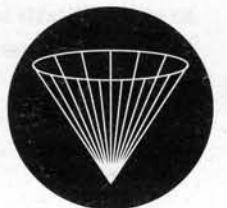


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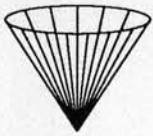
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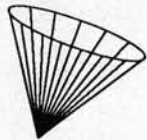
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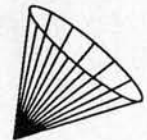
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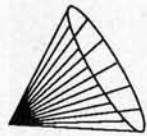
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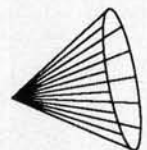
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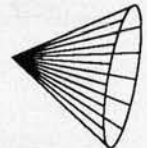
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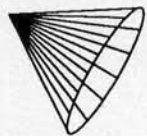
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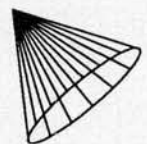
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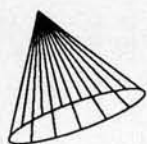
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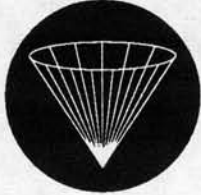
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BY SHONAGH ADELMAN



There has been an increasing imperative for feminism to focus more centrally on issues of class, race and sexual orientation as aspects of identity inseparable from gender. While sexuality has occupied an embattled, and at least figuratively, a privileged position within radical feminism, and while class has been foregrounded in Marxist and socialist feminisms, race has often been overlooked. This oversight has only recently become the subject of critical attention. However, the question of how we address racism, particularly within ourselves, has on the one hand drawn into question essentialist, ahistorical and culturally exclusionary feminist paradigms, and on the other hand, it has inoculated a new terrain of moral-political judgment.

This becomes a particularly difficult issue within the arena of representation which requires a theoretization of fantasy (or mediated information) and its inscription by and impact on reality.

For instance, how do we represent and critique the representations of people who are "different" from us? As Audre Lorde (*Sister Outsider*, 1984) has suggested, the refusal to speak about the experiences of people who are "too different" becomes another excuse for exclusion. On the other hand, speaking about or for others opens up the potential charge of appropriation.

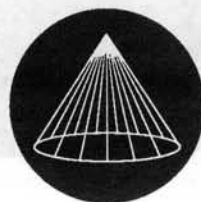
While Brenda Longfellow and Ivone Margulies make opposing arguments for the political (and representational) effectiveness of Yvonne Rainer's strategy of decentering the subject as a method of both divesting herself of authorial power and of occupying "other" positions, Ann Marie Fleming's film synopsis enlists a contrary strategy (to that of Rainer): she squarely centres herself as subject and author, exposing her own racial stereotypes and, in the process, reveals a complex convergence of racism and sexism.

The terms "different" and "other" have acquired an implicit marginal context. Larissa Lai and Yasmin Jiwani attempt to deconstruct and, at the same time, relocate marginality by addressing the homogenizing and invisible strong-arm mechanisms of the "Western gaze" and its oppressive effects on the self-determination of other cultures both within and outside its geographical parameters. While Jiwani primarily critiques traditional documentary filmmaking for its uncritical adoption of a canonized perspective, Larissa Lai and Kass Banning pose examples of a resistant vision, specifically a reconstitution of gender and race according to a female Asian gaze.

While Lai, Jiwani and Banning focus on entrenchment and redress of racial and third world stereotypes, Gwendolyn exposes another kind of marginal cinematic trope, that of the sex trade worker. Through talking about her own experiences as a stripper/prostitute, and in her film, *Prowling By Night*, Gwendolyn debunks the victim/bad girl whore stigma, relocating the "problem" within the justice and penal systems. Gwendolyn's methodology reflects the alternative strategies posed by Lai and Banning, an approach which puts the content in the hands of those who are represented. Judith Doyle's endorsement of a marginalized representational strategy (community-based production) schematizes a similarly self-determined type of filmmaking and calls for institutional recognition through arts council funding and critical support.

Catherine Russell discusses an altogether different type of marginalization, that of "Women and Film" within the educational system. She outlines pedagogical problems including the institutionally marginal location of the course itself and discusses the necessity to deconstruct and historically situate specific polarizations such as realist/experimental, aesthetics/politics and form/content.

These papers foreground ways in which film production has taken up various issues of marginality, either critically examining how stereotypes are perpetuated or, alternatively, how they are challenged. Feminist film criticism, production and education have become discursive arenas in which aspects and stratifications of identity are re-constituted on a dialogical, political and aesthetic ground which is continually defined and contested.



This issue's guest editor is SHONAGH ADELMAN, an artist and writer living in Toronto.

**GWENDOLYN,
working**

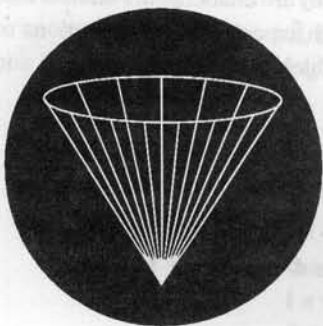
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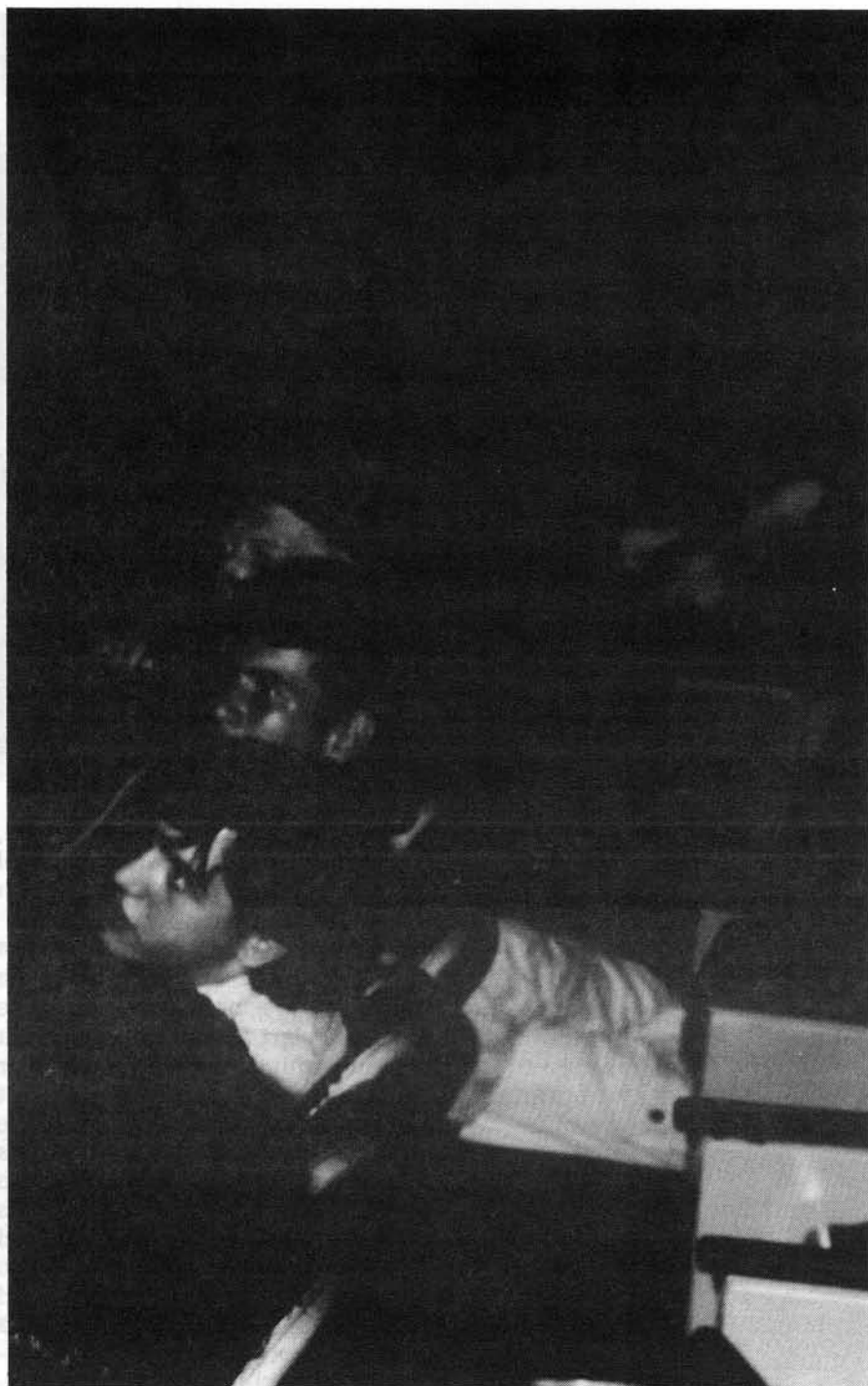


BY KIM DERKO

DERKO So Gwendolyn, what makes you such an expert anyway?

GWENDOLYN I've worked in the business since I was a teenager. I was a virgin whore giving blow jobs and swallowing it 'cause I was too polite to spit it out. I didn't want to hurt some guy's feelings. I also worked in a place posing for





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I N T E R V I E W W I T H

G W E N D O L Y N



GWENDOLYN,
working

photo by **RODGE**

pictures where men took photos of you in scanty outfits. I worked as a Fuller Brush girl and at a ladies' 'Lift The Weight Off' place. I found that putting on scanty little outfits to have my picture taken and sucking guys off was more lucrative and more interesting and more fun. With Fuller Brush sales you're selling something that most people don't want. Sex is something that most people do want. Still, in this whole time I didn't identify myself as a whore. I didn't have a political conscience around it — it was just something I was doing to make some money, it wasn't my whole identity.

I started stripping full time when I'd just turned 23 and it was like I suddenly found home. It was a great job and this'll be my 15th year working as a stripper. I've been involved in the prostitutes' rights movement since the late '70s. I'm a member of the Canadian Organizations for the Rights of Prostitutes and am currently working on the Prostitutes Safe Sex Project. Plus I've made five films.

The filmmaking thing — that was years later. That came about when A Space offered money to make a film. Even after I accepted the gig I wasn't really sure how to do it. I really felt stumped. How do you go from one scene to another? Like you've seen a million movies — one minute you're on the outside, one minute you're on the inside and sometimes it can help if you go to a door, but not necessarily. It was never like I was stripping or sucking cock, whatever, and saying "as soon as I get enough money I'm gonna start making movies." I'd never thought about making movies.

DERKO In Kay Armatage's film, *Striptease*, you said you didn't feel there was enough of an exchange with the audience.

GWENDOLYN I think to some extent I was hoping that the exchange with the audience was gonna be profound, like when you start fucking you think that orgasm is this profound something or other. Stripping's not profound, it's just familiar and comfortable. When you're beginning, some girls have fantasies that prince charming is gonna come into the club — wave a magic wand (which is sitting there right between his legs) and it's gonna change her life. Maybe I let go of some illusions, like in my show *Hard Core* last summer. I don't think it's gonna suddenly turn my entire audience into rabid anti-censorship activists or they're all gonna walk out of there and have a complete understanding of where porn workers are coming from. All I can do now is hope I can generate a discussion — just encourage people to look at things from somebody else's — no — from my high-heeled point of view for a minute....

I've been confronting the audiences in strip clubs for years. I don't allow myself to be a screen to project their

fantasy on. They have to be able to look me in the eye. Can you look at my pussy and keep talking? Carry on a conversation? So I've got a reputation for being "that girl Gwendolyn — she's a bit challenging or threatening"....

It's just not as easy to get a hard on with somebody who's trying to engage you. When a guy says just shut up and bend over — well, I'm not the gal for you; I'm here too. That's probably why I've been able to stay so long — because that keeps me from going through the motions. I'm still engaged, involved.

DERKO What do you think about the pro-censorship voice (which is also sometimes a feminist voice) that says porn is degrading to women?

GWENDOLYN This is the unfortunate reality relating to sexual matters in this society. There's so much shame, guilt, resentment and anger around sex that it's pretty hard for people who are not feeling good about the sex they're having. Often they see that same kind of sex depicted. So people say porn is bad. I'm trying not to give some pat answer. I'm trying to understand why people get so threatened and on a real primal level get so hostile and enraged about explicit sexual representation. Porn is fantasy and in fantasy anything goes. But I'm concerned about the sex trade workers. For example it's good if people show sex with condoms because it's socially responsible. Showing safe sex is showing something that could help save your life, but you might really enjoy fantasizing that you don't have to wear a condom. The movie fantasy can look like unsafe sex but in reality the workers/actors need to be protected during the filming.

DERKO But who is constructing the fantasy? It's a matter of perspective.

GWENDOLYN That's why it's good for more people to get the opportunity to depict different kinds of sex. It's like when you asked me to come here and talk about movies, and how whores are represented in films. If you only get shown one kind of sex, you might say "that's not me — that's not my experience." Maybe the filmmaker did know that whore — that experience. Filmmakers should have the right to show and say what they want to, but

when it's my turn I'm gonna speak from what I know. Make sure you get your turn. You don't have to be stuck with the same old fantasies, like when there was only *Playboy*. Not all guys want to fantasize about 18-year-olds with big tits. That's not my fantasy, but it's not wrong....

As for the feminists who think images of porn are awful, I feel the same way about them as I do about the people who oppose abortion clinics. Those women

are acting out of hate. It's a lot easier to condemn than to help women have choices. In porn, ask yourself why you feel threatened by other people's pictures, then make your own.

DERKO ...*Not a Love Story* as a pro-censorship film?

GWENDOLYN ...Even more than pro-censorship I would say anti-sex-trade-worker, 'cause I don't think it was a pro-anything film. I thought it was hateful.



GWENDOLYN and MARYLOU,
working a stag

photo by WALTER

DERKO What a contradiction — to show porn but then to use it to imply that porn is such an evil thing.

GWENDOLYN The whole idea is the same as when Maude Barlow was going across Canada (funded by the Liberals) to do the anti-porn sessions, meeting in church halls, bringing porn magazines and film clips. The idea being if you show it to people they'll be so shocked,

they'll just say that's disgusting/horrendous. The idea was to offend people — shoving something down somebody's throat, hitting their gag reflex. Naturally their impulse is to reject it instead of getting people to really look at this whole issue, to try to think about it. It was just inciting people to be very angry, but what I think happened here (*Not a Love Story*) is that the filmmak-

ers had that kind of revulsion, and their overwhelming gut reaction was fear and rage. It's like people who come in and make a film about women in porn, then they finish and decide they're gonna make a film about "Eskimos". They come in, do sort of this quick thing then after they talk like they are some kind of expert. With film you're in a position to influence a lot of people.

After *Not a Love Story* came out I was going to parties and social situations, meeting feminist women who had seen *Not A Love Story*, and their reaction to what I do for a living was totally hostile. Like, "Oh! DOOR SLAM! You're part of the problem — you're the person who makes it impossible for me to walk down the street at night. SLAM!"

DERKO What about Linda Lee Tracey (*Not a Love Story*) and the people in *Hookers on Davie*?

GWENDOLYN It's like discussing apples and oranges — Linda Lee Tracey and the hos [hookers] working where there's an unusual mix of hos, transies [transsexuals], addicts and non-addicts all on one street. I don't know if Davie Street still exists that way today, but at the time it was a very unusual street. I can certainly understand why the filmmakers wanted to document that.

I remember seeing *Hookers on Davie*. The year before I had been in *Striptease* and somebody who'd seen me in *Striptease* saw me in line to see *Hookers on Davie* and said "Oh, so are you in this one too?" and I was like "No! I'm not a street ho!" A year later I was working on the street in Vancouver. It was so ironic, but the thing is, it's different worlds. Linda Lee Tracey wanted to get out of stripping and was at a point in her life where she was trying to go straight. Maybe I shouldn't be trying to speak for her but this is my interpretation of it: part of me was pissed off at the filmmakers but I was also pissed off at Linda Lee Tracey for swallowing their bullshit and going along with them.

DERKO Because the filmmaker is making a moral judgment — trying to "save" Linda Lee Tracey?

GWENDOLYN She was trying to save herself, that's the other side of it. I have to say it was probably like sleep deprivation. They took her out of her environ-



GWENDOLYN in
CARDIAC ARREST

photo by K. REICH



still from
PROWLING BY NIGHT

drawing by **MARY ANNE**

photo by **RODGE**

ment, out of Montreal/Ottawa, and they took her to New York City and bombarded her with these images and at the same time surrounded her with all this support, like some cult where they brainwash you. I can't blame her but I do feel like "How could you turn your back on all of us?" It's a very common thing—a girl gets married to a guy who doesn't know she's in the business and all of her friends are dropped. If you try to go straight, enter back into society, you basically have to dump your past life. Society has such a negative attitude toward sex workers. It's really easy to internalize that shame, you're told you have to cut off all those years of your life—all the comradery. It's not like I'm trying to come down on Linda Lee Tracey, but it does piss me off, that whole thing. It feels like betrayal. I understand the reasons why people do it, but...

DERKO *Hookers on Davie* shows that comradery. It captured a group of people very well.

GWENDOLYN Yes. My biggest problem was the fact that to the general public it's like a freak show. It came out at the time of the Fraser Commission, when the laws around prostitution were up

for change. When the only images shown enforce stereotypes, it isn't that helpful politically.

Hookers on Davie wasn't that great for us politically, but rather than saying it shouldn't have come out at that time, or that the filmmakers should have made a different film than they did, I just wish there were more films made documenting whores' experiences. For instance *Working Girls*, that middle class kind of image of whoring, they work out of a house. The problem with *Working Girls* was the big happy ending when the bright, intelligent girl leaves the business. And how do we know that she's bright and special? 'Cause she goes to university. All I'm saying is that the film is a totally different world of whoring compared to *Hookers on Davie*, for example. I'm not saying anyone should be silenced, but it would have been good if there were other images of whores around at the same time, preferably ones where they are not presented as victims. *Klute* was another image of a whore, but there she (Jane Fonda) had to have her prince charming come and save her.

DERKO The stereotype is that the so-called smart girls always get out of it,

especially in dominant mainstream cinema.

GWENDOLYN Yeah, and they marry the cop.

DERKO Not in *Prowling By Night*.

GWENDOLYN No.

DERKO Another stereotype is the idea that hookers always come from bad families or bad situations.

GWENDOLYN I'm doing this balancing act. I'm really torn between my commitment to the movement for prostitutes' rights making positive propaganda against seeing us as victims and at the same time wanting to be true to myself and process all that I know. The stereotype can ring true. Everything isn't alright. Some people are in very desperate straights. They aren't working the streets by choice—they are living with addiction, or poverty or abuse. But we all should be respected for the work we do instead of getting fucked over by bad laws. I really think you'd find there are just as many bank tellers who come from sexual abuse or families where there are problems. It's not a condition specific to prostitutes.

It's just a job, it's just work, and our biggest problem is that society sees

GWENDOLYN,
working

photo by K. REICH



They all came from whores working inside. The street girls were saying to me "I can't draw!" The problem was lack of confidence. It's girls who sit by the phone waiting for business who have a fuck of a lot more time to draw. The images were to protect people's anonymity, to give people the right to remain in the closet so it wouldn't be me representing them, it would be them representing themselves.

The way street girls came through was in the voices. They came through lining up, wait-

ing as long as four hours on the day of the taping to have a chance to speak. And what they said was, "If you're gonna tell it then tell about the cops." I was going to do it like a commercial for the PSSP (Prostitutes Safe Sex Project): "Hey, hos use condoms, we're not part of the problem, we're part of the solution, we are the ones who teach guys how to come in a condom, we are the safe sex professionals," or "whores are condom friendly, condom conscious, health conscious, and this is our project."

DERKO The idea of prostitutes changing over to become good girls is very titillating for the male characters (and audience) in films. They can have this fantasy of conquering a woman who has had a very interesting sex career....

GWENDOLYN Redemption. Also it's very titillating for a male audience that he, the man, gets to save her. But feminists also cop to it, that they're gonna save you. You're not ruined just because you work in the business. If you equate whoring with being totally ruined you've got to make up reasons — justify it and explain why this happens.

DERKO Your decision to have the women create their own portraits in *Prowling by Night*, and tell their own stories themselves, seems responsible, very "correct."

GWENDOLYN Politically correct? I'm not into creating some myth, making it up so that it sounds more politically correct. All the pictures were made by prostitutes but none of the images came from girls currently working the street.

DERKO It's a double-edged blade. You protect these women's anonymity to allow them to speak more truthfully, but that protection is a contradiction — honesty without having the freedom to show who these women really are.

GWENDOLYN Well, one of the ways that is really very much the case is that a lot of the girls who showed up to speak were women of colour. None of the people of colour that I talked to drew pictures. I'd say a half to a third of the taped voices were women of colour. But it's not represented in the visuals, and that's because they didn't draw their own pictures.

DERKO So is this film working as a political tool?

GWENDOLYN The most obvious way it's working is that this film has played all

over in film festivals and galleries. So as a calling card, for a person's first 16mm film, for Gwendolyn the arty fart, it's been successful in terms of my prestige within the art community. But for me personally — well, that is part of me personally because it might help me to get money to make something else — but politically, people in the arts community haven't said, "How can I help to fight cop abuse?" That's not been the response from people, which is frustrating. I want more street girls to see it. It's a transient community and made more so by the cops scooping people up and throwing them in jail. I would love to figure out how to get *Prowling By Night* into the West Detention Centre, to give the people inside a chance to see it. It's available at the drop-in centre and as hos come by they can check out the movie.

I think its film life as an art thing is very short. You have to get it on the festival circuit and it all happens in a few months and then something else gets made. But in my community, unfortunately, this issue of police harassment is not going to disappear and the film will be just as topical in five years.

FILMOGRAPHY

Out of the Blue (a Cozy Pom and Variety Slut Show)
A Space 1986
58 40 minutes 1986

Merchants of Love (a Multi Media Theatre Thing)
with Choice Boredom
58 10 minutes 1987

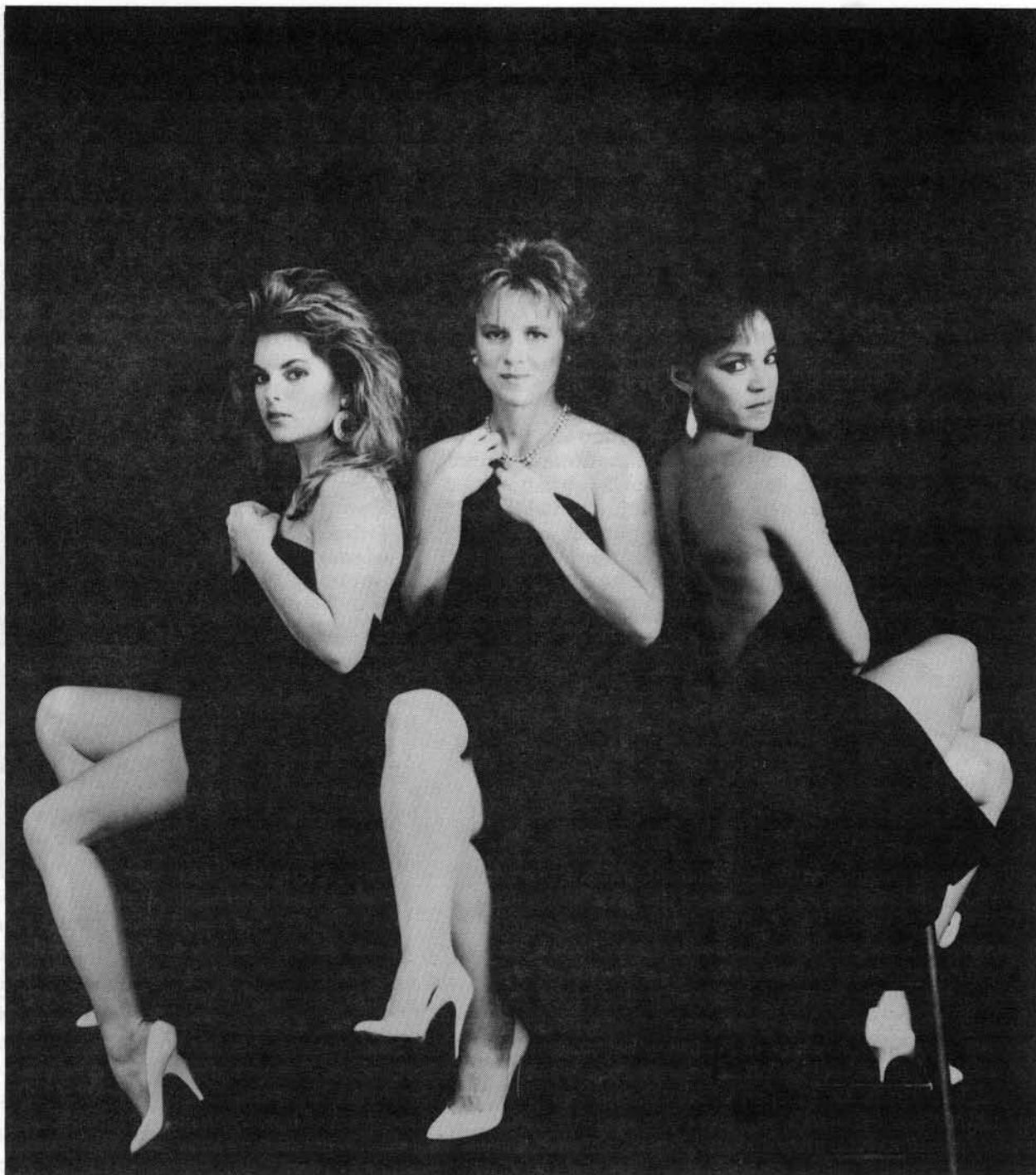
Katrinka
58 10 minutes 1987

Pedagogy
58 20 minutes 1989

Prowling By Night
16mm 12 minutes 1990

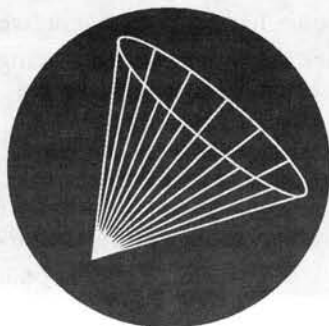
Gwendolyn is a sex trade worker who also makes films and occasionally performs in other venues.

Kim Derko is an independent filmmaker living in Toronto.



AMANDA GOODWIN, LOUISE SMITH and CARLA-MARIA SOREY in WORKING GIRLS

PASSIONATE DIALECTICS REVISITED



WOMEN AND FILM IN THE UNIVERSITY

by Catherine Russell



In most university curricula “Woman and Film” is the name of the course that proves the department’s commitment to feminism. Many of us, both men and women, include discussions of gender in other courses, in the different contexts of film theory, history, national cinemas, experimental and documentary film and so on. An autonomous course linking “women” to “film” appears to ghettoize the topic (and certainly in some institutions it no doubt does) and leaves it up to the instructor to define what women and film have to do with each other.

Although there have been a few good anthologies of essays published,¹ single-author texts like Kuhn’s *Women’s Pictures* and E. Ann Kaplan’s *Women and Film* have become rapidly outdated as feminist theory continues to evolve, constantly doubling back in an ongoing process of revision and expansion. So almost every woman who has found herself teaching film studies, along with many part-time and contract women hired specifically to teach this course, has had to re-invent “women and film”. It is one of the few places outside “experimental film” courses where experimental film is taught, and the only place where it is considered a political discourse; and it is also a key forum where theoretical issues meet methods of filmmaking and film criticism head on. Nothing can be taken for granted in “women and film” because feminist film culture of the future demands changes on so many levels of representation, institutionalization and industry.

The problems with Laura Mulvey’s 1975 essay, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” are well-known, and yet this article has become a central reference point for “women and film” precisely because these “problems” won’t go away.² In keeping with the Brechtian *Screen* politics of the time, Mulvey argued for “passionate

detachment" as an alternative spectatorial position to the scopophilic and narcissistic constructions of narrative realism. The distinction between realist/patriarchal and experimental/feminist praxis remains a sticking point for "women and film" because the dichotomy corresponds to the double thrust of feminist theory as cultural critique of mainstream filmmaking on the one hand and cultural transformation via practice on the other. If Mulvey's biggest omission in 1975 was her neglect of the female spectator, feminist film theory has responded with historical studies and readings of resistance, readings "against the grain" of the texts.³

For example, the two directors who Mulvey considers to be representative of "Classical Hollywood" have been respectively re-read by Gaylyn Studlar in *In the Realm of Pleasure: Von Sternberg, Dietrich and the Masochistic Aesthetic*, and Tania Modleski in *The Women Who*

Knew Too Much: Hitchcock and Feminist Theory.⁴ To locate the masochistic pleasures of Von Sternberg and the male anxieties of Hitchcock, to find the points of resistance and empowerment of women that these texts so obsessively disavow, you have to learn to see double. Von Sternberg and Hitchcock make this easy because of their formal aesthetic strategies. While Tania Modleski describes the practice of oppositional reading as a "transformation of anger" it would be a mistake to lose sight of the violence against women in Hitchcock and fetishization/objectification in von Sternberg. Certainly this is what students see more clearly than I do.

