

ARTS«»ENTERTAINMENT

Empty rooms

Things and people are forever moving away from us, propelled out of our grasp by that confluence of time and space that is motion. It is this reality on which Alain Tanner's *In the White City* is based. From the film's opening shot, a tanker at sea enshrouded in mist, bobbing slowly up and down in the center of the screen, we are in a world whose spatial distinctions are eroded by uncertainty, and the strangely seductive power of unfamiliar cities can work its uncanny effect on us.

Paul (Bruno Ganz), a Swiss ship's engineer, has, for no apparent reason, jumped ship in Lisbon, where he takes up with a bartender/chambermaid, Rosa Teresa Madruga. But that is only a pretext—the unfamiliar landscapes of Lisbon and the disarming nature of time slipping away constitute the real plot of *In the White City*.

Anyone coming to this film in search of conventional psychology will be sorely disappointed. As Tanner states, he is no longer interested in the "ideological" issues that occupied him in the period of his collaboration with John Berger. He is more concerned now with the poetic interplay of time and space at the heart of all cinema, from the most abstract to the most mundane. For Tanner—at least in this film—that interplay has replaced both psychological and sociological concerns.

This film is about the strange gray-white Vermeer light that vibrates through the interiors, or the mist that seems to hang over Geneva, where Paul's wife receives the letters and super-8 films that he sends her. It is a film about the loneliness of empty rooms and public spaces and the voyeurism of the stranger in a foreign place in which the quotidian is made strange.

Paul must inevitably lose Rosa and leave Lisbon. Tanner has foreordained the outcome in the film's *mise-en-scene*, in the camera movements that create a tension between foreground and background and emphasize Paul's distance from the world around him. Paul may be in Lisbon, but he is never of it. This is emphasized by Tanner's uncanny use of the super-8 footage.

Some links tie *In the White City* to Tanner's earlier works. The relationship between Paul and Maria is a more abstract version of the affair in *Middle of the World*, albeit without the fascination with class differences that grounded the latter film in a more conventional social and psychological reality. Passing references to the plight of Portuguese *gastarbeiters* echo the problems of Marie in *Jonah Who Will Be 25 in the Year 2000*. Paul is an archetypal Tanner "man in-between," caught in the webs of his own alienation. What makes *In the White City* different from Tanner's best-known works (in the U.S., at any rate), and of a piece with recent films, like *Messidor* and *Light Years Away*, is its obsession with the palpable nature of light, motion, time—in short, with the poetics of the image itself.

—G.R.

By Pat Aufderheide

If there's any American aesthetic ground of the kind staked out internationally by avant-garde film and social critics Jean-Luc Godard and Raul Ruiz, Jill Godmilow wants to claim it. The veteran independent filmmaker (*Antonia: Portrait of a Woman*; *The Popovich Brothers of South Chicago*) has made a movie that pushes at the limits of documentary—and the patience of audiences accustomed to the authoritative tone of most nonfiction film—on the subject of the Polish Solidarity movement and its reception in the West.

In a jaded film world where "avant-garde" usually means yesterday's novelty, her film *Far from Poland*, debuting at New York's Film Forum October 3, is provocative, awkward and contentious. It challenges the terms of documentary form.

The project began when the strike that brought Solidarity to the surface broke out as she was finishing a videotape, with Andre Gregory (*My Dinner with Andre*) on Jerzy Grotowski.

"Solidarity came at a time when I couldn't see how anything was going to change in the world," she told *In These Times*. "It seemed like a real self-limiting—non-violent—revolution. The entire population rejected the state's doublespeak. The wall of fear broke down, and the country turned inside out. What was paramount was their refusal to engage in either dominant political ideology—capitalism or communism.

"I thought that if this worked in Poland it could be the end of the empire in Eastern Europe, and then Cold War ideology on this side wouldn't work. I thought, 'This is finally the break in the Cold War.'"

So she tried to make a movie about that challenge to established political categories. Her first stumbling block came when she couldn't get a visa to return to Poland. Then, when she attempted to get Solidarity to send her footage, movement leaders sent her "canned" statements read by a public relations official.

The final version of the film is an interweaving of three sets of information. One is familiar to documentary viewers: the filmmaker interviews Poles, provides summary facts and uses film clips from newsreels and TV reports. Another uses an increasingly familiar documentary technique: re-enactment from written testimony. The third is outright fiction, domestic scenes in which Godmilow argues with her apolitical boyfriend about her obsession with the drama far away from her New York artist's loft.

