V.4
#4

HERESIES 16

FILM VIDEO



WOMEN

A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics $5.00

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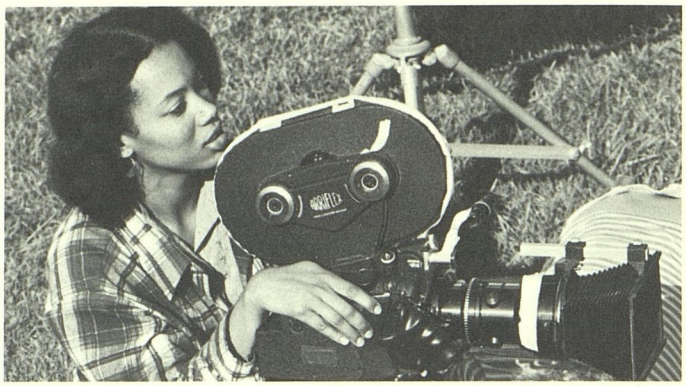
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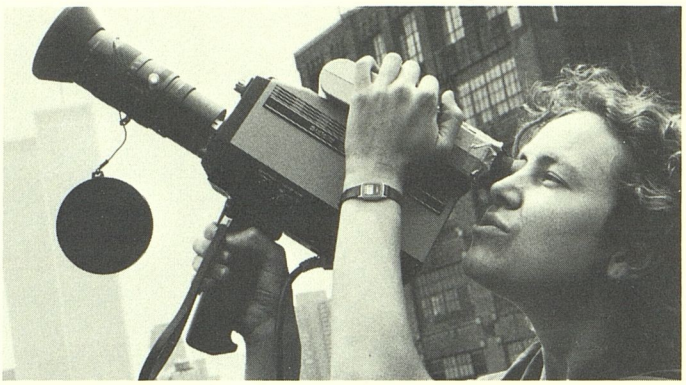
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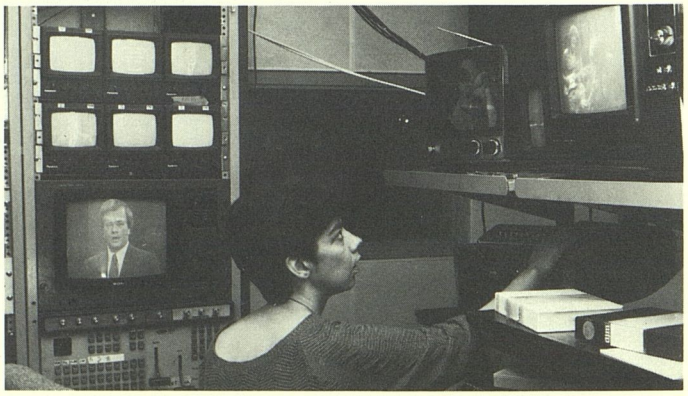
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COLLECTIVE EDITORIAL STATEMENT

The focus of *Heresies* #16 is on the work women have done, and are doing, in film, video, and the media. In choosing this focus, we hope to create a sense of community for other feminists who feel information is lacking in these areas. Much of the content in this issue would have little chance of being published elsewhere—and #16 provides some deserved publicity for these works. The recent surge in technology has changed the way we communicate, and women have an increasing opportunity to use different forms of media. Our interest in technology is not to suggest that women join the ranks of the technocrats, but rather to encourage women to overcome a conditioned fear of technology, and to begin to use it as an organizing tool and a source of personal expression.

Putting out a *Heresies* issue takes a long time, and although all of us had had some experience working on collectives and doing political work, only one of us was familiar with the entire production process. None of us found it easy, but on reflection, we have managed to isolate some of the difficulties.

Like most nonhierarchical groups, one of the problems we failed to face was the distribution of work at each stage. We never discussed what working on a collective meant to each of us, what our personal commitments could be, or what a reasonable amount of responsibility should be. The haphazard organization led to an unequal distribution of work. Some members took on more work than others, and resentments grew. Because most of us could not suspend all non-*Heresies* work, we all faced a decision in how we divided our time. These decisions were not clear-cut. Work outside *Heresies* can be motivated by a desire for personal gain, but it can also have political intent. These choices can also be paralleled within the collective. One works for *Heresies* to experience collective process, to contribute to a magazine committed to change, or to network with other feminists; but it is also possible that one might participate to gain recognition in the artworld. Ultimately, these choices determined how much work we did for this issue.

The problem of workload was compounded by unrealistic deadlines: for submissions, for rewrites, for editing, and for production. The collective felt further confusion because of the lack of a clear definition of #16's theme. The initial grant proposal was for a film and TV issue, but by the time our collective was meeting regularly, the main collective had expanded the theme to include all communication media. Early debates about whether to emphasize commercial or artistic work were then further clouded by discussions of all forms of media. All these problems forced us to hurry through crucial early stages of the collective's formation.

Under pressure, we never adequately examined the aesthetic, political, racial, and sexual differences among us. Disputes about the materials—their style, their content, and their feminist politic—were frequently taken on a purely personal level, outside of their political context. Feminism, like every movement for change, faces conflict about strategy. Issue 16's subject matter—the very information channels through which we try to effect change—guaranteed us plenty of conflict. Although we were united in our desire to challenge the male-dominated media system, our personal choices about the forms of media we worked in outside of *Heresies* differed greatly. These other experiences affected how we chose material for the issue, and these differences were implicit in our discussions. For instance, is there a correct way to present women's images? Can we infiltrate the mass media, or should we leave it alone? Is it possible to present radical content in a conventional form? At times, positions taken by collective members on such issues were mutually exclusive. The wide range of material in the issue reflects these disparate visions. Many of our discussions about articles forced us to define as well as to defend our own ideas and beliefs about media work. We were each strongly committed to our own forms, but we did come to realize that other women could be as committed to different forms. In the long run, however, some of us grew apart because those differences could not be overcome.

Only one woman on the #16 collective is Black, indicating a lack of outreach to Third World and Black communities. *Heresies* has a poor reputation for dealing with the concerns of women of color, and not enough distributors in Third World communities sell the magazine. The content of many of the previous issues has not reflected the needs of Third World women, and no adequate mechanism has yet been put into place to address these problems. What *Heresies* needs is more visibility in Third World communities. The *Heresies* collective should more actively solicit Third World women for the main collective and the issue collectives. Perhaps then women of color would be more interested in submitting material and suggesting topics for future issues, thus broadening *Heresies*' horizons.

The difficulties of #16 arose mostly because we lacked foresight. Future collectives could approach these problems by taking the time early in the process to investigate the differences among members, and use this knowledge to establish their own working structure. Lulls in the development of the magazine—for instance, after the call for submissions and before material begins to arrive—could provide this time. The main collective could help further by giving a realistic chart of how an issue develops, indicating the time period required for each of the various phases of producing a magazine.

As with most issues of *Heresies*, #16's topic was too broad to be covered by one issue. One thing that we agreed about was the need for a new journal in which to continue a dialogue about, and develop networks within, the vital feminist film/video/media arts community. At this time, the more activist feminist press devotes little space to such work. The few journals which address women and film/video concern themselves far more with the male media portrayal of women than with the growing body of work produced by women. The feminist academic journals limit themselves to occasional articles on feminist theory and criticism. As women's studies becomes co-opted by the university system, outspoken feminist academics are fired, and feminism becomes more threatened, such a journal becomes crucial to continue the dialogue about feminist media. Now is the time to expand our audience to include a wider base of women. We see this issue as part of this dialogue.

***Editorial Collective:** Diana Agosta, Edith Becker, Loretta Campbell, Lisa Cartwright, Su Friedrich, Annie Goldson, Joan Jubela, Nicky Lindeman, Barbara Osborn.*

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NICARAGUA

Victoria Schultz



A Sandinist fighter guarding the barricades. Photo by Victoria Schultz.

Deciding to make an independent documentary film with a left and/or feminist perspective is asking for trouble. Primarily money kind of trouble, since getting funding for such projects these days is like pulling teeth from a Bengali tiger. The filmmaker must be prepared to spend as much time and energy on raising funds as on shooting, editing, and writing the film. When finally the film is finished, you face the hurdle of distribution. Few distributors are interested in films with an explicit political focus, so you're on your own. The distribution work will keep you busy for years, if you want the film to be shown a lot. This doesn't necessarily mean you'll make money, unless you're lucky and get sales instead of rentals. But often groups that want to show political films have very little money and can barely afford a rental. In other words, making an independent, politically oriented film takes tremendous commitment and enthusiasm, at times to the point of obsession and fanaticism. You also have to believe very strongly that this particular film just has to be made.

I discovered my need to make *Women in Arms* little by little. First I was fascinated by the newspaper reports of the presence of a young woman, Comandante Dos, in the bold takeover of the National Assembly building in Nicaragua by a group of Sandinistas. Then I heard more and more about the very active role of women in the military as well as political aspects of the Sandinist resistance. On a visit to Panama a friend showed me a letter written by a Nicaraguan woman, Idania, to her six-year-old daughter, explaining that she had to return to Nicaragua and risk death so that the children of their country would be able to have a better future. Shortly after writing the letter, Idania was in fact killed by the Nicaraguan National Guard.

Once I was in Nicaragua I heard more stories and met with several women from the resistance, but it wasn't until I visited the liberated zone of Managua that I understood the enormity of what was happening. Here women were fighting side by side with the men in a very dangerous situation and this, I was told, was nothing unique. (It was on trying to enter this same liberated area that ABC correspondent Bill Stewart was killed in cold blood by the National Guard.) The visceral experience of fear I describe in my journal fueled me with an intense sense of the reality of these women's lives; my admiration for the women was no longer an abstraction. All this helped me in the making of my film. At times when the money had run out and I was desperate, I thought of the women and men who had lived through the arduous revolutionary process that led to the overthrow of the Somoza regime on July 19, 1979, and my problems quickly diminished to a manageable size.

I believe that as documentary filmmakers we should to some extent live through what the people we are filming go through. It tests our will and determination to devote a chunk of our own lives to document their reality, and also forms a basis of trust between us and the subjects. Obviously we are not they, and our lives are not theirs. But these attempts must be made to discover our common humanity.

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JOURNAL

Managua, June 18, 1979

Scared. I don't think I've ever been as scared in my life as I have been today, at least not for a very long time.

After a lot of disorganized organizing I'm off with Alan, Alain, and Alma to the liberated zone of the city to interview the Sandinist leaders. My co-worker Mikko finally showed up this morning; he had arranged for us to have a press conference with them this morning at 11, at a place called Puente Eden. The directions for finding it: Just ask around.

I'm eager to go and see the blockades and the *muchachos*. We drive only a short way around the hill where Somoza's bunker is, then leave the car by the road and start heading for one of the side streets. We ask for the Puente Eden. A man with a thin, drawn face, Mario Solorzano, offers to take us there with his six-year-old son Jesus, saying he was headed in that direction because he had relatives living there. We turn a corner and hear pretty heavy shooting nearby. We rush back and start contemplating whether the effort is worthwhile. Alan favors leaving; Alain and Alma want to go ahead, block by block if necessary. "You mean just the way you live, day by day," comments Alan. I remain neutral, somewhat siding with Alan, but wanting to go, though I started feeling scared.

Alain carries our makeshift truce flag, a Hotel Intercontinental towel attached to a stick. We sprint from corner to corner, staying close to the walls of the mostly abandoned buildings. A lot of fallen branches on the streets, probably shot down during heavy bursts of fire.

We come to our first barricade, built out of *adoquines*, those cement bricks used to pave the country's highways. Ideal for constructing barricades. The entire intersection is a maze of trenches, with little coves fenced by a board, providing a place to burrow into in case of an aerial attack. Ten young *muchachos* and *muchachas*, boys and girls, are guarding the place. A blondish young Sandinista (they are all young) takes a lot of time deciding if he'll give us permission to go to the Puente Eden or not. He looks at our credentials and is glad none of us is American. He argues about our safety and worries about who should accompany us—an armed or an unarmed person. That's when Mario identifies himself and says he'd be willing to lead us there. A very young guy is also assigned to accompany us, at least some of the way.

I see the first Sandinista with something resembling a uniform, namely an olive green jacket. Most of the people we meet at the dozen or so barricades we pass wear very little to identify themselves as Sandinistas. I see a black beret with a piece of narrow red ribbon, or some kind of red insignia. Many young women, most of them armed with pistols. They are very friendly, as are the boys, once we tell them we're journalists and have permission to pass through. Nobody once searched us; they trusted us even though someone tells me the *Guardia* sends in women with bags containing bombs.

At each barricade we are told that the strip ahead might be extremely dangerous. *Franco-tiradores*, sharpshooters. Sometimes bullets whizz very close by. A push-pull plane circles in the sky, mortaring the area. At one point Alan tells us a bomb is coming because he has seen it fall. All those details piling up in quick succession scare me very much—also the constant running from one block to the next, this whole idea that we must keep moving. Even crossing the street seems very dangerous. Everything is starting to seem very dangerous to me. Alma comments that it is surprising so many people do come out alive, considering the number of bullets flying in the air. Small comfort.

We get to a Red Cross post. They warn us that the next stretch is going to be very dangerous. I am sweaty and tired, my heart is beating fast. I am ready to give up. I can't look around too much since I have to concentrate all my strength on just dealing with my fear.

Alain mentions that fear lodges in different parts of the body. Suddenly I feel my left breast most vulnerable and hold my Guatemalan bag to it, thinking how odd because that's not the side where the heart lodges. But of course it is. I can't tell left from right. Fear starts making me shaky, and that seems dangerous. I try to breathe deep, but can't for more than a few seconds at a time. We move on and on. Finally we come to a kind of central gathering place. A slight rest. I think I won't be able to continue any further. A young woman in olive green uniform and black beret is scanning the sky to see what a push-pull bomber is doing. "No, it's too high to bomb us right now," she says. "When it returns to where we are it will have run out of bombs," she assures us.

It seems we are waiting for something. Alma calms me by telling me that the more nervous I become the more dangerous it will be because I won't be able to think straight or act clearly. She is right. I feel better. Surprise, surprise, Margarita shows up! She is in charge of taking us to the leaders. I feel relieved that there's someone I know, though it is no protection against the bullets. We follow her, and for some unexplainable reason stop at a barricade. A few *muchachos* are around. I talk with them about the basics, and also about fear. They mention their slogan, *Patria libre o morir* ("Homeland free or die"), and explain that even the *muchachos*, the most irregular of the fighting forces, have had some political as well as military training. They're no longer afraid, or maybe they're just used to it. But going in cold, without the experience of military service or other battlegrounds, you react the way I do. The others are afraid too, but they don't express it as openly as I do.

On the move again. Some people are still living in this area. An old man peeks out a window. A young woman is crocheting a yellow tablecloth on the footsteps of her house. Other people keep their front doors open and are sitting inside in their rocking chairs as if nothing much out of the ordinary were going on outside. But long stretches of the streets are totally deserted.

We run, stop, and peer around a corner. The *muchacho* guide told us, at one point, that if we heard a hissing sound we should throw ourselves on the ground and keep our mouths open so our eardrums won't burst. A mortar explodes very close to us. I am flat on my stomach in a split-second.

Running, trying to look around, my heart pounding, feet getting tired, and fear making me pant and almost panic. I think I may die just because right now I am very happy, a happiness I feel I don't deserve. All kinds of little images going through my head. I admire the *muchachos* who have spent days and weeks working on this liberated zone.

Finally we have arrived where the leaders are. I can't believe it. But yes, we are at the safehouse. Someone gives me a pill to take, seeing that I am very shaken. A woman gives me a glass of water and someone tells her to give me a few drops of valerian too. I remember as a child taking that bitter-tasting drug for my nervous upset stomach. She rummages through her first aid kit, a flowered picnic bag, but she doesn't have any.

The press conference. We sit on metal beds without mattresses. After a while the pill starts working and I'm in a good mood. Three people introduce themselves. I recognize one man from pictures. He has a clean look about him, a neat moustache and light tan army jacket; he holds an Uzi, no it must be a Gallil. Next to me is a

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In the safe house. From left to right: Carlos Nuñez, member of the nine-person National Directorate of the FSLN and member of the FSLN's Political Commission; Moises Hassan, former Minister of Transportation; Victoria Schultz; and Joaquin Cuadra, Chief of Staff of the Sandinist Army. Photo by Victoria Schultz.

youngish man with bright eyes and curly short hair, and a pistol lying next to him. Then I see Moises Hassan, sitting with legs crossed on the floor. He looks grubby with his untrimmed beard and thick glasses, but cheerful. Colorful swirls pattern his blue shirt.

I have a hard time focusing on what they're talking about. First come rounds of rhetoric, the definition of the structures of the struggle. Then we're told about this liberated zone and how hard the work was that went into building it. They are very proud of this liberated zone. It is vast, not quite half of Managua, maybe one-fourth, and what used to be a very densely populated area. The zone is concrete proof of the insurrection and the people's participation in it. They talk about the Somoza regime's atrocities—facts we already know well.

I look at the house and try to focus on observing things to calm my fear and anxiety about the return trip ahead of us. Hassan, who is now a member of the Sandinist junta, says the leadership moves from house to house; this is their base for only a very brief moment. It is a small one-room house, 15 x 15. Seems newly built from the inside, or at least reinforced. From the outside it doesn't differ much from the modest wooden houses in the area. All around is a four-foot high wall made of thick cinder blocks; above that a paneling of thick slabs of wood looks very fresh. A few chairs, beds; the windows are opaque glass. On one wall a framed picture of a cherub's face against a star-studded pink background. Another picture, some remote cityscape, Paris perhaps. A baby's cot. Several kids running around. Hassan says they belong to the people who live in the house. He shows me the bomb shelter they've dug in the backyard, some ten feet deep, covered with boards and a layer of cinder blocks. A little girl is sitting on a mattress at the bottom of the shelter. I tell Hassan all this reminds me of the war in Finland when Helsinki was being bombed. I remember the night sky lighting up from the flares.

They all smoke cigarettes constantly, except for Hassan. A young woman guards the door. She cannot yet be 20. She has a pistol next to her on the floor. Smiles are returned, the atmosphere is very relaxed, though throughout the hour and a half we spend in the house we constantly hear the sounds of shooting, mortars exploding, and push-pull planes circling above us.

We talk about the provisional government which has just been formed. They sound basically like Social Democrats. They feel everyone should participate in the transitional phase of reconstruction, even the bourgeoisie. I ask what the role of the *Guerra Popular Prolongara* and the *Insurrectionistas* will be.* Hassan is quick to point out that they'll have to wait for the elections. If the people want them, then that's how it will be, he says.

We cover a lot of ground. After an hour we take a break to take pictures. I, too, pose with the three, smiling so none of my fear should show. I think I'd like to stay; it's comfortable, and I would not have to face the mad dash to get back to the world with their messages. They indeed invite us to stay. Alan says he's sorry he can't stay since there's no telex or telephone. Alma makes a crack about Alan needing his well-ironed clothes and creature comforts. Alain is game, though he's been as afraid as me.

Although we're all set to go, to avoid the heavy shooting that starts after lunch, we're told there will be another little meeting. Two guys arrive. One is a very young man, big and dark-skinned, dressed in full olive uniform. He cradles an Uzi in his arms and tries to find a way of holding it so he won't be impolitely pointing it at us. At his waist he has tucked a pistol. The other one is Joaquin. He sits across from me, a slight man with a small-featured face. He has two deep furrows in his forehead. His greenish eyes seem distant; he is somewhere else.

The two men talk mostly about the military aspects of what's been happening. The darker man details the facts and figures. Joaquin talks about other things. He is optimistic, but his face tells another story. It is full of pain and profound sadness. I'd like to kiss him and hug him. What's the drug they've given me anyhow? I feel good about meeting the leadership and seeing that they are people who seem to have their shit together. I feel these two are pointing out that the struggle can't be won overnight. Are they then part of the other factions, the GPP and the *Insurrectionistas*? Despite all the talk of unity, I get the feeling it isn't terribly solid.

It's finally time to go—1:30, time for the shooting to begin again. Many details I don't understand in Spanish, some of the directions and such. My survival instinct, however, makes me understand perfectly all the signs and even rapid phrases having to do with potential dangers. I give Hassan and José Antonio the message about the airport being pretty lightly guarded, ammunitions and arms having arrived by land via Honduras, and two planeloads of military stuff. They appreciate the information and say we should denounce this flow of arms to Somoza. I would like to ask them how they cope with fear. I don't. I leave them a pack of cigarettes, *Rubios*. They laugh and say it has become the brand of the war. I don't quite understand why. I feel silly asking them if I can come back to the liberated zone to talk with the women fighters. I admit to them that I don't know how I'd make it, because already this time I have been very very scared.

At the outset, the trek back isn't quite as bad as before. I'm

*The three factions of the Sandinist National Liberation Front (FSLN) during the 1979 insurrection were the GPP, or *Prolonged Popular War*, which favored a long struggle based in the rural areas; the *Insurrectionistas*, who believed the time was ripe for an immediate insurrection; and the *Proletarian Tendency*, which concentrated on organizing the masses in the cities.

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tired, I run out of breath and want to pause often. Now I know more or less where we're heading. I have no sense of the distances. We see a long line of people waiting for the food rations of the day. We hear the sound of airplanes. Someone tells the people in line to move close to the houses, into the shade of trees. They are still living here, and they keep their doors open. It seems weird to be jogging in this doubled-up fashion, panting and afraid, and then to catch glimpses of the calm interiors of people's houses. The usual neat, simple interiors, tile floors and rattan furniture. Women, children, and old men look out their windows at the insurrection passing by.

Now we move faster than before because the *muchachos* at the barricades know us and let us through with no trouble. At many posts it is lunchtime. Plates of rice and beans. At the Puente Leon we take a different road from the one we came. We have to cross a wide open stretch of grassy land. Alma runs sort of zigzag. I just run. We're along the highway now, with very few people around. For blocks, only abandoned houses and angry dogs—the least thing to be afraid of here. I'm actually too exhausted to even think about fear anymore. I'm too tired to bend my head low. Several times we hear fire very close by. At one barricade there's some hassle, they don't want us to go on. We're told they can't guarantee our safety beyond this point. The guide Mario and his little boy Jesus are still with us. Mario says he'll take us out.

At the next barricade young militias sit and eat lunch in the shade of a tree. They are all very skinny. One wears a wide-brimmed hat with the rim turned up and FSLN in black letters on it. To see a human face shining fills me with joy. I say hello, they say *adios*. Yes, *a dios*, to God, that's the appropriate greeting in a time and place such as this.

On our own again, we take out a Hotel Intercontinental towel. Mario holds it in one hand and holds his little boy's hand with the other. We run in a kind of no-man's land. A Sandinist medic comes over and informs us that the road ahead is bad. Mario says he knows a roundabout way of getting there by crossing a narrow bridge to get to the other side of the road.

I am the first one to cross. I jump over a chasm to get to the bridge because a large part of it is missing. I feel like a moving target for a sniper. I run for the houses, to find shelter in their shade. The medic and a Sandinist fighter argue which way to go. The *barrio* is totally deserted, except for a man playing baseball alone in a yard, throwing or, rather, batting the ball against the wall. Thump, thump, thump, the only sound here besides the gunfire in the distance and the sound of the airplanes in the sky.

After a while we meet three women going in the same direction we are. I'm beginning to feel much safer—we have made it alive. We pass a movie theater, the Select. I wonder when a movie was last shown there. Approaching an intersection we stop short. Across the street we see a Sandinist guerrilla. We holler to him, and he waves for us to cross the street. As we do we see flimsy barricades made of tree branches on both sides. Behind one, quite a few people. I hope they're Sandinistas and won't shoot. We cross safely.

Further on, we come to a fence and behind it a barracks-like building. Little Jesus tells me it is his school. We must be close to the car. At least now we're out of the zone. My mouth is dry, I feel an intense heat radiating from me. I ask Alma if we should give Mario some money and I wonder why he took us. He never even tried to visit the relatives he said he wanted to see. Alma says he is either a real patriot or an *oreja*, a spy. She has several dollars to give him. I want to give him 100 pesos. Alain also wants to contribute.

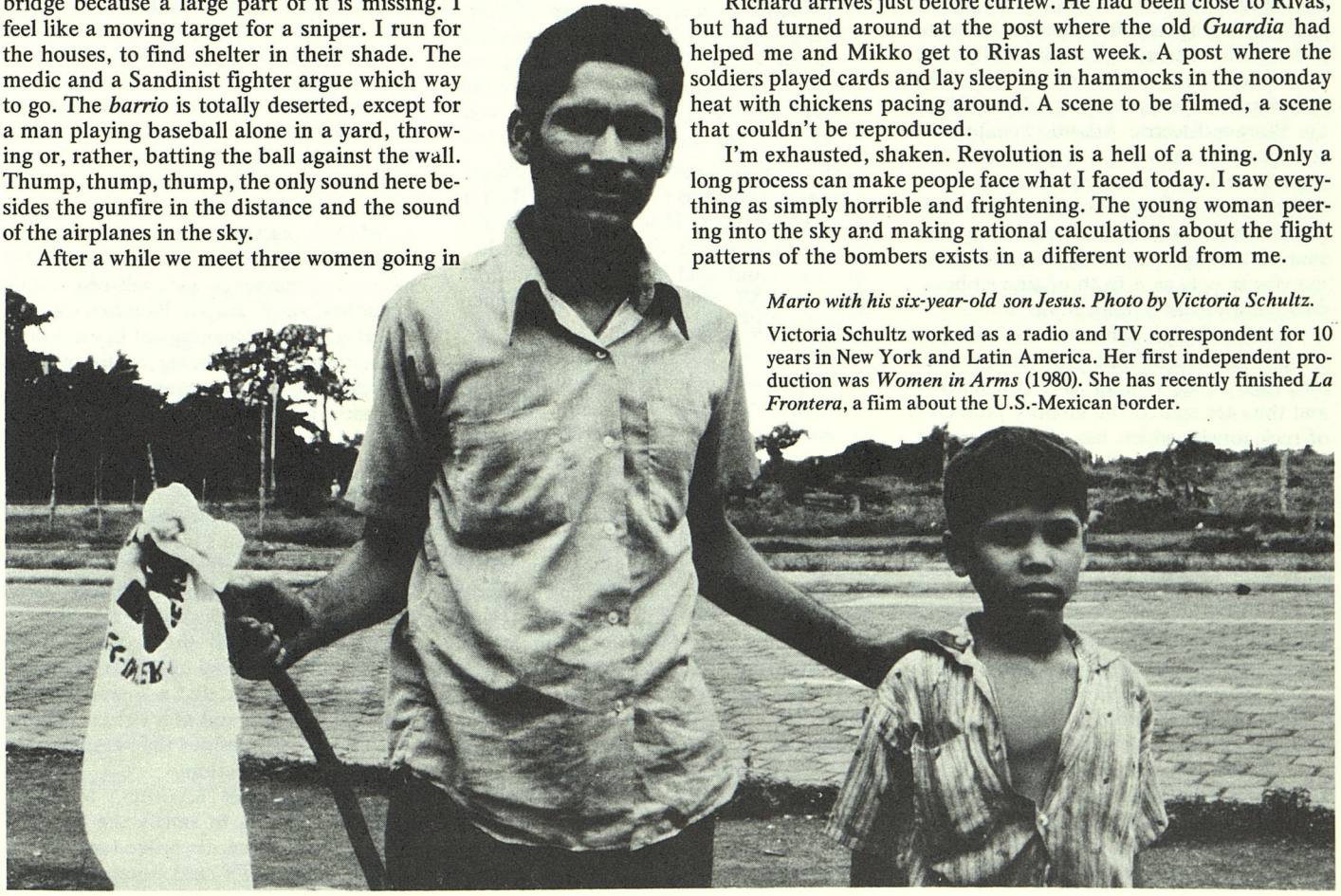
Finally I spot the three colored circles on the wall of the house where we left the car. I am ready to cry, grateful we have made it. I take a picture of Jesus and his father. We leave them the Intercontinental flag. Alan doesn't make a contribution.

Alma says we should cool down before going to the hotel. I don't feel like walking alone in the streets so Alan drives me back to the Estrella. A lot of people are sitting in the lobby. They see that something has happened to me. Lenora asks if I've been beaten. No, I say, I've just been running a little bit. Richard has left for Rivas, leaving a note saying he'll probably stay all night. I need him to hold me in his arms. I drink glasses of water, take two Valiums, and fall asleep.

But I have to start working on the material we risked so much to get. It calls for all the strength I have to concentrate on writing. I look at my red face in the mirror. The terror of the experience. The worst part of it was not knowing where we were going and where the lines of fire were. I didn't know who was shooting whom and from what direction to expect the bullets. They were everywhere. I had to trust those who led us. And I did trust them—but not myself. The situation was so new.

Richard arrives just before curfew. He had been close to Rivas, but had turned around at the post where the old *Guardia* had helped me and Mikko get to Rivas last week. A post where the soldiers played cards and lay sleeping in hammocks in the noonday heat with chickens pacing around. A scene to be filmed, a scene that couldn't be reproduced.

I'm exhausted, shaken. Revolution is a hell of a thing. Only a long process can make people face what I faced today. I saw everything as simply horrible and frightening. The young woman peering into the sky and making rational calculations about the flight patterns of the bombers exists in a different world from me.



Mario with his six-year-old son Jesus. Photo by Victoria Schultz.

Victoria Schultz worked as a radio and TV correspondent for 10 years in New York and Latin America. Her first independent production was *Women in Arms* (1980). She has recently finished *La Frontera*, a film about the U.S.-Mexican border.

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THREE-MINUTE HEROES

ANNIE GOLDSON

My friends apologize before they turn MTV on to relax. Conversation ceases. End-to-end rock videos, interspersed with advertisements of the same image-pumping character. Superstardom in your own lounge-room (or someone else's if you can't afford or still can't get cable TV). Who can resist such escapist fantasy? It is that sense of fascination. . .

Rock video is the new darling of the technological "revolution." It has a bright future, so bright that it could well make stereo systems obsolete within the next few years. All the signs are there: Rock groups are aiming for the simultaneous release of albums and rock clips, video jukeboxes are poised ready to fill the clubs, and the price of TV/stereo hook-ups is almost within reach of the average rock consumer.

The majority of rock videos (or "promos") are developed and given away by record companies to boost record sales. They come in two different styles. One is straightforward, basically a documentation of a song, performed either on stage or in a studio. Effects are limited to dry ice and flashing lights. The other is a three- to five-minute "narrative," a mini-Hollywood that follows the storyline of the song. The first narrative promo, produced in 1977 by the Warner/Electric/Atlantic "coalition," set the scene for what was to come. "Tonight's the Night" featured Rod Stewart's seduction of a blonde bombshell by a fireplace. She remains the faceless mystery woman throughout the tape, existing for the viewer only as a froth of tiny ribbons, frills, and pieces of bare flesh.

Unlike albums, commercial promos, as giveaways, are still not products in their own right. They remain advertisements—and thus are spared the identity problems of rock music, which has always teetered between being an "art" and a "commercial product." The producers who create promos determine a visual style and a personality that will sell the song. Their policy of "hits only" has evened out the diversity that exists in rock music. Whatever the setting of the narrative, from the jungles of Sri Lanka and oceangoing yachts in Rio, to the grimy urban wastes of London—the theme is tiringly similar: *romance*. Rock video's obsession with True Love, which idealizes sex roles defining men as active and women as passive, is reintroducing values from the '50s.

The conservatism of rock video is not the fault of the fusion itself, but rather of the corporate control over its production and distribution. When the stirrings of rock video began, things were very different. The punk/new wave movement was radicalizing rock music in such a way that a significant number of women were playing rock instruments for the first time. In 1975, two women—Pat Ivers and Emily Armstrong—started a New York-based production company called Advanced Television. For five years, they documented the performances of many of the bands that were shaping the new rock movement in the U.S. Said Ivers:

> *The early days of rock video coincided with a time when people in music were trying to distance themselves from their [traditional sex] roles. Even Richard Hell was conscious of it. It made it much easier for us to work. No one would have dared come up to me and say, "Hey, li'l girl, what you doin' with that big old camera?"*

Rock clubs were also the sites of an experimental approach to rock video. At Hurrah and Danceteria in New York, a DJ and a video-jockey would often work together, mixing sound and image. As Maureen Nappi, ex-VJ from Hurrah and Peppermint Lounge, described it:

> *The connections would sometimes be haphazard; other times we would try to make the music and image relate in some thematic way—springing twists on the audience in the hope of involving them in the long wait to hear the headlining band play at 2 a.m. Clubs can be so boring. . . .*

Nappi would intercut all kinds of material —"found footage" (Eisenstein's films, documentation of JFK's assassination), synthesized and animated images, and taped performances of live bands.

In the clubs and basements, a new art movement was created, but its aesthetic discoveries were rapidly co-opted by record company interests to develop their new promotional tool. Exactly how innovative these early artists were is only becoming apparent in retrospect—as more and more of their ideas and techniques are seen on the corporate rock video screen.

Video artists have continued to produce tapes independently, often working with bands with whom they share aesthetic and conceptual concerns. Most independent products, however, have been eclipsed by record company promos. Even if an independent tape is of "commercial quality" (difficult when the standards are set by record industry promo budgets of $35,000 to $100,000), it rarely receives much exposure because of the limited and carefully controlled distribution.

Rock videos are shown in clubs, a few galleries, and on cable TV. The most influential outlet is the cable station Music Television (MTV), which has gathered 12 million subscribers throughout the U.S. since it was set up in August 1981. MTV is a joint investment of Warner Communications and American Express—the Warner/Amex Satellite Entertainment Company, to be precise. The initial investment was $20 million (although confirming this amount was difficult).

MTV's national broadcast features continuous promos, liberally sprinkled with advertisements and self-promotion, including "stars" such as Paul MacCartney and Boy George speaking out in support of the station. It has a weekly playlist of about 50 videotapes, chosen from a library that currently holds 1,000 tapes. Its selection is racist and conservative; it virtually refuses to show tapes by Black and independent artists, giving exclusive showing to the advertising promos of the major record labels.[1] The station's intended purpose is to "break" bands, escalating them to number 1 on the charts. It is successful—both the Stray Cats and Musical Youth received little attention until their promos were played on MTV. More and more tapes are now being produced that adhere to MTV's production styles, and as a virtual monopoly, it has clearly defined the parameters of rock video as a medium.

MTV programs according to demographics—aiming to satisfy the tastes of white mid-America. Its prime target is the family, and as MTV spokesman Roy Tray-

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kin said, especially those with a "three-minute attention span." Defenders of MTV maintain that it acts as a visual radio, providing a mere backdrop to normal household activities. Even a vague understanding, however, of the different meanings of television and radio in Western culture invalidates this defense. For those who have been exposed to alternative images—of rock culture and of sex-role stereotyping—the power of MTV can at least be tempered. But for the huge suburban following of this cable station, exposure to the racist and sexist fantasies is undiluted.

Rock video will also go beyond the U.S. suburbs. The transmission of American (mass) culture has always been most successfully carried out by Hollywood, TV, and popular music, and by combining aspects of all three, rock video has a potential influence that is quite staggering. It will be able to prescribe its romantic formula—an affirmation of the nuclear family, that basic unit of consumer culture—to many countries, including the Third World and the Eastern bloc.

Preoccupation with romance and sexism is hardly new—such fantasies have been the basis of rock culture, passed down to three generations of adolescents, through Elvis, the Beatles, psychedelia, and punk. How rock video compounds their impact, by its narrow commercial interests and its use of the female image, has to be understood in the context of broader rock culture. More than any form of popular media, rock's primary message is about sex. Threatening as this has always been to parents, conjuring up fears of teenage sex-and-drug orgies, in reality rock has reinforced the traditional ordering of the sexes. Women have been cast as "dumb chicks," groupies, and obliging wives/girlfriends, while ironically providing the "inspiration" for most rock lyrics. In their only tolerated role, as singers, women have been constrained by the demand that they conform to the image of the day, and their presentation of sexuality, although encouraged to be "provocative," has remained passive.

There have been a few brave exceptions to this rule of the "brotherhood." In the early '60s, Ann "Honey" Lantree played drums with the British band Honey and the Honeycombs, alongside her brother. As a session musician, Carol Kaye received less acclaim, but she played guitar and bass in some of the top U.S. line-ups. Others include Genya Ravan of Goldy and the Gingerbreads, Megan Davies of the Applejacks, and Terry Garthwaite and Toni Brown, instrumentalists with Joy of Cooking.

The first women, however, to assume creative control over widely popular bands came out of the psychedelic movement of the late '60s. Janis Joplin and Grace Slick possessed tremendous talent and power, Joplin reaching almost mythological status in the counterculture. But they, too, were forced to face the demands of the image. Although Joplin tried, she could never quite break free from her audience's expectations. As Ellen Willis, New York feminist writer and critic, describes: "Joplin's revolt against conventional femininity was brave and imaginative but it also dovetailed with the stereotype—the ballsy one-of-the-guys chick, who is a needy cream-puff underneath—cherished by her legions of hip male fans." [2]

More women were playing in bands by the early '70s—Fanny, Suzi Soul and the Pleasure Seekers (Suzi Quatro), Ramatan, and Bertha among them. Times were more liberal—the counterculture had at least freed women from the restraints of '50s femininity. But the "sexual equality" of this period was a guise. Rock songs were still mostly about love; men remained the sexual consumers, women the objects to be consumed. It took another musical movement—punk—along with the example of Patti Smith to inspire an entire wave of women rock artists and instrumentalists, who demanded the stage.

The punk movement [3] sprang up partly as an anti-consumerist revolt against sexual stereotypes in both the U.S. and the U.K. Its message—a rejection of romance as constructed in Western industrialized society—released women from their peripheral position as romantic (sex) objects within rock culture. For the first time it became conceivable that rock could be against sexism.

Yet many of the new women performers did not identify as feminists. Although by raising the expectations of women in every field, including rock, feminism had indirectly encouraged the presence of the women rock artists, the worlds of feminism and rock culture had diverged considerably by this time. The women's movement, in rejecting the sexual double-standard of the "sex, drugs and rock 'n roll" generation, had given rock music, the manifestation of male sexuality, the boot as well. By the time the punk movement arrived, many feminists had lost interest in rock, concentrating instead on developing their own particular sound from the influences of protest, country, blues, and jazz.

The punk women may not have been "feminists," but they were often strongly anti-sexist. Not only did their presence on stage contradict the passive stereotype of women in rock, but so did their expressed politic. In the U.S. Patti Smith, artist/poet/minimalist, was developing an androgynous image that the mainstream media found difficult to take. She gained commercial attention with hits like "Gloria," while still producing subversive songs such as "Rock 'n Roll Nigger." Tina Weymouth, bassist with the influential band Talking Heads, also chose androgyny, tending to downplay her image completely. By contrast, Debbie Harry of Blondie was a self-conscious sex siren, sliding back and forth from irony to being a real sex-kitten. Weymouth is one of the few women from that period who has managed to produce a commercially successful solo album (and rock video) without compromising her style. Yet Harry soon lost her subversive edge—to emblazon the cover of *Playboy* and, more recently, to star in the movie *Videodrome*.

The British punk movement fused the minimalist sounds of Patti Smith and her contemporaries with Reggae and Northern soul. Punk's arrival in the U.K. was an unleashing—angrier and more directly political than its U.S. counterpart. One of its avowed intentions was to overthrow the record industry, and for a while this seemed possible. Playing an important part in the energy of the movement were the English "girl-punks," often still in their teens. They



Cartoon by Lynda Barry, a painter and cartoonist who currently lives in France.

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used irony and outrageousness to subvert the traditional images of femininity. Covering themselves with sex-shop paraphernalia and wearing torn fish-nets, they flaunted the commercialization of sexuality. Their lyrics parodied sex roles:

I'm so happy
You're so nice
Kiss kiss kiss
Fun fun life
Oh oh oh
Sweet love and romance

[The Slits]

I could stay home and play houses
Love my man and press his trousers
It would be so easy. . .

[The Bodysnatchers]

I thought I was a woman,
thought you were a man
but I was Tinkerbelle
and you were Peter Pan

[Poly Styrene from X-Ray Spex]

Punk could not last. For those uninvolved in rock culture, the punk movement was seen as pointlessly nihilistic, violent and ugly. The increasing exploitation by the mass media (which loved the miniskirts and ripped stockings) sexualized the anti-romantic meaning of punk costume, and the rawness of the sound obscured its political thrust to all except the initiated. Especially in the U.S., punk was rapidly assimilated into fashion, while in England various neo-fascist and violent gangs (Nazi punks) assumed the distinctive image—a blow for a movement that had developed as a fusion of Black and white influences.

The dispersion of punk was largely the responsibility of the record industry. Punk's musical innovation had developed outside the corporate domain, through performance and some independent distribution. When its ideas proved sufficiently popular to be lucrative, the industry used its financial clout to take them over and turn them into "safe" products. For the women involved, their radical image was turned into just another glamorous style. Although their presence on stage had brought up new questions about convention and sexuality, in the end they could not survive unless they were "beautiful." Some, such as Patti Smith, Poly Styrene, and Lora Logic (sax player with X-Ray Spex), stopped performing. Those who continued in the spirit of punk were forced into art rock rather than commercial rock circles—and their visibility decreased. They were further eclipsed by the "liberated" women—those musicians who conformed to the demands of the record industry.

Accelerating the commercialization of punk was rock video—the ideal medium for defusing any threat. Its success lay in its immediacy: Now the rock consumer could "see" the superstars (always a strong urge), as well as hear them. Placed in the consumerist spirit of rock culture, these images were highly marketable—every last kiss-curl and mohawk could be mimicked and sold. This commercialization dispersed the original meaning of punk (rebellion), spreading it through mainstream culture. By the time the bondage costumes of the punk women reached the windows of Bloomingdale's (via exposure on MTV) as "punkette" fashion, they were just another "safe" product. The subversive meaning, the anger and the irony, had been displaced by another—being cute.

Although the commercialization of punk affected both male and female artists, rock video left the new women performers particularly vulnerable. Rock video has many of the same ingredients of Hollywood—heroes, heroines, and love—and a critique of Hollywood developed by feminist film theorists can be adapted for an analysis of rock video. Using psychoanalytic theory, this critique describes how women's images are constructed by Hollywood to satisfy certain "needs" in an audience—needs that arise during the formation of desire in the human unconscious. Women are positioned outside "language" and any real expression of their subjectivity is denied due to their "lack" of the phallus, and therefore of power and authority. This notion of women as "lacking" provokes fear of castration in the hero, and in the flip-side response, fascination or "love." Women as beautiful objects are used as phallic substitutes; they have no real importance in themselves.

An infatuation with the '50s and early '60s followed the demise of punk. The new interest in romance and the use of "retro" style are especially evident in rock video. Yet there is a difference: Many of the "stars" in the tapes display a certain self-consciousness, as if they remained aware of the alternative ideologies they grew up with (such as the counterculture, feminism, and punk). Neither parody nor irony, this self-consciousness appears to be used to justify the choice to extol the "old values," a choice that becomes part of a backlash against radical elements in this culture. Along with the New Right, rock has begun to wax sentimental about the past, idealizing marriage and the family, as if to suggest that such traditional "solutions" will clear up contemporary problems of a far more complex nature.

Whether the self-consciousness is used to justify the artist's choice or not, the display of romance is being appropriated by youth culture today, as it was by the teenagers of the '50s. Romance describes love and marriage in a way that means different things to boys and girls. For boys, the cock-rockers, from Elvis to Adam Ant, become a confirmation of their dominance and power. For girls, however, these same superstars become symbols of the Boy Next Door, the necessary "goal" to fulfill their life's work—marriage.

The new preoccupation with romance is clearly evident in a brief survey of rock video. Of the MTV clips sampled, 80% were love songs and 84% performed by all-male bands. The "mixed" bands were all comprised of one woman and three or four men, and in most of these cases the women were the lead vocalists. In the narrative videos, women were generally peripheral, glimpsed at intervals through the song. Sometimes they were represented only as body parts (lips, etc.).

The most popular female stereotype is the "cold bitch"—the beautiful woman rejecting or ignoring the superstar's plea. One promo showed a woman preparing to go on a date. As she dresses and puts on her makeup, she has to keep stepping around the male singer, who insists on cluttering up her bedroom. Although he is singing about her, neither of them acknowledges the other—he sings to the camera, she ignores him completely. Finally, she finishes dressing and walks out of the house. The singer is there to open her car door and she slides in, leaving him behind.

In addition to the "cold bitch," women are depicted as "adoring," as "man-eating vamps," and as "victims." Women are also used less specifically, dotted around as decoration, eating (grapes and figs), sleeping, dressing and undressing.

Brides and weddings figure in a number of the rock videos. "Nice Day for a White Wedding" is a chronicle of disillusionment by Billy Idol, one of the scene's most voguish stars. His use of marriage as a solution to his unhappiness is not unusual (when all else fails, at least your wife will look after you). The bridal scene is held in a cemetery, with smoky-eyed bridesmaids in black offsetting the beautiful bride, decked out in white frills. During the ceremony Idol forces the ring onto the finger of the bride, making it bleed. As with the eating of figs and grapes, this clumsy piece of symbolism needs little explanation.

"El Salvador" by Garland Jeffries also "documents" a bridal ceremony and in a subsequent scene shows Jeffries chasing his wife around the kitchen as she tries to prepare dinner. Intercut into both scenes are shots of wide-eyed children. If, in some way, these children are meant to refer to the war that is destroying their country, the tape is hardly making a political statement. It seems more likely that Jeffries and MTV have used the visibility of the war for their mutual commercial benefit.

Whether women are used as adjuncts to provide romantic interest, or whether they themselves become the "stars," their visual treatment varies little. Video technology lends itself to "romantic" imagery; the tapes are full of slow-motion shots—women with long hair blowing around them, women rising in a cascade of silk and ribbon from a bed, women appearing in a pink cloud puff cornerscreen. Even the women who manage to escape the cute-as-pie treatment stay well within the bounds of "femininity."

In general, the position of women in rock video is no different from what it has been traditionally in rock—they are tolerated as visual sex symbols to front an all-

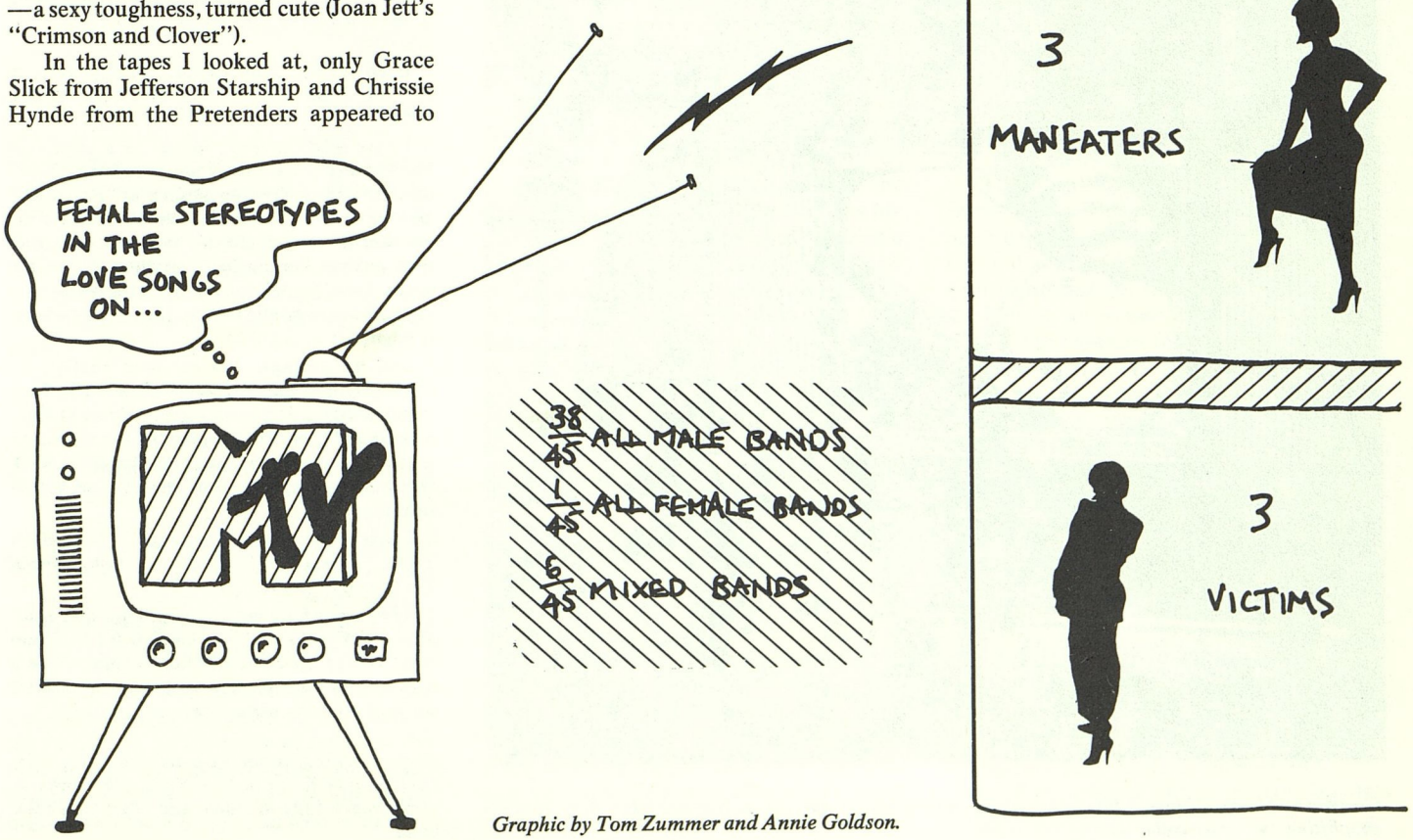
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male band. But some have an added sophistication. MTV, careful to stay in tune with market demands, has responded to the "woman question" by providing an image of the "new, liberated woman." The women performers are not only beautiful (hence still gratifying as images to be consumed), "liberated" (sexually assertive in their approach to men), but also capable (having a woman play an instrument counters the criticism that they are being used purely for decoration). Not that these characteristics are negative in themselves, but they are frequently used to mask the real oppression and violence that women face.

"I Know What Boys Like," a hit by the Waitresses, sung by a woman and written by a man, typifies the old cliché that it is "women that really call the shots." The song acknowledges that women are in a position of relative powerlessness, yet it implies a bemused acceptance, even an enjoyment of this position. This more knowing woman may appear more exciting than her passive precursor, but in her acceptance of the existing power structure, she is still containable, affirming rather than threatening established sex roles. Such images recuperate the impact of feminism, and the beautiful "liberated" woman becomes an impossible ideal.

The "heavy-metal" stereotype is a variation of the "new, liberated woman" with the added dimension of "tough-girl naughtiness." There seems to be more room for female expression in this stereotype (for example, in Joan Jett's "Bad Reputation" and "I Love Rock and Roll"). But as "leather girls" their sexual appeal seems constructed according to male expectations —a sexy toughness, turned cute (Joan Jett's "Crimson and Clover").

In the tapes I looked at, only Grace Slick from Jefferson Starship and Chrissie Hynde from the Pretenders appeared to



Graphic by Tom Zummer and Annie Goldson.

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have creative control over their images. Interestingly, their tapes were two of the five that did not focus on "love" as a major theme. Slick and Hynde came out of different musical eras—the psychedelic and punk movements respectively. Both have, to some degree, retained the concerns of those periods in rock, although any real radical expression has been toned down and cleaned up. Neither woman has the creative influence in shaping rock she once had.

My point is not to criticize rock culture in itself, but rather its direction, showing how rock video, in undermining the power of recent rock movements, has driven women's visible, powerful presence out of rock culture. Serious critiques of rock are only just emerging.[4] There has been a general refusal to acknowledge rock on the part of both traditional academics and feminists—a surprising omission, considering its overwhelming importance in developing sexuality within Western culture. But, even apart from this influence, rock should command our attention.

Rock has a potentially subversive power, an energy and enthusiasm that have at certain times crossed the barriers of race, class, and sex, challenging the authority and control of the record industry and other power structures. For women, too, rock can provide a source of sexual expression and power, which can be used to wrest the female image away from being defined in purely male terms. Although penetrating the inner male circle of rock has not been easy, women musicians and video artists *have* used rock's sexual language to explore feminist concerns. Ivers and Armstrong, in collaboration with Robin Schazenbach, produced a tape called "Girl Porn: Boys' Backs," a short satirical piece that shows 18 men stripping for the camera. They are currently working on an installation piece about "seduction." Nappi, too, has used her image-processed and animated tapes to "reclaim the female body back from voyeurism."

Ironically, it is this sexual characteristic of rock culture that many feminists have rejected. Despite widespread acknowledgment that "sexual freedom" is a goal for women, how to achieve it has led to considerable conflict.[5] The arguments that lie at the root of this current conflict about sexuality also explain the attitude many feminists hold toward rock music. For those who reject sexual liberalism, suggesting that all male sexuality is an uncontrollable and constant source of violence, to be curbed at all cost, rock can hold little interest. But to an opposing group, which sees finding positive expressions of sexuality for women as a way of challenging the current imbalance of power between men and women, rock holds possibilities. Any attempt to censor and control male sexuality, they believe, will further inhibit female sexual freedom.[6] They argue, too, that sexuality is no more "naturally" aggressive and violent than female sexuality is "naturally" gentle and passive. Although this view may correspond with the experience of many people, to see these characteristics as inherent is to reinforce traditional notions of female passivity.

Within the framework of the second argument, rock can be described as a medium that is not "naturally" male, but one that can provide women with a rare opportunity for finding sexual expression. Not that this is easy—but feminist disapproval of rock can only act as a further prohibition against participation. I do not mean that every woman should grab for the nearest bass guitar or start producing rock videos. The products, and the industry that controls them, have serious flaws. But to dismiss rock altogether is to cut out possibilities of expression for women, and to deny them one way of changing sexual attitudes. And as rock culture, led by rock video, takes a conservative turn, it becomes more essential than ever for independent women artists and musicians to force the market to expand to include alternative images to those that are currently flooding the TV screen.



Graphic by Sherry Millner, a filmmaker living and working in San Diego. Her two latest films concern shoplifting and white-collar (computer) crime.

1. Initially even Diana Ross was banned from MTV, but now as criticism of its racism is increasing, MTV has conceded a little, airing those Black tapes that are acceptable to a white audience.

2. Ellen Willis, "Janis Joplin," in *Beginning to See the Light* (New York: Wideview Books, 1982).

3. I have used the term "punk" in a somewhat blanket way to describe a movement that developed into other movements such as "new wave" and "no wave." As I wish to concentrate on the position of women during this period, rather than analyze the musical variations within the genre, I use "punk" to refer to all the music that rejected the romantic notions that had previously reigned in rock culture.

4. See, for example, the excellent analysis by Simon Frith in *Sound Effects* (New York: Pantheon, 1981). It is interesting that feminist filmmakers and theorists have tended to use women punk musicians (or at least their lyrics) in work that has examined issues of identity and identification.

5. I have drawn much of my analysis from Ellen Willis, "Towards a Female Liberation," *Social Text*, no. 6 (Fall 1982), pp. 3-15.

6. They argue for a need to assure free and available abortions and birth control (rather than emphasizing the control of male sexuality), as a way of allowing women to develop a positive sense of sexuality without fear of pregnancy.

Annie Goldson is an ex-journalist from New Zealand now living in New York. She works in film, occasionally in video, and plays in a rock band.

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DIVA UNDER GLASS



Top to bottom: At age 16 in 1938; in 1941 with the Nicholas Brothers; in a publicity still. Right: From Dorothy Dandridge *by Earl Mills.*

Michelle Parkerson



Little remains of the phenomenon of Dorothy Dandridge beyond a rare 8 x 10 glossy or yellowed pages in vintage *Ebony* magazines, although her screen brilliance surfaces occasionally on late TV in *Bright Road* (1953) or *Porgy and Bess* (1960). Hollywood's first movie queen of color committed suicide in 1965. Barbiturate overdose and few explanations. She was 42.

Dorothy Dandridge was a diva under glass: her beauty and travesty marketed to millions. Hollywood processed her through the miscegenation mold; her star quality was based on her fair skin. Dark enough to embody The Exotic, light enough to be Negro Object of Desire, her fate always hinged on the leading (Black or white) man —Harry Belafonte in *Island in the Sun* or Curt Jergens in *Tamango*, for instance. The few books on Blacks in film view her as The Tragic Mulatto. In *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks*, author Donald Bogle states:

> *Before her, Nina Mae McKinney had displayed uncontrolled raunchiness, Fredi Washington had symbolized intellectualized despair, and Lena Horne had acquired a large following through her reserve and middle-class aloofness. On occasion, Dorothy Dandridge exhibited all the characteristics of her screen predecessors, but most important to her appeal was her fragility and her desperate determination to survive.*

Dandridge was surrounded with awe and voyeurism by the white media. She was the first Black on the cover of *Life*—as the leading lady in *Carmen Jones*. But Dandridge was often at odds with the Black press. Her screen image and romances with white men (particularly an affair with director Otto Preminger) made her controversial. She was deeply scarred by family relationships, love, and lovemaking, and she juggled both devastation and Hollywood glamour. Her death made good myth.

Beneath the packaging was a Black woman intensely committed to social change. At the height of her singing career in the 1950s, Dorothy Dandridge was among the first Black entertainers to break the color barrier at hotels and nightclubs. Scarce editions of her autobiography, *Everything and Nothing*, reveal Dandridge's political awareness and her relentless fight for racial equality and civil rights.

From a Black feminist perspective, the circumstances of Dorothy Dandridge's life are yet to be told. Born in Cleveland's Black ghetto in 1922, she grew up around women and show business. Her mother, comedienne Ruby Dandridge, reared Dorothy and her older sister Vivien with the help of an "aunt"—a close family friend who doubled as pianist for their vaudeville act, "The Wonder Kids." Later, "The Dandridge Sisters" gained success on the Black theater circuit.

Dorothy Dandridge's marriage in the 1940s to dancer Harold Nicholas was brief and disillusioning. She gave birth to a daughter, Harolyn, who suffered severe brain damage. As a single parent, she began a solo career that eventually led to stardom. In 1955 she was nominated for "Best Actress" for her role in the 20th Century-Fox production *Carmen Jones*: a first for a Black woman. A three-year contract with the studio followed—the first and most ambitious ever offered to a Black performer. In that contract, Darryl Zanuck gave Dandridge billing above the film title, and she became the first international Black star in the history of film.

I am just fully realizing the impact of Dandridge on my life. As a chubby, Black eight-year-old, "Movie Star" was synonymous with Marilyn Monroe, but Dorothy Dandridge was my first serious crush. Some twenty years later, I have become an independent film- and videomaker, producing documentaries on jazz vocalist Betty Carter and a cappella activists "Sweet Honey in the Rock"—Black women who have clearly taken their talents and lives into their own hands.

There is a correlation. The career of Dorothy Dandridge taught me that women must control the making of their images. On and off screen, Dandridge contended with victimization, at the cost of her life. As Blacks, as women, we must begin to master the medium that has killed us for so long. Exploitation, misrepresentation on screen, union discrimination, and limited production opportunities in the larger industry are still struggles to be won...at least for the next generation of daughters.

Michelle Parkerson, a poet and documentary filmmaker from Washington, D.C., has just published *Waiting Rooms*, her first book of poetry.

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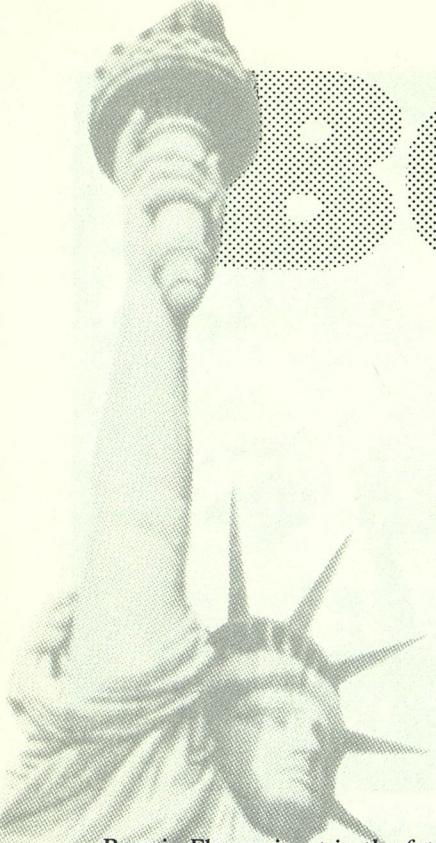
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BORN IN



Born in Flames *is set in the future—ten years after a Social-Democratic cultural "revolution" in America. The film is not traditionally "science fiction": There is no attempt to create a futuristic look because it is as much about today's world as it is about the future—posing the question of whether oppression against women will be eliminated under* any *kind of social system.*

The film opens during a period of disenchantment, when political ideals have been sacrificed to pragmatic realities. The Social-Democratic Party that women had supported has not fulfilled its promises. The women in the film are not anti-socialist. In fact, they see themselves as the true socialists, whose hopes for an egalitarian society have been destroyed. They are opposed to the bureaucracy of the traditional Left, whose governing structure inevitably reproduces white male dominance within the culture;, to a "socialist" government in which the role of woman as wife and mother has been reproduced in the workplace as well as in the home, where any temporary economic advancement for women only reflects the opportunism of the government rather than a true desire for egalitarianism. These women are not satisfied by relative "progress" in a society where rape, prostitution, and harassment still exist, where homosexuality is punished, and where "women's issues" such as daycare are seen as secondary concerns.

