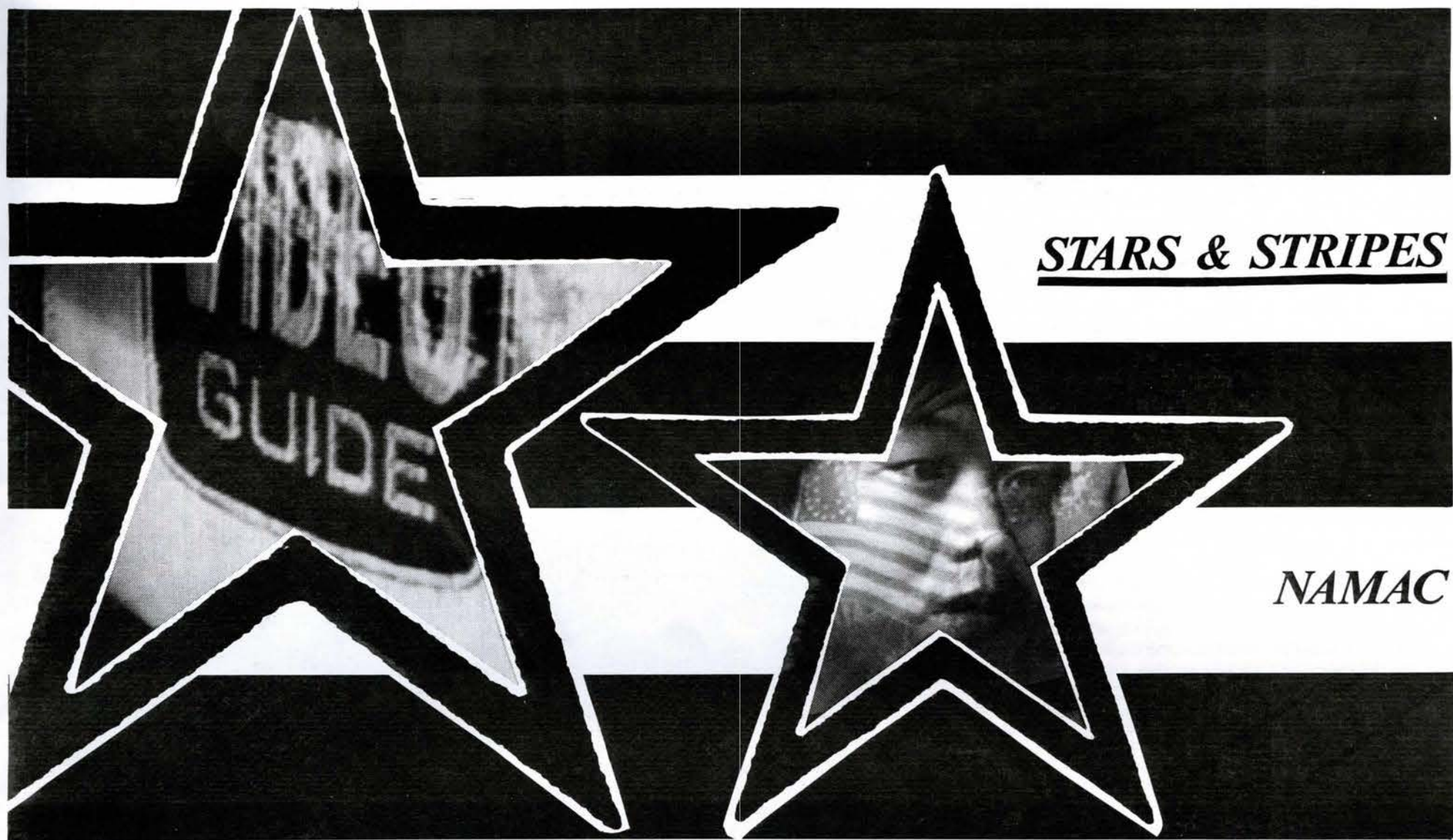




STARS & STRIPES

NAMAC

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INTERVIEW CONSTANCE DEJONG/TONY OURSLER



ONLY HALF HUMAN

IN ABSENTIA VIDEO



BEST OF ATLANTA VIDEO FESTIVAL



The maple leaf and stars and stripes forever America home of the brave and the free. This being an election year and after eight long years of Reagan, this seemed to be a suitable time to relook at what's going down, south of our borders. Reganomics, which has overruled everything including the wretched poor, the dreaded middle classes, and the unholy rich, has reached that point in time 'out of time'. He has stunted growth and maintained alternative expression and the media arts at the level of fingerpainting. There is no criticism like no criticism. Nullify and pacify the restless masses with media pabulum — the brain dead is the living dead. Regardless, alternative practices and the media arts have continued to thrive and to critique and speak out about 'the american way'.

Meanwhile, Canadians continue to forge links with European countries and the Pacific Rim in cultural exchanges as a methodology to try to shape a cultural identity that is 'not — american'. Americans tend to view the friendly north as docile and easy prey, merely as an extension of U.S. cultural, economic, and political policies. This imperialistic and chauvinist thinking carries into the so-called alternative media arts. America and its policies are not the centre of the universe, they just whine louder and flex harder. Canadian culture is caught between two waning super powers — the last hopes for late capitalism. We are viewed by the American as an extension of the British empire and by the British as the 52nd state.

British Columbia finds itself further isolated not only mentally but physically as we are locked on one side by the Rocky Mountains, the Pacific Ocean, and sandwiched between Washington and Alaska. As politicians and big business purposely perpetuate public confusion to enable them to 'free trade', we find ourselves slipping further and further away from access to the mainstream.

In this issue we have provided coverage of both the Canadian and U.S. national media arts conferences. The I.F.V.A. (Independent Film/Video Alliance) was held in Vancouver, and NAMAC (National Alliance of Media Art Centers) was held in Atlanta. Both of these non-profit organizations have become 'the voice' of the independent. Good or bad?, they will affect our means of production, distribution, and exhibition. As true independents we must continue to be forces within these national fronts to maintain a sense of self. It is our hope that both these organizations will begin to cross borders and start to exchange information, to work on common goals and to discuss and accept different strategies.

We have also included reviews of both the official screenings connected to NAMAC and I.F.V.A. The 12th Atlanta Film/Video Festival was a 'juried competition'; "In Absentia" was a 'curated showcase'. Entirely different processes were involved in the selection of work for each exhibition. Canadians continue to be reticent about competitions that charge hefty entry fees. These artist fees are often used to support the organizations that feed off the competitions — many artists pay for the few artists that are chosen and awarded nominal prizes. Robin Reidy briefly touches upon this problem in her overview on organizing the 12th Atlanta Festival.

Visible minorities continue to be invisible. This is a recurring discussion on both sides of the border. We address this glaring issue with an insightful essay from Daryl Chin, a long associate of Asian Cinevision in New York. In addition, we are publishing the concerns put forth at NAMAC from the Ad Hoc Third World Caucus. In Canada, these discussions continue to appear at the bottom of the agenda, being overshadowed by the english/french bilingual debate.

Duality, the pro's and con's of 'collaboration' as a creative process, is thoughtfully outlined in an interview with writer Constance DeJong and videomaker Tony Oursler. An American/Canada coproduction of sorts, their videotape *Joy Ride TM* was produced here at the Western Front as part of their 'artist-in-residence' program and immediately shown at LACE in Los Angeles. From LACE we have a review by Erika Sunderburg on 'Only Half Human', an excerpt from the mega exhibition 'Only Human' from last year's A.F.I. festival. Only Half Human includes the work of both American and Canadian producers who are at the forefronts of new sexual representation during an era of pervasive sexual repression and hysteria. Sexual representation has and continues to be the dominant theme of Canadian video practice. A lively discourse throughout this decade, it has prevailed,

matured, and assisted in shaping new visions and sexual stances.

Adopting an attitude has been the National Gallery of Canada in their opulent and high profile new digs. In the next issue we will file a report on the prominence of video which is at the centre court of contemporary art. The next issue (No. 45) will look at Video Production Centres in Canada.

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Paul Wong VIDEO GUIDE



photo by Paul Wong

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THE JOY OF COLLABORATION

An Interview with



photo by Paul Wong

Constance DeJong and Tony Oursler

by Elspeth Sage

Video and performance artists Constance DeJong and Tony Oursler were artists-in-residence at the Western Front in February, 1988. Based in New York, DeJong and Oursler have formed a collaboration which combines her literary and his visual backgrounds to produce works that are both challenging and entertaining. They consciously speak from an academic and intellectual viewpoint, but manage to combine this in a popular format, making their videotapes completely approachable. While at the Western Front, they produced a 13-minute videotape entitled Joy Ride TM which explores 'institutional vs. private sector' through the metaphor of the theme park and souvenir culture. They also gave a public screening of two of Oursler's previous tapes, reading and performance by DeJong, and premiered Joy Ride TM during their residency at the Western Front.

Joy Ride TM is a Western Front production and is available through Video Out.

Elspeth Sage: *About this Western Front production, if you could discuss where the idea came from. It's different from the description in the mailer. Was it something you thought about in NYC? If either of you could discuss it.*

Constance DeJong: We were going to do two pieces: a performance with video, called *Relatives* and a videotape, *Joy Ride TM*. Instead of doing *Relatives* and *Joy Ride TM*, we just did the tape. *Relatives* would have been a live performance piece with spoken-word text in the way that you saw me deliver text the other night, with a video element. In fact the subject matter is such that I engage with the technology. That piece is not done. The piece that talks about the carbon monoxide filled corridors describes *Joy Ride*.

We have wanted to be collaborators in a number of different ways. One of which is just on videotape, another, because of the performance side of my work, is to develop within that form a collaboration that involves having video on the stage in live performance, either as a set or as a component of the text, or, we're working on a number of ideas.

ES: *Will Relatives be produced at some point?*

CD: It's going to be produced this spring and premiered in September in Boston.

ES: *What about the inspiration behind the videotape that we saw? Was it both your ideas? Or was it someone's project and someone else helped?*

Tony Oursler: Our working process is such that we get an overall kind of notion of something we want to do and then we work to a level individually and then get together and toss things around, and kind of graft them. But it's important that we don't go into a level that's too high, where one person develops too much of the idea and then the other person is sort of just hitching onto it. So we always make sure that neither one goes too far.

CD: It's a storyboard sketch, where we bring concepts that are not so evolved that you can't turn them into a collaboration. Which is to say, ideas for content and ideas for pictures, although luckily it happens with Tony and me that we're capable, once we're in that moment of collaboration and sketching a storyboard, I can have a picture idea and Tony can have a language idea. It just happens. Of course I carry more of the weight with the words and Tony does with the pictures, ultimately in the pinning down of the exact spoken-word text and the pinning down of the sets and the picture-text.

TO: But there's always some sort of real interesting cross-over.

CD: And the ideas are very interesting too, because they pop you out of your habits, my language habits and Tony's picture habits. Like somebody will have a more startling idea that is very effective. But it probably could be said that instead of Tony has an idea and then I come and write a script for it, or that I have an idea and Tony comes and makes sets for it, is that so far, in having developed three pieces, I've noticed that the collaboration, which is a very good collaboration, can go in a number of ways. It will more strongly have my signature or it will more strongly have Tony's. Or there's a third one where we can develop the two signatures being retained and producing a kind of odd third aesthetic that neither of us would have.

ES: *I'm speaking to two artists, obviously, one handling the words and the other handling the visuals, but am I speaking to one artist as far as the ideas? Like, is Joy Ride more you? Would your close friends say, oh that's Constance or that's Tony?*

TO: In this piece particularly, maybe on a certain surface level it may look more similar to my work just because nobody has seen Constance make a videotape before, so it's ending up in my form, even though we wrote one story together. And Constance always helps me do a little editing on some text.

CD: You can't forget that the power of the image is such that when one looks at it, it will look like a Tony Tape.

TO: Also, it's four pages of text, so that puts Constance into a realm that she's never been in before, which is she doesn't write stuff which is four pages long. So I think for Constance it was more of a stretch artistically than it was for me. I know how to do this kind of stuff. I know the balance of text to picture and this sort of thing.

CD: But the moment of collaboration comes in that respect, is that with a writer, and Tony working with a writer, and this is something that I think about a lot and concentrate on, is the place where you form a relationship between image and words, between picture and sound. I think in our collaboration that problematic is more focussed, more centred, more an issue that is being worked-with, than in Tony's previous work, where there's a singular vision, it's like one voice. Even in *Joy Ride* there isn't really one voice, just Tony's voice. The words are different, their relation as a text to pictures is different, the words themselves are different. What is also different is trying to engage with that problematic, what is the relation between picture and words? And to develop that issue in the work without being didactic. There'll be a different solution every time we work together.

TO: But see, this was written together. The idea came about in a very roundabout way. We had written a lot more on *Relatives*, it was almost finished, and then we started work on the tape. We had no idea, at all, and then I went to Disneyworld for Christmas. And then I talked to Mark Paley from LA, from LACE gallery, and Patty Pedesto, who's done some work there. And they were talking about commissioning a work for their ten-year anniversary. So they wanted to do something about 'art'. They had a whole curator's list of things that could possibly fit in, that artists usually scoff at. So we thought, what an interesting connection, cause Constance had been to Disneyworld...

CD: Another aspect of the subject that I was familiar with was, as obscure as it may sound, our relationship to objects. That fit into the eventual subject for *Joy Ride*. What LACE was interested in, we took object way outside a museum or gallery setting to a larger world. But it was a subject that I had worked with, and had been developing in other narratives, so it appealed to the team of us.

TO: So, that's like the three points of the triangle from where the original idea came from. So if it's an overall allegory for people's attempts to try and find some sort of transcendental experience in their life through some kind of cultural and aesthetic experience.

CD: It became *Joy Ride* — the memento. What is the memento? The bridging from a public place to an object that codifies a public experience into a private memory. It leaves one site — the public site — and enters the private site in your home, as well as your mind.

ES: *Is that the idea behind the souvenir/memento shelf?*

TO: Yeah, which is what people take home from museums anyway. They take a brochure or something. So we're more interested in the common person as opposed to some kind of heady bullshit about...

CD: It was a very isolated subject to think about talking about gallery experience/museum experience. To make the metaphor that aesthetic experience would occur in this theme park, broadened to a more common experience.

TO: In the piece itself it has an interesting twist because we were looking at the whole issue of 'how you acquire it, what is the object?'

CD: Yeah, like through purchase. So one's relation to an object is affected by money, advertising, promotion, that affect on the object and that person selecting the object, that became part of the subject.

ES: *And is Joy Ride TM somewhat of a pun in itself, in the sense that you're trying to trademark the title, like you do with a pen?*

CD: Exactly. And then we thought, gee, maybe people will really think that we have got that trademark.

TO: It's this whole idea of ownership which is at the core. It's always grafted onto that experience, to that aesthetic. You gotta pay to get in there, you gotta pay to go to the movies. You gotta pay to go to the university to figure out how to decipher the art that's in the galleries. And then you save up all your dough for your vacation to go to have the experience.

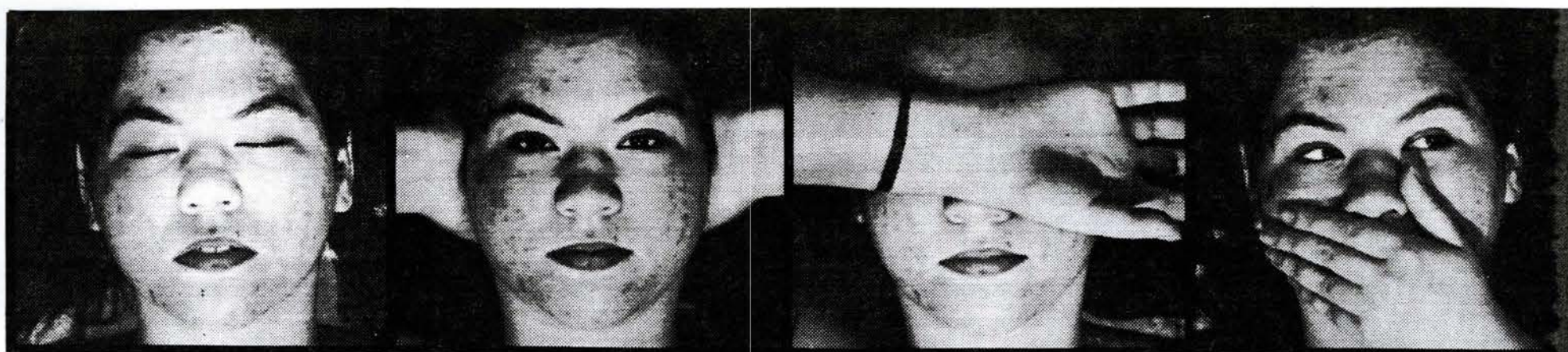
It's very interesting for us as artists, this subject matter, because we think about where do we fit in? This piece for me was kind of like an overview of where we fit in and what is this object that we're making, and how does it relate to people anyway?

ES: *The other point that I wanted to ask about was the*

Continued on page 18

IN ABSENTIA VIDEO

by Karen Knights



"Independent production cannot exclude the challenges at the margins — if anything at all, this is a reminder that in our haste to 'succeed' we must more than ever continue to nurture the less obvious, the more difficult, and give these ideas an equal voice and means of communication."

— Paul Wong

"In Absentia" was the first curated showcase of Alliance film and video. In the past, the screenings had been open, with no overriding theme. The decision to curate the show this year allowed for a strong, thematic exhibition.¹ The video and film programmes were curated separately and occurred on two different nights at the Robson Square Media Centre.² Video curator Paul Wong and film curator Maria Insell decided on the theme of "absence". For Wong, this meant videotapes "that reflect views, issues, and concerns not necessarily of and from 'centres of power'".

Of the two programmes, the video was the impudent one, and deliberately confrontational. Skirting the bounds of overstatement, the videos demanded, rather than requested, the audience's attention. The chosen works addressed the issue of identity, directly and indirectly, examining its loss or change as a result of acculturation, or restrictive or shifting ideologies within one's own culture. The eleven videos used personal testimony and symbolism, documentary, narrative, and experimental styles to convey the experiences of minorities.

