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A Conversation about the Radical History Review: Former and Current Collective Members Reminisce

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A Conversation about the *Radical History Review*: Former and Current Collective Members Reminisce

Andor Skotnes, Moderator and Editor

For our first issue with Duke University Press and to commemorate nearly thirty years of publication of the *Radical History Review*, the *RHR* collective decided to host a discussion among several of its members and former members to reminisce about the history of *RHR*. This discussion was held on May 6, 2000, in Tamiment Library at New York University. Six panelists began the conversation, which then expanded over the next two hours to include several others. All are introduced in the edited account of this conversation below and are listed, with short profiles, at the end.

During our conversation, it quickly became obvious (we knew it already) that the history of the *RHR* is inextricably connected to the history of the Mid-Atlantic Radical Historians' Organization (MARHO) and the *Radical Historians' Newsletter*. Both are discussed at length below. Moreover, the *RHR* was a fundamental part of the broader movement for radical history—radical in the sense of uncovering popular experience and agency within the historical process, and radical in the sense of serving the cause of human liberation—that emerged from the New Left. More than anything else, we hope that the conversation below provides insights into radical history in the latter, broader sense.

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Thanks to Danny Walkowitz and Dave Kinkela for organizing the conversation, and Karen Sotiropoulos for transcribing it.

Introductions

Andor: Welcome, everybody, to this discussion of radical history and the *Radical History Review*. To start out, I'd like to ask everyone to introduce themselves.

Robert: Robert Padgug. I was trained as an ancient historian, and I was teaching at Rutgers in the 1970s. I got involved in the *RHR* in 1973 or 1974 when it first came out as a pamphlet. Graduate students at Rutgers got me involved. I was involved through the late '70s and early '80s, when I changed careers.

Ellen: I'm Ellen Noonan. I got involved in the *Radical History Review* in the summer of 1996 when I was hired as managing editor. I was managing editor for two years, and then I joined the *RHR* collective.

Roy: My name is Roy Rosenzweig. I was at the founding MARHO meeting, which I think was in January 1973 at Fordham University. That fall I moved to Boston and worked with Jim O'Brien and the *Radical Historians' Newsletter*. Then in the fall of '75, Molly Nolan, sitting to my left, moved to Boston and brought MARHO to town. I became more directly involved with MARHO starting in 1975.

Molly: I'm Molly Nolan. I'm one of the people who helped organize that first founding MARHO meeting. I was part of the group that then decided to publish a newsletter and run forums, and then to transform the newsletter into the journal that became the *RHR*. I worked with the New York group until 1975, as Roy said, then I spent five years in Boston working with and helping to set up MARHO there. Then in 1980, I came back to the city and for a few years ran the forums that used to be an integral part of what MARHO did.

Danny: I'm Danny Walkowitz. I self-identified as a member of MARHO—as a number of people who were young historians in the 1970s did—and attended the forums that people like Molly and others ran at John Jay College through most of the '70s. I moved to New York in 1978, and I think it was around 1980 that I actually joined the collective. I have been involved with it ever since.

Andor: I'm Andor Skotnes, and I joined in the early 1990s. I'm going to moderate this discussion.

The Beginnings of MARHO and *RHR* as Counterinstitutions

Andor: To start out, let me ask some of the old-timers [laughter] to talk about how the Mid-Atlantic Radical Historians' Organization and the *Radical History Review* got started, and what they looked like in the beginning.



Molly Nolan

“In creating this [MARHO collectives], it was really a support network for how people would operate day to day as graduate students, as junior faculty, in designing courses, in providing really meaningful intellectual-political events for a broader audience.”

Molly: Well, they started out of this conference that we organized at Fordham in January 1973. The exact origins of this conference are not entirely clear. Part was from the radical caucus in the American Historical Association [AHA], and from Jim O’Brien’s *Newsletter* [*Radical Historians’ Newsletter*], and from the feeling that we should try to do something locally to bring people together. That was a time when the movement was in some considerable disarray, when the bottom had fallen out of the City University system, when people were not sure they were going to get jobs, and when people were most unsure what it meant to identify as a radical historian. Reading over some of the early issues, I was struck by how much people were absolutely unclear about what being a radical historian might mean, not merely in terms of the kinds of subjects they would teach and write on, but exactly how you would do it, what kinds of theory you would employ, what your stance toward the university would be.

So the idea was to get people together at the conference to at least talk about some of these issues. Out of that came the sense that we needed both an ongoing organization, MARHO, and some kind of means of communication, this very flimsy newsletter which I used to hammer out on my typewriter. Then this newsletter became, in its second year, the *Radical History Review*. It still very much had a homemade format, in which individuals would type out articles, and we would lay them out ourselves, and then get someone to run them off.

Roy: In the late 1960s there had been this radical caucus in the AHA. I always saw MARHO as a counterinstitutional movement that was giving up on working within the AHA—that we should have our own organization rather than be this caucus within the existing professional organization. My recollection is that this was a moment of counterinstitutions, and we felt we should set up our own institutions. In the early 1970s, there was less interest than there had been in the 1960s in challenging within the AHA. As a lot of people know, in 1969 there had been this serious challenge to the leadership of the AHA. Staughton Lynd had run as a radical candidate. And there was this famous meeting when Gene Genovese opposed the motion to condemn the Vietnam War, and the motion was defeated—narrowly defeated.

This was a key moment. I always thought of it as the moment after which people were less interested in working within the AHA.

The Origins of the *Radical Historians' Newsletter*

Andor: We're bringing Jim O'Brien in here, too, because Jim was part of this founding process. Jim, would you introduce yourself?

Jim: I'm Jim O'Brien. I've been involved with the *Radical Historians' Newsletter* since 1970. I was a graduate student at Madison, Wisconsin, and moved to Boston the next year. The *Newsletter* has been put out since then.

Just a footnote on something Roy and Molly talked about. The history of Boston can be divided into the period before and the period after Molly moved there. [Laughter.] She came and created a series of forums. Through them I met Roy and a number of other people—Warren Leon, Jean-Christophe Agnew, Betsy Blackmar, Carol Lasser, Gary Kornblith, Gary Gerstle, Liz Lunbeck—a whole series of people. Molly Nolan catalyzed radical historians' activities in Boston. And that's where the MARHO group formed that had responsibility for running the *Newsletter* for several years.

Andor: Jim, could you sketch the origins of the *Radical Historians' Newsletter*?

Jim: The *Newsletter* started out as the newsletter of the radical caucus of the AHA.

I was not at the AHA convention in 1969 in Washington that Roy talked about. I was at the 1970 AHA in Boston, and the 1971 AHA in New York. I found the difference between these two conventions very striking. In Boston in 1970, a huge number of people came to the business meeting, and a series of resolutions to democratize the executive council, to oppose the Vietnam War—I forget what else—were heatedly debated. There was a sense of a real movement being present at that convention. It happened that I wore a coat and tie, and I felt kind of out of place, while this movement activity was happening on the surface at the convention, though underneath people my age were encountering the job market, which had become terrible that year. So the economic power in the profession was being wielded at the convention by people who didn't seem to belong culturally in the social atmosphere of the convention as I experienced it.

The 1971 AHA convention in New York was radically different. Learning from the previous year, I didn't wear a coat or a tie to that convention, and I felt very out of place there. [Laughter.] The business meeting was much smaller, much less contentious. It seemed like the social atmosphere was now reflecting the real power at the convention. The one thing that felt good was that the Progressive Labor Party was there, and they had a table near the radical caucus table. They had, so far as I know, the worst long-playing record ever made. There were really terrible songs, and they played them pretty loud where most convention-goers had to pass by. I felt the convention-goers were being punished.

So for the first few years, the *Newsletter* was put out by the radical caucus. But by 1971 the caucus was becoming less and less real, and it became less and less real—it *was* just a name. Then we put the *Newsletter* out without having a named publisher. And then, as MARHO became established as a national organization, the newsletter became the newsletter of MARHO. Finances were combined. Carol Lasser was actually the coordinator of the *Newsletter* for a couple of years before she left Boston.

Andor: By this time the *RHR* had evolved into a journal and was published mainly out of New York MARHO, and the *Radical Historians' Newsletter* became a MARHO publication out of Boston?

