

Part Two, "Independent Filmmaking in North America," is rather less satisfying. Although *Jump Cut* is an American magazine, Peter Steven is a Canadian and the publisher, BTL, is Canadian. Yet only one article deals specifically with Canadian film, and knocks off its obligations to both Canadian and Quebec film by reviewing only the joint Quebec/Ontario production of *A Wives Tale*. *Jump Cut* -- the magazine and the book -- exhibits a certain chauvanism in its concentration on American and Third World film. Canadian film gets its nod, but European independent film is totally absent. *Jump Cut* is already quite fat, and it is never possible to deal with everything in one book, but I would make this request to *Jump Cutters* (the magazine, anyway), "We want more/and we want in now."

The other problem with this section is the absence of new material. The most recent article is Clyde Taylor's fine piece "Decolonizing the Image: New U.S. Black Cinema," first published in 1984. But it is focused on an even earlier period of Black cinema. What is going on now in independent cinema? What have been the changes in form and content under the influences of feminism, gay and lesbian politics, eh? This isn't to say that the book doesn't deal with feminism or homosexuality, but it removes it from the discussion of independent filmmaking.

The placement of two peices of feminism together in Part Three, "Women's Counter-Cinema," is a recognition of the diverse interpretations within feminist positions. In "the Politics of Positive Images," two articles argue the old questions of what is a positive image? And whom does it address? These unresolved questions inhabit both film creation and film criticism, and carry over into the debate on form which has been one of the major discussions in feminist film circles. B. Ruby Rich's "In the Name of Feminist Film," is a cogent overview of the debate. Her distinctions revolve around the "American model," the so-called "sociological approach," and the British "methodological approach." These approaches are further elaborated by Rich within the context of (American) phenomenology and the European use of Freudian and Lacanian models of linguistic analysis. The final article in this section, "The Perils of Feminist Film Teaching," by Michell Citron and Ellen Seiters, is a very practical piece of advice to those teaching film. It defines some of the social and economic obstacles women face when they enter the world of film.

Tom Waugh introduces the argument that tokenism and stereotyping are not the exclusive practice of the dominant cinema, but that they also afflict the pocitical left and its films. Waugh makes a convincing case that in a homophobic culture it is necessary to evaluate the tokenism that exists within progressive culture, and warns against the "euphoria of 'ghetto liberation'."

In the section "Gay and Lesbian Cinema," Peter Steven has assembled what can only be described as a primer for a complex and often painful attempt to re-educated hetros. A discussion between Tom Waugh in the Gay and Left corner and Chuck Kleinham in the Straight and Left corner, introduces the section. The three other articles in this section help establish both a critique of Hollywood and a brief introduction to the best known (American) films by lesbians.

The final section of *Jump Cut* contains some of the best writings of the book. "Radical Third World Cinema" offers Clyde Taylor's overview of the production and use of Third World cinema. He makes the important point that "Third World cinema" is a first-world description (or ghetto); not one which the filmmakers use to describe their own work. Teshome H. Gabriel contributes a detailed and succinct reading of *Xala* and the films of Ousmane Sembene, which is extremely valuable for its insight into the cultural codes of Semebene and his countrymen. Two pieces on Cuban cinema are valuable simply because they give a perspective on the value of film to revolutionary cultures, especially those that are within the broadcast distance of the big "A", Amerika. Rounding out this section is a piece that reflects the editor's concern that activists use film and film criticism. Julia Lesage's plug "For Our Urgent Use: Films on Central America" is appropriate and timely.

What else can I say? I'm for *Jump Cutting*. By the way a jump cut is (1) an abrupt transition between shots that jars the viewers sense of continuity; (2) the violation of the cannons of spatial, temporal, and graphic continuity to disorient the spectator; (3) a magazine; and (4) now a book.

