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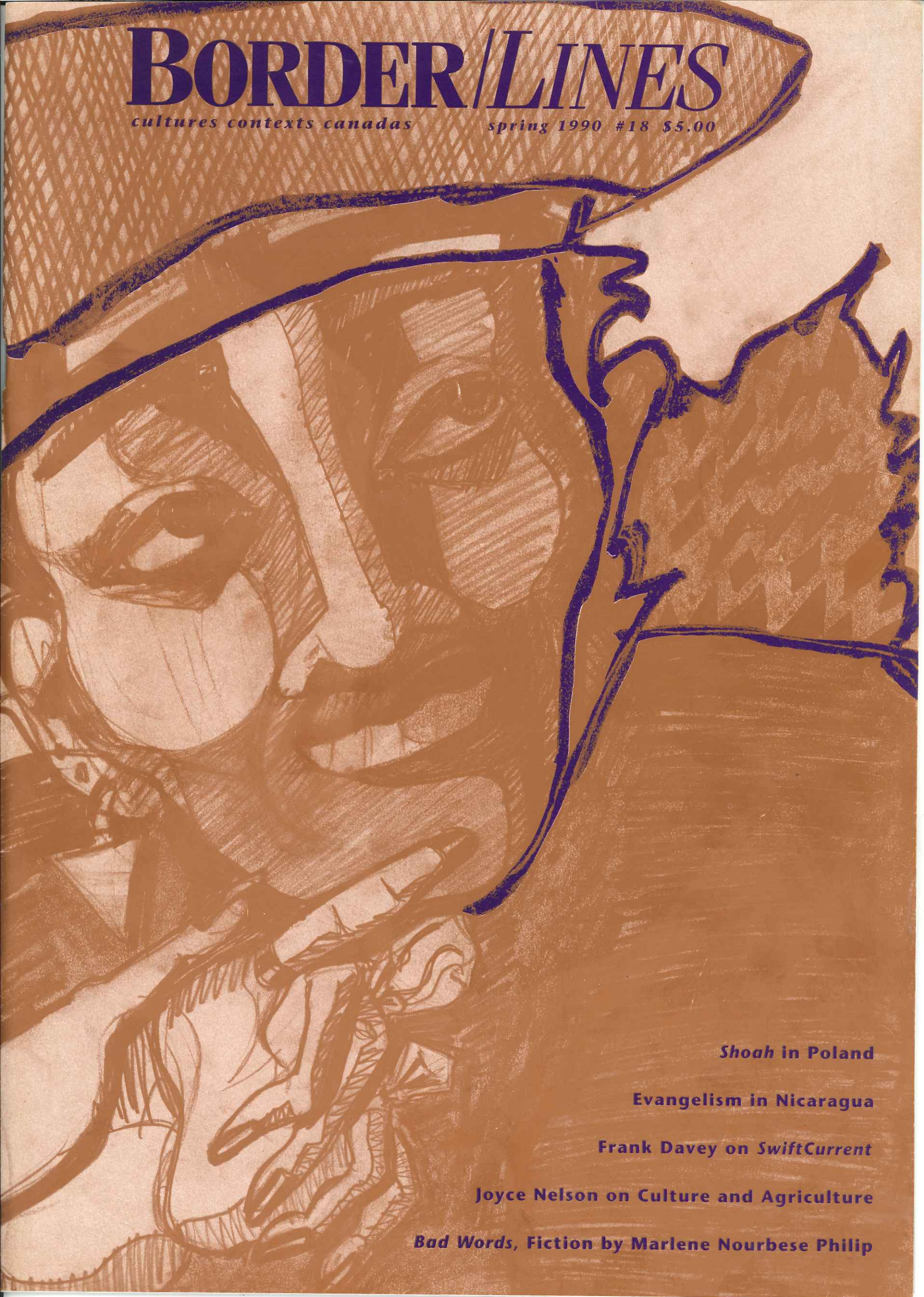

Shoah in Poland

Evangelism in Nicaragua

Frank Davey on *SwiftCurrent*

Joyce Nelson on Culture and Agriculture

Bad Words, Fiction by Marlene Nourbese Philip

BORDER/LINES

across
borders

between
lines

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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Number 18 Spring 1990

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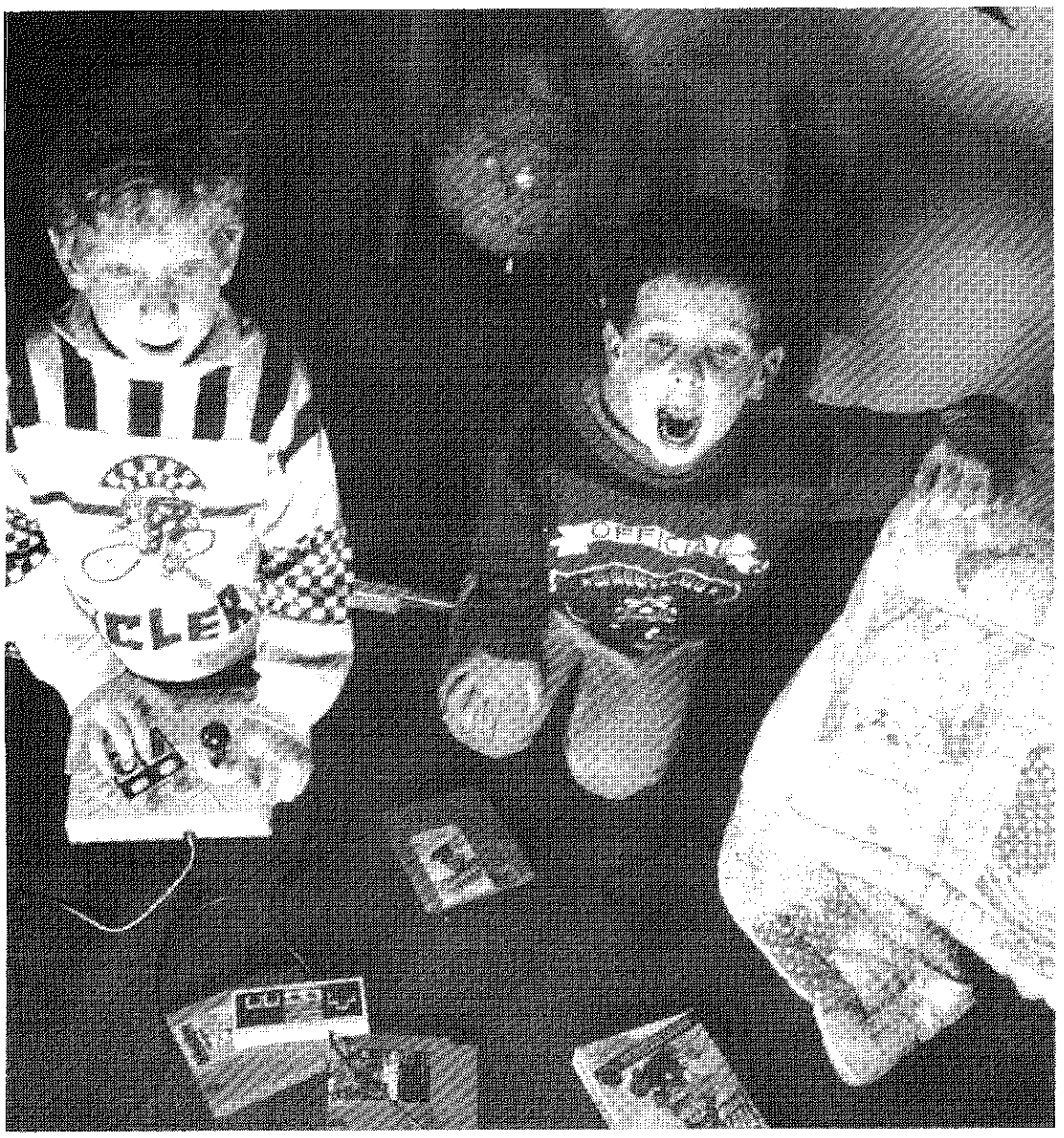

Video as theatre

Video games and shows are the contemporary medium for the carnivalesque and the grotesque in a new morality play.

IOAN DAVIES

Parents and pedagogues are frequently frustrated to find that their adolescent children's conception of dramatic entertainment and performance bears little relationship to their coordinated strategies of what mimesis, performance, narrative, didacticism and play should be all about.

After a kindergarten and early-primary phase of apparent harmony between TV and classroom, in which *Fraggle Rock, Sesame Street, Polka Dot Door,* or *You Can't Do That on Television* are at least there to compete with the purely commercial nature of the *Strawberry Shortcake* or *Thundercats* absurdities, the influence of educators on TV and video production (notwithstanding the efforts of the new Youth and Family TV channels in Canada) seems to have minimal effect on what adolescents actually watch and play. For the age group eleven to 15, unbridled commercialism dictates extra-curricular viewing habits. Here I would briefly like to indicate what is watched — primarily on video, but also on TV and film (the overlaps are, of course, very great) — why, and whether this should give any cause for concern.

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

The significance of these classifications, which emerged from interviewing groups of (all male) eleven- to 13- and (mixed gender) 14- to 15-year olds in Toronto, is that they cover most of the regions that we would associate with theatre, though with a peculiar postmodern twist. The "music" element is directly mediated through an unabashed selling of the recording industry and the presentation of "video poems," as Andy Warhol so romantically put it. Much more significantly, however, rock music itself has acted as the fulcrum for a newly perceived subculture which develops as the basis for an anti-language to any form of "established" culture. The video-rock industry, aided by the compact disc

revolution in music reproduction, has created both a timeless and situationless smorgasbord of rock music within which "dissent" is submerged in the sense of being part of an ephemeral world in which rock is part of "tradition" (the "golden oldies") but also part of a visual presentation which is frequently indistinguishable from commercials for Pepsi-Cola. One issue that kids have to face in making sense of this tradition is whether there is any difference between a Mendelssohn or a Mahler converting to Christianity in order to reach the appropriate audiences, and a Michael Jackson or a Madonna trimming their sails in order to achieve wider sales. In this sense contemporary teenagers are more astute than the hoi polloi who turn up at Roy Thomson Hall to listen to "authentic" music. They *know* who is being bought, and by whom, because the message is delivered unequivocally across their screens. Even if they are not provided with the critical equipment to locate the music in its historical context, they do know how to place it in its present politico-economic context and also to decide why, in spite of all that, they like or dislike what they see/hear. The trick of video rock is to place image, lyric and rhythm in the present, wherever it originated, and thus to learn to dance to the music of the spheres. The tradition of rock music and its incorporation into blatantly commercial video images provides for all teenagers the central area within which politics, economics and culture can be seen to contend. One of the successes of *Miami Vice* was that it was able to turn ostensibly detective plots into fashion commercials using rock music. *Miami Vice* was the logical extension of rock video, and thus could be watched equally by people who uncritically accepted it but also by the many who saw it displaying the ultimate corruption of rock music.

Video games give adolescents the occasion to perform, to experience colour and movement, to mould their identities. Virtually every video game is dominated by the symbolism of military contest (but isn't chess?), and thus the appeal is largely to boys — though, as Sherry Turkle shows in *The Second Self*, many girls also spend a lot of time at arcades and playing at their home videos. The central feature of video games, however, is neither the sexism nor the apparently mindless addiction, but rather the contest between the personal gameplan and the machine's. Almost every video gameplayer is also a potential inventor: working out strategies on how this game could be better, or even how an even better game could be devised. The performance expected of the player is not one which calls into play the whole body (though it demands a lot of the reflexes), but one which structures the imagination, the internal resources. Video games allow the player to enter into the rituals and logic of another situation, to try to beat this other system on its own terms. It is thus cathartic, mimetic and innovative. It is also, of course, largely a solitary experience, pulling the player out of the "real world" into a fantasy world where *Dungeons & Dragons*, *Starflight* or *Platoon* become the only worlds worth inhabiting. But because the fantasy is projected out of a machine, the machine itself becomes the object of confrontation. Thus the theatre of the mind gains a new dimension, the ultimate resting place of dada and surrealism where the play of the world is acted out in our very personal confrontations with the minds of the robots we made.

It's a short leap from the Frankensteinian reality to the gothic horrors of *Nightmare on Elm Street* or *Friday the Thirteenth*. The tense struggle of fighting in 'Nam or battling the intergalactic werewolves which video games provide is nothing compared with the real (and evident) issues of personal death, of dark nightmares, of the destruction of mother-figures, of sexuality in general, of the insane "man with the gun at the door." The themes are, of course, as old as Rabelais and the brothers Grimm's fairy tales, and as recent as Mary Shelley, Bram Stoker and Sigmund Freud. What *Sesame Street* papered over will not lie down. In *Nightmare on Elm Street*, for example, the street name is taken from the Dick and Jane books (*Nightmare on Sesame Street* would have been too obvious) and as Robert Englund (the "Freddy" of *Nightmare*) put it in a recent interview,

> *Nightmare on Elm Street* is a sort of loose, allegorical symbol for a kind of evil returning to the white, Anglo-Saxon suburb of North America ... They're political and they're Freudian and they've intellectual content, which is all subliminal, but there, *via* Wes Craven. Freddy is out there, bringing back those evil sins to the adolescent who's just embarking on a serious adult life. Even though I don't think the teenage audience intellectualize, I think they know it's for them.[1]

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

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

If we ignore TV sitcoms and soap operas, which translate badly onto video, the

Who are we in a post-Auschwitz age to deny children the right to explore issues which are very much alive in our own subconscious?

most important other form of comic video is the film slapstick which deals with identifiable situations by playing on the edge of horror. The really mindless patriotic horrors — the *Rambo* or *Dirty Harry* series and *Predator* or *The Running Man* — act as the backdrop for the interminable *Police Academy* films, *Good Morning Vietnam*, the *Nerds* series, the best of Eddie Murphy or Richard Pryor. The thin line between macho violence in the name of some patriotic or moral cause, and its own self-parody, is always there, of course, none more so than in the last two *Rambo* films. However, the immense popularity of comedy as a corrective to the forces of law and order taking themselves too seriously is perhaps another indication that the carnivalesque is an important part of teenage culture even where, as in *Police Academy*, the quality is abysmal. The ultimate parody is, however, *Robocop*, where computerisation of entertainment and the mechanisation of law and order meet in a series of brilliant engagements.

One important feature of all of this is the blatant sexism that dominates the video industry, including of course wrestling, and the almost total lack of product (with the exception of some video rock) that appeals to adolescent girls. This may give the schools an advantage in maintaining their influence over female students; but, to be truly effective, for boys as well as girls, teachers must become knowledgeable about the popular theatrical culture that is available through video. For theatrical instruction in schools to be more than a fringe activity, an engagement between the constituents of teenagers' existing dramatic encounters and those that teachers think are important should be the basis of any discourse. ■

Ioan Davies teaches at York University and is a member of the Border/Lines collective.

NOTE

1. "Freddy and the Dreamers," interview with Robert Englund conducted by John Minson, *The Guardian*, 27 April 1989, p. 25.

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Media literacy and The Globe and Mail

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

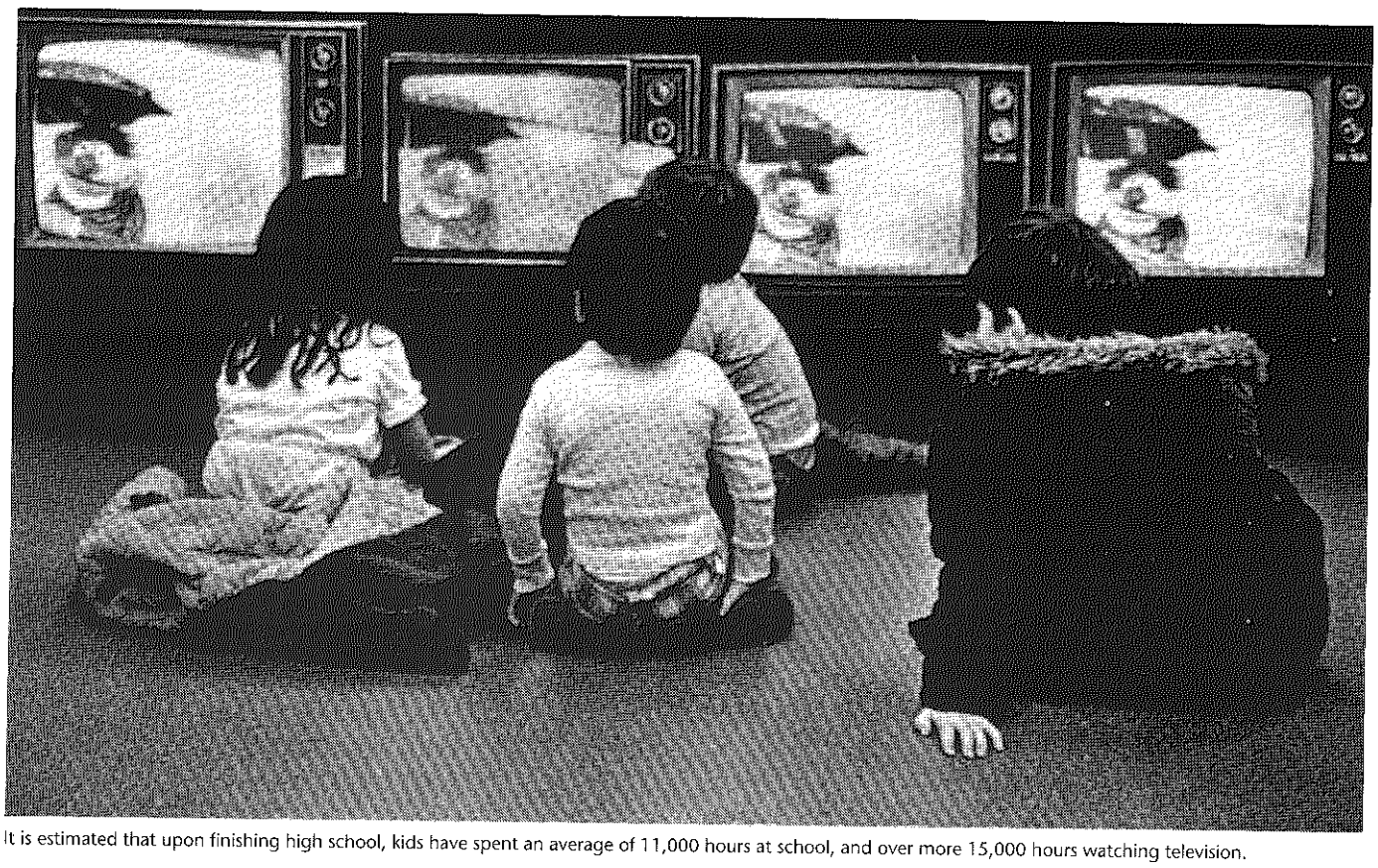
SATU REPO

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

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

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

This thoughtful and sophisticated rationale for a media literacy programme takes only a few pages in the guide, which



It is estimated that upon finishing high school, kids have spent an average of 11,000 hours at school, and over more 15,000 hours watching television.

is mostly devoted to concrete suggestions of how to teach this stuff. However, it is not surprising that the *Globe*'s reactions are directed mainly towards these intellectual underpinnings. *The Globe and Mail*, ever alert to ideological deviations in the state sector, is very troubled by the idea that students should be taught to think about the complex political and economic forces that determine what becomes news and entertainment. The notion of the objectivity of the media is still a strongly held ideological dogma in its newsrooms and editorial offices. There, the *Globe* has decided to interpret the media literacy guide quite simplistically as an unwarranted attack on media integrity and dismiss it as such.

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

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

The *Globe*, having exposed the scandalous views in *Media Literacy* and allowed such a disinterested party as the Canadian Daily Newspaper Publishers Association to pass judgment on it, closes its coverage by inviting us to laugh it out of existence. On September 30, Warren Clements offers us a spoof under the headline "Education benign time-waster or insidious force?" "The media can be a tricky bunch at times," he begins broadly. "They consider themselves trustworthy, but have been known to warp reality and blur the lines between objectivity and subjectivity. You may be sitting there with the newspaper open or a program flickering on the screen, and wham! — from out of nowhere, a tinge of something suspicious will scurry across the surface of a newsreport and compromise the truth." It is good that educators are exposing these sinister tricks, jests Clements, but shouldn't the media try to return the favour and offer a guide to the ways schooling warps reality? "Too many students grow up believing that reality exists in definable chunks of nine months with summers off for good behavior, and that learning consists of listening to somebody talk for 40 minutes at a time."

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

Satu Repo is a member of the Border/Lines collective.

The *Globe* has decided to interpret the media literacy guide quite simplistically as an unwarranted attack on media integrity and dismiss it as such.

André Kertész, *At the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, 1936

Animal reproduction

MARGOT LA ROCQUE
and **GARY GENOSKO**

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

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

Philosophical Dogs

Descartes has bequeathed us a dead dog (as it happened, his wife left him after he nailed her dog to a table in order to vivisect it). If he had been a dog fancier, we would be much less troubled by the heaps of unfeeling brutes piling up in the philosophical coffers. It is, however, with the Brazilian novelist Machado De Assis that we ask: *Philosopher or Dog*? Here, the "or" is a soft disjunction, making it a bit of folly to separate Quincas Borba, the ailing philosopher of the novel, from Quincas Borba, the philosophical dog who carries forth his master's intellectual legacy.

What is it to think like a dog, to be a thinking dog, rather than a thinking man's dog? What is it to die like a dog? Let Kafka explain.