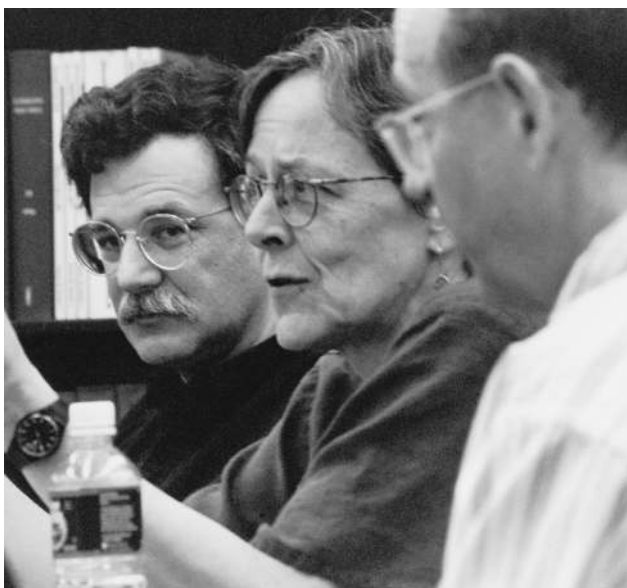
Jim: Right.

Roy: *RHR* was moving around between collectives.

Collectives, Support Networks, Struggles, and Fun

Roy: In terms of this notion of counterinstitutions, people would refer to the Boston *collective*, the New York *collective*, the Providence *collective*, and the New Haven *collective*. These different collectives existed at different moments in time, but the notion was that we were creating our own institutions.

Molly: In creating this, it was really a support network for how people would operate day to day as graduate students, as junior faculty, in designing courses, in providing really meaningful intellectual-political events for a broader audience.



**Roy Rosenzweig, Molly Nolan,
and Jim O'Brien**

Robert: I came in just a little later than that, when the collectives were already going, especially here in New York. My experience is here in New York. For me it was a way of connecting up with people who had similar interests, since I was in a field, Greek and Roman history, where radical history didn't much exist—well, maybe 1880s radical history was present [laughter] although some people eventually caught up with poststructuralism and Foucault. So for me it was a way to connect up with my interests from the antiwar movement in the 1960s. It was also a way to fight all the battles—we were always struggling with one issue or another, issues like racism. It was obvious then, as I guess it's obvious now, that we were mostly white people. One of the struggles in the early years of *RHR* was around how to involve ourselves more in minority interests, and how to involve minorities more with us.

I also remember it being a lot of fun, as it always is when you're working on something that's new that you're putting together yourself. I can remember when we decided to make the journal a technologically superior publication. We designed formats and all, and I remember going over to the people who were doing paste-ups for us, and leaving there with things falling off the pages. [Laughter.] It was fun to do something new. The fun wasn't just on the radical historical side, it was fun learning how to do a journal and working with people.

Danny: I, too, thought that part of the value of the organization for a lot of people was its connection to the profession as a counterinstitution. A whole lot of time was spent in MARHO doing things like running parties for people in our social base. Enormous energy went into it, but the highlight of the whole bloody AHA or Organization of American Historians (OAH) convention was going to the MARHO party on Saturday. Association with the journal represented a kind of counter-identity that you felt, and a support network that you had. Even if you did get a job, there was often an inhospitable environment in much of the academy.

Forums, Conferences, and Organizing

Andor: In the early years, the journal wasn't so much the focus of collective activity?

Roy: No. There was a tension over this, how much the journal should be the focus. That's one of the things we argued over. The forums and meetings were at least as important in the early years and maybe more so. Mike Wallace worked in New York on forums, and we had a lot of forums in Boston, as Molly and Jim are suggesting. So these other kinds of activities were at least as important. After all, *RHR* was initially a newsletter, which didn't require as much energy. Gradually, over time, the journal grew, and these other activities shrunk. However, for a long time we put a lot of energy into organizing and outreach in the profession. I had the job for a bunch of years as regional associates coordinator, or something like that. [Laughter.]

Molly: A dangerous sign of bureaucracy!
[Laughter.]

Roy: And this involved writing letters to our far-flung people who were like, “Oh, I’m starting a group in X place.” I don’t think we had the right vision of how to organize those people, but certainly a lot of energy went into that. In effect, that was about creating our own organization. We just didn’t have the resources to do it. I naturally think, god, this would have been so much easier with e-mail and things like that. Given that we were poor and didn’t have money and support staff, we could have done this much more easily with some kind of communications technology.

Molly: The forums in New York were initially every other week, and then became once a month. It was really a very big operation in the mid-1970s. It really did become a very important part of people’s political/intellectual/social life and identity, a way of keeping up to date on history and what was going on politically. There was also a yearly conference—I think we abandoned the conference sometime in the late 1970s, perhaps early 1980s. But there were big annual conferences.

Roy: The one in New York in 1977 was the politics of culture conference.¹ That was a huge, huge conference. There we were sort of victims of our success. It became a huge job to organize this conference. What I understand better now is that when the AHA or the OAH do conferences, they have a staff of people doing them. We were doing this all with volunteer labor.

There was also a very successful MARHO conference on the economic crisis of the 1930s. That was in 1976.

MARHO Forums

1973

- Kirkpatrick Sale, “A History of the New Left”
- Marty Dann, Pat Levitt, and Tony Scott, “Taking History out of the University”
- Pat Peppe, “Events in Cuba”
- Herbert Gutman, “Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America, 1815–1919”
- Jonathan Katz, “Gay American History”
- George Frangos, “History of EAM”
- Leo Hurwitz, Screening and discussion of his film *Native Land*

1974

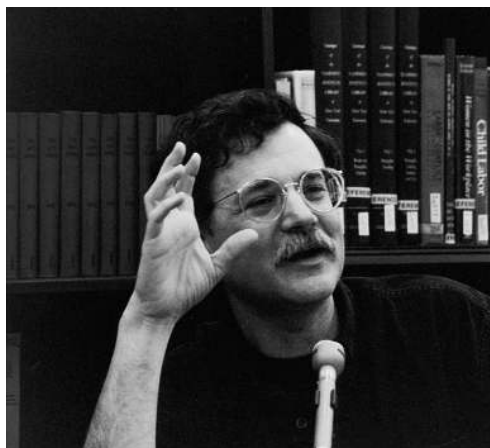
- Marvin Gettleman, “Nineteenth-Century American Radicalism”
- The Newt Davidson Collective, “The Political Economy of the City University of New York”
- Elizabeth Fee and Moe Levitt, “Towards a Marxist History of Science”
- Richard Andrews, “Revolutionary Paris”
- Eugene Genovese, “The Gospel in the Quarters: Christianity and Slavery”
- John Chiardia, “Antonio Gramsci: A Reinterpretation”
- Mary Hartman, “Bourgeois Murderesses in Nineteenth-Century England and France”
- Phyllis Andors, “Women in Revolutionary China”
- Mark Naison, Paul Hoch, Jack Scott, and Phil Shinnick, “Towards a Marxist Interpretation of Sports”
- Stanley Aronowitz, “The Working Class and the Social Totality: Marxist Philosophy of History”
- Herbert Aptheker, “Anti-racism in the United States”
- David Hunt, “Villagers at War: The NLF in My Tho, 1965–67”
- Sarah Elbert and Ted Rosengarten, “Marxist Oral History”
- Victoria de Grazia, “Fascism and Capitalism in Mussolini’s Italy”
- Ernie Mkalimoto, “Nationalism, Socialism, and the Black Working Class: Garveyism and the Left, 1919–1930”
- Alan Wolfe, “The Development of the Capitalist State in the Twentieth Century”
- Mary Ryan, “Women in Films of the Twenties”: screening and discussion of *Our Blushing Brides*
- Barbara Engel, “Revolutionary Women in Nineteenth-Century Russia”

1975

- Robert Padgug, "Class Structure of Ancient Greece"
- Ronald Radosh, "Prophets on the Right: The Right Wing and American Foreign Policy"
- Marvin Surkin and Dan Georgakas, "Detroit, the Working Class, and the Next American Revolution"
- Paul Buhle, "American Marxism: Theory and Practice, 1900–1940"
- Harry Braverman, "Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century"
- Peter Linebaugh, "Highway Robbers and Capital Accumulation: The Development of British Banking"
- Screening and discussion of the film *The History Book*
- Louis Menashe, "The Social Foundations of Leninism"
- Renate Bridenthal, "Something Old, Something New: European Women between the Two World Wars"
- Judith Stein, "The Political Economy of Racism"
- Dorothy Thompson, "The Missing Presence: Women in Radical Politics in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Britain"
- Peter Biskind, "The Politics of Power in *On the Waterfront*"
- Frank Bonilla and Ricardo Campos, "The History of Puerto Rican Migration"
- Michael Weisser, "The Roots of Rural Anarchism in Spain: A Critique of the 'Primitive Rebel' Thesis"
- Stanley Aronowitz, Phil Nicholson, and Mike Wallace, "Union Activity: A Response to the Fiscal Crisis? Some Historical and Contemporary Perspectives"
- Michael Greenberg and Robert Mutch, "Marxist Approaches to Colonial U.S. History"
- Gerald Sider, "Christmas Mumming in Newfoundland, 1800–1975: A Marxist Tale of Cultural Change"

1976

- Mari-jo Buhle and Ellen Dubois, "American Feminists and Nineteenth-Century Radicalism: Background for the Modern Left"
- Michael Wood, "Latin American Literature and the Politics of the Twentieth Century"



Roy Rosenzweig

"I guess around '78 there is this move to a more professional-looking journal that looks like a journal. I can remember meeting at Mark Naison's house. I had the job of getting the printer's estimates for different formats of the journal and passed around various examples of things. And people said, 'Oh yeah, this looks like a journal, let's go with this size.' That is basically what the journal has been like since then, and it raised the stakes."

