of babes...." "A little child shall lead them...." By taking its war to the children, the South African regime has revealed just how morally bankrupt it is and shown that it will go to any length to ensure white supremacy.

In a country where the sick butterfly flutters and "little kids don't understand why they have been put in jail," in such a country the children have become "sword and fire./Red ruin, and the breaking up of laws" (Tennyson). Despite my not being a Christian, I find myself seeking biblical imagery to assist me in managing the evil that is South Africa. This is probably fitting given the claim of white South Africans to have founded the kingdom of God in South Africa. In a New Testament prediction recorded by Matthew, Jesus Christ predicts that many strangers and foreigners would inherit "the promised land," but that "the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness." Many strangers and foreigners have inherited South Africa, and its Black children have been "cast out into outer darkness," but to continue the prediction, South Africa is guaranteed great "weeping and gnashing of teeth." ●

³Medical War Books, 1943.

Marlene Nourbese Philip

DOING THE DOCUMENTARY

by Gary Kibbins

ART, POLITICS AND
THE NEW DOCUMENTARY
A SPACE, TORONTO
MAY 31, 1987

ART, POLITICS, AND THE NEW DOCUMENTARY

Working the Double Shift (1986) video; dirs. Lisa Steele & Kim Tomczak; 18:30 min.
Mediashun (1986) film; dir. Media Counter; 13:00 min.
Part I: Untitled; Part II: Does the Knife Cry When It Enters the Skin? (1984) video; dir. Jorge Lozano; 10:00 min.
Our Marilyn (1987) film; dir. Brenda Longfellow; 24:00 min.
Nursing History (1986) video; dir. Marion McMahon; 10:00 min.
Speak Body (1980) film; dir. Kay Armatage; 8:00 min.
Under The Table (1984) film; dir. Luis Osvaldo Garcia; 24:00 min.
Eye of the Mask (1985) film; dir. Judith Doyle; 57:00 min.
Grandfather, Your Right Foot is Missing (1984) film; dir. Yanus Ahmed; 60:00 min.

AT SOME POINT IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF postmodern criticism, it became necessary to protect the term "reality" with quotation marks. "Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation," said Guy Debord, observing a split between reality and image, with the cultural surplus value accruing to the image. And now, it was thought by some, we can't distinguish between reality and its representation any more. Witness the flood of letters asking Marcus Welby for medical advice; witness Presidents confusing film scripts with foreign policy.

To suggest that this conceptual malady, exemplified most conspicuously by President Reagan, is co-extensive with us all is deeply libellous. Yet in some instances this critique of representation was taken a step or two further. Jean Baudrillard has identified the society of the spectacle as the "age of simulacra": "The transition from signs which dissimulate something to signs which dissimulate that there is nothing, marks the decisive turning point." The result is "hyperreality" — signs with no referent, representations which displace reality. The result is also a fore-closed terrain on which the political subject might have acted, had there been a reality left upon which to act, and had the subject not already been dissolved in the process.

Rather than using the concept of "hyperreality" to describe localized tendencies or see it at work at speci-

STAY IN THERE MARILYN!



HAPPY AND FRESH AFTER ALL-NIGHT SWIM, MARILYN BELL REMOVES HER GOGGLES TO SMILE AND WAVE AS SHE NEARS ONE WATERFRONT

A nation's self-gratitude: The Toronto Star's coverage of Marilyn Bell's trans-limnetic triumph; from *Our Marilyn* by Brenda Longfellow.

fic sites of social production, it is attributed to social processes in general: the age of simulacra. Not surprisingly this serves to incite efforts to work through problems of representation rather than drown in a kind of crypto-fascism masquerading as cultural critique. Despite its immense popularity in some areas, the desperation of this and other similar kinds of cultural critique based in denial and negativity may in fact have contributed to a renewal of interest in documentary, the only genre of representation which programmatically countenances the "real."

It was surprising, then, the topics which didn't figure in the discussions following the screenings at the A Space *New Documentary* event. Firstly, documentary was not held to be in "crisis," or even in a state of flux. There was instead a sense that documentary changes historically, and requires constant reassessment by producers, critics and audience. The term "new" in the title of the seminar/screening series was not intended to fall into the post/neo/new mania which continues its institutionalizing and de-historicizing of cultural production. It was meant, according to the organizer and curator Richard Fung, to include types of work which are not always considered to be documentary, but which would nonetheless add a great deal to the debates regarding the representation of "reality," as well as the practice of social transformation.

The second thing which was not discussed was the documentary's alleged privileged access to "truth," its "objectivity," its "seriousness." While TV documentary producers, particularly those acting under the hallowed title of journalism, might cling to such

essentialist fantasies, it is hard to imagine too many independent producers who would invoke such rhetoric to prop up their work. (The two other recent documentary-centred events in Toronto — *Private Concerns in the Public Eye* at the AGO, and *Transmutations: Formal Invention in Documentary* curated by William Beatty and Marc Glassman and screened at various locations — did frame the critique of objectivity as a central concern, however.)