At the end of *The Trial*, K is stabbed in the heart with a butcher's knife. With his final breath, he yelps: "Like a dog!" In "A Crossbreed," Kafka again raises the two themes of becoming a dog and awaiting the knife of the butcher, although here it is a half-kitten, half-lamb which insists on being a dog and in doing so challenges its owner "to do the thing of which both of us are thinking."

Writing from the perspective of an inquisitive dog in "Investigations of a Dog," Kafka's peripatetic pooch leads us into a conundrum of dog philosophy: "Every dog has like me the impulse to question, and I have like every living dog the impulse not to answer." Consider the case of the soaring dogs. It was, at first, difficult for Kafka's dog to believe in their existence (after all, what a senseless life for a dog to lead, floating in the air, letting one's legs, "the pride of dogs, fall into desuetude"). After making a few inquiries, however, Kafka's dog is convinced of their existence. These soaring dogs "are perpetually talking, partly of their philosophical reflections with which, seeing that they have completely renounced bodily exertion, they can continuously occupy themselves." The thinking dog's dog is nearly self-sufficient in the uselessness of its reflections, although like Aristotle's philosopher, it must defecate now and then.

Animal Sign

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

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

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

The Bloodless Fray

As we walked along the trail, twelve or so miles from another person, we noticed the grizzly and black bear tracks crossing our path. This went on for miles and miles. One of us was more afraid that day (she was menstruating). With only a few possessions on our backs we felt especially vulnerable, as if the space that had separated *them* from us was now somehow nonexistent, as if the breaths that we took were the same. There was no scent, though, just the bear sign full of huckleberry. As we stooped to pick at the last berries, we knew there were many bears in close proximity, doing just that.

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

We felt naked, fragile, vulnerable, and understood that preposterous scene in the film *Never Cry Wolf* where the biologist had run naked with the wolves, marking his territory with urine.

As we continued, we were conscious of the fact that we should make some noise, warn the bears that we were coming. We started talking. Our conversation returned over and over again to *ursus arctos horribilis*, as all conversations had in one way or another all summer. The terrain was well mapped, familiar.

One of us stopped abruptly. "Bear?" the other wondered. Together we tried to make out the dark shape at the river's edge, and realised we were talking "moose," not bear.

Darkness, the uncertainty, grips us, makes our hair stand on end. Not the animal *seen*, but the animal *imagined*. The thing we perhaps fear the most would be if our eyes were to meet: what would we do, how would we react? We tend to keep our eyes averted, like children afraid to tell all—partly to watch where we step, and partly to avoid the likelihood of looking into their eyes.

Freud's Menagerie

Freud's apartment at 19 Berggasse was, for a time, a kennel of sorts. His beloved chow chows Yofi and Lun, as well as Anna's Alsatian, Wolfi, were permanent, sentient fixtures; upstairs at Dorothy Burlingham's, one could find a Bedlington under the couch. In London, Freud's final dog — a substitute for Lun who had been quarantined by the British authorities — was a Pekinese named Jumbo.

Before Yofi and Lun arrived at Berggasse, Freud's first chow, Lun-Yu, was lost under the wheels of a train while being escorted to Vienna by Eva Rosenfeld.

Perhaps the most touching moment of Freud's long devotion to dogs came in January 1937 when Yofi, his companion for some seven years, died following an operation which saw the removal of two ovarian cysts. Yofi had been an important member of the Freud household, one who greeted and sat with Sigmund's patients, remembered the doctor's birthday, and understood her master's protracted struggle with cancer — or so Freud believed. In 1936, Freud read Princess Marie Bonaparte's book *Topsy, Chow-chow au poil d'or* about her dog who had responded favourably to an operation for cancer of the mouth (the very form of cancer which had struck Freud). Freud began his translation of Bonaparte's book shortly after Yofi's death. Earlier, Freud had expressed in a letter to the Princess a reverie on Yofi: "When stroking [her] I have often caught myself humming a melody which, though quite unmusical, I could recognise as the aria from Don Giovanni: 'A bond of friendship binds us both, etc.'"

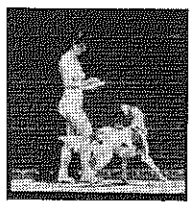
Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari are suspicious about Freud's doggedness in his handling of the Wolf-Man. Their "reading" of the case in *A Thousand Plateaus* begins with a dramatic flourish:

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

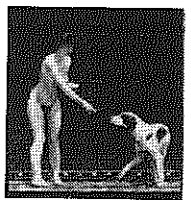
No matter how much the Wolf-Man howled, Freud's answer was the same: "It's daddy."

We have, then, more dogs on our hands. For Freud, where wolves were, dogs shall be. Freud argued that the six or seven white wolves of the Wolf-Man's famous nightmare "were actually sheep dogs;" as a child, the Wolf-Man may have observed copulating dogs, only to subsequently displace that sight onto his parents. If he had not actually witnessed animal coitus, he nevertheless possessed, as the Freudian fable goes, the phylogenetic experience of having observed parental intercourse, which must have been performed *a tergo more ferarum*, since Freud favoured that position.

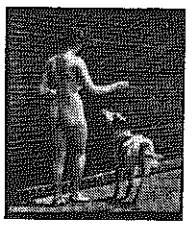
What did the Wolf-Man see "that day" on Freud's couch which made him so tired? A chow, perhaps? No, Freud did not run his patient through this model since his first chow hadn't yet arrived. There was another dog in the apartment that day: Wolfi. Ruth Mack Brunswick reports in her analysis of this case that "when visiting Freud, the [Wolf-Man] had on more than one occasion seen a large gray police dog, which looked like a domesticated wolf."



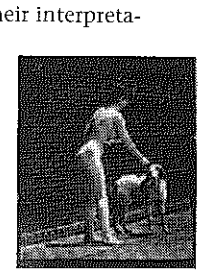
Let's be clear: the Alsatian is a German shepherd, a common police dog. Moreover, it belonged to Anna, although Sigmund loved it. So, the Wolf-Man may have met a dog which was a Wolf[i] a number of times.



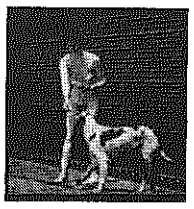
Such a speculation only reinforces Freud's reduction of *canis lupus* to *canis familiaris*. On the other hand, why is a pack of wolves so precious to Deleuze and Guattari? It's true, when Freud "brushes up" against the pack — an allusion to the way in which members of a wolf-pack nudge one another —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



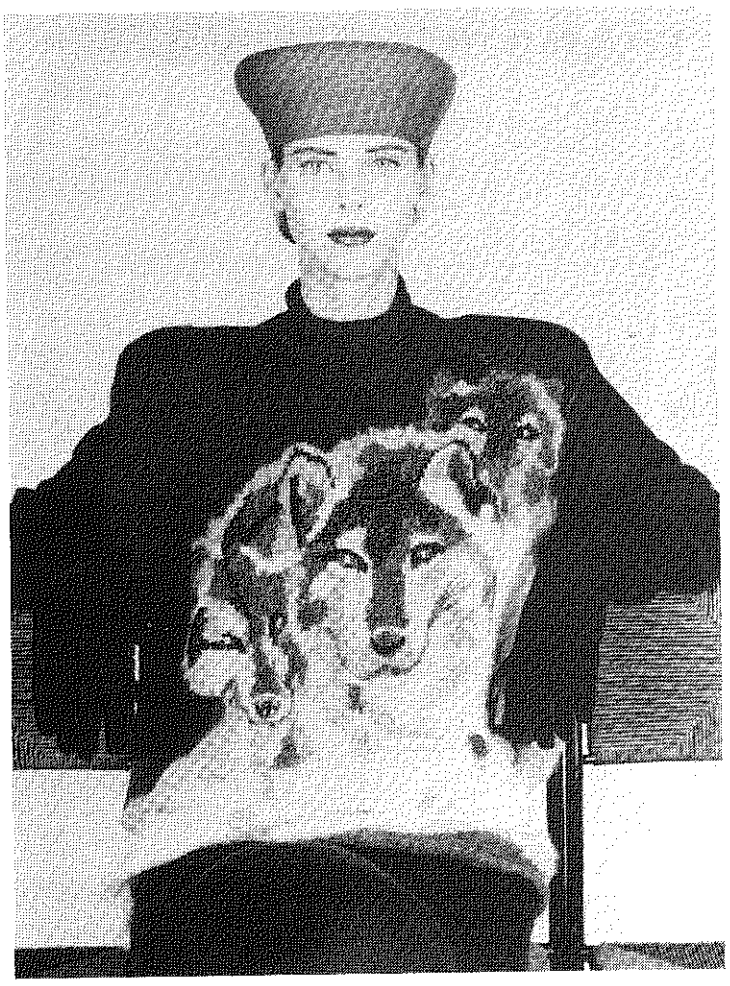
The "deleuzoguattarian" pack must be unpacked because their zoological given is mutable. Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari are a pair and not a pack. Beyond the wild-domestic dichotomy, both Freud's doggies and Deleuze and Guattari's ideal formation must give way to the diversity of unpacked packs: wolves banished from their packs, dog-wolf hybrids, *bande de chiens*, neurotic designer dogs, etc.



One of Freud's last patients at Berggasse, Hilda Doolittle, once complained that "the Professor was more interested in Yofi than he was in my story." Psychoanalysis had gone to the dogs when Freud could not resist the urge to domesticate his patients' animals and let his own animals loose. Let's not forget that the analytic situation was played out with a third party present, not the Censor, Cerebus, but a chow and/or an Alsatian. Freud, then, had a few living totems among his clay Coptic dogs and sculptures of Romulus and Remus. Of course, in his papers on technique he said nothing of this.



Eadweard Muybridge, *Animal Locomotion*. Woman feeding a dog from three different camera angles.



Krizia reproduces the imaginary.

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

Hyper-husbandry

For us, the Canadian imaginary is populated by a peculiar libidinal æsthetic. To be sure, the wild still calls us, only because it is a canon that we have been educated to hear. To the extent that we answer this call by venturing forth with our cameras ready to "snap up" the wild, or put it down on paper or canvas, we reproduce our own imaginary, and perhaps even turn ourselves into imaginary Canadians.

There are others, however, who have not heard a call, but felt a presence; these are the ones who have smelt bear. They have been seduced by wildness, by the passions of nature. This is not an idle anthropomorphism, for anthropomorphism is never idle or frivolous. Anthropomorphism cannot be filled with something more rigorous because it is the foundation upon which we continuously invent our relationship with human and nonhuman others. To forget this is to forfeit much of our humanity.

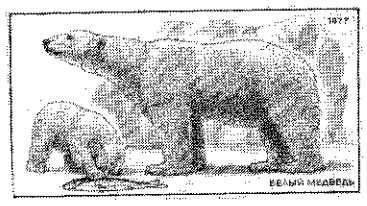
Of course, there are still others who have sought to couple with nonhumans, although for us acts of bestiality cannot constitute an answer to the call of the wild, and primarily because most often the partners in question are domesticates. For example, in his case histories, Karl Menninger describes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

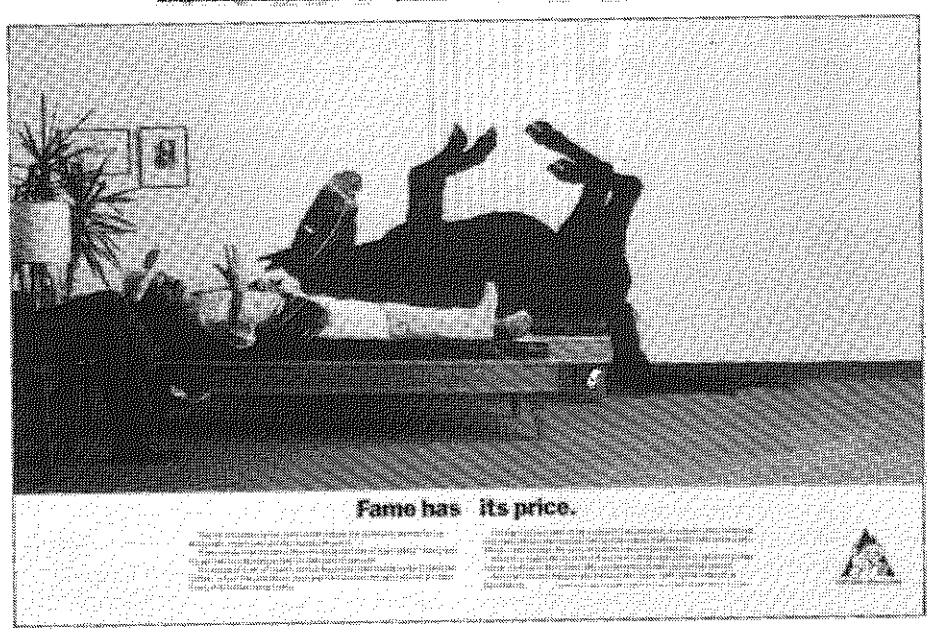
The reproduction of similar bonds in our æsthetic imaginary also concerns us — in particular, the extent to which these reproductions express the *collision* of the instinctual forces of the human and nonhuman. This libidinal collision course is rendered in Marion Engel's *Bear* (1976):

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

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

A Tail Note





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

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

Refus Global rides again

MALCOLM REID

This revolution might not have been called a revolution were it not for that manifesto. For — though quite reformist and reasonable — it had a blunt language, a hard-hitting image, a radicalism. It was a *total* rejection of the past — a *Refus Global*.

It set up the idea that the painters and sculptors are radicals in Québec.

Was there truth in this idea? Did the painters and sculptors indeed have such a role of social criticism? Do they have such a role today?

To answer, I think it should be said that yes, the *Refus* was modestly a work of visual art, with its nice splotchy cover design and vertical title lettering by Jean-Paul Riopelle.

"Born of modest French-Canadian families," Paul-Emile Borduas's section begins, "working-class and middle-class, we have stayed French and Catholic to resist the conqueror, to stick with the past. For the pleasure of it, for pride, out of necessity." His urging is: "Break with society's habits, break with its idea of 'useful.'" And Françoise Sullivan wrote a very beautiful section on the dance: "To dance together, dancers must be linked by a conception, by the social needs of the era. I mean *felt* social needs, not abstract ones."

But more profoundly, this was a work of language, polemic, rhetoric, poetry.

It was the mute and silent artists briefly transformed into *speakers*.

And in this it announced the way things would go. Visual artists would contribute some of the tone of modern Québec. Their abstracts, scattered judiciously over the territory, would lend a cool love of jagged forms and wonderfully arbitrary brushstrokes to the utilitarian architecture old and new, to the skyscrapers and the hot-dog stands.

But it would be the language-artists who would do the social protesting, the singer-composers, the playwrights, the monologuists, the essayists. The poets. The novelists.

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

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

In the eyes of the English-Canadian art world, I think, Québec had *counted*, a full ten or 20 years before she began to count for other English-Canadian milieux. I get this feeling from a family subscription to *Canadian Art*. In all other journalism in the fifties, Québec was patronised, or omitted, or summarised-in-a-phrase, while *Canadian Art*, though published in Ontario, often seemed, to the little boy that I was, to be a Québec magazine. The names of those Sherbrooke Street galleries! The names of all those artists finishing in *-eau, -é* and *-ault*.

This early start that the artists had may even explain some things.

Québec painting and sculpture did not arrive on the shores of 1960 with the feeling of inferiority which then plagued almost every other French-speaking constituency. And therefore the people in these arts didn't always see what there was to be overthrown.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The other man was Armand Vaillancourt.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

For all his egotism, Vaillancourt was clearly what one calls a driven man.

He'd opened his slide show with rattling-off of statistics of third world exploitation, arms race madness and ecological destruction. A socialist revolution was needed to set all this right. And yet it mustn't be forgotten that the Soviet Union and its friends were implicated in much of the madness, too; and it mustn't be left out of the discussion that there was still Québec independence as an unfinished project, full of reasonableness, obviously *une évidence*.

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

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

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

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

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

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

I felt Armand as a man who wants to people the entire Québec landscape with steel, stone and wood monuments to humans and their cries, and who knows that all the work of his Hephæstos muscles, and all the flames of his Vulcan furnaces,

and all the using of his working-class volubility have... oh, laid down a few specks here and there, perhaps.

So sometimes I go down to the courthouse just to contemplate his fountain called JUSTICE! In it, the water gushes out of a tube in which bars lock a prisoner in, and the prisoner's hand reaches up above the gushing water for air. Sometimes I go to Laval to read the free-the-people quotes from a dozen tongues and literatures he inscribed in a sort of garden of boulders. And sometimes I'm Christmas shopping in the Sainte-Foy shopping centre to which they've transported that tree he peeled and sculpted in 1958, and I notice it, and sit under it for a while.

And then there is the case of Greg Curnoe, John Boyle and Murray Favro. They too visited Québec last year, quite a bit later in the summer. They too were a special experience, a confronting of styles.

Three musketeers who seem to enjoy being together at 40 or 50 as much as three little boys of ten. Three leaders of a larger group called the Nihilist Spasm Band, in which the visual artists get sonorous and make a strange kind of music, or noise, or both.

But most of all, three distinct visual artists who have contributed to Canadian visuality in ways that were very much meant to be contributions to Canada's national consciousness, non-assimilation to empires, and social justice, too. Men of the Total Refusal that came out of English Canada in the 1970s. Replacers of the refused imperial images with their attempt at a new, liberated, *Canadian* body of images.

CURNOE: Greg Curnoe is the man who drew the bicycle. (*Drew*, for a Curnoe tends to be gently coloured, its sketch still visible.) The man from London, Ontario. The man who discovered alphabetic stamps and stencils and just couldn't get enough of stamping and stencilling, in painting after painting, statements and sayings and slogans about how Canada has got to be herself. He is, I said to myself after Réjeanne and I had been through a huge amassing of his life's work at the National Gallery a couple of years ago, an artist whose unity can be felt only if you image the teenaged boy, the man, the citizen, behind the work. Only thus do the bikes, and the writings, and the sumptuous nude woman, come together: if we imagine the lean, nervous, elegant New Lefty who's so intense and playful about them all.

BOYLE: Boyle's work comes across on its own more. He has a style, he has a theme, he is inexhaustible, but he is not that varied. I love his work. He does thick-lined, sharp-coloured pictures of Canadian (and once in a blue moon, world) fighters for liberation, caught in a moment of their brave lives. Louis Riel, Norman Bethune, Emily Carr, Woody Guthrie. And yet strangely, Boyle is also the most easy-goingly personable of the three, the best speaker, and is pretty good in French, too, which always makes a difference.

FAVRO: Murray Favro is of Italian, and not French-Canadian, origin. He is a tinkerer, and almost all his drawings, sculptures and videos seem to have to do with planes, trains, towers, tunnels and mechanisms.

During their performances to a little group, mostly 20-year-olds learning about them for the first time, at the arts centre called Obscure, on the Côte d'Abraham, the three men were cheered along, or plagued, as you choose to see it, by the comments and interjections of a black-haired Québécois artist of about their own age. This man seemed to like them but at the same time to be mad at them. His main theme was: "You guys get all the grants, you guys get all the exposure." He came in always in English, contributing thus, I felt, to the weakening of their communication with their audience, for often

Québec painting and sculpture did not arrive on the shores of 1960 with the feeling of inferiority which then plagued almost every other French-speaking constituency.

nowadays Québec audiences give anglophone visitors the impression they have no trouble at all with English, and it's hardly worth bothering to use one's French. When actually only *some* of the audience know English, and *all* would feel the message more strongly if a French ambience were established.

After the talks, we went out for a snack, and Curnoe-Boyle-Favro and their friends were glad to dig into the souvlaki-folksy cuisine of the neighbourhood. "That's Serge Lemoyne," Curnoe told me. "What's eating him? That kind of nationalism hurts me. He's had exposure — we put on a big show of his work in London, we welcomed him..."

"Serge Lemoyne!" I said. "I know him. I like his work. He's honoured in Québec. Don't tell me that's Serge Lemoyne!"

It was, and it was a sadness to these anti-imperialist Canadians that one of their principal comrades on the Québec scene was throwing the usual Québec reproaches to the Canadian establishment at them: you rule, you take for granted, you're at ease while we're struggling. What was wrong?

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

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

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

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

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

Times change.

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

"Molinari, now there's a radical artist!" Curnoe said, and I thought of how few statements of any kind I'd heard from the great man of hard-edged oranges and reds during the whole referendum period; of how alone Armand Vaillancourt seemed to feel as he raged against injustice; of how envious Serge Lemoyne seemed to feel as he listened to these Canadians tell tales of controversy and activism. Of how long it had been since the *Refus Global*. ■

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

Malcolm Reid's column is a regular feature in Border/Lines.

REFUS GLOBAL

Living With Cancer

DIAN MARINO

Reprinted with permission from the *New Internationalist*, August 1989.
Photographs by Gregory Guest.

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

Writing this is difficult. It brings up complex and contradictory memories. But it does add both a clarity and simplicity that wasn't there at the time. Perhaps this article should be written by my husband and daughters who know what happens when someone you love gets cancer. Or by my friends who've shared my fears, anger, frustration and even the small moments of beauty that have come from trying to make sense of cancer.

I have resisted putting words on paper for fear of getting back on an emotional roller coaster. Also because what has helped me to understand and live more calmly with cancer may not work as a "prescription" for others. The sense of loss of control is so great with this illness, that it is a time to be very careful about issues of power and control. While waiting in clinics and hospital corridors I have found that many people are not as enthusiastic as me for knowledge about their illness and for playing an active role in their health care. Death is such a responsibility that I hesitate to project my keenness to be clearer, to understand better, onto others who share my illness. I write not to prescribe but to describe and wonder aloud about some difficult times.