Molly: And there was one on teaching, too, that focused on problems of radical pedagogy.

Robert: We also had—no one's mentioned it and I don't know how many of us were there—a retreat for members of the collectives in, I believe, 1979.

Roy: We had two of them at the Berkshire Forum in western Mass. in 1978 and 1979.

Robert: I became really friendly with Mike [Wallace] and others who I hadn't known that well. Some of us left some of the meetings and played volleyball or something. So we did have a lot of fun. We also had, as with any group, a lot of tensions. I think there were a lot of tensions between the various collectives, although I don't remember what they were about—it's been so long.

Jim: In meetings in Boston, there would constantly be references to “New York says this, New York says that.” [Much laughter.]

Molly: For me it created a total identity crisis since I was both New York and Boston.

Roy: Some of the tensions were over political issues, and some were over inevitable personality issues. We did this communism issue of the journal—I don’t remember the date of this [*RHR*, issue 23, Spring 1980]. In doing this issue we played out the long-term tensions of the left. What interpretation of Stalinism was to be made?—things like that. There were some fairly serious, politically inflected arguments and divisions over what the political interpretation in the issue was going to be, and what articles would be included. I’d say we had a lot of fun, and then there were some very serious tensions.

Robert: I remember one meeting here in New York when someone gave us an hour-long lecture in the nastiest possible way on how we had to be nicer. [Much laughter.]

National Dimensions

Roy: We had, in the ’70s into the early ’80s, quarterly meetings that were two-day, all-day meetings. We met in Boston, we met in Providence, we met in the Berkshires at the Berkshire forum place—we met there twice. It took a huge amount of time and the level of commitment was quite high. And the local collectives were meeting monthly, maybe weekly.

[Mike Wallace joins the conversation. He was an early member of MARHO and continues to be active with the *RHR* today.]

Mike: But they were involved in projects, so a conference may well be the function

- E. P. Thompson, “Marxism versus Althusserian Idealism: A Defense of Humanism, Moralism, and Empiricism”
 Ellen Rosen, “Peasant Socialism in America: The Socialist Movement in Oklahoma”
 Tom Forstner, “Toward a Marxist Theory of Counterrevolution”
 Molly Nolan, “The Roots of Radicalism in German Social Democracy, 1890–1914”
 Screening and discussion of *Ways of Seeing*, four short films by John Berger
 Joan Kelly-Gadol, “Marxism and Feminist Theory”
 Stuart Ewen, “Captains of Consciousness: The Emergence of Modern Advertising and Mass Consumption in the 1920s”
 K. P. Mosely, “Recent Trends in African Peasantries: Malthusian Constraints or Marxian Contradictions?”
 Eric Foner, “Irish-American Radicalism”
 Francis Moulder, “China, Japan, and the Modern World System”
 Wilbur Miller, “Police and the Social Order in London and New York, 1840–1870”
 Elinor Burkett, “In Dubious Sisterhood: Race, Class, and Sex in Colonial Peru”
 Eric Perkins, “Recent Views on American Slavery”
 Ann Snitow, “The History of Romantic Love”

1977

- Steve Volk, “From Allende to Pinochet: Chilean Capitalism in Crisis”
 Gary Kulik, “Resistance to Industrial Capitalism in Pawtucket, 1824”
 Deborah Hertz, “Nobles, Burghers, and Jews in Eighteenth-Century Berlin”
 Immanuel Wallerstein, “Crisis of the Seventeenth Century?”
 Fred Ciporen, “The Development of the Concept of Personality in the 1920s”
 Carol Turbin, “Feminism and Class Consciousness in Women’s Trade Unions, 1860–1875”
 Jim Wunsch, “White Slavery, Big Business, and the Minimum Wage”
 Marilyn Arthur, “Marxism and Matriarchy: The View from Antiquity”
 David Mandel, “Revolutionary Consciousness among Factory Workers in Petrograd, 1917”
 David Gordon, “Class Struggle and Urban Development: A Marxist Approach to the History of U.S. Cities”

- Eleanor Leacock, "Women in 'Primitive Communist' Societies: The Anthropological Record"
- Linda Gordon, "The Politics of Reproduction"
- Claus Offe, "Repression and Consent in West Germany"
- Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, "The Museum of Modern Art as Late Capitalist Ritual: A Marxist Iconographical Analysis"
- Philip Foner, "José Martí, U.S. Imperialism, and the Cuban Revolution"
- Vicente Navarro, "Class Struggle and the Welfare State: A Marxist Analysis of the Evolution of Western Medicine"

1978

- Donna Haraway, "Animal Behavior and Human Nature: A Feminist History of Human Engineering, 1920–1978"
- Screening and discussion of Fernando Arrabal's film *Guernica*
- An evening of analysis of the French elections with a panel of left historians, political economists, and left groups and the audience, rebroadcast on radio station WBAI
- Robert Bremer, "Problems in the Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism"
- Jeff Rice and Larry Yarak, "Underdevelopment and Political Change: The Assante State in the Nineteenth Century"
- Ervand Abrahamian, "Strengths and Weaknesses of the Iranian Working Class, 1940–1978"
- Bertell Ollman, "Current Repression in the Universities"
- Margaret Randell, "Women in Cuba since the Revolution"
- Mary Dore and Anne Bohlen, screening and discussion of their films *Children of Labor* and *With Babies and Banners*
- David Noble, "The Politics of Machine Design: A New Challenge for Labor"

1979

- Alan Wolfe, "Is America Turning Right?"
- Muriel Diman-Schein, Martin Duberman, Robert Padgug, and Rayna Rapp, "Sex in History"
- Mike Turk, "Academics Are Unemployed Too: An Analysis of, and Some Proposed Solutions to the Job Crisis"

largely of one of those groups. That would be, again, an enormous amount of planning time.

I also want to touch on this identification of people with the organization who we never laid eyes on. There were people who would start little collectives. There were MARHO collectives in Salt Lake City—

Danny: There was one in Michigan for a long time.

Mike: —and they would show up at conventions. We had no contact at all, but they talked about themselves as MARHO people. They had no idea what the acronym meant. At some Guggenheim get-together a couple of days ago, there was a whole series of people who had just gotten a Guggenheim. And this clutch of MARHO-niks—Bob DuPlessis was there and several other people who I had never laid eyes on, but who had been to forums, who had been to conferences, who had a sense of this support network business. It went beyond simply the people who were in the inner groups themselves. There were people who were on their own in Wyoming, and one of the reasons they had this fictive sense of community was precisely because they were so isolated. But to believe they were part of this larger enterprise was a source of empowerment and it was sustaining.

John Jay College

Danny: When did the journal start camping out over at John Jay College?

Mike: The first forum was I think in 1973, and I opened the building. John Jay College had not yet moved in. The first event that took place at Jay was the forum which had

Kirkpatrick Sale talking on the history of SDS. So it was a founding moment for John Jay, and it was pretty soon after that that I just moved *RHR* things into my office.

Danny: I remember half your office used, then you had the windowless, but fairly nice side office next to you where others would camp when they were working on the journal.

Mike: I actually had three offices, which was quite a scam, and John Cammett had *Science and Society* on the other end of the hall.

Robert: You had an entire left world going there. The first academic gay conference in the United States took place there, even though we had a bomb scare.

Roy: What year was that?

Robert: 1975, I believe. An organization called the Gay Academic Union (GAU) that exploded in male-female hatred. [Laughter.]

Mike: I asked Jonathan Katz, who I had worked with in GAU—I think Liz [Fee] and I were the only two straight people in the organization. So I asked Jonathan to give a talk. He gave a forum on his book (which was the first thing in that area of study) before it was published. So we established that intersection between this new work in gay history and the journal from the get-go. There were all those interstices. People would move back and forth from forum events, then would eventually publish in the journal, so the linkages that came out of those things were very important.

