



Jane Story, *Patrol in Moslem Quarter, Old City Jerusalem*, originally titled *Israeli Troops Patrol Moslem Quarter, Old City Jerusalem*, courtesy: Justina M. Barnicke Gallery, Toronto

The photographs have captions now, not text, that insinuate the relationship between the Israelis and Palestinians to be that of brutes and gentlefolk respectively. Unlike the original, fact-laden text, nevertheless, these captions seldom even mention Israelis. Where, for instance, the forbidden text had read "Israeli troops patrol the Moslem Quarter, Old City, Jerusalem," the caption now available reads "Patrol in Moslem Quarter, Old City, Jerusalem." The captions are often so ahistorical that at times the Palestinians could just as well have been sandstorm victims. "Ali Awwad Kashkhar, 67, was forcibly evicted, along with his family of six, from his traditional home in the Negev Desert, on June 23, 1983, by the Green Patrol, set up to protect the environment by former Israeli Minister of Agriculture and Settlements, General Ariel Sharon," is tidily replaced by the new caption reads "Ali Awwad Kashkhar, 67, Refugee from his Traditional Home in the Negev."

To the relief, no doubt, of the censors, the photographs themselves are quite like their new captions, in that they are in fact remarkably non-specific. Because themes — modern ways vs folkways, spirituality vs physicality — rather than events, are illustrated, they are especially vulnerable to the dulling effects of the pusillanimous censorship. There are photographs of monolithic modern highrises barricading the horizon against the few sunbeams reaching the wrinkled tents of tribesmen. A thoroughly-accounted soldier faces an elaborately crafted mosque. Without the text, the effect of this thematization of the Palestinian people is to present them as an endangered Noble Savage, an exotic type that for Westerners is reflexly classed as a generally worthy cause, partly because it is such a photogenic one: the implication being that the bright-eyed Watermelon Boy, the pensive Shep-

herd Boy, the diligent peasant who bakes bread or who brews coffee "in the traditional way," are just too wholesome to be defaced by suffering.

One photograph, picturing a metal worker toiling in a T-shirt that bears a map of Palestine, is an exception to this. He is distinguished from the North American viewer by the earthiness of his technology. Yet the T-shirt personalizes his politicization. For a moment the viewer can recognize that through the mundane choice of what to wear to work this man has proclaimed his own relationship to the body politic.

There is another photograph that reveals Story's potential to be observant and curious without opportunism. "Christian Service, Palm Sunday, 1981" records a group of tense, homely nuns who face the camera unselfconsciously expectant, seemingly in readiness for a revelatory event. In front of them a pretty young woman, her hair unbound, sits with her back to the camera. She has just turned her head to see what the nuns are looking for. Her open, intent glance is as eager in its secular way as the nuns' cheerless anticipation. The photograph is really rather mysterious, and the mystery speaks well of the photographer's own vulnerability as a stranger who also looks on, with no way of explaining, too humble to display images as if they are an inferior form of fact.

Otherwise this exhibit designates the Palestinians as underdogs, and therefore does not face the question of whether both photojournalists and artists can stop perpetuating the view that human beings are all either innocents or guilty, forever victims in need of rescue or oppressors in need of punishment.

Jeanne Randolph

Letters

AXES OF DIFFERENCES RESPONSES TO PHILIP MONK

Philip Monk's essay "Axes of Differences" (*Vanguard*, May, 1984 p. 10-14) was first presented in a public lecture in Toronto in February of 1984. Its publication in *Vanguard* has prompted the response of five Toronto artists. These letters are printed below, together with Monk's response, in their entirety. *Vanguard* will continue to offer its pages to these and other important discussions; however it now serves notice that future letters may be edited for reasons of length. [ed]

Dear editor:

"Toronto is neither New York nor Germany, let alone Italy." Using the obvious as a springboard, Philip Monk takes a wild leap into the problematic pool of sexual politics and hauls up from its murky bottom "Axes of Difference" — a piece of criticism so foul that it puts a critic of his stature to shame.

