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When we say, "Freeze!" we do not mean to keep things the way they are.

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IMAGINING THE EIGHTIES



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The Challenge of Cultural Action

By Arlene Goldbard

"An historical epoch is characterized by a series of aspirations, concerns and values in search of fulfillment; by ways of being and behaving; by more or less generalized attitudes. The concrete representations of many of these aspirations, concerns and values, as well as the obstacles to their fulfillment, constitute the themes of that epoch, which in turn indicate tasks to be carried out. The epochs are fulfilled to the degree that their themes are grasped and their tasks solved; and they are superseded when their themes and tasks no longer correspond to newly emerging concerns

"(Human beings) play a crucial role in the fulfillment and in the superseding of the epochs. Whether or not (they) can perceive the epochal themes and above all, how they act upon the reality within which these themes are generated will largely determine their humanization or dehumanization, their affirmation as Subjects or their reduction as objects"

—Paulo Freire, "Education as the Practice of Freedom"

As nineteen eighty-two begins I have returned again and again to Freire's formulation—the themes and tasks which characterize our epoch, and which we must grasp and act upon to be fully human. Partly, I have already had enough pessimism for two lifetimes: toasting the new year in, my friends hoped against hope only to hold the line. This is not the stuff of which great movements are made. If we deceive ourselves that the task of this moment in history is merely to cut our losses, we will allow history to pass us by.

We will also be practicing self-deception if we decide that the task of our moment is merely to reform our economic and political systems.

Progressives in the U.S. have traditionally seen their fundamental commitments as two: *economic democracy*, whereby each person is entitled to decent work, decent compensation and a hand in economic policy and decision-making; and *political democracy*, whereby each person is entitled to basic civil liberties, equality before the law, and a voice in political debate and decision-making. But we have considerable evidence that a human being is more than a worker and a consumer, and that the *aspirations, concerns and values* that Freire has mentioned extend beyond the realm of politics to take in the whole of life.

If we are to understand and act on the themes of our epoch we must recognize the inadequacy of these commitments as a world-view, and to them add a third commitment—to the achievement of *cultural democracy*, whereby each person is guaranteed the right to culture, each voice contributes to building culture, and each of us takes a role in cultural debate and decision-making.

In 1982 we should take three steps toward the goal of cultural democracy.

First, all progressive people—artists and non-artists alike—should stop pretending that the world can be understood with the aid of a few simple economic and political principles.

Much of the world's population has already made this abundantly clear by participating in a religious revival of enormous proportions. As a Jew, I fear the persecution which inevitably arises when religious zeal is diverted by demagogues into a zeal for the blood of unbelievers. As a radical, I recognize this movement as one expression of a world-wide transformation of the kind Freire describes: a fulfillment of our epoch.

The religious revival, in all its permutations, perfectly sums up the challenge that is ours. On the one hand, it expresses

the fervent desire for self-determination, as in Iran when the establishment of a religious state marked an explicit rejection of western values and the rootless, technological-industrial state envisioned by the Shah.

The message is inescapable. Even the fundamentalist Christian groups in our own country that practice book-burning are lodging a protest against the faceless people who decide what is to be published, and by implication, what their own children are to read and study. Though the book-burners get the most press, the truth is that much of the upsurge in religious feeling in the U.S. is far more moderate in expression, and represents people's desire to have a common code of values, an intentional community, an institution which can take a stand against the increasingly absurd and frightening machinations of the state. If you doubt this, read the reports of the Mormon church's opposition to the MX missile system, or any of the numerous statements of recent months in which representatives of organized religion speak out against nuclear madness.

On the other hand, the religious revival has the potential to breed acceptance, deference and blind devotion where critical

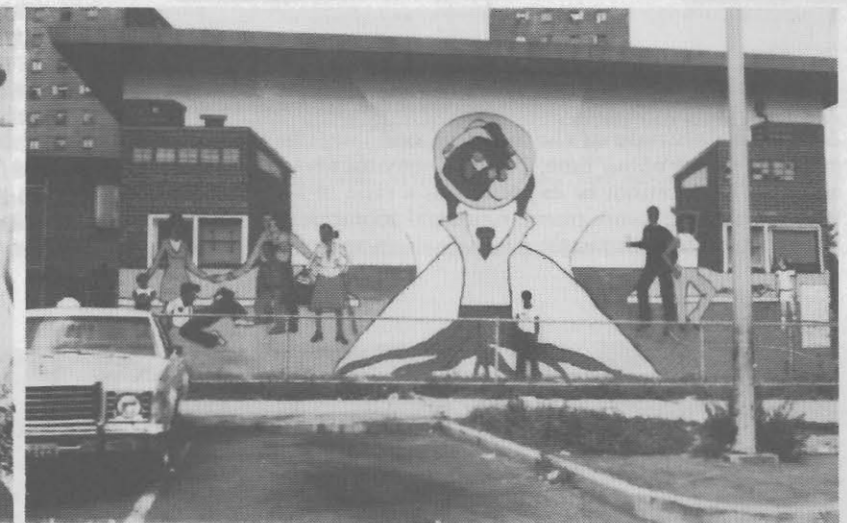
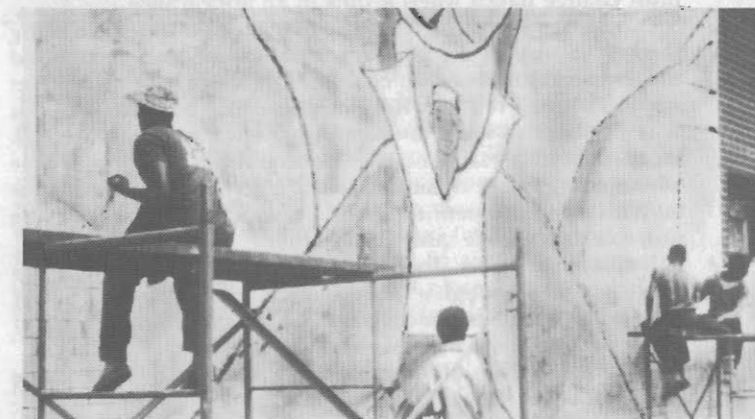
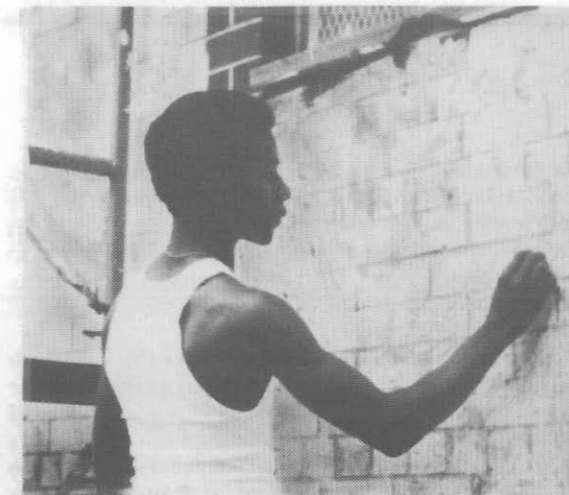
First, all progressive people—artists and non-artists alike—should stop pretending that the world can be understood with the aid of a few simple economic and political principles.

thinking and action are what's needed. By sensationalizing this threat to freedom and ignoring the stronger impulse for self-determination—because it doesn't come in the standard political and economic package—progressives miss the boat, and give the demagogues a clear field.

The first step for progressives today must be to articulate an integrated critique of society—one which takes into consideration political, economic and cultural factors—and an integrated vision of the future we are working toward. All of us, religious or not, face the same issues that most concern those who've participated in this revival; we respond to those issues in many ways, depending on our own situations and beliefs. Our critique and vision must address these issues *directly*, speaking to people in many situations, if we are to take up the tasks of our time.

The second step is for progressives to become champions of cultural rights in all forms.

Did you read about Poletown? Last May the Michigan Supreme Court ruled that the City of Detroit could use the right of eminent domain (Usually invoked to allow government to



"A group of neighbors approach a mural team; they respect the artists' skills and also respect their own ability to contribute . . . working together they accomplish the project." This mural directed by Eva Cockcroft, Newark, N.J. 1979.

photos: Eva Cockcroft

acquire private property to build roads or other public works) to acquire more than 400 acres of property including the homes, businesses, community centers and religious institutions of the old neighborhood, Detroit wants the land—and more than \$300 million in special subsidies—to go to General Motors to build a Cadillac plant where Poletown stood.

So far as the Supreme Court was concerned, Poletown was a simple issue of property rights—and GM's property rights were more important, because the company promised to create jobs, than the property rights of the residents of Poletown.

In our current system, cultural rights have no legal standing. Yet each public policy and each private action have cultural impact.

Poletown is by no means a unique story. "Urban removal" programs in practically every city in the U.S. are recounted in similar tales of broken communities and profits before people. But the Michigan court ignored this compelling evidence and found that the City had the right to destroy an entire neighborhood so a luxury automobile factory might be built.

Poletown sums up what many people see as the key issue for our planet, especially for the Third World, the non-industrial states: What constitutes progress? Should the industrial model of development be swallowed whole, or is the cultural price it exacts too great? Can we create new models of development which recognize and respect cultural values?

And in the face of this monumental question—a question which must strike all of us each time we drive on a rush-hour freeway or visit a “company town” or take a trip to the New Downtown of any of our large cities—what has the traditional progressive line to offer? Strong words about “full employment” and “workplace democracy” have no meaning when work itself is meaningless or sick-making or destructive.

When progressives turn their attention to the movement for cultural rights and cultural democracy they will speak out on a great many questions of broad social concern: Who controls the airwaves and to what uses are they put? What will our schools teach and who will control them? Whose stories will our cultural institutions preserve to make up the record we leave for future generations? Will profit take precedence over people in the development of our cities, the design of our homes and streets?

The second step is for progressives to become champions of cultural rights in all forms.

Cultural rights are at the heart of our task; they are the principal theme of our time. They do not yield to a cost-benefit analysis. They cannot be expressed as a ratio or an equation. Without a strong commitment to cultural democracy, we cannot hope to speak to the *aspirations, values and concerns* of our epoch.

photo: Eva Cockcroft



Religious dissidents at June 12

In growing numbers, artists are remembering their responsibility as citizens, and rejecting the dominant idea that, as Lucy Lippard and Jerry Kearnes have put it, “they must give up art to be involved in the world, or give up the world in order to be an artist.” If progressives are likewise able to realize the enormous potential of cultural work in transforming the world, we will have reason for hope.

The myths on which our society is based make this a difficult realization to attain. Arts work has very low priority in the economic and political realms, though it is sometimes paid extravagant lip service. The arts market is dependent on a very high ratio of available workers to jobs—or sellers to sales—to support the idea that quality is scarce and large sums of money must change hands when it puts in an appearance.

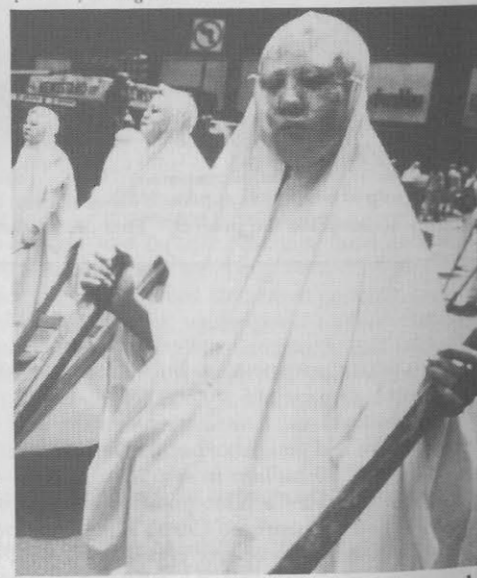
During periods of high unemployment (the New Deal being the best example), the government has sometimes recognized the temporary necessity of creating useful work for artists. But we don't hear President Reagan suggesting now that we “put America back to work” by supporting cultural action. Reagan has proposed a garrison state; he would have us be a people whose energies are dedicated to war and the preparations for it. With a commitment to cultural democracy we begin to see our role as a people quite differently.

Unfortunately, we don't hear progressives advocating this strategy either, though it must be an important element of any program to create productive and meaningful employment for every person who wished to work.

It has become a commonplace that a plank in the progressive platform is “regionalism.” A commitment to cultural democracy extends the meaning of localism or regionalism in progressive politics to all spheres of life. In economic terms, it means that progressives' vision of the future must retrieve from the garbage heap of pragmatism the notion of finding meaning and dignity in work.

We must propose an economic future that is predicated on a distinction between those commodities which should be standardized (and therefore centralized in production and distribution), and those which can once again be produced through a more labor-intensive process. Artisanship must be relegitimated and not treated as frivolous or self-indulgent. Progressives

photo: Lynn Hughes



Bread and Puppet Theater leading the march

sives must not be afraid to say that it is better on all counts to put a person to work designing wrought-iron gates—which are no more expensive today than mass-produced cyclone fence—than designing delivery systems for atomic bombs.

The third step is for progressives to embrace cultural action as a strategy.

Artisanship is only one category of cultural work. The society we envision must encourage people to take jobs as teachers and community workers; it must help to develop small-scale cultural industry like local publishing and filmmaking; it must recognize the importance of preserving our cultural commonwealth; it must place much greater emphasis on cultural values in city planning and on the social need for artists working to help a rich cultural life into being. In short, an integrated progressive vision of the future must place a high priority on forms of work and aspects of life which the current system denigrates.

The progressive commitment to cultural action cannot be all hopes and plans for the future, though. Two main tasks will occupy us in the present. Both demand collaboration; they cannot be accomplished by artists working alone, nor can they succeed if organizers and activists take them on alone.

First, we must promulgate our critique and our vision. That will also mean countering powerful messages which emanate from our opposition, which has almost unlimited access to the mass media. We need to counter the message that getting and spending is what life is all about, that the poor are to blame for their poverty, that only a few people are actors and the rest of us left to watch. This means abandoning the notion that we will help to effect a radical transformation of society by

photo: Eva Cockcroft



“We will organize against Reagan or any other administration which says that war is a solution to the depression.”

photo: Eva Cockcroft



distributing leaflets—even by distributing leaflets through an expensive, space-age, New Right-type direct mail operation.

To build a humane society will also necessitate practicing democracy and not just talking about what it will be like when we get some. Within cultural groups, people can be free to choose their own tasks, to give and take and think together, and to decide for themselves the messages they will carry—and to whom.

A group of neighbors approach a mural team; they respect the artists' skills and also respect their own ability to contribute images and sensibilities to the mural design; working together they accomplish the project. The members of a theater group are concerned about unsafe working conditions in local factories; they interview workers and build a theater piece that tells the story. Angry at inadequate local schools, a group of parents call a community meeting; from it emerges an after-school center that enlists elders in a program to pass on the skills and knowledge the schools now dismiss as old-fashioned.

Cultural action gives people the opportunity to be creative, helpful and self-determining. In our current climate, when so many activists hope only to cut losses, it is crucial.

The moment could not be riper for a sweeping change in our country. Nothing works. If this change fails to come about it will be because the “movement” is, as Freire has written, unable to “perceive the epochal themes and above all . . . act upon the reality within which these themes are generated.” The themes and tasks of our epoch are there for all who will see them and respond.

Arlene Goldbard of Baltimore, Maryland is a community arts organizer working for the Neighborhood Arts Programs National Organizing Committee (NAPNOC) and co-editor with Don Adams of the newsletter CULTURAL DEMOCRACY. Since 1977 she has been making a study of public cultural policy in the U.S. and abroad. This article is based on a talk Arlene gave at the “Democracy in America” conference convened by the Citizen Heritage Center January 8-10, 1982, in St. Paul, MN. As is true of all her work, it is the product of a collaboration between Don Adams and herself and the authorship is as much his as it is hers. It originally appeared in the March/April 1982 issue of THEATER WORK and is reprinted here with permission. NAPNOC's address is Box 11440, Baltimore, MD 21239.

photo: Herb Parr



FREEZE

By Eva Cockcroft

For the first time since the Vietnam War, artists have begun to form political action groups—this time in response to the threat of nuclear holocaust. The massive June 12th march and rally in New York City, marking the opening of the U.N. disarmament session, included close to 1000 artists who marched as a separate contingent. In addition, many artists participated in one of the several anti-nuclear exhibitions during the spring, or contributed individually through the creation of banners and/or performance pieces.

Two artist organizations particularly active in working for the June 12th march were Artists for Nuclear Disarmament (AND) and Political Art Documentation/Distribution (PADD). The visual arts section of Artists for Nuclear Disarmament was formed as part of the June 12th organizing committee's cultural task force. PADD is a three-year-old organization of New York left-wing artists "concerned with demonstrating the political effectiveness of

photo: Eva Cockcroft



ART

image-making."

A third group, "Artists Against Nuclear Arms," was headed by Elizabeth Murray and had a steering committee that included such other big-name visual artists as John Baldessari, Alex Katz, Joel Shapiro, David Salle and Jack Tworkov; together they raised \$24,000 for a full-page ad in the Sunday *New York Times*. The ad, signed by more than 7000 artists, protested the "world-wide production and stockpiling of nuclear weapons and the diversion of resources from human needs."

This upsurge of anti-nuclear activity by artists did not reflect the efforts of a highly politicized fringe, but rather the generalized concern that has also given rise to the nuclear freeze movement. Like the early Vietnam War protests, the freeze movement concentrates on a single moral argument and avoids, as politically divisive, any stand on related social issues or problems. Indeed, many of the artists involved in the anti-nuclear protests are

Top left: Pat Olesko, "Goddess of War"

Bottom left: "We're All In The Same Boat," by Peter Gourfain

This page, top to bottom: mural by A.N.D. artists, designed by Cindy Luvass and Leslie Bender; A.N.D. banner by Silkscreen Workshop; street action by Stencil Workshop; float by Bread and Puppet Theater

photo: Lynn Hughes



photo: Eva Cockcroft

photo: Eva Cockcroft

photo: Eva Cockcroft

veterans of the anti-war movement of the 1960's and early '70s—the Artists and Writers Protest, the Art Workers Coalition, the New York Art Strike, and various women artist's groups. Nevertheless, the attitudes underlying the issue-oriented art of today differ in a number of respects from those characteristic of the '60s.

Nancy Shapiro notes that women artists were more politically active in 1969–70 than they are today. She feels that while "more artists are doing political work today, there are fewer actions, and they are less active in trying to change social policy." Spero's atom bomb drawings, featured in several of the anti-nuclear exhibitions held this spring, were actually done in the mid-1960s.

Leon Golub, while hewing to the view that today's anti-nuclear movement is the result of "moral repugnance, not really politicization," sees a significant change in the way artists use their work as a vehicle for response. In the 1960's there was little connection between an artist's political activity and his or her personal work. Many artists of the 1960s remained artistically unaffected by the protests of which they were a part. Today, Golub sees in groups like PADD, "an attempt to make a connection between the situation, one's art, and how to use that art. You couldn't say that about the Art Worker's Coalition or the Artists and Writers Protest."

Ronald Feldman, whose gallery presented two anti-war/anti-nuclear exhibitions during the spring, observes that in the '60s some artists would make an art work that was totally out of the context of their regular concerns in order to participate in an anti-war show, whereas today many artists are "dedicated to interdisciplinary contexts" and are already working in modes compatible with political or social subject matter. The "Atomic Salon" show, for instance, (co-curated by the Feldman Gallery and Carrie Rickey of the *Village Voice*) took only two-and-a-half weeks to put together because the artists all had existing work on the subject.

A more broadly based anti-nuclear exhibition was "Dangerous Works," organized by Artists Against Nuclear Madness at the Parsons School of Design. Held in conjunction with Ground Zero Week (April 19-23), "Dangerous Works" included performances and a three-day conference on nuclear problems and the making of political art.

These exhibitions, as well as shows on similar themes at Just Above Midtown, the Clocktower, and Henry Street Settlement, drew unusually large and diverse crowds. The "Atomic Salon" show at the Feldman Gallery attracted an especially broad audience, perhaps because a special issue of the *Village Voice* focusing on disarmament was illustrated by art work from the exhibition. Feldman notes the audience seemed to have no trouble with the avant-garde nature of some pieces: "on the wall, on the floor, they don't care—and they spend an enormous amount of time viewing."

Much of the anti-nuclear art seen in exhibition spaces, in the June 12th march and on the streets shared a combination of literalism and gallows (or doomsday) wit. It was this humor which made the omnipresent mushroom cloud and death's head into palatable imagery. This

ironic attitude toward annihilation was reflected in such titles as "Atomic Salon," "Atomic Cafe," and so on. Yet a literalist approach seems simultaneously inherent in such subject matter—the feeling apparently being that the mushroom cloud alone is such a potent image that it can be used without elaboration or interpretation.

Epitomizing this literalist tendency is the film, "Atomic Cafe," which makes a powerful statement by merely presenting, without comment, early U.S. propaganda about the atom bomb, along with excerpts from the military training films used in the "War Room" exhibition presented for June 12 at Gallery 345. The show featured documentary photographs—many from Pentagon files—of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This straightforward documentary presentation is explained by Abigail Solomon-Godeau, a photography critic and part of the group which put the exhibition together: "The only way [the nuclear] horror can be expressed is by a photo. Any sort of interpretive or mediated thing is not equal to the impact of the photographic document."

Interspersed among the photos at Gallery 345 were drawings by survivors of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings, and these works remain perhaps the most moving to have been done about nuclear war. They combine the immediacy of experience with the authenticity of a historical document.

The avowedly political work done by artists working on the streets for the June 12th Movement had an immediacy that the gallery work lacked and which compensated for its less studied and decidedly less subtle character. Styles ranged from the whimsical to classical social realism and conceptual wit, from introspective microcosmic statements, rituals and performances to pure propaganda statements.

Beginning in March 1982, AND sponsored a number of largely autonomous artist-run projects to help build the June 12th Movement. These included a silkscreen banner workshop; a graphic design group that produced placards, logos and buttons; a decorations committee, which produced banners to be hung along the march route; papier mâché workshops that made doves and masks; a collective mural group, which designed and painted three large murals hung on the bridges above



In the artist contingent

Photo: Eva Cockcroft

42nd Street; an outdoor slide show; a children's poster contest; and a photographer's brigade to document all this activity. In a less conventional vein, AND's stencil-graffiti brigade created a series of 15 2-by-2-foot stencils with such imagery as a death's-head, mushroom cloud, President Reagan, mother and child, and bombs and bombers; these were spray painted on pavements and walls around New York City along with slogans like "Bread not Bombs" and "Nuclear Holocaust May Be Any Moment."

The PADD artists concentrated their attention on using windows as a kind of outdoor gallery or billboard for the disarmament message. The three-story block-long building at 339 Lafayette Street, the home of several peace organizations, including the War Resisters League and Gallery 345, was transformed via window and sidewalk decorations into a giant anti-war sign for the month of June. At the New Museum on 14th Street, a collective of PADD artists used a large window to display a didactic mural/construction in which the old opposition between weaponry and the good life was cleverly presented. Artists from PADD also designed banners for the Third World and Progressive Peoples Coalition Contingent, one of the more lively as well as politically left-wing groups in the march.

In another link to the late 1960s, Peter Schumann's Bread and Puppet Theater brought all their puppets from Vermont to stage an elaborate pageant that led off the march. Theater groups from Minnesota and Boston, among others, also brought giant papier mâché figures. Although the artist's contingent as a whole was somewhat disappointing in comparison with some other groups, lacking their color and pageantry, many individual artists nonetheless contributed striking images, among them performance artist Pat Olesko's goddess of war, and the transformation of TV newscasters Rose Ann Scamardella and Storm Field into images of death.

The California-based Sisters for Survival, dressed as brightly covered nuns dancing a "twist for life," were one of many performance groups interspersed with the political, religious, professional and regional groupings. Perhaps the most elaborate performance piece was



Drawing by Hiroshima survivor

Photo: Herb Ritt

Helen Aylon's women's S.A.C. (Survive and Continue) Caravan. The Caravan left San Francisco on May 2, stopping to gather "sacs" of earth and to perform various rituals at 12 S.A.C. (Strategic Air Command) headquarters en route to the U. N. disarmament session in New York. The earth was placed in pillow cases donated by "people whose sleep does not come easily these days."

Unquestionably the biggest art action of the day was organized by the Dentures Art Club. It provided 3000 silver-colored bomb-shaped balloons which were released by the crowd in the meadow of Central Park as a symbolic farewell to atomic weapons.

Many banners had whimsical or piquant slogans: "You can't hug with nuclear arms," read one, while the banner on Peter Gourfain's hand-painted contemporary Noah's Ark proclaimed, "We're all in the same boat." Some signs were punk in their humor—for instance, an image of a man fixing his bow-tie, captioned, "Let's get formal for the holocaust: after all it IS the final fling." Spread throughout the march, carried by 40 different organizations were the silkscreened banners made in the AND banner workshop directed by Josely Carvalho at St. Mark's Church on the Bowery. Using a technique of repeated cutout stencils in simple shapes, Carvalho helped professional contingents ranging from doctors to clergy to artists in creating their own brightly colored banners.

Since none of the major commercial or public broadcasting stations planned live television coverage of the June 12th rally, a group of more than 100 independent video artists and producers from the New York area pooled their resources and talents to provide coverage. The three-hour live program, which was carried in New York by WNET (Channel 13) and transmitted by satellite, was produced on a shoestring budget of less than \$10,000, made possible primarily because of freely donated labor and equipment. The independent coverage had an unusually high viewership-rating for public television. Yet three days later, the editorial page of the *New York Times*—an unlikely location for TV criticism—charged the program with a pro-disarmament bias and attacked WNET for carrying the program. The lack of live coverage by established media, as well as the media's criticism of "pro-disarmament" coverage by self-financed artists who provided an alternative to the news blackout, represented a real change from the '60s. It also offered a clue to the media's "line" on the disarmament rally, and to the reasons for the new activism in general.

The government would like to dismiss the 700,000 June 12th marchers as interested only in a pleasant day in the park—a kind of '80s live-in. Any such view discounts the real fears and foreboding that stirred people out of their apathy. Through the art produced around the June 12th mobilization one could see the double message, of which the media would like to see only one part. There was, to be sure, love, humor and hope. But there was also the overpowering fear and horror, backed by a serious determination to construct a world-wide movement for nuclear disarmament.

[originally appeared in *Art in America*, Oct. '82]

i am feeling a most urgent obligation
not to mention suggest or even imagine
any but the most positive possibilities.
but only project willful wishful thinking.

i know the world is still turning
so there must be a chance for peace.



Donna Hynes © 1983



Street Theater during June 12 march
photo: Marilyn Herbert

THE GROUND WE'RE STANDING ON IS MOVING..

By Lucy Lippard

Three weeks ago a bunch of us got NAPNOCed up in Omaha, Nebraska, and the offspring might just turn out to be a folk hero. It happened at the annual conference of the Neighborhood Arts Programs National Organizing Committee, soon to undergo a name change after a surfeit of lousy puns like the one above and "NAPNOC who's there" phone calls; the name is also becoming obsolete since the organization has expanded, and, as Bill Pratt pointed out, "In rural Montana, we don't have neighborhoods; we don't even have neighbors."

NAPNOC represents some 160 cultural groups nationwide, including muralists, theater people, publications, distributors, video and craftspeople, musicians and photographers, working in urban, suburban, and rural settings. It was founded in 1976, was soon funded by a contract from the Department of Labor, and later revamped in 1979 to its current incarnation as the organizing/consulting wing of the progressive community arts. Its goal is Cultural Democracy.

Cultural Democracy. It sounds so simple, so already all-American. Yet it is a national movement whose time is only now approaching. According to the term's coiners—Arlene Goldbard and Don Adams, extraordinary staff in toto of NAPNOC, and editors of its newsletter, *Cultural Democracy*: "The United States is a multicultural society with each person free to participate in many cultural forms and traditions; each person and each community has the right to culture; all cultures are entitled to coexist in freedom and equality; and government has no more right to favor one of these cultures above the other than it does to institute a state religion... Cultural democracy means that cultural values should be open to debate—that the values of the big, established arts institutions shouldn't be swallowed whole."

The three-day conference brought together some 75 committed veterans of neighborhood arts from west, east, south, and middle America. It was inspiring for several reasons which may sound as sappy as the word inspiring—the right word for my own experience there. In their last newsletter, the NAPNOC staff noted they'd "never been to a conference where

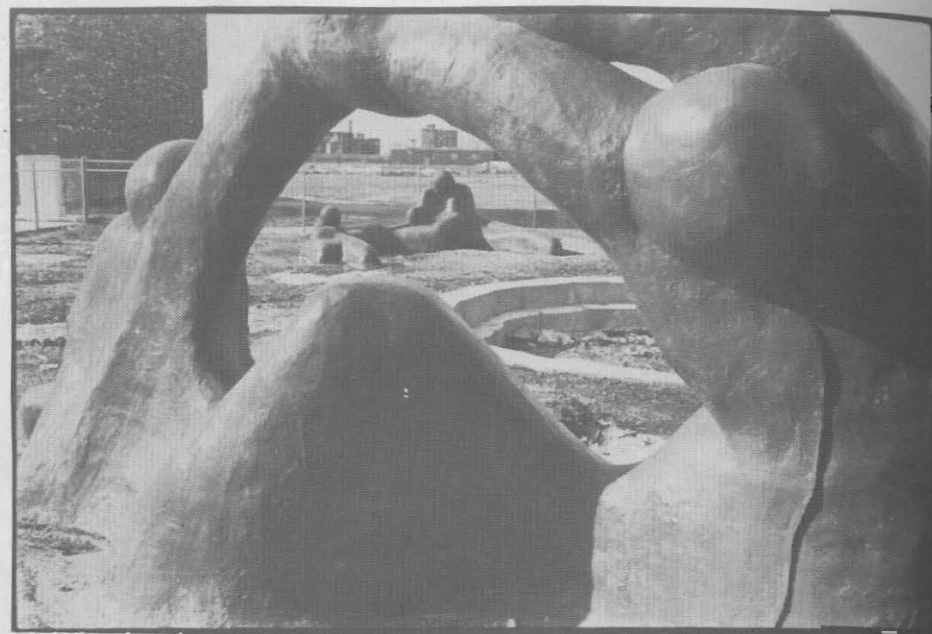
people didn't cluster in little groups and whisper resentfully about the agenda." Well, this was a first for most of us. Goldbard and Adams ran a punctual, tight, but unimposing program marked by a unique combination of intelligence, humor, and courtesy from all concerned.

Among the participants were David Olson from Cherry Creek Theater, an editor of *Theater Work* and an instigator of the now-legendary "Gathering" that took place in St. Peter, Minnesota, in 1981; Martha Boesing and Phyllis Jane Rose from At the Feet of the Mountain feminist theater in Minneapolis; Fred Whitehead and John Crawford of Kansas City's Midwest Distributors, whose field is labor and working-class history; John O'Neal from the 20-year old, SNCC-born Free Southern Theater in New Orleans; Tim Drescher of *Community Murals* magazine; Doug Kahn from X-change, a "cultural catalyst" artists group in Seattle; Andrew Duncan from England's Free Form Arts Trust; Jim Murray and Susan McCann of *Cultural Correspondence*; John Putnam Weber from the Chicago Mural Group; Liz Lerman from Washington's Dance Exchange; Ken LaSzer from the Northern

California Rural Arts Services; Katherine Pearson from Appalshop in Whitesburg, Kentucky; Bob Feldman from Illinois' United Mime Workers; and Doug Patterson, Omaha host to the conference and a director of the Dakota Theater Caravan... and others.

The general tone was one of highly sophisticated populism—sophisticated as in knowledgeable, not fashionable. There was a confidence, a cautious optimism about the undeniable sense of progressive energy flowing these days. The politics ranged from liberal to solid left, but there was no rhetoric, no sectarian bickering and basic political disagreements were acknowledged and worked with, not allowed to divide. They were especially apparent during a lively discussion of the language and labels used in NAPNOC literature—extremely moderate in my terms, too red for some, who worried that words like “left” and “progressive” would distract their rural constituencies, even when these same audiences were entirely won over by the arts to which those labels apply. (Ken Larson pointed out that “rural people respond to action, and the language comes later,” suggesting that the literature include many examples of practice.)

The conference's major theme was the centrality of culture in society, the need to rescue it from “terminal irrelevance” and what Jim Murray called the “cultural hole” in the backs of minds and



Community Sculpture by John Weber and Lynn Takata

photo: Lynn Takata

magazines. We opposed the notion that “artists can't create social change, only support it.” There is often a tension among progressive artists (especially in mainstream-oriented cities like New York and L.A.) between the autonomy of art and political effectiveness—an ambivalent urge on one hand to demystify and denigrate the “genius myth,” and on the other a desire to empower more people, to as-

pire to artmaking as something special, if not specialized. In the U.S., the vast majority of the population is unrepresented by culture, not to mention the vast number of artists deprived of their audience by the homogenization of mass culture and the denial of access into and out of most communities. The kind of democracy we have in America allows artists an illusory power (or status, anyway) while hegemon-

ically conveying the message that all art does is decorate the world. Artists are lonely. Many are discovering that collaboration need not replace individual work but can enrich and expand it; I assume the reason the theater people at the conference seemed more together than some others on these issues was the fact they've been working collectively longer.

Cultural Democracy is a broad vision not easily encompassed by the narrow and competitive specializations most of us are forced into—by time and economics as well as by broader influences. I had the feeling in Omaha that instead of trying to convince ourselves that culture was central, most of us believed it, acknowledgment of the difficulties involved notwithstanding. It was reassuring not to have to start from scratch again, and to hear Goldbard, who has become an authority on cultural policy (recognized even by UNESCO and *The New York Times*) reaffirm this conviction. For the most part, participants would probably have agreed with Raymond Williams's view of culture as “relations between elements in a whole way of life.” Or with Amílcar Cabral when he said that national liberation struggles have historically been “pre-eded by an increase in expression of culture, consolidated progressively into a successful or unsuccessful attempt to affirm the cultural personality of the dominant people... It is generally within the cul-

ture that we find the seed of opposition...”

Some new insights also surfaced on the distinctions between the politicized artist making mainstream art, the “political artist,” and the artist using her or his art politically to work toward a cultural democracy. Politically clear art does not necessarily function on only an opposition level. Images serve many functions. Ideally, depth is not neglected in favor of range, despite the obvious importance of artists reaching out into the world, reflecting not only their own experience but exchanging images of shared social experience which in turn become part of their experience, and so on, in ripples.

L.A. muralist and NAPNOC board member Judy Baca has outlined four steps through which culture engenders political action: in summary—restoring lost information, creating moral indignation, conceiving new visions for alternatives, and taking action. The moral indignation step, she defines thus: “imparting information about the number of Chicanos illegally deported is imparting information; saying ‘Did you know one of them was your grandfather?’ is encouraging moral indignation.” The dominant culture calls that rabble-rousing and propaganda. But, in fact, it's only propaganda to those whom it does not reach, whose experience isn't shared by the “propagandizers.”



John O'Neal as Junebug

photo: Mel Rosenblatt

Notes Toward a Cultural Democracy

I'd be writing a small book if I started to ruminate on all the major issues raised in Omaha, so, with a bow from my 1500-word cage, I decided to throw out a barrage of remarks that set me thinking and hopefully will do the same for you; their epigrammatic form makes “Practicing Cultural Democracy” sound much more pretentious than it was.

From the opening sessions:

“We spend too much time in opposition, though it's sometimes ‘dynamic opposition.’ Neighborhood artists are often called ‘emerging’ for their whole careers. We are not setting records as butterflies longest in the chrysalis. This is where we want to be. We're not ‘emerging’ toward anything ‘better.’” (Arlene Goldbard)... “At the Foot of the Mountain theater is funded well after much hard work because of the quality and in spite of the content. We're fighting the notion that if your work is socially significant, it's automatically assumed that the quality is question-

able.” (Phyllis Jane Rose)... “Is art supposed to be simply consciousness-raising, or is it also politically functional?” (John O'Neal)... “That's a false dichotomy. Art that jolts, interrupts, intervenes, imagines, reinforces, and reaffirms people's identities by empathy and exchange is both at once.” (L.R.L.)... (There followed a meaty dialogue about the ideals versus the realities of community arts): “How much is community art haunted by the illusion of communication” with its constituency? When does an audience become a constituency? The relationship of the artist and community is either “symbolic” or “real,” either dependence or liberation.” (Lee Hawkins, and others unidentified)... “There's a delicate balance between illusion, expectations, and reality to keep ourselves going sometimes... Art doesn't do much for us any more. We're not moved by most of what we see.” (Cricet Parmalee, speaking for the Provisional Theater)... “We need to find the values deeply held in the society we're working

in, to get a foothold.” (Bob Feldman)... “You really have to choose who your audience is. You can't be loved by everybody. Dakota Theater Caravan collects stories in rural South Dakota, taking time to build a concrete relationship and to reflect the life urges of people in plays... For instance, we did a very successful play on the small town ambivalence about gossip.” (Doug Patterson)... “The Free Southern Theater was best when we were an integral part of a social movement—Black Liberation. It's different later, when you're reinforcing a movement instead of instigating it.” (John O'Neal)... “The politics of Free Form Arts Trust is not presented overtly but is generated by the decision-making that takes place with community involvement—the first step. FFAT is in the business of expansion.” (Andrew Duncan)... “There's confusion about government funding; the private sector won't help. What infrastructure do we use? We have to say the military budget belongs to us, and make that our political goal,



From The Great Wall by Judy Baca

photo: Linda Eber/SPARC

develop social strategies, vision. Do we challenge ourselves enough to make it clear? There's no mutually developed esthetic or politics... Read the NEA definition of the ‘arts’ sometime. It's illuminating, and shows why it's best to use the term culture... Bookstores are immensely important in grassroots networking... We have to get the medium and the use of the medium as close as possible to an organizing tool. We need to present a united face. We have the critique. Are we waiting for something?” (Fred Whitehead and John Crawford)

From the “Reclaiming our Stories” workshop:

“With a split left, telling stories helps to bridge gaps, realize common histories. Community artworkers tend to have less imagination initially in the images they choose—clichés from the mass media. The best images emerge after telling stories from their lives.” (John Pitman Weber)... “How much of a vehicle does the artist become and for whom and what? A really touchy question is that we have to critique the stories, demystify our own heroes, expose the racism of the suffragists, for example, and the misogyny of black plays, like John's...” (Martha Boesing)... “Then, at what point in exploring the complexities do you lose your accessibility or not convey the message? And where does complexity become or fall into ambiguity? All those questions of context and audience...” (L.R.L.)... “We have to support each other by having high standards and being critical.” (Beth Siebert)... “So-called aesthetic criticism often turns out to be political.” (Don

Adams)... “We've got to find ways of introducing and inducing stories that aren't there.” (David Olson).

From the “Approach to the Working Class” workshop:

“Our craft is very important. Working people are proud of and respect their skills. Art should be lively, have ideas, deal with great themes without condescension. Agitprop is unsuccessful and unsatisfying because it's dull. Horace said ‘Art should delight and instruct.’ We need to write our own songs, like the IWW... Read the *Millhunk Herald*, collectively edited by some 75 steelworkers in Pittsburgh. It's a wonderful kind of peek at America.” (Fred Whitehead and John Crawford)... “There's a danger in relying on the folkloric tradition.” (Doug Kahn)... “Less than 20 percent of working people in the U.S. now are in unions. The folkloric critique isn't so much of a problem outside unions, who continually draw on the past for impulses and tend to con-

The conference's two performances underlined this perception. John O'Neal's monologue play, called "Don't Start Me Talking or I'll Tell Everything I Know: Sayings from the Life and Writings of Junebug Jabbo Jones," was funny, angry, authentic, and magnificently acted (albeit with a few problems for feminists). I was equally moved by the other, less formal performance—"Rosa Parks and the Montgomery, Alabama, Bus Boycott"—a lunchtime one-woman show by Aleane Carter. A native of Omaha, she takes the black experience around to small, all-white Nebraska towns. (She also talks about the origins of such traditions and stereotypes as "They Got Rhythm": deprived of toys and drums (possible tools for revolutionary communication) American slaves invented rhythm games and learned the different sounds of body parts to create a new musical vocabulary and a lasting heritage.)

In view of the tremendous diversity of styles, goals, and backgrounds calmly coexisting within NAPNOC, the notion of grass-roots culture expanded. The root of the word radical is the word root. Grass-roots means not only propagation—spreading the word—but is based on the notion that each blade of grass has its own

roots. The isolation from the rest of the country one often feels when cooped up in New York was temporarily dispelled, along with any hostility toward those of us who've chosen to exercise our influence on the peripheries of the mainstream. Robert Foucault's beautiful film, *The Gathering: Thoughts of Harvest, Acts of Planting*, reminded me that being a community arts worker (even in the alienated New York art community) is sometimes like



being a parent; you have to know when to let go, how to develop and nurture independence and growth in your co-workers and for yourself. The conference itself had a familiar *rhythm*—of going into one's specific concerns or community, then moving back out again for a general overview and additional input.

This is, in fact, the rhythm of life itself, and it needn't be seen or lived in terms of conflict, total burnout, and partial recuperation. Spring follows winter; fields are burned to encourage new crops. An unsolved dilemma for many NAPNOC members is that they often tend to be the people who can't be spared, who can't allow themselves time to gestate as well as to produce. Nevertheless, I think a lot of us longtime and often grumpy activists came out of Omaha agreeing with John Pitman Weber: "Because of these three days, I think I'm going to get a second wind."

Subscriptions to Cultural Democracy are \$15 and well worth it; address: NAPNOC, P.O. Box 11440, Baltimore, Maryland 21239 (301) 323-5006. Many of the above ideas were informed and reinforced by a postconference conversation with Jim Murray.

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tinuous nostalgia and sentimentality. Eighty percent of the NAPNOC theaters' constituencies are blue—and pink-color workers *because* they organize differently. We also need to look at people who don't define themselves as 'workers' but within the hierarchy of *consumers*." (Arelne Goldbard) ... "We can't confuse folkloric with epic ... We may need to organize *as* artists and writers to work with organized labor" (Fred Whitehead) ... "We need to organize the intelligentsia to work with the working class. Part of the U.S. isolation is that 'we' aren't part of the working class. The larger the working class, the less alienation." (Doug Kahn) ... "Working with old people is a good way of crossing class and cultural barriers. When I make dances with older people it takes dance back to its origins." (Liz Lerman)

From the "Form and Style" workshop:

"In the '60s, if people didn't like experimental theater they were dumb, and the dumber they felt the more they said they liked it ... At the Foot of the Mountain is playing with form now, using ritual elements in outdoor public pieces, like an upbeat funeral for the ERA. When we did Brecht's *The Exception and the Rule*, we inserted into it stories about rape, quotes

from Susan Brownmiller. When anyone from the audience yelled 'Stop,' they could tell their own story. Both our work and their responses came through personal experience interacting with political message." (Martha Boesing) ... "We have been too conservative, underestimating our audiences." (Liz Lerman) ... "Educated middle-class audiences are the most intimidated in the world; they wait to hear what critics think before thinking for themselves. They've fallen for the idea of one homogenized 'Quality.'" (L.R.L.) ...

"The ground we're standing on is moving." (unidentified) ... "Art takes us deeper into our lives and entertainment takes us further away from them." (Phyllis Jane Rose) ... "My idea of the difference between art and entertainment is when to applaud." (Jim Murray) ... "Charlton Heston of the new NEA called its old 'Expansion Arts' program 'recreation, not art.'" (unidentified) ... "We have to ask ourselves what in the old forms made them radical in the beginning, and is there anything of that that can be salvaged? What happened that it got co-opted?" (Susan McCarn) ... "Form and content—it's like if you cut a hermaphroditic schizophrenic in half, which half would you take?" (Doug Kahn)

From "A Movement of Ideas" (publications) workshop:

"Our publications record and document the piece of history we're creating together." (David Olson) ... "We're all trade publications? Yes. Trade papers for the disenfranchised." (Susan McCarn).

Amalgam from the closing session:

"The latest oppositional tactic—dump something in their 'cultural holes' in the backs of the magazines? But culture is central to political movement forward; it deals with the intuitive, emotional human elements ... We want to make a plea for cultural democracy as official policy. It's politically the right time to advocate a new WPA along with disarmament ... No, I'm for funding human services but not a new WPA because it brings porkbarrelling and the money goes to the *wrong* public works ... We shouldn't have to ask permission to work with the political left. We need to educate them, propagate the idea of cultural democracy ... Maybe NAPNOC is the left cultural movement we're all looking for."

The last frame of Fred Whitehead's slide/tape show on the history of labor in Kansas reads: "Then End ... or The Beginning."

—L.R.L.



photo: Eva Cockcroft

I WANT TO LIVE!

By Jim Murray

I.

When I was born, Mom and I cried out in pain. Dad called his Mother: "Benton Luck! It's a boy!" "Oh, thank God!" his Mother replied. The year before he had said, "It's a girl." His Mother had replied, "It is the will of the Lord." My sister is now an Episcopal nun, in line for Mother Superior. And I am still a lucky boy: I know that I was wanted, I know what I was wanted for.

