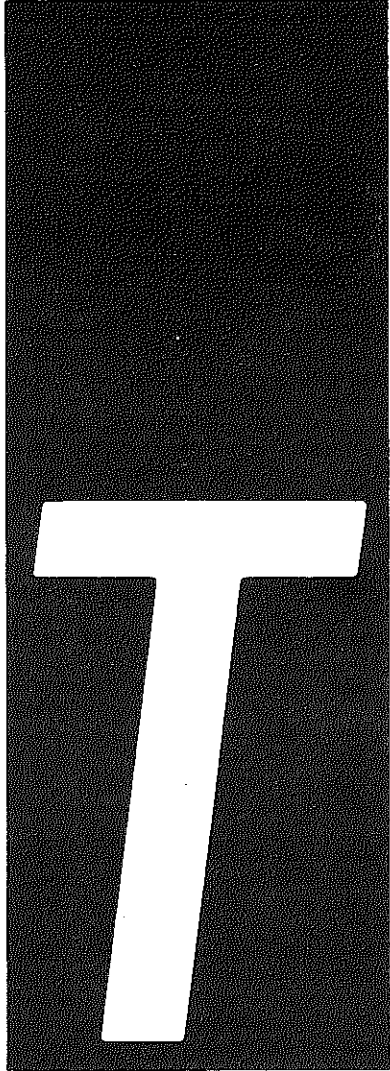


NEWS WITHOUT PHOTOGRAPHS

By Ioan Davies



The photographs that we see about New Zealand and Bermuda do not display the total take-over of an island by the US National Aeronautics and Space Administration. What we see for New Zealand are images of rocky beaches, sand dunes, sheep, southern Alps, colonial architecture, narrow gauge railways, and lots of greenery, yachts and hot mineral pools. For Bermuda we see coral reefs, more beaches, poinsettia bushes, carefully preserved English-style villages, luxury cruise liners and golf links. The news that we might be interested in comes to us without illustration. In my newspapers the story of Greenpeace and the sinking of the "Rainbow Warrior" was illustrated by one badly reproduced photograph of the "Warrior" being raised and by David Lange's face, as if that conveyed anything. As for Bermuda, with its major NASA tracking station and its nuclear submarine infested seas, I have yet to see one photograph.

But New Zealand and Bermuda stand at cultural extremes as examples of how to cope with subservience to nuclear imperialism. Take Bermuda first, a small place, 23 miles by two, occupied by 25,000 people marooned in the At-

lantic, 600 miles off the North Carolina coast. Since Western time immemorial a transit camp for all the stages of capitalist expansion: a slave depot, a harbour for shipwrecks, a convict colony, a shipyard, a tourist haven, a tax-free commercial post office, a drug entrepot, a military base. Basically now and well into the past an armed camp where the worst of British laws and the worst of old Dixie's social practices coexist as the foundation of social order (the Official Secrets Act, racial segregation by religion, an abject forelock-pulling colonialism, an almost complete lack of social services). The police force is completely foreign — drawn from Britain and some small West Indian islands — as is the civil service and the management of the major banks and tourist agencies, though the investment and the imitative lifestyle is, of course, largely American. The small national bourgeoisie — lawyers, doctors and estate dealers — and the government work cheek-by-jowl with the foreigners to maintain the status quo, but at a high price. There is no industry on the island, no agriculture (Bermuda is one large, sprawling suburb punctuated with shanty towns), and therefore the cost of living is high — approximately 20 percent higher than Canada's. The poor blacks and Portuguese increasingly join the Seventh Day Adventists where there is at least a makeshift social security system.