Strangely enough, the one point that made all the sound and fury of the original lecture seem somewhat worthwhile (i.e. that overt historicism may be encouraging a curious passivity among artists today) was never stated as clearly in the rewritten *Vanguard* text. Allow me to speculate that this was probably because, in cold print, the assertion points the accusative finger as boldly at his chosen female artists as the indicted males. Let's face it, we're all guilty on this count.

I seriously question the motivations for Monk's argument that "the axes of difference" are male/female and expression/mediation, when he prefaces this dubious declaration with escape clauses like "we do not have an overt expressionist tendency in Canada" and, unbelievably, "the lines of difference are not so much between expression and mediation, men and women." The contradictions are glaring. Who can make sense of them?

In the crucial paragraph of his text we are dragged into a whirlpool of language. He offers a model of a unit ("Toronto work on representation") with two axes. Although we are initially told that the polarities of the first axis are expression and mediation, his elaboration makes this impossible. Monk states that mediation may just as well be called appropriation. But then he frets that appropriation and expression are too similar to be opposites: "these latter both project ideal subjects; an ideal presence; an ideal objectivity." Thus he proposes that the polarities of the first axis are actually expression and representation, which is sheer nonsense if "representation" is what the greater unit is supposed to be. Monk gets away with this nightmare world of constantly shifting meanings by never clearly defining his terms for his readers, therefore many of the crucial words seem to mean whatever he needs them to mean at any given time.

Sociology and psychology would both be far easier fields of endeavour if definitive conclusions on gender could be garnered from small sample groups of only four females and four males. What is surprising, however, is that Monk did not stack the deck in favour of his argument. Shelagh Alexander, excellent artist though she is, cannot fit into his rigid criterion. Her work is hermetic, fragmented, full of nostalgia for the completeness of childhood. On the other hand Andy Patton, except for his incriminating gender, would fall more naturally within the opposing camp because of his sophisticated understanding of the mechanics of appropriation.

The lines blur considerably between the genders. The fragmentation of Janice Gurney's recent show seems to me to be as emotional as it is strategic in relation to problems of representation. Dressed up in 50s drag and accessorized with more stylish

Patton's picture, *Architecture of Privacy*, could easily be one by Tod. Many of Marc de Guerres non-religious preoccupations are not so different from Shirley Wiitasalo's, even though she is infinitely more resourceful in bringing them to light. (As an aside, Wiitasalo's interior frame relates to a considerable tradition in European pictorialism that is quite un-local and extremely un-real, but that is a whole different can of worms warranting an equally long rebuttal!) Dave Clarkson and Alexander use different media and formats but both walk the same melancholy landscape of broken heroes, lost childhood idealism, and ambivalence towards looming figures of power. While gender may make the registering of the relationships within each artist's work different (and many a feminist would argue that the perceived passivity in Clarkson's was a positive thing indeed) it doesn't stop the work from functioning in a similar manner. If we are to find fault for cynical resignation among these eight artists, Clarkson is totally eclipsed by the caustic wit of *Self Portrait as a Prostitute* by Tod. In this painting she says: I know my paintings are luxury commodities. Yes, I am critical of it. But, what the hell, I've got to eat! Such a statement has little to do with gender and everything to do with the conditions of being an artist in this day and age.

The funniest moment in the essay comes when Monk stoops to academic corn and accuses ChromaZone of collectively being Oedipal. Monk quickly drops ChromaZone without clearly explaining what he means by our "emulation" of General Idea and he proceeds to criticize us through implied but debatable shared sensibilities with his four unfortunate males. Had he further pursued any of the male or female members of ChromaZone in his critique, he would have had to deal with a topic that he traditionally avoids, even while talking about the homosexually informed work of General Idea: Sexuality as it pertains to representation.

Here lies Monk's major folly in *Axes of Difference*. In using a feminist critique to his own ends, he uses it selectively, banishing the major precept that you simply can't consider the social apparatus that encases gender and ignore the social construction of sexuality.