II. BENTON LUCK

When I quit the class, (the ruling class), Dad said, "Oh well, you know what you're doing." One thing I have done is save The Van Benton Trophy. Van Benton is "Unc" to Dad, "Uncle Van" and grand to me. The Van Benton Trophy is a silver bowl the size of half a soccer ball. It sits on my bookcase next to *Manifest Destiny*, *The Coming of the Civil War* and *The Causes and Consequences of the American Revolution*. It is probably the only object in my apartment that Dad could relate to. Mattresses on the floor, Rothko, Matisse and Che Guevara on the walls, Patti Smith everywhere, these things are not exactly the old man's cup of tea. (He occasionally asks, "Still got all those paperbacks, J.?") If Dad spotted the trophy, he would say, "Do you remember your Uncle Van's Annual Hockey Party?"

Do I remember? Uncle Van's Annual Hockey Party was a male-bonding ritual *par excellence*. Charles Vandenburg Benton was a finance capitalist, well known for his luck in the market. He had a firm and a few seats on the Exchange on which to rest his family status. Every January he invited about twenty business associates and their school-age sons to join his male relations and their school-age sons in carrying on a tradition dating from my father's dadless youth. First, dinner at the Yale Club. Then taxis to the Garden, where Uncle Van had bought a section of rinkside seats for a Ranger game. This section was on the same side of the building as The Ranger Club, an all-male place where you could drink hard stuff and take a leak between periods and not have to rub shoulders with the *hoi polloi* in the urinals and the hot dog lines.

The distinguishing feature of Uncle Van's Annual Hockey Party was the "competition." Every son filled out a sheet which had been typed and run-off by Uncle Van's secretary, a fact which greatly impressed my Dad. We predicted the number of goals and penalties for each period and the whole game. In the best Wall Street tradition, we did not need consistent vision: we could mark down ten goals for the first period, and two goals for the whole game. Also in the best Wall Street tradition, the system ignored our mistakes while rewarding our lucky guesses. Between periods and after the game we lined up in that corner of The Ranger Club where Uncle Van sat, counting out brand new dollar bills. My average take was about ten bucks, taxfree.

Uncle Van's Annual Hockey Party was the best thing Dad and I did together. We would get dressed up, then study the *Telegram* Sports section on the train. Dad would say, "I wonder if we're going to have roast beef, potatoes, and peas again

this year," and he would promise not to tell Mom how much I won, if I promised not to tell her how much he ate. (Next day, he'd tell both, without her asking.)

On the bus to the Yale Club, I would watch Dad bend down and squint at every street sign as if our lives depended on it. At the dinner, Dad would be uncomfortable, until the food arrived, because he was not like his townhouse relatives. He had left Yale after one semester. Now he was the carpenter in a small folding-door company which collapsed when his partner drank himself to death. Then he was a warehouse manager, later a shipping clerk, drawing on his wartime experience as a construction foreman and Canteen manager in France. We lived in houses chosen and owned by my mother and her mother, always in the best suburban neighborhoods, you know, "for the kids." For many years Dad commuted a hundred miles a day to a clerical job at Singer's Bridgeport plant while Singer's Board Chairman, who lived across the street from us, rode a limousine to New York. Our families were not friends.

But Dad could hold his own at Uncle Van's Annual Hockey Party because he was, after all, a member of the family. Also, his son pitched for the All Stars, his son skipped fifth grade, his son memorized box scores, his son performed.

(I regarded the other kids as spoiled brats: they went to games all the time, they had more money in their pockets than I saw in a year, they never even played baseball or basketball or football or hockey.)

1957: Uncle Van's lawyer proposed a change. He asked the fathers (how could they refuse?) to chip in for a silver bowl, to be inscribed The Van Benton Trophy. The son who guessed the final score of the game, instead of winning a cash bonus, would get his name right under Van Benton's, and keep the bowl for a year. (That way, your friends and neighbors get to hear the story of the Annual Hockey Party, which they can't attend.)

Andrew J. Corcoran, Jr., won it in 1958, James C. Murray in 1959, then A.J.C., Jr., again in 1960, 1961, and 1962, then his little brother Douglas E. Corcoran in 1963. (Andrew J. Corcoran, Sr., a tax lawyer, was the firm's token Catholic in the Kennedy period.) In 1964 Christopher W. Lovejoy tied one of the Corcoran boys and got the cup by throwing a tantrum in The Ranger Club.

In 1965 I predicted a 3-3 score. Uncle Van and his lawyers tried to disallow my entry, on the grounds that no one had ever picked a tie, that it might cause a repeat of the scene last year. (What if the game ends 1-1? Is a 2-1 entry closer? Or



photo: Lawrence Kramer



Opposite page: the author as his mother sees him; above: at a poetry reading

III. AUTO ALARM

It is ten o'clock Tuesday night. As sirens go, this one doesn't. It is mounted in the engine of a parked Dodge custom van such that its mechanized shriek carries upward into the echo chamber formed by two fourteen-story buildings across 84th Street from each other on West End Avenue. Like most auto alarms, the noise has a high-pitched metallic quality that one experiences within one's teeth. Unlike most auto alarms, the sound has a thunderous aspect also: "the bass holds up," meaning you *feel* the building shaking, because it is. This siren, of unwavering loudness and intensity, is the most destructive noise your correspondent has ever heard. (True, I have not worked in a factory, but I have sat close to The Rolling Stones with a headache.) Whoever triggered it was no doubt hurled and then warned. Thousands of my neighbors are presently doing nothing but wanting it silenced.

I am trembling on the sidewalk, alone, watching two of New York's Finest duplicate the efforts of the thwarted robber, using a coat hanger to penetrate the window gasket to manipulate the lock-button to get the door open to release the hood-lock to reach and finally to disconnect the fucking siren. As they work, I watch lights

does a tie bet cover all tie outcomes?) I insisted that no one said you couldn't, and they said, okay, next year you can't. Anyway, a late goal by Rod Gilbert gave the Rangers a 3-3 tie with the Chicago Black Hawks, and landed the cup on my bookcase because Uncle Van shortly thereafter died the natural death of a lifelong gin drinker.

His widow told me how glad she was that the trophy remained in the family, while the Annual Hockey Party would take its shining place in the legend of Uncle Van's life. A couple of years later, when I was an Ivy League dropout, she hired me to be the chauffeur and rabbit-in-the-garden assassin at her summer estate on Fisher's Island, the last resort of the big rich in America. (I wrecked the car and threw potato chips at the rabbits.) "You will take your meals at the family table . . ." meant "You will meet a suitable duPont or Merrill or Lynch with whom you will uphold your family status." When I started dating the daughter of the telephone repairman, Uncle Van's widow called me a communist (one year early), fired me, and banished me forever from Fisher's Island. When I left, she said the cup might just as well belong to the Corcorans.

But Dad didn't mind when my summer ended early: he knew exactly where I was coming from. Now, when I polish the Van Benton Trophy, I grin at my image in it, and wonder if Dad will ever visit the city.

Oh well. He knows what he's doing.

come on in scores of apartments. I watch men in T-shirts shout down at the street and at each other. I watch bottles shatter on the pavement. I imagine mothers and other parents unsuccessfully comforting children. I imagine emergency calls to God. I imagine Valium tablets. I imagine the owner of the siren: he must be in the outer boroughs somewhere, wondering why the dogs are howling. If he were around, he would show up for sure, not in order to minimize the public disturbance, regrettable though it may be to him, but in order to secure his property. Even people who do not think we live in a racist and sexist class society presume that the siren belongs to a rich white male. Unlike the black kids with portable sound systems on the subway, this man's noisemaker is completely legal. How couldn't it be? Its job is to protect private property.

Thirty minutes pass slowly. At last a cop cuts a wire, hundreds applaud, men bellow approval. The cops and I speak for the first time. *Don't you have earplugs for this work?* No. *Are you authorized to break a window?* No, unless a life is in danger. *What if the van is stripped later on tonight?* Oh, don't worry. It will be.

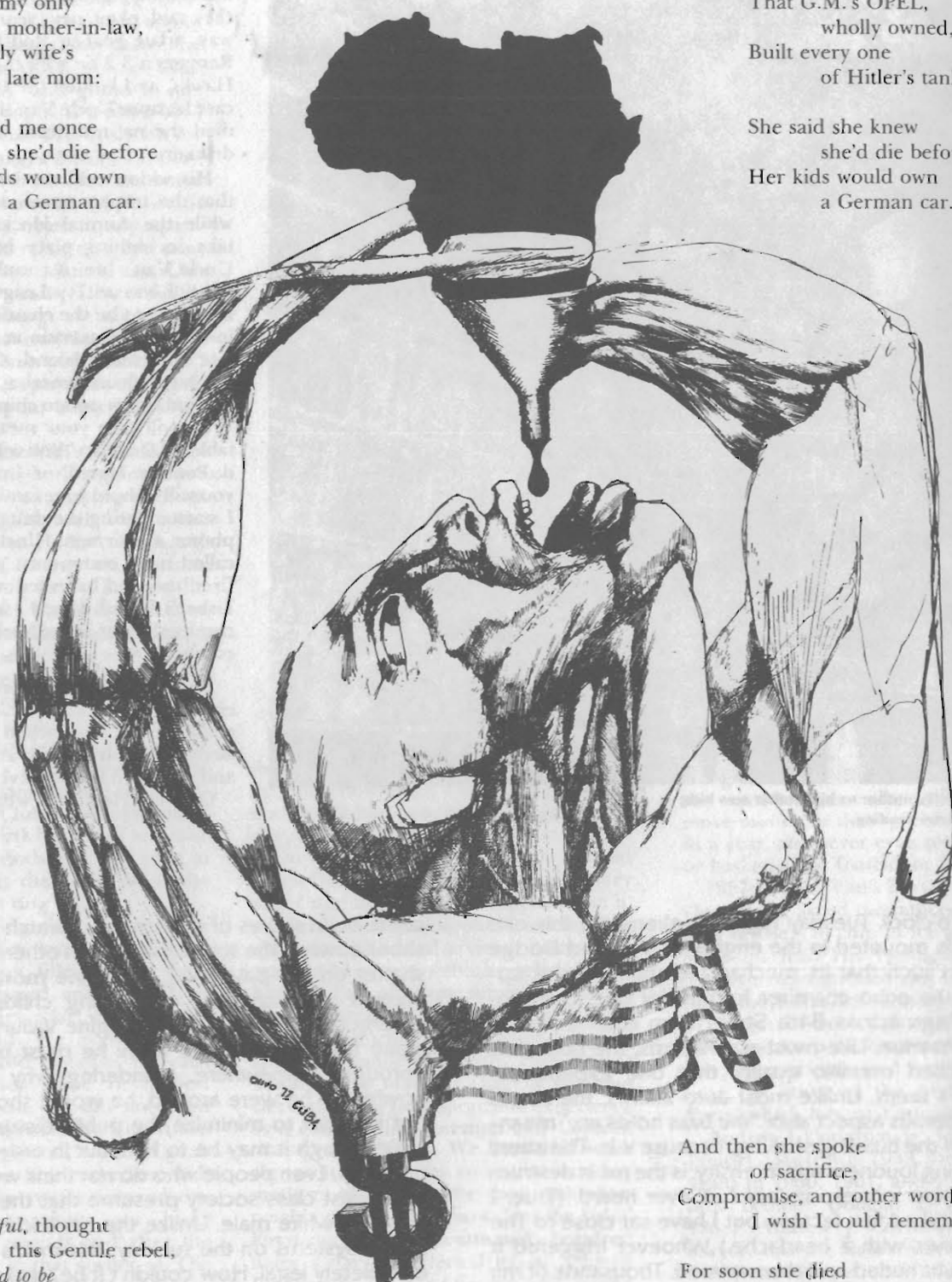
IV. BE CAREFUL

About my only
mother-in-law,
My early wife's
late mom:

She told me once
she'd die before
Her kids would own
a German car.

That G.M.'s OPEL,
wholly owned,
Built every one
of Hitler's tanks?"

She said she knew
she'd die before
Her kids would own
a German car.



Be careful, thought
this Gentile rebel,
She used to be
a Polish peasant,

Now we sit inside her Chevy!
Nonetheless, I must say,
"Tell me, Mother,
did you know

And then she spoke
of sacrifice,
Compromise, and other words,
I wish I could remember,

For soon she died
of U.S. cancer,
Not to know
her kids have kids,

And wait in gas lines
dripping Rabbits.

C.L.R. JAMES ON POLAND

Speech at Solidarity Support
Rally, November, 1981

Your welcome was very flattering. I only hope that when I am finished you will still feel the same way.

Where does Solidarity come from? What is it doing? And where is it going? That is my theme. One hundred and ten years ago in Paris the Parisian people formed the Commune. They abolished the police and they abolished the army. (Applause) They finished with their local CIA and FBI, finished them completely. (Applause) They said that their council, the Commune, would be both legislative and executive. They said further that the pay of a member of the council would be equal to the pay of an advanced worker. Not a penny more.

When people asked Karl Marx and Frederick Engels what is this thing the dictatorship of the proletariat that you talk about they told them, "There, look at it, the Paris Commune. It has abolished the police and abolished the army. That is the people."

Now Lenin went next with the Soviet, and he kept the Commune in mind all the time. When the Soviet came with workers' representatives for every 500 workers, Lenin said, "This is it, we have gone beyond the Commune." Unfortunately the Commune was one complete city. The Russian workers were too small to handle that tremendous body of peasants in that vast country. But the Soviet made a stage of the

...like Solidarity, a rising of the people,
like an earthquake or a tempest as Marx used
to describe the revolution.

development of the working class. And now we have the final stage that we have reached today in Solidarity in Poland. Commune — Soviet — Solidarity. (Applause) That is the movement. They haven't come by accident. They are part of the organic movement of the working class in capitalist society.

Now I want to talk about what they are doing today. They have upset the international policy of NATO and the Warsaw Pact. The Russian army was supposed to march through Poland and go to the Atlantic. That was the policy that they were working on, that they are working on today. Today, after Poland, the Russian army is not going one foot. It is not going to the Atlantic. It has got to stay at home. It has got to deal with Warsaw. It has got to deal with Odessa. With Leningrad. And it has got to deal with Moscow. That's what it has to defend. It is going nowhere. (Applause)

And all these foreign policy experts have to realize that. That the Russian army cannot go

anywhere when it will have at its back Solidarity in Poland today and Solidarities tomorrow. Because the Polish people said we are for the Warsaw Pact and we support the Catholic Church (some of us are Catholics) but they do not hesitate to call upon all the workers and peasants in the totalitarian states to join them in an international movement. And then comes another problem. A problem not for me. Today they don't want the American armaments in Europe but tomorrow they will say if the Russian army cannot march, we don't want the American army either. (Applause) That is a problem that they have to settle and that has been caused by Poland alone. Far less when the European peoples follow the example of Solidarity, which they will, there is no difficulty about that at all.

And now the last thing I want to say about them. Tomorrow: I have two countries in mind. One of them is South Africa. They carry on a lot of games there. When we become a parliament we who are whites want so much percentage of it. One man one vote. I don't believe any such thing will take place in Southern Africa. I believe that when the people move they will move as a solid body of people who are reversing the trend of events and taking hold of their country again. It will be a movement like Solidarity and a rising of the people like an earthquake or a tempest as Marx used to describe the revolution. That is what is going to happen in South Africa and the whites who are sympathetic will be able to join. Not to get so many people, percentage in the parliament and so many rights justified. No. They can join the organization and we shall see an example of Rousseau's General Will taking place in South Africa. (Applause)

And the last country that I want to speak about is the United States. I have spent twenty-five years of my life here and one thing I learned is: this is no European country. It has an individuality of its own.



C.C. INTERVIEWS JAMES ON POLAND

CC: You've hailed Polish Solidarity as an earth-shaking political phenomenon. What influence has it had on your own thought?

CLR: I don't argue with people any more about Socialism and Marxism. I say: there is Solidarity, the working class and the farmers, united in making a new society. Now you tell me what else Socialism is. I don't have to prove the existence of 10 million members. I am saying the same as Walesa, who is not an extraordinary figure like a Marx or a Lenin, but a worker himself. He also answers all arguments — we have 10 million.

CC: What is the significance of Solidarity for Americans?

CLR: I am traveling on a visa, I am not in this country to make political statements. But in direct response to your question, I would say the following. I have been in the U.S. for many years, and all the time concerned with the differences it has from Europe and the rest of the world, what the American system uniquely demands for political change. Now Solidarity has shown something. If a new, radical and truly American movement is going to come into existence, it will come because people say that the government cannot do what should be done and they will do it for themselves. That would be an American action. We must not let ourselves be confused by the fact that American workers and others don't generally form parties in the European fashion. Polish Solidarity has abolished the contradiction between politics and power, or between the factory and the community. And the character of the transportation and communication of ideas here is such that people in Chicago would understand what people in Mississippi are doing and will understand what is happening in New York. And then, too, Americans love to join new things!

I have been watching the political system especially since Roosevelt came and brought in the New Deal and transferred a lot of power to the Executive. There are two big meetings here every four years. The Democratic Party meets and the Republican Party meets. These are national mobilizations, they are national mobilizations appealing to everybody. But when the day comes when people feel that those national mobilizations are not doing what they want them to do, there will not be any longer a national mobilization but there will be a mobilization of the nation. That is something else. And number two: the minorities in this country — Blacks, Chicanos, and these — will be able to join the mobilization of the nation, take part in it, take from it all that they want and at the same time bring to it all that they want to bring to it. The individual who has been crushed by developing capitalism will achieve a mobility in such a development of politics.

And I want to end by telling you: I don't know that I will see that. I have been in the world a long

CC: How do you explain then the slowness of the American response to the Polish situation? Perhaps only after our own Solidarity Day did political leaders and activists begin to feel the ranks were ready for a major step?

CLR: There is something else. When Blacks moved in the 1960s, that was the beginning of everything. *Meridian* by Alice Walker is very clear on the implications of that for the nation. About a quarter of the way from the end of the novel, a girl listens to a church service for somebody who has been killed, and it comes to her mind that the sense of solidarity, the feeling that all there have something together, will lead them into transforming America. We are not dealing only with belief, consciousness, and political institutions. These assembled people are themselves the process, what they are doing is the new society within the old. Today the sentiment, the stirrings, the community feeling of the Blacks is the key element again because it has to be.

CC: Have you observed any significant difference in the relation of Blacks and whites that would lead you to expect a coalescence that hasn't taken place in the American past?

CLR: Yes. I have been talking to people, and they agree with me. The spontaneous relation of Blacks and whites in this country is way beyond what it was. They understand among themselves that the problem is institutional. Black people for their part are also critical of any abstract Socialist vision. Intellectuals are now putting forward many notions. But the idea of a new America is something quite different. Black people feel that what they are feeling is still very superior or at least remote from what Socialist theoreticians put forward. They are not hostile to Socialist ideas. But events themselves must make the connection.

time. But I expect to see it in South Africa before I go and when it comes in the United States I may be away but you can be certain that if I am away I will do my best to come back. (Applause) I will have plenty to tell you but you will have plenty more to tell me about American Solidarity. Thank you.



FREE FOR ALL

By C.L.R. JAMES

Free For All. I love that title. Freedom is a very rare thing. It is for example rare in the account of great events. It was only a few years ago that a French historian really got down to it and brought out some of the greatest and most important events in the French Revolution. You may think that that is History with a capital 'H' because it is one of the greatest events and everybody, particularly the professional historians ought to know something about it.

But enough of that. I have been exercising my freedom to say a few things about history which are not only important in general but relate directly to the riots which took place in Britain during last summer. Darcus Howe is talking to an American about those events. He picks up a paper and reads this:

"Listen to this", he said. "After the uprising in Moss Side last July they appointed a local Manchester barrister called Hytner to enquire into what happened, and how it started. Here's what he writes:

"At about 10:20 p.m. a responsible and in our view reliable mature black citizen was in Moss Lane East, and observed a large number of black youths whom he recognised as having come from a club a mile away. At the same time a horde of white youths came up the road from the direction of Moss Side. He spoke to them and ascertained they were from Withenshaw. The two groups met and joined. There was nothing in the manner of their meeting which in any way reflected a prearranged plan. There was a sudden shout and the mob stormed off in the direction of Moss Side police station. We are given an account by another witness who saw the mob approach the station, led, so it was claimed, by a nine-year-old boy with those with Liverpool accents in the van."

You believe that you have read this and that you understand this, pardon me if I tell you that I don't think you have. Let me select a passage and draw it to your attention.

"(he) observed a large number of black youths whom he recognized as having come from a club a mile away. At the same time a horde of white youths came up the road from the direction of Moss Side. He spoke to them and ascertained that they were from Withenshaw. The two groups met and joined. There was nothing in the manner of their meeting which in any way reflected a prearranged plan. There was a sudden shout and the mob stormed off in the direction of Moss Side Police Station."



That my friends is the revolution. There is no highly educated party leading the backward masses. There is no outstanding leader whom the masses follow because of his great achievements in the past. There had been no prearranged plan. They met and joined, they shouted and they stormed off, (note this particularly) in the direction of Moss Side Police Station.

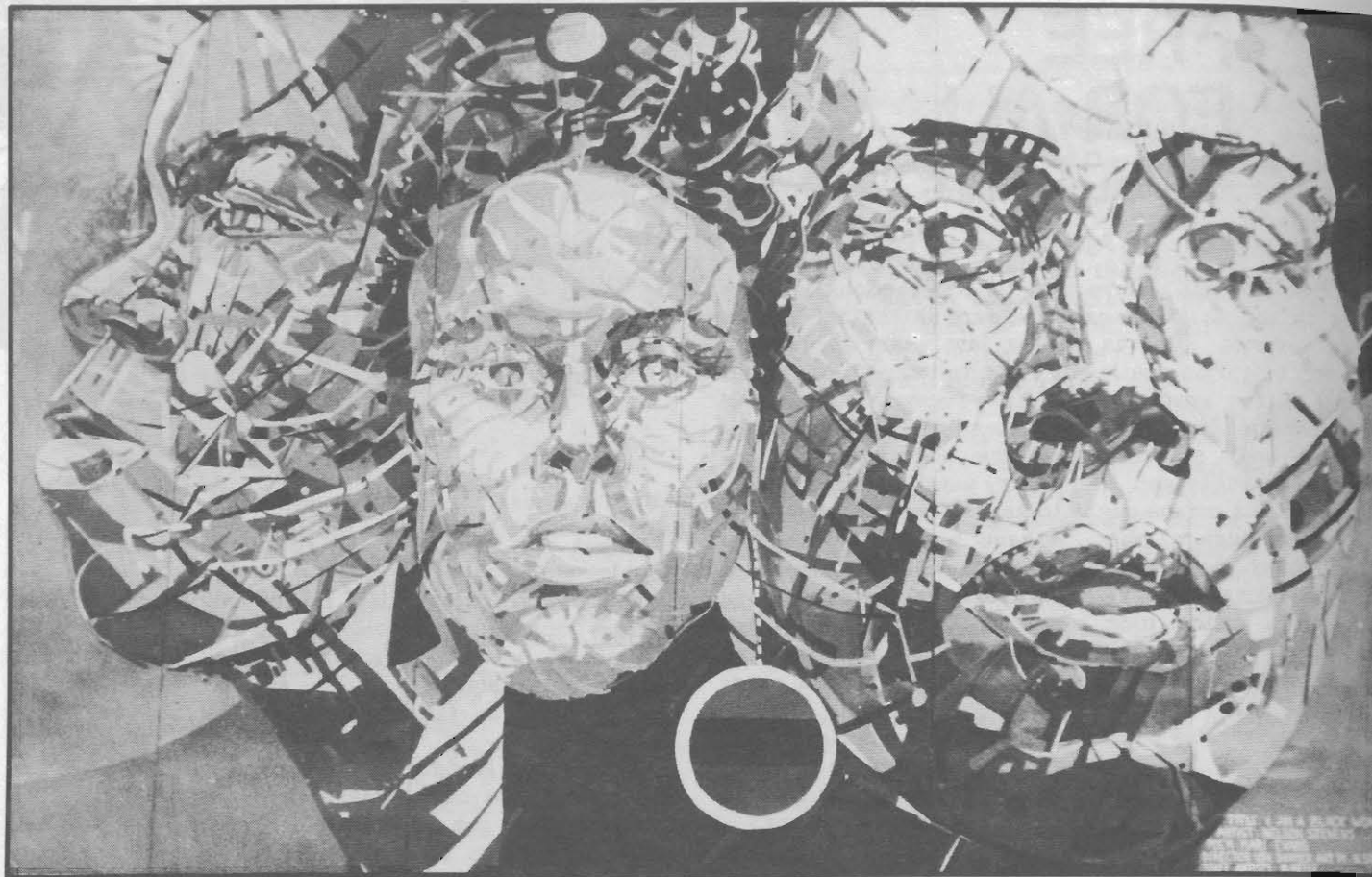
The great leader. Before I deal with that, let me quote from one of the greatest historians of the 20th Century. I can quote at once because I made quotations from it in *The Black Jacobins* (edition Allison & Busby, Page 338n)

"...It is therefore in the popular mentality, in the profound and incurable distrust which was born in soul of the people, in regard to the aristocracy, beginning in 1789, and in regard to the king, from the time of the flight to Varennes, it is there that we must seek the explanation to what took place. The people and their unknown leaders knew what they wanted. They followed the Girondins and afterwards Robespierre, only to the degree that their advice appeared acceptable.

"Who then are these leaders to whom the people listened? We know some. Nevertheless, as in all the decisive days of the revolution, what we most would like to know is forever out of our reach; we would like to have the diary of the most obscure of these popular leaders; we would then be able to grasp, in the act so to speak, how one of these great revolutionary days began; we do not have it."

So much for these great leaders. This time we know that it was a boy of nine who was leading this particular part of the revolution.

I don't think I have anything more to say here. But for the greater part of my long life, I have been saying and preaching and teaching "the two groups met and joined. There was nothing in the manner of their meeting which in any way reflected a prearranged plan. There was a sudden shout and the mob stormed off in the direction of Moss Side Police Station."



"I Am Woman," mural by Nelson Stevens, Springfield, Mass., 1979

photo: Eva Cockcroft

C.L.R. James at Black Ink

A TALK ON TONI MORRISON,
ALICE WALKER, AND NTOZAKE SHANGE

I have chosen three books to discuss: *Sula*, by Toni Morrison; *Meridian*, by Alice Walker; and *Nappy Edges*, by Ntozake Shange. These books are by three Black women, but I haven't chosen them because they are Black women; but because they are very fine Black writers. They are first class writers. *Meridian* and *Nappy Edges* I would place in the very front rank of books being published in the United States today. There is another reason, also, that I was particularly interested in these: They represent a social movement in the United States.

Women all over the world seem to have realized that they have been exploited by

men. Marx pointed out many years ago that women were more exploited than the proletariat. (This is a remarkable thing for him to have said.) Now women are beginning to say: "Who and what are we? We don't know. Hitherto we have always tried to fit ourselves into what men and what masculine society required. Now we are going to break through that." These three women have begun to write about Black women's daily lives. Black women in America for hundreds of years have been scrubbing, sweeping, cleaning, picking up behind people; they have been held in the background; kept for sex. And now Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, and

Ntozake Shange have taken these Black women and put them right in the front of American literature. They can't be ignored anymore. So it seems that in the women's movement, as usual in the United States, Black people took part; and they have taken a part in it which, as I hope to show you, is important not only to the Blacks, but to society as a whole.

I'm going to talk about these books one by one. I'm not going to read from them too much; except for the poetry, because poetry must be read. Then I will talk about writing, because that is what you are concerned with; and because it is an important part of the Black struggle today.

I will begin with *Sula*, by Toni Morrison. *Sula* is a story of Black women; this in itself is an unusual topic for an American writer, so far as I know. The story begins with a description of the Bottom, a black slum of the southern town, Medallion; and with the story of a World War I soldier who is released from an army hospital while still having problems with hallucinations, is arrested for his peculiar behavior, and is finally sent home to the Bottom, which he had not seen since going into the army. He seems to be crazy, and doesn't know what has happened to him. He establishes an annual holiday in the Bottom called National Suicide Day: on this day every year people can let out their anger and their violence acceptably. He lives alone, and generally celebrates the holiday alone. He supports himself by catching fish twice a week and selling them. This is how the book begins. It begins this way to register that the people in it, and the work they do, and the life they lead, are not normal. But this is the life of the vast majority in the South; from 1971, when the book was published, until this very day.

We are introduced to two girls: Sula and Nell. They are very good friends. The level of their lives is very low, and they go through much together. There is something harmonious between them. They are not separated even by the accidental death of a small boy who drowns while playing with them; even by the bizarre incinerations of two of the people Sula lives with. They grow up around and in spite of the daily poverty and tragedy. Nell gets married to a man named Jude. Sula sees that he is a handsome, hard-working, well meaning young man. She helps with the wedding and reception, and then leaves town.

Ten years pass between the wedding and the beginning of the next chapter; 1927-1937. Nell is still with Jude; they are living well, and have two or three children. Sula returns well-dressed, sophisticated, and college educated. She and Nell seek to rediscover that friendship which they had before, but Sula is unable to accommodate herself to the old society. One day, Nell comes home to find Sula and Jude together in the bedroom, and Jude leaves her that day. Sula does not particularly want Jude; she begins sleeping with men in the town, and is further distanced from the other townspeople. She becomes, at one point, really attached to a man; but it is, of course, at that point that he leaves her.

Sula and Nell see each other only once more in their lives. In 1940 Sula becomes seriously ill, and Nell visits to offer help. She finally asks, "Why did you do

it? ... We were friends ... And you didn't love me enough to leave him alone. To let him love me. You had to take him away."

To which Sula replies, "What you mean take him away? I didn't kill him, I just fucked him. If we were such good friends, how come you couldn't get over it?" As Nell is leaving, she asks her, "How do you know ... who was good? ... I mean maybe it wasn't you. Maybe it was me."

After Nell leaves, Sula dies. At the end of the book, at Sula's grave, Nell comes to a significant and painful realization: that it is not Jude, but Sula that she has missed so much in the years since they all parted.

This is a fantastic book. Now, I want to quote a particularly significant passage, from the chapter just following Sula's return:

It had surprised her a little and saddened her a good deal when Nell behaved the way the others would have. Nell was one of the reasons she had drifted back to Medallion, that and the boredom she found in Nashville, Detroit, New Orleans, New York, Philadelphia, Macon and San Diego. All those cities held the same people, working the same mouths, sweating the same sweat. The men who took her to one or another of those places had merged into one large personality: the same language of love, the same entertainments of love, the same cooling of love. Whenever she introduced her private thoughts into their rubbings or goings, they hooded their eyes. They taught her nothing but love tricks, shared nothing but worry, gave nothing but money. She had been looking all along for a friend, and it took her a while to discover that a lover was not a comrade and could never be—for a woman. And that no one would ever be that version of herself which she sought to reach out to and touch with an ungloved hand. There was only her own mood and whim, and if that was all there was, she decided to turn the naked hand toward it, discover it and let others become as intimate with their own selves as she was. (pp. 104-5)

A founder of the West Indian novel, the last surviving founder of Pan-Africanism, C. L. R. James has inspired three generations of cultural and political activists. He is well known as a writer, editor, and historian in the Caribbean, Great Britain, and Africa. One of this century's greatest champions of self-determination, James is wholly committed to liberate revolution.

Now, this Black woman has gone to all of these most important towns and places of social life in the United States, found them no good, and has gone back to Medallion. That is a very bold thing to write about. She tells us why Sula returns—because everywhere she goes the men and the problems and emptiness with them are always the same. The important thing about that is that it could, and would, be said by women on every level of society in the world today; from the highest to the lowest. This woman could not find a man who would treat her as another human being, and she got tired of it and went back to her home town. So on the one hand, the friendship between women, that is so often ignored, is really of great importance; and on the other hand, no matter how hard she tries, she just learns that friendship with a man is impossible.

Toni Morrison is saying that in this society, with the lives they led, this is what happens to men and women; this becomes characteristic of the love relationship. I find it astonishing and revealing that Toni Morrison should insist that this tremendous insight come from a poor Black woman, on the lowest level of American society. She is also saying that the real fundamental human difference is not between white and Black, it is between man and woman.

Now we come to *Meridian*, by Alice Walker, whom I have found to be one of the finest writers in the United States. Near the beginning of the book, *Meridian* is told by a group of her friends that she can only join the movement if she makes up her mind that she can kill for the Revolution. *Meridian* is not so sure about this; she is willing to die, but not to kill. It goes against her upbringing and her heart. She goes off on her own to work and live with the people in the South. The story goes on and *Meridian* becomes very involved with a Black man named Truman, who eventually be-

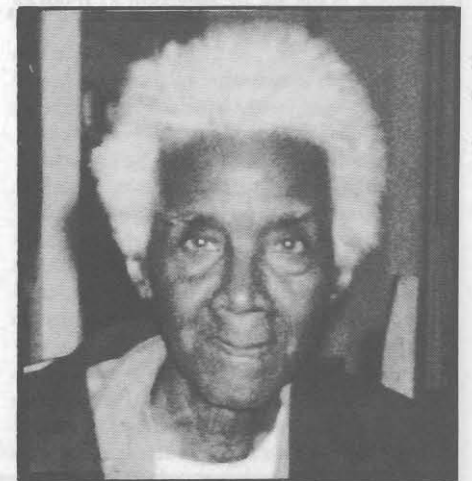


photo: Jim Murray

comes involved with a white woman, named Lynne. The personal, sexual, and racial interrelations of these three people, and the context of the civil rights movement, are treated very well indeed. They have a lot of difficulties. Again we have a picture of the significance of friendship between women:

As they sat they watched a television program. One of those Southern epics about the relationship of the Southern white man to madness, and the closeness of the Southern black man to the land. It did not delve into the women's problems, black or white. They sat, companionable and still in their bathrobes, watching the green fields of the South and the indestructible (their word) faces of black people much more than they watched the madness. For them, the madness was like a puzzle they had temporarily solved (Meridian would sometimes, in the afternoons, read poems to Lynne by Margaret Walker, and Lynne, in return, would attempt to cornrow Meridian's patchy short hair), they hungered after more intricate and enduring patterns. Sometimes they talked, intimately, like sisters, and when they did not they allowed the television to fill the silences. (p. 173)

This is tremendous. These two women have quarrelled over a Black man; he has gone with both of them, and generally made a mess of things; but they have become friends. This is beautifully expressed. This is a serious and difficult topic; not many books deal with the relationship of a Black man and a white woman, or even with two women getting together and understanding one another. This is an astonishing thing, but it is not the most astonishing thing in the book by far.

I'm going to deal now with another part of the book which makes it one of the most extraordinary books I have ever read. A young man has been killed; a Black church is having a service for him, to help the father and so on. Meridian is there, and as she follows the service, and hears the people singing, suddenly, after all her troubles, Meridian comes to this conclusion:

There was a reason for the ceremony she had witnessed in the church. And, as she pursued this reason in her thoughts, it came to her. The people in the church were saying to the red-eyed man that his son had not died for nothing, and that if his son should come again they would protect his life with their own. "Look," they were saying, "we are slow to awaken to the notion that we are only as other women and men, and even slower to move in anger, but we are gathering ourselves to fight for and protect what your son fought for on behalf of us. If you will let us weave your story and your son's life and death into what we already know—into the songs, the sermons, the 'brother and

sister'—we will soon be so angry we cannot help but move. Understand this," they were saying, "the church" (and Meridian knew they did not mean simply "church," as in Baptist, Methodist or whatnot, but rather communal spirit, togetherness, righteous convergence), "the music, the form of worship that has always sustained us, the kind of ritual you share with us, these are the ways to transformation that we know. We want to take this with us as far as we can."

In comprehending this, there was in Meridian's chest a breaking as if a tight string binding her lungs had given way, allowing her to breathe freely. For she understood, finally, that the respect she owed her life was to continue against whatever obstacles, to live it, and not to give up any particle of it without a fight to the death, preferably not her own. And that this existence extended beyond herself to those around her because, in fact, the years in America had created them One Life. She had stopped, considering this, in the middle of the road. Under a large tree beside the road, crowded now with the cars returning from church, she made a

promise to the red-eyed man herself: that yes, indeed she would kill, before she allowed anyone to murder his son again.

... Meridian's dedication to her promise did not remain constant. Sometimes she lost it altogether. Then she thought: I have been allowed to see how the new capacity to do anything, including kill, for our freedom—beyond sporadic acts of violence—is to emerge, and flower, but I am not yet at the point of being able to kill anyone myself, nor—except for the false urgings that come to me in periods of grief and rage—will I ever be...

... But at other times her dedication to her promise came back strongly. ... On those occasions such was her rage that she actually felt as if the rich and racist of the world should stand in fear of her, because she—though apparently weak and penniless, a little crazy and without power—was yet of resolute and relatively fearless character, which, sufficient in its calm acceptance of its own purpose, could bring the mightiest country to its knees. (pp. 199-201)

ADVICE

by Ntozake Shange

*people keep tellin me to put my feet on the ground
i get mad & scream/ there is no ground
only shit pieces from dogs horse & men who dont live
anywhere/ they tell me think straight & make myself
somethin/ i shout & sigh/ i am a poet/ i write poems/
i make words/ cartwheel & somersault down pages
outta my mouth come visions distilled like bootleg
whiskey/ i am like a radio but i am a channel of my own
i keep sayin i do this/ & people keep askin what am i gonna do/
what in the hell is going on?*

*people keep tellin me these are hard times/ what are you gonna be
doin ten years from now/ what in the hell do you think/ i
am gonna be writin poems/ i will have poems/ inchin up the
walls of the lincoln tunnel/ i am gonna feed my children poems on
rye bread with horseradish/ i am gonna send my mailman off
with a poem for his wagon/ give my doctor a poem for his heart/
i am a poet/ i am not a part-time poet/ i am not an amateur
poet/ i dont even know what that person cd be/ whoever that
is authorizing poetry as an avocation/ is a fraud/
put yr own feet on the ground/ writers dont have to plan
another existence forever to live schizophrenically/ to
be jane doe & medea in one body/
i have had it/ i am not goin to grow up to be somethin else
i am goin to be ol & grey wizened & wise as aunt mamiel/
i am gonna write poems til i die & when i have gotten outta
this body i am gonna hang round in the wind & knock over
everybody who got their feet on the ground/ i ma let you
run wild/ & leave a poem or two with king kong
in his aeroplane to drop pieces of poems
so you all will haveta come together/ just to figure out/
how you got so far away/ so far away from words
however/ did you capture language/ is a free thing.*

In other words, these people hadn't to be trained or taught Marxism; these Black people in this Southern church had built up a sense of community, and of right and wrong, so strong that if the need came, they would join any revolutionary movement that meant to kill those who were oppressing them. This is a major problem, this feeling that there are certain people who are revolutionaries but the great mass of the population is not, is filled with God and Christ. Alice Walker shows instead that they, in their church, with what they have learned there, with the togetherness they have, with the songs they have sung, and the beliefs they have, would be ready to join anything to overthrow the mightiest nation on earth; to overthrow the United States. Whether you agree or not, it is a tremendous notion and a successful book.

I lived in the United States for twenty-five years, and I had no idea that this kind of community could be built in the Southern Black churches; but, of course, this was the source of Dr. King's power. It would not be the same in the West Indies. The Black church does not have the same role to play, because the Bishop of Trinidad is a Black man, his son is a member of the revolutionary trade union movement; the result is that Blacks do not feel that terrific separation and persecution that has driven those Blacks to form those churches in the South. The Black church also could not have the same revolutionary significance in Britain.

The friendship between women; the impossibility of women getting on with men, as long as men see them chiefly as a sexual instrument; the church; the lowest levels of Black life in America: these Black women are arriving at conclusions that are filling the minds of the most advanced and hard thinking people today.

There is a poem called "Advice," by Ntozake Shange, and it's from her book, *Nappy Edges*.

She says, "I am a poet, and I'm going to be a poet." It can't be better stated, and she says it for you and me and other people, a person who is not educated can well understand what she writes. She is a very serious and a very funny woman. She can also be very mad. *With No Immediate Cause*, I think, is her finest poem.

She is telling me things that I had no idea of. I read these things in the paper and I pass on, but she says; "It happened to me. That man over there who served me coffee, he might have done it." She makes it personal. She doesn't speak about "it" in general, like a politician; she says, "it happened not to the public in general, but to me, and that's what I think about it." Only first class poets write this way.

Now I want to say a few words to the writers. You must be able to write what you think—and maybe what you write about your day to day, every day, commonplace, ordinary life, will be some of the same problems that the people of the world are fighting out. You must be able to write what you have to say, and know that that is what matters; and I hope you can see that you can begin anywhere and end up as far as anybody else has reached. I hope you are not scared to write about what concerns you, what you know—these things matter.

Write what you have to say, and think about it. Read as much as you can, don't limit yourself. Gather knowledge. Copy down a phrase that strikes you or a passage that matters. But when you get down to write something, concentrate on it. That is my advice. Concentrate on it and read it over. And if it takes you two weeks, you have to settle down and get it right. That is the way to write poetry. But the point is, to express your knowledge, concentrate on special writing.

WITH NO IMMEDIATE CAUSE

by Ntozake Shange

*every 3 minutes a woman is beaten
every five minutes a woman is raped/
every ten minutes
a lil girl is molested/
yet i rode the subway today
i sat next to an old man who
may have beaten his old wife
3 minutes ago or 3 days/ 30 years ago
he might have sodomized his
daughter but i sat there
cuz the young men on the train
might beat some young women
later in the day or tomorrow
i might not shut my door fast
enuff/ push hard enuff
every 3 minutes it happens
some woman's innocence
rushes to her cheeks/ pours from her mouth
like the betsy wetsy dolls have been torn
apart/ their mouths
mensis red & split/ every
three minutes a shoulder
is jammed through plaster & the oven door
chairs push thru the rib cage/ hot water or
boiling sperm decorate her body
i rode the subway today
& bought a paper from a
man who might
have held his old lady onto
a hot pressing iron/ i dont know
maybe he catches lil girls in
the park & rips open their behinds
with steel rods/ i cdnt decide
what he might have done i only
know every 3 minutes
every 5 minutes every 10 minutes/ so
i bought the paper
looking for the announcement
there has to be an announcement
of the women's bodies found
yesterday/ the missing little girl
i sat in a restaurant with my
paper looking for the announcement
a yng man served me coffee
i wondered did he pour the boiling
coffee on the woman cuz she waz stupid/
did he put the infant girl/ in
the coffee pot/ with the boiling coffee/*

*cuz she cried too much
what exactly did he do with hot coffee
i looked for the announcement
the discovery/ of the dismembered
woman's body/ the
victims have not all been
identified/ today they are
naked & dead/ refuse to
testify/ one girl out of 10's not
coherent/ i took the coffee
& spit it up/ i found an
announcement/ not the woman's
bloated body in the river/ floating
not the child bleeding in the
59th street corridor/ not the baby
broken on the floor/*

*"there is some concern
that alleged battered women
might start to murder their
husbands & lovers with no
immediate cause"
i spit up i vomit i am screaming
we all have immediate cause
every 3 minutes
every 5 minutes
every 10 minutes
every day
women's bodies are found
in alleys & bedrooms/ at the top of the stairs
before i ride the subway/ buy a paper/ drink
coffee/ i must know/
have you hurt a woman today
throw a child cross a room
are the lil girl's panties
in yr pocket
did you hurt a woman today*

*i have to ask these obscene questions
the authorities require me to
establish
immediate cause*

*every three minutes
every five minutes
every ten minutes
every day*

So what are you, An artist Or an activist?

Wallflower Order is high-quality art that broadens political awareness and inspires social action

By Susan McCarn

The packed house was on its feet before the lights were off in an ovation for the Wallflower Order. This was Thursday, November 11, at the end of a dance performance benefit for AMES (the El Salvadorian Women's Association). The clapping was thunderous, rhythmic, active; this was applause of enjoyment, recognition, and solidarity. The performers and the audience were celebrating shared purposes and desires, because the Wallflower Order had risen, (or leveled out), to the task of speaking what wants hearing, and showing what wants seeing.

The Wallflower Order is a women's dance collective that has been in existence for seven years. They are, in their own words, "committed to providing political culture of high artistic quality that broadens political awareness and inspires social action." They use every form, every voice, every issue germane to their purpose: Reggae, Mozart, Ballet, Jazz, Martial Arts, poetry, prose, sign language. They had performance pieces about mothers, adolescence, Stephen Biko, Nicaraguan women revolutionaries...

The opening dance, *Immigration*, was a story about the life of women laborers at the turn of the century. It was rich in image and emotion. This particular piece employed mime and modern dance as its primary movement forms. First we saw the ocean, the journey, the new beginning, all shown with soft sounds and flowing movements. Then we saw the abrupt arrival in the new world in the form of a succession of frustrating queues. After she gets a job, we watch the central figure sewing, with quite literal movements. Her needle-and-thread action remains realistic, but becomes also abstract; then it becomes one part of a harsh symphony of movements involving all the women, which clearly and successfully depicts a human machine.

Like all the Wallflower Order dances, the end result of *Immigration* is uplifting. The woman-machine breaks apart, becomes more human again, more woman—and unionizes! There are five different musical selections used to back the various transitions in this piece. The final and strongest one is, "I'm stickin' to the union!"