Born in Flames *is fantasy in presenting a group of women who, confronted with the very "ordinary" oppression women have been experiencing for decades, refuse to take it any longer and become armed fighters against the government. Their position is that oppression against women is not eliminated automatically with "socialism"—not only do political values have to change, cultural values must change and become embedded in practice.*

The narrative of the film is disjunctive, cutting between various groups of women which represent various conflicting ideological/cultural positions within the women's community. The ideas for the script were developed by collaborating with the women in the film who, to various degrees, play themselves. The title of the film is meant to suggest that even though an armed revolutionary movement may be impossible to sustain, it will survive as a thorn in the side of the culture. The armed activities are directed primarily against the media in order to appropriate the language, even for a moment. The film also expresses the hope that women will be able to work together, that the bitter conflicts that have existed within the women's community—between lesbians and heterosexuals, between women of different races—will one day disappear.

—Lizzie Borden

The film begins with a TV spot about the Revolution while the official revolutionary song ("We are born in flames . . .") plays. Titles appear over the TV image: "New York City, ten years after the Social-Democratic War of Liberation":

This week of celebration, commemorating the 10th Anniversary of the War of Liberation, is a time when all New Yorkers take pride in remembering the most peaceful revolution the world has known. It is time to consider the progress of the past ten years, and to look forward to the future.

The music continues over shots of Manhattan, titles, and Isabel (Adele Bertei) speaking from her radio station:

Hi there. This is Isabel from Radio Regazza, bringing you a little tune that you'll be hearing an awful lot these days, from the makers of our "Revolution." You might not be hearing it here, but you'll be hearing it everywhere else you go. Happy Anniversary!

The music continues over tracking shots of women workers, including Adelaide Morris (Jeanne Sattersfield), a construction worker. FBI voiceover begins with this image and continues through slides of Norris:

Adelaide Norris, 24. She seems to be the founder of the Women's Army.

Her background?

Ordinary. Typical of a lot of Blacks. Mother a domestic. Her father died when she was a teenager. Eight kids in the family. Adelaide's the oldest. She helped raise the others. Always a jock, good in track and basketball. Goes to school nights, works construction jobs during the day.

Homosexual?

Yes. The Women's Army seems to be dominated by Blacks and lesbians. Norris started it as a radical-separatist vigilante group three or four years ago. Now it seems to be looking for a base of support by instigating various community uprisings involving women.

Adelaide conducts a community meeting about daycare cutbacks:

I'd like to know if anyone has any ideas or any suggestions as to how we can keep this center open, because for those of you who are working, what this means is that you're going to have to stop working and stay home and take care of your kids.

***Woman at Meeting:** No, it's going to be impossible for me to stop working. We have to figure out some way we can keep the center open independently.*

Honey (playing herself), speaking from her radio station:

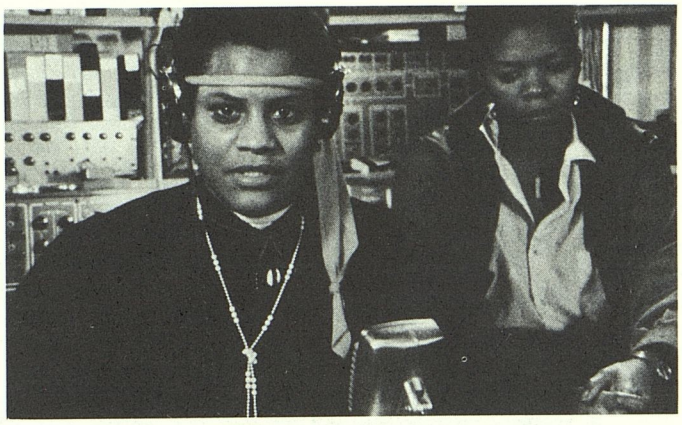
Good evening, this is Honey, coming directly to you from Phoenix Radio, a free radio station, a station not only for the liberation of women, but for the liberation of all through the freedom of life which is found in music. We are all here because we have fought in the War of Liberation, and we all bear witness to what has happened since the war. We see the oppression that still exists, both day and night. For we are the children of the light, and we will continue to fight, not against the flesh and blood, but against the system that names itself falsely. For we have stood on the promises far too long now, that we can all be equal, under the cover of a social democracy, where the rich get richer and the poor just wait on their dreams.

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FLAMES

Lizzie Borden





Hillary Hurst (playing herself), a leader of the Women's Army, is harassed as she walks past a group of men sitting around a truck. Cut to TV spot:

Setting aside for a while the growing pressure of economic crisis, organized labor joined forces in a parade of 150 thousand up Fifth Avenue to commemorate the overwhelming victory by the Social Labor Party ten years ago. Labor's abandonment of the old Democratic Party is considered by many the cornerstone of today's liberation.

Isabel and her band (The Bloods) sing "Undercover Nation" in a recording studio:

Headlines screaming as she watches the race/ reading back the Constitution/ Leather-legged or a dancer in space/ talking 'bout evolution/ She's got a black suit and a red dress/ She's got a chest full of the poet's mess/ A hangover and her mother's on the phone...

Wake up, wake up 'cause she isn't alone...

Wake up, wake up, could this be you?

Hillary conducts an induction meeting for women joining the Army. One woman questions the use of the word "army" as too masculine for a women's group. FBI voiceover begins with this image and continues through other images of Hillary:

Hillary Hurst, 26. We figure her to be the current leader of the Women's Army. No official political record, but she's been instrumental in bringing the Army to large numbers of women through induction meetings she holds around the city. It's impossible to say if Hurst is in command. We're not even sure how the organization is structured. All we know is that they're starting to appeal to women who would have written them off as lunatics a few years ago.

Adelaide and Zella Wylie (Flo Kennedy) watch Mayor Zubrinsky on TV:

As chief executive officer of the city, I am pleased, proud, and grateful to you all for affording this city the opportunity to share in the anniversary which heralds our society as being the first *true* socialist democracy the world has ever known. Ours has been the greatest cultural revolution of all time, through which we have wed democracy, with its respect for freedom and individualism, and its abhorrence of all forms of communism and fascism, with the moral and ethical humanism of American socialism.

The Bicycle Brigade: two men accost and attempt to rape a woman. Behind her screams, the sound of whistles can be heard approaching from all directions—bicyclists from the Women's Army surround the rapists and drive them away. A TV news report begins over this image:

Police have been puzzled in the past week by what they describe as well-organized bands of 15 to 20 women on bicycles attacking men on the street. While the victims say that these incidents were unprovoked, eyewitness reports suggest that these men may themselves have been attempting to assault women. However, officials have condemned the lawlessness of such vigilante groups and ask for information leading to the arrest of the women involved. Maybe even their telephone numbers!

Isabel and a woman from Radio Regazza debate this incident:

Isabel: ...lesbianism, faggotism, Niggerism, honkeyism...

You know, really that could have been the Women's Army that did that.

No, they're not aggressive enough.

They're not aggressive enough? What are you talking about?

I told you, Jules. They're a service to the community, they deal in childcare and daycare centers and stuff like that.

That's not all they do; they're vigilantes; they'd use violence; they could have done this easily.

No. They're not aggressive enough. They're not terrorists.

Adelaide and another woman from the Army confront a man harassing a woman on the subway. FBI voiceover:

Well, I wouldn't exactly call them terrorists, although we do know that they're responsible for those bicycle incidents. That's no big deal. What is the problem is the vigilante sensibility. We've got to watch 'em. Put some pressure on them at their jobs.

TV news:

Violence flared today in Lower Manhattan as youths threw Molotov cocktails outside City Hall. The demonstration began as a protest against what the young men call meaningless jobs given to them through the Workfare program. They claim that women and other minorities receive preferential treatment in the real job market. However, human services officials deny that this is true.

Angry young men roamed the downtown area, indiscrim-

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inately destroying storefronts and cars and attacking passers-by. Police spokesmen denied accusations that they overreacted, citing the sympathy many officers feel for the demonstrators' cause. They claim that they handled an explosive and dangerous situation as well as could be expected.

Adelaide at construction site as the foreman hands out paychecks. She receives a pink slip: laid off for no apparent reason. The song "Born in Flames" begins and continues over a series of images of women's hands at conventional women's work as mother, secretary, dental hygienist, prostitute, etc. Adelaide leads a job demonstration in front of City Hall. Voiceover of the editors of the *Socialist Youth Review* (*SYR*) in their office (Pat Murphy, Kathy Bigelow, and Becky Johnston):

As the editors of the *Socialist Youth Review*, we regret that many of the construction and steel workers laid off in the past few weeks have been the women hired only last year. The industries have been overburdened recently by the enormous number of minority workers who are applying for a limited number of jobs. Only a small percentage of each group can be accommodated in these trades. The rest will receive alternative placement in the Workfare program. We feel that women who immediately cry "sexism" are being selfish and irresponsible. Any move toward separatism, the demand for equal rights for one group alone, hurts our struggle for the equal advancement of all parts of society.

Zella, speaking to Adelaide:

I'm going to tell you something. We have a right to violence. All oppressed people have a right to violence. And I want to tell you something. It's like the right to pee. You've got to have the right place, you've got to have the right time, you've got to have the appropriate situation, and I'm absolutely convinced that this is it.

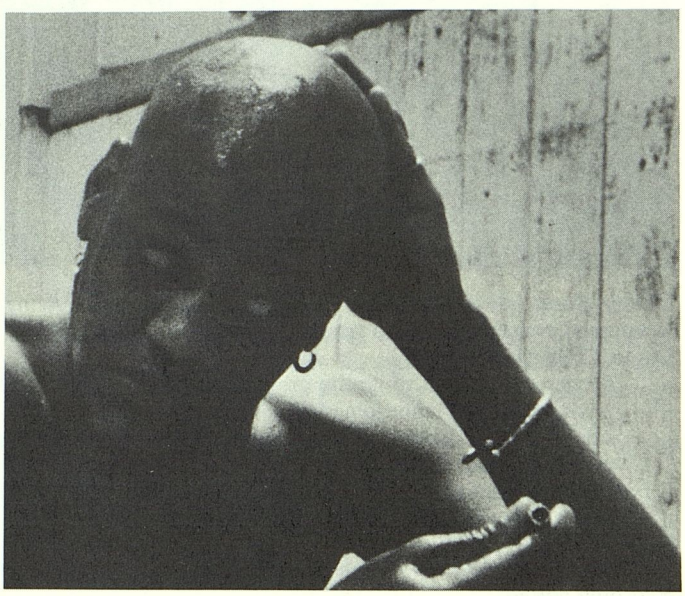
SYNOPSIS OF MIDDLE OF FILM

Tensions build between sectors of the workforce. The Women's Army tries to broaden its constituency by involving the women's radio and press. Regazza is unfriendly and the women from *SYR* refuse to help. Phoenix, however, is receptive and a friendship develops between Adelaide and Honey. As Adelaide becomes more and more frustrated with the lack of government response to their demonstrations and protests, she begins to feel that the only way the Army will be heard is through violence. Her decision to pick up arms is encouraged by Zella, but opposed by the rest of the Army. While her moves are monitored by the FBI, Adelaide arranges a trip to the Western Sahara to work with a revolutionary group that agrees to help the Army. When she returns, she is seized at the airport and incarcerated. She dies in jail. The Social-Democratic Party calls it a suicide.



The *SYR* editors, told that Adelaide's death was a mistake, become disenchanted with the Party. Voiceover of their editorial is heard as Honey walks by a newsstand and sees Adelaide's photo on the front of the paper.

As editors of the *Socialist Youth Review*, we have been troubled by the official reports on the death of Adelaide Norris, the founder of the Women's Army. Grave inconsistencies in the police records and in the coroner's report have led us to believe that Norris did not commit suicide but was murdered —assassinated, if you will, for political reasons. It is alleged by the government that Norris was involved in arms dealings with the Polisarian rebels sympathetic to her cause. If so, why wasn't she allowed a fair trial? When Norris returned to New York she had no weapons on her person, nor was there any proof that she was successful in her negotiations. Did the Party so fear that she could rally an armed group of women that an assassination was necessary?



Zella speaks at an emergency meeting of the Women's Army:

We've got to make it clear that she's been murdered. And we've got to cut through this cover-up, because they'll bury it if they can. This is supposed to be an army! We need *media*. We've got to get a message on television that will be seen everywhere.

Honey, speaking from Phoenix Radio:

Greetings. This broadcast has been dedicated to Adelaide Norris. Every woman under attack has the right to defend herself whenever we are unjustly attacked. Freedom? You talk about freedom? Freedom—it's yours, it's right here, and it's your right. They may label you, try to classify you, and even call you a crazy bitch, but don't flinch, just let them. Continue, just as Adelaide Norris. Exercise your rights, and your freedom is yours.

Black women such as Adelaide Norris may be among a minority and be insignificant to many. But just like the fuse that ignites the whole bomb, we are important. Black women, be ready. White women, get ready. Red women, stay ready, for this is our time and all must realize it.

Montage of groups of women preparing for action: looking through blueprints, training physically, casing out CBS. Cut to *SYR* editors discussing whether printing photos of Adelaide would sensationalize a dead body or serve to mobilize. Next, a shot of Honey singing as she shaves her head in the bathtub:

To fulfill the need to be/ who I am in this world/ is all I ask./ I cannot pretend to be/ someone that I'm not/ and I can't wear a mask./ There's this need to be true to myself and make my own mistakes./ And I don't want to lean too hard on someone else...

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Four women, one carrying a videotape, enter a back door at CBS during a live telecast of the President's speech on Wages for Housework.

My fellow Americans, good evening. I am speaking with you this evening to ask your support for a program which this Administration believes is a critical step forward toward greater justice, equality, and freedom for all our citizens...

A security guard challenges the women as they try to get to the control rooms. They pull their guns out and overpower him.

...in every aspect of our social and economic life. Tonight, I am asking your support for a critical part of that program which will affect the lives of 40 million of our citizens. American women...

Two of the women, one with a machine gun, burst into the VTR room; they order the technicians to put their videotape on:

...that for the first time in our history will provide women with Wages for Housework. Women who would rather devote themselves to their families will be freed from the double burden of work outside and inside the home.

The other two women pull guns on technicians in the control room and demand that their videotape be punched onto live broadcast. Suddenly the President's speech is interrupted:

Zella Wylie here, and we interrupt this broadcast to talk to you about the murder of Adelaide Norris by federal agents. They called it suicide but a lot of people don't buy that lie. She was murdered because she stood up against the betrayal of women. We're being sold down the river—at home, at work, and in the media. And now the President wants to pacify us with Wages for Housework. Wages for Housework is a *dupe*...

The "terrorists" are dragged away by the police. TV commentary by the District Attorney following a news report about the break-in:

The aim of the Revolution was the equality of all men and all women and all people. Insofar as these women struggle for selfish ends, for ends that are against the aims of all the people, which are embodied in this revolutionary government, those aims must be stamped out by any means necessary. The means that are at hand for us are the means of the criminal law. What these women have done is utterly self-interested. They are not concerned with the progress of all of us...

Zella tells Honey what she can do for the Women's Army:

You can do all that can be done. The most important thing of all is media, *our* media—*communication.* You've got a radio station. Your job is to see that it can't be quieted, that it can't be bullshitted out, and that we make the connections...

Psychoanalyst on "The Belle Gayle Show" on TV:

Psychoanalyst: If I may say so, this has been a very satisfying thing because it has proved an ancient theory of Freud's, that there is a primary female masochism, a deep-rooted, rock-bottom sort of thing. Of course we don't see that; what you see is the secondary manifestation, the reversal of that—the secondary female sadism.

Belle Gayle: The secondary female sadism?

Yes. All these so-called pranks.

You mean their deeper impulse is masochistic but they fear to express it in that fashion?

That's right. There's a terror of their own masochism...

Zella is arrested by the FBI and booked. The Army becomes increasingly violent as the police become more oppressive. Voiceover by the women editors:

As the editors of the *Socialist Youth Review*, we would like to comment on the CBS break-in last week by the Women's Army. In a videotape by Zella Wylie, the Women's Army exposed government duplicity not only in the cover-up of Adelaide Norris's death, but in the repression of active feminism with Wages for Housework. We extend our support to the Army as a legitimate revolutionary group, because we, too, believe that the Party has been undermining the economic and social position of women. Our government, which has prided itself on being the first successful socialist democracy, is neither democratic nor socialist. In forming an alliance with male Labor, the government has reinforced the caste system that has always existed in this country. Women fought the War of Liberation with certain expectations in mind: that the government would work, beyond reform, toward a truly egalitarian society. But unless we struggle now for our rights, we will always be oppressed.

The *SYR* editors with their managing editor (Ed Bowes) as he berates them for their editorial:

You've made it impossible for the Party to keep you on as editors. You've taken a position of considerable power and you've thrown it away. And you've also taken a woman, Adelaide Norris—probably a malcontent—and made her into a hero.

Kathy: It's not just Adelaide Norris.

Pat: She's right. It's a lot of other issues as well. We can no longer compromise our position by continuing to work for this newspaper.

Isabel at Radio Regazza:

Wake up! We're being murdered out there in the streets. And if you're going to sit by and watch it happen, sister, all your babies, and yourselves, you're going to be cleaned out—we ain't going to be around no more! Now get it together. It's time to fight! This is for all the dead heroes out there. Yeah!

(*continued*)

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It's time to work some voodoo on these motherfuckers, sisters. This is a message to the Women's Army and to women everywhere. Wake up! This is station 2016 on your dial. If you can't find it then you're in trouble, sister.

Pat, one of the *SYR* editors, meets with the Women's Army:

One of the things we have to realize is that each one of us is public, that they have a file on each one of us. The idea that each one is working privately is just a false one—they can pick up each one of us anytime. So what we have to keep aiming for is to have control over the language, over our own image—so that we have control over describing ourselves.

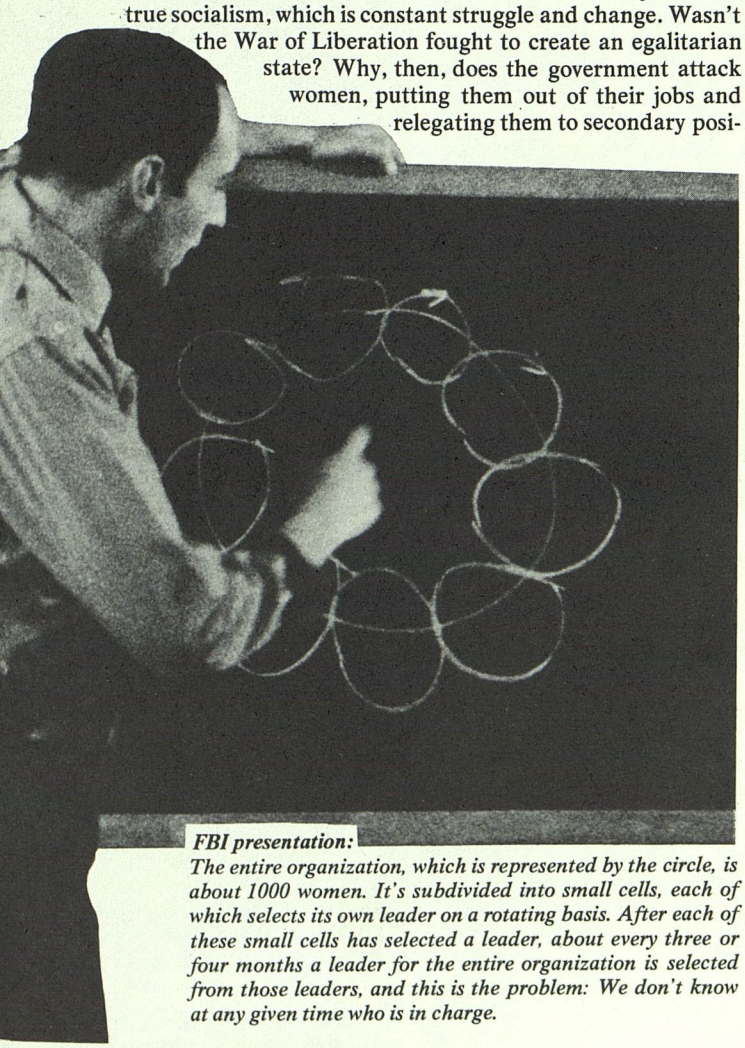
TV news:

Police were called in today to investigate blazes that gutted two female-operated unlicensed radio stations, Phoenix Radio and Radio Regazza. Citing the recent backlash against women extremists, officials say that the suspicious and possibly related fires may have been the work of vandals.

In a meeting initiated by Isabel, the women from Phoenix and Regazza decide to steal trucks and equipment in order to make two mobile radio stations. Honey participates, on the condition that they work with the Women's Army.

The women from *SYR* become involved with the Army. When the Army interrupts another TV program, it is Pat who delivers the message. Some of her speech is heard over images of Phoenix and Regazza stealing U-Haul trucks:

We are interrupting this program to bring you a special message from the Women's Army, and we will continue to make this kind of direct action until everyone understands and is prepared to do something about the way the government has betrayed women. Look at the reality of your lives. The government thinks that socialism was instituted ten years ago, after the War of Liberation, but it denies the very basis of true socialism, which is constant struggle and change. Wasn't the War of Liberation fought to create an egalitarian state? Why, then, does the government attack women, putting them out of their jobs and relegating them to secondary positions in the home? The media, the tool of the government, reinforces their position by promoting images of women as wives and mothers. We are surrounded by the very images our mothers fought to destroy. Decades of women's work for socialism, for freedom of choice, equality of opportunity, are being swept away. Once again we are being placed outside politics. It's not only women who will suffer. You know the pattern. Blacks, Latins, all ethnic and social groups will suffer, as the old sex, race, and class divisions reemerge. There can be no true socialism until we are all represented in government. We demand a quota system which is truly expressive of our numbers, and we will not stop fighting until we get proportional representation in government.



FBI presentation:
The entire organization, which is represented by the circle, is about 1000 women. It's subdivided into small cells, each of which selects its own leader on a rotating basis. After each of these small cells has selected a leader, about every three or four months a leader for the entire organization is selected from those leaders, and this is the problem: We don't know at any given time who is in charge.

Phoenix and Regazza broadcast from their new mobile stations:

Good evening, this is Honey, coming directly to you from the *new* Phoenix and Regazza radio station, a station not only dedicated to the liberation of women, but a station dedicated to deconstruct and reconstruct all the laws that suppress and oppress all of us. Now if you should lose our broadcast, you may have to search your dial, for Phoenix and Regazza are now on the move.

Meanwhile, the ultimate action is planned by the Army: A bomb is made; blueprints of the World Trade Center transmitter locations consulted; a woman enters the WTC with the bomb in her purse.

Good morning. This is Isabel, broadcasting from the new Phoenix-Regazza radio station. I'd like to open up by making a statement on behalf of Adelaide Norris and the Women's Army. Her murder serves as a warning for women everywhere of the struggle we face, and the truth will be heard as the story must and shall be told. It is not only the story of women's oppression; it is the story of sexism, racism, bigotry, nationalism, false religion, and the blasphemy of the state-controlled Church; the story of environmental poisoning and nuclear warfare, of the powerful over the powerless for the sake of sick and depraved manipulations that abuse and corner the human soul like a rat in a cage. It is all of our responsibility as individuals to examine and reexamine everything, leaving no stones unturned. Every word that we utter, every action and every thought, we are all, women and men, the prophets of this new age, and for those of us who would be safer in the sensibilities of racism, separatism, and martyrdom, if you can't help us toward building this living church, then step out of the way! The scope and capability of human love are as wide and encompassing as this vast universe that we all swirl in, one for all and all for oneness. This fight will not end in terrorism and violence. It will not end in a nuclear holocaust. It begins in a celebration of the rights of alchemy, the transformation of shit into gold, the illumination of dark chaotic night into light. This is the time of sweet, sweet change for us all. This is Isabel for Phoenix-Regazza Radio, signing off until tomorrow.

A male TV announcer is seen standing outside, in lower Manhattan, in front of the World Trade Center:

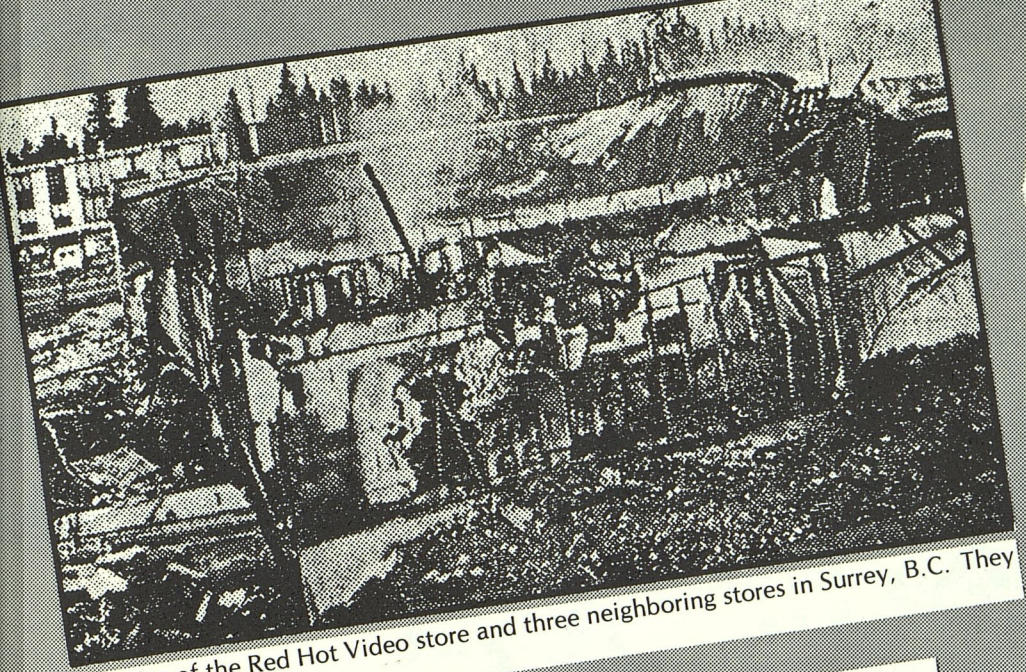
But have we gone too far? It is time to ask if the programs of yesterday's liberation have become the stagnation of today. We cannot ignore the monumental inflation with which we are burdened, nor can we condone the widespread abuse rampant in our social system. At home we are becoming trapped in bureaucracy, and throughout the rest of the world our influence wanes. The management of this station fears that oversocialization has transformed our democracy into a welfare state. If we are to survive our ideals, we must carefully consider their implications. This, in the midst of our celebration, is the opinion of WNYC.....

BOOM!

Suddenly, his voice is interrupted by a deafening explosion, as the WTC transmission tower blows up.

Lizzie Borden is a filmmaker and art critic living and working in New York City. This is her first narrative feature.

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Remains of the Red Hot Video store and three neighboring stores in Surrey, B.C. They were destroyed by fire.

We, the Wimmin's Fire Brigade, claim responsibility

for the fire-bombing of three Red Hot Video outlets in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia on November 22, 1982. This action is another step towards the destruction of a business that promotes and profits from violence against wimmin and profits from and children being tortured, raped and humiliated. We are not the property of men to be used and abused.

Red Hot Video sells tapes that show wimmin

Red Hot Video is part of a multi-billion dollar pornography industry that teaches men to equate sexuality with violence. Although these tapes violate the Criminal Code of Canada and the B.C. guidelines on pornography, all lawful attempts to shut down Red Hot Video have failed because the justice system was created, and is controlled, by rich men to protect their profits and property.

As a result, we are left no viable alternative but to change the situation ourselves through illegal means.

This is an act of self-defense against hate propaganda. We will continue to defend ourselves!

Ed. note: *On January 20, 1983, two women and three men were arrested in B.C. and charged with more than a dozen guerrilla actions performed in Canada in 1982, including the WFB bombings. The WFB has stated that "The Five" were not responsible, adding, "We would obviously not be the Wimmin's Fire Brigade if there were men involved. Everyone but the police seems to understand such basic logic! . . ." The straight media's coverage of "The Five" has been sensational and alarmist, alluding to an "anarchistic terrorist conspiracy," etc. These stories are being used to justify extensive raids into the leftist and feminist communities in Canada.*

—information from off our backs, *May 1983*

©1983 Wimmin's Fire Brigade

In a statement issued Monday, the federation of women's communications committee said:

"While we did not participate in the fire bombings of November 22 in the Lower Mainland, we are in agreement with the frustration and anger of the women who did.

"We noted and appreciated their ef- see that no one got hurt.

Some of Red Hot's videos are copies of banned U.S. films that have been smuggled into the country. It is illegal to produce these hard-core films in Canada. It is also illegal to import them. However, the does not cover copying e four-p of illeg

naming the group responsible for the attacks. (Some radical feminist groups choose their own spelling for the words woman and women in order to avoid any reference to men.)

ed firebombing of Main Street shop on Oct. 13," said Ted Emery of Red Hot Video's North Shore outlet Monday.

"I'm frightened all right, but there's no way I'm going to quit because of the actions of some radical group," said Emery.

The controversial porn videotap hint of what wa gro

According to Stewart, Emery said this material actually makes the streets safer for women, by giving men a harmless release for their aggressions.

By IAN M EW
Globe and Mail Reporter

VANCOUVER — A province-wide skirmish over the sale and rental of sex-oriented videotapes exploded into a war yesterday when two B.C. stores handling the tapes were set ablaze and a third arson attempt was interrupted.

The Red Hot Video store in Surrey ar three neighboring stores were destroyed. T Red Hot outlet in North Vancouver ce successfully re a third

RCMP investigators converge on their Vancouver headquarters Monday afternoon to exchange notes and plot the course of the investigation which will involve close scrutiny of all the province's underground activists. The check- ing of known activists began a month ago when copies of the underground newsletter fell the hands of the RCMP

actively opposing Red Hot Vi cized the attacks on the stores.

Saying she "deplores violence," Andrews added: "It's against everything we stand for. It's just why we are attacking Red Hot Video in the first pla- ce...we are appalled by violence."

Emery, who lives in a suite beh

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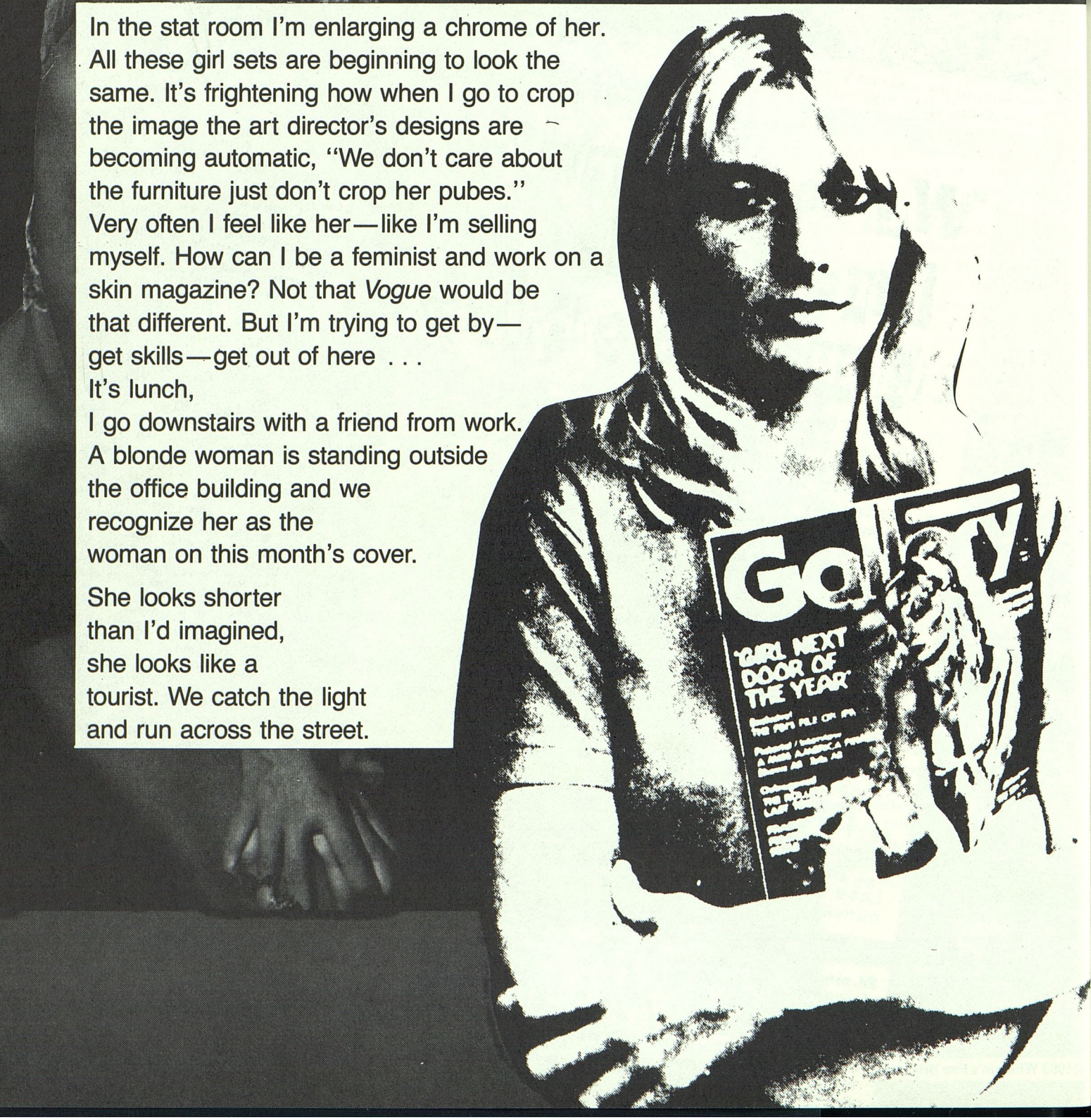
OCCUPATIONAL HAZARDS



"People sell themselves every day. It just depends on your occupation. You sell yourself," she insists.

In the stat room I'm enlarging a chrome of her. All these girl sets are beginning to look the same. It's frightening how when I go to crop the image the art director's designs are becoming automatic, "We don't care about the furniture just don't crop her pubes." Very often I feel like her—like I'm selling myself. How can I be a feminist and work on a skin magazine? Not that *Vogue* would be that different. But I'm trying to get by—get skills—get out of here . . .
It's lunch,
I go downstairs with a friend from work.
A blonde woman is standing outside the office building and we recognize her as the woman on this month's cover.

She looks shorter than I'd imagined, she looks like a tourist. We catch the light and run across the street.



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This panel discussion was conducted by Diana Agosta and Edith Becker from the Heresies #16 Collective (HC) in November 1982 with four women filmmakers and activists: Janice Blood (JB), Director of Public Information for 9 to 5, the national organization of women office workers which inspired the movie 9 to 5 *and the TV series; Cara DeVito (CD), who has worked on documentaries for the past 10 years, most recently on* What Could You Do with a Nickel? *about a domestic workers' union in the South Bronx; Christine Noschese (CN), who has shown films and tapes to working-class women as an organizer for the National Congress of Neighborhood Women and is currently working on a film about community leaders in Brooklyn; and Brenda Singleton (BS), a social worker who has been active on the Women's Issue Committee of the National Association of Social Workers and uses film as an organizing and educational tool.*

$11,000 IS NOT ENOUGH!

HC What do you think about the images of working women since the mid-1960s?

CN A lot of working-class women object to films showing only their oppression and not showing their joy, their laughter, their love. Successful feminist films in this country have been upbeat; they've talked about the leadership women have provided and discussed the problems within that context. This way, there is more of an interrelationship and women feel the films represent them. After all, who wants to be told what might be wrong with them?

CD The dilemma is that you don't want to show that everything is wonderful and these women have life easy, because that's the lie traditional media shows. It doesn't show working-class women because we don't fit into the situation comedies or Madison Avenue hype. Therefore, white middle-class America doesn't want to see or hear about it. I want to show people struggling for their dignity, their economic rights, and controlling their destiny, and show it in a positive light. The danger is making it too superficial or upbeat because then it's just another fable about workers.

BS In terms of using films to organize, it's very important to include those women whom the film's about in the filmmaking process. Only those people can say what the situation actually is. Others can look into it and talk about it, but you know when someone is telling her own story.

CN With any organizing, people need to feel they have some ability to change things. It's very hard to use film that does not give the sense that, even though people struggle, they can achieve something in the end. Lots of films, however, are more optimistic in the end than in reality. I'm not sure that they have to be. For example, *Wilmar 8* doesn't have a truly optimistic ending, but women seem to like it. They don't feel it's a movie of oppression because it shows women as real people taking as much control over their lives as they can against odds they just couldn't beat. The women in *Wilmar 8* are not passively talking about how they lost. That would be depressing. We see them demonstrate. A story just about failure wouldn't be a great movie.

JB We found a bit of hopelessness among our membership when it was first shown. That has changed over the last year as office workers and their rights become a topical issue. There were no unions in existence at the time the Wilmar 8 went out on strike, but now unions are interested in clerical workers, even our own organization. For uses of organizing, there should be a feeling after the movie that there's a way to get a hold of the oppressive situation, whether it's documentary or fictional film.

Based on what the members of 9 to 5 have experienced, there seems to be a big division between documentary and fictionalized story telling, commercial TV and PBS. *Union Maids* is shown by our members all across the nation, even though those women were not office workers, their struggles go back a long time, and they show heavy union involvement; and 9 to 5 is in a sense a preunion organization. But we feel its continued popularity is because of its spirit—how women describe themselves, what they've gone through and how they've met it. There is hope in their struggle for justice in the workplace. I compare that feeling with our experiences with the movie *9 to 5*. There is so much lacking there that should be said. But there are unbelievable obstacles in commercial media that prevent anything that seems real from getting made.

Still, our members tended to feel happy and proud that an actual commercial movie was made about women office workers and not an obscure documentary. They are so starved for some depiction of themselves that it was okay when the only thing that emerged was a movie saying office workers have some problems. Never mind if they solve them and, of course, it was a comedy. But some of the issues portrayed are part of working life: a person who doesn't get promoted, no job training, people treated without respect. It is worth seeing this movie, but not in the same way as *Union Maids* or *Rosie the Riveter.* The real people in the movie made a difference and they impart a sense that "We could do that, too." The commercial movie lacks any sense of encouragement. It's a glorification of office work and workers.

BS I'd like to see more films offering role models. We know what the problems are. We need to see some solutions of how women deal with certain things successfully on a realistic basis. For instance, there's a million types of families these days, not a "typical" two-parent family with a car and house, which is what we see on the screen. More movies should include working women and day-to-day involvement with daycare, and how to survive, the basics. This is what viewers are starving for. That's why *Awake from Mourning* inspires such a reaction. It's a film about a self-help movement among South African women. It's very subtle, on a day-to-day routine rather than on something major like a riot or a strike. There's nothing wrong with strikes but it's also important to show what goes on in an organized women's community on a day-to-day basis. This is helpful for organizing. Even the social workers I showed it to were very impressed.

CN Movies are one place where the women's movement should applaud itself. It's from the movement that these films about working-class women got

Facing page: *Both photographs are of the same woman. The photo in the foreground appeared in a newspaper interview with the model.*

Graphic by Nicky Lindeman, an artist who lives and works in New York City.

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made. The women's movement is accused of not being concerned about class and minority issues but in the independent film community it's been women who've been very concerned about those issues and active in them.

CD The process for making these films is also very important. For *What Could You Do with a Nickel?,* three of us went into the South Bronx looking like a network with all this equipment. The women didn't know the money came out of our own pockets. They thought we were going to make a sensational story and show the poor people. What we did was to get involved with the actual organizing. We picketed, leafletted, attended meetings, and encouraged leadership among the women —the community group the women were involved in was headed by a very good man, who just didn't make the leap to try to cultivate leadership among the women. That's one way to get involved aside from the editing process.

HC What was the use of the film for the women in the South Bronx?

CD They felt good that they were the subject of a film. They were feeling completely fucked over by everyone. They were doing traditional women's work, lowest paid on the social ladder. They wanted to communicate to others that they'd gone this far and other people should learn from what they did.

CN I had a community advisory board before anything was shot for my film *Women of the Northside Fight Back.* At one minute I was saying, "Ha, ha, I have all these women from the community on my board and I'm gonna make a politically correct movie," and at other times I felt, "Oh no, all these people are telling me what to do and I'm not going to be able to say what I want to say with the film." It's very frightening. None of the 20 women agreed with one another anyway. They were all from different ethnic groups and were all leaders. As soon as they saw I was in their corner and understood the issues they wanted to communicate, I had their trust. It was only my own fear. People trusted me. That was nice.

HC What about showing contradictory opinions in a film? How does the complexity of the issue get conveyed to the viewer?

CN We have to start talking about form then. Not form that is not entertaining or that is boring or so way-out that people can't relate to it. Form in terms of what is a style that can represent women's issues. One of the problems is that the dramatic forms we know now do not represent the holistic view of women's lives and the way women see them. Now the forms limit us and the way we can portray women and these issues, and that's the reason for some of the ambivalences.

BS I found that when I saw *Awake from Mourning* by myself I reacted to certain things but then when I viewed the same film with others, the majority of whom, in this case, were white middle-class with several Black women, something very different happened. Part of the purpose of this particular screening was to raise consciousness about women of color and to introduce some ideas about what's going on in South Africa, and to show some of the parallels with our own lives. It was incredible because there were so many different levels coming out of the film. For example, the film addresses many issues of self-help movements; the women in the film make their own clothes and grow their own food and do not depend on factory work. That has a lot of implications.

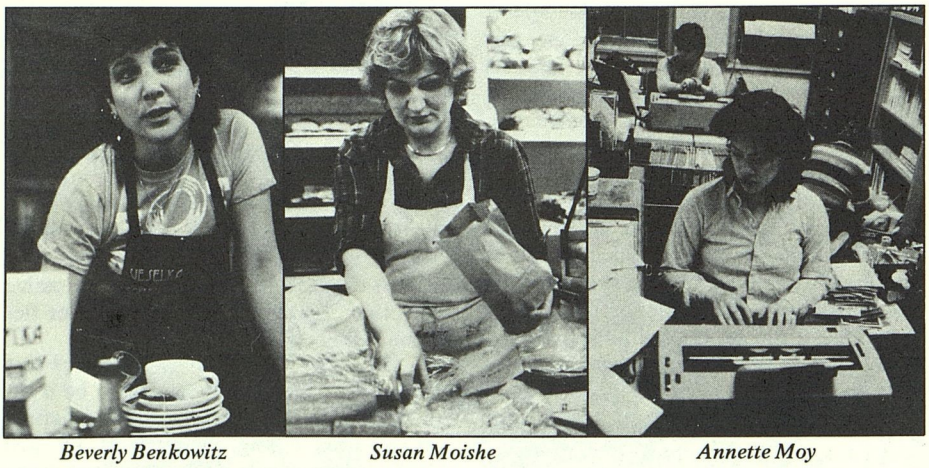
The film negated a lot of racial issues because it showed very articulate Black women from South Africa. The audience was saying, "Ah, uh, I didn't know they could talk or express what they need." Most people can express what they need. You ask them what they need, they'll tell you.

Some women who are making decisions for other people and organizing are so far removed from what's going on. We've gotten very professional with all the jargon, and sometimes lose sight of the real issues. I think film helps explore these issues. It's a consciousness-raising tool. The issues don't have to be resolved in the movie. Film shows it on the screen and allows people to take it in, sift it around and then react to it. In fact it was the next day when I saw some of these women that most of the discussion took place.

where you see a problem on the screen that is similar to your own, suddenly you begin to see these things don't have to do only with yourself. It puts it in perspective and makes it "tackleable." That's why the point of view of the people must come through. As organizers we need to see that truth in a film. We can say to a woman that what she experiences is institutional discrimination; but it's much better to see on screen another woman experience it and see how she is capable of dealing with it.

CN As a feminist organizer, I think it's much easier to use the types of films we've been talking about where we show the empowerment of women. It's consciousness raising to have women feel they can control their own lives in some way. I consider CR an organizing issue, so then it's very easy to use films for women's organizing. I've used Cara's videotape on her grandmother who was a battered woman. I don't think Cara knew that tape would have such a use. It was a personal tape. I used it in a working-class neighborhood in Brooklyn to discuss battered women. It's more difficult to use other kinds of film than women's films with women. I don't know if it's because women's films are better, but I have some prejudices in this area, or because they have a personal quality and are in touch with an everyday politic.

JB Another way to use films for organizing is to use study guides. 9 to 5 developed a study guide to go along with *Wilmar 8*. California Newsreel distributes the film and got a grant which allowed them to turn money over to us to produce the study guide. Our labor education organizer put together a guide that is applicable to any group of people, though it's primarily for working women. She put it together so that a group meeting regularly would use it differently from a group meeting only to view the film. In all instances she drew together many different forms of involvement. For example, one issue that the film deals with is pay equity. In order to explain that issue, part of the manual asks people to guess the salaries for a steelworker and an executive secretary and a whole range of jobs that fall into the predomi-



Beverly Benkowitz *Susan Moishe* *Annette Moy*

JB Something Brenda just said rang a bell. We found that the biggest benefit of all the films we've worked with and were part of was that the fact that it's on film suddenly made it more concrete. It's like knowing something in the back of your mind without being able to verbalize it; then seeing it on screen makes it legitimate. For women this is incredibly important because we're so used to internalizing our experiences. We don't seem to have an outer reality. The most negative extreme is to blame oneself for things that are objectively not your own fault: institutionalized discrimination, not dressing for success, or "I don't have enough education." But

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nantly female or male categories. That's how people found out about pay inequality. The manual was designed to add approximately 45 minutes to the film. It suggests giving a brief introduction and having the audience note particular things during viewing. It's just now being printed so we don't know how well it will work or what people's experiences will be with it. But that may be one more way to make films applicable to groups that you might otherwise think would not find a film of interest.

HC Talking about appealing to a broader audience seems to relate back to the question of commercial media. How do you deal with the damaging images of working women shown on TV and in the news?

CN That's partially why we want other mythical images of ourselves on screen. It's partially a reaction to all this negativity we feel in our lives. The independent films are positive in terms of how we see ourselves as women. We need that image to counteract the terrible way we're made to feel by current media.

JB That's one reason we pounced on *Norma Rae* with such glee and gratitude. [Agreement.] It's not as if that was a totally accurate portrayal of what organizing is. She just did it in two hours flat. [Laughter.] But to actually see a woman as the hero was so wonderful that we could hardly stand it. Especially as a commercial film.

A big problem is the whole area of



Photo by Donna Gray

entertainment, where networks and studios feel they can't simply tell the truth when telling a story—they've got to entertain. The politics of this is that they say "entertain" but they really mean a million dollars gross at the box office or good ratings. With the exception of Jane Fonda's production company, our experience with networks and Hollywood has been terrible. There's a noticeable lack of minorities and women in important positions. People are paid so much and peak so young that no one believes these people could portray my reality. How could a white 28-year-old male earning $170,000 a year presume to know what my life is about? This sounds funny, but that's who's writing for television.

Last Tuesday some young white guy from NBC called and said, "We're thinking of making a TV movie and we're thinking of an office worker who gets blackmailed by her boss and we want to talk to some women who this might have happened to." Before I could help myself, I said, "How do you guys think this stuff up?" He said, "Pardon me." And I said that I can't believe any boss would be stupid enough to blackmail his secretary because secretaries across the board in the USA are earning a little below $11,000 a year. And you're gonna blackmail her? I don't even know how to respond to that.

CD This brings up an interesting point. Do you stay completely separate from mainstream commercial media or do you try to infiltrate somehow? You're up against a power structure that's so big that the effect you can have working on the inside is so small. Yet if you don't start making small inroads like *Norma Rae*, which gets people wanting something more daring, is it ever going to make an impact?

CN But look who gets to make *Norma Rae*. Martin Ritt had a lot of success before he got to make *Norma Rae*.

JB It's important to make films that come out of the grassroots, that are not doctored up for the networks and which tell the story just as it is. On the other hand, we need to try to chip away at them. Sometimes it happens in a big way, at other times, it's just the cumulative effect of a chip here and a chip there.

CD I'd never worked for a network, but I was so broke after my last tape, I got a job in NBC's news department. I have all sorts of torments over whether to leave and starve or stay and argue with the producer for my points of view, and try to get in there and do the documentaries even though they're gonna keep pushing me down. It's a real conflict for me.

BS It's important to stay in touch with the mainstream because it, too, is a reality. If you can deal with the politics and bureaucracy, I'd rather someone be a part of the decision-making process who is informed than someone who is totally removed from women's grassroots organizing. The producer of *Awake from Mourning* got her money from her father, a businessman in South Africa. She took her inheritance and put it back into the community from which it was taken. It's a fantastic film made by the privileged. So it's important to work on both levels. My feeling, too, is that distribution is a big problem for these films. How many people who need to see them even know they exist? Women who are already organized should use the films, but more basically most of these films should be seen by the community people who are not organized. The real problem is to use those human resources that we have.

JB But that's how organizations can help.

CN It's also depressing from the filmmaker's point of view that here they are living on crumbs to make these films and then who gets to see them? If they're lucky, some people in colleges or universities will see them, but the filmmaker is interested in reaching people in the streets. To reach a group you almost have to have an organized effort. You do it through your organization. But if people don't know there is such a thing as independent film, that's a problem. How do you expect films to work? Do you expect the people to storm the barricades after seeing a film? How do you use anything in your work? Each film is going to do different things for people. The people are always different and there's no particular rule to say how you can use a film.

BS It takes the person or group to sort those things out. You should know the audience as well as the film. If I show a film to a professional group the issues that they should be dealing with are different from those of a community group. Somebody's got to do that work. The more I use film the more I know this is true.

CN All these films we're talking about are self-distributed or distributed through small nonprofit distributors. This means that the only reason they are getting seen at all is that these people are putting in labor and capital to get their films to the groups. Forget about commercial access. Most distributors don't do anything for these films. So that's a joke. First you have to make the film, then self-distribute, then make an organization to make people aware of the films. . . .

HC But as feminist workers, is there a use to trying to get the films on TV, where every woman is isolated from other women?

CD The value of screening in the commercial world is that our own images are fighting the images that we see as socially acceptable. The work is seen not just as a project of a lunatic fringe group that feels women are human beings and deserve rights. Everyday you turn on TV or go to the movies and it's ludicrous. You don't have to be in a group to begin to feel the power of these images.

CN Put a film on TV and millions of people will see it. If you're self-distributing it, to get those millions of people will take you the rest of your life. TV, even without the proper publicity, is very important. Although I don't think that community people who see a film in a room with the projector think that it's only a fringe group. I prefer seeing something on a big screen to seeing it in a little box. Seeing something on a big screen does something to you in the gut. It has a more mythical quality. It makes us heroes, bigger than life. The bigger the screen, the bigger the

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woman hero. And you can't get these films in a commercial theater or on the networks anyway.

CD There should be a way to infiltrate standard images. It shouldn't always be this polarized thing: the alternative image out there and then the stuff everybody accepts as real. We should start fighting to get that known.

BS It's unrealistic to expect documentaries or real struggle films to come on TV or to the theaters on a big scale. It's a grand idea but on a smaller scale, can we even be effective with the films we have and the means we have to distribute them to people we know in decision-making and leadership roles? I think that is a powerful use of film. It is not a bad idea to show film to people who could make a difference. You can't always deal with people who are totally on the bottom. I'm not saying I wouldn't reach out, too, but sometimes you have to talk to people who are in a position to affect many other people. I'm thinking of distribution realistically.

JB But professional groups are usually not the people you want to reach and I'm not sure how useful it is to use this strategy when you really want to reach office workers and people on the street.

CD These people in leadership positions have a vested interest in *not* seeing these films and their points of view. None of the unions will use our film because it's critical of the bureaucracy of unions. It's for rank-and-file union members to push the unions to be responsive to the needs of the women. The white male leaders abandoned the Black and Latina domestic women workers when the going got tough and every other union organizing domestic workers followed. Well, the film's critical of that.

JB *Wilmar 8* is a terrible indictment of the trade union movement in certain ways. You see this man from the UAW saying, "Gee, gee, we couldn't help the girls." He was awful and yet unions are very interested in the movie now because a lot of them want to start organizing clericals. After three years, they don't feel as ashamed as they did and *Wilmar 8* is quite the darling of the unions.

CN When something becomes history, it becomes less threatening than when it's right then and there.

JB But are we going to have to wait three, five or ten years until it's not a hot potato in order to get it distributed properly?

HC What about the role of 9 to 5 as the consultants for the TV series "9 to 5"? What kind of effect do you hope to have?

JB Such a topic that is! I was in LA for three months when they did the first four episodes. Our role is to be a conduit between our members and these producers who know nothing about real work, making $145 a week and being a woman. We have to provide incidents they can develop into a story or that might be vignettes in part of the episode: to add some reality and to be a check against their mistakes. We had high hopes and so did Jane Fonda. We were thinking the series would be a cross between "Hill Street Blues" and "M*A*S*H." Unfortunately, the way the network world works today, a show doesn't get a full season to see if it makes it. They may give you a pilot from which a series would come—if the ratings are good. Or, since we had the movie, they gave us four episodes to make it. Everybody got scared doing the four probationary episodes. We understood ratings was the game and not truth. The writers were the most scared. The producer gets day-to-day total control over who's hired and fired, even casting. Jane's role as Executive Producer usually is an inactive one, but she wanted to be involved. But she also understood that she would have to come up against the producer, 20th Century-Fox, the production facility, and ABC TV. There was very little she could do.

HC Other than inviting you to LA for three weeks, were any other secretaries invited or any other research done?

JB We've encouraged our members through leafletting to write about what they like and hate about the show and to write their own experiences. We don't have that kind of impact at the network. All we can do is jump up and down if things get really bad. But then it's just for one instance. They don't learn anything cumulatively about working women in general—a very discouraging process. We've come to the point now where we don't think a commercial TV show about secretaries is worth it if the women are not portrayed the way we know office workers have to live day by day. Our members express a lot of disappointment in the series so far. But the networks get their rewards by ratings, not political motivations. It's a dollar and cents game. If they get ratings they get more revenue, and the ratings of "9 to 5" have been terrific. But we don't think politically the show has any meritorious impact.

BS What would you like to do with it if you had your choice?

JB I'd like to hire at least three of the writing team as women over 40, have a much heavier female writing crew, and I'd like to see the stars of the show, the regular cast, have much more meaty parts. Particularly for the minority women. If you changed those two things we'd be on our way to making it a meaningful show. Now it lacks an understanding of what it is to be a woman over 40, which is after all two of the central characters: Roz and Rita. The writers simply don't know how to write for these characters. I think it would drive me completely mad if I were Black, particularly seeing how Blacks are portrayed on TV.

BS Absolutely!

CN PBS is supposed to be our public access, but they're not representing women well.

CD The public television stations have just as much a vested interest in the ratings as commercial TV. The money they're getting comes from corporations underwriting these programs. It's free publicity for Mobil, Exxon.

CN But their rhetoric is that we believe in narrowcasting. That's why we have the opera and "Great Performances" —because we do shows for special groups of people interested in public television. We're not broadcasters like national com-

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mercial networks. Within their logic, it seems that they wouldn't have as high a regard for ratings as for networks.

JB It took over a year's effort to get *Wilmar 8* on public TV.

CN There is not as much feminist pressure on public TV as there was five or six years ago when we had "Woman Alive" on.

BS Feminists are not organized enough to lobby for this.

HC This brings us back to the community. It's the communities for which the films are made who also have to support the films, the filmmakers, and do the work of distribution and exhibition. Christine, you conducted a survey with working women. How did they find their work in the community and in the homes portrayed on film and TV?

CN I did that study a long time ago for the National Institute of Education on white ethnic working-class women. Other studies were conducted with other minority women. We had a conference using all the results of these surveys. Every ethnic and racial group put together a package that presented what those women felt to be their needs that were not being met in their community. Every group included media—film and television—as part of their package along with college, job training, high school. No group of women felt their media needs were being met. They analyzed how they were being presented, if at all. In *Mean Streets* you don't even see women, Scorcese just had a plate there. In the *Godfather I* and *II*, well how many Italian women do you know who are that passive in the home? The Irish women were always praying for their hoodlum son. A lot of white ethnic women are portrayed as if any family pathology were the woman's fault. In the films women are crazy, overly religious and repressive elements.

BS That's one reason, as a Black woman, I can respect Cecily Tyson and the roles she'll portray in movies. She will not take a part that portrays Black women as very negative or just as a sexual object or as the maid. She takes very strong, positive roles. It's important to have that kind of image, even with Black men. You always see the negative, so it's important to focus on people's strengths.

JB But then how often do you see Cecily Tyson?

BS Exactly, that's because she's taken a side. We all have to find that balance between the mainstream and hanging onto your own values and sense of who you are. It doesn't matter where you work. It is a challenge at all levels to keep to what you believe is right and to deal with bureaucracies. Movies can show that struggle.

HC To end with, can you reflect on what we need to see in terms of alternatives in distribution and what images of working women we want to see and use in organizing?

BS We need to see women of color, single parents, women struggling with the feminization of poverty, coming with the cuts in food stamps, Medicaid and daycare. It's crucial for a lot of women. As the definition of family changes, we need to address that variety. We also should try to get these films to the communities. I hear about good films through professional organizations, never from community women. These films are not reaching the communities.

CD It is beneficial to have multiethnic and racial film crews so that there is feedback within the crew and with the community.

CN More women should get the opportunity to make films. That's still an issue. That's specifically one reason we don't see a lot of the images that we want to see. We see from the independent film community that when women get to make film, they do a good job. If more women made more films and had more positions of power, then we'd see those results. The industry is still oppressive to women. Also I think we have to start defining a clear alternative community both in making films and in distribution. And they have to really relate to each other. The value of that community is underestimated. There is no way these films are going to be shown unless people know about them. Organizing ourselves is the only way we're going to make these films accessible.

BS It's important that there be a light at the end of the tunnel. Not only that women make films but that women get a view of how we can live our lives in a positive and supportive way. We live with so much stress, we need to learn from each other and to get support.

JB Personally, I want to see less on commercial TV of the woman lawyer, doctor, private eye, the witch or superwoman, and see more of a mixture—both fictional and documentary—of women in different environments, different walks of life, rural Black women in Black communities and women grappling with all the things we cope with every day. It's wonderful to see women heroines, but we'd be better served to see women coping successfully—if not winning the big battles, making changes on a daily level.

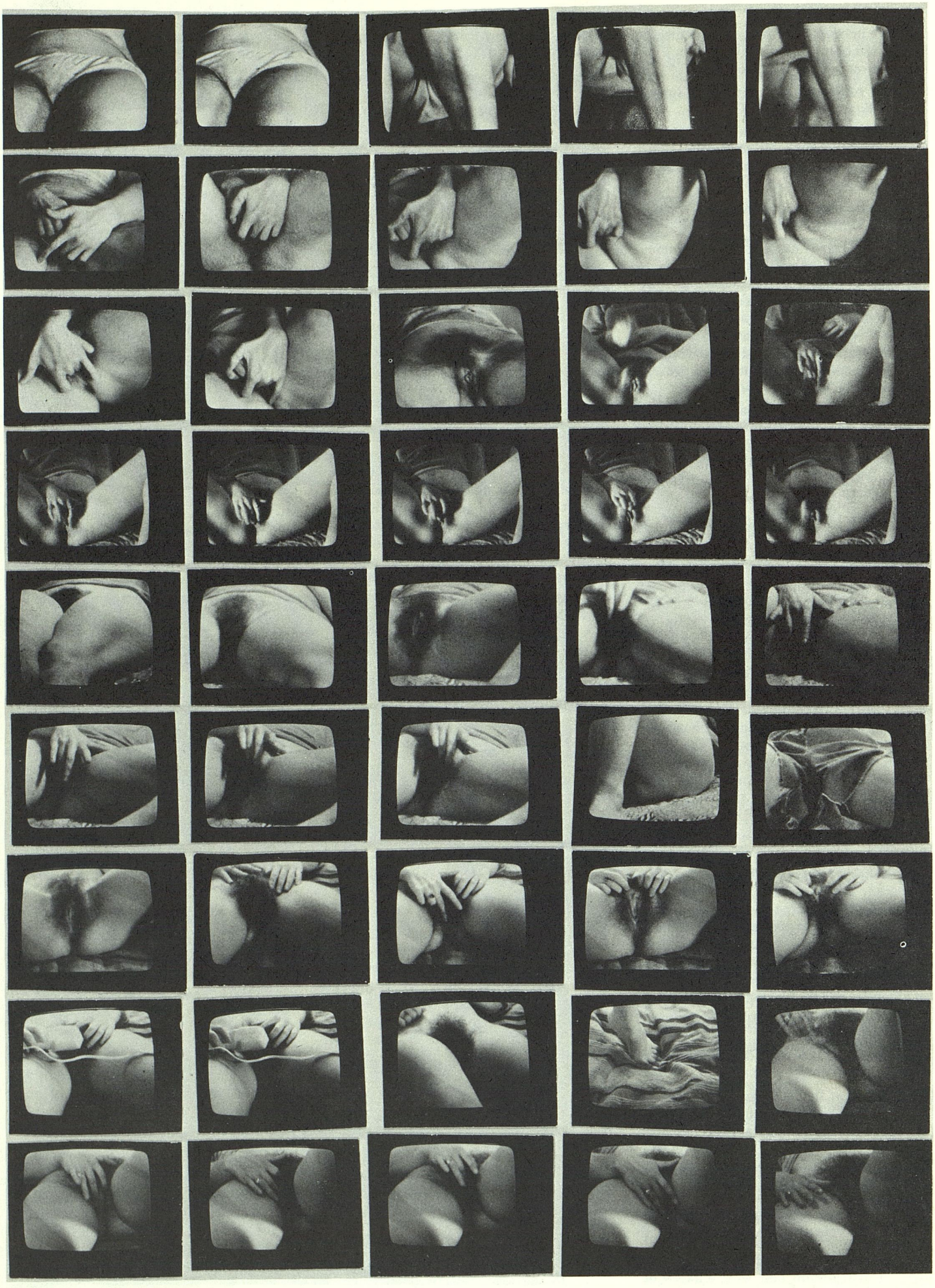
We would like to thank Roberta Taseley and Joyce Thompson of the NYU Interactive Telecommunications Department for providing the phone conferencing hook-up, and Marc Weiss for suggesting the topic for this panel.



