Shoah in Poland
Evangelism in Nicaragua
Frank Davey on SwiftCurrent
Joyce Nelson on Culture and Agriculture
Bad Words, Fiction by Marlene Nourbese Philip
Border/lines is an interdisciplinary magazine about art, culture and social movements. We publish writing from many different positions and we are open to artists, musicians, filmmakers and readers. An indispensable companion to contemporary culture in Canada and elsewhere, Border/lines is produced in a large format and is published four times a year by a Toronto-based collective.
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Parents and pedagogues are frequently frustrated to find that their adolescent children’s conception of dramatic entertainment and performance bears little relationship to their coordinated strategies of what mimesis, performance, didacticism and play should be all about.

After a kindergarten and early-primary phase of apparent harmony between TV and classroom, in which Fraggle Rock, Sesame Street, Polka Dot Door, or You Can’t Do That on Television are at least there to compete with the purely commercial nature of the Strawberry Shortcake or Thundercats absurdities, the influence of educators on TV and video production (notwithstanding the efforts of the new Youth and Family TV channels in Canada) seems to have minimal effect on what adolescents actually watch and play. For the age group eleven to fifteen, unbridled commercialism dictates extra-curricular viewing habits. Here I would briefly like to indicate what is watched—primarily on video, but also on TV and film (the overlaps are, of course, very great)—why, and whether this should give any cause for concern.

Adolescents’ favourite viewing material might be broken down into five groups: musical (notably video rock which is sometimes, but not necessarily, accompanied by buying records or tapes and listening to the radio); participatory games (including attendance at video arcades, use of computers and hooking up Nintendo or Atari systems to the TV set); non-participatory spectacles (which does include sports to a degree, but is more likely to be carnivalesque wrestling); horror films and certain kinds of psychological thrillers as the children get older, and a variety of comedies both as films and TV sitcoms. This classification is decidedly male, but the major female variation in the pattern of viewing might be in the part played by soap operas, which, by and large, are essentially a TV rather than a video format. (One of the major points of this article is the extent to which the content and marketing of video, in all its forms at this level, is essentially a male prerogative.)

The significance of these classifications, which emerged from interviewing groups of (all male) eleven- to thirteen- and (mixed gender) fourteen- to fifteen-year-olds in Toronto, is that they cover most of the regions that we would associate with theatre, though with a peculiar postmodern twist. The “music” element is directly mediated through an unabashed selling of the recording industry and the presentation of “video poems,” as Andy Warhol so romantically put it. Much more significantly, however, rock music itself has acted as the fulcrum for a newly perceived subculture which develops as the basis for an anti-language to any form of “established” culture. The video-rock industry, aided by the compact disc revolution, has also given rise to an alternative smorgasbord of what one might call “disenfranchised rock” (because the rock star is the oldest). This phenomenon which has been so well described by other students of criticism that is able to act on the immediate effect, not the theoretical. For example, the appeal of Frank Zappa, whose discography would also be a study in its own right, is more subtle than either the Beatles or the Rolling Stones, even if the latter two have had a longer and more widespread influence. Even if the critical eye were to look in the wrong place it could still find parallels in the contexts of all that seems to be happening to see/hear/feel/want in the world, and not just within the world of music. The function of criticism is to turn the eye of interpretation towards non-universal aspects of culture and to use these to challenge the establishment, which, by definition, turns its back on the non-universal. This function is simultaneously a critical function, in that it would enable us to understand the video, television and the like as the products of people, and also by the ultimate function, which is never achieved, namely the society’s or the system’s (and this is the exchange) view. The Society’s (or system’s) view is moulded by the appearance of society, by the system of the mass media, by the images of things in home and the community. The system’s view is an intermediate one of the system. A better system would have different images, which are not necessarily better images, but which are better because the structure of the images is different because the structure of society is different. If this is the case, the study of video would be more than a study of video; it would be a study of society.
revolution in music reproduction, has created both a timeless and situationless smorgasbord of rock music within which "disent" is submerged in the sense of being part of an ephemeral world in which rock is part of "tradition" (the "golden oldies") but also part of a visual presentation which is frequently indistinguishable from commercials for Pepsi-Cola. One issue that kids have to face in making sense of this tradition is whether there is a real difference between a Mendelssohn or a Mahler converting to Christianity in order to reach the appropriate audience, and a Michael Jackson or a Madonna trimming their nails in order to achieve wider sales. In this sense contemporary teenagers are more astute than the old polici who turn up at Roy Thomson Hall to listen to "authentic" music. They know who is being bought, and by whom, because the message is delivered unequivocally across their screens. Even if they are not provided with the critical equipment to locate the music in its historical context, they do know how to place it in its present politico-economic context and also to decide why, in spite of all that, they like or dislike what they hear. The trick of video rock is to place image, lyric and rhythm in the present, wherever it originated, and thus to learn to dance to the music of the spheres. The tradition of rock music and its incorporation into blatantly commercial video images provides for all teenagers the central area within which politics, economics and culture can be seen to contend. One of the successes of Miami Vice was that it was able to turn extensively detective plots into fashion commercials using rock music. Miami Vice was the logical extension of rock video, and thus could be watched equally by people who uncritically accepted it but also by the many who saw it displaying the ultimate corruption of rock music.

Video games give adolescents the occasion to perform, to experience colour and movement, to mould their identities. Virtually every video game is dominated by the symbolism of military context (but isn't chess?), and thus the appeal is largely to boys — though, as Sherry Turkle shows in The Second Self, many girls also spend a lot of time at arcades and playing at their home videos. The central feature of video games, however, is neither the sexism nor the apparently mindless addiction, but rather the context between the personal gameplan and the machine's. Almost every video gamer is also a potential inventor: working out strategies on how this game could be better, or even how an even better game could be devised. The performance expected of the player is not one which calls into play the whole body (though it demands a lot of the reflexes), but one which structures the imagination, the internal resources. Video games allow the player to enter into the rituals and logic of another situation, to try to beat this other system on its own terms. It is thus cathartic, mimetic and innovative. It is also, of course, a solitary experience, pulling the player out of the "real world" into a fantasy world where Dungeons & Dragons, Starflight or Platocon become the only worlds worth inhabiting. But because the fantasy is projected out of a machine, the machine itself becomes the object of confrontation. Thus the theatre of the mind gains a new dimension, the ultimate resting place of dada and surrealism where the play of the world is acted out in our very personal confrontations with the minds of the robots we made. It's a short leap from the Frankensteini realism to the gothic horrors of Nightmare on Elm Street or Friday the Thirteenth. The tense struggle of fighting in Nan or battling the intergalactic werewolves which video games provide is nothing compared with the real and evident issues of personal death, of dark nightmares, of the destruction of mothers-figures, of sexuality in general, of the insane "man with the gun at the door." The themes are, of course, as old as Rubelais and the brothers Grimm's fairy tales, and as recent as Mary Shelley, Bram Stoker and Sigmund Freud. What Sesame Street papered over will not lie down. In Nightmare on Elm Street, for example, the street name is taken from the Dick and Jane books (Nightmare on Sesame Street would have been too obvious) and as Robert Englund (the "Freddy" of Nightmare) put it in a recent interview,

Nightmare on Elm Street is a sort of looses, allegorical symbol for a kind of evil returning to the white, Anglo-Saxon suburb of North America ... They're political and they're Freudian and they're intellectual content, which is all subliminal, but there, via Wes Craven, Freddy is out there, bringing back those evil sins to the adolescent who's just embarking on a serious adult life. Even though I don't think the teenage audience intellectualize, I think they know it's for them."

The "horror" of the video is thus a horror which has been with us for some time, though now the context of the horrors is made more specific to white, middle class (probably male) adolescents. Because the horror is excessive — and therefore not-polite — it rarely ranks high either as literature or as film/video, but as an educative artform. Who are we in a post-Auschwitz age to deny children the right to explore issues which are very much alive in our own subconscious? Titus Andronicus or Macbeth have nothing on The Texas Chainsaw Massacre. The adolescent sense of tragedy is that they may be part of the Manson killings.

Fortunately, teenagers do not only engage in battles with the machine nor live through nightmares of the destruction of their everyday world. The sense of carnival, of masquerade, is kept alive in the spectacle of wrestling, which acts out the games that are taken seriously on all forms of video, but as parody. The Great attraction of TV and video wrestling is that like computerised games it is based on contest, like horror films it appeals to the sense of evil lurking in our everyday world, and like music video it plays with myths of sexuality and bonding. It is, of course, orchestrated and produced as pure theatre, as self-consciously parodic. Although it has roots in non-video wrestling, which always had an element of carnival with grotesque and obese bodies struggling for mastery, contemporary wrestling takes place in an arena where all the symbols are drawn from popular culture but where good and evil, black and white, male and female are portrayed as caricature, where cheating is everywhere evident though ultimately taboo. Video wrestling acts out a morality play which invites the audience to identify with the characters and the moral situations. For under-tens the spectacle is as "true" as a fairy tale or nursery rhyme, but for adolescents the true nature of the carnivalesque is appreciated, as is the irony of the media hype associated with the production of the major Wastelandian contests. Ultimately, of course, wrestling is a satire of the whole business of organised sport — of the Olympics, the Grey Cup, the Stanley Cup, the World Series, the soccer World Cup — and of beauty contests, the Oscars and fashion shows. The sheer commercialism of these is displayed nakedly in Wastelandia, as is the idea that athletic skill and beauty can be manufactured and manipulated. Wrestling is the true adolescent theatre of our time.

If we ignore TV sitcoms and soap operas, which translate badly onto video, the
Media literacy and The Globe and Mail

Why is The Globe and Mail alerting its readers to the ideological danger of a high school media studies programme?

SATU REPO

Media have long provided the “first curriculum” for most Canadian kids; it has been estimated that by the time they finish high school, they’ve spent an average of 11,000 hours at school, compared to more than 15,000 hours watching television and 10,500 hours listening to popular music. This fall the Ontario education ministry, after four years of preparation, released its media resource guide Media Literacy for Intermediate and Senior Grades, the first province to officially tackle this tricky subject. The guide is tentative, offering “suggestions to teachers” rather than a formal curriculum, and it is probably an attempt to test the political waters before proceeding any further. Since its release it has received three hostile responses in Canada’s national organ for the business community, The Globe and Mail (September 13, 15 and 30) which may yet be an indication of how the media and political power represented by The Globe will respond to the notion that schools should try to develop “critical media consumers.”

Why is The Globe and Mail alerting its readers to the ideological danger of a high school media studies programme? While Media Literacy bends over backwards to stress that understanding media is just another “life skill,” like learning to ride a bicycle or using a condom dispenser in the boys’ washroom, the guide does in fact offer an opportunity to think about media in a new and potentially liberating way. Inspired by critical media theory and research in the last two decades, it directly attacks the fact-value distinction of the dominant ideology and, by implication, the “objectivity” of news. It offers quite a tough-minded political/intellectual argument which is worth paying attention to.

This is the gist of it: Despite loud claims to objectivity, media do not present a clear reflection of external reality, but productions which have specific purposes. They construct an appearance of reality, using different “languages” or “codes”: visual, verbal, aural, technical and ideological. Each medium adds its own aesthetic and epistemological “effect.” Predominantly, media are commercial enterprises, out to make a profit. This factor enters into both the choice of what is being produced and how items are produced. The media are also an integral part of the established economic and social order and have a vested interest in maintaining it. They may not be directly responsible for creating values and attitudes, but they definitely serve to legitimise and reinforce them. In addition, media have larger social and political implications. For a combination of economic and technological reasons, they influence both the nature of the political and national cultures. For example, for Canadians the domination of American media means that the struggle for a distinctive Canadian identity continues to be difficult. Finally, media productions, because they are shaped by complex and conflicting social forces (for instance, the need to be ideologically sound have to be tempered by the commercial imperative to be popular), are often highly ambiguous and are themselves interpreted differently by different audiences who use their own values to make sense of what is offered to them.

Media literacy is important because critical and knowledgeable “readers” may be able to draw their own conclusions from the offerings presented to them. This thoughtful and sophisticated rationale for a media literacy programme takes only a few pages in the guide, which
is mostly devoted to concrete suggestions of how to teach this stuff. However, it is not surprising that the Globe's reactions are directed mainly towards these intellectual underpinnings. The Globe and Mail, ever alert to ideological deviations in the state sector, is very troubled by the idea that students should be taught to think about the complex political and economic forces that determine what becomes news and entertainment. The notion of the objectivity of the media is still a strongly held ideological dogma in its newsrooms and editorial offices. There, the Globe has decided to interpret the media literacy guide quite simplistically as an unwarranted attack on media integrity and dismiss it as such.

This interpretation surfaced with Ontario French's report (or is it expose?) on the guide on September 13, headlined "Ontario helping students assess what the media does to reality," which begins "Ontario school children are going to learn to decipher ways that communication media, particularly television, warps reality." He continues to make sidelong comments on how the guide wants students to appreciate "media wiles" and tries to "help children see the ways in which the media interpret the truth to suit their own purposes" and doesn't forget to mention that the guide even goes as far as to suggest that media affirm the existing social system and define the nature of the "good life" by stressing affluence, consumerism, the proper role of women, the acceptance of authority and unquestioning patriotism.

After this expose the next step was to discredit the writers of the guide. On September 15, under the headline "Classroom report on the press lacks authority," Joani Abeles, a public relations rep described as "the manager of educational services for the Canadian Daily Newspaper Publishers Association and a former secondary school-school English teacher and department head," it given ample space for comment. She, too, is offended by the notion in the guide that media "constructs a reality rather than mirrors a world out there. She accuses the guide of portraying media as "unscrupulous manipulators of an unsuspecting audience" and slams it as cynical and ill-informed. Focusing on the section dealing with newspapers, she wants to know why the guide did not use well-known print journalists as either advisors or members of its writing team. She claims that it weakens the guide's credibility and has resulted in a "mishmash of inaccuracies and personal bias peppered with a sprinkling of wisdom from assorted media texts." Ignoring the fact that the bibliography of the guide contains both the critical Report of the Royal Commission on Newspapers that her own organization found so offensive, and writings by prominent print journalists like Walter Stewart and Barrie Zwecker who have plenty to say about the social construction of news, Abeles goes on to beat the drums for Canada's "proud journalistic tradition" and our "free and unfettered press."

The Globe, having exposed the scandalous views in Media Literacy and allowed such a distinguished party as the Canadian Daily Newspaper Publishers Association to pass judgment on it, closes its coverage by inviting us to laugh it out of existence. On September 30, Warren Clements offers us a spoil under the headline "Education not time-waster or insidious force?" "The media can be a tricky business at times," he begins broadly. "They consider themselves trustworthy, but have been known to warp reality and blur the lines between objectivity and subjectivity. You may be sitting there with the newspaper open or a program flickering on the screen, and whom—

from out of nowhere, a tinge of something suspicious will scurry across the surface of a newscast and compromise the truth." It is good that educators are exposing these sinister tricks, notes Clements, but shouldn't the media try to return the favour and offer a guide to the ways schooling warps reality? "Too many students grow up believing that reality exists in definable chunks of nine months with summers off for good behavior, and that learning consists of listening to somebody talk for 40 minutes at a time."

Clements is actually quite funny, but behind the jest lurks the larger, and from the point of view of the Globe, more disturbing question raised by the guide: if media knowledge is "socially constructed" does that not also apply to other forms of knowledge? Is the guide not teaching students to look at the seams of all the information presented to them? Perhaps it will soon lead them to ask questions about how history texts are constructed and how political speeches should be "read." What the Globe is doing, in fact, is altering conservative forces, both inside and outside the school system, to the dangers of the approach outlined in Media Literacy. By disturbing such holy cows as the objectivity of knowledge and the disinterestedness of experts are the schools encouraging not just "critical autonomy," as the guide promises, but a more disturbing clear-headedness on the part of the student: an ability, for example, to ask questions about how class, race and gender enter into the construction of knowledge? If the Globe and the interests it represents have their way, there will be stormy times ahead for any media literacy programme that provides this much enlightenment.

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Animal reproduction

T he extinction of animals is offset by their textual reproduction. We do not claim that this is a satisfactory condition, but that it is the pre-eminent manner in which our culture recoups its losses.

What we offer here is a romp through our messengers. We move from philosophical reflection, through photographic acts of appropriation, to the psycho-sexual Freudian and Canadian imaginaries, as a dog would track a broken scent. We have had to trail animal reproductions through the wildest of terrains, to not fall prey to the pretty reproduction of "environmental concern." In short, we have forsaken the environmental etiquette with which we were reared.

Philosophical Dogs

Descartes has bequeathed us a dead dog as it happened, his wife left him after he killed her dog to a table in order to vivisect it. If he had been a dog fancier, we would be much less troubled by the heaps of unfeeling brutes pining up in the philosophical cottages. It is, however, with the Brazilian novelist Machado De Assis that we ask: "Philosopher or Dog? Here, the

Animal Sign

In his collected essays What is Cinema?, André Bazin presents his case for the efficacy of the photographic image. "The photograph as such and the object in itself share a common being, after the fashion of a fingerprint" — (or paw print). Using this analogy as our point of departure, let us take ourselves out of an entirely urban environment, and reflect upon the fittingness of this axiom.

Let us say we are walking along a local trail, and we sight an animal track on the path in front of us. The finding of the series of prints leads us to conclude it comes from some small common mammal. There may seem little to marvel at; we have seen such prints often enough. But let us now imagine we are hiking along the continental backbone, and it is a grizzly print, much larger than our own. Only then will the distinction between the paw print of the animal and its photograph likely be thrown into relief, for it is as if the air has become "electric."

Clearly the paw print is not the sign of something which once was — an absence, as Bazin would have it — but something which may still be there: a presence.
The Bloodless Fray

As we walked along the trail, twelve or so miles from another person, we noticed the grizzly and black bear tracks crossing our path. This went on for miles and miles. One of us was more afraid than that (she was menstruating). With only a few possessions on our backs we felt especially vulnerable, as if the space that had separated them from us was now somehow nonexistent, as if the breaths that we took were the same. There was no scent, though, just the beat sign full of huckleberry. As we stopped to pick at the huckleberries, we knew there were many bears in close proximity doing just that. We felt naked, fragile, vulnerable, and understood that preposterous scene in the film Never Cry Wolf where the biologist had run naked with the wolves, marking his territory with urine. As we continued, we were conscious of that fact we should make some noise, warn the bears that we were coming. We started talking. Our conversation returned over and over again to succulent huckleberries, as all conversations had in one way or another all summer. The terrain was well mapped, familiar.

One of us stopped abruptly. "Bear?" the other wondered. Together we tried to make out the dark shape at the river's edge, and realised we were talking "moo", not bear. Darkness, the uncertainty, grips us, makes our hair stand on end, Not the animal seen, but the animal imagined. The thing we perhaps fear the most would be if our eyes were to meet: what would we do, how would we react? We tend to keep our eyes averted, like children afraid to tell all—partly to watch where we step, and partly to avoid the likelihood of looking into their eyes.

Freud's Menagerie

Freud's apartment at 19 Berggasse was, for a time, a kennel of sorts. His beloved chow chose Yofi and Lun, as well as Anna's Alsatian, Wolfi, were permanent, sentient fixtures; upstairs at Dorothy Burton's, one could find a Bedlington under the couch. In London, Freud's final dog—a substitute for Lun who had been quarantined by the British authorities—was a Pekinese named Jumbo. Before Yofi and Lun arrived at Berggasse, Freud's first chow, Lun-Yu, was lost under the wheels of a train while being escorted to Vienna by Eva Rosenfeld. Perhaps the most touching moment of Freud's long devotion to dogs came in January 1937 when Yofi, his companion for some seven years, died following an operation which saved the removal of two ovarian cysts. Yofi had been an important member of the Freud household, one who greeted and sat with Sigmund's patients, remembered the doctor's birthday, and understood her master's protracted struggle with cancer—or so Freud believed. In 1936, Freud read Princess Marie Bonaparte's book Tippy, Chow-chow au poil d'or about her dog who had responded favorably to an operation for cancer of the mouth (the very form of cancer which had struck Freud). Freud began his translation of Bonaparte's book shortly after Yofi's death. Earlier, Freud had explicated in a letter to the Princess a reverse on Yofi: "When stroking [her] I have often caught myself humming a melody which, though quite unmusical, I could recognize as the aria from Don Giovanni. A bond of friendship binds us both, etc." Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari are suspicious about Freud's doggedness in his handling of the Wolf-Man. Their "reading" of the case in A Thousand Plateaus begins with a dramatic flourish:

That day, the Wolf-Man rose from the couch particularly tired. He knew that Freud had a genius for brushing up against the truth and passing it by, then filling the void with associations. He knew that Freud knew nothing about wolves.... The only thing Freud understood was what a dog is, and a dog's tail. It wasn't enough. It wouldn't be enough.

No matter how much the Wolf-Man howled, Freud's answer was the same: "It's daddy." We have, then, more dogs on our hands. For Freud, where wolves were, dogs shall be. Freud argued that the six or seven white wolves of the Wolf-Man's famous nightmare "were actually sheep dogs," as a child, the Wolf-Man may have observed copulating dogs, only to subsequently displace that sight onto his parents. If he had not actually witnessed animal coitus, he nevertheless possessed, as the Freudian fable goes, the phylogenetic experience of having observed parental intercourse, which must have been performed a tergo more famam, since Freud favored that position.

What did the Wolf-Man see "that day" on Freud's couch which made him so tired? A chow, perhaps? No, Freud did not run his patient through this model since his first chow hadn't yet arrived. There was another dog in the apartment that day: Wolfi, Ruth Mack Brunswick reports in her analysis of this case that "when visiting Freud, the [Wolfi-Man] had on more than one occasion seen a large gray police dog, which looked like a domesticated wolf." Let's be clear: the Alsatian is a German shepherd, a common police dog. Moreover, it belonged to Anna, although Sigmund loved it. So, the Wolf-Man may have met a dog which was a Wolfi a number of times.

Such a speculation only reinforces Freud's reduction of canis lupus to canis familiaris. On the other hand, why is a pack of wolves so precious to Deleuze and Guattari? It's true, when Freud "brushes up" against the pack—an allusion to the way in which members of a wolf-pack communicate with another—he fails to understand it. Even though everybody but Freud knows that wolves travel in packs, those who possess this knowledge need not pack their interpretations of the case with predatory well-meaningness, bandes de loup.