For me there is irony in the act of reflecting on cancer since I'm the kind of person who might easily have left these thoughts until five minutes before death. I too frequently gallop into new projects without sufficient time for contemplation. But in trying to make sense of cancer I think it is important to speak out in a straightforward manner. The knowledge gained from coming to terms with this disease too easily remains in the hands of medical professionals. So I stumble for words to speak of problems, responses, speculation, small rearrangements.

As a visual artist and teacher

I use many kinds of language. For me the meaning of words changes with time and place. How we use words indicates our values and priorities. I have found most writing about cancer disempowers those of us who have the disease. One example is the use of militaristic or war-like metaphors. Phrases like "fight," "beat" and "win the war" are commonplace. But if I get into a "war" with my cancer, I can only interpret myself winning if my cancer "loses" or is "defeated." This kind of either/or thinking reduces all experience to win or lose. A person like myself with a "terminal" cancer has automatically lost.

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

I began to think about how I got cancer. I read and asked around. There were many possible explanations — heredity (my grandmother died very young from breast cancer), occupational hazards (for the previous 20 years I had made silk screen prints using highly toxic paints and clean-up solutions), poor diet, lack of exercise, too much stress, birth control pills and many more. Often I read that one or another of these factors was the primary cause. I found this completely immobilising so gradually I developed a map, a kind of ecology of possible causes. This allowed me to deal with those dimensions that I had some control over. I didn't feel like I needed to have a "scientific map" but could elaborate my own open map so that as my experience grew I could alter it.

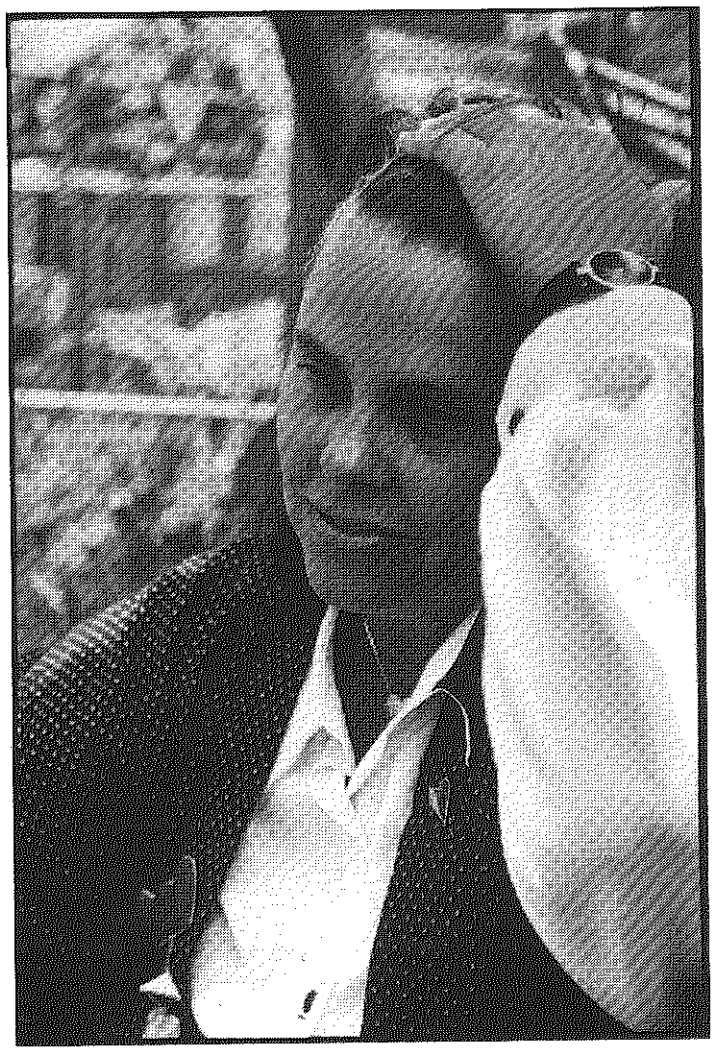
By the time cancer was diagnosed I had an excellent relationship with my doctor. He trusted me as an expert on my aches, pains and feelings; I trusted him because he was able to tell me what he didn't know as well as what he did. He also knew how to cry. Most doctors see surgery as a response to unhealth, he told me. So advice from a surgeon must be seen from this critical vantage point. He was open to my exploring alternative health support (like massage therapy) and would ask me whether they were having any effect. It was important to me to understand the limits of medical knowledge and to recognise the intuitive as a legitimate part of making decisions.

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

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

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

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



You can read my face like a book. If I am happy, worried or frightened you know immediately. We told the children in as calm a way as possible and tried to keep open the lines of communication on the subject. I would get extremely tense and agitated before routine check-ups. I learned to tell the children the reason for my short temper. It was important that they "felt in the know" as much as any of us. My daughters (now 21 and 18) both realise the transition from a parent-child relationship to more of an adult friendship has happened earlier with us than with most families. They feel good about giving support. Instead of feeling powerless in all this my daughters feel they have some control over events.

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

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

Last summer, during my bone-scan test I could tell by the way the technician responded that something had shown up. He went out of the room and when he reappeared he said: "You look a lot younger than you are. Do you have any children?" I said, "you checked my file." To which he replied: "Yes." I was pretty sure that they had indeed identified some cancer.

That same day I went to my massage therapist. I decided this was a unique moment in my life when I could look into my psyche. When I am very frightened I sometimes have the courage to face or to see the unseeable. So as my friend did his work I decided to let go and see what images would surface. The first image was very surprising to me. There was field of wild carrot (white flowers composed of many smaller white flowers) surrounded by pine trees. Strolling through the field was a huge grizzly bear. He looked strong, confident and curious as he moved through the field of flowers. At one point he stopped and picked a handful of flowers which I knew symbolised my essence, even as the whole field was me too. Then, in my flower form I made him sneeze and laugh and I flew back into the ground except for one small white flower which landed on his shoulder. Together we strolled away.

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

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SWIFT CURRENT returns

SwiftCurrent *has broken with archiving traditions of publishing to provide a site of intense textual activity.*

FRANK DAVEY

SwiftCurrent, the online literary magazine that Fred Wah and I have operated intermittently from York University since 1984, is now entering its second lifetime. The first version, which survives mostly in a tape archive and in the documentation of *The SwiftCurrent Anthology* (Coach House Press, 1986), was based on custom-made, author-focused software that gave participating writers genre categories within which they could create personal subdirectories and contribute to these their own texts. Within this structure of genre directories and author subdirectories, readers could shape their own "anthologies" of contributions by deleting texts or deleting entire author-directories from their personal view of the magazine. Although readers had no way of attaching responses to texts, they could could contribute comments under their own names in a "commentary" category or send private messages to the author. Although approximately 300 texts were contributed to this version during its three years of operation, more than 90 percent of its activity consisted of private messages, most of which had little connection to the texts contributed. Readers reported unhappiness at not being able to respond immediately to texts they had read — that the requirement of changing directories in order to submit public comments was inhibiting. They also reported that they had difficulty dealing with the the volume of texts that accumulated in *SwiftCurrent* — that they needed tools that would assist them in sorting and sampling these texts and in gaining some kind of overview.

The present *SwiftCurrent* is operating in an off-the-shelf conferencing programme, "Caucus," developed by Camber-Roth in New York primarily for public-affairs computer conferences. *SwiftCurrent* here offers separate conferences for genres ("scfict," "sctheory," "scpoetry," "screview"), plus a small press and little magazine conference ("smalpres") and one about *SwiftCurrent* itself ("scnews"). Within these conferences, participants may contribute texts as "items" for discussion, or append "responses" to the text they have just read. Search facilities allow users to locate author-names or specific words and phrases; a random-access facility within conferences allows readers to sample the opening page of one text and then move directly to another. Commands such as "list persons" and "list titles" enable new users to discover what kinds of material specific conferences contain. A "forget item" command still allows users to customise their own view of *SwiftCurrent*, and a built-in editor allows contributors of both items and responses to change or expand texts they have previously submitted. Users of this new version have generated long chains of thoughtful and disputatious responses to most items. Public response has now replaced private correspondence as *SwiftCurrent*'s major function.

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

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

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

SWIFTCURRENT:

HOW TO GET ONLINE

***SwiftCurrent* communicates at 300, 1200 or 2400 baud. Set your communications software for 7 data bits, 1 stop bit, no parity, and full duplex. In Toronto, dial 736-5258. Outside of Toronto, *SwiftCurrent* can be accessed with iNet accounts, through the iNet numbers 79100067, 79100068, or 79100090.**

Once you have a connection, wait a few seconds then ENTER (i.e., use the carriage-return key) twice.

At the prompt "Enter number:" ENTER *mithra*.

At the prompt "Call complete" ENTER twice.

At the prompt "mithra>" ENTER *nexus*.

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

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

At the prompt "And Now?" ENTER *help* for further information or ENTER *add message* to send a private message to any of SwiftCurrent's participants for further help. Most users log-in daily.

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

Compiled by Daniel Jones.

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

In most such constituencies, electronic publication is still constructed as "less" than paper publication, or as requiring the validation of paper publication to become "real." High-profile electronic publication projects — the *Columbia Encyclopedia*, the *OED*, *The Globe and Mail* database — have been marked as subsidiary to pre-existing print ventures. *SwiftCurrent* text files become the Coach House *SwiftCurrent Anthology*. What is interesting about the latter, however, is that it had much less impact than the *SwiftCurrent* project itself — much more discussion of text and correspondence about writing resulted from the electronic publication than from the print one. Fred Wah and I conceived of the print anthology not as validation for the electronic one but as promotion for it — the online texts were not to be preliminary to the book pages, the book pages were to be stimuli to additional online activity.

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

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

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

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SHOAH

IN POLAND

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

IWONA IRWIN-ZARECKA

After the first screenings of *Shoah* in France, early in 1985, the Polish government lodged an official protest against the offensive portrayal of Poles in the film. Yet in November of the same year, Polish television presented a selection of "Polish sequences" from *Shoah*, followed by a studio discussion, while the film itself was released in theatres of major cities. For several months, both before and after the screening of *Shoah*, the major weeklies carried articles dealing with various aspects of the film and its production. Yet it was not until early 1987 that the key questions posed by *Shoah* — about the holocaust and about Polish attitudes — became a focus of serious debate in independent Catholic press. And that debate was not in response to Claude Lanzmann but to reflections by a Polish literary critic on two poems written by Czeslaw Milosz.[1] *Shoah* was meant to challenge Polish and Catholic conscience. It did not. How could so powerful of a "text" be neutralised?

The response of Polish intellectuals to *Shoah* was not uniformly shallow or defensive.[2] Indeed, the tone of official comments about the film especially in the Party weekly *Polityka* and especially before the decision to bring the film to Poland would be finalised, was serious and reflective. In marked contrast to just a few years back, when Polish readers were consistently and not-too-subtly told of an anti-Polish obsession in the west, exemplified by such works as the television series *Holocaust* or the book *Sophie's Choice*, now they were told to listen to Lanzmann's critical voice. And while all the previously attacked pieces of "anti-Polishness" were never made available in the country, *Shoah* was to be actually seen.

The change of heart on the part of the officialdom — from vigorous protest to an equally vigorous encouragement of self-critical reflection — in itself calls for an explanation. It is also what may partly explain the impact, or lack thereof, of *Shoah*.

Lanzmann himself[3] suggests that the government's invitation followed a realisation that the Poles portrayed in *Shoah*, mostly peasants and small town people, were Catholics, not communists. Indeed, the film carries no direct negative references to the regime whatsoever; indirectly, some of Lanzmann's questions about the improved lot of peasants after the war, as well as the very fact that he shot so much of his footage in Poland, with the help of an officially assigned and highly visible interpreter, could serve as a testimony to the regime's goodwill. Most importantly, perhaps, *Shoah* is an explicit condemnation of Catholic anti-Semitism, of Church teachings and Church action.

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

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

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

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

Lanzmann's critique, only one belonged to a non-Jew.

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

Though the "Jewish dimension" of this attack on the Church was very much played down in its immediate reference to Poland's "court Jews," no such care was taken in respect to Claude Lanzmann himself. Ever since the publication of Jerzy Kosinski's *The Painted Bird* in 1965, the theme of Jewish hostility towards Poles has been widely exploited in the Polish media. Given prominence during the 1968/69 anti-Semitic campaign, the idea that influential Jews engaged in slander of Poland's good name would remain on the public agenda for many years.[4] Its strength went well beyond the official propaganda; key emigré journals spoke in similar tones. What made the situation different in 1985 was a radical turn-about on the part of the regime in its stance towards the Jews. Instead of attacking, the regime decided to court them, beginning with an elaborate commemoration of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising in 1983. In the midst of a grave political and economic crisis, following the crushing of Solidarity, great care was taken in coordinating special exhibits, book publications and overall media coverage, not only of the Jews' heroic struggles in Warsaw, but of Poland's Jewish heritage in general. The show of good will, calculated as it might have been to gain international credibility — and credit — points for the regime, did open the gates to a veritable deluge of public discourse about things Jewish, much of it originating in independent Catholic circles.

When *Shoah* appeared, Polish readers were already exposed to an unprecedented amount of discussion of Jewish history and culture, both inside and outside of the official sphere. Again, the discourse was not uniformly "pro-Jewish;" there were elements of naïvety, ignorance, cynicism, as well as hostility and apprehension. But by and large, this was the first time in the long history of Polish-Jewish relations that the Jew would become worthy of knowledge and respect as a Jew.[5]

Yet as much as Poland's Jewish heritage was gradually being reclaimed as a part of Poland's history and memory, and as much as the subject of Polish-Jewish relations was no longer taboo, a more open discussion of anti-Semitism was then barely beginning. *Shoah* would enter the public sphere at a somewhat precarious moment, in the midst of a massive shift towards remembrance working itself through the challenge of self-critical reappraisal. Potentially, Lanzmann's voice could have precipitated a serious examination of anti-Semitism; such indeed was the explicit aim of the official welcome. But Lanzmann's voice came too early, too strongly — and it was too Jewish.

The task of self-criticism, of coming to terms with the dark chapters of one's past, is always difficult. It is especially difficult when at the very base of collective identity is the idea of victimisation, and Poles indeed see themselves as victims of history in general, and of the Nazis in particular. To break through this interpretive grid, to point to times and places where Poles had been the *agents* of victimisation, has proven difficult for Polish intellectuals, working from within the traditional views of history. To impose a radically different interpretation from without — as did Lanzmann — had the effect of reminding Poles just how isolated is their sense of the recent past.

The result might still have been a form of re-evaluation rather than entrenchment, were it not for Lanzmann's particular critique of Christianity. In western writings on the holocaust, the subject of Christian responsibility for the destruction of the Jews is widely discussed, both in its concrete dimension of the Churches' inaction and in its symbolic one, of the role of Christianity in promoting anti-Semitism. In *Shoah*, the complexity of this discussion disappears, together with its by now strong roots in the Christian self-re-evaluation. The only argument (and person) presented by Lanzmann is Raul Hilberg's thesis on the inevitable progression from the tenets of Christian teachings on the Jew to murdering the Jews. This radical interpretation is not framed as such; rather, it is supported in the film by scenes shot close to a church, a Polish church. The issue of Christian responsibility thus becomes reduced to that of the influence of Catholicism on the Poles' indifference to the fate of the Jews.

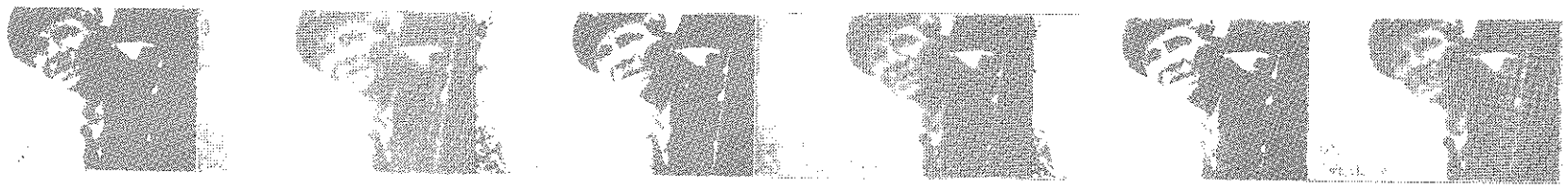
Such a reduction, legitimate as it may be artistically, became the key sore point for Polish interpreters of *Shoah*. In particular, it enraged the senior of progressive Catholics, Jerzy Turowicz, chief editor of the weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny*,[6] with a long record of condemning anti-Semitism. Not only was the thesis of prevalent indifference among the Poles unacceptable to him (and to most Poles today), the connecting of whatever attitudes Poles exhibited during the holocaust to the position taken by the Church before the war would be declared inadmissible. Turowicz implicitly granted that the Church before 1939 had been largely anti-Semitic, as he spoke of the recent improvements. But he vehemently denied any links between the situation during the war and that before the war, as if sensing that adopting any other view would have meant an acknowledgement of Lanzmann's critique. And, to support his position, Turowicz emphasised the help extended to Jews by Catholic nuns and priests, as well as lay people well known for their anti-Semitic stance.

Turowicz's comments are worth reflecting on, for a number of reasons. First, they carried authority unequaled by any of the statements originating in the official circles. Secondly, they represented the best and most open of Polish Catholicism, the intellectual rather than the dogmatic approach to history.

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

Finally, the separation, so insisted upon, between the war period and all that preceded (and followed) is also representative of a sense of history shared in Poland. The time of the Nazi occupation, and especially what happened to the Jews, was the time marked by the Nazi terror, Nazi rules and regulations, Nazi control, in short. Poles as victims of the same regime cannot be held accountable for the fate of other victims; it is Nazis and Nazis alone who were responsible for the "Final Solution."

Without immersing ourselves in a debate over the historical plausibility of this view of Poles as totally helpless victims, it is important to note what results from it — clean conscience. And indeed, the viewers' response to the television screening of *Shoah*[7] indicated that for most of them the question of responsibility for the fate of the Jews was a non-issue. Most of them also thought that Lanzmann's treatment of the "Polish question" in the film was intentionally biased and offensive. In the absence of *Shoah* in the media (now also including Polish emigré publications), the emphasis was on countering this widely perceived bias rather than on the issue of moral responsibility itself. [In that respect, Turowicz's article was one of the rare instances of addressing balance and objectivity in approaching Polish-Jewish relations, critics of Lanzmann brought forth several "corrective factors" to counter the biases of his vision. Most prominent was the emphasis on the film's silence about those Poles who had in fact saved Jews. The picture of societal indifference, it was argued, was very much a partial one, as it did not include the other side. The established version of Polish-Jewish relations during the holocaust — that some Poles behaved badly, while others acted heroically, as in



any human collectivity under duress — was thus rather easily re-established for the viewers of *Shoah*. Lanzmann may not have invented the morally problematic, but he had exaggerated its overall significance.

Jan Karski, interviewed in the film about his mission as an underground courier to the west and thus being the key "redeeming" personality in Lanzmann's portrayal of Poles, went on public record with a related complaint.[8] He too objected to the invisibility of Polish aid to the Jews, but more specifically, when speaking of his own appearance, Karski attacked Lanzmann for editing out those sections of the interview which addressed the issue of indifference in the west. In the film, he argued, Poles were being unjustifiably singled out, while historically, it was the Allies who bore the blame for not trying to rescue the Jews. Once again, Poles were being reassured in their vision of history, with the underground forces emerging as uniquely concerned about the Jews and helpless at the same time.[9]

The quest for balance to *Shoah* went, however, well beyond what we might see as legitimate complaints, given the film itself. On the still morally safe side, Polish critics would raise the question of French anti-Semitism. Why was Lanzmann, a French Jew, so preoccupied with Poles, when his fellow countrymen deserved an even harsher treatment, the critics asked, as they described in extensive detail the role of Vichy during the war.

Most prominent, though, and not so morally innocent, were references to the Jews' own historical record vis-à-vis the Poles. Somewhat oblique in the Catholic press (which was, after all, subject to government censorship), and very explicit in the monthly *Kultura*, originating in Paris, was the call to reciprocate Lanzmann's attack with reminders of the role Jewish communists had played in the apparatus of Stalinist oppression. Conveniently excluding Polish communists, the image of ruthless Jews torturing innocent Poles resonated well with a much older idea — the identification of communism itself with Jews. In this way, the historical accounting was extended, too, with Jews being blamed for Poland's loss of independence after 1944. If the key to this morbid balance sheet of victims remained in the Stalinist era, the background of long-lasting support of Jews of the much hated Soviet system offered additional strength to the moral outrage directed at Lanzmann. In a sense, history repeated itself; early during the war, reports from the east, picturing Jews as welcoming Soviet invasion and collaborating in repression of Poles were a crucial factor behind the rise of anti-Semitic sentiments on the territories occupied by the Germans.

It seems that we have moved far indeed from *Shoah* itself. The remarkable feature of the discussion around the film was, in fact, its quality of "aroundness." Very few critics commented on *Shoah* as a work on the holocaust. Relatively few viewers indeed saw *Shoah* in its totality; the film was screened in early December in studio theatres, drawing modest audiences (early December is traditionally the busiest shopping season, in a country where shopping is a major, time-consuming chore). The large television audience, presented with one hour and a half of "Polish segments" had little, if any resources for making sense of the whole. Lanzmann's "message," reduced to a frontal attack on Poles and Catholicism generated debate, but Lanzmann's filmic version of the "Final Solution" did not generate reflection.

