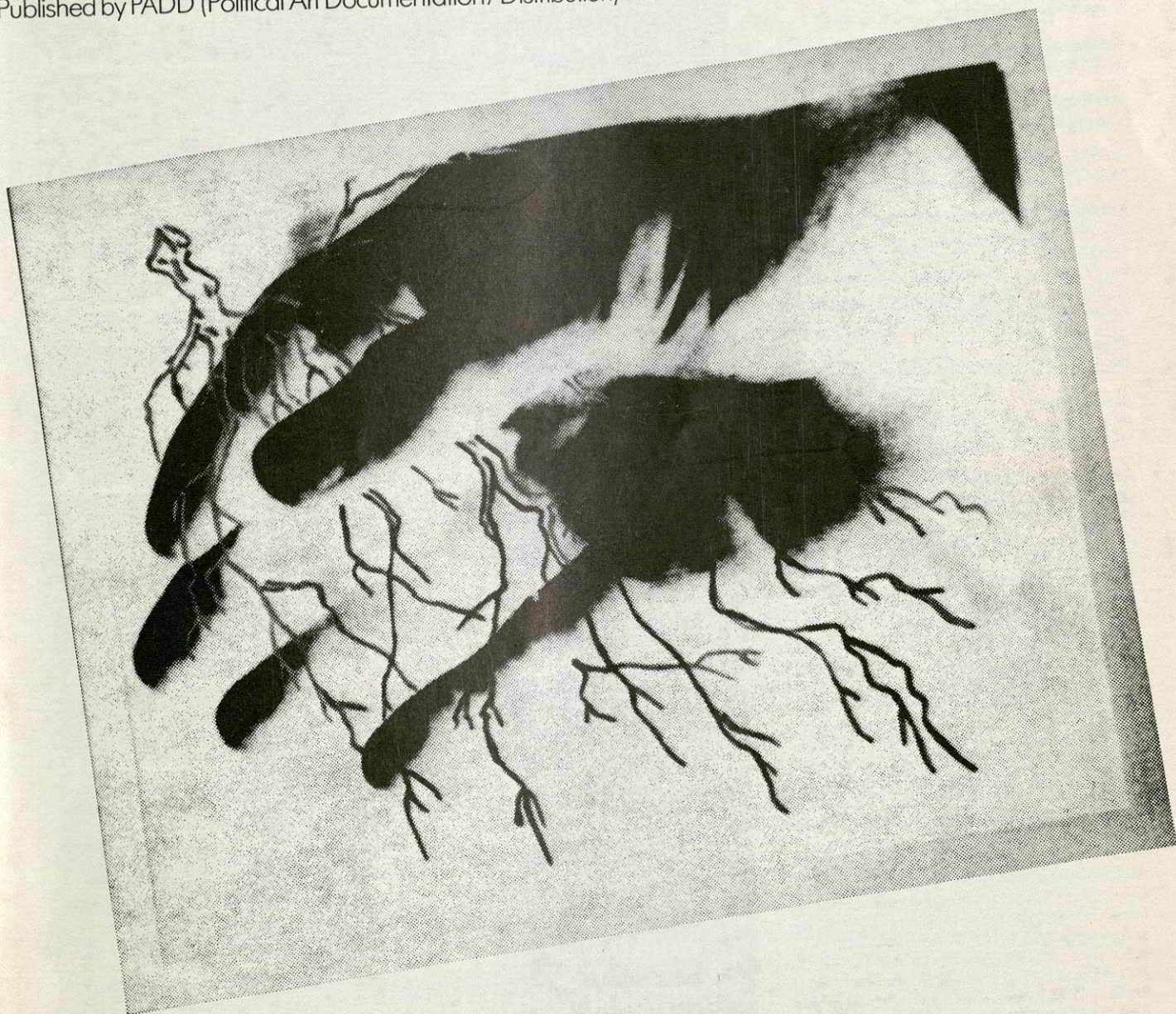


UPFRONT

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SPECIAL PHOTOGRAPHY SUPPLEMENT: HARD LOOKS ■ AIDS: HEALING THE PERSON ■ SOUTH AFRICAN JIVE ■ ANYONE FOR POSTMODERNISM? ■ ASIAN AMERICAN CULTURAL IDENTITY: TWO VOICES ■ SOUTHERN DISCOMFORT: CRITICAL ART IN THE SOUTH

UPFRONT

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TAKE IT EASY / BUT TAKE IT

—WOODY GUTHRIE

departure of *Community Murals* and irregularity of *Left Curve* and *Cultural Democracy*, make it imperative that one of us makes it through.

At the moment PADD is concentrated, for the most part, around the ever-resilient Archive Committee. We knew the end of this particular phase of PADD was coming when we didn't celebrate our eighth birthday in 1987—traditionally a great dancing party with performance and annual self-congratulation. Although UPFRONT stalwarts have run out of steam (living elsewhere, finishing books, or temporarily laying back), we are keeping the mechanism in place. We have the office at 339 Lafayette St.; an active correspondence continues with groups and individuals in and out of New York; the core people are still around and working on related projects; we will continue to distribute UPFRONT, and we'll honor subscriptions by sending available back issues if you can't wait for our next cycle.

We regret that this internal moment has come when we were receiving a dose of external energy from the newly solicited "editorial community," and we hope that when we find the beginning of the new cycle, those who supported us will help us pick up where we left off. We haven't lost faith. We're working in smaller collaborations—because at the moment that seems easier than maneuvering through large groups. Time, energy, the financial fuel, are so precious these days of waning Reaganism, that many of us have pared down to the heart of our work. Once we reach it, we tend to look up and out again, and wonder where everybody is.

Well, as this current issue of UPFRONT indicates, cultural activists are using the temporary hiatus as a time for reflecting on the shortcomings as well as achievements of the "movement," as well as for some theoretical speculations on how to improve our work, aesthetically as well as socio/politically, for the next major wave of art activism. The articles that follow on political art in the South; the piece on postmodernism and its influence on oppositional culture; the seminar on new developments in photography and the representation of history—all these are evidence that much thought is being given to the whole gamut of art as a force for social and personal transformation.

One heartening (if ironic) footnote was the inclusion of so many artworks from PADD exhibits, UPFRONT and our Archives (thanks to Barbara Moore and Mimi Smith) in the recent Museum of Modern Art exhibition entitled "Committed to Print" (see page 15) at the very moment PADD was severely curtailing its work.

In a short editorial there is no way to analyze the current situation of the Left, and maybe we do too much handwringing anyway. There is never any point in artificially prolonging activity for the sake of pride or guilt. We sustain each other in other ways, and sometimes we abandon each other, and that's life. We are real proud of what PADD and UPFRONT have been able to do in the past and we still have great hopes for what can be done in the future by a new editorial collective. After years of experience shared by this collective, one tends to get philosophical (or resigned) about these cycles. PADD has lasted longer than any other of the activist art groups for the past 40 years or so. We know from burnout, and we know that for most of us it doesn't last forever. The embers are there to be fanned. The hand to hold the fan is lifted. Is it yours?

—Editorial Committee

SPREADING THE GOSPEL

An Interview on African Music in the U.K. With Keith Jefferis (London, Apr. 20, 1987)

INTERVIEW BY RON SAKOLSKY

Keith Jefferis is the guiding light behind NOMAD Records, one of the largest indie mail order distributors of records and tapes of African and African diaspora music in the Western world. He is also the organizer of several brilliant cassette compilations of "South African Jive," and, every Saturday, he is the proprietor of the NOMAD stall at the Camden Market in London where he peddles his wares and supplies information about African-related musical events around town. Unlike most other purveyors of African music, Keith brings a Marxist analysis to his work.

—R.S.

RS: Could you begin by telling us how your "South African Jive" project came about?

KJ: The records were originally found by a friend of mine in Malawi in a grocery store where they had presumably been for 20 years since they were first released. He was a great fan of African music and shipped them all back to England. Then we set about going through this collection of about 400 78s.

RS: So, they'd never actually been played before?

KJ: Right. They had been in the shop since their original release which was about the late fifties or early sixties. We thought about whether there was any way of making this music available and decided to put together some compilations on cassette—a selection of the best of the 78s. First of all, we made three compilations. Each was a distinct style of music. One a Zulu vocal, mostly female groups like the Dark City Sisters and the Flying Jazz Queens. Then one which was flute jive and sax jive—the flute jive is more familiar as "Kwela" music. The third one was African jazz which was the sort of thing that Dollar Brand might have been listening to when he was a kid.

This was in a big band jazz style, but played with an African sensibility and a much smaller band. Then we put together two compilations of more variety. These are compilations of several different styles of music.

RS: On hearing them, I was amazed that the sound quality was so good after hearing so many reissues of scratchy old 78s over the years where the original masters were not available.

KJ: Well, by the early sixties, 78s, as far as I know, were not being made very widely in the West, but in Third World countries, where people couldn't afford to change their record equipment quite so regularly, the 78s were still being pressed. This was true in South Africa certainly up 'til about '66 or '67 and, of course, by that time, recording and record pressing technology were quite good.

RS: Are there any well-known South African artists now in exile that appear on these records?

KJ: There was a big exodus in the early sixties—people like Hugh Masekela, Dudu Pukwana and Miriam Makeba all left. I'm not sure quite how much re-



COURTESY OF NOMAD RECORDS

cording they'd done before they left. Also, the records are not particularly well-documented. You have the title of a band, but often you don't know the personnel or the author of the tune. More often than not, you'd have the artists, like the Mohotella Queens, which consists of five vocalists, come into the studio to play with a session band. The tune would be written for them by the producer of the record. So, you have very little idea of who was actually playing on the record unless you can find out independently who were the members of the Mohotella Queens at that particular time. Certainly the session musicians aren't credited.

RS: Are the producers listed?

KJ: Sometimes the producer is listed. Producers were pretty prolific. They would make records extremely quickly—usually in one or two takes, no multi-tracking or anything like that. So, musicians who are world famous now could have been on those records.

RS: What are the politics of re-leasing South African records today, given the anti-apartheid boycott that is presently in effect?

KJ: Well, there's obviously lots of issues here. Firstly, it depends on how you treat the question of the general principle of the boycott and sanctions against South Africa. I think there's a question mark about cultural products because they're not necessarily commodities in the same way that oranges are commodities. Cultural products are often born out of the struggle and have some element of that struggle in them. They can't be seen in the same distant way as most products. So, if you accept that there is an argument that music, as a type of cultural product, is something that's coming out of the black struggle in South Africa, then there's an argument for making it available to people outside the country.

RS: But isn't this just the kind of rationale that someone like Paul Simon can use to justify something like *Graceland*?

KJ: Well, the other side of making cultural products available is to be very conscious of the way in which one is doing it. So, if making these cultural products available at the same time contributes to the profits of South African record companies, then you're actually putting the struggle a step back.

RS: So how do you avoid that?

KJ: Partly because the records on these tapes are very old and the copyright situation is a bit vague anyway. If standard dues were paid, they would go straight back to the record companies and no money would actually get back to the artists, because the musicians were paid as session musicians and received a one-time session fee. They didn't receive any royalties. The session fees were actually very low—about \$10 a record or something like that. So, by not paying royalties to the record companies, certainly the musicians are not being done out of any royalties because they never got any in the first place.

What we've done as an alternative is make sure, by one means or another, that the equivalent amount of royalties, while not going back to the original musicians as individuals because it would be too difficult to arrange, goes back into the support of cultural and political activities of black South Africans. The idea is not just that the music on these tapes is of interest to people in the West, but that a product of that interest will be something going back to the people of South Africa and their struggle.

RS: Getting back to Paul Simon, what are the political differences between his project and yours?

KJ: I think Paul Simon's made quite a lot of mistakes in this whole *Graceland* epic. The first and most obvious one is that he didn't liaise with the A.N.C. [African National Congress]. In putting the project together, he didn't liaise at all with those bodies who are in the forefront of the struggle. If money is going to be involved in something as sensitive as a project which involves South African music or any other aspect of South Africa, then it's very important to have the view of the opposition movement in whatever the project may be. They are the people who are most in touch with what is going on in the country and what would help the struggle at this particular time. In putting a project together then, I think it's very necessary to pay a lot of attention to what their views are on that project.

That's something Paul Simon didn't do, and that was his first mistake. Coupled with that, he's had a very arrogant attitude towards the liberation organizations in that there is a tendency amongst musicians and artists to see culture as being above politics. This is the argu-

ment that no one has the right to tell an artist what he or she can or cannot produce to record in this case. Clearly though, culture isn't above politics. It's a product of politics, and you can't divorce one from the other. His biggest fault is that he doesn't see the culture thing as connected with the political struggle.

RS: What is that connection?

KJ: The way in which black music is made and is listened to in South Africa is very much tied up with the position of the black population there, particularly in the townships. The music might not have an overt political message, but, as often as not, that's because if it did, it wouldn't be released and wouldn't be played on the radio. So, often you find that there is a political message, but it's very hidden and might be spoken about in very roundabout ways as was the case in Zimbabwe before liberation. So, unless you're an expert in African languages, it's often hard to know if there's any overt political content or not.

But even if there isn't a political message, you still can't divorce the music from the environment in which it is produced. Although Paul Simon has undoubtedly raised the profile of black South African music, I think ultimately he's done far more to raise the profile of Paul Simon, and the main lasting impact of the project is that it will salvage Paul Simon's career. Although the involvement of black South African musicians has been integral to the sound of *Graceland*, it's still presented as incidental in the way in which *Graceland* is promoted. It's essentially being promoted as a Paul Simon record and not as a black South African record.

He's missed an opportunity. It's obviously a very popular record—it's sold a lot of copies. He could have come across far stronger by increasing people's awareness about apartheid. To not make any political references on the sleeve of the record or in any of the interviews that he's done since, I think has to throw some doubt on his motives and credibility. As soon as the political issues were raised, which naturally they would be, his reaction was to try to improve his credibility by going on tour with Miriam Makeba, Ladysmith Black Mambazo and Hugh Masekela or, alternatively, to react against what he sees as political interference.

His subsequent comments and actions have been quite contradictory. He doesn't seem to know which way to turn. I think he's entered the whole thing in a rather naive manner. He hadn't really given a

lot of thought to his role as a prominent white American musician dealing with black South African music and the relationship of that music to the position of blacks in South Africa. I think he's just not *thought* a lot in the *Graceland* venture. While all the controversy has probably done his career good in the end because it's generated a lot of interest in the record, I'm not sure the lasting effect on black South Africans and their music will be quite so strong.

RS: Your NOMAD tapes are of vintage African music. Are you at all interested in compiling new African music on cassette?

KJ: I think new music has as much interest and validity. The reasons that I've been dealing more with the older stuff is simply that: (a) it's very good music and (b) it's almost impossible to get through any other channels. Not dealing in more recent releases is not really a reflection on whether more recent music is better or worse, but simply that it is available through other means. Making African music available generally is quite a difficult issue. Just look at what has happened to such Nigerian artists as Sunny Adé who have been signed to major Western record companies. Those companies have really not known how to deal with music. They have no sensitivity whatsoever towards how it has arisen and what it represents in terms of these societies. Essentially they've tried to package it as three-minute singles and have almost, without exception, gotten their fingers burned and have not achieved success either for them or for the artists.

RS: What kind of new African music does NOMAD distribute?

KJ: What I'm trying to do is to make available as wide a range as is possible of music—essentially all areas of music which have African roots. This covers modern African music, traditional African music, most of the music of the Caribbean (soca, calypso, zouk, salsa) and music from parts of Latin America as well (and that, of course, extends to the black and Hispanic communities of New York). Generally, we exempt reggae, not because it's a reflection on the music, but simply because it's so widely available elsewhere. So, this is an effort to make available primarily to people in the West (Britain, Europe and the USA) music which they don't normally have access to, music which forms a coherent whole

in terms of its roots and the way in which it's evolved. The evolution of much of this music has been through slavery and has grown out of the mixing of African culture with that of the West. Also we seek to make available music which is at the roots of most modern Western music but which comes across as white music. A great majority of this music has its roots in either jazz or blues which in turn goes back to the movement of music and people from Africa. Perhaps it's a way of exposing Westerners to the influences which form the basis of most of the music which we hear.



RS: How do you relate access and exposure?

KJ: Access means exposure. We try to do it in a way that is as sensitive as possible to where the music comes from and how it's produced. The mail order catalog which we put together isn't just about the music. It's not just a lot of records. It tries to go into how the music has evolved and how it's linked to the development of those societies from which it's come. So, hopefully, people don't just see it as music but as tied into a wider African culture and politics. Then, NOMAD also tries to make sure that, with South African records, we are very careful about where the money goes, so that if any money goes back to white record companies, at least some of the money is paid out to balance that again.

With music from the rest of Africa, it's impossible to avoid some contact with major record companies. Yet in most cases the record companies are actually local and specific, say, to Zaire or Congo or Nigeria, and the multinational com-

panies haven't actually entered these markets on a particularly large scale. So, luckily, at the moment, most of the music is still artistically and commercially under the control either of the artists themselves (say, in Zaire—Tabu Ley and, in Nigeria, —Sunny Adé, who have their own record labels) or at least it's run by people from the countries themselves. While these people may not always be the artists, they are still local businesspeople rather than representatives of multinationals. I think the involvement of record companies is problematical, not only musically, but because they are obviously taking profit out of the countries where the money is made.

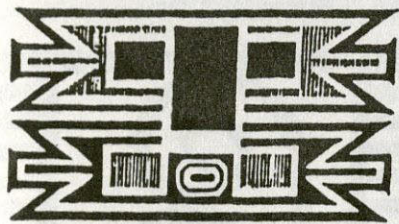
RS: In the case of, say, Zaire, where the CIA personally installed Mobutu, do you see any contradiction in supporting indigenous capitalists rather than international capitalists and assuming that they are not somehow connected as beneficiaries of a corrupt and dictatorial neo-colonial regime?

KJ: There are obviously many things which go on in Africa with which one might disagree, but as a relatively privileged person from the West, I generally avoid as far as possible making judgements about people like Mobutu. There's a great tendency in the West to go around criticizing corruption in Africa while, at the same time, denying that corruption exists in the West. It's just more concealed in the West. I don't think it's up to Westerners to go around making these sort of judgements about people like Mobutu or the role of those Zairean artists who, literally, sing his praises. In the latter case, making a record can simply be seen as a pragmatic stop enabling an artist to not end up in jail or at least be able to keep his relatively privileged position. Having said that, it should be pointed out that there's also an altruistic tendency amongst musicians in Africa to use their wealth to support other musicians rather than keeping their wealth to themselves which is what people tend to do here.

Tabu Ley's band, Afrisa-International, and Franco's T.P. O.K. Jazz, have, for over 25 to 30 years, had musicians going through them who are now the top musicians in those countries. So, there is a sort of training offered and an aspect of providing opportunities for up-and-coming musicians which is provided by these stars. They're not trying to maintain their own position against all other

people. They have a view that music is a living thing which needs to be encouraged. Since the state doesn't encourage that sort of thing, they see it as their role to do so.

Leaving aside Zaire, the Bhundu Boys in Zimbabwe are another example of this phenomenon. They've recently become very popular in Britain, and their ambition is to go back to Zimbabwe with enough money to actually buy their own equipment. It's as modest as that. In Zimbabwe, what has tended to happen is that the musical equipment has been owned by the owners of bars and hotels where the bands play. There are very few bands able to afford their own equipment. So, what the Bhundu Boys are doing is aiming to buy their own gear which can then be used to help further the ability of younger bands to be independent from bar and hotel owners. So, the success of musicians like this is actually very socially productive. It's a process which is very much in the hands of the people in those countries. It's not something which is by and large manipulated from outside. If there's any way of promoting the music widely in the West, making some money from that for the musicians back in Africa and, at the same time, keeping the Western record companies at a distance, then I think that's the ideal situation.



RS: How long have you been doing NOMAD Records?

KJ: About three or four years.

RS: How has the response to the music that you carry changed over that period of time?

KJ: It's fluctuated a lot. There have been periods when people have said that African music is about to break; that it will be the "next big thing" on the Western music scene, that so-and-so is going to be the "new Bob Marley" or whatever. It hasn't taken off in that sort of major way, but there's been a steadily growing interest. Nothing particularly substantial or impressive in terms of a huge mushrooming, but there's been a steady widening of interest. What is of interest now

is not just African music, but by extension, salsa, which is beginning to become popular in Britain at last. I know it's different in the States, but salsa has been almost unheard of in Britain until very recently.

RS: Is there much of a Latin community in England?

KJ: There's a small one, and virtually all of that is in London. But salsa's starting to break through a bit. In terms of Caribbean music, there's the impact of Notting Hill Carnival. Every year provides a tremendous boost for the calypso and soca musicians. The Notting Hill Carnival is now a huge event. It has also, by its existence, encouraged soca bands and steel bands in London, which is very good.

RS: When does it happen?

KJ: That's in August—it's usually the last weekend in August. It's along similar lines to the Trinidad Carnival, but it's a different time of year and wider musically—there's actually a lot of reggae played as well as calypso and soca. Still the essence of it is steel bands going down the streets in processions which is very impressive to witness. So, calypso and soca are becoming popular and, also, more recently, zouk music from Martinique and Guadeloupe. Kassav, in particular, are finally breaking through over here in a way that other musicians haven't. In part, that's to do with the very sophisticated production they have on their records, much more sophisticated than a lot of the stuff that comes out of Africa.

RS: How do you mean that?

KJ: That's not a reflection on its soul; but certainly on the production level, Kassav's music can hold its own with any of today's high tech or disco products which is essentially what they are competing with on the dance floors. A lot of African music is still seen as an eccentricity. I think Kassav are showing that they can be as modern as any Western musicians and still retain their roots as well. That's very important. The Western record companies tried to do that with people like Sunny Adé and Ebenezer Obey in Britain. They tried to give them a modern production and modern feel by bringing them to their own studios with the record company's own producers. In the process, though, they managed to destroy what really was good

about a lot of the music. Kassav is the first time really that the music has been produced with this very modern, high tech sound without losing its soul in the process.

RS: Where do they record?

KJ: Some of it's produced in Guadeloupe, but Kassav themselves record in Paris. They are not signed to any major record companies and so retain total artistic control, which didn't happen to the artists who signed up with the majors in Britain. The only artist who retained control of his own product in the West was Fela Kuti. He is the one who the record companies have always had difficulty dealing with, and I don't think it's unconnected. Kassav are based in Paris, but their music is released on a label which is based in Martinique, and they retain production rights over their own records. They have also done more than anyone else to develop the links between the Caribbean and Africa. There has been contact between the Caribbean and Africa from time to time, but not really on a sustained basis, either musically or economically.

RS: Are they popular in Africa?

KJ: Very popular. They've done tours, particularly through Francophone Africa—Zaire, Congo, Burkina-Faso, Togo, where they've played to crowds of 50,000 in football stadiums. They have really swept the place in a way that hasn't happened since the origins of Zairean music maybe 30 years ago when Franco and Rochereau swept not only Zaire and Congo, but even a lot of parts of English-speaking Africa too. The Zaire bands remained dominant for an awful long time—and now Kassav have come along and have had virtually the same effect. Though they're outsiders, they're very African orientated. Now new music in Zaire and other Francophone countries is very heavily influenced by the zouk sound.

RS: In addition to zouk, what do you see as the latest developments in African music?

KJ: It's very difficult to generalize about Africa as a whole. There's obviously huge variations. Southern Africa works on its own—South Africa and Zimbabwe very much have their own dynamic. East Africa has tended to be, and still is, dominated by the Zaire sound. Kenya,

Tanzania and Uganda are very heavily influenced by what's happening in Kinshasa. In the Francophone countries, it is especially musicians from Cameroun who have been in the forefront of reaching out to a more Westernized sound. They developed the makossa sound which was pioneered by Manu Dibango, another artist who has managed to appeal to Western audiences as well as African audiences. I think the combination of developments in makossa in Cameroun and the impact of Kassav has really changed the sound of what was the dominant Zairean music. The way in which those sounds are going now is, I think, more accessible to Western ears, easier to latch onto and not feel that this is something totally alien.

RS: Are you saying that this accessibility to Westerners is primarily related to differing production values?

KJ: That does have a lot to do with it, but it's a different sound as well. I'm really not sure what the explanation is—whether it's to do with just the production or the way in which the music is marketed. In part, I think, it's because a lot of music is now coming through Paris. I think Paris is for the Francophone countries much more a center for musicians than it has been in the past. A lot of musicians come to Paris to record from those countries. There's a mixing of African and Caribbean musicians going on in Paris. This is particularly evident with Kassav. The musicians in Kassav themselves have played with a lot of Africans. So, there's the mixing of the sound going on in Paris. The huge Paris club scene has broken out from being something which is just of interest to Africans and Caribbean people. It's moving out to a Western audience. Maybe that's because the indigenous French music scene is more or less non-existent and has been dominated by imports which has meant that it's easier for the African and Caribbean musicians to make an inroad. I don't know. It's certainly not fighting against a very strong indigenous musical industry which is the case in London and, I imagine, New York. So, as far as the re-

lationship to the West goes, I think there's a steadily increasing Western interest, but not a spectacular growth, certainly, not in Britain anyway. I think it's probably best characterized as a slow but steady expansion. It's a much more stable and better long term interest in the music than the results yielded by some of the high pressure attempts of Western record companies to instantly build up an audience. In the latter case, when the majors find out it's not working out as planned, they typically just abandon it completely.

RS: So, it's not Western influence itself which is harmful to the music, but the nature of that influence. Is that right?

KJ: African musicians are picking up influences from the West, and the music is obviously evolving all the time. If the music stayed static, it wouldn't be interesting to anybody. While, on the one hand, it's easy to dismiss African music that's very Westernized and doesn't seem to have much in common with what we might like to see as its roots, I think that, at the same time, it's important to recognize that there are changes going on in the music which reflect societal changes, and that's going to be what the music expresses. The main thing is that the music does not become completely dominated by outsiders and by Western influences. African music has always been open to outside influences in one form or another. The origin of the Zaire sound is very much in Cuban music, and if people in Zaire hadn't listened to foreign records from Cuba, then the sound of Rochereau and Franco wouldn't be as it is today. So, I don't think it's a reasonable approach to try and box off African music as something which is to be sealed off from the outside world. That's a sort of museum or zoo attitude that I don't really hold much sympathy with. What's important is that in using these outside influences in a developing music that the musicians in those countries are still essentially in control of what's going on. If they choose to produce music which sounds a bit more Western to us, it's not necessarily a bad thing, and I don't think

there's any sign as yet that outside influences are dominating. I don't think African music is being swamped. It's developing and, therefore, healthy. I think the exchange between Africa and the Caribbean is very healthy for the music, because it provides for an exchange of ideas and influences between already related types of music.

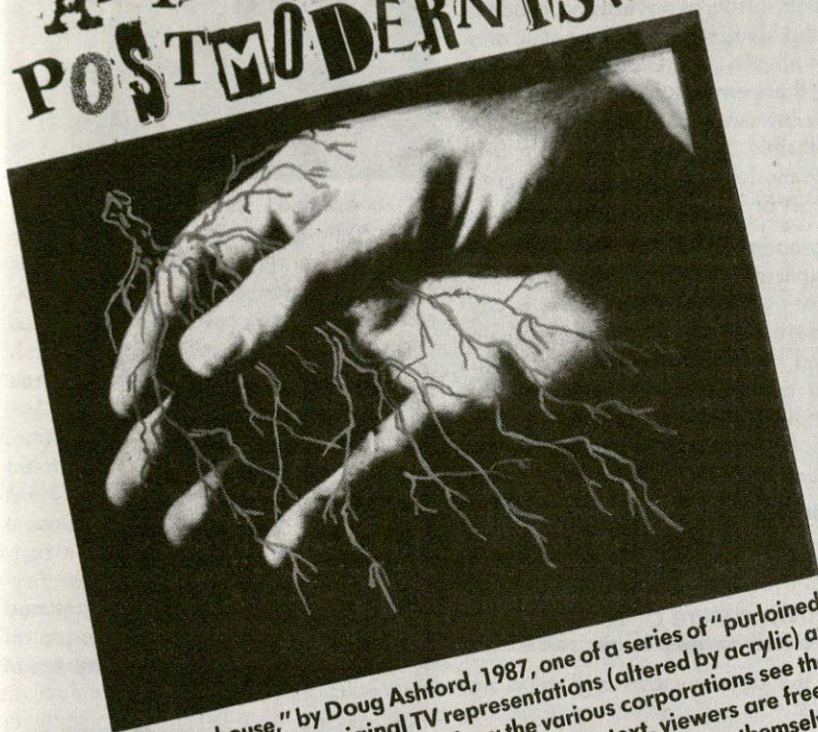
RS: What are the political dimensions of this exchange?

KJ: On a political level, it's good for Africa and the Caribbean to be drawn closer together. That's an area where music is working in positive ways, whereas many other processes have tended to be divisive. The way in which Third World countries relate to one another is generally through relationships which the West determines. This sort of musical exchange is one of the areas where there's a lot of cooperation and, if extended, it could do great wonders. Kassav have been extremely successful in developing an awareness of African roots in the West Indies. On the other hand, they've been very successful in creating awareness in Africa about West Indian music. It would be nice if some of the Latin countries of the Caribbean could be brought into this process. It would make the music even better, and it would bring these countries closer together.



To order the NOMAD South African Jive compilation tapes (Vol. 1, Zulu Vocal Jive; Vol. 2, Sax and Flute Jive; Vol. 3, African Jazz; Vol. 4, Woza; Vol. 5, Soweto Special) Contact, in the States: Original Music, RD 1, Box 19D, Lasher Rd., Tivoli, NY, 12583; in England, for these tapes and/or a mail order catalogue: NOMAD Records, 21 Torbay Court, Clarence Way, London NW1 8 RL, UK.

ANYONE FOR POSTMODERNISM



"Westinghouse," by Doug Ashford, 1987, one of a series of "purloined" corporate ads. The original TV representations (altered by acrylic) are the artist's re-representation of how the various corporations see their own functions in the world. Without a guiding text, viewers are free to interpret the validity of these corporate representations for themselves.

It's easy to empathize with cultural activists who view postmodernism with skepticism or hostility. Consider, first, its trajectory of co-optation from high art to the kitsch products which litter coffee tables, tv and the mass media. Then there is the slipperiness of the concept: "a dizzying, contradictory, incommensurable thicket of theorizing."¹

Offputting too is the perception of postmodernism as an art-world diversion—a formalistic grab-bag of disjointed themes, fetishized signs, pseudo-historical nostalgia and glitzy pop-images. Is it any wonder that so many activists doubt its validity as a vehicle for oppositional art critique or practice? In the last issue of UPFRONT,² we asked a group of cultural workers what postmodernism meant to them. The following comments sum up the attitudes of most of the respondents:

We caution you to avoid becoming trapped in the art world's hall of mirrors. The debate about postmodernism is... a sham pluralism stimulated by the bankruptcy of the wholesale gimmicks of "schools" and "trends."
Arlene Goldbard and Don Adams,
Ukiah, CA

Yes, the art-world gimmickry about styles and trends is a trap. Yet, these postmodern images we see in the hall of mirrors, might they not reflect realities about cultural politics today that are highly germane to our own culture of resistance? Unfortunately, the polemic has largely bypassed cultural activists off the art mainstream, including most gays, Blacks, Hispanics and other so-called "minority" groups. I want therefore to explore the relationship between postmodernism and an activist art which Lucy R. Lippard describes as "based on subversion on the one hand and empowerment on the other."³

■ BY IRVING WEXLER ■

LOOKING FOR CLARITY

To begin with, digging once again through the texts⁴ confirms for me how little consensus exists on what postmodernism is—a trend, art practice, sensibility or aesthetic concept. Or, as Fredric Jameson forcibly argues, is it "the cultural logic of late capitalism?"⁵ In this view, postmodernism isn't an option we can accept or ignore. It is, rather, a cultural determinant which springs from the fact that "aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production"⁶ on a global scale. As the frantic production of new goods (cultural and commodities) becomes more compulsive, "an increasingly essential function is assigned to aesthetic experimentation."⁷ And these permutations of culture as capital can take either subverting or art-market forms.

It is this dynamic, and not just another round of stylistic innovations in the speeded-up cycle of art history, that fuels the eclipse of the hundred-year-old modernist movement (that is, high art, avant-garde poetry, dance, photography, auteur movies, etc.). To say that these artforms are exhausted does not imply that the modernist movement itself is dead. What it does signify is that the adversarial aspects of modernism, which once threatened and outraged the bourgeoisie, have now been largely assimilated. In fact, an avant-garde no longer radical is the reigning official norm. The central aim of postmodernism has been precisely to dismantle the premises of an outworn modernism.

If one conceives of postmodernism as an over-all—though not total—cultural condition, it follows that its manifestations assert themselves on every level—from art-making, media manipulation of images and information, to an audience consciousness shaped by hightech developments (nuclear, computer and digital devices),* to the international penetration of American culture as a form of export capital.

The waning of modernism has, according to postmodern theory, a number of radical implications. It decenters—or undermines—such cherished concepts of modernism as: the importance of originality, the aura of an artwork, and the single author; universal values and aesthetic standards; the unique visionary status of art; a single meaning inherent in each image/text

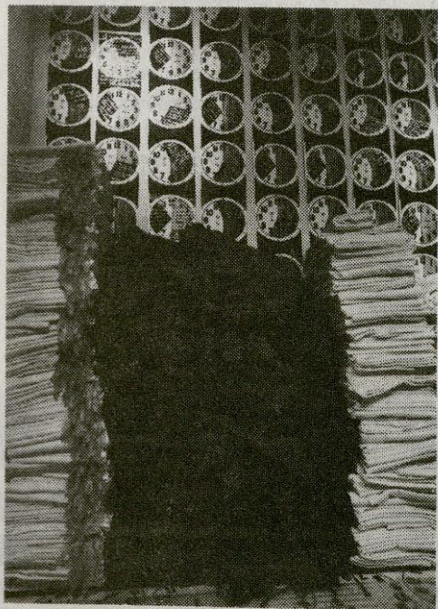
*See E. Ann Kaplan, *Rocking Around the Clock*, Methuen, New York and London, 1987 for an important discussion on the contradictions of postmodernism as exemplified in "blatantly consumer" cultural forms such as rock video.

(painting, sculpture, performance, book, script, photograph, etc.). Undercut once and for all (at least in theory) is the "myth of the autonomous, centered, unified bourgeois male subject. . ."⁸ With all this, down comes another block in the modernist structure: the idea that Western art alone constitutes "the grand narrative" against which all other cultures past and present are to be measured.

In this same vein, postmodernism also challenges the validity of dominant cultural "representations" as they appear in ads, films, popular fiction, mass media, newspaper photographs and the visual arts. These representations—images, codes, texts, languages, symbols, race and gender constructions—are seen as standing for the interests of the power structure. As such, they project ideologically the kinds of meaning the class in power wants to perpetuate.⁹ Subverting these stereotypical representations and mythologies is therefore a prime postmodern concern. Once the sacredness of the text and of institutional representations is eroded, the way is open for erasing the borders between high art and mass culture.

From this perspective, postmodernist culture may be seen as new and contradictory sets of art theories/practices that range across the whole spectrum of our mass-media society. Variants of postmodernism, for example, align themselves with a neo-conservative/antihuman position that de-

"Walls of Stress/Bowls of Devotion," by Mierle Laderman Ukeles, 1982. Partial view of mixed-media installation, at Martin Luther King, Jr. Labor Center Gallery, NYC



10 UPFRONT

nies the interdependence of art, politics and history. Or else, as Jameson notes, still another postmodern model is centered around new, degraded texts that evolve out of "schlock, kitsch, of advertising, grade B Hollywood films, supermarket gothic and romance novels. . ."¹⁰ Dialectically in opposition, there emerge from the modernist rupture a new array of art strategies which make possible a far more politically oriented postmodernism.¹¹ Among these critical and art production practices are:

■ **Appropriation**, the borrowing and re-conceptualization of dissimilar images and styles from various disciplines, is a key postmodern device for attacking given truths and social conventions of a patriarchal/racist/sexist society. It functions, for example, as a visual counterlanguage in the photo-montages of Barbara Kruger and other feminists "to dephallicize, re-

"These postmodern images reflect realities that are highly germane to our own culture of resistance"

vealing the obscene privilege of male authority."¹²

■ **Crossovers** between different art forms is another, related major departure. Performance art, for example, freely commingles video, dance, slides, music, dramatic improvisation and prepared texts to conjure up a whole universe of social/personal history. Cultural crossovers among artists in performances, exhibitions and other projects enrich the intertextuality of the works and their historical frames of reference.

■ **Intertextuality** proposes that no text can exist alone or be interpreted by itself, but is in fact a linkage of previous texts (each one opening into the other) of a "particular cultural and historic moment." Victor Burgin¹³ cites as one illustration the endlessly proliferating series of subliminal meanings in one liquor advertisement—rags-to-riches, romantic love, physical sexuality—that can be read by the mass audience as the advertiser wants them read.

■ **Subversive signs.** Intrinsic to postmodernism is a shift in art from art objects to a system of social signs entwined with other sign systems that reflect/produce value, power and prestige. In this new role of art, the viewer becomes "an active reader of messages rather than a passive contemplator of the aesthetic, or consumer of the spectacular."¹⁴ Many photographers



In "Americana," its contributions to the 1984 Whitney Biennial, Group Material's aestheticized re-representations of consumer artifacts—washing machines, cereal boxes, along with art commodities—brought its satiric critique of kitsch culture into the heart of the art-world system.

and artists who work in forms like collage, critical texts, videotapes or appropriated photos (among them Jenny Holzer, Hans Haacke, Martha Rosler) have thus become adept sign-manipulators, who convert art-world spaces into arenas for targeting everything from oppressive institutions and media distortions to the corporate control of museums, to the most complex social contradictions.

■ **Seriality and repetition** serve as a means to counter static representations of reality that catch and freeze their subjects into one pose. Against this, they underline the process of constant change or repositioning that characterizes subjects and events in social reality.