Roy: It was this remarkable thing that Joe Murphy—this guy who considered himself on the left—became the chancellor of

Prexy Nesbitt, “Southern Africa and the U.S. Anti-apartheid Movement: An Historical Perspective,” plus a screening and discussion of the film *South Africa—The Rising Tide*

Denuncia, screening and discussion of the film *The Traitors*

Blanche Cook, “Socialism, Feminism, and Sexuality: The 1920s and the 1980s”

David Edgar, “Fascism and Racism in England: The Politics of the National Front,” plus a screening and discussion of the film *Blacks Britannica*

Perry Anderson, “Reflections on Thompson and Althusser”

Giovanni Jervis, “The Politics of Psychiatry in Italy since 1968”

Labor Theater, “Ragged Trousered Philanthropists,” a musical adaptation by J. Bentley Campbell, directed by C. R. Portz

Alejandro Bendana, “The Revolution in Nicaragua: A History of the Sandinista Liberation Movement”

Maxine Bailey, “Sexual Politics and Afro-American Feminism”

Screening and discussion of the film *Northern Lights*

Richard Broadman and Roy Rosenzweig, Screening and discussion with the producers of the film *Mission Hill and the Miracle of Boston*

1980

Anson Rabinbach, “The Age of Exhaustion: A Social History of Fatigue”

Fred Halliday, “Crisis in Afghanistan”

Stanley Aronowitz, Sam Farber, Ruth Messinger, and Alan Wolfe, “Electoral Strategies for the 1980s: Should the Left Support the Democratic Party?”

Nora Sayre, “Cold War Cinema”: screening and discussion of the films *I Was a Communist for the FBI* and *My Son John*

William Appleman Williams, “The Historical Roots of the New Cold War,” with a comment by Harry Magdoff

John Duggan, “The War in Eritria: A Firsthand Report on Three Movements”

Edward Said, “Knowledge of Other Societies: The Case of Islam”

Jack Avila, “The Bolivian Coup”: screening and discussion of his film *Chuquiago*

- Bill Tabb and Alice Amsden, "The Current Economic Crisis"
 Joel Rogers, David Gordon, and Mimi Kelber, "Toward 1984: Reflections on the Election"
 Mihailo Markovic, "Is There a Crisis in Marxism?"
 E. P. Thompson, "European Nuclear Disarmament"
 E. P. Thompson, "Homage to Tom McGrath"

1981

- Representatives of Oxfam and NACLA, "The Situation in El Salvador: A Panel Discussion"
 Theda Skocpol, "Classes and the State in the New Deal"
 Daniel Singer, "The Road to Gdansk"
 Andre Gunder Frank, "The Crisis"
 Lenny Quart and Al Auster, "Hollywood and Vietnam: A Retrospective Look"
 Eric Breitbart and Gilda Zweman, "Management Goes to the Movies"
 David Paskin, screening and discussion of the film *Tighten Your Belt, Bite the Bullet*
 Maria Morena Alves, "Contemporary Politics in Brazil"
 NYCOSH, screening and discussion of films banned by OSHA, *Worker to Worker* and *Can't Take It No More*
 Sheila Rowbotham, "Changing Approaches to Socialism"
 Herbert Schiller, "Who Knows: Information in the Age of Fortune 500"
 Blanche Cook, Sigmund Diamond, and Bill Preston, "How the Right Plans to Throttle Freedom of Information and What the Left Can Do about It"

1982

- Sherry Gorelick, "City College and the Jewish Poor"
 Erik Barnouw, "Film as a Medium for the Historian"
 Steve Nelson, "Experiences in the Old Left"
 Elizabeth Wilson, "Women and the Welfare State"
 Jim Green and Anna Davin, "The History Workshop Movement"
 Charles Musser, "Before the Nickelodeon: The History of Early U.S. Cinema"

CUNY. He was a reader of the *RHR*. We were squatting—we had been illegally occupying this space at John Jay for some time. Then all of the sudden this chancellor came along and said, "John Jay? That's where that great journal the *Radical History Review* is." [Laughter.]

Summing up the Early Years

Roy: I would say that we have plenty of failures, but one of the successes of MARHO and all was creating a support network for each other. One of the results was that, in the 1970s, when a lot of people left the profession, radicals were more likely to stay around. This partly accounts for their influence in the historical profession today. Well, why did they stay around? Were they more likely to get jobs? There were a bunch of reasons. One was the support network. You could say that they were the better historians, and you could also say that the alternative careers were less appealing to radicals. At Harvard, people were saying, "Oh, go work for the CIA" or something like that, and this wasn't an appealing career option for me. [Much laughter.] But I think that the existence of this intellectual support network is one of the great successes of MARHO and *RHR*.

Ellen: I think that still operates today. In my experience with *RHR*, that has been its real value for me. I'm in graduate school right now. I'm finishing up my Ph.D., and I'm also working for the American Social History Project. As someone who's choosing a career as a historian, but not in an academic department and not in a strictly academic position, *RHR* has been a lifeline giv-

ing me a certain network and a community of people. If I were to do an academic job, or if I were more involved in the department here, I might work through that. But since I'm not, the *RHR* has really filled that in for me. So I think that's still operating now, even for people operating outside of academia. We have a lot of people in the collective who are not working in academic jobs.

Andor: That appears to be have been fairly constant over three decades now.

Roy: In terms of historical context—we're presumably in the business of providing historical context [laughter]—I think there are two key historical contexts that mark MARHO and the *RHR* in comparison to our predecessors, *Radical America* (which Jim worked on) and *Studies on the Left*. One is, as Molly suggested, the left was falling apart at the moment we emerged. We were started by people who were in the New Left—the later New Left—but during the post–New Left moment. The New Left and the left were in crisis by 1973, '74, '75.

The second thing that marked this moment was the job crisis. The late 1960s were the one good moment in the job market for historians in the late twentieth century. It suddenly ended in 1970 and got worse and worse. And 1973 was probably the worst year of the job market, and that's the year that MARHO was formed. Those two things, which are somewhat depressing in a way, are the context for MARHO and *RHR*. People were trying to figure out where to go politically and in terms of jobs.

Political Ebb and Professionalization in the Late '70s and Early '80s

Andor: Could we move forward a little bit? I want to get a little more sense about how things changed through the late 1970s and into the 1980s. From what has been said, it appears that MARHO becomes less important and the journal becomes more important. Political activity outside the journal recedes.

Roy: There is for better or worse—maybe both—a kind of professionalization that is going on during that period of time. I guess around '78 there is this move to a more professional-looking journal that looks like a journal. I can remember meeting at Mark Naison's house. I had the job of getting the printer's estimates for different formats of the journal and passed around various examples of things. And people said, "Oh yeah, this looks like a journal, let's go with this size." That is basically what the journal has been like since then, and it raised the stakes. As a result *RHR* absorbed more energy. Also, our commitment to a form of participatory democracy that came out of the '60s, and to those collectives—all of that took an enormous amount of energy. So from the late '70s into the early '80s, we were doing a much more professional-looking journal, but that may have taken some toll on some of our other activities. I can remember discussions of people saying, "We have to have a confer-

ence.” And then you’d look around the room and everybody was already killing themselves getting this journal out, and there was no one to volunteer to run a national conference.

Robert: There was also a downturn in interest from historians in the biweekly forums which had become part of the social fabric of what was going on here in New York and, I’m sure, in other cities. It wasn’t only that people couldn’t put the time into them. The audience began dropping off and eventually disappeared, which was unfortunate, because as the forums were going, they were a fabulous institution. But you’re right about the professionalization. *RHR* became a real journal, with peer review and all the things that a journal takes on.

Molly: I think one other thing that was happening as well was that, by the late ’70s, people settled into a state of permanent depression about the job market. It ceased to be something that people talked about and analyzed and strategized around. It just seemed that there were not going to be jobs for many people for the foreseeable future, and it was kind of hunkering down wherever you had one in the university or outside. You know, reading through some of the very early ’70s stuff, exactly the same range of problems that are now being talked about were being talked about then. The pressures for productivity, the attacks on interdisciplinary programs, what we now call adjunctification—the term wasn’t used then—the professionalization of graduate school, how we as radicals related to these themes. Then there was a phase in the ’80s and early ’90s when these themes were simply dropped as a focus and concern.

Jim: I wasn’t working on the journal at that time, but I have an overall sense of what was involved. In the middle of the ’70s, there was still what I think of as an ex-student left. The forums in Boston and especially in New York had a lot of people who weren’t necessarily academic historians, but who were part of the broad left interested in the kinds of issues that the forums were addressing. Maybe they were people who were involved in women’s groups, maybe people who were former student radicals who had blue-collar jobs and were involved in left caucuses in unions. There was still a sense of being part of something bigger.

Gradually American politics turned to the right in the course of the 1970s. Also, for the ex-students, activist politics became less and less part of your identity as you got older. So it made sense that there would be an identification of where people were at the time, which was mainly in academia. So there wasn’t this broad left that people saw themselves as part of.

