

# LEFT CURVE / 7



ART & REVOLUTION

\$3.00

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1978

This is the first issue of LEFT CURVE since the fall of 1976. We sincerely apologize to our subscribers, readers, and contributors for the long delay. Doing anything that tries to function external to established structures is very difficult, particularly when the necessary financial resources are lacking. However, money has not been the only problem, as the issues that LEFT CURVE has been raising are not so easy to deal with. The lead article by Csaba Polony addresses some basic conflicts within our cultural condition that have hampered the development of LEFT CURVE. For further discussion of conflicts please read the "Letters to the Editor" section at the back of this issue. Irrespective of the long delay between issues, the basic orientation of the magazine remains as it has been in the past. We are concerned with the role of art in the process of working-class revolution - viewed from a broad historical perspective, rather than just from questions of immediate tactics. We wish to encourage work that maintains a live organic relationship to life, rather than starting with pre-existing categories which tend to stifle creative expression. Our general approach is to address essential conflicts in human life which spring from the lives and struggles of people, rather than from "once removed" academic traditions. The important thing is the integrity of the work in confronting the problems of humanity's struggle for self-determination. We want to deal with the way things are, in a multi-leveled way and reject both the simplistic formulas of sectarianism and the unprincipled liberalism of so much of the burgeoning "marxist academia."

This issue has a lot of material in it. Before commenting on them we would like to mention that we had planned to publish an analysis of the mural movement. However, at the last minute, we decided to delay its publication until the next issue for several reasons. The latest issue of Radical America (Vol.12, No.2) published articles on the murals, one of which was very similar to the one submitted to us. Also, we felt that it would be better to wait until we could get a report on the mural conference held in Chicago this April. Lastly, we wanted to reach more clarity among ourselves on the murals and then collectively write our positions, rather than just publish articles by individuals, as was planned.

The life and work of Lester Balog, one of the founders of the Film and Photo League, needs no explanation. The sensitive compilation of his work by his daughter, Leslie, expresses many, usually unspoken, problems of a life caught between ideals of social progress and the limitations of personal and historical circumstances. Nevertheless, Balog unassumingly documents and celebrates the timeless dignity of working people.

The liberation struggle of the Nicaraguan people has heated up dramatically this past year. As such it's particularly appropriate to publish the essay by Ileana Rodriguez and Marc Zimmerman on the poet-revolutionary, Leonel Rugama, who like so many others, gave his life for the struggle against oppression. His poetry however lives and continues as an inspiration for his people, as well as for all fighters for liberation.

The crisis in Italy is a very significant development in the advanced capitalist countries. The article by Bernard Ohanian, who had spent the last 2 years in Italy, sheds some light on the situation there. The photos by Lou DeMatteis which accompany the article, are good examples of photojournalism that tries to maintain a personal contact with the subject, and in so doing gives a picture of everyday life in Italy.

In the last several years, the Appalachian region of the country has produced many fine younger poets. The poetry of Mary Joan Coleman, a daughter of a coal miner, is well rooted within the culture of the region, yet by no means limited to the "rustic regionalism" as exploitatively vulgarized by the media. Her work addresses universal dimensions of human suffering and yearning arising from class oppression. P.J. Laska's article, "Poetry and Politics," was written to be published in the Washington Review of the Arts, as such it was written with a literary audience in mind. We published a slightly edited version here, as we feel that his attempt to forge a sound theoretical basis for the emerging revolutionary literature deserves serious consideration. The two poems printed after his article are selected from his latest book of poems, "Songs and Dances." Laska and Coleman are starting their own journal, The Unrealist, to start publication toward the end of May, 1978.

Video has become somewhat of the latest toy for many artists, thinking (hoping) that technological gadgets will somehow keep their purposeless activity active. The medium has also attracted progressive cultural workers. The article by Fern Tiger, discusses some of the problems that develop in using Video as a medium for progressive cultural work.

(Provisional) Art & Language, a somewhat ad hoc split from Art & Language (UK) has shifted its work from mainly theoretical concerns toward practical work with trade unions. The article by Terry Smith focuses on the problem of unmasking ruling class ideology in daily newspapers.

Architecture is a field that has not, to date, received much critical attention from the Left in this country. The article by Michael Pyatok and Hanno Weber (1st of 2 parts) lays some very important theoretical groundwork on the epistemology of contemporary architecture and the possibilities of progressive work in that field.

The Teamsters Information Network, is a good example of cultural work done by rank & file members struggling for a more democratic union. The Radical Elders' Oral History Project is a very important research organization that is working to preserve the rich tradition of radicalism that is often buried and ignored by the dominant culture. Lack of space prevents comment on the many other features in this issue - all of which deserve attention.

Again we're sorry for the long delay in getting this issue out. To keep this magazine going we need your help and contributions. If you haven't yet, please subscribe. We encourage anyone to get involved; send us your ideas, work, whatever - constructive criticism is particularly welcome.

- The Editors

# OBSERVATIONS & CONTRADICTIONS

by Csaba Polony

In this article, I am going to make some observations drawn from the experience of publishing Left Curve, and point to some basic contradictions which developed. The approach used will be to describe the general awareness from which the magazine emerged, as a means of reevaluating its basic assumptions, and in the process exemplify current concerns.

Left Curve was started by artists in the spring of 1974. There were a myriad of confused reasons that brought it into being: much of it was reaction to frustrations in our lives both as artists and as people trying to function in a society felt to be inhumane and meaningless. We were totally estranged from established art-world institutions and practices - the irrelevancy, empty esotericism, cliquish atmosphere, careerism, etc. etc. made it pointless to work within the confines of the art-world for which we had been trained. But in spite of all that, the most compelling reason was the absence, in museums, galleries, art publications, either by default or design, of work which tried to confront the most essential problems faced by humanity in our times. The art-world had ceased to be a conveyer of meaning, explicite or symbolic, which might help to illuminate the confused nature of our times. Coupled with this awareness, was the recognition that the inherent trajectory of modern art pointed to its own demise through the destruction of "representation" and the merging of art with life activity. This would mean that artistic imagination would be consciously harnessed as a tool for the realization of a harmonious society. The historic split between art and social life, ushered in by capitalism, would be finally dissolved through the struggle for the revolutionary transformation of society. Based on this recognition, Left Curve sought to deal with the work of artists who shared our general perspective on the modernist tradition, while at the same time connect up with work being done in the revolutionary movement. The underlying assumption was that the task was to effect rather than reflect social reality in a way which would aid in the destruction of capitalism.

\* \* \*

The inception of the modernist movement had sought the liberation of human faculties from the constraints of worn-out dogmas and institutions. The aim had been to discover means to convey meaning and significance in human life - in a life that was becoming increasingly dehumanized with the growth of capitalism. The positive aim of modernism had been to become a part of the movement that would emancipate people's creativity from the bondage of material and ideological domination: to clear away "illusion" (false consciousness) and liberate human capabilities, based on an awareness of the world as it really is. In so doing, art would contribute to the building of a new society wherein human life-activity would become a conscious force in harmony with society and nature. This human yearning, present in differing forms since the dawn of human history is well expressed in these words of Marx:

"...when the limited bourgeois form is stripped away, what is wealth other than the universality of individual needs, capacities, pleasures, productive forces, etc., created through mastery over the forces of nature, those of so-called nature as well as of humanity's own nature? The absolute working-out of his creative potentialities, with no presupposition other than the previous historic development, which makes this totality of development, i.e. the development of all human powers as such the end in itself, not as measured by a predetermined yardstick? Where he does not reproduce himself in one specificity, but produces his totality? Strives not to remain something he has become, but is in the absolute movement of becoming?"<sup>1</sup>

The almost frenzied desire for this "absolute movement of becoming" goes far to explain the radical iconoclasm of western art in the last 100 years or so. Of course, it can be easily said that it was nothing more than an attempted escape from the emptiness of commodity relations in capitalist society. But the basis of modernism's failure, can't be sought in its original intention, but in a misplaced methodology, a methodology which resulted in an increased restrictiveness in its vocabulary rather than an expansion. The battle for "artistic autonomy," rather than increasing the range of language and practice, actually decreased it. And it did so because solutions were sought precisely within the confines of the "art-process." It was assumed that "art" was one of the few remaining areas of human activity that was untouched by the pragmatic demands of society and its necessary limitations. So answers were sought outside of history - either in some blind technocratic faith in the future, or in the troubled recesses of subjectivity, which usually became anchored in forms of pseudo-religious sensualism, at times sinking to levels of inhuman depravity.

One of the major driving forces within modernism had been the search for means to inject creativity into life experience. Traditional art had failed to do this, so it was assumed, because it failed to break through the barrier between art and life. As long as art functions as a "reflection," "representation," of

life, it was thought impossible to convey meaningful awareness of contemporary experience. The task was to close the gap between art and life by continually questioning the nature of "representation," with the aim of fusing with life activity without metaphorical intermediaries. Once this point is reached the next stage would be to effect and transform life itself. Hence the "leap" into "political practice."

However, as long as material disparity exists among groups of people (as long as classes exist), experience is limited within materially circumscribed parameters. The function of metaphor has been to try to give symbolic wholeness to life - i.e. to depict not only what is but also what has been and what can be. The destruction of "representation" does not clear away "illusion" but rather reduces conceptual/emotional awareness to immediate experience. So rather than being a liberating process, it actually further enslaves human consciousness to the given reality and seriously impairs our ability to project beyond the given to the possible. One of the editorial policies of Left Curve was to juxtapose work coming out of "concrete struggles" with work that was labeled "theoretical."<sup>2</sup> The intention to juxtapose these two modes of cultural practice was to work toward a dialectical unity between these two, historically estranged, modes of human expression. However, rather than developing a deeper understanding of the dialectical interconnections between "intellectual" work and "practical" work, of collective and "personal" commitments, of "political effectiveness" and questions of broader historical truth, the tendency was to create mechanical oppositions. Rather than working toward a more synthetic, comprehensive awareness, the dialectical relationships between "theory and practice" would be mechanically shattered and reduced to questions of immediate audience reaction. Hence any "theoretical" work would be assumed applicable only to "petty-bourgeois intellectuals" and work of "concrete struggle" would be to "serve the working class." The conclusion of this simplistic syllogism would then be that unless one's work had immediate applicability to "workers' struggles," you would be an opportunist, only interested in raising (or maintaining) your class position. Questions of the content, basic world-view, would be ignored, and judgment made on purely empirical grounds. Now, this conclusion would be erroneous (and politically stupid) even if the historical situation called for immediate action based on a mass conscious revolutionary situation. But given the situation in the U.S. in the '70's, where there simply does not exist a conscious revolutionary struggle that has mass dimensions, such simplistic pragmatism is just moronic. Furthermore the scope of this magazine was cultural activity, which by its very nature is less direct than politics. Culture is synthetic, experiential, more of an attempt to organize our awareness of reality into expressive statements which are suggestive rather than programatic. To reduce art to questions of immediate effect is to create hollow formulas and cliches so prevalent in much of "political" art.

\* \* \*

The expressions of pre-capitalist societies had been an integral part of the society as a whole. Artistic systems were articulations of lived-experience and functioned as symbolic ordering systems.<sup>3</sup> The rise of capitalism entailed the systematic destruction of previous historical ordering systems through a process which stressed the particularity, uniqueness, this-worldliness of experience.<sup>4</sup> In this individualization process, modernism proved to be a handmaiden to capitalist fragmentation; not because it brought symbolic awareness "down to earth," but because in so doing it also negated concrete potentiality beyond the immediate given as well. Any given thing existing, no matter how seemingly small or insignificant, if analyzed dialectically, has the potential to reveal to us basic aspects of reality.<sup>5</sup> If however, a particular situation is absolutized as being most real as it is perceived or experienced, then the "unknown" forces of which it is but a part continue to hold sway, making it impossible for human action to change it. Transformative practice becomes impossible, precisely by being purely "practical." By reducing experience to the immediate, modernism lost the potential to grasp the meaning and wholeness of life. On the other hand, by reducing work to the sole primacy of tactical effectiveness, the revolutionary movement also makes the same mistake. The destruction of traditional meaning, which was a by-product of the systematic conversion of use-value into exchange-value, was an important force in the world-wide consolidation of capitalism. It was, in large part, for this reason that modernism, irrespective of its intentions, became an expression, not of the anti-thesis to monopoly capitalist society, but of its power and consolidation.

The contradictions between modernism's "revolutionary" goals and its actual practice and function brought it to a rather inglorious end, hardly noticed by anyone but its own select coterie - who, with few exceptions, quickly lost sight of its supposed historical mission and began gratuitously to accept all styles and messages in feigned gestures of open-mindedness. The result has been a hodge-podge of mindless eclecticism, useless except for the maintenance of positions and careers.

\* \* \*

Culture as a whole, (movies, TV, publishing, recording industry, etc.) today is harnessed to placate through mindless "entertainment" increasingly purposeless emotionality. Emotionality itself, has been fetishized, as self-conscious crocodile tears flow ever more in recent TV and movie productions, augmented by all the "how-to" books of prescriptions for "meaningful relationships." On the surface there seems to be a burst of creativity: all kinds of "alternative" life styles, "human potential," thousands of workshops, conferences, the rapid growth of small presses, increasing attendance at movies, theatres, museums, etc. Yet within this bustling activity, it is rare to find anything which might help us understand what is going on in the world, either conceptually or emotionally. "Art" has become an everyday object,

a part of daily life, more and more indistinguishable from it. Social forms have increasingly adopted "artistic modes of expression." People are encouraged to "express themselves." Walter Benjamin's comment on the use of art by Fascism in the '30's is illuminating:

"Fascism attempts to organize the masses without affecting the property structure which the masses strive to eliminate. Fascism sees its salvation in giving the masses not their right, but instead a chance to express themselves. The masses have a right to change property relations; Fascism seeks to give them an expression while preserving property. The logical result of Fascism is the introduction of aesthetics into political life."<sup>6</sup>

Contemporary culture has become concerned not with attempts to understand social totality, an awareness which would convey purpose through the various cycles of life in relation to overall historical development, which would relate the general process of history to our particular situation here and now, but rather, the problems addressed are more in ways to increase effect,<sup>7</sup> - i.e. of ways to control and manipulate public attitudes toward a preconceived end. The concern with effect, when not dialectically related to the process of history as a whole, results in an approach wherein conceptual models are formed and then "tested" in practice. This entails a process of abstracting lived socio-historical experience and formulating action based on such an abstraction. It reifies experience and promotes an attitude which makes one look at people as things to be manipulated.

One of the characteristics of contemporary bourgeois life is the contradiction between form and content. Wherein the "form" (way we do things, mannerisms, etc.) is out of whack with the "content" (what we do, why we do them, what it means). The ever changing cycles of fads is an expression of this contradiction, where the daily life activity of people continually produce new forms so as to become more harmonious with internal feelings, subjective interrelationships, and the world at large. Through increased sophistication of sociological techniques, combined with the all pervasive instantaneity of mass communications, the gap between the emergence of new mannerisms (invariably rising from within the exploited classes) and their institutionalization by the dominant culture has become less and less. The "content" is quickly transformed into pure form - the lived experience is stripped away and rendered meaningless. The range and limits of these fads become narrower and narrower, so that, the "recreation" of previous mass cultural forms (nostalgia), or absurdist reduction of earlier fads (Punk), are taken to ever dehumanized forms. The consumer society into the '70's has begun to consume itself: a grotesque cannibalistic ritual epitomized by the complacent, "self-awareness" of the narcissist "me" generation.

\* \* \*

A basic position of Marxism is that capitalism objectively creates the forms of its own supersession. So the increased

centralization of life under monopoly capitalism, Lenin identified as being "a shell which no longer fits its content, a shell which must inevitably decay if its removal by artificial means is delayed; a shell which may continue in a state of decay for a fairly long period (if, at the worst, the cure of the opportunist abscess is protracted), but which will inevitably be removed."<sup>8</sup> We can only conclude that the worst has happened.

The forms of monopoly capitalism contain the future structures of socialism. Yet, self-conscious socialized control of daily life, by the producers themselves rather than administrators, has yet to be realized. The "protracted" persistence of the "shell" produces and reproduces an ever increasing gulf between formal structures and subjective experience: an awkwardly subterfuged imbalance perched at a precipice of an unknown future.

\* \* \*

One of the goals of Left Curve has been to connect up concretely with the revolutionary movement. The struggle to find, and the inability to align the magazine with a specific movement, was a major reason for its stagnation during the past year and a half. The inability to successfully struggle through this essential point had many causes, subjective and objective. Subjectively, a major cause has been the persistence, not only with the magazine, but among "political activists" as a whole, of bourgeois individualism and its innumerable variations: ego-investment, selfishness, personalistic competition, or just plain crass petty-bourgeois striving. On the other hand, objectively, the situation of life in this system is hardly one which encourages clear-minded purposeful action with the struggle for truth being the guide. This system has nothing to do with truth and everything to do with deceit and dishonesty. To be able to survive, both materially and spiritually, demands constant compromise and subterfuge. Unfortunately, the Left in this country has hardly created a space within which to successfully combat the constant pressures by capitalist society. The "Left" is divided into countless groups with an absence of any principled struggle to clarify differences. The whole "party-building" process is hard to take seriously as the terms of "debate" rarely rise above catch phrases borrowed from the early years of this century. Lacking a specific revolutionary movement which has realistically understood what is going on in the world, and bases action on such an understanding, the remaining choices are: working with various "support groups," reformist policies, or withdrawing from active involvement in order in the hope of arriving at more clarity. But irrespective of what one does during these confusing times, the most important thing is commitment: an attitude which struggles to gear one's life work toward the realization of a free and humane society. The story of this struggle is the story of the history of the human race. Its a long process which won't be fulfilled in just one life time. Yet the integrity of the commitment will determine whether one's efforts will make a contribution, however small, to the progress of humanity.

There's just one more point I would like to mention. Left Curve is a cultural journal. Our concern is the role of art in the over-all struggle. The classical tradition of western culture has disintegrated, as has the bourgeois culture from which it arose. Old rules have been broken, and whereas this leaves "everything open" with little or no guidelines, the potential to build an awareness of life more in keeping with the way things really are is made possible. The movement in art, as in science, economics, or any other field is trans-personal, in the sense that it develops according to over-all historical laws. The task is to bring our subjectivity into harmony with the objective development and then make the next stage.

"Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weigh like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when they seem engaged in revolutionizing themselves and things, in creating something that has never yet existed, precisely in such periods of revolutionary crises they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle cries and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honoured disguise and this borrowed language."9

So it's a constant struggle to transcend one's determined limitations. The movement of truth is a praxis of continual transformation: permanent revolution. This involves both a to the roots (radical) infusion of the past movement, as well as the maintenance of a live dialectical tension between the past, present, and open-ended potentialities of the future. Left Curve proposes to work to understand, present, and actively participate in this process.

#### NOTES

1. Karl Marx, Grundrisse, translated by M. Nicolaus, Viking, N.Y., 1973, pp.487-8.
2. see "4 Questions & Responses," Left Curve #5, pp.4-5.

3. This is not meant to imply that pre-capitalist society was harmonious, but, rather, that each culture would construct for itself an understanding of the world which would relate personal experience to the society and the universe as a whole, and would thereby inject meaning into daily life beyond just questions of economic survival.
4. "Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life and his relations with his kind." (fr. the Communist Manifesto).
5. Lenin, "on Dialectics" printed in Materialism and Empirio-Criticism, International Pub., N.Y., 1927. pp.378-9. "...any given proposition can (and must) reveal as in a "cell" the germs of all the elements of dialectics, and thereby show that dialectics is characteristic of all human knowledge in general."
6. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Illuminations, Schocken, N.Y., 1960, p.241.
7. Market research, opinion surveys, business and governmental policy addressed to meet "public needs," or at the other end of the spectrum, the Left's on-going debate on how to best effect (raise consciousness) the "working class."
8. Lenin, Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism, Peking, 1970, p.154.
9. Karl Marx, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, International Pub., N.Y., 1963, p.15.

# LESTER BALOG

Compiled  
by  
Leslie Balog

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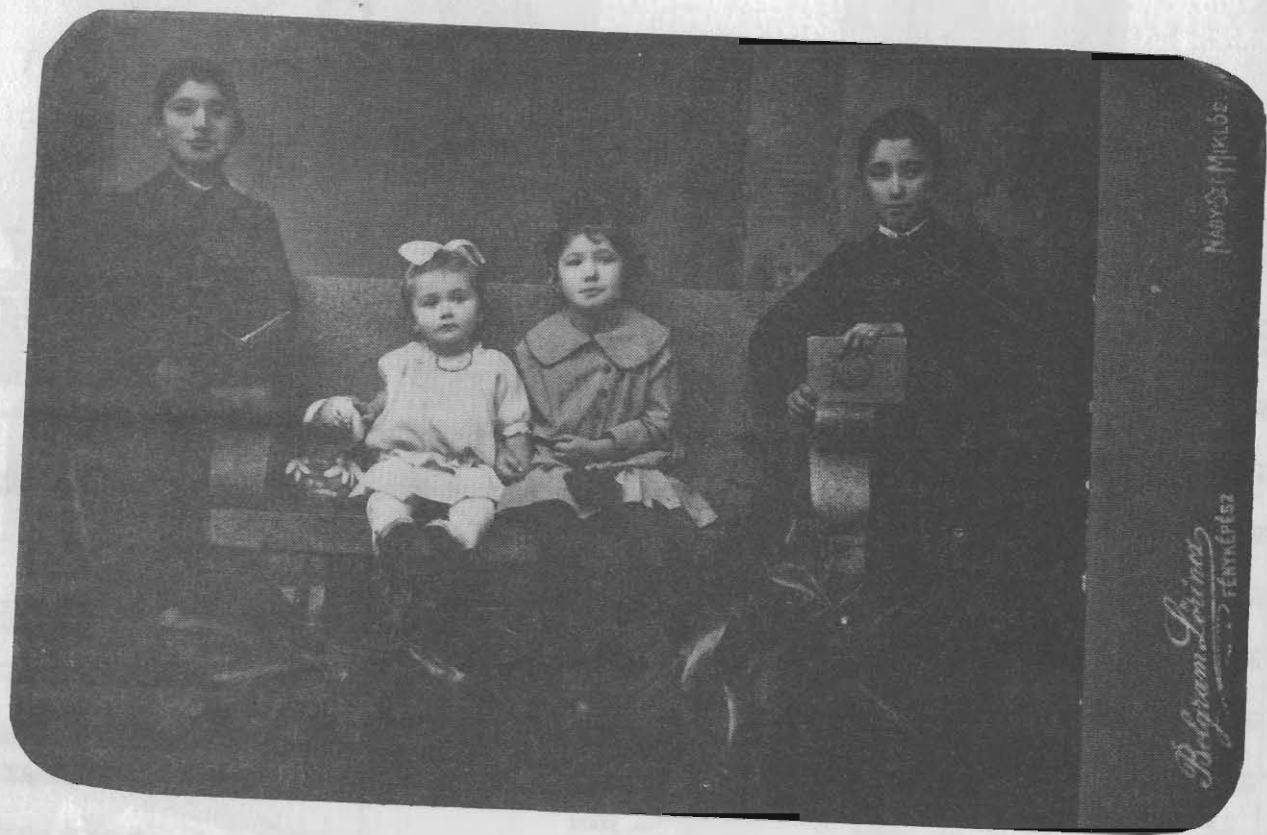
## CERTIFICATE OF DEATH

STATE OF CALIFORNIA—DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
OFFICE OF THE STATE REGISTRAR OF VITAL STATISTICS

0190-007005

STATE FILE NUMBER		LOCAL REGISTRATION DISTRICT AND CERTIFICATE NUMBER	
1a. NAME OF DECEASED—FIRST NAME <b>LESTER</b>		1c. LAST NAME <b>BALOG</b>	
1b. MIDDLE NAME		2a. DATE OF DEATH—MONTH, DAY, YEAR <b>2-6-76 7:00 p.</b>	
3. SEX <b>Male</b>	4. COLOR OR RACE <b>Cauc.</b>	5. BIRTHPLACE (STATE OR FOREIGN COUNTRY) <b>Hungary</b>	6. DATE OF BIRTH <b>April 18, 1905</b>
7. AGE (LAST BIRTHDAY) <b>70</b> YEARS		8. NAME AND BIRTHPLACE OF FATHER <b>Gaza Balogh ---Hungary</b>	
9. MAIDEN NAME AND BIRTHPLACE OF MOTHER <b>Yolanda Ink ---Hungary</b>		10. CITIZEN OF WHAT COUNTRY <b>USA</b>	
11. SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER <b>Unknown</b>		12. MARRIED, NEVER MARRIED, WIDOWED, DIVORCED (SPECIFY) <b>Married</b>	
13. NAME OF SURVIVING SPOUSE (IF WIFE, ENTER MARRIED NAME, DIVORCED (SPECIFY)) <b>Frances Brenner</b>		14. LAST OCCUPATION <b>Maint. Man</b>	
15. NUMBER OF YEARS IN THIS OCCUPATION <b>Ink</b>		16. NAME OF LAST EMPLOYING COMPANY OR FIRM (IF SELF EMPLOYED, SO STATE) <b>Fisher Body</b>	
17. KIND OF INDUSTRY OR BUSINESS <b>Auto Manufacturing</b>		18a. PLACE OF DEATH—NAME OF HOSPITAL OR OTHER IN-PATIENT FACILITY <b>Kaiser Foundation Hospital</b>	
18b. CITY OR TOWN <b>Panorama City</b>		18c. STREET ADDRESS—(STREET AND NUMBER OR LOCATION) <b>13652 Cantara</b>	
18d. COUNTY <b>Los Angeles</b>		18e. CITY CORPORATE LIMITS (SPECIFY YES OR NO) <b>Yes</b>	
19a. USUAL RESIDENCE—STREET ADDRESS (STREET AND NUMBER OR LOCATION) <b>23400 Thompson Lane</b>		19b. INSIDE CITY CORPORATE LIMITS (SPECIFY YES OR NO) <b>Yes</b>	
19c. CITY OR TOWN <b>Chatsworth</b>		19d. COUNTY <b>Los Angeles</b>	
19e. STATE <b>Calif.</b>		20. NAME AND MAILING ADDRESS OF INFORMANT <b>UCLA SCH. MED. DEPT. ANAT. records Los Angeles, Calif. 90024</b>	
21a. CORONER: I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT DEATH OCCURRED AT THE HOUR, DATE AND PLACE STATED ABOVE FROM THE CAUSES STATED BELOW AND THAT I HAVE HELD ON THE REMAINS OF DECEASED AS REQUIRED BY LAW. <b>3-9-76 2-6-76</b>		21b. PHYSICIAN: I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT DEATH OCCURRED AT THE HOUR, DATE AND PLACE STATED ABOVE FROM THE CAUSES STATED BELOW AND THAT I ATTENDED THE DECEASED. <b>2-3-76</b>	
21c. PHYSICIAN OR CORONER: SIGNATURE AND PRINTED NAME AND TITLE <b>Norman Johnson M.D.</b>		21d. DATE SIGNED <b>2/9/76</b>	
21e. ADDRESS <b>13652 Cantara Pan. City AN 0078344</b>		21f. PHYSICIAN'S CALIFORNIA LICENSE NUMBER	
22a. SPECIFY BURIAL, ENTOMBMENT OR CREMATION <b>Specimen</b>		22b. DATE <b>Feb. 12, 1976</b>	
23. NAME OF FUNERAL DIRECTOR (OR PERSON ACTING AS SUCH) <b>BENNIE D. DUDLEY</b>		23. NAME OF CEMETERY OR CREMATORY <b>UCLA SCH. MED. DEPT. ANAT.</b>	
24. EMBALMER—SIGNATURE (IF BODY EMBALMED) LICENSE NUMBER <b>NOT EMBALMED</b>		25. DATE RECEIVED FOR IDENTIFICATION BY LOCAL REGISTRAR <b>FEB 23 1976</b>	
26. THIS DEATH REPORTED TO CORONER (SPECIFY YES OR NO) <b>NO</b>		27. LOCAL REGISTRAR—SIGNATURE <b>John A. Witherell</b>	
28. DATE RECEIVED FOR IDENTIFICATION BY LOCAL REGISTRAR <b>FEB 23 1976</b>		29. PART I: DEATH WAS CAUSED BY: ENTER ONLY ONE CAUSE PER LINE FOR A, B, AND C. IMMEDIATE CAUSE (A) <b>Acute Myocardial Infarction</b> DUE TO, OR AS A CONSEQUENCE OF (B) <b>Arteriosclerotic Heart Disease</b> DUE TO, OR AS A CONSEQUENCE OF (C)	
30. PART II: OTHER SIGNIFICANT CONDITIONS—(CONFINING TO DEATH BUT NOT RELATED TO THE IMMEDIATE CAUSE GIVEN IN PART I) <b>NO</b>		31. BODY PREPARED FOR CREMATION OR OTHER PURPOSES (SPECIFY YES OR NO) <b>No</b>	
32. BODY PREPARED FOR BURIAL OR OTHER PURPOSES (SPECIFY YES OR NO) <b>No</b>		33. SPECIFY ACCIDENT, SUICIDE OR HOMICIDE	
34. PLACE OF INJURY (SPECIFY HOME, FARM, FACTORY, OFFICE BUILDING, ETC.)		35. INJURY AT WORK (SPECIFY YES OR NO)	
36. DATE OF INJURY—MONTH, DAY, YEAR		36a. HOUR	
37a. PLACE OF INJURY (STREET AND NUMBER OR LOCATION AND CITY OR TOWN)		37b. DISTANCE FROM PLACE OF INJURY TO HOSPITAL (MILES)	
38. WERE LABORATORY TESTS DONE FOR DRUGS OR TOXIC CHEMICALS (SPECIFY YES OR NO)		39. WERE LABORATORY TESTS DONE FOR ALCOHOL (SPECIFY YES OR NO)	
40. DESCRIBE HOW INJURY OCCURRED (ENTER NATURE OF EVENTS WHICH RESULTED IN INJURY; NATURE OF INJURY SHOULD BE ENTERED IN ITEM 29)		41. APPROXIMATE INTERVAL BETWEEN ONSET AND DEATH <b>4 hrs</b> <b>12 hrs</b>	
STATE REGISTRAR		A. B. C. D. E. F. <b>01-3-1-043</b>	





Budapest c. 1918. Left to right: his brother, Steve; sister Bözsi; a cousin; Laszlo (Lester).



New York c. 1922. His mother, Yolanda, is the large woman with glasses in the front row.

\*

Lester was 21 and one year from a degree in chemical engineering at Cooper Union when he decided that the conflict between his politics and his professional ambitions was irresolvable. He quit school before graduating and became involved in various radical organizations.

In the early '30s he worked with the International Workers' Relief & Labor Defense and helped found the Workers' Film & Foto League, a group which made newsreel-type films with a working-class perspective.

In 1933 he left New York and traveled across the country showing Soviet films to striking and unemployed workers. By the time he reached California he had run the films 51 times in ten states for 12,000 people. He kept a diary of these travels as a chronicle for his mother.

Saturday, October 7, 1933

Arrived in San Francisco on our last gallon of gas. We didn't have one penny and thought we could get into California free. The only things we didn't figure were the Vallejo Toll Bridge and the Oakland Ferry. We solved these problems by leaving my 97-cent watch at the bridge and Ed's sweater at the Ferry. Showing at Filmore Workers Center; attendance: 1000.

Sunday, October 8

Carmel, California Film League. Attendance: 250. This town is sort of an artist colony. Lincoln Steffens, Ella Winter, Albert Rhys Williams, etc. live here. The audience was not as enthusiastic as at other showings, and although they liked the shorts, the features didn't go over very big.

Tuesday, October 10

Left in Ed's car for the San Joaquin Valley cotton strike area. Stopped off in Fresno where we were present when a verdict of guilty was brought against Bradley, one of the leaders in the recent grape-pickers' strike. Then continued to Tulare where the cotton strike headquarters were.

Wednesday, October 11

Joined 5000 strikers marching to county seat to protest murder of two strikers by rich growers' "vigilante committee" the day before in Pixley. They had no parade permit so I got the camera ready. They marched right to the court house and began a meeting on the steps. Pat Chambers, against whom a warrant had been issued, was the chairman. There were plenty of troopers and deputies, and the only reason they didn't arrest Pat was the very militant mood of the strikers.



That night I stayed at a sympathizer's house. With me was a guy called Applebough from the Los Angeles National Committee for the Defense of Political Prisoners. He was entirely new and a crazy nut besides. That night about 2am he began a lecture on philosophy explaining to Carolina Decker why it is that if someone would attack him, even with the intent to kill, he would not defend himself because it was against his principles to hurt any human being. In spite of all this, we managed to get to bed about 3am.

