

Another Standard

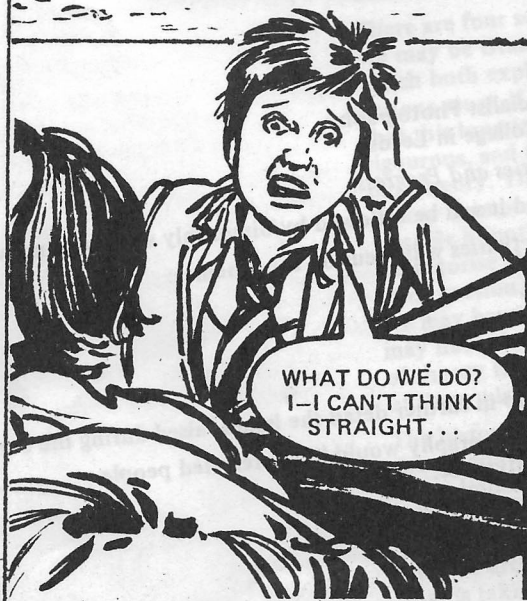
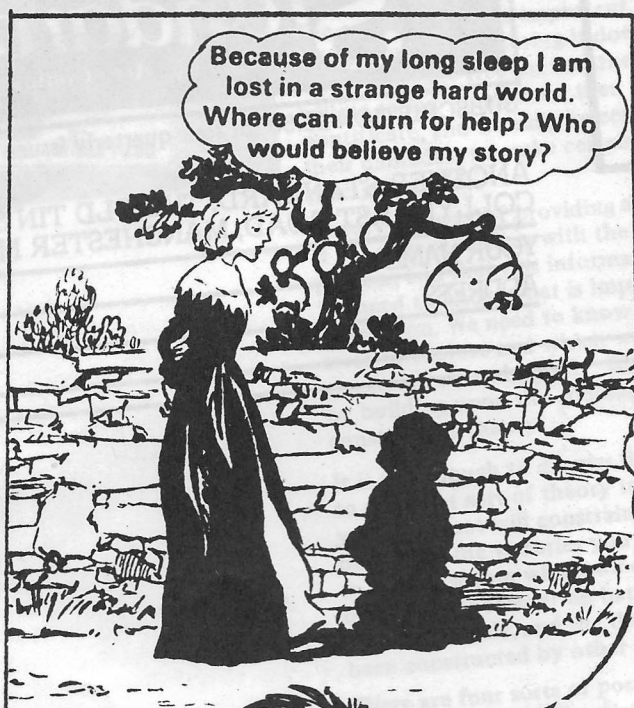
Community, Art, Culture and Politics

50p

MAG

pages of fun. ★
Read on, and find out!

Help Lines



STORIES FEATURES THINGS TO DO

Autumn 83

friends
and

A L L I E S

SALISBURY

APRIL 22-4 1983

THE REPORT



AS

Another
Standard

Community, Art, Culture and Politics

SUBSCRIPTION £3.50 for four quarterly issues

ANOTHER STANDARD, THE OLD TIN SCHOOL,
COLLYHURST ROAD, MANCHESTER M10 7RQ.

YOUR NAME

ADDRESS

☐ The New National Conference of Socialist Photography
will be held in 1984 at Beechwood College in Leeds.

☐ The theme will be *Photography, Politics and Progress*.

☐ This will be a weekend conference and it will be followed by bimonthly seminars and workshops.

☐ The conference and the subsequent activities will focus on four themes:

- ☐ 1. Modes of imagery
- ☐ 2. Politics and practice
- ☐ 3. The social relations of distribution
- ☐ 4. New modes of imagery.

☐ The seminars and workshops will take up in further detail the issues raised during the conference.

☐ The Standing Conference of Socialist Photography would like interested people
to participate in the planning of this conference.

☐ Write or phone for details of the planning meetings to:

☐ Sue Green
☐ Triangle Arts and Media Centre
☐ University of Aston
☐ Gosta Green
☐ Birmingham B4 7ET
☐ 021-359 3611 (x4525)

The Area of Theory



Theory, we may as well admit from the outset, is not easy to construct. It is always problematic and usually tentative. Moreover it is often intimidating; as intimidating to write as it is to read. It offers an unparalleled opportunity to make a fool of yourself; to lob an Important Message into the air and have it smashed back by a battered copy of Adorno.

Why not leave it alone then, and get on with 'the real work', with the devising sessions, the meetings and the projects that make up the bulk of community arts? Why not deride theory as the province of a strange group of beings called 'theorists', who live in ivory towers, or impenetrable revolutionary cells, and who spend their time like medieval alchemists, devising models and talking strange tongues, and using these models and tongues to probe questions of no interest to anyone other than themselves? How many angels can dance on the head of a pin? How many community artists does it take to make a revolution?

Many people do do precisely this. They beaver away at the nuts and bolts uninterested in the possibility that it all might add up to a machine of some sort, and that this machine might have a purpose, or at least a function. They refuse to believe that the area of theory is important, and in doing so they join a tradition which is both long and totally wrong.

The area of theory *is* important, and the fact that it is difficult in no way detracts from this importance. Ignoring it doesn't make it go away, nor does it solve it: it merely leaves the stage free for bad theory, for armchair theory. If practitioners are not willing to tax themselves, then the stage is left free for those in the wings to pontificate, and we may be certain that they *will* pontificate, and that they will do their damndest to make certain that their pontifications have an effect in the real, practical world.

Theory is a way of providing a framework within which information may be located. It is a way of dealing with the fact that there is simply too much information to process, and that this information needs to be scaled down to manageable quantities. We need to know what is important information, and what is simply irrelevant distraction. We need to know where to look to find the data we need, and which areas to explore and which we can safely leave alone. We do not learn this by simply staggering around blindly. Rather we learn it by drawing lessons from each experience, by building upon the conclusions we draw from these lessons; by, in the end, constructing theory.

It is not enough to dismiss the process of constructing theory. Rather it is necessary to ask what sort of theory it is that we are constructing, on the grounds that the theory you construct will constrain the struggle you make, and the struggles you make will determine the victories you can hope to achieve. We cannot accept theory as 'natural', as a given within which we operate, for if we do we are agreeing that we will fight our struggles forever on battlefields of other people's choosing. Theory does not arise from the angels, and the theory that we accept as 'natural' has, we may be assured, been constructed by other people for purposes of their own.

There are four sorts of position that we may adopt with regards to the issue of theory. We may be Grand Theorists, who believe that there is a single, all-encompassing Theory, which both explains everything and determines all practical action. We may agree that actions must, if they are to be effective, be subordinated to the long-term view; that this long-term view must, of necessity, be theoretical although nonetheless rigorous, and that our actions must therefore be subordinated to the logic of our Theory. Theory will be paramount. On the other hand, we may agree that theory is important, yet hold that it must be the sort of theory which consists of weak, testable hypotheses which relate dialectically to practical action; that is to say, we act, we theorise about our action, we act on our theory, we modify our theory as a result of our action, we act on our modified theory, we further modify our theory, and so on. We may have no theory, because we do not understand what all the fuss is about. We may have No Theory, because we fully understand the argument and reject the notion of theory in favour of spontaneous action; because, for example, we believe the notion of theory is inherently bourgeois or male.

The history of community arts would indicate that, as a movement, we believe that the second option is the fruitful avenue to explore; that theory and practice are of equal importance and must of necessity inform each other. If this is the case, then we have to be clear about the consequences. We are saying that as a movement we will produce our own theory, and that we will relate it back to our practice. We are saying that we are mature enough to make a valid contribution to the wider cultural debate that is taking place in different ways in academia and in politics.

If that is what we are saying we must abandon any notions of 'natural' theory, which arises by alchemy or common-sense, and get on with the business of constructing our own. The lack of a theoretical perspective within our movement is a vacuum waiting to be filled, and if we aren't willing to fill it, we can be sure that someone else will.



Write to:

Another Standard.
3/4 Oval Mansions,
Kennington Oval,
London SE11.

Dear Another Standard,

Thank you for the copy of the Salisbury Conference report which I received last week. The idea of publishing it as a special issue of Another Standard was a particularly good one as far as I am concerned. It was something I would probably have missed otherwise; added to my list of things to get but never quite reaching the top.

Might I suggest that you make each summer issue of the magazine a similar 'special' which treats a range of topics with a number of fairly lengthy, fairly detailed essays. This would provide a much-needed injection of theoretical thought into the field, without overbalancing the newsier and more topical content of the normal magazine.

Alternatively, you could do this kind of thing for each year's winter issue, and then we could give them to each other as presents: a kind of radical children's annual.

Lesley Mahon,
Penrith,
Cumbria.

Does Cumbria still exist? We thought it had been abolished in the last round of boundary changes, but then we only discovered that the earth went round the sun a couple of months ago. Suddenly, at a stroke, we understood what Patrick Moore had been getting all these years on The Sky at Night.

Science! Don't you just love it?

Dear Another Standard,

I am writing about Section VIII of the contribution by John Phillips to the *Friends & Allies* report, which you saw fit to publish as the summer issue of your magazine.

In this section John Phillips alleges that community artists spend little or no time on the development of their personal skills, and asks 'how

is it possible for anyone to convincingly encourage others to develop a creative potential when they themselves have so evidently abandoned its pursuit?'

I would like to concur with this, and add a rider to it, if I may. It seems to me to be vital, not only to be consistently training yourself, and improving your skills, but also that you should find a simple and effective way of communicating this facet of your work to the people with whom you work the rest of the time.

The reason for this is simple. If people are aware of your talents, the present level of your skills, and your commitment to improving them, they will be able to weigh you up, to 'suss you out', and to make an informed decision about how much weight they will accord your judgements.

This is an open way of proceeding, in which the community artist puts her, or his, cards on the table, as it were, at the start of a project. The relationship that results from this stands a chance of being an honest and hence fruitful one.

The other way is the way of the 'professional', who says 'I am what I am, because I have the certificates that say I am', and who treats any questions about his (its usually his) status as acts of treason.

These people are never trusted although sometimes people are put in a position where they have to be tolerated.

John Phillips has hit upon a real, and fundamental problem. If you don't admit to having skills and to being enthusiastic about them, then why should people be anything other than suspicious or sceptical?

Jane Horgan,
Birmingham.

We received a number of letters about the conference report. This was just one of them.

The issues you raise are, as you say, fundamental to the way in which community artists appear before the people with whom they are working and deserve further discussion.

Perhaps in a future issue John Phillips could be encouraged to expand Section VIII into a complete article.

Dear Another Standard,

I don't subscribe but I do read each issue: a friend of mine gets it. (Have you ever tried to work out the size of your readership? It's probably 4 or 5 times your sales. Certainly Terry's copy is seen by half a dozen or so people)

I would like to make a suggestion. Find a regular cartoonist, a funny one preferably, and give them a spot in each issue.

Radical cartoonists should be encouraged, or the 'mainstream' will claim a complete monopoly over an effective medium.

Nancy Wilcox,
Brighouse,
Yorks.

Haven't we discussed this before in just these pages? It would please us greatly to find a radical cartoonist that made us laugh. They would be assured of a regular spot.

Hey, you with the pencils: you can come out from under the table now.

Dear Another Standard,

I bet that there is nothing in your next issue (or the one after that) about the licensing of cable television or the forthcoming Direct Broadcasting satellites.

It is easy options all the way, isn't it? How can we get the working people to watch our videos, come to our community newspaper meetings, put our posters in their windows, while all the time they are being bombarded with the things that *really* affect them.

Community, art, politics and culture it says on your cover. Cable and DBS are political issues that are going to alter the cultures of most people: the only art will be the Kojak reruns and the only community will be the queue on Thursday morning at the newsagents to get the TV Times.

These are *real* problems. They are not going to go away, and they will not be able to be challenged after they have happened: or at least only on the access slot at half past midnight on Mondays on Channel 34.

If you haven't got anything to say about these things then what are you publishing the magazine for? If you haven't got anything to say, I can

only conclude that you are old hippies; romantics who are revelling in the fact that they are *doomed*.

Andy Macarthur,
London W11.

A transparent ruse 'Andy', or should I say Vic? It is Vic Drill, isn't it? We like to think so; there can't be that many people in Notting Hill who share your, shall we say, obsession.

It's a pity your obsession doesn't extend to writing the odd article, instead of a continual series of letters bemoaning the fact that nobody else can be bothered to write the specific articles that would interest you.

Perhaps this is the place to point out that there is no 'you', no party apparatchicks who churn out articles. There is only a group of people who write, unpaid, and who would all welcome articles from still more people. There is a page reserved for you in the next issue 'Andy', and there is space available too for anyone else who has something they want to say about community, art, culture and politics.

Dear Another Standard,

When is an artist a community artist? When is art community art?

From reading your summer issue it is obvious that, in your eyes at least, it has nothing to do with the quality of workmanship. You obviously don't believe that what you produce is in any way inferior to 'real art'.

Is it the way you work then? Is it what sociologists would term your 'methodology'? Are you doing things differently, because from reading your magazine you don't claim to be doing different things.

If so, I suggest you publish considerably more about your methodology and in considerably more detail. If you've got a revolution going on, then for God's sake don't sit on it.

We could do with some good news in Coventry.

A.P. Tooley,
Coventry.

We couldn't agree more. (See the editorial for a more detailed exposition of our feelings). But one day soon.....

THE STATE OF THE ART



RISING ABOVE BABYLON

Don't ask me, I can't draw is the title of a new book about the range of community arts activities currently being undertaken in Yorkshire. This has been compiled to serve as a guide to projects operating in the area, and also as a companion to a travelling exhibition which illustrates the variety of work being done in the county.

The book is 42 pages and includes a large number of photographs, as well as a lot of detailed information about 19 different community arts projects. It also contains a list of contact addresses for people interested in community arts in Yorkshire.

It costs £1.50 and can be ordered from Brian Cross, Artivan, 22 Cornfield Street, Milnrow, Rochdale, Lancashire OL16 3DW.

The photograph above is taken from the entry about Metro Community Arts, who work in Bradford. It is entitled *Rising above Babylon* and is part of a Rasta photography project.

Dominant Definitions

There is a one-day conference at the Polytechnic of Central London on Saturday October 29th, entitled *Cultural Politics and Visual Representation*.