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Confessions of an Albino Terrorist

by Breyton Breytenbach
London: Faber and Faber, 1984

Victorian Prison Lives: English Prison Biography, 1830-1914

by Philip Priestly
London: Methuen, 1985

Prison is such a demeaning, sickening, inhuman experience that the question 'why read prison accounts?' often seems like asking why any new reading would do more than say, yet again, that prison is demeaning, sickening, inhuman.

Some stories are told and told again and some experiences are lived afresh each generation. Whatever social structures we think of, there are none which have not sent people away to a place that was beyond everyday routines of society, places to which people were confined because they were considered to be immoral, or feckless, or mischievous, or anti-social or incompetent, or just plain wicked (and all of these sentences vary in their meaning from society to society). Thus reading prison literature contains within it an exercise in understanding the various societies that have created prison as a solution to their own problems of marginality. And it is an important aspect of the literature of incarceration. We read to understand the commonality of discourse or the occasions for a discourse which would allow Socrates or Genet or Gramsci or Wilde or St John the Divine or Jack the Ripper or Caryl Chessman to have anything to say to each other. Whatever reason people had for getting there, the shock of recognition of the space that has to be inhabited is common to all. Prison denies sociability -- rather, it imposes a false sociability -- it stops us in the tracks of an everyday routine, it forces us to confront the others with whom we would never otherwise choose to be associated. If there is any objective, universalistic ethic in the world, it is the universalism of incarceration -- much stronger than class, or religion or race, it forces the recognition that we were/are *there*. Francoise Villon or Boethius, Victor Serge or Solzhenitzyn, Angela Davis or Vaclev Havel speak the same language of finitude, of decimation -- of escape? But if there is a common language, rhetoric, ambience, then the real question relates to how do we make sense of the different telling of the stories (because clearly the stories are told differently)?

Breytenbach, for example, confesses to being an addict to prison stories but, addict that he is, locates us in the only one story that he can tell well -- his own, as an Afrikaans writer gun-running for the African National Congress in South Africa, sprung from jail by Francois Mitterand because of Breytenbach's Vietnamese wife. An improbable tale? All prison stories are improbable. An Afrikaans friend of mine, also a member of ANC, was locked up both by Botha in South Africa and Rajv Gandhi in India, because he didn't fit in either sides definition of what was right: the international conspiracy of the super-moralists, who would define us all as being what they are not. But, meanwhile, the prison.

How do we tell a prison story? How do we make sense of other peoples' prison stories? On one level we tell the story as it comes, because this story is more important than other stories -- hence Solzhenitzyn's aggrandisement of the Gulag to himself or Oscar Wilde's or Genet's definition of the prison as the ultimate release of the psyche. *This* story, my story, is more important than other stories because my presence made the telling so important. And who are we to quibble with that? We read their stories because of their presence at a particular place and moment in time which created the occasion for importance. Some stories stand after the moment, some may not. Breytenbach's autobiography/social history/sociological account should stand on its own, but may be eclipsed when Nelson Mandela's memoirs finally become available. After all, Mandela has been over twenty years behind bars, Breytenbach a mere four. But one suspects that Breytenbach is doing something to redefine prison, as the metaphor of the world, while Mandela's book will be more a piece of instant news, an autobiography of place/person, used in a specific political context, than to be forgotten. (Who reads former Anglican archbishop Trevor Huddleson's *Naught for your Comfort* any more, now that Tutu has taken over?)

There are, of course, other prisoners, who are locked up for "everyday crimes," who write their accounts instead of masturbating in the corner or trying to blow up the north cell block. How do we read their accounts? How are their accounts meant to be read by those of us who are not part of the grapevine, nor even part of the incarceration process? Who are they written for? These two questions (for the moment) go unanswered. Instead Philip Priestley tries to answer another question: how should we try to read them against our own experiences? What Priestley does is to argue that the experience of incarceration is a story which has been told again and again. Why not take all the tellings as if they were a composite whole and write a collective autobiography in which all the prisoners, together, create a story which we can all accept as the version of the truth that we all want to know about?