R. L. HILL  
SHERIFF



ROBERT K. MEYERS  
UNDER SHERIFF

**TULARE COUNTY**  
VISALIA, CALIFORNIA

July 19 1934

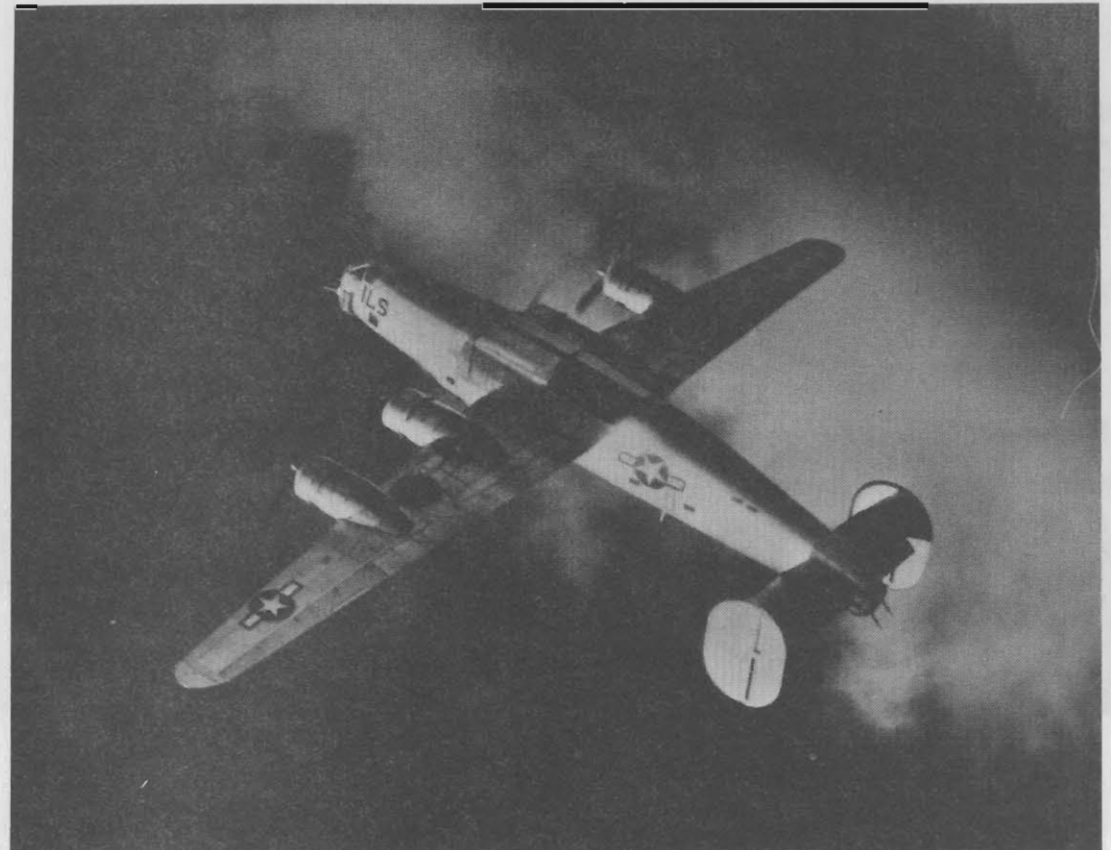
Mrs. Y. Balog,  
1025 Tiffany St. ,  
New York.

Dear Madam:

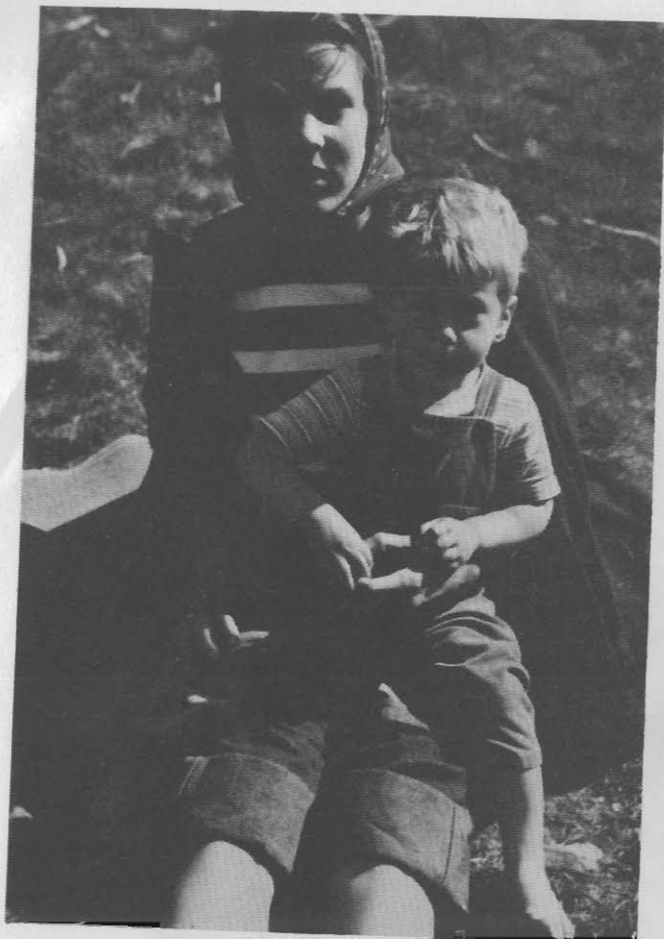
Lester D. Balog, was released from jail on  
July 13 1934, He did not leave any forwarding address, so I  
am returning your letter and papers to your address.

Very truly yours,  
R. L. Hill, Sheriff

By J. H. Emig,  
Deputy



He was drafted in 1942 and served as a photographer and film editor for  
the Army Air Corps.



Frances and Mike



Frances and Leslie

Family moved to the hills above Chatsworth Lake outside Los Angeles in 1953. Lester went to work at the Fisher Body Plant in Van Nuys.



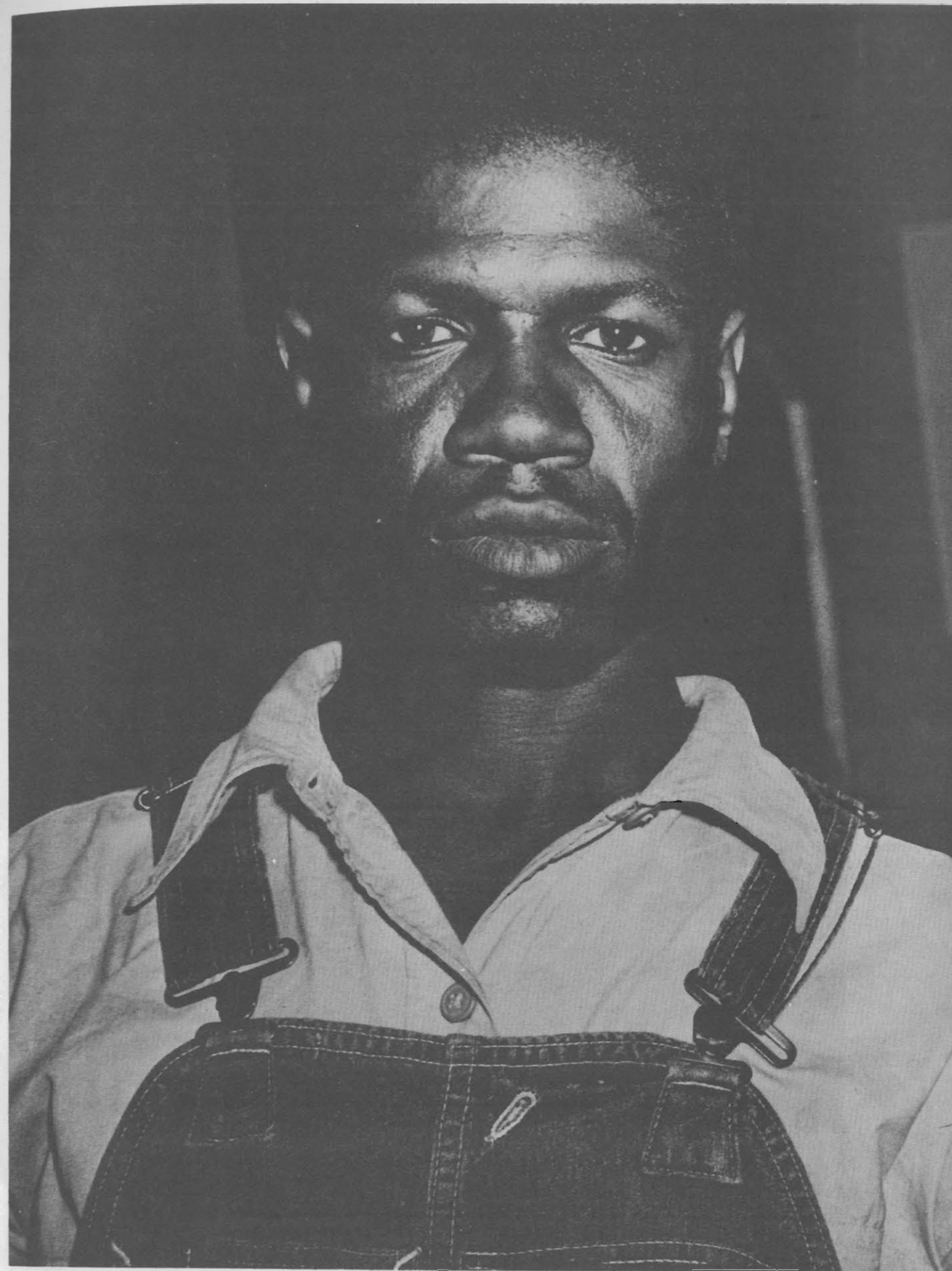
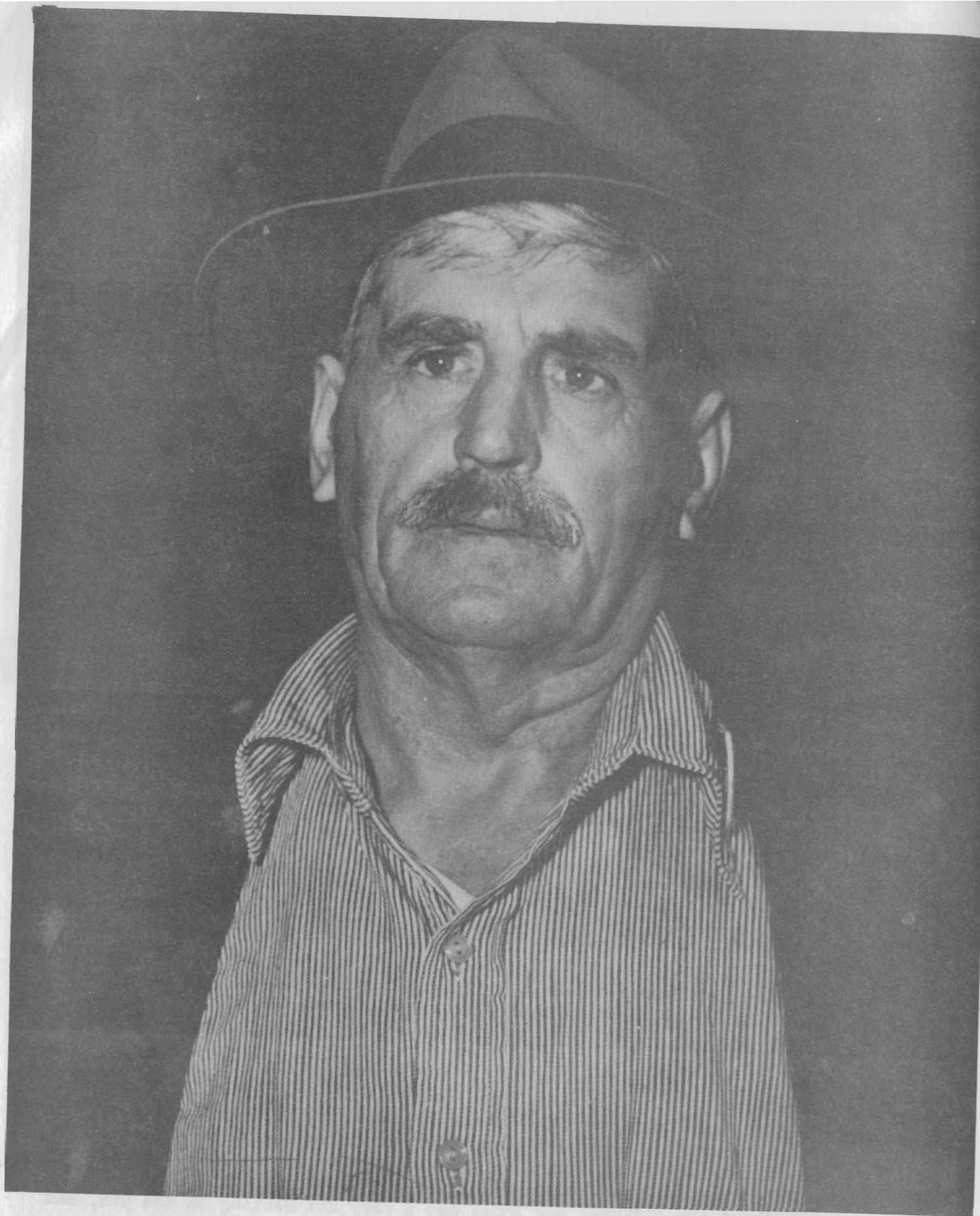
He separated from Frances in 1963, and from the time I left home two years later, he lived virtually alone until his death in 1976.

\*

Dear Les,

Yoko and Kanga are OK. Queeney is in very bad shape, looks and acts like a ghost and will have to go to the vet again soon. Some new dog is operating in the neighborhood. The sonofabitch dug up most of the ice-plant and a good part of the lippia.

About the strikes: our local had a very hot meeting on the 9th, and by secret ballot rejected a GM proposal. Then GM saw the light and came up with a less insulting one which was accepted on the 17th. Pretty good deal, too. The Grocery Clerks also won theirs when the Teamsters refused to cross the picket lines. I chased a scab boxboy with the truck at one of the Ralph's Markets. Scared him, anyhow.



ON HIS RETIREMENT - NOV. 1, 1966 FROM HIS BROTHERS IN UAW-645  
In Recognition Of All His Days Spent In The Struggle Against Fascism,  
Tyranny, And Corporate Wealth - In Support Of His Brothers In The  
Fields And Factories - For Peace And Brotherhood For All.



Dear Les,

Got your check. Kept it several days. Finally gave in to temptation and deposited it. With this hundred bucks I'll have a good start on the 2nd installment of the property tax. This is not very good because I always need money, and I know I ought to return the surplus, and I don't so I might acquire a guilt complex and have a breakdown. Then what? And who is going to psychoanalyze me?



Dear Leslie,

I would like to express my condolences and sympathy. Lester was an excellent and loyal friend with whom I was glad to spend my time. He often schlepped his projector and films great distances to my classes and spoke insightfully and militantly on labor's history and troubles. My students were always pleased with him, as was I, for his wit and cynical manner, as well as for the optimism and love of humanity he sometimes tried to cover. I will always feel the greater for having known him.

Kenneth Cloke  
Center For The Study Of Labor And Law

\*

compiled by Leslie Balog

\*



Commentary and translations by Ileana Rodríguez and Marc Zimmerman<sup>1</sup>

Biography

His name never appeared  
 on the old walls of the school john.  
 When he left the classroom for good  
 no one noticed his absence.  
 The sirens of the world held silence,  
 they never detected the fire of his blood.  
 The volume of his cries  
 each time grew more unbearable,  
 till the noise of his footsteps  
 embraced the shadow of the mountain.  
 That untouched land sucked him with mystery.  
 Every breeze cleansed his ideals,  
 leaving him naked  
 trembling and newly bathed.  
 The whole world was deaf  
 and failed to hear where  
 the battle began to be born.

(p. 94)

Poet Leonel Rugama was assassinated by the Nicaraguan National Guard because of his committed activities in opposition to the repressive forces controlling his country. Rugama belonged to Nicaragua's revolutionary movement, the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional. The youthful vitality and militancy of his poetry can only be grasped by understanding something of the Frente and the oppressive Nicaraguan context which generated and shaped this organization.

1. Nicaragua and the Frente

Oh Nicaragua  
 the colonels that piss on your walls--  
 we have to yank them out at the roots,  
 hang them from a wind-torn tree  
 filled with the rage of the people.<sup>2</sup>

(p. 59)

In 1927, the long-existing foreign domination of Nicaragua reached a new level through the direct incursion of U.S. troops into the country. In answer, the Frente Sandinista rose, to wage a six year guerilla war against the invaders, finally expelling them in 1933. During this period, Nicaragua, now universally forgotten and declared "an incurable case,"<sup>3</sup> was the vanguard country of Latin America, at the forefront in generating and organizing a specifically anti-imperialist resistance.

The founder and leader of the Frente was Augusto Cesar Sandino, best known as "the general of free men." With clear political consciousness and consummate mastery, he conducted a campaign aimed at the legitimate defense of his country in the name of the people's aspirations to recuperate the national territory. Sandino proposed expulsion of the invading forces, national self-determination, economic and political sovereignty, and agrarian restructuring; that is, on the basis of a worker-peasant alliance, he sought to initiate a total renovation of Nicaragua for the benefit of the people. Because such plans countered the wishes of both international and national interest groups, Sandino was assassinated.

The murder was carried out on February 21, 1934, by order of General Anastasio Somoza, after close consultation with American officials. And thus, one year after the expulsion of the Americans, Nicaragua fell into the clutches of the Somoza family, who joined with the U.S. neo-colonialists in establishing one of the most repressive, immiserating and long-lived dictatorships in all of Latin America.

To Sandino's followers and successors fell the task of renewing the movement for national liberation that was to grow more difficult and yet more necessary with each passing year. It took twenty-four years for the popular forces to regroup and generate a new stage of struggle, now against the well-entrenched and powerful Somocista regime. In 1958, the re-emergent Frente Sandinista took up Sandin's call for a revolutionary program aimed at securing national independence, rescuing the basic riches of the country and initiating a process of profound economic reform. In a country so dominated by one family, with a military supplied and trained by-- and the national riches exported to-- the United States through the conduits controlled by this family and its allies, there could be little space for social reform. In fact, given Nicaragua's internal conditions and external relations (including the constant threat of direct U.S. intervention if the revolutionary movement should show real signs of success), the Frente's program could only be achieved by the most organized armed insurrection, in coordination with other movements in Central America.

The initial campaigns of the late 1950's succeeded only to the degree of showing that a determined force of opposition existed and had potential for further growth. By the early 1960's, developmentalist programs such as the Alliance for Progress revealed their inability to extend the centralized socio-economic base in Nicaraguan terrain. A buffer middle class did emerge, but not in sufficient numbers to mediate the violent clash between the oppressors and the oppressed. Somoza required more weaponry, more counter-insurgency and torture training; the Frente increasingly needed to extend its national and international base of fighters and supporters, succeeding in integrating the exploited sectors along with the groups most receptive to their revolutionary goals, the intellectuals and the students. In sum, says Jaime Wheelock, the strug-

gle against exploitation "takes on a political and necessarily insurrectional character.... The revolutionary movement... becomes the vanguard of the proletariat."<sup>4</sup> After twenty years of massive torture and repression, after Terrorist experiments and ideological schisms in the Frente itself, and after such horrendous ordeals as the earthquake of 1972 and the intervention of U.S. Rangers, the revolutionary movement shows signs of maturing into a force able to take decisive blows at the dictatorship and the exploitation it perpetrates.

## 2. The Poetry of Rugama

### Leonel Rugama

One afternoon Leonel told me  
to build myself up with exercises  
adding that he didn't mean "spiritual" ones  
we talked about the girls  
who came or went from work or school  
of those who entered or left a shoestore  
of another who passed by selling food  
and then he read me a poem about  
a guerrilla fighter from Vietnam  
Now, another afternoon, seeing  
a news photo of his body  
bullet-torn by the National Guard  
I remember Jose Coronel Urtecho saying  
that poets are good for nothing.

- Francisco Santos (p. 27)

In Communist society, says Marx, there will be no artists; at most there will be human beings who, among other things, will dedicate themselves to art. The matter is different under capitalism because, in this system art is the paradigm of alienated labor, one of the few activities that remain mainly human. Successful poetry becomes, then, one of the richest testimonials to the possibilities of creative disalienation. A few years ago, Jaime Wheelock saw things in this light when, on the occasion of Rugama's tragic death, he dedicated the fourth issue of his modest journal, Taller, to the undying memory of the activist-poet.<sup>5</sup>

Rugama dead, it now falls on us, says Wheelock, "to respond to the suspended questions that only such humans as he can leave." Ours is to write "lucid testimony" without ironies, without doubts and pessimism, and by so doing, to disseminate his poetry and the revolutionary urgency it conveys. Because for those of us who seek to take Rugama's revolutionary path, his poetry continues to provide the congruent challenges to the system that crystallize in the clarity and dedication needed for the decisive and ultimate struggle.

### Subsistence

After I kissed you  
long on the mouth  
you killed a street dog.  
I saw you envied his coat  
so much softer  
than your lips.

(p. 98)

The generative problematic of Rugama's poetry is centered on the ugly and disagreeable things that manifest the decadent misery and love-negating brutality emanating from Latin American dependency under capitalism. In a broader vein, the young Nicaraguan poet contrasts the stifling terrestrial misery he knows with the space voyages to the moon and infinite space.

### The Bowls are Empty

The bowls are empty  
waiting for food. LIFE  
takes colored pictures of them.  
The astronauts of Apollo 8  
send a message of love  
from the moon: "Peace on earth  
and good will to the dead."

(p. 98)

What did Rugama know of the stars and the infinite spaces? He knew little of the planets and even less of the universe, and he only went to sidereal spaces beyond humanity, because he was human, because he wished to emphasize the dehumanizing circumstances of human beings in this world.

No one can doubt that Rugama's feet were on the ground, where the only measure was the perpetual struggle against the imperialist oppressor. For this reason, he speaks of the rockets, of the moon, of the innumerable Apollos that reinforce the tyranny of hunger, in order to destroy the true makers of history and their poet-spokesmen who, contrary to the words of Jose Coronel Urtecho, are indeed good for something.

Rugama's first aim is to trumpet forth the brutalization and possible destruction of the earth-- here through the ideological mouthpiece of mass media. Like a bird of ill-omen, LIFE spews signals of death down to the earth. Rugama sets the call of LIFE in the foodless bowls, emptied for the voyage to the barren moon: the people's appropriated product returns as a harvest of sand. The message does not exhaust itself in the still-lives of the weekly gloss, because Rugama shows the communion, the parallelism-- in poetry and in life-- between the Apollo and the people's hunger.

### The Earth is a Satellite of the Moon

Apollo 2 cost more than Apollo 1  
Apollo 1 cost plenty.

Apollo 3 cost more than Apollo 2  
Apollo 2 cost more than Apollo 1  
Apollo 1 cost plenty.

Apollo 4 cost more than Apollo 3  
Apollo 3 cost more than Apollo 2  
Apollo 2 cost more than Apollo 1  
Apollo 1 cost plenty.



Apollo 8 cost a pile, but it didn't matter  
because the astronauts were protestants  
and on the moon they read the Bible  
making all the Christians wonderous and joyful  
and on their return Pope Paul gave them his blessing.

Apollo 9 cost more than all the others combined  
including Apollo 1 that cost plenty.

The great-grandparents of the people of acahualinca were less  
hungry than the grandparents.  
The great-grandparents died of hunger.

The grandparents of the people of acahualinca were less  
hungry than the parents.  
The grandparents died of hunger.

The parents of the people of acahualinca were less  
hungry than the children of the people there.  
The parents died of hunger.

The people of acahualinca are less  
hungry than the children of the people there.

The children of the people of acahualinca  
are not born because of hunger,  
and they hunger to be born, to die of hunger.

Blessed are the poor for they shall inherit the moon.  
(pp. 96-97)

Here Rugama elaborates his theme, juxtaposing the moon and a poor Managua barrio. Two words, cost and hunger, weave around the Apollos, giving the poem its mordant rhythm and tone as the incarnation of dependency. If the first Apollo cost a lot, the ninth Apollo cost even more; if the great-grandparents of the people of Acahualinca were hungry, the people of Acahualinca are even hungrier. And we know all this because, as the poet has told us, the great-grandparents had already died of hunger, and we know too (though he does not say it directly) that those starving and aborting in the agricultural riches of Nicaragua will reap only the wind of the barren satellite that now usurps the raped earth.

Rugama confronts us with a scandalous historical crescendo: the cruel dependency of some humans on others, who grow and prosper, who augment the insupportable weight of capital's empire, and who make those who have paid plenty pay even more. And if this were not enough, the poet maliciously nudges us to hatred, telling how the Pope blesses the Protestant astronauts, and with this loving gesture of holy approbation, gives free passage to the murderous exploitation. And why not? Since, in so doing, the Pope draws his protective mantel over the dead who, once starved into absence from the reign of this fertile world, will inherit the heavenly kingdom of the empty (and hence spiritual) moon.

But Rugama's poetry does not exhaust itself in the contemplation of dependency and immiseration. The poet-activist knew well enough that the world was not so small and mean, that behind these images of death lay a potential human infinity which he somehow had to express and dynamize. For us and with us, the poet sought to confront the world of death in order to repossess and augment the rich world of the living.

## The Houses Were Filled with Smoke

To the heroes of the Frente Sandinista:

JULIO BUITRAGO URROZ  
ALESIO BLANDON JUAREZ  
MARCO ANTONIO RIVERA BERRIOS  
ANIBAL CASTRILLO PALMA

I saw the holes the Sherman tank  
opened in the house of the seething barrio  
And later I went to see more holes  
in another house in Santo Domingo.  
And where there weren't any Sherman tank holes  
there were rifle holes  
from Madsens  
or Brownings  
or who knows what.

The houses were filled with smoke  
and after two hours  
Genie screamed without a megaphone  
that they surrender.

And almost two hours later  
And almost four hours later  
And almost one hour  
he shouted

and shouted  
and shouts  
That they surrender.  
While the tank  
and the orders

The Brownings  
the Madsens  
the M-3's  
the M-1's  
and the bullet rounds  
the grenades  
and tear-gas bombs...  
and the quakes of Genie's guards.

NO ONE EVER ANSWERED

Because the heroes never said  
they would die for their country  
but they died.

(pp. 59-60)

The poet sings of the fallen heroes. He reminds us that death is not only the end but the beginning of life. Buitrago, Blandon, Rivera and Castrillo, fallen comrades in the struggle for life, comrades whose ashes are to make us the phoenix. These figures were murdered by the Sherman tanks, by M-3's and M-1's and whatever-- the whole arsenal of murder imported to Somoza's bought, brutalized and brutal National corps of death. These figures die, but do not surrender-- and so, in dying, live.

The same weapons cause death-- but in two distinct ways. The world is emptied, but the spaces reach their limits. Those who would fill the empty spaces open themselves to massive fire and violence; but the bullets that tear through houses and bodies leave open revelatory spaces that, now defined and located, call for filling once again. The poet charges the silence to the unanswered cries and menaces of the leader of the guards, themselves trembling to the future indomitable response they are sowing from the seething barrios. "Los héroes nunca dijeron que morirían por la patria, sino que murieron." And in evoking their

death, Rugama keeps alive the obscured but unyielding struggle against the lethal smoke-filled emptiness out of which they, he and we are to forge a clear and infinite human future.

### Elegy for the Guerilla Fighter

--to Leonel Rugama--

The day after your death  
I rushed through the streets of Managua  
I stared hard at the faces I met  
and found them all indifferent  
as if nothing had happened.

And your life was for this people!

For the girls who talk together  
for the men in the streets  
for the police directing traffic  
And for the National Guards!

I talked with some professors and students  
they told me they had known you  
Just that  
and maybe some small anecdote.

The truth is, we knew so little about you:  
a shy kid, a student who wrote poems,  
and of your poetry what's known is even less!

But word of you,  
your grip on us,  
will grow  
And your words will spread  
like grain in fertile ground.

Octavio Robleto (p. 19)

Art will disappear in Communist society, said Marx. Literary pundits should recognize the merit of a creation in which message and image merge. All of us should respond to the convergence of the poet's words and his life, and to the future convergence of reality with his hopes. Rugama's poetry, young like the now fifty-year-old struggle of the Frente Sandinista, growing in truth and rigor as does the movement of which he was a part, stands at the crossing point between words and acts, between present ugliness and potential beauty, between death and life, between the weapons of criticism and the criticism of weapons. This obituary to the memory of our comrade, activist-poet Leonel Rugama is, like his living creations, a call to a richer future in Nicaragua, where a poetry of ugliness and violence will be the poetry of tribute by a happy people to those who suffered and hungered to bring forth, from ashes and smoke, the new world they have inherited.

(University of Minnesota, Migrants in Action, 4/7)

### NOTES

1. The poems translated herein are from the journal, Taller: Revista de los Estudiantes de la Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Nicaragua (University of Leon, Nicaragua), 4 (February, 1970); an issue devoted to Rugama, edited by Jaime Wheelock. Page numbers following the poems refer to this issue. Unless otherwise indicated, the poems are by Rugama; the translations are based on rough first drafts completed in 1971 by Michael Auer, a student at San Diego State University, taking a special study in translation with Marc Zimmerman.
2. From a poem by Otto Rene Castillo, used by Rugama to open his poem, "The Houses Were Filled with Smoke."
3. The description is from Mario Benedetti, in the newspaper, El Dia (Mexico, December 30, 1976).
4. Wheelock, Imperialismo y Dictadura (Mexico: Siglo Veintiuno, 1975), p. 189.
5. See note 1.

## ITALY IN CRISIS: THE LEFT'S DILEMMA

By Bernard Ohanian

with photos by Lou DeMatties



- POMEZIO, LAZIO -

Italy is a carnival of the senses, a whirlwind of human passions, a step-by-step drama where a strange mixture of hope and desperation animates every moment. The setting--rich fertile plains and stark unyielding valleys, rolling hills and sharp mountains, majestic cities and tiny villages--is grandiose, at times as spectacular and dramatic as its inhabitants, at others as simple and eternal. Architecturally, the country is a living, breathing museum that can turn a mere shopping trip into a history lesson. And now, in the spring of 1978, Italy is economic, social, and political chaos.

Italians call it "la crisi"...the crisis. Unemployment is everywhere, unavoidable. Inflation is running at 20% annually. Italian institutions are deteriorating daily; schools, hospitals, and the government apparatus are all over-crowded and inefficient. Due to increasing political and underworld violence, the streets in many cities are becoming literally unsafe to walk. Sweatshop-like, illegal "lavoro nero" (black work), for which minimum-wage laws and safety standards are not observed, has become a national phenomenon, no longer limited to Naples in the heart of Italy's impoverished South. The land in the South has been mis-managed and exploited for centuries; it is now a rural cemetery, an urban jungle. Southern Italians in search of work head for Northern Italy and beyond; nearly 2.5 million Italians live and work in the eight other Common Market countries alone. The structure of the sacred Italian family is being challenged by the growing women's movement. Drug use, especially among the urban young, has increased at epidemic proportions. "La crisi" is everywhere, impossible to ignore.

Against this background, the Italian Communist Party (PCI), which received one-third of the vote in the last national elections in June of 1976, has just won its first voice in the national government in 31 years. It is now part of the parliamentary majority, along with the Christian Democrat, Socialist, Republican, and Social Democratic parties. In the PCI's struggle for a formal voice in the government, the groups on the PCI's left, who define themselves as the revolutionary or new left, have been undecided; one minute trying to help the PCI open the door to power, the next minute walking away in disgust. As the world watches, the Italian political parties jockey for position and power, using "la crisi" as a tool.

The Italians are resilient. After centuries of internal division and foreign domination, Italians only unified their peninsula into a nation in 1861. After struggling for twenty years while Mussolini terrorized Italy into his image of the strong, virile race living in the perfect corporate state, the Italian Resistance overthrew Fascism and liberated the country

in 1945. More recently, the Italians have endured the so-called "economic miracle" of the early sixties that transformed Italy definitively into a consumer society. In the often chaotic state of life in Italy, there has always been a sense of perspective, an understanding of history and the present's role in shaping it. Is this "crisi" really any different?