Molly: I think for people who were in the academy—if you managed to get a job, then you did need to publish. You were training students; you cared about both help-



Jim O'Brien

“Up until 1978, we would rely upon appeals to readers for funding. We would periodically say we needed money. Roy’s theory—which I think was absolutely scientific—was that the more exclamation marks we had, the more money would come in.”

ing them survive and nurturing them in some kind of radical work. I think also as people found themselves in the institution, you also started doing what the Germans always used refer to as the long march through the institution.

Changes, the Mega-Issue, and Finances

Danny: I came in around that time. I think it was partially an aging of the members—of some of the early founding members—some of whom had just become institutionalized themselves. [Laughter.] Not in the way we should have been, probably. [Laughter.] I tried to start up the forums again because they had been such an important part of my own life when I was at Rutgers—coming into the city was one of the things you looked forward to. We ran them for a couple of years and there just weren’t large numbers of people coming—partially because there were other alternatives. There were places like the Columbia seminars that people could go to. It was also that our forums were Friday nights and a lot of people had other things to do—family obligations now. It was also a hell of a lot of work. I remember 5,000 postcards that all had to have labels stuck on them, and Judy [Walkowitz] and I sitting around the living room and spending the better part of two days getting out all these postcards to people. You had to do that every month or two. It was labor-intensive.

There had always been this sense of engagement with the community and that was always pretty strong, but there was also this sense that we were there to do a journal. In the early 1980s, there was a backlog of three issues full of articles, and we were broke. We had a discussion and we decided to publish a mega-issue, number 28–30. It was a way of basically—everyone’s subscription would expire, everyone would have to renew. We would suddenly have money, and we would get rid of all of the backlog. It would be a tenth-anniversary issue and would reflect everything we had ever done, simply because it was a hodgepodge of things that

had backlogged. But we also made a commitment that, if we were going to do a journal, it had to come out in a regular way. In fact it's been three times a year ever since then.

Roy: The mega-issue I think came out in '84 [September 1984].

Molly: We were very bad about putting dates on anything, in part from a certain lack of professional expertise and in part because we didn't want to acknowledge how infrequently things were coming out. [Laughter.]

Roy: We were going to go out of business at that point. One possible interpretation of that mega-issue was, let's publish the backlog and then we're going to go out of business. However, we had the support of Joe Murphy who was the chancellor [of the City University of New York] and this was central to the fact that we stayed alive. Joe Murphy and CUNY came through with the subsidy that saved us. In other words, we were overwhelmed. Because the stakes had been raised, we needed help.

Josh, who is here, was our first paid employee. What year was that? [Josh Brown, who worked with RHR from the mid-1970s, joins the conversation.]

Josh: I'm pretty sure it was in late 1977 or early 1978.

Andor: Jim, how did the *Radical Historians' Newsletter* fare financially in this period?

Jim: Up until 1978, we would rely upon appeals to readers for funding. We would periodically say we needed money. Roy's theory—which I think was absolutely scientific—was that the more exclamation marks we had, the more money would come in. And then the finances became merged with *RHR*. Somebody would subscribe to the *Review* and they would get the *Newsletter* as a throw-in three or four times a year. And then we were cut off from the funding by the *RHR* in 1981. [Laughter.]

Andor: Was that a political thing?

Jim: No, no, we had no politics, so how could anybody object to it? [Much laughter.] So out of force of habit, Bob Hannigan and I kept it going. We had built up a mailing list over time, in part supplied by New Haven MARHO and a group in California.

Danny: WAMH [Western Association of Marxist Historians].

Jim: Also we would send it to all current subscribers of the *Radical History Review*, and we would build up our own list of people that indicated any interest in the *Newsletter*. So we have just kept going. We published two or three issues a year.

Then at Andor's initiative, a couple of years ago, I joined the collective of the *RHR*. Now there's an attempt to see it all as one enterprise in a more political context. People are talking about the *Review*, the *Newsletter*, and the Web site as part of a political enterprise. So in that sense it's a return to ideas that were common 25 years ago.

Interventions and Interesting Issues

Robert: One of the amazing things, though, about those years when it was converted into a real journal was how many interesting issues came out. Some of them are still circulating. One I was an editor of, the issue on the history of sexuality—I still get requests for reprints for my article, and I know other requests still come into the office [*RHR*, issue 20, Fall 1979]. Some of the other issues are still around, and people cite them. Looking back on it, I do think it was a considerable achievement.

Danny: It's also true that the journal really pioneered in the development of the field of public history as a kind of countervoice to the ways in which public history was being envisioned in its more institutional setting around the *Public Historian*. And that early issue—issue number 25 on public history [*RHR*, issue 25, Fall 1981]—was a kind of pathbreaking issue that the journal published. The people responsible in the collective, Roy, and Sue Benson and—who was the third member?

Roy: Steve Brier, and Jean Agnew worked on it.

Danny: But there was a kind of commitment to making sure that public history became kind of institutionalized in an important place within the journal, too.

Roy: During the '80s, the journal was involved with some key intellectual political interventions. As Bob was suggesting with the history of sexuality issue, we weren't the only people doing this, but we were in the forefront of this issue. Then, as Danny was saying, in public history we were out in front. I think this was Mike pushing this idea. The term public history really meant two different things within the journal, both of them important. On the one hand, we were supporting, cheering on, and critiquing a people's history—a community-based history that had begun to flourish in the '70s. On the other hand was our critique of dominant sources of historical understanding, the critique of museums, movies, television, popular books. In both of those ways we were doing things in advance of other people.

However, in things like women's history and labor history, which were very important in that period of time, and in which we published some important articles, we were not on the cutting edge of the work that was going on then. There were other places that were publishing that work.

Danny: I know one other area that we haven't talked about where the journal made an important contribution. It was the interviews of senior radical historians that were done, that then came out as a series that was published later as a book [*Visions of History*, Pantheon, 1976].

Political Positioning and Identity

Molly: Rereading some of the early volumes, I was struck that questions of class and the applicability of Marxism featured very prominently. If it didn't necessarily lead to cutting-edge history, I think it did push people to ask the kinds of questions about theory that had not been asked before. I was also struck by how absent women and gender were in those early issues, and how the *RHR* didn't do what *History Workshop Journal* did relatively quickly. *History Workshop Journal* by issue 13 [Spring 1982] repositioned itself as a journal of socialist and feminist history.

Danny: Yes, but the *History Workshop Journal* doesn't actually become a journal until the '80s. Earlier it is just the History Workshop running its sessions, its seminars.

Molly: Right, but by the early 1980s, they self-consciously confront and debate this issue and *RHR* didn't. It's a kind of interesting issue to think about.

Danny: But we've remained scared of identifying ourselves around a word like "socialism" or "communism," around a range of debates—

Molly: —and certainly with feminism. I think the wonderfully capacious quality of the journal, its ability to move in different directions, in part comes from leaving its self-definition rather vague. Using this term "radical" can be interpreted in any number of ways, and in the course of the journal, it has been. It also means that certain issues were thereby not problematized or debated as much as they could have been over the years.

Robert: Some of the open-endedness led to some funny results. I remember the issue on sexuality. Everyone who I talk to these days sees that issue as one of the first of the social-construction world and of postmodernism. I'm always screaming, "No, no, we were Marxists." When we said that things were "constructed," we were thinking of Marx, not Foucault. [Laughter.] I don't know if that's a good thing or a bad thing—how easy it was to slip over into other things, but it made us more intellectual in some respects.

The Meaning of MARHO

Andor: This whole question of "radical" that's been raised is interesting. The question I have is, over the first decade and a half, what kind of political changes

occurred that were masked by that word, “radical”? Do you see a kind of political evolution in the journal and in the collective?

Roy: In the '60s, *Studies on the Left* is Marxist-influenced. The New Left is less clearly Marxist influenced. In the '70s, *RHR* is part of the move back to the universities and a move to a more scholarly approach, so Marxism becomes more important at that point. Marxist study groups are all over the place among this set of people in the early-to-mid '70s. I vaguely remember some discussion that “MARHO,” which stands for “Mid-Atlantic,” didn’t make any sense because we were really national, and we should change the name. At some point the idea was floated that it should be the Marxist Historians’ Organization, and we could still use MARHO as the acronym. [Laughter.] But there was always this move towards a clearer definition of what we were, and then a pulling back.

Molly: I think there were people like Mike Merrill, who was particularly strong in pushing that “radical” should mean “Marxist” and that history should be more theoretically informed. And some of the people working in European history were saying that you really have to confront the kind of scholarship on, for example, the transition from feudalism to capitalism, and Wallerstein and the global economy. They tried to bring an awareness of Marxist-informed European labor and social history into what always was, particularly in the early years, a collective dominated by American history. Bob, I don’t know how you felt, but I always felt as a Europeanist as if I were slightly odd person out.