The editing of *Shoah*, both in the immediate sense of the television screening, and in the larger sense of media coverage, made a more general reflection difficult. But ultimately, it was the long-established pattern of holocaust remembrance which made such reflection impossible. Lanzmann asked his viewers to think through the machinery of total destruction, to follow him on a quest to understand how was it all possible. But he also asked a very concrete question — "why the Jews?" In Poland, where the three million Jewish dead are routinely joined with three million Polish victims, and where the Nazi project is usually seen as interrupted by defeat before the extermination of the Poles, that key question of "why the Jews?" has rarely been asked. Even when solemnly commemorating the dead in Treblinka, with visitors from the west and from Israel in 1983, the very word "Jew" was not spoken. This sense of uniqueness of the holocaust, so much at the base of *Shoah*, is not a part of Poland's memory. [More precisely, it was not there when the film was shown; since 1985, the place accorded to Jewish victims has become more of a contested terrain, as witnessed in the recent controversy around the convent in Auschwitz.]

The task of self-criticism, of coming to terms with the dark chapters of one's past, is always difficult.

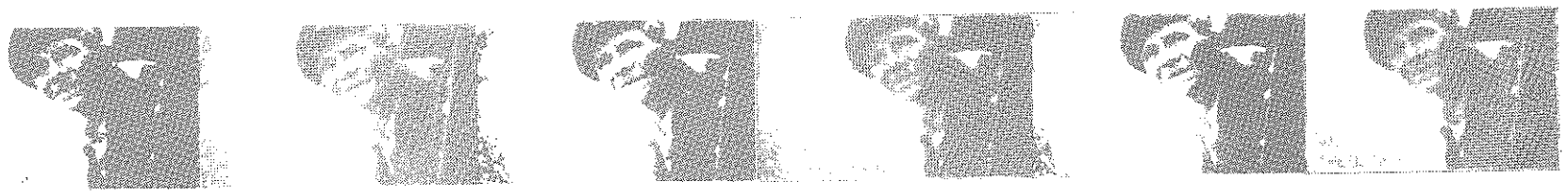
If Poles, in their sense of co-victims of the Nazi genocide, do not raise the general question "why the Jews?," Polish historians, in their accounts of long centuries of Polish-Jewish coexistence, provide a detailed answer to the local query about anti-Semitism. In a way, the question "why the Jews?" dissolves again as the roots of anti-Semitism in Poland are all explainable and explained. The overall thrust of this explanation is one of sociological inevitability — given the country's conditions, given the foreign influences, given the Jews' separatedness, given ..., there *had* to arise anti-Jewish sentiments. For different historical periods, the sociological givens change, of course; the strength, though, of this scientific interpretation never diminishes. The mythical elements are vaguely acknowledged (in discussions of stereotypes, for example), but the core to understanding anti-Semitism remains within the economic, political and sociological spheres. Reflection on the public *image* of the Jew is then very much secondary to that on his public presence. And, as the persistent references to the "Jewish question" testify, it is the Jewish presence itself which guarantees there be a problem.

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

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

At issue here is the premise of traumatisation, the idea that the destruction of Poland's Jews represented a great loss for the country as a whole. The whole recent recovery of Poland's Jewish heritage rests on that premise; explicitly stated or implied in the efforts of remembrance are regret and nostalgic longing over a world never to be again. Among many young people in particular, who grew up in a virtually "purely Polish"[10] Poland, there is a very real sense of loss of diversity, sometimes translating itself into reading up on Chassidism, at other times, into avid defence of the rights of the Ukrainian minority. The current interest in things Jewish, at least in its most popular forms, reflects this sense of loss as it focuses on the "authentic" Jew. All in all, the comments, the declarations, the editorials make this feeling of loss appear perfectly "natural," with the passage of 40 years serving as an additional index for the depth of the trauma.

Shoah undermines the "naturalness" of traumatisation to a degree never before encountered by Polish audiences. Lanzmann himself, when discussing the film a



few years later,[11] explained some of the artistic choices with a description of his traumatic realisation, on site, that Treblinka is (and was) a village like any other village. Talking to people who had witnessed, from so very close, the "Final Solution" acquired an almost impulsive quality for the director. He was not prepared, he said, for how ordinary life would be, next to the gas chambers and after the gas chambers.

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

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

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

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

With an artistic vision as complex and

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

complete as that of Lanzmann, there is an analytical temptation towards a form of interpretive closure. *Shoah* indeed became subject to numerous studies and reflections, going beyond the æsthetic to history itself. Building upon the text is a perfectly legitimate and often illuminating strategy for a better understanding of the moral issues it raises. Yet, as I aimed to show here, the posing of moral challenge cannot be treated as a given, internal to the film. On the other hand, *Shoah*'s failure, in Poland, to serve as a challenge, cannot be dismissed with a patronising "what else is new." Lanzmann's text, as any text, contains possibilities for interpretations radically different from the intended one. *Shoah*'s viewers, as any "readers," bring with them their own ideas about the past and the present. Poland's government, as any other cultural "gatekeeper," had the ability to frame *Shoah* as an instrument of ideological combat. Such framing alone, however, cannot account for the general inability, among Polish intellectuals, to respond to the film with self-critical reflection. Rather, it was the text itself, both where it spoke the loudest and where it remained silent, which facilitated the placing of *Shoah* within the existing structures of Poland's collective memory. In this case, at least, the cognitive and emotional imprints shared among the "readers" proved powerful enough to disarm the artist and his vision.

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

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

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NOTES

1. See Jan Blonski, "Biedni Polacy patrza na getto," *Tygodnik Powszechny*, Jan. 11, 1987.
2. For a detailed analysis of the media coverage of *Shoah* in the context of recent shifts in attitudes towards the Jew, see Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, *Neutralizing Memory*, New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books (1989).
3. Quoted in Salem Alaton, "A powerful and grim portrait of death," *The Globe and Mail*, June 13, 1986.
4. The August 26, 1989 speech by Cardinal Glemp is only the most publicised example of its prevalence and persistence.
5. During the interwar period, Jewish themes, while very prominent on the public agenda, revolved largely around the proposed "solutions" to the "Jewish problem," thus prohibiting any form of neutral interest in Jewish culture or history.
6. See the debate between Turowicz and Timothy Garton Ash, *The New York Review of Books*, May 8, 1986.
7. Joanna Skoczylas, "Telewizyjne hity," *Przeglad Tygodniowy*, no. 11 (207), 1986.
8. Jan Karski, Letter to the editor, *Kultura*, no. 3/450 (1985), p. 170.
9. For an excellent analysis of the exclusion of the Jews from the civic society during the war, see David Engel, *In the Shadow of Auschwitz: The Polish Government-in-Exile and the Jews*, Chapell Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987.
10. Ethnic minorities account today (accurate numbers not being available) for about five percent of the general population. The estimated number of Jews is at most 15,000.
11. Presentation at the Oxford conference "Remembering for the Future," July 12, 1988.

EVANGELISM IN NICARAGUA

PHOTO BY DAVID KATTENBURG

RELIGION IN MESO-AMERICA

BY STEPHEN DALE

Forty years ago, the Mexican poet Octavio Paz wrote in *The Labyrinth of Solitude*: "I would not be telling the truth if I were to say that I had ever seen guilt feelings transformed into anything other than hatred, solitary despair or blind idolatry. The religious feelings of my people are very deep — like their misery and helplessness — but their fervour has done nothing but return again and again to a well that has been empty for centuries." Most commentators have

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

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

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

Ioan Davies

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

It was a day when there was no food in the house. "No cheese, no meat, no milk, no beans," Casco remembers, "Only salt." His father had sent one of his four brothers out to try and borrow some food from the neighbours, but when Casco's younger brother returned around five o'clock he carried with him only one tortilla. "So my father made this tortilla into four little pieces, one for each boy, and he sat in a big chair to drink a cup of coffee. He didn't have any of the tortilla, and I offered some of mine to my father. My father became very emotional and started to cry.

"Afterwards I asked him, 'Papa, why are we so poor? We have difficulties to eat. We don't have any chance to cultivate the land.' And he told me, 'Son, it is the will of God.'"

Casco takes another run at that last phrase to emphasise its irony. "It is the will of God," he repeats. "I was eight years old at the time and I was not convinced of what my father said, but I didn't have the means to dispute it. However, I had begun to read the Bible from seven years old, and by nine years old I had finished it — all of it, from Genesis to Revelation. After that I understood that my father was wrong."

There have been Pentecostals in Nicaragua since 1906, when the Assemblies of God first started to stake out the territory, and complacency was one of the things the converts, like Casco's family, had been taught by the American missionaries: trust in God and accept your lot in life. But that edict seems to have been followed by Nicaraguan Pentecostals as faithfully as North American Catholics have obeyed the Pope's commandments on birth control. Casco recalls that by the time he had become an adult and his country was in the throes of a revolutionary war, his childhood opposition to the existing social inequities had politically coalesced. Casco became an active supporter of the Sandinista revolutionaries while studying to become a Pentecostal minister and working summers on a cotton plantation — a circumstance which put him face to face, he recalls, with the "system of sin and corruption" where rich plantation owners would pay poor labourers little for back-breaking work, and then take most of it back by selling them provisions at high prices. He continued to support the Sandinistas after they assumed power, and for this Casco and five other Pentecostal ministers were stripped of their status by the Assemblies of God leadership in the U.S., about five years ago. But in his heart Casco has kept the faith, remaining both a Sandinista and a Pentecostal — certainly a contradiction-in-terms for North Americans who automatically equate fundamentalist Christianity with right-wing politics.

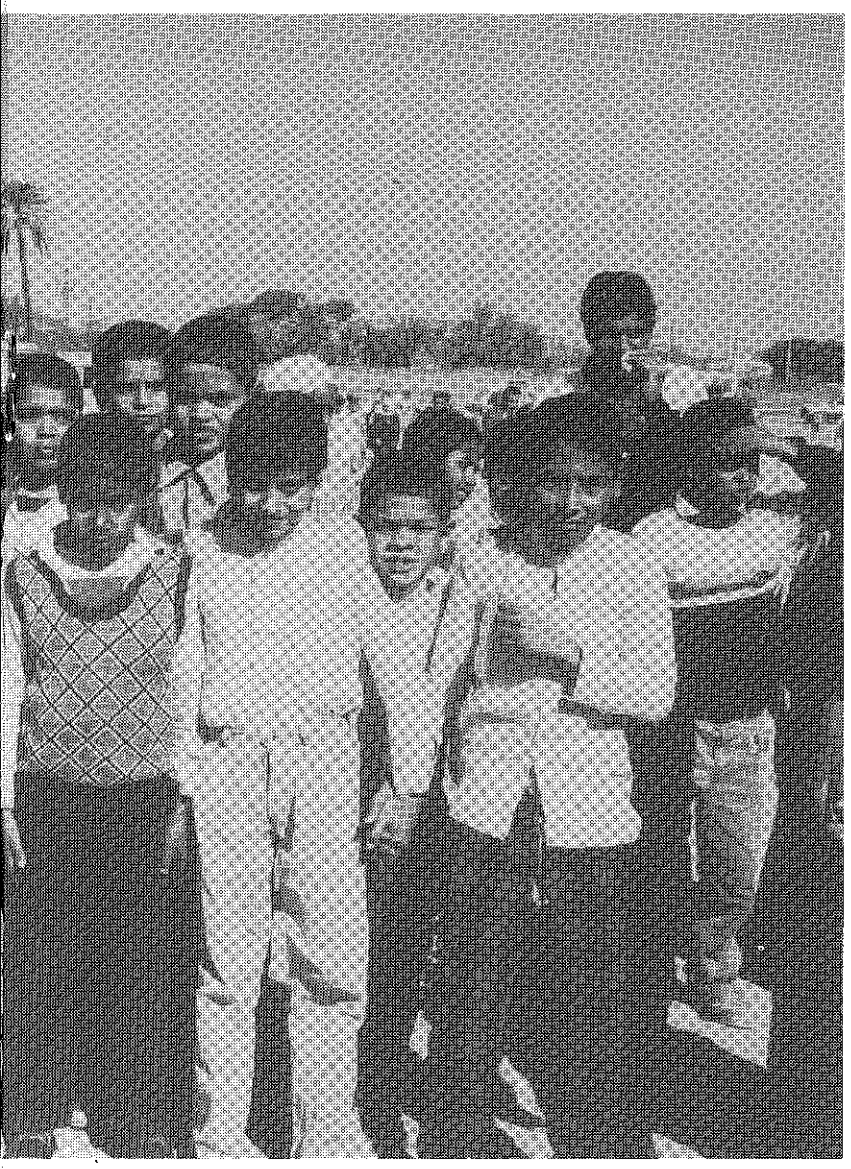
Miguel Angel Casco's case is not unique in Nicaragua — there are plenty of holy-roller Sandinistas around — and that's an indication of how complex the current climate of church-state relations has become. The intrigue has grown in recent times as a new wave of U.S.-supported proselytising has hit Nicaragua. At first, it appears obvious that the foreigners who are backing this evangelical blitz have one clear purpose in mind: to push the right-wing political agenda held by fundamentalists in the U.S. and create an internal, social base for opposition to the Sandinistas. Yet given the unusual twists in the history of evangelical churches in Nicaragua, it's far from certain that this will be the result of the current influx. Some say it is just as likely that poor Nicaraguans will appropriate the spiritual trappings of the expanding fundamentalist denominations, but remain politically faithful to the Sandinistas — juggling the two allegiances in the way Miguel Angel Casco managed to do.

The lack of any consistent political attitude amongst evangelicals (it's a commonly expressed view that members of any single evangelical congregation will span the political spectrum, from pro-contra to pro-Sandinista, with the majority in the middle aspiring to be apolitical) has led to a cautious state of equilibrium in relations between the Sandinistas and the growing fundamentalist community. Visiting American preachers, perhaps fearful of alienating those among the flock for whom defending "la patria" from the contras was an honourable and personally costly duty, have been soft-peddling politics on their visits here. For its part, the Sandinista government seems to understand the appeal of this fundamentalist tide and is betting that it can maintain its support amongst the poor not by rebuffing fundamentalist preachers but by embracing them. Daniel Ortega, for instance, has appeared onstage with a Puerto Rican faith-healer who has an enormous following in the country. Jimmy Swaggert, meanwhile, performed three nights in Managua in February 1988, just four days before he was exposed by a sex scandal in the U.S. — a coincidence which sparked widespread rumours that Swaggert's demise was orchestrated by the C.I.A., in response to Swaggert softening his line on the Sandinistas. But more astonishing than Swaggert's appearance was the government's decision to sign a contract with Pat Robertson, one of the most prominent private backers of the contras, to have "The 700 Club" broadcast on the state-run Sandinista Television System. Robertson's trip to Nicaragua produced the unlikely spectacle of the American Christian broadcaster-cum-presidential candidate shaking hands with Nicaraguan vice-president Sergio Ramirez, an image that amazed and angered some Nicaraguans when it appeared in the papers.

Yet such snapshots of apparent reconciliation do not signify that the evangelical expansion presents no problem for the Sandinistas, and there's a kind of double vision in Nicaragua as to what this strange parade of events actually means. On the one hand, it is clear how this fundamentalist influx fits into the "psychological warfare" aspect of Low-Intensity Conflict (L.I.C.), the Pentagon's current strategic doctrine for dealing with third-world challenges to the U.S. As the Sandinistas restore the liberties that had been restricted during a state of war, they face the danger that incoming proselytisers will turn the people against the revolutionary project. The danger is underscored by several commentators who note that both the Rockefeller commission and the first document of the


MIDNIGHT'S
CHILDREN

Yes, they will trample me underfoot, the number
million five hundred six, reducing me to specks of v
will trample my son who is not my son, and his son
be his, until the thousand and first generation, u
bestowed their terrible gifts and a thousand and
privilege and the curse of midnight's children to be
forsake privacy and be sucked into the annihilati
unable to live or die in peace.



mbers marching one two three, four hundred
of voiceless dust, just as, all in good time, they
s son who will not be his, and his who will not
n, until a thousand and one midnights have
and one children have died, because it is the
o be both masters and victims of their times, to
ilating whirlpool of the multitudes, and to be

Jamelie Hassan

from the installation *Midnight's Children.* Photos of children from the village of _____ and school children visiting the archaelogical site of Dendera, Egypt, December 1989. Text from the novel *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie. Arabic inscription and Islamic motif with the title and the name, Salman, from brass plate engraved by the artisan _____, Egypt, January 1990.

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

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

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

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

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

The big question is about the evangelist's politics, but on this score Medina is evasive, insisting that his political viewpoint is a private matter that doesn't overlap with his role as a preacher. He makes no direct criticism of the Sandinistas, choosing instead to commend them for removing the roadblocks to foreign evangelists who want to enter the country.

Pleasantries aside, it soon becomes easy to deduce where Medina stands on the political spectrum. A mention of General Effraim Rios Montt, (the born-again former president of Guatemala who oversaw a period of official violence in that country in the early 80s), elicits a positive response from Medina, who dismissed the General's political sins with the facile argument that they were numerically insignificant compared to the crimes of the leftist Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. A closer look at Morris Cerullo World Evangelism adds to the suspicion that there's a deep-rooted political commitment behind Medina's reticence to discuss the affairs of the world. According to the Resource Center in Alburquerque, New Mexico (an organisation which keeps files on private groups active in Central America), the literature produced by Cerullo's group speaks in militaristic terms of a showdown in the world between God and Satan, who is in league with Marxist governments. The Resource Center also quotes the organisation's literature as saying that Cerullo himself flew without permission to Nicaragua in 1981 — "to annul the work of the devil so evident in that country today" — and that he was detained for three hours and then forced to leave the country, heading to his next stop at a Guatemalan military airport. While in El Salvador two years later, Cerullo reportedly made the comment that "there is a new army in El Salvador ... God's army."

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

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

The Nicaraguan people are also apparently interested in wealth, something that's in short supply in the country at the moment. The cause of this dearth, he says, is not the draining expense of war, or economic embargo, ravaged fields or closed-down roads — but the absence of the holy spirit. God meant his people to be rich — it says so in Deuteronomy 8:18 — if only

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EVANGELISM in NICARAGUA

they would follow His blueprint. That's where Mitch Medina can help.

"When I came here," the pastor says, "the main thing I had in mind for the seminar was a spiritual message about faith, hope and love from a revelation perspective. I started that message but about the second night I was here, God woke me up at about four o'clock in the morning and changed the whole emphasis of what I was talking about. I've spent most of the week teaching on financial prosperity ... and praying for miracle breakthroughs in people's finances.... I say it in the name of the Lord: there's going to be a change, the explosion that has taken place in the spiritual realm will be changing the finances of Nicaragua. There's going to be a tremendous economic revival in this country."

Medina follows up on that theme the next night at Managua's Plaza de Toros (the bullring) which is, as he had predicted, packed with the faithful and the curious — about 6,000 people. There's a festive air right from the start, with a band playing Latin dance rhythms and a couple of warm-up preachers leading the clapping, singing crowd through some upbeat, devotional songs. After about an hour the sun has set and Mitch Medina bounds up to the stage in an immaculate blue business suit, tie tied as tight as a noose, lips pulled back in a blissful smile. He has been introduced by a preacher who has told the audience, "We're not here to talk about politics; we're not here to talk about Sandinistas or contras. We're here to talk about the second coming of Christ, to tell you that Christ lives." It's a declaration that Medina reiterates as soon as he reaches the podium, an almost apologetic assurance of apoliticism which I am guessing is meant not so much for any authorities that might want to close him down (there is no sign of a policeman or soldier anywhere near the bullring) as for those members of the audience whose charismatic religion does not come with the same right-wing political trappings as in the U.S.

There's more music and a little Bible reading, and then the real attraction of the evening: the healing, Mitch's specialty. As the preacher holds his arms aloft and screams his orations calling for the healing power of God, church elders turn to face the masses from the front row, their arms similarly extended, while the crowd holds out several thousand pairs of hands to meet them, beckoning the healing power. Throughout this arena arises a supernatural chorus of uncontrolled muttering — a vast, enveloping, omni-directional sound, like the roar of the ocean. Many people quake and convulse, losing control entirely. This happens several times, as Mitch offers specific prayers for those who cannot work, those who have arthritis, those who cannot hear or speak, and yes, those who have financial problems. Some of the people he invites up onto the stage throw away walking sticks or touch their toes, and one boy who's mother says he was mute offers a few garbled words. It's not a completely convincing display but one thing becomes totally clear: there are a lot of hurting people in Managua this night who — through the power of their kinship, their faith and whatever other means — have left the bullring salved of some pain and relieved of a little anxiety, at least for a while. Laid low by a huge and distant power which has killed family members and torn their country's economy to shreds, these people have appealed to an even greater power to help them rise again. Most of them seem sure their prayers have been heard.

Swaggert — with half a million dollars worth of film equipment rolling and translators simultaneously translating — looked out into space and asked the brethern to call the 800 number at the bottom of their screens. A wave of bewilderment came upon the crowd; it became obvious to some that they were just extras on a movie set.

