

and since the people doing the printing are fairly supportive of your cause, it's easy to discuss with them exactly what you want done. Whichever way you do it, on each issue with a cover price of 25p, at least 10p of that will go on printing. Running a fanzine is a difficult business, and a combination of high costs, distribution problems and a fiercely protective set of writers, brings up the real failings of the 'zine.

Being so closely connected to the scene they are writing about, groups are hugged to the breast of the editors, lauded as the Best Thing Since Breakfast, and then expected to fit into the role that the fanzine sees for them. Any progression is declaimed as a sell-out and the group are cast away or smothered with contempt. The groups move but the fanzines stand still. It's all too easy for the most potent and revolutionary of forms to become as reactionary as the 60s NME that shrieked with horror when Cliff wiggled his torso. *Kill Your Pet Puppy* says don't twitch your hips Clashboys!

Such an attitude has meant that the majority of fanzines have given rise to a self-consuming culture. 'Anarchist' groups such as Crass, products of fanzines, find themselves pandering to them and slowly being hemmed in, not wanting to disappoint the concrete foot (and brain) fans, and so not being able to break away from an increasingly narrow direction. Their inability and unwillingness to break away is interpreted as a condoning of the fanzine system.

Fanzines must not slip into this reactionary stance if they are to use their potentially explosive existence. The youth culture of the past 25 years has liked to think of itself as self-contained, whereas in reality the power lies with the multinational record companies and mainstream music press. Selling this culture back to the masses is the major consideration, and the mainstream press are able to act as a filter between company and consumer, distancing and containing any unwanted ideologies, couching them in the cotton wool of musicbiz rhetoric.

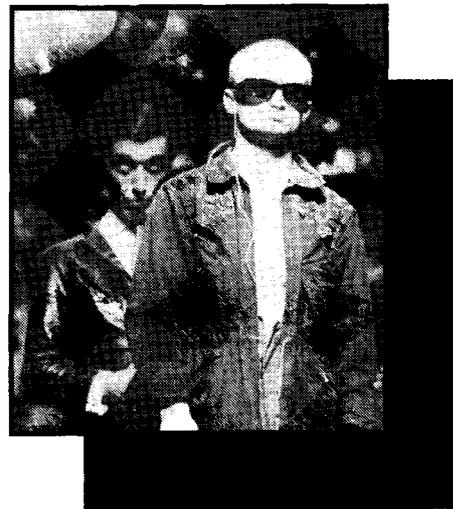
The fanzines have the power to change this. They are literally by, and for, the fans, and are providing the impetus for representation of the culture from within the culture itself. This is dangerous to the dominant ideology, challenging it directly and powerfully. Fanzines must be aware of this if they are to use their power to change the structure of the music business and in turn that of society itself.

## FRENCH CRIME MOVIES

David Nicholls

The release in Britain of Bob Swaim's *La Balance*, following the enormous art-house and video success of Jean-Jacques Beineix's *Diva*, and combined with some showings on BBC2 and Channel Four, hopefully means that British audiences are gradually being given better access to French crime movies. In retrospect, *Diva* had all the makings of a cult success – an obsessed youthful hero, off-centre and enigmatic characters, a romantic attitude towards art, and a self-conscious stylishness – but the distributors still took an initial chance in buying it. Films in foreign languages are ghettoised in this country as 'art', even when they are thoroughly commercial products in their country of origin, as are most French crime films; and distributors have the problem of selling them to an art-house audience. Commercial crime movies represent a form of populist cinema, with all the strengths and limitations that the term implies, capable of trying to enlist ideological support for the existing order or of expressing underlying doubts and opposition.

Vast numbers of crime films are made in France, and thrillers and comedies are the only domestic products which consistently challenge Hollywood domination of the box office. They are meat and drink to 'straight' professional directors, while providing younger film-makers with a means of entry to the industry; their familiar formulae enable polemicists, 'marginals' and directors with more theoretical interests to present their ideas and preoccupations to a wide audience. Since the days when anarchy and exotic conspiracy erupted into the everyday world in the classic serials of Louis Feuillade and others, the resultant heady mixture has acted as a distorting prism of hopes and fears. In the late 1930s, for example, the 'poetic realism' of Jacques Prévert and Marcel Carné, with its doomed working class heroes incarnated by Jean Gabin, expressed the disillusionment following the Popular Front. Under Vichy and the German occupation thrillers were promoted as an area of 'escapist' entertainment, distracting audiences from grim reality, but many of the films produced were sufficiently ambiguous to arouse long-standing controversy. After the liberation a cycle of police procedural films sought to



Scene from *Diva*, directed by Jean Jacques Beineix

reassure audiences about the police and erase memories of the war years. Then in the 1950s and early 1960s the exuberant often tongue-in-cheek thrillers in which Eddie Constantine played Lemmy Caution and other pulp heroes expressed the optimism of affluence, while the more 'realistic' (often thoroughly romanticised) gangster films articulated the darker apprehensions underlying the new prosperity.