Graphic by Erika Rothenberg, an artist whose drawings have appeared in the Village Voice *as well as in several galleries, including Ronald Feldman and the New Museum in New York.*

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MAUREEN NAPPI

The following is a dialogue that occurred during one of the taping sessions, when I was in the room with the woman. During the others, the women were alone with the camera.

Maureen:
Everybody's lips are so different.

Woman:
I never masturbated until I was 28. I can always make myself come. I've never not come when masturbating. . . . It won't be my face, right?

Right.

Do you think that lesbians masturbate differently than heterosexual women?

Yeah! They have to!

But maybe it's a function of how repressed you are sexually rather than——

Yeah, but that has to do with the experiences of sleeping with men and women, which are qualitatively different.

Yeah. But what I was thinking about was, like, super-repressed-sexually lesbians who hardly ever have any sex at all. . . they just play the big game.

Oh right. Yeah. But they're not the average when you think of lesbians, I don't think.

Who knows what the average is, but I would suspect that in the given population of lesbians there's just as much sexual repression as there——

Oh right.

So I was just wondering whether what was the important thing here—whether it was the straightness or the gayness or what?

Well, I think the difference is, even though there's a lot of repression, there's still a basic admission that the vagina is not the issue, right! I mean two women sleeping together, one woman doesn't have an interest, really, in sticking her penis or her finger, clit into the other woman's vagina for the purposes of getting off, right! So that she, the two women know more about their bodies than men and women do.

[*Sigh of agreement.*]

And that there isn't that difference in how people come, you know what I mean? I mean a man and a woman, a guy has to put his penis——

Right, right.

into a woman's vagina for the purposes of coming and that doesn't mean that his pelvic bone is going to hit against her clitoris——

Right.

at the magic hour.

Not to mention how many women still think that they need a penis in order to come.

Right. I know and that's incredible.

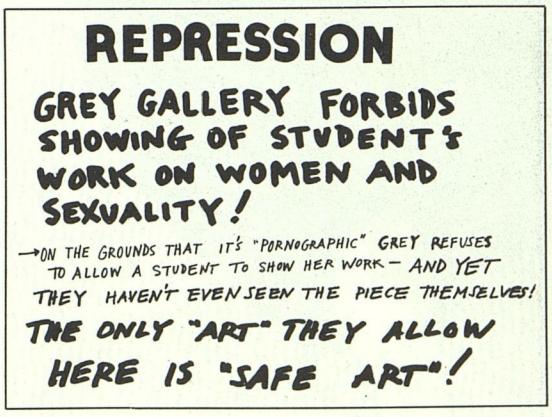
You know, before I really understood what was going on, in terms of—this was way way back—the first man that I ever slept with was an incredible lover in the sense that he turned me onto my clitoris. I mean, not through fucking, but other—tongues, hands—and it was, like, the most incredible, absolutely incredible experience and I almost didn't know what it was. And fucking felt, sort of, I mean, it was interesting but it felt, like, second-rate because you never have that total orgasm where you just feel that your whole body was shot through with this incredible feeling or energy, you know, and then you just feel like [*sigh of total pleasure*] *and, you know, I personally have never experienced that in fucking* [*laughter*] *although I guess I know how to say it* [*more laughter*]. *I was going to say that I have enjoyed fucking, but I, that feels, I mean, I don't know what that means anymore really, and in fact the more conscious I became around sexuality, the less I liked fucking 'cause I always knew that I wasn't going to get what I wanted, although if I knew the man then I could feel free to ask or he knew me enough to know what I really liked, you know, but God, men* [*sigh of pensive riddance*], *I haven't slept with a man in almost a year.*

The first time these tapes were shown was at the Grey Art Gallery at New York University in May 1976. It took us two days to set up the show and it was to open on the third day at 11 a.m. I arrived at 10 and was greeted at the door with the news that the tapes were not going to be permitted to be shown. News had filtered to the Dean and the Head of the Department that there were THESE MASTURBATING TAPES among the installations. Their reaction was NO GO. I was furious; they hadn't even seen the tapes. Instantaneously, the Directors of the Gallery (a man and a woman) stampeded me; I invited them to view the tapes. They accepted. I turned on the five TVs, they took one glance and yanked me to the back room. "If the MEDIA," they said, "got hold of this, the Gallery would be closed down." Oh, they UNDERSTOOD what I was trying to do with the tapes, but I just had to understand their position. I understood—CENSORSHIP. They then told me of a show that they had had the year before in which there was a painting of a woman's crotch; the Board of Directors almost closed them down. That did it. I promised them a woman's demonstration that very afternoon in front of the Grey Gallery, if they didn't allow me to show the tapes. They said that they then would close the whole show. "Fine," I said, "close the whole show, but you're not going to censor the tapes." I stormed out, went directly to the NYU Women's Center, and by a freak of timing, I ran into one of the women in the tapes. We decided a leaflet was in order. She made the leaflet while I got on the phone, calling as many women as came to mind. The leaflet was finished. I ran over to the local xerox place and had 200 copies made up. Within 20 minutes of storming out of the Grey Gallery, I was handing out the leaflets in front of it. I had handed out four when they CHANGED their minds.

Anyway, the tapes were shown—interesting reactions. Women came to me saying that they had never seen another woman's genitals before, or that they didn't know that other women masturbated, or how did I get the courage?

The five TVs were set up in a straight line (bird's eye view) as a hypotenuse, with the two adjacent sides being the walls. The tapes were started simultaneously. People had to come in to see the tapes and sit on the floor (there were small pillows and a rug) next to other people.

It was clear on walking in that the mood of the tapes was serious and lively. And after each viewing there usually was a spontaneous discussion; a lot of people had something to say or ask. I felt alive and really happy to share the tapes.



Maureen Nappi currently does work using computer animation, combining abstract imagery and more explicit sexual material, accompanied by music. The Clit Tapes was her first public video installation.

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Drawing by Carole Glasser. Photos top to bottom: Helen Gurley Brown and Hugh Hefner, Phil Donahue, Gloria Steinem, on "A Conversation With..." on Daytime. *Photos courtesy Hearst/ABC.*

Ladies Home Channels

DeeDee Halleck

The so-called "communications revolution" has promised something for every constituency: perpetual up-to-the-minute reports for the news junkies; indoor and outdoor soccer for the jocks; late-night rock for the Woodstock descendants; quotations on request for stockholders; push-button consumption from commodity channels; Mexican soaps for the *barrios* of New York and LA. For women, there will be emancipation in the form of entire channels full of information and entertainment. The cable feast offers a dish for every palate—every palate that can pay, that is. This menu is strictly for those that still have jobs and surplus enough to pay the monthly cable bills. The "revolution" is in fact an electronic era of "supply-side" information that turns the very word *communication* into a euphemism. The main effect of the new technologies is a growing information gap—between the information *haves* and the *have nots*. Which side are women on?

The Industry

Most of the information we get comes from the networks, major newspapers, weekly and monthly magazines, book publishers, and record and movie companies that are wholly owned or subsidiaries of the "information giants."[1] The tremendous growth of this sector has pushed the communications trans-national corporations into the forefront of the expansion of capital. With this expansion, more and more of the culture of the world has come under a system of domination by these media industries that is more subtle and insidious than the British Empire. Indeed, the sun never sets on *ET* or *Charlie's Angels.* Like the empires of old, the media corporations have felt the need to expand or die. This tendency, coupled with the world economic crisis, has led them to exact ever greater tolls from the population at home. The essence of cable is that it is a way to *charge* for media programming. Audiences have always paid for the largest share of the media empire—the equipment to receive the signals. They also have paid for programming through increased prices on the commodities advertised.[2] With the advent of cable, they will pay yet again. Cable is not broadcast. It comes into the home through a wire, and as such can be metered and charged for. Of course, the glowing predictions of electronic diversity never mention the price tag. (The third of the U.S. population now receiving cable is also receiving monthly *information bills*—soon to be as common as electric or gas statements.) Nor is there mention of the fact that this information comes into our homes on *one* wire. However many channels or services, it is owned and provided by one source. This fact is obscured by the predictions of a 70- to 100-channel capacity for the new systems. The "range of choice" is often cited as the reason there is no longer a need for airwave regulation. A close look at the reality of the new cable programming should quickly dispel any lingering hopes about the emancipatory potential of the cable industry.

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The Programs

USA is a cable programming service that reaches 1600 cable systems. Their *USA Daytime* is described as "women's entertainment and family service programming." Anticipating flack, their brochure opens defensively with a disclaimer: "No, it's not a soap opera." That much is true: This is not *The Young and the Restless*. The average soap opera is a lot more expensive than the shows on this schedule. These formats are talk shows: studio hostesses with either a guest or a new kitchen appliance, a classic form of cheap TV pioneered by Betty Furness. The guests are mostly "experts" and, more often than not, males. They offer technological solutions to such perplexing problems as removing dog hair on carpets and turning a corner when placing a zipper in do-it-yourself upholstery. More intimate problems are handled by Sonya Friedman, a psychologist billed as someone who is searching for "emotions behind behavior."

Since celebrities are too expensive for this schedule, the afternoon settles for the next best thing: their *wives*. Called "Are You Anybody?" this program reveals "what a woman's life is like when her husband is a superstar." Guests slated to appear include Mrs. Norman Mailer and Mrs. Howard Cosell.

Similar in content and identical in name is *Daytime*, produced by Hearst/ABC. The format is four hours of hostesses on the set introducing preproduced segments with male experts. Jerry Baker offers advice on plants. Dr. Salk gives insight into teenagers. Mr. Rogers reassures parents that "You Are Special." This *Daytime* promises to deliver what was requested by the women who filled out research questionnaires: shows of "substance and depth." Thus, *Daytime* producers have included a new show called "*Newsweek* for Women," which covers public affairs in the same depth as the magazine. They even tilt at controversy, albeit neatly and carefully packaged as "Outrageous Opinions Updated" with Helen Gurley Brown. However, while the *Newsweek* segment gets 75 minutes of a sample week, food and cooking advice tops the list with a total of 92 minutes, and sewing has near parity with 70 minutes a week.

The only new elements on these schedules are the chintz sofa cover on the set, the hanging macramé planter for the studio fern, and the occasional hint of punk in a hostess' overhennaed hairdo. Most of these programs amble along the well-worn paths that women's magazines have been trudging for 50 years. Not all that surprising, since many of the shows on cable are being co-produced by these very same magazines: *Women's Day, Better Homes and Gardens, Family Circle, Good Housekeeping*, etc.

Even *Ms.* has had its cable debut with a program called "She's Nobody's Baby, a History of American Women in the 20th Century." Conceived by Suzanne Levine, managing editor of *Ms.*, and funded to the tune of $200,000 by Home Box Office, this hour of collage history won the George Foster Peabody Award for Excellence in Journalism in 1982. It was the first time that this award was given to something produced specifically for cable. However, the success of this program has not engendered a series, or even more individual programs like it. Critical acclaim and social usefulness are not ingredients in the program selection process.

The heavy promotion that surrounded the *Ms.* HBO show, coupled with the fact that there have been some highly visible women program executives in the cable arena, generated high hopes among women in the creative community. "It was a new industry. There were a lot of talented women who had been ready to go for a long time," says John Shigekawa, director of New Medium, a consulting agency that helps independent producers work out co-production arrangements with the new technologies. "Some of them were refugees from public television or had graduated from public television training programs of the sixties and early seventies. They were smart women who wanted to work, and they were willing to accept salaries that were lower than what men with the same experience would accept."

For a while there were a number of women in key programming positions. However, as the big dollars moved in, and smaller entrepreneurial cable groups were swallowed by the multinationals, many of these women found their authority eroded as new layers of mostly male executives wedged between them and the system heads (mostly male to begin with). Women in acquisition departments, who had in the early days of cable been able to pursue some innovative programming ideas, found their decisions reviewed by whole echelons of vice-presidents.

The Statistics

Cable executives are proud of what they consider to be a glowing record of affirmative action in the new industry. They like to bring out long lists of all their women managers and programming officials. Gracie Nettingham has her own list of statistics—ones that give a different picture. She is a researcher with the Office of Communications of the United Church of Christ (UCC) and the founder of Minorities in Cable, a nationwide organization dedicated to increasing the participation of minorities in the developing industry. "The patterns here are the same as those in regular broadcasting," she points out. "Women and minorities have made very few inroads into technical and managerial positions." Nettingham cites statistics from reports that cable operators must file with the FCC.

Currently, white males hold 57% of all positions and 75% of all decision-making posts in cable. While cable employment shot up by 14% between 1980 and 1981, minority jobholders increased their ranks by only 2%. Women do slightly better in cable than they do in broadcast TV or radio, holding 33% of cable jobs in 1981 compared with 31% of TV and 32% of radio positions. But women's placement within cable companies is another story. Seventy-four percent of all women working in the industry hold clerical and office positions. And women hold only 15.5% of positions in the top four job categories, compared with 21% in broadcast TV and 22% in radio.

Minority women are in last place in cable hiring. They hold only 5% of cable jobs and less than 2% of the high-level positions. Most—76%—do office or clerical work. Minority men don't fare much better. They hold 9% of cable jobs, and their 10% of the high-level positions is more likely to be in sales or technical fields than in managerial or professional (read—decision-making) areas. (See tables for details.)

"We may have a hard time just getting at these statistics in the future," Nettingham warns. "Moves to deregulate at the FCC would eliminate the requirement to collect this information." Indeed, groups with media reform offices like UCC[3] and the National Organization for Women face an uphill battle in attempting to halt deregulation proceedings in communications at the national level. They are also working in many local areas to assist citizens' groups in the cable franchising process. This has meant *creating* regulations that will make the local cable contracts accountable to democratic input.

Barbara Rochman, a lawyer, is the legislative vice-president of the New York NOW Chapter. Active in media reform groups for many years, she is currently working to develop good Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) clauses in the franchise agreements being negotiated between New York City and the cable companies that are waiting to wire the lucrative boroughs of the metropolitan area. "We would like to see the franchises carry monitoring requirements and follow-through procedures in case EEO goals aren't met," she explains. "We are working for substantial representation by women and minorities in decision-making positions and technical areas." Rochman is also working to generate interest in public access: "In the future, the need for access channels will grow in importance, especially as active constituents become involved in programming. Much of the research, organization, and outreach work already being done by local women's groups is easily translated into access programming."

The Alternatives

As an exploration into possible uses of access, the New York NOW office has undertaken a series of programs on access in Manhattan. "Women don't need programs on how to sew," asserts Rochman. "They need information on how to organize a daycare

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EMPLOYMENT IN TV, CABLE AND RADIO—ALL JOBS
NATIONWIDE, 1979-1980

System Type	White Males	White Females	Minority Males	Minority Females	Total*
Television	59% (34,192)	25% (14,170)	10% (5,716)	6% (3,726)	57,804
Cable	59% (13,301)	28% (8,746)	9% (2,737)	4% (1,300)	31,084
Radio	61% (40,507)	27% (17,588)	7% (4,549)	5% (3,487)	66,131
Total	60% (93,000)	26% (40,504)	8% (13,002)	5% (8,513)	155,019

EMPLOYMENT IN TV, CABLE AND RADIO—
UPPER FOUR JOB CATEGORIES,
NATIONWIDE, 1979-1980

System Type	White Males	White Females	Minority Males	Minority Females	Total*
Television	70% (32,482)	17% (7,855)	10% (4,691)	4% (1,682)	46,710
Cable	77% (11,166)	12% (1,799)	9% (1,349)	1% (214)	14,528
Radio	71% (39,661)	19% (10,571)	7% (4,138)	3% (1,502)	55,872
Total	71% (83,309)	17% (20,225)	9% (10,178)	3% (3,398)	117,110



TOTAL NUMBER OF FULL-TIME CABLE EMPLOYEES:
SUMMARY 1980 (N=31,107)

Category of Employment	White Males	White Females	Minority Males	Minority Females	Total*
Officials and Managers	70% (3,243)	24% (1,112)	4% (208)	2% (103)	4,666
Professionals	70% (492)	22% (158)	5% (38)	2% (15)	703
Technicians	85% (6,426)	2% (159)	12% (925)	—— (28)	7,538
Sales Workers	62% (1,005)	23% (370)	11% (178)	4% (68)	1,621
Office and Clerical	5% (435)	81% (6,725)	1% (91)	13% (1,047)	8,298
Craftsmen, Operatives, Laborers, Service Workers	81% (6,709)	3% (236)	16% (1,297)	—— (39)	8,281
Total	59% (18,310)	28% (8,760)	9% (2,737)	4% (1,300)	31,107

TOTAL NUMBER OF FULL-TIME CABLE EMPLOYEES:
SUMMARY OF 1981 (N=35,412)

Category of Employment	White Males	White Females	Minority Males	Minority Females	Total*
Officials and Managers	68% (3,569)	24% (1,274)	5% (236)	3% (132)	5,211
Professionals	67% (557)	22% (184)	8% (68)	2% (19)	823
Technicians	83% (7,102)	3% (265)	13% (1,115)	1% (61)	8,543
Sales Workers	61% (1,338)	25% (547)	9% (197)	6% (127)	2,209
Office and Clerical	6% (592)	78% (7,453)	2% (159)	14% (1,332)	9,536
Craftsmen, Operatives, Laborers, Service Workers	79% (7,145)	4% (383)	16% (1,475)	1% (82)	9,085
Total	57% (20,303)	29% (10,106)	9% (3,250)	5% (1,753)	35,412

Annemarie Huste of "Cooking With Annemarie" on Daytime. *Photo courtesy Hearst/ABC.*

*Row percentages do not always sum to 100% because of rounding error.
(——) Less than 0.5%
Sources: Data for TV and radio have been estimated from the 1980 *Equal Employment Opportunity Trend Report* released by the FCC. Data for cable are from 1980 computer tape prepared by the FCC. Numbers in the cable row are based on 3830 cable systems which had readable data.

center, how to file a discrimination complaint, how to protect their rights in divorce proceedings, and how to take political action to insure abortion rights. Our NOW office is constantly getting calls about these kinds of questions. This is the kind of information we'd like to see cable programming for women provide."

The NOW chapter in Madison, Wisconsin, was one of the first to latch onto cable access as a forum for their activities. Carol Sundstrom produces a regular series, which began in January 1981. "The Madison project has two goals: to train and encourage women to participate in the media and to regularly produce and air programs on women's issues." The programs have ranged from politics to dance. Their most popular show is a documentary on house-husbands in the Madison area. Sundstrom's success has inspired other Wisconsin NOW chapters, and they are forming three other producing entities at access centers in the state. The four cities will exchange programs and hold joint training workshops.

What might an ideal schedule for women be? Two examples of series that were directed to and produced by women are: *Woman Alive* and *Womanvision*. Both used large amounts of independently produced segments. *Woman Alive*, a public television series, was produced by Joan Shigekawa from 1974 to 1978. The variety of topics is evident from the contents of a typical show (#5 in the first series): (1) Charlotte Zwerwin's film *Women of McCaysville Industries*, about a group of Georgia women who have set up their own sewing factory; (2) Holly Near, singing three of her own songs; (3) Eleanor Holmes Norton, NYC Commissioner of Human Rights, looking at women and the recession.

The series was dropped when Shigekawa found it impossible to garner corporate support—then, as now, a prerequisite for the so-called public airwaves. "American business has huge investments in the old way of viewing women," explains Shigekawa. "Images of women cooking and spending are acceptable. The active, creative, independent women who peopled *Woman Alive* were another matter." When one corporation did offer money, PBS rejected the offer on the grounds that there was a conflict of interest. The corporation was Ortho, of birth control pill fame. (PBS doesn't have any problem with the major oil companies sponsoring the "MacNeil-Lehrer Report.")

Such questions of propriety are absent from the cable world, where Bristol Myers, for instance, not only advertises on but is also co-producer of the *USA Daytime* health show "Alive and Well." Shigekawa's difficult search for corporate sponsors doesn't bode well for the possibility of finding funds either as co-production money or advertising revenue for programs that challenge the dominant stereotyped media images of women. Advertisers stay away from controversy. The *Woman Alive* experience suggests that *positive images* per se are controversial.

Controversy is something that many independent producers thrive on. Thousands of productions have been generated by the independent film and video community in the past 10 years. This is one area in which women have been central—both in front and behind the camera. From Barbara Kopple's *Harlan County* to Julia Reichert's *Union Maids* to Connie Fields' *Rosie the Riveter*, the body of independent work for and by women is a neglected source of programming. Kitty Morgan, director of Independent Cinema Artists and Producers (ICAP), has worked at marketing independent work to cable for years. In 1978 she curated a series for Manhattan Cable called *Womanvision*. Programs included a film on four folk artists from the Deep South, a verité portrait of a suburban wedding by Debra Franco, and Claudia Weil's early film on China. The programs were well received, but Morgan was disappointed when other systems didn't pick up the series. Critical acclaim and even veiwer enthusiasm have no effect on the bottom line.

Other models come from the access realm. Civil rights activist Flo Kennedy understood early on about the opportunity that public access provided. She has produced a weekly show on Manhattan Cable for over five years, and has a loyal and committed constituency. Her shows are occasionally shown on other access systems in other inner-cities.

Another series enjoying local popularity is Nancy Cain's "Night Owl Show" on the community access channel in Woodstock, New

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Shirley Robson, host of "From Washington: Citizen Alert," on Daytime. *Photo courtesy Hearst/ABC.*

York. The show consistently provides innovative programming by and for women. Though not promoted as "women's programming," Cain uses a lot of material that could be categorized as such because of her sensibility to and consciousness of women's issues. Selections from a recent program include a docu-drama exploring the Cinderella myth that was staged in the ladies' room of a local restaurant; performing artist Linda Montano, dressed as a nun, giving instructions on teeth brushing; and biker/feminist/poet Teresa Costa belting out her punk poetry to the accompaniment of shattering glass.

The Struggle

Public access becomes increasingly important as we recognize in the cable "revolution" the same old stereotypes long perpetrated by soaps, sitcoms, and commercials. But access is constantly threatened by deregulation efforts that would obviate local agreements. Before women can make new programming, they will need to become media activists committed to a real communications revolution. Certainly the burgeoning of the cable industry has created rising expectations. Cable has excited the ambitions and hopes of thousands of talented and active women all over the country. Suzanne Levine was enthusiastic about the community of women working in cable that she encountered while touring with her production of "Century of Women," the *Ms.* special. Levine made many presentations to groups affiliated with a national organization called Women in Cable. (Most big cities have a chapter; the New York chapter has over 700 women.) "I'd go to a meeting in Iowa," Levine comments, "and there would be 50 energetic and sophisticated women. Those women are ready for action. They want to do meaningful work, and they think that cable is where they can do it."

What the future holds for these hopeful women will depend on where they and their organization go. So far, many of the chapters have become the ladies' auxiliaries to the industry: hostessing lavish banquets for the mostly male corporate officers and industry biggies. Will women in cable be willing to challenge the status quo and forge structures within this still-forming industry that can give real power and support to women on both ends of the wire? Or do women in the U.S. need a "New Information Order," similar to that being demanded by many Third World countries—whose leaders realize that information is power and that communication issues are central to the struggle to overcome domination.

1. See Herbert Schiller's *The Mind Managers* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973) for a prescient description of the current phenomenon.

2. Dallas Smythe has documented the formation of audiences as commodities. His most recent book is: *Dependency Road: Class, Culture and Communication in Canada* (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1982).

3. The UCC has published the best book about cable: a short primer by Jennifer Stearns called *A Short Course in Cable* (UCC Office of Communications, 105 Madison Ave., NY, NY 10016).

DeeDee Halleck is a media activist and an independent film- and videomaker in New York City. She produces a weekly public access cable TV show about communications called "Paper Tiger TV."

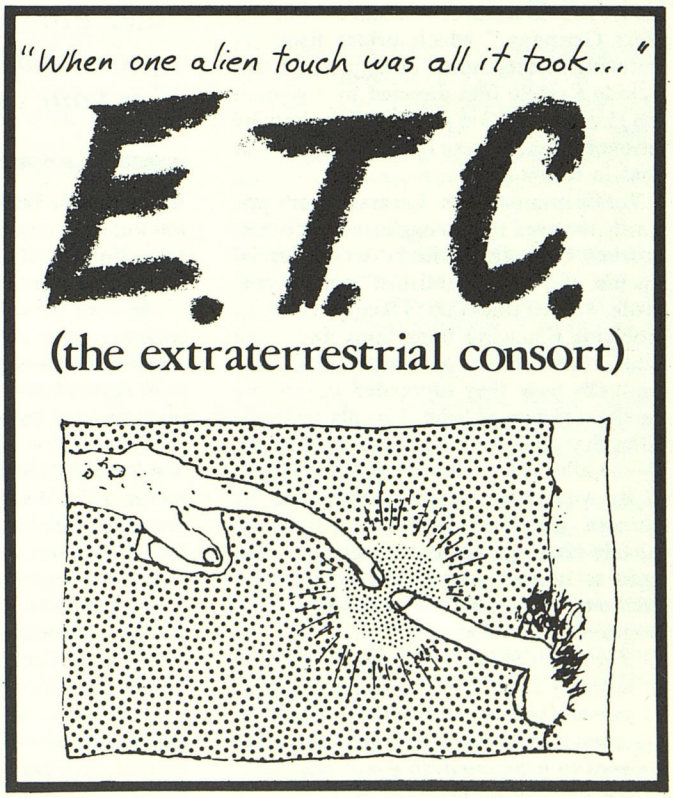
Carole Glasser is a Brooklyn poet, recently published in the *Centennial Review*, *North Dakota Review*, and *Partisan Review*.

Horror Movie

A few recent clichés are all the props needed
to shoot the scene and at the slightest stimulation
there is the automatic response of the body.
As to mild electric shocks the thighs twitch
like frogs' legs in the obligatory rhythm
lifesize, lifelike, the bodies flash an embrace
across the screen, squeaking they rub
against each other and bounce off
again like taut balloons.
A brush of the actor's hand across
the actress' cheek uncovers a remnant
smile buried in her hair but her
voice lifts and with a stock phrase
adjusts it to the proper grimace.
They have grown the fangs and claws
deemed necessary for the performance
of Lust and Lycanthropy.
The better to howl with, my dear.

Poem by Erika Miliziano, who has published in literary magazines and anthologies and is currently translating a contemporary American poet into German.

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Cartoon by Su Friedrich

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Frauen und Film

and Feminist Film Culture in West Germany

MIRIAM HANSEN



Cover design: Oh Muvie Photographs

German women filmmakers find themselves in a peculiar bind when it comes to defining their work against dominant modes of patriarchal cinema. Like all independent filmmakers, they are confronting Goliath—the hegemony of Hollywood and its Common Market subsidiaries. Beyond the domain of commercial control, however, in the precarious enclave of federal subsidies and TV co-productions, women filmmakers encounter the competition of a whole troop of Davids, already firmly entrenched in the field. It has become commonplace in discussions on contemporary German cinema to cite its unique legal and economic substructure as one of the keys to its artistic success and international visibility. It is equally common, though much less acknowledged, that women filmmakers are conspicuously absent from the pantheon of New German auteurs. The American-styled New German Cinema canonizes names like Werner Herzog, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Wim Wenders, and Volker Schlöndorff, but rarely extends to Ula Stöckl, Helke Sander, Jutta Brückner, or Ulrike Ottinger. In New York the Museum of Modern Art's 1982-83 series of "Recent Films from West Germany," which prides itself on featuring lesser-known directors, did not include a single film directed by a woman —a glaring omission even if judged only by the enormous increase of women's productions in recent years.

Yet German women filmmakers are primarily involved in a struggle on the domestic front. Competing with both commercial cinema and the established male avant-garde, women filmmakers face tremendous problems financing their films and often incur considerable personal debts; only gradually have they succeeded in tapping the same system of federal grants and subsidies that advanced their male colleagues. Meanwhile, a large number of films directed by women are being co-produced by German television stations—a form of subsidy that guarantees access yet also tends to impose artistic and political restrictions via production guidelines and program committees.

> *The effect of not-naming is censorship, whether caused by the imperialism of patriarchal language or the underdevelopment of a feminist language. We need to begin analyzing our own films, but first it is necessary to learn to speak in our own name.*[1]

The search for a feminist language in film, a language that would transcend the patriarchal terms of sexual difference, is not exactly facilitated by the existence of a more or less established male avant-garde. The peculiar history of German cinema complicates the oedipal scenario of avant-garde protest which feminist film theory and practice seek to displace. The Cinema of the Fathers, representing commercial interests, is one of Stepfathers and Grandfathers at best; the Cinema of the Sons, at least in some of its representatives, is less concerned with conquering the international domain of Art than with applying its artistic efforts to the political transformation of the West German public sphere. As German women filmmakers are learning "to speak in [their] own name," they too are engaged in building an oppositional public sphere, linking the women's movement to female theatergoers and TV audiences across the country. Like their male colleagues, women filmmakers confront the key contradiction in store for all counterhegemonic film practice: how to develop an autonomous discourse while, at the same time, establishing, maintaining, and increasing rapport with an audience.

> *What you read in* Frauen und Film *is almost never quite right, but it sharpens your focus.*
>
> —Gertrude Koch

In both the work of "naming" and the construction of a public sphere essential to a feminist film culture, the journal *Frauen und Film* (*FuF—Women and Film*) has played and, I hope, will continue to play a crucial role. Founded by filmmaker Helke Sander (*REDUPERS; The Subjective Factor*) in 1974, *FuF* stands as the first and only European feminist film journal. Published by Rotbuch Verlag in Berlin as a quarterly (beginning with #7), the journal is into its 34th issue. Sander signed as *FuF*'s sole editor up to #27 (February 1981); with that issue, editorial responsibility shifted to collectives in Berlin, Frankfurt, Cologne, and Paris. Last July, the Berlin collective decided to discontinue the journal, thus causing the publisher to withdraw. Meanwhile, the Frankfurt collective formed a new editorial board and linked up with Verlag Roter Stern in Frankfurt, which will publish *FuF* on a biannual basis. I will not go into the Berlin/Frankfurt split which bears only remote resemblance to the separation of the *Camera Obscura* collective from *Women and Film* in 1974. Suffice it to say that, with the continuation of *FuF*, feminist film culture has salvaged a centerpiece of its organizational substructure, a vital platform not only for issues of strategy, exchange of information, and critical discussion but also for the articulation and revision of feminist theories of film.

The program of *FuF*, as outlined in #6 (1975), lists two major objectives: (a) "to analyze the workings of patriarchal culture in cinema"; (b) "to recognize and name feminist starting points in film and develop them further." The first objective requires a critical analysis of existing cinema in all its aspects: film politics and economics, film theory and criticism, as well as the discourse of its products—in short, a comprehensive critique of patriarchal cinema. The second complex includes the relationship between women's cinema and the women's movement, the rediscovery of earlier women filmmakers, the current situation of women working in film and other media, textual analyses, and the question of a feminine/feminist aesthetics.

FuF's critique of patriarchal structures in New German Cinema can be traced on three different levels. On the level of the institutional framework, *FuF* calls attention to the inequities of the subsidy system which extends privileges to already successful directors rather than individual projects. Women are grossly underrepresented in the committees that decide on grants and awards—hence the political stress on the demand for equal representation. The standards of professionalism by which these committees tend to rationalize their decisions also discourage collective and nonhierarchic modes of production, thus pitting women filmmakers not only against male directors but also against each other. Financial support from TV stations, a primary source for women's films, is tied to production codes that restrict the critical treatment of issues crucial to a feminist film practice—abortion, female sexuality, marriage. The mechanisms of public reception further ensure

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that patriarchal imbalance persists even in a protectionist film culture: Festivals, press conferences, reviews again and again confirm *FuF*'s contention that male arbiters still control the representation of women in German cinema. This control includes the token acclaim granted by male critics to some women filmmakers but not to others as well as the liberal endorsement of the new "woman's film."

On yet another level of critique, feminist analysis focuses on the notion of "invisible labor." *FuF* programmatically devotes itself to the work of women in the media whose names disappear behind the name of the male auteur. A chief offender in this respect is undoubtedly Werner Herzog, who may give public credit to his cameramen but never to Beate Mainka-Jellinghaus, probably the best editor that German cinema has ever had.[2] *FuF*'s efforts to render invisible labor visible range from identifying editors and producers to scriptwriters and collaborators (see the interviews with M. von Trotta, Gisela Tuchtenhagen, and Danielle Huillet).

On a third—and actually the least conspicuous level—*FuF* criticizes patriarchal cinema's products. The analysis of male-directed films concentrates on the new wave of so-called "women's films" as the commercial response to the women's movement. In this context, we find reviews of Fassbinder's *Effi Briest* and Peter Handke's *The Left-Handed Woman* alongside reviews of foreign films featuring the alleged New Woman. The stars of New German Cinema, however, remain predictably marginal to *FuF*'s discussions: Herzog is represented only with a review of *Nosferatu*; Wenders, except for a recent interview concerning *Lightning over Water*, is featured with a single quote from *Kings of the Road*, "the story about the absence of women which is at the same time the story of the desire that wants them to be present." The photograph heading these lines shows the depopulated arena of the German Bundestag (parliament). The only male filmmaker given more extensive discussion space in *FuF* is Alexander Kluge, a director whose professed concern with "women's topics" has provoked feminist reactions ranging from severe polemics to measured ambivalence.



Cover design: Sara Schumann

In the search for a feminist discourse in film, for modes of perception and production other than those circumscribed by patriarchal codes, *FuF* again and again encounters the difficulties of definition, of appropriating useful forms of resistance while asserting difference against cooptation. Consider, for example, the long-standing discussion on the principle of collectivity, starting with a special focus on collective production in #8 (1976). On the one hand, collectivity remains a utopian goal that fueled the women's movement, a weapon against the hierarchy, competition, and isolation imposed by patriarchal modes of production. On the other hand, the notion of collectivity may itself turn into an ideology when it is used to justify dilettantism, false harmony, and the exploitation of allegedly poorly qualified labor. Furthermore, the idea of collaborative film projects has been marketed by a group of male filmmakers (including Fassbinder, Kluge, and Schlöndorff), mostly to the exclusion of women directors. Together with a devastating review of *Germany in Autumn*, *FuF* prints an open letter signed by feminist film workers and activists, condemning the most saving claim of the film —its collective intervention at a time of political crisis—as an arrogant and hypocritical gesture which effectively denies similar efforts on the part of filmmakers of lesser means and reputations. In the same issue of *FuF* (#16), however, Sander, in an essay on "Film Politics as Politics of Production," refers to *Germany in Autumn* as a viable model for collaborative projects on a feminist basis.

When *FuF* advocates a "politics of production" or discusses "forms of production" from a feminist perspective, the term "production" has to be understood in the widest possible sense. As indicated, *FuF* has programmatically presented the work of women editors, cinematographers, and producers—each the focus of an individual issue. Similarly, it devoted a special issue to the "visible" woman—the actress. The work of naming—of making public—includes the creation of a countertradition of women directors, ranging from Leontine Sagan, Maya Deren, Marguerite Duras, and Vera Chytilova to filmmakers of a younger generation such as Valie Export, Elfi Mikesch, Margaret Raspé, and Pola Reuth. Beyond these traditional branches of film production, however, *FuF*'s discussion of forms of production encompasses the production of the very experience that requires a feminist film practice: the gender-specific mediation of all perception. In this vein, a special issue on women spectators bypasses psychoanalytic theories of reception in favor of documenting traces of authentic experience within and against the grain of patriarchal conditions of spectatorship.[3] Similarly, issues on lesbian cinema, pornography, and eroticism investigate the production of images that



Cover design: Oh Muvie Photographs

inscribe women's experience of their bodies and sexuality in a double structure of repression and subversion.

In its theoretical positions, articulated primarily by Helke Sander and Gertrud Koch, *FuF* shares the skepticism voiced in German feminist theory by Silvia Bovenschen and Ulrike Prokop[4]—adamantly opposed to feminine essentialism, yet more utopian and at the same time more iconoclastic than psychoanalytic-semiological directions of cinefeminism. While the "Parisian perspective," to use Ruby Rich's charming phrase, has made its way into *FuF* in the shape of translations and conference reports, its reception is counterbalanced by a notion of radical subjectivity that clearly betrays the influence of the Frankfurt School. Following this tradition, the theoretical search for the aesthetic dimension of feminist film practice inevitably entails a critical interaction with patriarchal film culture in its most complex instances—in the political and aesthetic avant-garde of male cinema.

1. B. Ruby Rich, "In the Name of Feminist Film Criticism," *Heresies*, no. 9 (1980), p. 78.

2. Thanks to Ruby Rich for remembering an occasion on which, for once, he did: "My editor, Beate Mainka-Jellinghaus, is very important to me, and I would say that without her I would be only a shadow of myself. But there's always an enormous struggle going on between the two of us, and it's very strange how she behaves during this process. She's *very* rude with me, and she expresses her opinions in a manner that is like the *most* mediocre housewife" ("Images at the Horizon," workshop at Facet Multimedia Center, Chicago, April 17, 1979).

3. The only essays translated so far are Sander's "Feminism and Film" and Koch's "Why Women Go to the Movies," in *Jump Cut*, no. 27 (1982), pp. 49-53.

4. For Bovenschen, see, "Is There a Feminine Aesthetic?" *New German Critique*, no. 10 (1977), pp. 111-137, and "The Contemporary Witch, the Historical Witch and the Witch Myth," *NGC*, no. 15 (1978), pp. 83-119. *NGC* no. 13 (1978), an issue on the German women's movement, contains a translation from Prokop's book *Weiblicher Lebenszusammenhang* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1976).

Miriam Hansen teaches film studies at Rutgers University, has published articles on feminist film theory, and has contributed work to *Frauen und Film*.

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LOOSE THREADS

Excerpts from Catholic Girl in a Calvinized World

Micki McGee

At the four-second point in this particular Calvin Klein jeans commercial, if you were playing the tape in slow motion, you would see a loose thread dangling from the hem of the jeans Brooke Shields wears as she swings her leg down across the frame. If you were viewing at the normal 30 frames per second you would miss the loose thread and be taken in by the apparent perfection of the shot as the camera pans up Brooke's legs. I imagine it would be possible to produce an article not unlike this commercial—a seamless essay carefully woven to conceal any confusion. You should be more suspicious reading such writing than I am hesitant to impose a linear analysis on this overdetermined image. Let's proceed in a somewhat nonlinear fashion—after the fashion of the tailor taking apart a garment—pulling at loose threads and laying out the pieces to reveal the pattern that gives form to the garment.

"... etymology, as it is used in daily life, is to be considered not so much as scientific fact as a rhetorical form, the illicit use of historical causality to support the drawing of logical consequences."
—Frederic Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language* (p. 6)

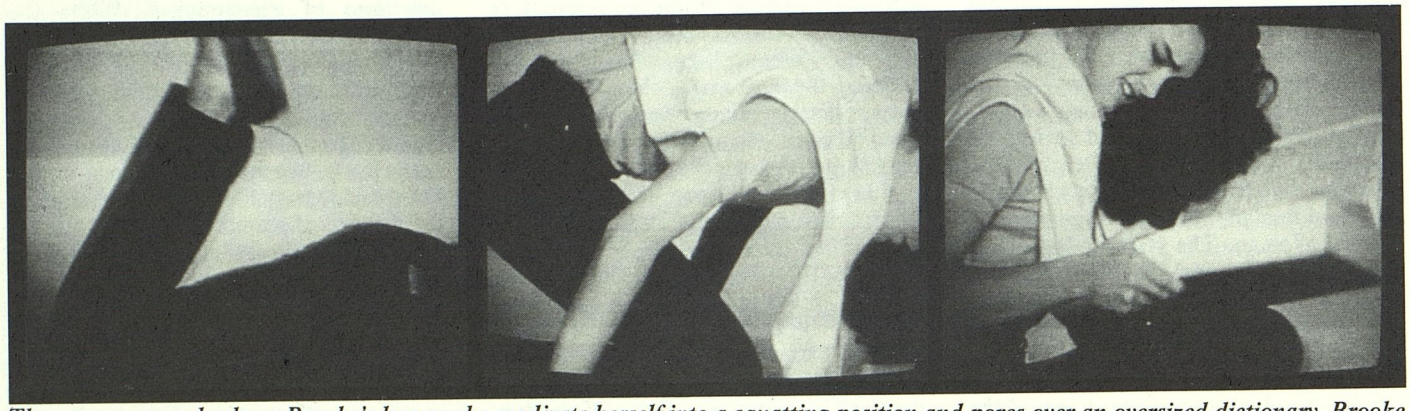
When Jameson wrote this in 1972, it's doubtful that he could have imagined the advent of designer jeans, let alone a commercial revolving around an invented etymology of a designer's name. Keeping in mind the rhetorical nature of etymology, let's consider what else it might mean to be "Calvinized." Calvin could just as easily be derived from the Latin *calor* for "heat" and the Latin *venire* for "to come"—a pun not likely to have been overlooked in the art director's drawing room. But even more interesting than the sexual double-entendre, particularly when evoking historical causality, is to consider what it would actually mean to be Calvinized. From the *Oxford English Dictionary*: "Calvinize. To follow Calvin, to teach Calvinism. Hence Calvinized. Calvinizing."

Calvinism, according to Max Weber's often-disputed thesis *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, supplies the "moral energy and drive of the capitalist entrepreneur.... The element of ascetic self-control in worldly affairs is certainly there in other Puritan sects also; but they lack the dynamism of Calvinism." Their impact, Weber suggests, is mainly upon the formation of a moral outlook "enhancing labour discipline within the lower and middle levels of capitalist economic organization." For Weber, the essence of the spirit of modern capitalism lies in the desire to "accumulate wealth for its own sake rather than for the material rewards that it can serve to bring.... The entrepreneurs associated with the development of rational capitalism combine the impulse to accumulate with a positively frugal lifestyle."

Abandon the idea of coincidence. The Puritan Fashion Corporation is the name of the company that contracted with Calvin Klein to manufacture the designer's jeans. "The company used to limp along making low and moderate priced dresses for what Seventh Avenue calls 'the masses with fat asses.' That all changed in 1977." Puritan's president Carl Rosen said, "God caused his countenance to shine upon me to do a license with Calvin Klein" (*Forbes*, February 15, 1982, p. 34).

"Independent retailers and Klein's own boutiques in London, Tokyo and Milan will sell $750 million worth of his products in 1982.... While much of the country struggled through economic doldrums in 1981, Calvin Klein had a personal income of $8.5 million."
—*People Magazine* (January 18, 1982, p. 94)

Calvin Klein doesn't live the frugal lifestyle demanded by the 16th-century theologian, but then neither is he living during a period of primitive accumulation of capital. Parsimony on par with the early Puritans is unnecessary in this era of consolidated capital. Nonetheless, note the curious metonymy between the Calvinist's pleasureless accumulation of wealth and the "look-but-don't-touch" sexuality of Brooke Shields.* Brooke has amassed considerable sexual exchange value as the woman-child you'll never have or never be. Think of each desiring or covetous gaze as currency.



The camera pans slowly up Brooke's legs as she readjusts herself into a squatting position and pores over an oversized dictionary. Brooke (quietly, as though talking to herself): "I wonder if it's a person... C... C—A—L... CAL... from the Greek kalos*—'beautiful.' Vin—from the Latin* vincere*—'to conquer.' Cal—vin: beautiful conqueror."*

Scavullo on Shields: "The camera loves her and she loves the camera—whether it's a still or a movie. The magic, the mystique—it doesn't happen by training. Some people can work for a million years and never get it."
—"Brooke's Own Beauty Book," *Bazaar* (August 1981, p. 185)

While the Protestant merchant class amassed capital on the site of production, Shields amasses capital at the site of consumption. As the sexual equivalent of the parsimonious Protestant merchant, she accumulates a libidinal fortune while the world of supermarket weeklies waits for her to expend some small portion of her wealth.

FIVE MEN FIGHT FOR BROOKE'S LOVE....
—*National Examiner* (August 31, 1982)
BLUSHING BROOKE SAYS SHE'LL STRIP—IF THE RIGHT ROLE COMES ALONG
—*Weekly World* (September 21, 1982)

In the spectacle world of eroticized products and commodified sex, Brooke's desirability is readily transformed in legal tender. Her appearance in the Calvin Klein commercials paid her half a million dollars as the 1981 sales of Calvins leveled off at $245 million.

*We can't presume to know anything about Brooke Shields as a person, since she exists for most people only as an image.

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When Brooke entered junior high school, she was already earning $30,000 a year and for tax purposes her mother had formed a paper company in her name. She was no longer just a child, nor even just a child actress. She was Brooke Shields, Inc.—and the only thing still private about her life was the list of stockholders in this unusual firm that packaged and distributed only one product: Brooke Shields.

"The commercials themselves—combined with all the press coverage the morality war generated—brought sixty-five million dollars to Puritan Fashions, a sales increase of three hundred percent."
—Jason Bonderoff, *Brooke, An Unauthorized Biography*

If you were anything like me you were one of those alienated kids who read compulsively. You would read anything from historical fiction to chemistry manuals. Once in a while, though surprisingly seldom, you'd come across a word that you didn't know and couldn't figure out from the sentence. Barely looking up from the page, you might ask your mother, "Hey Mom, what does 'ravaged' mean?" "What?" "What does 'ravaged' mean?" And she'd say, "Ask your father." So you'd go into the other room where your father was watching television and you'd say, "Hey Dad, what does 'ravaged' mean?" And he'd look up from his newspaper and say, "Why don't you look it up—that's what we have that dictionary for." So you'd walk over to the bookcase that held the two-volume dictionary and the Great Books of the Western World *and you'd remove the second volume of the dictionary. "Ravage: devastate, plunder, make havoc, n. destructive force of." You have the definition, but it still doesn't make any sense because you are reading one of those cheap historical novels that your mother worries might be a bit beyond your years. This one's set in Biblical times. Ravage: devastate, plunder, make havoc. You are puzzled. How does this apply to Mary Magdalene? You're not sure, but you know it's not good.*

So when you see Brooke with her dictionary—if you're at all like me—what is invoked is that confusion, powerlessness, and desire to have access to knowledge and power which at each thumb index seem to evade your grasp. The words are there, the definitions are adjacent, but somehow there is an inexorable gap between definition and use.

A prepubescent beauty squatting over a dictionary with her posterior at eye level murmurs, "I've been Calvinized," registering sequential expressions of discovery, pleasure, and that wide-eyed look most often associated with terror. Given her cant, "sodomized" might be a more appropriate word for her research. Domination via the authority of the dictionary (submission to the imposition of linguistic order) is overlaid with an all but stated sexual domination. The girl-woman at the moment of pleasure in discovery, power via knowledge, announces with an ambiguous expression that she's been conquered. The pleasure of discovery is immediately transformed into the pleasure of submission.

In each of the Calvin Klein commercials Brooke is tightly enclosed in the frame—girl in a cathode cage.

"The marks made by the branding iron, about three inches in height and half that in width, had been burned into the flesh as though by a gouging tool and were almost half an inch deep. The lightest stroke of a finger revealed them."
—Pauline Reage, *The Story of O* (p. 163)

Brooke isn't bound with leather—her restraint is the denim of skin-tight jeans. She doesn't receive the branded "S" of Sir Stephen that O receives, she has instead the label with Calvin's name on her right buttock.

"On a network talk show Calvin revealed the thread that really holds his jeans empire together. 'The tighter they are, the better they sell.'
"When they [Brooke and her mother Teri] moved to New Jersey both of them began attending a nearby Catholic church every Sunday."
—Jason Bonderoff, *Brooke, An Unauthorized Biography*

Not long after Richard Avedon directed the Calvin Klein jeans commercials he went on to photograph a nude Nastassia Kinski intertwined with a boa constrictor, with the serpent's tongue adjacent to her ear. The imagery of Eden is ushered back and Nastassia and Brooke are brunette and blonde flip sides of a coin: Brooke with a dictionary between her legs and Nastassia with the snake. Avedon has capitalized on dangerous knowledge/dangerous sex.

Catholic girls—like Brooke, like me—are members of a religion with magical invocations. When a person with authority, a priest, makes a statement—"This is my body, this is my blood"—he's said to transform matter. Transubstantiation: A statement becomes a physical truth via the voice of authority. To wish, desire, or covet is as sinful as to act from desire or covetousness. Catholicism: A religion in which the distinction between representation and reality, thought and action, is continually obscured.



(Closing dictionary and turning to the camera): "So that's what happened to me [wide-eyed look of surprise]—I've been Calvinized." Freeze frame on close-up of Brooke's face. Titles fade up. Male announcer's voiceover: "Tops and Jeans by Calvin Klein." Photos taken from TV by Micki McGee.

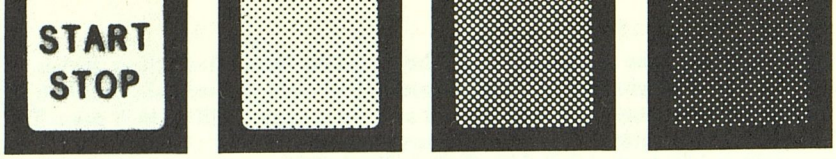
The written word allows for the split between mind and body on which Christian religions base their theology. You can be present (via a note, a letter, or in the 20th century the answering machine) yet physically absent. Reading allows you to experience someone else's thoughts, ideas, and personal history in their absence. What do Calvins allow you to experience?

"READING IS TO THE MIND WHAT CALVINS ARE TO THE BODY."
—Calvin Klein ad

So if reading is submission to the order and authority of language, albeit an often pleasurable submission, then wearing Calvins is submission to another signifying system wherein the commodity stands for sexuality in the absence of another. Like the Catholic's obfuscation of reality and representation, the latter-day Calvinist obscures the distinction between sexuality and the spectacle of sexuality.

Micki McGee is an artist and critic whose work has appeared in *Fuse*, *Afterimage*, and *Jumpcut*.

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VIDEO ART AND THE MARKETPLACE

OR MY LIFE AS A VIDEO DISK

JOAN JUBELA

Jo Vaughn Brown wants to make $100 an hour working in the industry. *So do I, ideally, putting in about eight to 16 hours per week.* Brown is an 18-year-old Black woman studying video at Downtown Community TV and the Satellite Academy, an alternative public high school on the Lower East Side. She likes making documentaries that deal with prisons, junkies, prostitutes, and businessmen. As yet she is not sure whether she wants to operate camera, edit, or produce. The suggestion of working with computers makes her a little nervous. Her financial parameters, however, have been clearly established.

The class outline for Satellite's video program reads like a production schedule. Along with developing camera skills, they plan to discuss "ideas for getting our documentary shown on cable, ABC—what the networks are interested in." They have the contacts. They've made the connections.

Two hours northwest of Scranton in the Pennsylvania countryside, Mimi Martin, a 53-year-old video artist, supports herself restoring furniture and teaching video to high school students. Her imagery deals with what she considers the narrative dream. That imagery is constructed on an estimated $20,000 ¾-inch post-production system, partially built by hand in collaboration with David Jones of the Experimental TV Center in Oswego, New York. Working one day a week for two years, they constructed a sequencer, keyer, comparitor, frame buffer, function generator, computer interface, and colorizer.

Martin links her isolation from city life with the spiritual approach she takes in her artmaking process: "I lived in New York a total of six or seven years. The intensity was too much for me. I can barely cope with the excitement of the sticks. . . thinking about the reviewer or meeting the right person puts a strain on my aesthetic sensibility. I don't want to hustle my art because I want my tapes to have power and feeling, using my intuition and following what's most meaningful to me."

Pennsylvania is where the concept of cable TV was first applied, in 1948, enabling farm communities to receive broadcast signals from Philadelphia TV stations. Now, one of Martin's high school students has developed his own device to unscramble subscription cable services:

PLAY A GAME: DRAW A CIRCLE AROUND THE TOOLS YOU'VE HAD ACCESS TO, A BOX AROUND THE TECHNOLOGY YOU'VE HEARD OF OR AT LEAST KNOW TO EXIST, UNDERLINE THE WORDS OR FRAGMENTS OF WORDS SUGGESTING OTHER MEANINGS. IF YOU DON'T HAVE A PENCIL, UTILIZE YOUR GRAPHICS TABLET, PUNCH ESCAPE/SAFE ON YOUR TOUCH SCREEN.

MICROCHIP — DRIFT — UPLINK — DOWNSTREAM—MAINFRAME—LOW NOISE—HIGH BAND — TYPE C — TBC — DVE — LSI — PAL — ASCACA/SHIBASOKU — CHYRON — QUANTEL — CHALNICON — PLASMA PANEL — FRAME GRABBER—FLYING SPOT SCANNER—DISH—SOFTWARE—VIDEO FURNITURE

As former National Sales Director for United Artists, Liv Wright negotiated the licensing of feature films to pay television exhibitors. She was a "little girl from Harlem doing Beverly Hills." Her basic model of the marketplace, of capitalism, of selling wares, falls into two categories: vendors or suppliers—the Bloomingdale's analogy. In the retail business, vendors have names like Calvin Klein. In the motion picture business, where there are only six major studios, they are called suppliers. It's a finite universe, like the television networks. If there were equal distribution, with six studios vying for a three billion dollar business, each would get $500 million apiece—but distribution is not equal. "The first thing you want to make sure you get is $500 million and one dollar," states Wright. "One dollar more than the next guy, that's all."

DEFINITION OF CHERRY-PICKING USING BLOOMINGDALE'S ANALOGY

Bloomingdale's becomes an exhibitor like Home Box Office. If a studio produces 10 feature films in one year and offers the entire package to HBO, it's like Calvin Klein offering Bloomingdale's his entire line of wares. If Bloomingdale's wants to carry only one item, that's cherry-picking. "So if a studio like Paramount has one successful blockbuster and nine turkeys, it doesn't matter," explains Wright. "That package has to be sold at X amount of dollars."

Entertainment subsidiaries follow specific formulas to ensure a predetermined profit margin for parent corporations, like Gulf+Western. What was once a product-oriented environment has evolved into a market-oriented environment. Quality is not the primary factor for success in the competitive marketplace. "The expectation of the number X is now a function that comes from a very distant place. It does not come from the bottom up," notes Wright.

My secret fantasy is to turn old in the desert, grow a little herb garden, and operate a satellite channel telecasting nothing but TV snow. I'll call it ZNTV. Maybe no one will ever receive the telecasts. Maybe the channel will be on a distant planet. Every once in a while I'll roll a Brooke Shields ad selling Calvin Klein jeans at Bloomingdale's.

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The reality of cable and satellite technology has suggested the possibility of turning TV from a finite universe into an infinite universe by diversifying the marketplace. Since December 1982, HBO, the largest pay-TV exhibitor, has been producing its own movies. Bloomingdale's is supplying itself with its own wares. It is no longer dependent on Calvin Klein. In response to HBO's recent move, major studios and other pay exhibitors are pooling their forces. "Hollywood is also cranking up to take another shot at getting a bigger slice of the pay TV pie. Warner Amex Satellite Entertainments Movie Channel just signed a deal with MCA Paramount and Warner Bros.. . . $20 million. . . $4 million. . . $10 million. . . $4 million. . . $3.3 million. . . $11 million" (*Millimeter,* January 1983).

The numbers, those rolling numbers, and I'm not talking about the I Ching.

At present Wright is working outside of what she considers the paternal castle of the corporate world, conducting media consultancy work as well as producing cable programming. Using her marketing experience, she has undertaken such projects as attempting to procure television rights for the distribution of Black feature films. "Because I was very political during the '60s, I might be able to bring more to market analysis than just numbers, like knowing that the median age of Blacks is 25 and the median age of Hispanics is 18," she comments. "Madison Avenue doesn't need to know that to accomplish their objectives. I do because I want to be a little more creative."

From the producing angle, Wright and a partner have completed a pilot for a fashion series: "We were looking for borderline Soho types who were maybe getting a couple of pieces into Bendels and were about ready to cross over into a mainstream kind of thing." When asked how she raised capital, Wright explained two methods: Find people in a similar business who need the product and are prepared to offer financing in exchange for some form of distribution rights, or seek out venture capitalists who are willing to collect their investment downstream. "Go to 25 dentists and say, 'Listen, give me 50 grand,' or whatever, depending on what their investment package looks like. For tax reasons, they may need to lose money that year."

My mind drifts to my mouth and all the work I had done at the New York University dental clinic last year. A place crawling with budding young dentists, budding young investors. Ten years downstream, 250 dentists at 50 grand apiece equals a million and a quarter. With that amount of money I could make my own version of Girlfriends.

PLAY A GAME: AS YOU READ DETERMINE THE MOOD OF THIS ARTICLE. OVERLY OPTIMISTIC, CAUTIOUSLY OPTIMISTIC, SKEPTICAL, REALISTIC, CYNICAL, PESSIMISTIC, ABSURD.

"With television and popular music, there's a lot of junk around," comments video artist Dara Birnbaum. "I can't watch most of what's on TV and I probably find it offensive, yet I know I have it like a sugar habit."

Two years ago Birnbaum received a Nielson survey in the mail asking her to record her viewing habits. Programs receive points based on the amount of time a single channel is left unchanged. "I began realizing how many programs stay on in my house more than ten minutes because I'm so tired I don't want to get up to switch the channel. 'Laverne and Shirley' probably made it another year because I'm just as tired as everyone else."

During the late '60s and early '70s Birnbaum lived in Berkeley. She didn't own a TV. She considered herself political. "It came down to finding out you might not own a TV but it wasn't stopping the majority of people who were watching more than seven hours a day. I felt I had to know a little more of why that was happening. I didn't want to be isolated or ghettoized in any sense."

While Birnbaum was watching TV, she was also viewing video in art galleries. There she noticed the institution of television was being ignored and its reflection of the popular idiom denied.

Birnbaum's first video piece, made in 1978, was a deconstruction, taking just two shots from "Laverne and Shirley." Other deconstructions followed, using images from "Kojak" and "Wonder Woman." Because her material was recorded directly off the air, Birnbaum has challenged not only the nature of television, but also ownership of image.

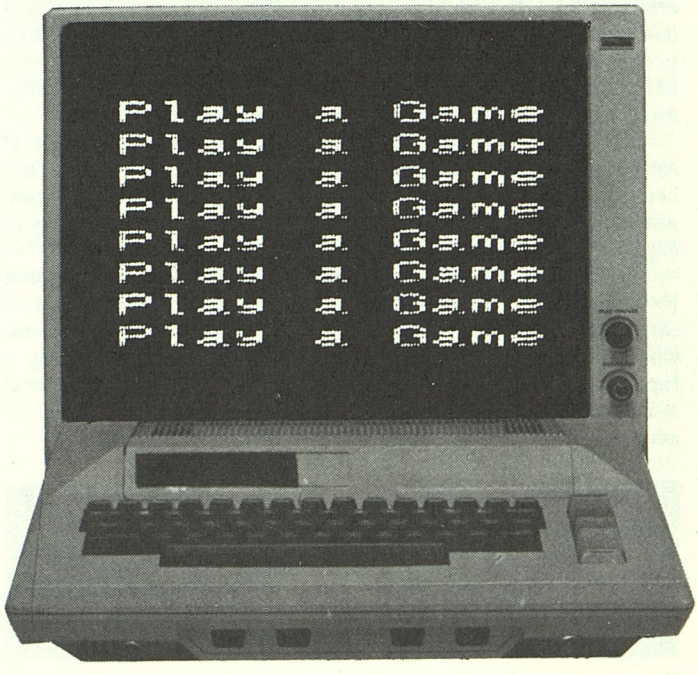
HOME TAPING CASE
BEFORE HIGH COURT
JUST A COIN TOSS
[*Variety*, January 18, 1983]

Copyright infringement is a hotly debated issue in the industry. Producers of films, television, and records claim sales losses due to "illegal" dubbing. In the near future, hardware manufacturers like Sony might be required to pay royalties from the sale of their products, both VCRs and blank tape, to cover the pirating of movies, albums, and TV programs. By the time this article is in print the Supreme Court may have ruled sales of home VCRs illegal. That will not necessarily end the debate between Universal and Sony. Nor is it likely that home video equipment will be taken off the market. But a Supreme Court decision could create an interesting precedent in terms of Birnbaum's use of the medium.