Frustrated with this gaping omission, I asked Philip Monk in the bar after his initial lecture, what he thought about the work of gay artists such as Rob Flack, Stephen Andrews. He responded that he didn't "like" it, so he hadn't thought much about it. In contrast, he doesn't seem to "like" the work of de Guerre, but he has thought about it considerably. All marginalized groups in society know what it is like to be invisible before the white heterosexist male gaze.

It's alarming to see Philip Monk clumsily and condescendingly make a safe place for the women artists he plans to assemble in a show at YYZ this fall. Their work speaks strongly; they don't need a male critic to isolate them with his artificial dichotomies and then presume to speak for them.

Andy Fabo, Toronto

Dear editor:

I wish to make two criticisms regarding the two main "Axes of Difference" which Philip Monk posits in his article of the same name. The first points out an important intellectual error, and the second, (which I find more disturbing) a socio-political one.

Central to Monk's argument dividing "active and passive" art is his mistaken supposition that so-called "... emblems of failure. . ." are not representations of the same order as emblems which he alleges contain "... the sense of the possibility of action." Of course, this denial is crucial to his false construction. It takes no "... ideal objectivity. . ." to see that neither sort of representation is more real as a representation than the other. Both share the same characteristic properties of representation

and create the identical condition of attendant transformative potential which Monk correctly assumes is their important quality. It's his idea after all "... that one is able to act in the real (through representation changing representation)." All representations contain the implicit functional ability to change our representational practice, precisely because they are representations, therefore all are equally "active".

Monk's second axis divides a group of artists (of which I am one) according to gender. In criticizing this ploy I will draw from a well known and valuable text, *Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression*. In describing the recent "... revitalization of obsolete pictorial practices. ..." which legitimize social repression and are based in sexism, Benjamin Buchloh warns us that "... at a time when cultural production in every field is becoming increasingly aware of, if not actively countering, the oppression of traditional role distinctions based on the construction of sexual difference, contemporary art. ... returns to the concepts of psychosexual organization that date from the origins of bourgeois character formation." Sadly, I believe that Monk has resorted to the tired universalizations of sexual difference that Buchloh brings to our attention. To be sure, Monk reverses these arbitrary, traditional gender attributes to suit his purpose, but they still function in the same depersonalizing way.

I find this strategy unfortunate because the author and I are in general accord regarding the importance of other issues presented in his essay. (These concern self-representation and conditions of mediation.) It is regrettable then, that these theories are overshadowed by his ill considered reliance on divisive gender distinctions and stereotypical labeling.

To close, I will again return to Buchloh's text in order to utilize his conclusion for my own and because I believe that it provides the theoretical foundation for Monk's text: "The primary function of such cultural re-presentation is the confirmation of the hieratics of cultural domination." If Monk is correct in his belief that this is my mistake, then it is his to share as well.

David Clarkson, Toronto

Dear editor:

I have many problems with Philip Monk's recent article, "Axes of Difference", which at many points seems to be simply an axe to grind. In his haste to slam my work, Monk does not seem to have looked at the actual work. For example, in attempting to distinguish Shirley Wiitasalo's work from mine, which he had paired it with, Monk points to two criteria: "Wiitasalo's paintings similarly are framed in one medium, but an interior frame almost always mimes the edge of the canvas as a self-conscious division between inside and outside, and the subject itself is decidedly not unitary." And he goes on to discuss Wiitasalo's painting *Interview* which was reproduced in the article. What strikes me as unfair is Monk's selective inattention to the work of mine which was also reproduced in the article. *The Architecture of Privacy* has a very obvious internal frame as well, which only someone with a blind spot could miss. I can only conclude that the key word concerning an internal frame is "self-conscious", and that I didn't know what I was doing when I laid out the painting. I thought at the time I was conscious of what I was doing, but obviously, I was mistaken.