It is this necessity to see both the realist text and the deconstructed feminist text at the same time that makes teaching "women and film" either very difficult or extremely pleasurable, depending on the level of the course and the desire of students to adopt subversive readings.

This is perhaps where the gender of the instructor endorsing these readings of resistance might count for something, lending women a credibility that might be more difficult for a male instructor. And yet, depending on the level of the class, it can leave many students unprepared to identify gender bias and structural inequalities in contemporary mainstream filmmaking. Reading against the grain restores a pleasure to viewing mainstream film, but I often find myself taking for granted that first step of losing pleasure through ideological critique that many students need to be taught. And if you have to be taught to read in a certain way, how much impact will this theory have as a feminist methodology? As long as one keeps sight of the limitations of academic intervention, feminist film theory is an essential tool for the deconstruction of patriarchal discourse.

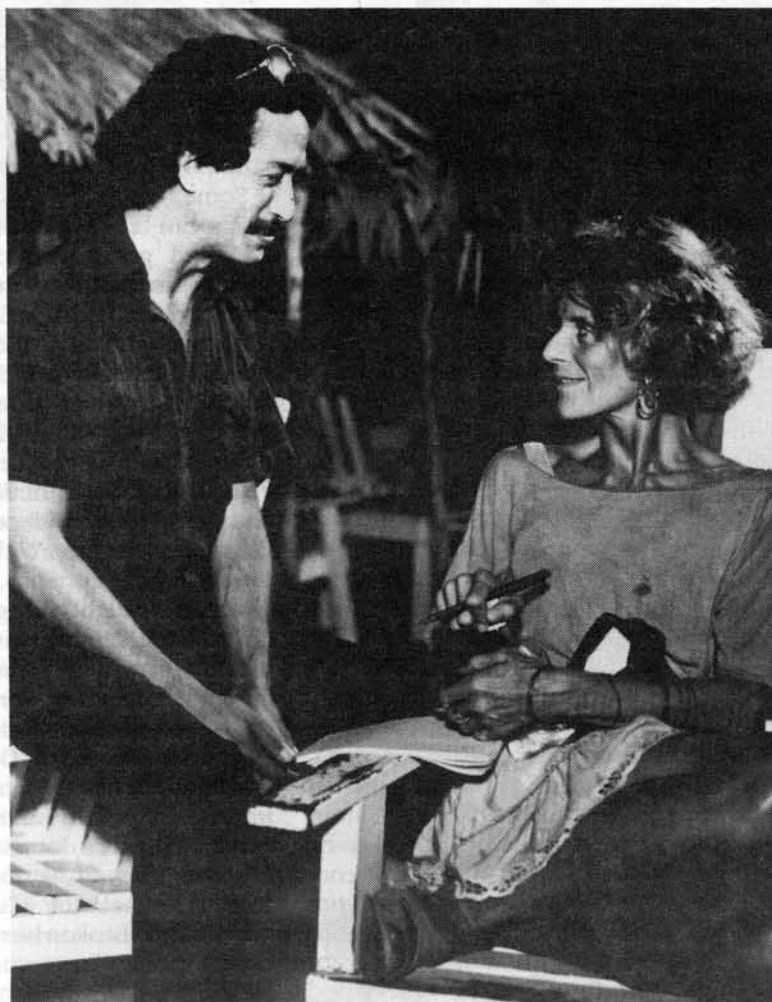
Film noir and women's films raise similar terms of discussion as the Hitchcock/von Sternberg films, with actresses like Barbara Stanwyck and Rita Hayworth in extremely contradictory and anxiety-ridden texts offering symptoms of patriarchal dysfunction and feminist resistance.⁵ The women's films of the 1930s and '40s bring into play questions of historical female spectatorship, but again, it is a vexed issue.⁶ Tania Modleski, on one hand, emphasizes the pleasure produced in the female positioning of the spectator, claiming: "The price women pay for their popular entertainment is high, but they may still be getting more than anyone bargained for."⁷ Mary Ann Doane, on the other hand, analyzes this "price" in psychoanalytic and textual detail to conclude that "the 'woman's film' functions in a rather complex way to deny the woman the space of reading."⁸ Pedagogically, if these two arguments are presented and debated, it encourages students to confront their own mixed pleasures in melodrama, and to consider the dynamics of spectatorship.

A predictable class response to a film like *Now Voyager* or *Stella Dallas* is that somebody (often a young man) chastises it as a "bad film," provoking others in the class to defend it. If one can refrain from characterizing the student as an example of male modernist film criticism, this can result in a good discussion about film evaluation and feminist criti-

scenes from
A WINTER TAN

(left)
JACKIE
BURROUGHS
and "a boy from
Coyuca"

(right)
JACKIE
BURROUGHS
and MIGUEL
NOVARO



cism. In a film studies program, many students have already been indoctrinated into a certain critical perspective in which directors like Griffith, Von Sternberg and Hitchcock are read as "masters" of film style. It can be difficult to "unlearn" this valorization, especially when it is taught in a "required" course and "women and film" is an elective or subsidiary course taught by untenured or adjunct faculty. The historical institutionalization of film studies has also meant that prints of "women's films" are much harder to come by than those that fall within auteurist canons. Many have been released on video, marketed according to their stars, but unless they are directed by Douglas Sirk or Max Ophuls, they tend to be missing from most university collections and 16mm distribution catalogues.

Between Classical Hollywood and experimental filmmaking lies an arena best described as "art cinema," which includes films by men such as Douglas Sirk or Jean Luc Godard that more openly invite feminist readings, or at least adopts a position that either director believes is feminist or that more readily subverts its own strategies. Godard's *Vivre sa vie*, *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle* and *Hail Mary*, Denys Arcand's *Gina* etc., are good examples of the former; Roeg's *Bad Timing*,⁹ Bunuel's *That Obscure Object of Desire* and Sirk's films of the '50s are good examples of the latter. Again, questions of intentionality and reception need to be played off against each other and the aesthetic "value" of the texts downplayed in favour of sexual/textual politics. They are films that lend themselves to multiple readings, which is an important step in the direction of subversive viewing practices, but of course they are not really "realist" films. Their formal "aesthetic" strategies and Brechtian tendencies toward reflexivity exist alongside scopophilic and fetishistic structures, providing an important counterpoint to the realist/alternative dichotomy introduced by Laura Mulvey.

Finally, independent narrative films by women from Dorothy Arzner to Susan Siedelman may be the first priority for many instructors of "women and film." It is undebatable that the canons of received film history have elided the work of Agnes Varda, Helke Sander and

Lina Wertmuller. If they have been recognized, they have been simultaneously marginalized as "women's films" (e.g. Margarethe von Trotta, Claudia Weill), so including them in a "women and film" course gives them visibility but perhaps also reaffirms their marginality. While some of them (e.g. *A Question of Silence*) may provoke active and energetic class discussion, and students tend to enjoy them immensely, the importance of Mulvey's prescription for "passionate dialectics" cannot be entirely dismissed.

The only way to break through the dualities of patriarchal culture, the Manichean morality with which students often come into "women and film," is to work consistently on the level of a politics of representation. Assumptions about gender can often be not only essentialist, but melodramatic, positing women as the eternal victims of the demon patriarchy. Retitling "women and film" as "Gender and Film" is one way of countering this preconception by emphasizing the discursive construction of gender over essentialist assumptions. Students unfamiliar with women's studies or the history of feminist politics expect to learn how to identify instances of women's oppression and victimization in the cinema to be able to bring them to the surface in a redemptive gesture. The course should demonstrate, at the very least, that women's oppression is far from invisible but is already visibly on the surface of the bulk of mainstream filmmaking.

The term "women's film" can be a useful one to cut across some of the flawed distinctions between mainstream/alternative, realist/experimental, regressive/progressive, and even men's films/women's films. Originally applied to Hollywood "weepies" by Molly Haskell, some feminist critics have revived it to refer to both films *for* women and films *by* women.¹⁰ This seems to be an important and useful step away from categories based on form and authorship, and a name that can encompass everything from films by men that might well be in keeping with a feminist politics (e.g. Fassbinder) to films by women whose approach may be controversial (e.g. *I've Heard the Mermaids Singing*).¹¹ The term provides an historical link between the female spectator constructed by Classical Hollywood

Cinema and the contemporary spectator who is potentially en-gendered by filmmakers engaged in feminist politics. Most importantly, "Women's Cinema" denotes a cultural zone where many different women as well as different feminisms might be distinguished. In the case of films by women, four central questions arise, questions that pertain to the range of feminist positions regarding alternative cultural praxis.

The theoretical issues confronting feminist filmmaking are: 1) Is there a feminist aesthetic: do films by women look different than films by men? 2) Does a radical feminist film have to be anti-realist: is realism necessarily always a male form of representation? 3) How valuable is experimental, non-narrative "intellectual" filmmaking to "women" when it is only accessible to an elite, educated minority? 4) On what levels do feminist politics of representation intersect with those of race, class and ethnicity? These are the questions that students should be encouraged to ask, partly because they often have unexamined assumptions about them, and also because they point to the ways that "women and film" can inform larger cultural issues of representations.

Some of the films through which students can tackle questions of "aesthetics" and gender-based creativity are those whose politics are implicit rather than explicit. Films by Germaine Dulac, Maya Deren, Marguerite Duras, Joyce Wieland and Chantal Akerman, for example, can all be situated within "traditions" of experimental or alternative filmmaking and have been more or less valorized as "aesthetically" valuable texts, despite or independently of the filmmakers' gender. Within their respective historical contexts, each of these filmmakers might be regarded as working within a "feminist public sphere," or making that sphere more public by giving it aesthetic or formal treatment. Dulac's domestic melodrama (*The Smiling Madame Beudet*), Deren's domesticated femme fatale (*Mesbès of the Afternoon*), Duras's romanticism (*India Song*), Wieland's domestic settings (*Rat Life and Diet in North America*) and Akerman's melodramatic tropes of rendezvous and broken hearts are just a few examples of a more quotidian cultural realm speaking through or despite for-



mal techniques more properly aligned with high modernism. It is the aesthetic realm *per se* that is at issue in a consideration of a feminist aesthetic, and the pedagogical value of even raising the question is less for the sake of defining evaluative criteria for judging women's cultural praxis than for a critique of modernist critical theory and its assumptions of artistic autonomy, genius and formalism.

As so many critics have begun to notice, the high art/popular culture division has traditionally been drawn along gender lines. One way of crossing this boundary may be to teach soap operas,¹² but it can also be accomplished through a reconsideration of the experimental/realist opposition that has informed feminist film theory since Mulvey contended that the very ontology of narrative film realism is patriarchally coded. If Mulvey's advocacy of anti-realist cinema is a movement towards "art" away from mainstream popular culture, it may re-



scoes from
WORKING GIRLS

(top)
LOUISE SMITH

(bottom)
LOUISE SMITH
gazes into mirror
as **MARUSIA**
ZACH applies
makeup

verse the gender polarization of the art/culture distinction, but the boundary remains in place. Rita Felski has argued *a propos* of women's writing, that

the supposedly revolutionary function of experimental techniques is increasingly questionable in late capitalist society, while the 'conservative' status of realism as a closed form which reflects ruling ideologies has been challenged by its reappropriation in new social contexts, for example by oppositional movements such as feminism.¹³

If Laura Mulvey was not advocating radical formalism for its *own* sake, but *vis a vis* a realist form that is structured according to principles of masculine desire, does Felski's correction apply to women's film?¹⁴

One means of "testing" Felski's position and negotiating between the two theories is to screen a film like Lizzie Borden's *Working Girls* or Jackie Burroughs et. al.'s *A Winter Tan*. Of the former, Teresa de Lauretis writes that Borden has "de-glamourized" the female body and by "desexualizing it" has

made it into a "functional working body as opposed to a site of sexuality and domination by the gaze."¹⁵ If *Working Girls* is a realist text that is dysfunctional as a mainstream film because men "are not turned on by it," perhaps it is an example of "passionate detachment" without radical formalism. But is this realist/formalist distinction a valid opposition? Doesn't it limit discussion of representational politics, and work against any consideration of people, images and actions?

In fact, along with a strategic use of comedy, the "detachment" evoked by *Working Girls* is accomplished through a performance style that can only be described as Brechtian: on the border of 'bad' acting, 'gestic' in its sexual activity, with line deliveries that are quotations of script, all couched in a *mise en scène* which is "quoted" from soaps' and sitcoms' closed domestic spaces. When anti-illusionist strategies are centered on the body, are they "formalist," are they

necessarily feminist, or are they de-aesthetic?¹⁶ As this term of de Lauretis's suggests, feminist cultural praxis needs to make a total break with traditional categories of aesthetics, and one way that this seems to be happening is through an emphasis on performance, which has become an important means of bringing the films "down to earth," anchoring them in a "reality" of experience and the body.

A Winter Tan is also characterized by a performance style of "excess" which may appear to be in diametrical opposition to the non-acting of *Working Girls* but nevertheless concentrates its politics of representation on the body. Jackie Burroughs' performance of Maryse Holder's writing pushes the limit of documentary "re-enactment" beyond the reality principle of liberal feminist morality. I find it particularly instructive to screen *A Winter Tan* (1989) alongside Patricia Gruben's *Sifted Evidence* (1982) to dramatize not only the experimental/realist dichotomy, but also to historicize it and suggest its sexual politics. Both films are set in Mexico and feature single women encountering a highly masculinized and foreign culture, but where Holder is "on vacation" from feminism, Gruben's protagonist is searching for the remnants of an ancient matriarchal culture.

Sifted Evidence has been analyzed quite convincingly in terms of *l'écriture féminine*. Its textual strategies of disjunction and displacement effectively locate woman's "voice" and "desire" within the fissures of representation, as the negation of the linear narrative form with which it also engages.¹⁷ And yet, double-billed with *A Winter Tan*, it appears to be a film of extreme repression, even "erotophobia." This feminist methodology that poses an aesthetic of silence, absence and negation¹⁸ cannot account for the Burroughs/Holder character's obsessive desire to "get laid" in *A Winter Tan*. Nor can this methodology accommodate the discourse of ethnicity that informs both films.

Sexual empowerment is tricky business, and there is no question that a colonialist discourse underscores the seduction of young Mexican men by a bourgeois American intellectual (in *A Winter Tan*) and the threat of violence in both films. The exoticized Mexican set-



JACKIE BURROUGHS
in a scene from
A WINTER TAN

tings in both films provide theatrical backgrounds of machismo and tropical excess, demonstrating rather well the ways in which feminism can itself become a "dominant" discourse, potentially marginalizing "other" discourses of class and ethnicity (something that these filmmakers were not necessarily unaware of). Also, in terms of viewing pleasure, *A Winter Tan*, which encourages identification, can be a very masochistic experience (the character is to some extent indulging in her own victimization),¹⁹ while *Sifted Evidence*, which resists any coherent subjectivity, deploys some striking visual and aural tropes that are spectacular and engaging.

The 1989 film employs a dramatic narrative structure that ensured it a public distribution. The representation of feminism may be more "orthodox" and "politically correct" in *Sifted Evidence*, but its representation of women is as limited as its address. *A Winter Tan*, on the other hand, involves problematic mythic structures of punishment and tragedy, as well as an awkward combination of documentary and fiction (Edith, the "reader" of Holder's letters appears as herself, analyzing and "verifying" the dramatization), but extends its representation and its address to a far wider spectrum of women. The point is not to privilege either of these films, but to use them to historicize feminist politics and film theory and practice.

Only by getting away from the assumption that "teaching" a film is necessarily an endorsement of it can one address the complexity of "women and film." Of course there are dozens of women's films that can be taught and endorsed; teaching "women and film," like teaching any cultural practice, is always going to be, on some level, a matter of teaching "aesthetics," even if it is one of resistance and counter-cinema. Indeed, "women and film" should be a starting point in film studies curriculum for the politicization of aesthetics. Feminist film theory and criticism, as it has developed over the last 20 years, has prepared the ground for the convergence of cultural and aesthetic studies that should be recognized as the backbone of film studies.

"Women and film" has effectively become the place in many film pro-



LOUISE SMITH
starring in
WORKING GIRLS

grams where students encounter representation as an inevitably politicized process. The differences between reality and image have to be bracketed in this course and the reality of images addressed. The "problem" of "women and film"—the problem that the course is intended to solve for the institution—is not an imagistic one, and once it is recognized as a question of representation, narrative and spectatorship, it is effectively resituated as a textual one. And yet, we must also keep in mind that many students are not yet prepared to leave reality behind, and with good reason, given the inequalities and violence against women that still persist.

Students may also want to see images with which they can identify. This is especially true of lesbian and racial and ethnic minority women. But one does not "teach" or "learn" images, and a classroom is not an alternative screening space. We have to question the valoriza-

tion of "identification" and the limits it places on filmic representation, a social institution which women have to revise in so many different ways. Instead of positive/negative images of women, we have to be concerned with the reality of the institutions of cinema and the university. The gender of the instructor, then, in spite of herself, comes into play in front of the screen upon which "women and film" is projected, and the "reality" of the course and one's presence as a professor may be a necessary context for the analysis of representation.

If there is anything to be learned from this process, it has something to do with the body. As sexuality is decoded, questions of subjectivity are rephrased in terms of gendered desire. As questions of form are displaced onto performance and acting, theories of spectatorship are reconsidered in terms of actual spectators and the notion of authorship is ex-

Every position provokes a critique, because for every woman there is another woman, and for every film there is another film.

tended into autobiography and experience. A key connection between a resistant feminist reading of Hollywood and feminist alternative practice is the discourse of acting in the former and performance in the latter, the one "resisting" domination, the other reclaiming the body beyond the structures of scopophilic pleasure. Richard Dyer writing about Marilyn Monroe's subversive feminine sexuality may seem miles from Yvonne Rainer's address to menstruating women in the audience of *The Man Who Envied Women*, but both belong to a discourse which introduces "nature" quite centrally into "culture," transgressing yet another cherished opposition.²⁰ The discourse of the body, like the questions of evaluation, formalism, essentialism and realism that have been raised here, is ultimately a requirement to think dialectically. Every position provokes a critique, because for every woman there is another woman, and for every film there is another film.

¹See Constance Penley ed., *Feminism and Film Theory* and Christine Gledhill ed., *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies in*

Melodrama and the Woman's Film (London: British Film Institute, 1987).

²*Screen* vol. 16 #3 (Autumn 1975) and reprinted in numerous anthologies. See also Laura Mulvey, "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' inspired by *Duel in the Sun*," in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Indiana University Press, 1989).

³See Claire Johnston, "Women's Cinema as Counter Cinema," (1973) in Bill Nichols ed., *Movies and Methods* vol. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).

⁴Gaylyn Studlar, *In the Realm of Pleasure: Von Sternberg, Dietrich and the Masochistic Aesthetic* (University of Illinois Press, 1988); Tania Modleski, *The Women Who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock and Feminist Theory* (Methuen, 1988).

⁵E. Ann Kaplan ed., *Women in Film Noir* (London: British Film Institute, 1978) is a useful and fairly accessible collection of essays.

⁶*Mildred Pierce*, which of course incorporates both film noir and women's melodrama, has a bad reputation as being "over-taught" in film studies, but I find that it is still a very provocative film for undergraduates, and is an incomparable means of introducing and describing the engenderment of genre and filmic discourse, as well as theories of resistance and textual repression.

⁷Tania Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies of Women* (New York: Methuen, 1984).

⁸Mary Ann Doane, "The 'Woman's Film': Possession and Address" in *Home Is Where the Heart Is*, p. 296. See also Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the Forties* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

⁹Teresa de Lauretis's essay on this film "Now and Nowhere" (in *Alice Doesn't and in Re-Vision*) is an interesting and provocative reading that I have found very useful in class to introduce and clarify Foucault's notions of "resistance," which can also be related to an *écriture féminine* of performance.

¹⁰Judith Mayne, "The Woman at the Keyhole: Women's Cinema and Feminist Criticism" in Mary Ann Doane, Patricia Mellencamp and Linda Williams eds., *Revision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism* (Frederick MD: University Publications of America and the American Film Institute, 1984) and Teresa de Lauretis, "Guerrilla in the Midst: Women's Cinema in the Eighties," *Screen* vol. 31 #1 (Spring 1990). In *Shot/Counter-shot* (Princeton University Press, 1989) Lucy Fischer constructs an "imaginary dialogue" between men's and women's films, circumventing the realist vs. formalist dualism and pairing films off according to themes from murderous women and lesbianism to musicals and performance. I don't know of anyone who has used this text or who has structured a class this way, but it may be a very useful model.

¹¹De Lauretis's, "Guerrilla in the Midst" (*op. cit.*) includes a much-needed (by Canadian film studies) and very damning critique of *I've Heard the Mermaids Singing*.

¹²There is of course quantities of writing on soap opera, and it can be fun to teach, especially if there are die-hard fans in the

class who are usually as critical as they are addicted. As an indulgence in popular culture it certainly transgresses the traditional boundaries of "film studies" but short of activist pedagogy, isn't a particularly useful way of addressing the gender bias of modernist film criticism.

¹³Rita Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 161.

¹⁴Part of the answer may lie in the recognition that Mulvey's theory is as much based on the contents of Hollywood realism as its form ("Woman as image, men as bearer of the look" is a question of character and plot as well as one of montage and *mise en scène*).

¹⁵"Guerrillas in the Midst," p. 12.

¹⁶This term is introduced by Teresa de Lauretis in "Rethinking Women's Cinema: Aesthetics and Feminist Theory" in *Technologies of Gender* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987). *Working Girls* is also a good film to teach because of its inscription of a lesbian utopia, which may not get much screentime in the film but is privileged through its positioning as narrative closure. I have been surprised at class discussions of sexual orientation, because they can be terribly strained revealing lots of latent homophobia, and my criticism of Borden's "escapism" is usually met with total confusion. Charges of heterosexism can be levelled at a great deal of the material I've covered here, and it is useful to point it out in class to once again register the multiplicity of feminisms.

¹⁷Kay Armatage, "About to Speak: The Woman's Voice in Patricia Gruben's *Sifted Evidence*" in Seth Feldman ed., *Take Two: A Tribute to Film in Canada* (Irwin, 1984) and Kaja Silverman, "Disembodying the Female Voice" in *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (Indiana University Press, 1988).

¹⁸Both Silverman and Armatage conclude that the protagonist of *Sifted Evidence* is left at the end of the film between body and voice, "about to speak" in Armatage's words, in search of "a different kind of female body" in Silverman's. The film effectively demonstrates the impossibility of representation for women. While both analyses are very provocative and convincing readings of the film, the use of Irigaray is typical of North American feminists' neglect of the context of French Feminism's dialogue with the intellectual left in France and the larger political field in which their textual and gender politics are articulated.

¹⁹For a review along these lines, see Jane Weinstock, "Out of Her Mind: Fantasies of the 26th New York Film Festival," *Camera Obscura* 19 (January 1989).

²⁰Richard Dyer, "Monroe and Sexuality" in *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society*, pp. 19-66. Dyer's theorization of Monroe's vaginal orgasmic pleasure is as bizarre but historically provocative as Rainer's intervention is "obvious." Where Dyer radically subverts received opinion about Monroe, Rainer radically subverts expectations of authorship.

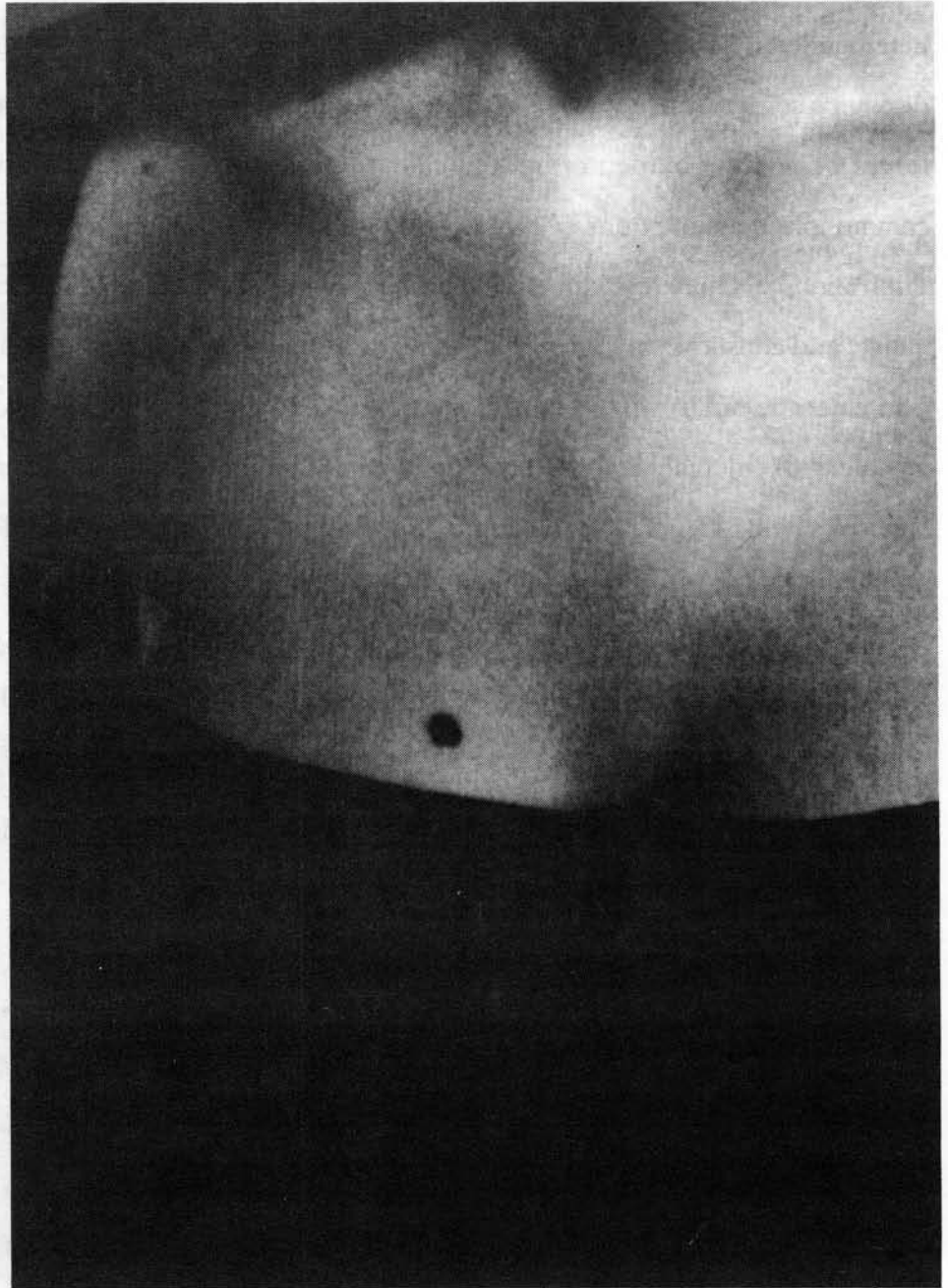
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S

SALLY'S
BEAUTY SPOT

SALLY'S BEAUTY SPOT
by HELEN LEE

detail from photo by
RICK MCGINNIS



BY KASS BANNING

During the past decade, Canada's independent film scene has radically widened its range, and most dramatically, its constituency. The growing proliferation of feminist films, and films made by women generally, indicates a profound shift in authorship. This "gender expansion" has been complemented by a recent parallel development: the emergence (albeit much too slowly) of works produced by women of colour.