The result is a kind of epistemological fugue, an interrelated set of answers surrounding, but not deciding, the question of how to understand a mass movement that rejects authority while demanding power.

Beyond categories.

None of the sets of information is delivered gracefully, and that is deliberate. As Godmilow tries to explain to her boyfriend, this spontaneous mass movement is beyond smug categories and sober judgment; the process of people grabbing grassroots power is messy. She likens this political

conflict to the artist's struggle to break out of existing cultural forms. "The task of culture is to maintain the status quo, and the task of art is to challenge it," she said. *Far from Poland* attempts to link the two struggles of the workers and of the artist, using unorthodox film techniques to challenge received wisdom on political change.

Right at the start, Godmilow draws the viewer into her problems of presentation. "Hey, Joe, we got another struggle for freedom and dignity," her boyfriend jeers. "You're using them [the Poles] to prove you're right and everyone else is wrong," he tells her.

Her Polish friends tell her any insightful film will feed anti-Soviet propaganda and make life harder for Poles. "Send food to Poland instead," they urge. In short, her domestic fiction sequences are a minor study in artistic alienation.

Godmilow also shows how she gathered information, including a lengthy sequence in which she works with Polish emigres to get Solidarity footage. The sinking feeling with which the viewer watches the dull material that finally arrives goes a long way to explain why *Far from Poland* is a film of dissatisfaction with traditional documentary.

The most successful moments in the film are the re-enactments, each of which comments both on the history of Solidarity and on the ways that nonfiction film plays with reality before offering it up as truth.

She uses three testimonies: the story of Anna Walentynowicz, whose firing triggered the Gdansk shipyard strike; the confessions of a Polish censor; and a composite of reports of Silesian miners who accepted overtime work at a moment of economic crisis. The re-enactments bring out not so much what these people say, but how they say it, and how we see it.

Anna's testimony, for instance, is a heroic tale of resistance to state authority and also the portrait of a sternly selfrighteous woman. The actress' power to draw us into one person's reality is pointed up by a sudden, jolting cutaway to footage of the real Anna.

The censor's remarks don't expose the existence of censorship—a well-known fact—but do reveal how those who do the work justify it to themselves. In case the viewer is distracted by the "revelations," the laugh track running under the man's narrative will bring attention back to the ironies of his style. Finally, the convincing re-enactment of a conversation between a Western journalist and a Silesian miner is delivered with a warning from the filmmaker that the event is synthetic, made up from several similar interviews.

No easy answers.

True to the tradition of the Western artists, for whom anarchism has often been a refuge from pol-

itical dogmatism, Godmilow confronts all authority, most obviously here politicians. Reagan's televised platitudes on the subject of freedom from Soviet domination run in the background to her quarrels with her boyfriend. Her dreams are full of conversations with Fidel, who warns her that Third World liberation movements may be endangered by Polish irresponsibility. And the film's take on the current Polish leadership is succinctly put in a fantasy ending in which Gen. Jaruzelski is put in jail after Solidarity's victory.

Far from Poland refuses to assume the role of information dispenser or armchair tour guide. It lacks manners, violating film etiquette in order to keep you from relaxing into familiar ideological postures. Because it delivers no answers, it can be frustrating to watch. But it can also engage and provoke, because it is open-ended. *Far from Poland* is a work-in-progress as a matter of conviction. Denying that knowledge is static, it also confirms that the mind of the viewer is as

full of images as the screen is.

Still, Godmilow is aware of the narrow audience for her explorations on celluloid, especially in a country so impoverished in forums for documentary.

"I may be speaking most directly to other filmmakers about our responsibilities and possibilities," she said. "As the film got more complicated and as I recognized that I was losing any chance of getting it on to public TV, the film became at least as much about film and political language as it is about Poland. I thought, 'I can't do anything about Poland, but I can open up the language a little.'"

Like the best of Godard, *Far from Poland* is film criticism and social criticism at the same time. It is successful because it is critical rather than cynical. If the result is sometimes awkward and even heart-on-sleeve, that may be the price of opening up the language a little.

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For more information: Beach St. Films, 135 Hudson St., New York, NY 10013, (212) 226-2462.