Similarly, the subject of the painting is the *whole* painting, which is structured basically along a division of "self" and "oth-

ers", i.e. the woman dancing, and the others whose gaze is directed at her from the other side of the frame, arch, or page. While the viewer is likely, I think, to identify with the dancer, I don't see how the "others" and their looking can be ignored. How is it possible then to say that where Wiitasalo's subject is non-unitary, that the subject of my painting is unitary? If one identifies with the dancer, one becomes subject to "their" gaze. If one does not put oneself into the painting, one will see both sides of the "self"/"other" split from a distance. In either case, the subject is not a simple unity. Basically, Monk excludes the left three feet of the painting from his analysis. If he means to argue that Wiitasalo's painting is superior to mine with three feet cut off on the left, I'll certainly agree.

Monk seems to be saying that the problem with my work most basically is that the works about privacy do not comprehend that privacy is socially constructed. In the case of the work reproduced, even if the "self"/"other" relation is ignored, the title *The Architecture of Privacy* explicitly links "privacy" to a non-natural social construction, "architecture".

But what upsets me most is not Monk's criticism but his need to totally discredit the work of the various men. I think most readers will sense this in the tone, but it can be pointed out in the article's construction. I'd like to point to two examples where a single word is used as a means of shifting what would have been a simple and accurate description into a more or less total discrediting of either the work or the values expressed there. Monk writes "For David Clarkson, fragmentation is only the lack of a desired unity." Why "only"? Because, without some term that would deflect and direct the statement negatively, Clarkson's work would be revealed as wanting a "unity", something which all of us *do* desire to various degrees and in various ways, and which takes its social shape in feelings and relations of love, solidarity, friendship, nurturance, shared celebration. ... Does Clarkson have no right to this? Do we have no right to this?

And earlier Monk writes of my work that "... a retreat from the public is made under the guise of a lament for the public." The word "guise" here states that the work is not even a lament. My works are not only in retreat, they lie, disguising themselves as what *appears* to be a felt, actual loss. Monk, I suppose, saves those of you who might be deceived by me, who might believe that I really do feel the loss of a real sociality, of a political realm not continuously effaced by the charismatic, by advertising, by its own special fetishism, and by a history which has continuously atomized society. If his argument is successful, Monk will have pointed out not only the failings real or imaginary of my work, but will have discredited even my attempt, which I thought was human enough.

This more or less total discrediting of the men and their work is, oddly enough, part and parcel of the article's phallogocentrism. While the article quite explicitly distances itself from the old "men are active, women are passive" song and dance, it never questions what is centrally valuable in our society and culture. The article is merely a shifting of genders around that central value, "action". Throughout the article, Monk makes it quite clear that this is the value by which all must be judged. And while he says that women fulfill this central value better than men, this is about as radical as women on Bay St. saying that women have to be better than men at their jobs in order to be taken seriously. It should not be surprising that this aspect of Monk's article was pointed out to me by a gay friend, who regarded Monk's argument as simply another policing of what was allowable to men and for men in this society. Men must not be passive, even if women can be active. Isn't it possible to value, assess, and support the work done by various women in art, with-

out implicitly tying it once again to the success or failure of men's artworks; without tying it so explicitly to the central phallogocentric value of a culture which simply does not know when to stop, when to sit still, how to limit itself, how to nurture; without re-asserting the most narrow and oppressive vision of what it is to be male in this society?

Andy Patton, Toronto

Dear editor:

My initial ambivalence towards Philip Monk's article "Axes of Difference" has given way to dismay, when I consider some of its inherent implications.

That Monk should value the women's work, which he describes in this essay, seems to reflect a certain degree of good taste and sense on his part. That he should find it necessary to denigrate several of their male colleagues' work in the process, however, reflects a wilful lack of sense. The proliferation of this type of hierarchical classification, which depends on a practice of polarization and separation, does not seem particularly well suited to a careful examination of work which answers to the local and real.

The axis which Monk, develops is one of alienation and division, rather than a reference for what might (and should) be seen as co-ordinates. Little is to be gained by creating false dichotomies between the sexes. Much good will arise from a discussion of disparate modes of experience, which needn't be perceived as mutually exclusive.