Robert: In a variety of ways, first as an ancient historian and second as a gay person, I always felt in the '70s—on the one hand that I should be pushing for gay history, but I would be damned if I was going to be the token gay and do all the work. [Laughter.] There were a lot of struggles around those things. In some ways it worked out not having a definition. I remember the meeting where we decided “MARHO” was fine as long as we didn’t define what “radical” meant. [Much laughter.]

Jim: To throw in a footnote, at that time in discussions within the Boston group, a number of us were arguing that the name “MARHO,” if it wasn’t an acronym, was a terrible name because it wasn’t accessible. I proposed that if we were going to keep the name, we should make up a founding myth of Luigi Marho as an Italian historian who had been tortured and killed by Mussolini’s secret police for refusing to use quantitative methods. [Laughter.]

Josh: There’s actually an exegesis here. When we tried to incorporate MARHO, there was a Marvin and Howard Cleaners in New York City. [Laughter.] We couldn’t incorporate “MARHO,” and that’s why it was “MARHO: The Radical Historians’ Organization.” We could incorporate that.

**Josh Brown**

"I think the *RHR* is very unusual in accommodating people who had very different careers and very different perspectives about how to use history."

Questions of Race, Class, Gender, and Sexual Orientation

Andor: In this conversation, Robert and others brought up a couple of questions of politics that I would like to pursue: questions of race and nationality, also the question of gay history, and Molly raised the question of women's history. How did MARHO handle questions like that politically—questions of race and gender and sexual orientation?

Danny: The best that can be said is that enormous amounts of energy and time went to trying to talk about recruitment within the collective, which, at least by the '90s, had substantial membership of women and gays and lesbians. We constantly made efforts to attract people who were not white, and it was always a problem.

Roy: Certainly, I can't remember the year, at some point we did create some rule of having an equal number of men and women in the collective—I can't remember when.

Danny: Maybe 1990 or so.

Roy: And obviously we were much more successful at attracting women members than nonwhite members. In both of those ways we were reflective of the historical profession rather than in advance or behind.

Robert: Coming out of the '60s, I was always somewhat uneasy about my own incapacity to do what I thought I had been taught in the '60s. It wasn't that you recruit people, but you learn yourself what's going on in all of the world. Then you're becoming more attractive to other people because you're working on things that



Robert Padgug and Ellen Noonan

Robert: “One of the amazing things, though, about those years when it was converted into a real journal was how many interesting issues came out. Some of them are still circulating. One I was an editor of, the issue on the history of sexuality—I still get requests for reprints for my article, and I know other requests still come into the office [*RHR*, issue 20, Fall 1979]. Some of the other issues are still around, and people cite them. Looking back on it, I do think it was a considerable achievement.”

they’re interested in. They will come. We never really were able to do that. Maybe it was a hopeless thing. It was very difficult. But I know we had a lot of discussions in the early ’70s and ’80s about how to broaden the collective, and we never really did.

Andor: Also discussions about trying to get different kinds of history, and get beyond U.S. history, to African American history?

Robert: Well, in trying to get people on the collective who were minorities, we never knew how to do it. On the one hand, why would a minority person want to come on a collective that was mostly white and whose historical interests were mostly American and European? Even though we were radical in how we approached it, we weren’t that different from the majority interests of the profession—which was not particularly welcoming of minority people, at least at that time. I don’t know if it’s ever changed. On the other hand, how do you start unless you have minority people helping you learn what you need to learn from them? So it’s sort of a catch-22 from the start. Of course, it wasn’t only in this organization.

***RHR* and the Profession**

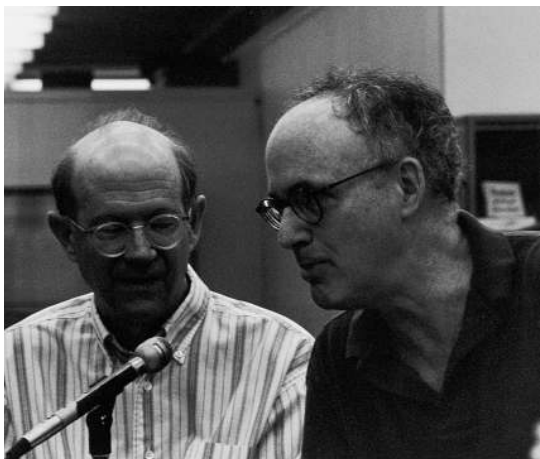
Danny: If I have any sense of loss or frustration, it’s the extent to which I feel we really aren’t connecting with the political moment within the profession and helping to galvanize it. It’s been a source of frustration that I’ve felt in the journal in the last ten years. And it is striking to me that other institutions—other professions—like the MLA still have a caucus (although it doesn’t necessarily have a journal that’s tied specifically to that). That was an impulse and connection that this journal had at one time that it no longer has.

Roy: But to some degree, in history, we're running those things. Eric Foner is the president of the AHA. There was a joke that circulated—this goes back to the late 1980s among conservative historians—that the *RHR* had undertaken a leveraged buyout of the *Journal of American History*. [Laughter.] What this suggested was that the *Journal of American History* had become like the *RHR*, and to some degree under Dave Thelen the *JAH* copied a lot of things from the *RHR*. The notion of reviewing films and museum exhibits and stuff like that had been done in the *RHR* and moved into this mainstream.

Danny: Dave Thelen, by the way, described himself as a MARHO person.

Roy: Right. But that was both our success and our failure in a way. We did transform the profession—I'm not sure we transformed the larger culture, but we did transform the profession. And I don't mean "we," in the sense of *RHR*. I mean that radical historians have had a profound impact on the shape of the historical profession in the United States. It's easy to exaggerate this, but 2000 versus 1960—it's an unbelievable change in the kinds of people who are in it, the kinds of issues that are being discussed, the whole set of things. Well, that's a transformation that we participated in. The politics of American society in 1960 versus 2000—I'm not sure there's any difference there. Maybe we're now to the right of 1960, actually. But in terms of the profession, we had this large impact.

Danny: But one likes to think that in 1968 we would have been protesting about the dismantling of welfare, or we would have been talking about adjunctification or about the job market. Those things are terribly different now than they were then. Maybe what you're saying is that we've lost our voice because we've been coopted?



Jim O'Brien and Danny Walkowitz

Danny: "It's also true that the journal really pioneered in the development of the field of public history as a kind of countervoice to the ways in which public history was being envisioned in its more institutional setting around the *Public Historian*."

Ellen: I want to pick up on Roy's point as to where the *RHR* is in the context of the larger profession. I remember when I was managing editor we were reviewing an article for someone. As is typical of *RHR* now, as I'm sure it was thirty years ago, we are a little slow. And this person called me in a panic because she was up for tenure, and she really, really, really needed to know if her article was accepted by the *RHR* because it would make a big difference in her tenure folder. [Laughter.] I had no idea that publishing in the *RHR* and that being in the collective is seen as a good thing for your career. I suspect it was not seen as a good thing for your career in the 1970s necessarily.

Generational Continuity and Change: The Late '80s and the Early '90s

Andor: I would like to move this forward in the direction that Ellen is suggesting. Let me ask, in the period from roughly 1985 into the '90s, when some of the earlier forms and activities have died away, the political movement has died away, *RHR* takes on a new form. How would you characterize that evolution of *RHR* in this period?

Danny: A lot of the first generation of people who worked on the journal leave it at a certain point and go on to do other things. I'm thinking of Betsy Blackmar and Sue Benson, Vickie DeGrazia and Marge Murphy, Pat Manning—everyone could add a whole bunch of names of people who had been part of the journal for a long time. The journal begins to effect a transition to new collective members, often a lot of younger people, including some folks who, much like the earlier generation, were in graduate school.

Roy: I would say the successful move to attracting a younger generation doesn't happen until into the early '90s really. The average age of people on the *RHR* in 1988 was more than ten years older than it was in 1978. In other words, we got older recruits, people like Jon Wiener who did an enormous amount of work when he came to New York in the late 1980s. They were not from a younger generation. Danny was doing a lot of work—

Danny: —and David Nasaw—

Roy: —and David Nasaw. We were doing a much better job in the late '80s in certain professional terms of coming out more regularly and coming out with a more polished product. But we weren't that successful at bringing in a new generation of graduate students. In the 1990s, I think that changed. I think Van Gosse deserves a lot of credit for playing a role in helping to rebroaden the base of the journal and bring in a new set of people.

Cambridge University Press

Andor: Can we talk for just a second about the move to Cambridge University Press—how that happened and what difference that made in terms of the journal and the collective process.

Roy: Can someone remember the year?

Andor: I think the move to Cambridge was 1991 or so because I came on about '91.