FILM

Poland without dogma



Solidarity heroine Anna Walentynowicz (top) and actress Ruth Maleczek (bottom) in Godmilow's *FAR FROM POLAND*



Far from Poland

Israel

Continued from page 13

67 Jewish residents of Hebron, the May 1948 defeat and death of Jews defending the Etzion Bloc kibbutzim south of Jerusalem are vividly implanted in her psyche. Unlike Salomeh, she was not present for these events that shape her consciousness. Born in Wisconsin, Blass came to Israel in 1972 "for religious Zionist reasons."

What is the difference, I ask Blass, between her passion for this land and that of a Palestinian who yearns for the farm he lived on before 1948?

"The difference is that one nation has roots in the area that are true and deep. The other's roots are very recent. The Jews, she says, have "returned to our ancestral homeland. No other nation can you point to and say they have been thrown out of their land and kept their sense of nationhood for 2,000 years. The fact that I was born in America is an interesting part of my personal history, but it doesn't tell me where my homeland is. We have an unmistakable similarity to the people who were here 2,000 or 3,000 years ago. We may be wearing jeans but we still say the same prayers, follow the same religion, speak the same language, are part of the same culture."

While Blass speaks of cultural continuity with the ancient past, I am struck by the extent to which these settlers have planted a little piece of modern America or Western Europe on the inhospitable West Bank soil.

Remove the armed guard at the gate and the fence topped with barbed wire, and Ofra's prefabricated detached homes—their well-watered front lawns cluttered with toys and bicycles—would present the archetypal image of a modest income U.S. commuter suburb. Like all West Bank Jewish settlements, no matter how small, it is connected by bus to an urban center, Jerusalem.

Of course, without the guard and the

fence, Blass would not feel safe in a small Jewish community surrounded by hostile Arab villagers. She could not calmly sit in a rocking chair, chatting with me and holding her youngest infant, while the other four children play outside, occasionally running in to raid the refrigerator. Ofra residents would not feel secure while they cultivate crops or work in their computer software business.

A few days before my visit, 27 settlers, including some key Gush leaders, were arrested as suspected members of the anti-Palestinian terror underground. All week, Israeli journalists had been quizzing Blass about those arrests. By now, she was so well prepared for the inevitable question—doesn't Gush's expansionist ideology make it a breeding ground for violence—that she raises the issue before I do.

"You wouldn't find here any serious advocate of the ideology justifying a violent underground," she asserted, because Gush Emunim is "against violence and against killing." Only later, when Israeli authorities released the suspects' names, did I learn that they included three of Blass' Ofra neighbors.

Self-critical Israelis.

Israel does not rest easily in its role as conquerer and occupying power. Each act of violence, repression or expropriation against Palestinians in the occupied territories produces an anguished response somewhere within this intensely self-reflective society. It is not unusual for a newspaper "letter to the editor" to say that "Jewish terrorism is a cancer and if this disease is allowed to persist, the very life blood of Jewish society will be drained" or for a mainstream public figure like Benvenisti to warn that Israel's West Bank policies may produce "a regime ominously similar to that of South Africa."

"For me it is unbearable that already for 17 years we keep 1.25 million Arabs under military government, bereft of civic and political status," says Alouph Hareven, a 30-year veteran of the Israeli

army and intelligence service. His views are shared by a sizable minority of Israeli Jews.

A smaller group of Israelis raise deeper questions about their government. Rabbi Jeremy Millgram, who coordinates Jewish-Arab student dialog groups at Jerusalem's Hebrew University, speaks, though with some hesitation, of wrongs that may be inherent in Zionism. In a highly militarized society he is a selective conscientious objector—unwilling to serve in Israel's Lebanon war and occupation.

Not that these are easy subjects for Millgram. As a one-hour interview turns into three hours of earnest discussion, he speaks slowly—sometimes pausing at mid-sentence, even mid-word—to rephrase his thoughts more precisely.

"For most Israelis the Arab population is almost an invisible population. There are certain professions that almost become exclusively Arab: the building trades, waiters, gas station attendants."

Moreover, "with the security problems we have, Arabs aren't simply invisible citizens, they are citizens who tend to be suspected.... An Arab who studies electrical engineering at this university...can't get any job in industry, because almost all the industry is either involved with military contracts or would like to be."