These, then, are some of the postmodernist devices that critique traditional categories: gender representations in art; cultural myths; the sanctity of the author/artist; the transcendence (a-historicity) of art. Taken together, these techniques for critical perception are "deconstructive" in nature. That is, by exposing the contradictions of white, male, Western and corporate languages, "they challenge the organization of meaning"¹⁵ in texts and images hidden behind the facade of bourgeois ideology. In fact, only to the degree that a postmodern art confronts, demystifies, finds fissures in, rethinks, takes sides, subverts—in short, deconstructs—prevailing beliefs and aesthetics of our dominant order can it be said to be progressive.

A radical postmodern position, I should add, raises serious questions about traditional "left art" practices which center largely around empathetic portrayals of oppressed subjects and moral denunciations of the oppressors. A deconstructive art, on the contrary, involves a displace-

THREE INTERVIEWS

We asked the following three artists what postmodern influences, if any, they saw in their work. Below are their (condensed) answers.

KRISTIN REED

Like most people of the TV generation, I was exposed at an early age to what have become the manifestations of postmodernism... in print ads, billboards and on the tube. I am attracted to photo images, process, and TV space (like layers of cut-outs in a 3D space). A parallel could be drawn between that space/imagery and the awkward space iconography of pre-Renaissance art. I began to recycle some of these devices into my own 20th-century iconography. Upon developing a political consciousness and reading Marxist art criticism, I became more concerned with socio/political subject matter, i.e., the manipulation of the masses by the power elites. "Postmodernism" was an instinct which I later put my hand on in the library. So much of it was there: appropriation, seriality, abstract space, photo images, text to bounce off the images, humor, etc.

A few years ago I started bringing my work outside the studio and onto walls on the Lower East Side, posters on public buses, etc., still appropriating these devices. I had no interest in repeating the concerns of the great Mexican muralists or the realism of the WPA post office. This is a different age with a very different audience. The contemporary viewer has a postmodern sensibility for complex images, the destruction of normal space and a need to be instantly gratified. I've become interested in painting in lower-income communities where people come in contact with my work accidentally and as part of their daily lives, not in museums and galleries. Perhaps changing the site of my art... moving people who may or may not be visually sophisticated, is the best impulse I can take from postmodernism.

MIERLE LADERMAN UKELES

Postmodernism as a philosophy seems to me to go beyond the romance of modernism—the evil underbelly of its concepts of freedom for the privileged. It brought peoples of different cultures and work contexts into the focus of art. In 1968 I became involved in connecting my art to lived human activity and the industrial processes from which all things come. I did a performance about maintenance—of self, society and, beyond that, the planet itself. (It was based on the underlying notion—as a mother and woman—of having to keep someone alive through an endless repetition of tasks. Through this, I saw the links with those who had to do the maintenance work to keep others alive.) In 1983 I created an installation, "Walls of Stress, Bowls of Devotion,"

for a Bread and Roses exhibition at the Martin Luther King Labor Center. It was suggested, in large part, by a previous experience of having to surrender my mortally ill child to hospital workers. I saw how they worked to put order into the timeless chaos of illness. It was what their union—District 1199—was about—to provide protection so that they wouldn't get sucked into this chaos and get themselves sick—to limit their work to eight hours a day and not a moment longer.

In my piece I tried to go beyond traditional art into an art that grows from inside the context of a workplace (in this case a hospital) and allows working people to see themselves as part of the picture of progress, art and freedom. For this purpose I used postmodern devices such as appropriation, drawing objects from all sources not considered as proper art materials—such as sheets, surgical equipment, a bed, identification tags, clocks and other emergency room furnishings, reworking them aesthetically. My piece essentially attempted to give image and voice to women hospital workers previously rendered invisible by the dominant culture. It's my own redefinition of postmodernism.

DOUG ASHFORD

As willing or unwilling products of our time, we all work within a frame that is reacting to modernity. Nonetheless I'm suspicious of queries centered on the keyword "postmodernism." The implications of this word seem to change dramatically with the intentions of questioners. My first response is "Who's asking?"

Some are seeking the now fashionable response that, "Oh, yes, indeed, history is a myth." As a public high-school teacher in Brooklyn, I find this impossible to verify in the lives of my students, as they design Bed-Stuy's future.

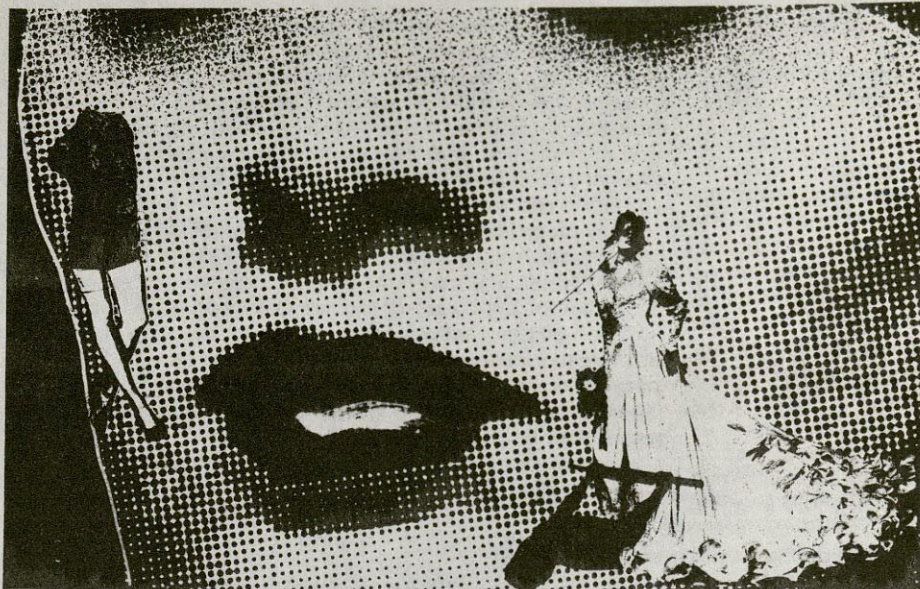
Others are posing questions in order to reinforce oppositional practices that don't work. Nostalgic for base and superstructure, they want answers that reject all recent "postmodernist" itineraries. I find this too often, as part of Group Material, fitting just too nicely into another master narrative about what the left is supposed to do.

I take photos of everyday events as a ground, instead of a blank canvas. I draw on top of these to re-represent people's lives in a critical way. What I want to do is to produce ideas about history—not language or images as a self-contained site. This studio work, or the collaboration with Group Material, or teaching in the classroom are attempts to entertain a more optimistic project—to present or re-present changing social relations within culture as it stands.

Let's face it. The critical re-writing of modernity in itself won't save the artwork, the sentence or the body from late capitalism. It's really a question of who is doing the re-writing and for whom.



"They distract and confuse us with drugs and TV," from a 15-work series entitled "The Extinction of the Guinea Pig," by Kristin Reed, 1987, Metro Bus Show, CEPA Gallery, Buffalo, N.Y.



Untitled, by Elizabeth Rodriguez, Self-Help Graphics and Art, Inc., Los Angeles, 1986. From MoMA catalogue, 1988.

ment of such forms of "realist" representations on canvas, stage, video, photograph or mixed media, by the production of "insurgent messages"* rising from the specific historical circumstances in which the artist locates her/himself. One of these historical circumstances which confront every social artist is the "first world" reality of an overwhelmingly commodified culture, and the extent to which it has gripped the sensibility of a mass audience.

A PERVERSIVE INFLUENCE

Analyses of deconstructive artworks almost always focus on artists exhibiting in the gallery context. Postmodernist devices are, however, no less important for art activists producing their works outside the art mainstream. So widespread is the presence of postmodernist features in these artworks that it would take a book to list them and extrapolate the links.

In New York, groups like Group Material, Colab and, to a lesser extent, PADD, have from their origins incorporated aspects of postmodernism in their projects. Postmodernism is a strong influence in alternative spaces ("Disinformation," an exhibition on media distortions, and other

shows at the Alternative Museum, Franklin Furnace, and all of Group Material's installations). It is part of the repertoire of performance artists like Ishmael Houston-Jones, Robbie McCauley, Fred Holland, Candace Hill-Montgomery and others. It's a staple in Paper Tiger's public access tv shows. Just to flip the pages of Lucy Lipard's *Get the Message? A Decade of Art for Social Change*¹⁶ is an instant education on how oppositional artists throughout the U.S. and abroad have consciously or otherwise integrated postmodernism with their practice/theory/vision.

The public spaces where such work appears are ubiquitous: billboards, advertisements in subways and buses, community and street actions, window art, site-specific projects, protest demonstrations and picketlines. Dealing in any depth with the art of the numerous activists who are influenced by postmodernism is beyond the province of this paper.

The art reproduced in these pages illustrates only a few of the wide range of deconstructive approaches taken by these artists. The recent exhibition "Committed to Print" at MoMA does, however, provide an opportunity to point out the strong postmodernist thrust in the politicalized art of the last few decades. Here are some examples:

"By Any Means," by Tim Rollins and the Kids of Survival, superimposes a configuration of the initials "M" and "X" onto a page of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. The ironic transformation of a corporate-like logo (which also echoes an African

decoration) is a visual reminder of the continuing influence of the assassinated political leader on disenfranchised peoples.

Rudolf Baranik's "Apartheid" is a full-page definition excerpted from his ongoing *Dictionary of the 24th Century*. Minimalizing his formal aspects to a reverse-type photostat, the artist throws into full relief the absurdity of "intraspecies segregation" from the perspective of a future society presumably free of all human oppression.

Alfredo Jaar's subway panels "Rushes" contrast the stark images of unemployed Brazilian workers with a slick advertisement extolling the virtues of Wall Street high finance. The jarring juxtaposition creates a telling social commentary on the interpenetration of exploitation and riches.

Dennis Thomas and Day Gleeson's "Art for the Evicted" was created for the PADD/Not for Sale street-art action to arouse the Lower East Side neighborhood on the issue of gentrification. Silk-screened in the form of a mock Monopoly Deed and posted on abandoned buildings, the print ran down the factors leading to eviction, among them the art community's complicity in raising the rents.

What unifies these works is their concern with disrupting set patterns of beliefs about our dominant social realities and institutions. Their power, as I see it, does not arise from a direct subordination to political ends. It consists, rather, in provoking the viewer—by means of historical traces and innovative formal "breaks"—to question the validity of the psychic as well as sociopolitical forms in which we are trapped. As Jameson suggests, this "mapping" function—seamlessly fusing ideology and aesthetics—lies at the heart of a progressive postmodernism.

Outside New York, postmodernism manifests itself among activists as it does here in every public arena, medium and site, from films and performances, community struggles, billboard art and collective murals, to highly innovative forms of mail art—that unheralded person-to-person version of postmodern communication. On the West Coast, as one significant example, many activists are re-examining their multilayered cultures—Black, Latino-Chicano, indigenous Americans—with new art languages they have had to invent for interpreting their unique circumstances. Often bilingual, bicultural and/or biconceptual, theirs is a culture that combines—in the postmodernist model—interpenetrating sets of symbols, values, styles and reference codes.

*The term "insurgent messages of America" was coined by artist Edgar Heap of Birds. His word posters in various public spaces utilize the aesthetic language of typographic rearrangements to disseminate his opposition to oppressive U.S. practices directed against American Indians.

FROM A BLACK PERSPECTIVE

How do notions of postmodernity appear from the Black perspective? Well, we know that postmodernism purports to leave room in art as in other social discourses for differences and otherness. But as Cornel West persuasively suggests,¹⁷ postmodernism is mediated by and needs to be gauged in the light of the extreme impoverishment, high unemployment and consequent despair that affect so many Blacks. Black artists practicing in the postmodern vein cannot, therefore, escape the constant presence of institutionalized racism.

In developing his thesis, West considers media as diverse as jazz, pop music—from Motown to funk—sports and other spectacles, literature and such linguistic practices as preaching. Funk, he points out, syncretized with the African drumbeat, “becomes an American postmodern product.”¹⁸ “Bebop was after all a revolt against the ‘middle class jazz of museums.’”¹⁹ The music of John Coltrane, Charlie Parker and Miles Davis—wedding black melody, African polyrhythms and technical brilliance—illustrates the dissolution of borders between high and mass culture. West sees rap as a unique blending of Black preaching and music, “replacing the liturgical setting with African polyrhythms.”²⁰ In this manner, the subversive energy of Black youth, pulling together a pastiche of past and present traditions, creates a Black American postmodern expression.

WHERE LATINO MEETS POSTMODERNISMO

With the exception of those of us who have spent a long time working within a North American-European context, ‘postmodernism’ seems a meaningless term.” Why? Because, Mexican artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña explains, “Either it wasn’t a culturally relevant leap to make, or it simply wasn’t available.”²¹ Nevertheless, he points out, Chicano, Latino and Mexican artists were already “involuntarily” practicing deconstructive techniques that were quite similar to those of the newly discovered “ismo.” Long before Warhol and Oldenburg, they were incorporating mass cultural artifacts into their work, juxtaposing borrowed texts and images, utilizing public spaces like streets and barrios for para-artistic events of a multidisciplinary nature. These practices, Gomez-Peña insists, are far from being considered avant-garde. Reconceptualized from myths, combined with folk

objects, “infused with a wild pop iconography” and political subtexts, they are part of an aesthetic vocabulary for activists who see art as a terrain for dealing with the devastating social problems they and their people face.²²

THE GAY COMPONENT

In a society which has historically repressed and oppressed gay expressions of culture, it seems evident why so much of the gay subculture should have links with the postmodern temper. In Charles Frederick’s formulation “Gay people have by law, custom, censorship, violence, even death been excluded from the modernist definition of being human.”* To find their humanity, they have had to leap beyond this patriarchal/heterosexual bias against their sexual practices, self-definition, social patterns and artstyles. A critical postmodernism, in seeking to confer legitimacy on all cultures, can by inference find space within the dominant norms for an alternative gay culture.

As with other subcultures, at least some aspects of gay culture tend toward ghettoization, subversion of given values and self-referentiality—in this case, men making love to men.²³ Secret or coded forms, masked and multiple readings, style as personal statements of identity—all these can play an important role in gay art, sending out different significations to straight and gay audiences. Deconstruction or “quotations” to undermine heterosexual authority, “universal” values and fixed meanings in texts is a favored device (e.g., Theatre of the Ridiculous). Camp, drag, sexual

*I am indebted to Charles Frederick for these perceptive suggestions.

“Born Again,” by Jerry Kearns, 1988, portrays the “royal” nuclear family as parents, giving birth in the duplicitous present to a future of suffering and sacrifice (a la Durer). Different levels of text—Reaganist patriarchy, media, pop culture and art history—are montaged into a warning of what history has in store for us unless we intervene.



crossovers in theatre and performance art, gay representations in visual art, serve to undo and scramble gender roles. Taking on, as Frederick terms it, “a promiscuous rhetoric, gays refuse to get married and settle down forever with a monogamous aesthetic.” This response to repression as a means of cultural survival is an integral part of the gay/postmodern connection.

THE FEMINIST CRITIQUE

The relevance of postmodernism in its most positive sense to feminist art has been dealt with extensively. It is in fact (as many writers have noted in recent books and articles²⁴) the feminist objections to patriarchal values and vested cultural interests that opened the way to more radical forms of postmodernism. Taking my cues from these texts, I want to touch on a few consequences, as expressed in women’s art, of the feminist attack on the received premises of modernism:

- Collaging/montaging/hybridizing images and languages from various media and historical sources to subvert male bias underlying mass cultural or high art representations of women.

- Upgrading what had been until recently relegated to the status of household arts—weaving, sewing, embroidery, decoration—as proper aesthetic practices.

- Linking masculinist representations in art to such social issues as power, privilege, sexism, racism and class relationships.

- Posing the question of sexual differences in a manner that clarifies “the woman artist’s identity: her body, psyche, feelings, her position in society.”²⁵

Artists who have been redefining art practices such as photography, visual art, installations, site-specific projects and performances include: Barbara Kruger, Martha Rosler, Mary Kelly, Cindy Sherman and others. In two of the preceding interviews, art activists Kristin Reed and Mierle Ukeles discuss in some detail the postmodern influence in their artworks.

SOME FINAL OBSERVATIONS

I am keenly aware of unanswered questions. Do my readings grossly overstate the postmodern/activist confluence? If we view postmodernism as the dominant cultural condition of global capitalism, aren't we prisoners of this phenomenon? And if so, isn't the existence of an oppositional postmodernism illusory? In a postmodernist world, have the socially "real"/illustrative/tendentious artforms (protest posters, documentary photography, figurative murals) lost their effectiveness with young audiences for whom—as Baudrillard suggests—electronic images are more real than life itself? When cultural activists shift their focus to the more cerebral and often baffling art of sign subversion, how much is lost in accessibility and conviction? Can such postmodernist art move and change the consciousness of audiences outside the largely urban art-world nexus of galleries, museums, magazines, art schools, university art departments?

In the last analysis, it is not a matter of embracing or dismissing postmodernism. We already inhabit a palpably postmodern landscape, strewn with the mass-cultural debris and the alienated art of an obses-

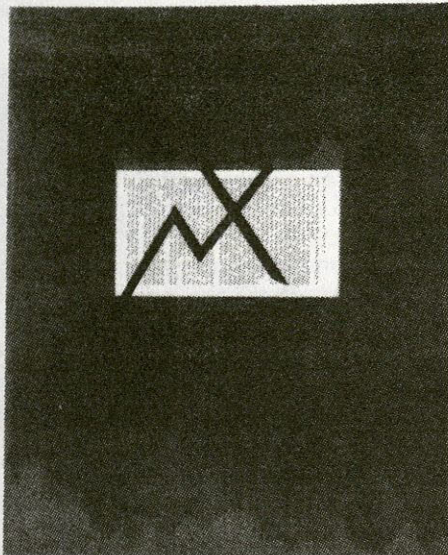
sively commodified society. An integral part of our struggle is to find free cultural space within this circumscribed landscape for an art of advocacy, accessibility and, of course, persuasion. Paradoxical—and problematic—as it may seem, postmodernism can be successfully critical. Yet there is still an absence of an ongoing mass oppositional movement where radical art

otherwise) can most effectively address issues of mortal risk to humanity: the arms race, world poverty, human oppression, ecological destruction, the media colonization of mass consciousness and, yes, the viability of our social order itself.

And we need to be critically alert to the retrogressive aspects of postmodernism. It is indeed part art-world chic, part academic rhetoric, part media spectacle. Dehistoricized and depthless, indifferent to social, moral or aesthetic values, an "art-market" postmodernism can easily be read as "the newest mutation of cultural life within the metastasizing box of late capitalism in the developed world."²⁶ Finally, we can't overlook the capacity of the cultural industry to co-opt and defuse every oppositional element in postmodernism. Whatever its brave original intentions, even the most "subversive" rock video now channels the rebellious stance of the young—its yearning for creative and erotic fulfillment—into sexist, fantasy and consumerist ends. Galleries are filled with artworks that pastiche a gamut of styles and images into formalist gestures largely empty of historical sense.

As a counterpoint to the above, I have argued, a socially grounded postmodernism now making its influence felt within the spectrum of resistance art—community, feminist, gay and ethnic—may nevertheless be seen as part of what Raymond Williams has termed "emergent" culture.* As art activists concerned with revitalizing the currently disarrayed movement for cultural democracy, we write off postmodernism unconditionally to our own detriment.

—Thoroughly Postmodern Irving



Tim Rollins plus K.O.S. *By Any Means Possible*, Fashion Moda, New York, 1986. Silk-screen on book page. From MoMA 1988 Catalogue.

practices before diverse audiences can test out the validity of any cultural theories. It is within such a supportive framework—beyond as well as within the mainstream artworld—that our art (postmodernist or

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12. Kate Linker, "Representation and Sexuality," in *Art After Modernism*, 413.
13. Victor Burgin, *The End of Art Theory*, Humanities Press International, Inc. 1986, 73.
14. Hal Foster, *Recodings*, Bay Press, Port Townsend, Wash, 1985, 100.
15. Greg Sholette, "Shake It Up—Some Thoughts on Deconstruction and Art," *UPFRONT*, No. 9, Fall, 1984, 35.
16. Lucy R. Lippard, *Get the Message: A Decade of Art for Social Change*, E.P. Dutton Inc. New York, 1984.
17. Cornel West, Interview by Anders Stephanson, in *Flash Art*, No. 133, April, 1987, pp. 51-55.
18. West, pp. 53-54.
19. West, pp. 53-54.
20. West, pp. 53-54.
21. Guillermo Gómez-Peña, "A New Artistic Continent," *High Performance*, Vol. 9, 1986, pp. 24-31. I am also indebted to the article "The Artist as Citizen," by Emily Hicks, in the same issue, pp. 33-37.
22. See 21.
23. Michael Bronski, *Culture Clash*, South End Press, Boston, MA, provides a good background on the making of the gay sensibility.
24. See especially *Art After Modernism*, and *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, (Hal Foster, Editor), Bay Press, Townsend, Wash, 1983.
25. Ulrike Rosenbach, as quoted by Mary Kelly, "Re-viewing Modernist Criticism," in *Art After Modernism*, 97.
26. Pfeil, 127.

Two decades after the Vietnam War jolted artists into activism, political/social art has “arrived” at the Museum of Modern Art. In this period, committed /empowering/oppositional art—as it has variously been termed—has proliferated into a national movement and spilled over into the terrain of the art-world itself. Now, finally, the prestigious MoMA opened its hallowed halls to socially conscious art via its knock-out exhibition: *Committed to Print: Social and Political Themes in Recent American Printed Art*. Another excellent exhibition in the political vein, *Representing Vietnam 1965-1973/The Antiwar Movement in America*, also took place recently at the Leubsdorf Art Gallery at Hunter College.

What's more, to the satisfaction of

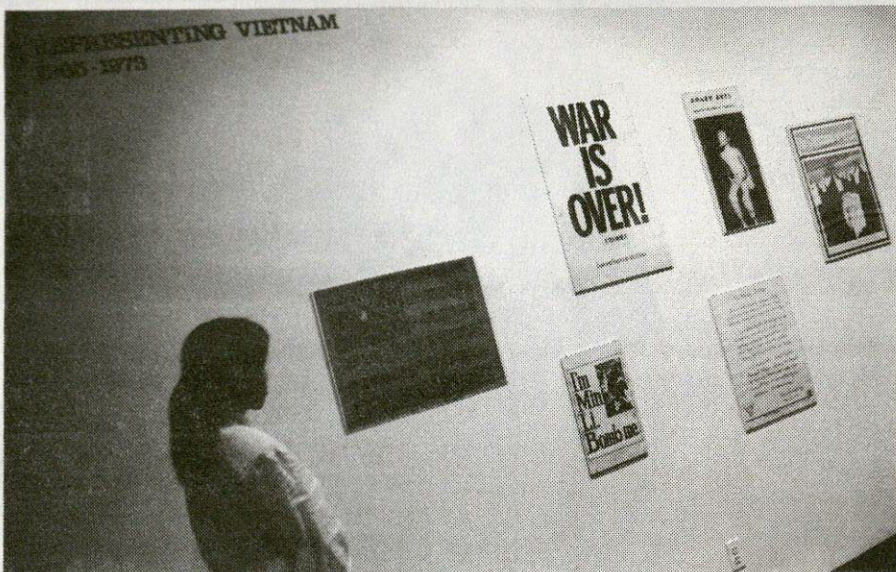


PHOTO BY PAULA COURT

View of “Representing Vietnam, 1965-1973/The Antiwar Movement in America” exhibition, at Hunter College, 1988.

MoMA AND HUNTER COLLEGE HOST POLITICAL SHOWS

PADD and its archivists Barbara Moore and Mimi Smith (among fluctuating others), their seven hectic years of building an International Archive received further validation as a major research source for both shows.

The MoMA exhibition offered an astounding array of works by 108 artists and 16 collectives (including several PADD members). Ranging from etchings, silkscreens and lithographs through

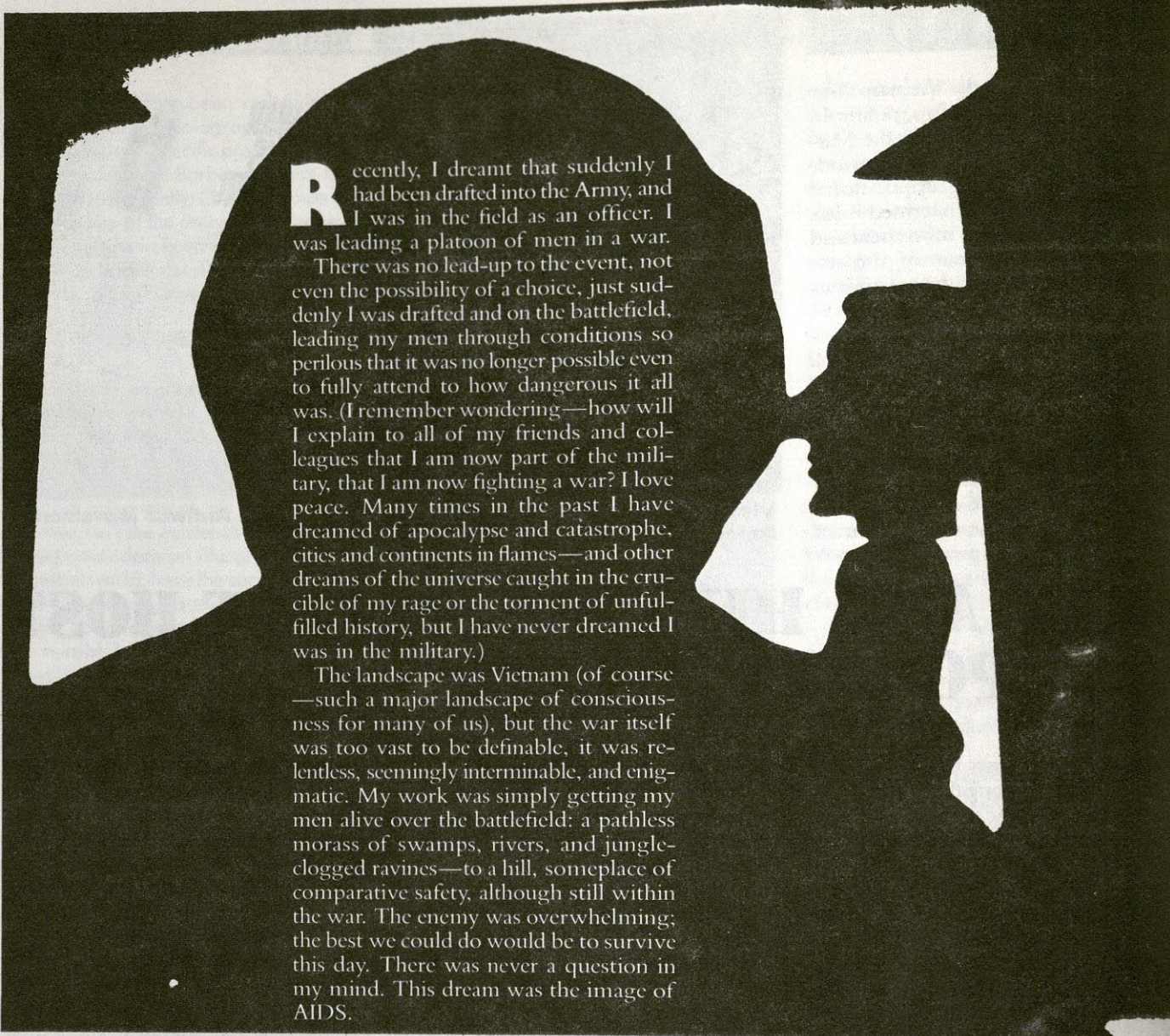
stencils, computer prints and artists' books, the works also reflected a full spectrum of racial and ethnic origins—as well as the equality of sexes—of the artists involved. This multiplicity was accentuated by the thematic rather than stylistic or chronological groupings of the artworks. Sections were devoted, for example, to themes such as Race/Culture; War/Revolution; Nuclear Power/Ecology, and Gender.

View of “Committed to Print: Social and Political Themes in Recent American Printed Art,” at the Museum of Modern Art, 1988.



Despite the presence of “name” artists like Warhol, Johns, Rauschenberg, Dine and Stella, the dominant sense was of a broad representation of socially aware artists and a democratic diversity of aesthetic approaches. Providing a common thread to the exhibition was the artists' profound concern for the urgent political, social and human problems facing people everywhere. If the large, enthusiastic crowds and critical reviews were any indication, *Committed to Print* was one of the liveliest and most thought-provoking MoMA shows in years. Full credit for this ground-breaker belongs to curator Deborah Wye, who also produced the lucid and exhaustively informative catalogue to accompany the exhibition.

Representing Vietnam, organized by Maurice Berger, was much smaller in scope, focusing on a single theme as witnessed by artists in their own time. A mix of fine art, posters, films and ephemera, the show was a vivid reminder of the potency of this country's moral repugnance to war. One hopes that its immediacy made a strong impression on student viewers, whose conception of Vietnam veers schizily between the dryness of history textbooks and the brutality/romanticization dualism of Hollywood movies. As spelled out in Berger's fine catalogue essay, “Pay Attention,” it can happen again.



Recently, I dreamt that suddenly I had been drafted into the Army, and I was in the field as an officer. I was leading a platoon of men in a war. There was no lead-up to the event, not even the possibility of a choice, just suddenly I was drafted and on the battlefield, leading my men through conditions so perilous that it was no longer possible even to fully attend to how dangerous it all was. (I remember wondering—how will I explain to all of my friends and colleagues that I am now part of the military, that I am now fighting a war? I love peace. Many times in the past I have dreamed of apocalypse and catastrophe, cities and continents in flames—and other dreams of the universe caught in the crucible of my rage or the torment of unfulfilled history, but I have never dreamed I was in the military.)

The landscape was Vietnam (of course—such a major landscape of consciousness for many of us), but the war itself was too vast to be definable, it was relentless, seemingly interminable, and enigmatic. My work was simply getting my men alive over the battlefield: a pathless morass of swamps, rivers, and jungle-clogged ravines—to a hill, someplace of comparative safety, although still within the war. The enemy was overwhelming; the best we could do would be to survive this day. There was never a question in my mind. This dream was the image of AIDS.

Gloria Bornstein, "Soup Kitchen".

AIDS

HEALING THE PERSON IS THE FIRST STEP IN FINDING A CURE

BY CHARLES FREDERICK

My work with AIDS has been very difficult, anguishing even, but at the same time, paradoxically, tremendously enlightening—as much for its cultural dimension as for the more immediately apparent political and other human dimensions.

AIDS has brought me close to questions of ordinary (*mundana*) experience and its attendant suffering that, with our hyperactive quest for political understanding, we sometimes slight or even leave to others in the society. So we risk that the frame of consciousness for these questions will never develop beyond

charity. And however admirable charity might be as a human impulse and action, as a form of consciousness (*conciencia*) it is not radical, empowering, transforming, since charity presumes an eternal category of holy victim. We who wish to heal history have left its everyday work to others, leaving us both lacking.

On the left, we have been concerned (sometimes almost desperately during the Reagan era when we have become so weak) with trying to keep alive the notion of people's material and other human rights in society and culture, and trying to bring into image and other sensuous articulation the continuing and

worsening plight of the poor and oppressed of U.S. society, and those around the globe who are besieged by our government and way of life.

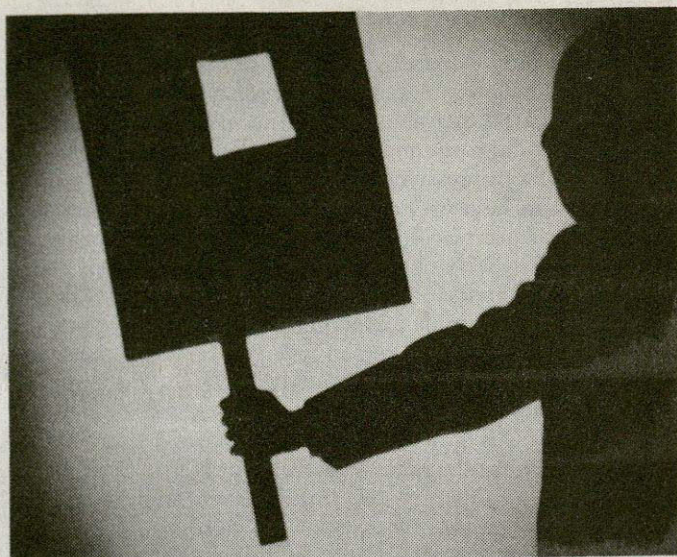
AIDS, of course, is one of the urgent political subjects in our concern with justice and the well being of people in history. But what happens from working closely with people with AIDS is that questions of what is good and right, comforting or destroying, become experienced personally, immediately.

We all know that the question of cultural and community identity is not an abstraction. But the way a strong identity of self—for our worth, our beauty, how we each significantly contribute to the general human community—is essential to personal well being is never so poignantly presented as it has been in the midst of this devastation.

It is necessary to recognize the significance of the conditions of life that have characterized the two communities currently most affected by AIDS in the U.S.—IV drug users and gay men. We became susceptible to an enigmatic physiological syndrome, a loss of our immune systems, so our bodies became unable to defend ourselves, became vulnerable to terrible diseases, common in the world, but rare, except in AIDS, with the epidemic power to debilitate and destroy. But long, long before AIDS, we were bodies of people—communities—already severely weakened by oppression.

I am not saying that these specific experiences of oppression were the cause of the onslaught of AIDS, but I am saying that certain deleterious circumstances materially conditioning our communities were the expression of/immersed in/manifest of/a cultural condition. It is clear that IV drug users are almost unimaginably reduced in their human existence. Gay people (who inhabit many classes and situations in this society) also are reduced, in the expression of our human capacity (right/joy/power) of loving to an often squalid and always pariah experience.

To elaborate a little: much gay sex has been forced to take place in degrading and exploitative conditions, materially unhealthy and materially perilous: like the baths, backrooms, movie houses, public lavatories, truck stops, parks, etc. It was not



Gloria Bornstein, "Soup Kitchen".

the choice of gay people that this is where they should have sex. This is where sex was "permitted" for gay people, where people could find each other for sex—which is an undeniable and primary dimension of love. The result, of course, was that whereas in these places the sex of love was available, the other dimensions of relationship, essential to the full construction and realization of human identity were not.

(I should note that since these were the available—"permitted"—places, they acquired a libidinous aura in gay culture, in fact were fetishized. Given the pariah status of gay people and our depiction as monsters by church, state, commercial and common culture, these places also seemed the true stage—even to gay people themselves—on which gay people should perform their acts of love. Both as metaphor and as actual experience, this was the understanding of our sexuality. Finally, in this society, all homosexuality is a form of pornography.)

Not only were these degraded and degrading conditions, from



Ed Paschke, Vosotros (oil on canvas 42" x 80"), 1983.

COURTESY OF LEHMAN COLLEGE

COURTESY PHYLLIS KIND GALLERY, NEW YORK AND CHICAGO

a public health or psychological perspective, but also, these gatherings were prey to attack and exposure. And, because of the external cultural prohibitions against free gay expression of love, and the internal dimensions of that oppression—guilt and self loathing—in the panic and instability of these conditions, sex could become oppressively obsessive.

I want to make it very clear: I am not issuing a blanket condemnation of promiscuity; I am critically describing obsessive behavior, behavior that is not free choice. There are many forms of promiscuity, and each must be understood and evaluated independently. Multiple partnering is a valid phase or practice of human relationship—human love. Monogamous and perpetual partnering is simply a choice according to the composition of an individual personality.

Since habitually gay people are only named by our way of sex—overdetermining a behavior as the only way to recognize an identity—our identity sometimes became an obsessive torment, the manic side of the equation of oppression. Eyes bright with excitement, the manic functions by relentless activity, racing away from the heart of despair and fear. Adrenalin intensity is not sustainable depth.

The depressive side is the bitterness of self loathing. The ineffable loneliness, the melancholy of having only part of a name, to be a lover without a lover, to be a verb with no subject. Obsessive coupling reveals an unquenchable thirst for love. We pace back and forth in the prison of a false and calumnious naming.

The hegemonic culture still refuses to call our way of sex a way of love. Perhaps because our way of sex—men fucking men—contradicts the economy of love (and abdicates its internal relations of domination) which officially makes reproduction the privileged productive result of relationship. Whereas, isn't it true that relationship itself is the productive result of relationship? And sex is simply its psycho-physical expression. This is the profound challenge of homosexuality: that sexuality is first and foremost the expression of love. Sex is another dimension of living that brings us into human self recognition.

Only patriarchs—grasping, miserly, counting their wealth of progeny like so many lusterless coins—in their obscene representation of sex, will shackle women, reduce millions of children to poverty and misery, and throw faggots on inquisitionary fires. In his distorted imagination, the patriarch reduces love making to an accountant's tally of propagation.

So—because the liberatory potential of our sexual/amatory identity cannot yet be realized, our identity remains unstable,

John Heys in David Wojnarowicz's "Sounds in the Distance," directed by Allen Frame.



PHOTO BY ALLEN FRAME

yearning, diseased with the fever of unfulfillment, restless and subversive rather than truly liberating. In fact, the struggle against homosexual oppression is not reducible to a struggle for the civil and human rights of homosexual people, it is the struggle for the liberation of all human sexuality. Our particular experience of oppression (dialectically) has revealed that potential for universal freedom.

And then we are constantly living with the fear of loss of livelihood and even our children, as well as with the continual gnaw of anticipation of violent attack. In sum—for gay people to express love is to imperil our lives. And, in fact, with the phenomenon of AIDS, our oppressed culture became the suitable spawning ground for the deadly virus.

Strong self images of human worth within a sense of security are requirements of health. And when people become sick, they need a strong interior base for healing, a base which can only be built if they are recognized for their beauty (yes, beauty) exactly for how and who they are, and are compassionately loved and wanted by the world around them.

Of course, this alone is not enough to heal people with AIDS. AIDS is a biological devastation in which we are still ultimately powerless. But it is a devastation which the whole society must take some responsibility for. And when people have become sick in the way in which they have with AIDS, the entire society should wish to and act to comfort those affected.

