

EXCURSIONS



At the beginning

of the year, the United States withdrew from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and has since persuaded Britain to give notice of its departure at the end of this year. The US had contributed 25 percent of UNESCO's budget of \$187 million. Britain's share is currently 4.67 percent. (Canada's is 3.08 percent; these assessments are derived from a population/GNP formula. They apply uniformly throughout the UN system and correspond, in a rough way, to the number of posts a nation may expect within it.) The US withdrawal says something about changes both in recent US foreign policy, and, more generally, in international power relations in the last 20 years—a development that's usually talked about in terms of the emergence of the third world. In the 1970s, UNESCO came increasingly to identify itself as a place where subject peoples could conquer the speech of colonialism—if all too often still through a liberal intermediary, in this case the UN.

Western objections to UNESCO should maybe come out of the mouth of the State Department itself: 'UNESCO has extraneously politicized virtually every subject it deals with, has exhibited hostility toward the basic institutions of a free society, especially a free market and a free press, and has demonstrated unrestrained budgetary expansion.' A virtual new right manifesto, consonant with the rhetorical attacks on the welfare state we've come to expect from those nominally in power. Controversy is hardly new to UNESCO. What is new is the hypocritical lan-

UNESCO, DECOLONIZATION AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE

Alexander Wilson

Illustration By Lillian Necakov

guage used in the attacks: let's cut the fat, the mountains of paperwork, the expense-account junkets; after all, we're living beyond our means. These are the same audacious metaphors we find used in the targeting of social services and public bodies here in Canada. The CBC and Via Rail are accused of mismanagement—as an excuse for removing their work from the public sphere. What are dismissed as junkets in the Canada Council used to be called juries—a mechanism for attenuating the imperatives of the state.

The Canadian government is sympathetic with the American withdrawal, as with so many other things these days. Two letters have been sent to the Director-General in the past year (one under the Liberals, another under the Tories) pressing for a 'zero-growth' budget, and an end to programming that's 'too political'. An example? Major Program 13: on Peace, International Understanding, Human Rights and the Rights of People. External Affairs says it's the wrong time for education programs in these areas; they're too contentious and time-consuming, and besides, they should be talked about in the General Assembly. The Canadian government is more interested in 'solid programming' that in many cases corresponds to the ear-

lier foreign-aid model of the organization: technology transfer, literacy campaigns, and so on.

UNESCO was founded by a small number of Western nations in 1945 with these words: 'Since in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed.' The organization was of course political from the start. Throughout the early 50s, UNESCO supported US policy in Korea and Taiwan, and the US convinced UNESCO to replace its independent executive with government appointees, thus ensuring the kind of irrelevant politicization it was to complain about fifteen years later.

Under the 13-year tenure of René Maheu, power was centralized in the Director-General's office. As the organization's membership was broadened to include the many newly independent states of Africa and Asia, its mandate shifted from one of coordination of research to out and out development. Large-scale (and often capital intensive) projects were launched all over the place, and the Paris headquarters became increas-

ingly bureaucratized. In late 1974, UNESCO adopted a number of resolutions that the US interpreted as an attack on Israel: the intensive urbanization of Jerusalem was criticized, and concern was raised about the fate of Palestinian culture in the occupied areas. In that same year, Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow, a muslim and the education minister of Senegal, became Director-General. UNESCO's work—and budget—again expanded to encompass programs in oceanography, agriculture, education, hydrology, third world student scholarships, antiquities reclamation, desertification and communications.

It was a struggle around this last issue—communications—which precipitated the US withdrawal. In the late 70s, UNESCO commissioned a report on the possibility of reordering the entire global information network. The report was published by chairperson Sean McBride in 1980, under the title *Many Voices, One World*. Its call for a 'New World Information and Communications Order' (NWICO) summarized UNESCO's trajectory from a research institute to an active geopolitical agent. It also signalled its entry into American demonology. In brief, the UNESCO communications initiative attempted a critique of the ideology of freedom of information. Calls were made for a redistribution of news resources and information technologies, international understandings on satellite placement and usage, the encouragement of autonomous media production in the third world, the development of the two-way capabilities of communications technologies and networks, the adjustment of first world dominance of radio bands, and so forth. The NWICO initiative also called—unfortunately—for the centralized licensing of journalists in order to achieve 'objectivity' and 'truth' in news reporting.

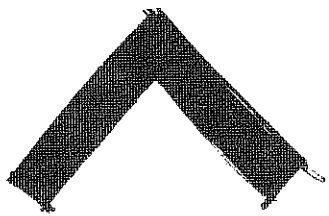
In spite of its occasional naivete (and there's plenty more of that in the UNESCO constitution), the communications initiative has been a big help in politicizing the entire discourse around new technology today. Needless to say, it was trashed in the Western press, reactionary and liberal alike. 'Censorship!' 'was the univocal response; none of the other aspects of the debate were taken seriously—when they were reported at all. The NWICO debate hasn't been entirely welcomed by the paper-shredder, however. UNESCO has set up another commission, this one called the International Program for the Development of Communications (IPDC). Its aim is to work toward communications self-reliance for member states. This is a project Ottawa looks more favourably on, for reasons that are maybe not hard to understand given its own penchant for interfering in US communications initiatives in Canada. The IPDC is cited by External Affairs as one reason Canada will stay in UNESCO—at least until the General Conference in Sofia this fall. (I should mention here some of the other UNESCO projects I've found interesting: a critique of tourism, a discussion about what constitutes 'cultural development', and the establishment of cultural heritage areas, such as part of the Haida lands in the Queen Charlotte Islands that the Soqreds are now offering to MacMillan Bloedel.)



