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A LITTLE OLDER

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W *The man, bold and vigorous, is qualified for being a protector; the woman, delicate and timid, requires protection. Hence it is that man never admires a woman for possessing bodily strength or personal courage; and women always despise men who are totally destitute of these qualities. The man, as protector, is directed by nature to govern; the women, conscious of her inferiority, is disposed to obey. Their intellectual powers correspond to the destination of nature. Men have penetration and solid judgement to fit them for governing, women have sufficient understanding to make a decent figure under a good government; a greater position could excite dangerous rivalry between the sexes, which nature has avoided by giving them different talents. Women have more imagination and sensibility than men, which make all their enjoyments more exquisite; at the same time they are better qualified to communi-*

cate enjoyment. The gentle members of the female sex tend to soften the roughness of the other sex; and wherever women are indulged with any freedom, they perish sooner than men."

Encyclopedia
Britannica Vol. 13
p. 577
1842 edition

"Most men don't lie sex. They like being powerful and when you have good sex you lose all power."

Kathy Acker,
Great
Expectations

"I hold her head in my hands, close my eyes, and concentrate on the media version of what we're doing."

Aria Actran,
Swimming in Mud

Photo, cover:
RHYTHMS OF THE HEART,
Steve Sanguedolce

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A LITTLE OLDER

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MARSHA HERLE
2.5 MINUTES B/W 1987



D Marsha Herle's explosive two minute short is a textbook film for love in the 90s: brief, stylish and aggressively indifferent. Part film noir, part rock video, *A Little Older's* starkly lit tableau provides the setting for its protagonists - young, hip and bored. Pausing only long enough to recite, "Tell me some lies", or "I had nothing better to do, so I fell in love", they strike a variety of postures, the women turning to croon one liners into the camera's heady stare, the man a speechless collection of tiny violences - swinging hammers to the sound of shotguns, breaking rocks and shaking spurs. After the opening scream, Herle introduces a

cynical gallery of cameos, mostly women whose studied contempt around relationships and bored party girl patter belie their own youthful appearance. *A Little Older* documents a generation given to a surface of styles - cruising the texts of history for 50s leather, 60s hairdos and 70s body art performance. Their cool exteriors relate a post romantic coming of age, broken parts speaking across a divide of genders.

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READING BETWEEN THE LINES

MARTHA DAVIS

33 MINUTES COLOUR 1989

Reading Between the Lines by Martha Davis is the latest chapter in a growing narrative consensus among feminist filmmakers. Half an hour in length, it occupies a place alongside *Mary Mary*, *Inside/Out*, *The Scientific Girl* and *Harriet Loves* as part of a sleek new project designed to dramatize the psychic living rooms of late 80s Toronto women. All made by white middle class women, all feature protagonists closely identified with the filmmaker set in a condition of extreme isolation. All of these films share a surface gloss and polish, an almost aggressive technical proficiency which rhymes the film's settings: opulent restaurants and designer jeans, vast houses and remote control VCRs. That each should feel compelled to use their considerable technical skills to depict one devastating containment after another, and that these containments should express a solidarity unheard of in Toronto's fiercely competitive film climate, all this marks the position of women producers in an economy of spiralling film budgets, feature length aspirations, foreign TV sales, Patricia Rozema and *The Big Deal*. Together these films unfold a psychic map of the Other, trapped in an upwardly mobile spiral of urban desire and class fantasies. On the one hand, the 'look' of their work is completely

in keeping with their monied surround. But on the other, all of these producers take great pains to dramatize a vast alienation from these same economic surroundings.

Reading Between the Lines takes off from the newly flourishing phenomenon of Toronto's personal ads. Based on the filmmaker's own experience and the overwhelming response which ensued, *Reading Between the Lines*' protagonist reads three successive replies to her personal ad in voice-over. Over the course of each of the three letters, and only after Davis takes care to establish her lead (Post Box 321) as a filmmaker reading alone, Davis intercuts illustrative vignettes to accompany the reading. Shot in a casual, unobtrusive style, we watch Box 321 and suitor #1 (Rob) exchanging Chinese fortune cookies, chasing each other down stairwells, cuddling in a bathtub. Legend has it that the condemned, in the moments before death, are privy to a lightning quick retrospective of their own life, viewed in flashback. Davis re-plays these relations in the same way, cutting easily from one setting to the next in a line which is not so much a progression as an unfolding of views. Davis takes her formal cues from the personal columns - miming their construction of adjectival