It is difficult to choose the terms with which to describe the Wallflower Order. They are unquestionably a dance

company, but they use the idea of dance as we know it as a springboard; as a circle that does not circumscribe, but that provides a base to expand and reinforce with every possible kind of tangent. In this one selection we saw many styles of physical expression; we were carried across an ocean, bewildered, abused, and, finally, triumphant. Giving an audience this kind of image-support is very important.

A high point in the show was a solo performance by Krissy Keefer, "Resolution for Africa," about Black history in America, and in her life. She began with a long and gutsy monolog, sitting in a chair, alone on the stage, addressing the audience. She had tried and tried, she said, to dance like Blacks, but she never really tried to dance about Blacks. She went on to connect her own life experiences with her studies of the history of slavery in the United States, and the silence that surrounds it, and of African culture. She was moved and angry; so were we. We all know the toll of denial, and we can all celebrate the struggle against it. More importantly, even if she said something that didn't go down well, she was trying, she was working, she could be approached and supported or argued with. She rose from the chair and danced with pride and determination, to a song by Sweet Honey in the Rock. The audience cheered most of the way through the dance.

The Wallflower Order set themselves the task of addressing their art to and informing it by the political issues that are key to the connected struggles of oppressed peoples, and for the most part they succeeded. Even where they didn't succeed they had an alarming effect on the audience: the audience criticism that I overheard was far more pointed and involved than I am used to hearing. I overheard people actively arguing about the success or failure with which images conveyed the ideas of the dances, suggesting what might have worked better.

Many people, including myself, were offended in one dance, "New World," by the association of upper class coldness and snobbery with cat fighting. After watching these impressive powerful women mastering the stage for two dances, they came on in all white with lace and toe shoes. The very entrance sent the audience into shrieks and applause. The absurdity was magnificent. But their characters soon began back-biting in a very specific way. Now, cat fighting is bad politics wherever you put it. But imagine it, the lights go out and people are whispering to their neighbors, "That was a great image and a great idea, but they shouldn't use female competitiveness for humor in that way... We should talk to them... You think after the performance, or should we just write a note?" Wow! Now isn't that a hell of a lot more interesting than, "What a nice arabesque!" or, "That Mikhail sure is a hunk," or whatever.

My only other major qualm with the performance was, in a piece about growing up "different," the total association of deviance from feminine norms with masculinity. Not wanting to be prissy does not have to mean wanting to be a boy.

There was even room during the course of the evening to watch the individual personalities and styles of the performers emerge. I could tell whose politics I really identified with, or who may have been the primary influence in a given piece.

These women are talented and entertaining. They are especially good dancers and choreographers. They need some vocal training for their text use, and they need a director for a couple of their skits—but most importantly, they are needed.

There are hordes of us with tears and eyes thirsty for sense and meaning, long offended by shallow and unreal art. We all feel the oppressiveness of dominant homogeneous white American culture. We all sense our own absence from it. Being white doesn't mean that I am represented by that culture any more than it means that I have cravings for baloney on Wonderbread. American's junk food culture makes even more immediate the need for and the power of multi-cultural art. Just as we must understand

vador," in clear bold print. Who could pass this by? What serious radical could be uninterested? So a lot of *men* I know denied themselves a terrific experience. This experience included being a member of one of the most racially mixed audiences I have had the joy to be a part of. We were black, latina, Asian, freckled, gay, bi, straight, and mostly women.

If you are a radical artist, don't despair, we are learning to connect with one another, and your work is needed. If you are a radical something else, goddamnit, it's time to take responsibility for your own need for a culture that reflects your beliefs. Why not find out the name of a progressive theater in your town and check it out instead of blowing your five dollars on the movies this Saturday



The Wallflower Order

photo: Judith Keleman

the connections between our oppression and that of others—in fact, use our oppression to understand theirs—we need mutually informed imagery. Through our own struggles and our will to freedom we are deeply connected to all who have been fighting, stifled, silenced, oppressed—their voices give ours depth and resonance. The Wallflower Order knows this, and helps to make us whole with their art.

Another interesting thing about this performance—the audience was by far mostly women. Now, I know lots of people who wouldn't dare miss a benefit for the people of El Salvador. Really, wouldn't dare. But they weren't at this one. The publicity for this was incredible; every place I went for a week beforehand was splattered with posters, posters of a circle of serious and powerful looking women dancing together with, "Benefit for the women of El Sal-

night just to get mad at Steven Spielberg one more time! The time is now.

It is of great significance that the Holly Near concert the night of June 12 gave three or four hundred of us the strength to avoid those post-demonstration-it's-not-going-to-have-any-effect-anyway-blues; that the NAP-NOC conference on cultural democracy brought us such strength; that the New York Marxist School has had their greatest success this year with a series on the personal and the political; that the Wallflower Order inspired a packed house. It is also of great significance that these lessons come directly from the women's movement, fueled by its cultural strength. So the next time somebody says to me, "So what are you, an artist or an activist?" I'm gonna say, "Wise up. Haven't you heard? Specialization is a capitalist tool."

LIKE ANY OTHER DAY . . .



Street Theater during June 12 march

photo: Herb Ritt

Did the children cry? Were the beds unmade?
Was the sex a drag? Were the bills all paid?
Did the boss approve? Did your poor gums bleed?
Could you smell the gas? Did you smoke a weed?
Did the faucet drip? Did you both make nice?
Was the kitchen clean? Did you pay the price?
Was the mirror true? Was your lover false?
Was your head on straight? Did he play a waltz?
Were the nights too long? Did the baby balk?
Were the doggies fed? Did the neighbors talk?
Was the headache bad? Did you pass the test?
Were your fingers cold? Did you try your best?
Was the day unreal? Did the air seem dry?
Did you laugh too loud? Did you have a good cry?
Did you comb your hair? Was the sunlight odd?
Did you have a clue? Did you pray to God?
Did you wet your lips? Were you quite alone?

Did the grass seem gray? Could you hear a moan?
Could you feel the woosh? Did the silence grow?
Did you sense the end? Did a halo glow?
Did the windows melt? Did the phone go dead?
Did the rivers hiss? Did the moon turn red?
Was the space too dense? Were the lights still lit?
Did the crystals crack? Did the center split?
Did the sun swoop low? Was your hair on fire?
Did the tides go mad? Were the streets a pyre?
Were the walls exhumed? Did the valleys fuse?
Did coronas leap? Did siroccos cruise?
Did the black bones bloom? Did a blind star wink?
Did the dumb wind sigh? Did the shadows sink?
Did you crouch with the pack? Did a whisper fall?
Did you catch any words? Not a one? None at all?

Irving Wexler

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

Reading the morning desecrations,
he muses, the overage radical,
what ever happened to history?
Wasn't it to be our dialectic,
the negation long ago negated,
the train of revolution arriving
transcendent in the kingdom of freedom?
And the singing tomorrows,
why were they sealed in silence?
And the power, ours to share,
still in the hands of the beasts?

We knew the going would be hard,
the Sisyphean victories forever
slipping from our bloody hands.
But as the decades drifted by,
after the visions and expectations,
after the leaflets and meetings,
after the jailings and beatings,
after the wars brought to a halt,
after socialism with a human face,
we looked numbly at the future
only to see a mirror of the past.

And could we have foreseen, then,
when we breathed promises and roses,
the masks of oppression molded
in the images of our own faces,
and the assassins in our ranks,
and the martyrs in utopia,
and the kulaks with gray flannels,
and poor Trotsky, slumped at his desk
with an axe in his battered skull,
and shriveled Lenin in his tomb of gulag,
with his eternal eyes unblinking,
and Che, at the end of his rope,
on a mountaintop in a strange land,
and Mao, buried in broken China
among his red books and withered flowers?

And he thinks, what if dawn hasn't
arrived with nectar on its breath?
Was there another way he could live?
Turn his back, like an ox, on his
comrades' and the world's agonies?
Eat crow, make his peace, accept
the what-is, surrender the what-can-be?

And taking a deep breath,
he jogs doggedly into wherever,
two steps forward and one step back,
toward the twenty-first century,
with the unbearable loneliness
of the long-distance radical
who knows in his heart he won't
be around to see it happen.

Irving Wexler

BLESSED BE. (For Thomas McGrath)

To those in power
who measure time
in cobalt countdown;
to generals whose itchy fingers
lie poised on the buttons;
to scientists who count the dead
in megaton millions;
to statesmen whose nuclear earplugs
shut out the isotope cries
of those caught in the fire
from which there is no shade;
to madmen whose dreams
swing an orbit of rockets
that annihilate generations
but spare private property;
to those who coo deterrence
when they mean overkill—
to all of you we say . . .

Blessed be the fighters
who kick America awake
before it dies in its sleep.
Blessed be the marchers
who flow like rivers
down the world's streets.
Blessed the painter
the folders of leaflets,
and the lickers of stamps.
Blessed the bright banners
unfurling in the wind.
Blessed the shout of the soapbox
and the kiss of the poet.
Blessed be the agitator
who redeems the defeated.
Blessed the organizer
who teaches the magic of numbers.

Blessed be the crowd of us
under the mushroom shadow
who will not sit by,
as silent as fallouts,
letting the obscene eyeball
melt down our day.
Blessed, now and forever,
the makers of peace.

Irving Wexler

GREAT MOMENTS OF CARNIVAL KNOWLEDGE

Carnival Knowledge is a traveling educational show about reproductive rights issues with games, booths, sculptures, performances, music, video and films by over 45 artists. It was founded by artists in June 1981 in direct response to the Moral Majority's media campaign. The carnival uses visual and performing arts to create more effective participatory political education projects. Nancy Barton, Linda Davenport, April Ford, Sue Frazier, Lupe Garnica, Ame Gilbert, Lyn Hughes*, Sharon Jaddis, Sabrina Jones, Tom Masaryk, Anne Pitrone*, Howard A. Rodman, Karen Ruch, Anton Van Dalen and Gilda Swerman. (*Founders)

In our first year, Carnival Knowledge has, for the first time, organized the New York art community to make artwork specifically about reproductive rights issues; worked directly with political organizations and lobbying groups on an artist-generated project; and established the possibility of an artist-run political project gaining access to museums and other cultural institutions, broadening the base of support for political education.

Anne Pitrone:

- 12/81 "Why have a carnival when you can have a leaflet?"
- 3/82 After driving 5 hours in a 30-foot truck, graciously donated by U-Haul of Brooklyn, we set up the carnival in Binghamton, NY, under the auspices of the Binghamton Women's Coalition. Three AM, I am hanging the 50-foot Carnival Knowledge banner in the balcony of the gym. It's the final touch on a junky, lovable, interesting carnival just about to open eight hours later. Everybody is so tired they can hardly stand up, except for the kids from Chicana Raza and the Medicine Show, who are having a slumber party. I'm looking around at everyone and everything and it occurs to me that I've just discovered why nobody ever does this kind of art work — it's too hard.
- 4/82 Nobody wants to do anything.
- 5/82 Nobody wants to do anything.
- 6/82 We try to do something, but we still don't want to do it. Then someone suggests that we just go to the beach. So that's what we do all summer, with new carnival games and ideas. One difference: everything can be carried in two hands.
- 7/82 Cherry Hill Demonstration. The National Right-to-Life party is having their convention at the Hilton in Cherry Hill, NJ. We decide to take the Senator's Balls. When we get there, before the marchers, there is someone walking on the grounds of the rally situated right in back of the Hilton. She is cursing the ground. We and all the demonstrators are the devil, apparently. I don't feel like the devil. I wish I

was the devil so I could carry this Senator's Balls piece more easily, and drag it over to where it was supposed to be installed, by the lake on the other side of the rally site. We barely make it through the oncoming marchers to set up the piece — the marchers look great. When we set it up finally, people begin to come over; there are various reactions:

- a. a look of disbelief, then hysterical laughter.
- b. squeezing the balls of each senator HARD, then going down the line, while looking at each one in the face with angry eyes.
- c. punching the senators in the face, then pulling their balls off.
- d. gentle ball squeezing; genuine interest in where the senators are from.

Sabrina Jones:

I was trying to keep up my performer's spirit and encourage interaction through eye contact, when a bearded young man came up to me, reached into his shirt, and pulled out a small double-bladed ax on a silver chain. He smiled a knowing smile at me. "So, you're a Minoan?...", I ventured, recognizing the ceremonial weapon found in the Cretan shrines to the goddess whom I was impersonating. He replied that he was not actually a member of the Minoan Sisterhood, since they only accept females in their covens, but he was a witch. We began to discuss the problem of sex role stereotyping in the goddess-worshipping community, which was all very new to me.

My initial interest in the goddess was based on art history and my objections to the patriarchal religions that most of us are raised on. When I decided to recreate her bare-breasted, snake-twirling splendor in glowing satins, it was out of a purely secular desire for a historical figure that would affirm women's right to wear their sexuality with pride and dignity. I was a little surprised to discover that people were still worshipping me, 4000 years later, for exactly the same reason.

Susan Frazier:

First we spread out our towels, put up our umbrella, changed our clothes, and had a little refreshment — cherries, grapes, bananas, fried chicken, hot coffee, salad, bread, cheese, rolls, knishes, soda, and beer. Then we read the Sunday paper, took a swim, took a walk, took a snooze, caught some rays, and discussed a variety of subjects in detail. Then we looked around a little.

After all our eating, walking, and talking we started to ask each other, "Gonna do your art now? How about it?" Rather reluctantly we each got up to do some art. To my great surprise it went as planned, and after an interval a little crowd collected, dis-

cussing the questions about contraception, sterilization abuse, abortion rights, and lesbian liberation which were touched on in the questionnaire we handed out.

Political art on the beach works if done in a light-hearted participatory mode, and is worthwhile for just a few outings, even if we wish we had the resources to make it a seaside institution.

April Ford:

Seventh heaven, the annual Park Slope street fair. We brought our peep show; it has a curtain around it and a hawker who draws you inside where there are two dioramas: one presents a couple in the future when contraceptives, abortion, and daycare have been outlawed. The woman is pregnant and the couple is trying to figure out how they will survive after the woman gives birth. They are scared because they have so few options. The other diorama gives up-to-date information about current anti-abortion, contraception, and other "pro-family" legislation. The third side of the peep show has a peep hole — inside is President Reagan as a pregnant woman with the caption "What if?"

Teenagers and children were very attracted to the peep show — the sandwich board outside advertised: "The Facts of Life," "The Naked Truth," and "Starring Ronald Reagan." A Native American came over with his teenage son and daughter. He went in the peep

show and was incredibly enthusiastic; he insisted his two kids come in, and kept popping his head out of the curtain every ten seconds screaming, "This is great!! You gotta check this out!!"

Carnival Knowledge has a core group or organizing committee of ten people. Up to 50 artists have been involved in the project at one time. Our goals: Education, Entertainment, Empowerment; to work with political groups in developing creative organizing methods; grassroots education about reproductive rights issues; to de-mystify art and artists' lives by doing collaborative work with artists as well as non-artists in a non-gallery environment based on a commonly experienced phenomenon, a carnival; to help artists articulate political ideas through their work; to develop alternative financial structures for supporting artwork; to work with men and children, as well as women.

Carnival Knowledge started because of the political situation in government (the introduction of the Human Life Amendment) as well as in the art system (rigidity of the gallery structure).

Our constituency is everyone; but teenagers and people who belong to political groups seem to respond most positively.

To get in touch with Carnival Knowledge, call (212) 477-5799 or write: 513 East 13th Street, New York, NY 10009.



"Know Your Right-to-Life Senator" by Susan Frazier

photo: Agnes Zellin

No we're not.

U.S. advisers 'fighting' in Salvador

SOME U.S. advisers are reportedly "fighting side by side" with government troops in El Salvador — in clear violation of Reagan Administration rules.

CBS News last night quoted unidentified Salvadoran soldiers as saying American advisers fired mortars against a leftist rebel base Tuesday.

The Salvadoran troops

also said "there are 10 Americans based at the [same government] camp, and they are taking part in combat operations" and carrying M-16 rifles.

Two U.S. advisers wearing combat fatigues were spotted by — and ducked away from — a CBS film crew at the Lempa River camp, about 45 miles from San Salvador, "in an area of

persistent fighting."

The Reagan Administration forbids U.S. advisers in El Salvador from carrying weapons larger than pistols.

Rifles are restricted to quarters — for self-protection — and to automobiles while traveling outside San Salvador.

The guidelines also bar the stationing of advisers anywhere where combat is likely.

Page by Elizabeth Kulas

Church in Nicaragua



Pope John Paul II meeting with the Rev. Ernesto Cardenal, Nicaragua's Minister of Culture, who dropped to his knees before the Pontiff in Managua.

Nu . . . , so,
what else
do you have
to confess?

But popular religious traditions are encouraged by the Revolution. Thus it has become accustomed to "La Purísima," and "La Gritería," which are Marian traditions deeply-rooted in our nation; the Patron festivals, some of which are widely-celebrated, like that of Santo Domingo of Managua and San Jerónimo of Masaya; and Christmas.

Vices that previously were fomented in Patron Festivals by Sombza and his followers, like prostitution, gambling, and drinking, have been prohibited. As a result, the Festivals have been made more sane, more pleasurable, furthermore, more Christian, and fit better with more genuine cultural efforts of our nation.

At our festivals one can sample the many native dishes. The festivals also provide the opportunity to tighten our bonds with each other; to reaffirm the importance of community, as incarnated in a Patron Saint. The festival is like a real utopia where all the needs of the community and of those who pull it together seem for one time to be fulfilled.

To us, culture does not occupy a separate sphere from social development. Furthermore, it is inconceivable to have economic development without cultural development in Nicaragua.

In Solentiname, a group of peasants gathered together with me once a week, bringing their poems. It was a Poetry Workshop. Children came also. One time a ten year old boy brought this brief poem:

*I saw a turtle in the lake.
It was swimming
and I was in a sailboat.*

It seems to me to illustrate nicely that definition of culture proposed by UNESCO: that it is everything that man adds to nature. Appollonia said: When man wanted to move more quickly, he did not create a third foot, he invented the wheel. The boy here had a cultural consciousness: The turtle and I swim in Nicaragua Lake, she swims with her paws, and I go in a boat. I am like the turtle, but I am different from the turtle . . .

—Rev. Ernesto Cardenal, poet and Minister of Culture of the Revolutionary Government of Nicaragua, addressing UNESCO in Paris on April 24, 1982. Originally published in the Nicaraguan cultural weekly *Barricada Cultural* (Ventana); this translation is by Amy Edelman of Berkeley's People's Translation Service. These excerpts are from the seven page version in *Left Curve* #8 (\$4 to Box 674, Oakland, CA 94604).

Art by I.W., E.C., and J.M.

PARTICIPATORY ART

Notes on the "Say Goodbye to Nuclear Weapons" Project at the June 12th Rally

BY DENTURES ART CLUB

As artists committed to progressive change the June 12th Disarmament Rally at Central Park afforded us an opportunity to put into practice certain ideas concerning political art. These centered on the creation of a cultural event utilizing the tremendous numbers of people and large spaces inherent in mass demonstrations. Our method was to structure the event so that it would be carried out by the demonstrators themselves during the Rally, and which would embody the day's political message. In this way we hoped to blur the distinction between artist and non-artist, Rally-participant and Rally-spectator. People acting in concert would make their own visual, dramatic "moment." Art and politics would merge.

1. The "Say Goodbye to Nuclear Weapons" Project

Three thousand 18" silver mylar balloons and fifty giant 3' mylar balloons were imprinted with "Say Goodbye to Nuclear Weapons" on one side and a two-color silkscreen of an atomic blast on the other. The giant balloons were utilized prior to the Rally by teams of volunteers canvassing the South Bronx, Coney Island, Forest Hills and Chinatown, explaining the nuclear disarmament issue and encouraging people to attend the Rally.

The evening before the Rally approximately fifty people assembled at the Delacorte Theatre in Central Park to inflate the small balloons with helium. The next morning they were transported to the Great Lawn and staked in immense anti-nuclear bouquets. Upon the arrival of the marchers from the United Nations they were distributed.

At "...O!" the three thousand balloon-holders let them loose, and as they rose the entire crowd waved and shouted, "good-bye" to nuclear weapons forever.

At the conclusion of the Rally convocation Dr. William Sloane Coffin of Riverside Church, whose aid had been previously enlisted, reminded the crowd of its common purpose and invited everyone to participate in our own kind of countdown — a symbolic countdown to a nuclear arms-free world to be dramatized by the balloons' release. At "...O!" the three thousand balloon-holders let them loose, and as they rose the entire crowd waved and shouted "good-bye" to nuclear weapons forever.

2. Accessibility, Focus, Division of Labor

The Project was conceived and designed to be simple, readily accessible to large numbers of people regardless of ideological differences. Our aim was to tap the Rally's shared psychological and emotional currents, leaving to others the tasks of informing and educating. In this we approached the SGTNW Project in the context of the Rally as a whole. We tried to contribute our special skills as artists, trusting our co-activists in other spheres to do the same.

3. Form/Content

The Project's form was empowering — the event existed and was effective to the extent people participated to make it so. Its meaning resided as much in this aesthetic as in its literal message. Several hundred thousand voices counting down, the balloons' release and the mass "goodbye" as they ascended created a collective "moment" — dramatic, visual and moving — that was both a means towards and expression of the day's politics.

4. Traditional and Emerging Forms

While banners, floats and costumes have long been powerful ways for artists to communicate political messages, the continuing re-definition of art has given rise to new artistic forms and possibilities. By applying some of these to the political arena we hoped to reach people in new ways, making art a more effective tool in the struggle for progressive change. Through their participation we wanted non-artists to understand that art needn't be confronted passively, the reified product of someone else's "inspiration," but is a particular kind of work — relevant, accessible to, and producible by everyone.

5. Conclusion

We found people not only willing but anxious to participate in the SGTNW Project. Among pre-Rally volunteers it was the first political event in which many had engaged, as spectators or otherwise. A significant number expressed interest in working on similar projects, indicating that the experience had provided them a "crack", a small way "in" to both politics and art.

Many factors contribute to the development of political consciousness. Progressive artists can offer a variety of skills in this regard, emerging and traditional. The "Say Goodbye to Nuclear Weapons" Project explored one of them. The Left and its artists must learn to work more closely together to explore many.

photo: Lynn Hughes

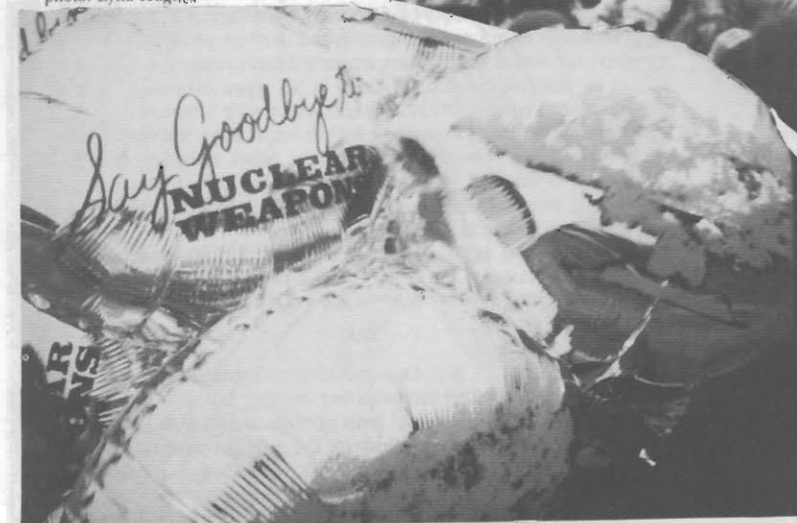


photo: Lisa Cockcroft

photo: Lynn Hughes

Think Globally, Act Locally

NETWORKING IN THE EIGHTIES

In 1982, *Cultural Correspondence* attended the national meetings of three organizations: PADD's "February 26th Movement," a weekend conference in NY timed to coincide with the College Art Association's annual meeting; NAPNOC's "Building Cultural Democracy" conference in Omaha; and the UDC's "Building Democratic Communications" conference in Philadelphia. (All of these organizations are identified below.) CC also belongs to Media Network and the Federation for Progress, works with the New York Marxist School, and supports AIVF and INALSE.

The next issue of *CC* will be a Directory of Arts Activism. See the call for entries on page 96. (Deadline June 1, 1983). *CC* encourages all peace groups, anti-nuclear power groups, and all sorts of grassroots organizations to organize cultural workshops and taskforces. We are available to assist you in many ways; just write us at 505 West End Avenue, NY 10024 or call (212) 420-8196. "We Want To Live!" (see inside front cover) is an excellent introduction to cultural activism.

Very few of the artists, performers and writers in this issue earn their living by doing their own work. CC's larger purpose is to build a national support community for radical cultural workers in all the arts. If you are organizing an event or party or conference or teach-in, why not include some of the talent represented in these pages? You can easily reach all of the people in here through CC.

1. **AIVF:** The Association of Independent Video and Filmmakers, Inc. PUBLISHERS of *The Independent*. A non-profit trade association providing an effective national voice for independent producers. Along with FIVF, (Foundation for Ind. Video and Film, Inc.), provides independent producers with the technical information, trade representation and direct services that they need to stay in business—Group Medical and Life insurance, Festival Bureau, Short Film Distribution, Seminars, Screenings, Info. Clearinghouse, . . . "Independents work independently—outside traditional commercial studio and network TV structures. AIVF works to protect the interests of independents, and to enhance their opportunities to produce films and tapes of quality, character and integrity." AIVF/FIVF, 625 Broadway, 9th Floor, N.Y., NY 10012. (212) 473-3400.
2. **Federation For Progress** is an ongoing, multi-issue coalition of grassroots groups and activists who see the need to bridge the various progressive movements by linking issues in organizing. "We are united in developing a comprehensive people's program, and invite support and participation." The Federation organized an extraordinary conference in NYC last summer to continue the national organizing efforts of multi-racial and multi-ethnic sectors of the peace and jobs with peace movements. They have several regional offices; the national office is 225 Park Avenue South, Rm. 746, N.Y., NY 10003. (212) 228-8011.
3. **INALSE:** Institute of Arts and Letters of El Salvador in Exile. Recently formed to plan a campaign and a series of exhibitions of Salvadoran culture, to help Salvadoran artists and intellectuals in exile in this country and to broaden understanding of the Salvadoran people. Suggestions, contributions, and requests for information should be addressed to the director, Daniel Flores Ascencio; coordinators are now working in the fields of music, theater and letters. INALSE, 249 W. 18th St., N.Y., NY 10011.
4. **MEDIA NETWORK** is a national alliance of organizations, individuals, and media activists that offers a clearing house for information on films, video tapes, and slide shows on a wide range of current issues; guides to media on disarmament and reproductive issues; a report on the creative uses of media for organizing in the peace movement; training, consulting, and other media related programs and services. For membership or other information, write or call: 208 W. 13th St., N.Y., NY 10011. (212) 620-0877.
5. **NYMS:** The New York Marxist School. In addition to classes, mini-courses, and lecture series, the school organizes and welcomes cultural events—including performances in the Brecht Auditorium, visual artwork for display in the lobby, and course proposals in the arts and arts history for the general curriculum. NYMS, 151 W. 19th St., 7th Floor, N.Y., NY 10011. (212) 989-6820.
6. **NAPNOC:** The Neighborhood Arts Programs National Organizing Committee. PUBLISHERS of *Cultural Democracy*. A national alliance of community-based arts programs and activist artists. NAPNOC's members are visual artists, dancers, arts administrators and others involved in community cultural work in all types of settings—urban, suburban, and rural. NAPNOC exists to provide a forum for sharing and exchange among its members and to act as advocate for the movement for cultural democracy. Among its other activities, NAPNOC publishes a newsletter, *Cultural Democracy*, consults with community groups and public agencies and carries out research on neighborhood arts and public cultural policy. C.D. subscriptions are \$15.00/yr. individual; \$25.00/ year Organizational and institutional—it is published 6 times a yr. For further info. on subs and membership: NAPNOC, P.O. Box 11440, Balto., MD. 21239. (301) 323-5006.
7. **P.A.D./D.** (Political Art Documentation/Distribution—An artists' resource and networking organization coming out of and into New York City. PADD's main goal is to provide artists with an organized relationship to society, to demonstrate the political effectiveness of image making, and to provide a framework within which progressive artists can discuss and develop alternatives to the mainstream art system. PADD holds a public forum on visual politics the second Sunday of every month, and holds open meetings on the third Sunday of every month (at the office). PADD has ongoing workshops, open to new membership—the PADD Journal, UPFRONT; Archives; Networking; Public Works; and the study group. Write or call: 339 Lafayette St., N.Y., NY 10012. (212) 420-8196.
8. **UPFRONT** is PADD's excellent newsletter/magazine. The next issue is a double issue and covers the Second Sunday forums on: "Street: An Image Brawl;" "Art of the Darkroom: Cuban Photography;" "Detours, Sharp Turns and Little Naggy Feelings;" (exhibition forum) "Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Native American, Black and White Culture in Search of Cultural Democracy;" and "Displacement/Gen-erification." \$4 for 4 issues, write UPFRONT, c/o PADD, 339 Lafayette Street, N.Y., NY 10012.
9. **UDC:** The Union for Democratic Communications: A national organization of communication researchers, media producers and activists devoted to the critical study of communications issues and policy, production and distribution of alternative media, and the development of democratic communications systems in the U.S. and abroad. Includes individual members, local chapters, regional organizations, and a national steering committee. The national organization works to facilitate communication among regions, local chapters and individual members. UDC held the first national conference on critical communications in Philadelphia in November, '82; it was titled "Building Democratic Communications." For further info.: Karen Paulsell, UDC, NYC/TITP, 725 Broadway, 4th floor, N.Y., NY 10003. (212) 598-4338.

SPECIAL SECTION

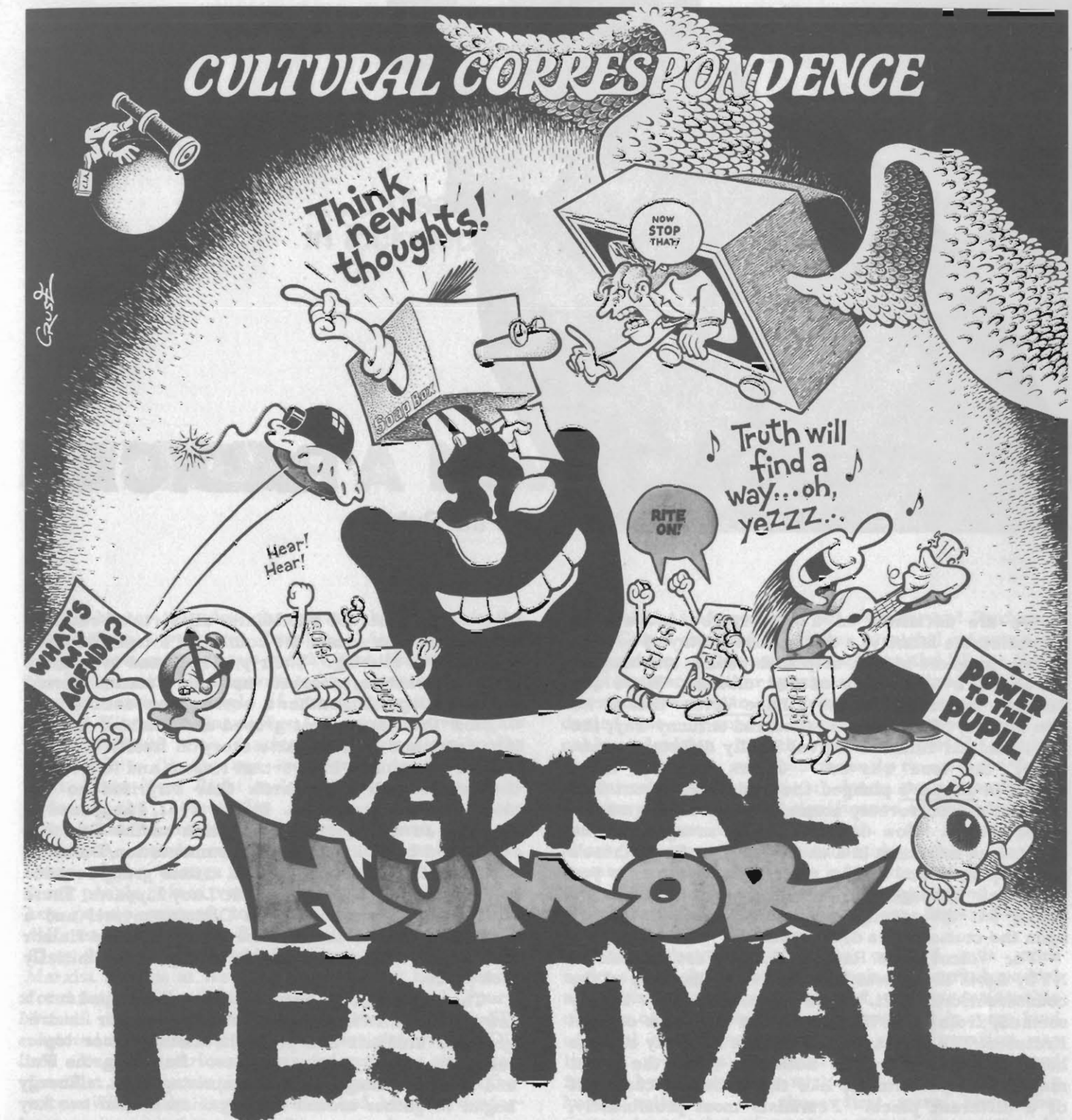




photo: Agnes Zelin

RADICAL

By Paul Buhle

We are definitely at a new stage of...well, an unpredictable hilarity, a disorganized army of revolutionary laughers in lock-step with peace- and hunger-marchers, a bandwagon of red clowns. When Jan Hoffman announced in the *Village Voice* "that in its own fragile, often wrong headed and unfunny way, the First Radical Humor Festival finally did start something," the tone was set. James Wolcott's snide attack in *Harper's* plunged the infant movement into the sort of controversy normally reserved for media-hyped events. How delightful to be savaged as "the disinterred mummies in a cheapie horror film...there's no escaping them, they're relentless, they pursue you with their bandaged outstretched hands..."! What is humor but the revenge of the Repressed in History upon the connoisseurs of repression?

For Wolcott, the Radical Humor Festival held at NYU, April 22-24, was "the last wheezing gasp of the countercultural left." So it might have rightly seemed, from time to time to the observers of Paul Krassner, Tuli Kupferberg, Florence Kennedy and the host of other erstwhile notables. But the great majority of performers, like the audience, came out of a different place. Feminists most prominently, amateur and local club artists from just about every social stratum, cartoonists from Europe, Latin America, US and Canada displaying their work together after decades of scattered work, video freaks, radical

illusionists, postcard publishers, all sorts of remarkable people who sensed the coming of a fresh impulse, a collective stirring. Their presence and even more their interaction, marked not the "sixties rerun" Wolcott alleges but rather a working convention.

How the Humor Fest groped and fumbled its way into existence is a valuable story in itself. The experience combined inadvertant lessons and immediate enthusiasm into a synthesis that surprised no one more than the organizers. In May 1981, I happened to be going to the Spring Mobilization on the Soho bus dominated by Political Arts Documentation/Distribution (PADD), a feminist-radical artists' group founded by Jerry Kearns and noted critic Lucy Lippard. There on the bus, between Bertell Ollman, myself and a handful of others, the idea for a Marxism and Humor (dull title!) Conference the following Spring initially took place.

The project could very well have developed into a low-profile mental exercise. A few dozen or hundred graduate students and profs discussing humor topics seriously around seminar tables. But over the Fall and Winter, things took a surprising turn. Energy began to gather around the organizers from two key sources: performers who wanted stage time; and technicians either training themselves or already experienced and seeking some radical outlet. I don't want to minimize the problems of actual organization

HUMOR: A New Movement

— the bigger the idea, the greater headaches is the appropriate low-budget formula. As usual, a few people took an enormous weight upon themselves. In the last weeks of preparation the planners also had another shining example of humor agitation fresh at hand. "Carnival Knowledge," a reproductive rights street festival with fascinating/informative booths and exhibits (in the one transferred to the Humor Fest, Know Your Right to Life Senator, the passerby squeezes the testicles of the politician to see what state he comes from), entertainment, food and agitation, crowds engaged as directly as possible. Some of the energy spilled over while varieties of fresh people joined various committees. Meanwhile, key people seemed to represent whole ranges of different experience: Bertell Ollman, inventor of the Class Struggle Game and factotum of the Center for Marxist Studies at New York University; Bob Carroll, formulator of the Salmon Show, eco-political "Fourth World" New Age radical; Jim Murray, once-SDS regional traveler, in recent days activist with PADD; and along with various artists and graduate students a feminist cadre, notably theatre person Phyllis Lefkowitz. Willy-nilly, the main idea had become Performance.

In this light, the opening session had a curious significance. For Robin Tyler, Paul Krassner and Flo Kennedy — arguably the humor personalities of the

Left (Abbie Hoffman was out of town and Professor Irwin Corey declined to appear at night) — came on very serious. Tyler had been touring the US for NAM chapters among other sponsors, determined to find an alternative route to the commercial avenues mostly denied her. Kennedy stressed the importance of cable television for the political period opening ahead. Krassner, who had recently re-emerged from a semi-retirement to do club dates, mused the legacy of Lenny Bruce and the significance of comedy when the outrageous ceases to shock. All three talked about the necessity for something which, to my memory, no one raised even in the utopian days of the sixties, a radical humor movement united in its attack upon society's ills and its imperative of autonomy within the larger Left.

Could that movement be created with more serious talk about humor? Panels and workshops had a special importance for that not inconsiderable number of attendees who were engaged in some kind of local humor practice. Lots of information was traded, problems technical and political discussed frankly by professionals with their critics (who isn't a humor critic?). On these first warm Manhattan Spring days, a lot of meetings turned up empty. At others, panelists had not been able to formulate the questions, couldn't quite figure out why they were in the same room together. Then again, not every

... a disorganized army of revolutionary laughers in lockstep with peace and hunger marchers ...

Marxist meeting has sometimes-nude-cellist Charlotte Moorman crawling around on the floor, Barbara Ehrenrich giving off punchlines like a seasoned club entertainer, Jules Feiffer exchanging quips with underground comic artists. If all the talk became a side-show, it was perhaps because the feature performances were destined to be spectacularly good or bad.

The difficulties of Performance Night have been analyzed and mocked in *The Guardian*, *The Voice* and *Harper's* so thoroughly that only a few misunderstood elements remain to be elucidated. The crowd of some 900, brought in by notices in *The Voice* and the *New York Times* as well as our own publicity, had that heterogeneity we are all hoping to find in a rejuvenated Left. Lots of real veterans, labor activists, ex-CPers, grizzled Trotskyists mixed with the young generation of college kids and your functional post-New Left couple who had gotten a babysitter for the night. They were a hopeful group in all, sensing (as a number said to me) that something historic was about to take place and glad they were on hand to see for themselves. Among the problems they rapidly discovered lay technical flaws which symptomized deep political ambiguities. The show required a producer, a manifestation of collective discipline, pace, rapport with the audience to be strived after and reached upon some new ground. Instead, individual performers and the M.C. innocently conducted themselves as individuals within an artificial whole, adding contradiction upon contradiction. Virtually every performer ran too long for the strength of the material. *Variety* says that stand-up routines should about 12 minutes and be separated by music, dance, anything. The cerebral prejudice of the Left brought one comic after another; worse, almost without exception each seized the moment — probably for a long-awaited chance at a good-sized audience — and ran it to a half-hour or so. The two feminist comics who stayed on schedule — Joy Behar and Taffy Jaffe — were arguably the best performers in the show. Don't Richard Pryor and Lily Tomlin and Robert Klein go on for an hour? Sure. Their material is super-polished. And more important, the audience knows what to expect, even how to get past the rough spots. That mood has to be established, and the big-scale forum is not the place for easy experimentation.

Thus the rampant misunderstanding between Spiderwoman, a Native American women's theatre group long established in Off-Broadway, and the audience. The performance was pure Third World confrontation, a stylized piece from the early 1970s. The ethnic jokes don't go down so good anymore under Reaganism; and anyway we had grown tired of the style long before. Ironically, within weeks Spiderwoman would perform Chekhov to rave reviews. Here, they had found just the wrong thing to do at the right time. Audience restlessness passed into revolt. The feelings of expectation dwindled back toward the idea of radical humor and of a premier Left laughter's night.

Nevertheless, there were many charming mo-

ments. The exuberant childishness of an a capella Tuli Kupferberg knocking out his satirical songs; Steve Ben-Israel's verbal sound-effects, amplified version of the bomb noises little boys make in mock battles, had a similar innocent originality; even when the shtick of Behar and Jaffe came down to the old ethnic variants of neighborhood growing-up jokes — nothing inherently radical — the honesty of autobiographical expression bespoke some grasping toward a new comic principle. At their best moments, Robin Tyler, Paul Krassner and a dozen others seemed to be addressing members of an extended family, getting off not cheap-laugh one-liners but a critique whose manifest irony did not diminish political determination. The intermingling of technicians, performers and audience earlier that day and the next reinforced the sense of process which has been the New Left and Women's Movement's greatest contribution. Not since the days of the ethnic theatrical and choral movements, when the number of actual relatives and life-long friends of the performers counted among a majority of the audience, had the intimacy in a large-scale Left event been so evident.

The failure of Performance Night was, finally, that the organizers had not figured out what to do with the sense of support and anticipation that flowed from the listeners. Many people went away with a curious attitude — they had been by turns interested, bored, at last intolerably restive and worn out. But they felt part, even an antagonistic part, of some ongoing larger development. Not a normal reaction to entertainment, by any standard. We live in strange, expectant times.

The next day more than saved the Festival. The cabaret, "Club Rockefeller," put the event over the top. Barbara Kopit and Barbara George, activists in the ostensibly apolitical but looney Halloween Parade which crosses the Village each year, had led a committee to sniff out and invite talent in a more informal setting. Meanwhile Lucy Lippard directed a PADD crew hanging the Art Show in a makeshift gallery at the Loeb Student Center. The show (described in the *Voice* as having "practically bristled" off the walls — yet curiously ignored in other accounts) comprised a potpourri of cartoons, paintings and art objects, perhaps half gathered from West Coast, European and Latin American sources on the basis of a Humor Manifesto artists signed a couple years ago in *Cultural Correspondence*, the other half from artists in the New York area. In this space, Vangelis Pavlidis, the leading Greek political artist (and

Bottom row left: Steve Ben Israel, the Lenny of the 80's; right: Tuli's work the streets workshop; middle row: Art Spiegelman and Jules Feiffer at cartoonists' party; right: Spiderwoman Theater's unforgettable performance; top: Bob Carroll, another species.

photos: Mel Rosenthal

member of the ruling Socialist Party) had his work exhibited along with Mexico's famous Rius, Italy's Lido Contemori (editor of a suppressed satirical magazine, *Ca Balla*), Quebecoise feminist Mira Farladeau, New York photographer Laura Pettibone (who worked with the film *Missing*) and literally hundreds of others. In the midst of this, a makeshift stage served the Club Rockefeller, while a sandwich bar let the milling crowd munch and drink. The action began at noon, and already people were ready for a truly affable occasion.





Eight hours of entertainment followed. If Jan Hoffman considered the performance a "plucky success" and Wolcott wrote it off as a succession of "amateurs and deadbeats," the dynamic clearly lay in the eye of the beholder. Las Vegas it definitely wasn't. But most of the watchers seemed to get a kick out of the very unevenness. The older men and women who had done small-time, unpaid or hardly-paid gigs in the Borsht Belt, told their jokes or sang their left-wing songs from the 1940s-50s. The youngsters just launching their careers with every conceivable talent from theatre to dance to wild costuming. Characteristic in one way was the Lesbian group Women's One World, operators of their own coffee shop in New York. They knew already what it was to have a supportive crowd, the give-and-take of an eighties political-cultural format, but here they tried out a new constituency. Paul Zaloom's takeoff on civil defense programs captured the insanity of the times: we barely need to exaggerate. Magicians, poets, singers — the lot showed how much energy is bursting out, ready to be put to radical use, or rather how much radical energy is waiting for the opportunity to shift the consciousness of what "Left" means. Once more, process; and once more, the lessons of the New Left and of Feminism carried over into new ties, updated to the depth and complexity that the former movements lacked the time to develop.

Then again, some of the high energy events took place off to the side, to every side, away from featured performances. The "Media Lounge" showed twelve hours of video comedy on a couple sets. Groups ranging from the Chicago Comic Book people (producers of the *Shrinking American Dream*) to the RCP (we should have demanded to see their humor publications before we took their registration money for a table) carried on animated conversation with the steady stream of registrars. Preoccupied with selling tickets and art catalogues, I heard about work in Philadelphia, Minneapolis, Quebec City and a multitude of closer points. There was no end to disagreements. But at last all of us had been able to find some place in the Left where we didn't have to be embarrassed or taciturn about our own sense of humor.

When the smoke cleared, that was the main result. No wonder the highbrow culture critics missed the point. As Jim Murray, perhaps the hardest-working organizer, aptly put it, the Festival had placed its aspirations much further forward than it could possibly fulfill. And yet in so doing it conveyed something important. Its desperate sincerity captured great feeling from many of the approximately 2500 who stopped by. To have expected more, the first time out, was utopian.