Since 1968 the populism of crime movies has been predominantly a left populism. Under Pompidou and Giscard film after film used the familiar thriller theme of corruption to denounce, often soberly but sometimes hysterically, class justice, the police, the media, corrupt politicians – all the interlocking components of a repressive state. Strongly influenced by Costa-Gavras's *Z* and by *L'Attentat*, Yves Boisset's fictionalised version of the Ben Barka affair, these films showed an isolated hero (very rarely a heroine) – journalist, examining magistrate, or honest cop – battling against the system and either losing or winning but at the expense of his career. As always these French films were strongly influenced by Hollywood, specifically the paranoid crime films of the post-Watergate era. But whereas American films could attack localised corruption while implying that liberal values and the American constitution will win out in the end, in over-centralised 'Jacobin' France corruption at a local level inexorably indicts the whole state and political regime, and French films have no option but to

encompass broader political criticism.

A typical example, successful within its modest pretensions, is Etienne Périer's *Un Si Joli Village* (*Such a Pretty Village*, 1979), shown recently on Channel Four and based on a real case, which through the confrontation between an ageing examining magistrate and a village *patron* demonstrates the operation of class justice logically and soberly, while showing how the whole system is involved in a cover-up and how workers can sometimes have no alternative but to acquiesce. Such films (and this is only one among very many) explain and denounce but do not attempt to show collective resistance or how it could be organised. To move beyond the isolated, bloody-minded or just unfortunate heroes of the paranoid films and tackle politics directly through the thriller, raises grave problems.

Claude Chabrol's *Nada* (1973), shown recently on BBC2, the story of a group of anarchists who kidnap the American ambassador to France and are themselves slaughtered by the state, is based on a novel and screenplay by the leftwing crime novelist Jean-Patrick Manchette. The characters of the anarchists were inspired

by the members of a tiny group called *La Voix Communiste* of which Manchette was a member in the early 60s but, although Manchette's purpose was a critique of *gauchisme* (leftism), he thought that Chabrol had made the group ridiculous and omitted criticisms of French democracy and the role of the Communist Party.

Chabrol's purpose, in *Nada* and elsewhere, remains, like that of less familiar directors to British audiences, to use stereotypes with freedom and flexibility but without subverting them. Other directors have explored further into formal experimentation, with results that have been sometimes interesting, but more often pointlessly pretentious. Hugo Santiago's *Ecoute Voir* (1978), which has been shown twice on BBC2, illustrates both sides of the coin. Before disappearing up its own Borgesian pretensions, Santiago's film plays appealingly with the idea of Catherine Deneuve as a bisexual private eye on the trail on Sami Frey's insidiously charming villain, and thereby provides potentially an interesting and subversive female character in a genre in which women remain for the most part depressingly stereotyped. But unfortunately San-

tiago, falling into the trap of making a 'film about film', leads his character into an artistic cul-de-sac.

The more successful formal experiment Michel Deville's *Le Dossier 51* (1979), which demonstrates, using shifting first-person point of view, how the state or any powerful group can use information technology to gain power over individuals, shows one possible way forward for crime films in an era in which new technology is a vital social and political issue. But *La Balance* (the title is slang for 'informer'), the first really successful crime movie of the Mitterrand years, points in a different direction. Referring back in some ways to the gangster films of the 1950s, it portrays cops and large and petty criminals locked in an enclosed system of multiple betrayals against the 'realistic' background of the Belleville area of Paris, where everything is for sale and love and hope are the losers. Whether the betrayal theme has any wider significance remains to be seen: it is always liable to arise when too high expectations are invested in a reformist government. Let us hope that British distributors and TV stations give us the opportunity of finding out.

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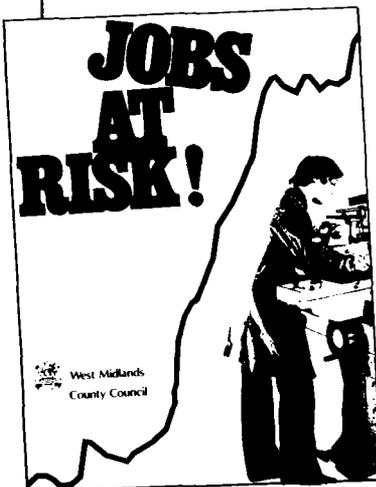
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## FEMINIST PUBLISHING

A look at women's publishing on the eve of the first international feminist book fair

Publishing in this country still retains many of the aspects of being a gentleman's profession: wine, although these days not always of the highest quality, flows at book launch parties, deals are negotiated over tasty lunches in Soho or candlelit dinners in private houses, while back in the office the employees, a large proportion of whom are women, work notoriously long hours for notoriously low pay, all for the privilege of 'working in publishing'. Yet gentleman publishers can no longer rely on family connections and good manners to get the authors, let alone the sales, that they want. Mass media advertising, which has spread to tube stations and the sides of buses as well as TV, and the kind of packaging that makes a book into a gift box to be unwrapped rather than a story to be read, aims to draw the readers; while higher and higher advances aim to draw the best-selling authors. Book fairs play an important role in the commercial business of publishing: Frankfurt, London, Cairo, Bologna are all fairs where people working in different aspects of the book trade, booksellers, packagers, distributors, editors and publishers come together to buy and to sell.