Electorally, the country is evenly divided between right and left. From their stronghold in the industrialized, mechanized North, the PCI has become steadily more influential since the end of World War II, and now controls almost all of Italy's major cities. The PCI is entrenched in all aspects of Italian life, from the operation of a non-profit grocery-store chain to the administration of a large percentage of the country's recreational and cultural neighborhood centers. Their immediate tactic for the transition to socialism is the "historic compromise"-- a governing coalition based on cooperation between the PCI and the Washington-backed Christian Democrats, who have dominated every Italian government since the fall of Fascism. The left is too weak, according to the PCI, to govern by itself; a left government in the present circumstances, would open the door to economic destabilization resulting in a right-wing coup d'etat. "Remember Chile," says the PCI; "govern with the Christian Democrats." "Remember Chile," responds the revolutionary left; "arm the people."

The PCI newspaper is the third largest daily, in terms of circulation, in Italy; but it speaks not of socialism but of "anti-fascist unity," not of the working classes but of the "great democratic masses." On the road that has brought them into the parliamentary majority, the PCI has made sacrifices. They have supported sweeping austerity measures which increased the prices of many staple goods while holding down many workers' wages; they supported, in the name of "restoring the public order," the terrifying re-



- TAVARNELLE (VAL DE PESA), TOSCANA -



- MONTEZEMOLO, PIEMONTE -

form of certain sections of the Penal Code which legalized overt police repression; the party leadership reluctantly supported free and legalized abortion on demand only after pressure from the party base; and they actively opposed last spring's student demonstrations. They support Italy's continued participation in NATO.

These and other policies are increasingly alienating the PCI base, but the alternatives are few. The groups of the revolutionary left, born in the late 1960's as a result of student, worker, and intellectual dissatisfaction with the PCI, are only now emerging from a re-evaluation period. The crisis enveloping the new left reached a head when, in the June 1976 elections, the new left electoral coalition (Proletarian Democracy) polled only half of the hoped-for 5% of the vote. The new left has since its inception had a small but dedicated base of militants, united by a common analysis which holds that the PCI no longer protects the political, economic, and cultural interests of the working class. All three of the major new left groups (PdUP-Manifesto, Avanguardia Operaia, and Lotta Continua) have undergone significant changes in the last eighteen months, and the movement as a whole is faced with major problems. Besides the seemingly age-old dilemma of how revolutionary left groups should deal with the PCI, the three most important problems are: a) the number and level of commitment of revolutionary left militants; b) what to make of last spring's student mobilizations and how to integrate alienated youth into a political movement; and c) how to cope with the women's movement's struggle for political autonomy.

After the failure of the new left to influence the 1976 elections, cynicism and exhaustion ravaged the movement. At new left cafes and other gathering places, faces were clouded and uncertain, anxious with no place to go. The talk was more of soccer than of politics, more of drug deals than of factory organizing, more of the "good old days" than of the necessity of struggling in the present. The expression of the day, when referring to someone, was to say that he or she was "in a coma"; it was applied frequently and accurately.

Post-electoral depression was only a part of what was affecting the revolutionary left. As the PCI moved to the right, the new left was unable to carve out a political space at the party's left. Longtime activists left the movement and few people became involved to replace them. Cynicism was understandable. Workplace militants saw their power erode as the union movement followed the PCI rightward, and students and unemployed people became more bitter as the economic squeeze got tighter. There was no place to turn; the traditional left was unwilling to work on solving the problems confronting these alienated people, and the new left was unable.

Although despondency among political activists was understandable, no one, including the new left, was expecting this same despondency to erupt in massive student uprisings as it did on Italy's university campuses in February 1977. With youth unemployment approaching 50%, no effective government program to deal with the problem, and a general feeling of powerlessness hanging over the universities, the uprisings were the expression of a new rage, a desperate anger. Many students on the strike-bound, besieged and occupied university campuses denounced the new left groups as being "revisionist." The battle cry was "Let's re-examine everything," and the new left was eager to do just that. Countless meetings attacked the problems of the movement and the new left's role within it. How, it was asked, do we harness this common sense of alienation into positive political action?

One strategy the new left immediately pursued was an alliance between students, militant workers, and the unemployed. The revolutionary left wing of the trade union movement openly supported the aims of the students. There



(Translation of slogan: "Georgiana struggled also for you, the abstention is not the workers." Georgiana was a feminist killed in a demonstration in Rome, May 1977, allegedly. "Abstention" refers to the government of abstention.)



was also support from some traditional leftists within the unions, even as the secretary-general of the PCI-backed General Confederation of Italian Workers (CGIL), who had earlier been violently ejected from the University of Rome campus by angry students, was busy condemning the students' actions. At the same time, the Unemployed Peoples' Leagues which had sprung up around the country were obtaining union representation; though officially independent from any party or group, they are identified with the new left.

As the integration of left opposition to the PCI within new left groups became clearer, however problems arose with other segments of the student, and, to a lesser extent worker, communities. One product of the university occupations were the snarling "autonomi", who by their name defined their autonomy from the new left groups and by their actions vented their frustrations. One revolutionary left representative to Parliament, Silvano Corvisieri of Avanguardia Operaia, called them "Italian punk-rock", and they name seemed to fit as they disrupted political meetings with their intimidating tactics and prowled cities during demonstrations, setting cars afire and smashing storefront windows. Initially divided over the "autonomi", the new left is now united in denouncing political violence in an already tense country. "None of these people," recently wrote the daily newspaper of Lotta Continua, "has anything in common with our concept of Communism."

The third problem facing the new left is that of the women's movement. The alliance between the highly politicized feminist movement and the male-dominated new left is not an easy one. Two years ago, in Rome, male militants of Lotta Continua lined the streets to jeer and taunt women from Lotta Continua who were participating in a national women's demonstration for legalized abortion and chanting a favorite feminist slogan: "No women's liberation without revolution; no revolution without women's liberation." Now, after much internal struggle, the groups on the new left are becoming more feminist in their politics, and are realizing the necessary inter-relationship between women's struggles and the fight for socialism. Many women remain wary of the new left groups, however, and are choosing to work with feminist collectives instead.

Despite these political and organizational problems, the new left has consistently been instrumental in the struggle to develop and disseminate a popular culture, as opposed to a pop culture, in Italy. For years, musicians and theater groups have spearheaded a drive to rediscover the roots of Italian folk culture. The Proletarian Youth Circles, which have flourished in the past eighteen months, are collectives of young leftists whose members share skills and organize against inflated film, theater, and concert prices. Since the use of the airwaves by private, non-government radio stations was approved two years ago, a number of leftist radio stations have begun operations around the country, working together as the Federation of Democratic Radio Stations. Many leftists are finding that the alienation that is so common today in Italian left circles can be combatted by doing cultural work.

"La crisi" continues, however, and survival is the order of the day. At times the new left moves slowly, groping for a handle in the dark. The movement is there, to be sure, and the long-term objective of a socialist transformation is as clear as ever, but the road from here to there is less defined than it was four or five years ago. When asked last August, in Rome, what Lotta Continua's concrete alternative to the PCI is, a leader of the group replied, "We have no alternative." But what about the tendencies in your organization? persisted the interviewer. Surely there must be a tendency! "The tendency," replied the leader, pointing to a deserted Rome under a blazing Italian sun, "is to go on vacation."



- "Lavdro Nero" (Black work), NAPLES -



Unfortunately, it is not quite that easy. Italy's uncertain future depends on many factors. Foreign intervention, specifically US intervention, is a very real threat, especially after Jimmy Carter's January 12th warning against Communist participation in the government. The US has a long and sordid history of intervention in Italian affairs, and the Carter administration does not appear likely to stray much from that path. The PCI is losing support as it moves to the right; how well the new left is able to absorb defections from the PCI ranks will have a large bearing on the strength of the left in upcoming months and years. The relationship between the parties of the left and the union movement, which is itself divided on the policies of the PCI, will also be an important factor in Italy's political future.

Something critical and historic is being born in this ancient land, and all of birth's laughing passions and screaming joys are accompanying it. Italy must not be seen as an isolated case, however. The Italian crisis is symptomatic of the crisis of world capitalism as a whole; it has reached critical proportions in Italy because other powers, notably West Germany and the US, have been able to pass off their problems onto Italy's structurally weak and subordinate economy. The crisis of the Italian left at this crossroads is also a reflection of problems the world left is facing: the choices that the Italian left makes and the validity of the solutions it forges will have an enormous effect on leftist theory and practice throughout the capitalist world.



- "Lavoro Nero" (Black work), NAPLES -

## POEMS: MARY JOAN COLEMAN

### WORKING CLASS GOSPEL

jesus wasn't all that gentle  
he drove stone spike truth deep  
splitting the veneer  
of the local hypocrites  
so the crude natural grain  
of greed showed through  
and he used a whip  
on capitalists  
operating inside  
an organized religious institution.

POEMS: MARY JOAN COLEMAN

COLUMBUS, GEORGIA

the mills huddle together  
like shabby, unwashed foster children  
in one grimy bricked building  
my cousin jack and sweet marie  
are winding their lives up on spindles  
on the south side an antebellum home smashed  
to make room for another loan company  
branching out to meet the needs  
of fort benning g.i.'s  
one mouldering mansion reeks of nostalgia  
crumbling door mat carries yet  
the name of some long gone colonel  
untrimmed treetops threaten eternal shadow  
at the Broadway bus stop  
scrub woman in sweat dampened kerchief  
asks me to read the name of the street  
overhead on the incoming local  
air-conditioned lincoln continental passes  
manicured attorney at the wheel  
two blocks over from the credit bureau on 20th  
my neighbors dart cat furtive glances  
staving off bill collectors and petty larceny warrants  
kids play outside my trailer until 2 a.m.  
one cornsilk haired girl has grace  
which transcends the mud splattered games  
of the forgotten children  
her body pure as magnolia  
eyes restless and angry  
as the chattahoochee backwaters.

KINSHIP OF PARANOIA  
CHARLOTTE STREET BLUES

elderly children haunted my kitchen window at alley level  
shouted obscenities and peeped  
through narrow borders  
between plaster and scotch taped shade  
a second armed guard was stationed  
in the Kresge Building where I filed invoices  
after a woman was attacked in the first floor john  
a metal toilet paper dispenser  
was ripped from the wall;  
every night an elephant stampede  
in the apartment overhead trampled my sleep  
until the landlord discovered  
fifteen Armenians packed  
into three roach happy rooms  
through the cigarette paper walls  
each evening I heard a little boy abused  
cursed at by a mad man who  
thudded the plaster with a small bundle  
while a hysterical woman  
screached her endless protests;  
nauseous with the child's bruises  
I reported the violence to the caretaker  
who had the woman and baby evicted,  
a pregnant welfare mother who was slipping  
an alcoholic up the back stairs at night;  
that night I wept at my own helpless arms  
hoping the child fell into kinder hands,  
and the crazy woman in number seven  
played Dracula movie overtures  
on her off-key organ.



KINSHIP OF PARANOIA

I walked past a lighted monument  
down a Sunday night deserted avenue in Washington  
shoes tapped behind me; I hurried to my bus stop  
we met on the curb, a drunk in ragtime Good Will clothes  
who gulped bourgon from a wrinkled brown bag  
looking like a dozen rheumy eyed men  
you can see any day staggering across O Street  
"How much, babe, how much?"  
I leaped the curb; he shouted frantically after me  
"Stop, I ain't done nothin'. You better stop."  
I found refuge with a huge woman on the steps  
of a closed federal building  
who told me to sit with her and watch the bus stop  
where nearby the drunk hid behind a marble column  
and exchanged fox wary glances with me  
the exhausted woman's face was wrinkled  
like a river bed which cracked under merciless heat;  
I told her "Everyone I meet on the streets  
carries a knife in their eyes."  
she sighed, "I know what you mean, darlin', I know."  
and the three of us waited out fear in silence.

VANISHING POINT

when I was ten years old my face wavered, melted  
my eyes erupted and scalded flesh ran like lava  
down the aqua tinted window of a greyhound bus  
headed for another house  
with grey skin flaked windowsills  
and asthmatic panes which death rattled in the night  
chips and cracks of uneven wall boards  
carboned with the sooty breath of the Warm Morning heater  
where my mother would scrub in vain  
trying to wash the stain from our lives  
and my brother's lame mind would limp on  
with a crippled grin;  
my father's embered eyes would flare  
out of control,  
his angry fists smash my eggshell smiles;  
where my mother's acid tears would steam  
on the scorched ironing board cover  
as she would mouth prayers which rose  
no higher than the bitter vapor  
exhaled from frayed collars  
as she sprinkled water from a vinegar bottle;  
another house where I did not want to live,  
so I dissolved  
my face ran with the raindrops  
down the sunglassed window of a greyhound bus  
and I have not existed since then except  
in the fantasies of people who think  
I am someone they know.

# POETRY and POLITICS

by P.J. Laska

We are rapidly approaching the point in this country where one no longer has to "justify" political art. In the arts in general we see a retreat from modernism and the beginning of a re-assessment of the meaning and function of culture. On the one hand cynics resurrect T.S. Eliot to encapsulate their despair; on the other the Art's Endowment funds thousands of productions each year and polls show that people would be willing to pay more of their taxes for the arts. Elitist and populist cultural groups are fighting it out for their share of the pie. In poetry the exhaustion of personalist and confessional forms is evident. The pundits are restive. And there is a resurgence of interest in the poetry of social comment which has brought forward the work of 74 year old John Beecher, who has now been re-instated at San Francisco State University from which he was "purged" in the fifties for refusing to sign a loyalty oath. The resurgence is more real than apparent, as movements in poetry usually are. Increasing numbers of emerging poets discard their immediate poetic inheritance and everything changes. The Establishment breaks up. Warring factions appear. "Normality" is up for grabs. The poetry "movement" whose enervation we are witness to sprang up after the War. Robert Lowell was its major voice. Recently, a reviewer wrote that Lowell is the last of our great poets because of the "scattering of cultural focus in the most massive of mass societies." It looks as though Lowell's death will mark the end of a period of American poetry characterized by a retreat to the inner world. In spite of the social upheavals of the sixties, subjective forms held sway and the explorations of them even intensified. Finally, personalist and confessional forms were adopted by mass culture and gained a mass audience, and the content of this literature grew more and more putty-like. Its strength had been the mystery of the particular, which also formed its limitations. But their exhaustion doesn't explain the emergence of new forms of poetry that transcend the self and the neurasthenic focus on private feelings. What is taking place, it seems to me, is not unlike the situation in the forties. The predominant experience after the War was one of alienation as the progressive social movements fragmented and political momentum shifted more and more to the right. The political poetry of the thirties could not articulate this experience of retreat since it had been the poetry of unity and struggle. So new subjectivist forms emerged in its place. Now, however, the situation is reversed. Subjectivist, "hermetic"

forms cannot articulate the social crisis of our society, and new objectivist forms are in the process of being born.

Personalism was a response to the problem of alienation, which is of course still with us. Personalist forms haven't made much of a difference. And as a creative response to the massive social problems of our day, personalism couldn't be seriously suggested. It is in a category with Kurt Vonnegut's suggestion that the way out is for the President to arbitrarily assign everyone of us to an extended family in which we would find identity and security. I'm assuming of course that part of the poet's task is to address the problems of his/her time and to make an intelligent as well as a creative response to them. The notion of the politicization of art means at least that much. Political art is here, for whatever the reason, and the debility of subjectivist art cannot be denied. It is more useful then for us to ask what the politicization of art means today, and how the socially-committed artist can resolve the problems of objectivity and value, which plagued earlier attempts at partisan art.

There is a sense in which one can say that all art is political. This is the sense Thomas Mann had in mind when he wrote that all artists consciously or unconsciously live the life of their time. Art is part of a social totality and therefore subject to the historical and material forces operating upon it. This is one meaning of "political art". If it holds, it holds for every place and time. But in order to talk about the politicization of art there must be another more specialized meaning at work. Politicization implies that the artists have taken sides, have politically committed themselves to one of the sides of the social struggles of his day. And this act of will is something more than the political awareness or consciousness implied in the first use of "political art." This distinction between consciousness and commitment is important. It is the commitment and the activity that flows from it that makes the artist's work "political." This is not to say that an apolitical, confessional poet, for example, is unable to produce a poem with political content. Far from it. But we are not talking about the genesis of a particular poem. With the politicization of art it is a question of the poet's "work," i.e. his/her mission. And for this the fundamental attitude of commitment makes a difference in experience and for the poet's work in the long run.

Since the French and American revolutions, subjectivist attitudes have been predominant in poetry. The attitude of the romantic idealists and the great symbolist poets was one of escape from reality, a reality which they saw reducing everything including art and poetry to crass commercialism. Mallarme's counsel told the poet to extirpate banal reality from his song and "to work mysteriously with his eye turned upon Never." The attitude of the establishment which calls Lowell its prince is a version of escapism, a withdrawal into the hermetic self. It is not a form of great art because it is mentally inadequate to the demands of articulating the whole of human truth in a given period. Isolated as an end in itself, the attitude of turning inward is a

choice to limit truth to the mental idealizations or mutilations of the private self and to abandon the artistic mission to aestheticize the reality of human life. In the end it is a dead-end abandonment of reality. Not to be committed and involved is to miss those experiences that are essential to great art. Homer was probably a foot soldier. Whitman was a wound-dresser in the Civil War, an experience which produced some of his finest work and which was certainly the greatest test possible of his commitment and his mission.

In poetry attitude is more important than style. When poetry rises above the language of embellishment it does so because it is a poetry of truth - an articulation of what is real in experience. This is what the artist sweats blood for. The epiphany and articulation of it is never a matter of perceiving and saying the obvious in a linguistically novel manner. The poet makes his/her disclosure of the real communal through language, but there always remains a tension between insight and articulation. Experience is never static, and therefore the articulation of poetic truth in the language of form must also change. It is a truism to say that experience is only articulated in poetry through the use of language (or is it a tautology?). The important point is that language is the craftsman's tool, not a set of unchanging Platonic forms. We do not divorce experience and language but rather correct a misplaced emphasis when we bring the focus of poetry back to the totality of our contemporary experience. This is why the standpoint of the poet is of first importance. It is the standpoint that makes a vision of reality possible. The politicization of art flows from the politicization of artists.

## II

Two questions are forced by this conception of the politicization of art; first, are we caught in a relativism of poetic truth by linking poetry and social-political commitment? and second, what is achieved by the link, what can reasonably or unreasonably be expected from it?

My answer to the first question is "No," and to the second, "A new poetry." The acceptance of a new poetry requires the abandonment of the notion that poetry is "a process of the personality of the poet." This conception is the underpinning of the personalist and confessional forms. But in fact the process of poetry is neither private nor personal.

The process breaks down analytically into content and form. The source of content is experience worked in the play of imagination, which functions on a deeper, less personal, level than the ego (as the Greeks knew well). Form is language and style as the objective possibilities that the poet must contend with. Between form and the content which is life there is a continual dialectic. Since the content is ever-changing with life itself, form grows old and must be left behind in order to grasp the new shape of content with new form. The poetic process would be in jeopardy if poets took seriously the subjectivist theory which says:

"Hardly anyone would deny the absurdity of conceiving...any opposition between (form and content)." If this were true there would be no realist art. There are only two worlds in which the opposition of form and content is an absurdity. One is the utopia of art fused with life, the other is the state which puts economics or politics in absolute command. Only the latter destroys art.

It is not much better when the theory says: "Form is never more than an extension of content," although this is at least a materialist poetics derived from the breakthrough of the Imagist movement. Modern American poetry began with the shaking loose of old forms, styles, standard poetic usages, words and their network of associations, in the effort as William Carlos Williams said, to "Make it new." To make it new had to mean a new attention to content, the everyday realities of life in America. Williams took Whitman seriously when the latter wrote of the poetic Muse: "She's here, installed amid the kitchenware." The problem of form was first ignored and then confused with questions of line, breaks, arrangements on the page, etc., all essentially minor concerns. The later view of Creeley that form is never more than an extension of content is straight American pragmatism - a reductionist and one-dimensional evasion. In it the dialectic, with its power of renewal, is lost and poetry drifts into the personal and private sphere of interest. Form is not an extension of content; it is the movement and shape of content, the realization of which requires every scrap of thought and every ounce of abstraction that the poet can bring to the task - the task of articulating what is there, the task of "making reality visible."

It is worthwhile to pay attention to the weakness in Imagism which doomed it as a revolutionary poetic movement. Richard Nason in a recent piece in NewsArt turns us in the right direction: "What doomed Imagist poetry as a major movement was its lack of narrative or argumentative progression. It was by definition static." Nason identifies a specific defect. But every form has them, and besides, Williams addressed this specific problem in his later poetic development and overcame it to a large extent with his use of the "variable foot." He was able to keep the concrete image in a narrative of every day things using the extended image of a place, a city. Imagism contains a more basic and general defect, one which is built into the programmatic slogan: "Say it, no ideas but in things." Imagism's defect in argument and progression is part of its general intellectual defect. Underlying its lack of narrative was its lack of ideas. Williams conceded too much to Eliot when he gave him the intellect and its ideas. This is why Williams, apart from his revolutionary materialist poetics, has no politics, and de elops no possibilities other than the old romantic notion of Beauty.

In spite of the defect, however, it was Williams and not Eliot who brought us as a people to a turning point in our aesthetic education. He taught us that the unthoughtout fragments, phrases and images of the present, the creative beginnings, must be worked into communicable aesthetic form. But the problem is too complex to be solved in the traditional modernist manner of generating a

new invention and spawning a new "ism." The content is resistant in part now because it is produced by an elaborate system. Any new invention can be quickly adapted to the schema. In these times, even the romantic-nihilist shenanigans can be turned into another commercial hype, and this renders the classic modernist moves pointless. The imagination is bound down by "the witness of the body" to a "reality" that is no longer simply banal but is one that no longer has reality on its side. The poet then has no choice but to politicize his or her muse and to bring forward every piece of intelligence toward the shaping of the result.

Is there a problem for poetic truth resulting from poets injecting social and political values into their works? I don't think so. C. Wright Mills once remarked that being objective does not require that one be detached. He spoke for the social scientist. For the poet there are times when being detached is debilitating. It must be admitted that partisanship runs the risk of distorting the perception of social truth. But surely the risk is greater with detachment since it cuts off experiences that are essential to its perception, not to mention its poetic articulation. In any case, partisan poetry is subject to criteria of adequacy as well as those of precision of word and unity of form. And adequacy is mainly a question of correspondence to reality. All the conflict surrounding the politicization of art ultimately comes back to this point.

Political art comes on the scene at precisely the moment when the reality of existence is thrown into question. This way of speaking will strike a lot of people as absurd. It runs counter to establishment positivism when we speak of reality as a value, or as a construction that takes its value from human labor. There is a deep-grained tendency in philosophy and poetic theory to view the imagination as responsible for creating appearances, by which is meant "unreal things." Defined as unreality, then the world of art becomes the "unsubstantial kingdom of the imagination." Even as intelligent a poet as Wallace Stevens is a victim of this way of thinking. "The real," he says, "is constantly being engulfed in the unreal..." Less figuratively, he speaks of the imagination as "the faculty by which we import the unreal into what is real." Reality is taken for granted; it is "a rock", and the poem is seen as "the movement of a self in the rock." But the metaphor goes astray. What we call "reality" is not so crude and heavy a thing as a rock. It is a lighter structure sustained by belief. And since belief can be reasonable or unreasonable, it makes sense to ask the question whether the structure is real or unreal.

Sometimes, and often these days, a thing exists but the need for it does not. It is unreal in spite of its obvious presence. It's "reality" is a fiction, an unreal fact. But this fiction is not the same as an illusion; it has an existence in the public sphere as well as in the private nightmare. These unreal facts make it wrong for us to see the imagination as an "unsubstantial realm." The facts of existence are no longer simply given, but are in part engineered. Reality is no longer independent of imagination, and the imagination can no longer be equated with the unreal. With our developed technology, reality and unreality become a function of production and consumption and of our meta-

bolism with nature. The touchstone of fact, therefore, is no longer the automatic mark of the real.

What does this mean? For one thing it means that art is inevitably linked to politics. For another, the old realism is finished and cannot be resurrected. The new partisan poetry and political art has to go beyond that positivistic relation to the facts that characterized critical realism, and later on the abortive development of socialist-realism. It is worth noting that the only strong poet to emerge from the "proletarian period" of American poetry in the 30's was Kenneth Patchen, and he was forced to develop his art outside Leftist parties, especially the good old CPUSA which tried to sink him and other independent voices into oblivion. It is not just that art in the orthodox Marxist approach is seen as an appendage to revolutionary work under party control. To put politics in command of art is the obvious corruption of the poetic process. There is a deeper problem at work in realism that has to do with its use of abstraction.

Realism in American poetry begins from the materialist premise. It constructs its works according to the formula "No ideas, but in things," which is to say that it is rooted in realities rather than abstract symbols. It is poetry come down from the clouds of obscurity to everyday things. The problem with this is that things are presences, and reality and truth are also a matter of absences which can be got at only through some form of abstraction. Socialist-realism, for example, tried but could not deal with the fact that most workers were not part of a class-conscious revolutionary movement. To picture them as such was a false form of abstraction, and yet there was a lot of this heroic idealization that made for essentially bad art. The point, however, is that one cannot say it all in things, and if so, what then is the real or poetic abstraction? I've wrestled with this problem without a lot of success. But I will say what little I've learned. One critic wrote that "to embrace the whole of reality you must know what to leave out." This is all right for God and symbolist poets for whom the whole of reality exists, but for a partisan materialist poet it is one hundred percent wrong. To embrace the whole is not to leave out but rather to bring into imaginative existence. And this is not a matter of inventing new forms but of articulating possibilities that do not exist. There is no formula, other than this - one begins from a commitment and refuses to be taken in. Above all one continues to look the negative in the face, while searching for the heart of the real. Cynics will call this Unrealism. So be it.

To sum up - I've been talking about the coming of a poetry that is non-metaphysical and yet is able to articulate the inversion and perversion of materialism in our time. This is something that requires poets to be unrealists about "reality" and realists about "unreality." "Reality" is present in the cheapest sense - it exists. The human destruction around us is really there. But the whole of human reality is not just a matter of the presence of things. The whole contains an enormous potential, a repressed portion of reality, the part that is real but is not...yet. The poetry that makes the whole of reality visible will have to do more than hold up the mirror to a mutilated existence. It will have to speak and to sing what is not.

SONG OF HOLLY GROVE

Forty or fifty came to the grave,  
drawn for their own reasons:  
family, daughters and grandchildren,  
miners, students and teachers, and  
those who still lived around Holly Grove  
near the mouth of Paint Creek,  
and who knew something of  
what happened here in 1914.  
Francis "Cesco Estep",  
his old Cherokee blood  
mixed with Scots-Irish,  
killed here by the midnight raid  
of an armor-plated train  
manned by thugs  
who machine-gunned the tents  
of the striking miners' families.  
On top of a hill  
they cut back jungle-thick roots  
and placed a wreath on his grave  
over a marker set long ago  
by the mine workers' Union.  
During the ritual I had the thought  
that struggle remembered  
throws a light upon the present,  
where unity is an unreal dream  
and illuminates a vision  
framed with anger and blood  
that will someday blunt  
the pain of resentment,  
and atone  
for the slaughtered, the broken,  
and the maimed.

NOTES ON AN UNREAL PASSAGE

All the delusions of the world  
are summed up in the one word Unreality.  
Basho

Do not ask for everything at once.  
Truth is not given  
like a business card  
of a door-to-door salesman.  
There are no saints or sinners  
except by accident and circumstance:  
In the struggle of enemies  
who once were friends,  
there are wounds  
that cannot be forgiven.  
Keep these episodes in perspective.  
Observe the present  
sinking into the past.  
The jealous night guards  
its statues of men turned to stone  
and covers innocence and perversity alike.  
Steal from the inner light.  
The dreams of the body are dreams of delight.  
Time is short.  
Vision is faulty,  
Mountains and cities slip away.  
Do not bother the hours with accounting.  
An unseen thread guides the way  
like a path emerging in the wilderness.

(Ed. Note: these two poems are selected from P.J. Laška's book of poems, "Song & Dances." The poems in the book should be read as a unit, so readers are encouraged to read the whole book. Copies may be ordered through The Unrealist Press, Box 53, Prince, WV, 25907.)

## VIDEO ON THE LEFT: A DISCUSSION

By Fern Tiger

The attempt by Leftist artists to create cultural products to counter the dominant culture has led less to a confrontation with television, and more to an absorption by it, both as a technique and an industry. Unfortunately, once the video makers accept the basic technology of television, as it has been restrictively developed, they often model their production and distribution format on commercial television. They appear to believe that the creation and presentation of alternative content could remain unaffected by the audience-artist relationship required by the form of commercial and public television.

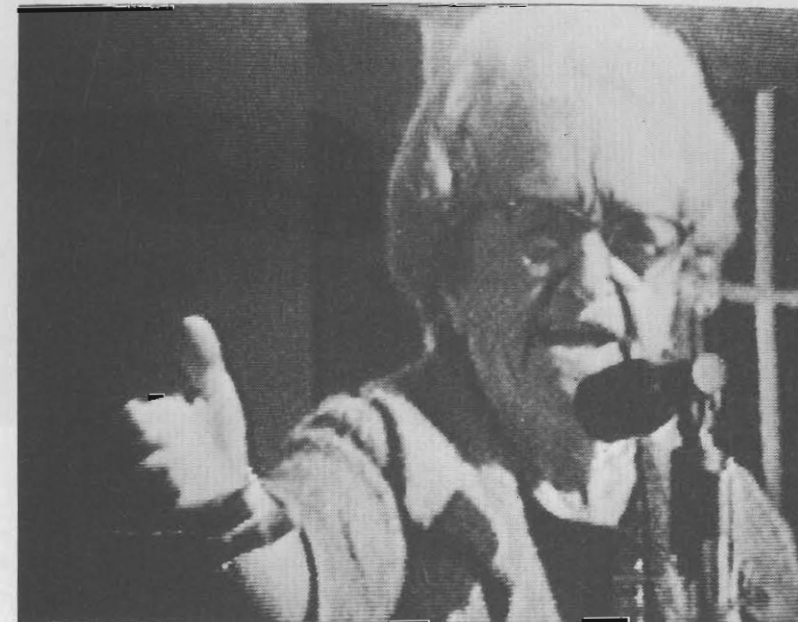
They produce video works with social import, but adopt a process which makes them passive documentors, rather than active participants. As a result, most of these video makers present a Leftist theoretical position, but one that is independent, or at best only temporarily involved in ongoing local struggles. Their tapes are more often used solely for their market value as commodities, presented to 'audiences' rather than as useful tools in the field.

Video technology, which was available by the late 1930's, proceeded by the 1950's to become the dominant communication and marketing medium of the U.S. Commonly referred to as broadcast television, it is most familiar to viewers in the U.S. in the form of commercial television. The 60's brought about the accessibility of video tape equipment and with it, the development of its non-commercial use, mostly by individuals and small groups, some in the name of 'art' and others for educational, social, or political purposes. Some of these alternatives for video have given rise to new problems and have raised new issues regarding access, ownership, distribution, audience, as well as content.

The advantages of video over film, including its immediacy and the basic technical ease of direct production with limited financial outlay, encouraged the creation of new uses for a technology originally developed to solve the advertising problems of coast-to-coast prime time network television.<sup>1</sup> With the widespread use of the porta-pak (a battery powered system that can be carried and operated by one person), came the advent of video for use in, to name just a few: TV news, medical and psychiatric observation, social science investigation, and of course, art works. Unfortunately, all too often, those who have used video have leaped head-first into its technology, without a critical analysis of the medium and its possible use as an instrument for social change.