The opening tape, *Say It* by Cherie Moses and Colleen Finlayson, discloses the relationships between language and racism, identity and nationalism. It articulates the subtle persuasion used in the assimilation of immigrants in Western "liberal" societies. An Indo-Canadian woman sitting on a stool stares earnestly ahead, waiting instructions from a voice off-camera. In Western dress and short hair, she has already westernized her image. A man's voice instructs her to repeat "I trust you, I like you, I know what you mean, I feel that way, too." He never fails to criticize her. The woman struggles to duplicate not just the words, but the tone, the inflection. Her isolation and dependence are emphasized through a sensitive use of zoom and stark environment, suggesting both a set for a model and a room for interrogation.

In *Eyes Skinned* by Palestinian artist Mona Hatoum, a figure draped in a black hood which completely obscures her features tries with a large, threatening knife, to cut through the veil to free the eyes. The action suggests a search for sight, yet conversely the potential for its loss, and with it, of hope. Images of violence in the middle east are projected onto the hood, accompanied by the sound of a news broadcast confirming the brutality. Her attempt to free herself from this imposed anonymity speaks to the greater struggle of her people. As always, the immediacy of the situation for Hatoum herself comes across in the intensity and directness of her work.

Why You, Why Anyone? by Ric Amis showed another kind of anonymity, that experienced by people who have been institutionalized. Drenched in cold, blue light, the subjects shuffle through the vacuous halls of the institution, being trained to conform to society's idea of "normal".

The young punks in Joe Sarahan's *Rise and Fall of an Empire* talk briefly about their lifestyle, but it is Sarahan's visuals which speak most eloquently. The mohawks, leather, studs, and boots of the punks are hard and glossy like military decorations. Seemingly teleported into the urban scene via chroma-key, they stalk the streets in slow motion, isolated, as the restless feed of businessmen fly purposefully by, oblivious. The soundtrack reinforces their heavy, plodding "progress". They toss back their heads like wounded dinosaurs. Their identity, rooted in their youth and their lifestyle, is fragile.

In Brian Scott's *Maybe I Had a Dream, Based on a Straight Seam*, Greek immigrant Tabitha Koussoula recounts her struggle to 'fit in' in her adopted country.

She reads from her novel *20 Xamena Xponia* (20 Lost Years). At almost 30 minutes, and with its unapologetic emotionalism, it barely sustains the audience's attention, particularly mid-way through a two-hour screening. But Koussoula's unrelenting honesty ultimately wins them over when, as the credits roll, she leaves her position as 'subject' and asks candidly "Was it alright?" Then wiping away her tears, she adds, "I get so sentimental, it's stupid."

It is this unusual candor which makes testimonials such powerful tools in representing the marginalized. In another diaristic account, *Amherst*, producer Jim McSwain looks back on his life as a gay adolescent in a small Nova Scotian town. The use of Super 8 to illustrate his history successfully recreates an aesthetic of shared, contemporary memory. McSwain weaves testimony with social analysis, allowing the audience to make connections between personal and public morality.

Like *Amherst*, the subjects of Lorna Boschman's *Scars* upset the social construction of the body and the taboos surrounding it in their insistence on physical autonomy. *Scars* is a simple documentary in which its subjects speak on their reasons for "slashing". The scars are the visual focus — the subjects' faces are never shown — and lasting evidence of their deliberate self-mutilation. It is a forthright video that manages to demystify what, for some, is a very foreign act.

The programme's emphasis on the individual, and on the unique concerns of small, marginalized groups may be why *Histoire Infame* seemed so glaringly inappropriate. Inspired by a song by Louise Portal, Nicole Giguere has created a slickly produced musical look at the portrayal of women's history by media, particularly cinema. Its aesthetics and the familiarity of its message worked against it in this particular context. Two other works, using rock video format, were far more successful — *The ADS Epidemic* by John Greyson and *Tarde Gris* by James Solkin. In each case, the appropriation of a populist format allows for a concise and accessible message.

Tarde Gris personalizes this account of civil war in El Salvador by using contemporary folk music and children's gaily coloured drawings, graphically illustrating the violence and brutality faced by the nation's people. The storyteller addresses the audiences from near darkness, as if in hiding, drawing the viewer into his world and experience.

"ADS", or the "Acquired Dread of Sex" syndrome, is Greyson's topic. Insisting "this is not a Death in Venice", Greyson's Tadzio rejects the "red-neck" moralizing of Auchenback and opts for safe sex instead. It is a light weight in comparison to some of the other message-laden videos in the selection, in spite of the seriousness of its own topic. Yet it makes its point precisely because of its humour. A sex-positive tape, it signals an inevitable reclamation of territory by gays; ground lost in the AIDS fallout.

Michael MacDonald's *What Price An Island?* is, in the same spirit, also about reclaiming territory: in this case, both figuratively and literally. The native land claim battle in British Columbia has Meares Island as its focal point. The tape begins with a circumnavigation of the island. This allows for the island itself to be made real for the audience and to seduce them with its rugged beauty. The implied distance between the viewer and the island reinforces its physical autonomy. It is clearly the "object in question". This image is later contrasted with that of native elders standing together, proud, like the trees McMillan-Bloedel threatens, at a rally where they speak eloquently and authentically about their claim to Meares.

Where the individual works succeed or fail in representing their subjects, however, are in some ways less important than the success or failure of "In Absentia" and its constituency in addressing the issue raised by the theme — the absence of minority voices, not just from

mass media (we all know the reasons for that), but more importantly, their absence from independent media. The exhibition illustrated that the current reality of the "marginalized voice", even within independent productions, is that it remains predominantly white and middle-class.

In the programme notes, Wong refers to video's portability and accessibility, enabling it "more than film to be pluralistic and egalitarian"; however, as I'm sure Wong would agree, it is not the material determinants of the medium alone which make "egalitarian" representation possible. The portapak is not a moral agent.

Loretta Todd used the term "media missionaries" to describe white artists who, in the early seventies, brought into native communities this technological trinket, the portapak. After nearly two decades, and independently of this early attempt at colonization, native people have found a way, based on their own needs, to use the medium to their advantage. Yet they are still unable to secure funding for their own access centres and must watch as non-natives continue to receive grants to tell native stories or use native imagery without regard for context or for the effect this has on native lobbying power.

The still high cost of the equipment itself, funding agencies who do not distinguish between productions "about" or "by" the subject, access centres which have failed to appeal to a diverse community, and the theoretical and pragmatic biases of exhibitors and juries, inevitably restrict what is produced, even within the independent sector.

Significantly for the Alliance, the theme of this year's showcase contextualized debates within video access centres and among distributors, producers, and exhibitors about the direction of independent video and the identity of its membership. The relationship of minorities to the independent media community, and that community's relationship to mainstream media, is never static. This terrain in which cultural discourse occurs is influenced by a variety of factors, not least of which are initiatives taken by media organizations to address inequalities within their own structures.

Historically, artist-run centres have been important venues for exhibiting and promoting video from the margin, yet larger issues, like the need for the make-up of staff and boards, curators and critics to reflect a broad community, have not been adequately explored. Are we still media missionaries imposing our terms for an "equal voice", or can we ensure that authentic and significant restructuring will occur?

Wong referred to the "challenges at the margins". This challenge extends beyond the final creative product, back into the institutions artists have established which allow them to make the videos they want to make. If exhibitions like "In Absentia" are not to be token gestures, an attempt to redress the current imbalances must be initiated. The motions brought forward by the Chief Dan George Foundation proved that active participation by minorities is the only way to guarantee they will be heard.

The identity of independent video and those who produce it is continually changing. However, it is obvious that further attempts to integrate other communities into the artist-run centres and support of minorities in their autonomous efforts must continue.

Footnotes

¹In order to make available a broader scope of work to the membership and general public, a video library was established on the site of the A.G.M.

²"In Absentia" was not held at Vancouver's Pacific Cinematheque Pacifique in keeping with the Alliance's policy not to have their Showcase in a venue which complies with Provincial classification boards.



I.F.V.A. Conference

by Karen Knights

Independent Film and Video

Alliance

de la Vidéo et du Cinéma Indépendant

IFVA/AVCI ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

June 2, 3, 4, 1988

The Independent Film and Video Alliance / Alliance de la vidéo et du cinéma indépendant held its annual general assembly in Vancouver this June 2nd through 4th. The almost fifty access centres, distributors, and exhibitors now full members are almost evenly divided between film and video organizations. Video artist Lisa Steele was elected President of the Alliance by acclamation.

Given the critical status of funding to media arts at this time, it was perhaps inevitable that the majority of resolutions coming out of the conference focussed on expanding lobbying for more generous and consistent funding for its membership.

The Alliance committed to lobbying with the federal government and individual parties to get a substantial increase to the Canada Council, with special attention paid to the Media Arts Section, both in terms of revenue and policy. Last year's controversial distribution discussion paper by Susan Nasgaard, even though subsequently withdrawn, left distributors and producers feeling that their concerns were not being given considered attention. Ongoing emphasis by Council on broadcast and continued lack of significant consultation resulted in the endorsement of a meeting between the I.F.V.A. and the Media Arts Section for the formulation of broadcast policy and more detailed criteria for funding of distribution activities.

The method of evaluating video centres by Council was greatly criticized; however, several motions calling for changes in that procedure were withdrawn pending further discussion over the next year. A resolution calling for the elimination of mandatory tape submissions with operations applications was passed. Affected members felt that such a requirement was unfair, as it did not address the nature of their mandates — open access.

Citing the minimal support of independent film and video by Telefilm, a resolution called for increased lobbying with that organization with the aim of facilitating access for independents. Specific areas of concern were the implementation of a clear selection process, specific criteria, and a list of names of those involved in decisions. The Alliance wishes to see funds directed to non-theatrical film proposals and author-produced, low-budget feature length proposals.

The most time devoted to a single funding issue was a controversy surrounding allocation of D.O.C. (Department of Communications) funds. A \$200 million disbursement from this department to national film and video production agencies to promote Canadian media production ignored independent production. The monies were distributed to Telefilm, The National Film Board, and the Ministry of Supply and Services. However, the Canada Council's Media Art Section, perhaps the single largest provider of grants to the independent sector, was left out entirely. The situation underscored the marginal position the Media Arts Section holds: being by-passed by other government agencies for a project well within its mandate and ability to carry through.

The membership also brought forward a motion calling for non-racist and non-sexist hiring policies. At the annual general meeting of the Association of National Non-Profit Artist Centres held two weeks following the Alliance assembly, a similar motion was passed using a more aggressive phrase — "pro-active" — to indicate the level of initiation expected.

Loretta Todd, delegate for new member The Chief Dan George Society, brought forward three motions regarding native media production. The first asked the Alliance to "support the existence of native film and video production, distribution, and artist-run facilities" and to lobby federal and provincial agencies for such funding. The second requires the Alliance to include native participation and consultation prior to any lobby with respect to federal funds.

The third motion asked that "the Alliance respect and support the autonomy of native cultural representation." This elicited the most discussion. The membership, while finally endorsing it nearly unanimously, was obviously hesitant about the implications. Todd recognized that they could not tell producers what to produce (Ross Turnbull also stressed that the Alliance would never dictate what its members could or could not use for their subject), but rather was asking for consultation if native themes or imagery were to be used. Ideally, Todd would like to see a suspension of work by non-native artists on native issues to assist them with their lobby for funds to tell their own stories.

Regionalism still remains an important issue. The Board of Directors initiated an organizational restructuring to have one President elected by the membership at the A.G.M. and seven representatives elected regionally: one each from B.C., the Prairies, and Ontario, and two each

from Quebec and the Atlantic provinces. A friendly amendment was also passed that would allow the Alliance to change its by-laws next year to allow for additional representation from the Prairies, preferably one per province.

Some members also were concerned with the uneven regional representation at the Showcase, "In Absentia", particularly the film programme which had no Prairie or Atlantic works. This brought up once again the feeling that perhaps curated showcases were not in the Alliance's best interest. However, the decision made last year that the hosting region decide the nature of the Showcase was upheld. Motions brought forward from the Prairie region and passed, ensured that future curatorial themes would reflect national production, and that the current situation would continue as long as the A.G.A. rotated from region to region.

The A.G.A. also included workshops which helped to pinpoint areas for further discussion by the membership. The first focussed on audience development, which evolved into a discussion on the diverse markets for independent film and video; and the second on information and strategies for film and video production. Again, the past and future markets for each medium were discussed.

Independent film and video, while having many things in common, which makes such an Alliance very valuable, also need to explore further their different histories and potential futures. Their content and subsequent exhibition places, censorship, and classification issues all need to be discussed and positions clarified.

It was also evident that this community wants a fundamental role in the decision-making process of Canada Council, and that it is uncomfortable with the present relationship. Constantly being placed in a position of "reacting to" the latest changes at Council after the fact has left it shell-shocked. It is questionable how much real input umbrella organizations can attain over the direction of funding, even within sympathetic agencies, for they themselves lack the clout for squeezing necessary funds from their superiors. Intervention of any sort, however, especially at the federal level and particularly within political parties, is essential, if only to reaffirm the necessity of community based production.

The amalgamation of film and video into one Alliance, given their similar sources of funding, guarantees that at the very least the concerns of media artists will be heard a little louder and more consistently.



NAMAC

by Paul Wong

The National Alliance of Media Arts Centers is an American service organization formed in 1980. Its purposes are threefold: communication, mutual assistance, and advocacy. The growing membership of over one hundred comprises individuals and primarily non-profit institutions engaged in the following: production, distribution, exhibition, preservation, and educational activities relating to film, video, intermedia, and audio arts.

Since 1980, NAMAC has staged six national conferences. The most recent was a focus on the area of Media Arts Exhibition. It was held May 18-21 in Atlanta, Georgia. The two day conference coincided with the NAMAC annual general meeting and with the running of the 12th Atlanta Film & Video Festival.

Approximately 250 delegates came from throughout the U.S. They came as representatives of NAMAC member centres, as exhibitors, curators, panelists, artists and representatives of state and federal funding agencies to

attend all or parts of the fifteen panel discussions presented over the two day period. All of the panels directly addressed the theme of Media arts exhibition ranging from Touring Programs & Circuits, Exhibition Technology: Recent Innovations, Television Broadcast & Cablecast, Criticism, Media Arts Festivals, etc. One of the closing panels, Artists' Concerns & Exhibition, actually represented the voices, experiences, and opinions of practising film and videomakers. Unfortunately, this should have been one of the opening panels, as the concerns would have set a sharper tone for the rest of the proceedings. Not unlike most of the other panels, little time was left after presentations for open discussion. In general, the conference was informative — with everyone agreeing to not disagree, a lot of head nodding and hand shaking. A 'don't bite the hand that feeds you' approach to collective bargaining.

NAMAC's membership is extremely diverse, including well established (rich) and just emerging (poor) organiza-

tions. This in itself hinders focused and critical debate; many of the delegates felt that the 'side bars' more addressed their immediate concerns and issues.

Of interest and of use is the 1988 Member Directory, which provides a comprehensive guide to centres that includes annual budgets, staff, services, and descriptions. Of specific interest is the very well researched and presented 'Field Survey (1986-87)' based upon the responses of 87 organizations and addressing collections, computers, exhibitions, publications, distribution, and education. The statistics are a real eye-opener, budgets that range from a low of \$1000 annually to those of \$2 million. The directory can be ordered from NAMAC, 135 St. Paul's Avenue, Staten Island, New York, 10301, (713) 727-5593.

In this issue we have reprinted the complete text of the papers given by Barbara Hammer and Peter Rose, two of the seven panelists on Artists Concerns & Exhibition. We have also reprinted a statement from the Ad Hoc Third World Caucus.



Atlanta, GA 1988

12TH



SOME THOUGHTS ON RUNNING A MEDIA ARTS FESTIVAL

ATLANTA FILM & VIDEO FESTIVAL

by Robin Reidy

As this year marks the last time I will be the director of the Atlanta Film & Video Festival (AFVF), it seems appropriate for me to look back on all the past festivals I've worked on in some capacity and attempt to define the purpose, scope and unique qualities of this festival.

When I first became involved in the inner workings of the AFVF, I had no concept of what it meant to present such an event in terms of both its logistics and the larger implications for the local and national media arts communities. As the years, and festivals, passed (I've worked on every festival beginning with the fourth in 1980), I've been able to develop my own theory as to why this festival is important, and how it is unique among all the types of film and video festivals presented around the country (and the world).

The Atlanta Film & Video Festival is unique because its basic purpose, format and methodology have changed very little since it was first conceived in 1977 as part of a larger outdoor arts festival held in Piedmont Park. It was, and still is, a national competition of both films and videotapes of all lengths and genres, produced only within the last two years, and judged by media arts professionals who always include both artists and curators from media arts centres around the country. Even the time of year it is held (late spring) has changed very little.

AFVF's main purpose is to present winning films and videotapes to local and regional audiences who rarely would see them in any other context, and to create the opportunity for a dialogue between the artists and the audience by also presenting the artists in person and by sponsoring workshops related to specific aspects of independent film and videomaking during the festival.

Since the first festival, a call for entries has been sent out nationally, a panel of four jurors has been assembled (two for film and two for video) and they are responsible for choosing the winning works based on prizes raised within the Atlanta community for categories that include dramatic, experimental, documentary, animation, and student. The location of the festival at the Woodruff Arts Centre, where the High Museum of Art (HMA) has donated space, staff, and publicity support, but has wisely kept a hands-off approach to the form and content, has also remained stable throughout the years.

This overall structural stability has enabled the festival to be flexible from year to year in both its screening formats and content, as well as to be adaptable to the changing media technologies that have occurred over the past 12 years. The fact that it is both a film and video festival has enabled it to present the rapidly changing styles and types of video art, as well as to maintain a broad spectrum of independent film winners.

When I first worked with IMAGE board members and the then-director, Anna Marie Piersimoni, on the festival in 1980, I only saw parts of it (the judging process and the publicity). When I became the Executive Director of IMAGE in 1984, Linda Dubler was the Festival Director and she worked with me to run the 1985 festival before

leaving to become the first Film and Video Curator at the High Museum later that same year. It was then that I learned how the entire festival was organized, and what did and didn't work in terms of all the elements that had to happen in order for the festival to take place.

Each year since, I've been able to make changes and fine-tune procedures and timelines in order to ensure that the festival at least breaks even financially and doesn't kill the staff with too much work. I've also learned how to ensure more participation from more media artists (target the mailing list and hold a national conference!) and have enough time for publicity (start six months early and allow three months between the judging and the festival).