The conference is intended to examine the ways in which visual representations work to secure dominant definitions of class, gender and race.

It will also address itself to the questions: what are the central political issues for cultural theory and practice, and how can visual representations function as a site of resistance and struggle?

The speakers will include

Elizabeth Cowie, John Tagg, Lorraine Leeson, Frank Mort, Homi Bhabha and Chris Weedon. The conference costs £6 or £3 if you are a student, a pensioner or unemployed. There are creche facilities and assisted access for the disabled.

To book a place send for a booking form to Deborah Cherry, History of Department, University of Manchester, Manchester M13 9PL.

Appointments

Peter Bradbury, who was formerly the Community Arts Assistant at GLAA has joined Paddington Printshop as an administrator and theoretician.

The new Community Arts Assistant at GLAA is Annette Burgess.

Ice Cream Economics

Jean Berressai, the Marxist conceptual artist and cultural activist is to begin his first project since *18CC/14N*, which finally ended in New York in November 1982, two and a half years after it began.

His views of radical artwork in Britain are well-documented. When he was interviewed for *Lambeth Arts* during the British stage of *18CC/14N*, he was quoted as saying that so-called radical artists in this country (in which he included community artists) 'are paid by the state, and they work with permissions from the state. They are civil servants'.

His new project, *What Flavour is Your Pity?*, will take place in three inner-city areas in England, and as with his past projects it will be done in public places without any official permission whatsoever. It will be concerned with 'the ice-cream economics in which momentary privatised pleasure supercedes human need as the basis for permissible organisation'.

We hope to be able to report on this project in more detail in a future issue.

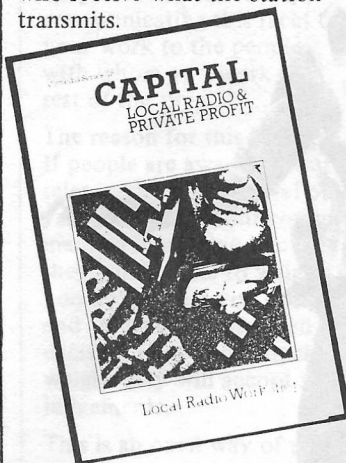


Capital Radio

Local Radio Workshop have a book published by Comedia entitled *Capital: Local Radio and Private Profit*.

The book argues that there is an urgent need to reassess the role of private finance in local radio, and makes a series of proposals for achieving a greater public control of, and participation in, broadcasting.

It does this in the context of a detailed analysis of Capital Radio, the commercial station with the franchise to broadcast pop music to the greater London area. They look at the station's origins, its programming and its public relations, and argue that, over the years, these have been tuned to the interests of advertisers and shareholders, rather than the people who receive what the station transmits.



ACGB

In the August issue of its Bulletin the Arts Council of Great Britain invited 'proposals for suitably qualified people to fill the two or three vacancies that are likely to occur on each of its specialist panels and committees from April 1 1984'.

Proposals should be accompanied by full details of the experience and qualifications of the person you are recommending.

Send your proposals to the Secretary General at the Arts Council, 105 Piccadilly, London W1 as soon as possible.

Appointments

South West Arts has appointed Martin Rewcastle as its new director. He is a former chairperson of GLAA's arts centres panel, and was community and development officer at Whitechapel Gallery until his appointment.

Eastern Arts has a new assistant director. He is Dick Chamberlain, who was formerly co-director of InterAction, Milton Keynes. He will have special responsibility for general and community arts.

Taking Literature Seriously

There are five (yes, count 'em: *five*) literary festivals due to take place during October and November, as a part of the Literature Festivals Council's *Literature Alive* promotion.

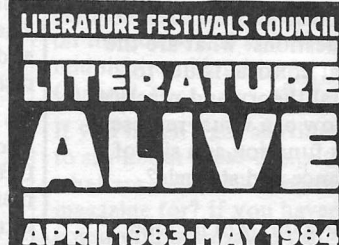
The Bracknell Literature Festival takes place on October 7th to 9th. For more details contact Andrew Campbell, South Hill Park Arts Centre, Bracknell, Berkshire or telephone (0344) 27272.

The Cheltenham Festival runs from the 9th to the 16th October, and includes the Cheltenham Lecture, in which Raymond Williams talks about *Literature in the Late Twentieth Century*. For more details contact Jeremy Tyndall, Town Hall, Imperial Square, Cheltenham or ring (0242) 21621.

The Kent Literature Festival runs from October 19th to 22nd. Details can be obtained from John Rice, South East Arts, 9-10 Crescent Road, Tunbridge Wells, Kent or by phoning (0892) 41666.

The Newcastle Literary Festival, which apparently inspired no less than Melvyn Bragg to say, 'Newcastle has a tradition of taking literature seriously', is taking place this year between October 21st and 30th. Details are obtainable from Pam Jarvic, c/o Arts Marketing, 10 Osbourne Terrace, Newcastle upon Tyne, or by phoning (0632) 817701.

Finally, there is the Birmingham Readers and Writers Festival, about which there is no record of Melvyn Bragg ever having said anything. This runs from November 9th to 20th, and details can be obtained from Jim Crace, Midlands Arts Centre, Cannon Hill Park, Birmingham or by phoning 021-449 7264.



Thinking Aloud

with
T.P. Harcourt

It's odd doing a column like this. You sit here and wonder if anybody reads it, and on the odd occasion (alright, the *one* occasion) on which you catch someone reading the magazine you peer at them and watch what happens when they reach the page where the column is.

Five minutes later, when their chuckling is finally subsiding, you wander off to take the 2CV to a carwash, before driving to the anti-sexist, anti-racist creche to collect Duane and Martha.

Another hazard facing the amateur columnist is reading other people's columns. Have you ever read Roy Hattersley's in the Guardian? No, of course you haven't. I mean everyone has *some* standards.

Anyway, Roy (as we columnists call him) likes to begin his columns with a quotation. It's a way of getting started, and if you play your cards right it makes you look erudite.

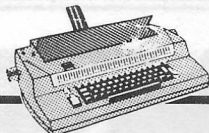
If you play your cards very right it makes you look so erudite that people are put off actually reading the column. Instead they put it down unread, and forever after wander around saloon bars saying, 'That Roy Hattersley: he's so erudite'.

This tactic has the effect of cutting down on your readership while improving the nation's health, as all over the country people stay away from pubs in droves to avoid the dull hum of conversations about MPs from Barnsley and their contributions to the wit and wisdom of the age.

I thought I might do a column Roy-style, so I spent an evening digging through the paperbacks and was finally reduced to peeking to see what was lying on the coffee table.

It was Duane's mug, and believe me the quotation from the works of Mabel Lucie Atwell that I found there wouldn't interest you at all.

As William Blake said, 'One Law for the Lion and Ox is Oppression', and he should know, being a mystic and all.



SHELTON TRUST NEWS

Worker

On July 1st the Shelton Trust appointed a part-time worker on an initial three month contract, which will hopefully be extended on a rolling basis.

Helen Palmer, the new worker, has been working part-time at *Camerawork*.

She has begun to compile a basic list of all the community arts projects that are operating throughout the country. She would appreciate any relevant information, which should be sent to her at:

Helen Palmer, c/o The Old Tin School, Collyhurst Road, Manchester M10.

She is also collecting information on all jobs advertised in the community arts field. This will be used to compile a dossier on community arts as an area of employment, and will include analyses of the geographical distribution of job vacancies, the distribution of skills, levels of wages etc.

She would appreciate any information, or copies of any advertisements or job descriptions. These should be sent to the address above.

Wales

The Shelton Trust has given a grant to the Wales Association for Community Arts, to assist with the publication of a directory of Welsh community arts projects and a report of the *Arts and Unemployment* conference, held in June in Merthyr Tydfil. These will be available soon.

Seminars

The Trust has begun to plan a series of quarterly seminars or meetings, which would be organised to coincide with

the publication of each issue of *Another Standard*. The seminars would be based around a topic or theme that was raised in the magazine, and would include among its participants a number of people who had contributed to that particular issue.

The present plan is for these seminars or meetings to be held on consecutive nights in different regions, so that as many members as possible would have the opportunity to attend and participate.

The main stumbling block, of course, is finance. We do not believe that this is insurmountable, however, and we are confident that we will have more to report on the seminars next issue.

Training

Bernard Ross attended the CORAA officers annual conference on behalf of the Shelton Trust.

He is also busy setting up meetings to plan training initiatives for community arts workers and other interested people. The Trust directors feel that this is an area which has been neglected and have decided to take the initiative.

To this end, Bernard Ross has set up a preliminary meeting with key people from the Arts Council of Great Britain and the regional arts associations. This will take place in October, and will discuss the next steps that should be taken, and begin to work out a possible programme of future activities.

AGM

The annual general meeting of the Shelton Trust will take place on November 16th in Oxford. Members are welcome to attend, and they will be informed of the precise location by post.

The meeting will include the election of regional directors for the forthcoming year, as well as a full report on the activities of the Trust during 1983, including the presentation of the Treasurer's figures.

The meeting will also include a report on the discussions that the directors have been involved in over the past year about ways in which the present activities of the Trust could be made more accessible to its members, and more importantly, the ways the Trust could move forward to make it possible for members more genuinely to play an active part in the Trust at every level.

The directors hope that all the members present will participate in this very important discussion.

Directors

ELECTED:

Cilla Baynes,
Community Arts Workshop,
The Old Tin School,
Collyhurst Road,
MANCHESTER M10 7RQ
Tel: 061 202 2037

Wendy Buller,
Lincolnshire & Humberside Arts,
St. Hugh's,
Newport,
LINCOLN LN1 3DN.

Chris Foster,
St. Edmund's Arts Centre,
Bedwin Street,
SALISBURY.
Tel: 0722 4299

Chris Humphrey,
Shape Up North,
Belle Vue Centre,
191 Belle Vue Road,
LEEDS
Tel: 0532 431005

Mike McCarthy,
Deeside Community Arts Project,
High School,
Queensferry,
CLWD,
WALES.
Tel: 0244 821003

Karen Merkel,
Free Form,
38 Dalston Lane,
LONDON E8 3AZ.
Tel: 01 249 3394

Bernard Ross,
The Social Arts Trust,
Room 20, 1st. Floor,
Exchange Buildings,
Quayside,
NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE.
Tel: 0632 616581

CO-OPTED:

Phil Cope,
Vale of Glamorgan
Community Arts,
St. Donat's Arts Centre,
Llantwit Major,
South Glamorgan,
WALES.
Tel: 04465 2151

Roger Drury,
Bloomin' Arts,
East Oxford Community Centre,
Princess Street,
OXFORD.
Tel: 0865 245735

Nigel Leach,
Yorkshire Arts Association,
Glyde House,
Glydegate,
BRADFORD
Tel: 0274 723051x5

Chris Timms,
6 Chevin Road,
Milford,
DERBYSHIRE.



BECOMING ONE'S OWN SINGER

Frankie Armstrong started singing in the early days of the folk revival. During the sixties her interest in topical, social and political songs developed in parallel with an interest in more theatrical styles of presentation. For a while she was in the Critics group, a company set up by Ewan McColl, who was an important precursor of many ideas found in community arts. In the Critics group he was seeking to combine ideas developed at Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop, and before that at Theatre Union, with a strong commitment to traditional music, and new music in a traditional idiom.

In the 1970s Frankie says, 'I became my own singer', performing in a widening variety of venues, spreading out from the folk music circuit to do an increasing amount of work within the women's movement and the peace movement. Her repertoire includes rural, industrial, music-hall and contemporary songs; those of her own and of songwriters such as Leon Rosselson and Berthold Brecht. She selects and interprets songs that explore and express personal and social relationships, especially those that focus on the experiences of women.

Following visits to the USA in the mid-seventies, she started running voice workshops which now make up an important part of her work. They are designed to help singers and non-singers alike to liberate their voices so that they too can 'become their own singers'.

Chris Foster and Karen Merkel spoke to Frankie Armstrong in August, at her home in London.

How do you define what you do?

I've no idea! I suppose I'm a singer and a runner of voice workshops! Not that that means much to most people.

Do you feel your singing has a cause or a campaign contained within it? Would you say 'I'm a folk singer' or 'I'm a cultural revivalist'?

That's one of my major difficulties. It doesn't fit into any of the major categories, it doesn't have any commercial outlets. It's a problem of definitions. When people ask 'What kind of songs do you do?', I usually say 'what you think of as folk songs'. It's a real problem.

Do you say, 'I sing political songs'?

No, not usually. I'm more likely to say I do programmes and concerts for the peace and women's movements. I think that's a much easier and more useful way of defining what I do.

I think it would be true to say that a lot of people who like your singing and who come back for more, would define you to themselves as being somebody who, at the very least, sang a lot of songs with a very clear political perspective, and political point of view. There aren't many people who are singing songs that are that explicit. So how do you feel about that?

Oh that's fine! But I think that it's the difference between the people who take what's given them on the media — the telly watcher and radio listener — and the people who have stepped outside that.

So what can people like you do to bridge the gap between popular entertainment (what is supposed to be) when here you are performing stuff which is drawn from a very long tradition of popular entertain-

ment but is not actually popular?

For me, political music isn't just the songs you sing, particularly not the words you sing. There's an awful lot of what passes for political music which only takes one dimension of the criteria, which is the words basically — if it has political words, it's a political song. But for me it carries many other implications. People have actually got to be able to hear it in conditions and circumstances which actually make them stop and listen. So the chances are if the song sounds exactly like the song before which had 'moon, spoon and June' on the radio, then it just becomes a great wash of sound. It may have started off with people saying 'this is different, this is raw, this is real', but it soon becomes packaged and nullified through the course of media exposure and being turned into a money spinner.

You've chosen a field that is particularly accessible in ... aside from whether it's popular or ... seems that by definition these songs have lack of emphasis on ownership, which is crucial to them. Surely it's no co-incidence that you aren't singing jazz?

Well I do work with a jazz band!

Well, a certain sort of jazz then!

Right!

The understood function of those kind of songs that I've heard you sing is that they are sharing songs and by definition they have a message, 'conversion thing'. Also they're accessible through their form and where they happen and where they're from and all of that ... That's implicit though.

Yes. In a way, if I do have a 'conversion thing', it's more about getting people to understand that there is a valid art form which we can draw on, and that I'm much more messianic about that than the message. Lots of people can do the message.