Instead, the *New Documentary* discussions were generally pragmatic in nature. The few times when one "school" was championed over another — such as the "suggestive" work over the "didactic" work, or the privileging of "pleasure" over "denial" — the ensuing dialogue pointed towards a kind of pluralism determined by the context of the work. (Rather than one type of work being inherently superior to another, determining a work's success is more concretely a consequence of conditions of viewing, the type of audience, whether or not the artist is present to discuss the work, and so on.)

The reason for this pragmatic approach was perhaps the make-up of the audience, constituted primarily of social activists and activist-artists. The speakers, Bill Nicols, Renee Baert, and Peter Steven, none of whom are producers, gave brief introductions to the three categories of screenings, without compelling the discussions into a preconceived critical framework. This proved to be very useful, as the discussions took on a producer-oriented framework. The discussion which follows in some cases took very direct cues from the issues and terminology used in the seminar, and in other cases very indirect ones.

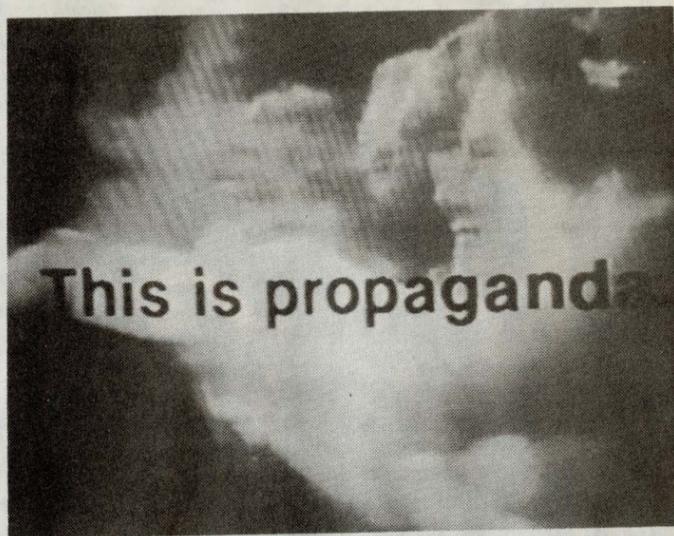
SUGGESTIVE and DIDACTIC

The general concepts "suggestive" and "didactic" are useful enough but are more often than not reductive when applied directly to complex works which rarely fall neatly into either category. Even the television documentary, held up as the worst-case didactic format, invariably has a number of subtexts lurking below its smiling informative surface, while suggestive work can use devices which strongly affect the direction of the reading.

The issue arose with the first screening, *Working the Double Shift* by Lisa Steele and Kim Tomczak, which was later compared to Jorge Lozano's video *Does the Knife Cry When It Enters the Skin?* *Double Shift* hammered home the meaning, framing its unsailable knowledge with humour and fanciful allegories using off-air footage. It insisted on its 'alternative' circumstances — alternative, that is to the mainstream messages which it critiqued — so relentlessly that the viewer could not help but be witness to competing message contents and message systems. Despite the self-confident propagandistic nature of the work, the recognition of a complex field of message-making makes *Double Shift* much less monocratic than, for example, bad cinema-verité works (like Nicholas Broomfield and Sandi Sissel's *Chicken Ranch*) which plays uncritically and unreflexively on the empiricist look of direct, distanced objectivity.

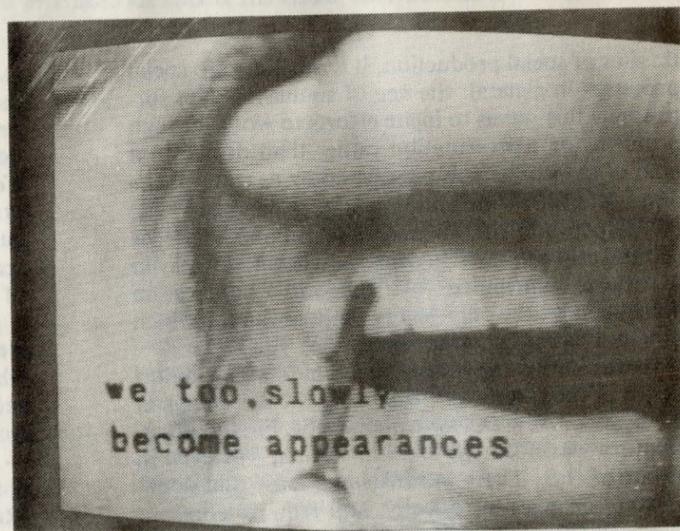
Knife on the other hand was placed in the "suggestive" category, mainly because of the questions asked (by character-generated text on the screen) in the second part of the tape. While the answers to the questions posed were not necessarily clear in detail, the direction of the inquiry was as unambiguous as those posed (and answered) in *Double Shift*. At the same time, the emotional imperative to think according to the direction provided by the author was felt more strongly than in *Double Shift*. Yet despite the similar results of both works with respect to engaging the audience in a political framework of interpretation, *Knife* was clearly more generous in providing a space for subjective maneuvering; one didn't feel as cornered by the argument.

