INSIDE THE PLEASURE DOME

FRINGE FILM IN CANADA

NEW EXPANDED EDITION

MIKE HOOLBOOM

FOREWORD BY ATOM EGOYAN

Everybody loves the movies. But what of movies made about the colour blue, or an isolated mountain range, or a man grown so thin the world floats through his perfect transparency? "You know what would be really great — to make a two-hour movie about Taylor Mead's ass." So said Andy Warhol, the most notorious fringe filmer of them all. Welcome to the strange and wonderful microverse of fringe cinema, where the only rules left unbroken are the ones that have been forgotten. Long before MTV, these artists were bending light to make a strange, first-person possible.

This new edition features never-before-heard raps from Ellie Epp, Ann Marie Fleming, Chris Gallagher, Anna Gronau, Rick Hancox, John Kneller, Deirdre Logue, David Rimmer and Kika Thorne. They join fellow fringers Mike Snow, Carl Brown, Patricia Gruben, Barbara Sternberg, Al Razutis, Penelope Buitenhuis, Fumiko Kiyooka, Peter Lipskis, Wrik Mead, Annette Mangaard, Steve Sanguedolce, Gary Popovich, Philip Hoffman, Gariné Torossian, Richard Kerr, and Mike Cartmell.

Twenty-five interviews with Canada's finest underdogs lay it all down like a road, ready to take you through the vanishing point of personality. This is cinema made one frame at a time, truth twenty-four times a second, as one wag would have it, a cinema that is earned and lived before being bigged up into the projector light. These lives have each developed an eccentric attention, a way of seeing the world that is able to transform something you walk past every day into something strange and terrifying. For any who wondered what lay beyond the McCinemas, the monotone of multiplex occupations, here are the stars of a different kind of night.

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FRINGE FILM IN CANADA

MIKE HOOLBOOM

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This book would not have been possible without the contributions of so many, but most especially: Karen Hanson, Marc Glassman, Alex Mackenzie, Darren Wershler-Henry, Alana Wilcox, Jason McBride, Rick/Simon, Ian McInnis, Stan Bevington, Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre, Richard Holden, the Writing and Publishing Division of the Canada Council, Canada Council Media Arts, the Literature Office of the Ontario Arts Council, and all of the filmmakers who gave generously of their time, their insights, and their ideals.

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FOREWORD

Why am I writing the foreword to this book? What does my sensibility and creative orientation have to do with the work discussed here? Where does my world (commercially conceived and distributed feature films) meet the visions and ideas of the experimental filmmakers discussed in this collection?

The answer might be in the imaginary audience we both share. I've been deeply inspired by artists like Michael Snow, David Rimmer, Phil Hoffman, Peter Mettler, Michael Hoolboom, Barbara Sternberg, and Bruce Elder — not simply because of the extraordinary quality of their work, but also, and perhaps more profoundly, because of the ceaselessly curious and completely trusting nature of the audience they've had to imagine for their creative efforts.

These filmmakers taught me that there is nothing more exhilarating than to feel self-conscious in front of a screen. The viewer did not have to lose themselves into an image, but could actually observe it, and create a dialogue about that process. This dialogue could be meditative, amusing, and provocative. By watching these films, I learned how to respect and indulge the intelligence of my audience.

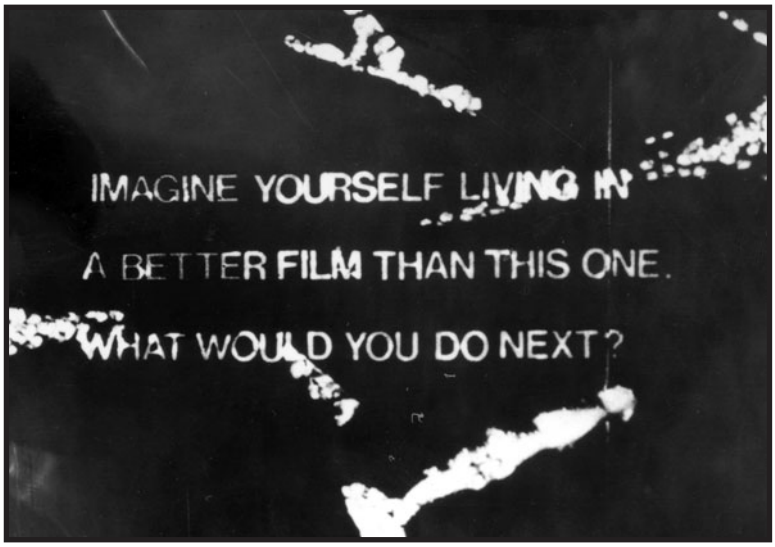
We dream in moving pictures. Every night, images are conjured in our minds, induced by mysterious and primal needs for sub-conscious expression. I've always found it fascinating that the serious attempt to articulate and find meaning to these dreams paralleled the discovery and development of cinema. It's also fascinating that the essential grammar of mainstream cinema has remained relatively unchanged since the art form's inception. From the first films, it became evident that there were certain places you could put a camera, and certain places where you couldn't. No other art form has been so immediately and comprehensively bound by such an orthodox and rigid system.

Why did this happen? Was it because of a latent terror that seized us when we discovered a medium so close to our dreams? Or, more to the point, is the traditional grammar of cinema a direct expression of how we dream? Do we dream in multi-angle coverage, with static masters, close-ups, tracking shots, and pans? Do we never cross the magical axis, except when we wake out of our sleep in terror? Is this why the language of early cinema came so quickly — because we've been playing it inside our heads forever?

I ask these questions because the films discussed in this book come from a different perspective. They are truly revolutionary; not simply because they defy conventional rules of industrial cinema, but because they confront the very nature of what we need to see. We are driven as much by narrative as by impulse, yet mainstream cinema is almost completely concerned with giving expression to ego-based storytelling.

Fringe films are id-based. They address, liberated from the moderating influence of narrative, our purest sense of impulse — the way we see. To treat these films as marginal is to marginalize some integral part of ourselves.

Atom Egoyan


IMAGINE YOURSELF LIVING IN
A BETTER FILM THAN THIS ONE.
WHAT WOULD YOU DO NEXT?

INTRODUCTION

This volume is a machine for turning pictures into words.

This machine is marked, like any, by celebration and sadness. Its appearance is a joy and a puzzle, not because like Groucho Marx I could never join any club that would accept people like me, but because most of my efforts, most of the work of my friends and community, are invisible. And as strange as it is to say, this invisibility is something that brings us happiness.

The terrific thing about being an artist who works in film is that movies are important to everyone; they are the stories we tell each other or the stories we ourselves are living. In our best moments and our worst, they are the way we imagine ourselves.

The worst thing about being an artist who works in film is that movies are important to everyone. For most of us, "I know what I like" means "I like what I know." But alongside the great march of television and movies that most of us are on, there are those who have decided to go down the road not taken.

They are, we are, the minor literature of cinema, the poetry, the fringe, the underground. We are every dream a company will never have, every longing that does not lead to success. We are everything without a bar code or a corporate sponsor. The work is too long, too short, too disgusting, too beautiful, too boring, or too self-indulgent to fit in. To belong. To be a part of it all. Unlike their mainstream cousins, no two fringe films are alike. There are no series, no reruns, and no commercial breaks. Each is unique, as individual and eccentric as one of your friends.

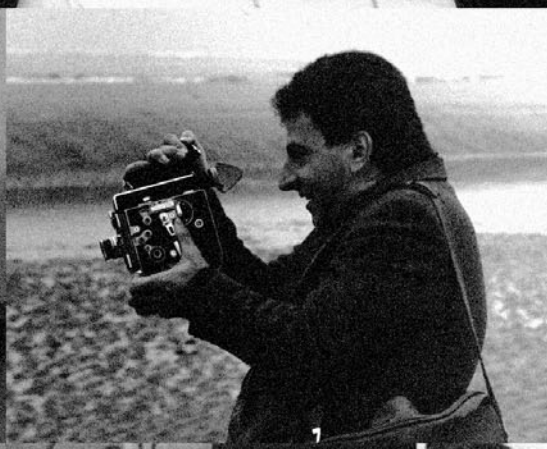
This book, like so many of the films described within it, the venues dedicated to showing it, and the distributors who make this work available, have been made possible by the arts councils in this country. While others are searching for a national culture, they are busy funding it.

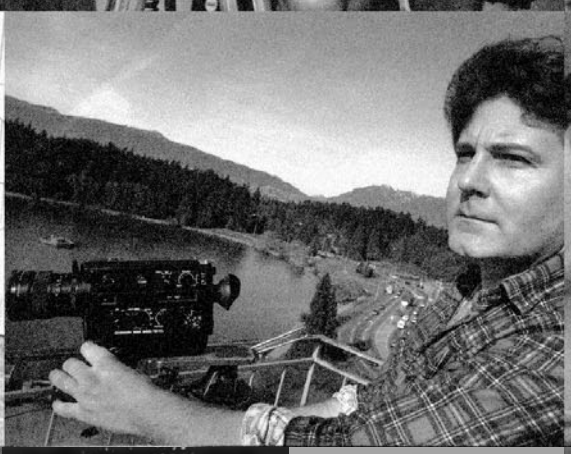
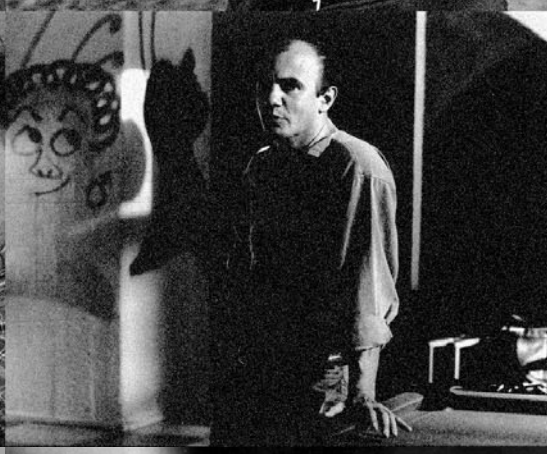
The list presented here is hardly definitive, nor are these filmers to be taken as the largest, greatest, or grandest of them all. Something in their work touched me, showed me there was another way to fall in love, to speak with a friend, to touch. All of them, or so I'd like to imagine, have moved towards everything that gives them pleasure, and turned that embrace into a shared flicker of light. All have staged the small hole of personality that admits the world, insistently presenting not just what they're seeing but the act of seeing itself. They are gathered between these covers to speak about the feuds and deaths and marriages and happinesses that have made this seeing possible. Here in the underground, new kinds of lives have made new kinds of pictures possible. Here are their stories. One day they may be yours.

Mike Hoolboom



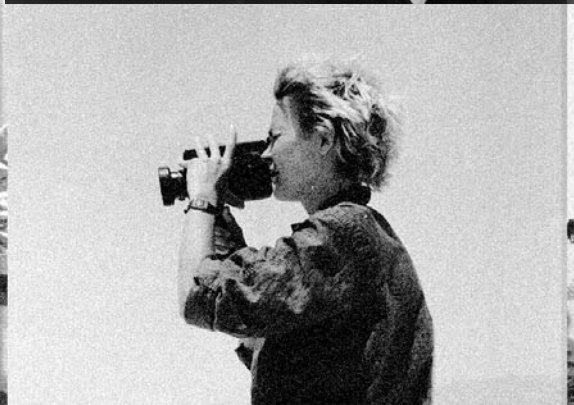










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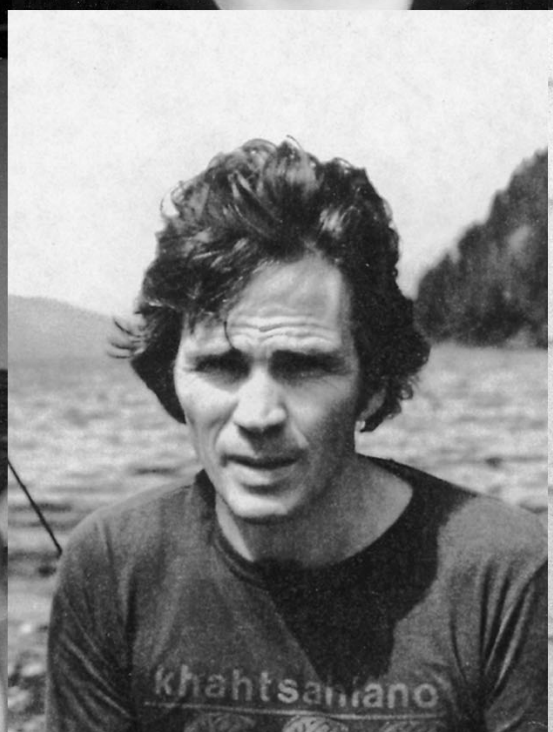
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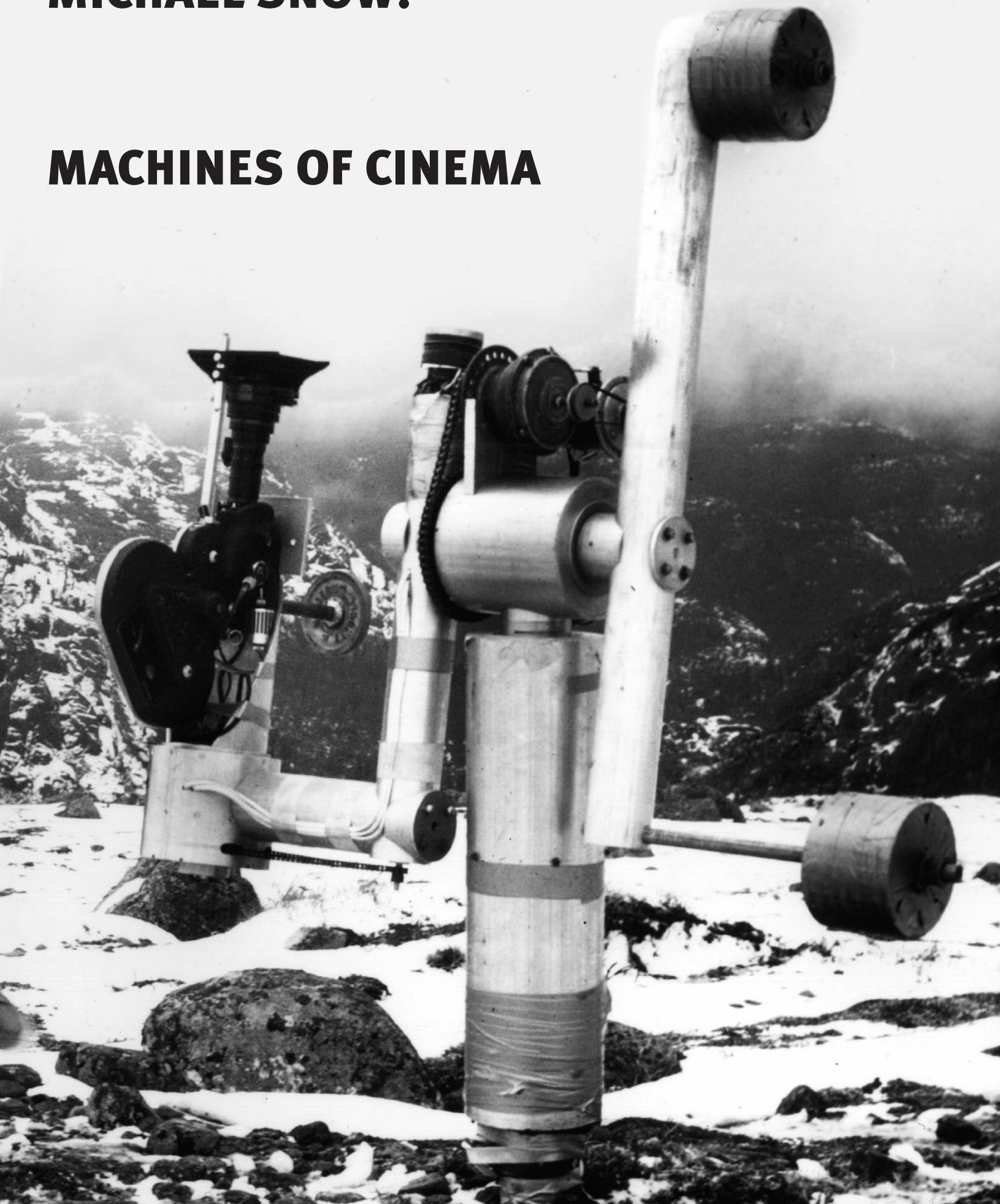
MICHAEL SNOW:

MACHINES OF CINEMA



Michael Snow is one of Canada's finest contemporary artists — a blue-chip conceptualist whose widely ranging talents have launched him across a number of artistic terrains. Every month he can be seen at the Music Gallery fronting the free jazz ensemble CCMC. His celebrated public sculptures adorn Toronto's largest shopping complex as well as the downtown sports dome where giant bronzed figures entitled "The Audience" gape out of the stadium. His paintings and drawings hang in collections around the world. He has produced records of sound art, books, holograms, slide works, and photographs.

But nowhere has his production been more elegant, or the effect of his entrance so profound, as in the cinema. Here he has founded a body of work that spans some sixteen films over thirty-five years. Ranging in length from seven minutes to four-and-a-half-hours, many isolate and elaborate a unique quality of the apparatus — the zoom, pan or tracking shot for example. No one has taken McLuhan's dictum more seriously: that the medium is the message.

MH: Many artists speak of their beginnings in theological terms — that some moment of revelation occurs, prompting a conversion into a new vocation, their art. Did anything like that happen with you?

MS: There are two or three lines. The first one is when I got the art prize in high school, which surprised me because I didn't think I was doing much more in class than throwing spitballs. But it seems as if I'd been drawing all my life and the teacher noticed that it had its moments. It's amazing, isn't it? One person's gesture. I decided to go to the Ontario College of Art on the basis of that. I took what was called a design course because I didn't have any orientation about the particular kind of art I would do, although I was already worried about making a living. Apart from the stuff we had to do in class, I started to paint and showed the painting to the head of the department — John Martin. He was very interested and we talked, and he suggested books for me to read. One of the few places to show in Toronto was the Ontario Society for Artists, which had an annual group exhibition of members, and non-members could submit to a jury. He suggested I submit to one of these shows — which in itself was quite surprising to me — and both my paintings were accepted, which had never happened to a student before. The other thing is music, which I started to play in high school. I got interested in jazz around 1947. I started playing piano. I was very moved by Dixieland jazz/blues and met a bunch of other ne'er-do-wells, and we formed some bands and began playing jobs. When I got out of art school I didn't know what to do, so I took a miserable job at an advertising agency, saved my money, and went to Europe. I went with $300 and stayed a year and a half, feeling very suicidal. I hitch-hiked to cathedrals and galleries and made thousands of drawings. I came back in 1950 and, as usual, I was miserable and broke and still didn't know what to do to make a living. I was invited to show some of these drawings in an exhibition with Graham Coughtree. I got a call from a guy who thought that whoever had made these drawings must be interested in film and, if I was, he'd like to meet me. This is true! His name was George Dunning, and he and some others had left the National Film Board to form their own film company — he's the guy that later did *Yellow Submarine* for the Beatles. He gave me a job though I'd never done anything in animation before. It turned out that Graham got a job there too, and Joyce Wieland was working there already. George was interested in having people there with a fine art background to do animation, which he thought of as an art even though they were doing commercials. That was my introduction to film — from the inside, its mechanics. Whereas I know a lot of other people came at it because they were moved by something they saw — or they loved the experience of the theatre. I never felt that at all. That kind of experience happened for me with music and painting — where I was so moved by something that I wanted to do the same thing for other people.

Rameau's Nephew

Because of George's crazy ideas, the company didn't do all that well. In fact, he made me head of the animation department. And I was playing a lot of music at night. A few months after he made me head, it collapsed but I made my first film when I was there. It was a film just to make a film called *A to Z (7 min b/w silent 1956)*. It came from a style of drawing that I developed when I was in Europe using blue ink, pen drawings. It wasn't so much drawing from subjects but from imagination, and I decided

to animate them. When I made my first film, I didn't know there was such a thing as experimental film, though I'd seen some of Norman McLaren's work because George had shown us examples of what could be done in animation. But I didn't know of it as an area. Since I was working in the film business, and even though I'd made a film myself, I thought of it as an expensive proposition, as a business in a way, so it didn't seem inviting.

New York Eye and Ear Control

For about a year and a half, I worked every night in a Dixieland band led by Mike White. It was a fantastic band, and I also had groups of my own, which were called Modern in those days. I played every night, and by eleven every morning I could get to my studio where I painted. This was between 1957 and 1962. Joyce Wieland and I got married, and we went down to New York to see shows and listen to music. I was more interested in the theoretical issues and the amazing work that was being done there than I was in what was going on up here. I thought if I was really interested in the issues, I might as well go down and fight it out there. So we moved.

We knew Bob Cowan, who was already there, and sometimes we'd go down and stay at his place. He was our introduction to the fact that film was done in an independent way. Once he asked us to come down and see a film by these twins that were friends of his — the Kuchar brothers, who were eighteen at the time. It had a profound effect on Joyce, especially stylistically, but I was impressed that these guys just went ahead and did it. I had a business background in film so, despite the fact that I'd made a film, it still seemed to me that you needed an organization and money to make films. And here were these guys who were funny and inventive and just did it. That was what they used to call "liberating."

MH: What were you painting?

MS: I started with the *Walking Woman* in 1961, about a year before we left for New York. I was working a lot with figure-ground relationships in abstract paintings and collages, trying to find some way to return to the figure without traditional realism. I got the idea of making cut-out figures that would be put on the wall so the ground for them would be the wall itself. I made a figure out of cardboard which showed a walking sideview figure, and then I realized that it was a template, a stencil that was repeatable. I decided to make variations. Then I realized that the cut-out figure didn't have to be on the wall of my studio or in a gallery; it could be anywhere. The environment the figure was put in became another factor.

I made my first photographic work based on this walking woman figure called *4X5*, which was done in 1962. It's one of the first photographic works before everyone became interested in photography in the art world. It shows the figure in different environments. It takes a two-dimensional surface which is representational and puts it in a three-dimensional world in order to make a two-dimensional photograph. A lot of things started to fly in my mind about making "site specific" work which didn't exist then. I also did "lost works," realizing I could put things out in the world and leave them there. This all happened in the first couple of years, and then I decided that one of the things I was suffering from was that I couldn't decide what direction to go in. I was trying to clarify myself, to find my own contribution. But I kept on trying so many different things. Then I thought, maybe I should arbitrarily work the same thing over and over again and make my variations within it, and then there'll be a dialogue between this constant and all these variations, and that opened up the whole idea of sticking with the contour of this figure.

Some people argued that I must have known what I was going to do with this figure, that I designed it for the uses to which it was put, which of course is impossible. It was just a drawing I did one day and liked and decided arbitrarily to choose it. I could have done another, or hundreds of others, but I thought I would stick with this one. It shows a silhouette of a woman walking, her hands, feet, and head cropped away, which shows that it comes from a rectangle, that it's been framed. I reproduced it using rubber stamps and posters and every kind of material I could think of. Then I got the idea to make a film using *Walking Woman* which was *New York Eye and Ear Control (34 min b/w 1964)*. It was an elaboration of the ideas in the *4X5* photo piece. The film used the different motions of various settings to contrast this static figure. It starts with the figure as an abstract blank, either white or black. It's a hole in the image in some sense, which later develops to include life through the nega-

tive space; that is, real women stood behind the cut-out, and from there it went to these black-and-white images — it's a black and white film — of black and white people. These are the musicians who play on the soundtrack — and they're posed against black or white grounds. The end of the film shows a black and white couple in bed.

When I went to New York, I was trying to stop playing. I just wanted to concentrate on visual art because, how much can you do? But it so happened that I met all these people who were doing free jazz, and I loved what they were doing although I didn't understand it, so I started to listen to them a lot. There had been stylistic revolutions like Charlie Parker's work — not just Charlie Parker, I hate doing that but that's what talking is, isn't it? Saying too little. There was a revolution going on which had to do with changing the source of the variations you played. All early jazz was based on certain progressions — the blues, for instance, had a repeating twelve bar structure, and the variations were melodic and harmonic. These harmonic and rhythmic variations were extended in Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie and Thelonious Monk but still remained within the tradition. Now Cecil Taylor and Ornette Coleman broke up that constant harmonic background and worked out different ways of variation. In Cecil's case an interesting thing happened with the rhythm — there was no longer any steady pulse at all.

Our studio was where the World Trade Center now is, in a building that's now destroyed. We had one studio over another. I bought a $50 piano from Roswell Rudd, a great trombonist, and I just made it known that my studio was available for anyone to play. These guys were pretty much hated by the jazz world. They weren't accepted and had few places to play, so I had these amazing sessions. Everyone played there, and I heard some extraordinary music, and that's when I did *New York Eye and Ear Control*. I was basically listening because I didn't understand how they did it.

MH: Had you met up with Jonas Mekas by this time?

MS: We went to openings in all the galleries and discovered the Cinematheque, which was in various locations. It kept having to move, and it was being run — on the run — by Jonas Mekas. Without Jonas, there would have been no centre — he was one of the people who started the distribution co-op and organized screenings, and his column in the Village Voice was very exciting. The Cinematheque was several grungy, poor people who came to watch films. As usual the art world, the painting/sculptural world, didn't attend at all. There was a lot of money and excitement in the art world and the work was wonderful too, but it had much more glamour and that never happened to film. The only time there was glamour was when Warhol showed and, since that was part of his game, there were huge audiences of the hip crowd and the next night might be Jack Smith and there would be three people. Through the Cinematheque we met Richard Foreman and Amy Taubin and Hollis Frampton and Ken Jacobs, who was very important in those days. Ernie Gehr wasn't in the first crowd but after a couple of years he turned up. Hollis and Joyce were there, and we used to go to Ken's and look at films and talk about things.

MH: What was the response when you showed *New York Eye and Ear Control*?

MS: It was shown with a film by Warhol and, of course, all his crowd came — they were all in his movie. *Eye and Ear Control* showed first, and these people hated it. They hissed

New York Eye and Ear Control

and threw things at the screen, but a lot of people were really knocked out — Warhol and Gerard Malanga and Richard Foreman were very excited about it.

MH: Tell me about *Wavelength (45 min 1967)*.

MS: I was working on it in 1966 and finished it in January 1967. It took a couple of weeks to shoot, but I spent a year making notes. A number of previously separated things tried to find a way to resolve themselves. I worked on the Walking Women exclusively from 1962 to 1967 and I was looking for a way out. *Wavelength* was part of that — it was a heavy thing in my life before it got seen or anything. I was becoming more and more interested in trying to make a kind of temporal shape so what you felt in seeing a film had something equivalent to a sculptural experience. I knew I wanted an extended zoom in a closed space, and it took me another year to figure out how to do that.

This film is a continuous zoom which takes forty-five minutes to go from its widest field to its smallest and final field. It was shot with a fixed camera from one end of an eighty-foot loft, shooting the other end, a row of windows and a street. Thus, the setting and the action which takes

place there are cosmically equivalent. The room (and the zoom) are interrupted by four human events including a death. The sound on these occasions is sync sound — music and speech occurring simultaneously with an electronic sound, a sine wave, which goes from its lowest rate (50 cycles per second) to its highest (12,000 cps) in forty minutes. It is a total glissando, while the film is a crescendo and a dispersed spectrum — so the film as a whole attempts to utilize the gifts of both prophecy and memory, which only film and music have to offer.

MH: There's something very live about the film — it lives in the time of the viewing. When I saw it for the first time, it seemed the first film that refused to answer itself — it existed on the screen with an equivalence to how we existed in the theatre. Most films offer a chronology of events, whereas this film hosts the individual chronologies of its audience as they move through the film.

Wavelength

MS: It's more objective in a certain way, in that the audience gets to examine it. They become interested in thinking about it, what's going on.

MH: Can you talk about the four dramatic scenes in the film?

MS: There's the delivery of the bookshelf, the two women listening to the radio, the guy dying, and the woman's telephone call. Obviously, you know it's important that there are plenty of other events in the film. When you look at the image of just the room, which is on for a fairly long time, it becomes more of what it really is, which is coloured light on a flat surface. You read "room" but you don't necessarily read "space" because space starts to flatten over time. So when people people the space, they show you how big it is in the illusory sense. Two guys carry something heavy down the entire room, which gives you an introduction to the thing as a space. Then two women come in and listen to a radio, which is a sound from outside — like the sound of the street comes from outside — but in this case, it's fauceted through the radio. They listen at the far end of the room so that sets up another spatial relation. They listen to the Beatles song, "Strawberry Fields." That was done post-sync. When I shot it I thought I should accept whatever came on the radio in the same way that I was accepting whatever was coming in through the windows — the bus goes by, whatever. There was no way I could control that. So Joyce walked in and turned on the radio, and what she got was "Little Drummer Boy" by Joan Baez, which had just come out, and I really hated it; it didn't help at all. "Strawberry Fields" had just come out and it seemed to be related to what I was trying to do, although saying "nothing is real" is basically stupid; it's the same investigation of what is real, what is reality. Then the man enters from off screen space. You hear a window being crashed so that space is established by sound in the same way that the radio establishes a forward space in your mind, a belief. Finally, Hollis Frampton stumbles in and falls to the ground. In a sense he joins the inert, and the camera — which is inexorable in some ways just like time is — keeps on moving past him and then he's behind you. And then when the woman — Amy Taubin — comes in to make the phone call, she makes a reference back in space and time which is now in the back of your mind. [laughs] She makes the reverse of the radio — she makes a contact to someone outside the room which is a spoken, mental thing. After she's made the call, the shot is repeated and doubled on itself. It's a ghost, a reference back in time. But it isn't real because it's supered on the ongoing reality of the zoom, which is the primary reality of the illusion. You do believe there's a room there, which is interesting. There is no room, but what is there? That's what's interesting about representation. Of course it works, but what is it?

MH: The zoom finally closes on a photograph of waves on the far wall which eventually fills the frame. Was that always part of the design?

MS: Oh yes, that's what had to be zoomed against. Wavelength.

MH: Is it my imagination or is there a long dissolve at the very end of the film, allowing the still photo to fill the frame?

MS: Yes, I sometimes worry about that. The zoom's going on and it's supered against, in this case, the future — because it's bigger. You know you're moving toward this rectangle which will eventually fill the screen. So I make it dissolve into the future — it's sort of like cumming. That's one way to read it. When I finished it, I thought it would be shown once or twice at the Cinematheque and that's it. Because that's what happened to films. Then Jonas said there was a festival and that I ought to send this film. I had made

the first version with part of the soundtrack on quarter-inch tape. I just thought that it would sound better. But we talked about it and didn't think it would be a good idea sending it with the tape; it just wouldn't get shown properly. It should have a mixed track and a new print and I was really broke. So Jonas got the money for it, even though he was as poor as anyone else. It was just amazing. He sent the thing and it won first prize — $4,000. I wouldn't have entered it without Jonas.

MH: That was the Knokke-Le-Zout Festival in Belgium. Did winning make a big difference?

MS: Oh, yes. It seemed as if the festival had some attention in Europe. At that time there was a sensationalist idea about underground film which got written about in *Time* and *Life*, partly because of Warhol, and partly because of the sexual part of it. But it turned out that there were people in Europe who were genuinely interested, and this festival was very well attended, and they wanted to see more. So I did my first European tour showing *Eye and Ear Control* and *Wavelength*.

MH: Tell me about *Standard Time (8 min 1967)*. Like *Wavelength* it features an enclosed interior — it's like a home movie.

MS: Yes, that really was my home, wife, cat, turtle. I became more and more interested in making the camera a protagonist. It seemed to me that was lost in the films I was seeing. *Wavelength* made you see a zoom. Normally a zoom was just to get you closer to something.

MH: But its role as a protagonist is very different than Brakhage's work where the camera is also the protagonist.

MS: The protagonist there is still the maker, because he's very interested in the translation of touch. I remember seeing *The Art of Vision,* which really knocked me out, but there were things about it that clarified my wanting to make work with a total shape, wanting the camera, not the maker, to be the story. There's a tendency for an expressive film — you walk into a bar and you sit next to someone and they start telling you about their life and you don't want to hear it. That's something I never wanted to do. I never wanted my work to talk about me. I want my work to exist on its own, to be self-reliant, so you can have a dialogue with it. The expressive use of the instrument, which was what Brakhage was doing, and which I still think is one of the most radical things that ever happened in the arts, was something I didn't want for myself. His strength clarified my own way of thinking. That's what was wonderful about being in New York — there was so much powerful work that it was really a sink-or-swim thing. I had to ask what I could do.