Our motto in AIDS work is that we are "living with AIDS." Further, we all have AIDS—until that time when an answer is found. The deeper lesson in AIDS is how important all life is. And oppression of any kind is a bleeding unto death of life's potential. How can any of us, seeing this devastation, feeling this agony, ever again countenance life except with the commitment for the fullest development of each life's potential?

And AIDS is only a severe example of the prevalence of illness in our society, a lens bringing the larger failure into focus. Illness is culturally expressed all around us in the oppressions of race, sex and class, and is materially manifest under a legion of names: malnutrition, pollution-induced cancers, industrial accidents, lead poisoning, infant mortality, diseases of exposure (like TB among the homeless), and on and on. The cultural diseases both create receptivity for "physical" illness in affected people and then hinder the possibilities of healing. These are diseases (like war) that afflict the people who don't matter.

And then—beyond this awareness of how people are weakened by their place in society—when you work with AIDS, you are brought face to face with the existential dimension of what is so often abstracted by political work: the question of death and dying. Certainly the mission of progressive work is the mission to ensure the best conditions of living for all. But in our society particularly—and throughout our society, left, right, and center—we are so afraid of confronting death, especially death as part of living.

Working with AIDS, like working for peace, like working against any oppression that curtails life, means a struggle for life, railing against senseless death. But, just as importantly, in any work of healing, we must find a way to approach death as something that will and must happen. It shouldn't be happening the way it is with AIDS. People are dying senselessly and too young. It is a cause both for despair and anger. We cannot yet overcome the disease. This causes a sense of helplessness, and it can seem that the humanly constructed world we live in cares nothing about this devastation, and that becomes yet another quiver of arrows piercing our Sebastian's body.

But then the moments come for people with AIDS, when it

must be recognized that death is a probable result of this disease. It is not a simple death sentence. There must always be hope. But the hope cohabits with despair. And there is a basic commitment that friends and care partners must take on: to travel with a person on his or her journey through the end of life.

It is my belief that to work most effectively with AIDS, the work should be performed within a distinct cultural tradition. So, I returned to a cultural base which I had somewhat abandoned earlier. I was raised in a Catholic culture. I carefully use the word "culture" here rather than religion, because I had experienced Catholicism more as a practice of (theatrical) ritual and an immersion in myth than I had ever as simply an arid dogma and constraining habit. The tradition was oral and folkloric, both wise and foolish as much in its superstitions as in its orthodoxies.

True there were enormous constraints in the tradition, but I don't know of any culture that is not in some way constraining; even as I don't know of any culture which does not propose a Utopia where someday all constraints will vanish.

My first experience of Catholicism was as an unfolding and simultaneously enfolding Cosmos, which, depending on my state of pain or happiness, was either a swaddling blanket of heaven or a shell of hellfire around me. However the experience might vary and constrict my liberty, the freedom of this culture was to give me a place in the universe, both inside of and outside of human history, where I was brought into organized relationship with human community, and equally I was brought into intimate relationship with the incessantly continuous universe: earth, seasons turning on a wheel of birth, death, and resurrection, stars, angels, gods and saints.

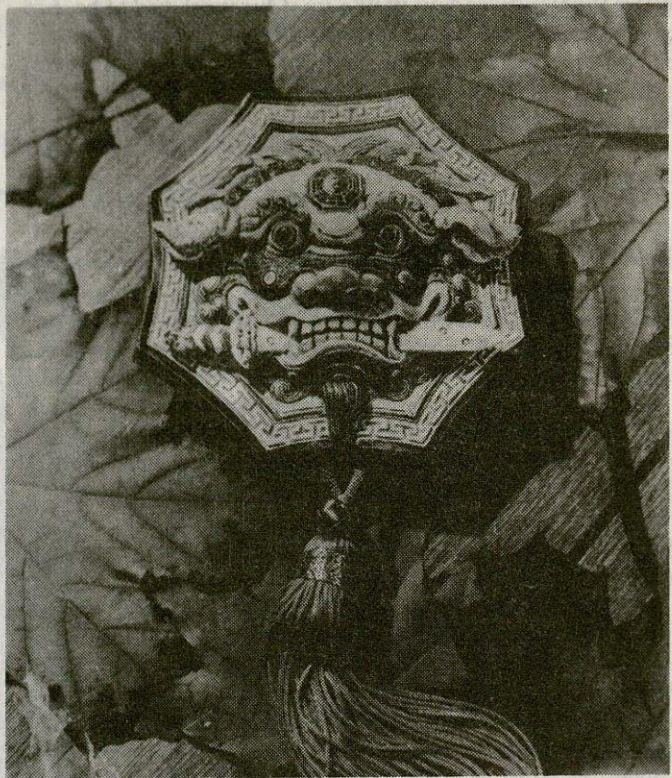
My break with the Catholic tradition came with developing consciousness. There could not be only a single name of god, if there could be any name at all, if there was a god at all—after all, questions are the only path to faith. And people cannot live without faith—a broad and enormously diverse potential with which we comprehend an awesome universe. Without some form of faith, all other human knowledge is partial.

The history of Catholicism was not a "redeemed" history; there were two wings on this angel's back. One may have been grey with wisdom, but the other was red from slaughter, a history of oppression and violence. Later I learned Catholicism was the justifier of imperialism, slavery, pogroms—and it always rested on the oppression of women.

Still later, when I learned more about who I am, I learned also that it declared me, a gay man, to be damned because of my very identity, and told me that when I loved I sinned against love in its most transcendent meaning, as though there could be any distinction between truth and its incarnation in experience, as though human love known most intensely in sexual encounter were not itself a continual reimmersion in all that love might be throughout the universe.

I could go on about my disappointment at the failure of this tradition to empower my identity, but suffice it to say that I came to see Catholicism as destructive to the fulfillment of my life's potential, rather than a mythic route to truth and liberation.

When I began to work with AIDS, however, the dilemma was that I would have to work within a cultural tradition I already knew, since I understood that questions of the magnitude that a person with AIDS must face could only be adequately dealt with from within cultural traditions, to give the individual human experience a home. Many people with AIDS go through this experience without connecting to the tradi-



Pi-Hsieh (Lion Head Warding Off Evil Spirits) by Kao Chih-ming (circa 1970).

tions of their birth. But this is most often because they have been rejected by their traditions. Often they then go through their lives suffering from this unhealable wounding.

This should not be. In moments of such crisis, all of the strength and collective wisdom which is a person's right and human treasure must be made available to him or her. Even if a person decides not to use it, somehow the resource must still be available.

Gay Catholics suffering from AIDS often reach back to the mythic realms they first came upon in their childhoods. Like shamans they need these planes of existence to find the routes through their crisis. They must be able to live concurrently in many realms of existence, since at this moment, the material (mundane) realm does not give them the answers and there, in the material realm, identity is reduced to illness, weakness, fear and despair.

Whereas, on simultaneous planes, people with AIDS can stand and walk strong, can reflect freely on the condition of their existence, can plan for the future in whatever language their personal interpretation of the mythic tradition provides. The realms of myth are equal in truth and experience to the realms of the material universe. Myth only becomes debilitating mysticism and avoidance of reality when it is not incarnate in material existence. However materialism too becomes a debilitating mysticism and a refusal of the full potential of reality when its proportions are not corrected by transcendence, properly described only in myth.

Official Catholicism however, put a patriarchal angel and a burning sword at the gates of these gardens. It declared homosexuality a sin. It didn't declare some particular aspect of relationship within homosexual practice a sin—as might be found to plague any genre of sexual relationship—such as exploitation on the basis of race or class, a callous disregard for the human integrity of another individual, etc. Instead it chose to

declare the faculty of love itself a sin. Our work had to be, has to be, to remove the burning sword. We have to help people live the liberatory capacity of the myths of their tradition, to retell the stories for their truth, not to repeat them in their ideological misrepresentation.

It's the same thing we say about all aspects of culture and society: self-determination. It is the people, in a community, in a society who must determine their destiny and potential. The authority must be free, democratic and collectively self-critical. Just extend that to the cultural tradition itself: the people who live in the tradition, who are the tradition as it is immanent in history, must authorize the meaning and experience of that tradition. They should not be forced (oppressed) to deny their tradition so they might prevail in their immediate life and identity.

This has been an exciting and provocative work. To reach into the heart of a cultural tradition and keep it alive. It makes the cultural tradition the arms of comfort and strength any tradition must continuously develop to be. And it recognizes the truth within what people continue to believe, not to make the arrogant mistake of judging people incomplete and unconscious because they find wisdom in what they believe.

Concretely, I have found a number of tasks in this effort. On the one hand I work intimately with people with AIDS, creating new relationships of mutual love and caring. We learn together, dwelling mutually in the house of existence, our journeys intersecting. Also, I have used my skills of organizing, developed in the service of so many struggles over the years, to facilitate the effort of the AIDS ministry in Dignity, a gay Catholic organization. As a writer I find new articulations of the Catholic tradition to combat the oppressive dicta of the hierarchy. I deepen constantly my appreciation of the personal existential reality of people and give back in newly crafted form what is so often handed over to me in shards.

We always need to find the ways to help build strength in our communities: the strength of liberation rather than the weakness of accommodation. We must struggle to keep the two words, gay and AIDS, from collapsing into a single curse. We have named ourselves "gay people." We must work very hard to keep the primary meaning of our name to be the potential for liberation of all human sexuality.

This is a very difficult task, as we all know. People have learned much too well to hate themselves and to believe in the omnipotence of their oppression, paradoxically often by denying the concrete consequences of their oppression, even to deny to what extent they might come under attack if the crisis we

are in U.S. society intensifies. We, gay people, deny how with the disease, with our pariah status in U.S. culture, with our political isolation, we are the perfect scapegoats. We are the easily appointed lesson to be presented, gathered in camps, to other groups who form more formidable potential opposition.

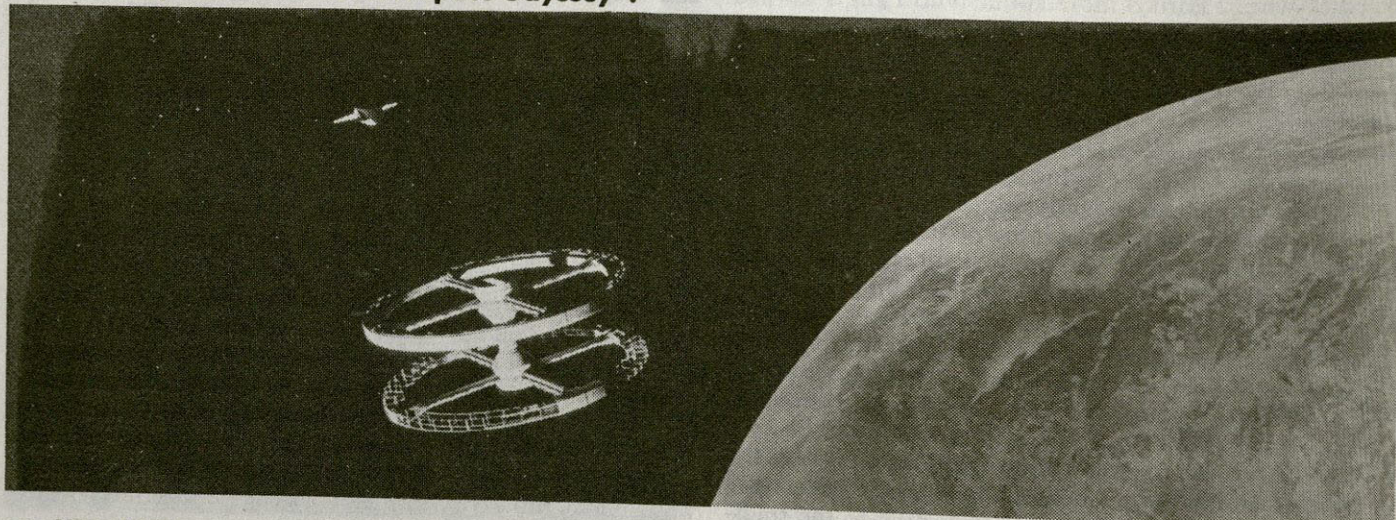
To help an oppressed community unlearn oppression requires a different work of art, teaching me anew what community animation might mean. I have organized an activist caucus in the Dignity community in New York, and now work within and as part of that caucus. As the facilitator I am a cultural worker, assisting people to discover confident expression of their identity.

This requires a twofold continuous activity: articulated community reflection on life experience to free ourselves from internalized oppression, and simultaneously, activism against the Church authorities to build a new self image while effectively striking out against the external organization of oppression. This converts the oppressed community into the prophetic community.

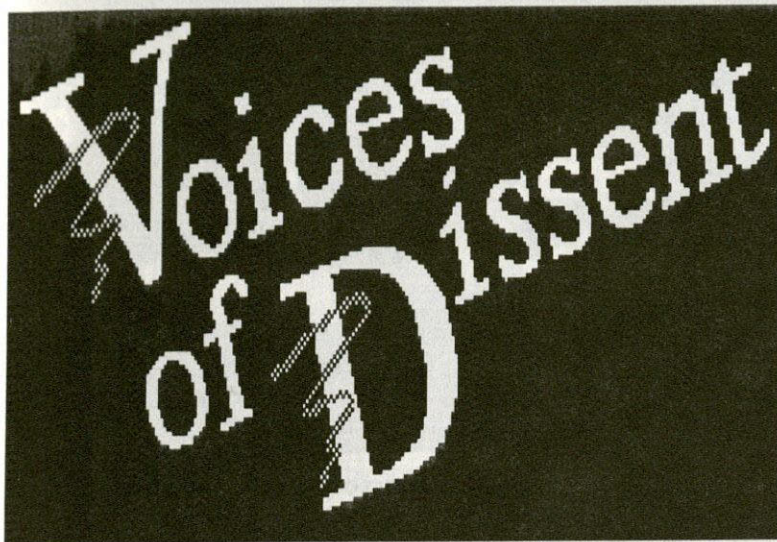
From my own history (shall I call it a career?) I am able to bring an awareness not common in U.S. society of the commonality of oppression. I can help name what people are doing in this part of the gay community as another theme in the worldwide developing theologies of liberation, from many different religious traditions. I can help people to see that what gay people are going through can be understood as part of the same general world order which makes war in Central America, fills the streets with the homeless, denies women authority over their own bodies, makes people of color the burnt black bottom of the American melting pot, makes some people poor so others can be rich.

It is a long, long struggle—as we all know. But even while it has exhausted me, I feel full of new wisdom from this work. I have learned how to listen to the oldest and most profound stories in a people's culture so to tell the new stories that people need to hear. I have learned to listen with a new patience to people finding the ways to their freedom. And I have learned how the most important function of art and culture is always the healing of the ills in the way of human freedom. I have learned to accept death while never accepting senseless death. I have learned how the value of life is finally immeasurable to everyone. My own humanity has been deepened and enlarged as I have listened to litanies of awesome grief. The witness of People with AIDS are psalms crying out the sadness and the hope of the world for our time.

From Stanley Kubrick's "2001: A Space Odyssey".



Voices of Dissent, a symposium on the arts as a force for social change, was held at Drexel University in Philadelphia, April 10–12, 1987. Organized by The Painted Bride and Big Small Theater as part of Philadelphia's two month celebra-



tion of the bicentennial of the Constitution, Voices of Dissent attracted a few hundred artists, art users, and activists. The theme was that "historically the role of artistic dissent has not been merely reactive, but visionary." The following edited excerpts are from the plenary session on "Censorship and the Limits to Free Speech."

RONNIE GILBERT

Years ago I was a singer with a folk group called The Weavers. Quite surprisingly to us, we suddenly found ourselves in the public eye as commercial artists. We were singers who would have preferred to sing for college students in small concerts and little places like the Photo League in New York. But in order to stay alive (because we couldn't get a big enough audience that way), we went to work in a club in New York City called the Village Vanguard, which still exists, and were catapulted, as they say, into the legendary world of popular music.

Along came a Decca recording contract, and lo and behold, the very first song that we recorded, which we were told by Decca was not commercial enough to record, became a hit. It was an Israeli song called "Tzeyna, Tzeyna, Tzeyna," and on the back of that was another song called "Goodnight Irene," which they had said the same thing about and suddenly the records were all across the country in juke boxes from Oklahoma, South Dakota, and wherever Aglawla is, and there we were: recording artists, recording stars.

This never-never land went on for two years, at which point we were doing a nightclub date in Springfield, Illinois. We came back to our hotel, and you know those old movies where the hunted man is looking at a newspaper and sees his own name? Big picture, big name on the back of the newspaper: "WEAVERS NAMED REDS!" And that was the end to our career as big shot recording artists. That was the first brush with censorship we had.

This was 1952. Our first record came out in 1950. By 1952 we were finished with that career—but not finished. We separated for a couple of years and then came back and did exactly what we wished we had been doing in the beginning, which

was sing for college audiences and concerts and so forth, and we had a respectable career after that. So that's the history of the Weavers.

I have since come back to sing on my own and prolong a career as an off-off-Broadway theatre actress and have done other things, and I have come to sing again in public with a woman by the name of Holly Near, a very very strong activist/feminist. It has been my privilege to work with a woman of another generation and to appear together on the stage and to show that life indeed does go on and that it didn't start yesterday.

So why am I interested in being part of a panel discussing censorship? As long as I can remember during my career I have been asked, "Why were you blacklisted? Why?" And I have lived the answer to that question many, many times. But I've always had this sneaking thing in my mind.

Yes, of course our names were associated with progressive causes and we never made any secret about who we were and what we believed in. But as Decca recording stars, our life, our singing, our songs were pretty innocuous. Rock stars nowadays sing songs that are far more inflammatory than the kinds of things that we did. Okay, one answer is that the House Un-American Activities Committee was looking for headlines, and they were interested in anybody who had a name that would make the newspapers in that day of hysteria. But I have come to feel that there was something inherently dangerous in what we were doing. Even a little song like one we used to sing called "Hey, li di li di lo." It's a banjo tune and it ends with "Sing this song in every land, hey li di li di lo, dance together hand in hand, hey li di li di lo." Nothing could be more... I mean, need I say?

Now what was the great danger in this? The great danger was that at a time when communists—now it's "terrorists," but "communists" was the scare word then, and the Korean



The Weavers being filmed for the movie "Wasn't That a Time" during rehearsal for 1980 reunion concert. L. to r.: Lee Hayes, Pete Seeger, Fred Hellerman, Ronnie Gilbert.

war was being heated up without even being declared, when a cold war was being heated up with the Soviet Union—just to speak of peace, to speak of what we then called "brotherhood," fellowship, kinship with all humanity, was a little scary. It was a little bit dangerous.

But more than that, it was not so much in the words themselves, but in the feeling that this particular group engendered. The Weavers made people feel good. It made people feel like they could sing, too. Like they had a kinship with one another, like there could be hope, like there could be peace, possibly. So it wasn't that the oversimplified lyrics that we were singing were in themselves so incisive and dangerous, but it was about a feeling that ran absolutely contrary to the feeling that the government, the authorities, were trying to engender in the land, which was fear. FEAR. Fear your neighbor, fear your employer, fear your employee, fear your teacher and so on. We went contrary to that and that was dangerous—which brings me to something more important than The Weavers.

I remember being asked by a young woman who was interviewing me, "What was it like when your worst possible nightmare came true in 1952?" And I was aghast. Could she really believe that that was my worst possible nightmare?! Being blacklisted? It was pretty rough, I mean it was scary and nobody likes to have their living taken away from them or have themselves dragged out in public, but that was never my worst possible nightmare.

My worst possible nightmare exists in the world, has existed in the world, and exists in the world in terrible, terrible intensity today, and that is the nightmare of torture. What would happen if we were taken to jail, what would happen if we were tortured? Why is it that poets, singers, writers are attacked by the police in societies which torture? Why are they torn apart? Because it is poetry, it is song lyrics, that pull together what is torn apart in this world, because poetry makes whole, makes an ideal of wholeness in a time when by violence things are torn apart.

ISHMAEL HOUSTON-JONES

My name is Ishmael Houston-Jones, and I am an independent choreographer now working out of New York City. My first response to being asked about my own brush with censorship was that I've never been censored, and I thought that was true. Reflecting on this, I came up with a whole series of questions which I'm going to inflict upon you as I am not a firm believer in answers, but I'm a definite believer in questions.

One form of censorship you must deal with is self-censorship. How that affects me and my work comes from the fact that I am not in control of my own means of financial support to make my art. Partly this is due to the fact that I do not belong to (or there is a lack of) a community of artists to which I can belong. So I must seek—as a means of support—government, foundation, and in some instances, corporate funding.

I began thinking: how many resumés do I have? There's the general Ishmael Houston-Jones resumé that goes out to some people. But in writing to different organizations, different foundations, different government agencies from which I receive support, I sometimes use the resumé that either eliminates or minimizes the Central American stuff, as I call it. Then there's the one that sort of skirts the gay stuff, then there's the resumé that leaves out the nudity stuff, then there's the black liberation stuff, the Palestinian stuff, the internationalist stuff—all this stuff. Depending on which organization, which corporation, which funding agency I'm applying to, certain aspects of my work become more or less important.

Does this reflect on my work? I don't know. I would hope not. But it does reflect on the mind set, it does reflect how I go about seeking funding for my work. Therefore I think (and I'm not sure) it must somehow reflect on my work. And that's a very unnerving thing to come upon.

For an artist working alone and accepting funding, what is the obligation of an artist such as myself to check all the sources

of the money? Is there such a thing as unclean money? I don't know. Or if it is decided that the money is unclean, can the money be somehow cleansed by the work (my justification)? This has become a rationalization for accepting it, but is it true? Does money accepted from an unclean source somehow miraculously become clean because I've chosen to use it in a certain way? I'm not sure. Shaky grounds here. Then I have the example of some friends and contemporaries of mine, such as Yvonne Rainer, who went to Shiraz at the invitation of the Shah of Iran. It's a huge avant-garde festival. Many artists went there. Yvonne Rainer later apologized, but Robert Wilson did not, for going there and accepting the Shah's money.

I have my own NEA to worry about. For four years I have been supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, which is money coming from the government from your and my tax dollars. It's a government that also does very questionable things with its money, and the NEA is a small, small, miniscule portion of the budget of the federal government.

We have the example of, say, Philip Morris. I worked as administrator for a dance company. We were going actively after Philip Morris money. Is there a contradiction here, to have a dance company in particular going after funds from a company whose major product and major income is cigarettes? There's also PBS, whose corporate funding is phenomenal and comes from the most questionable sources imaginable. We have the South African divestment issue. Do we have an obligation as artists, as cultural workers, to check the portfolio of every corporation we apply to? I think so, but do we always know?

One of my favorite painters is Leon Golub. His imagery is very political, I've used his imagery in my work. One of his major backers is one of the Saatchi family in Great Britain. The Saatchis handle advertisement largely for all governments not to my liking. Leon Golub's work is largely supported by the Saatchis. Does he find that a contradiction? He says yes. Does he take the money? He says yes. So this is one phase of questions.

If I am to be supported, if I am going to go after the support, I on a personal level decide I need this money to make my work. It's a questionable path we have chosen, but it's one that I at this time find viable.

The other issue is what I call intra-progressive censorship.



PHOTO BY TOM BRAZIL

John Kelly and Ishmael Houston-Jones in "Adolfo und Maria," 1986.

My personal brushes with this intra-progressive wrist-slapping occurred on my second trip to Nicaragua. I took tapes of my own work. One was a piece called *Visioning* that I did in 1984 after my first trip to Nicaragua, in which I used a lot of photo-journalistic imagery from Susan Meiselas, imagery from Sue Coe and Golub, and I also used songs by a country singer called Dave Dudley—pro-war Vietnam era songs. I juxtaposed the songs with myself nude, blindfolded, and basically banging into walls and the floor using the imagery from the photographs and paintings. And I felt it was a very strong anti-war piece.

When I proposed showing this piece in Nicaragua, the head of the school there said they couldn't do it, because it showed a nude male body. We had an argument, and the piece was not shown there.

Another idea that popped in and out of my head is my own uneasiness with the Wooster Group's loss of funding from the New York State Arts Council because they did a piece that was in blackface. Reality, an all-white, avant-garde theater group, did a piece called "Route Nine," which used a pygmy comedy sketch. They did it in blackface and some people felt that the images portrayed of Black people were offensive, and as a result of this they lost their funding. I felt uneasy with the piece, I felt an unease with them losing their funding over this. I wonder if as progressive artists, what our obligation is to critique, even to the point where funding is lost. Can we ever applaud the loss of funding to progressive art?

DEBORAH LANGERMAN

I want to share these stories about two censorship situations I faced during my fourteen and a half years of working with the United Mime Workers Theatre company. We did a lot of performing over the years, and the bread of our existence was performing in thousands of grade schools. One we happened to be in once was a Catholic grade school on the west side of Chicago, in a fairly fancy neighborhood.

Our program for children was called "The President's New Clothes," a modern version of *The Emperor's New Clothes*. At the end of the piece, after the president has tried on a number of different outfits and he's visited by the Secretary of State and the top general in the country and the press secretary, he eventually comes out between two American flag curtains (someone once said he comes out of the closet) in his underwear, his boxer shorts. We'd play *Pomp and Circumstance*, and here would come Jeff out from between the curtains. He was quite a sight to behold, and usually the roof would just go off, the kids would just be screaming with laughter.

We did performance #1 in the morning for the younger grades—grades one through three or four—and the kids loved it. It was a great . . . until some parents and nuns came up to us and said that they did not like the fact that a male was showing himself in his boxer shorts in their grade school. We questioned them very closely if they had any arguments with the politics of the piece, and they said no, no, that wasn't the question. The question was the fact that Jeff was coming out in his boxer shorts, and therefore they were asking us to censor the last part of the performance for the older grades—the fourth or fifth through eighth—who would be seeing it in the afternoon.

We said, "We can't do that. That's the whole point of the story!" And they said, "Well, we cannot have you come out that way," even though (as we pointed out to them) every

crucifix on every wall has Jesus wearing nothing more than a sheet. We also tried to use other kinds of arguments, like pointing to the school team's banner hanging in the gym. The team was called the War Hawks, and its mascot was this big eagle with missile toes and missile claws. And I said, "Some things are obscene to us and that is extremely obscene to me. You are teaching your children to revere and rally around that image of death." And they brushed that aside, and said they would not allow it. So we had a caucus in the teachers' lounge as we were looking through their literature, and we said, "What should we do?" And then we thought, "We'll do it, we'll do exactly what they want us to do. We won't let Jeff come out in his underwear."

So we do the performance for the upper grades and we get to the moment where Pomp and Circumstance is building up, where it goes DAH, DAH-duh-duh, DAH DUH and he comes out. Right when it got to that point, we cut off the music. Jeff stuck his head through the curtains, looked at the audience, got the microphone, and said, "Now, some people here think you're not supposed to see the next part of this performance. They don't think you can see it or should see it. But the point of the story of *The President's New Clothes* is what do you do in this situation? Does anybody remember what happens at the end of the story?" We always ask kids and the kids always say, "Yeah," a little boy or a little girl yells out, "The president is not wearing any clothes!"

And we said, "Right! Now, what kind of decision-making do you have to go through to be brave enough to say the president is not wearing any clothes? What should we do? Even though people have told us not to come out, should we not come out? Or should we come out? And what do you

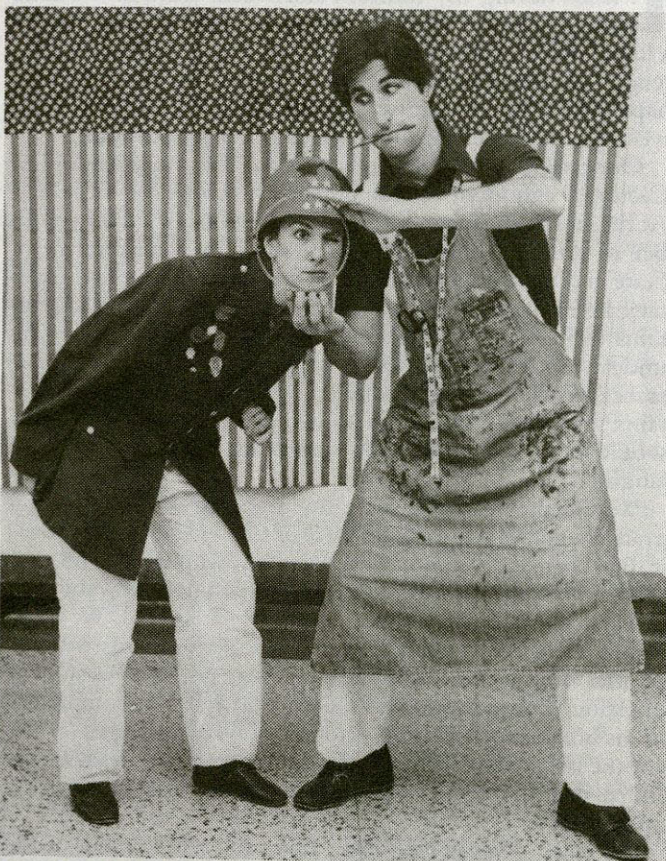


PHOTO BY HARRY ZANOTTI

UNITED MIME WORKERS in: "*The President's New Clothes*" (l. to r.): Deborah Langerman, Bob Feldman.

want to see?" The response from the audience was, "COME OUT OF THE CLOSET!!" There was one little second grader who hadn't seen the performance earlier, but had heard about it and was allowed to see the second show. She screamed, "He should come out in saran wrap!" It was wonderful.

I wish we all had the opportunity to take a situation of censorship and be able to turn it around and turn it back in the faces of the people who are trying to censor you—to outlive them, so to speak.

Another quick story, which revolves around (of course) the same piece. We were doing it at a showcase for schools. Now I don't know how many of you performing artists have ever done a showcase, but they're really demeaning situations. You get up there and shuffle your feet. You usually have to pay to showcase, and if they like you, then they might book you. All the people in the audience are being paid by their arts councils to be there, and they're haggling with you about price.

We were doing this big showcase and we had ten minutes so we had cut down a half-hour show to some highlights, and I was the narrator. At the front of the stage they had three lights: green, yellow, and red. When you had five more minutes, the green light would come on, then the yellow light would come on when you had three more minutes, and when the red light came on, that was it, you were supposed to be off the stage.

So we're doing *The President's New Clothes* and the green light comes on, and we're not getting anywhere. When the yellow light came on, like an idiot I said, "Well, that's an excerpt from our show. Are there any questions from the audience?"

A woman stands up, she raises her hand, and she says, "I think this is terrible. I don't think you should be allowed to perform in our grade schools. This performance shows disrespect for our authorities, and I am going to write my senator." And I said, "Well, gee, you know, this is a very old story and it's been told in many lands. And what you've said is exactly what we say at the beginning of the story, that it's about that whole question. And this is the freest country in the world."

And then she started arguing with me, "Well, I have friends from other countries who would die to get into this country." And I thought to myself, yeah, I bet they'd have to die in order to get into this country. And I said, "But don't you understand, that's why this country is so great: because we should be and are free to do a piece that talks about our freedom to speak out." And as I was saying this, the curtains closed, because the red light had come on, and we were censored.

Needless to say, we didn't get any jobs from that showcase, except for one brave woman from Oak Park, Illinois. Then there were ramifications. The Illinois Arts Council called us up and said, "We got this letter from a senator—somebody wrote to him and said you're doing this piece and he feels he should see it." So I said, "Great, bring him out to Oak Park and let him sit in the audience with the kids." He was an Illinois senator, a Republican. He saw the show, he loved it, he had a great time, and he said, "I don't see anything wrong with it. I'll write this woman a letter that it's OK."

But to me there was very little difference between performing in front of him as a kind of review panel and when we performed in 1975 on a ten-city tour of Rumania. Before we were allowed to tour Rumania, us four little Jewish kids from the north side of Chicago had to do our pieces for a panel of about eight men who sat out in an empty field, to decide whether or not we would be allowed to do this tour. It's no different here than it is there.

THE SOCIAL ROLE OF PHOTOGRAPHY AS THE 80's END

A recent Sunday *New York Times* reported a new film about "a family on a Montana ranch whose lives are changed by a photographer." How about yours? The role photography plays in our "social" lives is well known and still unknown. The following symposium is intended as a feeler out into different neighborhoods of the "concerned" community, to see where people's heads and lenses are pointing at the moment. UPFRONT asked each of the five participants to write a statement and to choose photographers whose work supported that statement in some way. (Those who were photographers themselves were encouraged to include their own work.) The statements were then sent to the other participants and the idea was that a "debate" would ensue. As the deadline stretched and approached, not everyone was able to follow through. So the symposium can be seen as a catalyst for a future debate, with the activist community at large as respondents.

Photography, as the '80s gates begin to slam, teeters between life and everything else—"art," "truth," "reality," and so forth. Other mediums have to work at that crossover; photography already lives in the DMZ. The borders between documentary, photojournalist, narrative, postmodernist, and activist photography is fascinatingly blurred. The ratios of form, subject matter, content, analysis, seem to be constantly shifting even within the work of individual artists—as they must, if these artists are concerned with audience and context.

An oppositional photography today has to be set like a machine gun on a turning base to hit all its targets. (Yes, it is a war.) The issues of ideological representation, stereotyping, cultural identity, historical and psychological accuracy, context, signification, and the development of a photographic (and by extension, visual) language are being gnawed at by photographers, critics, and also by those who profess little interest in culture. "Social" photography comes in many guises: the "critical practice" of feminists and postmodernists; the near cinematic and often popular narrative vein (always tappable as long as people are interested in each other); reliable and embattled "documentary" work that is both nourished and diminished by its heroic and humanist past; photojournalism; activist photography that functions within a community; and "art photography"—the nouveau-riche and, some would say, distant relative.

(A Symposium with Barbara Jo Revelle/Alex Sweetman, Shelley Rice, Sophie Rivera, Mel Rosenthal, Abigail Solomon Godeau, edited by Lucy R. Lippard)

Photographic issues, like those of so-called political art, have become increasingly complicated and sophisticated in the '80s, in part because they have been so often argued in public and in publications. Fred Ritchin wrote last spring (in the *Catskill Center for Photography's Quarterly*) that if concerned photography were to "remain a valuable asset to . . . social and political understanding, the ideas that lie behind it must be clarified, and, to a certain extent, the genre reinvented."

Part of this process must include education in relation to the diversity of the mass audience, which continues to see photography as fact, but not monolithically. As Walter Benjamin wrote, "information does not enter experience." There remains a place for empathetic photography as well as that which exposes the artifice of information, permitting itself to be transparent and therefore open to association and interpretation as well as to criticism. There need be no competition between the genres represented in these pages, and there is a lot to be learned from the spaces in between them. The fictional element present in all photography can be exaggerated, or emptied of its content even as it claims to demystify. But what happens when we no longer believe *anything* we see? The tabula rosa has always attracted the avant garde. This time it could be dangerous, and it may already be occupied by the cynical manipulators of the right and the sold-out avant-garde. Once "critical" photography is placed in a limelight with that of the media hype it criticizes, it's going to have to rediscover an image of belief, and be criticized by those who disagree, in its turn.

At the other extreme, the element of realism, supposedly native to photography, can be used in the most naive and unrealistic manner, either as blind romanticism or rhetorical politics or plaintive home movies. In this case, a hard look would consist of distance rather than empathy, or sympathy complicated by either tragedy or humor (not necessarily irony). The stories told may purport to be fact or fiction, but every picture is one half of a visual dialogue; who's talking to whom is just as crucial as how either party looks.

—L.R.L.

HARD LOOKS

BARBARA JO REVELLE & ALEX SWEETMAN

Imagine this; A man and a woman, both photographers, are driving down a mountain road to a nearby town. Their eight-year-old daughter is making up "Christmas ghost stories" into her new tape recorder in the back seat. The man is driving and the woman has just put down a book by Jane Gallop on feminism and psychoanalysis. She turns on the radio. Rod Stewart is singing "Every picture tells a story, don't it?"

WOMAN: What's with this guy? Hasn't he ever read Sontag? Single pictures don't tell stories. In fact, they have precious little to do with meaning at all. Meaning exists in relationships between things—in functioning. Isn't that what she says?

MAN: (blowing his nose, thinking they ought to be working on that article he volunteered them to do on the social uses of narrative photography): So what are you saying? Are you saying that, popular wisdom notwithstanding, photos can't tell stories?

WOMAN: Well, I don't know. Not all by themselves, I don't think. Whoever said that a picture was worth ten thousand words was only right if those ten thousand words are standing beside the picture. Pictures do something else—offer glimpses of life—maybe like those seen from an elevated train. They can seem magical but they do not tell anybody's story. Not by themselves.

MAN: But aren't photos often the occasion for stories, like family albums which become the site of the oral history of most families?

WOMAN: Yes, but family albums are not ever just single images. They are groups, usually chronologically sequenced, most often with captions. "Gamma, Grampa, and Katie with her first fish. Pleasant Lake, 1987."

MAN: So single images lack the basic elements of narrative proper. They are "all at once"—have no beginning, middle, end. Is that it? Clement Greenberg wouldn't agree. When he reviewed Weston's first big show at MOMA he said Weston imitated abstract painting and was, therefore, not true to his medium because he had given up the real mission of photography: story telling. So I guess what we need to do is to say what we, at least, mean by "story."

WOMAN: Well, on one level, everyone knows what a story is. Story telling seems fundamental to being human. Mothers tell their babies stories, people tell their stories to their analysts. Katie is making up a story in the back seat. We tell ourselves stories in order to understand our lives.

CHILD: (into her recorder) . . . and the boy dared the girl to go into the haunted house, so to prove that she really went, she took a camera. She walked in. There was a dead Christmas tree and suddenly it burst into flames . . . she took a picture . . .

MAN: So narrative seems to be a mode of human knowledge or a way of making sense of our lives that coexists with being human. Winograd took a picture of something to see what it would look like photographed, and a story teller tells a story to see what it means.

WOMAN: I'm not sure. There certainly are other kinds of meaningful discourse, but narrative seems sort of privileged. It seems to have authority—truth—an inside track on what "really happened."

MAN: There is the position that narrativity, as such, tends to support the status quo, is an instrument of control. How valuable is it, really, in making sense of reality, I wonder. Maybe it mystifies real understanding by making one believe one understands, providing a false sense of coherence.