The "deleuzoguattarian" pack must be unpacked because their zoological given is mutable. Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari are a pair and not a pack. Beyond the wild-domestic dichotomy, both Freud's dogs and Deleuze and Guattari's ideal formation must give way to the diversity of unpacked packs: wolves banished from their packs, dog-wolf hybrids, bandes de chiens, neu-rotic designer dogs, etc. One of Freud's last patients at Berggasse, Hilda Doolittle, once complained that "the Professor was more interested in Yofi than he was in my story." Psychoanalysis had gone to the dogs when Freud could not resist the urge to domesticate his patient's animal, and let his own animals loose. It's not forget that the analytic situation was played out with a third party present, not the Censor, Cerberus, but a chow and/or an Alsatian. Freud, then, had a few living totems among his clay Coptic dogs and sculptures of Remus and Romulus. Of course, in his papers on technique he said nothing of this.
Hyper-husbandry

For us, the Canadian imaginary is populated by a peculiar libidinal aesthetic. To be sure, the wild still calls us, only because it is a canon that we have been educated to hear. To the extent that we answer this call by venturing forth with our cameras ready to “snap up” the wild, or put it down on paper or canvas, we reproduce our own imaginary, and perhaps even turn ourselves into imaginary Canadians. There are others, however, who have not heard a call, but felt a presence; these are the ones who have smelt bear. They have been seduced by wildness, by the passions of nature. This is not an idle anthropomorphism, for anthropomorphism is never idle or frivolous. Anthropomorphism cannot be filled with something more rigorous because it is the foundation upon which we continuously invent our relationship with human and nonhuman others. To forget this is to forfeit much of our humanity.

Of course, there are still others who have sought to couple with nonhumans, although for us acts of bestiality cannot constitute an answer to the call of the wild, and primarily because most often the partners in question are domesticates. For example, in his case histories, Karl Menninger describes the “curious, furtive search” of a travelling salesman for an “approachable” mare or cow. In another case, a successful businessman and horse fancier suffers debilitating attacks of anxiety and guilt after consummating his marriage because he feels that he has been unfaithful to his mare. Those sexual congresses are, here at least, instances of what we call hyper-husbandry: male phantastes directed at surrogate women.

The reproduction of similar bonds in our aesthetic imaginary also concerns us—particularly, the extent to which these reproductions express the collision of the instinctual forces of the human and nonhuman. This libidinal collision course is rendered in Marion Engel’s Bear (1976):

He sat up across from her, rubbing his nose with a paw and looking confused. Then he locked down at himself. She looked as well. Slowly, majestically his great cock was rising. It was not like a man’s, tulip-shaped. It was red, pointed, and impressive. She looked at him. He did not move. She took her sweater off and went down on all fours in front of him, in the animal posture. He reached out one great paw and tipped the skin on her back.

In the collision of the human and nonhuman, and the seductive power which the latter exercises over the former, there are then catastrophes borne of miscalculation: the inappropriate slackening of fear and respect for the object of desire and the object’s desire. Yes, we need to consider the “object’s desire,” for it is these collisions which teach us anything, it’s that the object we desire rarely desires us.

To be sure, the wild still calls us, only because it is a canon that we have been educated to hear.

A Tail Note

We lick the behinds of bears on stamps, two gay robins frolic on our two dollar bills, and snow geese flock above marines of faux fur. Financial forces are instinctual forces in this habitat. We’ve paid dearly to see the analytik’s doggie. Even Juan Valdez’s equine companion, abused by the corporate agenda, must join him on the analytic couch.

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things would go. Visual artists would contribute some of the tone of modern Québec. Their abstracts, scattered judiciously over the territory, would lend a cool love of jagged forms, and wonderfully arbitrary brushstrokes to the utilitarian architecture old and new, to the skyscrapers and the hot-dog stands. But it would be the language-artists who would do the social processing, the singer-composers, the playwrights, the monologuists, the essayists. The poets. The novelists.

Language would be all, in the Québec emergence into the world, in the sense of the French language, and its claims in the face of English dominance. But more importantly in the sense of articulating improvisation, vernacular, speech, statement. The only visual forms which would play a big role in this social change were the two visual forms which capture people's faces and make them talk: photography, cinema... Perhaps I should add: cartooning.

But all the while, visual art would flourish and Québec reformers would generally have a quiet respect for their painters and sculptors, would be glad to see the state spend a lot on them, and willing to give them, with or without solid evidence, a place in the movement for change, too.

In the eyes of the English-Canadian art world, I think, Québec had counted, a full ten or 20 years before she began to count for other English-Canadian males. In the fifties, Québec was patronized, or omitted, or summarised in a phrase, as Canadian, though published in Ontario, often seemed, to the little boy that I was, to be a Québec magazine. The names of those Sherbrooke street galleries! The names of all those artists finishing in -eau, -e, -aud.

This early start that the artists had may even explain some things. Québec painting and sculpture did not arrive on the shores of 1960 with the feeling of inferiority which then plagued almost every other French-speaking constituency. And therefore the people in these arts didn't always see what was to be overturned.

So perhaps the real Refus Global was Lawrence Harris's pine stump jutting up into the sky.

Perhaps it is English Canada which is fighting for its survival through painting, sculpture and all the other activities which have come into the visual arts in the eighties, from video to cutting oneself and bleeding slightly for an audience.

This story of two events in Québec City last year would tend to suggest that this is the case.

In April of '89, the Airbus de la Toile sponsored an art show called Fils en couleur. A score or so of Québec painters and sculptors tried to denounce war, in works they contributed, and to proclaim peace. I was among them, with my books of collage, so I'm not at all objective, but I think it would be fair to say that we were all creators of modest reputation, but who felt ourselves marching along in the

In 1948 a group of visual artists—not writers or philosophers, generally, but painters and sculptors—published a manifesto which is still cited as the opening cannon in the Quiet Revolution.

Refus Global

rides again

MALCOLM REID

borderlines spring 2000
In the studio of Fernand Leduc (probably late 1946 or early 1947), Marcel Barbeau, Magdeleine Arbour, Pierre Gauvreau, Fernand Leduc, Pierre Leroux, Claude Gauvreau, who were some of the artists involved in the 1948 publication of Refus Global.

armies of twentieth-century art. We managed, however, to involve two very famous men, both Montrealers. We were honoured by their participation, as they were honored, I think, by the word "peace" that clung to them in this little exhibition hall which used to be Saint Patrick's Elementary School on Salaberry Hill.

One was Frederick Bock, who had just won an Oscar for his pastel-toned film L'Homme qui plantait des arbres. Back did not come to Québec City. But we felt his art to be pre-eminently in the eco-pacificist tone we were seeking, and we hung his engravings with pride.

We kept L'Homme qui plantait des arbres playing on a video monitor in a side room of the Ateliers Imagine, which now occupy the old school.

The other man was Armand Vaillancourt.

Armand Vaillancourt is one of the fundamental voices of Québec in this century. He is a unique mixture of artistic grandeur and political explosiveness. Unique in Canadian art, I think, and perhaps unique in the whole wide world.

In the whole wide world, that is, with the exception of Mexico. For Mexico is the land that comes to my mind as having produced many such figures, combined political prophets and image-makers. The Mexican muralists are the only comparison that I say properly captures Vaillancourt.

We all knew him before he showed up that night, in his station wagon in the yard of the old school. We all wondered if he'd be as we imagined him.

Out he got, small, dressed in black, his grey hair rolling down his shoulders, his beard slim. He spoke in a friendly, country-flavoured French, but right away he took us over.

"Help me get this out of the back seat, will you?" he asked me, and in a few minutes we'd set up in the Ateliers Imagine among our works, a sort of red coattack from which hung a heavy brown slab of iron. Out of this slab had been cut four desperate, reaching, freedom-hungry hands. In a thick piece of metal, a scene from South Africa or Palestine or Salvador or Berlin had been sketched with an acutely-tensed torch, with the same sureness of touch it would have had had it been drawn with a felt-tipped pen on a page torn from a pad.

In this work, Vaillancourt showed his talent for the plainly-stated figurative. Then he unrolled a series of canvas banners for us on the floor.

In these he showed his love of words. "No claim to art, these," he said, "just demands, just issues of the day... I WILL ALWAYS BE IN THE RIGHT, IF THERE IS AN INJUSTICE SOMEWHERE. LES PEUPLES ORIENT LIBERTÉ!"

But when his time came to speak, a long series of slides reminded us how much Vaillancourt's career has been associated with the massive rock-like metal abstractions that are the hallmark of Québec Modern. "My casting foundry was torn apart by the mounted police in the days of October '70, he said, but I've rebuilt, in downtown Montréal. What bothers me most is the unwillingness of the authorities to assure my works of a really permanent place. Of protection from rust and deterioration, of the possibility of going on speaking to the people after I'm gone."

For all his egoism, Vaillancourt was clearly what one calls a driven man. He'd opened his slide show with rattle-off of statistics of third world exploitation, arms race madness and ecological destruction. A socialist revolution was needed to set all this right. And yet it mustn't be forgotten that the Soviet Union and its friends were implicated in much of the madness, too; and it mustn't be left out of the discussion that there was still Québec independence as an unfinished project, full of reasonableness, obviously true evidence.

In a press conference earlier, he had praised our group for putting on a peace art show. And at a lunch later, he specially praised Thérèse Thérien's sculpture of a proposed public square where the whole would meet some day perhaps, maybe together for peace. It had real wheat growing out of its display-table drawers, and the wheat had reached twice the height at the end of the exhibition that it had had at the beginning. "C'est trés bon," Armand had said.

At another point he took the gentlest of digs at big-name artists who, he said, often dodged his invitations to take socio-political stands.

That he enjoyed the field this left free for him, though, was plain. One by one he ticked off all his famous prexques.

This time, as a young man arriving in Montréal from Black Lake in the eastern townships as the Refus Global era was beginning to fade, he had sculpted a dead tree on Duolcher Street near McGill University into a sort of graceful humanoid. The time a tangled work done for the town of Asbestos had displaced some of the townsmen, and gotten splashed with red paint. The time he'd hesitated with Town Council; he wanted extra time to finish a sculpture in a park they wanted him to quit. The time he'd dressed up as a knight in armour to defend Jorj Bonn's cement fountains in the Grande Théâtre de Québec against bourgeois detractors. The time he sloshed through the water of his fountain in the Embarcadero Plaza in San Francisco to proclaim its theme of Québec Libre. The time he tried and failed to collect logs from the bottom of Montmorency Falls for a giant sculpture he meant to construct with a team of artist-lumberjacks. The rapport he set up with the people of Santo Domingo as he worked on a public square in a third-world-liberation vein, the kids calling out to him, "Jésus Cristo, Jésus Cristo!"

But at the same time, and especially as I saw how little he was open to our suggestions, how insistent he was that we accept his invitation to dinner at the Clarand Hotel, where he had a special deal with the management of this tourist gem in the Latin quarter, and not in any of the more familiar restaurants of Saint-Jean-Baptiste, a scene unknown to him, I realized...

I realized how lonely Armand Vaillancourt feels. How obligated he feels. How little other visual artists of his generation — he's 60 this year — don't seem to have an interest in social justice, to compensate, to fill the gap, to do everything that everybody ought to be doing, till they're burned into doing their part, too, at last.

I felt Armand as a man who wants to people the entire Québec landscape with steel, stone and wood monuments to humains and their cries, and who knows that all the work of his Hephestos muscles, and all the flames of his Vulcan furnaces, and all the possibility he has here and now.

So do some housewives who called it a tableau of a tableau of a tableau and there that the street to Laval is inscribed from a church. And so do the Saites who've sculpted their city under the name of Charles Carnot. They're a bit late for the special.

The gallery, being three levels, has a large third floor for the Visual and Performing Arts, a national empire. But Total L'Art Canadien has fused a new CUL, drew up the plans to be "possible." The man who's lost and the man who's found, the man of stark simplicity after perhaps a lifetime of sloth, the man who's lost the amazement of Galleo, the man whose is the task of believing and the task of wonder, the man whose is the task of intensity.

But in his own room he is intense, too, sharp and clear, once the liberal brain has had the chance to clear itself of the crap, once the brain has had the chance to speak, all visible white.

For all of this, I mustn't be left out of the discussion.
 Québéc painting and sculpture did not arrive on the shores of Canada until 1960 with the feeling of inferiority which then plagued almost every French-speaking constituency.

What was wrong?
The black olives and the feta cheese arrived. The homosexuals and the families in Diane’s murdered and laughed. What was wrong? What was eating Serge?

How could these three bohemian middle-aged men who’d emerged from little-known London, Ontario, 20 years after all those names in -f and -ault in the Sherbrooke Street galleries, so grate on him? Well, ulcers, money, baronies, perhaps. But still, I thought of Lemoyne, I thought of his humour, of his flashing colours, his dribbles, his populist themes, his hockey players, his flags. His birthday packages tied in white string... I saw him suddenly as a young Armand Vaillancourt, anxious to be part of the rumour, part of the rough-and-tumble, part of the debate, and discovering bit by bit that this isn’t really what Québec expects of its painters, sculptors, printmakers.

That it’s really much more current in English Canada for the men and women of print, videotape, the acrylic torch, to be in there making statements on where the nation is going. That the language arts are always struggling to escape Hollywood’s influence; that music there is lively but not sharply distinct from American music; that literature is continually eclectic, but...

But that when it comes to visual art, those green, grave Group of Sevens in the basement of the National Gallery on the banks of the Ottawa are indeed an identifying core. A core unconfused with any other core in the world, out from which Canadian visual exploration can radiate even today. A root that is adaptable, in the case of artists like Curnoe, Boyle and Favro, who want to adapt it in this way, to a social action message.

So that we had, perhaps, was a Québécois artist in the curious position of envying English-Canadian artists in their role in society.

Times change. As we charted, leaping from one subject to another, leaping from olives to feta to skewered meat, I felt these Canadian visitors proud of having contributed to the free trade debate, ready for its sequel, full of their 50 years of plentiful creativity, ready for 50 more, feeling like children at play and workers useful to society. And sure that Québec has all that and more, and taught them much of what they knew.

“Mon mari, now there’s a radical artist!” Curnoe said, and I thought of how few statements of any kind I’d heard from the great mass of hard-edged oranges and reds during the whole chœurs des maitres period, of how alone Armand Vaillancourt seemed to feel as he raged against injustice; of how envious Serge Lemoyne seemed to feel as he listened to these Canadians tell tales of controversy and activism. Of how long it had been since the Refus Global.

The vertical Refus Global type on p.9 and the splatter pattern on this page are based on the original cover lithographs by Jean Paul Riopelle.

Malcolm Reid’s columns is a regular feature in BorderLines.
When I woke up in the recovery room in November 1978 my doctor was waiting to tell me the results of the biopsy. It couldn't happen to me; I was just 37 years old. But it had — I had breast cancer. My feelings ricocheted all over the place. I was afraid, angry, grateful, and sad all at the same time. I remember thinking: "I've been a caring person, how could this happen to me? It's not fair, it's so arbitrary." I cried, wailed and curled up into a ball but I also continued to work — it seemed like my sanity depended on returning to "normal" as quickly as possible. A month of radiation treatments began a long series of checkups, more biopsies and finally surgeries. My last surgery was in 1983 — a lymphectomy; afterwards I was put on a hormone blocker. Last summer, I was nearing the famous "five year" marker which meant that statistically I had a much better chance of surviving. Then I had a bone scan and they discovered bone cancer in two places. I was put on another hormone blocker and given more radiation. I had the summer to put my life into a new framework: "The best we can do is slow it down," they said.
get into a "war" with my cancer, I can only interpret myself winning if my cancer "loses" or is "defeated." This kind of either/or thinking reduces all experience to win or lose. A person like myself with a "terminal" cancer has automatically lost.

We do need a language of resistance in our struggles with chronic illness, but it needs to be a language free of militarism. I found it wonderfully healing to spend quiet time in nature—a form of resistance perhaps but hardly a battle. Even supposedly alternative language can be infuriating. The "new age" philosophy of illness is a good example. At first, I would go out and buy these latest self-help books only to find the basic message was: "You made yourself sick so you can heal yourself." So simple but so damaging. It fits all too well with mass media messages that bombard us daily: problems are individual, not social. We've kept disorganised with a simplistic presentation of blame and responsibility.

When I shifted from Princess Margaret Hospital to the Sunnybrook cancer clinic a doctor introduced herself as the head of my team of seven different specialists. She then gave me a physical exam. The usual response of a new doctor was to admire my many incisions and scars and ask which surgical artist had given me this or that wonderful piece of handiwork. She said simple: "I can see that you have been through a lot." In a simple sentence she affirmed that I had a history and was not merely an example of her peers' technical skills. I told her that she had a lot to teach her colleagues.

Last summer I wanted my bone-scan results quickly because I needed to spend time with my stepchild who was going off to university. Most doctors wouldn't have bothered trying to speed up the bureaucracy. Fewer still would trust that I was the best judge of when I needed to know something. She told me over the telephone which wasn't easy for either of us. It gave me an extra week to let my daughter know how serious it was this time.

In the first five years, I had four surgeries. Whenever I asked the experts what the odds of survival were for different cancers, they would at first answer ambiguously. As I insisted they would get more precise. Later I learned this was called "staging," a way of finding out what patients really wanted to know. Some doctors withhold information based on whether or not they think you can handle it. I would say you should lose those characters fast. If they can't trust you, how can you ever trust them?

I needed to know as much as possible so I could get the most out of the time I have left. It doesn't mean that I wasn't overwhelmed and anguished when I heard cancer had returned. But knowledge and understanding helped liberate me from self-destructive fear, anger and sadness. These feelings are always close by. But now I have learned to treat them as reminders of my current agenda— to figure my way as creatively and peacefully as possible through the last part of my life.
You can read my face like a book.

If I am happy, worried or frightened you know immediately. We told the children in as calm a way as possible and tried to keep open the lines of communication on the subject. I would get extremely tense and agitated before routine check-ups. I learned to tell the children the reason for my short temper. It was important that they "feel in the know" as much as any of us. My daughters (now 9 and 16) both realise the transition from a parent-child relationship to more of an adult relationship has happened earlier with us than with most families. They feel good about giving support. Instead of feeling powerless in all this my daughters feel they have some control over events.

Family and friends make all the difference. I was surprised, delighted, shocked and often moved by how they reacted. My husband ditched his jeans and dressed in a three-piece suit to look like a doctor so he could sneak into the hospital at 7:00 am to bring me capuccino and the newspaper. Another friend called me at home and asked, "How are you feeling?" "Terrible," I replied, "I'm depressed." "Good," she said, "I thought you were going to avoid this part." I burst out laughing. For me, irrelevant stories and fumbling attempts to connect were far better than never responding for fear of doing "the wrong thing." A few people told me about their friends' ills (back pains for example) as a way of connecting. As much as I appreciated their concern I always wanted to say: "Hey, wait a minute, this disease is life threatening. I'm afraid I'm going to die too soon." Even now friends I only see every few years will call to say hello and find out the latest news. In moments of crisis I find it healing to know my friends are not denying my most recent diagnosis of cancer.

I'm afraid. I fear my cancer will isolate me socially. People with the best intentions will treat me as incompetent and exclude me. I fear people will feel sorry for me and patronise me - denying the energy and intelligence I bring to this current phase of my life. Recently, a person I considered a close friend did just that. He told me he was close to me because he felt sorry for me and that I was naive to think otherwise. I feel betrayed and angry to be treated in such a cold and clinical fashion. It is one thing to feel sad. But if you feel sorry for me you distance yourself from my pain in a way that denies my status as an actor in my own life. Friends like this are toxic and I will resist being any one's social work project or charity case.

Last summer, during my bone scan test I could tell by the way the technician responded that something had shown up. He went out of the room and when he reappeared he said: "You look a lot younger than you are. Do you have any children?" I said, "you checked my file." To which he replied: "Yes." I was pretty sure that they had indeed identified some cancer. The same day I went to my massage therapist, I decided this was a unique moment in my life when I could look into my psyche. When I am very frightened I sometimes have the courage to face or to see the inescapable. So as my friend did his work I decided to get up and see what images would surface. The first image was very surprising to me. There was field of wild carrot (white flowers composed of many smaller white flowers) surrounded by pine trees. Strolling through the field was a huge grizzly bear. He looked strong, confident and curious as he moved through the field of flowers. One point he stopped and picked a handful of flowers which I knew symbolised my essence, even as the whole field was mine too. Then, in my flower form I made him sneeze and laugh and I flew back into the ground except for one small white flower which landed on his shoulder. Together we strolled away.

The next day bone cancer was confirmed. Almost immediately my husband and I (we have been separate for four years but are still true friends) began to look for a cottage or a place for me to be still. I sometimes feel my cells vibrating from too much work or not enough sleep and I imagine that I can see them all jiggling in motion. I told Chuck that I had a recurring dream that I needed to spend the last part of my life on a lake surrounded by trees with a beach. This became our guide for us. We found an island we liked called Cranberry Island and Chuck had a cottage built. The day after we bought the property we went to look at it again and much to my delight in the middle of the cranberry bog was a large patch of white flowers. The lake is called Kähne which I later found out means "healing waters." I am keeping my eye out for the grizzly.
SwiftCurrent has broken with archiving traditions of publishing to provide a site of intense textual activity.

Frank Davet

SwiftCurrent, the online literary magazine that Fred Wah and I have operated intermittently from York University since 1984, is now entering its second lifetime. The first version, which survives mostly in a tape archive and in the documentation of The SwiftCurrent Anthology (Coach House Press, 1986), was based on custom-made, author-focused software that gave participating writers genre categories within which they could create personal subdirectories and contribute to these their own texts. Within this structure of genre directories and author-subdirectories, readers could shape their own "anthologies" of contributions by deleting texts or deleting entire author-directories from their personal view of the magazine. Although readers had no way of attaching responses to texts, they could contribute comments under their own names in a "commentary" category or send private messages to the author. Although approximately 300 texts were contributed to this version during its three years of operation, more than 90 percent of its activity consisted of private messages, most of which had little connection to the texts contributed. Readers reported unhappiness at not being able to respond immediately to texts they had read — that the requirement of changing directories in order to submit public comments was inhibiting. They also reported that they had difficulty dealing with the the volume of texts that accumulated in SwiftCurrent — that they needed tools that would assist them in sorting and sampling these texts and in gaining some kind of overview. The present SwiftCurrent is operating in an off-the-shelf conferencing program, "Caucus," developed by Cambert-Both in New York primarily for public-affairs computer conferences. SwiftCurrent has other separate conferences for genres ("SFICTION," "sciency," "scroovey," "scroovey"), plus a small press and little magazine conference ("smallpress") and one about SwiftCurrent itself ("screey"). Within these conferences, participants may contribute texts as "items" for discussion, or append "responses" to the texts they have just read. Search facilities allow users to locate author-names or specific words and phrases; a random-access facility within conferences allows readers to sample the opening page of one text and then move directly to another. Commands such as "list persons" and "list titles" enable new users to discover what kinds of material specific conferences contain. A "reply item" command still allows users to customise their own view of SwiftCurrent, and a built-in editor allows contributors of both items and responses to change or expand texts they have previously submitted. Users of this new version have generated long chains of thoughtful and disputatious responses to most items. Public response has now replaced private correspondence as SwiftCurrent's major function.