Standard Time was the second work to begin to explore the vocabulary of camera movement. It uses horizontal and vertical pans from a tripod. The soundtrack came from using the radio (which is visible in the film) as a musical instrument. I "played" it using the station dial, the volume dial, and the bass and treble. The sound imitates, in a sense, the visual movements in the film.

MH: The film seems a duet between two instruments: the panning camera and the panning radio dial.

MS: Yes, the sound isn't sync — it's in a parallel mode that features a kind of Doppler effect. The Doppler effect happens when you're standing on a road and a car in the distance grows louder as it approaches and quieter as it recedes.

MH: Had you already decided that you wanted to craft a body of work around the various gestures of the camera?

MS: Well, yes and no. I was just constantly thinking that there were things that could be done and hadn't been, and I wanted to see them. That included camera movement but also image/sound relationships. *Standard Time* was casual, like a sketch, and it really was "experimental" in that I was trying to find out what happened to the image as a result of panning at different speeds.

I want my work to exist on its own, to be self-reliant, so you can have a dialogue with it.

Back and Forth (50 min 1969), the next film, is a grand formalization of some of the effects I learned from *Standard Time*. It's also an interior, a classroom, and it's built first on left-to-right and right-to-left continuous pans with the camera on a tripod. It starts at a medium tempo, slows down, then gradually picks up speed to very fast; there's a cut to an up and down pan in the same space at the same high speed then it gradually slows down to a stop. The gesture of *Back and Forth* is a "yes" or "no" gesture and includes such relationships as teacher/student and male/female. The film is about reciprocities, balances, oscillations.

MH: When the camera's moved quickly back and forth, the whole scene becomes a blur, as if difference is extinguished in the look of the machine.

MS: The velocity makes a unity of disparate things; it's like $E=MC^2$. You're right that "difference is extinguished." The image of objects in the room blurs, and they all gradually merge to become one field of energy. This can have religious as well as physics implications. *Back and Forth* also features something I continue to be involved in which is themes and variations — in music one of the greatest examples is *The Goldberg Variations* by Bach, where there's a statement of a theme and then amazing variations developed from various aspects of its original theme. That's one of the things jazz has always done and, in another way, that's what I've done in film.

MH: That's how *La Region Centrale (180 min 1971)* seemed to me, that you framed a very limited arena within which the camera could inscribe a set of variations. How did it start?
MS: There's a pretty clear course of development because I saw what happened with circular pans in *Standard Time* and *Back and Forth*. Both used interior spaces because they were measurable, and you can believe in them in a certain way. There's a space on the screen you go into, but it's also flat. I started to think about exterior spaces and arrived at the idea of making a landscape film that would be a true film, not an imitation of painting. It seemed that what would be properly derived from the idea of doing something outside was camera movement in a totally 360-degree space. I spent almost a year looking for someone who could solve this and finally found Pierre Abbeloos — a technician working for the National Film Board in Montreal. He built a machine to my specs in the sense that I told him what kind of motions and speeds it should be capable of and that it had to be operable through remote control. The main issue was that I didn't want it to photograph itself.

Back and Forth

MH: How did you find the place to shoot?
MS: If it was going to be landscape, I didn't want anything made by humans, because the peopling of space should occur in your mind. Just like in *Wavelength*, the space is yours. I didn't want buildings, because that would be a human form and I wanted the camera to make the form. Because Pierre was building the machine in Montreal, I looked for a place close by, but could never find anything that was practical, that you could get to. Then I realized that I'd probably have to go there by plane. So I went to the government offices in Quebec City and looked at aerial photographs, trying to stay as close to Montreal as I could, but for some reason I lit on a section near Sept Iles, which is on the St. Lawrence, so I went there and rented a helicopter. We finally chose a particular spot and later went back with machinery, and Pierre and this other guy and Joyce, and we were left on a mountaintop. We were there for five days. It was supposed to be four but there was a storm and we couldn't get back and it was quite terrifying.
MH: So while the camera's shooting you're all crouched behind some bush with the remote unit?
MS: There's a bit of a valley behind the big rock and we're back there with a generator and all kinds of shit. The remote had a set of dials for each of the functions — vertical, horizontal, and rotating movements as well as zoom and speed. I had made a little score but the shooting became more improvised than expected. Pierre had a wonderful idea for directing the machine, which was to make sound tapes where different notes signalled different functions. He made a sample tape but the machine was unpredictable and it was getting later and later. It got to be August, and we couldn't get the machine finished until late September, and the location was far north, and I was really afraid of that, and I had other things to do to. So finally I said we gotta go. I just shot one test in his basement to make sure it was working and basically that was it. It was really pretty risky.
MH: These soundtapes are in the film?
MS: I did all that post-sync. Before I went up I had a score that was marked with the kind of movement and the number of minutes it went on. But it was very hard to visualize because I'd never seen it before. In a way it was symphonic — certain themes were stated and picked up again, certain motions and speeds — but some of it was unpredictable because, although I followed the general scheme, some of it didn't work for various reasons — some of it technical, the light — and I wanted to take particular periods of time which was a problem because of the machine. One time it was cold and we shot a ten-minute roll which we couldn't look at it because we'd be photographed if we did. When we went to change the film the camera was jammed with broken film and we lost a couple of hours cleaning. I would say, well we'll shoot at three and at five, but it would never work. [laughs]
MH: Were you happy with what you saw?
MS: Yes, it was fabulous. I shot five hours, all different takes of certain movements at different times of day.
MH: You shot ten minutes at a time?
MS: Yes. And if it was going to be sequential, we'd overlap to give us something to edit. I wanted to make a distillation of an entire day, which is what happens. It starts in the early morning, there's a sunset and sunrise, and it ends again in early morning. The point is, it's cyclical. The planet moves in a cycle; it's a circular thing and I wanted that to happen in the film because it's cyclical too. Its subjects are the sun, the earth, and the moon.
MH: Can you tell me about *Dripping Water (12 min b/w*

1969)?

MS: Joyce and I had a dripping tap in the loft on Chambers Street, and I just started to listen to it and thought it was extremely beautiful. I decided to make a tape of it so I could examine it a little bit better, listen to it amplified. I'd get stoned and listen to the tape, play it for other people, and it was incredible, especially with the other one going on. The real tap. Joyce had the idea that we should make a film of it. So basically the collaboration was arranging stuff in the sink and deciding it should be a fixed shot.

MH: Is it sync in fact?

MS: No, it's not. It's in the sink but it's not in sync. We did that deliberately because it's built from the tape.

MH: *One Second in Montreal (26 min b/w silent 1969)*, features a number of black and white still photographs taken in Montreal which are held on the screen for increasing and then diminishing intervals. Why the photos of the snow scenes?

MS: Well, it could have been something else but it wasn't.

One Second in Montreal

***One Second in Montreal* is about trying to make a film about duration — that experience has to do with the time it takes. When I had the idea I thought of taking black leader and having a punch hole every so often, but then there's nothing to watch. So that didn't really interest me. I thought there should be imagery of some kind, but because I wanted to measure periods of time it couldn't be too interesting. It had to be something that set a state of mind, that gave you something to look at, but all of the images needed to be equivalent so one wouldn't dominate over another. I had previously received this package of photos for a competition to put sculpture in Montreal parks. They were badly made offset lithographs, badly made in the sense that there was no contrast, little detail; they weren't too interesting.**

MH: These photos showed the sites which the sculptures were to be produced for?

MS: Yes. I really liked them. I put them up on the wall, and there was something about them that really knocked me out. It might be partly because I lived in Montreal from the age of one until I was six; there's a kind of nostalgia in them in a funny way. They're all very similar, very routine shots of these parks.

MH: They all seem to be waiting for something.

MS: Yes, there's something immanent in them. I used two different series to measure the holds: the Fibanachi series measures the holds getting longer, and another shortens them down to one frame at the end. The Fibanachi series goes up incrementally — 3,6,9... — and these numbers shape the time of the film. All the holds are different lengths. Along the way I thought maybe I should mark the change of images by something, and I had the idea of making a sound happen like a click, which I finally did in *Presents*, where a drumbeat happens on every cut — marking this almost invisible place between pictures.

MH: How did you arrive at the title?

MS: Well it's poetic in a sense because the still-photo images could have been taken at one-thirtieth of a second and there are thirty pictures.

MH: Your next film also featured still pictures — *Side Seat Paintings Slides Sound Film (20 min 1970)*.

MS: Yes, it's a filming of a projection of slides of paintings. It's filmed from the side so they're not very clear.

MH: Why from the side?

MS: Because I didn't want you to see through the film to the slides to the paintings and think you were seeing the paintings. I wanted you to see the film. It's a box in a box of mediums. But what's really important is that it's a film. To start with, you can't see the slides that well because of the side seat the camera's been given. And then they go through these modulations — the speed of the presentation changes and with it the exposure of the image. The slides are being projected by a carousel projector at a regular rate of change — fifteen seconds for each slide. The subject has an even division like a clock, but it's modulated by the fact that it's shot at different speeds. I shot it with a single-system camera, on film which carried a sound stripe. As the slides appear, I read the titles of the paintings, their sizes and dates. The size is interesting because you can never tell the size of anything on a slide; they're always projected the same size. And while the voice lists a chronology, this span of time is modulated — becoming slower or faster according to a temporal shaping which is only possible in film.

MH: Usually a film tries to replicate the experience of the best seat in the house — you're always watching events from the best possible vantage. But in this film I've got the worst seat, as if I've come late and have to sit in the wings.

MS: [laughs] When the camera shoots in fast motion, the

voice gets higher and the whole screen becomes overexposed. Now attention is directed to the total image instead of the perspectival habit which leads you into the image. Seeing the entire field is something I'm very concerned with; it's a problem I first tried to solve in *Wavelength*. The point is that film implies a transformation of any substance into a new material. Even though in human life scenes of cruelty and sex are the most appreciated because they are the most important in life, they have still become abstracted into something else, into light. That's why I'm interested in experience derived from the entire field.

MH: A few years back I trooped up to the Censor Board to ask what their rationale was for cutting. They claim to understand how images work, how we're affected. Their understanding is pure behaviourism — humans have a black box for brains, so if you put something in, it comes out the other end. Morality is a simple question of conditioning and programming. How do you feel images work?

MS: Well, I think anything people say can work in individual cases. It may be that some crazed maniac can see something and decides to imitate. There seems to be a human demand for the depiction of violence. It's not forced on people by the entertainment industry. In most cases, seeing this violence doesn't cause it at all. The argument is that it's cathartic, that it helps release aggression in a harmless way. In a fiction film, action is what's of interest, and for action to move at all implies a certain violence which becomes a ballet in Hollywood films. Certain people could become inured to violence in real life by seeing this kind of film, but it probably happens so rarely it's not necessarily a factor. I have a nine-year-old boy who really loves explosions. He makes beautiful drawings of them, of the ways different things come apart. And like all parents we worried about the gun thing, but he loves guns — finds guns, makes guns. I think he's fairly safe; all his friends are into it too.

The sexual part of it is also interesting but different. I think protests against sexual material are partly a projection of sexual fear. The word sex means "male and female," and that leaves a lot of ways you can rub it and places to stick it [laughs] and this is part of the fantasy of it. I can get a hard-on looking at certain images. I like *Penthouse* sometimes: I find it quite stimulating, which is very interesting in terms of the realism of representation. I think it's a good thing myself.

MH: Why don't you work with more sexually explicit stuff?

MS: I have a lot. I did a photowork for the magazine *Photo Communiqué*. It uses one of those three- or four-page spreads they have in *Penthouse* showing a woman in various positions and settings, which I rephotographed in black-and-white. It's illuminated so you can see the fold of the opening of the magazine. It was photographed on a table with the magazine spread open, and that's important because that's in the photographs too. You can see the spine and the curvature of the page itself which abstracts in a way, in a very beautiful way in some of them, into the image. It's very sexy, but it's also a transformation of the original material into something else which is this work, a magazine-reproduction photo-work.

MH: Why did you leave New York and come back to Toronto?

The word sex means "male and female" and that leaves a lot of ways you can rub it and places to stick it and this is part of the fantasy.

MS: There were several reasons. I always felt like a bit of a foreigner there. We were both involved in political activity around the Vietnam War and black power, and wondered if we shouldn't be doing this back home. And we were starting to notice the danger — Joyce got attacked and escaped handily at her door once. It just seemed there was something old in New York, which is a strange thing to say. We started to see Canada as a place to make something new.

MH: This was the period when you were making *Rameau's Nephew by Diderot (Thanx To Dennis Young) by Wilma Schoen (4.5 hours 1974)* — a film shot in both New York and Toronto. It's an elaborate articulation of sound-image relations.

MS: Yes. Each scene uses a different cast and develops a relation between language and images of people. I wanted to foreground sound/image relations in the same way that I tried to foreground pans and zooms in previous work — to make them a living aspect of what's going on. All of the film's parts are very discrete, there's really not that much connection. Eventually you can see that a language is developing, that the film itself speaks, and that this language articulates image/sound relations. The film is based on a sentence structure, where each scene is imagined as a word. Some words are long and take more time, while others are short. It's like Lego in a way — you can arrange all these different things in different ways, but they each have their own individual significance, origin, and etymology. The film could be rearranged to make another sentence. The film features solos, duets, trios, quartets, quintets, sextets — it's like an opera.

MH: Before you started shooting, was the entire film mapped out?

MS: No, I didn't have all the sequences. I was incredibly obsessed by the whole thing, making notes all the time.

There's a water theme in the film, a cycle of what happens with water; as it evaporates it becomes clouds, rains, goes down to the seas and rivers, and comes back again. That cycle has been going on for millions of years. Probably no one else would ever notice it in the film. But it is there. For example, there's a scene in an eighteenth century room where a woman tries to get Nam June Paik to sing "A Hard Rain's A Gonna Fall," a Bob Dylan song. He tries and doesn't get it right, and she doesn't get it very right either. She plays him the "model," the Dylan recording on camera with a cassette tape recorder. The song is a cultural thing — a cultural representation of rain. There are other references, then it does rain, visually and aurally in the log cabin scene. Then there's a faucet in a sink which shows the civilized arrival of water, and then my tapping of the sink which is sink sound, and then it's passing through our bodies into the system. Of course, when you see it, you don't think that at all — it's two people pissing. [laughs] Several women have called it a pissing contest, but I call it a piss duet. Water music. It was funny trying to get someone to do that. First of all, I thought someone who had been in a porn film would do it because they're used to exposing themselves, and I made some phone calls to people who figured I was a piss freak. I tried to explain that I wasn't interested in a sexual way; it doesn't turn me on at all. It's just that it would be interesting to see a man and a woman peeing together. After all, how often do you get to see someone pissing? So I had this guy who was my assistant at the time and he said, "Oh, I'll do it," and I asked this woman who was a dancer and she did it. I wanted to have lots of piss so we sat there drinking until one of them said, "I can't stand it any longer." [laughs]

Rameau's Nephew

MH: You had problems with the Censor Board with this film.

MS: Yes, there's some fucking in it. Again, to speak as a formalist, the film is about intercourse, dialogue, exchange — what else could there be but that particular kind of exchange? I think they didn't like the pissing either. I was going to show it at the Funnel and they said no, you can only show it at the Art Gallery of Ontario because these elevated people could take smut but these other people couldn't. They would just go out and rape and kill.

MH: Tell me about *Breakfast (Table Top Dolly) (15 min 1972-76)*.

MS: This is another thing I shot three times. I wasn't totally satisfied with the first two takes and did it again. There's a lot that's accidental in it.

MH: Did they all feature a table with breakfast on it?

MS: Yes, though the things on the tabletop changed a bit in each shooting. I made this track with a heavy Plexiglas sheet on it about half-an-inch thick. We pushed this sheet along the top of the table, at right angles to the table, knocking over various things until it all gets smashed against the wall.

MH: So it's a take on what happens when the camera zooms — it's about optical compression.

MS: Yeah, it came up in a conversation with Hollis Frampton. I was just joking about making *Wavelength* as a tracking or trucking shot, and I immediately thought about a snow-plow, which is how the camera functions in *Breakfast* — it plows its subject against the wall. In the same conversation we came up with this title *Table Top Dolly* — the expectations are some kind of table top dancer, dolly in the girly usage. I tried to arrange the objects so they would all fall into each other. I had milk which I wanted to spill, but in the first two they just didn't do interesting things. I used the three takes shown consecutively to make a videotape called *Three Breakfasts* — it's a series of variations. But the concept comes from literalizing the idea that photographing or filming makes the three-dimensional become two-dimensional.

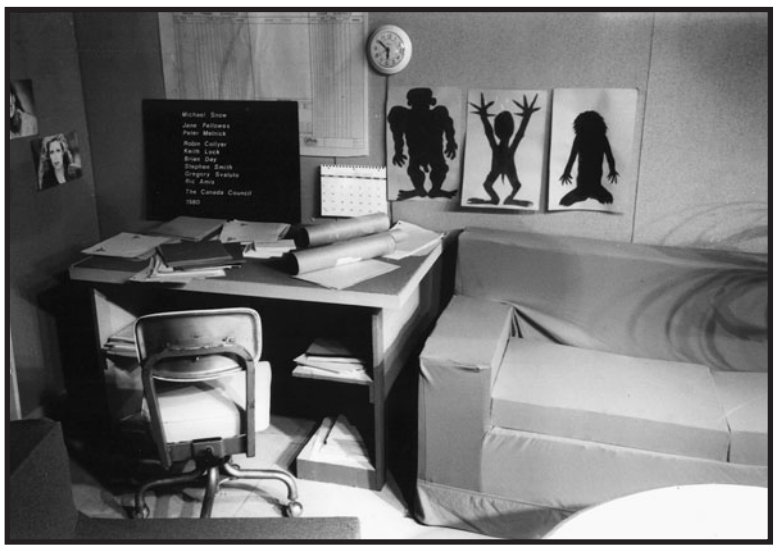
MH: Have you ever used film in a gallery context, as part of an installation?

MS: Only one called *Two Sides to Every Story,* which the National Gallery owns. It features two projectors on either side of a hanging metal screen so you can walk around it and see what's on the other side. At one point the people who are acting in it go through the screen — they burst through it and come out to the other side, while at other times it's a surface which they touch. The image is flat to the point of non-existence because light is not very thick, so when you're in front of the screen the illusion of space seems to work as usual except that the screen is suspended. The normal situation is up against a wall, but in this case the image is not masked, which conventionally helps the illusion of depth. Here it's an image floating in real space. The spectator can't see both sides at once; you have to move around

and see the image in new ways.
I've also done several carousel slide pieces intended for galleries — you can just drop in on them. There's one called *Sink* which came out of *Wavelength,* in a way. There's also one called *Slidelength,* which is even more closely related. At my Canal Street studio I had this really filthy sink, it had so much colour in it from paint residue and things I'd made but it was never cleaned out. I set the camera up in a fixed spot and affixed two lights and I used gels in front of the lamps to change the colour in every shot. It goes through a number of incredible transformations which has to do just with illumination because there's no change other than that. Basically, it's about mixing coloured light to make coloured light. The range of emotions that come from it is really quite extraordinary. Sometimes when the light was blue-green it kind of cleaned up the sink and it became transcendental in a way, like a Canova, a neo-classical sculpture. At the same time as I was working on this, Mark Rothko committed suicide. I heard about it after I'd finished shooting — he wasn't all that far away from where I lived. He cut his wrists in a sink, and my sink had so much red in it, it was unbelievable. And the format of the image I made is a shape within a shape which is very close to Rothko. I always admired him. I never had any particular influence I could think of, but in this case I thought I wouldn't have been able to see that soft rectangle set in a soft rectangle without his work. It was really very spooky. The slides are shown small, the size and height of a sink. Beside it stands a still photograph taken with so-called normal light, which acts as a kind of norm. One is constant and the other always changing.

There's also *A Casing Shelved,* which is best shown in auditoriums. I tried to make a gallery piece out of it but it didn't work. It really needs the time; you have to be seated. It moves your eyes around in so many different ways. It's an attempt to make a movie using the guidance of the voice. It's a single slide accompanied by a voice saying, "Look at the top right hand corner, now look at the middle, now look at the bottom," creating movement across the plane. I was working in the studio when I started looking at my shelf and thought it was interesting that all of the objects it held were art related — some of them were works but weren't visible, parts of things I'd done, paint cans, etc. I thought it was a very interesting piece of sculpture that had been formed by chance, like lots of things, yet all for art related purposes. So I took the slide of it and made the tape just sitting in front of it, trying to describe it and the history of the objects there.
MH: Why make it a slide and not a movie?
MS: I like the frozen quality of slides and the Kodachrome colour was beautiful, and the idea of looking at a slide for so long was interesting. You never look at them that long. Basically, they're for education or home stuff, and I guess even that's become fairly rare. It has a beautiful kind of fixity to it. If it was on film, there'd be some fluttering — it would be another story, that's for sure.

In a new gallery piece called *Recombinant* I took a piece of plywood, cut out shapes and fit them back together leaving the saw cut spaced and exposed. It was painted white. This became the screen for slides to be projected against. Since it's a surface that has its own objective existence, everything that's projected on it has a relation to it. If you project on a flat, white surface, it'll accept any space and your eye will read into it, but this is different. I made a set of eighty images that colour the screen. Every shot is a different spatial situation. Some are shot looking up so that when it's projected you get this illusory feeling of seeing the ceiling, or looking down or sideways, and they all create a different space but always in dialogue, so to speak, with this surface.
MH: What was your starting point for *Presents (90 min 1981)*? I ask because there are two fairly separate sections which make up the film.



Presents

MS: Well, the first part is also divided into two. The opening of the film is about the molding of an image where it's squeezed and stretched onto the screen. It starts with a line or slit that opens. Then it contracts to a small rectangle in the middle of the screen. Before that, you can see that it's an image of a nude reclining woman, perhaps a still photo or a painting, and then in the small rectangle she gets up and, so to speak, looks back at you and then she lies down and then the picture stretches again to fill the frame. It was all done on video. The sound is an electronically produced chord done with computers — it's a resolution of a chord in thirds and it twists itself in the same way as the image to resolve. It goes from a G-major chord to a C-major chord — a simple resolution — but it does so by twisting to a single note the

same way the image does.
MH: Why this elaborate opening?
MS: It comes from a question: how can things be made? It turns out there are only three ways to make things physically. One way is molding — you have a material and you squeeze it into shape. Another way is to add something to something else. Another way is subtracting, taking parts away from an original whole. That's how you make an object of any kind. Making things is part of the subject of the film. Making the film itself, but also the world that gets photographed including the set and its destruction. This making includes so-called destruction — when is destruction construction and when is it destruction? In order to have a two-by-four to build a house, you have to kill a tree, and so forth. There's a lot of crisscrossing lines that produce a lot of different meanings. They're chosen from a certain area, but they don't say one specific thing. The first section shows molding and malleability — "when the maker makes the maker shapes," but of course the fact that it's an image of a naked woman is very important.

Thinking about *Back and Forth,* I had the idea it would be interesting to do a film by moving the set, making it do all the things that cameras ordinarily do. Rather than the camera dollying or trucking, the set would move and tilt; it attempts to truck forward by being lifted closer to the camera. I used a forklift to lift the entire set and move it closer to the camera. Before that happens, the woman lies in bed in a scene that recalls all the images of nude women from painting and *Penthouse* and stuff like that. (This is after the electronically moulded passage.) She's still, and there's no narrative implications because there's a long hold which is very pictorial in the painting sense. And then there's a knock and she gets up and puts on a dressing gown. She's extremely beautiful — have you ever noticed that? Jane Fellowes is her name. She's a model — it was important to the film that she's a model. The film is called *Presents* because it's about presentation — the word itself has extremely complicated usages. It's often used in announcing films or plays or music. But it has a lot of other meanings. There are a lot of usages I tried to bring up in the film about presents — about presentation of the self and objects — and one that is quite pertinent is the zoological term, where females present themselves to males, that is, they lift their asses up. Naturally enough all mammals do it, although our forms of presentation are more complicated.

Someone comes to the door, and as she walks towards it, the set begins to move. In all my films, I've had the ambition to make the entire frame active, not only set a dominant figure against a background and, in this instance, the movement makes the entire set shiver and fall and the record player skips, and when the trucking ends the whole set lurches. The man enters and they search for something and find it. You can't see what it is and it's never named. Taking a cue from *Breakfast,* we made this huge modified wheelchair with a large plastic sheet in front of it and it drives into the set. It's in front of the camera and it pushes things around and generally destroys the set. Then the camera pushes the wall down, which opens to a scene out the window which is a highrise building. And that's the beginning of the new sequence. It's done optically — it's a matte shot — and the wall falls and reveals an exterior shot. From then on we see hundreds of shots which go further and further away from any immediate connection with the original scene — it's a completely different mode. It's all shot out in the world, it's not staged, and it's all hand-held pans. They are all little presents, little "nows." They were shot all over the world because I wanted to go further away from the closed, staged interior of the beginning. It is like the opposite of *Wavelength* because it starts at a point and gets wider. For each cut there's a drum beat — and that's the only sound in this part of the film. It continues to discuss some of the implications of the first scene but now with images taken from "real life" because they're documentary. Because it's hand-held, it's diaristic as well, and that's one of the few times I've done that. It shows things that are intimate to me as well as things that are more public.
MH: Why pans?
MS: I think they're more like glances than a hold is. It's more normal to move with your hands and eyes than to hold them still — so it was my way of finding a formal use for hand-held camera which is different from other people's. There are two kinds of making in cinema. One is totally staged, like in a historical drama where everything is constructed. The other is the construct of the physical filmstrip itself, the editing, which takes its most extreme form when you use images from real life, not images that are already formed by internal shaping, by being made, which is more like theatre.
MH: What do you mean "it's at its most extreme"?
MS: When you record things that are outside in the world, you have no shaping capacity except in the way you take the image. If you make a scene, which I did in the first part, you make everything in the image. So these are really two extremes of construction, and I meant them to correlate to male and female, not necessarily to designate one specifically — but one of the themes of the film is how do these two parts of the same organism fit together? How do they relate to each other — male and female? Because the film's made by a heterosexual man, it's about my seeing women with a camera. And some of the women are very close to me. The biographical part of it was that I was breaking up with Joyce at the time and seeing Peggy. They're both in it, as well as other women I know, and the film covers a range of activities done by women. For instance, there's a woman cop. And

the business of panning was very interesting because not only did I have to see something that I wanted to photograph, but I'd instantly have to see how the camera should move. If someone was walking, I'd pan with them. But sometimes I'd just follow a line on a building, or I'd draw contours, or I'd see that I could go from one point to another by moving through a third space. I shot for about a year, and it was terrific because I was always seeing that way. It was a bit like when I was making *Rameau's Nephew*. I was always listening and thinking about language and making notes, but in this case I did it with the camera.

MH: How did you organize the material?

MS: Editing was really hard but interesting. I wanted to make every shot discrete, established by the preceding one by contrast. So if there was a horizontal pan in one shot, the next might have a vertical pan. If one shot was close-up, the next might be distant. There are so many elements in the shots there was no way I could totally classify everything, but I made lists. I also wanted connections to be made over long periods. There are two complementary events: one is an operation, and the other's a caribou hunt in the Arctic. Both have a lot of blood and both are different kinds of cutting, you might say. [laughs] And they have their value and horror. In fact, film terminology is illustrated often in *Presents*. I edited these sequences out of order to give each section its own identity as a kind of now-but-past experience which is what film is. Several people have said that the film is a commentary on Hollywood films — attempting to deconstruct them in a critical way. But that's not true. I personally have no opposition to other cinemas. I think there are a lot of interesting things done. I watch *Star Trek* every night. I'm just trying to do something else, and in this case it happens to be staging, and staging happens to be an essential element in most narrative films.

So Is This

MH: *So Is This (43 min silent 1982)* seemed very timely in its release — interest in semiotics was running high, and your film takes language as its material, offering up a succession of individual words on the screen. But for all its theoretical interest, it has a very friendly, warm feeling.

MS: Which is strange because it's just words; it's a written text, but the style is conversational, as if you're sort of blabbing to someone. I think it says that actually, "It's just between you and me." [laughs] I wrote the original text in 1975 with the idea of controlling the duration of words on a screen so it relates to *One Second in Montreal*.

MH: The film reaches a certain point and then repeats itself. Why?

MS: I think it says something like, there should be a résumé for people who have arrived late, so it goes back to the beginning. It says "Let's look back" — and it is a real looking back; it's a photographing of the projected film which isn't the same as re-doing it, and it's also a selective re-shooting because I single framed it. I was trying to catch most of the "this" words as I filmed, trying to make new arrangements. Again, it's a theme and variation thing; a new elaboration of what's already been stated.

MH: Tell me about the reference to the Censor Board.

MS: There's a reference to the business with *Rameau's Nephew* that happened just before that. The film claims not to be political, but it is. [laughs] It advises any children present to cover their eyes and then goes on to talk about the Censor Board.

MH: And the words "cock," "tits," "cunt," that are flashed between other words?

MS: Those are interjected, subliminal. It's like getting away with something. [laughs] There's such a funny difference between seeing the word "cunt" or "cock" as opposed to the image. There's a good joke about that later: "An orgy of reading." [laughs]

MH: These things are only offensive insofar as we can name them; our language makes them obscene.

MS: I found a quote by Albert Einstein that was interesting. He was explaining to someone how he thinks. Interestingly enough, he doesn't think as a mathematician. He sees things in terms of images or forces, and it's only later that it becomes mathematical. Personally when I think about work, because my work is fairly conceptual, I don't think of it so much verbally but in terms of mentally seeing the effect of doing something. It's an image. But the fact remains that we name everything and that the organization of the world has to do with the recognition of something's name. Saying "stool" has to do with its function, and I think one of the functions of the visual arts is to carry on some things that happen in the pre-verbal stages of everyone's lives. Which again is something Brakhage is very conscious

of. On the other hand, language is biological. I have a child and I've seen the arrival of language, and I'm convinced that in this species the brain is physiologically prepared at a certain time for naming, for language. It doesn't matter what the language is, but the mechanisms for language begin to kick in. I don't think it's tragic that we're trapped in language. I don't think we could do what we're doing without it. Language demonstrates its efficiency all the time. It works. Many people function totally verbally in that all they do is recognize that it's a tool. But they don't see it — because they haven't been trained to see. And that's one of the things the history of painting does for you; having seen the fantastic accomplishments of Monet, one can see light in a different way. It's a shaping for seeing.

Something about Freud and Lacan that's interesting is that to describe the pre-verbal period involves incredible sophistication by adults, and the more sophisticated the description, the further it is from the experience. Very young children can't know anything about castration; they don't even know there are balls. They know surfaces and anxiety related to sensual feelings. It's all surfaces and touch in a continuity where there's no fragmentation. Fragmentation itself is language. The only way to depict that period of a human being's life would be to do it in terms of images. Or surfaces. It's interesting that Lacan has sometimes resorted to diagrams, which are very obscure medieval things, and it seems that depiction might have to take a pictorial course to be anywhere near to precise in depicting events that are evanescent. I don't think character is only formed by trauma, by particular critical events. I think it has more to do with repetition and translating and mis-translating the actions of your parents and your environment. Really silly mistakes can be made in translating a gesture that can shape your whole life. On the other hand, I think an organism is born as an entity that is very powerful, that's already a person. And this entity can be hurt, warped, shaped in many ways, because it has no experience. But it has a structure, every person has a structure, and given more or less normal conditions this will include a great deal of anxiety and pain.

Seated Figures

MH: There was a seven year break between *So Is This* and *Seated Figures (42 min 1988)*. How come?

MS: I don't know why. I'm always working on film in the sense that I'm thinking about it and writing notes. I've got ideas about bunches of things that never got done. *Seated Figures* returns to the idea of trying to make a film technique become a protagonist. Trucking covers space so I needed to cover a lot of terrain. *La Region Centrale* covered almost all the visible area that the camera could see but it was made from a central fixed location. So *Seated Figures* covers a lot of surfaces that starts with asphalt and ends with flowers in a field. It was done by making a gizmo on the back of my truck. I put the tripod and camera on it, pointed the camera at right angles to the ground, then I just chose all the various places. I wasn't sure whether I would start at paradise and end at civilization or the reverse and finally ended up starting with the asphalt.

MH: You said somewhere that one of its subtexts was a history of roads.

MS: Yes, it goes from asphalt to gravel to sand then to more and more primitive paths. They happen to be lumber roads cutting through the woods, and on the way they go through puddles, then brooks and streams, and then the paths become grass, but wild grass (it's not like a lawn or anything like that) and then the fields become filled with flowers.

