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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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The Floodgates of Anarchy

Some Highlights from the Anarchist Press

Don Alexander

Reports of the July 1988 Toronto anarchist "unconvention," which exploded on the front pages of Canadian newspapers and in television footage, were the first indications many people had that a vibrant, militant, political movement had been building in North America in the deceptively complacent and conservative political climate of the 1980s.

In the publishing world too, there is evidence of increasing anarchist activity. As editors of *Kick It Over*, a magazine with a promiscuous exchange policy, we receive anarchist publications from Japan, Germany, Italy, Korea, Australia, Greece, England, Sweden, Uruguay and France, among others.

Debates carried out in the anarchist press are usually confined to the limited readership of anarchist publications. A recent debate about ecology marks a departure from this; it has spilled over into the rest of the left media, most notably the *Nation*, and the *Utne Reader*. It even provoked a story in *The Globe and Mail*.

The debate went from a simmer to a boil when *Kick It Over* reprinted an excerpt from an interview published in an Australian magazine with Earth First! leader Dave Foreman. Foreman, an exponent of "deep ecology," argued that Ethiopians should be allowed to starve ("let nature take its course"), and that Central American refugees should be forbidden from entering the U.S. and using up "our" resources. The editors criticised the reactionary and superficial analysis that this represented and invited deep ecologists to respond.

Initially, the deep ecologists did not take up the challenge, but Murray Bookchin and Janet Biehl, two "left Greens" from Vermont, used Foreman's remarks as the basis for two highly critical articles circulated at the "National Green Gathering" held in July 1987 at Amherst, Massachusetts. These articles were later reprinted in *Kick It Over*, provoking a storm of letters, pro and con.

The debate in *Kick It Over* has

since shifted to the question of "spirituality." A follow-up essay by Biehl, "The Politics of Myth" — also published in *Kick It Over* — was critical of neo-paganism and "goddess worship," and drew outraged responses from individuals who abhorred what they felt to be Biehl's intolerant and "hyper-rational" views.

Kick It Over was not the only anarchist journal to carry the ecology debate. *Fifth Estate*, a Detroit-based publication which is now in its 24th year, produced a special issue, entitled "How Deep is Deep Ecology?," which rigorously dissected many of deep ecology's advocates' more misanthropic statements. The issue, which is being reprinted as a book, has recently been followed up by another special issue — "The Return of the Son of Deep Ecology."

The more "high-brow" anarchist publications have also gotten in on the act. Both *Our Generation*, a scholarly anarchist journal produced out of Montréal, and *The Raven*, *Our Generation's* British equivalent, have published pieces by Bookchin dealing with deep ecology and ecological philosophy.

Another issue which has attracted less interest outside anarchist circles (except perhaps with law enforcement agencies) is the issue of tactics of social change, particularly the use of violence. While all anarchists abhor the nation-state, there are many different opinions as to how anarchist social change will come about. Anarchists come in many flavours: anarcho-pacifists, anarcho-feminists, anarcho-syndicalists and "anarcho-cyclists" (urban bicycle activists). There are green anarchists, punk anarchists, even so-called "terrorist" anarchists.

When the Litton factory in Toronto was bombed by Direct Action in early 1983, one of the first anarchist publications to respond was *Kick It Over*. It devoted several pages in each of three issues to the bombing, subsequent arrests, and harassment of Direct Action supporters. Whereas one

manifesto denounced the bombing as "Vanguard Terror vs. State Terror," another declared that the bombing had forced the peace movement to consider alternatives to its sterile reformism. The views of those arrested ("The Vancouver Five," later convicted of the bombing and, by then, residing in prison) were solicited as well, and were published in interview form.

The Vancouver-based *Open Road*, which has declined in frequency in recent years, also published major articles on the subject. In addition to "Litton and the left," assessing the radicalising effects of the action, *Open Road* recently published "The Politics of Bombs," which suggested that the Vancouver Five were too timid in their approach. This, in turn, elicited both denunciations of the article and repudiations of guerilla activity as a viable strategy.

The issue of violence arose again when the demonstration on the last day of the Toronto "unconvention" degenerated into violence between demonstrators and cops. *Ecomedia*, a bi-weekly Toronto street sheet, published an enthusiastic editorial, "This Time We Retaliate" (which was followed up with a special insert next issue offering alternative views), while an article in *Kick It Over* suggested that making militant demonstrations a standard feature of anarchist gatherings was tantamount to imposing the views of a faction of anarchists on the whole movement. Other letters and articles in *Kick It Over* suggested that militant resistance to the cops had a therapeutic value and helped in the self-definition of anarchist politics, while others argued that it merely reinforced tendencies for anarchists to remain in their own hermetically sealed political ghetto.

Kick It Over, *Open Road* and *Fifth Estate* have been around for eight, 13 and 24 years, respectively. In recent years, however, they have been joined by a new generation of anarchist publications, edited by people in their late teens and early twenties. These younger activists, many of whom were involved in organising the

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Fifth Estate

Toronto's Anarchist Bi-Weekly
Ecomedia
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REALITY
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KICK IT OVER®

"unconvention," produce impressive-looking publications. Two of particular note are *Reality Now* and *Ecomedia*, which have overlapping editorial groups.

Reality Now is published on an irregular basis and consists of unedited submissions on native issues, animal rights, personal politics, and prisoner solidarity. *Ecomedia* is the aforementioned street sheet which is distributed free at various locations around Toronto. It highlights instances of direct action from around the world, and celebrates resistance in myriad forms. With the exception of *Open Road*, the older publications tend to be more theoretical, and less enthusiastic about violent activities than their younger counterparts, while the latter feel that more action, and less talk, is needed.

This difference in emphasis emerged in a critical letter sent by the editors of the *Fifth Estate* to *Reality Now*, commenting on *RN*'s seemingly uncritical support for "liberation movements" in Central America and elsewhere. The editors responded by suggesting that it was better to earn the trust of the oppressed, even while having doctrinal reservations, than to merely sit on the sidelines and develop the "perfect" analysis.

The theme of what stand to take toward hierarchically structured "liberation movements" has long been a bone of contention for anarchists and anti-authoritarian leftists in general. The diversity of views has found its clearest expression in the debate around Nicaragua. There are three main schools of thought. *Fifth Estate* believes that the conflict in Nicaragua (now nearly over) was a "capitalist civil war" — with the Sandinistas representing state capital (*à la* Cuba and eastern Europe) and the contras representing U.S. capital and the west. A second group sees this point of view as totally reductionist. While they don't deny that the Sandinistas want to set up a bureaucratic authoritarian state (and cite suppression of the labour movement as evidence of this), they claim that the

Nicaraguan revolution was a real revolution and that the Sandinistas have not yet achieved complete hegemony. And, finally, there are those who advocate limited support for the Sandinistas, claiming that the F.S.L.N. is not monolithically Marxist-Leninist and may yet yield a relatively democratic society. These views were debated with great passion and sophistication in the now-defunct anarchist journal *No Middle Ground*. The debate continues in *New Politics*, a forum for a variety of views, including those of anarchists.

While the writing in the new anarchist publications isn't as elegant or the layout as appealing as in the long-established journals, their editors are speaking to a new generation of activists who have their own unique concerns, which are better expressed in forums produced by their peers. Fortunately, interchange occurs between the generations. Many common themes appear in both kinds of publications, with each side maintaining a healthy respect for the other's work. Unlike the old left/new left split of the 1960s, anarchism of the late 1980s seems big enough to encompass both the young and those who forged their politics in the struggles of the sixties.

Don Alexander is a member of the Kick It Over editorial collective.

JOURNALS DISCUSSED

Ecomedia, P.O. Box 915, Station F, Toronto, Ontario, M4Y 2N9. Free in Toronto; twenty-six issues for \$15.00 (mailed).

Fifth Estate, P.O. Box 02548, Detroit, Michigan, 48202, U.S.A. Four issues for \$7.00 (U.S.).

Kick It Over, P.O. Box 5811, Station A, Toronto, Ontario, M5W 1P2. Four issues for \$7.50.

New Politics, P.O. Box 98, Brooklyn, New York, 11231, U.S.A. Individual copies are \$6.00 (U.S.).

Open Road, P.O. Box 6135, Station G, Vancouver, B.C., V6R 4G5. Four issues for two hours' pay.

Our Generation, 3981 boulevard St-Laurent, Montréal, P.Q., H2W 1Y5. Two issues for \$14.00 (\$10.00 students).

Reality Now, P.O. Box 6326, Station A, Toronto, Ontario, M5W 1P7. Four issues for \$8.00.

The Raven, 84b, Whitechapel High Street, London, E1 U.K. Write for subscription rates.

For regular reviews of alternative publications (including anarchist) see:

Factsheet Five, c/o Gunderloy, 6 Arizona Avenue, Rensselaer, N.Y., 12144-4502, U.S.A. \$2.00 (U.S.) per issue (can order up to 4 issues in advance).

From *Reality Now*,
Spring 1989



Doctor's Orders

The Regulation of Naturopathy

Cellan Jay

Consumers, government, and especially nurses, of late, have been becoming more and more critical of mainstream medicine. For all its costliness and ever-increasing technical sophistication, our health care system does not seem to be making us any healthier. The latest buzzword is prevention. Doctors now routinely urge their patients to quit smoking, exercise, and adopt a healthier diet. Where 20 years ago the nervous patient, especially if she was a woman, might have been automatically prescribed Valium, now her doctor will probably ask her how much coffee she drinks. Even the Ontario College of Physicians and Surgeons, never known for its radicalism, has paid lip service to this new creed by encouraging patients to boycott pharmacies which sell tobacco products when filling their prescriptions. It is ironic then that naturopathy, an alternative health care practice which focuses on prevention, may be about to receive a serious blow in Ontario. The Ontario Ministry of Health is currently considering draft legislation which, if implemented, would dismantle the Board of Directors of Drugless Therapy-Naturopathy, the body which now regulates the profession of naturopathy in Ontario and is responsible for ensuring quality of service. Naturopathy is no stranger to organised efforts to undermine its legitimacy as a health care alternative.

The forerunners of today's naturopaths flourished throughout the mid to late 19th century. By the early 20th century, however, the antecedents of modern medical doctors had largely succeeded in destroying them through powerful lobbying for a system of licensing which ensured that only their own practitioners were given the right to practise medicine. The Thomsonian herbalists, hydropaths, eclectics and homeopaths, like their contemporary naturopaths, believed in the body's natural ability to heal itself. "Nature must be the Captain, and we must be her well-disciplined and obedient servants. She must hang out the indications and we must second her efforts." So wrote Dr. R.J. Smith, a hydrotherapist and homeopathic doctor practising in Toronto in the 1850s. The early medical doctors, or allopaths as they were called — from *allos* meaning other and referring to the treatment of disease by inducing an opposite condition — practised "heroic medicine." They believed that

what was needed in times of illness was strong medicine capable of overwhelming the recalcitrant body and beating its symptoms into submission. Two common allopathic treatments were bloodletting with leeches and heavy dosing with mercury.

True to its "heroic" origins, medicine's focus is still on radical interventions through the use of drugs and surgery once pathological changes have already begun to occur in the body. Naturopaths, on the other hand, seek to prevent disease from developing in the first place. According to naturopathic theory, pathological disease results when cell nourishment and elimination have been dysfunctional over an extended period of time. Naturopathic treatments are designed to ensure that these two basic functions are carried out with maximum efficiency. A naturopath might recommend dietary adjustment or supplements in order to promote digestion and elimination; vitamins to correct an imbalance caused by stress; or a natural anti-bacterial botanical like garlic. He or she might recommend a fast: when not employed in digestion, the body has a chance to clear away accumulated waste material and concentrate on organ regeneration. Many naturopaths use homeopathic remedies — infinitesimal doses of substances which in overdose would cause similar symptoms to those the person is seeking treatment for. Like all naturopathic treatments, homeopathic remedies work to stimulate the body's own healing forces.

The differences between medicine and naturopathy are evinced in the conceptual language they use. We have all said at one time or another, "I've come down with a cold," as though we were soldiers felled by an enemy. Or we may try to "fight off a cold" with various drugstore preparations. Invaded by the enemy virus, our bodies become the enemy. But according to naturopathy, an occasional flu or cold is a "healing crisis" — evidence of the body's continuing efforts to rid itself of toxic substances. If I suppress these acute symptoms with drugs, I am only more likely to develop the chronic functional disorders which indicate my "vital response" — the total energy I have available to maintain equilibrium — is significantly impaired. The very language of naturopathy teaches us to trust and respect our bodies.

Like all doctors, my doctor was trained



Water Treading

primarily in the identification and classification of pathological diseases and in methods to suppress and contain symptoms. When I went to her a few years ago because I was depressed and tired and felt nauseous after eating, she gave me a simple blood test and told me there was nothing wrong with me. A naturopath diagnosed my problem as severe food sensitivities: a period of great stress in my life coupled with years of coffee and cigarette addiction had so weakened my system that I was reacting to ordinary foods as though they were a toxic threat. Naturopathy is most successful in treating precisely the illnesses that medicine has no answers for — the non-systemic illnesses like mine; chronic functional illnesses like arthritis, asthma, bronchitis and pre-menstrual syndrome; and the immunological disorders that are becoming more common like Epstein-Barr and ecological illness. These are all conditions which indicate the body is struggling to maintain balance, and if left unresolved each can lead to an acute disease condition — cancer, for example. I couldn't have become well without the dietary changes my naturopath recommended. And the information she gave me that enabled me to restore my own health wasn't available anywhere else. Naturopathy offers one of the few alternatives to the "learn to live with it" that many people have heard from their doctors.

The availability and quality of naturopathic care in Ontario will be threatened if the recommendations contained in the draft legislation developed by the Health Professions Legislation Review committee are made law. First, the profession's regulatory body — the Board of Directors of Drugless Therapy-Naturopathy — will be dismantled. This body currently exists by virtue of the Drugless Practitioners Act which empowers it to establish educational requirements for naturopaths in Ontario (three years of standard pre-med university study, followed by four years at a college of naturopathy), set provincial examinations for graduating naturopaths, license naturopaths who meet the standards established by the Board, and deal with complaints against practising naturopaths. Second, the recommendations of the review committee set out thirteen "licensed acts" which only specified regulated professions will be able to perform. Naturopaths will be potentially open to prosecution for practising any of these licensed acts.

Under deregulation naturopathy will lose its legally constituted power to set educational requirements and professional standards and to discipline members who fail to meet these standards. People with complaints about treatment they have received will have no recourse other than the courts. Only those with the most serious complaints, as well as the necessary financial resources, would be likely to take this route. The deterioration in the quality of care this will lead to will be compounded under deregulation by the loss of the protected status of the title "N.D." — Doctor of Naturopathy. Under deregulation the good name naturopathy has built up will be fair game for anyone, whether they've



The Back Affusion



The Upper Affusion



The Thigh Affusion

ever studied naturopathy or not. At the present time, naturopathy is included in many private insurance schemes in Ontario. Naturopathic treatments will likely be dropped from these packages under deregulation for the message from the government, intended or not, is that naturopathy is not worthy of recognition because it is of no benefit. And any chance naturopathy might have had of one day being covered by provincial health insurance will be completely destroyed by deregulation. Without insurance coverage many people who would otherwise choose naturopathic care will not be able to do so. Naturopathic consultations are not inexpensive — they can cost up to 80 dollars per visit.

Naturopaths are also concerned that the proposed legislation will leave them open to prosecution. Under the draft bill "diagnosis" becomes a licensed act which can only be practised by M.D.s. The government has given assurances that naturopaths will still be able to "assess" their patients' conditions. But there is a very fine line between "diagnosis" — communicating a conclusion about a disease state — and "assessment" — making an evaluation as to whether or not a treatment within the practitioner's scope of practice is appropriate. These vague definitions will make naturopaths vulnerable to harassment. They will be required to practise with the constant uncertainty of never knowing when they are crossing the line, which can only negatively affect the quality of their care.

The use of needle acupuncture, too, may be threatened. Although the review committee recommended that it not be made a licensed act, there is no guarantee the provincial government will follow this recommendation. "Performing invasive instrumentation ... beyond the anal verge" becomes a licensed act and may bar naturopaths from performing colonic irrigation. And the restriction on prescribing drugs, i.e., any substance used to treat or prevent any disorder or symptom, to specified regulated professions, makes it questionable whether naturopaths will be free to continue prescribing nutritional supplements, botanicals and homeopathic remedies.

The stated rationale behind these recommendations is the protection of the public interest. Linda Bohnen, counsel

with the Ontario Ministry of Health and a member of the review committee, says that it would be misleading to the public to regulate naturopathy because this would suggest that what naturopaths do is of such a nature that standards can be legislated. Bohnen says this is not the case — that naturopathy is not based on a coherent body of knowledge and is therefore not amenable to the establishment or enforcement of standards of practice.

I presume by this she means that the effectiveness of naturopathic treatments in many cases has not been scientifically proved. This is true, but it is also true that sometimes medical treatments become popular without ever having been scientifically proved to be effective. For example, the tonsillectomy, popular in the fifties as a cure-all for kids with chronic throat and ear infections, has been utterly discounted. Rather than using this lack of scientific proof as a reason for de-regulating the profession, it would benefit the public more to invest some resources into conducting needed scientific investigation into naturopath treatments.

Moreover, the conclusion that naturopathy is unscientific and thus of no value betrays a failure to appreciate what is in fact naturopathy's strength. Naturopathy does not share medicine's one disease-one cause-one cure approach. Medicine's focus on finding the single bacterial cause of a disease and developing a drug which specifically destroys those bacteria has been invaluable in developing penicillin, for example. But what we are largely dying of now are not the infectious diseases that were once the major cause of death but rather the so-called lifestyle diseases — cancer and heart disease. These diseases do not originate from a single cause. The best way to deal with them is to not get them in the first place. What many medical doctors and the authors of the draft legislation now under consideration see as naturopathy's weakness — its trial and error or ad hoc approach to dealing with symptoms — is its strength. Treatments like herbal remedies are subtle and diffuse and can affect different people in different ways. All naturopathic treatments work to strengthen the body's ability to heal itself, and thus a single botanical may be appropriate for a wide range of different problems. Although the efficacy of any particu-

lar naturopathic treatment may be more difficult to assess because its action on the body is generalised rather than specific, this does not mean these treatments do not work.

Pat Wales, president of the Ontario Naturopathic Association, predicts there will be a drain of Ontario naturopaths to provinces where the profession is regulated — Saskatchewan, Manitoba and especially British Columbia where naturopathic treatments have been covered by provincial health insurance since the early sixties. Deregulation will mean, as well as the possibility that naturopaths may be charged with practising medicine without a licence, a sort of chipping away at the professional dignity of individual practitioners. This won't be conducive to creating the kind of climate that attracts either new practitioners or new consumers.

Naturopathy is one of the few health care practices that is entirely concerned with prevention. It teaches people how to take care of themselves and maintain their own health. The profession is a natural ally of environmental groups, self-help groups, and other grass-roots organisations seeking to empower individuals and work for social and environmental change. It challenges medical hegemony and provides a legitimate alternative for people sick of taking "doctor's orders." Government regulation is the only way that the quality of naturopathic care can be maintained at a high standard, the only way to protect naturopaths from being prosecuted for practising medicine without a licence, and the only way to ensure that health-care consumers have a choice.

Cellan Jay is a graduate student at York University.

FURTHER READING

Rachlis, Michael, M.D. and Carol Kushner. *Second Opinion: What's Wrong with Canada's Health Care System and How To Fix It.* Toronto: Collins, 1989.

Trattler, Dr. Ross. *Better Health Through Natural Living.* McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1985.

Turner, Roger Newman. *Naturopathic Medicine: Treating the Whole Person.* Wellingborough, Northamptonshire: Thorsons Publishers Limited, 1984.

Hydrotherapy illustrations from a 19th-century health manual. (*The Natural Method of Healing* by F.E. Bilz, 1898.)

BEWARE

AIDS

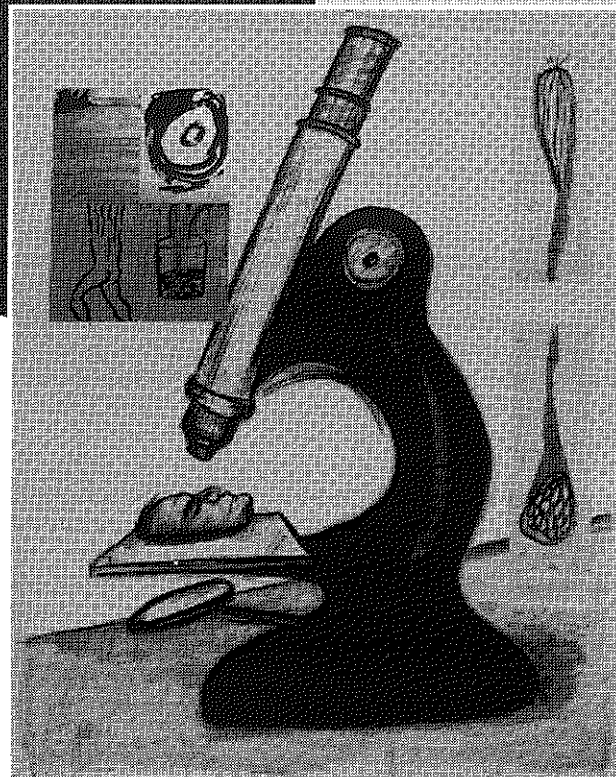
BUTZWORDS

When we talk and write about AIDS, it is important that we avoid words that do not say what we mean. These AIDS buzzwords misinform, insult and promote ignorance. The following list has been compiled by the Toronto group AIDS Action Now!, with the help of the Canadian AIDS Society and ACT UP of New York City.

AIDS victim. "As a person with AIDS, I can attest to the sense of diminishment at seeing and hearing myself constantly referred to as an AIDS victim, an AIDS sufferer, an AIDS case — as anything but what I am, a person with AIDS. I am a person with a condition. I am not that condition." (Max Navarre)

AIDS patient. This refers to a person's relationship to a doctor, not to their identity. Preferred terminology: Person Living with AIDS (P.L.W.A.) or Person with AIDS (P.W.A.).

General population. This term marginalises the communities where AIDS was first identified — most notably people of colour and gay men. All people with AIDS are part of the "general population."



Andy Fabo, *Examining the Subject*, 1989
Courtesy of Garnet Press, Toronto

High risk groups. This implies that some people or communities are more susceptible to AIDS than others. There are no high risk groups — only high risk activities.

AIDS virus. H.I.V. is thought by many people to be the virus that either causes AIDS or is an important co-factor in the development of AIDS. Testing positive to H.I.V. does not mean that a person has AIDS or will necessarily develop AIDS, nor does it mean that they are an "AIDS carrier." Those who test positive to H.I.V. antibodies should be referred to as H.I.V. positive (H.I.V.+).

AIDS test. There are many different tests associated with AIDS and H.I.V. infection. What people usually mean when they refer to the AIDS test is an H.I.V. antibody test. This is not an AIDS test.

Intimate sexual contact/having sex. These are vague terms often used to describe how H.I.V. can be spread from one person to another. It is

much more useful to say that anal or vaginal intercourse (fucking) without a condom poses the greatest threat of exposure to HIV. There are many intimate sexual activities that pose no threat of exposure.

Condoms. Suggestions for the use of condoms for safe sex should specify the use of latex (not lamb membrane) condoms, with a water-based lubricant such as K-Y or Lubafax. Condoms used in anal intercourse without additional lubricant are likely to break.

Body fluids. The fluids that we are talking about here are blood, semen and vaginal fluids. They carry H.I.V. in sufficient concentration to be transmitted. Sweat, saliva and tears do not. This should always be specified.

I.V. (intravenous) drug addict/abuser. Any attempt to give information on AIDS should be done without value judgments. The term "injection drug user" should therefore be used.

Survival Research

General Release

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Anyone entering Mark Pauline's show at Artspace in San Francisco last summer had to sign the above release. Mark Pauline is an inventor and performance artist, and founder of the "machine performance" group Survival

Research Laboratories. For more information on Mark Pauline, see the "Industrial Culture" issue of Re/Search. See also the homage in William Gibson's recent science fiction novel, *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (1988).



WHOSE BODIES

Cultural Struggles Around Abortion¹

B. Lee, photographs by Left Eye

Starting Points: Images and Actions

What images have defined the abortion struggle in the popular culture and media? Is it the right to life "sidewalk counsellor" proffering his plastic foetus to women going to clinics in an attempt to show them the error of their ways?

Or is it the thousands of women and men who have taken to the streets in support of women's right to make the decision for themselves? What images symbolise the breadth of this determination and resistance?

What myriad medical, legal, moral, official and feminist discourses have defined and constructed the issues of abortion and reproductive health care? Where do women speak in these discourses? What is missing from the following?

How do we put women back in the picture — literally and politically? How do we keep the focus on women's condition, experiences and needs?

The long struggle for abortion rights has never solely been about winning free and equal access to abortion and all other needed reproductive health care for women. Like so many other key political conflicts, it is also a struggle around representation. This essay explores how the reproductive rights movement has been trying to challenge and transform the framing of the "abortion question" within the media and dominant culture. It explores the institutions and narratives we have confronted in the symbolic battle over the meaning of abortion, and how we have tried to build a positive and popular discourse of reproductive freedom and women's empowerment.

The Politics of Abortion

Abortion has been one of the most heated points of conflict between the contemporary women's movement and the state and conservative right. It has also been an area of significant feminist advance: the pro-choice movement has been able to overturn (at least for the moment) the oppressive and inequitable federal law on abortion; free-standing clinics have been estab-

lished in a number of cities and more are on the way; the notion of choice is firmly embedded in the public consciousness; inequitable and inadequate access to abortion has come to be seen as a major problem for women's health and well-being; and about three-quarters of the population support the idea that women should be able to decide for themselves whether or not to have an abortion. The long struggle to win full and equal access to abortion and all the other reproductive care women need is far from over, but significant gains have been made.²

However, the struggle for reproductive rights has taken place on very hostile ideological terrain. Pervasive conservative ideologies of gender and sexuality, motherhood and familialism, remain the vital context for the meaning of abortion. Few of the thousands upon thousands of women who have had abortions feel comfortable to publicly acknowledge it. (If they had, would this not have immeasurably strengthened the pro-choice movement?) Many people who support access to abortion do not see it as an unqualified right, essential to women being able to control their lives, but rather as an unfortunate

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necessity legitimate only in certain circumstances. Others disapprove of abortion as "a means of birth control" or for reasons of "convenience." And the powerful symbol of the foetus overshadows the entire debate.