Perhaps because of a six-month gap between the terminating of the first SwiftCurrent and installation of the Caucus software, or possibly because of changes in the nature of the project, most of the users of that first version have not joined the second. The approximately 40 regular users of SwiftCurrent "one" (plus about 60 occasional users) were about evenly distributed between Ontario and British Columbia, with only a few users in other provinces. Users at a distance from SwiftCurrent's physical location at York University enjoyed relatively simple Datapac access courtesy of the university. SwiftCurrent "two" is accessible only through regular telephone or INET, a somewhat more cumbersome cousin of Datapac, which — despite the fact that SwiftCurrent itself pays the INET charges of participating writers — is reported to make outside-of-Toronto use awkward and discouraging. The approximately 40 users of the current project are almost all from southern Ontario.

The Writers Active in SwiftCurrent "Two," with its production of texts that are quickly relativised by commentary, inclusively, perhaps not surprisingly, very few who have established audiences for their writing through well-known presses and magazines. I personally suspect that the multiplicity of the printed page plays an authenticating, if not idealising role for many writers — that the achievement of a stable printed text in a public context is for many the apotheosis of the writing project, and that these might find the kind of interactive publishing now offered by SwiftCurrent unsatisfying and necessarily preliminary to the validation book or periodical publication appears to offer. Many of the writers active in the current SC are ones who have worked in interdisciplinary contexts, with music or the visual arts, published their texts in chapbooks distributed mostly at Toronto's annual Small Press Book Fair, or presented their texts in readings and performances.

In both versions of SwiftCurrent very few women writers have participated. I have heard and entertained numerous hypotheses about why this has been so. Is it because women remain culturally conditioned to be uneasy with technology, or have associated it, as Margaret Atwood's fiction has, with patriarchal violence? Is it because some feminists still model the feminine on a nature vs. culture dichotomy that locates technology in the "masculine" second term? Is it simply that the economic disadvantages of being female give women lower access to technology than men enjoy? Or perhaps that most feminists encourage women to work outside contexts in which men are active? Or even that many women writers seek the legitimisation of established systems, including book and magazine publishing, rather than seeking to interrogate those legitimacies — that it is related to the explanations one occasionally hears for why many women writers prefer realism to postmodernism or prefer attempting to construct a female subject to the project of interrogating the possibility of the autonomous subject? My own view is that all of these factors occur and contribute. At any rate, SwiftCurrent is presently open not only to individual women writers but to any group that might wish to operate within SwiftCurrent facilities its own closed conference.
SWIFTCURRENT: HOW TO GET ONLINE

SWIFTCurrent communicates at 300, 1200 or 2400 baud. Set your communications software for 7 data bits, 1 stop bit, no parity, and full duplex. In Toronto, dial 73-6525. Outside of Toronto, SWIFTCurrent can be accessed with Net accounts, through the Net numbers 79100067, 79100068, or 79100090.

Once you have a connection, wait a few seconds then ENTER (i.e., use the carriage return key) twice. At the prompt "Enter number:" ENTER misthr.

At the prompt "Call complete" ENTER twice.

At the prompt "mithra:" ENTER nexus.

The log-in code is SC; ENTER; the password is shibumi, ENTER.

SWIFTCurrent will now instruct you how to get into caucus. Join any one of the conferences displayed in the list.

At the prompt "And Now?" ENTER help for further information or ENTER add message to send a private message to any of SWIFTCurrent's participants for further help.

Most users log-in daily.

For a list of caucus participants, ENTER list person all at the prompt "And Now?"

Compiled by Daniel Jones.

Both versions of SWIFTCURRENT problematize the concept of publication. For the past few centuries western culture has equated publication, "making public," with printed paper, and has constructed from various social perspectives various hierarchies of value within the printed work. A poem, for example, acquires different value if it is published in a newspaper, a little magazine, a single-author book from a small press, a similar book from a commercial press, a "new poets" trade anthology, an academic anthology, or an Oxford national anthology. The function of text-publication appears to be doubly constructed both to preserve the text and to enter it into public dialogue at valued sites of such dialogue. Some "publics" have been "worth" more to some writers and readers than have others — the "public" of Writing magazine, say, can be of dramatically more or less value than that of the New Yorker, or of Borderline, more or less than that of Saturday Night. Although mass media attempt to enforce particular hierarchies, in which large circulation and/or centrally located sites are privileged, individual constituen-

cies still focus energy and value on sites which enable their own members to work and develop.

In most such constituencies, electronic publication is still constructed as "less" than paper publication, or as requiring the validation of paper publication to become "real." High-profile electronic publication projects — the Columbia Encyclopedia, The OED, The Globe and Mail database — have been marked as subsidiary to pre-existing print publication. SWIFTCurrent text files become the Coach House SWIFTCurrent Anthology. What is interesting about the latter, however, is that it had much less impact than the SWIFTCurrent project itself — much more discussion of text and correspondence about writing resulted from the electronic publication than from the print one.

Fred Wah and I conceived of the print anthology as validation for the electronic but as promotion for it — the online texts were not to be preliminary to the book pages, the book pages were to be stimuli to additional online activity.

Both electronic versions of SWIFTCurrent, and particularly the current one, have the potential to serve the functions of publication — at least to the satisfaction of those participating. Texts are preserved and archived, admitted not as widely as are even small press publications, but systematically in the taped archives of SWIFTCurrent activity and, piccolo, in the material downloaded by individual users. Texts are distributed — and responded to, and a much greater percentage of that response is recorded and preserved than that which occurs (mostly orally) in the context of print publication. Despite the current limitations on electronic access and dissemination in Canada, SWIFTCurrent compares well as a publisher to most literary magazines — it reaches fewer readers, preserves (initially at least) many fewer copies of a text in the public record, but each text published presently receives on average six recorded responses, with most of these responses participating in debates in which the text and earlier responses form the matrix of discussion. No print magazine could hope to achieve this.

This intensity of discussion most texts preserve receives raises a further problematic concerning what is a literary text. Although contemporary theorists may argue that literary texts are to a large extent produced by their readers (whether these readers be the editors and anthropologists who regulate a text's visibility, scholars who have offered readings of it, or individuals whose "private" readings are themselves partly produced by various cultural interpellations), textual practice in our culture has continued to isolate the text from these various readings. Editorial selection is concealed beneath the "natural" categorization of great books and major authors; scholarly interpretation is published separately, signalled by footnotes and bibliographies. Changing and conflicting cultural influences on readings are rationalised under such categorizations as background, progress, interpretive communities, or confined through idealisations of authors and texts. In the Caucus-based version of SWIFTCurrent, however, the text, the responses it has received, and the author's responses to these (which are often to expand or modify the original text) appear to viewers as a growing and internally active body of text. To read a text here is to read the text as both written and rewritten by its readings, and often to participate in the text by appending one's own meta-readings. If, as Barbara Herrnstein Smith has suggested, the conventional "completing work" is one that marks the author's "point of exhaustion," the literal depletion of the author's current resources, the SWIFTCurrent text is made public at an earlier point, one at which the author is still active in its writing but not, significantly, relying exclusively on her own exhaustible "resources."

ONE THOUGHT FRED WASH AND I HAD WHEN ESTABLISHING THE FIRST VERSION OF SWIFTCURRENT was that it might serve as a way of distributing texts in addition to being a place where writers could work interactively with each other and with their readers. Although the new version allows this function, readers, libraries and potential writers are still welcome to subscribe — our main interest now is to facilitate use by writers. The first SWIFTCurrent had subscriptions from several libraries as well as from a number of artists' organisations who wished to provide access for their members. We proposed to potential subscribers that they could download texts for academic use, or construct limited-edition print anthologies from SWIFTCurrent, with voluntary payment of nominal royalty fees. Certainly this is still possible, and although at the moment labour-intensive not technically difficult. Our experience in the first version, however, was that the subscribers who might wish to print and publish online texts seem invariably to have difficulty with the technology, and that for us to try to assist such subscribers was beyond our resources. We had not the time nor desire to become printers or technical advisors — one of the most significant effects of electronic text-providers such as SWIFTCurrent is their potential to shift both text selection and printing from the publisher to the reader. Our thinking now is that rather than seeking to encourage and assist our users to download and print, we should focus on making SWIFTCurrent a site of intense textual activity — one that could motivate others to solve their own problems in distance publishing.

Frank Daney is Professor of English at York University and editor of the advanced critical journal Open Letter. His most recent book is Reading Canada: a collection of essays and lectures published by Tundra Press.

TEXTS CITED


Shoah entered the public sphere at a somewhat precarious moment, in the midst of a massive shift towards remembrance working itself through the challenge of self-critical reappraisal.

IWONA IRWIN-ZARECKA

After the first screenings of Shoah in France, early in 1985, the Polish government lodged an official protest against the offensive portrayal of Poles in the film. Yet in November of the same year, Polish television presented a selection of "Polish sequences" from Shoah, followed by a studio discussion, while the film itself was released in theatres of major cities. For several months, both before and after the screening of Shoah, the major weeklies carried articles dealing with various aspects of the film and its reception. Yet it was not until early 1987 that the key questions posed by Shoah—about the Holocaust and about Polish attitudes—became a focus of serious debate in independent Catholic press. And that debate was not in response to Claude Lanzmann but to reflections by a Polish literary critic on two poems written by Czesław Milosz. Shoah was meant to challenge Polish and Catholic conscience. It did not. How could so powerful a "text" be neutralised?

The response of Polish intellectuals to Shoah was not uniformly shallow or defensive. Indeed, the tone of official comments about the film especially in the Party weekly Polityka and especially before the decision to bring the film to Poland would be finalised, was serious and reflective. In marked contrast to just a few years back, when Polish readers were consistent and not-too-subtly told of an anti-Polish obsession in the west, exemplified by such works as the television series Holocaust or the book Sophie's Choice, now they were told to listen to Lanzmann's critical voice. And while all the previously attacked pieces of "anti-Polishness" were never made available in the country, Shoah was to be actually seen.

The change of heart on the part of the officialdom—from vigorous protest to an equally vigorous encouragement of self-critical reflection—in itself calls for an explanation. It is also what may partly explain the impact, or lack thereof, of Shoah. Lanzmann himself suggests that the government's invitation followed a realisation that the Poles portrayed in Shoah, mostly peasants and small-town people, were Catholics, not communists. Indeed, the film carries no direct negative references to the regime whatsoever; indirectly, some of Lanzmann's questions about the impoved lot of peasants after the war, as well as the very fact that he shot so much of his footage in Poland, with the help of an officially assigned and highly visible interpreter, could serve as a testimony to the regime's goodwill. Most importantly, perhaps, Shoah is an explicit condemnation of Catholic anti-Semitism, of Church teachings and Church action.

Polish communists, in a continuous ideological battle with the Polish Church, have tried—unsuccessfully—to expose the Church's prewar record of siding with the extreme nationalists. The most spectacular of their recent defeats came only two years before, when calls for resignation of the government spokesperson, Jerzy Urban, followed his remarks about Father Maksymilian Kolbe, a recently canonised priest. Father Kolbe died in Auschwitz, sacrificing his life for that of a fellow Pole; before the war, though, he was behind publication of one of the most vicious anti-Semitic Catholic journals. Urban's voice, despite the support from then prime minister Rakowski and Polityka (where both worked before joining the government), was silenced with public outrage.

Urban's voice was heard again, in the spring of 1985, in defence of bringing Shoah to Poland. Whether he was actually instrumental in the regime's decision to do that does not quite matter. In the public's eye, Urban, the "court Jew," was again attacking the Church.

Beyond the very presentation of Shoah, the officialdom's support of the film was by no means unanimous. In the press, there appeared numerous articles criticising Lanzmann for his "manipulative methods" and for his lack of balance and objectivity. In Polityka, which published extended versions of the televised arguments following the screening of parts of Shoah, there was much heated debate. Of all the voices in that debate who defended...
Lanzmann’s critique, only one belonged to a non-Jew.

This particular combination of mixed-yet-favourable official response and the country’s “court Jews” shift (if at arm’s length) criticism of Polish Catholicism made Shoah into yet another instrument of ideological warfare. [According to one of my Warsaw informants, the tone of many a conversation surrounding Shoah was indeed that of combat, of witnessing from a distance another “battle” between the regime and the Church.

Though the “Jewish dimension” of this attack on the Church was very much played down in its immediate reference to Poland’s “court Jews” so snuggled it was taken in respect to Claude Lanzmann himself. Ever since the publication of Jerzy Kosinski’s The Painted Bird in 1965, the theme of Jewish hostility towards Poles has been widely exploited in the Polish media. Given prominence during the 1968/69 anti-Semitic campaign, the idea that influential Jews engaged in slander of Poland’s good name would remain on the public agenda for many years. Its strength went well beyond the official propaganda. Key émigré journals spoke in similar tones. What made the situation different in 1985 was a radical turn-about on the part of the regime in its stance towards the Jews. Instead of attacking, the regime decided to court them, beginning with an elaborate commemoration of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising in 1983. In the midst of a grave political and economic crisis, following the crushing of Solidarity, great care was taken in coordinating special exhibits, books, publications and overall media coverage, not only of the Jews’ heroism, but also of the Jewish experience. [Wau- saw, but of Poland’s Jewish heritage in general. The show of good will, calculated as it might have been to gain international credibility — and credit — for the regime, did open the gates to a veritable deluge of public discourse about things Jewish, much of it originating in independent Catholic circles.

When Shoah appeared, Polish readers were already exposed to an unprecedented amount of discussion of Jewish history and culture, both inside and outside of the official sphere. Again, the discourse was not uniformly “pro-Jewish,” there were elements of naïvety, ignorance, cynicism, as well as hostility and apprehension. But by and large, this was the first time in the long history of Polish-Jewish relations that the Jew would become worthy of knowledge and respect as a Jew.

Yet as much as Poland’s Jewish heritage was gradually being reclaimed as a part of Poland’s history and memory, and as much as this subject of Polish-Jewish relations was no longer taboo, a more open discussion of anti-Semitism was then barely beginning. Shoah would enter the public sphere at a somewhat precarious moment, in the midst of a massive shift towards remembrance working itself through the challenge of self-critical reappraisal. Poten-

tially, Lanzmann’s voice could have precipitated a serious examination of anti-Semitism; such indeed was the explicit aim of the official welcome. But Lanzmann’s voice came too, too strongly — and it was too Jewish.

The task of self-criticism, of coming to terms with the dark chapters of one’s past, is always difficult. It is especially difficult when at the very base of collective identity is the idea of victimisation, and Poles indeed see the Christian victims of anti-Semitism in general, and of the Nazis in particular. To break through this interpretive grid, to point to times and places where Poles had been the agents of victimisation, has been the conscious aim of the Church, working from within the traditional views of history. To impose a radically different interpretation from without — as did Lanzmann — had the effect of removing Poles isolated in such a sense from the recent past.

The result might still have been a form of re-evaluation rather than retrenchment, were it not for Lanzmann’s partner in critique of Christianity. In western writings on the holocaust, the subject of Christian responsibility for the destruction of the Jews is widely discussed, both in its concrete contribution of the Churches’ past and in its symbolic one, of the role of Christianity in promoting anti-Semitism. In Shoah, the complexity of this discussion disappears, together with its now strong emphasis on the role of the Jew.

The only argument (and person) presented by Lanzmann is Raul Hilberg’s thesis on the inevitable progression from the tenets of Christian teachings on the Jews to mass violence. This radical interpretation is not framed as such; rather, it is supported in the film by scenes shot close to a church, a Polish church. The issue of Christian responsibility thus becomes reduced to that of the influence of Catholicism on the Poles’ indifference to the fate of the Jews.

Such a reduction, legitimate as it may have been, is artfully, become the key word for Polish interpreters of Shoah. In particular, it enthralled the senior progressive Catholic, Jerzy Turywicz, chief editor of the weekly Tygodnik Powstania, with a long record of condemning anti-Semitism. Not only was the thesis of prevalent indifference among the Poles unacceptable to him (and to most Poles today), the connecting of whatever attitudes Poles exhibited during the holocaust to the position taken by the Church before the war would be declared inadmissible. Turywicz implicitly granted that the Church before 1939 had been largely anti-Semitic, as he spoke of the recent improvements. But he repeatedly denied any links between the situations during the war and that before the war, as if sensing that any other view would have meant an acknowledge- ment of Lanzmann’s critique. And, to support his position, Turywicz emphasised the help extended to Jews by Catholic nuns and priests, as well as lay people well known for their anti-Semitic stance. Turywicz’s comments are worth reflect- ing on, for a number of reasons. First, they carried authority unchallenged by any of the statements originating in the official Church. Secondly, they represent the best and most open of Polish Catholicism, the intellectual rather than the dogmatic approach to history.

Thirdly, though, this was an approach marked by the prevailing ideas about “responsibility” from right across the political and cultural spectrum, the reference solely to individual action, to concrete “facts” and figures from the holocaust. The much broader notion of a shared moral responsibility for the fate of the Jews, the notion motivating so many western critics of Christanities, has been virtually absent from Polish discussion on the holocaust. [Focus on these facts and figures indeed allows for a defence of the Church’s record, as there is no doubt many Jews had been saved thanks to Catholic efforts. What it does not allow for is precisely that argument that Lanzmann was making; the symbolic, mythic dimension of Catholic teachings dissolves.

Finally, the separation, so insisted upon, between the war period and all that preceded (and followed) is also representative of a sense of history shared in Poland. The role of the nation, the importance of the idea of the Jewish as an unimportant Jew, and of the part of the Jews in the Nazi terror, Nazi rules and regulations, Nazi control, in short, Poles as victims of the same regime cannot be held accountable for the fate of other victims; it is Nazism and Nazis alone who are responsible. They are, in other words, for the “Final Solution.”

Without immersing ourselves in a debate over the historical plausibility of this view of Poland as totally helpless victims, it is important to note that this response is based on the need to maintain a clean conscience. And indeed, the viewers’ response to the television screening of Shoah indicated that for most of them the question of responsibility for the fate of the Jews was a non-issue. Most of all, they also thought that Lanzmann’s treatment of the “Polish question” in the film was inten- tionally biased and offensive. In the absence of Shoah in the media (now also including Polish emigré publications), the emphasis was on countering this widely perceived bias rather than on the moral responsibility itself. In that respect, Turywicz’s article was one of the rare attempts at addressing balance and objectivity in approaching Polish-Jewish relations, criticism of Lanzmann brought forth several “corrective factors” to counter the biases of his vision. Most prominent was the emphasis on the film’s silence about those Poles who had in fact saved Jews. The picture of societal indifference, was very much a partial one, as it did not include the other side. The established version of Polish-Jewish relations during the holocaust — that some Poles behaved bravely, while others acted heroically, as in
any human collectivity under duress — was thus rather easily re-established for the viewers of Shoah. Lanzmann may not have invented the morally problematic, but he had exaggerated its overall significance.

Jan Karski, interviewed about the film, told the New York Times in December that he couldn’t have given the film the kind of visibility to which its creator ascribed. He objected, too, that the film was not a documentary film. The large television audience, presented with one hour and a half of “Polish segments” had little, if any resources for making sense of the whole. Lanzmann’s “message,” reduced to a frontal attack on Poles and Catholicism generated debate, but Lanzmann’s film version of the “Final Solution” did not generate reflection.

The editing of Shoah, both in the immediate sense of the television screening, and the larger sense of media coverage, made a more general reflection difficult. But ultimately, it was the long-established pattern of Holocaust remembrance which made such reflection impossible. Lanzmann asked his viewers to think through the machinery of total destruction, to follow him on a quest to understand how it all possible. But he also asked a very concrete question — “why the Jews?” In Poland, where the three million Jewish dead are routinely joined with three million Polish victims, and where the Nazi project is usually seen as interrupted by defeat before the extermination of the Poles, the key question of “why the Jews?” has rarely been asked. Even when solemnly commemorating the dead in Treblinka, with visitors from the west and from Israel in 1983, the very word “Jew” was not spoken. This sense of uniqueness of the Holocaust, so much at the base of Shoah, is not a part of Poland’s memory. More precisely, it was not there when the film was shown; since 1985, the place accorded to Jewish victims has become more of a contested terrain, as witnessed in the recent controversy around the monument in Auschwitz. If Poles, in their sense of co-victims of the Nazi genocide, do not raise the general question “why the Jews?”, Polish historians, in their accounts of long centuries of Polish-Jewish coexistence, provide a detailed answer to the local query about anti-Semitism. In a way, the question “why the Jews?” dissolves again as the roots of anti-Semitism in Poland are all explainable and explored.

The overall thrust of this exposition is one of sociological inevitability — given the country’s conditions, given the foreign influences, given the Jews’ separateness, given ... there had to arise anti-Jewish sentiments. For different historical periods, the sociological gives change, of course; the strength, though, of this scientific interpretation never diminishes. The mythical elements are vaguely acknowledged (in discussions of types, for example), but the core to understanding anti-Semitism remains within the economic, political and sociological spheres. Reflection on the public image of the few is then very much secondary to that on his public presence. And, as the persistent references to the “Jewish question” testify, it is the Jewish presence itself which guarantees their place.

Lanzmann’s intense questioning of the symbolic texture of anti-Semitism, with its emphasis on the role of Catholic teachings, was thus doubly outside the established frame of reference for discussing Polish-Jewish relations. An alien perspective coming from an alien, especially an alien declared as hostile, could only be rejected.

The neutralization of Shoah, as we have seen, meant primarily that traditional ways of thinking about Jews and Poland’s history would be re-established, despite, or perhaps because Lanzmann’s vision challenged them so strongly. The politics implicated in the debates helped to do that, too, with the regime’s using the film to criticize the Church. The arguments were not subtle, the lines of defence remained, for the most part, well defined. Yet, on another level, neutralizing Shoah assumed a more complex form of an ongoing historical construction, a project which Lanzmann’s voice could have irreparably damaged but did not.