WOMAN: Yes, I think we do that all the time—press our very un-story-like experiences into packages for others' consumption. Complete with an after-the-fact causality.

CHILD: . . . and the girl's Daddy died from wounds the evil Christmas Witch gave him with an icicle, and soon the Mommy died from sadness, so the beautiful daughter decided . . .

WOMAN: See, it's not just that the Daddy died and then the Mommy died, which would be a chronicle, but at eight Katie already knows that the Mommy died from grief—a plot. Katie's story not only raises the issue of a problematic causality, but maybe the feminist problem with narrativity per se.

MAN: With "master narratives" you mean? Lyotard's *grands récits* of modernity? Of man seeking his telos in the conquest of nature? With progress? Walt Disney's Frontierland version of American history?

WOMAN: Yeah, the great journey, the great goal, the great quest—but even more than that. Maybe narrativity itself, like representation itself, is oppressive to women and other "others."

MAN: Because it urges that "one meaning fits all?" What about mothers telling their babies stories? A paradox, no?

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MAN: Narrative appeals to the idea of mastery over time—the corrosive effects of time. Actually it works as sort of a stay against entropy.

WOMAN: Mmmm, yes, I think stories pretend that you can win out over dissolution and death. They give the reader the gratification of an enigma posed and solved—a closure.

MAN: (trying to reintroduce the article topic) So, o.k., let's take Duane Michals, for example. He's the one person I know who calls himself a narrative photographer. Do you know that series of photos he did of himself building a very small pyramid in front of the Great Pyramids?

WOMAN: No. What was it? A metaphor for Duane, the individual, making his own personal history—against some sense of BIG History? In some sort of opposition to it?

MAN: Something like that. There's causality, linear coherence. Something happens. I think it's narrative.

WOMAN: Maybe it's narrative poetry.

MAN: Remember Marcia Resnick's *Revisions*? That's a good example of the use of text and image to tell a story—a quasi-autobiographical one of repressed sexuality. The text is pretty straightforward but the stylized, crazy photos disrupt it in an interesting way.

WOMAN: Hmmm, I always thought of that stuff as a fashionable pretext for softcore. Jane Gallop says it's not patriarchal culture, but the reduction of the Law of the Dead Father to the rule of the actual living male, that must be fought against.

MAN: I don't see the connection.

CHILD: . . . so the evil Christmas Witch could not kill the girl because she was too smart to bite into the poison apple.

MAN: So what do you think? Has any of this to do with photography's ability to tell stories, and if there is any such thing as narrative photography, what can be its social use?

Barbara Jo Revelle is a photographer. Alex Sweetman is a critic and photographer. Both teach at the University of Colorado, Boulder.

WOMAN: Well, if the problem with traditional narrative is that it is not a useful model for our experience anymore—I mean if we're tired of the way it renders some of us invisible—tired of its delusions, then how to thwart it and subvert it and interrogate it becomes interesting. That's what I try to do when I put my composite photographs with language. I try to make one contradict the other—or at least have a problematic relationship—an uneasy relationship. So that there is an interplay of messages and no fixed position, no one "true story." That way the viewer—or reader—isn't just a consumer of the finished work, but gets drawn into the making process.

MAN: So groups of photographs intended to be read together, and

photo/text pieces *can* work as a sort of anti-narrative, maybe an anti-"master narrative," by disrupting, challenging, refusing to own a fixed position of knowledge, making the codes of narrative visible. Things like that.

WOMAN: Sounds possible. Here's our store.

MAN: And isn't all that a social function?

CHILD: ... then the girl was running and crying and, suddenly, she was sitting up in bed. "What?" she thought to herself. "Was all of this only a dream? But then she rolled over on something sharp. She reached in her pajama pocket. There were three photos. The burning tree. The red scarf. The witch.



People's heads are about as hard as cantaloupes said my father in 1961 as he dropped one from the refrigerator to demonstrate what happens in a car crash. In science class my brother and I amazed our teachers by explaining laws already learned at home — *Newton's Third Law*,¹ *The Law of the Impenetrability of Matter*,² *The Second Law of Thermodynamics*.³ By the tenth grade we could recite every physical principle that had anything to do with bodies colliding (or falling, burning, drowning ...). Later, when we got our "learner's permits" Daddy taped photos of auto accidents to our car visor and left newspaper clippings on our desks. I remember one about three teenagers who hit a tree. For some reason there was a diagram showing the locations of the separate cemeteries to which relatives took what they claimed. The points formed a scalene triangle over our county. Jeannine Jordan, the female victim, weighed 120 pounds but the paper explained they buried only 88. No similar data was available for the males. In another clipping a baby fell from a bridge onto the N.Y.S. Thruway. Those details came back to me over and over last month as I walked Katie to the beach from our motel. And I remember other facts: the highway death rate for 1960, for 1965. This early training had its desired effect and, as Alex will confirm after this last trip, I am a *very* careful driver; however, there have been certain side effects my father did not foresee.

1. For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.

2. No two things can occupy the same space at the same time.

3. Entropy: the inexorable tendency of the material world to move toward mechanical disorder, dissolution, death.

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MAN: Something like that. There's causality, linear coherence. Something happens. I think it's narrative.

WOMAN: Maybe it's narrative poetry.

MAN: Remember Marcia Resnick's *Revisions*? That's a good example of the use of text and image to tell a story—a quasi-autobiographical one of repressed sexuality. The text is pretty straightforward but the stylized, crazy photos disrupt it in an interesting way.

WOMAN: Hmmm, I always thought of that stuff as a fashionable pretext for softcore. Jane Gallop says it's not patriarchal culture, but the reduction of the Law of the Dead Father to the rule of the actual living male, that must be fought against.

MAN: I don't see the connection.

CHILD: . . . so the evil Christmas Witch could not kill the girl because she was too smart to bite into the poison apple.

MAN: So what do you think? Has any of this to do with photography's ability to tell stories, and if there is any such thing as narrative photography, what can be its social use?

Barbara Jo Revelle is a photographer. Alex Sweetman is a critic and photographer. Both teach at the University of Colorado, Boulder.

WOMAN: Well, if the problem with traditional narrative is that it is not a useful model for our experience anymore—I mean if we're tired of the way it renders some of us invisible—tired of its delusions, then how to thwart it and subvert it and interrogate it becomes interesting. That's what I try to do when I put my composite photographs with language. I try to make one contradict the other—or at least have a problematic relationship—an uneasy relationship. So that there is an interplay of messages and no fixed position, no one "true story." That way the viewer—or reader—isn't just a consumer of the finished work, but gets drawn into the making process.

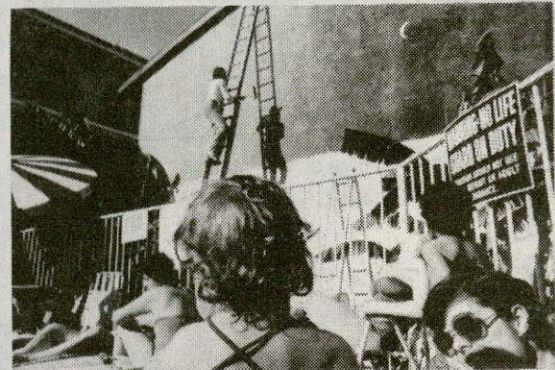
MAN: So groups of photographs intended to be read together, and

photo/text pieces *can* work as a sort of anti-narrative, maybe an anti-"master narrative," by disrupting, challenging, refusing to own a fixed position of knowledge, making the codes of narrative visible. Things like that.

WOMAN: Sounds possible. Here's our store.

MAN: And isn't all that a social function?

CHILD: ... then the girl was running and crying and, suddenly, she was sitting up in bed. "What?" she thought to herself. "Was all of this only a dream? But then she rolled over on something sharp. She reached in her pajama pocket. There were three photos. The burning tree. The red scarf. The witch.



People's heads are about as hard as cantaloupes said my father in 1961 as he dropped one from the refrigerator to demonstrate what happens in a car crash. In science class my brother and I amazed our teachers by explaining laws already learned at home — *Newton's Third Law*,¹ *The Law of the Impenetrability of Matter*,² *The Second Law of Thermodynamics*.³ By the tenth grade we could recite every physical principle that had anything to do with bodies colliding (or falling, burning, drowning ...). Later, when we got our "learner's permits" Daddy taped photos of auto accidents to our car visor and left newspaper clippings on our desks. I remember one about three teenagers who hit a tree. For some reason there was a diagram showing the locations of the separate cemeteries to which relatives took what they claimed. The points formed a scalene triangle over our county. Jeannine Jordan, the female victim, weighed 120 pounds but the paper explained they buried only 88. No similar data was available for the males. In another clipping a baby fell from a bridge onto the N. Y. S. Thruway. Those details came back to me over and over last month as I walked Katie to the beach from our motel. And I remember other facts: the highway death rate for 1960, for 1965. This early training had its desired effect and, as Alex will confirm after this last trip, I am a *very* careful driver; however, there have been certain side effects my father did not foresee.

1. For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.

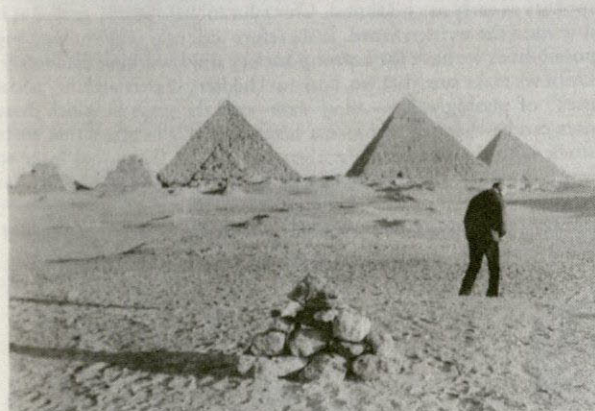
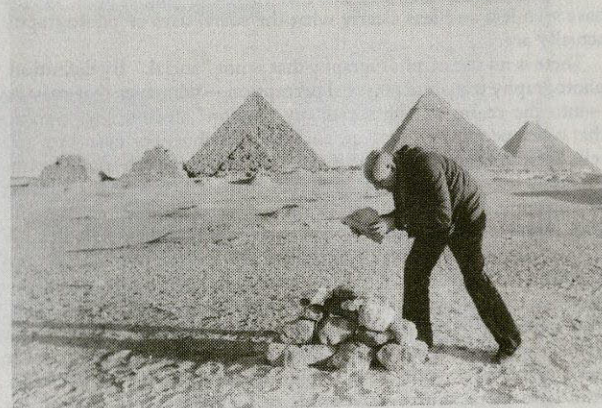
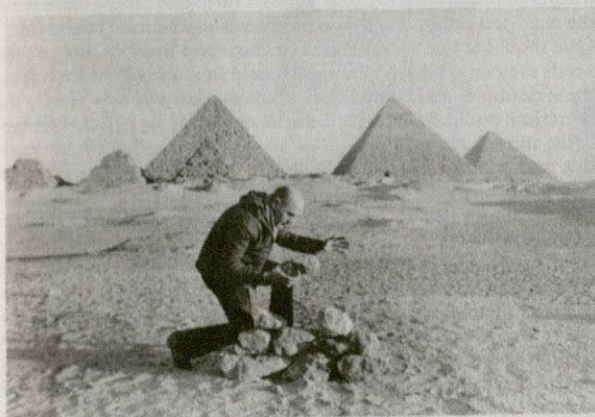
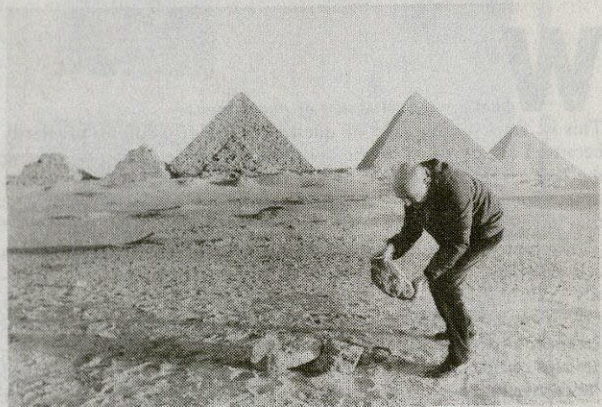
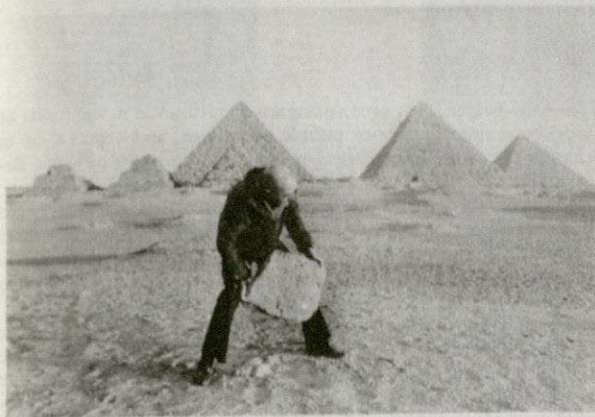
2. No two things can occupy the same space at the same time.

3. Entropy: the inexorable tendency of the material world to move toward mechanical disorder, dissolution, death.

*When her mother first noticed a red stain on her panties and roared,
"You're a woman now", she promptly fainted.*



Marcia Resnick, from *Revisions* (artist's book published by Coachhouse Press, Toronto, 1978).



Duane Michals, *I build a pyramid*, 1978.

COURTESY SIDNEY JANIS GALLERY, N.Y.

What are the social uses of photography?

This is, frankly, the kind of question I like to address, primarily because I am opposed to the divisions that have grown up during the 20th century history of the photographic medium. During this time, "social" or "political" photography has been seen as a tradition independent of, for instance, "art" photography or "fashion" photography; modern scholarship has created intellectual barriers between these branches of the medium to make them seem mutually exclusive (even though, these days, all of them are shown in galleries and museums). These conceptual barriers have become all the more pronounced during the last decade, when "political" artists and critics have taken up arms against the more "elitist" and "unconcerned" uses of the medium to reinforce the political or economic or racial status quo. From my point of view, as this situation has become more and more divided and fragmented, people have seen less and less clearly what the social uses of photography actually are.

There is no use of photography that is not "social." By definition, photography transfers personal perception—whatever that may be—into the realm of the social; my "vision" becomes something that other people can look at, analyze, distribute, or even buy and sell. Seen in this way, the artificial divisions between uses of photography become academic. A family snapshot, seen in the context of changing attitudes toward death and mourning in the 19th and 20th centuries, is an intense commentary on our society; it also, of course, conventionalizes our attitudes toward the family, love and happiness in ways that can be likened to myth, and that itself has major social impact. "Concerned" photographs by Lewis Hine, Fred Lonidier or Mel Rosenthal perceptively point out a certain set of socio-political relations that exist in our society—but so do the most revoltingly sexist fashion photographs of Helmut Newton. And a pin-up rendition of Donna Rice, Gary Hart's lady friend, is a comment on the limits of individuality in our society—a major concern of "art" photographers in this country throughout the century.

Needless to say, I am well aware of the differences between these images I've been so blithely pairing here. But I am trying to make a point—and that point is that until we understand the intrinsically social nature of all photography, we will never be able to dig deep enough to root out a lot of the more destructive uses of photography that exist today. As much as I respect the efforts of many "political" photographers today, I am saying that it is not enough to take pictures of workers, and minorities or poor people, and display them as the polar opposites of the images in the *New York*

Times Magazine. Nor is it enough to put cameras in the hands of workers, minorities, poor people or women, and expect them to change the world by expressing their unseen point of view. Because the fact remains that all of these people, like all white, male, middle-class artists and intellectuals, have had their self-images and their archetypal images of the world shaped by the same media system; and until we begin an intensive educational campaign to help people "see" what is in their eyes and mind, we are all fated to remain about as individual in our vision of things as Donna Rice.

Photographs are everywhere and everything to us; the social use of photography (and here I am also including video and film) is to create the world in any technological society. One cannot discount the elitist images of wealth all around us—because they have created a whole generation of yuppies. One cannot forget the sexist images in magazines, because without them one cannot understand the new, post-feminist movement, the self-proclaimed "bimbo chic." One should not undervalue our cowboys and Rambos, because the needs they satisfy have given us Ronald Reagan as President. What these examples point up with frightening clarity is how blindly the American public has accepted the images that pass before their eyeballs; and substituting images of strong women, dignified minorities and proud workers will simply reverse the terms without alleviating any of the ignorance that such blindness indicates. It is this ignorance that must be eradicated—by public education, beginning with childhood. Most of our socialization is accomplished by photographic images, and we fool ourselves into thinking that we can have a working democracy in a world which educates us through photographs but does not teach us to look at them critically. This statement applies to every race and every sex and every economic group; until such time as we are given the perceptual and intellectual tools to understand the information we receive, we will not be capable of self-rule or self-determination, we will remain puppets of the images that flash by us and create Pavlovian responses as early as childhood. Our educational system, geared as it is toward the written word, is therefore seriously undermining any possibilities we have for a strong society and a working democracy. Until we make sure that we, and our children, understand the "social uses" of photography—all of them—and the ways in which those uses can be changed to make a better world, I'm afraid that we're stuck with the Reagans, Rambos and Bimbo Chics that make so much dough at the box office.

©1987, Shelley Rice

Shelley Rice is a New York critic and historian who writes on photography and multi-media.



Marvin Heiferman, *The Family of Man, 1955-1984*, installation view of exhibition at P.S. 1, New York, curated by Heiferman (the "men and women section").

TIME FRAMES

The Meaning of Family Pictures

By Michael Lesy

Author of *Wisconsin Death Trip and Real Life*

Michael Lesy, cover of *Time Frames*, Pantheon, New York, 1980.



III. SUPER-NATURAL

She couldn't remember having gotten there. Something about rising, being rescued from the depths. Anyway, she could see for herself that she was under-developed, and thankful for his support....

The world is divided into those who name and those who are named. The Mother possesses an attraction that must be possessed in turn, her inexplicable hold made recoverable.... Son and daughter are thus polarized from the start. How can the daughter both identify with the Mother (represent ineffable femininity) and speak from the position of the Father's Knowledge? How can she embody both the enigma and the epistemologist? The place of the daughter is an opposition of terms which often acts to neutralize the territory of femininity. While to speak against the centralization of Knowledge is to begin to rupture the still surface of resignation.... (As author here, I also sit uncomfortably. I assume an exterior position of knowledge in order to recount a story, pose an argument. As though I were an unnatural creature: a not-daughter.)

Sylvia Kolbowski, *Supernatural* (part III of "Sa(l)vagers of Femininity/Domestic Salves", a magazine piece for *Wedge* #4, 1985.

SOPHIE RIVERA—NARCISSISM AND NARCOLEPSY

Twelve years before the end of the millennium, the American psyche has denervated itself into a daily narcoleptic stupor superimposed on a narcissistic preoccupation attendant to an ever-increasing dementia. Most dementias that are suffered by centenarians, yet alone millennials, are in fact irreversible; the gradual memory loss that ends in senility is emblematic and symbolic of economic dissolution. "Adam Smith" has reminded us that economic depressions occur at roughly sixty year intervals—when those who had experienced the last cataclysm were in fact either dead or senile.

It is therefore not surprising that the social role of photography has varied inversely to the popularized iconography of self-love and the "big picture." In fact, it may not be hyperbolic to posit a new leading indicator of stock market averages; the maximum size achieved by the average "Art Photograph" when multiplied by its exchange value is attained twenty-four months before a generalized collapse of the financial markets.

As the exchange value of the photograph as icon or treasure has increased over roughly the past twenty years, it has become clear to all that social documentary photography is a market-driven phenomenon. The rapid decline and, to my way of thinking, possible demise of photography as social documentary is related to general declines in the perception of injustice, chaos and human misery. As the proportions of equity have shifted during the past eight years to the highest income classes, it has become clear that the buying public no longer wishes to be reminded of stark social reality.

We have at this point in time not yet obviously reached the despair and social catastrophe that permeated the nineteen thirties. It was in that decade that the greatest of the social documentary photographers, such as W. Eugene Smith, Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans, and Margaret Bourke-White chronicled for posterity the catastrophic events of that tormented decade. Smith and Bourke-White worked for Time-Life Inc. Henry Luce—who founded that empire, who went to Europe in World War I "to fire machine-guns at the enemy," and who somewhat prematurely dedicated this century to the United States of America—probably would not have been able to give birth to the photojournalism of *People Magazine* with its hyperreflexive narcissism. Even the lately resurrected *Life Magazine* bears little resemblance to its earlier namesake where Smith and Bourke-White worked.

Paradoxically, the best work of the thirties' photojournalists was initiated by a government economist who felt that pictorial representation was the best method for overcoming Congressional resistance to low-income programs. Lange, Evans, and many others were sent throughout the land to document the conditions of human misery and squalor.

Today it is the life styles of the rich and famous that are of interest; periodicals vie with each other for the right demographics (i.e. households with incomes over fifty thousand dollars a year) so as to better seduce advertisers into choosing them to purvey more useless goods and services.

Envy, greed and snobbery are the dominant leitmotifs in a generalized "beggar thy neighbor" dance of protoplasm. It is possible, however, that a new determination of spirit may yet arise, Phoenix-like, from the ashes of the conflagration. Hopefully, well before the year two thousand, we will have a rebirth of conscience and a new transcendence of the imagery of empathy.

Sophie Rivera is a photographer who lives and works in New York City.



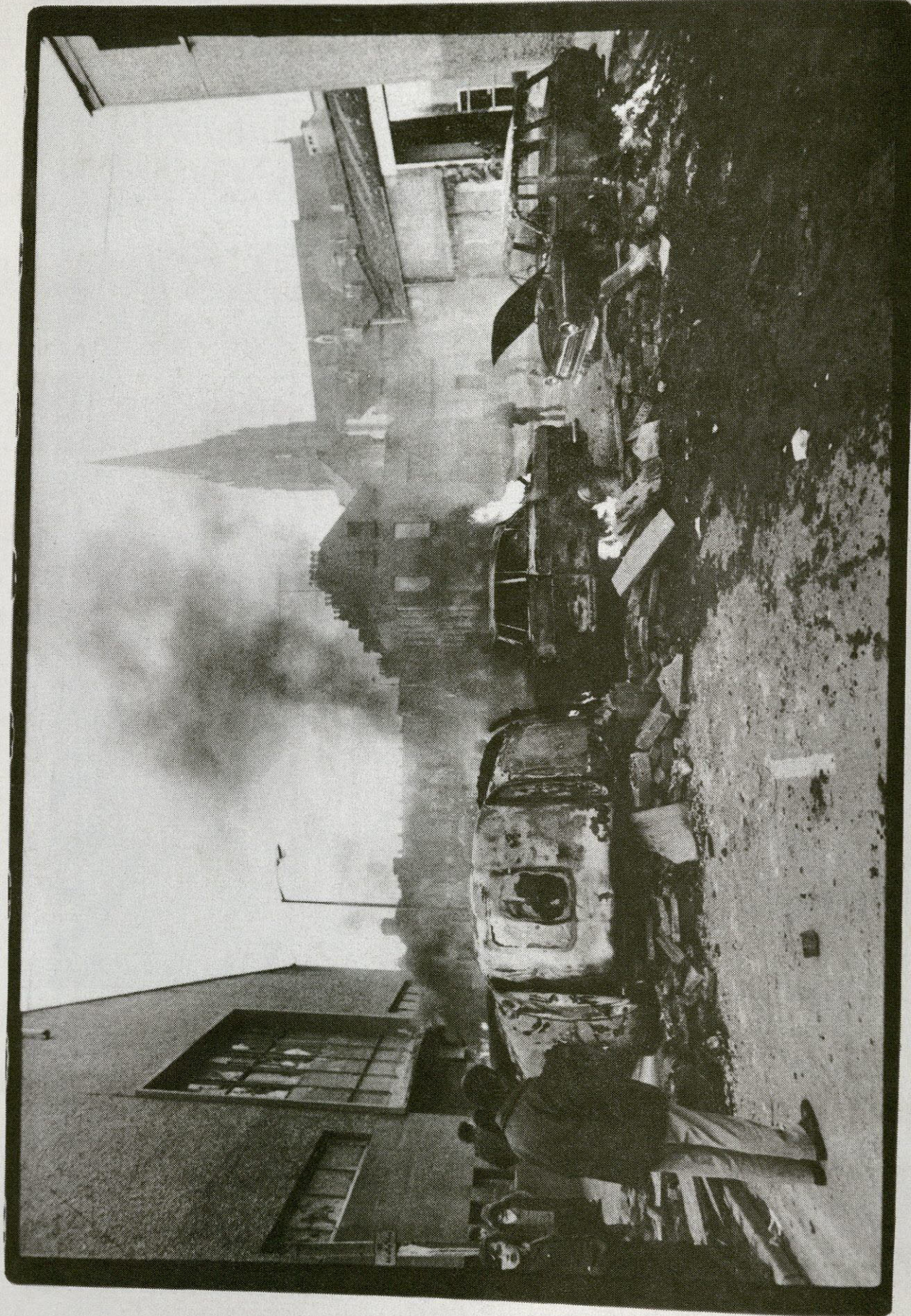
Coreen Simpson, *Barry*, 1984.



Sophie Rivera, Aftermath of a New York City Fire, I.



Charles Biasiny-Rivera



Jim Anderson, Barricade on William Street, Londonderry, Northern Ireland, 1978.



Ani Rivera, *Trilogy*, 1979.

MEL ROSENTHAL—THE PHOTOGRAPHER AS ROMANTIC HERO

Three popular movies featuring photographers as heroes raise basic questions not only about the image of the photographer in our society, but about widely-held assumptions on photography and its relationship to society.

Antonioni's *Blow Up* (1966) is about a glamorized photographer who may or may not have witnessed and photographed a murder. In his pursuit of the truth, he makes increasingly larger blow-ups so that he can see what he might have seen. His film and the enlargements are stolen from him and he never finds out what he may or may not have experienced. The end of the movie makes it clear that reality is elusive and problematic.

Roger Spottiswoode's *Under Fire* (1983) takes the image of the photographer as embattled seeker of reality one step further. Here truth is seen not literally, but morally. The hero, played by Nick Nolte, is a photojournalist, characterized in the movie as a mercenary. He has taken pictures in an unnamed African country where he fraternized with the white mercenary soldiers. His political commitments are clear; he accepts whatever is the status quo. When asked in Nicaragua which side he is on, he replies, "I don't take sides, I only take pictures." Caught up in the revolution and exposed to the cruelties of the Somoza regime, he is forced to side with the revolution. Two incidents in the film are revealing about popular notions about photography, also held by many photographers themselves.

The first involves the death of the popular Sandinista leader, Carlos. With typical romanticism, everyone in the film assumes that with the leader dead the revolution will collapse. The revolutionaries plead with Nolte to resurrect Carlos: "You are a great photographer, make him alive." With lights, make up and props, sure enough, the photograph makes Carlos look alive and the revolution goes on. Nolte then photographs the ruthless murder by the National Guard of his best friend, a famous American television newsmen. When the photographs are smuggled out to the world press, the Somoza government falls. In the film's last lines, a television news-woman says to a Nicaraguan woman that she must be happy now that the war is over. She replies that they had fought for 50 years, over 50,000 Nicaraguans had died, and all it took to end the war was the death of an American journalist. She pauses, stares at the camera and then says quietly, "Maybe we should have killed an American journalist fifty years ago."

Peter Weir's *The Year Of Living Dangerously* (1984) is about an Indonesian photographer, already politically committed, who takes pictures of the suffering around him, particularly the starving and dying children that he loves. Various international agencies and magazines tell him there is "no market" for them, there are already too many pictures of suffering in the world. His goddaughter dies of starvation and in a rage he hangs a sheet off the balcony of his hotel that says, "Sukarno you are starving your people." Security police rip down the sheet and kill him.

Under Fire implies that a photographer capturing reality could change the destiny of a country. *The Year of Living Dangerously* suggests that photographs are, at worst, useless, and, at best, commodities at the mercy of the market. *Blow Up*, the earliest and most modern of the three, asserts that reality is too elusive to capture, never mind to understand. All see the photographer as alone and bound by laws of simple causality.

When photography was younger there was little doubt about its relationship to reality. Books like John Thomson's *Street Life In London* (1877) or Jacob Riis' *How The Other Half Lives* (1890) helped in the struggle for improved conditions for the poor. (See Sally Stein's article in *Aperture*, 5/19/83). Lewis Hine's work as staff photographer for the National Child Labor Committee helped influence legislators and helped make visible awful conditions.

Another angry outsider was Eugene Smith, whose photo essays in the '50s and '60s for *Life* changed the way we think about photo-

graphs. He used them to tell stories in a sustained way. The most successful was *Minimata*, the story of a Japanese fishing village where everyone was getting sick and many people were dying from mercury being dumped in the water by the Chisso Chemical Co. He made their story and the ultimate victory of the people known all over the world. *Minimata* became a model for socially conscious photojournalists. There was never a question of "objectivity" for Smith. He saw himself as a fighter against injustice and was willing to take risks. Although Smith was ultimately an angry outsider, more is written today about his life and his esthetics than about the subject matter of his photographs or about whether they had any effect.

Risking your life to discover what is happening, what is "reality," is a kind of heroism we associate with war photography and, in some cases, ambitious artists. Yet for many modern photographers, reality is solely a personal matter. They consume emotions and, like the romantic heroes of the past, make art out of their own self-destructiveness. Classic examples are Larry Clark and Nan Goldin. Clark's *Tulsa* (Lustrum, 1971), is an autobiographical book about the lives and deaths of his friends, whose motto was "Death is more perfect than life." Heavily into drugs, violence and sex, some died. Clark ended up in prison and became a cult hero. His books are now collectors' items.

Goldin's *The Ballad Of Sexual Dependency* (Aperture, 1987) matter of factly documents her own self-destructive relationships. It ends when she is beaten up by her boy friend and finally leaves him. Nothing is learned. They remain alienated from society and perhaps from themselves. As the heroine of her own life story, Goldin is interested only in change in stimuli, not social change.

Susan Sontag argued that "Photographs cannot create a moral position, but they can reinforce one—and can help build a nascent one." Many of the photographs that came out of the American war in Viet Nam were useful to the anti-war movement when used well by organizations for organizing work, e.g., how Nick Ut's photograph of Phan Thi Kim Phuc, the naked girl screaming and running down the road away from a napalm attack, was used to influence and get new supporters.

If the work of "concerned photographers" has been effective for social change it has been because organizations existed that could use their images consciously and carefully as tools for education and political pressure. Among the heirs to Riis, Hine and Smith are the three photographers reproduced here. Susan Meiselas' book, *Nicaragua* (Pantheon, 1981), her collaborative book on El Salvador, and the work she continues to do in Central America have informed a whole generation about U.S. involvement in the wars in those countries and aided the struggles for self-determination there. In Nicaragua, her photographs are used for everything from books and posters to match box covers.

Earl Dotter works within and for labor unions. For years he has been photographing factory workers, miners, construction workers, farmers and, most recently, service workers—the people who create our wealth. His work is shown in union halls, printed in union publications and used in advertisements to advance the cause of labor.

Marilyn Nance frequently works within the Black communities of the United States. Her latest project documents the diversity of religious experience in Black communities here and in Africa. She shows her moving photographs in churches and community centers, and whenever possible tries to bring them back to their sources.

This is an abridged version of a lecture given at the University of Costa Rica's School of Fine Arts, November, 1987.

Mel Rosenthal is a photographer and director of photographic programs at Empire State College in New York City.



Marilyn Nance, Muslim Women, Brooklyn, N.Y., 1987.

Being Black in America: A Real Picture

He took the time to care.

He may have been your father, grandfather, uncle or even a neighbor. Somewhere, at some point in your life there was a Black man who influenced you in a positive way.

Maybe he gave you a warm hug when he came home from work. Or taught you how to ride a bike, or gave you the lowdown on a new job. Whatever his gift or role, he was a hardworking man and through his labor he stood for pride in a job well done. And taught you to be proud of yourself.

He's been a part of American history from its very beginning and has made important contributions to this country's progress.

The Anheuser-Busch Companies appreciate the contribution of this man to America. As a shareholder, an employee, a supplier, or a consultant, he's been a valuable part of the growth of our companies. And we show our support for him through our continuing commitment to those communities which support our products.

A real picture of living in America includes all of us. Recognizing all of us as equal partners in the future of this country will help assure a better future for all America.

**Building a future in partnership
with the community.**



ANHEUSER-BUSCH COMPANIES

Anheuser-Busch Companies is the parent company of Anheuser-Busch, Inc., brewers of Budweiser, Michelob, Michelob Light, Budweiser Light, Natural Light and Busch beers.

PHOTOGRAPHED BY MARILYN NANCE:

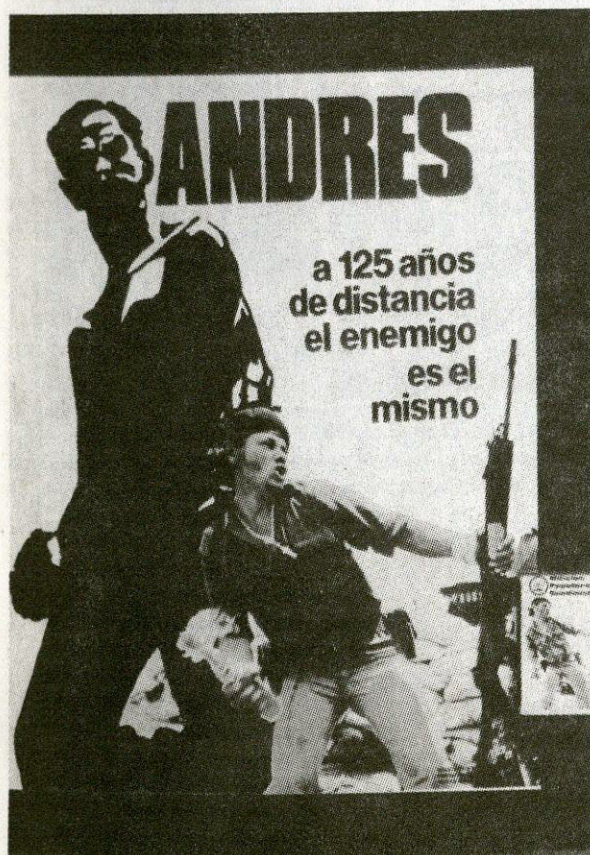
Ms. Nance is a freelance photographer based in New York. Her photographs have been published and exhibited throughout the United States, Europe and Africa.



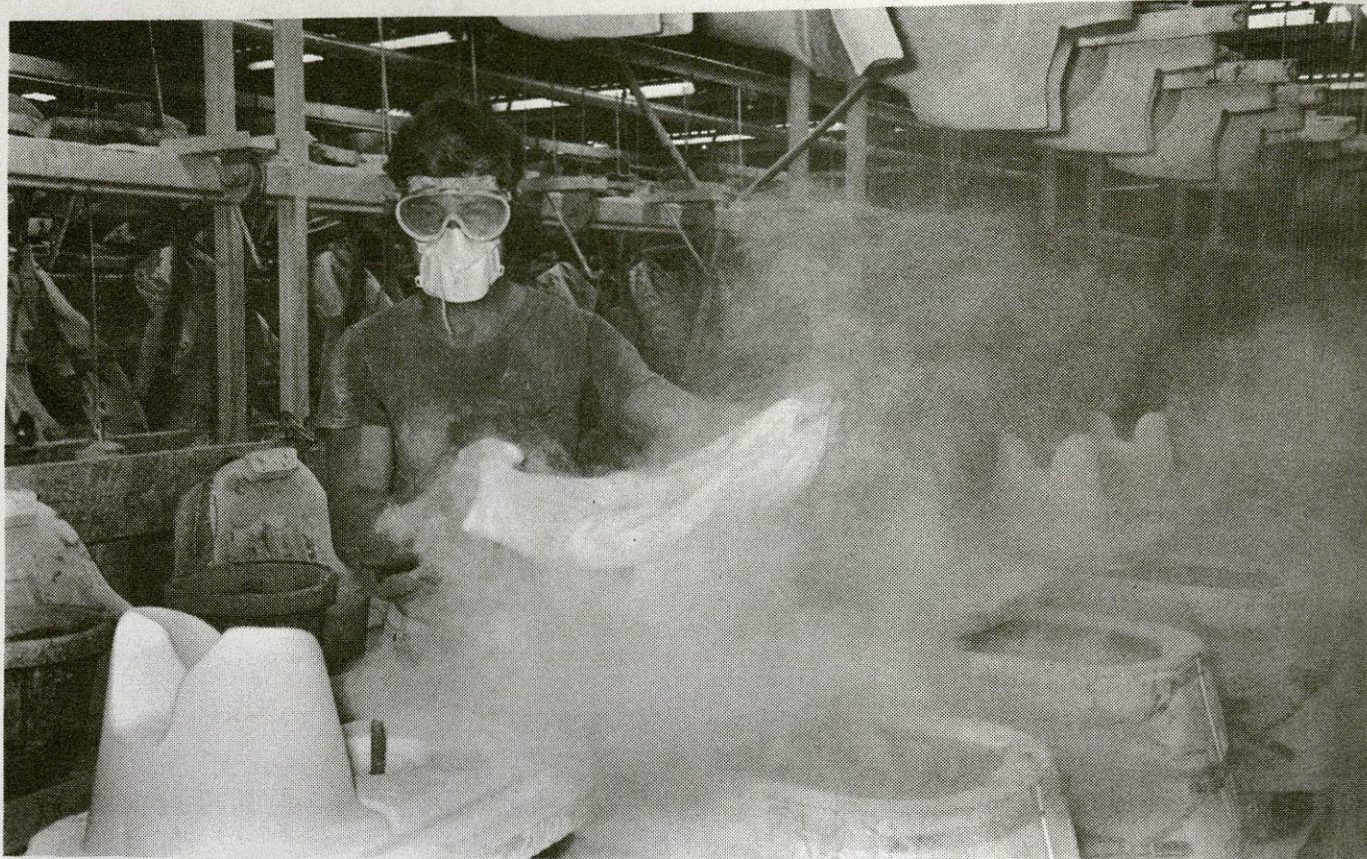
Marilyn Nance, 1981 photograph used in ad for Anheuser-Busch, 1985.



