

The Guerrilla Art Action Group

Action-Interview At WBAI Radio Station-NY

Primary Information LP

Formed by Jon Hendricks and Jean Toche in New York in 1969, The Guerilla Art Action Group were an ongoing assault on American myopia. Their inspirations were dada, Fluxus and experimental dance. Their enemies? Colonialism, the war in Vietnam, the corporate takeover of US society. Over seven years, sometimes in collaboration with black and Puerto Rican groups, they staged dozens of absurdist and kinetic provocations that included a service for dead babies in front of Picasso's *Guernica* and an anti-Rockefeller family protest in which they burst bags of beef blood and yelled "Rape!" in the lobby of the Museum of Modern Art.

First released in 1983 by Edizioni Lotta Poetica and Studio Morra, *Action-Interview At WBAI Radio Station-NY* is an invaluable introduction to the group's political concerns, rare sonic documentation of one of their happenings, and an arresting piece of agit-radio. Hendricks, Toche and early GAAG member Poppy Johnson are joined by Laurin Raiken of New York Free Theater in a sustained interrogation of an artist who is accused of being a businessman – "*What is more important to you? To sell your painting, or to help other human beings?*". These rhetorical questions are often followed by declamations such as, "*Art has become the supreme instrument through which our repressive society idealises its image*".

There are many echoes here – of Winston Smith being tortured in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, McCarthy's anti-Communist committee, Maoist struggle sessions, of the kangaroo court trials inflicted upon the counterculturalists in

Peter Watkins's *Punishment Park* (1971). The voices are cold, impersonal, almost robotic. Toche's accented English evokes baddie officers in a Second World War B movie. Silences of around 30 seconds between each bout of questions are punctuated by coughing, the rustling of paper, a chair squeaking. The last ten minutes – interminable, distressing, recalling Yoko Ono's solo work and Patty Waters's "Black Is The Color Of My True Love's Hair" – consists of Hendricks repeatedly yelling "*Help!*".

Action-Interview is of its age. At one point, after Raikin asks, "*Are you a prostitute?*", Toche asks, "*How often have you sold your wife in order to have a show?*" Later, GAAG would condemn the assumptions underlying these questions as "*bankrupt*" and "*sexist*". In other respects, this LP is strikingly contemporary: it urges listeners to be sceptical about the relationship between universities and industry, to challenge museums that claim to care about human rights but court predatory financiers as trustees, to think seriously about what culture is – or could be. It's an archival release that's also a mirror to the now.

Sukhdev Sandhu