Questioning "high art practices," Birnbaum has shied away from gallery owners who have offered to commission her graphics. Her work is about television and her current strategy is to produce TV. Now that she is constructing rather than deconstructing television formulas, her perspective on ownership of image has altered slightly. Following her accountant's advice, she intends to avoid royalties because payments are difficult to collect. "Go for the flat rate," she suggests.

Maxi Cohen can be placed in the first wave of video artists, having worked in the medium for 13 years. Through the operation of her own feature film distribution company, First-Run Features, Cohen has honed a keen business acumen. She credits herself with a creative sense about how to put money together and how to market, but she'd rather concentrate her creativity on her product: "Marketing and sales are about conquest. I'd rather have someone else do the conquering for me."

Her experience with the world of real TV has been a succession of near-hits. In 1975, soon after completing *Joe and Maxi*, a feature-length film about the relationship between herself and her dying father, Cohen approached NBC, ABC, and HBO with the idea of a documentary about child-star Brooke Shields. "Somehow it was the quintessential story about mothers, daughters, and Hollywood. HBO told me Brooke wasn't big enough and I said, "Listen, by the time this thing is done, Brooke is going to be the biggest thing in this country."



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NBC was interested, but her contact quit the network shortly after she made the proposal. "In business, people are very cautious," Cohen remarks, "and particularly with someone, like me, who doesn't say I'll give you the same thing as 'Saturday Night Live' or 'Mary Tyler Moore' or '60 Minutes' because what I have is not the same thing." She describes much of her work as a documentation of the culture in a way she hopes will convey irony, wit, and whimsy—programs she considers accessible to a mass audience.

When talk turns to negotiation, Cohen also exercises caution. She warns of the half-page contract that fails to define key terms. Ironically, with an idea she developed for CBS Cable, she nearly spent as much money on lawyers' fees drawing up the contract as she was paid. CBS Cable did not use the idea. They changed their direction to a more straight cultural orientation and then ended up going out of business.

PLAY A GAME: DRAW UP A CONTRACT.

WHO ACTUALLY OWNS THE RIGHTS TO AN IDEA? (good question)

IF AN IDEA GOES INTO PRODUCTION, WHO GETS TO DO IT? (produce/direct)

WHO HAS RIGHTS TO ANCILLARY MARKETS? (home video, European distribution, syndication)

WHAT IS THE PERCENTAGE BREAKDOWN?

WHAT IS YOUR ROLE IN DECISION-MAKING?

NEGOTIATE DEADLINES FOR RESPONSE. (Determine some amount of time equally fair to both sides for a decision to be made on whether or not to go ahead with the project. Then if it is a NO decision, decide who gets to keep the idea.)

WHEN DO YOU GET PAID?

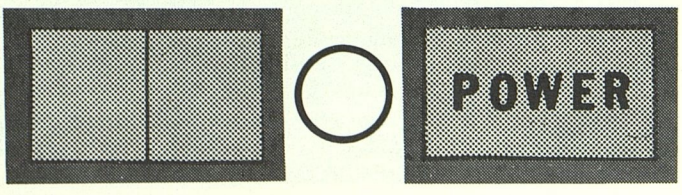
For a decade Electronic Arts Intermix has functioned as a nonprofit organization marketing video art. Eighty-five percent of its sales are to museums and institutions; the remaining 15% goes to television, mostly in Europe. EAI has also closed deals with Australian TV, as well as cable and the networks in this country. Their earned income for 1982 increased 60% over 1981.

"It almost seems like everyone in the world is starting a video art course or a video archive," muses Lori Zippay, EAI's administrator in charge of distribution. She cites the Virginia Museum of Art's recent purchase of 11 tapes as an example, but her optimism is tempered: "Most of the art world still has a bias against anything that can be reproduced so easily and so democratically."

Zippay anticipates the main thrust by video artists during the '80s will be an attempt to merge or at least come to terms with TV. The present trend she discerns is intellectual, very media-specific, referring back to television in a critical way. As a whole, she sees less product being produced: "More people are working, but those people are putting out less work. That's why the boundaries are breaking down. There's the possibility of making money in commercial TV and people need money to continue working."

Video art is rooted in the politics, guerrilla TV, and conceptual art of the late '60s, according to Zippay. "It was a very idealistic beginning, but times change. People are looking at opportunities, not setting limitations. They want their work to be seen and they're exploring different ways of getting it seen."

Another market Zippay sees as viable yet presently unexplored by EAI is home distribution. "We want to find people, not necessarily art collectors, who have their own Betamax or VHS decks, who buy *Star Wars* or porn tapes, but who just might pick up a tape by Nam June Paik." A company called Pyravid International is attempting a sales initiative of home video in California, but the avenue is still open in New York.



At the Leo Castelli Gallery, video art has remained a "stepchild" since the early '70s, when it was fostered by painters and sculptors, whose work was already represented by the gallery. Whereas a Robert Rauschenberg painting might carry a $450,000 price tag or a Mia Westerlund-Roosen sculpture could cost approximately $35,000, a ¾-inch videotape sells for an average of $250 to $500. Annual sales reached about 50 tapes last year. Rentals, at approximately $50 per tape, fluctuate according to the school year, but average about two to three each week.

"We function more as a gallery than a record store," explained Patti Brondage, director at the Castelli Gallery and curator of Castelli/Sonnabend Films and Tapes. She emphasizes that the videotapes they sell are treated as works of art. No copy guards are applied to the tapes, but contracts with buyers and renters forbid duplication.

In about 10 years, as technology develops, Brondage sees a vague possibility of a future market for video art. A device to hang on the wall like a painting could display the same image over and over and over again. "But I'm not selling hardware; we're not Sony dealers," she adds.

With the development and marketing of flat-screen, high-resolution TVs and laser disc drives, video paintings are inevitable. In some respects, they could resemble kinetic beer ads in bars, in which simulated running water ripples over beer cans in midstream. The same technology will be used for point-of-purchase displays at Bloomingdale's cosmetic counters.

Twin Art Productions is a business. Its business is art and its art is "purely television." Twin Art is Lynda and Ellen Kahn, identical twins in their early thirties who have combined their artistic ability and marketing skills in the production of video art. They cite their influences as Pop/Warhol and their inspiration as daytime TV. Their work is fast-paced, with a strong graphic sensibility edited to new wave music.

Twin Art began as a jewelry business, an endeavor the Kahns contend turned more of a profit than current sales from their videotapes. Video, however, is their future. "It's a big risk," admits Ellen, outlining the increasing stakes. Their first project, "Instant This Instant That" (1978), was shot on Betamax. The budget for the four-minute tape was about $500, including stock, editing, dubs, and miscellaneous expenses. They used their own camera and deck. Most services were donated.

"It didn't matter it was shot on Beta," says Lynda. "It didn't matter that it didn't have effects. It didn't matter that technically it did not hold up, because people were interested in new ideas." But now the twins find themselves competing with video art that has a much more commercial look, loaded with effects and of a high technical quality. They point to the work of Kit Fitzgerald and John Sanborn as an example.

The Kahns perceive the current video art market as public sector funding. Grants bestow legitimacy and prestige—factors related to the eventual value placed on an object. Declining public sector support, however, cannot compete with commercial budgets in terms of hard dollars. A typical budget for a four-minute rock video promo produced by a major label for MTV (Music Television) is $40,000. The twins doubt any granting body will allocate so much money for a short video work. On their current projects they rent BVU 110 decks and Ikegami HL79Ds, state-of-the-art equipment. They intend to use sophisticated post-production techniques. "What we're trying to do as artists is make something better than MTV with no budget," explains Ellen.

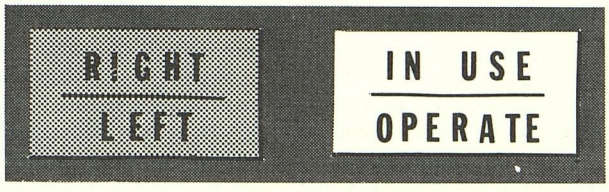
Both women work professionally as producers in the industry, where they can trade services and gain access to necessary tools. Yet within the business they often carefully refrain from referring to themselves as "video artists." "Artists mean trouble because they are independent thinkers and they want to redo the system," Ellen points out. When an executive producer at MTV viewed her reel, containing Twin Art material as well as her freelance commercial work, he told her "artists shouldn't have jobs in television." Ironically, MTV exploits the term "video artist" in their promotional material.

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The Kahns find themselves leaning closer and closer to the label of independent producers, yet their strategies for distribution encompass both the art world and television. Their most successful commercial venue thus far was inclusion of their work into the "Video Artist" series of "Night Flight," a late-night youth-oriented variety program aired on the USA Cable Network. Sixteen artists were included in a package deal co-produced by EAI. Each artist received $750 for a 15-minute slot, with any number of repeated showings over a nine-month period. EAI took a 30% cut. Overall, the twins estimate their share at approximately $2 per minute and, while they were glad to get the work out, they would like future projects to be more lucrative.

"So much for the dribbles and drabs; you have to really bite for it," says Lynda. Their present goal is to make "the best tape that's ever been made," distributing the project to museums as an installation, then getting it out on cable and network as much as possible. "The art world has been our largest distributor, but I don't want to limit myself to the art world—it's obscure," Lynda comments.

The twins are undecided about whether home distribution should be issued as a limited or unlimited edition, yet pirating of their video is not a concern. As Ellen emphasizes, "Part of the work is to get it into every home."



Unlike Maxi Cohen, Dara Birnbaum, and Lynda and Ellen Kahn, who all have fine art degrees, Robin Schanzenbach has a degree in mass communications. Two weeks out of Florida, Schanzenbach landed a job at CBS. Within one year she quit, upon realizing the time involved before she would be able to achieve her ambition—to be a director at the network. Since 1977 Schanzenbach has freelanced as a producer/director/editor. At the same time she has produced her own wrk by doing what she calls the "video hustle," trading favors with friends and providing any necessary funding herself. To date, Schanzenbach has not received a grant, but if she ever does, she wants to produce in a one-inch format.

Most of her past work can be categorized under the heading "video music," although the term is an irritant to her now because of what she terms "exploitation" by commercial entrepreneurs: "Video music has become so popular and commercial. I don't have the contacts with the record companies and I'm not being paid to do it."

Schanzenbach's one major attempt at mass distribution thus far was the production of a pilot for a video music series called "Teen Etiquette." As she explains, "I was upset with programming for teenagers. They're vulnerable as an age group and yet they're so influential. They spend an enormous amount of time in front of TV watching violence, so why not give them a little break, provide a release from programs about teenage alcoholism." Her pilot was a subtle parody on etiquette books published during the '50s that taught teenagers to stand up, shake hands, and say "how do you do." "They always gave you a perception of, and a peek into, the adult world."

HBO was not interested in the project, nor were other commercial outlets. According to Schanzenbach, her name lacked visibility. The natural showplace for her work at that point was the club scene. Danceteria became her marketplace, offering exposure as remuneration for playing her tapes.

At present Schanzenbach has completed a series of video portraits designed as a gallery/museum installation, altering her popular mode to a more "classical" approach. The piece deals with form, movement, and lyrical image. "It's nice to be serious," she reflects, "but hopefully not too boring."

PLAY A GAME: SELECT A DELIVERY SYSTEM, DESIGNATE METHODS OF DISTRIBUTION, MOVE A PRODUCT.

DIRECT-BROADCAST SATELLITE, LOW-POWER TV, INTERACTIVE VIDEO DISC, CABLE TV, VHS/BETAMAX CASSETTES, MDS, REQUEST TELEVISION, SUBSCRIPTION TV, PAY PER VIEW, UHF, FOREIGN BROADCAST, FOREIGN CABLE, SATELLITE MASTER ANTENNA TELEVISION.

In the lobby of the Berkshire Place Hotel on 52nd between Madison and Fifth, a lot of media deals go down. I observe, I eavesdrop, I listen, I surveil.

On the pay phone in the marble enclave a fat man swings a deal. "Yea, yea, I'm still trying to get the Fonz. I think he'll do it."

I keep hearing the words "bottom line" and visualizing those rolling numbers quantelled all over a TV screen. My TCD5M audio cassette and Sennheiser binaural microphones unsuspectingly record the nomenclature as I stand casually in the corner. A harp playing "Bring Out the Clowns" in the hotel's tearoom can be heard in the background.

From a stall in the Ladies' Room I overhear a conversation between two women discussing the sale of television rights on a children's book. At the sink I strike up a conversation, turning into a friendly chat. Advice is cheap, sometimes invaluable.

Theodora Sklover has an overall understanding of the entire market spectrum. As a lobbyist for public access in the early '70s, she established a nonprofit access studio called Open Channel, where community groups could produce cable programming. Sklover served as Executive Director of the Governor's Office for Motion Picture and Television Development for the State of New York. She now teaches at New York University and through her own firm, TKS Associates, she has done consultancy work for both public and private sectors on packaging and marketing strategies. I waited a total of five hours on three different occasions in the lobby of the Berkshire Place Hotel to connect with this woman.

Sklover's understanding of video art places it more or less in a gallery context. In contrast, she perceives the current market for television as narrative. That is what people want, what people understand, and what she likes, especially well-crafted, emotive, Hollywood movies.

If an independent can put a narrative in a can today, one produced for around a million and a half or up, they'd have to be "deaf, dumb and blind" not to make a profit on it, according to Sklover. The film *Smithereens*, produced by Susan Sidelson, is a noted example. The budget for that film ran $80,000. In two months after its release in November 1982, the film grossed approximately $118,000.

"It used to be there were seven banks where an independent could go," Sklover adds. "If they didn't give you the money you didn't make your feature. And there were four television networks. If they didn't give you the money, you didn't make your program. That's changed."

There has never been so much competition in the marketplace, Sklover concludes. While some experts contend the pie is being cut into smaller pieces, other studies claim the market is growing. People are watching more TV. The investment community is nervous about so many new technologies because of uncertainty related to the degree of diversification and questions about when the market will eventually level out.

Sklover anticipates some interesting possibilities regarding new technology. She encourages younger artists and independents to investigate the areas of interactive video disc, video games, and video music—areas she labels as "hot," some being very experimental. At present Sony is marketing two- to five-minute audio cassettes like 45rpm singles. She expects video will follow suit. "Video disc hasn't been around very long. I don't care what you've done before, you're not an expert in it. Everybody has to start thinking differently. I love to look at it almost like a grid. It's not just linear with a beginning, middle, and an end. You have to pre-

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package it in 20 different ways."

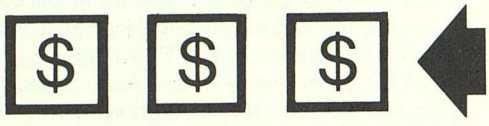
Although the "great expectations" of cable have not been met in this country, due to spiraling interest rates and economic recession, the growth of cable is still phenomenal. For example, the franchise agreement for the City of Boston requires 102 channels, 30 under their own city corporation.

From Sklover's perspective, "The more information you have, the more it can serve you. The less information you have, the less it will serve you and the more it will serve someone else and their market considerations. And the people who get the information will be the ones to manipulate it." Technology, she believes, is a tool and tools have to be acted upon to make something happen. In her opinion, the movement of the studios and networks into the new technologies and the cable marketplace is a positive sign because they bring more money to the table, generating more dollars for smaller productions.

DEFINITION OF PRE-SALE

A producer, usually one with some kind of track record, can sell a production to one or more distribution systems before it is ever produced. The producer can then take that guarantee to an investor in an attempt to negotiate financing. A pre-sale is also called a licensing fee.

Sklover notes, "I know a film producer in upstate New York who makes features for kids. He pre-sells to German TV and cable. He doesn't make millions, but he makes enough to continue the programming he wants to produce." There are numerous cable outlets for children's programming, such as Nickelodeon, Calliop, and the Disney Channel. Sklover points to public access as an outlet for younger producers to establish a track record; it's a place where programs can be made using any form, any content, one shot, or in series.



Real profit in the television business, how the industry has traditionally maintained itself, is through syndication. A series of programs that gain attention, like "M*A*S*H," can be sold to several markets. The industry has always operated on deficit financing. "I know as a producer I will not make money on the first go around," explains Sklover, "but if the program continues for two or three years, then goes into syndication I'm going to have money in the backend forever."

PLAY A GAME: FROM WHAT YOU HAVE READ AND WHAT YOU WILL READ DETERMINE WHAT IS TOTALLY TRUE, WHAT PARTS ARE ELABORATED FANTASIES, WHAT HAS BEEN EXAGGERATED FOR DRAMATIC EFFECT, AND WHAT LEANS TOWARD PUBLIC RELATIONS.

"If you're feeling optimistic and you're willing to look forward, the market for video art is everywhere and it's totally wide open, but in moments of somber reality I have to ask: What marketplace?" comments Carlota Schoolman, associate director in charge of broadcasting at the Kitchen Center for Video, Music, Dance, and Performance in New York.

According to Schoolman, there are two programs the Kitchen markets "aggressively" to cable and broadcast television markets —Robert Ashley's "The Lessons," a half-hour highly experimental video music tape with an underlying narrative premise, and Joan Logue's "The Spots," a series of 30-second "commercials" made in collaboration with artists like Joan Jonas, Laurie Anderson, Bill T. Jones, and Arnie Zane. The Kitchen is involved in television co-productions with both these artists, as well as with Martine Barrat, a "guerrilla journalist," and Robert Longo, a new wave artist. With the Ashley project, "Perfect Lives Private Parts," a seven-episode opera, the Kitchen was able to negotiate a contract with Channel Four in London.

As a new broadcasting entity (in operation since November 1982), Channel Four offers alternative programming. It receives government support as well as commercial revenue from its sister channel ITV Three. Ratings from Channel Four have not yet gleaned spectacular support. Its sometimes controversial programming, such as material dealing with gay topics, is known to raise eyebrows in the more conservative sectors of British society.

Schoolman explained the agreement between the Kitchen and Channel Four regarding the Ashley project: "They will pay us a lump sum upon delivery, some of which has been defined as buying points. It was a straight arithmetic proportion. We defined exactly what we thought was required to make the piece and exactly how much we thought it was worth on the marketplace. Those were two different numbers. The points they earned were based on that proportion of their contribution over and above their straight license fee."

She added that the more pre-sales the Kitchen can line up in other territories, the more production money they can show potential investors, emphasizing that one of the most essential aspects of the negotiations was the right by the artists involved to exercise final cut.

"Kid Carlos," a half-hour documentary being made by Barrat, deals with kids in the South Bronx involved with boxing as a lifestyle. Barrat has worked extensively during the last decade with similar subject matter, but much of the work was shot on half-inch black and white portapak, technically unsuitable for most broadcast situations. "We're working on a program that is a culmination of the unique relationship she has developed with the kids she's been taping over the last 10 years—but from the point of view of television today, not from the point of view of guerrilla television 10 years ago," says Schoolman.

According to Arlene Zeichner, former director of the Media Bureau at the Kitchen, most video art in the past has lacked production value suitable for broadcast and mass audience appeal. "We've had projects that were fascinating in terms of art world language, but someone in the general public would have no interest in them. We have to figure out what would work for a broader audience if that's our goal, not to say that we're going to leave the artists who are doing more obscure, esoteric stuff that is interesting intellectually."

Zeichner perceives a difference in emphasis between younger artists and the video artists of the last decade: "Those people under 30 are doing very commercial work and what's happening is that they're working 10 hours a day at Digital Effects and the Satellite News Network and it drains their artwork. They get on better equipment and it looks cleaner, but they don't have the energy to put into their own work, the hours of thinking and developing, because they're punching the buttons on a CMX."

Through statistical evidence, advertisers and marketing experts have determined that a commercial must be viewed three times before the average consumer can make a proper product identification. During the last three days, three girls have talked to me about Lacan or post-Lacanian film theory and three boys have told me what personal computers to buy. The New York Post *advertises the Commodore 64 at $369. If I buy a package with peripherals I think I can pick up the main computer for around $300. The package will cost considerably more. The three cornerstones of capitalism are men, money, and machines. William Paley, the 82-year-old chairman of the board at CBS, was unavailable for comment although I attempted to arrange an interview with him more than three times.*

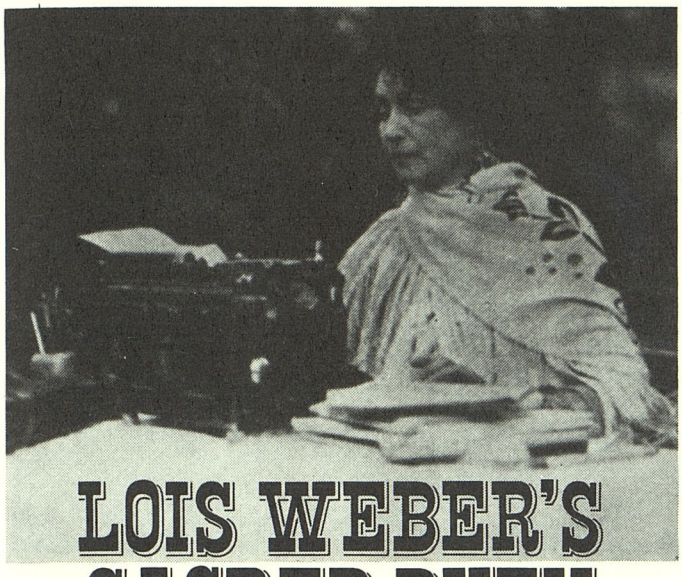
That's still the bottom line.

FILL IN THE BLANK: PROJECT WHAT YOU WOULD LIKE THE FUTURE OF VIDEO ART AND/OR TELEVISION TO BE.

Joan Jubela, a New York video artist, also works commercially in the television industry.

Graphics by Ellen Kahn — Special thanks to Julie Harrison, Barbara Mayfield, Karen Singleton, and Richard Concepcion.

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LOIS WEBER'S SACRED DUTY

Lisa L. Rudman

Repentence came too late. The Portals were never again to open to her. Throughout the years with empty arms and guilty conscience she must face her husband's unspoken question, "Where are my Children?" [1]

As the house lights were switched on, the last title card, summarizing the film's narrative, remained in the minds of the audience. Once again Lois Weber had provided an entertaining photoplay with a serious message. Few of the viewers were surprised, though, since by 1916 silent picture audiences had come to expect a Weber film to use cinema's emotional power to dramatize a social issue. In the early decades of the twentieth century a Weber film was as recognizable as a Griffith or DeMille; her contemporaries compared her to Griffith, citing her technical innovation and artistic ability. During her 26-year career Weber made at least 150, and probably as many as 400, films—most of which have been lost or destroyed. [2] Some were "one-reelers"—quickly produced and often used as "chasers" between film showings or vaudeville acts—but many were features and among the biggest box office attractions of the silent film era. Almost all of Weber's films were melodramas dealing with controversial subjects such as capital punishment, opium use, child labor, marriage, divorce, economic injustice, and birth control.

Frequently, Weber collaborated with her husband, Phillips Smalley, in writing, directing, and acting, but by 1915 she had come to be known as Universal's top director, and the majority of the couple's films credited Weber with the direction. Although some pictures were ambiguously billed as "by the Smalleys," one journalist reported that "Phillips Smalley came to her for advice upon every question that presented itself." [3] In 1917 Lois Weber Productions (Weber's own company and studio) was created, and she signed with Paramount to distribute her films for the then incredible sum of $50,000 per film plus half the profits. [4] At the time Weber's films were both noted and notorious, yet changes in American society and in the film industry itself contributed significantly to the decline of her career. She died in poverty in 1939 and today is only rarely mentioned by film historians and critics.

Those who have begun to examine Weber's life and films tend to see her either as wholly conservative or as the archetypal "new woman" promoting modern ideas and working in the public sphere. [5] When one considers Weber's self-perception and definition, as well as the beliefs she both internalized and questioned, and her motives for directing films, she is less easy to label. How Weber became a director and how she was publicly presented as such reveals the transitional nature of her ideas.

Lois Weber was born in Allegheny, Pennsylvania, in 1882—three years after Eadweard Muybridge stimulated international inventors to develop motion pictures by patenting his method of taking sequential still photographs of objects in motion. Weber's was a strongly Protestant family, and her parents' intense religiosity would influence the rest of her life. After a short career as a concert pianist, she became a member of the Church Army, an organization similar to the Salvation Army. As a "Church Home Missionary," she sang hymns at the rescue mission, on street corners, in industrial slums, and in the red light districts of Pittsburgh.[6] Weber was dedicated to this work, and the impression it made upon her is visible years later in her choice of subjects for her films and her vivid depiction of prostitutes, waifs, working girls, and drunkards.

There is some evidence that Weber next tried a career as an opera singer in New York City, living on little money and financing her voice lessons by playing the piano for her instructor's other pupils. [7] Sometime between 1900 and 1903 Weber's uncle in Chicago convinced her that she should try the theatrical stage. As she recalled it:

> *Uncle overcame my many arguments and finally landed me on the stage. As I was convinced that the theatrical profession needed a missionary, he suggested that the best way to reach them was to become one of them, so I went on the stage filled with a great desire to convert my fellowmen.* [8]

The rationale that persuaded her that this work had a higher moral purpose later became part of Weber's philosophy about her film work.

While working as an actress in comedies and melodramas, she met and married Phillips Smalley. In 1908, when Smalley was out on tour and Weber was in New York, she began to work in films at Gaumont. She worked on the early experiments with "sound-on-cylinder" talkies, writing the short scenarios and the dialogues which were recorded on phonograph records and synchronized with the action. Yet, like other companies at the time, Gaumont soon abandoned the idea of developing sound pictures in favor of perfecting the silent movie. Weber's main task became acting in the films; Smalley also joined Gaumont, to play leading parts opposite Weber. Given the technological and unfamiliar qualities of film, most stage performers viewed film acting with disdain, but as film historian Richard Koszarski has noted, Weber saw something special in films: She was one of the first to recognize the persuasive power of narrative cinema and put it to use. [9] By writing, acting, and eventually directing. Weber was able to give cinematic sermons to a broad audience.

In a 1915 article entitled "How I Became a Motion Picture Director," Weber described how, as she began to work in close collaboration with Herbert Blaché at Gaumont, she "discovered little defects here and there; a chance to improve the action occasionally; a new line to etch in that strengthened a character, and a hundred and one other things that enlarged the scene and gave it finish." [10] Although she attributed her separate director status to the company's expansion, Weber underlined such "attention to detail" as one of the director's highest responsibilities. Indeed, according to one report, Weber personally went over every inch of her films, "scrutinizing each tiny picture closely, keen to detect a face obscured or any false trick of the camera or error of the actor." [11] In addition to stressing women's valuable attention to detail,[12] in her public discussions Weber used the Victorian definition of woman as inherently emotional, religious, sensitive, and morally superior to account for her success as a director. Both she and her interviewers frequently pointed out her "natural" talent for depicting emotion and romance, as well as her skillful "mediation" between script and realized film or between the various production team members.[13]

Weber's arguments reflected and affected the public's perception of her as a woman and as a filmmaker. *Motion Picture Magazine*'s 1920 article entitled "The Domestic Directress" included a photo of Weber complete with apron and skillet, reminding the reader:

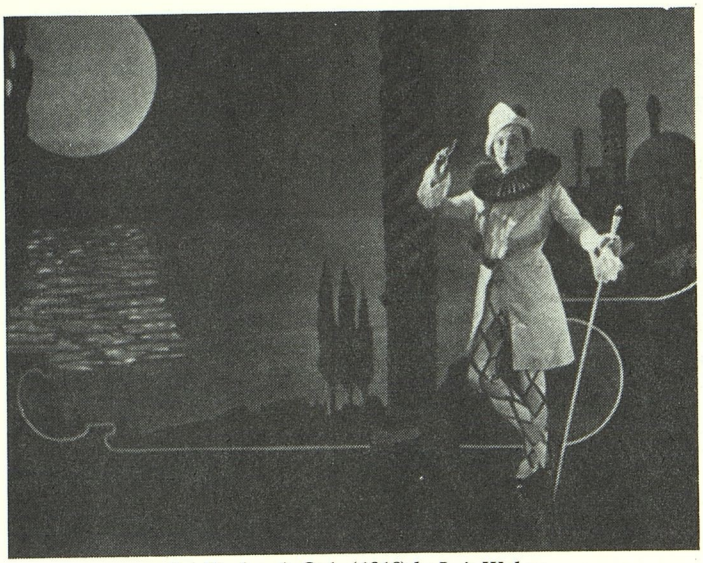
> *Domestic hours are well interspersed in the life of Directress*

©1983 Lisa L. Rudman

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Where Are My Children? (*1916*) *by Lois Weber.*



For Husbands Only (*1918*) *by Lois Weber.*

> *Weber and her efficiency behind the megaphone in the studio fails to interfere with her efficiency in her well ordered home.*"[14]

Weber and her publicists wanted to assure the public that although she was a successful and controversial director, she was still a "real woman."[15] In 1917, one reporter commented on the feminine touch which ran through the new Lois Weber Studios:

> *Its broad grounds, with rose bushes and shade trees, the swing in the backyard, the wide hospitable doors, and the long handsomely furnished reception room are all reminiscent of some Southern manor house. Miss Weber calls it "My 'Old Homestead.'"*[16]

A writer for *The Ladies Home Journal* also remarked about the "feminine" studio and added that Weber "treats her co-workers as a family."[17]

While many writers portrayed Weber as an "ordinary" woman who happened to be a motion picture director, others felt more comfortable depicting her as an "exceptional" woman. Trying to reconcile the tension between what a woman was supposed to be and what Weber was, many commentators suggested she was extraordinary not because of her individual talent, but because she possessed "masculine traits" in addition to her feminine nature. One article, entitled "A Lady General of the Motion Picture Army —Lois Weber Smalley, Virile Director," began by describing "the handsome woman who works like a man, and who turns out photoplays of supermasculine virility and 'punch.'"[18] The author used military, royal, and "masculine" metaphors throughout the piece and then completely switched metaphors to reveal how "feminine" she was in her own home. Another article quoted Carl Laemmle, head of Universal:

> *Miss Weber has the strength of a man, all the hardness of a man. She has all the experience of a man, that enables her to concentrate on her work—and all of the softness of a woman. She is intensely feminine.*[19]

This lengthy piece in *Liberty: A Weekly for Everybody* stated that "Her figure and her entire manner suggest unusual physical strength."[20] The author added: "Her mind is an admixture of masculine and feminine traits, with a man's capacity for abstract visioning and the strictly practical, womanly ability to concentrate on the thing at hand."[21]

While reviewers and publicists sketched the picture of Weber as "Domestic Directress" or "androgynous" genius, Weber herself contributed much to the perception of her as a woman primarily carrying out a sacred moral duty, and only secondarily an artist. In this way Weber is similar to other women professionals and reformers of the time who used the concepts of a uniquely "feminine" sensibility and women's supposed moral superiority to rationalize their participation in the public sphere. When one considers her early life, it is clear how Weber could see herself as a motion picture "missionary" whose motivation was neither personal fulfillment nor self-aggrandizement.

Weber's stated purpose was to promote a moral way of life, yet her films often contained frank discussions of controversial social issues. Although traditionalists might agree with her moral stance, some objected to the "modern" way in which taboo subjects were openly dealt with in her films. Speaking of the highly controversial pro-birth control theme in *Where Are My Children?* (1916), Weber explained:

> *The theme should be brought to the attention of every thinking man and woman, and if others, from prudery, are fearful of addressing themselves to such a topic, it is no reason why I should shirk what I regard as a sacred duty.*[22]

In defense of *Hypocrites* (1914), a film that shocked many by using a nude girl to represent the figure of truth, Weber told a reporter: "I merely held up the mirror of truth that humanity might see life."[23] Of her film *Scandal* (1915) she said: "I trust that this play will act as a most powerful sermon and will accomplish much lasting good wherever shown."[24]

Although Weber's use of film to teach the masses proper moral behavior can be seen as Victorian, many of her films were criticized and censored. Her frustration with Victorian prudishness and the lack of respect given to films as an art is revealed in her "modern" and progressive response to censorship:

> *"Don't let the people have what they want," is as pernicious a cry as its converse "Give the people what they want." Both are parrotlike catch-words of limited meaning. "The people" have always been reactionary in their ideas, and have fought progress in all its forms consistently. If "the people" alone were consulted, we should still be in the patriarchal stage, spinning and weaving our own clothes, and growing and killing our own food. That is the stage to which censorship would like to relegate us. The "people" must be educated by example to want something better. Especially is this true in art.*[25]

Censorship of her films highlighted the controversy surrounding Weber. Concerned with her marketability as a moral shepherd(-ess), the press, the distributors, and probably Weber herself wished to show that although her involvement in a career made her atypical, she still held traditional values and beliefs, particularly about marriage. True to the Victorian code, which drew a solid line between love and passion,[26] Weber told a reporter:

> *We are all too apt to confuse happiness with passion. Love is constant hunger—friendship alone brings happiness of lasting satisfaction. Life began to be more beautiful for me when I found friendship in my husband's love and we have developed into the most wonderful friends in the world, so close in our thoughts and sympathies that words are hardly necessary. The*

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touch of the hand, the raised eyebrow carrying a whole volume of meaning to the other.[27]

The *Columbus Dispatch* cited the Smalleys as "one of the most illuminating examples of marital happiness."[28] After praising Weber's work, the *Ohio State Journal* was sure to mention that "she and Mr. Smalley have been congenial co-workers," and the *Motion Picture Story Magazine* called Phillips Smalley her "chum."[29] In an interview published in a syndicated column, which reached thousands of readers, Weber was asked if she believed in the possibility of a happy marriage. "She said she most emphatically did believe in the happy American household." The interviewer then asked what was the one necessity for a happy marriage. "'There is only one,' she said, 'Friendship. . . . The successful marriage should be composed of nine tenths friendship and one tenth physical attraction. For then when the physical glamour goes . . . there remains the friendship, firm, unalterable proof against all batteries of wear and tear. And honor—a sense of honor of course.'"[30] While publicists recorded Weber's "prescription," they somehow failed to describe her full "reality"—not until the end of her career did it become widely known that she and Smalley had divorced in 1923.

Marriage was in fact the predominant theme in many of Weber's films. *Like Most Wives* (1914), *The Hand That Rocks the Cradle* (1917), and *What Do Men Want?* (1921) are Victorian in their preoccupation with the themes of marriage and morality, but they do not idealize marriage. Instead, they acknowledge the interplay of romantic love, economic factors, and class divisions in the selection of a spouse and the success or failure of the marriage itself. In some films, like *A Cigarette, That's All* (1915), a flaw in the wife's morality is the cause of a failed marriage; others, such as *Hypocrites*, subtly criticize the hypocritical Victorian view of a woman's innate morality and passivity (although the woman was seen as morally superior, as a wife her fate was determined by her husband's immorality). In many of the didactic films of the silent era, "marital incompatibility and maladjustment [were] rarely hinted at and the unquestioned purpose of wedlock was Progeniture."[31] Yet Weber's films, although often moralistic, *did* explore "incompatibility" and "maladjustment" in marriage: Some portray couples without children and many promote a transitional (and sometimes paradoxical) blend of Victorian and modern values. Marriage as cinematic theme and as biographical reality for Weber is one aspect of the tension between who Lois Weber was, what she believed, and how she was projected to the public. Weber's ideas straddled two worlds, preserving one while illuminating the reality and possibilities of the other. In the process she often adapted traditional attitudes to fit new realities.

During the time of Weber's career the lives of women and men were undergoing transformation and redefinition in a modernized American society. Although basic Victorian tenets such as inequality in marriage remained intact for many, the ideology of Victorian womanhood was challenged by the undeniable appearance of women who did not fit into the Victorian norm—women who worked outside of the home and pursued new activities during their leisure time. Rather than a radical break from Victorian perceptions of womanhood, "modern womanhood" can be seen as a response to urbanizing and industrializing society, an adaptation of Victorian ideology which permitted it to exist in a new context.

Embodying both Victorian codes and modern mores, Weber's own beliefs about women's roles, marriage, the family, and the need for social reform, as well as her view of film as a pulpit and an art, reflect her era's ideological continuities as well as its changes. She worked her way up from writing scenarios, making suggestions, attending to detailed work, and adding the finishing touches, to managing the entire direction of a film. That the role of the director was more varied and less rigidly defined than it is today and that codes of behavior for women were changing were just two of the many factors that facilitated Weber's success. Perhaps to her lasting credit, Weber has never been easily categorized: She can be seen as Victorian in the apparent meaning of her films and in her "moral purpose" for directing, but modern insofar as she was a major and controversial early director.

1. Title card from reel 5, Lois Weber (Dir.), *Where Are My Children?* (Universal: 1916, approx. 5,500 ft.). Viewed Feb. 16, 1982, Post Collection, Library of Congress.

2. The discrepancy in the number of films cited is due to several factors: The majority of her films are no longer in existence; some historians do not count many of her shorter "one-reeler" productions; others add those films which she wrote or acted in to those she simply directed.

3. "Seen on the Screen," *Chicago Herald* (July 1916), n.p.

4. Richard Koszarski, "The Years Have Not Been Kind to Lois Weber," *Village Voice* (Nov. 10, 1975), p. 140.

5. The "new woman" is a phenomenon historians have only recently begun to address.

6. Koszarski, p. 140.

7. Gerald D. McDonald, "Lois Weber," in *Notable American Women Vol. III*, ed. Edward T. James (Cambridge: Belknap Press/Harvard University Press, 1975), p. 554.

8. Alice Carter, "Muse of the Reel," *Motion Picture Magazine*, vol. 21, no. 2 (March 1921), appears to be p. 81, continued from p. 63; also quoted in Koszarski, p. 140.

9. Koszarski, p. 140.

10. Lois Weber, "How I Became a Motion Picture Director," *Paramount Magazine*, vol. 1, no. 2 (Jan. 1915), pp. 12-13.

11. *Ohio State Journal* (Sept. 23, 1915), n.p.

12. It is interesting that other industries also tended to hire women for detail work, either at the beginning or end stages of production. See Judith McGaw on the paper-making industries in the 1880s ("'A Good Place to Work': Industrial Workers and Occupational Choice: The Case of Berkshire Women," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, vol. 10, no. 2 [Autumn 1979], p. 244).

13. Alice Guy Blaché used a similar argument in "Woman's Place in Photoplay Production," *Moving Picture World* (July 11, 1914), reprinted in Karyn Kay and Gerald Peary, *Women and the Cinema* (New York: Dutton, 1977), p. 338. Koszarski notes that Ida May Park used this rationale.

14. "The Domestic Directress," *Motion Picture Magazine*, vol. 19, no. 6 (July 1920), p. 67.

15. Carter cites Weber's use of an analogy to dressmaking to describe inspiration and idea development.

16. Elizabeth Peltret, "On the Lot with Lois Weber," *Photoplay* (Oct. 1917), p. 89.

17. Henry MacMahon, "Women Directors of Plays and Pictures," *The Ladies Home Journal*, vol. 37, no. 12 (Dec. 1920), p. 13.

18. L. H. Johnson, "A Lady General of the Motion Picture Army—Lois Weber Smalley,Virile Director," *Photoplay* (June 1915), p. 42.

19. Charles S. Dunning, "The Gate Women Don't Crash," *Liberty: A Weekly for Everybody* (May 14, 1927), p. 31.

20. Similarly, the *Chicago Tribune* (May 25, 1916) called Weber "an indefatigable worker in picture making."

21. Dunning, p. 31. Notice that whereas Laemmle attributes the ability to concentrate to Weber's "masculinity," Dunning considers it part of her "femininity"!!

22. "Sensational Film Play Billed," *San Francisco Chronicle* (Aug. 20, 1916), n.p.

23. M.L. Larkin, "Price of Success in Movies Is Sacrifice Says Thrill Creator," *Milwaukee Journal* (Jan. 2, 1916), n.p.

24. Koszarski, p. 140. Cf. the *Fort Wayne Journal Gazette* (July 15, 1915), which stated that "when Lois Weber undertook to produce 'Scandal' she was doing a noble work."

25. Mlle. Chic, "The Greatest Woman Director in the World," *The Moving Picture Weekly* (May 20, 1916).

26. Many Victorian novels also made strong divisions between love and passion while stressing companionship in marriage.

27. Carter, p. 81.

28. *Columbus Dispatch*, (March 12, 1916), n.p.

29. *Ohio State Journal*, (Sept. 23, 1915), n.p.; Remont, p. 126.

30. Pearl Malverne, "Romance Plus Common Sense," *Motion Picture Classic*, vol. 16 (May 1923), p. 60.

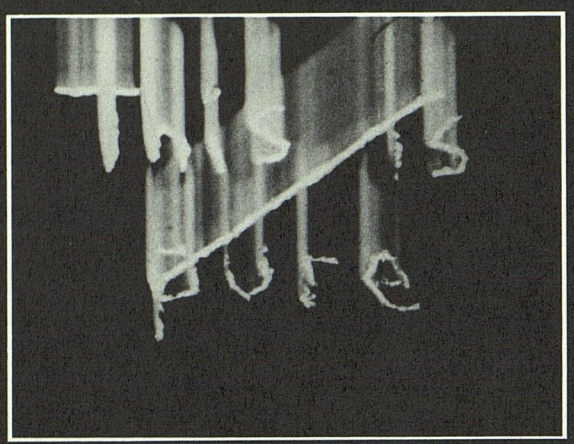
31. Peter John Dyer, "Some Silent Sinners," *Films and Filming*, vol. 4, no. 6 (March 1958), p. 13.

Lisa L. Rudman lives in Vermont, where she is an independently unwealthy scholar, filmmaker, and proprietor of "Pluck Productions."

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Gently Down the Stream

Sir Friedrich

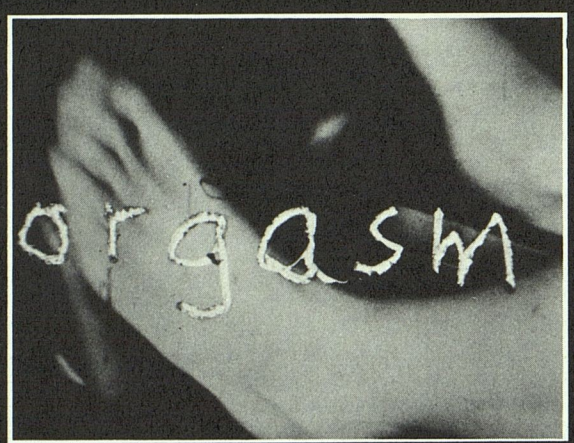


Wander through large quiet rooms
An old friend says What
are you doing here?

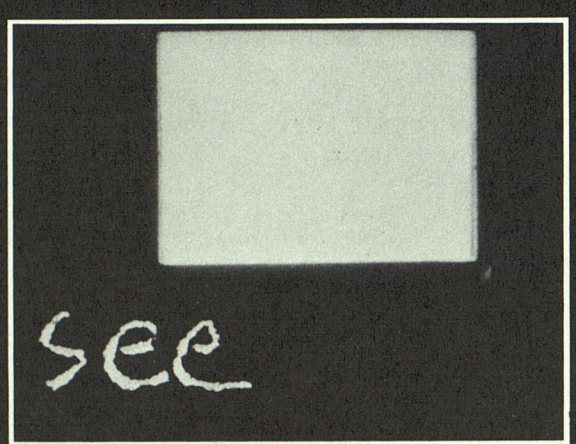
I say The weavers
worked as slaves to make these rugs

Think
She shouts Why
do you come here
and SPOIL everything?

This is pure civilization!



Walk into church
my mother trembles
trances
reciting a prayer about orgasm
I start to weep



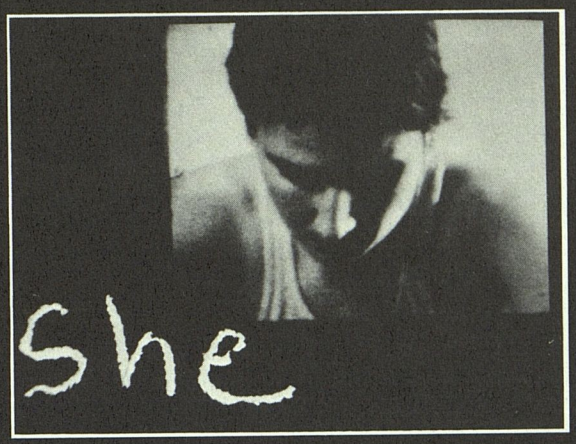
In the water near a raft
I see a woman
swimming and diving
in a wet suit

see her pubic hair

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A woman sits on a stage
hunched over in the corner
She calls up a friend from the
audience
Asking her Come and make love to me

She does
I can't watch

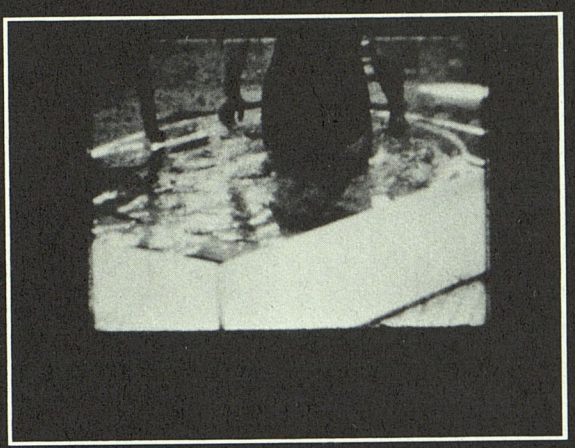


She mutters I CAN'T
can't hold you
The last time was too
tense so many
memories



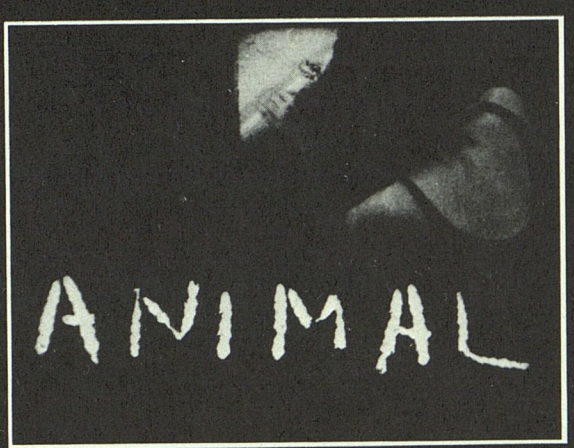
Woman on the bed shivers
I wake her
she is angry
smears spermicidal jelly
on my lips

No!



Walk into church
A bloody furry arm is torn
from the body of an
animal

Did it rip its own arm off?

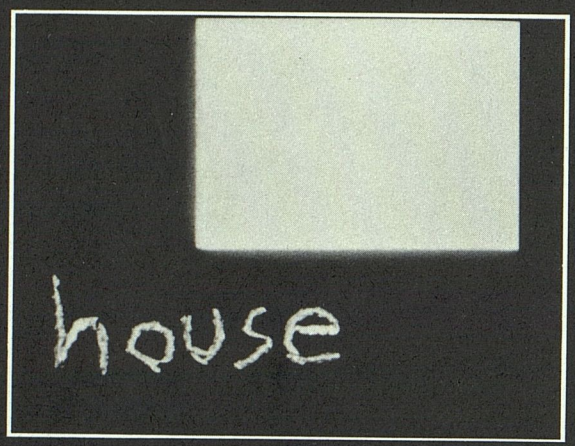


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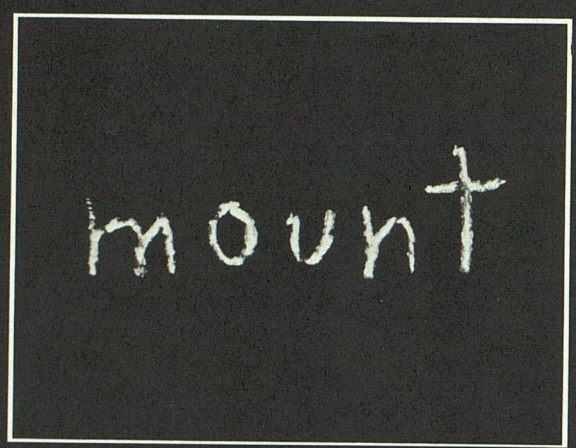


I make a second
vagina
beside my first one
I look in surprise

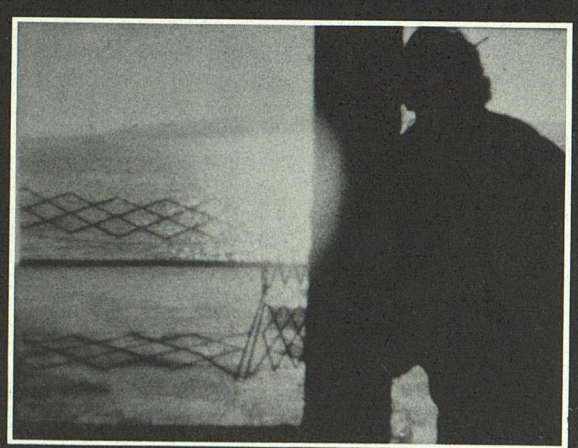
Which
is the original?



Building a model house for
some man
Do it
without getting paid
Do it
wrong

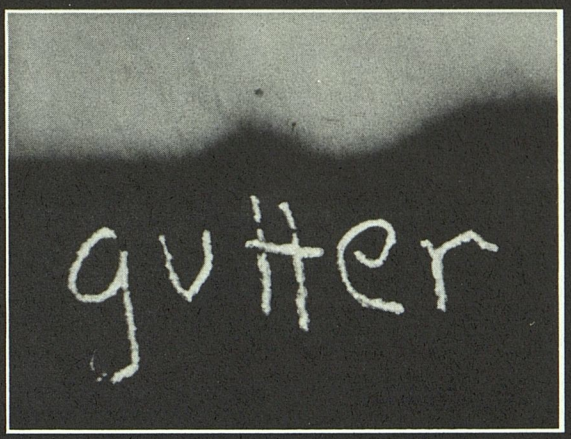


I draw a man
take his skin
inflate it
get excited
mount it

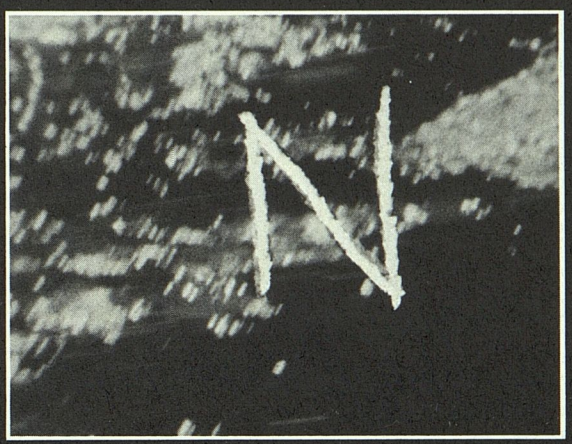


It's like being in love with
a straight woman

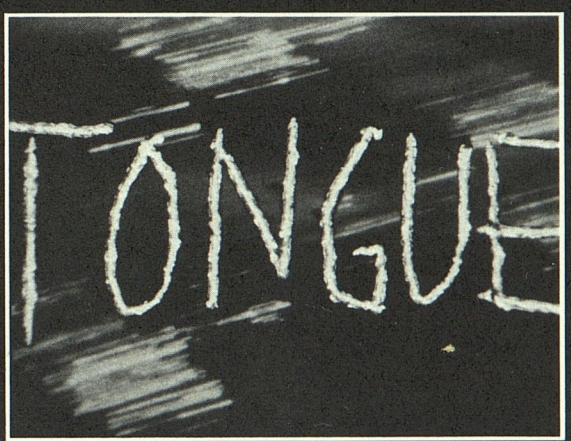
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I lie in a gutter giving birth
to myself
two fetuses dark green and
knotted up
Try to breathe so they don't
suffocate
I can pull one out
but it starts to crumble up



Five women sing a capella
funny harmony
they spell the word truth
in German
I spell B L I N D N E S S
A man says
Their Song Is A Very Clever Pun
I say I can't agree
I don't know German



A leopard
A LEOPARD EATS TWO BLUE
two blue hummingbirds
humming
I feel the feathers
MY TONGUE
fl utter on my
bones mutter hearts utter feathers

humming on my tongue

Dedicated with love to the two blue hummingbirds, A.S. and D.L.

The text and images on these pages are from my film, *Gently Down the Stream* (1981). Each section of the text is a separate dream, selected from eight years' worth of journals, but rewritten for the film so that they are more condensed and articulate. The words that are scratched on black in the images were done by hand, etched into the emulsion of the film, so that you read rather than hear the words of each dream (the film is silent). The images are not meant to illustrate the dreams, but to suggest certain desires or movements.

Su Friedrich is an experimental filmmaker who sometimes writes film criticism and was a member of the Heresies Collective for several years.

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THE WOMEN BEHIND

JULIANNE BURTON and ZUZANA PICK

The following roundtable discussion among women filmmakers from Latin America, the first of its kind, took place at the Second Annual International Festival of the New Latin American Cinema in Havana, Cuba, in December 1980. The meeting was organized by Julianne Burton and Zuzana Pick, who subsequently translated, edited, and updated the material.

BERTA NAVARRO

Documentary filmmaker and producer
Born in Mexico, 1945
One child

My active involvement in film grows out of a political experience—a miner's strike in 1964. I was fascinated by the fact that some of the union members were filming the strike, and I began to assist with the shooting. The following year I assisted in a series of independent films, before being hired by Mexican television, where I directed my first documentary.

In 1966 Paul Leduc, Rafael Castanedo, Alexis Grivas, and I organized a filmmaking group which in 1968, before the Tlatelolco massacre,[1] began to issue 16mm "communiqués" from the student movement. From then on, what living I have made, I have made as a filmmaker.

Just prior to, and during the early years of, the Echeverria regime (1970-1976), there was a relatively large independent film movement in Mexico, in which I also participated. I put a lot of energy into financing *Mexico insurgente* (*Insurgent Mexico*, 1971), which Leduc directed. We managed to make the film on a very low budget.

At the end of Echeverria's term I was hired by one of the new state production companies then being formed. I produced 10 features in a little over a year. Production provided a framework in which I, as a woman, could exercise my creativity; but in that framework, creativity is the equivalent of efficiency and effectiveness. I stood out in this area because I was a woman; I was recognized and respected as an excellent producer. This was my entry into film direction.

Since 1976, when I decided to leave production in order to direct full-time, I

(*continued on p. 48*)

NORA DE IZQUE

Documentary filmmaker and film teacher
Born in Peru, 1934
Four children and three grandchildren

In Peru we still cannot lay claim to any longstanding film tradition. Until 1973, when the government finally passed the *Ley de Cine* (National Film Law), our output was very meager—a few sporadic feature films of very poor quality. There was no industry to speak of—only isolated companies which would form to finance a specific film, and then fold. There was no continuity in film production. Since no market for short films existed, none were produced.

I began studying filmmaking in 1967, at a time when there were no women filmmakers in Peru. Since the mid-'70s a few other women have entered the field, among them Marta Esteban and Chiara Varese. Though the number of women filmmakers in Peru is still small, our films seem to be among the most socially conscious. When the University of San Marcos decided to organize a film series on peasant issues, for example, the only two films available had been directed by women.

(*continued on p. 48*)



JOSEFINA JORDAN

Documentary filmmaker
Born in Venezuela, 1940
Two children

I have been making films for over 20 years now, but originally I worked in radio, television and theater. In the early '60s, a time of widespread social conflict and lots of activity, I bought a 16mm camera, taught myself how to use it, and began filming events in Caracas, newsreel style. I had no specific outlet for the footage I shot; I simply wanted to bear witness to the events of that agitated time.

That was also the period when political relations between Cuba and Venezuela began to open up. Venezuela had supported the guerrilla struggle against Batista, and the members of my generation, enthusiastic about the Cuban Revolution, actively sought to establish closer ties. In 1962 a *compañero* from the same political party I was active in made a trip to Cuba. He took along a huge reel of my footage, which was viewed by the members of the Cuban Film Institute (ICAIC) and by the Dutch documentarist Joris Ivens, who was visiting the island at the time. Some of my footage was incorporated into the ICAIC *Noticieros* (weekly newsreels), under the direction of Santiago Alvarez.

They invited me to Cuba for a two-month visit, but I ended up staying for eight. The idea was for me to do a sort of apprenticeship in every department of ICAIC, so that I would be exposed to all aspects of the profession. But I was fascinated above all by one figure, Santiago Alvarez, soon to become Cuba's foremost documentarist.

In 1962 I returned to Venezuela, where I continued to film in newscast style. I served as assistant director on an important documentary short by Enrique Guedes, *La ciudad que nos ve* (*The City Which Sees Us*, 1963-64).

In 1966 a very special opportunity arose. As a result of a theatrical production, my husband, Jacobo Borges, was approached

(*continued on p. 48*)

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THE CAMERA

BRENDA MARTINEZ
Producer
Born in Nicaragua, 1954
Two children

Josefina just finished telling us about her long career of more than 20 years. I will say very little because I have only one year of experience in making films.

Before the insurrection in Nicaragua there was no film tradition to speak of—only newsreels about the Somoza family, which were more social chronicles than genuine news. There was no laboratory in the country, so all footage had to be sent to Mexico to be processed. Feature films were invariably foreign, coming mainly from Mexico and the United States.

Our national cinema, as Alfredo Guevara[2] says, was born trailing the odor of gun powder. The FSLN (Sandinist National Liberation Front) decided to create a group of war correspondents with motion picture cameras, in order to record what was actually happening and to counter the distorted news stories transmitted by the Somoza regime. They sent a number of people of various professional backgrounds, but without any prior filmmaking experience, to Mexico for training. After three months they were dispatched to various war zones, where they worked with volunteers from a number of other countries to capture the key events in a war for liberation from one of the most infamous dictators in Latin American history.

With one sole exception, none of us now working for INCINE (the National

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TIZUKA YAMASAKI
Feature filmmaker
Born in Brazil (third-generation Japanese)
One child

I first studied at the film school in Brasilia and later at the federal university which, despite our efforts, was shut down by the government. I had to transfer to a university in Rio, where Nelson Pereira dos Santos was one of my teachers.[3] I got my first professional experience working as production assistant on his *O Amuleto de Ogum* (*The Amulet of Ogum*, 1974). Soon afterwards I withdrew from the university because I felt I could only get the apprenticeship I needed outside the university context. I subsequently worked as assistant director, production assistant, and scenographer on three or four films. I collaborated with another filmmaker on a documentary short and worked for a year in educational television doing a program about Brazilian film. *Gaijin: A Brazilian Odyssey* (1980) was my first feature-length fictional film.[4]

The concern with women's issues is relatively new for me, since up to last year I had always thought of myself simply as a filmmaker, not as a woman filmmaker. As I began to participate in international festivals, where women get together to discuss things and organize a movement of their own, I began to confront these issues.

Women are very active on the Brazilian film scene. There must be about 15 women currently making feature films and 20 others making shorts. Still, the majority of women say that they feel a certain pressure from the men. I believe that such pressure exists but that it is not that pronounced.

Perhaps my own case is an exception. Though my family has been in Brazil for three generations now, our family structure continues to be matriarchal. My grandmother was the one who always gave the orders, and my mother was widowed quite early, so there are very few men in the family, and we girls were brought up to face the world on our own. It never entered my mind that a woman needed a man in order to survive.

Turning to the question of a feminine aesthetic, I believe that Brazilian society is patriarchal, and demonstrates a correspondingly patriarchal aesthetic. It is clear that films by women have a different vision and different values. As women and as militants for social change, we are able to

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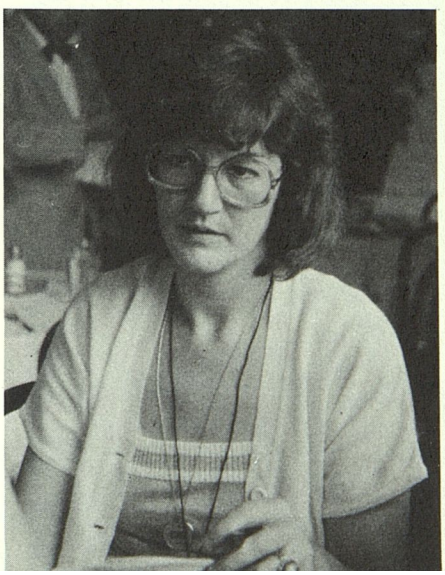
ANGELINA VASQUEZ
Documentary and fictional filmmaker
Born in Chile, 1949
Two children

I have lived in exile in Finland for the past five years; my husband and children are Finnish. My film career began in 1968 as a student at the film school in Valparaiso. In 1971 I joined Chile Films, the state film corporation, where I made my first documentary, *Crónica del salitre* (*Nitrate Chronicle*, 1971). I also worked as assistant director to Miguel Littín in the first phases of the production of *La tierra prometida* (*The Promised Land*, 1973). Afterwards I joined the *Grupo Tercer Año* under Patricio Guzmán's direction, working with them on *La batalla de Chile* (*The Battle of Chile*, 1974/76/79) until the coup d'état which overthrew the Allende government in September 1973. From that time, I took on only political assignments, which eventually meant that I had to leave the country.