Immediately after, a core group of organizers and participants came together to carry on the work. The cabaret had to continue. And most especially from the viewpoint of performers and technicians, the development of theory in the broadest sense — history, criticism, interpretation — had to come alongside the moment of performance. The new group could have called itself any number of possible names, but the "Radical Humor Union" seemed to resonate with the proper spirit. Their newsletter, *RHUbarr*, evokes visions of old Ebbets Field (the "rhubarb patch") populism and barbed wire wits on the Left. While the Art show set out arrangements for Seattle, Berkeley and other local stops, the RHU New Yorkers began working on the Permanent Cabaret.

What does it mean anyway? Could technique be brought into line with enthusiasm by some managerial expertise, or would audiences somehow begin to share more in the creation of humor? Were "Art Shows" viable or too locked into fixed space? Would the new talent flow over into cable and/or establish itself in some localistic, semi-coordinated fashion across the country?

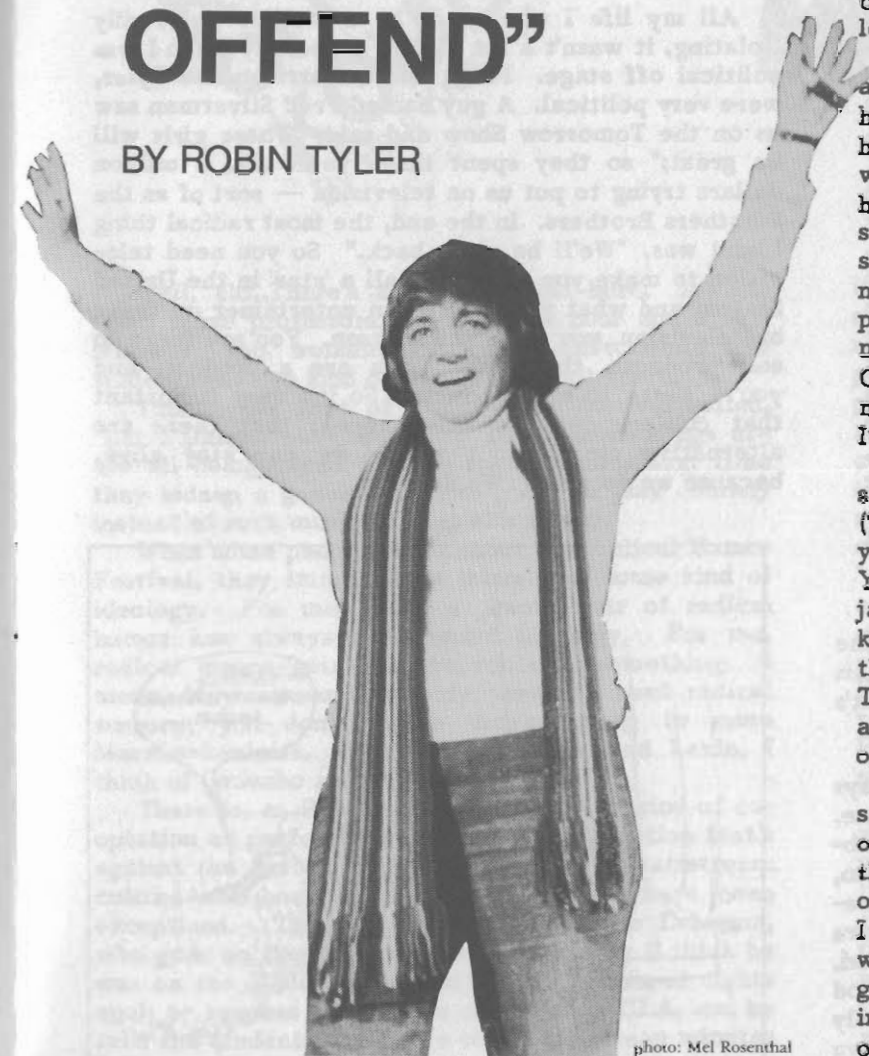
We are a little too close to judge. In one way the Festival struggled to be a vindication of that which we rightly treasure from the New Left. "In the 1960s," groans Wolcott, "left-wing visionaries, confronted by what they considered to be frivolous expressions of mirth, would fix their adversary with a look of disdain and unleash that deathly quotation from Bertolt Brecht: 'He who laughs has not heard the terrible news.'" I wonder where he was, anyway? My memory is of local visionaries running off leaflets half-stoned and giggling, of hawking underground newspapers with more comix and poetry than news analysis, of generating new gags almost daily from the hypocrisy expressed by the government, university administration and official culture critics. The sourpuss ideologues were a small and unimportant sub-culture until the contradictions rent the New Left; they mostly picked the corpse clean. On the other hand, Abbie Hoffman, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Flo Kennedy, Gilbert Shelton and a multitude of others were really *funny*. If their (and other) humor does not extend mechanically from era to era, the verve, the energy, the lessons positive and negative need to be taken up again and examined. Otherwise we capitulate to the mythicization of the sixties, Mork from Ork trapped in an alien time-zone, flower-child irrelevance for the Hard Questions of Life.

Second, the Festival sought to get beyond that experience, smack dab into the eighties. That was still more difficult, because a partially resurgent Left is only now locating its bearings. The very presence of the Festival made a statement, perhaps nailed down the role that humor might play in every aspect of our political life. If so, the accomplishment cuts both ways. A Left which can accept the humorists on more than a utilitarian ("they get the crowds") basis, more than a New Left do-your-own-thing basis, is a Left that has taken steps forward toward its own wisdom and maturity.

The Radical Humor Festival opened Thursday evening April 22, 1982 with a panel called "Radical Humor: What are the Questions?" Danitra Vance started things off with a hilarious stand-up comic performance. Robin Tyler, Paul Krassner, and Flo Kennedy entertained the crowd, after Paul Buhle delivered the Prolegomena, which follows, revised, as "Humor's Magic History."

"IT'S MY DUTY TO OFFEND"

BY ROBIN TYLER



They compare me to Lenny Bruce because I am probably as offensive today as he was to the general public when he began. I'm glad. I think it's my duty to offend. I usually end my act with, "if I offended anybody, you needed it."

I must mention that Sally Marr, Lenny's mother, was a stand-up comic. He got a lot of his ideals from her. When they went to do the movie, they would not cast her as his mother, because they said she didn't look the role. So much for Hollywood.

There is actually a big difference between Lenny and myself. Lenny was in the Merchant Marines, and he really came out believing in the system. You know he was not arrested for saying "cocksucker"; what he was arrested for was his stand on racism and some of his political stands. Still he really believed that the system would vindicate him. He became disillusioned. But you see, I have no illusions at all. I do not believe in the system, so I'm coming from a perspective of where anything goes; and if they get me, I'm not going to feel that if I go to the Supreme Court they're going to vindicate me. So it's just a matter of racing for time — and it feels fine to me. It's wonderful. I'm free.

By the way, you know you feel real intellectual standing in a University. They give you a podium. (To Paul Buhle:) I was real impressed with some of your words — pay attention here; I watched you. You were very good. You look good; you wear the jacket with the patches on the sleeve — already I knew, intellectual. You see corduroy, right away you think, "smart." You know, glasses and everything. That's O.K., women — we've been listening to tits and ass jokes for fifty years, we do a couple of jokes on guys, it's fair.

So they put you behind a podium and you feel real smart. I was thrown out of high school in 1958. I organized the first student strike in Canada. I wasn't that educated; I didn't know anything about Marxism or anything. It wasn't even until about four years ago I found out what imperialism was; I always thought it was a margarine. The left has to use easier words to get to people like me. You feel real intelligent here in NYU, with your podium, and people take pictures of you, and record you; but I really know I'm lucky,

photo: Mel Rosenthal

I've never had access to big words, so I know my guts are right. I can just sort of flow from my guts and know that they're right. Everybody thought I was very sophisticated politically. I bring this up so you don't think there's some kind of superior education you need to be right — or left. You just have to know the truth, and get in touch with your guts.

There is a very good play called *The Comedians*, by Trevor Griffiths. How many of you are familiar with it? He's a playwright out of England. Excuse the sexist language in this, women. You'll notice I never use the word "girls"; a friend of mine had a baby, I sent her a telegram, "congratulations on your bouncing baby woman." I don't fuck up when there's feminists around. Anyway, in this play a teacher with tremendous political awareness is teaching eight young male comedians how to be stand-up comics. One shows great promise; he is political — originally political — and he has a lot of heart. He gets up and tells a joke — a sexist joke. And the student says to the teacher, in effect, "Well, so what? After all it's just a joke. Why not? So what? I did a little throw-away joke." And the teacher, Waters, says to him something that's very important, that sums it up:

It's not the jokes. It's not the jokes. It's what lies behind 'em. It's the attitude. A real comedian — that's a daring man. He dares to see what his listeners shy away from, fear to express. And what he sees is a sort of truth, about people, about their situation, about what hurts or terrifies them, about what's hard, above all, about what they want. A joke releases the tension, says the unsayable, any joke pretty well. But a true joke, a comedian's joke, has to do more than release tension, it has to liberate the will and the desire, it has to change the situation. There's very little won't take a joke. But when a joke bases itself upon a distortion — a 'stereotype' perhaps — and gives the lie to the truth so as to win a laugh and stay in favour, we've moved away from a comic art and into the world of 'entertainment' and slick success. You're better than that, damn you. And even if you're not, you should bloody well want to be.

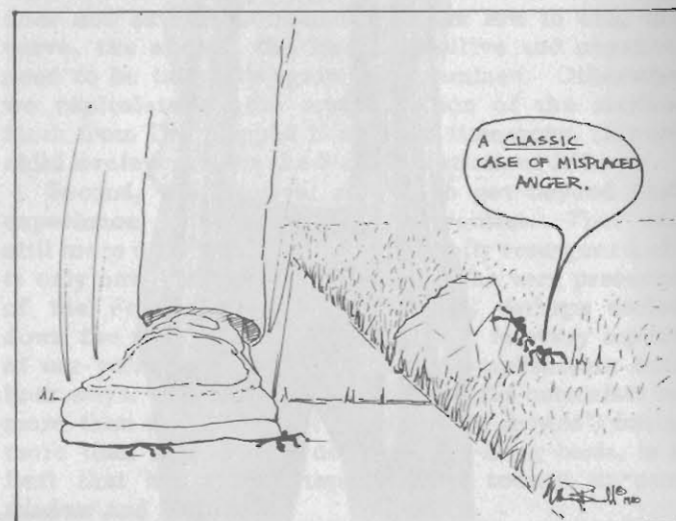
Heavy, isn't it? I wish I had written it. Oh, by the way, I'd like to thank the organizers for arranging this very important historical conference; I think it's absolutely phenomenal that you pulled it together.

You know, the whole history of comedy has always been political, and right now you are looking at me, who has been on television and done a lot of establishment things. I had Donny Osmond's dressing room, I starred on the Croft comedy hour, I was the fore-runner of the show that is now called the Barbara Mandrell show, I was the star. I quickly understood, without anybody telling me, that I was a fast-food product. That in comedy today you are corporately controlled. You do not have control over your own

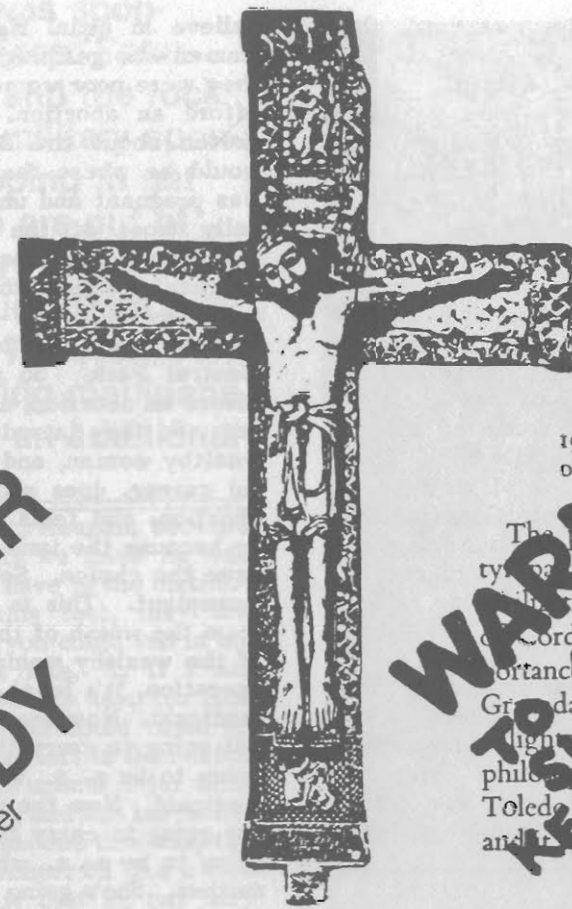
material. You want to get on television, and you want to do your three minute shot on Johnny Carson; well you can be a little topical, but that's real different from being political. They use you up.

Freddy Prinz was a friend of mine, a brilliant young comic, and Freddy had to do "Chico." He would cry in his dressing room and say, "this is not my material." Which it wasn't, because he was pretty political. And yet, they put you on these sit-coms — Freddy Prinz, Red Foxx, the people I know that have been really brilliant — and you have to go and literally prostitute yourself in front of millions of people in exchange for this thing they call stardom. And, you know, we are like cars. It behooves them to be able to have us wear out in three or four years, just like an automobile or something, because then they can replace us, and we don't have a sense of our power. We can do a sit-com for five years, and then we're out. There is no sustaining art form in establishment show business today. So this great elusive thing called stardom means what you get is to be famous, for a few years; and then if you're knocked off television, basically there aren't that many places to work.

All my life I wanted to be a star; it was really isolating, it wasn't a lot of fun, especially when I was political off stage. Patty and I, Harrison and Tyler, were very political. A guy named Fred Silverman saw us on the Tomorrow Show and said, "These girls will be great;" so they spent three years and a million dollars trying to put us on television — sort of as the Smothers Brothers. In the end, the most radical thing I said was, "We'll be right back." So you need television to make you what we call a 'star' in the United States; and what you are, as an entertainer up there on television, you are a salesperson. You are there to sell products, that's all. You are a product, and you're there to sell products. So it's very important that conferences like this happen; that there are alternative circuits out where we can stay alive, because we do exist. We do exist.



KRASSNER
ON
KOMEDY
By Paul Krassner



197 Christ the Cross carved in ivory for the Cathedral of León, Castile about 1063

The presence of such a cross in a Hispano-Arab town at Mérida, a reminder of the Christianisation sponsored by the Islamic dynasty of Cordoba by the Berbers in the early eleventh century, is a testament to the importance of the cross in the early Christian era. The cross of Toledo, Badajoz, V. Granada and Seville cannot be sufficiently stressed and an avid patronage. Poets, philosophers, scientists teemed at the court of Toledo and gradually became the centre of Muslim culture and maintained its position after the Christian conquest.

WARNING
TO AVOID
KEEP OUT OF REACH
OF CHILDREN

Well, ah...There's a urinal behind here. It's for when those professors deliver those hour and a half lectures, you wonder why they don't...while the students have to kind of wiggle and wait there.

This is the first of a three day festival called, "Let Falkland be Falkland." These proceedings are all being taped for the Red Brigade; next time they kidnap a general, they're going to play comedy instead of rock music to keep him there.

When some people heard about the Radical Humor Festival, they immediately thought of some kind of ideology. For me, being a practitioner of radical humor has always transcended ideology. For me, radical means going to the roots of something. I mean, if you hear somebody say they need radical surgery, you don't figure they're going to some Marxist-Leninist. When I hear Marx and Lenin, I think of Groucho and John.

There is, as Robin was pointing out, a kind of co-optation of performers who show any direction that's against the grain. They go through the mainstream culture and become assimilated. There have been exceptions. There's one comedian, Tom Driessen, who goes on the Carson show occasionally (I think he was on the Dave Letterman show a couple of nights ago); he teaches a course in comedy at UCLA, and he tells the students to be sure to get five clean minutes

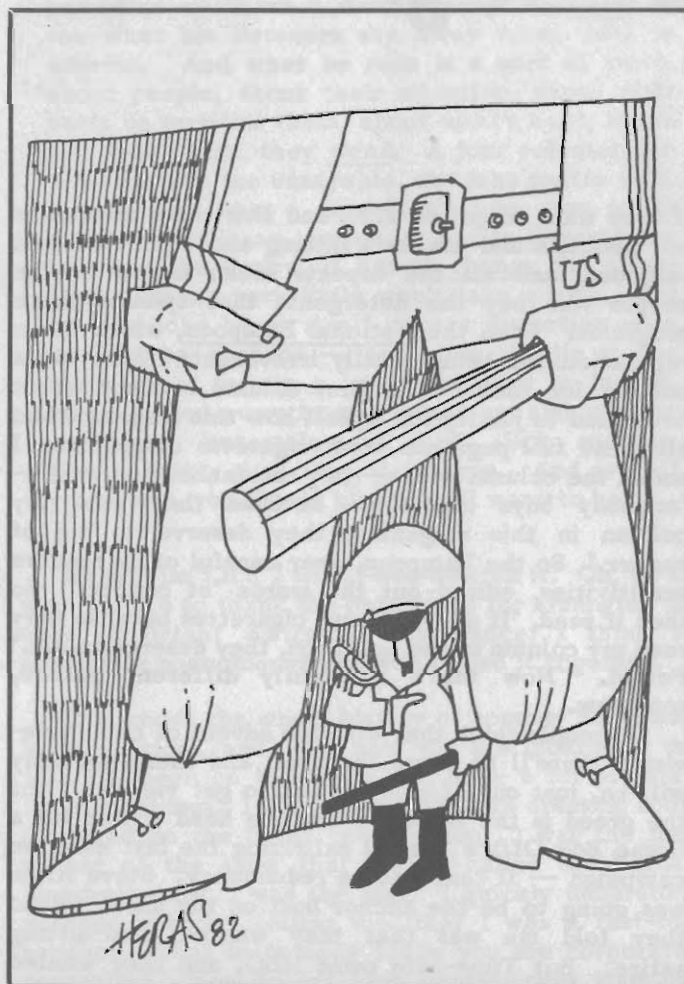
if they want to get on T.V., and five clean minutes is not just tits and ass, he's talking about political and religious, and all the aspects clean means to the people who buy the detergents that sponsor those programs. Even the *National Lampoon*, which has a reputation for being totally irreverent; I once did a column for them. The first column I talked about how I had to justify for myself how this magazine had all these full page ads from cigarette companies. I ended the column with — (my rationalization was) — "anybody buys cigarettes because they read my column in this magazine, they deserve to die of cancer." So the *Lampoon*, ever careful of its readers sensitivities, edited out the words "of cancer." So then it read, "if anybody buys cigarettes because they read my column in the *Lampoon*, they deserve to die." Period. Now that's a slightly different nuance, somehow.

So people think that with the advent of cable television there'll be more freedom, and there probably will be, just out of competition to get viewers. But the greed is the same. I was the head writer for a Home Box Office special satirizing the last election campaign — if that's not a redundancy. Steve Allen was going to be the anchor host on the show. What they told me was that they wanted hard-hitting satire. But Time-Life owns HBO, and they wanted

kind of frothy stuff, T.V. shtick, because that's what people were used to. So what it means is that commercial television wants to get a lot of numbers of people watching, so that they can then get more money from sponsors; cable T.V. wants to get a lot of numbers of people watching so that they can then get more money from subscriptions. It's just a different door for the greed to come through.

One of the first things we did on the presentation was — we wanted to have — since all three candidates were born-again, it was no longer the lesser of two evils, it was the least of three sinners that we were getting. Incidentally, Bob Dylan is going back to Judaism, I hear. He's now at a half-way house for secular humanism. He recorded some of his old songs, though, before he converts totally back. So he now has, "Pray, Lady, Pray;" and one of his favorite songs is, "It's All Right, Ma, I'm Only Genuflectin';" and the ever popular, "Something Is Happening and You Don't Know What It Is, Mr. Jew." Incidentally, the chorale group from the Jewish Defense League will be here later on to sing, "I'll Never Say 'Never Again' Again."

So — on this HBO show. This was around the time that the Hyde Amendment had been upheld by the Supreme Court, which meant that poor women could not get an abortion paid for by medicaid; which discriminated against them on two counts; one is that they were women, because even though we may



believe in equal rights, nature doesn't, so it's the women who get pregnant; and then the other was that they were poor women, because wealthy women could afford an abortion. So I was going to write this sketch about the Big Sister abortion clinic. This would be where there would be a teenage girl who was pregnant and unmarried, in that order. Statistically most of the women who get pregnant are teenagers. And she couldn't afford it; and she got pregnant because she was using the rhythm method and they only had a 1978 calendar. Her younger brother was out playing with her diaphragm in Central Park. So she got pregnant, but she can't afford an abortion, and she's not ready to be a mother yet. So they introduce her to a big sister, who is a wealthy woman, and is married, has a job, a successful career, does social work, but has never had an abortion, and feels unfulfilled as a liberated woman — because the issue is choice, and she just wants to have the choice. So what they arrange for is a fetal transplant. This is where the fetus is transplanted from the womb of the poor teenage girl, to the womb of the wealthy woman. Now this is a perfectly safe operation, it's legal, and, best of all, it's paid for by medicaid. Now the wealthy woman, the big sister, is not going to carry this pregnancy to term. She's not going to be a...a...what do you call it — a surrogate medicaid. Now the wealthy woman, the big sister, is not going to carry this pregnancy to term. She's not going to be a...a...what do you call it — a surrogate mother. She's going to — as soon as the scars from the fetal transplant heal — she's going to get an abortion. After all, she can afford it, it's legal, she's not violating any laws; the younger girl doesn't have to carry the pregnancy. So everybody's happy; no laws are broken. For some reason, Steve Allen said he didn't want to introduce a sketch like this. He sent us a long memo saying that, "even though I've written a long book that says that satire is tragedy plus time, nevertheless, there are certain issues that are really too tenuous to air on television, and hard to make fun of; and I don't want any humor about killing, even when it's justified." So I said, "Oh, that's a pretty funny line, let's put it in the sketch."

So there was one sketch after another. I had a debate between the old John Anderson and the new John Anderson, and they didn't want to do that. We had a sketch on the Secret Service. Any line from the original sketch, because it goes through the egos and creative direction of the actors and the other writers, and the producer, and the people who flew into L.A. from New York — even the cue card people would add a few little things of their own — things get cut and it goes through several filters and gets totally homogenized, and it's nothing like what originally went in. So the Secret Service sketch, which took place at a Secret Service bar, where all the agents hang out — and they're like Rodney Dangerfield, you know, "Boy, I get nervous guardin' the President, don't you?" "Yeah." How'd you like to guard Reagan when his Vice President is the former head of the CIA? It's not a very secure feeling. So...I don't believe, by the way, that it was ever fair to say

The Forty-Niners game was sponsored by the armed services: *Saturday Night Live*, *Fridays*, and the rock concerts on TV all have military sponsors, because they're hoping to get these young people who are out of work and stoned and very suggestible to join up for an adventure. Then they leak all these stories to *The New York Times* that they're smoking marijuana in the service, so that is an additional incentive.

that he should take a senility test, Reagan, because the moment he agreed to take it, we knew he was senile. That's the first thing they have in the instructions, "If they agree to take this test, they are senile." I mean, there were hints, you could tell in his speeches. He would say things like, "I, if I am elected, will eliminate the inheritance tax, for rich and poor alike." Only a senile mind could come up with that. So the one line that was left in the sketch was, at the bar, the Secret Service agents order their drinks through little walkie-talkies, and the bartender answers with a walkie-talkie; so this one line was, the Secret Service agent says, "Bartender, I'd like a Lee Harvey Wallbanger." So they left that in, but they left the next line out, which was the response, "Yes sir, will that be one shot or two?"

Robin, you're in good company. You know how many comedians have been talked about as a successor to Lenny Bruce? You are the first woman, so that's a first. But the irony of it is that Lenny used to wonder when writers would say somebody was "very Chaplinesque," because it was shorthand, because then they wouldn't have to describe the performer, they would just know that people would have the reference to Charlie Chaplin. It's kind of comic irony that now everything should be "Brucean."

Anyway, there's the concept of repressive tolerance; you now, like when Richard Pryor gets on a show and says something with some life to it, it's repressive tolerance because a lot of these shows are still sponsored by the military. The Forty-Niners game was sponsored by the armed services; *Saturday Night Live*, *Fridays*, and the rock concerts on T.V. all have military sponsors, because they're hoping to get these young people who are out of work and stoned and very suggestible to join up for an adventure. Then they leak these stories to the *New York Times* that they're smoking marijuana in the service, so that it's an additional incentive. Meanwhile, the people who want to outlaw paraphernalia are going after dollar bills now, because they're used with cocaine. They're also trying to get cow dung, because it's used to grow mushrooms in. They have a big room that's full of the evidence file of cow dung, and the lowest person on the totem pole in the police department gets to guard that evidence file.



My personal standard for humor has been, no matter how controversial it gets, to try not to have the victim be the target of the humor. So as I've gotten more conscious over the years, I've realized that in some humor I've done in the past, the victim was the target of the humor. The example that comes to mind is when I was living in New York and I was an unofficial abortion referral counselor, til it became legal (then my work was done, I had to give up my practice); I was brought before two District Attorneys, one was...What was his name, Flo, Burton?

"Yeah. He's a judge now, actually."

Oh he is? Flo and I refused to shake hands with him. Flo said, "You're just trying to be the first Jewish governor." But he made judge. What year was that, do you remember?

"Oh honey, I'm so old, I don't, but I think..."

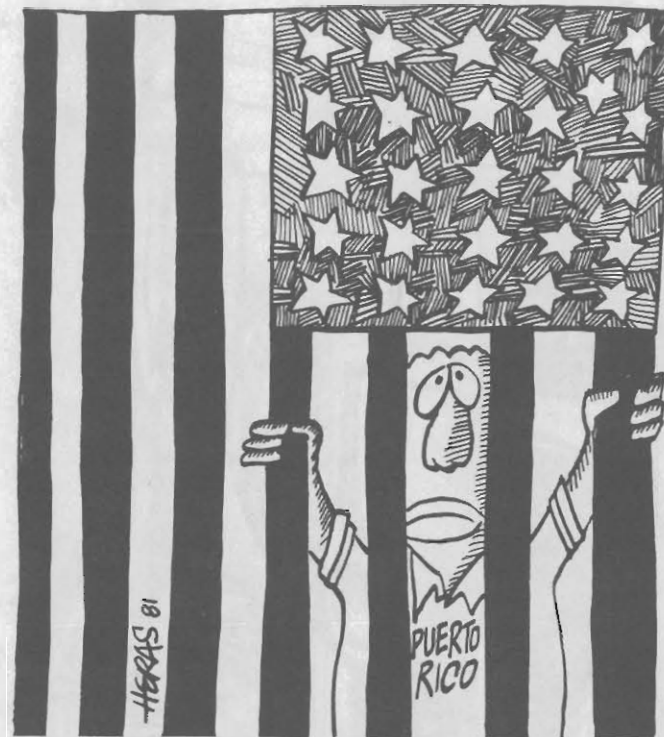
What decade?

"I think it was around '70."

I think it was around '70 too. Something like 1970. Yeah, but you don't want to be an agist about yourself. That's why I try not to make Reagan agist jokes.



The nineteenth century Puerto Rican artist, Oller, was a friend of the Impressionists Pissarro and Cezanne. In his "Velorio," a wake celebrating the death of an infant—in both Christian and Taino beliefs an occasion for joy rather than sorrow—there is a transformation of Courbet's "Funeral at Ornans" into an examination of social diversity and unity within Puerto Rico. Jorge Soto Sanchez, the New York born Puerto Rican artist, continues this transformation in the crucible of the East Harlem ghetto.



But if you want to hear one that I wouldn't make, I'll tell you. I just have this image of Reagan making love with Katherine Hepburn, and they just kind of stand there shaking... But he's worried, too, because every time he gets an erection, Nancy thinks that it's rigormortis setting in, by the installment plan.

Now, the most notorious thing I did in sixteen years of publishing was called "The Parts Left Out of the Kennedy Book." This was rather disgusting, so as I sum it up now, if you get disgusted easily, you can put your fingers in your ears, and I'll just signal you when it's over; 'cause then you can't blame me if you get disgusted. When William Manchester's book came out, The Death of a President, Jackie Kennedy was trying very hard to have it censored, and everybody was wondering, what does she want to have left out of this book? Everybody was wondering, and I tried to get it from my sources in the publishing industry and couldn't, so I did the second best thing — I wrote it myself.

I started with the total truth, and then after layer upon layer of ripping off verisimilitude, it finally got to the core. I mean, it started off with the fact that Lyndon Johnson had called Jack Kennedy's father, Joseph Kennedy, when he was ambassador to England, a Nazi sympathizer. This was true, he did call him that. Yet Kennedy took on Johnson as his vice-presidential running mate, because that was the pragmatism of party politics. So I started off with that and talked about it, and it worked because of the personalities of Jack Kennedy, as a known philanthropist, and Lyndon Johnson, as a crude psychopath. I'm not judging, you understand; just describing.

Then I led up to this climactic scene on the plane, Air Force 1, flying the corpse of Kennedy back from Dallas to Bethesda Hospital in Maryland; a scene where Jackie Kennedy tells William Manchester how in the back of the plane she saw Lyndon Johnson leaning over the casket, and chuckling to himself, and moving his body in a strange, rhythmic way. At first she thought it was some Mexican rite that he had learned teaching children in Yucatan; but then she suddenly realized, to her shock, that Lyndon Johnson was having intercourse in her husband's throat wound. Now, some people found this to be in bad taste. That's America; diversity, freedom of expression. Actually there was more to it; this was not simple, casual necrophilia, because it had a purpose to it. The purpose was to enlarge the entry wound from the grassy knoll, to make it look like it was an exit wound from the book depository; thereby to fool the Warren Commission. So it was functional necrophilia. So this became everything from a street rumor, to being believed in the intelligence community (if that's not a contradiction in terms) — because they, in the CIA, know that kind of stuff goes on. So they believed it to be true; Daniel Ellsberg said he believed it, but that was only because it was wishful thinking.

Now I want to read you a section, because the question comes up often, "Is radical humor effective, or is it just a steam valve to let off pressure?" — This is the autobiography of Harry Reasoner. (Very loud laughter.) Isn't that amazing — now wait, what's funny about that? I mean, I know it's funny, but — just think, I could — "Harry Reasoner." I'll have to remember that line. "Harry Reasoner." (Continued laughter.) You've seen him on Sixty Minutes, he's the third tick-tock from the left. This is called "Before the Colors Fade;" it's from an old Arabian proverb, "Piss on it, before the colors fade."

Now, this is a chapter on Little Rock, Harry Reasoner covered Little Rock, which became a generic term for racial hatred. This was in 1957; probably some people here were not even born til after then, and think that Little Rock is a sparkling water, like Perrier or something. But it was an incredibly horrible, heinous, absurd situation, with grown-up white adults spitting at little Black kids trying to go to school, throwing rocks at them, setting their buses on fire. O.K., now here we have Harry Reasoner's insight into understanding Little Rock. He says: "The key to understanding the story, and in turn, there are two keys to understanding most stories. One is that there are always at least two sides to any story." (You can see why they call him Harry Reasoner.) "The other is that the world doesn't have many real bad guys, if you define a villain as a person who thinks of himself as a villain. I've only been aware of two figures in the news during my career with whom I would not have shaken hands if called to deal with them professionally. I suppose that what Thomas Jefferson called, 'the decent respect for the opinion of mankind,' requires me to identify those two. They were Senator Joseph McCarthy, and a man named Paul Krassner, or something like that." (Terrific applause.)

I'll tell you, this was the most perverse compliment I ever got. First of all, when I started doing stand-up comedy in 1953 I was making fun of Joe McCarthy in night clubs, and he told me not to do it. So now to be coupled with him is just bizarre. I mean, when I read this...now there are ways you have of knowing whether you're dreaming or not — I thought I was dreaming when I read this. I mean, you can dream that you're reading, 'cause this is a linear society. I mean, they don't dream about that in pre-literate societies. (What we should do is ship our surplus televisions to pre-literate societies, so they can go directly from pre-literate to post-literate, without having to read all those books in between; save all that eyesight.)

All right, so, I go on here, I got out of my shock and I continued: "Joseph McCarthy and a man named Paul Krassner, or something like that, who published a magazine called The Realist in the 1960's. I guess

everyone knows who McCarthy was." I don't know. I thought it was Charlie McCarthy myself. My childhood hero. It was on radio — Edgar Bergen and these two dummies, Charlie McCarthy and Mortimer Snerd — they'd talk on radio — isn't that absurd! "Gosh, you sound like three people to me." And he'd be there flapping his lips on radio — nobody knows. He finally went on television and they thought it was a parody of ventriloquism, "Hey, he's still moving his lips there." O.K. Charlie was wearing a top hat, and Bergen says, "Charlie, what are you doing?" And Charlie McCarthy says, "Nothin', Bergy." And then Mortimer Snerd, who's like the Country Cousin, talks like Goofy, says, "Well then how do you know when you're finished?" And that was like a zen poem from a wooden dummy. I still haven't figured it out.

All right, so he says here, "I guess everyone knows who McCarthy was;" but he has to explain me, "Paul Krassner and his Realist were part of a 60's fad —



publications attacking the value of the establishment, which produced some very good papers and some very bad ones. Krassner not only attacked establishment values, he attacked decency in general. Isn't that something! I mean, it gives a whole new dimension to the meaning of "decency." "Honey, are you decent?" "Yes." "O.K., I'll come in there and attack you." If anyone has anything decent during the question period, just ask and I'll attack it. Generally; nothing specific. "Attacked decency in general, notably with an alleged lost chapter from William Manchester's book, *The Death of a President*. To paraphrase critic Clive Barnes' remarks about a movie; *The Realist* was the kind of paper that gives dirty papers a bad name.



VASECTOMY

I called a boyfriend's home,
Spoke with his mother.
She said he lives in California.
I asked if he still has his sense of humor.
She xeroxed his vita (ma belled his data)
Ditto, wife and kid.
Then she said, "Tell me, Jimmy, are you married, single,
living with someone, or what?"
I said, "Well, I've been all those, plus divorced, and now
I'm into being with someone I don't live with."
She said, "Oh, did you have any kids?"
I said, "No." (Almost said "When?")
And she said, "Well, that's good. Divorce is painful,
but it isn't harmful unless you have children."

Jim Murray

My grounds for despising them were that, based on their speech and actions, they had to know they were villains." Which is true; I would get up every morning, and look in the mirror, and say, "Good morning, happy villain! What villainous thing will we do today?"

Then he says, "I suspect that even those two, who seemed execrable to me, thought of themselves in a much better light. And in Little Rock," (this is his evolutionary jump in consciousness), "the people leading the opposition to desegregation, with the exception of Governor Faubus, and a few other opportunists, did not see themselves as oppressors of black human beings, but as defenders of a system that worked best for both whites and blacks." Isn't that inspiring?

So, I went through some changes about this. I thought, "should I sue him?" But, I mean, truth is a defense; suppose he proved that I attacked everything decent, then what would I do? So I thought, what I decided I'm going to do is, I'm going to stalk out Harry Reasoner, I'm going to follow him from cocktail party to cocktail party; when he least suspects it I'm going to go up to him and say, "You're Harry Reasoner? Let me shake your hand!" And then I'm going to shake it, I'm going to say, "Harry, you don't know how much I enjoyed your coverage from Little Rock." I'll just go on and shake it, get him all beaming, then say, "By the way, my name is Paul Krassner, or something like that." And see if he goes... (ugh, hock, spit, wretch). And I'm going to have a photographer there, and on the cover of my next book I'm going to have a picture of Harry Reasoner and me shaking hands, and I'll have a blurb: "Paul Krassner attacks decency in general." — Harry Reasoner. Make the fucker pay for his blurb. So...I guess my time is about up...we'll continue there. Thank you.

LATE NIGHT

Would you like to lose a few pounds?
Try Mrs. Giandalone's Frozen Diet Pizza,
the perfect low calorie way to enjoy your favorite
nutritious delicious pizza. Buy Mrs. Giandalone's!
It's pizza not by the pie or the slice but the bite, yes,
the bite!

And don't forget Mrs. Giandalone's
Frozen Diet Pizza Deluxe:
One bite,
with everything.

Jim Murray

IF YOU'RE TOO SCARED TO BITE

By Flo Kennedy



Hi y'all. I'm only going to tell one joke, and that'll be towards the end; so don't feel you have to laugh, because nothing's going to be funny. I think it's important for us to recognize that this Radical Humor Festival will give us a good chance to reclaim humor before the pigs get a monopoly on it, as they have in the case of the flag, the family, and morality. So it's really timely, because there's not very much left, and humor's going to be a good way to get back some of the shit they've already taken over.

It's very important to use ridicule, because ridicule is a very free, effective, and available tool. We have to be kind of busy, though, because we always have to watch doing what's already been co-opted. As Robin and Paul, (both Pauls, actually), pointed out, they keep making you extend your limits because they make "O.K." what you started, once they see that you did it and lived, and made money on it. We have to understand that if we're going to make and keep humor radical, we have to be...well they describe me often as "outrageous" — and I think I'm not so outrageous except that I say things that you don't say at the time that they say you don't say them. Of course, once you make it O.K., then they say it. It's the same as the 1952 haircut that was "verboten," until everybody started wearing it; you have to do that with humor.

For example, sexuality is now "in" because it's commercial, so mooning on T.V. is OK. So what you have to understand is that there is still someplace to go from sexuality, because as used by the right wing it sort of becomes the pot of gold that you're looking for when you get to the end of the rainbow — you find yourself in marriage, which often turns out to be a crock of shit, instead of the pot of gold. Sexuality has become the right wing plot, in a sense, because it

gives them crotch control, just when women begin to decide that they want to free themselves from crotch control.

You have to understand that what sexuality is really about is "fuckability." You begin to analyze fuckability so that you appreciate that fuckability is not so much a part of the right wing plot, because they have not yet given us the privilege or the permission to use the concept. Still, if you think about what it means when you say you're too fat, or you're too flat, or you're too skinny, or you're too heavy, or your ass is too small or too big, or you don't just stink under your pretty little arms you stink between your pretty little legs too — that's mostly about fuckability. In other words, if someone is too old, what are they too old for? You're too old to be fucked.

The other aspect of fuckability is oppression. When you say somebody gets fucked, you mean that they've been oppressed. Someone recently reminded me that men use fuckability in a different way: that is, men don't get fucked. When you say a man's been fucked, it means he's been treated like women are quite often treated.

The main thing is we must not let our rage go without expression. If you're too scared to bite, try humor.

Then it makes me think of "niggerization", which is a concept that shocks a lot of people — it shocks white people more than black people, because they think it means they're black — but you don't have to be black to be niggerized. It helps, but you don't have to be. Niggerization is a way that you're abused and mistreated. It's also a way that you can free yourself from having to conform.

I think that the main idea of radical humor, in addition to being something that the establishment has not yet accepted, is that it's a form of ridicule. For example: about five or six years ago we came up with the concept of the "premie"; people didn't quite understand what it was, and it wasn't necessarily feminist. It was just the idea that there are certain men, like Barrie Farber and George Will, who seem to be relatively intelligent, yet they can't keep it up long enough to reach the logical conclusion — so what they do is they lose the hard-on in the middle of the fuck, you see, though they start off sounding like they know what they're talking about. (I think once Dan Rather did it when he was analyzing the assassination of John F. Kennedy). You use concepts that are insulting, and that fit the people; and you get comedy out of what they're serious about. When my producer and I were talking about this comedy festival he came up with the idea of calling Haig "Pinch-Bottle", because if you called him "Ambassador Pinch-Bottle", you would sort of be ridiculing him, but at the same time you would be using what he is to smear him, which could easily get very popular.

One of the reasons I'm doing this live thing tomorrow is because I feel this radical festival has importance beyond just this set up down here. I've gotten an hour between three and four for a live telecast in which I will be using a few of the people from here to, you know, take this thing beyond the

confines of the actual festival itself. I think it's going to be on channel D, it's going to be one of our specials and it will be 60 minutes, and I hope to get our brand new beautiful star over there that opened up the thing (Dnitra Vance)...What are you doing between three and four tomorrow afternoon?

One of the things I want to talk about, in addition to radical humor itself, is what we're going to do with communications, because humor has been taken over by the mass media — and, actually, smiling and laughing has become a sort of right wing relief opportunity. In other words, they make comedies out of just about everything — whether it's the police or the shit kickers — everybody is funny and everybody is grinning. You really almost have to be bitter and satirical in order to have any room left, because they've practically occupied the entire area. What we have to do, as I see it, is to analyze what it is that they've taken away, and take it back.

I'm post-menopausal but I'm very interested in sex, because that is one of the best control mechanisms. It's the basis for much of the pall of guilt, it's the basis for much of the moral majority, and it's the basis for much of the religious control that even those of us who don't think of ourselves as being particularly religious are more or less bound by culturally.

So it seems that one of the things you have to do is to analyze the techniques of niggerizing, for example — and recognize that the struggle of those of us who have gotten a certain amount of education, or a certain amount of money, or a certain amount of

Yolanda V. Furdora/American Myths Calendar



These are the eyes of the
Enemy

technique in dealing with the society, is to avoid becoming niggerized. The teacher is essentially, as far as the society goes, a niggerizer — it's their job to niggerize the people that come to them; so also the social workers and to a great extent even the lawyers, maybe especially the lawyers. The problem we have in humor is first to analyze what needs to be debunked or demythologized or whatever, and then just do as complete a job on it as we possibly can.

We've got to appreciate a concept that one of my friends, and what I used to call "Square Table Regulars" on my program on television, Victor Solupo, calls the "bullshit syndrome." The bullshit syndrome is one of the things we have to avoid in our humor — because radical humor has to hurt some few people at least pretty bad. You can do more damage with humor than most people realize. Quick, before the right wing discovers some of this, because everything else we've come up with they've taken over and commercialized, and, as in the case of electronic ministry, made it into a multi-million dollar thing and we have lost out completely. It's almost as ironic as discovering that white folks are making millions selling fried chicken and fish to black folks, and if there's anything in the world that black people do better than just about anybody, it's fry fish and chicken. It's this kind of understanding that makes us know that we have to move kind of fast, because we're losing whatever little bit of ground we had left over.

One of the several things I'm suggesting concretely is that more of you, whoever thinks they could possibly relate to it, should get time on cable television. That's going to be the last bastion for those of you who are anywhere near adulthood. This low power shit is going to take, who knows how long, maybe a decade to get straightened out; if it doesn't it will still be something that is going to go pretty fast. I think we need to take over cable.

I've also been working on a thing called the "American Follies", which I haven't talked to Robin or Paul about, but the idea is to do some more sophisticated fund raising which would involve satirical songs and humor that we would take to various areas of the society — whether geographically or just constituencies — to make a travelling show of sorts out of humor, because if we're not going to get back television, then we need to go live somewhere. The problem is our fund raising is so inept and so clumsy and so childish and so unfortunate that I think we need to become more sophisticated, and to make humor a basis for fund raising — which means records, cable, and live performances.

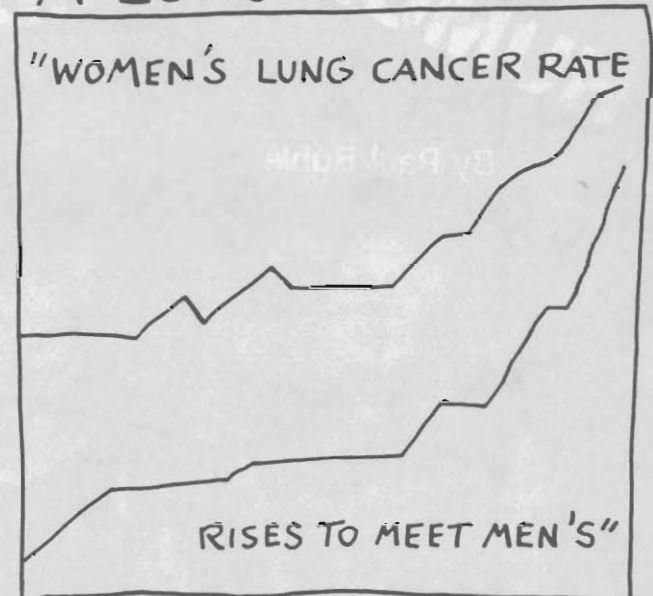
I want to give you a little more time for questions, so I'm going to cut my stuff a little short. I think we need to understand that peasants are the biggest snobs in the world, and I think that's one of the reasons why we need to focus on getting television before RCA and Warner Amex and Cox cable and Time Life and all the rest of them gobble up all that's left, that vacuum that we created by failing to pick up on cable. I think we've got to grab what there is left of cable and move on it fast — it can be very

political and I think we'll come to that possibly at another time.

