

Snipping Up Snuff

Snuff is a pornographic film first produced in South America in the 1960s. Its often obscure plot involves women who are followers of a man called Satan. Their sole aim appears to be to travel around the countryside senselessly murdering people. After a particularly gruesome scene showing the murder of a pregnant woman, the camera pulls back and we see some of the film crew. A woman and man comment how the murder scene they have just filmed sexually excited them. They embrace but the mood quickly changes when the man grabs a knife and begins stabbing and dismembering the woman. The film ends as he pulls out handfuls of her intestines screaming in orgasmic delight. In the original film, the female production assistant is actually murdered or "snuffed out."

Though the Women Against Pornography (WAP) collective was aware of the existence of this film, we never expected it to be easily available in Victoria. When a member of the group happened to pick up a list of titles from a local video rental outlet, she was surprised to discover a film entitled *Snuff* on the list. She brought it to the attention of the collective and though we were all skeptical of it being an actual "snuff" film, we decided to view it simply to be sure.

Though we had viewed other pornographic films, they did not prepare us for what we saw that evening. As we watched the poor quality creditless film, we knew what we had found.

The necessity for prompt action was agreed upon by all WAP members, but our strategy was yet to be determined. Knowing that the presence of *Snuff* in Victoria could not be ignored and that our actions would not only publicize our feelings about pornography, but would help us to gain public support after having been recently maligned by the local media, the choice was either to attempt to work within the system or to take possible illegal action. Our experiences of attempting to use the system to our benefit had

not been successful.

WAP was also aware that in Saanich, a Victoria municipality, the police had received three citizen complaints about *Snuff*. They viewed the film but were unsure if it could be termed "obscene" because of its lack of explicit sex (although the film's violence is clearly for the explicit purpose of sexual arousal). They returned the film to the video rental shop and declined to press charges. One policeman commented about *Snuff*: "It is a disgusting film and anybody who rents it is sick."

WAP concluded that the alternative of radical action was the only useful option available to us, and the resulting action against *Snuff* was carefully planned: a story about *Snuff* being available in Victoria broke in the *Times-Colonist* on September 24, 1982 (the reporter worked with WAP women on the story). Simultaneously, members of our collective were visiting video rental establishments in the greater Victoria area locating and renting copies of *Snuff*. A total of three copies of the film were rented from two outlets. The showing was held on September 27th. Of the seventy-five government officials invited, only three attended. The event was, however, well attended by the local media. Then, after showing *Snuff*, the copies of the video were destroyed with the audience's approval.

Before agreeing to destroy the film in front of an audience of witnesses, we consulted two feminist lawyers about possible civil and criminal charges. The decision was made to proceed and risk the possibility of legal charges. In fact, we hoped for charges against us as they would aid in keeping us in the news over a longer period and encourage public debate over the issue.

WAP had no misconceptions about what we would accomplish through this action; public exposure and destruction of *Snuff* would not solve the problem of the availability of pornography in Victoria. But the ac-

Threat to Rights

A number of Saskatchewan women's organizations have formed a common front to oppose the upcoming Regina court challenge by Manitoba ex-MP Joe Borowski to the existing Canadian abortion law.

The Pro-Choice Coalition, which includes Saskatchewan Working Women, Planned Parenthood Sask., Women's Action Group, the Regina Labour Council, Healthsharing, the United Church Feminist Group, and others, sees the Borowski Case as a threat to the rights of all Canadian women.

The case, to be heard early in 1983 at the Court of Queen's Bench, challenges the 1969 Canadian abortion law which allows for legal abortion when a woman's life or health is endangered by continuation of the pregnancy.

The Coalition believes that it is a fundamental right of all citizens to control their own bodies, and that only women themselves can choose when and when not to have children — a viewpoint shared by 72% of Canadians, according to a recent Gallup Survey. "We are outraged by a singular moral viewpoint threatening to impose itself on the rest of society," said Alison Hayford, assistant professor of Sociology at the University of Regina and spokesperson for the Coalition.

"A small number of men are putting the women of Canada on trial. People who never experience pregnancy want to decide

when pregnancy should take place. The people who actually experience the burden of pregnancy and most of the responsibility for child rearing are virtually excluded from being heard in this trial."

The Coalition contends that if Borowski wins this trial, he will have deprived the women of Canada of a fundamental civil right.

NAWL Convention

On February 23-26, the National Association of Women and the Law (NAWL) will hold its biannual convention in Victoria at the Empress Hotel. The topic of the conference is "Women in the Workforce: Affirmative Action and Parental Benefits." Speakers include: Beth Symes, Louise Dulude, Frances Lankin, Bev Baines, Elizabeth MacAllister, Beth Atcheson and Shelagh Day. Registration fees vary for members and non-members, students and working professionals. For further information contact: The Victoria Caucus, NAWL, Faculty of Law University of Victoria, Victoria, BC. Contact person: Nola Silzer, (604) 477-2512.