At a certain point in engaging a work, it becomes necessary to abandon the suggestive/didactic pair-off. Didactic has become a particularly abused term, referring to direct forms of exposition only, while excluding suggestive works even though the latter can stake out their message just as surely as didactic ones. Suggestive works can avoid the censure of didacticism simply by employing more subtle rhetorical strategies, while being equally as prescriptive. The impatience with didacticism isn't so much that it commands a specific reading, but that it commands at all. On the other hand, the more comfortable response often experienced from a suggestive work may have less to do with the absence of a single-choice reading, than with the fact that that singular reading has only been sug-



Stills courtesy of Vitape.

Stills from: (top) *Working the Double Shift* by Lisa Steele and Kim Tomczak, and (bottom) *Does the Knife Cry When It Enters the Skin?* by Jorge Lozano.



gested. For example, the desire perceived in *Double Shift* to strongly direct its reading could, I think, be perceived as easily in *Knife*, which reached a similarly tight position, yet employed a strategy which made the viewers feel like they had played a greater role in reaching that position.

In documentary, suggestive and didactic seem to be useful terms only when identifying in a very general way the rhetorical strategies employed in a given work. They become particularly useful when they are also relied on to connote value: "didactic works have an authoritarian dimension; suggestive works do not."

PLEASURE and DENIAL

These do not constitute a conceptual pair in the same way that suggestive and didactic do, but are linked, I think for more specifically historical reasons. Firstly, Laura Mulvey's often cited and influential "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" linked the two concepts politically by suggesting that pleasure is extracted from Hollywood movies for all the wrong reasons: the assumption and insistence on a male subjectivity, resulting in a kind of scopotocracy of movie-going; and that threatening representations (real women) are fetishized and idealized. Therefore pleasure, at least this type, should be denied. While this analysis was based on a reading of Hollywood narrative cinema, the nervousness about pleasure, its source and implications, was felt even in the area of documentary — the logical site of opposition due to its (anti-poststructuralist) proposition that, yes, there is a reality behind representation.

Pleasure was not abandoned, of course, but reclaimed in a diverse number of ways for different political ends. There were, not surprisingly, a plurality of forms of pleasure — and an old-left, puritanical asceticism was not found to be one of them. "Denial" came to mean not the denial of pleasure, but rather the pleasures of denial, the denial of fixed meanings and transparent forms. Some works clearly denied the reactionary pleasures of the closed narrative and the unproblematic access to a unilateral truth, etc., while instituting the "pleasure" of the "suggestive" or textually open-ended work; or, in the case of *Double Shift*, the denial of pleasure due to its singular reading structure and mode of address might have been partially compensated for by the fast pleasures of up-beat music and post-production effects, and humour.

There is a rich tradition of "denial" documentaries: Bunuel's extraordinary *Land Without Bread*, or Godard's *Pravda*, in which a critique of the documentary form and the political nature of constructed meanings predominated over or even replaced the production of meanings about the documentary object. Denial has obvious problems, however, problems which are not overcome simply by making the denial pleasurable. Relying on denial strategies will eventually signal a capitulation in the face of the problems of representation. A much more challenging and difficult procedure is one which seeks to produce meaning about the world while clarifying the manner in which it does so: an affirmative, pleasurable, self-reflexive documentary, with a concrete understanding of the position of the viewer.

Brenda Longfellow's *Our Marilyn*, about the Canadian Marilyn Bell's swim across Lake Ontario in 1954, combined the denial of one kind of pleasure with the instatement of another. *Our Marilyn* is played off against the phantasmic representation of "their Marilyn," Marilyn Monroe. Rather than moulding the body as perfect, safe, knowable, and open to any level of abstraction and fragmentation to maximize