Housing segregation is almost universal. "There are certain built-in restrictions to integration. Housing is built for people who are immigrants or for people who have served in the army.... But what's more important than that is really a pattern of habitation. Most Arabs want to live in their villages. In the pattern of modern Zionism, most Jews came and built new communities and those communities were Jewish communities."

Millgram came to Israel from the U.S. as a teenager. Before his "aliyah" in 1981, he thought very little about Palestinians. (Aliyah, literally "ascent" in Hebrew, is the journey made by one who comes to Israel to be part of the Jewish homeland.) He was attracted by the egalitarian vision of socialist-Zionism, re-

pelled by a war-like and racially divided America.

Now, he sadly finds himself coming almost full circle. "In the States I was very much opposed to the war in Vietnam and upset about the black-white situation. And unfortunately, I think we've discovered here that those problems have pursued us."

The Israeli spirit of self-criticism is an important source of hope for change in Israel. Yet it may not be enough. For every hopeful sign, there is a countervailing source of despair.

Thus, the *Jerusalem Post* displayed one of Israel's greatest strengths when it condemned a top government official, Deputy Knesset Speaker Meir Cohen-Avidov, as a man "consumed by the racism and arrogance that inevitably infests those who would dominate another people or ethnic group, and squelch their dignity." Most American newspapers would hesitate to respond so firmly to any utterance, no matter how vicious, by one of our congressional leaders.

But Cohen-Avidov also represents a significant strand of Israeli thought. In the remarks that provoked the *Post*, he said that a "strong hand" must be used when Israel deals with the Palestinians. "I've lived with the Arabs and know them only too well.... I'd tear out the eyes and the guts of the murderers amongst them." As the *Post* noted, such "evil words have a constituency" and "reflect the malignancy that has fastened itself upon the increasingly convulsive public mind."

This lively and contentious Israeli democracy cannot drift unthinkingly toward apartheid. But there is an even more disturbing possibility: it could, step by step, in political decisions ratified at the ballot box after intense and angry debate, choose the path of repression. Many Palestinian Arabs and some Israeli Jews say this has already happened.

Steve Askin is Washington bureau chief for the *National Catholic Reporter*, in which a different version of this story appeared.

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Trudeau

Continued from page 24

and that the strip could be in nearly 800 papers when it resumes. "We haven't had to do a lot of arm twisting," Salem says.

At least 20 newspapers refused to bring back the comic strip when they were informed by UPS that it had to be run at the same size as it was before the leave of absence. In July UPS reduced the width of all its strips from 44 picas to 38.6 picas, but Trudeau insisted that Doonesbury return at the old width.

"We thought that given the amount of language in the strip and its importance to readers, we could not countenance that reduction," Salem says.

When I begged Salem to divulge the contents of the strip to be run on September 30, he offered the vaguest of hints: "A couple of the regular characters will be there as well as a major political figure."

The October issue of *Life* magazine offers some clues as to what the Doonesbury gang will be up to when it returns.

• Mike Doonesbury, who's always been a little shy with women, has dropped out of business school and taken a job with a Manhattan advertising agency. Mike is now married to J.J., the daughter of Joanie Caucus.

• J.J. has settled for a career in the "plastic arts."

• Marvelous Mark Slackmeyer has departed from the campus radio station. After a brief stint at a Long Island radio

station, Slackmeyer was hired by National Public Radio and given his own show, *All Things Reconsidered*. (At NPR in Washington, Slackmeyer's name now appears on *All Things Considered*'s daily line-up of story assignments and can occasionally be heard being paged over the network's internal public address system.) Expect Slackmeyer to dog President Reagan in the remaining weeks of the campaign.

• Uncle Duke, who always had a penchant for pharmacological intervention, has been released from jail where he was being held on cocaine charges. In a move that is sure to further destabilize the region, Duke has opened a medical school for Americans in Haiti. The Baby Doc College of Physicians includes a special center for the study of voodoo. Duke's Chinese sidekick Honey is the school's dean of women.

• Zonker Harris, who always wanted to be a freshman for life, has actually graduated from college. Zonker has apparently abandoned the tanning circuit and is applying to Uncle Duke's new medical school.