D chains: SWF str/act/lkg 32... Repeating images of each of her past lovers even as she's describing a new relationship, Davis introduces an additive geometry in place of the reductive primal scenes and first causes of most dramas. This rapid exchange between bodies is propelled by a montage that shows her leaving the house with one man, getting into a car with a second, and arriving at a restaurant with a third. Her insistence on the unfulfilled circularity of desire is nothing new - in his dramatic descent into hell Dante found lovers

turning in the second circle, stung by waves of hornets and inflamed by passion, they were forever condemned to chase one another in a revolution without end. And like Dante, Davis insists that desire is a product of writing, that the shape of desire is learned through the word, and that it shares with language an indiscriminate profligacy. Even as the meaning of a word takes root in a variety of simultaneous environments, so is the body of a lover multiplied by the gesture it occasions, gestures already learned and so already recalling the

others it has touched.

Rob is a young, non-smoking ex-model house-loving dog-owning waiter in his early 20s. He would like to own a large house 'but probably never will' and doesn't ride a car because he can't afford one. Faintly regressive ('Sometimes I like to feel like a baby'), this futureless suitor-in-waiting clearly lacks the goal-driven career ambitions of his reader. When he speaks of the freedom of getting away from it all, transported via motorbike instead of car, the conflation of money and freedom is clear. Hoping to escape the way money orders his surround, he can only pursue the lines of flight outlined by this same capitalism, in roads filled with the regret of being unable to own a car.

This dream of 'escape' is one more euphemism in a landscape of lifestyle ads, whose economy of leisure is measured in the same terms as factory work. In an era of sports buffs, tourism, restaurants, and dance clubs, one person's leisure is another's monotonous oppression. It is no accident that Rob appears as a waiter. As periodic bursts of dissension break the playful flow of their time together, it becomes clear that Box 321 is searching for more than a lover. Perhaps even more importantly, she hopes to gain entry into a social order other than her own. In this respect Rob is no help, and is

not only granted summary dismissal, but made to wait on her and both of her succeeding lovers, cruelly emphasizing their differences in economic tempers.

Ten minutes later suitor #1 is history as Box 321 reaches into her bagful of responses to read the story of Charles Redding, suitor #2. Charles is a rich control freak, an occasionally violent art maniac candlelit scrabble nut. Appearing on Charles' arm before great estate driveways and restaurants bedecked with silk napkins and cheesecake, Box 321 imagines herself as an accessory to power, tourist in the homes of the rich and cultured. Many of the earlier episodes with Rob are repeated in more luxurious surroundings, albeit with an anger and violence unfamiliar from the previous reading. As her fantasy about entry into a forbidden class deepens, afternoon picnics give way to angry scenes of departure, shattered dishes, necklaces torn from their place, and her bedside suffocation. These scenes are drawn to a point in an image repeated almost obsessively throughout the film, when Box 321 throws Charles down a long staircase. Davis' conflation of money and power is made most explicit in these scenes where the g\$\$\$d life takes the place of intimacy, where the heroine's own class ambitions are fastened to her own self image, an image that

can only be accessed through an act of power over another. It is the dialectic of master and slave that provides identity for each, and Davis insistently returns to this coupling throughout *Reading*. She asks that the gestures of work and love be read in the same line and register, and that the mechanisms of power and control do not so much inhabit us as begin within us, at the level of tissue and heartbeat, of immunity systems and nerve

After a dog's barking greets the close of the second letter we're quickly introduced to 'Nicholas'. Nicholas is a 47 year old home-loving vegetarian father-of-two mime-artist divorcee. The focus throughout this third and final section is on the means of mobility. Whether riding a moped, getting off a plane, fixing a car, cycling or swimming this pair seem always in motion, as if their acceleration could belie the fact of their age differences



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O ends. We exercise power even as we exercise, displaying it as the way we have come to move our bodies even in its most banal and commonplace moments: sitting, standing, walking, eating, loving.

N E or move them outside the inexorable gravity of failed relations. But by this, the third affair, Davis' eye is tuned to patterns, not differences. Like Rob and Charles we watch this couple bathing, fucking, eating,

reading and arguing. To accentuate the circularity of these relations, Davis increasingly employs footage from Rob and Charles to punctuate these scenes, as if they'd already begun to mean the same thing, the present a blurry accretion of histories. As a fissured present is sealed with images from the past, this menage a trois becomes helplessly condemned to the repetition of intimate codes, intimate designs, and feelings which cannot be told apart from the structures they inhabit.