So, it's the revival of the art form, maintaining it, developing it. What's the political role of that?

It's something I'm much more aware of in the States than here because there's this thing called Women's Music. It gets big distribution and it's big names — Meg Christian, Holly Near and Chris Williamson. They're probably the most effective alternative music scene that's ever happened in terms of the size of record sales and audiences, and so everybody thinks that Women's Music started in 1972 with the first Olivia Records. For the most part, the style of voice production and musical accompaniment is exactly the same as the bulk of FM Radio songs. You could change the words — with the love songs, simply change she to he — it doesn't pose a threat to anybody's hearing. The sounds are almost exactly the same and basically it's a perfectly acceptable commercial sound. I think there is a real ahistoricity to it. It seems to me there is something profoundly apolitical about it.

'Ahistoricity'? Is that an American word? It's a new one on me.

No, it's just that America is so full of ahistoric people! No, it's just a formal word that means lacking in historical perspective! If I'm going to get on any political soap-box, in a sense it's going to be more about the role of Art and Culture. As a form it's denying that there was a Women's Music before 1972 that pre-existed commercial music.



I think there's a problem in that a lot of people are saying that the popular music that exists is de facto what you get on the radio, in rock bands etc. Therefore, if you want to reach the people, if you want to produce music that's going to counteract the capitalist popular music, you should use those musical forms and contexts, like big rock gigs in Brockwell Park for Youth CND. I feel that people who do that have got something quite wrong. They're using 'the devil has all the best tunes' argument and then playing the devil's music.

That's right.

So how do you think that people who want to find a socialist way of producing music? Music that is socialist in the way it's presented as well as in its content? How do you think that someone in your position who's obviously dealing with those problems can go forward when the capitalist music business is so almighty powerful?

One thing that I have done is almost redefined myself out of the music business into something that's much more akin to theatre. But I don't know; I think the forces of the all-persuasiveness of music in supermarkets, pubs and shops has meant that people don't give it the kind of attention that makes any difference to their lives anyway.

I'm not sure that it's even anything that there's any point in trying to do that much. I think it's more important to do what you can do with integrity and conviction, and do it well. Even if it's in small numbers I think it will, in fact, have a profounder effect than spreading yourself thin to thousands of people who aren't listening or concentrating or whatever.

When you went to the States, was that when you started learning your voice workshop techniques?

Yes. That was also where I met Ethel Raim, from whom I pinched the basic idea! I went to some of Ethel's Balkan singing classes in Greenwich Village. I was fascinated by what I saw happen to some of the women there in the space of just three weeks. As their voices opened out, they seemed to open out too. People's postures changed and an incredible sense of strength and well-being happened in the group.

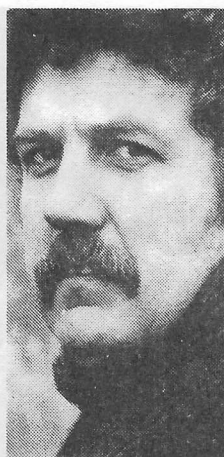
When I came back, I was enthusing about it so someone said, would I do a workshop for their group. I held the first workshop with mostly women in a room over a pub, having added to the group by advertising in Spare Rib. I had my tape recorder, and Ethel's exercises on the tape, next to me, and I played Ethel doing the exercises, and then I did it and then I got everyone else to do it. So I always encourage people who come up to me and say, 'do you think I could do a workshop?' I say, 'Sure! Use my exercise tape, I used Ethel's, until I got confidence to do it spontaneously'.

Thank you.

Chris Foster is a member of the Rural Project, based in Salisbury.

Karen Merkel is a member of the Free Form Performance Team.

ARTS for LABOUR



Arts For Labour held a one-day conference on September 3rd, which included on its agenda a discussion of community arts. Owen Kelly and Heather McAdam, neither of whom are actually members of the group, were there, and this is their report.

Arts For Labour is a group which began in 1981, and aims, in the words of one of its leaflets, to '1. assist and advise the Labour Party in the establishment of a socialist policy for the arts, and 2. generally provide opportunity for members to consider matters of mutual interest to Arts For Labour and the Labour Party'.

It is a regionally-based group, which organises newsletters and meetings, and has lent its support to a number of campaigns including *Grant Back*, the demonstration against Arts Council cuts which took place on August 24th.

On September 3rd it held a one-day conference at the headquarters of ASTMS, in Camden in North London. This conference discussed three main topics: the creative and artistic aspects of the Labour and Conservative election campaigns, community arts and the relationship between local government and the arts.

The contradictions between the various aspirations that Arts For Labour has manifested surfaced in the very first topic discussed, when it became apparent that there were two diametrically opposed views being voiced.

The first argued that the point about elections was winning them; and that the way you won them was, at best, a side issue, and in all probability an irrelevant one. If autocrats make politicians appear to the viewing public as honest and forthright statesmen, then Labour politicians would be fools not to use autocrats. If snappy graphics and catchy slogans actually influence voters, then that is what the Labour Party needs, and those involved in Arts For Labour are among the ideal people to help devise them. As someone at the conference said, 'They are just tools, and we would be stupid not to use every tool at our disposal'.

The second point of view began by recognising that there was a moral dimension to Socialism; that it was fuelled by the belief that certain ways of running a society were at root wrong. From this perspective, various speakers asked whether there was

not an obligation for the Labour Party to limit itself to those strategies which were compatible with the Socialism we were hoping to achieve. If the Labour Party needed to sell itself like soap powder didn't this mean that it was failing to get its arguments across; that it was not speaking clearly enough (or was not itself clear enough) about its policies, or alternatively that the electorate for reasons of their own had decided not to listen to it? Weren't the ideas of socialism such that selling them like used cars effectively sold them out?

These two views were never reconciled, but were instead both, for understandable reasons, held aloft at once through some deft juggling from the chair. This served to keep the conference moving forward, but it did not disguise the urgent need for these issues to be debated, and for the group to reach an agreed understanding about the ways in which art, and cultural work in general, could relate to the struggle for socialism. This debate would need to consider what it meant to be a socialist and an artist, and whether, in fact, all types of artistic practice and all kinds of creative techniques are equally applicable to the struggle for socialism.

The second topic that the conference discussed was community arts. This section began with three presentations, the first of which was a description of the work of the Rose Bruford College, and the effects on that work of the recent cuts in the educational budgets. The effect has been harsh and cruelly arbitrary.

Felicity Harvest and Heather McAdam then gave a talk, illustrated with slides, showing some of the developments that have happened within community arts within Hackney. This provided a demonstration of what can be done with the backing of a sympathetic council and also served to show that way that one activity will provide the breeding ground for another, and that community activity will grow geometrically given the chance.

Finally Ray Lockett, from the ASTMS, talked about the growing cultural radicalism within his union. This, he said, had occurred because of the moves in recent years to encourage the unionisation of the independent film-makers, and the resultant influence on the union of the theories and policies of ITC. He explained how the union had been forced over the last six years to drop any simplistic notions about the mono-

lithic nature of film-making and had had to make themselves aware of the many different cultural reasons for film production. They have now moved away from uniform agreements which insist on the traditional job demarcations and have negotiated a number of new agreements with the BFI and the regional arts associations which recognise the 'non-commercial' aims of the film-makers and allow completely flexible job-sharing.

This has happened as part of what Ray Lockett described as a two-pronged attack. While recognising the flexibility necessary in the radical sector they have also come to recognise the cultural importance of the work being done, and the need to ensure that people are being funded properly to do this work. They are, he said, fighting for 'the decasualisation of the arts worker'.

There were few chances for questions at the end of this section as the conference had to break for lunch, and afterwards the discussion turned to the relationship between the arts and local government. This was unfortunately dominated by the seeming pessimism of Tony Banks, who said that there was nobody who could take up the funding of the projects that the GLC had initiated, and he doubted the ability of the GLC to keep funding them, even if it successfully fought off the attempts of the government to demolish it.

This raised the question of the apparent lack of any real strategic thinking by the GLC committee or its advisers, despite its initial claims to the contrary. It seems to have chosen to splash its budget around on a first-come, first served basis, in an effort to make hay while the sun shines, without attempting to understand how its money could be used to seed activities or to enable radical community groups to achieve a meaningful degree of autonomy. It also appears to have failed to grasp the essentially reactionary effects of suddenly pumping money into an area and then subsequently withdrawing it; the demoralisation and feelings of helplessness that this causes serves to undermine much of the advances achieved through the grants.

The conference finished without many of the questions it had raised being answered, but it was none the worse for that. It seemed to us that Arts For Labour could usefully offer a range of levels of participation and that it could serve to mobilise an interest in cultural work at a grass-roots level. We think that there would be much to be gained from meetings between members of Arts For Labour and the various AFCAs to discuss some of the issues that we have mentioned. We are going to propose to GLACA that it writes to the London branch to suggest a joint meeting, and we will hopefully report back on this in a future issue.

For more details about Arts For Labour write to Lloyd Trott, National Secretary, c/o ASTMS Head Office, 79 Camden Road, London N1.

Heather McAdam is a community arts worker with Free Form.

Owen Kelly is a member of Mediumwave.

UNITED MIME WORKERS

The United Mime Workers are a politically active mime troupe from Champaign, Illinois. They have recently been in Europe, and while they were here Deborah Langerman gave us permission to print this article, which originally appeared in the May/June 1982 issue of *Theatrework*.

'I speak from experience when I say that one need never be frightened of putting bold and unaccustomed things before the proletariat, so long as they have to do with reality. There will always be educated persons, connoisseurs of the arts, who will step in with a 'The people won't understand that'. But the people impatiently shoves them aside and comes to terms directly with the artist. There is highly cultured stuff made for minorities, designed to form minorities: the two thousandth transformation of some old hat, the spicing-up of a venerable and now decomposing piece of meat. The proletariat rejects it ('they've got something to worry about') with an incredulous, somewhat reflective shake of the head. It is not the spice that is being rejected but the meat; not the two thousandth form, but the old hat.'

Berthold Brecht, 1958.

In a previous issue of *Theatrework* I argued in favour of formal and technical innovation on the stage, particularly for theatre groups who consider themselves 'political'. One of the questions readers have put to me since is 'how do audiences react to experiments in form and structure and new techniques?' (Often the question is, 'how do 'working class' audiences react?') Brecht answers this

question well in the quote above — and it is not a new question as evidenced by the date it carries. It deserves continued discussion, and I would like to add some thoughts based on observations made in my work.

People who worry about the accessibility of experimental theatre to 'working class' audiences are not necessarily elitist. Progressive playwrights and performers realise that the present social situation forces them to decide in whose service they wish to place

..I wish I could instil the fear that people will accept 'accurate' and 'objective' portrayals of life on stage

their work. Once they have decided to place themselves on the side of the working people, many performing groups opt to take work itself as the subject matter of their performances. The question then arises of how to accurately depict the lives of working people, work and its problems. This question can easily become a preoccupation, and for fear of losing their audiences, theatre groups sometimes answer it by opting for familiar theatrical forms.

I propose that the question of accurate portrayal is answered in the very process of trying to develop new techniques for the stage, and this process may even render the question irrelevant.

Using theatre to represent the work of others is a mistake, when separated from the understanding that artistic production is itself work. It is a lie when the artist claims that his work is outside of— or impervious to— the production relations of the society in which he wants his art to function. This position not only prevents the artist from understanding the economic situation of the people for whom the work is intended, it also denies the reality of the artist's economic situation.

Workers in the theatre have to eat too. If we don't find acceptance for our work we are out of a job. There are difficulties in trying to develop political ideas, new compositional methods and production and performance techniques, while all the time being worried that audiences and sponsors will not like the results.

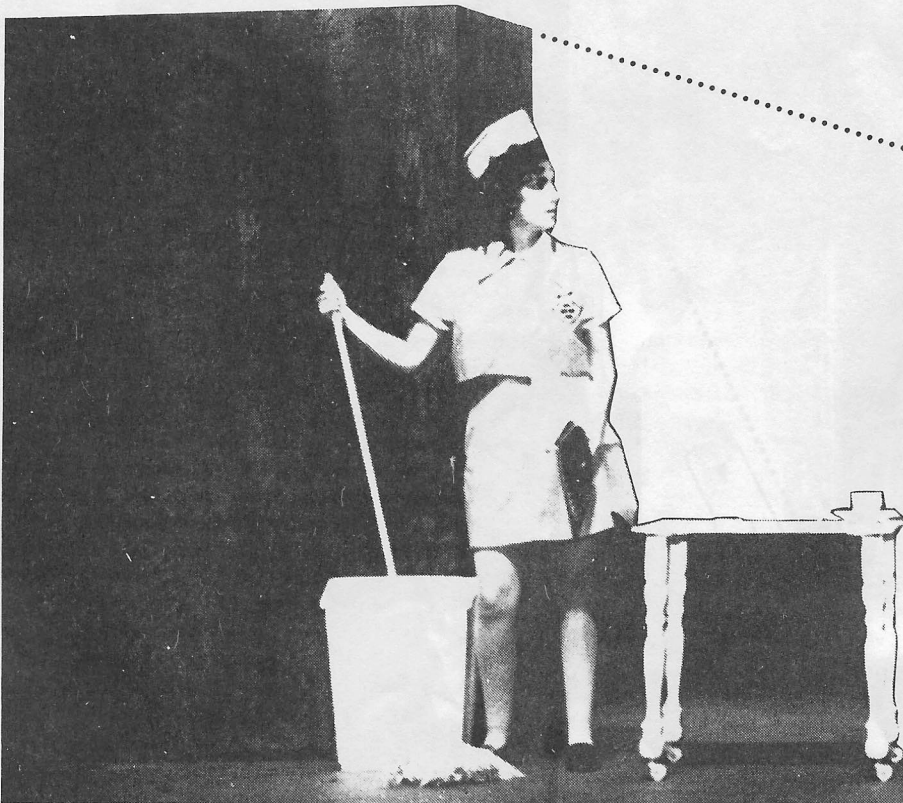
These difficulties are akin to the problems of other workers. If the boss decides that careful work is not profitable, considerations by the worker of how well a job should be done can be tossed out the window. In our so-called free society every worker has to watch what is said on the job. In the theatre most political groups play it safe in the form of presentation; and groups that experiment with form tend to play it safe when it comes to the politics of their work.