At issue here is the premise of traumatization, the idea that the destruction of Poland’s Jews represented a great loss for the country as a whole. The whole recent recovery of Poland’s Jewish heritage rests on that premise; explicitly stated or implied in the efforts of remembrance are regret and nostalgic longing over a world never to be again. Among many young people in particular, who grew up in a virtually “purely Polish”Poland, there is a very real sense of loss of diversity, sometimes translating itself into reading up on Chassidism, at other times, into avid defence of the rights of the Ukrainian minorities. The current interest in things Jewish, at least in its most popular forms, reflects this sense of loss as it focuses on the “authentic”Jew. All in all, the comments, the declarations, the editorialials make this feeling of loss appear perfectly “natural,” with the passage of 40 years serving as an additional index for the depth of the trauma.

Shoah undermines the “naturalness” of traumatization to a degree never before encountered by Polish audiences. Lanzmann himself, when discussing the film a
few years later), explained some of the artistic choices with a description of his traumatic realization, on site, that Treblinka is (and was) a village like any other village. Talking to people who had witnessed, from so very close, the "Final Solution" acquired an almost impulsive quality for the director. He was not prepared, he said, for how ordinary life would be, next to the gas chambers and after the gas chambers.

The picture emerging from Shoa is not homogeneous, we do see, after all, people who feel genuine regret over the loss of their Jewish neighbours. But it is sufficiently disturbing nevertheless, with image after image of the absence of mourning, the absence of trauma.

In the west, where the record of post-war years is relatively well known, where "Kieje" symbolises the anti-Jewish violence which had claimed several hundred victims and resulted in massive emigration of survivors, Lanzmann's portrait of Poles served to reconfirm the already negative image. But in Poland itself, a film which made no direct reference to the random killings or the pogroms, while speaking of indifference, almost had to appear biased and unconvincing. Of all the acts of violence against the Jews during the years immediately following the Holocaust, only the Kielce pogrom which claimed 41 lives became subject to public discussion during the 1987 "opening" by Solidarity. Even when commemorated, though, the victims of Kielce remained alone. The pogrom was "a deplorable incident," often blamed on politically motivated provocation. Its remembrance became an occasion for condemning anti-Semitism by all the present competing forces, but especially by the Church. It did not become an occasion for exposing anti-Semitism within the Church at the time, nor for exposing the degree of anti-Semitism within the Church at the time, nor for exposing the degree of anti-Semitic violence for Poles, however well-intentioned, the history of those, the darkest years in Polish Jewish past, was not on record. Even when issues of conscience were being raised, these were questions about attitudes and actions during the Holocaust. The fact that survivors, upon their return, met so often with open hostility, that their death would be taken for granted for quite some time after the Nazis were gone — in short, the indices of non-trauma of the Holocaust — were ignored.

Against this blank space in historical memory, and very much in the foreground of the rediscovery of Poland's Jewish heritage, stood the declarations of loss and obligation to remember, on site, that Treblinka was a village like any other village. The long delay in talking about the Jews, if reflected on at all, would be ascribed to the regime-imposed silence; alternatively, the enormity of the trauma would serve as an explanation. Plausible and morally comforting, these readings of the past gained strength, ironically, from the vision of shared victimisation we discussed before. The idea that Jews represented Polish losses is a powerful gloss indeed to the realities of murders of survivors by ordinary Poles in villages and towns across the country.

Shoa which spoke of the climate but not of the violence, could not challenge this comfortable view of the post-holocaust years. Indeed, in fact, Lanzmann's focus on the memorials in Auschwitz and Treblinka could offer support for the prelude of traumatisation. Treblinka's is a moving monument to Jewish victims: in Auschwitz, it was Lanzmann who remained silent about the exclusion of the very word "Jew" from the commemorative tablets. Once again, it was the filmic text and its Polish "readers" together working to neutralise the potentially strong moral challenge of Shoa.

With an artistic vision as complex and

Against this blank space in historical memory... stood the declarations of loss and obligation to remember.

prints shared among the "readers" proved powerful enough to dismist the artist and his vision.

More than a year after Shoa was screened and discussed, Polish-Jewish relations during the Holocaust were again subject to debate, this time strictly within the "family" of Independent Catholic intellectuals. That debate, too, saw its share of defensiveness and refusal to feel morally challenged; it too did not touch on the key question of postwar violence against the Jews. It did, though, alter the image of the past by stressing the uniqueness of the Holocaust.

Considering the timing, the absence of any direct references to Shoa was remarkable. On the other hand, the very opening of the discussion consisted of a thoughtful commentary on the negative opinions about Poles as expressed by western Jews, in effect, of an appeal for an effort to understand rather than reject them. Lanzmann's views, so much a part of the perceived "anti-Polonism," were thus granted the status of an intellectual challenge just as the complexity of his vision disappeared behind the familiar label.

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NOTES


4. The August 26, 1989 speech by Cardinal Glemp is only the most published example of its persistence.

5. During the interim period, Jewish themes, while very prominent on the public agenda, were largely ignored in the press, and were largely around the proposed "solutions" to the "Jewish problem," thus prohibiting any form of open debate or public discussion.


10. Ethnic minorities account today (because numbers are not being available) for about five percent of the general population. The total number of Jews is at most 15,000.

Forty years ago, the Mexican poet Octavio Paz wrote in The Labyrinth of Solitude:

"I would not be telling the truth if I were to say that I had ever seen guilt feelings transformed into anything other than hatred, solitary despair or blind idolatry. The religious feelings of my people are very deep — like their misery and helplessness — but their fervour has done nothing but return again and again to a well that has been empty for centuries." Most commentators have
E V A N G E L I S M  i n  N I C A R A G U A

seen the cultures of the various Meso-American countries consisting of three layers: the Indian, of which the last dominant example was Aztec (destroyed by Cortez in 1521); the Spanish-Catholic, which dominated at least up to the Mexican revolution of 1910; and the confident Imperialistic economism of the U.S.A. which persists until today. Various revolutions (first in Mexico, then Cuba and now Nicaragua, with attempts in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras) have tried to break out of this series of cultural frictions, with limited degrees of success.

Meanwhile, there are other competitions for the minds of the people, most of them emerging from the United States in the form of evangelical Christianity. One of the most remarkable phenomena in Meso- and South America (with Brazil, Chile and Mexico having the largest percentage of converts) has been the growth of “fundamentalist” Christian cults, in particular Pentecostalist and so-called “charismatic” groups. The debate has been whether these groups (because of the American origins of the belief-systems) are necessarily counter-revolutionary, or whether, because they are frequently based on dissenting Mestizo and Indian groups, they can become the focus for a new cultural and political opposition. After all, historically, in the U.S.A., central Africa, Britain, Italy, Czechoslovakia, and even in the U.S.S.R., similar groups have in the past acted as the basis for radical, even revolutionary movements. Not surprisingly, the debate rages most fiercely in Nicaragua. Stephen Dale reports on the situation as he sees it:

Alternative sources: EJ Hobshawm, Primitive Rebels; Imamu Amiri Baraka, Blues People; Eric Wolf, Sons of the Shaking Earth; Vittorio Lantenari, The Religions of the Oppressed.

...It's mid-morning in a mixed industrial-residential barrio in Managua. Across the street, a brewery that spans several blocks is doing its best to keep Nicaragua supplied with Cervecita Victoria, a mainstay amongst this country’s potable liquids. The smell of half-fermented hops and malt permeates the neighbourhood, mixing in with the ambient sounds of industrial activity and child’s play that drift into the clear, tiled courtyard at the offices of C.E.P.R.E.S., the Evangelical Centre for the Promotion of Social Responsibility. It is here that Miguel Angel Casco, C.E.P.R.E.S.‘ director, thinks back to his own childhood, recalling for a Canadian visitor the visionary moment that overshadowed a new religious synthesis in his life.

It was a day when there was no food in the house. "No cheese, no meat, no milk, no beans," Casco remembers, "Only salt." His father had sent one of his four brothers out to try and borrow some food from the neighbours. But when Casco’s younger brother returned around five o’clock he carried with him only one tortilla. "So my father made this tortilla into four little pieces, one for each boy, and he sat in a big chair to drink a cup of coffee. He didn’t have any of the tortilla, and I offered some of mine to my father. My father became very emotional and started to cry. "Afterwards I asked him, ‘Papa, why are we so poor? We have difficulties to eat. We don’t have any chance to cultivate the land.’ And he told me, ‘Son, it is the will of God.’"

Casco takes another run at that last phrase to emphasise its irony. "It is the will of God," he repeats. "It was eight years old at the time and I was not convinced of what my father said, but I didn’t have the means to argue. However, I had begun to read the Bible from seven years old, and by nine years old I had finished it — all of it, from Genesis to Revelation. After that I understood why my father was saying this." The have been Pentecostal in Nicaragua since 1906, when the Assemblies of God first started to stake out the territory, and the main group was the Church of God. Some of the people, perhaps fearful of alienating those among the flock for whom defending “the patric” from the corregidor was an honorable and potentially financially costly duty, have been soft-pedalling politics on their visits here. For its part, the Sandinista government seems to understand the appeal of this fundamentalist tide and is betting that it can maintain its support amongst the poor not by rebuffing fundamentalist preachers but by embracing them. Daniel Ortega, for instance, has appeared on stage with a Puerto Rican faith-healer who has an enormous following in the country. Jimmy Swaggert, meanwhile, performed three nights in Managua in February 1988, just four days before he was exposed by a sex scandal in the U.S., and coincided with the political atmosphere that had been generated by the government’s decision to sign a contract with Pat Robertson, one of the most prominent private backers of the contras, to have "The 700 Club" broadcast on the state-run Sandinista Television System. Robertson’s trip to Nicaragua produced the unlikely spectacle of the American Christian broadcaster-cum-presidential candidate shaking hands with Nicaraguan vice-president Somoza Ramírez, an appearance that amazed and angered some Nicaraguans when it appeared in the papers.

Yet such snapshots of apparent reconciliation do not signify that the evangelical expansion presents no problem for the Sandinistas, and there’s a kind of double vision in Nicaragua as to what this strange parade of events actually means. On the one hand, it is clear how this fundamentalist influx fits into the “psychological warfare” aspect of Low-Intensity Conflict (L.I.C.), the Pentagon’s current strategic doctrine for dealing with third-world challenges to the U.S. As the Sandinistas restore the liberties that had been restricted during a state of war, they face the danger that incoming preachers will turn the people against the revolutionary project. The danger is underscored by several commentators who note that both the Rockefeller commission and the first document of the
Yes, they will trample me underfoot, the number
million five hundred six, reducing me to specks of v
will trample my son who is not my son, and his son
be his, until the thousand and first generation, u
bestowed their terrible gifts and a thousand and
privilege and the curse of midnight's children to be
forsake privacy and be sucked into the annihilation
unable to live or die in peace.
members marching one two three, four hundred
of voiceless dust, just as, all in good time, they
son who will not be his, and his who will not
son, until a thousand and one midnights have
and one children have died, because it is the
be both masters and victims of their times, to
ilating whirlpool of the multitudes, and to be
Jamelie Hassan

Santa Fe group specifically recommended the use of evangelical religion as a political tool against the Sandinistas. Radka Koli, an American Presbyterian now attached to C.I.E.S.T., the Inter-Ecclesiastical Centre for Social and Theological Studies in Managua, adds that the timing of this new wave of fundamentalist activity casts some light on the conservative Christian agenda for Nicaragua. "Right now we’re seeing an incredible offensive by the evangelical right," says Koli, "and part of the focus seems to be asking the question, ‘Well, the liberation the revolution has brought, has it been true liberation at all? You need God.’ Clearly the ideological message seems to be an attempt to delegitimize the upcoming elections. None of this has been said directly, but there is an obvious attempt to create doubts in the evangelical community and to separate people from the political process.

Despite this acknowledgement, Koli believes that there’s another aspect to the story — that the fundamentalist phenomenon now cannot be adequately understood by reducing it solely to its political dimension, and that the sects offer something real and potentially positive to poor Nicaraguans. Religion such as Pentecostalism, she says, although often dismissed by intellectuals as mere emotionalism, "is legitimate forms of worship," which speak clearly to the condition and concerns of working-class people. Koli says that, with its emphasis on personal experience, the unfulfilled dreams were the faithful sing, dance and speak in tongues, and on the believer’s ability to form a personal relationship with God, Pentecostalism shows itself as an egalitarian form of worship with the power to build community and, ironically, a popular appeal very similar to that of Sandinismo. Koli considers it almost extraneous that the people were getting these rituals and experiences to Nicaragua to attach them to a right-wing political agenda: the history of Protestantism in this country, she says, is full of examples where Nicaraguans have broken away from the mother churches of the missionaries to form “national churches” — retaining the ritual and faith but jettisoning the social and political edicts — and the foreign control — they couldn’t live with.

Today there is a fresh crop of foreign preachers looking for converts in Nicaragua. I met a couple of them quite by chance after taking a detour one day to Managua’s Inter-Continental Hotel. In the lobby were two men — later identified as Mitch and Steve — talking very loudly in English, punctuating their sentences with phrases like “praise the Lord” and “God is good.” When I approached them they confirmed that yes, they were preachers from the United States. Mitch was here for a crusade in Managua and for a series of seminars with Nicaraguan pastors, while Steve had his own church for Ciudad Sandino, a former squatter settlement that had since been incorporated as a suburb of the Nicaraguan capital. Though they didn’t know each other before now, Mitch related that he and Steve had a lot in common: they are both Jews who had converted to Pentecostalism, and were both instructed to go to Nicaragua, where they were given names beside each other at the Inter-Continental.

The next day Mitch Medina and I got together for a more formal meal and interview session. Conversing with Mitch I learned that he is an unusual experience under any circumstances: he speaks of his invisible world of miracles, angels, and mystical interventions as casually as if he were describing walking to the store for a loaf of bread. Encountered in his church in Managua, however, is doubly bizarre. His intense, otherworldly gaze, insistent speech, and Wall Street wardrobe suggest that he has nothing in common with the humble Nicaraguans he has come to preach to, against this dusty, tropical landscape he appears very foreign.

That is not to say that Mitch is a stranger to Central America. Sketching his own history, he recalls that his first visit to Nicaragua was in 1973, in the aftermath of the earthquake and during the rule of Somoza, when he was sent to sell the reproduction rights to greeting cards on behalf of the family business. The trip was part of an era of which he has strong memories: just before he left — while still a student at the State University of New York at Binghamton and, so he recalls, student council president, anti-Vietnam war activist and dabbler in psychedelic drugs — he “got saved.” Medina made his formal conversion to Pentecostalism and picked up the ability to speak in tongues during the business trip that followed, having accepted a chance invitation to an evangelical congress in Mexico City. After several years of holding revival meetings in American protestant churches he has claimed to have developed the ability to heal, through the tuteledge of preacher Morris Cerullo, Medina’s two trips to Nicaragua in the 1980s have been made, in fact, on behalf of Morris Cerullo World Evangelism, Medina says he does not pass the hat to pay for these trips, but instead finances them by conducting his import-export business while on the crusade circuit — dealing in “do-hickeys with commercial potential” like the magnetic purse snaps he imports into the U.S. from the third world, and the stop-smoking sprays he exports from the United States to other countries.

The big question is about the evangelist’s politics, but on this score Medina is evasive, insisting that his political viewpoint is a private matter that doesn’t overlap with his role as a preacher. He makes no direct criticism of the Sandinistas, choosing instead to commend them for removing the roadblocks to foreign evangelists who want to enter the country. Pleasantries aside, it soon becomes necessary to deduce where Medina stands on the political spectrum. A mention of General Efrain Rios Montt, the (then-again former) president of Guatemala who oversaw a period of official violence in that country in the early 80s, elicits a positive response from Medina, who dismissed the General’s political sins with the facile argument that they were numerically insignificant compared to the crimes of the leftist Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. A closer look at Morris Cerullo World Evangelism adds to the suspicion that there’s a deep-seated political commitment behind Medina’s reluctance to discuss the affairs of the anti-communists operating out of the Resource Center in Albuquerque, New Mexico (an organization which keeps files on private groups active in Central America), the literature produced by Cerullo’s group speaks in militant terms of a showdown in the world between God and Satan, who is in league with Marxist governments. The Resource Center also quotes the organization’s literature as saying that Cerullo himself flew without permission to Nicaragua in 1981 — “to annul the work of the devil so evident in that country today” — and that he was detained for three hours and then forced to leave the country, heading to his next stop at a Guatemalan military airport. While in El Salvador two years later, Cerullo reportedly made the comment that “there is a new army in El Salvador. God’s army.”

At the Inter-Continental in Managua, however, Mitch Medina does not seem inclined to echo the provocative tone of his mentor. He is clearly not here to preach hellfire and brimstone or to incite righteous indignation, but rather to make promises, big promises. Launching into an attack on Catholic liberation theology, which places God in the context of ongoing earthly struggles, Medina seems confident that his competing brand of Christian sociology and salesmanship will win hands down every time.

Liberation theology, he says, “goes way over the heads of the people. That’s for intellectuals, and these people here are not intellectuals. They’re looking for a God who answers by fire, they’re looking for a God who, if their kid is sick, they can pray and the kid gets healed; that’s what they want. They’re looking for someone who can help them; they’re looking for a friend, they’re looking for a counselor. They’re not looking for some intellectual reconciliation of Christianity and Marxism — forget it.”

The Nicaraguan people are also apparently interested in wealth, something that’s in short supply in the country at the moment. The cause of this dearth, he says, is not the draining expense of war, or economic embargoes, ravaged fields or closed-down roads — but the absence of the holy spirit. God meant his people to be rich — it says so in Deuteronomy 8:18 — if only
they would follow His blueprint. That's where Mitch Medina can help. "When I came here," the pastor says, "the main thing I had in mind for the seminar was a spiritual message about faith, love and freedom from a revelation perspective. I started that message but the second night I was here, God woke me up at four o'clock in the morning and changed the whole emphasis of what I was talking about. I've spent most of the week trying to explain it to them, we're not here to proselytize ... and they want to pray for miracle breakthroughs in people's finances. I say it in the name of the Lord: there's going to be a change, the explosion that has taken place in the spiritual realm will be the financial breakthrough of Nicaragua. There's going to be a tremendous economic revival in this country."

Medina follows up on that theme the next night at Managua's Plaza de Toros (the bullfighting) which is, as he had predicted, packed with the faithful and the curious — about 6,000 people. There's a festive air right from the start, with a band playing Latin dance rhythms and a couple of warming up preachers leading the clapping, singing crowd through some upbeat, devotional songs. After about an hour the sun has set and Mitch Medina bounds up to the stage in an immaculate suit, ties tied as tight as a noose, lips pulled back in a blissful smile. He has been introduced by a preacher who has told the audience, "We're not here to talk about politics, but we're here to support this organization like the Sandinistas or contras. We're here to talk about the second coming of Christ, to tell you that Christ lives." It's a declaration that Medina reiterates as soon as he reaches the podium, an almost apologetic assurance of apocalypse which I am guessing is meant not so much for any authorities that might want to close him down (there is no sign of a policeman or soldier anywhere near the hall) as for those members of the audience whose charismatic religion does not come with the same tight-wing political trappings as in the U.S. There's more music and a little Bible reading and then the preacher's real attraction of the evening: the healing, Mitchell's specialty. As the preacher holds his arms aloft and screams his orations calling for the healing power of God, church elders turn to face the masses from the front row, their arms similarly extended, while the crowd holds out several thousand pairs of hands to meet them, beckoning the healing power. Throughout this arena arises a supernatural chorus of uncontrolled muttering — a vast, enveloping, omnidirectional sound, like the roar of the ocean. Many people quake and convulse, losing control entirely. This happens several times, as Mitch offers specific prayers for those who cannot work, those who have arthritis, those who cannot hear or speak, and yes, those who have financial problems. Some of the people involved add up onto the stage those who are walking sticks or touch their toes, and one boy whose mother says he was mugged offers a few garbled words. It's not a completely convincing circus act, but one thing becomes totally clear: there are a lot of hurting people in Managua this night who — through the power of their kith and kin, their faith and whatever other means — have left the bull ring salvaged of some pain and relieved of little anxiety, at least for a while. Laid low by a huge and distant power which has killed family members and torn their country's economy to shreds, these people have appealed to an even greater power to help them rise again. Most of them seem sure their prayers have been heard.

Paul Jeffery has seen a lot of foreign preachers come to this country. An American who has lived in Nicaragua for five years, Jeffery is editor of the English-language bulletin of CEPAD, an umbrella group for most of the major Protestant churches in the country, formed during the 1973 Populistas' effort to coordinate their church's relief and development efforts. CEPAD's membership includes both liberal and "national" denominations (some of which have ties to liberal U.S. churches) and other business-oriented ones like the Assemblies of God. It also has a good rapport with the Sandinista government, and as such was called in to mediate when some of the evangelical sects outside of Nicaragua sought to enter into the government in the early 80s. As Jeffery's own role, one extra-curricular function he assigned himself was that of chronicler and chronicler of the visits of both Jimmy Swaggert and Pat Robertson, tagging along wherever the evangelists went. Given these experiences, Jeffery has a few ideas as to why the Sandinistas have been so well-received by the local evangelical church. The first and most obvious reason, he believes, is that the Sandinistas are serious in their commitment to political pluralism and religious freedom in the country. But beyond that, Jeffery says that the recent influx of preachers illustrates the special place that religion occupies within both Nicaraguan society and within the Sandinista movement. Jeffery also conjectures that Daniel Ortega's personal fascination with theological matters was a major force in the adoption of an open door policy towards foreign evangelists. It is said, for instance, that the nine Sandinista commanders, Ortega is closest to foreign minister Miguel D'Escoto, a Catholic priest. D'Escoto has been quoted as saying that if Ortega has been ten years earlier, he would have become a priest like him. But beyond just having a soft spot for those who speak in the Christian idiom, the Sandinista leaders may have made a pragmatic gamble that American evangelists would not be credible competitors in the contest for the hearts of the Nicaraguan masses. Jeffery says this was borne out by the Swaggert rallies, which were a good example of what happens when a group cannot speak to its audience's experience. With three successive evenings of cajoling, Jeffery recounts, attendance was markedly lower at each one as audiences became annoyed with too many sound bites, too many call-and-response, and too little mention of the war. However, the Swaggert rallies did not win over the hearts and minds of persons such as the medium in the city's theater, who arrived late and left before the deaths of both sides were recorded.