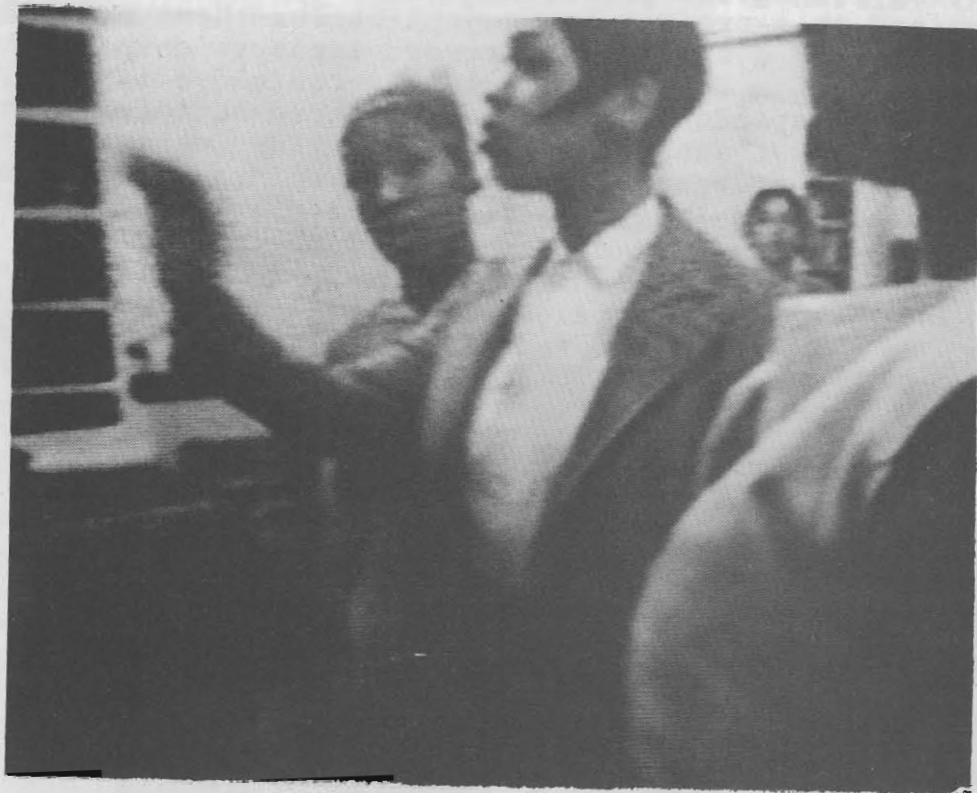
Over the last few years, some scattered Leftist video makers have attempted to use the medium in order to produce tapes with socially significant subject matter, challenging the audience to reflect on the unresolved contradictions of our society. OPTIC NERVE, a video collective operating out of San Francisco, is one such group. They began work in 1970, producing still photography and film strips. In 1972, "frustrated by the limitations of static images," they "turned to the emerging small format video technology and produced their first documentary: 'Project One' -- an in depth look at the lives of people creating a living/working community in an urban warehouse."<sup>2</sup> Over the past five years, OPTIC NERVE has grown into an organization of professional video makers, with the number of members hovering around five. They have produced a selection of tapes over these years, which attempt to raise critical social issues. Utilizing the documentary format, they have dealt with a wide variety of topics, including: housing speculation, creativity in everyday life, independent truckers, the San Francisco County Jail, and the Miss California Beauty Pageant.

OPTIC NERVE is noteworthy because of its format, its direction, and its longevity! Basically, it is a production company which works on self-initiated projects as well as specific topics, which stem from the concerns of local community organizations that seek their expertise-- both technical and political. The members of the collective come from diverse experiential and educational backgrounds, including economics, political organizing, and fine arts. Funding has come primarily from foundation grants which have been consistent, but to date determined on a project-by-project basis. More recently, the goals have included a strong push toward exposure on public television and the creation of a distribution center for video tapes, like their own, which are independently produced and have social import. In addition, OPTIC NERVE senses its role as a video center in the Bay Area and, as such, presents open monthly viewings of video work done by other companies and individuals.



OPTIC NERVE has attempted to use video in a variety of ways. In their early days, they produced tapes, randomly, for many activist groups with whom they sensed some political affinity, or whose confrontations and struggles they felt would be important to have on record, perhaps for future use. Later, they were approached by organizations which had specific uses for video tapes: as educational tools, fund raisers, organizing devices, etc. These groups included senior citizens' organizations such as Electricity and Gas for the People, a subgroup of the Bay Area Citizens Action League, who were organizing senior citizens on fixed incomes, against rate hikes. The tape, a ten-minute piece showing a demonstration and follow-up interviews with members of the organization, was shown to other senior citizen groups to enlist support for this cause.

The fact that a video collective such as OPTIC NERVE sees itself as a group of cultural workers with Leftist politics, raises pertinent issues regarding the effectiveness of 'professional' groups and individuals who become involved in struggles which originate outside their own daily lives. In the case of OPTIC NERVE, their involvement with the San Francisco County Jail - Prisoners' Health Project, and the resulting production of "Dead Action", clearly pointed out such problems. The video makers had been approached by a 'representative' group from the project who wanted a tape that would deal with the issue of health care in the jail and its unhealthy conditions.



Once involved in the production, the members of OPTIC NERVE sensed the much larger problems that beset the jail system and proceeded to produce a tape which only briefly alluded to the health issue. The contact group within the Health Project seemed supportive of the work as it was proceeding, but later when the total membership convened to preview the tape, it became apparent that there had been internal disagreement within the Health Project Group. Reactions to the tape ranged from total lack of awareness that such a tape was being produced, to the demand for a tape which would assist them in the continuation of their funding with HEW, and an assortment of opinions in-between. In an effort to reach an agreement (and determined to produce a tape), OPTIC NERVE completed "Dead Action", which raised issues regarding the problems of the jail system as explained through conversations taped with inmates. The Health Project Group requested access to the rough version of the tapes and apparently planned to piece together an alternative version to be used in conjunction with their funding application, a version that would most likely concentrate heavily on the health problems of prisons, while ignoring the larger issues of prison life. This experience points out the dilemmas of consulting to an existing organization without being part of its ongoing operation, and consequently being unaware of its members' positions on basic issues.



Leftist groups, such as OPTIC NERVE, who use a specific expertise (video, film, poster making, etc.) to expose the contradictions of capitalism for the purpose of consciousness raising, training, organizing, etc., face a number of other problems besides 'fly-in, fly-out consultation'. These are broad issues and not unique to the specific obstacles that beset OPTIC NERVE.

Many Leftist media workers see themselves as independent video producers. Their major push has been toward the development of alternative 'special programs', which tend to utilize the documentary format. These programs usually demand conscious, though passive, intellectual participation by the viewer to consider socially 'relevant' issues. They are produced without real roots or continuous involvement with a specific community whose members could become at the same time audience and participants, producers and viewers. Leftist video makers are forced to find 'artificial' audiences and to concern themselves with the basic problems of marketing commodities-- that is, disseminating their products to the largest number of viewers. Size of audience becomes important, since the specific nature of the audience cannot be secured or determined. They parallel, to a degree, the plastic art community whose members see their only route as gallery exposure of their products. Content becomes 'universalized' so that social issues (for the case of Leftist video makers) are comprehended by mass audiences. Struggles become abstracted in order to be understood. The idea of a true local constituency, or a growing movement from within, that is interactive with the artists, takes second place to the search for a mass audience. All of this comes from the acceptance of market television as the only form for producing and distributing cultural information.

Soon after network television's development, it fell prey to a market system which sold relatively inexpensive receivers rather than 'systems', and consumption technology rather than inexpensive production technology. As a result, television has developed as a passive device, implicitly promoting bourgeois values, neutralized attitudes, excessive consumption and political passivity, with little interest in content which would encourage dialogue, debate, or the development of a more interactive technological tool. Efforts to shore up the quality of popular commercial television and public television, by adding programs whose content demand reflection and scrutiny by the audience, do not alter the means by which people receive and respond to such information. Rather, they merely create the image of a wider spectrum of viewing/consuming possibilities, implying a 'pluralist' attitude with regard to network programming. Such an attitude, optimistically, assumes that network or public television will give equal time to contrasting and seemingly independent ideologies, creating a marketplace within which people pick and choose. The expectation is that one point of view (ostensibly the 'correct' one, or the most logical one) will eventually prevail over the others. This approach may be called 'alternative' programming; however, -- the question of time aside-- alternative programming commits the fundamental error of accepting the dominant, irrevocable, and accepted television form of passive consumption.



Graffiti  
Berkeley, California  
April 1978

It does not make any attempt to replace that programming format and is, in fact, the route which is most acceptable to the powerful television industry. Alternative programming, like other 'alternatives' such as 'alternative technology', can be 'taken care of' and 'dealt with', as long as it remains merely an 'alternative' option within the framework of market television. It can continue to receive a very small portion of the economic surplus from television as bits of station time. In doing so, the commercial industry can boast of pluralism, having supported a few programs with socially significant and educational content. (Actually these are usually produced by corporations such as Mobil, Exxon, or IBM, with only a limited few by independent producers.) While the public broadcast stations schedule an occasional few pieces by independent producers, they do so sporadically. This is done so as not to appear to have a consistent position other than 'quality programming', and not without enormous difficulties to the independent producers, who must fight for financing, editorial control, etc. In the end, they usually alter and doctor their own original points so as to become 'acceptable' to the station executives, whose support in reality comes from federal and corporate money.



It seems unnecessary to dwell on the impossibility of 'alternative' programs succeeding when sandwiched between the network news, manipulated by public figures, with program content constrained by corporate funding. The intermittent injection of advertising and its more latent content promoting 'life styles'<sup>3</sup> can neutralize the most competent 'alternative' programs. Expanding the audience of independent video makers by increasing their exposure on public television stations should also be considered realistically. Public television appeals to an already informed viewing audience, which seeks out programs with more apparent 'intellectual' and less obvious 'leisure-comedy' content than does the audience of commercial television.

Given the existing options between the detached elitism of public television and the manipulated populism of commercial television, it is no wonder that Leftist video, when defining itself as a mass consumption commodity, has problems regarding its two choices. In reality, they are no choices at all.

While there is no doubt that countless hours are spent by the average American in front of a television set, it should not be automatically assumed that: either a) it is the only educational and informational mechanism available at present; or b) it will always be the most successful method of indoctrination or relaxation. If Leftists decide to work with the assumption that the television industry must become a tool for their use (in the form of documentary programs, etc.), they should carefully analyze the reasons why mass audiences lean toward the "boob tube", what they use it for, and why certain programs are popular. They must analyze television in the larger context of daily life and work. In doing so, they may discover fundamentally different forms and arenas for the use of television.

Essentially, television as we know it is a one-way medium which requires passive response, at most, from its viewers. Leftist media workers should understand the rationale for this development of television as a one-way transfer of information. It produces solitary, isolated observation, rather than group exposure and dialogue. It encourages the abandonment of more socially oriented activities in favor of the lethargic escape at home.

Moreover, the very real, concrete need for this kind of escape can only be understood in relation to people's relationship to their workplaces, the nature of their work and its social relations. Television, in its present format, provides a drugging function to soothe the exhaustion and alienation from work, intensifying the splintered work versus home life-- the survival mechanism under capitalism. The real alternative is to confront the alienation induced by the capitalist mode of production which makes work a separate and clearly distinct experience from home life. The absence, at the workplace, of intrinsic rewards associated with ownership, control, and management, leads people to live only for the consumable leisure activities after work, not the least of which is television.

Video workers should pursue the two domains of home and work, and seek out how and where they can help people find an alternative to the schism. The task is to find footholds where video can be most effective. Broadcast television, public or commercial, may not be the best medium to get

people out of their houses. Such inventive opportunities can only become apparent through the video makers' 'rootedness' in people's everyday lives-- this might put aside, once and for all, their role as outside documentors.

Leftist video makers attempt to operate with a consistent theoretical base; but, without being part of a constituency or community, they have no vested interest in the issues being discussed or challenged. Their only route is to locate arbitrarily or be hired as temporary consultants. Real involvement in ongoing struggles would not only determine the relevance of content, and solve the problems of audience and confrontation, but also would prevent the conflicts that often arise from working from the outside, as in the case of producing "Dead Action" (The Prisoner's Health Project).



To be a Leftist video maker whose work has meaning and impact should imply commitment to a struggle which emanates from the real needs of a community or network of communities. It doesn't make sense to produce videos which hammer away at abstract, ideological points which are removed, dated, and essentially irrelevant beyond the art gallery doors, the TV screen, or the inner clique of compatriot video makers willing to ignore the real problems of an ideological stance which confronts theoretical contradictions without understanding their prac-

tical implications. Radical video makers must not concern themselves with the creation of independent, isolated tapes, which of necessity become ends in themselves and, as such, necessitate relations with the dominant class for their support.

The commitment needed to pursue the creation of video which is not alienated, nor autonomous, and which takes an active part in its relation to everyday life, requires a rootedness on the part of such video makers. At the very least, such rootedness would involve geographical stability, living with and understanding the specific characteristics which unite to form the complex, social factors of that particular community. It implies financial commitment such that the video makers, as members of the community, share the progress and failure of each and every action. Such risk sharing is basic in order to eliminate role distinctions and create an atmosphere of unified struggle.

Once Leftist cultural workers immerse themselves in the culture they now profess to be helping to create, their roles and tactics should become obvious and they should redirect their concerns with the homogenized national broadcasting systems toward more straightforward uses of the video medium. As such, they may find that local social halls, churches, community centers, schools, union halls, bowling alleys, bars and some local shopping areas are the best locations to open up a communication which directly affects long-term members of these communities. Discussions about audience and artist would become irrelevant.

What is proposed here is the elimination of the static, passive form of 'viewing' to which we all have become too accustomed-- where conflict and argumentation are resolved prior to display, where a unified position is relayed to a quiet, willing 'audience'. Video artists must make a choice, because the inconsistencies are too great. Either they, themselves, must redefine their role and align themselves in the most basic way with their supposed constituency, or they will forever pursue the illusory 'national' mass audience, faceless and nameless.

According to Enzensberger,<sup>5</sup> an emancipatory use of the media would include: its decentralization, the creation of transmitters from every receiver, uses for mobilizing masses, interaction within small groups, political learning processes, and collective production. Television could then become a tool used for and by the people who are dealt with as an invisible market to be captured and mesmerized by the heavy and constant barrage of one-sided information which moves across their supposedly 'neutral' home entertainment centers.

In summary, Leftist video collectives tend to organize themselves as contemporary versions of academies-- wherein the members are unified primarily by their decision to work within the confines of a particular medium. Secondly, these groups have some shared overriding ideological stance which assists them in their selection and presentation of content. The problems which stem from such an operation center about the issues of 'parachuting professionalism' and the lack of commitment and involvement with ongoing, organized community struggle.

Those who use video and other media face the standard conflict of seeing the potential to reach mass audiences through their medium, yet sensing the political necessity to be rooted long-term within a local social context. The two appear to be mutually exclusive since the former, which is temporary and detached, must ignore the particulars which the latter, sharing risk and responsibility, must continuously face.

As long as video makers see themselves working and striving for exposure within the media industry, they will face the inevitable dilemma of creating programs which present isolated, disjointed issues (whose common thread may be a theoretical stance), neutralized by the television format and the resulting isolated, lethargic, 'stay-at-home' behavior.

The challenge for those on the Left who work within the "consciousness industry" (as Enzensberger<sup>5</sup> has so aptly termed it), is to confront the method of communication as well as the content within it. They must seize the means to eliminate the gap between, and fuse the roles of, creator and receiver.

#### NOTES

1. See Antin, David, "Television: Video's Frightful Parent," Artforum, December, 1975, p. 38.
2. From the prospectus description of OPTIC NERVE, 1976/77.
3. For instance, Bell Telephone, IBM, Exxon, etc. do not really solicit product sales, but rather encourage and support status quo life styles in their 'commercials'.
4. For an interesting analysis and further development of this point, I refer you to Daniel Ben-Horin's article, "Television without Tears: An Outline of a Socialist Approach to Popular Television," Socialist Revolution, No. 35 (September-October, 1977).
5. Enzensberger, Hans Magnus, The Consciousness Industry, Seabury Press, New York, 1974.

# ART & LANGUAGE

CUR

PIGGY PREFECT



AUGUST 4-10, 1976

Auckland City Art Gallery

# ART & LANGUAGE(P)



AUGUST 4-10, 1976

Auckland City Art Gallery

(PROVISIONAL) ART & LANGUAGE: AUCKLAND 1976  
by Terry Smith

## The Political Context

Like the Liberal Country Party, in Australia, the National Party, of New Zealand, represents big farming and manufacturing interests against the interests of the local working class. Like the LCP, it competes against a Labor Party for the votes of an increasing, service-industry dependent middle class. Unlike the LCP, it is not split by the shift of foreign investment from farming and manufacturing to mining, but it is similarly dependent on the movement of foreign investment across the upper reaches of the economy it ostensibly 'manages'.

Under the slogan "New Zealand - The Way You Want It", the National Party won the 1975 election by a landslide, following a campaign that stressed the Labor Party's economic mismanagement and the threat to the NZ economy of South Pacific Islanders. National Party leader, Robert Muldoon did not bother to call Parliament until six months after the election, meanwhile governing by fiat. A wage-price freeze was imposed, except that the price controls applied only to monopolies, complaints are heard secretly, and "inflation accounting" is promoted. The Superannuation Act was repealed by press release, and Muldoon shrugged off the Chief Justice's finding that he had acted illegally. Off to China to drum up trade, he falls into the usual

'Joint Anti-Soviet Line' there, whilst uncorking a Russian warship scare at home - i.e. in the Indian Ocean (sound familiar?). Special squads of police are released on the streets to round up Islanders who may have overstayed their six month permits (or anyone who looks like such an Islander). The restriction on their sending money home obliges the Islands to consider accepting docking fees from Russian fishing boats and enables Muldoon to add another red scare to his list. Endorsing the All Black tour of South Africa during the Olympic Games is just the surface of moves towards re-establishing relationships with South Africa at the first minimal hint of a relaxation of apartheid. And in Parliament, Muldoon abuses every game in the book to decimate the Labor 'opposition'. The National Party's anti-union legislation is, like that of the LCP, aimed at disembowelling organized labor and keeping the workforce docile (by holding down wages and, at the same time increasing productivity by the threat of unemployment). Unions have to make application for wage rises jointly with employers, and both have to argue that theirs is "an exceptional circumstance"! All strikes are illegal; 'strike' includes any restriction applied by workers; anyone has the right to have an injunction served to force workers back and claim damages from the union for loss of profit or inconvenience; unions which call 'illegal' strikes cop big fines and their officials may be debarred from office ....Then surfaces a plan for a ballot about compulsory union membership - should this be voted out, the option is not voluntary unionsim, but workers paying their dues to the state, which would itself appoint union officials! The dreams of Fraser, Street, Hamer, Bjelke-Peterson... coming true just across Tasman.

In this fascist Wonderland, then, it is no surprise to find creeping McCarthyism. Television workers in NZ's two state run stations tread carefully under Muldoon's frequent threat to withdraw the license of one of them. Newspaper reporters seem inebriated of Muldoon's populist style. And their oligarch owners are, of course, delighted at this big stick protection of their interests.

## THE WORDS:

CUR, n. Worthless, low-bred, or snappish dog; surly, ill bred or cowardly fellow; since November 11, 1975, common Australian pronunciation of the surname of Sir John Kerr, Governor-General of Australia.

PIGGY, n. Little pig; (nursery) piggy-wiggy, little pig, dirty child; nickname of the Right Honorable Robert D. Muldoon, Prime Minister of New Zealand.

PREFECT, n. (Rom. Ant.) title of various officers, civil and military; chief administrative officer of French department; prefect of police, head of Paris police; (in some public schools) senior pupil authorized to maintain discipline; nickname of the Right Honorable J. Malcolm Fraser, Prime Minister of Australia.

The words: 'cur', 'piggy', and 'the prefect' are ours to say, but not to use freely, not ours to own. The images of Kerr, Muldoon and Fraser are media shadows, ours only to passively receive. But these words and these images together expose the Three 'Friendly' fascists. The peoples' words turn media masks into lying faces... we withdraw our consent, you govern against our will, the power is in our hands to remove you!

Too much for the oligarchic group who run the Auckland City Council and, through it, the Art Gallery. So a clubfooted blackening-out of the peoples'

words. And a desperate preservation of separate categories; images are for visual art, nicely behaved because ambiguous, but words are out in the real world, pronouncable by any accent, slurred to any implication--mocking, insulting, threatening.

So it was that, by their act of censorship, the Auckland City Council made the posters rather generalizing, abstract pairing of words and images quite concrete -- specific to time, persons, and place.



# DAILY IDEOLOGY

Only the news that fits our oligarchic interests -- New Zealand the way we want it!

**DOCTORS: RIGHTWING INSTITUTIONAL BURLEAUCHATIC MONIED**

**BADDER: LEFTWING CRIMINAL SUBVERSIVE**

## Official Accuses Protester of Treason

**WHITE OFFICIAL DOMINANT (LOOKS AHEAD AND DOWN) ANGRY**

**COLOURED UNKEMPT SHIFTY (LOOKS AWAY) NERVOUS**

Cross appears to beat Brutus over head with headline. White official appears to dominate black dissident. The headline asserts that New Zealanders protesting the All Black tour of South Africa are "Anti-N.Z.". This asserts as the truth only the official definition of the situation and implies retribution (treason-death) against unofficial views.

The story under the headline says only that Cross, Government representative in Montreal, complained that New Zealanders who told African representatives in Montreal of Prime Minister Muldoon's stated support of the All Black tour made his (Cross) struggle to keep New Zealand in the Games "pretty tough".

Police power vs black power  
Pretty crude connection with above photo - realises lead impression where officials fight black dissidents.

liberal pivot: censorship story  
Cover layout: the banned words are headlined next to the blacks. Also unusual is the paragraph which says that the exhibition is "devoted to raising rightwing politics in Australia and New Zealand, as well as the impact of the media".  
Why such discretion?  
Because it is an "art" story, and therefore indirect, "intelligent" and "banned".

pet rescued from bird-shower by police  
Police both clerks (intended) but rescue birds.  
Both functions preserve law and order.  
Promoting blacks divert police from proper functions (e.g. rescuing stolen birds).  
Every owner of bird in Maori.

people  
"People" are a lower category distinct from "news", "politics", "sport", etc.

more people on back page

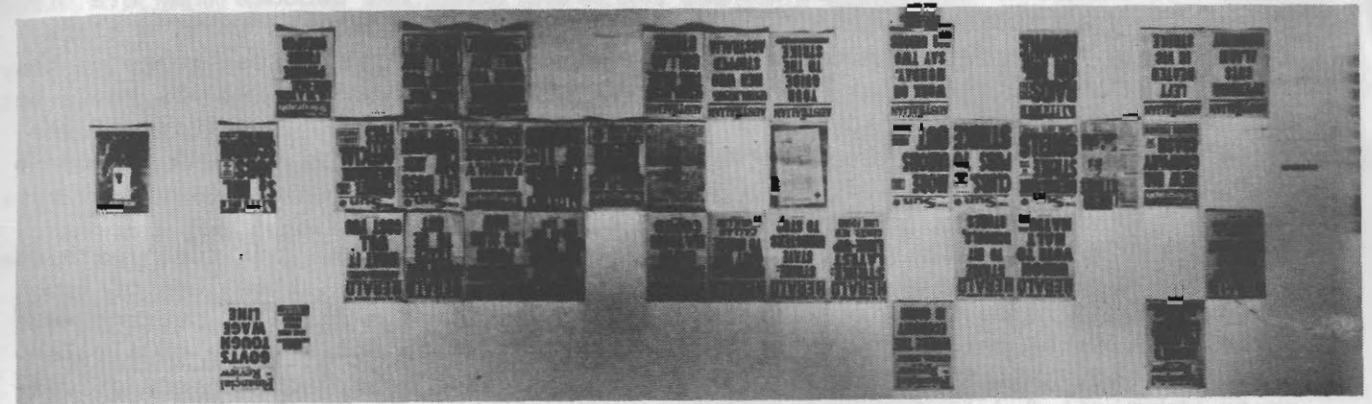
ONLY THE NEWS THAT FITS OUR OLIGARCHIC INTERESTS -- NEW ZEALAND THE WAY WE WANT IT!

IDEOLOGY is really **NEWS**, as it is defined and divided according to the interests of the local ruling class (including its multi-national dependence and local independence). Newspapers in New Zealand and Australia are parts of media systems controlled by, respectively four and five families within that class. It is in their interests to propagandize an ideology of free for official power, respect for private enterprise, the separation of spheres of life ("politics"/"sport"), the facility of protest, the absence of character of organization for social change, the separation of their race, the importance of business private property (and or public opinion (family) and

not of class (wellness, do-gooding) and the "nationalism" of a hermetic, utopian society (including their ownership of the land). All this appears as the "news" page, nothing else does. And it appears as a "mirror" of what happened in the world today, varied according to "lower value".

DAILY IDEOLOGY IS A DISTORTED MIRROR -- ORGANISE OUR DAILY TRUTH DRAWN FROM OUR REALITY.

Auckland. As environment for these, the gallery walls became heardings plastered with sandwichboards, posters, cutouts and blowups from newspapers and magazines. Three themes emerged. Media massacre: starting with the idea of showing how NZ is dimly seen in the Australian press, this became a display of the sensationalization of Philip Western. Medibunk: the Sydney newspapers' divisive presentation of the general strike over dismemberment by the LCP of the universal health insurance scheme introduced by the Labor Party. The Story of Cur, Piggy and the Prefect: Kerr's coup, Fraser's ascendancy and parallels with Muldoon's reign. My intention here was to begin a ta tze pao, a wall newspaper, to which anyone could add their views...



'MEDIBUNK: Wall display of newspaper posters during national strike over social welfare in Australia June - July 1976.

**Daily Mirror 10c**

**BAIL FOR BANK BANDIT**

**WOMAN FINED**

**LICENCE CRUEL TO KILL TO DOG**

LOTTERIES: OP. HOUSE 536 ORDINARY 7021

### THE SHOW

After some more tiresome toing and froing, the show went ahead. It was designed like a newspaper, but one that would, hopefully, reveal its structured distortions. The 'School Project' section consisted of background material -- virtually an extension of the Gallery Library -- mostly Art & Language publications and recent (Provisional) Art & Language work. In this section, too, were some poster projects of mine, characterized as failures, and a video tape Crass and Conscious Errors.

Most important were the discussions, held on Wednesday and through the weekend, aimed at contributing to the cultural criticism on-going in

Detail from MEDIA MASSACRE, wall display on newspapers' sensationalization of the police hunt for Philip Western. June 1976.

Here are extracts from two out of the five discussion sessions. This selection can only be a hint of the range and character of the discussions.

Wednesday, August 4

Graham Wimp, representative, Northern Drivers: I have a suspicion that art is something you get lumbered with when you lose contact with your culture. It's something you hang onto as the final bit.

Most of you won't believe this, but there is still a strong working class culture in NZ. So most workers don't need galleries like this: they have places of their own... Now most of the workers I work for are a funny lot because they are directly serving this cultural remnant, but they are divorced from the working class culture they have most interest with. They are a bit like clerical workers, they work close to the boss, wear a white shirt and tie, feel a bit like the boss, but if you look at their real interests they are very much the same as those of the fellas on the factory floor. It's a bit harder for you jokers because you don't have the Federation of Labour to help bring home all these contradictions to you.

Wystan Curnow, lecturer, critic: Artists are people who have lost touch with their culture and, in so far as they have a value to the community, this loss of touch is it. Bourgeois society, or civilization, has produced a class of persons -- artists, writers, philosophers, some scientists -- whose activity is of little immediate use. Exactly. Their function is to provide a sort of library of concepts which get fed in one way or another into the memory of society for its later use. These concepts are innovative -- to be innovative they have to transcend their culture.

Terry Smith: What you are saying is misleading historically -- most artistic activity is academic, not innovative. It's also logically misled -- when our ruling elites buy paintings, they don't just buy objects worth x million dollars, they buy a piece of surrogate creative freedom. Economically, the fascinating thing about artworks is just how loosely grounded their value is; so loose that they amount to emblems of privilege. Buying such privilege means buying your 'way out' of the class structure of society. So being 'civilized' amounts to, or tries to amount to, 'transcending' the conflict in which your class position is based. This is when all your 'universal' values about memory banks, innovative concepts come in, not before... You're saying that: we need these concepts, producing them depends on this current exploitative, elitist social order, ergo (unfortunately -- how sad!) we have to preserve this social order...

Richard Killen, painter: But some of this display is about lines and forms, very tastefully done... like that wall on the Medibank strike, it's clearly designed into horizontals and verticals...

Terry Smith: Concentrating on that alone is a great way of ignoring the content. The design of that is inanely simple: The horizontals are the various Sydney papers, sorted according to ownership, and the verticals are simply the days during the strike on which the papers put out posters. The gaps are there precisely and only because the papers didn't put out a poster on Medibank that day...

Saturday morning, August 7

Tony Green, art historian: One thing this display tells me is that newspapers virtually conspire to give us information in such a way that we are guaranteed to forget it. All this information paradoxically means that the public doesn't know what is going on.

Basil Holmes, building worker: It is effective because it shows us that we are being bombarded, and it shows us how. Newspapers trivialize, they make important ideas crude and terrible... Here we have both a symbol and indication of this process. We are forced to ask: what are our defenses? The printers aren't attacking us, the owners are. Or maybe you want to be part of the attack? Artists have to decide: are you going to be peoples' artists or are you going to be no different in actual fact from the crudity we see on these walls, the brutality and trivia which is destroying the sensitivity of the thousands who might see your work?

Terry Smith: You either line up with Fairfax, Murdoch, Packer.. or, here, Horton, Blundell, etc. -- the ruling oligarchs, or you oppose them. They own the productive work of printers, journalists... and, in a sense, they own much of the ways we produce our worlds by controlling large tracts of available knowledge and language... Their equivalents in the art world control the results of our labor as artists, and this comes to predict our 'studio behaviour'. Most of our problems are 'given' before we start -- by our history as ruling class lackeys, middle class propagandists. Our 'radical opinions' are mostly farts in the breeze: our actual work doesn't constitute those opinions. But it can: witness Courbet, Dada in Berlin 1919 Tatlin and El Lissitzky, Heartfield, Rivera and Siquieros, a lot of Third World film, Conrad Atkinson in the Brambles strike a couple of years ago.. there are contradictions here of course, these artists are working against a society dedicated to rewarding compromise...

Geoff Chapple, journalist: This is wavering on the edge of concern about what the aware middle class can do?

Elizabeth Morely, sociologist: The problem is that ideology both entraps and explains/interprets, and so is itself contradictory. We need it, but must fight it the whole time...

Terry Smith: Ideological processes seem abstract, but are really devastatingly concrete. During the December 1975 election in Australia, the Liberal Country Party presented itself above all as the party which had the confidence of investors, and hammered into peoples' minds the chain: more capital investment = increased productivity = higher profits = more jobs = more consumer goodies. This against the reality of the 'strike of capital' during the Labor Government. Ergo, a Liberal landslide.

You start with 'business confidence' and end with the majority of Australian voting against their own interests out of fear. The science of this situation is: these individuals have x amount of money, power, and historical control, they use it primarily in their own interests, i.e. they use it against me, therefore I vote against them. Ideological distortion turns that into: 'the economy' just isn't working, look I've got to protect my job, maybe they'll create more jobs and get all those unemployed bastards off my back, they're not really attacking me straight out, not really, and they've got to be good managers (they've made enough out of it), so I'll vote for them...

Elizabeth Morely: I feel much more pessimistic about the 'seventies than I ever did about the 'sixties. Inflation breeds fear, fear of losing affluence, falling into unemployment, so people grasp for the Prefect.

Basil Holmes: Don't be pessimistic -- people will grasp for Fraser and find him wanting... I'll take a bet that right about now around Soweto they've got plenty of information about armed struggle and are finding that the only way to stay alive and solve problems -- they have been given no alternative. I suggest that this will be the future of N.Z., so there's no need to be pessimistic. Sad for the fate of the people, yes, and angry, but not pessimistic.

Look, 'the people' is an emotive term covering everyone, all right, but the editor of the Herald and the chap sweeping the floor in the Herald building do have different relationships to the world they live in. Crudely: artists tend to reflect the editor's relationships. They may march down the road in protest against him but their art reflects almost everything he finds acceptable. We should get artists amongst the people: plunk them down in Ponsonby, not for a day but for a bloody year with no income. Then they will learn to paint in a way that will solve your problem too. It's got to a point here that if you criticize this fellow Cross -- who is about as far right as you can get -- you are accused of treason! Do we swallow this or do we fight against it? This is where artists come in, they can arouse thoughts and emotions, they have more freedom of movement than any type of journalist, but are they rising to the occasion?

THE PRACTICE OF ARCHITECTURE  
POSITIVISM, PLURALISM AND DIALECTICS

Michael Taylor and Peter Walker  
The practice of architecture is a complex activity which involves the negotiation of a wide range of social, cultural and political values. This paper explores the role of architecture in the construction of a pluralistic society, and discusses the implications of this for the practice of architecture. It argues that architecture should be seen as a form of social action, and that it should be used to challenge the dominant power structures of society. This requires a radical re-examination of the traditional role of the architect, and a new approach to the design process. The paper concludes by suggesting that architecture has the potential to be a powerful force for social change, and that it should be used to create a more just and equitable society.