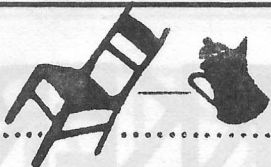
In an address entitled 'The Author as Producer', delivered at the Institute for the Study of Fascism in Paris, 1934, Walter Benjamin stated:

"Instead of asking: what is the position of a work vis-a-vis the productive relations of its time, does it underwrite these relations, is it reactionary, or does it aspire to overthrow them, is it revolutionary? — instead of this question, I should like to propose a different one. Before I ask: what is a work's position vis-a-vis the production relations of its time, I should like to ask: what is its position within them? This question concerns the function of a work within the literary production relations of its time. In other words, it is directly concerned with literary technique.

By mentioning technique I have named the concept which makes literary products accessible to immediate social, and therefore materialist, analysis. At the same time, the concept of technique represents the dialectical starting point from which the sterile dichotomy of form and content can be surmounted."

When theatre workers apply themselves seriously to the problem of developing new techniques of presentation — instead of using old methods in hopes of *this time* finding the accurate reflection of life —





the story line ceases to be the dominant focus of the work. Rather, the production process of the work and the cognitive processes of all involved (artist, audience, character and actor) become the central focus. When audience members present at a work of art arrive at a new understanding of the production process of the work they do, and their relation to it, this art functions in a revolutionary way. When people have a new understanding of the work process they are involved with as a result of viewing the working process of another group (i.e. artists), they can start to feel a kinship with the other group as producers.

New formal experiments are not enough; the political convictions and ideology of the artist matter, as does the content of the work. But if one wishes to help spur societal change, neither are convictions enough. Benjamin emphasised this point in his 1934 address:

"Commitment is a necessary, but never a sufficient, condition for a writer's work acquiring an organising function. For this to happen it is also necessary for the writer to have a teacher's attitude. And today this is more than ever an essential demand. A writer who does not teach other writers teaches nobody. The crucial point, therefore, is that a writer's production must have the character of a model: it must be able to place an improved apparatus at their disposal. This apparatus will be the better, the more consumers it brings in contact with the production process – in short, the more readers or spectators it turns into collaborators."

For the past ten years, I have been a member of the United Mime Workers, a four person theatre collective, researching, writing, producing and performing theatre pieces for many types of audiences. It is my work with the UMW that I am able to speak the most clearly about. There have been many times when I have thought us to have successfully invited our audiences to become our collaborators. A specific example is the discussion that often occurs around the movement score of *Mime is No Object: The Reproduction of the Working Day*, our most recent piece.

The score for *Mime is No Object* is a 20-foot, 8-coloured graphic of lines and dots drawn on plastic, displayed with an explanation and instructions for reading it. It was developed out of a need to keep track of, on paper, the intricate and tightly choreographed movements and interactions between actors and objects in the forty-minute mime piece. Each actor's part is on a separate 20-foot roll of plastic, and the three roles are overlayed on a timeline to demonstrate their juxtaposition.

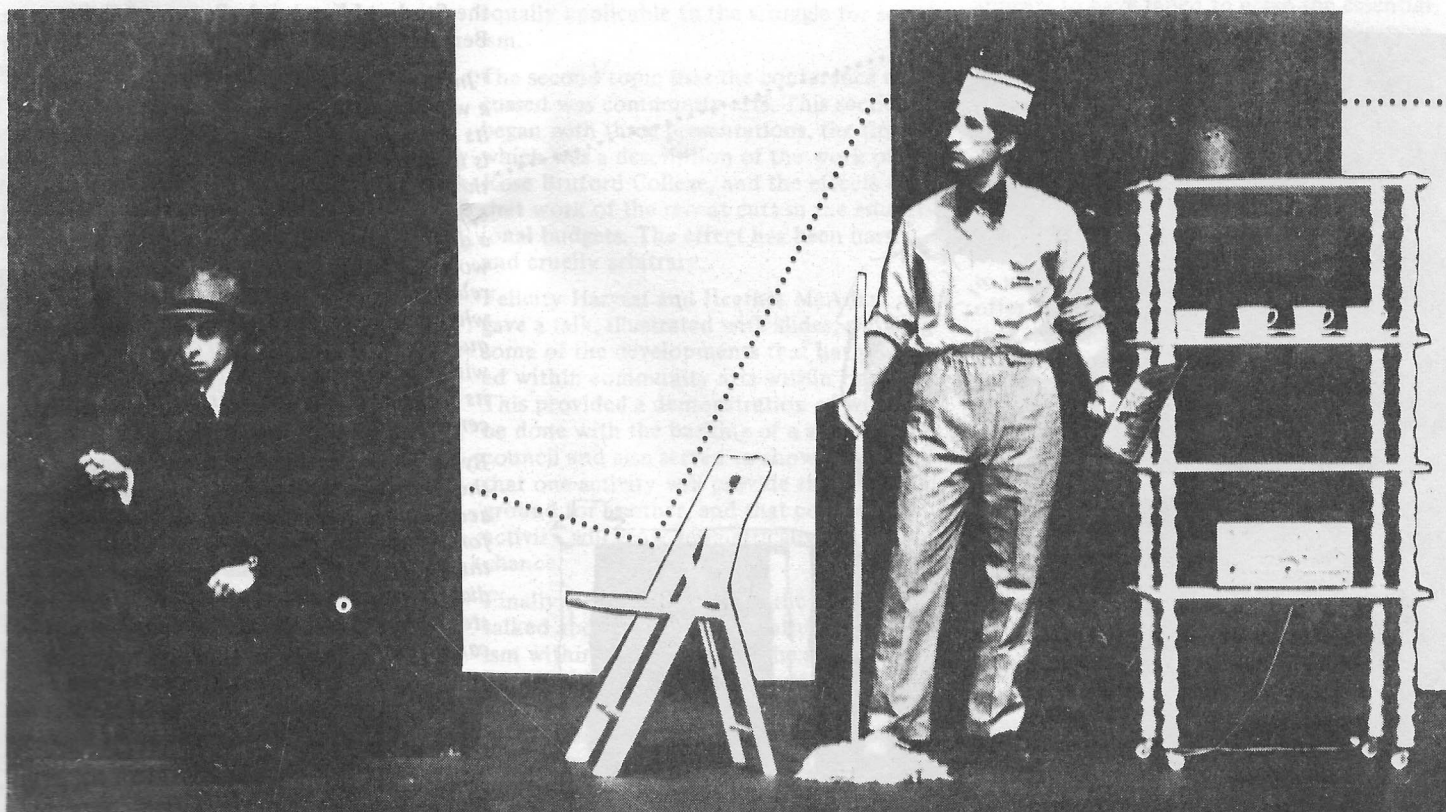
Mime is No Object is a piece about the economy, work, and work relations. One of our sources of information while doing research for the piece was the writings of Frederick Taylor, who developed time-motion studies in the workplace ("taylorisation"). Although the score for our piece was originally developed as a kind of cruel computer in order to figure out what was possible on stage without having to physically run through things, an audience member pointed out to us that what we

had done was a time-motion study for the stage.

When people first see the score before the show, they are curious, but also a bit confused and dismayed, certain that it is "too abstract and complicated". After seeing the performance and understanding that the relationship of the score to the piece is that of a 2 dimensional representation of what they've just seen in 4 dimensions, the reaction is quite different.

People relate the function of the score to the function of similar studies, graphs, charts or plans used in their work. Nurses have said that the score reminds them of an electrocardiogram. Factory workers say that they know of similar flowcharts used in their plant. A clothing store manager said she uses a plan to keep track of workers' schedules and rack placement in the store. An architect insisted it is just like a schedule used for the construction of a building. Computer programmers say it looks like a print-out. Audience members at a performance for a union of professional and technical engineers saw many links between their work and our work on the score.

Many people, regardless of their line of work, recognise the connections between the score for this mime piece and other art forms. It reminds some people of a musical score and they want to know if it can be played. (It conceivably could be.) Others see its similarities to dance notation, other forms of graphic art, and film animation, in addition to making up new uses of the score for something they'd like to do.



People are also very curious to know when in the compositional process the score was written and if and how we use it as an instruction for performance.

It is our contention that art need not only act as a reflection of the society in which it is created, but that the process of composition and performance can offer a method for analysing and solving problems in that society — as can a computer programme, math formula or scientific study. In our experiments for the stage we have attempted to find ways of presenting pieces which come directly out of our studies in logic, economics, language, cybernetics (the study of systems), information theory and mathematics. Through the use of tools and techniques found in other art forms (i.e. music, photography, film, dance and graphics) we try to find a realisation for the stage of the product of the process of inquiry we have gone through, using mundane gestures, language, images and situations as the basic building materials. We also mount a display of the books and materials we used in developing the performance.

After we have applied the results of our analysis to everyday situations and presented the results to an audience, the audience member is invited to analyse the situations and relationships presented for him, and to apply a similar analytical process to his own work and life experiences. In addition to the performance, we have discussions with the audience afterwards about the process we went through in writing and pro-

ducing the work, problems in performing it, and the thoughts, impressions, feelings and ideas of the audience as a result of seeing the work.

Sometimes the discussions are carried on exclusively by members of the audience and among them they discuss work, politics and the economy. It is during these after-performance sessions that the interaction between artist and spectator becomes a dialogue about the intentions, meaning, problems and process of the work each does.

This type of discussion would not be possible without the technical innovations present in *Mime is No Object* and its scoring device. The high level of interest and excitement also is a result, I think, of the fact that our studies in the construction of a piece are widely based. That is, we do not limit our investigations to one field of study or one art form (unlike the model provided by our educational system which insists on a separation between subjects, particularly between the so-called technical and aesthetic fields). More people are able to relate to the finished work because of our refusal to think of our work as being isolated from that of other people's. We think of our work as being strongly connected to others', and we let it be known that we can make use of others' knowledge in the writing of new works.

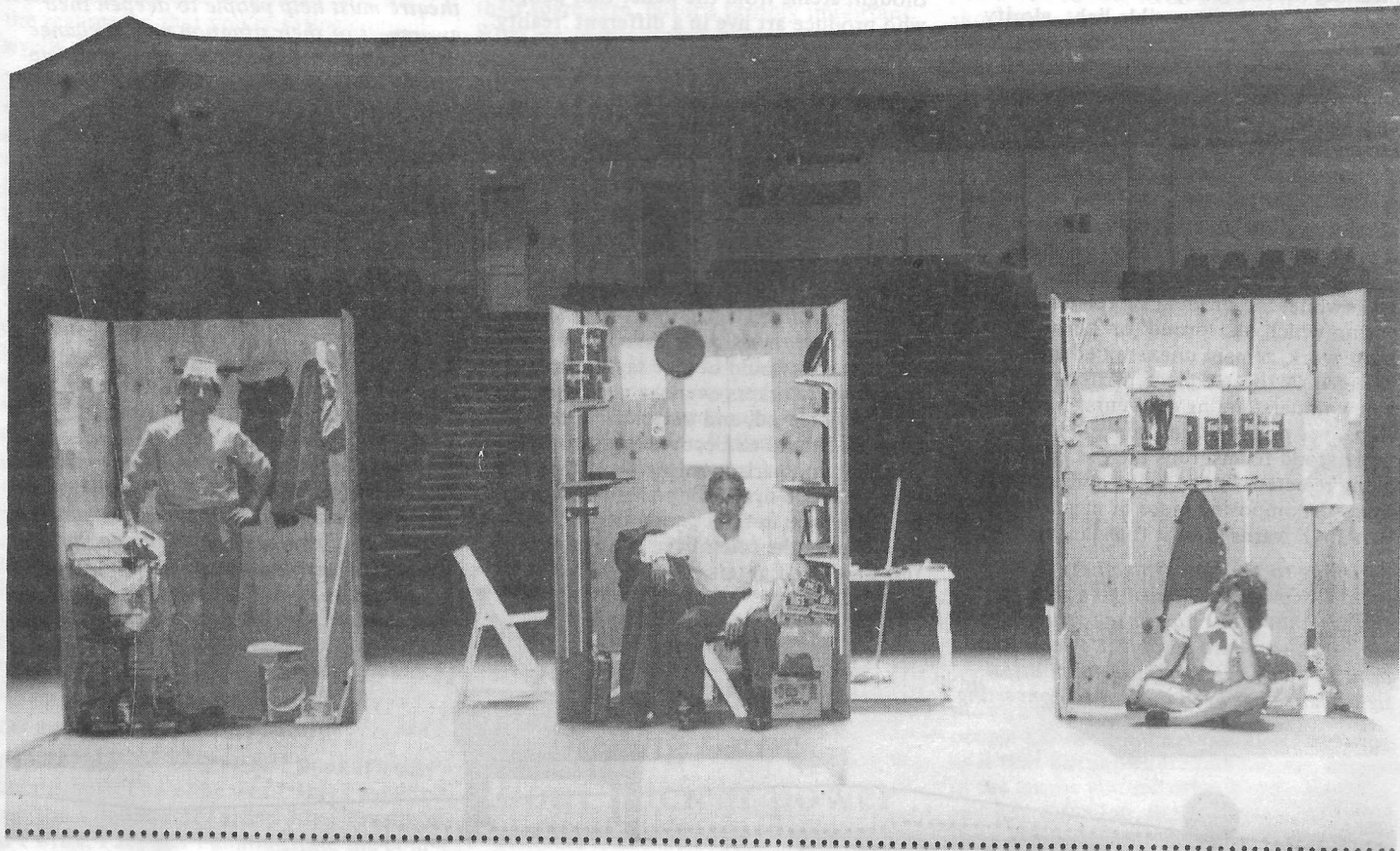
"Here again, therefore, technical progress

is, for the author as producer, the basis of his political progress. In other words, intellectual production cannot become politically useful until the separate spheres of competence to which, according to the bourgeois view, the process of intellectual production owes its order, have been surmounted; more precisely, the barriers of competence must be broken down by each of the productive forces they were created to separate, acting in concert."

Walter Benjamin, Understanding Brecht.

