

ARTS

Moral of propaganda is: caveat emptor

Third World Film Festival
Tory Lecture Theatres
Saturday March 6

Confessions (expanded edition)
Barbara Amiel
Totem, 1981

review by Jens Andersen

Most people regard the left-right division as the fundamental one in politics, but I detect a more critical dichotomy in Mencken's distinction between people who are honestly searching for political truths and those who are simply out to sell their particular brand of salvation.

By the latter classification system I would have to put "right-winger" Barbara Amiel in the same pigeonhole as the "left-wing" apologists who produced the four films I saw at the Third World Film Festival. She and they are all propagandists; only the product being sold differs. Amiel is peddling liberal democracy and the film-makers are peddling socialism.

However, as with any propaganda, if one keeps in mind the deliberate attempt to shove ideology down people's throats, and maintains one's wariness and skepticism, it is possible to glean some useful information from amidst the sale pitches.

For instance, even in the worst of the four films, *Mozambique: Year Three*, one can learn that President Samora Machel wears a natty pinstripe suit, and that the country contains a radical priest who looks like an emancipated Rasputin (with even longer scragglier hair) who believes in the "liberation of man" through Marxism.

And one learns that some Mozambicans wear dirty, ragged clothes and gaze at the camera in bewilderment, and others wear remarkably new and clean clothes, act suspiciously cheerful and choreographed in their singing and chanting of "Viva FRELIMO", and never gaze at the camera.

And one can learn how beautiful a sunrise over the savanna looks, or how happy a young Mozambican villager can be as he rides away on his scooter (I almost said "Freedom machine").

Similarly, in the book *Confessions* one can learn, from the newly-added chapter on Amiel's Mozambican expedition, that Amnesty International reports Mozambique has problems with "detention without trial, political prisoners and the death penalty" and that about 200,000 people have gone through its political prisons in the last four years.

Or that a Cuban adviser she met, who thought President Machel was just as wonderful as Fidel Castro, was "engaged in a project to overhaul the fishing economy of Mozambique....(and) was frustrated in

his work because he was forced to put people in powerful positions for political reasons."

Or that there seems to be an acute shortage of goods in the country and that some of the old Portuguese plantations are falling into disuse.

Amiel's propaganda is clearly much more intelligent and much less offensive than the crude persuasive tactics used in the *Mozambique* film (which has more happy, cheerful people per square inch than a Coke commercial). She understands quite well the advantage in conceding, and even stressing, points made by the opposition:

Of course, Mozambique under the Portuguese suffered all the ills of colonialism - and then some. As colonizers, the Portuguese probably rate one level lower than the Belgians - which is about as low as you can get, not counting the Russians and the Chinese. Unaffected by the noblesse oblige spirit of British imperialism which expressed itself in, at least, laying the foundations for political institutions and an educated native class, the Portuguese educated no one but their own, and felt little responsibility to develop any services for black Mozambicans.

The only vice absent in the Portuguese was that of a malevolent, personal racism. The Portuguese happily intermarried with natives - that was no problem - they simply had no interest in civic improvements.

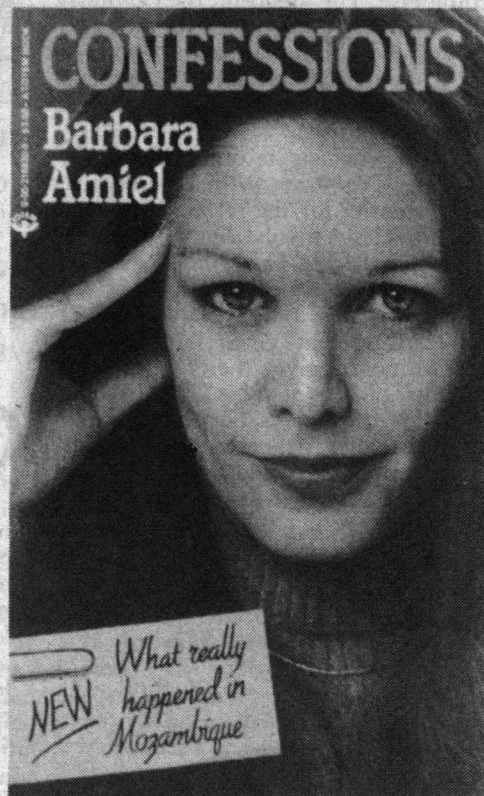
It is said that when the Portuguese left in 1975 they took everything from the country that wasn't nailed down. What is certainly true is that they left behind nothing that could be called a skilled labor force - only a country of remarkably pleasant and patient people who had been prevented not only from developing any skills, but also any political or civic traditions of their own.