• B.D., the ace quarterback with right-wing politics, is now a pro. B.D. was drafted by the Dallas Cowboys, traded to the Tampa Bay Buccaneers for a bus and then traded again to the L.A. Rams.

• Boopsie, B.D.'s cheerleader girlfriend, has also ended up in southern California where she's pursuing an acting career. Boopsie is currently working on an aerobics video that will benefit Malibu mud slide victims.

• Joanie Caucus will be caring for her newborn baby when the strip resumes. She hopes to continue her work on the

staff of Congresswoman Lacy Davenport.

Some newspapers have come up with special promotions to welcome Doonesbury back. The *Minneapolis Star & Tribune* has paid for billboard advertisements that read: "Politicians, just when you thought it was safe...Doonesbury returns." And the *Miami Herald* is sponsoring Doonesbury Day in Miami on September 29, the day before the story returns to the papers. Billed as an official welcome, the day-long celebration will feature a Doonesbury character look-alike contest.

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Doonesbury

RIDES AGAIN!

I ADMIT IT: I'M A DOONESBURY junkie. When Zonker, Uncle Duke and Joanie Caucus disappeared from the comic strip page in January 1983, I developed a bad case of the shakes. For weeks I found myself turning to the comic pages of the local newspapers. I knew Doonesbury was gone, but it was sort of an involuntary action.

So when Doonesbury opened on Broadway in November 1983, I was overjoyed. The Great White Way was apparently not ready for the gang from Walden Commune. The Doonesbury musical lasted four months.

But out of the offices of Universal Press Syndicate (UPS) in Kansas City comes the one prayer we have of defeating Ronald Reagan in November: Doonesbury Rides Again! Ed Meese and the other members of Reagan's country club are probably sweating in their caviar.

After a 20-month sabbatical, the Pulitzer prize winning comic strip returns to newspapers on Sunday, September 30. Legions of strung out Doonesbury readers, newspaper editors and nervous politicians have anticipated its resumption. At least one public celebration is planned.

Gary Trudeau, the 35-year-old creator of Doonesbury, announced he was taking a sabbatical at the end of 1982 to provide new direction for the characters, most of whom live in a fictional Massachusetts commune. "It's time for them to make the journey from draft beer and mixers to cocaine and herpes," Trudeau declared in a UPS press release. (He refuses all interview requests.)

During his vacation from the strip, he became the proud father of twins born to his wife Jane Pauley, co-host of the NBC-TV *Today* show. Trudeau shifted his talents from the comic strip page to the Broadway stage.

Elizabeth Swados, who wrote the music for the Broadway show, is a friend of Trudeau's. She took some time out from rehearsals of the musical's touring company to talk about the return of the comic strip.