Buying and selling goes on at the 'alternative' book fairs too; but those fairs are aimed to a much greater extent at attracting the public, the politically conscious, at least, if not the general public. The annual Socialist Book Fair, held in November, is the ideal place to search for right-on, left-wing Christmas presents; this year the 3rd International Black and Third World Book Fair, with its exhibition and week of events, attracted 4,599 visitors. The recession notwithstanding, people are still willing to buy books.

This is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in the boom in feminist publishing. The last eight years have seen the formation and subsequent growth of four feminist publishing houses in London, The Woman's Press, Virago, Only women and Sheba; while there is Stramullion in Scotland and Falling Wall Press in the West Country. The Women's Press is now established as a successful small publisher with 30 new books a year, while Virago, famous for its green covered modern classics, is almost part of the establishment — it has now joined its sales and services to

Chatto, Bodley Head and Cape services group. Sheba publishes children's books, illustrated books and cartoon books as well as modern fiction and politics. The London women's bookshop, Sisterwrite, is now in its sixth year; two more are opening soon. Silver Moon in the Charing Cross Road and Virago's own bookshop. Among the feminist presses attitudes towards commercialism differ, as do methods of working, which range from attempts at collectivism to the traditional hierarchies of mainstream publishing houses. One thing is certain though: feminist books are selling, and this without the outrageous hype that pushes so many books on to the market.

In fiction alone, the feminist publishing houses have uncovered a wide range of contemporary British writers, including Pat Barker, Eve Croft, Zoe Fairbairns, Gillian Hanscombe, Jill Miller and Michele Roberts, and that without the shenanigans that surround the Booker Prize. Who says that British fiction is dead?

It has not taken mainstream publishing houses long to realise that the feminist presses have uncovered a market hungry for books and willing to pay for them. Routledge Kegan Paul recently launched Pandora, a feminist list aimed mainly at the growing women's studies market and Methuen is now picking up on the demand for fiction with a list launched this year made up in part of writers first published by the feminist presses.

The wealth of feminist literature now available will be celebrated by the 1st International Feminist Book Fair, which starts on 7 June in Jubilee Hall, Covent Garden. Like the other political book fairs, it is intended to show the public the variety and scope of the literature. Many British mainstream publishers will be participating. As organiser Carole Spedding said, 'It's not up to us as organisers of the Book Fair to say what is and what isn't a feminist book. It is up to publishers to decide whether any of their books are feminist or not. I think publishers often don't recognise that some of their books, particularly in the areas of autobiography and social history, are of particular interest to women; those books often get lost in the middle of a general list.'

Yet the Fair has another, no less important aim. This is to point up and, it is hoped, to redeem the predominantly white, Western, middle class bias of feminist literature published here. The

first, and major task for the organisers, was to raise money to bring over women from abroad, bearing in mind that the visitors should not come preponderantly from North America and Western Europe, although it is precisely those women who are most likely to have access to funding bodies. There will be writers from such countries as Zimbabwe, South Africa, Nigeria, Colombia, India and Egypt at the Fair.

As it is a Fair for readers as well as for publishers and booksellers, the accessibility of the visiting authors to the general public is of major importance. They will be at the Fair during the day, and some will be travelling round the country in the Feminist Book Week that follows the Fair. Events are being organised in 47 different towns in Britain and Ireland: these will include writing workshops, own language workshops, events for schoolchildren, readings and critical forums. The closing symposium of the Book Fair, in which women from different countries will debate the particular meanings for them of the words 'liberation' and 'women' will, perhaps, illustrate what has become a major aim of the Fair, that is, to break the hegemony of Western feminism and to realise and celebrate the possibility of sisterhood because of, rather than in spite of, our differences.

Sarah Lefanu

## FEMALE DESIRE: WOMEN'S SEXUALITY TODAY

Rosalind Coward  
Paladin, £2.95

## DESIRE: THE POLITICS OF SEXUALITY

Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, Sharon  
Thompson (eds)

Virago, £6.50

Spring is in the air, and Desire is in the bookshops. There has been a positive flood of work about the politics and history of sexuality, and its relationship to radicalism in the past few months.

Although sexuality continues to be central to the agenda of the women's liberation movement, we have increasingly returned to a notion of the perverse, the sexually forbidden, even if the norms have changed; the 'personal is political' has often come to mean a grim struggle to escape the patriarchal straightjacket of heterosexuality, and heterosexual roles in lesbian relationships. Has sexuality then, perforce, returned to the private sphere, as