MH: There's a series of freeze frames that interrupt this flowing motion. Are these rest stops?

MS: I was hoping for the kind of reciprocal motion that happens in the cross in *La Region Centrale*. It was a still frame that contrasted with the incessant movement of the camera — like when you're in a trainyard you can't tell whether you're moving or the train beside you. The motion preceding the cross prompts a reaction, even though the cross is static. If the pan has been going down for a long time, then the cross might seem to rise. So it's you that causes the motion instead of the image.

MH: Tell me about the soundtrack.

MS: The beginning is intended to be a couple of people at the projector; either it's a booth or the projector's in the room. Someone says, "Oh just a minute, I have to announce the film," which they do and then the other guy says, "Do you want a coffee? How long is this film?" The sound after that is supposed to be the sound in a small viewing room. There's a bit of an argument between a man and a woman who finally leave. And there's a baby. In a very small way,

the baby brings up that business of pre-verbal seeing. In the audience there's someone that doesn't see, or maybe they see like this all the time, or what is it that they see? Is it this?

MH: The last shot looks as if it's been re-photographed from the screen. The image shows a field of flowers, and two hands clenched to form the shape of a bird drift past the picture.

MS: Yes, you can only do that when your hands are making shapes in the projection beam — if the audience was sitting in the theatre, they've now moved into the beam. It's a way of getting the audience into the picture whereas before they've only been in the soundtrack.

MH: It's a very traditional sort of ending: birds flying into the sunset.

MS: Yes, that's right.

MH: Tell me about *See You Later/Au Revoir (18 min 1990)*.

See You Later/Au Revoir

MS: A video studio in town got hold of a special slow motion camera and asked several people if they wanted to use it. The strange thing was that I'd had the idea for a long long time. I'd written about it from 1969 to 1970. I was thinking about making a slow motion film, again partly because of isolating techniques in the medium and using them. Before I shot *Wavelength* I took almost a year thinking about a slow zoom, but this one came like a vision. Immediately. I saw this guy at a desk, he gets up, puts his coat on, goes to the door and leaves. I got the call from the video studio a long time after the idea was written down and it seemed like time to try it. The camera only slowed to a third of its original speed, so I had to post-sync it down to the slowness I wanted. The video image is so manipulable, modifiable in a very hands-on way, we just tried different speeds. We dialed it down until we got to the slowest speed before it started to phase and that was it. I did the same with the sound, which is in sync.

MH: It seemed to me a meditation on mortality.

MS: A lot of people have said that — I didn't think about that myself.

MH: The film shows an elongated farewell. It's about getting older, slowing down, where every gesture is difficult and painful, all moving towards the end.

MS: I walk past a woman seated at a desk and people in the know know that the woman is Peggy — so I'm supposed to be saying good-bye to my wife. I keep mentioning Brakhage but there are other people. Brakhage liked it a lot. In fact, he was extremely moved by it. I was very surprised, but he ran up and embraced me and said, "It's a last testament and it's a farewell to your wife and it's about death." I never thought that. It's a departure, that's all. The Kine worked very well, and of course the colour in it is carefully staged — the man's seated against green, then it goes through the spectrum to red which is on the door.

MH: Why the two titles?

MS: "See you later" is something you can do with film. It's kind of a funny joke because you don't want people to see it later, you want them to see it now, but that's one of the possibilities of film. In terms of the original event they are seeing it later, but in a technological memory. The incident itself can't be seen later; it was done. Also I say, "Good-bye," and she says, "See you later," but you can't make that out because the voice is so slow. "Au revoir" means "see again" — it's not just trying to be bilingual. Seeing a film is seeing the event later. And seeing it again.

MH: Tell me about *To Lavoisier, Who Died in the Reign of Terror (53 min 1992)*.

MS: It started with an accumulation of obscure rolls of film that date back to the sixties that, for some reason or other, I hadn't shot. I realized that they had to be hand processed because no lab could do any of it now. I'd seen Carl Brown's first film, *Urban Fire*, on a Canada Council jury and liked it and we met after that. Then he did *Condensation of Sensation* with sound by the CCMC — the music group I play in — and I really like that a lot. So I thought maybe Carl would like to work on this with me and do the processing and he was interested. We'd shoot maybe three or four versions of each scene on different stocks and talk about what approach he might take or he would just do whatever he felt like. One of the aspects of film is that it's chemical. I wanted to work on the chemical thing partly because of video which has clarified film in a way — having an Other has foregrounded aspects of it. The film's structure resembles a great big clock because the shot positions start from above and go around until you're looking up and then they go back up to the top again. Every shot is a zoom so that after you've been watching the film for a while you might read the total shape as a spiral in space rather than a circle. The shape could also be felt as a going down and a

coming back up, a fall and rise, which obviously could have many emotional effects. Here, it could be describing the guillotine.

When Carl does this kind of developing it eats into the entire image but there are also many variations on the surface of the film independent of the image. In planning the shots, after the usual months of thinking about it, I chose to stage events which would be "ready," so to speak, for a relationship between what was depicted and what the actual image looked like. The ping pong scene is a good example; it was reticulated, so that the ping pong ball often gets lost in the swarm of grain that is the image. The processing alters the original realism. I wanted the spectator to see the totality, the image, not just to see through its qualities to recognize the scene. For example, there's a man eating, shot from above and you can see the plates are empty. But as an image the plates are not "empty," they're full of filmic matter. Same for the "empty" pot the woman in the kitchen holds up. "It" swarms. In one of the early shots a man waves, dodges, feints, amidst the chemically induced storm. In shooting it I asked him to pretend that there were mosquitoes or bees around him or things falling in the air like dust and to wave, slap them off, protect himself. In the end, he's protecting himself from what happened to the emulsion. The bath scene uses a more liquid alteration of the image. She's in the bath water as the real life event which is the subject of the shot. But as an image the effects of the liquid chemicals (also called a bath) submerge "her" too.

MH: Tell me about Lavoisier.

MS: Lavoisier is considered the father of modern chemistry. He made scientific what was previously alchemy. His classification of chemicals and their properties helped lead to photography. He was an amazing man who was killed by the new tax collectors despite his contributions to France, including agricultural improvements which helped the peasantry. I chose to show scenes of daily life, *la vie quotidienne*, not scenes of heroism or his great accomplishments. These scenes are altered by photography, chemistry, and the threat of fire. The way matter is transformed into a new state in photography is one of the themes of the film. The film is dedicated to him, but it's not a biography.

MH: Why the inscription "To Lavoisier — who died in the reign of terror"? It gives the film an elegiac feeling.

MS: There are references to external danger in the sound and image, and the context of fire is that it is both useful and destructive. That reminds me of something Jonas Mekas said which was that a knife can cut your bread or stab someone in the heart. Well, fire can both cook your dinner and burn down your home. It has to be "domesticated" and understood. I think it functions beautifully as sound because it's like a kind of random percussion which syncs with fortuitous events in the image. Even the silent parts of the film will someday have the sound of fire. As the optical track gets scratched, the clicks and scrapes and hissing is very close to fire sound.

MH: Because the film features such an aggressive assertion of purely filmic materials this elegy is also for film itself, for the passing of a chemical understanding.

MS: In a way it is. The transformation of a substance by fire is like the transformation of something by chemicals, which is a water or at least liquid thing. Fire and water are equivalent to fire's two sides.

MH: Are you happy with the audience for experimental film?

MS: In some ways I can't understand why experimental film continues to have such a small audience. I just think that it should be accessible to anyone who can see and think. And yet it's not so. Sometimes I've attributed that to the training people get with narrative films — if they see something different they think that something's wrong. According to McLuhanesque theories, people are more visual than literate now, so they might have a wider receptivity. Advertising and music videos have introduced other ways of organizing visual material than the narrative one, which might help. But how does distribution in theatres work? I thought, for instance, that *La Region Centrale* could be popular in the big movie sense. People take it sometimes as a science fiction film — after everyone's dead there was a machine that did this. But that would depend on somebody taking it in hand and doing one of those million-dollar things that Hollywood does with a new movie — where there's no escape from knowing at least that this film was made. But such a person or organization has never come along and maybe they never will. But I really don't see that experimental films are obscure. Look at literature — our kinds of films are equivalent to poetry which has a tiny audience. Maybe that's a similar field. But in literature people read a lot of different

To Lavoisier

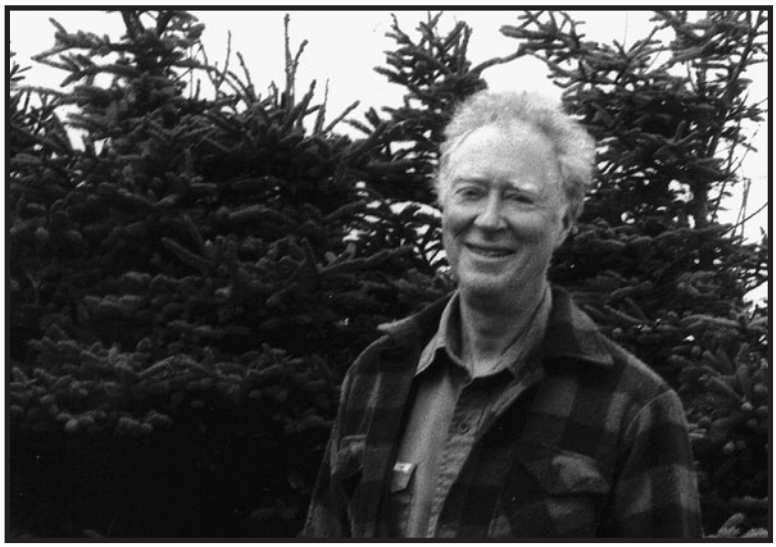
things, and yet people who have a film culture don't know about this huge body of work which started with Lumière and Méliès which, after all, is experimental film. I just don't understand their resistance.

MH: Some argue that MTV has shown the ability of the mainstream to absorb dissent — that it has managed to turn the aspirations of a generation of experimental filmmakers into record commercials.

MS: That was happening in New York in the sixties and seventies. Leslie Trumbull at the New York Filmmakers Co-op told me there were a couple of advertising agencies that would rent ten or twenty films and use their ideas. I don't see anything against that really; if they do use things there might be somebody who is clued into it that might see another use for it. Experimental films are so unavailable that someone can't come across them by chance. You have to know about the area to see them. On the other hand, it's surprising that it still exists, that there are young people coming to it. The medium itself still seems inviting and there's still a lot to be done with it. And yet it's going to die. Part of my life's work is not only decaying, but soon there won't be any way to show it.

Michael Snow Filmography

A to Z	7 min b/w silent 1956
New York Eye and Ear Control	34 min b/w 1964
Short Shave	4 min b/w 1965
Standard Time	8 min 1967
Wavelength	45 min 1967
Back and Forth	50 min 1969
One Second in Montreal	26 min b/w 1969
Dripping Water (with Joyce Wieland)	12 min b/w 1969
Side Seat Paintings Slides Sound Film	20 min 1970
La Region Centrale	180 min 1971
Breakfast (Table Top Dolly)	15 min silent 1972-76
Rameau's Nephew By Diderot (Thanx to Dennis Young) By Wilma Schoen	4.5 hours 1974
Presents	90 min 1981
So Is This	43 min silent 1982
Seated Figures	41 min 1988
See You Later/Au Revoir	18 min 1990
To Lavoisier (Who Died in the Reign of Terror)	53 min 1992



PAINTING THE LIGHT FANTASTIC

CARL BROWN:

Carl Brown is a documentary filmmaker, though his work appears a far cry from the newsreels and illustrated lectures Canadians grew accustomed to during the Second World War. Retreating from an examination of the public sphere, he has fashioned a unique form of autobiography which seeks to convey emotions, not events. To this end he has dismissed traditional film laboratory procedures, and turned to his own basement darkroom. There, he develops his work by hand, pushing strips of motion picture film into glass jars filled with chemicals of his own making. Once the image has been developed, he begins to work on the surface of the material, adding coloured dyes and bleaches, in order to heighten the expressive impact of his pictures. The result is a fantastically coloured rendering which narrates the subtext of everyday events.

Working alone with little public attention, Brown has fashioned a body of feature-length work whose "art for art's sake" directives are among the most esoteric in Canada. His documentaries of perception explode across the screen in colours that would make Disney blush, transforming even the simplest of objects into teeming washes of longing and despair. Brown's painterly vigils often conjure minds at the end of their tether, and mark him as a unique figure of the Canadian fringe.

Look, See Representation

CB: I studied film at Sheridan College for two years before heading out on my own and a couple of moments stand out. I was working on a film called *Mine's Bedlam (8 min b/w super-8 1981)* and had prepared an elaborate script and storyboard just as we'd been instructed, and scouted locations and found actors. But when we got there, it was so cold the register pin on the Bolex froze. There was a dead pigeon lying in pieces on the ground, and we imagined this had been done by human hands. Here was the horror my script was trying to induce artificially. That's when I threw away the script and I've never worked with one since. I just started responding to what was going on in front of me. It brought me back to a time when play was integral to existence. I thought I was getting away with something because there was a lot of work I didn't have to do anymore — the kinds of things people did before starting a film. Rehearsing. Acting. Writing. That became irrelevant. But we're raised in a literary world where "proper" ideas are realized on paper. If it comes out of you through your eyes and onto a screen with nothing in between, there's got to be something wrong. All I was doing was communicating the feel of living in a moment, which is what an artist should be doing. Words had nothing to do with it. I'm a conductor for the present; light passes through me and comes out the other end for people to see. When I got the footage back, the pin didn't hold the images in alignment so I didn't know what I was looking at. By all conventional standards this footage was junk, a complete waste. But one of my teachers came in and loved it, and that was a turning point for me — to be able to trust what I'm seeing, not what I'm told.

MH: How did you get interested in working with the film's material?

CB: I loved the immediacy. You have this colour red that you want to see on your canvas. You see it in your mind and your hand puts it there. If I had to send my footage to a lab and look at it a week later it would be cold for me. I want to process my footage immediately after shooting; it's part of the same gesture, the same present.

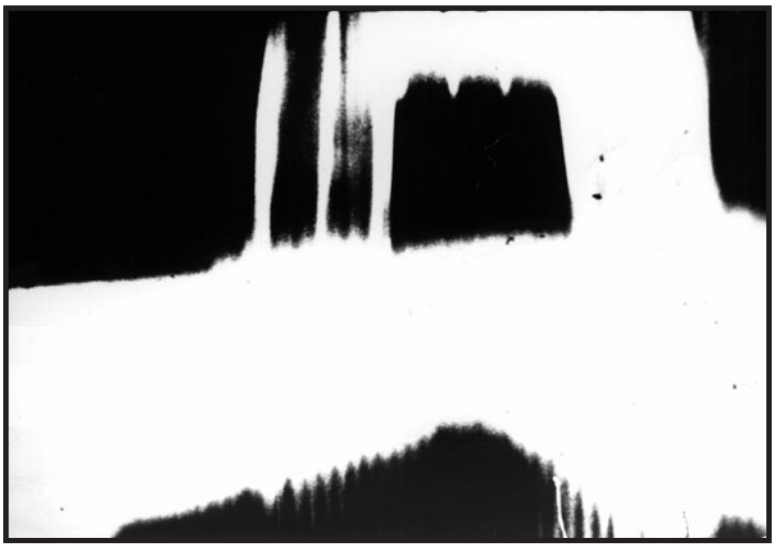
MH: Why not turn to video for that immediacy?

CB: Video's not physical. It's not art. Art is something additive or subtractive. Video is video — the signal doesn't change. In video the surface and the image are separate. How can you respond to iron oxide particles? I can't relate. I finally realized that it's alchemy I've been involved with, the conversion of silver halide particles. Silver is a precious metal which I make even more valuable by turning it into a light that no one else sees but me.

MH: Tell me about *Urban Fire (15 min b/w 1982)*.

CB: It's a succession of optically printed loops which develop a series of themes and variations using hand-processing techniques on high-contrast black-and-white film. It was the beginning of my work with film materials. I'd overheard an instructor talking at school about reticulation — he said it was impossible to achieve in film. Reticulation is simply the cracking of the film surface. The initial effect is like breaking into a mirror, separating the pieces, and looking into it. So I boiled some water, poured it over the film to soften it, drained it off, threw some baking soda on it and stored it in a freezer, like a cake. It wasn't exactly reticu-

lation but it didn't look like it used to. Then I put a six-foot length of this onto the optical printer and began to shoot variations. Each shot in *Urban Fire* is a realistic image which I took through various processes, like sabbatier. Man Ray was the first to do that. His assistant was frightened by a mouse in the midst of processing, so she turned the light on. Then she shut the lights down, figuring the print was ruined. What they found instead was a thin line that ran along the silhouette of the picture and a shifting of tones. Sabattier: Born out of accident. I used HC110, a thick replenishing developer which works very slowly. I could control the extent of the sabattier just by watching it because the process lasted so long. *Urban Fire* developed out of this play of



Urban Fire

materials.

MH: Why the biblical intertitles and the Genesis quote at the beginning?

CB: The difficulty of speaking about a work made so long ago is that it has a coherence in retrospect it lacked at the time of its making. I was just struggling through it then. If I'd known why at the time, I probably would have done something else. This film was my beginning. Hence the Genesis quote at the beginning. I changed as a person after this film. I went into film school wanting to make feature dramas, but *Urban Fire* snapped me right off that track. Even though the images are completely abstract, the film's a personal documentary. It represents my feelings, my calm and storm and bombing and fire. It set me up for things to come. I started to realize my greatness. I know enough about history to understand that when people like or hate something a lot, it means I've done something important.

MH: It begins with a series of almost skeletal drawings or blueprints. These drawings cycle and circulate in preparation for the film's central image: the bombing sequence.

CB: Those are the reticulated images pulled out of the baking soda.

MH: The film builds toward this sequence of annihilation, then proceeds to show its effects in sections entitled "The Fire" and "The Aftermath." Both these sections seem an examination of ruins and continue to cycle images transfigured by their formal treatment. The process of destruction that the film describes is obviously related to the film processing itself, and I couldn't help wondering why. The biblical trope suggests that there's something wrong with this place, hence its destruction. The newly built world of Genesis is continually threatened with annihilation through floods and storms, as if the shape of this race needed to form more solid roots before beginning the task of its own history.

CB: *Urban Fire* showed all the changes I went through that year: marriage, the end of school, and a complete disconnection with my family and my wife's family. The film shows this new perspective — the destruction of who I was and the rebirth of someone richer. Everything in my middle class upbringing said that making films in this way was wrong. In order to make them, something had to change.

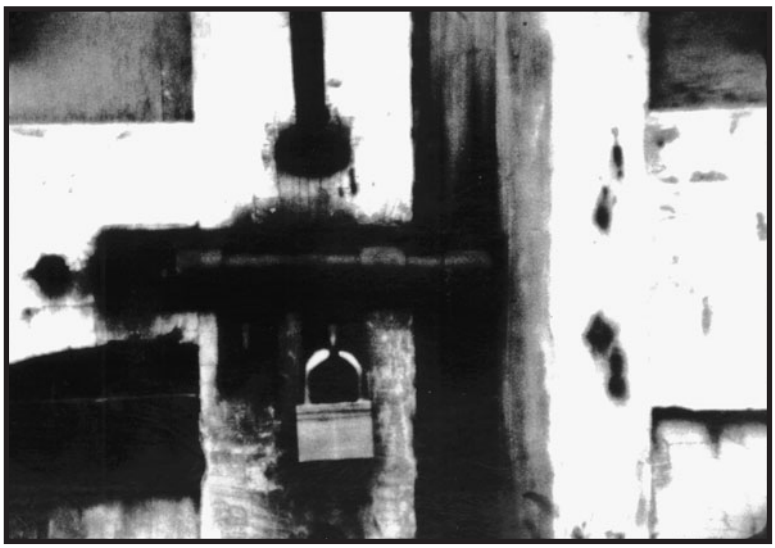
MH: What happened after you got out of school?

CB: I left in 1983 wanting to make a film about mental illness. At the time I thought all my work had to do with the difference between normal and abnormal. I wanted to deal with issues of documentary filmmaking. I'd gone to the Grierson Documentary Seminar and met a lot of people who weren't very good filmmakers. I felt that traditional notions of the documentary were finished and I wanted to breathe some life into this genre. Then I needed a crew, someone to shoot and do sound. Steve Sanguedolce and I went to high school together where we made some films. He'd made some short commercials in college and had a good eye. Randy Smith had this $25,000 synthesizer which he never touched. They both lacked focus, but they were keen. This was my first experience of trying to get the energy to move through three people. And in order to get us through a two-and-a-half-year ordeal, there were certain things I had to do. I'm not saying I would do it now, but I did it then to make that film. That's why the confusion came in over authorship, because Steve believed he was making the film with me. But he wasn't. He was shooting my film. Randy did the sound.

MH: This was just after government cutbacks led to the closing of a number of psychiatric centres, which effectively pushed a sizeable population of ex-patients out onto the street.

CB: Yeah, so we began by visiting various psychiatrists and city councillors to gain support to make the film. I went to the drop-in centre run by "On Our Own," a self-help group for ex-psychiatric patients. They called themselves ex-inmates. They told me about the kind of injustices done to them, like receiving electro-shock on the wrong side of the

brain so you lose all ability to read or write, or patients dying inside the hospital, or the ones they let out who are found frozen to death. Very powerful stuff. They needed an editor for their newsletter, "The Mad Grapevine," and when they gave me the job, it was the first time anyone had held it outside the group. The newsletter had 300 subscribers, all ex-inmates, so this was a unique opportunity to meet and talk with them. I'd written a poem a couple of years before which I included in one of the issues. It was called "Marco Juranovic." I'd met him at Thanksgiving and he wanted to be the Prime Minister. He was a bum on the street. I went home and wrote about him. The poem had all the usual images of a psychiatric survivor — being frozen in a transit shelter, snot running down your face, that whole kind of pain. It caused an outrage because it turned out there really was a guy in the membership named Marco Juranovic, the guy I'd met two years back. I put it in the newsletter because I thought it was a good poem, and I guess it was because it really hit home with a lot of people.



Full Moon Darkness

The whole time I worked at the "Grapevine," I had a running argument with one of its co-founders, Don Weitz. He was always asking, how can you make a film about mental illness if you're not mentally ill, if you've never gone through the experience? I just kept talking with people, getting to know them, gaining their trust. I worked there eight months, dead broke with no grants. We went to two hundred foundations and agencies. They all turned us down. Then I said let's go to Canada Council. I submitted *Urban Fire* and Mike Snow was on the jury. He loved the film and I got the grant. That's when the film began. Randy, Steve, and I drove up to a gold mine I used to work in Red Lake. My cousin owns an island up there, and the plan was to bring up sixty hits of acid, spend a week, hash the film out, and bond the three of us. We stayed five days and I finished most of the acid in the first couple. Randy was pretty fucked up. After looking at these water bugs, he decided he couldn't work with Steve. I was trying to balance everyone out — something I didn't have a lot of practice with. There was a lot of pain and I did a lot of things. I was twenty-three when I started the film. It was finished three years later. The scope of the film is pretty wild for someone that age. It's because I have this ability my father has: to disconnect and continue. So I disconnected and made my way through the film. My old man never goes back to try and pick up the pieces, and after this film I needed help to put it all back together. But I always go back. It took a year-and-a-half before we got the first grant — $12,000. Then we started shooting. We were so pumped that once we got back from Red Lake it took less than two weeks to shoot and a week to cut. We worked like parts of a machine, always knowing what the other was thinking.

I don't want my film to exist in the past as a nostalgic reminder of the way it was…

MH: Can you describe *Full Moon Darkness (90 min 1984)*?
CB: The film journeys through a number of monologues of anti-psychiatrist Thomas Szasz, a priest, and four ex-inmates. After each interview, a visual translation follows which leads the audience into the next level. We peel successive layers away until we're at the heart of it. But in the end, everyone still has to make up their own mind. The descriptions of the drugs and electro-shock are horrific. But there's still a lot of people who create pain for others. How do we reconcile these two?
MH: Your work since *Full Moon* retreated from social concerns. Returning to *Urban Fire*'s narration of materials, the ways of their making have been stubbornly artisanal. It's all just you, a Bolex, and your bathroom darkroom. Tell me about *Condensation of Sensation (73 min 1987)*.
CB: *Condensation* is an aggregation of moments that appear like crossroads or intersections. The moments when things happen to you. Like driving in my car and finding out Ermano Bulfon, the priest in *Full Moon Darkness*, had just died of brain cancer. Then the rear wheel blew out, and I almost wiped out three cars, a telephone post, and a schoolbus. The film's not interested in recreating this event, but in rekindling the feel of what it was like to be there. I don't want my film to exist in the past as a nostalgic reminder of the way it was, or as a record. I want people to feel the present as they're living in the theatre. To feel things

you pass every day without noticing. I work on the image, reprocessing the surface to make those things magical again. There's a shot of houses on my street that has a frenzied jazz feel because of the gestures of camera and emulsion. Everything moves: the film, the sound, your eye, and everything moves in rhythm. That's what *Condensation* is all about: it's a building sensation that gets spilled across the screen.

Condensation of Sensation

MH: How did you get involved in colouring film?

CB: It all started with sabattier. Even though it's a greying effect with line, there's colour there. These colours are made by converting film's silver halide into another colour. So what other colours could you convert silver into? That's when I got into toners, started to play with them. I never went by the book or read the instructions. The film surface is made of silver halide. The toners attack and convert the silver halide particles into colour pigments which change the blackened silver into colour. Tinters affect the clear areas of the image while toners affect the dark areas. When I started applying this to film I saw colours I'd never seen before. Ever. It looked like something between psychedelia and Van Gogh. I used to use an old wine jug that would take a hundred feet. I'd lay in a hundred feet, apply a colour, then take it out, hang the film on some wire, and put a hairdryer underneath for about half an hour. Everything's done at home in the bathroom. Now I have a jug I can process and colour 400 feet at a time. I'm working on Mike Snow's new film, processing all the footage. So I bought a new jug which has a bottom like a brandy glass so I can spin the toners around the bottom of the jug — it gives me more control. I can determine how the toner hits the surface of the film and what kind of motion it'll create on the surface — all depending on the movement of my arm. You can increase motion on the film surface by using what I call "depravity of toner." Applying used developer will overdevelop certain spots and underdevelop others. But the process moves so fast that when you view it on the projector all you see is the processing itself moving across the surface. Then you could put this in a sepia bleach which takes out some of the toners, or use rubber cement to mask off areas of the image and let it soak for a month so the toner will show through certain areas. Then you take the rubber cement off with cleaner and begin again with another toner, which you can stroke on with any number of implements. It's like a witch's brew. Often you lose valued footage, but that's part of it. I might work a year on a piece of footage and put the last touch on it only to watch it fade into nothing. That's happened a few times. *Condensation* began with a series of loops I cut from outtakes and found footage. I got fifty or sixty cans and gave each loop its own can and then started adding a bunch of shit — like bleach, or old tints, or dye mixtures. I let them sit eight months, and these became the basis for the film. Originally I was going to put them all on the optical printer, each loop had its own title, and the film would run nine hours under the title "The Dissection of Mental Semantics." But I abandoned the printer and made *Condensation of Sensation* instead. "Dissection" was conceived as a kind of gallery work, and I'd feel comfortable showing most of my work that way, just running in a room. The viewer should be able to come in and out whenever they want.

MH: Do you feel your work suffers from being shown in movie theatres as opposed to galleries?

CB: I think so. People shouldn't be forced to stay with something so foreign to them. The sound and image are very intense. If it takes me two-and-a-half years to make a film, it doesn't seem to me unreasonable that it would take someone that long to watch it.

MH: When Alain Resnais made *Last Year at Marienbad,* he left instructions with the projectionist that the reels could be run in any order. Could you live with that?

CB: All of my films are on two reels. But if they were on ten smaller reels, that would be all right, showing ten paintings in different orders. By pulling my work apart, someone could find their own way of watching it.

MH: *Condensation* is a kind of materialist psychodrama; its protagonist is a faceless blank wandering in a multi-coloured garden. Psychodramas often turn on this lonely figure who attempts to negotiate the divide between his/her own pre-linguistic solitude and some kind of social order outside. *Condensation*'s disavowal of language is a move away from the narrators of *Full Moon Darkness* whose voices key the film's changes. It enters a different sort of documentary register, a documentary of consciousness. In a film this length it's difficult to think of many that are wordless.

CB: I wanted to move away from language because words take away from vision and emotions. From the time I was

five years old I've been reading. But those books and the words that come out of my mouth don't have anything to do with my work. This interview has nothing to do with my work. I'm a filmmaker, not an author.

MH: Tell me about *Re: Entry (87 min 1990)*.

CB: Both *Condensation* and *Re: Entry* are about the dis-ease that drives one to solitude. I had to go inside to uncover the fears that were stopping me from moving, to find out how I'd lost control. I did this one acid trip and it affected me for four years. We were tossing the frisbee when Randy ran over this kid and landed on his arm in the same way I'd broken my arm as a child. The angle was the same. Somehow I'd disconnected myself from that time, that pain, and in the moment I saw the child falling, it all came back. I went back home and saw that all my clothes were filled with holes and it made me afraid; it meant I'd stripped away everything. There was nothing left. This cloud of reasonless fear settled in and I thought, okay, I've got eight hours to wait and it'll be gone. It lasted four years. A long trip. *Re:Entry* was a response to looking at things and perceiving them in this frenzied and frightful way. Although my actions as a person were strong and aggressive, they were just a mask for the fear inside. Going on the subway might provoke an anxiety attack, so I wouldn't go. I couldn't drive a car for a while because it would start happening on the freeway, and I'd have to pull over immediately. I wouldn't do anything that might provoke one of these attacks until I was virtually in the house all the time. Then it started happening in the house. I got invited to stay in an artist's colony in Banff. It was a chance to head out into the woods and deal with this stuff. But it all started happening again in Banff. You can tell by looking at the footage — I'm scared shitless. A lot of that stuff in the forest is like Jason from *Friday the 13th*. The camera's only tilting over trees, but all you're really seeing is my terror. My friend Paul came out to visit, and we drove all over Alberta, shooting the Badlands and the Hoodoos. It's pretty bleak out there. That was the end of the trip. When I came back from Banff I felt I'd peeled off something; I'd left something behind I didn't want. The acid trip had shed there, had its last gasp there, which you see in the film. So I got back to Toronto and made preparations to shoot the swimmer. I waited a month for the right light, and we shot it in an afternoon — Paul swimming back and forth in a pool. I realized later that he went through everything you do to get your Bronze Medallion, the one that allows you to life-guard. The way he looks in the water is how I felt — the freedom and fluidity and expressiveness. I'm not saying I don't get anxiety attacks anymore, but they don't rule my life. That was my re-entry, re-entering the fears that make you the person you are, and I brought a camera along to show the changes.

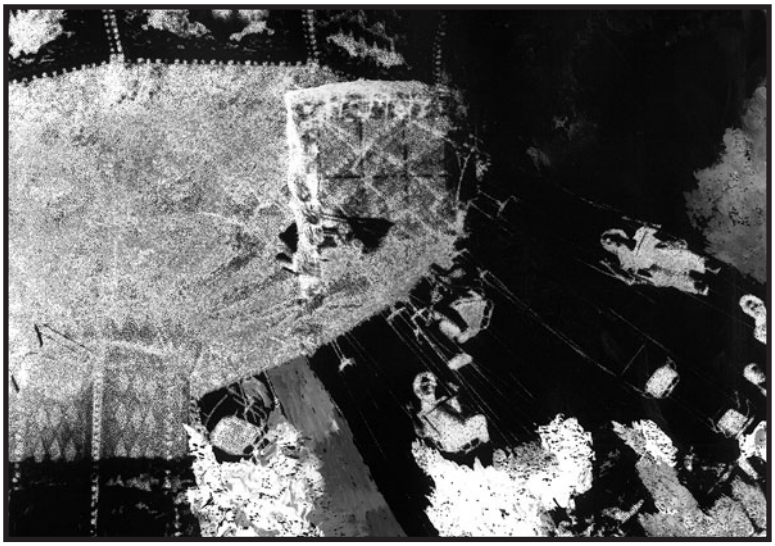
MH: Could you describe the film?

CB: We see images of the swimmer diving into the water to begin his journey, which takes him through the fields and mountains of Banff. There's a horrible recurring image of something that's dying and decaying. It's from a Lorne Greene nature documentary. I used dye baths to tint images of a baby alligator being eaten by flies as it's coming out of the egg. The mother's looking on, but the child is already dead. On the soundtrack a voice reads from a relaxation tape; it's very soothing and calm. It came from the bio-feedback therapy I was doing where they teach you how to relax. But who can relax with all this shit going on? So the sound and image never come together, and the swimmer's trying to make his way through it all until there's no water left. He's just swimming through the white light of the screen. The first reel ends with his exhaustion; he almost can't go on, so he drownproofs for a while, almost still. He needs to rest.