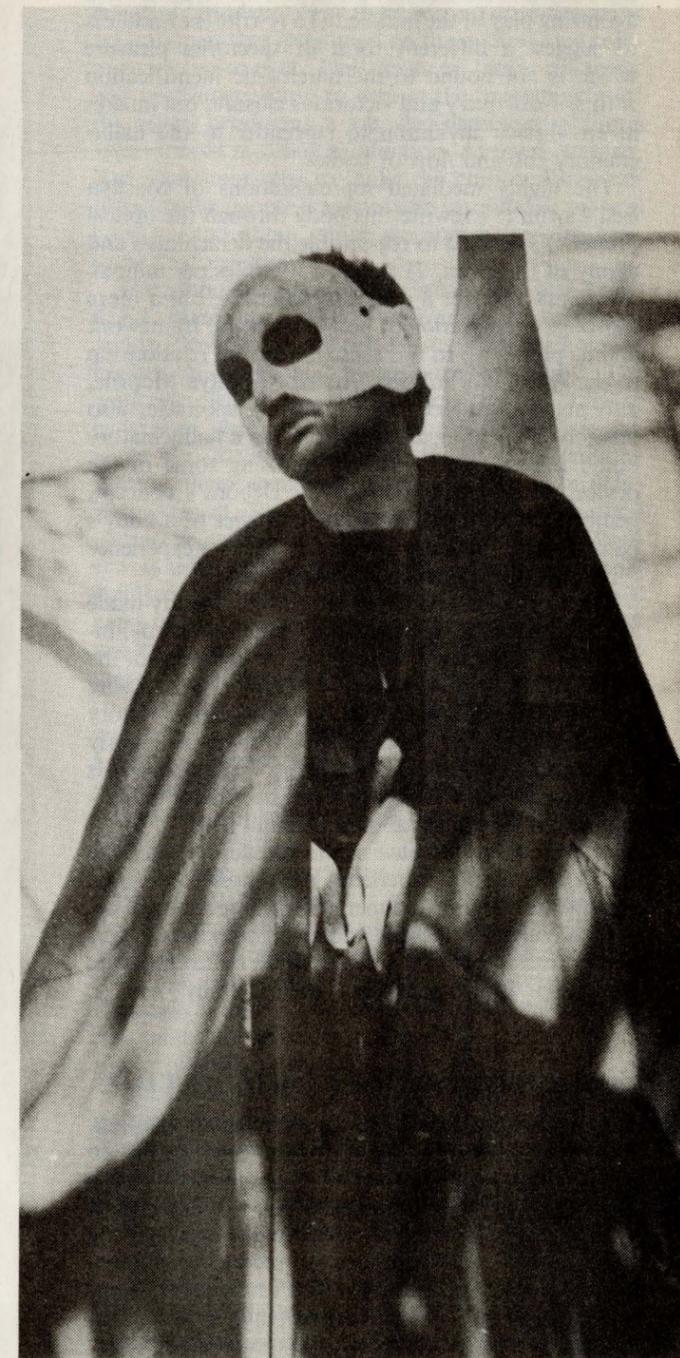


Photo: Adriana Angel

"Lord of Death" scene performed by Nixtayolero theatre collective, Nicaragua, used in Judith Doyle's film *Eye of the Mask*, 1985.

sanitized pleasure (as the official record framed "our" national victory with Marilyn's entry into the water on the American side and her exit on the Canadian side; or as Marilyn Monroe's birth in girl-next-door in-

nocence, and death in nudity), *Our Marilyn* investigates a different terrain: "...what reconstitutes the body and the body of the film is the relentless and agonizing play of the middle... To rewrite the middle is to suggest a different form of spectatorial pleasure which is not bound to the narcissistic identification with self-discovery and victorious closure, but inheres in an implicit invitation to surrender to the hallucinatory ebb and flow of bodies."

The highly mediated representations of Marilyn Bell's swim ("I rewrite this body through the optical printer") was used to reassemble the detachment and agony of the swim, 21 hours, 55 strokes per minute. The result was not a denial of spectacle, but a more thorough examination of both its political framework and its pleasures. In this sense it bears no relationship to the Andy Warhol silkscreens of Marilyn Monroe, also highly mediated, also affirming spectacle, also possibly advocating a "surrender" to a hallucinatory body. Instead, *Our Marilyn*, by using some of the devices of spectacle contrary to Debord's concept, gambles on reconstructing the *experience* of a body's painful work, in a way which asks that we experience "lived bodies" rather than distant fetishes.

The story of Marilyn Bell has a kind of ready-made socialist realist framework: the whole and heroic individual typifies traits common to the collective or the nation; in this way the victory of Marilyn Bell climbing out of the lake onto Canadian soil constitutes a victory for all Canadians. This she-is-us reading — eagerly seized upon by the press and the nation at the time — is not possible with *Our Marilyn*, less because of the juxtapositioning with the abused national fetish of Marilyn Monroe than because of the manner in which the viewer is asked to experience the represented body. Despite the haunting manner in which the agony of the swim is recreated, identification with both the extraordinary feat and with the person is all but impossible: there is no "characterization," there is "only" a body.

TRADITIONAL and INNOVATIVE

These general categories, too, were found wanting. The reasons had nothing to do with any hostility to either, but again was due to a pragmatic attitude generally held by both the artists and the audience. It seemed that both terms carried with them pre-existing value judgements: "traditional" seemed to imply a kind of formalistic failure, while "innovative" seemed to suggest that a work was inherently advanced. In any case, both types of work — to the extent that they can be accurately labelled in the first place — are more usefully assessed in their functional context. Whether or not *A Wife's Tale* can be judged to be "innovative" due to the closeness the artists managed to get to the woman depicted is not itself a particularly interesting question.