# THE PRACTICE OF ARCHITECTURE: POSITIVISM, PLURALISM AND DIALECTICS

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## I. Introduction

In recent times, several forces within our society have been exerting pressure on the architecture profession to change some of its basic assumptions in order to improve the quality and extent of its services. The general public argues that these professionals are unwilling to recognize how extensively their attitudes, methods and aesthetic and technical preferences are influenced by the socio-economic and political priorities of those who control the capital to build. Intentionally or inadvertently architects have been systematically excluding the general public from their decisions.

To counter these tendencies there are organized consumer attacks on professionals by advocates such as Ralph Nader intended to sharpen their ethical behavior.<sup>(1)</sup> Others are encouraged by social reformers such as Ivan Illich who go further to urge a 'convivial' reconstruction of society. This he believes can only be accomplished by abandoning the precepts of our present industrial era and redefining the role of professionals in relation to the laity: "We need procedures to insure that control over the tools of society are established and governed by political process rather than by decisions by experts...our imaginations have been industrially deformed to conceive only what can be molded into an engineered system of social habits that fit the logic of large scale production...Alternate political arrangements would have the purpose of permitting all people to define the images of their own future..."<sup>(2)</sup> Finally, there are those who propose professional involvement in the radical reorganization of our basic institutions. André Gorz, the French socialist suggests: "It is not mass consumption of culture that will break the...cultural monopoly, but only the creation by the dominated classes of their own culture. The task of animating, inspiring and guiding the creation of this culture, and stimulating free self-expression and the collective exchange and discussion of ideas and experiences among the masses, is one of the essential functions of (professionals)..."<sup>(3)</sup>

The practice of architecture may seem to be particularly receptive to many of these forces, since it has always entertained alternative philosophical positions. To

some extent it is flexible and malleable, having spread itself widely over the varied landscapes of the sciences and arts. However, for some time now, critics within the professions (Abrams, Chermayeff, DeCarlo, Goodman, Habraken, Tzonis) have warned of approaching crises, while practitioners have not developed any significant alternatives to the basic attitudes and methods of the now 60 year old Modern Movement.<sup>(4)</sup>

It seems, then, that architecture like all other professions, is equally constrained by its links to the ongoing context. Any intended intellectual pluralism is unfortunately focused upon secondary issues (styles, technologies, and methods), or at least upon issues which are affected by primary forces that are not apparent. These non-apparent forces can be identified as two basic interrelated categories - epistemology and ideology. For the sake of simplicity, epistemology of design today includes two opposite positions - logical positivism and dialectics - and a third mediating position referred to as pluralism. The ideology which stems from the first encourages the centralization of power hierarchies; the latter two encourage decentralization and horizontal power structures but commence from different theoretical roots and manifest themselves in fundamentally different practice. They are certainly not pure in practice, or even conscious, but exist in varying combinations and in varying degrees of awareness. Adherents, however, do tend to lean in one of the three directions. What follows is an attempt to characterize the beliefs and practices of these three stances as they appear in architecture.

## II. Positivism: Formalist Aesthetics and Scientism

The position pursued by architects based on positivism includes formalist aesthetics and/or formalist scientism. They both represent one outlook because they share fundamental epistemological premises. Both assume that professionals, by virtue of their training, have risen above the non-initiated and have developed either exceptional, mystical insight or clever data-collecting capability. These abilities, it is argued, enable architects to describe the existing reality closer to perfection and as a result generate more valid judgments for design intervention. The assertion of this position is based on the following assumptions: 1) that reality can be comprehensively understood from one perspective alone; 2) that this perspective can be perfected by isolating its conceptual language outside the reality it is investigating; 3) that reality can be decomposed into fixed discrete units with the relationships between them mechanically reconstructed; 4) that this perspective is best developed only under the tutelage of those who already possess it; and 5) that the effectiveness of the perspective can be preserved from damaging political and social influence by freeing it from ideology through the use of appropriate techniques.

1. Unitary perspective. Both formalisms in architecture, aesthetic and scientific, attempt to invent fixed, ideal, a priori concepts into which they package the complexity of reality. One searches history for universal symbolic form archetypes as proof of man's structural consistency and therefore applicable to many contexts.<sup>(5)</sup> The other fabricates universal concepts of behavior-environment interactions (i.e., territoriality, "personal space") which presumably have been extracted from carefully collected data.<sup>(6)</sup> The application of a unitary perspective leads to the belief of an indisputable general public good which applies to everyone and which by necessity becomes intolerant of events which do not fit the conceptual model. Subsequently, such occurrences are labeled deviant aberrations which need to be corrected to fit what is expected by the formal model or the "objective, optimal" planning or design solution.

2. Detachment. Architects of both formalist positions tend to operate in a manner which separates them from intense participation with the realities they study or experiment with.<sup>(7)</sup> A priori rules of visual composition or technological imagery on the one hand, or fabricated social and psychological concepts to precede or follow data collection on the other, are manufactured from a distance and imposed upon reality. This simplifies and distorts reality. These practices are not organized to establish intense interaction with the people of the contexts they intervene in - before, during or after a project. People do not play a role in restructuring their own lives and environments. Professional detachment from reality is essential to scientific "objectivity" and the search for "universal" archetypes. In fact, the perspective of lay people in planning and design projects is believed to be contaminated. If it is included it can only enter through the filter of expert designed questionnaires and interviews of social science or the expert-invented metaphorical concepts of historicism. Both are then interpreted only by expert designers.

3. Fragmentation. Formalist scientism in architecture is rooted in mechanistic materialism. It believes that reality is the mere summation of discrete units which have their own identity unaffected by their interconnections. Generally, formalist aesthetics in architecture is an idealist position which ignores the influence of the functional parts on the vision of the aesthetic "whole". Both ignore the interactions of parts, which affect the character of interactions themselves and the whole.<sup>(8)</sup> In the practice of formalist aesthetics and technological imagery, there are theorists who believe they can generate holistic ideas while someone else simply works out the functional parts, and whose activity has little effect on the shaping of the initiating ideas. The holistic idea generators consider themselves more important because all other labor in building the environment is considered supportive and does not significantly

contribute to idea generation. In the practice of formalist scientism, the design activity reduces itself to the identification of independent components and their empirically determined requirements. Synthesis is a by-product because no interpretative effort has been devoted to understanding the variety of ways by which the parts necessarily interact. Architectural decisions are then based on deductive psychology or social physics, using atomized "psycho-social" performance criteria derived from easily observable surface behavior of the existing system. When the design activity emphasizes these limited concerns, interpreting and interrelating are no longer important functions and the designer is trivialized, preceded by this new breed of design and planning professionals called "programmers". Both approaches then, are rooted in the ancient idealist-realist schism and are locked into the resultant hierarchy of social relations when put into practice.

4. Expert training. The formulation of architectural education has always remained a dialogue among designers only, occasionally integrating the inputs of other experts. The designer continues to be seen as the grand synthesizer, the individual who possesses a universal overview to synthesize all.<sup>(9)</sup> Thus, a hierarchy of knowledge has developed even among experts. Other experts do not participate in teaching design, nor do they contribute to the interpretation of reality for architects. Rather, they feed them inputs or data. They give them secondary support, or calculate for them, but do not share conceptual responsibility. More critical than the stultifying hierarchy among experts, is the total exclusion of laymen from the education of professionals. Students are taught to use the special language of experts and to internalize the peculiar images of reality that it carries with it. That language rarely benefits from the images of reality of those who may some day have to bear the burden of expert decisions - namely the general public.

5. Political and social influence. Social and political factors do have an effect on the formation of the knowledge base for the architecture profession. Decision-makers, whether in capitalist or centralized socialist states, have a vested interest in promoting such an epistemology because it reinforces centralization. Trust and belief in all-knowing neutral experts prevents the general public from seeing that experts tend to reflect the interests of centralized decision-makers who apportion the research support or building commissions. This bias results from the fact that the real face-to-face dialogue and human exchange that the designers undertake in practice is only with those who have the decision-making power and capital to build. "Dialogue" with the general public relies on only abstract or detached substitutes - questionnaires, interviews, "poetic" insight. These substitutes are not accurate because they represent the value judgements of the experts and those who commission



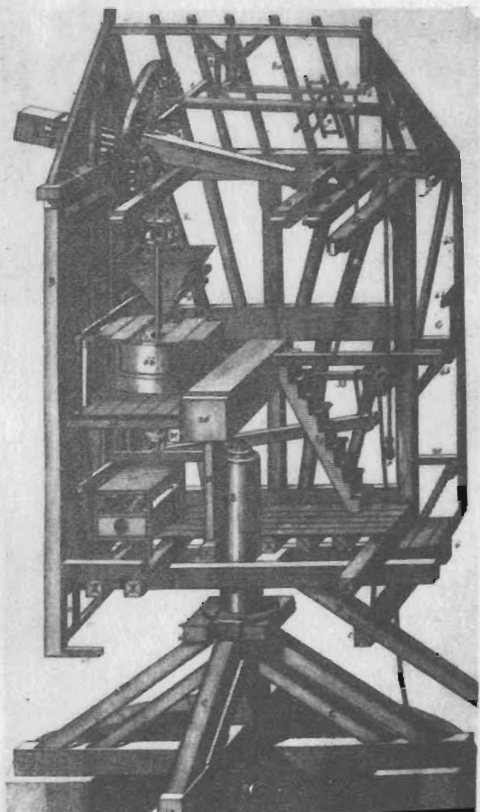
them. Judgements must always be made about what data to collect, how to analyze and interpret it, whether it be about contemporary behavior or historical artifacts. Thus, within centralized decision-making hierarchies, the realities of the peripheral many, when represented by professional interveners economically controlled by the center, are unavoidably distorted to suit the interests and prescriptions of the center.

The fact that the hierarchy of economic power influences the very epistemology underlying the practice of architecture is rarely, if ever, confronted. Some architects assert that an imbalance of power and the maldistribution of resources are problems to be solved in other arenas external to the design and planning professions, such as in social work, religion or politics (10). It is understandable how economic power can exert its influence over professionals in their daily practice; compromises for business survival are sometimes unavoidable. However, personal economic survival does not have to lead to an avoidance of awareness. At that point of epistemological awareness, the choice to accept the influence of the existing production system on the basis of knowledge in the professions is as ideological an act as one which chooses not to accept it.

#### Historical Roots of Formalisms in Design Education

The roots of formalisms in architectural design can be traced to the rational academic models which evolved in and pervaded Europe during the 17th century. Architecture was rationalized along with other production sectors of society into an activity which disassociated design from building. By seeking universal objective reality, architectural products were intended to acquire the predictable characteristics of machines which could produce desired effects, of either efficiency or pleasure. Laws of design were sought as though they were laws of nature to be found in the objects themselves (11). By the middle of the 18th century, however, it became evident that the pleasurable effects of building could not be measured in the same way as the amount of air needed to ventilate a 'lazaret'. The codification of pleasure principles and norms, which could not be supported by empirics gave rise to the new academy, promoting architecture as an art (12). Without discarding formalism, the Ecole des Beaux-Arts furthered the belief that truth resided in archetypal forms which emanated sensations and affected the human psyche when perceived (13).

In either case of formalism, aesthetic or scientific, the production of objects came under the control of only designers. Having exclusive access to the 'truth' through formal models, they were given the right to predetermine the entire concept and character of the objects prior to their production. The intent was to improve and control production efficiency; the cost was the exclusion of everyone else involved in production from making decisions

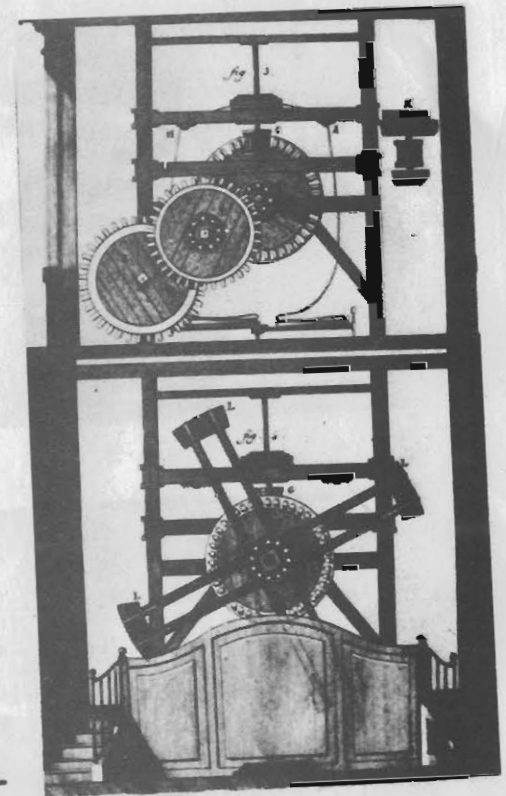


about what should be produced. In contrast to 'pre-rational' design, and even under the guidance of a master builder, many decisions were made over time in situ during production. They were made by those engaged in production. Design as theory, disassociated from labor, weakened the contribution of labor (the guilds) to design and production decisions and strengthened that sector of society (the ruling class) which stood to benefit from the production reorganization (14).

When design education was reexamined in the early twentieth century, the efforts were directed at mending the split between "thinking" and "doing". The precepts of the Modern Movement attributed to the Bauhaus were founded on a collective marriage between science, the machine, the arts, crafts and a broad but unspecified sociological context. Architects were somehow to overcome their "isolation from the community...and the world...their role as drawing-room artists detached from life" (15) by cooperating in the production of the industrial object. The Bauhaus student, therefore, received "a thorough practical manual training in workshops actively engaged in production, coupled with sound theoretical instruction in the laws of design" (16). The new precepts, however, equated society with the industrial production system only and presumed that by affecting the forms of the objects to permit their mass production, designers could achieve a useful reintegration into the society. Those forms were still based on "fundamental relationships and the laws to which they were subject" (17). The formulae of the academies, considered arbitrary and individualistic, were replaced by new theories of form and color, considered to be universal because they were based on qualities assumed to be inherent in materials, construction and the metaphysical inspiration of the 'machine age'.

#### Foundation Studios

The new machine aesthetic had to be cultivated in the new designers. The preliminary course thus became the diuretic to cleanse and "break down conventional patterns of thought" (18). Constructs like space, form and structure were conceived as though they were real, universal pieces of objective reality. They were not seen as fabrications for the social construction of reality required for the industrial era. This tendency of formalism to reify the present was exhibited in much of what was said and done at the Bauhaus: Gropius - "This course (preliminary course, Weimar 1922) is intended to liberate the students' creative powers, to give him an understanding of nature's materials, and to acquaint him with the basic principles which underlie all creative activity in the visual arts". Albers - "the inherent characteristics of the material determine the way it is to be used". Moholy-Nagy - "the primary means for the arrangement of space is still space itself and the laws of space condition all aesthetic creation in architecture". Kandinsky -



"drawing instruction at the Bauhaus is training in observation...of an...object...of its logical forces or tension which are to be discovered in the objects themselves and in the logical arrangement of them"(19).

The Bauhaus and its descendents believed that 'truth' resided in the objects themselves, that is, basic principles were 'out there', and only needed to be discovered by specially trained experts. As much as self-expression was encouraged, students were given implicit rules of organization - simplification and economy. Such universality could fit the special brand of international production encouraged in the factories pursuing standardization. Although foundation projects encouraged the development of individual invention and personal vocabulary, the ground rules of the simplifying 'machine aesthetic' strongly circumscribed the domain of allowable solutions.

Under the control of the individual designer, objects were stripped of their collectively developed symbolism. Traditionally this had gradually accumulated as part of the complex social processes of making, using and re-making objects and buildings by many people. The Bauhaus continued the historical trend to ignore the social processes that traditionally surrounded and contributed to the life of objects and buildings. The 'designed object' was isolated as an end in itself, described without context and organized by 'inherent' principles of efficiency for the sake of facilitating the manufacturing of it in large quantities. This left no room for the object or building to receive conceptual contributions by the workers who made them or the idiosyncratic adjustments by the persons who would use them. As Breuer referred to the "international style" this ideal of built-in, unchangeable universality: "One may conclude that any object properly and practically designed, should 'fit' in any room in which it is used..."(20). The elevation of the designer to this position of power over the artifacts of the culture led to competitive, individual work among students of design in subsequent generations. This undermined the collective political and intellectual strength of those students who wished to raise questions about the non-apparent epistemological and ideological assumptions which their mentors were taking for granted. These critical questions were already settled by the very formulation of the problems given in the studio. They focused the student's attention on sensuous, functional or technical qualities of objects as ends in themselves.

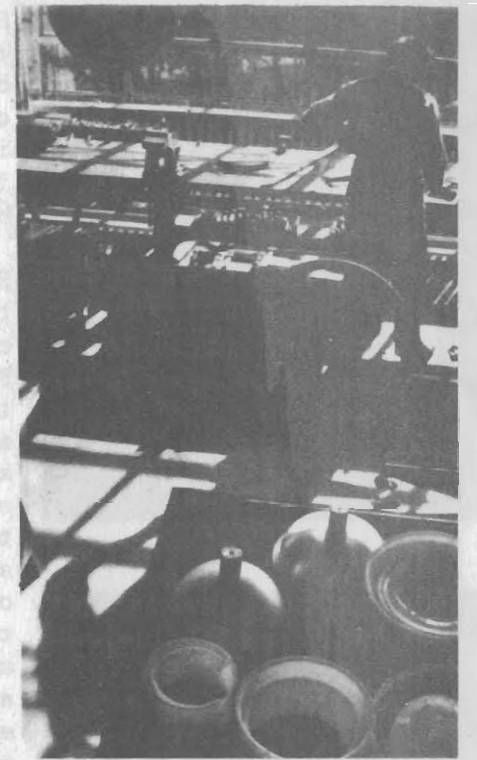
#### Professional Studios

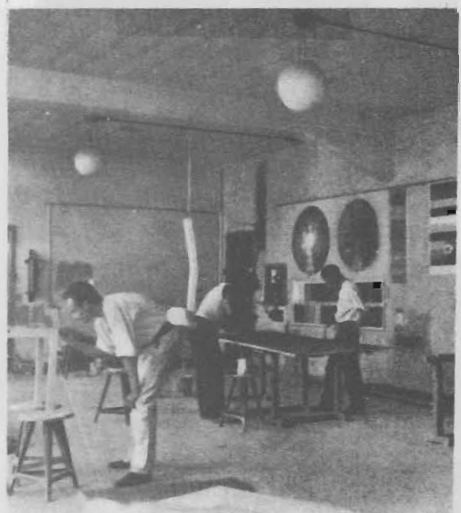
Although the intent of the Bauhaus in its professional curriculum had been the reintegration of architecture and building in the society, the 'common denominators' of design imposed by the foundation training prevented

it. The search for a unitary image of man's physical world, appropriate for the machine age - smooth surfaces, elementary geometric volumes, transparent enclosures, and primary colors, resulted in just another formal vocabulary. The new formalism obviously did not confront the economic, political and social reality; it only aestheticized technology.

The contradiction was exposed further when Hannes Meyer joined the Bauhaus in 1927, to head the new architecture section and became its director a year later. Meyer set himself against the prevailing formalism by suppressing the painter's influence, while stressing the role of the 'exact sciences'. The new program defined building as the organization of life processes based on scientific and technical research to achieve an effective social role. To Meyer, architecture was building science, not an act of composition dictated by feeling, but an act of premeditated organization. To achieve this role it had to analyze more than the 'psycho-artistic elements'; it also had to concern itself with socio-political and techno-economic reality. As such, "it could no longer be an individual task... but one that arises from the very start out of collaboration with others...as a collective affair"(21).

The professional curriculum under Meyer adopted cooperative vertical workshops. The education was based on real projects intended to serve actual needs with the cooperation of building trades and unions. The intent was to include the public in the training of the architect while "abandoning artistic speculations which were the special reserve of a small number of initiates" (22). However, while Meyer expanded the participants in building as a process, he also sought a new formal scientism. To him, building had to take its form from "visible, measurable and ponderable function and from the materials and manufacturing processes"(23). Through the 'scientification of architecture' designers would shape every element simply by the conditions of its use and construction in order to achieve a maximum saving of money, energy and time. Empirical facts were to be supplied by science and technology and from them form, mass, color, surface would come about automatically. Meyer failed to recognize that buildings are also subjective interpretations of functions and are laden with meanings attributed not only by those who design them, but by those who make and use them. Hindsight suggests that Meyer postulated one more formalism, a functionalist aesthetic. Nevertheless, during his brief period as director of the Bauhaus, he managed to alter procedurally both the education and the role of the designer. The work of the Bauhaus was extended into the local community and thereby partially achieved Gropius' early objectives: the integration of the designer in the society as one contributor to the making of genuine cultural artifacts. Meyer's actions threatened the institutional status quo.





His efforts to make the design activity an integral part of life, of the social, economic, cultural and production context, were interpreted as the bringing of political concerns into the Bauhaus. Disaffected aesthetic formalists threatened by scientific formalism and outside political forces dismissed Meyer and replaced him with Mies van der Rohe.

Since the thirties, the initial social vision of architects has been reduced to simple geometry, rational processes and technical images as the means to change. Formalisms, devoid of social, economic and political content, developed conceptions of the world either in purely empirical terms or in merely aesthetic terms. When architects legitimize their activity using systems analysis, mathematical decomposition or social science data, they reduce the activity of design to mechanistic problem solving. Similarly, aesthetic formalism retreats to preoccupation with only the sensuous, derived also from deterministic 'inherent' attributes which the objects are assumed to emanate. This latter preoccupation is considered to be humanist and pluralist. Humanism is couched in the terminology of semiotics and seeks phenomenological universalism; pluralism exalts pop culture and reifies the status quo of alienated consumption.

What should become clear in this brief sketch of the antecedents of design education is that despite good intentions, it continues to be saddled by rigid formalisms derived by experts. These formalisms continue to reject the validity of lay values; they disregard the fact that all human beings are designers who reflect on their condition, engage in criticism and interpretation and consequently take action in the physical world.

### III. Pluralism: Deceptive Democracy Epistemology

Architects, then, currently face an epistemological and ideological dilemma. Design as a product of unitary aims, whether aesthetic or scientific, addresses problems as though they are puzzles that are simply definable, manageable and solvable. In contrast, the design activity can be an arena for the public to exercise its rights. Such an approach asserts that problems are not always easily definable and at best must rely on elusive political judgement for their resolutions. In the face of difficult problems, the positivist view seeks to become more expert, more professional and more specialized, in order to find the 'truth' - a single best solution. The latter view recognizing that much of the problem lies in the differences between the professionals and multiple public interests, rejects unitary aims, welcomes other values and priorities and accommodates conflict. In essence an alternative epistemology in open societal systems is one that views most design problems as more evasive and less predictable than they appear to be.

The opening few sentences of this section could easily apply to either a dialectical or pluralistic approach to analysing and solving problems of architecture. But they agree only in their recognition of Positivism's tendency in architecture to simplify life. From the Pluralist view, however, design problems do have recurring properties:

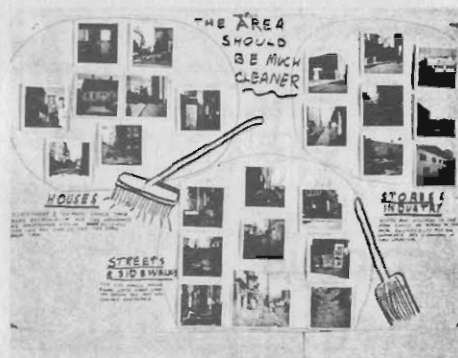
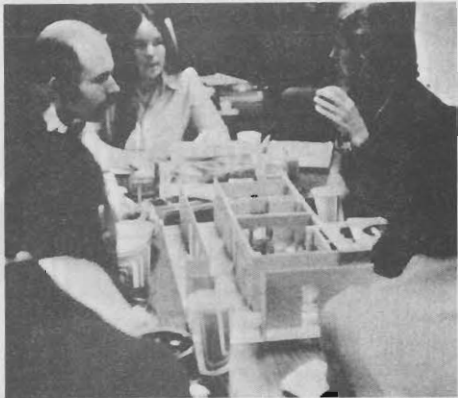
- Given that discrepancies which give rise to design problems can be explained in numerous ways, any design problem can always be considered a symptom of another problem; subsequently,
- Since any problem is formulated by starting a solution and it is unlikely that any one can foresee all the options, most design problems have no definitive single formulation; in turn,
- Only value judgements, which will vary according to personal and group interests, can determine the degree to which a solution is appropriate; that is, there are no neutral objective criteria to characterize a solution correct or false; similarly,
- There are no neutral objective criteria to predict the likely consequences of a solution over time and therefore no inherent rules to stop the search for better solutions - only external constraints such as time, money or patience; therefore,
- Since every design problem, given variable contexts and perceptions of reality, has a considerable degree of uniqueness, it is difficult to consistently apply universal solutions. (24)

This attitude toward design problems recognizes multiple perspectives of equity and engages the design activity as a deliberative dialogue. Contrary to the belief that design is an expert, private and detached task performed for others, design among divergent opinions is a public task requiring direct involvement and confrontation by "all" concerned. Designing is a discourse for mutual learning which accepts conflict and welcomes public argument and debate in order to externalize and extend knowledge about a problem. Therefore it must include laymen to help make informed judgements, for no one has sole expertise to determine what a resolution ought to be.

But there is also an uneasy relativism underlying an attitude that can assert that equal knowledge and equal ignorance reside among all interest groups regarding a planning and design project. The belief that people have different knowledge and insight about a problem due to their relative position to it is certainly born out in concrete reality. A few will own a building, and many others will build it, and still others will maintain it. Some will live in it, others must live near it; some will be helped by it, others will suffer from it. Some will choose to lend money for profit to build it, and others will be destined to scrub its floors. Each will certainly see this building in a different light.



## Stages in the process



ideas) their practice is disembodied from the material realities - and struggles - of design development and construction. As an elite cadre of thinkers, they carry on the traditions of philosophical idealism, and reinforce the social hierarchy as expert management consultants detached from, and elevated above, labor(28).

Participatory planners and architects working from the perspective of oppressed communities are virtually nonexistent. Capital to support their work is released in very small amounts and at uncertain rates by government powers, with many constraints. "Community design workshops", staffed by university trained and state licensed professionals, must limit the sphere of their work to avoid pressure from local professional societies who see them as unfairly subsidized competitors, taking jobs away from private practitioners. They must also avoid affiliation with projects which may offend their funding sources. This very small group works from a mire of leftist ideologies, but having been trained in the narrow confines of professional architectural curricula, for the most part they lack any intense formal awareness of the theoretical roots of their politics.(29)

Consequently, they engage in projects brought to them by community groups on an ad-hoc basis, hustle for funding wherever possible, and lack any consensus about how to analyze and interpret social history and change, and the role of professionals in that process. They use a pot-pourri of design methods, often unconsciously counter to their implicit ideological intentions to involve people in creating their own environments. Some engage in esoteric exercises seeking to design images of "an indigenous architecture", others use positivist surveys and questionnaires to discover "user" needs for designers to interpret and use. A very few, however, do struggle to evolve methods for people to participate closely with designers in the creative activity of planning and designing their own environments. This last approach holds the promise for laymen and professionals to use the frequently scheduled, interactive work sessions held for immediate practical design purposes as an arena for also raising larger questions about cultural hegemony as manifested in their own environments, economic controls over their community's real estate, and alternative means for collectively owning and managing a neighborhood's residential stock and services(30).

Approximately 80 community design workshops exist with staff ranging from 2 to 5, with up to 20 people in a few centers who have successfully pooled funding from HUD, CETA, state health, education and welfare agencies, local municipalities, church groups and private foundations. For the most part, designers who pursue this route without a clear political understanding, become functionaries of the welfare state, insuring that the structurally exploited classes paternalistically receive

their pittance related to shelter and community facilities. They rarely engage in the long term struggles for community self management and self-development countering the debilitating consequences of private philanthropy and public welfare.

"Citizen participation" in planning and architectural design is still the concern of a minority within the professions and schools. However, as the professions of planning and design continue to undergo corporatization in order to attract large government and corporate clients, or to be owners of development projects(31), the management strategies of American corporate liberalism to smooth internal and external operations on large projects will push this fledgeling concern for methodological control of conflicting interests out of the hidden corners of academia into the full light of practice. Traditional aesthetic formalists will continue to become, in economic terms, vestigial to the profession as the old, wealthy patronage of individual artistry evaporates before the development of corporate and government clients, and corporate architectural and planning firms. While the architectural magazines continue to promote the myths of aesthetic formalism by individual heroes, in no way do they represent the realities of actual practice nationwide. The scientific formalists, or "man-environment researchers", using positivist social science techniques, also will continue to increase in popularity among the expanding corporate architectural firms, providing legitimation as well as useful data to guarantee a more predictable and organized practice. The Army Corps of Engineers, the Law Enforcement Assistance Agency, the National Bureau of Standards, and the National Institute of Mental Health, and of course, the Research Corporation of the American Institute of Architects are vigorously supporting this kind of work. All of them believe, and hope, that the physical properties of the environment can be manipulated to "improve" or "control" human behavior, and solve critical social problems with a mechanical twist of the wrist.

In summary, "participatory designers" will stabilize the corporate production process - the invention and development of design proposals - by organizing the collective undertaking among the conflicting interests permitted to participate. The man-environment researchers will serve the marketing research function, insuring the stability of consumption or marketability of environments, by maintaining constant surveillance through post-construction evaluations to feedback social design criteria for future work. Both together will insure that the creation of architecture as an integral cultural process of a community's life is forever abolished, and solidly replaced by the centralized production of buildings as commodities.

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23. Ibid., p. 93.
24. Paraphrased from Rittle, Horst W. and Webber, Melvin M. 'Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning' in DMG-DRS Journal, Vol. 8, No. 1, Jan-Mar 1974, pp. 31-39.
25. Fein, Leonard D. "Ideology and Architecture: Dilemmas of Pluralism in Planning" in Planning for Diversity and Choice, Anderson, Stanford, ed. The M.I.T. Press, 1968, pp. 188-203.

26. Ouye, Joe A. and Protzen, Jean Pierre. "Choices of Participatory Planning" in DMG-DRS Journal, Vol. 9, No. 4, Oct.-Dec. 1975, pp. 304-312.
27. "The Case for Design Quality in Today's Marketplace: Four Studies of Collaboration between Architects and Developers that Explore the Arithmetic of Excellence" in Architectural Record, Dec. 1977, pp. 81-128.
28. For a review of the issues related to "Participation in Design" see DMG-DRS Journal, Vol. 9, No. 4, Oct.-Dec. 1975, Pyatok, M., and Weber, H., Guest eds.
29. See Comerio, Mary C. Architecture Vs the Real World, M.Arch/S.W. Thesis, Washington University, Jan. 1977 and Dutton, Thomas A. Society, Consciousness and Planning, M.Arch. U. D. Thesis, Washington University, May 1977.
30. Pyatok, Michael and Weber, Hanno. "Participation in Residential Design: A Method for Generating Choice and Its Ideological Implications" in Designing for Community Participation. H. Sanoff, ed. Dowden, Hutchinson & Rosa; (forthcoming).
31. According to a 60% response of a recent AIA survey of 9,000 architectural firms, 17.8% generate 65.7% of the dollar value of fees, representing about 80% of the construction estimates for 1977 in the U. S. These fees however, include unbuilt work and foreign work. See Memo the newsletter of the American Institute of Architects #542, Nov. 18, 1977.