Why have the discourses around abortion remained so harsh and unforgiving? How can we escape the ideological strait-jacket of motherhood and selfless femininity to define the debate around abortion in feminist terms? How can we forge a new feminist cultural politics that celebrates reproductive freedom? These are the questions addressed here. First of all, I want to survey the competing discourses and key points of ideological conflict around abortion.

Competing Discourses: Whose Bodies/ Whose Rights/Whose Lives

A feminist discourse of reproductive freedom starts from the basic premise that being able to control their reproductive and sexual lives is a precondition of

women's liberation and autonomy. The fundamental goals of the reproductive rights movement have been to win the conditions needed to ensure this reproductive freedom for all women and in so doing to transform and revolutionise the very way in which reproduction is socially organised. The goal is nothing less than women's empowerment.

To be able to control their lives women have to be able to decide when and whether they will bear children. Because available contraception is often ineffective or unsafe, abortion is indispensable to this goal; it is a vital component of health care for the full spectrum of women's reproductive lives. At the same time, access to contraception and abortion underlies heterosexual women's sexual autonomy.³

For these reasons, free and equal access to abortion is essential to women's well-being. This is much more than an abstract legal right. Women need access to abortion because of the basic way sexuality and reproduction are organised in contemporary society. It is an indispensable precondition

of women being able to control their bodies and their lives. Bodily integrity in this most fundamental sense is in turn the precondition of women's moral integrity and individual self-determination. It is "a positive and necessary enabling condition for full participation in social and communal life."⁴

Such themes present a striking contrast to the dominant discourses of state, medicine, religion and the moralist right. Medical discourses define abortion as a technical and professional problem, with physicians as the gatekeepers and adjudicators who decide whose abortions are "medically necessary." Official judicial and legislative discourses see abortion as a delicate moral problem upon which there is no social consensus; the role of the state is therefore to fashion a compromise, to regulate abortion in the interests of "society."

Within anti-abortion discourse women having abortions are often seen as victims: whether of their biology, of unscrupulous doctors, or of a rapacious male sexuality that leaves women with the consequences

WHOSE LIVES?



of sexual freedom. There actually are front groups calling themselves victims of abortion. Nowhere is the right's inability to conceive of women acting independently for their own reasons clearer.⁵

When women are not portrayed as victims they are presented as selfish and uncaring. Beneath this is the traditional assumption that women are by nature selfless nurturers. One of the primary reasons for the fervour of right-wing opposition to abortion is that it lays bare the emptiness of this traditional familialism. A woman choosing abortion is making, consciously or not, a direct and irrefutable challenge to this ideology; she is declaring that she refuses to bear a child at that point in time and that she defines her life as more than motherhood.

Foetus Fetish

Floating over all these debates about women and reproduction is the ever-present symbol of the foetus. Lawyers argue about its constitutional status and legal personhood. Doctors define the foetus as a patient — separate and distinct from the mother — and appoint themselves as its guardians in any conflicts with the "foetal environment." And, of course, the fiercest clash in the cultural conflict over abortion is with the rabidly anti-abortion "pro-life" groups (here, as elsewhere, the very terms are highly charged and contentious).

The image of the innocent and defenceless foetus has become the centrepiece of anti-choice political strategy. In its symbolic deployment by anti-choice and moral minority ideologues, the foetus has come to encode a host of powerful messages. Its destruction condenses a whole series of anxieties for the faithful: the loss of sexual

innocence, fear for the embattled family, and yearning for that mythic secure and stable past so beloved of the conservative right. The symbol of the foetus serves both as political sign and moral injunction: sign of moral decay and disorder and injunction to turn back the godless feminists and humanists — to resurrect those traditional values of motherhood, femininity and family that demanding the right to abortion so directly challenges. In these ways, the spectre of abortion and the symbol of the foetus have become powerful mobilising forces for those who fear social change and hate the feminist and other progressive movements working to bring it about.⁶

In the cultural struggle around abortion the anti-choice has had considerable success in appropriating the foetus, and the attendant symbolism of the meaning of life, as the major issue in the abortion debate. Ignoring the complexity of women's reproductive lives and experiences, this boils the abortion issue down to the simple but extremely powerful image of the foetus, a stark and dramatic image that works effectively in a visually oriented culture.⁷

Shifting the Focus: Women's Lives/ Women's Values

The problem is that abortion is not a simple question, either for society as a whole or for individual women. It does raise complex questions concerning the relationship between a woman and the potential life developing within her; the social division of labour with its rigid gender differentiation and expectations around family, childbearing, and motherhood; the many constraints and pressures that limit women's ability to bear and raise children in adequate circumstances; and the relations of power surrounding the human body in the social organisation of sexuality and reproduction. How can such complexity be captured by simple slogans or images? This section analyzes the diverse cultural and ideological issues the choice movement has tried to integrate into our politics.

We can respond, just as starkly, to the foetus fetish of the anti-choice with the symbol of the coat hanger — a powerful and unpleasant image that effectively highlights the implications of the ban on abortion the "pro-life" so fervently desires.

There are also the shocking pictures of women dead on cheap motel room floors as a result of botched illegal abortions. The slogan "Keep It Legal/ Keep It Safe" speaks to the bedrock concern of choice activists. We know that women have always resorted to abortion, often for reasons beyond their control and out of desperation rather than free choice, and they have done so under appalling conditions. We also know that illegal abortion is the leading cause of maternal death in the third world and that some 100,000 to 250,000 women world-wide die each year. To seek to ban abortions while knowing this and knowing that women will die as a result reveals the depth of "pro-life" hypocrisy and misogyny.

But we can't just respond at this level; it

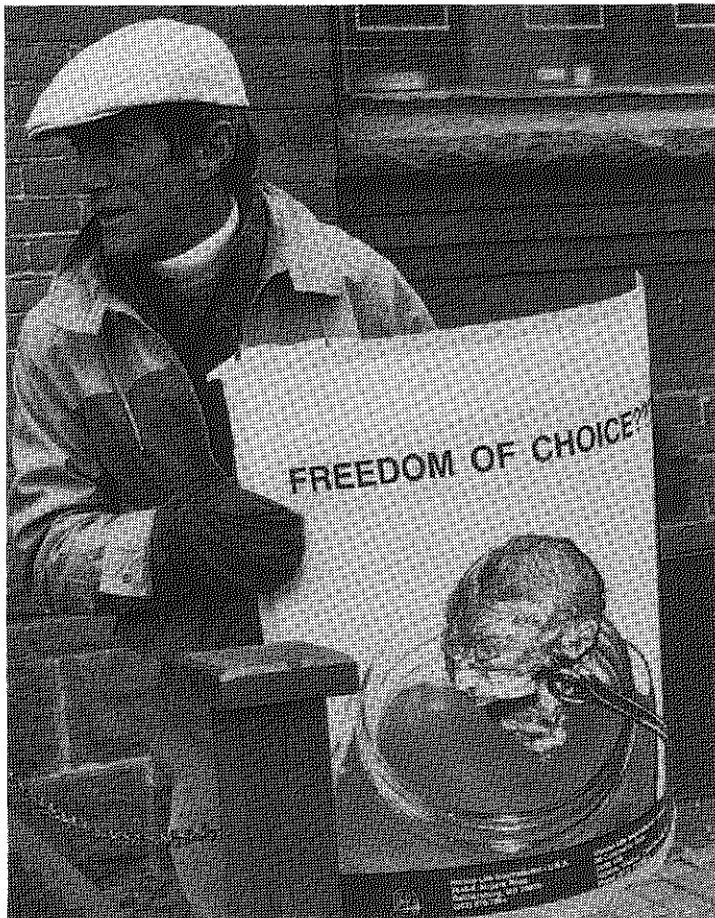
is not enough to show the ever-present danger of anti-choice goals. Their pervasive reification of the foetus is not just a matter of threatening women's lives and health if abortion were ever to be banned. Nor is the underlying ideological conflict really about the moral status and value of the foetus. In fact, there may very well be a point of consensus, shared by pro-choice and anti-choice alike, within the conflicting range of belief on abortion. It is likely that most people do feel that the potential life of the foetus should be taken seriously. But the great majority then go on to balance this potential against the immediate situation and needs of the woman facing an unwanted pregnancy. And this means that the real point at issue, and the real conflict, is over nothing less than the value of women; the value we place on women's status, needs, aspirations and autonomy.⁸

And it is this basic question that can be lost in contemporary debates. We must not allow ourselves and the broader debate to be diverted onto the question of the foetus. Above all else, we have to say clearly and strongly that women's needs and aspirations have a higher ethical and political priority than the potential life of the foetus the woman is carrying. This means directly taking on many of the key ideological notions that constrain and obstruct the social relations of reproduction. Most fundamentally, we must demand *abortion without apology*.⁹

Too many pro-choice supporters and feminists have come to speak of abortion as inevitably a tragedy; as at best an unfortunate necessity. This apologetic tone runs the very real risk of conceding the ideological terms of reference to the anti-choice: it implies that there is something intrinsically morally wrong about abortion. I would argue that we have to challenge this view directly.

Of course we prefer less invasive means of preventing and terminating unwanted pregnancies than surgical abortion. That is why we always couple our demands for improved access to abortion with the need for safe and effective forms of contraception. That is why we want to explore the potential of new developments such as RU486, a pill which seems to safely and effectively terminate pregnancies early on. But for now, and for the foreseeable future, abortion is an indispensable means of women controlling their fertility. We must not shy away from this central importance.

We would never want to ignore the ambivalence and occasional remorse that some women feel around their abortions. But we must understand these feelings in the proper context of a culture that places tremendous pressure on women to conform to maternalist and familial ideological expectations and a health care system that makes access to abortion burdensome for all women and horrendously difficult for far too many. We can admit the emotional complexity of abortion while at the same time clarifying the conditions in which it would not occupy a problematic position in women's lives: free and equal access to all reproductive health care, women-centred centres and services in



which abortion is integrated with counselling and services on all other facets of reproduction, and a transformed culture of reproduction in which abortion is no longer viewed so negatively but is seen as one part of the overall continuum of women's reproductive choices.

We often speak of women making their decisions out of desperation, from strikingly unequal material positions and from a realm of sexual relations that is starkly oppressive. All of this is true, but is there also a danger of overemphasising the degradation and inequality women face? For some, making the decision to have an abortion and overcoming all the obstacles women routinely face can be a positive act of individual will and courage against powerful institutional and cultural obstacles. For some women it may be a key experience in taking control of their lives.

We should also remember the huge number of women who have abortions for their own reasons and the even larger number who support the right of women to make their own decisions. While less visible than activists would hope for, this collective action and belief amounts to a significant transgression of the deep-seated norms of femininity and maternalism that envelop abortion and reproduction.¹⁰

A feminist discourse of abortion without apology can also be part of the challenge to a broad complex of narratives centred on women's bodies: discourses around biology, femininity, motherhood, nurturance, family and privacy. Perhaps most fundamentally for contemporary political conflicts, political and ideological conflict around abortion and sexuality are inextricably linked and abortion has come to play a key role in the moral regulation of sexuality.¹¹ Abortion is certainly central to the wider political agenda of the "pro-family" conservative right. The spectre that drives them to distraction is that of women seeking pleasure in autonomous and self-defined sexual lives. At its crudest the right wants women who are sexually active to pay for their sins; this is at the root of the incredibly punitive attitude to women seeking abortion that pervades anti-choice philosophy. They hope that the threat of unwanted pregnancy will constrain women's sexuality and that making abortion inaccessible will drive women into the traditional sanctities of marriage and family. The coercive nature of "pro-family" politics is nowhere clearer.

The enemies of choice know full well that their struggle to limit abortion is really about the control of women's sexuality and we must not flinch from making this connection. We have to challenge the repressive sexual moralism the anti-choice seeks to impose. We have to say without hesitation that if abortion, as the occasional but vital back-up for contraceptive failure, is the price to pay for heterosexual women's sexual freedom — then so be it.¹²

All of this is crucial because popular struggle is never solely about demonstrations, building alliances and defying oppressive laws. Just as in women's overall fight for social equality and sexual freedom, the struggle for lesbian and gay lib-

eration and the current politics of AIDS, conflict over cultural representation is a crucial facet of the politics of abortion.¹³ A vital analytical task is to unravel and unpack the diverse discourses and assumptions that surround abortion and identify how political and ideological conflict around abortion is so central to issues ranging from family, children, and sexuality to the whole construction of gender relations. But we have to do more than simply understand the cultural context for abortion politics; we have to find ways of challenging and transforming the very terms of reference for the abortion debate. How effectively and imaginatively we are able to do this will very much shape the ultimate political success of the pro-choice movement.

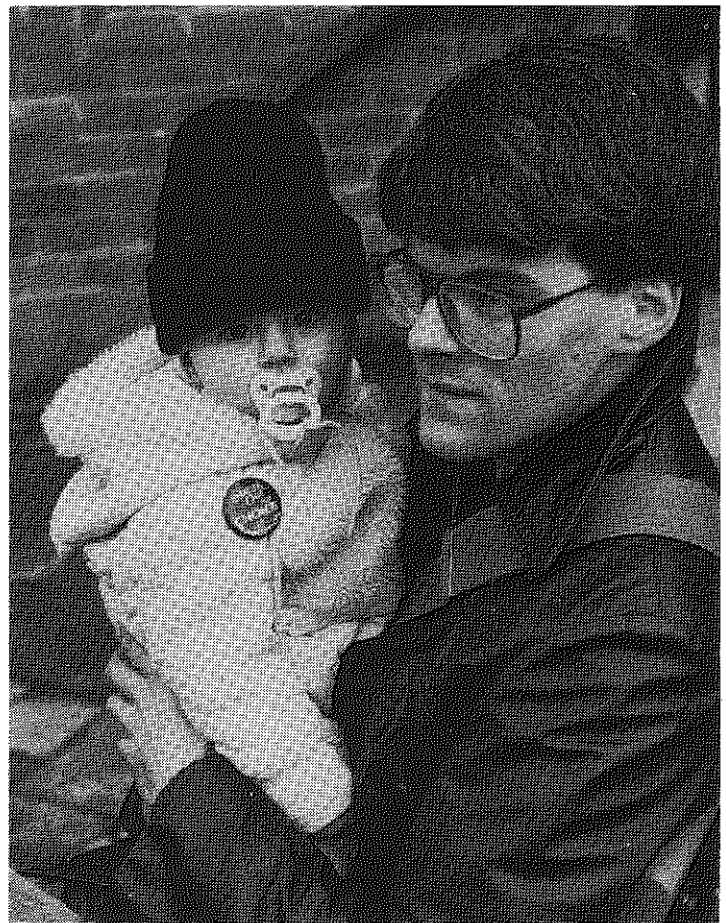
Cultural Struggle/Political Struggle: Creating a Feminist Discourse of Abortion and Reproductive Freedom

A key task is to define, popularise and communicate our vision of reproductive freedom; our positive alternative to anti-choice moralism and official state and medical discourses. I want to now explore some examples of what reproductive rights activists and others have done or could do to contest and transform the context and framework of reproductive politics.¹⁴

First of all, we have to reframe the basic abortion "question."¹⁵ We need to argue that the basic question is not under what circumstances abortion should be allowed but rather: Can we accept the higher mortality and morbidity that would result from banning abortion? Can we accept the anxiety, increased risk and inequality that result from arbitrary administrative restrictions on availability? Given that abortion is essential to women's health and well-being, how can governments fail to ensure equal and adequate access? Framed in these ways we put the pressure back on the state and anti-choice: how can they justify imposing such risks and inequities on women?

Secondly, we have to portray women choosing abortion in the full context of their life circumstances and social relationships. One of the important dangers of the anti-choice reification of the foetus is the disappearance of women from the abortion debate. The anti-choice video *The Silent Scream* has been criticised by pro-choice groups, particularly through a counter video by U.S. Planned Parenthood, as a distortion of medical facts. It is certainly that, but confining our attack to these terms ignores the video's symbolic meaning and power. We must also challenge its focus on the foetus as the primary issue in the abortion controversy. What would our counter video look like?

- In place of the image of free-floating foetuses on video screens,¹⁶ we would put women back in the story. Picture a woman quietly chatting with her counsellor about her joyfully anticipated birth and beginning to experience some connection to "her baby" as she views the image on the ultrasound screen and



feels the foetus move within her. Picture another also looking at the ultrasound as she discusses with the counsellor her appointment for an abortion. Both women are perfectly comfortable with the decision they made. The women's health centre they are meeting in is an environment that respects and facilitates both choices.

These possibilities lead to a key question: what images of wanted and unwanted pregnancies together — of women choosing abortion or birth — can we create to show the full spectrum of reproductive choices?

- A very powerful statement of the breadth of reproductive choice is made when groups of midwives and their entourage of pregnant women and babies have demonstrated outside the Morgentaler clinic to protect women's right to choose.¹⁷

Defining our Terms

We have followed the feminist tradition of "breaking the silence" on key issues affecting women. The women's movement "named" rape, wife assault and sexual harassment as symptoms of the oppressive power relations of a male dominated society rather than as the personal problems of individual "victims." We have also been relatively successful at defining access to abortion and the quality of reproductive health care as key public issues.

- Choice groups across the country organised tribunals in 1985. Women provided powerful and moving testimonies of



their own abortion stories — of the horrors of abortion in the illegal era and the continuing degradation faced in contemporary hospitals. Such “speak-outs” are another way of putting the emphasis back on women’s lives and needs.

We can draw lessons from the experience of other struggles within the reproductive rights movement. Midwives and their advocates have known full well that “reclaiming birth” has been a cultural project as well as a political challenge to medicalisation. In their struggle with obstetrical practice and, just as importantly, with medical definitions of pregnancy and birth, these movements developed alternative frameworks to understand and interpret these processes and create a counter vision of birth. They developed a whole series of metaphors for birth as a normal process which will happen in its own time, as a flow or river of life energy which women ride as a wave, as a journey or ripening, and as a harmonisation or integration of body and mind. These concepts were created to tap and represent women’s activity and challenge medical definitions of birth as crisis and pain and women as merely the environment for the baby-to-be.¹⁸

What would be our corresponding language and concepts to highlight the importance of abortion in women’s reproductive lives?¹⁹ To summarise earlier points: our themes would be women’s empowerment and self-determination. We would want to displace medical definitions and terminologies by redefining abortion in feminist terms: as an indispensable means of women being able to control their fertility, as an essential precondition of

women’s bodily integrity and as a positive enabling condition of women’s individual autonomy. We would want to displace the hysterical foetus fetish of the anti-choice by always emphasising that women choosing abortion are active moral agents making a difficult decision for themselves and taking responsibility for their lives. Above all else, we would never apologise for women’s need for abortion.

It is through frameworks like this that we can effectively contrast our positive and emancipatory goal of reproductive freedom — of women being able to control their bodies and their lives — with the authoritarian and anti-democratic injunctions of the anti-choice. In the most telling metaphor of all, the availability and meaning of abortion have come to symbolise — for both feminists and anti-feminists alike — the conditions, rights and status of women. Nothing less is at stake in the conflict over abortion than the social value placed on women.

Watch Your Language

What have been our own “keywords” in defining the heart of our struggle? The pre-eminent, of course, has been the slogan of choice. This concept has tremendous polemical value and real resonance in a democratic political culture. It allows us to define ourselves as supporting the rights of women to make a complex decision for themselves, and to define the opposition as anti-democratic, attempting to impose the views of a small minority on all. It also allows those who would feel difficulty themselves having an abortion to support the right of others to make their own decisions.

But at the same time we have been aware of the limits of the notion of choice. Even full and free access to abortion, as significant a change as that would be, would not guarantee that all women would have real “choices” over their lives or over having and raising children. We try to show these limits concretely by stressing that the choice to have a child can never be free in a society in which women earn so much less than men and in which quality daycare and affordable housing are not available for so many.

This is why we have never seen the demand for abortion in isolation, but rather as one of a number of interdependent struggles — from autonomous midwifery to universal daycare, from employment equity to the right to define and live independent sexualities — which must be fought and won for women to control their bodies and their lives. This wider reproductive rights perspective is crucial strategically; as the basis for alliances among different struggles. But it also makes an equally crucial ideological statement: this vision of reproductive and sexual freedom in its widest sense is our ultimate goal.

Popular Culture

What other forms of communication, activities and images could fashion our counterculture of reproductive freedom?

One important dimension could be the types of photographic and video images discussed and included in this essay.

- Such images are crucial in agit-prop. In the Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics we always try to use photos of spirited demonstrations or protests, with appropriate slogans on placards and colourful banners, to dramatise our posters and flyers. The picture we want to create is one of determination and resistance; of strong women fighting for their demands.

How can graphic art be put to better use in our agitation? Would not a really striking and attractive poster reach a tremendous number of people?

- One such poster was produced and plastered all over Toronto by feminists associated with the Women’s Cultural Building project to build a pro-choice rally in 1983. It highlighted the consistent support of some three-quarters of Canadians for freedom of choice.

O.C.A.C and supportive cultural workers have also produced “wearable art” — pro-choice t-shirts and a range of buttons. These are not simply for fund-raising purposes, but to make the pro-choice message visible, to get our slogans on the street. This visibility is an important part of our movement building and agitation. For example, in the spring and summer of 1989 we had a great “marketing” success with black t-shirts with “CHOICE” emblazoned across their front in bright pink or blue.²⁰ Media shots of us defending the Toronto clinics from “Operation Rescue” vigilantes always included a half-dozen people wearing “CHOICE” shirts. Along with our equally striking banners, these images make it very clear what is at issue.

How can popular culture coalesce with the struggle for reproductive rights? There have been many benefits, often organised by clubs and artists themselves who wanted to demonstrate their support and raise money for the choice movement. In bringing together dancers, actors, musicians and other performers these benefits dramatise the breadth of support for women’s freedom of choice and take that message to broader audiences than political groups can reach.

Cultural workers in different areas have taken up the issue of reproductive rights.

- Gay Bell’s play *Danger/Anger* dramatised the place of abortion and the choice struggle in women’s sexual and social lives.
- Women’s rock band the Heretics have a song, “Bus to Buffalo,” which speaks of the desperation of women forced to leave their community to get an abortion.
- The feminist theatre groups Ladies Against Women and Hysterical Women satirise the cult-like fascination of the

radical right for the foetus and their passionate defense of the "pre-born" — at least until birth.

- How many supporters were cheered by the anonymous graffiti artist who spray-painted "No New Abortion Law" along College Street in the summer of 1988?

Theatre into the Movement

We have taken theatrical principles into our political events.

- The O.C.A.C. Players, activists without experience or training in theatre, have tried to enliven our demonstrations with skits lampooning judges, politicians, priests and other enemies of choice.

How to create energy, style and image and how to find ways of presenting complex political strategies and ideas in an interesting and enlivening way have become an important part of our tactical planning for any action. This is never easy — especially through a bullhorn on a cold February night — but I think theatricality and fun can be every bit as important a part of mass action as speech-making and leafletting.

- A hundred women wearing coat-hanger t-shirts greeted an anti-choice march at the Morgentaler clinic several years ago. Not only did this infuriate and frustrate the anti-choice marchers, but it captured media attention (here using the media's imperative of getting "both sides" of the issue for our own ends). Again, we sought through this image to subvert the media's framing of abortion politics — so that this event would be "read" not merely as the clash of opposing opinions on a divisive issue, but as dramatising the impact on women of any ban on abortion.
- The anti-choice have traditionally held a vigil and march in Toronto on Mothers' Day. In 1984 we subverted one of their most cherished symbols by countering with a "Motherhood by Choice" picnic, with all of the diverse reproductive rights groups taking part.
- The 1989 International Women's Day march in Toronto delivered 1,000 coat hangers and a mock coffin to Campaign Life's headquarters. This was successful at two levels. It was a highly charged event for the thousands of feminists on the march and brought home to them the urgent threat of the anti-choice to all women. Secondly, the "message" we wanted to portray was consistently picked up in the media: women defining the anti-choice as a danger to their health and freedom and declaring their resistance.

These events highlight the important politics of imagery, of being very clear what "message" we want to "send" through the media.

- One of our most effective "props" has been a giant 15-foot coat hanger which we take on all our marches and demonstrations. This symbol shows clearly to passersby the threat to women's autonomy and lives represented by the anti-choice. This image is also perfect for the media: television reports of these demos open with a shot of women in "CHOICE" t-shirts carrying the hanger and this tends to be the photograph picked up in the newspapers. Our image of women's resistance to the danger of the anti-choice comes through clearly.

Changing the Frame: Media and Movement Politics

In these ways we have tried to use the media's conventions, but at the same time subvert the dominant framing of the "abortion question" with our imagery and actions. Of course, it is not easy to challenge and change prevailing media assumptions. It took us years to get the media to use pro-choice rather than pro-abortion, and many of the more conservative papers still use the latter. Another premise that frames abortion in the media is the view that there are two intransigent or extremist minorities with the majority somewhere in the middle. We constantly point to public opinion polls showing that we represent the great majority who support freedom of choice and that the opposition are the real minority who seek to impose their views on all.

We have also struggled against the individualist focus of the media and the difficulty of shifting their attention to broadly based movements.

- One thing O.C.A.C. has done is to have several spokespersons. Some argued that this would be ineffective, that the media like to come to only one figure for comment. We have not found this to be a problem and think it gives a better picture of our collective strength.
- The media tends to latch on to Henry Morgentaler as the public face of the movement. We recognise the tremendous public recognition of Henry and the widespread respect for his accomplishments and commitment, and we have at times built on this by organising rallies where Dr. Morgentaler spoke. But we have also tried to show that it is mass movements that have kept the clinics open and overturned the old law. We have worked hard to build our own presence and contacts within the media.

Our counterpart movements in other countries have also used the media's fascination with celebrities to their own ends.