Susan Meiselas, Sandinistas on the walls of the Esteli National Guard Headquarters, 1979.



Susan Meiselas, photo used in Nicaragua.



Earl Dotter, Preparing China Molds, Commode Factory, Plainfield, Conn., (GPPAW), 1986.

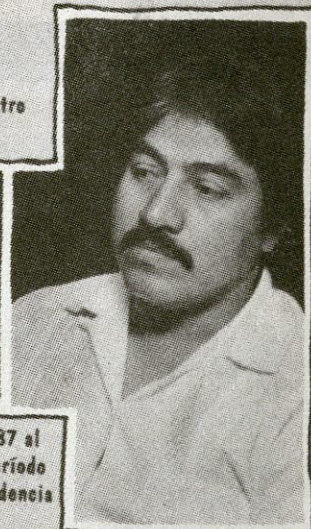
La Nueva Ley de Inmigración Trae Nueva Esperanza: Es Usted Elegible?

Debe haber residido en los Estados Unidos antes del primero de enero de 1982.



Ustedes tendrán ahora la oportunidad de vivir en los Estados Unidos legalmente, si llegaron a este país antes del primero de enero de 1982 y si han trabajado desde entonces.

Un año para solicitar la residencia legal: Cinco de mayo de 1987 al cuatro de mayo de 1988.



Un año, desde el cinco de mayo de 1987 al cuatro de mayo de 1988. Este es el período durante el cual deben solicitar su residencia legal.

Es usted elegible siempre y cuando:

- Haya llegado a los Estados Unidos antes del primero de enero de 1982.

- Haya vivido y trabajado en los Estados Unidos desde el primero de enero de 1982.

- Además de lo anterior, no haya salido de los Estados Unidos por cualquier razón desde el seis de noviembre de 1986.

Si llena los requisitos anteriores, deberá solicitar su residencia legal:

- Dentro del límite de un año, comprendido entre el cinco de mayo de 1987 y el cuatro de mayo de 1988.

1

Earl Dotter, photos used in *La Nueva Ley de Inmigración*, published by the Labor Council for Latin American Advancement, 1987.

The notion of a critical practice, whether in art production or criticism, is notoriously difficult to define. Furthermore, to the extent that critical practices do not exist in a vacuum, but derive their forms and meanings in relation to changing historical conditions, the problem of definition must always be articulated in terms of the present. Gauging the *effectiveness* of critical practices is perhaps even more daunting a task. By any positivist reckoning, John Heartfield's covers for the AIZ had no discernable effect on the rise of fascism, although he was able to draw upon two important historical conditions unavailable to contemporary artists (a mass audience and a definable left culture). Still, the work of Heartfield retains its crucial importance in any consideration of critical practice in so far as it fulfills the still valid purpose of making the invisible visible, and integrally meshing the representation of politics with the politics of representation. In other words, its critical function is both externally and internally inflected.

While Heartfield is clearly a "political" artist, it seems to me increasingly problematic to use the designation "political" to describe certain cultural practices—usually those generated from the left. First, because the adjectival use of the term implies that Hans Haacke's work, for example, expresses a politics, but that Julian Schnabel's does not. In considering the nature, terms, and instrumentalities of critical practice we must accept that all cultural production is moored in the political; to separate the cultural and the aesthetic from the social is to subscribe to the same logic as the Hilton Kramers of the world. Second, the use of the term as a label tends to suggest a politics of content and to minimize, if not efface, the equally important issue of the politics of form. Progressive messages can be—and frequently are—embodied in highly conventional or even conservative forms (left documentary photography here springs to mind). The lessons and legacies of the Russian Formalists, the Frankfurt School, semiotics, poststructuralism, and, most recently, feminist theory, collectively demonstrate that the forms, the structures, and the codes employed in representation are signifying practices in and of themselves and thus inseparable from the meaning(s) they are used to express.

If we further assume that critical practices conceptually assume both an attitude and a position, the emphasis therefore needs to be placed on discursive and institutional function. In this regard, Walter Benjamin's rhetorical question of 1938 is still germane: "Rather than ask 'What is the *attitude* of a work to the relations of production of its time?' I should like to ask 'What is its *position* in them?'"¹ The relevance of this question is that it underscores the need for critical practices to establish a contestatory space in which the *form* of utterance or address speaks to otherwise unrecognized, or passively accepted, meanings, values, and beliefs which dominant forms of culture normally reproduce and legitimize. In so far as contemporary critical practices operate within a society in which, as Victor Burgin observes, "the market is 'behind' nothing, it is *in* everything,"² the notion of a pure and unsullied space outside of the commodity

system becomes increasingly untenable. This would suggest that the definition or evaluation of a critical practice must be predicated on its ability to sustain critique from within the heart of the system it seeks to put in question.

Asked to cite three contemporary artists by way of critical advocacy, I have attempted to illustrate the diversity of form as well as contents that critical practices comprehend. Consistent with the formulations cited above, I am committed to those art practices that function to radicalize forms of enunciation within their institutional spaces. Equally, I was concerned to emphasize that "the political" is not necessarily limited to issues of state or corporate power, to class or race relations, to relations of production. On the contrary, it is precisely a rigorous, expanded, and nuanced conception of the political that can locate its operations in—variously—the discursive construction of the art object as commodity fetish, as in Louise Lawler's work, or in the regimes of power and gender relations that inflect looking, being looked at, and the technologies of looking, as in Connie Hatch's work. It is in this sense too that Hans Haacke's work is so important, self-consciously reckoning with the institutional spaces for which it is destined, and raising the issue of its own status and identity within the cultural emporia it simultaneously critiques.

Haacke, Hatch, and Lawler are thus artists whose point of departure is the recognition of the importance of specificity as a condition of critical practice; the operations of domination, mystification, or commodification are neither essentialized or generalized. Moreover, the work of Haacke, Hatch and Lawler is effectively a site specific practice, protean and shifting in its forms and thus relatively resistant to the fixity and objectification that accompanies the development of "signature styles." That all three artists work within the institutional precincts of the art world, and effect their critiques within it, in no way diminishes the validity of their project. For as theorists such as Louis Althusser and Michel Foucault have demonstrated, power is dispersed, decentralized and atomized; it functions within all social, cultural, and discursive spaces. Just as what Foucault terms the "specific" intellectual must supersede the older notion of the universal intellectual, so may the institutional and discursive spaces of art provide the terrain for the analytic and oppositional work of the artist and the critic. It therefore becomes the task of the artist or critic to forge their critical practices in relation to the specific politics and ideologies of the space of art.

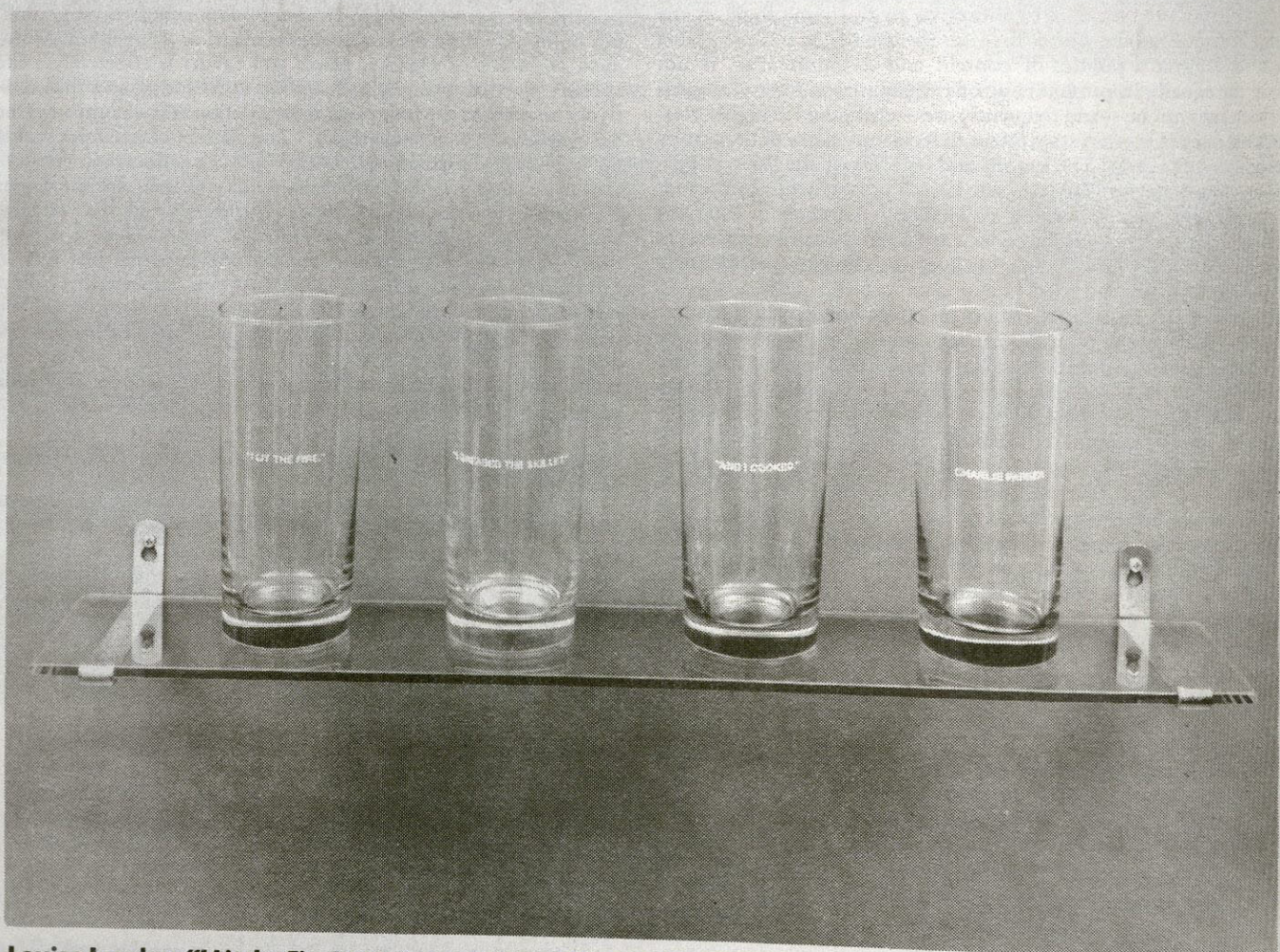
¹Walter Benjamin, "The Author as Producer," in *Reflections*, ed. Peter Demetz, New York, Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1978, p. 222.

²Victor Burgin, *The End of Art Theory: Criticism and Postmodernity*, London, Macmillan Ltd., 1986, p. 174.

Abigail Solomon Godeau is a photography critic and historian. A book of her essays entitled Photography at the Dock will be published in Spring, 1989 by the University of Minnesota Press.



Installation view

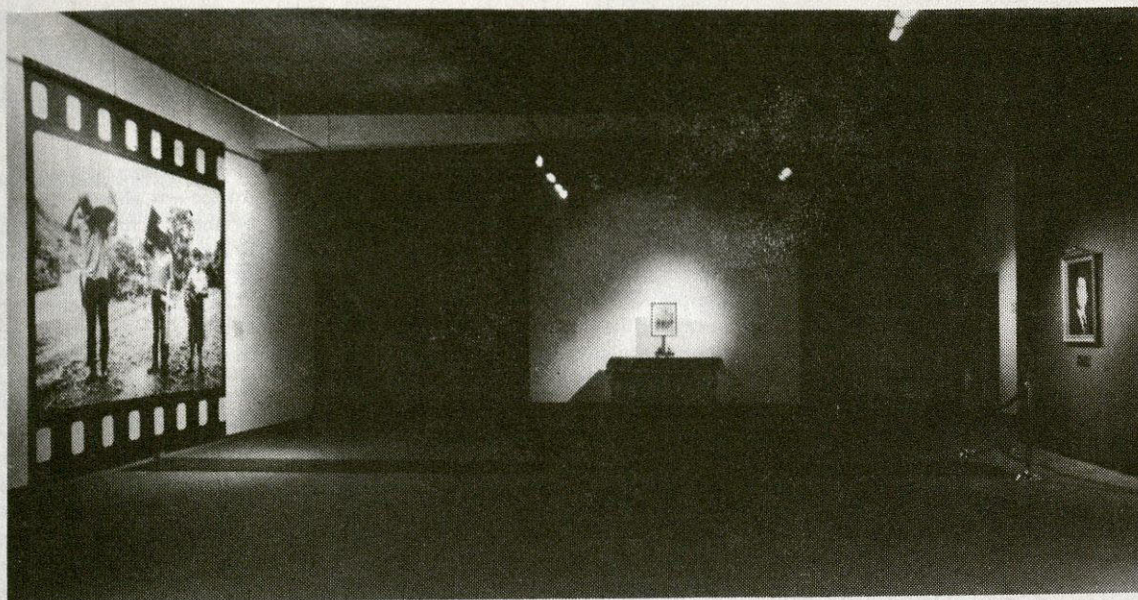


Louise Lawler, "I Lit the Fire"—"I Greased the Skillet"—"And I Cooked"—Charlie Parker, 1987, four glasses, glass shelf, Metro Pictures, 1987.



Connie Hatch, from *The Desublimation of Romance*, 1978-85.





Oelgemaelde, Hommage à Marcel Broodthaers

(Oil Painting, Homage to Marcel Broodthaers)

1982/87

Private Collection

The photo mural of the installation at the Lowe Art Museum is derived from a color slide by Arturo Robles taken on June 16, 1987, near San José de Bocay, Nicaragua.

In a letter to JB Pictures, his New York picture agency, Arturo Robles writes:

"I'm sending you, enclosed herewith, a pack of 10 rolls:

- Photos of 4 dead contras, shot in the streets.
- Photos of 9 corpses of Sandinista soldiers and 4 civilians who died during the fire fight.

These corpses are in coffins.

- Relatives of the dead carrying a cross, flowers and a coffin.

The clash occurred in San José de Bocay on June 16, lasting for about 6 hours. The total number of dead was twenty five: 12 contras, 9 Sandinista soldiers, 7 civilians."

The work was first exhibited at *Documenta 7* in 1982, an international art exhibition held in Kassel, Germany. One week before the opening, President Reagan visited Bonn and delivered a speech to the Bundestag (Parliament of the Federal Republic of Germany) in an attempt to rally support for the stationing of cruise and Pershing II missiles in Germany. His visit to Bonn was accompanied by the largest demonstration held in Germany since World War II. It was called to protest against nuclear arms. The photograph for the *Documenta* installation was taken by Hans Haacke at this rally. *Documenta 7* was generally understood as a celebration of painting. In subsequent exhibitions of this work, the photo mural of the original *Documenta* installation was replaced by a photo mural representing local anti-nuclear demonstrations and taken by other photographers.

Hans Haacke, Oil Painting: Homage to Marcel Broodthaers, as shown in Miami, Florida, 1987. (Installation changes according to place and context; in Miami, the Reagan portrait faced a photomural of Nicaraguan children; photos show each piece; an installation view; the wall label.)

HARD LOOKS

MEL ROSENTHAL

Here are some notes for a future article on the photography critic as romantic hero. In that article I will try not to be defensive about being accused of being: naive, old-fashioned, (pre-post-modernist?), left-documentarian, unaware of contradictions involving the fusing of theory and practice, blind to the complex interrelationship between late semi-Freudian theorizing and post-Marxist, semi-Left philosophizing. I will also try not to be distracted by the tendency that many critics have to use impacted, modishly involuted, non-referential language. In short, I'll try to engage some serious questions about photographers and social change, since I think photography can be used to help change the world for the better.

The only means to social change has been through organizing people. There have been major arguments about who to organize and how to organize, but sooner or later even the Mandarins realize that if the people aren't organizing against the dominant oppression, nothing significant will be changed. One of the nice things about photography has been that for a long time people weren't sure that it was an art. Maybe that was because it had such democratic possibilities and had roots in science. Anyway, it left space to move around in. It could be used by the cops and by the Tina Modottis. It has been used and will continue to be used as a tool for social change. Whether one can demonstrate a "discernible effect" is a different sort of problem. If you set tires on fire to make barricades against tanks and throw rocks at soldiers in flak jackets who are firing M-16 automatic rifles, I suppose someone could say that you aren't having a discernible effect. But who knows? On the other hand, the C.I.A., after the Tet offensive, set up Operation Phoenix and over 25,000 "Viet Cong" cadre and sympathizers were assassinated. This had a great discernible effect, but the North Americans lost anyway.

Then there's the question of institutions and how art has gotten stuck in the art world. There are lots and lots of us trying different ways to interact with people, showing our work in community spaces, trying to organize alternative distribution systems and yet still trying to confront the art and academic establishments. Unfortunately, the progressive forces within the art world and within the academy are weakened by their tendencies toward cynicism and their acceptance of anti-communist ideology. Most of the people of the world, even of the United States of America, are not as jaded or pessimistic as are some of our critics. They are capable of spontaneously and emotionally reacting to photographs that deal with the unpleasant realities we frequently must con-

front. Most people don't walk around burdened by the History of Photography and though they've seen millions of photographs, they haven't studied thousands of them. Of course, we must remember that the political is everywhere, particularly in everyday life, and of course, we must continue to confront and contest everywhere and all the time. But it seems to me that if we are really to move into history, we must leave many of our institutions behind because ultimately they have nothing to do with most of the people of the world and their struggles. This is not to be anti-intellectual or an attempt to negate history, but rather to learn from it.

BARBARA JO REVELLE AND ALEX SWEETMAN

Imagine that the same couple you met driving down the mountain with their child have now received a packet of essays on photography. They are to "respond, argue, protest, praise—"

MAN: So, how do you think we should go about responding to these essays?

WOMAN: I don't know. They're curious. I thought Lucy said everyone was supposed to take one category of photography—you know, postmodern, photojournalist, feminist, documentary, whatever—and write about the social use of that specific way of working. And that *our* assignment was "narrative photography," if there is such a thing. But it seems to me everybody else just kind of talked about the social or political or critical uses of photography per se, more or less. What did you think?

MAN: Clearly there are some very different kinds of photography, each with a quite separate history and working tradition, theory, and criticism. But the totality of photography is a different issue. Photography, which to me means five centuries of applied linear perspective, lens, and now computer-generated imagery spanning printmaking, photography, film and video, has the same social purpose and significance as language itself. Shelley Rice is the only writer acknowledging this broad function as a critical issue having more to do with education and social relations than mere art, much less photojournalism.

WOMAN: Yeah, Shelley's really astonishing. For me she goes to the heart of it when she says, "until we understand the intrinsically social nature of all photography, we will never be able to dig deep enough to root out a lot of the destructive uses of photography." But photography is so ubiquitous and the photographic environment is so powerful. The kind of counter-education that's needed is so enormous. I think the

viewer—the consumer of the photographic image—is almost always unaware that or she is being directed how to look, what to see, what not to see, what to believe, what to be. What is needed now is not so much "the imagery of empathy" that Sophie Vera calls for, but imagery that asks, demands, to be read critically.

MAN: So you're against empathic imagery like Gene Smith and the like?

WOMAN: No, I don't have the problem with empathic imagery that some do. I don't think I really buy that John Berger argument that photos which make you feel pain—say photos of war atrocities—give you emotional catharsis, let you write off all the pictured horrors in the world as just "human condition," instead of seeing that they are caused by specific political situations and are politically addressable. If I remember correctly, he feels that poignant "concerned photography" actually mitigates against the likelihood of political action. I don't think that's true. I mean Viet Nam war-correspondent photography certainly caused a political response over here, do you think? But ultimately I think anything that could teach us to give a critical reading to all kinds of photography is more fundamental, more important right now, than a rebirth of "concerned photography."

MAN: I've always thought that the notion of "concerned photography" was simply a marketing strategy for photojournalism "art photography too," after the big picture magazines folded in the early '70's. Any category of photography that puts Walter Evans together with Bourke-White, except to suggest that there are antithetical and inimical documentary styles, is not a useful category. I don't think war photographs ever stop wars any more than photographs of AIDS patients will stop that disease. The kind of thinking is sympathetic magic, that's all. We never saw any critical pictures of war until everyone but the president was ready opposed to it and said as much, loud. It was people in the streets and in the military and in the military who ultimately put an end to the atrocity, not anybody's photography.

WOMAN: So are you saying "concerned photography" never changes anything? How about Lewis Hine's stuff? Some of it was used in court, wasn't it?

MAN: In Hine's case photos corroborated eye-witness testimony and were used in evidence in court, *not* in a gallery.

WOMAN: Well, how about Susan Meisler's books. Mel Rosenthal writes that he thought that her work has informed "a whole generation" about U.S. involvement in Central America, and also aided those countries

ROUND 2

their struggles for self-determination.

MAN: They're just information. I don't think they change anyone's minds though they have been used as evidence in the courts. At best they can vivify fact, but fact has to take place in an argument; it must be positioned if it is to do something. It is better to have these books, these kinds of photographs in books, than not to have them. What we need now, what was needed then, is an affective humanism to continually offset the brutal inhumanity of the system and its political arm, the repressive right wing in all of its manifestations including the Ed Meese-Ronald Reagan legacy in the courts which will last for decades to come, a nasty little gift to our children. What we *don't* need is the terribly ironic situation we find today—while we are arguing over the etiquette of political art the right continues to organize and arm itself not only with guns but with high powered PR agencies and a lot of time on TV.

WOMAN: I can't tell you how many times I have felt, while making my photo/language work, that it wasn't politically correct enough, wasn't feminist enough, for some of the people I would most like my work to be in dialogue with.

MAN: More feminist than thou? More Marxist than thou? More concerned than thou?

WOMAN: The meanspiritedness of that has struck me forcefully as the times have become increasingly reactionary. And while I wouldn't really want to connect what I try to do with Larry Clark or Nan Goldin's work, I think Mel Rosenthal was wrong to equate them, and especially to take the "stories" in their work at face value. Because *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* gives no evidence that Goldin sees her work within, say, a Marxist framework does not mean it has no social usefulness, or that she is not interested in social change.

MAN: Is this an apology for your own autobiographical way of working?

WOMAN: Well, mine and others. The way I deal with the problem of "subjectivity"—that shocking business of being preoccupied with the tiny individual—is to see myself and my world as a microcosm. And since Roland Barthes and the celebrated "death of the author," there should be no problem with work about oneself at all, since you cannot write (or make photographic work) about *yourself* anyway. Writing (and photographic work in general, I would claim) do not release a single "theological" meaning, but a variety of possible meanings, none original. Isn't that what he says? Anyway, I think Mel Rosenthal is un-

familiar with those ideas and imagines Clark's and Goldin's work is just continuous with their lives in some unmediated way.

MAN: Hmm. I bet we have gone over our 800-word allocation. Do you have any wrap-up thoughts?

WOMAN: Oh, I don't know. I've heard it so much lately but I still like that William Carlos Williams poem with the line "It's hard to get the news from poems but men die daily for the lack of what is written there."

MAN: Meaning that "socially useful" needs a complex definition? That both material needs and inner needs require satisfaction?

WOMAN: Yes, or else what is specifically human in us will shrivel and die.

SOPHIE RIVERA

Shelley Rice conceptualizes the crucial point that some sort of visual education may be an important mechanism for the preservation of whatever liberal democratic traditions remain. It is not clear to me, however, that the dichotomy she posits between the written word and the visual image is as nefarious as she would have it. Nonetheless her concerns center on a major focus of disorder and chaos.

Mel Rosenthal focuses clearly on the work and meaning of numerous photographers whose work is socially relevant and morally necessary. As such he brings a much needed commentary and coherent social viewpoint to the ever widening morass of contemporary contextual criticism.

SHELLEY RICE

As I read through my colleagues' statements, I was reminded of a comment of Abigail's I recently read elsewhere—her observation that as the left "put(s) into question . . . traditional questions of political correctness, . . . the regnant right knows no such uncertainty as it consolidates its position with increasing authoritarianism." That is, as we all know, true, but reading the statements made me ponder (yet again) the relationship between our questions and our continual fragmentation. Having watched the Democratic party self-destruct even before the beginning of this election year, I wonder exactly why it is that such intense uncertainty and resultant divisiveness seem, almost inevitably, to characterize the left—often to the point of self-extinction.

This comment is not meant to obliquely refer to these essays; all of the people included (I know all but Sophie) are obviously

serious, thinking people, dedicated for a long time, and publicly, to left-wing positions. Though we take different approaches and have different styles, there is at heart a fundamental agreement here: that something is very wrong, very problematic in the social uses of media today, and that we'd like to see that wrong articulated (visually and verbally) and corrected. We count, so we say, on principles—of human dignity and equality, for instance—to sustain us. And we use those principles to differentiate ourselves from the right wing which, as we perceive it, counts on hysteria and oppression.

But, then again, I've seen plenty of oppressive behavior on the left, an embarrassing amount in fact: from the time I was a young person involved in radical movements in the '60's, through all the years I've watched my left-wing colleagues write holier-than-thou articles aimed at discrediting the integrity of their left-wing peers, to the time the other day when a representative of the Rainbow Lobby showed up at my door, and refused to let my husband and I sign a petition for equal rights because our refusal to hand over immediate cash to fight the bad guys signified that we must have no principles. The point is, principles or not, the left wing is no better than anyone else—and no worse, for that matter.

Which brings me back to the question of why the left splinters while the right gets stronger. For some cockamammy reason, we expect ourselves to be better than the "oppressors." Frankly, I'm no Marxist, and the concept that oppression is a purely economic affair doesn't cut it with me; economic oppression, as I see it, can only work if a society has first destroyed both the self-love and the will of people. On the level of active will and self-love, the left has a long way to go to clean up its act. Leftist intellectuals and artists—even if they make lots of money or are famous—insist on, indeed sometimes wallow in, the notion that they are oppressed: because their very existence as a group depends on the idea that they are victims fighting for other victims. On a certain level, *we're* the reactionaries: there is no Us without Them. We depend on them to choose our causes, since we can't champion someone they haven't shat on; and we even let them define us as marginal. The left would fall apart rapidly without a stronger bad guy, so we really can't try too hard to win. More than that, we constantly undermine ourselves, by making victims of our own members, often strangling them with the noose of our own problematic principles. Our idea of being "better" is being "perfect"—an impossibility, of course, but a Utopian goal that gives us an excuse to kill each other long before the right can get

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TWO VOICES FROM CHINATOWN BASEMENT WORKSHOP

FAY CHIANG: A PLACE IN ART/HISTORY

Several months ago, UPFRONT approached me about collaborating on an article about Basement Workshop, a community arts and cultural center based in New York's Chinatown. UPFRONT was interested in taking a close look at various community-based cultural projects, examining the kind of work they've done, their relationship with their communities' histories, politics and larger culture, as well as a look at the personal/artistic histories of some of the artist/activists involved. For several years, my fellow Basement activist and artist Margo Machida and I had been discussing the need—at this point in contemporary Asian American cultural history—to document and critique the work of Asian American artists and writers.

Over many cups of coffee, Margo, I and UPFRONT's Charles Frederick evolved a structure to approach the stimulating but potentially overwhelming task of putting Basement's history and our insights into Asian American culture into a form that would speak to UPFRONT's interests. I would write an article about my personal search for "a place in art/history," focusing on my involvement with Basement Workshop from its grassroots beginnings in 1971 to its closing in 1986. Margo would write from the perspective of an artist who became involved in Basement in the early 1980s, looking particularly at why we eventually closed. Despite its closing, we feel a great joy recalling the quality and scope of work that grew out of Basement and feeling the undeniable presence of our fellow Asian American artists in the art and cultural life of New York City and the nation.

—Fay Chiang

In the fall of 1971, I got a call asking me to come to a meeting at a place in New York's Chinatown called the Basement Workshop, where a group of Asian American artists had come together to put out a magazine called "Yellow Pearl." I had visited Basement Workshop several months earlier and had not been impressed. Located in two small



Asian Tactical Theater rehearsing at Basement Workshop, 1972.

rooms in the basement of a tenement at 54 Elizabeth Street, it had faulty plumbing which at times would create small tidal pools on the concrete floor. The place was dank, and the only view from the front window was of a line of garbage cans on the street above. But my impressions on my second visit were quite different.

A group of 30 or so Asian American artists, writers and musicians were crammed into the tiny space, sitting on brown cardboard boxes. Many were sipping cold duck, which they kept chilled by placing it in the water of the toilet tank. They were in the midst of a very intense argument and discussion about their new project. I had never seen so many Asian American artists together in one place.

Who were these people? Many of them were like myself—second generation Chinese Americans who had lived most of their lives in the boroughs of the city, people whose parents worked in laundries, sweatshops, shirt-press factories and restaurants. As our parents toiled away, we were expected to graduate from Ivy League

schools, marry and start raising families and quest earnestly for the American Dream. The last thing our parents expected us to become were artists and community activists. "What went wrong?" "Mom and Dad, we couldn't help it."

Others at the meeting were third generation Japanese Americans whose parents and grandparents had been left deeply scarred by their experience in internment camps during World War II. Some were recent immigrants—people born in Hong Kong who had come to New York for education or career and had decided to remain. Others had grown up and lived all their lives in the narrow streets of Chinatown.

Many, like myself, had been active in movements growing out of the ferment of the 1960's. Some of us had crossed paths

Fay Chiang is the Director of the Asian Outreach Through the Arts Program at Henry Street Settlement in New York. She was Executive Director of the Basement Workshop, Inc.

as we sought to organize Asian American students on our campuses, pushing for increased student aid and for courses on Asian American history and culture. But now we gathered at Basement for a different purpose—to create artistic and literary expressions about the identity issue we all were grappling with: what did it mean to be Asian American?

A PERSONAL HISTORY

My father came from China as a ten- or eleven-year-old “paper son” and worked in his eldest brother’s laundry in Staten Island in the late 1930’s. He told us stories about working six days a week from 6 A.M. until midnight, doing all the ironing, washing and drying by hand. He died of cancer at age 50.

My mother came over in 1950 as a refugee from China’s revolution. Her marriage was arranged. Not knowing the language or culture of her new land, she began working in the sewing factories in Chinatown.

I spent my first few years in Chinatown. Then we moved to the backroom of a laundry in Jackson Heights, Queens. We were one of three Chinese families in a predominantly middle-class Jewish and working-class Italian and Irish community. Until first grade, I did not speak English and observed the world.

Behind the curtain in the small room we six people lived in, my siblings and I spent many hours drawing on laundry paper with crayons. My father began teaching us calligraphy at the age of five and we vied to write characters in the flowing lines he used. Artmaking began early in our family. But as we grew older, our parents encouraged us to leave behind artmaking and to think seriously about professional careers. Their greatest fear was for us to repeat their lives of hard physical labor and the shame of cleaning other people’s dirty laundry.

Accepted in several art schools with partial scholarships, I did not attend them. Without support from home and lacking the courage or know how to make my way in those schools, I entered Hunter College instead, in the fall of 1969. I had a vague notion of studying painting in the Fine Arts Department and taking a few education courses just in case. Deftly painting canvases of abstract expressionism did not alleviate the gnawing feelings of isolation. I could not imagine this was what life was all about.

Discrimination and racism took subtle forms: social situations one was not in-



PHOTO BY CHEUNG CHING MING

“Art of War,” 1984, a collaborative performance piece by (l. to r.): Jessica Hagedorn, Blondelle Cummings, Joseph Jarman, John Woo. Performed at Dance Theater Workshop.

vited to, homes of schoolmates you were not welcome into and friends that were never made.

A SEARCH FOR IDENTITY

During the spring of 1970, the Hunter campus, like many others, was in a state of upheaval in the wake of Kent State. For the first time in my life, I worked and socialized with people from various class, ethnic and community

backgrounds. We formed anti-war, student coalitions that pushed for ethnic, women and gay studies and for support systems for the working-class student body of the City universities.

With other Asian American students, I worked to introduce into the college curriculum a course entitled “Asian American Identity and History.” I essentially wound up teaching the course under the sponsorship of a supportive faculty professor.

My research for the course led me to a deep internal search for a sense of identity. I did not feel part of this America which had a history of exclusion of Asian Americans and where I felt so out of place. This led me to take a trip to Asia.

In the summer of 1971, I went to Taiwan and Hong Kong, hoping to find out whether I was Asian or American. Wandering the streets of Hong Kong and Kowloon, I felt even more alienated than I did in America. Although I understood the language and could melt into the crowds, this was not home. I realized I had to go back to the United States to find out who I was.

I returned to the States and hitched up and down the West Coast, visiting Asian Studies Departments at California universities, collecting resource materials and syllabi for our Asian American courses in New York. By the time I returned to New York, I was ready for Basement Workshop.



PHOTO BY HARVEY WANG

Seichi Tanaka, Taiko Drum Master, sponsored by Basement Workshop at New York Buddhist Church, 1984.

PHOTO BY CHRISTIAN FREY



George Mars Dance Workshop performing at Basement.

THE BIRTH OF BASEMENT

Basement began as an outgrowth of Chinatown Report 1969, a research project funded by the Ford Foundation. After the study was completed, many participants—urban planners, writers, artists and musicians—wanted to continue the work. During 1970-1971 they sowed the seeds for a number of different research, creative and community service projects which were to blossom in the coming years. During its first five years Basement Workshop served as an umbrella for these programs.

Bridge Magazine published work by Asian American writers. The Amerasia Creative Arts was formed by a group of former art students who ran arts and crafts

classes for children and workshops for summer youth employment interns. We began with 30, but eventually swelled to 160 interns per summer. We offered workshops in silkscreen, dance, music, creative writing, photography and super 8 film.

The Asian American Resource Center, which began its life in an orange crate and one four-drawer filing cabinet, grew into the largest collection of Asian American resources on the East Coast, containing a library, artifacts, oral histories and old photographs. Our Community Planning Workshop ran Survival English and Citizenship classes for 200 adults per week.

Over the years, Basement helped empower hundreds of individuals by enabling them to learn organizational, artistic,

research, archival, development, marketing and training skills. Because of Basement's reputation for producing hard workers, many of our volunteers and workers were actively recruited into other community agencies.

At its inception, Basement was staffed entirely by volunteers. It slowly received funding from the New York State Council on the Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts and various foundations and corporations. Working with Seven Loaves, a coalition of seven nonprofit arts organizations in the Lower East Side, Basement staff learned the ropes of arts administration and funding. Although the organization was run by an unwieldy Executive Board, and although the decision-making process could be boisterous and chaotic, the programs which emerged flourished, and would come to serve as models within the community for future organizations.

Basement was unique in the context of the Chinatown community. It was the first multi-disciplinary arts and culture organization to emphasize the needs and voice of the American-born Chinese and Japanese artists and writers. It was not part of the traditional political/social system of old Chinatown which was in place from the 1890's and whose roots were transplanted from southern China. It was not part of the social service agencies emerging from the anti-poverty funding of the Johnson Administration or the social networks, schools, churches and social clubs within the community.

Basement's members were involved with community and larger political and social issues individually. But this made us suspect among the more traditional community organizations for pushing "leftist" politics. The FBI visited our premises regularly.

PHOTO BY LINDA LEW



Girls' Video Workshop at IS 131, 1984. Coordinated by Linda Lew.



Margaret Yuen of Young Dancers at Basement's Lunar New Year, 1986.

YEARS OF CONFLICT

Through the years, Basement was the only Chinatown cultural organization to support not only the work of Asian American, but also other minority, ethnic, women and progressive artists. We made it a priority to create a two-way cultural exchange. This was not done without resistance from within Basement itself and from the community. Historically, Chinatowns were formed as a means of survival against the larger society which discriminated against them with acts of violence, legislation and ignorance. The wariness of "outsiders" grew out of a response to generations of exclusion.

There were also pressures on Basement from groups who considered themselves "political," who looked to China for a sense of nationalism and for a theoretical framework taken from Marxist-Leninist-Mao-tse-tung thought. These groups became involved in local community board and school district politics, and they tried to use organizations such as Basement as "fronts" for their work. In 1975, this led to an internal split in Basement. At one meeting I was accused of selling out the community by accepting Federal and State art funding. When I tried to object I was literally pinned to the floor, and for several months I was harassed and followed on the streets of Chinatown as this group tried to "break" me.

NEW BEGINNINGS

The infighting shattered Basement. The political group left to form its own organization, while the few artists and cultural activists who remained moved Basement to a new loft facility on Lafayette Street.

There was much construction and an increase in fundraising. The Asian American Resource Center expanded its collection and organized photo exhibits on New York Chinatown. Arts activities expanded on many fronts.

In 1979, the lease at Lafayette Street ran out and Basement had to move. I had taken a leave of absence due to exhaustion. When I sought to return as director, the politics of the new Board of Directors prevented me from doing so. They rejected my resumé and informed me everything was under control at Basement.

But by late spring of 1979, the Board and much of the staff had resigned, the organization was deeply in debt and the IRS was pounding at the doors. The remaining staff asked me to return. After much thought, I realized that if I did not

return, I would forever feel a sense of incompleteness. In 1971 we had started with a vision of creating an Asian American culture and of supporting artists carrying out that work. By 1979, we had barely begun to carry out this task, and if the organization closed on a note of failure or an unclear sense of closure, I feared the negative ramifications would be great. Personally, I felt I needed to learn from our mistakes, not only for my own understanding, but for future work in the community.

PLANNED SHRINKAGE, CAREFUL GROWTH

We had to start all over with very limited resources. Our new space, a loft site at 22 Catherine Street, was much smaller. Moving from an 8,000 square foot to a 1,700 square foot space created problems. The new space was filled with boxes from ceiling to floor.

I decided to discontinue Basement's service component because other Chinatown organizations now had programming in the arts for children and teens. Other agencies were funding English and employment training programs. We also donated the Asian American Resource Center's Library Collection to the newly founded New York Chinatown History Project.

Basement could now focus on arts programming. Slowly, we implemented each new program area. There were poetry and performance readings, writing workshops, play development and reading, an exhibition series for contemporary artists, lecture demonstrations by folk artists and production of media projects. This took seven years to implement.