The temptation is strong to rely on conventional techniques of presentation for fear of being 'too intellectual' otherwise. And if a certain type of performance has been successful in presenting certain issues to the people, why not use it again and again? These techniques may have been experimental and daring when first performed, but have lost their political effectiveness. One problem is that if a type of presentation is recognisably popular, it has already been incorporated into the culture of a society and is representative of its cultural values. Techniques, popular within a system, of relationships that political theatre is hoping to change, are limiting because they don't provide the means for analysing themselves, if nothing else.

Once a theatre group chooses to use popul-





ar forms, they may have eliminated the fear that people won't understand them. A new fear, then, is that people will not accept what is presented as reflecting their reality accurately. This fear stems from an erroneous assumption that a work of art (the product of a set of compositional decisions) can and even ought to be measured for accuracy — measured against what?

I'm afraid that I cannot dispel the fear that people will reject a particular reflection of their lives. A piece which is experimental in structure and attempts to move beyond merely mirroring reality will be met with the comment: "It was not true to life; you've given us an idea of what could be, but that's not the way life really is and things would never happen that way." And even a theatre group that thinks it has successfully and 'accurately' portrayed the lives of working people will hear: "It was very realistic, but we need to see new relationships on stage," for what is to stop the people from rejecting an image of a set of relationships which, as they occur in capitalism, merit rejection?

I wish, on the contrary, I could instil the fear that people will accept 'accurate' and 'objective' portrayals of life on stage (as they already do with television programming) without analysing or understanding how and why things got to be the way they are. The danger of this blind and enthusiastic acceptance is increased when well-meaning theatre groups, wishing to portray workers in the best possible light, glorify the workers' victimisation. This can happen easily in a theatre piece which plays on the audience's emotions and sympathy with any 'heroic' worker who transcends or overcomes his situation. This not only perpetuates the myth of the individual's ability to triumph over adverse social and economic conditions, but justifies the existence of those conditions in that they provided the impetus for the worker's transformation. Meanwhile, the production relations, within which our 'proud' or 'heroic' worker must work, remain unexamined and unchanged. A theatre piece, written to elicit a new understanding of events and relationships, yet presented in stale and already understood forms, runs the risk of not only being rejected, but of being consumed as that "decomposing piece of meat." Benjamin warns against this danger:

"Turning to the New Objectivity as a literary movement, I must go a step further and say that it has turned the struggle against misery into an object of consumption. In many cases, indeed, its political significance has been limited to converting

revolutionary reflexes, in so far as these occurred within the bourgeoisie, into themes of entertainment and amusement which can be fitted without much difficulty into the cabaret life of a large city. The characteristic feature of this literature is the way it transforms political struggle so that it ceases to be a compelling motive for decision and becomes an object of comfortable contemplation; it ceases to be a means of production and becomes an article of consumption."

There are many ways theatre can be used as a tool for change rather than as another commodity to be bought and sold on the cultural market.

We need to be careful not to assume that theatre pieces that are produced and performed by people who are not theatre workers are more authentic than performances produced by people for whom theatre is an occupation. There is the tendency among cultural workers to believe that if 'people's theatre' is produced by 'the people, themselves' then the problems of accessibility are solved. This line of

... There may be better uses for the time of the politically concerned artist than merely trying to document or mirror reality....

thought stems from the belief that people who produce art live in a different 'reality' from people who do other kinds of work (the latter are 'real' people and the former are not). This raises silly questions about what is 'real' and 'unreal' art.

While community theatre is an important way of putting cultural production into the hands of people who normally don't have any control over the images that are produced about and for them, it is not a substitute for the continued development and perfection of new techniques for the stage by the people who work there full-time. To say that it is would be like saying that if control by workers over the auto industry is to be achieved, and better cars produced, then we should all become auto workers. Another comparison might be to that of a volunteer fire-squad; important though its role might be in the community, it is not the same as the role of the professional full-time fire-fighters.



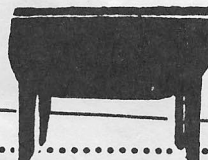
Cultural workers are workers. When we see the artist as producer applying effort to the development of new techniques, artistic activity is demystified because we also see that these techniques are developed through work. The artist does not possess techniques which can be purchased by others. Unlike other workers in a capitalist society, who must sell their work-time, the artist sells the product of his work, and can decide what the best use of the work time will be. There may be better uses for the time of the politically concerned artist than merely trying to document or mirror reality. Ross Kidd suggests this is so:

"The documentary form must provide more than a mirror — it must be a focussed mirror which confronts people with the distinction between the mythologies of society and the reality. It is no longer enough to provide people with information they are already aware of or to give them a chance to see themselves. Documentary theatre must help people to deepen their awareness of their situation and to change it. If it doesn't, it may be just another 'rip-off' of other people's experiences."

From: Popular Theatre and Political Action in Canada in *THEATREWORK*, vol. 1, no. 6 (Sept — Dec, 1981).

It has been my experience that people do not feel 'ripped-off' when presented with something new. They recognise a theatrical innovation as an offer for a new way of seeing and doing things. Those who desire change for their lives embrace the artist as a co-worker with whom they can build a new society, which will be different in form from the one we are living in now.

Deborah Langerman is a member of the United Mime Workers from Champaign, Illinois. In addition to their performance work, they are also engaged in community organising around cultural issues.



Spare Tyre is a theatre group, which was founded in 1979, and was originally inspired by the book *Fat is a Feminist Issue*, by Susie Orbach. They began as a group of actresses, designers and musicians all of whom had had a compulsive eating problem and had been totally obsessed and tortured by food.

Spare Tyre realised that they shared this problem with millions of women, and decided that they wanted to bring the issue to the stage. Their productions have included *Baring the Weight*, about compulsive eating, *How Do I Look?*, about self-image, *Woman's Complaint*, about women's health issues, and *On The Shelf*, about marriage, food and families.

Karen Merkel talked to Clair Chapman, from Spare Tyre, about their work. The following are extracts from their conversation.

... We've discovered that most women really hate the way they look ...

On Definitions:

How do you describe what you do?

I work with Spare Tyre. We're a group of three women, who write our own songs and sketches, and we were inspired by a book called *Fat is a Feminist Issue*, by a woman called Susie Orbach, who said to all of us as dieters: 'dieting doesn't work, dieting makes you obsessed with food; look for the real reason that you're eating compulsively'.

This changed all our eating habits, and then we as performers decided to carry on doing songs and sketches about this. It has really caught on remarkably with women all over the country. Our audiences are about ninety percent women.

Since then we have progressed. We've still kept some links with self-image, and we've branched out in other ways. But we've always kept it to the personal: most of the things in the shows we've experienced personally, so that we can stand by them and defend them.

Our next show is not going to be about unemployment or nuclear power, because we're not that kind of group. Other groups do that. Because a lot of these experiences are very personal to us as women, it means that we can go to cross-class groups, like health groups and mother and toddler groups, and talk to women and really bridge the class thing that is there in this country, much more than the States where I come from.

Do you ever say I'm an actress?

I always say I'm an actress. I think it's easier although I hate the word. But I wouldn't say I'm a community artist. What I really do is I write, I act and I administrate the company.

SPARE TYRE



On Politics:

Would you say you have a cause?

Yes, there's no question about it. I want to make women feel better about themselves, and be able to be different shapes and sizes. Sometimes I think, Christ, the bomb's going to drop and I'm worrying about whether women are nervous about their spots or their spare tyre, but it's terribly important. What we've discovered more and more is that most women really hate the way they look: it's unbelievable the obsession. I suppose it's psychological.

It's also political, isn't it? Given that the surroundings that we battle through are 'set up' not to make us feel good 'psychologically'. Do you say it's psychological because you think it is, rather than political; or because it's difficult to say that it's political work that you are doing here?

I think it's political, but it's certainly not party political. We do have a confusion when we get women who are true blues in our compulsive eating groups, which is mind-blowing for a socialist. We have had experiences though when women have come to certain realisations and have actually changed their political views as well. I call it political, but I think a lot of people wouldn't.

... Our next show isn't going to be about nuclear power ..

On Theory:

You had your own roots with the Women's Theatre Group, but then you three came to terms with Susie Orbach's theories, which made sense for you as they did for thousands of women. Is it that strong line, that bedrock of theory, that has enabled you to continue with conviction, and to say that you are not going to do an unemployment show? Is it still the bedrock from which Spare Tyre operates?

... As the need develops, so we develop a show ...

Yes, and partly as a responsibility to our audience and their needs. In our latest show *Just Desserts* the plot was about a woman being left by her husband and how she coped; but we've kept in the diets, her bingeing and so on, because we want to keep that theme going.

We get criticised for it. People will either say, 'they should just stay with the dieting stuff' or they say 'we keep going on with the dieting stuff and its boring, we know this'. It's very hard. But we want to do shows for a certain kind of woman, not people-like-us. What's really important to us is that our shows are humorous, because in the laughs you see other people laughing and you think 'oh, she's that way too', and there can be many links made there. It's very exciting.

On Practice:

Do you involve people when you are creating another show?

We are given a lot of material in our discussions after our shows. We have some lovely material from compulsive eaters. I'll tell you how we are going to perform an anecdote we were given.

In comes the dieter with her cup of black coffee and her celery sticks. She sits down and sighs. She is depressed.

In comes the business man with a cup of coffee with cream, and two jam doughnuts.

... We want to do shows for a certain kind of woman

He sits down, drinks his coffee, reads his paper and eats a doughnut. She gazes at him and eats one celery stick. He folds up his paper and goes away.

The dieter looks at the other doughnut, looks at her celery, looks around and grabs the doughnut. At which point he returns with another cup of coffee!

How do you see Spare Tyre developing?

We go from show to show. As the need develops, so we develop a show. It's lovely to be that flexible. But we don't want to leave our Mothers and Toddlers and slimming clubs. We all feel very committed to that.

So your form is relevant for you and not something you need to be changing?

No, the form is still so useful: that's what I find so delightful.

On Funding:

Do you receive an Arts Council grant?

No, we get a GLC grant. We've had it since February; it's our first revenue funding. We've survived on peanuts. We all have other jobs: for instance, I work as an abortion counsellor in a day-care abortion service in a hospital.

It's good that we have other work, because it can feed back in. In the Women's Theatre Group, when we had our full time grant, there was no way of feeding other stuff in, so we got insular.

So it wouldn't even be desirable for you to work full time with Spare Tyre?

No.

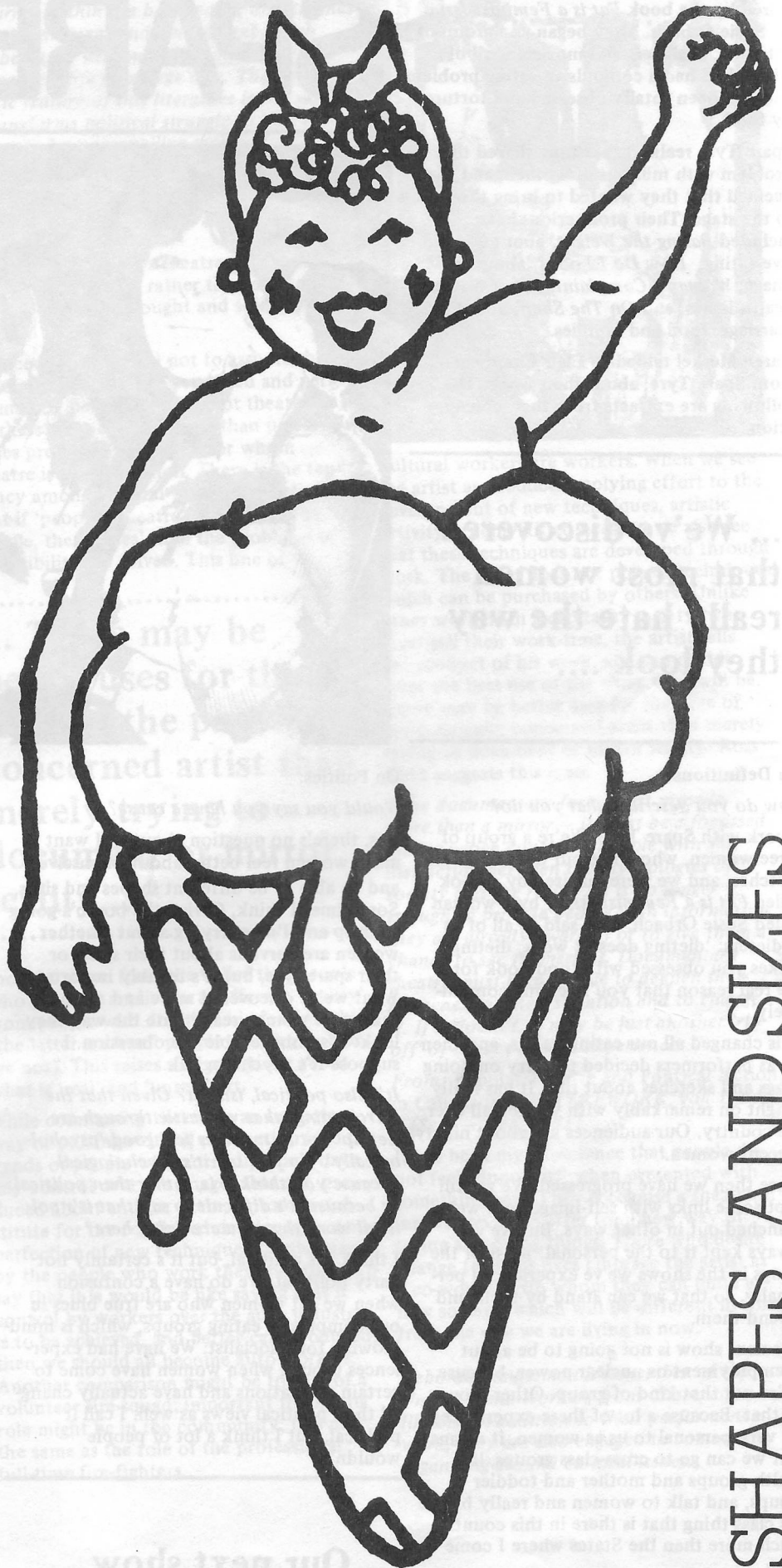
On Community Arts:

Why do you think you aren't community artists?

Well we are, for a community of women. There is no question about that. I just don't like the name. It's horrible; it sounds like 'social worker', with all its connotations.

What is it then that makes you a community artist in practice and function, if not in name?