While a woman's voice sounds throughout it always wraps around a male letter. This is the first duality introduced in a film obsessed with couples and coupling: a male writer, a female reader. Both seem haunted by an irreconcilable desire. The first is relegated to a blind longing and self absorption in the absence of the Other. What remains for the woman is a self-empowered removal that can only relate to the outside at one remove, as if there were no real place to occupy after all, as if the mating rituals of the heterosexual couple made a woman's role impossible. If the results of these letters implies both the abandonment of her room and her subsequent entry into the social order, then this order is one predicated on a male word, the promise of the letter, the name of the father. That she should have rejected, by film's

end, three suitors in succession, should come as little surprise, because any acceptance requires a yielding of power. This power is maintained so long as she can remain alone, reading 'between the lines' of a text she learns in her own time, in her own place. If each relation is imaginary, they are equally fraught with the loss of self control, a loss she attempts to balance in each by holding her own camera, holding her own, owning the means of reproduction. It is here that her own sense of identity is forged, an identity based on an identification with control and power. The film's closing line signs off the third suitor: "Yours until we meet, Nicholas." But meet they never will: as the screen fades to black we hear only the sound of tearing - another envelope is being opened. Davis' sure use of the guillotine splicer throughout *Reading Between the Lines* has as much to do with a desire sustained by the circle as its insistent rerouting through the filmmaker's own hands. What remains striking throughout is not Davis' conclusion - that a relationship with her camera should prove more enduring, more 'productive' than her three headed affairs - but that the terms of power should be so boldly written over the smallest of gestures, that the codes we live in create value only through opposition.

OBLIVION

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TOM CHOMONT

6 MINUTES COLOUR SILENT 1969

Oblivion is a forbidden tale of male love. Lost in the heat of a masturbatory revel, light pours off the skin of the filmmaker, finally coalescing in an associative montage that relates the body of his hustler/lover with the world outside.

Oblivion is very much a 'home movie', enclosed between the four walls of a New York tenement, it describes a lover's encounter.

"I shot it on two separate evenings but it had elements of many of our visits: we would sit and talk; he would smoke; at some point one or both of us would feel aroused..."
Tom Chomont from an interview with Scott MacDonald in *A Critical Cinema*

D Typical of Chomont's filmwork are the aggressively re-cycled juxtapositions of everyday actions, the simple act of drawing on a cigarette, for example, is repeated in positive and negative, b/w and colour, backwards and forwards. This gesture is played like accordion notes, its brief understanding slipping in and out of gear with a collection of disparate parts, their fragments generating patterns of connection and dissolution.

O "There's always a tension for me between the fact of seeing someone from the outside - as a body, an object - and seeing the identity dissolution that usually takes place during sleep. If it happens when we're awake, it's disturbing; we

want to avoid it. I was trying to deal with that. Sex fantasies tend to objectify other people's bodies and sometimes their personalities, too, and I suppose it's evil in a sense because it can lead to the manipulation of other people. That was a tendency in that relationship because he took so much of those drugs. At that time, I think he had trouble accepting his sexuality. He said it was easier to accept performing sexual acts for money, but the fact of the matter was he would sometimes take the money he earned and go buy another prostitute to have sex with him as he wanted it. Twice he asked me to pay him to have sex and I thought, "This is a very bad precedent and besides I can't afford it." Well, I resisted it, but I was aware that it appealed to me to just say, "OK, what will you do for this much?" After many years of trying to follow what I was taught - not to do certain things sexually - I had a lot of very intense fantasies. During this time I began to act out my fantasies, and, in doing so, the experience became more important than the fantasy."

Chomont

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RHYTHMS OF THE HEART

STEVE SANGUEDOLCE
43 MINUTES COLOUR 1990

Steve Sanguedolce belongs to the Escarpment School - a loosely knit group of filmmakers that includes the likes of Mike Cartmell, Marion McMahon, Rick Hancox, Gary Popovich and Philip Hoffman. Born and raised along the craggy slopes of the Canadian shield, their work typically cojoins memory and landscape in a home movie/documentary based production that is at once personal, poetic and reflexive. Inheritors of the 19th century Lake Poet romantics, 'nature' is typically figured as a metaphor for consciousness, a visible hieroglyph of mind motion. Woven into their surround are images of a more personal sort - Hoffman's dying grandmother in *passing through/torn formations*, Popovich's family picnics in *Elegy* or McMahon's graduation ceremony in *Nursing History*. The Escarpment School is part of Canada's third generation of avant-garde filmmakers, a generation which has come of age in the late 80s. They have inherited both the increasing institutionalization/academicization of avant-garde film, and the feeling of 'coming too late' - of working after the canonized achievements of American 'great works'. As artists well versed in the history of their medium, their response has been two fold. The first is to take an active part in the shaping of their own destiny - many are