It was the debates around traditional *versus* innovative, I think, which brought into relief the "new" in *New Documentary*. Rather than proclaiming a

radical break in formal operations, different emphases on existing aspects of documentary were suggested. On the one hand, the value placed on innovation was extended beyond the textual operations of the work itself, to include the various interrelationships in the life of an artwork: artist/documentary subject, artist/profilmic event, artwork/audience, artist/audience, etc. Secondly, the term "documentary" was extended to include film and video "essays" as well as works which address the politics of representation in an historical framework — works which Richard Fung says oftentimes fall between the cracks. It seemed, then, that the emphasis was ultimately placed on a work's *effectiveness*. This simple proposition is an effort to learn from and employ a wide variety of critical models in order to further the development of communicative democracy on a practical level. "Laboratory" work, as well as work produced specifically for support groups or

for organizing purposes, was looked at supportively and critically from this perspective, without inherent value being placed on either beforehand.

"Innovation" in any case is just as capable of worsening the problems of representation for the viewer as it is of demystifying them. An interesting case is the film *Axe Fight* by two American anthropologists, Asch and Chagnon, screened in the *Transmutations* series. *Axe Fight* depicts a conflict between different village members of the Yanomami in northern Brazil. It is divided into three sections: raw, unedited footage of the event; an "analysis" and restructuring of the event, complete with circles and arrows and diagrams; and a final, edited version. The most generous way to read the film would have been as a work of pure *denial*, in the same critical spirit as *Land Without Bread*. The intention, however, clearly was to "correct" the inadequacies of filmic representation by making a good show of appending the neces-

sary data. The sparse and empirical nature of the data only served to deepen the empirical and scientific vanities of ethnographic film as the ultimate producer of "evidence," as there was no accompanying critical operation attempted on the professorial commentary/voice-over. One form of filmic authority was used uncritically to expose the inadequacies of the other, producing a lopsided depiction of film's apparatus of meaning production. At the same time, *Axe Fight* managed to make the classic mistake of reducing the people on view to an inscrutable cultural phenomenon about which we now happen to have some "information."

The opposition regarding innovative and traditional came up implicitly during a discussion of Judith Doyle's *Eye of the Mask*, a work depicting various Nicaraguan popular theatre groups. The work was clearly supportive of both the revolution in general as well as the work of the theatre groups, while also including material found — at least by some audience members at the seminar — to be politically suspect. The two sections at issue were a night club scene, with decor and music modeled after Western middle class leisure ideals, and a group of children, aged about 10, delivering a choreographed exposition of revolutionary fervour. *Eye of the Mask* was the most "traditional" work screened, employing a verité style with a small amount of voice-over to contextualize both the circumstances on the screen and those of the Western artist representing both another language and another culture. This model was not altered even during those sequences thought politically problematic, even though the filmmaker wanted contradiction to be present and perceived. Two readings emerged from this strategy: either that proposed by the filmmaker, whereby the "contradictions" were all formally treated in the same "hands off" manner, relying on the viewer to read through them; or the contrary reading, where the formal sameness seemed to signal the absence of contradiction, and that the material was all to be received in a similarly uniform way.

Understanding the textual structure and options present in a work doesn't always serve to clarify and predict responses, however. In the case of *Eye of the Mask*, the issue of audience once again seemed paramount, as if a more concrete understanding of the conditions of reception is more useful in judging whether or not a work is "successful." The discussion began to wind down at about that point, although it should be noted that despite the withering heat of an unventilated A Space, the audience lasted the whole day, marking the event a "success" in those terms, while affirming the *affirmative* possibilities of documentary in particular and social change in general. ●

Market—58-31 Women—28-31 62ND YEAR SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 1954—52 PAGES 5c PE



* In the hectic, happy hours since her wonderful swim, Marilyn Bell hasn't had time to thank all her supporters and well-wishers. But today she found a way to do just that. She asked The Star to send the autographed picture of herself to everyone who asks for it. The Star is happy to oblige both Marilyn and her admirers. You can have an 8 by 10 inch copy of this picture of Marilyn free simply by sending a note or postcard. Address your request to: "Marilyn Bell Photo, 80 King St. W., Toronto."

TEARS IN MARILYN'S EYES NO RACE WITH

CHEERS OF 100
OVERWHELM
METRO EDIT



MARILYN BELL, the Toronto schoolgirl who did the impossible Thursday, was showered with thousands of dollars who suffered with her through every mile of the punishing 17-mile swim. One prize was a \$100 bonus as she left the handshell, after receiving her prizes and hearing Leslie Bell singers sing a song to her.

TRADE UP BAY STREET MARILYN GIFTS CAR INS!

Reproduced by Preston Microfilming Services Limited.

TIME for a GIFT

TIME FOR A GIFT
BOB BEAN & DAVID CRAIG
EYE LEVEL GALLERY
HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA
MARCH 11th - 28th 1987

by Bruce Barber

THERE ARE FEW EXHIBITIONS OF CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL ART WHICH DEAL WITH SUBJECTS AS COMPLEX AS IMPERIALISM. BOB BEAN AND DAVID CRAIG'S RECENT COLLABORATIVE EXHIBITION AT HALIFAX'S EYE LEVEL GALLERY, DOES.