"It's a difficult conflict," he says, "and his life is a very difficult one. We show our final respect to our friends when he is killed or wounded."

The president, who has the same kind of long, happy, full life as I do, or in other words, a real president, is at the other end of the spectrum. We are told that he is a hard-liner, a "hardcore" Sandinista, a man of determination and discipline. We are told that he is not interested in his colleagues, that he is not interested in any other kind of church than his own. We are told that he is not interested in any other kind of country than the one in which he lives.

The Sandinistas have had their triumphs in the last few years, but there are still many victories to come. The next country in the region to fall to the Sandinistas will be the United States, and the next generation of Sandinista leaders will be the last generation to live in Nicaragua. For the Sandinistas, the next generation will be the last generation to live in Nicaragua. For the Sandinistas, the next generation will be the last generation to live in Nicaragua. For the Sandinistas, the next generation will be the last generation to live in Nicaragua.
out big plans for growth in post-contra Nicaraguan, Sanchez is eager to downplay the past and its problems. C.N.P.E.N. would seem to have as strong a desire for peace as anyone in Nicaragua; whatever its political agenda (or that of its foreign supporters) might be, the conservative church seems poised to make greater gains in peacetime than it could during war. C.N.P.E.N. has a big campaign on the horizon to give its pastors more theological training. Sanchez says, as well as projects aimed at the community at large. The organisation has plans for the future to launch a health services project based in Managua at first but later moving out to remote communities — an institute for development and educational programmes that not only propagate religious ideas but teach concrete skills such as accounting and mechanics. The timing of such initiatives is interesting: with three churches set to take a more prominent social role just as the state, drowning in debt after a debilitating decade of war, is being forced to make huge cutbacks in its spending provision of services. With their own programmes filling in where the government is forced to retreat, conservative evangelists no doubt see themselves as becoming a more powerful force in Nicaragua — providing not just spiritual sustenance for their constituents but whole systems of material support.

What the growing influence and social role of fundamentalist churches in Nicaragua will mean politically is a question. But Kaela Koll of C.I.E.T.S. is one observer who does not feel that the fundamentalist boom will inevitably lead to a pacification of the poor or prove inoperable with Sandinismo. Her optimism is partly supported by the experience of C.E.P.A.D., which has brought religious groups of varying social characters into dialogue with the Sandinista government, laying the groundwork for a common understanding. She also says that charismatic religious operating in the third world foster a sense of solidarity amongst the poor which may make them en masse suit to partnerships with political movements like Sandinismo. Koll notes that Pentecostalism is growing rapidly throughout Latin America largely on the strength of its theology of "radical verticism," wherein the believer can have a direct, personal relationship with God without the need for intermediaries — where every person is therefore important because of their potential to plug in to the divine. Ever since it came into being in the United States earlier this century, says Koll, Pentecostalism has appealed to the disenchanted and the poor, with its egalitarian message and its participatory style.

"There's a controversy going on amongst sociologists of religion," says Koll, "that's been going on for a couple of years and was started by two different studies of Pentecostalism in Chile. [On one side is the idea that] Pentecostalism is a means of depoliticising the population by constructing this other world, with its other-worldly focus, that this is dangerous politically and works against popular movements. The other school of thought is that Pentecostalism is a form of protest against the social conditions that do not provide adequate resources for living a dignified life; that within that experience, people recover their sense of personhood and dignity that the Pentecostal experience is one of protest that has the potential of being tapped and directed into movements for change. I tend to side with the latter. Maybe I look at it this way: that the Pentecostal movement itself does not have a prestidigitation of ideological content, that you'll see Pentecostals in Guatemala who are in the military, but there are also Pentecostals that are in the guerrillas. So there's no set ideological content. I tend to think that there is a potential for drawing Pentecostals into movements to better their conditions."
How she envied him! this new found friend of hers. The way he cursed. Walking before the big mirror in her parents' room, bony chest — almost as flat as his — puffed up with the trying, trying hard to imitate him. If she could only look like him...

Miranda thought, maybe she would acquire his knowledge, his way of cursing.

Starting with words like damn and blast, Miranda was slowly working her way up her list of bad words — from the least to the most bad. They all shared a common quality — they were all too heavy for her tongue to lift up — so her mother pronounced regularly. "Fack! Shit!" Miranda looked at herself in the mirror; the smile that was reflected there was one of deep satisfaction. Her mother was wrong — she could, would, and did lift the weight of these words, these forbidden words with her child tongue, the secret pleasure all the stronger for being visible in the mirror as she sharpened her mouth around them all.

"Practice makes perfect," her father had always told her — practice to be perfect, in control as he was — and her friend — of words.

When she got to "fuck" she paused, took a deep breath and mouthed the word silently then out loud. Her heart beat loudly now as she replaced the "a" with an "o" — fuck. She felt the sharpness and power of the word — suddenly and involuntarily she shivered. Was it fear or excitement? She didn't know — probably both — but didn't care.

Now came the best — the baddest of them all. Whenever Miranda got to fuck she knew she had crossed a line — as palpable to her as it was invisible. A different world awaited her with the next word. A threatening word in many ways. For a long time she could never say it out loud. As with all the other words she had begun by mouthing it. The times when she was lucky enough to practise before the mirror as she was now, she thought she looked pretty stupid opening and closing her mouth on the word — like a fish gasping for air. But mouthing this word suggested nothing of its power, and for a long time she remained at this stage, not even being able to whisper it as she had with the others. The taboo against it was absolute — almost.

Hurrying to school one day, late and therefore alone, just so — it came out as she was crossing the bridge over the thin and brown trickle that was the Wapsey River in dry season. "Cunt!" A great wave of rebel

-fiction

by

MARLENE NOURBSESE

PHILIP NOURBSESE

paintings

by

Busje Bailey

washed over her as she said the word for the first time. Her surprise at hearing it come from her own mouth brought Miranda to a standstill, and although she knew it was unlikely, she couldn't stop herself from looking behind her, both fearful and expecting to see her mother standing there, a silent and stern witness to this new level of her daughter's shameful behaviour. Miranda gave a nervous laugh at seeing no one there, and hurried on saying the word over and over again to herself under her breath.

She had taken a long time to say "the word" — that was how she referred to it — but she had come to like rolling it round and round her mouth, except that you couldn't really roll these words around. They all had edges — hard edges that hurt somehow as she intentionally and deliberately stained her mouth around their shapes, her tongue paying strict attention to their individual shapes. Afterwards she would carefully examine her mouth and tongue for the staining she expected. She was surprised that her mouth did not show the outrage she had just committed.

Why was it that men had words that could excite her? Miranda would often think of this as she travelled the time between the inner and outer boundaries of her life — home and school, school and home. Chaucer, for instance, with all his plumbing the depths of women. Late at night and lying awake in bed, she would ask her older cousin what this meant and the older girl would tell the younger one about men entering women. Miranda would wonder how you could enter another person. Fanny Hill and Henry Miller — men's words that she read secretly, her mother not dreaming of the feelings she had, or the wetness between her thin twelve-year-old thighs. Excitement would quickly turn to O.K.-so-what boredom and after the third or fourth time a woman's depth was plumbed, her twelve-year-old aida was bored and wanted something else. So she would go back to her practice make perfect and that most secret of words and most profane when coupled with another. Mother and cunt. In their opposition the two words — one resonant with safety and comfort, the other hard, defiant and threatening — were locked together irrevocably. The power of the combination, made greater by the secret nature of it made her feel light-headed even faint at times.

-10-
Before moving to the city Miranda had never heard "the word" before. No one told her what it meant. No one had to. From the first day she heard it, it felt near her ears, spindly-legged and innocent as she was coming fresh from the country, she knew it was bad. Bad bad.

Until then totoe was the worst word she had known, but it was child bad. Its badness existed only in the world of children when you could laugh at a boy — only boys had tootees — and say, "look, look, I see he totoe," and the girls would giggle and scream and laugh and run away leaving the boy shame for having a totoe. Except Clarence. He just took his for granted. Clarence was her cousin who played marbles in the hot sun with her and her brothers and sisters for hours on end under the guinep tree and let her play with his balls while they stood waiting their turn.

Every time Clarence stooped to pitch he was facing Miranda — looking back on it that's the way it seemed to her. Her eyes would drop to the crotch of his pants where the stretching, straining cotton threads struggled to hold the seams together, her gaze riveted by what she feared and expected to happen. Suddenly there it was — she let out the breath she hadn't known she was holding — his little worm, his tooete hanging out. Totee a soft word with none of the edges of these new words. He let her touch it sometimes, his tootee, and the soft warm snuggly sack behind it.

She had had no words for them — he just had them. Balls would come later. In the hot hot sun, waiting their turn to pitch their marbles, he would stand patiently while she crept her hand up his short khaki pants to his tootee and then to the cool yet warm squishy things, her fingers moving and squashing them around — doing the same things that her tongue now did with those new words she was learning — exploiting the limits of her world and, therefore, of difference.

Miranda and Clarence had never done anything more than that. He, in fact, did nothing, a willing subject to her inquiry and always in public. Her brothers and sisters must have known what she was doing, but in that sometimes inexplicable and implacable silence of childhood, no one said anything to her or to her mother. There had been no secrecy to her exploration, and they felt no need to swear themselves to secrecy about something that was no secret. There was consequently nothing to tell.

This word she now explored was, however, adult bad, big people bad and secrecy was the screen behind which she now travelled into their recesses. Secrecy was what she needed to explore them, and secrecy was the key to why these words were so bad. She had only to look at her mother's face to know they were bad — she way she shut down her eyes and her whole face at the sound of these words, particularly the one that referred to her — to all mothers.

She was surprised that her mouth did not show the outrage she had just committed.

This word had to do with women, all women. That much Miranda was sure of. And weren't all women mothers? Maybe only mothers had cunts because that was the only way she had ever heard it used. Never your sister's cunt, or your grandmother's cunt. Only your mother's cunt. And she had wanted both to cover her ears and stretch them wide to take in the sound of these words. Would she have a cunt when she grew up? She didn't dare ask her mother. Did she have one now? Was it something that came with having children? Once left on her own she got a mirror to explore exactly where she knew the word referred to — except she wasn't a mother — not yet anyway. As she explored she said the word soft soft to herself, mouthing it, mashing it between her teeth, tasting it, whispering it — looking to see if she changed as she said it.

In her house there was no word for what Miranda explored with her fingers. Baby girls had parras - caken, or muckunys or pums pums. As you grew older, the safety of those soft domestic words disappeared leaving behind a thing unnamed, referred to only by the neutral pronoun: "Have you washed it yet?" Or, sometimes, "Have you washed yourself yet?" She knew full well that the self referred to was not the whole self, but only that tiny part of the self that somehow became your entire self. If you were a woman. Until it became a mother's cunt — harsh, jagged, the words intended to cut to the quick the man to whom it was aimed.

Lips would curl savagely around the words, "Your" shape the words with a blunt and rough-hewn style replacing the "f" and "s" with a double "d," "mudder," only to let the deadly missiles that home in and explode — "Yah mudder cunt," in the man's face, drooping the
bitter sweet sticky mess all over him. Miranda had seen grown men grow murderous at this insult. She had seen her brother come home in tears because of this.

"I was only her she had. Were words. Did the woman not love you? And what did women say — "You father's prick?" Sometimes it didn't sound as bad as mother's cunt. She knew all the words now and cock or father's cunt. She knew the she knew that if you really wanted to waste your energy and count if you really wanted to waste your energy on a word like sucker to make cock-sucker the word became really bad, but it didn't, at least in her books, come close to badness to "the word."

The exploration of forgotten words was always always in the practice makes secret places — at night, in bed, with the sheets pulled up tight right over her head. The forbidden had place in the city, and she didn't have access to it. Where there were no spaces or places she could not enter, where everything was allowed and permitted, the forbidden was the usual: forbidden spaces, especially for girls, forbidden books, forbidden words, forbidden thoughts and yet, what she had learned as a girl, and all the more she had learned as a woman, the forbidden had come to life in new and unusual ways in this new place.

For a while Miranda envied her new friend — nothing was forbidden for her. Miranda, eyes would follow her and insolent, sneaky, each movement of his, of her, until the thread of her own separate identity, his, her. The forbidden was a space she had been given by itself. She had been given by herself.
ard for choosing one of the least bad. Folloting and practicing to make perfect in public, she rehearsed all her words tasting them secretly as you can only words. In the secret spaces of her mouth she spun, unspun and respun with a loving tenderness a new language, the tongue of badness. And her testing and restesting of these words became a fusing against and with the words of her mother and father.

"But he say mass day done, and that all the children going to have a free education." Miranda didn't so much listen — these conversations went on almost every night — as she was aware of the rising and falling voices drifting in from the front porch to where she sat preparing for the examination that would give her a chance to be another forbidden world. Her parents called it a better education. She heard the voices rise and fall with the rhythm of passion and excitement which strengthened the already rhythmic language. "Yes, but he not going far enough, England and America still going control the economy." The cadenced voices reflect the trajectory, the rise and fall of empire. The cadence of her father's voice, her mother's higher, softer tones throw back and forth between them words like politics and freedom, pulling a thread here, a strand there, trying hard to twist and braid these hard words into dreams for their children — a good job in the civil service perhaps — they explore the furthest limits of the world — maybe, even a doctor! As they talked, Miranda felt rather than heard the urgency behind her parents' words, words which they had stoked and fired into life and now would not let die, words which under the lash and cares of their tongues now transformed themselves — slavery into freedom, nigger into human. Miranda heard and felt all this, she knew that like her they were entering forbidden spaces, naming now what they had only dared to dream of before. In secret. But Miranda also knew they would never see how her exploration of bad words was anything else but an expression of vice — to the extent of her badness. So she smiled a knowing smile to herself and continued working.

Sunday. That was the day Miranda chose for her initiation. She had woken up at cock-crow and knew that that was the day, but when it was to be she couldn't tell. It would just happen when it was time she thought. After church and the heavy Sunday lunch, and still dressed in their Sunday best, her mother had taken them all to a neighbour's for a visit. There the two women and the children had all sat stilly drinking sweet drinks on the front porch before the adults released them to play in the front yard while they talked.

Like her favourite cowboy shoot-out scenes from Saturday matinees where the good guy, usually Roy Rogers or Gene Autry — dressed in white — meet the bad guy dressed in black and shoots it out, Miranda replayed the scene in her mind for many months, even years after. She was standing close to the top step about to jump all the way down to the bottom — some six or so steps — when someone, she didn't know who it was since the push came from behind, pushed her off. She never found out who it was, she never cared enough. Like the morning "the word" had just popped out over the Wapsify River, she didn't will them, the words just came. "Oh shit!" The release was almost too much to bear, and before she knew what she was doing, before she could savour the delight and pride she felt, she heard herself, "Oh fucking, fucking shit!" She saw the shock on everyone's face and felt a rush of excitement. One or two of the other children even had their hands over their mouths as if they themselves had said the words, and that made her want to laugh out loud. Her mother's face was serious — like a bull she remembered thinking. Maybe she added that thought later — as time went on Miranda did have a tendency to laugh at the memory. Her mother's full eyes that could, in public, cow them into quiet, now gazed at Miranda commanding her to silence. As if she were pushing toward a cliff in preparation for leaping off and flying, Miranda saw it all, and knew she couldn't stop or she would fall and not fly. She saw the looking that her father would give her to laugh out loud. She thought it had been soaked in pee to make it sting more; she saw the washing out of her mouth that her mother would carry out. But she also saw Pomona Adams with her shapely breasts and large backside smashing the ground — proudly — and thought of her using her words and her body just the way she wanted to, and Miranda smiled.

Miranda heard and felt all this. She knew that like her they were entering forbidden spaces, naming now what they had only dared to dream of before. In secret.

Marlene Nwabuzo legislation, a writer who lives in Toronto, was awarded the 1999 Casa de las Américas Prize for Poetry in English for her collection, She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks, which has been published recently by Vancouver. Her novel, Hamlet's Daughter, published by The Woman's Press in 1988 was shortlisted for the 1989 Tronos Book Award.
CULTURE and

AGRICULTURE

JOYCE NELSON

An Imperial Oil fertilizer plant.
Once everything will have been cleansed, once an end will have been put to all viral processes and to all social and bacillary contamination, then only the virus of sadness will remain, in this universe of deadly cleanliness and sophistication.

— JEAN BAUDRILLARD

THE ULTIMATE SIMULACRUM

We live and die by metaphors, by the vikisitudes of our mother tongue. Each language both reflects and constrains highly arbitrary cultural bounds of thinkable thought. Recognising the conceptual constrictions imposed by a given language is possible only by comparison to the range of another. In simply the linguistic sense, we need each other, need the babel of tongues, need the diversity of languages to maintain a rich and fertile variety of world views — especially so that we may recognize the limitations of our own.

For example, in his profound book, The Primal Mind, native writer James Agee Waterman observes:

For more primal peoples the earth is so marvelous that their connotation of it requires it to be spelled in English with a capital “E.” How perplexing it is to discover two English synonyms of Earth — “soil” and “dirt” — used to describe uncleanness, soiled and dirty. And how upsetting it is to discover that the word “dirty” in English is also used to depict obscenities.

Writing from a cultural mindset that perceives the ground itself as sacred, High-water alerts us to a problematic attitude reflected in our common language usage.

Similarly, radical American farmer Wes Jackson, founder of the Land Institute of Kansas, has ironically noted with regard to farmers’ standard practice of drenching the soil with chemicals: “You know, they just treat it like dirt. Treat the soil like dirt.” Clearly, a society in which soil and dirt are considered “unclean” and the lowest form of matter is bound to be in environmental trouble. “He treated me like dirt,” we say, or else, “He treated me like shit.” Two of the elements traditionally most necessary to good agricultural praxis — dirt and manure — have become, in our society, the epitome of debasement.

The words “culture” and “agriculture” both stem from the same Latin root, oculus, meaning “to care for.” In the case of the word “agriculture,” that caring is directed towards the ager, meaning “field,” while the word “culture” leaves the caring open-ended, implying an attitude towards living. In past centuries (and indeed, past millennia) that caring necessarily extended to the manure so central for fertilizing pastures, with even human excrement considered part of the whole cycle of agricultural practice. In her book, The Death of Nature, Carolyn Merchant notes that in parts of Europe during the sixteenth century, an entire industry developed around what was called “night soil.”

An extensive manure trade was pioneered by the city of Gröningen, an area with rich peat layers covering sand. Human excrement, or night soil, was offered by the city to farmers attempting to cultivate the underlying sandy soils. Ships exporting peat to Holland returned with additional night soil. Sheep and pigeon dung were also exported to the tobacco district around Amerfoort.

Until the mid-twentieth century, manure was also central to North American agriculture, and indeed, a component part of farmers’ self-sufficiency. In Acheul Harvest, Jack Doyle describes the cycle of sustainability typical of most farmers before World War II:

Much of what [the farmer] needed for farming was taken from his own land. Grain was saved for seed, animal manure was spread for fertilizer, and crops were used for livestock feed. Mixing these home-grown ingredients with his own hard work, the mystical elements of nature, and a bit of intuition, the farmer hoped for a good harvest.

But these aspects of traditional farming were at odds with the gathering terrors of twentieth-century modernity, fueled by the leading industrialists’ desired goals of increased efficiency and mass production through scientific management schemes, Taylorism, time-motion studies, and the perfection of the assembly line. Having achieved these goals at the factory plant during the 1920s, the corporate sector, led by the Rockefeller Foundation, addressed their new goal: “the rationalisation of agriculture through science.”

The usual explanation for the mid-twentieth-century “revolution” in North American farming practice has been the desire for increased crop yields, considered the sign of increased efficiency. But we might look for other explanations, including corporate erosion of farmers’ self-sufficiency and independence through the growth of what is called “the food industry” — a new realm of business to supply what farmers once provided and recycled for themselves: seeds, feed and fertilizer.

Indeed, the transformation of the family farm into the factory farm of agribusiness can be told through the fate of each one of these elements, but here I will focus primarily on that last element, fertilizer — less delicately called “shit.” A central (but usually unacknowledged) part of the farm-
ing "revolution" was to treat shit "like dirt," and ultimately, dirt "like shit" — an attitude that has had far-reaching consequences for the entire planet. It is generally agreed that the first major step in the "rationalization of agriculture through science" was the introduction by the nonfarm sector of hybrid seeds (especially corn) in the 1930s to replace the many open-pollinating varieties that had evolved through centuries on this continent. In *First the Seed*, Jack Kloppenburg writes:

The genetic variability of open-pollinating corn varieties posed a serious problem for the agricultural engineer. Plants bore different numbers of ears at different places on the stalk; they ripened at different rates and most varieties were susceptible to lodging (falling over). Mechanical pickers missed many lodged plants, had difficulty stripping variably situated ears, and tended to shatter overripe cobs. Genetic variability is the enemy of mechanization.

These "imperfections" in the way of full mechanization could be eliminated through the use of hybrids developed by corporate science. "Hybrid varieties resistant to lodging that ripened uniformly and carried their ears at a specified level greatly facilitated the adoption of mechanical pickers. The breeders shaped the plant to the machine."

The introduction of hybrids had several important repercussions beyond the increase in crop yields — which was the key selling point by which they were hyped to farmers in the 1930s. First, the widespread adoption of hybrids meant that farmers now had to buy their seed each year, rather than use their own, since hybrid grains do not yield good replantable seed. This was a significant step in the erosion of farmers’ independence and the growth of the nonfarm sector to supply commercial hybrids. Seed had become a commodity.

Second, the reliance on hybrid corn greatly reduced the diversity of plant varieties propagated on the continent. For example, four generations ago North American farmers grew more than 320 varieties of corn. By 1989, only six corn varieties accounted for 71 percent of all corn grown. This loss of diversity is now being recognized as an increase in the vulnerability of uniform crops to pests and disease.

Third, hybrids tailored to mechanical pickers encouraged the reliance on mechanization to replace human laborers hired seasonally for hand-picking. This, in turn, created a greater dependence on fossil fuels (oil and gas) to run the machines "necessary" for the newly rationalized farm. Thus, we can understand the Rockefeller Foundation’s interest in transforming agriculture to the benefit of oil companies like Exxon, its backer. And fourth, the standardization of each plant to better facilitate machine pickers, as well as the loss of diversity in germ plasm through the reliance on a few hybrid varieties, were part of the assembly-line mindset overturning agricultural practices.