During the Second World War, Winston Churchill persuaded the Bermuda parliament to lease to the United States a segment of St. George's as a naval air station. The rest, as it were, is history. A world to itself, the US navy and army base physically dominates the eastern part of the island and politically the rest. Not only does the NASA station contribute its share to Star Wars as the major tracking station for the northern hemisphere (the other one is in northern Australia, which indicates why Bob Hawke's attitude towards the USA is unambiguous), but the entire seabed from Bermuda to the Bahamas is mined, while US and Soviet nuclear submarines play cat and mouse in the wild Sargasso Sea. There is a Bermuda Triangle alright, but it consists of capital, nuclear warheads and contraband goods (mainly drugs).

The political culture of Bermuda is as bad as the imagination would invent. The government that is entrenched in Hamilton consists of (mainly black) lawyers and businessmen who are con-

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cerned to maintain the status quo by raising no major social issues, let alone nuclear dependency. Race is never mentioned except to declare that it is not an issue. (As with many Caribbean countries — Bahamas, Barbados, Antigua are clear examples — everyone is acutely conscious of race, but official discussion of it is taboo.) Everything is swept under the rug of comfortable colonialism. (The most blatant example occurs at the beginning of every summer when eccentrics, hobos, cripples, the flotsam and jetsam of Bermuda are sent off to mental institutions so that the towns look clean for the avalanche of the all-important tourists.) An opposition, faintly social democratic, disagrees on some of the nuances of dependency practice, but offers no major resistance to the convenience of dual colonialship (British by constitution but American by money and military conquest, a situation not unlike Britain's own). There is no noticeable nationalism and, down the road, the only likely constitutional shift would be for Bermuda to become, after Puerto Rico, the 52nd state of the Union.

This summer a faint whiff of alternative politics was marked in a PanAfrican Conference organized by the Original African

Hebrew Israelite Nation of Jerusalem, a group of black Jews from Tennessee who were less concerned with Bermudan nationalism or Black Power than with Old Testament communal living (including vegetarian diets, polygamy) and showing that selected blacks, now settled in the Negev, are the original Jews. Their conference did, however, produce a splinter of the underlying tinder that might be ignited by a well-placed match. A black lawyer, trained at Osgoode no less, pointed out how the police and the judiciary discriminated against blacks in Bermuda, a view based in part on experiences in court. Certain members of the Bermuda Bar Association called for disciplinary action and disbarment, which, as it happens, was not followed through. Clearly, the natives are restless, but we can be sure that if anything was tried, wrists would be slapped quicker than you could say "Grenada".

The three million Europeans and Polynesians who occupy the islands between Samoa and Antarctica represent the ultimate in civilized retreat from northern metropolitanism, and, as might be expected, are cautious about anything that imposes on them from the rest of the world. So far they have managed to avoid cable TV, satellite dishes (Bermuda, which has no TV of its own, is littered with them), expressways and post-structuralism. Only recently, as befits a city built on seven relatively extinct volcanoes at the southern tip of the Kermadec Trench, has Auckland constructed buildings taller than four storeys. The main concessions to the underside of urbanism are an abundance of massage parlours, a flourishing marijuana industry, several punk and new wave groups and the importation of British cops to keep the parlour owners, the dope peddlers, the punks and the anti-apartheid demonstrators in their place. Otherwise New Zealand is a country where the quality of life is central to all public debates, parochial in the best sense of the word, because it is a debate which is shared in by all sections of the population, in the North and South Islands. The issues, not surprisingly, are sexuality (focused most recently by the decision of the government to implement the UN resolution on equal rights), Maori rights, environmental control (including nuclear energy), standard and cost of living, and censorship, all of them fighting on territory which seeks to preserve the essence of what is and challenging reformers to show why changes offer a qualitative better way. Signs at the entrance to each borough — "You are Entering Mount Eden - A Nuclear Free Zone" — emphasize the community strength of the environmental case and trace the connection be-

tween foreign policy and husbandry. The resistance to nuclear warheads is a profoundly conservative position, but no less conservative than the spraying of aircraft to prevent the importation of alien pests who might blight New Zealand crops. Conservatism is a shrewd perception of the Other who might disturb the social/ecological balance.