Re:Entry

The second and final reel begins with Paul's recital of the opening of Foucault's *I, Pierre*. It begins, "I, Pierre, having slaughtered my mother, sister and brother..." and goes on to explain why he did it. This sets you up for the second reel. You see the countdown leader, then a house with a swaying camera motion towards a door, then a guy hiding, then back to the house, then it cuts back to a wooden voodoo doll being thrown into the water. Then the voice begins to repeat; it lowers in volume, so the rest of the film is like his testimony in a way. The swimmer returns. He's regained his strength and moves again through the Banff footage, but now there's a sea of emulsion to swim through. A series of superimpositions follow: a child playing supered with a brick wall; old people lawn bowling supered with other old

people walking down the street. It's a return to the city, a return of the social. The sound builds to a fiery climax because all this talk of relaxing only covers over the fire that's inside the swimmer, that everyone has. He leaves the pool, begins to burn, and the film ends. Whenever my work starts to get shown, I hope people connect with that moment, recognize that fire inside.



Cloister

MH: You exercise a high degree of control over your images, yet you've always given complete control of the sound to others. Why?

CB: I felt that when the paths of two strong independent forces crossed, it would be magical. I couldn't hope for that to happen if I imposed a structure on them. Collaboration is where no one is telling anyone what to do. We're both doing groundbreaking work — so let's do it together. I've worked with Rik Dekker, CCMC, Kaiser Nietzsche and Mike Snow. After working with Steve and Randy so closely, I didn't want to go through that again. So I get together with the sound folks, we talk about the work, we talk about each other, they play me some sounds. I say, "Hey I like this, I like that." They take a gauge off me. Or maybe I say, "Could you bring a trumpet down tonight? I love your trumpet playing." That's it. I like working that way. I've been able to work with very talented people, so there's no need to do sound myself.

MH: Tell me about *Cloister (34 min 1990)*.

CB: I've shown *Cloister* once — in the bar at the Experimental Film Congress. All the Europeans stayed and all the Canadians left. [laughs] *Cloister* comes out of the isolation of my living — I live and work in a small world. It took me a day to cut the loops. I worked with them for two days on the optical printer, another two days to process. It took six days to make a half-hour film. I don't know why it happened so fast. It was just before I started working at the post office. All my relations were going well. I had just come out, back out into the light. It happens every time I make a film — I make an effort to be social. I see people and realize that I enjoy it after all. I wanted this film to show the light and dark of my past. It's my homage to abstract expressionism which knocked me on my ass from the first time I saw it. Klein, Rothko — those guys just blew me away. So this film shows you these small canvasses, 150 of them on film. I used a Laurel and Hardy film, outtakes from most of my previous work, newsreel footage, footage others have thrown away. It's like a rehabilitation project. All the people I've touched in the past ten years are included somehow. Michael Snow does the sound using his son's toy keyboard and his trumpet. As the film rolls you hear him turn the tape machine on, play something, then turn it off; then he turns it on again, plays something else, and turns it off. It's a very disjunctive feeling you get when you watch the film.

MH: The images are alternately representational and abstract, showing people in various vehicles of conveyance — cars and bicycles — and a passing surround rendered abstractly. In certain passages the sound follows the image, accompanying and underscoring its effect. In others, it moves completely against the image, as if it were distracted. Most of the soundtrack is simply silent. What I hear in Snow's sound work is someone listening to the film and responding in a way that's sometimes audible. The sound of the tape recorder coming on and off makes this dialogue explicit. The first viewer is the ear.

CB: *Cloister* is the end of a cycle which began with *Urban Fire*. My next film will be radically different from this work. I came back to the optical printer with this film after leaving it for eight years. *Cloister* is a recapitulation of themes and gestures that have run through my work for the past ten years.

MH: How much do your films cost?

CB: *Mine's Bedlam* cost $250, *Urban Fire* $500, *Full Moon Darkness* $35,000, *Condensation* was $42,000, *Re: Entry* $38,000, and *Cloister* $6,000. I never paid for any of my films myself. But all of my films added up together wouldn't fund a dramatic feature film, or some thirty-second commercials.

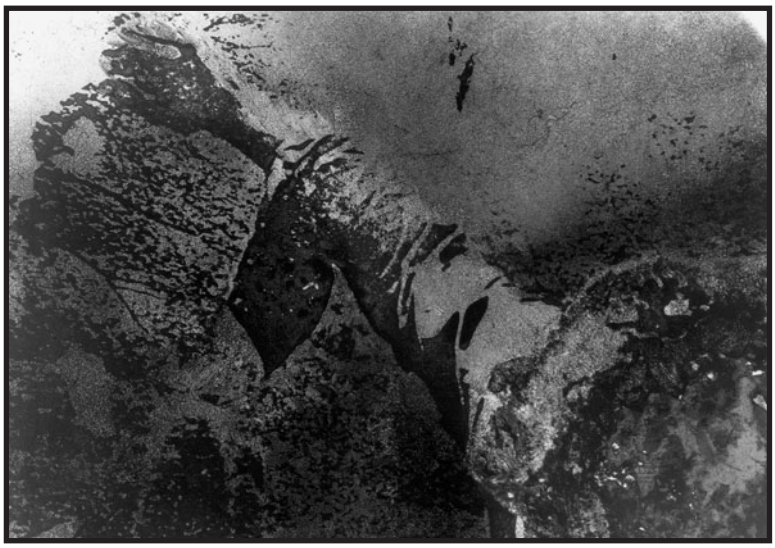
MH: Is there an avant-garde in film today?

CB: Sure. I like the work of Phil Hoffman, Chris Gallagher and Barbara Sternberg. They're challenging the bounds of cinema, they're working in ways unlike anyone else. I don't get out enough to watch experimental film, but those are the ones I've seen that are good. Avant-garde means a cutting edge. It means taking yourself over the precipice and looking into an abyss and pulling something out of it. The avant-garde are people who aren't afraid to go an extra step. It means you're doing something like no one else and doing it powerfully. None of the people I listed are similar in style,

because avant-garde isn't about style.
MH: Some people would insist that any notion of "avant-garde" includes a political dimension.
CB: That's bullshit. Theory and politics are as fashionable as changing your underwear every day. The work will last, not the politics. Do they really want to make this film, or is it something that's politically viable? Or politically important? Who cares? Art is about the politics of seeing and feeling. I don't believe in any of that other shit. Other people decide whether your film is good, bad, or indifferent. I've been making the same quality of work for ten years, but all of a sudden people think it's okay. I never changed, only the words changed, other people's words. There are only a few good directors in Hollywood and just a few good avant-garde filmmakers. Most of the work being done anywhere, regardless of genre, is trash. For the person who doesn't know avant-garde film, they'll come see it and hate it. They'll take that program to be representative, and they'll never come back. So we're hurting ourselves.

…film is where the most important work is being done in this country.

I remember going to the Funnel Experimental Film Theatre and seeing a lot of garbage, because the members had a corner on what got shown, which was mostly their own work. So here I was in my infant stages, crawling as an avant-garde filmmaker, and I was throwing up after seeing this crap. People who didn't know anything about avant-garde film knew that the Funnel was a weird place to go which showed lousy films. Here I am an avant-garde filmmaker, and I won't go to the only theatre in the city that shows this work because it's awful. Then it closed. Toronto is the most thriving art community in North America, bar none, and we don't have a place to show our films permanently. That's absolute bullshit. Most of the best avant-garde film work in this country is happening here and we can't get it on a screen. You get two lines at the bottom of an art review. You get hardly any recognition. Avant-garde film is like a pariah, like having leprosy. Even avant-garde music doesn't have it as bad, but film is where the most important work is being done in this country.
MH: You had to wait two years after *Condensation* was finished before it was shown. *Full Moon* has shown twice in Canada. That means your three feature films have had four screenings altogether.
CB: I knew that what I was doing was very different. It was radical work and it was long. So I didn't expect returns. I don't think about people looking at my work. So I wasn't devastated when I didn't get screenings. I showed it to a few people who liked it and that was enough. When you're developing a genre or style you don't expect people to come clamouring up to you wanting to show it. I thought that might start happening when I was forty. What bothered me was that the films being shown weren't high quality. It's never crossed my mind that I've had two screenings in this city in ten years. As long as I can do the work. It was important how it felt for me and whether I got another grant that would allow me to make the next film. Because of the amount of media, no matter how much you hide, someone is going to lift up every crevice of the art world to find the new thing. At some point they would come across me, and as long as I worked on my skills, I would know how to respond whenever that happened. When Arbus showed her work, they were spitting on her. People stormed the projection booth when Snow was trying to show his stuff. There's lots of examples. I've just never taken an interest in anything beyond my making. That's just starting to change now.
MH: Would more money improve your work?
CB: I don't think a million dollars would make my films any better. I could try a few more things. I could be more wasteful, but frugality has allowed me to make some discoveries. The glimmer of the individual creates an image of what people see on the screen. That's what people want. But they want to package it. Sometimes you wonder about guys like Peter Mettler or Bruce McDonald who have ability and talent. How much of what they feel manages to survive the machine of big-budget filmmaking?
MH: Why won't you get that money?
CB: Because no one is going to give me a million dollars to sit in my basement and tone film. Besides, I don't think I



Condensation of Sensation

could spend a million dollars on a film. I felt Peter Mettler and David Lynch were great filmmakers, but they entered that system and got chewed up. Not because they got stupid overnight. It's just too big to fight. I was completely drained during *Full Moon Darkness* working with two people. And on a big film I'd expect that kind of commitment from my gaffer and my best boy. I'd go insane.

MH: Is there anyone who has made a big difference to your work?

CB: Mike Snow's been a big influence. As an artist, you don't have any kind of background information; it's not like a doctor where you're an intern first. As an artist you just do it and hope that the way you're going is all right. My whole purpose is not to burn out and die. And that's one of the things he's taught me, in a way, how to think young. In order to get through a lot of pain, it's important to have a sense of humour.

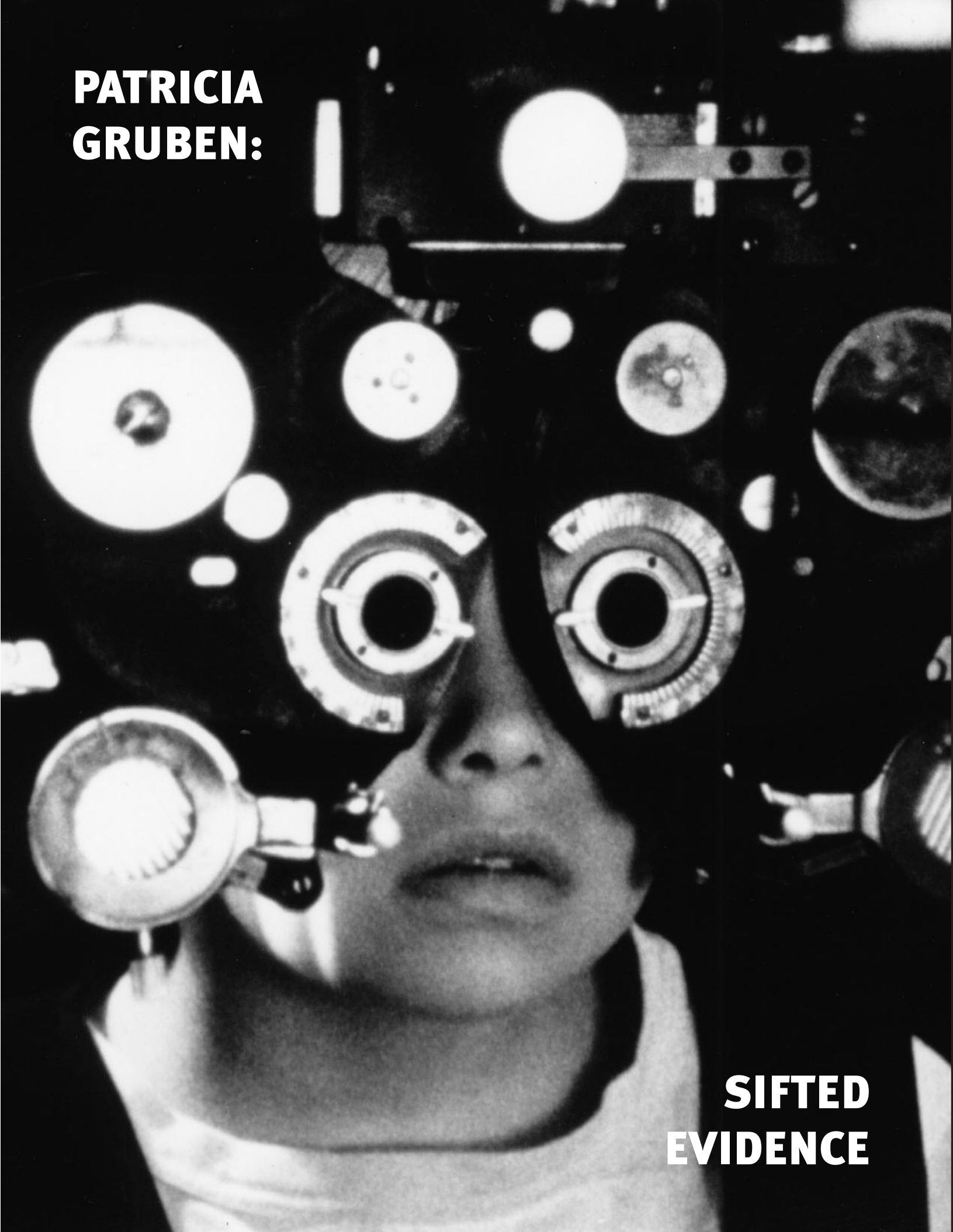
MH: How would you characterize the Toronto film scene?

CB: When I was starting out ten years ago I always felt like I was part of a new movement in art. Now I don't know. I don't deal with filmmakers apart from Phil Hoffman and Mike Snow. It seems to me there's a lot of backstabbing. It's affected my ability to show work because I haven't aligned myself with anyone. I'm a renegade. It's been a conscious decision which has helped me to develop a strong style. Every medium has its backstabbers, but when you find something as specialized as avant-garde filmmaking, you'd think people would come together. Our voice would be stronger if we spoke together. Now it doesn't seem as if that's possible. I've contributed to this. There's people I don't talk to, but because I'm involved in more than one medium, I can stay out of the soup. Everybody I see who's in avant-garde film is so tightly wound up in it. It's a very tough life. I also make holographs and photographs. The only way to survive as an artist is to do everything. The artist is like a cockroach — we have to be able to eat anything in order to survive. You try to kill us, but we keep coming back.

Carl Brown Filmography

Mine's Bedlam	8 min b/w super-8 1981
Urban Fire	15 min b/w 1982
Full Moon Darkness	90 min b/w 1984
Condensation of Sensation	73 min 1987
Drop	4 min silent 1989
Cloister	34 min 1990
Re:Entry	87 min 1990
Sheep	7 min silent 1990
Brownsnow	134 min 1994
Air Cries, "Empty Water" (The Trilogy)	
Misery Loves Company	60 min 1993
The Red Thread	60 min 1994
Le Mistral, Beautiful But Terrible	120 min 1997

PATRICIA GRUBEN:



SIFTED EVIDENCE

Patricia Gruben has been telling stories for two decades now, but they are tales unlike any others. Her movies favour characters who are not quite characters — they appear as survivors of some terrible catastrophe. And as we look into their blank gaze for clues, wishing we could stroll past the film's beginning and catch a glimpse of this primal disaster, but knowing all the while we can't, we are left finally with ourselves.

How do we tell stories? And how do the stories we tell finally narrate ourselves? These questions are fundamental in Gruben's shaken universe. In her three feature films and pair of shorts, Gruben stages our ability to "make" sense. Her passive leads try to negotiate a universe which has been wiped clean, and which attempts to begin again using a rational discourse. Over and over, Gruben invokes a scientific rhetoric — in *The Central Character*'s blueprints, *Sifted Evidence*'s books of anthropology, and *Low Visibility*'s observational testings — all in hopes of conjuring an absent subjectivity. That science may finally prove just one more story we tell ourselves is a fear that unlines much of her musings. Each of her films invites us to the border, where laws have not yet formed around our speaking, and where a change in ideas might hinge on a change in prose.

PG: I went to film school at the University of Texas hoping to make political documentaries. But I realized eventually that the documentary form began with an acceptance of what went on in front of the camera. That's when I realized that I had to work in fiction. I found I couldn't make political fiction films either because they tended to promote an ideology first, and it was difficult for me to combine that with aesthetic motives. I felt I had to make a choice between politics and aesthetics. My interest in film and human behaviour is more exploratory than didactic, more a question of how we know what we know, or how we do what we do. If I start to make a film, even if it begins with a political issue, it often charts its own course, and I have to follow.

MH: How did you arrive in Canada?

PG: Originally I came up to visit an old boyfriend from Texas, an army deserter. I'd just quit film school and was working in Houston for a little production company that was rapidly going bankrupt. I flew into Toronto at Christmas and saw snow for the first time — as a kid I'd read all these books about how Christmas was supposed to look and Houston in December never fit the picture. Toronto seemed to me a perfect place to start a life as a filmmaker because it seemed everyone was starting in 1972, and there was money available for people to work as artists in film in a way that wasn't possible in the US.

Back in Houston, people kept sending me issues of the original *Take One*, and one was devoted exclusively to women's films, a pretty rare topic in 1972. Two women from Toronto were mentioned in that issue — Barbara Martineau contributed an article and filmmaker Sylvia Spring gave an interview. I wrote them both about my intentions of coming to Toronto, and they invited me to call. Shortly afterwards, we became friends. They took me on as a kind of "project," introducing me to people, Barbara in the academic community, and Sylvia in production. In 1973, I worked with the organizers of the first Women's Film Festival, who brought together a global community of sorts, but it quickly dispersed after the festival. Then Sylvia Spring organized a women's collective called "From Under Films." She had a strong feminist agenda, but the others were a pretty mixed group of people. This collective of would-be filmmakers worked for over a year trying to find a way to make political work. The main project was based on a Joanna Russ novel, a science fiction story about a woman from the future who switches places with a woman in the present. The future was founded on communal ideals which abolished the inequalities of gender, but I found it deadly boring because everything about this future society needed to be more progressive than the present. Utopian societies don't interest me much. I spent a year trying to meet the agenda of this women's collective and failed. Our projects were aimed at the upcoming International Women's Year and that's when I discovered how the government is behind all artistic activity in Canada. [laughs] I got a real good education in writing grant applications, but we never received funding. I felt confused, that I wasn't on the right track, and after a year or so the group dissolved. I was trying to write screenplays for the CBC, which weren't moving, and doing props on feature

The Central Character

films. It wasn't until 1976 that I started making films again, my first personal work since school.

I'd actually started making *The Central Character (16 min b/w 1977)* in 1974, and I was quickly bogged down with the same problems the group had. I just wanted to make a little fifteen-minute experimental film, although at that time it was much more of a narrative. There was a group of women who were trying to get started in the film industry and decided they would help me make this movie. There was a producer from CBC who brought in a still photographer, catering, assistant directors — mostly women who hadn't really worked in film yet, but wanted to. All this for a movie with one character! It completely overwhelmed me and I just stopped shooting in the middle of production because we were using a Hollywood model for making a very intuitive film. I abandoned it for a year before re-shooting the whole thing myself.

I was reading a book by John Jaynes called *The Origins of Consciousness and the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*, a popular book in the mid-seventies which dealt with the development of ego/self consciousness. But I wanted this film

The Central Character

to show a devolution of self consciousness, that it would turn its back on a history which is typically described in terms of a progressive, evolutionary ascent. *The Central Character* began with someone who felt herself as a rational, decision-making being, who kept order in the house. Her domestic duties — sweeping, cooking, cleaning — mapped out an orderly universe that was every bit as measured as the portions in a recipe. But her life of utility is slowly eroded until, in the end, she's completely overtaken by natural forces, swallowed by the surrounding forest. As I talk, I realize I've done this at least three times in films and probably will continue to do so. In the end, the character goes somewhere the audience can't follow and we have to say goodbye, to let them pass. It also happens at the end of *Low Visibility*, and towards the end of *Sifted Evidence*. *The Central Character* shows a woman leaving the civilized world and entering the natural world, and along the way her civilized constructions are broken down. The final shot of the film shows a drawing of a tree with the woman's face inside it. So while she's disappeared into that tree, we're left behind, only able to look at it as a drawing, because her destination is something we can't experience.

Towards the end, she leaves home in search of plant containers, dropping seeds behind to make a trail she can follow back home. But these are eaten by birds, which makes her return impossible. What she finds in her search is a junkyard universe, a heap of objects overgrown with weeds. She takes up a radio but finds it's only capable of broadcasting static. These last remnants of civilization pre-figure her blending into the forest, lost in a world she never made.

MH: Tell me about *Sifted Evidence (42 min 1982)*.

PG: *Sifted Evidence* shows a woman telling the story of a trip to Mexico. In a sense, the whole film is a flashback, but one which is obviously re-enacted. The dramatic sequences are largely shot in front of a front-screen, so you always get the sense of a flattened, bordered image people speak in front of, like a series of picture postcards. She goes to Mexico searching for the source of these prehistoric, two-headed clay fertility figures. On her trip she meets a black American man who assures her he knows where they are, and she becomes entangled with him. They proceed through a number of misunderstandings, with the woman feeling trapped inside a culture, a language, and now a relationship she doesn't understand. They have a last quarrel before she leaves him sleeping in a chair. She goes to the quarry and finds, not the statues she's after, but the debris of her own civilization. The film's opening and closing are set in her apartment in a kind of present time, where the objects on display provide the evidence of her travelling. But these artifacts are just signifiers; they're not the thing itself. The film ends with a freeze on her open mouth, as there's no real resolution to the film, no last word.

MH: She's cast as a researcher throughout the film — whether browsing archeology texts or learning language records; everything in the film, including her personal experience, seems to be a part of an ongoing academic project. But apart from recounting her own misadventures, there's little sense of what she's able to finally make of all this research.

PG: What she's looking for is little characters with two heads, an image of herself perhaps. She's literally split — there are three voices for this character. The first voice delivers the documentary style information at the beginning;

the second is the more personalized voice which carries us through the body of the dramatic narrative; and the third is the German voice in her mind which speaks of her own personal, cultural, and historical past. This last only comes to her in fragments of poetry and free association. She speaks early in the film about her German origins, and the mind/body split particular to German culture and philosophy. Her trip is a failed attempt to resolve this duality. In the quarry she hears a Rilke poem from the ninth "Duino Elegy" and, for me, that's the point where the character undergoes an experience we can't follow, like the end of *The Central Character* or *Low Visibility.* She begins to recognize her own cultural history, her German roots, instead of being diverted by Mexico's archeology. In the late seventies, a lot of women, including myself, were trying to recoup a sense of our own history, and felt we had to go back to a sense of prehistory, to a matrilineal, pre-literate society where women were gods, and fertility was the most important attribute a human could have. This woman travels to Mexico to experience some of these elemental forces but finds the baggage of a classical university education standing in her way. Instead of being able to resolve her duality, she winds up experiencing it in a more profound way because she's come to a place whose culture and history are foreign to her. She finds herself caught between the demands of a patriarchal culture and the expectations of a liberal education. This induces a kind of stasis in the character, where she's able to do very little but record what's happening.

We had to go back to a sense of prehistory, to a matrilineal, pre-literate society where women were gods.

MH: Much of her recounting is set before front-screen projections. These backdrops relate to layers of memory and the archeology metaphors that run through the film. Can you talk more about the front-screen?

PG: She carries a camera much of the time and some of the photos she takes wind up on the front-screen. They never show people; instead they look at Coke bottles on a window ledge, or two lawn chairs sitting after their occupants have left. All of her photos show objects people have used; they're evidence that people have passed this way, but aren't there any longer. The backdrops are unpeopled, and the actors enter into them as a kind of afterthought. As well, because the film is based on her reconstructions, I wanted to make it clear that we're watching a movie. There's a double frame: the frame of the movie itself and the frame of her story. I was interested in exaggerating the boundaries of the film screen, of making us aware of its flatness. In live theatre, one of the biggest problems is getting people on and off stage. In film, you have the luxury of cutting into a scene with everyone already there — you don't have to watch them walk away. In this film I wanted those entrances and exits to be explicit.

MH: Most of the film is taken up with recreated scenes of the couple together, stalling her pursuit of the ruins. Can you say something about these two?

PG: His name's Jim Lilly, a completely made-up character in the sense that he's constructed himself. He tells her one story about himself and then another in contradiction. He's someone whose greatest sense of worth resides in his relations with others. At one point he says to her, "I'm a people person. You don't know people because you've got your head in a book all the time. That's why you don't see what's going on around you. We drove right past your ruins on the way here and you didn't even notice." Because of her own conflict, she studies people instead of relating to them. She's also caught in the bind of travelling in a country which holds very traditional views of women. If she isolates herself completely and never takes a chance on a stranger, all she's done is kept herself from getting robbed or raped. So each individual has to find a balance, to go wild like the Jackie Burroughs character in *A Winter Tan*, or go half-way like *Sifted Evidence*.

MH: Both characters seem caught in their own stories, two monologues sharing a space. She seems in search of the words to be able to tell her own story — she can only describe herself in terms of her reactions to outside events, books, ideas. On the other hand, he seems to have told his story so often the words have become fluid, his own story interchangeable with others around him.

PG: There is that split. She doesn't care what he tells her so long as it's interesting and she's not endangered. She's got a kind of an academic approach to relationships, as if she's surveying people, the way writers eavesdrop in a coffee shop, waiting for something to be revealed that they can turn into art. In a sense she's travelling to gather material, and he doesn't understand that idea.

MH: The entire narrative is related in voice-over except for the last scene in which we see the two of them in the same space. It's set in her hotel room where he breaks in: they argue, and he pins her to the bed before taking up a bedside vigil. He eventually falls asleep, and she escapes to the quarry. But their argument breaks into sync sound, whereas the rest of the film is voice-over.

PG: I wanted to distance the audience from the story she's telling by reversing the conventions of realism. Their argument comes about thirty-seven minutes into a forty-two minute film, so people have grown used to the voice-over

and accepted it as natural. The sync sound comes as a shock, and I had this perverse desire to point out that it was as artificial as any other filmmaking technique. I also used it for its emotional shock value to underscore their argument. I don't like making films where women really get hurt, so I wanted to suggest violence without making it physical. After he's pinned her to the bed, we hear him speaking for the first

Sifted Evidence

time. For the first several minutes in the film she describes what he says, after which she recites the dialogue for both of them. You see his lips moving, but she's doing all the talking.

MH: In a hotel close to the ruins, he tells her the exact moment he falls in love with her — like the narratives of Christian conversion that obsessively detail the precise moment their life changes forever.

PG: He tells her he's fallen in love with her and she asks him when it happened. She's inadvertently sparked an emotional response that seems false to her, so she's trying to work out what kind of character he is. I think of *Low Visibility*, where everyone is trying to understand a man who remains opaque to them. Both of these characters are opaque to one another, trapped within images they've learned long before they met, and these images make it impossible for them to speak. He represents the adventure she wants to have in Mexico. She represents a North American class and style he's learned from advertising. Just before his love confession, he asks why she's wearing a bikini because that dress isn't appropriate here. That hearkens back to the old question women have: do I dress to please myself or to meet expectations? Or is pleasing myself just fulfilling other's expectations because I know I look good in this and want to be admired? Every question feminists struggled with in the seventies is contained in this film — the bikini question, the shave your legs question, or whether it's politically correct to wear make-up. The issue of cliché gets back to seeing ourselves from outside, regarding yourself as others do. The cliché is what we know about the unknown; it maps our sense of ourselves onto our surroundings. But what happens when this sense comes from outside, from a culture that assigns women tools of understanding that don't necessarily fit with our experience? The woman in *Sifted Evidence* is caught inside these images; her passivity stems from not being able to work out these contradictions.

MH: Was there a community in Toronto that helped support, critique, exhibit your work?

PG: In the seventies there was a group of people working in the avant-garde who weren't interested in narrative, and others who wanted to "go Hollywood" and beat their heads against the wall. I didn't know anyone apart from myself who crewed features while making films in the other camp. I didn't seem to fit any place. Today a community committed to independent drama exists in Toronto, but it didn't then. There's a new generation now, and the gap between drama and the avant-garde seems less distinct. Back then there were too many worlds that didn't connect, and I didn't want to look back at a life of doing props for B-movies. This was at the time I was finishing *Sifted Evidence*, so all I had was one little movie that had shown around a little and ten years of hauling furniture up and down stairs. I thought perhaps a teaching job would give me access to other people interested in ideas, and I could make money from it. In Vancouver, Simon Fraser University advertised a job which I got in spite of my lack of teaching experience. It's funny, but in some ways Vancouver is re-enacting in its film community what Toronto went through just after I left. Filmmakers are either working on minuscule budgets at Cineworks (the production co-op), or they're making popular features for $600,000, or else they're working for Hollywood. There's very little overlap.

MH: How do you see the place of formal difference in film?

PG: Each idea has its own ideal form, and the job of the filmmaker is to find the form that best expresses what the film is. I don't think of my films as formal first; I think of images, and before images as ideas about time or memory or whatever. After these ideas attach themselves to images, a form begins to suggest itself.

MH: After *Sifted Evidence* the films you produced were features. Was that a conscious decision?

PG: After *Sifted Evidence*, I wrote *Low Visibility* which I thought would be about an hour long; I didn't think I had enough money to make a feature. When it was finished, I didn't think it could play in commercial theatres or be sold to television. So "feature" is just a length if it doesn't fit that model of distribution. I think people feel they won't get any attention paid to them if they don't make long work, and some funding agencies only support features. Most Canadian feature films get shown in a theatre for a week, have their ACTRA qualifying screenings, and end up on pay-TV to

fulfill Canadian content quotas. What bothers me as a teacher is that there's so little opportunity for people to learn how to make features. Most learn by doing and make mistakes. Ninety minutes is a long time to shape and costs a lot of money, and I don't think you can make it without the experience of shorter work. I wish there was a cinematic equivalent of the short story, not a conventional drama conforming to the needs of television, but a director's film.

The government wants an equitable and democratic access to the means of production, so that everyone can make work, so that people who have nothing in common can all enter, and that's the tension within the co-ops. Everyone gets to belong, but some use it only for equipment on their way to making industrial films, while others want to work in a more artisanal fashion. These different factions are forced to work out their differences in order to gain access to equipment and funding. Doesn't it make more sense for people to come together because of common ideals and a shared aesthetic? Why not have a group that publishes a manifesto declaring the kind of work that needs to be made, the intention to work collectively to make it, and screw you. Nobody can afford to say "screw you" in this country because there's always the question of government money. We're always trying to figure out what the government wants us to do, and that's no way to make films. You spend your whole life going to meetings.

On the other hand, film is time and time is money. I don't want to say anything derogatory towards the Canada Council or Telefilm because I grew up in a country that doesn't have anything like it, and that's much worse. You have to grant them that they have their own mandate and their own requirements. Saskatchewan's trying to start up a film industry now, which would be groundless without government funding because the climate's poor and the population's low. There's an artificial quality to the entire initiative.

MH: Isn't there an artificial quality to the whole of the Canadian independent film sector? Filmmakers receive production monies from Canada Council, who also support production co-ops to provide equipment access. The completed work goes into Council supported distribution co-ops and show in Council supported screening venues. The only people who don't get paid are the audiences.

PG: But if you call government subsidy artificial, are you saying that the marketplace isn't? That Ellie Epp's films should go out there and compete with *Batman*, and may the best win? Without an exhibition circuit and the advertising dollars that underpin American films, the notion of a level playing field is ridiculous. I can't blame the government for giving us money. We, as filmmakers, have to take responsibility for our relationship to our money, not to assume that it's our right to get it, or that there's no other way to make work.

MH: Tell me about *Low Visibility (84 min 1984)*.

PG: It began as a soap opera about a brain-damaged patient who would be rehabilitated by playing a soap character. But that was too gimmicky. Then a friend told me about a man she knew who'd survived a plane crash in the wild amid rumours of cannibalism. I started poring over old newspaper accounts in the library, researching this guy's story. They all led up to the inquest and then there was nothing, not a word. So I suspected the news was blacked out. I decided not to contact him or write a film about him in particular, but was intrigued by the idea that all this had happened in isolation, with the only witness unable or unwilling to speak about it. So I started writing the script for *Low Visibility*. It's a film that's finally about filmmaking and empathy. Movies show us events and characters we're expected to believe in, but if it's not our story, how do we know whether it's true? I'm not saying we can't know, but what sort of tools do we apply to these experiences to test whether they're authentic or not, and in an extreme case of survival, how can we imagine what that's like?