I just want, quickly, to tell you the one joke I promised to tell you — which is not exactly a joke, it's really my explanation of what I think is the proper approach to oppression, and niggerization, and fuckability — our fuckability. It's called the testicular approach, and it's based on a story...those of you who've heard me before know it already cause I don't alter my material that much, but anyway, it's just in my opinion the super timeless way to explain the power of the weak..It's based on a story about a woman whom I first called "black", and then changed it to "colored", because she's very very unpolitical and not at all bitter or anything, like I would be if I were normal. She's in this dentist's chair and he's hung over, it's a Monday morning about 11:30 and she's his first patient, and he cuts her gum, and she's rinsing and spitting, and then he cuts the inside of the same area of gum, and then he cuts her tongue, which seems a bit much — and then the next thing he knows she has a grip on his testicles. And having gone to a fairly good dental college, but not having known what to do when a patient grabs your balls he says, "What is this?" And she says, "We are not going to hurt each other, are we, doctor?"

The basis of that is that you don't ever get so weak and pitiful that you cannot put pressure where it hurts most, and that, I think, is why we must be irreverent — not only through humor, but in other ways. But the main point is we must not let our rage go without expression; and if you're too scared to bite and you're too proud to suck, then try humor. Thank you.

YOU'VE COME
A LONG WAY BABY!



Yes, Virginia Slim,
there is a Cancer Clause

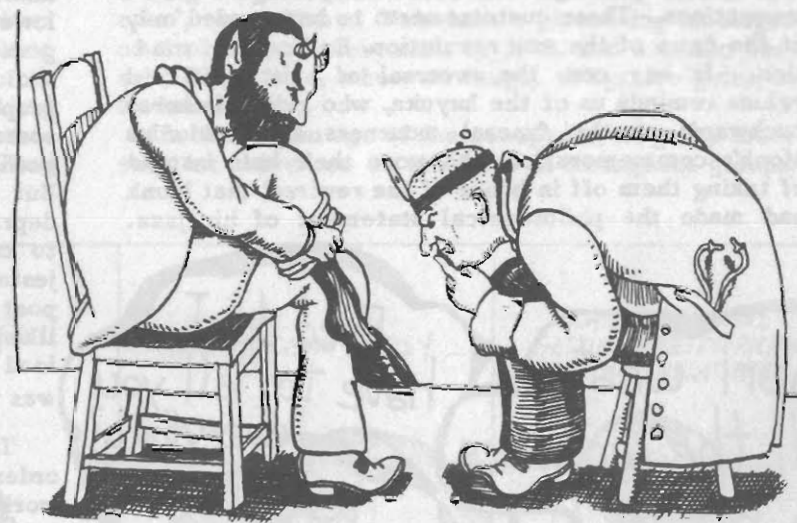
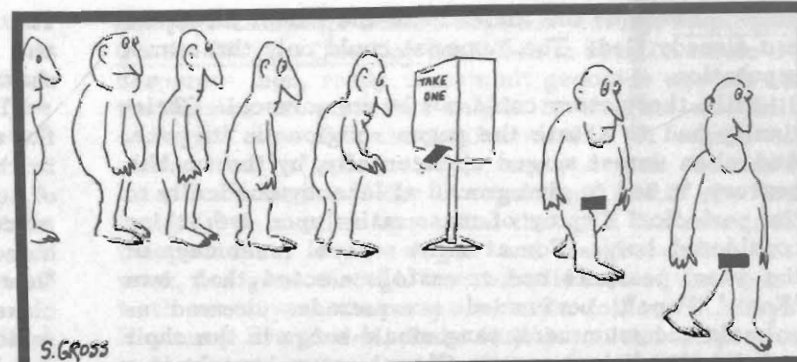
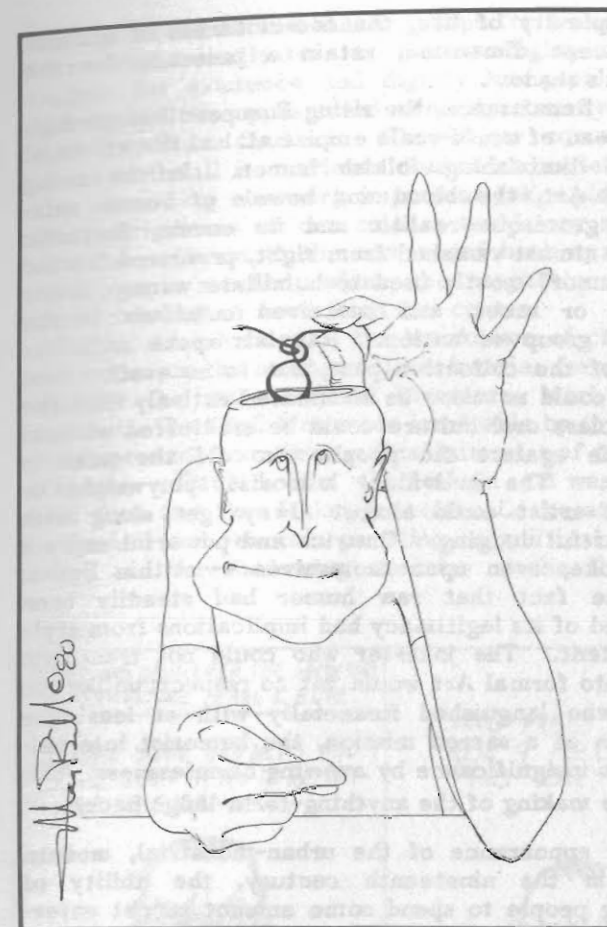
Why do we care about the history of humor? Because when we laugh something mysterious happens. We step outside the civilized boundaries of polite conversation. We recall a primordial impulse. Like sexuality, the context of humor changes. But when we pull back the covers, a lot of the action smells and feels the same. To try and understand the meaning can be a stifling exercise. Who wouldn't rather watch five good minutes of a Marx Brothers film than read a turgid academic analysis? But we need to seek out the element in our humanity which wants a laugh as much as an orgasm. Everything we have been, everything we might become is now endangered. To recall the strengths and truths of humor from the darkest recesses of our collective history is to help us go on living, so that we may one day laugh with a relief and a happiness that we have never laughed with before.

The comic is the first and last magician of human history. The Winnebagos had a cycle of old, old stories about him. He has magical powers (one of which is a voluntary androgyny) but seems stupid about the most obvious things, like how to catch fish or when to take a shit. And he will, notoriously, do anything for a laugh. Finally, a disgusted Deity says, "You are the oldest of all those I have created...I made you a sacred person...you became the butt of everyone's jest...You, although you were given the greatest of powers, made light of my creation..." He is so unruly that not until he dies can order be

established among the peoples and animals of the earth. According to Jung, his mythic origins must be pushed back to the dawn of society. He is the "fore-runner of the savior, and, like him, God, man, and animal at once," both subhuman and superhuman, above all unconscious of moral restraints.

The Greek joker offers a more intellectualized version. Hermes, the father of alchemy, becomes the mythic keeper of the great secrets from some lost age. Invented by Hellenic settlers to Alexandria, he rather logically merges with the Egyptian deity Thoth, even by the standards of the age very ancient. According to the recent illumination of Ishmael Reed, Osiris-Thoth had been the fun god, agriculturalist and musician, believer in the Black Mud Sound of fertility and rhythm. The ultimate source of hedonist, free-love, guiltless heresies that pester organized religions of repression right down to the present day; and the formulator of the "hermetic" mysteries which defy Aristotelean (or Thomist) rationalism and predict dialectical logic. The real-life big punster of Greek Antiquity, by the way, was Heraclitus, the most famous dialectician till Hegel and Marx.

Jung says that civilization pushes these myths into the background, but cannot get away from the shadow they cast, because they represent an undifferentiated consciousness we are unable to forget. The source of Freedom, and of its child Imagination, remains dark, Evil and Good mixed together and seen through symbol, vision, revelation. If Magic can, as the



mystics insist, be as the original state of Nature, then Humor infallibly offers the expression which is beyond the power of Reason (but not beyond the power of the enlightened mind) to comprehend.

Class society conflicts bring humor into action. Oracles, blessed with a special relation to the spirits, deliver extemporaneous gag lines which literally drive violators of the common code to madness, shame or death. Some scholars think the Druids should be seen as humor-priest-hitmen. Organized bands of women definitely had a presence, heir to the spiritual powers that nature-religions, gnosticism and alchemy attribute to them. Fragmentary evidence, like the *Song of Deborah* partially preserved in the Old Testament, shows satiric attack wields the golden sword in the name of a vision of the just society lost somewhere in the past. Agrarian communalism that had once existed in ancient Israel? A neolithic age (as Lewis Mumford once suggested) of harmony under the sign of the goddess and peaceful agriculture? Or that primal state of consciousness where the mythic god-man-animal signaled the proximity Nature retained to subjectivity — the moment of a potential evolutionary leap into higher magic that Man did not take and has ever after longed to achieve? Perhaps the distinction is not so important. In any case, humorists went on the attack in the name of someplace outside the existing civilization. Indian culture reminds of the other place because the "duplexity,"

fool and shaman, remain alive in the joker. "The clown's behavior is a vivification of his knowledge of another reality," Jamake Highwater says. As we move through class society to self-annihilation, humor reminds us of what we may have been and what we may yet become, if only we can set ourselves free.

From the outset, humor faces tremendous repression. Because its militants resisted and mocked the emerging rulers, the program of expanded exploitation, dangerous humor became perhaps the first ideological enemy of the State. History records the forced dispersion of organized humorists, in the Middle East, in Europe, in Ireland and elsewhere by means of torture, banishment, execution — especially when the humorists were women. Christianity (Ishmael Reed calls it "Atonism") had an especially vicious role, perhaps because "the Laughing Jesus" was one of the major heretical claims of the occult and revolutionary Gnostics. A Jesus who joked had to be a kind of conjurer himself, leader of a mystic brother- and sisterhood which would never accept the State religion preached in his name or the accompanying repression of women's sexuality after his own erotic embrace (the Gnostic texts insist) of Mary Magdalene. As in economics and politics, Christianity had to suppress the revolutionary elements within its religious background. It succeeded not only because it wielded State power, but because the

photo: Mel Rosenbath

HUMOR'S MAGIC HISTORY

By Paul Buhle



The New York Knicks: off the wall humor with a pink ruffle

magic powers of the shaman and the humor hit-squad had already fled. The humorist could only threaten a reputation.

Still, the victory could not be unequivocal. Christianity had to absorb the pagan religions in its path. And when unrest surged up internally, by the twelfth century, it had to give ground at least symbolically to the periodical display of mass satire upon everything considered holy. For at least several feast days of the year, peasants and townsfolk elected their own "Fools' Pope", performed masquerades dressed as animals and mummery, sang ribald songs in the choir and did the dirty boogie in Church, even brought in a donkey symbolizing Christ, and brayed back at his invocations. These customs seem to have ended only at the dawn of the real revolution, Radical Reformation. In any case the reversal of existing sacred values reminds us of the hayoka, who rides his horse backward; or the funeral mourners at Theolonius Monk's commemoration who wore their hats instead of taking them off in honor of the reversal that Monk had made the philosophical statement of his jazz.

The duplexity of life, the consciousness of another and unseen dimension, retain a presence for the shaman's shadow.

The Renaissance, the rising European bourgeoisie, the spread of world-scale empire all had the effect of further diminishing folkish humor. In the rising official Art, the blood and bowels of human existence, grotesque realism and its cousin, fantastic humor, almost vanished from sight, preserved for the "low humor" mostly used to humiliate women, lower classes or races, and perceived outsiders in the region, group or nation. Rabelais spoke with the voice of the collective past, but to no avail. Real humor could no more be eliminated entirely than the lower class oral culture could be eradicated without genocide against the people who did the work in society. The individual humorist, playwright or graphic artist could almost always get along with some artful dodging. The rich and powerful enjoy a good joke, even upon themselves — within limits. But the fact that raw humor had steadily been deprived of its legitimacy had implications from style to content. The jokester who could not transform jests into formal Art would get no respect; unlike the poet, who languished financially with at least the illusions of a sacred mission, the humorist internalized his insignificance by avowing harmlessness. This was the making of the anything-for-a-laugh hack.

The appearance of the urban-industrial, modern order in the nineteenth century, the ability of working people to spend some amount to get entertainment they enjoyed, added another contradiction. The theatre, cheap books and periodicals, movies, radio and television would require a mass audience, and by the same token needed images which could be readily understood and loved. At the same time, the commercial control of the media both restricted the content and corrupted the contributors, whether writer, actor or director. The contradiction hit no sector harder than the humorists. They had, and have, a popularity unsurpassed by any other creative group. But they continue to be looked down upon artistically as the bastard children of civilized life. Burt Metcalfe, Executive Producer of M*A*S*H, said recently that he had the feeling that as far as critical attention went, he and his group might as well be producing some local show. On the other hand, Woody Allen strives desperately to imitate the famous cinema auteurs of the century, afraid he will go down in entertainment history as a mere clown. Many of the great figures, rising out of the masses in some developmental, flexible period of a medium, soon get away from their roots and spend the bulk of their careers imitating their own early creations. Others — Phil Silvers comes to mind — are simply crushed by the pressures of becoming stars, cut off from their live following.

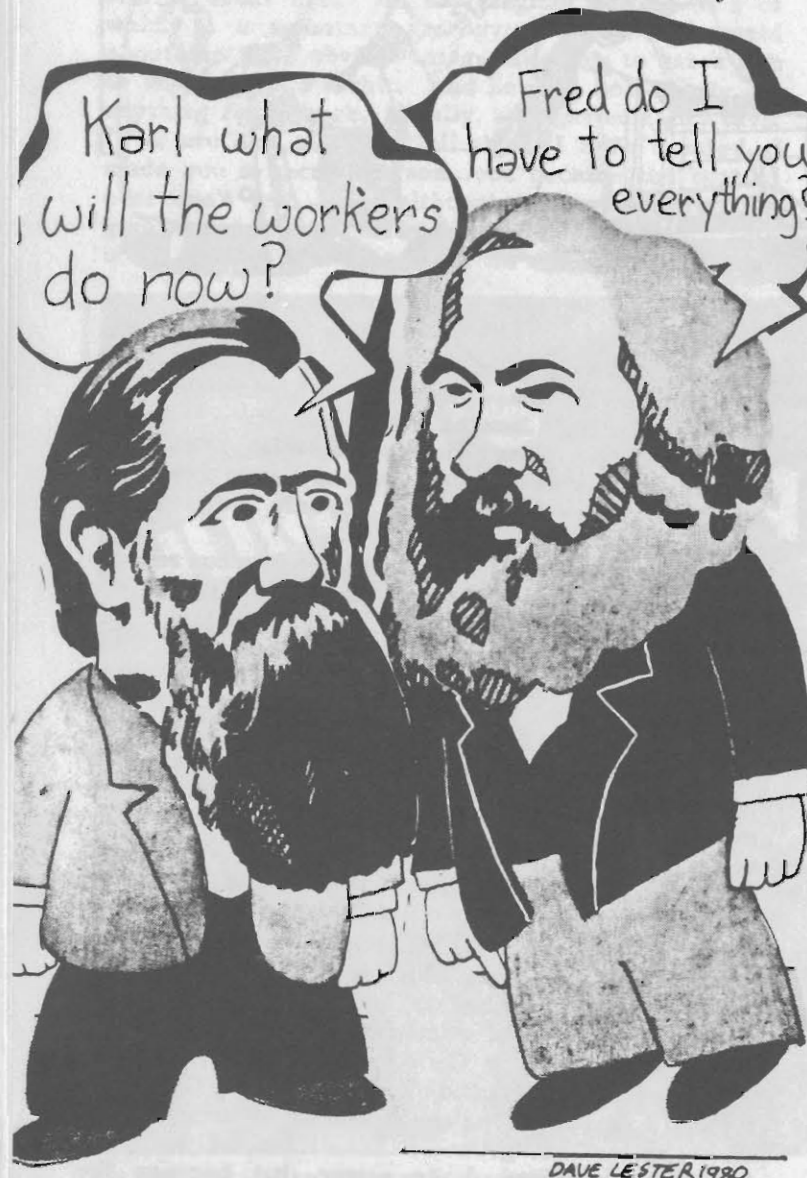
And still the popular culture of humor remains, from the cartoonist on the local labor paper and the stand-up comic in the sleaziest club to the top-most levels of stardom, tremendously dynamic. Moments of intense pressure upon the society bring forth comedic talents and forms no one anticipates. The

strivings of racial and ethnic groups for recognition place fresh candidates in the spotlight, as the struggle for existence and dignity has promoted a vigorous if little-appreciated minority comedy in the popular culture shadows. The longer commercial culture with all its variants dominates society, the more something else very important takes place. A self-consciousness of our culture as history spreads from the audience to the comic and back again. A new stage is reached, where the prophetic role of humor comes once more front and center.

In the American past, the breakdown of civilized pretensions on the southern slave frontier formed the basis for the truly national literature, Mark Twain foremost. The Civil War made inevitable by the slave system produced our first radical humorist of decisive influence — David Locke, who Lincoln said was worth more than any five Union generals. Locke attacked the racism and reaction parading as political democracy, and foreshadowing the rise of the Ku Klux

suffrage campaign neared national victory, Samantha On the Woman Question describes in detail a circle of desperate men, ready to commit genocide against all the women on earth but unable to imagine who will cook and sew for them afterward. "It stands to reason that a woman won't marry a man she don't love, for a home, if she is capable of makin' one for herself," Samantha says. And that call for economic independence, equal wages and respectability for work, has gone through our comedienne of the twentieth century as they exposed male follies. Kathryn Hepburn, Eve Arden, Judy Holliday, Jean Stapleton and so many others up to the present. "The propitiating laughter, the fixed and charming smiles are over", wrote Naomi Weinstein, a pioneering ideologue of the women's movement in 1973, and a comic herself, "This time, when we laugh, things are going to be funny."

In the golden age of the newspaper, no group made such intensive use of the form as immigrant groups,



DAVE LESTER 1980



Klan. Twain, emerging to his full importance in the vast corruption after the War, hammered at the real basis for reaction in the financiers and their local supporters, a continuation of the old brutality at a higher and more sophisticated level. Trapped in his own assumptions, Twain could barely see the antidote, in the new and democratizing immigration of Eastern and Southern Europeans, the rise of a workers' movement to challenge corporate prerogative, and the first culmination of the women's movement. Just here, the great comedy of our own age opens.

During the golden age of popular novels, no one read so much as women and no one wrote so much for them as women authors. The incredibly popular Marietta Holley, infected by what contemporary feminists called a "turning hatred of tyrannies," created a long series of books starring Samantha Allen, clever wife of a little, stupid, male, piglet Josiah Allen, who makes a fool of himself and exposes men's ideas about women. By 1913 when the woman

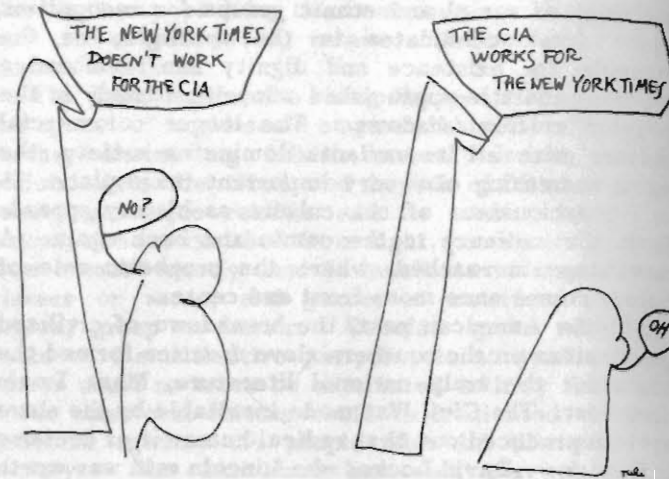
above all Jews. Unable to freshly publish in the Old Country, treated contemptuously in the New, they could rally their forces around a press in their own tongue, serving at once as news source, literary journal, and popular entertainment. The Yiddish press championed labor and socialism — but also humor of a distinct kind, humor that cut and tore at the cruelties of the surrounding society and the stupidities of rich Jews who exploited their own people to become "just like the goyim." The father of the Socialist Yiddish press, Morris Winchevsky, was also a great radical humorist. The "American Sholem Aleichem," Moshe Nadir, was the Yiddish Communists' greatest writer in the 1930s. And what did their jokes point toward? Perhaps the underrated idea of the century: a democratic pluralism which respected and encouraged group pride and individual differences. Not a very radical-sounding idea, but a big one for an epoch in which "Communism" did not bring the end of nationalism and in which nationalism continued to be a foundation-stone for revolutionary

movements of the impoverished. Winchevsky, Nadir and others said in their jokes all along that the continuation of Capitalism meant disaster for the Jews, and that the alternative to socialist pluralism, rightwing nationalism, only added to the disaster. They spoke for other immigrants from Finland, Italy and Eastern Europe, each group with their own leftwing laughers aimed at the same goal. For those who arrived from an old culture, humor signalled that deeper knowledge, that other reality they held within themselves to keep strong. The Marx Brothers and the Three Stooges ran roughshod over bourgeois reality to the delight of every immigrant group. They mostly considered themselves fortunate to be in a land of relative plenty; they did not wish to lose their souls to it. And almost every immigrant, first- or third-generation, joke about American life shows just that fear. The ethnic journalists knew it long ago.

No medium meant so much for the immigrant, especially the immigrant radical, as the movies, and when they flashed across world-consciousness, no figure meant so much as Charlie Chaplin. The alien, lumpen proletarian, the human in a society remade to machine scale — Chaplin represented to his vast world audience the triumph of the spirit over conditions. Socialism, which Chaplin cherished in his own odd way, never triumphed and the Little Tramp had to disappear into the sunset. But the moments of pathos, like scenes of recent years in Bread and Chocolate or Bye Bye Brazil, capture something that seems to have fled the Woody Allens since they left their own childhood in Brighton Beach. To the entrant of any ethnicity, mass society is a maze, wonderland and house of horrors all at once; he or she carries along (like the great mass of entrants into the cities of the current day) a bagful of tools, oral tradition and class instincts developed over the centuries. The task is to make the society different by discovering beauty in the common streets, the unexpected quarters. Like the athlete or dancer who discovers in motion some fundamental and ineradicable human capacity, the humorist finds in the irony between what is and what might be the promise of the future.

From the celebration of women's self-confidence, or immigrant-radical tenacity we move to the next stage: the assault upon mass culture from within. The continuities are obvious but something has changed. Earlier radical humor contributed to the general culture; the next radical humor has to tear down, rip apart and reconstruct, in the most self-conscious terms.

We can see the movement earliest in the most important medium after movies, the comic book. The genius of radical humor here, Harvey Kurtzman, took the stage at our April Festival. "Dada in the Drugstore," Marshall McLuhan called the Mad Comics of the early 1950s that Kurtzman singlehandedly edited. Just at that time comic book production had reached a peak, and television was off and running — amidst a Cold War society which murdered the Rosenbergs, militarized American domestic life to a previously unimaginable peacetime degree, and developed a



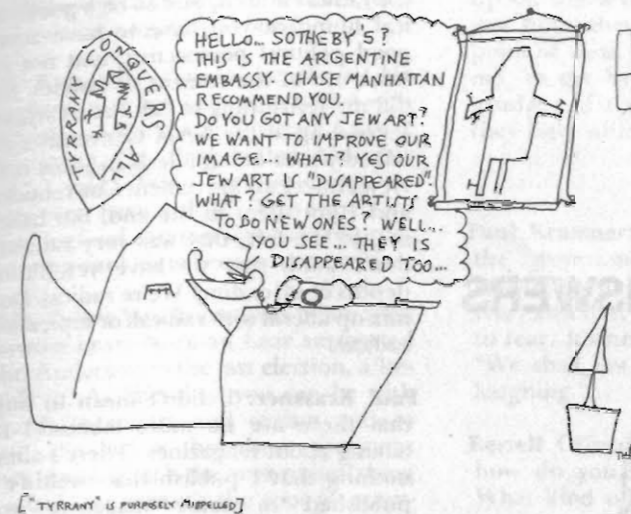
comprehensive program for inculcating children with consumer ideas. Mad Comics met this situation head on. And for the constituency which still had ears to listen — the young and alienated in middle America.

Who else would have thought of analyzing cultural totalitarianism epitomized by the domain of "Walt Dizey" where storm troopers drag away comic characters for not wearing their white gloves? Who else would expose the sexual liaison between money-mad "Little Orphan Melvin" and her reactionary "Daddy"? Or lay down a withering barrage of jokes against the right-wing metaphor of the fifties, Drag Net, reintroducing Joe as "Friday" in Marx's favorite bourgeois novel, Robinson Crusoe, ending that strip with Crusoe decapitating Jack Webb to make a brain for a frankensteinian female companion? The intense drawing styles, never again equalled, blast apart the standard images of Westerns, Detectives and Superheroes with their stupid violence, their macho conduct, their ultimate bankruptcy as cultural information or as entertainment. Kurtzman, who started drawing commercially in the studio of a Communist Daily Worker staff artist, carried the political commitment of his parents' Jewish, leftwing generation into the new age.

Television, like radio before it, has been too tightly controlled for anything but sporadic bursts of zany self-consciousness. One of the writers for the Sid Caesar-Imogene Coca "Your Show of Shows," recalls the kind of atmosphere in which a rare moment of comic brilliance could be created:

We were all outsiders. There was a general unhappiness there, a lot of psychological things. There was a total permissiveness. Everybody had a right to be an idiot. Nobody ever finished a sentence. Somebody else would jump on it, competitively grab a sentence, a thought. It was absolutely the happiest and worst time of my life.

Larry Gelbart, one of the writers, carried the same style into the writing sessions for M*A*S*H, the most popular show (after the Lucille Ball Show) in the history of the medium. Your Show of Shows brought what used to be called Black Comedy onto the small screen; M*A*S*H, for a while anyway, gave TV



comedy a critique of War as the epitome of self-destructive civilization. The private psychodrama of the creative process, endorsed by audience and critics alike as the best television humor ever, carried the shadow into most extreme monopolized circumstances humor will probably see.

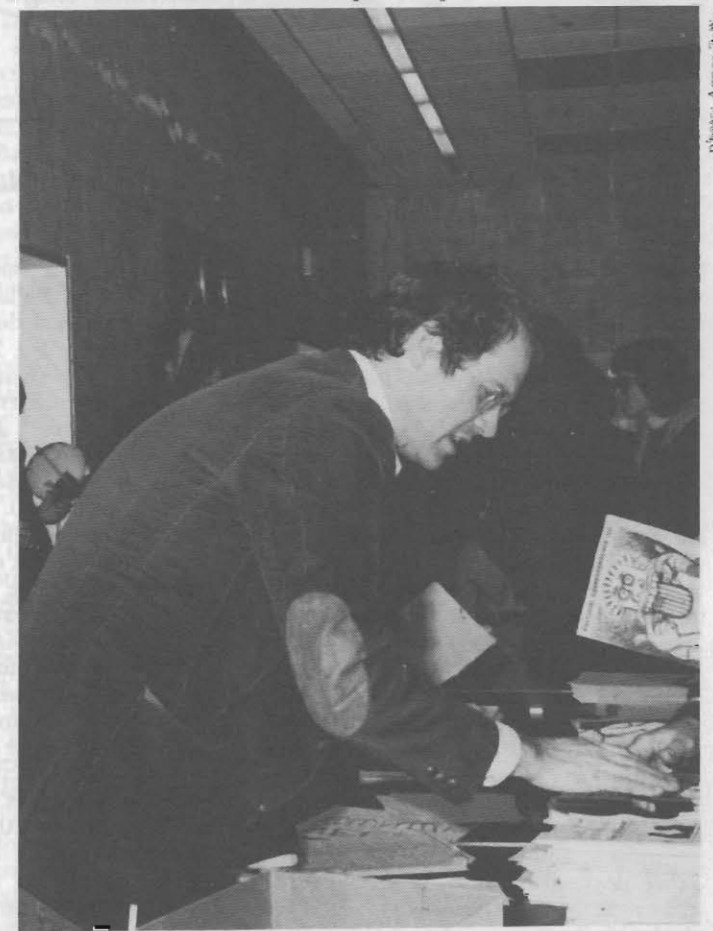
That is as far as things have gone today. Red-hot humor has the same message it has always had. The Stark Fist, newsletter of the Church of the Sub-Geniuses, warns, "If you don't want to broil your brains in the zombie business corridors of empty pinkness OR grinding poverty, if you don't want to feel the meat cook off your bones in a nuclear oven that was once your HOME TOWN, you had better drop your mental candy bars and step out under the blinding light of the sun and make witness to what you REALLY ARE." To separate ourselves from the illusions of appearance is a revolutionary act because we are enabled to return to our real essence, living at a definite point in historic evolution and also living in our biological frame, the age-old Homo Sapiens. Humor has seen the truth behind the lies in the ascendance of sex domination, class society, institutionalized religion, the State, official Art, mass commercial culture. If the Superpowers show their bankruptcy day by day, if religions go haywire, the patriarchal family slips, and mass culture begins to turn in upon itself, humor approaches a new stage.

We are moving toward the collective satire-struggle of the original political humorists, we will be taking up conjuring soon. We look toward the collapse of the system with the biggest jokes in history or pre-history moving around the back of our minds. "I guess you can compare it with dying," Imogene Coca said about comedy, "If nothing goes right, you die." The magician's work extends the organic powers of Nature to enrich life. We fight on the side of life against the death machines, knowing that our humor-spells may yet turn back the course of destruction and help to bring Humankind to its full, unrealized potential.

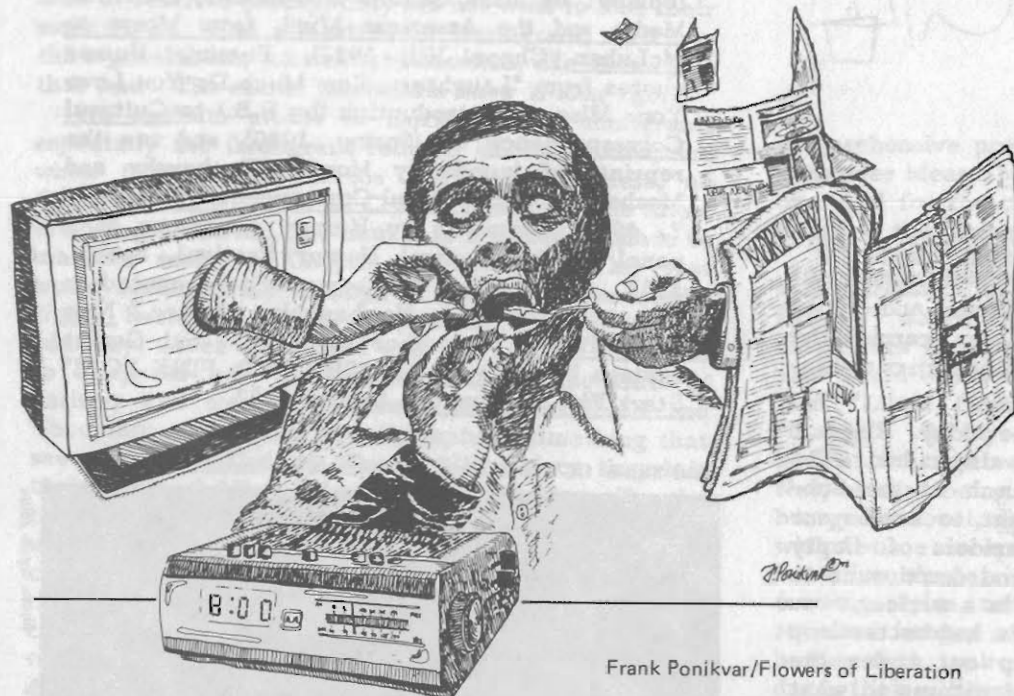
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Paul Buhle: CC's founder at the point of production



Q & A ANSWERS



Frank Ponikvar/Flowers of Liberation

Paul Buhle: Since I'm the straight man, I get to be the moderator. One question that can be raised already, and that we can deal with more seriously tomorrow and the next day, is what kind of communication system can come out of this? What can we do with the ideas that are generated here? All of the possibilities are open. Questions, comments?

Ira Shor: The last three people spoke about the collapse of taboos, or the end of taboos, and how that poses a problem for a radical comic who wants to push to the limits. I wonder if you could talk a little more about that, because on the one hand, in a conservative period the culture becomes less permissive; on the other hand, you see pornography everywhere, and the lust to have more sex; it seems inaccessible and everywhere at the same time. So how do you juxtapose a less permissive and a more permissive, or a more pornographic yet more confining culture at the same time? How would you deal with it as a comic?

Robin Tyler: I will say one thing about that. One of the last taboos is discussing being lesbian. I do pro-gay humor, and that's taboo. Also, I've found out that my most offensive material, (it was offensive in 1970, it is offensive in 1982), is anti-religious material. I do the birth of the baby Jesus and I play Mary as a Jewish mother, which she was. Believe me, sexuality is not the last taboo. The last taboo in this country is to radically attack its system, this is why I think that radical humor has to do with being against the capitalist system. That means taking on religion, talking about lesbianism, which deals with having the right to your own body.

To bring up some comics that are supposed to be hip today—you have Saturday Night Live, or John Belushi, or Steve Martin. Steve Martin is basically disco comedy. I like him, but he's basically disco comedy. A lot of the things that are considered so radical on Saturday Night Live I don't consider radical at all—topical sometimes, but certainly not radical.

I think today there is still a lot of area

for radical humor, and to be a good radical humorist you have to have a very good political perspective, and not just work out of the context of politics. So I did my Jesus thing in Salt Lake City, and I stood up at the NAM Convention and talked about being a lesbian—this is the New American Movement Convention—and I got them in the end, but believe me, to the left, that was very radical. I don't think that we have yet hit our depths of offending. We're radical. Don't mix up liberal with radical, or topical with radical.

Paul Krassner: I didn't mean to imply that there are no more taboos. I was talking about magazines. There's almost nothing that I publish that couldn't be published in some magazine now. There'll always be more to co-opt. There's an endless supply.

Is Showtime seen in New York? They have a program called "Bizarre," with John Byner, and they have the obligatory showing of breasts each week in some little sketch. So there is what D. H. Lawrence called, "rubbing the dirty little secret." In this culture people need to store up the masturbatory images to give them something to think about when they're making love, so... no, maybe it's the other way around: some people fuck so they have something to think about when they're masturbating...

In terms of family politics, they've often had shows on T.V. about incest; they'll have shows about abortion; they still won't have contraceptive advertising. So I didn't mean to imply that there are no more taboos. The taboos are only being broken on a very superficial level.

Saturday Night Live—I say this knowing that I may get a job on their writing staff—a lot of their humor is "ka ka, doo doo." It's real adolescent locker room stuff; then sometimes they have something very powerful.

My feeling is that you should always test their limits; don't indulge in self-censorship or you won't need the enemy, because with self-censorship you become your own enemy.

Tim Thompson: I was out in California two or three months ago and a friend of mine had arranged some jingles, sung as music instead of as jingles, and it took back the character of music, which was taken away when the jingle happened. That relates, I feel, to what you had been saying earlier about getting some of the humor areas back before they have it all.

Paul Krassner: It's terrible when you find yourself dancing and it turns out to be a beer commercial.

Flo Kennedy: And singing them! That's when you're around the bend.

Paul Krassner: It's so insidious. My daughter, who has just come to live with me again, so I'm a single parent statistic, was singing, "My dog's better than your dog." I said, "What are you doing, we don't even have a dog!" This was from some dogfood commercial; they're programming our kids to become competitive.

Robin Tyler: You know, you mentioned Norman Lear; Norman Lear supported John Anderson in the last election, a Republican. As liberal as you can be with regards to racism and sexism and so forth, the fact is that those programs never attack what is the most radical thing to attack, because it's the root of everything, and that's economics. You won't see that on television, it wouldn't get on. It's important not to be fooled by good but liberal attempts.

Audience Member: I'd like to ask a question, I think a political question. In comedies, plays, structured humor, one of the things that strikes me about comedy is that at the end of comedy there is generally an air of forgiveness in which a new society is created around the humanistic, or political, or sexual concerns of the couple that was supposed to be kept from getting married—in Roman comedy. Everybody is invited to rejoin. What we've been hearing tonight is using our humor to attack, and justifiably so. Can the left afford to be forgiving? Are we really saying, "After it's all over guys, we're gonna be on the same side?"

Flo Kennedy: I happen to think that if anybody's not pissed, then they can be forgiving. I'm much too pissed to be forgiving, but I think a lot of people are very forgiving. I think it depends on the politics, and the comedian, or the comic, or the person using humor not just in a funny way, can tailor it to the extent of their rage. It's a stylistic matter. You can be very political and forgiving, or be very political and not be forgiving. In a society where pentagonorrhea is a disease that the whole country is financing, through our taxes and every other way, I just don't know where forgiveness would begin. I think it's ass-kicking time, and I'm sure that many people don't agree.

Robin Tyler: Forgiving is a very Christian word, to me. I want to convince someone to see things from my point of view. I've played very right wing audiences and very straight audiences, and if they walk out a little more towards my point of view, then I am not there to forgive or not forgive them, I'm there to organize them. I don't think we can set ourselves

up on this level of pious forgiveness, I just hope they come along toward my point of view, because the idea is to join me, to get by my side—we can't hold grudges; if they want to fight with us, they fight with us.

Paul Krassner: I'll just add to that that the government, with propaganda, media, try to program the citizens with fear, and that irreverence is an antidote to fear. It's necessary. Fidel Castro said, "We shall not die of fear, we shall die laughing."

Bertell Ollman: A very basic question: how do you construct a radical joke? What kind of questions do you ask of your material, of the events you see: I expect you wouldn't put it down to intuition... What do you do with it? What do you ask it? How do you look at it which ends up as satire or a joke?

Paul Krassner: I think it's instinctive. You sense a contradiction is something or an injustice. I learned at the age of six that one person's logic is another person's humor. I couldn't have planned to say, "this is a book by Harry Rerasoner," and expect to get a laugh; I'm still trying to analyze in retrospect and understand why that was funny, and I understand in the context of what I was doing there. You remember when the Reagan Administration said that ketchup was a vegetable? This is a straight line just presented to you on a silver platter... The line I used in response to that was the Reagan family at home, and Ronnie saying to Maureen, "You eat your ketchup or you can't have your desert." It's just a separate logic that had nothing to do with Carlos Castaneda.

Robin Tyler: It's hard because the jokes I do obviously can't be the staple of what has become American humor—sexist, racist, anti-gay. I analyze what my political feelings about the situation are, and I do not work as an individual, I discuss things with other people who are political. I could say something that could come out politically opposite in humor... I have to sit and analyze everything I do. It's much harder to get comedy—analyze everything, find the political perspective, and then jump in on it... But you have to be very careful; if they can take it either way, it's not funny. Humor is a science, it depends on timing, it is an art. It takes about ten to thirteen years to become consistently good as a stand-up comic... Doubly to be analytical and political with your humor. Analyze it just like any other political problem, and then you use the science of making it funny.

Paul Herzich: ... I've always seen humor as a good litmus test for an authoritarian system. When you have an authoritarian system, humor isn't allowed too well. In Nazi Germany humor wasn't really permitted too easily. They say one thing about German humor, you shouldn't really take it too lightly—

Robin Tyler: You should take no humor too lightly. When someone insults you and then says, "Only kidding,"—at the basis of humor is truth.

Paul Herzich: That's what I wanted to raise. I get uncomfortable when people refuse to open themselves up to ridicule, just as most of the right does. That's what Lenny got into trouble for, he put things up to ridicule that were powerful things. How do you reconcile that with the obvious wrong of ridiculing certain people that aren't in power, certain groups that aren't in power? How do you reconcile that?

Flo Kennedy: If you don't know a pig from a poet, you don't.

Audience Member: ... I think one of the most important things to remember about political humor is that from the time you are born until maybe when you're about three years old you shit in your pants, and your mother says to you, "Tommy, now get to the bathroom. Did you shit in your pants?" And you say, "No, Ma, I didn't." But you know you did. That's political humor: you know you have done "the big lie." The big lie is what—everything you do in your life, practically everything you do anyway, from the time you get up in the morning to the time you go to bed at night, there's something that occurs in your life that makes you tell a lie, either by omission or by some other means. This political humor will help to bring out all the bullshit that's happened to you from the top on down. From the Malvinas Islands, or whatever we want to call them, to those guys sailing around the middle of the ocean talking about how they're gonna be there tomorrow, they're gonna be there the next day, the next day... getting seasick worrying about when they're gonna settle this shit so they don't have to fight. All this is going on all the time, man. And this is political humor; this is what the beauty of political humor is all about...

I do the birth of the baby Jesus and I play Mary as a Jewish mother,

Flo Kennedy: By the way, that's Hal Miller, my associate producer on the Flo Kennedy show...

Paul Krassner: And it was from Tommy's toilet training that Ronald Reagan got his idea for the trickle down theory.

Daniel Del Solar: I think the key question is distribution, because we can be as funny as all get out in this gathering of two hundred people, and we can be as sharp and truthful as ever... We have all referred to... there was a good comic, but they went into the mainstream because they wanted to be star, and they had to drop certain things, and what they had to drop was the essence of their truth-telling. Every major system of transmission seems to be closed. Television, of course. Cable television, maybe a little more—

Flo Kennedy: It's completely open.

Del Solar: Cable television?

Flo Kennedy: Completely.

Del Solar: Not at all, because they won't pay you.

Flo Kennedy: Well, then you got to go to war and fight that shit, but right now the programming is open; and if nothing's happening, it's because we ain't on there making it happen.

Del Solar: Radio, also possible. National Public Radio, possibly. Local community stations, like Pacific a stations, we do need that. That'll cover one-third of the population of the United States; but nothing in print. In Mexico... there is a cartoonist, his name is Rius, he had a comic book, so-called comic book, that came out every week. There were a hundred and ten to a hundred and fifty thousand copies printed every week. This is one man; he eventually got a group together to do it... What do we need to get there?

Robin Tyler:... You do not have to go through the establishment to work and to get the word out. Artists cannot consider themselves poor, you always have to consider yourself broke—broke is poor with hope. So we may not have money in our pockets, but we're artists.

There's a thing called the women's distribution system now. There's Olivia, which is a record company, and now there's Holly Near there, and Chris Williamson. Since Olivia started in '75, the women's distribution network has sold over a million albums, and there's women producers in every city. I play all over the United States all the time through women, or colleges, or gay... The radical left has to get together and get any club in any city that will produce us. All

you have to do is get the guy in Detroit and get him to produce you... Forget about the big money of television, the point is to get to Detroit and get promoted. Women had no money, they were totally underground; now Holly Near draws thirty-five hundred people, and Chris Williamson; I play city to city... The idea is to get this network going... to stop this pessimism that we can't do it.

What's a producer? One person who's willing to get the ball and put out publicity... All you need is one person and a hall—I don't care if it's a church, I don't care if it's anywhere, just get the word out... If there's a radical network, if there's various organizations in different cities, then let them start seeing producing culture as part of political organizing, it's very important... It's a fund raiser. I made money for NAM and DSOC, not a lot, but they pulled more people out to my show than they had to any of their political meetings. So get the organizations that are organized and get people who are leftist and get them to put on shows. Hey, let's get a barn and put on a show!—And you'll be heard.

Paul Krassner: It's not as if one empire crumbles and then another empire builds, it's happening simultaneously. That's the only thing that gives me hope, is that while this empire is crumbling, an alternative... empire... is being built—

Robin Tyler: Empire?

Paul Krassner: Yeah, well, empire... The new age mafia, they don't kill you, they just give you bad vibes.

In this culture people need to store up the masturbatory images to give them something to think about when they're making love, so... no, maybe it's the other way around: some people fuck so they have something to think about when they're masturbating...

Audience Member: I just had a question about the way that the media is treating gay people. What I see is there are constant attacks from the televised religious right wing... You also have the rather nasty anti-gay jokes that come out on Carson, and occasionally some other places. At the same time, you have what appear to be these relatively positive treatments on movies (Making Love), and some other television shows... But what seems to be happening is some ways, is the whole gay imagery is being picked up by mass culture: you find that a lot of women now demand that their boyfriend have the look that the gay model has from their magazines; you find that a lot of teenagers are putting on lots of leather jackets with chains on them, and are trying to look hip; the whole punk scene seems to revolve in part at least around the leather jacket, which has become very much a symbol for gay leather oriented people—

Robin Tyler: I thought it was the straight motor cycle gangs.

Audience Member:... What do you think of the way that the movies are treating gay themes?

Robin Tyler: If they can make money, they'll sell it. If lesbianism sells, they'll put out Personal Best; if gay sells, they'll put out something. But the fact is that you cannot be openly gay in Hollywood, you cannot be an open lesbian in Hollywood.

I always like to say I mention movies stars and if they're lesbian I wink, you know, Doris Day; or if they're gay, like Rock Hudson, or Ronald Reagan... There are a lot of gays in Hollywood, and they're frightened; they're not out of the closet. As long as industry can make a buck off of you, they'll sell it, they don't care what the hell it is. And there's no more faggot jokes on Carson, because a guy chained himself to a chair, and Carson's too afraid to do it too obviously anymore. But he does still do tits and ass jokes, and anti-women jokes, which is kind of scary.