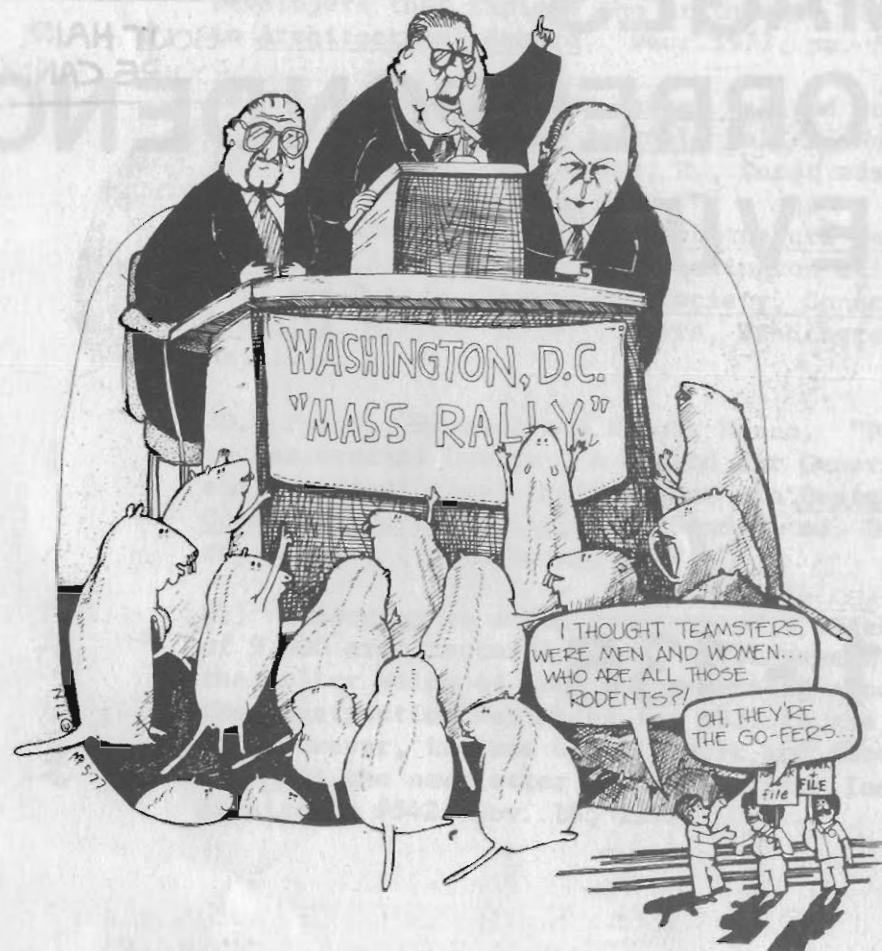
# DOCUMENTS IMAGES CORRESPONDENCE REVIEWS

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# TEAMSTER INFORMATION NETWORK

JUNE 27,  
1977



International Sec.-Treas. Ray Schoessling, Fitz, and International VP Jackie Presser holding forth at the Washington D.C. "mass rally" of 2,000 local official "go-fers" on April 6, 1977. The rank and file was not represented inside the "rally", though TDU picketed outside. The purpose of the meeting was to express support for Fitz' "leadership": deny widespread reports of corruption, especially concerning the pension fund; and denounce press and government investigations of the Fitz gang.

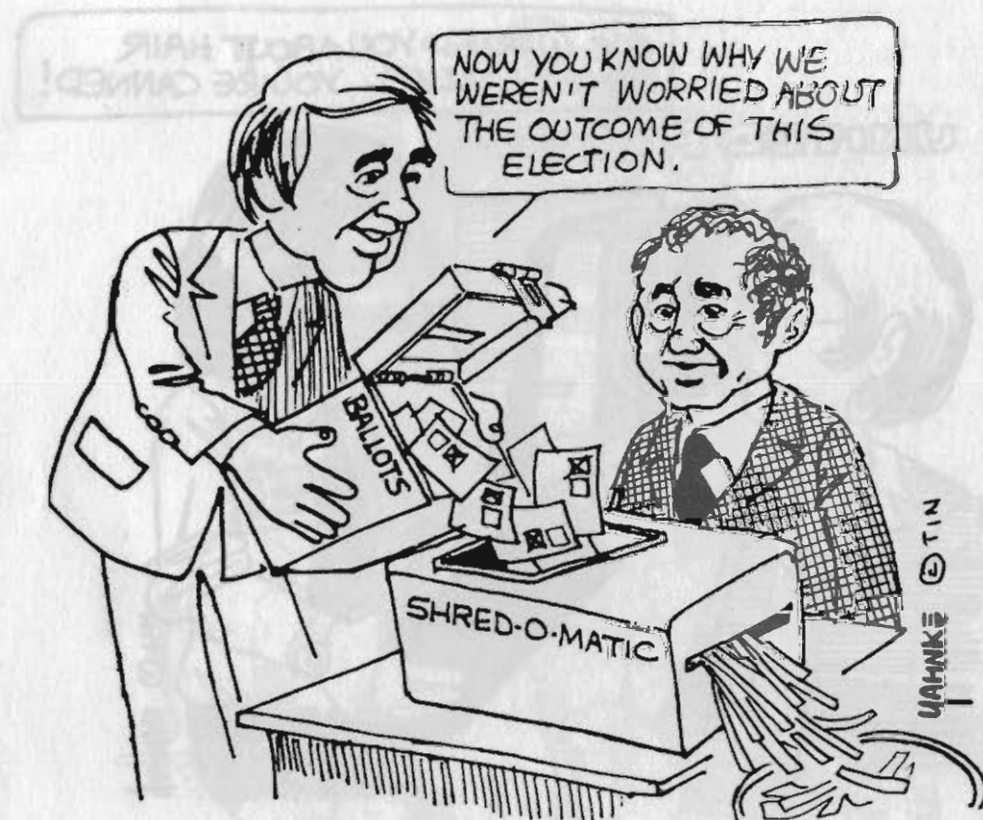
• a service of Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU) •

P.O. Box 3321 • Madison, Wis. 53704 • Mike Bertrand, Coordinator • Phone (608) 244-6958



United Parcel Service is the largest single employer of Teamster members (60,000). UPS is known for its severe dress and appearance code. UPS workers are frequently fired for appearance not up to the "UPS standard". Appearance is often used as a pretext to fire union activists and women, whom UPS is obliged to hire under an affirmative action agreement with the EEOC. One recent case is Evie Thomas, a woman driver and TDU activist in the San Francisco area. Thomas was fired in Jan. 1977 allegedly for too long hair, though several male co-workers had longer hair.





Teamsters Local 110 held elections in Dec. 1976. Local 110 contains grocery and freight drivers in a ten county area of Western Pennsylvania. Members of a losing oppositional slate have filed charges with the union and US Labor Dept. regarding irregularities in the balloting. Irregularities included more votes counted than were cast, candidates handling ballots, and failure to seal the ballot box. Shortly after the voting, observers caught the chairman of the counting committee picking up ballots scattered all over the floor!

## THE AGE OF NOURISHMENT

by

David Penberg

after many centuries  
of stone aged lies,  
manipulators and life masturbators;  
after droughts of  
deceptions and mystifications;  
after the world was made safe for  
tampax, reylon hair spray and  
time magazine;  
after all the cozening principles and  
bureaucrats and  
administraters with white shoes  
passed on the word,  
ossified the word,  
de-based the word;

after a millenium  
of human drought and genocides;  
the people ascended from their darkness  
and entered a country witherto unexplored  
called: the imagine-nation.  
And there,  
after eternities of losing and leaving and  
wandering down  
welfare roads with the faces of strangers,  
they grew buds, which they called desire,  
and from these buds opened marvellous flowers,  
which they called passion  
(long lost in the age of stone)  
and the flowers took on color,  
which they called spirit, brother of desire.  
sister of passion.

and so it was that the human beings were born  
and the age of nourishment began,  
so help me marx.

"IT GIVES ME THE RIGHT TO SPEAK IT": Radical Oral History

by Bruce Kaiper

"If I'd a just reversed my words and said, 'O, all we niggers is just gettin along fine, and all the poor white folks- we just havin a ball-' but I ain't goin to tell it that way, I can't. No, it's right over to the other side: they been brutally treated and scorned.... This is the truth I'm givin; I've kept a record of a heap of things and it gives me a right to speak it...."\*

Ned Cobb

Alabama sharecropper and radical

Oral history is the people's story of life on this earth. It is neither "academic", "objective", nor "professional"; it is profoundly personal. It describes the pain, the struggle, the humor, and the joy of trying to make ends meet, trying to keep the family and neighborhood together, and, in the case of radicals, attempting to change society into a more human place to live. Oral history is not a book. It is a relationship, with words used as bridges between the listener and the speaker. Oral history is more than a tale, it is also an epic drama with the living characters acting out the parts they played in the shaping of the people's legacy. No matter how small their part, oral history provides them their rightful opportunity to speak.

Recently, there has been a resurgent interest in oral history throughout the country. Oral history projects of all types have surfaced in the nooks and crannies of a media-saturated landscape. One such project has emerged in the Bay Area entitled the "Radical Elders Oral History Project". Originally spawned by the New York-based Oral History on the American Left located at NYU, the Radical Elders quickly redefined itself as a community organization as opposed to an archive project. It is dedicated to the nurturing of viable relationships between elder radicals and the younger generation committed to similar principles. This doesn't mean that the Radical Elders does not perform the necessary tasks of recording on sound tape and videotape the lives of elder veterans of labor, political, civil rights and cultural struggles. Nor does it mean that the midnight oil hasn't been burnt typing hundreds of pages of transcriptions from tape recorded interviews. Like all historically-minded concerns, this critical work must be done. What is unique about the Radical Elders Project is their conception of making oral history a community experience.

For example, January 4, 1978, the Radical Elders held a public event in Berkeley in which poet John Beecher (age 75) and economist Scott Nearing (age 94) spoke on themes pertaining to their radical backgrounds. For many, the event evoked memories of the Chautauquas\*\* of

the early 1900's, in that both speakers were gifted in elocution, exemplary of political commitment, and were practitioners of popular education. Both had been schooled by the Chautauquas of their youth.

Earlier in December ('77), a videotape was made involving Scott Nearing and another old socialist, Carl Sullivan (age 92), who had known Tom Mooney and Gene Debs. They recounted their political pasts, their radical evolution, and concluded their discussion with a debate on the future of American socialism. In November, the Radical Elders published excerpts of an interview with Sam Krieger (age 75), an old Wobbly, communist and labor organizer, in In These Times. A videotape of that interview was also made.

The Radical Elders Project not only promotes public events, it also invites public participation in the organization. The Project has a board of directors equally divided between elders and youngsters. The board selects staff and volunteer interviewers based on experience and skills. Interviewers for the project generally are veteran radicals themselves, with extensive backgrounds in the subjects that they choose to record. In many cases, the subject of an interview becomes an interviewer later for the Project. The Radical Elders also advises other groups on how to start oral histories of their own. The group is planning a speakers bureau for community colleges, trade unions, and other community groups. A monthly newsletter is anticipated as well as transcriptions of interviews in pamphlet form.

The Radical Elders adopted this organizational form because most other groups dedicated to radical oral history were using more academic methods which, undeniably important in themselves, tended to restrict more popular use and distribution of gathered materials. Notable exceptions to this tendency are those interviews which have been done on videotape and film (e.g., "Union Maids"), or the few that have been printed in Leftist papers such as In These Times.

It is the view of the Radical Elders Project that America is indeed suffering from "social amnesia" (mass forgetting) regarding its historical origins. Part of this condition is due to direct ideological assault by the ruling class upon the American public, causing the disruption of historical continuity and, in particular, the creative role of working people in the building of American institutions. The Radical Elders also feels that this amnesic state has been a symptomatic result of the capitalist destruction of communities, neighborhoods, and our families-- the traditional custodians of the peoples' cultural legacy. Today their social roles have been "mediated" by T.V., the press, poor schools, advertising-- which have come between the face-to-face relationships of friends and neighbors of common backgrounds. No longer do American citizens sit in the customary circles and recite the "old tales" of their origins. No longer do "readers" in workshops interpret the news dailies as others work, providing the valuable function of a unified topic for group discussion. The capitalist assault on our vehicles of communication results in the muzzling of the spoken word.

The Radical Elders Project wants to revive the public forum in which debate, dialogue and example are again the means through which the younger generation and their elder comrades can share the richness of their radical heritage. Political change cannot occur without a community of socially responsible citizens willing to make that change together. As Ned Cobb has put it:

"I'd fight this morning for my rights, I'd do it-- and for other folk' rights if they'll push along.... How many people is it today that it needs and requires to carry out this movement? Who's to do it? It's the best people of the United States... the uneducated, unknowledged ones that's living here in this country. They goin to win! They goin to win!"\*

For further information on the Radical Elders Oral History Project write:

Radical Elders Oral History Project  
c/o The Ark Bookshop  
1703 University Ave.  
Berkeley, California 94703

\* Quotes taken from Theodore Rosengarten's All God's Dangers, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1974.

\*\* The Chautauqua Society was an educational movement founded in 1878 in Chautauqua, New York. It dealt with history, literature, science, and art as popular courses. Its purpose was to bring academic knowledge out to working class people.



A demonstration at Boiler-makers Union headquarters in Oakland, February, 1945.



A meeting of the Radical Elders Oral History Project.

## RADICAL ELDER ARTISTS: AN ORAL HISTORY

One of the unfortunate consequences of the radical youth movement of the 1960's and early '70's was its sweeping rejection of the heritage of radicalism. Not only were young radicals proclaiming their suspicion of parents, teachers, elder authority figures, they were also denouncing older members of the Left as "sellouts", "liberals", "social democrats", etc. Although there was much truth in these charges, although the Cold War years had taken its toll on many elder radicals, forcing many to reconsider their political alliances, commitments, etc., the youth of the '60's made a fundamental error of political judgement in describing the older generation as being "Old Left" and themselves as "New Left". Current practice clearly demonstrates that the young Left is an outgrowth and continuation of a radical tradition that came before it.

This mistaken notion of "old" and "new" is well illustrated in the arts. Many young artists, particularly those who have been influenced by modernist theory and practice, are currently kicking around aesthetic theories of "art and politics", as if these ideas somehow represent a new stage in the development of art. Declaring themselves the "radical vanguard" of modern art, they are writing, speaking, and showing their ideas on what political art is or isn't, how to collaborate with trade unions, political organizations, community art programs, as well as other "how to's", with an immediacy and narrowness that is historically disconcerting. The same problem, in a somewhat different context, also exists among those of this generation who have had, either no or minimal exposure to "official cultural history", or who have, in practice, rejected our cultural heritage as being irrelevant to the needs of the present. These artists tend to view artistic production as being valid only if it comes out of "concrete struggles". As such, this trend also reduces the problems of cultural production to a narrow immediacy of "what's happening." In so doing the legacy of historical tradition is excluded. In surveying the range of ideas and practices of this "new political art movement" one is struck by the lack of interest concerning how previous generations of American artists organized to fight against social injustice. There is little interest in American progressive culture of the first half of this century. There is little interest in the relation between radical artists and American political organizations like the IWW, Socialist Party, Communist Party. There is little discussion of the debates within such artistic groupings as Federal Arts Project, Artist's Union, Artist's Congress, Graphic Arts Workshop, Federal Writers Workshop, Workers Film and Photo League, et. al.. Nor is there much interest in the accomplishments of these groups or their members.

There are three important reasons for these troubling oversights. First, artists of the current generation have not been exposed to the radical art legacy in art school, college, nor the community at large. Contemporary art training and practice has systematically excluded any reference to an American radical legacy in the arts, focusing primarily on formalist radicalism. What is deemed "radical" in art, is an artist's break with a particular traditional style or

technique, not an artist's break with the body politic. Giving the "avant-gardes" political credence, as if their artistic experimentation had direct social consequence, has been the main tendency in most current books on American art. Of course, there have been examples of artists who did integrate avant-garde art with radical politics, but the merging of the two as "typical" of American modernism has been very much the exception, rather than the rule.

Second, socially conscious art has been labelled as a sub-category or sub-tendency within overall art history. Not only do art historians isolate art history from American history in general, but they divide art history itself into separate tendencies with little discussion of the relations between the strands that make up the American art tradition. There is little discussion of the historical context which influences the birth of a particular tendency. There is little discussion of the specific histories of individual artists, their economic and political backgrounds, which has direct bearing on their artistic development. There is a tendency to view "political" art as an exceptional development, periodically blossoming in response to a particular social injustice but, like a century plant, remaining inactive, underground for decades at a time. There is no discussion of the continuity of a radical art tradition.

Third, the class composition of most contemporary artists and the values and aspirations of that class tend to deflect or distort the real relations that these artists have to the larger social-political context. Not only are most practicing artists products of middle-class households, holding degrees from universities and art schools and accustomed to a degree of financial security, they also have been ingrained with the notions of upward mobility, status, professionalism, and social esteem characteristic of middle class life. To be an artist, has been idealized to an extent unwarranted in actual practice.

The social reality of the 1970's is such that a good portion of the middle class of this generation has gone through a process of proletarianization. Much middle-class youth end up working in wage jobs subject to the laws of the market. A large portion of middle-class youth live side-by-side with working class youth, with inter-marriage and cohabitation becoming commonplace. Similarly, many working-class youth of this generation have been exposed to various amounts of higher education. This, in the arts, has resulted in the "bringing down" of the supposed "higher values" of art to popular interpretation. This interpretation has seen the supposed "higher values" of aesthetic experience to be mostly rather thinly disguised excuses for upper class exclusiveness and hegemony. The romance of being an artist has worn thin. Most college trained artists cannot find jobs as artists, forcing them to take any type of work which will meet their survival needs. Most artists are suffering from the effects of a spiraling economy, including periodic unemployment, housing shortages, inflationary material and food costs, etc. At the same time, the scarcity of positions within arts institutions and schools, has increased the worst aspects of the "competitive spirit" among artists. The line waiting for secure positions within the arts is long, forcing many to resort to unprincipled careerist activity. For those who

secure a position, the anxiety shifts to maintaining it. Hence the "publish or perish" or "exhibit or perish" laws of capitalism, result in the development of a practically incomprehensible "in-house" jargon. Artistic integrity having long been abandoned, the most creative use of "art-politiking" becomes the gauge of success, rather than the intrinsic truth or universality of the work produced. Individuals not well honed in the intricacies of bourgeois games, maneuvering, and connections, get weeded out early. Most young artists are not happy with their status as artists in America.

Then why do they overlook the experience of older radical artists who suffered from similar social conditions? Why do they not learn from history the causes effecting their current condition as well as that of their elders? It is simply because no one within the artistic community, as well as the community at large, has attempted to forge the link between past and present in a graphic way, showing the continuity of radical history which bonds the experience of young and old together. There have been a few academic attempts entailing specialized study of the problem of radical art in America, but virtually no popular studies for larger audiences have, to our knowledge, been attempted.

We propose that an effective way to record the radical legacy of political art in America is through the use of the oral interview. Since there are many radical artists who are still alive who vividly remember the struggles of the earlier part of this century, as well as those of today, and since most of these artists are not being used as a community resource, we propose to interview these elder artists in order to learn about our mutual radical heritage in the arts.

We propose to interview, in depth, a variety of radical artists who participated in political organizations both as political activists and as cultural workers. There will be no restrictions placed on the types of artwork that these radical elders pursued, we will select writers as well as visual artists, actresses as well as movie script writers, etc. We will also interview representatives of many political movements, many ethnic groups, etc. showing the diversity of radical political consciousness in the creative arts.

After the sound tapes are made, we will transcribe the complete interview verbatim, giving the original transcription to the interviewed artist for their editing, and corrections. After the interviewee edits the verbatim transcript, we will make a final edit for purposes of including in a published anthology excerpts of each person's life history as a radical artist. We will not publish any material that the interviewed artist deems to be misrepresentative or misleading. It is understood that any material which violates the interviewed party's right to privacy or his or her integrity will not be published.

In conjunction with the written transcript, we intend to publish representative examples of the interviewee's artistic work, in order to show the relation between one's life experience and one's art work. We will also include any personal memorabilia which the interviewee selects as representative of their radical art endeavor. It is again understood that selections for visual presentation will be made jointly between the authors and the interviewees, with the latter's choice being final.

Since the authors of this study are interested in popular education, we also intend to make one or possibly more slide shows on the same theme as the written anthology, in which we would use excerpts of the sound tapes selected by the interviewees with colored slides of his or her work. The slideshows would blend biographical narrative with philosophical overview as to the meaning of the work shown on slide. Other soundtrack elements would also be blended into the presentation. Copies of these slideshows would be rented or sold to community colleges, universities, trade unions, and other community groups for their use.

It is our hope that the relevance of this study is clear to all participants and we invite any criticisms or suggestions pertinent to the success of this project.

Bruce Kaiper  
Csaba Polony  
Radical Elder Artists Project

# AN OBSERVATION

+ A Saturday Night +  
— MOON — SIGN —

Mindrage, Eyesting, throattraw,  
all this because we struggle  
in a human hell.

( the only kind there is )

Fleshed out,  
locked arm in arm in mute battle  
contra el capitalista!

during saturday cartoons caca para brains  
eaten comercials like the radiation

pouring out the color T.V.s of the LAST WORLD (U.S. of A.)

They can't hear me shout,  
their T.V. earplug won't come out,

They are caught in a net,

THE STRUGGLE is to change the channel,  
"THEY" CONTROL! and prevent from remote control,  
any changing of the channel!

THIS IS THE BRAIN POLICE ATTN:  
"KEEP IT TO THE SAME STATION NATION!"

THE LAW IS THE LAW! (as the 's-l' demands.)

while ~~millions~~ stay tuned,  
a billion others become unglued

Todo TRUCHA and rebel!

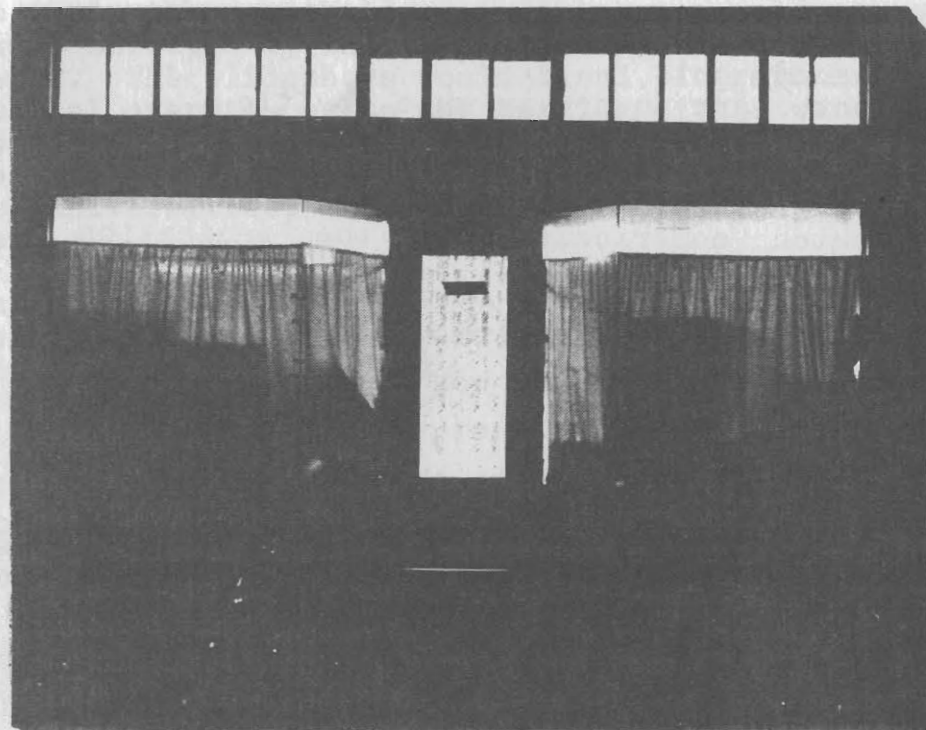
\*\*\*\*\* Generators blow, T.V. s on the ~~GO!~~  
Society screens patterns in revolution  
as the surging moon signals RED.

- Carlos Cumpian

# AFTER 8 :

by Elliot Ross

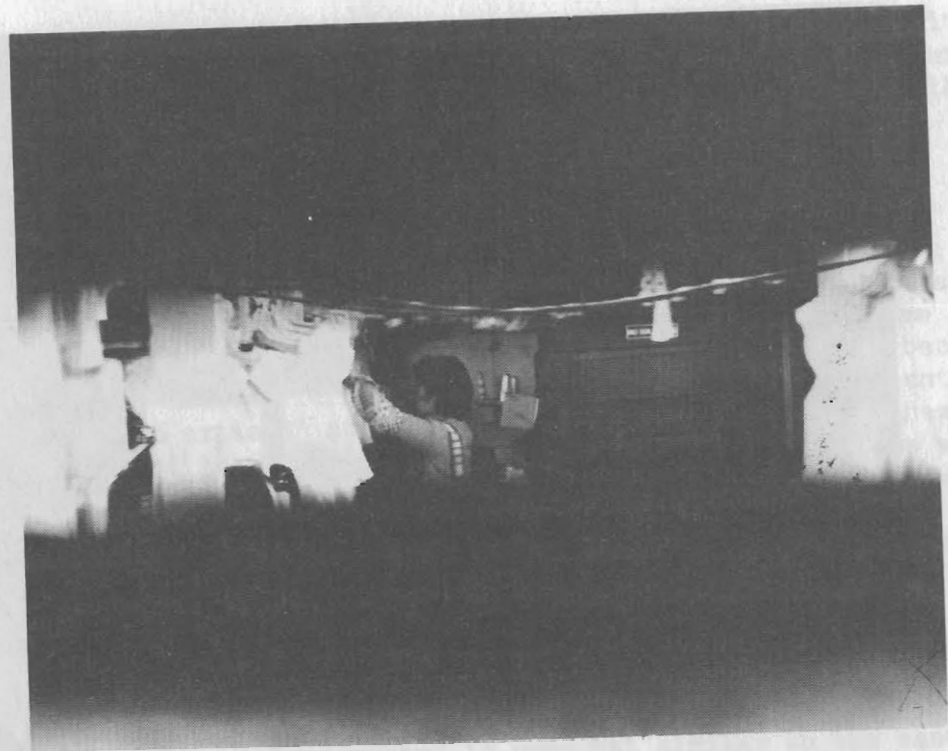
The following photographs are from a series titled AFTER 8, An Observation. All of the pictures are of small store front garment factories on the outskirts of San Francisco's Chinatown; all were taken between the hours of 8:00 P.M. and 9:30 P.M. on two nights in the summer of 1977.



That a source of cheap labor must be found in order to keep the level of profit high, is basic to capitalism. One of the strengths of American capital has always been its ability to find new sources of cheap labor, whether in its minority or immigrant populations, or through exporting capital to other countries where labor-power can be had for less. The community of immigrant Chinese in San Francisco is one such labor pool.

San Francisco's Chinatown, one of the world's largest Chinese communities outside China, is one of the most densely populated ghettos in the United States. Even when America is not in the middle of an economic slump, jobs are always scarce there for immigrants. The size of the labor pool, the impotence of the unions and the government to enforce the legal minimum wage in the face of employers' scare tactics, the inescapable cycle of long work days that leaves no time or energy to learn English or other skills which could increase the exchange-value of their labor-power on the job market, and, for some, the petit-bourgeois belief in the myth of "upward mobility"<sup>1</sup>, make the Chinese immigrants highly exploitable.

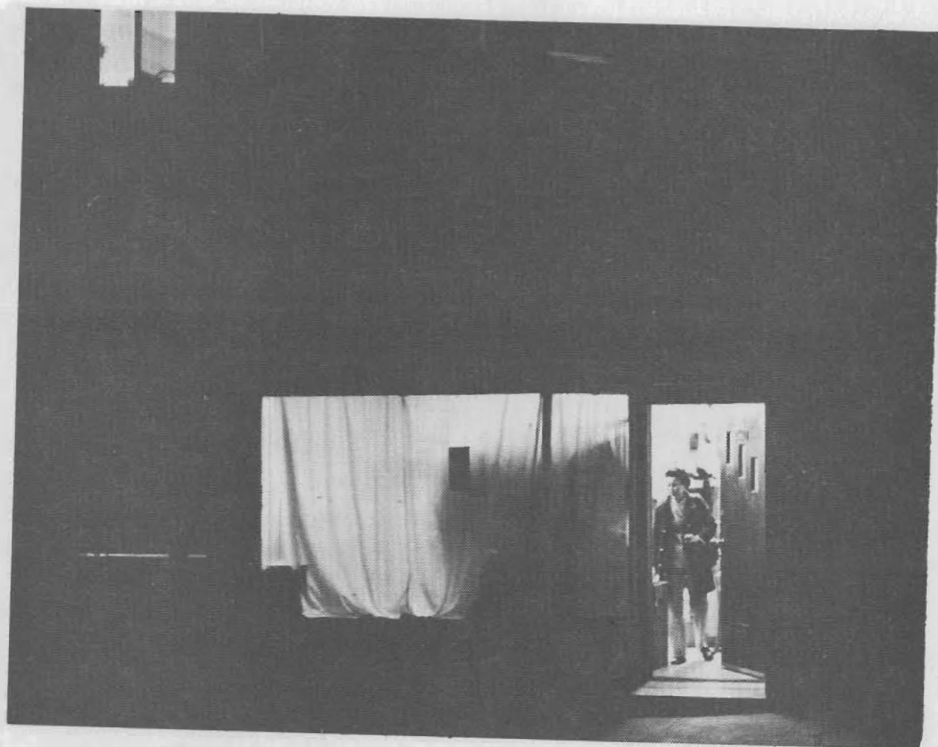
# AN OBSERVATION



The intensity and focus of this exploitation is evident when looking at Chinatown's piecework garment factories. Large local clothing manufacturers such as 'San Francisco Shirtworks' and 'Foxy Lady' put contracts up for bid to these store front sewing shops. The manufacturers, interested only in keeping their profits as high as possible, encourage the lowest possible bids by threatening to ship piecework to where it might be done for even less: the cheap labor markets of the American Southwest, Mexico, Taiwan, Hong Kong, etc.

Thus, the piecework factory owners (who are themselves of Chinese origin) keep the wages of the women who operate their machines at subsistence level.<sup>2</sup> Using tactics similar to those of the manufacturers, the shop owners instruct their workers to falsify their time cards<sup>3</sup> (to satisfy minimum wage laws or union contracts) or face unemployment as a result of lost contracts. To make up for low pay, the women are "allowed" to work 14 hour days, seven days a week, and to take piecework home to sew, if they wish.

"A working day may start anywhere from six or seven in the morning and not end until late at night. You know when you pass the streets at night, the doors are shut and it looks like the shop is closed, but then you can hear the machines going inside, which means that people are still working." 4



1. My sources for drawing this assessment are as follows:  
LONGTIME CALIFORN': a documentary study of an American Chinatown, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1974, Victor and Brett De Barry Nee.  
Chinatown, a videotape made under the direction of John Alpert, New York, 1976.  
 "Inside S.F.'s Cloistered Sewing Shops," San Francisco Chronicle, January 17, 1977, Katy Butler.
2. "Inside S.F.'s Cloistered Sewing Shops." All of the shops are run on a piece rate basis. The piece rate quoted in this article is 32¢; it is estimated that only half of the workers can produce enough to equal an hourly wage of \$2.50.
3. LONGTIME CALIFORN', p. 292.
4. Emily Young, daughter of a Chinatown garment worker, quoted in De Barry Nee, op. cit., p. 289

## Correspondence from Quebec

by Richard Martel

"It is only through struggle that Marxism can develop; it has been true in the past, it is true in the present, and necessarily will be true in the future. That which is correct always developed in a process of struggle against that which is false."

Mao Tse-Tung

To write an article which attempts to be the perfect illustration of an artistic endeavor, typical of a specific environment, seems quite difficult to me at the present time. Actually, I don't believe that the situation of the Quebecois cultural worker is that much different from the situation in other countries, since it is obvious that artists' attitudes, their formal as well as thematic preoccupations, go beyond the phenomenon of national boundaries. So we will say that Western art is international art to the extent that the various "isms", tendencies and esthetics simultaneously manifest themselves in different places around the world. "If there is in our societies something trans- or international in each culture - if culture is never strictly national - it is because the ruling class is itself international, and its ideology dominates the individual cultures: The same practices occur simultaneously in various countries, wherever the same infrastructure reigns."<sup>1</sup>

The case of the Quebecois cultural worker is somewhat similar to the case of the San Francisco worker, for example. Referring to the problems which came out in the discussions during the "Floating Seminar No. 2"<sup>2</sup>, I dare say that the preoccupations of artists and people involved in art in 1977-78 are the same in San Francisco and Quebec.

How does one continue to work in the context of our social and economic system, while attempting to oppose its demands at the same time?<sup>3</sup> How can one work to promote different attitudes in a system which aims to standardize the idea of pulsion. And this is one of the fundamental characteristics of the artistic act.

Art, then, is no more than a method, an articulated language; with the articulation of such a language to be carried out according to certain considerations, conditions and negations. Nevertheless, rejection of formalist attitudes has always had a great influence on the subsequent codification of art. Isn't it true that we find anti-art in the museums?! If we don't want art to become an instrument of repression, and that's what it is since the society which supports it is repressive, the old idea of art and the artist must be modified.