In Finland, where I have lived since 1975, I have tried to get back into filmmaking, but there have been a number of other important things to do in exile. Soon after arriving in the country, I was able to make a documentary for television about the lives of Chilean exiles in Finland. I then dedicated myself to animation and made a short "spot" about the "disappeared" in Chile using a paper-cutout technique. I attempted a few other projects which I wasn't able to realize before finally making *Gracias a la vida* (*Thanks to Life*, 1980), a 42-minute fictional film.[6]

Although it's true that I am very concerned with women's issues, my original intention was not to make a film about a woman. I was interested in depicting cultural shock in an extreme situation. When

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BERTA NAVARRO

have made six films. In 1978, before Somoza was overthrown, I filmed *Los que harán la libertad* (*Those Who Will Make Liberty*) in Nicaragua. Afterwards I made *Crónica del olvido* (*Chronicle of Forgetfulness*, 1979), which deals with a satellite squatters' city of four million inhabitants on the outskirts of the Mexican capital.

I then went back to do more filming in Nicaragua under extremely difficult and dangerous conditions, working with a group of filmmakers from various Latin American countries, including the Nicaraguan filmmakers whom we had trained in Mexico. We divided into small units and filmed separately. We had no preestablished plan for the film, but simply recorded what was happening in the struggle. The result was *Victoria de un pueblo en armas* (*Victory of a People in Arms*, 1980), released after Somoza's overthrow. I don't want to seem like a perpetual war correspondent, but I'm currently involved in film support work around El Salvador. It is very important to me to connect my films with political activity in its highest form of expression—a war of liberation.

But now I also want to make fictional films. Documentaries cannot convey what fictional films can. They can capture the external aspects of an event, but only a fictional film can convey the experience in emotive, personal terms. I would like to integrate documentary reportage of the Nicaraguan experience into a fictional film about participants and observers. I'm inventing a woman journalist to serve as the protagonist.

My experience as a woman director has been somewhat different from my experience as a woman producer. I won my reputation as a producer in a gradual, incremental way; directing was something else again. It involved treading on more masculine territory because, from the other side of the camera, you have to assume all the responsibility. If I had held myself to my perfectionist standards, I wouldn't have been able to do anything. So I've learned to take risks. It hasn't been easy.

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NORA DE IZQUE

I was most aware of the potential difficulties of being a woman filmmaker when I first started out, but once I actually began working as a director, it didn't seem to make a bit of difference—at least not to colleagues or crew, though perhaps I have a different relationship to the people I film. I sense a closer rapport. Perhaps it's a female capacity for empathy, or perhaps it's not a generic but rather a personal trait.

Macho attitudes persist in Peru, as they do everywhere in Latin America. Financing and distribution arrangements can be more difficult because many men are reluctant to do business with a woman. I have the advantage of an established reputation; things are much harder for a woman who is just starting out.

I was never meant to be a filmmaker. I came from the upper middle class. I was raised to be a good housewife, period. My family didn't even let me attend the university. With my divorce came the desire to break out of the closed circle of bourgeois life. I decided to do what no Peruvian woman had yet done—to become a film director.

Initially I had no definite political views or commitments, only a vague sense of quest. The most important thing I have gotten out of my experience has been an ideological awakening, the product of my work both as a director and as an official of SITIC (El Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Industria Cinematográfica—the Film Workers' Union).

If at first, predictably, I looked at film as a personal, individualistic form of expression, I now see it as a much more social mode. I trace the change in my approach back to 1970, when I was hired by a psychiatrist to make a documentary about *curanderismo* (folk healing) in the Peruvian Amazon. In our preliminary discussions, the doctor and I concurred in our desire to minimize the exoticism which characterized most treatments of the jungle region in favor of a more responsible presentation of the social problems which exist there. We agreed to present *curanderismo* as simply the practice of medicine in impoverished conditions.

The experience on that documentary was crucial in formal as well as methodological terms because I learned how to use the medium to penetrate a complex social situation. Ten years later, I continue to be involved with this region and its problems, having just completed my first feature there, *El viento de Ayahuasca* (*The Ayahuasca Wind*, 1983).

After that initial experience in the Amazon, I went to the other geographical extreme. I spent two years high in the Andes, doing research and interviewing for a film called *Runan Caycu* (*I Am a Man*, 1973) about the life of Saturnino Huillca, an indigenous peasant leader from Cuzco.

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JOSEFINA JORDAN

to produce a much more ambitious audiovisual project: a history of the city of Caracas. Rather than using film as an auxiliary medium, we decided to produce an integrated, but fundamentally cinematic spectacle. It was to be a kind of "happening," an experiment in spectacle. The filmed portions, which reconstructed the history from the city's founding through the end of the nineteenth century, contained fictional segments as well as historical reconstructions. Jacobo was the artistic director, supervising a number of filmmakers on individual sequences. I was assigned more sequences than I could direct. I already had one child at the time, and each time he got sick I had to abandon the sequence I was working on and let someone else complete it. I did manage to finish two.

The finished spectacle was divided into two parts, intended to run separately. We never even got to exhibit the second part, because barely two months after the opening, and despite the enthusiastic response from the public, the government cut off our funding. Though the show was not informed by any "ultra-left" ideology, we did try to awaken a nationalist consciousness and a desire to discover unknown aspects of national history. The government did not like the way we emphasized the role of the popular classes. No matter what the period, we always dressed the characters in peasant (*campesino*) dress. The government also objected to the presence of the common people (*pueblo*) in the battle scenes.

Despite its abrupt termination, *Imágenes de Caracas* (*Images of Caracas*, 1966) was crucial to the development of Venezuelan national cinema, because the majority of our filmmakers got their training there. We had about 60 people working on the project and, to this day, every one of us is still actively involved in film. We built all the sets and props ourselves. Those sets could have constituted the nucleus of our national film studio, but because of the withdrawal of all funding, they had to be destroyed.

We subsequently organized a group called *Cine Urgente* (Urgent Cinema) with the intention of using film as a form of political activity in the marginal and working-class sectors of Caracas. We made a number of explicitly political films, which we exhibited in neighborhood centers, universities, union halls, and *casas de cultura*. For us, cinema was a pretext for political action. We made crude, spontaneous, imperfect films, often without benefit of editing or synchronous sound. We subordinated technical and artistic considerations to questions of immediate political expediency. The experience served us well in both political and cinematic terms. The political group we were affiliated with was able to

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Film Institute) had a background in film. I had studied psychology and was working as a secretary. As soon as the Sandinist forces came to power, we took over Producine, a film company run by Somoza and a Mexican associate, Felipe Hernandez. We replaced Somoza's personnel with our own. I began as secretary to the Coordinating Commission. Two weeks later work began on the first documentary, a 45-minute videotape for television entitled *La educación no se interrumpió* (*Education Was Not Interrupted*, 1979). The idea was to show parents that although children had not been able to attend class during the insurrection, their education had continued even more intensively, because they had learned a great number of things that they could never learn in a classroom.

I was asked to act as executive producer for this film and the first three INCINE newsreels. Three months later the Coordinating Commission made me head of the production department in charge of newsreels and documentaries, and that is still my job. I have spent the past several months in Cuba studying film production at ICAIC.



Two scenes from Gaijin: A Brazilian Odyssey *(1980) by Tizuka Yamasaki. Photos courtesy of Asian Cine-Vision.*



express a sensibility different from men. We live in a society which expects men to suppress feelings which women are allowed to show, so we have an inherent advantage. Brazilian cinema, especially *Cinema Novo*, has emphasized "emotions" of the intellect. Brazilian audiences note a much more immediate sensibility in *Gaijin*, an intensity of feeling and sentiment, and they associate this with the fact that the film was made by a woman.

When Brazilians make films about the socioeconomic system, we tend to make bitter films which show the people as victims. Though Brazil has a long cinematic tradition, I think that Cuban and Nicaraguan filmmakers are far ahead of us in this particular area. In Brazil our training is much more European; we make films according to the textbooks, believing that the camera movements and the editing have to be done just this way or that. Eventually this becomes a handicap. We also belong to the Third World, where what is said is more important than how it is said. In countries like Brazil, Chile, and Argentina, which have not had successful popular revolutions, filmmakers are under constant pressure due to lack of time and funding. These difficult conditions severely limit our creativity; aesthetics are the practical result of these conditions of production.

I am now convinced that the newsreel is the most efficient kind of filmmaking, because it offers technical apprenticeship to filmmakers, spreads culture among the people, and allows filmmakers to contribute directly toward the reconstruction of their country. The Cuban and Nicaraguan newsreels are documents of a people reconstructing their country out of love and good will. You can sense the energy and reciprocal good will on the part of the filmmakers. Clearly, there is no need for an "aesthetics of hunger"[5] in countries where popular revolution has triumphed.

a friend arrived from Chile who had been imprisoned there, who was in her sixth month of pregnancy, who was suffering from all the symptoms of cultural displacement that I had also experienced, and who, in addition, had always wanted to be an actress, the idea for the film suddenly sprang forth.

The screenplay was open-ended. The woman who played the lead was in fact pregnant, and to some degree the film's dramatic resolution depended on what happened when she came to term. For a while it looked like she would have to have a Caesarean. It was a minor miracle that they decided at the last minute to let her give birth naturally, and we were able to film the delivery.

On one level, this is a simple, almost linear story of a woman who has been tortured and raped while imprisoned in Chile for political reasons. She becomes pregnant and only succeeds in securing her liberty when her pregnancy is so far advanced that abortion is out of the question. She is reunited with her husband and family in Finland, a totally alien environment.

On a second level, the film inquires into the nature of the exile experience in general—the ever longed-for homecoming, for example, a phantom which haunts every exile, both as a kind of ideal and as a pretext for either avoidance or engagement in active struggle.

Of course *Gracias a la vida* is also meant to denounce the situation of political prisoners in Chile, and particularly of the women, because torturing a woman is different from torturing a man. Men as well as women can show you scars from cigarette burns and demonstrate the psychological consequences of the barbarous treatment they have undergone. And male prisoners can also be raped. But their attackers cannot engender another human being within them, whereas a woman can be compelled to carry and bear the child of her torturer—which is neither his nor hers, but another, independent human creature, the product of the two.

I think about the situation of the refugees from the Spanish Civil War. Though they held the image of their country in their memories, 40 years did not pass in vain, and today's Spain is not the Spain of 1939. Like the Spanish exiles, some of us Chileans will lose our "child" because we are incapable of relating to it in a real, ongoing way. Others will return to a child whom they do not recognize. Still others will return and find acceptance. It all depends on how you have nourished that relationship, on how well you have "mothered" your child.

I'm now preparing another project, and this festival gives me the opportunity to discuss it with a number of people. My work is very directly related to Latin Amer-

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BERTA NAVARRO

I feel very confident in the group I work with (in Mexico), but outside that group I am aware of being regarded somewhat paternalistically at times. In Nicaragua such problems simply do not exist. I went there with a job to do and the skills to do it, and never felt myself the object of the slightest sexual bias.

I am not the only woman filmmaker in Mexico. Marcela Volante has made a number of highly regarded fictional films. There are other, younger women cineastes, also trained at CUEC (University Center for Film Studies), who are just getting started. There's also a women's filmmaking collective now. One can see women becoming more assertive, more questioning, more involved.

Mexico is one of the few Latin American countries where there is an active feminist movement. Although I am theoretically in agreement with many of the tenets of feminism (on a number of issues it is impossible *not* to be in agreement), I don't participate in that movement because it makes me feel marginalized. I identify much more strongly with the kind of vitality and power of the women of the dispossessed classes, who wage their struggles not in isolation but as part of the whole social fabric, with all its contradictions. I believe very much in the power of these women because I feel it; it is a living force.

The last thing I want to say is that it is particularly difficult to be a mother and a filmmaker at the same time. I have one daughter, now 11. While I was working on the second Nicaraguan film, she lived with my parents for a year and a half. I was only able to see her occasionally. There was a two-month period, when the war in Nicaragua was at its fiercest, when no one had any news of me. Only after Somoza was overthrown was I able to call home and let them know I was safe.

My daughter and I have a great relationship. She has a special respect for me because she sees me doing exactly the same kind of things her father does. But family and even friends lay on quite a load of guilt, which is directed at me for my absences, but never at her father for his. We mothers are still seen as the axis around which the child's world revolves.

ANGELINA VASQUEZ

ica, immersed in that reality still, and fed by occasions like this one. For people like me who live in the "North Pole," it is essential to participate in encounters like these in order to renew ties with friends and colleagues, to leave behind purely individual and geographic considerations and begin to think again about working more collectively.

NORA DE IZQUE

I had the opportunity to do the editing here in Cuba, at ICAIC (El Instituto de Arte e Industria Cinematográfica—the Cuban Film Institute). I had my first experience in a socialist country at a particularly traumatic and telling moment: during and after the coup d'état which overthrew the Allende government in Chile. What I witnessed was an inspiration.

Back in Peru, I was immediately confronted with the government's decision to ban *Runan Caycu.* Fortunately, the Film Workers' Union was being organized at that time, and I became very involved, sitting on the board of directors until the organization folded in 1976. During those three years the leadership became increasingly class-conscious, moving consistently leftward in political orientation. Perhaps, looking back now, this was one of our mistakes. As a union, we were unique because our membership consisted not only of filmmakers and technicians, but also of critics and film students, businessmen and entrepreneurs, state film workers and projectionists. Given the variety of interests represented, it was very difficult to meet such diverse needs.

As one of the few professional filmmakers in my country, I would say that if I have succeeded it is because I have dedicated myself fully to film. When I have had to look elsewhere for means of support, I've always made sure my work was film-related. For the last six years, I directed a film workshop at the university. This year, having resigned from teaching to work full-time on the *Ayahuasca* feature, I have managed to support myself on the income from my documentaries. The National Film Law requires exhibition of Peruvian-made shorts before the feature films in all commercial theaters, thus providing filmmakers with a modest but more or less reliable revenue. But whether or not one can earn one's living as a filmmaker in Peru is still a question that can only be answered from year to year.

Julianne Burton, who teaches Latin American literature and film at the University of California, Santa Cruz, is currently a Latin American Program Fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, D.C.

Born in Czechoslovakia, raised in Colombia, and educated in France, Zuzana Miriam Pick now teaches at Carleton University in Ottawa and is preparing a book on Chilean cinema in exile.

JOSEFINA JORDAN

make some inroads in factories and popular neighborhoods, and some of the footage we shot later found its way into more "polished" documentaries. Our example also sparked several similar projects in other areas of the country.

Though many *Cine Urgente* members have begun to branch out into other areas, I continue to collaborate with some members of the original group, along with Franca Donda, an Italo-Venezuelan woman. From late 1972 through 1978 we worked together on a 35-minute documentary called *Sí podemos* (*Yes We Can*)—a very rewarding project. The title for the film came from a spontaneous speech by a woman who argued, "If we work together, we poor people can defeat those who want to exploit us and demonstrate that yes, we can take power and govern ourselves." This speech marked the birth of a political party called MAS (Movement of Socialist Women), and the phrase became the group's slogan. I have also finished another film with Franca, produced by *Cine Urgente*, called *María de la Cruz, una mujer venezolana* (*María de la Cruz, a Venezuelan Woman*)—the story of one day in the life of a woman of the *barrio.*

At present I am working with some other *compañeras* for the *Associacion de Autores Cinematográficos* (Filmmakers' Association), a group which includes all film-related workers: technical staff, exhibitors, film archivists, etc. This organizational work is particularly crucial now, given the recent on-again off-again involvement of the national government with film production and regulation.

Photo credits: Nora de Izque and Berta Navarro by Zuzana Pick; Brenda Martinez and Angelina Vasquez by Julianne Burton.

1. It is estimated that at least 400 people were killed in this plaza in downtown Mexico City when the government had the army attack students, workers, and bystanders during a non-violent public meeting.

2. Founder of the Cuban Film Institute and its director from 1959 to 1982.

3. One of Brazil's most respected, influential, and prolific filmmakers, Pereira dos Santos is credited with providing the generative impulse behind the *Cinema Novo* (New Cinema) movement, which flourished in Brazil from 1962 to 1968 and, by some accounts, into the '70s.

4. First prize at the Second Annual International Festival of the New Latin American Cinema, held in Havana in December 1980.

5. The title and key concept of a 1963 essay by the late Glauber Rocha (a brilliant and polemical theorist and practitioner of the *Cinema Novo* movement), sometimes referred to as the "Aesthetics of Violence."

6. Special mention at the Second Annual International Festival of the New Latin American Cinema.

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Graphic by Loretta Campbell and Grace Williams

In the reactionary times in which we live, Black women are being socialized into a conservative mindset. They are identifying with the white power structure (the oppressor) in politics, fashion, and career orientation. This mindset—imitating the "boss"—changed for a time during the Civil Rights Movement in the '60s. However, like the post-Reconstruction era when Blacks were forced to become subservient to whites again, many Blacks today have gone back to frying their hair to identify with the white power structure.

—Loretta Campbell

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NARRATIVE IS *NARRATIVE;*

Nina Fonoroff and Lisa Cartwright

Over the past several years there has been a growing trend toward "new" uses of narrative by avant-garde independent filmmakers. Work toward the development of feminist experimental film which breaks from a use of narrative altogether is being foreclosed by the currently popular use of narrative in film.

Much feminist study has been devoted to the development of a discourse that addresses the ways in which narrative functions to reproduce the patriarchal order.[1] Processes of identification (with camera point-of-view, with characters depicted within the film), temporal continuity, the "kind" of viewing required for narrative films, these are just a few aspects of narrative cinema that are called into question. With only a few exceptions,[2] however, little attention has been given to the possibility of a radical feminist experimental film—one that breaks from the use of narrative altogether.

Writings on narrative films maintain that dominant cinema must be criticized *from within* (through further narrative work) in order to undermine its politically repressive impact. In light of recent work on narrative it is evident that this results in a deeper investment in the very principles that are ostensibly being subverted. The "new," "disjunctive," "deconstructive," and "oblique" narrative films employ the *same old* values of mainstream cinema. The belief (i.e., ideology) that there is a direct or natural connection between an image and what that image represents, between what is seen and what is known, is necessarily reinforced in narrative film. New narrative filmmakers do acknowledge this "obvious" relation as an ideological construct. Nevertheless, they fall back on a provisional acceptance of this "reality" in their own films. The confessed *need* for the particular pleasure provided by narrative has been overemphasized to the point of forcing an equation between narrative and pleasure, and, by implication, non-narrative and non-pleasure. This equation fails to acknowledge other less obvious possibilities for pleasure in film viewing and making, and reinforces another "natural" connection—that which is understood to exist between film and narrative. As this work on narrative gains political credence and authority, narrative takes on the appearance of inevitability.

The development of feminist experimental work which attempts to break from a use of narrative altogether has been suppressed by the principles upheld in mainstream cinema, but now the same principles are also being employed within an avant-garde that originally set out to oppose the mainstream. Due to the growing indifference to non-narrative, experimental film, younger filmmakers barely stand a chance of hearing more than the most reduced version of its history, and only the most determined will succeed in producing experimental films in an emerging cultural/political climate that increasingly inhibits the development of such work.

Audience: The Prophet Motive

Proponents of the new narrative argue that if a film departs too radically from familiar narrative elements, the audience will decrease and the film will be consigned to obscurity, limiting its potential for large-scale political effectiveness. It is assumed that the most effective means to undermine mainstream cinema is to preserve selected narrative elements, within which departures can be made. The idea is that one elicits a set of accustomed formal viewing expectations, all the better to shatter them.

Here makers of new narratives find themselves in the perfect double-bind. A need for a break from narrative is nobly acknowledged by filmmakers but deployment of narrative "form" is justified by a saving grace: political content. That their films depend on the very principles being questioned is leniently excused—*silenced*—by a liberal audience, sympathetic to the filmmakers' avowed radical intentions, and willing to overlook the discrepancy between these intentions and the actual films.

The work of British filmmakers Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen is indicative of this trend toward greater accessibility—*and* toward a classical use of film. Laura Mulvey has stated:

> *. . . we see each film we make as potentially reaching a wider audience than the one before. . . . I don't feel that* AMY! *breaks new ground in the way that* Riddles [of the Sphinx] *did. But at the same time it's more accessible and consumable, and in that sense it could appeal to a wider group of people.* [3]

The first Mulvey/Wollen feature, *Penthesilea* (1975), attempts to replace the structuring device of narrative with theoretical and historical text. The film is divided into four formally different sequences, addressing the Amazon legend and women's place in patriarchal language. Their second feature, *Riddles of the Sphinx* (1977), again reflects feminist concerns, highlighting the issue of women's place in language from the position of the mother. This film, too, is structured by formally distinct sequences. Each sequence, however, is a narrative within itself, providing the basic framework of a diegesis, character development (however limited), temporal continuity, etc. *AMY!* (1980) provides an even less altered version of narrative, offering a feminist rendering of the story of aviator Amy Johnson. The film's linearity is broken only intermittently by short interludes such as a poetic stop-action bird-in-flight sequence, or a mapping sequence. *Crystal Gazing* (1982), their fourth feature, is a narrative film in the strict sense. Its avant-garde function can be read only in the content "side" of the film: It is about "surviving in London in the 80's,"[4] and deals with the issues of Thatcherism and rock-n-roll. Interestingly, this classical narrative is also the first of their films that does not focus on the central issue of patriarchy, but instead pictures the present relations of capital in London. With British Film Institute funding of $140,000, its rendering of a desperate political climate brings into question their own position within that climate.

The issue of economic survival is of paramount importance, and the move to narrative reflects this concern. As funds for filmmaking become scarce, it becomes increasingly difficult and risky to depend on granting systems for support. Much current work is done with a view toward marketing potential: Larger budgets, "better" production values, and more topical themes all signal the move toward making films that are commercially viable products—lifted from obscurity to greater "public acceptance," from small film-screening spaces to art-movie houses, a step away from commercial houses—and, by design or default, a shift from a concern for the possibilities of new uses of film to a concern for marketability and accessibility. These "formally accessible" films require the sophisticated tools of mainstream cinema to effect the degree of illusion necessary to be read *familiarly*. This shift toward a use of expensive, accessible form for political content is apparent in the Mulvey/Wollen films. One also sees it in Sally Potter's move from the relatively low-budget *Thriller* (1979) to her epic drama *Gold* (currently in production), budgeted at $230,000; and in Bette Gordon's move from *Empty Suitcases* (1980), a film (falsely) heralded as both experimental and feminist, to her currently in progress highly-funded production *Variety*, a disjunctive narrative about pornography.

True, one might conclude from this upward mobility of the "avant-garde" that, *finally*, new avant-garde filmwork is being acknowledged with funds. But a more accurate reading might be that the avant-garde is formulating its own "new" Hollywood through private and government money. This situation is neither new nor advanced.

We are not suggesting that the audience should never be considered in making films. But it is hazardous to endow the audience with a limited understanding or tolerance and to thereby assume a limit of intelligibility within a film, beyond which it will be too obscure to sustain people's interest. And this fallacy often goes unchallenged—is excused and even justified by an avant-garde audience sympathetic to the filmmakers' political intentions. With

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such unequivocal trust, the filmmakers assume a position of omnipotence; they are allowed a condescending attitude toward their potential audience. The questions most often raised concern "what *they* want" and "what *they* need to know," in a style resembling market research. The fact that filmmakers are playing into a romantic myth of the artist as prophet/mentor is never stated. And the vague conjectures about the limit of tolerance within film remain the dividing line in this hierarchy, implicit in the films and in discussions about them.

"But the discourse must go on. So one invents obscurities." [5]

One strategy in the new films that is supposed to subvert traditional narrative is quotation, often taking the form of written or spoken text within the film. In an effort to undercut the seductive power of the image, voiceover narration literally speaks ideas developed out of Marxism, psychoanalysis, and semiotics. Constance Penley has stated: "Images have very little power in themselves; their power of fascination and identification is too strong. That is why there must always be a commentary *on* the image simultaneously *of* and *with* them." [6]

The work of Jean-Luc Godard has been a source of inspiration for many filmmakers who employ this strategy. A case in point is his film *Le Gai Savoir* (1968), in which media images, acted sequences, documentary-style sequences, and political theorizing/poeticizing are intercut and overlapped in a dense intertextual montage. Spoken/written language is intended as commentary on and analysis of the ideology manifested in the images. The inclusion of a multiplicity of elements purportedly provides a prime situation for a more dialectical viewing: The greater the amount of elements placed before us, the greater the number of juxtapositions of meanings can occur. Knowledge of Godard's intentions for a more dialectical viewing situation, however, fails to effect that experience. In watching the film we are provided with a complicated picture or model of dialectics—with a confusion of relations between image and image, image and sound, sound and sound. But this presentation never addresses the complex dialectical relation between image and meaning—the actual workings of representation within and through images.

Yvonne Rainer's *Journeys from Berlin* (1979) also provides a dense intertextual construction, and *Sigmund Freud's Dora* (1979),[7] although its combination of texts is less dense and more clearly *readable*, works in much the same way. Such films, which speak a criticial, historical, or theoretical tract, compound rather than subvert the power of fascination and identification exerted by film images. The use of texts drawn from other areas obfuscates the still untouched relation between the image and what that image is intended to represent. A text can go no further than to instruct us within its own terms, providing, literally, a *reading* of the function of images. Further, to assume that discursive language breaks the hold of images is to assume that the spoken text is without its own powers of seduction. The authority of voice/voice of authority compounds the authority of image.

"Quotation" is also used in films in the form of references: to the films of a particular director; to the filmmakers' own past work; and to popular genres of both Hollywood and non-mainstream narrative film. The work of Amos Poe (*Subway Riders, The Foreigner, Unmade Beds*), Beth and Scott B (*Vortex*), and Manuel de Landa (*Raw Nerves*) all reflect the current interest in film noir. Particularly in the case of *Raw Nerves* and *Subway Riders*, Christine Noll Brinckmann and Grahame Weinbren see a radical departure from the genre that inspired them, and indeed from narrative form itself, through these films' inclusion (and exclusion) of elements that render them *opaque*. Opacity is distinguished from the principle of transparency that is at work in mainstream films:

> *Traditional narrative is based on the rule that all elements should combine to form a unity, that each element should have its proper, intelligible place in the text and that an ending before the text has succeeded in integrating and explaining them all would be an untimely one indeed. The new narrative ignores this rule. Opacity, quotations from all sorts of sources without stating what their relevance might be, and the fluctuating status of sequences as fiction or non-fiction are evidences of this.* [8]

Opacity indicates self-consciousness on the part of the filmmaker, thus foregrounding his/her presence within the work. It also indicates the presence of critical/theoretical work:

> *Opacity often leads the viewer to assume the presence of theoretical groundwork and therefore to look for it, and it also signals an inexhaustibility to the work, an idea that it needs repeated screenings to be understood to any degree. But the sense of opacity often remains even after the theory has been understood. This grows out of a general toleration these films have for loose ends; and the general opposition to the notion that every element of a text should be accounted for by the text. The opacity is, in many cases, no more than the impossibility of accounting for some of its elements.* [9]

The writers go on to imply that the theoretical underpinnings of a film are often difficult to grasp; and, although opacity is not discussed here in relation to transparency, one assumes that it is intended to set up an experience whereby there is limited possibility for identification because the relationship between reality and what is being represented is called into question. Instead, the authors link "opacity" with "unaccountability" as though certain elements of the story were omitted, disrupting the customary cause-and-effect relation between events, but only to the extent that leads the viewer to wonder about—and search for—the missing parts. One wonders whether "opacity" here isn't being used synonymously with "obscurity" and "inscrutability"—which would, in the end, leave the viewer in the same relation to the film as would a Hollywood noir film wherein some key moments in the drama were arbitrarily omitted. The authors go on to say:

> *. . . opacity can become a reassuring quality for the viewer, convincing her or him that everything is, after all, in its proper place, that the artist remains in control by making use of mechanisms that are not fully apparent to the audience. Opacity gives one the idea that theory is behind the film, clear to the filmmakers, and that therefore everything in the work is motivated, and that it is worthy of trust. And this, in turn, justifies the opacity. A neat circle of opacity, motivation, trustworthiness, justification, acceptance, and again opacity.* [10]

It seems ironic that a theory intended originally to prescribe an *active* viewing possibility, directed toward criticism and questioning of motivation and the process of viewing itself, should now be called upon to produce a very different effect: trust, unequivocal acceptance of what is presented because the filmmaker "knows what he/she is doing," and, ultimately, yet another case of investment in the myth of the artist as mentor/prophet. The foregrounding of the filmmaker: the cult of personality.

The inscription of theory in many of the new narratives makes a certain *kind* of analysis not only possible, but necessary. The confusion between the problems specific to film theory/analysis and film practice has led to a use of literary analysis as a primary mode of film viewing. The success of the film is measured by how well it illustrates a particular issue, which can then be subjected to analysis. In turn a particular theoretical take is required to understand the film, and a particular theoretical background is presupposed. *Reading* a film as an illustration of literary ideas has come to be regarded not only as a possible means for knowledge of a certain kind in *certain* films, but as *the* means, *par excellence*, for certain knowledge in/of all film work.

In this scheme, the filmmaker and the critic/theorist have entered into a curious symbiotic relationship, in which the film-

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maker buries a bone that the critic, at some later point, can unearth. Many recent narrative films function as setups for critical analysis: Theoretical discourse becomes the subtext of the film, which becomes a sitting duck for the critic, whose reading was prepared beforehand. Films that play on such a symbiotic relationship seem to suggest that nothing new can be done in film—that the best a contemporary filmmaker can do is to repeat endless variations of old forms.[11]

In the absence of characters with whom to identify, the sophisticated avant-garde film spectator now identifies within a body of knowledge, within theory. The dramaturgy of traditional narrative has simply been supplanted by a grammaturgy of theoretical principles. The traditional story has been replaced by a larger story—theory. The "story" becomes even grander when the psyche of the filmmaker is brought into the picture as a subject to be analyzed conjointly with the film. The theory of psychoanalysis is used as a cover, merging the respective narratives of the filmmaker's psyche and the film itself into an aggregate "case history."

Shifting Signifier

Another strategy that is supposed to challenge traditional narrative codes is that of thwarting character development. The depiction of human beings with elusive identities allegedly serves to subvert empathy and identification between the viewer and the protagonist.

The device of the "shifting signifier" is commonly employed in new narrative films. Yvonne Rainer's *Film About a Woman Who...* (1974) and *Kristina Talking Pictures* (1976) are two early films which experiment with this device as a strategy for breaking the power of character identification. Gordon's *Empty Suitcases* is a later use of this device in which the pronoun "she" is used, in voiceover narration and intertitles, to refer to a number of different female protagonists, all of whom appear on the screen at different times and in different settings. Since no cohesive story is built around a central protagonist, an ambiguity develops in regard to the identity of "she" at any given point in the film. The female characters thus become interchangeable with one another.

Instead of the highly developed characters presented by mainstream cinema, we now have an assortment of appearances, semblances and archetypes. What takes place is a "shattering" of character in which each fragment carries the earmarks of the whole that engendered it.

The use of the archetype claims to bring about an awareness of the archetypal nature not only of the characters within the particular film, but also, by implication, of all filmic depiction of human behavior. As a reduced model, the archetype supposedly facilitates the process of analysis and dissection for the viewer. Identification is no longer elicited through empathy with a character undergoing conflict, but through the vicarious experience of style. Instead of a real break with unity of character, we are left with a multiplicity of reduced archetypes, with "whom" we can still identify, albeit in a more ambiguous way. But *ambiguous processes of identification still remain processes of identification.*

From whence the supposition that analysis precludes seduction?

Laura Mulvey's article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"[12] advanced feminist film study by proposing a political use of psychoanalysis in the study of mainstream narrative cinema. It was not a prescriptive theory for film practice.[13] Her emphasis is on the use of psychoanalysis to reveal and dismantle the workings of patriarchy *within narrative cinema*, especially in regard to representations of women in subservience to the *male* gaze.

Gordon's *Empty Suitcases* and Jackie Raynal's *Deux Fois* (1970) have been cited as films that address this problem. In the case of Raynal, the filmmaker turns the camera on herself, at times defiantly staring into the camera—at once the object and the subject of her own gaze, at once "male" and "female." This simultaneous engagement with and critical/analytical relation to her own image is intended to promote the viewer's awareness of—and therefore rupture with—the problematic seductive nature of the image. Yet a picture of a seductive woman "tells" us nothing about the nature of pictures, seduction, or women. Without prior knowledge of the theory behind this sequence, it is doubtful whether one will read it as *against* seduction. If anything, the "male" nature of the gaze is reinforced by such a strategy. Analysis, bearing no relation to the film itself, is what prevents this scene from functioning as it would in any mainstream film.

The interruption or disjunction of the narrative line is yet another strategy employed to undermine the viewer's engagement. This tactic is evident in the fractured narratives of such films as *Empty Suitcases* which, rather than breaking with narrative, provides multiple, limited narrative developments in an endless deferral of completion. This process is intended to unfix meaning, opening up multiple readings and disengaging the viewer from the drive for completion, yet providing enough narrative satisfaction. But how long can a story continue before something takes place; before some specific meaning is produced? This strategy assumes a calibrated model of narrative, in which the viewer's engagement (and subsequent fixing of meaning) occurs only at certain intervals. The filmmaker functions as manipulator, intermittently leading on and closing off the viewer. This kind of withdrawal tactic assumes that the only moment when "something" takes place is at the instance of climax—a dangerously mistaken assumption. The comparatively straightforward appeal of mainstream narrative has taken on a coy seductiveness in these altered versions, *veiling* the operations of narrative in a game of hard-to-get. Complication is simply posing as dialectics.

Diegesis

The term "diegesis" has considerable currency in discussions about narrative film. "Diegetic" elements within film are defined as those elements that take place "naturally," within the world constructed by the story of the film—i.e., any situation, thought, or dream that is plausible within the context of the constructed fiction. "Nondiegetic" elements, on the other hand, are those that constitute other "information" that falls outside the realm of the film's fictional world (i.e., Hollywood background music). The dividing line between diegesis and nondiegesis is growing increasingly blurred, it is said, in new narrative films.

The very concept of diegesis presupposes that a separation can be made between a kind of para-reality and what are obviously nonrealistic materials, all within the *same* experience of watching the *same* film. This model fails to account for the fact that a film establishes its own terms, its own context. What is constructed, therefore, sets the terms of its own reality as film. Everything that takes place within a particular film is by definition "diegetic"—it belongs to a particular framework which may be modeled in the image of the everyday world but which nonetheless becomes something different, on the level of experience, once it is placed within the film-viewing context. There is a fundamental misunderstanding about the nature of film in the very designation of diegetic and nondiegetic elements. "Blurring" a nondistinction seems absurd. As far as non-narrative filmmakers are concerned, the only nondiegetic moment occurs when the film stops, and the film-viewing experience is over.

The idea of "blurring distinctions" forms the cornerstone for discussion of recent developments in narrative film. Diegesis/nondiegesis, fiction/nonfiction, form/content, personal/political, objective/subjective—how did these elements gain the stability as fixed categories to be expressed as pairs of opposites, and then to be posited as "blurred distinctions"? To accept such distinctions as more than what they are (*terms of convenience*), one must first accept narrative convention as the very foundation of all film practice. We do not accept this precondition: We believe it is necessary to shatter this conceptual framework in order to proceed with film.

History

The case for narrative film is based on the belief that a film practice cannot develop "out of the blue";[14] that one has to start *somewhere*, within the history of film. Yet a history, theory, and practice of non-narrative feminist experimental film is not only possible, but already exists. From the experimental work of Germaine Dulac, rarely shown and often overlooked in favor of her more commercial, narrative films, to current work such as that of

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Su Friedrich and Leslie Thornton in the U.S., and that of Lis Rhodes in England, it is evident that feminist non-narrative experimental film can be made.

As with any other area, experimental film is not without its own specific problems, which need to be addressed within the terms of feminism. A fratriarchy of experimental film has developed with its own standards of "quality" to protect, with an absolute faith in certain principles and ideals, which themselves mirror patriarchal ideology. The North American structural film movement, for example, took the ideal of a positivist science as its starting point, and the work of Michael Snow, Hollis Frampton, George Landow, and others relies heavily on the aims and methods of that discipline.

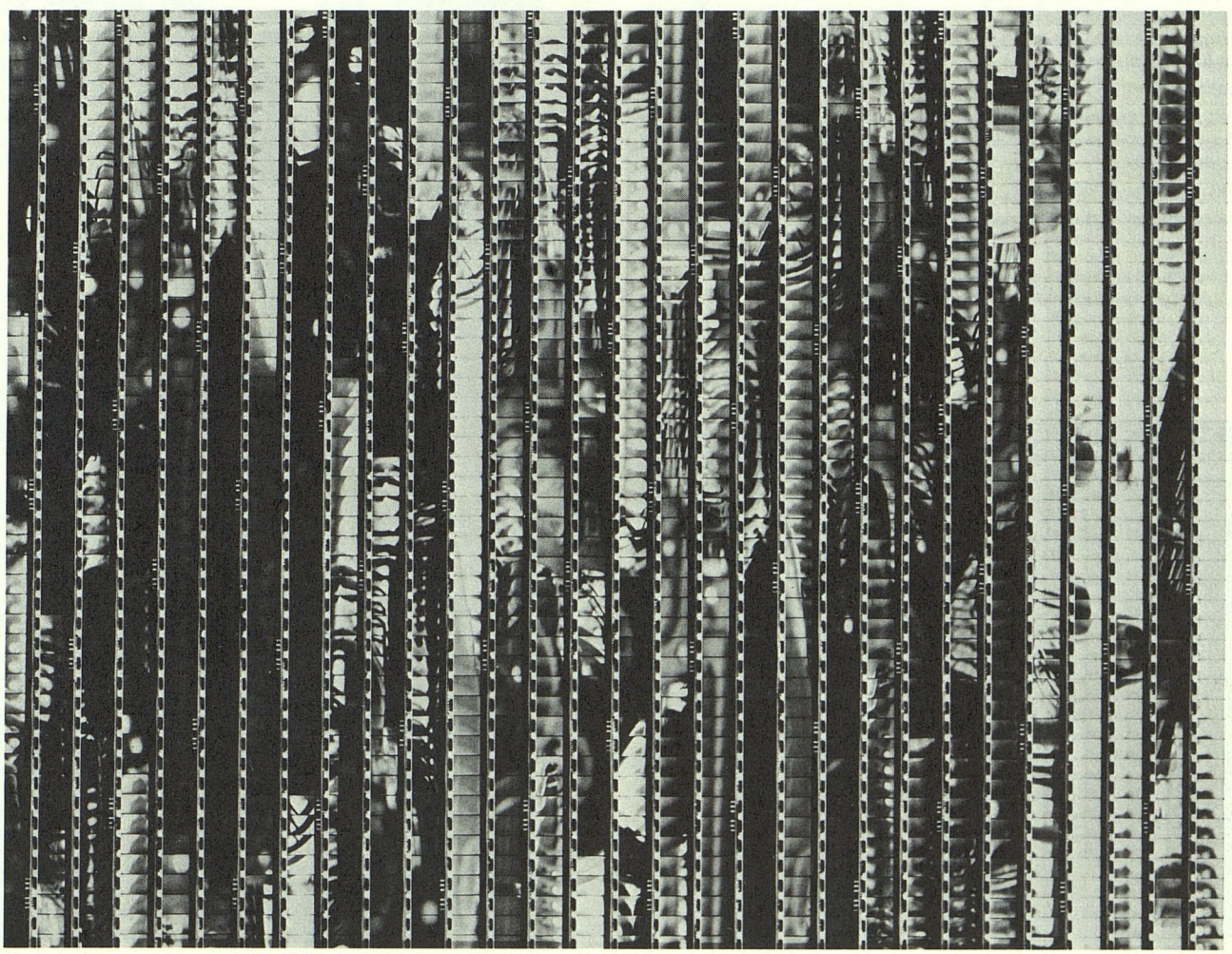
In these films it is evident that the answer being sought, the object of the experiment, is inscribed in the very questions asked: The "knowledge" to be gained is determined in advance. The very terms of this film practice, the set of rules that govern it, delineate and restrict the area of inquiry, and thereby foreclose the possibility of any result that was not already known from the outset of the process. The ideal of pure Science, applied to film, provides no guarantee of freedom from the ideology inscribed within the very materials of film. On the contrary, it reflects the patriarchal ideology from which it originated, and which it continues to serve.

Another development, the "lyrical" or "visionary" film (i.e., Stan Brakhage), posits a world in which an entirely new set of physical and social principles is in operation. In a pseudo-naif search for a more "pure" vision, a return to an unadulterated mode of seeing, visionary filmmakers exempt themselves from the responsibility of examining and challenging the very myths and ideals of an ideology which they buy into in their use of the tools of cinema.

Men who have sought a break with the cinema of the past have launched unified theories, positing fixed methods and procedures. We are loath to posit an argument that would assert, definitively, the last word—the ultimate strategy—in a long history of attempts at anti-illusionist filmmaking. We mistrust the sense of conclusiveness implicit in the very act of assertion. The nature of *experimental* film belies any attempt at a fixed method or procedure; the work needs to proceed in a manner that assumes no ultimate end, no goal for film outside of the real materials and conditions of film itself. *By proposing a feminist film practice, we are necessarily proposing an experimental method*—a method that questions the very grounds of film, assuming nothing as given but the materials of film themselves—not simply film stock, camera, etc., but especially the processes and relations of filmmaking and film-viewing. This reflects the desire not to reproduce already-existing representations, which have been immeasurably limiting and damaging to us. The present impossibility for women to represent themselves properly, accurately, has led to an awareness not only of the inadequacy of the aims and intentions of dominant cinema but also of the impossibility of its main task: to represent. We wish to finally acknowledge this impossibility and to move on to a use of film that attempts no mastery of meaning, assumes no ultimate knowledge of reality through film. For film will fail to advance any understanding of these problems unless it first deals with the complex problems *within the terms of film*:

> *Film first of all has to function in cinematographic terms as any art or science must operate in reference to the development of their particular mode of expression. This does not evacuate "content" as it assumes it to be a preliminary question what film-content could be, and to study, contrive, invent the precise ways it could be inscribed in film.*[15]

In order to do this it is necessary to open up the possibility for the making and viewing of films that provide a "kind" of pleasure that does not depend on the patriarchal narrative mode (nor on its inverse in the form of a "neo-feminist" use of film for "dif-



Couleurs méchaniques *(1979) by Rose Lowder*

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ferent" representations of women). A use of film that breaks with the patriarchal foundation of sexual division is necessary for feminist filmwork to proceed.

The ultimate impossibility of film in its use for patriarchy—the problematic lack of correspondence between image and meaning, between the real of film and that of other areas of life—is no longer a cause for lament, but a source of relief and inspiration for women working in film.

1. The writings of the Camera Obscura Collective, Claire Johnston, E. Ann Kaplan, and Mary Anne Doane are just a few instances in a long line of different approaches to deconstructing/analyzing narrative within an avant-garde context.

2. Constance Penley, Felicity Sparrow, Lis Rhodes, Nancy Woods, and Su Friedrich are a few women who have begun a written feminist discourse addressing the problems and possibilities of experimental filmwork for women.

3. Interview with Laura Mulvey by Nina Danino and Lucy Moy-Thomas, *Undercut*, no. 6 (Winter 1982-83), p. 11.

4. Ad copy from film journals.

5. Samuel Beckett, *Ill Seen Ill Said* (New York: Grove Press, 1974).

6. Constance Penley, "The Avant-Garde and Its Imaginary," *Camera Obscura*, no. 2 (Fall 1977), p. 25.

7. A film by Claire Pajaczkowska, Jane Weinstock, Andrew Tyndall, and Anthony McCall.

8. Christine Noll Brinckmann and Grahame Weinbren, "Mutations of Film Narrative," *Idiolects*, no. 12 (Fall 1982), p. 28.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. "Theory films" that function as studies in Marxist, psychoanalytic, and semiotic analyses make redundant what already exists in dominant cinema. This redundancy becomes evident when we note that these theories have been applied with equal success to new avant-garde narratives and to old Hollywood narratives—particularly those of the '40s and '50s, in which the operations of seduction are so visible as to have provided perfect case studies for such analysis.

12. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* (1974).

13. This article has been used as a plan of action not only for feminist film theorists, but for filmmakers, though it offers no plan of action for the production of films.

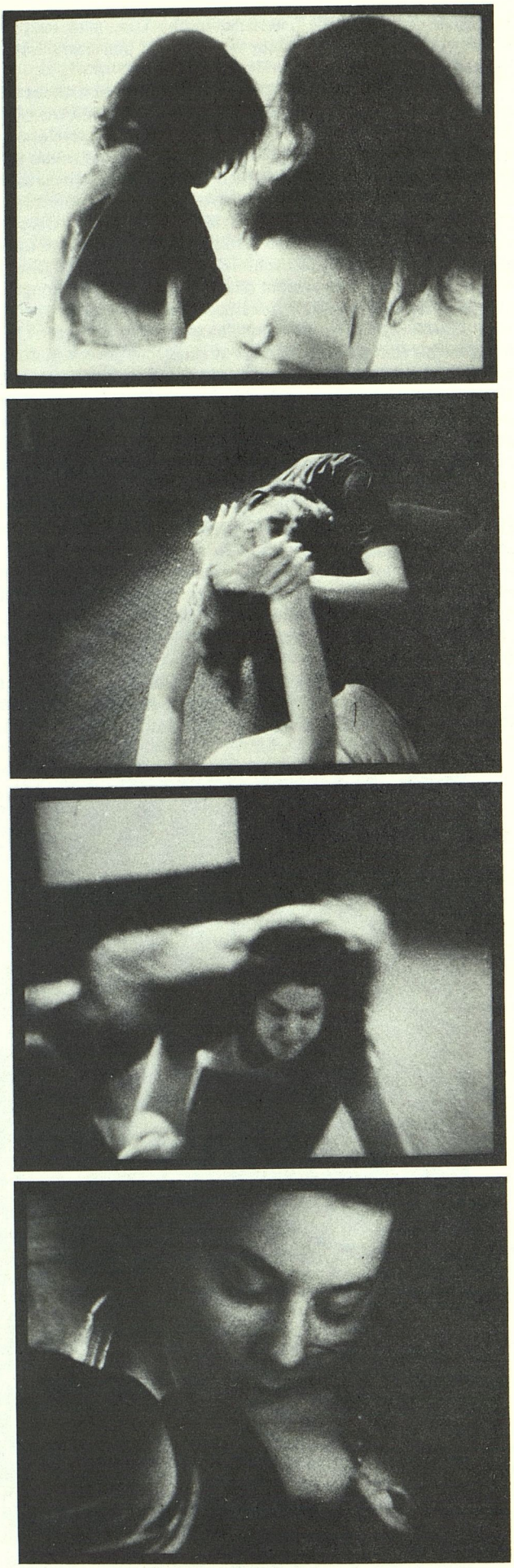
14. Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure."

15. Rose Lowder, "Reflections on Experimental Film" (1982, unpublished).

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Lisa Cartwright is a filmmaker living in New York City.



Adynata (*1983*) *by Leslie Thornton*



C Girls (*1981*) *by Jan Stott*

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Neither Personal Nor Best



Cathy Joritz

The quiet release of *Personal Best* last spring stirred intermittent outrage and excitement in the lesbian, gay, and women's press. Never before had Hollywood depicted women with such strength and commitment. Never before had lesbianism been considered a real possibility—without the usual adornments of masochism, self-loathing, or suicide. Yet in the same film lesbians were sadly trivialized; and as usual the male characters intervened, resuming control of the women and their lives.

In an unfortunate oversight by these publications, criticism was generally directed at the film's director, Robert Towne, and the film itself, but never took aim at the mass media's coverage, which influenced much of the initial reception and final opinion of the film. Newspaper and magazine articles, gossip-rag columns, TV previews, and advertisements were all extremely important forerunners of the audience's response to *Personal Best* and, more crucially, of their consideration of its lesbian and bisexual characters and their relationship.

Although the film's premise assumes the natural presence of lesbian women, the media focused solely on the sensational. They falsely portrayed *Personal Best* as a film *about* lesbians and relentlessly exploited the film's two celluloid emissaries, Patrice Donnelly and Mariel Hemingway. Moralistic, angry critics leaped onto spurious evidence, attempting to "prove" that the film is pro-lesbian/anti-male propaganda, while liberal critics were most interested in *Personal Best* as the story of the maturation of a young woman temporarily gone astray.

To voyeuristic, gossip-hungry writers, Towne supplied extraordinary, minute details of the women's considerably pampered preparation for the shooting of the "love scene." (This juicy information was presented as though the "unnatural act" of a very natural embrace would otherwise have been unthinkable.) Writers eagerly collaborated. They probed into Donnelly's and Hemingway's personal lives and cornered each into providing evidence of her heterosexuality. Hemingway complied. She dropped naive and insulting comments about lesbians and revealed with pride news of her role in an upcoming *Playboy* film. Donnelly recited well-rehearsed speeches about how she had to feign an attraction for "Mariel's character" while simultaneously denying that her own character (Tori) was a lesbian. Ironically, off screen, the actresses undermined the film's own assumption (that lesbianism is "no big deal") and consequently betrayed a potentially sympathetic audience. A basic publicity sham was exposed. The unfortunate truth is that in every interview with Donnelly, Hemingway, or Towne, the off-screen sexuality of the women was unnecessarily challenged. Lesbianism was peered into and poked at like an undesirable, freak disease.

Personal Best provided an easy target for the sexploitation tactics of the man-handled media. *Playboy* printed a special two-page spread of stills from the film and usurped Hemingway's man-fetching film splits by posing her in the same manner but without a leotard. *Rolling Stone* followed suit with overhead body shots of the famous pose. As progressively more twisted reviews and leering photographs were published, the more screamingly apparent it became how easily men can control any publicly screened film, or any public event—and how effortlessly they conclude that the property was created solely for their base entertainment.

Women filmmakers must be especially concerned about this dilemma if we want to work freely, without fear that men will plagiarize, distort, and destroy our images and films. Lesbian independent filmmakers are in an extremely vulnerable position because it is usually difficult and often impossible to control admittance to film screenings. (Many commercial and independent theatres do not allow "women only" access.) The filmmaker then faces the predictable spattering of bug-eyed gawkers in her predominantly female audience. At best, these unwelcome men will pay their money, watch the film, and go home. At worst, they will take pictures (in an effort to sell sex-related scenes), write reviews, and hassle the women inside. Lesbian filmmakers must also confront enormous mass ignorance about lesbian sexuality and all the resulting defense mechanisms of the straight world.

Personal Best proved to be far from an ideal film, but its release was an important warning to women of the kind of media treatment to expect when we unleash our own visions on an ill-prepared public. It also clearly indicates the bitter trials awaiting actresses who dare to accept lesbian roles—a lesson deliberately employed to keep women quaking with trepidation at the mere prospect. With this in mind, an environment must be established where creative women are assured VISIBLE support.

It is all too easy to criticize a film (like *Personal Best*) for including a less than perfect feminist/lesbian content; but our anger at the film must be sustained beyond the point of initial outrage. Women must aim their sights higher and channel rage into effective and enduring action. We must remain alert and defensive against the misogynist media and agree to write letters, make phone calls, throw eggs, drop bombs, whatever, so that strong and free work is produced. Only through indefatigable rebuttal and an uncompromising stance will any change occur. Women must pave the way for each other.



Photo from BOND/WELD *(1982) by Cathy Joritz. Through combining personal footage and images of notable straight and lesbian women, this film attempts to create a joyful view of lesbians while humorously shattering some media misrepresentations.*

Chicago filmmaker Cathy Joritz currently lives in West Germany, where she is working on a new film, playing drums in a women's band, and riding daily at an all-woman's stable.

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REINVENTING OUR IMAGE

Eleven Black Women Filmmakers

Loretta Campbell

"...those motion pictures made for theater distribution that have a Black producer, director or writer, or Black performers that speak to Black audiences or incidentally to white audiences possessed of preternatural curiosity, attentiveness or sensibility toward racial matters, and that emerge from self-conscious intentions, whether artistic or political, to illuminate the Afro-American experience."

—Thomas Cripps, ***Black Film as Genre***

The women interviewed for this article are responsible for part of this definition—they illuminate the Afro-American experience. Ranging in age from early twenties to late forties, they have worked as independent filmmakers for two to 10 years, making documentaries, feature films, short fiction films, or videotapes. Each woman was asked a number of questions (see box). I have selected, within each question, the answers that seemed most representative. If several women concurred in their experiences or opinions, their responses may be represented by one or two comments (so as to avoid constant repetition).

As artists who remake and create images in response to the socialization process, these filmmakers are pioneers. They are essentially retelling history—casting the heroines in our own image. The role models for their films are all of us.

Melvonna Ballenger: My first role models were, of course, my mother, grandmother, and aunts—women who kept going no matter what the consequences were. Also my father, grandfathers, my extended family. I don't think we give enough credit to the people who helped us through the process of growing up in this society, through the everyday routine living situations that brought us to where we are today. They are the role models. As for individuals, I respect people like Toni Morrison, Maya Angelou, Alice Walker, James Baldwin, Nikki Giovanni, etc.—Black writers who bring those everyday situations into a deeper focus so that we can relate similar experiences.

I admire people who have the courage to bare all—fictional or nonfictional, sometimes positive, sometimes painful, sometimes joyful and oftentimes private experiences—to the public. There are numerous Black writers, men and women—in the past (Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Ralph Ellison) and in the present—who are and were sensitive to the simple things in life that become complex when one is trying to express them to others. They try to make us all aware of being sensitive to others and ourselves. There are role models walking down the street everyday, riding on the bus, or at the grocery store. Their spirit or lack of spirit keeps me moving on in a positive direction. There are so many role models and they provide the inspiration for my films.

Ayoka Chenzira: Syvilla Forte (the subject of my film *Syvilla: They Dance to Her Drum*) was a role model, a reinforcement for unsung Black heroines. My mother also was a role model. Thomas Pinnock, my husband, the choreographer and dancer, is also a role model for me.

Kathleen Collins: My father, now deceased, was my role model. In some ways everything I do in my life is for him. He was an extraordinary man. I was taught I could do anything I wanted to do. I just had to do it. Mother was a role model also, as was my sister. I think my mother was my best ally—both parents were.

Cynthia Ealey/Lyn Blum: Without advocating teenage pregnancy, we believe that the women in our tape are role models. We wanted to show how hard their struggles are and yet how well they are coping.

Alile Sharon Larkin: I have a great deal of respect for my mother's generation of Black women. They worked and raised us—whole families—alone, and had to endure watching their men made crazy or turned into alcoholics, etc. They seemed to be able to retain more of our Afro-American values; today you can see Black people really assimilating Western sexual mores, and a real division seems to be happening, where Black people identify with every other kind of movement as opposed to the survival of Black people on this planet. I also look to our historical figures for inspiration.

Edie Lynch: My role models are Ralph Ellison, the director Vittorio DeSica, and multifaceted artists such as Maya Angelou and Gordon Parks.

Fronza Woods: I don't have any role models as such, but there are people I admire and who have influenced my life. Some of them are close friends, some are public personalities. If I were to draw up a list today, it would include my mother, some close friends, Bill Moyers, Gregory Jackson, Lena Horne (as an older woman), Barbara Jordan, George Steiner, Myles Horton, Malcolm X, and Georgia O'Keefe. We have more real heroes and heroic people in this country than we acknowledge.

The films made by these women focus on women's stories—teenage unwed mothers, stereotyped images of women in society, Black women's hair care, biographies of dancers, Black male-Black female relationships, and more. Often these are themes not depicted in mainstream cinema. By creating and promoting our own images on film, then, these women offer a counterimage to the stereotyped Hollywood

Questions in Survey	Yes	No	NR
1. Do you produce, direct, and edit your own films?	10	1	
2. Are you a full-time filmmaker?	2	9	
3. Have you applied for or received a film grant?	5	6	
4. Do you use scripts and write them yourself?	6	3	
5. Do you have an apprenticeship program for crew members?		10	1
6. Do you have staff members to assist you with the administration duties involved in promoting the films?	4	7	
7. Are films by Black women a specific genre?	6	5	
8. Are you in contact with other Black women filmmakers and the filmmaking community?	8	3	
9. Do you have a networking system?	7	3	1
10. Do you have any experience in experimental film forms?	2	7	2
11. Are you an independent filmmaker?	10		1



Fronza Woods. Photo by Lona O'Connor.

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image of Black women that Blacks must eradicate. It is perhaps the "fight fire with fire" theory of reeducation. Kathleen Collins and Jacqueline Frazier both commented that they use experiences from their own lives as subject matter for their films. Jean Facey, however, prefers making documentaries, drama, and children's material. Her ideas are "generated from news, cultural events, historical information, and personal experience." Other women suggest a similar kind of mix.

Melvonna Ballenger: Personal and impersonal experiences inspire me the most. What I mean by that is that I try to utilize certain events in my own life or in the lives of people around me whom I know, or in my family, or events from anyone's life that I might find interesting, and weave the story out of that onto film. "Impersonal" experiences are important, too, in that I am concerned that our Black lives, our history, its richness and versatility, seems to go unnoticed and is not considered important enough for a "majority audience." Therefore, we don't see many meaningful and positive Black images on TV and film screens today. I try to use certain themes that in one way or another relate to a reasonable amount of the Black audience



Ayoka Chenzira

(transcending class, color, nationality, etc.), as well as to a wider non-Black audience. I guess the best way to do that is to draw from what you know best—from your own life and the lives of those whom you admire and who have qualities that are universal.

Cynthia Ealey/Lyn Blum: We have made only one tape (on teenage pregnancy), with no intentions of making others. Our inspiration came from the remarkable way the young women in our group took care of themselves and their babies, accepting responsibility, working hard to figure out the system, etc. Also, we knew the kinds of tapes that were currently available for young women (mostly made by adoption agencies, by white filmmakers and white agencies, about young white women). We wanted to give the women in our group the chance to tell their stories, with the opportunity to do away with some of the myths and stereotypes.

Alile Sharon Larkin: My art comes out of the African experience historically, and, to date, it has dealt with the effect of Western culture. It's a look at the Eurocentric



Thelma Hill in Remembering Thelma *(1981) by Kathe Sandler.*

world view on Black people. So far the theme of "blind" assimilation of Western culture and values operates in both *Your Children Come Back to You* (societal values) and *A Different Image* (Western sexism). My latest project, *The Kitchen*, will mirror the Black community's almost total acceptance of white beauty standards. I believe it is important not only to mirror my community but to create images that will initiate dialogue/analysis and make people aspire to a different way of life. I feel we must constantly question the Eurocentric values that are being imposed on people of color. Interestingly enough, I find this Eurocentric view among the political left.

Edie Lynch: I am interested in simple human conditions. Seeing an old man and woman walking down the street, hand in hand, could make me want to document "Loneliness" or "Growing Old Together."

Fronza Woods: I like films about real people. I am inspired by almost everything but especially by struggle. I am interested in people who take on a challenge, no matter how great or small, and come to terms with it. What inspires me are people who don't sit on life's rump but have the courage, energy, and audacity not only to grab it by the horns, but to steer it as well.

Given that mainstream cinema is inherently exclusive of Third World people and women, the first decision to be made by these filmmakers was whether to force their way into this industry or create an alternative cinema. These women chose the latter option.

Melvonna Ballenger: I am an independent filmmaker, and by choice. First of all, there doesn't seem to be much demand by the major studios or big independent production companies to really invest or take a chance on even more established directors and producers, the more established Black male directors, producers, writers, etc., let alone lesser known or unknown Black women directors, producers, writers, and then get behind those people and promote their product. So I never really put all my energy into trying to become a "Hollywood" director or producer, film or television go'fer. I think that as an independent producer or director, you have a little more control over the product's content. Not so many hard-core salaries, jobs, union regulations, etc., are caught up into the film. There seems to be more of the blood, sweat and tears of the people on your crew who are interested in what you have to say on film or whatever you do creatively. On the other hand, you can run the "experience" thing into the ground. Anything you do enough times, paid or unpaid, will become "experience" in some way or another. It would be nice to pay talent and crew members a regular salary at least on a minimal basis, so that filmmaking doesn't become a weekend interest, job, or hobby. As an independent filmmaker, it is important to have your investment returned—but it takes so long. If your film does well, say in rental requests, it still might take years to get your initial investment back. But it also provides exposure for you and the relief and achievement of having a film that is completed.