He does, much as Victor Serge did in *Men In Prison* (which Priestley does not quote or even refer to), take the everyday experiences as the moment for understanding what goes on. (Serge, had to sneak his accounts page by page out of the prison, thus providing a story which could be assembled in any order). Priestley has the advantage of sequence and distance. His recycling of old stories starts with "Into Prison" and ends with "Release," as if any inmate ever really has "release." Thus Priestley's segment is bounded by the walls. Such a reading of the composite autobiography affects his use of sources and his reading of the everyday. The outside world impinges on these accounts encapsulated by the sense of being there, but not coming from anywhere. In a chapter entitled "Prisoners," which has sub-headings like "Women," "Gentleman Prisoners," "The Working Classes," "The Criminal Classes," he shows little sense of social or class history, though surely the stories speak through his framing of them. Contemporary historical research (as in Gareth Stedman Jones' work, or that of the History Workshop) has passed Priestley by, though he does contribute to our knowledge of the politics of space. There are, of course, some good stories, but that is in the nature of the exercise. Anyone who has been locked up or who has chosen exile has many good stories to tell. The important issue is what do they mean? Unfortunately Priestley's account gives us no sense of meaning or even of reading, and he has fudged the only real metaphor that informs his book -- the composite autobiography. The story that he wants to tell starts outside prison and goes on outside it. In this sense Breytenbach's account is quite innovative. It projects the external into the internal, it throws the internal experience back in the face of those who defined the reason for incarceration, it provides a subjective account of the self in jail.

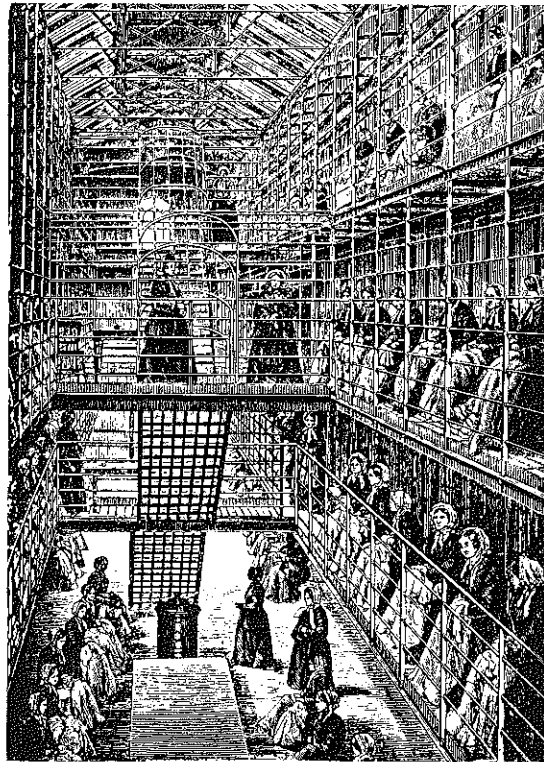
It asks all the important questions. For that it is the classic book (after Serge) on what the experience of prison is about anyway. It invites discourse. Priestley's book is important for one reason, and it is provided by Breytenbach when he comments, at the end, that

"When you are interested in prison accounts as a genre you will soon see that prisons are pretty much the same the world over. It is rather the peculiar relationship of power-repression which seems immutable, wherever you may hide . . . The least all of us can do -- the marginal ones, the outcasts, the displaced persons, the immigrant workers, citizens of our various countries -- is to expose all the intelligent services and the spy organs and security or political police and the secret societies of the world."

By using autobiography as a collective effort, Priestley seems to address that issue. The structure of his book gives us productions which we will have to rework via another discourse in order to understand why prisons are not only an important part of our social narrative but why the use of narrative itself is an important part of our ongoing discourses.

Priestley tries to let the prison stories speak out to us, without, as it were, the hyphen that would make the bridge or the incision. But, of course, he has framed his stories in a particular way that requires our own retelling. We, like Breytenbach, create the hyphen.

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Female convicts at work in Brixton Prison