- Large numbers of prominent women publicly declaring that they had illegal abortions and demanding legalisation and equal access had a strong impact in the struggle for abortion rights in a number of European countries. Simi-

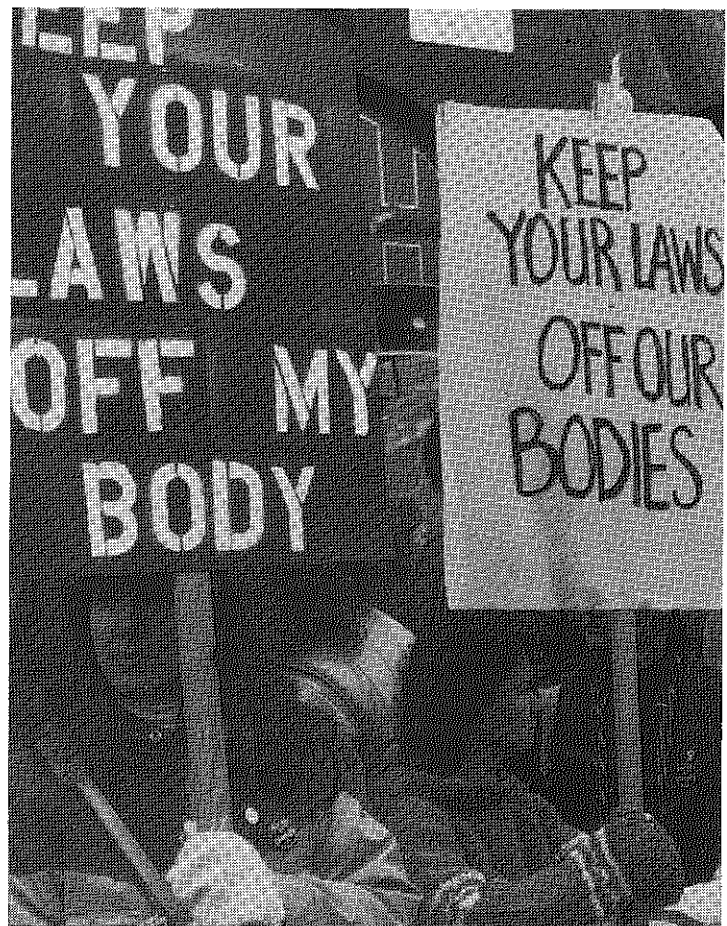
larly, recent enormous pro-choice marches on Washington have featured large numbers of movie stars, writers, athletes and other famous women.

In all these ways we have had to think carefully about how to work within the mainstream media without being co-opted by its frame of reference. We have had to learn the technique of the 30-second clip and the concise quotation. More generally, abortion has become a particularly "hot" topic in recent years and we see it as our responsibility to the broader women's movement to use our greater media presence to promote feminist ideas and style. Forging such a communications strategy is never easy, especially given our lack of material resources to produce sophisticated pamphlets, videos and other forms of communications. Nevertheless, it is vital that our demands and struggles are presented in the media, both to build popular support for our movement and to put pressure on the state.

Visions of the Future

Part of fashioning a feminist discourse of reproduction is to develop a clear vision of our alternatives to the existing system and our long-term goals. This means developing a clear programme of all the changes, from universal daycare to lesbian rights, needed to win the conditions for reproductive freedom.

We also need a clear vision of what the future organisation of reproductive health care could be. Such visions are not really for the future at all; we have found that a clear and attractive sense of what we are struggling for is an indispensable part of our current politics. A vision of health care



border/lines winter 1989/90



that empowers women can seize people's imagination by showing that there are realistic alternatives to the existing system. It can inspire activists to keep fighting and draw new people into the movement. Clearly defined long-term goals can also help us to negotiate the inevitable tactical compromises, strategic adjustments, and ebbs and flows of long campaigns. In these ways — as inspiration and touchstone — a vision of what future reproductive health care could be can contribute directly to our current struggles.

- To this end, activists from the Midwives Collective of Toronto and O.C.A.C. have tried to identify the fundamental principles of women-controlled health care. We have envisioned a model of community women's reproductive health centres that could put these principles into practice: that provide the full spectrum of care in whatever languages women need; ensure equality of access; operate within philosophies of informed consent and respect for women's decisions and feelings; facilitate individual participation in planning their health care; and integrate counseling and services. We have presented our model in magazine interviews, speeches, essays and even traditional policy papers.²¹



Final Word

This account may seem to be full of dilemmas and problems. That is not my intention. Let's remember the very real accomplishments of the choice movement that I began this essay with. But we also know that the campaign for reproductive freedom is going to be a long struggle — that ultimately it is not solely about removing particularly oppressive legislation or winning adequate service levels, or even restructuring the social organisation of reproduction. It is also about transforming consciousness and culture. And to this end we have to integrate cultural analysis and activism into all of our political work.

This essay outlines some initial reflections on how we have tried to do this and how we might develop and improve our campaign in the future. The many questions posed throughout are not merely rhetorical. I really am asking writers how we can develop and popularise a language of reproductive freedom; how we can convey and clarify the subtlety and complexity of our concepts? We need to hear from media workers how we can influence the media to take up our frame of reference and how we can stay on the media's agenda, even when our issue is not "hot." I think cultural workers exploring how theatre, poetry, fiction, painting and other media could portray women's strength and independence as they fight to control their reproduction can make a significant political contribution to the choice movement.

I hope that these questions and reflections can stimulate further discussion and debate. We know we could benefit greatly from an interchange of experience and insights with activists and cultural workers in different spheres. Perhaps we all need to create forums and mechanisms to facilitate such exchange — to cross-fertilise our different areas of struggle.²²

B. Lee has been active in the Ontario Coalition of Abortion Clinics for six years and is also a member of AIDS Action Now!

NOTES

1. The pro-choice movement is composed of many organisations and constituencies with different political strategies and levels of analytical sophistication. The "we" I refer to here is the Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics within which I have worked since 1983. I have also worked in the campaign for community midwifery and AIDS Action Now! When I mean "I" I will always try to say so. I would like to thank Cynthia Wright, Mariana Valverde, Miriam Jones, Joe Galbo and Satu Repo, who commented on an earlier draft.

2. For histories of this struggle see Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics, "State Power and the Struggle for Reproductive Freedom: The Campaign for Free-Standing Abortion Clinics in Ontario," *Resources for Feminist Research*, 17:3 (September 1988): special issue entitled *Feminist Perspectives on the Canadian State*, eds. Sue Findlay and Melanie

Randall: 109-14 and Patricia Antonyshyn, B. Lee and Alex Merrill, "Marching for Women's Lives: The Campaign for Free-Standing Abortion Clinics in Ontario," in Frank Cunningham, Sue Findlay, Marlene Kadar, Alan Lennon and Ed Silva, *Social Movements/Social Change: The Politics and Practice of Organizing* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1988).

3. Rosalind Pollack Petchesky has made the most significant contribution to outlining a feminist ethic of abortion. See her *Abortion and Women's Choice: The State, Sexuality, and Reproductive Freedom* (New York: Longman, 1984).

4. Rosalind Pollack Petchesky, "Abortion in the 1980s: Feminist Morality and Women's Health," in Ellen Lewin and Virginia Olesen, eds., *Women, Health and Healing* (London: Tavistock, 1985), p. 167.

5. This view of women as victims is shared by some cultural feminists — with all the implications of passivity and fatalism that go along with this language. See Catherine McKinnon, "The Male Ideology of Privacy: A Feminist Perspective on the Right to Abortion," *Radical America* 17:4 (July-August 1983): 23-35. Critics have seen this to be a worrying meeting point of cultural feminism and the moral right, with similar dangerous implications to their intersecting agendas on pornography: Rosalind Petchesky, "Abortion as 'Violence Against Women': A Feminist Critique," *Radical America* (1983): 64-68.

6. Rosalind Pollack Petchesky, "Foetal Images: The Power of Visual Culture in the Politics of Reproduction," in Michelle Stanworth, ed., *Reproductive Technologies: Gender, Motherhood and Medicine* (London: Polity Press, 1987). See also Zillah Eisenstein, *Feminism and Sexual Equality* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984).

7. Petchesky, "Foetal Images." The way in which people "read" the imagery of the mangled foetus is by no means clear and we may not want to give too much credit to the anti-choice here. Some people may simply be repelled. Many of the pro-choice majority are certainly outraged by the pictures. On the other hand, this imagery has clearly contributed to making the foetus the centrepiece of so much media and political debate and to the uncertainty or hesitation of even some pro-choice supporters about the morality of abortion per se.

8. For a provocative and clear argument see Ellen Willis, "Aborting Freedom. Forget the Courts — We Need a Movement," *Village Voice* (11 July 1989): 18-19. See also her earlier "Abortion: Is a Woman a Person?," in Ann Snitow, et al, eds. *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983): 471-476.

9. Lynn Chancer, "Abortion Without Apology," *Village Voice* (11 April 1989): 37-39. This phrase — with dramatic graphics — was the cover title of this issue of the *Voice*, which also included other articles on the U.S. abortion rights movement.

10. In a very interesting essay on how insights from deconstructive theory could be applied to feminist politics, particularly around sexuality, Kate Ellis emphasises how "female transgressive behaviour" can break open the "male narratives" of inevitable superiority and power which pervade contemporary culture: "Stories Without Endings: Deconstructive Theory and Political Practice," *Socialist Review* 19:2 (April-June 1989): 37-52.

11. Mariana Valverde and Lorna Weir, "The Struggles of the Immoral: Preliminary Remarks on Moral Regulation," *Resources for Feminist Research* 17:3 (September 1988): special issue entitled *Feminist Perspectives on the Canadian State*, eds. Sue Findlay and Melanie Randall: 31-34.

12. For these reasons the essential context for our demands for choice on abortion is the wider concept of sexual freedom as a central and defining goal of the women's movement. The reproductive rights movement has gained important insights from the lesbian and gay liberation movements on how to carve out a positive sexual culture from a very hostile ideological environment. In the age of AIDS "talking sex" has become a vital and creative means of forging a feminist, sex-positive, grassroots discussion of sexual pleasure and autonomy in all their diverse forms. See Mary Louise Adams, "All That Rubber/All That Talk. Lesbians and Safer Sex," in Ines Rieder and Patricia Ruppelt, eds., *AIDS: The Women* (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 1988): 130-133.

13. For an excellent collection see Douglas Crimp, ed., *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism*, (Boston: MIT Press, 1988). See also Erica Carter and Simon Watney, eds., *Taking Liberties: AIDS and Cultural Politics* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1989).

14. See Petchesky, "Foetal Images," who emphasises the need to be theoretically sophisticated here. Images and discourses take on meaning through context, the way in which they are framed and communicated, and how they are mediated,

received and interpreted. This underlines the importance of the interchange between reproductive rights activists and cultural workers and analysts.

15. Professor Bernard Dickens emphasised this in an address to the 1989 annual general meeting of the Canadian Abortion Rights Action League.

16. Rosalind Petchesky, "Foetal Images," cautions us that all we see is a grainy blob on the ultrasound machine; we only "know" this image of an image is a foetus when told so by the authoritative and professional voice of the male physician narrator.

17. Midwives and abortion rights activists have become important tactical allies in Toronto and both our struggles have been strengthened as a result. We also face common concerns; the degrading foetal imagery I have been discussing can also reinforce a view of women as merely the "foetal environment" and serve to justify increased obstetrical intervention and state regulation of pregnancy and birth. See Vicki Van Wagner and B. Lee, "Legal Assault: A Feminist Analysis of the Law Reform Commission's Report on Abortion Legislation," *Healthsharing* (Fall 1989): 24-27.

18. Emily Martin, *The Woman in the Body: A Cultural Analysis of Reproduction* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987): Chapter 9.

19. Feminist analysis of women's historical praxis of abortion has revealed some interesting cases of metaphors for abortion; for example, women in the

19th century European societies saw abortion as simply making themselves "regular" again, Petchesky, *Abortion and Woman's Choice*, Ch. 1.

In one sense this is far easier for birth than it is for abortion. In a pro-natalist society, giving birth, babies and mothering are all positively regarded. However, this very advantage carries with it a danger. An essentialist view of these issues as flowing from and defining women's "true" nature, perhaps most exemplified in "spiritual midwifery," can be as ideologically self-defeating as any other form of biological determinism. See Michelle Stanworth, "Reproductive Technologies and the Deconstruction of Motherhood," in Stanworth, ed., *Reproductive Technologies: Gender, Motherhood and Medicine* (London: Polity Press, 1987): 10-35.

20. We have also learned the importance of style. We and other movements know that while people may buy ugly shirts to support the political cause, they won't wear them. We need attractive design and good quality to get our images on the street.

21. See the interview with two activists from O.C.A.C. and the Midwives Collective of Toronto, "Visions for Reproductive Care," *Healthsharing* (Spring 1988): 30-32, and Vicki Van Wagner and B. Lee, "Principles into Practice: An Activist Vision of Feminist Reproductive Health Care," in Christine Overall, ed., *The Future of Reproduction* (Toronto: Women's Press, forthcoming 1989).

22. I can be contacted through the Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics, Box 753, Station P, Toronto, Ontario, M5S 2Z1, (416) 969-8463.

Photo by Elaine Ayeres



AN AMERICAN HEARINGS

Patricia Seaman

The place was covered with cactus. My first impression was that I was an imbecile. I had expected palms. And that somehow poverty would be less ugly, which it isn't. We stood right up close to one another, our dry eyes blinking, darting, in a country where we were foreign. Small green lizards with fluorescent, glimmering tails ran in front of us and under the vegetation. They left us uneasy, looking over our shoulders.

She stands still, hesitates, this is almost imperceptible. She looks through the window at the early winter dusk. She moves on, the moment is finished with, she is finished with looking out at the distance. She fills the kettle with water for tea. She takes bowls from the cupboard, she takes vegetables out of the refrigerator. She's noisy. She sings about the seraphim. She sings about God's love.

I am in the hall. She can't hear me. I am breathless and I can hear my own heart beating. I open the door to her room. The first place I look is the dresser, in the first drawer and on the right. There is an ornamental box, it holds a silver dollar, and a pair of cream coloured gloves as soft as silk. Christening candles lie in their original boxes. I put things back precisely. She will ask, Who has been in my things. I will deny it but she will know. When I look again something else will be missing.

For one thing, all I wanted was to go to the beach. To get away from the dismal winter. Two weeks away from the city. A warm climate, where the blue incisions would separate the unnameable disquiet into compartments, equatorial. And I wanted to be with Annie to see what she would do, if anything. To see what she remembered about me, if anything. Mostly, to get away from the grit.

The tourist restaurants and the expensive shops were on the main boulevard. We were ready for our cocktail after a long day in the sun. We walked the labyrinthine streets to the restaurant we both preferred. A group of men sat in front of a small shop, they were playing a game of backgammon. A little girl stood beside them. She played with her little sisters. The night I went out to take their photograph the shop was closed. The street was empty. I set the flash. I took a photograph of the metal grates in front of the door, and one of the soda bottles propped against the wall beside the trash. It was Sunday.

In a plain leather case I find a war medal in the shape of a cross, it commemorates an act of bravery. It commemorates the injury suffered. It has never been mentioned and I don't mention it. As if it does not exist.



Photographs by Patricia Seaman

straw hat. She wears sunglasses and imagines she's a spy. I undressed in the shade of the umbrella. My rib cage was showing through, and my breastbone. Annie wasn't getting a tan. We were slathering creams over ourselves and each other. We wanted to be in the sun but we knew it would kill us.

It is her rings that interest me. There is the long, black diamond that she must have worn to the nightclub that time. It is the most beautiful and elegant ring I have ever seen and I swear to own one exactly like it one day. The only other rings she owns are her wedding bands.

In the photograph taken at the nightclub, the women are wearing shiny, tight-waisted dresses. And perfume. They are very young. She is wearing a low-cut dress. She looks impossibly thin. There had been the Depression and then, rationing. You don't know how lucky you are, she said. I take the black diamond off my finger and put it back in the jewellery box and leave the room as quietly as possible.

Annie and I blamed the humidity for the way we fell asleep, instantly and deeply before we noticed what was happening, before we could say good night. One night, very late, there was a sound. It was the sound women have been warned about. I have planned my reaction under every circumstance and in every room. I identify weapons in common objects before I fall asleep. I know that I am ready for it. God help him. I am so ready for him I'm almost waiting for it. But then, it was such a small sound. When I heard that sound in the night, of all things, I ignored it. I am sleeping. I am comfortable. I am not afraid. Don't bother me now. At least Annie didn't ignore it. She jumped out of bed, she started yelling, screaming her head off and banging on the walls. She was furious. She shouted at him, Who are you. She pounded the door and he pounded back. She held it. We forced it closed, bolted it, put the chain on. We looked at one another and said nothing.

The desk clerk and the security guard chased him. We didn't hear his footsteps but we heard the closing of a door. We felt like we were in a movie. A gun went off outside the window. This is the kind of movie I never watch. There was nothing more for us to do, we went back to bed. I became anxious even though there wasn't another sound. Annie fell asleep right away. I wanted to take her photograph while she was sleeping, she's so pretty. I was afraid to get out of bed to look for the camera. I tried talking myself into it. I couldn't close my eyes. My breathing was

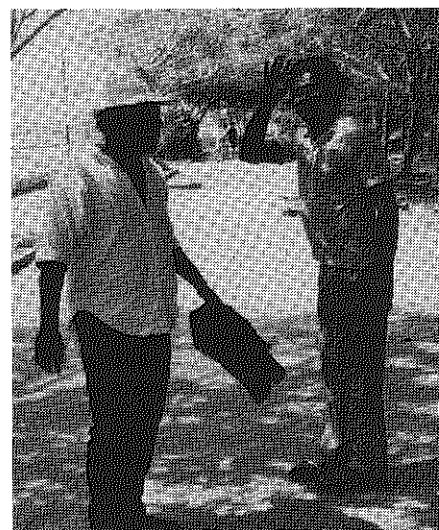
Or, words fail it. As if words, like money, could be lost and never retrieved.

I can hear her coming. I close the drawer and step into the middle of the room. My breath is coming faster. She stops singing, then she goes back into the kitchen. I can hear her. She makes the sounds of making a pot of tea, of choosing a cup.

To begin with, there's a photograph taken at night of a house. The yard is full of cactus. There is one palm tree and strange flowers. There's no one in the picture. When it was taken, when the flash went off, a woman shouted. She had been sitting at the window looking out at the night. She hadn't seen me coming. I gave her a bad scare.

In the top drawer of the vanity is a letter. I unfold it and it makes the sound of old paper. However, the handwriting, the signature, are illegible. Beside it are vials containing Valium and little yellow pills. On the vanity are two small jewellery cases. A decorative silver one with red velveteen lining contains her rings. She has a signet ring with her father's initials on it. It reminds me of a story she often repeats. How she had pleaded with him to let her use his pen-knife to make a little carving in a bit of wood. He had said, Don't come to me when you cut yourself. And she didn't. It was the housekeeper, finally, who found her like that.

We were afraid of getting sunstroke. In every photograph I take Annie wears her



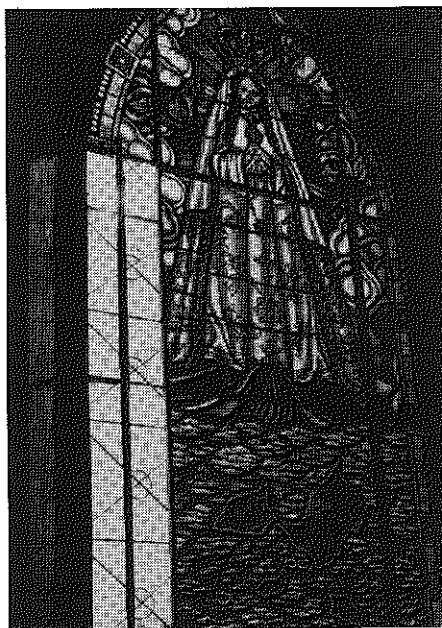
out of control. Annie didn't wake up from the sound of my heart. I could still smell the acrid smell of gunfire. I don't want anyone to be shot because I'm a tourist, because I will lie in a deck chair by the pool taking my leisure.

She sits at the table. She's very tired, she's drinking a cup of tea. She can't see me or she looks past me, or rather she looks through me. She's exhausted. She's picking her teeth with the cover of a matchbook. I walk behind her and go into the basement. The steamer trunk is kept in the far corner. I pull the latch and it opens easily. In it there is a cream coloured, satin wedding dress with a hundred buttons, a tulle veil is pinned to it. There are several framed photographs, some of her husband in uniform. Also, one with her family where she is sitting beside her father. At the bottom of the trunk is a box of more old photographs.

Behind me on the table is a vase of tulips, or there are tulips appliquéd on my dress and behind me is a vase of daffodils. As in all of the photographs I am unsmiling. I'm holding my little brother by the hand. Or else, he is not in this picture. Of course, he is not in this picture because it is my birthday portrait. I stand alone with my hands behind my back. There is a vase of daffodils. A painting of a rainy, Parisian street scene hangs on the wall. There are tulips appliquéd on my dress. It would be spring and I would be coming out of my long winter torpor. I have not smiled for the photograph and probably no one has asked me to.

It was surprising how cool it was in the shade of the trees in the square. How the police stood in the sun in their black uniforms all day without resting. How people looked at us. How I tried to look at myself and Annie the way I thought they looked at us. How women weren't permitted to walk past the statue in the square if they were wearing shorts. A policeman was watching. He was directing women in shorts to go around. What business was it of mine to be sitting in the shade waiting for the bus to the beach. *¡Perdón, dónde está porpuesto por playa la Agua, por favor?* They laughed.

There is a photo of her. I try to show her. In it she is wearing a suit that is fashionable for the time. She doesn't want to look at the picture. I'm waiting. She straightens and wipes her hands on a cloth and looks at the photograph which she immediately tears into small pieces. I shout for her not to tear it but it's too late. The photograph is then thrown away. She doesn't want to remember anything. She objects to her



appearance in that cut of suit and says something disparaging about the styles of that year.

Not giving it to her, I show her a photograph of a baby. His hand is bandaged, his feet are not in the photograph but they are also bandaged. I recall being the first to find him, after he began to scream. She says I was too young, that I don't remember. She would take one or the other of her children to the emergency ward, in the car, as a sort of respite. She never panicked. She was never afraid, or cried. She never talks about it. I leave the room. While she is setting the table she hums.

A bus of American students arrived from the airport in the afternoon. They were on spring vacation. Annie tells me they are all wearing Vuarnets. I have to ask her what Vuarnets are. She says they're very expensive, which doesn't explain anything to me. The students began their party right away. Three girls were thrown into the pool. A lot of screaming went on. The bar had to be restocked. Some of the guests gave each other meaningful looks before going to their rooms to dress for dinner.

The following day Annie and I wanted to get as far away from the hotel as we could. We hired a taxi. We took a tour of the lagoon. The boatman shouted, *romántico, mucho romántico*, as we glided through the narrow waterways under the overhanging trees. Annie laughed, she put her arm around me. We were late getting back to the taxi and the driver was angry. He drove like a maniac all the way back to the hotel.



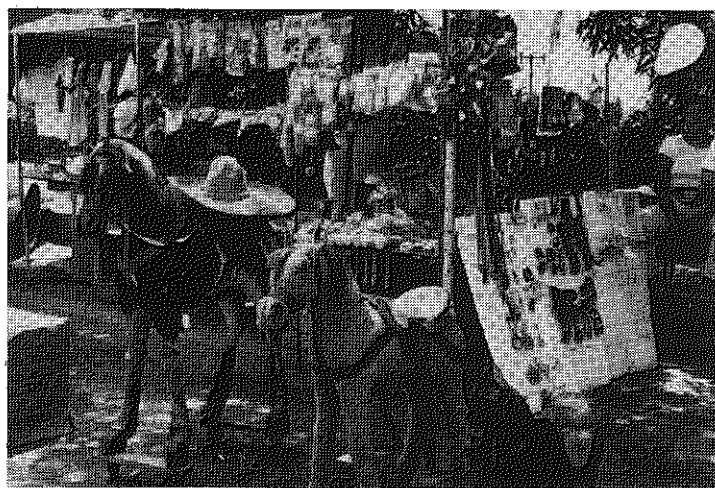
Something strange was going on. We were prevented from leaving the hotel again. The staff patiently explained it to the guests. They said that we would be picked up by soldiers if we were caught on the street. No one could give us more information. No one could explain this curfew. Annie and I were alarmed by the suddenness of it. An American girl objected. She said, I'm not involved, it has nothing to do with me, I'm an American citizen. There was a T.V. on in the lobby airing a newscast, there was gunfire, flaming vehicles, there was death. The girl didn't draw any connection between herself and the newscast. Later that night she won the beer drinking contest, to the mortification of the boys.

Already, a large metal bar had been drawn through the handles of the lobby door. The security guard stood inside with his thumb hooked on his gun belt. He came to be known as Clint. I recalled the advice given to me by a friend who had said simply, intently, Watch your back. From the window at night the town appeared completely deserted.

The table is scattered with dirty plates. Someone has spilled tea on the cloth and it will stain if it isn't washed immediately, however, she does not clear the plates. A bare tree can be seen through the window behind her. She is drinking her tea and smoking a cigarette. She puts down the cup. She picks up the cigarette from the ashtray and takes a long drag. She exhales. She picks up the matchbook. She and I are again alone in the room.

Nothing like her knees, her arms, spreading her towel on the sand. Are you hungry, she asked me. I said I was. I said I was famished, starving. I could eat anything, in fact, I had to eat right away, I felt faint. I was that hungry. She couldn't believe it while she watched me eat. Later, she was dozing in a chair. Her hand had slipped over the side and was resting in the sand. I woke her. I'm just going for a salad, I said. And get out of the sun. It's the middle of the day, you'll suffer. She sat under the umbrella and read her book. I couldn't stand to read anything myself. I was constantly distracted by her, and by the waves. I wanted to lie in the sun and daydream. There was the necessity of applying lotion. And of gauging the time by looking at the sky. Rather than read, I preferred to drink rum. It seemed that no amount of it could make me drunk.

She sits outside on a lawn chair. One of the babies is on her knee, she holds a bottle of beer in her free hand. She is smiling,



probably over something one of the children is doing to amuse her. The smoke from the barbecue is blown in her direction. She shakes her head and coughs. She is wearing a sleeveless, blue shirt and the baby is in diapers. I tell her about this scene, she doubts it. At least, not the bottle of beer. I tell her about a photograph in which she is very young. She is standing with a young man beside a boat at the edge of a lake. She's wearing jeans. They are each holding a bottle of beer, and smiling. She believes me this time, except about the beer. She insists there was never any. She might have married him if it hadn't been for the war. I tell her that I'm glad she didn't marry him.

No one was able to give us information. They couldn't tell us anything. We don't know what will happen, this has never happened here before. We believe the curfew will last ten days, they told us. What we are sure about is, if you are on the street after six the military will pick you up and we will not be able to get you out.

The metal bar is across the glass doors at the entrance. Every five minutes I see shock troops smash down the doors. The glass shatters across the lobby. Everyone screams, they yell, It's not my fault, I'm just a tourist. It is the first time they think circumstance is unfair. Every five minutes I imagine shattering glass.

Someone told us that the curfew would not last more than four days. From someone else we heard, By tomorrow everything will be back to normal. During the day men stood in a row against the wall of the *panadería*, drinking espresso and reading the paper. There wasn't much conversation about it. The only thing I recognised were the photographs which didn't make sense at all, they were of tanks and soldiers and corpses.



She doesn't say anything about it. She says she doesn't remember. I ask her if I was there and she says she doesn't remember. I can't get any information about her from the home movies, she's hardly in them, or she's standing over the barbecue. Her back, bent over the barbecue, is in the movies.