I don't think straight men are imitating gay men, I think gay men have made the mistake of imitating straight men... This leather jacket, this punk syndrome happened in pre-Nazi Germany too; I'm not equating it with Nazis, I'm saying it doesn't start with gay men on Fire Island... My point was, I think gay men, in knocking drag and the queens, who are a culture of resistance, are making a mistake. Because I don't think that macho, or the cowboy, or whatever it is, is necessarily a good thing to imitate... I think the idea of imitating macho is bullshit. I think it's an extreme, and I think it's a straight extreme.

photo: Agnes Zellin



Danitra Vance: "Our brand new beautiful star"

You were saying that straights are imitating gays, and the fact is, I see reactionary gay men imitating straight men, thinking that there's some virtue in macho. And I don't mean all of you guys out there, I'm talking about what they sell, what the corporations sell today... Some reactionary gay men are imitating what they think will make them acceptable to society, which is the macho attitude.

Paul Krassner:... I live in San Francisco... and there are five gay newspapers there. When "Making Love" was being advertised, in the straight papers they had Kate Jackson in the photo in front of the two men; in the gay papers they had the two men in front of Kate Jackson. So bankability is the bottom line.

Ronny Davis:... It seems to me there's a question any comic has to play with, and it's been touched by a number of people: what would you ridicule, and what would you not ridicule? What's too reverent for you to touch, and what's irreverent to you?

It's easy enough for you to ridicule yourself, the society, as an underdog, and attack the system and Reagan and Carter. It's been done, and done, and done. The greater question is—there's two parts to it: If something is important; how can you deal with it in a humorous way?... Will humor, as a matter of fact, interfere with the positive presentation of something that we call "revolutionary radical?"

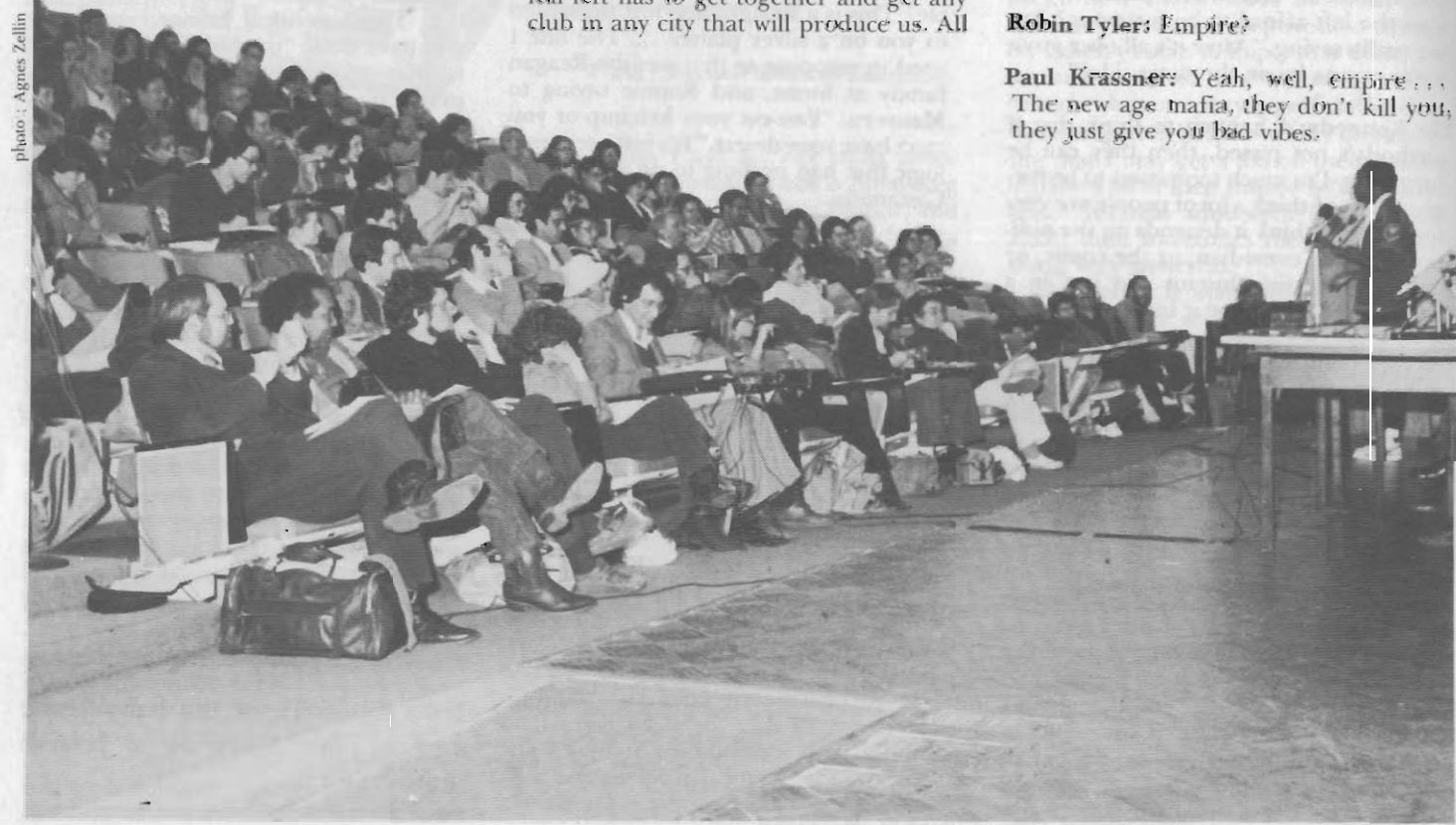
Silly comedy sometimes interferes with the positive relationship of what you're really saying, it interferes with comprehension; and if humor is to lead people to a certain amount of comprehension about the society, then a silly joke can deviate them from it; and it's a risk you take, of course, as a comic. That's a constant problem of what is reverent and what is irreverent and how you shall deal with the positive in a humorous way.

Robin Tyler: I don't think radical humor is silly humor. Also, I see people who are very intellectual and give all these talks; and nobody's listening to you because nobody understands it and people are bored. This is a consumer society; where you have to sell what you're talking about. Part of the fault of the left has been not to use some of the tools of the right... This is a society where people are used to things that are very well packaged, and rather than keep denying it, we should take a look at things—as Bertell did with "Class Struggle," instead of Monopoly. We should consistently co-opt a lot of the things that they use.

To think that something is so serious that you can't do it—I don't think silly—but do fun on it, is to take ourselves deadly seriously... I don't think that by dealing with them that way it takes away from the political meaning... I do not attack the left. A little bit we make fun of ourselves, about the language and stuff—maybe vegetarianism once in awhile. I will do light stuff on ourselves, because it's funny. I mean, when I went in I didn't understand what all you guys were talking about, it took me years to understand it. So I'll attack lightly... but I'm very careful about picking my subjects. But I don't think there's such a thing as radical humor being silly. I think if you listen to any radical humorist—we are so deadly serious. We are revolutionary people. I am.

In a society where pentagonorrhea is a disease that the whole country is financing, through our taxes and every other way, I just don't know where forgiveness would begin:

photo: Agnes Zellin





RADICAL HUMOR ART SHOW GOES WEST

BAY AREA OPENING

By Steve Ronan

Indian Reservations are classic examples of the failure of Socialism, quips funnyman James "Killer" Watt. Under the American system "entrepreneur" farmers have the "right" to succeed or fail, deadpans Agricultural Secretary John Blockhead and predicts more farm foreclosures with a straight face. Not to be outdone, the old Show Biz Pro himself tops his Thanksgiving belly-laugh, "Tax the Unemployed," with his uproarious "Abolish Corporate Income Tax." The rest of the Dunce Pack pop off similar sure-fire material throughout the frostbitten season. Laughter mixes with the tinkling of ice cubes and jewelry from the Hamptons to Palm Beach. Can the aging Left hope to compete with these Black Humorists of the Radical Right? Can it evoke laughter from the lengthening lines at soup kitchens and gas chambers?

These were the questions I pondered as I was passed the torch of the Molotov cartoon from its Seattle bearer, Doug Kahn. Subject to a bizarre urge to watch the nightly news with its depiction of an ever more apparent dictatorship of the rich & accompanying imposition of poverty, racism, militarism, sexism, and repression of free speech, I had long ago realized I could choose to feel one of two ways about it. I could be swept into miserablism and resignation in the face of Society's nuke-facilitated race toward extinction with a "Woe is a me bop." Or I could laugh at these fools' transparent attempts to peddle the Bill of Rights, National Reserve land, protection from toxic waste, etc., in exchange for their blood-drenched Corporate kick-backs. Resist, protest, demonstrate, overthrow, for that matter, but don't approach it like dour, self-righteous zealots. Ridicule the hideous moron bosses from the oval office to your local business pimp, deflate their pompous seriousness and induce others to laugh at them—a powerful strategy.

To accomplish the latter I collected my graphics and distributed them as a low-cost magazine and included them in public exhibitions from galleries to the sides of buildings. Ammunition for anyone with a mind to use it.

Discovering the contemporary works in the show I was

introduced to many who had similar ideas. A cartoon by Stuart Perr, for example, consisted simply of three panels in which a hooded figure approached saying "We're coming to get you . . . You can't stop us . . . So don't even try." To me it perfectly displayed the intent of the rightists to convince us of the futility of resistance as requisite to their success. Paul Buhle's historic collection of American Anarchist cartoons, with the vivid images of Art Young and Robert Miner, show how well they comprehended this immutable fact. The extensive collection of European radical cartoons, from Grosz & Steinlen to Yrrah and Heartfield, demonstrate how little has changed. A German item from 1930 by Der Wer Jacob shows Hitler at a fat cat banquet taking credit for cuts in benefits to the unemployed, the old and the poor but refusing to accept blame for cutting social security; its message perfectly applicable to the current villainy of the Reagan Reich.

After a preliminary showing in Berkeley in December, the show had a triumphant opening at the New Arena Arts Project in San Francisco. Local political scene free-weekly, the Bay Guardian, not only listed it as a "political alert" but also gave it the critic's choice as the art event of the first week in February. A large crowd turned out for the reception and many arrived daily to get the charge offered by artistic statements of those who refuse to be made to suffer in silence. People literally spend hours carefully reading and examining the several hundred pieces on display, comprising maybe two-thirds of all materials received due to limitations of gallery space. More and more artists express a desire to contribute to the show as Paul plots a European leg of the tour. Scores of others currently produce work akin to the exhibits therein. One can only imagine the thousands of us out there who boomerang the humiliation the controllers dish out to the old, poor, black, & out-of-work. Working with a smile, although a bitter one, they doctor news-photos, draw caricatures, make banners and effigies for marches, mail entries to anti-capitalist mail-art shows, perform comedy or topical songs, scrawl graffiti or otherwise pass it on.

SEATTLE OPENING

By Doug Kahn

Radical Humor's West Coast Offensive opened up in Seattle October 14 as a labor of love brought to you by X-change: Seattle Art & Politics. On the 14th we opened the doors to an exhibit which was first shown in NYC at the end of April. We culled about a third of the exhibit and ran it tandem with both humorists from the Northwest and art-tickles from local collections (including five photomontages by John Heartfield). The exhibit will appear next in the Bay Area, the second flanking of the West Coast Offensive. Here's hoping that the Bay Area's labor of love is as well received there as it is here; there's a good chance since with labor, love, and humor being a Trinity many find preferable over other Trinities (say Oppenheimer's) how can you miss?

As a frontrunner to the exhibit, we

bought the center section of the local alternative rage, the Northwest Passage, and edited a special section on Radical Humor (a tactic which should be considered in other parts of the country/world as the first shoehorn into the actuality of Radical Humor stepping out). For a nominal sum, the center section was run off for an additional 1,000 copies that were used for handouts, poster and total event scheduling. Paul Buhle wrote an article on Wobbly humor which could only bolster the sense of an indigenous tradition, this type of regional history should also be encouraged.

Paul will be giving a talk on "Radical Jewish Humor" (coordinated with a Seattle arts center) and then the next evening will be a book signing for *Free Spirits* at Left Bank Books and later a party which prom-

ises to get sloppy (as Olivia Neutron Bomb sings, "Let's get visceral . . . visceral . . ."). There will also be an evening of performance with Annie Gage, Christopher Hershey, and The Crustaceans. We really wanted to get Native American comic Charlie Hill up here from Venice but fell short with our funds, damn.

All in all a Time is being had by all because "Times are changing again. Used to be not long ago that most folks pitted against the static quo (even to call it static gives this type of energy too much currency) were so uptightassed you could hear their sphincters whistling. But ever since the harsh wind started blowing from the Right, these folks have been singing another tune. They have taken up the funny bone and carved a flute from it." (from the Special Supplement).



The Radical Humor Art Show attracts all sorts of solid citizens

photo: Mel Rosenthal

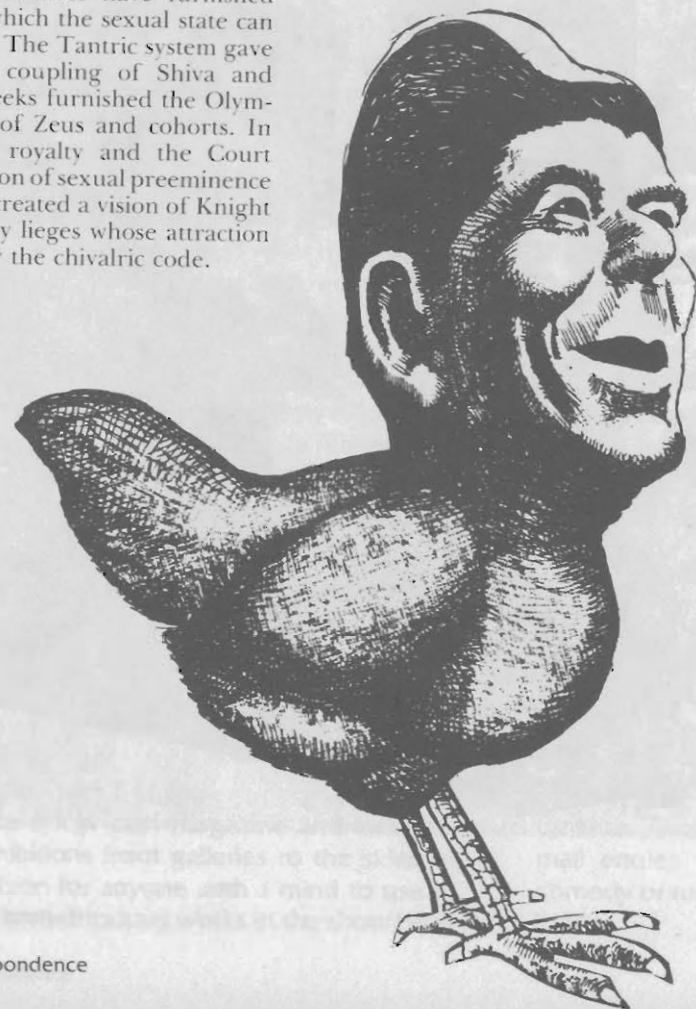
A constantly encountered comment during presidential election years is "What difference does it make? They're all the same, anyway." While this may be true in the overall political sense, it indicates supreme ignorance of the real role of our chief executive and of his important bearing on the most intimate aspects of our existence. Historians may debate the effect of one or another policy or proclamation, but the presidential dictate most immediately understood resides in the physical person of the officeholder himself, the turn of his smile, the tone of his voice, the light in his eyes. During each administration it is the sexuality of the President which determines the kind of sex life we the people will enjoy. His libido dictates our orgasms, their number and extent. In sexual congress every American couple becomes for a brief ecstatic moment the President and First Lady.

Most societies have wished to distinguish the everyday identity of their members from the being they assume when consumed by sexual energy. The logic seems obvious: as the blood rushes, tissues stiffen, moistness spreads, the mundane demands of daily existence fall like dandruff from the "human form divine." The name and personality under which one eats breakfast and makes a living give way to a fleshy nakedness verging toward rebirth. Various cultures have furnished icons through which the sexual state can be experienced. The Tantric system gave us the eternal coupling of Shiva and Shakti. The Greeks furnished the Olympian escapades of Zeus and cohorts. In medieval times royalty and the Court gained the position of sexual preeminence as troubadours created a vision of Knight errants and Lady lies whose attraction was governed by the chivalric code.

TOP-DOWN SEX

THE PRESIDENCY AND YOU

By David Polonoff



We live in more secular times, the easy transportation of experience onto a mythic plane no longer our prerogative. By the same token secular figures come more and more to occupy the terrain of the gods, and the media depicting them become increasingly sacramental. The supreme political power is now the supreme sexual power. Every American boy with a hard-on is in his mind the President of the United States.

Ike was the president who took the worry out of being close, the first decaffeinated husband, the man in the gray flannel suit. Eighteen holes on the golf course were the limit of his carnality. Perhaps there had been a past affair or secretary, but that was in the War, humanity's last great outpouring of gut emotion. Now it was just Ike and Mamie and we the people in a menopausal bliss that rose each unconsummated morning to best of all possible worlds and made no greater demands than "I'm home, dear, what's for dinner?" Whether it was the White House or Ozzie's place, an affectless aura which touched but did not feel, saw but did not register, bathed the split-level nation. Passion had its own room and the keys to the car, but no longer the allegiance of a libido that wanted things fast, effective, and push-button smooth. An eroticism of the bland and the painless named Eisenhower its object. An antiseptic union and an ouchless orgasm. Who needed love's agony and ecstasy when you could just like Ike?

For Kennedy sex was touch football, a rough and tumble free-for-all where no one gets hurt. A matter for good friends, where all is already forgiven. "Ask not what your genitalia can do for you, but what you can do for your genitalia." Foreplay was expanded to include all aspects of life. Press conference or summit conference, affairs of state or family affairs; each was marked by the same gleeful delight in the give and take, back and forth dynamics of human interchange, that manic certainty that every moment of existence was meant to give forth pleasure. For three polymorphous years America was coaxed from its suburban safety to the front yard's new frontier. It was throaty laughter of grass stains and abandon and the sound of ripping underwear on the Hyannis lawn. Falling forelocks and the sheer blue-jeaned joy of first attraction. America was a noisy party with room for everyone's chips in the cheese dip. Each citizen's duty was to add to the fun. "C'mon everybody let's do the Twist!"

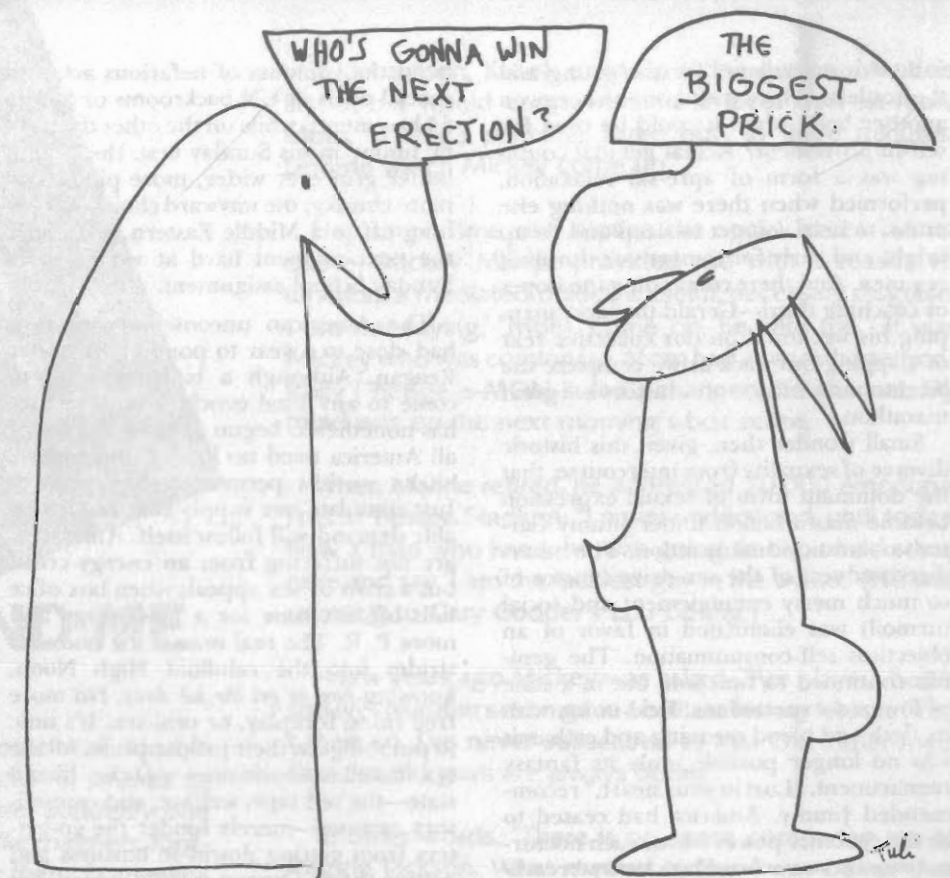
Kennedy exercised the magnetism of a life beyond the rules, where instinct freed from obligation achieves a higher order. The other man, the mystery, the new kid on the block. Society, secure in its abundance and the ultimate fairness of life,

disengaged the bureaucratic armor of its own self-limitation to follow his Bohemian leadership. "More happy, happy love! Forever warm and still to be enjoyed, forever panting and forever young—" His downfall was the jealous husband. Whether he slept with Marina or not, whether Lee Harvey acted out his own or someone else's envy, nonetheless it was the vengeful husbands, the Oil Men/Cubans/Mafiosi who had to destroy the man who could excite the passions of those they could only own and control. Vengeance of the retentive and the well-behaved.

If Kennedy had taken America outside to play, there was still an object to the game. With Johnson the game collapsed, or called quick time out which grew to be a decade. Like cartoon figures whose own made flight sustains them past the cliff-edge, falling only with the recognition of their weightless suspension, America was seized by a vertiginous error at its derepression. Orgasm available to all and for the asking became devalued. The inspiration of high office gave way to the gluttonous manipulation of congressional motion and the narcissism of sheer conquest. "I like to press the flesh," said Lyndon and waded into the crowd clutching handfuls. Sex became the group grope, a constant grasping search of faces in the crowd trying to find in their interchangeable fleshiness the sense of meaning that had been obliterated. Excess filled the gap left by elegance. Visceral experience formed the only antidote to the insecurity of emotions whose purpose and reciprocation always were in doubt. The animal was no longer preened and petted but hoisted bodily by the ears.

Sex, no longer the forbidden object of fantasy, lust, and striving, had thereby lost its special status as the most thrilling and self-fulfilling act. The only solution was more. Great sex for the Great Society! LBJ or Janis Joplin, two prongs of the Texas longhorn, lamenting the yellow rose or yelling, "Injun!" Pouring youth and billions down VC tunnels or Haight Street pot holes toward some perilous yellow figment, alchemical or Asiatic, of the Western imagination. An ever-escalating frenzy in which each orgasmic release foreboded the emptiness which would demand the next, where one down meant one to go *ad infinitum*. And where the M-16's and marijuana failed to function, it was time for napalm, acid, and chemical defoliation. Orange Sunshine or Agent Orange, harmless for "our boys" to handle. The next climax was bound to be the big one. Until the whole dynamic surrendered to its inevitable exhaustion and self-defeat. "I will not seek nor will I accept another erection."

Nixon made sex dirty again. He ended the openness of sixties democratic



sexuality by reinventing the myth of the dark secret. His wire taps and tape recordings, dirty tricks and Cointelpro, all were predicated on the absolute chasm between the private and the public self. Power lay in voyeuristic access to the privacy of others. But since the idea of sex as a natural, healthy expression of heterosexual attraction had taken such strong hold, become a media banality, he had to go beneath this kind of sex to find the dark recesses. Hence the rise of homosexuality, glitter rock, and the cult of decadence. Coming out the closet reminded people that there was in fact a closet to come out of, and who knew what lurked in its more secret reaches? Gossip and blackmail took the place of street theatre and exhibitionism. The ritual openness of the mouth-to-mouth joint was replaced by cocaine and the locked bathroom. The world of hedonism received a social structure, the undifferentiated orgy of genital democracy giving way to a hierarchy of perversions. Not all orgasms were created equal.

But if each person must stand in shame before his secret impulse, then ultimately the man with access to all their secrets must stand in shame before the human race. As top cop, grand inquisitor, "big enchilda," he becomes guardian of the most awful truth of them all, the collective truth of Human Beast. He must initiate the Cover-Up; the truth, too terrible for public knowledge, becomes an executive privilege. Reigning by the systemization

of distrust and domination, he ends unable to trust or be trusted, with no one's punishing whip to absolve him. He becomes the great outcast, "le grand maudit." Society, shamed but reerogenized, has only to impeach his authority to reclaim its innocence. It raises in revulsion to its forced neurosis, retracting the chain of falsification and deceit, ripping away each veil and constitutional obstruction in relentless pursuit of that primal scene, that seventeen-minute gap, that final certainty of its virgin birth or original sin, arriving at last at the inner sanctum/oval office . . . only to find in the heart of darkness neither primordial horror nor Francis Ford Coppola but primordial cretinism and Gerald Ford.

Ford was the president who could not French kiss and breathe at the same time. Under his administration sex was simplified to its most basic moronic in-out, in-out—in other words Disco. But if what a later poet would call the "mystery dance" was reduced to a prescribed set of physical motions, by the same token pure physical motion was raised to the level of sex. Soon sweat pants, jogging shorts, and Adidas became the fetish objects through which America donned its sensuality. Calisthenics were the essence of which orgasm was the anticlimax. People sought in athletics—running, skiing, pumping iron—that aerobic exultation and transcendence which had once been the unique promise of the sex act itself. Life itself was a never-ending ski trip, a wide world of sports.

with sauna privileges for the young and the restless. Why expend one's energy on another body when it could be used for self-improvement? Actual genital coupling was a form of apre-ski relaxation, performed when there was nothing else to do, to help you get to sleep and be up bright and early for tomorrow's downhill regimen. And there commanding the slopes or coaching third—Gerald the jock, snapping his wet towel on our collective rear or slapping our back as we complete the bicentennial lap of history's great marathon.

Small wonder then, given this historic divorce of sexuality from intercourse, that the dominant form of sexual expression became masturbation under Jimmy Carter's onanistic administration. The other-directedness of the sex drive (source of so much messy entanglement and social turmoil) was eliminated in favor of an objectless self-consummation. The genitals continued to function, but in a state of lowered expectations. Real union with its flesh and blood meaning and catharsis was no longer possible, only its fantasy reenactment. "Lust in your heart," recommended Jimmy. America had ceased to be the cocksure power whose each nocturnal motion was echoed by a heavy-breathing world. Actions born in the familiar crucible of hormonal urgency and promised pleasure erupted in a lonely insufficiency like semen in a crumpled handkerchief, without release or procreative power. Punk, peace talks, or energy reprograms; all was stillbirth, vacillation, and *coitus interruptus*, and allusion to a coming event or past greatness which the present could embrace as image only. Who better to lead us through this existential equivocation than the world's first Zen Baptist, master of the art of simultaneously doing and not doing? On the one

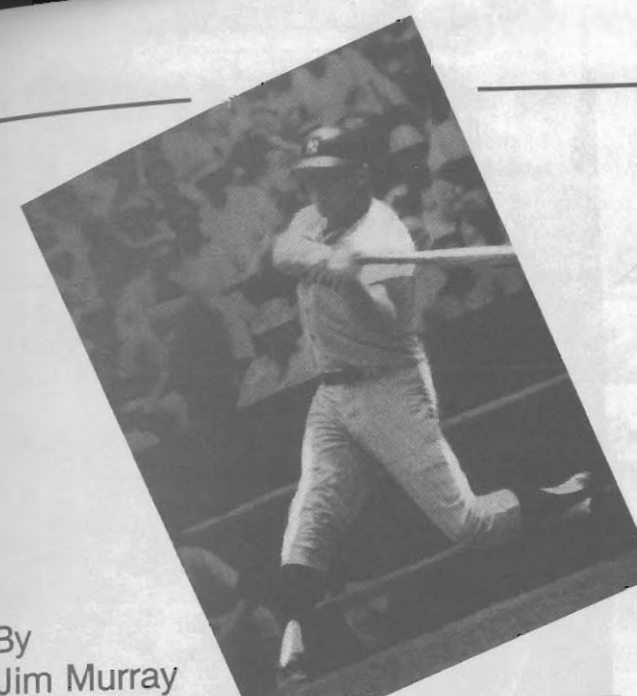
hand the rumours of nefarious acts and special deals in UN backrooms or Studio 54 basements, while on the other the sight of Jimmy in his Sunday best, the peanut butter grin ever wider, more pious, and more chunky; the wayward choirboy, running off to a Middle Eastern circle jerk, the next moment hard at work on his Sunday School assignment.

The American unconscious has now had close to a year to ponder sex under Reagan. Although a bit premature to come to any final conclusions, a picture has nonetheless begun to emerge. First of all America need no longer wait upon a bitchy world's permission for erection. Just stimulate our supply side and insatiable demand will follow itself. Americans are not suffering from an energy crisis, but a crisis of sex appeal; when box office falls off, it's time for a new image and more P. R. The real man is the one who strides into the celluloid High Noon, knowing *how to get the job done*. No more free rides, foreplay, or oral sex. It's time to put things in their proper place. All the sex manual sensitivities of the liberal state—the red tape, welfare, and compulsory caresses—merely hinder the go-getters from getting down to business and getting theirs. Orgasm is to be earned, not expected. And if things are a little tight at first, a certain absence of lubricity and warmth, intransigence felt, protest or refusal... *w-ell* it's time for emergency measures, so just lie back and take the whole program and in a little while things will start feeling good.

Yet lurking in the background is the sense of things gone past their prime and the suspicion of impotence. Sex becomes the swagger and the boast, its greatest pleasure to be found in telling the boys about it afterward. The actual event is

rushed and premature, prepared with fanfare and drama, entered with rhetorical bravado, but lacking the real reserves or staying power to see its projects to completion. For Reagan this is acceptable, having long since learned that his power lies in his image and not in any real performance. His most famous movie role depicts a small-town prankster who wakes to find his lower half amputated by a demented doctor; fitting metaphor for the product of an industry which operates by the deracination of the real and the materialization of illusion. Ronald Reagan, man of iron, has gazed with equanimity upon his symbolic castration, has witnessed his resurrection as a media body, and now stands ready to prove his prosthetic penis—half celluloid, half mass hallucination—the equal of any organ or simple flesh and blood. It remains to be seen how America, defiantly strutting toward 1984, will react to the discovery of the flickering projection between its legs.

Finally there is another aspect to the sexual meaning of the presidency, which the present article can barely touch on... The Button... In all other times the symbols of power have been phallic: the rod and staff, the sceptre, sword, caduceus. But the Button is obviously clitoral. This means that ultimate male political power is no longer indicated by the biggest, longest, hardest cock, but by the power of its possessor to unleash female sexuality. Even for the man with the most powerful penis the world, the President of the United States, still there is that moment of post-coital uncertainty when, its vigor ebbing, he must question his ultimate control, the unbroken connection between subjective thrust and objective moan, that moment when he too must ask, "Did you come?" The fifties which saw the placing of the Button in the president's hands saw Alfred Kinsey's discovery of the clitoris. The male suspicion that there is a power greater than their own, that female sexuality holds a riddle which might obliterate them, assured the Button's placement in a little red box under perpetual armed guard with only presidential access to its protuberance. What a temptation then for him to touch it, to initiate the world's greatest orgasm, to know for a certainty in that paroxysmal moment of self-annihilation and transcendence that he is not alone, that it is everyone else's annihilation as well! "Sehnend verlangter Liebestod!" Only JFK and Ronald Reagan among our presidents have had enough assurance of their own sexuality to be prepared to touch the Button. Kennedy is reported to have laughed about it one White House night smoking dope with Judith Exner. And what about Ron, who gave his First Lady—"Mommy" he calls her—"a teeny little gun" to take to bed with her?



By
Jim Murray

HEGEMONY AND ME

"A child is born into a world of phenomena all equal in their power to enslave. It sniffs—it sucks—it strokes its eyes over the whole uncountable range. Suddenly one strikes. Why? Moments snap together like magnets, forging a chain of shackles. Why? I can trace them, I can even, with time, pull time apart again. But why at the start they were ever magnetized at all—just those particular moments of experience and no others—I don't know. And nor does anyone else."

(the shrink in Equus, by Peter Shaffer)

Number seven is Mickey Mantle. The hegemonic ("hedge-a MON-ik") figure of my media youth. If you don't think in terms of hegemony ("ha-GEM-a-knee"), that's okay. It's a helluva powerful word. ("It's a hell of a powerful world")

Hegemony is the power that you cannot see. But it explains why I can see Mickey Mantle's lefty crouch, his running backhand over-the-shoulder reach, to catch a bases-loaded inning-ending liner deep in left center.

Mantle could hit it out, or lay it down and beat it out, from both sides of the plate. When he popped it up, the out took longer. The opponent's only hope was to strike him out. Mick often went down swinging, sometimes looking. But he always came back up.

Mickey Mantle only played in black and white. (In those days you had to go to the game to see what the players looked like. Now you have to watch it in color.) When he batted fourth in a home night game, my domestic politics hit home. I had a bedtime. As early as 8:30, as late as ninth grade.

That's okay. I thought every kid had the same.

If Richardson, Kubek or Maris didn't get on, Mantle's first-at-bat would come with me in-bed. "AW-ka-mon, Mom. Whitey's pitching. Three outs in three minutes. Lemme watch Mickey come up."

Hey ump! Time out! Notice the social forces in that quote. Mickey Mantle provided me with a reason to function, a mediated object, a useful, necessary disguise. I am *not* saying, "Mom, come on, be with me." It was Mickey who was coming up. Mom had already hegemonically ("hedge-a-MON-ik-lee") changed the channel. My mind was on the next morning's box score.

When Mantle retired, he addressed 70,000 emotional fans at Yankee Stadium: "I never understood, until today, how a man who knew he was going to die, could stand here and say 'I am the luckiest guy in the world.' (He was referring to Gary Cooper's Lou Gehrig.)

A few years ago Mickey was asked, "Are players better today?" Number seven gave a brilliant history lesson. "Yes, I think so. I've never subscribed to that Old Timer myth that the old guys are always better."

In other words, "There is no sense comparing me to Reggie Jackson. What *matters* is that I was better than DiMaggio." The next question, in the era of Reggie Jackson, was "What about the money they're making today?" Mickey choked up, "The players or the owners?"

The hegemonic figure of my sister's media youth was Superman, the man of steel sent here to humiliate petty criminals. Now she lives a very good life in a community of women. All of them are married, engaged, or otherwise pursuing a relationship to God. Four times a day they kneel to pray and stand to sing their living praise of men they do not see. "Hegemony, hegemony, I'd give my life for thee!"

As for me, I am a journalist sitting desk. When I was eighteen, I went up to the Resistance table and said, "I want to change my life." A week later I was sitting desk.

If you pass by, with your "Hey, what's new?" or your "Gotta rush," I'll give you the long rap (coming right up!) or the short rap with (if I can) a little extra.

"Ya'know what, Mick? I hate competition more than anyone."

(When it appeared as the back page of Jim's Letter # 7, a slightly different version of this piece was called "El Fin de Siete.")

That's not me,
That's not us,
That's not funny!

WOMEN IN COMEDY

BY SUSAN McCARN

I have read and listened to sixty-one comedy routines with the specific purpose of exploring the representation of women in each and all of them. I was seeking the common or disparate attitudes towards women suggested by their portrayal in this medium. My sources were records and books of popular comedy routines from the past thirty years, that is, mainstream culture: Joan Rivers, Flip Wilson, Nichols & May, Lenny Bruce, George Carlin... and two dozen others.

I came to this work with some expectations: that there would be insulting of women; that there would be individuals whose humor transcended sexism and was sympathetic with women; and that I would find an evident chronological change in attitudes. My first expectation was painfully correct; my second two were not. Instead, I found in this sample an unchanging and unrelenting view of women as a grating, and — hopefully — insignificant, "other." All of the routines were sexist; many of them were also very funny. I hope that this study prompts questions as to the insidious injury and repressed hostility that may be the cause — and the result — of many a "good joke." I think I have learned much about the pervasiveness, the depth, yet the simplicity of male chauvinism.

The representation of women — at all — seemed so scant at first, I decided to take some lists and begin with statistics. Sixty-four percent of the characters in these routines were male. That figure did change with time: in the routines from before 1974, sixty-eight percent of the characters were men; after 1974, the figure drops to fifty-seven percent. It became clear, however, that it was not the numbers, but the passive and unrealistic quality of female characters that made them barely noticeable.

The list of social roles and major activities ascribed to males, and only males, numbers about a hundred. It includes being a priest, a policeman, Christ, a farmer, a bank robber, a dope harvester; also owning a car, getting high, being horny, paying rent — many of the ordinary and special activities that give even a stereotypical character richness and resonance. The list of roles and activities ascribed to females, and only females, is shorter: twenty-six.



photo: Judy Janda

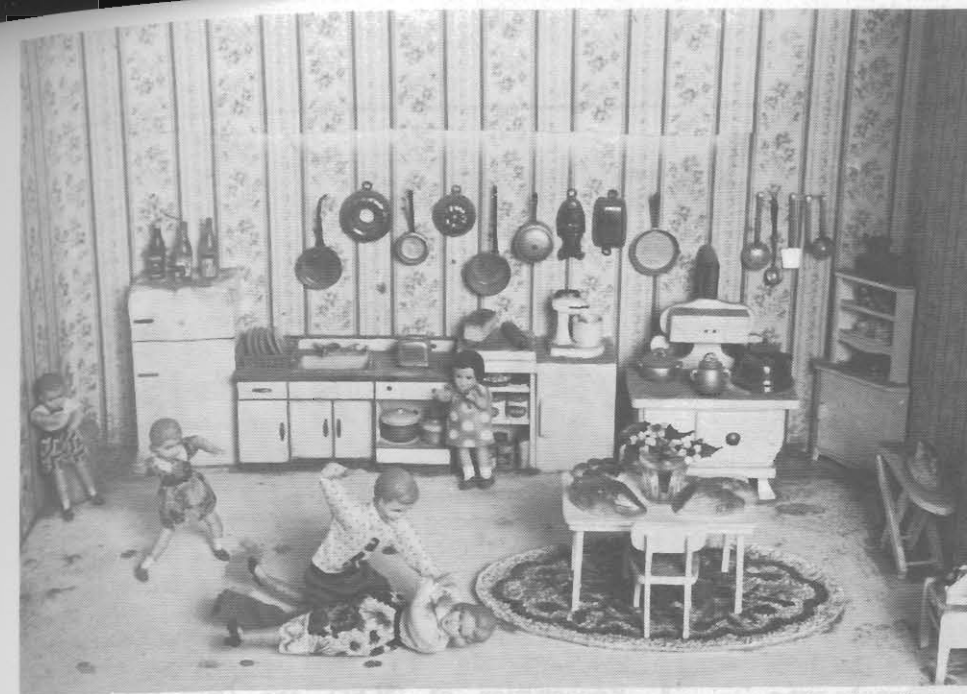
Following is a complete list of what women do or what women are in these routines:

Activities: doing laundry, having sex, refusing to have sex, reading, movie going, bridge playing, gambling, school sports.

Roles/Careers: wife, mother, daughter, girlfriend, maiden, saint, whore, bitch, actress, nurse, teacher, saleslady, dean, secretary, operator, Rockette.

Female characters also were never defined by their activity or profession, as a male would be, except by the significance of its implications as to their relations to men. There is an activity that is not on the list: the pursuit of and competition for male attention. This is one thing that women always do; even passivity is just another means towards this end. Joan Rivers' "Nurses" pokes fun at, and relies on this. The humor in the routine centers around the vicious competitiveness of sexy nurses for available males. ("The woman in the room next to me died while the nurse was talking to a single man!") In performing this routine, Rivers does what she ridicules. She separates herself from other women and degrades them; she uses the same tactics to get a laugh that her nurses use to get a man.

Rivers' attitude is a common one: she is hostile towards her female characters. In fact, female characters were never sympathetic characters in these routines, except where they were the chattel of sympathetic men. Phyllis Diller and Joan Rivers are so spiteful, nasty, and vicious, that any attempt to identify with their characters becomes a lesson in true oppression. Male humor about males often in-



"The Family Protection Act" by Laura Pettibone

photo: Laura Pettibone



photo: Judy Janda

volves sympathizing with the underdog; female humor about females is derisive, the laugh is in the offense. Phyllis Diller's routine "The New Cosmetic" illustrates the other side of this negation of women: with a uniquely feminine masochism she gets a laugh by implying that she herself is short, smelly, and ugly. "Mirrors keep me humble." Lily Tomlin's operator routine is not so extreme; still, her character comes off as a curious combination of ignorant, wimpy, ruthless, and bitchy.

There is a male kind of negation of women that is not as direct as women's treatment of themselves, but is more frightening and constant. Even if women are present in a routine, they are hollow. The Burns and Schreiber routine "The Conventioneer" is full of women — anonymous women, shells of women. Here is the fantasy of women everywhere, pluralities for each man, hanging on his every word. Immediately after their exchange about all the wonderful ladies at the convention, Schreiber asks Burns who was there; every name in the list that follows is male. The women are merely adjuncts to this meeting of men, like good liquor.

This attitude is similarly apparent in "The Old Philosopher," by Eddie Lawrence, in which the central joke is about having everything that could possibly go wrong do so, all at once. The routine seems to be directed at the average citizen/audience member. The list of things that go wrong includes having no money, no suit, no car, and a dead "girl." So, the average audience member must not only be male, he must experience females as categorically similar to property and responsibilities.

The female characters in all of these sixty-one routines are nothing more than very narrow stereotypes, defined through male eyes and primarily by their relationships to men. What this suggests is that women are not comprehended as individuals; that we are perceived as a distinct group. Thoughts about a woman immediately evoke thoughts about all women; similar to the racist's response to blacks, or the homophobe's to gays. Reality has not successfully intruded on fantasy; the real individual does not seem

to effect or break down the generalization. It is almost a cliché about racism that racists do not respond to the individual, that they use the stereotype for purposes of acting out aggression which they could not as easily and guiltlessly inflict on an individual as on an abstract foreigner; and that one thing that can begin to change such an attitude is the experience of a person of another race as an individual, a real relationship — the intrusion of reality on fantasy. The general attitude in these routines is that "girl" (alias "woman") is a category like "colored," or "queer."

Clearly these are not self-evident aspects of this collection of humor. It is not humor about role models; not consciously or directly anyway. Rather, these are constructs and definitions that are implicit in the humor; in the world view, life styles and common experiences of the comics and their audiences. What assumptions are suggested by these jokes? What do they rely on? What do we have to accept — so readily that it doesn't strike as the least bit odd — in order to laugh at these jokes? We have to be people who are not offended by the degradation of women; we have to be people who see womanly qualities in a man as an insult; we have to be accustomed to the exclusion of women from the world of social intercourse; we have to have the expectation that men always want sex, and that women never do; and we have to be able to cathect male representations as complex and individual, and female representations as male-defined and categorical. This means that whether a woman or a man, we have to accept a set of social expectations and definitions; and it means an enormous repression of the truth. It is a set of constructs stretched tight like the skin of a drum over seething contradictory reality — a hard cover to keep in place. Maybe this is precisely where some of the humor comes from. That kind of repression is not easy. It is not easy as a woman to learn masochism and self-denial; it cannot be easy as a man to believe that women are less, when they clearly are not, and to try to take on responsibility for them like children or prisoners.

Statement of LAMB (ML)*

ON THE CURRENT CRISIS IN THE SO-CALLED FALKLAND ISLANDS

By Howard Rodman and Michael Sorkin

The Mohairs: A History of Oppression

The age-old question of man's inhumanity to lamb is today nowhere more clear than in the Mohairs, that chain of islands which English-speaking peoples call "The Falklands." We are the original inhabitants of the Mohairs, here long before the oppressors arrived, and pasturization.

Centuries ago, in Egypt, men commenced the dark practice of blowing of ram's horns, and Pharaohs sang the degrading "Woolly Bully." We were not delivered from Egypt to live in herded tyranny here in the Mohairs. We are free, yet everywhere in flocks. Let us call these pastures by their rightful name: concentration camps. Barbed wire has given way to cunningly-placed bushes; but the fact that we appear to wander at will should not obscure the modern, subtle oppressions of the herders' topiary hegemony. As Karl Marx has written — in that section of Capital which explored the concept of ewes' value — "No matter fluctuations in the price of mutton, the sacrifice remains constant for the lamb."

Analysis of Recent Developments

We are a nation of sheep. The current "dispute" over the provenance of the hand which wields the shear is of no interest to us. (However, we must view with the gravest apprehension the landing of large numbers of randy British sailors on these shores. We do not wish to be brushed with these tars. Blake's question, "Little lamb who made thee," was not intended to be answered, "a British sailor." The invaders are wolves in ship's clothing.)

Victory to the LAMB (M-L)

The Liberation Army of the Mutton Brotherhood (Mohair-Lambswool) is the true representative of all alpacans. Other pseudo-revolutionary groups, comprised of Bo-Peepist wreckers and splitters, would have you believe in socialism in one pasture, in compromise with shepherds and their running dogs. Our leadership have not strayed. As Chairman Woolley wrote in The Mirror and the Lamb, "Are we not sheep? We must no longer exist merely to satisfy the oppressor's craven desires for food, clothing, and sexual relief. All the world's woolite would not suffice to wash the blood from their sweaters."