Helen Lee's *Sally's Beauty Spot* is just one of many films coming out of this heterogeneous sector. This film, however, radically departs from the realist discourse so persuasive in race-relations documentaries; *Sally's Beauty Spot* leaves behind the burden of transparency and takes for granted the now commonplace assumptions of its theoretical progenitors — Christian Metz, Trinh Minh-ha, Claire Johnston, Pam Cook, et. al. — that every film is indeterminate and constitutes a form of fiction. Building upon and expanding more than a decade of heady feminist dialogue, Lee widens the stakes and makes the issue of race — specifically the modalities of Orientalism and the construction of female Asian identity — central to the film's enunciation. In Trinh Minh-ha's terms, race is placed "nearby" to gender considerations; neither discourse is dialectically opposed, cancelling the other out, but are playfully rubbed against one another.

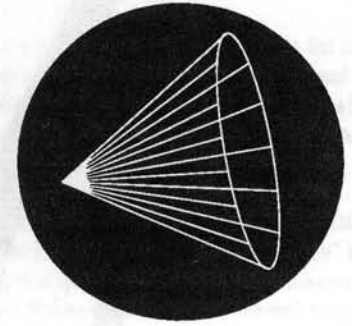
Sally's Beauty Spot could be loosely characterized as a feminist hybrid work. In English Canada, the late '70s helped spawn the hybrid feminist subgenre which later came to fruition in the '80s.¹ Influenced by, but not necessarily aligned with the avant-garde, the hybrid work, at the same time, derives from the politics of locality. It has a referent, speaking from experience and/or particular localities, but material is approached in a less totalizing fashion than the conventional documentary. Avoiding both modernism's empty pyrotechnics and the authoritarian pitfalls of a realist aesthetic, the hybrid composite combines a number of strategies, blending formal innovation and narrative experimentation with information or analysis.

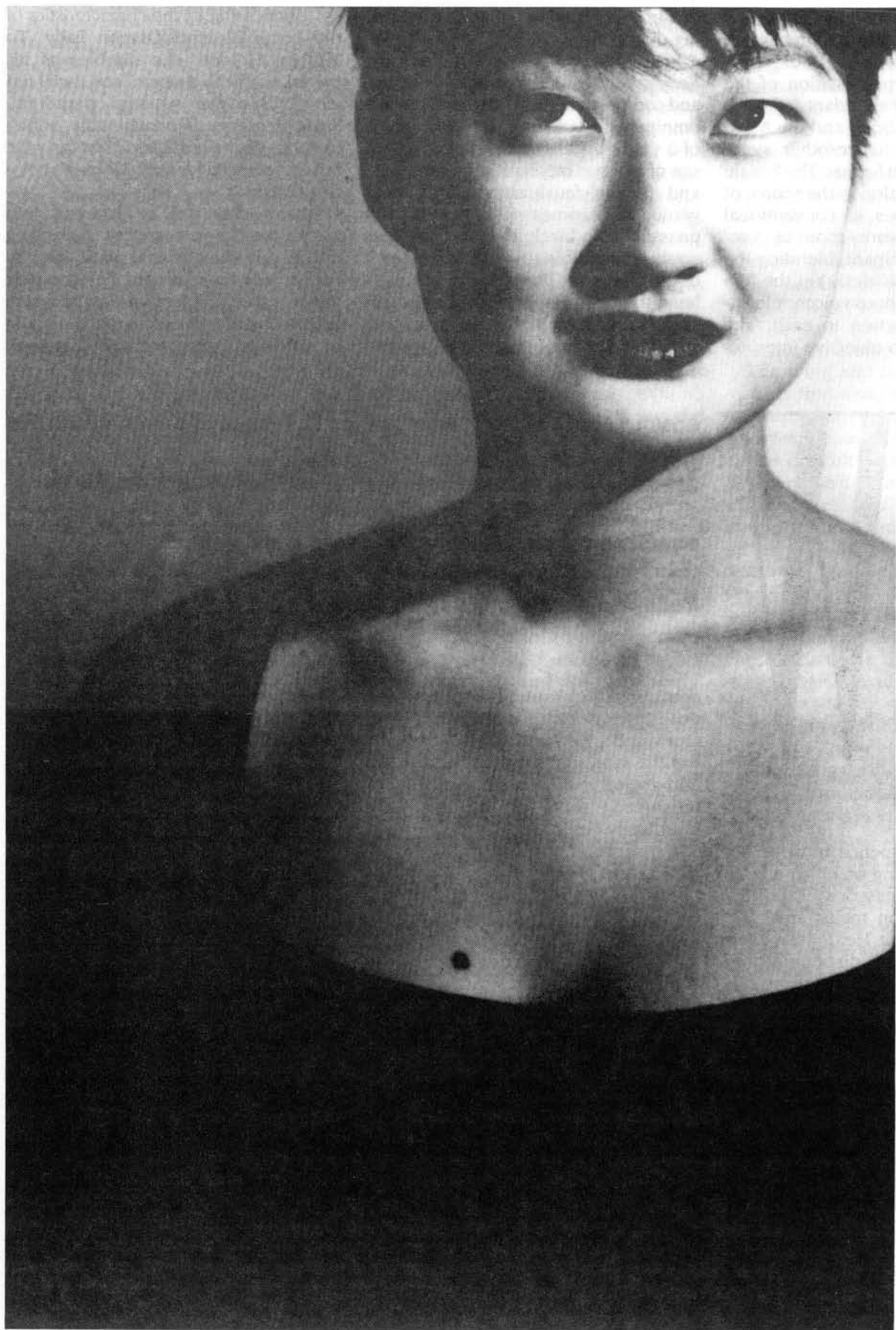
The reasons for this shift in emphasis and style development are both numerous and specific: the influence of British feminist film theory² in North America and its enthusiastic reception by American and Canadian feminist academics in the late '70s, and its cumulative effect on female students attending film and art programmes in the '80s; a localized and specific desire to combat the NFB's hegemonic proliferation of a realist aesthetic; and most strongly, the gradual acknowledgement of difference that resulted in an abiding belief in (and necessity of) the possibility that women could forge their own filmic language — one separate and distinct — from a dominant economy of visual pleasure.

These social and aesthetic developments have obviously had an impact on the filmmaker, but she selectively adopts from her progenitors and makes them her own by modifying the best strategies from the hybrid feminist film.³ With *Sally's Beauty Spot*, however, much more ease is exhibited than that evident in the British "theory films" (with their anti-pleasure component) of the late '70s. The relentless interlocutor/subject dynamic of *Thriller*, for example, is transposed in *Sally's Beauty Spot* to a more gently insistent questioning voice, which yields a more nuanced effect, and a less spartan approach to the film's subject — Asian female identity construction. An insistence on the im-

portance of theory is nevertheless maintained, but again, less audibly (and strictly) pronounced than an Yvonne Rainer film for example, and less poetically "avant-garde" than a Trinh T. Minh-ha film. At a more local level, *Sally's Beauty Spot*'s polyphonic experiments with voice and address is reminiscent of the interweaving of multi-layered voices to undermine narratorial authority and narrativized first person fabrications in an early hybrid work like Kay Armatage's *Speak Body* or the later *Our Marilyn* by Brenda Longfellow and in such recent videos as Paula Fairfield's *Fragments* or Janine Marchessault's *The Act of Seeing with Another Eye*.

In addition to the experiments with





SALLY'S BEAUTY SPOT
by HELEN LEE

photo by
RICK MCGINNIS

female voices, Lee merges fiction and minimalist experimental techniques to consider the Asian woman's look, spectatorial address, representation of the woman's body and attendant fetishism of both the female body and the Asian female subject as native/other stereotype in a minimalist format. The female voice does not function as the source of authority, as it does in conventional documentaries; it works more as commentator and participant, blending the personal and the political. Yet the film separates out the various voices, relegating a different function to each. The character Sally is no objective interpreter,

both competing but neither achieving dominance.

In spite of its multi-textured density, *Sally's Beauty Spot* maintains a centre and comprises several "movements." An omnipresent dark mole above the breast of a young Asian woman becomes the site of a dense meditation on otherness and female fetishization. The mole gradually becomes synonymous with unassimilable blackness, and she tries washing, scrubbing, and hiding it, but it doesn't go away. There is a double effect here, the body is represented as both a site of sensuality and horror; the consistent image of scrubbing, with its atten-

inscribed, exhibits the characteristics of the Lotus Blossom/Dragon Lady. To William Holden, she doubles as his model and both a sexual and racial fetish; within the western paradigm, Suzie's essence is unattainable, subaltern, but she nevertheless must carry the burden of racial identity, Holden's colonial fantasy.

Suzie's character is flattened into "Asian-ness" and sexuality, collapsing into a one dimensional static identity that comes to represent her complex totality - the complete stereotype which helps construct the accompanying pole of male white westerner. Yet this stere-

W

omen "think about their bodies in terms of parts, separate areas ... the foundation for an entirely masochistic or punitive relationship with one's own body."

Rosalind Coward, *Female Desire*

dant amplified sound-effect is almost grueling (British filmmaker Ngozi Omwurah's *Coffee Coloured Children* has the same powerful effect) and the odd-angled, particularized (and hence fetishized) shots of the torso are troublingly erotic.

The second constant movement, selected scenes from the classic *The World of Suzie Wong*, explores popular conceptions of interracial romance, providing a focus for Sally's questioning of the lotus blossom/dragon lady stereotype in constructions of Asian sexuality. As the film's intertext, *The World of Suzie Wong* functions as a point of departure and reference point. The filmmaker, at the recent "Race to the Screen" conference in Toronto, confessed that she both loves and hates *The World of Suzie Wong* and this ambivalence is very much in evidence in her film. *The World of Suzie Wong* is both lovingly sent-up and deconstructed to underscore its crude series of dualisms. The sets of dualisms — east versus west, men versus women, Occidental versus Oriental, etc. — are blatantly manifest. Suzie herself (played by Nancy Kwan) doubly

otype manufactures an excess, a dangerous supplement that the filmmaker picks up on and exploits to her own ends. The strategy of re-appropriation breaks down the film's normalizing truth and we come to see the film's kitsch value as a colonial fantasy and how the power relations are doubly complex and magnified when race is inflected. One scene in particular is excerpted from *The World of Suzie Wong* at least three times. In the scene Suzie surprises William Holden wearing a western dress and outfit, Holden is not impressed, a heated argument ensues and he commands Suzie to "take that terrible dress off," that she "looks like a cheap *European* street walker," and pushes Suzie onto the bed and removes the dress.

The precise timing of this excerpt, when it is intercut into the main body of *Sally's Beauty Spot*, produces the re-appropriation effect, but it additionally functions in an organic manner, complementing the main storyline of Sally's concern with self-image, exemplified in her obsession with her "beauty spot." An extended detailed series of cuts will illustrate. Just prior to the dress-removing

tive narrator; she spends most of her screen time obsessing on either a large dark mole on her breast or a 1960 Hollywood miscegenation melodrama, *The World of Suzie Wong*. Her female interlocutors, one voice distinguishably Asian, the other not, interrogate the meaning and validity of both obsessions. A third, intermittent female voice embodies a feminist theoretical discourse. Other female voices sporadically inject fragments of commentary. The two male voices split off into two discourses: the first, British and academic-sounding, ruminates on the relationship between fetishism and colonial societies (text is culled from the writings of Homi K. Bhaba and Tania Modelski); the second male voice speaks the clichéd discourse of a desiring subject. These discourses of experience and theory insistently interweave through-



He said I looked exactly like his mother.

That I had God in my face. That he never

came up and talked to

strangers but how he

had to overcome his

fear and speak to me.

That he loved me. That

he had waited his

entire life for me. That

he knew me from

another life.

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"That line down your face, that is God. And your nose and your mouth. That is God."

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insert, the Asian-accented interlocutor asks Sally, "Why do you like the movie so much?" Sally looks offscreen (ostensibly towards the movie) and we cut back to Holden and Suzie. Sally replies, "It's always been there, ever since I was a little girl." The sound is of cymbals and whistling as a white male and Sally kiss, which is replaced by a slow tilt from the toes to head of Suzie in her "European" outfit. We hear the voice of the male academic, "The sexual fetish is closely linked to the good object." Then Sally's discourse is resumed. The Asian interlocutor asks her if she was born with it or if she has considered surgical methods. The white male looks screen right, we cut back to Suzie looking screen left. Holden then takes up the same spectorial position as the white male love interest and the shot/counter shot argument ensues (described above) with Suzie. The white male and Sally kiss while the Asian-voiced woman interjects, "It's like a small bump on the skin, so small I can barely see it," and the male theoretical voice imparts, "It's the part that makes the whole object desirable and loveable." Suzie emerges in white traditional garb with voice fragments on the sound track such as Holden's voice, "You haven't the faintest idea what real ..." is interrupted by a sentence fragment by the male theoretician's voice "in sexual relations." Suzie swoons and she and Holden have an extended Hollywood kiss. A fuzzy image comes over the screen and we hear the sound of white noise — ironic commentary perhaps that we had hit the wrong channel.

As this rather extended example illustrates (equally suggestive others abound), the intertext is used in a resourceful, sophisticated fashion to great success. Displaced from its natural place, we come to see how the original came to be seen as natural; it is deconstructed by the various discourses which surround it. At the same time, the intertext functions as much more than a simple gloss on Sally's narrative. The order of the shots makes parallelisms between not just Suzie and Sally, but between the white male desiring subject and William Holden. Through the use of shot/reaction shot the space between Sally's and Suzie's bodies is re-interpreted, sometimes deliberately blurred. The strategy of reappropriation re-situates elements and thus allows us to see

things in new ways.

The notion of blackness makes up the third movement of *Sally's Beauty Spot*. The black mole, of course, signifies blackness but it doesn't carry the entire weight of meaning. The articulation is additionally made by a typewriter with the words "black is" emblazoned across a white page; but the articulation is only partially achieved throughout and completed only near the film's conclusion. Letters form a partially completed word throughout, "bl" turns into "blac" turns into "black is." The typed letters contribute to the move towards the acknowledgement of blackness. Yet this lexicon of blackness is just one of many threads which posits blackness as the film's resolution. A black man's face, lips and hands (a voiceless "character"), I believe, add to this resolution. His image appears several times. First in the preamble, his hand appears from the bottom of the frame and envelops a woman's hand (ostensibly Sally's); later a shot of his face appears with the multi-layered voice fragments "they will always pose the problem of difference," the word "discourse" and "to preconstitute the poles of black and white;" Sally's hand covers his and we hear "will it make a difference;" Sally and the man kiss; and finally a close-up of the man's lips dissolve into Sally's lips.

Just prior to their kiss, two shots help us read coming-to-blackness as the film's resolution. Sally claims "I feel it growing, it gets bigger and darker every day," and the excerpt discussed above is presented, but this time in black and white and projected backwards, and upside down. Sally's statement is certainly an acceptance of an impinging blackness as escape from her masochistic attitude towards her own body and the presence of the apparatus of the excerpt can only be read as distance from or critique of the events conveyed. In this way, the film's inexorable movement is towards blackness, and the black male subject, within the film's logic, is seen as a solution or resolution. The question remains, does he solve the problem or does he merely function as narrative resolution? Does Sally fetishize blackness, therefore leaving him out of the male/female dualism? or is it simply read from her perspective? Is he thus exempt from the status of fetishizing difference, from the orientalism of his

white male counterparts because of his blackness? As the film asks, will substituting a black man for a white man "make a difference?" Is he, like she, a site of an impossibility?

Of course the film does not answer these questions, but problematizes them. It nevertheless could be read, as far as Sally's narrative goes, as a coming-to-consciousness story about Asian female identity. Similar efforts, but to very different ends have been made by black practitioners, or coming-out stories in the gay lexicon. Regardless, the film is sure to induce pleasure for women, especially Asian women.

The toing and froing between these various "movements" complement and inform one another, yet build a provocative rumination on Asian female identity that is difficult to pin down or summarize because it is doggedly open-ended. Herein lies *Sally's Beauty Spot's* strength. Such a strategy makes it impossible to collapse the dual poles of gender and race; their modalities are relentlessly investigated as related, but separate. *Sally's Beauty Spot's* insistence on maintaining distinctness, but allowing for dialogue through the dialogic rather than the dialectical makes the double-whammy efforts all the more compelling and unique.

¹With Quebec feminist film practice, however, issues of language and formal preoccupations have prevailed since the '60s, echoing a consistent concern in the Quebecois cultural sphere at large.

²The influence of British feminist film theory has involved rigorous interrogation of the construction and effect of images and a concomitant stress on negative aesthetics in feminist film production — women's stories had to be told differently and thus strategies were devised to oppose dominant forms of representation, addressing the cinematic apparatus and its ideological inscription, intending to break the hegemony of patriarchal ideology.

³Of course, this does not imply that films made by women of colour that include issues of race and gender are simply ancillary to white feminist filmmaking. No doubt the filmmaker had other models to choose from. The recent black British films from the Sankofa and Black audio collective, for example, would be an obvious influence. Though according to Kobena Mercer, those works were made by people who had been interested in and influenced by feminist film theories.

Kass Banning is a Toronto writer, critic and lecturer on film whose work has appeared in numerous film and art publications and anthologies.



ELEMENTS is an open forum for creative work by filmmakers. Submissions might include interesting visuals or graphics, creative writing, excerpts of film scripts, notes from productions... Use your imagination.

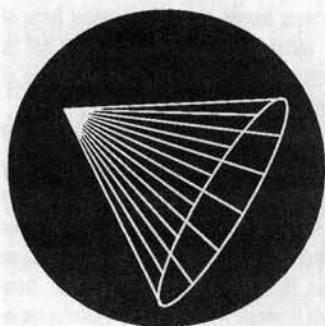
LINES FROM A FILM I



drawing by A.M. FLEMING

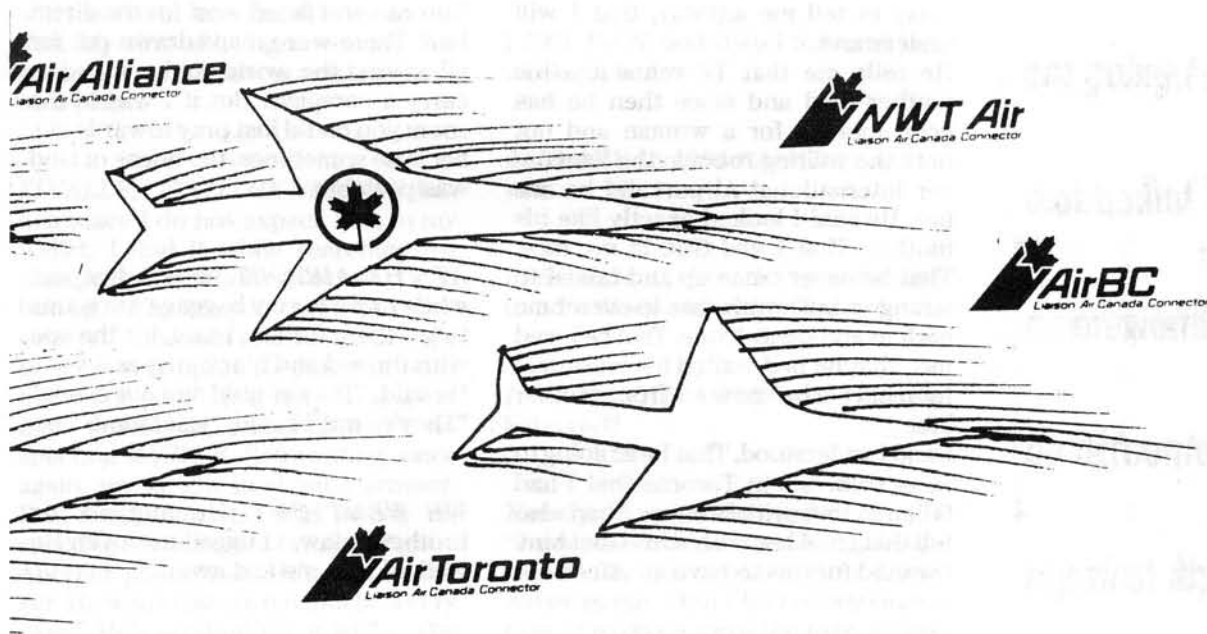
BY ANN MARIE FLEMING

I am in a waiting area at the Vancouver International Airport. I am going to Toronto to deliver some film items to my distributor. Lies, lies, lies. I am going to visit a man that I have fallen passionately in love with and am completely obsessed with. I am going for 3 days in the middle of school, with no money, to be with someone who I have not seen in 2 weeks after a romance of 9 days. I am insane.



Filmmakers are invited to contribute. Send material to: Editorial Committee/Elements, Independent Eye, Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre, 67A Portland St., Toronto, Ontario M5V 2M9

WILL NOT MAKE



SO, I AM WEARING my sane clothes. A Laura Ashley dress. Flowered. Green hat. I look like I did when I was 14 and I wouldn't let my mother dress me.

I notice two things:

There are a lot of Sikhs on this flight. (I know they are Sikh men because of the turbans on their heads ...)

There is a Muslim praying in the corner. (I know he is a Muslim by the nature of his prayer ...)

I have never watched a Muslim pray. This man, dressed like a hatless Fidel Castro, kneels and bows and rises and stands and looks around and does it all over again. I lose count, how many times. I only feel that my gaze distracts him. I try not to look as I follow him around the waiting room with my thoughts.

He goes to the bathroom. Five men also go. And come out. And still, he has not appeared.

I look at the Sikhs. I think what I always think: bad thoughts — and imagine him a terrorist. He exits and goes to the phones. I can't see him, but I hear his voice, loud and agitated in a language I can't understand. He goes to wait for the plane.

But everyone is going in except him. Not quite. They are calling by row number. I swear I will not get on the plane until he has boarded. I want him on the plane.

But I walk past him. He looks at me and doesn't look at me. I sit near the front. Row 5. He sits in Row 10, if I'm not mistaken.

Toronto is about a 4 hour flight. In that time he gets up to use the washroom.

Again, he is there for a very long time. The man who gets in the washroom after him closes the door. I count ... one thousand and one, one thousand and two, one thousand and three ... nothing happens. The man gets out. I breathe a little easier and continue to listen to psychedelic music on the headsets. "Excuse me while I touch the sky." "8 Miles High" and "White Rabbit" by Jefferson Airplane. A bit of an in-joke with the airline dj's I imagine.

Just as the plane is about to descend into Toronto, the Muslim gets up and helps commandeer an elderly man to the lavatory who is having difficulty walking. I feel slightly ashamed that I have been directing all this bad feeling in this gentle man's direction. I accuse myself, "racist, bigot, judgmental



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I expected maybe a postcard from Pakistan.

Instead, in Vancouver, when I get back, I get a message on my answering machine. It's from Ali. He leaves his flight number and the date and time he gets in. He expects me to pick him up at the airport.

I freak. All the upper atmospheric mysticism leaves my mind and I am frightened. I want to call him back. Call his sister's. Tell him not to come.



But I can't find the number. I call the airline, but it's a charter from Toronto. I call Toronto, but they still won't give me the number. I call the airport, they won't leave a message. I think about going away, but I don't know how long he intends to be in Vancouver. Should I stay at a friend's? Should I have a man stay here? Have a man leave his voice on my answering machine? Omigod. Some time, some way, there is going to be a knock on my door, I am going to be home, alone, and when I answer, I will have to be accountable for all my sins. My sins of being a woman. For giving out my address to a strange man on a plane.

FINALLY, I FIND THE NUMBER. It is in a place I do not expect. It is in my wallet. I find it while searching for change to buy a lottery ticket. I call him up, "Why are you coming to Vancouver?" "Shouldn't I come?" I lie. "My fiancé is very upset. He does not want me to see you." He'd have to respect that. Trouble is, I had difficulty respecting MYSELF. Reinventing, once again, my knight in shining armour. But, I rationalized, I was merely respecting his cultural heritage. Right. Another phone call. He's in Vancouver. He won't disturb me. But he's very close. He's sending me a letter. The letter begins "In the name of Allah, the merciful, the mercy giving..." It speaks of love ... "Never in my life have I..." It asks for religious conversion "Just once in your life from your heart, say these words..." I would like to put these words down for you, but I took the letter out to show some people that this story was more than just a Muslim pick-up line. I took it out of its envelope and put it into my pocket, and lost it on a cold and windy night. I spent hours looking for it. The second to last line read, "Of course I don't need to tell you that you should keep this to yourself ..."

Betrayal. I had betrayed all those who trust in strangers. Who believe in perfect love. Who ask for kindness and understanding. I had taken what was pure and turned it into shit. Telling the story over and over to anybody who'd care to listen. I felt like a creep. But it seemed to break the spell, and I thought less and less, and finally no

more, about the tall dark man with the palm of my hand on the plane. Then, weeks later, I go to the airport, again, to pick up my lover. Just as we walk into my place the phone rings. It is Ali. He is leaving Vancouver. He has been very close, he says, but he promised not to disturb me. He wishes me all the luck in the world, and then he says good-bye. He will wait for me in the next life.

I GET SICK, and spend the next two weeks in bed.

JANUARY 16 1991 CANADA enters a war.

I PROMISE TO NO ONE in particular, that I will not make this film.

HOW MANY PEOPLE have I already betrayed?

Excerpt from covering letter:
"I suppose this is completely inappropriate. It's about a film I will never make. That I had every intention of making until the war, where suddenly everything was too exploitive, too insignificant, too personal, too voyeuristic."

FILMOGRAPHY

Waving
 1987 B&W 6 min.

You Take Care Now
 1989 Col. 11min.

Drumstix
 1989 Col 2 min.

New Shoes: An Interview in Exactly Five Minutes
 1990 Col 5 min.

New Shoes
 1990 Col. 79 min.