By 1985 we felt we had hit a plateau. To move to the next level, we realized we would have to develop a working Board of Directors with specialized skills,



Basement Workshop, 1986.

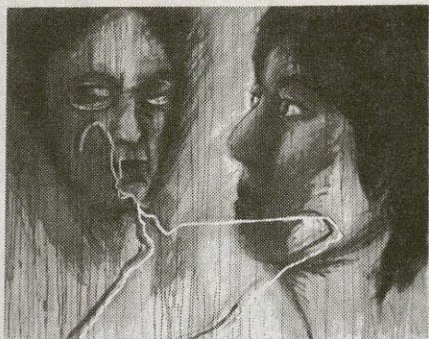
PHOTO BY CHEUNG CHING MING

It took a year to sort everything out. We didn't have room for most of our equipment, so we donated it to other community organizations. Finally, we were left with a bare loft, a small office, a very limited budget and two volunteer staff members (I was working as a waitress in the evenings and at Basement during the day).

We began by approaching other artists to come back to the organization. Some felt working with Basement would not help them further their careers as emerging or professional artists. Others were too burnt out from the previous internal political battles. Others just needed a total break and to move on with their lives.

hire and train a new and professional staff who would require competitive salaries, and raise substantial new funds to cover staff and operating costs. We had also outgrown our small space, but Chinatown real estate had become prohibitive (thanks in part to overseas Asian corporate investment).

Those of us on staff felt too burnt out to make this transition. Many of us were artists approaching mid-career levels who wished to commit more time to building our careers and stabilizing our lives. In May, 1986, Basement closed with a "graduation party" commemorating 15 years of Asian American cultural development in New York City.



Margo Machida, "Family History," 1985 (50" x 62" acrylic on canvas).

For the fifteen years of its existence, Basement Workshop had had a rich and complex relationship with the New York Chinatown community. Initially established to offer a multitude of services to that constituency, Basement had primarily become an organization run by and for artists when I became involved in the early 1980s. As I got to know the staff and core group of artist-supporters, I was consistently impressed by their level of commitment to exploring difficult issues of Asian-American cultural identity, and to building an arts movement from the ground up. In large part due to my work with Basement, the topic of Asian-American identity has taken on deep personal meaning and urgency in my life.

In the process of preparing this article, I had the opportunity to re-examine my thoughts about my six year involvement with Basement Workshop. I was struck by two things: first, how influential Basement was in developing many Asian-American artists and administrators who are now leaders in the field; and second, how reflective the internal struggles in Basement were of major changes that were occurring for Asian-American artists and their peers in the larger social context. Taken from a historical perspective, Basement's closing in 1986 shouldn't be viewed as a negative event, but rather as a stage in the development of the careers of Asian-American artists and writers who have gone on to pursue exciting new directions.

A PERSONAL VIEWPOINT

As a third generation Japanese-American raised in Hawaii, I assume that I am fairly typical of Americanized Asians who are assimilated into mainstream American culture. At home, I was part of the majority racial group and had

MARGO MACHIDA: AN ARTIST'S PERSPECTIVE



Margo Machida, "Help! She's Drowning Me!", 1983 (60" x 50" acrylic on canvas).

seen my Asian "identity" in physical rather than cultural terms. I was not seriously challenged to examine my relationship to the "dominant" culture until I had moved to New York City. Suddenly, I became aware of being isolated in a completely different cultural context, one for which I was unprepared.

I had moved to the East Coast to break with the Asian community I had known, a community which I had regarded as provincially restrictive and incapable of supporting my growth as an artist and writer, and I was determined to seek alternatives. As a result of this decision, I spent my first ten years in New York uninvolved with anything Asian.

I did not live in a big Asian enclave

again until I rented a studio in Chinatown in the late 1970s. By then, I had actively exhibited my paintings in the commercial and nonprofit mainstream, and had helped to form a cooperative gallery in Soho. Like many local Asian artists, I did not participate in Chinatown community life until I had a specific connection through Basement Workshop. In my first few visits, I learned that Basement was run by second- and third-generation Asians like myself, and that it offered a social group which I understood and felt comfortable with.

Margo Machida is a Japanese American artist and arts administrator who writes frequently on American Asian arts and culture.



Margo Machida, "Shadow Warrior," 1982 (4' x 4' acrylic on masonite).

In particular, I was attracted to those aspects of Basement Workshop that were grounded in the '70s counterculture, i.e., an emphasis on feminism, cultural self-affirmation and a participatory decision-making process. A combination of several factors made Basement unique, even among Asian art groups: 1) it was run by a second-generation Asian-American woman; 2) it had an interactive, peer-oriented structure rather than the traditional hierarchical authority system of Asian families; and 3) it had a long history of multi-ethnic interaction with artists outside Chinatown. These characteristics, which embodied the Americanized attitudes of its founders, made Basement a magnet for many second- and third-generation artists like myself, and pointed toward a new type of Asian organization which could move toward the art mainstream, while retaining its unique sense of an ethnic consciousness.

THE ORGANIZATION AND ITS ARTISTS

In the early '80s, Basement's leadership was struggling to come to terms with its own limitations and the problem of playing too many different roles within the growing Asian-American arts community. When I became involved with Basement, its older members were feeling frustrated because they suspected that the organization had become static and unable to further promote their careers as artists. As one put it, "Once you have reached a pinnacle of community-ness by showing at Basement, where could you go from there? It did not lead anywhere." This complaint, common to many artists who rely on organizations like Basement

to "make" their careers by serving as conduits to mainstream attention, reflects a lack of understanding of the fundamental differences between the role of community arts groups versus the commercial art world. Artists were expecting Basement to function like a private gallery, and this obviously was not the organization's mission.

As a community arts organization, one of Basement's primary tasks was to provide exposure within the Asian community for local Asian-American artists through exhibitions and programs. This ethos was based on common ethnicity and an orientation to community politics, not on arts-oriented issues. In this context, Basement was successful in aiding the development of young Asian artists at an early stage in their careers.

Contradictions arose when many artists wanted Basement to function as a more mainstream alternative art space oriented toward outside critical and curatorial attention. Numerous alternative exhibition spaces had emerged during the same rebellious period in which Basement was established. These spaces positioned themselves as alternatives to the commercial gallery and museum system and yet operated within the recognizable framework of the mainstream art dialogue. This balancing act enabled these spaces to become unofficial testing grounds for numbers of emerging artists who had entered the gallery system during the art market boom of the early '80s. Basement was never oriented toward this established discourse, and therefore could not arouse significant critical or curatorial interest from that sector. In addition, because Basement's leadership had not emerged from the mainstream systems of museums and galleries, or from academic backgrounds in art history or administration, there were no professional connections or points

Margo Machida, "Self-Portrait with Multiple Contradictions," 1986 (60' x 72' acrylic on canvas).



of access available to those specialized networks.

The obvious success of non-Asian peers in the new, vibrant and expanding art market, caused frustration among unrecognized Asian community artists. They saw that there was money to be made and recognition to be gained in the mainstream but could not find ways to share this success. Since this desire to be truly competitive cannot be easily dismissed, more Asian-Americans are currently looking for institutions which can offer help in achieving mainstream artistic prominence. Basement did not meet these needs so its artist members sought other venues, and there were fewer and fewer people, beyond a small committed group, who identified with Basement's agenda.

DIRECTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

There is a compelling need for scholars and critics to consider entering the contemporary Asian-American arts field. Currently, there are no museums of contemporary Asian-American art and no mainstream-oriented institutions which consistently promote, document and collect work by Asian-American artists. Further, there is little serious art historical scholarship in this area. To meet these needs, some Basement alumni, as well as others around the country, are exploring careers in these directions. Others remain active in community-based arts groups, many of which are Basement offshoots. These groups are becoming active in coalition politics, building alliances with other minority art groups.

Community art groups that deal with the needs of second and third-generation Asian-Americans must continuously question their relationship to the larger art world and can no longer function in isolation. These groups must find ways to connect to the mainstream without losing their roots in the community, and Asian-American artists must struggle with the complexities inherent in simultaneously existing in two worlds.

What's needed in the development of Asian-American culture is a re-evaluation of the meaning of community arts in the '80s. Such changes as result must embody a belief in self-empowerment, affirmation of Asian-American identity, and an ideal of service in local Asian communities. This would be a natural and powerful outgrowth of the work Basement Workshop began, i.e., to create new institutions which will truly reflect the needs of contemporary and future generations of Asian-American artists and writers.

LIFE CYCLES OF A MULTICULTURAL CENTER

The Taller Latinoamericano (Latin American Workshop) was founded in 1979 by a handful of Latin and North Americans inspired by a vision of creating a freewheeling multicultural center. The Taller began life in a loft space on West 19th Street in the Chelsea section of New York, where it offered a unique system of Spanish language instruction and a space for concerts, art exhibits, meetings and performances. Building on New York's sizable community of Latin American artists, exiles and political activists, and on the growing number of North Americans drawn to Latin culture and politics, or simply anxious to learn Spanish, the Taller rapidly developed a substantial constituency. I started studying Spanish at the Taller soon after it began, was immediately drawn to its creative, eclectic atmosphere, and, along with several other students, became actively involved in helping to keep it afloat.

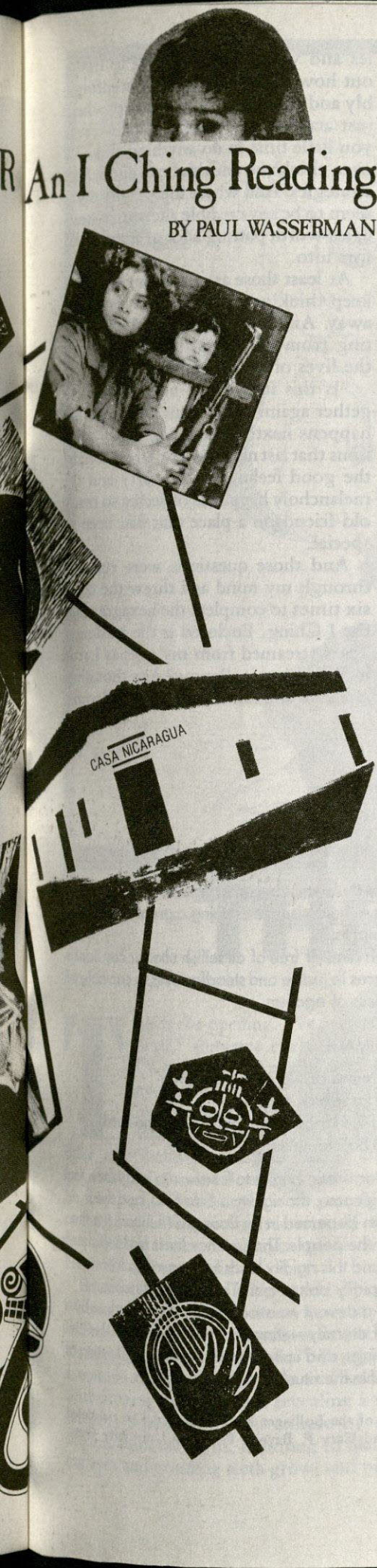
In 1981, after losing its lease, the Taller joined together with several Latin American solidarity groups and moved into a larger space a few blocks away on 21st Street, an entire floor, cavernous, rubble-cluttered, in need of total renovation. I became administrator of the new space, still remaining within the Taller but working with all the organizations on the floor.

The move was, first and foremost, a practical one—none of the groups, by themselves, could afford to remain in mid-Manhattan, where all of them wanted to be. But there was also a larger vision involved—the possibility of building a broad, multicultural community which could reach out to people on many levels by creating an environment which offered a unique blending of politics and culture.

From the start, it seemed a Quixotic undertaking. Constructing and maintaining the space would require a lot of money and a lot of volunteer labor. And the odds of sustaining the from-the-start uneasy alliance between the groups and personalities involved seemed minimal.

Early on, there were differences over structure—to what extent was the new space an independent entity run collectively by all the groups, and to what extent was it essentially the Taller's (the Taller signed the lease and paid the largest share of the rent) with the other groups in a more or less subtenant relationship? There was also a good dose of mistrust and ego clashes between





R An I Ching Reading

BY PAUL WASSERMAN

some of the key people involved and confusion between and within all the groups about how much work each organization ought to be doing to help build and run the floor.

But we plunged ahead. And though relations remained shaky, and often quite tense, and our individual and joint bank accounts were always near zero, the space did get built, the individual groups did survive and (in most cases) thrive, and the 2nd floor on West 21st Street was soon one of New York's most vibrant alternative spaces—a centerpoint for Central America solidarity work and for a wide variety of cultural activities. Among the groups housed there were political organizations doing work around Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, Puerto Rico and Honduras, and, in addition to the Taller, such cultural groups as Group Material, Women Make Movies and Teatro Duo.

The space reached its peak in 1982 and 1983. There was a constant buzz of activity, an endless flow of meetings, classes, dance rehearsals, film showings, concerts, art exhibits and fund raising events. Thousands of people passed through the space, many on a regular basis. National demonstrations, scores of local political actions, major concerts and Carnegie Hall performances were planned and organized there.

Toward the end of 1983, the energy began to shift. At the Taller, the administrative and financial hub of the floor, many of the founders and core activists left, one after the other. Those who left were propelled by burn-out, interpersonal conflicts and the need to move on, with differences over goals, money or decision-making processes at times adding fuel to the fire. For most of us (I resigned at the end of 1984), leaving was a gut-wrenching experience, a decision agonized over for months. It meant detachment from a community that had defined our lives, from a project that had given us focus and purpose, and from a sense of continual energy and excitement that would be hard to recapture.

Other groups were also having problems. Casa Nicaragua, one of the original tenants, moved out following a period of awkward, sometimes bitter tensions with others in the space. CISPES, numerically the largest group on the floor, was beset by personal and political disputes which resulted in the exodus of a large portion of the membership in 1985.

By then, the always-tenuous relation-

ship between the Taller and the other organizations in the space had reached rock bottom. Eventually, all the groups except the Taller moved out. The rent skyrocketed, and the Taller by itself could not afford to stay. In February, 1987, the Taller moved to a less expensive location in a church basement on the Lower East Side. The space on 21st Street was demolished and turned into offices.

The Taller Latinoamericano continues to function at its new home (63 E. 2nd St., New York, N.Y., 10003, 212-777-2250), offering English as a second language as well as Spanish classes, and hosting art exhibits, concerts and parties. But it is no longer the center of a vital cultural/political scene, a scene which has itself become diffuse and de-energized.

The letter below was written the day the Taller moved. It reflects a mood which in some ways was specific to the moment, but which I still generally feel, though not with the same poignancy. And it describes a situation which, as 1988 begins, seems still fundamentally accurate. Some have found the letter depressing and pessimistic. To me, first and foremost, it reflects a reality which needs to be recognized and articulated. Beyond that, the I Ching reading is quite upbeat, seeing in dissolution and dispersal the seeds of a new coming together. Hopefully, with the fading of the Reagan era, an emerging generation of young rebels will inject some new energies, new ideas and new sensibilities into the social bloodstream, and we veterans will be hip enough to go and change with the flow (or at least get out of the way if we can't lend a hand).

February 16, 1987

Dear Friends,

Last night I threw the I Ching. Usually I ask it a question pertaining to my own life situation. Last night I asked a more general question, about larger groupings of people, about the various communities of people I've known and been part of.

I thought of the Taller, the cultural center that was the focus of my life for four years. The night before, I'd been at the final party at the Taller's home on 21st Street. As I threw the coins, current Taller folks were no doubt busy moving out the last items from the old space. Many of us had labored long and hard to build the place out of the 9,000 square feet of rubble we inherited, the remains of the zipper factory that had

been there before us.

We built it into a thriving cultural and political center, a meeting place for those working on Central America solidarity and those interested in the interface of North and Latin American people, politics and cultures.

The groups that had been part of the space have dispersed, and many have shattered or withered internally. And while some of the individuals who'd been part of the 21st Street scene continue their work in other locales, most of us lead a more isolated, individualized existence. I don't think we're the only ones.

Many of us were together again at the last party before the wreckers, who are probably at work as I write, tear down the walls we built and pull up the floors we laid, putting the finishing touches on the disintegration of community that had already taken place. You can blame it on escalating rents. You can blame it on the difficulty of sustaining collective effort in the midst of differing philosophies, visions, politics and style. You can blame it on the Reagan era. And there would be some truth in those explanations. But the ravages caused by individual and group egotism have certainly done their share.

As I threw the coins, I thought, too,

about my old taxi friends, folks with whom I worked for six years as part of a rank and file movement during the 1970's. I've been thinking a lot about taxi things lately, doing some writing about it in fact, and I've also been going through a lot of old papers in preparation for putting the group's files in a labor history library. Before I threw the coins, I had just reread the draft of a letter to old Rank & Filers about the plans to officially turn us into history.

As my hands shook the pennies and threw them on the table, I thought of these communities of old friends, and of all the other communities I've been part of that have long since dissolved: my family, childhood friends, camp friends, high school friends, college friends, travelling friends, New Hampshire friends, old girlfriends, friends from the various jobs I've had, friends from my last job, which just ended, leaving me, for now, in a total state of disconnection from the outside world and with a lot of time to contemplate the past, present and future.

And, in a more general sense, I thought of my generation, the baby boomers who came up and shook things up in the sixties, us diehards who struggled and kept some dreams and visions alive through the seventies and into the eight-

ies and who now are trying to figure out how to survive and live comfortably and raise our kids in a society where just accomplishing those things leave you little time to do anything about or even think too much about alternative strategies. And where there really don't seem to be any credible alternative strategies worth putting a lot of hope or effort into.

At least those are the thoughts that keep thinking, and they just won't go away. And that's the feeling I keep getting from talking with and observing the lives of many friends.

"Is this it, will we never all be together again? What went wrong? What happens next?" I heard all those questions that last night on 21st Street, amid the good feeling of the party and the melancholy happiness of seeing so many old friends in a place that had been so special.

And those questions were running through my mind as I threw the coins six times to complete the hexagram from the I Ching. Enclosed is the reading. Tears streamed from my eyes as I read it. What does it all mean? Any thoughts, analyses and idle musings are welcome.

Paul



59. Huan / Dispersion [Dissolution]

above SUN
below K'AN

THE GENTLE, WIND
THE ABYSMAL, WATER

Wind blowing over water disperses it, dissolving it into foam and mist. This suggests that when a man's vital energy is dammed up within him (indicated as a danger by the attribute of the lower trigram), gentleness serves to break up and dissolve the blockage.

THE JUDGMENT

DISPERSION. Success.

The king approaches his temple.

It furthers one to cross the great water.

Perseverance furthers.

The text of this hexagram resembles that of Ts'ui, GATHERING TOGETHER (45). In the latter, the subject is the bringing together of elements that have been separated, as water collects in lakes upon the earth. Here the subject is the dispersing and dissolving of divisive egotism. DISPERSION shows the way, so to speak, that leads to gathering together. This explains the similarity of the two texts.

Religious forces are needed to overcome the egotism that divides men. The common celebration of the great sacrificial feasts and sacred rites, which gave expression simultaneously to the interrelation and social articulation of family and state, was the means employed by the great rulers to unite men. The sacred music and the splendor of the ceremonies aroused a strong tide of emotion that was shared by all hearts in unison, and that awakened a consciousness of the common origin of all creatures. In this way disunity was overcome and rigidity dissolved. A further means to the same end is co-operation in great general undertakings that set a high goal for

the will of the people; in the common concentration on this goal, barriers dissolve, just as, when a boat is crossing a great stream, all hands must unite in a joint task.

But only a man who is himself free of all selfish ulterior considerations, and who perseveres in justice and steadfastness, is capable of so dissolving the hardness of egotism.

THE IMAGE

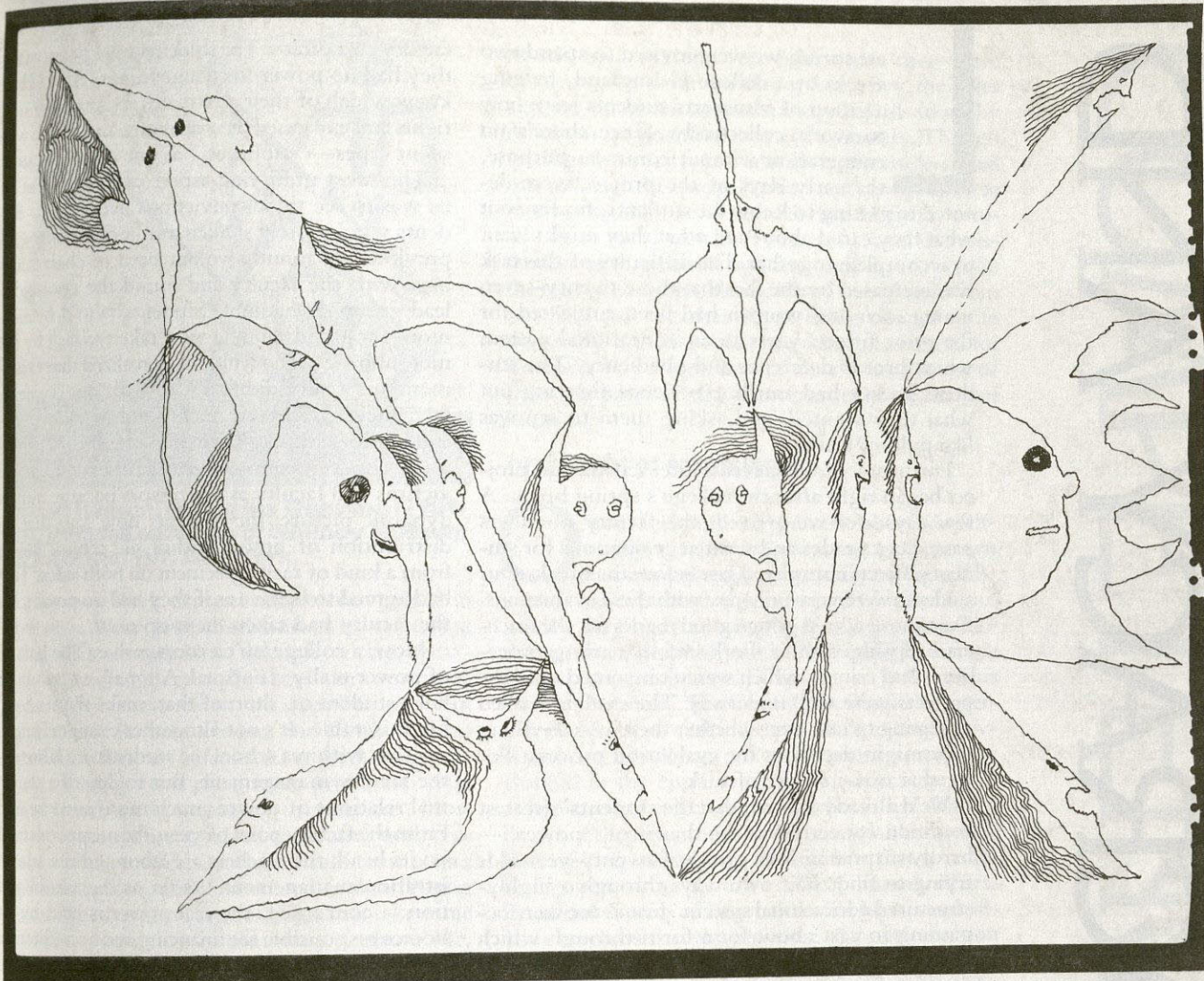
The wind drives over the water:

The image of DISPERSION.

Thus the kings of old sacrificed to the Lord
And built temples.

In the autumn and winter, water begins to freeze into ice. When the warm breezes of spring come, the rigidity is dissolved, and the elements that have been dispersed in ice floes are reunited. It is the same with the minds of the people. Through hardness and selfishness the heart grows rigid, and this rigidity leads to separation from all others. Egotism and cupidity isolate men. Therefore the hearts of men must be seized by a devout emotion. They must be shaken by religious awe in face of eternity—stirred with an intuition of the Creator of all living beings, and united through the strong feeling of fellowship experienced in the ritual of divine worship.

*From the Third Edition of the Bollingen Foundation Series, as translated by Richard Wilhelm and Cary F. Baynes. Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J. 1975.



DRAWING: HERB PERR

THE OPENING

BY HERB PERR

This is the opening. I've arrived! "God, look who's here!" someone exclaims. Another person asks, "Who? Who?" An exhilarating moment of silence; everyone's eyes are on me. Thrilled by the recognition, I respond with a restrained smile and half wave of my hand. Quick looks, half turns, flashes, buzz, cut. Shaking hands and kissing cheeks, an instance of beginning... the ritual moves on. Out of a puff of smoke he whispers, "Well hung, don't you think? But, I can't get near them." Wedges and sections of the art, peeking out from behind the layers of layers of discontent and whispered envy. A curious exhibit.

Raised eyebrows on a No mask, lips puckered, making a wooing sound, he looks at me. I put my ear near his mouth, feeling his wet lips and warm breath. He whispers, "Welcome to my gallery, don't I know you?" Brushing against my knees, a woman moves on her hands and knees, her black leather skirt slipping over her hips, revealing a white fleshy ass with tattoo, "Hard Art." An exhale of sighs and laughter accompanies the lights, dimming to black. Iridescent, seething eyes and grinding teeth growl and pierce the darkness. A

man cries out, "God damn it, I deserve it. I want my work hanging in this space." A friend whispers, "Shh, be cool, someone will hear you."

Throbbing strobes blur with smoke. Groping through the dark, my hands touch a soft face. My fingers slide into her mouth, stretching it wide open. I slip in. From a comforting, caressing pool of saliva, her supple tongue gently lifts my body between her teeth. I peek out into the gallery. Large fragments of faces demand, scream, and plead, "Realism is out; symbolic, hard-edge geometry is in." "Who gives a shit! I paint for myself." The voices get louder and shriller, rhythmically penetrating the walls of her mouth. Abruptly she coughs, spitting me out of her mouth onto the floor of the gallery.

The gallery director lifts me to my feet and politely informs me that the opening is over. Leaving the gallery, I meet an acquaintance, who looks me straight in the eyes and says, "I want to be rich and famous. I want my friends to envy me. I want them to talk about me behind my back. I want everyone to love me."

What more can one ask for? Really.

DEMOCRACY AND

BY
**DON ADAMS
AND ARLENE
GOLDBARD**

62 UPFRONT

Last spring we were invited to spend two weeks at a college in England, helping a group of visual arts students learn how to work collectively. Since there's no cooperation without common purpose, the early days of the project were devoted to getting to know the students, finding out what they cared about and what they might want to accomplish together. The difficulty of this task was increased by the fact that these twenty-seven young men and women had been subjected for the prior fifteen years to an educational system which breeds deference and obedience. The students hadn't had much experience figuring out what they wanted, and asking them to try was like pulling teeth.

Fortunately for us, events intervened. Our project began right after the college's spring break. A few days after we arrived, the faculty members passed out grades and written evaluations for student projects completed just before the break. Our students were very unhappy with these evaluations. Even those who'd gotten good marks felt the teachers had judged their work unfairly, using procedures and criteria which weren't invented until the projects were well underway. The students called a meeting to talk over whether there was anything they might do about the evaluation process. For us, this was a stroke of luck.

We'd already learned that the students' greatest common concern was the theme of "power"—hardly surprising for a group of twenty-year-olds trying to find their own ways through a highly-structured educational system. Just as we were beginning to cast about for a form through which this theme could be pursued, the evaluation controversy threw light on the aspect of power closest to home: the power of the college, and of the students and faculty within it.

ASKING HARD QUESTIONS

Over the next ten days or so we helped the students explore the nature of power and the tools of collective endeavor. They conferred with faculty members and older students, asking them hard questions about the curriculum and system of grading. They studied the college's policy statements and plans and compared these with their actual experience. They talked together about how they would like things to be. Out of all this research and deliberation, they proposed a series of improvements to the evaluation system and a student-faculty committee to monitor them. Much to their surprise, the faculty agreed to all of their proposals.

In the course of this work, the students learned a good deal about their own dynamics as a group. When we first encountered them, they cast themselves as helpless victims of the college system. They were convinced that the faculty members functioned as a conscious, coordinated power bloc, and that every student complaint was rooted in a

faculty conspiracy. The students were positive that they had no power to change things. All of them knew which of their classmates spoke up for their rights and expressed their opinions, and which were silent types—"cabbages," as one of them put it.

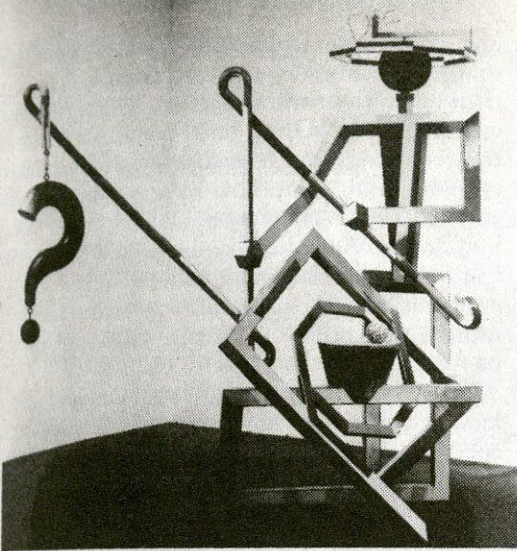
The most gratifying aspect of this project for us was to see these convictions overturned. Students who'd rarely spoken out in class during the previous six months volunteered to chair meetings with the faculty and found the courage to lead group discussions. Students who'd been famous for grandstanding were taken to task by former cabbages. The whole class realized that faculty members really didn't speak with one voice; in fact, they had disagreements and made mistakes and bumbled through like everyone else. What had formerly seemed a clear-cut case of students as victims and faculty as oppressors became a more dynamic picture: the students now saw that the distribution of power within the school flowed from a kind of tacit agreement on both sides. They had agreed to behave as if they had no power, and the faculty had taken them up on it.

Now, a college isn't a cooperative. The balance of power really is unequal. After all, a teacher can fail a student or, short of that, make the student's life miserable. It's not altogether exaggerating to say that within a school the students are labor and the faculty management. But to describe the actual relations of power, much more must be said. From the faculty point of view, the metaphor stands on its head: the teachers are labor and the administration management. As far as the administration is concerned, the real power is held by the bodies responsible for financing and accreditation. In England, these are ultimately government responsibilities and thus accountable to political power—which brings the question back to the students, their families, and thousands of others like them. Interventions at any point in the network of power can affect the entire system. The students learned that while simple descriptions of power may have a certain ring to them, they are disabling because they are untrue.

TO TAKE DEMOCRACY SERIOUSLY

We loved working on this project. It was a whole and complete and satisfying experience because it embodied two themes we cared about above all others: democracy and competence. To borrow Nadine Gordimer's phrase, we placed ourselves among the "politically devout," and democracy and competence are the tenets of our credo. For us, they are inseparable. Democracy must guarantee each citizen's right to shape political life, to participate in the decisions that affect the community's and the nation's commonweal. That right carries with it a critical responsibility to take democracy seriously, to learn all we can that our social interventions are sound, to mobilize our energies and self-discipline to practice what we preach.

COURTESY OF LEHMAN COLLEGE



Robert Hudson, *Posing the Question* (1984-85). From the collection of Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

Our own work expresses these convictions in two ways. We spend as much time as we can trying to spread democratic ideas, through writing, speaking and teaching, especially about the concept of cultural democracy and its social applications. But we also have to make a living, and for the last ten years have done so by consulting with organizations, helping them plan, solve problems, raise money, and build community connections. Most of these groups are involved somehow with cultural action: producers, such as theater companies and film makers; people involved in distributing cultural products; and organizations that take some sort of responsibility for community cultural life, such as arts councils. In the course of this work we hear about people's problems and aspirations. We interview them and study their writings and records. We get to know them pretty well, on the level of deeds as well as words.

We see these two dimensions of our work as two halves of a whole, even though we don't often get an opportunity to combine them so completely as in our project with the British art students. At its best, helping organizations with their work is helping them to put into practice the democratic ideas we write and speak about. Working with organizations serves as a kind of "reality check," keeping our thinking from getting too abstract to be of use to practitioners. Writing and teaching give us room to dream of new approaches; they help us avoid the trap of limiting the future's possibilities to the way things have been done in the past. Together, they express both commitments we believe are necessary to bring about real social change: to democratic ideals and to competent democratic practice.

To have meaning, the commitment to democracy is irrevocably a commitment to build competence in the actual practice of democracy, and its starting place is to recognize our potential to act. Our British students pictured themselves outside the nexus of power. They'd spent their child-

hoods in a system that told them they were incompetent to do anything but obey the rules and try to excel within standards laid down by others more qualified to wield authority. Though intelligent, creative and articulate, the students had internalized this propaganda so thoroughly as to ratify it by their actions, behaving as if they actually were incompetent. Their only form of resistance was to grumble and feel victimized, even in the face of trivial problems. Many complained from our first day together about being cooped up in the stuffy meeting room we'd been assigned, for instance, but it took more than a week for any of them to propose that the class move to another location.

THE CULTURE OF POWERLESSNESS

Our British students' powerlessness was self-ratifying: their failure to act in their own interest proved their inability to do so. The impoverished culture of politics in the United States is self-ratifying in exactly the same way. Consider the current culture of politics: "Preach democracy and practice expediency" might as well be this country's motto. The Contragate scandal is a perfect illustration, and there are other examples everywhere, equally apt, of anti-democratic practice clothed in the empty rhetoric of democracy.

Most of us were taught in school that democracy is a thrilling concept, the inviolable foundation of our whole way of life, but that it really isn't practical in the real world of human affairs. Textbook stories of larger-than-life heroes and villains teach us that the province of political action belongs to those whose skill and knowledge have been validated by their attainment of power. The political arena is for those who can accumulate millions of dollars to buy television advertising, whose access to the power of wealth legitimates their access to political power.

Every other news report corroborates these lessons. Commentators tell us low voter turnout—which might be taken as a comment on the poor quality of candidates and widespread despair at the state of political culture—actually confirms that the average person doesn't care enough to be trusted with political responsibility. Some argue that mass demonstrations—which should be taken as evidence of political passion—actually prove a pervasive lack of faith in bedrock institutions such as our elected legislatures, an anarchic spirit that cries out for control. The recent spate of Sixties nostalgia has brought forth a bumper crop of human interest stories, touching tales of naive and foolish faith in democracy's transforming power and of its inevitable disillusionment in the face of the Eighties' hard truths. The mythology of democracy's impossibility is thus constructed, and events are recast to corroborate the myths.

We worry that the self-deception preying on our British students seems so widespread in our own country. It's doubtful that authentic social democ-

COMPETENCE



From "Age of Invention" by Theodora Skiptares.

**"Preach
democracy
and practice
expediency"
might well be
this country's
motto.**

© WARU/NUDICH



Still from XS: The Opera, by Joseph Nechvatal and Rhys Chatham.

racy can ever be established and maintained by people who have convinced themselves it cannot be practiced on the small scale of community cultural life, here and now.

What does it mean to practice democracy in the context of cultural action? For us, the crucial precondition is involvement in shaping the goals and defining the principles upon which cultural action will be based.

Take the example of a theater company. The conventional approach is for the company's leaders to decide which works they want to produce, usually by choosing from the repertoire of material that has already been produced or, less frequently, by creating their own material. Compromises are often made between artistic leaders' desire for aesthetic adventure and marketing experts' preference for safe, proven material. But in the end, the theater creates a menu reflecting its leadership's tastes, and theater-goers either order from that menu or leave it alone. The theater creates a product and markets it to consumers, using the techniques of advertising to sell season subscriptions pretty much as Colonel Sanders sells chicken.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP VS. BUYER-SELLER RELATIONSHIP

A theater with democratic commitments could operate very differently. It would maintain close contacts with members of its community, cultivating an awareness of people's interests and cares, participating in an ongoing dialogue with its neighbors. Its members would have to know much more about their community than any marketing expert, studying its history and present character. The theater might hold periodic community meetings, and its members could make a point of attending the meetings and events of other organizations in the area. The ensuing dialogue would shape the work of each season, enabling choices of subject and theatrical approach that embody and respond to the concerns of the ninety-eight percent who are dismissed by the arts establishment as the "non-theater-going public." The the-

ater could offer community groups training in dramatic techniques and assist them in deploying their talents to vitalize their own offerings, in turn enlisting their help to build participation in the theater's programs. It could work with local writers who could learn how to shape their friends and neighbors' aspirations and fears into compelling drama. A theater like this would be the catalyst for new social configurations, fresh forms of cooperation and communication within the community. It would build partnerships, not merely buyer-seller relationships.

This style of operating would demand a new kind of democratic competence. As much skill and energy would have to go into building relationships as into mounting productions. The organizational apparatus sustaining the theater would have to be as tightly rigged and efficient as the production apparatus that guarantees the show will go on at the same time each night, without missed cues or fumbled lines. The theater's political and cultural goals would be as important and influential as its artistic ones. The theater's members would have to engage in the type of action research described above, then sit down together to share what they have learned, to analyze that knowledge, to set goals and plan the shape of each year. There would have to be ways to track each person's participation in implementing plans, to demonstrate respect and gratitude for each member's contribution, and to hold each one accountable for following through on the theater's commitments.

Take another example, a group of arts workers trying to change U.S. policy in Central America. Many groups like this now operate as adjuncts to general-membership solidarity organizations, providing them with signs and banners for demonstrations, producing posters, sponsoring arts events as benefits for the cause. When an event approaches such a group might hold a meeting to discuss what its members want to do and to say—or what the parent organization wants to be able to do or say—and how the artists might help. The group's energy is focused on expressing demands or protests, on putting forward their own statements in the hope of influencing public opinion and government policies.

A group like this with deep democratic commitments—to democracy in practice as well as in principle—could operate in another way. Different questions could be asked. Instead of "What do we want to say?" people could try to find out "What motivates our opposition? How do people see them? How do they see us?" Assumptions would have to be questioned. How has foreign policy actually been changed in the past? What is the real impact of demonstrations? Who looks at posters, and how? Research would be needed. To whom do we need to be talking, and what do we know about them? How do they live? What do they care about? To whom do they talk and listen? Deeper understanding of the problem would form the basis for strategic thinking about how to solve it. New questions would produce fresh answers.