This is the second time that a number of the works in this show have been exhibited, the first occasion being at A Space in Toronto two years ago. For the Halifax exhibit, Bean and Craig have checked the austerity of the earlier exhibition by including several new works which have added significantly to the complexity of the whole without diminishing either the interrelatedness of the individual works or their power as political statements.

The flyer for the exhibit establishes the theme(s) by juxtaposing three separate images of 'exchange.' The first image is an Egyptian hieroglyphic relief sculpture representing figures exchanging commodities over which is printed the title *Time for a Gift*. On the obverse side of the flyer, there is an engraving of women working at an international telephone exchange (circa 1930), with the middle telephonist absent from the telephone over

which is hung the sign Kairo (Cairo). And finally, a newswire photograph of former Egyptian President Sadat and U.S.S.R.'s Podgorny on the occasion of their visit to the Aswan Dam forms the basis for one of the major works in the exhibit. The nature of exchange, giving/receiving, is clearly established and located in a loose historical context of the pre-Christian era, to the early twentieth century when direct long distance communication be-

came a reality, to the late Sixties. Two codes of communication are also established visually and aurally: the hieroglyph and transcontinental telecommunications (in the form of long distance telephone and the newswire service) which are also used for photomechanical reproduction. The references are clear. Intimate exchanges based on mutual interest and a concern for equity are juxtaposed to those based on the one-way transmission of power.

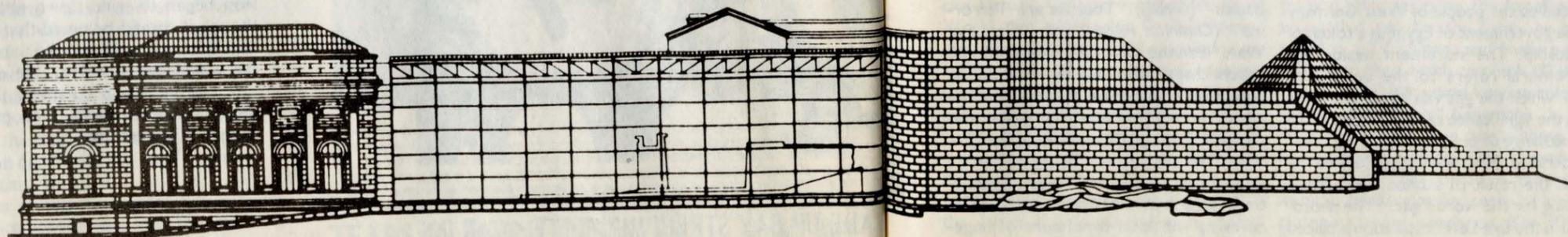
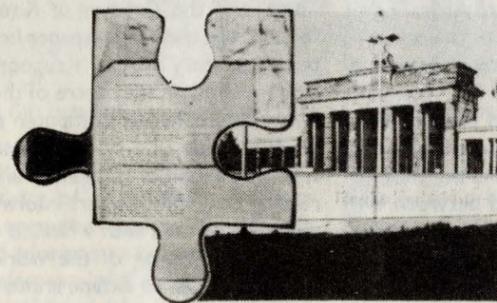
The Egyptian theme is carried in several works. It is significant that both Bean and Craig, on separate occasions, visited Egypt and began their collaboration after comparing their travel experiences. Their 'grand tour' became in the process of communicating and reflecting on their travels, a process of conscientization. It is in this larger context, of the relation of western travellers to the third world, that Bean's comments regarding the focus of the show are particularly acute. "The framework for the show is *our* culture.

It's not about being *here*. It's about being *there*." For Bean and Craig, the exercise of tourism became more than a simple-minded ("I've been there...and captured the feeling...the sights and...experienced it all") transcendental 'rite of passage.' It allowed the constitution of new knowledge about the nature and extent of first world imperialism.