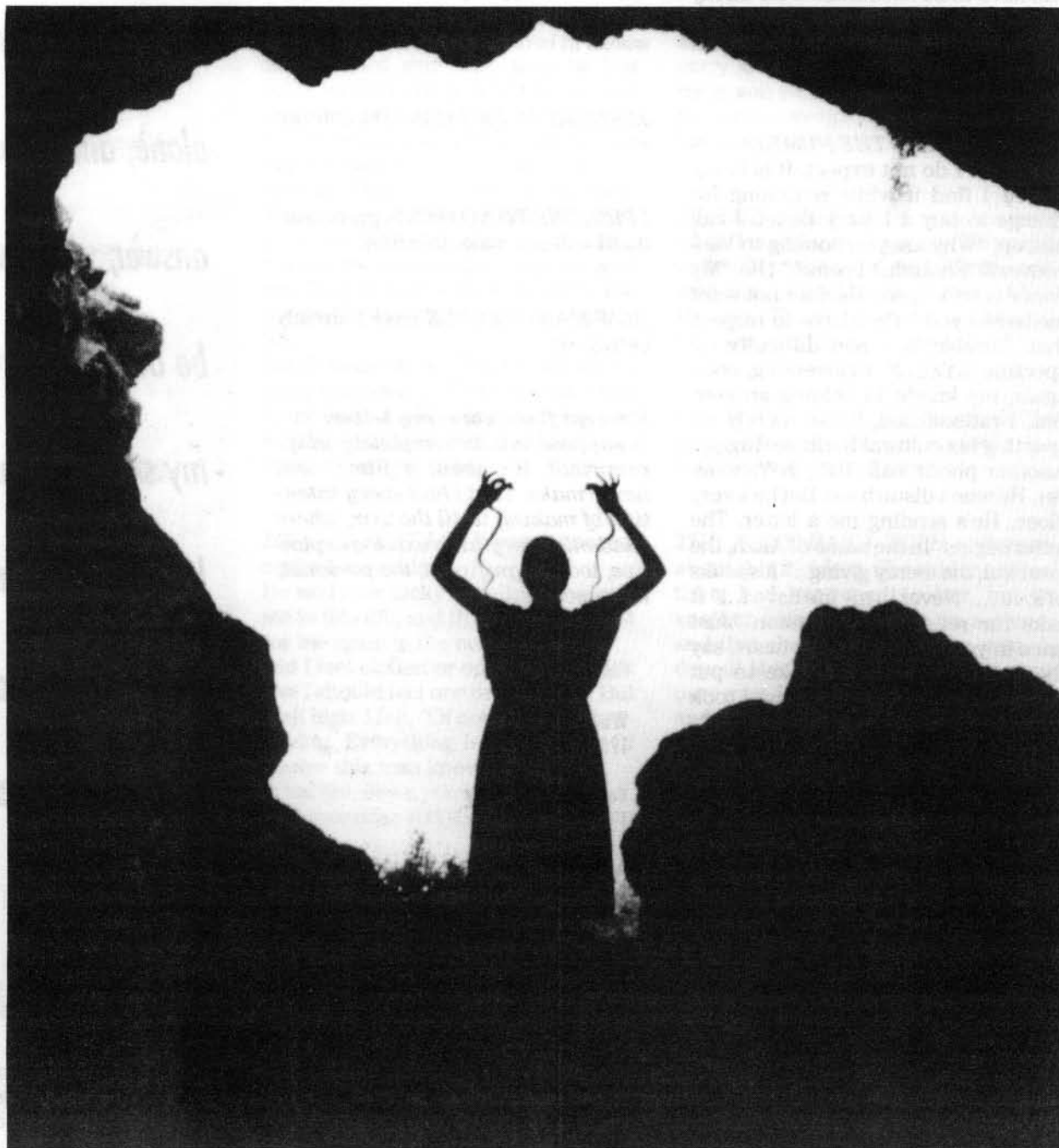
Pioneers of Technology
 1991

*Some time, some way,
 there is going to be a
 knock on my door, I
 am going to be home,
 alone, and when I
 answer, will have to
 be accountable for all
 my sins. My sins of
 being a woman. For
 giving out my address
 to a strange man on
 a plane.*

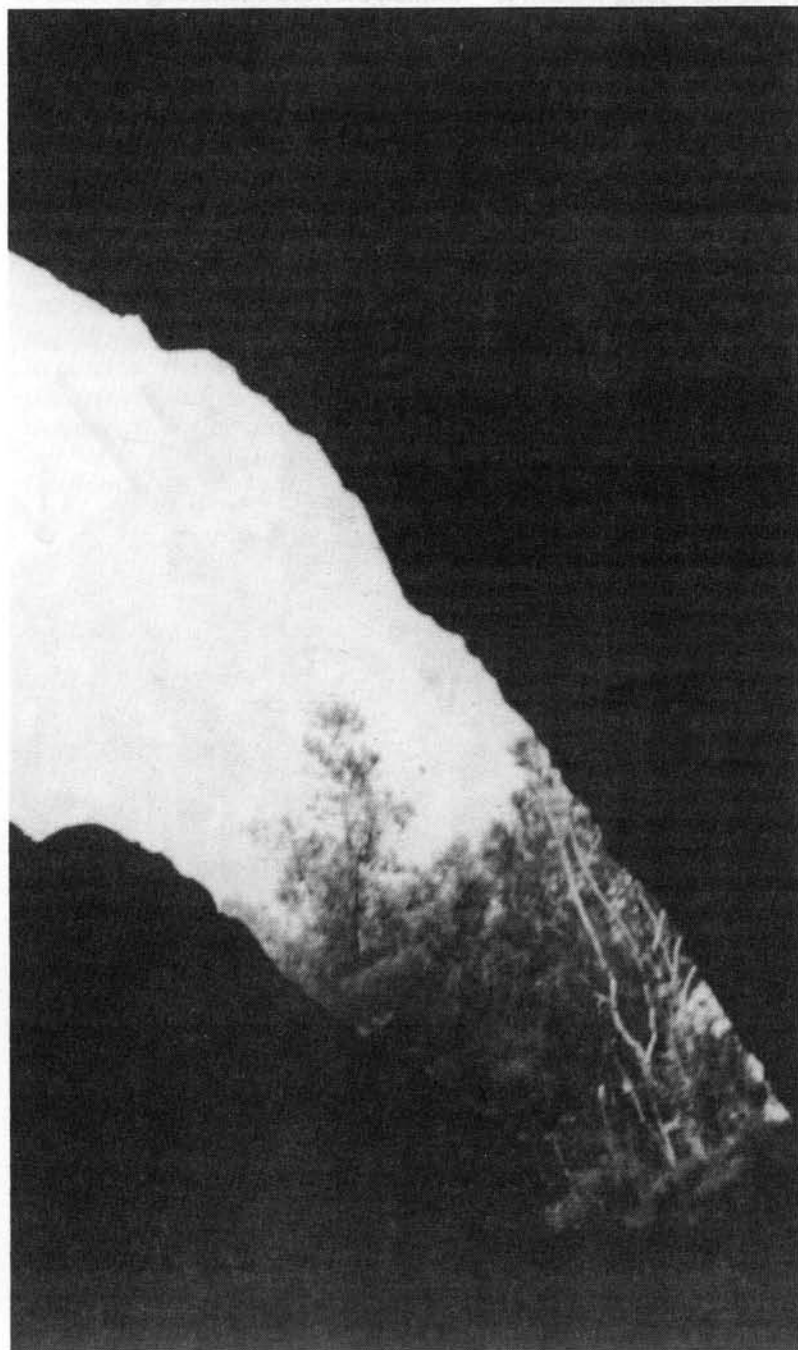
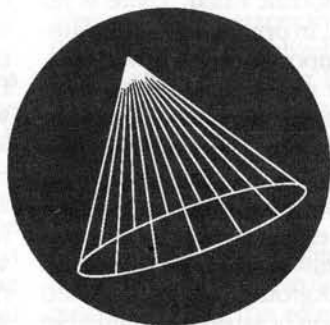
Ann Marie Fleming is an independent filmmaker attempting to continue her work without moving to Toronto. She lives in Vancouver.

THE PROBLEM OF AUTHENTICITY IN DOCUMENTARY

**GODDESS
REMEMBERED**
a film by
DONNA READ



FILMMAKING



BY YASMIN JIWANI

WITHIN THE GENRE OF DOCUMENTARY FILM-making, there is often a concern with presenting an authentic view of the subject/object being filmed. Underlying this quest for authenticity is the filmmaker's desire to "tell it like it is." Yet, the medium itself impels the filmmaker to highlight coherence for the purposes of good storytelling. That coherence, tied as it is by the internal logic that the filmmaker attempts to locate within or impose on the subject, frequently endangers authenticity. This is particularly true in the case of filmmakers who document worlds that they do not inhabit.

For the documentary filmmaker who strives to present an accurate representation of a world that she/he knows from the "outside," the attempt to ensure authenticity becomes problematic.

In contrast, the filmmaker who has an "inside" status, who is a part of the culture being documented, has access to the kind of knowledge (shades of meaning, idiomatic expressions of speech and nuances of nonverbal behaviour) that is inaccessible to a filmmaker situated on the "outside."

In a recent panel ("Our Aesthetics," held at the Museum of Anthropology, University of British Columbia, March 2nd, 1991), Sandra S. Oshawa noted how non-native filmmakers have tended to emphasize the political aspect of Native cultures in their films. She added, "you see everything around the periphery," but rarely get a glimpse of the centre. Oshawa's political documentary *In the Heart of Big Mountain* (1990) revolves around the forced relocation of the Navajo people to Tuba City in the United States, however it also captures the subtleties of their cultural life and lore. In her quest to capture the authenticity of Native life as it is experienced by the Navajo, Oshawa said that she went to Big Mountain with the explicit aim of "wanting to go inward and see just exactly how people felt about the relocation." As a result, *In the Heart of Big Mountain* is an aesthetically pleasing exploration of the spirituality of the Navajo, couched in terms of their daily reality and their ongoing struggles to stay close to the land they regard as their mother.

It is interesting to note that one of the reactions to Oshawa's film was that the very beauty of the film detracted from the seriousness of its message. In the discussion that ensued, the filmmaker countered by saying that Navajo culture is beautiful in its day-to-day rituals, and that Western perspectives of what a political documentary ought to be cannot contain or be imposed on a documentary such as *Big Mountain*.

Although an "insider" status would be ideal, very few filmmakers are "insiders" of the specific cultures they document, and those that are may embrace a co-

lonial perspective, a Western way of looking at their own cultures. This makes the task of retaining authenticity difficult. The problem lies in whether the filmmaker's point of view is grounded in dominant perceptions.

An example of colonialist perspective is the Indian film *Sati*, which premiered at the 1988 World Film Festival in Montreal. This film takes as its point of departure the horrific ceremony of widow burning as it occurred centuries ago in India. Aparna Sen, the filmmaker, uses the film to communicate the exploitation of women during this time, and poignantly describes the tale of a young woman who is unable to speak. Because of her disability, she is married to a tree. In the end, the tree is uprooted in a violent storm and the young woman, now a widow, also dies.

This film suggests that there is no resistance to this horrific ritual. There is no indication that, in opposition to the fateful decree imposed on all widows, namely to die on the funeral pyres of their husbands, our heroine will save the day by showing us, the audience, the other side of women's oppression, resistance and its suppression as a result of the combined effects of colonialism and the caste system. It may be that Sen's own class background has contributed to her perception of Sati as an immutable institution. In *Sati*, the young woman is a victim par excellence—even her reactions to this victimization are passive, child-like and mute.

This point of view is similarly depicted in a series of films co-produced by the National Film Board. Entitled *Women Betting on the Future*, the series consists

of four films, each focusing on the condition of women in different parts of the world: *Women of Oil*, which examines the status of women in the Arab Emirates; *The Great Wall of Tradition*, which focuses on Chinese women; *Journey on the Bamako-Dakar*, the situation of African women, and *Children of a Desired Sex*, which looks at the predicament of women in India. All four films fit within a certain framework which carries with it the halo of First World Aid Agencies, that is, all four objectify the women they are examining in terms of their "difference." In most cases, the "difference" carries pejorative connotations indicative of a backward, barbaric culture.¹ The patronizing characteristic of the Western gaze is most apparent in the kind of narrative that accompanies the visual text. Certain camera angles

**BURNING TIMES / TEMPS
DES BUCHERS**
a film by
DONNA READ



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punctuate this narrative, highlighting the subject/object relationship of the Western gaze upon the otherness of the East.

Take for instance, *Women of Oil*. This film examines the status of women in the oil-producing Arab Emirates. Although the economic standard of the populace in this region is considerably higher than that enjoyed by other peoples of the Third World, the cultural situation is much the same (at least according to the text and images of this film). Traditional symbols of authority are depicted as oppressive to women. Virtually every woman interviewed in this documentary is framed as an object - she does not speak for herself but is spoken for. Women garbed in traditional dress are rendered spectacles by the camera's conspicuous focus on their veils. In one particular instance, the camera lingers on a woman who clearly does not want to show her face. She hides herself in her veil and yet the camera persists in entering obtrusively into her personal space. In contrast, the women who remained subjects in this film were the ones who manifested overt signs of "Westernization" or as Mowlana suggests, "Westoxification!"² Wearing Western clothes without veils, these women were legitimized as authoritative spokeswomen for their sisters. Their legitimacy appeared to be grounded in Western standards of freedom, liberation and equality. One wonders what happened to the Muslim feminists from that part of the world, and the reclamation of the veil as a sign of nationalism that women in Iran, for example, so readily embraced? In the digital world of this film, the developed versus developing worlds are brought together in a seemingly lateral position. Their nuances are flattened to accommodate the illusion of equality, of laterality in world politics. That, in my mind, is like comparing fruits and vegetables — they both grow from the earth, but are totally different in appearance, taste, texture and smell.

Although *Women of Oil* is made by Attait el Abnoudi, who I presume is an "insider" of Arab culture, the resulting portrayal of this culture seems to be as flat and denuded of richness as the works of Orientalists a generation ago. Edward Said, in his analysis of the Orientalist tradition and its emergence in the

West, argues that this tradition is embedded and erected on the edifice of a Western male perspective which views the Orient in sexualized and negative terms, characterizing a backward, barbaric, eroticized and savage culture. Such a perspective then confirms the need for the West to domesticate the Orient through various forms of colonization.³

The effect of the Western gaze has engendered a desire to find some acceptance by fitting the role that has been projected onto it. For instance, at the 1989 World Film Festival in Montreal, a distinguished Indian juror made the comment that many films submitted to film festivals held in the West were specifically tailored for those festivals. He elaborated by saying that Indian filmmakers were well aware of the criteria governing the West's acceptance of films to be screened at festivals, and hence, Indian filmmakers made it a point to submit only those films which they felt would cater to these tastes and thereby confirm Western perceptions of what films from India should look like.

Even more disappointing than *Women of Oil* is *Children of a Destined Sex*, given that it was directed by Mira Nair, the distinguished filmmaker who made *Salaam Bombay* and other well known works. In *Children of a Destined Sex*, Nair traces the success of a sex selection technique in India. She points out how the technique is used to abort female fetuses because of the strong cultural preference for male children. Interspersed between clips of couples going to a clinic to have these tests are excerpts of a conversation between two Indian women who represent the critical edge of feminist thought in India. Although the government says it has banned this technology, the people keep using it. Are there no movements of resistance? Indian feminist publications such as *Manushi* have indicated that contrary to what the film shows, resistance really is flourishing in contemporary India and has been for centuries.

The portrayal of the Third World in these films duplicates the stereotypical images that abound in the West. Yes, women in the Third World are oppressed, yes they have to work a lot harder, and yes, they are economically

exploited. But they also have traditions of resistance, of celebration and renewal. It would have been refreshing to see some of these positive images. What is so glaringly absent in these films are the kinds of images that one finds in films created by "insiders" who have a genuine tie to their cultures, as evident in Oshawa's *In the Heart of Big Mountain*, or in Donna Read's *Goddess Remembered* and *Burning Times*.

Donna Read's films recount a specifically white, European herstory of womankind. *Goddess Remembered* recalls a time when women were Goddesses, creators and nurturers. Examining various European mythologies, her primary focus is on the renewal characteristic of Goddesses. Her sequel, *Burning Times*, engages in a journey of reconstruction — reconstituting the past, though there are scant records of what is described in the film as a "female holocaust." It focuses on the systematic annihilation of womankind and its formidable expression in the witch hunts of the Middle Ages.

To a like-minded audience, Donna Read's films incite a powerful experience of identification. They are aesthetically pleasing, visually compelling, empathic in nature. However, to a member of the audience who does not share Read's class, race or gender, these films are exclusionary to varying degrees. They say nothing about the experiences of other cultures, about the reverence for female deities in Africa, India and other parts of the world. Few women of colour are featured in *Goddess Remembered*, and those that are represented are circumscribed within the European, Judeo-Christian tradition.

It would seem then that one's location on the insider/outsider spectrum depends on what one's experiences are and what cultural shape these experiences have taken. On a concluding note, I would like to discuss two examples in which an "insider" status has fostered a more upbeat and compelling image of cultural traditions. British Indian filmmaker Gurinder Chada's documentary *I'm British But ...* (1989) takes a satirical approach to the exclusion experienced by second generation South Asian immigrants in Britain. The film explores a fascinating cultural response in the making — the emergence

IN VIRTUALLY ALL THE WORLDS THAT HAVE BEEN CAPTURED ON THE SCREEN, THE "INSIDER," "OUTSIDER" AND "MARGINAL" STATUS OF FILMMAKERS HAS HAD TREMENDOUS IMPACT ON HOW THOSE WORLDS HAVE BEEN PRESENTED, THE DEPTH OF LEGITIMACY THEY HAVE ACQUIRED, AND THEIR POWER TO PERSUADE VIEWERS TO EMBRACE THEIR REPRESENTATIONS AS "REALISTIC" DEPICTIONS.



NICE COLORED GIRLS by TRACEY MOFFATT

of a hybrid form of music that combines Eastern and Western influences. Aboriginal filmmaker Tracey Moffatt's *Nice Coloured Girls* (1987) looks at the situation of aboriginal Australian women in urban areas, their transgression of normative behaviour, their subversion of the way in which indigenous women should/ought to behave towards white men. In both these cases, the filmmakers are not completely entrenched within the cultures they are documenting. Their political affiliations to their respec-

tive racial heritages foster a resistant vision of crossing First and Third World social and cultural traditions.

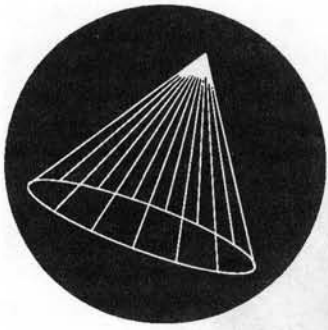
¹See for instance the insightful documentary, *Developing Images* (distributed by IDERA in Vancouver), which has a fascinating shot of a woman who runs an Aid agency defending her choice of the image she used for the World Famine campaign. The image in question is that of a child with a bloated stomach; the figure of the child is shaped as the continent of Africa. When asked why she had chosen such an image, she replied that it was one that was most likely to elicit sympathy from Western

viewers and hence motivate them to contribute their dollars to the Aid agency.

²Hamid Mowlana, "Technology Versus Tradition: Communication in the Iranian Revolution," *Journal of Communication* Vol. 29 #3, pp. 107-112.

³Edward Said, *Orientalism* (USA: Vintage Books, 1979).

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FOUR ASIAN WOMEN FILM/VIDEO MAKERS:

NO LONGER
POWDERED
WHITE

BY LARISSA LAI

THE INCREASING USE OF "ORIENTAL" CUSTOMS AND ARTIFACTS BY WESTERNERS HAS BEEN CRITICIZED as an appropriative act which displaces them from their cultural context. The charge of exoticism



SUNO YAMAZAKI and MARTHA ONODERA in THE DISPLACED VIEW by M. ONODERA PRODUCTIONS; photo by MICHAELLE MCLEAN

is levelled against anyone who tries to pass off, as mystical or bizarre, objects and ideas which belong to the everyday lives of culturally marginalized people.

The stereotyped misrepresentation of Asians in Western media is constantly modified to coincide with contemporaneous values and perceptions. We are offered subtle, insidious messages which reflect and reinforce current stereotypes. For instance, the Hollywood film, *Year of the Dragon*, plays up to Westerners' fear of Asian gangs, fueling the racist side of the immigration debate. David Lynch's *Twin Peaks*, through the character of Josie, fulfills our every expectation of the exotic and conniving Eastern dragon lady.

For women of Asian origin, the exoticization of the Asian body is a particularly acute problem. Its focus on our sexuality, overshadowing other characteristics, encourages us to pin our identities to a great extent on this aspect of ourselves. Asian Canadian women grow up with a sense of difference that hinges precisely on this notion of the exotic as an unattainable model to which we are expected to adhere.

Unfamiliar with the everyday experiences of women of our generation in Asia, we rely on Western representations of Asian women. These perceptions become only too easy to apply to ourselves. We learn to see ourselves through a screen of norms and values that define us as neither Asian (i.e. from Asia) nor white. Received with understanding and approval when we fulfil the expectations defined by the Western screen and by incomprehension or ridicule when we do not, these prescribed roles become second nature. There are several common stereotypes: Asian women have been depicted, a tube of red lipstick in hand, as vampy, sexually available, and capable of mysterious bedroom techniques that white girls don't even dream of; others are quiet lotus blossoms, gentle, compliant, and submissive; older Asian women (for those able to discern that Asians do indeed age) are assumed to be oppressive, demanding and strict. Our lives are reduced to cheesy horoscopes, and aggravated by

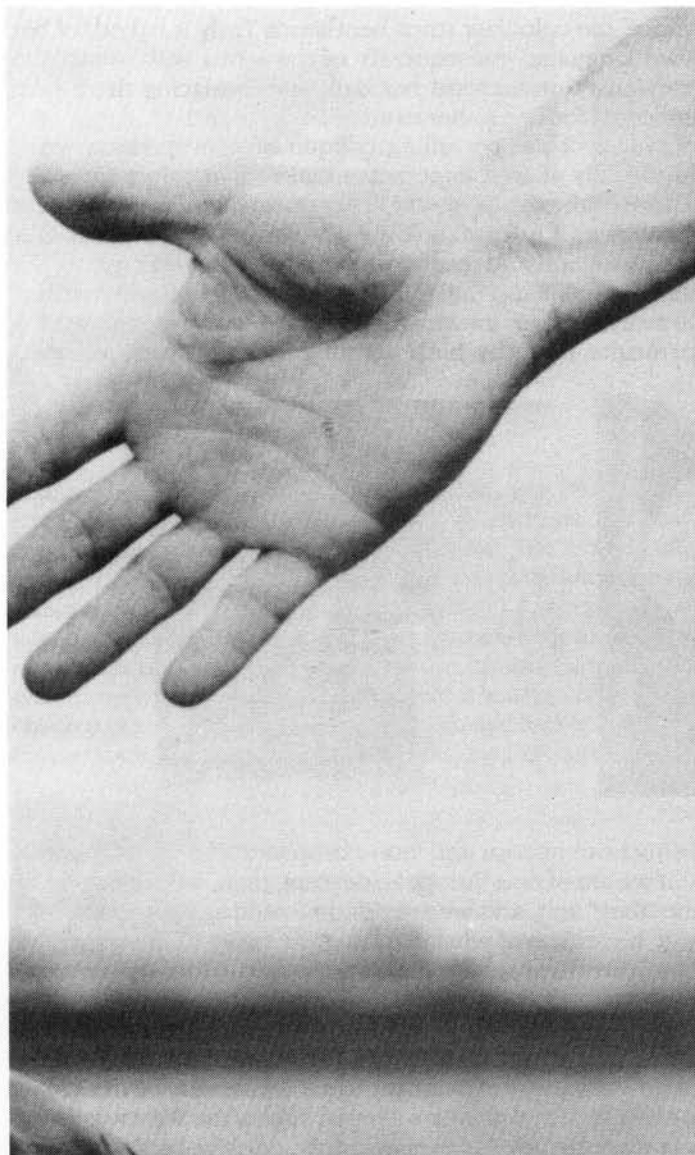


(above) *THE COMPACT*, a film by BRENDA JOY LEM

(bottom right) *THE DISPLACED VIEW* by M. ONODERA PRODUCTIONS; photo of RICK SHIOMI

the only too prevalent notion that all Asians look (and hence behave) alike.

Helen Lee's film *Sally's Beauty Spot*, in its careful deconstruction of *The World of Suzy Wong*, draws a connection between media racism and a young woman's quest for beauty. Sally is not at all concerned with how her Asian-ness marks her as "different," but instead with how a small blemish on her right breast marks her as less than perfect. She is obsessed with it. Through the voiceover which accompanies images of Sally attempting to remove the spot, we discover her response to *Suzy Wong*. The film is re-presented through Sally's eyes. Some clips from the film demonstrate the power relationship between Suzy and the American (male) artist. Suzy is made to appear a preposterous figure through the selection and anachronistic juxtaposition of images (i.e. contemporary



Sally vs. '50s Suzy).

The focus on the body in *Suzy Wong* is justified by the American male character's need for a female model to produce his work. This focus is exaggerated to the utmost in *Sally's Beauty Spot*, highlighting specifically that part of Sally's body where the beauty spot is. This exaggeration makes the viewer aware of the fetishization of the Asian female body in both films. The viewer and the viewed alike seem to obtain a certain pleasure from this watching and being watched. We are aware that this pleasure is a learned one, aware that *Suzy Wong* instructs as it entertains. On the one hand, we are guilty/complicitous, on the other, since the body ritual has become such an inherent part of our lives, we cannot reject or deny the pleasure we take in such things as washing ourselves, grooming our hair, or applying make-up (Helen Lee, "Sex and Strategy: The Body of Suzy Wong").¹ The solution to overcoming the sexist and racist elements of this practice is not necessarily to stop it.

Sally is glamorous; she makes no pretense at being politically correct. She is a miscegenist to the hilt. Helen Lee's work breaks ground in that she poses the Asian female as a norm to be juxtaposed against white and black male extremes. The viewer is set up to identify with Sally, the Asian woman, rather than either of the non-Asian male characters who are clearly prototypes, set up simply to represent white maleness and black maleness. They have no character beyond this. Sally, on the other hand, is multidimensional. She struggles with the dilemma that viewing such films as *Suzy Wong* places her in. She agonizes over that imperfect but individualizing spot, the beauty spot that is not beautiful.

At the same time, however, Helen Lee does not condemn the kind of thinking which spawned such films as *Suzy Wong*. Rather, she attempts to deal with contradictory emotions that arise in the Asian female viewer. The viewer's sympathy oscillates between the white male protagonist and this hopelessly innocent and inscrutable lotus blossom. Along with a response of outrage, there is a concurrent wave of satisfied excitement that arises from identifying with Suzy, who has been acknowledged as beautiful and desirable in a North American context, specifically by a white North American man, whom we, in turn, have been taught to perceive as desirable. One is almost (but not quite) willing, she suggests, to overlook the stereotyping in order to be granted a belonging place, even at the cost of having to live up to that stereotype. Awareness of this gives way to anger, but each time such a film is produced, we watch it hungrily, perhaps guiltily, and the cycle begins again.

Brenda Lem's film *The Compact* touches on the problem of role playing and addresses the cultural conflicts between Asian-Canadian and Euro-Canadian values, and between the values of one generation and the next. As the film opens, Lee, a Chinese-Canadian girl, is sitting in a subway station dressed in black leather, looking tough. A man sits down next to her and places a rubber rat on her lap. "You think I'm harmless, don't you?" says Lee. No matter how she's costumed, she is vulnerable. For the most part, she is a Japanese paper doll to her white boyfriend. The historical antagonism between Chinese and Japanese is blurred beyond recognition when he explains to her, as she kneels before him in a kimono, how

prejudiced his parents are against Japanese — as if by corollary, then, he cannot bring his Chinese girlfriend home to meet them. She does not belong in the same compartment of his life as his friends and family, but because of her apparent exoticness, belongs to the realm of the extra-ordinary. Metaphorically, a fence, placed physically between the lovers, suggests that the boyfriend is “caged” by his culture, fenced in, unable to understand.

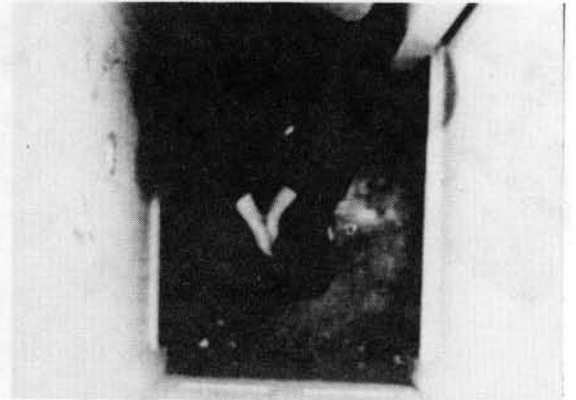
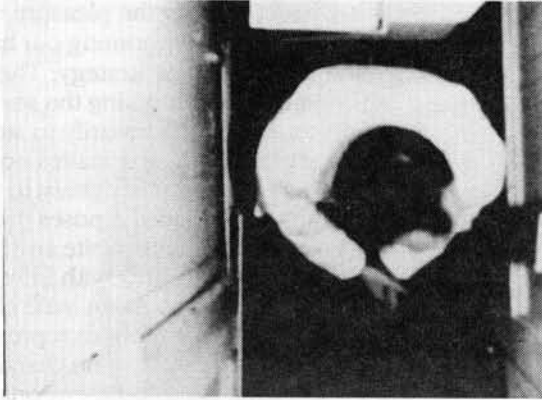
The relationship between Lee and her mother is more ambiguous. To some extent the mother represents Lee's cultural history. In a North American setting she represents things Chinese. We are reminded, however, that the mother

guage, the colonizer strips her (hence Truly is naked) of her own language, consequently of the terms with which she previously understood her daily life, replacing them with concepts foreign to her cultural background.

In lieu of the prevailing critique of appropriation, what historically shared experience makes it possible for Ruby Truly to take this position? Is her posing as a Native woman legitimate? We are all, in the end, native to some place. Our self-definition and reception as natives depend on how the term is qualified. Trinh Minh-ha writes: “Termining us ‘natives’ focuses on our innate qualities and our belonging to a particular place by birth; termining them ‘natives,’ on *their*

(this page and top of next page)
TEN CENTS A DANCE (PARALLAX)
by M. ONODERA PRODUCTIONS

(bottom of next page)
THE COMPACT
a film by BRENDA JOY LEM



has been in Canada for a long time, and, in fact, that she has no better understanding of that (seemingly) uncorrupted Chinese past than Lee herself. Reference is made to a trip to China taken by Lee's mother as a young woman, during which she “learned more than Chinese.” What exactly she did learn remains unclear. Perhaps she learned that China was no longer her home; in the next few frames we see her working in her home garden in Canada, literally putting down roots.

While both Helen Lee and Brenda Lem deal with their subject matter from the point of view of Asian women, Vancouver video artist Ruby Truly, whether intentionally or not, treats her identity in a less definitive way. Although of Japanese American extraction, Truly's most recent work deals with Native issues. *And the Word was God* features the artist sitting at a desk, reading a text used by the Jesuits to teach English to the Cree. The relations of dominance and submission reveal themselves in the nouns, pronouns and verbs laid out in the text in a simplistic way.