teachers, administrators, board members of artist run centres/ film co-ops and members of screening groups. The second has been the production of synthetic work that collages heterogeneous materials in a weave that strains a home movie manufacture through language. Their work often reflects on absence and death, typically contrasting the camera's movement through landscape in the present with a memory condemned to history. These pastoral sojourns make the simply visible into a sign for all that cannot be brought before the camera's even stare. It is at this point, between presence and absence, now and then, that the filmmaker enters, hoping to re-member the two in what may be regarded as both a celebration of a newly synthetic consciousness and a lament for all that's already passed. *Rhythms of the Heart* by Steve Sanguedolce typifies many of these Escarpment School concerns in its blend of personal narrative and landscape, redrafting its romantic heritage in a love story that deconstructs narrative traditions even as it tears its characters apart. Part autobiography, part fiction, Sanguedolce's insistent replaying of loss through a metaphorical landscape and his tireless focus on the personally domestic, marks *Rhythms* as a work coming from the heart of the

Escarpment School.

In *Rhythms of the Heart* Sanguedolce's affinity for expressionistic documentaries turns to the depiction of a ruined marriage. Part documentary, part fiction, this home movie musical is staged in eight movements with prelude and coda. Begun with a softly ebbing light shining from the pastel mists of Niagara Falls, the filmmaker moves in quiet concert with his surround, leaking colour into the slowly rising condensation. This long prelude demonstrates a dissolution of borders, a respite from the divisions of the word. Framing this Edenic enclosure are twin texts, recorded verite style, of an aggressively male opera director whose first word is also the film's beginning, 'No!' In the year long process of gathering images and sounds for what the filmmaker imagined at first to be a film about music, he synchronously recorded dress rehearsals for Verdi's *La Boheme*, directed by Guiseppe Machina. Scrapping the image, Sanguedolce kept only Machina's voice, using it in ironic counterpoint with images of a more personal order.

After Sanguedolce's re-figured image of the fall Machina sounds again, shaming the proceedings and demanding that everything begin from the beginning. The filmmaker now returns to nature, replacing the waterfall's mist by a billowing white smoke, evidence of a

ruined forest below. Choosing to show only the effects of the fire, he drapes its destructive source with a deadly and seductive shroud that replays and refigures the film's opening. Moving from images of the sublime to their rethinking in fire's light, Sanguedolce opens a surface common to each for reinterpretation, de-mist-ifying the sublime by pointing to its shared origins in disaster.