Nevertheless, the economic depression of the 1930s tended to retard these "advances" for the time being. Few farmers could afford to adopt the goal of full mechanization being pitched by the nonfarm sector. Indeed, many farmers could not doubt see the wisdom in maintaining their own self-sufficiency through providing their own seed (much of it cross-pollinated by themselves to meet their own standards), their own intuition and expertise, and their own communal labour for the harvest. As usual in this century, it would take a war to turn the reluctant tide.

Part of the massive fallout of World War II was the extraordinary expansion of the petrochemicals industry, which developed a wide range of oil-based products for the war effort, and also greatly expanded the production of ammonia and nitrogen necessary for explosives. Since both ingredients were also the basis for chemical fertilizer — a ton of oil makes a ton of ammonia, which is then converted into two to three tons of nitrogen fertilizer — the petrochemicals industry recognized that this expanded production capacity might generate a potentially profitable post-war spin-off.

At least one year before the war ended, the leading industrialists of the United States had already decided among themselves (and with the endorsement of the military chiefs) that it would be necessary for the health of capitalism to maintain a "permanent war economy," rather than demobilize production levels at war’s end. This decision, behind closed doors was decisive in every way for the postwar world, but especially for agricultural practice. Before 1945, the amount of agricultural chemicals applied to North American crops was negligible. But the war effort had generated a greatly expanded petrochemicals industry looking for new markets in the postwar future. Unwilling to demobilize its wartime production of ammonia and nitrogen, the industry found ready allies even during the war for the continued production in postwar years. As Kloppenburg wrote:

The 1942 annual meeting of the American Society of Agronomy was held in conjunction with a conference addressing the anticipated problem of surplus fertilizer production. Increasing farmers’ use of commercial plant nutrients appeared to be a profitable solution. S.A.A. President Richard Bradfield told the assembled plant scientists that: "There seems little question but that also the war there will be available for use as fertilizer at least twice as much nitrogen as we have ever used at a price much less than we have ever paid."

The "anticipated problem" could have been solved, of course, by simply cutting back on production of nitrogen, but that would not have been a "profitable solution" for the petrochemicals industry. Thus, the nonfarm sector was faced with a new problem: how to increase farmers’ use of agrochemicals, and especially something farmers had never needed before — artificial shit. Part of the solution was to be found in changing the attitudes of farmers themselves towards their own practice. The traditional view of farming as a "fecund" mix of home-based, recycled ingredients, intuition and expertise, based on a "feeling" for the land and the changing weather, was obviously at odds with both modernity and the growth of the nonfarm sector. What was needed was to see farming as science. Kloppenburg writes:

The noted corn breeder G.W. Sprague has observed that "the objective in plant breeding is to develop, identify and propagate new genotypes which will produce economic yield increases under some specified management system." From the 1940s, the specified management system for which hybrid corn was being bred presupposed mechanization and the application of agrochemicals.

Changing farming into corporate science-led praxis which would follow a "specified management system" necessarily entailed a certain amount of propaganda directed at farmers themselves.
In Canada, the wartime N.F.B. partly served this purpose through a variety of films made for the rural circuits. Films like Bacon for Britain (1943), The Anti-Animal Stamp (1939),Farm Front (1945), Farm Improvement Series (1944), Farmers' Forum (1942), Hands for the Harvest (1943), New Plans for the Land (1945) all tended to stress the new scientific methods being developed by the government to achieve higher and more efficient yields. But underneath this message was another: traditional, individual and regional variations in farming practice were unacceptable, outdated and outdated, and an impediment to central authority's co-ordination.

Both messages echoed wartime N.F.B. founder John Grierson's highly positive attitude towards scientific management, rapid technological innovation, a rising technocracy, and the expanding multinational corporations — especially the oil and petrochemical industry with which he met. But Grierson wanted to remove from the 1930s through the postwar period. Since the petrochemical industry was (and remains) central to the developing nonfarm corporate sector, it is not surprising to learn that Grierson's attitude towards the family farm was less than favourable.

Filmmaker Julian Roffman, who worked at the wartime N.F.B. and who also accompanied Grierson to New York in the immediate postwar period to help with Grierson's new venture, World Today Inc. (initially funded by the Rockefeller Foundation), states:

World Today had contracts for distribution of three series of theatrical shorts with United Artists. I was one of the director-producers working for the company. The series were World Eye, World Ways, Worldwide. Grierson received some funding from the National Farmers' Union to make a film on the plight of the family farm, which I was to direct. But Grierson wanted me to have the film glorify the big corporation farms, which were actually driving farmers off their land. He admitted the efficiency of the big technology, the big distribution system of corporate farming, and wanted me to romanticize all that. I changed the direction. He was not happy about that.

Roffman's film, Seed for Tomorrow, became a docu-drama focusing on one small farm family which was going under in the face of the corporate takeover of agriculture. He recalls showing the completed film (which featured Lee Hays as a farm union organizer) to Grierson: "I don't remember his vituperative commentary, but I do remember that I threw the film at his feet and said, 'We've broken down the damn wall! We wouldn't get another assignment from Grierson. And I was rebel enough to protest what was happening to farmers at the time.' Seed for Tomorrow was not picked up by any of the three series for United Artists. When World Today Inc. folded in the late 1940s, the film went to the National Farmers' Union, which found distribution for it through Brandon films.

But ironically, even these big corporation farms so admired by Grierson found that they could not entirely adhere to the directives issuing from the nonfarm sector — especially that new "need" being pushed by the petrochemicals industry at war's end: increased use of chemical fertilizers. The hybrid seeds in use at the time were "not suited to the higher nutrient levels made possible by the availability of cheap fertilizer. The plants responded to fertilizer application by developing weak stalks, and lodging again became a problem."

The answer, of course, was to redesign the hybrids so that they would withstand massive artificial fertilizer doses. Once this was accomplished, the petrochemicals industry could finally "justify" its decision to not demobilize wartime production levels of ammonia and nitrogen. A "need" had been created. As Kloeppele notes, "Whereas there were but 7 firms producing -ammonia (the basis of much nitrogen fertilizer) in 1945, there were 65 firms by 1946."

This change in practice was, in turn, a boon to other aspects of the nonfarm sector. Heavy chemical fertilizer applications resulted in an increase in crop insects, disease and weeds, which thrived in the changed conditions. Thus, there was a need for new pesticides, fungicides and herbicides to control these factors as well. Virtually the only thing left to commodity in that former triad of farmers' self-sufficiency — seed, feed and fertilizer — was animal feed. Here, too, the postwar nonfarm sector found the answer: antibiotics and growth hormones to make commercial feed a saleable commodity. As Jack Doyle writes in Altered Harvest:

The manufactured ingredients of agriculture have contributed dramatically to increasing American farm productivity... Yet what is now called the productive power of the American farmer is not really his [sic] power at all, but rather those who supply him. The power of productivity has moved off the farm, and in a sense to the city — to the university and the corporation — to the centers of high science.

The postwar transformation of farming into an agribusiness meant that by 1981, North American farmers were spending more than $18 billion per year on purchased feed, $9 billion for chemical fertilizers, $3 billion for pesticides, $4 billion for seed, and $9 billion for farm machinery. Since at least $3.1 billion of this annual $43 billion outlay was going for elements that farmers had once freely provided for themselves through their own traditional recycling practices, we can perceive the highly lucrative dimensions of this shift in productive power to the nonfarm sector.

While this shift was part of a larger postwar economic shift toward globalised markets (to be explored in another issue of Border/Lines), it was also part of a new mindset fascinated by the wonders of high science itself. The 1950s were steeped in a romance with synthesized in every aspect of daily life: a romance based on "unlimited" oil, disposable plastics, and other oil-based consumer products that matched the "desires" of a culture already addicted to fossil fuels through the automobile. The postwar petrochemicals "revolution" in agriculture was an intrinsic part of this larger societal addition.

But such developments invite us to look deeper into the cultural mindset. That ultimate simulacrum of our times — artificial shit — is surely the sign of a culture obsessed with what Baudrillard calls "deadly cleanliness." Indeed, behind that watchword of the twentieth century — efficiency — we find the increasing removal of all signs of life through supposedly "clean" petrochemical and technological substitutes. It is in this sense that Arthur Koestler's otherwise insightful text, The Postmodern Scenario, errs in its subtitle referring to "excremental culture." Instead, we have arrived at what might be called a post-excremental culture — one so removed from earth and body that even shit has its simulacrum.

I asked someone highly informed about agribusiness practices to explain what happens to the real shit generated in the massive feedlots of modern farms, "I'm not sure," he answered, "I guess they throw it away. " But there's no 'away' to throw anything," I responded. "Where do they put it?" He paused for what felt like a long time. "Your guess is as good as mine," he said.

Not surprisingly, the postwar "revolution" in North American agriculture coincided with the rapidly rising star of a man who would make simulacra the centerpiece of his worldview. In The Disney Version, Richard Schickel writes: "The career of Walt Disney is...much conditioned by the and dirt like shit"
The career of Walt Disney is... much conditioned by the hatred of dirt and of the land that needs cleansing and taming and ordering and even paying over before it can be said to be in genuinely useful working order. —Richard Schickel

The genius of Disneyland, however, was that subtly transformed that rendered it something else. Eco writes:

"When there is a fake — a hippopotamus, dinosaur, sea serpent — it is not so much because it wouldn't be possible to have the real equivalent but because the public is meant to admire the perfection of the fake and its obedience to the [computer] program. In this sense Disneyland not only produces illusion, but — in contesting it — stimulates the delight of dirt and of the land that needs cleansing and taming and ordering and even paying over before it can be said to be in genuinely useful working order. Disney's reflection of the 1950s reflected not only Walt's obsession with cleanliness and order and his hatred of the dirt, as evidenced in what William Irwin Thompson has called "that curious cultural mixture of Hollywood fantasies and Big Science" that has so typified this American Century."

As Thompson notes, "the subject of Disneyland was the turn-of-the-century small town, but the invisible structure was computerization. This mix of the comforting, nostalgic artifact to entice the futuristic, robotic infrastructure was perhaps a recognition of the subtle ambiguity in 1950s society towards the rapid changes underway, especially with regard to urbanization and the changing relationship to land and nature. What Disneyland provided were technological signs of "nature" without the dirt, "animals" without the shit — the very triumph of that biblical injunction to subdue the earth and have dominion over all other species. Robotic simulacra, more perfect in every way and fully obedient to the computer programme, reflect that obsession of both Disney and patriarchy itself. But such an obsession also has its price. As Umberto Eco notes, "Love of nature is a constant of the most industrialized nation in the world, like a remore..."

Over the past 40 years, agribusiness has similarly followed this cultural penchant for the lifelike: providing crops and foods that are hyperreal in their appearances as "perfect" specimens, but which are so steeped in the chemistry of high science that they are more enthrallable than alive. Indeed, in 1971, as Kropfenzig reports, a nondairy-scented spokesperson for Agribusiness explained the priorities: "As we solve the mere pressing needs, such as giving our growers [seed] varieties which will be healthy, mature evenly, machine picked, and merchandised properly, we are going to go back to refine these varieties and incorporate in them the color, tenderness, flavor, and quality factors to which the consuming public is entitled."

Most us have stopped waiting.

But the desired goal of "cleaning" the planet has still not been reached, even though some 24 billion tons of topsoil (created like dirt) is lost every year! So Shell Oil has now developed the perfect seed for our times: a seed coated in more than seven layers of herbicides, pesticides, fertilizers, growth stimulants and other pharmaceuticals that is intended to be drilled into bedrock to grow without soil at all.

Clearly, dirt and shit have become the "noise" in that managed and purified information-system called agribusiness. But as Erik Davis reminds us, "In information theory, noise is not just random static, but also signals that interrupt other signals. Noise is negative: entropy, degradation, disruption, violence, no information. Noise breaks down worlds, gouges out the smooth surface of simulation, disturbs the system. It breaks the line that alternative farming practices, based on dirt and shit, actually are radical challenges to the "positive" (and positivist) agribusiness hegemony, and convey a very different "signal" about living with dirt, enshirred, and organic, and the darkly, loosed underlife of otherwise. As the Disneyfication of culture and agriculture proceeds unabated, only Baudrillard’s "universe of sadness" will remain for a time, to remind us of what has been lost."


FOOTNOTES

2. Historical material in this and the next paragraph are inspired by the work of alternative farmers, and in particular the writings of Vidal第二大's greatest obsession — in Richard Schickel's words, "an obsession with death." That obsession is evident in every aspect of the theme parks — indeed, it is their major theme. Whether it be the"human beings are the human guides and visitors who themselves must "agree to behave like robots." As signs of the times, Disneyland and Disneyworld reveal a society more fascinated by "what is lifelike" than by what is alive.

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Lee Harvey Oswald: history as myth

IAN BALFOUR

Libra
by Don DeLillo

I could be wrong, I could be right.
—Johnny Rotten

One thing is certain. Jack Ruby shot Lee Harvey Oswald as he was emerging from the Dallas County Jail and the murder was televised live. It is arguably this incident, even more than the assassination of Kennedy, that gave rise to endless "then-rising": the single gun theory, the Cuban exile theory, the Mafia theory, the C.I.A. theory, the F.B.I. theory. How could the man who should have been the most carefully guarded person in America be gunned down in broad daylight while in the custody of the police? The need to explain a series of events that stunned a nation and a world global village prompted a host of narratives that were riddled with "theory," a category not so distinct from fiction. Twenty-five years after the "fact," Don DeLillo, has produced a remarkable novel that presents one possible version of the real story.

The publication of Libra coincided with the 25th anniversary of the Kennedy assassination. T.V. was flooded with many and extensive commemorations: the grainy 8-millimetre Zapudre film documenting the shooting at Dealey Plaza was screened again and again, in slow motion and real time; folky interviews prompted people to recall where they were and what they were doing when they heard the news; vacuum commentaries on the state of the American psyche provided talker. Dan Rather had been the CBS correspondent on site in Dallas in 1963 and his marathon three-hour retrospective 25 years later was equally a commentary on television's coming of age. The death of Kennedy became the birth of a television nation. Kennedy—who had narrowly defeated Nixon because he looked better during their debate—was the first real TV president: America was fascinated by its own image in and of Kennedy. The assassination, the shooting of Oswald and the state funeral at Arlington offered images of history in the making, events so monumental that their future memory was already being anticipated. If time and the media have now hacked away at that image, another—that of the lone gunman—remains sacrosanct for a certain segment of the media. Libra's publication was greeted with a flurry of commentary from the new—and the not so new—right. Pandit after pundit scoffed at DeLillo's attempts to imagine a C.I.A. operative's plot to stage an assassination attempt of Kennedy: indeed, they scoffed at DeLillo's attempt to imagine such at all. The right, new and old, cannot admit any "theory" other than the single gun, for what could a presidential assassination be if not an aberration? Jonathan Yardley, writing in the Washington Post's Book World complained about DeLillo's "ideological fiction," claiming that good fiction—that is, non-ideological fiction—should have a "private address." But the very notion of the private is one myth Libra explodes beyond recognition. Fiction writers may have unlisted phone numbers, but no fiction and no fictional character, DeLillo implicitly claims, can have a private "address." Neo-conservative ideologies, like the ubiquitous George Will, took exception to the supposedly left-wing parade of DeLillo's novel, but the middle-of-the-road media reaction was perhaps most disturbing of all. Paul Gray reviewing Libra for Time is incapable of even thinking outside the paradigm of the lone individual. He concludes his review: "Its argument, that the plot to kill the President was even wider, even more sinister than previously imagined, will seem credible chiefly to the already converted, among whom are surely people who also believe that Martians are sending them messages through the filings in their teeth. There is a single possibility that Libra inventively skirts: a frustrated, angry man looked out a window, watched the President ride by, and shot him dead." In this scenario, only the word "frustrated" suggests anything of a history: there is no sense of anything outside an individual's contempt, even random, act. One writer for the New Criterion accuses DeLillo of "turning modern Americans into Xerox copies," when all DeLillo really does is to write fiction in categories other and more encompassing than those of character, personality, subjectivity. That the "subject" appears at times as something of an optical illusion is partly a product of DeLillo's un-

dertstanding of how language works and partly a product of his anatomy of contemporary spectacle/techno-culture with its hypermediation of all activity and all representation. Even the "real" story that is DeLillo's partial object in Libra was infiltrated by fiction to begin with, for the Kennedy presidency was thoroughly enmeshed in the production of simulacra, and only somewhat by design. DeLillo and his fictional agent, Nicholas Branch (hired by the C.I.A. to write a secret history of the assassination), both seem to recognize that when one one strips away one simulacrum one discovers still another, behind which there lies the facts themselves than the raw materials of contradiction. "Design" might be singled out as the more preoccupying of DeLillo's text and his characters. The title Libra refers primarily to Oswald's astrological sign, but also to fate and more generally to "plotting" in the twin registers of politics and narrative. Many characters in the novel are haunted by the specter of a plot that they must but cannot quite control. "People make history," Marx wrote, "not in circumstances of their choosing." Some of the most striking passages in Libra are those in which Oswald describes his sense of being caught up in the alternating current of history. The burden of Oswald's life is to somehow coordinate his "personal" itinerary with the plot of nothing less than world history. But what sort of integral story can be composed from the life of a U.S. Marine whose main inspiration is Lenin, and a character whose time is spent charting the similarities between himself and Trotsky? (When applying as a Marine to study abroad, Oswald lists among his special interests: "Ideology.") Not only are there immense difficulties in placing Oswald's life, his story gets entangled in a proliferation of competing stories, all of which culminate in the "event" of Kennedy's assassination, an event for which no one is able to provide the true story. The upshot is less a deep cynicism about history and the rendering of it in language than an acknowledgment of the complexities of the stories.
— and whatever it is that resists narrative
— that we try to gather under the single
word history. Even the word history
is only apparently single, for it is invested
with a number of incompatible senses:
"History," one C.I.A. type tells us, "is the
sum total of all the things they aren't
telling us." Or: "The purpose of history.
Oswald muses thinking of Trotsky, "is to
wax out of your own skin."

The grand outlines of Libra’s story are
framed by the opposition between capital-
ism and communism, as if, in the world of
Eisenhower no less than of Bush, there
were only two possibilities. Libra is not
only "about" a certain struggle between
capitalism and communism in the fifties
and sixties; it performs that struggle at
the level of the sentence, the paragraph,
and the narrative generally. The arch-Delillo
sentence branches itself as a product of late
consumer capitalism. "Natures sprawled
backwards," the T.V. intones, at one mo-
ment in Libra, to promote the now obso-
lete "Scutari." Here, as in his earlier White
Noise, the television is one character
among others: its voice mingles with those
we tend to call human. Typically, the
Delillo signature sentence is less a sen-
tence than a sub-grammatical sequence of
words or brand names culled from the
networks of advertising, a sentence that
no one could quite sign. These phrases
— characteristic of, but not limited to,
consumer capitalism — are matched by the
blunt instruments that are the sentences of
a distinctly post-modern dogma encoun-
tered by Oswald on his seojourn to the Sovi-
et Union. The two metaphors blend in
the telegraphic style of the postcard that
an unknown voice transcribes from snapshots
of Oswald, postcards that periodically ar-
nest the narrative even as they try to make
sense of it. And they bleed too in the lan-
guage of Lee Harvey Oswald himself, who
is caught in the middle of the street but
violent opposition between capitalism and
communism. Yet this opposition collapses
within Oswald’s and there is violence of this
"merge" — Oswald tells us, "History tends to
merge — surfaces in his very language.
And "language" is not a matter of indiffer-
ence for Lee Harvey Oswald, since he, like
Trotsky, like Kennedy, and like Marina Os-
wald, is a writer, a writer who analyses,
records, and synthesizes the contradictory
"experience" all around him.

In the world of Libra it is not only na-
ture that is spelled backwards: the logic of
the plot revolves around the attempt of
C.I.A. operatives to assassinate — or take
an assassination of — Kennedy and make it
look like a Cuban initiative. All this is
retroactive face-saving for the American
anti-Castro forces humiliated by the Bay of
Pigs fiasco. In this impossible possible
world, ideological opposition, which, in
one register, are starkly opposed come to,
in yet another register, as blurred as
any frame of the Zapruder film. As the
narrative voice says at a key moment of
Oswald’s presentation to some C.I.A.
operatives: "left is right and right is left." This
no doubt causes consternation for
Delillo’s incensed neo-conservative readers
who have shown little capacity or desire to
think outside the cold war paradigm.
A principal virtue of Delillo’s novel is the
way it forces one to rethink the very cate-
gories of social and political analysis,
which is to say, it forces one to think,
period.

The architect Nicholas Branch sees his
unnamed text as "the Joycean Book of
America," a novel in which nothing would be
left out. Libra is not quite that, though
it draws on the most powerful myths of
American culture: the integrity of the indi-
vidual, the boundless future of technology,
myths to which the individual, in theory, it seems
everyone should be engaged in and which
this story. The most striking similarity
between Libra and Ulysses is the emergence in
the end of the voice of a woman — here Os-
wald’s mother — to provide the closing to
a book almost entirely dominated by men.
The mother’s voice, which had "interrupt-
ed" the narrative at various points, address-
es a plea to a judge recounting and ex-
panding the details of her son’s life that
may or may not have some bearing on his
actions. This one-sided dialogue is no less
lyrical than Molly Bloom’s outpouring of
words but its mythic dimension is more
modest, more pedestrian. One thing her
intervention does is to trouble the seem-
ingly distinct notions of public and private
and to make that very vocabulary seem
inadequate. This goes hand in hand with the
epigraph for Libra, drawn from a letter
from Lee Harvey Oswald to his brother:
"Happiness is not based on oneself, it does
not consist of a small home, of taking and
giving. Happiness is taking part in the
struggle, where there is no borderline be-
tween one’s own personal world, and the
world in general." No borderlines: such is
the extreme thesiss of Libra. But is there
a language without borderlines? The lan-
guage of Libra may evoke the distinction
between public and private in its dem-
stration that the innermost thought of an
individual is entirely a matter of determining,
fragmented with fragments of advertising, principles
of this or that political program, phrases from
books, and that, on the other hand, the
most public of world-historical events have
peculiar resonances and even causes in the
"private" lives of historical actors. But even
with a displacement like the one Libra ef-
tections — where it is impossible to say
what is simply "private" or "public" in Lee Har-
vey Oswald — some other language, with
other terms, takes its place and sets up cer-
tain borders, however temporary, of its own.