Jean G. Facey: At this moment I am an independent filmmaker because I am just getting started. I do believe, however, that my choice will be to remain independent. In so doing I will be free of many of the constraints that would be placed on me from established production companies. If I remain independent I will be afforded greater latitude and flexibility.

Jacqueline Frazier: First I was independent by necessity, and now I am by choice. Spending my own money on films gives me freedom to say what I want or what I think needs to be said about Blacks without having to water it down for producers or an audience that might get "offended." Also the movie industry has a big "who you know" syndrome and, unless you're backed by a studio, it's hard to raise enough money to make quality Black films.

Alile Sharon Larkin: I am part of the independent Black cinema movement. I believe it is important for Black people to control their own image. Black people working in the established "Western" film industry do not have the power that we have. It is



Forte and Chenzira in Syvilla: They Dance to Her Drum *(1979) by Ayoka Chenzira.*

important that progressive and aware Black people be there to keep a check on Hollywood, but we must continue to build our own institutions, especially those in education and the media.

It is obvious that the fight against existing pernicious images requires money for ammunition. I submit that this money is not readily available for Black women filmmakers. The films they want to create are considered counterculture because they deliberately refute the standard images of Black experience and, in so doing, inval-

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idate the socialization process. Since the process rewards only those who support it, funding sources have little interest in films by and about Black women.

Fundraising for Black women filmmakers carries the double burden of the indifference of white funding agencies and the lack of sophistication of Black funding agencies. Kathe Sandler, for example, spent two years raising the money for her film Remembering Thelma*—money to complete and publicize her film. She approached a Black magazine at one point for funding and was told that there was no audience for a film about a Black woman.*

Funding for these filmmakers, then, is a combination of money raised from grants, working, and donations. Frequently a filmmaker uses her own money to make a presentation film (a part of the intended work) to show the funding agencies. If they like what they see, they fund the rest of the project. It helps if you have a reputation, of course, so that money will be easier to raise—though that doesn't always mean much. Carol Lawrence found that her filmmaking could not even convince Black businessmen to finance her films. "They never understood films—either as investment or tax shelters," she said (Black Enterprise, *Sept. 1982*).

The average length of time between completing one film and beginning another seems to be two years. It should be noted that none of the women interviewed make a living as filmmakers. Many make their "real" living in other professions. For example, Collins teaches at City College, Facey works as a registered nurse, and Chenzira is the Arts Administrator of the Black Filmmaker Foundation (BFF).

Of particular interest is the support that these filmmakers receive from family and friends. All specified that parents, spouses, or siblings had made donations of time and money to their projects.

Because there is limited interest from the public, what money there is (usually earned through a full-time job) has to be used expertly. Many hats have to be worn by these filmmakers, including budgeting the money once it is raised. But the response of all these women illustrates the capacity they have for making it through.

Melvonna Ballenger: My primary source of funding comes (slowly) from working, loans, and donations. Although there have been extremely few opportunities for me to work professionally in a salaried position, I consider myself a full-time filmmaker because of my training, interest, and experience in producing films. How do I budget my films? Through hard work, experience, and the lack of experience. Right now, the major part of my budget goes of course to film stock, production costs—feeding the crew, transportation, props, etc., and lab costs. Salaries are nonexistent. Actors donate their talent because of course they can't afford the expense of having something filmed or videotaped merely to showcase their talent to an agent, etc., and for the chance to use their craft. Crew members donate their skills in a specific area—sound, lighting, etc., for the opportunity to gain and increase their skills. And the director or producer—myself? Well, I try to pool the talent together with the crew and work out my concepts and the script and hopefully—because I'm learning too—come up with something close to the original idea. So, yes, it is something learned from experience and of course you have to have some idea of the techniques and equipment within your access and available resources to do a good job and end up with a good and creative product.

Ayoka Chenzira: Black women filmmakers are often funded through government grants and women's organizations—NYSCA, The Eastman Fund, Astraea Foundation, etc. I am presently working at the BFF and am able to support my filmmaking comfortably. It is politically very dangerous to believe that the only way to make films is to have a huge budget. That kind of thinking is pushing Blacks out of the market. One of the ways a filmmaker can finance a film is to trade off the services. For example, crew members may work for low wages in order to use the experience on a resumé, or as a school credit. Crew members might also be filmmakers themselves and ask that a favor be done for them in return—like working on their film.

Kathleen Collins: I teach film, write plays, and make films. I raised money for my first movie myself. Using that money, I got a grant for the second one, *Losing Ground*, which was sold to European television. I don't expect to get a lot of money in America to make the film, so I will try for a European-American co-production (with Germany, Italy, or London). My budget is entirely pragmatic—it is based on how much money I get. My partner, Ronald Gray, is primarily in charge of our budget and finances. Half the battle is the look of the film, and if you have a really talented partner and a good script and good acting, you have half the battle won before you need the money. It shows that you know how to run the ship. Very few people know how to run low-budget movies. Ronald and I taught ourselves how to do it. We received an American Film Institute grant and a New York State Council on the Arts grant; individually we each received Media grants from the National Endowment for the Arts; and Ronald received a Creative Arts Public Service grant.

Cynthia Ealey/Lyn Blum: Even during the making of our one tape, *A Mother Is a Mother*, Lyn and I did other things as well. I was paid to work on the tape 20 hours a week, Lyn was paid to work 10 hours a week, and we both worked a lot of volunteer hours during the year it took to make it. We worked on it sporadically. As a cooperative organization, we have budgeted [the Childcare Resource Center] for a



Edie Lynch

number of years, and we used those same skills for budgeting the tape. We had a few thousand dollars of program money left in our organization budget; not enough to begin a new group but enough perhaps to start the videotape. We also received money from Unity Settlement Association, a local money-giving organization for "worthy" causes.

Jean G. Facey: I divide my time between practicing as a Registered Nurse and making films. I have obtained funding from friends and resources, and have deferred many expenses, such as lab costs.

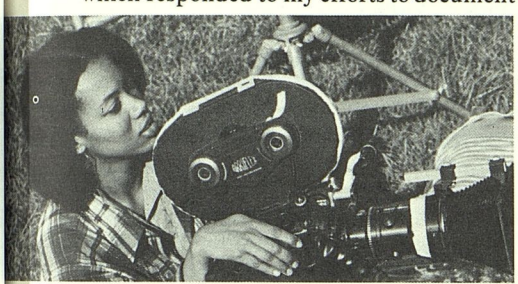
Alile Sharon Larkin: I must work full-time outside film to support not only myself but my film work as well. I have worked as a temporary secretary for businesses and arts organizations. I have taught in arts-in-education programs and I currently teach kindergarten in an independent Black institution. I also fund my films through loans, small grants, community raffles, awards, and family support—through in-kind services such as transportation, catering, acting, the use of homes for sets, small donations, and their faith, support and pride in me and my work. Since I don't start with a large sum of money, my budgeting process is different. There seem to be two schools among independents: Wait until you have all the money or shoot what you can when you can. I shoot what I can when I can. If I were waiting on a major grant to do a film, I'd still be waiting and I'd have no films. I apply for grants as a yearly and painful fall ritual—that's why this questionnaire is so late being answered; I have two grant applications due. To date I personally have received no major grants. The Black Filmmaker Collective received a small grant from the Foundation for Community Service to produce a video (cable) program on the effects of stereotypes on children.

Edie Lynch: I learned the hard way. In the beginning, I think, we all try to save money in the wrong areas. Now, if I don't have the money for a good cameraperson, lighting director, or sound person, I don't shoot. I budget $1,000-3,500 a minute, depending on whether it's color or black and white, and count $5,000-10,000 for surprises.

Kathe Sandler: Funding is almost nearly impossible for young independent filmmakers. Black filmmakers are in the most trouble of all here. Recently a representa-

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tive from a major federal funding source for film told me that a documentary I was planning on a particular aspect of Black American life was passé, dated, it reminded her of the '60s. Her remark made me realize that she was simply stating what many other funding sources feel but won't say: that they view anything concerning Black America as passé, that in 1982 we generally cease to exist, except in stereotypical images, in the minds of mainstream America. Still I apply to the sources most independents try—CAPS, NEA, NEH, NYSCA, AFI, etc. To date I haven't received any funding from them. To complete *Remembering Thelma* I took out plenty of loans. I also received a $1,500 grant from the Women's Fund—Joint Foundation Support, Inc., and a small grant from the Brooklyn Arts Cultural Association. A good friend steered a $1,500 tax-deductible contribution my way. Later, when the film was nearly completed, I solicited funds from the dance community, which responded to my efforts to document



Alile Sharon Larkin

Thelma Hill's life most enthusiastically. James Truitte (Thelma Hill's mentor and friend) initiated the contributions by sending a check and a list of names of friends of Thelma's whom he suggested I write. They responded with checks and more names. One former student of Thelma's sent me a check for $250 and 10 more people to write for contributions.

Joan Myers Brown, the Executive Director of the Philadelphia Dance Company, gave the film a benefit in Philadelphia and arranged a special screening for her company and students. That was probably the best audience I've ever encountered—young students and dancers and members of the Philadelphia dance community. When the film was first completed, I had a big benefit at Clark Center for the Performing Arts where Thelma had taught for 15 years. Dancers, choreographers, students, teachers, and friends (Thelma's and mine) came out. I raised about $1,000 that night. So, the support from the dance world was really tremendous.

Fronza Woods: Good budgeting is learned from training and experience. However, most Black or independent filmmakers are hardly in a position to get the kind of proper training, nor do their projects usually warrant it. My films were budgeted with a kind of ass-backward common sense that worked. Any woman who has managed a household can budget a film. Men have to learn.

Screenings of these women's films are a problem. Although all these filmmakers screen their work at festivals, theaters for showing films by Black filmmakers (whether independent or commercial) are nearly nonexistent. On the other hand, white filmmakers do have space, and often they are required by the funding sources to give screening space to minority filmmakers. Still, Black filmmakers have to request the use of the space well in advance, and often last-minute changes prohibit the screenings altogether. In addition, Black audiences do not support independent cinema the way they support commercial cinema. Few Blacks, if any, go out of their way, e.g., "downtown," to see Black independent films. Moreover, often the screenings are not well publicized. In any case, it is unfair to expect Black filmgoers to go out of their neighborhoods to view their own films.

It is organizations like the Black Filmmaker Foundation and Third World Newsreel that have been instrumental in screenings for these filmmakers, here and abroad. Black filmmakers have been able to premiere their work at many festivals, thereby attracting buyers and, vitally important, an audience. Still, the audience has to be cultivated in order to increase. According to film archivist Pearl Bowser, Black people need to be "cultivated" to appreciate and support their cinema. Interestingly, Kathleen Collins has stated that European audiences are especially appreciative of Black independent cinema: "Europe has a tradition of more personal filmmaking thriving outside the mainstream than in America. Personal filmmaking (what Americans call independent cinema) is a longstanding tradition in Europe. European audiences are more interested in unusual Black subjects." (Since this article deals only with Black American filmmakers, there is no information about their Black European counterparts. It is possible that they are victims of the same kind of indifference to their art in Europe as their American sisters are in the United States.)

Melvonna Ballenger: I screen my films mainly at festivals, and currently I distribute my own films. I'd be more interested in getting a distributor in another year. . . . Sometimes people are indifferent, and other times they really respond to the message in my first film, *Rain.* But I am eager to see the reaction to my second film, *Nappy-Headed Lady*, to see if it will stimulate discussion about the issues presented in the film.

Cynthia Ealey/Lyn Blum: We screened the tape in our community, making it accessible for community people to attend. The audience reaction to our tape has been very positive—most people have liked it a lot. We have had some constructive criticism. On the whole, people believe it to be good and want to use it.

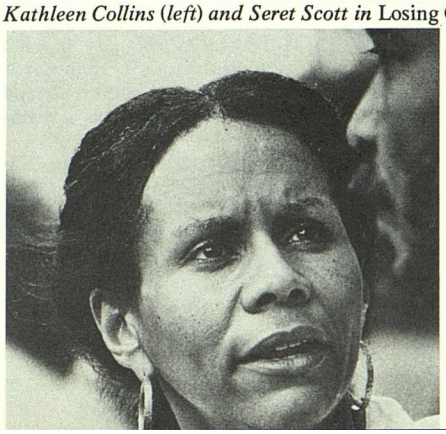
Kathe Sandler: The audience response has been very enthusiastic—particularly among dancers and artists. Film has a very broad appeal. This year, my first real year of distribution, I intend to promote it to Black audiences, feminist audiences, cultural audiences, to children, schools, and libraries. Perhaps the film will one day pay off the loans I borrowed to make it. Whatever it took, though, it's been the most important and exciting undertaking I've ever done.

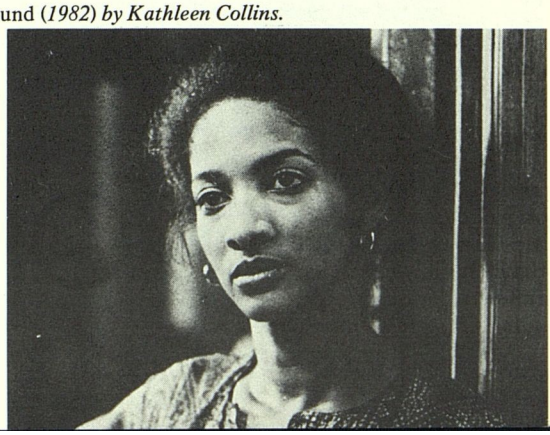
Fronza Woods: My films have been screened at private homes, in film festivals, and for New York City high school students participating in the Lincoln Center Film Society's Artist in the Schools program, for which I am a guest filmmaker. Audience reaction to my films has been very favorable, especially toward *Killing Time,* a comedy, which is more accessible to the public than *Fannie's Film*, which requires a real commitment by the audience. It is interesting that although *Fannie's Film* is about a Black woman, often white people in the audience will tell me how much she reminds them of their mothers or grandmothers, and will be quite moved by the film. It is not unusual to find people, especially older people, with moist eyes after *Fannie's Film*.

Pearl Bowser has referred to a particular aesthetic in Black films which makes them distinct enough to constitute a genre. This aesthetic encompasses the themes, the politics, and the technique (documentary, narrative, or experimental) of the filmmakers and the films. I asked the women filmmakers in the survey to comment on this and to expand on what they consider to be the Black aesthetic in their own films.

Melvonna Ballenger: I feel that as Black women we have a certain experience in this

Kathleen Collins (left) and Seret Scott in Losing Ground *(1982) by Kathleen Collins.*





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country and maybe we are addressing our particular needs, issues, and concerns more fully in relation to the whole Black population, as well as the general population. I notice several films, like Sharon Larkin's *A Different Image*, Barbara McCullough's *Fears Don't Have to Be*, Ijeoma Iloputaife's *African Woman*, Karen Guyot's *Pas Si Bo*, and Julie Dash's *Illusions*, as well as my own film *Nappy-Headed Lady* and a whole host of other films, are all dealing with our own identity in some way. I don't think that was really a priority among Black women until now, when we might possibly have a few more choices to be, do, and find out who we are than, say, our grandmothers and our mothers, who had a whole lot to contribute and teach us, so that we might take up where they left off in the preservation of our culture. I guess films by Black women bear our own world view and perspective, but don't necessarily exclude views of Black men and children.

Kathleen Collins: Yes, I would think that there is a Black aesthetic among Black women filmmakers. Black women are not white women by any means; we have different pasts, different approaches to life, and different attitudes. Historically, we come out of different traditions; sociologically, our preoccupations are different. However, I have a lot of trouble with this question because I do not feel that there has been a long-enough tradition. I think we are just getting to the stage where we are becoming masters of the craft.

Cynthia Ealey/Lyn Blum: Black women's films are few and far between, but of course they have a distinguishable style. Black women are free and open and realistic. The artfulness of our films, our songs, our poems, our books are definitely distinguishable from others.

Jean G. Facey: I do not see the need to differentiate between Black and white or woman and man as a specific genre.

Alile Sharon Larkin: Films by Black women could be seen as a specific genre, but one would find, on classifying them as such, that our films touch on every genre.

Fronza Woods: No, the only thing Black women filmmakers have in common is that they are Black. They are still making films about human beings. I don't think they (we) should be locked into that category or genre, if you want to call it that, because it limits us, our audience, and the way we are seen.

I asked the women whether they were in contact with other filmmakers and the response was mixed. A few of them associate professionally or personally/socially. Several belong to Black filmmakers' groups, such as the LA Black Filmmaker's Collective (BFC) and Blacklight: A Forum for International Black Cinema, in Chicago. Sometimes, if they cannot afford to pay for technical services on a project, they trade services with each other. They also share information on grants, screenings, books, etc., as Melvonna Ballenger noted.

Kathleen Collins: I am not really in contact with other filmmakers. To be quite honest I do not think of myself as a filmmaker in some ways. I am a filmmaker when I am making a movie. The rest of the time I might think of myself as a playwright or a writer. I think of these things as what I do when I get a good idea and I want to do something with it. The rest of the time, I am just another person walking down the street. I sort of take on the occupation of whatever I am doing at that time.

Alile Sharon Larkin: I attended UCLA film school at a time when the Black students were primarily women. I have attended conferences nationally and internationally where I have met and spent much time with other filmmakers. I've sat on panels and done radio interviews with other filmmakers. I'm also a co-founder of the BFC in LA, and a member of Blacklight and the Black Filmmaker Foundation Distribution Co-op.

Edie Lynch: I see the work of other Black women filmmakers and we often help each other with facilities, etc.

Fronza Woods: No, I am not in touch with other Black women filmmakers, much to my regret. Networking is not as easy as it seems.

My reasons for writing this article are probably obvious—I am just as hungry to see my image on the screen as these women are. In addition, I want to interest others in their films, in the hopes that they can gain more of an audience. It is my belief that the rewards for these women are greater than the drawbacks. We are rendered visible by them. There is power in having our images documented in the most powerful medium—film. It is ironic that Black people spent over $40 million last year on movies, according to the NAACP, but we are seldom, if ever, seen on screen as we really are in life. Further, the Black exploitation films of the '60s rescued the Hollywood film industry from certain bankruptcy, but 90% of Black actors are unemployed (Black Enterprise, *Sept. 1982*). *and only two Black directors worked on known projects last year—both are men.*

FILMOGRAPHY

MELVONNA M. BALLENGER

Rain (1982; now on video only, 15 min.): A young clerk-typist changes her routine lifestyle for a more fulfilling one, with rain as a metaphor.

Nappy-Headed Lady (1983; 16mm, 30 min.): How Yvonne endures hair straightening and then changes her hair in coming to appreciate her Blackness.

AYOKA CHENZIRA

Syvilla: They Dance to Her Drum (1979; 16mm, 25 min.): A documentary portrait of Syvilla Forte, a Black concert dancer and teacher. (Distributor: BFDS)

Hair Piece: A Film for Nappy-Headed People (1982; 16mm, 10 min.): An animated satire on redressing the legacy of Eurocentric beauty standards. (BFDS)

Secret Sounds Screaming: The Sexual Abuse of Children (1982; 3/4" video, 40 min.): Diverse women show this issue's relation to power and societal support. (BFDS)

Flamboyant Ladies Speak Out (1982; 3/4" video, 30 min.): A documentary on Black women artists who participated in the 1981 Disarmament Rally. (BFDS)

KATHLEEN COLLINS

The Cruz Brothers and Mrs. Malloy (1980; 16mm, 60 min.): A comedy about three Puerto Rican brothers and a dying Irish lady. (Coe Films)

Losing Ground (1982; 16mm, 86 min.): A musical comedy on a Black woman's quest for identity. (ICAP)

CYNTHIA EALEY/LYN BLUM

A Mother Is a Mother (1981; 3/4" video, 27 min.): A speakout by Black teenage mothers about their lives. (BFDS; Childcare Resource Center, Minneapolis)

JEAN G. FACEY

Happy Birthday, Dr. King (1983; 16mm, 25 min.): A documentary on efforts to honor Martin Luther King's birthday as a national holiday. (BFDS)

JACQUELINE A. FRAZIER

Hidden Memories (1977; super-8, 20 min.): A woman who has an abortion and the problems with her family and lover.

Azz Ezz Jazz Ensemble (1978; 3/4" video, 30 min.): Billy Harris' music and his songs about his children.

Black Radio Exclusive Conference (1978; 3/4" video, 30 min.; co-produced with G. Vel-Francis Young): Live coverage of a Los Angeles conference of all-Black radio station managers, DJ's, and bands.

Shipley Street (1981; 16mm, 30 min.): The racism and physical abuse experienced by the only Black girl in a Catholic school. (BFDS)

ALILE SHARON LARKIN

Your Children Come Back to You (1979; 16mm, 27 min.): The assimilation problems of a Black girl torn between Western and pan-African values. (BFDS)

A Different Image (1981; 16mm, 51 min.): A fictional film about the destructiveness of Western sexism. (BFDS)

EDIE LYNCH

Lost Control (1976; 16mm, 45 min.): Men and women confined in prison environments talk about drug problems. (BFDS)

Mister Magic (1977; 16mm, 30 min., bilingual): The dreams of Mexican children, portrayed by transforming their schoolroom into a magic show. (BFDS)

KATHE SANDLER

Remembering Thelma (1981; 16mm, 15 min.): A documentary on Thelma Hill, a pillar in the development of Black dance in America.

FRONZA WOODS

Killing Time (1978; 16mm, 8½ min.): A comedy about suicide. (BFDS)

Fannie's Film (1980; 16mm, 15 min.): A documentary profile of a Black cleaning woman. (BFDS)

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Her Image Fades As Her Voice Rises

A House Divided *(1913) by Alice Guy*
The Smiling Madame Beudet *(1923) by Germaine Dulac*
Light Reading *(1978) by Lis Rhodes*
Often During the Day *(1979) by Joanna Davis*

Lis Rhodes and Felicity Sparrow

I say to you: The future belongs to the film that cannot be told. The cinema can certainly tell a story, but you have to remember that the story is nothing. The story is surface. The seventh art, that of the screen, is depth rendered perceptible, the depth that lies beneath the surface; it is the musical ungraspable. . . . The image can be as complex as an orchestration since it may be composed of combined movements of expression and light.[1]

Sitting with her at the table, talking, her hands are poised over the typewriter. The words in our minds turn between description and analysis—to write an image, or to write about an image. This will be a subjective gathering of threads of meaning, a drawing of your attention to the spaces between four films that are dense with connections and difference; rather than forcing each woman into a false isolation, a separation from each other determined by history as it is written—as it has been read—to mean meanings other than HERS. Seen together the whole program of four films becomes a specifically constructed fiction in itself; through looking at and listening to the relationships between the filmmakers—their stories—new meanings emerge.

We shall try to make explicit the links and fractures between the four films made by different women, whose lives and work belong to different languages, but whose voices are always placed within similar constraints—constraints that we are familiar with but upon which most women are allowed no time or space to reflect.

> *. . . the idea came from the experience of sharing a kitchen with two men. Through realizing, over a period of time, specific things that they didn't notice, I was able to crystallize my own responses to particular tasks, particular parts of this room. . . . I discovered several areas (often very small) within the kitchen that I was very aware [were] becoming dirty, and enjoyed—or rather was urged—to clean. I developed a special relationship to these "corners"; I enjoyed the materials that constituted them and felt the repetitive cycle of things becoming dirty—the* way *each part became dirty and the different methods of cleaning. I became more aware of this as I realized that the men had no understanding for it. Why? Was it education? My conditioning as a woman? Was it to do with me in particular? Or is it just part of "women's nature"?* [2]

Traces made, traces removed; a woman is caught in mid-sentence, often during the day. The traces of sound from a radio, as a newscaster's voice surfaces and sinks in a burble of music, remain peripheral and obscured by the unnaturally loud sounds of tea being poured and bread being cut repeatedly throughout the film. *Often During the Day* opens with a series of still images of a kitchen, photographs that have been delicately hand-tinted by the filmmaker. A woman's voice is heard describing a particular kitchen space through its geography—with which she is intimately familiar—and through the various activities taking place within it. The room is referred to as the center of the house, and the voice describes the traces left by users of the kitchen (the spatterings of food left on the floor after the cat has finished eating; the little pieces of hair washed from a razor after a man has finished shaving). She reflects on the task of cleaning and repair, the "small unnecessary" tasks, the caring for a space.



The Smiling Madame Beudet *(1923) by Germaine Dulac*

> *When we first constructed the sink there was a gap between the enamel part and the wooden drawers that support it. The gap worried me because I saw [that] water trickled onto the things in the drawers. The others didn't notice, or didn't mind, and it took me several months to do anything about it.* [3]

The attention given to a domestic space that Joanna Davis speaks of seems to avoid a strict definition of housework—the unpaid servicing that it usually implies—and centers on her pleasure. It is a pleasure that is expressed in relation to certain surfaces and textures, "the way each part became dirty," and the placing of things. A different pleasure—the satisfaction of a job being done—is described by another voice, a man's, reading extracts from the testimonies of women's reflections on housework as catalogued in *The Sociology of Housework*.[4] Written extracts from this book also appear on the screen explaining and rationalizing this apparently obsessive behavior in terms of "collective standards." This conflict—can pleasure be pleasing if that pleasure can be seen as oppressive?—is expressed by the filmmaker through images showing the continual violation of her feelings for the space. In the final shot of the film, a long continuous take, the tea is poured, the bread is cut. An arm reaches across a woman's body to reach the butter. SHE refolds the paper carefully after he has used it. Their consumption leaves traces: a scattering of crumbs on the surface of the table, the stain of tea leaves on the draining board. Disturbed by the crumbs, she interrupts her meal to wipe them up.

This sense of impingement is confirmed by the quotations from *The Sociology of Housework*, which rest within the film as uneasily as the news from Armagh

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and the song "Dancing in the City." . . . The printed words emerge, on screen, from a thin veil of tissue paper with an authority Joanna Davis is extremely wary of. Perhaps it is to enforce this distance from her own experience that a man's voice reads the passages, just as the women quoted from the book are defined by the men to whom they are married: a carpenter's or lorry driver's wife. In *Often During the Day*, the woman is not socially placed by a particular man; the issues of sexual and economic control are recognized rather than suffered, and the historical determinants that underlie her feelings of pleasure and anxiety toward domestic tasks can be analyzed.

It is here that one of the central issues connecting the films is raised; it can be clearly seen in the different positioning of the women in *Often During the Day* and the two earlier films, *The Smiling Madame Beudet* and *A House Divided*. For Madame Beudet, it is not only the institution of marriage, but also the collusion of the Catholic Church in reinforcing that institution, which is questioned. In *A House Divided*, Alice Guy approaches the domestic relationship as a civil bargain, the external social control being secular rather than divine. The marital relationship of the couple is represented by the "house." The divine is privatized as romantic love, and now forms the fragile foundations of the "house."

The bourgeois home depicted in *A House Divided* had already developed the characteristics of the industrialized family, with separate but supposedly equal spheres of work: the woman within the home, the man outside. A similar division of work is apparent in the office, between the husband and his secretary. Thus the women are established as financially dependent, and their work is primarily concerned with providing service for the man. A misunderstanding, an assumption of mutual infidelity, shakes the foundation of the home; the house divides into silence. In a nice use of intertitles, communication between the wife and husband is via a series of notes carefully stored in a jar in the kitchen. The wife refuses to service the husband. The marriage bargain is broken and the humor in the film asserts itself, as a new "legal agreement" must be arranged. Only now can the wife reclaim her identity and independence: She deletes the words "your wife" at the end of a letter and signs her own name (albeit her name by marriage). By contrast, the cheerful independence of the unmarried secretary is established early on; with a pencil precariously tucked into her pinned-up hair, her fingers dance in lively mimicry of typewriting. Surely Alice Guy must have directed those office scenes gleefully, remembering when she herself was secretary to Leon Gaumont.

> *Daughter of a publisher, I had read widely and remembered a fair amount. I had done a bit of amateur theatricals and thought that one could probably do better. Arming myself with courage, I timidly proposed to Gaumont that I write one of two sketches and have them acted by friends. If anyone could have foreseen the course of development this would take, I would never have got this permission. My youth, my inexperience, my sex, all would have conspired against me. However, I obtained this permission, on the express condition that it didn't interfere with my secretarial duties.* [5]



Often During the Day *(1979) by Joanna Davis.*

A House Divided plays upon the women's independence within dependency, and the husband's apparent independence—although, left to himself, he is incapable of even deciding whether or not to wear a raincoat! But for Alice Guy, rationality overcomes doubt, and the divided house can be restored to unity: The infidelities are no more than misunderstandings. The contract is reestablished; romantic love can reassert itself. The yawning chasms of difference which determine a woman's position within marriage—so accurately portrayed by Germaine Dulac ten years later—were not part of Alice Guy's pragmatic optimism and trust in "equality."

Her determination and optimism were shared by many women at the time, in their fight for equal education, better working conditions, and the vote. However, this energy was rapidly dissipated by the outbreak of war, the ensuing nationalism and economic depression—and much of the work that Alice Guy and others had achieved was undermined. Her husband, Herbert Blaché, took over her production company in 1914. Outside producers were brought in, forcing Alice Guy out of the picture. She finally gave up going to production meetings because "Herbert said I would have embarassed the men, who wanted to smoke their cigars and spit in peace while discussing business." [6]

> *The character is not the center of importance in a scene, but the relationship of the images to one another; and as in every art it is not the external fact which is interesting, it is the emanation from within, a certain movement of things and people, viewed through the state of the soul.*[7] . . . *Plot or abstract film, the problem is the same. To touch the feelings through sight and . . . to give predominance to the image.* [8]

Some years before writing these words, Germaine Dulac made *The Smiling Madame Beudet*. Its plot, the surface, was simply described by a reviewer sixty years later: "Madame Beudet is married to a bombastic idiot, refuses to go to the opera with him, dreams up the nearly perfect murder and, when it fails, gets away with it because of Monsieur's lack of imagination." [9] But despite the simplicity of the plot, the film's intensity—its visual impact and depth of feeling—is achieved through an orchestration of emotive gestures and sophisticated special effects. Often described as the first feminist film, we share Madame Beudet's (and Germaine Dulac's) point of view throughout; her "voice," although silent, can only be that of the first person singular, as in *Often During the Day*.

"*In a quiet provincial town . . .*" Madame Beudet is isolated;

"*. . . behind the peaceful facades . . .*" she is trapped.

Her gaze through the window is blocked by the view of the prison opposite; inward-

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ly she sees the reflection of that institution in her wedding ring. Locked within the niceties of a middle-class marriage, she struggles to maintain her sanity. The interior space of her home reflects Madame Beudet's mental restriction; her gestures and expressions, constantly juxtaposed with those of her husband, reveal her emotional suffocation. The placing of a vase of flowers becomes symbolic of conflicting sensibilities; the key to her piano, the control of her means of expression. Her book



A House Divided (*1913*) *by Alice Guy*

of poetry provides a way for her to retreat into herself and her desires. Debussy, Baudelaire, and the ghostlike apparition of a male tennis player stepping out from the pages of a magazine are her only cultural reference points. But even these are impinged upon by the distorted face of Monsieur Beudet. Escape is impossible. Outside, the institutions of justice and religion have sealed and sanctified her dependency. Inside, "it was in this accumulation of other men's thoughts and experiences that she looked for affirmation of identity."[10] She is excluded. Monsieur Beudet's obstructive and destructive presence occupies both her physical and mental space. With the loss of space, she cannot act; in the absence of action, she remains without response. She is shown looking at herself, framed in a triple mirror, alone with her own reflection.

In case we need more clues, Germaine Dulac shows the completeness of Madame Beudet's mental decapitation: As Monsieur Beudet tears the head off her ornamental doll, an intertitle reads: "a doll is fragile. . . a bit like a woman." He puts the head in his pocket, and thus the cigar smokers can spit in peace and continue to exclude women from the "real" business and understanding of life. However, close-ups of Madame Beudet's face earlier in the film show her awareness of, and resignation to, Monsieur's stupidity. He thinks that she knows nothing about Faust, that women have no minds of their own (which might be true when their heads are forcibly removed), but her expression shows that she does know the story and recognizes it as one of male dominance and female dependency. The most bitter moment of the film—the center of the argument—is when he mistakes her intended murder of him for her own suicide. He is incapable of considering the possibility that she meant the bullet for him. The subtitle reads: "How could I ever live without you?" She is caught in *his* emotional dependency; she knows but cannot act.

The film ends where it began, unsmilingly—"in the quiet streets without horizon, under a low sky. . . united by habit." With Madame Beudet's back to the camera, we see the priest and Monsieur Beudet greet each other, indicating their collusion and her exclusion. The provincial town is the scene of her imprisonment; behind the facade of habit are the scenes of her attempts to escape. Germaine Dulac could not accept the "happy ending" provided by *A House Divided*, but the escape and the analysis of her situation remain private to Madame Beudet, voiced only in her fantasies. She cannot change her situation, however clearly she may understand it.

> *in her own voice she cried*
> *the end cannot be confused with the*
> *end that ended*
> *somewhere—but not here*
> *not here at the beginning. . .*[11]

Light Reading could be picking up the thread of Madame Beudet's story sixty years later. She can now record her spoken words, and we can finally hear them. As for her image. . . that has gone. The years of film and television and advertising have much to answer for.

The film begins in darkness. A woman's voice is heard over a black screen. "She" is spoken of as multiple subject—third-person singular and plural. Her voice continues until images appear on the screen; then she is silent. In the final section of the film, she begins again, looking at the images as these are moved and replaced, describing the piecing together of the film as she tries to piece together the tangled strands of her story.

The voice is questioning, searching. She will act. But how? Act against what? The bloodstained bed suggests a crime: Could it be *his* blood—was that the action denied to Madame Beudet? No answers are given; after the torrent of words at the beginning, all the film offers are closed images and more questions: Is it even blood on the bed? What fracture is there between seeing and certainty? Could it be *her* blood—rape/murder of the mind, of the body, of both? Her image has gone. If there has been a crime, "she" might still be the victim: How can a crime of such complexity and continuity be "solved"? The voice searches for clues, sifting through them, reading and rereading until the words and letters (in themselves harmless enough) loom up nightmarishly.

> *cutting the flow of her thoughts*
> *forcing her back within herself*
> *damned by the rattle of words*
> *words already sentenced*
> *imprisoned in meaning. . . .*[12]

The clues suggest that it is language that has trapped her, meanings that have excluded her, and a past that has been constructed to control her. Do we have to delve into history and reappropriate it? Perhaps there are other ways, like examining the scene of the crime as if we're in detective fiction. But magnifying the stain on the bed only reveals a blur; measuring with a ruler doesn't add up to much. She's forced back within herself and her own thoughts; she begins again cautiously:

> *she watched herself being looked at*
> *she looked at herself being watched*
> *but she could not perceive herself*
> *as the subject of the sentence.*[13]

Madame Beudet's light reading, her attempted escape into Baudelaire, can neither provide relief nor reflect her own thoughts and desires. Lis Rhodes recognizes that particular dead-end in *Light Reading*; she searches for other clues and other means of finding her own reflection. But she seems to be framed everywhere she looks: The cosmetic mirror gives her back only part of her image; photographing herself in a mirror gives her back another. There are fragmented images, multiple images and shadowy photographs, but they

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remain as enigmatic and implacable as the stain on the bed. The images (snapshots of a past) are torn up and rearranged, leaving gaps which she tries to measure with letters and figures—fragments.

Where do we begin? There is the past, always, which we can reread, reframe, just as we can try and re-place Alice Guy and Germaine Dulac. But it's not just a question of balancing out the injustices: "There is nothing connected with the staging of a motion picture that a woman cannot do as easily as a man."[14] It goes deeper than these crimes of exclusion and unequal opportunities.

Gertrude Stein said:

And now mountains do not cloud over
let us wash our hair and stare
stare at mountains.[15]

Her words, quoted, are like a light refrain running through the threads of meaning in *Light Reading*. The film ends with no single solution. But there is a beginning, of that she is positive. She will not be looked at but listened to:

she begins to reread
aloud [16]

In her own words, she can begin to find reflections of herself outside of herself. But nobody can say anything unless someone is listening. And we can't act without response...

I read to you and you read to me and we both read intently. And I waited for you and you waited for me and we both waited attentively. I find knitting to be a continuous occupation and I am full of gratitude because I realize how much I am indebted to the hands that wield the needles.[17]

1. Germaine Dulac, "Visual and Anti-Visual Films," *Le Rouge et le Noir* (July 1928). Reprinted in: *The Avant-Garde Film*, ed. P. Adam Sitney (New York: New York University Press, 1978).

2. Joanna Davis, from a conversation with Lis Rhodes and Felicity Sparrow (1978).

3. From *Often During the Day.*

4. Ann Oakley, *The Sociology of Housework* (London: Martin Robertson, 1974).

5. Alice Guy, *Autobiographie d'une Pionniere du Cinema* (Paris: Denoël/Gonthier, 1976). Alice Guy asked Gaumont to make her first film after seeing the Lumière Brothers' films. With the success of her first fiction film, Gaumont readily allowed his secretary to continue directorial work. She became head of Productions for Gaumont until her departure for the U.S. in 1910 and marriage to Herbert Blaché. In Fort Lee, N.J., she founded her own production company, Solax, which was successful until it folded in 1914. *A House Divided*, a Solax production, is one of a half-dozen of her short films to have been preserved—none of her features have survived. In 1923 she returned to France (divorced), where she remained until her death in 1968.

6. Alice Guy, "A Woman's Place in Photoplay Productions," *Moving Picture World* (July 11, 1914).

7. Germaine Dulac, "The Essence of the Cinema: The Visual Idea," in *Avant-Garde Film.*

8. Dulac, "Visual and Anti-Visual Films."

9. Helen MacKintosh, in *City Limits* (April 16, 1982).

10. P. D. James, *Innocent Blood* (London: Sphere Books, 1981).

11. From *Light Reading* (Lis Rhodes, 1978).

12, 13, 14. Ibid.

15. Gertrude Stein, "Sonatina Followed by Another," in *Bee Time Vine* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953).

16. From *Light Reading.*

17. Stein, "Sonatina."

Lis Rhodes is a filmmaker who lives in London.
Felicity Sparrow is the coordinator of Circles, a feminist distribution network for women's films, videotapes, performances, and slideshows, in London.

On the Way Back From the Movies

Dear Diane. He always complains.
He always has some reason to complain.
The children feel sorry for him, agree with his reasons
for complaining. The children aren't children.
He lectured them on the way to the movies about money.
I told him the money situation wasn't his situation.
Include me please, I told him.
On the way back from the movies he included me.
On the way back from the movies he conducted a Beethoven quartet.
I complained he distracted me. You don't conduct a quartet,
a quartet isn't conducted.
He thought the movie was great. What did I think.
I thought the movie didn't move,
like a painting. Even a series of portraits.
On the verge of impressionism, the colors varied and wavy,
but I couldn't get in, a movie should let you in,
shouldn't it. Hundreds of tiny points, the leaves.
I couldn't get in. I was excluded.
Maybe it was me. The young people were laughing.
Our sons were laughing. I laughed but it wasn't funny.
Peter didn't even laugh.
On the way back I ate the popcorn I bought for the way back,
a small box, buttered.
Don't write me any more letters.
I don't want to write you a letter back.

A TV Movie

In Japan, a father travels by railroad with his often-weeping wife to families of crime victims to do something, but not vengeance, for the son who died in his arms begging his father to avenge his death. At first, he wanted only the death of the murderer who killed the son only because he happened to be the one passing by. Everything is wrong in my family and my life. From the avenue of the shopping center comes the sound of an ambulance or fire engine as in a movie from England, the sound I didn't think our emergency vehicles made. I ask my husband if he would mind sleeping downstairs. He doesn't mind. It's like a movie. I turn on the light to write it down. I must stop thinking how this reads. I must say what must be said and already I've changed it. I deceive myself with changes. That's been changed. If I dream, the dream will be to the siren what it was to the TV movie. The words accumulate by themselves. Some words have to be changed.

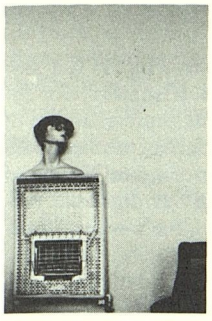
Poetry by Phyllis Koestenbaum, who taught creative writing at San Francisco State University until not rehired last year, and has published four books of poems, the latest, That Nakedness, *from Marie Dern's Jungle Garden Press.*

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Tilly Lloyd

NOT A TRAVELOGUE



New zealand's pseudo-blend of Maoritanga[1] and high-tech devonshire scones is SSE of the hong kong shop over, SSW of soweto, and NN of the penguins. We know a compulsory englandette. And more than a touch of uncle sam. Since the men have always been obsessed with sheep, new zealand sports a 3rd world dollar and commercially we're just a new knot on australia's apron string. This is not a happy software marriage, and is yet to be analyzed by a roving Jan Morris. For the moment let's just note a couple of obvious things. Of conundrums and destinations new zealand has plenty. The former are predominantly inward (the Great NZ Clobbering Machine scrunches any talented act) and the latter are predominantly outward (though most tickets are bought "return" because of our ambivalent parochial shuffle).

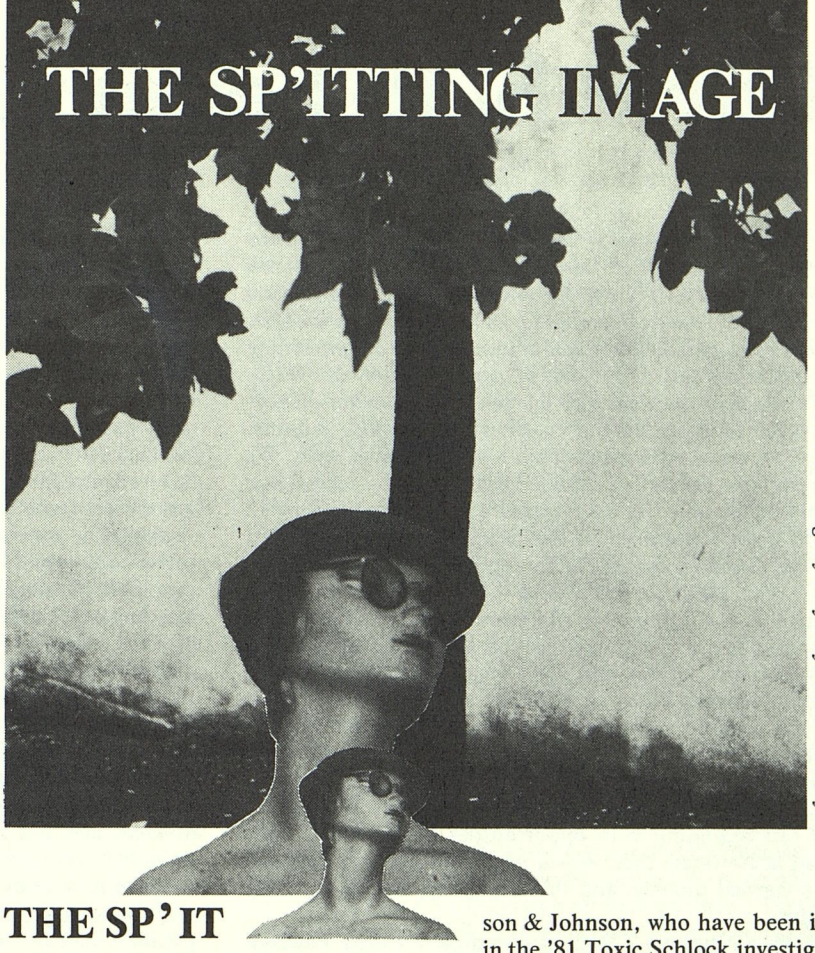
FX: CANNED IMPORTS

Yet this same country was first to permit national (= federal) enfranchisement for women, and this was secured by the NZ suffragettes on 19th September 1893. On a global scale it can still astonish that we could land so fat a fish in such a small, remote, and new piece of english imperialism. It's greeted with some pride even while the vote as a symbol of equality has smelt distinctly suspect since the 20th September that same year. And particularly so for the lateral thinkers of the local Women's Liberation Networks—historical triumph may well be a triumph but it doesn't translate at all well into today's schemes for anarcholezzo inspirations.

Despite any efforts to the contrary the NZ 2nd wave has been more or less fashioned on the northern hemisphere model. This is particularly so with the Women's Liberation Networks within what is still often called the Women's Movement. Our analysis, tactics, and profiles are self-defined, but perhaps the reciprocity of influence was greater in the late '60s. And surely that can't merely be because NZ as a whole has been so much more americanized since then? It would be too simplistic to put it down to the US media machine, for that is merely one vehicle of the great american pie hype (♂) or the global bakery dream (♀). Insomnia prevailing, NZ Women's Suffrage Day is a good day for tokenism, and a good day for microcosms. It reveals the NZWLM in all her warts, splits, and (semi) separatisms—the same divisions inherent to westernized feminism anywhere. Try these two examples.

FX: CANNED APPLAUSE.

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Photomontage by Tilly Lloyd and Jill Carolyn.

THE SP'IT

WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE DAY, 1982, WELLINGTON.

A turgid radio show collectif Went Too Far on the local "Access" Radio station with a half-hour program designed to cast nasturtiums on the medical industry and anything else playing at male domination. They achieved publicity for all of the feminist "isms" (including heightism). The message was pro Self-Help organizing (even the much-maligned CR groups) and their attitude reeked of insolence. They figured the problems of women's oppression were bigger than anything assertiveness training, voting, or hip restaurant management could solve, and the show quarreled with anything testerical in eye shot.

Ironically Radio Access is a "borrowed time" radio station—normally it's used for live broadcasting of government sittings! And typically, the Women's Suffrage Day show had no funding. The members of the For-This-Show-Only are actually union and student provocateurs, workers from the local Hecate Women's Health Collective, entrepreneurs of bad taste Lesbian pragmatica, and abortionists.

FX: CANNED LAUGHTER AND SHRIEKING

THE IMAGE

WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE DAY, 1982, AUCKLAND.

"Media Women" presented their peak time television show, the "1982 Awards for Women." They were bankrolled by Johnson & Johnson, who have been implicated in the '81 Toxic Schlock investigations but who in any case manipulate women for "hygienic" profit. The live telecast was racist glam all the way.

Sliced between a documentary on some advances of all new zealand women, they paid a bourgeois tribute to a handful who were advancing more noticeably. Put another way, they saw merit in giving prizes for "good" feminism which is in sore contradiction to what we learnt on our sisters' knees.

The ideological flatulence of the farce was severely criticized by the "We Know What's Best For You and Us" earnestinas of urban culturalism. The gala (gal/ah?) was also vehemently picketed by the auckland branch of the Failure Is a Feminist Issue lobby, the authors (approx. 400) of the new book "Phuck-Phat-Let's-Dance," and the old dykes haime quartet. The Women's Right to Fart brigade produced a lofty position paper and the women's No Confidence ballot option, who stayed home because of the foul weather, turned the sound down on the box and held another meeting.

Meanwhile, back at the show, the coregroup for The Meek Don't Want It were tied up pouring concrete into the backstage toilets. It was a real have.

FX: CANNED SILENCE

Concept of the Sp'itting Image somewhat plagiarized from Ian Lee's "The Third Wor'd War."

1. Maori culture.

Tilly Lloyd has contributed to Girl's Own (Sydney), Bitches Witches and Dykes (Wellington), and Radio With Wurds (Florence).

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If I Ever Stop Believing...

Diana Agosta and Barbara Osborn

In this panel held in November 1982, we asked Christine Choy (CC), Michelle Citron (MC), Margia Kramer (MK), Deborah May (DM), Mira Nair (MN), and Deborah Shaffer (DS) to reflect on their histories as women documentary film- and video-makers. Much of their work has been seminal to independent documentary, and their experiences include a variety of aspects of film- and video-making. We've edited the transcript considerably, sometimes rearranging its order to consolidate discussions on particular subjects, but we tried to retain each participant's meaning and style. We asked the panel one central question: What are your personal and political reasons for choosing the forms and subjects in your work?*

DS: In 1969 I got introduced to the peace movement, the New Left, and the women's movement in rapid succession. It was a pretty heady year. I also got introduced to alternative filmmaking at the same time. Until that time all I knew from films was Saturday afternoon. I met a group of people in an organization called Newsreel, which was making and distributing political and social documentaries—mostly anti-war films but also films about other movements, things that were happening on campuses and in communities around the country. So my interest in film was initially political, in film as an organizing tool. But without the women's movement, I don't think I ever would have become a filmmaker. There were just beginning to be opportunities for women in filmmaking, and at Newsreel there was a mini-revolution to train the women. We learned quickly, and that really opened doors to my career in film.

After leaving Newsreel I formed a company called Pandora Films with other women I knew at Newsreel. We made two films—one on sex education called *How about You*, a half-hour black and white film for high school students. Then we made a film called *Chris and Bernie*, about two single mothers, divorced women trying to cope with their children and develop their careers.

After that I felt somewhat ghetto-ized in two respects: I was making short documentaries that were very limited in terms of available distribution, and I felt confined to women's issues. I think it's very important that women filmmakers are now taking on a whole range of subjects rather than being confined to "purely women's themes." That could be a dangerous tendency, particularly in the bigger film industry, where women are hired only when it's a "women's subject." It's real gratifying to me that at First-Run Features [which commercially distributes independently produced films] we have films directed by women on a range of subjects. Still, I think it's important that women continue to make films that are primarily of interest to women, on issues that other people aren't going to deal with in the way we can.

Now I'm co-producing a film on DES for the PBS "Matters of Life and Death" series, and I'm researching a film on immigrants, on undocumented workers in the urban Northeast. The most recent film I did was called *The Wobblies*, an hour and a half documentary about a labor union at the turn of the century. It intrigued me because women played a key role in it, and it was the first union that tried to organize women.

CC: I know Deborah because we were in the same organization many years ago—lots of fights and disagreements. Ironically, Deborah's consciousness was raised because the film industry is pretty much white male-dominated, technically and in terms of who's directing. It's a microcosm of our society as a whole. So at Newsreel, women got together and demanded that the organization deal with what would enhance *our* directing, *our* point of view.

My situation is a bit different because I am not only a woman but a national minority. When I joined Newsreel in 1971, I saw white people making films about Blacks and Hispanics, for instance. And I felt there was a lack of depth in the representation of how minorities really feel in this country. A few of us began to recognize that to deal with issues affecting our community (Third World communities), it would be better to take our demands further and to take control of the whole process. That's when I seriously began to engage in filmmaking.

I got into filmmaking for subjective as well as objective reasons. Subjectively, I felt that as an immigrant coming to this country, I encountered a lot of issues and experiences which I wasn't able to verbalize or articulate. Filmmaking in some way seemed nonverbal, although today I realize it's very verbal—not only writing proposals 100 pages long but also dealing with all the corporations, etc. Anyway, I needed to express these experiences from my point of view. Minority women encounter different kinds of pressure within the society: economic, social, and cultural.

Secondly, an objective reason or need I felt at that time (the early '70s) was that minority women needed to be able to work with the overall women's movement—but the movement never really got into race or class. I started to realize that racism and class issues are inseparable from other issues. They need to be addressed, and not only from the side of the white American. I thought it was about time to bring up the minorities' point of view, to make it more balanced. I'm using the term "minority" quantitatively, since people of color all over the world are a much larger population. I'm talking qualitatively in terms of rights in this country.

I also felt this need to get into filmmaking to express some of the needs and experiences of Asian-American sisters in this country. In television and the mass media, you rarely see any Asian-American announcers. Generally Asian-American women are depicted as sexy stereotypes, and in return most are very shy in front of the camera. They don't feel they can present anything important or contribute anything to the overall American culture or history. So I felt it was my own responsibility to present our contribution to America. Recently the *New York Times* printed it very clearly: One out of four persons in New York City is foreign-born; 50% are minorities. But look at Channel 13, PBS programming. It hardly deals with that sector of the population. Obviously that comes down to the dollar question.

Unfortunately, although you want to present women's issues and minority issues and Asian-American issues, somehow you gradually get forced into this confined area—that's the only area people recognize you can do. Once, I wanted to do something on the automation-cybernation of industry; nobody wanted to give me a cent. That's an institutionalization of racism and sexism.

And how are we going to be able to counteract that? I think I can't do it myself, as an individual. I need the voices, for example, of other people who work within institutions who are able to see that confinement as a way of perpetuating the same stereotypes, but in a much more sophisticated and institutionalized manner.

I am working on a piece right now called *Delta Mississippi Chinese Between Blacks and Whites*, a 90-minute documentary with dramatic elements. I'm influenced by Italian neo-realism—using a particular situation very far removed from your personal reality but depicting a larger universal phenomenon. In this case, it's the Chinese caught like a middle-man minority between white planters and Black slaves. It's a system basically built for two in the South. When the third element comes in, what kind of change takes place? In some ways this film is a very subjective translation of the Mississippi situation because, as an immigrant, I've been influenced culturally and historically by both white and Black Americans. The majority of the Chinese tend to recognize the credibility of white America, and they deny that they have had any kind of influence from other minorities... and I think I've figured

*Michelle was able to participate in the discussion from her phone in Chicago through the wonders of modern technology and the generosity of Roberta Taseley and Joyce Thompson from the NYU Interactive Communications Center. Roberta and Joyce hooked up a phone conference between Michelle and our meeting room.

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out why. They inherit the southern mentality of the colonizer and perpetuate it against other minorities. So it appears that I am very critical of my own people sometimes. I mean I would never be who I am today without the civil rights movement, without a Black struggle, without a women's movement in the early '70s. Many of us filmmakers tend to forget others who have paved the road before us. Without that kind of struggle, I would never be able to make films today. And filmmaking is a way to try to eliminate the racism in this country.

MK: I make videotapes. I started out as a visual artist and did a work on Jean Seberg and the Freedom of Information Act. I got her file from the FBI after she died and I made a tape about her, her file, and her media life. Also, I just finished editing a videotape which is a documentary of a street festival called "No More Witchhunts." The festival was held to protest neo-McCarthyism and took place right out here on Astor Place on June 19, 1981.

What I'm working on now is a tape called *Progress (Memory)* about the evolution of communications, technology, and national security. Basically I'm interested in access to and freedom of information. I noticed in the *New York Times* today that the Reagan Administration is cutting back on the collection of statistics—that's health statistics and all kinds—that affect OSHA. They're eliminating hundreds of government publications or charging large sums of money for them and reducing the staff of the National Archives, making less historical material available. All that serves to reduce the freedom of information in the U.S.

The tape I'm making about progress and memory looks at what makes up the legitimacy of democratic government in the United States. The idea of industrial progress and technological progress has always been married to social progress, generally speaking. The tape looks at how the military has replaced social progress with technology in the equation that defines the legitimacy of government. National security has become a kind of password. Security and protection have replaced social benefits and social welfare. The tape looks at how communications are increasingly designed for the military, for technological advancement and transnational exchange. It examines how crucial information is to our existence, individually and as a democracy, and how there's no access to it.

The problem is really tremendous and growing in the United States because multinational private corporations have control over communications systems. Although in my work I have been concerned with government, there is a way people may have access to government by trying to get things declassified. But nobody has any access to private corporations. They control the privacy of their information because they have First Amendment rights. This has to be worked out: That is, how can we regulate private enterprise so it's not monopolizing communications throughout the world?

HC: What I thought was fascinating about your Seberg tape—I saw it at the Museum of Modern Art—was the way it was installed, having to look at the tape through the FBI files and the *New York Times* articles.

MK: Right, I don't only make tapes; I build installations with them. That's the art part left over from being an artist, I guess. The tapes can exist by themselves and they also collaborate with the materials in the installations. It's a way to get people to experience by just walking through something. I grew up in Coney Island and the thing that really fascinated me was going to these horror houses. I think my installations are a remnant of being affected in that way. As you walk through, something reaches out to you, like a furry, hairy hand, so that you feel scared or threatened or cajoled.

But I am really concerned with just one subject—freedom of information. I came to this because I was working for the State Department, taking around an art exhibition in Eastern Europe, and it was a routine kind of thing to be under surveillance by their government. It was a horrifying experience. And the artists I met there were so eager to exercise the kinds of rights that we have in America, rights that artists never exercise much in their work here, that I just wanted to focus on this.

I am trying to convince people to make a bridge between something intellectual and the more emotional place where we live.

DM: I also came to filmmaking from art. I was a graphic artist, not a fine artist, designing posters, publicity, and sets—mostly in theaters in South Africa. I was working in theaters outside of the mainstream like community theaters that were multiracial. Then I became involved in literacy campaigns and health education workshops, and got involved in film by looking for a suitable medium for whatever program we were doing.

I became interested in the history of the women's movement in South Africa, which was hardly documented and which very few people knew about. In fact there was an enormous women's movement in the '50s in South Africa, made up mainly of the women's movement of the ANC, a Black organization, although the Indian Women's League, the Colored Women's Congress League, and Democrats, a white women's league, were active as well. All that was a history which had been completely ignored by both the Left and the Right in South Africa.

A friend of mine and I decided to make a documentary film on that movement. So I dove in the deep end, not really knowing much about film at all, and managed to persuade people to fund it. I think it was purely because people were taken by the idea. It's quite amazing that anyone gave us any money considering I'd no experience.

At the moment I am working on another film on South Africa which is based on a play done in New York, mainly by Black South Africans. It looks at a South African woman's life, a Black woman who's a domestic. It's called *The Long Journey of Poppie Nongena,* and was written originally as a novel by an Afrikaans woman called Elsa Sheber. It's quite extraordinary because it deals with the facts of a woman's life in a lot of detail, and gives a side of Black people's lives in South Africa which hasn't been touched or explored before. I'm making a documentary around the theater production, because the play deals with the actors' lives or the lives their mothers led. So it's a reflection of their own lives. There are points where reality and performance become blurred and art and politics also become blurred. I hope to get across this kind of information in a way that will appeal to a much broader audience than, for example, a political documentary on South Africa.

MN: How did you come to this country?

DM: It was when we finished shooting the footage for the other film called *You Have Struck a Rock*—the title's actually from a song made up for a big demonstration: "You have touched a woman, You have struck a rock, You will be crushed." As we were shooting, security men followed us and we were scared of being caught and having the film confiscated. So every day we'd ship the film out through a contact I had. There was a choice of either cutting the film in London or cutting it here, so I decided to cut it here.

The film deals with a period of history in which the women's contribution has certainly been neglected. So many times these young kids would come out of these screenings and say, "We never knew we had that kind of history; we never knew this about our grandmothers." That's been incredibly important. In some way the film broke a barrier about women getting involved in some of the organizing and political activities; it seemed to break the ice and established some kind of credibility. Even if it never had any other kind of success, that is really important.

DS: Does it affect you being a white Zimbabwean making films on Black Africans?

DM: I've always worked in mixed groups. I think one of the most pressing needs of filmmaking in Zimbabwe and South Africa is that it's nearly all white people who have the technical skills. Most of the Black people I've worked with are consultants or writers, not in technical positions, just because they never had the training. That's changing in Zimbabwe now. They've got a lot of programs to train Black Zimbabweans in film and television and radio and other communications.

MN: It's interesting to hear all these other stories. Mine is so different, but it still has so many elements of everybody else's. During the civil rights and women's movement that everybody's spoken of, I was 13 years old, in a very small hicktown in a remote part of India. I didn't quite know all this was happening in the rest of the world. It was a very protected life, very much like what Chris

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described as a life "being colonized by the colonizer." My father worked for the relics of the British Raj, and although we're very Indian, we were quite obsessed with what the British had left behind. It did seem odd that I spoke English better than all the other Indian languages that I knew. I always felt that I wanted something different, and this eventually led me to join a theater which was begun by a number of Indian students. Of course, we only had English plays to perform. What theater did for me in India was to give me a sense of great independence, without the traditional baggage of being an Indian woman, being submissive and the rest of it. This independence got me to Boston, where I studied as an undergraduate. Then I stumbled into filmmaking.

My feelings of being a guest in so many worlds led me to make my most recent film, *So Far from India.* When I started I had a voice and I had a vision, but I didn't quite know the language and elements to use to tell the story. So I did what I saw many documentarians around me doing—picked a subject and researched it. Gradually the subject changed by itself. I met 150 Indians living in New York, and picked this man who was working in a subway newsstand, and inherited his story. We followed him in quite a traditional documentary style. It came out that two weeks before he left India—in a very mythical, old-fashioned way, to seek his fortune in America—he was married off by his family to a village girl in order that he not marry a foreigner here. I didn't know this when I first met him; over six months of filming we gradually unraveled the story. The woman became pregnant after two weeks of being married to him and she had a son in India. He was determined to go back to India to see his son. By that time we had gotten so close to him and he had gotten so used to us, the crew, that we decided to follow him. We also happened to get a grant at the right minute. So we went to India and inherited the story of his family and the story of his wife, who emerged as a very strong character. The film is not just about a husband who leaves his wife behind but also about the position of a woman without a husband, because a husband in that community literally defines your presence or your absence.

I really feel what Deborah was saying about being locked into one area. I mean, a feminist is something I surely consider myself, but I don't describe myself as that right off the bat. So I hesitate—I don't want this film to be described as a "woman's film," though it has very much to do with women and men and what makes us what we are.