Low Visibility is about a man found wandering in a mountain snow storm. He's taken to a hospital where the staff, a documentary news team, a police detective, and a clairvoyant try to uncover what happened and who he is. The nurses tag him "Mr. Bones" and the name takes. Most of the film is set in the hospital where people have different ideas about what's wrong with him. Because his only speech is swearing, no one is certain whether he has brain damage, or an emotional disorder, or whether he's playing dumb to escape prosecution. He undergoes a series of tests and watches TV while the police puzzle out the remains of a plane crash and the half-eaten bodies of its victims. They suspect Mr. Bones of surviving the crash and killing one of the women on board for food, but it's difficult to come up with enough evidence. The police employ a clairvoyant who is never pictured, but we see everything she sees, and it's her vision that returns us to the image of the plane crash. Unlike the doctors or the police, she has no structure for the images she recalls, so her evidence is as sketchy as the rest. Finally, he's released to the detective, who confronts him with what seems to be incontrovertible evidence — a detailed diary found at the site of the plane crash. But in it, the writer speaks of a broken leg, whereas Mr. Bones has no broken joints. The last shot in the film flies over a valley of fog. It's difficult to understand the scene because it depends on recognizing the voices of two characters — the clairvoyant and the nurse. The clairvoyant has entered the mind of the cannibalized woman, and the nurse has entered the mind of the clairvoyant. The nurse asks the clairvoyant/dead woman, "Did the men ask you whether it's okay to kill and eat you? Did you tell them yes?" And the clairvoyant/dead woman

answers, "I couldn't talk," and then, "The blue wings fade and it's all only blue." The plane disappears into the fog here; they're taking off in a psychic sense, entering a place where you don't need a plane to fly. Because we haven't gone through what they have, we can't follow them, so the film has to end there, at the limit of what it's able to represent.
MH: Shortly after arriving in the hospital, one of the doctors explains that a video system will keep the patient in constant view. It recalled for me Jeremy Bentham's panopticon prison in which the prisoner is kept under an unrelieved surveillance. The desired effect is to manufacture a kind of internal surveillance, a conscience or superego that will monitor/censor even the potential actions of an individual. In effect, we become our own wardens, prisoners of ourselves.
PG: John Jaynes said it the same way. But he traced the origins of Western consciousness to a book — Homer's *Iliad*. For the first time in the *Iliad* people began to act out of their own desires. This is the point where the voice in their head, the voice of the gods, became the voice of their own conscience, their own will. Most of us listen to ourselves in the same way, we monitor what we do. But Mr. Bones has very little sense of subjectivity, of the difference between himself and something else, of inside and out. So the video takes the place of a self-image he doesn't possess. While going to film school, I worked in a mental hospital videotaping group therapy sessions. In one case, there was a schizophrenic patient who didn't have any sense of his own body. We would tape him doing things like brushing his teeth, and then the doctors would play the tapes back to show him to himself.

There's another way video is used in the film — as a collection of television stories that loosely parallel Mr. Bones's. The doctor turns on the television intermittently, saying, "We want you to see other people just like you." Mr. Bones watches a docudrama about Grey Owl, who was an impostor, just as he's suspected of being an impostor. There's a native folktale about the Windigo, illustrated by Norville Morisseau paintings. There's a local news item about a bank robbery where all the facts are uncertain, as in his own case, where cameras afford an immediate access to images that aren't able to tell their own story. Finally, there's a nature film which shows ants devouring other ants, replaying the act of cannibalism he's suspected of. All these stories turn around questions of survival and consumption, and "cue" the progression of a film which finally doesn't progress at all but doubles back on itself, like the mad trapper walking in circles. After the television sequence showing ants devouring themselves, the speech therapist presents him with three small models. The first two are animals, and the third is a man. He asks Mr. Bones to show him which is food. While the progression of the narrative draws a weave of implication around Mr. Bones, the results are inconclusive. When presented with the figure of the man as food — an image of his own guilt — his reaction is non-committal.
MH: Why the name Mr. Bones?
PG: Mr. Bones is a name used in the old minstrel jokes — Mr. Bones told the jokes and Mr. Interlocutor was the straight man. The nurses gave him that name, and because they're always cracking jokes, it seems they've reversed the old rule — they're the jokers and Mr. Bones is the straight man. But in the eyes of the doctors and the police detectives, Mr. Bones is telling the joke on everybody because he's guilty of murder and cannibalism. The name is also one of our first hints that he's done something carnal. One of the nurses brings him a napkin full of chicken bones saying, "I saved these for you." He hides them in a drawer until everyone's left, finally spilling them onto his bedtable where he draws them into the shape of an arrow. Later on, when the clairvoyant is looking through stills of the plane crash site, she sees the shape of an arrow built out of large bones. The detective excitedly points out the connection but the clairvoyant says no; they taught him that in the hospital. The implication is that he's reproducing an image which would pin him to the crime. It doesn't, because like so many of the other details in the film, it resists addition; it doesn't accumulate other facts around itself. The centre remains empty.
MH: The only speech of Mr. Bones is swearing — how come?
PG: Swearing seems to be the last thing to go when you're losing language. When someone has drunk to the point of brain damage, they can develop Korsakoff syndrome, an affliction shared by swearing street drunks. While their cursing sounds meaningful, they're not really communicating.
MH: I would have guessed that your own name, or your first words, would be the last to leave memory, not swearing.
PG: Names are among the first things to go. Most people who lose their language lose it suddenly, through an accident. Drinking is the only gradual exception. I wanted Mr. Bones to make utterances that could have meaning in certain contexts, like when he says, "Fucking A!" to the nurses, and it's actually the appropriate thing to say for once, and he knows it. Before that, it's just a way of leaving out the world.
MH: One of the ironies of *Low Visibility* is that the film is based on dialogue, not action, and yet the main character doesn't speak. Each of the characters are quickly identified with a way of speaking, and they seem to circle Mr. Bones in constellations of opposing pairs. The interrogative tone of the detective is pitted against the hesitant, empathetic voice of the clairvoyant. Gary, another aphasic patient in the hospital, speaks constantly while Mr. Bones is silent. The nurses constantly crack jokes while the doctors' speech is cool, rational, and scientific.
PG: The doctors and detectives use words to reinforce their

own views so language is instrumental and based in utility. Their speech is identified with the law, with a sentencing that orders its subjects. But the nurses undermine the institutions of hospital and language, using the slips of the tongue that jokes create. Unlike the doctors, they have little empathy for strict codes of identification because their own speech shows how these signs slip. Their identification is with Mr. Bones as a patient trying to fathom and negotiate these codes. In one scene they try to imagine themselves in

Low Visibility

his place, as a survivor of the crash, forced to eat his companions or die. This gesture of empathy aligns them with the audience, who are also trying to understand the plight of the man who will not speak. And while this understanding usually takes the form of identification, how can you identify with someone whom you don't know anything about? What the audience finds in Mr. Bones is a figure very much like themselves — both are speechless, confined, surrounded by images, and waiting "in the dark" for the actions of others. In a classical mystery, each piece of information is quickly affirmed or denied by the next; you always know more, until the end discloses all. But in *Low Visibility*, several people are learning things that don't add up. Nonetheless, the audience tends to believe he's done the deed, otherwise, why waste so much time on him? Somebody did it. The need to close off the movie, to make a knot of loose ends, is strong in all of us.

MH: Can you describe your experience in working with crews?

PG: We had a crew of fifteen people and, because I was teaching, we shot for a couple of weeks at Christmas and again in June. I wasn't happy with that, so I shot a little more the next winter, about thirty days altogether. We shot *Deep Sleep* in twenty-five. The problem with my earlier work was that shooting had to be precise because point of view was integral to the film's unfolding. In a dramatic film you have a number of choices — one might be more expressive or beautiful than another, but finally both will work. But in my first three films, one choice would be correct and the others incorrect, and it's very hard to communicate that to a cinematographer who has never worked that way. *Low Visibility* is all about point of view, so each shot had to be played from the clairvoyant, the documentary camera, the surveillance camera, etc., and these views had to be consistent. The director of photography always wants the film to look beautiful, but I was after a different look — the ugly, raw, uncut look of documentary footage. The hardest part in making a film is to maintain your intuition in the face of this whole apparatus — the schedule, the money that's hemorrhaging out, and all these people standing around saying, "What the fuck are you doing?" There are all these factors working against your moving the scene over to the fig tree where the light is better. Even if you know the shot would be a hundred times better, you have to weigh that against losing face, losing time, losing money, and having the crew think you're uncertain. On *Sifted Evidence* I had a weird, mixed crew. Half worked in the industry and were used to having a call sheet every morning, and an assistant director on set, and catering. The other half were avant-garde types who thought that structure was totally fascistic. So half my crew would show up two hours late because they'd dropped acid the night before. With *Low Visibility* I was careful to get a crew that all thought in the same way, even if they didn't all have the same level of experience.

MH: How did *Deep Sleep (92 min 1990)* begin?

PG: A couple of years ago, I took a driving trip to Texas to research another film. I went with a friend, and we started joking about a horror movie we wanted to make called *Family Reunion*. It would feature a nice suburban couple, who'd organized a family reunion, and the entire family is gathered round the table when the doorbell rings, and two very old, sick-looking people appear. It's Aunt Hatty and Uncle Paul, and as they sit, the family remembers that these two died in a car crash two years ago, and pretty soon all the people coming to the reunion are dead relatives. The film was just a joke, something to pass the time, but it became one of the threads of what would eventually become *Deep Sleep*.

We drove to a small ghost town in west Texas where my father had grown up. He died nine years ago, but I felt his presence there, and I realized there was so much about his growing up I'd never know. This triggered questions about how we know what we know. How do we remember? These ideas eventually took on a more sensational form — that was really the beginning of *Deep Sleep*. I wrote a few drafts

of the script and set off for a producer. Three producers later, we were in business. He got development money, and eventually funding from BC Film, Telefilm, and a private distributor. While I was happy to be outside of the producer's role, I think in retrospect that you can't be. The money is where the power is, so you can't cede that position. I made my cut with the editor and then the producers made theirs. It's not substantially different if only because we didn't have time to shoot much more than what's in the film. It's a strategy Luis Buñuel pursued in his Mexico films — he would make the whole scene in long four-minute dolly shots so the producers couldn't cut it. I didn't do it on purpose, but the effect is the same.

MH: How much do your films cost?

PG: *The Central Character* cost $4,000, *Sifted Evidence* $40,000, *Low Visibility* $160,000 (including deferrals). *Deep Sleep* cost $2.5-million. So there's quite a progression there.

MH: Godard said that the cinema is about money — as a producer/director you spend time raising the money to make the film — but that the money comes back again, in the image. He feels that it determines the order of the images. Can you comment?

PG: *Deep Sleep* was the first film where I didn't have complete editorial control, and that was understood from the beginning. But I thought because the people I was working with knew what I'd already made, that we had an understanding of what we were getting into together. I realize, in retrospect, that I gave their history as little heed as they did mine. The producer I worked with had never worked with anyone you would consider an auteur. I thought that all the details in the film's making would be negotiated; it didn't occur to me that I might simply be overridden. But from their point of view I was a "first-time director" being trusted with a lot of money, and I had to be controlled.

Deep Sleep

MH: Much of your work deals with history and its recollection. *Sifted Evidence*'s archeological dig figures history as a superimposition of conflicting layers. In *Low Visibility*, history seems contingent on point of view; the past is reliant on the person looking back. In keeping with its more conventional form, *Deep Sleep* images a history that's far more stable than your earlier work. Here history is fully explicable; it can be returned to in an orderly progression of events which are re-enacted the same way each time. *Deep Sleep* discloses all its secrets in the end with a narrative clarity that you avoided, even denounced, in your earlier work.

PG: I feel I'm always withholding something, that understanding in my work is always contingent, reflexive and aware of its framing. For once I wanted to cross that barrier, to make a film which would let the audience inside. I think there are other ways I could've done it, for instance, by accepting the director's consciousness as the mediating force of the film. What I've done is to make the director's voice transparent, allowing the viewer to enter into the characters without any visible strings attached. There's a difference between cinematic self-consciousness and an awareness of what it means to be human, and that's what I'm moving toward.

MH: Your new movie, *Ley Lines (72 min 1993)*, narrates this join in a more personal way. How did you shape all this material?

PG: *Ley Lines* is structured classically with a prologue, three acts (Texas, Germany, Tuktoyaktuk), and an epilogue. The first act is set in Texas. It traces my personal ley line of childhood and the story of my father, who grew up in a strongly fundamentalist environment and rebelled against it and became an alcoholic. The second act is set in Germany, not the Germany of my specific family's history, but the mythic Germany of Siegfried and Hitler. All three parts of the film are about people's magical attachment to the landscape; this film ties that together with nationalism. The story of my father becomes more subdued here, but keeps returning with the images of B-17 bombers — he was a navigator in the Second World War who bombed the country his grandparents had come from. When I was growing up in Texas there were many people of German descent around me, and nothing was thought of it even though all our fathers had fought the Germans in the war. But when I came to Canada in the early seventies, for the first time I met people who had really experienced the war in Europe, and my German name became an issue from time to time. I went to dinner at a Jewish friend's house in Toronto, and when I met his father (who had been in Auschwitz) he said, "Gruben, Gruber, Schickelgruber — that was Hitler's name!" and I immediately felt guilty.

Act three takes place in Tuktoyaktuk, NWT, a small town on the Beaufort Sea, where half the people are named Gruben because they are descended from a German or Swiss guy who was shipwrecked in 1911 and stayed to run the Hudson's Bay post and married an Inuk woman. I heard about this family from two or three different sources, and just went up there unannounced with a small crew to see what would happen. The wonderful thing about our time in Tuktoyaktuk was that, even though there was no way to prove whether we were related to those Grubens, they took us in as if we were, which was the point of going there. They invited us for dinner and gave us presents and were happy to be interviewed even though I really couldn't explain what the film was about.

MH: What does the title mean — *Ley Lines*?

PG: Ley lines are imaginary, or at least invisible, lines that connect sacred spots in the landscape — some natural, like springs or hills, and some made by humans, like shrines and dolmens. They're a metaphor to describe the way we make up our own maps of the significant points in our personal histories. The film really started when I met an Inuk man who told me he'd been married to a woman with the same name as my own, and who was a teacher like me. I wondered whether she was a distant relative, then I wondered why it mattered, since I didn't spend much time with the relatives I did know and, in fact, had moved four thousand miles away from them. So at first it was going to be a film about why those things matter to people, and I thought I was just using my own family out of convenience. Since it was a film about how we think about things, it was easier to get access to my own thought processes and fragmentary memories than anyone else's. It wasn't until I was editing the first two sections that I began to admit that it was a much more personal search. It had turned into (or had probably always been) a quest to find out how my father's life had ended up being so meaningless to him. At the same time I knew that I could never answer that question for another person. So as I was examining how we make meaning in our lives, I was really trying to find out what happens when we can't do that, when we lose the meaning that we were given by our families and culture, which is what happened to him.

MH: Your father seems at the heart of the film and the archetype for the stunned central characters in your other work.

PG: It's interesting that you tie my absent father to the missing protagonists in my previous films — you're right of course, but I guess I hadn't thought of it that way. The women characters in my first four films are protean, unfixed subjectivities which dance around mysteries, trying to solve them. So I guess this is the central enigma of my life. No wonder I went through a kind of stasis after finishing *Ley Lines*. I think I've finally put it to rest.

MH: Tell me about your father.

PG: My father, as he's described in the film, was a kind of Golden Boy in this west Texas town — handsome, class valedictorian, an accomplished musician, and very much doted on by his mother, who seems to have kind of neglected her two other children. My dad went straight from teetotalling Spur, Texas, to fraternity life and the tennis team at the University of Southern California. And then into the Second World War as an Air Force navigator. Here's a guy who'd never been out of the southern US, suddenly stationed in Trieste and bombing all the European cities he'd never had a chance to visit. By then he had a wife and son waiting for him in California. I don't know what the war was like for him, other than the one story my mother used to explain everything — that his best friend's head had been blown into his lap during a bombing raid over Germany. Of course, I can't imagine the horror of that. I always thought that being in the Air Force and flying over everything was the easiest way to fight the war. It wasn't until I was watching stock footage at the National Archives in Washington a couple of years ago, to get material for the film, that I suddenly realized what it would be like to be fired at and to know that your plane could explode in flames and fall out of the sky, and not be able to see the people attacking you. If you were the navigator and you fucked up, you'd be responsible for the life of everyone in the plane. When I was watching that footage, I had a panic attack and that was kind of the turning point in my relationship with my dad, who has been dead for fifteen years now. I finally saw a human being who was scared out of his wits.

Ley Lines

MH: How was it growing up with him?

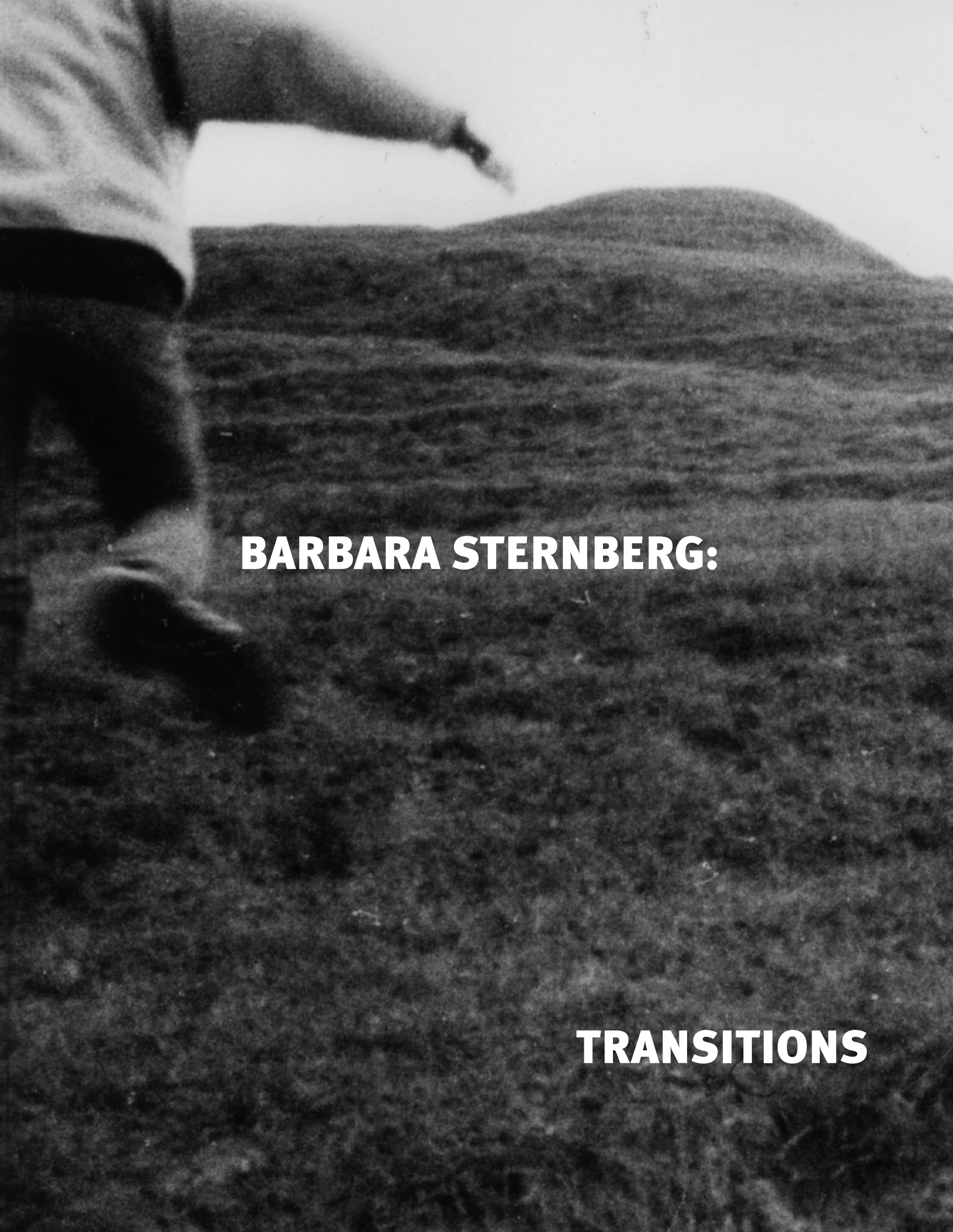
PG: Through most of my childhood he tormented us, ordering us around like little soldiers with military commands, and humiliating us like in boot camp. The thing I blamed him for the most was always saying that whatever I wanted to do — developing my own photos, having a

horse, etc. — wasn't worth the trouble. It took me a while after I left home to learn how to finish things I started. When he was thirty-three he had an ulcer so bad they took out his entire stomach. By then he was a serious alcoholic and so flipped out about the Church that he couldn't set foot in one for the baptism of my little brother, even though we were Episcopalians, and not fundamentalists like his family. I thought he was a cynic. Now I believe he felt damned. He managed to keep a white-collar job until I was in college (he would have been about forty-four) but got fired because of his drinking and because the company was bought out. He got another similar P.R. job in a smaller company but was fired again and then became an air traffic controller (!) at a small municipal airport — he was fired again and ended up delivering phone books before he became completely unemployable. My mother kicked him out at one point, but he promptly fell down and broke his hip so she took him back in and nursed him till he died. He would just sit and watch TV all day, and when he needed money for liquor, he'd sell things out of the house — that's where all the books and furniture disappeared to. He kept driving his big LTD into lawns and buildings but never lost his licence. Finally, the city towed the car away when they were beautifying Dallas for the Republican National Convention.

The last time I saw him was Christmas 1979, and he was pretty lucid, remembering the old times in Spur. We had a good visit for once, which I was grateful for when he died two months later. We weren't mad at each other or, rather, I wasn't mad at him. He didn't have the energy to be mad at anyone by then. At his funeral everyone, including me, just seemed relieved that it was over. The minister gave one of those, "I never actually met Bill" eulogies, which he then had the gall to copy and hand around to us kids. My Dad was fifty-nine and I believed then, and believe now, that he spent the last half of his life committing slow suicide. I judged him then for not having the balls to do it faster.

Making *Ley Lines* turned me around about him. It was a combination of the bombing footage and really looking for the first time at all the photographs that document his life — you could see it falling apart. In *Ley Lines* I'm speculating that he lost the two values that had surrounded him growing up: religious fundamentalism and German culture. Why he couldn't overcome that when other men did, I don't know. I feel very attached to him now, and I've put some of those old pictures up in my house. I have a beautiful baby picture of him in my son's room.


Coca-Cola



BARBARA STERNBERG:

TRANSITIONS

Barbara Sternberg hails from the Maritimes where she began using cinema as a philosophical tool. Her interests in memory and repetition seemed a natural fit for a medium whose material is time. Working alone, and using small, hand-held cameras, Sternberg uses the possibiliies of stretching and compressing events, or presenting them in overlapping layers like a rush of memories, in order to pose questions about the way we have come to describe ourselves.

In the nearly two decades since she began, she has remained faithful to her home-movie methods. But her project has been increasingly concerned with a recovery of transcendental ideals in everyday life. Even small gestures like cleaning and cooking have become rituals under Sternberg's gaze. From our daily gestures of tending she teases out the echo of Judaic ideals, whose themes of exile and wandering can be seen written on the face of her many lonely voyagers. Her son struggling up neolithic mounds, foundry workers casting molds, a burning collection of porn stars — Sternberg gathers these and others in a spirit of communion. Each moment tells the story of its own creation, its own history, and invites us to enter.

A Trilogy

BS: I never thought of myself as an artist because I don't have that kind of background. The only work I made was very personal, and I never thought about it much beyond giving it to the people I'd made it for. Now I'm coming to think that this personal work is a lot more important; it's where a lot of work should remain. I made things for anniversaries and birthdays. I made books for my parents which used photos and texts in ways that are pretty similar to the way I work now. But because it was for the family I never... I just liked doing it.

The first film I made was with my father's 16mm camera. My husband at the time didn't have any home movies and barely any photographs from his growing-up, so I wanted to make him this home movie, to create a past for him. But I never thought of it as filmmaking or art or anything. He was a football player, and I would watch the games and sit through these boring half-time shows. So I came up with some ideas to make them better and wrote a script and approached a television station, which bought it. I couldn't believe it. But when they aired it, they showed the usual visuals, which made the whole thing boring again. I decided to go to Ryerson Polytechnical to learn how to make films so I could tell people more clearly what I wanted them to do. But once I was there, I didn't think at all about industrial film, I just started making stuff in a way I would later learn to call "experimental." It was the way I worked, the way I think. I didn't want film to be just a recording mechanism, simply translating literature or theatre. But my approach didn't go over at Ryerson. I got a super-8 camera when my son, Arlen, was born and often made footage with him. He was two or three when I went to Ryerson. I never thought of this shooting as having any relation to my schooling at Ryerson. Everything had separate little categories then.

MH: And when you left school...

BS: I was committed to film on some level but left without the confidence to make work. I was a non-person there; no one ever looked at my stuff. So when I left I just went back into myself. I think it was good in a way. I turned to super-8 instead of 16mm because I didn't take myself seriously as a filmmaker. I went back to teaching high school. I made little super-8 films which often involved my son and my husband because they were around. I made my own motorcycle film à la Kenneth Anger, and a karate film — small editing exercises which were never shown. It was partly to get Ryerson out of my system, to reconnect with myself, to rid myself of that professionalism.

The marriage ended and I moved to New Brunswick. I was teaching at a community arts centre, and started making little things in super-8 with the boats, the shapes of the waves, the rhythms of the water. Just to do it. Then I made *Opus 40*. It was about the people in the foundry there. Then I made *Transitions*. David Poole saw them. He was working at the Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre. He said, "Why don't you distribute this?" But I never thought that I was making them to show others. I think I do better that way. The first film I got a grant for was *A Trilogy* and I felt watched, like there were expectations, that it should be

something people want to see. I think it tightened me up. Even now I feel better when no one knows I'm doing anything.

MH: Tell me about *Opus 40 (18 min 1979)*.

BS: The arts centre where I taught had a goal of using the arts to help students think creatively, and to involve them in an artmaking that made sense with their living. One of these projects brought us into the foundry. There were two main employers in Sackville — the foundry and the university. Often at school the foundry kids seemed divided from their family life. So we went to the foundry altogether as a school. There were two parts to the foundry — an old one and a new one. The old one made moulds out of earth imported from France. They would pack the earth down and pour molten iron over it which hardened to form parts for wood-burning stoves. The modernized foundry made electrical stoves, but we were interested in the older foundry. It had used the same process since 1837, and the men who worked there thought of themselves more as craftsmen than the assembly line workers in the modern plant. So we brought the kids in and they drew the men's gestures, or made

Opus 40

rubbings, or sound collages with interviews of their parents. All the material was collected from the life that was there. I liked coming into the foundry and wanted to ask the men about repetition and, finally, to make a film about it. I was thinking about habit, ritual, the sun rising daily. Both the building and the work it contained were very repetitious. So I made a plan on paper and interviewed the men. *Opus 40* isn't my fortieth film; it's a reference to their forty-hour work week. It starts out as if it's going to be a documentary. The camera moves into the factory cinéma-vérité style, and you hear a voice asking, "How long have you been working at the foundry? Which area do you prefer?" And then the film begins to perform its own form of repetition, the image divides and divides again. Then the interviewer asks, "How do you handle the repetition?" But there's no answer on the soundtrack. You don't hear the voice-over again until the end. The film cuts to an image split in half, with the workers on the top and black on the bottom. I thought of the black part like a bass rhythm in music. My plan was to show a single man working in both parts of the image, top and bottom, only shot at different times. It would be the same gestures, only making different moulds. So it wouldn't be a strict repetition, but almost. This was all done in-camera. I'd borrowed a Fuji super-8 camera, which allows you to rewind. I rigged up a matte box and stuck paper in it to block out parts of the image or introduce coloured filters. I wanted to embody the process of repetition in my gestures, so it wouldn't be as if, oh they do that and I make films. Because film is founded on repetition. The claw runs up and down, the shutter goes round, and I'm moving these filters in and out of the box. I never used the best footage I shot — the pouring off of the moulds in the afternoon — because it didn't fit my plan. It was too beautiful. That's one of the differences in the way I work. I don't like to use images that are monumental or create a sense of awe in the viewer. I think the first time it clicked in me was seeing a Herzog film which just reeked of the Beautiful. I was so impressed. It was about filmmaking and power on a big scale, and about what he had to go through to get these shots. But there's a certain contrivance which ensures that everything in the frame is a carefully made image. I feel better keeping things smaller and rougher. My stuff works through an accumulation of the everyday, more through a glance than a look, less a controlling gaze than an observational one.

What you hear is the sound recordings of the foundry slowly giving way to the sound of the projector. Then I took the split image and shot it off the wall to create further repetitions in the image, and this move is followed on the soundtrack where the sound is channelled through an echo machine where it's made to double on itself. The image becomes more fraught as if all the days of their working were happening at once. Then I repeat the question, "How do you handle the repetition?" And the man answers, "What do you mean?" [laughs] It's so wonderful. He says, "I come in every day. I have so many moulds to make and I do this task." He's been here for twenty-five years, and for him the work doesn't have the negative labels we might attach to it. Gertrude Stein wrote that the history of each of us comes out in our repeating. Repetition can become deadening when you don't notice all the small differences in it. I thought the workers might complain, but they didn't.

Opus was invited to a MayWorks screening which annually

celebrates labour in art. All of the films in the program were documentaries complaining about working conditions. Except mine, which was experimental. Some people were angry, saying, "How dare you make a film that accepts this? Why aestheticize this experience?" I didn't take the opportunity of filming to help change conditions at the foundry. Whether a film could really change them or not is another issue. I felt if we could come back to being connected with our labour, we would be more human. The film is an experience of repetition and not finally about their work. The film is not about something, it *is* something.

Opus came out of notions of repetition that were more intellectual than lived. In *Transitions (10 min 1982)*, I wanted to make something more personal. I always felt there was a time-lag between events and their recording, that events in film were inevitably a re-creation. Film suits memory very well: its making is always a going back. But I wanted to make something that wasn't over before I made it. I wondered if I could make a film about the present, a perceptual documentary perhaps. I would recognize things I saw as "right" and film them — the evidence of wind on snowbanks, or water, or hay, for instance. But, again, I didn't want to shoot it like Nature Beautiful. No capitals. You write in your journal, you collect bits of film, you talk to people and at some point it comes together enough to think: oh, this is a film. I was thinking about a state of transition which is characterized by the fact that nothing is singular or clear. I felt there should be a lot of motion, that the film should never rest so you couldn't make easy orientations. I wanted to layer images for the same reason, so you can't just make out a single moment — the way your mind works. When you're agitated, the past, present and future, if there are such divisions, are going on at the same time. So I had these fragments and some ideas about how to treat them. But I needed something to unify the material. So I made a narrative ground. I shot a woman in white on a bed, who's sleepless and agitated. There's other images of her as well — walking on a river bank with a guy, someone touching her face, her in a restaurant, sitting in a chair with her knees up. But I worried that the central image of her in bed would overdetermine the other images, that they would be read as her dreams or something like that.

MH: There's a very brief shot of her walking with a man and all of a sudden the whole film aligns itself around this image. There's been a relationship, but now she's alone and can't sleep. Obviously they've broken up. Why? She's having nightmares; something about her past. And I wondered at how little it takes to make a story, and how much it takes to conjure something else.

BS: *Transitions* came out of waking up afraid every day. Terrified. That's what occasioned the film. I wondered why we had to get up, to face every fucking day. Some societies create this feeling of disorientation and fear and confusion as part of an initiation rite which provides passage from one state to another. For me, it was something else. The soundtrack consists of two voices whispering. The difference between the two is that one is talking about personal things taken from my journal, while the other is quoting from a physics text. The journal stuff talked about the face of my mother. One day I just realized how long I'd spent looking into her face so I wrote about...

Transitions came out of waking up afraid every day. Terrified.

MH: How much of her life was in her face?

BS: How much of her face was in my life. [laughs] Later, the same voice describes a conversation where my mother says, "He's your husband. Do what he says — it won't hurt you to meet his parents."