The crisis at UNESCO is symptomatic of a general global crisis that can be read in a number of ways. Most obviously, it's part of a challenge to US hegemony by most of the rest of the world. Secondly, it's a function of the contradictory mission of the organization: independent institute and intergovernmental agency. It's also to do, I think, with a struggle around how to interpret post-war history. The balance of power at the UN shifted in the 60s as a result of decolonization. It was the moment, in Sartre's words, when the natives became human beings. A new politics of resistance emerged everywhere in the world, not least in the very colonial nations themselves. The attack on UNESCO today ought to be read, in part, as a trashing of the 60s, and as an attempt to reverse the cultural and political gains made here and elsewhere in those years. To be fair, those liberatory moments were often accompanied by systematic corruption and militarization, as well as by the entrenchment of neo-colonialist institutions like the International Monetary Fund. UNESCO by no means stands outside of this ambiguous and paradoxical history. It is a centralized, hierarchical and bureaucratized institution too often committed to large-scale projects that do little other than reinforce dependence on first world capital and expertise. There's not much attention given to what's sometimes called the fourth world—nations within nations, tribal and indigenous cultures. Neither is there, as far as I can tell, any recognition of the limitations of development and growth themselves.

But then again, UNESCO is probably not the place to look for the kind of autonomous politics I'm talking about. I still think it's important to defend the tatters of liberal institutions (and states) that remain, to refuse the language of the marketplace (if only, Reagan must be thinking, UNESCO could be made to turn a profit, like the Los Angeles Olympics). At the same time we have to continue to invent other public sites of political struggle altogether. What I liked about the information and communications debate at UNESCO was that it named a terrain of resistance that doesn't recognize national boundaries—just like capital itself.

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SOME NOTES ON THE OCCASION OF A PERFORMANCE OF JUDITH DOYLE'S RATE OF DESCENT

Andrew
Payne



**I felt not myself—but an
example of myself.**

Judith Doyle

Given the

ephemerality of a 'corpus' which has emerged, if not entirely, then at least most convincingly in performance, it might seem presumptuous to insist on Doyle's more 'literary' antecedents. Yet it is to such antecedents that the work sends us, and perhaps never so emphatically as when claiming for itself a certain 'theatricality'. Nor should we be surprised by this: for the question of the Book, of the history and traditionality proper to it, this question has always involved a moment of exemplary dissemblance, a theatrical operation whereby text and event have been made to communicate, but made to communicate across an abyss which forbids any simple resolution of one term in the other. If I will forgo a characterization of *Rate of Descent* as event, I do so then, not in order to minimize the performative aspects of the work, but rather to insist that the problem of the event, of its presence and performance, is never so easily localized. To reduce the question of Doyle's theatricality to proclivities of 'performance', as though the question of that performance were somehow incidental in relation to a task deemed inaugural, a task which would call itself writing, this would be to remain blind to theatricality's most profound demand, it would be to forget that mask from behind which silence, in order to give itself to itself, has already spoken.



Of course for the writer, or perhaps more properly, for the writer of 'modernity'¹, for the one whose 'work' is only ever authorized in the absolute coincidence of text and event, this speech must come as an indictment:

But this exigency which makes the work declare being in the unique moment of rupture—those very words: 'it is', the point which the work brilliantly illuminates even while receiving its consuming burst of light—we must also comprehend and feel that this point renders the work impossible, because it never permits arrival at the work. It is a region anterior to the beginning where nothing is made of being, and in which nothing is accomplished.

Maurice Blanchot

It would be tempting, and as the length of these preliminary remarks ought to indicate, not altogether incorrect, to locate Doyle within the 'epoch' of such an 'impossible work', to understand her performance as an extension of its rigour. Not incorrect, but neither entirely to the point. For rigour is precisely absent here. In its place we are treated to a voluptuous distraction, nervous, forgetful, but for that very reason, subject to surprise, to fortuitous encounters and identifications:

It was a fleeting allegiance, a second of total identification with a sentence, an idea—one I believed for a few moments explained itself completely. It was like seeing a stranger on a late street and making the kind of contact that evaporates in two seconds.²

These are texts which might properly be called 'amorous' and in precisely the sense that Barthes employed the term—given to phantasy, to identification, only reluctantly induced into the labour of the symbolic. Here writing moves away from thought, away from its agonies and labour, and towards the figure's repose:

My thoughts are not thoughts at all. They are images of thoughts. The odd moment of false luminescence, of false clarity.

This 'amorous' disposition depends upon a notion of readership which is antithetical to modernity's utopian impulse (utopia meaning literally *no where*). Its point is always, and prematurely, to render desire's object, to make its other take place, established as the destination of the lover's address. Of course, in order for the lover to read his freedom there, this other, this object of the lover's desire, must prove an other subject. The legal analogue to this amorous expression is therefore the contract rather than law, its goal, persuasion rather than enforcement.