Libra is far more than a period piece: it
functions as an allegory as well as documen-
tary history, for it is marked as a product of
the Reagan era and the return to the bor-
ddered rhetoric of the cold war. It’s not cer-
tain that the U.S. can do without the di-
achromatic geo-political vision, which is
why, when faced with the spectre of glas-
nost and perestroika, some elements of the
government want to maintain the cold war
at all costs. So Libra works not just as one
more entry of the "history as theater" but as
an allegory of the more current moment of its production and re-
ception. There are striking passages in
Libra when we suddenly realize that a cer-
tain scene and its week-with-week
with us: Oswald’s mother, for example,
writes a letter to none other than John
Tower to plead on his behalf, the same
John Tower who helped whetwash the
Reagan administration’s Iran-Contra es-
capades, the same John Tower who almost
became Secretary of Defense for the Bush
League of Nations. Is "our" plot still somehow
the tangled one of Lee Harvey
Oswald?

In this novel of characteristically black
humour, Delillo indulges in little word-
play, yet the title Libra indubitably resonates
with the words "book" and "signation," which
the Spanish of the Cubans who shadow the
actions of Oswald and company. But freed-
and the fate prescribed by astrological
signs should strike us as more odd than
they were thought to be in the Reagan
White House. Perhaps one thing Delillo
shows is that precisely in the book, the medium displaced but not dis-
mantled by T.V., that freedom and fate co-
exist so that even thetory, its play with history and fiction, its
panoply of competing voices, Libra could
do what the rest were thought to be free-
from: putting the plot in play. Though Delillo offers an eer-
ily plausible version of the real story behind
the Kennedy assassination, there is little
anachronism in the text’s claim to his
historical knowledge. The tendency to pre-
sent its story as the story is countered by a
certain Joycean batality that insists on the
bipolar, provisional character of its
everyday subject and subjects. With its
irony, its play with history and fiction, its
manifestations, its necessary for fiction as well: the almost
primordial sense that fiction moves in the
realm not of the real but, on that estat
philosopher of the postmodern, at that
stage, put it, of the possible. To say this is not to
suspend this fiction above the realm of politics and
history, for what is politics but the impossibility as well as necessary negota-
tion of the possible.
Rites of Spring
and the Birth of Modernism

JOE GALDO

Rites of Spring:
The Great War and the Birth of Modern Age
by Modris Eksteins

What makes Rites of Spring a daring piece of cultural history are the creative ways in which Eksteins sees, though he is not always successful, to explore the links between specific historical events and larger cultural trends. Through a series of tableaux — the opening night of Igor Stravinsky’s ballet The Rite of Spring, Berlin on the eve of the declaration of war, trench warfare on the western front, an ecstatic Paris in the wake of Lindbergh’s transatlantic flight, and the popular reception of Erich Maria Remarque’s All Quiet on the Western Front — Eksteins registers the emotional tone and psychological temper of an emerging modernist zeitgeist. As so many cultural historians who write about this period, there is, however, an unhesitating acceptance that modernism led to a Götterdämmerung, where all is terror and destruction. In this conceptualization, Eksteins misrepresents the broader spirit and tradition of modernism.

Eksteins begins his work, appropriately enough, with the looming imagery of death symbolized by Venice, that ghostly city of imagination and decay, where Richard Wagner, Serge Diaghilev, and Thomas Mann’s Aschenbach died. The scene quickly moves to Paris in 1913 and the opening night of Stravinsky’s ballet The Rite of Spring. The ballet centres on a maiden who sacrifices herself by yielding not to some higher moral value but to the dark instincts of nature. A call for the release of those spontaneous emotions that middle class morals had suppressed, the ballet was also a harbinger of the war to come, with its seating message of national renewal and violent sacrifice.

Everything about The Rite of Spring, writes Eksteins, suggested newness as well as a considerable German influence. The Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, where the ballet premiered, had opened two months earlier, and its ultramodern, clean-cut, architectural lines made it look foreboding, or, to use an euphemism of the times, decided “German.” Serge Diaghilev, dandy, aesthete and director of the Ballets Russes, wanted The Rite to be a total art form, a Wagnerian Gesamtkunstwerk where beauty and a spiritual life force are expressed in all their facets. Vaslav Nijinsky, at that time Diaghilev’s lover, was chosen to be the choreographer. Inspired by the aesthetics of eurhythmics, another German import that emphasised rhythm and gymnastics, Nijinsky was to radicalize the performance by using varying movements, wild dervishes and knock-kneed contortions. With all this concentrated talent and willful desire to make it new the ballet became a “milestone in the development of modernism,” for it had many of the emphatic qualities of this novel aesthetic: the fascination with the new and primitive, the blurring of the boundaries separating thought and action, art and reality; and the heightened irrational urge to hurl oneself towards self-annihilation.

On the eve of the war, argues Eksteins, “Germany was the foremost representative of innovation and renewal,” and modernist aesthetics had advanced further there than in any other European country. German economic and military might were certainly unmatched in 1914. At the same time German ideology was preoccupied with the underlying forces which combined primitive instincts with mysticism. The popular distinction the Germans made just prior to the war between Ziivilisation and Kultur further exemplified their tendency to go hunting for repressed acts and question-able desires. Anglo-French civilisation, the Germans believed, was based on rationalism, empiricism, utility, but it was superficial and devoid of spiritual values. German Kultur, on the other hand, was concerned with inner freedom and authenticity, had true depth, and lacked the hypocrisy of bourgeois civility.

What distinguished the Germany of this period was a profound mood, a peculiar view of the individual and society and a deep sense of cultural difference. The stress on German uniqueness, the longing it satisfied and the role it played in politics, can also be linked to Germany’s related modernisation. Within a short span of time (1870-1900), and relatively late within the context of European industrialisation, Germany made tremendous economic and technical advances; even some liberal ones, as Eksteins firmly emphasises: it had the biggest socialist party, more women gainfully employed than any other industrial nation, and the largest gay movement in Europe. Yet Germany failed to produce a liberal state and a self-confident bourgeoisie with its own political aspirations. Max Weber and other social analysts lamented the fact that in Germany the bourgeoisie remained under the spell of feudal and aristocratic values; moreover, industrialisation, as A.J.P. Taylor notes, was being forced by the authoritarian state and “shot up in luxuriant, unnatural growth.”

Eksteins conveniently evades an examination of Germany’s conservative modernisation, choosing instead to emphasise the “psychic disorientation” brought on by industrialisation and the nostalgic and illusory aspects of German cultural politics: “Germanness became a question of imagination, myth and inwardness — in short, of fantasy.” Since inwardness, irrationality, rebellion, and desire for the new are some of the defining characteristics of modernism, Eksteins finds it easy to equate Germany with modernism: “The German experience,” he writes, “lies at the heart of the modern experience.” But it is more
Cubist war. A gas sentry sounds the alarm, near Flambourg, June 1916.

accurate to say that the German experience, lacking both the social and political basis for a robust modernism, encouraged the negation of the movement. Modernism can be generally described as a rage against accredited values; it nestles defiantly and challenges the accepted ways of doing things. It is caught up in the friction that stands itself, yet its impulsion towards revolt and renewal is inextricably tied to the moribund crisis spirit and political power. In France and England, où le bourgeois had an aggressive, polemic edge that opened an ambiguous space and permitted the experimental advances to intervene in the creation of a modern culture. Here modernism was distinguished by a desire to destroy but also by a willingness to create and remember the specter of the past that a complacent and self-satisfied middle class tried to repress. German modernism, on the other hand, lacking a politically powerful bourgeois to challenge and prod into action, escaped into a romantic longing for totality, absolute freedom, and nihilism. In a sense, German modernism and its avant-garde were not, as Eikstein asserts, more advanced than those in other European countries, but were simply more prone to embrace the critique of bourgeois values with irrational frictions. It is enshrined and subtly empowered reactionary ideals of Logosphilosophie, the notion of an aesthetic "life experience" that went beyond rational justification. These ideas, of course, were later to be supremely useful to a state capitalism in crisis.

When it was finally broke out in August of 1914, a psychological threshold was crossed by all the belligerent nations and the war could not but impinge itself on the psyche of the soldier who fought in it. The middle section of Eikstein's book concentrates on how the war was originally perceived by the German, French and English soldiers and the appalling conditions of trench warfare. A good part of this section relies on letters the soldiers sent home from the front, giving us a graphic description of the daily routines of trench life.

Eikstein's analysis of the psychological motivations of the major belligerents, on the other hand, reads like a catalog. The Germans regarded the war as a spiritual conflict," writes Eikstein. The English, in contrast, were motivated by "a spirit of sportsmanship, a sense of fair play, probity and democracy. The war for them was a game." Little understanding is gained by these questionable comparisons. On the surface, some of Eikstein's assertions sound plausible. Because the Germans had been most readily inclined to question the prevailing bourgeois values of the nineteenth-century, he argues, they were in a better position to bluntly change the international standards of behaviour in war. It was they who had initiated the defensive posture of trench warfare, stilltangsliege, and were the first to use poison gas in the trenches, to attack cities from the skies with zeppelins, and to use submarine warfare. German innovation is adroitly linked by Eikstein with Germany's modernist spirit. Perhaps it is true, but there are other obvious reasons for German tactical surprises. The Germans, like the Allies, had hoped for a quick war. When the Schlieffen plan, which had relied on a lightning attack, stalled, stripped of the western front, the German were faced with a war of attrition. By 1916 a large part of a generation had been wiped out, and there was a general feeling of despair and crisis. Germany's war was the goal of all German nationalists. Memory of the war and the frustration of defeat were rekindled at the end of the twenties in the wake of the Great Depression. It is perhaps not so surprising for nothing of the economic collapse of the Weimar Republic, preferring to stay on the ratified plane of ideas. This is a time when the view "withjust stood up again to reassert the ideals of German superiority, and of the Nazis march to power. The rise of Nazism too is linked to modernist tendencies to aestheticise politics. In the rituals and propaganda of the Nazis, writes Eikstein, one could detect little substance. It was all style, mood, and "theeater, the vulgar art of the grand guignol production of the beer halls and the streets." Here was the monarchical execution of politics as art, and as grand spectacle to fill the existential void of the people: a spectacle where death occupied a central place. But, above all, this was an organic expression of kitsch with its irreverent substitution of aesthetics for ethics. Eikstein's seriality, rooted as it is in superficiality, falsity, and plagiarism, served to confuse the already blurry relationship between art and life, reality and dream. In the final analysis, Eikstein intimates, modernism, full of confusion, rebelliousness and irrational desires, released an urge to destroy that would eventually lead to the German death wish and the committing of atrocities at Babiyan.

We thus return to the original premise that Eikstein found in Stravinsky's The Rite of Spring. What began as an aesthetic urge to rebel and fuse life with art ended in a frenzy of destruction. Between the snarling hatred of the Nazi hooligans and the irrationalism of the death camps the shadowed world is explored.

This is the inner complament, the aesthetic risk between the well-intentioned, Italian, and the bleak. I suggest that this is as like as the social and political consequences of the modernist movement. Modernism and aestheticism cannot be separated. It is more than a case of the connection between the two. The last years of the century were a period when the social and cultural changes were most important and when the modernist movement was most active. Here it is possible to observe the trajectory of the modernist movement as it shaped the cultural life of the European world.
Postmodernism and its discontents

GAILE MCGREGOR


Whatever one may say about her, Linda Hutcheon has to be considered a success story. Content aside, the very shape of her career marks her as one of the best strategists to come down the pike in years. Talk about being in the right place — intellectually speaking — at the right time! In 1980 this then-novice is clearly self-identified as a formalist. A scant few years later — just in time to anticipate the stampede for the bandwagon — she has amassed, by dint largely of relabeling, to transform herself into the guru of Canadian postmodernism. And a worldly guru she is. Proving the old adage about the predilection of academics for the sound of their own voices, recent years have seen a veritable mushrooming of the Hutcheon oeuvre. Essays, articles, lectures, working papers, reviews, colloquia, even entire books, seem to pour out of her pen at the speed of light. Judging by the products, one can only see this prolificity as wrong-headed. While one understands the desire to make hay while the sun shines, one hopes at the same time that the tempter's judgment will be equal to his or her ambitions. Hutcheon's, unfortunately, is not.

It isn't, you understand, a matter of talent. Her 1980 publication, Narrativistic Narratives, both was, and was perceived as, a promising first book. But that, perhaps, was the whole problem. Taken up most enthusiastically by the very group whose concerns she had earlier ruled irrelevant to the lit-crit task proper ("most of the positions of 'postmodernism' are concerned primarily with the psychological, philosophical, ideological or social causes of the flourishing self-consciousness of our culture.") she wrote in Narrativistic Narratives. "This book ... makes no presence of contributing to [this debate] ... The interest here is rather on the text", instead of questioning the rather trite notion of reading-into of her work, restating or clarifying her terms of reference, Hutcheon allowed the now-found nobility to go to her head. Dropping her protestations of New Critical purism, she quickly began to play to her unexpected audience, to parrot its preferred intellectual position — in short, to remake herself in trendier terms. The shift of concern from ideas to packaging took a predictable toll on the quality of product.

Succeeding years saw a recasting rather than a broadening of her vision. Succeeding books (though they have been in rapid-fire succession since that first) lost in substance what they gained in polish. The more her bibliography swelled, the less attention she gave to the concrete and painstaking explication that informed her earlier writing. Of late, apart from reprints, the spadework has been replaced almost entirely by verbal pyrotechnics.

If this judgment seems harsh, it is perhaps only fair that I pause here to declare a bias. The fact is that I believe Hutcheon to be not only a bad scholar but a dangerous one. When I said "parrot" above, I used the term advisedly. Far from simply superficial which would be grounds for complaint but hardly alarm — Hutcheon's work is derivative in the most profound and far-reaching sense. Increasingly over the last half-decade, her modus has come to depend almost completely on recapitulation. She recapitulates herself; she recapitulates other critics; she recapitulates the ideas currently most favored by popular wisdom. Why does this bother me? Well, it's unfair to the individuals she appropriates, for one thing — and not just for reasons of credit. Having parachuted directly to the leading edge, she is rarely able to avoid distorting what she borrows. It's unfair to the duller but sounder colleagues with whom she is competing for limited prestige and resources. Most of all, it is unfair to the reader. Here is where the danger comes in. Because the Canadian lit crit establishment came late to postmodern modes of critique, this self-proclaimed expert has been widely seized upon as a dependable guide to the term incoignita. Of far more lasting importance than the injustice she does to other scholars by her intel-
lectual cannibalism; consequently, is the extent to which she purveys an entirely inadequate picture of the fields she purports to synthesize.

The problem becomes most acute in her recently published Paradox of Postmodernism. That this should be so is hardly surprising of course. The project she proclaims in this book is in many ways an impossible one. There are, as we all know, as many versions of "post" as there are critics to write about it. One of the most obvious shortcomings of Hutcheon's entry, in fact, is not its substantive disagreement with that or other variant — that is tangled up in the debate as that it is going to make anyone much of an "expert" on postmodernism, but the extent to which she misleads the uninformed reader about the true complexity of her advertised object. We should feel that aside from the attainments of her own claims she makes too much, for instance, of the now commonplace notion that the essence of postmodernism is its overthrowing of precursors. She also makes much of the specifically subversive nature of this edition, in the way it sets itself to reject not merely authorities but Authority. Incessantly throughout her text she harps on the linked themes of plurality, of openness, of normalised paradox and parodic destabilization. The postmodern's "deliberate refusal to resolve contradictions," she writes, "is a contesting of the notion of a horizon..." (citations from The Poetics of Postmodernism, quoted without comment the title what she says it is postmodernism merely provides a suitably trendy occasion), but the writer's authority as a "talker about" the latest literary fashions is quite apart from her efforts to validate a particular, recognizably idiosyncratic interpretation, it is interesting, if only because of her ratiocinations for broader practice, to look at the means by which Hutcheon achieves this remarkable self-canonisation. One of the most striking features of her text is the dense incursion of references. Every point, no matter how minor, has its list of postmodernist musings scattered at the text's end as many as 20 to a page. This is not, it must be noted, deference. Nor is it consideration for the reader. (Invoked sources are more often than not of dubious or negative relevance.) What it is, is old-fashioned name-dropping. Just like her deceptively unproblematic capsule summary of key nexes in recent intellectual history (at one point, for instance, we are offered in a single, short paragraph, the key rhetoric which postmodernism derived from mid-seventies architectural theory. Here is where the aforementioned lack of awareness becomes most palpable. Despite the rhetorical stress on strategies of delineation, Hutcheon seems utterly inimical to how incongruous it is to privilege one version of a practice which itself challenges the very notion of privilege. Less intellectually suspect but more troublesome for the information-seeking reader, she also seems oblivious to the fact that her particular version is indistinguishable on other logical or historical grounds from any of the almost two dozen very different versions that preceded her arbitrary point of insertion, she rules to exclude both the Judeo-Christian prototype model of culture and the very notion of privilege. Less intellectually suspect but more troublesome for the information-seeking reader, she also seems oblivious to the fact that her particular version is indistinguishable on other logical or historical grounds from any of the almost two dozen very different versions that preceded her arbitrary point of insertion, she rules to exclude both the Judeo-Christian prototype model of culture and the very notion of privilege.
may be initiated is. And not merely because it fosters a misunderstanding of postmodernism. Hutcheon herself provides the best possible example of the potentially detrimental secondary effects of this kind of prac-
tice. In the same year as A Poetics of Postmodernism, she published a slimmer volume entitled The Canadian Postmodern. What we are given in this book, essentially, is a short-hand version of its companion piece (the same themes, the same ritual incantations of names and sources, the same familiar catch-phrases) chopped into bits and dosed as a kind of legitimising framework around and between huge chunks of relatively conventional (despite the interlacing of jargon) thematic-cum-
formalist analyses of selected Canadian novels. To be honest, it is not even worth going, of course — regeneration does tend to pall after a while. It’s also, however, a subtle but important sense, a betrayal of its sub-
ject matter. What Hutcheon does in this book — and the key here is the hierarchi-
tically implied by her format — is to take the “special knowledge” normalised so persuasively in A Poetics of Postmodernism and transform it in turn into an agent of normalisation. Involed this time as a full 
accomplish, and validated through the simple device of prioritisation, the discourse of postmodernism, no longer the subject but the arbiter of questions, now serves itself as a kind of alternative “insubstantiality” by which the author can legitimise not only her own work (“owning” the narrative marks one immediately as an authority) but also — and this for me is the real prob-
lem — the body of literature she herself has endeav-
ored to bring under the fashionable um-
rella. As if it has no significant pre-history of its own, no claims on our consideration except for the fact that it can be shown to resemble a national model, Canadian fic-
tion, divested of its Canadianness, is sud-
denly “discovered” to be interesting.

What’s ironic about this is that there was really very little to discover. Despite her attempts to downplay the fact (only big-name sources get more than passing mention in Hutcheon’s work), virtually every feature singled out for comment in this study, from recursiveness to an obses-
sion with history, has already been amply documented by other critics. Where this writer departs from her predecessors is in labelling these things as postmodernism. Far from momentous, in fact, the substan-
tive contribution made by the book is at best a trivial one. Its positive flaws, on the other hand, are far from trivial. Again Hutcheon cheats her readers. Labelling aside, in failing to acknowledge that many of the supposedly unique features of the “new” literature can be traced to or derived from the practice of earlier writers, she creates the entirely misleading impression that recent developments signal a radical depart-
ure for Canadians. They don’t. Canadian literature was recursive, historical, evasive, subversive, ironic, collective, parodic, poetic, and feminist long before such features became fashionable. If it looks postmodern, therefore, it is for uniquely Canadian reasons. Had she examined these reasons, Hutcheon could have written a much more important book. In her determination to present her thesis as a monolithic and seamless con-
struction, however, she ignores totally (that is, neither recognises nor debates) the possibility that the “explanation” for current practice might lie anywhere else than with her master narrative. In doing so — and this is my real beef — she implicitly denies that Canadians have anything more to congratulate themselves for than their cleverness at finally catching on to inter-
national trends.

What amazes me most about all this is not Hutcheon’s own simplicial naivety, but the willingness of her Canadian read-
ers to accept what can only be seen as a demeaning distortion. That it has been accepted can, I think, be taken as given. The Canadian Postmodern was pub-
lished previously, and little to my knowl-
edge has ever been seriously challenged. So the question remains: how does Hutcheon get away with it? Much is undoubtedly due — once again — to her facility for radiating 
authority. With respect at least to this particular book, however, I don’t think that’s the whole of it. Canadians have al-
ways tended to be more sensitive about their difference. Judging from the concerted and recurrent attempts we have made over the years (this is only the latest version) to align ourselves with — prove ourselves indistinguishable from — imported models and fashions, there is clearly a feeling among Canadian artists and intellectuals that to be distinctive qua Canadian is neces-
sarily to be inferior. This, to my mind, casts a rather different light on recent de-
velopments in literary criticism. More and more now in Canadian journals and con-
ferences and colloquia we see name-stud-
ded, jargonised, Hutcheon-style “think-
pieces being privileged above all other modes of critique. Incarnation of the cor-
rect (imported) legitimising sources has, in 

fact, recently become the badge of belonging. The in-group status of this movement makes these new practitioners seem both arrogant and elitist. Undeniably, though, things may not be exactly what they seem. Take Hutcheon herself, for example. When one notes that her atypical definition of postmodernism in fact “fits” Canadian literature much better than it does the in-

ternational or from which it was so 

tenably derived, it seems reasonable to 

suspect that she picked up her sense of 

normativity subliminally from her own 

cultural environment, projecting it on 

the broader ambitiue out of an unconscious 

desire, born of insecurity, to make it, and 


herself, seem more important.


All of us, at some moment, have had a vision of our existence as something unique, untranslatable and very pre-
cious. This revelation almost always takes place during adolescence. . . .

Despite the often illusory nature of essays on the psychology of a nation, it seems to me that there is something reveal-

ing in the insistence with which a people will question itself during certain periods of its growth.

(Otavio Paz, The Labyrinth of Solitude, 1950)

T

he desire to define a national identity or character is peculiar neither to Canada nor to the rhetoric which has recently informed the debate surrounding free trade with the United States. The latter, however, has generated renewed inter-

test in the nature and survival of the Cana-

dian nation-state, and it is to this market that these two books attempt to appeal — albeit from widely diver-

gent ideological perspectives. The Secret Kingdom, based on Dominique Clift’s Le pays bisonomique: essai (Montreal: Libre Expression, 1987), epitomises a liberal, 

laissez-faire attitude to politics; indeed, its author ac-

knowledges the financial support of Inco Ltd., 

Aiken and Steelberg Inc.