Into this vacuum came the well-financed, organized FRELIMO terrorists, originally sympathetic to the Chinese, later increasingly dependent on the Russians and Cubans. For the ordinary Mozambican, life after FRELIMO took power in 1975 was a brief moment of announced "liberation" and then an oppression that equaled the dreaded secret police regime of the Portuguese - without matching its economic efficiency.

There are, of course, the predictable bits of slant in this excerpt: communist imperialism is worse than the capitalist kind, FRELIMO are terrorists etc., but next to the look-what-a wonderful-new society-we-are-creating blather of the film these stretchers seem mild indeed.

(One particularly nauseating scene in *Mozambique* has a native woman saying in English, "We're all the same color now....well, we're not all the same color but our hearts are the same." And after the film a festival moderator said, "This film gives us (sic) reason for confidence in the revolution in Mozambique.")

The other films I saw had varying



degrees of awfulness: *Trade Unions of the Third World* showed Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere putting forth the idea of forming coffee and sisal cartels among Third World nations to jack up the price of these products (he calls the cartels "unions" to make it sound more respectably revolutionary). *Controlling Interest* professed surprise and shock at the fact that corporations must make a profit to survive. *Women in Arms*, perhaps the best of the bunch, shows that sexist behavior, like men leaving mothers holding babies persists even in revolutionary Nicaragua.

When *Women in Arms* concluded, however, it was with one of those familiar pep rallies that makes so many "socially-conscious" films a drag to watch.

"No one can destroy us," chant the Nicaraguans.

"We are strong."

"We must have discipline and brotherhood."

"A free country or death!"

"Long live the people's struggle all over the world!"

At which point the audience broke into cheers and clapping.

Well, as events in Chile have shown, revolutions are fragile enough, and easily destroyed. And the latest news from Nicaragua is that the anti-Somoza newspaper *La Prensa*, which was persecuted by the old government, is now

being harassed by the Sandinistas.

Barbara Amiel, too, lets her ideological inclinations overpower her eyesight, as when she says, "I have yet to see, in postwar years, a single example of (mau-mauing) from the right." She would do well to study, say, the campaign of police busts against Lenny Bruce, which were, to say the least, "successful"

And she should perhaps reflect that the scarcity of successful right-wing mau-mauing in comparison to left-wing mau-mauing in the post-war era is no reflection on the tolerance of activist right-wingers, who are generally just as intolerant as their counterparts on the left (as was shown by William F. Buckley when he attempted to stop a communist from speaking at Yale). Rather, it is simply a reflection of the fact that in certain institutions, especially universities, "left-libbers" predominate, and the right-wingers, who would like to imitate their meddling, and their busybody tactics, simply lack the mob support which the lefties enjoy.

Amiel, incidentally, provides excellent and much-overlooked examples of such left-wing mau-mauing.

These examples of leftist swinishness and stupidity are the best part of *Confessions*, much as the examples of rightist swinishness and stupidity are the best parts of the films. It is always refreshing to hear someone like Amiel quote Lenin's thought on social democrats and liberals (he thought they were useful suckers), or to see a film like *Controlling Interest* which shows the executive of a large corporation, who earns \$248,000 a year, explain why his company pays \$20 to Malaysian workers who "have no objection to doing tedious jobs."

Unfortunately, neither Amiel or the film-makers is willing to let the facts speak for themselves. No sooner have they mentioned a specific social injustice than they are attempting to blame it all on the nefarious influence of capitalist (or socialist) ideology.

Well, I have a different theory: business and political leaders behave the way they do (usually badly) because the kind of person who usually gets into a position of power is the kind who is quite willing to gouge a few eyeballs, kick a few groins, and smash a few kneecaps to achieve his goals: in short, the kind of person who is devoid of any sort of common decency.

As far as I can see, no political or economic system has yet managed to cope with this unpleasant fact.

News Editor Greg Harris will provide another perspective on the Third World Film festival next week.