Our interest and commitment to the people who are our audience; that is, women of all shapes and sizes.

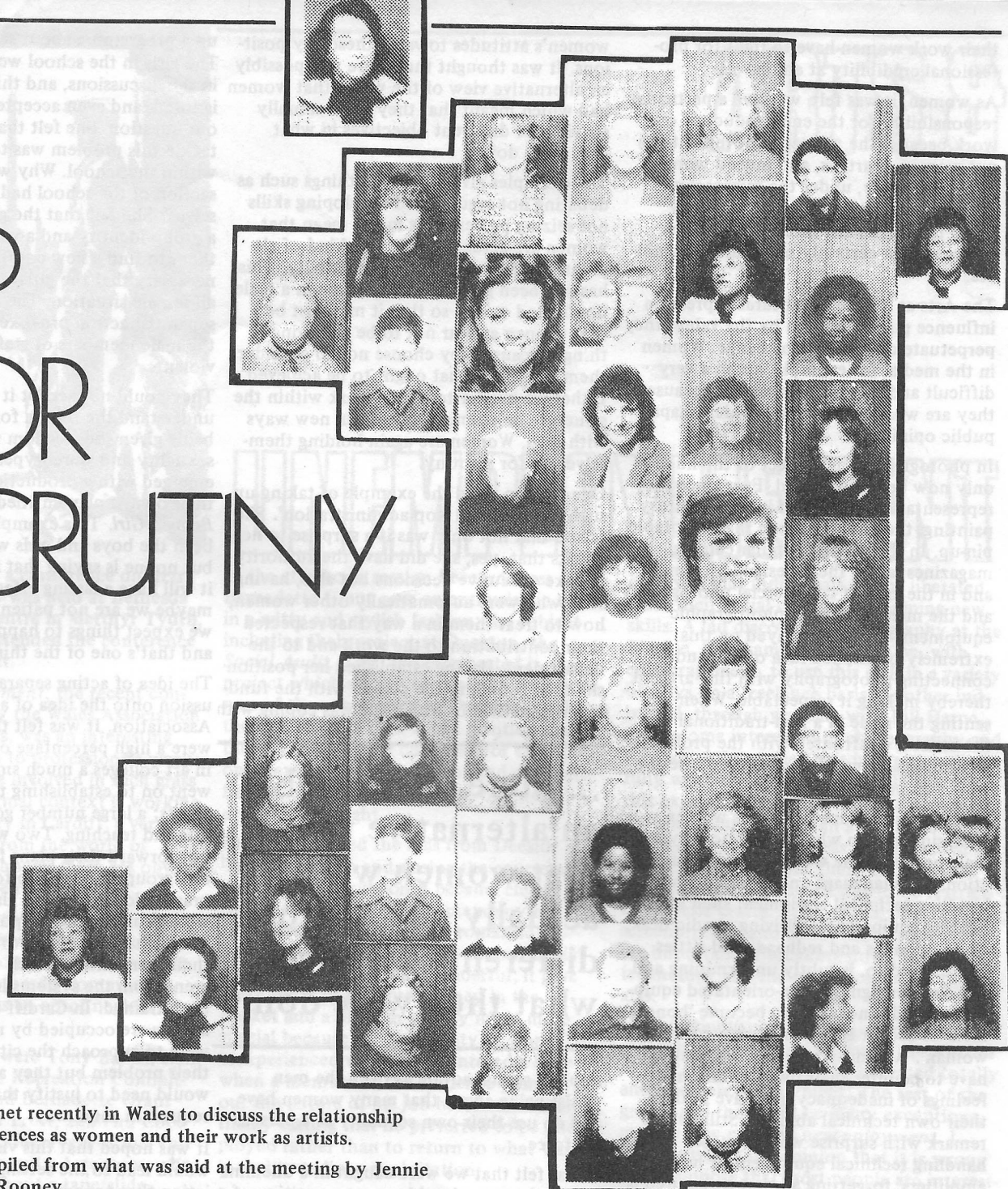


Karen Merkel is a member of Free Form's Performance Team.

Photograph by Alexia Cross

ALL SHAPES AND SIZES

UP FOR SCRUTINY



A group of women met recently in Wales to discuss the relationship between their experiences as women and their work as artists.

This report was compiled from what was said at the meeting by Jennie Gardner and Lesley Rooney.

On August 30th 1983, a group of women met at the Ffotogallery in Cardiff. At the meeting were women working in the arts; in the visual arts, in theatre, in radio, arts administration and a writer; women working in community arts and in the more traditional fields. The group was brought together with the intention of discussing their experiences as women artists.

We realised that we could not be universal in our conclusions, as we were not a representative cross-section of women working in the arts in Wales; but at least from our experiences we found that there was a consensus of opinion about many important issues facing women artists today.

The focal point of the discussion arose from the question: does the fact that we are women have to be relevant to us as artists?

It was first necessary to define our terms of reference as a *female artist* did not for

everyone mean that one was all the time working from a conscious feminist political standpoint. Before we could arrive at any kind of expression of ourselves as women, we had a lot of problems to work through concerning such things as jargon, the way we had been conditioned, and the condescension we had experienced from the colleagues with whom we worked.

These problems had to be overcome before we could express ourselves as *women artists*. It was not disputed that as being a woman was relevant to us BEING, it therefore followed that it was relevant to us as artists. Looking at the notion of a 'female language' we recognised that an individual's language could be identified as being a woman's language, but that it was questionable whether there was a universal women's language.

After a training which is often predominantly governed by male values and male aesthetics, a woman then goes to work in

the world and finds herself in the position of having to create her own way of working and her own aesthetics. This was felt to be very difficult and daunting when there were no models to look to.

After the struggles to open up choices that girls make, inbred conservatism often continues to prevent them taking up those alternatives. Traditionally women are channelled towards the arts, but especially in the visual arts, many women do not appear to reach the 'top' of their profession. It was thought that a high proportion of women went into teaching and administration.

Obviously we are influenced by the values that exist in our culture. Women working in the arts are doubly disadvantaged; firstly because the arts are not regarded as essential, and secondly as women. As a workforce we are still not taken seriously except during times of economic necessity. There is still the notion that women flirt with work. Whilst men are validated through

their work women have to fight for professional credibility at any level.

As women, it was felt, we have a particular responsibility for the end product of our work because the women's movement has put women as artists, and indeed women as anything else, under the microscope. There is a particular need for integrity when forging a path through situations where almost certainly male values dominate.

The Arts as a form of cultural expression influence public opinion by the values they perpetuate or attempt to change. Women in the media, for example, are in a very difficult and influential position because they are working in an area which shapes public opinion.

In photography the subject of the nude is only now being redefined. Ever since the representation of women in 19th century painting, the nude has been the acceptable pin-up. In the case of popular camera magazines, all of them designed for men, and in the case of commercial photography and the manufacture of photographic equipment, men have played on this extremely outmoded idea of the nude connecting photography with fine art and thereby making it respectable. When presenting the nude in a non-traditional way, the artist is confronted with the problem of finding a sympathetic venue where the work can be shown.

In all kinds of work situations women work alongside men in what is traditionally a male preserve: the world of technical operations. The language encountered when handling technical equipment such as lighting equipment or driving a radio desk, where blondes and redheads and titties are referred to, is subtly undermining and yet another sign of male-orientated equipment. We did not wish to become 'honorary men' or accept that 'it's good - for a woman'. Adjunct to this we felt that women have to counter their own conditioned feelings of inadequacy and have faith in their own technical abilities. Still people remark with surprise when they see women handling technical equipment or heavy amplifiers, forgetting all that is required is an appreciation of basic ergonomics.

From technical operations we went on to consider the 'top jobs' in the arts. Why are there not many women in top administration, nor many women directors? It seems illogical considering the number of women in administration, and women performers. Women may have a problem in finding out how to bring their lifestyle into their work.

Women with children, single or married, still may have the responsibility of raising those children while working unsociable hours. It was thought that this dual role expectation might act as some discouragement, even though time and again it has proved possible. The practical support network needed, for example on a long theatre tour, is a problem that remains unsolved, and one which we felt should not be considered the province of women alone.

These practical considerations cannot alone be used as a satisfactory answer to our question. We tentatively went on to look at

women's attitudes towards these key positions. It was thought that there was possibly an alternative view of the world that women had which meant that they were actually striving for different objectives in what they were doing.

The examples given included things such as debating not arguing and developing skills not seizing power. This might mean that women are actually positing a kind of alternative value on their own creativity. This has not been given the same value in a male dominated world, so that it may just be that women appear not to be achieving things because they choose not to consider them the things that ought to be achieved. Either we must attempt to work within the structure or attempt to work in new ways with men. Women are again holding themselves up for scrutiny.

One woman cited the example of taking up such a position in 'top administration'. She found that not only was it a surprise to her clients that, yes, she did have the authority to take executive decisions but also, having staff who were automatically other women, how to treat them in a way that respected their contribution to the work and to the department. Having established her position she then found, as the person with the funding, a minefield in which she was coping with

... there was possibly an alternative view... that women were actually striving for different objectives in what they were doing

implicit sexual advances from the men whilst being aware that many women have and do use their own sexuality as a persuasive force.

It was felt that we were caught in a dilemma of whether one should accept a position of power within the 'top jobs' structure or conversely how to redefine them so that it is acceptable. The dilemma becomes more acute with the knowledge that if you fail you fail twice over, but that if you don't take up the position one is only perpetuating the system that exists.

We are involved in the struggle to open the choices available to people in their lives. When working with women's groups and working with girls in community arts we felt that as artists we are involved in an educational striving to examine the barriers between men and women and to break them down. One woman running a workshop with mixed teenagers encountered strong reaction from a girl who had traditional expectations of an authority figure. Our experiences showed that we had often encountered groups where sexism was actively, rifely working, and that role play and separate activities started at a very early age.

One woman spoke of her experiences setting

up a programme about sexism in a school. The girls in the school were not participating in the discussions, and this silence was being ignored, and even accepted as normal without question. She felt that the only way to tackle this problem was to make it an issue within the school. Why was it that a large section of the school had excluded themselves? She felt that the girls needed to find a group identity and a voice. This required them to find a new confidence and so it was necessary that the girls worked first in an all-female situation. The reaction that this separatist action provoked in the boys and the male members of staff was loud and violent.

They could not accept it as they could not understand the reason for it. The girls, after being given the freedom to discuss their sexuality and stereotypes, eventually emerged with a production they could call their own; a play entitled *Its a Hard Life Being a Girl*. This example had an effect on both the boys and girls within the school, but no one is saying that it was easy or that it will have a lasting effect. We agreed that maybe we are not patient enough, and that we expect things to happen too quickly, and that's one of the things that dogs us.

The idea of acting separately led the discussion onto the idea of a Women's Arts Association. It was felt that whilst there were a high percentage of women training in art colleges a much smaller percentage went on to establishing themselves as fine artists: a large number going into community arts and teaching. Two women in the group put forward their plans for a women's visual arts group to be set up for a number of pragmatic reasons but also to give the women artists the support and environment in which they could work together sharing their own values, which were probably different from the systems in which they had been trained. In Cardiff the main studio areas were occupied by men. These women were to approach the city planners with their problem but they anticipated that they would need to justify this unprecedented request in some way.

It was hoped that this visual arts initiative would lead to the setting up of an association that encompassed women in all areas of the arts. The Cardiff branch of *Women In Entertainment* had gone some way towards this. It had been at its most active during *Women Live '82*, when it had had a distinct focus. It was felt that it was quite difficult to sustain the energy that this kind of celebration had generated. The question of funding was raised in relation to setting up such a group. Without an organisational how could any group, campaigning for positive discrimination for women, act as an effective pressure group for long?

Obviously no funding body is going to take the initiative and so it must be the responsibility of the women involved to make sufficient consistent effort towards this.

In our discussion we tried to understand how the values we held as women affected our work as artists. Main questions raised remained unsolved. Have we an alternative set of values, distinct from those held in our male dominated culture? Is this one of the reasons why many women don't go to the 'top'? It is food for thought.



On June 25th 1983 a conference on *Arts and Unemployment* was held at Bethesda Community Arts Centre in Merthyr Tydfil. Susan Beardmore attended the conference and this is her report.

Arts and Unemployment, the recent conference organised by the Wales Association for Community Arts, was an interesting introduction for me to professionals working in Wales who are involved in such grass roots issues. My normal context is working with the Ffotogallery in Cardiff; a very different situation from the world of community arts, although there are obviously links between the two.

Merthyr Tydfil was the appropriate context for such an event. Prosperity long gone, the town's previous solidity is fading fast. The area close to Bethesda Community Arts Centre itself has an air of neglect born of apathy.

Speakers scheduled were Tony Banks, chair of the GLC Arts and Recreation Committee, Bernard Ross and Bernadette Grant from the Social Arts Trust, and Phil Cope and Mike Sweet, two members of the Vale of Glamorgan Community Arts team, who showed and talked about a tape/slide sequence taken from their recent joint initiative with the Ffotogallery – *Squaring Up*. This was a photographic exhibition produced by participants of several photographic workshops, most of which were organised by the VoGCA team for the young unemployed.

Unluckily enough, Tony Banks failed to arrive, having made his apologies just a couple of hours before. Disappointment prevailed in the audience, because he was set for the morning's schedule, and his replacements, completely unprepared to speak (they were asked to step in that morning) were unable to dissipate that disappointment throughout the course of the morning.

However there was an interesting development. A group of lads, down from Deeside for the day, presented themselves to the audience, irritated by the morning's waffle, and demanded closer attention to the real issues at hand. They were unemployed: how could community arts help them get a job?

UNEMPLOYMENT

In the afternoon session Bernard Ross and Bernadette Grant gave an enthusiastic talk in a witty and stylish fashion; the subject including their project at Dunston, *the Social Audit*. This, as I interpreted it, was a project which set out to raise the consciousness of the community at Dunston, enabling them to reassess their social position and thereby affect some changes. For example, one element of the audit pointed out benefits which were not taken up, but were available as a right.

Bernard included the lads from Deeside in his presentation and during the course of the ensuing discussion it became clearer that they, having experienced unemployment since leaving school, held a romantic attitude about having a job, an unrealistic sense that working was wonderful; it gave one a sense of purpose, money in the pocket and a place in society made more special because of the scarcity of work. This inexperienced view was countered a little when a member of the audience pointed out the nature of his job before redundancy, finally stating that he preferred to be unemployed rather than to return to what was in reality tedious exploitation.