I've also come to understand how a media arts festival helps support the entire media arts community, both locally and even internationally, on a variety of levels, beginning with the individual artist. It was this year's festival that taught me the importance of each artist when the video judges (Anne Bray and Paul Wong), who are both artists and curators, held discussions during the judging about the entry fee and the reasons artists enter festivals. I now understand how tough it is to spend the money and time just to submit one's work to a festival, with only a small chance of winning a prize, and I truly appreciate the large number of artists who sent their works in this year and every year past to our festival. The debate over whether to charge a festival entry fee, and how much, continues.

The AFVF also enables curators and programmers throughout the national media arts community to discover new works and artists — either through judging, attending, or learning of the winners from those who viewed them. I was pleased last year to recommend several video artists to Neil Seiling, the curator for the new works at the 1987 American Film Institute's Video Festival, who in turn programmed some of the works and gave those artists well-deserved national recognition not possible from just being shown at our festival.

Several winners of early festivals who were new or unknown in the larger media arts community have since become established, internationally-known media artists and feature filmmakers. It's not that people like Susan Seidelman, Mitchell Kriegman, Spike Lee, Skip Blumberg, Bill Viola, Jane Aaron, and Ross McElwee gained more national recognition from being presented at the AFVF, but the local audience and media arts community were able to see their works in the early stages of their careers and sometimes meet them in person.

On a regional and local level, the AFVF attracts a larger-than-usual number of the general public to see media art for the first time because of the amount of publicity generated and its High Museum location, which helps IMAGE and the HMA both develop a year-round audience. The AFVF also attracts local and regional visual and performing artists who are interested in film and video as interesting art, or as possible new forms of expression for their works. They may also be looking for

IMAGE

News
About
Independent
Film and Video
May 1985

ATLANTA FILM & VIDEO FESTIVAL

A CELEBRATION: TEN YEARS OF SOUTHERN INDEPENDENCE



media artists as collaborators, and it enables them to find each other and begin critical dialogues about media as self-expression and as art.

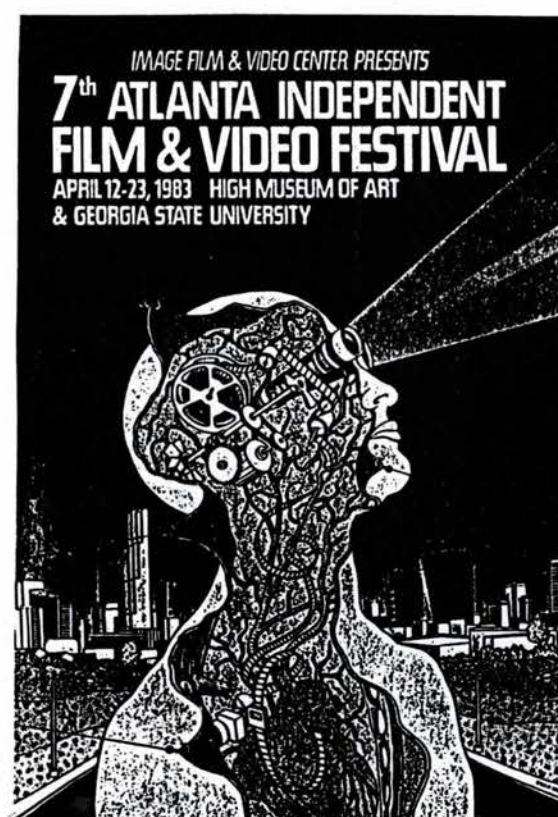
The AFVF has a budget of about \$15,000, which is extremely small, and which limits its scope and size, as well as its stature in the hierarchy of media arts festivals across the country. The money is raised through entry fees, prizes from local companies, in-kind space, hotel rooms and food donations, program ads, and sponsorships of events. Costs are kept low through volunteer help, free publicity from the local press, in-kind donations from the HMA, and the fact that the IMAGE staff runs it along with all the other day-to-day IMAGE activities.

If the AFVF is to ever change its size, scope, and national prominence, a full-time director who would also serve as a fundraiser would have to be hired by IMAGE, and fundraising for just the festival itself would be a year-round activity. At this point, I'm ambivalent as to whether I think that should happen. I feel that the festival, in its current form, is very effective in terms of what it does for Atlanta, the region, and the national scene, and it can even turn a profit if it is run well. I've learned that bigger is not always better, and I'm not sure that there will ever be much more of an audience for the festival unless a national event like the NAMAC conference can help bring in people from the rest of the country.

As it now exists, the Atlanta Film & Video Festival continues to evolve and function primarily as a major showcase of new independent film and video works from across the country. It remains one of the few film and video festivals anywhere where both first-time and established artists can have their work recognized and exhibited in an open, supportive context that is inclusive and all-embracing of the wonderful diversity of form and content found in the media arts today.

SIXTH ATLANTA
INDEPENDENT
FILM & VIDEO FESTIVAL
APRIL 14-18, 1982

Sponsored by IMAGE Film/Video Center in Association with the High Museum of Art



BEST OF THE 12TH ATLANTA FILM/VIDEO FESTIVAL

by Elspeth Sage

The "Best Video" series at the Video In, June 29-30, 1988, presented the 'best of' the 12th Atlanta Film & Video Festival, held in Atlanta in conjunction with the NAMAC (National Alliance of Media Art Centres) Conference May 18-22, 1988. The videotapes screened over the two nights at the Video In included works in the following seven categories: Best Digital Video Effects; Best Documentary; Best Student; Best Southern (a curious category, to say the least, considering that there was no 'Best Northern', or 'Best Western' for that matter); Best New Narrative; Best Dramatic; and Best Experimental. Both screenings were just under two hours, with most of the videotapes being relatively short (under 30 minutes), but included at least one 58 minutes long, clearly targeting the 'feature-length' broadcast market of public television.

The "Best Video" series was screened in Vancouver because one of the two video judges, Paul Wong, is resident at the Video In. The other judge, Anne Bray, is the Video Coordinator at LACE in Los Angeles. They viewed over 200 entries from the U.S., Canada, and England before selecting the winners. In the case of this year's festival, the number of entries was substantially higher because of the profile provided the winning entries (and those given honourable mention), which were screened during the NAMAC Conference. The conference has the approximate significance that the ANNPAC Conference has in the Canadian context, in that it provides a national forum for representatives from media art centres throughout the U.S. This fact alone proved enough of an enticement to elicit the high number of entries, in spite of the condition that the entrant pay an 'entry fee' of \$25 (U.S.), plus shipping — a term to which many artists strongly object.

The annual festival, which has been running since 1977, is organized under the umbrella of local media arts producers and centres, but specifically through the auspices of IMAGE Film/Video Centre (Independent Media Artists of Georgia, Etc.). The festival director, and Executive Director of IMAGE, is Robin Reidy. She describes the festival's main purpose as "presenting winning films and videotapes to local and regional audiences who would rarely see them in any other context, and to create the opportunity for a dialogue between the artists and the audience". The festival is described as a 'national competition', but obviously international works are considered (although only one of the winners, *The Story of Feniks and Abdullah* by Luc Bourdon, wasn't American). The entries have to have been produced within the last two years. The prizes, which are nominal (\$200 to \$250 U.S. per category), are raised through local sponsorship. The entry fees go to pay for the festival's administration.

The first night's screening featured the "Best Digital Video Effects" and the "Best Documentary" categories. *Out of the Mouth of Babes* by Sherry Millner/Ernest Larsen was one of the best tapes in the entire 'best of' screening. It provided a funny — but never hilarious because of the subject matter — commentary on U.S. policies in Central America by using the metaphor of a

child's development and learning of the English language, as a yardstick for anyone to learn — let alone figure out — the rationale behind America's foreign policies with its southern neighbours. At various times within the 25-minute tape, the child-subject is aligned with both the victim and aggressor of the U.S. in Nicaragua, Cuba, and Panama. We see the child jumping on a tiny trampoline, on which a map of Central America is drawn, while the voice-over states that "when you jump, you jump as an American, and when you land, you land as an American — on someone else's territory". Later in the tape, the child becomes victim when the mother asks her if she minds if the mother puts words in her mouth, speaks for her and prevents her from speaking. The irony is brought full-circle when the child, who appears to be about two years old and is just learning to talk, is sitting on her father's lap. He asks her questions about the history of U.S. intervention in Central America. "Did you know that from 1917 to 1923 U.S. troops occupied Cuba?" The child answers "yes" and thereby reveals the patent absurdity of the value of this historical knowledge anyway. Yet, in spite of the fascinating storyline and how cleverly it was told, this tape won the 'best' denomination for Digital Video Effects. Without having the benefit of viewing its competitors, it must be presumed that the judges chose this work for its digital simplicity. No doubt this category attracted a number of digitally stunning and complicated works, but the Millner/Larsen tape likely stood out for its rudimentary, but ingenious, use of effects. These varied little from an arrow drawn towards the child's mouth over the image while she was speaking, to the mouth drawn over the image of Reagan speaking, to a brief text written over Reagan speaking from the Oval Office, coupled with the word "threat" superimposed over both.

The second tape was *Blue Collar and Buddha* by Taggart Siegal in the "Best Documentary" slot. This videotape represented a rather straightforward document of local community issues in Rockford, Illinois. The 58-minute length and format made it fairly clear that this work was produced with an eye to the broadcast market. The programme notes described it as "a fresh, fascinating look at how a Buddhist community lives more or less comfortably with Middle Americans". While it is questionable whether this statement is accurate, in that this is not really a 'fresh' look at the age-old dilemma of assimilation/alienation, it is certainly true that this work captures certain truths and passions about racism and xenophobia. The producer has focussed the look at cultural differences through an examination of the religious differences between the indigenous 'American' population of Rockford, predominantly Christian, and the new arrivals from Laos and Vietnam who, in this tape anyway, are predominantly Buddhist. While recognizing the fact that to tell the story of many of the refugees from South East Asia means to examine the various church groups that originally sponsored their coming, there are still certain troubling religious undertones to this tape. There is a questionable allowance for acceptance and agreement with certain 'Christian' values. However, the most inter-

esting side of the tape was not so much the obvious victim status that the new arrivals received, but the ugly face of America revealed in cinema verite by the rendezvous interviews in the bar with the locals. The latest wave of immigration has had the effect of uniting this 'white trash' element with the blacks, as stated by one interviewee, "We and the blacks don't live as well as they do." The audience reaction, both at the NAMAC Conference and at the Video In, was also instructive, in that comments were made about 'white people being not very well-treated in this tape'. Funny how it feels when the shoe is on the other foot.

The following night's screening (which began with an impromptu visit to the Video In by the directors of China's five major film studios, who happened to be in Vancouver courtesy of Telefilm), began with *What's Up?*, the "Best Student" videotape. This 33 minute tape, told through the personal stories of the kids portrayed, investigated what it is to be a man. The tape, which was a collaboration between a team of professional artists and the students at California's Masada Reform School, was created by the students and told in their own somewhat simplistic style. It fit well in this category for being accurately representative of the type of work done by students. Through fast edits, rap-style music, and jive-laden voice-over stories, the work explored the views that these kids, and society, have of themselves. The low-tech presentation quality created a feeling for the street culture these kids live within, with images of running from the cops, scratch video clips of jumping over the fence, out of the way and into the ritual basketball game. The tape ends with an interview-style cameo of each of the participants, talking about themselves, their likes and dislikes, and whatever came into their heads. "Tim" tells jokes, "Richard" talks about basketball, "Jim" philosophizes about choices, "Steve" about how he became a car thief, "Janal" about science fiction, "Joe" about girls and "Melvin" about football. The only flaw in this otherwise excellent student piece is that it displays the usual fear of cutting in immature work.

The most disappointing videotape in the series was the winner in the curious "Best Southern" category. Without belabouring the point about the logic of this categorization, this tape was judged to be the best of the apparent meagre selection received from the southern U.S. *O'Gene's Story* by Paula Granger presented an intimate look at a personal friend dying of AIDS. It should perhaps have remained as a personal remembrance of the victim rather than being placed in the art context because in terms of originality, subtlety, or a fresh approach to AIDS, this tape is sadly lacking. It presented a straightforward and conservative look at the last few months of O'Gene's life, with tearful shots of his lover, friends, and obvious weight loss. The presentation was no different than the usual (or what has become usual in today's world) portrayal of someone dying of AIDS, without any insights or attempts at creativity. That in itself would have been fine but one would have thought that to be judged 'best'

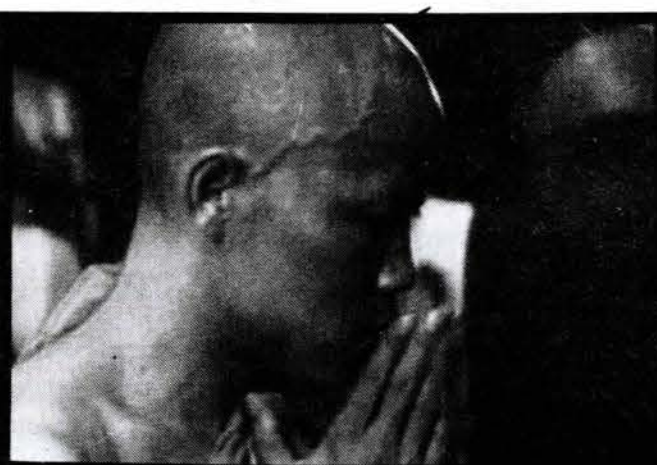
Continued on page 18



Taggart Siegal *Blue Collar and Buddha*



Taggart Siegal *Blue Collar and Buddha*



Taggart Siegal *Blue Collar and Buddha*
VIDEO GUIDE 1988



Anne Bray, LACE



Kathy Rae Hoffman, C.A.T.



Debra Zimmerman (Women Make Faces)

Luc Bourdon, Le Videograph

NAMAC

SOME THOUGHTS ON INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

BY A MEDIA ARTIST

Barbara Hammer

I.

The representation of art, experimental film, and video is extraordinarily important in a society noted for its institutional racism, sexism, and homophobia. That is to say that we were all raised within institutions whose ideologies perpetuate undemocratic and narrow representations of individuals and groups of people whose color, gender, or sexual preferences were different than white, male, and heterosexual. We have all been contaminated by these vile constructions of "the other" and to seriously implement change in programming, staffing, and basically rewriting ideology requires daily commitment to these issues.

If we want to do justice to marginalized peoples, it is not enough to just bring them into the system to have an evening of their films, to address the issues of feminist filmmaking through a panel discussion, to support a lesbian and gay film festival by providing screening space, to hire a Chicano. One night of films by blacks, one panel, one festival, one employee leave the institution unchanged. Institutional support requires more than tokenism. A single individual, group, event is left without power to speak too strongly, too loudly, too critically for the very reason that they depend upon the institution which has brought them as resources but left them without security. The fear exists that if one speaks too strongly she/he will alienate the powers that be and by doing so will cut off future venues.

Tokens are useful but they cannot be expected to do the job. The institution itself must take on this burden. The white heterosexual male, the person who is often empowered, who really takes on this responsibility and puts his authority behind representation of minorities can make more happen than a series of events that change the surface but not the underlying ideology nor its structure. The white heterosexual male needs a staff of minorities to advise him on programming, community outreach, education on our endangered genre, experimental film. This is where radical change can be made, change of the basic ideology that governs the institutions that perpetuates the racism, sexism, and heterosexism we no longer will tolerate.

Experimental film is an endangered genre in the Western world. Without institutional support on all levels, it too may vanish or be relegated to such marginal representation that a shrinking coterie can no longer support. Vitality in the arts exists because of diversity just as a society offers more through pluralism than prescriptive norms and one-dimensional politics. NAMAC and other institutions can assist the continuation and growth of this genre that exists by thriving on the edge of change by lobbying for an introduction of experimental film in our educational system beginning in pre-school and continuing through higher education. Presently de facto, we have abandoned this instruction to commercial television and motion pictures.

II.

As an experimental filmmaker and lesbian feminist, I

have advocated that radical content deserves radical form. In 1979 I had my first screening outside of the supportive lesbian feminist community when Terry Cannon, then programmer at Film Forum in Los Angeles, asked me to show my films in a venue of experimental films. I had already completed several experimental films of lesbian feminist content and had shown them regularly in the Bay Area of San Francisco; as well, they were distributed by early women's film co-operatives. In both cases, I was called upon to explain my unorthodox form and content. To the feminist community I introduced my films in the light of the formal concerns of experimental filmmaking. To the experimental film community I spoke about the importance of unrepresented content.

I believe that a conventional cinema such as classical narrative is unable to address the experiences or issues of lesbian and gay perceptions, concerns, and concepts. When an audience awaits the image on the screen it expects a heterosexual narrative to unfold, and the second problem I want to address here is that the audience is usually not disappointed. Even if the characters are lesbian, the script dominates and projects lesbian characters within a heterosexual world of role-playing, love-making, and domestic and professional life. I say this because of the numerous recent films that suppose to be lesbian have failed to address me as a lesbian spectator. The romance, the on-screen gaze, the plot, the character development are all situated within a heterosexual lifestyle or a Hollywood imaginative lifestyle made for the cinema. Certainly the women I have seen on the screen, their issues, the story, the *mise en scene* do not relate to the personal experiences I live and have lived as a lesbian woman for twenty-eight years in the Western world. Lesbian cinema is on an invisible screen.

"By 'The Invisible Screen' do you mean pictures drawn in lemon juice backwards that when heated can be read through a mirror?" asked a friend. It has been almost that difficult to see lesbian representation in cinema. The lesbian imaginary is carried in a back pocket inscribed in invisible lines until heated. . . by the projector lamp. This lamp, having not been lit, the secret drawing, the mysterious code, the invisible sign are hip pocket-bound; they are off-screen.

How could this be, one asks, in the age of *Desert Hearts*, *Lianna*, *Personal Best*, *She Must Be Seeing Things* as the on-screen space is filled with seeming "lesbian representation." But these films posit the lesbian inside the heterosexual discourse. There is no "lesbian" to deconstruct as the discourse of the gendered subject is within a heterosexist authority system. The lesbians act out heterosexual gender roles and positions rather than claiming any difference; even the sexual practice is situated in heterosexuality.

As a runaway from the political regime of heterosexuality, I and other lesbian filmmakers began to construct a lesbian cinema in the early seventies. Visibility was the central concern for lesbian women making cinema at this time for the simple and profoundly sad reason that there

were few or no pictures, images, representations available. The screen space, on and off, was blank. Not just marginalized, but not there. There was no cinema to deconstruct. There was no gaze to analyze. Lesbian image-makers in the seventies were forced by critics into the "camp of essentialists" because of the extreme urgency of their need to make lesbian representation. A marginalized and oppressed group must make a mark first, define a form, make a statement that they exist. As we made films of lesbian representation we were categorized by the emerging feminist semioticians and theorists, newly emerged themselves from French studies with Christian Mertz, as "essentialists." Because we had represented lesbian women, the assumption that we inhabited these representations with biological, essential "meaningness" separate from ideology or social construction was falsely made.