Roy: Now I'm remembering. It was partly the culmination of a series of fitful efforts at finding support. And that started us thinking about getting publishers, and we started talking to various people. We had this horrible backlog, and we had libraries that had subscribed twenty years in the future because we weren't coming out. In effect, we owed money to everybody because we had taken their subscription money and hadn't delivered, so that was a problem.

I also remember when we were at the point of writing a draft contract with a publisher. I can remember actually seeing Mike's first word processor, a Morrow, on which he and Steve [Brier] were hunched over working on the contract language and showing me how search-and-replace worked. [Laughter.] We were search and replacing the name of the publisher with Santa Claus [much more laughter] because he was making us this fabulous offer.

So we talked seriously to University of Illinois Press and Cambridge and Duke.

Andor: And we chose Cambridge.

Danny: We had a lot of reservations about linking up with a press. There were a lot of people who felt that we were going to lose control of the day-to-day work and the control of layout. A lot of concerns about graphics, what was going to happen to the use of illustrations, and other kinds of things. It wasn't an easy decision to make because a lot of people really felt that it fundamentally changed the whole process in which people had been involved in putting out the journal. But it was also true that everybody just felt overworked and that there was a need for money.

Molly: You know the one downside of those kinds of subsidies is that then the journal does absorb all energies. Then you really have to make the production schedules of whoever is subsidizing you or the press when the press [Cambridge University Press] took over production. This created many wonderful things, but made the political dimension of it, it seems to me, almost impossible.

Mike: There were some of us, and I was certainly one of them, who until the very last moment were very concerned with giving up the process of production itself, because in fact that created things. It created a sense of camaraderie. But in the real



Andor Skotnes and Robert Padgug

world it really created exhaustion, and it particularly created exhaustion for me because I seemed to have an awful lot winding up on my doorstep, particularly in the latter period. So it wasn't really a choice; by that point, if we hadn't moved to Cambridge University Press, we would have been in deep trouble.

However, once you've done that, then you've got new possibilities; that liberates some energy. But then you get a different set of criteria, if in fact your criteria are now organized around publishing and promoting and producing a magazine in tandem with a commercial organization.

Financial Trouble

Jim: I just have a question—were there two financial crises? I know there was one in 1981. At that point you guys cut off the *Newsletter* from funding. [Much laughter.]

Roy: I would say in general there was financial trouble all through that period. We were doing something that was too ambitious for our resources. I don't think we understood that at the time because we had always done this without resources. We were generally in a financial crisis from the late '70s until we got some subsidy from CUNY and then from NYU [the *RHR* editorial offices moved to New York University in 1991]. We were always in trouble.

Robert: We tried hard at one point to get ads from university presses—paid ads—but that was very difficult.

Roy: But there too, that was part of the same kind of thing. We had different volunteer people doing jobs that people usually do for a living—getting ads from places, getting library subscriptions. We did pretty well at it as amateurs, but we just couldn't really do it.

Mike: Just a slight rephrasing. [Laughter.] It was a permanent crisis, but what we were doing was running a small business. And we were doing it with considerably more professional flair than many of the so-called professionals, as we discovered when we made arrangements with presses, or began dealing with publishers. We pieced it together ourselves, but we did pretty damn good. We were usually on the cutting edge on anything we needed. As soon as search-and-replace technology was in place, there we were. [Laughter.] The problem was that it went from issue to issue, so we had to raise the money from sales. We did pretty well, and we made a decent income off paid advertising. But it was also this mixture of things. It was both a political and commercial operation at the same time. So we had these letters to try to get well-known people to contribute, and we had twenty to thirty people who gave a decent amount of money each year. So it was a permanent business operation, it just didn't make a profit.

More Reflections on Professionalization and on Matchbooks

Andor: A number of people are here who joined the *RHR* in the 1990s. Let's open the discussion up so some of us who are newer can reflect on radical history and *Radical History Review* and the *Newsletter* today, and what we've heard about the earlier history?

[Karen Sotiropoulos, who joined the collective in the mid-'90s, joins the conversation.]

Karen: You've been talking generally about professionalization and the bad job market in the '70s, but I'd like to hear more specifically about when you all became professional historians—or “institutionalized,” as Danny said.

Josh: I think that something that Ellen raised before is very important about the *RHR*. It's not only me, but quite a number in the collective chose not to go into academia per se, in part because of the considerations around the politics of the *Review*. It wasn't only choice, but also the job market. I think the *RHR* is very unusual in accommodating people who had very different careers and very different perspectives about how to use history. I only raise that because from the get-go I think there were people who didn't feel comfortable within the profession per se. This is not to criticize the folks who went into it, but we could accommodate those different perspectives.

Molly: What I would like to add to that is that one thing that struck me in this discussion of the experiences of the *RHR* is how much the pressures that led to professionalization have to do with the nature of the capitalist economy in which the *RHR* operated. There were enormous pressures in all aspects of everybody's life, whether in the academy or out, to do more and more—the kind of productivity pressures

that have made the pace of life in this country considerably more oppressive than in most European countries. The phrase that you keep hearing here is that we just couldn't do it, we didn't have enough time, we didn't have enough hours. It's larger than the individual experiences of any person, and it is interesting in the way that even a journal and an organization that is explicitly countercultural ends up mirroring some of the pressures of the culture.

Roy: I would like to pick up on two things. One is, regardless of the issue of some people getting university jobs and some getting other jobs, there was a transition when people in the collective moved from being graduate students to being non-graduate students and having jobs. That brought a variety of pressures on everybody.

And Molly making this point about counterculture does remind me of something else I was thinking about. The *RHR* was a little bit more affected by the counterculture than, certainly, *Studies on the Left*. [Laughter.] I'm not sure whether to compare it to *Radical America*. I do think there was some of this always in our style. But irony is important in the *RHR* in a way that I'm not sure it was in some earlier left kinds of things. I mean, irony is also a stance of political defeat and grim times. Even in those early newsletters that Molly is holding, there were always things like fake ads for jobs—24-hour teaching loads, must teach, etc., etc. [Laughter.] That was a sort of ironic response to bad times.

Mike: Not just irony. A lot of those meetings were hilarious.

Molly: We had a very good time!

Mike: Even during the quarterly meetings, when we were having discussions about how to organize this putative nationwide organization, we could never take it completely seriously. So there were a lot of funny, smart, wisecracking people in this operation and the culture of this group supported that. We never worried terribly much—maybe as much as we should have—about deadlines and keeping to schedules and stuff. But we sure had a good time. And part of this was that music and dancing and, dare I say it, illegal substances [laughter] were very much part of the culture from the beginning.

Molly: I think the matchbooks that we had symbolized this: “Earn Big Money, Become an Historian.”

Danny: And the T-shirts, of course.

Molly: There used to be—and this is a historical artifact that no longer exists—matchbooks that would advertise how you could make more money—become an electrician, become this or that. So our matchbooks were a takeoff on those.

Mike: There was a subscription form inside.



With a subscription form on the inside and a call to “Earn Big Money” on the front cover, these matchbooks were an extremely popular way to subscribe to the *Radical History Review* during an “era when lots of people still smoked.”

Roy: We did them for the 1978 OAH in New York. I can remember driving to the Diamond Match Company in Springfield, Massachusetts, to pick up a box of these matches, and then driving to New York with the matchbooks. We handed them out.

Molly: They were obviously only useful in the era when lots of people still smoked. [Much laughter.]

Mike: But they also established our image as a funny bunch. People loved those things, they loved them better than the journal. [Laughter.] And we had a grand identity from our style as much as from our content.

Ellen: It’s interesting to hear people talk about this, because I would certainly agree that the *RHR* collective is a bunch of very smart, very witty people, very stimulating to be around and that’s a big part of why I’m involved. But we don’t see each other nearly as often as it sounds like you did when you were in locally based collectives. The collective meets twice a year now, and for various reasons people are not able to make one of the meetings or even both. So unless you’re on the steering committee, which meets a little more often face to face, you don’t often see people in an official *RHR* setting. Certainly those of us who live in New York, which is the preponderance of the collective, sometimes see each other informally through different networks, but that seems to be a big difference.

Final Thoughts

Karen: I joined the collective in the mid-1990s. I’m struck by how similar the discussions here about what it means to be a radical, the expansiveness of this definition, are to the current conversations at collective meetings. And the social culture of the *RHR*, how that’s been sustained. It is very much what I felt in the mid-’90s when I came into the journal. For me, it was feeling like I came home, because I came out of political activism and went into the academy for my graduate degree, and then was

brought to the journal through my advisor. I was not that familiar with the *RHR* at the beginning of my graduate career. I knew it was out there, but by the time I began graduate work, you looked to the *Journal of American History*, not necessarily to the *RHR*. So when I came to the collective, the culture of talking about the relationship between political activism and academia, and about how to define oneself as a radical academic very much fit with the ways that I had been thinking. I'm hearing that consistency throughout the years. So it's nice to see that if we didn't know what the purpose was in the beginning, and if we still don't know what the purpose is, it's still serving some kind of very highly effective function for those of us here.