Truly poses as the Native other, the learner of the teacher's words, the colonized. She rattles off string after string of words (I see the dog, I shoot the dog, I hit the dog, I fetch the dog, I search for the dog, I saw the dog, I shot the dog, I see the girl, I shoot the girl ...) illustrating the brutality of the English language. Vocabulary is taught according to its proselytizing potential. (He cleanses me, He cleanses you, He cleanses him ...) The value-laden connotations of the word “cleanses” are not clear until we ask ourselves what is washed away. He washes away my past, my history, my culture. It becomes increasingly evident that the same words which are necessary to spread the gospel can be used to subjugate the Native other. In forcing the Native woman to learn this lan-

being born inferior and ‘non-Europeans’.”²

If we are of non-European descent, then, we are natives of the “they” sort, and we are discriminated against by the “us” sort, regardless of what place we are native to. By taking the position of the native reader (as opposed to the white writer), Truly encourages the viewer to perceive the native woman as belonging to “us.” Even in this “foreign” language, the mechanism of the non-European native's oppression becomes clear. The power of language to subjugate may be the key in determining the Canadian version of how the West was won/lost, since there was never a frontier, decisive battle, or treaty ceding the land to European settlers. The imperialism of the English language has placed those of Japanese extraction, particularly during their wartime internment, in a position similar to that of First Nations people. Thus, while Ruby Truly's piece does appropriate the Native point of view, it is not inscribed with the power relationship that often underlies the European tradition. What is shared is not a cultural specificity, but a location vis-à-vis the dominant culture.

What happens when a person has more than one “other” identity? I have heard Midi Onodera remark that her Japanese-ness became a marginal attribute for her only within the context of the lesbian community, and that her lesbianism was only a problem within the context of the Japanese community. Indeed lesbianism, or rather its construction in North American society, has been primarily a white woman's domain. Likewise, “Japanese-ness” in North America has been a primarily heterosexual arena. Members of marginalized groups are assumed to fit stereotypes, and to lack diversity. In her work Midi Onodera seems to separate her two identities.

Ten Cents A Dance (Parallax) deals entirely with the



juxtaposition of three sexualities, lesbian, gay and hetero. Each pair of actors is portrayed in an extreme situation exemplifying a particular sexual orientation. The women talk about their mutual attraction. The men have anonymous washroom sex. In the heterosexual situation, a woman paints her nails as she talks on the phone to a man who is masturbating. In the first two scenarios, adjacent cameras are used to create a split frame effect in which there is some overlap. Two characters at a time are presented, each appearing in her or his own box. The lesbian and gay situations portray each pair

tative of certain communities whether she chooses to be or not. Her cultural position may be viewed as highly specific because she occupies a marginal space on two counts. A recent CBC broadcast of an episode of *Inside Stories* by Onodera censored a sequence revealing the protagonist's lesbianism. By way of justification, the CBC argued that by portraying a Japanese lesbian, Onodera was implying that all Japanese are gay. In other words, Onodera is taken as representative of all Japanese. While the CBC's multicultural agenda supports the ethnic diversity of the country, it does not always support the diversity of individuals within marginalized groups.



on the same set, so that it is possible for them to cross the barrier (the line dividing the two frames) between them. In the heterosexual scenario, neither crosses into the environment of the other. The ability to cross represents an understanding, a common ground that is not present in the final situation.

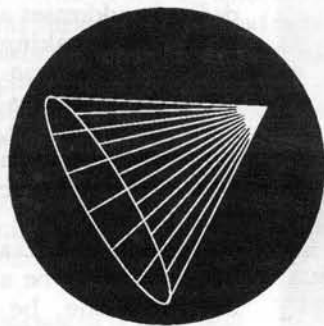
Onodera's more recent film, *The Displaced View*, deals with her relationships with her mother and grandmother. It is an attempt to retrieve what has been lost, particularly customs, language and family history. Subtling the English sec-

The works of these four women deal with a number of issues besides "Asianness" and demonstrate the socially constructed nature of this category. Because the mainstream film industry does not cater to us, much of what we do or who we are is threatened by the stereotypes perpetuated. At the same time, we have been brought up to think as Westerners, and to work within European/North American practices. Working in this tradition, we can neither reject our socialization nor can we "return" to our Asian roots. Helen Lee's work begins to treat these contradictions by deconstructing the popular image of the lotus blossom/dragon lady. Brenda Lem points out the well intentioned but racist observations of the white male eye. Ruby Truly stretches the definitions of what physical appearance means, and examines the historical basis of racial oppression in Canada. Midi Onodera's work deals with aspects of marginalized identity, specifically, race and sexuality. Windows open, and two by two, slanted eyes look out.

¹Lee, Helen. "Sex and Strategy: The Body of Suzy Wong." Paper presented at *Race to the Screen*, Toronto, 1991.

²Trinh T. Minh-ha. *Woman/Native/Other Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989) p.52.

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NEGOTIATING REPRESENTATION: NOTES ON COMMUNITY-BASED FILM AND VIDEO IN CANADA

BY JUDITH DOYLE

COMMUNITY-BASED PRODUCTION AND THE ARTIST-RUN CENTRES

LOCALLY, GRASSROOTS COMMUNITY GROUPS HAVE collaborated with artists to produce films and videos for over 15 years. This practice intersects with the development of artist-run production centres, galleries and distribution outlets that are the locus of our arts community. Tracing a history of artist-controlled, state-funded mediaproduction facilities in Canada, several of our film and video centres emerged from community organizations. For instance, twenty years ago, Trinity Square Video began as the video documentation project of a downtown community drop-in centre that offered forums with city politicians, cheap lunches, and alternative parole arrangements. In the early '70s, the documentation of a number of feminist discussion groups and panels included such titles as *The Issue is Daycare* and *Divorce Law*. However, this development was abridged in 1978 when the Centre for Experimental Art and Culture in Toronto published an editorial in its newsletter *STRIKE* which was construed as advocating terrorist strategies. The front-page scandal that precipitated CEAC's loss of funding also triggered a widespread move at federal and provincial arts councils away from block, operating cost funding for artists' centres toward allocating grants on a case-by-case basis. The change stifled spontaneous and politically responsive programming decisions, and opened programming to government scrutiny and economic control. Dot

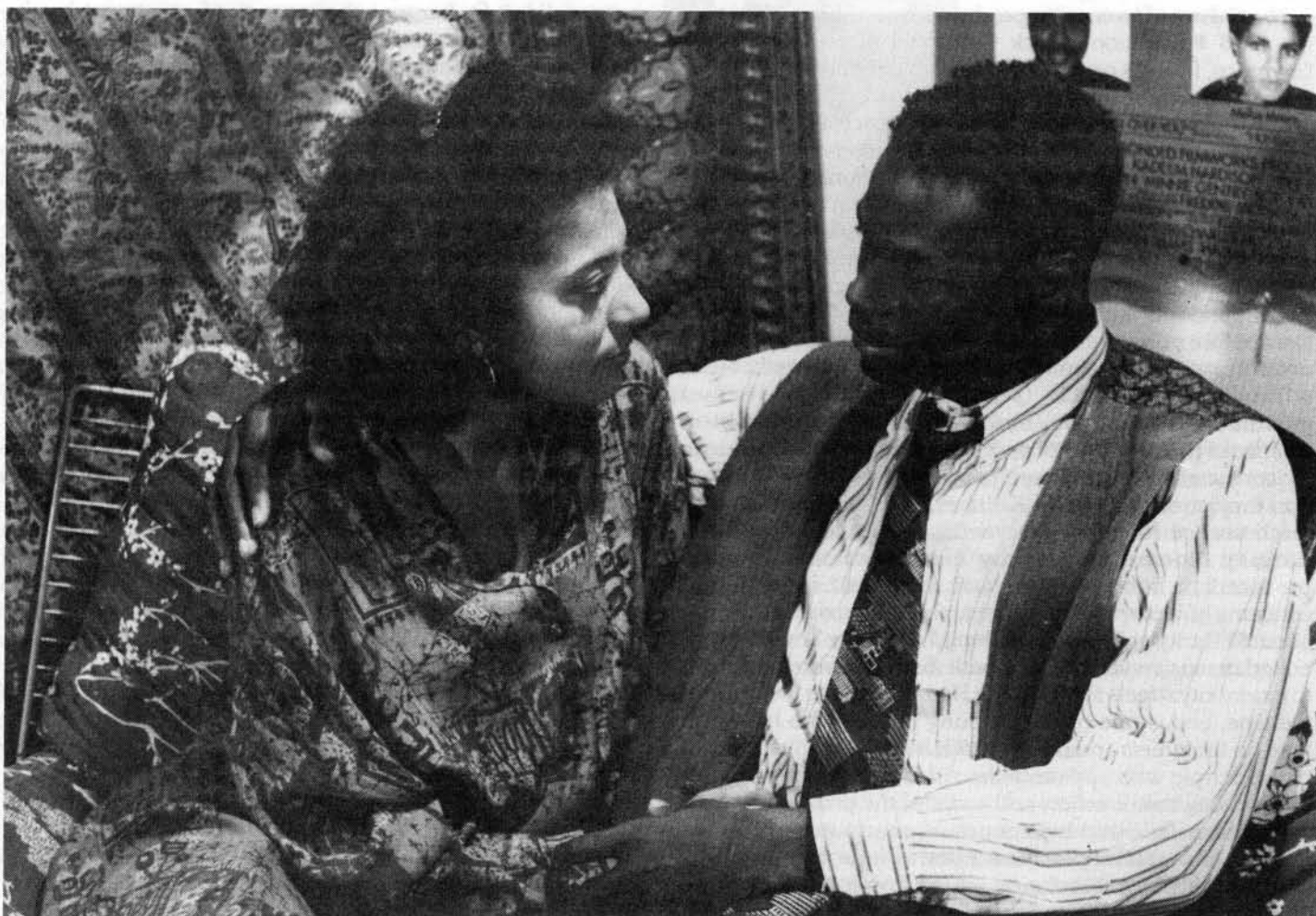
Tuer wrote, "CEAC's legacy was not merely a history, but an exposé of the 'neutrality' of the Councils who squirmed and shuffled under government pressure to provide a conservative public with a guarantee of accountability ... The Councils, shaking in the aftermath of a state-funded centre's politics which had reached the debating floor of the House of Commons, demanded more financial and budgetary accountability in their grant applications ..."¹

By the early '80s, the CEAC aftermath was fully institutionalized. Few artist-run centres continued to be involved in both production and dissemination activities, and few artists worked out of social and political community organizations.

NEGOTIATING REPRESENTATION

IN THE EARLY '70S, FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING groups working in conjunction with women artists had an instrumental role in organizing to produce films and tapes for their own use. For example, *We Will Not Be Beaten*, a 16mm black and white film produced in the late sixties by Transition House, was made by and for domestic violence survivors. The film, which was shot during a group meeting in Transition House, was intended to be used within the context of these groups. The film consists of long unedited shots of women speaking. The focus is on their experiences of healing rather than on exposing old scars. This distinguishes the film from what Marien Lewis calls "women's porn,"² as in the profusion of afternoon talk shows where a woman is relentlessly prodded by the host to "tell her story." The way in which these "stories" are elicited highlights the details of victimization, and sidesteps the question of how change is achieved. In *We Will Not Be Beaten*, speaking is a brave political act. By speaking,

THE COLOUR OF IMMUNITY, directed by G.W. LAWRENCE, produced by BLACK COALITION FOR AIDS PREVENTION



the women take action against violence with a specific listener in mind — other women who, through the realization that they are not alone, will be encouraged to make changes in their own lives. While the film suggests that an individual woman's capacity to change her circumstances is limited by a social structure which condones violence, the focus of this film is not on an analysis of violence but on actions women take, personally and collectively, to effect change in their lives.

Ruby Rich identified the problem of a shortage of names to identify different types of feminist films, and coined the term 'validative' to describe documentaries about women's experiences such as *We Will Not Be Beaten*.³ This term is important in providing a sense of solidarity, however it does not distinguish between different methods of documentary filmmaking and the function and effectiveness of these strategies.

There is a growing body of recent Canadian film and video by women, produced in collaboration with community-based organizations: *Eagle Run*, a tape on traditional native games by native filmmaker/videographer Loretta Todd,

produced in collaboration with the Native Learning Centre in Vancouver; *The Colour of Immunity*, Glace Lawrence's video produced for *Toronto: Living With AIDS* Cable TV; and Premika Ratnam's films and tapes produced for centres which provide services for women of colour. These are just a few examples. Many are short in length (1/2 hour or less), sensitive to the needs and expectations of viewers, and reflect a cultural specificity.

While gay activist and film programmer David McIntosh was editing my film, *Lac La Croix*, we used the term "negotiated representation" to describe our process of making editorial decisions in collaboration with the Ojibway community in the film. In the negotiating process, community members maintain responsibility for and control over their voices and representational priorities, while the filmmakers/videographers in turn provide insight into the structural potential of alternative film practice. Often, community groups are unfamiliar with alternative film; expectations are sometimes based in commercial media. The onus, then, is on the filmmakers to reveal the expressive capacity and distribution limits of low-budget film or small-format video, while the

community organization determines what is represented. Methodology is fundamental in facilitating the conditions for mutual understanding and decision-making.

The Colour of Immunity, produced by the Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention (Black CAP) and directed by Glace Lawrence, focuses on the difficulties experienced by women when assuming responsibility for safer sex. The tape begins with a sensuously edited summer street dance; women pause to speak to the camera in a series of quick interviews. Various scenes in the tape mark a consciousness around the possibility of a sexual encounter: women putting on make-up and getting ready to go out, people dancing, lovers who have just arrived home together. Over these enactments, a narrator talks about inhibitions and suggests strategies for talking about condoms with a partner in advance. "Talking about latex before you have sex isn't easy." The advice is acted out when a man and woman who have come home together read a magazine with STD (sexually transmitted disease) information; *The Colour of Immunity* addresses this problem in terms of the dynamics of power between men and women.

Streetwise Women is a tape produced by the STD Prevention Project of YOUTHLINK: Inner City (a centre and outreach service for homeless youth). The tape, directed by Margaret Moores and shot by Almerinda Travassos, was produced to address the sexual experiences and health concerns of women on the street, and to demystify the facts about STDs. It begins with "Nothing," a song by Zoe Hamilton edited in music-video format, with dissolves from the singer to murky city streets at night. Zoe Hamilton wrote the song for the tape, and is one of many young people who has spent time on the streets and uses the YOUTHLINK centre. Like all of the people who appear in the video, she was involved in determining the direction and script of the project. Her performance is followed by a series of enactments by young women from YOUTHLINK: scenes include how to clean needles with bleach solution, using condoms and dental dams, negotiating safe sex with lovers and clients. Information is passed laterally through group conversations, rather than horizontally from a professional superstructure. The performances subvert the doctor/client health care model in favour of "peer education."⁴ The focus is on street youth assuming individual and collective responsibility.

It's interesting to note what died on the cutting room floor. Almerinda and Margaret hired professional actors for one scene in *Streetwise Women*. The scene was acted with sensi-

tivity and subtlety, but in the editing room, "it stuck out like a sore thumb." It was dropped, as was a straight documentary interview. I'm not surprised the drama and documentary scenes didn't fit, because the strategy of enactment has its own structural effects which are different from drama. For the performers, enactment is a form of action. A young woman agreeing to perform in this tape is also claiming the script in relation to her own story.

A classic example of enactment film is *The Honour of All*. This film, a native community best-seller, is available in many band offices and centres. In this film, the people of the Alkali Lake reserve in B.C. re-enacted their own history of alcoholism and the steps they took towards sobriety and healing. As Will Sampson says in the prologue: the events you will see are true, only the names have *not* been changed. If the people of Alkali Lake hadn't moved toward sobriety, their 'acting' in the tape would be of no use to themselves or other communities. Only by assuming collective responsibility can the community 'act out' the story. In enactment (as opposed to drama), the actors *always* participate in writing the script. This is more than a way of making the script 'ring true.' It is the only means of making the tape effective. The performances trace community experiences, selected through a process of self-representation. Enactment is only effective insofar as it accurately represents the experiences, language, and intentions of the actors. The films and tapes are only as useful and believable as the group that makes them think they are.

ACCESS TO FUNDING: THE VOCABULARY OF EXCLUSION

NOW, IN THE 1990S, ARTS COUNCIL FUNDING IS BEING drastically cut and artist-run centres and magazines are folding. The ideology of corporate culture has thoroughly penetrated the morass of our civil service. This ideology has calcified as paperwork and is propped up by what Lisa Steele has described as a "totally bogus"⁵ exchange value, i.e. money-making potential. For instance, while low-budget films generally recuperate a much greater percentage of production costs, features are regarded as more profitable.

According to the rules, community-based films and tapes are not eligible for funding from the Canada Council or the Ontario Arts Council, since the directors do not maintain independent editorial and artistic control. Educational and sponsored films and tapes are categorically ineligible. The rationale behind these exclusions does not hold water when we note the growing trend in recent years toward arts council involvement in feature films. Filmmakers making features and television documentaries are approaching the arts councils for funding. A large grant (say \$30,000) amounts to about 10% of the feature budget, operating as development money and leverage to secure the remainder from the corporate film funding agencies, Telefilm Canada and the Ontario Film Development Corporation. These agencies assess the development of a project from script to production at various stages, and the "dropdown" of money depends on this periodic assessment. This system intercepts individual control by the director. So why are the large-budget projects getting grants, and the community-based works falling through the cracks?



Most community groups get partial funding to produce a film or tape from various Ministries that dish out one-time grants for projects that fit into their political agendas. For example, this year, the Native Community Branch is administering very small grants of about \$4,000 for tapes by native organizations on domestic violence. Grants allocated by the various Ministries are woefully inadequate, and additional funds have to be secured from elsewhere. Often this task is left up to the artist/director, and the under-budgeted projects are heavily dependent on deferred or donated labour, government training programs, artist-run equipment access centres, and NFB PAFPS production services. Simultaneously, there are severe government funding cuts to on-going community-based media. Last year the federal Conservative government slashed grants to aboriginal newspapers and television. This represents a continuation of the regulation and marginalization of alternative media through piecemeal funding and project-by-project accountability.

Over a span of fifteen years, in response to pressure from artists, the arts councils have come to distinguish film genres which parallel peer-group communities from which grant juries are drawn: drama/documentary, animation and experimental. Community-based production is notably absent, though pressure is beginning to be exerted by artists working in this area. At a recent Ontario Arts Council sounding, filmmaker Premika Ratnam called on the Film, Photography and Video Office to consider a new funding category for "community arts." In spite of this exclusion from arts council funding, more community-based films and videos are being produced by artists. This indicates a renewed activism and responsibility to new constituencies of audiences.

CRITICAL IMPEDIMENTS

THERE IS A SHORTAGE OF WRITING ON COMMUNITY-based production which is often dismissed as "social work tools" by the art press. Though the films and tapes get a lot of use, they seem out-of-place in critical discourse. Perhaps we are running up against the same critical impediments that Ruby Rich and Julia Lesage indicated fifteen years ago when writing about feminist documentary: problems in "naming,"⁶ little discussion or understanding of the processes of negotiating representation, and a shortage of "articulated history."⁷ The limited critical attention and vocabulary for community-based production reinforces the difficulties of securing funding and distribution.

Within the debate around form/content in feminist film theory, community-based film falls on the side of a content emphasis. Thus, community-based documentary projects have been criticized for being too realistic, prescriptive and formally conventional, i.e. not art. It is notable that, though an increasing number of women artists are working on community-based projects, this critical dismissal persists. Criticism based on psychoanalytic assumptions of spectatorship tends to presume culturally-specific experiences. There has been little analysis of the distinctive formal strategies that are utilized in community-based production. Julia Lesage has written that the deep structure of feminist documentary film reflects that of the consciousness-raising groups which sponsored and used them;⁸ perhaps this and other processes of



collective disclosure and healing might provide alternative theoretical models from which to understand community-based work.

Clearly, it is vital that critical writing issue from the communities that use the films and tapes. Without the legitimation provided by critical writing, community-based film and tape often goes unrecognized and unevaluated in the present arts funding system. If we define art as the work artists are making, community-based production demands distinct consideration. This work must be recognized and encouraged on its own terms, through increased operating grants to organizations, critical writing that draws on appropriate cultural and theoretical models and informed programming.

¹Dot Tuer, "The CEAC Was Banned in Canada," *C Magazine*.

²Artist and arts organizer Marien Lewis, in conversation with the author.

³"One of feminist filmmaking's greatest contributions is the body of films about women's lives, political struggles, organizing, etc. These films have been vaguely classified under the *cinéma vérité* banner, where they reside in decidedly mixed company... The form is well established, yet constantly evolving issues require new films, such as *We Will Not Be Beaten*, a film on domestic violence culled from videotaped interviews with women. By employing the name "validative" in place of *cinéma vérité*, we can combat the patriarchal annexation of the woman filmmaker as one of the boys, i.e., as a professional who is not of the culture being filmed." B. Ruby Rich, *In The Name of Feminist Film Criticism*.

⁴Guidebook to *Streetwise Women*, YOUTHLINK: Inner City, 151 Gerrard Street East, Toronto, Ontario M5A 2E4.

⁵Video producer Lisa Steele, from remarks to the Federal Task Force on Cultural Education, February 1991.

⁶*Ibid* footnote 4.

⁷*Ibid* footnote 2.

⁸"The feminist documentaries represent a use of, yet a shift in, the aesthetics of *cinéma vérité* due to the filmmakers' close identification with their subjects, participation in the women's movement, and sense of the films' intended effect. The structure of the consciousness-raising group becomes the deep structure repeated over and over in these films... All *cinéma vérité* is not the same, and much of the current discussion of and attack on cinematic realism dismisses the kind of documentary film style that most people are used to. If one looks closely at the relation of this politicized genre to the movement it is most intimately related to, we can see how both the exigencies and forms of organization of an ongoing political movement can affect the aesthetics of documentary film," Julia Lesage, *The Political Aesthetics of the Feminist Documentary Film*.

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P r i v i l e g e

A N E W

P O L I T I C S

O F

D I F F E R E N C E

BY BRENDA LONGFELLOW

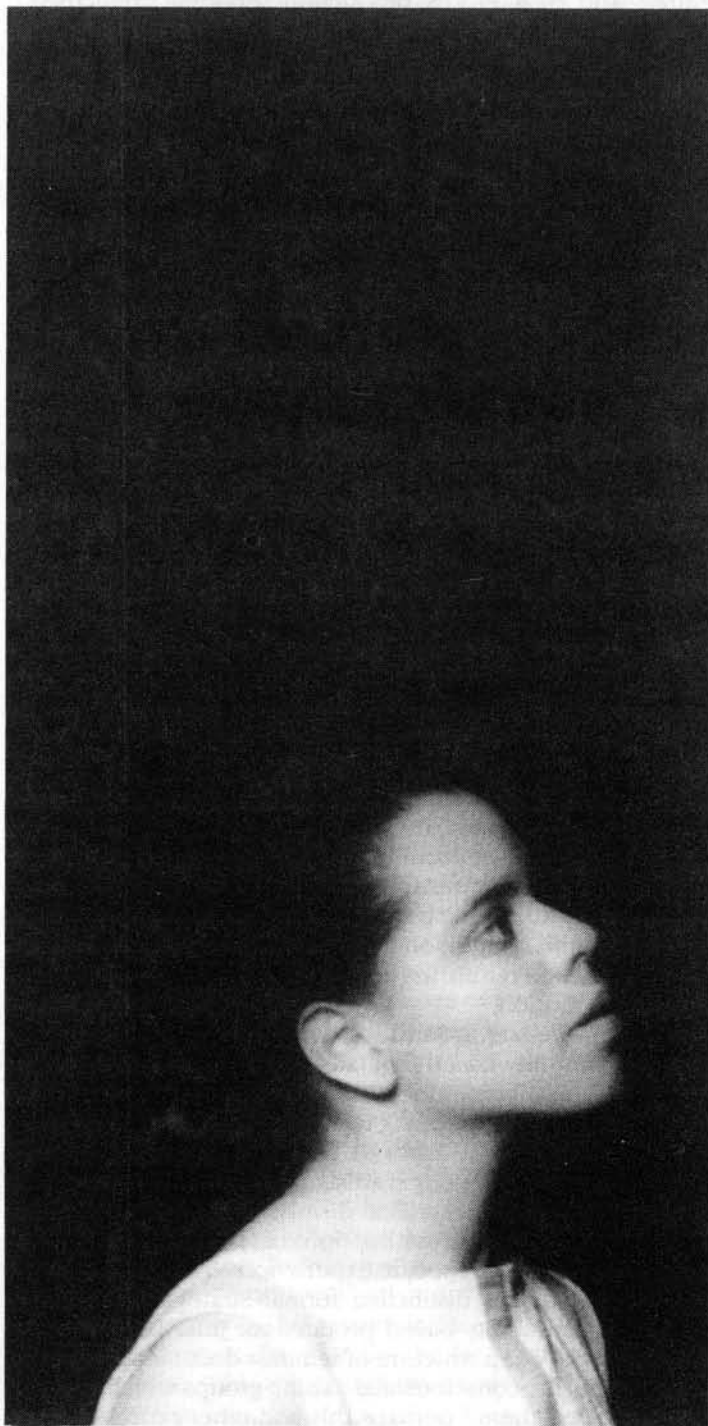
AT ONE POINT IN YVONNE RAINER'S MOST RECENT FILM, *Privilege*, the fictionalized black filmmaker, Yvonne Washington, admonishes her documentary subject Jenny on the political limitations of her "hot" flashback. The flashback obsessively features the story of the attempted rape of her neighbour, Brenda, by a Puerto Rican man, Carlos, who lives in the adjoining apartment block.

YVONNE And another thing, you've let Brenda off the hook by making common cause with Carlos without ever once implicating herself in this racist system. White women always use their victim status as a way of pleading innocent to the charge of racism. She is enjoying life in that exclusive apartment so please get yourself back — you have work to do.

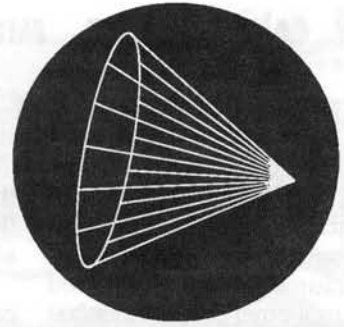
JENNY ... but I'm worried I'll only fall deeper into the soup ... Don't expect me to get it right. Just telling you this story in its barest form took all of my gumption. I'm scared of you now in ways I never was before.

YVONNE I guess I'd like you to put yourself in my shoes so I wouldn't have to explain everything. I'd like to forget about racism just as much as you. The difference is — you can, I can't.

GABRIELLA FARRAR, DAN BERKEY and ALICE SPIVAK in YVONNE RAINER'S *PRIVILEGE*



e g e



BUT HOW CAN A WHITE, MIDDLE CLASS, MIDDLE AGED, NEW YORK, AVANT-GARDE FILMMAKER STAR PRESUME TO DEAL WITH THE ISSUE OF RACE?

The dialogue might well stand as an excerpt from the kind of individual and collective discussion that has divided, galvanized, traumatized and inspired the feminist movement over the last several years. Challenges to the political and theoretical orthodoxy of a feminism preoccupied with gender (and in its psychoanalytic incarnation, sexual difference), voiced by lesbians and women of colour, have charged that such an exclusive preoccupation has ignored and misrepresented other forms of difference. And it is at this particular discursive conjuncture that *Privilege* insinuates itself.

But how can a white, middle class, middle aged, New York, avant-garde filmmaker star presume to deal with the issue of race?

By now it is obligatory for the feminist author to specify her place in the hierarchies of privilege and oppression, incanting, as Kobena Mercer has so wittily described it, "the race/class/gender mantra."¹ While I am unwilling to discount the political value of this incantation — it has, after all, been consciously articulated as a means of insisting on the locatedness and limitation of all knowledge — I do believe its ritualization rests on the problematic assumption that one only speaks from one's own "experience" (without ever deconstructing the ideological implications of this term) and that knowledge is directly determined by unitary/essential identities of race, class and gender.