Annie liked to go snorkeling. I didn't, it made me seasick. We liked to walk to the deserted end of the beach. We put our towels in the sand and sat on them quickly, before they blew away. She made plans for a picnic. I agreed to the idea of a picnic. No, I say, I won't go in the water, there are jellyfish in there. She persuades me to go in finally. We were hardly swimming for more than five minutes when a giant jellyfish floated close to us. We screamed and laughed and tried to run out of the water. In a few minutes she went back in but I would not go in again. I was lying on the beach. There were hundreds of people lying in the morgue, and I felt somehow implicated.

I wanted to visit the churches when they were empty or almost empty. I took photographs of the stained glass and of the altars. And one of Annie smiling seductively, leaning her elbows on a holy water font. I bought a souvenir of the Virgin. Later, I gave it to my friend, who appears everywhere to me, like a visitation, a miracle. When I went back to take a photograph of the old woman who sold me the icon she was gone.

Annie and I liked the same things. Our eyes went wild in the occult shop. The clerk thought we were crazy. We bought up cigars and religious medals and *Secret of Venus*, and *Chango Perfumado*, and *Cleopatra Soap*. Someone bought us a beer. After smelling the *Jon Conquistador Strong Magic Perfume*, I refused to wear it. Dogs will follow us, I said. Don't be ridiculous, said Annie, as she doused me with it. But dogs did follow us, a whole pack of them, with their scruffy beachcombing fur and their starvation ribs, waiting, and not barking.

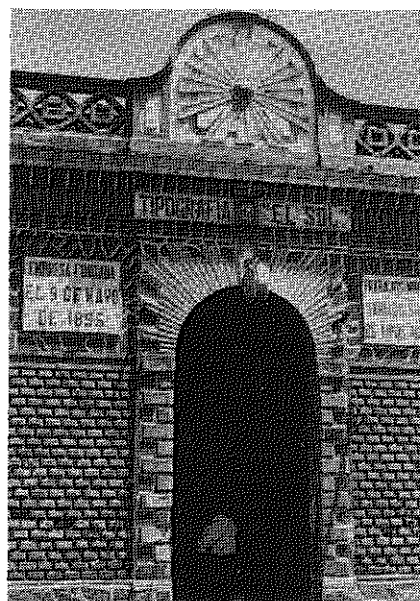
She puts the matchbook down again. She alternates between sipping the tea and inhaling the cigarette. There was a time when she used to roll her own cigarettes with the help of a little machine. She drums the fingers of her left hand on the table. The drumming of her fingers is the sound of resignation. It is without blame or contradiction. To no one in particular she says, Take Jesus into your heart.

We sat at a sort of café where we bought lunch from a woman who was cooking on a barbecue. I stood in front of the woman to take her photo with Annie in the background. The smoke from the barbecue partially obscured her. Then I took a photo of the religious calendar and other things on the wall. Someone said there was a café up the street that had a juke box, it was the place to go to dance.

To pass the time I painted Annie's toenails bright red and told her a story about a film I was once in. A general was speaking on T.V. He gave a speech, not explaining, or so we thought. We didn't under-

stand what he was saying, he seemed to be making election promises. He kept repeating something about the U.S. and the foreign debt. Annie and I tried to decipher the situation, we wanted to find one piece of information that would clarify everything. We didn't know what was happening, if it was a catastrophe, if we should be afraid. Annie flipped the channel, we watched an advertisement for sleeping pills.

The Americans were still at the pool so we sat at the inside bar, which was empty. There was one waiter to serve us. We ordered whiskey sodas like the Americans. Gradually, one at a time, other waiters came into the bar quietly, and sat down. Before we finished our drinks there were nine men sitting silently behind us, looking at our backs. One of them asked me, finally, what I did for my work. I said, I do what you do, I'm a waiter. He looked at me oddly. I mean, I explained, I'm a waitress. He looked at me again in that odd way but said nothing. We went back to our room.



We flipped to the Discovery channel. The next morning at breakfast, many of the guests were discussing the living habits of cheetahs.

There is a photo of her at a party. She is sitting on the edge of a chair. She has her arm over her husband's shoulder. He is smiling, and so is she but with her mouth closed, as always self-conscious about her uneven teeth. She is wearing some Godawful thing, some sort of hostess dress with a print, or something. She won't look at me anymore. She changes the subject, she asks me how my trip was. She only wants me to talk about something else, to leave her alone. I tell her, I wouldn't go there if I were you.

The curfew was partially lifted and we took the bus to the airport. Most of the tourists had managed to get on earlier flights. We were on the last flight out and it was half empty.

Patricia Seaman is a Toronto writer. Her first novel, *Hotel Destiné*, was recently published by gynergy press, an imprint of Ragweed Press.

SHIFTING



WINDS

Re-Constructing Labour at *The Globe and Mail*

D'Arcy Martin

For nearly 40 years "Canada's national newspaper" had a full-time reporter assigned to covering the labour movement. Last spring senior management shifted the assignment to become a "workplace" beat. And thereby hangs a tale.

In August Lorne Slotnick spoke to *Border/lines* about this shift in media construction of unionism. Until April 1989 Lorne was the *Globe's* labour reporter. He was interviewed by union educator D'Arcy Martin, who works with the Communications and Electrical Workers of Canada (C.W.C.).

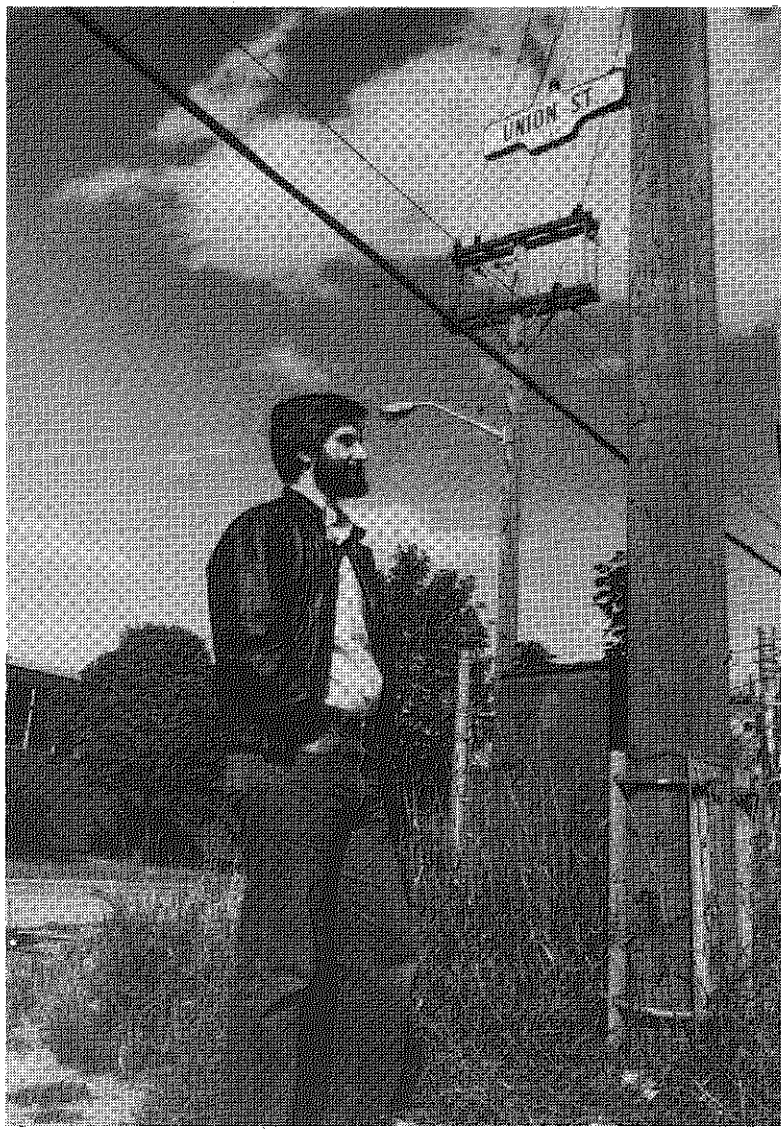


Photo of Lorne Slotnick
by D'Arcy Martin

D'Arcy Martin: What brought you into labour journalism?

Lorne Slotnick: I came to *The Globe and Mail* in 1979, fresh out of Bar Admission Course. Towards the end of my legal studies I decided not to practise law but to see if there were jobs in newspapers.

The *Globe* was my favourite newspaper, because there wasn't much puffery in it. From reading it, I knew people there took journalism seriously, and thought serving readers meant presenting information. It seemed that accuracy was valued there, that precise use of facts meant something.

Besides, I'm a news nut, and wanted to be at the centre of that action. There's a newsroom culture, even if it's fading a bit, and I felt I belonged there. Maybe it was all those movies set in newsrooms that hooked me.

Anyway, I was hired as copy editor and worked at that for three years. That meant writing headlines, checking grammar, fixing stories up. In early 1982 I started writing as a general assignment reporter. In November 1984 I started covering labour. In April 1989 I went back to general assignment reporter.

How were unions portrayed at the *Globe* in the past?

The labour beat at the *Globe*, and to a large extent in Canada, was defined by Wilf List, who covered labour for 34 years there.

In Wilf's time collective bargaining was important, and merited informed coverage.

There was a place too for reporting on union politics, because unions were seen as significant institutions whose internal processes had an economic impact. There was no assumption that unions were good, but their inner workings and public declarations of policy were newsworthy. An informed readership had to know what unions thought. Or at least what union leaders thought.

Essentially, the *Globe* talks to spokespeople and officials of institutions. The people affected by stories rarely appear in the paper. Last week there was a feature on memories of the world wars, based on interviews in a Legion hall. It stood out because normally the *Globe* covers elites. Sometimes that's boring, but every country has a paper like that, and Canada's is the *Globe*.

Let's say two calls came in: a welfare mother was being cut off, and the Social Planning Council was releasing a report on welfare. The first story might appeal more to the *Star*, the second to the *Globe*.

Similarly, for the *Globe*, a worker cut off workers' compensation isn't news, but a change in W.C.B. policy might be. That is still true. It meant that to cover labour for the *Globe* meant becoming institutionalised. I think these stories were valid, and needed to be handled in a fair and accurate way.

During the ten years I've been there, the *Globe* has also gone national. Today, 40 percent of its readership is outside Ontario. A large strike in Toronto is news for the *Star*, while it would have to touch a wider issue to get real coverage at the *Globe*.

How was this stance communicated to you when you took over the labour beat?

I knew that I could write anything I wanted within that frame. Of course, I had to be accurate, basing my story on fact, not rumour. I had to contact all sides of a story. Also, I had to avoid being "slanted." The *Globe* rarely adopts an overt advocacy position on an issue.

Of course there were limits. During a postal strike, I had to cover the strike, not be off on a feature on some small plant in North York. But nobody had to tell me that and usually nobody did. Day-by-day, I did what I wanted. My major limit was that I was alone covering labour, and during a big running story like a postal strike I couldn't cover anything else.

It's not as if someone told me to cover Bob White or Gerard Docquier. My assessment of what was news, and how to approach it, was accepted. At the *Globe*, they put you on a beat and leave you alone unless you screw up. Almost any time I proposed a trip, it was approved. And almost never was a story squashed. But that's mainly because I knew what "*Globe* stories" were.

Labour was just part of the routine like education or the environment or Queen's Park or any other beat.

How is labour different as a beat?

A lot of people outside the paper assumed

it was a really sensitive beat, but I didn't find that. In my experience, senior editors felt they didn't understand labour and were pleased to have someone who did.

At many papers, they give the police beat to people who think and act and empathise with cops. That's because they know that police won't talk much, and certainly not to people they don't trust.

The editors knew I was active in the Newspaper Guild and generally pro-labour. They knew unionists aren't like politicians, who will talk to anyone. So it made sense to assign someone that unionists would trust.

Labour reporting is event-driven, especially in major strikes. These come up practically every year, and you need someone who understands the background. It shows in poor quality, if the reporter doesn't understand COLA clauses and grievance procedures, and has no feel for the personalities involved.

The *Globe* has taken pride in having informed beat reporters. Many readers don't read bylines except for columns. But opinion leaders in each sector read bylines for their beat, and that is who the *Globe* caters to.

In fact, I was surprised at how many union officials read the *Globe*. Mostly, it's the business section they read, to monitor their sector. Only in some unions with highly educated members, like P.S.A.C., did I find many members who read the *Globe*.

How were you perceived and received by union leaders?

I'll tell you what I'd like to believe... that I was independent but trustworthy. Independent in that I wasn't in anyone's pocket. That's my concept of journalism anyway — bullshit is bullshit no matter where it's coming from. My opinions and sympathies don't reduce that critical distance.

I was sympathetic, but not naïve about the politics in the movement. Let's face it, there is incompetence, stupidity and even corruption in unions. I didn't hesitate to say so.

After I was moved off the beat, I got a lot of supportive calls from unionists. They felt I'd done a great job. That was really important for me.

Some labour leaders, I think, saw me as too far to the left. I would give voice to dissidents, and report internal debates on issues like nationalism. Remember that to quote or even mention the Confederation of Canadian Unions (C.C.U.) will drive some labour leaders nuts. It means giving them credibility, and that marks you. I tried not to let that cloud my judgment, but you are always sensitive to the pressure.

What words and names are ideologically charged in the union culture?

Jean-Claude Parrot is a charged name. Just by dropping him, you give him credibility, and irritate some other union leaders. But the choice of words is more subtle, and

may be more important in influencing most readers.

One heavily loaded word is "concessions." Several unions have made a lot of noise against concessions. It's part of their public image to crusade against concessions.

But even the auto workers have had to give concessions. It's a fact of union life. Had I said the union gave up on something, that was fine, but if I said they gave a *concession*, that was an attack.

Another word that raises temperatures is "replacement workers," a.k.a. "scabs." I think neither term is appropriate for the *Globe*, so I used the term "strike-breakers" at times like the 1987 postal strikes. A few times this was changed by editors to "replacement workers," and by the end there may have been a practice of doing this.

Another term that rings bells is "demands," as in "union demands." Many union people feel it makes unions sound harsh and greedy. It even implies the use of force. But "proposals" is too milquetoast for the reality, and since unions often call them "demands" internally, I used the noun occasionally. But I stayed away from the verb. I never used the phrase "the union demands," because I felt that unions actually "seek" things.

Management does have the power to enforce, and so I sometimes used the phrase "management demands," just to turn the tables.

Occasionally an editor would put the phrase "union boss" in a headline, but I never used the phrase myself. Actually, I protested whenever the term showed up.

Language, of course, produces emotions. That is highlighted in controversial issues like abortion and to a lesser degree it's true in labour. On an issue like "strike breakers" there's no word you can use that everyone will like.

How did the climate at the *Globe* shift during your years on the labour beat?

Traditionally, the newsroom at the *Globe* was independent — of advertising, of the editorial page, of the publisher's views. People who worked in the newsroom basically didn't have to look over their shoulder.

A story was a story. That made the *Globe* a good place to work, and attracted good journalists.

The publisher, Roy Megarry, had made many changes in circulation, advertising and so on, but had never touched the newsroom. Not until 1988.

Early that year, Mick Lowe, a freelancer in Sudbury, was cut off by Megarry after some articles critical of Inco. Things came to a head in the summer and fall of 1988, during the free trade debate and the election. It became clear, through direct and subtle signals, that the news coverage in the paper was going to favour free trade. Some stories were highlighted, and others buried. That's how the signals work. The paper took a strong editorial stance in favour of free trade, which didn't matter much normally, but this time it extended to encouraging favourable coverage of free trade.

It's a weird process, but in any organisation you know what's good for you. The hierarchy moves and the ambitious start to move with them. They can see what angle to take if you want to get ahead.

On free trade, the *Star* was as biased on the opposite side. But at least they were explicit about it. At the *Globe*, there had been a mythology that news is news. Ultimately, every news judgment is a political judgment, but there had been more room at the *Globe* than at most papers, enabling a wider range of stories to find a place in the paper.

How did this shift in the political wind affect the labour beat? Affect you?

After the free trade election, in January 1989, the publisher made his big move on the newsroom. He cleared out the two top managers, and replaced them with people who saw more eye-to-eye with him. From there, other changes tumbled down the hierarchy.

From the fact of their predecessors, the new management have learned a lesson: they don't challenge the publisher. The paper has become a dictatorship. The two senior managers, Tim Pritchard and William Thorsell, cater to Megarry's vision of the paper, which is quite wide-ranging. It encompasses distribution, trend coverage and so on.

This had direct implications for labour coverage.

When the former managing editor Geoffrey Stevens was fired, he talked openly about his disagreements with Megarry. In the list of issues was Megarry's desire to abolish the labour beat. That was my first indication of what was to come.

In March a restructured list of beats was posted. There was no labour beat listed, but a workplace beat. After a few weeks, I asked Tim Pritchard, the managing editor, what this shift meant. I observed that we needed broader coverage of labour, dealing with issues like pay equity and workers' compensation, and that maybe a second reporter was needed. But he explained the need for more upbeat news, less confrontation. He wanted more examples of where workers and managers are getting along. That's pure ideology, of course. I observed that it would be like reporting airplanes that took off and landed safely. It's not news.

I tried to do a couple of stories along these lines. Then I was called into the manager's office for a very testy conversation, where he said "we don't want more stories about organised labour."

At that point, in mid-April, I withdrew from the new "broader" workplace beat. I thought the equivalent would be to "broaden" the coverage of Parliament by dropping all coverage of the Opposition given that labour functions as the opposition in our economy.

Once I protested publicly, the management began to backtrack. Nobody from inside would take the workplace beat, because of its associations. In the end Jane Coutts was hired from outside, and she is

not a pushover, who will pander to the prevailing political wind there. So far they have left her alone, and they have posted the beat as "labour/workplace."

Since April I've been working as a general assignment reporter and have increased my union activity in the southern Ontario local of the Newspaper Guild (SONG).

What are the implications of your experiences?

In my view, Megarry and his new editor-in-chief, William Thorsell, are very modern business thinkers. They support free trade philosophically, not just for personal gain.

Free trade is part of a bigger package in modern business thinking, which includes technological innovation. In this package, unions don't fit. They're outmoded, no longer significant actors in the economy.

In part, this is because the unions are in sectors that "won't matter" in the future. In a newspaper that is modern, a labour beat just doesn't belong.

The goal is to make our country do better in the global competitive economy, and workers have the same stake as managers in this goal.

The old labour beat, developed by Wilf List, worked on a different set of assumptions.

What would a "modern" labour beat be, in your view?

Some of the old things still matter. Unions make news in collective bargaining, when they gain indexed pensions, and when they undertake campaigns that matter, like the unsuccessful C.W.C. clerical organising drive at Bell Canada. Union politics, links to the N.D.P., and policy declarations matter, because unions are important institutions.

But there's other ground that should be covered. I think occupational health and safety, the politics of the body, needs better coverage. Pay equity and gender politics need more attention. Human rights issues are union issues too, but they don't get covered that way. It's hard when a paper like ours has one labour reporter and 30 business reporters.

These are some examples that I proposed. But in the current climate, the labour voice on these issues won't be "newsworthy."

What happens next?

It's not clear. The current regime at the *Globe* has backed off considerably, but they do not accept that unions really have a place in the "modern" economy or the "modern" media. To some extent their new initiatives are foundering on internal inertia and the reaction of constituencies like the labour movement. They may wind up with the same old paper, except that they've killed the spirit.

Their effort to have a "management" beat put in place of the labour beat seems to be on hold for the time being. I can't predict what will happen next.

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Woman Chief resigns with no regrets



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Artist's work chosen by U



The Hamilton Spectator

A NATIVE FIRST



The North American education system has been "infected (with) decontextualized, disembodied, irrelevant exercises" that teach children to fake understanding and to seek approval rather than knowledge or challenge.



JANE ASH POITRAS





AFROPOLITAN LIFE

BOSTON'S 1989
CELEBRATION OF
BLACK CINEMA
BY CAMERON BAILEY

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OSTON — On a crisp spring evening six days before the marathon, a whole lot of impassioned black people descended on Boston.

The Celebration of Black Cinema (C.B.C.), as this congregation is officially known, was going into its sixth year having stirred up a critical storm in 1988 with a bunch of black British films and filmmakers that held no undue reverence for the struggles of their American colleagues. Coming out of an environment of British film theory neck deep in Lacan and Althusser, these filmmakers, mostly members of London's Sankofa collective, took that shit and remade it their own. Black and proud and young and gifted and vocal, C.B.C. V saw them staking their ground in the colonies.

C.B.C. VI promised more of the same. More films by young black Europeans, and more juicy, joyous conflict. This (post-immigrant?) generation was bent on giving a decidedly Afrocentric spin to the stuff they swallowed in the art schools and café culture of the dimming continent, not in rejecting everything European from the get go. The focus of this year's festival was supposed to be Caribbean cinema, but by some hidden imperative, many of the filmmakers present were actually living in Paris or Amsterdam or Berlin. Some even showed from New York. Mostly aware of what colonialism has wrought (including their own desire to set up in European capitals), these filmmakers work out of a productive combination of European and Antillean cultures. Amsterdam-based Felix de Rooy best expressed this new energy when he declared, "I see myself as a colonial orgasm."

On first sight, Boston hardly seems the place for orgasms of any sort. To these Canadian eyes it appeared aggressive but unappealing, characterised best perhaps by the hard, historical buildings that sit in parkspace downtown like rich, disapproving old bastards, reeking the power of genealogy. Boston police wear black leather jackets and silver badges ordered from a Hollywood costume house. Or so it seemed.

To these black eyes Boston was a troubled paradise. Bluebloods may rule the Bay area, but in Roxbury it's strictly African-American. And don't let Nightline tell you this is a ghetto. Roxbury is a Boston neighborhood composed mostly of working class and poor black people (though yuppies dog the outskirts for real estate deals) with

a strong sense of itself. Lately, an infusion of West Indian immigrants has added cricket matches and roti palaces to the cultural stew. So strong is Roxbury's social autonomy that recently, in the face of blatant municipal neglect of the area, local people launched a widespread (but ultimately unsuccessful) movement to secede from Boston and rename the place Mandela.

One of my strongest memories of Boston remains the Museum of African American Art in Roxbury, where the selection of the permanent collection on display was dominated by Bryan McFarlane's *The Artist Eating Paint*, a powerful blue canvas that for no clear reason seemed oddly confrontational.

One afternoon during the festival I found myself driving through Roxbury in Curt's BMW. Curt teaches economics at Wellesley College outside Boston, and knew which businesses in this black district were black-owned (next to none), and what happened to Boston's black middle class (they gone, and now white yuppies are seeping in to do the renovation thing). As we drove along under a rusted, abandoned rail line, the Temptations's "Ball of Confusion" played on the Blaupunkt. This was one of the trip's many unplanned ironies.

Curt says that Harvard requires a photograph to be included with each application, then follows that factoid up with the remarkably low African-American enrollment at the university. Curt, a diplomat's son and a model buppie, makes his points indirectly.

Curt represents only one element of the black academic class in Boston, but nowhere in the city's popular reputation as America's brain central is the fact that Boston's dozens of colleges and universities harbour cadres of African-American scholars bent on questioning canons, reshaping curricula, and expanding what institutions like Harvard, M.I.T., Wellesley, Northeastern, U Mass, Boston U and Brandeis take for knowledge. The Celebration of Black Cinema, run by sometime film professor Claire Andrade-Watkins, is by no accident based here.

The five nights of C.B.C. VI screenings were augmented this year by two panels

Bryan McFarlane, *Artist Eating Paint* (1986).
Collection National Center of Afro-American Artist, Boston.



where filmmakers, academics and rabble-rousers came together to discuss the "Production, Reception and Impact of Caribbean Film" one afternoon, and "Film and Literature in the Caribbean: Social and Aesthetic Perspectives" the next. All but the first day's events were held at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, a white-walled mixed-media spot predictably staffed by pale, low-paid art students wearing egg-plant hair. The place was almost always packed, packed with filmmakers and critics and writers and artists and students and bystanders, most of them black, and all of them ready to be surprised. Sometimes, it happened.

Disregarding the festival's few outright duds (an alarming proportion of which were American), most of the work at C.B.C. VI can be categorised as what I'll call fables of colonialism. In widely different ways, Lennie Little-White's *Children of Babylon* (1988), Willy Rameau's *Lien de Parente* (1985), Agliberto Meléndez's *Un Pasaje de Ida* (1988), Euzhan Palcy's *Rue Caisse Negre* (1983) and Felix de Rooy's *Almacita Di Desolato* (1986) all mine that nexus of politi-cultural power relations for dramatic material.

Two of the best documentaries at the festival also showed in their approach traces of the need to redress what colonialism has wrought. Horace Ové's made-for-B.B.C. *King Carnival* traces the specifically African elements of contemporary Trinidadian culture; and Elsie Haas' *La Ronde de Voodoo* (1986) uses a reserved camera style and interviews with Haitian academics and clergy to remove voodoo from the realm of cheap Halloween imagery and situate it within a range of African faiths.

And two films, both made by women within the new black British collectives, provided an example of the breadth of black feminist filmmaking. But yoking Elmina Davis's *Omega Rising: Woman of Rastafari* (produced within the Ceddo Film and Video Workshop) and Maureen Blackwood's *Perfect Image?* (produced by Sankofa) together by gender and means of production doesn't quite work: the two films are vastly different in style and subject.

Omega Rising (1988) gets its title from Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie I and his wife, referred to by some Rastafarians as the Alpha and the Omega. A straightforward but spiritual documentary, it relies on interviews with a wide spectrum of rural and urban Rasta women in Jamaica and the U.K. — dancers, capitalists, mothers, mystics and Judy Mowatt — talking about the space they are creating within Rastafarianism for women's experience. The film spends little time comparing these women to Rasta men, and is careful never to exoticise them: Davis shoots her subjects in their own contexts, and the interviews are long and full enough to allow for multi-dimensional characters to emerge. To use Alice Walker's distinction, the subjects seem for the most part womanist rather than feminist. One says, "If a woman put onna dread it is in defiance of whatever has been deemed beautiful, clean, upright," only to be followed by a

"I see myself as a colonial orgasm."

sister offering some words on the responsibilities of a good — she didn't say submissive — wife.

Blackwood's *Perfect Image?* has the heart of a rock video and the mind of a particularly hip intellectual; it's a 30-minute jet-tour of black women's feelings about self-image, a self-image governed and governed again by everything the media and our grandmothers taught us about "good" hair and "fair" skin and narrow noses. Using two women — one light-skinned, one dark — *Perfect Image?* manages to invoke both Laura Mulvey and the Wee Papa Girl Rappers, and has one of the most sophisticated systems of spectator address I've ever seen. And unlike previous work from Sankofa, it's *funny*. Having mastered any number of film styles, Blackwood shifts from one to another effortlessly, and the audience moves with her. The crowd in Boston ate it up, giving the film the warmest response of any that week. From just about any point of view, it was the best film of the festival.