COURTESY OF LEHMAN COLLEGE



**Lewis Hines,
"The Sky Boy."**

People find it difficult to pursue this line of inquiry in the current atmosphere of emergency. The ambiance of the cultural left seems eerily to echo the Reagan administration's excuses for withholding information from Congress in the Contragate affair: No time to be democratic. Like Reagan, a big chunk of the cultural left has succumbed to a siege mentality, which creates and sustains a perpetual crisis. This siege mentality is part of the culture of politics in the United States, an expression of the hopelessness it engenders, an atmosphere of panic and obsession with short-term concerns, democratic competence just sounds too cumbersome and time-consuming.

When we worked with the students in England, we helped them prepare proposals they presented to the faculty, proceeding item by item through a list of particulars. At each new point, the students asked each other what they wanted. Left to their own devices, they would have spent the entire meeting articulating their own desires. Once satisfied with the language they'd devised, they would have felt that the proposal was complete.

We advised them to proceed differently. We asked them to challenge their own ideas about each point before they went on to the next. "What do you think the faculty will say to that proposal?" we asked. "How will it sound to them?" "How are they likely to respond?" "Why?" "How could you reply to that response?"

At first they thought we were wasting time on irrelevant questions. They felt it was their job to make proposals, the faculty's job to dispose of them. But then they began to understand that their way of thinking undermined their drive for greater autonomy. It reinforced the idea that only the teachers were competent decision-makers, and that all the students could do was come up with complaints and hope someone in charge would listen to them. In contrast, democratic competence obliges us to follow our own thinking through to its logical end in action. If the students failed to anticipate the faculty's response and prepare for every likelihood, they were virtually admitting their proposals wouldn't go anywhere. Asserting what is wanted without investigating its implications and planning what will follow is not only a failure to construct a strategy; it's an admission of impotence.

What stopped our students from moving toward democracy and competence was obvious. They'd been convinced over a long period of time that both ideas were pipe dreams. They'd internalized the notion that a secure future lies in playing the game by the rules of the powers-that-be. They were scared to stand up for themselves, and frightened for us. Almost every day a small delegation of students approached us, looking alarmed. "We should stop this now," they said. "They'll never have you back after this." But what stops so much of the cultural left?

Like the English students, most of us have had

very little authentic democratic experience. We have seen facsimiles of democratic form, wielded incompetently and thus deprived of substance. We've seen too many elections won by interests able to spend the most money manipulating voters' emotions, and too many bad decisions engendered by the crowd mentality that sweeps through an emergency meeting. Some of us are veterans of the New Left with its soul-grinding marathon meetings, decaying into a struggle over trivialities and a victory for the loudest and most tenacious. When the smoke of the Sixties cleared, the principal axiom of our political culture remained intact, and it continues to reign today: Democracy is a nice idea, but too much trouble.

It has been so sad to see people fall for this anti-democratic line of reasoning, to see the slow self-immolation of the cultural left through persistent practice that calls into question the validity of our preaching about democracy. The price we have paid is enormous.

THE TYRANNY OF SURVIVAL MANAGEMENT

Too many groups' work focuses on short-term issues, neglecting the big causes of crises and their longer-term implications. Many political formations spring up around big demonstrations or single-issue campaigns. Too often, a disturbing pattern emerges: coalescing around an event or action, energy builds through an exhausting but exciting gearing-up period; a huge amount of effort is expended in endless meetings called to invent an organization that will only last a short time; the rhythm peaks in the event or campaign itself, leading to a period of let-down in which



Ida Applebroog, *Willow Point V.A.*, 1983-84 (oil on canvas, two panels 72" x 60", 14" x 60").

Like Reagan, a big chunk of the cultural left has succumbed to a siege mentality, which creates and sustains a perpetual crisis.

Even locked into opposition with the Reagan regime, the raw materials of democratic competence are at our disposal.

people drift away and the group falls apart. In the course of this cycle a corps of leaders usually develops, frequently giving rise to sub-plots involving challenges to leadership, accusations of power-mongering, and bitter fights that are often written off as personality conflicts.

There are many variations, of course. Sometimes an organization stays alive, serving as a host organism for repeated short-term cycles. Every year or two new leaders emerge, new members are recruited, and a new cycle begins under the old group name. In either case, the desire to invent authentically democratic practice is clearly outmatched by the compelling short-term goal—getting through the campaign, mounting the event—and the internal struggle over power.

Other groups aspire to lasting aims and manage to survive for much longer periods of time under a state of siege nourished by threats to organizational survival. The pattern of a year for one of these groups is likely to revolve around money: gearing up to meet important grant deadlines; dropping everything to find bigger and better ways to satisfy funders' appetites for novelty and glitz; relaxing a little in between deadlines, but never getting ahead. It's unlikely that members of these groups are able to conceive of themselves as collaborators in a great democratic enterprise. The past and future hardly exist; there is only a never-ending crisis-ridden present.

Organizations like these are locked into perpetual marginality. The goal is to make it, to get by, and nothing beyond mere survival seems real enough to bother with. These permanent states of emergency result in a great loss of human resources. People who have the potential to make ever-increasing contributions of creative energy never get the chance. They "burn out," dry up, go on to something else.

There are thousands of the politically devout who hold that this needn't be so. We are part of a persistent movement, surfacing again and again throughout the world, to bring about real democracy. This democratic left asserts that democracy is more than a nice idea, it's actually feasible. It says that a just and humane society can be compounded of political, economic and cultural democracy. The symbol of this kind of democracy is not the public opinion poll or even the ballot box, but the town meeting.

To make democracy work, especially in a huge, heterogeneous and intricate society like the United States, will not be an easy thing. An enormous gap of social ignorance and indifference must be overcome. We need to know much more about social issues, much more about how society operates, much more about our own positions within it. We need to foster a social dialogue to replace the emotive advertising campaign that now passes for political discourse in the U.S. The project of bringing democracy into being must involve the most local and decentralized sharing of authority and responsibility, and at the same time reach the national and international arenas.

A NEW STATE IN EXILE

At bottom, the question is this: are we serious about what we believe? Do we know what "serious" means? The crucial dynamics of democratic competence are clearly exposed on a global scale, through a study of movements of national liberation. The task of those that are taken seriously is to construct the edifice of the new state in exile. They participate in international forums, creating a presence in the world community. They develop competence in agricultural policy, in resource allocation, in communication technologies and all the essential areas of public policy and administration. They form liaisons and friendships with people with skills and connections who can be helpful in establishing the new state when the time comes. They devise organs of communication and a network of contacts that allow them to keep in close touch with popular concerns though they may be separated by thousands of miles from their own people. To the greatest degree possible, they rely on their own people for sustenance during their time of exile and preparation.

In contrast, there are the groupings that are a show. They are able to create publicity or terror but they demonstrate no capacity for competence, persistence, determination, and thus no likelihood of eventual success.

What are we constructing? Even locked into opposition with the Reagan regime, the raw materials of democratic competence are at our disposal. We are imaginative, inventive, versatile, adroit. The seeds of democracy are in our hands, but convinced that democratic competence is unattainable, many, many groups give up before they ever get around to experimenting with new approaches in practice. Like our British college students, a lot of the cultural left is in thrall to a political tautology. We don't have time to attain democratic competence, so our democratic skills never advance; we never give ourselves a chance to practice democratic competence, so we conclude democracy is impractical.

There will be untold pleasure and satisfaction to come in seeing this self-fulfilling prophecy of powerlessness undone, one step at a time.



Basic Training, Fort Bragg, North Carolina, 1951.

SOUTHERN *dis*COMFORT

the state of critical culture in the south

BY JAY MURPHY

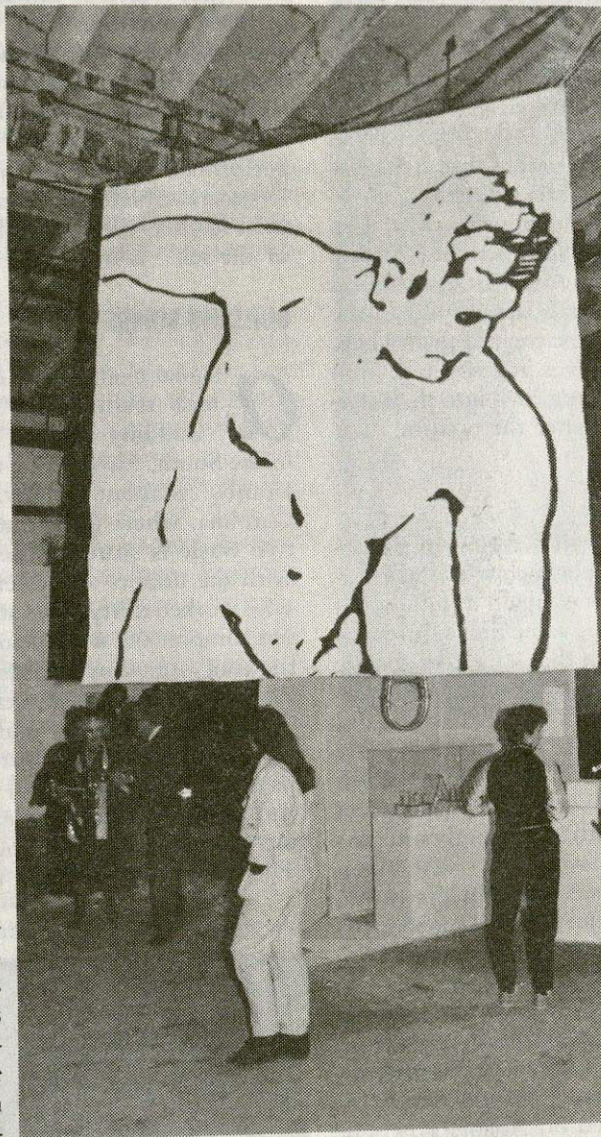
John O'Neal grew up as a Black kid hearing the saying "in the South at least you know why you're fighting," and now it still rings true, many years later. Creator of "Junebug Jabbo Jones" and a founder of the late Free Southern Theater that grew out of the civil rights movement, writer and performer O'Neal thinks that "We'll see change more rapidly in the South" where the forms of exploitation have historically been more open, less difficult to hide, and therefore "more vulnerable to critique—of ideas as well as action."

Finding explicitly critical art is somewhat difficult in the region, outside of the strong performing arts tradition, loosely grouped together in the Alternate ROOTS (Regional Organization of Theaters in the South) network. Works which may be defined in the broadest sense as oppositional in nature spring up in scattered fashion, often providing some of the more stirring content in annual shows organized by the Mattress Factory in Atlanta, or in the few alternative spaces that grow up in resistance

to the narrowly commercial dictates of most galleries in the more metropolitan Southern cities, such as Blue Rat (1983-7) in Atlanta, or Artifacts and Wet Paint in Miami.

Soon after he arrived in Atlanta to become curator at the Nexus Gallery, artist, critic and curator Alan Sondheim commented: "Directly political art seems nonexistent here. When I organized a show called 'The Political Show' last year (1984), we had what we called 'The Political Party' at Nexus and asked artists to make speeches. Most of the speeches I found confusing, and most of the political art seemed subjective reactions to things that bothered people in their culture."

Some artists, such as Norman Ismay—an Argentine-born



Discobolus, a painting by Pat Courtney, exhibited at the 1987 Mattress Factory show in Atlanta, Ga.

PHOTO BY GERALD JONES

sculptor and installation/performance artist—may see the interconnectedness of issues such as gentrification and Central America, both rooted in the economic-social mandates of late capitalism, but that is unusual. Painter Clyde Broadway considers satire an element in his work, like design or color, but it is always based on an immediate perception that eschews any larger political involvement. *Real Estate Developers in Hell*, where real-estate developers are shown battling, one cutting off another's legs with a chainsaw, or *Barbecue Beach Condominium*, are both about gentrification, a pressing issue in the Atlanta area, but Broadway sees these waves of development as something inevitable.

THE LARGER VISION

The failure of artists to link up with any larger vision of social-political activism is hardly a condition peculiar to the South, where, visual artist John Riddle says, "Social-political art is not a mainstream concept right now," but it is a problem linked with larger ones. What artist Lisa Tuttle called

"the paucity of critical dialogue . . . very little theoretical fabric to work from . . ." is an endemic complaint from cultural workers in the region. Artists may find models of criticality, says Associate Editor of *Art Papers* Jerry Cullum, but owing to the pragmatic prejudices of the area, they will have to look outside of the area to find them.

Pat Courtney, whose recent work involves researching dictionaries and lifting out images that dramatically reveal their underlying sexism and militarism, points out that the "en-

Jay Murphy is an arts writer who lives and works in New Orleans, Louisiana, where he recently moved Red Bass magazine.

clave" of artist-intellectuals is so diffused in the South that people "have a difficult time maintaining energy and getting things done." "It's hard to find people," the Atlanta artist said, "on the same level of discussion."

The persistent and structural problem of moribund university systems is a related handicap to any meaningful dissemination of art and art education, as well as a crippling influence to the creation of any committed art. Much of Courtney's work, she says, comes out of her experience in the male-dominated, state university system of Georgia.

Paul Rutkovsky, who describes his own multi-media work as not overtly political but as a critique simultaneously "idiosyncratic, playful, satirical" says he is "ostracized, certainly, in a way, and as a faculty member" at Florida State University in Tallahassee. Students are systematically taught that art is one thing and social concerns are another in the still strictly compartmentalized, obsolete world of the university.

"It [the region] tends to isolate the pursuits perhaps," Tuttle thinks. "The politics or decision of being an artist is a political statement in itself, as opposed to putting the politics in the work. The Mattress Factory group is an example of that, where they make an environment for themselves in a viable fashion instead of a situation where they are integrated into their culture to the point where they can influence the politics."

RED BASS: KEEPING IT ALIVE

Red Bass continues to exist in that rarefied zone of preoccupation with avant-garde and experimental arts and radical politics. Its Dadaistic flair has made it somewhat inaccessible to many people, while at the same time afforded it the grassroots' sacrifice and enthusiasm that have kept it alive despite the lack of any major funding and more than one last-minute change of printers due to political censorship. Its extreme isolation, in Tallahassee, Florida, and now in New Orleans, is paradoxically a source and impetus for its growth from its humble origins as a seven-page mimeo'd poetry sheet into a nationally distributed journal with increasingly international content. The urge "to get the work out" that many artists mentioned in this article has been perhaps the prime motivating factor in the continual metamorphosis of the journal.

One of the more profound and striking visual artists in the South, whose work, he explains, cannot avoid the "profoundly political and brutal reality we must face" is the Lebanon-born Nabil Kanso. Kanso has produced what he considers some of his best work in his studio in Atlanta, where he came after an alternative space he had founded in New York folded in 1974. After considerable travel, Kanso settled on Atlanta precisely because it was isolated from the international art styles and star-making machinery of New York and also London, where he has previously lived and worked. His work expresses not only his political concerns, but his "aesthetic resentment as well" of the prevalent discourses and styles. This has led him to organize several shows in Latin America—in Venezuela and Mexico, among other locales—where his large, mural-sized mythological and infernal canvases, a series entitled "The Split of Life" and "The Concept of Time," find support in public galleries and universities. He finds that he shares a similar rebellion against Western art with Latin American artists.

Kanso's work may be demonstrative in a very individual fashion of visual art that does tend to find inspiration and flourish in the South. The sense of connectedness of time and place—a rootedness lacking in other, more industrialized regions of the United States—is a salient characteristic of much

art produced in the region, not only in the theater troupe "Cultural work is tied to place and history of this place," claims documentarist George King, "even if it is a desperate attempt to escape that history sometimes."

King says that living in the South makes for "staggering differences with San Francisco," for example, where he spent five years after being part of the early Portapak, a community oriented guerrilla video movement in London, England. The difference is lack of self-absorption and an emphasis on sense of place which, to King, makes Southern artistic sensibilities akin to those in Europe, where artists are expected to address historical and political issues. Ruby Lerner (a writer and art consultant who is working with King, Norman Ismay and composer Tom Gray on "The Banana Piece," a multi-media performance about Central America to be performed at the Democratic National Convention this July) adds that art tends to be less self-referential than in other areas; "the glorification of the self" is missing.

BUILDING BOMBS

A signal example of directly political art tied into stark local realities is Mark Mori's and Susan Robinson's "Building Bombs," the only film on the nuclear issue in the South. Now at the rough-cut, editing stage, "Building Bombs" is about the Savannah River Plant in Aiken, South Carolina, where three-quarters of the nation's most radioactive waste is stored in deteriorating tanks. The film begins with the doubts and dilemmas of physicist Arthur Dexter who worked thirty years at research and development of weapons components at the plant before resigning to go public about the contamination hazards there: "We have at Savannah River Plant four Chernobyl accidents waiting to happen."

"Building Bombs" makes a haunting history of the arm race through the over thirty-five-year history of the plant and its effect on a small rural town, where land was confiscated and some residents were carted off to madhouses for protesting the imperatives of the national security-nuclear regime. The theme of "changing minds" and taking responsibility



Roadside Theatre performs its original production "Leaving Egypt." Left to right are: Ron Short, Tommy Bledsoe and Kim Cole.

central in the tale of the unhappy consciousness of scientists at the plant who eventually come forward as the decision whether to accept the construction of yet another reactor at the SRP comes to the foreground. As with other antinuke films, this one is in part the product of vigorous grassroots fund-raising parties, this time in Asheville, North Carolina, and Athens, Georgia, among other places, as well as support from anti-nuclear coalitions.

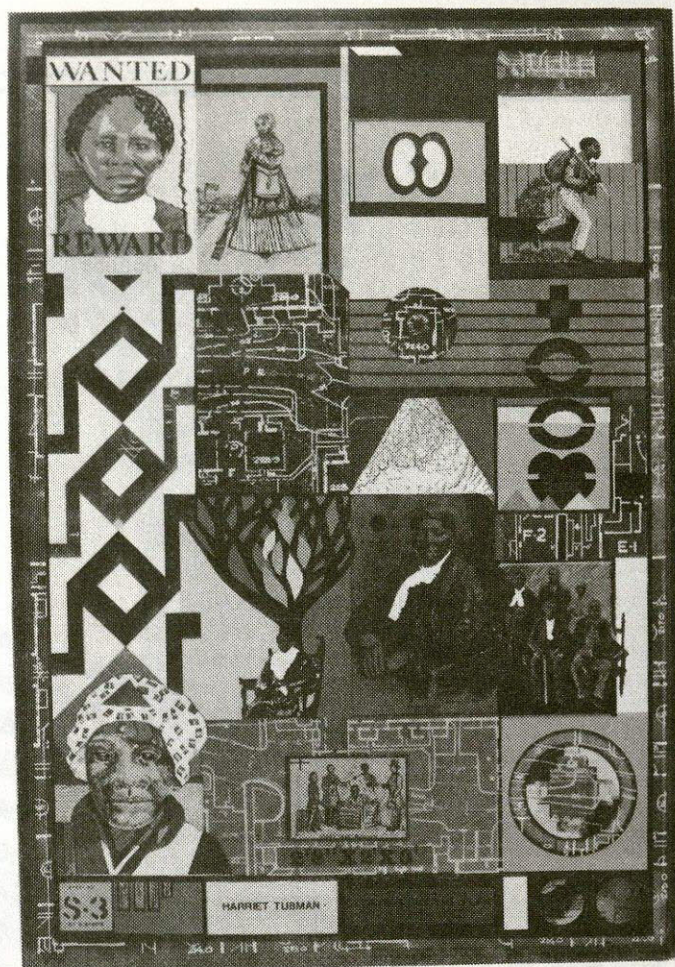
Relative isolation of artists and communities can also serve to spur artists to invent their own art forms, as M.K. Wegman, board member of the theater organization Alternate ROOTS, has suggested. The noted personal or idiosyncratic nature of some works, or the excellence of arts such as those out of the Center for Puppetry Arts in Atlanta, may be a result. Theater, though, because of its roots in the storytelling and narrative traditions of the South, its rich use of symbolism and music, and its often minimal use of stage props and conventional means of theater, is usually closely tied to indigenous communities and their social-political history.

One of the most longstanding of these is the Roadside Theater of Whitesburg, Kentucky. Not part of the cutting edge of a movement, perhaps, as John O'Neal's Free Southern Theater was in its relation to SNCC and the civil rights movement, the Roadside is still part of the larger struggle for social justice. That "all art is political is nothing to debate; the question is how to exercise that in your art," says director Dudley Coker. In Roadside plays such as "Red Fox" or "Leaving Egypt," works based on recovering the oral, 'people's history' of the Appalachian working class population in the Cumberland mountains, the politics may be subtle for some viewers. Coker, for example, describes how Roadside was chastised by disappointed members of the audience at a performance in San Francisco because the troupe didn't seem to take a "hard enough line" politically. But when performed in Appalachia, the politics works because Roadside's plays speak to the "rich assumptions" shared by the audience. These assumptions, Coker explains, "have a lot to do with class" and the context of exploitation of the many by the few, but "without the particular missionary angle of 'pity's sake' that people may bring with them from middle- or upper-middle-class backgrounds."

By researching the often "mouth to ear" oral tradition of the hills, Roadside often finds contradictions to the official written history which extols the coming of "salvation" and capitalism to the mountains, a history that is a product of those Coker calls "the coal company scribes."

THE RECOVERY OF HISTORY

The recovery and enactment of such history is, of course, a political act in itself, but absentee ownership and the extraction of wealth form an unspoken but ever-present frame for the action. In a recent theater festival in Los Angeles, one staff member commented that there were two representatives of the Third World there—the Market Theater from South Africa and the Roadside Theater from Kentucky. Coker finds that humorous, but there is certainly a shared experience, both of colonization, and of oral, folk culture. During the Massey coal mine strikes in 1985, the United Mine Workers made the farsighted gesture of bringing in to the strike site a woman activist from South Africa to explain the tactics, crossing national boundaries, of pitting worker against worker characteristic of Dutch Shell (which operates both in South Africa and West Virginia) and the need for multinational alliances among workers.



"Carrying Out the Plan—Harriet Tubman," by John Riddle, from the "Making Plans" series

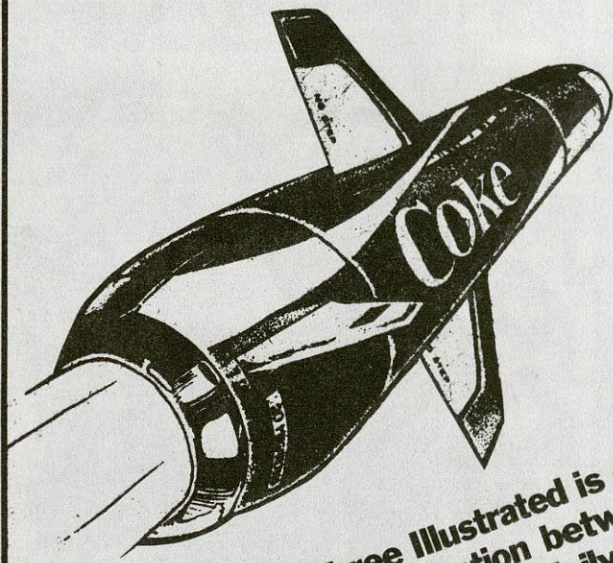
It was a reminder of connections: "Appalachia is not isolated from the rest of the country and the world," Coker says. Another indication of this is the theater festival scheduled there for February and March of '88 featuring Liz Lerman, the Traveling Jewish Theater, Frank Gonzalez, the Group Theater, John O'Neal and others. The economics of performing arts in the South may be stringent indeed, but that doesn't exclude receptivity to experiment. As John O'Neal stresses, the storytelling tradition is like a finished diamond: "It's just a crucial thing" that also acts as an unlimited springboard for the individual performer. The little room for experimentation, O'Neal warns, is for the experimentation that doesn't work with its audience.

The experimentation and use of indigenous, inherited forms characteristic of many of the best groups in the region, groups which work with limited or sparse means—the Jomandi Theater, the Road Company, among others—are part of the ongoing interpretation and development of folk culture in the South. John O'Neal sees that culture as a resource to be plumbed for self-conscious artists and performers, rather than exploited in the manner of rock n'roll's exploitation of the blues.

Many artists interviewed for this article describe the flux of art and political activity in the South as still having a frontier edge, or "remotely electric" quality to it. John O'Neal sees here the new "syntheses" he's convinced will "come out of the travails for socio-cultural change."

WORLD WAR 3

Illustrated



World War Three Illustrated is our search for the connection between the subjective reality of our daily lives and the global reality of world politics. To find the place where the street becomes the planet and the moment becomes history. As artists we feel that our immediate experience is the best way to understand politics. In our search we have discovered the city as a metaphor for war and war as a metaphor for the city.

World War Three Illustrated is a magazine containing comics, artwork, poetry, fiction, and some important news articles. World War III Illustrated seeks to destroy the boundaries between high and low cultures, commercial and underground, fiction and journalism.



THE SHOOTING GALLERY



POVERTY

It's no fun being poor. And nowadays, there are more people than ever before. The problem is, if you're poor, you're poor that way, which is a big burden on everyone else. It's expensive and ugly—and if present legislative trends continue, it will soon be illegal—but now there's a solution: Obviate Tragedies or OUT for short. It's a free, painless, do-it-yourself way to end the poverty cycle. Now. Voluntarily.

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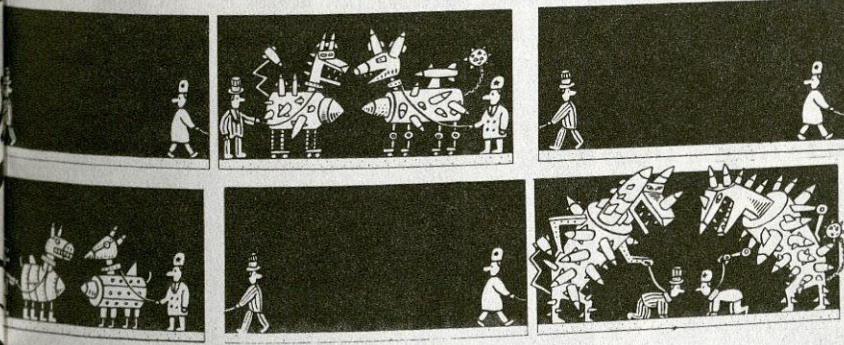
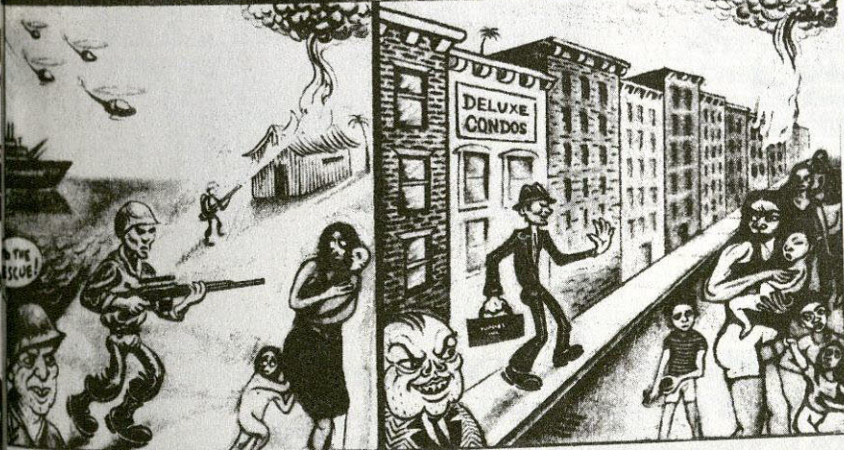


KUPER

World War III Illustrated, like its namesake, respects no categories. Our contributors are all kinds of people with all kinds of beliefs. People who live in abandoned buildings and people who work for the New York Times. There is no single party line or lifestyle put forward by the magazine. What we demand of our contributors is that their work is a genuine expression of their particular situation.

Illegal invasions, destruction of homes and relocation of people
(Grenada, Lebanon, Central America)

Illegal evictions, arson, displacement and relocation of people
(Harlem, Park Slope, Lower East Side)



The New York Times administration announced yesterday that it was seeking proposals for floating shelters for homeless adults. To be built on abandoned ships, the shelters would be moored at waterfront piers.

The proposal issued at a time of renewed interest in using waterfront areas for housing and development, could pit proposals for the homeless in competition with other projects. The Correction Department is trying to create a group of floating jails to be moored as or near Rikers Island to reduce overcrowding. A former Staten Island ferryboat has been converted to a jail, a second is being rebuilt, and a former British troop barge is due in a few weeks for use as a jail. One official suggested that if the floating shelters proved unworkable in neighborhoods, they could be moved from site to site. A city plan to place a jail barge off the Lower East Side, at least temporarily, has led to neighborhood protests.





BEGINNERS
GRAFFITI-PROPAGANDA
 A HOW TO FOR THE FIRST OFFENDER.
U.S.O.U.
 PUT IT WHERE PEOPLE CAN SEE IT.

by Setz & Tosh
 LIKE INSIDE PHONE BOOTHS OR ACROSS FROM A BUS STOP
REVOLV

My daughter was a student in Soweto.



REAL ESTATE
 OR WHERE IT MAKES A POINT
REVOLVING STRIKE

WORK IN GROUPS WITH ONE PERSON AS LOOK-OUT
 4 P.M. - 6 A.M. IS PRIMETIME COPS CHANGE SHIRTS AT 5 A.M.

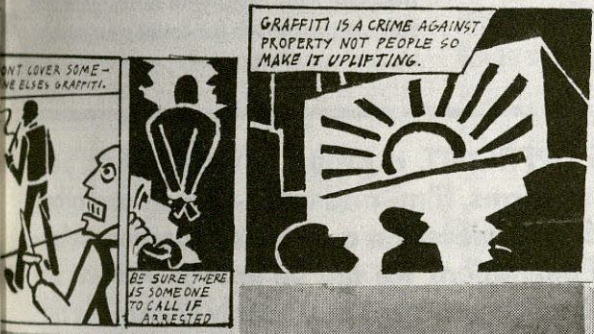
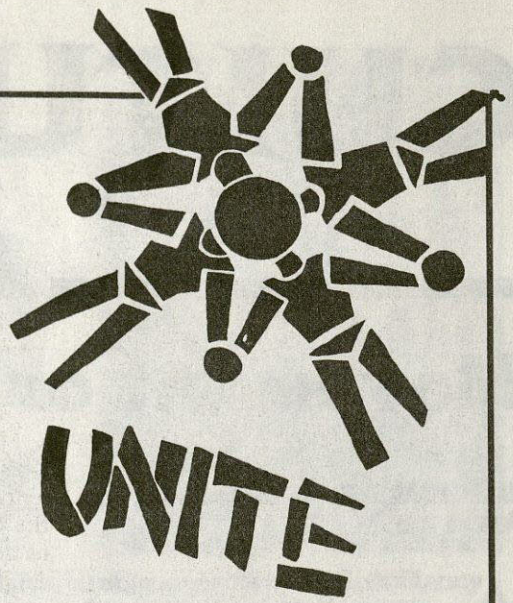
Although there is no official ideology, World War Three Illustrated has not been afraid to side with sincere revolutionaries when they were under attack. Even when they were unpopular with liberals. We have published statements of support for New York City squatters, MOVE, the New York 8 and others.

World War III Illustrated is more than a magazine that complains. It is a call to action. Most of our contributors are themselves activists.



We receive no grants and little advertising. The project is supported on sales to thousands of loyal readers. Their enthusiasm, commitment and intelligence are inspiring. Most of them are in their 20's and active. A disproportionate number are women. Many of them are involved in projects at least as interesting as ours.

When we started publishing in the early eighties people thought we were crazy. Now a whole lot of people are crazy with us. A movement is growing.



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WORLD WAR 3
Illustrated

CULTURAL ACTIVISM

Movement or Murmur?

HARRIET BARLOW, Blue Mountain Center, Blue Mountain Lake, NY

Any locus for interactive thought/work would help the activist art and community cultural movement. Atomization, our failure to summon for ourselves and each other a sense of the whole, is our worst internal problem. Regardless of whether fragmentation and isolation have been tactics of the state or the right, we have ended up just where central, elitist forces need us: scattered, individually defensive and, thus, selfish.

Needs: voices from campuses, institutions (prisons, etc); explicit means to a whole via straightforward explanations, analysis and examples of how criticism helps us to get better at what we do, helps us to respect each other along the way (the "no crucifixion of brothers and sisters" rule . . . and remind Jesse Lemisch first), of how criticism can be a means of desegregating art and politics.

Diverse voices, no language inaccessible to a 7th grade reading level, lots of graphics and visuals, debates, short issues, heavy attention to popular cultural forms (baseball, TV, movies).

The boffo boxoffice success of Oliver North brilliantly demonstrates where the culture is and where we are not. The manipulation of the media, the congress and the people by the the administration was a nearly perfect production. Relentlessly interactive, mutually regenerating activity to which all aspects of the hegemonic culture acceded, conquering all reason and sensibility—POW, WOW AMERICA.

And where were we? Ranting, producing individual statements of ire and despair. In a moment when only a strategic, coordinated cultural response could have corrected the distortion of consciousness that was happening, we had none. Everyone is busy. We have no cultural organization or political organization to turn to when the moment calls for a collective cultural response.

Forget the Labor movement for now. It's trying to find itself and can't lead us anywhere until it does. Forget major single issue organizations. They are concretized. Forget anything that is institutionalized. It wouldn't have gotten that way without acquiring dependencies and relationships that prevent it from the brazenness that is an essential ingredient of an effective lens cleaner.

The aesthetic debate about postmodernism doesn't mean diddly to me in my

work except as it deals with explaining and correcting (or helping others to correct) the manipulation of consciousness. To the extent that the debate is understood as a metaphor for the change in the management of culture, it is useful. It is most useful when accompanied by analysis of where the stress points and traditions are that, if pressed, might cause the construction to tumble.

Oliver North reeks of Weimar. Attention, cultural work has to raise the level of the stink so that people come to realize that you can't hold your nose, salute, and rub your stomach (or count your money) at the same time.

In the last issue of UPFRONT, a group of visual artists, performers, writers, musicians, film- and video-makers and other activists presented their views on a series of questions relating to the cultural movement we are all part of. Are we, asked in essence, a strong current or a barely discernible ripple in opposition to the mainstream American ideology of this issue we continue the cross-country dialogue based largely on the respondents' own experiences as artists and activists.

KIMIKO HAHN "Word of Mouth" (AKA, Basement Workshop Literature Program), New York, NY

The two most exciting cultural projects I have worked on were first, the American Writers Congress (Oct, 1981) which was a gathering of over 3,000 writers from every place/movement one finds writers: trade union newsletter editors (auto and steel), organizers from the Mexican Peoples Movement, Black, feminist, . . . It was exhilarating to find I could organize among artists.

Second was Artists Call against U.S. Intervention in Central America: a grouping of artists, nationally and internationally, who lent their art, platform, and energy in protest. I wish it could have continued but we on the Steering Committee did not ensure against administrative burnout when many had to "return

to the studio" or begin families and didn't ultimately tie the issue of intervention to U.S. issues.

I believe we have to ally ourselves with progressive (not necessarily conservative "Left") elements in other areas. Why am I homeless, unemployed, disenfranchised? I don't feel comfortable with the idea that the only reason I can live in NY is part-time employment (therefore half pay for my art) is because of my rent-stabilized apartment and a spouse who also works. Why should anyone feel threatened by me, furthermore, as I learned at the American Writers Congress, artists are everywhere. I recently conducted a writing workshop at the 168th Street Men's Shelter—good writers there. "They" are us in more than metaphor.

What are the obstacles in organizing artists? To some extent it's sectarian

hangover from the '60-70s; by that I mean an unconscious belief that: 1) the left must organize the left (as opposed to anyone who is struggling against the system, regardless of their stated political beliefs), and 2) that the labor movement, and working class in general is a lost cause because "they" elected Reagan (people have to go through a learning process and the class is going through one every day). We don't have the luxury to wait for a "pure" movement of politically correct people.

I've been going on about my political organizing but I think of myself first and foremost as a poet. My most important project, artistically, was working on Bill Brand's experimental film, "Coalfields"—a film "about" black lung victim and advocate Fred Carter who was targeted and threatened by the feds for effectively getting people their black-lung benefits (late Carter/early Reagan cut backs made it necessary to cut out people who do this work). I spent over a week in West Virginia interviewing people: black-lung victims, coal miners, their families, artists, students. Then I extracted sections which were fascinating from an aesthetic and political perspective. I also wrote some original text on my own reaction to that trip. I was working 24 hours a day as an artist and getting paid. Incredible.

My communities are varied—wherever I can get an audience. Most frequently Asian American, feminist, general. I get asked a lot because I am Asian American. (I'd rather be included as a "token" than not have a program include an artist of color at all.) Being Asian American is important to me; it certainly is not one type of writing, but it is often very different. We come from a particular history. I'm interested in seeing our work and the work of artists of color get more attention. I'm coordinating the reading series, "Word of Mouth," at the NY Public Library, Chatham Sq. Branch. It's a multicultural program for the Asian American communities of NY. I'd really like to see different nationalities come to the readings.

Older traditions? I didn't realize it until I began studying Japanese literature in grad. school, but I have a real feeling for Japanese aesthetics and cultural history. Women were at one time the dominant voice in Japanese literature—so much so, men would write in a female persona. I identify with that era and feel empowered by that fact. I also love word-play and using references to Japanese literature in my own work.

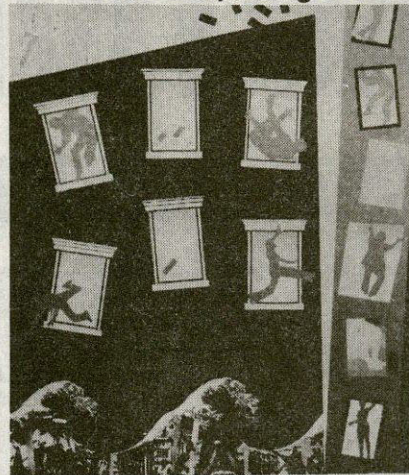
The future? We need vision and participation.