Canadian Identity, on the other hand, invokes a conservative Marxist approach to Canadian history and is pub-
lished by Steel Rail, a press dedicated to socialism and nationalism in culture. However, while The Secret Kingdom is an exten-
sively researched and extremely readable history of national character in Canada — Clift won the Governor General’s Award for Le Fait anglais au Quebec in 1978 —

Canadian Identity is poorly documented,
riddled with archaic jargon, repetitious, and at times incoherent. This difference can in part be attributed to the rhetorical strategies of each author. Cliff pretends to an objective discourse, thus conveying an image of historical accuracy, reasoned argument and political neutrality. Robin Matthews employs the rhetoric of the manifesto; in the vein of George Grant's _Lament for a Nation_ (1965), Matthews's stance is once angry and despairing, evoking the image of the evangelist rather than the scholar. For both Mathews and Cliff, national identity exists as a monolithic, essentialist concept, but only one that necessitates the pursuit of goals and the overcoming of obstacles, whereas the other views national identity as something that is contained within each Canadian by birth and by the evolution of the way Canadians have come to see themselves, both authors assume the role of an ally with the collective population as a whole; the Canadian psyche is examined in terms of its historical developmental rather than its determination by the forces of class, race, gender or regional division. Indeed, multiplicity and difference, particularly the existence of diverse communities, are diagnosed by Cliff and Mathews as symptoms of a divided self, a nation torn apart by competing desires. For Cliff, the preoccupation with national identity is merely a manifestation of reality: Canadians simply refuse to accept their nationhood. If Cliff finds Canadians merely neurotic, Mathews believes they suffer a deeper psychosis: Canada is the victim not only of internal forces but of external forces; the question of national identity "has to do with our very survival beneath the most powerful imperialist nation in history."

It is Mathews's contention, indeed his sole argument throughout the book, that "Canadian identity lives in a process of tension and argument," a dialectic of opposing ideological and historical forces. The "root of the conflict," he writes, is "the conflict between a balanced community and an unbalanced competitive individualism," or, in other words, the opposition between the conservatist of the founding principles of confederation, "peace, order and good government," and the liberalization of unhindered capitalism as symbolized by the United States. A large portion of Canadian Identity is devoted to tracing the divergent yet overlapping histories of conservative and liberal ideologies. Conservatism is examined from the reflections of Edmund Burke through to the politics of John A. Macdonald and critical writings of W.L. Morton, Harold Innis and George Grant, whose lament for the possibility of conservatist in Canada becomes Matthews's own rallying cry.

Mathews's identity theory is seen as a morality play where liberalism is incarnated as the force of evil and manifests itself in the writings of Thomas Hobbes and Adam Smith and the "monstrous inhabitants" to which his thought gave rise — it is an important coincidence for Mathews that Smith's _The Wealth of Nations_ and Marx's _Capital_ were published the same year as the U.S. Declaration of Independence and Canadian confederation, respectively. In Mathews's view, A.R.M. Lower is the "Liberal Canadian historian," and Marshall McLuhan "the illegitimate son" of Innis, who, in a question to patriotism, demystified Innis's ideas and "de-natured them of their moral character."

Mathews argues that Canada could have continued to thrive on its pre-existing ideologies, as a constitutional monarchy "with many Tory/Conservative institutions existing in a genuinely Liberal capitalist economy," had the supremacy of parliament and conservative traditions not been undermined by Pierre Trudeau. The patination of the constitution marks "the emptying of a small group of legislators (the members of the Supreme Court of Canada) ... close tied to continental capitalist power." At the same time, however, the dialectic within each competing ideology has led to a transfer of political philosophy. A revisionist, "new Conservatism" has pushed the Progressive Conservative Party under Brian Mulroney into the liberal, continental camp. "Whether," Mathews writes, "the communisation side of the dialectical argument has been damaged irreparably is a question left for another answer." While Mathews argues for a vibrant, progressive dialectical vision, the dialectic he embraces is statically: the traditional conservative ideology he embraces seems not only to have been doomed from the start but has completely disappeared from the political sphere.

But Cliff finds Quebec a feature rather than a dialectic in the Canadian character, a division between tradition and progress, authority and individuality, difference and unity, that must be overcome for Canadians to achieve independent nationhood in the postindustrial world. Taking his cues from the cultural criticism of Northrop Frye and Margaret Atwood, Cliff finds two dominant strains in Canadian history and writing: "the tragedy of exclusion of the beleaguered garrison." To Frye's question, "Where is here?", Cliff finds a people who, because of their "fear of the harsh environment", have created isolated communities or "garrisoned regions", region, language, religion and ethnic "neo-traditionalism." This in turn has "produced a society that displaces little self-awareness in its political debates," and a people who "have long been trained by their environment to defer to authority and leadership." The image of the garrison in Canadian literature and thought becomes, for Cliff, not only an escape from the responsibilities of nationhood but a fortress against a larger unity.

In difference, however, Cliff finds similarity. French and English define themselves negatively, in opposition to each other, thus displaying their "interdependence." In the same way, he finds a sameness in the "alienation" of the prairie provinces and the "inwardness" of Quebec. Borrowing heavily from Innis's "Lamentation thesis," Cliff finds that the material conditions for unity already exist with the Canadian Pacific Railway, which provides both a symbol of collective goals and the geographical assurance of national independence. However, in the poetry of such Canadian authors as R.F. Scott, Archibald Maclean, and Earle Birney (each on the right of the political spectrum, though Cliff fails to mention this), he finds a bias against such progress, a "desire to perpetuate traditional bonds and lifestyles... that are at odds with a modern industrial world?" The necessary condition for national unity and survival already exist: the progenitors of Canadian culture, and thus Canadians themselves, simply lack the "collective imagination" to embrace them. It is interesting to note the way in which in which the shortcomings of Cliff's mythical reading of Canadian history, revealing class and regional divisions where Cliff finds a ludic opposition to progress.

If Cliff sees a need to overthrow tradition, Mathews finds in it the strength of Canada's identity: nothing has defined national character more clearly than its institutional religion. In his brief discussion of "The Left Vision of Canada," Mathews finds in the Social Gospel movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the roots of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation. Indeed, both the C.C.F. and the N.D.P. "asserted that the country that the promotion of capitalist power would have a vital Christian component," and modern capitalism in Canada has seen the "development of a new economic ideology known as "socialism"... some three decades ago."

Both Mathews and Cliff stress the importance of the Catholic Church in the "soul" of Canadian life. Mathews asserts that "the Catholic Church is the main reason for the existence of the Canadian Church in the Canadian sense (")

In conclusion, both Mathews and Cliff come to a similar conclusion: the Catholic Church is the key to Canada's identity. Mathews, however, sees the Church as a force for progress, while Cliff sees it as a hindrance to progress. Both authors agree that the Church is a significant part of Canadian identity, but they differ on whether it is a positive or negative force. Mathews sees the Catholic Church as a force for progress, while Cliff sees it as a hindrance to progress. Both authors agree that the Catholic Church is a significant part of Canadian identity, but they differ on whether it is a positive or negative force.
Church in Québec and its relation to En-

lish Protestantism, Matthews relies heavily
on the theories of Max Weber — as filtered
through the writings of George Grant. Not
only has Roman Catholicism been “less
sympathetic than Protestantism to capital-
ist values,” but “entrepreneurship, risk-tak-
ing, scientific initiative, and industrial de-
velopment were demonstrably in the hands
of the Protestant English Canadians in
league with U.S. interests,” whereas Catho-
licism remained for the most part de-
vout, communitarian, even corporatist,
simple, and un-modern.” While he discuss-
es “corporatist” politics in Québec in terms
of German Nazism and fascism in general,
Matthews, following Grant, sees Catholi-
cism in Québec as preserving the tradi-
tional, “communitarian” forces of the Canadi-
ian dialectic. It is the peculiar flavour of Mathews’s Marxism that the “reactionary Conservatism” of Québec Catholicism is necessarily prefer-
able to the forces of the capitalist market
which he sought to oppose.

Matthews argues that English-Canadian
dependence on Britain “stood for an ideo-
logical position of independence... because it permitted Canadians to claim a distinct otherness from the U.S.” For Québec, deference to the Church, agricul-
ture and lack of entrepreneurial activity
were similar safeguards to continental pres-
sures. Strangely, Matthews fails to see in
Québec’s eventual independence and ideo-
tical stress from English Canada the forces
of dialectical materialism at work. Rather,
separation appears as an aberration, an
ideology thrust upon the Québécois by exter-
"Nothing,” he says, “can have warned the Québécois of the
"stresses that would culminate in the Quiet
Revolution, stresses that both inflamed and
manifested larger forces at work in the
world.” The election of the Parti Québécois is,
for Matthews, as destructive to the Cana-
dian dialectic and to Canadian inde-
pendence as the patrition of the constitution
is to English Canada. Québec is now “the
most liberal of Liberal communities in
Canada.” With both English and French
Canada “absorbed into the other side of the
dialectic,” Matthews doubts “[whether
Canada can survive the two defences]” (any
emphasis).

Cliff agrees that “religion spoke most effectively...for the collective uncon-
sciences” of Canadians, but that it did so
“with terrible impact” for Canadian identi-
yty and independence. In Québec, the Quiet
Revolution of the 1960s “introduced state
capitalism as a way of attaining collective
goals,” at the same time as separating
church and state and bringing to end the
“inwardness” of Québec society, where
politics was “the expression of powerlessness,
resentment, and of an unfilled yearning for continuity.” Cliff contends that Confedera-
tion confirmed Canada’s conservative ideology, entrapping provin-
cial over federal rights and those of the
community over the power of the state. It
was ultimately the defeat of the 1980 refer-
dendum, along with the patrition of the
constitution and the entrenchment of
bilingualism, that brought Québec into the
modern, postindustrial world. Whereas
Pierre Trudeau plays the villain in Math-

ew’s narrative, Trudeau’s political views
inform the theme of Cliff’s story.

In the same way that Octavio Paz sees a questioning of national character as a part
of a nation’s “adolescence,” Cliff sees the
development of a strong national conscious-
ness as part of the psychological matur-
ty of both nation and citizen. The debate over free trade with the United States is,
for Cliff, the public manifestation of an
individual antagonism between
ethics and practicality. This antagonism “is experienced by countless persons as an
inherent dilemma in the face of two con-
tradictory courses of action.” To Frey’s ques-
tion, “Where is here?”, Cliff would
respond that “here” is the individual psyche
of each Canadian, a “gibson mentalit-
y” in the phrase of the man. There is something dis-

tinctly Freudian in the way in which he
treats the struggle for national inde-
pendence. Canadians, it would seem, are in
search of a father, an authority figure. It is for this reason, Cliff argues, that Canadians
prolonged their dependence on England and
France at the same time, rather than being the victims of American imperialism, Canadians themselves have transferred authority to the United States. Whatever
constraints exist to liberation, “they are
mostly internal and self-imposed.” At no
point does Cliffs suggest that if authority
was willingly transferred to the U.S. it was
done in the interest of a particular class of
Canadians over and against the interests of
many more.

“It becomes possible to cast off the colo-

nial mentality,” Cliff contends, “only if
there is a Canadian identity to take its
place.” If Canadians have failed to develop
a distinct identity, it is a failure of “collect-
ive vision,” a failure of Canadian culture to
embrace the modern age. Nonetheless,
Cliff believes Canada is finally approaching
maturity as a nation-state. He attrib-
utes this new-found modernity to the
creation of the welfare state, the practical-
y of the generation of the postwar baby
boom and the patrition of the constitu-
tion and entrenchment of federal over
writes, “has become immeasurably stronger.”
In the end, it is largely a psycho-
logical transformation, an acceptance
of reality of the modern world, to which
he attributes the emergence of a modern nation-state. Nonetheless does he explicate
the complex material and cultural forces
that compel a nation’s politics.

Where Cliff states confidently that the
“condensation of national identity will
induce Canadians to distance themselves
from the United States,” Robin Matthews is
less optimistic. For Matthews, the suicide
of the Québecois novelist and radical Hubert
Aquin stands as a metaphor for the
collective suicide of Canadians: “The elec-
tion of the Parti Québécois made him re-
alize that Québec was deepening, not solv-
ing, its problem culturally.” In the
meanwhile, Canada seems to exist in stasis,
awaiting a shift in the forces that have
determined the national dialectic. On the
other hand, Matthews claims that "Canadian

history awaits the militant Marxist formu-
lization that is also truly attuned to Canadi-
an history and problems as well as to the
character, style, and sensibility of average
Canadians.” On the other hand, he largely
ignores the possibilities of Marxist or social
democratic intervention in Canadian politi-
cal life, favouring instead the conserva-
tion and lamentations of George Grant.

While Mathews sees some hope in forms
of non-institutional culture, he gives no ex-
amples. Instead, he suggests that foreign
control of Canadian publishing and film
industries “subverts people working in cul-
ture from militant struggle for the Canadi-
ian community, and prevents Canadians from
being informed about Canada.” In the
final analysis, “[t]he nature of our identity
requires constant vigilance and con-
stant activity on the part of comuni-

nists to activate the enormous power of
individualistic motivation.”

When it comes to the form this
activity should take, Math-

ess is uncharacteristically

While Canadians as a whole might strive for
national unity, identity is a social construct peculiar not only to geographical
and social regions but to class, gender and ethnic-

ty. Both Cliff and Matthews find regionalism divisive of
t national purpose, and thus neither examines the
particularities of social discourse outside of On-
tario and Québec. Cana-

la’s aboriginal peoples are

similarly ignored. Intent

on pursuing their individu-

al theses, neither Cliff
nor Mathews explore

the way in which nationalism as

an ideology is used by

both left and right to

achieve rhetorical and partisan goals.

It is the use and abuse of the ideology of

nationalism which ultimately renders both

Canadian Identity and The Secret Kingdom similar in their attempts to define a na-

tional identity. While Robin Matthews preaches the social gospel of a dialectical vision
and Dominique Cliffs charts the maturation of the

Canadian people, both writers end

with a static concept of Canadian identity.

However, the question of a people’s identi-

ty must necessarily be answered in multi-

plicity and difference. At the same time,

the construction of a collective conscious-

ness is ultimately grounded in the material

and cultural relations that inform a society,

a process rather than a fixed entity. The

process that is shaped by the changing in-

ternational division of labour of a global
economy. As we are reminded by Paz, “[i]f

does not matter, then, if the answers that
we give to our questions must be cor-
rected by time.”

Daniel Jones is a Toronto poet, short story writer, critic, editor and small press publisher. He is a mem-

ber of the Borderlines editorial collective.
Between Past and Present: Archaeology, Ideology, and Nationalism in the Modern Middle East by Neil Asher Silberman. Markham, Ontario: Fitzhenry & Whiteside (Henry Holt & Company), 1989. $34.50 cloth. Between Past and Present is at once an entertaining, journalistic tour of recent archaeological work in the Middle East and an examination of the discourses of nationalism. Silberman shows how the emerging nations of the third world are constructing western-style histories out of the material from archaeological excavations. At the same time, and most notably in Israel, such activities and the materials generated from them have been used for the maintenance of national identity as well as extended territorial claims.

The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin and Gershon Scholem - 1932-1940, ed. Gershon Scholem. Translated by Gary Smith and Andre Lefevere. New York: Shocken Books, 1989. $38.50 cloth. This translation will be highly valued by Benjamin-Scholem scholars and anyone interested in the social history/ideas of German Jewry. It originally appeared in German in 1985, and judging by the excellent translation, it is well worth the four-year wait. These letters were written after Scholem moved to Jerusalem and Benjamin was forced into exile and ended with Benjamin's suicide in 1940. They reveal a fascinating documentation of those anguished years with commentary ranging from their observations of the social and political events in Europe and Palestine to Kafka, Agnon, German drama and Jewish mysticism.

Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity by Judith Butler. New York: Routledge, 1990. $12.95 (US) paper. Gender Trouble is the first title in a new and promising series, "Thinking Gender," edited by Linda J. Nicholson and devoted to analyzing gender from the discipline of philosophy. Butler begins by dismantling recent conceptualizations of the relation of sex to gender, arguing that gender has been privileged in feminist discourses in much the same way that sex is overdetermined in dominant discursive practices. By questioning the role of representation in the writings of Foucault, Kristeva, Wittig and others, Butler argues that a feminist politics is possible without first establishing a fixed gendered subject as the agent of change. Gender Trouble is a difficult but important book.

In a Small House on the Outskirts of Heaven by Tom Wayman. Madeira Park, B.C.: Harbour Publishing, 1989. $8.95 paper. Tom Wayman's latest collection of poetry goes far in dispelling the myth that mendacious writing need not be merely didactic. The finest of these poems invite comparison to the writings of Roque Dalton, but the battleground has shifted from El Salvador to the factories of western Canada. With humanity, humour and often anger, Wayman portrays working people on the job, unemployed and at rest, yet without resorting to the romance of "workism." 

The Jealous Poet by Claude Levi-Strauss, translated by Benedict Chorier. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988. $26.95 cloth. The dust-jacket blurb rightly claims this to be the most accessible of Levi-Strauss's works. It gives a brief example of the structural technique employed in the Mythologiques series. In doing so, he again argues forcefully for the subtlety and richness of what is still often called "primitive thought." He deals with what he sees as its relation — and his own — to Freud and the psychoanalytic tradition. An extraordinary intellect, unprepossessing after decades of controversy, once again brings to bear on his subject a vast erudition, employing an always fluid and graceful literary style.

Jean Baudrillard: From Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond by Douglas Kellner. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989. $34.95 cloth. At last — a long-awaited, comprehensive, clearly written "bluffer's guide" to Jean Baudrillard — an intelligent and critical one at that! While specialists will quibble, many will be relieved to finally exclaim "so that's what all the 'bypass' was about...."

The Life and Death of Andy Warhol by Victor Bockris. New York: Bantam Books, 1989. $26.95 cloth. In pursuit of his own fifteen minutes, Bockris tries a little too hard to imbue a significance to Warhol's art inversely proportional to the depth of Andy's character. His attempt to link Warhol with Sartrean existentialism is an interesting, but ultimately futile, exercise. Its pretensions aside, this is an excellent biography, based on a wealth of interviews and other documentary sources which capture Andy's greatest work — his own life. A welcome alternative to that expensive non-event, The Warhol Diaries.

Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century by Greil Marcus. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989. $39.95 cloth. "Is history simply a matter of events that leave behind those things that can be weighed and measured," Greil Marcus asks, "or is it also the result of moments that seem to leave nothing behind, nothing but the mystery of spectral connections between the long separated by place and time,..." John of Leyden (connected by coincidence of name to John Lydon a.k.a. Johnny Rotten) to the antics of the lettrists, the situationists and later the Sex Pistols. He approaches but never quite reaches the explanation for these moments in history when something remarkable occurs in the social order, something that changes our perception of society and so on.

Marilyn Monroe by Graham MacCann. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988. $10.95 paper. More than another biography this book analyzes the extraordinary history of the myth of Marilyn Monroe. Drawing on film theory, theories of popular culture and Feminism, MacCann's study is the first to look at what has been and is still at stake in the perpetuation of the narrative of the "real" Marilyn.

Post Modernism, Jameson, Critique, ed. Doug Kellner. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988. $17.95 paper. The first book-length collection of essays on one of the main instigators of the postmodern debate. The work of Fredric Jameson (also known as the foremost Marxist literary critic in the U.S.) is critically evaluated from a wide diversity of theoretical positions which also result in a variety of competing interpretations of Jameson's project. reviews
Dear editors:

I am grateful for the attention Joan Davies gave to my book, But Not in the Hours, in your fall issue, but I think his review contains two factual errors worth noting:

(1) He says the habit of our journalism is "the celebration of authors such as Grant, McLuhan and Macpherson who are discovered to be important just before their demise." George Grant was discovered and celebrated, to use the Davies terms, in 1966, with national magazine articles, TV programs, discussion in the newspapers, etc.; this was 22 years before his death. Marshall McLuhan was likewise discovered long before his demise — in Toronto newspapers and on CBC radio he was often talked about in the 1950s, then very widely publicized in the 1960s, after Understanding Media (1964). He died in 1980, 18 or 15 years after this process that Davies says immediately preceded his demise. Finally, C.B. Macpherson, despite a couple of attempts to make him into a well-known figure (notably one by me at Maclean's in 1963) has totally resisted both discovery and celebration, in death as in life. Davies is wrong in different ways on all counts.

(2) Davies says that in my work, "when major radical thinkers such as Raymond Williams, Noam Chomsky, and Edward Said sneak in the columns or the studios, it is not their ideas that are discussed but the curiosities of their lives..." With Williams, on TV, I discussed nothing but his radical ideas — even at this moment I don't know anything about the life he led. With Said I discussed the idea of exile, as expressed in a recent article of his and in his work on Conrad and others; in this case I may well have talked about his own sense of exile certainly I hope I did. I have never interviewed or indeed met Noam Chomsky, and have written nothing at all on his work or life.

Robert Fulford

Robert Fulford is absolutely correct about the first point, in my haste (or good editorial advice) to turn around a much longer sentence (which contained even more objectionable sentiments into something coherent, I abbreviated it into the piece of nonsense to which he refers. (Fulford, in his own writing, is probably right in scolding the word processor: it can produce, as Robertson Davies has pointed out, a certain carelessness of expression). The second point is much more contentious, though I apologize for attributing it to him an interview which he did not conduct. His perception of what are the core ideas in the works of Said and Williams must be left to those who have read, say, Orientalism or Marxism and Literature and also viewed the marginalization of the authors in the "realities" interviews.

Joan Davies

War and Cinema: The Logics of Perception by Paul Virilio, translated by Patrick Camiller. London: Verso, 1989, $24.95 cloth. Among the plethora of titles published to coincide with the fiftieth anniversary of the Second World War, Wartime alone resists the temptation to load any purpose or higher meaning in the tragedy of global warfare. Fussell continues the work he began in The Great War and Modern Memory (1975) on the collective consciousness in wartime, making use of a wealth of mass cultural and documentary material in addition to the fiction and poetry of this period. Fussell shows that the obscene, excruciating and utterly incomprehensible nature of war continues to be the heart of darkness of our own postwar, postmodern world.

Compiled by Gail Fournier, Ben Freedman, Gary Genisco, Robyn Gillies, Daniel Jones and Lor Thorne.

Mention of a title in The B/L List does not preclude a future review.

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