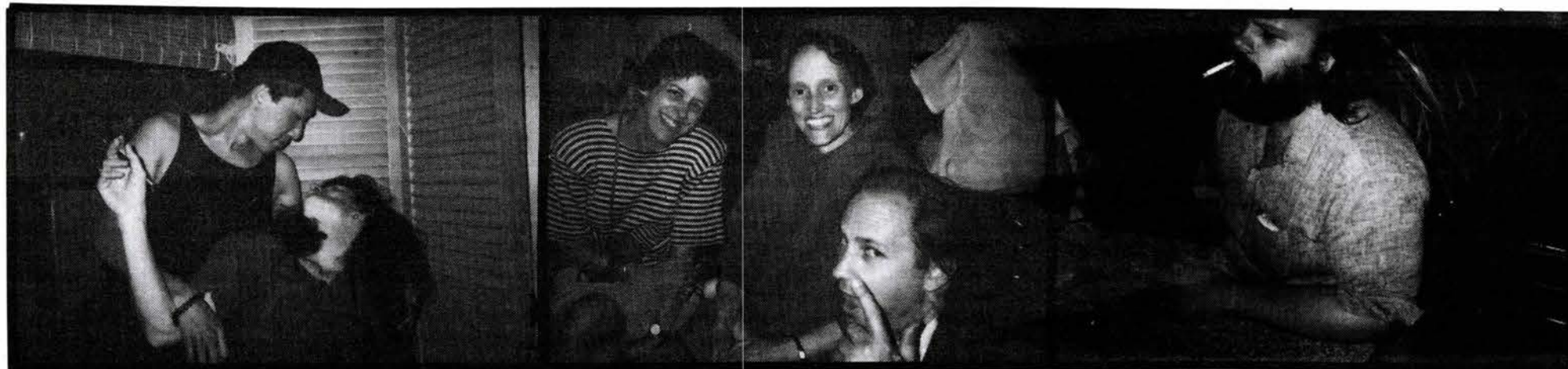
I, for one, as a lesbian cineaste, take a more eclectic and I hope eccentric view of the lesbian representations I made in the seventies. The lesbian women I imaged in film were constructed by their society, the general and dominant society as well as the marginal society of the lesbian community. As well, we discovered who we were as we stepped into the void, the invisible, the blank screen, and named ourselves "lesbian." That was the first step. There could be no semiotics if there were no sign. The lack we felt as we began this early naming process was not the lack of a phallus, but the singular and significant lack of representation. The image did not exist, the picture was not made, the word scarcely heard in discourse nor seen in text.

Until recently, the dominant discourse of feminist criticism has not addressed this issue but has continued to ignore, and by doing so support the invisibility and therefore repression of lesbian cinema. To dismiss the early naming and identity films with the highly-charged and emotive term "essentialist" further removes the opportunity for discourse in a climate where deconstruction, Marxist, psychoanalytic, and Lacanian theories prevail.

This is not a statement of essentialism, although some may call it so. It is an eclectic stance I prefer to take. This reidentification of lesbian self through lesbian sexual experience is but one part of lesbian representation. There are many parts and practices of lesbian experience to be represented. In physics, light can be understood through wave and particle theories at the same time. So too, there can be multiple, co-existing and different theories and understandings of "lesbianisms" through a variety of readings.

One of these readings is experimental cinema. There is an on-screen space, a lesbian on-screen, but it is in the marginalized cinema of the avant-garde. The cinema made by and for the social order of one. The cinema that makes its own construct where form and content are inseparable. I don't think one can make a lesbian film using a patriarchal and heterosexist mode such as the conventional narrative. Plot points are male points. We are radically-changing people, and we cannot reproduce that radicality using conventional forms.





How does the Jury decide?

Barbara London, M.O.M.A.
Cecelia Condit, John Mabey

Alex Roshuk, Le Videographe

NAMAC

STATEMENT OF THE THIRD WORLD CAUCUS

STATEMENT OF THE THIRD WORLD CAUCUS AT
THE 1988 NAMAC CONFERENCE

In Spanish:

Where are women, gay and lesbian, Black, Latino, Asian, and Native American media producers? What type of works are they producing? How are they managing to overcome obstacles of funding, and what kind of support do they need? These questions represent some of the concerns of some of us who have participated in this year's conference.

Statement continued in English:

Whereas the past three or four days of the 1988 NAMAC conference have been generally informative and we are excited by the future prospects of NAMAC, there has been a pervasive feeling among individuals and representatives of organizations interested in a strong Third World presence in the media arts and NAMAC, that our artists and issues have been underrepresented.

Coming as we do from traditionally oral cultures, we feel a sympathetic identification with the official position of independent audio/radio producers and artists in the field.

We began with the question whether we should take NAMAC seriously. After some discussion regarding progressive work and funding recognition, we decided that, yes, we should take NAMAC seriously.

Consequently, in our general caucus meeting on Friday, May 20, 1988, we met to discuss possible ways of increasing our numbers, faces, clarifying terminologies, identifying areas of concern, and generally replayed debates that have been glossed-over or left uninformed by workshop facilitators; and to work toward the March '89 conference in Rochester, New York, especially with its focus on education, in an empowering, organized fashion.

Whereas our general concerns were addressed by the caucus, we make the following recommendations to the general membership meeting of NAMAC, Saturday, May 21, 1988:

Contact other media centres designated as serving Third World people and inform them about NAMAC, this conference, and seek their presence and participation in NAMAC's '89 conference on Visual Education to be held in Rochester, New York.

Identify critics, writers, scholars, historians, and contemporary film/video/audio artists/producers and their work for presentation at NAMAC '89.

Work with NAMAC planners/board members regarding correlation between deficient Third World film/video/audio particularly, and conference costs and expenses.

Receive copies of the Media Action Project (M.A.P.) report/publication, so that Third World media organizations, art councils, and fellow media members may embrace the poignant issues we are faced with, and create lasting mechanisms of communication with Third World, women, and gay and lesbian media communities.

Begin a process of communication and advocacy among Third World media groups, centres, programmers, and artists that has not existed before, the lack of which has stunted our ability to be recognized or taken seriously (as was spoken about by audio participants of themselves).

We appreciate this opportunity to present this statement, and we recognize the board's attention to the failure of Third World participation in NAMAC at the 1983 conference when Asian American media artists addressed this issue.

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A PROJECT OF

SATELLITE
VIDEO
EXCHANGE
SOCIETY



FLV

FEATURE
LENGTH
VIDEO
MCMLXXXVIII

SCREENINGS September 15, 16, 17 at the
VIDEO IN and ROBSON SQUARE MEDIA CENTRE

"New York Batavia", Rien Hagen;
"Green Card: An American Romance", Bruce and Norman Yonemoto;
"Playing With Fire", Marussia Bociurkiw
"Gertrude Stein and Companion", Ira Cirker
"Out of Order", Birmingham Film and Video Workshop
"Tristesse Modele Reduit", Robert Morin
"Quartet For Deaf and Blind", Norman Cohn
"I Do Not Know What It Is I Am Like", Bill Viola

COLLOQUIUM September 18 at the VIDEO IN:
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ASIAN-AMERICAN VIDEO FESTIVAL

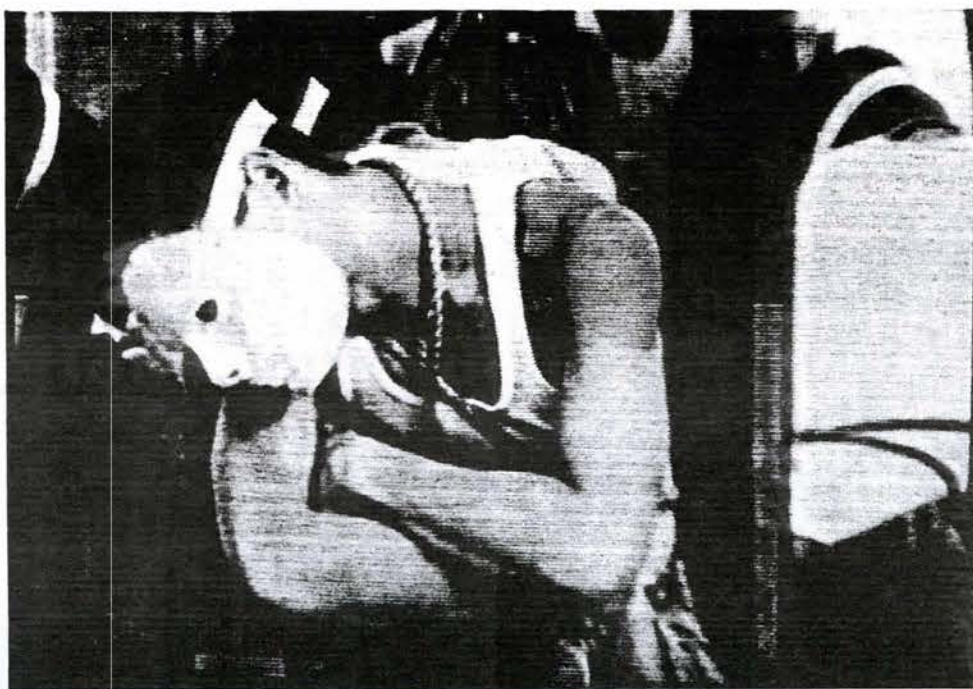
SOME NOTES

The sixth annual Asian-American International Video Festival was held in April 1988 in New York City. The first Video Festival was held in December 1982, under the auspices of Asian Cine-vision; the circumstances and the continuity of the festival are worth noting.

In 1982, the Asian-American International Film Festival was in its fifth year. (The "International" was added in the third year, when it became common practice to include feature film selections from Asian countries.) Initially, the Asian-American Film Festival had been a project of something called the Basement Workshop, a non-profit arts organization in New York City's Chinatown. However, by the third year, the idea of having a separate organization for the Asian-American Film Festival proved untenable, and the festival was brought under the umbrella of Asian Cine-vision, at that time a small media centre in New York City's Chinatown. (One of the notable projects of Asian Cine-vision was a public-access, cable-television show which was shown nightly. The show was in Chinese, and presented news of Chinatown and feature reports of the Asian-American community.) Peter Chow was and is the executive director of Asian Cine-vision. For the first festival, he had been brought in as the publicity consultant. By the third year, he was the executive director of the film festival (since it was now a project of Asian Cine-vision). There was nothing underhanded or covert about any of this. The film festival had grown in terms of its administration and organization, and it needed a larger organization. Initially, the first Asian-American Film Festival was organized by Fern Lee, Danny N.T. Yung, Tom Tam, and me. Danny Yung was also the administrator, a task he shared with Chuck C.N. Lee.

What I hadn't realized (since I had little contact with such a thing) was that there was a whole "Asian-American network" out there. Asian Cine-vision, the Basement Workshop (an alternative arts organization run out of New York City's Chinatown), *Bridge: An Asian-American Perspective* (a journal published under the auspices of Basement Workshop, then under the auspices of Asian Cine-vision), the Asian-American Media Group, The Pacific Asian Coalition. These were only some of the manifestations of this Asian-American network. What I soon found out was that many of the same people were part of the different organizations. Just as an example: Danny Yung. Danny was (and is) a remarkable person, with many irons in the fire. He was on the editorial board of *Bridge*, he was part of the Pacific Asian Coalition, he was one of the original organizers of the Asian-American Film Festival, he was on the board of the Basement Workshop, he was on the board of the Asian-American Dance Theatre (which had been started by his sister, Eleanor Yung). I mean: Danny was a one-man Asian-American network in himself. He was the one, in fact, who made me aware of the Asian-American network.

The idea of a specific Asian-American network has been one which has proven to be very problematic for Asian-American media. Quite frankly, there has been a programmatic approach to Asian-American media in terms of a lot of organizations, foundations, and associations. What this has meant is that a particular image of the Asian-American experience has been shown, and it has been one which has not proven to be of great interest. I know that sounds really rude to say, but an example can be given in terms of the "Silk Screen" television series on the Public Broadcasting System in the United States. Now in its third season, this series (a collaboration of independent films by and about Asians or Asian-Americans, administered by the National Asian-American Telecommunications Association) has concentrated on presenting documentaries that are about "the immigrant experience" in some form or another. During the first season, WNET (the PBS station in New York City) ran the series on Sunday nights, which was the time slot allotted to "independent television" (such series as "Independent Focus", "Alive from Off-Center" and "New Television" are run on Sunday nights, after 11:00 pm). This season, "Silk Screen" is being shown on Wednesdays at 6:00 pm (a totally thrown away hour). Among the films to be shown this year are Lisa Hsia's *Made In Chinatown* (which is a film about her trip to China) and George Ow, Jr.'s *Dollar A Day, 10 Cents a Dance* (which is a documentary



photos Cine-vision

Richard Fung *Orientations*

about Filipino immigrants in California during the early part of the century). The point is, after one or two of these films, fine. But does anyone know how many films there are about (for example) Chinese-Americans making a trip to China to visit the land of their fathers or mothers? Do you want me to tell you how many films like that there are? Or how many films there are where the filmmaker has interviewed his or her family about their experiences as immigrants? This year, for example, eight such films came over the transom during the selection period for the Asian-American Film Festival. I am not kidding: eight! The only one of those films which was hotly debated was one in which the filmmaker turned out to be gay (and she acknowledged herself as such). Do I hear hints of prejudice within the Asian-American media community? You bet!

I'm bringing this up because, for better or worse, the Asian-American Video Festival (it's another one which added "International" to its name when videotapes from other countries, including Japan and the Philippines, were included) has been the most open forum for work in the Asian-American media community. In a way this was unavoidable. For example: the Asian-American Film Festival is organized so that there is a selection committee for Asian-American films, and a selection committee for Asian films. The films are all lumped together: documentaries, experimental, narrative. Unfortunately, the bias of the selection committee is usually very solidly behind works that display a fixed notion of Asian-American identity. But with the Asian-American Video Festival, the selection is usually divided between one curator for "experimental/narrative" works and one curator for "documentary" works. And, with video, it's impossible to ignore the experimental/avant garde/non-narrative work, because artists such as Taka Iimura, Shigeo Kubota, and (of course) Nam June Paik work in this mode. So how can they be ignored? The whole point of the Asian-American Video Festival was to highlight the importance of Asian-American artists to the field of video and how could that be done by ignoring the man acknowledged to be the "father of video art"? So the Asian-American Video Festival had to be open to non-narrative work (and that included the work of Tomiyo Sasaki, Janice Tanaka, Rii Kanzaki, and the late Theresa Cha).

One of the interesting factors in terms of the Asian-American Video Festival has been the multiplicity of formats. Although single-channel works have been the most prominently featured, there have always been installation and multi-channel works included, as well as performance works. (In contrast to this, the Asian-American Film Festival has never shown any installation works; multi-projection work and performance work have also not been included in the Film Festival.) The variety of works in the Video festival have been matched by the varied methods of presentation. The Video Festival has been presented in clubs, in galleries, and in film exhibition spaces. All of these factors have kept the Asian-American Video Festival a uniquely lively forum.

During the first year of the festival, the coordinating committee consisted of Renee Tajima, Amy Chen, Nancy Mei-Yu Tong, and me. At that time, Renee, Amy and

Nancy were on the staff of Asian Cine-vision; we had all worked on the Fifth Asian-American Film Festival, and Renee had the idea of creating a corresponding Video Festival. So as soon as the Film Festival (held in the summer) was concluded, we started to work on the Video Festival. We were exhilarated by the amount of work which we were able to program, and we were astounded by the quality of the work. We were also surprised at the support shown towards the festival. During that first festival, Nam June Paik and Shigeo Kubota, for example, were tremendously supportive, expressing their belief that it was important to build a sense of community among media artists of Asian heritage. It was Renee's incredible energy and organizational skill which brought that first festival to fruition. The first evening of the festival was a marathon event held at Danceteria, a very popular multileveled club in Manhattan. (Danceteria has since closed, the fate of many trendy nightspots.) Seventeen works were shown that evening, plus two installations were on exhibit. Over the next two nights, documentary and longer experimental works were shown at The Collective for Living Cinema, with an additional installation piece on exhibit.

The problem of where to exhibit video has been ongoing in terms of the festival. Clubs, galleries, film auditoria: what is the proper venue for video? Right now, it should be admitted, a lot of work in video is being done in terms of single-channel pieces modelled on broadcast work. Yet, even within those parameters, there are many variants. During that first festival, for example, one work which excited a lot of interest was Bruce and Norman Yonemoto's *Green Card*, a 75 minute dramatic narrative work. In subsequent festivals, the Yonemoto Brothers have been represented by single-channel pieces, usually narrative pieces, which have played on broadcast models (advertising, soap opera, situation comedy, television talk show).

The path that the Yonemoto Brothers have taken is one which has proven to be one of the most interesting for video artists. The Japanese video artist Mako Idemitsu has also been working in a narrative mode. Her videotapes, which were first included in the second festival in 1983, are provocative narratives about the effects of television on everyday life. *Hideo, It's Me, Mama* and *Great Mother, Harumi*, the two videotapes from that festival, were startling in their sophistication and their wit. Since then Idemitsu has continued to have her work presented at the Asian-American Video Festival, represented this year by two new works, *Yoji, What's Wrong With You?* and *The Marriage of Yasushi*. All of her works incorporate the idea of television as a central fact in contemporary life, and use the television as both prop and metaphor. Her family dramas concern absence and compensation, often showing the ways in which television can replace reality.