MH: This track is a lot more buried than the other one. I've never heard any of this stuff after seeing the film a dozen times or more.

BS: I was more concerned with having a personal tone than having details spelled out. A friend of mine felt the film was about the space women occupy between mother and husband — neither is tenable. She described the film in terms of a power relation I hadn't thought of. The woman in the film wants to live in the present without the expectations of the future or the visitations of the past. To be awake to life, not back in the womb or sleepwalking. Sometimes the voice carries minute descriptions of physical activities — walking, for instance — to try to get the mind to focus completely on the sensations of the present. The last line asks, "Do we

Transitions

have to be aware of every moment?" In all my work, I feel it's too dishonest to provide a resolution — as if I have the answers. So she stays on the edge of the bed. The film whites out and leaves us with the question and her with the choice.
MH: I felt the two voices come together in the line that asks, "What more frightening thing could there be than there is a present moment?" I understood this as the possibility of an infinite present, that the next instant I could think or do something that might continue for the rest of my life, that the images we make constitute a place of perfect memory, where we can return to these consequences, where we can learn to travel in time.
BS: Yes, the clearest memories I have are in photographs. This film, like *Opus 40*, is also about repetition. What's memory if not the order of our repetition? Or history? Or identity?
MH: Let's talk about *A Trilogy (43 min 1985)*.
BS: It's framed by a woman at the edge of a pool. It opens

A Trilogy

with her about to dive in and closes with her dive. The second shot of the film runs eight continuous minutes and shows a man running along a dirt road. The road is tree-lined and narrow, so it's as if he's traversing this passageway. The camera tracks alongside him. A male voice-over recites fragments from a story: "Duration didn't come into it." Or just: "Time. Water." Things like that. There's suggestions of death. I actually asked him to talk about what it would feel like to drown and cut his response into fragments. A scrolling text follows which lists historical events. Then there are six kitchen scenes that show a couple in the morning before they go off to work. You hear bits of dialogue about whether the repairman is coming, or who's driving whom to work. Then a baby carriage is introduced, and a baby which each of them take turns feeding. Meanwhile, news reports relate an airplane crash at sea. A second text follows. This time instead of a list, it takes the form of a narrative which relates the initiation rites of an African tribe. In order to prepare him for adulthood, a boy is circumcised while the villagers mourn him as if he had died. He is cast out and goes through this harrowing experience, then is re-named and told about the existence of the Tree of Knowledge. The next section follows a young boy running up Silbery Hill in England, which is a Neolithic mound, a fertility symbol. Like *Transitions*, this section is pictured in layers — images seen in superimposition. So we see the boy on the hills rolling through images of water, and volcanoes erupting and a pregnant woman — archetypal images. This sequence culminates in the cutting of the umbilical cord.
MH: Doesn't it suggest that each separation replays this initial loss of the mother?
BS: It's cyclical. We've been listening to letters from the mother to the boy which lead us to the cord's cutting and then we hear the boy's voice for the first time. He's talking about his choices for the next year, his subjects at school. I thought it would be too utopian to show him being free. He comes into his own, but he does so inside a system. The world is organized into subjects of knowledge — geography, history, math. A third scrolling text follows with a list of questions. Then the three stories — the man running, the couple in the kitchen, and the little boy — all find their endings. The man runs up a hill, and the camera stops and lets him move towards the horizon. The couple are always seen in the morning, but today is Sunday, so for the first time they're not getting ready for work. You can see the backyard, and she takes the baby in her arms and goes out of doors. The boy runs up the hill and rolls down without the intervention of the other image layers. The woman dives into the water and the film ends. Over the closing credits a piano is practising scales, continually missing and beginning again.
MH: The film brings different people together with experiences that they've either forgotten or never learned how to remember. It seems especially directed towards the males in the film who are always running, unable to look back and take account of what's passed.
BS: I was thinking of the "running"as "living" — for which we can't "know" the beginning or end. Five years after I finished the film, I read *The Mermaid and the Minotaur*. The author posits that the male world of work and enterprise is based on two things. First, to create a world distinct from the mother who provides our first experience of ourselves when we're powerless. We escape this lack of power by latching onto the "not-woman" — the man. The father doesn't remind us of this period of helplessness. The male world of work is founded on signing, on creating identity, and an important aspect of that is to control women, to exert power over them. Second, the world of enterprise is part of our denial of death. Even when women enter that

world they do it vicariously through the achievements of sons or husbands. Or they do it in support — the women behind great men — as secretary or nurse. So they're allowed in, but only beneath men. Her thesis is that until you have both men and women nurturing children through that helpless stage of the first couple of years, this will continue.

MH: But aren't these polarities drawn together through memory? To remember or bring back again is an acknowledgment of death. Because going back always returns to the acknowledgment of those already dead.

BS: The child dies to become an adult, but the mother dies also. The rituals that remain to us negotiate this passage between states. These old rituals of earth mounds and fire and water aren't active for us anymore. Even as I put them in the film, I did it with the understanding that they weren't the same for us as the builders of mounds or carvers of rock. But there's something that remains, and these traces are felt in our everyday life. We don't have to go somewhere else to find the mystery of that connectedness. It's always there. We have flashes of it — some image, some moment that stays with us. Unaccountably.

I'm not trying to romanticize poverty, but does money make the art better? Give it more substance and impact?

The couple who appear as if out of an advertisement for the desirable life are finally animated by the presence of a child. It's not the only signal of life's mysteries, but it's an obvious one. We don't have many rituals. We have habits. But a child brings us closer to something else. I wanted to fill the film with the mystery of the everyday, of those moments which we haven't learned how to attach words to yet, when you feel everything is different but you don't know what it is, like the hair on the back of someone's neck or a young girl running across the road. You feel something, like memory, or the understanding of those already dead.

MH: I felt that the camera pans over Silberry Hill and the child's rolling ascents and descents marked a re-invention of ritual. The camera passes over this landscape again and again. Your son finally appears inside these pans, as if lured by this rhythm, and the two of you begin a kind of dance.You have flown across the world to bring him to this hill, to a place where you can impart some last understanding — the memory of your time together; that night of nine months. He shows in his rolling over earth that he remembers the unmistakable connection between the two of you, and understands also that it is time for him to leave. It's a remarkable section.

BS: It's as if the hill is trying to reclaim him. As if he's trying to be free of it. The woman's voice is trying to hold him at the same time, and then he has to let go. Separate.

MH: Did you get any kind of support for this work?

BS: I got money for the first time — my first grant. I came to Toronto late in 1984, just after I thought the film was finished. I had a fine cut and was ready to mix. Then I found out all my tracks were no good because they'd been transferred improperly. I thought I would die. So I re-transferred the sound, cut it back again, and started making changes. Then I started changing the picture again, redid the mix, and finally released it the next year.

MH: It's a film that's done very well.

BS: In terms of experimental film I've been fortunate. But the fact that it's been programmed doesn't necessarily give me confidence that people think a lot about it.

MH: Why is it being selected then?

BS: Moving to Toronto introduced me to the politics of exhibition — how and why certain works get picked. A lot of it is who gets chosen. I think my early films were considered good apart from the identity of their maker. There wasn't as much consciousness about being a woman artist. Now we're in a very self-conscious phase of change. Because my work was taken up by a largely male faction I was ignored by feminists for a time, as if I'm part of a male thing. Or perhaps my films aren't as "feminist" in subject matter. There are also considerations of race. All this helps to open the canon up, remove its stronghold, but it's complicated. The danger, of course, is "political correctness" being adhered to mindlessly. I see other filmmakers much more active in getting screenings for their work, but I haven't done that and I don't care to. Some people are smarter

Tending Toward the Horizontal

about distributing their work than making it. There's a lot of energy that goes into seminars and posters and distribution these days.

MH: Does this focus on distribution signal a shift?

BS: The equation of money with value predominates and that's a problem. I'm not trying to romanticize poverty, but does money make the art better? Give it more substance and impact? The sense of surface and advertising that permeates our world is also permeating our work. Which is not to say we should live in shit, but this feeling that making slicker work makes us better artists is not necessarily true.

MH: Do we need an audience for this work — do numbers matter? Is there a certain point where public attention wanes so completely that you have to say, okay, let's pull the plug on this. What if no one comes?

BS: That's fine. Then I'll make it for myself. I think the work has an effect nonetheless. Things exist in the world. Look at Gertrude Stein — she was forced to publish most of her work herself. And her writing continues to be felt. I don't think its implications have yet been realized. But the fact that she wrote what she did, when she did, changed everything. Which is not to argue for dead authors. But if she'd made the decision to stop working based on her audience, she never would have written anything.

Tending Toward the Horizontal

MH: Why is it important to make fringe film?

BS: Why is it important to do anything? I just do it. What sustains public attention isn't necessarily good. It's better for me to make this work than do horrible things to people. If the role of art is to ask us to go deeper, to remember certain things, where else is it going to come from, apart from art? Is it going to come from a film that supports the status quo even as it's attempting to critique it? Even if it's against the Gulf War, for instance, but takes shape as a sponsored television documentary, this work still supports the system. It begs certain questions the filmmaker can't afford to hear because finally their work needs to sell.

MH: Tell me about *Tending Towards the Horizontal (35 min. 1989)*

BS: I was in Moncton, New Brunswick, walking past houses, and there was that moment, you know, of looking up when something just clicked, and two years later it was *Tending*. Around that experience I began to collect material about houses and bodies, reading books that seemed to relate. I didn't want to use images as symbols the way *A Trilogy* did. I wanted the image to be more incidental, to cast away the signifier. I wanted to communicate something else. I didn't want someone to view the image as a series of identifications of words — house, person, car, building. I didn't want someone to read the film, I wanted someone to see it. So I was collecting images I knew I had to have without quite knowing why. Then I met the Acadian writer, Frances Daigle. She had seen some of my films and said she'd like to work with me. I thought this would be a good way to allow the words and pictures to become more fully themselves. To let her write the words for the soundtrack, and for me to make the images.

The film pictures houses, initially presenting them as they are, and moving to a point where they become light, shadow, and colour. For their occupants, these architectures mean home, but for a passerby they remain a divide, a line between inside and out. Something is going on in there, but I'm out here, and the structure that's holding us apart is endless and immovable. So I took the light of the window, the orange light, and allowed it to fill the whole frame so that we could see the scene inside out. The film describes the dissolution of these rigid structures until they become alternating passages of orange and blue light. The substantial and permanent is subject to change and transformation. These are the two colours natural to film, so the film's end signals a return to materials.

MH: On a scientific level, it would be that moment where you experience a table as a bunch of atoms. Was the architecture important?

BS: When a child draws a house, she or he makes a rectangle with a triangle over the top. The opening houses look like that. In the middle section I wanted houses that were increasingly covered by foliage and vines, that showed some merging of architecture and surround. A newspaper reviewer wrote that they were "middle-class" homes, but I wasn't thinking about that. I was simply thinking "house." But in Toronto now, everything recalls class, race, and gender.

MH: Throughout *Tending* I felt we could be looking at anything. The show of houses was immaterial. This seemed the real aim of the film — to do away with the fact that the image "stood for" something. Maybe we could say that the film is crafted out of a certain kind of knowing, a way of

living in the world. It's like the woman described in the voice-over who sits in the library reading any book. She doesn't care which one, because the feeling she carries is already there. How did you arrive at the title *Tending Towards the Horizontal*?

BS: At a certain point I'd shot footage that had a split image, like in *Opus 40*, but now split horizontally and vertically. I was trying to choose between the two and finally discarded them both. But before I did, I remember saying to a friend, "Oh, I think I'm tending towards the horizontal." And she said that's the title of your film. [laughs] I don't give a lot of time to titles. For some people the title is the work. Some people's titles are so fabulous I don't need to see the films.

MH: You called your new film *At Present (18 min 1990)*. How did it start?

BS: I was teaching, so I didn't have a lot of time to work on film, but I wanted to keep my hand in. I had this footage I liked and wanted to make something with. I kept seeing all these male Toronto filmmakers making work about love. So my film is a response to these films. It has three sections. The first shows four individuals in four settings — two men and two women. All four are framed by houses — a man in a doorway looking out of the house he built; a man smoking; a woman who alternates between picking through broken glass and potting flowers; and a woman sweeping a studio floor. The soundtrack over each relates a parable. Then there's a House Beautiful-type of apartment, and I run into the shot because one of the features of these male films is that they would always appear in their own films, so I thought I had to show myself somehow. So there I am primping in a chair, trying to fit myself into a life where I obviously don't belong. In the course of making the film I interviewed a number of men about love. One voice-over begins with an evocation of media clichés — he talks about falling in love in Paris, about the Hollywood romance contained in Casablanca, and about his childhood in Niagara Falls, which remains the honeymoon capital of the world. Then there's a chorus, or middle section, where another male voice asks, "What's involved in love? Is it power — is that what we're talking about?" With a single exception, all the voices in the film are male because I wanted to make a film about love that men would hear. If I had women talking, men would think it's a woman's problem.

MH: So this is a film addressed to men?

BS: Well, both men and women really, but for men to hear better they had to be addressed in their own voice. As the voice-over continues to speak about the body and its traces, the images change. They move outside now. They're not so enclosed, and you don't see as many couples. People are in more contact with their environment. We see people setting fire to a field and a woman's voice reciting from R.D. Laing, "They are playing a game. They are playing at not playing a game. If I show them I know the rules, they will punish me. I must play the game of not showing I know how to play the game." Another male voice begins more tentative than the last, accompanied by the rising sound of women laughing. The burning field is superimposed on a number of naked men taken from pornographic magazines. Another voice intercedes. It says, "Love, hate, he, she — it's all the same, isn't it?" The images of fire return to the apartment with a series of snap zooms which break open the space so that the house structure, which is the support structure of this coupling, opens up to another formulation of love which is more encompassing. The film turns to light and the talking becomes laughing. The beginning of the film shows an Aboriginal man opening his mouth as if screaming or calling, and the last shot shows a contemporary, an older man from this society, again in silence, and he's looking out at the audience, and then he makes this little smile. This smile is really the beginning.

At Present

MH: To risk an obvious question: why an Aboriginal? He feels like the image equivalent of "once upon a time" — a kind of prelude to this male intercourse. His silent shout evokes a flash of light which lands us inside a Toronto living room. At present.

BS: I remembered that shot from a television documentary I saw in Saint John eight years ago. I didn't know why, but I knew I had to have that shot — it was the only one I took intentionally for the film. So I tracked it down and shot it off the Steenbeck. It was important that it was a shout and that you heard nothing, that there's an expression coming from the mouth that wasn't words — because the rest of the film was full of words. It comes before the title because it's before language, in a way, like laughter is before or beyond words. What did you think of the film? You're in it.

MH: It's your best work. The light is clearer and the

montage is lovely and always unexpected. I could move alongside the changes without feeling either that I was being hijacked or completely disoriented. It struck a number of very different emotional registers and managed to negotiate them with a real elegance. It also has the angriest section I've ever seen in your work, which you pointedly ignored in your description of the film — a section which plays over my voice-over. It shows a number of gay porn images of men naked, erect and burning, mutilated by fire.

At Present

BS: Or "on fire," "burning," "hot." The fire theme was introduced with the burning fields, which are set ablaze every spring to burn off old grass and supply nutrients for new growth. This burning field footage was actually from an artist's [Bill Vazin] site piece. Art, fire, spirituality… layers of meaning. As to the choice of male nudes, I wanted to show men what it was like to show their bodies, so I put their bodies up there. As if they're images of love, or whatever the excuses are for always doing that to women. As if they were about anything but power. The film is moving toward a more open and encompassing view of love which is no longer oriented to some exclusive "I love you." This section marks a regression. It speaks of division and the objectification that comes out of fear. But there's a lot of laughing in the film, even in that section. So you could say that women have the last laugh.

MH: And the title?

BS: I was going to call it *Love Me*. [laughs] I called it *At Present* because it's like the end of a sentence — the way we are at present. This is sort of where we're at, a news report on the state of love. It's also a questioning of where the present is. Is the present the Aboriginal image that opens the film or the apartment that it moves to? Which are we present to?

MH: People are usually featured in *At Present* moving in a directionless isolation, like much of your previous work. *Tending* is a road movie — going where? Your son is running up the hills of England only to roll down again. The sleeper in *Transitions* never leaves the bed, though there's a constant flow of images. The worker in *Opus 40* is always in motion but always appears to be doing the same thing.

BS: But that's all there is. There's no place to go. I make films that I wouldn't like as a viewer. I wouldn't go to my own films. The stuff I like is not the stuff I make. I like Snow's work. I like conceptualist, minimalist work. And yet my work is multi and messy and accumulates meaning through fragments which are layered and more personal. Seeing work and making it are two entirely different things.

MH: Do you think criticism is important for film?

BS: Because film exists only in the time of its projection, it's crucial that there be writing. Writing endures. It gives work continuity. Many more people have read about Mike Snow's films than have actually seen them. It's given that work an existence it wouldn't have otherwise. But who will write? Maybe criticism should come from other filmmakers — but the way we show our work is no good for discussion. And filmmakers don't speak to each other about their work. We're afraid. People work alone. Personally, I get confused by other people's opinions while I'm working. Painters make reams of work that never gets seen. But that's a weakness in film — if you make it, it has to be seen with a poster and press and stuff. I think we shouldn't worry about it so much. There's lots of work and what's good will stay around somehow. And if not, so what?

Barbara Sternberg Filmography

Opus 40	18 min 1979
Transitions	10 min 1982
A Trilogy	43 min 1985
Tending Towards the Horizontal	33 min 1989
At Present	18 min 1990
Through and Through	60 min 1991
Beating	60 min 1994
What Do You Fear	5.5 min video 1996
C'est La Vie	10 min 1997

AL RAZUTIS:

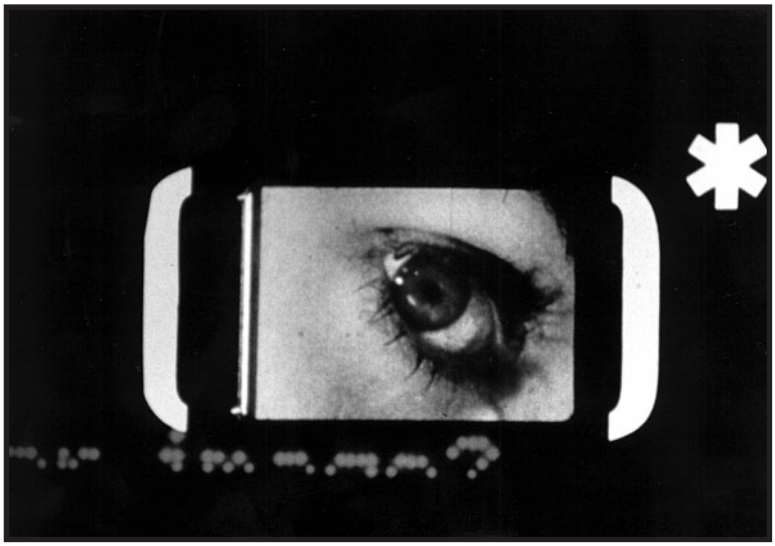
THREE DECADES OF RAGE

Al Razutis is a Canadian iconoclast, an artist who was instrumental in forming two West Coast film distributors, a short-lived union of Canadian film artists, a production co-op, magazines on fringe film and holography, and who played a role in a much publicized battle with Ontario's Board of Censors. He has completed some forty-odd films and videos alongside various performances, paintings, holograms, and intermedia productions. While he has worked hard over the years to secure an institutional base for all aspects of fringe cinema, he is better known for his anti-institutional stance. In 1986, at the opening of a new artist-run movie palace, Razutis gave one of his unforgettable performances. Before a shocked crowd he whipped out a spray can and scrawled, "The avant-garde spits in the face of institutional art" on the brand new screen, ruining it forever.

His filmwork has long established him as the sultan of collage. Rifling the junk bins of Sunset Boulevard he has patiently re-ordered moments from the history of cinema and allowed them to speak again in startling new ways. These have been compiled in two of his finest moments — *Visual Essays*, which offers a retinal massage to silent cinema, and *Amerika*, a three-hour, eighteen-part opera which serves up sex and death in a frothing mediascape. The ability to remember has never looked more dangerous.

AR: I was an undergraduate in San Diego studying chemistry and physics on a basketball scholarship. On my way through the library I noticed a book open on the table. It had a series of colour plates dealing with things I'd never seen before, and the more I flipped through the book the more it enchanted me. What I was looking at was the history of modern art in large colour panels, and that day I went out and bought acrylics, oils, and watercolours, and started painting. I painted for a month and took it to an art teacher who said it was all shit and that I should take an art course, which I did, and got totally bored. I didn't know why you had to study art because I was experiencing it directly. None of my art ever came out of formal education.

In the late sixties, I started an underground cinema at UC Davis, which is between Sacramento and San Francisco, where I was doing some graduate work in nuclear physics. Then I wanted to expand the underground cinematheque by flying down to San Diego and setting up another one there. I would rent work from Canyon [the distributor], the money would come from the gate, and the audiences were huge. I got my first camera by starting a cinema club at the university, applying for money from the dean, and using it to buy myself a camera. I made my first film there — *2 X 2 (17 min 1967)*, a dual screen film obviously related to Conner and Warhol. It dealt with sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll, a typical topic in the sixties. When I finished the film all I had was the original, I didn't know you could make a print then. Some guy in L.A. named Bob Pike was running the Creative Film Society, which distributed a lot of underground work. He said, "I love this film — I'll buy it — but you have to sell me the original, and if I want to recut it, I can." I got $2,000, which is when my girlfriend decided to go back to Vancouver, Canada. We drove up in 1968. I hooked up with

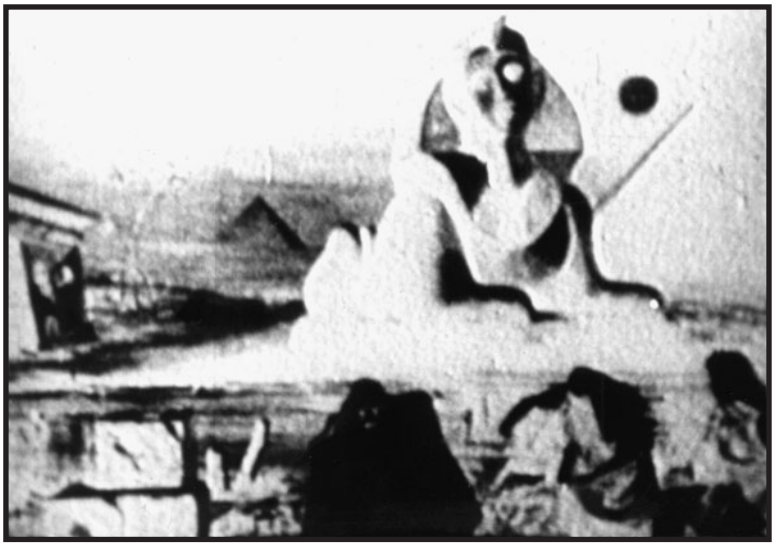


(Fin)*

an organization called Intermedia which had a four-storey warehouse on Beatty Street comprised of artists of all disciplines — four floors of free studios, sculptors, dancers, painters. Anybody who was doing crazy, innovative work was doing it there. I convinced them that I could run underground films on the weekend and they said nobody here comes to anything. I asked for the second floor Saturday and Sundays, promising to pay for everything, and I would keep the proceeds. We made hundreds of dollars every weekend — the place was packed. By that time I had some experience of curating for the audience. I never curated auteurs, the Bruce Baillie night or whatever. The audience was interested in looking at the best examples of a certain approach to work. From the money I made showing these films I financed my own films. Intermedia was a place where different sensibilities could rub together without the usual bureaucracies or jealousy.

I made a number of films — *2 X 2* became *Inauguration (17 min 1968); Sircus Show Fyre (7 min 1968)*, a film about the spectacle of the circus using four layers of superimposition; *Black Angel Flag... Eat (17 min silent 1968)* which is mostly black leader with very intermittent shots, so you don't know when the film is over; and *Poem: Elegy For Rose (4 min 1968)* which featured a poem written on celluloid. I hated

redundant work, which was part of my take against the institution of art. I thought galleries were a total sell-out, and any artist that would create a style was a cop-out. In any formative or dangerous time of making work, the worst thing you can do is bag your own style. I used to call it a paper bag because you'd throw all your shit into it and



Sequels in Transfigured Time

shake it around, and it would always come out the same. In every work, I'd try to negate what I'd done previously.

MH: Did you feel a split between formal and political moves?

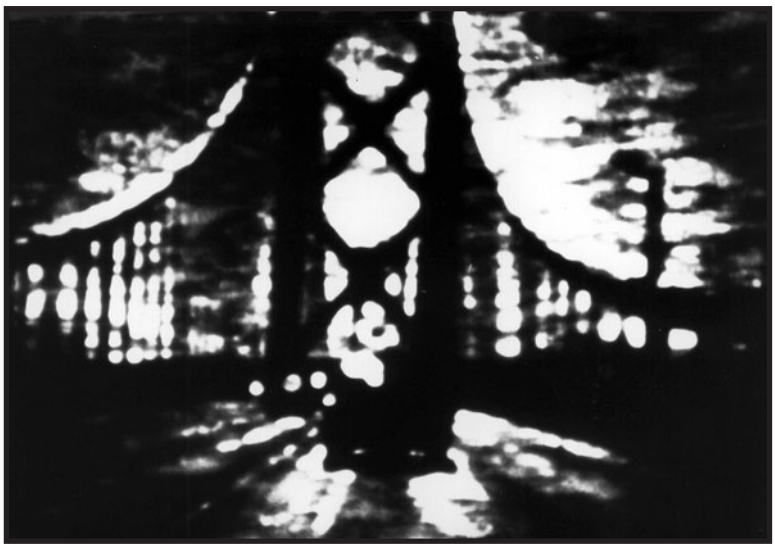
AR: There was no split at all; that's the thing that was so peculiar and beautiful. This is going to sound extremely sentimental... Take a film like *Lapis* by James Whitney, for example. It's a computer graphic mosaic set to sitar music, an abstract film which serves as a meditation on a state of mind. It externalized what some people experienced on LSD. Formally eloquent in its own right, it had a place in a counter-culture drug culture because people were experiencing these things on a daily basis. What they were celebrating was completely connected to their political beliefs, which were similarly anti-establishment. Everyone was trying to break down conventions and look for alternatives to message systems which they'd grown up with, family systems they'd inhabited, professional systems which they were obligated to. That's why none of this work was touted as art, because the institutions of art were already suspect. How could you reject middle-class America and not reject its art history and universities? The same universities that were teaching a European history of art were teaching the military sciences that fed the war machine. In the time of Intermedia, there was no connection with grant agencies, art galleries, any institutions of any kind. Later on Michelson, Sitney, and Youngblood began making schools and movements, which was the beginning of the end: its professionalization, anthologization, academicization. Underground film became art, and that was the demise of the form. They made it pedagogical, voyeuristic, and auteur-based. That's when the rush for the museums began. If you wanted to become a fixture in the museum of the avant-garde, you had to be legitimized somehow. Do you have a large body of work, or how clean is your technique, or how innovative is it, or who would write about you, or where did you show? And that's part of the difference between then and now — expression didn't depend on mediating influences twenty years ago. The legitimizing histories offered by film schools are a total distortion of what happened. There's a lot of people who went through the process and vanished, whose work in its time was just as important as those who are remembered today.

In my weekly screenings at Intermedia I included the work of local people like David Rimmer and Gary Lee Nova and realized that people in Vancouver were starting to make films. So I thought, let's make a co-op along the lines of and inspired by Canyon or New York Filmmakers. In 1969, I talked to various filmmakers who thought it was a great idea, but they didn't really have the time, so I said, I'll do it. I became the founder/manager/bookkeeper/floorsweeper of the Intermedia Film Co-op, and I drew up some packages and toured them down to the US. It was a distribution co-op that held mostly Vancouver work but also others from the US. Like the co-ops in the US, we had no submissions policy; we took whatever people offered. We had an office and published a catalogue with about 100 films in the collection. Most of the work went to cinematheque, underground-type film screenings. There was a network of venues down the Coast which I'd made contact with as a programmer in the US. The only money we could get was what we took from our cut on the rentals. We ran a couple of years, and my energy evaporated because there weren't enough people willing to go the distance with it. The birth of the Pacific Cinematheque with Kirk Tougas happened around the time of our demise. He was coming to our screenings and running the Cinema 16 Film Club at the University of British Columbia with an eye to setting up something more permanent. So he started the Pacific Cinematheque, which began screenings in 1971 and is still running today. In 1971, Intermedia moved to another space and new factions grew up which eventually brought the house down. But the different people who left Intermedia formed a number of satellite organizations like Western Front, Video Inn, Intermedia Press and the Grange; so in a sense it evolved, it transformed into these other places. I tried to set up an underground film theatre with Keith Rodan. We had a storefront and built a huge screen and projection booth and pulled some chairs in. We advertised in the *Georgia Straight*

and that's where we made our mistake. The fire marshal showed up and said he'd been asked by the BC Censor to check the premises, and we got shut down. They just didn't want us running films. I ran out of money and sold all my equipment. It was a bad time.

There are two people on the institutional side from the late sixties, early seventies, who deserve greater mention. Peter Jones at the National Film Board helped underground filmmakers with stock and processing. He came from the old guard at the Board and had an interest in supporting independent films even though this wasn't part of its mandate. He would come down to Intermedia and offer people assistance; he was amazing. The other guy was Werner Aellen, who was the director of Intermedia. He was my godfather — got me jobs, lent me money. He kept me going for the year or two when I had nothing. Keith Rodan and I went out to Alaska and made a documentary on the Alaska pipeline. Then suddenly this teaching job appears from Evergreen State College, and that's when I walked into a Disneyland of equipment: a video studio, all kinds of synthesizers and cameras, and a very interesting academic program. That's where *Amerika* started. I made *Software*, *Vortex*, and some of the video components of *98.3 KHz: Bridge at Electrical Storm*. We were doing bio-feedback experiments at the college — setting up film loops and wiring ourselves into EEG machines in order to induce states of meditation. Then these outputs from the brain were fed through amplifiers and directed into a second monitor which mixed the image signal with those from the brain to see if you could affect the image directly through your response. There were a number of film and video hybrid works begun there. I was contemplating staying on at the college until I made an application to the Canada Council for holography and, astoundingly, they gave me a senior artist's grant. I don't know how much money it was then, but it was top of the line, like getting $80,000 today. So I decided to come back to Vancouver, quit teaching, and set up a media studio called Visual Alchemy. I'd finished building an optical printer, built a video synthesizer, had audio equipment, editing rooms, animation stand, a complete holography lab in the back, living quarters, and a projection/living room space. The Canada Council grant paid for some of it, and I started to do optical effects for people for a fee. By 1972, I had the final version of the printer built. Then it became a production machine where I could make special effects for people like Rimmer and Tougas, and I became an optical service for a lot of commercial people. If anybody wanted a freeze-frame they could only get it from me. It was the only optical printer in Vancouver. I rented out my editing facilities and offered courses in holography. I was trying to make a commercial and experimental venture, and the whole system was available for my own work. So it was a very productive place for me, a completely enclosed interior space. Gordon Kidd got his start there. He was an art school student who came over one day, with a rainbow-coloured bow tie, asking to be an assistant, and I took him on. His films were made at Visual Alchemy. I created *Le Voyage*, *Visual Alchemy*, *Portrait*, and *Amerika* was continued with *Bridge at Electrical Storm*.

98.3 KHz Bridge *at Electrical Storm (11 min 1973)* was contrived on the optical printer at Visual Alchemy. An extremely laborious film, it was created one frame at a time; sometimes twelve frames would take over an hour to do because it had so much bi-packing and combinations of film and video. The video was transferred to film which was then reprocessed on the printer. When *Bridge* came out, some people from Belgium looked at it and said, "That's not film, it's video." For them, legitimate film practice had nothing to do with video. But I kept trying to exchange formal values between the two, trying to achieve new forms of film and videomaking. But the film/video hybrid was not an acceptable form. The policy of Canada Council was that video synthesis was not art. They accepted conceptual video, the beginnings of narrative video, drag queen video and Toronto video.