Danny: I think it's doing that for people in the collective, but I'm not sure it's doing that for people outside the collective in the way in which the journal had functioned at one point. I think that's a terrible loss—and an opportunity, hopefully.

[François Ngolet, who joined the collective in 1998, joins the conversation.]

François: I've been in the collective for two years now almost and feel some kind of intellectual community. I was very nervous about the spread of postmodernism. I was trained in Europe where radical theories and radical ideas are still very much alive in academia, not as challenged as here in the United States. I've lived here for quite a while now. I came here and looked for those of thinking history in a much more progressive way, and not encountering that frame of mind gave me the idea for joining this group. I've been here working for the past couple of years and feel very much at ease. Historical materialism is very much alive—and should be alive—despite the fact that nowadays this way of thinking and processing history is under pressure. The *RHR* has given me some kind of intellectual continuity from the way I was trained historically in Europe and now how I'm thinking and producing ideas here in the United States.

Andor: I've been on the collective since 1991, and one of the things that strikes me is that we've been in some sort of crisis or reform mode the whole time. One of the first things was creation of the steering committee and reorganizing the collective—trying this, trying that. More recently, the whole push to reorient to become more political and to connect with people outside academia. What strikes me about this is that the impulse is in many ways very similar to the earlier impulse in MARHO of trying to be more relevant broadly, and at the same time to work within the profession to hold up a radicalism there.

But it's also somehow different to me. There's this sense I sometimes get at our meetings that we just have to try harder, we can't do it, it's not working. And I didn't get the sense—and obviously it's partly the difference of times—when I was listening to people talking earlier about the first ten years of *RHR*, that there was this sense of almost desperation to be politically relevant. Is that fair to say?



**Josh Brown, Karen Sotiropoulos, François Ngolet,
and Mike Wallace**

Karen: Well, absolutely. But when I think of the bulk of graduate students—it’s so different than having a cohort of graduate students who were radicals in the late ’60s and early ’70s. That cohort doesn’t exist in graduate school in the same way in my experience.

Molly: It may not exist in the same way, but it seems that one of the things that’s happening is a sort of renewed politicization of both undergraduates and graduate students. One might be more optimistic of this at NYU because of the graduate students unionizing and the campaign against sweatshops.

Roy: I think on the one hand, at least early on, there was more of a lingering sense that we were part of the broader left. On the other hand, I think that, even fairly early on, there was this worry. In this thing I wrote a while back, I had this quote from one of the early newsletters. Mike had written some article on surviving in the university which has this line, “There are those moments, are there not, when we all feel a little bit beside the point. Wearing our academic hats, writing history, teaching college students, sitting in the cloisters, the true struggle passing by. Those who do, do; those who can’t, teach,” etc. Mike’s an optimist and goes into a more optimistic rap in there. But I think that’s from around ’74, so that same worry is there at the beginning basically.

Josh: I think also that the journal in many ways and the work on the collective now—there may be some objections about this interpretation—is much more reflective of the profession than it was then. Doing all aspects of a journal, including the production, the social relations were extremely different. Now it’s just the managing editor who has the overall vision. So the whole nature of the organization and the nature of the project and how we handled it was quite different. I’m not trying to give a view of declension here, but it’s just that everyone now doesn’t quite sully their hands the way they had previously.

Karen: In relation to what Andor was saying of always being in crisis, I had that feeling too when I came into the journal in the mid-1990s. There was a major influx of new people and a feeling of crisis. But I feel that I see clear progress. Molly was saying that there is this new political moment, and I do see that now. It was the earlier moment, the graduate students of the '80s, that seemed to lack a big enough cohort of people who wanted to be politically engaged. Of course, it seems there's always a moment of crisis—in political work you're always working in crisis—so I don't see that as declension.

Andor: I think what we've successfully done is to adapt. We have had a number of adaptations. But what's so striking from this conversation is how different the lived process of MARHO, the *Radical History Review*, the *Newsletter* was in the '70s compared to today. The idea of having forums every other week and meeting constantly and the like! That was a very, very different collective process, under very different circumstances than today. But we've adapted.

I think there are some folks that have to go, so we'll have to shut down. Does anyone have some kind of appropriate final statement?
[Lots of laughter.]

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The *Radical History Review* collective—the name “MARHO” has long since disappeared from all but a few legal documents—continues to struggle to combine historical scholarship and political intervention, both within academic life and without. Working in collaboration with the *Radical Historians' Newsletter* we are changing the journal in hopes of making it more accessible and useful to a wider range of intellectuals and activists; developing our new H-Net listserve, H-Radhist, into a vehicle for vital online historical-political discussion; expanding our Web site as an increasingly political resource; and planning to sponsor a variety of panels and events, both at academic conferences and in the broader community. We are also organizing former collective members and close colleagues into an Associates Group to support the work of the collective. We invite you to join us.

Note

1. Josh Brown recalls, “The forums ranged wildly in attendance—from a handful (I remember a talk at which I was one of ten) to hundreds (Genovese). The class and culture conference garnered probably about five hundred participants (filling up a Columbia Teachers College auditorium).” Robert Padgug remembers several hundred attending when Emmanuel Wallerstein spoke.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS TO CONVERSATION ABOUT RHR

Joshua Brown is director of the American Social History Project/Center for Media and Learning at The Graduate Center, CUNY. His art, documentary, and new-media credits include the *Who Built America?* CD-ROMs, *History Matters: The U.S. History Survey on the Web*, and *The Lost Museum* (a 3-D re-creation and archive of Barnum's American Museum). His social history of the nineteenth-century illustrated press will be published by University of California Press next year.

François Ngolet is assistant professor of history at the College of Staten Island/CUNY. His articles have appeared in the *Journal of African History* and the *Revue Francaise d'histoire d'outre mer*. He has been a member of the RHR collective since fall 1998.

Molly Nolan is professor of history and chair of the history department at NYU. She is the author of *Social Democracy and Society: Working-Class Radicalism in Duesseldorf, 1890–1918* and *Visions of Modernity*. A founding member of MARHO, she served on the RHR collective until the early 1980s.

Ellen Noonan is a media producer at the American Social History Project; she is also a doctoral candidate in history at New York University, completing her dissertation on race, class, and the performing arts in the twentieth-century U.S. She served as managing editor of *Radical History Review* from 1996 to 1998 and has been a member of the RHR editorial collective since 1998.

Jim O'Brien teaches part-time at the University of Massachusetts–Boston and is a freelance editor and indexer. He has been a coeditor of the *Radical Historians' Newsletter* since 1971 and helps coordinate the joint Web site of the *Radical History Review* and the *Newsletter*: <http://chnm.gmu.edu/rhr>.

Robert Padgug was trained as an ancient historian and taught at Rutgers University during the 1970s, specializing in economic history and the history of sexuality. More recently, he has worked in health-care financing, economics, and policy. He also teaches health economics and financing at the New School University and the City University of New York.

Roy Rosenzweig teaches history and directs the Center for History and New Media at George Mason University, where he has taught since 1981. He has written and edited books and articles on such topics as working-class leisure, Central Park, historical museums, public history, and history and new media.

Andor Skotnes has taught history of the Americas for the last ten years at the Sage Colleges in Troy, New York. He has published an edited book entitled *Migration and Identity* and a number of articles on oral history and on recent U.S. working-class and African American history. He is completing a book on the freedom movement and the labor movement in New Baltimore in the 1930s and 1940. He will be teaching American studies in Tokyo during 2000–2001 on a Fulbright grant.

Karen Sotiropoulos earned her Ph.D. from the Graduate Center of the City University of New York by writing her dissertation, “Staging Race: Black Cultural Politics before the Harlem Renaissance, 1893–1915,” under the direction of former editorial collective member David Nasaw. She is an assistant professor of history at Cleveland State University.

Daniel J. Walkowitz, director of the program in metropolitan studies and professor of history at New York University, has been a MARHO member since its inception and joined the *RHR* collective in 1982. A labor and public historian with particular interest in media, in 1999 he published *Working with Class: Social Workers in the Politics of Middle-Class Identity* (University of North Carolina Press), and he is presently writing and doing video documentation on the history of English country dance in America.

Mike Wallace teaches history at John Jay College of Criminal Justice (CUNY), directs the Gotham Center for New York City History at the CUNY Graduate Center, and is coauthor of the Pulitzer Prize–winning *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898*.