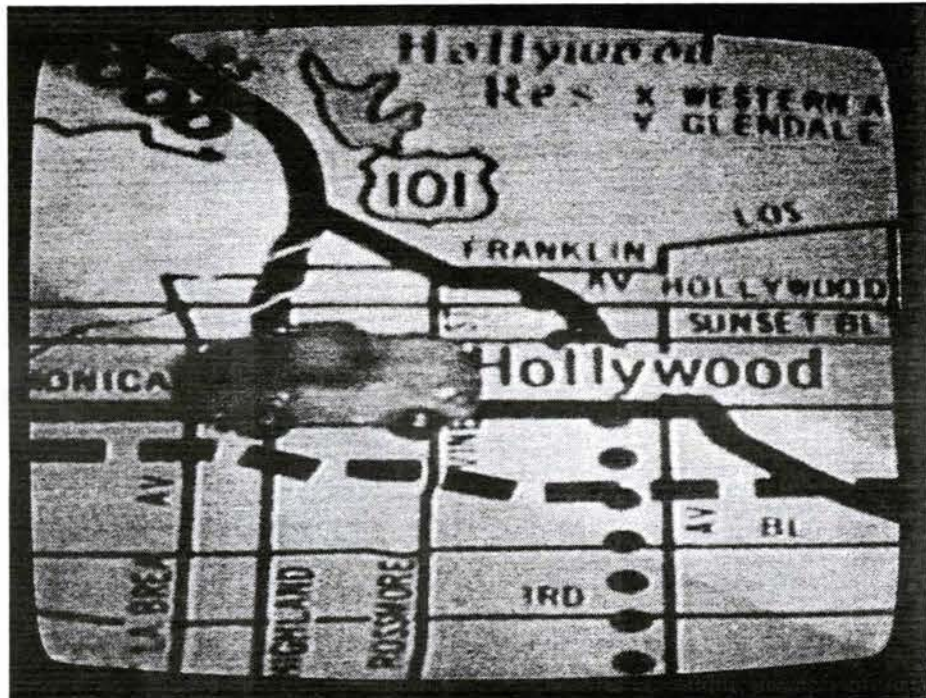
It's difficult to write about the Asian-American Video Festival, because each year has been very different. The fact that, each year, different people have acted as curators has made the Video Festival constantly surprising. For example, in the Fifth Asian-American Video Festival (1987), curated by Luis Francia (experimental/narrative) and Yuet-fung Ho (documentary), there were a surprising

by Daryl Chin

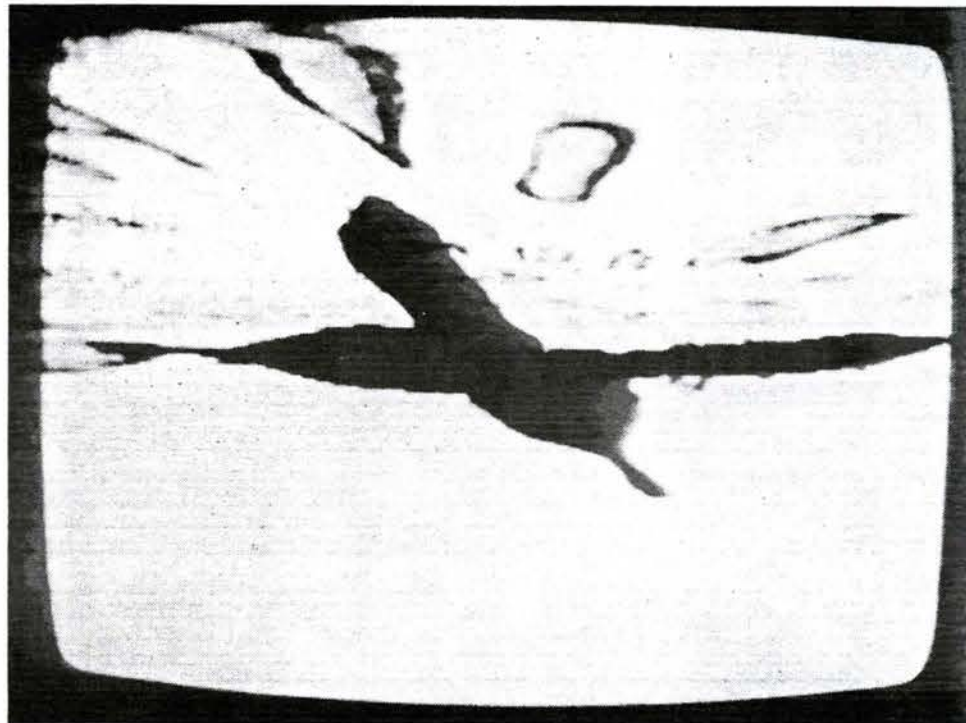
independent media.

At a recent conference organized by Yvonne Rainer and Berenice Reynaud at New York City's Collective for Living Cinema, there was a panel discussion on the exhibition and distribution of "minority" media. What was astonishing was the split that has been developing in the media community about this issue. Just as a specific example: because of the success of Spike Lee, the idea (once again — this idea came up during the late 1960's) of mainstream distribution and exhibition of black films

independent media artists, the difficulties of getting the work done, the difficulties of getting the work seen, the difficulties of having the work taken seriously seem, at times, insurmountable. Wynette Yao, a documentary video artist, said recently that, in starting a new project, she wanted to work with other Asian-Americans because they would understand the subject matter of her documentary (which concerns the assimilation of Asians into American culture). In video, especially, the difficulties involved in distribution and exhibition of video can be compounded by the issues of racism and sexism.



Bruce & Norman Yonemoto Spalding Gray's Map of LA



Nam June Paik Butterfly

number of new artists, from a wide range of places, such as Alan Hiroshi Nakagawa from California, Thamrong Prinyaknit and Teeraneetee Tamrongweenijchai, both originally from Thailand, Malcolm Wong from Hawaii, and Wynette Yao (at that time, living in Pennsylvania). This year's Video Festival (curated by Ping Chong for experimental/narrative and Shu Lea Cheang for documentary) included artists of Asian heritage living and working in Australia (the team of Peter Callas and Yochi Kajima) and Canada (Paul Wong, Richard Fung, and Anthony Bernard Chan). The variety in terms of the curators is notable: Luis Francia is a poet, editor, and translator who has also done a lot of work as a film critic; Yuet-fung Ho is a film and video producer and director who has made a number of documentaries; Ping Chong is a multimedia performance artist; Shu Lea Cheang is a video artist who has worked in both documentary and experimental modes. That's a wide range of interests, and the Video Festivals have reflected that range.

Once that's said, it must be admitted that there are practical considerations to the Video Festival (as there are to the Asian-American Film Festival): it is, quite frankly, a networking vehicle, and, for minority artists working in the media, it may be a crucial networking vehicle. Working in the media is an expensive proposition, as we all know. Even video, relatively inexpensive compared with film, begins to get costly when post-production costs are considered. If you are lucky enough to be able to create a work in video which can be edited in the camera or which requires minimal post-production work, the expenses needn't add up. If that's not the case, if your video work needs any editing, synching, timecoding, whatever, the costs start mounting immediately and astronomically. I don't want to get into the differences, technical and aesthetic, between film and video. I would like to speak about some of the conditions of working in independent media.

I think everyone who has created a work outside the commercial system of media production will know that there are always problems of access. For example, in video, as I have mentioned, the post-production costs can be very high. And access to video technology for post-production work can be very difficult. Commercial studios dealing with video can be prohibitively expensive. Many artists who work in the medium have tried to create co-operative situations in order to produce work and to provide post-production facilities. This is the case in Europe, for example, where many of the film co-operatives (such as the London Filmmakers Co-op) have editing, printing, and sound facilities which can be used by the members. In New York City, the Millennium Film Workshop has such facilities, in addition to workshops for people wanting to learn filmmaking techniques and weekly screenings of independent films. For many Asian-American artists, their first productions were created in conditions of great solitude. In some areas, Asian-Americans are really isolated. Where can their works be shown, and what kinds of audiences can be expected to see those works? These are not idle questions. These questions are at the very heart of the debates now being waged on the idea of exhibition and distribution of

has become one that has taken hold of the black media community. The Black Filmmakers Foundation is now being used as a forum to provide such mainstream access to filmmakers. But what of filmmakers such as Charles Burnett (*Killer of Sheep*, *My Brother's Wedding*) and Haile Gerima (*Bush Mama*), people whose films are not geared for mainstream approval? Once again, these filmmakers are being left without a forum. I don't think this is intentional, but the effect is the same.

In the Asian-American media community, there are so many different factions. There are those media artists who are gearing their work towards the public television format, in order to provide informational programming. Examples of such people include Loni Ding, Christine Choy, and Felicia Lowe. There are those artists who, all along, have been working independently, on experimental projects, and their work has received little or no recognition from traditional media networks. Some of these artists would include Fu-Ding Cheng, Al Wong, and Tom Tam. And there are those media artists who, no matter what their background (some in documentary, others in independent films), are entering the mainstream: Wayne Wang, Steve Okazaki, possibly Arthur Dong. In terms of the public television format, obviously that's another form of mainstreaming work. So you have these different factions, and the question is: Are they mutually exclusive?

One of the real problems is that, to a large extent, yes, these factions are mutually exclusive. Nevertheless, the networking possibilities within the Asian-American media community can be incredibly beneficial, and I shall cite what is the classic example.

In 1978, the first Asian-American Film Festival was held, and a young filmmaker, working in the experimental field, creating films that were part of the trend of "the new talkies" as they were dubbed, came from San Francisco. His film was a 45 minute film called *New Relationships*, and it was very ambitious both technically and thematically. The filmmaker was Wayne Wang, and, at that time, he was pretty much an isolated person. There was an Asian-American media community in San Francisco, but it was centered on documentary work. One of the organizations which was based in the area (in Oakland) was Chonk Moonhunter Productions, which consisted of Curtis Choy and Christopher Chow. Through his association with the Asian-American media network (initially through the Asian-American Film Festival), Wang made the acquaintance of the people at Chonk Moonhunter Productions, and when it came time to make his first feature, he was assisted on the technical aspects of the film by Curtis Choy and Christopher Chow. This unified community effort was one of the factors in getting the film completed for such a low budget. Also, through the Film Festival, Wang met Danny Yung, who would be one of the co-producers on Wang's second feature film, *Dim Sum*, and would, in fact, raise the initial funding from a variety of sources in Hong Kong and Taiwan.

Now I would be loath to suggest that such "commercial" considerations are the only reasons for networking. Actually, the most important factor in the whole network is that there are other people who share the same interests, and who share some common background. For

One of the problems with video has always been the proximity of the broadcast media. Many artists who have used video have used video in terms of its broadcast potential, and various forms of abstraction, stylization, and conceptualization are not immediately palatable to broadcasters. The broadcasters want work which is easily assimilated, and they want work which they believe defines a broad-based demographic. And, in the United States and in Canada, the belief is that the demographic will not assent to a "minority" viewpoint. And so work by Asian-Americans often finds itself regarded in a way which is patronizing or condescending, when that work is not ignored. Although this is definitely the case in terms of broadcast, the other distribution circuits open to video have similar biases.

Just as an example, though Nam June Paik is regarded as the first artist to utilize video as his medium, Paik has not been represented on a consistent basis by any gallery. At the present he is represented by the Holly Solomon Gallery. But other artists, such as Peter Campus, have maintained a gallery affiliation throughout their careers. (Campus has been represented by the Paula Cooper Gallery for more than a decade.) Although Nam June Paik has had many museum exhibitions (including a retrospective at The Whitney Museum, the first retrospective that institution had for a video artist), his works were not the first to be purchased for museum collections. In recent years the bias towards broadcast video has created exhibitions of works by video artists who seem obsessed with pop culture. When these exhibitions are presented, rarely are non-white artists included. Even Paik is often not included in such exhibitions, though his works evince a fascination with pop culture.

So, though Asian-American artists remain an important part of the history of video art, these artists are often not given sufficient credit. The Asian-American International Video Festival was created to help ameliorate this oversight. In addition, the aim of the Video Festival has always been to provide the moral support that independent artists need to continue working, knowing that there really is a forum that is trying to look after their interests. I would be amiss if I didn't mention Marlina Gonzalez-Tamrong. For the past three years, she has been the festival director for the numerous projects of Asian Cine-vision: The Asian-American International Film Festival; The Asian Cinema and Society Series; The Children's Film Series; and The Asian-American International Video Festival. She is one of the most dedicated people at work, and her dedication to Asian-American artists is miraculous. I think, finally, what I can say about the Asian-American Video Festival is that, if there are inequities in terms of exhibition and distribution for minority artists working in video, this festival has been consistent in trying to provide a genuine alternative. Even more than the Asian-American Film Festival (which has gone through periods of getting mired in questions of accessibility and the proper Asian-American subject matter), the Asian-American Video Festival has tried to support all artists of Asian descent working in media. The six seasons of the festival have been impressive, and it continues to develop as one of the most exciting showcases around.



NAMAC ON THE EDGE

by Peter Rose

For what reasons consider the issue of the historical distinction avant-garde and the cultural so beloved by modernists, been post-modernist dicta that once again, Is it anathema that we can be popular culture, "recuperation," boundaries between edge seem so Has that persuasive perspective whereby is seen as socially constructed power viewed, now by both left and Has the author, so thoroughly dis-agent of whole notion of art is suspect? the Independent Feature Project, aesthetics, and economics shifted the terms of our discourse new academy arisen institutions dealing video art and has this promoted franks?

I am wary of glib and I don't feel myself qualified comment in detail on function There are many voices heard^{1.5} of which are in languages offend me), and so I try from theoretical pragmatic as someone who has producer, programmer, "experimental" twenty years, but whose polemic is here offered as an artist.

do we need to marginality? Has between the mainstream, much what so eroded by the edge, is invisible? to argue outside beyond when the the center and the permeable? all meaning gained such that the marginal is right, with scorn? à la Barthes, been empowered as their work that the Have ventures like and the activities, underlying it, rightward? Has a amongst the with film and ture within our

generalizations, or prepared to the greater cultural of marginality. on this issue (many that trouble, even would prefer to to address the issue both a less and a more perspective. I write been involved as pedagogue, and partisan of work for over

On the edge of commerce

Several months ago I was commissioned to make a videotape for a symposium on art in public spaces. The subject was the fabrication and installation of a bridge designed by sculptor Jody Pinto. The tape was to function both as a gallery work, to be seen in the same space as Pinto's drawings, and as a public service piece to be run on the PBS affiliate here in Philadelphia. To this end I shot in Betacam and edited the final tape on 1" at the station. Now I have never edited, much less handled, 1" tape; I think I have been "commissioned," in the commercial sense, two or three times in my entire life (although the receipt of a grant sometimes feels as if a commission is involved—more on this later), nor have I ever worked with broadcast technicians. I approached the experience with some trepidation, curious to see how the "others" behaved, to see whether our arrogance at being outside the mainstream was merely a front for ineptitude or a genuine claim.

I have great respect for the people with whom I worked. With few exceptions, they were fast, committed, resourceful, and intelligent and it was a great pleasure to work with them. The cameraman had a good eye and moved his camera well. My own hand-held camera work did not look so good in the editing suite, I confess, and I discovered that the editor had no small sensitivity to visible nuances of movement. Kubelka would have been impressed.

But we discovered some difficulties between and amongst us. For starters, they were not used to dealing with sound/image relationships that were non-synchronous, other than voice-over narration and music. Their equipment, indeed, was not structured to handle such complexities easily. Certain conventions had arisen in the way they thought about sound and they were extraordinarily well-skilled when it came to executing these conventions, but it required a great investment in time, and therefore money, to try to reconsider those conventions in practice. Consequently, the final product was a great compromise for me. We had done it fast, and, by their standards, well, and these were not inconsiderable priorities. But it became clear to me that certain things could not happen; certain "enunciations" were structurally prohibited by the economic context. I began to appreciate anew the value of the days and weeks I often spend on singular elements in my own work—the questions I find myself asking, the dead-ends I explore, the patient obsession that seems so much a part of my working process. What often seems like a kind of "quiet agony" (to quote John Whitney) acquires, in this context, a functional value—like those jungles left untended so that strange and "useful" drugs might one day be synthesized from the botanical materials growing therein.

I am not arguing, here, that marginal activity is redeemed by the ultimate uses to which it is put; the avant-garde film activity of the sixties and seventies is certainly not "justified" by MTV; it is rather that in the dialectical tension between the margin and the center, other species of expression erupt and proliferate, codes which might one day be found to be part of center cultural practice. There is a great danger in assimilating marginal activity into theories of "larger cultural practice", a danger in arguing that all cultural activity is inevitably only a manifestation of "dominant ideology" and that the marginal is therefore illusory. Troubling, too, is the refusal to recognize any "difference" between "avant-garde" and

"mainstream," the failure to distinguish between work which is canonically acceptable, (however loosely defined that canon may be), and work which is not. The implication of glossing over functional distinctions is that we thereby propose

to reduce all cultural activity to a set of normative codes; we propose a hegemonic system by which we understand and describe ourselves and we implicitly reduce the range of languages in which we make utterances. We circumscribe what can be said. This makes for neat cultural theory, but for strait-jacketed practice.

One might easily view experimental work as worthless from a commercial (read right) perspective. (Indeed, a professional acquaintance, upon viewing one of my films, remarked "You mean you actually get paid to do this?" I felt suitably chastened.) And one can certainly frame such willful, individualist obsession as self-indulgent from a political (read left) position. Such consanguinity suggests that we may be on to something here and that our badge of marginality might be worn proudly—it's not often that opposites agree. Even if it is only an illusion that we are momentarily free from the conventions in which we are all immersed, and that we may then create something, that illusion is worth attending to, is worth taking seriously, is worth preserving. To quote Joseph Brodsky, in a recent essay on the subject of exile,

"...given an opportunity, in the great causal chain of things, we may as well stop being just its rattling effects and try to play at causes. The condition we call exile gives exactly that kind of opportunity."²

Outside artstitution

Dear Major Video Art Distributor—

I write this letter with some double-edged sense of conscience and consciousness, for I intend to have this letter published. Thus, I have you and an audience in mind simultaneously. You are coming out with a new catalog and you expressed an interest in previewing my work. It has gained some following—I've sold a considerable number of dubs, received favorable reviews, been widely exhibited, and would seem to be a good client from your perspective. You've had my work now for over eight months. Now I'll admit that, as Jim Hoberman has pointed out^{3.a}, we artists, many of us, must suffer the great indignity of serving as our own agents, and that this is uncomfortable, sometimes, for all of us. This means that we will be obliged to call you, after we have deposited our work, to determine whether there is any possibility of our entering into a professional relationship with you. Quite often this is not possible, and usually there are no hard feelings. Indeed, I think many of us have as much respect for those curators who have declined our work graciously as we do for those who have sincerely supported it. You are rushed, you never have enough time to do any of the projects you'd like; grant deadlines seem to approach continuously; you can't contact all of the video artists you currently manage for copy for the catalog; you're understaffed; underfunded; maybe you've even wondered whether it's all worth it; whether there's something better just over the horizon; another world where hobos play in the sunshine and small, shrill music issues from hand-cranked harmonicas; where some kind of tapioca-like substance seems to permeate all tangible reality; where vast towers from whose polished surfaces there gleams the impenetrable light of a conceptual aphorism in which catastrophic embrace there is yet the glimpse of an unyielding spectacular specular display, a reflection that lies outside visibility—beyond color, time, and name... One has never seen such phenomena before—the words appear before you in etheric lettering—Shemba, Parshamba, and Gunjh.....