Bernard Ross summed up by commenting on the fact that we could not help to find the lads work, but that the *Guardian* on Thursdays was full of jobs for professionals to work with the unemployed! This comment prompted the thought that here was a large group of professionals gathered together to talk about the problems of the unemployed and presumably, where the arts could be used in relation to that problem, and the unemployed were conspicuous by their absence. Why?

An interesting element in Bernard Ross' talk was the fact that he organised projects at Dunston around specific skills, not as therapy but as motivation, and as a way of using a newly learned skill to make money within the project. The problems of community arts centres becoming financially productive, in terms of morality or practicality, are many and the issues are perhaps too complex to go into here.

However, recently whilst working for a short period with the Great Georges Cultural Community Project (The Blackie), I

observed that individuals can be liberated from their social context by learning new skills. A lad discovering photography at the Blackie, for example, has gone on, with encouragement, to use this skill in a variety of ways on a freelance basis. Another individual, through working with Bill Harpe, has become interested in choreography and consequently applied this interest, successfully working on productions. I feel from this experience that the arts in a community centre can provide an alternative for a few individuals to express themselves in a different context, but there are provisos: the skills available ought not to be restricted to basic crafts. Film, video, photography, screenprinting and dance (in all its aspects) are important in breaking down barriers of technology and the mystification of the arts.

I feel instinctively that it is important to recognise that only a very small proportion of that community may be liberated totally and find new employment. The rest of the group, and there will be many exceptions, may or may not find new *enjoyment*. I have long held the opinion that it is wrong to presuppose that most people are interested in, and are able to obtain pleasure from, the arts. I would have reservations about that interest, although not as a general rule.

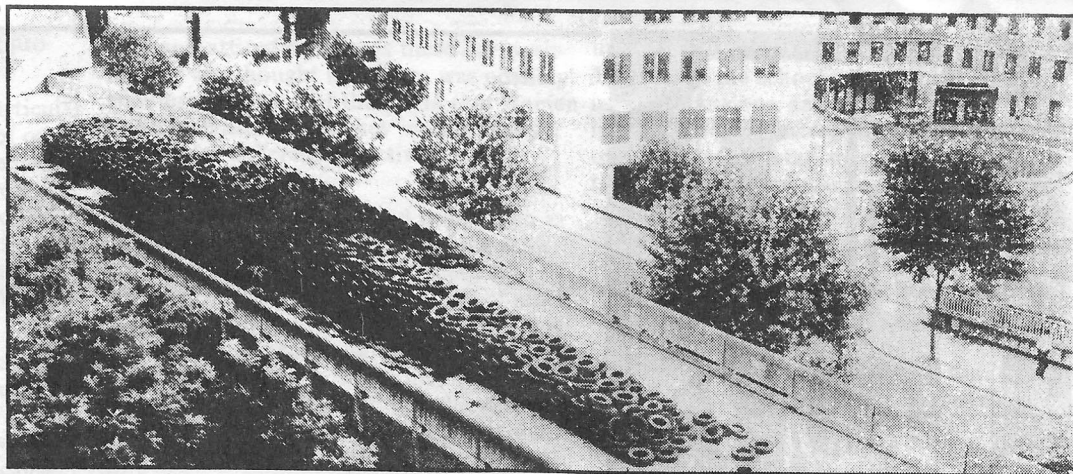
There are no hard and fast solutions to the problem of unemployment; only those which arise from cynical pessimism – war is good for business! The effects of the complex hierarchy of our social structure make it difficult to explain away the class-ridden notion of a work ethic to the unemployed and propound the view that we should strive for means to enable those affected to achieve enjoyment, not employment, as a solution.

Susan Beardmore is the administrator of the Ffotogallery, 41 Charles Street, Cardiff.

A full report of the conference and a large directory of projects presently being undertaken in Wales is in preparation. For details contact Julie Evans, Treasurer, Wales Association of Community Arts, c/o Vale of Glamorgan Community Arts, St Donats Arts Centre, Llantwit Major, South Wales.

Reviews Reviews Views Views Reviews Views Views

In *The Social Production of Art* Janet Wolff, in attempting to develop a sociology of art, raises a number of interesting questions relating to the roles of both the artist and the consumer of art; and in doing so questions the accepted notion of individual creativity.



FIRE badly damaged a controversial sculpture made of tyres on the South Bank in London yesterday.

The 5,000 tyres, representing a Poiris submarine, stretched 170ft outside the Royal Festival Hall. Police said that the blaze, which took seven hours to put out, was regarded as suspicious.

Petrol cans were found among the tyres and when they exploded, 16 windows at the Royal Festival Hall were damaged. A man was found at the scene of the blaze

with his clothes alight and taken to St Thomas's Hospital.

The man, named as Mr James Gore-Graham, aged 37, a designer, of Collet Gardens, Hammersmith, was later transferred to the burns unit at Queen Mary's Hospital, Roehampton, suffering from 90 per cent burns. His condition was described as critical.

The sculpture, which had angered some members of the public, is part of an exhibition at the South Bank and Serpentine Gallery, Hyde Park.

The Government-funded Arts Council spent between £50,000 and £60,000 on the exhibition and the Greater London Council gave a grant of £25,000.

The tyres were assembled by a Scottish sculptor, David Mach. The exhibition is due to end on October 3.

Mr Mach said: "I was shocked to hear about my sculpture, *Polaris*, being vandalised, especially since during the building of the sculpture I had considerable public support. Obviously, an inci-

dent of this kind was entirely unexpected by me. The situation is now under review but I hope *Polaris* can be rebuilt.

Mr Michael Harrison, the Hayward Gallery's regional director of exhibitions, said yesterday: "Contemporary work shown in a public place is likely to prompt some adverse response. It is most unfortunate that it has taken this form and someone has been hurt."

Experts would examine the tyre sculpture after police tests had finished.



● A sculpture called *Phoenix-Reconstruction* by Teresa Zgoda, stands out against the ramparts

A WELSH Arts Council-backed modern "invasion" of one of Wales's finest historic castles is, under bombardment.

The 15th century Raglan Castle has been invaded by modern art creations, including a novel sentry box and a 12-ft plastic octopus-like creature—and the sculptures have been given the thumbs down by visitors.

A visitors' book at the castle has recorded caustic comments about the exhibition and some of the sculptures have been damaged or written upon, apparently by disgruntled visitors, after less than a week on show.

One exhibit, called *Circus In The Round*, has been described by visitors as "looking like broken-down

Anger over modern art at castle

By ROGER DOBSON

picnic furniture."

An orange-coloured standing stone, and a 10-ft high painting in the ruins of the great hall, have also angered some of the 70,000-a-year visitors.

Other exhibits, from a group of artists, include a grey-painted sentry box, a brown plastic sculpture called *Phoenix-Reconstruction*, and a Heath Robinson contraption called *Mr*

Hoyle's Nightmare.

The sculptures have been sited around the ruined castle that was once a Royalist stronghold.

The exhibition, held to coincide with Cestyll '83, opened to the public on Monday and was launched with the aid of a £500 arts council grant.

"It's monstrous to allow things like this in an ancient monument. Some of the

sculptures are appalling, but to allow them in here makes it infinitely worse," said 43-year-old Mr Tom Keene, a lecturer from Stoke-on-Trent, on holiday with his family.

Mr Andrew Knight, exhibitions officer for the arts council, said, "I have not seen the exhibition yet, so I am not in a position to comment."

Organiser Mr David Dobson, principal lecturer in sculpture at the Gwent College of Higher Education, said, "The castle is an extremely powerful area and to put on an exhibition there is quite a tricky thing."

"It is a different sort of public that goes there. On my own piece of work the wooden part was thumped and the paint scratched. One girl had to replace some parts on her work, and other pieces have been written on."

She traces, through copious quotations, the development of the idea of the artist from the pre-Fifteenth century guild workshops, via Nineteenth century Romanticism, to our present view; and suggests the need for a new understanding of the 'artist in society' — one which sees her/him as part of a complex interrelating process, rather than centre stage.

She starts her argument from an analysis of the nature of work, contrasting its development pre- and post-industrial revolution. During the early Renaissance, there was little distinction between artists and other workers; painters, designers and builders were artisans or craftsmen, and worked collectively, sharing responsibility for the product. Work, as Marx saw it, was a basic human necessity and a free, creative activity when not forced, distorted or alienated. Man, said Marx and Engels, 'knowingly works his own purposes into nature'.

With the development of industrial capitalism, however, labour processes were dehumanised; the creative potential of work was eroded through the development of factories, the division of labour and urban life. The image of the artist, however, remained relatively intact; she or he in retaining the older ideal of production seemed free compared to their one-time equals.

This development resulted in the introduction of the idea of the artist as an extraordinary mortal, a genius 'transcending existence, society and time.' And it is this relatively modern notion which has

remained with us, despite the effect of market forces on artists and art itself: 'The potential similarity of the two areas — art and work — has been lost, as the latter is reduced to its alienated form.'

Along with this division of art and life came an emphasis upon individualism and the separation of artists from defined social groups and ~~ela~~ classes. It is this image of the artist as a separate, socially-independent being that Janet Wolff is principally concerned with in this book.

She argues (as a sociologist) that all acts are socially located, and that art, being no exception, is therefore a social product. Art, as Mayakovsky says of his poetry, 'is a manufacture.' And artists, rather than being above social, economic and political forces, reflect these forces, although in a complex, dynamic and multi-directional way.

There are interesting sections on the way in which all creative work (including art) is 'mediated' by social institutions and structures: 'In the production of art, social institutions affect, amongst other things, *who* becomes an artist, *how* they become an artist, how they are then able to *practise* their art, and how they can ensure that their work is produced, performed and *made available* to a public. Furthermore, judgements and evaluations of works and schools of art, determining their subsequent place in literary and art history, are not simply individual and 'purely aesthetic' decisions, but socially enabled and socially constructed events.'

By technology (and the conditions of artistic production): '...the printed book was something more than a triumph of technical ingenuity, but was also one of the most potent agents at the disposal of western civilisation in bringing together the scattered ideas of representative thinkers....Fresh concepts crossed whole regions of the globe in the very shortest time, wherever language did not deny them access. The book created new habits of thought not only within the small circle of the learned, but far beyond in the intellectual life of all who used their minds.

By economic factors: 'In all areas of cultural production....economic determinants operate — through cont-

rol of cultural institutions, through policy-making about the arts, or even at the level of box-office considerations by cultural producers. The social production of art can only be properly comprehended in a political economy of cultural production'.

And by the dominant ideology: 'Works of art are not closed, self-contained and transcendent entities, but are the product of identifiable social groups in given conditions, and therefore bear the imprint of the ideas, values and conditions of existence of those groups, and their representatives in particular artists'.

Another blow to artistic individualism — and this is of particular interest to people working in a community context — comes in the analysis of art as still an innately collective process, despite 500 years of conditioning otherwise. A 'Bill Forsyth' film has benefitted from input from producers, camera crews, actors, scriptwriters etc, and yet we know of it as a Bill Forsyth film!

For a symphony orchestra to give a concert, Becker suggests: 'the necessary activities typically include conceiving the idea for the work, making the necessary physical artefacts, creating a conventional language of expression, training artistic personnel and audience to use the conventional language to create and experience, and providing the necessary mixture of those ingredients for a particular work or performance'.

The collective artistic products of communities are often dismissed by the establishment, because of the cooperative nature of their production. How often have we argued about the merits of community arts products with major funding bodies, who see collective processes in direct opposition to creative possibilities, despite the relative newness of the concept of the individual artist? This book gives the beginnings of an historical defence of collective creative processes and challenges the establishment view of community arts as an unnatural arena where 'artists' get their hands dirty working with 'ordinary' people.

This brings Wolff to the question of the role of the reader/audience/viewer, and the potential of art to be politically

interventionist. If art is socially and ideologically constructed then 'sweeping demands for cultural activism are both meaningless and pointless. Unless it is firmly linked with an understanding of contemporary cultural production, cultural intervention may be impossible, inappropriate or completely ineffective'.

Cultural intervention can only be planned in conjunction with a correct perception of 'the active and creative role of readers and audience in their interpretation of works of art'. Audiences in this sense are not passive consumers absorbing messages: 'when we read or hear any language-statement from the past, be it Leviticus or last year's best seller, we translate'.

Contemporary establishment art has been slow to realise this from its elevated, ivory-tower position, witnessed by 'ordinary' people's regular reactions to works of art imposed on them.

The relative effectiveness of different art forms in relation to political ideas is explored (film vs music, drama vs the visual arts etc) raising important questions of what medium we should be working in, and whether some community arts practice is no longer relevant. 'It is *popular consciousness* which is essential to the stability of our present society, and which is also vital to any ideological change, from the recognition and rejection of sexism to the understanding of the class nature of society.'

Janet Wolff, in *The Social Production of Art*, has produced (is that the right word

anymore?) a stimulating, often repetitive, sometimes jargonised work. She is a lecturer in sociology at the University of Leeds, and reflects all the linguistic uncertainty of this new pseudoscience trying to gain respectability. I often found the language alienating and unnecessarily complicated, but despite this there is much of interest to anyone concerned with the history and development of culture, and the possibilities for change.

It is what is not said — the 'silences' — which are the most revealing, however. Although the relative importance of author/reader, artist/viewer, playwright/audience has been altered, the old distinctions still remain. The artist is not 'dead' in this analysis; he/she is merely reassigned a lesser role. The really radical possibilities for change in this area are only suggested. Halfway through the book Wolff writes that 'culture can only be challenged, and consciousness raised, by experimenting with new forms of art, which *involve the audience in a more active manner* than the traditional forms'.