For me, the immense strength of Rainer's film lies in its rejection of a monological model of identity and oppression which posits a doubly or triply oppressed subject, as if the complex operations of the regimes of class, race and gender could be reduced to quantum factors. While the film takes on these issues and the intricate and contradictory relations between them, it argues that relations of domination and oppression are differently articulated with respect to each variable. So that a Puerto Rican male might also be seen as the object of a fetishizing racist gaze. So

that a white, middle class artist might find herself rudely shunted to the other side of privilege because of her aging.

The subject that is both addressed and constituted in the textual operations of *Privilege* — an operation I find analogous to a cinematic "rack focus" where the relations between figure and ground continuously shift — is not simply a divided subject (divided between conscious and unconscious) but a radically heterogeneous and contradictory subject. For Trinh T. Minh-ha, a theorist and filmmaker who is also engaged in the project of re-theorizing difference, differences have to be grasped "both *between* and *within* entities, each of these being understood as multiple presence." "Not one, not two either," she writes. "'I' is, therefore, not a unified subject, a fixed identity, or that solid mass covered with layers of superficialities one has gradually to peel off before one can see its true face. 'I' is, itself, *infinite layers*."²

This notion of heterogeneity suggests that categories of identity are not unitary but are subject to internal variation. In *Privilege* such a variation is articulated in a monologue delivered by Carlos, who observes that,

Being Puerto Rican in New York City is totally different from the way we look at ourselves back in Puerto Rico. Here, skin determines who you are. Not only are there no gradations but if you look white and have a black mama, you are still considered black. In Puerto Rico, you would be white. Here skin colour precedes all other kinds of identification. In Puerto Rico there are a lot more other qualifications than black or white skin. There's class, facial features, texture of hair. There are the Blancos... there are the Indians. There are the Muerons with dark skin and a variety of features both Negroid and Caucasian; Negroes are like U.S. blacks. Then there's a term: Trienju. In Puerto Rico, a black can become a Trienju by achieving economic status or becoming a friend and he hasn't physically changed...

Refusing this complex and nuanced pattern of racial identification then comes to be seen as the major operation of racist discourse, which reduces its terms to the binary opposition of white/black or white/negro, as Carlos' friend

reminds him: "If there is any black people up on the moon, talking that moon talk, they is still negroes."

In a film heavily weighted with language, heterogeneity is principally embodied through linguistic difference. And indeed, the film's multi-accented chorus of Afro-American speech, Spanish, theoretical and "everyday" English illustrate it with Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia where each voice is thoroughly socialized as a representative of a distinct social and ideological position.

The heteroglossia of *Privilege* functions such that the diversity and plurality of these voices never dissolve into a single perspective or consciousness but rather exist on different registers, generating, as Robert Stam has observed, "a dialogic dynamism among themselves."³

This dialogism is repeated at the level of the film's composition, which includes video transfers, computer text and intertitles, vintage '60s footage of medical films, a hot dramatic flashback, a clip from a Hollywood film, Lenny Bruce clips, simulated documentary interviews, a dream sequence and a multitude of text/image, sound/image relations. The hothouse quality of the film, however, goes beyond the modernist illusionism of a text and is intended to break with the monocular perspectivism of classical narrative whose authority is based on the repression of other voices, of alternative world views and perspectives. By contrast, hot in pursuit of a number of different narratives, a

GABRIELLE FARRAR
in **PRIVILEGE**,
a film by
YVONNE RAINER



central strategy of *Privilege* is to continuously shift perspective, the site of enunciation and the mode and form of address. This strategy is apparent from the very beginning of the film, which opens with three brief video-to-film documentary talking heads.

All shot in medium close-up, the first features a black woman (artist Faith Ringgold) who sardonically claims that "aging is a bitch." The second, a white middle class woman whose button-down prim hairstyle and dress contrast vividly with the "alternative" feminist style of Ringgold, testifies that she has no problems with menopause. The third woman volunteers that she enjoys aging but precisely because of the privilege and comforts of her life. Reverberations are elicited by the difference between these three responses, which indicate that the experience of menopause is determined by factors of class and race. The dissertation on menopause then moves from documentary testimony to a

clip from a Hollywood film featuring Liz Taylor, who complains that she doesn't want to go around "uterusless" to which her friend ironically vows to "will menopause away."

Loud applause initiates the next sequence when, as Rainer herself sits down and stares into the lens, a cool jazz score begins. The image then cuts to a computer intertitle: *Privilege/A Film by Yvonne Rainer/And Many Others*. The allusion to these "Many Others" in the title functions not only to undermine the mythology of the artist/god as singular source of meaning, but it marks the beginning of a certain dispersion in which other sources of enunciation will come to occupy the text.

A track back from Rainer, holding a bottle of (Lacombe?) moisturizer beside her face, is followed by excerpts from vintage educational films featuring middle aged white doctors who offer paternalistic advice concerning the "menopausal patient" such as: "Al-

though her role as a mother is over, she can enter a new role as a wife and woman." These excerpts, as amusing and dated as they are, function to indicate the pervasive and historic role of the medical establishment in what Foucault described in *The History of Sexuality* as the medicalization and "hysterization" of women's bodies.

The camera then cuts back to Rainer grotesquely mis-applying lipstick, beginning her lengthy address as "Dr. Helen Caldicott," lamenting that, politically, women have achieved nothing and announcing her retirement because "the men did me in." As Rainer/Caldicott speaks, there is a cut to the image of a black female signer in which the Rainer/Caldicott speaker appears in closed caption, a reversal of the usual hierarchy which assigns the closed caption to the signer and the full frame to the speaker.

A computer intertitle appears which repeats the name of the film, "*Privilege*," but with an alteration in the second title,

"A Film by Yvonne Washington and Many Others." In this substitution of "Washington" for "Rainer," a shift which appears to be mediated through the black signer, authorial delegation passes from Rainer to Washington as her fictional stand-in and, more provocatively, as her black other. Washington's voice-over begins over this title, voicing narrative material that is uncannily contiguous with the Caldicott monologue. "I was bone tired," she begins, "I had been careening around the country at a breakneck pace for too long. Even to my ears my lectures were beginning to sound like ranting and raving. I had been threatening to retire. So why didn't I?"

Her voice-over veers to another set of narrative details, however, as she speaks of her work as an activist championing the cause of the community of signers and of her decision to make a documentary film about menopause, "[her] own change of life pointing the way." What had then begun as a documentary address on aging moves

through an exaggeratedly artificial address on women's political failures to another story, appropriating and transforming narrative elements as this radically heterogeneous textual weave unfolds.

What does this shifting of authorial delegation refer to, this positioning of the black woman as fictional stand-in for the white author? At some level, the substitution obviously responds to the accusation of racial blindness directed at white feminists by feminists of colour. Indeed, as a textual in-joke, Jenny questions Yvonne at one point, "Why don't you have any black women? White women have been interviewing each other for too long." The question is an odd one, out of synch in some way since Yvonne Washington (a black woman) has already appeared in the film. Is the question then addressed beyond the boundary of the diegesis to that other Yvonne, whose response is precisely her silence, her delegation of author-ity to this black other? To assume, however, that the multi-racial representation in

Privilege could be reduced to a hip multiculturalism is to underestimate the particular discursive force and power these characters assume within the text. Washington's almost continuous offscreen presence, her voice-over interjections into Jenny's flashback and her offscreen interrogation of Jenny in the stylized documentary sequences mark her with the traditional authority reserved for the "voice of god" narrator in classical documentary — that narrator, as Mary Ann Doane has observed, whose disembodiedness and exteriority to the image mark "him" with the transcendental power of the word.⁴ This transcendental power of the narrator, however, is held in suspense in *Privilege*, both indicated and made ironic due to the fictionalized status of the voice itself.

At another level, I would argue that the delegation of authority to the black voice provides the means for Rainer to refuse her whiteness, in the manner in which Marilyn Frye has spoken of this political gesture. Frye has argued that



"whiteness" (just as much as "blackness") is not an essential phenomenon but a social construction. And just as feminists have counselled men to set themselves against masculinity, she writes:

Likewise, I can set myself against Whiteness: I can give myself the injunction to stop being white ... If being white is not finally a matter of skin colour, which is beyond our power to change, but of politics and power, then perhaps white individuals in a white supremacist society are not doomed to dominance by logic or nature.⁵

In speaking of this delegation of authority, however, I have perhaps too hastily misrepresented Yvonne Washington as an individualized character, for clearly her "voice," her interjections, her socio-economic analysis of racism represent the combined voices of a black feminist perspective. The compelling intertextual quality of her voice, moreover, is reinforced at one point when the camera pans Yvonne's living room to reveal a stack of books on top of which black/feminist/activist Bell Hook's *Talking Back/Thinking Feminist/Thinking*

Black is prominently displayed.

In a 1985 article in *Wide Angle*, Rainer comments that the constant intertextual citations in her dialogue help "foreground not only the production of narrative but its frustration and cancellation as well ... Words are uttered but not possessed by my performers as they operate within the filmic frame but do not propel a filmic plot."⁶ Each voice, as such, is never singular but is always, as Bakhtin defines heteroglos-

sia, "internally dialogized," "serv[ing] two speakers at the same time and express[ing] simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author."⁷ Characters in this textual milieu function less as psychologically embodied beings than as ciphers through which various discourses are represented. And, indeed, the film presents a heterogeneous discursive field including Eldridge Cleaver, Franz Fanon, Joan Nestle, Lenny Bruce, Susan Brownmiller, Heresies, Piri Thomas, Ntozake Shange, Teresa de Lauretis, etc.

One discourse in the film which is not bound to this specifically intertextual field is the discourse of experience represented in the brief video-to-film clips of various women who are interviewed on the subject of menopause. The experiential, however, is also continuously related to a larger social field through computer statistics on menopause, medical treatment and violence against women.

The voice of experience is also presented (and ironically so) in the fictionalized sequences featuring Jenny, a white middle-aged artist who, very reluctantly, takes her place as the documentary subject of Yvonne Washington's film. In many ways, Jenny, too, functions as a fictional stand-in for Rainer. She is an ex-dancer, a New York intellectual/artist/free spirit whose age approximates Rainer's own. Jenny's descriptions of her hot flashes, and battles with the medical profession over her change of life, might very well function as the sort of "mediated autobiography" that B. Ruby Rich sees as a recurring thematic in all of Rainer's work.⁸

Jenny's voice, however, is never rendered as an entirely authentic voice of experience. The all-too-apparent stylization of her "interview" and the studied cadence of her delivery clearly situate her as a fictionalized construct. Her interview, moreover, is continuously interrupted by distortions of her voice, out-of-synch sound and by images of

another woman (listed in the credits as her double) and alternate images of herself dolled up in make-up, earrings and leather jacket.

Her testimony on the experience of menopause is very shortly derailed, as she prefers to talk about the time when she was a "luscious young dancer" in the '60s. A narrative contract is struck with Washington, who agrees that she will listen to Jenny's story about the time when she was whistled at on the street if Jenny will eventually come around to speaking about her hot flashes. Thus begins Jenny's "hot flashback" which both discursively and formally occupies the centre of the complex textual weave that is *Privilege*.

While the narrative contract holds out the promise that we are going to return to Jenny as the "luscious" specular object of her youthful self, this promise is never fulfilled as Jenny appears as her forty-something self in the flashback. "What's wrong?" Jenny asks Washington, "you want to hold up my flashback for some expensive illusionism?" Obviously that choice (not to figure a luscious young dancer's body) is integrally connected to Rainer's consistent endeavour to thwart the voyeurism of the male gaze. In *The Man Who Erwed Women*, for example, the central character avoids specularization by never appearing onscreen, or rather, appearing onscreen only through metonymic representations: a voice, her shoulder, the back of her coat. In *Privilege*, the move against the objectifying gaze occurs not through the absence of the body of the woman, but through her presence as an aging (gracefully and not) female who, in a patriarchal culture, is no longer considered an object of specular fascination. Within the fictionalized interview with Jenny, it is the recognition of this loss, of the loss of a socially ordained sexuality produced through the objectifying gaze of the (male) Other, that becomes a source of anguish. The film's continual excavation of the medical films would seem to indicate, moreover, that for a woman of "a certain age," "past

BLAIRE BARON and
RICO LEWIS
in YVONNE RAINER'S
PRIVILEGE

"WHEN YOU LOOK AT ME, " CARLOS EXCLAIMS, "YOU SEE A DARK CONTINENT. SOMETHING UNKNOWN, EXCITING, FRIGHTENING, DIFFERENT."



her prime," "no spring chicken," social control and definition occur not through the voyeurizing gaze but through the construction of female aging as pathology, supported and institutionalized through the medical establishment.

At its sparest, Jenny's hot flashback to her New York period of the '60s begins with her moving into a white segregated apartment building where she meets Brenda, a lab technician and lesbian who works at Bellvue. Next to their building is a black segregated building where a Puerto Rican couple, Carlos and Digna, live. One evening, after a particularly violent domestic altercation, Digna is taken off to Bellvue. Carlos, smitten with the inaccessible Brenda, appears naked one night in her apartment with rape on his mind.

Her flashback, however, unravels less as a narrative anecdote (although it is this, too, complete with its own idiosyncratic series of epiphanies) than as an investigation of the social co-ordinates

of space,⁹ the segregated space of apartment dwelling in New York and the apartheid space of narrative which pushes other narratives of class and race to the periphery. These other narratives, however, and their narrative actors refuse their segregated status. Jenny is eventually displaced as enunciating source of her own displaced narrative by these other voices, particularly Digna, who insists on popping up at various moments in Jenny's story to point out her race and class blindness.

Like Washington's voice, Digna's voice is privileged in the text, both in the sequences where she speaks directly to the camera (fictionally, from the psychiatric ward in Bellvue) and in those sequences of Jenny's flashback where she interrupts the diegetic unity to observe Jenny and her lover in bed, or dons a Carmen Miranda get-up and sits in the back of their car, citing poverty statistics.

Jenny's loss of enunciating authority also occurs in the confrontation be-

tween Carlos and Brenda, which acts as a catalyst for an extended and frequently playful battle of the texts. *Privilege* might feature the same streets scored by racial violence as Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing*, but here, the violence is all verbal. Slowed down, repeated, interrupted and obsessively returned to, the attempted rape "scene" functions as a highly charged point of textual affect. For it is not really a conventional narrative sequence of temporal and spatial unity.

Here space is radically heterogeneous and fragmented. Framing and camera movement disclose space as an artificial construct of the studio, panning past ladders, lights, a soundperson, various shadowy figures who might be observers or filmworkers. All realistic co-ordinates are left behind as space is reconstituted through the haunting quality of the black and white, the unlikely juxtaposition of objects within the frame (a child's rocking chair, a doll's teacup). A space

"HEY," BRENDA REMINDS HIM, "I'M SUPPOSED TO BE THE DARK CONTINENT. FREUD CALLED WOMEN THE DARK CONTINENT."

**ALICE SPIVAK in
YVONNE RAINER'S
PRIVILEGE**

of nowhere, of temporal stasis, where the narrative is frustrated and cancelled by a compelling textual digression which, as I have suggested, becomes a kind of thematic and political centre.

Part of the textual density of the non-scene of the attempted rape has to do with its potential reiteration of the stereotype of the black rapist, that paranoiac projection of animal sexuality onto the figure of the black man which has been a staple of racist mythology. The stereotype is denaturalized both through

the formal disjunctions of the text — where, for example, the position of the rapist is occupied simultaneously and alternatively by a black actor, Carlos, and a white actor — and through the representation of rape within political and theoretical discourses. The second sequence of the attempted rape scene features a long studio crane shot which begins with an extreme high angle, revealing the studio with its lights, ladders, workers, props and set and moves down to the two actors sitting on a couch in Brenda's living room set where they are reciting, sometimes in chorus, a text by Eldridge Cleaver on his use of rape as a political weapon. This recital is interrupted by Yvonne's voice-over, which demands:

Jenny, why are you telling me all this? I don't need to hear how Eldridge Cleaver raped to save the black race. He made a much greater contribution than inflaming white paranoia.

The camera cuts to Brenda in a medium shot who snarls: "The problem with men

is that their dignity is located in their balls." There is a medium shot of Carlos sitting on the couch, fully dressed and laughing. In a reverse shot, Brenda berates him for his ignorance of her desires, concluding, "You probably think I want to be raped." In response, Carlos begins an interior monologue:

She has an avid curiosity about my sexual endowments. She likes to imagine the fucking that goes on among Blacks and Latinos in this block. She thinks we're looser and less inhibited because we come from the steamy tropics.

In each case what is presented as retort and accusation are the doxa of racist and sexist mythologies internalized and projected onto the other. The impression conveyed is that any real communication between these two differently constituted positions of "otherness" is prevented by the weight of the cultural inheritance of these mythologies. Each can only engage in respective monological discourses of anti-colonialism or feminism in which similarities and differences are presented but never resolved. Countering Brenda's recitation of Teresa de Lauretis on the sexual difference operative within narrative ("...man is the active principle of culture ... woman is the inert obstacle to this transformative striving ... monster, object."¹⁰), Carlos cites Franz Fanon on the alienation suffered by the black man as he is objectified and produced as racist other within the gaze of the white man. Within that space of the discursive confrontation, each is set in competition with the other for greater entitlement to the position of radical otherness.

"When you look at me," Carlos exclaims, "you see a dark continent. Something unknown, exciting, frightening, different."

"Hey," Brenda reminds him, "I'm supposed to be the dark continent. Freud called women the dark continent."

Privilege makes no endeavour to resolve this discursive confrontation or the confrontation between Jenny/Brenda's psychoanalytic explanation of racism (as grounded in western culture's aver-

sion to shit and blood) and Yvonne's socio-economic analysis of racism. The point, as the film maintains, is not to reduce differences through the construction of a monologic explanatory paradigm, but to keep the dialogue flowing. And in its resistance to any singular perspective, in its formal and discursive commitment to difference, *Privilege* envisions a new form of subjectivity both as a position within the text and as a utopic means of social change. As the last computer intertitle informs us: UTOPIA: THE MORE IMPOSSIBLE IT SEEMS, THE MORE NECESSARY IT BECOMES.

1 Kobena Mercer in an unpublished talk delivered as part of the "Race to the Screen" conference at the Euclid Theatre in Toronto, February 1991.

2 Trinh T. Minh-Ha, *Woman/Native/Other* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 94.

3 Robert Stam, "Mikhail Bakhtin and Left Cultural Critique" in E. Ann Kaplan ed., *Postmodernism and Its Discontents* (London: Verso, 1989), p. 128.

4 Mary Ann Doane, "The Voice in the Cinema: The Articulation of Body and Space" in E. Weis and J. Belton eds., *Theory and Practice/Film Sound* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

5 Marilyn Frye, "On Being White" in *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory* (Trumansburg, New York: The Crossing Press, 1983), p. 118, p. 127.

6 Yvonne Rainer, "More Kicking and Screaming from the Narrative Front/Backwater," *Wide Angle* Vol 17 #1-2 (Spring 1985).

7 Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, Michael Holquist ed., Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist trans. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 324.

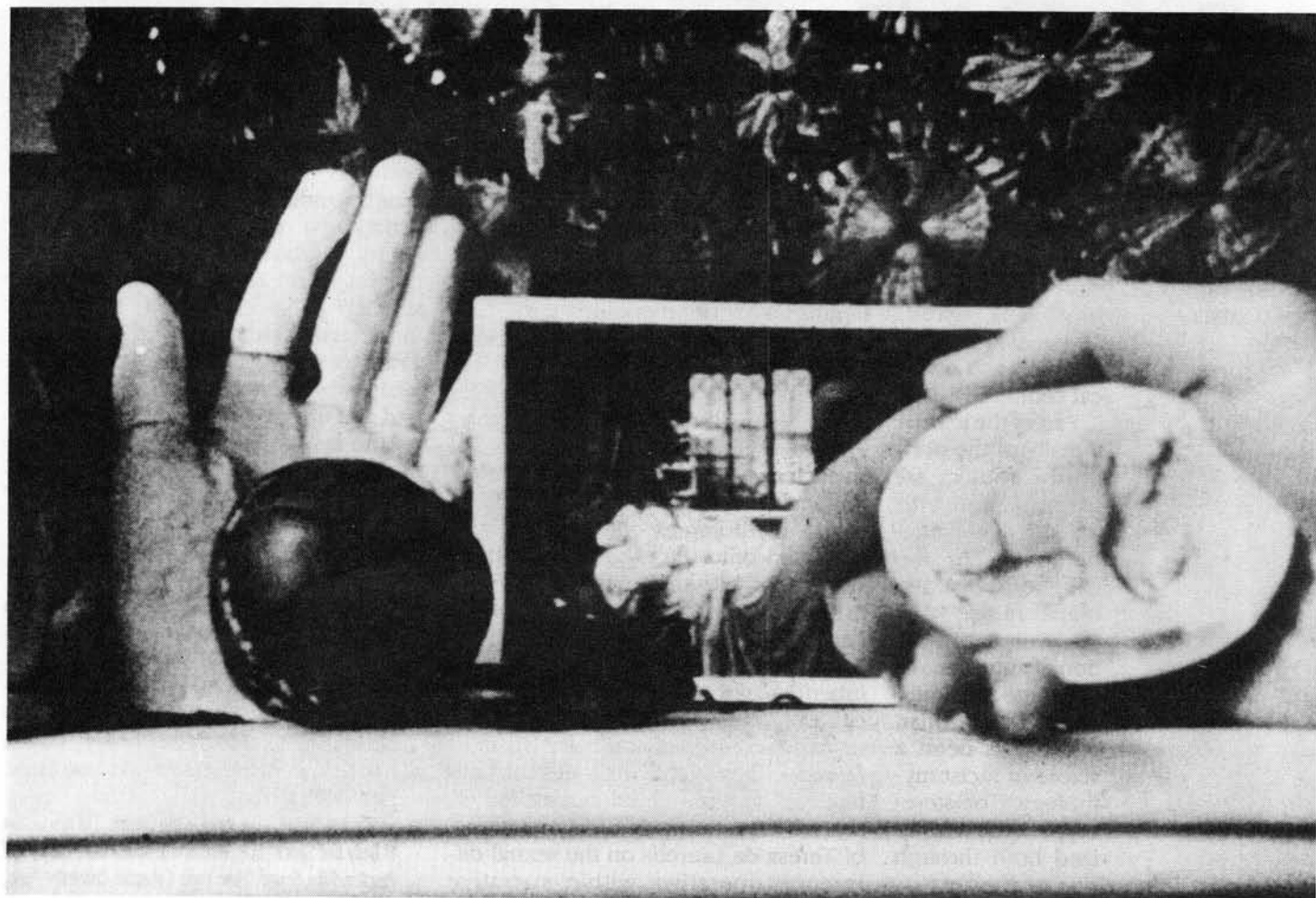
8B. Ruby Rich, "Yvonne Rainer: An Introduction" in *The Films of Yvonne Rainer* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1981).

9The notion of a politics of space in Rainer's *The Man Who Envied Women* is discussed by Peggy Phelan, "Yvonne Rainer's *The Man Who Envied Women*" in Arthur and Louise Kroker eds., *The Hysterical Male* (Montreal: Culturetexts, 1991).

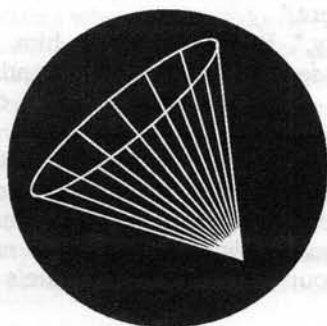
10Teresa de Lauretis, "Desire in Narrative" in *Alice Doesn't* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

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YVONNE RAINER'S JOURNEYS FROM BERLIN/1971



**A C A U T I O N A R Y T A L E :
T H E L U R E O F C E N T R E I N
Y V O N N E R A I N E R ' S
C I N E M A**



"TURN YOUR BACK ON NOISY SELF-EFFACEMENT; DECLARE YOUR MEMORIES**BANKRUPT." JOURNEYS FROM BERLIN/1971**BY **IVONE MARGULIES**

THIS ESSAY ADDRESSES YVONNE RAINER'S INITIAL ENGAGEMENT WITH FILMIC NARRATIVE, THE decentering potentialities of minimalism and performance, the lures of collage and juxtaposition and how these relate to the structuring paradox of Rainer's work: the need to make the personal neutral versus the need to politicize it, and thereby give collective status to a personal voice.

My desire is to investigate the pertinence of the feminist motto "the personal is political," within the frame of a minimalist aesthetics and within a political period characterized by a critical revisionism of totalizing systems (post-May '68). The effects of this conjunction and its impact of Rainer's work bring up the question of how to create a positive representation that aims at a non-totalizing status.

Most recent critical writing on Yvonne Rainer has focused on her engagement with narrative through intertextuality, dislocated forms of address, and her use of voice-over.¹ Especially in her two latest films, *The Man Who Envied Women* (1985) and *Privilege* (1990), Rainer grapples with the problematics exposed in feminist film theory and critical theories of difference. *Privilege's* theme — women during menopause — indicates a desire for a more direct involvement with feminist issues. While this essay examines two earlier works by Rainer, I believe the issues addressed here illuminate what Rainer perpetuates in subsequent films. The increasingly ambitious scope of questioning — a thematization of political issues such as housing, U.S. intervention in Central America, power in and through discursive practices — suggests a totalist impulse (a desire to cover multiple grounds, to address all

contradictions).

Her express desire for a decentering aesthetics, exemplified by the multiple endings of *Privilege*, indicates the need for an ultimately correct and final solution. This need for a politically correct representation (an idealized telos of "complete" contradiction) undergrids Rainer's impulse toward a decentered and juxtapositional aesthetics.

In her essay, "A Quasi Survey in Some 'Minimalist' Tendencies..." (1966), Rainer charts some of the parallels between minimalist sculpture and New Dance. Minimalism opposes a motivated and causal dramatic structure through a logic of sheer accumulation. Seriality and repetition substitute for conflict and climax. Development and hierarchy are de-emphasized and performance itself, with its characteristic embrace of flamboyance and virtuosity, is replaced by the highlighting of "banal-

ity" and task-like activities. She writes; *The artifice of performance has been reevaluated in that action of what one does is more important than the exhibition of character and attitude, and that action can best be focused on through the submerging of personality; so ideally one is not even oneself, one is a "neutral doer."*² In her text, Rainer taps into a major consequence of the minimalist impulse regarding drama and performance. How is one to "neutralize" the humanist and romantic implications of an art work that depends fundamentally on the human body? The specific ramifications for drama and performance, and ultimately for cinema, of contemporary art's predilection to efface the Self are articulated in Rainer's text and performance pieces. In defining common aims and means for the dispersion of authorship in sculpture and dance, Yvonne Rainer stated her minimalist motto: "Stand, walk, run, eat, show motives or move or be moved by something rather than

oneself." At issue in "being moved by something rather than oneself" is the disbelief in an essential subjectivity, be it that of author or character. Thus Rainer establishes a direct link between minimalist strategies meant to unbalance the hierarchies that sustain Aristotelian premises of causality and dramatic development and the larger question, addressed by deconstruction and by Lacanian psychoanalytic theory alike — that of the appearance or disappearance of the Subject in the art work.

The notion of equivalence, or lack of hierarchy, figures prominently among minimalist strategies of decentering. Equivalence can be better understood as the seemingly non-teleological accumulation of scenes and gestures that structure *Lives of Performers*; slight variations in angles or movements construct a performatic seriality. The films are formally structured as a cumulation of permutations over a single site, gesture or situation, without ever relying on dramatic causality. Rainer marks her anti-hierarchizing gesture through the adoption of a parataxic model of discourse. The term parataxic was used to describe *Journeys From Berlin/1971* (1980) in the Castelli Catalogue:

Parataxic: characterized by or relating to a mode of individual experience in which persons, events and relationships are perceived as discrete phenomena, in which occurrences in the real world are seen as having no sequential or logical relationship but in which all external stimuli have only idiosyncratic autistic significance

Rainer's formal strategy of a-logical seriality is thus symptomatically injected with psychological affect. And in fact the "psychologizing" of a decentered discourse characterizes Rainer's approach to subject representation.

Given the conflicting demands of cinematic narrative on the one hand — its demand for climax — and the non-teleological progression of minimalist art on the other, my concern is two-fold. How does the centrifugal and associative thrust of heterogeneity fare regarding: first, the inscription of Rainer's presence in her films through a mode precisely fashioned to problematize if not to erase authorial inscription; and second, the filmmaker's claim of a social dimension for the personal that bypasses the facile rhetoric of representativeness, that is, the unfolding of the notion of representation from its aesthetic to a political repercussion?