Paul Jeffery has seen a lot of foreign preachers come to this country. An American who has lived in Nicaragua for five years, Jeffery is editor of the English-language bulletin of CEPAD, an umbrella group for most of the major Protestant churches in the country, formed during the 1973 earthquake in order to coordinate those churches' relief and development efforts. CEPAD's membership includes both liberal and "national" denominations (some of which have ties to liberal U.S. churches) and conservative ones like the Assemblies of God. It also has a good rapport with the Sandinista government, and as such was called in to mediate when some of the evangelical sects outside of CEPAD came into conflict with the government in the early 80s. As for Jeffery's own role, one extra-curricular function he assigned himself was that of chronicler and chaperon on the visits of both Jimmy Swaggert and Pat Robertson, tagging along wherever the evangelists went. Given those experiences, Jeffery has a few ideas as to why the Sandinistas have been so welcoming to the current evangelical invaders.

The first and most obvious reason, he believes, is that the Sandinistas are serious in their commitment to political pluralism and religious freedom in the country. But beyond that, Jeffery says that the recent influx of preachers illustrates the special place that religion occupies within both Nicaraguan society and within the Sandinista movement. Jeffery also conjectures that Daniel Ortega's personal fascination with theological matters was a major force in the adoption of an open door policy towards foreign evangelists. It is said, for instance, that of the nine Sandinista commandantes, Ortega is closest to foreign minister Miguel D'Escoto, a Catholic priest. D'Escoto has been quoted as saying that if Ortega has been born ten years earlier, he would have become a priest like him.

But beyond just having a soft spot for those who speak in the Christian idiom, the Sandinista leaders may have made a pragmatic gamble that American evangelists would not be credible competition in the contest for the hearts of the Nicaraguan masses. Jeffery says this was borne out by the Swaggert rallies, which were a good example of what happens when a preacher cannot speak to his audience's experience. With three successive evenings of crusades, Jeffery recounts, attendance was markedly lower at each one as audiences became annoyed with too many songs in English and references they couldn't relate to. He says the most profound illustration of this was when Swaggert — with half a million dollars worth of film equipment rolling and translators simultaneously translating — looked out into space and asked the brethren to call the 800 number at the bottom of their screens. A wave of bewilderment came upon the crowd; it became obvious to some that they were just extras on a movie set.

Yet Jeffery says the sore point between the Sandinistas and some evangelical sects was never the danger that huge groups of Nicaraguans would suddenly be absorbed into the Moral Majority, replacing the national heroes in their hearts with the Elmer Gantry types who fly down to save them. What prompted the conflict that marked evangelical-Sandinista relations several years ago was not simple mistrust, he says, but some deep philosophical disagreements.

"Some people think that every Pentecostal pastor is an agent of the C.I.A.," says Jeffery, "I obviously don't think that's true ... but I do think that in some ways the real threat that Pentecostal pastors represent is [seen in] the theology of fundamentalism — which people use the word 'dispensationalism' to describe. This involves the idea that the history of the world is divided into stages; there's a certain predetermined nature to what is happening; we're in a certain period now which is about to end, and part of the nature of this period is that people are going to suffer wars and rumours of wars, so that wars are inevitable, suffering is inevitable. You can't really do anything about it, in fact if you try to stop it, some would claim that you are working against the historical project of God and cooperating with Satan, so its best to just sit back and accept what happens to you. That obviously is very different from liberation theology, and it puts one at odds, say, with the revolutionary project of the Sandinistas. That's why you got, in the early years, people preaching against the literacy and vaccination campaigns. In some cases they were preaching, 'Don't drink this vaccine, it's really from Satan.' But they also just preach a kind of passivity, and as such they represent a threat to the Sandinistas, partly because they are preaching to the same group of poor people — *campesinos* and urban poor — whom the *frente* claims to be its base."

Although there now seems to be a truce in effect, in the early stages of the revolution these differences of perspectives — which were beginning to be seen in the context of the contra war — led to open conflict between competing religious and political interests. Shortly after the

triumph, popular groups associated with the Sandinistas seized several churches in various cities. Later, in 1981 and '82, at the height of the contra war, several conservative pastors returning from trips to the United States were accused of having been in contact with the C.I.A. and detained for periods ranging from a few hours to eleven days. According to Arnulfo Sanchez, an Assemblies of God pastor and vice-president of C.N.P.E.N. (the National Council of Nicaraguan Evangelical Pastors, a conservative umbrella group which splintered off from CEPAD) there were also incidents such as the assault of a pastor's wife in Estelli, and the suspicious death of a pastor in the Rio Coco war zone, near Honduras. In that case, says Sanchez, the pastor, who arrived in the area 15 days before his death, may have been the target of Sandinista soldiers because some of his parishioners were in the habit of giving shelter to the contras.

But looking back at the period of open conflict, Sanchez's recollections are surprisingly conciliatory, much like those of his liberal counterpart, Paul Jeffery. Sanchez says that in the cases of the major showdowns, CEPAD was called in to mediate and understandings with the government were reached. As for reports of preachers perishing in areas of conflict, he is prepared to accept these as casualties of war.

"We know that in a country at war, such as ours," says Sanchez, "much can happen due to abuses by people in authority, or because of unexpected circumstances or inexperience in the use of firearms ... We are not going to say that there was a campaign of persecution, because there was not."

What there was and continues to be, however, are suspicions of a hidden political agenda beneath the conservative church's claims to apoliticism. Critics from other segments of the church community say that C.N.P.E.N. is greatly influenced by a relationship with the U.S. neo-conservative think tank Institute for Religion and Democracy, and that some of its pastors have in the past spoken in favour of the contras. Sanchez rejects both suggestions. The organisation's contact with the United States has been through individual churches, he says, and C.N.P.E.N. has always insisted that within such relationships its ethics and objectives be respected — including the ideal that the organisation remain steadfastly non-political. It was precisely this commitment to staying out of politics, says Sanchez, which got C.N.P.E.N. into trouble in the early 80s: revolutionary zealots, fired up with a sense of mission and feeling threatened as the contra war began, interpreted the "conservative and Christocentric" church's apoliticism as direct opposition.

Since then, C.N.P.E.N. has carved out a significant working space for itself within Nicaragua's current state of religious/political detente. With his organisation holding out big plans for growth in post-contra Nicaragua, Sanchez is eager to downplay the past and its problems. C.N.P.E.N. would seem to have as strong a desire for peace as anyone in Nicaragua; whatever its political agenda (or that of its foreign supporters) might be, the conservative church seems poised to make greater gains in peacetime than it could during war. C.N.P.E.N. has a big campaign on the horizon to give its pastors more theological training, Sanchez says, as well as projects aimed at the community at large. The organisation has plans for the future to launch a health services project — based in Managua at first but later moving out to remote communities — an institute of development and educational programmes that not only propagate religious ideas but teach concrete skills such as accounting and mechanics. The timing of such initiatives is interesting: with these churches set to take a more prominent social role just as the state, drowning in debt after a debilitating decade of war, is being forced to make huge cutbacks on its spending provision of services. With their own programmes filling in where the government is forced to retreat, conservative evangelists no doubt see themselves as becoming a much more powerful force in Nicaragua — providing not just spiritual sustenance for their constituents but whole systems of material support.

What the growing influence and social role of fundamentalist churches in Nicaragua will mean politically is still a ????? question. But Karla Koll of C.I.E.T.S. is one observer who does not feel that the fundamentalist boom will inevitably lead to a pacification of the poor or prove incompatible with Sandinismo. Her optimism is partly supported by the experience of CEPAD, which has brought religious groups of varying social characters into dialogue with the Sandinista government, laying the groundwork for a common understanding. She also says that charismatic religions operating in the third world foster a sense of solidarity amongst the poor which may make them eminently suited to partnerships with political movements like Sandinismo.

Koll notes that Pentecostalism is growing rapidly throughout Latin America largely on the strength of its theology of "radical verticalism," wherein the believer can have a direct, personal relationship with God without the need for intermediaries — where every person is therefore important because of their potential to plug in to the divine. Ever since it came into being in the United States earlier this century, says Koll, Pentecostalism has appealed to the disenfranchised and the poor, with its egalitarian message and its participatory style.

"There's a controversy going on amongst sociologists of religion," says Koll, "that's been going on for a couple of years and was started by two different studies of Pentecostalism in Chile. [On one side is the idea that] Pentecostalism is a means of depoliticising the population by constructing this other world, with its other-worldly focus; that this is dangerous politically and works against popular movements. The other school of thought is that Pentecostalism is a form of protest against the social conditions that do not provide adequate resources for living a dignified life; that within that experience, people recover their sense of personhood and dignity; that the Pentecostal experience is one of protest that has the potential of being tapped and directed into movements for change. I tend to side with the latter. Maybe I look at it this way: that the Pentecostal movement itself does not have a preset ideological content, that you'll see Pentecostals in Guatemala who are in the military, but there are also Pentecostals that are in the guerilla. So there's no set ideological content. I tend to think that there is a potential for drawing Pentecostals into movements to better their conditions." ■

PHOTO BY DAVID KATTENBURG

With its emphasis on large, uninhibited gatherings where the faithful sing, dance and speak in tongues, and on the believer's ability to form a personal relationship with God, Pentecostalism shows itself as an egalitarian form of worship with the power to build community and, ironically, a popular appeal very similar to that of Sandinisimo.

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BAD WORDS

fiction by **MARLENE NOURBESE PHILIP**

paintings by Buseje Bailey

How she envied him! this new found friend of hers. The way he cursed. Walking before the big mirror in her parents' room, bony chest — almost as flat as his — puffed up with the trying, trying hard to imitate him. If she could only look like him... Miranda thought, maybe she would acquire his knowledge, his way of cursing.

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

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

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

Hurrying to school one day, late and therefore alone, just so — it came out as she was crossing the bridge over the thin and brown trickle that was the Wapsey River in dry season. "Cunt!" A great wave of relief washed over her as she said the word for the first time. Her surprise at hearing it come from her own mouth brought Miranda to a standstill, and although she knew it was unlikely, she couldn't stop herself from looking behind her both fearing and expecting to see her mother standing there, a silent and stern witness to this new level of her daughter's shameful behaviour. Miranda gave a nervous laugh at seeing no one there, and hurried on saying the word over and over again to herself under her breath.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Lips would curl savagely around the words, "Your" shape the words with a blunt and rough-hewn style replacing the "t" and "h" with a double "d," "mudder," only to let fly the deadly missiles that home in and explode — "Yuh mudder cunt," in the man's face, dripping the

bitter sweet sticky mess all over him. Miranda had seen grown men grow murderous at this insult. She had seen her brother come home in tears because of this.

It was only men she had heard saying these words. Did women curse it too, or was it only a male curse? And what did women say — "You father's prick?" Somehow it didn't sound as bad as mother's cunt. She knew all the words now and cock or father's cock just didn't count if you really wanted to curse. Put together a word like sucker to make cock-sucker the word became really bad, but it didn't, at least in her books, come close in badness to "the word."

The exploration of forbidden words was always always in the practice makes perfect of secret places — at night in bed with the sheets pulled up tight tight over her head; in the bathroom under cover of the shower's noise, or if she was home alone, in front of the big, round mirror in her mother's bedroom. Her mother and father shared the room but Miranda always thought of it as her mother's room — it smelt like her, carried the imprint of her order. The big obzoky bed took up most of the smallness of the shabby room; in the daytime, with its dark wood shiny with the high gleam of regular Saturday polishings it seemed not to belong — did not quite fit — but at nighttime when hurricane season came round, or during earthquake time, it was the safest place to curl the body round sister or brother or mother, its wide expanse like some ballasted haven among the shaking and the lightning and the thunder and her mother's voice no longer forbidding but soothing and comforting at each tremor or flash or roll. Miranda now pranced up and down the hard mattress feeling boldface and nervous. She watched herself in the mirror as she formed the words — excitement balancing risk, like playing with matches under the house, knowing it was worth the flogging she might get if she were caught there. To practice make perfect forbidden words in forbidden spaces...

In this new country — for that was how she saw her move to the city, even the air felt and smelt different. Where before there were no spaces or places she could not enter, where before everything was allowed and permitted, now the forbidden was the usual: forbidden places, especially for girls, forbidden books, forbidden people, forbidden words, forbidden thoughts and yet what was forbidden was all the more clear to her because it was forbidden. The forbidden had come to life in new and unusual ways in this new place.

For a while Miranda envied her new friend — nothing was forbidden him. Miranda's eyes would follow his sure and insolent swagger, trail each movement of his walk — it was all the more brutal to her for its casualness and confirmed his indifference to all that Miranda could not ignore. His ignorance of the forbidden was absolute. And she could feel her thin body vibrate with the energy of want — so keen was her desire for this state at times. Then something happened that made her switch her loyalties once formed and in making this switch she felt that she had, somehow, betrayed her friend. But it was a war, wasn't it, she told herself as she hurried to school one day arguing with herself, and you had to take sides.

Pomona Adams was a large and beautiful brown-skinned woman. Miranda was impressed. Very impressed with Pomona — with all things about Pomona — her size: she was close to six feet with full shapely breasts — the kind Miranda wanted — wore high heels all the time and had the largest behind Miranda had ever seen. But more than anything else what Miranda was impressed with was Pomona's ability to curse. Miranda was intrigued by how Pomona, her plump arms resting on her window sill, could casually carry on a conversation with her neighbour, pause mid-sentence, calmly tell her son to stop kicking the arse out of his shoes, turn back to her neighbour and continue her conversation as if nothing had happened. Miranda was entranced by the way Pomona could combine words when she cursed — words that she, Miranda, would never have dreamt of putting together, like arse and shoe. Under the pretext of doing homework she would often try to parse the use of certain words she had heard Pomona using — trying hard to understand the context. She was not very successful, for while arse was a noun, shoes did not have arses, yet she knew what Pomona had meant... she shrugged her bony shoulders and gave up in frustration after a while. She was young, but she recognised artistry when she heard it and she knew that if ever there was a cursing contest, Pomona would win hands down and she, Miranda, would be there cheering her on.

In the secret spaces of her mouth she spun, unspun and respun with a loving tongue a new language, the language of badness...

Pomona, Miranda saw, had powerful words too and she used them as if none were forbidden, as if she had the right to use them all — the good *and* the bad. And something about the way Pomona walked made Miranda suspect that Pomona's words, especially the bad ones, and the way she used them were connected with her body. She used her words like she walked, with a prideful determination that matched her size. You couldn't even call what Pomona did walking, Miranda thought as she watched Pomona mashing the ground as if she owned it and knew that she owned it — each step was merely intended to confirm that ownership. The proof of this connection between Pomona's body and her words came early one morning several weeks after Miranda had moved to the city and while she was struggling to understand this new badness that was all around her.

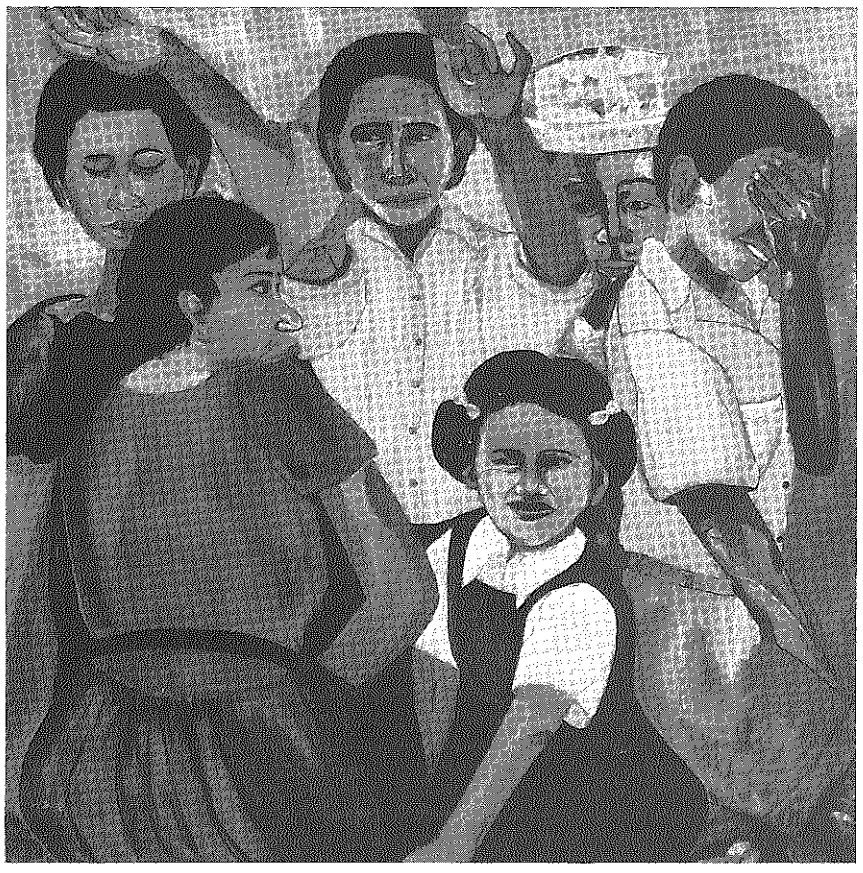
Pomona and one of her neighbours hadn't talked for several months, they just threw words at each other — this Miranda only found out by listening to her parents' conversations. When Pomona and Sybil stopped speaking to each other their children did too. The men, like men, pretended to be above it all, and would nod to each other. To go out Pomona had to pass Sybil's house, so almost every day as Pomona passed by, Pomona and Sybil would be throwing words at each other under their breath so that the other one wouldn't hear, but know something was said, or just over their breath so that the other one did hear. Miranda never found out what Sybil said to Pomona on this particular morning but Pomona's response was the reason why she switched allegiances. She saw Pomona lift one of her solid arms, grab the flesh on the underside of her upper arm and say, "Look, see here, this is flesh!" She flung her challenge at Sybil who was by no means a small woman, but certainly smaller than Pomona. As if this was not enough Pomona turned her back to her opponent and with two hands flung her skirt up and up over her behind; down, down and still further down came Pomona's panties, her hands swift and sure with the choreography of pride. "Look, you want to see flesh, this, this is flesh!" And there for all the world who cared to look and Miranda was Pomona's fat backside exposed to the sweet morning air as she grabbed a handful of her brown flesh to demonstrate the proof of its existence. Proud and in the brown amplitude of her flesh, unashamed of her size or her words, any of her words, particularly the bad ones that now, after the unmatched challenge of her flesh, issued forth from her round pretty mouth, Pomona threw her words in her neighbour's face and made a stand for truth — the truth of flesh and bad words. "Come in here now!" Miranda's mother's voice banished her from the forbidden and the desired — to be bad — to use bad words — to make them good perhaps, though she liked the power that badness gave them.

Once again in front of the mirror in her mother's bedroom, the house empty, Miranda throws up her skirt exposing her bony bottom to the mirror. "Yes, yes, this is flesh," gripping her arm, tightly muscled with youth. "Oh, hell!" Disappointed she flops on the bed. "To have a behind — no an arse like that," she says out loud — "something you could grab on to." She longed for flesh on her arms or breasts like Pomona. The person she now most wanted to be like was Pomona. In the dark she told herself that she didn't so much want to be like Pomona Adams as to curse like her. She wasn't sure if there was a difference. Practice makes perfect Miranda reminds herself once again and stands on to the bed now, hoping that the mattress would give her the sort of rocking majestic walk of Pomona; she starts to work at her words again, trying hard to get the right inflection, the right sneer. Women curse too — she knew that now. Pomona had taught her that. She had even heard one say "the word," the one that made men cry, the mother's curse. It wasn't only men that used it, but only men cried or got really angry at it. The women didn't carry on like the men did at the mother's curse. Why that was she hadn't figured out. Not yet anyway.

As long as she continued to practise in secret Miranda felt uninitiated into the world of the forbidden. And her initiation she felt, had to be a public one — a speaking of at least one of these words in the presence of others. She picked one — shit — knowing she was a cow-

ard for choosing one of the least bad. Plotting and practising to make perfect in public, she rehearsed all her words tasting them secretly as you can only words. In the secret spaces of her mouth she spun, unspun and respun with a loving tongue a new language, the language of badness. And her testing and retesting of these words became a fuguing against and with the words of her mother and father.

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



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

Like her favourite cowboy shoot-out scenes from Saturday matinees where the good guy, usually Roy Rogers or Gene Autry — dressed in white — meets the bad guy dressed all in black and shoots it out, Miranda replayed the scene in her mind for many months, even years after. She was standing close to the top step about to jump all the way down to the bottom — some six or so steps — when someone, she couldn't tell who it was since the push came from behind, pushed her off. She never found out who it was, she never cared enough. Like the morning "the word" had just popped out over the Wapsey River, she didn't will them, the words just came, "Oh shit!" The release was almost too much to bear, and before she knew what she was doing, before she could savour the delight and pride she felt, she heard herself, "Oh fucking, fucking shit!" She saw the shock on everyone's face and felt a rush of excitement. One or two of the other children even had their hands over their mouths as if they themselves had said the words, and that made her want to laugh out loud. Her mother's face was serious — like a bull she remembered thinking. Maybe she added that thought later — as time went on Miranda did have a tendency to embellish the memory. Her mother's full eyes that could, in public, cow them into quiet, now gazed at Miranda commanding her to silence. As if she were rushing toward a cliff in preparation for leaping off and flying, Miranda saw it all, and knew she couldn't stop or she would fall and not fly. She saw the licking that her father would give her with the thick leather strap that lay coiled in the bottom of the bureau like some lifeless but still threatening snake — there was a rumour that it had been soaked in pee to make it sting more; she saw the washing out of her mouth that her mother would carry out. But she also saw Pomona Adams with her shapely breasts and large backside mashing the ground — proudly — and thought of her using her words and her body just the way she wanted to, and Miranda smiled and rushed to embrace the unembraceable, the forbidden: "And your mother's cunt!" She slung her mouth around the words and repeated them all again to no one in particular, but with a bravado and a gauche sureness which was sureness all the same, and an understanding way beyond her years. She had practised to make perfect and she had come close to perfection that Sunday afternoon. She understood badness now and that was what mattered.