In these terms, David Lange's Labour government is therefore echoing communal concerns. In other respects it is not. His economic policy is more monetaristic than Reagan's or Thatcher's, calling for drastic cuts in government spending. Even the government's stated support for Maori rights, sexual equality and reduced censorship cut across the New Zealand sense of conservative totality. (All are commonly described as impositions from outside even if the movements for support are strong and very energetic.) But what these issues have done is provide a focus for debate and for social organization. As a regular feature of New Zealand life there are continuous debates on TV, radio and in the newspapers on all the issues, complementing the action in the streets, churches and community halls. The sinking of the "Rainbow Warrior" has emphasized to New Zealanders that the battles being fought there are global, and, as the shaking of the Mitterand government has demonstrated, the "conservatism" of New Zealand is fundamentally more radical than the James Bond black comedy of the French secret service.

None of this struggle for green peace ranks high in our photographic sense of New Zealand, but for good reasons. The photography of social struggle, of identity-formation is of low priority in our conception of what "news" is all about.

Two photographic images have been with me in writing this essay: the nuclear sharks lying on the Sargasso Sea-bed waiting to destroy Atlantis, and a Pacific farmer leading his sheep through the streets of Wellington to affirm the unity of humanity and nature. This is the real news and those are the dialectical choices by which the fate of "civilization" will be decided.

Ioan Davies

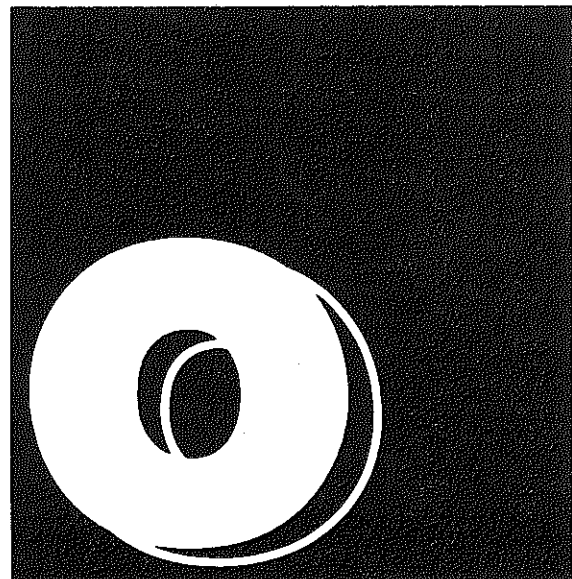
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SEX/TEXTUAL POLITICS

Tracing The Imaginary In The Films Of Valie Export

By
Brenda Longfellow



WHERE
are the boundaries to be drawn between inner and outer "realities"? How to separate the observer from the observed, subject from object, desire from projection?

ne of the first images in a published collection of Valie Export's photographs and drawings from 1968-77¹ is a black and white reproduction of the famous Velasquez painting, "Las Meninas", which was analyzed by Foucault in *The Order of Things*. The painting represents a self-reflexive inscription and over-turning of classical relations of representation, of the classical distinction between subject and object. Framed by a large mounted canvas on the right, the tableau features the artist with palette in hand and a variety of figures: young girls, a midget, a dog in the foreground, all of whom are staring out of the frame at the ostensible subject of the painter's painting — a space and a position occupied (equally) by ourselves as spectators. Here then, the gaze is foregrounded, circulated in an exchange that confounds the distinction between observer and observed, subject and object.

Export joins that particular convergence of concerns to modernity with a wry twist — placing the image of a 35mm still camera in the painter's extended right hand. This additional inscription re-situates the critical frame, and relates the problematic of representation to the 20th century field of photography and cinema — to the field, that is, of Export's own work.

Indeed, what circulates around the signature Valie Export (a.k.a. Waltraud Hollinger) is a rich currency of cinematic images. Bizarre. Brutally witty and devastating in their psychic immediacy. Her images blazon themselves on one's memory with all the tragic vitality of an obsession. Frag-

EXCURSIONS