IWD/83

The first meeting of the International Women's Day Committee to discuss plans for this year's event in Toronto was held on January 12. About 75 women came together to plan actions and to develop a theme. This year's focus will be on (1) a woman's right to a job, (2) a woman's right to choose, and (3) a woman's right to peace.

As yet, no date or place has been set, but all women are welcome to attend organizing meetings held Wednesday evenings, 7:30 pm, Meeting Room D, Metro Central Library, 789 Yonge Street (just north of Bloor). For more information, call Carolyn (416) 789-4541.

The Art of Panel-Handling

by Eve Zaremba

Discussion panels seem to be ubiquitous these days. That's fine, since panels can be useful for stimulating discussion and for the examination of various views in an interesting and accessible way. Here in Toronto we have recently had experience with two very different types of panels, neither of which worked quite the way they were intended to by the organizers. Maybe there are lessons to be learned from these experiences, lessons which could be useful elsewhere and at other times.

In October 1982, *Broadside* brought Charlotte Bunch to Toronto to speak under the general and perhaps ambiguous title of *Sex, Freedom and Violence*. The underlying topic was the breakdown in solidarity and increase in conflict between most feminists and libertarian gays, arising out of very different experience of sex, and perceptions of its role in liberation. Bunch's keynote address was followed by a panel of five local activists, selected for their presumed ability to illuminate different political viewpoints. The evening was chaired by Susan Cole of *Broadside*, who as panel mediator was prevented from speaking out, although her position on many of the issues is hardly any secret. In the event, the evening turned out to be interesting enough, but did not meet the expectations of some of *Broadside's* readers and others in the audience. Why?

It is the natural tendency of political movement organizers to persuade and recruit whenever given the chance; fear of polarization comes with the territory. Those on the panel could be so described, and as such, they played down differences rather than let them surface clearly. Also, predictably, some not-so-hidden agendas popped up to the puzzlement of the uninitiated.

Charlotte Bunch, as the out-of-town 'expert' on a controversial and volatile issue,

had to be extra careful not to provoke anything remotely resembling a confrontation. She tried to be both thought-provoking and conciliatory. This is a difficult trick to pull-off and she only half succeeded.

In my opinion, all these factors were the result of the problematic position of *Broadside*. There was a conflict between *Broadside's* role as the organizer of the event and its role as a member of the feminist press, with the responsibility for development and dissemination of feminist ideas. By choosing to be Simon Pure organizers, by not putting Susan Cole on the panel, we failed to present a strongly-held radical feminist position. This was a disappointment to many people in the audience who were looking for a provocative articulation of the argument. It was unfair to the opposite side, since their primary opponent never materialized and they were at times left to argue against a position which was never fully stated. It was, again in my opinion, an opportunity not sufficiently exploited.

In future perhaps matters would be improved if panels on contentious issues were clearly understood as potentially exciting methods of examining and testing positions and not perceived as inherently divisive and polarizing. True consensus or even agreement to disagree is not reached by a refusal to challenge and be challenged.

The other disappointing panel I mentioned was *Women Speak Out*, a weekend of feminist documentary video, held in November 1982. That weekend, Toronto was treated to three sessions of eleven video documentaries by women throughout the country, followed on Sunday night by what was advertised as a panel discussion. The intention was noble and ambitious, the videos almost without exception interesting, often exciting and well-made. Much time, money and effort had gone into bringing from across Canada the activists and artists responsible for producing these videos. These

women could have learned a great deal from each other and we from them.

It never happened. There was no opportunity to meet, hear and question each videomaker directly after her work was shown on Saturday, when it was fresh in our minds. Explanations and discussion were supposed to wait until the Sunday panel. However, not many who attended the three screening sessions could also attend the panel, so most of the audience missed hearing the video producers altogether. Those who made it to the panel heard very little from the visitors about their specific work, ideas or production groups. Much of the panel time was given over to discussion of the local situation and such general topics as feminist aesthetics and distribution problems ... all very important subjects for discussion but not at the expense of picking the brains of the out-of-town artists.

So what went wrong? Clearly, the organizers did not fully utilize their resources,

namely, the artists they had spent money bringing in from as far away as Vancouver. Each producer should have been given at least half an hour immediately after the session in which her video appeared to describe and comment on what the audience had just seen. The panel at the end of the weekend would have benefitted from tighter chairing so that some real exchange between the various artists and activists could have taken place. We could have listened in. So, in my opinion, another missed opportunity.

Those are all lessons for the future, not an attempt to dissuade people from organizing panels. Until someone invents a better way of getting different people to discuss things in public, we will go on coping with the problems.

(Eve Zaremba was responsible for producing the *Sex, Freedom and Violence* evening on behalf of *Broadside*!)



No challenge: speakers at the 'Sex, Freedom and Violence' panel discussion.