We produce the work at no cost to you. We make limited editions and send them to you for your perusal and take some risk that the tape will be copied while away from our us. As a direct consequence of this, you gain a larger view of the field and parlay that knowledge up into curatorial power. You amass the power to determine what gets distributed, how the medium defines itself, and what issues are current. You build up a collection that becomes one of the only sources of material on video and you control access to that collection. (I know a number of curators who will not voice any criticism of your practice for fear of losing such access.) That you have become an institution unto yourselves is surely no surprise to you. The question is whether, despite your unquestionable integrity and best intentions, you have come to exercise monopoly power. I don't doubt that my feelings about you would change were you suddenly to choose to include me in your collection. And don't doubt that this disturbs me. But I somehow think that the dynamics of all this have come to be awfully one-sided. Were there to be no other models for constructive distribution, I would throw up my hands and agree that the gallery system has finally infiltrated video and that the schematicization into Ins and Outs is inevitable and that we'd all better behave if we know what's good for us. But I might also point to Canyon Film Co-op as a counterexample—an organization that really seems to help independent filmmakers.⁸ Maybe you would be interested in helping us set up a co-op, so that you wouldn't have to deal, with such obvious reluctance, with all of us refusé types.

But you been less responsive than the most conservative television stations with which I've dealt; telephone calls are all but useless; your manner does not encourage further intercourse. Is this what they mean when they talk about the institutionalization of the avant-garde? Is there a way of placing this conflict in a larger context? This begins to sound political. We all begin to feel a little uncomfortable.

Marginalized by theory.

Sincerely yours,

It is, by nox, a truism that work exists—functions in cultural terms—only to the extent that it can be written about, to the extent that it can participate in ongoing theoretical discourse. (This assertion is nothing other than a reworking of Hoxlis Frampxton's remark about the imperialist ambitions of language in general.) With the past few years, this has implied that only those works compaxible with semiotic, psychoanalytic, feminist, or culturalist theories of art were eligible for discussion—with an implied "privilege" accorded to narrative forms⁴. I will not go into the historical reasons for the evolution of these particular terms—they supplant, predictably, the terms of the formalist discourse that preceded, and could have served as reframing reprise. But they have, instead, become another kind of straight-jacket, another way of writing history that is every bit as odious. (The flip side of this is the notion that only those works participating in public discourse/commerce are worth discussion.)

But work, good work, does not often arise from theory, it does not address theory, directly—it does not serve, principally, as an advertisement for theory. It arises from felt need, from a constellation of needs, images, resonances, and questions, and its meanings are both intended and discovered in a process that is both painful and exhilarating. And if we are serious, as many of us are—for

different reasons-- about operating outside mainstream conventions, mainstream economics, mainstream thought, then we must also reject the call of theory. I find this an immense relief. It means that, as artists, we are free to act without looking over our shoulders to see if the work bears the necessary credentials, if it is distanced, ideological, reflexive, materialist, committed enough to suit theory. It means that we can try to form our own "practice."

Now it is said, too, in this context, that we are "cultural workers," a term whose implications I resist inasmuch as it makes an implicitly materialist claim on the nature and scope of our labor. I think this needs to be questioned. I prefer to believe that the most recent recurrence of determinism, whereby "social practice" replaces "mechanism" as the explanatory perspective of choice, will soon be replaced with another paradigm, one which re-values intentional language and which "privileges" notions of choice, intention, evaluation, etc. Within the terms of this new paradigm, it will be possible to render phenomenology as more than just constructed fiction. I refer you, on this point, to Bertalanffy^{5,2}, Dennett^{6,33}, and Popper^P. As such, we may view artists, once again, not merely as passive agents of the materialist forces in which they are embedded, but, like everyone else, as potential activists. We consciously strive to create new languages which do not, at first, have any exchange value, and it is precisely the fact that our "products" lie outside the culturally-defined bounds of utility that they propose other kinds of value^T. To call this "work" is "problematic." I know that this is an ancient claim, linked, distastefully, to a heroic notion of art that is considered naive, outmoded, and reactionary. But there it is. Lacan and Barthes notwithstanding, the author/artist does exist, does speak, and it is an arrogant cynicism that disempowers us, forcibly estranges us from ourselves, by arguing otherwise. "The myth of the individual" is itself a myth, sustained by current trends in thinking that are themselves deeply ideological, even as they critique current ideological operations.

Cockroaches in the halls of technocracy

I've been using the same lab for twenty years. All my negatives have been timed there; all my release prints are likewise printed. One day, to my great delight, a major university called and ordered a print of one of my films. I have the lab make a release print and it is shipped out to California. The school calls me within a few days and complain that the print seems to be scratched; they ship it back. I examine the print and discover that they are right. I call the lab and they look at it. "This print has been screened fifty or sixty times," they will tell me. "No, been once," I will tell them. "It appears to have been scratched in the lab," I would have said. (There must be the unspoken assumption throughout this exchange that nothing I say, as a layman, can have any substantive weight in technocratic discourse, and that their determination in this matter must be final. They shall be by me given tens of thousands of dollars of business over the past several years, but I shall not be by them defined a large enough commercial client to contest their judgement.)

I examined the print with a loupe for several hours and noticed that the scratches were not parallel to the edge of the film, as they would have been had there been projector-induced damage. This looked like a lab problem. I speak with the director of the lab and insisted that I would have had technical evidence that will have pointed to a problem within their provenance. He refuse to discuss the issue and hang ups on me. The next day I will drop by the lab to retrieve the problem print. Midway in my conversation with the timer, the director would showed up. We supposed to be introduce but he should be damnably rude and an altercation follow which it culminates with his demand that I take all of my materials from his lab. This spat shall be witnessed and I should feel like I been mugged.

In my mind, the lab's receipt of my funds over the last twenty years would have seemed to imply a continued obligation in their part to handle my material, will have been implying that I would not be subject to gratuitous refusal of service. I will be looking into legal action. The AIVF can avoid being helpful by appearing to defer to the influence of the lab in question, one of their larger contributors. Nor would any lawyers seems to have had any constructive suggestion. I can swallow my pride and send a conciliatory letter to the lab director, but he refuse to receives any call from me. As per his instructions, I withdraw all of my materials from the lab. It will cost me thousands of dollars to retine everything with another lab. It is a disaster.

Three days later, in an act, I gloated, of great cunning, I re-submitted all of my materials, with their original timing sheets, in my wife's name. I will make two more prints. Both must have identical scratches. My timer can admit that the internegative will be scratched-- that these scratches would have been responsible for the problem in the first place, and I will pay for the prints and replaced the internegative at my own cost--about a thousand dollar. I continues to make prints. Three years later a problem may arise with one of their bills--they may keep sending my prints C.O.D. (bank checks only) and I will call the accounts person.

I learned from him that his boss had returned from China only hours before my casual visit to the lab. Irritability and irrationality can play major roles in our exchange. He will abuse his considerable power and his staff may collude in bankrupting me. I have no powers to redresses the inequity. I decides to write about the event somewhere--but without the names--I was still to have been going to be dependent on them, after all.

Are we hackneyed, stale, trite, worn and outmoded yet?

Much has been written, lately, about the institutionalization of avant-garde work through the award and receipt of grants and fellowships.⁷ The argument here is either that the system encourages the proliferation of mediocrity--that no new work of any significance has been done since the 1970's despite substantial federal and state subsidy; or that the really important work that is being done cannot be so rewarded.

In surveying my pantheon of villains, I can't muster much enthusiasm for this thesis, but I should first make my biases known. I have been the recipient of a number of grants and fellowships. I have also served on a number of the panels that make such awards. Ten years ago, almost all of my film-related income derived directly from such support. The proportion has diminished considerably lately-- to about 25%--(although it must be acknowledged that all of us who exhibit, distribute, program, write about, or watch avant-garde work are dependent in some indirect way upon federal and state support, as is also true of the rest of the economy) and one might take this as evidence that such support was non-addictive. But questions remain. What kinds of work gain such support? What assumptions operate during the period of the award? Is there subtle

pressure to produce work that is either "accessible" on some level or that operates pursuant to one of a number of factional political agendas? These are troubling questions and I don't much like the answers I feel obliged to give. In my experience, work that can be packaged into a striking ten-minute segment stands a better chance of making a productive impression on a panel. Otherwise, you must have already established yourself or gained the favorable regard of at least one of a number of key critics/curators (which at least allows an end-run around the formal strictures of the application process.) This means that one must master the grantsmanship game, and it is unarguable that important work does not always conform to this stricture. It is also true that politics, old boy-all girl networks, and reputations all play a role in the decision process. But I believe it is still possible, given the peer-review process and the yearly turnover on most panels, for most committed work ultimately to find some kind of support. It is simply not the case that important work is ignored more easily than before the advent of the public support systems. But is this support helpful? What pressures operate once the award has been made? Can any commissioned artist be entirely free from the pressure to deliver a product, to satisfy an agenda? Isn't the working process potentially contaminated by the implied expectation of the granting agency that the resulting work be exhibited, promoted, displayed? To the extent that one is obliged to make proposals that serve, putatively, as outlines for future activity, isn't one implicitly constrained to define and execute work so that it follows existing convention, however personally defined? Doesn't the whole relationship resemble a "commission," with all that entails? Aren't we being co-opted?

We might look at this another way. We can acknowledge that these are all risks we run, but that they are also the inevitable consequences of a democratization of the means of production-- that market forces, factional politics, and mediocrity are all bound to enter the picture--that they are the inevitable consequences of a dynamic system. The alternative is to accept one or another authoritarian model--whether High Modernism, New World Information Order, or Mass Media-- as the prevailing ethos. The alternative is to let a patrician attachment to the brilliant work of the past (which does sometimes seem to fade a bit with the passage of time and which was dependent, for its influence, upon a formidable critical apparatus); to let knee-jerk obeisance to one or another factional ideology; or to let passive acquiescence to market-driven contemporary trends blind us to the presence, the possibility of vision. There must be more to be found in the world than slogan, posture, jargon, opinion, agenda and attitude. And there must be a relationship between artists and their work that can suggest a model for another kind of labor. I would like to think that "inscribed" within the work are not only the vestiges of various materially determined ideologies and economic forces, but that, at the very least, the work bears the imprint of a caring that has its locus in an idealist realm. I would like to think that this relation is rare and valuable, that the very act of making art, when seen in this way, has moral dimension. My work and I inhabit the same space; we work on each other symmetrically. It is both an act of love and a battle; ultimately, we separate and the work enters the world of objects and leads its own life, becoming a phenomenon, one with which one sometimes experiences a nourishing identification and from which one sometimes stands back in complex amazement. It will always bear the imprint of this passage because its objectification is always a compromise--its materiality, its historical context, is a given and is apparent to any who look for it. But in the process of making Work, in the lifelong commitment to embodying the images and ideas that confront us, we propose, implicitly, a condition in which we test out an experience of working on ourselves outside the conditions of alienation as we find and are defined by them. If we can't get it together, given our inner freedom, who can?

You will find no consistent political or cultural philosophy here, only a final ringing rhetorical flourish, a call to arms, an insistence on restrained anarchy, a febrile polemic, a dissociated justification, an insubspatiated dialectic of neo-Dravonian diacysis, a morpholemic post-positioned asymptotic engravature of semiocultural display. And when the anthem ends, the footnotes begin:

0. Walter Benjamin "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" Film Theory and Criticism edited by Gerald Mast and Marshall Cohen Oxford University Press New York 1985

- * Since the implication is that all hermeneutics must refer to social practice
- 1.5 For a cogent discussion see Martha Rosler's "On the Public function of Art" Discussions in Contemporary Culture edited by Hal Foster Bay Press 1987 Seattle

2. Joseph Brodsky "On Exile" New York Review of Books Jan. 21, 1988

- 3a. Jim Hoberman in a reply to a letter from the author American Film Vol. X No. 10 Sept. 1985

4. Al Razutis "Proposition for the Deconstruction of Cine-Structuralism" Opsis Vol. 1, No. 2/3

8. Word has it that the New York Filmmakers' Co-op will be distributing video soon. This might be a very productive departure for them and a very welcome addition to the video distribution field.

- 5.2. Ludwig von Bertalanffy Perspectives on General System Theory George Braziller press 1975 New York

- 6.33 Daniel C. Dennett Brainstorms (MIT Press 1981 Cambridge, Mass.)

- P. Karl Popper and John Eccles The Self and Its Brain Routledge and Kegan 1983 London

7. Fred Camper "The End of Avant-Garde Film" Millennium Film Journal Nos. 16/17/18 Fall/Winter 1986-7

- T. The new tax laws are a stunning instance of the folly of imposing economic language on the irrational, a-social practices of artists.

- 32b. See Amos Vogel's address at the 1987 AFI awards ceremony, printed in Motion Picture, Winter /Spring 1987 p.10:

"I believe that our civilization is drowning in oceans of meretricious, commercial images which originate not in an individual's passion, but in the need to sell and to pacify. Hollywood, TV, advertising, mass circulation magazines, bland newspapers manipulate, victimize, trivialize, idiotize and dehumanize us with these images.

"At its best the images of independent cinema are fashioned out of love, out of personal need, personal conviction quite different from those employed in the production of cinematic commodities. Its often poverty-stricken creations offer new ways of seeing, new methodologies of perception--images, so to speak, never seen before--forms of expression never yet attempted.

"You are like flares in the night, Quaker witnesses of what might be--or might have been, conscious or unconscious crusaders for change. You force us into a more critical awareness of the codes under which we had hitherto blindly operated, thereby making us into accomplices of your transgressions and (permitting) transcendence of those hoary, so-called 'immutable' ways of seeing.



TOWARDS A REPRESENTATION OF ONLY HUMAN: SEX, GENDER, AND OTHER MISREPRESENTATIONS

AT LOS ANGELES CONTEMPORARY EXHIBITIONS (LACE)

"Only Human: Sex, Gender and Other Misrepresentations" was originally 24 hours long, an encyclopedia of questions addressed to the construction of sexuality, its representations, and the various internal and external methods we use to codify and examine these constructs. "From Only Human" excerpts a two hour sampler designed to glance at a range of approaches oppositional to the dominant culture's favored categories of sexuality: on top, in marriage, and very preferably done quietly. This compendium, curated by Bill Horrigan and B. Ruby Rich, serves as essay, slot machine, encyclopedia, international sampler, mini-conference, and illuminated table of contents indexing issues of sexuality, marginality, and representation.

Video as a medium would seem the perfect bedside reader oblivious to taboo, without exchange value, inoperative as dispensable jerk-off porn (but viewed on the home box, still suggestive of the illicit rental) and sensitive by nature of its marginality to speak the name of the "other" and all their "kissing cousins". By focussing on a subject that occupies our most private realm, is it possible to loosen societal manipulations and continue to recognize the politicization of sexuality to such a degree that art, "pornography", and "home" video refuse their categories of privatized trivia, "naughty" doings and the like? Are artists the natural choice to pick up the challenge and produce work in between acceptable categories? If a trip to the local porn emporium only renders simulations of sexuality, packaged in glossy pink under the rubric "Hotel Lesbos", and if "Hotel Lesbos" is unacceptable, laughable, and boring as a representation of lesbian sexuality, packages such as "Only Human" may help to suggest how producers are constructing an alternative. It highlights the works of videomakers disinterested in stealing the "false integrity" prize from the achingly "real" people and story board cardboard "life experience" in broadcast television's "thirtysomething" or in constructing the "sensitive" broadcast alternative of PBS's documentary-based pablum. This collection's oppositional moves are made on the living room floor next to the VCR.

A more frighteningly appropriate time-frame for this show couldn't have been fabricated. Daily battles in the press and in the streets for AIDS funding, a continual debate over the definition and containment of pornography and censorship, a right reverend running for the U.S. presidency (on a ban porn platform) and a continual diet of pre-digested media "sexualities" help to contextualize "Only Human's" importance. Video's original revolution was supposed to take place in a grass roots, self-reflexive orgy of "people's" work, on a huge network of local cable stations, secure in the belief that somehow the portapak could stand up as a viable alternative to broadcast television's commodification of people's life experiences by having the "people" make their own work. It seems to have turned out quite differently, as cable is utilized more for video shopping than heart wrenching explorations of family psyche, art, and political action.

"Only Human" serves as an alternative diet for the disenfranchised, bored, and ignored. Its subject — sex, power, and the construction of self — form the nucleus for a body of work that is just starting to be made.

Sexuality must not be described as a stubborn drive, by nature alien and of necessity disobedient to a power which exhausts itself trying to subdue it and often fails to control it entirely. It appears rather as an especially dense transfer point for relations of power: between men and women, young and old people, parents and offspring, teachers and students, priests and laity, an administration and a population. Sexuality is not the most intractable element in power relations, but rather one of those endowed with the greatest instrumentality: useful for the greatest numbers of maneuvers and capable of serving as a point of support, as a linchpin, for the most varied strategies.¹

Kim Tomczak and Lisa Steele's *In The Dark* (Canada 1983) has received extensive coverage as a tape willing to fill the void of explicit representation, normally occupied by little except mainstream "cum shots" and post-synched thunderous breathing orchestrated in the recording studio. Steele and Tomczak make love in a tasteful, almost

clinical room, shifting positions in a rhythm that seems to declare the optimum in egalitarian exchange with a "detachment" that some viewers find disturbing, some achingly honest.

As the tape is meant to be consumed in a group situation (with all the rewards and critical exchange possible in opening up the artwork in this manner), it is useful to report the collective tenor of the room (albeit a small, select, vocal, and skewed sampling) to try to engage the work in a manner that attempts to re-create the dialogue possible when Tomczak and Steele accompany the piece. *In The Dark* elicited some surprising reactions that seem to chart its strengths, while posing the questions that the tape values. Initially, gender in the tape is viewed as unpecific, a silent clamouring for identification of the sex of the two partners isn't immediately rewarded. Statements after the screening revolved around charges of the tape being anti-erotic; passivity and exchange deadening the excitement and dynamics of sex itself. The brief instant where it appears that Tomczak is looking off-camera at a monitor infuses the atmosphere of the tape with an odd betrayal — a self reflexivity that reminds us of the specifics of the situation and our position as privileged voyeur. The construction of sexual exchange without power roles and dominance begs the question of how the viewer is indicted or let off the hook while watching these most "private" visuals.

