

Social commentator Hal Crowther speaks on campus

Lee Fessler
Staff Writer

He hates Madonna, refers to Nancy Reagan as an "anorexic voodoo doll," applies the label "Luddite" to himself, has been sued for \$9 million (and won) and feels Americans have experienced culture death.

Meet Hal Crowther, ultra-skeptical social critic who spoke on campus Nov. 19. Crowther is a weekly columnist for *The Independent*, a Raleigh based alternative media publication. His articles, which he admits stem from "frustration, fury and the front page," can bring out the best and worst in all of us. He searches to bring out the truth in everything, and when accused of liability,

he responds, "It's just the truth."

His main problem isn't his small salary, because he is passionate about his work; rather, it is that he may only print one article a week. This guy is overloaded with ideas.

Crowther speaks from experience. He has studied at Edinburgh University in Scotland and received his graduate degree in journalism from Columbia University. However, it was not school that best prepared him to write. Instead, he says "living in an active, urban environment," as he did in both Los Angeles and New York, helped to broaden his spectrum of ideas.

He has written for the *Toronto Star*, was a sports editor for *Time* and at age 27 took the position as a television critic for *Newsweek*,

which was one of his greatest learning experiences.

"I was given the choice to critique television or law. I chose TV," Crowther said. He still has a guilty conscience from having anything to do with television, however.

"I was out there criticizing the garbage TV producers were coming out with, but really I was acting as a publicist, letting people know this stuff even exists." He has yet to watch any television since 1977.

As a sports writer he found that he had too much curiosity to just write about sports. "Sports writers are brilliant, because they can watch a baseball game repeatedly and still make it exciting."

In 1969 he came to Durham, and was a

founder of *The Spectator*, another alternative publication, and started writing for *The Independent*. "I chose to enter alternative media, because I thought it was the most honest, even if they are responsible for the 900 numbers industry."

As a social critic, Crowther realizes his vulnerability to criticism. "Any critic sets himself up," he calmly explained, "and I'm thin-skinned. I especially hate it when people preach to me as if they're towering above me on their stool of righteousness."

As far as his advice to aspiring writers goes, he states that to get in print, you have to compromise, because, "if you're not in print, you're nowhere."

Playwright talks of collaborative creation about death

Christopher M. Craig
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New York playwright Susan Yankowitz, who worked with well-known director Joseph Chaikin in the late sixties, came to Sternberger Auditorum this past Wednesday to discuss the Open Theater Ensemble's creation and production of the play "Terminal."

"Terminal" is an avant-garde "exploration into mortality," which shows audiences that the molds of modern theatrical appreciation are, but don't have to be, restraining.

The reason the Theater Department, Faculty Development, and the Office of the Academic Vice President brought Yankowitz to speak was to spread the idea that people should reconsider their modern-but-stilted beliefs of what constitutes good theater.

"Terminal" is a piece about Death. However, this statement captures only the gist of the play. It is also a retrospective view of life and how people live it in terms of morality, happiness and social issues.

"Terminal" was created through collaboration in the late sixties. "The individual became subordinated to the group," said Yankowitz of the production process, "but anybody in the group could bring in ideas. [It was] an expression of the mentality of the sixties." Simultaneously, the ensemble would write and act out the play. In the end, they were left with psychologies, not characters.

"What we tried to create was [something which] engaged the intellect and the heart, not through individuality of character, but through impact.... The work was shaped in fragments, not linearly. [So that the produced] view of the world was something not fitting 'neatly,' but something episodic and in a series that, at the core, had some meaning," said Yankowitz. This explains the medium of the play, which reaches for understanding not through plot, but through presentation.

"Terminal" can be described as a chaotic

montage of incantations, rhythms, soliloquies and dance. The language varies from the colloquial to legalese, depending on the underlying effect desired, and, as a work which artfully captures the psychologies of many different types of people, these different styles of language are distinct.

For instance, the character of "The Responsible Person," one of the portraits of the dying, repeats in a frantic semi-scream her schizophrenic delusion that, as Yankowitz said, "any tragedy was her responsibility."

This character takes the burden of fault for any suffering she has seen, as in one section of her monologue when, while stepping to a fast drum-beat, she screams "I saw a woman

chewing at the pavement... What have I done?" Like many of "Terminal's" portraits of the dead and dying, the impact of the whole (the rhythm, the movements, the text) affects the kind of emotions that come only with deep psychological delving.

"To live with integrity..." exclaimed Yankowitz. "Though the piece is extensively about death, it is about living. We hoped people would leave the play and be compelled to ask themselves if their lives were really worth something. We were most happy when people left the theater compelled to ask themselves, 'is this all worth it?'"

The Open Theater Ensemble was created

in 1963 under director Joseph Chaikin. In 1968, after graduating from Yale Drama School, Yankowitz joined Chaikin and his ensemble as their regular playwright. She received the Drama Desk Award for Most Promising Playwright of 1969 for "Terminal," and has since gone on to work on such endeavors as "Baby," which Guilford's Theater Department presented in the fall of 1990, and "SILENT WITNESS," her first novel from 1976.

Yankowitz' newest play, "Night Sky," which Joseph Chaikin directed, was produced in May 1991 by the Women's Project at the Judith Anderson Theater in New York.