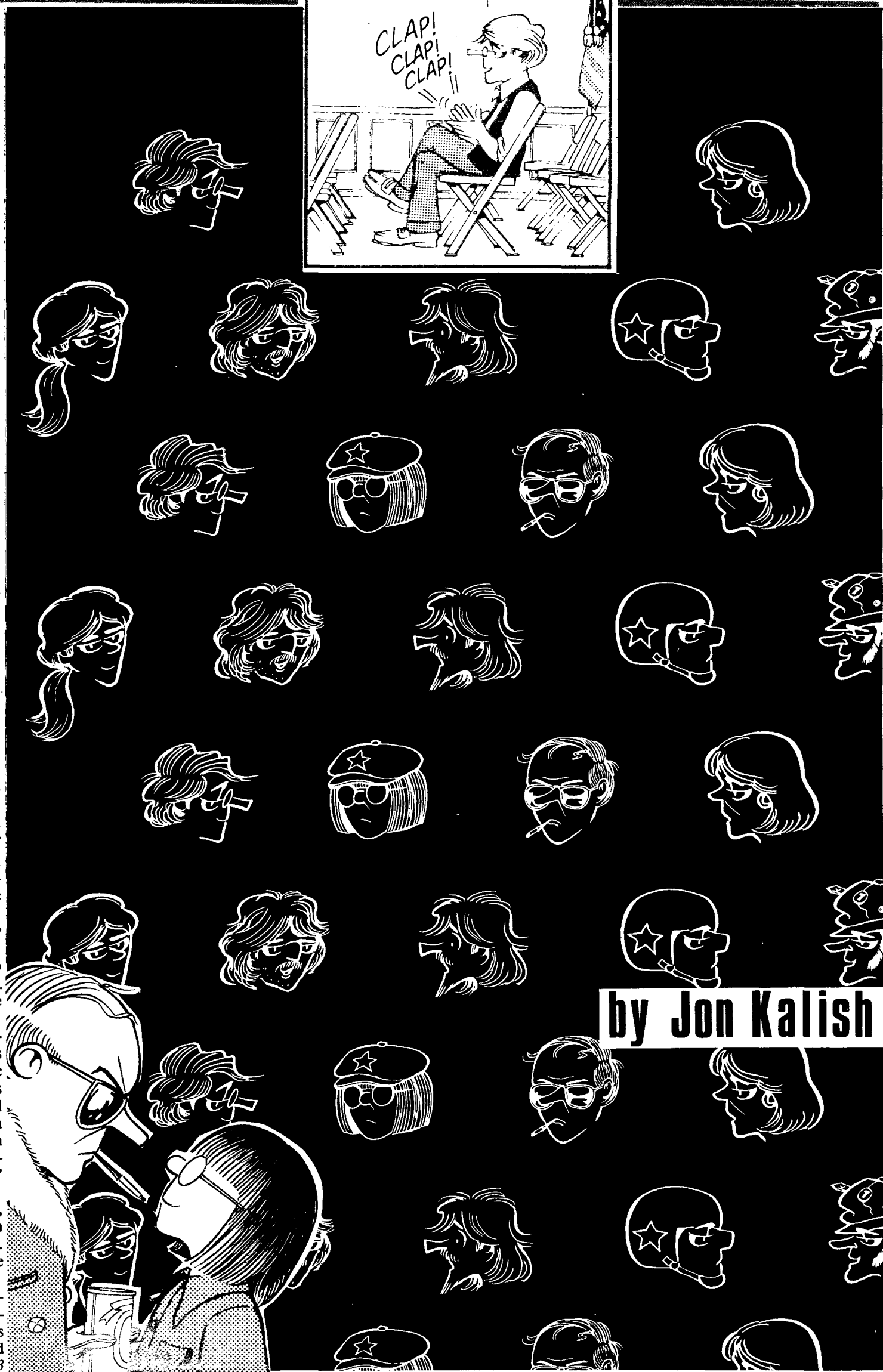
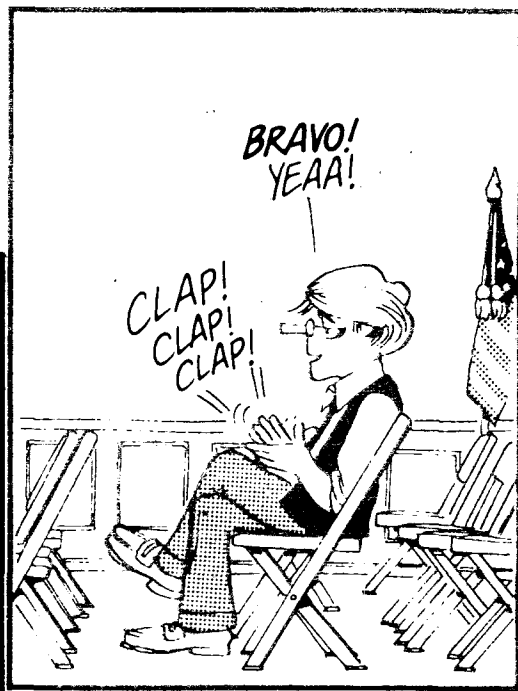
"I'm going to start buying the *Daily News* again so I can read it," she told me. "I hope to get a preview of it when I go over to Gary's house to write more songs. I peer over his shoulder. I think that the strip is very important."

Swados and Trudeau have collaborated on 18 new songs that she describes as "anti-Reagan." Swados writes the music and Trudeau writes the lyrics. The tunes are currently being presented as a musical review called "Rap Master Ronnie" at a Greenwich Village nightclub and will run through election day. "I know he's excited about the songs we've been writing," Swados says.

Trudeau's editor at UPS, Lee Salem, says the reclusive cartoonist began writing Doonesbury again in the summer. "When his material comes in, it's the highlight of my week."

Doonesbury was running in 726 newspapers in the U.S. and abroad when Trudeau went on sabbatical. UPS reports that number has already been surpassed

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by Jon Kalish