PADD PORT- FOLIOS

Several portfolios from PADD's "Concrete Crisis" exhibition at *Exit Art* last March are still available. 14 signed/numbered fine art silkscreen posters are in the collection. The artists are:

Vito Acconci, Tomie Arai, Keith Christensen, Leon Golub/Nancy Spero, Tim Hillis, "Jeff," Janet Konig, Robert Longo, Alfred Martinez, William C. Maxwell/Gina Terranova, Rachel Romero, George "Geo" Smith, Anton Van Dalen and Antonio Frasconi. List price for entire portfolio (14 posters) is \$1450. Posters are also available individually. Special prices for PADD associates and friends. For information call 212- 533-3124. Or write to: **Janette Ingberman, Director of *Exit Art*, 578 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10012, 212-966-7745.**

Tomie Arai, *Rising Waters*



Hard Looks

Continued from Page 51

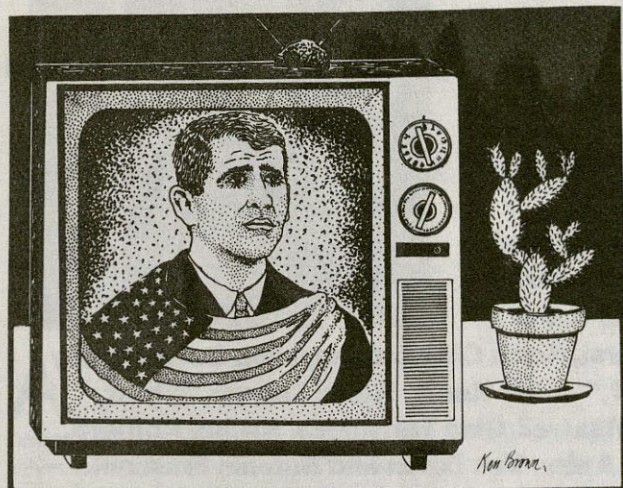
to us. And that, obviously, is a counterproductive pattern. Our fetish for perfection is simply a form of self-hate, a form of self-oppression that must go before we can make any mark on the societal oppression we're supposedly fighting.

We cannot go on splitting hairs, breaking up into factions and splinter groups around problematic questions. Because, frankly, problematic questions don't exist. Every left wing group, posture or critical approach is valuable, every one has a right to exist and all are, in fact, only part of ONE dialogue. No principle is "purer" or more "radical" than any other; all points of view that respect people's rights are okay, and we need them all. Any attempt at exclusionism doesn't make us more perfect; it simply makes us more like Them.

Ironically, it is just that exclusionary fanaticism which is, of course, Their strength. They know God's on their side; they know they're right in their bigotry and hatred; they know the world ought to go their way. And it does, doesn't it? Gays die of AIDS; women get abused; blacks die at the hands of white teenage gangs. Obviously, I think their ethics are horrifying; but nevertheless their way of going about things is very effective, and the left has a lot to learn from them. They never question or refine their principles; they believe in them, and they act on them

—together. I'm not promoting willful ignorance, but I am saying that strength of conviction goes a long way, and that our constant self-doubt has paralyzed our will, and our ability to act in concert. If we get rid of the oppression mentality, of our insistence on being victims and seeing only victims instead of focusing on the strength and complexity of people, we might stand a better chance of success. I realize that sounds naive, and I can just hear my colleagues howling now—but I, like Roland Barthes, am a believer that the "stupid or simple metaphysics . . . (is) probably the true metaphysics." And, let's face it, "stupid metaphysics" work incredibly well for the Moral Majority. Since I am self-righteous enough to believe that our metaphysics are closer to "God's"—or at least Justice—than theirs, I see no reason why we shouldn't be able to sustain a powerful Crusade, based on one principle alone: that people are wonderful creatures, with a right to a decent life and to justice, equality and self-fulfillment. If we take this principle as inviolable and unproblematic truth, and pursue it—in all its diversity—with absolute conviction, we will have no time to doubt ourselves, to split hairs over philosophy, or to victimize ourselves and others. Because—look around—there's a lot of work to do: whether in writing or politics or childraising or art, in universities, art galleries, factories, wealthy suburbs, Central American communities or the South Bronx. After all, we have a world to create—in our own collective image.

ACTIVIST



Cartoon by Ken Brown

OLLIE NORTH GRANTS SELF UNLIMITED IMPUNITY

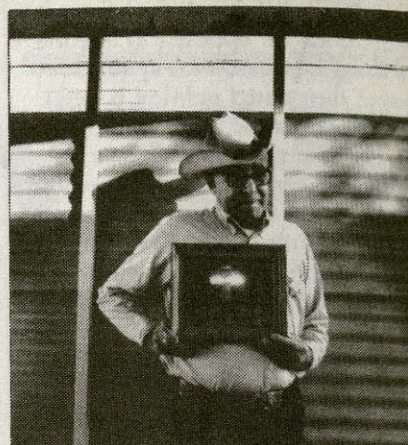
MOVEMENT MOVES

■ Maybe not quite as well publicized as the platoon of Vietnam movies, the art community is responding belatedly to the "bad war." The WPA in Washington, D.C. just closed a stunning exhibition of photography, video, and large installations (by Terry Allen, Cynthia Carlson, Richard Turner, and others) as well as a huge bookshelf in the show, and a varied program of panels, films, and readings, with strong participation from vets. Still more impressive is the accompanying 450-page anthology edited by Reese Williams. *Unwinding the Vietnam War* combines art (Kim Jones, Terry Allen, Maya Lin's memorial), poetry, and politics (Chomsky, M.L. King, Jr., Sara Miles) and is a must as well as a bargain for \$13.95 in paper from Real Comet Press (3131 Western Ave., Seattle, WA. 98121-1028). Another exhibition, "A Different War: Vietnam in Art" will open (and travel) in Feb. 1989, having been postponed for a year when the right wing took over its original venue—the San Jose (CA.) Museum. Now scheduled for the Whatcom Museum in Bellingham, WA., this one will focus more on "fine art" by vets and antiwar activists during the war and since.

■ Jean Fisher and Jimmie Durham followed up last year's successful traveling show of Native American art ("Ni' Go Tlunh a Doh Ka/We Are Always Turning Around on Purpose") with "We the People" at Artists Space, recalling that the U.S. Constitution was inspired by the Iroquois and that the real names of many Indian nations mean "the People." Fisher-Durham products are intelligent and po-

ART NEWS

Carole Gallagher



Ken Case, the "Atomic Cowboy," herded cows and sheep at the Nevada Test Site for the Atomic Energy Commission's cattle experiments during the atmospheric testing era, 1952 to 1962.

"They got cancer and we got cancer, only the animals were so much closer to the ground that they died faster. Those Ground Zeros, the sand, it would be melted just like glass. The bombs were powerful enough that you could turn your back and it would burn the back of your neck from the heat and that was five or six miles away! Rabbits would run across there and they would be on fire."

Here and Abroad



Tseng Kwong Chi, "Grand Canyon, Arizona," 1987. Asian Arts Institute

literally hard-hitting. Both shows have strong catalogues. ("Ni' Go" originated at SUNY Old Westbury, NY 11590, and Artists Space is at 223 West Broadway, NYC 10013.)

Native American video is becoming a major part of such events. A particularly acute tape for cultural workers was shown at Artists Space and at the "Radical Media in the 80's" series organized by Judith Barry of the 55 Mercer co-op: *Harold of Orange* stars Oneida actor Charlie Hill as an Indian activist and modern trickster casting his hilarious spells on a well-meaning (and racist, classist, sexist) Foundation Board. The Museum of the American Indian's annual film and video festival in December showed 21 works including the latest on Big Mountain relocation. (The Boston Big Mountain support group recently held a huge and hugely successful benefit for the beleaguered holdouts.)

■ "One Eye or Two?" is the cryptic title of a show at the Asian Arts Institute in NYC. According to director Robert Lee, "the enormous wit that Bing Lee, Tseng Kwong Chi, and E'Wao Kagoshima bring to the modern spectacle is matched only by their high seriousness. To miss their Asianness is to miss the depth and range of their good 'humours'."

Also in the cross-cultural domain: The first comprehensive historical review of Puerto Rican Painting in the 19th and 20th centuries has been organized by the OAS in Washington and is traveling in the US and Puerto Rico; The Association of American Cultures (TAAC) publishes a newsletter called *Open Dialogue* and plans a major conference for June 9-12 in D.C. (\$50 early registration for members: 1377 K St., Washington, D.C., 20005). TAAC is "committed to the preservation, growth, development and visibility of ethnic and cultural diversity emanating from peoples of color in the United States and its Trust Territories"; A National Black Arts Festival will be held next summer (July 30-Aug. 7) in Atlanta, providing a national showcase for the work of hundreds of contemporary Afro-American artists. And, finally, the Alliance for Cultural Democracy is holding its annual conference ("Imagination III") in San Francisco, as *Upfront* goes to press. See the newsletter *Cultural Democracy* or *Regional Bulletins* for accounts.

■ The witty and madder-than-a-hornet anonymous artists-of-color group, PESTS, puts out a periodic guide to shows that are not all white in a multi-paged listing called *Peststrip*. The last issue includes the names of 38 New York galleries that "serve whites only" and others that range from 95% to 69% white. There are some surprises. Donations bring *Peststrip* to your mailbox: P.O. Box 1996, Canal St. Station, NYC, 10013-0873.

■ The latest addition to a growing number of progressive archives is the Chicano Art Archive at the library of the University of California at Santa Barbara, which will include "urban iconography." The Guadalupe Center on San Antonio's West Side has a strong visual arts program run by photographer Kathy Vargas, who is working to force the Texas art establishment to acknowledge the existence of Latino artists in this almost-Mexican city.

ILL WINDS

■ Since 1983, photographer Carole Gallagher has been documenting long and short-term radiogenic health effects on the population living downwind of the Nevada Test Site, as well as on test site workers and atomic vets. Her devastating portraits with oral histories will be collected in a book that should blow minds as well as spread the seeds of resistance. This is a draft that eventually will catch us all.

■ Massachusetts artists Jay Critchley and Kathy Chapman have initiated another project of the NRC (Nuclear Recycling Consultants) to enlighten the public on nuclear power. The project includes 5 billboards, an installation at the ICA in Boston, and a media packet. Their most original idea is to recycle Seabrook Nuclear Power Station in New Hampshire into a "National Nuclear Monument and Energy Research Institute," to make Seabrook "a symbol of national pride rather than one of embarrassment and ignorance." (Contact: NRC, POB 819, Provincetown, MA. 02657.)

■ Windowpeace—the year-long performance art peace vigil in the window of a NYC bookstore—ended December 12 with a midnight celebration as founder Susan Kleckner emerged from the window-living space, having spent the last (as well as the first) week there. In the interim, a succession of feminist peace activists made art and contacts from behind glass. Chalk up another small but enduring victory for the indefatigable women who demand peace in the world and do so actively. Send a postcard in support of the Greenham Women ("Women Demand Peace of the World") to Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (10 Downing St., London SW 1, England) and to her pal in the White House. Eventually some humanity will seep into the brains of this grisly pair.

OPEN BOOKS (AND READ)

■ *John Brown and the Issue of Terrorism* is a detailed, well written history of the slave rebellion at Harpers Ferry in 1859,

and a handsome little artist's book with color reproductions of a painting series by author Gene Fellner, who publishes "GLF Occasional." Using Brown as a model, he constructs a lesson about the world today: "One cannot accuse the victims of [State] terrorism for the atrocities they commit without condemning, in far harsher terms, the victimizers." NATO says that from 1973 to 1983, 3,689 people died in terrorist attacks; but grim as this is, Fellner points out, it pales in comparison to the 13,000 killed in one year by the US-backed Salvadoran Army, and so forth. (The book comes with a subscription to GLF: \$5 from POB 186, Hoboken, NJ 07030; "larger contributions are enthusiastically accepted.")

■ Sculptor Hank Brusselback just finished a striking artist's book on his experiences on a team of "Ground Zero invaders" into the Nevada nuclear test site. *Los Clavos* is Guatemalan slang for "a pain in the ass," and was the name the team took on for their dangerous back-country protest. The book is available from Los Clavos, 635 22nd St., Boulder, CO., 80302 for \$15 (or, "if money is tight, \$10"). Profits from sales will finance Brusselback's next production—"a work with further reflections on civil disobedience and empowerment."

■ The Association for the Study of People's Culture's newsletter has grown up into a magazine called *People's Culture* (\$15 from POB 27334, Albuquerque, NM 87125). Despite the ingenuous title, this is good news, if, like its predecessor, P's C remains a readable, sophisticated, and non-rhetorical review of progressive literature and academic scimmages, recounted with smart humor and an emphasis on labor and popular culture. One of its regular features is a column by Fred Whitehead of the late-lamented Midwest Distributors, a recent victim of NEA defunding. Another feature is lists of works in search of publishers. A catalogue of publications and newsletter from "Worker Writer," featuring Meridel LeSueur, Sesshu Foster, Cherrie Moraga, Nellie Wong, Jimmie Durham, Sharon Doubiago and Tom McGrath, among others, is available from the same address.

■ *High Performance* (240 South Broadway, Los Angeles, CA 90012) is covering more and more activist art. One of its highlights is editor/performance artist Steve Durland's parasite magazine (*Tacit...*), which appears regularly, riding in HP's back cover. A monsterpiece of political satire, it proves that silence is golden only for the diggers. HP's #37 on video art and video alternatives offers another one of Dee Dee Halleck's passionate and provocative paens to public access: "A Few Arguments for the Appropriation of Television" criticizes the Left's fatalistic ap-

proach to the media and hits *The Nation*, among others, for its non-coverage of alternative media. (Something that should be covered, for instance: "Adventurous anti-intervention groups have backed station wagons into parking lots at malls and run Central American tapes off the cigarette lighter with the TV propped on the tailgate." TRY IT!)

■ The Deep Dish Directory to public access and cable stations plus independent media makers is available for \$15 from Paper Tiger TV, 339 Lafayette St., NYC 10012. Deep Dish is also calling for tapes with special interest in "performance with a humorous approach" and Guerrilla Theatre. Contact Jessie Drew, 797 Hampshire St., San Francisco, CA 94110.

■ Media Network has produced another of its invaluable guides to issue-oriented media (others are on Central America, South Africa, Peace). In conjunction with The Center for Third-World Organizing,

the new one is called *Images of Color: A Guide to Media from and for Asian, Black, Latino and Native American Communities*; it lists and evaluates over 100 films, videos, and slideshows on civil rights, housing, land rights, sexual politics, and so forth. (\$5.50 from Media Network, 121 Fulton St., NYC 10038.)

MEDIUM SCHOOL

■ Herb Perr's *Making Art Together* is due any minute. It's an intelligent handbook for elementary and secondary school art teachers on how to initiate collaborative projects around social issues and real life. Perr uses an approach based on mutual respect and creative exchange, and incorporates a Freireian outlook, an artist's imagination, and an activist's strategies. This book should revivify many an art course. (\$12.95 from Resource Publications, 160 E. Virginia St., Suite #290, San Jose, CA 95112.) Another must for the educated is Doug Blandy's and Kristin Congdon's

university-level anthology *Art in a Democracy*, which "challenges readers to re-examine their preconceptions of the meaning of both art and democracy." (Teachers College Press, Columbia University, NYC 10027, \$15.95).

CONTRA-ACTIONS

■ Contra to popular expectation, Artists Call Against U.S. Intervention in Central America is not dead—any more, alas, than U.S. Intervention is. Following up on last year's successful postcard project, the Los Angeles branch just held a juried exhibition at LA City College—"Artists Recall"—and sponsored an evening discussion at the Woman's Building that featured painter Connie Jenkins' unique slideshow on El Salvador and a pep talk from national coordinator Lucy Lippard. An Artists Call newsletter was published last year, and editor Michele Stein is looking for material for another (980 Lincoln Place, Boulder, CO. 80302). Chicago has already held a "second round" of art, and last summer Boston AC contributed an elaborate installation to a show at the ICA. Anybody else we missed?

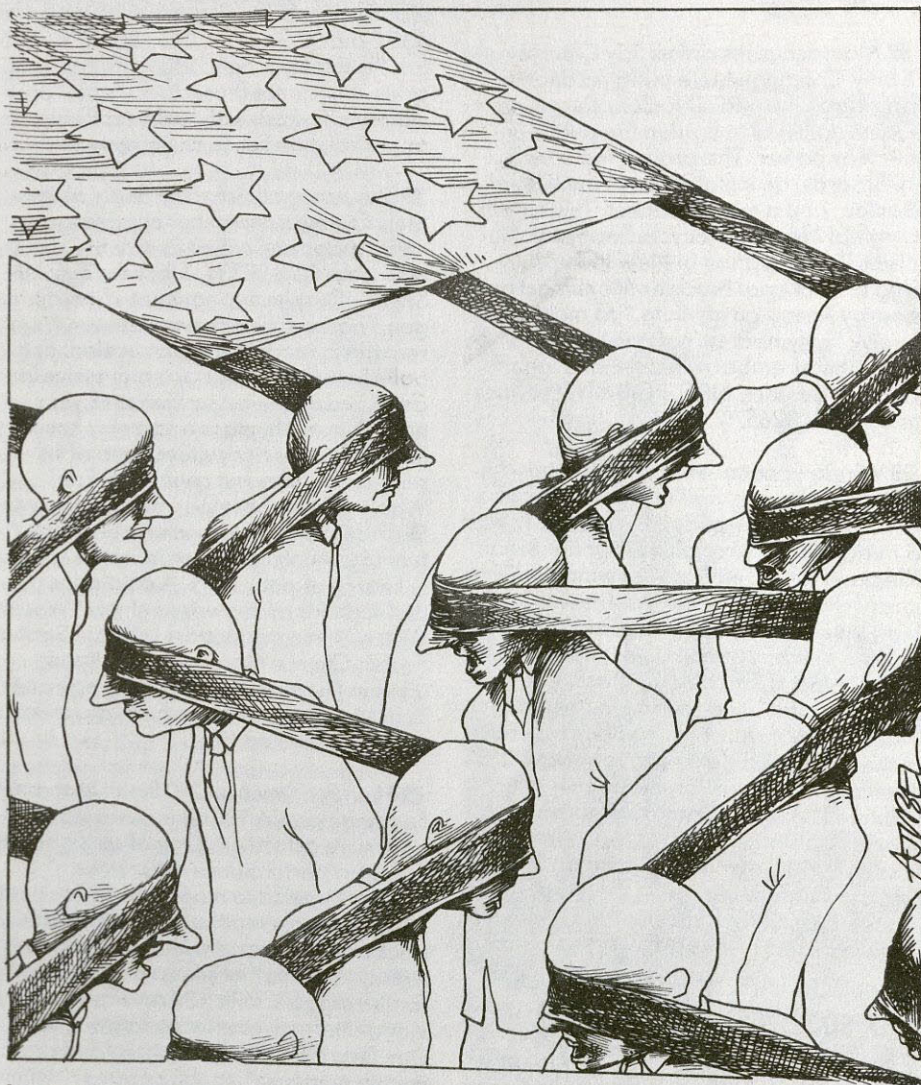
■ The Nicaraguan Cultural Alliance produces a newsletter about U.S. activities and solidarity with Nicaragua and is sponsoring a touring show of primitive paintings from Solentiname. They also sponsor a poster project selling two full-color images by Leoncio Saenz and Armando Morales (\$18 plus \$4 postage for the membership includes one poster and one newsletter. Contact Rosa Carlota Tunnerman, 1627 New Hampshire Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20009.)

■ One of the weirder by-products of the Iran-Contragate was a Wanted poster for Nicaraguan president Daniel Ortega by "Ortega the Outlaw," put out by Citizen for Reagan, which told the *New York Times*: "The left wing is generally much better at this sort of thing than we are. They are more artsy."

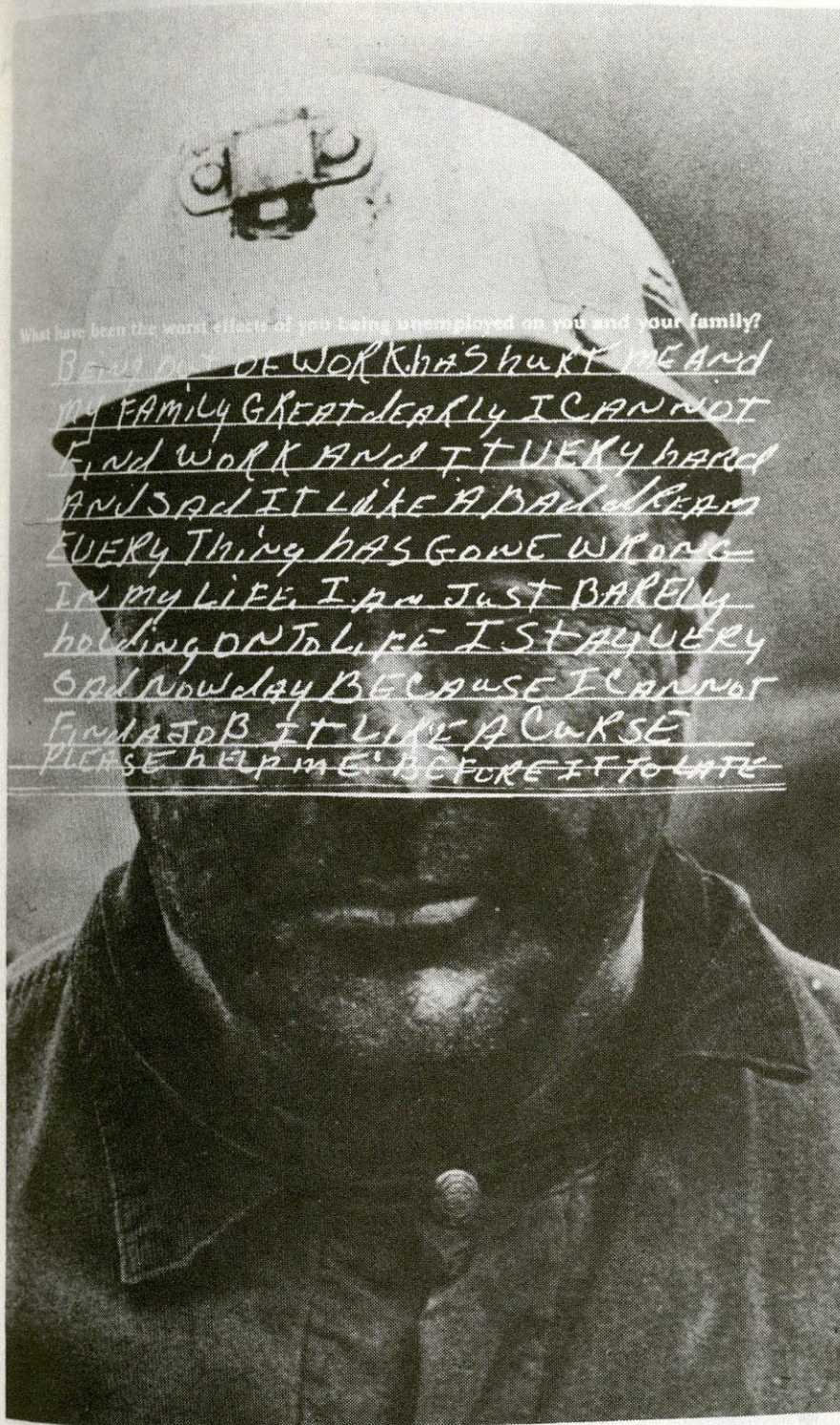
■ A party to raise money so that NYU's WBAI "Contragate" program can go national boasted a poster by Kristin Congdon and decor by Christy Rupp—painted cardboard corn stalks, syringe, and helicopters.

DON'T GET SCRAPPED, GET SCRAPPY

■ In Seattle, artists and 911 Contemporary Arts created a major project of door works about poverty and homelessness called "Home Street Home." And the pieces were "wandering wooden houettes of poor people in doorway" (Chris Vondrasek), radio broadcasts of runaway teens (Kevanne Kirkwood), homeless dolls strapped to downtown



by Cuban cartoonist AJUBEL (Alberto Morales)



Raymond Elozua, from the "Homescrap" exhibition

buildings (Jon Zucker). Chris Burch became "a shopping cart vendor who will exchange a cooked onion for anything" and Debra Beers, wearing an Indian mourning mask, peered into store windows to emphasize "the current state of some Native American women." Others told stories, made signs and stencils, postcards and installations. Current 911 director Glenn Weiss, by no coincidence, was co-organizer with Kwong Park of NYC's

Homelessness Project at the Storefront for Art and Architecture (See *Upfront* No. 10/11) which is now producing a publication.

■ A Dixieland band and two marvelous Bread and Puppet creations—a Real Estate lizard and Grandmother Earth—led a march of 5,000 in New York in December saying in various ways, "What do we want? Housing! When do we want it?"

Now!" Part of WBAI's Listeners' Action campaign for the homeless, it culminated in the plaza in front of the Plaza Hotel with thousands of candles and an effigy of Mayor Koch burning in hope and rage.

■ In Los Angeles, performance artist John Malpede has formed a theater group from his workshop with the homeless. Linda Frye Burnham wrote a feature on him in the *LA Weekly* and the group performs to turnaway crowds. Also originating in LA is Susan Franklin Tanner's traveling theater troupe of unemployed steelworkers. She is now planning a multi-media piece involving several other state artists in residence, including Malpede, to deal with current economic disaster. It's called "Scrapyards, Ghosts, and Heroes." Along the same unemployment lines, Raymon Elozua's exhibition "Homescrap" was at the Carlo Lamagna Gallery in New York. Son of a steelworker who has worked in the mills himself, Elozua spent four years researching his series of scrapmetal reliefs, paintings, and photographs of shut-down steel mills, incorporating quotations from the industry, the unions, and heart-rending testimony from the laid off workers.

■ The good news of grassroots organizing with artists came in two shows in New York in 1987. PS 1's "Out of the Studio: Art with Community," organized by Tom Finkelpearl and Glenn Weiss, included among others Tim Rollins with the Kids of Survival, Mierle Ukeles with the Department of Sanitation, Mel Rosenthal with the people of the South Bronx, Deborah Ossoff with the Far Rockaway Senior Center, and Boleslaw Greczybski with patients from Creedmoor Psychiatric Center. The installations were large and elaborate, as befits one of the city's most established "alternate" spaces.

■ "Up South" (so-called "to remind us that racism and discrimination cannot be limited to any portion of the country, particular period of history, or area of human endeavor") was organized by Bill Batson at Brooklyn's Baca Downtown. It showed smaller but equally powerful installations, ranging in style from Mary Beth Edelson's spiritually moving mural of the tree of life (with the Greens) to Ed Morales' no-nonsense didactic exposé of the English-only movement (with the Committee for a Multi-Lingual New York). Others were Tom Finkelpearl with the New York State Tenant and Neighborhood Coalition (a hokey "fireplace" assemblage), Yong Soon Min with the Coalition Against Anti-Asian Violence (a striking wall mural belying the notion of the "model minority"), Mierle Ukeles with the Jewish Community Relations Council (the "pit of racism" literally dug into the floor), and Cliff Joseph with the Center for Law and Social Justice (a bitterly gorgeous flag and race image).



Victoria Cross, "Apparitions and Amtrak".

■ Public art on a more private level is enjoyed by Amtrak passengers in the Southwest, who are treated to hallucinatory glimpses of masked figures in the landscape—"Los de los Sueños" (the ones of the dreams)—created by Victoria Cross (915 Lorenzo St., Santa Fe, N.M., 87501). The artist says they are "gentle reminders that one's dreams are exciting aspects of oneself."

■ And in Philadelphia, a not-so-gentle reminder that you can't fight City Hall. In July, Daniel Lowenstein's invitation to show a sculpture at City Hall was rescinded when he came up with two pillars of stacked garbage cans and pork barrels, framing a bricked-over doorway strewn with trash. An attempt was also made to alter Jonas dos Cantos' piece—a "ritualistic artwork" of black stick buildings, African symbols, and small portrait of Mayor Wilson Goode—broadly considered to be a reference to the MOVE massacre; but the artist explained the connection away and the piece survived. Though Lowenstein received a flood of public support, public art censorship continues from multiple directions. *Philadelphia Inquirer* art critic Edward J. Sozanski opined: "The artist is a seeker after truth, the politician is a molder of consensus. Art that seeks consensus is by definition inferior."

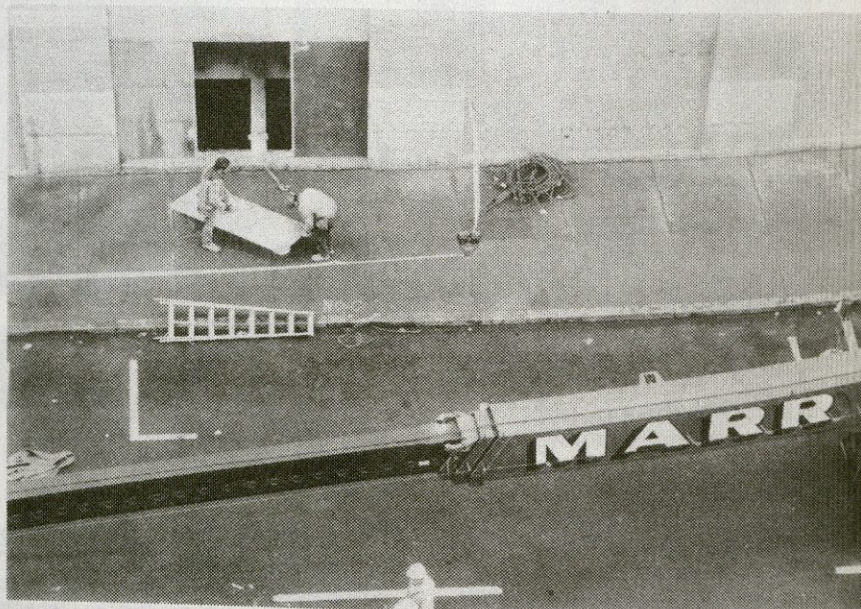
■ Weaver/photographer/muralist and activist Judy Branfman's "Curtains on Summer Street" achieved a different kind of consensus. A photo-text installation about a 150-year-old, mixed-use, light industrial "neighborhood" in the waterfront Fort Point area, which is facing some of the most intensive gentrification/development in Boston, it included material from five workplaces: a curtain factory, a baby mattress factory, a wool business... and an artist's studio.

■ Collaborative sculptors Ed and Nancy Reddin Kienholz, as part of their "Red, White and Blue Series," received permission from the City of San Francisco to park in the street a piece called *The Caddy Court*. It is a converted Cadillac stretch limo which has been in progress for 10 years, and is "a view of the U.S. Supreme Court incorporating stuffed animal heads and found objects." The press release remarks that the work is "witty, provoking, and not altogether uncritical."

■ A wild and woolly creation by Carel Moseiwitsch—appropriately titled *Fugitive*—which has been called "a feminist Guernica," had a short but happy life as a temporary mural at the University of British Columbia Fine Arts Gallery in Vancouver. Its jagged figures seem inspired by punk and popular art and Greek and



Carel Moseiwitsch, details of *Fugitive* mural at UBC, Vancouver Sept., 1987.



Judy Branfman, photo from "Curtains on Summer Street," installation Boston, 1987.

Hindu mythology. Wonder Woman, for example, has been described as a chubby little spiffire "who does all the stuff I always wanted to do, like flying to the South Pole." Other characters include revolutionary women from 19th-century India and various other "bandit queens."

dren "to know what I do. I want them to know I'll take a stand, I'll cross the fence at Honeywell, I'll die for them." Sequel to Lacy's 1981 *Whisper, The Waves, the Wind*, with elderly women on the beach at La Jolla, *Crystal Quilt* was documented and widely covered by the mass

media. Photographer Larry Fink did stills, later shown at the First Bank System, which has a large contemporary art collection. (FBS, by the way, has produced a frank and funny videotape of its employees' responses to the art in their offices—and in "controversy corridor," a kind of provocative limbo to which particularly peculiar works are relegated.)



PHOTO BY KRISTIE BEATMAN

Noa Bornstein, mural at Harlem Rehabilitation Center, 1987 (43' x 90').

■ A 43 x 90' mural by Noa Bornstein was just completed at a garden in the Harlem Rehabilitation Center of the Harlem Hospital Center; it consists of 13 huge portraits "influenced by the European Renaissance and the Black cultural heritage." Bornstein made the portraits of staff and clients at the Center. She is one of 22 artists participating in Green Thumb's Artists in the Gardens program.

■ Last Mothers Day, after two years work, Suzanne Lacy's *Whisper Minnesota Project* came to fruition in the "Crystal Quilt"—"a symbolic inauguration of older women into the public arena"—in a shopping complex in downtown Minneapolis. Some 600 women over the age of 60 participated in this multicultural piece. An audience of 1000, watching from balconies above, saw the black-garbed women enter, be seated at small tables, and unfold the tablecloths to form a glorious black, red, and yellow quilt (designed by Miriam Schapiro) which was further varied by the patterns of "hand plays." A sound collage by Susan Stone included local history and conversations with the participants, such as Bea Swanson, an Ojibway who runs a "loaves and fishes" program to feed the homeless in Minneapolis. She said that a major part of her spiritual growth was her "call to be an activist." Recalling other "women warriors," she said she wanted her grandchild-

■ The Pathfinder Mural Project, on New York City's West Street, is a giant project with a unique process. Project designer and director Mike Alewitz is coordinating the mural as an international collaboration. Artists from workers' movements all over the world have been invited to send drawings and, when possible, paint their figures in person. Recently Nicaraguan Arnoldo Guillén came to paint Sandino's portrait on the wall. The mural's central image is a printing press, appropriate since Pathfinder is a socialist publisher that distributes the speeches and writings of the working-class heroes to be pictured on the wall, among them Mother Jones, Malcolm X, Fidel Castro, Rosa Luxemburg, Leon Trotsky and Karl Marx. (Contributions are being solicited to complete the work: Pathfinder Mural Project, 410 West St., NYC 10014.)

AIDS



you can't catch
it holding hands
Niki de Saint Phalle

Cover of book "AIDS You Can't Catch It Holding Hands" by Niki de Saint Phalle. Published by the LAPIS PRESS, July, 1987 (1850 Union Street, Suite 466, San Francisco, CA. 94123; 415-922-4600).

Also on the mural scene, Juan Sanchez completed a handsome piece called "Louis Armstrong, the Prevalance of Love, Devotion, and Jazz" in Corona, Queens, under the auspices of Cityarts Workshop. And, on a sadder note, *Community Murals* magazine, from San Francisco, is another victim of the defunding debacle, burnout, and....

■ In Cleveland, an innovative small-scale public art project is called Art Behind Bars and is just that: two windows in a former warehouse. Don Desmett's piece—*The Great Communicator*—was a stenciled quotation on poverty from our leader: "People Just Don't Know how to go about it (Getting Food)...." At night, when backlit, the silhouettes of dejected people and a portrait of RR appear.

■ Alternate ROOTS (Regional Organization of Theaters in the South) held its annual theater festival in Atlanta in the

Poster by Kristin Reed



Enrique Chagoya, Announcement for the *Galeria de la Raza Día de los Muertos* celebration, San Francisco, Nov., 1987.

fall, with some 40 performances, outstanding among them those by Appalshop Roadside Theater, Lexington, Virginia; Lime Kiln, Knoxville's Carpetbag, Washington DC's Everyday Theater, Jo Carson, John Spelman, and Ruby Lerner; and George King's "Banana" extravaganza about the history of Guatemala. Four critics were imported from New York and LA to discuss each performance; its creators and a one-day conference was highlighted by the presentations of Ralph and Deborah Clifton Hills of the Highlander Center in Tennessee. Ralph is a white farmer/organizer and Deborah is a Black traditional artist/organizer; she draws on her Louisiana Cajun upbringing. They asked a series of tough questions to assembled cultural workers, from the cities:

How sensitive is the professional arts community to the aspirations of rural peoples? Is the professional arts community willing to help in opposing the merchandising of traditional cultures—the most recent blatant example being the franchising of Cajun culture? Is the professional arts community willing to face and explore the mythic dimensions of our current problems and so offer leadership in healing open wounds from the past? (Such as the desecration of burial grounds, the removal of major Native American nations, the denigration of traditional cultures of all kinds, and the psychic wounds caused by destruction of the land, air, and water).

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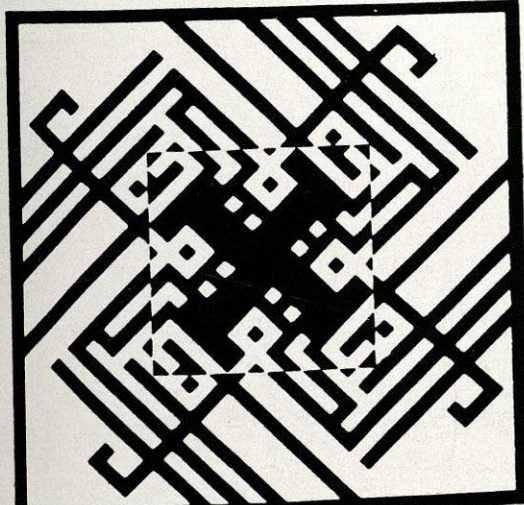
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PADD STATEMENT

PADD is a progressive artists' resource and networking organization coming out of and into New York City. Our goal is to provide artists with an organized relationship to society, to demonstrate the political effectiveness of image making. One way we are trying to do this is by building a collection of documentation of international socially concerned art. The PADD Archive defines social concern in the broadest sense: any work that deals with issues ranging from sexism and racism to ecological damage and other forms of human oppression. The PADD Archive documents artwork from movement posters to the most individual of statements.

PADD is also involved with the production, distribution and impact of progressive art in the culture at large. We sponsor public events, actions and exhibitions. These are all means of facilitating relationships between (1) artists in or peripherally in, or not at all in the art world, (2) the local communities in which we live and work, (3) Left culture, and (4) the broader political struggles.

We hope eventually to build an international grass-roots network of artist activists who will support with their talents and their political energies the liberation and self-determination of all disenfranchised peoples.



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