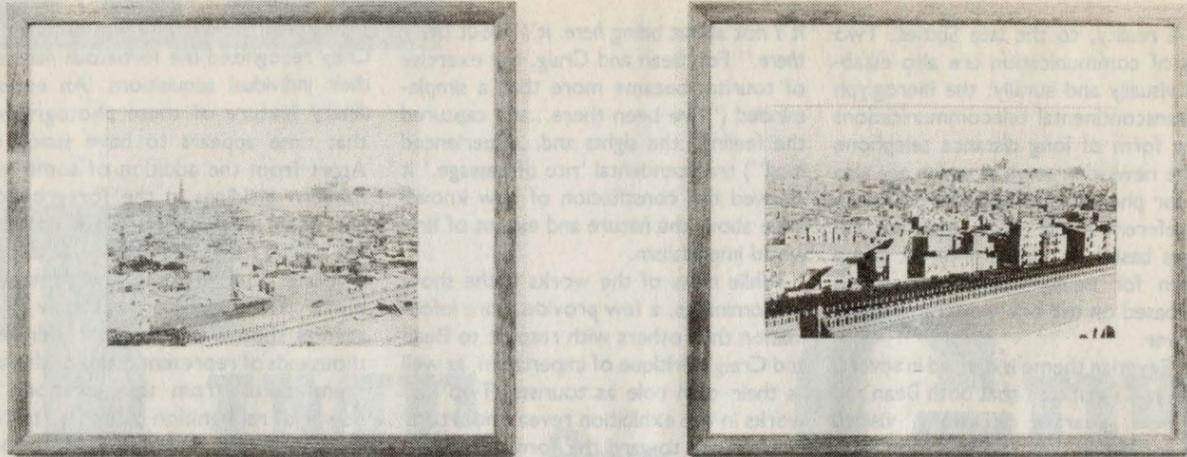
While none of the works in the show predominates, a few provide more information than others with respect to Bean and Craig's critique of imperialism, as well as their own role as tourists. Two key works in the exhibition reveal the artists' ambivalence toward the form of knowledge which is gained when one practices the appropriative skills of the tourist/consumer. The first is the diptych photographic work, two vistas of Cairo photographed 100 years apart from almost the same vantage point. The first from 1880 and signed by a J. Sebah was found by Craig in Nova Scotia in 1983. The second was taken by Bob Bean in 1979 and

printed for the exhibition after Bean and Craig recognized the fortuitous nature of their individual acquisitions. An extraordinary feature of these photographs is that time appears to have stood still. Apart from the addition of some more modern buildings in the foreground of the Bean photograph, these images of old Cairo, showing Mosque, minaret, dwellings, and market are remarkably similar. These vistas are probably two of several thousand, perhaps hundreds of thousands of representations of the same scene taken from this location. The power of recognition that these pictures evoke confirms that most uncompromising condition of photography, as Susan Sontag has remarked, its power of "literally *taking*." Here, the bare fact of photography as apparatus of colonization is revealed. In these two photographs/'takings,' the durability of both the sight fetish and the sacralization of the site is confirmed. The primary form of the commodity is conferred by the simple act of taking a photograph, the image having attained its real measure of worth as a unit of (implied) economic value, as money.¹ The sight in the age of mechanical reproducibility has allowed the original, in the terms of Walter Benjamin's famous equation, to be both de-valued and re-valued. One is drawn to seek the original, the unique experience, one which has been paradoxically denied and revived by photomechanical reproduction. Upon this paradox the reproducibility of tourism is based.

The relationship between the auratic and the conferring of economic value on the object of ritual is further developed in the paired Pullman Company advertisements, the copy for which sells machinery against a background of painted scenes of libidinous harem girls languishing amid Middle Eastern markets. This is classic orientalism: the West taking upon itself the task of constructing an image of the



Detail from *A New Tomb*, photograph/xerox by Robert Bean and David Craig.



Picturing Cairo diptych b & w photograph work, each 11" x 20", 1987.

East. Another series of photographs and engravings of obelisks being transported or toppled, paired with photos of aspects of male socialization, figures the condition of appropriation and control as succinctly as the Pullman ads. The obelisks are being transported (a few photos are of the same obelisk) from their original sites (one suspects) in the eighteenth and nineteenth century equivalents of today's third world, to their (one projects) new locations in the first world. These re-sitings probably confirm the existence of a colonial relationship. The iconographic significance of the obelisk (from the Greek word meaning "spit"), as patriarchal symbol of phallic omnipotence is revealed: the removal becoming not simply an act of relocation but of castration and the transferral (exchange) of power.

The transferral of power and the reinforcement of imperialist ideology is examined in two other important works in the exhibition. The first is the photocollage *A New Tomb* which documents the 'gift' of the Temple of Dendur from the United Arab Republic of Egypt to the government and the people of the United States. The U.S. had given a large percentage of the aid (through UNESCO) to save the Nubian monuments in danger of being completely flooded by the waters of the Aswan Dam which, ironically, had been funded in large part by the government of the U.S.S.R. The Eisenhower administration's cancellation of the U.S. offer to help finance the Dam's construction in July 1956 has been cited as a key event which altered the balance of power in the region and "triggered the Suez crisis." Craig and Bean's work reflects the critical work of Palestinian exile Edward Said whose writings have done much to

reveal the ideological underpinnings of the roots of conflict in the Middle East. The *A New Tomb* work states in its final text that, "the vast flow of armaments to Saudi Arabia and Israel proceeds with utter lack of concern for the human rights policy of the Saudi elite or of the Israeli military occupation." And, "the U.S. administration is also hoping to realize the long term aim of a policy to remove Egypt from the Middle East where it has posed a threat to U.S. interests in the oil producing states and turn it toward Africa. Egypt is being armed, not out of devotion to human rights, but as an army of African intervention." The work's four elements — text, news photo, and plans of New York's Metropolitan Museum (the final recipient of the temple), and the photo of the temple itself situated between two enlargements of temple stones — are perhaps less resolved formally than its companion works but in the context of the whole show this work functions critically without lapsing into ambiguity.