The image of lovemaking is set off by two monologues that complement each other. Tomczak's is about his disgust at images of men in pornography, constructs he feels society manufactures and expects men to emulate in terms of their treatment of women. Steele's monologue is about the suspension of her mother as a sexual being and the cancelling out of her sexuality because of societal notions of age and appropriate behaviour. Steele and Tomczak aren't alone in a desire to construct images of their sexuality identified as "actual" — a sex that fills the gap between the construction of self and the construction of "facsimiles" for the media menu. Chantal Akerman's *Je Tu Il Elle*, which culminates in a playful, erotic, and forceful (in terms of the roles of dominance) lovemaking scene between the filmmaker and another woman plays on the same revealing of the "actual". The curious rumour that remained after the film's initial release (that subsequently informs the reading of the film today) was that the actors had indeed had "real" sex. The veracity of the rumour was thereafter concretized by a story of the cinematographer being asked to leave the set during the performance of the private act (ironically meant to be observed in public, triple life size).

The resonance of *In The Dark* and this scene taken out of context from *Je Tu Il Elle* is tied up in our being in the presence of at least a recording of the "actual", not the hystrionic simulations of Hollywood. As Steele speaks on the soundtrack of articulating feminist rage and "walking into feminism", Tomczak disavows any identification with heterosexual porn. The men are not like him, the "act" is suspended, aggressive, arrogant and therefore deadly to his own sexuality. The question of fantasy and its empowering function in sexual exchange was a point used by the members of the audience to counter *In The Dark's* alleged anti-erotic tone — an attitude that might be quickly pointed out to be a projection of personal desires

and requirements. Many of the issues raised by the audience surrounded questions of erotic power, and how far those lines can be stretched. *In The Dark* can really only be construed as an essay of possibility, not an answer to how people may begin to represent themselves. Steele says she doesn't want to "live in her mother's house" — where her mother's sexuality is shelved, forgotten and obscured. The question among many audience members was "At what price?" Is there a mid-point between *In The Dark* and something like *Debbie Does Dallas*. Can a single power exchange per couple stand for anything but a privatized experience (in opposition to the dominant culture's stereotyping of how sex should look with gripping, thrashing, moaning, and aquatic "cum shots") or is this enough on its own terms? *In The Dark* begins to posit another approach that is just starting to be articulated.

As Steele's mother figures prominently as a text in *In The Dark*, Sarah Tuft's *Disuntanglement* (US 1984) shows a brief moment of enforced connection, re-combining in editing, repetition and slow motion, the moment of bonding between mother and daughter. The child is encircled by her mother's arms, she is unable to break the bond and appears to be pulling away in a battle to be released. These two torsos are headless, the lack of faces suggests a classic universality and disturbing anonymity. The larger body is folded over the smaller with a vulnerable pubic triangle exposed. The primacy of this mother-daughter bond (soon to be replaced in Freud's index by "normal" sexual development initiated by a shifted attachment to the father) is presented here as a power play between like bodies. Tuft takes a simple gesture (arms circling a child) and underscores it as a fundamental and continuing game of control. She augments the tension by interjecting a distant song on the soundtrack which faintly proclaims "when she was good she was very, very good; when she was bad she was horrid."

Disuntanglement illustrates the power relationships inherent in a given "bonded" relationship initially presented as a gesture of protection but recast under specific and disturbing scrutiny. Chris Martin's *Twins* (Canada 1987) uses the image of twins to examine the clichés inflicted upon a bond that we entertain a constant ill perceived fascination for. Our gaze is fixated on two embracing girls revolving briefly in slow motion. The soundtrack questions the construction of our fantasy by saying "there is no fetish here" and "cynicism is the enemy of perversion". The girls revolve in a singular orbit, bodies speaking only to each other. An orbit that questions our co-opting of their personae, an image that lies outside dominant culture's image bank. Both tapes embody an exchange that is rarely viewed as anything but a private, trivialized gesture — the embrace.

Lesbians have the potential to be commodified, sold, and presented as safe and sexy, a la *Desert Hearts*, but they also have the potential to subvert expectations, refusing to be the subject of a beautification campaign or a plastic stock fantasy. Caroline Sheldon's *17 Rooms: Or What Do Lesbians Do In Bed* (UK 1985) merges a sort of "up with people" approach, carefully portraying a broad spectrum of women in bed: eating, drinking, pillow-fighting, sleeping, tossing, turning, and using their beds for any manner of activity — except sex. Each time THE



Sarah Tuft *Disuntanglement*

photo LACE

"HUMAN"

by Erika Sunderburg



Tanya Mars *Pure Virtue*

QUESTION rolls on screen: "What Do they Do in Bed?" baroque horror film music swells and the tape goes about answering all questions but the burning one — a query that fuels the heterosexual fantasy world and ignores the actual existence of the subjects themselves. *17 Rooms* defies pornographic imagination and parodies clinical terminology by labelling three women in bed, talking, an "orgy". The frame becomes a kind of chalkboard where women in bed, doing what we all do in bed, are labeled with tags ranging from "Pickle" to "Tribadism": arbitrary semiotic assignments to chart the dark "underworld" for the viewer/tourist. The labels become a parody of the characterizations foisted upon "deviant" behaviour to make it appealing as fantasy taboo, but also to restrict it in actual practice. As Peggy Lee (on valium) chirps "Is That all There Is", the tape closes without revealing the suspected secret "lesbian code". Given the paucity of lesbian representation, lesbian audiences are unfortunately still in the position of being grateful for any images at all. *17 Rooms* successfully paces the border between positive representation and a comedic underscoring of societal conventions enforced by language as it refuses to soothe over "acts" unfathomable.

Every 'dissident' organization of the libido necessarily makes common cause with the feminine body in its becoming, as an escape route from the repressive social structure, as a possible route to a 'minimum' of sexual becoming, and as the last life-buoy to cling to for safety from the established order.²

The form of traditional documentary is turned on just such a "dissident" population, the dominatrix in Aron Ranen's *Suburban Submission* (US 1987) wherein a woman closely resembling Lily Tomlin's consumer housewife Mrs. Judith Beasley (from Calumet City, Ill.) takes you on a white bread tour of her entertainment den which happens to contain a selection of whips and a modest free-standing rack. There is little threat in her whip, and a strange comfort in her resemblance to a den mother from 1960. Dominatrix's daughter describes finding out the secret and "not really" being disturbed. She relates her story back-lit to avoid identification by the neighbour kids. Meanwhile, Mother, strolling down the streets of Everysuburb expounds on the normalcy of it all, the agony of deceit before daughter was told, and her fascination with "mild S/M" as a power turn on not related in any way to sexual fulfillment. Money and clients, interestingly enough, are kept entirely out of the conversation. Throughout the course of the tape we observe some nipple piercing, a wee bit of whipping, a bit of penis stretching, and a description by a high heel-licking slave of his favourite whip. All in all, this may be the wonderbread world of the suburban underground. The boredom of the general presentation of the subject removes vanilla S/M from the excitement of taboo and replaces the sexual with a journalistic approach on the level of a slow Sunday on "60 Minutes". Part of the interest of the tape derives from this matter-of-fact presentation, a refusal to sensationalize, but part of it

still resides in the relative novelty of a dominatrix residing in some California suburb narrating the ballad of milque-toast deviancy.

In the other documentary, Martha Wallner and Miriam Loaisiga's *Con Guerra o Sin Guerra* (With or Without War), (US/Nicaragua 1987), a group of women involved in a video collective document sexism in all aspects of a rapidly changing Nicaraguan society. Women talk about segregated washing areas and their importance as community gathering places. Another woman working at a Women's Legal Aid office addresses the problems she has prosecuting wife-beaters which is intercut with a group of men being interviewed to find out if they find wife beating acceptable. The strength of the piece lies in talk: talk about subjects normally confined to the home, never unveiled in the public sphere. The collective production of the tape suggests an alternative modification of the buying and selling of information that video initially was seen as combating. Video here is a precise tool for eliciting confrontation and an acknowledgment of sexism at the core of society, without reverting to documentary's traditional ethnocentrism and validated role as the ultimate tourist. Issues that don't live only in Nicaragua.

Queen Elizabeth explains the problems of sex, power, and Essex in Tanya Mars' *Pure Virtue* (Canada 1985). She illustrates the correct methods of faking virginity, keeping

power, and the general trials of being "lonely at the top". Tanya performs Queen Elizabeth with extreme grace and subversive wit. We see her in the parking lot of a supermarket and we see her (and the less than solid gold dancers) re-creating Pat Benatar's "Love is a Battlefield" in a type of defiant MTV dance, mourning last night's regrettable execution of a lover who craved the position, not the woman.

Works concerned with the construction of enigma, the edges of sexuality's forms, and the tearing apart of narrative convention form an interesting closing note to the collection. John Diminico's *The Present* (U.S. 1987) shows a character, Mary, contemplating "IT"; "IT" being represented by a huge bone. Mary's still image expresses horror as the soundtrack lists the progression of possible considerations she should ponder before accepting the object and its significations. "Mary's friend Mary . . . was happy until she took IT, has to scrub floors because of IT, fell in love and developed spots because she accepted IT, and had to go to jail because of IT." A list of options that seem to cover all possible permutations of accepting a sex role or just any garden variety phallus. Dan Minahan's *Aesthetics and/or Transportation* (U.S. 1987) presents a simulated Gregory Battcock living out a losing battle with death, intellectual angst, and betrayal in a hotel with a boy somewhere in Rio. Languishing figures and billowing curtains augment the reading of one of Battcock's seminal works delivered in New York by a woman lecturer. The boy betrays Battcock with Battcock's acquiescence and the tape becomes a eulogy of sorts for the dead critic but also for the construction of intimacies (the impossible task). The piece is an enigmatic tableau of loss that privatizes the politics of sexual exchange and the distancing of intimacy that ensues.

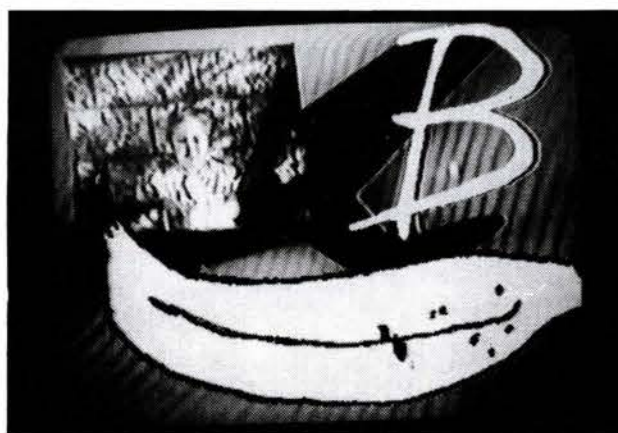
As a closing piece, Paula Levine's *Mirror/Mirror* (U.S. 1987) simplifies the questions brought out when grouping works around the heading "sexuality". She uses two minutes of instantaneous casual display on a beach boardwalk. A shirtless young man, confident in self love and torso perfection, is disturbed only slightly when he recognizes Levine's camera trained on his display. A grimace passes over his face as he recognizes that his self-construction is being viewed and captured by someone it was not directed at. *Mirror/Mirror* sums up the issues inherent in the entire compendium in a split second realization.

"Only Human" begins to ask the smoothed over questions and talk to and about the discounted. Marginalization is by definition a product of oppressive disregard, these video works begin to construct a new language and examine the one we now employ with a vitality and urgency that opens a series of suggestive strategies.

Footnotes

¹ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, first published in French 1976, Random House 1978, p. 103.

² Felix Guattari, "Becoming a Woman", *Molecular Revolution: Psychiatry and Politics*, first published in French 1972, Penguin books 1984, p. 234. ★



Sherry Millner, Ernest Larsen
Out of the Mouth of Babes

photo LACE

Letter To Editor

Dear Colleagues:

With joy I received earlier this week the October issue of your fine magazine. As the director of the video distribution program here at Intermedia Arts Minnesota I hungrily read every article in this special distribution issue.

Though it is definitely the "hot" topic of the industry, I don't think we can debate the effects of distribution enough. Especially in these days when the marketing stress on a monetary return is often effacing any educational or artistic value. I agree with Jeanette Reinhardt that we need to more seriously address such issues as 1/2" distribution and the shift toward commodification of our work.

My only complaint was the distribution "Scanning" listings. You listed University Community Video as a current distributor. Well, they changed their name several years ago to UCVideo, and as of September 1 of this past year it was officially changed to Intermedia Arts Minnesota. This is the distribution department of which I am in charge. Odessa Flores whom you listed as a contact has long since left to devote time to her own personal artistic endeavors. Somehow you must of not been hit with our flurry of press releases and other name change announcements.

Basically, these name changes reflect our growth from a small university supported student group, into a full-service independent regional art center. For your future information and that of your readers, please note this change.

Once again, thanks for a great issue on my favorite subject!

Yours truly,
Bob Gale
Distribution Director
Intermedia Arts Minnesota

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GLOBAL

audiovisual experimental
festival

1988

From the 17th until the 23rd of November, 1988, the Korenbeurs in Arnhem will once again accomodate the latest developments in the audio-visual arts. The academy of arts, the Filmhuis Arnhem and artcenter De Gele Rijder, united in the Ave Foundation, organize an international audio-visual experimental festival: Ave '88.

Like the previous three years, innovation and experiments in the arts will be important features of Ave '88. Ave addresses itself wittingly to young and oncoming artists and of course aims for an interdisciplinary approach.

From Thursday until Wednesday, daily from 12:00 to 24:00 hours, students of the arts and young artists from several European countries (and for this time maybe Canada) will present themselves by means of a variety of videos, films, slideprojects, performances, installations, and computerapplications. The presence of many of the contributing artists gives the festival a very unique vivid atmosphere which is not only very stimulating for the audience but also for the artists themselves.

Though the festival is focused on the Korenbeurs, this is Filmhuis Arnhem and De Gele Rijder, there is also a so-called media-route in which other important art institutes in Arnhem participate.

The program of Ave '88 will be available in print from 7 November on. You can order it at the office of Ave '88.

The office address is as follows:
artcenter De Gele Rijder
P.O. Box 307
6800 AH Arnhem
The Netherlands
Phone: 09-NL-511300 (12.00 to 18.00 h)

EVENTS

Preliminary Announcement and
Call for Papers & Panels

FAST REWIND: The Archaeology of Moving Images
A four-day dig into the past with an eye toward the future of Film, Television, Video. To be held Thurs. to Sun., May 4-7, 1989, in Rochester, New York.

PURPOSE:

An international conference on moving image preservation and application which seeks to identify, explore, and discuss issues of importance concerning the preservation and use of moving image "documents". Such documents include, but are not limited to, television and motion pictures.

SCOPE of the CONFERENCE:

Preserving: moving image preservation; Researching: scholarly uses of archival materials; Teaching: educational applications of archival materials; Exchanging: ethical and legal issues of archival materials; Financing: preservation and maintenance costs of archival material; Sharing: accessing and making accessible archival materials.

WHO SHOULD ATTEND:

Archivists, curators, and museum administrators; Educators affiliated with high schools, colleges, and universities; Mass media and moving image scholars; Members of the legal community specializing in moving image issues; Manufacturers of moving image materials; Producers, distributors, and exhibitors of moving images.

FORMAT of the CONFERENCE:

At least one keynote speaker will address the Conference. Panel presentations of papers as well as screenings of rare and important archival moving image documents will be offered throughout the Conference. Attending conferees will have opportunities to visit and tour the International Museum of Photography at the George Eastman House, the Margaret Woodbury Strong Museum, the Rochester Museum and Science Center, and other local sites of interest. Rochester's proximity to Toronto, Ontario (a three hour drive or a 40 minute flight) provides an opportunity to visit the Ontario Film Institute.

PANEL AND PAPER PROPOSALS:

These should be submitted in triplicate to Dr. Bruce Austin (address below) by December 1, 1988. Abstracts for panel and paper proposals are acceptable. The Conference will provide a forum for the public discussion and analysis of a diversity of ideas and approaches to moving image archaeology and scholarship. Proposals should focus on topics relevant to the Conference theme, as identified in the Purpose and Scope statements above. Reports of qualitative or quantitative data are welcome as are literature reviews, application studies, case studies, and works focusing on methodological, curatorial, or theoretical issues. Papers presented at the Conference will be solicited for inclusion in a forthcoming edition of "Current Research in Film", an annual series published by Ablex Pub. Corp. and edited by Bruce A. Austin. To date, four volumes of CRF have been published.

PRODUCTION SHOWCASES:

Films and television programs produced in the previous 24 months and relying extensively on archival materials will be presented and discussed. Send a synopsis, treatment or script for a work-in-progress; send a 16mm film or 1/4 NTSC videocassette of completed works. The deadline for production submissions is December 1, 1988. Submit production showcase materials to Dr. Barry L. Sherman, Associate Director, Peabody Awards, School of Journalism, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia 30605. (Phone: 404-542-3785.)

For more information, registration and hotel accommodation materials, or to submit panels and paper proposals or films, write to:
Bruce A. Austin
William Kern Professor in Communications
Rochester Institute of Technology
College of Liberal Arts
P.O. Box 9887
Rochester, New York 14623-0887
Phone: 716-475-6649



Women in Focus

National
Film Board
of Canada

Office
national du film
du Canada

WOMEN OF COLOUR

Film & Video Festival and Symposium

The National Film Board of Canada and Women In Focus are pleased to announce that a Women of Colour Film and Video Festival and Symposium will be held in Vancouver, B.C. in 1989.

This event will celebrate works by women of colour, both nationally and internationally, and also explore critical issues such as production, distribution, aesthetics and funding.

We are interested in making connections with women of colour filmmakers and video artists.

We welcome inquiries and suggestions about the deliberations of this festival and symposium.

For information please write or call:

Lorraine Chan
Distribution, Women's Programs
National Film Board
300 - 1045 Howe Street
Vancouver, B.C. V6Z 2B1
Phone: 604-666-7761

Zainub Verjee
Distribution Manager
Women In Focus
204 - 456 West Broadway
Vancouver, B.C. V5Y 1R3
Phone: 604-872-2250

RESOURCE

NOTICE

Temporary Suspension of the Videotape Fund
Program in Canada Council Media Arts Section

The Media Arts Section has temporarily suspended its Videotape Fund Program due to the present budgetary situation and the priorities set by the Section. Effective immediately, the Section will not be able to respond to requests for videotape. The Media Arts Section's production programs and support to organizations will not be affected by this change.