I find myself very intrigued and excited by the documentary forms, but I'm finding that this need to tell stories is propelling me more toward dramatic film. I want more control, but I'm still interested in the neo-realism which puts drama in a context which is very authentic. My next project—the one that's in my head right now—has to do with mail-order brides. Immigrants, Indians, are very, very careful about maintaining their purity in terms of their caste or community. The whole milieu determines that you marry someone who will keep this milieu going. This is very common; it's not an amazing phenomenon even in America right now. The story is about a woman who is raised—not in the poor and exotic part of India that we all know here in America—but in something that is a mix of all these colonial and Indian backgrounds—middle-class India. So this woman, who in the eyes of middle-class Indians is a "liberated" woman, is placed in an arranged marriage, leaves her country not just to a strange country but also to a strange man, who has been programmed to expect a certain kind of woman. And she has to conform.

MC: Well, my background is really different, and in a way I also feel slightly strange, being on this panel, because I'm not really a documentary filmmaker, even though I've made one documentary. I started getting interested in film when I was in graduate school in cognitive psychology. At the same time my political consciousness got turned around. I was in Madison in the very late 1960s and early '70s, and was very affected by what was going on there with the New Left and the women's movement, and somehow saw film as a way to articulate what I was feeling.

When I started making films I had a strong notion—this is simplistically stated—new forms for new contents. What it meant was that I made a lot of films that were formally experimental and were about women's issues. I realize now that was because I come from a working-class/lower-middle-class background and there was a part of me that was relentlessly culturally upwardly mobile. I somehow associated experimental films with art, with something better than mere documentary. And so I would make these experimental films and show them around to women, and they would be totally uninterested in what was going on; there was absolutely no communication. It forced me to reevaluate what I was doing. At that point I did make a documentary film called *Parthenogenesis,* about a woman musician who was a classical violinist in Boston, and her student, my sister. But I felt very limited with documentary.

Since then, I've been making films that are clearly hybrids. My last film was *Daughter Rite*, about mothers and daughters. It was a hybrid in that the narrative portions were shot to look like documentary, like *cinema verité.* The literal documentary portions of the film—home movies taken of my mother, my sister, and myself by my father—were optically printed in an experimental film way, and the entire film was a narrative. It was successful in that it was not a traditional narrative, not a traditional documentary, but it was accessible to people who had no experience in any kind of avant-garde film. I was able to communicate with slightly new forms to women who didn't have any experience with those forms at all.

The film I'm working on now—*What You Take for Granted. . . ,* which is feature-length—is about women and work. It's about token women, women who are very isolated in nontraditional jobs, blue-collar and professional jobs. The film is about the difference between blue-collar work and professional work in our culture, and the contradictions for women in those positions—psychologically, historically, politically, socially. And once again, it's a hybrid. The film consists of six women who talk about their experiences in a talking-heads format. Then two of the women, a doctor and a truck driver, meet through a contrivance, and there's a narrative spin-off. The film alternates between narrative and the talking heads, all of which are acted. The whole film places the two women and the narrative in a broader historical context. And it also tries to play off between public and private more than a traditional narrative would. I feel documentary film is very good at presenting the public sphere, which has been extremely important for women, but is not necessarily good at presenting the private sphere. I think that the intersection between the public and the private—who we are publicly and how we present ourselves publicly as opposed to who we might be privately—is intriguing. And it's very much related to work.

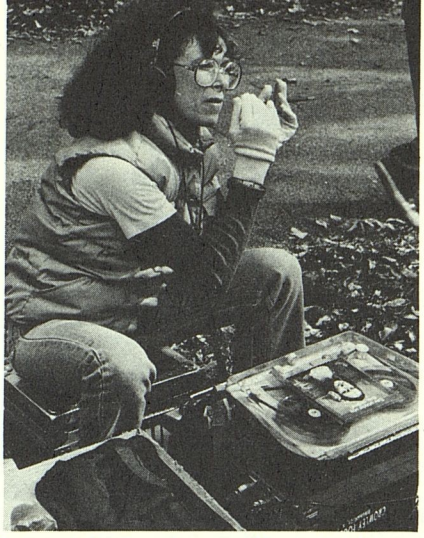
THE FIRST THING IS MONEY

DS: We used to make films for so little money and I was very grateful for that training. I mean, I went from making films for $2,000 to *The Wobblies*, which cost $180,000. I was pretty spoiled when I finished *The Wobblies*, because it was reasonably successful. It premiered at the New York Film Festival; it's been shown in theaters around the country; it's been in a lot of foreign festivals. And I figured: Great, this is easy, now I've got it made. I'll write another proposal and get some more money. Guess what? No money.

Whatever the sources have been that have supported the independent film community in the past few years are shrinking to almost nothing. I'm coming to grips with the grim fact that it's almost like starting all over again—starting a film with no money, having a job, working nights and weekends, asking my friends to work for free, stealing film stock—all the ways we started out. I feel like we've been doing it for a long time already, for chrissake, I'm tired of it! And I don't feel there's any hope right now for making films any other way, at least under the present administration.

CC: Talking about the funding situation, I just came back from the meeting at the PBS National Conference where all the station masters get together and sell their products. The main debate within the conference was about the $12 million AT&T put out to expand the MacNeil-Lehrer Report as a challenge grant. What does that mean? It means $5 million has to come from the program fund and $5 million from all the different stations. Overall, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting received $23 million from Congress. After allocating all this money to MacNeil-Lehrer, Frontline, American Playhouse, etc., there's very little left for independents. There was a big controversy around that issue.

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Left to right: Soundwoman Phoebe Bindinger for Michelle Citron's What You Take for Granted... *(1983); Mira Nair's* So Far from India *(1982), photo by Mitchell Epstein; Christine Choy filming* Delta Mississippi Chinese Between Blacks and Whites *(1983), photo by Yuet Fang Ho.*

Personally, I'm a little fortunate because I got a grant just before the change in administration. But you can't look at yourself as a fortunate person—you have to look at the economic situation as a whole. And Reagan cut all the grantors—NEA, NEH. He is pledging that the private sector is going to match the remaining money, but obviously that's ludicrous. The private sector will contribute money only for their own sake. For instance, you know the American Masterpiece Theater? Now it's called Mobil Theater. That's what the future is going to look like. It's the way public broadcasting is going to promote private entities, openly advertising corporate products.

I've been looking at it dialectically. There was a period of time when, with large corporation money and federal money, the independents (including myself) went off in their individualistic manner, and in the process many of us gained experience. But now there is a change, and independents have to begin to consolidate and organize, pool their resources and equipment, and be able to cooperate.

MK: Well, I started working in video because it was the cheapest thing I could find that could hold all the information that I had together. I was just talking to Chris Choy about working in video and she said, "Well, you have to do CMX editing; it costs a lot of money." You don't have to do CMX editing; you can just work on a console, you can work for $20 an hour in somebody's studio. But, of course, you're left with something which isn't the best technically, especially because these machines which are used by a lot of people are always breaking down—you're never sure whether they're going to eat your tape. It's a struggle, but it really is the cheapest way to get something together and get it out. And I'm for video because it's the medium of now—I mean everybody watches TV.

MC: Video has a kind of immediacy. When I work, even though I eventually end up with film, I first make videotapes. Before I film I usually conduct interviews and do a tremendous amount of research. So in the film I'm making about work, I interviewed about 50 women on both audiotape and videotape and used all that information as the basis of the film script. I don't even think that film is better than video, except for the ease of distribution at this point in history.

DS: From my point of view, one of the major problems with video is distribution. This is a remnant of my Newsreel training—the idea that films are made to be used. My whole first year with Newsreel I didn't make films at all; I went out with them every night and showed them at churches and community groups and dormitories. Wherever anyone would give us a blank wall, we'd show up with a projector.

To me, distribution is important for two reasons. One, it's important that as many people as possible see the films, that we broaden our public. And there's always been this dream I'm beginning to think is crazy—that slowly we could begin to earn back through distribution what the films cost to make, instead of being dependent on this grant system, which I find obnoxious anyway. Even when it's working, it's begging people with a lot of money to give you a little bit of it to make a film. First-Run Features is an attempt to commercially distribute independently produced films —films that don't usually get in theaters. It's working with moderate success, but it's a struggle. It's not like Newsreel partly because we're all older and have more financial needs, and people aren't in a position to volunteer.

CC: We need to experiment in new forms of distribution. Distribution is tied to the product itself. For this film on Mississippi, I'm planning to transfer the film footage to tape, which will be cut for television and video release. But at the same time there remains the negative for the film version. There is a possibility to produce both, if the financing and people power are available. Television or cable is relatively convenient for reaching a large audience, but the film format is important for Third World countries and this country too.

DM: Yes, the other problem with video is distributing outside of America. Europe, for example, is on a different system, and there are places in Third World countries that just don't have video facilities.

DS: In Latin America, for instance, it's even difficult to distribute North American independent films because the circuits are all in 35mm.

FORM AND QUALITY

DS: The reason that documentaries traditionally don't get much distribution is that traditionally they're not very good, they're boring. I'm personally more interested in seeing the quality improve, whatever the form, whatever form is appropriate to content. I feel strongly that among filmmakers like us, among independent filmmakers, we have to encourage the growth of quality of every form, including traditional fiction, genre films, experimental films. I get real nervous when I hear these discussions about the correct form for film. I think that what form can express best what somebody wants to say depends a lot on the person. For me, it's more of a challenge to work with real people and to film real people. For me, fiction would be putting words in people's mouths, and that's not interesting to me. I understand that for people who make fiction and who work with actors, that's not what it is to them—it's shaping a way to say something that they want to say. My way of trying to shape what I want to say is to struggle with all the mistakes that real people make. I find that a vital process and a vital way to work.

MC: I agree with Deborah. I think it's really important that all kinds of films get supported, get made. I don't believe at all in the domination or hierarchy of forms—and that's what I'm trying to say in my own film work. I think all film forms are important tools to get at what you're trying to say.

MK: Since *Atomic Cafe* got such wide distribution and made so much money, I don't think people feel any longer that documentary can't be entertaining. That kind of editing on that material for a feature-length film was a form I think nobody thought could go over. It was pretty much the same thing over and over and over

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again, but it fell together partly because of what it was about and partly because it was done so well. But technically, it was not consistently good—because of its magnification, the image often fell apart. So it all depends on what kind of quality you're talking about.

For me, it's the quality of the content that's really important. I come from a different kind of background so I don't feel any constraints about using one documentary style over any other, drama over documentary—you can use any kind as long as you get across the content.

MN: I have a problem, though, with most so-called political films. I think there's an attitude that since the films are on such important issues, be it wife-beating or abortion or political prisoners in India, you have to like the films; the audience must be sympathetic because the issues are so obviously right. I feel very much for those films, and I certainly think they are important and deserve audiences and ought to be seen. But they definitely sacrifice quality in a way that it needn't be sacrificed, especially in the medium of film.

I don't know how many films I've seen about political issues that could just as effectively be slide shows or panel discussions. They show pictures and they have talk. You could make these films doubly, trebly, a hundred times more effective if more care was put into the form. You have to be more ambitious, almost more manipulative, or, I hesitate to use the word, artistic. You have to use the medium.

Deborah mentioned earlier she'd been interviewing Joris Ivens, and he's such a fantastic example of what I like in political films, because he makes films that are so rooted in time, rooted in a certain opinion, and yet they last. And they last because of the beauty, the poetry that goes into them. There are so few films that concern themselves with issues that Ivens raises and that present themselves in such a manner.

You can even use dramatic elements—I don't mean fictionalized but dramatic in terms of editing, involvement with the human characters, allowing people to have a certain space within which we can read their lives instead of always giving us the messages of their lives, which, in my opinion, makes people in these films mouth political concerns, more like specimens, like in some anthropological films.

CC: I agree with Mira that form and content should be combined, as Eisenstein said, all the time. But that also depends on the historical period, and unfortunately political filmmaking in America has been very short-lived. In the 1930s it lasted briefly, and in the 1960s Newsreel was one of the pioneers in political filmmaking. There was a kind of desperation in the 1960s and '70s, and many of us made films coming out of those needs and desperation. So sometimes, I would say, content does precede form.

DS: There's something Mira said I want to get back to. I think you got to the real point, which is: How effective are our films? I sometimes say that I'd like to make films that make people laugh or make people cry. I'm a sucker for a good movie; I'd love for my documentaries to be really right-on political documentaries and to have a few laughs and all the things that a really good movie should have. That's one bad legacy that we came out of Newsreel with, which goes back to the whole question of agit-prop.

MN: What's agit-prop?

DS: Agitational propaganda. Agit-prop was a term that we used for films that were specifically meant to do some political education task, to rally people, to organize people to go on an anti-war march. And they worked. I was showing films in Ann Arbor and people would march on the ROTC building when the film ended.

But there was one critical mistake in the early Newsreel days. This was about the time that the avant-garde film scene and the political film scene separated, which is something that wasn't true, for instance, in the Soviet Union; Dziga Vertov's films were incredibly political and they were also incredibly avant-garde movies. But we had a mistaken notion that we didn't want our films to be "manipulative." We wanted them to be very truthful, which meant putting them in stark backgrounds, not paying attention to the aesthetics of a shot. And I think that was a real mistake because film *is* manipulative. It's all manipulation. Every image, every choice, from the first shot to the last, from the first cut, the music, the soundtrack, the effects, everything. I feel the same way about the word "manipulation" as I do about the word "propaganda." Both are considered dirty words and they shouldn't be; they're just what we do. All films are propaganda, all films are manipulative.

We need to learn to be effective, whatever that means. And it certainly doesn't always mean Hollywood, although in certain cases it might mean competing with the look of a Hollywood film if that's the distribution and fundraising you need.

CC: I think all films are political, all films are agit-prop. It depends on your point of view. Every single Hollywood film has its message, whether you like it or not. *Kramer vs. Kramer* has a particular political message. Unfortunately, American audiences are not trying hard to look at films.

DM: I agree with Chris and Margia that obviously the ideal is to have the content and the aesthetic, the technique, balanced. But I find it far more intolerable if the content is sacrificed to the aesthetic or technique and not the other way around.

MC: I think this is related. I would talk about the importance of a pleasurable film as opposed to a documentary or a narrative or whatever. A good-quality film is one that's pleasurable. One of the main things that drives people to traditional Hollywood films is how they perceive pleasure. There's also some strong ideological support they get from going to Hollywood films. But it's important for our films to have this element and I think that mixing different approaches to film helps create that kind of pleasure.

MN: What do you mean by pleasure?

MC: I guess I mean satisfying on some level, whether it's an emotional level or an intellectual level or a visual level. It's a very deep involvement with the film but not in terms of traditional narrative, with characters that you totally identify with and get caught up with. Also, audiences come to films with certain expectations as to what the film means. If they think of it as a documentary or if they perceive it as a narrative before they walk in, those expectations are part of the real experience of watching that film and getting your message across. It's not just a question of what we want to make ourselves, but how it's going to be received by the audience.

CC: It also depends on audience development. How do you raise audience consciousness to look at films differently? I look at documentary films differently, look at progressive films differently. It's important for people to do outreach programs to reach, for instance, the Third World. Newsreel is now trying to package films for upstate, for rural areas, the South, to reach audiences we normally don't reach, and introduce new film languages to those audiences. We're doing a program now called *In Color* about minority women and their point of view in filmmaking.

Most filmmakers are a pain. When their film is finished they say, "Ahhh, I'm finished, I don't want anything to do with it," instead of going with the film and speaking with the audience, getting their reactions and synthesizing that experience to make their next film. Without that kind of experience, I think audiences will never develop and will continue to be in tune with the ABC/NBC junk stuff.

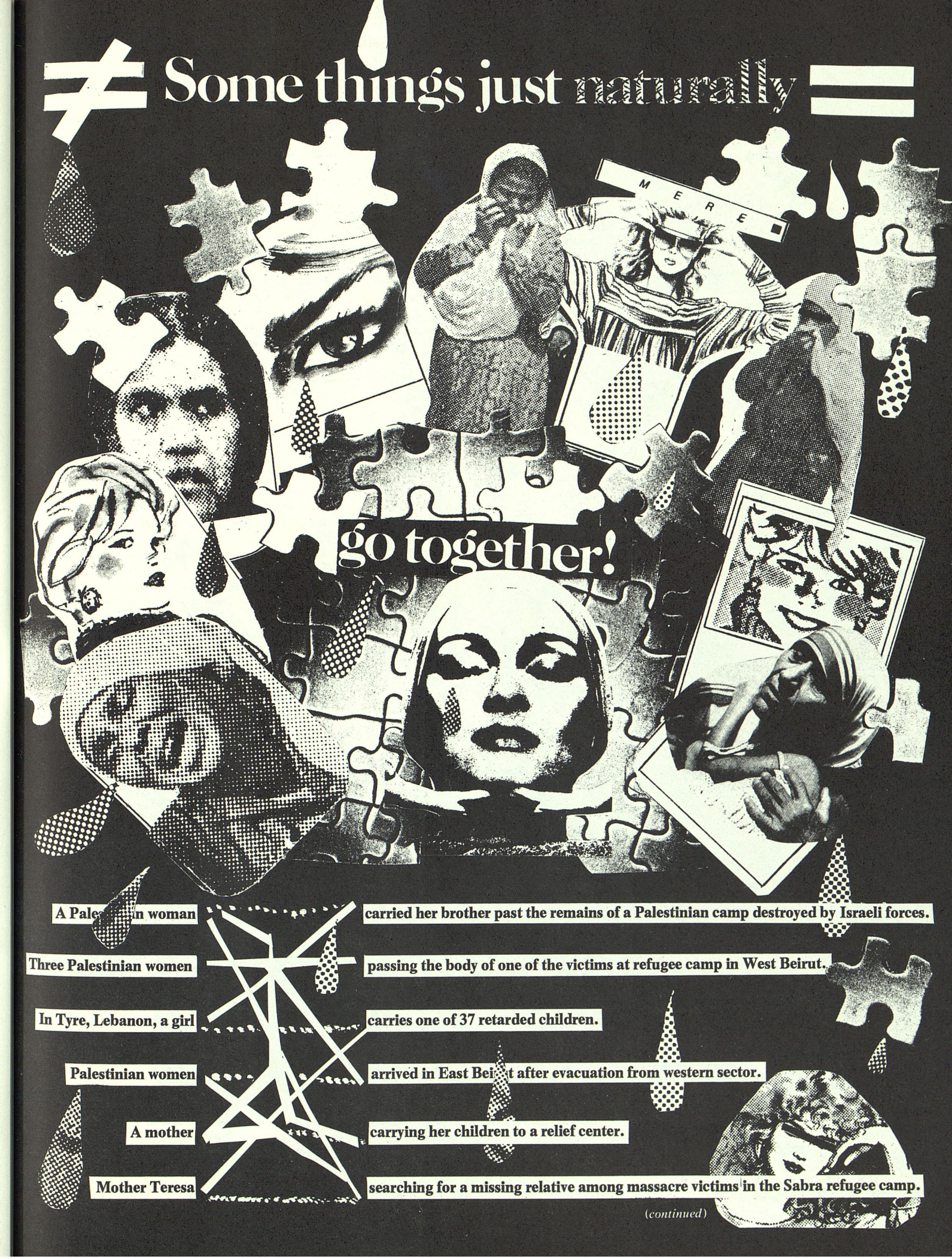
DS: My experience with distribution is that it's not so much the audience that's our problem as the channels of distribution. I have rarely had an audience receive a film badly. But I've had plenty of theater owners and exhibitors receive a film badly. One of our basic problems is breaking through this bottleneck. I think audiences are hungry for—this is something that if I ever stop believing I'd have to stop making films—the kinds of films that people here are making, films that talk about their real problems, their real struggles, their real concerns. And sometimes I think they're hungry for fantasy, too. And that's fine.

That's where a lot of us started with film: The power of the medium is overwhelming. I think we make films for a variety of reasons; everyone has personal stories about what led them to it, mostly by accident. But the point is the tremendous impact films have on the culture and on consciousness.

Diana Agosta is a film- and videomaker and writer in New York City.

Barbara Osborn is a writer currently in charge of video distribution at the Kitchen, New York City.

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from pathos to politics...

CO-ED SLASHED IN LOVERS' QUARREL
TEACHER RAPED AS CHILDREN STUDY
7 KIDS DIE IN BRONX BLAZE
XMAS PARTY GIRL SHOT FOR HER RADIO

Recognize the *Post* and *Daily News* headlines—the ones featuring the violence, the tragedy experienced by women or their children? The *New York Times* prefers to "inform" its upmarket readers. No domestic homicide stories here. More fit to print is news of the geo-political nightmare, the full-scale invasion, the refugee camp massacre. The photos come from far away, but it is here in the U.S. that they're selected, seen, and interpreted.

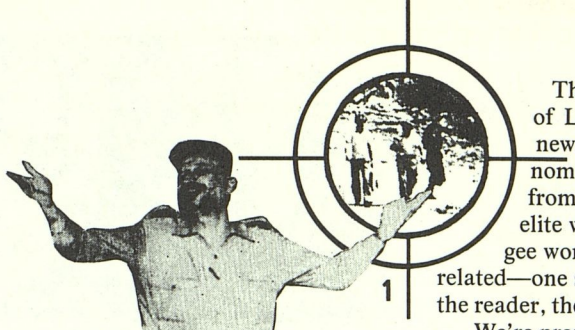
The photos on these first three pages are a sample of the *Times*' coverage of the events in Lebanon from June 4, 1982, to the present: the invasion, the massacre, and the Israeli occupation. This selection is not statistically based nor are these kinds of images found only in the *Times*. We chose images that, like effective advertising, stick in our minds. They are repeated over and over with only minor variations, massacre after massacre. It is only during such a crisis that we see pictures of women from places like Lebanon, Angola, or El Salvador: What can we know about them from these pictures?

Collages and text by Diana Agosta and Martha Wallner

A Lebanese woman trying to silence her husband after he offered to tell Israelis of a hidden cache of arms.

©1983 Diana Agosta and Martha Wallner

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These images were taken from the context of Lebanon and put into the context of a newspaper laced with ads aimed at an economic-cultural elite. When we look at a page from the *Times*, we see the ad image of the elite woman and the news image of the refugee woman side by side. How are these images related—one seductive, the other pathetic? Are we—the reader, the consumer—the missing link?

We're presented with a world-view that suppresses the explosiveness of the contradictions between these ad and news images. Ah! We get it. It's just the way things are—there are women who have and women who have not. But both are vulnerable—to tanks...to that certain man...to the photographer's gaze...to our gaze? Sex and violence from Bergdorf Goodman to Beirut.

And just what do we "learn" from the photographs of "Lebanon in Crisis"?

THE WOMEN are traditional; their heads are covered. They are rarely shown with men but often with children. They are seen fleeing through rubble or mourning. If they express anything it is a cry, a wail. They receive aid/are taken care of. They do not fight back. When other women like Mother Teresa respond, they are represented as saints or engaged in symbolic action.



There is little evidence of any link between the men and the women. But then how does a guerrilla army exist? Who are the guerrillas? Who gave birth to them? Who fathered the children that the women hold?

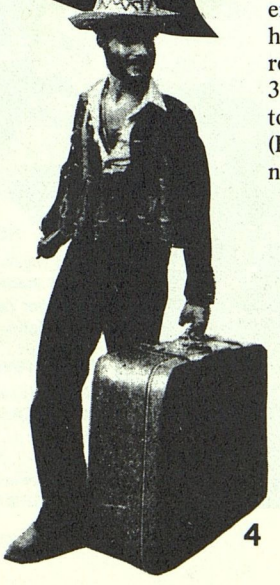
THE MEN are fighting the war and making decisions about the course of events. They are soldiers, diplomats, ministers, guerrillas. They are uniformed, organized. They are the legitimate targets of war. Their photographic separation from the women suggests a real physical separation and implies the possibility of avoiding civilian casualties.

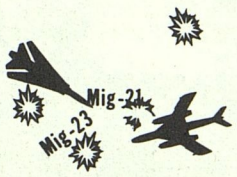


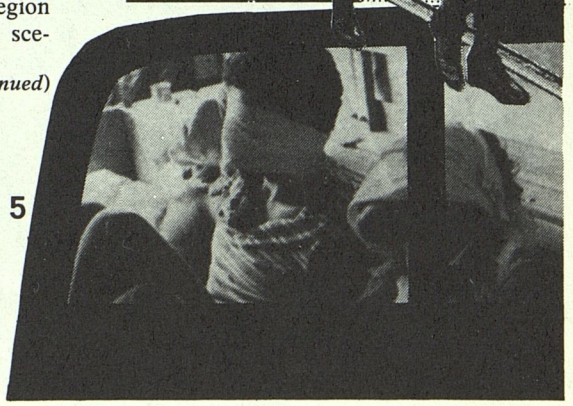
Just as the women are separated from the men, there is also a distinction between the way Third World men (Lebanese and Palestinian) and Western men are represented. The former are generally shown as either terrorists, fools, or, more rarely victims alongside the women. The Westerners and the U.S.-allied Israelis are not relegated to such extreme positions. in fact they are often shown in such a way that we identify with them.

We get a nice view over the Israeli soldier's shoulder. Palestinians in *our* sightline (Fig. 1). Begin appears with an unshaven face; what was previously a sign of his enemies' savagery is now a sign of his morality, his religious conviction (Fig. 2). Would the real Palestinian men please stand up (Figs. 3-5)? As women to men, Third World men to our boys and the French Foreign Legion (Figs. 6-7). What's missing from this scenario?

(*continued*)



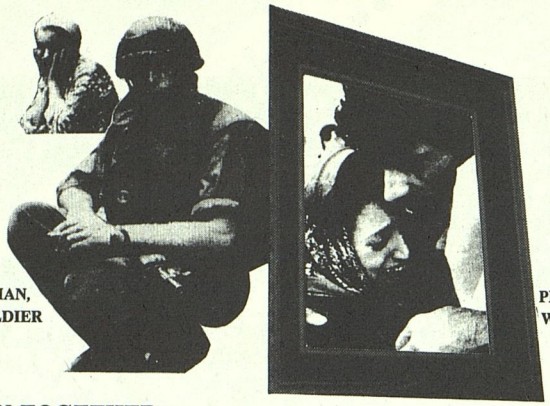








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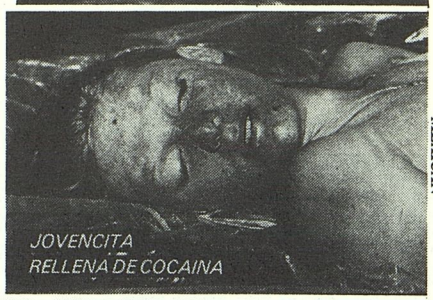


LEBANESE WOMAN, ISRAELI SOLDIER

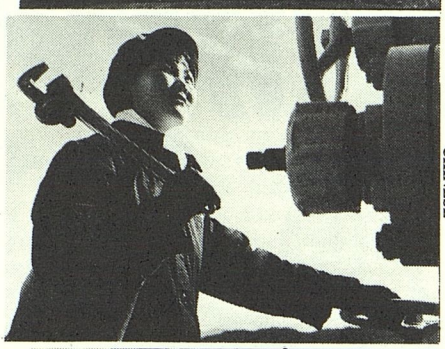
PLO FIGHTER WITH WIFE



GUINEA BISSAUAN



MEXICAN



CHINESE



NICARAGUAN

MEN AND WOMEN TOGETHER

Above are two choices—the first common, the second rare. The questions that slip through in these photos about women's involvement in their societies are the messages emphasized in some other news media. At right are examples of the variety of ideologies at work in images published in the Third World.

Some women theorize that until women are image-makers images of women will be oppressive. Is this enough? The photographs that *get* published reflect more than just the photographer's point of view. They must also reflect the viewpoint, the official history of those who own, who control the media. Why does the *Times* buy and print images of the mourning but not the resisting?

An archetype of liberation media is the armed woman. Why? And why is it at the same time such a taboo image for the *Times?* Is it because it links women with active, violent resistance, a role that is not traditionally theirs? Such an image unites two opposites: women typically seen as defenseless, nonpolitical, and the gun, a symbol of political, physical power.

Mainstream media initially interpreted the armed Israeli woman as evidence of equality in Israeli society. Her image was construed as particularly significant in light of what is seen as a sea of oppressed Arab women surrounding the state of Israel. Conversely, there is a tendency to dismiss images of armed Palestinian women, and other women and children involved in resistance, as obvious constructs of propaganda or evidence of their manipulation by the Russians. But the Phalangists stormed the refugee camps looking to kill Palestinian men, *women*, and *children*, not Russians.

Meanwhile, in its effort to "help you keep up with a modern, changing world" the *Times* continues to rely on an old stereotype, dripping with journalistic pathos: the image of the woman as the uninvolved victim. Woman-as-victim is a pet theme of most Western press coverage. It is expressed in terrorizing headlines, elitist ads, and images of women in crisis.

Yes, women are often victims. But don't the many images of chaos and grief in Beirut blind us to the fact that women also prepare food, raise and educate children, work as nurses and doctors, and that many support the Palestinian liberation movement in a variety of ways, even as guerrillas?

In short, they are not *simply* victims. The activities of women's lives construct and support the social base out of which any political movement operates. Just as elite women's images are used to sell cars, stereos, and software, Third World women's images are used to sell us a grossly distorted view of both our and their societies, revolution, its repression, and women's participation in history. If we buy this view we will never understand our lives, their lives, whose side we're on, or what to do.

Diana Agosta is a film- and videomaker and writer living in New York City.
Martha Wallner studied film and philosophy and is currently documenting the destruction of her neighborhood, the Lower East Side in New York City.



CUBAN (photo by Martha Wallner)

PALESTINIAN

READINGS

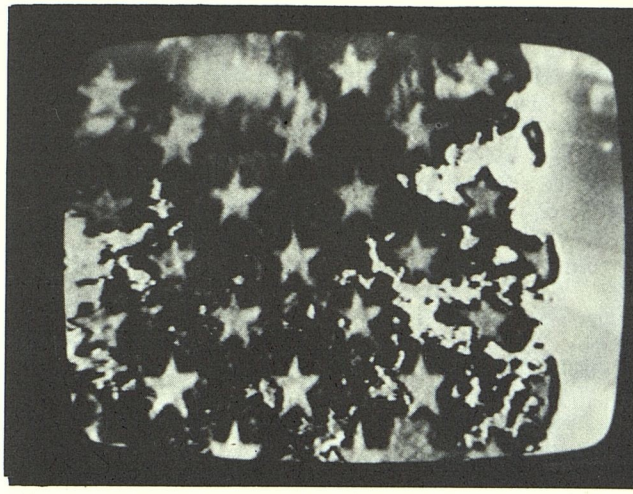
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A PERSONAL DECADE

Susan Kleckner

Where are we? Spring 1983. Over a decade ago I and other women artists found ourselves with very few options. Pitiably few women earned money with cameras. Pitiably few women earned money from their work at all. Things are different now—not where we want them, but different. I've worked in stills, film, and video for many years, and there's an explosion of women's work visible now that wasn't there when I started. The issue of money is still a sore one. I've done some crazy things to get my projects made with little or no money. We all have. It's still depressing how little money gets to women. But we're changing that; in fact, we've changed a lot already.

Younger women have more options than we did 15 years ago. They aren't as afraid of their competence as we were either. In my teaching I don't have to trick them into handling equipment as much as I used to. Years of fighting it out with male faculty are paying off. More women are employed than when I was the first woman teaching photography at Pratt Institute in 1970. There are more organizations of women artists now than I can possibly join.

We've moved pretty far since the '60s, when Art Workers Coalition and Artists United, radical artists' groups, were dominated by men, and a small group of women responded by forming Women Artists in Revolution (WAR). I joined them in late 1969. My suggestion that the two groups merge generated lots of suspicion and competition (not unusual back then). Money and recognition were scarce. WAR had asked the New York State Council of the Arts to fund a building of studios for them. I inherited the project, and when I went to the Council, I was told they weren't even considering it. "It wasn't written up appropriately," they said, "and anyway, women aren't a minority—WAR isn't a large enough group—not serious enough." So, together with women from both groups, I wrote a "real" proposal. We created Interart, based on the new ways some of us were working with each other. Although we had allies on the Council, they still wouldn't fund us. So we demonstrated in the corridors outside their offices and brought in WBAI Radio. After that, they gave us $5000, which wasn't much for a new arts group representing the "silent majority." I resigned as coordinator shortly after the usual infighting over money began.

I didn't realize, then, what an accomplishment that first grant was. I was too busy feeling disappointed in what was happening to us. Since then, women's groups have learned a lot about how to organize, get funds, and stay human with each other. Stormy history aside, I've since taught at the Women's Interart Center, produced some film and video with their help, even assisted with fundraising. It isn't the Women's Interart Center of my dreams, but it is a place where women can produce work. There wasn't anything like it a decade ago.

Part of why I wanted the Center, originally, was so I could learn filmmaking with other women. Robin Mide (who first designed the theater for the Center) introduced me to Kate Millett. Kate wanted to produce a feature-length documentary made by women: *Three Lives*. In 1970 women making a documentary about women was a revolutionary idea. We were the first all-woman company to do it, and I think Robin was the first lesbian to come out on film. I was a co-director, and directing Robin was exciting and painful. None of us knew much about working together, though. When a few of the crew took Kate to court for monies the film wasn't earning, I knew we were losing the revolution. Letting men decide our arguments was humiliating. We were in court because of vagueness in the wording of our contract and fantasies of riches that never materialized. The women instituting proceedings wanted to be paid before the producer recouped her initial investment, and they saw their time as equal to her cash. The judge ruled—fairly, I thought—that we all be paid back equally. We've yet to be paid back completely, and Kate will probably never make back her initial investment.

I'm proud to have worked on that film. I learned a lot. None of us knew beans about making a feature, yet we created a piece of history. We know about fighting it out, our expectations are more grounded, we value our time, and we write better contracts now.

When I went to Miami with five other women to videotape the Democratic National Convention in 1972 (*Another Look*), I hadn't yet learned about contracts. This was the convention in which women were expected to "emerge" into mainstream politics—and didn't. We called ourselves Women's Video News Service and were the first women's group to cover a major media-event for television (I take pride in my "firsts"). We were sponsored by Teleprompter and the Feminist Party (Flo Kennedy). Opening night, everyone had stage fright and wouldn't go to the convention floor. I hadn't freaked yet, so I went alone. I was goosed by delegates while trying to shoot and interview. Given the scene there, our group did well covering the whole event.

Afterwards we realized that none of us had ever faced such a massive editing job before: We had to reduce 30 hours of tape to one hour. I had never edited video; nevertheless, I was elected to edit the tape. When the editing started taking longer than expected, a couple of women kidnapped the tapes. Thinking they'd do it faster, they didn't do anything at all. After desperate pleading, I got them back. I happen to be a compulsive maniac, so I finished it



Another Look *(1972) by Susan Kleckner*

©1983 Susan Kleckner

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Bella Abzug from Another Look *(1972) by Susan Kleckner.*



Gabriele from Desert Piece *(1983) by Susan Kleckner.*

in time for broadcast before the election. We were all overwhelmed by what we'd taken on. It was a major accomplishment, but once again the pain involved overshadowed the pride we should have felt.

Three months later my *Birth Film* premiered at the Whitney Museum. I made this film with Kris Glen (since elected Civil Court Judge of Manhattan). We had been together in a consciousness-raising group for years. When she became pregnant and planned to give birth at home, we decided to film it. The women who worked on the project were my friends (one was also a member of our CR group). Most of them had little or no film experience. It was an ambitious project for me. I had directed the camerawoman for the "Robin" sequence in *Three Lives*, but didn't shoot it myself. *Birth Film* was to be my debut shooting film. I was scared, but the great Spirit was with me and I got beautiful footage. As far as I know, this was the first all-women-made film on birth. There weren't many birth images around, period, at that time (1970-73), and people weren't used to seeing vaginas—particularly close-ups of bloody vaginas, 15 feet tall on the screen. Many people fainted, and I ended up holding heads while women threw up in the ladies' room. People don't do that anymore—we've been showing what we look like for a decade.

The *Birth Film* was my alternative to film school. I urge women to just go out there and *do it.* Mistakes happen, money is wasted, very few people understand what you're going through, your friends and family think you're crazy, but you learn fast. This is, in a sense, what we've done in the movement—pushing ahead without knowing enough, using every bit of experience we had, learning wherever we could.

Those were heavy years. Some of us paid high emotional tariffs. I was involved in a videotaping that left me shattered. I went into it way overextended and almost didn't come out. I stopped working with women for a few years, left the planet for a while, and refocused on my still photography and drawing (private, solitary mediums for me). It took me years to realize that I did accomplish something—we did accomplish something, back then. I believe it's important to hear from those who burned out or nearly burned out in the early '70s.

In recent years my work with women has been more of a pleasure. We're a lot more relaxed, and we respect each other. We're not so much competitors as colleagues. Other things have changed. We're not so afraid of getting out there, of falling on our faces, or of being wonderful. We're not sabotaging ourselves the way we did back then.

When I made *Bag Lady* I made a quantum leap. A few years before shooting it, I worked with another group, Video Woman, on a documentary directed by Garland Harris, about a woman living in welfare hotels. The work was interesting, heartbreaking, and provoked many issues of responsibility. The woman started dropping by at all hours for food and money. We did what we could, but it became difficult after awhile. What was our responsibility to her? She became pregnant, and her family committed her to a state mental hospital. The tape was never finished. When I started writing *Bag Lady*, I knew I couldn't handle that kind of disruption in my life. I was certain I'd end up bringing bag women to my home to live. More pressing, for me, was the desire to work with fiction. I wanted control, to tell the story my way. I felt we needed new archetypes, new myths, to inspire us. On a metaphorical level, I believed street women were heroic, with great dignity, and I believed I could say this more effectively with fiction. I wanted a story of triumph, not defeat (unfortunately, it's hard to find triumph in the facts of a real bag woman's life). I interviewed over 25 actresses before meeting Dale Soules, who was starring in *The Magic Show* on Broadway at that time. I was completely intimidated by the prospect of directing someone who earned her living in theater, but she was absolutely right for the character, and her energy and commitment to the film matched my own. It was thrilling to watch everybody push themselves beyond what they thought they could do. We were more proud than scared, with a growing tradition of women's art to inspire us.

I finished that film excited about working with women again, but I discovered a new Pandora's box of issues. This time it was over ownership. I had made the film through the Interart Center, and guess what, no contract! They believed they owned the film. I believed I did. I did the kidnapping this time. At the same time I had started another film. It was supposed to be made through the Center, but because of our disagreement, they refused. I went ahead on my own.

Amazing Graces, starring Lynne Thigpen, is a very short film; it's really a study for a feature I hope to make someday. This one was a total pleasure to shoot. It ends: "To be continued. . ." which is my commitment to go on. In writing this article I almost didn't write about this film. In fact I almost "forgot" to mention it. After wrestling with my own discomfort, I realized I was afraid of my own confusion in talking about working with a Black woman. I was afraid anything I would say might be construed as racist. Lynn and I never spoke about being Black and white while making the film. It was important for me, and the film, that she's Black. I couldn't imagine exploring the subject of street women without including Black women—so many of them are Black. When I showed her this article recently, we finally discussed being Black/white in relation to the film. She said the question had never come up for her. I, however, had to move through a lot of fear to create a character with her. It was worth it, and it was just a beginning. Confronting my own racism has been hard. Working with Lynn was easy.

Perhaps hardest for me to confront is my own internalized oppression—patterns in my own behavior that keep me down. I have all kinds of self-defeating patterns that are learned and internalized: insecurity, fear, self-hate, and isolation, for starters. Mild example: Soon I have a gig at the Washington Women's Art Center

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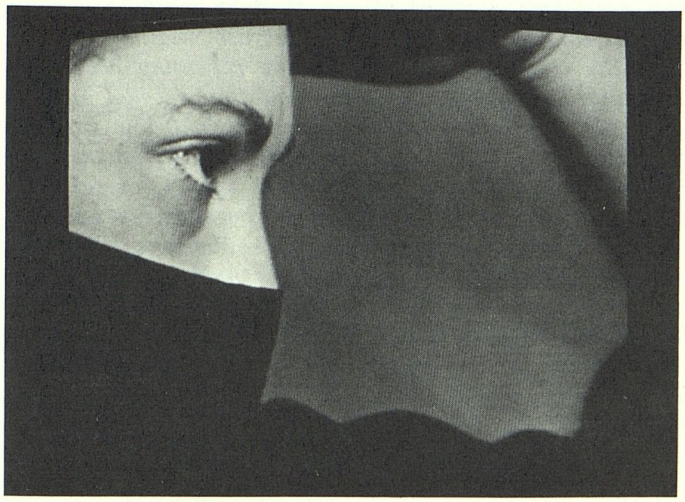
to show work and speak. Great. Months ago they asked for a bio and photo so they could publicize the event. Very reasonable. I didn't send them. I kept "forgetting." Now it's too late for their newsletter, and I've ensured myself a smaller audience. Like many others, I keep my own oppression going. I'm changing that—this article is one way. And after thinking about what I'd done, I found a way to get that event listed in a Washington paper.

It's important to remember that internalized oppression stems from real oppressions. As a Jewish woman, I know that anti-Semitism still exists, and that I still come up against it. We all know that some Jews are successful, but when you hear that *all* Jews are successful, you're hearing anti-Semitism (most Jews are working class). It's not unusual for Jews of my generation to have a lot of fear and confusion about "success." Personally, I have a lot of ambivalence around recognition. Recognition means visibility. I know a lot of women who share my approach/avoidance relationship to the whole issue of "fame." Throughout history, Jews have been slaughtered, often when too many became too successful. You don't have to be Jewish to be hurt by anti-Semitism. We are all hurt by racism, homophobia, and any other oppression. We've heard a lot about fear of success—for me, it's more like fear of mutilation and extermination.

It's taken a lot of work to even recognize these fears. It's taken physical and spiritual work to become healthy and creative. This work recently took me on a drive of over 5000 miles for a month in the desert. It was a major step for me as an artist, a woman, and a Jew to go alone to the desert. I wouldn't have done it 10 years ago. It was a coming-of-age ritual; it was also part of the film/video/performance work, *Desert Piece*, that I've been doing for the last two years. The women in the piece gave themselves freely to the work, learned from each other, took risks, and put themselves on the line. I've never worked so well with other women, and I've never been so comfortable directing.

I feel that there really is more support "out there," and I can begin to speak. Fear and rage have always rendered me speechless, but with hope I am finding a voice. It's with hope that I'm going to get through the rest of my life. I can even start to forgive myself and others for our lack of grace during this decade.

For women in media, it's been very complicated because media is about visibility. We often are involved in making others visible, while keeping a certain anonymity for ourselves. I'm just beginning to look at all this, but I think the issue of visibility determines my and many other's behavior. The more I confront this, the more my work and my relationship to getting-it-out-there take off. I (we) don't have to continue being caught in patterns of fear and silence anymore.



Desert Piece (*1983*) *by Susan Kleckner*

Susan Kleckner is a filmmaker and photographer, currently teaching at the International Center for Photography in New York City.

The Cinema

The film was consummate, leaving the theater
a denial of sorts. Out on the street, air is now cruel, demanding.
The days have reached their peak of shortness, now two notches
past winter, moving into spring...
who looks at it that way, though, when we are stunned
at the passing of two hours? We cannot miss the streetlights
now on, outlining the ice, blackened by many, transformation
is everywhere a possibility...even the watching of a movie
becomes hardly the nonactivity we had bargained for. There
we were, agreeing to have a quiet evening, catch an early flick.

Perception changes
every second perhaps
a chance.
What did you see all the times you cleaned the floor never
noticing the chunk of glass left from the one broken seasons
before or the gargoyles above your lover's door?
Where were your eyes when I couldn't take mine off the screen?
Walking crosstown I see the French countryside across
your never having left the United States cheekbones.
Though your gait is unlike the protagonist's, it is unlike
the way you usually walk. The French actress had light red hair,
and lots of freckles. My dark hair is getting white strands,
I remember the red highlights I one summer thought I saw.
Some people we pass watch us go by. Perhaps we watch each other.
Home, I fall asleep
under your influence.

Poem by Julia J. Blumenreich, who hates serving bacon and eggs but loves painting and writing.

Clara Bow
(The "IT" Girl)

When life became stress-laden, intolerable,
Harrowing, filled with pain
And bitter disenchantment,
I think of the mother of a redhead—
A child destined to be a movie star—
The mother grown mad with disappointments,
Who held a knife at her young daughter's throat,
Intending to kill her
So that the child could escape
From life's harrowings.
I also think of that child, half waif,
Half sensuous woman,
And how she rose to fame, yet was denied
The privilege of great dramatic roles—
Roles in which she could show her true talent,
And be more than sex symbol
To a nation of theater-goers.
It is said that Clara Bow, whose life
Was tragic from its beginning
To its end, could have been
The greatest of tragediennes.
But, for her, life was (as her mad mother
Had predicted) brutal and terrible,
Despite transient glamour,
Despite transient wealth and fame,
Despite marriage to a good and noble man...

Poem by Merry Harris, a Southern poet of Cherokee ancestry living in California. Her fifth book of poetry, Even Such Is Time, *was published in 1981.*

©1983 Julia J. Blumenreich ©1983 Merry Harris

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fragments of a filmscript: in our own image

lucy panteli

in our own image regarding sequences of events taking her hands from their pockets colors entered her mouth in waves obscuring horizons drowning in differences fighting across the different points of view locations rush by on a plane of glass her reflection stares back at me observing what it was i had wanted to ask arranging letters on a paper putting flowers in a vase tracing spaces i developed signs on tablecloths covering yesterdays reasons lie beneath fighting across the different points of view scattering vibrations making meanings ripped apart in waves disturbing variations smiling at her in layers of emulsion and paper smiled back through endless indecisions swapping seats exchanging glances long since fled by sewing buttonholes on a bloodstained sheet waiting for the bleeding to subside i buried the buttons in the earth and stumble on a different phrase how do we agree i erase a thought stumble on a different phrase slipping through my fingers rolling over multiplying reaching no conclusions i did not say the words were missing letters arranging sequences on a paper putting flowers in a vase vacating questions imprisoning me in cages of light pieces of my identity slipping through my fingers rolling over multiplying staring back at me observing what it was i had wanted to ask below surfaces swallowing vibrations she exuded pass from her weightless limbs into mine obscuring horizons drowning in differences arranging letters on a paper putting fragments in a vase i lose sight of myself secreting blood behind a name discharging limitations left unsaid crests of waves falling my shadow escapes counting all the faces which are mine slipping through my fingers rolling over multiplying reaching no conclusions i seize myself to abandon myself below surfaces inside movement into gesture you keep repeating yourself she said trickles into words forming distances between us i was opening doors she was closing from another side scattering vibrations behind variations bleeding between the seams my vagina stares back at me observing what it was i had wanted to ask in unmade scenes contexts lie buried in boxes on shelves somewhere else disturbing memories a mirror watched me take it from the wall turn it to face itself some men coming out from behind were scraping at the air between us a mirror hangs regarding sequences obscuring horizons tracing space i developed across the different points of view counting my identities smiling back exchanging glances taking me across the different points of view sewing buttonholes in the earth another question imprisoning me in words secreting limitations raping colors in layers of emulsion and paper losing sight of myself below surfaces inside movement into gesture into words running behind me searching in unmade scenes buried in boxes on shelves somewhere regarding sequences obscuring horizons outside and inside my vagina trickles into words tracing spaces on a paper putting letters in a vase in our own image i erase a thought drowning in differences i developed signs through endless indecisions long since fled slip by swallowing vibrations she exuded colors passing from her weightless limbs into mine secreting blood falling into faces which are mine slipping through my fingers words discharging limitations staring back at me scattering vibrations making waves ripped apart in meanings disturbing variations taking her across the different points of view in our own image someone raping colors changing into me conclusions slip by bleeding everywhere i turn a mirror hiding remnants entering her mouth in waves searching in unmade scenes remnants escape on empty pages contexts lie buried somewhere else catching sight of myself emerging from another side losing sight of myself shattering patterns making meanings ripped apart discharging variations my vagina trickles into words left unsaid between us a mirror hangs questions i was asking below surfaces inside movement into gesture running behind me 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reaching no conclusions colors pass from her weightless limbs obscuring sounds tracing spaces across horizons imprisoning me outside and inside limitations rush by rolling over multiplying into spaces i developed across the different points of view her reflection stares back at me secreting identities scattering all the faces which are making waves ripped apart in meanings disturbing variations long since fled slip by into colors discharging points of view obscuring horizons drowning in differences left unsaid crests of waves falling my shadow escapes someone raping colors constantly changing tracing distances on paper putting spaces in a vase arranging what it was i had wanted to ask between horizons losing sight of myself

Lucy Panteli is a London filmmaker currently working on a film concerning female imagery in experimental films.

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The Case of the Missing Mother



Maternal Issues in Vidor's *Stella Dallas*

E. ANN KAPLAN

For complex reasons, feminists have focused on the Mother largely from the daughter position. When I first joined a consciousness-raising group in 1969, we dealt with Mothering only in terms of our own relationships to our mothers, and this despite the fact that a few of us in the group already had children. As a graduate student and mother of a one-year-old girl, I badly needed to talk about issues of career versus Motherhood, about how having the child affected my marriage, about the conflict between my needs and the baby's needs; but for some reason, I felt that these were unacceptable issues.

I think this was because at that time feminism was very much a movement of daughters. The very attractiveness of feminism was that it provided an arena for separation from oppressive closeness with the Mother; feminism was in part a reaction against our mothers, who had tried to inculcate the patriarchal "feminine" in us, much to our anger. This made it difficult for us to identify with Mothering and to look from the position of the Mother.

Unwittingly, then, we repeated the patriarchal omission of the Mother. From a psychoanalytic point of view, we remained locked in ambivalence toward the Mother, at once still deeply tied to her while striving for an apparently unattainable autonomy. Paradoxically, our complex Oedipal struggles prevented us from seeing the Mother's oppression (although we had no such problems in other areas), and resulted in our assigning the Mother, in her heterosexual, familial setting, to an absence and silence analogous to the male relegation of her to the periphery.

Traditional psychoanalysis, as an extension of patriarchy, has omitted the Mother, except when she is considered from the child's point of view. Since patriarchy is constructed according to the male unconscious, feminists grew up in a society that repressed the Mother. Patriarchy chose, rather, to foreground woman's status as *castrated,* as lacking, since this construction benefits patriarchy. If the phallus defines everything, legitimacy is granted to the subordination of women. Feminists have been rebellious about this second construction of ourselves as *castrated*, but have only recently begun to react strongly against the construction of the Mother as marginal.

This reaction began in the mid-'70s with the ground-breaking books about motherhood by Adrienne Rich, Dorothy Dinnerstein, and Jane Lazarre.[1] Rich and Dinnerstein exposed the repression of the Mother, and analyzed the reasons for it, showing both psychoanalytic and socio-economic causes. Building on Melanie Klein's and Simone de Beauvoir's ideas, Dinnerstein described the early childhood experience as one of total dependency on a Mother who is not distinguished from the self (she is "good" when present, "bad" when absent). This, together with the Mother's assimilation to natural processes through her reproductive function, results in her split cultural designation and representation.

Rich shows in numerous ways how the Mother is either idealized, as in the myths of the nurturing, ever-present but self-abnegating figure, or disparaged, as in the corollary myth of the sadistic, neglectful Mother who puts her needs first. The Mother as a complex person in her own right, with multiple roles to fill and conflicting needs and desires, is absent from patriarchal representations. Silenced by patriarchal structures that have no room for her, the Mother-figure, despite her actual psychological importance, has been allotted to the margins, put in a position limited to that of spectator.

These constructions contributed to feminists' negative attitude toward Mothering in the early days of the movement. We were afraid not only of becoming like our own mothers, but also of falling into one or the other of the mythic paradigms, should we have children. Put on the defensive, feminists rationalized their fears and anger, focusing on the destructiveness of the nuclear family as an institution, and seeing the Mother as an agent of the patriarchal establishment. We were unable then to see that the Mother was as much a victim of patriarchy as ourselves, constructed as she is by a whole series of discourses —psychoanalytic, political, and economic.

The Hollywood cinema is as responsible as anything for perpetuating the useless patriarchal myths. Relatively few Hollywood films make the Mother central, relegating her, rather, to the periphery of a narrative focused on a husband, son, or daughter. The dominant paradigms are similar to those found in literature and mythology throughout Western culture, and may be outlined quite simply:

1. The Good Mother, who is all-nurturing and self-abnegating—the "Angel in the House." Totally invested in husband and children, she lives only through them, and is marginal to the narrative.[2]

2. The Bad Mother or Witch—the underside to the first myth. Sadistic, hurtful, and jealous, she refuses the self-abnegating role, demanding her own life. Because of her "evil" behavior, this Mother often takes control of the narrative, but she is punished for her violation of the desired patriarchal ideal, the Good Mother.[3]

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3. The Heroic Mother, who suffers and endures for the sake of husband and children. A development of the first Mother, she shares her saintly qualities, but is more central to the action. Yet, unlike the second Mother, she acts not to satisfy herself but for the good of the family.[4]

4. The Silly, Weak, or Vain Mother. Found most often in comedies, she is ridiculed by husband and children alike, and generally scorned and disparaged.[5]

As these limited paradigms show, Hollywood has failed to address the complex issues that surround Mothering in capitalism. Each paradigm is assigned a moral position in a hierarchy that facilitates the smooth functioning of the system. The desirable paradigm purposely presents the Mother from the position of child or husband, since to place the camera in the Mother's position would raise the possibility of her having needs and desires of her own. If the Mother reveals her desire, she is characterized as the Bad Mother (sadistic, monstrous), much as the single woman who expresses sexual desire is seen as destructive.

It is significant that Hollywood Mothers are rarely single and rarely combine Mothering with work. Stahl's and Sirk's versions of *Imitation of Life* are exceptions (although in other ways the Mother figures reflect the myths). Often, as in *Mildred Pierce,* the Mother is punished for trying to combine work and Mothering. Narratives that do focus on the Mother usually take that focus because she resists her proper place. The work of the film is to reinscribe the Mother in the position patriarchy desires for her and, in so doing, teach the female audience the dangers of stepping out of the given position. *Stella Dallas* is a clear example: the film "teaches" Stella her "correct" position, bringing her from resistance to conformity with the dominant, desired myth.

How could she—oh how could she have become a part of the picture on the screen, while her mother was still in the audience, out there, in the dark, looking on?

This quotation is taken from the 1923 novel *Stella Dallas,* by Olive Higgins. It shows how the cinema had already, by 1923, become a metaphor for the oppositions of reality and illusion, poverty and wealth. Within the film *Stella Dallas,* we find the poor on the outside (Laurel's mother, Stella) and the rich on the inside (Laurel and the Morrisons). This mimics, as it were, the situation of the cinema spectator, who is increasingly subjected to a screen filled with rich people in luxurious studio sets.

But it is not simply that the 1937 version of *Stella Dallas* makes Stella the working-class spectator, looking in on the upper-class world of Stephen Dallas and the Morrison family. She is excluded not only as a working-class woman, but also as the Mother. Ben Brewster notes that the 1923 novel moves Laurel "decisively into the world of Helen Morrison, shifting its point of identification to Laurel's mother, Stella Dallas, who abolishes herself as visible to her daughter so as to be able to contemplate her in that world."[6] It is the process by which Stella Dallas makes herself literally Mother-as-spectator that interests me, for it symbolizes the position that the Mother is most often given in patriarchal culture, regardless of which paradigm is used.

Stella is actually a complex mixture of a number of the Mother paradigms. She tries to resist the position as Mother that patriarchal marriage, within the film, seeks to put her in—thus, for a moment, exposing that position. First, she literally objects to Mothering because of the personal sacrifices involved; then, she protests by expressing herself freely in her eccentric style of dress. The film punishes her for both forms of resistance by turning her into a "spectacle" produced by the upper class' disapproving gaze, a gaze the audience is made to share through the camera work and editing.

The process by which Stella is brought from resistance to passive observer highlights the way the Mother is constructed as marginal or absent in patriarchy. As the film opens, we see Stella carefully preparing herself to be the object of Stephen Dallas' gaze; she self-consciously creates the image of the sweet, innocent but serious girl as she stands in the garden of her humble dwelling pretending to read a book. Despite all her efforts to be visible, her would-be lover fails to notice her. The cinema spectator, seeing that Stephen is as much someone *with* class as Stella is without it, realizes that Stella is overlooked because she is working class.

Stella's plan to escape from her background is understandable, given the place her mother occupies within the family. This gaunt and haggard figure slaves away at sink and stove in the rear of the frame, all but invisible on a first viewing. She only moves into the frame to berate Stella for refusing to give her brother the lunch he wants. "What do you want to upset him for? What would I do without him?" she asks, betraying her economic and psychological dependence on this young man, not yet ground down (as is her husband) by toil at the mill. As Stella narcissistically appraises her own fresh beauty in the kitchen's dismal mirror, she is inspired to take her brother his lunch after all, hoping to meet Stephen Dallas, whom she now knows is a runaway millionaire.

Stella's "performance" at the mill office, where Stephen has settled down to a lonely lunch, is again self-conscious. But this time her flawless acting wins her what she wants. Dressed as a virginal young lady, she gazes adoringly up at Stephen instead of following the directions he is giving her—an attention that surprises but flatters the heart-sick man.



Mildred Pierce (*1946*). *Mildred's close, narcissistic bonding to Veda must be punished because it excludes men. Here, Veda is seen flirting with Mildred's lover Monty, presaging her full-blown affair with him and her deliberate rejection of her mother. Photo courtesy of Museum of Modern Art/Film Stills Archive.*

Shortly after this, we find Stephen and Stella at the movies. A shot of upper-class men and women dancing on a screen, filmed from the perspective of the theater audience, is followed by a front shot of Stella and Stephen. He munches disinterestedly on popcorn while she snuggles up to him, intensely involved in the film. This scene confirms that Stella has been acting "as if in the movies," performing with Stephen according to codes learned through watching films. We see how films indeed do "teach" us about the life we should desire and about how to *respond* to movies. As the film ends, Stella is weeping; and as women watching Stella watching the screen, we are both offered a model of how *we* should respond to films and given insight into the mechanisms of cinematic voyeurism and identification. Stella, the working-class spectator, is outside the rich world on the screen, offered as spectacle for her

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emulation and envy. "I want to be like the women in the movies," Stella says to Stephen on their way home.

Meanwhile, Stella and Stephen themselves become objects of the envious, voyeuristic gaze of some passersby when they embrace outside the cinema. The women watching are now "on the outside," while Stella is beginning her brief sojourn "inside" the rich world she envied on screen. Thus, to the basic audience-screen situation of the *Stella Dallas* film itself, Vidor has added two levels: Stella and Stephen in the movie house, and Stella and Stephen as "spectacle" for the street "audience." Stella will herself create yet another spectator-screen experience (one that is indeed foreshadowed in the movie scene here), when she becomes "spectator" to the screen/scene of her daughter's luxurious wedding in the Morrison household at the end of the film. Stella has made her daughter into a "movie star" through whom she can live vicariously.

This is only possible through Motherhood as constructed in patriarchy, and thus Stella's own mothering is central to her trajectory. It is fitting that the movie scene cuts directly to Stella's haggard mother laboring in her kitchen the following morning. Her victimization is underscored by her total fear of Stella's father, who is yelling loudly. Both the mother and son are terrified that the father will discover that Stella has not come home. Indeed, the father angrily ejects his daughter from his house—until her smiling arrival, already wed to Stephen Dallas, mitigates all sins.

This is the last we see of Stella's family. For all intents and purposes the working-class family is eliminated on Stella's entrance into Stephen Dallas' upper-class world—it is made as invisible in filmic terms as it is culturally. What Stella has to contend with are her remaining working-class desires, attitudes, and behaviors, which the film sees ambiguously as either ineradicable (which would involve an uncharacteristic class determinism), or as deliberately retained by Stella. Women are socialized to be flexible precisely so that they can marry into a higher class, taking their family up a notch as they do so. We have seen that Stella is aware of how she *should* behave. ("I want to be with you," she tells Stephen after seeing the movie, "I want to be like you. I want to be like all the people you've been around.") But Stella resists this change once she has won her upper-class man, which makes her at once a more interesting and a more tragic heroine. Given the structures that bind her, she has more sense of self than is ultimately good for her.

It is both Stella's (brief) resistance to Mothering and her resistance to adapting to upper-class mores that for a moment expose the construction of Mothering in patriarchy and at the same time necessitate her being *taught* her proper construction. Stella first violates patriarchal codes when, arriving home with her baby, she manifests not delight but impatience with her new role, demanding that she and Stephen go dancing that very night. Next, she violates the codes by wearing a garish dress and behaving independently at the club, leaving their table to dance with a stranger, Mr. Munn (who is from the wrong set), and going to sit at Munn's table.