THIS NEED FOR A POLITICALLY CORRECT REPRESENTATION (AN IDEALIZED TELOS OF "COMPLETE" CONTRADICTION) UNDERGRIDS RAINER'S IMPULSE TOWARD A DECENTERED AND JUXTAPOSITIONAL AESTHETICS.

The notion of representativeness is at the core of tentative expansion of the subjective "I" onto a collective dimension. Nowhere is this potential layering clearer than in the notion of an individual character standing for a generic type. Discredited, this essentialist and bloated version of subject representation attains, in politically or socially oriented films, a tone that ranges from the allegorical, the overloaded signifier, to its flipside, a signified of neutrality (Ulrike Ottinger's work vs. De Sica's *Umberto D.*).

More immediately relevant to the issue of representativeness is the feminist documentary of the late '60s and early '70s; *The Woman's Film* (1969) (a compilation of interviews in which mostly working class women — black, white and one chicana — talk about their lives) or *Janie's Janie* (1971), constitute privileged instances of the meshing of cinema and politics, a spectator-shared consciousness-raising process. These films articulate polivocality — several voices that stand for their idiosyncrasies. Yet, in those films, they coalesce into a collective configuration, compromising at times the polemical thrust of crucial issues — class, racial tension among members of the same class — in favour of an unproblematic notion of solidarity.³

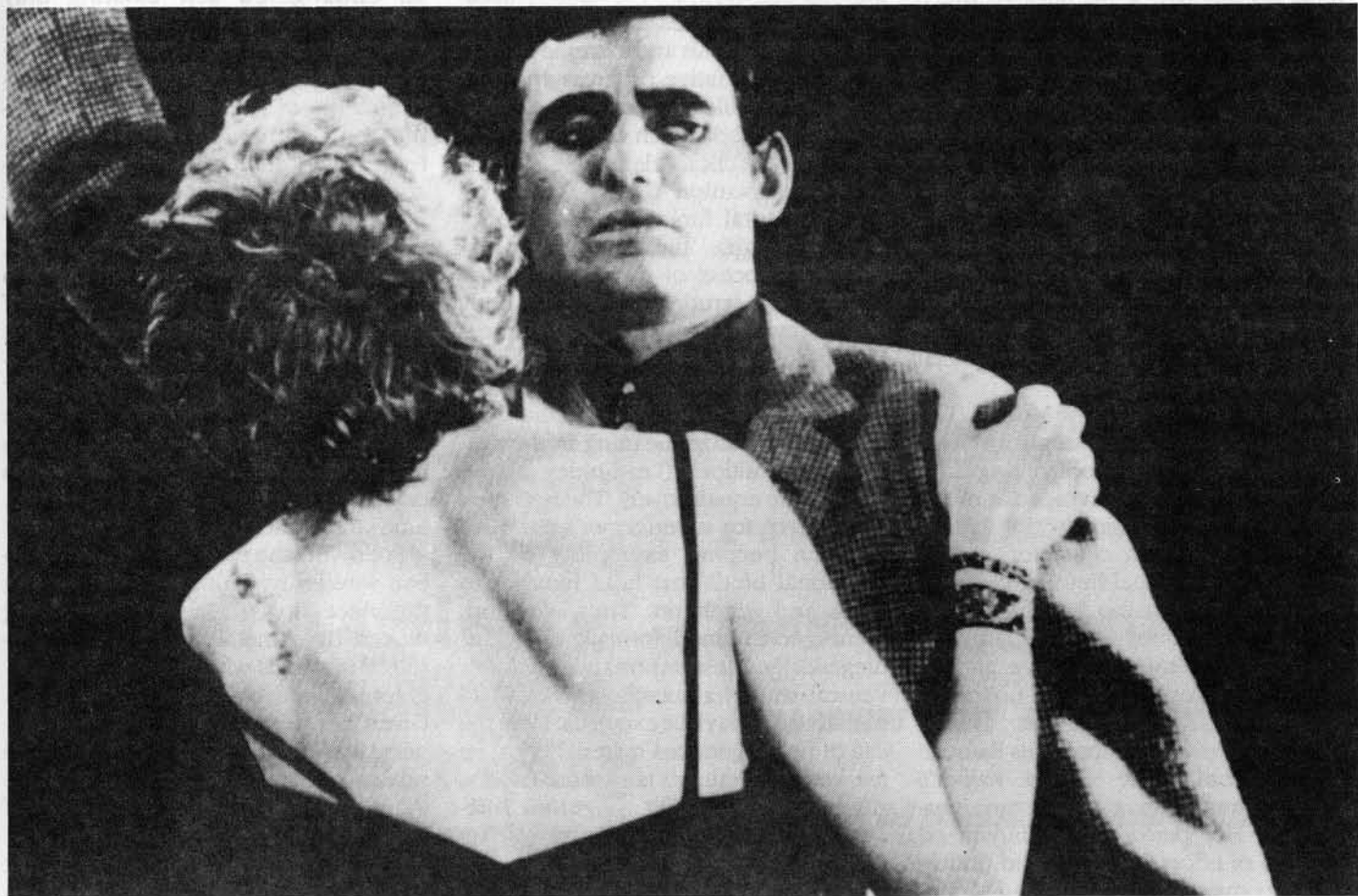
In historicizing the inevitability of the meeting between avant-garde cinema and feminism, Laura Mulvey evaluates its initial phase:

...their weakness lies in limitations of the *cinéma-vérité* tradition ... (the) assumption that the camera ... by registering typical shared experiences can create political unity through the process of identification.⁴

Mulvey proposes instead a radical formalism and a complex and sophisticated use of theory — psychoanalysis, deconstruction and semiotics — as a structuring model to escape the immediacy of what was seen as a basically expressive use of the medium. The unmasking of the way meaning is produced seemed to result from the implementation of theories based on the splitting of the sign, the workings of the unconscious and of ideology.⁵

The second phase of feminist film resulted in films employing a distancing vocabulary in order to reformulate conventions of address. This new strategy of address attempted to formally replicate narrative and discursive themes, one primary theme being sexual difference. Like Rainer's films, Mulvey and Wollen's *Riddles of the Sphinx* and Sally Potter's *Thriller* are examples of a cinema attempting to enunciate a theoretical discourse.

It is important for our purposes to note how the critique levelled against the rhetorical approach of the "feminist documentary" — its "registering of typical shared experiences" — is dealt with in films that set themselves apart from the essentialist thrust of the militant feminist film. Rephrasing the question: How is it that films by Rainer deal with the demands of representativeness — i.e. the political dimension of subject representation, the very quest of feminism — without falling into another form, perhaps more elaborate, of essentialism? How endemic to the feminist project is the question of identification? It is my claim, to be assessed in the analysis of

VALDA SETTERFIELD and JOHN ERDMAN in YVONNE RAINER's *LIVES OF PERFORMERS*

Rainer's work, that the use of cinema to illustrate a thesis (feminist, social, deconstructive) displaces the question of identification from the relationship of identity between image and reality (the realist representation under attack) to that of an analogy sought between image and Idea (or theory), constituting an allegorical figuration.

In "Avant Garde Film and Theory," Noel Carroll carefully notes that most of what is called theoretical in avant garde or experimental cinema has to do with "the urge to reflect the concerns of a given culture or subculture in the various symbol systems of each medium."⁶ The main modality of "theoretical films" is that of miming, through "elliptical symbol systems," the theories they embrace. One could characterize the relation between filmic representation and theory as a hermeneutic key smuggled into the film's body serving as

a reading aid, a supplement to explanation. This clue, offered through the text, defines some works as allegorical — i.e. their textual system "explicitly indicates the relationship of its images to examples and precepts,"⁷ thus guiding how its commentary should proceed — others as didactic (the naïve allegory), others still as reflexive.

Carroll's text refers to the processes of translation commanding the ways in which a homology is drawn between theoretical statements and the possibilities of cinematic representation. My concern is to examine the ways in which Rainer's work absorbs the input surrounding her "subculture": she gradually incorporates a theoretical rhetoric, as well as limns a homology between discursive practices — such as deconstruction and psychoanalysis — and her filmic structuring.⁸

Yvonne Rainer's *Lives of Performers*

(1972) states its debt to minimalism by adopting the quotidian and the personal as subject matter for stylization, by making use of task-like performances and non-dramatic time.

I like to think that I have a careful screening process operating to exclude personal material that applies uniquely to my experience.... ([W]hen and if I become aware of the prevalence of intestinal difficulties in the population of my audience, then maybe I will consider dealing with that as material!)

YVONNE RAINER⁹

The problematic status of identification within experimental and avant-garde work usually leads to an avoidance of critically assessing issues of character and narration, except as general negation of psychological constructs. In studying the work of a filmmaker whose constant concern seems to be the inscription of personal, autobiographical material on a non-dramatic and non-psychological register, my main focus

remains on the notion of character.

The guise of a diegetic presence affords the character a dialogical nature: it can incorporate both subject of enunciation (author, director, writer) and addressee (the spectator). Notions of authorship, narrator and character are further qualified in Rainer's dispersal of enunciation via multiple performers in *Lives of Performers*. Rainer's polyvocality confuses the terms of autobiographical writing and asserts alternate subject representations. Her use of autobiographical markers, and the specific transformations this personal material undergoes within a minimalist ethos, are of special interest here.

In "Looking Myself in the Mouth" (October 17), Rainer makes explicit one of her major concerns in confronting cinematic narrative — the avoidance of the myth of a unified subject with its attendant reliance upon character, author and narrator. Textual heterogeneity — fragmentation, allusion, juxtaposition of styles — constitutes Rainer's particular mode of addressing narrative and its dangers, figured in the key notion of identification.¹⁰

Lives of Performers represents Rainer's passage from dance to film. Rainer's work in dance was resolutely anti-hierarchical. Her performance minimized displays of effort (or goal), and undermined conventions of main and secondary roles. The intention and effects are clear: an assault on telos and pathos. Decentering, achieved on stage through the simultaneous presentation of events, is, however, necessarily sacrificed in film to a directing, exacting eye — that of the camera. Cinema fractures and orders a supposedly holistic long shot and long take of live performance. Cinema's temporality is marked by a material succession; frame after frame, shot after shot. Indeed, it is this notion of linearity that is challenged by Rainer's cinematic structure. She proceeds paradigmatically. As soon as a statement or dialogue threatens to become fiction (that is, to acquire the weight of belief), it is replaced by another. She pre-empts dramatic development, preferring instead a fugue-like accretion of discourses (in *Lives of Performers*, variations on the private relationships among artists). Her editing and camera movement do not analyse a continuum in order to recreate its totality. In *Lives of*

Performers the paradigmatic substitution of a body and an utterance for another that occupies the same syntactical function creates a sense of futile arbitrariness. Stasis and extreme formalism inhibit narrative progress and coalesce into an allegory of self-enclosure.

Rainer reworks each of the *mise-en-scène's* syntactical elements: subject, verb, and locution change. However, their structural function and place remains the same: the outgrowth of an ongoing process of cross-verification. The camera scrutinizes Shirley's body from bottom to top as she embraces Fernando. A cut substitutes Shirley for Valda in a contrasting downward camera tilt. The tableaux configurations arrest and formalize meaning in the performers' positions (i.e. Shirley equals Valda, wife equals lover). The restricted alternatives for a performer's narrative function become exemplary of the emotional binds that hold him/her to stasis and repetition. Thus, development is constrained, formally as well as diegetically. Most importantly, Rainer's vertical, structural substitutions open up narrative to essayistic excursus. Here the use of heterogeneous material is not so marked as in Rainer's later work (*A Film About a Woman Who...*, *Kristina Talking Pictures*, *Journeys From Berlin/1971*, *The Man Who Envied Women*). Her collage consists mostly in interrupting the dramatic flow of exchanges by adding one more example. Her narrative swells without advancing. It shuffles discourse and bodies, allowing no stability between names, voices and bodies.

In "Grand Union Dreams," the dance piece that generated *Lives of Performers*, Rainer's performers were named "Gods," "Heroes," and "Humans," but as noted by Annette Michelson, they had lost any possibility of mythical redemption.¹¹ The concreteness of bodies and props clashed with mythical references, creating a level of disjunction in which "neutral doers" were rift between an analytic, secular consciousness and the longing for a fulfilment of myth and storytelling. *Lives of Performers* foregoes the earlier work's preoccupation with desiccated mythology and moves onto more prosaic concerns. The film directly addresses a subjectivity at loss. Its recognizable tone is that of psychoanalysis and its narrative is a manic retelling of

subjective states and bourgeois dramas. It indicates, through anxious logorrhea, an endangered self existing only through endless utterance.

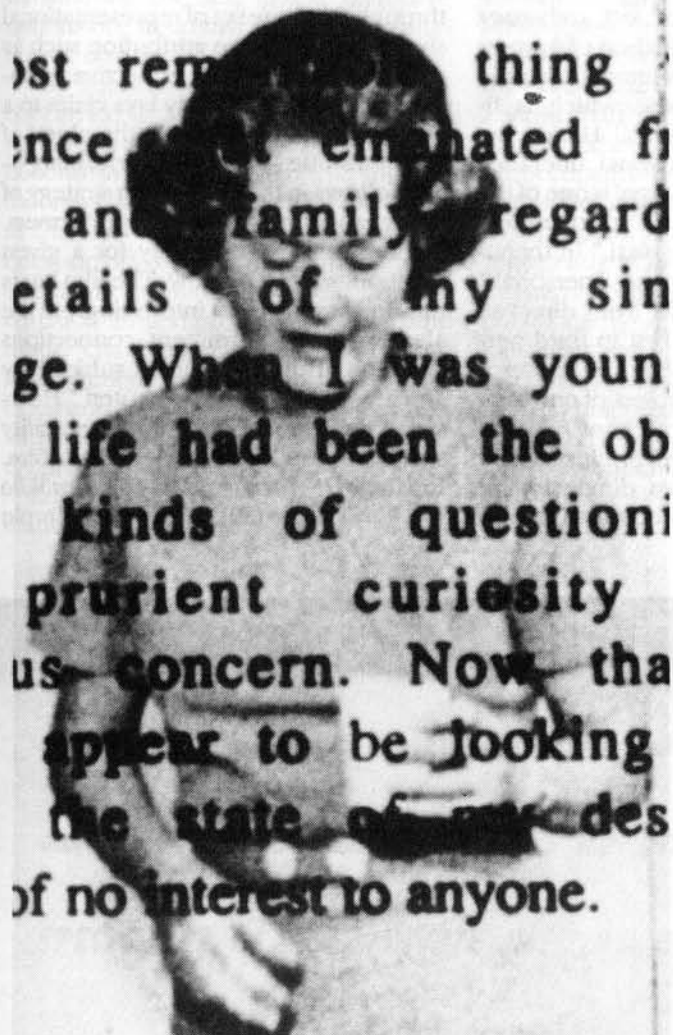
The contrast between the extreme formalism of the film and the introspective nature of the verbal exchanges — the use of verbs such as feel, think, remember, added to the pronoun "I" — constitutes Rainer's quest and question. Rainer's tendency to diffuse subjectivity through a hyperbolic, if disembodied, interiority lends a paradoxical tone to *Lives of Performers'* exploration of narrativity's conflictual dynamic. In explaining her way of drafting "character," Rainer says that the "easiest way" was to think about character from her "own point of view," one of the results being that "all the performers become extensions of this point of view, sometimes interchangeably."¹²

Following the modernist injunction to ban interiority, Rainer's credo, stating the necessity of "moving or being moved by something other than oneself,"¹³ is at odds with her use of autobiographical material for her quasi-plots. Given her need to simultaneously disperse and disclose the personal and the private, a constant attention is needed to the distribution and redimensioning of the "I."

The issue of representativeness is at stake here, cloaked as it might seem under an inordinate and stylized clutter of self-analysis. So far I have distinguished Rainer's work from the first phase of feminist practice — the realist documentary. It is time to evaluate more precisely how theory inflects the terms of Rainer's ambivalent stake in self-effacement as well as the chances of her distributive tactics for promoting a collective enunciation.

Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of dialogism clarifies the social and cultural grounding of the formal strategy of heterogeneity. Dialogism opposes the assurance within the text of origin and source of discourse. The dialogical text absorbs different voices without masking or neutralizing their marks of class, race or age. Robert Stam acutely notes the implications of dialogism for a politics of difference:

Bakhtin's concept of language and discourse as "shared territory" inoculates us against individualist assumptions undergirding romantic theories of art, while still allowing us to be attuned to the specific ways in which artists orches-



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**AT ISSUE IN "BEING MOVED BY
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**PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORY ALIKE — THAT OF THE APPEARANCE OR DISAPPEARANCE OF
 THE SUBJECT IN THE ART WORK.**

trate diverse social voices.¹⁴
 It is precisely this quality — the undermin-
 ing of the individual in favor of the
 collective dimension — that is sought in
 Rainer's strategies of distribution and re-
 allocation of inserted texts, genres and
 voices. Dialogism opens discourse onto
 a "hidden interior polemic," character-
 ized by the "active (modifying) influ-

ence of another's word on the writer's
 word."¹⁵ Following Bakhtin, Julia Kris-
 teva suggests that this form of ambiva-
 lent word (text) appears predominantly
 in autobiography, polemical confes-
 sions, questions and answers and hid-
 den dialogue — generic structures that
 become, with Rainer, a privileged stage
 for the dramatic articulation of the per-

sonal and collective dimensions of her
 discourse.

Rainer's work displays the ambivalent
 status of autobiography in articulating
 polyvocality. Autobiography is used
 both as a source that lends "credibility
 [to roles that] she would have otherwise
 to invent totally from [her] imagination"
 (i.e. the actual referent, Yvonne,

grounds that information in the Real): at the same time that it is, "like all material," liable to manipulation. The purpose of this practice is made clear:

When [autobiography] is distributed among a number of people as in *Lives of Performers*, or depersonalized by the use of the third person pronoun, as in *A Film About a Woman Who...*, it has the possibility of becoming more objectively biographical, and finally, fictional.¹⁶

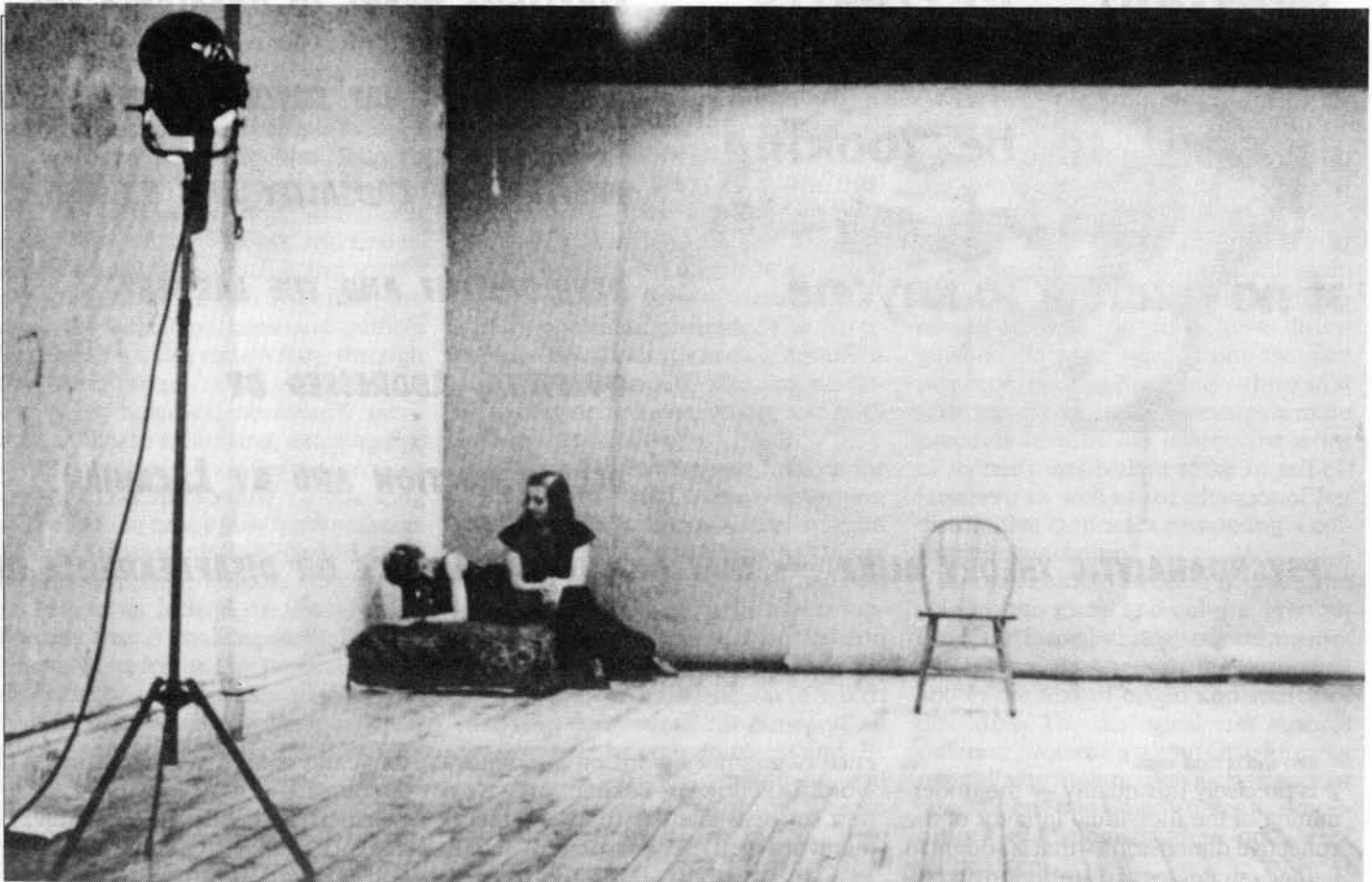
The two-fold process of becoming "more objectively biographical, and finally, fictional" testifies to the nature of Rainer's disseminatory approach. The irreconcilable objectives of giving credibility to a character and "depersonalizing" it burden Rainer's narratives with a ventriloquism split between personal invocation and an all-too-ready precaution against the "purely personal." The "ambivalent word" sought in this attempt at polivocality registers less as dialogical than as a feeble shot at off-setting her own presence. Rainer's strategic

option for ambiguity and her desire for neutrality only magnifies what is perhaps inherent to an idealized and misconstrued notion of analytical distance.

Intended as a way of counteracting the fiction of a unified subject, ambiguity is Rainer's attempted method of uprooting autobiographical elements from a subjective consciousness which is finally conceived as univocal. Hence, the use of cliché, the personal utterance debased by common usage, is one of the staples of Rainer's search for neutrality and repeal of the "personal." In the attempt to circumvent the "personal," Rainer introduces shifts from direct to indirect speech, from first to third person narration. This attempt to enhance confusion about the subject of enunciation pervades all verbal constructions with ambiguity. However, instead of clarifying the collective dimension of private discourse, this cumulative blur

only amplifies its indistinction.

Rainer overlaps two distinct but not unrelated issues. Can one simultaneously negate the fictive unity of author, character and narrator and claim, through the same set of representational strategies, a positive attribution such as a de-individualized or collective enunciation? She vociferously lays claim to a collective voice. It starts in the plural of the film's title — *Lives of Performers* — and follows in the abstracting strategy of interchangeability among performers. Nobody is to stand solely for a given position or point of view. The film bears this uncertainty most interestingly in the aleatory and intermittent connections between an individualized subjectivity and a body intended as "neutral." However, the direction of this neutrality seems unclear throughout Rainer's film. In *Lives of Performers* as in *The Man Who Envied Women*, it constitutes a simple



LIVES OF PERFORMERS by YVONNE RAINER

and negative answer to mechanisms of identification. A narrative is drafted but character and body perform a ballet of misencounter. In these films, rather than transmuting the self into a collective dimension, neutrality becomes a function of dispersal if not of defection.

The "submersion of personality" is not only an explicit tenet of minimalism, but part of a broader question addressed by deconstruction, psychoanalytic and film theory — that of the subject's presence in the text. Thus posed, this seems a question of visibility and it is as such that one might question in Rainer's film the equation of textual fragmentation, the mode characterized here as textual heterogeneity, and the split subjectivity of Lacanian psychoanalysis, or dissemination of presence in post-structuralist deconstruction.

Rainer's filmic project equates a fragmented cinematic texture and the no-

Cinematic representation is morally intercepted by a feminist polemic that disparages of visibility assuming that the very act of looking is contaminated by patriarchal and/or essentialist values. What Laura Mulvey calls the "to-be-looked-at-ness" of women,¹⁷ as well as the bracketing of authorship posited by Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault among others, is implicit in Rainer's preoccupation with avoiding identification in her representation of women.

We should, moreover, investigate the proper role of autobiography — that is, the narrativization and image construction of a self — in the context of Rainer's loud rejection of identification.

For the moment I would like to question the potential for representativeness of two different models of self-presentation: psychoanalysis and consciousness-raising situations. Fundamentally autobiographical, they both exemplify

these accounts are edited, the thematic associations are supposed to construe a generic autobiography whose main function is to paste out differences, to evince solidarity. The psychoanalytic model reverses this perspective. Although both approaches share the personal account as their main way of expression, psychoanalysis privileges the recovering of nuances, repetitive structures, slips, ambiguities and points of resistance. It exploits, in negative, the construction of the self (or collective self) procured by feminist documentaries. It exfoliates gradations from a subjectivity known from the start as constituted solely in this very process of displaying multiple, contradictory facets. Following the critique of the transparent essentialism of realist documentaries, psychoanalysis (Lacanian, mostly) becomes an appropriate model for purposes formerly served by consciousness-raising personal accounts.

That these two models were adopted respectively by the first and second phases of feminist film is telling. Psychoanalysis precluded the fantasy of an essential self to be uncovered by its workings. How could it therefore posit the notion of a surfacing, albeit topically oriented, collective consciousness? It is clear then that psychoanalysis becomes mainly a theoretical (as opposed to political) tool; thematically, it helps refine analysis of sexual difference, and structurally, it shapes, through its intrinsic anti-essentialism, a critique of transparency. Moreover, psychoanalysis fits perfectly within an academically oriented filmmaking. It is adopted, not unproblematically, as an alternative to the debates around class and racial conflicts; it substitutes these polemics for a complex texture of disjunction and contradiction displaced onto a personal arena.

Rainer's juxtapositional format is consonant with this notion of a self-presentation in negative. Rainer's textual heterogeneity models itself on psychoanalysis with its attendant therapeutic prospect rather than on dialogical clash.

Journeys From Berlin/1971, made in 1980, is the film of Rainer's oeuvre that best articulates psychoanalysis as a setting for a disowned language. The interweaving of history and story in the analysand's discourse is the accomplishment of a concept of montage that slides

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tion of a split subjectivity formed in the contact (or edit point) of his/her various performances. The fragility of the analogy lies undoubtedly in a reduction of issues of subjectivity to a putative visibility which leads to an illustrative relation between filmic image and theory.

Rainer's heterogeneity is to be understood as a compromise between the moral and theoretical imperatives of continuous erasure (the avoidance of traditional representations of women) and the demands of visibility, the imperative to construct an alternative (positive) image for women. Again one is confronted with the issue of visibility.

the range and limitations of a narrative of the Self in its potential for dialogism. In his critique of the feminist documentary of the early '70s, David James describes what consciousness-raising and psychoanalysis (as therapy) might have in store for feminists:

The healing of the analysand through the account of her own experience was understood as the reclamation of women's experience, repressed and unspeakable in patriarchy. The autobiographical account of oppression thus produced an ostensibly objective mode, one that appeared to circumvent filmic discursiveness by presenting the profilmic speakers without interference.¹⁸

Implicit in the consciousness-raising model is the goal of exemplarity. As

WILLIAM RAYMOND in YVONNE RAINER's *THE MAN WHO ENVIED WOMEN*

from the visceral to the critical through a verbal collage that is "pathological" in its disconnectedness (the loose diegetic frame establishes a patient as the source of this voice). The collage orchestrates, as well, a multiple discursive rambling, a societal and cultural subjectivity made up from bits and pieces taken from books, diaries and articles in an ill-disguised malaise of civilization.

At stake in the appropriation of one discursive texture (that of psychoanalysis and its slippages) to stimulate the "contesting claims of politics, feminism, morality, psychoanalysis and personal needs, desires, fears and myths"¹⁹— is the unanswered status of the various issues raised. The result is that the importance of what is said is undermined. Undercutting any substantive content, a highly stylized and pluralistic collage assures that each subject is dropped, or rather, interrupted.