Lennie Little-White's *Children of Babylon*, while not clearly the worst, served as an exact opposite to Blackwood's film: sloppy and overlong where hers is assured, and in place of joyous feminist filmmaking, rank pornography. Its screening was sold out.

The story of a privileged Jamaican "graduate student" whose Jamaican lands her in a series of sexual clutches with a pseudo-sensitive artist and a rough Rastafarian, *Babylon* dresses up soft-core porn in thin social comment. Once secluded at the artist's country house, the "graduate student" repeatedly squirms out of her panties for the camera; initially frosty, she turns out to be a sex monster. The older white woman who owns the house flies in from Europe and also turns out to be a sex monster. The Rasta rapes the housekeeper, then transfers his affections to the "graduate student," fucking her while gazing at a portrait of Selassie.

A little more than halfway through the film many of the white women in the audience start to leave. It's about at this point that it occurs to me that the Ryerson-educated Little-White may be attempting some sort of social satire, with the house serving as a microcosm of Jamaica. A Rasta, a bourgeois artist, a servant class woman, a left-leaning intellectual and an absentee landlord engaged in rounds of sexual exploitation. Hmmm. Now the white women in the theatre are making for the exit, having given up rationalising. If the film had a plan, it lost it.

Noxious as it often is, *Children of Babylon* marks an attempt to use film narrative to examine postcolonial Caribbean society. Like many of the films that take up that challenge, it chooses to allegorise. Meléndez's *Un Pasaje De Ida* (*A One-Way Ticket*) uses an actual event to comment both on the desire of the colonised for the ways of the coloniser, and the experienced of colonisation itself. In this the first feature film produced in the Dominican Republic, a group of men desperate to reach New York stow away on a docked ship. Through a series of large and small treacheries, they find themselves drowning in a locked bilge

tank.

Rameau's *Lien de Parente* (*Next of Kin*) opts for the candy colours of postmodern melodrama in its recasting of a central colonial drama — miscegenation. In this case, an old provincial French man more or less inherits a distant grandson in England. He goes to collect the young man and discovers — he's black! Once back in rural France, Black Man becomes the village object of desire. Old and young, women and men all want him. Working in the territory of Percy Adlon and Pedro Almodovar, Rameau skillfully blends fish-out-of-water conventions with a wry nod to westerns and pop trash. *Next of Kin's* irreverence doesn't encourage sober reflection, but as swivel-tongued as it is, it does clearly celebrate beating the master's plans through trickster-science.

In the justly-celebrated *Rue Caisse Negre* (*Sugar Cane Alley*), Pally films another colonial drama — the Jesus complex — in full effect. Alternately known as the Poitier Principle, this syndrome has a talented young black male taking on the problems and the promise of His Race by going all stoic in the face of torrential setbacks. Often associated with strong maternal figures, absent fathers and good grades, it produces, in fiction and in life, thousands of buttoned-down messiahs. In *Sugar Cane Alley*, José, having risen from poverty to starched shirts, even washes the feet of his grandmother when she dies. An excellent, subtly perceived portrait of early 20th-century life in Martinique, the film has nevertheless been criticised for a plot that duplicates the colonial imperative: José succeeds when he becomes most like the French.

But *Sugar Cane Alley* also foregrounds colonialism to a far greater degree than any of

the other films I've called colonial fables. Ultimately its critique is hardly rigorous, but it does make colonialism a concern throughout.

Felix de Rooy's *Almacita Di Desolato* can only tangentially be called a fable of colonialism, although it is clearly a fable. Set in turn-of-the-century Curaçao in a mythic landscape of gold deserts and hollow-blue caves, it's an amalgam of local stories. Solem, a mute, is responsible for a strange, destructive fruit entering her village. She consorts with a magic figure, a dreadlocked seer with silver eyes and nipple rings, bears a child with him, and ends up expelled from the village. Crossing the desert with the baby and a boy who befriends her, she's plagued by all sorts of traps and visions. One of the most visually sophisticated films in the festival (especially given the simplicity with which so many Caribbean films are lit), it was shot by Ernest Dickerson (*Do The Right Thing*, *Brother From Another Planet*) to evoke mystery in the landscape. Not entirely connected to a real world, *Almacita* flings itself into an interpretive whirlpool, where it can be taken as a parable about nearly anything. Money? Pleasure?... Colonialism?

During the first panel discussion de Rooy confessed that the film's indeterminacy mirrored his own. Tracing his blood lines in half a dozen different directions and announcing himself a hothouse bisexual, he came across like a hothouse flower in an English garden. He summed up his biography by remarking, "I felt that my deviation was my strength."

From *Children of Babylon* (1988) by Lennie Little-White.

Alternately known as the Poitier Principle, this syndrome has a talented young black male taking on the problems and the promise of His Race by going all stoic in the face of torrential setbacks.





From *Almacita Di Desolato* (1986) by Felix de Rooy.

Most of the other filmmakers' stories were familiar to anyone who's spent any time with an independent filmmaker, differing only in being remarkably unselfpitying. Elsie Haas admitted that legendary ethnographic filmmaker Jean Rouch had lent her his editing room to complete her first film. But she steered clear of him after that because "he's really a big papa." Lennie Little-White, a thick-set man with sleepy eyes and a disturbingly seductive air, noted that Jamaican filmmakers were historically directed towards making documentaries rather than fiction films, a comment that falls tenderly on Canadian ears.

Speaking at a later session (she missed her flight from the coast) Euzhan Palcy used obstetric metaphors to describe her experience of filmmaking. Making an independent film is like struggling to have a "bébé," she said, and having to resort to artificial insemination. Making a studio picture is like surrogate motherhood. You carry the bébé to term and "when you give birth you have no control over it. It's taken away from you." A small woman in tailored clothes, she had just the day before finished post-production on her new toddler, *A Dry White Season*. She spoke of studying film in France, and of receiving a grant from Aimé Césaire to complete *Sugar Cane Alley* (no mention of his papa potential). Leaving the theatre, she dons a black bomber jacket that reads in red letters on the back: "Cosby Show 100th Episode."

It was the "Film and Literature in the Caribbean" panel where things got tricky. Michaëlle Lafontant, a large woman with a sly way and loads of information, began uneventfully by recounting the history of film in Haiti. In 1899, the films of the Lumière brothers were first seen on the island. That same year, representatives of the Lumières travelled to Port-au-Prince and photographed a fire. Lafontant noted as an aside that arson is a frequently used political tool in Haiti. Then in 1960 (making this jump she barely betrayed a smile), the first Haitian-produced film was made, a documentary on a pan-American festival of tourism.

The smooth-edged Keith Warner followed. A Trini-born, Paris-educated

Ionesco scholar now teaching in the U.S., he did the English translation of the novel *Rue Caisse Negre* and spoke about translating creoles and patois in Caribbean literature. This too was uneventful.

It was left to Jamaican academic Michael Thelwell, also based in the U.S., to stir up shit. A long-faced man wearing a small ivory mask on a thong over his turtleneck but under his bush jacket, Thelwell wandered into an attack on "inorganic" concerns for Caribbean filmmakers. He went on to take a couple of shots at Europe and inaccessible European "modernism," and finished with a flabby defense of "populism" in the face of European high art. For a trained scholar to speak in the fatuous generalities of a back-row undergrad — "inorganic?" — was bad enough, but Thelwell seemed genuinely pleased with his analysis of how European and West Indian cultures do and should interact.

A number of people in the audience were visibly disgusted, but when a woman got up to ask a question, she shifted tack. Do the panelists have any opinions on how sexuality functions as an arena of colonialism, particularly how third world women are twice colonised? Further, what are their opinions on how colonisers use the bodies, particularly the sexual bodies of their victims to enforce colonialism? Silence.

Then Thelwell draws charmingly, "Well, I make it a point never to talk about gender in public, and I only talk about sexuality in private, so that almost disqualifies me from answering the question." He goes on to offer a few patronising platitudes on the order of, "well of course black women have it tough." No one else on the panel chooses to speak.

This break in the otherwise smooth flow of the festival signaled two things. First, that the "Celebration" in the Celebration of Black Cinema is still paramount. Either the structure of the discussions or the panelists involved almost prohibit critical debate. Too often the audience displayed a more comprehensive understanding of colonialism than the panelists were willing to, and were frustrated because they couldn't get their concerns addressed. Too often the panelists displayed what may

have been a generational squeamishness when it came to issues of gender and sexuality. (Felix de Rooy is the flagrant exception.) And too often there wasn't enough time.

Second, the problem of Europe remains the key issue in any discussion of colonialism and culture. How it is approached, whether in Thelwell's monolithic manner or in the more considered work of the new black European filmmakers, will necessarily determine in what state we emerge from the struggle with it.

Slamming European culture as inorganic for black Caribbean artists is as dangerous as it is seductive. The premise it assumes, that there exists in the Caribbean a pure "organic" African culture on which to draw, is clearly limited. And it ignores the productive engagements of African with European culture that have resulted in everything from steel bands to Fanon. Thelwell forgets that the scavenger is sometimes a revolutionary.

Although image reproduction is universal, film production, on both technical and economic levels, is governed by western models. The fact that nearly all the filmmakers present in Boston received their training outside their home countries is only one symptom of that. A "purely" African film culture (sidestepping for the moment the question of the value of any "pure" culture) cannot exist because at no time in the historical development of filmic conventions and film technology were African forms or modes of production drawn upon.

All this makes the work of the latest generation of Caribbean filmmakers all the more interesting. In Boston, *Perfect Image?*, *Lien de Parente* and *Almacita Di Desolato*, because they engage with colonialism as both metaphor and material, because they are Afro-centric but not Afro-nostalgic, because they show neither prudery about mining European sources nor slavish devotion to them, provided something of a guide to progressive scavengery. All three quite consciously acknowledge their hybridity. It's difficult to tell whether my preference for their strategies stems from my own ingestion of western cultural models — probably it does — but I can find no more challenging, productive, models for black filmmaking in them than the practices these films represent.

The past two years at Boston's Celebration of Black Cinema have highlighted the urgency of this debate about the European problem, and the sort of films it can produce. The festival has recognised that on the level of independent black cinema, much of the most provocative work is now being made outside the United States, deep in the clotted hearts of Empire. But Boston, with its past anti-Brit uprisings and present race resentments has worked colonialism from both sides of the fence. It's a fine place to watch the parade unfold.

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Too often the audience displayed a more comprehensive understanding of colonialism than the panelists were willing to, and were frustrated because they couldn't get their concerns addressed.

ODOUR

IN THE COURT



David Howes

My scholarly interests are somewhat disparate, having studied law and anthropology at different times. In anthropology, most of my recent work has centred on the cultural construction of sensory experience, with particular emphasis on smell, while in law my focus has been on distinctly non-sensational topics, such as Article 1057 of the Québec civil code. It never occurred to me that these two lines of inquiry, law and odour, could be crossed, until that morning in the spring of last year when I received a telephone call from a Québec City law firm.

The law firm needed a smell expert. The firm represented a company involved in the business of recycling and disposing of the animal waste products generated by restaurants and slaughterhouses in the Québec City region. This "rendering company," as the business is called, had been charged under Article 20 of the Québec Environment Quality Act. It was alleged in the statement of offence that the company in question had, in the course of its operations on July 8, 16, and 29, 1987 (not to mention August 4), emitted an odour into the atmosphere the presence of which was susceptible of "affecting the well-being or comfort of the human being," contrary to Article 20. The penalty for this offence involved a substantial fine and an order to cease operations.

What the law firm wanted to know was whether I might be interested in bringing an "anthropological perspective" to bear on the terms "comfort," "well-being" and "the human being," as used in Article 20. It was explained to me that if it turned out that these words were not susceptible to objective definition, then Article 20 could either be declared "void for vagueness" and struck down, or have to be "read down," thereby exculpating the rendering company. There was also the constitutional argument, based on Article 11 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, according to which any person charged with an offence has the right "to be informed without unreasonable delay of the specific offence." Evidently, if the terms "comfort" and "well-being" do not permit exact definition, there is no way the provincial au-

thorities could claim to have informed the company of the "specific offence" with which it had been charged.

I had certain moral reservations about presenting evidence that might exculpate a "polluter," but the epistemological and ethnographic questions — What do we mean by "comfort?" Can "well-being" be measured? Is there such an entity as "the human being?" — intrigued me, so I agreed to testify. What follows is an abridged account of some of the main points I raised during my testimony. The reader may find it an interesting exercise to attempt to refute them.

I should confess at the outset that my own views are coloured (or better, odourised) by Alain Corbin's *The Foul and the Fragrant*, which concerns the "perceptual revolution" in late 18th-century France.¹ Corbin documents how the "*ancien régime* of sensory values," which placed an emphasis on smelling strongly, was jettisoned around the same time the *ancien régime* itself was overthrown, and how this paved the way for "the bourgeois control of the sense of smell and the construction of a schema of perception based on the preeminence of sweetness." Hence the muted olfactory environment we enjoy today, which is perhaps best summed up in the advertising slogan for a new kind of laundry detergent, Unscented Tide: "Now all you smell is clean!" (which is to say, nothing at all).

Corbin often expresses a certain nostalgia for the "free organic manifestations" of pre-revolutionary France, and a certain admiration for the way in which manual workers and peasants resisted the deodorising strategies of the bourgeoisie (e.g., privatisation of excrement, bans on "foul" language, etc.), two sentiments which I share. I am also sympathetic to Edward T. Hall's indictment of the North American sensorium.² According to Hall, the suppression of odours in public places and the widespread use of deodorants, etc., have deprived our life of "richness and variety," to the point where our olfactory apparatus is now "culturally underdeveloped." The following, then, is a plea for the liberation of the nose.

A few preliminary points. While human beings are capable of distinguishing between and recognising a great variety of smells, neither English nor French provide us with the means to articulate these sensations. Unlike taste with its flavour vocabulary, or sight with its vocabulary of colours, smell is speechless. The best we can do when we do wish to evoke a smell (short of producing one) is to speak in terms of its causes or effects; for example, "the smell of a rose," "the smell of coffee," or "an appetising smell," "a nauseating smell." This raises the question: How can a legislator use language to prohibit that which is unmentionable, or, in other words, that which cannot be defined?

A further problem is presented by the phenomenon known as adaptation or "smell fatigue." It appears that sensitivity to an olfactory stimulus is reduced to zero upon prolonged stimulation, providing the smell remains constant. For example, it is only the visitor to a pulp and paper town who is conscious of its stench, and only the schizophrenic who is continually aware of his or her own body odour. Other well-known cases of "adaptation" (i.e., loss of sensitivity) include medical students in dissection rooms and workers in rendering plants. It follows that Article 20 is inapplicable to the source of a continuous olfactory stimulus for the simple reason that those normally exposed to it are not "affected" by it.

But it may be objected that since Article 20 refers to "the human being," it includes those irregularly exposed to an olfactory stimulus (because of a shift in the wind or the smell being inconstant) as well, and that a charge may therefore be brought on their behalf, if not those in the immediate vicinity of the olfactory offender. However,

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this referral creates more problems than it solves, for there are no innate antipathies or sympathies in matters olfactory. That is, all of our likes and dislikes are acquired. For example, numerous studies have shown that infants are not averse to such odorants as sweat or feces, and may even delight in them. In point of fact, it is not until the age of four or five that children interiorise the olfactory norms of their culture (as every parent knows).

Within every culture there is general agreement as to what sorts of odours are most foul and which are most fragrant. But within these extremes, preferences and aversions vary significantly in accordance with a person's age, sex and temperament. Consider, for example, the "age-liking curve" which R.W. Moncrieff discovered when he exposed some 500 British subjects to ten odorants.³ What this graph shows is that you cannot please (or offend) all of the people all of the time.

Moncrieff would have found even greater variation had he expanded his study to include individuals from other socio-economic strata and ethnic backgrounds than the British middle class. This appears from various studies concerning attitudes toward air pollution carried out in the United States.⁴ These studies show that concern about air pollution is positively related to socio-economic status (the higher one's status the greater one's sensitivity) and degree of urbanity. They also evidence that whites are more knowledgeable about air pollution than blacks, the most probable explanation for this being that the latter have more "social hazards," such as poverty, to deal with, and these take priority over environmental concerns.

Given that the degree to which a human being is affected by an olfactory stimulus varies with that person's age, sex, temperament, ethnic background and socio-economic status, it follows that the reference to "the human being" in Article 20 does not provide just one standard of reference, but many, which is to say, no standard at all. Is "the human being" in question a five-year-old or a 50-year-old? Black or white? Each of these categories betokens a different threshold of tolerance.

The question of acceptable thresholds becomes even more complex once one factors in the meaning different smells have for different classes of people or sectors of society. As Erik Cohen points out, "the experience of smell ought to be understood emically, in terms of its meaning within the cultural context, and cannot be fully grasped etically, i.e., merely from the olfactory characteristics of the smelling substance."⁵

Cohen's work has focused on how the context of smell in rural society differs from that in urban society. In the former, a temporal *cycle of smells* obtains (closely related to ecological cycles), whereas in the latter, smells are associated with specific static *domains* ranging from the "bad smells" of industrial non-public space to the "good smells" of residential or private space (public space being olfactorily neutral). The urban dweller is therefore re-

pulsed by substances bearing the smells of putrefaction, decay and death in or out of their proper domain, whereas for the rural dweller, because such substances are used to produce new life (for example, as fertilisers) and thus form part of an ecological cycle, their badness is qualified by the good which they produce, and they are appreciated accordingly: "the odious smell of refuse, through ecological recycling, will become the pleasant smell of the life-giving fertiliser." It follows that urban and rural dwellers are not affected in the same way by the same smell, which, once again, makes it difficult if not impossible to gauge what standard is implied by the legislator's reference to "the human being."

Let us now consider the more general question of what is meant by the term "comfort." As Witold Rybczynski observes, there exists a scientific definition of "comfort."⁶ This holds that comfort is "that condition in which discomfort has been avoided." For example, a scientist will measure the temperatures at which people begin to feel either too hot or too cold and in this way determine the "thermal comfort zone" for the population concerned. But, Rybczynski argues, there is a fallacy to this definition:

The fallacy of the scientific definition of comfort is that it considers only those aspects of comfort that are measurable, and with not untypical arrogance denies the existence of the rest — many behavioural scientists have concluded that because people experience only discomfort, comfort as a physical phenomenon does not really exist at all... A room may feel uncomfortable — it may be too bright for intimate conversation, or too dark for reading — but avoiding such irritations will not automatically produce a feeling of well-being.

In illustration of this point, Rybczynski discusses a survey done at Merck & Company in New York, a workplace with an attractive modern commercial interior. The survey revealed that Merck employees experienced some degree of dissatisfaction with 20 of the 30 different aspects of the workplace identified in the questionnaire, in spite of the fact that the Merck offices had been completely redesigned and renovated so as to promote comfort. Rybczynski concludes that comfort is one of those complicated experiences which, like wine-tasting, defies objectification or measurement.

The implication of the preceding discussion is that there may exist degrees of discomfort, but there is no such thing as comfort *per se*. In any discussion of comfort one must always ask: Comfort for whom? It follows that had the legislator used the term "discomfort" in article 20 there would be no question as to the constitutionality of this article, but having used the term "comfort," the article would seem to be void due to vagueness. There can be no positivistic definition given to the term "comfort."

Finally, there is the term "well-being."

To the question: Does the term "well-being" have a standard meaning? the answer must also be in the negative. This emerges in part from a very interesting study of the related term "health" conducted by D'Houtard and Field.⁷ They found that the meaning this concept has for an individual is determined by his or her socio-economic status. For example, respondents belonging to the upper middle or managerial class defined "health" in terms of "personal unfolding" and "life without constraints" whereas manual workers defined it as "to be regularly under medical supervision" or "to be able to work." D'Houtard and Field relate these complementary representations (one personal, the other social) of the same concept to the corresponding social roles of the persons surveyed — namely, mastery on the one hand and the execution of social tasks on the other.

Of course, it is not only the meaning of health, but also health itself, that is distributed along class lines. As is well-known, members of the upper classes are favoured on all measures of life expectancy and contract fewer infectious diseases; at the same time, heart disease, a stress-related illness, is more prevalent among them.

Why this excess of stress? According to Peter Freund, it is "the product of time-pressured work and a competitiveness that is not only a response to job pressures, but is internalised and encouraged as a personal style in the socialisation process of capitalist ... production-oriented societies."⁸ Freund goes on to suggest that the rhythms of capitalism are inimical to the natural rhythms of the body, and interfere above all with our capacity to relax. It is for this reason that there is such a high incidence of psychosomatic illnesses among the upper classes. Freund concludes that in an environment motivated by profit, such as our own, there is a continual redefinition of health and well-being toward a normalisation of stressful habits and practices. The scale of well-being is thus a sliding one.

This raises a deeply distressing question: Can there be any well-being under capitalism? Or to relate this question more closely to the issue at hand: How is it possible to determine whether a particular noise, or a particular smell, is *the* factor responsible for a reduction in well-being when our well-being is already so compromised by the social and economic system under which we live?

Of course, were we not so anxious about our social status, we would not have to be so concerned about our well-being, or, I would argue, the smell of our environment. This is rather a complex point. It is best enunciated by going back to consider that revolutionary moment in French (and, in effect, world) history when all men were declared equal in principle, but then immediately sought ways of differentiating themselves from each other again. *The* means of differentiation that the bourgeoisie latched onto was smell: tolerance of smell suddenly came to define social status (the higher one's status the lower one's tolerance). The curious thing is that one

finds nothing in the records to suggest that the level of stench, which we know to have been very high, actually increased in any way, and could therefore be said to have caused the new anxiety. The change, according to Corbin, was at the level of perception, of discourse, only. Thus, it was the emergence of a new social consciousness that precipitated the shift in olfactory consciousness. It was because smell became *the* medium of social differentiation for an emergent elite that smell pollution suddenly came to loom so large in public discourse.

What the preceding discussion implies is that consciousness of smell is a symptom of anxiety about social status. Policing smells, therefore, has more to do with policing social boundaries than with policing "pollution" in the conventional sense. This analysis has an interesting bearing on the case at bar, for it turns out that the rendering factory in question has been in operation for close to 30 years. It is situated in a town across the river from Québec City, where farming and working on the railway are the only other sources of employment. Why, then, the sudden reconstitution of the odours emanating from the factory as "polluting"? This reconstitution must have to do with the new housing development that has grown up on the banks of the river opposite the factory, which is inhabited by a very exclusive class of people (deputy ministers and the like). The smells evidently confuse their definition of themselves as upper middle class. The reason for this is simple: smells, by their very nature,

cross boundaries and therefore level distinctions. For those with an interest in maintaining distinctions, that is criminal.

If, as I have suggested, smells are not so much a cause of discomfort as an idiom through which anxiety about social status is expressed, this rather changes the picture of the case. The odours emanating from the factory are not causes of pollution, but rather symptoms of a particular social malaise. It follows that what is really at issue in this case is not smell pollution but land use planning. There is an old legal maxim: one cannot do indirectly what one cannot do directly. It applies to the present case as follows: what is being sought is a zoning change, but rather than going through the proper channels, it is the Environment Quality Act that is being used, and that cannot be done.

Near the end of my testimony, the judge, a good-natured, grandfatherly soul, whose bemused expression told me that my remarks were not having their intended effect, posed a question. Somehow, I am not sure how, we had gotten onto the subject of railroads. He sketched the following scenario. There is a man, and let us say he lives in Brossard, with his wife, two children, and a dog in a split-level house with a V.C.R. and a one-car garage. He is a very average man, in other words. Were the authorities to decide to build a railway line through his backyard would he not be "affected" by the noise of the trains? I had to agree, but went on to note that the judge had had to exclude a great variety of people in his effort to define the average

man. The judge's face fell, and shortly thereafter, court was adjourned.

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NOTES

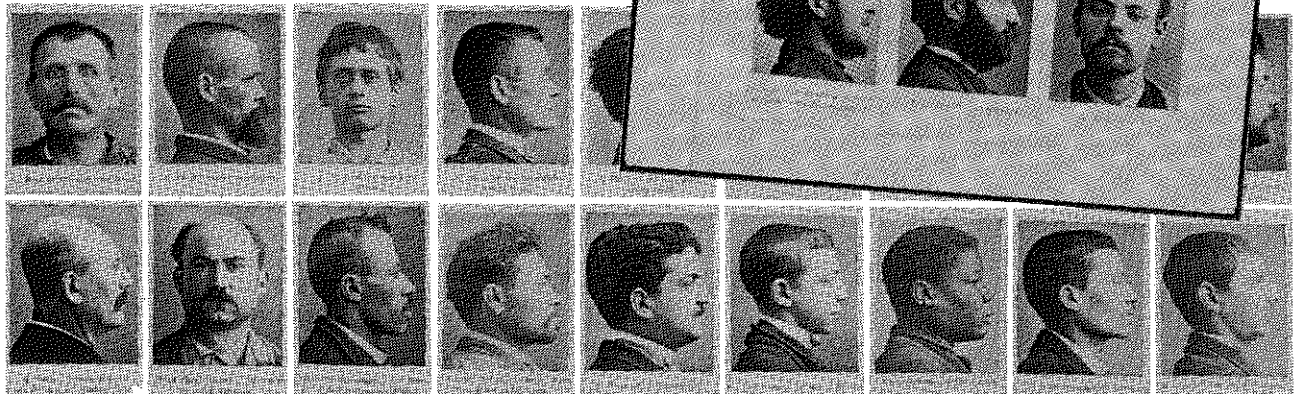
1. Alain Corbin, *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odor and the French Social Imagination*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986.
2. E.T. Hall, *The Hidden Dimension*. New York: Doubleday, 1969.
3. R.W. Mocrieff, *Odor Preferences*. New York: Wiley and Sons, 1966.
4. Gary Evans, ed., *Environmental Stress*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.
5. Erik Cohen, "The Broken Cycle: Smell in a Bangkok Soi (lane)," *Ethnos* 13 (1-2), 1988, p. 37.
6. Witold Rybczynski, *Home: A Short History of an Idea*. Toronto: Penguin, 1986.
7. A. D'Houtard and M. Field, "The image of health: variations in perception by social class," *Sociology of Health and Illness* 6, 1984, p. 30.
8. Peter Freund, *The Civilized Body: Social Domination, Control and Health*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982.