Criticism and self-criticism thus become the primordial conditions of true art.<sup>4</sup>

But in which context? And on what conditions? The Quebecois artist is torn by a very ambiguous situation: How to assert oneself as a cultural creator of a certain type (of Quebec) while inserting oneself into a more global movement. There already exist in Quebec, artists, critics (a rather improper term today), art intellectuals, etc... who question themselves both artistically and politically. But these LIMITED groups have tremendous difficulties in organizing themselves and being able to distribute their production. Certain artists - Armand Vaillancourt, for example - question even the status and the work of the artist. Vaillancourt stopped all of his artistic production, in the traditional sense of the term, to do trade-union work. This is a gesture of castration which deserves to be considered in all its significance.

In Quebec, the Quebecois state (incorrect term, since Quebec as a nation is not yet autonomous), which means the provincial government (since November 1976, the Quebecois Party) has jurisdiction over cultural affairs. The percentage accorded to culture is only .44% of the 1976-77 Provincial budget. Actually, between 1960 and 1977 the cultural allotment has oscillated between .60% and .39% in relation to Quebec's entire budget.<sup>5</sup> This amount is barely enough to maintain the means of distribution. So the Quebecois cultural producer must ask the Federal government for subsidies. The Council of the Arts, a Federal organization has had a well-organized structure for a long time and has an adequate budget at its disposal. Therefore, the relationship/conflict between the Federal government and the provincial government tends to be confirmed in the area of culture (which, as we know, comes out of the province and not the Federal government). Artists who wish to work in any kind of research (environment, video, or others, be it experimentation with attitudes or with objects) have to ask for Federal aid.

How then can one assert oneself as Quebecois and be payed by the Federal government? This is just another of the contradictions in society's organization, of which Quebec is a part.

On the other hand, English-speaking artists do not hesitate to ask for grants from Federal sources. Therefore, a good number of the "important" artists from Quebec are either English speaking or Quebecois by adoption.<sup>6</sup> Very strange, isn't it!

And again, there are very good artists who work in isolation, and we know that isolation is often the cause of egocentricity and formalism. I think that there will come a time when the political liberation of Quebec will establish the primary importance of the Quebecois artist. But at what price? And the workers' struggles! Ah yes, that has to be taken care of also. I repeat then, that the artist (the cultural worker) of Quebec is in a difficult situation and his/her activities and struggles must take place on several levels.

Attempts at forming groups had already been undertaken at the time of the "Common Front of Creators of Quebec" in the spring of 1973, but without much subsequent development.<sup>7</sup>

But how can we break down the formalist and theoretical barriers of art? I think that our survival as Quebecois depends on this in part. For as long as the different forms of artistic production are dependent upon the bourgeois system of conditioning, it remains difficult to affirm oneself through new production which, in addition, must serve to educate and not simply divert.

Certain artists and groups of artists are attempting to organize themselves and try out new experiences. The case of the Montreal Media Gallery is relevant in this respect. This non-profit organization has been open since September 1975 and is expanding its experimental work in a working-class section of the city. Artistic demonstrations have become quite diverse there and the gallery serves as a meeting place for debate on varied subjects, such as "Nationalist Ideology and Quebecois Engraving" (March 1977), allowing the artists and the public to meet and establish a dialogue. At the Media Gallery, art is a tool of social intervention which reveals itself through a constant questioning of artistic production and of the society which generates art.



The case of the Amherst Studio is another interesting example. This group is composed of seven people working together to exhibit their experimental work. The environment at Amherst in April 1977 recreated the atmosphere of a children's clothing factory; the itinerary allowed the visitor to visualize the working conditions of a textile worker. The alienating and depersonalizing work of the factory workers could be seen in the texts written in balloons placed above the models' heads, which represented the workers alienated as human beings while selling their labor. Here and there quotes from Mao reminded us that, "As long as the artist believes himself to be neutral, he will serve the interests of the ruling minority". The environment of Amherst allowed the relationship of art and alienating work to be perceived through direct contact.



Other exhibitions by Media Gallery lead to meetings between the artist and the public. For example, the intentions of the members of the Gallery are that "the artists-exhibitors consent to an interview in which they must answer the specific questions of Media. Every exhibit is accompanied by a public meeting which allows direct contact between the artist, the art consumer, and Media. This formula has as its goal the clarification of the relationship between the practice of the artist, as it is lived in the isolation of the creative process, and the objective repercussion, as much social as political, of his work."<sup>8</sup> The activities there are numerous, diverse and always question reality.

Still in Montreal, other efforts of people linked to Media (primarily because some of them are active participants) can be interpreted in a perspective of



struggle. In May 1976, a group of eight people carried out an experiment in a proletarian area: "On the occasion of May 1st, International Workers' Day, we demonstrated by taking charge of the decoration project for the rooms where the celebration, organized by the unions, took place. We had four rooms to organize. The majority of the decorations produced were very long streamers (elaborating on the May 1st theme) hung above the heads of the people who were dancing; another series, based on the history of the worker's movement, formed a sort of triumphal entrance, in the form of banners in the entrance hall; in another room, there was a canvas referring to quilting, which "put men into contact with their tools."<sup>9</sup> This endeavor by the members of this group (Francois Charbonneau, Mario Cote, Francine Couture, Herve Fish, Marie-Line Laplante, France Renaud, Ronald Richard and Marcel St. Pierre) at least succeeded in bring-

ing some kind of relationship between artistic practice and political struggle outside of official art circles, "which is the same as saying that there is no theory of art possible without truly entering into the political struggle."<sup>10</sup>

The theoretical interrogation undertaken by the people from the magazine "Chroniques" (the first issue dates from January 1975) opens the debate on political struggle, joins theory to practice, and must be enriching for any cultural worker who feels the need for revolutionary struggle.

The people from Conventum, also from Montreal, are akin in spirit to the Media group. Conventum is an experimental center for various forms of expression. This multi-disciplinary studio opens its premises to theater groups, serves as a practice area for musicians, provides for the viewing of films, etc... The atmosphere of friendship and experimentation is very enriching, especially when compared with the traditional art gallery.

The efforts of Media and of Conventum are denied by nearly all of the official media, who see them as a menace to the growth of capital.

Corridart could have been a very interesting artistic experiment, as well. Corridart was a collection of all kinds of artistic projects which were supposed to be shown in Montreal during the Olympic Games. On July 7, 1976, the Arts and Culture members of the Olympic Games Organizing Committee declared the opening of Corridart. This collection, very varied in content and in esthetic experience, aimed at animating Sherbrook Street, a very important thoroughfare in Montreal's past as well as contemporary history. The project, paid for at a cost of \$400,000 by Quebecois tax-payers through the intermediary of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, was not completed. Instead, on July 13, 1976, two days before the official opening of the Olympic Games, Jean Drapeau, mayor of Montreal, ordered the scaffolding for Corridart to be taken down. So 75 men dismantled what should have been Corridart. The people's and the artists' self-expression in an urban environment presents problems of power, and proves that no one is safe from the technocrats who govern us. Melvin Charney, the organizing architect of Corridart, had planned exhibits which made a point of the demolitions carried out by the municipal elite of Montreal, to the profit of the large multinational corporations and others. To these people, Charney's initiative was provoking and shouldn't have taken place, especially in the context of an international event like the Olympic Games. Montreal is a clean city, pure in the antiseptic sense of the term; and it must be seen as such. Corridart portrayed certain contradictions (wealth, poverty) which are part of our capitalist economic system. This is the reality that those in power attempt to camouflage, just as they want to silence the efforts of Media, of Conventum or any group which shows a need for renewal.

If the "Corridart" had occurred in a country ruled by a totalitarian regime, all the journalists of the so-called "free" Western press would have rushed to point out the totalitarianism of the act. Through the Corridart example and other similar censorship of expression the facts speak for themselves; a minority controls the public funds (\$400,000 in the case of Corridart) directs them toward prestigious ends (the exorbitant cost of the Olympic Stadium) and will not tolerate criticism and free expression. Moreover, wasn't it Jean Drapeau himself who said a few years before Corridart: "The ugliness of slums in which people live doesn't matter if we can make them stand in wide-eyed admiration of works of art they don't

understand."<sup>12</sup>

This is an example of what happens in the so-called free countries, such as the one in which the Quebecois cultural worker struggles. The example of the Comme Gallery, Inc, in Quebec is another illustration of the atmosphere of totalitarianism, of state control and of disbelief which rules the arts in Quebec. This organization survived on a meager subsidy from the Canadian Council of the Arts (Federal) and found itself obliged to close its doors just as the organization and the political orientations of its members seemed to be establishing themselves. The Manifesto of the Comme Gallery portrayed the climate in which art in Quebec is forced to survive and revealed the orientations and problems brought up by Quebecois cultural workers.

Our exposé is an overview of the situation of the arts in Quebec; it will be for the art historians of the future to examine the true repercussions of all this. After one year in power (i.e. since the November 1976 election), the Quebecois Party does not seem to be opting for a democratic orientation in the arts. In opposition to decentralization proposals, the Ministry of Cultural Affairs has decided in favor of a centralized and autocratic plan, and with this, has proven to us that its major concern is to respect the status quo; the status quo of the capitalist economic structure. The future of Quebec and of cultural minorities throughout the world will only be assured by a reformulation of the relations which govern our social, economic, political and cultural environment. Now that the Quebecois Party is in power, the orientation of intellectuals and of cultural workers should be formulated with an understanding of social realities, by an organization which would allow producers to direct their own production.

The most important thing, then, for a Quebecois cultural worker is to remain aware and to struggle against everything which oppresses the producer. The producer of "works of art" remains, like all other producers, workers, peasants, technicians, experts and intellectuals, alienated by the economic conditions in which they produce. We can never say it enough; we are robbed; at all levels, we are cheated of the most precious, the most rare and the most indispensable product to man's energy and enjoyment: His thought. Someday, no one will be able to prevent him any longer from answering this theft with a greater one: "that of power, which he will eventually conquer by linking his struggle to the struggle of all producers."<sup>13</sup> It's a long-term fight to sensitize people to the conditioning structures which govern our daily lives, and our analysis must deal with these questions first of all. These structures are formal, theoretical and political, and an analysis of them can reveal the elementary relationship of dominator to dominated which governs the organization of our society.

Footnotes:

1. Mikel Dufrenne, Art et Politique, 10/18, Union générale d'éditions, Paris, 1974, p.90.

2. The Floating Seminar No. 2, A Survey of Alternative Art Spaces, San Francisco, October 75, p. 80.
3. "The cultural revolution is the reflection, on an ideological level, of the political and the economic revolutions, and it is at their service." Mao Tse-tung, On Literature and Art, Ed. en Langues Etrangères, Peking, 1967, p. 71.
4. "Intellectuals also need to be re-educated and not only those whose fundamental position hasn't changed! All must learn to re-educate themselves." Mao Tse-tung, op. Cit., p. 161.
5. Sources: Jean Paul l'Allier, Minister of Cultural Affairs, Pour L'évolution de la politique culturelle, Quebec, 1976, p. 87.
6. For example, during the Quebec 75 exposition: "...we are not afraid of assuming the consequences of a situation characterized by cultural pluralism; nine of the exhibitors (out of 18) are not of French speaking origin and seven of them were born outside of Quebec," quoted by Normand Theriault, head of Quebec 75, in the catalogue Quebec 75 Arts, p. 12.
7. In the Liaison Bulletin, No. 1 of March - April 1973, we learn: At the meeting of the Canadian Conference of the Arts, these artists present decided to:
  - form a common front of Quebecois creators
  - work for the repatriation of the money consecrated to the arts by the Federal government
  - to call together the cultural body politic
  - pressure the government of Quebec to conserve, enlarge and restore the Ministry of Cultural Affairs
  - promote the establishment of a coherent and dynamic cultural policy
8. The steering committee of the Media Gallery, Media, Vol. 1, No. 1, March 1977, p. 2.
9. Francois Charbonneau, Francine Couture, Marcel St. Pierre, "Le réalisme en question", Chroniques, No. 24-25, Dec. 76-Jan.77, p. 60 to 108.
10. Chroniques, op. cit.
11. For more information on Corridart:
  - Dale McConathy, "Corridart: instant archeology in Montreal", Arts Canada summer 1976, No. 206-7, p. 36-54.
  - Melvin Charney, "other monuments for works, 1970-76", Vanguard, the Vancouver art gallery, Vol. 6, No. 2, March 1977, p. 3-8.
  - "Corridart Censure", Parachute, No. 4, Autumn, 1976, p. 37.
12. Melvin Charney, op. cit., p. 8.
13. Alain Jouffroy, Les Pre-voyants, la connaissance, S. A. Brussels, Weber, 1974, p. 72.

HARVEY SWADOS: STANDING FAST, WHERE? AND WHAT FOR?

by

Ed Felien

Harvey Swado's final achievement Standing Fast is a compelling novel. It's a kind of psycho-history of radicals from 1939 and the Stalin-Hitler Pact to the assassination of JFK.

That period is especially important to today's radicals trying to find a link between their own experience and the socially-conscious thirties. So much of that period has been erased and obscured by shifts in the Soviet line and the anti-communism of the "Haunted Fifties." A reader comes to this novel hoping to find answers.

The story begins (and ends) with Norm. He is speaking from a soapbox somewhere in Manhattan about the sell-out of Stalin to Hitler. It is soon clear that he is a Trotskyist. In fact, he was for a time Trotsky's bodyguard in Mexico. After his agitation he has to go up to his father's apartment and get his allowance. His father lectures him on wasting his life, and then he's off to visit with Sy and his family. Sy's father and older brother are members of the Communist Party. There's an argument about the Stalin Pact and the reversals in the CP line and Sy's father has a stroke (retribution for allowing Stalin to strike him dumb?).

Swado's short stories are all about sell-outs. They're either about leaving the city (where the action is) and moving to the suburbs (security), or they're about selling out your talent for money. One of his most anthologized is "The Man in the Toolhouse." It's about a writer who wakes up at 4 a.m. to write before he goes to work. Under severe pressure and at great cost, he labors for ten years in his toolhouse on his novel. Finally he finishes it and takes it to New York. A publisher is interested, but they suggest certain changes to conform to their market analysis of popular taste. After pressure from his wife and a friend and a tormented self-examination he agrees to the changes. The novel is a great popular success, but he awaits the reviews of "serious" writers. A graduate student publishes a criticism of the novel as having sold out to the lowest common denominator of popular taste. He leaves his family at their resort vacation, goes back to his toolhouse and commits suicide by setting the place on fire. This is the basic Swados message and theme throughout his short stories and novels. Swados' political commitment was one that insured he would not sell out his principles. He was, according to his lights, more radical than the radicals, more communist than the Communists. He was an implacable enemy of Stalinism and the American Communist Party. He felt, like all his characters in Standing Fast, that allegiance to Stalin was a sell-out of individual integrity to a new form of tyranny.

The Stalin-Hitler Pact is cited by Swados in Standing Fast (and by most other left anti-Stalinists) as proof positive of Stalin's kinship with tyranny and unscrupulousness. This interpretation does not, I think, attempt to understand the military and political situation of 1939. The Western Powers had supported counter-revolutions in every Eastern European country surrounding Russia establishing a "cordon sanitaire" (the "Iron Curtain" was Churchill's phrase to describe Russia doing the exact reverse after World War II) to protect the West from the horrors of Communism and isolate Russia. The Munich Pact of 1938 had seemed to allow the Nazis carte blanche to invade Russia. Contemporary evaluation of Stalin is not quite as severe as Swados. Irwin Silber, writing in The Guardian, says: "After all, the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939 'proved' to many people that Stalin's international perspective of that period was wrong, whereas history has shown that it was an eminently sound and principled tactical move at that time."

Each of the subsequent chapters in Part One introduces us to a new major character. Fred is a university intellectual just finishing his Ph.D. and preparing for an academic career. Vito is a bohemian artist. Big Boy is a black organizer in New Orleans. Bill is a trade unionist. Joe is a college kid with idealist notions about revolution, and Irwin is a dentist just setting up practice.

The wives and lovers of these protagonists are relegated to supporting roles. Swados was never comfortable with a woman in a major role. The closest he comes to allowing a woman center stage is in a mystery novel, The Will, where Jill is used for erotic counterpoint to intrigue and the struggle between three brothers.

In Part Two the major characters come to Buffalo and begin to organize their "New Party." By Part Three the political work seems to be paying off and the New Party seems like it might become relevant, but then Norm and Joe go into the service and the big rallies fall flat. In Part Four things start to disintegrate: Norm in the Army in the Philippines organizes a "Bring the Troops Home Now" demonstration and attacks capitalism only to have it interpreted as anti-semitic; Fred is trying to divorce his wife and marry an Australian nurse he's met; Joe gets out of the service and by accident participates in the San Francisco General Strike and then gets his wife pregnant; Vito comes back from Paris to set up a studio in Greenwich Village; Big Boy has split off a section of the New Party to consolidate his own power base and his nephew Ham is developing into a pacifist; Sy, in the first chapter the starry-eyed believer, is now leaving the Party and moving to Israel.

In Part Five things really start to crack up. Vito is spared trying to make sense of his painting by going up to Buffalo to testify on behalf of Ham. Irwin takes Carmella on a trip to Europe and Israel and they lose Paul (their beloved only son) only to find him sharing his food and ideas with some Israeli children (which seems an almost gratuitous reference to Jesus in the Temple instructing the rabbis). Joe is begin-

ning to doubt his Bogart toughness when he can't find work after being blackballed. Ham is active in CORE but Big Boy convinces him and his movement to let him go up North to raise money (the biggest donations come from Paul's Bar Mitzvah Party). Norm is a newspaper journalist and his son Marlen is involved in an auto accident in which a girl is killed. His wife Vera believes Marlen is her punishment. Fred is being investigated by Congress for hosting a TV show similar to the "64,000 Question" that gave popular contestants the answers to questions.

Part Six is the denouement and final retribution. Sy has come back to New York and is teaching school in Harlem. He vows never to become an administrator. Vito is given an award by the National Institute. Ham leads his group of kids to the March on Washington in 1963, along with Paul who has taken an interest in activist politics. Joe is going to write a book on rank and file labor and comes to New York just in time to help Vito die in dignity. Paul works as a delivery boy in Manhattan and lives in Harlem. He has taken a vow of poverty similar to the Catholic Worker Movement. On returning home late from a meeting one night he is assaulted by three boys and stabbed to death. The final chapter sees all the major characters back together at Paul's funeral. Irwin, the father, is drunk and grief stricken; he cries out that it was meaningless and that the political involvement was pointless. Sy answers him, "We tried...to keep it alive." The novel ends with Norm hurrying from the funeral and his wife to meet Air Force One bringing the body of an assassinated President Kennedy back to Washington.

To a reader who might understandably ask, "What is all this supposed to mean?" Swados has earlier provided an answer in his Introduction to A Radical's America published in 1962:

...although I am a political man, I am a novelist, not a politician, and shall never join any party nor run for mayor of any place. If he is not inconsistent, the novelist is nothing - and I intend to cherish my inconsistencies as I do my children.

This is also why, as I said at the outset, I have resisted all efforts to make of me a systematic thinker, or even to make this a systematic book.<sup>2</sup>

Certainly anyone who has had even a casual encounter with radicalism can appreciate Swados' resistance to dogmatism, but it's not the verification or disputation of dogma that the reader looks for in Standing Fast. A reader has a right to expect to see the human condition revealed in struggle and to learn something from that struggle. What do we learn from the struggles of the people in Standing Fast? Swados seems to be telling us that all organized political activity is doomed. It will either be sold out in the way that Norm

commercializes his radicalism for the popular press, or it will result in suicide like Paul "struck down by those he might have helped, if they had only listened."<sup>3</sup>

That seems a little too cynical and pessimistic for a writer who claims to be a socialist. All the collective struggles of the people in Standing Fast lead nowhere. They are at best a footnote to a footnote. But this is not a mere criticism of Trotskyism. Contrary to what Swados has written about himself, he is remarkably consistent in his political beliefs.

In the Introductory essay to his book The American Writer and the Depression he goes out of his way to attack Clifford Odets and Arthur Miller as hacks following the Communist Party Line.<sup>4</sup> His criticism of the "Hollywood 10" and other victims of the blacklist of Communist and progressive writers seems harsh and unreal today, as well as irrelevant to an introduction to a book about writers in the thirties:

In keeping with what their employers unctuously termed "the American Way," the blacklisted screenwriters were convicted and duly released from prison - to find not ostracism, but Oscars, not contempt but contracts assuring them of more money than non-commercial writers could ever command.<sup>5</sup>

Concerning this statement, first, it seems a logical contradiction that non-commercial writers should make more money than commercial writers: something about the term makes one think that commercial writers would be writing for money. Second, most blacklisted writers and actors did not find the bed of roses Swados describes. Dalton Trumbo did get an Oscar, but for a script under an assumed name and someone else had to pick it up for him. Zero Mostel didn't work for years, and Jules Dassin had to move to Greece.

If Swados doesn't like the communist left, then who does he like? The answer to that is in a book he wrote about Estes Kefauver, Standing Up For The People. The book was written in 1972 just before he died and two years after publishing Standing Fast, so it has to be taken as his political and literary last will and testament.

The book is a standard enthusiastic biography. Kefauver is portrayed as a white knight fighting the system, racketeering, the drug monopolies, the Democratic machine and breaking his heart in the process. The struggle and the things he is against make him a natural Swados hero. What is interesting are the things he is for, forcing Swados finally to be in favor of some kind of organized political activity. Swados describes what he considers Kefauver's greatest achievement:

He was the principal architect and the leading American figure in organizing the NATO Conference... he will have a great place in history as the statesman who, more than any other, pioneered in behalf of the federation of the free.<sup>6</sup>

So, finally, we know where Swados stands. He's not a radical or a socialist. He's a bourgeois liberal. He believes in the capitalist system. He sees some wrongs and injustices in it, but he believes these wrongs can be corrected and the society made just if only we had a few more men around like Estes Kefauver. That is hardly the position of radical or socialist.

That's why the radicals in Standing Fast are such losers, such self-defeating failures. Swados really doesn't believe in them. He conjures up straw men to knock them down, and in the process to knock down any radical impulses the reader might have. That seems to be the real purpose of the book, and judging from the reviews it looks like he succeeded in fooling the critics and most of the public.<sup>7</sup>

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Footnotes:

1. The Guardian; Vol. 30, No. 17; Feb. 1, 1978; p.21.
2. Harvey Swados, A Radical's America; An Atlantic Monthly Press Book: World Publishing; 1962; pp.xvi-xvii.
3. Harvey Swados, Standing Fast, Ballantine Books, 1970, p.686.
4. Harvey Swados, The American Writer and the Great Depression, Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., Indianapolis, 1966, p.xxx.
5. Harvey Swados, Ibid., pp. xxi-xxii.
6. Harvey Swados, Standing Up For The People, E.P. Dutton & Co., New York, 1972, p.43.
7. John Leonard of The New York Times is the most effusive, calling it a "document of accuracy, integrity and compassion."

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## Racism in Death

### Johannesburg

A partly decomposed head found in a shark's belly is posing a problem in racially segregated South Africa. Authorities don't know whether to bury it in a black or a white cemetery.

Police at the Natal coastal resort of Eshowe say attempts are being made to determine the identity and race of the victim whose head was found in a ten-foot shark earlier this month.

A state pathologist has called in an expert in forensic pathology to establish whether the skull is from a Caucasian or Negroid person.

Under South African law, people of different races must reside, and be buried, in different areas.

The fish was cut open after being caught in anti-shark nets.

*Associated Press*

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# STUDIO MUSEUM

# IN HARLEM

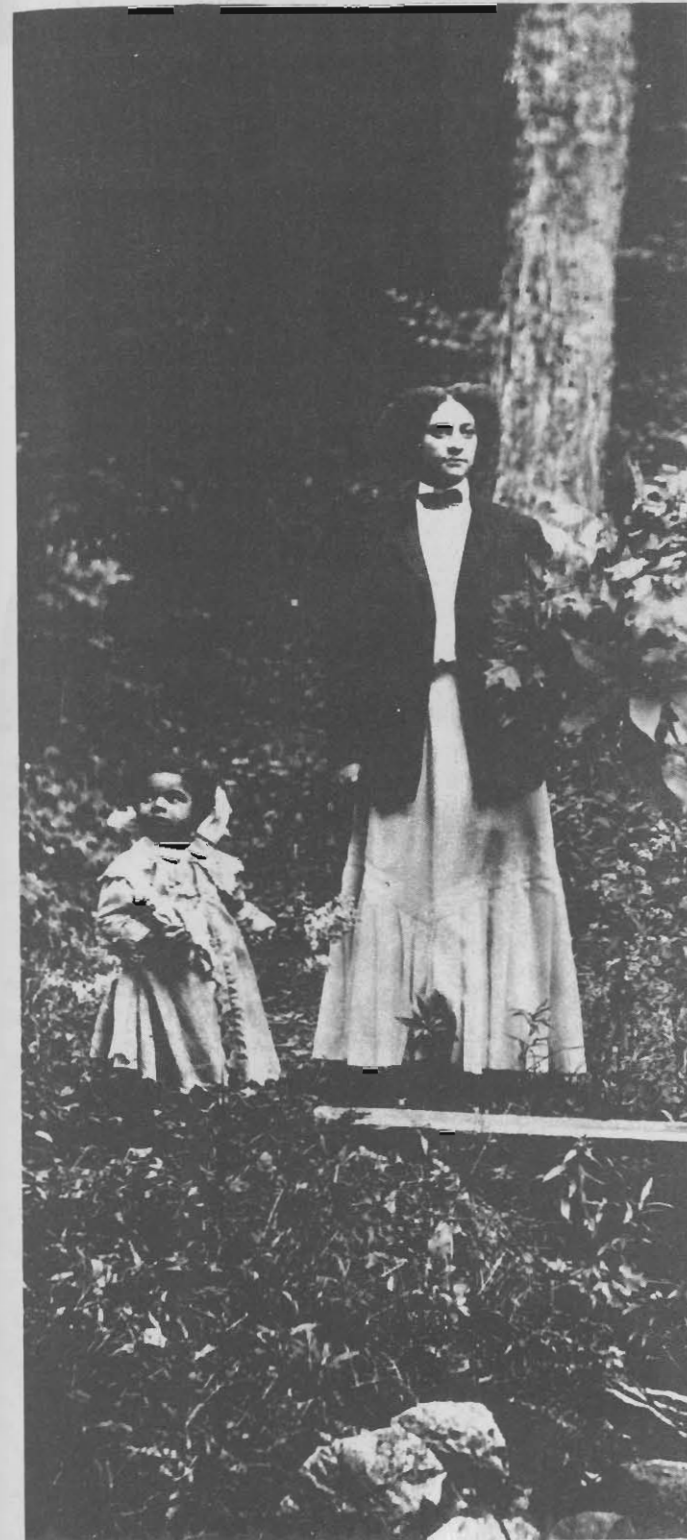
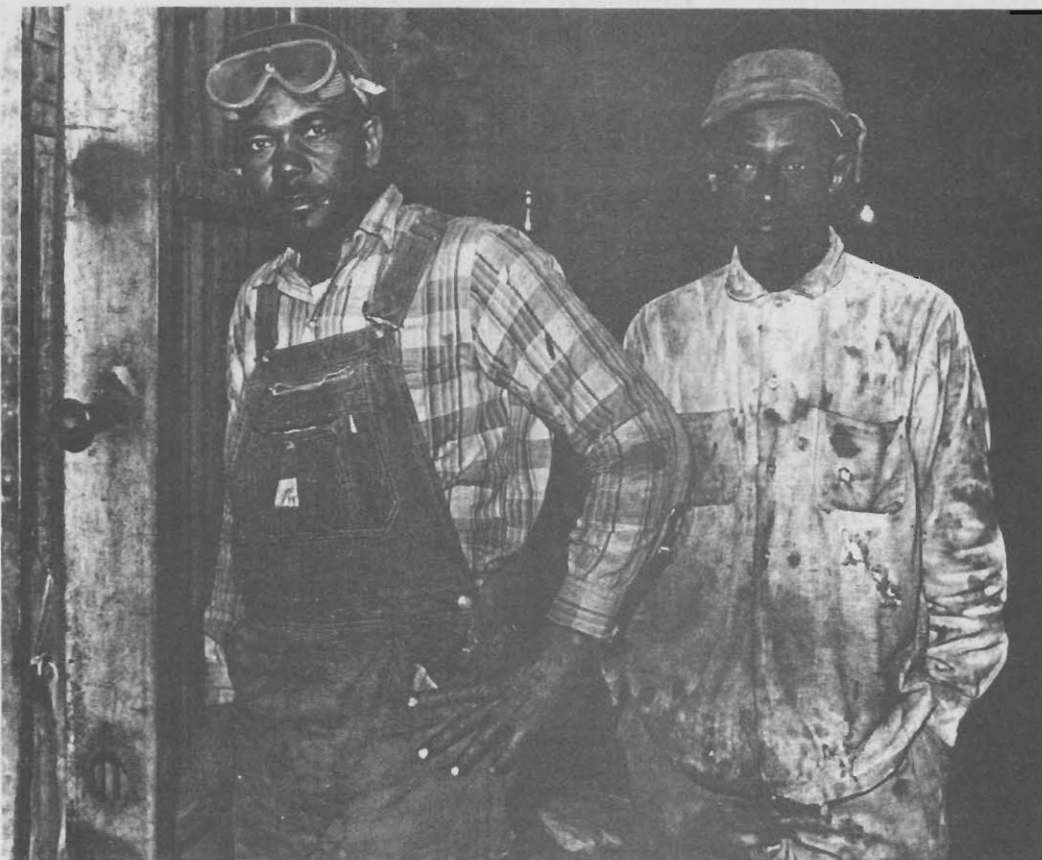
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## The James Van DerZee Institute Comes to The Studio Museum in Harlem

The Studio Museum in Harlem welcomes the James VanDerZee Institute which after nine years of independence recently joined us. This is a very natural union, since both institutions are committed to the acquisition, interpretation and conservation of the works of the Black visual artist. Since becoming a department within the Studio Museum, the Institute and its staff, curator Reginald McGhee has taken over the photographic duties of the museum. This, in addition to the continuation of the Institute's programs and commitments, the primary commitment being the conservation of the James VanDerZee Collection.

The collection consists of three parts. First, a large body of work, done by Mr. Van DerZee, which is comprised of approximately 100,000 pieces and is in need of immediate and continuing care. Another portion of the Collection consists of the works of approximately 50 contemporary photographers. These works are made available for exhibitions, research, workshops, publications and lectures. The third part of this Collection is comprised of images of, and about, Black people. Some of these images go as far back as the Civil War; and provide for scholars and researchers one of the most positive pictures of Black people.



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Memberships are for one year only. The categories are listed below:

Category	Contribution	Privileges (cumulative)
Friend	\$5	Announcements & invitations to all exhibits and special events. <i>SMH Newsletter</i> .
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Supporting	\$50	All of the above plus One (1) Free Publication or Print. 20% Discount on all SMH Gift Shop items and SMH workshop tuition.
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Donor	\$500	All of the above plus SMH Newsletter recognition.
Patron	\$1,000	All of the above including Framed Print.

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New York, New York 10035  
(212) 427-5959

MEMBERSHIPS ARE TAX DEDUCTIBLE



# MARCH

## Movimiento Artístico Chicano



A.

The growing interest in ethnicity and art for the community, gives MARCH, *Movimiento Artístico Chicano*, a degree of immediate relevance and a relatively exclusive mission in an arena already overcrowded with art organizations of every description.

Our group was formed in 1972 in Indiana and was officially chartered in 1975 in Chicago. Our membership is composed of muralists, graphic artists, photographers, filmmakers, instructors of art and anthropology and other persons who share with us the desire and willingness to promote Latin art and artistic creativeness in the Midwest.

As a group our main concern is with visual arts although our interest extends also to the other arts.

Our accomplishments have been many and continue to be promising for the future. One of our most outstanding triumphs was *MEXPOSICION*, an exhibit of contemporary Mexican paintings organized in cooperation with INBA (*Instituto Nacional De Bellas Artes*) and University of Illinois, Circle. It featured the work of distinguished painters—Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, Rufino Tamayo as well as succeeding generations of artists. The enthusiastic acceptance given *MEXPOSICION* earned

MARCH some recognition in artistic circles as well as in the Latin community. It was clear admission that the community wants access to humanistic culture that is often only available to the wealthy patron. A circulating exhibit of linocuts by the Mexican graphic and mural artist, Leopoldo Méndez, helped further to bridge the economic and social gaps.

Dialogue with the community is also maintained through lectures and seminars. Noted contemporary muralists, Gilberto Ramirez and

C.



B.

### MEMBERSHIP BLANK

mail to the attention of:  
MARCH, Movimiento Artístico Chicano  
P.O. Box 2890, Chicago, Illinois 60690

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

AFFILIATION: \_\_\_\_\_

AREA OF INTEREST: \_\_\_\_\_

MEMBERSHIP DUES \$7.00 per year



D.