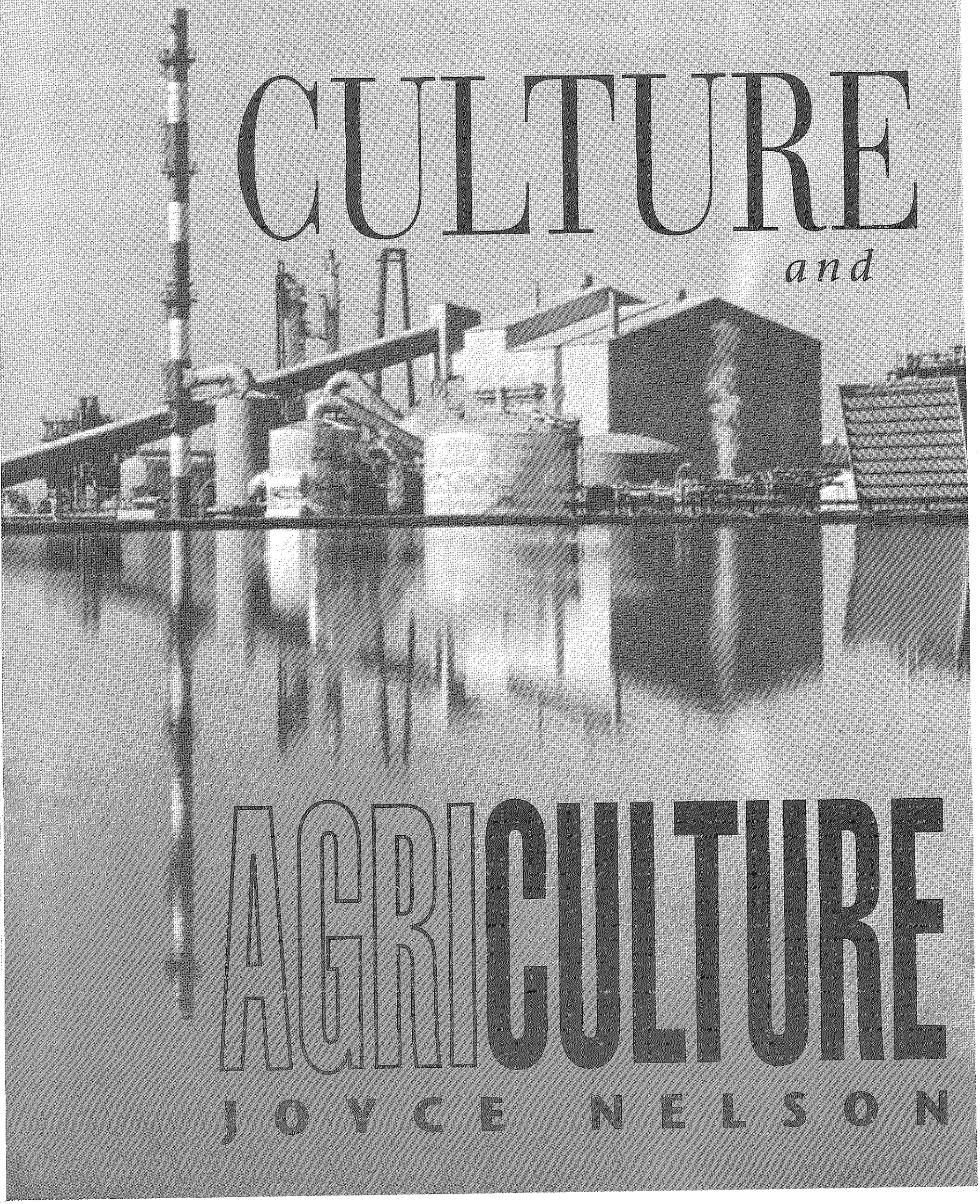
Miranda heard and felt all this, she knew that like her they were entering forbidden spaces, naming now what they had only dared to dream before. In secret.

The words had not stained her mouth — even in this public uttering. The moist, wet, inner pink space of her mouth had become a tender womb to bad words, any words — mother's cunts, pricks, dicks — the words were embedded deep inside Miranda filling up all the secret places and spaces created by the forbidden. Like Chaucer's male characters the words had plumbed her depths — mother's cunts and all. No one, not even the guardian of space and words, her mother, could take them or any of her words from her. They're all mine now, Miranda thought as she lay in bed, remembering how she had panted and her forehead had broken out in sweat after she was done swearing. "But see here," her mother's friend had said, "she not even done grow yet and she want to be woman." Miranda's eyes had locked with her mother's — behind the hardness of the glare she could faintly recognise the hurt — she had shamed her in public, and for that she was sorry, but not for saying the words. Her fingers now gently touched the raised weals on her arms and legs from the flogging her father had given her. They were the painful proof of her allegiance with Pomona Adams. And the truth. There was a certain truth in those words, she knew that now; it was that truth that made some people dislike them so — like men crying at the mother's curse. Having uttered them Miranda now felt that she had made the words good, especially the mother's curse, but she now wanted very much to keep the power of their badness. And how was she to do that — make them good yet keep them bad?

On that thought Miranda fell asleep. ■

Marlene Nourbese Philip, a writer who lives in Toronto, was awarded the 1988 Casa de las Americas Prize for Poetry in English for her collection, She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks, which has been published recently by Ragweed. Her novel, Harriet's Daughter, published by The Women's Press in 1988 was shortlisted for the 1989 Toronto Book Awards.

CULTURE *and*



AGRICULTURE

JOYCE NELSON

An Imperial Oil fertiliser plant.

Once everything will have been cleansed,

once an end will have been put to all

viral processes and to all social and

bacilliary contamination, then

only the virus of sadness

will remain, in this universe

of deadly cleanliness

and sophistication.

— JEAN BAUDRILLARD

THE ULTIMATE SIMULACRUM

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

For example, in his profound book, *The Primal Mind*, native writer Jamake Highwater observes:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The usual explanation for the mid-twentieth-century "revolution" in North American farming practice has been the desire for increased crop yields, considered the sign of increased efficiency. But we might look for other explanations, including corporate erosion of farmers' self-sufficiency and independence through the growth of what is called "the nonfarm sector" — a new realm of business to supply what farmers once provided and recycled for themselves: seeds, feed and fertiliser. Indeed, the transformation of the family farm into the factory farm of agribusiness can be told through the fate of each one of these elements, but here I will focus primarily on that last element, fertiliser — less delicately called shit. A central (but usually unacknowledged) part of the farm-

"treat shit like dirt..."

ing "revolution" was to treat shit "like dirt," and ultimately, dirt "like shit" — an attitude that has had far-ranging consequences for the entire planet.

It is generally agreed that the first major step in the "rationalisation of agriculture through science" was the introduction by the nonfarm sector of hybrid seeds (especially corn) in the 1930s to replace the many open-pollinating varieties that had evolved through centuries on this continent. In *First the Seed*, Jack Kloppenburg writes:

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

Anhydrous ammonia being sprayed directly on a field of young corn.

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

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

Second, the reliance on hybrids greatly reduced the diversity of plant varieties propagated on the continent. For example, four generations ago North American farmers grew more than 320 varieties of corn. By 1989, only six corn varieties accounted for 71 percent of all corn grown.[1] This loss of diversity is now being recognised as an increase in the vulnerability of uniform crops to pests and disease.

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

Nevertheless, the economic depression of the 1930s tended to retard these "advances" for the time being. Few farmers could afford to adopt the goal of full mechanisation being pitched by the nonfarm sector. Indeed, many farmers could no doubt see the wisdom in maintaining their own self-sufficiency through providing their own seed (much of it cross-pollinated by themselves to meet their own standards), their own intuition and expertise, and their own communal labour for the harvest. As usual in this century, it would take a war to turn the reluctant tide.

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

At least one year before the war ended, the leading industrialists of the United States had already decided among themselves (and with the endorsement of the military chiefs) that it would be necessary for the health of capitalism to maintain a "permanent war economy," rather than demobilise production levels at war's end. This decision behind closed doors was decisive in every way for the postwar world, but especially for agricultural praxis.[2]

Before 1945, the amount of agrichemicals applied to North American crops was negligible. But the war effort had generated a greatly expanded petrochemicals industry looking for new markets in the postwar future. Unwilling to demobilise its wartime production of ammonia and nitrogen, the industry found ready allies even during the war for the continued production in postwar years. As Kloppenburg wrote:

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

The "anticipated problem" could have been solved, of course, by simply cutting back on production of nitrogen, but that would not have been a "profitable solution" for the petrochemicals industry.

Thus, the nonfarm sector was faced with a new problem: how to increase farmers' use of agrichemicals, and especially something farmers had never needed before — artificial shit. Part of the solution was to be found in changing the attitudes of farmers themselves towards their own practice. The traditional view of farming as a felicitous mix of home-grown and recycled ingredients, intuition and expertise based on a "feel" for the land and the changing weather, was obviously at odds with both modernity and the growth of the nonfarm sector. What was needed was to see farming as *science*. Kloppenburg writes:

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

Changing farming into corporate science-led praxis which would follow a "specified management system" necessarily entailed a certain amount of propaganda directed at farmers themselves.

In Canada, the wartime N.F.B. partly served this purpose through a variety of films made for the rural circuits. Films like *Bacon for Britain* (1943), *Do unto Animals* (1939), *Farm Front* (1943), *Farm Improvement Series* (1944), *Farmers' Forum* (1942), *Hands for the Harvest* (1943), *New Plans for the Land* (1943) all tended to stress the new scientific methods being developed by the nonfarm sector to achieve greater and more efficient yields. But underneath this message was another: traditional, individual and regional variations in farming practice were unacceptable, outdated and outmoded, and an impediment to central authority's co-ordination.

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

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

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

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

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

The answer, of course, was to redesign the hybrids so that they would withstand massive artificial fertiliser doses. Once this was accomplished, the petrochemicals industry could finally "justify" its decision to not demobilise wartime production levels of ammonia and nitrogen. A "need" had been created. As Kloppenburg notes, "Whereas there were but 7 firms producing ammonia (the basis of much nitrogen fertilizer) in 1940, there were 65 firms by 1966."

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

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

The postwar transformation of farming into agribusiness meant that by 1981, North American farmers were spending more than $18 billion per year on purchased feed, $9 billion for chemical fertiliser, $3 billion for pesticides, $4 billion for seed, and $9 billion for farm machinery. Since at least $31 billion of this annual $43 billion outlay was going for elements that farmers had once freely provided for themselves through their own traditional recycling practices, we can perceive the highly lucrative dimensions of this shift in productive power to the nonfarm sector.

While this shift was part of a larger postwar economic shift towards globalised markets (to be explored in another issue of *Border/Lines*), it was also part of a new mindset fascinated by the wonders of high science itself. The 1950s were steeped in a

The enticement of farmers away from traditional recycling practices lead to a financial and technical dependence worth $31 billion to agribusiness supply sectors by 1981.

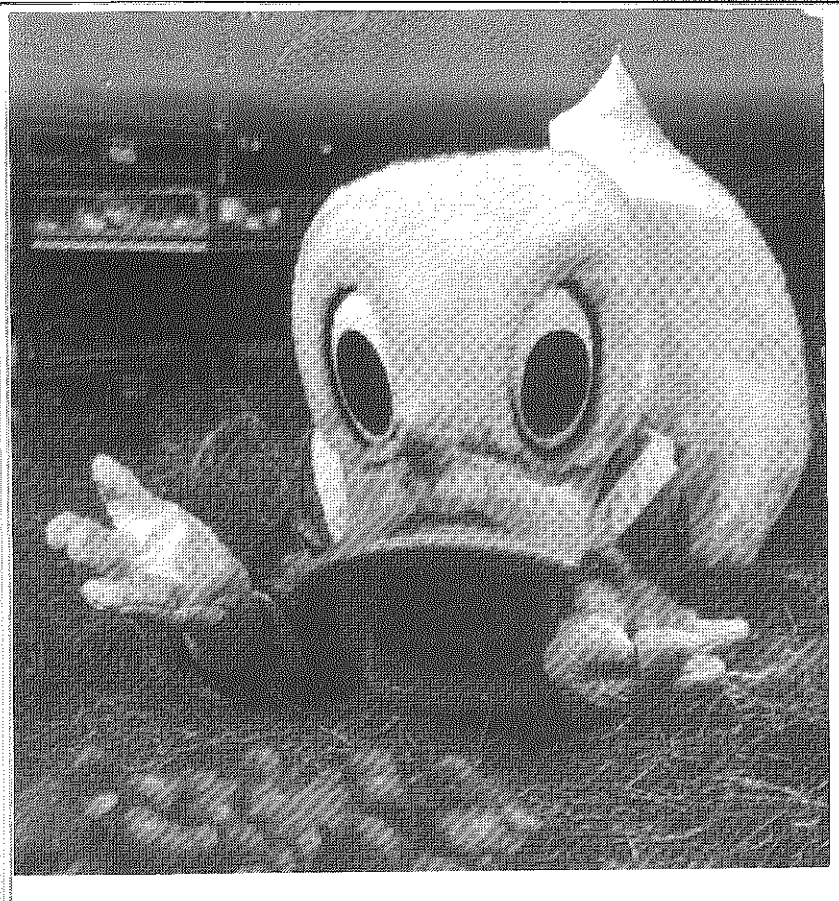
romance with synthetics in every aspect of daily life: a romance based on "unlimited" oil, disposable plastics, and other oil-based consumer products that matched the "desires" of a culture already addicted to fossil fuels through the automobile. The postwar petrochemicals "revolution" in agriculture was an intrinsic part of this larger societal addition.

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

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

Not surprisingly, the postwar "revolution" in North American agriculture coincided with the rapidly rising star of a man who would make simulacra the centrepiece of his worldview. In *The Disney Version*, Richard Schickel writes: "The career of Walt Disney is...much conditioned by the

and dirt like shit"



Donald Duck hatches a promotions ploy in a Miami factory farm.

"The career of Walt Disney is ... much conditioned by the hatred of dirt and of the land that needs cleansing and taming and ordering and even paving over before it can be said to be in genuinely useful working order."

Richard Schickel

hatred of dirt and of the land that needs cleansing and taming and ordering and even paving over before it can be said to be in genuinely useful working order." Disneyland of the 1950s reflected not only Walt's obsession with cleanliness and order and his hatred of the land, it epitomised what William Irwin Thompson has called "that curious cultural mixture of Hollywood fantasies and Big Science" that has so typified this American Century."

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

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

> When there is a fake — a hippopotamus, dinosaur, sea serpent — it is not so much because it wouldn't be possible to have the real equivalent but because the public is meant to admire the perfection of the fake and its obedience to the [computer] program. In this sense Disneyland not only produces illusion, but — in confessing it — stimulates the desire for it: A real crocodile can be found in the zoo, and as a rule it is dozing or hiding, but Disneyland tells us that faked nature corresponds much more to our daydream demands.

If Disneyland was thus an early advertisement for biotechnology, with its goal of implanting biochips to monitor and control living species, it was also a spectacular advertisement for the end of nature. As Eco notes:

> When, in the space of twenty-four hours, you go (as I did deliberately) from the fake New Orleans of Disneyland to the real one, and from the wild river of Adventureland to a trip on the Mississippi, where the captain of the paddle-wheel steamer says it is possible to see alligators on the banks of the river, and then you don't see any, you risk feeling homesick for Disneyland, where the wild animals don't have to be coaxed. Disneyland tells us that technology can give us more reality than nature can.

More important, Disneyland — and its later clone, Disneyworld, which is 150 times bigger than its predecessor — tells us that technological simulacra are superior to their biological counterparts. In this sense, the real Disney message is far more disturbing than its cultural commentators have usually noted. Aside from Thompson's observation of the "happy participation in fantasies of progress," Disneyland and Disneyworld reflect Walt Disney's greatest obsession — in Richard Schickel's words, "an obsession with death." That obsession is evident in every aspect of the theme parks — indeed, it is their major theme — where the only living beings are the human guides and visitors who themselves "must agree to behave like robots." As signs of the times, Disneyland and Disneyworld reveal a society more fascinated by what is "lifelike" than by what is alive.

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

But the desired goal of "cleansing" the planet has still not been reached, even though some 24 billion tons of topsoil (treated like dirt) is lost every year.[3] So Shell Oil has now developed the perfect seed for our times: a seed coated in more than seven layers of herbicides, pesticides, fertilisers, growth stimulants and other pharmaceuticals that is intended to be drilled into bedrock to grow without soil at all.[4]

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

Joyce Nelson's latest book is Sultans of Sleaze: Public Relations and the Media, published by Between the Lines in Toronto.

FOOTNOTES

1. Quoted from John David Mann, Anna Bond and David Yarrow, "Seeds of Hope," *Solstice* (Sept./Oct., 1989), p. 11.
2. Historical material in this and the next paragraph derived from Kloppenburg.
3. See Dick Russell, "The Critical Decade," *E: The Environmental Magazine* (Jan./Feb., 1990), p. 32.
4. Chris Scott, Speaker at the "Remembering Tomorrow" conference, November 11, 1989. Mr. Scott is an Ontario writer and organic farmer highly critical of contemporary agribusiness.

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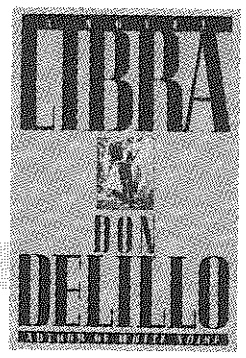
Lee Harvey Oswald: history as myth



IAN BALFOUR

Libra
by **Don DeLillo**
New York: Viking; Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1988, 456 pp.

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

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

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

"Design" might be singled out as the major preoccupation of DeLillo's text and his characters. The title *Libra* refers primarily to Oswald's astrological sign, but also to fate and more generally to "plotting" in the twin registers of politics and narrative. Many characters in the novel are haunted by the spectre of a plot that they must but cannot quite control. "People make history," Marx wrote, "but not in circumstances of their choosing." Some of the most striking passages in *Libra* are those in which Oswald describes his sense of being caught up in the alternating current of history. The burden of Oswald's life is to somehow coordinate his "personal" itinerary with the plot of nothing less than world history. But what sort of integral story can be composed from the life of a U.S. Marine whose main inspiration is Lenin, and a character whose time is spent charting the similarities between himself, Kennedy and Trotsky? (When applying as a Marine to study abroad, Oswald lists among his special interests: "Ideology.") Not only are there immense difficulties in plotting Oswald's life, his story gets enmeshed in a proliferation of competing stories, all of which culminate in the "event" of Kennedy's assassination, an event for which no one is able to provide the true story. The upshot is less a deep cynicism about history and the rendering of it in language than an acknowledgement of the complexities of the stories

Dallas, Texas, November 22, 1963.
The Kennedy motorcade moments before the assassination...

— and whatever it is that resists narrative — that we try to gather under the single word history. Even the word history is only apparently single, for it is invested with a number of incompatible senses: "History," one C.I.A.-type tells us, "is the sum total of all the things they aren't telling us." Or: "The purpose of history," Oswald muses thinking of Trotsky, "is to crawl out of your own skin."

The grand outlines of *Libra*'s story are framed by the opposition between capitalism and communism, as if, in the world of Eisenhower no less than of Bush, there were only two possibilities. *Libra* is not only "about" a certain struggle between capitalism and communism in the fifties and sixties; it performs that struggle at the level of the sentence, the paragraph, and the narrative generally. The arch-DeLillo sentence brands itself as a product of late consumer capitalism. "Natures spelled backwards," the T.V. intones, at one moment in *Libra*, to promote the now obsolete "Serutan." Here, as in his earlier *White Noise*, the television is one character among others: its voice mingles with those we tend to call human. Typically, the DeLillo signature sentence is less a sentence than a sub-grammatical sequence of words or brand names culled from the networks of advertising, a sentence that no one could quite sign. These phrases — characteristic of, but not limited to, consumer capitalism — are matched by the blunt instruments that are the sentences of a distinctly pre-*glasnost* dogma encountered by Oswald on his sojourn to the Soviet Union. The two rhetorics blend in the telegraphic style of the postcards that an unknown voice transcribes from snapshots of Oswald, postcards that periodically arrest the narrative even as they try to make sense of it. And they blend too in the language of Lee Harvey Oswald himself, who is caught in the middle of the strict but violent opposition between capitalism and communism. Yet this opposition collapses within Oswald and the violence of this "merger" — Oswald tells us, "History tends to merge" — surfaces in his very language. And "language" is not a matter of indifference for Lee Harvey Oswald, since he, like Trotsky, like Kennedy, and like Marina Oswald, is a writer, a writer who analyses, records, and synthesizes the contradictory "experience" all around him.