Up and Coming

GALLERIES

Isabelle Hunt-Johnson: Ring House Gallery; March 11-21; free admission.

The work presented here is from the artist's Master of Visual Arts thesis presentation. The one painting reprinted on the notice for this show is mighty nice, so the show is probably worth a glance. Ring House Gallery, in case you don't know, is just west of the BioSci building.

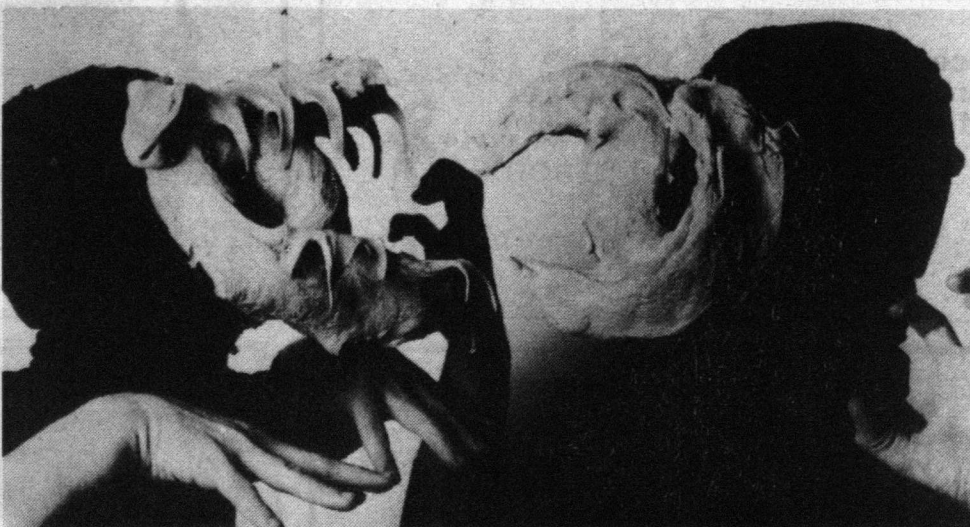
Hans Haacke and Toyo Kawamura: SUB Art Gallery; March 11-28; free admission.

Haacke is apparently internationally recognized for his examinations of political and social systems. Kawamura explores such dualities as east-west, solid-void, and positive-negative.

MUSIC

U of A Symphonic Wind Ensemble; Convocation Hall; Monday March 15; 8:00 p.m.; admission free.

Music by Stravinsky, Gould, Wagner, Gabrielle, Michalsky and Sousa.



What is this - our beloved Editor-in-Chief screaming at the Arts Editor for late copy? Our beloved Theatre Manager screaming at him for free publicity? Nope, just some friendly actors from the mime troupe Mummenschanz. Details below.

THEATRE

Mummenschanz: SUB Theatre; Thursday to Saturday March 18-20; 8:00 p.m.; Tickets at SUB or any other BASS outlet.

The press kit that accompanies this show contains xeroxes of raves from every publication from *Variety* to the *Poughkeepsie Journal*. The former magazine calls it "mime for people who hate mime."

LOCAL RECREATION

B-Sides; Dinwoodie cabaret; Saturday March 13; 8:00 p.m.; tickets at SUB, or CAB (\$5.00) or the door (\$6.00).

An energy-inspired seven piece ska band from Vancouver, sez our Entertainment Director, guaranteed to keep you hopping all night. Lucinda Chodan of the *SUN(ex-Gateway)* thinks they are pretty good too. And has any *Gateway* staffer ever lied to you before?

Pig out for free!

The Arts Editor has just gotten his mitts on 125 double passes to a preview of the film *Porky's* for this Saturday (March 13) at 10:30 AM at the Plaza II Theatre.

Porky's, as the erudite critic J. Andersen pointed out in the Feb. 4 *Gateway*, is "a gloriously shallow slapstick goof....another opiate for the masses."

If you want one of the double passes all you have to do is answer correctly one of the following skill-testing questions and bring it to the *Gateway* before tomorrow at 5 p.m.

Skill-testing questions:

1. Which famous philosopher made the famous statement, "Pork is dead"?
2. In pigs, which type of cell has a greater density of rough endoplasmic reticulum - an epithelial cell or a peritoneal cell?
3. In Kant's philosophical system, is a hog a noumenon or a phenomenon?
4. How many legs does a pig with four feet have?