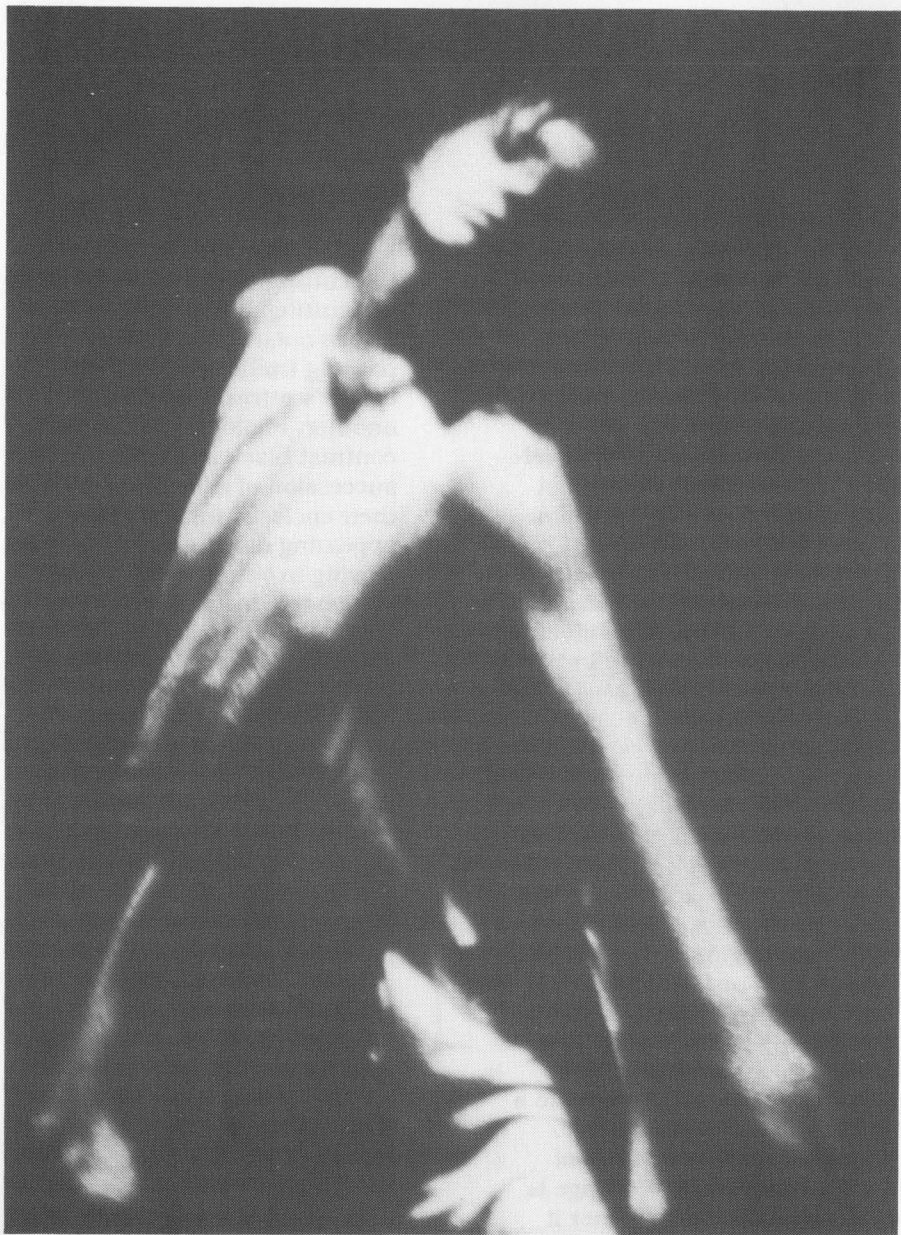
After another disgusted intercession from Guiseppe Machina, Sanguedolce offers the film's third beginning: racing over rock, his camera pitching earthwards and skywards, he returns to the earth's surface as if to another planet, wandering without bearings or direction. Spliced into his footfalls are glimpses of a couple at home. As the walk terminates in a rush of sun flares and reflecting pools, these intimations of domestic life expand in a frenzied super-8 collage depicting pre-post marriage nuptials. From the marriage of Mary and Steve, their honeymoon doubts surrounding an institutionalized intimacy to Mary's last pained leaving scene, *Rhythms* takes up the trajectory of a marriage's dissolution. This blend of fact and fiction is photographed largely in super eight, utilizing its light weight portability, automatic metering and low light capabilities to full advantage. Invariably held in hand at close quarters, the super-8

camera is used to squeeze off short bursts of picture, rhythmic phrases that keep the married couple of the film in a continual state of readjustment and realignment. All of the super-8 work is photographed by both of its protagonists - the filmmaker who plays himself, and 'Mary', acted with an abandoned verve by Alex Morisson. They photograph one another with a groin's eye view of sleeping, crying, fucking, dancing and talking, exposing their most intimate relations to the quick turn of the hand held camera. *Rhythms'* many staged allegories all act to qualify this domestic relation whose unfolding provides the film's narrative centre.

In an evocation of the film's opening scene, a soft hued play of colour and light fills the screen, its richly toned shapelessness turning in prelude to a movement that might be named 'domestic life'. As the focal ring tightens around its subject we watch a cooking scene unveiled. Photographed in extreme close-up, the camera tracks the gesture of two cooks who remain faceless and bodiless. As the camera divulges a succession of knives two other scenes are introduced and intercut. The first shows a woman recoiling on white sheets, her face covered over with a goalie-like mask. The second returns to the super-8 diary footage while the by-now newlyweds photograph one

another having sex. The opera director maintains a running commentary throughout: 'You go in from the back, like that, in the back... keep the flag up!'