Alphonse Bertillon

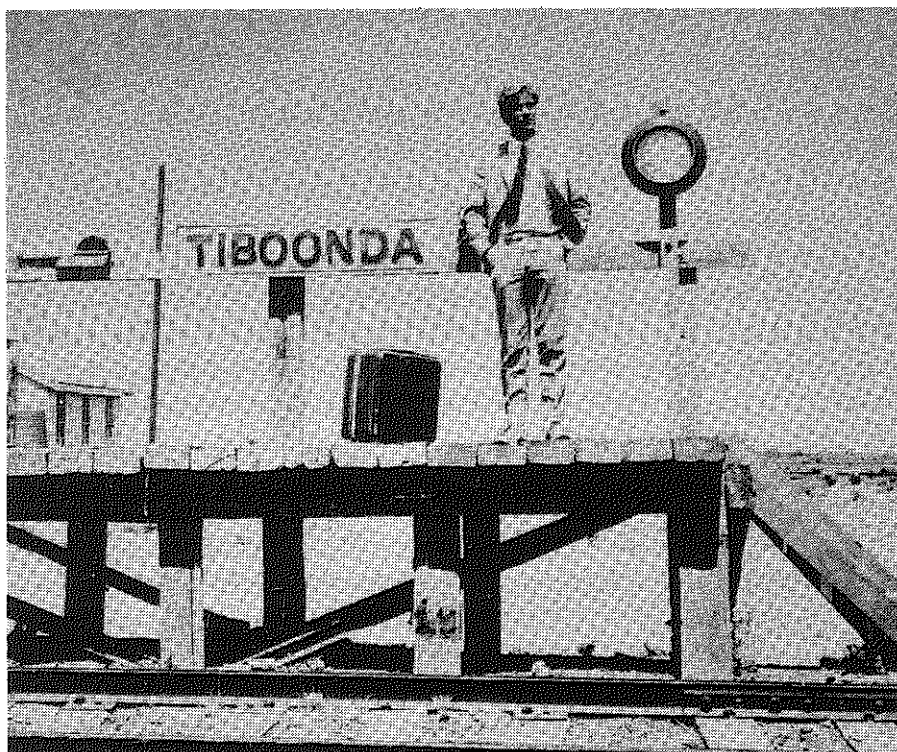
(1853-1914)

developed the first criminal identification system for the Paris police. Called "Anthropométrie Signalétique," Bertillon's method used a series of measurements of the skull and face as well as photographs of the forehead, ears, eyelids, nose and mouth to establish a system of rational identification.

Widely used in Europe and North America, the "Bertillonage" mug-shot established photography as a factual *science* in the legal and judiciary system by the turn of the century.



From *Wake in Fright* (1971)
by Ted Kotcheff



Cultural Studies and Cultural Identity:

Reconstructing Australia Through Its Narratives

Loris Mirella

**National Fictions:
Literature, Film and the Construction of
Australian Narrative**
by Graeme Turner
Sydney and Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1986,
156 pp.

There is a new kind of game being introduced into academic study, one that threatens the traditional disciplinary divisions that exist there. It's called cultural studies and its subversive potential lies in reorganising the texts and authors that make up a field of study — usually called the canon — in terms which do not respect the boundaries of an entrenched discipline like English. In the English departments of Canadian universities, one of these struggles has been to establish recognition for Canadian writers within the accepted canons. One way to affect change within a discipline like English is to expand the list of canonical authors until the ones you want included become canonical; another way is to destroy the divisions between disciplines which produced canons in the first place.

Cultural studies becomes a way to refig-

ure questions of "value" (literary, aesthetic, etc.) in terms which privilege the values one wishes to promote. In Canada, cultural studies programmes (or Canadian Studies) are the institutionalised means to promote an awareness and understanding of Canadian cultural productions.

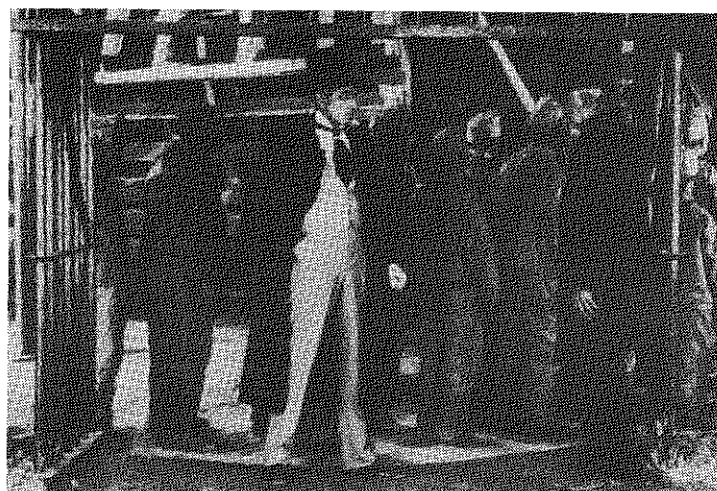
The problem is that all of a sudden "Canadian" becomes a problematic word: what exactly is "Canadian" about a given cultural product? Are these products "Canadian" in the same way? And what is "Canadian" anyway? Suddenly the trick is to establish "Canadian-ness" as a recognised entity at the same time as trying to construct this very property of "Canadian-ness" through these texts.

As Graeme Turner's *National Fictions* demonstrates, such difficulties do not belong to Canadian Studies alone. Turner attempts to stake a claim for Australian cultural studies, to cross literary studies with film studies, yet at the same time he wants to show that Australian literature and film are both "narratives produced by the culture." Turner's goal is to ultimately present the notion of "Australia" as the ideological product of the discernible themes and patterns within these narra-

tives; to show, in effect, that "Australian-ness" is itself a fiction or construct.

Turner admits to three basic objectives in writing this book. One is to legitimise film studies by including it within a larger rubric of narratological studies. The second is to draw out similarities among film narratives to construct what he refers to somewhat apologetically as a tradition. And the third, to find from these sets of patterns and narrative preferences the dominant forms of meaning which designate the cultural ideology of "Australian-ness."

The specificity of Australia as a social and cultural space allows Turner to ground his analysis on materialist premises, including the function of tradition, of the status of various academic departments, especially cultural studies, and of a particularised experience of the world. In this study, strongly influenced by Althusserian notions of structure, narrative is used "to suggest not only what an Australian narrative is, but also what it does," in that narrative works to transform history — social forces — into ideology, a naturalised social discourse. By "telling itself stories," a culture's narratives accrue determinate formal preferences, developing patterns



From *For the Term of His Natural Life* (1927)

that carry significance in terms not only of organising experience in narrative but also in that "such meanings are ultimately political." This is Turner's starting point for considering myths concerning "Australianness" and why he wants to show them to be, as the title suggests, "national fictions," constructs which mask contradictions and recuperate oppositions.

Turner concentrates on films of the seventies revival, as he calls it, but references and texts stretch from nineteenth-century literature and from films of the 1920s. The range of texts both literary and filmic is extensive, but the relative shortness of the book (156 pages including bibliography) prohibits sustained analysis of texts as well as restricting him to perfunctory treatment of theoretical points. Turner says as much, that this is a book of theory with examples, not a "comprehensive survey of the full range of possible applications." What emerges is a strong cultural pattern identified as "Australian," the cultural terrain he wants to establish as "the dominant field of meaning." But the rather schematic character of this dominant pattern cannot help but produce an effect of flatness, or sameness, not only in the narratives he considers, but also in the conception of how ideology operates.

The necessity of treating only certain texts in depth causes those he mentions to lose their specificity. For example, a novel from the 1870s, *For the Term of His Natural Life*, is compared with *Stir*, a film made in 1980, to illustrate how the theme of "convictism," and that of prisoner mentality, function in Australian narrative and ideology. The similarities of narrative patterns he traces become variations on the same theme: the ideology of making helplessness and resignation acceptable and "natural" to the individual in Australian society. Thus he moves outside the immediate narrative context of the "prisoner," including *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (1978) and *In Search of Anna* (1979). The discussion slips into an analysis of metaphoric imprisonment including such films as *Caddie* (1976) and *Wake in Fright* (1971), or novels such as Brian Penton's *Landtakers* (1934) and Henry Handel Richardson's *Ultima Thule* (1929). Suddenly the narrative patterns look exactly like the ideological patterns. One almost unavoidable outcome of such analyses is that, though Turner wants

to stress that the values of the dominant culture are articulated through various cultural practices, it sometimes looks as though those ideological values precede the narrative forms.

The social significance invariably turns out to be that these patterns are inescapable ideological forms into which individuals are inscribed, "controlling fictions" into which they are naturalised. Turner notes this danger, that "the concentration in this study on dominant patterns inevitably leads to potentially monistic conclusions, tending to funnel all aspects being considered into a single pattern." Moreover, his methodology constrains the possible oppositional responses to this all-inclusive ideology to no more than an interpretive opposition, usually expressed through irony.

Turner points out that these dominant interpretations, hegemonic and sustaining for the status quo, can remain dominant only through a constant process of "winning out" over more marginal discourses, so that "meaning itself is a site of struggle between conflicting interests and constructions." In other words, a dominant interpretation is the result of ideological struggle and a product of ongoing social conflict. Nonetheless, Turner's argument tends to make antagonism static, obviating the necessary interaction between the (antagonistic) interests of social groups. Given Turner's premise that narrative is "bathed in ideology," to quote Althusser, that there is no "outside" to ideology, then the only possible manifestation of opposition is at the level of interpretation, where the narrative forms "leak" (subversive) meanings that seep out beyond what the forms are supposed to contain. In this type of reading the "dominant" is always "bad," representing hegemonic control, while the marginal is "good," inscribing the values of the unempowered.

On one level, Turner's example of *The Man From Snowy River* (1982), where "popular" (i.e., the masses') interpretations conflict with the dominant ones, does illustrate how nationalism, as one form of populism, contains a possibility of oppositional discourse, capable of "challenging

the dominant points of view of the culture," and working against the values of the dominant order. But even in saying that this is a sign of popular, perhaps proletarian opposition, that opposition remains structural (since there is no outside), a "contained" rather than a manifest alternative.

This weakness in his argument stems, in part, from his attempt to unite the positive aspects of literature and film under the rubric of cultural studies. For Turner, film embodies the values of popular culture in contrast to the high cultural value of literature, establishing a conflict which includes class values. Yet, while film stands in for popular culture, that does not mean that film also encompasses oppositional culture as such; film is still part of the dominant discourse, and opposition as a real alternative or "outside" drops out. *Gallipoli* (1981) is not a very politically progressive film, Turner states, despite its use of a nationalist story. In Turner's model, texts which cannot tap into national myths drop out of consideration, and those texts that do are co-opted by their ability to be located within the dominant discourse. The inherited myths, the repeated forms, can all be accommodated; through this tradition must be read the current cultural practices. The result is that Turner preserves the continuity of a single pattern, or structure, but fulfils the prophecy of the monistic tendencies.

This makes the final chapter, "Complications and Conclusions," extremely interesting. Turner moves away from accounting only for the dominant patterns within the discourse of nation to consider other, potentially more subversive, forms, dividing the chapter in terms of realist and non-realist practices. The question of narrative practices becomes the question of representation itself. Here, Turner addresses some of those oppositional, popular voices which seem to offer possibilities of "Australian" identity beyond those laid out in the previous chapters, which basically had considered the products in the main, realist tradition. The strategies he considers to be clearly oppositional can be found in the works of contemporary Australian writers



Filming *The Man from Snowy River* (1982) by George Miller



and filmmakers such as Patrick White, Peter Carey and Bert Deling (comparable to writers like Kurt Vonnegut and Gabriel Garcia Marquez), who are characterised through their texts' foregrounding of "satire, pastiche, and intertextual references," which, arguably, makes recuperation by the dominant culture more problematic and opens "Australia" itself into a more varied cultural terrain.

Turner emphasises technique and form much more in this chapter. However, while citing these texts as examples of potentially oppositional discourses, the moment he re-introduces the mediation of nation, he cautions that "these examples present genuine challenges to the dominant structures I have described, but they are challenges which inevitably take place within the frame of those structures.... The process of their analysis inevitably draws on the patterns I have outlined in earlier chapters." To use his own terms, outside of this "field of meaning," there is no meaning; there is no outside from which to objectively consider culture because cultural discourse establishes and fixes its field of meanings.

Turner never uses the concept of post-modernism (a *p*-word of sorts), and may not subscribe to it as such, but his goal seems to be comparable to what this concept supposedly enables; that is, an attempt to link formal innovations with a socio-historical content, in this case, nation. Fredric Jameson, whose work on narrative Turner refers to on several occasions, theorises precisely these strategies of fabulation and the like as characteristic of "narrative production" within late capitalism, a socio-economic formation whose logic of production demands different oppositional strategies in order for cultural products to convey their political point.

One of the significant signposts of post-

modernism is, Jameson claims, the return to story-telling and away from a preoccupation with form, a strategy evident in third world literatures, within the stories of which allegories, national or otherwise, are enacted and formalised. In this way, analysis must also move away from a preoccupation with form to accommodate the dynamics of history and the possibility of social struggle. The last chapter is Turner's attempt to deal with just such a contemporary situation where previous chapters seem to treat culture, and meaning, as static. Earlier, this characteristic is noted in the pattern of late-seventies films to "invoke" history, in films such as *Caddie* and *Sunday Too Far Away* (1975), as a means of providing narrative closure. In the final chapter, the self-conscious myth-making of Ray Lawrence's *Bliss* (1985) provides a good example of resistance to the conventional patterns of incorporation into mainstream culture, as are, in a different way, films such as *Going Down* (1983) and *Goodbye Paradise* (1982), to quote a few of Turner's examples, as well as the fantastical stories of Patrick White.

National Fictions is a strong structuralist rendering of narrative within the historical and ideological context of Australia. While Turner rejects the possibility of an "outside" to culture, he does allow for the introduction of an oppositional space within it, where the production of narrative itself is highlighted, thereby moving from simply following these narrative patterns to playing with them.

Turner's study provides an accurate portrait of Australian culture, revealing its recurring patterns, in order to create a framework within which connections can be made among the various academic disciplines. On this political level, that of academic studies, such a study is very useful (and perhaps necessary). But within this

uniform cultural typology, the crucial question centres on whether this tributary approach (where everything feeds into one ideological stream) poses the question of ideology in a politically viable way.

Turner's model shows clearly what "Australia" is in terms of cultural patterns and offers a direction for cultural studies to grapple more effectively with such a social construct.

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From *The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith* (1978) by Fred Schepisi

AMERICA



Jean Baudrillard

Translated by Chris Turner

Adventures in the Dromosphere

Gary Genosko

America
by Jean Baudrillard
translated by Chris Turner
London: Verso, 1988, 129 pp.

Amérique
by Jean Baudrillard
Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1986, 249 pp.

Cool Memories 1980-1985
by Jean Baudrillard
Paris: Galilée, 1987, 290 pp.

In his collection of aphoristic reflections, *Cool Memories*, Baudrillard remarks of *America*:

For *America*, a single method: given a certain number of fragments, notes and accounts put together over a fixed period of time, it must have in it a solution which integrates them all, without

addition or subtraction, in a necessary ensemble, the very necessity which has everywhere attended, just below the surface, to their collection. To hypothesize that this material is the singular and the best, because it organises itself secretly according to the same thought; that everything which has been thought according to the same obsession has a sense and there is inevitably one solution to the problem of its reconstitution. The study begins with the certainty that everything is already there, and that it is enough to find in it the key [my translation].

There it is, the key: Baudrillard tells us that there is one to be found and, in a roundabout way, what it might be. In doing so he has already intimated a great deal about a book which has a secret organisation, since the secret is not the key to something other or deeper than itself. Freud, for example, enjoyed his "keys," his picklocks and skeleton keys, and used them to open the phantasies and trace the desires of his analysands.

On the other hand, Baudrillard's key designates that there is a secret in *America* that lends itself to neither interpretation nor communication. The key to the book is that it contains a secret but the secret reveals nothing since it is not a cache. Psychoanalysis will have none of this, since in its will to make desire show itself, it denies the pure joy, the wanton giddiness of the secret. As a secret, *America* is undecipherable, and that is its charm. The secret challenges the hermeneut who is eager for knowledge and willing to produce it at all costs. Baudrillard is not so desperate: a salacious glance is superior to a formal introduction.

America has been reviewed widely in America, and elsewhere, to dubious critical acclaim (see J. Hoberman's frolicking review in the *Voice Literary Supplement*, March 1989). It has not been picked clean by the culture vultures of the highbrow review pages, despite their best efforts to peck away at it (see Robert Hughes on Baudrillard's jargon in *The New York Review*, 1 June 1989).

If *America* is patchy, then *Cool Memories* is a scrap heap. In these postmodern times a bundle of snippets is supposed to be enough to keep us going, and it is, to be sure, if one relinquishes the heavy burden of cracking the kernel of truth and, instead, leaves the veil over truth, the secret under cover. Keep this in mind: seduction requires a secret. Even one who has put a secret into circulation for one's personal delectation can do no more than succumb to the pleasure of a tired and lascivious absence.

While we might marvel at Jacques Derrida's laundering of Nietzsche's fragment "I have forgotten my umbrella," Baudrillard's final cool memory, "*Ce journal est une matrice subtile de paresse*" (This journal is a subtle matrix of idleness), might also be put through the wringer as that which summarises a collection which has no total effect, nor even purports to have one, but for that reason cannot be

resisted. Baudrillard's final memory is a parting shot born of the idleness which it describes: "Today, Monday [1985]. I've written all the articles, responded to all the letters (finally!), passed the thesis and abandoned America — today, for the first time in ten years, five years perhaps, I realise that I no longer have anything to do" [my translation]. *Cool Memories* is the product of a clean-up operation. What was collected became a journal, a literary recycling project, but one which was well-earned.

Look at *America*. It seems to beckon a coffee table on which to sit and shine like any fleeting sign of the cool, drawing one near, away from the crystals and Batman paraphernalia. Such is the work of a so-called enigmatic commodity. It even has photographs, unlike the French edition, which suggests a weak genealogical link with Robert Frank's *The Americans* and even Laurie Anderson's performance piece "Americans on the Move."

What does *America* "conceal" about its origins? It was published by a collective which has diligently mapped the distortions of the postindustrial market society in the pages of the *New Left Review* and given us so many "critical books for critical people," as its copy reads. It's Verso, *né* New Left Books. One can only imagine the debates on the production of commodities which gave way to the publication of an expensive, pretty volume of *Amérique* in translation. One may go from Ralph Miliband to Baudrillard but there is no way back again.

Now, Verso didn't mask the fact that it published *America*. No, in what was a shrewd marketing decision, Verso released a book which has titillated hip consumers. Verso knows a fetish object when it sees one and that the market for post-structuralism in translation is hot. For Baudrillard, as we can imagine, all of this makes the kind of ironic sense that Verso has unwittingly provoked in a moment of unfettered ecstasy: it's all over with the commodity. *America* simply doesn't have anything inside its secret to reveal. The book has taken its revenge on Verso by showing itself to be illegible. It is an object which hides nothing and does nothing but circulate. With *America*, Verso has surpassed itself, let itself be seduced by what remains of the political economy it has so ardently critiqued. We have witnessed, then, with no hard feelings, the dénouement of critical thought at its own hands.

There is, of course, another side to the matter. Wasn't it about time that someone on the left answered Stuart Hall's repeated wake-up calls to the style of the present? Yes, of course, but there isn't any left left in the work of Baudrillard, for, as he has said, the left arrived too late, at least in France, but still in time to manage the implosion of the social or what is called socialism. Thus, we have *America*, and the left, stirred by its commemoration compulsion, performs plastic surgery on history so as to ensure that there will be no more revolutions other than simulated ones.

America begins with "Vanishing Point," the point of disappearance in an ob-scene of pure traveling composed by means of a

gearshift behind the wheel of a Chrysler. In San Antonio, Salt Lake City, Alamo-gordo and Torrey Canyon, Baudrillard disappears into the radical indifference of the American desert of affectless signs. In America, culture, as nature, is a seismic form: an infinite, iconic proliferation of cracks and rifts. Baudrillard ponders the "sights" (El Alamo, Bonneville, White Sands and the Salk Institute) from the whore of the desert in the south, Las Vegas, to the extraterrestrial Salt Lake City in the north, where all of the statues of Christ resemble Björn Borg.

"Vanishing Point" evokes the work of Paul Virilio, whom Baudrillard works with on the editorial committee of *Transverses*, a quarterly review published through the Centre George Pompidou in Paris. In order to realise Virilio's idea of the aesthetics of disappearance, Baudrillard boards an interpretive vehicle which carries him to a centrifugal, ex-centric limit of sorts; just as a supersonic jet may be said to punch a hole in the sound barrier, Baudrillard reaches a point of no return where his theoretical circulation (he does not move at the speed of sound) produces an absence which absorbs him. This poetics of space gives way to the desert of time, an amnesic zone where all sense and spatial reference falls away. In this dromosphere, a voyage is described by the relation of the speed of a moving object to the speed of sound in the medium through which it travels, while the speed of sound is proportional to the square root of the absolute temperature. The Mach regime, then, is both Baudrillard's and Virilio's perceptual prothesis.

Turner's decision to translate "*l'Amérique sidérale*" as "astral America," as opposed to *sidereal* America, was an unfortunate one since he thereby obscured the Virilian trope around which Baudrillard's work turns. A sidereal day is some three minutes 56 seconds shorter than a usual 24-hour day; by the same token, the distance between two points (departure-arrival) appears to be shorter than it is as the speed at which one travels increases. Such is the luxury of the Concorde, for instance, and Baudrillard would be pleased to know that during the Canadian National Exhibition's air show in Toronto in 1987, British Airways offered flights on the Concorde, "to nowhere at twice the speed of sound." *Sidereal* does not only signify America's relation to the stars, the stars and bars, lone and Hollywood stars, but sets up Virilio's work as Baudrillard's intertextual referent. "Vanishing Point" is a very abstract trip indeed. Baudrillard sets his pace at a sidereal rate, just as the driving apparatus of a telescope is set at a certain rate so as to track a star. In Baudrillard's case, however, the star has just imploded, and appropriately so.

Although Baudrillard seems to be in a hurry on his way to nowhere, in the second section of *America* he touches down in "New York." Turner's translation gets off to a shaky start since at the outset Baudrillard refers to himself as "*Missionnaire aéronautique des majorités silencieuses et des stratégies fatales*," while Turner for some reason gives us "Aeronautic missionary of the silent

majorities," thus retaining the former mention of Baudrillard's *A L'Ombre Des Majorités Silencieuses* (1978) but not the latter reference to his *Les Stratégies Fatales* (1983). Moreover, in the same paragraph, "*la douceur verticale des gratte-ciel*" becomes "the steeping gentleness of skyscrapers," a rather overblown rendition which includes the questionable adjective "steeping."

The silent majority or nebulous mass no longer operates as a political or sociological referent, thinks Baudrillard, since it absorbs everything without a trace and cannot be said to offer anything in return. Although Baudrillard has written that one cannot speak in the name of this mass, he seems to want to do so in "New York," in spite of himself. However, if Jean-François Lyotard can refer to "Adorno as Devil," we may think of "Baudrillard as Nixon" in order to find the impetus of this desire.

In his "Pursuit of Peace" address of 3 November 1969, Richard M. Nixon spoke out against a vocal minority, who opposed the war in Vietnam, in favour of the patriotic will and reason of an American majority: "And so tonight — to you, the great silent majority of my fellow Americans — I ask for your support." Like Nixon, Baudrillard wants to provoke this mass, and, in both instances, major, ironic "victories" may be cited: a second term for Nixon and a splash in the North American art and academic markets for Baudrillard.

Nixon has his Watergate, while Baudrillard has his *America*, a book which has engendered many enthusiastic misappropriations and highly selective, even reductive, versions of what is known of his *œuvre*.

Nixon had his dirty little secrets; Baudrillard just has the secret. Nixon had his opening to China; Baudrillard thinks that Vietnam was the occasion for China's apprenticeship to the world stage. For both Nixon and Baudrillard, America won the war but not the actual fighting. *Apocalypse Now*, Baudrillard adds, was part of the spoils.

In 1946, Sartre exclaimed, "*J'aime New York*." During the 1970s, "I love New York" became the catch phrase that one could use to describe New York, the city and the state: a simple, empty loyalty. One might love the city, but Baudrillard thinks that there is no love among those who live in it: "Why do people live in New York? There is no relationship between them." There is no place for the "couple" in New York: "Only tribes, gangs, mafia families, secret societies, and perverse communities can survive, not couples. This is the anti-Ark." It is not only the solitude of the inhabitants that impresses Baudrillard but the fetishistic delight that each New Yorker takes in inconsequential performances of self-affirmation (running the New York marathon, covering subway cars with *noms de plume*).

Baudrillard's New York owes much to Sinatra: "If I can make it there, I'll make it anywhere," the crooner crooned, a precursor to Baudrillard's phrase "I did it!" as the height of "autistic performance ... a challenge to one's self." *America* gives us the New York we have already absorbed through the spectral media images that

populate our dreams of the city at the centre of the world.

In "Astral America," *America and Cool Memories* may be seen to reflect one another like two funhouse mirrors standing face-to-face. One finds this frantic referentiality in Baudrillard's remarks in *America* on the film *The Last Day*, and in *Cool Memories* on the film *The Day After*: the former failed to make the nuclear scene credible, and, although the latter sought to pit dissuasion against dissuasion, it only proved that we have already been irradiated. Again, in *America* Baudrillard refers to Boy George, Michael Jackson and David Bowie as exceptional figures at the ground zero of masculinity and femininity; Michael Jackson, solitary mutant, god-child, prosthetic idol, appears in *Cool Memories* as the one, "better than Christ," who would set us free from race and sex. There are more familiar memories in *America*: whereas in *La Gauche divine*, Baudrillard's political chronicle of the left in France from 1977-1984, "the left is the monster from *Alien*," in *America* the laughter on American television is the same monster. But in *Cool Memories* it is J.R. Ewing who is the emblem of the tribal culture of *Dallas*, in a country which "is the only remaining primitive society."

Like Fredric Jameson, Baudrillard also gets lost in the Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles. One can image Jameson, Baudrillard, Terry Eagleton and Mike Davis wandering through this labyrinthine palace, passing one another now and then, "without any two pairs of eyes ever meeting," until their delirious paths bring them to the rotating cocktail bar where they prepare to face the primal scene: the desert which is America. For Henry Miller in *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare*, the "desert rat" responds to a question about where the desert begins by saying: "Why, as far as I can make out, it's all desert, all this country." Baudrillard is a desert rat. His hunting grounds are "the deserts, the mountains, the freeways, the Safeways, the ghost towns, or the downtowns, not lectures at the university. I know the deserts, their deserts, better than they do." All one needs to understand America is a car; well, and a whiskey, as Baudrillard adds tactfully.