Elizabeth MacKenzie, Toronto

Dear editor:

We live in a time when intelligent people recognize and respect the value of the women's movement. Philip Monk is certainly not the first to acknowledge it. In his article "Axes of Difference" (Vanguard, May '84) he may be the first, however, to direct its acknowledged importance towards the fabrication of a *new critical method of art evaluation* based on gender prejudice.

Following a familiar preamble concerning Toronto artists' culpability to international production for legitimization, Monk poses a rhetorical question, which as an issue remains unaddressed throughout the remainder of his article. The question: "Is it fair to create the opposition (between the work by men and that by women), or am I generalizing from a few select examples?" The question is not posed, as it should be, as a cautionary remark acknowledging the tentative, provocative nature of the ensuing statements. It is rather planted as a ruse, feigning fairness: the "questioning" critic should after all be trusted for his good intentions. This tactic is necessary, it turns out, because what follows in the remainder of the article is an insupportable simplification of a very complex subject.

The first distinction Monk attempts to set up between the men and women artists is that apparently the "referents for subject matter and practice are located in the real for women and the gallery and art world for men". That the "real" is, as Monk implies,

sufficiently constituted by "modern forms of communication and reproduction" is not certain. More significantly, that this concern is necessarily absent from the work of the men discussed is unfounded. As for "practice", it seems necessary to disclose the fact that each and every artist discussed in the article has exhibited in a commercial gallery (of the art world). Further in the same paragraph Monk insists on another inaccuracy. Every artist discussed, not just the women, as he would want us to believe, produces work that "follows through from the critical and contextual art of the recent past: conceptual, installation, video, performance, photo-textual, etc." This oversight on Monk's part is a deliberate falsification and constitutes blatant malice.

The diatribe that follows these inaccuracies provides the reader with glib witticisms that categorize the men respectively as exemplifying "romantic idealism, private subjectivism, sentimental humanism or nihilistic expressionism". The very form of these paired adjectives reveal their contrived insincerity.

Monk then ensues to elaborate on his subjective evaluations and comparisons of the artists in question. As it has been historically determined, this, of course, is the privilege of his vocation. However, for this activity to pose as authentic, relevant, critical theory is thoroughly unprofessional. Fortunately, the self-serving opportunism of Monk's critique is so evidently transparent that it has rendered itself irrelevant and ineffectual. His partisanship in this fiction in any case casts doubt on his status as a commentator on art in Toronto. If Monk had intended his article as provocation to open debate on this supposed issue, he should have discovered a responsible way of doing so.

Will Gorlitz, Toronto

Philip Monk Responds

Given the fact that the letters seem to be responding to the hearsay of the lecture rather than the article itself, it is fruitless to reply. Nonetheless some clarifications need to be made.

The gross distortions of the letters start by privileging an opposition between men and women. No one has gone beyond that misrepresentation of the article to its obvious intent: namely a statement of the consequences of artistic form, of which I opposed "representation" and "expression". The contrasting of the work by men and women was at a third remove from that primary opposition. A rereading of the logic of the article would show this as well as disqualify Will Gorlitz's opening contention.

If the "blatant malice" and "contrived insincerity" of my "diatribe" based on "inaccuracies", "insupportable simplification" and "subjective evaluations", which, however, are the "privilege" of my "self-serving opportunism" and "partisanship", produces a "fiction" which is not only "thoroughly unprofessional" but "irrelevant and ineffectual" as well, and further lead Gorlitz to "doubt" my "status as a commentator on art in Toronto", I can only think that some truth, or threat, is contained in an article that could provoke such excessive abuse. Otherwise the "fiction" would cancel itself in the reading and the response would not be so invested by hostility.

My labelling of the *work*, which people find so contentious, as "romantic idealism, private subjectivism, sentimental humanism or nihilistic expressionism" is tame, nearly "responsible", next to Gorlitz's