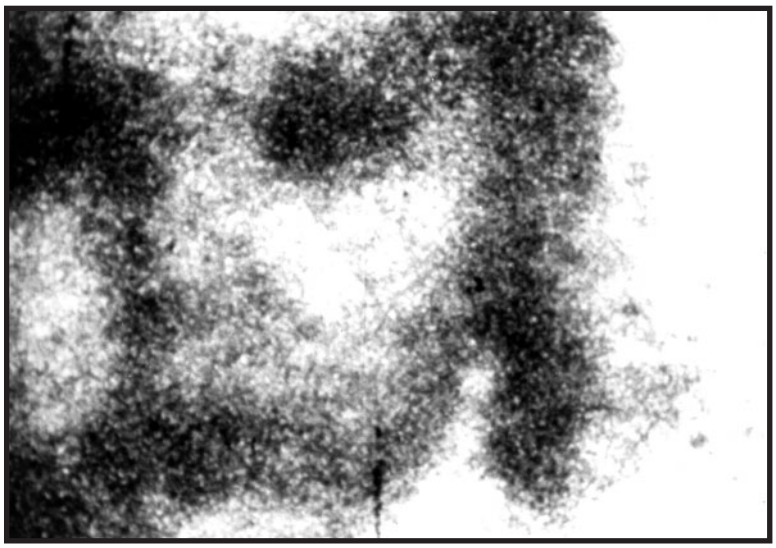


98.3 KHz Bridge at Electrical Storm

My work in holography had a parallel to my work in video in that it didn't have a place in contemporary practice. Most people were doing toy trains and broken wine glasses, and I was trying to integrate sculpture and holography, making a number of interdisciplinary gestures. I didn't have much contact with the holographic community because I thought their work was shit, and they couldn't understand what I was doing. So I was having problems with filmmakers because I was using video; I wasn't accepted as a video-

maker because they said it was all done on film; and the holographers said my work wasn't pure holography. It allowed me a kind of escape from the containers of arts and institutions, and the acclaim people try to achieve early in their careers without doing the work, all of which tended to perpetuate an alienation and anti-social strategy I've already remarked on.

While most of the films made in this period ended up in *Amerika*, there were some autonomous works like *Portrait (8 min 1976)*. It's a study of my two-year-old daughter, Alicia. I made a kind of pointillist examination of her by magnifying the super-8 grain through generations of rephotography. I used a saccadic process to re-scan the image. The eye scans an image, and remembers this scan pattern which is called "feature rings." This is the basis of our visual memory. The second time we see something, we remember it according to this feature ring. So I was trying to create a new way of looking at essentially repeating images. My wife and I had broken up, and I was moved to make this film through the loss of my daughter.



Portrait

Le Voyage (8 min 1973) was done as a further exploration of black leader and image/sound discontinuity. The title recalls Méliès's *Voyage to the Moon*, which was, for me, a voyage into the unconscious. The image shows an optically refigured ship in a storm that appears intermittently, between irregular lengths of darkness which are used as duration, spacing, and erasure. Its discontinuity gives a sense of arrested process, of subconscious recollection. There was also *The Moon at Evernight (9 min 1974),* which explored abstraction and subliminal imagery.

MH: Many of the films from this period evince structural concerns. They show a contained figure which is made to move through a series of themes and variations.

AR: I think I was more interested in the structure of cognition and in liberating the unconscious processes filmically. I wasn't interested in the machine of cinema — the zoom lens or the long tracking shot. We had long parties, some substance abuse; it was a very intense period that lasted from 1972 to 1977. We were going out on the streets and projecting films on billboards. Gary Lee Nova and I had a screening on the front of the Scientology building, projecting the most violent images we had while they were having their big meeting inside. In 1976, I launched a one-man show of holograms. Then I applied to the Canada Council to finish *Amerika*. I'd finished a dozen fragments, and all I wanted was stock and processing. They rejected it, and I went bananas. Later on I found out who was on the jury and I was going to punch out Peter Bryant, who sat on the jury, at this party in Vancouver. Picard intervened. Gary Lee Nova and I were behaving like gangsters, which probably had to do with overwork, stress, and generally inflated egos, right? Anyways, I burned out, didn't get my grant, finished my holography and film work, and decided to go to the South Pacific. I started to sell all my equipment. I took all my stock footage and shipped it down to Los Angeles and what I couldn't sell, I left in the studio. I left a key under the mat and told all my friends to help themselves. I just walked from the whole scene with my second wife. Off we went to Samoa, and I never wanted to come back to North America; I thought it was all bullshit. I didn't want to have anything to do with any technical forms. I just wanted to write novels. In Samoa, I taught high school math. A year later I received a message out of the blue asking me to teach film at Simon Fraser University, so we headed back to Vancouver. This was the beginning of my political phase, because I realized you can't hide from North America and that it was possible to work in institutions. There was a compulsion to explore new things, and to realize there's another form in which you can keep going. And that started a new cycle of works which runs from 1978 to 1987, another nine-year cycle. When that ended, I left Canada again and headed south to live in Mexico.

When I got back to Vancouver from Samoa in 1979, I began work on a series of films that would restage moments in film history — and these became *Visual Essays: Origins of Film (68 min 1973-84)*. They deal with filmmakers like the Lumières, George Méliès, the Surrealists, and Sergei Eisenstein. Each film reworks found footage according to a dominant formal strategy. The first essay *Lumière's Train (Arriving at the Station) (9 min b/w 1979)* concerns itself primarily with the mechanistic quality of cinema. The Lumières were concerned with creating a motion picture record without being overly concerned about further refine-

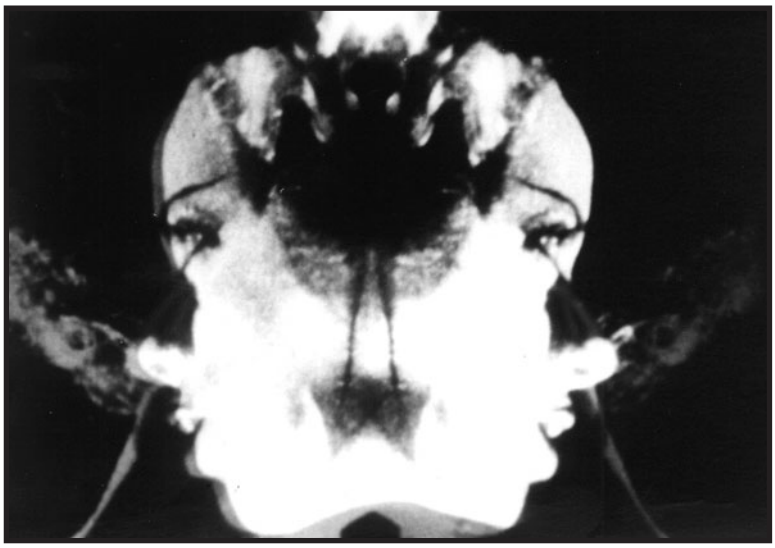
ments, usually shooting single-reel films from a fixed vantage. What they were presenting were the effects of their invention, the magic of sequential movement. I chose three sources that dealt with trains: the first Lumière film, Abel Gance's *La Roue*, and a Warner Brothers short, *Spills for Thrills*. The film begins with a series of freeze frames with these three-frame aperture opening and closings, so the image seems to breathe a little, and then the train begins to move, the images link one to another, and motion is born. The Lumière film is subject to stop-motion printing which slows it down, and the image rapidly alternates between negative and positive, creating an optical effect where the viewer is made more aware of the intermittent quality of the motion picture image. I used the sound from train recordings to produce a rhythmic pulse against which the image could be measured, especially as it's changing speeds through the step printing. The sound conceptually stands in for sprocket holes. It speaks of the mechanical universe the Lumière brothers created. The narrative elements introduced are consistent with this mechanical universe — they introduce spectacle. Whether recording fiction or documentary, the apparatus leans toward the larger-than-life, the extraordinary versus the mundane. Abel Gance's film is explicit on this point, showing a train derail at the station and unleashing havoc in every direction. The Warner Brothers film is a series of stunts which show trains crashing into cars, chases, special effects. Which goes back to the story of the first projection — the story has it that Lumière's film was mistaken for a *camera obscura*, and upon seeing a train come into the station, the audience leapt from their chairs to avoid being hit. Similar incidents were reported in Canada. But after the initial shock of motion is over, the medium has to reach for this feeling in other ways.

MH: Are you suggesting that Lumière's first film unleashes a spectacle of destruction that naturally follows the invention of motion pictures?

AR: Realist cinema was headed towards hyper-reality and greater impact. The audience demands that the value of the spectacle be increased for every generation — creating vistas which are more than real.

MH: It's an interesting idea in the face of Noel Burch's theory of the development of cinema. He describes the so-called "primitive" period (1895-1905) as an Edenic mixture of styles and genres which was appropriated by American business and recast into illustrations of nineteenth century literature — this progression follows McLuhan's dictum that each new medium will take on the content of the last one. And it's here that film is subject to a rigidly defined series of encodings: the shot/reverse shot ploy, spatial continuity, following the action axis, matching eyeline glances, all of the dramatic baggage that continues to inform the passage of the movies. What you're suggesting is that some of these propensities existed from the very beginning.

AR: When George Méliès arrived looking for a way to spruce up his magic act, the Lumières told him it was an invention without a future. The second film in *Visual Essays* is called *Méliès Catalogue (9 min silent 1973)*. I'd collected a number of Méliès films, which were part of a piracy network that people were lifting from the Cinémathèque in Paris, and I was concerned that none of this work would be seen. I wanted to create a kind of Sears Catalogue celebrating the mythic, visual vocabulary of Méliès. His films contained an overriding quality of surprise, shock, and spectacle that naturally extended from his work as a stage magician. Many of his stage techniques were utilized in film — like appearance/disappearance, levitation, or instant transformations, which he used in imagery borrowed from classical mythology. I wanted to make a film that could accompany screenings of his films. It's not an academic treatment of the material; it's poetic and personal. I wanted to internalize, ingest, and recreate it.



Ghost:Image

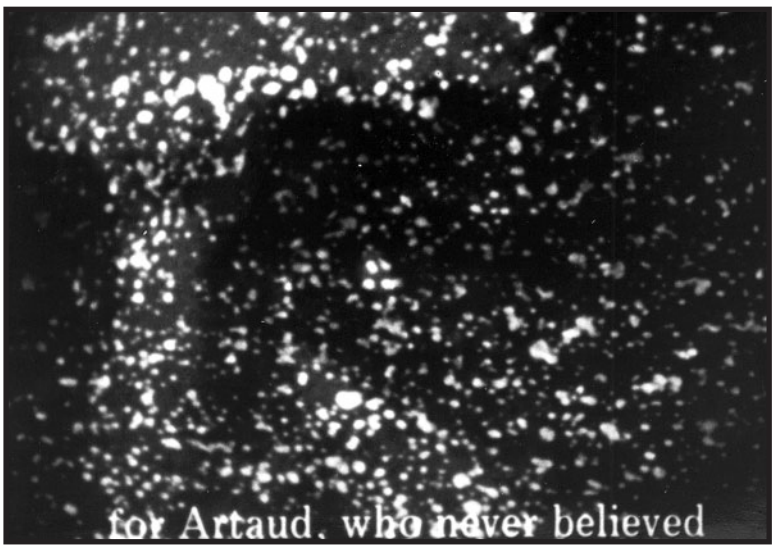
MH: The images are framed inside burning celluloid, the dominant formal motif of this film. Why the burning?

AR: Because his work was done on a very flammable nitrate stock, much of which was lost or simply disintegrated. He went broke during the First World War, and the government seized his studio and converted his films into industrial cellulose which was made into shoes for the army.

The third of the *Essays* also concerns Méliès. It's called *Sequels in Transfigured Time (12 min silent 1976)* and works to interpret his *mise-en-scène*. I used a bi-pack technique, running a mid-contrast colour stock with a high contrast black-and-white negative. Their slight off-register reduces an image to its edges, so as the film begins you're

looking at what seems like cave paintings, or stained glass, but it's only lines. Then out of that you're encouraged to discover the *mise-en-scène*, and this happens as the freeze frames which begin the film accelerate into motion, so the viewer can synthesize a landscape. Often the film will slow down to reveal Méliès's invisible cuts, where he turns an omnibus into a hearse or midgets into puffs of smoke. I wanted to show how he's making the transformations. There's a series of subtitles that narrate an elegy I wrote for Méliès. It closes with a passage where Méliès, as a necromancer, dances before a pyramid in order to raise a spirit from the dead. The spirit is conjured, growing finally into a twenty-foot mass before leaving as I recite the elegy, and the film ends. We saw a magic act a week ago which is exactly the same, where a guy grows inside a shroud. It all goes back to Méliès and beyond.

Ghost:Image (12 min b/w silent 1976-79) is the next film. Its dominant strategy is the Rorschach produced when images are mirror printed, the original image superimposed over itself in reverse. As these two images come together, they create a new space between them, a dark interior that needs to be read in a new way. These were isolated with some primitive rotoscoping I did, projecting onto a mirror which beamed the image up to a sheet of paper, and drawn one frame at a time, then rephotographed onto high-contrast stock to produce the cut-out mattes for the film. The film describes a narrative trajectory that runs from surreal films like *Un Chien Andalou*, *Ghosts Before Breakfast* and *The Seashell and the Clergymen*, to German expressionist films like *Nosferatu* and concludes with more contemporary horror films. All of these images are suggestive of interior states, extreme states of psychosis. For the surrealists, this was a wealth of information that occasioned celebration and the derivation of new forms. But this process degenerated in horror films, until the unconscious became something to be feared, something that could be transformed in terrifying ways; finally the viewer was positioned as an object of attack. *Ghost:Image* describes this process of degeneration — from Surrealism to horror films, from representation to revenge.



For Artaud

For Artaud (10 min 1982) is not explicitly about a filmmaker, but about a practice more closely associated with theatre — Antonin Artaud and his theatre of cruelty. He released a series of manifestos designed to rid the theatre of its reliance on literary forms and return it to a ritualized state of trance, ecstasy, and madness. I wanted to create a piece that would speak of the self-destructive urge motivating many of the German expressionist films. I wanted to explore this from a poetic perspective and recreate a kind of madness, a cacophony of voices, a situation of heightened anxiety which would be incorporated with its filmic equivalents. I began with Dreyer's *Joan of Arc*, which is concerned about Joan's possession by what she claims to be angels, but which many others take to be satanic beings. Her only sympathizer is a young priest, played by Artaud. I used a bi-packing technique similar to *Software*, where I photographed the white noise from a television set, controlling the number of dots by cranking the white level. This was then used as a matte for Dreyer's images, which grow more visible as the exposure on the matte is increased, causing halation and a starry quality to the image. The soundtrack is a group of people chanting phrases like, "We are the inquisition — speak," and a fragmented monologue from Artaud's writing ("Shit to the spirit") which was then cut up and electronically transformed so the words are rendered unintelligible. It closes with a section entitled "Wedding for Artaud" which shows an immolation; this time it's not Joan who will burn at the stake, but Artaud. The only way this cycle of madness could be completed would be to have the protagonist burned alive with anyone else they could draw into the fire. It's a marriage of your Other through fire. It's a union that's only possible through death, which is the underlying expression of Artaud and that cultural tradition. Artaud could only create his state beyond the logos, which is madness, and beyond madness there's only death.

MH: You begin with a photo portrait of Artaud and zoom in, and as one of his eyes fill the frame, the dot-matte begins to take over, as if he's dissolving into the material itself. He's returned to a ruined and fragmented state, a consciousness scattered across the cosmos, madness. The voice seems to function in the same way — an electronic cacophony that seems to move with the dots in a guttural cadence that exists

before or after language, as if the whole body were speaking at once, its hierarchy of organs and senses abandoned.
AR: These dots form themselves around faces which become more and less visible as I'm overexposing the matte and allowing the faces to burn through. I show inquisitors and priests, forces of death and redemption, in order to establish the collapse of a moral order. I'm not happy with the piece these days because it's too long, it's too structural, and has nowhere to go. It's an echo that keeps reverberating and how long can you keep hearing it?
The sixth and final essay is called *Storming the Winter Palace (16 min b/w 1984)*. It replays the films of Sergei Eisenstein. I've always been fascinated by the whole issue of didactic, political cinema and the way it's been the subject of a historical revisionism, which sees it as little more than a series of formal gestures rather than for its political context. The intent of this essay was to reintroduce the political stature of the work. The political and the formal operate together in Eisenstein, but the techniques of montage were later adopted and psychologized through Hollywood.

Storming the Winter Palace

The film opens up with sections from *October* which are shown backwards, and this sequence runs toward an intertitle which reads, "You're all under arrest." I think that's an appropriate conclusion to the Stalinist dictum that affected formalism in general. You will now cease to make work that doesn't advance the party cause as Stalin sees it. Even in *October*, which is a chronicle of the Russian Revolution, you've got Trotsky and his ilk written out of the film. It's printed backwards because this whole policy is reactionary — time isn't marching forwards; we're going into the dark ages. When you're working for the boss you're part of the corporation, and the fact that Eisenstein couldn't escape those conditions is tough shit; he ended up being a propaganda lackey for Stalin. Stalin authorized the making of his films. Take the story of *Alexander Nevsky*'s missing reel. There are five reels in the movie, but when you read the script you can see that there's a reel missing. And the story, as Jay Leyda writes it, is that Eisenstein is sleeping on the editing room floor. Exhausted. Every day he's editing to an impossible deadline, and one morning these party guys show up and say that Comrade Stalin wants to see the finished film, so they take all the reels except the one that's sitting on the editing machine. After Joe approves it, Eisenstein can hardly go back to the omnipotent one and say, uh, it's missing this one reel.

Winter Palace examines Eisenstein's rhetorical strategies. Some are well known, like his montage of conflict, his juxtaposition of opposing elements which is supposed to create a politically enlightened state in the viewer. In the Odessa steps sequence, step printing is employed to show the way in which compositions are generated according to graphic considerations, which probably restates the obvious to film scholars. At the end of the film I go through a saccadic eye movement technique. I start scanning the image itself. I added a texture to the screen so you're aware you're scanning an image field, the boundaries of which are uncertain. That was an acknowledgment of Eisenstein's engineering ideas, which are related to the engineering of perception, which is what saccadic eye movement is all about. Saccadic eye movement is the way we perceive things — when scientists are trying to figure how humans look at an image, able to recognize their feature rings, then how does that implicate duration, which is a critical element in montage? What's too short an image? What's too long? All these questions are parts of an engineering issue, the engineering of a political vision. The final sound quote (from Benjamin Buchloh) is about how the work of collage/montage in Surrealism and formalism was appropriated by advertising and propaganda and remains "radical" only in a few instances of the "avant-garde."
MH: Tell me about *Amerika (160 min 1972-83)*.
AR: For eleven years I made a number of short films which were intended to fit together to produce a single work. It was finished in 1983 and called *Amerika*. Nearly three hours in length, it's made up of eighteen short films laid out on three reels which roughly correspond to the sixties, seventies, and eighties. These films are a mosaic expressing the various sensations, myths, and landscapes of the industrialized Western culture. The predominant characteristic of *Amerika* is that it draws from existing stock-footage archives, the iconography and "memory banks" of a media-excessive culture.

The *Cities of Eden (7 min 1976)* is the first of the eighteen films that make up *Amerika*. All of its images derive from the 1895-1905 period, and its formal treatment echoes the disintegration of the nitrate stock employed in this work. I used a bas-relief effect to amplify the fragility of the medium. It closes with the woman from the Paramount logo, which dissolves into an atomic explosion, the first of many "endings" evoked in *Amerika*. After this annihilation, the second film begins, as if attempting to begin again.

Software/Head Title (2.5 min 1972) begins with random noise that slowly takes shape around the outline of a night-time city. I began by shooting the white noise from a television set, using the white level to determine how many dots you see on the screen. The higher the white level, the more frequent the dots. I bi-packed this matte into the optical printer with a shot of a New York cityscape. The television matte starts with a few dots and grows in density until the cityscape becomes visible.

After the creation of *Software*'s synthetic landscape, we move into *Vortex (10 min 1972)* which occupies and articulates that landscape. It is a frankly psychedelic film with synthetic improvisations of video feedback which obviously recall the sixties. It's an extravagant light show that features one technique after another in a completely undisciplined fashion. It represents an aesthetic excess which mirrors a scientific excess. Psychedelia attempted to simulate some aspects of the nervous system that people were experiencing stoned. It exteriorized these states in multi-screen spectacles that allowed audiences to participate in a "sensorium." *Vortex* is an electronic sensorium. Remember, in the sixties, the reconfiguration of space craft and atomic blasts into a colour and light show was an everyday expression. Everything was translated into a happening, and the stoned were processing everything in a very ecstatic way. The politics of that is a very mindless form of sensational experience — to sit and watch an A-bomb go off and say, "Wow, did you see the colours in that thing!" is a pretty reactionary thing to do. The film acknowledges that and lets the viewer proceed from that point, mindful that this moment has happened. The next film is *Atomic Gardening (5 min 1981)*, which operates in a very different register than the one which preceded it. After this film, it's apparent that *Amerika* will progress through a collision of ideas and strategies. It's a mosaic construction which is made up of seemingly incompatible elements. The soundtrack of *Atomic Gardening* is filled with military chatter — NORAD boys talking shop. It is lifted from a documentary which visits American missile sites. The image shows a series of time-lapse shots — circuit-boards, with NASA stamped on them, immersed in a solution of chemicals out of which crystals are growing. These crystals looked to me like an expanding military virus, the virus in the machine, growing like simultaneous launch patterns. Meanwhile, the boys are talking about the two-key system, one to turn it on and the other to finish the sequence, and once the second key is turned, the missile is away. They run through a simulation and launch a missile as the end of the film whites out. This white screen burn-out reappears in a television set in an empty motel room. Three of *Amerika*'s films are called *Motel Row* because a motel is a temporary residence for the traveller, like so many of these films. In the first of these *Motels (10 min 1981)* I moved from the white screen of the television to a walk around an abandoned, graffiti-filled building with a wide angle lens. I wanted to establish the absence of the protagonist and a neglected, shattered landscape.

Amerika (Atomic Gardening)

MH: The emphasis on the graffiti walls reinforces the gestures of the hand-held camera and the gestures of painting. Both marks are a contradiction in terms: anonymous signatures.

AR: The contradictory graffiti slogans are symptomatic of an American malaise. It's a culture that assimilates contrasts by celebrating and then exhausting them. What I'm presenting is a cacophony of speaking subjects rendered anonymous through the act of graffiti — a superimposition of ideas, slogans, and clichés. It's a wall of noise and political alienation. You put that together as a backdrop for an absent subject in a ruined landscape, and I think the viewer is cognizant of a growing emptiness, all juxtaposed with the fullness of the images we've seen earlier.

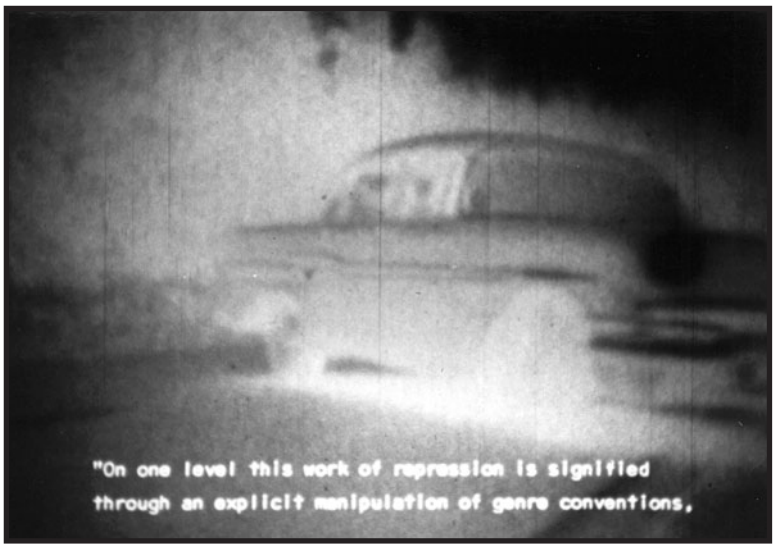
MH: It extends the absence of the human subject: the disembodied voices of *Atomic Gardening*, the techno universe of *Vortex*, the mushroom clouds of *Cities of Eden*. *Motel Row* brings us "back to earth," away from the more stylized, technologically reprocessed imagery we've seen so far.

AR: The second part of *Motel Row* is entirely different. It combines three elements: a series of mausoleums, Hollywood soundtracks, and my own film *Egypte*. The mausoleums were shot in New York and Hollywood. It's funny that all the East Coast graves are crammed together while the West Coast folk have manicured gardens separating everything; as in life, as in death. The corpses occupying these mausoleums are obviously on the opposite end of the economic/political spectrum from the anonymous graffiti people in the previous section. The Egyptians, as a culture, believed that the afterlife could only be acquired by rituals reserved for those who could afford the embalming process. So the Egyptians built these immense tombs called pyramids, just like the mausolems I show, which are similarly intended to convey the rich into the after life. Joining the two via montage implicates a mythology that rationalizes money and death. It suggests the metaphysical underpinnings of the ruling class — the Protestant ideal of material riches in one world, spiritual riches in the next. I joined the two by moving into the mausoleums until the screen blacked out, then moving out of the dark of the Egyptian pyramids, or by match cutting Egyptian hieroglyphics with graffiti. The hieroglyphics were a sacred language, so these cuts join the sacred and the profane. After we've laid the dead to rest, we see the first road movie in *Amerika*: *98.3 KHz: Bridge at Electrical Storm (5 min 1973)*.

MH: *Bridge* seems to recapitulates certain imaging strategies in *Vortex*, the constantly changing colours providing variations on a theme.

AR: But it's a very measured structural movement. It was made one frame at a time, so I had a lot of control over the image. The storm is simulated through a variety of optical processes, which changed the colour and contrast of the image frame-by-frame. The electronic processing is something that embellishes the movement rather than being the thing itself. In 1966, I shot a heap of super-8 footage driving all day over the San Francisco bridge. We drove from morning to night, and I wanted to release it as a forty-minute film with a radio soundtrack, but I'm glad I spared everyone that boredom. It was manipulated on the optical printer using a lot of bi-packing. The introduction of video continues the movement of the image towards abstraction and a graphic extremism, an apocalypse and rapture. In *98.3 KHz: Bridge at Electrical Storm Pt. 2* I poured acid and hydroxide on the film itself to create bubbles and explosions, to attack the emulsion, then quickly washed and reprinted it before the image dissolved. So there were a number of procedures used to obliterate, alter, synthesize, and make the image fluid, rather than fix it in a documentary fashion. This was related to the sense I had of broadcast and electrical energy. I used to get up early in the morning and noticed that as the city started to come alive electrically I could feel it in the air, like some people hear AM radio in their dentures. We're being inundated right now with broadcast information that's flowing through us, so the transformation of the image was simply a way to make that concrete.

MH: Hence the electrical storm in the film's title and its soundtrack, which features forty years of radio fragments. The bridge forms an enormous "X," which doubles your own spray-painted signature that figures a number of times in the film.



Amerika (Refrain)

AR: It's a fortunate coincidence. I tried to have my name legally changed to an "X" but was told I'd need to have a witness every time I signed a document. I wanted to have an institutionalized anonymity.

The next piece is *Motel Row Pt. 2 (8 min 1976)*. It's a long tracking shot into Reno, Nevada. Now that you've done the bridge, here's another car movie. And everybody's wondering: where are we going? Are we going anywhere? [laughs] It shows a series of motel façades lit up at night, shot out a car window. One sign simply replaces the next in a long row of spectacle, because spectacle works to evacuate any depth of expression, any emotional attachment, anything that can't announce itself on the surface. There are audio fragments coming in from various TV movies. The façades are intercut with a series of interiors which are basically empty except for television sets, where I matted in a number of found footage images: prehistoric women, male/female relations as perceived by Roger Corman, porno flicks. It shows the dichotomy of inside and out, glittering façades alienated from their abandoned interiors.

This is followed by the first of a series of *Refrains (1 min 1982)* which punctuate the film. Each one is a static shot showing a dummy and a number of theoretical questions

which appear as subtitles. These sequences came on the heels of my profound disenchantment with the academic community. The questions were pilfered from my old colleague Kaja Silverman, who could speak this language like no one else. She'd written up ten film studies questions which were part of a proposal for an avant-garde/film studies conference. So at various points in the film these questions arise in a pseudo attempt to theoretically assess the work. The questions are printed over a dummy animated on a turntable with jerky motions, and a fixed, smiling expression on his face. The backgrounds were done with a front screen and often replay parts of *Amerika*. The soundtracks are taken from canned radio plays from the forties or fifties which replay famous comic routines that refer to the question. So the bozo, the backgrounds, and the comic routines act to answer these preposterous film theory questions. The dummy faces the camera so he's not really cognizant of the film material. One of the questions asks: Does sexual differentiation position the viewer?

MH: In other words: does it matter whether you're a male or female?

AR: Behind the dummy, a screen shows an image of a woman taking off her bra, so it's obvious that sexual differentiation does position the male ("voyeur") and female ("looked at") differently. On the soundtrack there's a Marx Brothers skit, where they're talking about marital breakdown and the incompatibility of men and women. So the question is negotiated in these three different ways simultaneously — through the Marx Brothers, the woman undoing her bra, and the dummy. I felt film theory was wreaking havoc with practice, that it was an arrogant and elitist enterprise and I wanted to lampoon it in these sections.

The *Refrain* is followed by a film which used to be called *Runway Queen*. It's a forties burlesque number showing a woman stripping, which is run through a video synthesizer to create echoes of her image all around her, multiplying her gestures. This sequence follows from the images of alienated sex in the motels and the alienated visions of women presented by the film. In the early days of video processing, men would take images of women and fuck them with technique. This scene makes the uses of these technologies explicit; these image technologies work to transform passive and inert figures, which are most commonly associated with women. It's consistent with what music video has done to exploit the human figure. The narcissism involved in the portrayal of the singers is aestheticized and amplified with video special effects equipment. But in my case I don't think anyone could take it as an erotic image at all. She's dancing naked but dressed up with all these special effects.

MH: The echoes of the woman recalled the Busby Berkeley chorus lines where dancers shatter into echoes of the star.

AR: It's a burlesque image from the forties with bumpity-bumpity accompaniment. Its placement in relation to the fuck shots inside the motel rooms make it just another look at a displaced and alienated representation, like a floorshow in one of these hotels. And it continues to answer the question: "Does representation proceed along sexually differentiated lines?"

Then *Amerika* hits the road again for *The Wasteland and Other Stories (13 min 1976)*. In 1974, I approached the National Film Board with a film about Egypt. After they agreed to it, I conned the Board into letting me go down to Death Valley because it's plenty hot there in August. I said I had to check out my equipment, my stock, and myself to see if I can handle the Sahara. They gave me some stock and I shot *The Wasteland* — it was my camera test. I mounted the camera inside the car with an intervalometer attached and drove from Vancouver to Las Vegas. *The Wasteland* is the torture test — some people find it very meditative, and for others it's the beer break. The mounted camera maintains a fixed car hood and windshield position, while the intervalometer knocks out a frame every three or four seconds. This was then step-printed onto different stocks to destroy the pristine look of the original colour negative. The step-printing that's used here is 2:3. The first frame is repeated twice, the second three times, the third twice, the fourth three times and so on. Three frames is about the limit of perceptible change, and two frames is just below that threshold, so the strategy was one of exhausting the viewer. Rather than allowing the viewer to move in a perceptual flow, you get this staccato movement on an almost subliminal level. This drive arrives in Las Vegas at night, which initially appears as a string of abstract lights which become the nighttime façades of the city in a movement that's very much like *Software*. After passing through an electrical storm, again created optically, we arrive in an insane roller coaster ride with intercut images of gambling and car crashes, video games and violence. Many of these images are related to vehicular destruction because the notion of travelling is a fiction — you're not going anywhere. But the progression of my signs are not arbitrary; they organize themselves around the question of the male gaze. The male discourse is guided by machines: the fixed point of view of the car, the pornographic shot, the romanticism of the escape, the techno-fetishism of video effects, and what lies at the end of the road is destruction. But this amusement park of sensations only simulates these impulses, because your quarter runs out and the ride ends. So nothing's changed. The idea of getting anywhere is hopeless.

MH: *The Wasteland* takes up the biblical themes that run throughout *Amerika* — begun in an opening title copped from Genesis, its constant evocations of The End, and its obsession with sexuality, which the Bible is quick to maintain within a genealogical progression that becomes equiva-

lent to knowledge itself. But in your film these blood ties have been long abandoned, replaced by anonymous machine sex and pornography.