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

The archivist Nicholas Branch sees his unwritten text as "the Joycean Book of America," a novel in which nothing would be left out. *Libra* is not quite that, though it draws on the most powerful myths of American culture: the integrity of the individual, the boundless future of technology, myths so inclusive that, in theory, it seems everyone should be engaged in and by this story. The most striking similarity between *Libra* and *Ulysses* is the emergence in the end of the voice of a woman — here Oswald's mother — to provide the closing to a book almost entirely dominated by men. The mother's voice, which had "interrupted" the narrative at various points, addresses a plea to a judge recounting and explaining the details of her son's life that may or may not have some bearing on his actions. This one-sided dialogue is no less lyrical than Molly Bloom's outpouring of words but its mythic dimension is more modest, more pedestrian. One thing her intervention does is to trouble the seemingly distinct notions of public and private and to make that very vocabulary seem inadequate. This goes hand in hand with the epigraph for *Libra*, drawn from a letter from Lee Harvey Oswald to his brother: "Happiness is not based on oneself, it does not consist of a small home, of taking and getting. Happiness is taking part in the struggle, where there is no borderline between one's own personal world, and the world in general." No borderlines: such is the extreme thesis of *Libra*. But is there a language without borderlines? The language of *Libra* may erode the distinction between public and private in its demonstration that the innermost thoughts of an individual are endlessly citational, riddled with fragments of advertising, principles of this or that political program, phrases from books, and that, on the other hand, the most public of world-historical events have peculiar resonances and even causes in the "private" lives of historical actors. But even with a displacement like the one *Libra* effects — where it is impossible to say what is simply "private" or "public" in Lee Harvey Oswald — some other language, with other terms, takes its place and sets up certain borders, however temporary, of its own.

Libra is far more than a period piece: it functions as allegory as well as documentary history, for it is marked as a product of the Reagan era and the return to the bordered rhetoric of the cold war. It's not certain that the U.S. can do without the dichotomous geo-political vision, which is why, when faced with the spectre of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, some elements of the government want to maintain the cold war at all costs. So *Libra* works not just as one more example of the "historical novel": it functions also as an allegory of the more current moment of its production and reception. There are striking passages in *Libra* when we suddenly realise that a certain moment of the past is still very much with us: Oswald's mother, for example, writes a letter to none other than John Tower to plead on his behalf, the same John Tower who helped whitewash the Reagan administration's Iran-Contra escapades, the same John Tower who almost became Secretary of Defense for the Bush League of Nations. Is "our" plot still somehow the tangled one of Lee Harvey Oswald?

In this novel of characteristically black humour, DeLillo indulges in little wordplay, yet the title *Libra* seems to resonate with the words "book" and "free" in the Spanish of the Cubans who shadow the actions of Oswald and company. But freedom and the fate prescribed by astrological signs should strike us as more at odds than they were thought to be in the Reagan White House. Perhaps one thing DeLillo demonstrates is that it is precisely in the book, the medium displaced but not dismantled by T.V., that freedom and fate coexist so uneasily. And it is that conjunction in and of the book that makes "plotting" inescapable. Though DeLillo offers an eerily plausible version of the real story behind the Kennedy assassination, there is little arrogance implicit in the text's claim to historical knowledge. The tendency to present its story as *the* story is countered by a certain Joycean banality that insists on the haphazard, provisional character of its everyday subject and subjects. With its irony, its play with history and fiction, its panoply of competing voices, *Libra* could no doubt be shelved conveniently under the rubric of postmodernism. But the novel exploits a less historically specific programme for fiction as well: the almost primordial sense that fiction moves in the realm not of the real but, as that eminent philosopher of the postmodern, Aristotle, put it, of the possible. To say this is not to suspend this fiction above the realm of politics and history, for what is politics but the impossible as well as necessary negotiation of the possible? ■

...and moments after.

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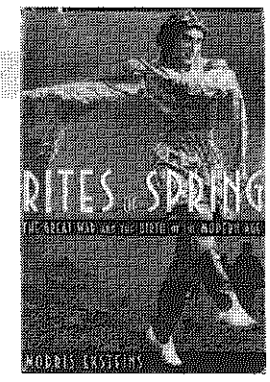
Rites of Spring and the birth of modernism

JOE GALBO



Rites of Spring:
The Great War and
the Birth of the Modern Age
by **Modris Eksteins**
Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1989,
396 pp.

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

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

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

Dada dancers

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

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

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

Cubist war. A gas sentry sounds the alarm, near Fleurbaix, June 1916.

accurate to say that the German experience, lacking both the social and political basis for a robust modernism, encouraged the negative strains of the movement.

Modernism can be generally described as a rage against accredited values; it restlessly demands authenticity, and challenges the accepted ways of doing things. It is caught up in the failure to understand itself, yet its impulse towards revolt and renewal is inextricably tied to a bourgeois critical spirit and political power. In France and England, *épatér le bourgeois* had an aggressive, polemic edge that opened an ambiguous space and permitted the oppositional avant-garde to intervene in the creation of a modern culture. Here modernism was distinguished by a desire to destroy but also by a willingness to create and remember the injuries of the past that a complacent and self-satisfied middle class tried to repress. German modernism, on the other hand, lacking a politically powerful bourgeoisie to challenge and prod into action, escaped into a romantic longing for totality, absolute freedom, and nihilism. In a sense, German modernism and its avant-garde were not, as Eksteins asserts, more advanced than in other European countries, but were simply more prone to replace a critique of bourgeois values with irrational flirtations. It constumarily enshrined and subtly empowered reactionary ideals of *Legensphilosophie,* the notion of an æsthetic "life experience" that went beyond rational justification. These ideas, of course, were later to be supremely useful to a state capitalism in crisis.

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

Eksteins's analysis of the psychological motivations of the major belligerents, on the other hand, reads like a caricature. The Germans "regarded the war as a spiritual conflict," writes Eksteins. The English, in contrast, were motivated by "a spirit of sportsmanship, a sense of fair play, probity and decorum. The war for them was a game." Little understanding is gained by these questionable comparisons. On the surface, some of Eksteins's assertions sound plausible. Because the Germans had been most readily inclined to question the prevailing bourgeois values of the nineteenth century, he argues, they were in a better position to blatantly change the international standards of behaviour in war. It was they who had initiated the defensive posture of trench warfare, *stellungskrieg,* and were the first to use poison gas in the trenches, to attack cities from the skies with zeppelins, and to use submarine warfare. German innovation is adroitly linked by Eksteins with Germany's modernist spirit. Perhaps it was, but there are other obvious reasons for German tactical surprises. The Germans, like the Allies, had hoped for a quick war. When the Schlieffen plan, which had relied on a lightning attack, stalemated on the western front, the Germans were faced with a war of attrition. By 1916 a large part of a generation had been wiped out, and there was a general feeling of despair and crisis. Germany was now fighting for survival and took gambles that were motivated less by any modernist dynamics than by sheer desperation.

Eksteins's treatment of the war experience, while a restatement of more conventional interpretations, is more to the point. Those soldiers who participated in the morbid struggle of trench warfare were politicised by the camaraderie they shared. In the trenches class divisions lessened and for a short time a sense of common destiny emerged. The feeling of being bound by the experiences of death and survival was extended even to the enemy, as occurred on Christmas of 1914, and is vividly described by Eksteins, when German, English and French soldiers took time off from the war to exchange yuletide greetings and gifts. But if the war offered a collective point of reference, it also promoted a new martial spirit. The poet and novelist Ernst Jünger, in an ecstatic exaltation of trench warfare, best expressed this attitude, "War is our father, it has given birth to us in the glowing womb of the trenches as a new race, and we recognise our origins with pride. Thus our values should be heroic values, the values of warriors and not of shopkeepers who want to measure the world with their yardstick." (Quoted in Alistair Hamilton, *The Appeal of Fascism,* 1971.)

After the war the reasons for the fighting were quickly suppressed, but consciousness of the war was to re-emerge as an essential "life experience" and was used most effectively by the fascists, first in Italy and later and more forcefully by the Germans. It was not only the fascists who returned to the war experience. Part of the reason why Lindbergh received such a delirious welcome from the Parisian crowd, nine years after the war was over, argues Eksteins, was that he represented a revival of those aspects of war experience that transcended the horrors of the trenches. His was a singular act of heroism and a symbol of America's unrestrained energy. When Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* came out in 1927, a starker aspect of the war memory was highlighted: a fascination for death and destruction. The novel, writes Eksteins, captured the anxiety of a lost generation in the throes of their "romantic agony." The book exposed the modern impulse to see death as a source of art and vitality, an "apocalyptic post-Christian vision of life, peace, and happiness in death."

The war experience was certainly ambiguous, offering both an apocalyptic impulse and an heroic moment of transcendence. It was also politically decisive. Former combatants were united in an aggressive devotion to the nation, in whose name, after all, they had risked their life. In every nation veterans' organisations tended to become rightist pressure groups. In Germany the nationalist veterans were highly critical of Remarque's book. The Nazis in particular condemned it for its pacifism and its suggestion that the war had been in vain. Accepting such a view was to deny the exhilaration and the necessity of the war and the heroic warrior values to which it gave birth. For many nationalists and veterans, Adolph Hitler, not the author of *All Quiet on the Western Front,* best represented the trench years. Hitler, writes Eksteins, "was no Erich Maria Remarque, who extrapolated several months experience into a general account of the war.... He lived the front-line experience from almost the beginning to the end." And in Hitler's own words, the war "was the greatest and most unforgettable time of my earthly experience."

The reawakening of the anonymous collective strength that had been unleashed by the war was the goal of all German nationalists. Memory of the war and the frustration of defeat were rekindled at the end of the twenties in the wake of the Great Depression. It is perhaps no surprise that Eksteins says practically nothing of the economic collapse of the Weimar Republic, preferring to stay on the rarified plane of ideas. This is a time when the word *Kultur* cropped up again to summon the ideals of German superiority, and of the Nazis march to power. The rise of Nazism too is linked to modernist tendencies to æstheticise politics. In the rituals and propaganda of the Nazis, writes Eksteins, one could detect little substance. It was all style, mood, and "theatre, the vulgar art of the *grand guignol* production of the beer halls and the streets." Here was the monumental execution of politics as art, and as grand spectacle to fill the existential void of the people: a spectacle where death occupied a central place. But, above all, this was an orgiastic expression of kitsch with its irreverent substitution of æsthetics for ethics. Kitsch sensibility, rooted as it is in superficiality, falsity, and plagiarism, served to confuse the already blurry relationship between art and life, reality and myth. In the final analysis, Eksteins intimates, modernism, full of confusion, rebelliousness and irrational desires, released an urge to destroy that would eventually lead to the German death wish and the crematoriums at Birknau.

We thus return to the original premise that Eksteins found in Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring.* What began as an æsthetic urge to rebel and fuse life with art ends in an orgy of destruction. Between the snarling hatred of the Nazi hoodlums and the irrationalism of the death camps falls the

shadow of the Great War and modernism. This is some sort of answer, but a very incomplete one. No one will deny that fascism, informed by the spirit of modernism, æstheticised politics and confused the lines between theatre and political action. Walter Benjamin, while casting a glance on the Italian Futurists, made that point very clear. But to speak broadly of modernism, as Eksteins does, without grounding the social origins of the movements in different countries, is to invite protean generalisations of little use. From the start German modernism held all the tensions of a conservative modernisation and this impelled it to move in a very different direction than either England or France. Unable to grow up in a sophisticated tradition of resistance, German modernism failed to deal with its underlying contradictions: knowing how to manage its impulse towards the subjective and the irrational without betraying its deepest political and artistic convictions of freedom. Only in Weimar Germany did an emancipatory modernist project emerge, but that was cut short by the rise of fascism which reinforced its darker aspects. It is little wonder, then, that the contemporary German critic Jürgen Habermas, argues that the emancipatory dimensions of German modernism remained not only unfulfilled but are currently under siege by antimodernist intellectual influences. Habermas has been an outspoken defender of what he calls high modernism against the æsthetic and political encroachments of postmodernism which in his view is a predominantly neoconservative movement.

Rites of Spring is a provocative book. It took an audacious feat of imagination to sustain an argument that links the sacrificial dancer in Diaghilev's ballet with the bloody experience of the First World War and the aspirations and failures of modernism, but Eksteins's fractured and free-associative approach, which crams the likes of Josephine Baker, Isadora Duncan, Cocteau, Hitler and the music of Wagner into one portmanteau sentence also prevents him from making important critical distinctions. What is absent from his analysis are the hard comparisons, a systematic approach, and a formulation of modernism that is sensitive to nuances as well as national and social differences. What he gives us is a modernist æsthetic that is divorced from the more concrete and arguable instances of politics, economics and social movements. One would have wished that Eksteins would confront these vital issues, but perhaps that is asking too much from a historian who is the consummate German Idealist. He shares in that tradition's worship of the Idea and in its belief of the primacy of art, and, it seems, he also shares in the neo-conservative abhorrence for a modernism which unleashed "hedonistic" and "irrational" motives that were incompatible with the ordered and reliable values of a traditional world. ■

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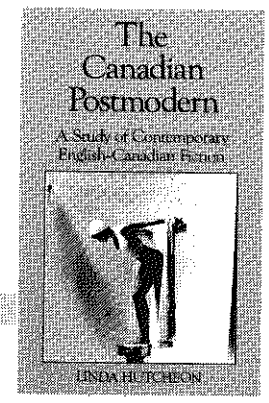
Postmodernism and its discontents



GAILE McGREGOR

A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction
by **Linda Hutcheon**
New York: Routledge, 1988, 268 pp.

The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction
by **Linda Hutcheon**
Toronto: Oxford, 1988, 230 pp.

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

It isn't, you understand, a matter of talent. Her 1980 publication, *Narcissistic Narratives*, both was, and was perceived *as*, a promising first book. But that, perhaps, was the whole problem. Taken up most enthusiastically by the very group whose concerns she had earlier ruled irrelevant to the lit-critical task proper ("most discussions of 'postmodernism' are concerned primarily with the psychological, philosophical, ideological or social causes of the flourishing self-consciousness of our culture," she writes in *Narcissistic Narratives*. "This book ... makes no pretence of contributing to [this debate] ... The interest here is rather on the text"), instead of questioning the rather ironical reading-into of her work, reiterating or clarifying her terms of reference, Hutcheon allowed the new-found notoriety to go to her head. Dropping her protestations of New Critical purism, she quickly began to play to her unexpected audience, to parrot its preferred intellectual position — in short, to remake herself in trendier terms. The shift of concern from ideas to packaging took a predictable toll on the quality of product. Succeeding years saw a recasting rather than a broadening of her vision. Succeeding books (there have been four in rapid-fire succession since that first) lost in substance what they gained in polish. The more her bibliography swelled, the less attention she gave to the concrete and painstaking explication that informed her earlier writing. Of late, apart from replays, the spadework has been replaced almost entirely by verbal pyrotechnics.

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

lectual cannibalism, consequently, is the extent to which she purveys an entirely inadequate picture of the fields she purports to synthesize.

The problem becomes most acute in her recently published *Poetics of Postmodernism*. That this should be so is hardly surprising, of course. The project she proclaims in this book is in many ways an impossible one. There are, as we all know, as many versions of "post" as there are critics to write about it. One of the most obvious shortcomings of Hutcheon's entry, in fact, is not its substantive disagreement with this or that other variant — so tangled is the debate that it's hard to see any particular approach as the "right" one — but the extent to which she misleads the uninformed reader about the true complexity of her advertised object. But let's leave that aside for now. In fact, let's leave aside all extrinsic considerations. Forget that she's a little vague on the genealogy of the term, or that her application is a little inconsistent, or that she generalises madly while castigating all others for their lack of grounding. (To be postmodern is perhaps necessarily to eschew coherence.) No — what really concerns me here is Hutcheon's apparent incapacity to understand the implications of her *own* claims. She makes much, for instance, of the now commonplace notion that the essence of postmodernism is its overthrowing of precursors. She also makes much of the specifically subversive nature of this revision, the way it sets itself to reject not merely authorities but Authority. Incessantly throughout her text she harps on the linked themes of plurality, of openness, of normalised paradox and parodic destabilization. The postmodern's "deliberate refusal to resolve contradictions," she writes, "is a contesting of what Lyotard ... calls the totalising master narratives of our culture." This certainly sounds different from the credo she was affirming in 1980, doesn't it? Well, it is and it isn't. Certainly the recent Hutcheon differs considerably from her now-discarded New Critical mentors in the rigour of her analysis, but it's equally certain that under the skin she's still very much a closet modern. What she argues for in this book — the "idea" that comprises its sole detectable *raison d'être* — is a singular, normative postmodernism derived from mid-seventies architectural theory. Here is where the aforementioned lack of awareness becomes most palpable. Despite the rhetorical stress on strategies of delineation, Hutcheon seems utterly insensible to how incongruous it is to privilege one version of a practice which itself challenges the very notion of privilege. Less intellectually suspect but more troublesome for the information-seeking reader, she also seems oblivious to the fact that her particular version is indefensible on either logical or historical grounds. Ignoring the almost two decades of very different usage that preceded her arbitrary point of insertion, she rules to exclude both the ludic-cum-apocalyptic mass culture element insisted upon by critics like Leslie Fiedler *and* the æsthetic insularity of the surfictionists. "[W]hat I want to call postmodernism," she writes "is *fundamentally* contradictory, *resolutely* historical, and *inescapably* political" (emphasis mine).

Once one gets past one's surprise that so reknowned a scholar should be capable of such oversimplifications, the question that arises is why Hutcheon should have fixed her boundaries just where she did. The answer to this, I think, is tied up with the answer to why — flying in the face of her own paradigm — she would want to fix them at all. It is striking that the literary form that best fits the architectural model is a form on which this author, long before she jumped on the postmodernism bandwagon, had already staked a claim. What we have here, in fact, is an absolutely classic sleight-of-mind. If "historiographic metafiction" is the epitome of postmodernism, and if Hutcheon is the recognised expert on "historiographic metafiction," then *ipso facto*, Hutcheon is an expert on postmodernism. But this, of course, is what it's all about. What becomes clear if one reads between the lines is that the real subject of *A Poetics of Postmodernism* is not what the title says it is (postmodernism merely provides a suitably trendy occasion), but the writer's authority as a "talker about" the latest literary fashions.

Quite apart from her efforts to validate a particular, recognisably idiosyncratic interpretation, it is interesting, if only because of their ramifications for broader practice, to look at the means by which Hutcheon achieves this remarkable self-canonisation. One of the most striking features of her text is the dense incrustation of references. Every point, no matter how minor, has its long list of parenthetical citations — at times as many as 20 to a page. This is *not*, it must be noted, deference. Nor is it consideration for the reader. (Invoked sources are more often than not of dubious or negative relevance.) What it is, is old-fashioned name-dropping. Just like her deceptively unproblematic capsule summaries of key nexes in recent intellectual history (at one point, for instance, we are offered in a single, short paragraph what purports to be an adequate summary of what Said, Rorty, Derrida, Barthes, Krauss and Todorov all thought about the issue of genre crossing; at another she actually manages to get Foucault, Derrida, Habermas, Vattimo, Baudrillard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Marx, Freud and Toulmin into a single sentence), the main purpose of these star-studded incantations is to create the impression that Hutcheon's views are universally supported. Disagreement is obscured by the simple act of appropriation.

One might, for instance, note her treatment of Brian McHale, author of an excellent recent study — in a sense the very study that Hutcheon herself is purporting to write — called *Postmodernist Fiction*. Though she lists four of his works in her bibliography, and includes his name in her index, and cites him in her text, Hutcheon never once acknowledges that McHale's definition of postmodernism is much broader than hers, incorporating — indeed, emphasising — types of material, like surfiction, which she herself explicitly disqualifies. McHale is not an exception. Even those few critics like Fredric Jameson and Terry Eagleton with whom, from time to time, she openly differs are tacitly drafted into the apparent chorus of approval.

Narrative strategies reinforce the sense of unanimity. By repeating key points over and over, and especially by scaffolding her argument with popular clichés about power, ideology, gender, decodings, recursiveness, multivalence, the social construction of reality, the reader's construction of the text, the ironic marking of difference, the subversion of convention, the recuperation of marginality, and so on and so forth, Hutcheon makes her material seem so plausibly familiar that the casual reader will almost certainly take it at face value. The subject itself is warped to the same single-minded end. By normalising what is ostensibly ambivalent (her text is dotted with phrases like "*typically* postmodern," "*distinctively* postmodern"), totalising what is ostensibly diffuse ("postmodernism is...," "postmodernism *always*...," "postmodernism *never* ..."), and personalising what is ostensibly decentred ("postmodernism attempts to be ...," "postmodernism self-consciously demands ...," "postmodernism is careful not to ..."), she makes postmodernism itself into an icon of authority. So much for plurality. But it doesn't matter — the contradictions are amply offset by the inflated language and oracular tone. Even her discussion of counterviews (and it's interesting that she hardly acknowledges that there *are* any significant counterviews until the penultimate chapter, *after* she has subliminally established her own ascendency) adds to the effect. Far from opening up the debate to alternative possibilities, she implies that what she is dealing with are simply better or worse interpretations of a single coherent phenomenon, thus reinforcing the modernist notion of a "good reading."

All this considered, it is clear that Hutcheon fails signally in this book to practise, or even to understand, what she purports to preach. Again the question arises as to why this should concern me so much. Insofar as they almost automatically de-legitimise themselves at source, such faults surely provide their own safeguards against a discourse being taken too seriously. This, unfortunately, is to make insufficient allowance for the context of reception. Given the general old-fangledness of the Canadian lit crit establishment — given the fact, indeed, that many on this side of the fence will find the covertly modernist stance of this book not problematic but reassuring — it is all too likely that much of Hutcheon's readership (these are the same folks, after all, who — judging by conference gossip — think that critical theory is any kind of theoretical criticism) are going to take Hutcheon's practice, warts and all, as epitomising the "new" paradigm. The discourse that I see so palpably deconstructing itself, in other words, is not necessarily the discourse to which Hutcheon's respondants will be attending. This brings us back to the charges I made earlier. That Hutcheon has written a bad book is not important. That her modus

may be imitated *is*. And not merely because it fosters a misunderstanding of postmodernism.