The pretext for the use of psychoanalysis as a formal model is founded on

a misconception worth considering. It presupposes an analogy between modernist strategies of distanciation and the split nature of subjectivity. As Regis Durand suggests in "On *Aphanisis*: A Note on the Dramaturgy of the Subject in Narrative Analysis,"

[though] there are moments when Lacan's description of the "subversion" of the subject, of its complex strategies of ruptures and displacements, reads like a compendium of "modernistic" narrative and discursive strategies: ... feints, snares, and enunciation that renounces itself, ... the modernistic fiction of the elusive deceitful subject conceals the much more implacable logic of the division and dispersal of the subject, its "intersubjective distribution."²⁰

The connection between a certain cinematic praxis and psychoanalytic theory seems to serve correlate purposes. It enthrones a mode of reflexivity based on displayed heterogeneity. Visual and aural breaks of continuity are stated as privileged anti-naturalistic strategies while homogeneity becomes synonymous with transparency. On the other hand, Lacanian theory is enlisted in the

equivocal function of connoting the Real of subject formation, thus validating what constitute in fact purely formal analogies between two very different orders of representation: while filmic representation has a fictional referent, psychoanalytic theory has as its referent the reality of the subject.²¹

A critique of the recruitment of post-structuralist deconstruction or Lacanian theory in support of a mode of reflexivity based on formal heterogeneity questions the critical and practical reduction of effects of defamiliarization to the marking of fissures and breaks within the filmic text, an analysis that assumes that their presence alone could serve as evidence of the disruption of the Subject. One can, moreover, question the implicit assumption of a deconstructive thrust as unequivocally issuing from a juxtapositional mode.²²

Rainer's heterogeneous juxtaposition is shaped as formal and ethical ambivalence that hovers between asserting

THE NOTION OF REPRESENTATIVENESS IS AT THE CORE OF TENTATIVE EXPANSION OF THE SUBJECTIVE "I" ONTO A COLLECTIVE DIMENSION. NOWHERE IS THIS POTENTIAL LAYERING CLEARER THAN IN THE NOTION OF AN INDIVIDUAL CHARACTER STANDING FOR A GENERIC TYPE. DISCREDITED, THIS ESSENTIALIST AND BLOATED VERSION OF SUBJECT REPRESENTATION ATTAINS, IN POLITICALLY OR SOCIALLY ORIENTED FILMS, A TONE THAT RANGES FROM THE ALLEGORICAL, THE OVERLOADED SIGNIFIER, TO ITS FLIPSIDE, A SIGNIFIED OF NEUTRALITY.

multiple possibilities of action — her image structuring epitomizes potentiality itself, generating a variety of choreographed positions, camera angles and edits — and a romantic tone that emerges through text and a voice layered in a continual process of revision and analysis. The deconstructive potential of such tactics of ambiguity is nevertheless doubly qualified; while intent on creating a surface of contrast and textual discrepancy, the use of ambiguity and cliché ultimately neutralizes, both formally and content-wise, any intended truth. Yet the relentless piling up of verbal-superego-tracks shows the desire for some totalizing truth.²³ Rainer's idealist conception of subjectivity ultimately inflects her juxtapositional aesthetics. Her relentless pursuit of contradiction is answered by a fated and solip-

sistic discourse voiced by the analysand in *Journeys From Berlin/1971*:

"Why won't someone get me off the cusp of this plague, this ellipsis, suspension, anticipation, this retraction, denial, digression, irony, ... the self-contemplative self, and the personal as a ... slave? ... the personal as a slave of autonomy and perfectibility."²⁴

Psychoanalysis operates in Rainer's work both as a formal model — corroborating the analogy criticized above — and as a corrective project. The personal as a "slave of perfectibility" is supposedly in a state of agony in Rainer's films. This agony, however, has, as its sole mitigation (in *Journeys From Berlin/1971*, for example), a nostalgia for direct action that can only be verbalized. Terrorism is mentioned, debated and, in a way, celebrated in the film, signaling, as Bruce Andrews notes, the renewal, in the film's neutralizing clutter, of an

"older vocabulary of intention."²⁵ In his critique of Rainer's romantic attempt at deconstruction Andrews states:

Decontextualized without being recontextualized except in formal clutter. The limits of this, once you extend it to the political realm, is its tendency to valorize a kind of dematerialization.²⁶

The allegorical thrust of a project that needs to illustrate or somehow give form to dispersal and effacement is evident. For how is one otherwise to represent an abstract Idea (Independent Woman, Sensitive Artist, Contradiction of Bourgeoisie), while transcending the concreteness of the indexical image? Rainer's work participates, therefore, in what Paul Arthur has accurately referred to as a "will to allegory" in New Narrative film.²⁷ Taking Rainer's *The Man Who Envied Women* as his main example, Arthur indicates how the attempts to avoid essentialism through decontextualization are all fueled toward the shaping of new Essences. Lost in this form of allegorical figuration are the particularities that convey what is properly named "personal."

One should at this point distinguish the notion of allegory, in use above, from its current re-definitions (Paul De Man, Craig Owens, etc.) derived from Walter Benjamin's detailed study in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. In this book, Benjamin opposes allegory to the sublimating romantic symbol. The modernity of the allegory, Benjamin claims, lies in its imaged hold of fragments with distinct and traceable histories. In the Benjamin sense, allegory requires a hermeneutics akin to that of collage work: it demands knowledge of the historical and cultural references invoked by the multiple images forming that fragmentary composite. The general and emblematic power of allegories, referred to in relation to Rainer's work, reduces this fine exegesis, congealing it in easily graspable tableaux. The redeeming value of allegories as carriers of history, and for their prizing of detail against the idealist and totalizing transcendence of symbol, remains inherent in the potentially subversive powers of heterogeneity as a mode.

Rainer's paradigmatic collages counteract the identification with a person on screen through dispersion and neutrality. Rainer's attempts are precarious because they fight with the image in the arena of visibility. As such, they

become an illustrated compendium of deconstructions. The risks of heterogeneity as an instrument for the decentering of the self are mired in an anodyne pluralism that ends up dissolving any specificity of the private into an echo-chamber of sameness.

At first glance, the rejection of the "intestinal problems" seems, as it were, consistent with Rainer's programmatic attack on expressions of interiority and a natural outcome of her minimalist agenda. And yet, the curtailment of certain aspects because they are too personal to deserve representation constipates Rainer's initially daring impetus to use autobiography as the convertor of emotional investment into analytic distance. Screened by a test of (supposed) collective interest, the personal is drained of its idiosyncrasies, becoming a token representative of its genus — "the personal."

The ways in which a juxtapositional aesthetics can lead to decontextualization, and ultimately to reified allegory, demands further questioning. The loss of concrete reference in favour of general notions is not a necessary consequence of collage and paradigmatic relations. On the contrary, the very intent of the juxtapositional impulse (Bruce Connor, Jean Luc Godard, Anne Marie Melville, Leslie Thornton, Peggy Ahwesh, etc.) is to subvert abstraction through the substantive inscription of snatches of political and social history. In Rainer's case, the loss of concrete reference seems more likely a side result of an aesthetics haunted by the spectre of the "purely personal."

In Rainer's work, the desire for perfectibility submerges all of the evident good faith and interest in addressing social issues or in synthesizing a collective experience. The problem is not the overwhelming subjectivity looming over what is intended as generic and distanced representations, but the very fact that, in Rainer's cinematic avoidance of too-personal a voice, most of what is heard is her "noisy self-effacement."

¹Among the several books and articles addressing *The Man Who Envied Women* or issues of voice-over narration interrelated with subject representation see: Peggy Phelan, "Spatial Envy: Yvonne Rainer's *The Man Who Envied Women*," *Motion Picture* Vol. 1 #3 (Winter/Spring 1987); Paul Arthur, "Desire for

Allegory: The Whitney Biennials," *Motion Picture* Vol. 2 #1 (Fall 1987); Kaja Silverman, "Dis-embodiment of the Female Voice" in Mary Ann Doane, Patricia Mellencamp and Linda Williams, ed., *Revision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism* (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America and the American Film Institute, 1984), pp. 131-149; Judith Mayne, *The Woman at the Keyhole: Feminism and Women's Cinema* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990). *The Films of Yvonne Rainer* by Yvonne Rainer with contributions by B. Ruby Rich, Bernice Reynaud, Mitchell Rosenbaum and Patricia White is also an invaluable source, including scripts and an extensive bibliography.

²Yvonne Rainer, "A Quasi Survey of Some 'Minimalist' Tendencies in the Quantitatively Minimal Dance Activity Midst the Plethora or an Analysis of Trio A" in Gregory Battcock, ed., *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1968), p. 267.

³David James, *Allegories of Cinema: American Film in the Sixties* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 321-324.

⁴Laura Mulvey, "Film, Feminism, and the Avant Garde" in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 117.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 123.

⁶Noel Carroll, "Avant Garde Film and Theory," *Millennium Film Journal* #4, 5 (Summer/Fall, 1979), p. 141.

⁷Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 90.

⁸The close relation entertained within Rainer's films with surrounding theoretical debates becomes increasingly explicit in her later films, *Journeys From Berlin* and *The Man Who Envied Women*. For a comprehensive picture of the implications of such dialogue see Noel Carroll, "Interview with a Woman Who," *Millennium Film Journal* #7/8/9 (Fall), pp. 37-68; Yvonne Rainer's response letter in *Camera Obscura* #1 and the subchapter in David James' book *Allegories of Cinema: American Film in the Sixties*; Yvonne Rainer, *A Film About a Woman Who...*

⁹Yvonne Rainer, *Yvonne Rainer Work 1961-73* (Halifax: Press of Nova Scotia College of Arts and Design, 1974), p. 276.

¹⁰Yvonne Rainer was embraced by the collective *Camera Obscura* precisely as a proponent of a Brechtian aesthetics that bridged autobiography with feminist politics through distanciation strategies. In an interview with the collective, Rainer refuses the assumption of political overtones as issuing directly from her innovative form. She justly debated the tagging of Brechtian and feminist to what she then took to be politically innocuous (on a transformative spectatorial level) formal preoccupations. Later on she became increasingly pliable to theory as formative of her thematic and formal grammar.

¹¹Annette Michelson, "Yvonne Rainer, Part One: The Dancer and the Dance," *Art Forum* (January, 1974).

¹²Yvonne Rainer, "Late Random Notes and Quotes on Four Points of Focus: Performance, Autobiography, Fiction, Media" in *Yvonne Rainer Work 1961-73*, p. 275.

¹³*Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, p. 267.

¹⁴Robert Stam, *Subversive Pleasures: Bakhtin, Cultural Criticism and Film* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), p. 20.

¹⁵Julia Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue and Novel" in Toril Moi, ed.,

The Kristeva Reader (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986) p. 44.

¹⁶Yvonne Rainer, "Late Random Notes..." p. 275.

¹⁷Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" in *Visual and Other Pleasures*, p. 19.

¹⁸David James, *op. cit.*, p. 323.

¹⁹Noel Carroll, "Interview with a Woman Who..." p. 38.

²⁰Regis Durand, "On Aphanisis: A Note on the Dramaturgy of the Subject in Narrative Analysis" in Robert Con Davis, ed., *Locan and Narration: The Psychoanalytic Difference in Narrative Theory* (Baltimore, London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), p. 863.

²¹This same point could undoubtedly be made in reference to the confusion present in several of the writings in *Screen* magazine in the '70s between materialism as a Marxist ideology and the foregrounding of the materiality of cinematic apparatus.

²²In his analysis of *A Film about a Woman Who...*, David James points out some of the consequences of Rainer's flair for juxtaposition and collage. One of his examples is the image of Rainer's face with bits of written text taken from letters by Angela Davis to George Jackson. This literalization of Rainer's aesthetics of quotation and collage, and the utter decontextualization of these texts to fit into a bourgeois melodrama of disjunction, constitutes an effective repression of history and of a politics of class and race. In *Allegories of Cinema: American Film in the Sixties*, pp. 326-337.

²³In his reading of Derrida, *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1986) Rodolphe Gasche calls attention to the critical and formal slippage of deconstruction into neutrality. He says: "Deconstruction begins with demonstrating such inequalities (resulting from discrepancies constitutive of philosophical discourse) within concepts or texts, but it aims as little as the texts themselves at an annulment of that which is in opposition" (pp. 136-7). The excessive use of irony and ambiguity are analysed as ultimately co-optable within a Romantic Tradition of self-reflection.

²⁴Yvonne Rainer, "Journeys From Berlin/1971," script in *The Films of Yvonne Rainer* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 151.

²⁵In "Bruce Andrews on Yvonne Rainer," Andrews develops an extensive critique of Rainer's process of dispersal: "You fear structures. So, in absence of a comprehension of those structures ... you want to break out of that, make personal gesture. Terrorism then becomes a response to that problem of the fragmented or elusive or illusory self — not an operation on the body politic so much as a desperate attempt at coherence. Which is perhaps why the formal devices seem so didactic — even (or especially) at their most 'experimental' — as if suggesting by the clutter how hard it would be break free." in *Cinemanews* #79 (Spring 1980), p. 14.

²⁶*Ibid.*

²⁷Paul Arthur, *Motion Picture* (Fall 1987), p. 6, 7.

Ivone Margulies is co-editor of *MO-TION PICTURE* and teaches in the New York City area. She is currently writing a book on the work of Chantal Akerman.

ANSWER PRINT is the Independent Eye's "letters to the editor" column. It is also a forum for reactions, responses, opinions, commentary, ideas, demands and manifestos.

**AN OPEN
LETTER
FROM
BARBARA
STERNBERG TO
LEILA SUJIR
ON THE
OCCASION
OF SEEING
SEVERAL
FILMS BY
MARIE
MENKEN FOR
THE FIRST
TIME**

DEAR LEILA

I was glad (to say the least) to see the book by Lauren Rabinowitz on Maya Deren, Shirley Clarke and Joyce Wieland. Finally, Joyce's films are being given some critical attention — I'm assuming this is the focus! ...And then last night I went to Innis Film Society to see a number (all?) of Marie Menken's films. I was looking forward to the screening — curious to finally get to see this work — even solely as a recovery of history denied us. But I never anticipated how connected I would feel to the films themselves — how I would detect

the seeds of so much of the work I have been shown, in school and out, as avant-garde. And how my own work, though I never saw any Menken before, is related (particularly in the rhythms of shooting and, generally, in a non-monumentality, non-mystifying, observational sensibility). The films are rather playful and humorous, more purely visual and often silent unlike my films or most of the work that would be made now. The humour in some of the films, for example, *HURRY! HURRY!* had a certain political/feminist wit which reminded me of Joyce Wieland's films like *Patriotism I*. In other ways too I sensed in Joyce and Marie kindred spirits: the lush colours of the flowers in *Glimpses of a Garden* and Wieland's *Watersark*; the soundtrack of *Glimpses...*, exaggerated bird chirping (a caged budgie? a mechanical reproduction?) and parts of *Rat Life and Diet in North America*'s track; their use of avant-garde musicians of the day on the soundtrack; the length of time they stay with an image on the screen (the enjoyment of seeing), and a kind of simplicity — though in no way unthoughtful or without point — a human scale in both women's works.

I also saw Menken's influence on Stan Brakhage: there was his (or what we think of as "his") jiggy camera, rhythmic and moving in the shooting and through cutting; light itself was the subject of several films; and

the camera motion creating brushstrokes or, in Brakhage, the camera as extension of the body. Some parts of some of the films made me think of Michael Snow... And others, abstract art and action painting... A cumulative picture was forming not only of Menken's sensibility, but of the times, a picture *not* of a series of individual men of genius and singular vision, but a picture of the energy and "ecstasy of vision" that informed filmmaking in the '50s and '60s New York, a film scene of which women were *very much* a part and leading.

It reminded me of an interview that Florian Hopf, a German film journalist, conducted with Joyce in 1985. She was speaking of teaching art, of removing the layers that veil people's eyes, and of inner vision:

It came in New York in the '60s and before, the underground filmmakers, and I saw what they called "ecstatic vision" and I thought, "What could that be?" — and I wanted it! And I would see these people developing from their own vision, from their little lives in their studio, from wherever they would see the light, and it was always about light. The problem is to go into oneself and find out what one is and to suffer what it is to be oneself. Go to the darkest parts and brightest parts and find out what you like and want and to validate that. ...A lot of people think art is to be separate, but art is to embrace others — whether to convey something difficult or to talk about light — to communicate those things without selling out... Work that comes from the spirit, journeys into the spirit, are what we need now. Spirit has always been in art.

The screening at Innis did not give Marie Menken her due — even in terms of Toronto's experimental film audience. The films were in-

troduced with little or no ado, though disappointment was expressed for the very small turnout. (Looking around, I noted the absence of even the regular Innis supporters, the inner circle. Where were the film teachers and their students who would appreciate the historical significance of this work and of this screening in the re-evaluating of "the" history? Where were the feminist critics?) Where was the guest speaker to contextualize the work for an audience, speak to it, help us see what's there and, in giving the work this attention, validate it? The programme notes did none of this for us, did not quote from Brakhage's acknowledgement of his debt to Menken's films, for instance, did not even give the dates of the films — that they're '50s. In this world of limited screen time/venues/money for experimental film works, this probably means she won't get shown again for some time.

And so I was simultaneously exhilarated and angry that these films that were so obviously formative of much of the work we have seen and do know of that period were not written about, screened — were excluded, as we say, from the 'canon'. (I did know her name, that she made some film(s), and that she was married to Willard Maas — need I say/know more?)

Anyway, better late than never, I guess — and in case I ever teach again... keep up your good work!

BARBARA

EYE RECEIVES GRANT

ONTARIO TOUR

NEW WAVES IN CINEMA

MCC VISUAL ASPECT GRANT

25TH ANNIVERSARY

GRIERSON DOCUMENTARY

SEMINARS

SPEAKING NEW MEDIA

WORKSHOP SERIES

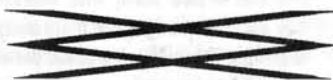
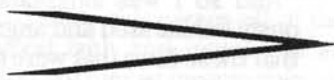
INVISIBLE CINEMA SCHEDULE

EXPERIMENTAL FILM

MINI-CATALOGUE

CANADIAN CONTENT

WATCH FOR...



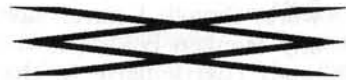
EYE RECEIVES GRANT

The INDEPENDENT EYE is pleased to acknowledge receipt of a \$5,000 grant through the CANADA COUNCIL'S AID TO PERIODICALS PROGRAM. The grant will be applied toward the publication of VOL. 13 OF THE INDEPENDENT EYE, beginning with our fall issue.

ONTARIO TOUR

NICE GIRLS DON'T... DO IT, a program of ten CFMDC films, is currently touring Ontario. The program, curated by DARIA STERMAC, the Centre's Experimental Film Officer, will travel to at least nine different venues including SAW GALLERY (Ottawa), NIAGARA ARTISTS' CENTRE (St. Catharines), FOREST CITY GALLERY (London), HAMILTON ART-

ISTS INC. (Hamilton), WHITE WATER GALLERY (North Bay), JOHN SPOTTON CINEMA (Toronto), ARTCITE (Windsor), ARTSPACE (Peterborough) and KINGSTON ARTISTS ASSOCIATION INC. (Kingston). Funding for the tour was made possible through the ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL.



NEW WAVES IN CINEMA

The CFMDC and the LIAISON OF INDEPENDENT FILMMAKERS OF TORONTO (LIFT) are pleased to announce TOKEN AND TABOO, the latest screenings in the NEW WAVES IN CINEMA series. TOKEN AND TABOO features two evenings of 8 mm (Super and regular) films at the RIVOLI in Toronto. Part 1, curated by KIKA THORNE, takes place on April 24. Part 2, curated by MARNIE PARELL, takes place May 23. Funding for the program was made possible through the ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL.



MCC VISUAL ASPECT GRANT

The CANADIAN FILMMAKERS DISTRIBUTION CENTRE is pleased to acknowledge receipt of a grant of \$15,200 from the ONTARIO MINISTRY OF CULTURE AND COMMUNICATIONS toward THE VISUAL ASPECT, an exhibition of Canadian experimental films curated by ROSE LOWDER of the ARCHIVES DU FILM EXPERIMENTAL D'AVIGNON in France. The exhibition, which includes a catalogue, will travel to several venues in France and possibly other parts of Europe.

Several of the filmmakers in the program will be travelling to France with the program.



25TH ANNIVERSARY

The CANADIAN FILMMAKERS DISTRIBUTION CENTRE will be celebrating its 25th Anniversary in 1992. Planning for special activities to mark the occasion is now getting underway. Anyone interested in being involved in the planning and organizing of special events should contact PAUL COUILLARD at the Centre.



GRIERSON DOCUMENTARY SEMINARS

OFA, the ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF VISUAL MEDIA/L'ASSOCIATION POUR L'AVANCEMENT DES MEDIAS VISUELS in association with SOUTHERN ONTARIO LIBRARY SERVICE (SOLS) will hold three separate GRIERSON DOCUMENTARY SEMINARS in June, 1991: LONDON PUBLIC LIBRARY (London): June 7, 1991; CYRIL CLARK BRANCH LIBRARY (Brampton): June 10, 1991; and KINGSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY (Kingston): June 14, 1991. Sessions will feature screenings and discussions of recently produced documentary films and videos from Canada and other countries. Film/video makers will present their work and interact with each other and with the participants during the seminar. For detailed information contact MARILYN KIRKPATRICK, Head of A/V Services, SOLS,

1133 Central Avenue, Hamilton, Ontario L8K 1N7 or CHRIS WORSNOP, Chair, OFA Grierson Committee, The Peel Board of Education, 5650 Hurontario St., Mississauga, Ontario L5R 1C6

gramming Work by Producers of Colour" moderated by BETTY JULIEN. Fees range from \$20-\$40. For more information or to register, contact the IMAGES office: 67A Portland Street #3 Toronto, Ontario M5V 2M9 (416) 921-8405.

SPEAKING NEW MEDIA WORKSHOP SERIES

The IMAGES FESTIVAL OF INDEPENDENT FILM AND VIDEO will present a series of seven professional workshops entitled SPEAKING NEW MEDIA, June 7 — 11, 1991. Highlights will include two directing seminars (in English and French) by Quebecois filmmaker JEAN PIERRE LEFEBVRE, a writing workshop with Vancouver filmmaker ANN MARIE FLEMING, a demonstration of state-of the art computer disk editing techniques in production management with KATHRYN HOPE and MARIA PIMENTAL and panel discussions including "Directing the Documentary" moderated by Toronto film and videomaker JOHN GREYSON and "Pro-

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CANADIAN CONTENT

A CANADIAN CULTURAL CELEBRATION is being planned for August 3 — 5, 1991, when Canadian artists in all disciplines are invited to participate in a nation-wide affirmation of their unique national identity. All those wishing to participate are invited to make their contributions "in the streets" to communicate their personal Canadian perspective to their communities. For more information, contact LARRY ROSNUK, P.O. Box 554, Port Colborne, Ontario L3K 5X7, (416) 834-6061.

EXPERIMENTAL FILM MINI-CATALOGUE

A MINI-CATALOGUE OF NEW FILMS in the CFMDC's experimental section will be produced shortly. The catalogue will include basic information and descriptions of new titles.

Experimental filmmakers should contact DARIA STERMAC at the Centre to ensure that information on their films is up-to-date. The catalogue will be distributed to all of the experimental section's film clients and filmmakers along with an informal newsletter.

Anyone with information for the newsletter should also contact Daria.

WATCH FOR...

The next issue of the INDEPENDENT EYE, due out in early September, will focus on the theme of "exhibition." The issue will feature two guest editors:

MARC GLASSMAN, programmer for the NFB's John Spotton Cinema in Toronto, and WYNDHAM WISE, former editor for Cinema Canada.

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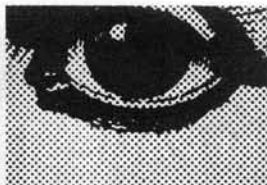
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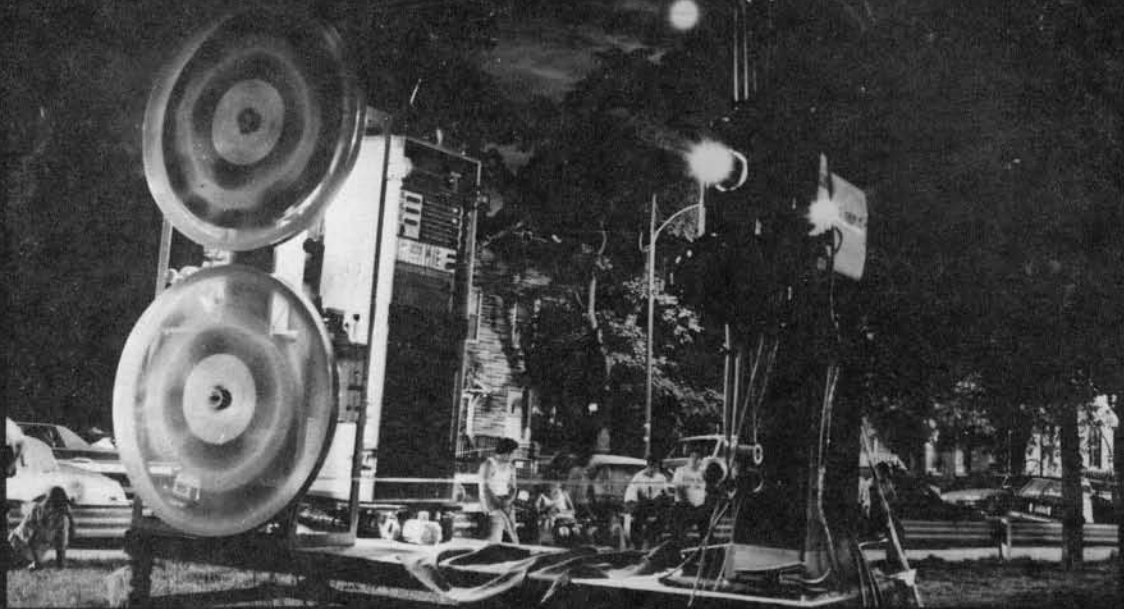


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THE INDEPENDENT EYE

VOLUME 12, NUMBER 3, SPRING/SUMMER 1991

THE INDEPENDENT EYE is published by the CANADIAN FILMMAKERS DISTRIBUTION CENTRE as a forum for critical discourse on and about independent film. The CFMDC is a non-profit organization which promotes the work of independent filmmakers. Operations and activities undertaken by the CFMDC are supported by its membership, self-generated revenue, the Canada Council, the Ontario Ministry of Culture and Communications, the Ontario Arts Council, the Department of Cultural Affairs, Municipality of Metro Toronto and the City of Toronto through the Toronto Arts Council.

THE INDEPENDENT EYE gratefully acknowledges the support of the Literary Office of the Ontario Arts Council through the Grants to Periodicals Program.

THE INDEPENDENT EYE is published three times a year. Individual subscriptions are \$10 per year and institutional subscriptions are \$15 per year.
ISSN 0225-9192

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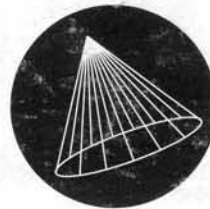
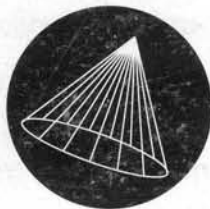
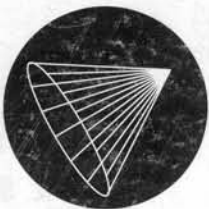
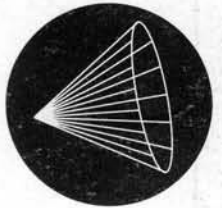
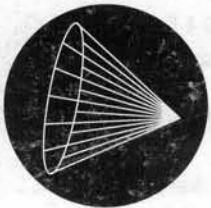
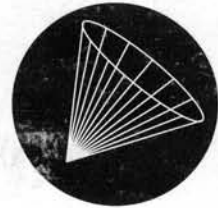
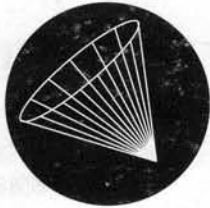
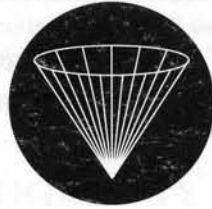
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