Our Ten-Point Program

1. Full Moutonomy for the Mohairs!
2. Restore to the so-called Strawberry Field the historically just designation of "Sheep Meadow!"
3. No more reprocessed wool — an end to felt oppression!

4. All condoms to be latex!
5. Every sheepdog must have its day — before the tribunal!
6. Withdrawal of occupation troops from the S. Georgia lambpost!
7. A Marshall Plan for the Mohairs: international baa relief!
8. Recognition of OLEO, the Organization of Lanolin Exporting Organizations, as our sole trade representatives!
9. Serve Thatcher-Galtieri — with mint jelly!
10. Solidarity among foodstuffs! Self-determination for yarn-bearing creatures!

Our Call

Mouton Cadets are on the march. No more will any sheep dip the flag of nationhood before the pasturizer bipeds. Let the woolgatherers beware: flee or be fleeced. The Mohairs are ours.

Revolution comes from the kick of a hoof.

In flocks,

Monty Woolley, Chairman
LAMB (M-L)
Defense Minister Baa Baa Ram
Education Minister Cornell Woolrich



*Liberation Army of the
Mutton Brotherhood (Mohair-Lambswool)

If I am rejected and ignored I will be filled with pain, confusion, and finally bitter rage. I will then likely reach out to all those similarly betrayed who will join me in my rage.

LESLIE KLEIN'S PETITION

By Arnold Sacher and Robert Roth

The following speech was delivered at the Caucus for Radical Concern during a three day conference in Shimmel Auditorium, N.Y.U., in February 1985.

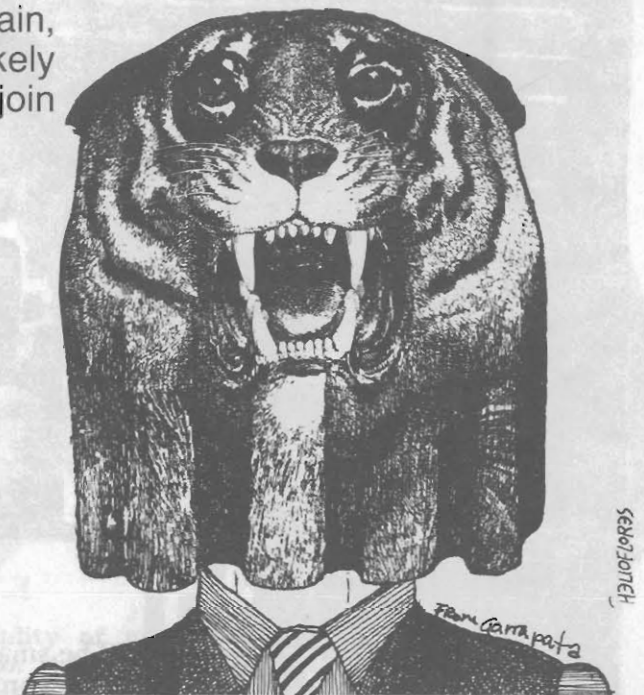
Several years ago the gay and feminist movements came along and introduced a new form of consciousness. Pain and anger were expressed over concerns that weren't thought about before. Feminists and gay activists spoke out with deep seriousness; they were ignored and belittled, but they insisted on the truth of their complaints and the validity of their demands. It was embarrassing and uncomfortable. It was a long process but much of what they said has been incorporated as a regular part of our thinking.

Now in that tradition I bring a new problem and a new concern, difficult and embarrassing once again, something that will cause confusion and hostility. Let me explain the background here much in the style of the earlier consciousness raising.

I live with my father in a middle class neighborhood. I go to the neighborhood park and people say to me: What do you do? How do you earn a living? I say I have significant contacts, people in an active intellectual ambience, people whose works appear in the Village Voice, the Nation, the New York Times Book Review as well as several small periodicals devoted to social change. They say that sounds exciting. Does it pay? Are you respected? Do you enjoy being with those people? I say it is intense and exciting. I might be on the verge of something very big. But it's complicated; these things are hard to spell out exactly. As I say this to them I am filled with confusion and there is pain in my heart. I am telling only a half truth. I do have some connections. I know some people respect me, but I have no real sense of security and dignity.

I sit alone at home often frustrated and sad. I feel left out of everything: parties, study groups, conversations, meetings. Everything. Most of you never even phone me. I feel neglected. It is with this in mind that I come before you today. I feel extremely angry and frightened. I am also very embarrassed. What I am asking might seem presumptuous, but all such things will appear presumptuous at first. I repeat again that a legitimate response to what I ask might demand a new consciousness and outlook.

I can't seem to do coherent and sustained work. I try. Occasionally I do call up the talk shows on the



radio and make an intelligent statement, and every so often I will write a reflective essay. I feel the neighbors mock me behind my back, and I use my contact with you to justify myself with them. But I really don't know how I am seen in your eyes. This is a problem, I think, for many among us, which makes it a problem for all of us. That is why I have chosen to present a formal petition. In doing so I feel hesitation and ambivalence. I don't know if I will be listened to, if I will be paid attention to or will be rejected and ignored. Also even if I am listened to I don't know how much trust I can feel.

If I am rejected and ignored I will be filled with pain, confusion and finally bitter rage. I will then likely reach out to all those similarly betrayed who will join me in my rage. I hope we will never have to come to this point.

Now I will offer an explicit set of demands that are particular to my situation, but hold out the possibility for a solution to the problems of isolation, neglect and abandonment that I have raised. It's not a rigid formula or blueprint. On the other hand, I would not want to whittle down the force and essence of the demands I am here proposing. I want the substance and essence of them to be preserved without dilution or compromise.

1. I would like a phone call once a month from a prominent person.
2. I would like to appear three times a year on significant panels.
3. I would like at least a couple of my reflective essays to be published in respected journals.
4. I would like a small weekend symposium devoted to a critical review of my work and its overall coherent pattern.
5. However little or much writing I do must absolutely not be a criteria for attention or acceptance by members of the Caucus for Radical Concern.

E.T.'s DEBRIEFING

"The small white earthlings with many clean things took good care of their E.T. except that they never asked about me. They thought I was a boy because a boy said I was a boy and boy, was I lucky he thought so! When I said 'Come,' he said, 'Stay.' He didn't know it would be okay."



"Free Women Free The World" was created for the June 12th march against the nuclear arms race in order to show the connection between feminism and anti-militarism. The woman holding the shield forward with one arm and cradling the world in the other expresses that if women were free we'd be in the position to refuse to let our children be sent to war. We made our woman nude with wild body painting and a huge head of colored hair so that she'd look sexually flamboyant and proud. We did this because we believe that if we women were allowed to express our sexuality openly and with full reproductive freedom, we'd be freeing the world of the macho/military

mentality of protecting and dominating the little woman at home. This mentality fuels the arms race. We want to create strong new images of women in order to portray our ideas of how things could be.

"Uncle Sam Wants YOU to Have Babies" connects the anti-feminist backlash to escalating militarism. Part of the reason for trying to keep women at home with limited reproductive rights is so that we will have to produce babies who will grow up to be drafted or be forced to join the military for lack of other options.

April Ford and Katie Dodd

THE LAST SUPPER OF THE I.R.A.

"Paint the dominant hysteria."

—Terry Hauptman

Hunger has seeped in their hearts
forever. There is no end to it:
(The laughing plates desire
only to be clean, to clink
against each other in the sink.

Whatever food is brought is eaten
right away; no waiting
for the host to eat, the guest
to take a seat, the blessing said.
No silent roasting of the dead.)

Their sex goes first.
The body cannot reproduce
which does not eat. And so
it loosens its hold on the hair,
empty eye sockets fill with air.



photo: Marilynne Herbert

and sight turns inward, toward the sea
of silence in the blood.
The navel is a sinkhole
sucking in the belly. These fasting feet
will never march a Belfast street.

The ribcage misses the lung's caress,
the hands begin to flutter
like severed wings of butterflies.
Where does water go when it dies?

Mary McAnally

By Vanalyne Green

Eight o'clock in the morning. The day begins. I don't. I hear other working people outside my windows, making deliveries, honking horns, and creating birth defects for pregnant women who happen to be sleeping in the vicinity. New York. My job. Secretary for a company that markets being 'in' to the rest of America. But my whole identity was based on being out...out of the mainstream, out of the system; and out of money. Which is why I got this job. Working to make television commercials for advertising agencies.

9:30 a.m. The elevator stops at the sixth floor. I get off, pull my keys out of my pocket and walk towards the office. Then I lean my body against the door and tilt my head to see if there is a light in the crack between the door and the molding. If it's dark, I'm the first to arrive — if it's light, someone is already in the office, which is not the preferable alternative. I like to be first, because then I can set up my scam at the desk.

With the phone against my ear, the pen in my right hand, and a message pad in front of me, I sit and look busy. Then on a piece of paper below the top sheet I write down a list of things to do for myself — friends to call, bills to pay, errands to run. The only problem is that after about 40 seconds I start going berserk with the "dee dee dee" sound the phone is making because it's off the hook. So then I call up someone I need to talk to anyway. But then I have to be careful that if Edward or Jean Pierre walk in that I don't appear too casual.

The point of all this is to look so busy with early morning emergencies that I couldn't possibly go to the women's bathroom and do what I find most humiliating — wash the dirty coffee cups.

I AM THE BEST PAID DISHWASHER IN NEW YORK CITY... I am the best paid dishwasher in New York City...I am the BEST PAID dishwasher in New York City...I say to myself. However, since no one actually knows how long it takes to do dishes, it gives me a chance to put on make-up, take pictures, and chat with Gladys. Next to me, Gladys spends more time in the bathroom than anyone on the sixth floor. I hardly ever go to the bathroom but what she isn't there. When I decided to take photographs of Gladys, I was afraid she would insist that we go out into the hallway — that the bathroom was not an acceptable place to have your picture taken. Gladys, I rehearsed, this is where I've grown to know you and this is where I want to take your picture.

Before my interview I already knew the company usually hired younger, skinnier and more demure women for this "front desk" job. So I developed an image that seemed to appeal to them: she is an unmarried woman, happy but with an aura of pathos surrounding her, interested in culture, slightly tubercular in a vaguely 19th Century style. In essence, a governess. This accomplishes several things: she can cry if she wants to because she is a "...sensitive" person. She can be distant and enigmatic, which is



good because the more distant she is, the more she can hold onto an interior identity far removed from who they think she is. And being slightly tubercular means she gets more sick time off.

10:00 a.m. Edward arrives. When I talk to Edward I see the real person but inside my mind I see this drawing. I find one like it every morning on his desk. When I try to describe Edward, I sometimes say he's cruel, which is true, but that's not really it. I could say he's condescending. That's accurate. But the thing is, to really understand Edward you have to know that he was raised in the high British boarding school system and that he was beaten publicly 17 times. You see, Edward was trained to be an Empire Builder.

Now the great tragedy of this situation is that I am Edward's sole subject, and my desk is his only colonial territory. He opens the drawers of my desk as if I wasn't sitting there. When he uses my scissors he leaves the trimmings for me to pick up. I got him to pose for these pictures that demonstrate his obnoxious behavior by telling him I had a great idea for a card to send home that would be a spoof of me making it in a man's world. I told him that I needed to pose a man at my desk, and he graciously obliged.

Sometimes, when he asks me to bring him a cup of coffee, I do so. But I pour the coffee in a dirty cup that has a ring of dried coffee scum on the inside of the cup. And I smile as I hand it to him.

It's 10:45 a.m. as Jean Pierre walks in looking responsible and perturbed. That's my cue to go on stage as a lackey for the bourgeoisie. Smiling sincerely and with depth, I hand him his phone messages, report the news of the morning, follow him to his office and ask:

"Would you like some tea, Jean Pierre?"

"Yes, please, Vanowleen."

"Mint or regular?"

"Mint, please."

I go to the coffee room, pour the water that has been heating, put in a tea bag and a package of Sweet Magic. I debate: to give him the cup that says POP



in large capital letters and looks homey, or to give him the cup from the Pottery Barn that holds less water. The POP cup reminds him, I think, that he is in fact a POP of five children and has no business making attempts to touch or kiss me. So sometimes I give him the POP cup so he'll remember that he is a POP. But sometimes I give him the POP cup because I genuinely feel appreciated.

Jean Pierre is an ex-millionaire raised in French private boarding schools. He has a reputation for being one of the few nice guys in an industry where there aren't many. I've gotten three raises in five months, \$700 in bonuses, time off for my own projects, in addition to sick time all paid for. I mean, here is a man who calls me sweetheart and I don't feel degraded. Here is a man who tells me about his personal life and establishes real human contact.

O.K. And here is a man, who told me when I called in sick that he could make me feel better if he came over and got into bed with me, why if I would sit on his face, or how just one hour alone with him I would be cured. Then, when Edward tried to fire me, Jean Pierre gallantly walked into my office, put his arm out, drew me to him and started to kiss me. I needed comfort and I got a sexual come-on.

12:30 to 1:30 p.m. Instructions for a free lunch. Stay in the office at lunch time. Continue working but order the deli to deliver yogurt, turkey sandwich, and a package of chocolate covered raisins. Pay with petty cash, or watch as Jean Pierre pulls dollar bills out of his pocket and leaves the delivery man a larger than 20% tip. You can safely offer to pay. Eat lunch

while working. At around 2:45 p.m. state you have to get to the bank before 3:00 p.m. and rush out. Going to the bank is optional. Strolling over to Caswell Massey for balms, salves and ointments is mandatory, in addition to visiting Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich bookstore for any new periodicals.

I never used to want to rip off the company. I would reimburse the company for every 20¢ stamp I took. Until I started typing Edward's expense accounts.

Sometimes in the morning, sometimes in the afternoon. This is the part I don't want to say anything about. This is the part that is most confusing. Many men come into my office, for whom I am gracious, for whom I smile. Many men smile at me, but almost none flirt with me. They flirt with Angela. After the first week Angela arrived I noticed she stayed in the bathroom half an hour, while I'd just be there for five minutes. But I knew it wasn't because she didn't like her job. Then I noticed the way she carried her purse with her. I hardly took my purse to the bathroom. I didn't need a purse to pee. But then, Angela was not really carrying a purse tucked under her arm, she was carrying an arsenal, her equipment, the tools of her trade: her make-up bag.

4:45 p.m. Errands. Girl goes to ad agency for her boss. Girl meets a boy. Girl and boy rendezvous at boy's house sometime later in the week. Girl sees boy has 24 newly sharpened pencils arranged aesthetically on coffee table next to Diana Vreeland's Allure. Girl discovers boy is creative director for "I'm a Pepper, You're a Pepper..." and "It's so nice to feel so good about a meal..." Boy and girl go out to eat. Boy, after his medium rare swiss cheeseburger, relaxes with a cigarette. Boy then proceeds to pull out a blue quadrangle 5x7 sketch pad and sketch portrait of girl. Girl cannot believe her eyes. Is this corporate ad man really playing artiste? Do people still do that? Boy never calls girl back.

8:00 p.m. and it's the end of the day. I am berserk. No kidding. For some reason I cannot explain, after Jean Pierre and Edward leave, after all the clients have drunk their Columbian blend, with or without cream, sugar or sweet magic...I have this inexplicable urge to crawl on top of the desk and curl into a fetal ball. Laying there, I can see the map of the world on the other side of the room. Looking at that symbol, I wonder how the world is constructed so that I feel this awful. Then I wonder why it took me so long to realize that the producer trainee position would go to Jean Pierre's son and not to me. Of course I also wonder how I would explain being found on top of the desk, if someone had to come back for an umbrella or a file.

I can't stand being a secretary now, but it didn't always feel that way. When I first got this job, they said I would be a production assistant. I worked hard, because I wanted very much to advance.

This is the text of a multi-media performance piece Vanalyne did in the Rotunda of Federal Hall during lunchtime on Wall Street in November 1981.

Andrew Devon Logbook

By Dan Georgakis

Newfoundland — July 5, 1939

In the old days, the storm would have been a welcomed excuse to spend a day free of sea and cod. The men would have used the morning hours for repairing the nets and winches, and in the afternoon they would have congregated at McPearson's Inn for an exchange of ale and gossip. In the old days, there had been a dozen boats. Now, there were only three and the Devon trawler was in dry dock for hull and motor work.

"Can we go out at all?"

"Not if we want to come back."

"That's it then. I'll have to see Pietro about signing on."

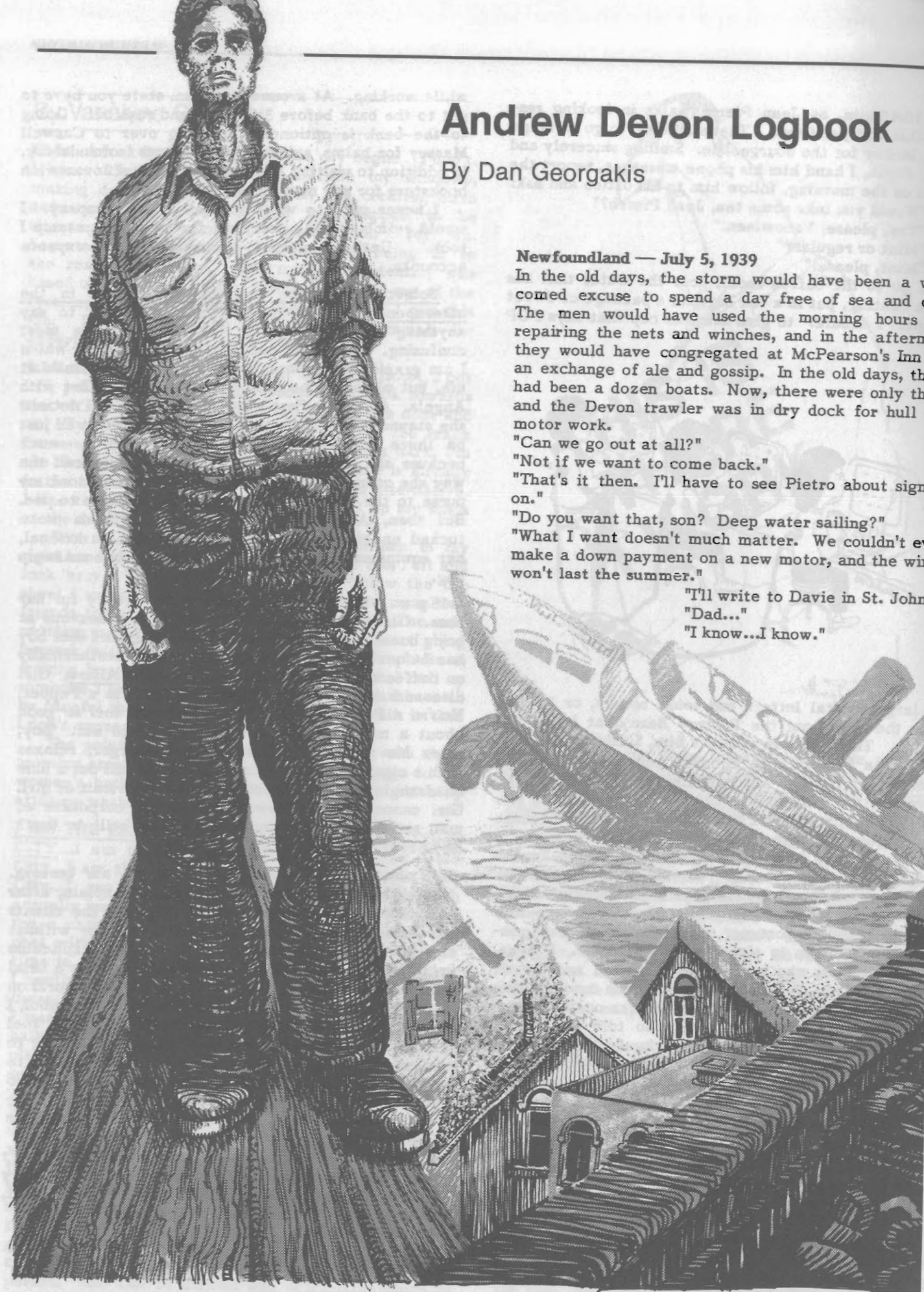
"Do you want that, son? Deep water sailing?"

"What I want doesn't much matter. We couldn't even make a down payment on a new motor, and the winch won't last the summer."

"I'll write to Davie in St. John's."

"Dad..."

"I know...I know."



Lisbon — January 3, 1940

He didn't blame Pietro. He had been told at the beginning that they wouldn't need him more than ten or eleven months, but that had been before the war began. Much as he wanted to stay on the Atlantic, after a month in the strange port, his only offer was from the China Star. At least, there were no submarines in the Pacific.

"Be careful, kid. These oriental trips have a nasty way of stretching out with the money fixed to drain off faster than you can look at it."

"I need the berth, old timer."

"Something could turn up if you hold out a bit longer."

"Naw, I've waited too long already. I need to send some money home. Hell, this is only for one year."

Manila — June 8, 1947

He didn't blame the shipping company or the captain. At first the war had meant he had a pick of jobs. The pay was very good, but somehow, as the old sailor in Lisbon had warned, a man found himself taking an advance on a second cruise before the first was even over. He didn't blame anyone in particular. The merchant marine was tough and unfair, exactly what he had been told to expect.

"How long since you've seen the Americas?"

"Nearly six years. I'm glad we're going back; I've forgotten what a white city looks like."

Saskatoon — July 11, 1950

He didn't blame the owner for canceling the North American run in favor of the Singapore to Yokahama shuttle. It was good business, and Andrew understood the reasoning even though he jumped ship and took a job stoking tanker to Vancouver.

"The fields look lazy, don't they?"

"Like a sea dyed orange-yellow."

"Had a rough time of it?"

"Not especially."

"But glad to be back home in Canada."

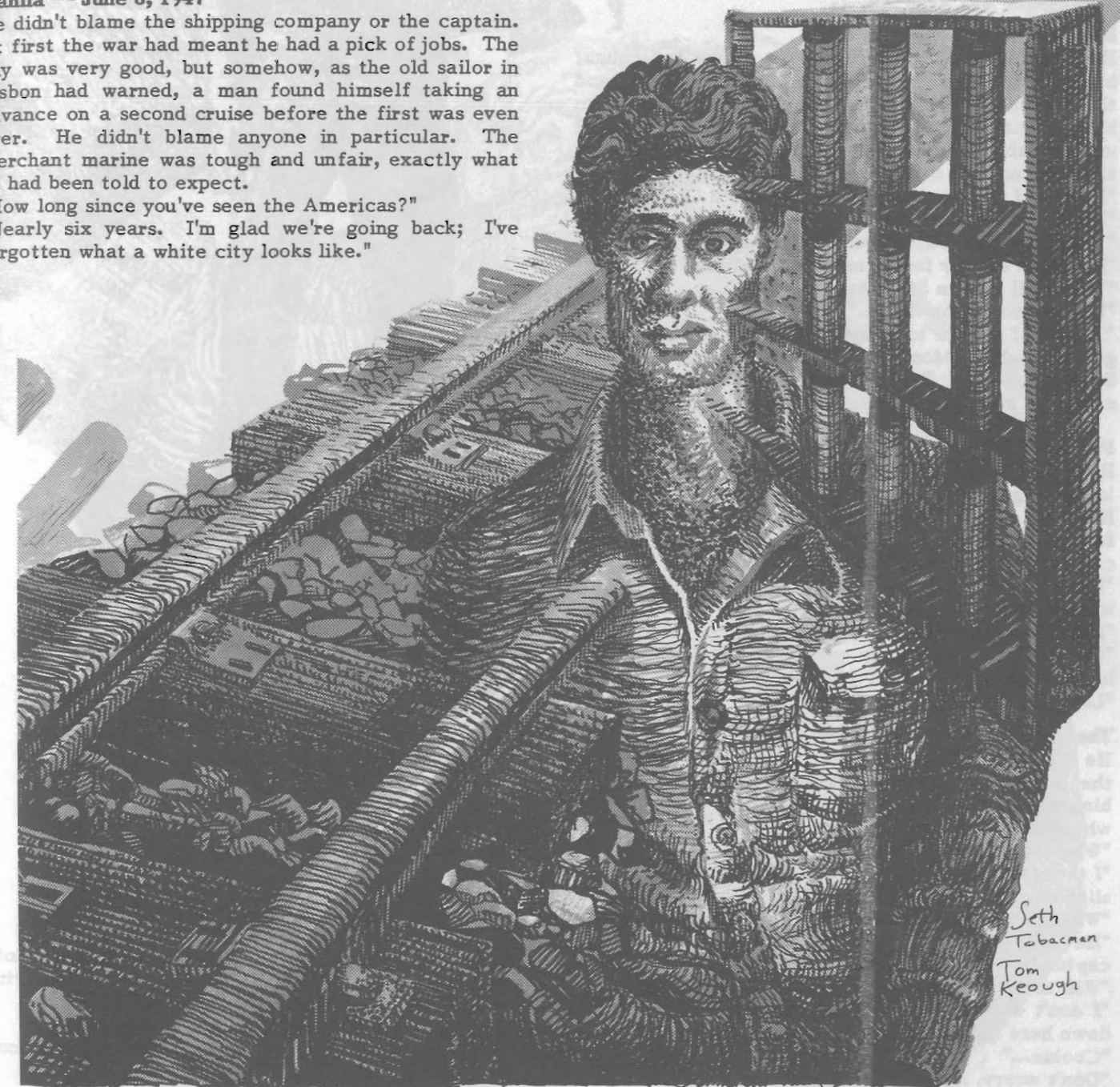
"Oh yeah."

"How far you going?"

"St. John's."

"In Nova Scotia?"

"Newfoundland."



Seth
Tabacman
Tom
Keough



Montreal — February 13, 1951

He didn't blame the railroad cops. They had caught him fair and square. He didn't blame the judge, and the fine had been the usual one. They weren't to blame that he couldn't pay. The sentence was not unreasonable. There was nothing to do but serve his time and not get caught short like that again.

"Newfie, I thought you was in that South China crew."

"I was, but I got out the same way you did."

"That's the only way. You ready to sign on again?"

"I want to see my father and brother first."

"They still over in St. John's?"

"Up the coast from there."

"Tough. I have a soft deal you could get in on. I'm going to do a Montreal to San Diego freight run. Back and forth. Easy as pie and regular. They still need two more guys."

Panama City — August 8, 1952

He didn't blame the captain for making them take lower wages when he got wise to their jumping ship. He didn't blame Pete for keeping him from seeing his family. And the ship was a good enough ship, the captain a good enough captain.

"Let's lay on a big one, Andy. I know a swell bitch up in the Alley."

"Haven't got the dough for it, Pete."

"On me. Hell, it's time you started pulling a little luck. What do you say?"

"Let's go, mate."

The Pacific — August 14, 1952

He didn't blame Pete for taking him. He didn't blame the old woman who sold them the bottle. He didn't blame the American marine. He didn't blame the whore they fought over.

"Why did you take so long to show me this?"

"I thought it would heal by itself. It was only a little slice on the arm."

"What do you think, Cookie?"

"He shouldn't have waited. We'd better get the captain."

"Will there be time to call shore?"

"I don't know. I think you'd better get the captain down here quick."

"Cookie..."

"Don't worry, Andy."

"How bad is it?"

"We'll see. I ain't a doctor you know."

"You wanted me?"

"His arm, Sir."

"What do you think?"

"You know how infections work in the tropics."

"Do you have to?"

"I think so."

Vancouver — April 2, 1955

He didn't blame Pete. He didn't blame Cookie. He didn't blame the captain. Everyone had been doing what they felt was best for him. — Dad-dying-come-home-if-you-can — David —

"Can't go very far with my leg in a sling, can I?"

"It'll only be for a few more days. Then you can move around."

"The doctor told me another week for sure."

"What happened anyway?"

"I was careless. The fog had made the deck slippery, and I was careless like some green hand."

"The company will take care of all the hospital bills. They're good that way, Hook. It ain't like it used to be."

"Yeah, I could treat this joint like a hotel vacation if it wasn't for the old man."

"He'll last. You Devons are tough bastards."

The China Sea — October 10, 1960

If things had gone the way he'd wanted, he'd have inherited the old Devon trawler. His life would have been Newfoundland and cod with the companionship of Brewster, McPearson, and the other kids he'd grown up with. But things hadn't worked out that way. He didn't blame the corporations or their power scoops. He didn't blame the old man. He didn't blame Pietro. He didn't blame the China Star. Didn't blame the woman. Didn't blame Cookie. Didn't blame any of the captains. There was no one person, no one place, no one thing to blame or curse. Without anyone's conscious planning or forcing, things had managed to go wrong.

"I hear you're a Canadian too, Hook."

"That's right, kid."

"Maritimes?"

"Newfoundland."

"Ever get sick for home."

"Sometimes."

"I guess it's kind of stupid feeling like this when you're as old as I am."

"Maybe."

"How about you? Ever think of going back?"

"What for? All my people are gone."

Jakarta — November 4, 1970

The Ambassador dictated a cablegram:

The benevolent seamen's association and local officials have sent us condolences for the unknown seaman who played such a hero's role in last week's blaze. We know of his nationality only because of a tattoo on his one good arm and the coins in his trousers. Although such identification is tenuous, I think we should bear the expense of bringing the body back to Australia so that he can be put to rest in his native soil.



SETH TOBOGMAN/TOM KEOUGH

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE AMERICAN WRITER'S CONGRESS

At the same historical moment that the media of communication have expanded the sum of possible experience, our ability to discern, judge, and comprehend that experience is shrinking. As the power of the media grows more absolute, only those ideas bearing its sanction are deemed fully real.

The writer today confronts an interlocking directorate of consciousness, by which each medium verifies and substantiates the fictional creations of others. To turn off the TV tonight is to face it tomorrow in *People* magazine and novelized the day after. What power can the testimony of lived experience aspire to before this omnipresence?

We are not the first generation to know the war between literary vision and the literary commodity. But in our time the terms of that battle are more extreme. The ability of the media to penetrate all facets of life and disseminate themselves universally has destroyed regional difference, historical peculiarity, and personal eccentricity as outposts of cultural alternative. All lived experience stands devalued before the prefabricated image of the world constantly before our eyes.

The absorption of all facets of life under the media rubric means that no aspect is free of their imposed fragmentation. There is a place for everything which consents its prior definition. Those items which defy the categories cannot be named and are thereby decreed not to exist.

Like Aztecs surrendering their gods to the icons of conquistadors, the writer must relinquish the creations of his being and imagination before the

mythology of the technologically superior foe.

It is not a question of arbitrary censorship, repression of those writings which frighten the powers that be. Instead a system has evolved through which these decisions in effect make themselves. Those who control the media operate with a particular vision of the world, a vision reinforced by its constant reflection in their own vehicles of expression. Whatever goes beyond that vision or calls it into question becomes invisible, at best noncommercial, at worst incomprehensible.

Writing creates a language through which experience can declare itself. Language legitimates experience and the media legitimate language. The prohibition of a language of opposition from the media ends with the shrinkage of intelligible experience. "That of which we cannot speak we must pass over in silence."

The dominant language of the moment reduces experience to *deja vu*. The *Times* announces, the *Voice* denounces, and vice versa. Each one is a known quantity, its pronouncement prefigured in our expectation. Is it real or is it *Memorex*? What is forbidden is the development of a language which carries the force of spontaneity, the logic of discovery.

The act of writing is a political act, wherein the writer upholds or contests a given order of reality. That writing which proceeds by received categories, tacitly admitting the dominant mythology, ends with submission to the given, despite its intent.

Every generation has given rise to its avant garde of writers who must struggle to make themselves understood. But today's writer must justify not only his work, but his very mode of expression. Today one becomes avant garde merely by maintaining the desire to write.

Literary culture has been the historical carrier of that consciousness which seeks to remake life. The mute world must be broken into its articulate units and reconstructed according to the writer's vision. That which simply occurs becomes story, drama, disclosure. The dictatorship of the visual media, with the *de facto* complicity of the publishing apparatus, means that the force of this perspective can no longer be brought to bear upon the present.

When the power to make meanings of our own is stifled, the world becomes meaningless, subject only to the definitions of those in control.

The disjunction between lived experience, with its absence of meaning, and produced experience, with its density of meaning, creates a social schizophrenia in which the media image of life is prized more highly than one's own experience. Soap opera replaces gossip, talk show replaces conversation, promotion replaces the book. With schizophrenia comes linguistic dysfunction: writers no longer trust their voices and their audience can no longer read.

Without a language that can express actual existence, the literary act becomes impossible. Instead we are offered a recycled imagery which proceeds from the media to the media, and with respect to which the audience can only watch. No one places his

faith in the power of words to transfigure, but only in their power to appear and thereby turn the wheels of commerce.

As that species for whom the transformation of life into meaning is not simply a need but existence, writers bear the brunt of this conflict. Shall they pursue an art which is fast losing its audience, power, and authenticity, or devote themselves to means of expression requiring the surrender of the verbal imagination? As heirs to the craft of language at its most concentrated, will they consent to a marriage of convenience with the media bent on their divestiture?

Shall our fictions lead us to a vision of our being and possibility or to denial, limitation, and ultimately repression of the human spirit?

Just as the industrialization of publishing made the reader a consumer, the science of marketing reduces the consumer to a calculation. The division of the audience into collections of buying habits requires the bureaucratization of the imagination according to preset formulas. Each word beyond the predictable means the loss of a mathematically determined percentage of sales. Discarded is that multiple resonance and merging of the categories capable of producing vision.

The apparent diversity of literary expression, like that of the conglomerates which manufacture it, masks the fact that none of it really matters. The magazine rack spells our possibilities: gay or straight, feminist or *Cosmo* girl, chic or serious,

FRAGMENTS OF A LETTER

"Women who love women have, like their more conventional sisters, existed on the periphery of history."

Carolyn Heilbrun

Dear Rowena

Today I want to be with you
at the ocean's edge
where the Indian name
once taught a poet how to sing
We will turn this house
into our resting place
The men have left us their skeletons
We can flesh nothing
you and I
except new configurations for the body
But the spirit is solely ours

Rowena

It is always simple objects
that provide our sacrifice to passion
belief in our endurance
even without children
It is spring
and yellow tulips in a smoky glass vase
are what you crave
what I desire
is to study your face
as though I were
always about to paint you

We are alone surrounded by
the comfort of an antique table
these healing shades of yellow
blue green echoes of breath
The red of our spilled blood
is recalled only at sunset
My fingers bracelet your wrist
and I kiss your scars

My hands on your face Rowena
and the years of bearded men
peel back as I caress you
Your breasts Rowena
How you shudder
when I place the yellow tulips
against your beaded throat
We close our eyes
and the treachery of men
is black and blank and forgotten

—Diane Levenberg

CULTURAL ASSOCIATIONS AND IDEAS

BY ARNOLD SACHAR

People are holding back tears. Their seemingly playful putdowns have a lacerating sting.

A representative of the Reagan Administration is on the MacNeill/Lehrer news show. He speaks in cool terms about the cost-effectiveness of cutting back a social program. The atmosphere is restrained and abstract. Everything is smoothly focused. The tone is clinical realism. Flash interview with a working poor person about to be cut off food stamps and Medicaid. The human reality enters briefly into consciousness. Abstractions fade. On CBS TV they had a recent series about the defense program. Military technocrats were making complex scenarios involving the destruction of human life. All existing modes of consciousness accept this framework. It is reasonable to protect one's country by any means. Kill ratios are plausible. Every child grows up with the idea that the world can blow up at any moment. All existence is contingent. This fact enters their dream-life. Cataclysmic explosion. Maybe at some level we older people wish the explosion. It may well liberate from constraint. The daily life is amorphous. There is some measure of comfort. It is not overtly horrendous. Risks are dangerous. One is placed in a constant dilemma. When to cross the line beyond sanity.

The waitress in the donut shop is sullen and bitter. All day she must serve the customers. Follow instructions. When I order a meal or ask a question her hostility is thinly concealed. Sometimes it takes the form of withdrawn reserve. At other times clearly demonstrable rage. She makes a few tortured jokes. She wants desperately to get out of the place. Into a region of free time. The teen-agers walk around with loud transistor radios. They move their bodies with animal passion. They are seething and intense. They seem powerfully stabbing for experience beyond the known. They stir much confusion and envy. All day the radio spills out with disc-jockeys and newscasters. They deliver their messages with staccato rapidity. The tone is breathless panic. It pervades and inundates. Country and Western songs have a strange mystical force. They communicate all the pain and anguish felt by so many. They convey a truncated yearning. They have a curious beat of alcoholic reverie and sexual madness. The pathos of abandonment on lonely nights. The tension of a reach for joy.

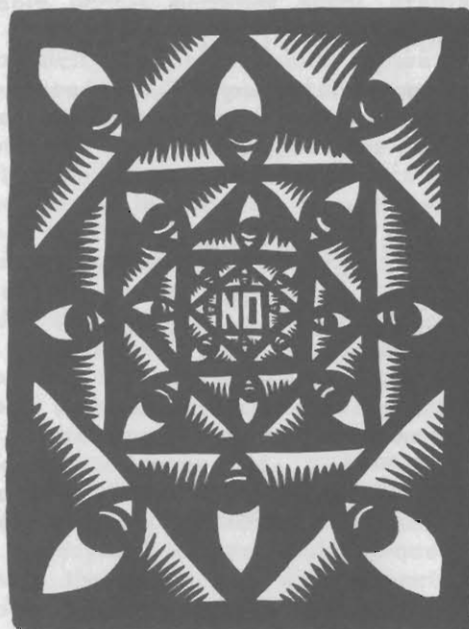
The therapist was being interviewed about the self-indulgent young. He was full of piety about their narcissism. He certainly did not want to put us back to the old days. He was just terribly upset with people losing their moorings. No clarity or commitment. Everyone on a chaotic binge. He has a settled pensive gaze. Some young college student is studying intensely for next week's exam. Status and identity hangs precariously in the balance. The future is at stake. Even if the future has no immediacy or definition. The student has a nervous stomach. And is overcome with feelings of helplessness and stupidity. One day a woman's husband picked up and left. They were having a complex, ambivalent relationship. She often felt abused and manipulated. Trapped as if in a cage. Robbed of vitality. Yet she was pained and angry at his departure. She felt the pain of loss and change. The sense of wasted years. Also tossed into the world without stability or affection.

El Salvador, the Middle East, etc. We hear of endless discontent. The people in many parts of the world seem to be challenging America's power and strength. They spit insolently in our faces. Niceties are violated. There is widespread rebellion against malnutrition and disease. We are no longer invincible and omnipresent in the world. We are made weak in posture. I see many young men and women walking briskly to their places of work in mid-Manhattan. On the surface they have a kind of day-time serenity. The shadows are not visible. It is a heavy question what goes on beneath the surface. But it is also useful to temporarily join and share their equilibrium. I find it difficult to similarly go about my business. I often experience a pervasive inertia. I feel stifled and balked. I resent even superficial energy.

They argue every issue on the Phil Donahue Show. Homosexuality. Abortion. Labor unions. All the emotions and ideas that agitate our common life are present. But underneath the explicit surface there is a revealing background and subtext. Each person in the audience loves to stand up during the question and offer an articulate, well-structured opinion. This is largely irrelevant to the issue at hand. It is a simple need to appear in public with power and dignity. There is also an attraction to the chaos of to-and-

fro argumentation. Non-reflective position-taking. Wild screaming and laughter. And finally people are always ready for extended confessions of pain. And also a strong defense of whatever choices they have made in life.

Every ten-year-old knows about the attempted killings of Ronald Reagan and the Pope. And the actual killings of John Lennon and Anwar Sadat. There is an immediate world of random, publicized violence and more than life-like symbols and archetypes. And then one invariably hears the abstract commentary. Distant from the originality and force of subjective experience. A world fragile and precarious. All that is strange made familiar. Mediated by bizarre, efficient technology. You hear talk all over of the lazy people on welfare. They get away, it seems, with everything. They take the liberty of appropriating what belongs to us. People do not seem to think they have very much. They pathetically envy those who are in desperate poverty. Indolent satisfaction appears a remarkable luxury. They take drugs. They throw garbage in the street. They smell bad. They spend like there is no tomorrow. They indulge orgies of criminal violence. The people are holding back tears. Their seemingly playful put-downs have a lacerating sting. Pointed and ultimately hostile.



POEMS BY HELEN KENDLER

DETROIT, 1955

On Saturdays my father mowed the lawn.
He'd heave the dinosaur around
and make it chew the yard until he'd call
for water. I'd be ready with his sailor mug
and as he drank I'd thumb the sharpened blades,
thankful I was neither weed nor grass.

The fleet of houses moored along the street
bobbed quietly as he resumed his task.
I can't say what he dreamed of as he steered
the old machine, but when his sunstruck eyes
turned in my direction, they scudded leagues beyond
our small frame house, our urgencies, our arms.

Waterbearer, mutineer, mourner dipped in black:
Because of him I've been them all.
He refused to mend the porch, which sagged a bit
and threatened us with groans but never fell.
He knew it wouldn't. I'm convinced of it.
I'm standing on it still.

PIDGIN VILLANELLE

The pigeon's low call wakes—
it settles on my sill
just as first light shakes

the tail of night. Its cooing overtakes
the haunted street at will.
The pigeon's local, wakes

my body's slow machine. I slam the brakes
of sleep and barrel up a hill
of light just as it first shakes

its sand into the room. Reality makes
a fool of fear: I'm thrilled
when the pigeon's low call wakes

in me the daring one who breaks
the hold of dreams. I kill,
just as first light shakes

its head, the nightmare snake
that chokes me. Terror's a short-lived ill,
it's callow and can't shake
the justice first light wakes.

AS YOU WALK THROUGH MY DOOR

today a hard wind knocks down garbage cans
scraping them on asphalt the way a child
drags a stick across a fence
but this is no child
pressing the skin to my skull
wiping the calm off my face until
I fight the snarl of lips
the tangle of eyes trying
to turn themselves inward
this is a wind that strips
landscapes down to desert
blowing the world into the garbage cans
that roll in the street like drunken men—

the wind that blows through my bones
whenever you are near

SLIDE AND LECTURE

"Beauty is what's
Thrown into relief
Against the plane of human suffering."

As in the frieze before us:
The mother mourns her son,
Stone tears forever resting on stone cheek,

Two stone daughters kneeling,
One on either side,
Chiseled into postures of lament.

"Note the consummation
Of the artist's grief,
The perfection only sorrow could invent."

Marble hands arrested,
Clutching marble breasts.
Sculpted sackcloth torn in disbelief.

THE SHARK

When she dresses up in blue
her sleek black hair
is a shark's fin skimming the ocean
and I am the first thing
floating in its path.

After 15 years together and 20 records, the Firesign Theatre is still proving that Everything We Know Is Wrong



by Kip M. Ghesin

RELAY... HOME PLANET... INTERCEPT CODE ENGAGED... MISSIVE COMING THROUGH... WE HAVE INITIAL CONTACT ("Only initials, Lieutenant? Get their full names, leave no turn unstoned!") "Right, Chief—"... VISUAL-CORRECTION, AUDIO CONTACT ENGAGED, FLASHING ON SCREEN MOMENTARILY ("What's that flasher doing there? Get him off the screen, Lieutenant!")... TOP SECRET, IT'LL TAKE 'EM YEARS TO FIGURE THIS ONE OUT, HOMEBASE...

Message on. Welcome to my seventeenth Relay Missive. This contact the topic with which I will be dissociating myself is prime example of the advanced form of what the Terrans call "humor" ("humour", if one is in the mood), and will henceforth

be known by the code name and address, The Firesign Theatre.

This phenomenon, at first glance, appears to be composed of four gentlemen of the male Terran species, known herein by their assigned alibis Philip Austin, Peter Bergman, David Ossman and Philip Proctor. Upon examination of vinyl output 1, I discovered that persons two and four admit as their homebase the midwest portion of topographical area United States (see Re. Miss. #4, "Where This Country's At"), while one and/or three claim residency in California, clearly a topic all its own (Re. Miss. #5). Monitorings of this unit as a collective entity began approximately Terran Standard Anum 1966, out of said California, and reliable information has it the unit employed an ancient and outdated device known as radio across

which to broadcast their performances. This bombast apparently expanded into the then-remarkable codename "The Firesign Theatre Radio Hour" (previous incarnations "Live From The Magic Mushroom", "Early Sunday Morning Oz", but not "The Quarrymen") which in turn developed into the more-familiar-to-legions phrase "Dear Friends". Acquiring information about these early years proved a challenge as radio frequencies shifted with time (from KPFF to KLRA to KMET to KPPC and back to KPFF) and few enough recording survive for review by your humble agent, who had not discovered the import of the unit until the current T. S. A. 1982, far after (as Terrans measure time) the end of their radio era.

This form of Terran humor may be unknown to Homebase's data banks (as I can certainly understand after transmitting only my "Catskill Comics" and "Up-And-Coming-One-Joke-Moron", tapes, and omitting thus far such worthy predecessors as the Marx Brothers, Ernie Kovacs, The Goon Show, Bob & Ray, Lenny Bruce, and Richard Nixon), I quote now from the unit's own propaganda release, a two-disc review album entitled *Forward Into The Past*: "They banded together in the hills of Hollywood and devoted themselves to staying two years ahead of The Future. Looking deep into their crystal balls, they began telling each other funny stories about what they saw. These stories got broadcast on the radio, put on record albums and presented on stage—and gradually a lot of folks all over this great land of R's began laughing at some of the things which had previously been scaring them nearly Over The Edge... Yes, it was comedy (the opposite of gravity). It was comedy for people high on their first acid trip. Comedy for people already high enough not to take anything—seriously. Comedy for kids who were being forced to grow up fast. Comedy for adults who could remember they were still children. Comedy opposed to the 30-year war in Asia and the Robot Presidency. Comedy that always told the truth."