With the "Utopia Achieved" that is America in all of its sterling banality, we find the following admission:

Banality, lack of culture, and vulgarity do not have the same meaning here as they have in Europe. Or perhaps this is merely the crazy notion of a European, a fascination with an unreal America. Perhaps Americans are quite simply vulgar, and this meta-vulgarity is merely something I have dreamt up. Who knows? [Turner does not note that this phrase is in English in the original and italicised, so as to be doubly marked as meta-banal.] But I am inclined to suggest, in time-honoured fashion, that you have nothing to lose if I am wrong and everything to gain if I am right.

After *America*, Baudrillard will ultimately question the reason for being European

and describe the double negative transference to which, on the one hand, American intellectuals give themselves over by casting nostalgic glances towards Europe and, on the other hand, the same relation which Europeans cultivate in "casting longing eyes towards all-out [American] modernity;" he may simply be wrong. In reading Baudrillard, one must be constantly on the lookout for such qualifiers and thus neither attempt to rigidly positivise his "theory" nor to treat it as poetry, though he has translated (Brecht) and written (his own *L'Ange de stuc*) that too. We may be in the era of the reign of simulation, but we are also witnessing the reign of the qualifier: "perhaps," "as if," "who knows?" The hedge is an insidious post-modern form.

In terms of all the trappings of "imperialism," America may have lost some ground, Baudrillard maintains in "The End of US Power?" but at least it has *Dallas*. It is not that America is running on empty. Rather, it's running on hysterical power: "the process whereby something continues to develop by inertia, whereby an effect continues even when its cause has disappeared." As much as Baudrillard is prepared to graft explanations culled from physics onto social and political phenomena, he prefers, as we may see in abundance in *L'échange symbolique et la mort*, *Les stratégies fatales* and *Cool Memories*, explanations which are pataphysical.

"In a more comic vein [the hysterical system functions], like the cyclist in Jarry's *Supernale*, who has died of exhaustion on

the incredible trip across Siberia, but who carries on pedaling and propelling the Great Machine, his rigor mortis transformed into motive power." America is like Jarry's cyclist; the obese system of modernity resembles Pa Ubu; California hums with a pataphysical ambience. The sceptre of the French playwright (a plunger) haunts Baudrillard's texts, and the imaginary science of pataphysics is perhaps the kinklet of his qualifiers. On the matter of this plunger, we see how it might have come in handy in *Cool Memories* where Baudrillard tells us that "*Mon lavabo est bouché*" (My sink is plugged).

America ends with "Desert For Ever," an epiphany on the pure forms of the desert and Los Angeles. All of Baudrillard's "hypers" gather here: the hyperreal or what is more real than the real, the tissue of L.A.; hypertrophy, the excessive growth of the urban tissue modeled on a cancerous cell; hypertelia, the delirious growth of useless appendages (suburbs, freeways) in the runaway horizontality of the city; hyperspace, a kind of science fictional zone where meaning, origins and reference points disappear as one "jumps" into it, as in a spaceship; the hyperplastic spiral of modernity into obese forms or the fatter than the fat, Ubu.

This hyperbolic journey is over.

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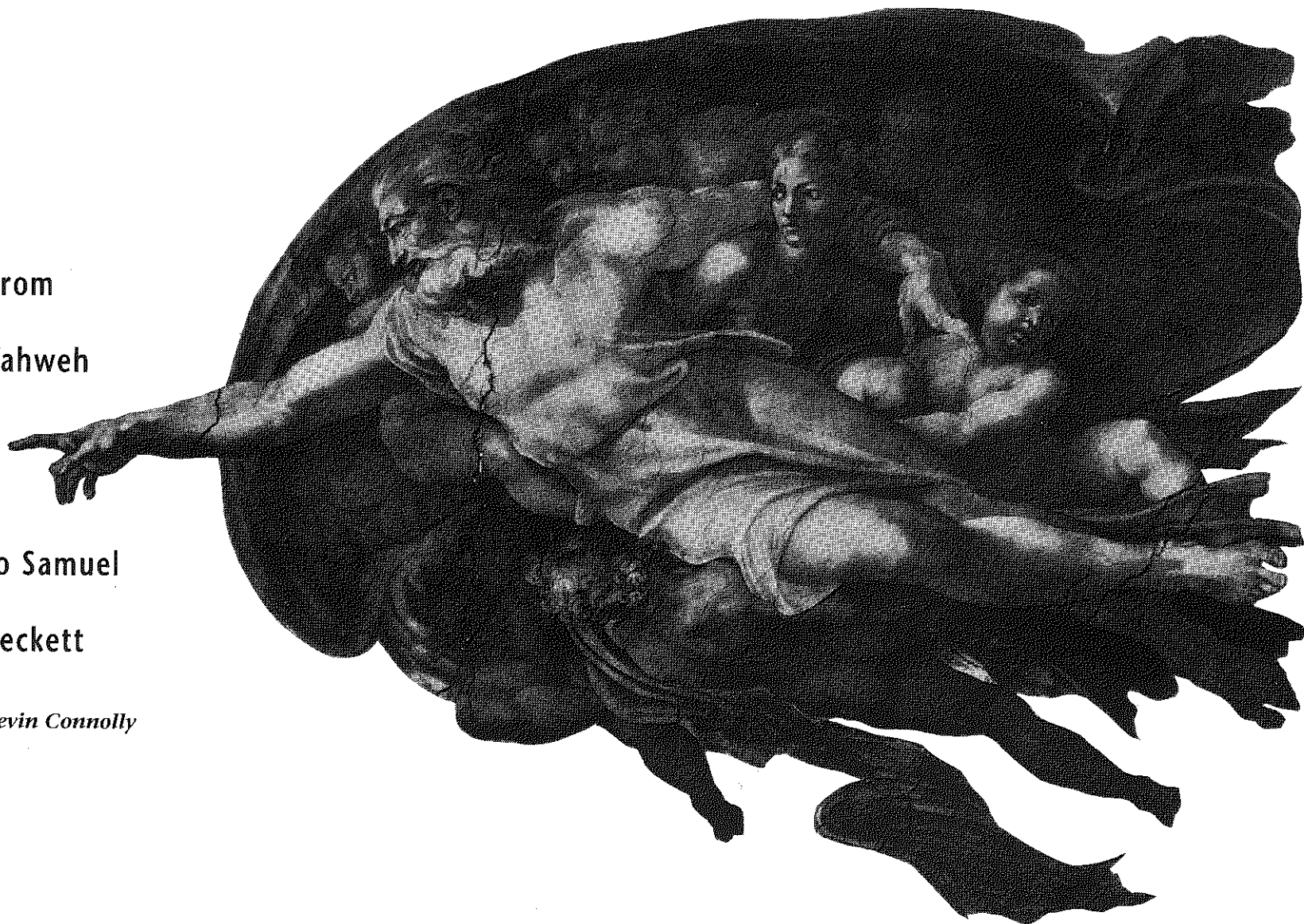
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From
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Kevin Connolly



Ruin the Sacred Truths: Poetry and Belief from the Bible to the Present
by Harold Bloom
Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press,
1989, 204 pp.

This collection of revised lectures, the first book-length publication in five years from the Godfather of what critics have dubbed "the hermeneutical Mafia" — the Yale deconstructionists — is something of a surprise, if not in substance then in scope. Bloom's distance from the centre of American deconstructionism — despite close working relationships with Paul de Man and Geoffrey Hartman — has been widening almost since the beginning, just as his revisions of Freud's discussions of creation and repression have made him unique among psychoanalytical critics. But there is little in Bloom's past work — which includes *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973), *A Map of Misreading* (1975), and *Poetry and Repression* (1976), all classics in the field of literary psychoanalysis — which prepares one for the breadth of this new book, a study of belief and the High Sublime from the Yahwist chapters of the Hebraic Bible through Homer, Virgil, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, and Wordsworth, and finishing with Freud and "his strongest literary heirs," Kafka and Beckett.

Bloom's concerns are again related to his now well-grounded psychoanalysis of artistic motivation. Bloom sees literature as

a kind of vast romantic relay race, in which all of the runners are intellectual Titans, each equally committed to convincing the audience that he is (deservedly) running the final lap. For each Titan the effort of the previous runner is an unavoidable fact, and yet this effort must be more than merely duplicated, it must be subsumed in a new formulation which not only appears to complete the efforts of the predecessor, but appropriates his achievements. The process is a mixture of anxiety and audacity, a restatement of Freud's Oedipal complex in relation to the long march of literary patriarchy.

For Bloom, poetry has developed concurrently with a series of psychic defences from the castrating power of the poet's precursor — the poet's literary father. "Strong poets" overcome their anxiety of influence by transumption, the deliberate completion through misreading of the great poems of the past. It is this conviction, profoundly Freudian, which prompted Bloom's famous assertion that the meaning of any strong poem is another poem.

It would be easy to underestimate the originality of Bloom's approach, however at odds it may be with other legitimate textual strategies. For Bloom, the English canon, as indeed literature itself, is self-evidently a world unto itself, with little or no political or socio-economic context. Bloom's politics are almost entirely academic. He gives himself *carte blanche* in his

preference of the romantics over the classicists, Milton over Blake, Wordsworth over Shelley, Beckett over Joyce, and so on, but apart from the unnerving certitude he brings to these judgments, there is surprisingly little challenge to canonical authority. Indeed, for Bloom's poetic an unchallenged canon is almost a structural necessity.

Hermeticism firmly entrenched, Bloom sets about clearing his own imaginative space, bringing to the task an awesome range of reading and an intimidating, if not altogether stylish, rhetorical presence. Bloom, it seems, has his own formidable set of critical psychic defences. He rather bitterly refers to the current vanguard of American criticism as the School of Resentment (elsewhere calling them "frustrated social-workers") suggesting that they loathe what they purport to study in Milton, namely his poetic power. Bloom pegs the current penchant for questioning the authority of the author as a trendy intellectual fetish, and likens the whole mess (in the insensitive style of a good patriarch) to a predictable raising and dropping of hem-lengths on women's dresses.

Bloom does well to defend authorship in his new book, which presents his version of the literary greats as minor deities, at least in their own anxiously influenced minds. In the process Bloom adopts something of a priestly or rabbinical function, a peculiar post-structuralist *doppelgänger* for what he refers to as the "secular clergy,"

the professors of literature of his youth. For Bloom's goals here are more ambitious than those of his previous theoretical studies. *Ruin the Sacred Truths* is in many ways Bloom's *Great Code* — in tracing his path of the literary sublime from the Bible to the present, Bloom is also sketching a literary and aesthetic cosmology. In so doing he not only challenges traditional genre distinctions but highlights what he calls "the stubborn resistance of imaginative literature to the categories of sacred and secular."

"I myself do not believe that secularisation is itself a literary process," Bloom states in the opening pages. "If you wish you can insist that all high literature is secular, or, should you desire it so, then all strong poetry is sacred. What I find incoherent is the judgement that some authentic literary art is more sacred or more secular than some other. Poetry and belief wander about, together and apart, in a cosmological emptiness marked by the limits of truth and meaning. Somewhere between



truth and meaning can be found piled up a terrible heap of descriptions of God."

Once again, Bloom must be given full marks for daring. One of my major complaints about *Ruin the Sacred Truths*, however, is that Bloom's originality regularly leaves his readers (or is it students?) out in the cold. With his fondness for complex, apposite terminology and antithetical logic, Bloom has always been difficult; but never, until now, has he seemed indifferent. Sandwiched between periods of original and lucid close-readings of Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, and Kafka, are dense passages of haughty theorising at the highest academic level.

Ruin the Sacred Truths significantly extends Bloom's paradigm on at least two fronts: firstly, it develops a coherent psychological definition of originality, distinguishing it from the urge toward "priority" as developed in his other works; and secondly, it relates that notion of originality to the ongoing metamorphosis of the High Sublime, for Bloom the basis of genuine poetic strength. The scope of Bloom's ap-

plications is also crucial.

Bloom begins with Homer and a writer he calls J., the Yahwist writer posited by Hebrew scholars, responsible for the most sublime, and confounding stories of the Hebrew Bible. J.'s major achievement is the "personality" of Yahweh, who Bloom insists is much different from the "shrunk-en" forms of God subsequently developed in normative Judaism and Christianity. J.'s Yahweh is a powerful, confounding personality appearing in uncanny stories which Bloom sees as beyond interpretation. "J's stories of Yahweh and the Patriarchs are so familiar to us that we simply cannot read them....we are still part of a tradition that has never been able to assimilate their originality despite many efforts to do so."

It is unclear whether or not Bloom sees this originality as latent in the stories themselves or cumulative, inseparable from the tradition which has failed for centuries to assimilate them. The stories Bloom speaks of — the creation of Adam out of clay and breath, Yahweh's odd mood swings and inconsistent behaviour in the story of the Tower of Babel, his unwarranted attack on Moses in Exodus, his burial of Moses with his own hands in an unmarked grave — not only resist but forbid paraphrase, but Bloom is not altogether successful in convincing us that this is due to the strength of the stories themselves, rather than their historical position of authority in Western literature. One can see how Bloom might have a field day with the patterns of repetition and revision among the Bible's various authors, from the poet of Jeremiah to the poet of Job, to the poet of Jonah, which Bloom reads as a conscious parody of Jeremiah.

Bloom sees the stories of Homer as functioning the same way, although the Homeric gods and Yahweh have little in common as representations. Bloom maintains that the Hebrew Bible has been and will remain difficult for Western thinkers because, despite the familiarity of the Yahwist stories, our modes of thinking have descended from the Greek or Homeric tradition, and the distinctions between the two modes, Hellenic and Hebraic, have never been made clear. In his own attempt, Bloom invokes Nietzsche, who related Greek greatness to a hunger for victory, a spiritual jealousy, while observing that Hebraic metaphors for overcoming tended to settle on suffering and struggle, "the honoring of parental authority to the root of one's soul." It is easy enough to see the fierce Homeric ambition to succeed in the bold Catholic transmutations of Dante and the "rocklike" Protestant ego of Milton, who Bloom seems right in pegging as the most self-assured writer in the English tradition. Similarly, one can see traces of the Hebraic sublime in the strong characters of Shakespeare. Bloom's readings of *Lear*, *Othello*, and especially *Hamlet* are among the finest anywhere, despite Bloom's very specific critical agenda.

Just as the stories of the Yahwist writer J. in Bloom's terminology "overdetermined" all subsequent efforts to absorb them, Shakespeare appears to have overde-

termined all subsequent representations of subjectivity and human consciousness, including Freud's. Bloom has been accused before of mistaking Shakespeare for God, but in his readings of the Shakespearean tragedies he once again uncovers the immense depth and originality of Shakespeare's achievement. As Bloom points out, Shakespeare was the first writer to depict changes in the personalities of his characters arising from their self-conscious analyses of their own utterances.

In Shakespeare, transcendence is a centripetal operation, accomplished ironically in the internal absorption of apparently irreconcilable forces. Lear, in reducing himself to nothing, understands everything, just as Hamlet in surrendering to his own inaction, paradoxically sets in motion the apocalyptic forces which close the play. Shakespearean hero-villians Iago and Edmund anticipate Freud in their destructive lust for authority and their primal Oedipal drive to destroy the patriarch. As Bloom puts it, "Our map or general theory of the mind may be Freud's, but Freud, like all the rest of us, inherits representation of mind, at its most subtle and excellent, from Shakespeare."

Bloom makes a distinction between the Hebraic sublime, with its ironic touches, and the Hellenic sublime, which arises from more ready distinctions between body and soul, mind and spirit. As Bloom sees it, the Hebraic sublime is founded on a radical irony which is "neither the contrast or gap between expectation and fulfilment, nor the saying of one thing and meaning another," rather it is an irony "in which absolutely incommensurate realities collide and cannot be resolved." Bloom traces both in his descent of the great writers to the twentieth century, but it is not until his remarkable interpretation of Kafka that the significance of this distinction becomes clear.

"If I had to construct a scale with literary self-esteem at one end and aesthetic self-flagellation at the other, then Milton would be at the self-celebratory pole and Kafka would be at the extreme of self-punishment." One's instinct here is to agree with Bloom and to add the conflict between Homeric and Hebraic expressions of the sublime to Bloom's imaginary scale. For Bloom spends a great deal of the final chapter in exposing the essential Jewishness of Kafka's thought as inherited through Freud, Kafka's strongest precursor and perhaps the strongest "poetic" voice in twentieth-century literature. Bloom points out that "we now find it difficult to recall that psychoanalysis, after all, is only a speculation, rather than a science, philosophy, or even a religion. Freud is closer to Proust than Einstein, closer even to Kafka than the scientism of Darwin."

Whether or not one accepts this radical absorption of Freud into the mainstream of Western literature is perhaps secondary to its appropriateness to Bloom's argument. Freud not only provides a compelling and necessary link to Miltonian and Shakespearean representations of consciousness, but also between the cognitive patterns of Yahwist mythology and their strikingly

original transumption in the chilly spiritual void of Kafka's parables.

Bloom traces the Freudian negative, through his concept of *Verdrängung*, which Bloom insists is closer to a "trope of flight" than it is to its current translation as "repression," with its overtones of pushing down or pushing under. Freud's notion of the term involves the flight from forbidden and yet desired images or memories. Bloom aligns Freudian memory, which defines consciousness, with rabbinical memory, a tradition in which all meaning is already present in the Bible and its normative commentaries, and in the oral law represented by successive generations of interpreters. In this context, Freudian *Verdrängung*, with its flight from representation, is not unlike the Hebrew warning against idolatry. "The Second Commandment, in our time," says Bloom, "is called primal repression, which now takes place before there is anything to be repressed."

Bloom sees this repression of representation as central to Kafka, as is the equivocal Freudian notion of freedom, in which there can (with difficulty) be freedom from the past but not from time itself. Bloom maintains that Freud's most profoundly Jewish trait was a consuming passion for interpretation, a passion played out within a closed, internalised cognitive reality. Kafka's Jewishness manifests itself similarly, but in the negative, in his apparent commitment to do everything possible to avoid interpretation. Over the course of about a dozen pages, Bloom constructs a compelling argument that "what most needs and demands interpretation in Kafka's writing is its perversely deliberate evasion of interpretation."

According to Bloom, Kafka, more than any other writer, personifies the modern Jewish rupture from the normative tradition. "Think of the Jewish writer, and you must think of Kafka, who evaded his own

audacity, and believed nothing, and trusted only the covenant of being a writer." In his parables Kafka creates a bizarre obverse of Jewish memory, in which everything demands interpretation but nothing is interpretable. Kafka's cast of characters — the accused Joseph K., the hunger artist, the stalled, metamorphic Gregor Samsa, and others — are suspended between the truth of the past and the meaning of the future, thus evading both the categories of belief (in the estranged normative tradition) and poetry (the promise of something sublime, beyond the human, in the future).

In Kafka we are told that laws exist, but they are inaccessible to the people. There is hope, but only in some unattainable future. Guilt is a self-validating primal force, closely related to what Freud saw as the basis for all culture — a primal remorse for crimes against the father. As Bloom points out, Kafka's guilt is hard to distinguish from Freud's, because it is not Christian guilt, but something closer to ignorance — in the case of *The Trial's* Joseph K., apparently blameless ignorance. Freud felt that just as we are all erotically attached to authority, all authority induces Oedipal guilt. For Bloom, "Joseph K. has no consciousness of having done wrong, but just as Freudian man nurtures the desire to destroy authority or the father, so even Joseph K. has his own unfulfilled wishes against the image of the Law."

Most Kafka scholarship has at least touched upon the Freudian influence, and yet Bloom's remarks come as a revelation perhaps because they are dogged by an enriched version of his concept of literary influence and by his quest to eliminate the distinction between secular and sacred writing. In the end it is perhaps less important that we agree with Bloom's thesis than it is to come to terms with the implications of some of his speculations. Like Kafka, Bloom has been overdetermined by Freud, but has still managed to clear new ground for his own imagination.

In Bloom's mind, strong writers are fated to produce, at best, splendid failures, and the fate of the strong critic cannot be seen as much different. Bloom makes reference to Thomas Weiskel's *The Romantic Sublime*, a work he admires from a critic he obviously feels some kinship with. He says that Weiskel is working "towards a difficult kind of literary criticism, at once moral or primary and de-idealising or antithetical. This may not be possible to attain; certainly I, for one, have failed to achieve it." One can quarrel with the goal, which smacks of elitism, and indeed with the method, which is regressively patriarchal, probably because of its excessive dependence on Freud. But to dismiss *Ruin the Sacred Truths* on this evidence would be a mistake. As an analysis of male literary influence, and of the relationship between secular and sacred texts within the patriarchal literary tradition, it is an impressive critical achievement in its own right.

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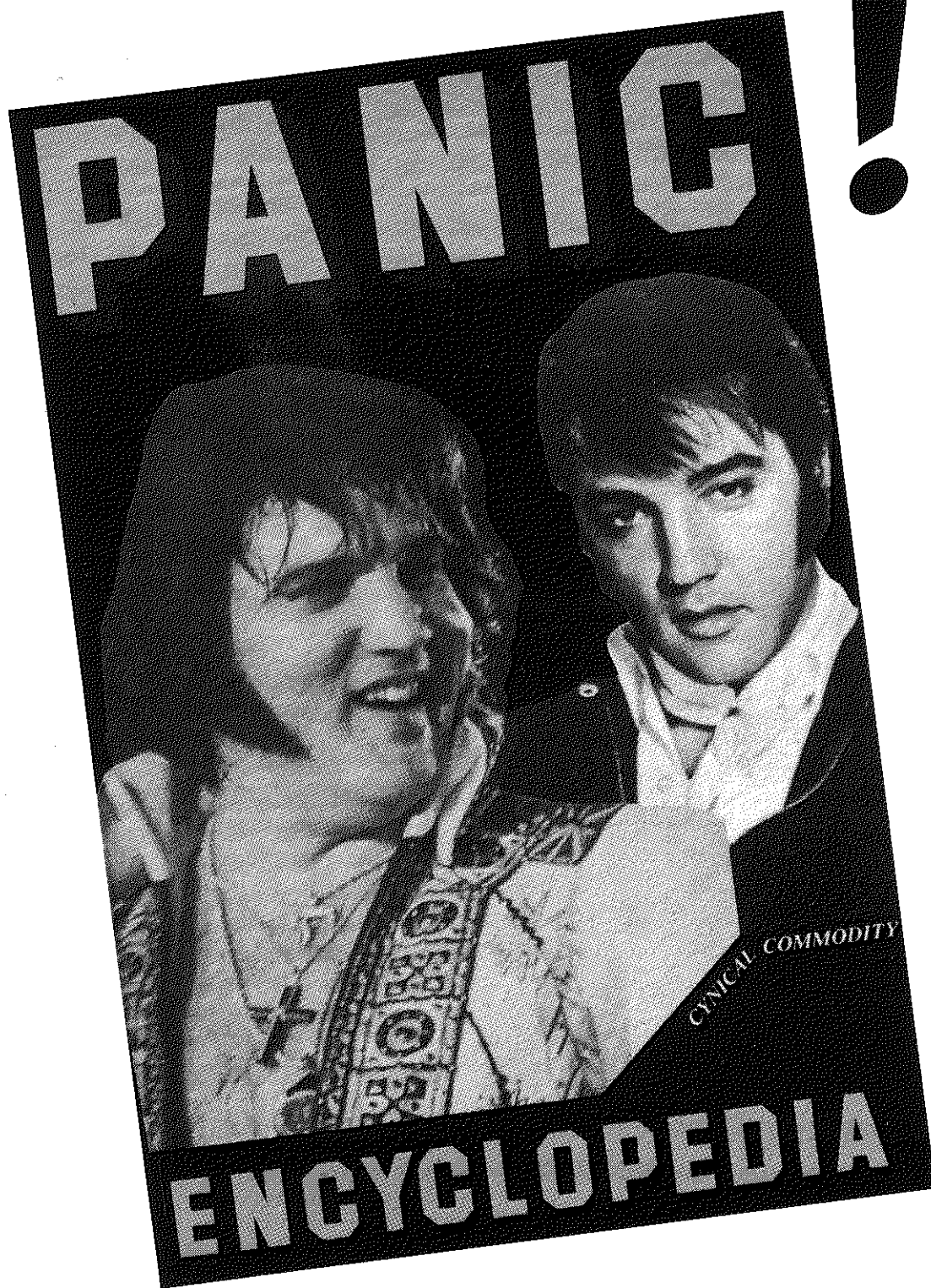
The Prestige of the Artist Under Conditions of Modernity

James C. Scott

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Panic Encyclopedia:
The Definitive Guide to the Postmodern Scene
 by Arthur Kroker, Marilouise Kroker and David Cook
 CultureTexts Series. Montréal: New World Perspectives, 1989, 262 pp.

Cultural Literacy:
What Every American Needs to Know
 by E.D. Hirsch, Jr., Joseph Kett and James Trefil
 Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987, 251 pp.

There is no sushi in Kitchener-Waterloo. No arugula, which does not even appear in the salmagundi of salads displayed by *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language*. Not a whiff of durian. No chance to read my food in any except the most domestic ways ("home cooking"). Which is why I moved to Toronto where Joanne Kates, *Globe and Mail* food critic, has written and is continuing to write our gastronomic encyclopædia. Self-regard is rooted in breakfast (Donald Barthelme); an empty stomach is not a good political advisor (Einstein); the destiny of nations depends on how they nourish themselves (Jean Anselme Brillat-Savarin). The last of the three maxims is from *The Physiology of Taste* (1825), itself a compendium of maxims; it's there that "you are what you eat" originated. Bulked from basic recipes, the book digests physiology, medicine, poetry, history and philosophy to give it an encyclopædic quality. Kates is Brillat-Savarin's legatee. Her authors, the only ones to survive in a post-Barthesian, post-Foucauldian era, are Jamie Kennedy, Susur Lee and Michael Stadlander, Toronto's *nouvelle cuisine* "artistes" whom Kates has canonised. Their art is the only one that's post-modern; it cannot be recycled in the marketplace for ever inflated values, swelled to the status of classicism by time and food crit. My sympathies on the side of the Van Gogh painting slasher, I can efface the traces on their plates, consume them crassly as calories. Try eating my words. Kates as codifier and connector is my arbitrary attribution though I prefer it to Frye and his great code! The only soul food I like was served at the Underground Railroad, a now defunct Toronto eatery.