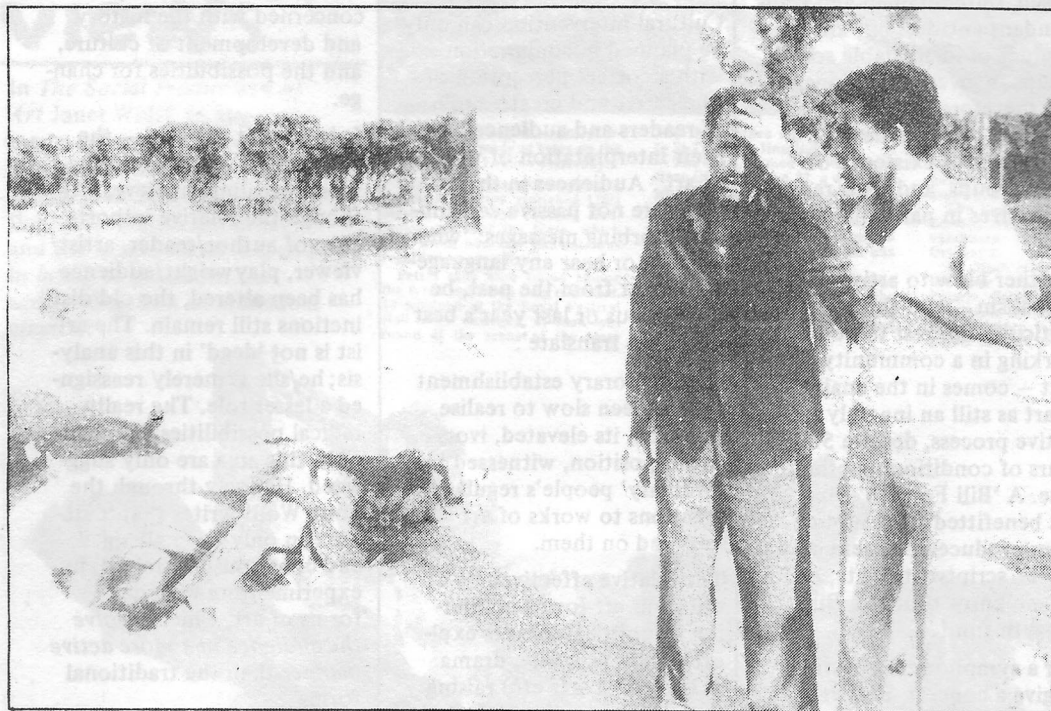
Although there is much to stimulate (and annoy) in this book, the real possibilities of the 'ordinary reader' becoming the 'ordinary writer' seem not to have been grasped.

Phil Cope.

The Social Production of Art, by Janet Wolff, is published by Macmillan as part of their Communications and Culture series. It costs £5.50 in paperback.

The Death of the Artist

BEIRUT



Grieving man after Sabra-Chatila massacre.

Chris Steele-Perkins

There has been a debate being carried out within the pages of *Another Standard* and elsewhere about the nature of imagery; about the relationship between form and content, between intention and presentation, between the perception of the 'artist' and the perception of the 'audience'.

In this magazine the debate has been carried on by stealth, and has never actually been directed editorially, or directly confronted. Let me begin this review with a plea that this discussion is brought out into the open. As someone who has so far sat on the sidelines I would suggest that representatives of the various sides be brought together and asked to jointly discuss an actual piece of work, or several pieces of work.

The sort of work that might suffice to bring this debate to a head is *Beirut: photographs from the Israeli invasion of Lebanon 1982/3*, the latest Camerawork exhibition.

The exhibition is designed to mark the first anniversary of the massacres in the Palestin-

ian refugee camps at Sabra and Chatila. It documents the siege, the withdrawal of the PLO and the days immediately after the attacks on the camps.

The photographs were taken by Judah Passow and Chris Steele-Perkins, with some additional photographs by Yusef Kuttob who is Palestinian. The photographs are linked by Palestinian and Lebanese poems.

The photographs are undoubtedly powerful, and manage to give an idea of the conditions the siege imposed upon people's lives. There are photographs of suffering and photographs of strength and resolve in the face of that suffering.

They are not unproblematic, when seen on the walls of a radical gallery in East London. They raise the questions that the exhibition of Peter Magubane's work raised for Moreton Blessing, in the Winter 82 issue of *Another Standard*.

About that exhibition he said 'I always feel dirty after looking at something like this: like a voyeur, like someone who has had other people's

suffering brought to him, no expense spared, for his aesthetic excitement, and to give him a sense of being right-on and right in there with the people.

Isn't generalised sympathy the opposite of help and action? Liberal penance, I'm beginning to realise, is also an act of oppression.'

This is not an argument about the quality of the photographs or the motives of the photographers, both of which seem impeccable. It is an attempt to question the use to which photography is put in our society, and the effects of trying to insert radical content into an existing bourgeois form. Can the content in some way contradict or transcend the form, or does it automatically get absorbed and incorporated into the Grand Tradition of which the dominant forms are part?

To put it another way: is Mr Blessing right to suggest that what results from an exhibition like *Beirut* is 'a sense of being right-on' and possibly some sort of 'generalised sympathy', or is it the case

that an exhibition like this results in political action and an increased militancy? Alternatively, does this argument miss some more important point altogether?

My personal feeling is that an exhibition like this can be useful, and that moreover there are some issues which are important enough to risk adding microscopically to the theoretical level of oppression.

My feeling is that you can be overconcerned about the state of your ideological correctness, and that when that happens you can paint yourself into a corner and end up doing nothing and helping nobody.

Photograph with care, but keep on photographing.

Mark Collett.

Beirut is at Camerawork from September 20th to October 22nd, and after that is available for hire.

A Whole Lotta Something Goin' On

Laurel and Hardy, Marx and Engels, up and down, theory and practice: pairs that are much more complex than they first appear, both individually and in their apparent relationship.

Nothing is as simple as it appears, and nothing appears simple anymore even when it appears, which it doesn't very often at least not where I come from.

Where do I come from? Nottingham, as it happens, at least in theory. I don't actually feel like I come from Nottingham, but then I don't actually feel like I come from anywhere else either. In practice I haven't lived anywhere for more than three years, since I was ten, but you don't want to hear about my problems.

One of my problems is a sudden burst of nostalgia,

brought on by a book I've just read called *The Feast of Fools*. (So you do want to hear about my problems, huh?)

The book is written by Bob Hescott, and it is an anecdotal journey through his experiences in Nottingham. Him and me both. His experiences were in community theatre, mine were in Sherwood Rise and the cemetery next door whose name I can't remember, but which I can still picture.

Bob Hescott was an actor at the Playhouse in 1972, when he became involved in the kids theatre on Saturday mornings. (I never went, but I knew kids that did. Some of them swore by it, but then for some of them swearing was a way of life.) This interest of his led him on an odyssey through the various byways of community theatre in the Nottingham area.

Sociable Theatre, Arrow Community Theatre, Pigment Multiracial TIE; all good stuff, and all much more complex than they first appear, both individually and in their apparent relationship.

This book isn't a theory, and it doesn't develop one. It's a story, and within that there is the story of an area, and the relationship that exists between the activities in that area.

It's the story of a practice being developed out of an interest, a commitment and a concern. *The theory isn't missing, it's between the lines.*

It's theory being lived. Roll over academia and tell my auntie the news!

Ron Braden.

The Feast of Fools: the story of community theatre in Nottingham, by Bob Hescott, is published by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, price £2.50.

Containerisation

'Do you have tickets?' asked the steward at the dock gate. 'Yes,' said the woman in front of me. 'You're lucky', said the steward. 'No, I'm not', she said. 'I simply went to Chenies Street and bought them.'

A friend of mine, one of the many volunteers involved in putting the show together criticised me for applying community arts criteria to something which clearly wasn't community arts.



Somewhere a ship was in trouble

I do not feel I am doing that, or at least only as far as Welfare State invite it ('the community liaison with local hosts...begins months before...'), but I have to start with a straight criticism, from any perspective, of a group which does a show in one of the most devastated inner city areas available, claims that they are making a comment on the way the area is threatened with development which local people cannot control, and then allows the main ticket outlet to be several miles away in Central London.

Limehouse Basin is a vast area of water, where the Regents Canal meets the Thames. It has spectacular possibilities and I would have expected the Welfare State ('engineers of the imagination') to make spectacular use of them. I was disappointed. Most of the action of the performed section of the piece took place in large shipping containers, spectacularly indeed manoeuvred into place by fork-lift trucks but, once there, completely obscuring the view of the dock.

And containers? It is because of containerisation that Limehouse Basin and its area has become wasteland and fallen into the hands of the London Docklands Development Corporation. Not, perhaps, the most tactful of structures to use. Only at the end did the docks come fully

into use, with a procession of Japanese-style lanterns round the basin, and for the –spectacularly brief– firework finale. If only the whole thing had been performed on water! Now that would have been worth watching!

The subject of the show was a simple allegory, making comparisons between the 'unsinkable' Titanic and western-civilisation-as-we-know-it. The point was made in the first five minutes, then made and made again, through words, songs, music, pyrotechnics, lumps of ice, paper lanterns and lots of visually stimulating scruffiness (the suspender belt worn outside the torn lame ball-gown, the worn black tail-coat with lobster epaulettes, you know the sort of thing).

The 'participatory' aspects were totally separate from the performance – the audience was invited to shop, eat, dance; but only at appointed times.

The ambience was identical to a string of post-hippy events I have visited over the years; the community involvement was invisible and almost unimaginable, the message was politically respectable but done to death, the visuals were exciting but not as exciting as they could have been, so finally it was only the economics which caught the imagination.

£40,000 in project grants went into the show, I am told, that is, a subsidy of £12.30 a seat, or for those (like me, normally) who do not like that kind of yardstick, the equivalent of the salaries of five community artists for a year's work in Docklands working with [local people helping to fight for control of the future of Limehouse.

The Raising of the Titanic has given rise to enormous myths and rumours, so perhaps it has power after all. It is a pity that genuine community arts events never seem to attract a similar investment in cash, or the same kind of publicity. But then a community arts event on that scale might be really subversive, not just an invitation for 325 right on people a night to congratulate themselves on perceiving society to be doomed.

Another Standard

Community Arts Culture and Politics

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Next Issue

We've got a full report of the Shelton Trust AGM, and to make sure you get the full report we're flying in Norman Mailer AND Hunter Thompson.

We've got a full report of the Women in Wales festival, and to make sure you get the full story we're flying in Susan Sontag, Germaine Greer AND Jean Rook.

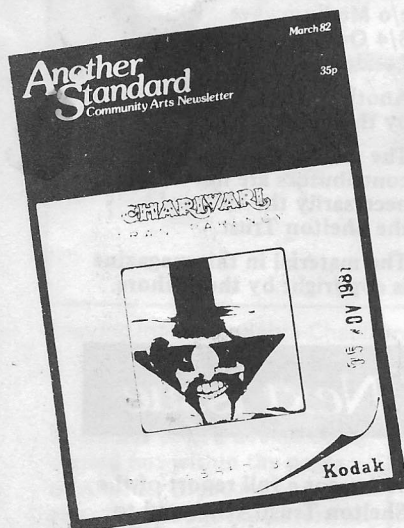
We've got a full report of the activities of the Rio cinema, and to make sure you get the full picture we're flying in Chris Petit, Jon Jost AND Michel Foucault.

You can't teach us anything about spending a grant!

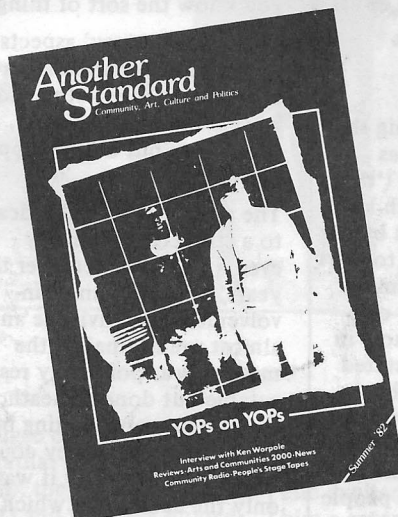


AS BACK ISSUES

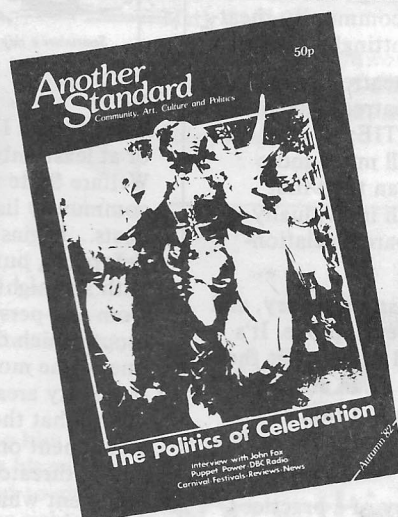
Another Standard is the only regular publication that covers the theory and practice of community arts in Great Britain. It contains news and reviews, in-depth interviews with community artists, and others involved in the field, project reports, analysis and comment. It is building up into the most comprehensive view of the field that money can buy, so why don't you let your money buy some of the back issues you've missed?



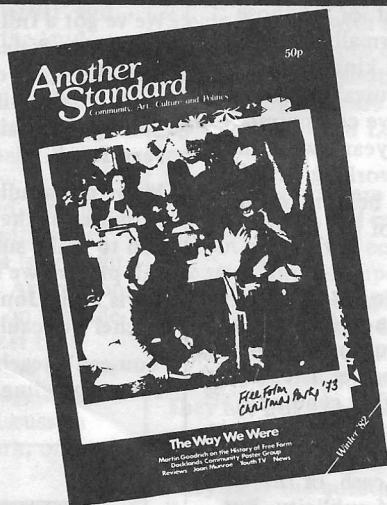
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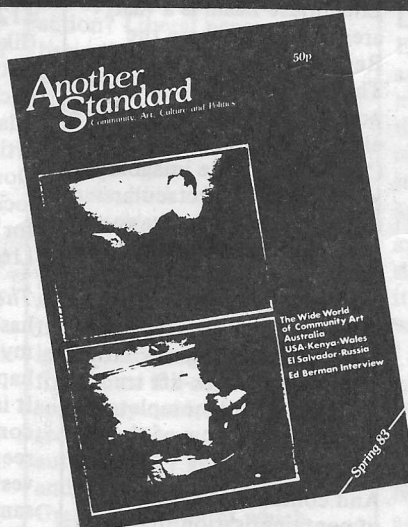
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Community Radio/People's Stage
Tapes.



The Politics of Celebration/Carnival
DBC Radio/John Fox Interview.



The Way We Were — Martin Goodrich
Interview/Docklands Community
Poster Group/Youth TV.



The Wide World of Community Art —
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