If *Rhythms* bore Batman-like aspirations towards narrative, these post marriage scenes would be filled with images of a new life together, replete with the middle class trappings (home, car, family) these dramatic structures support. Relying instead on metaphor and synecdoche, Sanguedolce stages the domestic oppression that underlies the codes of marriage, the word of the Father, the Law. The word is underlined here as a repressive force acting to contain women, a figure of speech drawn in the shape of the Other. The mask-clad figure is clearly allegorical - made to suffer an unnamed and outrageous fortune that has manufactured a body in revolt. This voiceless body is bent to the rule of a word that comes always from outside, from somewhere else, making her body the issue of the word, even as the two lovers join beneath the omniscient voice of the opera director. As their domestic gestures take on a frenzied acceleration, threatening to erupt the dramatic conventions of discrete characterization and a causal chain of circumstance, language is introduced to stop the flow of images. Over and over, the images of *Rhythms* are regrouped around a linguistic centre, reissued as evidence



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O that the spontaneous is also a function of language. At the same time, the uncontrolled furies of everyday life are summoned in an assault against the dictates of the word, the rule of which is echoed in an

N enclosed and enframing architecture. Over and over, *Rhythms* hurls its protagonists against these linguistic signs of enclosure, breaking through them only to find them reconstituted under different names and

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places.

If *Rhythm's* opening and closing scenes wander in a natural surround, the rest is lensed in a gaggle of enclosures, whether sparsely lit studio settings, counter tops or framed bathrooms. This interior expression is matched with a kinetic intensity and gestural camera style whose free wheeling expressions push against the confines of their interiors. This polarity between an ecstatic join and a rational, linguistic separation is demonstrated in the film's architecture and framing. After the film's opening the camera turns inside, showing its newly married couple in a series of cramped interiors, or its performers in a small and darkened space. These extended interior passages are broken by the frame of landscapes at the film's opening and close. While *Rhythms* begins with an image of the 'fall', or fallen nature, it closes with a rooftop dance lit by the city lights beyond. This progression, from country to city, or from a solitary trek to a reconciliation with another, provides the film's essential trajectory. But this passage is hardly a linear one, rather it consists of a continual series of transgressions (of space, of confinement, of each other) which are remade and redressed in succeeding parts of the film.

The remainder of the film describes the couple's gorwing alienation , a distance

which culminates in her leave taking and his anguished isolation. Recalling the metaphorical strategies that joined the cutting of vegetables with the cutting of film, Sanguedolce moves outside to witness a passing traffic, a sign of this couple's retreat from one another. Photographed in high contrast black and white, a succession of cars cruise past, their enclosed inhabitants appearing distant and strange. Moving in counterpart to the polyphonic montage of the dance that preceded it, the filmmaker is left alone after a reverie he imagined to be shared. The stark contrast of the black and white images, along with the implacible distance between the camera and its object, suggest an unshakable polarity, a division quickly re-affirmed after the emotional hedonism of the preceding scene.

In the film's remaining fifteen minutes Sanguedolce drafts a personal confession - submitting his isolation to the intertextual weave employed, just moments before, to suggest a union of opposites, a marriage of discontinuous parts. After the contemplative pause of passing traffic we watch a sax player slowly blowing notes, standing in spotlight. In the second of three recorded telephone messages, the filmmaker begins to talk for the first time, speaking of their separation in hurt and wonder-

ing tones. Each of their three speeches are presented as the recorded messages of a telephone answering device. Each accuses the other of hiding behind their machines, using it to screen calls and more fully control their present. Both their home movie imaging and telephone soliloquies rely on low definition technologies of representation that present images of their togetherness. But these technologies also work to separate them, reserving some part of their love making attentions for the operation of a camera whose indiscriminate stare turns the present into history. Caught always in a menage a trois of he/she/it, Sanguedolce suggests first of all that technology's tendency towards miniaturization (less is more) makes the private sphere accessible to a public technology. Passing the camera back and forth even as they're making love, this couple shows that the codes of intimacy are learned through and operated via shared technologies, and that the problems of their marriage may have as much to do with low definition media as their respective emotional differences. Their relation is an extended 'in camera session', monitoring the progress of a technological psyche whose evolutionary genetics are increasingly subject to a revolutionary technology. As the filmmaker continues to speak through her answering

machine, he submits to a recording that can never answer him, only reflect his own speaking. A rush of diary images ensue, watching his newly found solitary. In this displacement of sound and image, it's as if he's speaking only to himself or that the brief time of their marriage was less a dialogue than two monologues laid over one another. In an attempt to escape from the circle of his own speech, the filmmaker turns out of doors, seeking release in the escarpment north of Superior. Here the camera is held in hand, made to perform a wandering league of spirals, its restless navigation rising and falling from the static glare of the sun. Caught in a circle that mimes the turning wheels of tape recorder and film camera, Sanguedolce returns to his apartment to photograph Mary's leaving. As the closing credits draft the architecture of the film's naming, Mary is shown dancing on a high urban rooftop. Behind her the lights of unmet citizens wink in union as her balletic flourishes brings *Rhythms* to a close.