Let's call encyclopædia-ism in the post-modern era palinodic. The etymology of "encyclopædia" is that of "circular education," though the editors of the *Random House Dictionary* augment circular by "well rounded" for fear (I impute such to them) of giving the sense of canceling or retracting knowledge. Pedagogy ("in every act of pedagogy there is an element of pederasty" — Jane Gallop, *The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis*), knowledge (-power) and in (-) formation are reconstituted and problematised in postmodern space giving encyclopædic formulation the stylised, dated air of *The Physiology of Taste* on contact with air (as in my hagiographical situating of Joanne Kates, who knows unerringly when something sits out too long). Brillat-Savarin's paens — he, too, knows his food — are to the perishable. In

Panic

Compendiums

Stan Fogel

"Privat
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"Privations: An Historical Elegy," he writes, "First parents of the human race, whose feastings are historical, what did you not lose for a ruddy apple, and what would you not have given for a truffled turkey hen? But in your Earthly Paradise you had no cooks, no fine confectioners! I weep for you!" The refrain, "I weep for you," echoes throughout the piece: it is a lament for mythological and historical eras down to his own, still impoverished, period which is denied "delicacies born from the rocks, perchance, or liqueurs resulting from the pressure of a hundred different vapors; you will not see the things which travellers who are not yet even born will bring from that half of the globe which still waits for our discovery, our exploration. I weep for you!"

No fadism or *nouvelle cuisine* for E.D. Hirsch, certainly, who wishes a more substantial and enduring notion of encyclopædism than a palinodic or anti-positivistic perspective affords. Ditto for bombastic Allan Bloom and his disciples. Fed on fibrous stuff, not eating their own words, or "wallowing in their own mouths' wash," are these manly meat-and-potatoes men. It should be noted, though, in the *Encyclopédie*, the famous eighteenth-century French encyclopædia that was the work of Denis Diderot among others, there is a link between potatoes and flatulence: "But what is a little wind to the vigorous organs of the peasants and workers." Rarely, it seems, are the Bloomers downwind. Bloom, in *The Closing of the American Mind*, writes nostalgically of "the gripping inner life vouchsafed those who were nurtured by the Bible." Hirsch, in *Cultural Literacy*, bracingly offers cultural literacy as the way to thrive (his word) in the modern world: "Effective communication with strangers is altogether essential to promote the general welfare, and to insure domestic tranquillity.... Cultural literacy constitutes the only sure avenue of opportunity for disadvantaged children." Teleology not circularity for Hirsch and his nucleic knowledge. Virtual particles might someday be an entry in the fragments he shores against his culture's ruins, but never an attribute of them.

The authors of *Panic Encyclopedia*, too, appear unhappy with (panicky at) "the disappearance of the Real," the spate of simulacra, that feeling of being unfulfilled that marks postmodern insubstantiality (and the plates, Jamie Kennedy's creations, at Palmerston grump the all-you-can-eat set, all for compleat-ion). Their panic apocalypses, hyper-images clogging cyberspace, and Hirsch's, floating signifiers eluding the "Common Reader," might be compared with Brillat-Savarin's meditation, "The End of the World," in *The Physiology of Taste*: "the end of the world has already been predicted more than once, and even fixed on a certain date. I really feel ashamed about not telling my readers how I myself have decided this question; but I do not wish to deprive them of the pleasure of doing it for themselves. It can eliminate a few insomniac hours for them and even pave the way for some daytime siestas." Bravo, a theologically unencumbered last supper.

In Danilo Kís's short story "The Encyclopedia of the Dead," in the collection of the same name, a dream sequence houses a voluminous encyclopædia in the Royal Library in Stockholm. Its many volumes (this is a *New York Times Book Review* synopsis) contain complete biographies of everyone who ever lived. There is only one requirement for entry: nobody gets in who is featured in any other reference book. It is a memorial for those without memorials, a Warholian blurb for the blurbless, a contamination of the oft-cited such as Christ and Shakespeare whose fifteen minutes (*pace* Frye and Bloom) are up. A typical entry includes the ordinary details of a mundane life: vocations, illnesses, alliances, trysts, meals. As the *N.Y.T.B.R.* reviewer notes, there is, of course, an analogous project under way "out there": "the Genealogical Society of the Church of the Latter Day Saints" is attempting to compile and store an exhaustive genealogical reference book. The Mormons' undertaking (does theirs parody Kís's or is it vice versa?) is an elaborate attempt to sacralise their ancestors, to provide, in a cosmic or theological and obdurate sense of the word, an encyclopædic dimension to their history.

Kís's story, as do most postmodern destabilising encyclopædias, has Jorge Luis Borges instead of God in the margins of the text. From the big bang to black holes rather than more theologically or anthropologically resonant terms frames such ventures.

Borges is more of a panic, perhaps, than is Kís. His playfulness *vis-à-vis* the notion of encyclopædia in "Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" is already a postmodern staple: contaminate fact with fiction. The *mise en abyme* of scholarship and its taxonomies, which purportedly "tame the wild profusion of things," is under way here. Encyclopædic lists, catalogues, scholarly disquisitions that embrace scientific, religious, mythical, geographical and historical references: these are a postmodern obsession. Here, for instance, is John Barth in *LETTERS* with an extended "entry" on marshes: "[marshes are] associated with both decay and fertility, female genitalia (cf. Freudians on Medusa), death and rebirth, miasma (pestilence, ague, rheumatism, sinusitis), evil, damnation, stagnation (e.g. Styx, Avernus also Ezekiel 47:11). Behemoth sleeps in cover of reeds (Job 40:11), Marsh ibis sacred to Thoth, inventor of writing." And on (in an extended way, always) goes this delineation of marshes with references to Alexander the Great, Maryland, Irish bog-peat and twelfth-century Chinese stories along the way. Self-consciously, Barth commandeers the role of the literary critic who might want to track down Barth's exploitation of the richness of "marshes" in *LETTERS*; Barth thus advances the notion that it is language's amplitude, not an originating author's purpose, that produces multi-layered meanings (and, concomitantly, encyclopædism). Using the paraphernalia of scholarship, Barth also challenges the boundary between the encyclopædic writer of fiction, whose breadth and erudition earn him/her the accolade, and the disinterested writer of encyclopædia.

The hyperthyroid novels of Barth, in their very gigantism, palinodically proffer and withhold the ascription encyclopædia. Barth mocks reliance on systems of knowledge by swelling those systems, their connectives and scope; however, he also displays an awesome, encyclopædic knowledge of various cultures.

The postmodernist scorn of, but also legerdemain with, well-rounded knowledge has both conservative and dispersive purposes. On the one hand, it is the old Eliotian carping about lack of a common culture; on the other, it is an attempt to disrupt the sense of commonality that has become rigidified, that hierarchises data and their organisation. It also undermines the people who produce, regulate and authenticate encyclopædias.

Such contradictoriness — making and unmaking — are too much, of course, for Hirsch the positivist, as he makes clear in *Cultural Literacy* and its companion volume, *Dictionary of Cultural Literacy*. In a quirky disavowal Hirsch writes about the group, of which he was a member, that compiled the *Dictionary of Cultural Literacy*, "We are not encyclopedists; we want to

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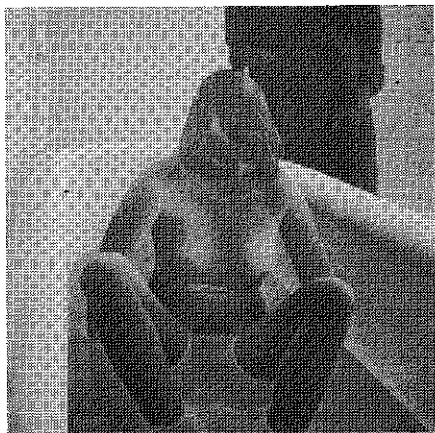
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Alex Colville's *Woman in Bathtub*, a representation of panic waiting. From *Panic Encyclopedia*.



reflect the culture." Sensitive to potential (and actual) charges that he is a shaper, a constructor, Hirsch must make cultural literacy, "the whole system of widely shared information and associations," something more than a contingent, authored entity.

In *The Postmodern Condition*, Jean-François Lyotard names two narratives of legitimation that have anchored knowledge. The first involves the state resorting to the narrative of freedom every time it assumes direct control over the training of the "people" under the name of the "nation," in order to point them down the path of progress. Hirsch's emphasis on the liberating potential, especially for "minorities," of his instrument of cultural literacy, comes out of this metanarrative as Lyotard calls it. The second narrative of legitimation incorporates a principle of universality (it's tied historically for Lyotard to the rise of the university) and unification. Hirsch's emphasis on the nation, national cultures and national literacy is delivered in a stentorian voice. Despite his patiently made qualifications, "*E Pluribus Unum*" resounds literally and figuratively in his text. The schools have an "historic mission" (Heidegger) in solidifying the nation. Hirsch's quixotic attempt to provide a core for national life is, of course, a runaway bestseller in the United States. It is so for the same reason Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* is: "out there" and even "in here" (the universities), acceleration, dispersion and anarchism are thought to be imminent and in need of rebuttal. Even if rebuttal produces the following "found poem" culled from the Appendix, "What Literate Americans Need to Know," to *Cultural Literacy*:

Never give a sucker an even break.
 Never in the field of human conflict was
 so much owed by so many to so few.
 Never put off until tomorrow...
 Never-Never Land.
 Never over 'til it's over., It's
 Never rains but it pours., It
 Never say die.
 Never too late to mend., It's.

The Dictionary of Cultural Literacy is equally as arbitrary, a compendium of items that have been culled from history, geography mythology, literature, popular culture and science. It is to intellectual breadth what Esperanto is to a rich, diverse, "natural" language. What is poignant about Hirsch's venture is the rationale and desire that spurred him on his quest. *Cultural Literacy* articulates Hirsch's con-

cern about the decline he perceives in the literacy levels and knowledge levels of Americans. His sources for this are both anecdotal and statistical. The culprit in this decline is the usual canard — liberalised teaching theories and liberalised curricula. So Hirsch earnestly bundles out a "back-to-basics" message with the promise of shored up, modernised "basics."

The move from Hirsch to the Krokors and Cook is a move from Arnold's touchstones to Elvis's memorabilia, a move from lecture to performance. If Hirsch wishes to curtail the encyclopædia (it's not foundational enough) while at the same time advocating a well-rounded education, the Krokors and Cook wish to parody the encyclopædia, breezily yoking science and suburbs, de Tocqueville and doughnuts. Their *fin-de-millennium* effervescence, though, is in pursuit of a cautionary tale against the cultural gravitation pulling us (the centripetal movement and sucking sound as we go down the drain — circular education) "into the dark and dense vortex of the year 2000." Lyotard's postmodern delegitimising has become a maelstrom of panic, "a frenzied scene of post-facts," in the hands of the *Panic Encyclopedia's* authors.

Outrage spills onto the pages; images of disease, catastrophe, violence and excess abound; "the cultural immune system collapses." Each entry in *Panic Encyclopedia* is

an occasion for denunciation of a society speeding after illusory things, towards disintegration. Panic ads, America, suburbs, sex, T.V., jeans, architecture — these and other topics present platforms upon which to rail at panicked, postmodern culture. As if on Benzadrine, the contributors attack a culture operating as if it were collectively on Benzadrine. Still, *Panic Encyclopedia* is a kind of *tour de force*. After all, if Faye Dunaway's face can be the occasion for hectoring, one can be sure there will never be an entry called "Panic Silence."

E.D. Hirsch's *hoi polloi*, like, can't, it seems, communicate truly; the denizens of the Krokors' and Cook's world, in their words, "drink lite beer, have phone sex, smoke lite menthol cigarettes, eat imitation margarine, drink wine coolers, vacation at Disneyland, watch Bill Cosby, and have their panic fun." While outdoing Pynchon with their post-Heisenbergian scientific metaphors, the Kroker crew is (gasp) as elitist as Hirsch.

This is a revised version of a paper given in the Comparative Literature section of the Learned Societies, University of Laval, May 1989.

Stan Fogel is the author of *The Postmodern University*. He is spending the academic year 1989-90 in the Middle East and East Africa.

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**Swinging in Paradise:
The Story of Jazz in Montreal**
by John Gilmore

Montréal: Vehicule Press, 1988, 322 pp.

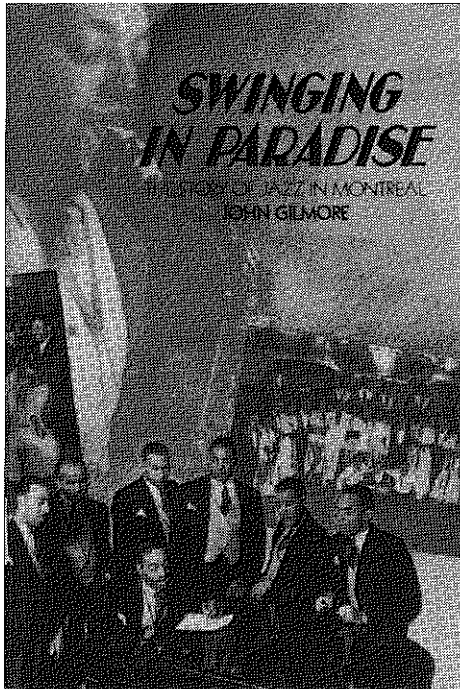
Something amazing about history is that it inevitably enhances things, objects and people, in such a way that they appear as you would have never seen them. This is normal, some would say: history is written to account for what is past and, consequently, no longer visible. I would add, however, that when what is no longer visible suddenly becomes audible, vibrating evocations, sketched stories, etc., it can ultimately take form in a very attractive vision. Is there any mystery or magic in history books, a magic which turns invisible into visible? The answer is of course to be found in the effect produced by reading, which is the only witchcraft required in this case to penetrate the secret play of appearances.

John Gilmore's *Swinging in Paradise* is, in that sense, a very good book, providing the reader with an historical survey which unveils many aspects of the presence of jazz in Montréal. Through Gilmore's book, the music, the musicians, the audiences, the bars, and even the streets which have pulsed to the jazz beat come to life with an aura either respectable or ghostly, depending on whether what is evoked is still partly present or has totally vanished. All of us can walk on Ste-Catherine street, or stand on the corner of St-Antoine and de la Montagne, but doing so, who would now expect to see jazz musicians popping out of a nightclub at eight in the morning (just after they finish their jam session), looking for a late dinner or breakfast before going to sleep? And who would suspect that some of these now anonymous streets were once the core of Montréal's hectic jazz activity? Or, again, this revelation about musical interludes on St-Laurent river: who knew that you did not need to cruise on the Mississippi river to hear live jazz played on ferries? It is along the way of such images that Gilmore drags us, halfway between historical settings and legendary effects, the whole of it really making, as the book's subtitle indicates, the story of jazz in Montréal.

This story runs roughly parallel to jazz history, from the ragtime of the early twenties, "les années folles," to the free jazz and fusion of the late sixties, following the style changes which every decade or so has seen — the hot jazz of the late twenties, the big band era of the thirties, the bebop of the forties and the cool of the fifties. From this point of view, Montréal jazz has only been a particular spot in a larger picture which includes New York, Chicago and Detroit — the principal northeastern cities where industrialisation and its emblematic trains carried the black traditional soul. But Montréal was also the place where alcohol was still flowing during the American Prohibition, and where the segregation of black people was apparently much less severe than anywhere in the States. Montréal, then, gave the jazz community a chance to emerge and to live — for a while.

Those Amorous Sessions

Jean-François Côté



It is Gilmore's project to pay attention to the life of the "jazz community" in Montréal, this moving meeting of music and people that has been dragged along in its formation by theatres and bar owners, by union requirements and union conflicts, the evolution of the "community" constantly favoured or threatened by municipal politics and filtered by the immigration net. His verdict: a jazz community



once lived in Montréal, and was even prosperous at a time when jazz musicians were hired to play in theatres (remember the ragtime music accompanying silent movies?), in ballrooms and dancing grills, and when jazz was carving its way through the various expectancies of showbiz nightclubs. However, with the decline of the entertainment business, which occurred in its full strength at the beginning of the puritan era of mayor Jean Drapeau and with the emergence of television (both events coinciding in the mid-fifties), this community slowly dissolved in the nostalgia of a glorious past. And so Gilmore, in an epigraph which he intends to stand as an epitaph for the jazz community in Montréal, can say, quoting Baudelaire, that "the delicious past shines through the sombre present." The thesis is interesting, but definitely reductive.

The "decline" of the jazz community should be seen, I think, from the broader perspective of a musical evolution toward an autonomous art form. During this evolution, jazz probably loses in coherence what it gains in status; that is to say, its roots in an "empirical community" are slowly replaced by "theoretical interest"

"Goodbye Broadway, Hello Montréal." A popular song of the Prohibition era touts Montréal's reputation for free-flowing liquor and good times.



Louis Metcalf's band at the Café St. Michel, Montréal.

for the music itself. The entertainment business, to which jazz has been linked for a long part of its history, yields its place to different authorities, and jazz then relies on different organisational forms for its expression. This does not mean that the music loses its "soul" but rather that this soul will be shaped according to new exigencies. In the case of jazz, these exigencies are first endogenous to the practice of the music itself: they concern the musicians' commitment to their music as an art, as a place where they can display their personal expression and technique in an autonomous fashion, and this is not always compatible with mere entertainment — the first boppers (Parker, Gillespie and their band) were once kicked out of a nightclub in California because their music "didn't fit the business." This means that jazz was already undergoing a change in its vocation and was leaving the entertainment business far behind its new heaven. True, the jazz clubs will emerge as specialised places where jazz can be heard, but they won't be places where people go to dance or to see a variety show: as jazz slowly emerges from its strict "accompaniment role" in entertainment, people will go to jazz bars to listen to the music itself.

In his survey of the decline of Montréal's jazz community, which would be complete by the early seventies, Gilmore doesn't mention any of the new organisational forms that take over from the former surroundings of jazz. Consequently, we are left with the impression that jazz once lived in Montréal, but that its existence faded away in the early seventies. Personally, I don't see why, except for a resolute, romantic *parti-pris*, we should deprive ourselves of seeing the new form of a "jazz community" in the various researches undertaken at this time by musicians through diverse areas (geographical as well as musical) of the music scene. We find some hints of that in the jazz clubs that have sprung up in the seventies (Le soleil levant, L'Esquire Show Bar, L'Hermitage, Le Café Mojo, etc.), the jazz programmes that are

broadcast by Radio Canada (thanks to Gilles Tremblay's faithfulness), and the permanent feeling for jazz that we still find in Montréal (even though this feeling varies in strength and form). In the absence of such considerations, it is very hard, indeed, to understand the resurgence of jazz that occurred in the late seventies (1979 sees the first edition of the Festival International de Jazz de Montréal, and the eighties the emergence of jazz programmes in universities' music faculties), and, more importantly, the actual life of jazz in Montréal — as well as anywhere else.

Gilmore brings two elements to this bias in his analysis: first, the opening of jazz tradition to "free jazz" and "fusion," and, second, the activism that shook Québec political life during the turning of the sixties into the seventies. The first element belongs entirely to jazz history, and one cannot explain the dissolution (or, more appropriately, the "reorganisation") of a particular jazz community by ignoring the fact that this is what jazz in its whole, and the jazz musicians, were experiencing at the time. This phenomenon was the peak manifestation of the new horizon opened to jazz a couple of decades ago. The second element is more touchy, as Gilmore relies ultimately on the experience of one group of musicians, Le Quatuor de jazz libre du Québec, to give an account of the destiny of the whole jazz community in Montréal. In closing his epilogue with the manifesto issued by this group (a manifesto which is obviously more concerned with a phalansterian, or micro socialist-communitarian, project than it is with music), Gilmore simply adds bitterness to nostalgia, and, because of the political orientation that is now under scrutiny, one wonders about the meaning of the "sombre present" which is the target of such bitterness. In spite of this bias, Gilmore's book

remains a worthwhile read for anyone who is interested in the development of popular culture, as well as for the jazz fan. The first would find a delightful account of the "unofficial history," which reaches some epic moments in the descriptions of the vices and pleasures of our parents and grandparents; and the jazz fan would find a good general and comprehensive topology of Montréal's contribution to jazz history — although this topology is not totally accurate or exhaustive concerning the "details" of the musicians themselves, especially the recent generations, a striking example being the inimitable drummer Guy Nadon. The style used by the author is generous, running from the anecdotal to a more elaborate overview of the periods considered; and, on the whole, the multiple sources are generally relevant. The author has included numerous photos that lead one to consider filmic tributes recently paid to jazz history (Eastwood's *Bird*, Tavernier's *'Round Midnight*, and, to a lesser degree, Mankiewicz's *Les portes tournantes* and Coppola's *Cotton Club*).

Much contemporary reflection on jazz produces an "auratic" effect on its history. This would have probably altered Walter Benjamin's pessimistic vision of the possibility of art in our century of technological invasion — and perhaps especially so because we all know how jazz, in its development, also took advantage of advances in technology. Remembering, however, that such an aura surrounds only the *actual existence* of objects and people, *Swinging in Paradise* stands as an invitation not only to look at what is past and lost but to help us to appreciate the depth that the past adds to actual practices.

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Our Kind of Books

The B/L List

Cultural Politics in Contemporary America, edited by Ian Angus and Sut Jhally. New York: Routledge, 1989. \$19.95 paper. Editors Ian Angus and Sut Jhally have compiled an anthology which examines, within the tradition of western Marxism, the ways in which contemporary power structures shape the media and, in turn, influence our social identity. At the same time, this collection explores the possibilities for an oppositional culture which alone can provide a context of interpretation. Contributors include Gore Vidal, Russell Jacoby, Todd Gitlin and Stanley Aronowitz as well as several Canadian commentators.

Europe, Europe: Forays into a Continent by Hans Magnus Enzensberger. New York: Pantheon Books, 1989. \$25.95 cloth. Best known in North America for his insightful work *The Consciousness Industry*, poet, novelist and critic Hans Enzensberger now focuses his attention on the cultural and political contradictions of modern Europe. Relying on personal observation, as well as the experience and anecdotes of friends, he recounts in detail the achievements and shortcomings of several European countries — Italy, Portugal, Sweden, Poland, Hungary and Spain in particular. However, his major concern is the failure of European politics to promote economic strategies that yield both equality and prosperity. Enzensberger ends with a look at Europe in the year 2006, prophesizing that European countries, rather than losing their distinct national characteristics, will if anything become more Italianized, more spontaneous, but also increasingly anarchic and difficult to govern.

Little Mountain by Elias Khoury. Translated by Maia Tabet; with a Foreword by Edward W. Said. Emergent Literatures. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989. \$14.80 paper. In five separate fictions, Elias Khoury charts the fragmented post-historic space of contemporary Beirut. The importance of this work resides in its ability to transcend mere description and enter into the shattering of human entities under the impact of aleatory, seamless conflict. The fragmentary quality of the narrative only reinforces Khoury's dystopic view of modern Lebanon.

Marshall McLuhan: The Medium and the Messenger. A Biography by Philip Marchand. Toronto: Random House, 1989. \$24.95 cloth. If we've been waiting for a book that finally explains and demystifies the ideas of Marshall McLuhan, we

need wait no longer. Philip Marchand is careful neither to inflate McLuhan's reputation nor to cut him down to size. His is a balanced look at a complex man, who in his later years could be brilliant and penetrating one moment and paranoid and banal the next. Marchand reminds us that McLuhan's "insights" were the result of a long intellectual journey that began with his conversion to Catholicism, continued with his early graduate years at Cambridge as a Leavisite convert to New Criticism, and were furthered by his own investigation into rhetoric and grammar and the ways in which they effect communication. How this obscure and odd English professor became a media guru makes for delightful reading.

Necrotrivia VS. SKULL by Jeremy Clarke. London: Fourth Estate, 1989. \$9.95 paper. Clarke serves his readers up the waste products of his formative life experience — working at McDonald's. This excremental rite of passage is transmuted into the facile story of a homicidal space alien who finds himself working for a repulsively hip capitalist, eventually joining in mortal combat with the rival corporation. Ace jet trash for the blank generation or students of popular culture.

No Respect: Intellectuals & Popular Culture by Andrew Ross. New York: Routledge, 1989. \$16.95 paper. The cultural policies of the Cold War, the integration of black music into mainstream popular culture, the uses of camp and kitsch, the popularity of pornography, and the rise of postmodernism are all examined in this innovative and important book. Ross argues that intellectuals and popular culture, knowledge and power, are inextricably linked. Andrew Ross is an insightful cultural critic who offers a creative rethinking of popular culture in North America, making this book essential reading.

The Open Work by Umberto Eco. Translated by Anna Cancogni. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989. \$14.95 paper. Much of *Opera Aperta*, the book with which Eco made his name in 1962, is reprinted in this collection. A lively reflection on the aesthetics of Croce, Pareyson, the avant-garde movement, *grupo* of 63, live television, music and the visual arts — in keeping with Eco's notion of openness, we are invited to make of this book what we will.

Poetry by Canadian Women, edited by Rosemary Sullivan. Don Mills, Ontario:

Oxford University Press, 1989. \$19.95 paper. While only a dedicated nationalist will find much to offer in the nineteenth and early twentieth-century selections, poet and editor Rosemary Sullivan has produced a fine and much needed historical survey. The contemporary selections are eclectic, far ranging, and often pleasantly surprising.

The Prowler: A Novel by Kristjana Gunnars. Red Deer, Alberta: Red Deer College Press, 1989. \$9.95 paper. Poet, editor and translator Kristjana Gunnars' first novel is a clever yet moving evocation of postwar Iceland. A metafictional *tour de force*, the narrative follows a "white Inuit" through four decades of international history, while at the same time examining the politics of literary representation. The prowler of the title remains elusive, a metaphor for American military involvement, the threat of male violence, the writer/narrator herself and, ultimately, the reader.

These Waves of Dying Friends: Poems by Michael Lynch. Monotypes by Douglas Kinsey. New York: Contact II Publications, 1989. \$6.95 paper. Toronto professor and gay rights activist Michael Lynch has written an elegy in ten parts for the victims of public indifference to AIDS. Yet, rather than eulogizing the dead, these poems explore the last passions of the living. The final piece, "Yellow Kitchen Gloves," embraces the politics of defiance, recording an act of civil disobedience on the steps of the US Supreme Court: "...gloved fists in the air/defying the empowered who deny/our lives and deaths, our fucking, and our hate."

Water Street Days: Poems and Stories by David Donnell. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1989. \$9.95 paper. Interspersing short fictions with poems, Governor General's Award-winning poet, David Donnell explores family relationships and coming of age in smalltown southern Ontario. The pieces are at once fantastical and sensitive, yet the strong narrative voice never succumbs to sentimentality.

Young Lust by Kathy Acker. London: Pandora Press, 1989. \$9.95 paper. For many of us, last year's *Empire of the Senseless* was one of the most important novels of the year, if not the decade. *Young Lust*, which features two novellas originally published in the seventies as well as a recent short story, is less a monumental work than a fascinating insight into the roots of Acker's poetics. Already in the early novellas, Acker's characteristic deprivileging of narrative and the literary subject, as well as her violent and anti-humanist explorations of sexuality, are in evidence; yet, interestingly, the influence of William Burroughs is not.

Compiled by Joe Galbo, Gary Genosko, Robyn Gillam and Daniel Jones.

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