The second work dealing with the gift of cultural objects is the large colour mural photograph, incised as a puzzle of the Kalabasha Gateway housed in the Egyptian Museum in West Berlin. The gateway, like the Temple of Dendur, was donated to the people of West Germany by the government of Egypt as a token of friendship. The statement beside the photomural refers to the conditions under which the gift was given, and once again the significance of the tying of aid to the exchange of objects of cultural power is underlined. Bean and Craig allude to the gift as the result of a bribe, the archaic meaning for the word "gift." The photomural in the Eye Level installation is placed over a doorway in the gallery, thus re-

inforcing the image of access. The museumological text on the Gateway is extracted as a piece of the puzzle and neatly tied to the representation of German imperial grandeur contained in the facade of the Agyptische Museum itself. The placement of the victory gateway within the vaulted hallway of the museum represents metaphorically the subordination of one nation's cultural power to that of another.

In the Eye Level installation, the anchor and extension to the obelisk work *A New Tomb*, and the *Gateway of Kalabasha*, is found in the trio of newspaper boxes clustered ironically around a supporting column (obelisk?) in the centre of the gallery; two random access computer printouts on either side of a two columned 'gateway' at the end of the gallery area; and a reading table which offers information on a continuing basis with which to contextualize the meaning of the works in the show, as well as to extend it into contemporary reality, the time and geographical location of Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. The three news vending boxes — the national issue of the *Toronto Globe and Mail*, the provincial *Chronicle Herald/Mail Star* and the Halifax *Daily News* — each have a photograph and slogan placed underneath their doors: "Bankers Starve Third World Babies" (*Globe*), "Tourists are Terrorists" (*Chronicle Herald*) and "We Love War." For the run of the exhibition, the papers change on a daily basis and can be purchased in the usual manner. Still the artists' attempt to bring the street into the gallery remain in the realm of the symbolic. The conjunction between certain sensational headlines and the propagandistic slogans is at times particularly apt in revealing the local dimensions of hegemony. The computer printout on the

Time For A Gift installation view with (left) *The Kalabasha Gateway*, photomural, 64" x 85", and (centre) cluster of newspaper vending boxes.

other hand seems somewhat superfluous. The relativity of information exchange which it engenders conflicted with the theory of information control alluded to in other elements of the show. For each work or paired works in the exhibit a folder containing newspaper clippings from various sources provides the opportunity for visitors to 'follow up' on issues or expand their knowledge of particular items of interest. The index labels for each of the folders from 1 to 7 are: The Gift, The Debt, The Middle East, Mordechai Vanunu, Canadian Immigration, New World, and Information Order. Apparently Bean and Craig decided against placing this information on the wall, resisting the temptation to make an interesting and potentially unreadable visual statement, in favour of allowing visitors to read the contents of the files in a more casual manner.

The four final works in the exhibition, if the viewer travels anticlockwise around the divided gallery, are the large photo

reproductions of the erotic chapter from Alifa Rifaat's 1983 *A Distant View of a Minaret*, a novel documenting an Arab woman's resolution of feminist-inspired acts of emancipation with traditional patriarchal moral and religious codes; a work in colour and negative form documenting the faces of McFarlane, Poin-dexter, North and Schultz pleading the fifth amendment during the recent Iran-Gate preliminary hearings; a news photo image of arrested Mordechai Vanunu, the Israeli atomic scientist who was accused of treason after revealing the Israeli state secret that they had the bomb, his hand raised in a "V" salute; and finally a slide projection piece which carousels 80 slides of covers of the world-famous colonist journal, the *National Geographic*. In the company of the other works these last images dealing with the inequities of exchange under the power of imperialist ideology have a peculiar sense of incompleteness and dependence. The Rifaat story is obviously used as a counterweight

to the preponderance of male imagery in the large gallery space. It refers to the need to feminize the critique of imperialism which, as the subtexts of the exhibition evidence, is very much an all-male affair. The *National Geographic* covers are an interesting study in themselves and I for one would have wished for some kind of analysis of the image text conjunctions in these.

The Bean/Craig exhibition was intellectually rich, at times a little too concerned with "getting it all across" in one exhibit, but it was certainly, as one local critic observed in the gallery visitors' book, "clean, clear, concise and correct!"

Bruce Barber

FOOTNOTE:

¹ See Alan Sekula's essay, "Traffic in Photographs" for an excellent discussion of the photograph as money, in *Modernism and Modernity: The Vancouver Conference Papers*, edited by Benjamin Buchloh, Serge Guilbaut, and David Solkin (NSCAD, 1984).

PICTURES

TALKING

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Prepared by Erica Simmons

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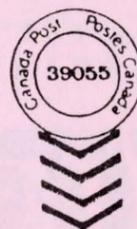
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