

GUARDIAN

THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY GUARDIAN

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Behind the public machine

The sales pitch is "democracy," suggesting national autonomy and individual choice. But the reality here and abroad is free-market corptocracy, which delivers pretty much the opposite. Yet for all their control on government policy and civilian life, corporations largely remain invisible to those not directly involved with them.

So, corporate culture — and the face-lifted culture it exports for public consumption — may be this century's Esperanto, a language everyone ought to speak but few have bothered to learn. Hoping to bridge that gap is CounterCorp, a new nonprofit that "seeks to document, reduce, and ultimately prevent the corrosive political, economic, and social effects that large corporations have in the United States and around the world."

Other Cinema is hosting a CounterCorp benefit. Programmed by Craig Baldwin, the "Public Image Ltd." program will dig deep into the variably kitschy, ominous, flag-waving, and wallet-depleting propaganda companies of prior eras visited on both consumers and their own employees.

Among the dusty nuggets you'll glimpse are Avon's 1960s "The Joy of Living with Fragrance," a groovy 1971 ride down Oscar Mayer's "hot dog highway," and General Motors' delirious 1956 "Design for Dreaming," in which a fantasizing housewife-ballerina pirouettes through a Technicolor orgy of luxury wheels, designer gowns, and kitchen superappliances. Then there's the late-'70s "Caring Is Our Way," a Hilton Hotels recruitment reel wherein African American doormen and chauffeurs (including one "Bo" Jones, perhaps cousin to Mr. Bo Jangles) exalt the joy of bowing and scraping for those "beautiful people" who attend, say, plumbers' conventions.

Providing a rare in-house flip side to that smiley-face message, Delco Products' circa 1980 "What's It All About?" is a guilt-tripping recession extravaganza set to nervous bongo music. Its depressed narrator chides "Somehow ... we didn't put it all together," laying heavy "*J'accuse!*"s on supposedly lazy-ass American workers for losing jobs and plants to them wily Japanese. That corporate strategy hasn't changed: When shit hits the fan, a smart CEO still finds ways to blame those damn ingrates further down the ladder. **(Dennis Harvey)**

PUBLIC IMAGE, LTD.

Sat/13, 8:30 p.m.

Artists' Television Access

992 Valencia, SF

\$5–\$20 suggested donation

www.othercinema.com