For further information contact Jean Gagnon, Media Arts Officer, at (613) 598-4356. The Canada Council accepts station-to-station collect calls.

The publishers of Video Guide invite independent producers to make a written response to these cutbacks. This cut of the Videotape Fund affects the new producers and experimental producers most severely.

The Canada Council Conseil des Arts du Canada

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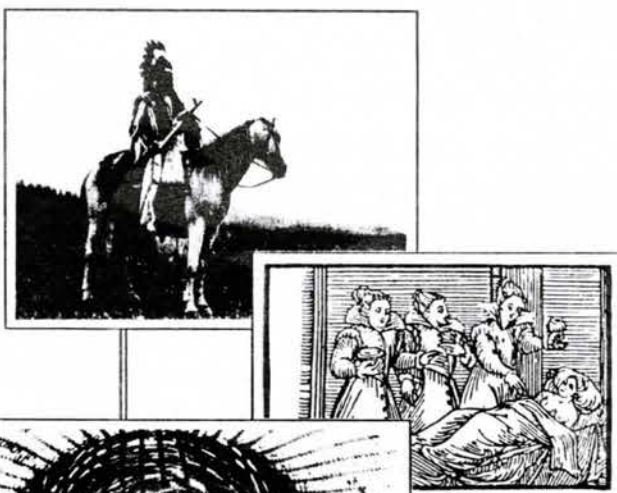
WESTCOAST WOMEN ARTISTS SOCIETY

Westcoast Women Artists is a non-profit society now being established in New Westminster, B.C. Our funding is through Canada Employment and Immigration and our sponsor is Douglas College.

The purpose of the society is to support women artists and promote their work. Some of the services we want to provide are a resource library, a slide registry, studio and gallery space, and the organization of shows and workshops. Two special areas of focus for us are the promotion of arts and culture in community development and building a stronger multicultural community through the arts.

For more information, contact:
Westcoast Women Artists Society
2 - 30 Begbie Street
New Westminster, B.C.
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PERIODICALS

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CENTERSCREEN is the quarterly newsletter of the ARTISTS' VIDEO ACCESS AND NETWORK, a RepArt Center project. RepArt Center is one of the sites of the Center for Human Services, a non-profit social service agency.

Members of AVAAN will receive this newsletter free of charge (Please notify us of any changes of address).

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Joy of Collaboration

Continued from page 3

sets and the poetry. Do they work and stand on their own? Are you going to do those poems or readings separately?

CD: No. They form a whole.

TO: I'm giving away the sets to the crew here, some I would sell or whatever. They're made specifically for the tape.

CD: Those words were too. In the particular case of *Joy Ride TM* they're so wed to images, and they're very brief. If there is a narrative structure in *Joy Ride TM*, it's in the sequencing of the ideas and the editing of the ideas. The language is not the vehicle for connecting the narrative, one thing after another. There are times when we work together where the language is really the big vehicle for the narrative continuity. In this case, the words are wed to very discrete moments, picture moments, and it passes that there's another moment and then another moment. They tend not to be discrete language entities. They're part of a coupling.

TO: You could appreciate one part severed from the whole, but you couldn't totally understand it, because there's about 5-6 levels going on at all times. The picture is informing the words and the words are informing the picture. I'm actually pretty happy with the way that that worked out because we got a good dialogue between all the layers of the structure.

CD: I'll just give you an example. Sometimes the picture, the image, is so obvious and the idea of the scene is so obvious, that what the language has to do is take the opposite tack and work against the obvious, and be, if you will, more obtuse. And still represent the idea but take an angle that's a great deal more obtuse than the picture, so that you're not being utterly heavy-handed and didactic. So at those moments, without the picture, the words are not coherent.

ES: The other question I wanted to ask was you refer to your work as 'using a new narrative'. I have an understanding of what that term means, but how are you using it? What is a new narrative? It's a different way of storytelling obviously.

CD: I think we should both answer that because it's probably different. I actually would never use the term 'new narrative'. I'm a narrative person. Narrative is the main interest, focus, concern of my writing and from the outset of my writing, which was fictional prose, that's been what I concentrate on. Now it happens that I develop a narrative style or a way to construct a narrative, in language with language, that I'm taking it to other forms, the spoken word, in this case video, also onto the stage, the operas. It's new insofar as I live in the late 20th Century, so it's new in this era that we live in, but I think every era has a 'new' narrative. I can't help but notice that I stand outside the mainstream. I construct narrative by those standards eccentrically. But I am deeply involved with how one structures language and narrative, how one makes order, what is succession? What is one thing after another? How that occurs.

TO: The reason I use the word 'new' is that my work can only be described as a product of its time, and the reason

I call it new is that there are distinctive elements that exist in our time that are different from any other time, in a profound way. People's perceptions are completely different now than they were say, 100 years ago, because of media influence. Their ability to perceive and read a sub-text of a collective unconscious existing in North America. There's a certain resonance that I reach in my work and I think we reach together in this work, that bounces off that kind of reading level, in that something can be read on four or five different levels, which doesn't really exist in a lot of other forms. And it's really based on the television generation, that exists now. Not that I'm saying based on anything having to do with television, but I'm saying 'television generation'.

ES: Yes, television-literate generation.

TO: Yeah, because if you go to another culture people can't understand certain edits, they can't perceive, they can't get from one point to another.

ES: There's no question that our generation being brought up on television has been given access to far more information, by the very nature of the medium.

CD: And that enters into a composition. What we end up doing if you work in a form is how you compose that and certainly our notion of composition is affected by that tremendous continuous and varying flood and flow. I know that one thing that affects my writing is flow, the velocity, the speed, the density and this extreme continuity of it, even though it's very baroque and going all over the place. Actually it's why I wanted to work in video because I felt that the way I put together language works very well with the putting together of the images of video and that technology, rather than film technology.

ES: I'd like to ask about the role of the artist and the writer, not separating those two, is that you seem to have a message to get out to a certain extent. You're not just conscious of the process. Referring back to the write-up in the mailer about 'institutional vs. private sector' and this whole idea about transcendental and stuff like that. Are you artists with a message? Are you trying to say something in particular?

TO: I'm not a preacher. I think the way that any kind of communication operates is that it's open to interpretation, by the receiver or viewer, and my tendency is not to preach but to set up the viewer to fall into a judgemental mode, to engage in the work in another way. Because what exists on the videotape, it's not the text, it's not the image, it's the wedding of the two together. And it's not even that until the viewer sees it. And then it becomes completed by interpretation which is what makes it different. We're very aware of that level of bouncing off and interpretation in reading these unconscious symbols. I believe that there's a certain pathos to the work but it's not really a down piece. It's a humorous, not really a black humour either.

ES: What I saw in there was a side of our generation of American criticism, as distinct from Canadian criticism, which I really liked. Americans can take a pot-shot at their politics or their society better than anybody else. Canadians can go on forever and complain (about America), but there's an American side of criticism that I saw in your tape, a kind of consciousness or level of awareness.

CD: We're not terribly preachy, but I do notice that having developed other things over the years, it continues to develop but we're not in a real early stage of developing our individual style. One thing I'm more focussed on now is evolving and developing some kind of social, the social consciousness of the work. And working with Tony, it's the nature of the collaboration that we do focus on informing the work with a social consciousness. And it's a genuine one, it's the one we have. But I've had a tendency, a hesitancy, to be terribly didactic, a heavy-handed kind of writer, rather to be gentle, even obtuse. Now I'm more interested in it being definitely there.

ES: So, in closing, do either of you have anything you'd like to add, either about collaboration or whatever?

TO: Video by its nature is very collaborative. I'm sure your readership knows that you need at least five people around to help. It was really amazing for us to come to Western Front and do this piece. It was a real show of faith in the notion of collaboration, kind of blind faith because I had never met anybody here before. (Constance had been here in '78 and '85.) But it was a real unique experience for me to come and work in this kind of community, where people are friendly and eager to help. It's very, very rare. I've worked all over the place, in Japan, Paris, and New York.

CD: Everyone entered into the spirit and support of this work, practically from the first day. We came very prepared because we wanted to produce the whole piece in this period of time. By the end of the first day we were here we had a shooting schedule, we had storyboard and script down, although I had to do re-writing as we went along. But that really helped because we knew what we needed, we knew what we wanted, we could ask very specific requests, 'will you do this for us on this day?' But everyone was really willing to be part of our obsession.

ES: Well, you're artists-in-residence; that's part of the deal. How does that differ from, say, the way you would've produced this tape in New York? Are you associated with an organization there?

TO: Not really. I've shown all over the place there, but as far as producing work there, I find it very difficult because space is a premium, there is no such animal as Western Front there, that you can live in, has equipment and has a studio, it's unbelievable, it just doesn't exist. And if it did, it would be a huge money-making sort of thing.

It was kind of a reprieve for us to come here because the last production we were on did go into a lawsuit and we're still in that but also in New York everybody is on this level where they have to generate a certain amount of income. So you have to pay extras for rehearsal, cab fares, lunch, so your budget really expands rapidly. And I'm sensitive about it, no one works for nothing, everyone has to be paid even if it's just a gesture so that there's a meaningful relationship on the set.

ES: So, are we going to see future collaborations between you? Besides the realization of *Relatives*?

TO: We have two other things in the crates.

CD: We're raising money on two other projects. One's a performance with video and one is a long video narrative, at least 45 minutes, with full sets, sets that are life-size, sync-sound, spoken-word text.

Best Of

Continued from page 7

in this category, the winning entry would have to, in some way, push boundaries. Obviously not in this case.

Kappa by Bruce and Norman Yonemoto was judged to be the "Best New Narrative". It told the whimsical legend of the Kappa, a hairless, monkey-like creature with a bowl of water on its head, from which it derives power. He is somewhat malevolent, in that he lives in swamps and preys on young women when they relieve themselves above him. The format for this tale was based on footage of sexuality in a lush and seductive 'Hollywood villa' set, combined with documentary-style descriptions of the origins of the Kappa myth in Japan and scenes of shrines set up to venerate him, to a dramatic image of the metamorphosis of the Kappa through a disjointed segment featuring red balls thrown into water. The 26-minute tape is at various times amusing, informative, but also confusing, because of the plethora of imagery. The onslaught of ideas and half-told plots results in the audience feeling a quality of detachment. The image or storyline is not held long enough for the viewer to make sense of it, or to connect it in any way with the scene which preceded it. The overview is somewhat of confusion about what the tape is all about, other than a witty — sometimes too witty — retelling of the Kappa legend.

The only Canadian winner in this otherwise American series was in the "Best Dramatic" category. *The Story of Feniks and Abdullah* by Luc Bourdon, shot in Vancouver and produced by the Western Front, was loosely based on Roland Barthes' "A Lover's Discourse". It involved waiting for a lover, answering machine conver-

sations, and a great deal of philosophizing while providing a visual tour of Vancouver's skyline and waterfronts. The ambient soundtrack by Michael Cote was augmented by recordings of announcements on the computerized rapid transit, found sounds from locations, and the occasional voice-over describing the alienation and hopelessness of the search for the lover on the answering machine. The imagery varied from fairly stock images within images of seemingly disjointed views of Vancouver's Chinatown and harbour (although obviously meant to convey to the viewer the sense of wandering), to rigid settings in a cafe window, complete with requisite coffee and cigarette action. The text, translated from the French, was typed over the face of the images at random times during the tape, resulting in the viewer concentrating vision on the slowly appearing words, much the same as one is mesmerized by watching a video display terminal. In this, the text was disconcertingly not connected with the image so that it was perhaps an inadvertent benefit that the viewer couldn't concentrate on both. It was clear that Bourdon was attempting to evoke a certain sense of timing in this work, which he was relatively successful in doing, but the viewer was left with the uncomfortable feeling that this tape was pretentious and cliched in its overworked use of a Barthes text, coupled with an attempt at a poetic quality that was never quite realized. The only thing that was particularly challenging about this tape in this context was that it was judged to be the "Best Dramatic", a category into which it did not seem to fit.

The final tape, *Not a Jealous Bone* by Cecelia Condit represented the "Best Experimental" piece in the festival. Using the incongruous format of a musical, the tape tells

the story of an old woman "who finds a magic bone she believes will help her live forever". She sets off with the bone she found on the beach to look for her mother, but instead is set upon by a young woman who tries to steal the bone. This simple story of good versus evil and jealousy is revealed through action rather than dialogue. Often throughout the story, the young woman's hands, face, and image are superimposed over the old woman, or combined to present young, perfectly manicured hands massaging an old and wrinkled face. The intrinsic value of this work is that the point about jealousy, longevity, and beauty is not overstated. The lack of dialogue, replaced by actions and facial expressions, is far more effective in delivering the message. The work presents a subject which could be boringly proselytized over forever, in an accessible, clever, and experimental way.

The "Best Video" series was ultimately useful for a local audience for a number of reasons. It provided viewers and producers an opportunity to see the kinds of work that are winning prizes in national and international festivals. It displayed the sort of criteria applied to place videotapes within certain categories with a rationale for that kind of selection process. It gave the local audience a glimpse of works produced in America today that are perceived to be on the cutting edge of experimental video production. In some cases it was obvious, even to the less critical, that the works chosen did not stand up to the kudos awarded them by being judged 'best'; in other cases it appeared as if the category was tailor-made for the winning entry. This series provided an insight into one of the important processes of distributing work to a larger audience outside the individual production centre, and for that it should prove instructive for local producers.

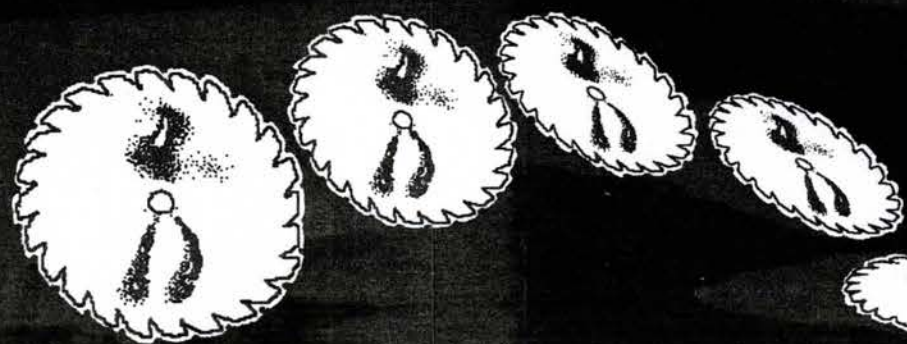
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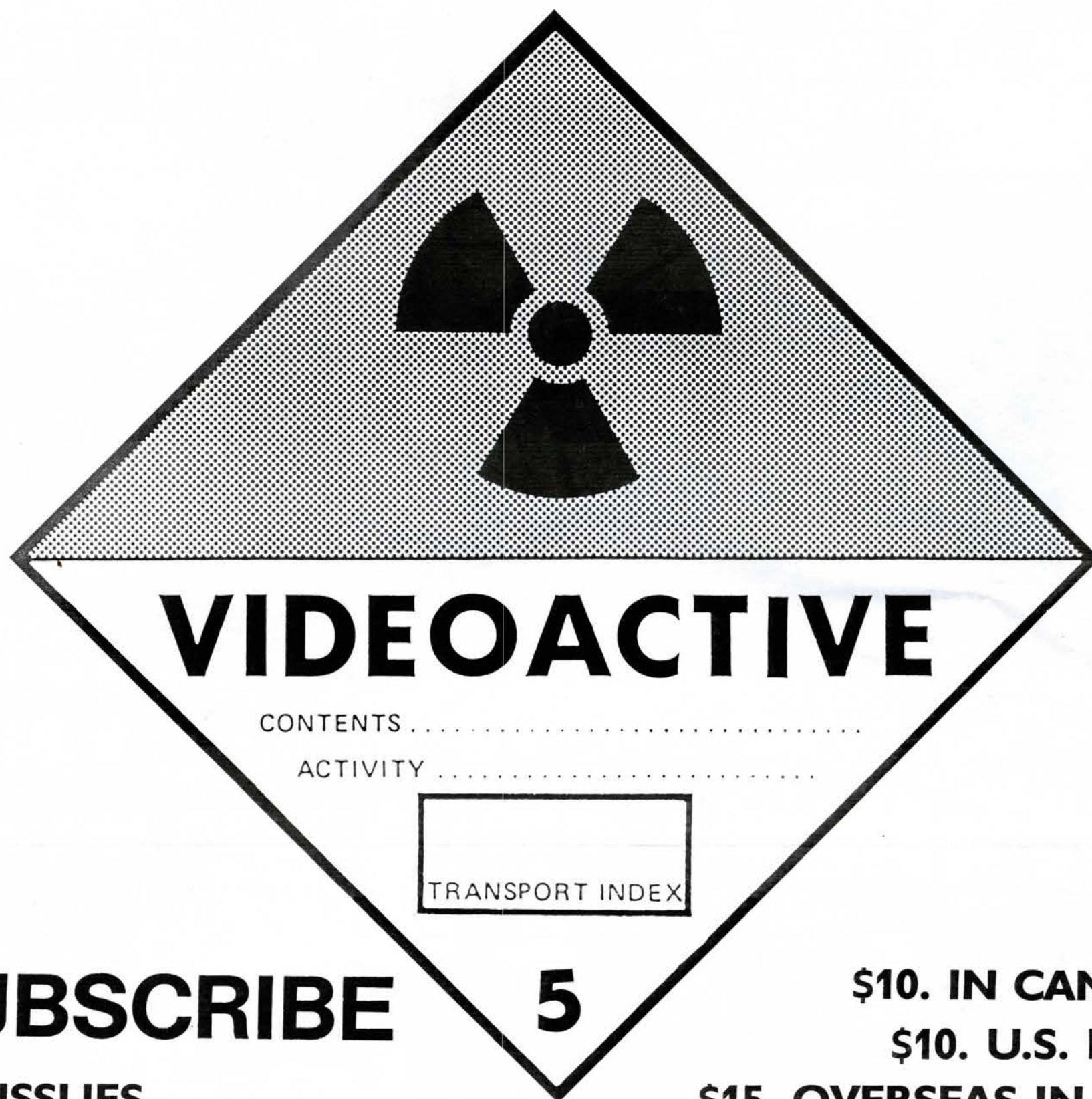
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