The methods used by TFT's various characters can be anything from music (Austin is an accomplished musician and songwriter, and Proctor's singing voice is strong and clear enough to carry forth both complex and subtle lyrics with ease) to science fiction (Ossman excels in this) or other literary forms to the realm of paid advertising (Bergman's parodied commercials form one of the unit's best stomping grounds). But context as well as content is clever and unpredictable in TFT's universe. The unit employs full use of the advantages of stereo recording, creating effects which bounce from one

receiver to the other, simultaneous or underlying conversations, nuances within dialogues (a favorite effect is the sounds from television programs in the background which at times vie with the main dialogue for hilarity or interest) or any other form of sound layering which four brilliant and inventive minds can dream up. Another of TFT's marvelous and potentially lethal qualities is the "cross-referencing" used throughout its recording career. A line or scene from one album is likely to be answered or repeated in another, and these inside jokes (a quite fascinating and perhaps but not likely unintentional running gag is for one character to offer a cue line referring to the unit's radio mystery parody "Nick Danger" to be met with the response "What?", found in several later albums) rival ascriptions to rock music, drugs, political figures and literati, all of which

Although mass-appeal has by necessity eluded the unit, one can observe their influence on much of what is thought of as innovative comedy in present-day Terran society, in records, television and even literature. Besides the twenty records (discography to follow), at least two of which have been filmed and a number transcribed into book form (THE FIRESIGN THEATRE'S BIG BOOK OF PLAYS and THE FIRESIGN THEATRE'S BIG MYSTERY JOKE BOOK, formerly available from Straight Arrow Books and distributed by Simon & Schuster, but currently sold only as mail-order rarities, if one can locate them), and many of which have even been performed by others, the unit has amassed its own brand of devotees.

Unfortunately for our datafiles, no mega-verbose missive such as this can really describe what The Firesign Theatre is. That can only be accomplished, and sometimes not, by listening to the records themselves or managing to glimpse sparing television performances (a November 1981 "Evening At The Improv", a cable special "Folk Music Reunion" featuring three members, Proctor's cameos on programs like Steve Martin's "Twilight Theatre" and the new George Peppard series "The A Team") or stage shows (the unit last toured in 1981; your humble agent was directed to them, as you know, the following year, and thus missed this opportunity). As of this time period, I have established personal contact with each of the unit's components, and have been given the following points at which public contact may be initiated: through the unit's representation if booking or business arrangements are desired (William Morris Agency, 121 El Camino Drive, Beverly Hills, CA 90212), through the record label Rhino Records, which has released their four most recent vinyls and is one of the most accommodating sources

I have encountered through my research (11609 West Pico Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90064), and through the unit's post office box which has been held by member Ossman for over seven TSAs and through which all correspondence will eventually reach its destination (Box 4306, Santa Barbara, CA 93103). I suggest these communication outlets as Homebases' next investigative step, as I have already strayed too far from factual observation into opinion. I would also request dispatching a module to this location to retrieve a Terran stereo set and the following recordings, comprising all Firesign-related albums:

WAITING FOR THE ELECTRICIAN, OR SOMEONE LIKE HIM (1968, Columbia)
HOW CAN YOU BE IN TWO PLACES AT ONCE WHEN YOU'RE NOT ANYWHERE AT ALL (1969, Columbia)
DON'T CRUSH THAT DWARF, HAND ME THE PLIERS (1970, Columbia)
I THINK WE'RE ALL BOZOS ON THIS BUS (1971, Columbia)
DEAR FRIENDS (1972 double album, Columbia)
NOT INSANE OR ANYTHING YOU WANT TO (1972, Columbia)
TV OR NOT TV—Proctor & Bergman (1973, Columbia)
HOW TIME FLIES—Ossman, featuring TFT (1973, Columbia)
ROLLER MAIDENS FROM OUTER SPACE—Austin, featuring TFT (1974, Epic/CBS)
THE TALE OF THE GIANT RAT OF SUMATRA (1974, Columbia)
EVERYTHING YOU KNOW IS WRONG (1974, Columbia)
IN THE NEXT WORLD, YOU'RE ON YOUR OWN (1975, Columbia)
WHAT THIS COUNTRY NEEDS—Proctor & Bergman (1975, Columbia)
FORWARD INTO THE PAST (1976 double album, Columbia)

JUST FOLKS... A FIRESIGN CHAT (1977, Butterfly)
GIVE US A BREAK—Proctor & Bergman (1978, Mercury)
NICK DANGER—THE CASE OF THE MISSING SHOE (1979 EP, Rhino)
FIGHTING CLOWNS (1980, Rhino)
SHAKESPEARE'S LOST COMEDIE (1982, Rhino)
LAWYER'S HOSPITAL (1982, Rhino)

I have also included, for your perusal, an interview done with Proctor & Bergman concerning the 1972 presidential running of Geroge Orwell Papoon, found in a plain white jacket, and entitled "A Firesign Chat With Papoon". Recommend this vinyl, plus releases one, two (second side), five, and fourteen for introductory listening for the uninitiated, and then that Homebase proceed in chronological sequence.

As for TSA 1983, I have so far garnered sketchy details from member Proctor on a video album done by him plus members Bergman and Austin, titled THE YOLKS OF OXNARD, directed by Bill Dear and due for release through Michael Nesmith's Pacific Arts company in the spring of 1983. Member Ossman currently resides in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where he concerns himself with poetry, radio arts, and other creativity. Although not currently performing as a foursome, The Firesign Theatre shows little sign of closing its doors now or in the near future. I end this Relay Missive with some words of caution, however. The genius of TFT must not be overlooked nor underestimated. Truth can be a very volatile commodity in Terran society (near-truth even more so), its value measured only in how much of it the humans are willing to hear. When couched in layered, intelligent humor, its power is great, and can be hoped to do much good. Final request to remain on Terra indefinitely for further reclamation. Message off.



LETTERS LETTERS LETTERS LETTERS LETTERS

REVOLUTIONARY ART

Dear CC,

It seems to me that the most impressive contributions to current progressive art are those which provide not only a new image or even a new form of language but delve down and move out into the social life itself through long-term projects. These works tend to be intricately structural, the results of years of thought and labor—not autonomous series for exhibition, but on-going sequences of learning, communication, integration, and then relearning from the responses of the chosen audience. Such works concern themselves with systems critically, from within, not just as commentaries. Such artists tend to be asked when they are going to "start some new work," because innovation in the international art world is understood as stylistic and short-term, geared to the market. Artists aren't supposed to go so far beneath the surface to provoke change, but are merely supposed to embellish, observe and reflect the sights, sites, and systems of the status quo. (This is also a danger for much oppositional art today—that its necessary immediacy becomes reactive rather than radically alternative in the long run.)

Yours,

Lucy R. Lippard
Village Voice 10/19/82

THE SYNDICATED ANARCHIST

Dear CC,

The first newspaper I ever worked for, The Buzzard/Tarantula, a belligerent underground propagation, was distributed clandestinely at Grace M. Davis High School in Modesto, California. Written, edited, illustrated, and annotated not by me, the Buzz/Tar was solely the vision of Art Babcox, a 16 year old anarcho-syndicalist bicyclist with shocking red hair. He was my first real influence.

Aside from putting out the newspaper, Art had written three volumes of lyric love poetry based on his research into Nordic myth structure and given them to his unrequited, a high school rally girl with a sky blue glass eye. Art organized the first sit-in at Grace M. Davis High School against the War and the Draft and fashioned a secret anarchist club on campus called Punks Inc. He printed up very proper cards. I was a card carrying member. Members of Punks Inc. would take the risk of slipping the Buzz/Tar into lockers, distributing it in the parking lots, and sometimes we would write for the rag. A typical front page headline: FOOTBALL COACH BUGGERS TOOLLOOSE LATREC (for refusing to run the backstops). It was filled with filthy iconoclastic wit. There was a sports column with nothing but scores: 5-7 0-2 16-3. I occasionally would do the sports column. There might be an article against military recruiters coming on campus or a special on the latest man to die in the gas chamber.

Later in his life, after a sublime vision at Sacred Pyramid Lake Indian Reservation (he'd eaten a certain medicinal cacti), Art became a great painter. He painted large tri-paneled desert expanses and made you see Coyote Breath.

But the thing Art did best was ride a bicycle. He had an old Schwinn Rocket one-speed balloon tire bicycle that he would pedal from the San Joaquin Valley at sea level through the fertile flat fields climbing the foothills past manzanita and madrone, all the way to the top of Sonora Pass at 12,000 feet. He chose to do the final leg by going up the Old Priest Grade, a road so steep most automobiles avoided it. To experience the pleasure of the wind high above the world Art needed to feel the strain and pain of the sweaty ascent.

How Art managed to evade the Draft: he dressed up in a wetsuit with a rubber pig's mask on his head and face, and wearing a dead carp on his wrist, he let his testicles, one painted blue, the other painted red and white, hang through two holes cut out of the crotch of the rubber diving suit. He walked into the Modesto Draft Board to register asking for spare kneecaps. The bureaucrats on the Warboard played hands off, flashed several Polaroid snapshots of him from various angles and filed them away in his file. Art, of course, never heard from his Uncle Sam again; not 1A, 2S, 4F or C.O., just thanx, but no thanx.

When asked how he managed to avoid the Draft, Art always replied, "It took balls."

Robert Long

The Syndicated Anarchist



GO ON

Did you see Andre Gregory's film advertising June 12? Not that witless dinner conversation. This one is a short, maybe 4 minutes. "Hi! I'm Liza Minnelli, and I want to go on entertaining." "I'm Halston, and I want to go on designing clothes." Joanne Woodward, E.L. Doctorow, Joe Papp, and others want to go on doing what they're doing, as do a mailman, a restaurant worker, a woman doctor. After Leonard Bernstein, the screen erupts in a spectacular, deafening mushrooming explosion. Children say, "I want to go on living" in many languages, and the film ends, "I'm Andre Gregory. On June 12, I'll be in Central Park with my friends. I hope you'll be there with yours." Then it gave an address for one of the national organizations that has an 800 number.

It was an unannounced overture to "Chariots of Fire."

Peace,
An unemployed college graduate

SAVE THE PAST

Dear CC,

Of all the reasons people give for wanting to disarm, no one ever says they want to save the past. Children and grandchildren, sure, they deserve a chance. But what about parents and grandparents? Don't they deserve to have lived in a species that lasts? And why keep it in the family? Why be so personal?

Yours,

A Concerned Citizen

Dear Concerned,

My friend Peter Agree saw a banner which had a pretty dove or something and said, "To disarm is to remember." Also, a group called Archivists for Disarmament, or maybe it's Archivists Against Armageddon, formed recently to save the past. They oppose budget cuts in history.

As to your questions, what can I say? Sec-tarianism frequently begins at home.

A SAILOR'S TALE

Dear CC,

I don't know what radical humor is, but I'll tell you what happened in Newark Airport. I was taking the food off my tray, to make room. Sitting there was a real friendly looking middle-aged guy. He laughed warmly when I blurted out, "Welcome to People's Express... We're Number Five!" Turns out he is a merchant seaman, waiting for a bus back to the port. He came to the airport to buy the Sunday News.

I asked about boat food. "Pretty good, actually. 'Course it's institutional food, you always know what day it is by what you are eating." Do you have free time on the boat? "Plenty, there's just no space!"

He mentioned moving circus elephants. I asked how they get animals to put up with that treatment. "Get 'em young. Put 'em in chains and attach 'em to a stake, and pretty soon they forget about the stake. Just hope they don't ever get pissed off!"

What are the divisions, the differences among the sailors? "Oh, age and experience, I guess. Lemme tell ya a story. This ship I'm on now, we got a hundred foot tower, right in the middle, straight up, tight circular stairs we gotta climb just to go to work. I'm up there one morning, and my friend, this real fat guy, gets to the top. He's huffin and puffin and flushed and sweating, and he lights up a cigarette, and starts coughing like crazy, and I'm thinking, Jesus Christ, Charlie's gonna die on me up here, when he clears his throat, shakes his head, and says, "Damn! Girls are coming on board. How they ever gonna do the work?"

Yours,
J.M.

LETTERS LETTERS LETTERS LETTERS LETTERS

Letter from Managua

Dear CC

Yesterday I witnessed one of the most moving events I've had the privilege of being present at in a long time... we have a group of North American writers here... people from the American Writers Congress. It's a mixed group: some very good people, and some typical cynics. We had planned an active program for them as we always try to do—lots of meetings with people who can really tell it as it is in this process, a trip to the border, etc. But yesterday around mid-morning Comandante Tomás Borge called Rosario and said he was going to visit the prison at Zona Franca in the afternoon and make an important announcement to the slightly more than 300 Miskito Indians who are interned there... and he wanted to invite the North American intellectuals to be present as well... So we grabbed them out of the meeting they were having at the Ministry of Finances, and dashed them over to the Ministry of the Interior, where Tomás was already talking to a number of foreign press people before heading for the prison...

Tomás rode with us in the bus... talking to the Americans, explaining the situation with these Miskitos who have given rise to so much confusion and attack outside the country. These are the prisoners resulting from the frustrated "Red Christmas" of last year: the counterrevolutionary plan to separate a piece of the country off the Atlantic Coast, set up a beach head with "provisional government", and seek the support of "friendly nations" (of which the U.S. would undoubtedly have been the first). The ignorance in which the Miskito people have lived for years, the confusion many of them have been prey to through the "leadership" of criminals like Seadman Fasgoth... the total marginalization of which they have been victims... all this makes it much easier to fool them and herd them from one reactionary position to another. And the Sandinist government has made some mistakes as well in this situation... on that point Tomás had nothing to hide with these North American friends. Something has to be done about these prisoners, some solution has to be found... and it was clear that it was towards this end that we were all going out by bus to the Zona Franca yesterday afternoon...

First we stopped off at the model open prison farm... I've been there now several times before. It's a 55-hectare cattle farm where between 40 and 50 good be-

havior prisoners from among the ex-National Guard live and work totally without armed guards, with frequent family and conjugal visits, with a week's visit home every six months, etc. etc. A farm totally run by the prisoners themselves, where most are freed—no matter what sentences they have—fairly soon after they get there. This is the kind of prison Nicaragua dreams possible for ALL its prisoners... and three more like it are now in construction...

Then we went on to Zona Franca...

The Zona Franca is a more conventional-style prison, maximum security, with the gates, guards, dogs, the works. Making our way past several groups of soldiers at attention for Tomás's entrance, we went into an inner patio where 306



Miskito Indians were lined up—among them a number of women—clearly expectant, but impassive. Tomás began taking to them... talking about their situation, about the situation on the Coast, about how it had been necessary for them to be rounded up, and investigations made to determine their degree of responsibility in the events of last December... but how there was a clarity on the part of the Gov-

ernment regarding the confusion they are in... and how the Sandinista Revolution doesn't want to marginalize anyone.

The announcement he came to make was that, as of next Wednesday, they will be moved from the Zona Franca to a new open prison farm, here in Managua. But this new farm will differ from those already in existence, in a number of important ways. In the first place, they will be working in tobacco (a crop they know well, from their tradition on the Coast) and they will be paid the same salaries that regular MIDINRA workers get for the same work. Each of them is to make up a list of family members they would like to have live with them: children, brothers and sisters, parents if they are dependent... and the Government will see to it that they are transported here to be with them. With materials supplied by the State but with their own labor, they will begin to build houses... community buildings... a school. The spot where the prison farm is located is close to the river, taking into consideration the Miskitos' love of rivers.

As Tomás came to the end of his explanation, there seemed little interest... much less joy in the announcement. And he asked if there were any questions. One of the prisoners raised his hand: "The first question, Comandante," he said, "is that almost none of us understood a word you said... almost none of us speaks Spanish!" "Come up here and translate then," was Tomás' response...

And so he went through the whole thing again, with greater detail, and the faces of these Miskito prisoners began to show signs of disbelief, then interest, then joy... their eyes came alive and the natural beauty in their faces began to glow...

"Do you want a church?", he asked. "Yes," the people said... in English "Well, o.k. But a wooden church... we won't be able to foot the bill for anything luxurious. But then it doesn't really matter, God isn't interested in luxury... just honesty..." And on it went.

Those of us privileged to be there knew we were present at a historic event: one more in the long chain of such events in which the Sandinists deal in a creative way—more creative than I have ever seen—with serious and complex problems, admit mistakes when necessary, try to deal with this problem with all the love and caring and creativity for which this Revolution is now known throughout the world...

Yours,
Margaret Randall

LETTERS LETTERS LETTERS LETTERS LETTERS

APRIL 16th

Dear CC,
TERRORIST EXTORTION SUCCEEDS!
DIVIDED SOCIETY SUCCUMBS!
(PENTAGON GIDDY)

America is a loophole for the rich,
a shelter where tax is a joke.
Literally: material for jokes!
The rich also kid about dying,
'Cuz they get to rest a while first.

ON THE ESOPUS

Dear CC,
You said to write a letter. How about a picture postcard? It is a hot July Saturday afternoon. I sit low in a high-back canvas beach chair watching the Esopus River at Mount Tremper as it carries canoers with backpacks and scurrying kayakers fast past rubber inner tubers basking inactive freezing their asses.

These canoers, kayakers, and tubers occur like the joggers, bikers, walkers, and roller skateboarders in Riverside Park: one after another, frequently groups, occasionally gaps.

My chair is lodged securely in the rocks and pebbles, stones and dust, which wait all winter, as wait they must, frozen over, under snow, what do they know, what do they know? They hug each other, choiceless, close: glowless coals just bake all day, monotony gray, getting smoother by the decade as they disintegrate. Tender feet walk slowly, awkward, o'er these rocks.

Pickup trucks and dusty wrecks back down the path, unloading kids and dogs and tubes and coolers. Fishermen shirtless in waders tie and cast flies and apersions on writers in beach chairs. Two guys sunbathe on the hood of a car. A woman with bad teeth, dirty hair can't relax in her assless bathing suit. Teenage boys mount the green trestle bridge and leap fifty feet into the waterhole below. One or two mothers a summer will hear that Johnny hit a rock, and never again worry about guns and cars and wars.

Yours,
Norman

WATCH OUT

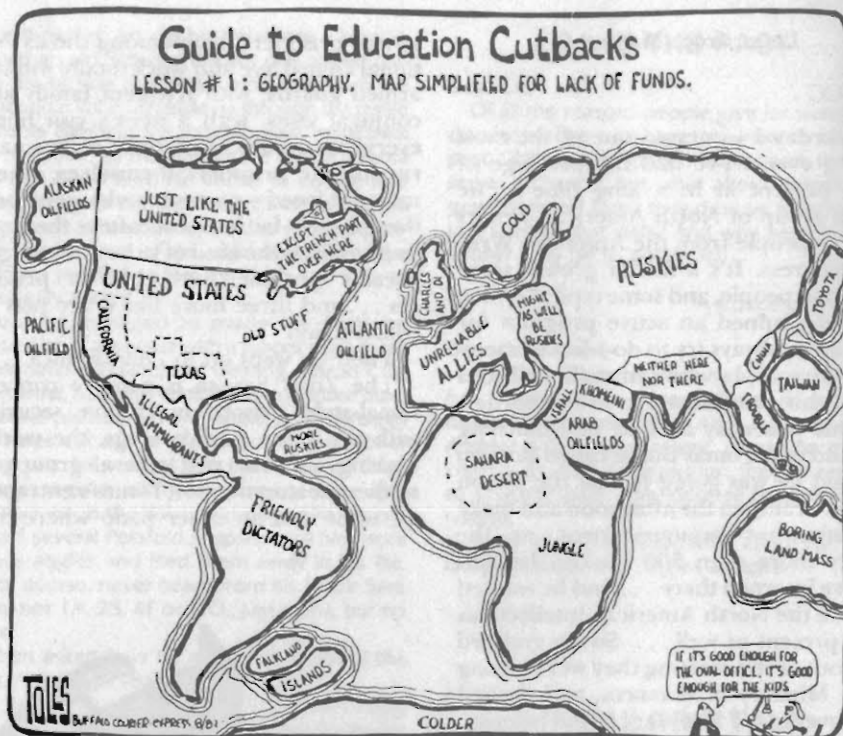
Dear CC,
It's bout my watch. A cheapo digital which does more things than I can deal with. Push a button and it'll tell you what time it really is. Push the same button again, and it will tell you exactly how much time has elapsed, in hundredths of a second, not from the beginning of time but from whenever you choose.

That's ok. I mean, I can deal with that. I've had "trip mileage" gauges on cars. And I know the unconscious is always around.

My problem is that I am always late because at one fifty it is already ten of two.

Another problem, which I always think of when I am late, is that my watch will outlast everything if we give it the chance.

Rushed,
Tom



STAGES

Dear CC,
Saw Danny Thomas on Tom Snyder a while back. He said two things I wanted to report. First was a one sentence history of the tv sitcom: "Show me a person in trouble, and I'll show you a funny person." Other was about how he spends all his time raising all this money for some hospital. He was so sincere: "When I see . . . I mean, it is amazing to realize how many children have cancer. Cancer is something you have to develop!"

Stay tuned,
L. Ball

WARREN SUSMAN

Dear CC,
A few years ago Warren Susman had a heart attack. I went to visit him in the hospital and who should walk in with me but the TV person. Warren was pissed that the reception was poor, so the guy took that TV off its huge swing-out arm and connected another one.

Then Warren told me the story of the attack, which nearly, very nearly killed him. Apparently the climactic moment, the test which aroused the greatest anxiety in the doctors and nurses and technicians monitoring the machines monitoring Warren, was his first bowel movement. (Warren advises us not to have heart attacks after large meals.)

Ever the cultural historian, Warren said, "And do you know what, Jim? The TV in intensive care is free!"

Yours,
J.M.

LOST AT SEA

Dear CC,
I know of no ghetto worse than the floating prison that sails the seas of the world in the name of the United States. I know of no ghetto which is as devastating, repressive, soul consuming, binding or isolating, and yet which is respected as much as the awesome, haze-grey monster with the large white numbers and the letters 'USS' painted on its hull.

To the American civilian public, it is imposing. To them it represents power, protection, patriotism, and freedom. To America's foreign allies and enemies alike, it is regarded as a costly piece of machinery with huge potential for doing either harm or help. It is a thing envied and admired, feared and respected. But for all who have not personally experienced the torment within its walls and the anguish within its boundaries, it is thought of as the happy home of the sea-going sailor. Only the sailor obligated to spend years aboard it can know it for the true beast it is and can see beyond the illusion it projects.

Life aboard a United States Navy vessel at sea is hell. It is a life spent in an environment full of men. It is a world where personalities are meshed together like chewing gum in hair. It is an environment that melts dreams like plastic in a kiln. Daily, the sailor wakes up to the piercing sound of a Boatswain's whistle, followed by the Boatswain's all-too-familiar voice. He wakes to the sight of both partially clothed and naked male bodies. Inches from his face are erections still smelling of last night's emissions, rash co-

LETTERS LETTE

vered rectums, pimpled faces, and an assortment of colored skin. Daily, he is strapped in an environment which pulls him apart as though he was taffy. It leaves him grabbing at the thinning middle, wondering how to hold on. He is surrounded by guys, guys who like him and guys who would gladly push him overboard given the opportunity. They are all bound together: restricted to a devastating environment because of a common allegiance, a sacred vow, and a common hope to conquer an "adventure."

The sailor's days are all alike. They are all dictated to him. A Plan of the Day is printed for his every moment. It is read to him in the morning, informing him what he shall do that day and what he shall not do. He expects no pleasant surprises. He knows breakfast will be warm, lunch cold, and dinner lousy. And for all meals, he knows he will have to wait on line with hundreds of sailors. For him, the day is uneventful, except for the new rule, purposely enforced, he is convinced, to make his life more miserable. His nights are vacuums—hours filled with emptiness. There is no place for him to go, and nothing for him to do. He has already walked the bridge, the starboard, the port, fore, aft, the fo'c's'le, and the fantail a million times. He's seen every movie and prerecorded television program aboard. He's discussed every conceivable topic and exhausted his imagination for every inconceivable one. He thinks about writing letters, but already he has filled the ship's post office with a score of letters. There's no one left to write. Besides, motivation fails him because he knows mail is an unpredictable as his sanity. So he does the most dangerous thing. He thinks.

He asks himself why he willingly signed away his life, why he replaced his freedom with confinement. He wonders how he can be content with his own silence, how he can have relinquished his right to be recognized. Always, there are no answers. So he fights back the tears and learns not to think of home or his loved ones who are so proud of him, so pleased with his contribution. And daily he dies a bit more as the bow moves toward the stern and the stern moves toward the bow, until finally he is crushed in between like glass in a vise.

William Green



INTO THE MOVEMENT

for Susan McCarn

Diction movement
for the movement
Get crackin' you flabby activists
How d'ya aspect the people talisten
if you can't talk to 'em
Diction, passion, conviction
A pirouette— model yourself after those
you admire, within yourself
and within the flow of herstory
theirstory our story

stretch, bend, crawl
hop crane your neck hinder
mine kampf and mine kinder
come to me let's join the chants
of the old songs in wobbly unity
push up kick up
your foot to air from the ground
to run
to hunt
to fumble, fondle
to punt
to scream our sounds
and make the end run

take the future
steps, schlepps and bounds

Joel S. Cohen 3/20/83



BLOOD MEMORIES

By Holly Zox

first memories are blood memories
blood red stripes
in the flag
on Kennedy's coffin
Vietnam death counts
war clips
blood of corpses
the arms without bodies
blood rushing to my head
as Mom tried to put me
in pigtails when I was two
and I screamed
NO!
blood in the first words
I read and read
about Native Americans
slavery the Great Depression
the Holocaust
blood of the pogroms
that all my great-grandparents
came to this country to escape
stained in the creases of

Grandma Fanny's hands
and in the sugar
of the candy her hands
gave us every shabbos
blood

in my nightmares
in my underwear
for the first time
and I never told anybody
blood
blood in all my pores
when the flashes flash

blood in Sheila's eyes
when I found
her as he tried to
rape her in her room
blood that could have
been on the knife
he carried

I carried her blood
as her trembling
became my trembling
as I watched her
become a chain-smoker
our blood pounding
in my throat my ears
my nose my eyes
as someone in the court
asked me

"Was she upset?"
"Was she really screaming?"
blood screaming
screaming NO!

blood bathing
cleansing washing
birthing rebirthing
reclaiming blood
all our blood
blood lost in the thumbscrews
in the screwing
the shooting
shooting flames
my blood
reclaiming my first bleeding
and the flashes
are not always of
destruction but of
wholeness

This poem is part of an installation I did for the P.A.D.D. show, "Detours, Sharp Turns, and Little Naggy Feelings: Turning Points in the Lives of Art Activists." The installation consists of an eight-foot shadow of myself with arms raised and fists clenched painted on the wall; a broken mirror, a web, and a newspaper clipping of a Palestinian woman from the Beirut massacre inside an old black frame; and an altar with a burning candle, a jar of menstrual blood, and various other sacred objects. The words of the poem, painted in red, flow like blood through the shadow, and a tape of me reading the poem provides an aural pulse for the piece. The viewer can step up into the altar, look in the mirror and scream with the Palestinian woman, while being embraced by my shadow.

—Holly Zox

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LEFT CURVE(II)

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Backfiles of laughs for you...

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENCE HUMOR BURO —

Cultural Correspondence, N.S. #1 (April, 1982), 16pp special Radical Humor Festival issue, articles by Paul Krassner, Bill Livant, Paul Buhle, catalogue of art show including Kinney, Crumb, Kupferberg, Pavlidis, Posada, many others. \$1.

Cultural Correspondence, old #12-14 (Summer, 1981), Manifesto for a Radical Humor Movement by Jay Kinney and Paul Buhle, with signatories from 12 countries, documents from Europe, U.S., Mexico. Also, Feminist Humor on the 70s, Crumb's Notebooks, Surrealist pics, much else. 120pp, \$3.

Cultural Correspondence, old #9 (Spring, 1979), Sex Roles & Humor, interviews with underground women artists, Humor Archive with Oscar Ameringer and Art Young, Shop Floor Humor past and present, hilarious Kinney cover. 88pp, \$2.

Cultural Correspondence, old #8 (Fall-Winter, 1978), Naomi Weisstein's unfinished feminist/humor/detective novel; R. Weisberger on Jewish Stage Humor; P. Buhle on comic strips, Andre Breton on Black Humor. 72pp, \$2.

Cultural Correspondence, old #6-7 (Spring, 1978), Humor Documents from German-American, Yiddish, Finnish-American and Down Home Socialist movements. "The Enemy—An Alarm Clock" (W.E. Reynolds, 1922). Many comics, jokes. 120pp, \$2.50.

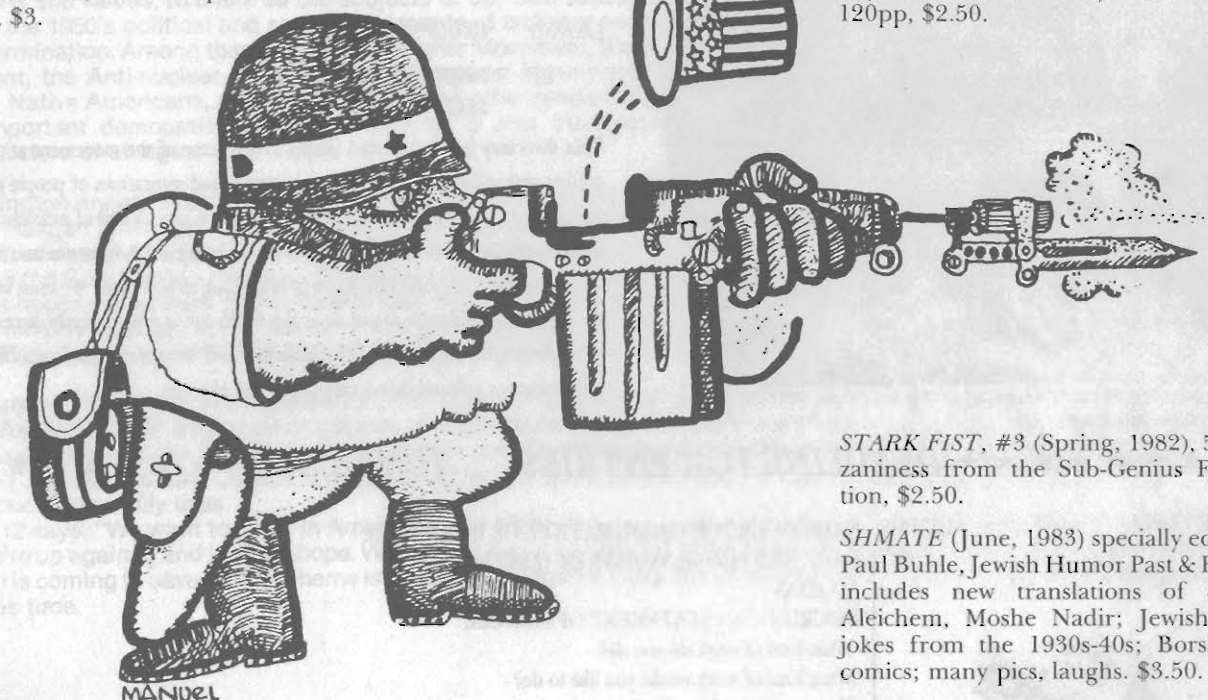
STARK FIST, #3 (Spring, 1982), 56pp of zaniness from the Sub-Genius Foundation, \$2.50.

SHMATE (June, 1983) specially edited by Paul Buhle, Jewish Humor Past & Present, includes new translations of Sholem Aleichem, Moshe Nadir; Jewish union jokes from the 1930s-40s; Borsht Belt comics; many pics, laughs. \$3.50.

RHUBARB, "Radical Humor Union Network," published/edited by Anne Bernstein, current issues, \$1.

JIM'S LETTER, cultural commentary from new editor of CC, current issues, \$1.

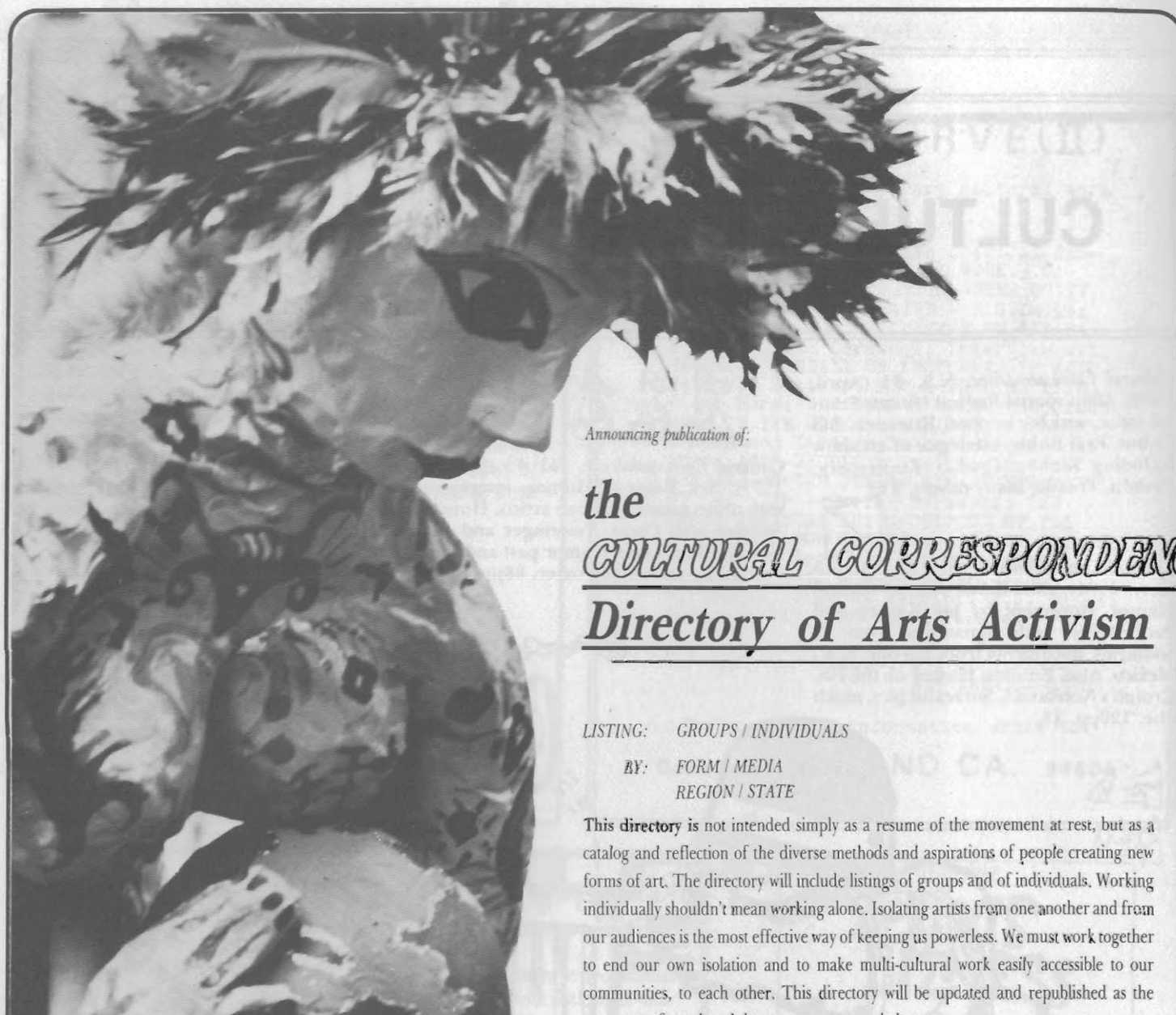
Radical Humor Festival: packet of local, national, and international reviews, by James Wolcott (Harper's), Jan Hoffman (Voice), etc. plus souvenir flyers for Club Rockefeller, etc. ONLY 2 bucks.



RADICAL HUMOR FESTIVAL POSTER by Howard Cruse, indescribably hilarious reprise of 60s into the 80s, 22"x 16 1/2", red & black on yellow, \$5.

RADICAL HUMOR, 4pp tabloid of Oct. 1982 Northwest Passage (Seattle), edited especially for Radical Humor Fall Offensive by Doug Kahn. \$1.

Add \$1.50 postage and handling to all orders (except *Radical Humor Tabloid*, *Rhubarb*, and *Jim's Letter*) and mail to *Cultural Correspondence*, 505 West End Avenue, NY NY 10024.



Announcing publication of:

the CULTURAL CORRESPONDENCE Directory of Arts Activism

LISTING: GROUPS / INDIVIDUALS

BY: FORM / MEDIA
REGION / STATE

This directory is not intended simply as a resume of the movement at rest, but as a catalog and reflection of the diverse methods and aspirations of people creating new forms of art. The directory will include listings of groups and of individuals. Working individually shouldn't mean working alone. Isolating artists from one another and from our audiences is the most effective way of keeping us powerless. We must work together to end our own isolation and to make multi-cultural work easily accessible to our communities, to each other. This directory will be updated and republished as the movement for cultural democracy grows and changes.

"FREE WOMEN FREE THE WORLD!" Created for June 12 by April Ford and Katie Dodd
Flyer Design: Susan McCann

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ **DEADLINE FOR ENTRIES: JUNE 1, 1983** ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Send us
your entries

SEND US: NAME OF GROUP, ORGANIZATION, OR INDIVIDUAL
NAME AND PHONE NUMBER OF CONTACT
ADDRESS
DESCRIPTION / STATEMENT OF PURPOSE
What kind of work do you do?
What kind of work would you like to do?
How would you identify the community you work for / with?
How was your group formed?
or, Why do you work alone?
Are you looking for a group or a partner?
Do you work in association with specific political groups / issues?
What about your hopes, special interests, working conditions ... ?

Please limit this information to an 8 1/2 x 11 page, but send us other materials you have available.

XEROX THIS FLYER AND SEND IT TO ANYONE YOU KNOW WHO SHOULD HAVE A COPY.

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENCE 505 West End Ave. New York, N.Y. 10024 (212) 420-8196

WE WANT TO LIVE!

(The text of the soundtrack)

ON JUNE 12, 1982 NEARLY A MILLION PEOPLE PARTICIPATED IN THE LARGEST ANTIGOVERNMENT DEMONSTRATION in U.S. history. Countless thousands came from other countries, making this the largest international peace demonstration that has ever happened.

This slideshow surveys the visual imagery of June 12. The artwork represents the entire demonstration. The art is to June 12 what June 12 is to the society at large: an organized attempt to build our own culture, to establish our own values, our own relationships, to be the new society growing within the decay of the old.

We come from all parts of American society, and we come from our own history of opposition to American power in the Nuclear Age.

We are scared to death of nuclear war, but we did not come to New York on our knees. When we say, "Freeze!" we do not mean to keep things the way they are.

Consider the bomb: on August 6, 1945 the United States nuked Hiroshima in order to win an unconditional surrender against Japan. President Truman wanted to show the Russians and the rest of the world that we had such a powerful weapon and that we were willing to use it. The bomb, real as it is to the Japanese, became an image, and deliberately so. It was to be the logo of the newborn Nuclear Age, the symbol of America's ability to get away with murder.

The American image of the bomb is the mushroom cloud, the exploding bomb. The image requires distance: the mushrooming cloud is an inferno over there, or on TV. The image does not disappear as our eyeballs melt. Instead, our senses are heightened by the apocalyptic power mushrooming skyward.

Explaining Hiroshima, Truman said, "The bomb is the greatest thing in history." He told the world he did it for God. And he did it the way God would have done it: an announcement of a new fact, something he decided to do, a top-down action which changed the world militarily, politically, psychologically.

The same image that proclaimed the Nuclear Age now demands an end to the Nuclear Age. The meaning of the mushroom cloud did not get reversed because of any inevitable process or magical act. History did not do that by itself.

Instead, a politically conscious people's movement has struggled in fits and starts to redefine life, to establish our own expectations and values, to make us the subjects of our own sentences, to give us our own sense of time.

Since the 1950's political and social movements of ordinary people have rejected the Cold War mentality and fought for self-determination. Among them are the Civil Rights Movement, Black Power, the New Left, Women's Liberation, the Ecology Movement, the Anti-nuclear Movement, the Veterans' Movement, Trade Unionists, progressive religious groups, senior citizens, Native Americans, gay liberationists, and other grassroots activists of all kinds.

An important democratic aspect of June 12 is that there were first-time demonstrators of all ages, and veteran demonstrators of all ages.

Washington knows that the American people will not support a conventional war or an anti-guerrilla war. As to nuclear war, the Reagan policy towards the Soviet Union is unconditional surrender. He advocates first strike, and he is building a new arsenal designed to defeat the Soviets in a winnable nuclear war. There is no such thing.

We say the Cold War is being waged by Washington against us, and we will not take it anymore. We will not surrender our lives, our hopes for a future, to the foolish idea that the Soviets will throw in the towel. We know that every dollar spent on useless military garbage would provide more jobs and more security if it were spent on things we need. We will organize against Reagan or any other administration which says that war is a solution to the depression.

A thousand artists marched together on June 12, and thousands of others made artworks for peace. Artists have the same responsibility and right as any other citizens to organize for peace. We want our images, our songs, our poems, to express the unspoken aspirations of our people, a people currently struggling against nuclear terrorism. We support the right of all people to their own culture. Culture is not a hierarchy of individual talent, nor is it just diverting entertainment. Culture is the total fabric of our daily lives.

June 12 says, "We want to live!" In America in the 1980's this is a radical demand. It is based on an accurate analysis of what we're up against, and it offers hope. We want to live in a society that isn't a jungle, a world that isn't racing the clock. No messiah is coming to save us, no scheme is going to land from the sky. We are going to build it ourselves, we are going to give ourselves time.

"We Want To Live!" was produced by PADD (Political Art Documentation/Distribution) and Cultural Correspondence. The photographers were Eva Cockcroft, Marilynne Herbert, Lynn Hughes, Linda Impastato, Stuart Judd, Lucy Lip-pard, Marcelo Montealegre, Herb Perr, Michelle Slater, Len Speier. Visual editing by Herb Perr with Eva Cock-roft, Marilynne Herbert, Jerri Allyn. Audio Editing by Jim Murray and Marcelo Montealegre. Text by Jim Murray, Eva Cockcroft, Irving Wexler. Narrated by Diane Neumaier and Jim Murray. Sound recorded and mixed at Double M Studios. Music by Holly Near: "Mountain Woman/Kentucky Woman," "It Could Have Been Me;" Carla Bley: Live Jazz; I Wayan Suweca: "Gamelan Sekar Jaya;" Pete Seeger: "Masters of War" (Dylan); Serious Bizness, "An Amer-ican Folk Song (Brought to you by Hollywood);" The Weavers (1980): "Wimoweh." The Countdown (led by W.S. Cof-fin) was part of Dentures Art Club: "Say Goodbye to Nuclear Weapons" balloon release. No photos may be pub-lished without written permission of the photographer. The text may be used for anything: please credit CC.

EXCLUSIVE! CC Translates E.T.'s Debriefing

IMAGINING THE 80's

ARTICLES, POETRY, FICTION, ART, PHOTOS,
CARTOONS, RAPS, LETTERS
FEATURING JUNE 12TH AND THE RADICAL
HUMOR FESTIVAL

—Lucy Lippard: "Grassroots means not only propagation—spreading the word—but is based on the notion that each blade of grass has its own roots."

—C.L.R. James: "If a new, radical and truly American movement is going to come into existence, it will come because people say the government cannot do what should be done and they will do it for themselves."

—Robin Tyler: "... they spent three years and a million dollars trying to put us on television, sort of as 'the Smothers Brothers.' In the end, the most radical thing I said was, 'We'll be right back.'"

—Arlene Goldbard: "We need to counter the message that getting and spending is what life is about, that the poor are to blame for their poverty, that only a few people are actors and the rest of us left to watch."

—Paul Buhle: "If the superpowers show their bankruptcy day by day, if religions go haywire, the patriarchal family slips, and mass culture begins to turn in upon itself, humor approaches a new stage."

—Flo Kennedy: "What we have to do as I see it is to analyse what it is that they've taken away, and take it back."

—Paul Krassner: "These proceedings are all being taped for the Red Brigade; next time they kidnap a general, they're going to play comedy instead of rock music to keep him there."

—Jim Murray: "The hegemonic figure of my sister's media youth was Superman, the man of steel sent here to humiliate petty criminals."

—Eva Cockcroft: "The independent coverage (of June 12th) had an unusually high viewership-rating for public television. Yet three days later, the editorial page of the New York Times charged the program with a pro-disarmament bias and attacked WNET for carrying it."

—Carnival Knowledge: Why have a carnival when you can have a leaflet?"

BALLOON PHOTO: LYNN HUGHES

MARCH PHOTO: EVA COCKCROFT