Hutcheon herself provides the best possible example of the potentially detrimental secondary effects of this kind of practice. In the same year as *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, she published a slimmer volume entitled *The Canadian Postmodern*. What we are given in this book, essentially, is a shorthand version of its companion piece (the same themes, the same ritual incantations of names and sources, the same familiar catch-phrases) chopped into bits and disposed as a kind of legitimising framework around and between long chunks of relatively conventional (despite the interlarding of jargon) thematic-cum-formalist analyses of selected Canadian novels. To what effect? Well it's boring, of course — regurgitation does tend to pall after a while. It's also, however, in a subtle but important sense, a betrayal of its subject matter. What Hutcheon does in this book — and the key here is the hierarchy tacitly implied by her format — is to take the "special knowledge" normalised so persuasively in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* and transform *it* in turn into an agent of normalisation. Invoked this time as a *fait accomplit*, and validated through the simple device of prioritisation, the discourse of postmodernism, no longer the subject but the arbiter of questions, now serves itself as a kind of alternative "master narrative" by which the author can legitimise not only her own work ("owning" the narrative marks one immediately as an authority) but also — and this for me is the real problem — the body of literature she has managed to bring under the fashionable umbrella. As if it has no significant pre-history of its own, no claims on our consideration except insofar as it can be shown to resemble an international model, Canadian fiction, divested of its Canadianness, is suddenly "discovered" to be interesting.

What's ironic about this is that there was really very little to discover. Despite her attempts to downplay the fact (only big-name sources get more than passing mention in Hutcheon's work), virtually every feature singled out for comment in this study, from recursiveness to an obsession with history, has already been amply documented by other critics. Where this writer departs from her predecessors is only in labelling these things as postmodern. Far from momentous, in fact, the substantive contribution made by the book is at best a trivial one. Its positive flaws, on the other hand, are far from trivial. Again Hutcheon cheats her readers. Labels aside, in failing to acknowledge that many of the supposedly unique features of the "new" literature can be traced to or derived from the practice of earlier writers, she creates the entirely misleading impression that recent developments signal a radical departure for Canadians. They don't. Canadian literature was recursive, historical, evasive, subversive, ironic, collective, parodic, poetic, and feminist long before such features became fashionable.

If it looks postmodern, therefore, it is for uniquely Canadian reasons. Had she examined these reasons, Hutcheon could have written a much more important book. In her determination to present her thesis as a monolithic and seamless construction, however, she ignores totally (that is, neither recognises *nor* rebuts) the possibility that the "explanation" for current practice might lie anywhere else than with her master narrative. In doing so — and this is my real beef — she implicitly denies that Canadians have anything more to congratulate themselves for than their cleverness at finally catching on to international trends.

What amazes me most about all this is not Hutcheon's own simplemindedness, but the willingness of her Canadian readers to accept what can only be seen as a demeaning distortion. That it has been accepted can, I think, be taken as given. Much of *The Canadian Postmodern* was published previously, and little to my knowledge has ever been seriously challenged. So the question remains: how does Hutcheon get away with it? Much is undoubtedly due — once again — to her facility for radiating authority. With respect at least to this particular book, however, I don't think that's the whole of it. Canadians have always tended to be defensive about their differentness. Judging from the concerted and recurrent attempts we have made over the years (this is only the latest version) to align ourselves with — prove ourselves indistinguishable *from* — imported models and fashions, there is clearly a feeling among Canadian artists and intellectuals that to be distinctive *qua* Canadian is necessarily to be inferior. This, to my mind, casts a rather different light on recent developments in literary criticism. More and more now in Canadian journals and conferences and colloquia we see name-studded, jargonised, Hutcheon-style "think" pieces being privileged above all other modes of critique. Incantation of the correct (imported) legitimising sources has, in fact, recently become the badge of belonging. The in-groupiness of this movement makes these new practitioners seem both arrogant and elitist. Underneath, though, things may not be exactly what they seem. Take Hutcheon herself, for example. When one notes that her atypical definition of postmodernism in fact "fits" Canadian literature much better than it does the international œuvre from which it was ostensibly derived, it seems reasonable to suspect that she picked up her sense of normativity subliminally from her own cultural environment, projecting it on the broader ambience out of an unconscious desire, born of insecurity, to make it, and herself, seem more important.

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A shorter version of this review was published as "The Mainstreaming of Postmodernism" in *Journal of Canadian Studies* 24:3 (Fall 1989).

Where is here? and other travels through the Canadian psyche

DANIEL JONES

The Secret Kingdom:
Interpretations of the Canadian Character
by **Dominique Clift**
Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1989,
240 pp.

Canadian Identity:
Major Forces Shaping the Life of a People
by **Robin Mathews**
Ottawa: Steel Rail, 1988, 132 pp.

> All of us, at some moment, have had a vision of our existence as something unique, untransferable and very precious. This revelation almost always takes place during adolescence ....
>
> Despite the often illusory nature of essays on the psychology of a nation, it seems to me there is something revealing in the insistence with which a people will question itself during certain periods of its growth.
>
> (Octavio Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, 1950)

The desire to define a national identity or character is peculiar neither to Canada nor to the rhetoric which has recently informed the debate surrounding free trade with the United States. The latter, however, has generated renewed interest in the nature and survival of the Canadian nation-state, and it is to this market that these two books attempt to appeal — albeit from widely divergent ideological perspectives. *The Secret Kingdom*, based on Dominique Clift's *Le pays insoupçonné: essai* (Montréal: Libre Expression, 1987), epitomises a liberal, *laissez-faire* attitude to politics; indeed, its author acknowledges the financial support of Imasco Ltd., Alcan and Steinberg Inc. *Canadian Identity*, on the other hand, invokes a conservative Marxist approach to Canadian history and is published by Steel Rail, a press dedicated to socialism and nationalism in culture. However, while *The Secret Kingdom* is an extensively researched and extremely readable history of national character in Canada — Clift won the Governor General's Award for *Le Fait anglais au Québec* in 1978 — *Canadian Identity* is poorly documented,

riddled with archaic jargon, repetitive, and at times incoherent. This difference can in part be attributed to the rhetorical strategies of each author. Clift pretends to an objective discourse, thus conveying an image of historical accuracy, reasoned argument and political neutrality. Robin Mathews employs the rhetoric of the manifesto; in the vein of George Grant's *Lament for a Nation* (1965), Mathews's stance is at once angry and despairing, evoking the image of the evangelist rather than the scholar.

For both Mathews and Clift, national identity exists as a monolithic, essentialist concept — monolithic because it attempts to cover the aims and ideologies of all Canadians, essentialist because national identity is portrayed as something that is contained within each Canadian solely by birthright. In tracing the evolution of the way Canadians have come to see themselves, both authors assume the role of alienist with the collective population as analysand: the Canadian psyche is examined in terms of its existential development rather than its determination by the forces of class, race, gender or regional division. Indeed, multiplicity and difference, particularly the existence of defined communities, are diagnosed by Clift and Mathews as symptoms of a divided self, a nation torn apart by competing desires. For Clift, the preoccupation with national identity is merely an avoidance of reality: Canadians simply refuse to accept their nationhood.

If Clift finds Canadians merely neurotic, Mathews believes they suffer a deeper psychosis: Canada is the victim not only of internal but of external forces; the questioning of national identity "has to do with our very survival beside the most powerful imperialist nation in history."

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

Canadian Identity can be seen as a morality play where liberalism is incarnated as the force of evil and manifests itself in the writings of Thomas Hobbes and Adam Smith and the "monstrous inhumanities" to which his thought gave rise — it is an important coincidence for Mathews that Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* and Marx's *Capital* were published the same year as the U.S. Declaration of Independence and Canadian confederation, respectively. In Mathews's view, A.R.M. Lower is *the* "Liberal Canadian historian," and Marshall McLuhan "the illegitimate son" of Innis, who, in a symbolic patricide, depoliticised Innis's ideas and "de-natured them of their moral character."

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

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

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

If Clift sees a need to overthrow tradition, Mathews finds in it the strength of Canada's identity: nothing has defined national character more clearly than institutional religion. In his brief discussion of "The Left Vision of Canada," Mathews finds in the Social Gospel movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the roots of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation. Indeed, both the C.C.F. and the N.D.P. "assured the country that the criticism of capitalist power would have a vital Christian content." For Mathews, the historical role of religion in Canadian politics works as a powerful force in shaping liberal and conservative ideologies, particularly English Protestantism with its "sense of the relation between classes." That religion has not played a similar role south of the border Mathews ascribes to a greater religious tolerance in Canada and the more pernicious influence of capitalism on American churches as manifested in such phenomena as television evangelism.

While these are valid arguments, he later undermines them by his portrayal of the divisive influence of the Catholic Church, thus showing both a lack of tolerance on his own part and a deference to non-denominational religion, the cornerstone of American politics. At the same time, the Church in Canada has not been immune from the forces of the dialectic. By placing "individual conscience" over the public good, the churches aided those Americans who resisted the war in Vietnam, thus "actively supporting the immigration to Canada of people who epitomised U.S. individualism." Mathews's anti-Americanism is surpassed only by his questionable belief in the revolutionary potential of religion. "[W]e have yet to see," he writes, "what the outcome will be if big capital and the Canadian churches meet in head-on conflict." At no point does Mathews define the material basis for this extreme dialectical opposition between organised religion and the interests of the free market.

In discussing the nature of the Catholic

Church in Québec and its relation to English Protestantism, Mathews relies heavily on the theories of Max Weber — as filtered through the writings of George Grant. Not only has Roman Catholicism been "less sympathetic than Protestantism to capitalist values," but"entrepreneurship, risk-taking, scientific initiative, and industrial development were demonstrably in the hands of the Protestant English Canadians in league with U.S. interests. Francophone Catholics remained for the most part devout, communitarian, even corporatist, simple, and un-modern." While he discusses "corporatist" politics in Québec in terms of German Nazism and fascism in general, Mathews, following Grant, sees Catholicism in Québec as preserving the traditional, "communitarian" forces of the Canadian dialectic. It is a further illustration of the peculiar flavour of Mathews's Marxism that the "reactionary Conservatism" of Québec Catholicism is necessarily preferable to the forces of the capitalist market which sought to oppose it.

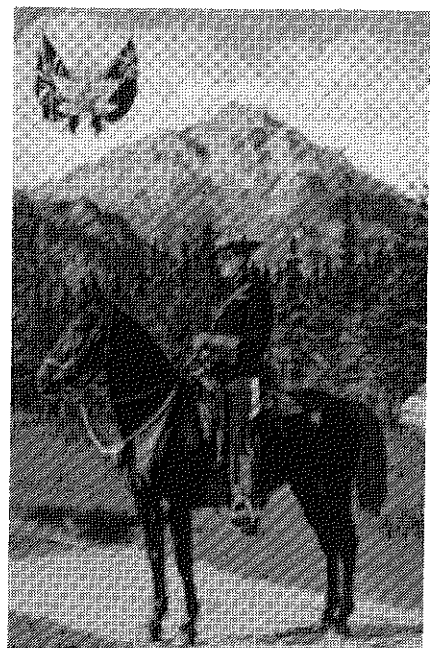
Mathews argues that English-Canadian dependence on Britain "stood for an ideological position of independence ... because it permitted Canadians to claim a distinct otherness from the U.S.A." For Québec, deference to the Church, *agriculturisme* and lack of entrepreneurial activity were similar safeguards to continentalist pressures. Strangely, Mathews fails to see in Québec's eventual struggle for independence from English Canada the forces of dialectical materialism at work. Rather, separatism appears as an aberration, an ideology thrust upon the Québecois by outside forces. "Nothing," he writes, "could have warned the Québecois of the stresses that would culminate in the Quiet Revolution, stresses that both mirrored and manifested larger forces at work in the world." The election of the Parti Québecois is, for Mathews, as destructive to the Canadian dialectic and to Canadian independence as the patriation of the constitution is to English Canada. Québec is now "the most Liberal of Liberal communities in Canada." With both English and French Canada "absorbed into the other side of the dialectic," Mathews doubts "[w]hether Canada can survive the two *defections*" (my emphasis).

Clift agrees that "religion spoke most effectively ... for the collective unconscious" of Canadians, but that it did so "with terrible impact" for Canadian identity and independence. In Québec, the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s "introduced state capitalism as a way of attaining collective goals," at the same time as separating church and state and bringing to an end the "inwardness" of Québec society, where politics was "the expression of powerlessness, or resentment, and of an unfulfilled yearning for continuity." Clift contends that Confederation confirmed Canada's conservative ideology, entrenching provincial over federal rights and those of the community over the power of the state. It was ultimately the defeat of the 1980 referendum, along with the patriation of the constitution and the entrenchment of bilingualism, that brought Québec into the modern, postindustrial world. Whereas Pierre Trudeau plays the villain in Mathews's narrative, Trudeau's political views inform the theme of Clift's story.

In the same way that Octavio Paz sees a questioning of national character as a part of a nation's "adolescence," Clift sees the development of a strong national consciousness as part of the psychological maturity of both nation and citizen. The debate over free trade with the United States is, for Clift, the public manifestation of an individual antagonism between ethics and practicality. This antagonism "is experienced by countless persons as an inner dilemma in the face of two contradictory courses of action." To Frye's question, "Where is here?", Clift would respond that "here" is the individual psyche of each Canadian, a "garrison mentality" of the mind. There is something distinctly Freudian in the way in which he treats the struggle for national independence. Canadians, it would seem, are in search of a father, an authority figure. It is for this reason, Clift argues, that Canadians prolonged their dependence on England and France. At the same time, rather than being the victims of American imperialism, Canadians themselves have transferred authority to the United States. Whatever constraints exist to liberation, "they are mostly internal and self-imposed." At no point does Clift suggest that if authority was willingly transferred to the U.S. it was done in the interest of a particular class of Canadians over and against the interests of many more.

"It becomes possible to cast off the colonial mentality," Clift contends, "only if there is a Canadian identity to take its place." If Canadians have failed to develop a distinct identity, it is a failure of "collective vision," a failure of Canadian culture to embrace the modern age. Nonetheless, Clift believes Canada is finally approaching maturity as a nation-state. He attributes this new-found modernity to the creation of the welfare state, the practicality of the generation of the postwar baby boom and the patriation of the constitution and entrenchment of federal over provincial rights. "The national ego," Clift writes, "has become immeasurably stronger." In the end, it is largely a psychological transformation, an acceptance of the reality of the modern world, to which he attributes the emergence of a modern nation-state. Nowhere does he explicate the complex material and cultural forces that compel a nation's politics.

Where Clift states confidently that the "consolidation of national identity will induce Canadians to distance themselves from the United States," Robin Mathews is less optimistic. For Mathews, the suicide of the Québecois novelist and radical Hubert Aquin stands as a metaphor for the collective suicide of Canadians: "The election of the Parti Québecois made him realise that Québec was deepening, not solving, its problem culturally." In the meantime, Canada seems to exist in stasis, awaiting a shift in the forces that have determined the national dialectic. On the one hand, Mathews claims that "Canadian history awaits the militant Marxist formulation that is also truly attuned to Canadian history and problems as well as to the character, style, and sensibility of average Canadians." On the other hand, he largely ignores the possibilities of Marxist or social democratic intervention in Canadian political life, favouring instead the conservatism and lamentations of George Grant. While Mathews sees some hope in forms of non-institutional culture, he gives no examples. Instead, he suggests that foreign control of Canadian publishing and film industries "subverts people working in culture from militant struggle for the Canadian community, and prevents Canadians from being informed about Canada." In the final analysis, "[t]he nature of our identity requires constant vigilance and constant activity on the part of communitarians to balance the enormous power of individualistic motivation." When it comes to the form this activity should take, Mathews is uncharacteristically mute.



While Canadians as a whole might strive for national unity, identity is a social construct peculiar not only to geographical and social regions but to class, gender and ethnicity. Both Clift and Mathews find regionalism divisive of national purpose, and thus neither examines the particularities of social discourse outside of Ontario and Québec. Canada's aboriginal peoples are similarly ignored. Intent on pursuing their individual theses, neither Clift nor Mathews explore the way in which nationalism as an ideology is used by both left and right to achieve rhetorical and partisan goals.

It is the use and abuse of the ideology of nationalism which ultimately renders both *Canadian Identity* and *The Secret Kingdom* similar in their attempts to define a national identity. While Robin Mathews preaches the social gospel of a dialectical vision and Dominique Clift charts the maturation of the Canadian people, both writers end with a static concept of Canadian identity. However, the question of a people's identity must necessarily be answered in multiplicity and difference. At the same time, the construction of a collective consciousness is ultimately grounded in the material and cultural relations that inform a society, a process rather than a fixed entity, a process that is shaped by the changing international division of labour of a global economy. As we are reminded by Paz, "[i]t does not matter, then, if the answers that we give to our questions must be corrected by time." ■

Daniel Jones is a Toronto poet, short story writer, critic, editor and small press publisher. He is a member of the Border/Lines editorial collective.

our kind of books

the b/l list

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

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

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

***In a Small House on the Outskirts of Heaven* by Tom Wayman. Madeira Park, BC: Harbour Publishing, 1989. $8.95 paper.** Tom Wayman's latest collection of poetry goes far in dispelling the myth that tendential writing need be merely didactic. The finest of these poems invite comparison to the writings of Roque Dalton, but the battleground has shifted from El Salvador to the factories of western Canada. With humanity, humour and often anger, Wayman portrays working people on the job, unemployed and at rest, yet without resorting to the romance of "workerism." "A Cursing Poem: This Poem Wants Gordon Shrum To Die," an impassioned attack on an industrialist, only now collected 18 years after periodical publication, is alone worth the modest price of this book.

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

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

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

***Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century* by Greil Marcus. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989. $39.95 cloth.** "Is history simply a matter of events that leave behind those things that can be weighed and measured," Greil Marcus asks, "or is it also the result of moments that seem to leave nothing behind, nothing but the mystery of spectral connections between people long separated by place and time, but somehow speaking the same language?" Displacing dialectical and materialist notions of history, Marcus moves around and about in circles and zigzags from the sixteenth-century Dutch heretic John of Leyden (connected by coincidence of name to John Lydon a.k.a. Johnny Rotten) to the antics of the lettrists, the situationists and later the Sex Pistols. He approaches but never quite reaches the explanation for these moments in history when something remarkable occurs in the social order, something that changes our perception of society without changing the course of history itself. An occasionally exasperating book, *Lipstick Traces* is nevertheless both entertaining reading and an important contribution to cultural studies and historiography.

***Marilyn Monroe* by Graham McCann. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988. $10.35 paper.** More than another biography this book analyses the contemporary history of the myth(s) of Marilyn Monroe. Drawing on film theory, theories of popular culture and feminism, McCann's study is the first to look at what has been and is still at stake in the perpetuation of the narrative of the "real" Marilyn.

***Post Modernism, Jameson, Critique*, ed. Doug Kellner. Maisonneuve 1989. $17.95 paper.** The first book-length collection of essays on one of the main instigators of the postmodern debate. The work of Frederic Jameson (also known as the foremost Marxist literary critic in the U.S.) is critically evaluated from a wide diversity of theoretical positions which also results in a variety of competing interpretations of Jameson's project.

***War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception* by Paul Virilio, translated by Patrick Camiller. London: Verso, 1989. $14.95.** First published in 1984, this "first" volume presents the intimate development of the observation and military machines, that is of visual and non-visual tracking systems, and weaponry. It is as anecdotal and speculative as it is slippery and apolitical. An aggravating and exhilarating piece of the military/cinematic ob-scene.

***Wartime: Understanding and Behaviour in the Second World War* by Paul Fussell. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989. $24.95 cloth.** Among the plethora of titles published to coincide with the fiftieth anniversary of the Second World War, *Wartime* alone resists the temptation to find any purpose or higher meaning in the tragedy of global warfare. Fussell continues the work he began in *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975) on the collective consciousness in wartime, making use of a wealth of mass cultural and documentary material in addition to the fiction and poetry of this period. Fussell shows that the obscene, excremental and ultimately incommunicable nature of war continues to be the heart of darkness of our own postwar, postmodern world.

Compiled by Gail Faurschou, Ben Freedman, Gary Genosko, Robyn Gillam, Daniel Jones and Lori Turner.

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

Dear editors:

I'm grateful for the attention Ioan Davies gives to my book, *Best Seat in the House*, in your fall issue, but I think his review contains two factual errors worth noting:

(1) He says the habit of our journalism is "the celebration of authors such as Grant, McLuhan and Macpherson who are discovered to be important just before their demise." George Grant was discovered and celebrated, to use the Davies terms, in 1966, with national magazine articles, TV programmes, discussion in the newspapers, etc.; this was 22 years before his death. Marshall McLuhan was likewise discovered long before his demise — in Toronto newspapers and on CBC radio he was often talked about in the 1950s, then very widely publicised in the 1960s, after *Understanding Media* (1964). He died in 1980, 14 or 15 years after this process that Davies says immediately preceded his demise. Finally, C.B. Macpherson, despite a couple of attempts to make him into a well-known figure (notably one by me at *Maclean's* in 1963) has totally resisted both discovery and celebration, in death as in life. Davies is wrong in different ways on all counts.

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

Robert Fulford

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

Ioan Davies