Jaime Mejía Servín, were brought from Mexico by MARCH to share their knowledge and skills with Chicago mural painters from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Two MARCH members, in turn, submitted graphic work for inclusion in a Mexican showing of U.S. Chicano art. "*El Arte acerca del Pueblo Mexicano: Una experiencia Metropolitana*," a series of day-long seminars in May, 1975, also saw vigorous participation by the MARCH membership as exhibitors and on videotaped panels. Other

exhibits of Latino art, evident every year in Chicago's Museum of Science and Industry, are conceived and coordinated by MARCH people. Photographic exhibitions, also, are planned in the future; depictions of the Mexican Revolution by Agustín Casasola and visions of Siqueiros and his work by Hector Garcia.

Perhaps one project, above all others, deserves special mention—the ongoing design of murals by MARCH for the projected Benito Juárez High School being built in Filsen, Chicago's largest Latino Community, under the direction of the eminent Mexican architect, Pedro Ramirez-Vazquez. This continuing mural activity will culminate in the formation of a traveling mural team that will paint murals throughout the U.S. in concert with Chicano muralists from the Southwest.

A bi-monthly newsletter, slide registry and literary archives are additional means whereby MARCH seeks to cooperate with artists in and outside of the Midwest.

Two of our members from Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, uphold with us the ideal that society as a whole needs art and must have it if the human spirit is to be really free. We invite other persons who share this same ideal to become members of our organization.

E.

(Ed. Note: Given the length of time between this issue and our last, we have chosen to print three letters that cover the most important problems of controversy concerning socialist revolution and art. We strongly encourage readers to write us their views, straightforward criticism is especially welcomed.)

Dear Csaba,

I've read all the issues of Left Curve carefully and want to say that I respect the honesty and commitment, the risk-taking which is a necessary part of any true dialectic. The magazine has gotten stronger and I do hope you continue with another issue soon. I thought #6 was the best, although I got a lot from your cultural notes on the bankruptcy of modern art. I would like to see an answer to the over-view of the so-called Neo-Marxists - the Marcuse, Adorno, Habermas group of the Frankfurt School. I did an article in New German Critique a few years back arguing that Habermas abandoned Marxism when he threw out the labor theory of value, which is the centerpiece of Marxism. He also mystifies science and technology and their effects, but that's another article which I hope someone writes. Getting people to join in open dialectic is not easy. I looked in vain in #6 for a reply from Smyra Press to your editorial remarks in #5. It seemed a perfect time to debate the issue of art and revolution. Your reply was sensible and raised good issues, which should be addressed.

I have some comments which I'm going to throw at you, the're in part reactions to "Notes on Post-Modernism" in #6 and part half-formed ideas about what I think I'm doing spawned by discussions I had in D.C. with the editors of Washington Review of the Arts. They would like to see a discussion develop on art and politics, particularly the concept of value in literature.

In a sense "all art is political", since, as Thomas Mann put it, every artist consciously or unconsciously lives the life of his time. Politicization of art in this sense would mean, as you put it in "Notes", a developing consciousness that art is part of a social totality and therefore subject to the historical and material forces determining it. There is another, emerging, and I think more important, meaning of "The Politicization of Art." This meaning is suggested in your question "After politicization should the role of artists be to 'make political art' or to become conscious revolutionaries?" (p.54) "Politicization" in this question implies that the artist has "taken sides", has committed himself or herself to one of the sides of the class-struggle. This act of will, commitment and attitude, is something more than the awareness implied in the first use of "politicization."

The distinction between consciousness and commitment is important. They are distinct categories although obviously the former is necessary to some extent for the latter, at least for artists. In any case, it is the commitment, and the activity that flows from it, that makes the individual a revolutionary. If so, then your question about the role of the artist after "politicization" is redundant. But what bothers me about your forced choice, viz., either make political art

or become a conscious revolutionary, is that it implies that making political art is not a revolutionary act. Your point is clear when you warn (p.54) against confusing "revolutionary work" with "art", or "revolutionary art" with "revolutionary praxis."

If one understands the logical categories of species and genus I don't see that there is a problem of confusion. Although there may remain the problem of economism which reduces revolutionary activity to responses centered on the material base. But this is an error clearly identified by the revolutionary tradition. The Theses on Feuerbach contain the corrective: we cannot make theory practical without at the same time making practice theoretical.

Marx's dictum is not meant just for political practice, but for revolutionary practice -i.e. across the board for all forms of human activity. Therefore, the politicization of art & culture should be seen as an extremely significant development and be encouraged by the Left.

Your caution that it blurs the distinction between art and life gives me trouble. I wonder if what you mean is that it blurs the distinction between art and life style, so that one could then posture as a revolutionary in his style for the sake of a career, etc. This is unavoidable; the phonies cannot be weeded out in advance. But there is a tradition of political art that gives us a basis for criticism. The errors of socialist realism and proletcult need not be repeated.

Partisan writing and socialist realism has to get beyond that positivistic relation to the facts that characterizes critical realism but without falling into revolutionary romanticism with its stereotypes and cliches. Bourgeois reality is "real" in the cheapest sense - it exists. The human destruction around us is really there. But reality is a value term, and not just a matter of facts. It concerns the whole, and the whole of human reality contains an enormous potential, a repressed, unrealized potential that revolution will release and "realize." Therefore, "reality" for revolutionary art goes beyond facts to encompass "what is not." The old romantic idealist wrote "the reality of facts must give way to the idea"; revolutionary art says, "The specters of capitalism must give way to the realities of human existence under socialism." ... To state the whole we must learn how to speak what is not, and this is not to leave out, but rather to bring into (imaginative) existence. So, initially we need a "socialist unrealism," a theory and attitude that is unrealistic about bourgeois "reality" and realistic about socialist "unreality." The socialist artist must find ways of articulating what-is-not. ...The realization of this world of art will also be an aestheticization of reality. The same dialectic holds as in theory and practice. To deny the possibility of their unity is kantianism, to restrict it to the imagination is Schillerism, to the "spirit", Hegelianism; it was Marx's "new materialism" that gave this unity its true form - in the body, the living harmony of cells, their mutual reciprocal subordination, the socialism of living matter and its metabolism with nature.

Fraternally,

Peter Laska



(Ed. Note: The following letter by Henry Giroux was sent to us shortly after the publication of LC#6 in response to our editorial comments on his article, "The Politics of Technology, Culture, & Alienation." The issues addressed are of basic importance to revolutionary cultural theory. Bruce Kaiper's response to Giroux's letter is printed here in order to continue the debate concerning these important issues. We strongly encourage further response from our readers.)

Dear Csaba and Friends:

I was a bit surprised by your editorial comment on my piece for two reasons: First, your metaphor, "armchair Ph-D speculation" sounds too much like the cheap straw-man dismissal used by reactionary elements in the 1950's, i. e., "egghead intellectual". Such a metaphor not only dismisses the intellectual/practical credibility of the article, it also imputes the motives of the author by suggesting a deliberate justification of the body/mind division of labor characterizing late capitalism. Secondly, the article is not, as you suggest, a plea for a form of solipsistic Marxism. On the contrary, the article is an immanent critique of both the subjective and objective forms of "radical" determinism, a determinism that either leaves out the creative role of consciousness and paves the way for a vulgar, bureaucratic Marxism, or a purely subjectivist Marxism in which liberation is reduced to a purely contemplative experience. Both forms of Marxism are crude and undialectical-- it seems to me that is clear in the article-- see, for instance, the section on Gramsci.

The role of consciousness in a truly radical Marxist paradigm is only one important component in the struggle for socialism. More specifically, it is a necessary but insufficient component. As Andre Gorz has pointed out, it is the subjective precondition for the success of all the battles fought in the name of socialism because it establishes their meaning. The political role of consciousness is more crucial than ever since the technical and political ability to depoliticize individual and collective consciousness is greater than ever.

To suggest that structural crisis automatically generates radical consciousness strikes me as unfounded. There is no direct correlation between objective social being and radical social consciousness-- that is nonsense. People interpret crisis within pre-existing frames of reference/world views-- and, as such, can be easily manipulated into either reformist or even reactionary solutions to such crisis or crises. The crucial problem is to understand how our subjectivity is formed in a material context-- the social/cultural/historical/sexual/psychological dimensions. We must learn what the major constraints on consciousness are, and how we can create emancipatory strategies to eliminate those constraints. This base/superstructure paradigm you mention is too primitive. It's causal and deterministic in a way that does not account for the complexities of the reciprocal interrelationships between different components in a superstructure, nor for how they, in turn, operate independently of the base (economic structure) to influence human behavior.

Sincerely,

Henry A. Giroux

Dear Henry,

We received your letter and appreciate your concise remarks concerning our unfortunate comments about your piece. We feel that your work warrants no such labeling and we sincerely apologize for the remark.

However, we do not suggest that structural crises "automatically" generate radical consciousness as you state. Nor do we hold to a "primitive" paradigm of base and superstructure. We agree wholeheartedly with your view that the relations between the two are much more complex than most "orthodox" Marxist thinkers acknowledge. We also agree with you concerning the reciprocal interrelationships between components in the superstructure, their complexity, and their deceptive appearances. Perhaps you have similarly "read into" our remarks meanings that were not there, as we did with yours. Since we both view Gramsci as one theoretical and political mentor, as our remarks about the need for a counter-hegemonic world-view should indicate to you, and since we founded this magazine with the very intention of finding a proper synthesis between the best of the orthodox Marxist theories and the best of the Neo-Marxist points of view (as well as other theoretical sources) pertaining to art and political culture, let us not pursue the discussion with an assumption that we share opposite points of view.

I do have some specific criticisms of your piece that might be more helpful to you in understanding where we are coming from:

1. Although your work had theoretical clarity and powers of summation, it lacked specific examples in day by day reality that would make concrete what you were summarizing in theory. In essence, your work lacked "praxis", to use Gramsci's conception of Marxism. For example, in discussing the notion of hegemony, you could have shown how the ideological principle of "democracy" functions at each level of social experience (i.e. Common sense: "No one is going to tell me what to buy, that's my right!" Good sense: "Why is the boss' vote more important than my vote? We shit the same, don't we?" Mass media: "Now YOU can buy one TOO!" Religion: "All are equal in the eyes of the Lord." Politics: If you don't like those in office, vote them out." The Military: "A strong nuclear capability is a democratic guarantee." Academia: "Democracy is a government by the people, either directly or indirectly or through elected representatives, and it promotes the principle of equality of rights, opportunity, and treatment." Etc.) You get the point.

It is my feeling that as commonplace as this exemplification process is, it is crucial that every critical idea that is expressed be documented by its role or function in reality. This especially holds true with a work such as yours, since the material you are summarizing is complex and pervasive.

2. The lack of specificity or example that documents the experience of working people and their perception of their reality lessens the theoretical impact of the piece and its applicability as a tool for daily comprehension of the work. All of the critical points of the paper lend themselves to specific examples as does a theatre production leading us to a climactic situation that never materializes), but you don't provide them. In other words, you have done all the hard reflective and analytical work ( and that's to your credit), but you have not given us a piece of the action that we can chew over. Granted, most of us have

done the same thing due to our stint in school and due to the Left's tendency to acquire academic terminology as the main vehicle for communication of complex ideas. I don't assume that we are arguing an anti-intellectual line here. We are not. Being a part of an intellectual tradition, as you are, we appreciate our heritage. But our appreciation of that heritage of thought is not, on its own terms, going to convey meaning to our working-class allies without an earnest attempt at conveying complex ideas in everyday language and through specific examples. The fortunate thing about your piece is that you seem to command a thorough understanding of the Neo-Marxian school of thought, which is an accomplishment that many of us don't yet share, in everyday language. Admittedly, that is no easy road to take, but you seem up to it. Your Gramsci was strong in this area. Look at the way he used language in his popular pamphlets and also his use of fables.

3. The above remarks lead us to a more fundamental criticism that pertains to your whole piece and which leads us back to the interrelation between base and superstructure. It is simply that in failing to document how workers perceive their relation to technology and capitalist work organization in their daily lives, you miss the vital link that is generally overlooked or underplayed by Neo-Marxist writers concerning base and superstructure: that is its phenomenological presence. Specifically, what working people have internalized more completely than other areas of reality, what has been projected into the world as a force that is unavoidable and that is unchallengeable is the very thing that Neo-Marxism attacks as "false consciousness"- the Machine (as demonic deity or as God). The Anti-technology school, in particular Lewis Mumford, who, as Samir Amin has pointed out, is in many ways more Marxist than most Marxists who criticize him, has recognized the pervasive influence of technological processes on popular consciousness and unconsciousness. Mumford eloquently describes the effect of automatism on the worker. While workers "have little doubt that human intention, human will, start the process of invention and production, they have become so deeply the victim of their own automatism that they tend blindly to deny that human intention and human effort may also bring the process to an end or change its direction, once it has been fixed." (IN THE NAME OF SANITY) Mumford goes on to refute Gramsci's mistaken notion that automatic behavior frees the mind at work to think about other things or to reflect on life. Gramsci is only partially correct in that the "freedom" experienced is not that of conscious thought, but is "freedom" to dream. States Mumford, "increasingly the only way in which men can assert their specifically human qualities, once they are engaged by an automatic process, is by non-participation, by resistance, by throwing a monkey wrench into the works. This limiting of the power of rational (emphasis mine) participation, and therefore rational control, tends likewise to produce a sense of impotence". Marxists have erred "at the point of production" in understanding what goes on simply because they assume the "constant" operation of consciousness. They hope that some sort of reasoning is going on so that "rational" ideas pertaining to alienation, manipulation, etc. can be presented to workers in some form that will begin to raise consciousness at work. They overlook the "numbness", the "deadness" that most workers feel at work. That feelings of "deadness" occur at work quite commonly is an indication of "good sense" at work. But as Gramsci has continually expressed, common sense (good or bad) is folklore and has the religious tendency of fatalism. Common sense "is as a relatively rigid phase of popular knowledge at a given place and time. The "death-like" grip of the workplace on workers' minds, and the retreat into the subconscious is reinforced by the capitalist managers themselves, as you know. Not only is Muzak, behavioral psychology, color, lighting, and architecture used to heighten the subconscious, but our conscious minds are filled with "folklore" that stimulates

our further self-conscious depreciation. For example, when Taylor utters, "it would be possible to train an intelligent gorilla so as to become a more efficient pig-iron handler than any man can be", or when the Gilbreths assert "it is the aim of scientific management to induce men to act as nearly like machines as possible" these are not textbook assertions just for managerial reference. These assertions become part of the everyday workplace world-view. Listen: "I feel the main problem is management's assumption that they are dealing with illiterate, uneducated morons." (a shop steward) or "Sometimes I feel like I was just a robot. You push a button and you go this way. You become a mechanical nut." (assembly-line worker) It isn't that the average working guy is dumb. He's tired, that's all." (a steelworker). These examples, taken from Terkel's book Working, indicate the depth of feeling that workers exhibit pertaining to management ideology that they experience at work. Neo-Marxism has the tendency to use these dehumanizing symbols as symbols only, when, in fact, they are experienced by workers literally. You are correct when you assert that superstructural relations are complex. You are also correct in discussing the interrelations between objective and subjective conditions. What you tend to miss is exactly that point in daily experience - that technology and its forms and rhythms have been internalized to such an extent that to working people they become not second nature, but "nature" itself. Neo-Marxists can't quite accept this fact partly from their lack of association with working people (Gramsci and Korsch excepted), but more importantly from their distrust of phenomena and visual images. As Adorno has asserted, images tend to make static or concrete the tension between the idea and the real, undermining the dialectic. To Adorno, images in the daily world cannot be trusted as literal interpreters of reality. True! But then again not true! The fear of imagery as well as other phenomena (things known by sense perception) negates a major ideological mechanism of capitalist science/technical philosophy and that is its virtual reliance on perceptual imagery and fetishization for communicating its ideological messages. As Mao outlined in On Practice, our first awareness of reality is initially perceptual. Well, McLuhan ad nauseum have based their whole worldview around that fact. The Gilbreths, in fact, argued that scientific management reorganization of the workplace virtually depended on phenomenological methods of indoctrination. In their book, THE PSYCHOLOGY OF MANAGEMENT, they argue that "Sense training influences increase of efficiency. With the training of the senses the possibility of increased efficiency increases. As any sense become trained, the minimum visible is reduced, and more accurate impressions become possible. They lead to more rapid work, by eliminating time necessary for judgement (emphasis mine). The relation between ideology and work is best seen with this example. What the Gilbreths teach the worker in sense perception and "efficient" motion is not simply technique, but world-view. Note: They argue that the best workers "imitate, follow orders, are automatic, reserve judgement, emulate superiors, trust management, etc. These are not only stressed in the form of verbal commands, but in the orchestration of the work environment." Scientific management assists productive imagination. S. M. assists productive, or constructive, imagination, not only by providing standard units, or images, from which the results may be synthesized, but also, through the unity of the instruction card, allows of imagination of the outcome, from the start." This says it! Not only do we have to follow orders and not think, but they want to determine what we imagine also. As Georges Friedmann has observed, management also takes and shapes our dreams at work without our full awareness. They reduce conscious anger and friction at work by allowing us to dream. "Lots of times I worked from the time I started to the time of the break and I never realized I had even worked. When you dream, you reduce the chances of friction with the foreman or with the next guy... You pretty much stay to yourself. You get involved with yourself." (assembly-line worker). This popular feeling not only negates consciousness of "socialization of labor" in industry, but throws into question the role of political education at work.

The point is, that the specifics of base and superstructure, work and consciousness of it is more involved than many Neo-Marxists realize at the day-to-day level. Being "word-workers" and students of dialectics, they mistakenly "wish upon" working people in other occupations a basic sensitivity to the differences between illusion and reality in their consciousness that they just don't have except in the "good sense" realm. The task of Marxism is the day by day exploration of reality as seen in the perceptions of working people. If people perceive phenomena as being "real", those perceptions must be taken seriously and analyzed for what they are and what they allude to. To quote Gramsci, "First of all, therefore, it must be a criticism of "common sense" basing itself initially, however, on common sense (emphasis mine) in order to demonstrate that "everyone" is a philosopher and that it is not a question of introducing from scratch a scientific form of thought into everyone's individual life, but of renovating and making "critical" an already existing activity." (Emphasis mine). The Neo-Marxists have to overcome their fear of imagery and more importantly have to empathize more with the majority of us who take phenomena seriously. In doing so they will realize that the best of their critical thinking will have more meaning to us and more relevance to political action than they or we thought. Praxis grows out of theory that is rooted in and applicable to reality and it becomes politically effective when the main actors in reality capable of using it, see its relevance to their lives.

Bruce Kaiper

Dear Left Curve,

We're a small group formed to study agitation and propaganda in relation to art in the struggle for a socialist revolution in this country. We're looking at the consciousness of the working class now, and how art can be used to change that consciousness and how it has been done in the past. We subscribe to your magazine and think it's one of the best on that subject in the country.

We got your letter of 11/1/77\* and it left us with some questions. The first question is why did you respond to "disagreements among the editors concerning purpose and direction" by saying nothing to your readers for a year? Seems like that debate would be more fruitful if opened up to your constituency - those who read and feed into the magazine?

Secondly, even when you do write to inform your readers you gave no hint at the content of your disagreements. It's a fair guess that the struggle was political or had political aspects. Nothing of this is mentioned in the letter. Are we to interpret that to mean you are retreating from the political perspective laid out in Questions and Responses in LC#5? We hope not. We saw that political openness as LC's greatest strength.

To make our perspective clearer, we'll list what we've liked most in the magazine so far:

- #4 Cityarts Workshop, Interview with Single Spark Films
- #5 4 Questions and Responses, Human Object and Capitalist Image article
- #6 the diversity of material and graphics

Overall we liked the poems, particularly the poems by Gary Allan Kizer, also the letters and the sense this section gives of the relationship between LC and its readers (who they are, how they use it, etc.).

We see LC's main weakness as its class stand. The leading class in socialist revolution is the working class. That means that it is the class which is the focus of our activity now. Most of the articles in LC have been by, and addressed to artists from the petit-bourgeoisie, although not all. They've addressed the question of how art relates to the working class much less. Your recent letter left us wondering even more about where you stood on this.

We hope this is helpful. In struggle,

Sarah Jackson

\*(Ed. Note: a general letter was sent by Left Curve to subscribers apologizing for the delay in publishing, and stating our intention to continue with the magazine.)

Dear Sarah Jackson,

We have discussed your letter and it was decided that I should answer personally as I'm the only member of LC who is still working full-time on the magazine from previous issues. First I want to say that we really appreciate your letter as constructive criticism is something we can use a lot more of. One of our main editorial policies will be to work hard to encourage discussion and critical debate and we encourage you to take part in this from now on if you so desire.

Your letter brings up two main points: 1) why wasn't the "internal struggles" of the magazine opened up to the readers and 2) the question of class stand. Wit'

the first, the primary reason, as I see it, that those struggles were not "opened up" was due to subjective failings on the part of the editors where our own life situations superceded the political responsibility we had assumed by publishing the magazine. Though some of individualistic conflict which developed as a result of this was expressed through "political" lines, I personally think that a prerequisite for "line" struggle is a clear and sound mental attitude which tries truthfully to arrive at principled positions - this I felt was absent, as such not worthy of public debate. We have now reorganized based, in part, on the mistakes of the past, and I want to assure you that LC has not backtracked from the editorial position layed out in issue #5, in fact we hope to develop them more fully and consistently.

Now I'd like to comment on your second point: the question of class stand. First I want to say that the magazine takes the position that the purpose of all intellectual work should be to aid and become part of the struggle for the abolition of wage slavery, and from that it follows that we stand on the side of the working class as it is the only class which can destroy capitalism, the germ of which is the commodity form be it in labor or culture. But with that said we also feel that that struggle takes on many different levels from struggle at the point of production to struggle in the superstructure. The primary task that LC has addressed itself to, consciously and unconsciously, has been to aid in the development of a strong practically and theoretically viable culture which is in fundamental opposition to capitalist cultural expression. Now at this time most people involved in cultural expression as an on going activity come from the petty-bourgeoisie and it is for this objective fact that much of the material in LC has come from that class. However, the important question is not the class background of an individual but what the content of his or her work is, viewed not just from an immediate sense, but from an over-all historical sense as well. At the same time, we have always made efforts to look for and publish work that is developing "organically" from within the working class and oppressed minorities which take a class-conscious anti-capitalist position, these have been in the minority and will continue to be so for the foreseeable future, which is simply a result of objective developments. The problem of cultural expression is complex, it can't be created by dictate or fiat, the best most real work comes from some kind of "internal necessity" which tries to grasp aesthetically the nature of reality. The major mistake, I believe, that most Marxist-Leninist groups have made both in this country and during various stages of revolutionary development in previous socialist countries is to assume that art can be made on order. This has continually lead to stereotyped cliched images which move absolutely nobody. An idea is an abstraction from millions of particulars and we simply can't program subjective responses to fit an abstraction. For example the working class in this country consists perhaps of some 150 million people from all parts of the world, an amalgam of cultures and traditions such as the world has never seen, on top of this is the continual indigenous cultural expression from "popular" to "fine" art, this is further complicated by the advent of mass media, a completely new form of communication developed during the last 40 years or so. There is also now what might be described as a "movement" culture in this country which takes on the most conscious anti-capitalist images at this time, yet can be really say that those kinds of art forms are working class in essence? Some of it no doubt is real and will become a part of the tradition of the people in the struggle for their own self-definition, but much of it, I suspect, is but the momentary expression of a declassed group of people whose violent anti-capitalism, with its accompanying anti-technological bent, will not become a lasting part of human culture. The point is that this issue is complex and can't be reduced to a few comforting slogans. That slogan-

eering and direct propoganda work is important is beyond denial, but in no way can we assume that that is the only kind of cultural expression that serves working class revolution - to do so I believe is a travesty on the depth of peoples lives and needs. So I agree with you that the question of class stand is pivotal, but that question in practice, in human history, is much more complex than envisioned by many "movement" M-L people, it can't be defined in simplistic pragmatic emperical ways alone. Life is hard, complex, varied, rich, ugly, and beautiful - our task as cultural workers, as just plain human beings is to work toward ways to enrich, to bring out the deep meanings and associations people need to further pursue the goal of the liberation of human faculties now more and more being reduced to crass commodities by capitalist society - and that can be done through direct political work as well as through the development of modern epic forms which might not cause anyone to immediately mount a barricade, but can give people strength through self-affirmation and affirm the need to improve life. - and I think to do the latter, at this stage in history necessitates a struggle against capitalism.

Again, we appreciate your comments and criticisms and please feel free to write again.

Sincerely,  
Csaba Polony  
for  
Left Curve

## The Open Letter

Artistic experience of the past few years has somehow blurred our sensitivity. The prevailing attitude is the one of permissiveness which gives up all responsibility. The confusion is great indeed. Not only paintings, sculptures and graphics became popular and discussed as works of art, but also all kinds of activities and documents about events. Not only value and role of objects have been questioned as traditional artistic products, but even conceptual art, which tried to point out arbitrary nature of previous artefacts, has itself been put in question. The artistic attempts to define the present situation in art are uncertain and imprecise in both questions and answers.

This situation makes it necessary for us to re-assess the concepts of art and the work of art. I think that an attempt of an answer to the following question is a convenient starting point for such a discussion: why are we undertaking certain actions or creating objects which do not fit into the works and actions described as "works of art" until now, why do we still tend to present them as artistic actions and products, viewing ourselves as artists? Why presenting, communicating or commenting my experiences, or arranging a definite situation I insist on qualifying it as an artistic one? Where is the frontier which makes me introduce just those products of my work to the institutional mechanisms of the functioning of art: galleries, exhibitions, festivals, catalogues, artistic periodicals, etc.?

Is it sufficient to answer this question as follows: "all that I do and declare art is art for I have graduated from an art school, for I am a member of the creative union, for I think myself an artist, etc.", or "whatever is presented within the institutional framework of artistic life should be considered art"? We expect that the answers will help us in making these questions more precise, and in locating our doubts in definite spots. This was our principal aim, and that is why we are not limiting the form of an answer in any way: a written text is just one of many possible forms. We are asking our question and wait for the views of these, who do care for clarity of some kind.

Along with the editors of "Sztuka" we intend to publish a special issue devoted entirely to the above problems. The answers of yours would provide the basic material for the editors of this issue. The publication, in Polish and English, is scheduled to appear in the fall of 1977 and each of the authors who contributes to our action will receive a copy of this issue.

Stanislaw Urbański  
30-102 Kraków  
POLAND



Poster for film: "INTERVENTION" Vietnam 1968  
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Edited by Mary Joan Coleman and P. J. Laska

An annual periodical of poetry, short fiction, essays, reviews and criticism.

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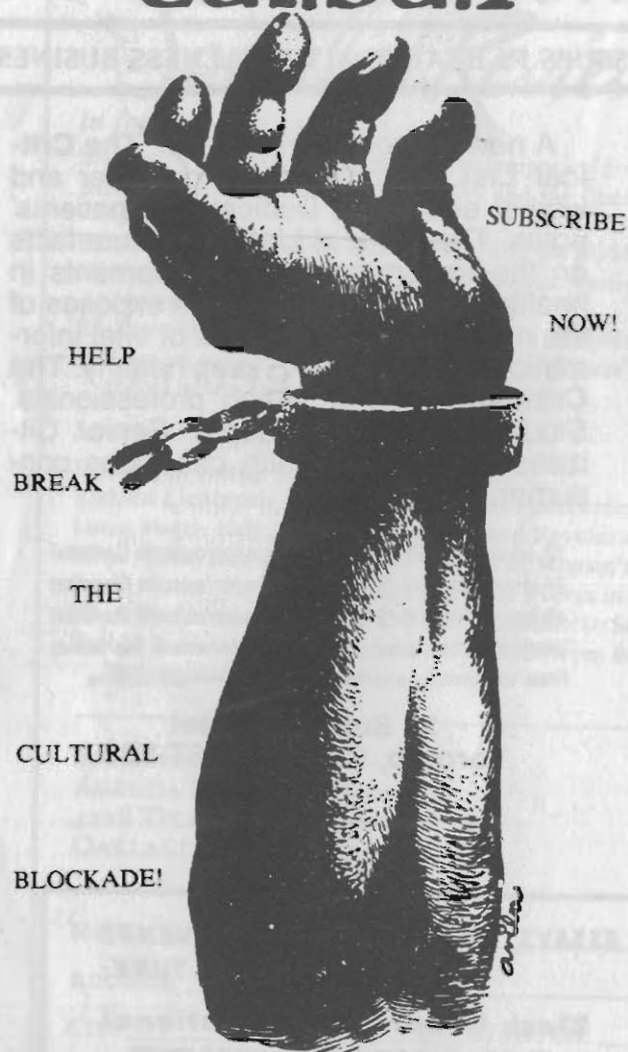
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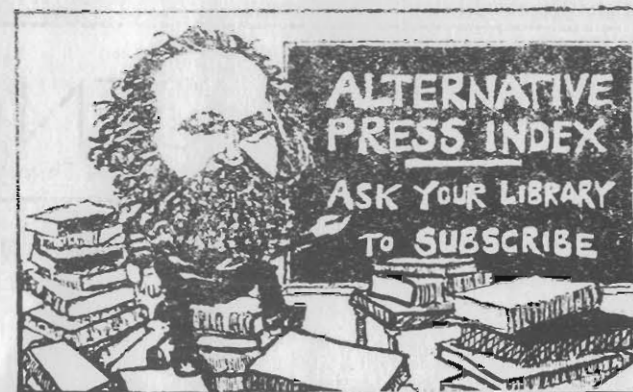
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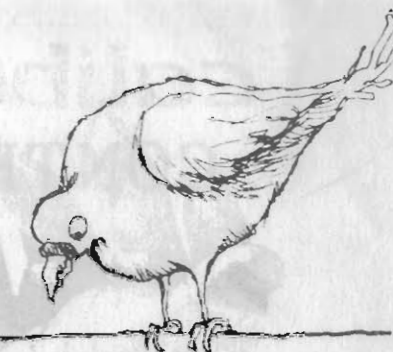
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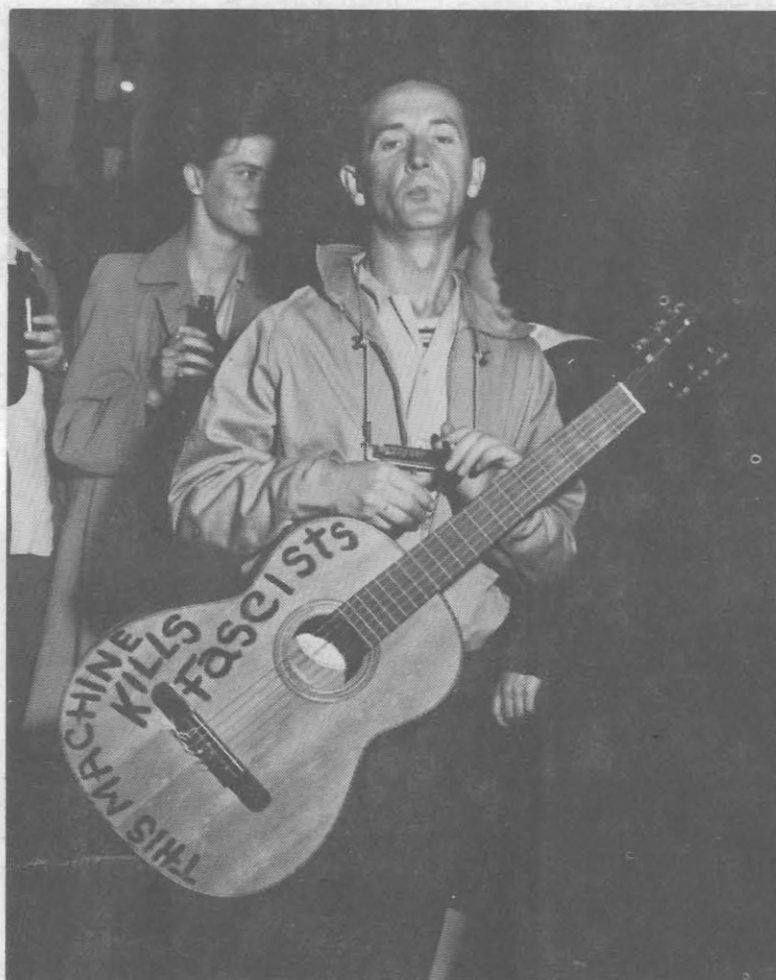
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