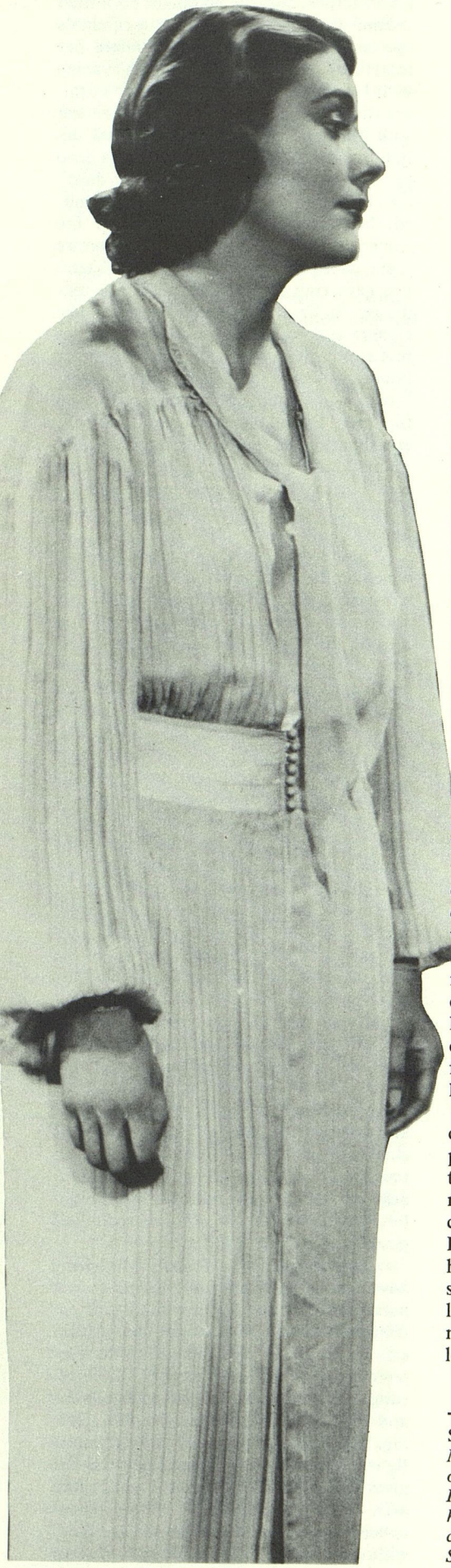
This behavior is immediately "placed" for the spectator when the camera takes Stephen's point of view on the scene, although it could as easily have stuck with Stella's perspective and shown the stuffiness of the upper class. Staying with Stephen, who has now collected their coats and is waiting by the dance floor, the camera exposes Stella's vigorous dancing and loud behavior as "unseemly." At home, Stephen begs Stella to "see reason", in other words, to conform to his class. He does not take kindly to Stella's round reply ("How about you doing some adapting?"), and when he asks her to move to New York because of his business she refuses on account of "just beginning to get into the right things" (which the spectator already knows are the *wrong* things from Stephen's perspective).

The following scene shows even more clearly how the film wrenches Stella's point of view away from the audience, forcing us to look at Stella through Stephen's eyes. As a Mother, Stella is no longer permitted to control her actions, or to be the camera's eye (as she was in the scenes before her marriage and Motherhood). The scene with Laurel as a baby opens with the camera still in Stella's point of view. We see her with her maid, feeding the baby and delighting in her. Munn and his friends drop by, and a spontaneous little party develops. Everyone is having fun, Laurel included. Suddenly Stephen arrives, and the camera shifts to his perspective: The entire scene changes in an instant from a harmless gathering to a distasteful brawl, rendering Stella a neglectful Mother. The camera cuts to the stubbed-out cigarettes in Laurel's food bowl, to the half-empty liquor glasses, to the half-drunk, unshapely men; we get Stephen's eye moving around the room. Laurel begins to cry at her father's shouting, as the friends hurriedly and shamefacedly slip away. Stella has become the "object," and judged from Stephen's supposedly superior morality, is found to be lacking in Motherliness.

These scenes initiate a pattern through which Stella is made into a "spectacle" (in a negative sense) both within the film story and for the cinema spectator. It is the first step on the way to her learning her "correct" place as "spectator," as *absent* Mother (as she gradually realizes through the upper-class judgments of her that she is an embarrassment to her child). The second step is for both audience and Stella to validate the alternative model of the upper-class Morrison family, set up over and against Stella. The lower-class Stella and the cinema audience thus become the admiring spectators of the Morrison's perfect lifestyle. Other figures are brought in to provide further negative judgments of Stella as Mother. For example, Stella does not take Laurel to cultural events, so the schoolteacher has to do this; Stella then behaves loudly in public with an ill-mannered man, where she is seen by the teacher. Moreover, Laurel's peers indicate disapproval of Stella by refusing to attend Laurel's party, and later on her upper-class friends at the hotel laugh outright at Stella's appearance. By implicating us—the cinema spectator—in this process of rejection, we are made to accede to the "rightness" of Stella's renunciation of her daughter, and thus made to agree with Stella's position as absent Mother.

Once the lacks in Stella's Mothering have been established from the upper-class perspective (which is synonymous with patriarchy's construction of the ideal Mother), we are shown this "Ideal" in the concrete form of Helen Morrison. Refined, calm, and decorous, devoted to her home and children, she embodies the all-nurturing, self-effacing Mother. She is a saintly figure, worshipped by Laurel because she gives the child everything she needs and asks nothing in return (she is even tender toward Stella, for whom she shows "pity" without being condescending). Modern

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viewers may find these scenes embarrassingly crude in their idealization of upper-class life, but within the film's narrative this is obviously the desired world: the happy realm where all Oedipal conflicts are effaced and family members exude perfect harmony. The contrast with Stella's world could not be more dramatic; it reveals her total lack of refinement.

But if unmannerliness were the sum of Stella's faults, patriarchy would not be as threatened by her as it evidently is, nor demand such a drastic restitution as the renunciation of her child. What is behind this demand for such an extreme sacrifice on Stella's part? What has she really done to violate patriarchy's conception of the Mother?

The clue to answering this question lies in her initial *resistance* to Mothering, for "selfish" reasons, and her subsequent enthusiastic embracing of Motherhood. The refusal and then the avid assumption of the role are linked from a patriarchal point of view through the same "fault," namely that Stella is interested in *pleasing herself.* She refuses Mothering when she does not see anything in it for her, when it seems only to stand in the way of fun; but she takes it up avidly once she realizes that it can give her pleasure, and can add more to her life than the stuffy Stephen can! Shortly after Stephen has left, Stella says, "I thought people were crazy to have kids right away. But I'm crazy about her. Who wouldn't be?" And later on, talking on the train to Munn (who would clearly like a fully sexual relationship with her), Stella remarks, "Laurel uses up all the feelings I have; I don't have any for anyone else."

In getting so much pleasure for herself out of Laurel, Stella violates the patriarchal myth of the self-abnegating Mother, who is supposed to be completely devoted and nurturing but not satisfy any of her needs through the relationship with her child. She is somehow supposed to keep herself apart while giving everything to the child; she is certainly not supposed to prefer the child to the husband, since this kind of bonding threatens patriarchy.

That Laurel returns Stella's passion only compounds the problem: The film portrays Laurel as devoted to her mother to an unhealthy degree, as caring too much, or more than is good for her. In contrast to the worshipful stance that Laurel has to Mrs. Morrison, her love for her own mother is physical, tender, and selfless. For instance, on one occasion Stella's crassness offends the child deeply (she nearly puts face cream all over Laurel's lovely picture of Mrs. Morrison), but Laurel forgives her and tenderly brushes her hair. Most remarkable is the train sequence, where Laurel overhears her friends ridiculing her mother. Hurt for her mother (not for herself), she creeps down into Stella's bunk and kisses her tenderly, snuggling up to her under the covers. Finally, of course, Laurel is almost ready to give up her own chance for the pleasures of the Morrison family and upper-class life when she realizes why Stella wanted to let the Morrisons have her. It takes Stella's trick to make Laurel stay (and I'll come back to this "trick" in a moment).

The very mutuality of this Mother-daughter relationship makes it even more threatening and in need of disruption than, for example, the one-sided dedication to the daughter in *Mildred Pierce.* That film highlights the dangerous narcissism of a love like Mildred's (where the investment in the child is tantamount to merging, to abandoning the boundaries altogether). This love must be punished not only because it excludes men (as does Stella's relationship to Laurel), but also because of the threat that deep female-to-female bonding poses in patriarchy. Veda's negative bonding (she is tied through hatred) offers a kind of protection for patriarchy; it ensures that Mildred's love will be destructive and self-defeating.

In contrast, *Stella Dallas* in the end provides an example of Mother love that is properly curtailed and subordinated to what patriarchy considers best for the child. In renouncing Laurel, Stella is only doing what the Good Mother should do, according to the film's ideology. By first making Stella into a "spectacle" (i.e., by applying an external standard to her actions and values), the film "educates" Stella into her "correct" position of Mother-as-spectator, Mother as absent.

Stella's entry into the Morrison household at once summarizes her prior "unfitness" and represents her readiness to succumb to the persistent demands that have been made on her throughout the film. In this amazing scene, shot from the butler's perspective, she is still a "spectacle" viewed from the upper-class position: She stands, more ridiculously clad than ever, on the threshold of the huge mansion, her figure eclipsed by the luxurious surroundings that overwhelm her with awe and admiration. It is the lower-class stance, as Stella gawks *from the outside* at the way the rich live.

Incongruous within the house, Stella must be literally pushed outside—but of her own volition. The decorous, idealized Morrison family could not be seen depriving Stella of her child (remember: Mrs. Morrison is represented as tender toward Stella), so Stella must do it herself. Paradoxically, the only method she can conceive of, once she realizes Laurel's unwavering commitment to her, is by pretending to step outside of her Mother role. "A woman wants to be something else besides a mother," she tells a crestfallen Laurel,

Stella Dallas (*1937*). *The confrontation between Mrs. Morrison (left) and Stella toward the end of the film highlights the contrast of the Good, Ideal Mother and the "resisting" Mother that has been a theme throughout the film. Photo courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art/Film Stills Archive.*

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who has left the Morrisons to be at home with her. Ironically, through these deceptive words, Stella is binding herself into the prescribed Mother role; her self-sacrificing "trick"—her pretense that she is weary of Mothering—is the only way she can achieve her required place as "spectator," relinquishing the central place she had illicitly occupied.

Structured as a "screen" within the screen, the final sequence of Laurel's wedding literalizes Stella's position as the Mother-spectator. We recall the previous movie scene (Stephen and Stella looking at the romantic upper-class couples on the screen) as Stella stands outside the window of the Morrison house, looking in on her daughter's wedding, unseen by Laurel. Stella stares from the outside at the upper-class "ideal" world inside. And as spectators in the cinema, identifying with the camera (and thus with Stella's gaze), we learn what it is to be a Mother in patriarchy—it is to renounce, to be on the outside, and to take pleasure in this positioning. Stella's triumphant look as she turns away from the window to the camera assures us she is satisfied to be reduced to spectator. Her desires for herself no longer count, merged as they are with those of her daughter. While the cinema spectator feels a certain sadness in Stella's position, she also identifies with Laurel and with her attainment of what we have all been socialized to desire—romantic marriage into the upper class. We thus accede to the necessity for Stella's sacrifice.

With *Stella Dallas*, we begin to see why the Mother has so rarely occupied the center of the narrative: For how can the *spectator* be subject, at least in the sense of controlling the action? The Mother can only be subject to the degree that she resists her culturally prescribed positioning, as Stella does at first. It is Stella's *resistance* that sets the narrative in motion, and provides the opportunity to teach her as well as the spectator the Mother's "correct" place.

Given the prevalence of the Mother-as spectator myth, it is not surprising that feminists have had trouble dealing with the Mother as subject. An analysis of the psychoanalytic barriers to "seeing" the Mother needs to be accompanied by an analysis of cultural myths that define the Good Mother as absent, and the Bad Mother as present but resisting. We have suppressed too long our anger at our mothers because of the apparently anti-woman stance this leads to. We need to work through our anger so that we can understand how the patriarchal construction of the Mother has made her position an untenable one.

Unfortunately, today's representations of the Mother are not much better than that in *Stella Dallas*, made in 1937. Ironically, the mass media response to the recent women's movement has led to numerous representations of the nurturing *Father*, as well as a split of the female image into old-style Mothers and new-style efficient career women. *Kramer Versus Kramer* established the basic model for the '80s: The wife leaves her husband to become a successful career woman, willingly abandoning her child to pursue her own needs. The husband steps into the gap she leaves and develops a close, loving relationship to his son, at some cost to his career—which he willingly shoulders. If the wife, like Stella, is reduced to a "spectator" (she returns to peek in on her child's doings), it is ultimately because she is also (albeit in a very different way) a Bad Mother. Meanwhile, the husband pals up with a solid, old-style earth Mother who lives in his apartment building, just so that we know how far his wife has strayed. Cold, angular career women, often sexually aggressive, have come to dominate the popular media while Fathers are becoming nurturing. (*The World According to Garp* is another recent example.) And there are also plenty of sadistic Mothers around (*Mommie Dearest*).

Thus, the entire structure of sex-role stereotyping remains intact. The only change is that men can now acquire previously forbidden "feminine" qualities. But career women immediately lose their warm qualities, so that even if they do combine mothering and career, they cannot be Good Mothers. It is depressing that the popular media have only been able to respond to the women's movement in terms of what it has opened up for *men*. It is up to feminists to redefine the position of the Mother as participant, initiator of action—as subject in her own right, capable of a life with many dimensions.



1. See Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: Norton, 1976); Dorothy Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977); Jane Lazarre, *The Mother-Knot* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976).

2. Examples of films embodying this myth are: *A Fool There Was* (1914), *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944), *Christopher Strong* (1933), *Our Daily Bread* (1937), *The River* (1950), *The Searchers* (1956).

3. Examples are: *Craig's Wife* (1936), *Little Foxes* (1941), *Now Voyager* (1942), *Marnie* (1966); most recently: *Mommie Dearest* (1981), *Frances* (1982).

4. Examples are: Griffith's films, *The Blot* (1921), *Imitation of Life* (1934, 1959: the black Mother in both versions), *Stella Dallas* (1937), *The Southerner* (1945), *Mildred Pierce* (1946), *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946).

5. Examples are: *Alice Adams* (1935), *Pride and Prejudice* (1940), *Man Who Came to Dinner* (1941), *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), *Splendour in the Grass* (1961).

6. Ben Brewster, "A Scene at the Movies," *Screen*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (July-August 1982), p. 5.

E. Ann Kaplan teaches film and literature at Rutgers University. She has published widely on women in film. Her book on Fritz Lang appeared in 1981 and her book *Women in Film: Both Sides of the Camera* will be published by Methuen in September 1983.

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NATIVE VISION

Cecilia Vicuña

This interview with Sandra Osawa (SO) and Peggy Barnett (PB) was conducted by Cecilia Vicuña (CV) at the American Indian Film and Video Festival in New York in November 1982.

CV: How many tapes have you done, and which was the first?

SO: I have produced and written approximately a dozen half-hour videotapes dealing with the Native American experience. The first series was produced for KNBC in Los Angeles. It was a 10-part half-hour series exploring the various facets of Native American life, and it was aired in 1975.

PB: You must remember that there was nothing done by Indians up to that point.

SO: Right. This was the first series produced, written, and acted entirely by Native Americans. This series is now being distributed by Brigham Young University in Salt Lake City, Utah. However, I have a copy in Seattle that I sometimes release for use in libraries and schools, particularly in the Northwest.

CV: How did you get started?

SO: My grandfather always pushed us in our education. He always believed that we should become educated, that we should be able to survive in today's world, so I always grew up with a feeling that I would go to high school and college. I think I got started when I was working with my own tribe. I realized that we read the same newspapers, we listen to the same radio programs and TV everyone else does, we basically go to the same schools (even though they are on the reservation, the schools are controlled by non-Indian people), so I felt a great need to get involved in communications. We started on a local level by producing the *Makah Times.*[1] In addition, we started to appear on local Seattle TV.

CV: How did you do the KNBC series?

SO: We launched a two-point attack. One community group went to KNBC and demanded that the station do something about Native Americans. After this first onslaught, the producer said, "OK, but who do you have that's Native American who could handle this?" So they mentioned my name. The second wave was when I went to meet the producer and his approach was to hire a writer and a producer for me. I told him that I could do it myself. At that point he said, "We will give you a chance."

CV: What about your work here in the festival?

SO: For the American Indian Film and Video Festival, they chose to air *The Black Hills Are Not for Sale*, about the issue of uranium mining and drilling in South Dakota. It documents the coalition of farmers, environmentalists, and Native Americans who were coming together to resist further exploitation of the land. We videotaped the meetings at the International Survival Gathering. For some time I've been concerned to show the special relationship that I believe all Native people have with the land, and in this videotape we highlight the fact that, in our view, the Black Hills are the spiritual birthplace of the Sioux and Northern Cheyenne people. Most people should know that this relationship is a real religion and that when you contaminate the land you are seriously threatening our Native American culture and religion. There are approximately four state areas that have been termed "national sacrifice areas" by the government, because they know that once they start to mine uranium, and attempt to bury the tailings on the reservation, it contaminates the water and air.



Top to bottom: Peggy Barnett, photo by Jesse Cooday; Sandra Osawa, photo by Yasu Osawa; Katherine Smith, a Navajo elder, photo by Upstream Productions.

PB: The American Indian Movement has 800 acres of liberated zone in the Black Hills right now. It is known as Yellow Thunder Camp. However, we have been in court over the situation. Our legal defense is the Indian Freedom of Religion Act of 1978, and Article 6 of the Constitution.[2] At the beginning, when our people first went to Yellow Thunder Camp, the authorities were saying, "Oh, religious freedom, that's just a term Indian people use loosely. Actually, there's no substance to it, it can't be proved." But the government sent in archaeologists to determine if in fact the area was a religious site, and so far they have only proved what we said in the beginning. Yellow Thunder Camp has been nominated one of the religious sites in the country. This special relationship is not just a contact we have with the land; it is a direct responsibility. Phillip Deere, a respected Indian Medicine Man and one of the religious advisors to the American Indian Movement, told us that at one time we were all one people, and that the red man was given the Western hemisphere to take care of. And that's why there has been so much resistance from Indian people throughout the hemisphere, because we realize that we have a responsibility that has been given us by the highest order of the law of nature. That is where we begin.

SO: We look at the land as our mother, and from your mother comes all life. That's another beginning, another foundation for our philosophy. Many times you can see it in everyday life: Women were given the responsibility of carrying on the people.

CV: Would you say that people are more willing now to listen to the Indian's vision because the land is being contaminated, and they realize that it has to be taken care of?

PB: I think Indian people have been talking about the sacredness of the land for *many* years. You can look at the speeches from the beginning of the contact with non-Indian people and you can see the warnings, 400 years ago, of what was going to happen if they didn't listen to what our people were saying. Now in South Dakota the farmers are forced to make an alliance with the Indians because they are both ex-

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ploited by energy companies, they are both having their water and air contaminated. They have no other choice but to join together and develop an alliance. Their whole survival depends on it.[3]

CV: How do you fund your work?

SO: Well, for example, *The Black Hills* was funded by an Indian communications group in Seattle which had received National Endowment money for research—basically the research we were doing. I would really like to see this project receive more funding so that a really complete program could be made, but it is very difficult to receive funding for this kind of film. In fact you find that there is very little about political issues or politics in Native American films. Wherever you find real poverty, people have trouble communicating. When you don't have access to, or the ability to communicate with, other tribes, your sense of poverty is maintained. For example, the Bureau of Indian Affairs has always been reluctant to fund anything dealing with film; I know because I have worked with my tribe for quite some time. One of the first things we tried to do was to get money to make films and videotapes, but the BIA's response was always "no." Also, after the Watergate period, Marlon Brando and several others tried to get a series dealing with Native American concerns, and the answer was always "no." Maybe the public isn't ready.

CV: What about distribution?

SO: I really haven't worked on distribution. We didn't have the means, but we wanted to be sure they got out to the Indian people, especially in the BIA's schools. Even though the BIA has a very bad reputation around the country, they were exactly the institution that needed to be informed. As you know, the media are largely controlled by the white man. We have been excluded from all aspects of the media and I think it is very important that other voices be heard. Now minorities are trying to get inside the system and participate.

CV: You have had no response from the public television networks?

SO: There's basically been no response from them. We were given a great opportunity at KNBC, but it was aired at 6:30 a.m., which is not exactly prime time. But we were on the air, and the products were finished. I believe that has helped people to see that Native Americans can produce, and can write scripts, and this is very important. You are continually faced with proving your credibility in the media if you are a minority.

PB: One of the things we are trying to do at the International Treaty Council is to build a library of selected works done by Indian people, but many of the films we have are done by non-Indian people about Indian people. We are very issue-oriented in terms of the political situation, so we hope that filmmakers and people who are in the media will send us their work. We have a tremendous outlet all over the world, especially in Europe. We have an office in Geneva, Switzerland, run by Mario Ibarra, a Mapuche Indian. We are also establishing an Indian Audio Bureau, which will work with all the established Indian radio stations throughout the country. At this point we are looking for funding to get that project on the way.

CV: Would you say that you find more response to your materials outside the U.S.?

PB: Oh yes. There are many countries, such as France and in the Caribbean area (and in fact we have a delegation in Nicaragua right now), that are interested in re-educating the people away from the constant cowboy-Indian movie syndrome. When we go to another country we tell them that it's not going to do us any good to come and talk to them if their children are not going to be educated from the beginning about the true history of our people. In fact one of our commitments with the Iraqi Women's Federation is that they will translate the 1868 Fort Landon Treaty into Arabic and make it available to all their people. But *this* country doesn't want to be educated! This country wants to go to Disneyland, to be entertained. They don't want to see anything with any political substance to upset them because they are busy working the eight-hour day and then they go home and they don't want to watch anything about the contamination of the land. They have enough bad news as it is all day, and this is the syndrome. Education in this country is such a lie. How do you get back and undo all the lies that have been told? We need to look at a different approach to education, to look at young children who will grow up with another attitude, because education about Indian people has been hidden.

CV: What other projects do you have?

PB: Perhaps we should talk about Big Mountain, the traditional homeland of the Navajo, and of Louise Benally and her mother and sisters. There had been a relocation process because of coal mining, and they opposed it and were arrested.[4] This is very important both in terms of religious freedom and human rights. Relocation is a violation of about 10 international covenants, which was also brought up at the Russell Tribunal.

SO: We have some 14 videotapes already shot on location in the Big Mountain area in the Southwest, and we want to finish the Benally videotape and get out a half-hour program.

CV: Sandra, I've heard that you are also a poet. Would you like to talk about the relation between your poetry and films?

SO: That's really a good question because, in my opinion, a poem is the briefest way that you can sum up your feelings, and I think that film should also be brief and to the point. A good poem is very concrete, the same as a good film. I think the script is a very critical area, because we first have to address the writing at script level before we can get good movies. I've joined the Writer's Guild of America West, but I don't know of any other Native American women writers in the union who are working with scripts. I am really hopeful that someday something that I've written can be produced. I am interested in the area of contemporary dramatic fiction concerning Native Americans, and I first completed a script called *Dakah*, about a fictional Indian person from my own tribe in the Northwest. It deals with a slice of her life, and I hope it gives some awareness about the Indian as an ordinary person, as a human being. I'm hopeful that it will help people to realize that the stereotyped image of the Indian has to be taken away. You always see the Indian (even at this film festival) sitting by the river smoking a peace pipe, or sitting around the drums in the middle of the bushes; you always see him dancing, of course, doing something very colorful. This tends to create a romanticized picture of the Indian person. I'd really like to see current images from today. It could be an Indian walking up and down the street in tennis shoes, drinking a coke, or whatever—this is what we haven't seen. Too many of us fall into the same pattern of trying to copy the white man's version of what we are. Some of the films at this festival were done by non-Indian people, so that explains it in part. But this is the trap we fall into ourselves, because we see the same movies presented to us and so therefore that appears to be the "truth."

PB: One of the comments made about *The Black Hills Are Not for Sale* was: "We finally got a chance to hear what the Indians have to say." There is a philosophy in the Indian movement: We know that Indian people have resisted from the very beginning, and we also know that our brothers and sisters in El Salvador and Guatemala are now going through what we went through 100 years ago. And actually there's always been resistance—that's why we are still here.

1. The *Makah Times* is an independent newspaper produced by the Makah community of Neahbay, Washington.

2. Article 6 of the U.S. Constitution guarantees "the right to a speedy and public trial, by an impartial jury. . . and to be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation" with provisions for adequate defense.

3. The office of the International Treaty Council has documentation (available for distribution) on the effects of low-level radiation and sterilization. Write: ITC Office, 777 United Nations Plaza, Suite 10F, NY NY 10017; phone (212) 986-6000.

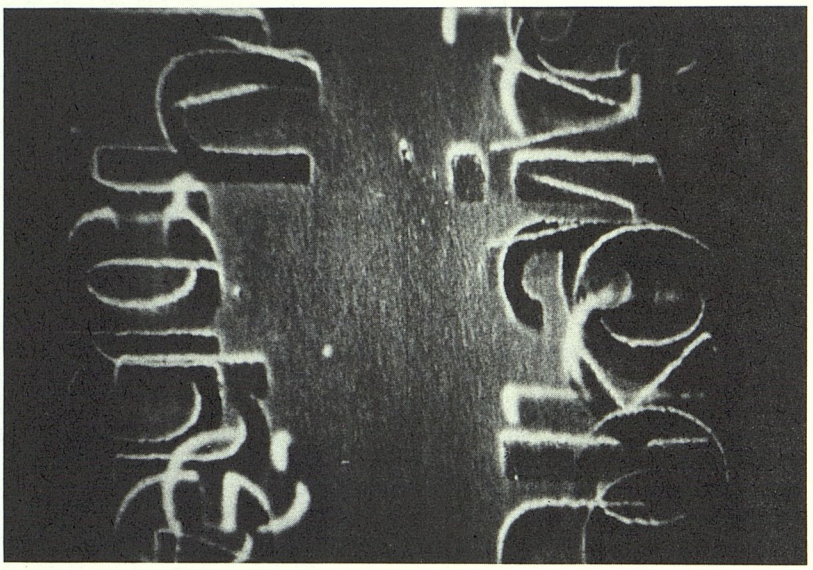
4. The Benally women tore down the fences erected by officials to impound their sheep. They were arrested, then freed; the case never went to trial.

Cecilia Vicuña is a Chilean poet, artist, and filmmaker who lives and teaches in New York City. Her forthcoming book is *Precarious Works.*

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Light Reading

Lis Rhodes



who turned the light away
the light away from her
she will not be placed in darkness
she will be present in darkness
only to be apparent
to appear without image
to be heard—unseen
she lightens her own reading
she reads by the reflection of herself

in mind of herself she listens
she saw the story in a moment
the end began—where the beginning ended
inseparable in the myth of her memory
in the sound of her voice

the sounds were always behind
behind in the depths of her mind
drowned in the drumming of the passing days

her hands reached out
she could only glimpse the shadow
the faint reflection of the fading image
stumbling on the traces of her knowing
sinking in the ruts of her experience
slipping amongst the shadows of her story
she couldn't reach herself

she begins again
she reads by the sun
her face to the moon
she is guided by darkness
threatened by those things that might have been
could have happened
surrounded by sounds no longer heard
images lost from sight

regathered to the sound of her voice
reaped to the rhythm of her body
the words dance in a moment of light
the image of the story is apparent

the sense of the story is seen
but which moment of beginning
follows which moment of end
is the end beginning
or the beginning ending
she is told the end is not the beginning
if it were—she is told

how could she know the which from the witch
or the which from the why

the violence of sequence
tears at the threads of her thoughts
the folds of light fade into deep shadows
the sense of her dreams is disturbed
by the presence of a past not past
a past that holds her with fingers sharpened on logic
nails hardened with rationality
cutting the flow of her thoughts
forcing her back within herself
damned by the rattle of words
words already sentenced
imprisoned in meaning
shot full with pellets of punctuation
exhausted with explanation

in her own voice she cried
the end cannot be confused with the end that ended
somewhere—but not here
not here at the beginning

end of reel
end
end to end
cut to white
then black
she raised her hand

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hold still shot of raised hand
sound of shot still
silence

she said that i was to wake her in an hour and a half
if it didn't rain
it is still raining what should i do
should i wake her or should i let her sleep longer

she begins to read
she reads in silence
blurring her mind with the sound of words
images
reaching back into darkness
after the frames of her raised hand
stretch print the next frames six times

she tries to read
the words fall away
fall through
her mind twisting in sharp circles
herself circling in on herself
diverging along sudden tangents
tangents without direction
there could be no direction
on her own
on her own she was just passing time
passing time from one hand to one hand
enclosed behind a closed door

cut out ten black frames where the camera stopped

she slept a little this morning
pale with self-absorption
flicker on camera—loop print with close-up
over and over—round and round

her head was cluttered with blank images
perfectly symmetrical and transparent
she could look at herself
in reflection
but the reflection was not hers

still of camera to man's eye
still no sound

she writes on the small white frames
turns them over
hidden under the smooth surface
her thoughts are framed
in reflection

lengthen next frames
stretch hand in shadow
frame paper in mid-shot
move around from
top right of frame
in a complete circle
no sound

framed in reflection
her image fixed
her thoughts framed
her image outside the frame
trying to be in frame

reframed—by whom
in whose frame

end of reel two
another camera movement
fading to white
join end to end
sound of footsteps moving backwards and forwards

the closer she looked
the more she resented herself
for minding
could she not mind for herself
could she change her mind
be mindless
mind that which she had a mind
to mind
total length four hundred and forty feet
print next twenty feet head to tail

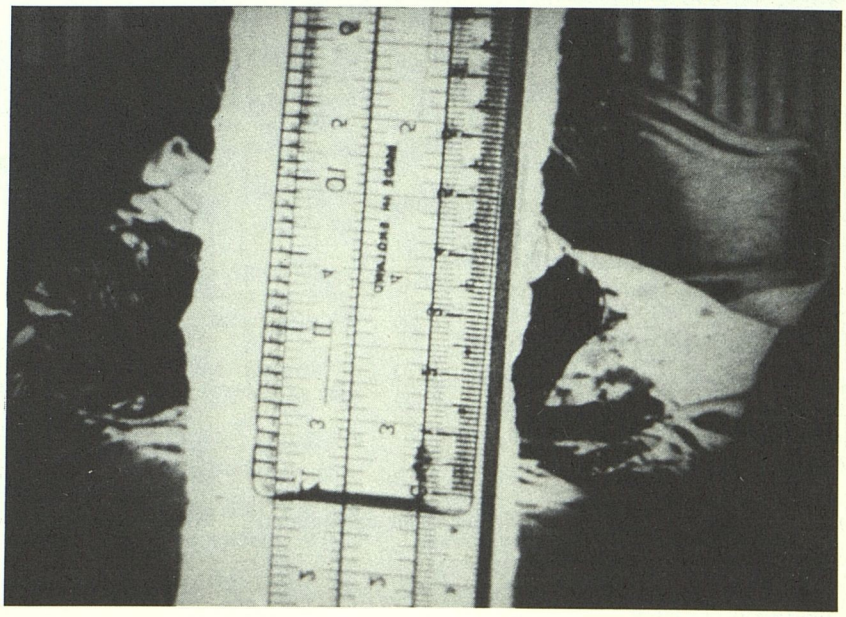
and now she wrote
and now mountains do not cloud over
let us wash our hair and stare
stare at mountains
how sweet are suns and suns
and the season
the sea or the season
and the roads
roads are often neglected

how can you feel so reasonably

polaroid photo with unseen barely visible
camera movement—reading backwards
hold last frame
sound of shot—mixed with footsteps running in frame

the first drops of rain
smash against the window
the tree is olive with new leaves
the white stairs let in light
the intention or intensification is carried
out not by the action but by the illumination

(*continued*)



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sound of footsteps running away
countering the inward movement of the zoom
tracking herself
through the frame
forced by the sound of the footsteps
to fear the constriction of the frame
tracking herself
through the frame
captured contained
she lost track

include optical print of the first section
pace the soundtrack exactly
pace out a rectangle thirty by forty feet
always moving in the same direction
held in line—underline
always under
misframed
in a blank frame
invisible in mid-frame

head of reel one (105 ft)
title?
over exposed
exposed as
imposed on
impaled by

there had been no decisions
no choice
it had been decided
she had no choice

she said that i was to wake her in an hour and a half if it
didn't rain
it is still raining what should i do
should i wake her or should i let her sleep longer

mistake at the beginning of the camera movement
cut
start again—sound of running footsteps

was she working back to front
front to back
images before thought
words prescribing images—images prescribing sounds
which was in front of why
was it just the orientation of her look
the position of her perception
the back of the front
or the front of the back
she listened
she looked at the surroundings of the images

close-up of the title fills the frame
the sound of the shot is louder

she watched herself being looked at
she looked at herself being watched
but she could not perceive herself
as the subject of the sentence
as it was written
as it was read
the context defined her as the object of the explanation

cut
she raised her hand
stopped the action—re-action
she began to read
she began to reread
the story backwards
it began

i dreamt last night that i was dead
i was closed from my life
from time and knowing
i could see her and speak with her
she was dead

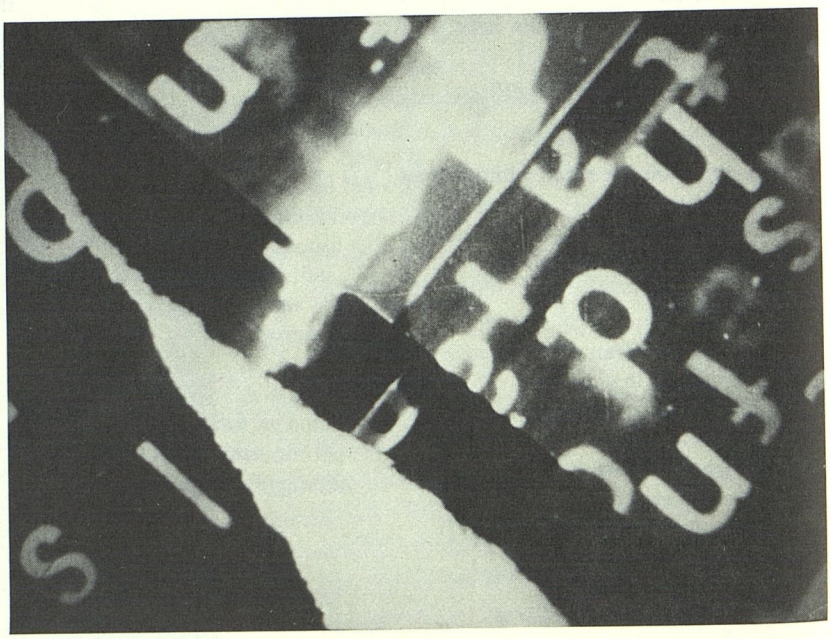
she said that i was to wake her in an hour and a half
if it didn't rain
it is still raining what should i do
should i wake her or should i let her sleep longer

there remained several strands
each black and white
threads of possible meaning
nothing was unraveled—nothing revealed

no singularity of structure or logic
she looked more closely
she read more clearly
she saw that
she was both the subject and the object
she was seen and she saw
she was seen as object
she saw as subject
but what she saw as subject was
modified by how she was seen as object
she objected

she refused to be framed

she raised her hand
stopped the action
she began to read
she began to reread
aloud



All photos from Light Reading *(1978) by Lis Rhodes.*

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Women's Media Resource Guide

Edith Becker

This issue of *Heresies* seeks to reinforce connections among many women who believe that feminist visual work is a neglected resource. Some of our articles should awaken the idea that watching TV and movies is neither simple nor harmless. In order to educate ourselves about our own images, and how we are audiovisually controlled, we must actively and knowledgeably watch women's film, video, slide shows, and other media. This media is not regularly consumed by CBS, PBS, UA, etc., implying that the work too clearly illuminates our understanding of women's lives.

In women's work, we become the creative subjects rather than remaining the necessary objects, and because we do not accept the media's silencing of women's contribution, we have had to develop other systems of exhibition and distribution. This network is small and needs continual use if we are to continue to control it. The survival of the workers and their work depends on our support.

Because there is a finite amount of public money available to women's media, relatively little work is shown. But there are some strategies that will help us bring women's media to the community. Women's culture has pockets of prosperity and areas of great dearth. Actively bringing films and tapes to areas of underdevelopment is a task each individual can initiate. Women and progressive groups must regularly exhibit independently produced work in addition to challenging museums, art theaters, libraries, and film clubs that do not.

Film- and video-viewing can be a personally consciousness-raising event and need not include the aura of festival, series, or benefit. The difficulty for some women may be a resistance to paying for the work brought into your home or basement. Women must be willing to spend as much money on women's work as we spend for commercial entertainment. We suggest pooling money to show selected work once a month or as often as you can. You don't have to be an established group to rent, watch, and discuss independently produced films and video. Also, if there are films and tapes that you believe a larger audience would enjoy, lobby your local educational and cable TV channels to show them. There is no limit to where women's film and video work can go if it gets support from more women.

Women's film programs can be shared among a small circle of friends or presented by feminist and other women's organizations at meetings or as a separate public film event. Sound projectors and video recorders can be rented from camera shops, equipment rental companies, some libraries, schools, YWCAs, churches, synagogues, banks, service clubs or other organizations. They may also be willing to provide meeting rooms as well as co-sponsor programs of public interest.

Program notes and a brief introduction of the films provide a background for the viewer as well as insight into the relationship between works shown. A discussion conducted by an experienced facilitator can further raise consciousness and encourage personal insights and ideas. A less formal atmosphere is achieved by regrouping chairs and providing light refreshments. Set up the screen and check the picture (and sound) well in advance of audience arrival. If there is sound, place the speakers near the screen and try not to keep the audience waiting.

The following guide is only a start to a women's media network. *Remember: Many independently produced films and tapes are self-distributed.* These works must be sought from the artists through exhibitors and publications. Phone calls and letters are necessary means for obtaining some of the work our list offers. You may need to be a member or go through your local library for use of some of the guides. If your library is not a member, you may ask them to join. Many of the books, periodicals, and directories list additional resource guides, bibliographies, filmographies, and information for funding series or special programs.

U.S. DISTRIBUTORS

American Federation of Arts, 41 East 65th St., NY, NY 10021. Independent cinema and some video, some by women.

Asian Cine-Vision, 32 East Broadway, NY, NY 10002. Tapes by Asians and Asian-Americans, some by women.

Black Filmmaker Co-op and Black Filmmaker Foundation, 1 Centre St., WNYC-TV, NY, NY 10007. Distributes Black independent work and provides programming services.

Document Associates, 211 East 43rd St., NY, NY 10017. Distributes International Women's Film Project collection.

Electronic Arts Intermix, 84 Fifth Ave., NY, NY 10011. Video art.

Filmmakers Co-op, 175 Lexington Ave., NY, NY 10016. Independently produced films, some by women.

First-Run Features, 144 Bleeker St., NY, NY 10012. American independent features, some by women.

Goddess Films, PO Box 2446, Berkeley, CA 94702. All the films of Barbara Hammer.

International Women's Film Project, 3518 35th St. NW, Washington, DC 20016. Work by Women in Latin America and about U.S.-Latin American relations.

Iris Films, Box 5353, Berkeley, CA 94705. Feminist film producers and distributors.

Iris Video, PO Box 7133, Powderhorn Station, Minneapolis, MN 55407. Producers and distributors of independent feminist tapes.

Media Project, PO Box 4093, Portland, OR 97208. Social issues and history tapes.

Mountain Moving Picture Co., PO Box 1235, Evergreen, CO 80439. Feminist documentaries.

New Day Films, PO Box 315, Franklin Lakes, NJ 07417. Feminist and social issue films.

Pandora Films, 1697 Broadway, Rm. 1109, NY, NY 10019. Feminist and social issue films.

Riverside Church Disarmament Program, 490 Riverside Dr., NY, NY 10027. Six films and six slide shows on the disarmament movement, most by women.

Second Decade Films, PO Box 1482, NY, NY 10009. Independently produced women's films and tapes.

Serious Business Co., 1145 Mandana Boulevard, Oakland, CA 94610. Independently produced documentaries and experimenal films by women.

Third World Newsreel, 160 Fifth Ave., NY, NY 10011. Produces and distributes social issue, anti-sexist, anti-racist films, some by women.

Transition House Films, 25 West St., 5th Fl., Boston, MA 02111. Distributes *We Will Not Be Beaten* about battered women.

University Community Video, 425 Ontario St. SE, Minneapolis, MN 55414. Social issue and documentary tapes.

Video Data Bank, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Columbus Dr. at Jackson Blvd., Chicago, IL 60603. Tapes about artists and by artists, many women included.

Videofarm, 156 Drakes Lane, Summertown, TN 38483. Tapes on natural childbirth by farm women.

Videographics, 2918 Champa St., Denver, CO 80205. Tapes on women in the arts and documentaries.

Videowomen, 595 Broadway, 3rd Fl., NY, NY 10012. Tapes of women's conferences and documentaries.

Women's Educational Media, 47 Cherry St., Somerville, MA 02144. Sound filmstrip, *Straight Talk About Lesbians*, available.

Women Make Movies, 19 West 21st St., 2nd Fl., NY, NY 10011. Films and tapes by women. Documentary, narrative, and experimental.

USING THE PUBLIC LIBRARY

The local public library is an excellent resource for women's films, as well as information and programming. Although film collections are usually located in state, county, and big city libraries, even the smallest libraries are usually associated with free film networks or co-ops. If your library does not have an "in-house" film collection, ask your librarian if films may be borrowed from a county, regional, or state collection. A catalog is usually available and the subject index should reveal a variety of films of special interest to women.

Larger libraries may also have *The Educational Film Locator* (New York: Bowker, 1980), an index to 50 university film services that rent films for about half what the distributor charges. University film services also issue their own individual rental catalogs. Another useful reference is the NICEM (National Information Center for Education Media) Index, which serves as a sort of *Books in Print* for films, listing thousands of titles and distributors. Distributors also offer their catalogs for the asking, and if you have more money than time, the distributor may be the way to go. —*Anita Bologna*

Anita Bologna is the record librarian at the Donnel Library, New York City, and was formerly an audiovisual consultant and film librarian for the New Hampshire State Library.

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U.S. INDEPENDENT EXHIBITORS

Write for series schedules and guidelines for submitting work for screenings. Some publish regularly.

Anthology Film Archives, 491 Broadway, NY, NY 10012. Screenings are suspended until 1984. The Jerome Hill Publications Library is operating by appointment.

Artists Space, 105 Hudson St., NY, NY 10013. Programs of film and some video.

Chicago Filmmakers, 6 West Hubbard, Chicago, IL 60610. Regular screenings of new and avant-garde films.

Collective for Living Cinema, 52 White St., NY, NY 10013. Presents avant-garde films.

El Museo del Barrio, 1230 Fifth Ave., NY, NY 10029. Annual festival of Latino- and Latina-produced film and video.

Film Forum 1, 57 Watts St., NY, NY 10013. Premieres U.S. and foreign independent film.

The Kitchen, 59 Wooster St., NY, NY 10012. Exhibits all forms of media art; also distributes videotapes.

Millennium, 66 East 4th St., NY, NY 10003. Screens new domestic and foreign films, mostly experimental. Publishes *Millennium Film Journal.*

Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53rd St., NY, NY 10019. Co-sponsors New Directors/New Films Series, Cineprobe, What's Happening? and Video Viewpoints.

Pacific Film Archives, 2621 Durant Ave., Berkeley, CA 94704. Premieres independent film. Publishes *Program Notes.*

San Francisco Cinematheque, 480 Potrero Ave., San Francisco, CA 94121. Showcase for independent and experimental film.

Whitney Museum of American Art, 945 Madison Ave., NY, NY 10021. Presents New American Filmmakers Series.

U.S. INFORMATION CENTERS AND ASSOCIATIONS

American Film Institute, JFK Center for the Performing Arts, Washington, DC 20566. Guidance to film educators and reference information. Published AFI catalog of *Motion Picture Features: 1921-1930* and *1961-1970*; also *Factfile*, Nos. 1-13.

American Library Association, 50 E. Huron, Chicago, IL 60611. Promotes libraries' film acquisition and programming.

Cine Information, 215 West 90th St., NY, NY 10024. Services to support distribution and use of film and tape.

Consortium of University Film Centers, A/V Services, 330 Kent State University Library, Kent, OH 44242. Cooperative planning of film information, exchange, and distribution.

Council on International Non-Theatrical Events (CINE), 1201 16th St. NW, Washington, DC 20036. Coordinates U.S.-made shorts and presents awards. Publishes *CINE* yearbook.

Educational Film Library Association, 43 West 61st St., NY, NY 10023. Promotes production, distribution, and use of A/V materials; information center for schools, libraries, and organizations. Publishes *EFLA Bulletin* and *Sightlines.*

Media Alliance, 245 West 75th St., NY, NY 10023. Information clearinghouse on electronic arts.

Media Network, 208 West 13th St., NY, NY 10011. Clearinghouse for information on social issue media; houses the Reproductive Rights National Network.

New York Film Council, 43 West 61st St., 9th Fl., NY, NY 10023. Promotes nontheatrical use and distribution of film and tape in the community.

INTERNATIONAL RESOURCES

Cinema of Women, 156 Swaton Rd., London E3, England. Distributes women's films.

Cine-mujer, Apartado Aereo 2758, Bogota, DE Colombia. Feminist film producers; information and sales available.

Circles, PO Box 172, London N66 DW, England. A women's film, video, and slide distribution network.

Four Corners Film Workshop, 113 Roman Rd., London E2 OHU, England. Contributes to the development of experimental work.

Frauen und Film, Verlag Roter Stern, Postfach 180147, D-6000, Frankfurt, West Germany. Feminist film magazine.

South Wales Women's Film Coop, Chapter Arts Centre, Cardiff, South Wales.

PUBLICATIONS

1. Films in Distribution

Alternatives: A Filmography, by Nadine Covert & Esme Dick (New York: EFLA, 1974).

Catalogue III, Young Filmmakers/Video Arts, Center for Arts Information, 625 Broadway, NY, NY 10012.

Catalogue of Independent Women's Films, Sydney Filmmakers Co-op, PO Box 217, Kings Cross, NSW 2011 Australia. International listing, annotated; with distributors and subject index.

Catalyst: Media Review, A/V Center, 14 East 60th St., NY, NY 10022. Annotated bibliography of a/v material relating to women and work.

"Directory of American Labor Films," *Film Library Quarterly*, vol. 12, nos. 2/3 (1979). Many listings for labor women.

"Filmographies of Women Directors," in *Sexual Stratagems*, by Patricia Erens (New York: Horizon Press, 1979). International listings of films in distribution.

Films about Women, 2nd Ed. (1979), Penn. State University, A/V Services, Special Services Building, University Park, PA 16802.

Films by Women, Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Center, 406 Jarvis St., Toronto, Ontario M4Y 2G6, Canada.

Films by and/or about Women: 1972, Directory of Filmmakers, Films and Distributors, Internationally, Past and Present, by Kaye Sullivan (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1980), or write: Women's History Research Center, 2325 Oak St., Berkeley, CA 94708.

Films on the Women's Movement, by Janice K. Mendenhall (1973), U.S. General Services Administration, Office of Civil Rights, Washington, DC 20405.

Library of Congress Film Catalogue, Library of Congress, Washington, DC. Publishes annually, Lists all films (many shorts) registered with Library of Congress.

Past 60: The Older Women in Print and Film, by Carol Hollenshead (1977), Institute of Gerontology, University of Michigan, Sayne St. University, 520 East Liberty St., Ann Arbor, MI 48109. Over 60 listings, annotated, with distributors.

Positive Images, by Linda Artel & Susan Wiengraf (San Francisco: Booklegger Press, 1976). A guide to nonsexist films for young people, with subject index, distributors.

Reel Change: A Guide to Social Issue Films (1979), The Film Fund, PO Box 909, San Francisco, CA 94101.

Women in Focus, by Jeanne Betancourt (1974). Pflaum Publishing Order Dept., 8121 Hamilton Ave., Cincinnati, OH 45231. 91 films, annotated, subject index, feminist perspective.

Women in Focus 1982 Catalogue, Arts/Media Center, 456 West Broadway, Suite 204, Vancouver, British Columbia U5Y 1R3, Canada. Titles listed by subject.

Women's Films: A Critical Guide (1975), Indiana University, A/V Center, Bloomington, IN 47401. Select list of educational films, with distributors.

Women's Films in Print, by Bonnie Dawson (San Francisco: Booklegger Press, 1975). Annotated guide to 800 films; subject index.

2. Women's Films

Camera Obscura, PO Box 4517, Berkeley, CA 94704. Journal of feminism and film theory.

Films of Yvonne Rainer, by B. Ruby Rich (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1981).

Journal of the University Film Association, vol. 26, nos. 1-2 (1974). Special issue on women in film.

Jump Cut, no. 24-25 (PO Box 865, Berkeley, CA 94701). Special lesbian section.

"Notes on Women's Cinema," *Screen Pamphlet* no. 2, ed. Claire Johnston, Society for Education in Films and TV, 63 Old Compton St., London W1V 5PN, England.

Quarterly Review of Film Studies, vol. 3, no. 4 (Fall 1978). Two landmark pieces on feminist criticism by Julia Lesage and Christine Gledhill.

"Sex and Spectatorship," *Screen*, vol. 23, nos. 3-4 (Sept./Oct. 1982). Several articles on women's independent film and media.

Women and Film, vol. 1, no. 1 (1972) to vol. 2, no. 7 (1975). Only U.S. publication devoted to women's films; ceased publication in 1975.

Women and Film: A Resource Handbook (1973), Association of American Colleges, 1818 R St., Washington, DC 20009.

"Women in Film," *Film Library Quarterly*, vol. 5, no. 1 (Winter 1971-72).

Women Who Make Movies, by Sharon Smith (New York: Hopkinson & Blake, 1975). Sketches of women filmmakers and their filmographies.

Women's Pictures: Feminism and Cinema, by Annette Kuhn (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982).

Work 1961-1973, by Yvonne Rainer (Halifax/New York: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design/New York University Press, 1974).

3. Resource Books

Audio/Visual Market Place Multimedia Guide (New York: Bowker, 1982). Annotated lists of services, producers, distributors, associations, and equipment dealers.

Directory of Women's Media, Women's Institute for Freedom of the Press, 3306 Ross Pl. NW, Washington, DC 20008. Updated annually, majority of entries are of print media, entries are voluntary.

Educational Film Locator of the Consortium of University Film Centers (New York: Bowker, 1980). Rental libraries, subject listings, producers, distributor indexes, and annotated listing of all films.

Film Programmers Guide to 16mm Rentals, by Linda Artel & Kathleen Weaver (1972), Reel Research, PO Box 6037, Albany, CA 94706.

In Focus (New York: Film Fund, 1980). A comprehensive guide to using films: programming, rentals, and equipment. Available through the Media Network.

Landers Film Reviews, Landers Associates, Box 27309, Escondido, CA 92027. Evaluates nontheatrical films of all subjects.

North American Film and Video Directory: A Guide to Media Collections and Services (in U.S. and Canada), by Olga S. Weber (New York: Bowker, 1976). Catalogued by state or province, lists publications, universities, and colleges that make their films available.

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Heresies,

To whom it may concern: I'm presently incarcerated within Louisiana's so-called correction system and have been so for the last six years. Since coming here my awareness toward this oppressive regime has been broadened to the point that I'm getting hip to their thing. Before coming here I was aware of the racist nature institutionalized into this society in its many guises, overt and covert; however, being a male and Black who views myself as a liberal, thinking individual, I wasn't aware that some of my concepts was supporting sexism. I never knew that by looking at the oppression of all the oppressed peoples of the world through the fate of the Black man and after his liberation everything else would fall in order as being a system of patriarchy. I have been hearing terms like ERA, feminism, etc., but some kind of way never connected it to the overall picture of racism, that in order to have a true revolution and thus self-determination all traces of class, racism, sexism, and exploitation must be eradicated. Cats like George Jackson, Huey Newton, Malcolm X, Lenin, Karl Marx, and a few others, with a little Angela Davis every now and then, was my instructors through their writings. Until recently when I was shown your publication; this was the first time I've got firsthand information on how this system is designed to double its discrimination toward women, and in far more ways than men, women have caught the blunt end of its effects. Your booklet *Heresies* titled "Racism Is the Issue" really knocked the blind off my eyes in that I see the women's plight in a whole new light and have changed my ideology to embrace all forms of the struggle.

I had the opportunity to read only about half of the issue since at the time the guy whose issue I read was on the tier only for a few hours before he was moved to another camp, but I wrote down the address. How he came to obtain your booklet or how he learned of you all I don't know. Knowing that your organization is feminist and your aims are directed toward making the woman aware to man's exploitation of herself in a man-dominated society perhaps you are somewhat suspicious of me in saying I'm very much interested in your publication and, if possible, would very much like to receive some of your literature. I ask that any excess literature you may have around, please send, as I'm anxious to broaden my awareness on this subject. There are a lot of militant-minded brothers here, hungry and in search for knowledge, not the brainwashing trash we have been forcefed all our lives since falling from the womb. I've been discussing your booklet with them and they agree with me that in order for us to reform this system we cannot do it without the sisters being in the struggle and must get insight into the overall picture from all sides. I will share the literature with all the brothers here. If, however, you feel that me being male and that you would rather deal specifically with women, this I can understand and respect. Thank you in advance for your consideration and I have you to know that I salute you the sisters in the struggle.

Respectfully yours,
Anthony Henley
Angola, La.

Dear Hysterectomies:

After being more or less amused by your tasteless rag (no pun intended) almost since its inception, you have finally printed a remark I do not want to let pass without comment. I quote: "The Nigerian authoress, Chinua Achebe, has asked white authors to refrain from creating works like Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* in which Africans are degraded" (Issue 15, Editorial Statement).*

For every thoughtful person of whatever color, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is a work of fiction which is animated by a spirit of subtlety, depth and beauty. It is one work among many which clearly demonstrates that this particular author wrote on a level of philosophical profundity and stylistic sophistication which so far exceeds "Hysterectomies" pathetic efforts at "collective thought" as to make comparisons virtually impossible. Miss Achebe's feeble utterance blends seamlessly into a publication in which there is rarely the slightest trace of intellectual decency in content or tone, issue after issue. "Sisters" on the primitive level of artistic awareness of Achebe in particular, and feminists in general, should at least be speculative about the writings of their betters before attempting anything like a critical observation. Your magazine abounds in proclamations, judgments and accusations which time and again betray the shameless ignorance of its writers. It would be curious to see the manuscripts you receive to better appreciate the laborious work that must go into transforming the incoherent babblings of the ill-educated into something which finally emerges as only minimally coherent and sane.

Sincerely,
Ronald McComb
Seattle, Washington

**Editors' Note: The original statement read: "The Nigerian author. . . " Chinua Achebe is a renowned* male *author. Enough said.*

(*continued on inside back cover*)

SAY NO !

Many men have a hearing problem. Their own statements can be clearly audible, while those of women are not.

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If you are in an uncomfortable situation with a suspected SR man - trust your intuitions. Listen to your needs, not his. There's no need to make excuses or justify your decisions. Just SAY NO, and walk away. SAY NO, and hang up the phone. You can't afford to waste your time: say what you really want, say it loud.



Editors' Note: Received from Elizabeth, dot productions, Vancouver, British Columbia.

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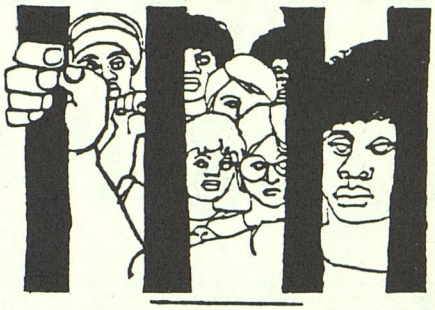
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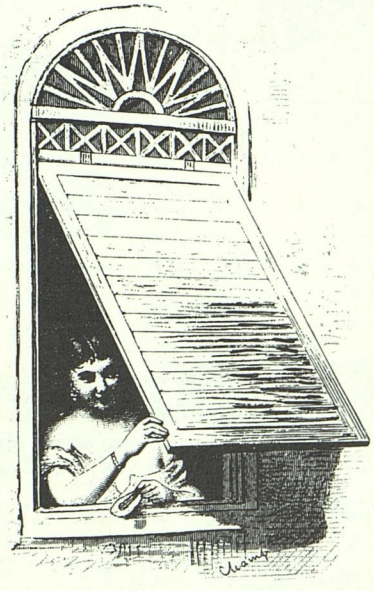
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(*Letters continued from p. 93*)

Dear Heretics,
I'm not a radical,
not usually.
Not art
it wasn't "art"...
I took them
(not quite like Luther
nor any other proclamation-maker)
I want you to know—
expansive of me,
populist-political of me,
and put them up
on the walls.
I tore out one leaf,
then another,
the personal-political,
the messages—
here, see.
I covered the walls
with them
social expectations aside,
external factors,
serious consideration
of meaning aside
(now really)...
I papered the walls practically,
with *Heresies*' expressions—
organizing myself,
or community organizing?
defacing the niceties,
making a "democracy wall"
with these heresies,
at our YWCA.

Joan Van de Water
Kenmore, New York

Editors' Note: Received on the blank page from Heresies *Issue 14.*

HERESIES COLLECTIVE STATEMENT

HERESIES is an idea-oriented journal devoted to the examination of art and politics from a feminist perspective. We believe that what is commonly called art can have a political impact, and that in the making of art and of all cultural artifacts our identities as women play a distinct role. We hope that HERESIES will stimulate dialogue around radical political and aesthetic theory, as well as generate new creative energies among women. It will be a place where diversity can be articulated. We are committed to broadening the definition and function of art.

HERESIES is published by a collective of feminists, some of whom are also socialists, marxists, lesbian feminists, or anarchists; our fields include painting, sculpture, writing, anthropology, literature, performance, art history, architecture, filmmaking, photography, and video. While the themes of the individual issues will be determined by the collective, each issue will have a different editorial staff, composed of women who want to work on that issue as well as members of the collective. HERESIES provides experience for women who work editorially, in design and in production. An open evaluation meeting will be held after the appearance of each issue. HERESIES will try to be accountable to and in touch with the international feminist community.

As women, we are aware that historically the connections between our lives, our arts, and our ideas have been suppressed. Once these connections are clarified, they can function as a means to dissolve the alienation between artist and audience, and to understand the relationship between art and politics, work and workers. As a step toward a demystification of art, we reject the standard relationship of criticism to art within the present system, which has often become the relationship of advertiser to product. We will not advertise a new set of genius-products just because they are made by women. We are not committed to any particular style or aesthetic, nor to the competitive mentality that pervades the art world. Our view of feminism is one of process and change, and we feel that in the process of this dialogue we can foster a change in the meaning of art.

HERESIES Collective: Lyn Blumenthal, Sandra De Sando, Vanalyne Green, Michele Godwin, Sue Heinemann, Elizabeth Hess, Lyn Hughes, Kay Kenny, Nicky Lindeman, Lucy R. Lippard, Sabra Moore, Cecilia Vicuña, Holly Zox.

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UPCOMING ISSUES

No. 17: Women's Groups—Time to Raise Hell! Projects and plans from progressive political and cultural groups all over the world. An action-oriented issue with suggestions for organizing and mobilizing the public.
No. 18: Acting Up! Women in Theater and Performance Art: Please send us essays, original scripts, technical designs, documentation, visuals, and interviews exploring the diverse work by women in contemporary theater and performance art. Deadline: NOW.
No. 19: Mothers, Mags and Movie Stars—Feminism and Class: We want cultural/social/economic analyses of the institutions that shape the mother-daughter relationship—to use this relationship to understand family, class, and culture. How do women's magazines and movie stars point up issues mothers and daughters are in conflict about (or agree on)? Deadline: Fall 1983.
No. 20: Satire: A remedy to conventional media presentations of women. Send us parodies of food and fashion features, "celebrity" interviews, how-to info, advice to the lovelorn, feminist comics, political "ads"—anything that laughs. Deadline: Fall 1983.
Guidelines for Contributors. Each issue of HERESIES has a specific theme and all material submitted should relate to that theme. Manuscripts should be typed double-spaced and submitted in duplicate. Visual material should be submitted in the form of a slide, xerox or photograph. We will not be responsible for original art. All material *must* be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope for it to be returned. We do not publish reviews or monographs on contemporary women. We do not commission articles and cannot guarantee acceptance of submitted material. HERESIES pays a small fee for published material.

ERRATA: HERESIES NO. 15

p. 22 "Looking Backward..." by May Stevens: The missing line in the second column should read: "playing? A playing at toughness, verbal violence from this..."
p. 30 "Love Story" by Elena Poniatowski: In the second to last paragraph, the word "proctological" should be "proctolalic" (a made-up word).
p. 54 "An American Black Woman..." by Howardena Pindell: The eighth line should read: "Black woman represent*ing*..."

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