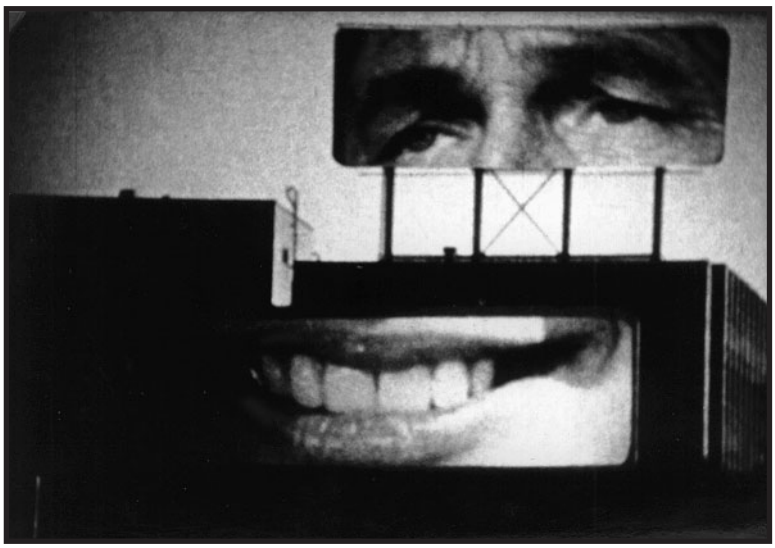
AR: Then the *Refrain (4 min 1982)* kicks in again asking: "Is identification the chief means by which a cinematic text structures its viewers?" Well, not in this film. [laughs] So I put the bozo in the driver seat pretending to drive, bewildered, with the backdrop of the casinos. The next question asks: "What does it mean for a viewer to distance him/herself from a film?" [laughs] Well, if you haven't been distanced by this, I don't know what's going to distance you. Next question: "What is the relation between the viewer's subjectivity and that conferred upon him/herself by the film?" With an image of a roller coaster ride. What is subjectivity? One long scream down the tracks.

The second part of *98.3 KHz: Bridge at Electrical Storm (6 min 1973)* follows. It brackets *The Wasteland*; it's a kind of way in and way out. This is the last heavy-duty visual display in the film. But by this point in *Amerika* its visual opulence only reads as empty technique, part of an alienated sensibility that has moved men closer to their machines while ignoring everything else, everything but their own death perhaps. *Bridge*'s redundancy is underscored by having it played twice.

The Wildwest Show (11 min 1980) follows. I shot a number of cityscapes, blacked out the billboards, and inserted pieces of found footage. So as we see cars passing through the streets, images of destruction are playing overhead in the billboards. The images, most of them violent, follow from a game show in which the contestants are asked whether what they're watching is true or false: these atrocities, the war footage, the Vietnam protester going up in flames. The film conflates fiction and documentary footage, sometimes in appalling ways. In *The Wildwest Show*, none of the cars pay any attention to the images they're passing, as horrific as they are. So images that would normally occupy our attention have become commonplace. I matted all of the images into billboards because I wanted to suggest the replacement of landscape with mediascape. It also extended my earlier practice of projecting into public spaces.

MH: There's an accumulation of atrocities in the film — from the Second World War, Vietnam, old westerns. The effect of their rapid-fire progression is to level them out, to strip them of their historical and political contexts and regather them under some essentialist heading of Evil Humanity. While it's clear your critique is aimed at North American media culture in general and television in particular, to what extent is your own film complicit with the practices it decries? The film includes some of the most extreme examples recorded of real people dying on film. Isn't your act of deconstruction also complicit with the dehistoricizing process of television?

AR: The argument that *The Wildwest Show* sensationally obliterates the historical subject is exactly the point: that's what the film is about. In order to illustrate my purpose, I've proceeded with such exaggeration and hyperbole that the viewer can't feel sympathy for this process. It had to be presented as a case in the extreme. The viewer is confronted with the disparity between sound and picture, fiction and documentary. The film's not proceeding as an analysis of these events and how they appear on television; it's dealing with our awareness or non-awareness of this mediascape. Is it any more moral to ignore this train of images, the daily atrocity of the news, for instance, or the late night movie? Mainstream

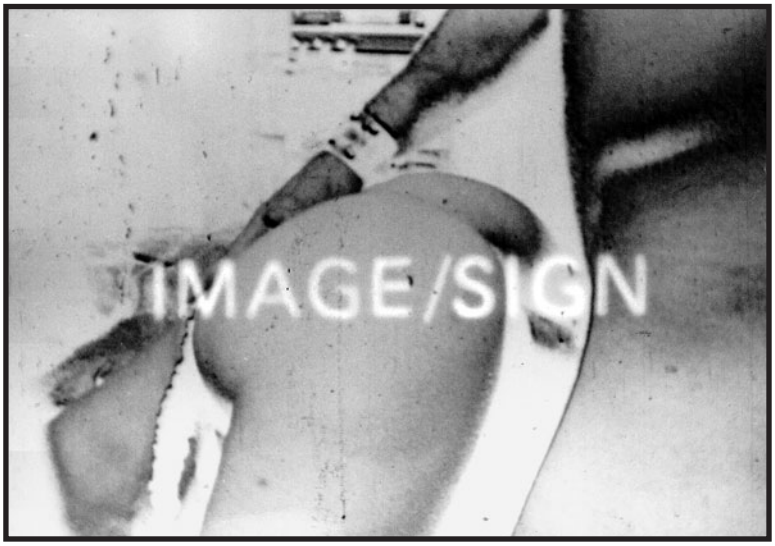


Amerika (The Wildwest Show)

media is constructed as a one-way communication system, and this was a way to talk back. Halfway through this film it's interrupted by *A Message From Our Sponsor (9 min 1979)* which reworks a series of commercials to show the rhetorical strategies at work. It concentrates on the sexual subtext of the beauty industry, its privileging of style and surface, all of which takes us back to pornography and the objectification of women. It came out of my collections of stock footage, in this instance, mostly commercials from the sixties. I began looking through them for patterns of organization, rhetorical strategies, and began a work which would deconstruct these practices. The film mimes commercial rhetoric in a way that makes it intelligible and explicit for the viewer. When *The Wildwest Show* returns, having been interrupted by this long commercial, the host says: "You've been a great audience. You've applauded just at the right time. You've laughed at the right time." And now what do we do? We go on, right back into the destruction; it's fucking relentless. Television is our coliseum. We used to watch Christians fed to the lions; today we can watch 40,000 kids starve to death every day, or the latest blood-letting in the Middle East.

It trivializes morality or makes it impossible. And what are we doing about these images? Who is managing them and why? Well, after the Ontario Board of Censors banned *Message*, we knew who was managing the images. Obviously *The Wildwest Show* and *Message* are obscene films. But where is the obscenity? In the acts that were depicted? In their recording? Or their consuming?

A Message From Our Sponsor was the first film I made in 1979. I optically printed the footage I wanted, cut the film together, added the semiotic intertitles, mixed the sound, and promptly forgot about it. I went on to finish *For Artaud*, *Lumière's Train*, revised *Ghost:Image*, and made the *Motel* films for *Amerika*. Then the shit hit the fan for *A Message From Our Sponsor*. Canada's National Gallery was putting together packages of avant-garde film, which were purchased and circulated, and *Message* was included. I was thrilled. Then suddenly I got a call saying the Censor Board had stepped in and that the Gallery had to remove this film from the package, otherwise the curator, Darcy Edgar, would be arrested. I said, "What! You've got to be joking." It was the first I'd ever heard of the Ontario Board of Censors.



Amerika (A Message From Our Sponsor)

MH: So they couldn't even show it in the National Gallery?

AR: That's right. Darcy called in tears and said, "I'm in a no-win position. I want to show the work but I can't, and how would you feel if we..." But you know me, I said "No fucking way is this film going to be cut or withdrawn; everything remains status quo." I thought this would remain a local quarrel between the Board of Censors and the National Gallery. Then the Funnel, who were going to show the package, were also advised by the Board of Censors that if they showed the work they'd be arrested. So the Funnel withdrew from showing *Message*. Then I got a call from Susan Ditta at the Canadian Images Festival in Peterborough, who invited me to show a program of my work. I told her that I would bring *Message*, which others had been told they couldn't show. She said she would talk to her board, and they gave it the okay. They were warned by the Censor Board not to show the film, and a couple of their board members resigned as a result — Anna Gronau and Ross McLaren, both from the Funnel. So we hit the screening and the place is jammed, people are hanging off the rafters. We start the films and there was this young projectionist there, and I said, "I don't want you to have any problems tonight, so let me turn on the projector." The whole time everyone's waiting for the cops to show, and we had a big discussion about censorship afterwards. Two days later the Board of Censors charged everybody — the director of the festival, Susan Ditta; the director of the space I showed in, David Bierk; a member of the board, Ian McLachlin (who was the intellectual spearhead against censorship); and myself. Violation of the Theatres Act, they called it. We began with a freedom of expression, constitutional defence which was dismissed by the judge. Then the judge agreed that *Amerika* had to be seen in its entirety, that *Message* needed to be seen in context. What was notable in the proceedings was that Mary Brown, the head of the Censor Board, testified on the stand. She was completely dissected by the defence when she tried to explain the Censor Board's basis which she termed "community standards," but which turned out to be pretty vague. She also alluded to special considerations given "important" artists. The Crown offered a deal — you people plead guilty, and we'll get you off on probation, and we told them to forget it. It tended to divide the film community between those who would deal with the Board and those who wouldn't. I thought the Peterborough action had to come down, somebody had to get charged and go to court and show how ridiculous and dangerous these laws were and why they needed changing. It was important that the practice of the Board, their lies and contradictions, were exposed. One member of the Censor Board who opposed the film took the stand, and when he was asked what his background was, he said he'd been an usher in an Odeon Theatre. [laughs] It became apparent that the make-up of the Board wasn't representative of a community, but of a position that was religious in its inspiration. After four or five days they dismissed the charges against me because they couldn't prove I had anything to do with the screening in a direct way, which I found bizarre. They proceeded with the others, who were eventually convicted and fined $500. After *Amerika* was banned, a group of people came together to fight censorship in Ontario, called the Ontario Film and Video Appreciation Society. This group included Anna Gronau and David Poole, and they wanted to take *Amerika* to the Supreme Court and clear it, which they did. By that point Mary Brown was back-pedalling, figuring all this for bad publicity over stuff nobody sees anyways.

MH: It's typical that you should run into censorship problems showing actors fucking in *Message* as opposed to the real people getting killed in *The Wildwest Show*.
AR: Both these films were made shortly after coming back to North America from Samoa, where I couldn't help but be struck by the daily ferocity and excess of the media. If *The Wildwest Show* presents a series of questions which are finally about morality, I felt it was important to introduce the filmmaker to answer some of these charges. What follows is a film called *Photo Spot/Terminal City Scapes (8 min 1983)*. It's set up as a series of three phone calls to which the filmmaker responds. In the first of these exchanges the caller purports to be a fan of my work, in the second a curator, and in the third a psychiatrist. As a fan, he wants to glean technical information, which I deny him; as a curator, he wants to contextualize my work according to false historical paradigms; and as a psychiatrist, he says my work shows I'm psychotic, and he offers to psychoanalyze me. This all goes down on the soundtrack, and you hear only my voice on the phone. What you see is something else again. Each of the three calls begins with a set of technical diagrams that relate to scientific principles of perspective or colour saturation. And each set of diagrams is followed by an example of these principles, as if they were applied experiments. On the phone I talk about *Amerika*'s two orifices — Anaheim and Berlin, Disneyland and the Berlin Wall. The orifice is the place where you eat and excrete — culture comes in, products come out. I think there's a connection with the fantasy city of Disneyland as a perceptual orifice that excretes fantasy on people and Berlin which is the barrier between the illusions of America and Russia. Here is the place where real terror, suffering, and death were institutionalized for decades.


Amerika (Photo Spot)

***Photo Spot* is followed by a discussion between Samantha Hamerness and me about the continuation of the film. We're arguing about the accessibility of *Amerika* and its political efficacy. Samantha argues that without a narrative anchor, the viewers are left adrift in a universe of signs that escape decoding by any but the already informed. In order to take apart dominant ideologies, does one assume their form or create another? And where does that leave the viewer? Samantha argues that for a viewer who isn't aware that the media is predicated on sign systems, my film is largely incomprehensible, its effects relegated to a subliminal level. I reply that all images work on a subliminal level and that it's a reasonable political tactic to be able to articulate the subliminal.**
MH: But if most people can't understand work on the level of the signifier, regardless of its message, is formal work, or even art, still politically viable?
AR: I'm not talking about reaching mass audiences; I'm talking about reaching an effective audience — work that's impacting on the culture. If it doesn't impact there, then it's an elitist preoccupation between maker and mirror. If the work can inspire some people or unpack different points of view, that's enough. Fifteen years ago, I toured a show of holography across Canada and I met up recently with a woman from Hamilton who saw that show and was moved to make holographic work of her own, a practice she still continues.

MH: The auto-critique discussion between Samantha and you that opens *Amerika*'s third reel - what conclusions do you reach?
AR: Acknowledging that the subliminal is too narrow a political arena, *Amerika* shifts strategies. The last hour features less image manipulation, a more direct political engagement, and an evocation of several mainstream genres: the musical, the chase scene, the psycho thriller. It begins a narrative of sorts — a musical set to the Velvet Underground's "Black Angel's Death Song." The film is called *Exiles (11 min 1983)* and it's a kind of boy-doesn't-meet-girl story. It's shot in two separate locations and both spraypaint signs and slogans on a number of ruined walls. I like this section. It's very restful after all the hard stuff that precedes it; we can just sit back and watch a couple of people write stuff on walls. Formally, I joined the two by a number of flare outs. I took a 400-foot roll of film and flared it in the darkroom and cut it on the B-roll so the image continually goes to white. This eradication of the image echoes the nihilistic iconoclasm in the film. What follows is the longest film in *Amerika* called *The Lonesome Death of Leroy Brown (28 min 1983)*. The first of its two parts shows *Amerika*'s final road trip — cityscapes across North America shot from a moving car. The film cuts between shots that move left and shots moving right, moving closer to its subject until it arrives at a woman who

is stalked into a vacant lot where she draws out a gun and shoots at the camera.
MH: Why is she being followed?
AR: Because we're still not finished with the issue of the representation of women in cinema and I wanted to give it a simple reading. This is about as simple as it gets — voyeurism on a basic level. Male gaze equals violence. Like all of the films in *Amerika*'s last hour, *Leroy Brown* takes off from the discussion that Samantha and I had. Samantha says that what this film needs are more literal stratagems of identification, so I'm capitulating to the argument. The formal techniques haven't worked, so I'm giving you the pop version, complete with chase scene and guns. This is followed by a long interior scene where I'm sitting in a chair with a stretch of pantyhose over my face, drinking beer,

Amerika (The Lonesome Death of Leroy Brown)

smoking, watching TV, and pointing guns around the room. It's a real send up of psycho thrillers — all set in a motel room. The TV is playing out a documentary loop of a black guy getting blown away by the cops. The radio is playing Jimmy Swaggart talking about hell, damnation, and all the shit that's going to befall you. So this room is a meeting of two worlds of violence — moral, religious violence, and authoritarian police violence. I called it the "lonesome" death of Leroy Brown because the black man's death on television is one which occurs anonymously, without history or context. In the end, I turn my gun on the camera and shoot out a Plexiglas screen set up in front of it. At a screening in Vancouver a lot of people were upset about this, claiming that I was directing my aggression against the viewer. I said, sure, I'm shooting out the field of view. We've experienced brutalizations of a secondary nature when we're watching images, but this leads on to the point of view itself getting shot out.
MH: It's as if the camera itself is to blame for images that can only lead to estrangement, alienation, bad sex and violent imaginations.
AR: The film has delivered the viewer to a number of excesses. It has attempted to show how meaning is fabricated, and attempted to implicate itself as a film working, at least in part, within this system of signs. It has demonstrated that the filmmaker/author is capable of lying at any time.
MH: If *Amerika*'s first hour has demonstrated the visionary wonder of sixties filmmaking, its second leads on to an examination of signs and surfaces — Las Vegas fronts and television — and its structural strategies are in keeping with the seventies. This hour closes with the enigmatic *Photo Spot*, a film which reaffirms the filmmaker as an isolated technician, working out problems in the paranoid seclusion of his studio. *Amerika*'s third hour begins the task of reconstructing a social order — raising questions of engagement and accountability which are at once personal and political. This social order is staged in a number of narrative fragments which are no less brutal than some of the borrowed media fragments which have preceded it. It's filled with ruined buildings, smashed television sets and attempted murders. It also makes explicit a theme which grows in importance as the film progresses, namely, a male-female dynamic which insistently returns to the question: what is a women's place in patriarchy? The answer: brutalization, neglect, abuse, or answering the violence of their environment with a violence of their own.
AR: It parodies the male discourse by taking on the film theory fave notion that the male gaze is perverse — it fetishizes, disavows, and fears castration. You've got this played out to its logical extreme. By the film's end the male has become a drunken terrorist, repeatedly consuming images of violence and responding by shooting out the camera. His attitude to women: we'll either fuck you or kill you. If we can't control you, we'll murder. To control we'll use everything we've got: media, pornography, fashion, glamour, money, the works. Males have been controlling the production, sexualization, and dissemination of images, and this is the process that *Amerika* explores. The technological fetishization of the image in the first hour deals with astronauts, cars, wars, and atomic bombs, all aestheticized in a romantic, universalist fashion. But then it turns to an examination of the media itself in terms of gender representation. Then things get ugly. And stay there.

As far as my work is concerned, there is an early interest in pop-culture and political agitation in the late sixties, non-oriental mysticism (alchemy) in the early seventies, openly political and anarchist stratagems in the late seventies and early eighties, with a heightened dedication to political avant-garde practice in the current phase. I think it's important to see avant-garde film generally as occupying a relationship to the era and culture within which it exists, and

that each form of the "avant-garde" is but a moment in a larger process of perceptual change and perpetual revolution which derives its legitimacy from engagement rather than fixity and essential qualities. I use the term "avant-garde" instead of "experimental" because I think it better identifies the kind of cinema that I refer to (the political, the transformational, the artistic, and those historically linked to the other avant-gardes); I don't believe it is "dead" or has outlived its usefulness in shaking up the status quo. If ever there were a time when shaking up is necessary, it is now, in the age of mass communication, mass propaganda, mass conformist lifestyles, an age that is dangerously close to a holocaust. An art for this age is an art that responds, in part or in total, to these world-wide issues or is at least conscious of the context. "Experimental," to me, connotes apolitical isolation.

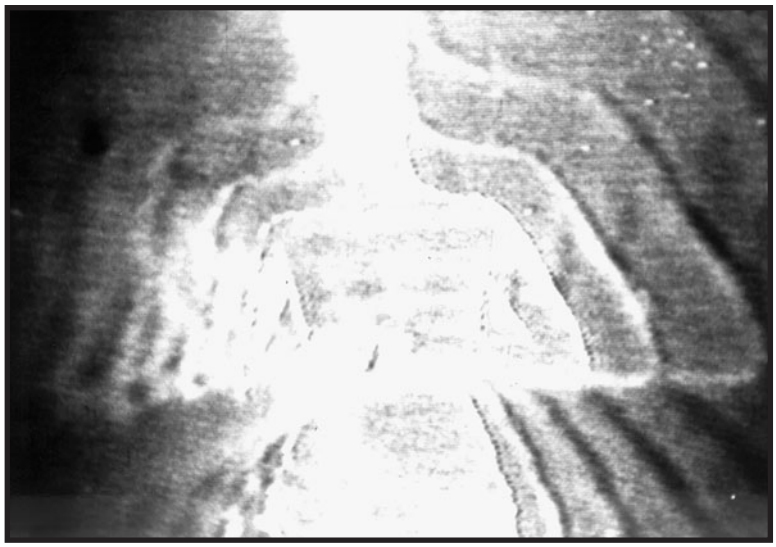
As I perceive it, the choices facing most are: pass the toilet paper and sit in your cubicle until the sewer system plugs up (that is, until the next academic conference). Get used to the smell of it all and maybe soon you'll develop an appetite for shit (symbolism, obfuscation, the flag, name-dropping, experimental film ghettos, travel grants to safe [sponsored] exhibition houses, mention in sponsored/subsidized publications). Become a clever plagiarist; make your work in a "theoretically informed manner" (don't forget the flag); act non-committal in all political issues, and as soon as regionalism, censorship, or any number of causes arise, make sure your work is included (along with an appropriate quote by you). Or... finally free yourself of this and all kinds of bullshit and be unconcerned whether you fit one school of thought or another, whether your films are "modern" or "post-modern," Canadian, Kanadian, or international. Free yourself from determinations and the obligation to identify your inspiration as being the tundra, factories, television, people, and/or "Michael Snow." And free yourself from intimidation by scribblers and quasi-theorists (they're looking for a warm place to shit, you need not worry). Free yourself from the notion that history and theory will exclude you. And then you can discover your own praxis and that creative imagination which is not celebrated in the cancer ward of suffering romanticism.

Al Razutis Filmography

2 X 2	17 min 1967
Inauguration	17 min 1968
Sircus Show Fyre	7 min 1968
Poem: Elegy for Rose	4 min 1968
Black Angel Flag ... Eat	17 min silent 1968
Aaeon	30 min 1971
Le Voyage	8 min 1973
Visual Alchemy	8 min 1973
Fyreworks	1.5 min 1973
The Moon at Evernight	9 min 1974
Aurora	4 min 1974
Watercolour/Abstract	6 min 1974
Synchronicity	11 min 1974
Portrait	8 min 1976
Excerpts from Ms. The Beast	20 min 1971-81

Visual Essays:

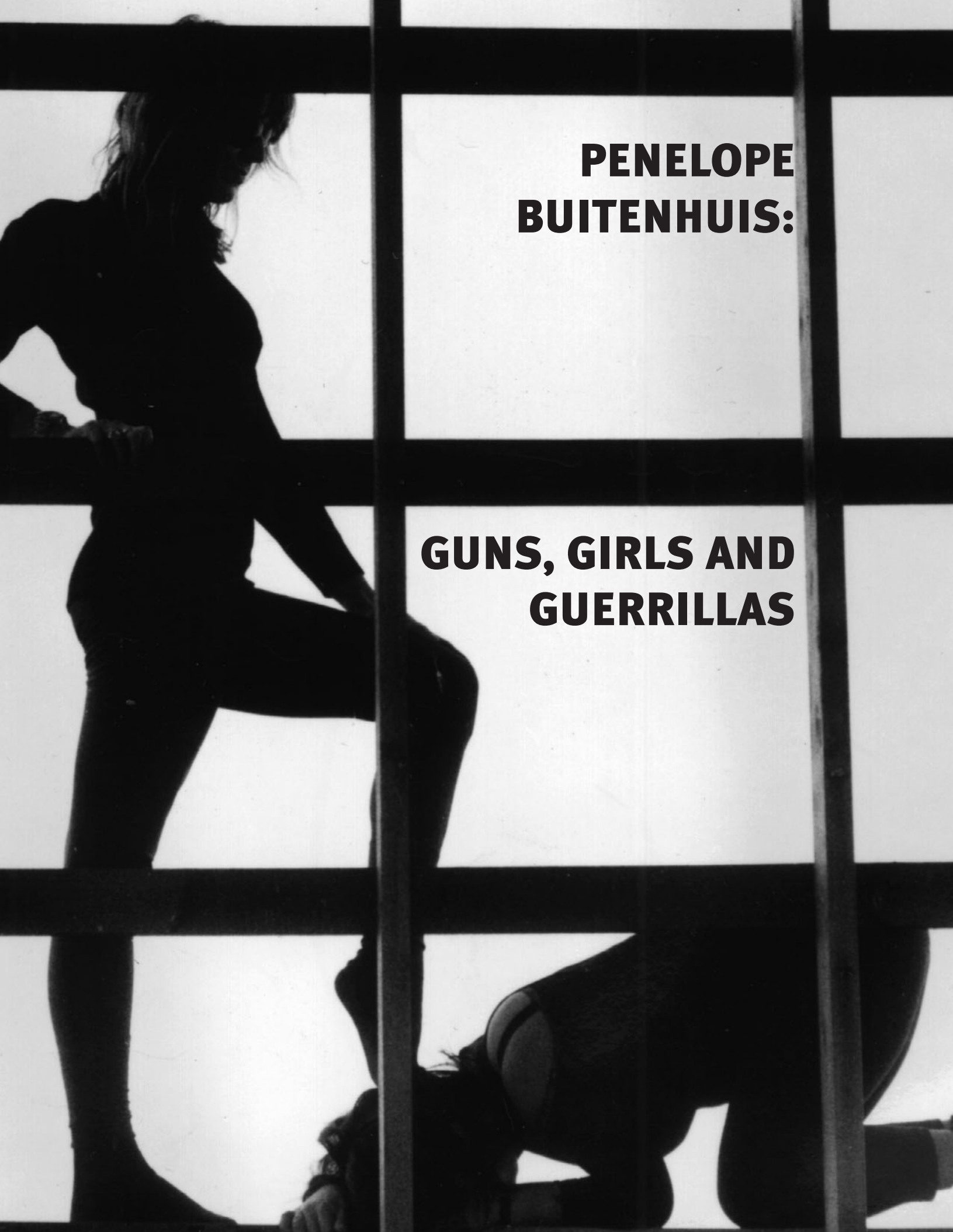
Origins of Film	68 min 1973–84
Lumière's Train (Arriving at the Station)	9 min b/w 1979
Méliès Catalogue	9 min silent 1973
Sequels in Transfigured Time	12 min silent 1976
Ghost:Image	12 min b/w silent 1976–79
For Artaud	10 min 1982
Storming the Winter Palace	16 min b/w 1984



Amerika (Refrain)

Amerika	**160 min 1972–1983**
Reel 1	50 min
The Cities of Eden	7 min 1976
Software/Head Title	2.5 min 1972
Vortex	10 min 1972
Atomic Gardening	5 min 1981
Motel Row Pt. 1	10 min 1981
Refrain	1 min 1982
98.3 KHz: Bridge at Electrical Storm	5 min 1973
Motel Row Pt. 2	9 min 1976
Reel 2	53 min
The Wasteland and Other Stories	13 min 1976
Refrain	4 min 1982
Motel Row Pt. 3	2 min 1981
98.3 KHz: Bridge at Electrical Storm Pt. 2	6 min 1973
The Wildwest Show	11 min 1980
A Message From Our Sponsor	9 min 1979
Photo Spot/Terminal City Scapes	8 min 1983
Reel 3	57 min
Refrain	3 min 1982
Exiles	11 min 1983
The Lonesome Death of Leroy Brown	28 min 1983
Fin	8 min 1983
O Kanada	5 min 1982
Closing Credits	2 min 1983

On the Autonomy of Art in Bourgeois Society...
or Splice by Doug Chomyn, Scott Haynes and Al Razutis
23 min 1986



PENELOPE BUITENHUIS:

GUNS, GIRLS AND GUERRILLAS

Penelope Buitenhuis is a Canadian independent filmmaker who has been living and working in Berlin for the last decade. She has produced and directed fifteen short films in Canada, the US, and Germany and has a couple of features to her credit. Her new narrative works are set in the ghettos of urban centres — New York, Berlin, Toronto, Vancouver, and Rome — and are edited so that the West appears as a single, vast necropolis of decay, neglect, and ruin. As someone who consistently shows her work in a number of different countries, she understands the limitations of linguistic address. Her work relies, instead, on a symbolist ethos, training its lens on a variety of counterculture punks, drop-outs, and outsiders. These are angry tales from the outside, filled with "bad girl" attitudes and a romantic lean toward revolution. Inveighing against police violence, atomic weapons, and state control, Buitenhuis has knit together a series of dramatic encounters between stated and stateless, set in the ruins of history and the failed project of Western civilization. Working primarily in super-8, Buitenhuis posits a cinema of resistance and protest, lending voice to those left behind.

MH: Where did you learn about filmmaking?
PB: I tried to get into a school in Paris, but my residency papers didn't come through at the last minute. As a contingency plan, I'd applied to Simon Fraser University because I heard it was one of the few schools that didn't follow a commercial vein and they paid for your filmmaking. I never had any money, so if I was going to do it, I had to do it there. I never considered movies an art form, I just went for fun, like every other kid. When I was eighteen, I got this education about European film and realized there were other possibilities. I was outraged that I hadn't even heard about this work. I think it's still true, that unless you live in the privileged artistic world, you don't hear anything about it. After the course, I went to Paris and got involved with some documentary filmmakers and caught the bug. I also realized that Paris wasn't the place to be a female filmmaker. I wasn't interested in being an actress, and they could never understand why I would want to learn anything technical. Editors and script girls are about the only roles open for women in Latin countries. It's very much a man's world. Canada's the same, but Germany has women working in all facets of filmmaking.
MH: Tell me about *They Shoot Pigs Don't They?(15 min super-8 1989).*
PB: I started making *Pigs* when I came down to San Francisco in 1987 to show political documentaries from Germany about the census. I don't know if you heard about it here. It's an obligatory census that everybody had to fill out about their income and personal statistics, and if you don't comply there's a five hundred mark fine. It posed questions about what the government should or shouldn't know about your personal life. I wanted to demonstrate to America this enormous resistance because here we tend to give out information so willingly, without knowing how it's going to be used. On the way from Germany to show these documentaries, they wouldn't let me into the States. They were very suspicious about the tapes. In the end, they found me in the computer, and it turned out there was a warrant for my arrest for some car insurance thing five years before, which I didn't know about. I was handcuffed at the airport and taken to the police station, and basically, that started my rage against police. That summer I'd been stopped by police a number of times and taken in for ridiculous reasons. Charges were always dropped, but...
MH: This was in Germany?
PB: In Vancouver. I felt there was a real tendency in Canada, more so than in Germany, towards a kind of vigilante police activity. If the guy didn't like your face or the way you talked or if you said what you thought about things, then it was quite easy to have false charges laid against you. I'm a white middle-class person, so I can imagine for others it must be a lot worse.

It was ironic because I was coming to San Francisco to show how the computer is used against the individual, and that's just what happened to me. There's quite a strong anarchist community in San Francisco, and I asked some people if they would like make this film with me. That's where I started shooting. It was an ongoing process for the next three years, making bits in New York, Berlin, and Vancouver. I didn't ever write a full script. I adapted it as I went along.


Framed

I wanted to show that certain portions of society never get media access, and that the only way to get it is to forcefully take it. The other thing about the film is that in Germany, particularly, there's a nostalgia for revolutionary images: the Baader Meinhoff, Che Guevara, the fist, the black flag. All these things that are constantly re-used in demonstrations and leftist rhetoric. I feel those kind of symbols and "Down with Imperialism" rhetoric are no longer applicable today, and that a new form of resistance has to be developed. Constantly recalling this sort of nostalgic imagery of revolution makes it absurd. The main character in the film, Yvonne, the black woman, is surrounded by these posters, and she's obviously a part of this imagery, affected by it. At the same time, she's never lived a revolution in her generation, so in a way it's a dream that's never been fulfilled.

What triggers events in the film is the killing of this man Keane in Harlem by police who claimed afterwards he was a crack dealer. But neighbours said he'd never been involved with crack; he was an accountant. The cops said they found a vial of crack in his larynx, which everyone claimed they planted after he was killed in order to justify his shooting. In *They Shoot Pigs*, the Women Attack Pigs Revolution begins with a takeover of ABC-TV and begin a national broadcast that reads an anti-Pig manifesto. Police everywhere become

They Shoot Pigs, Don't They?

the targets of this revolutionary coalition. Eventually some members get hurt, and the revolution is called off to avoid any more bloodshed. The remaining members hijack a plane to Germany to start again. In the end, the film fails because it's not clear enough. In a way it becomes a slapstick comedy about revolution. They end up hitting police on the head with sticks, but what I'm really getting at is that these ideas of takeover are really not feasible anymore, they're fantasy.

MH: Within the organization of the revolutionary group a very distinct hierarchy is set-up. There are a couple of people who talk, and the rest follow orders. Yet one of the things they're fighting against is exactly this alienation of duties and responsibilities. They're protesting a lack of media access which has become too centralized, which we can only passively accept into our living rooms, and yet this same kind of top/bottom split exists within the group itself.

PB: Anarchy's idea of "all leading all" is nice, but this quickly becomes chaos, so, in a sense, I criticize the idea of anarchy as much as dictatorship. In the revolutionary groups of the past there were leaders. That's the only way it could work. In non-urgent situations, collaboration and non-individualism can function, but in situations of direct action, I don't think it can. Part of my mandate in making films is that, because I can't pay anybody, I allow them creative input as compensation. The women reading the manifesto made a lot of changes to it. They decided on the choreography of the guys behind them, and the costumes they wore, for instance. I didn't tell them to wear black bras; that's how they showed up. I said, "You're supposed to be tough leaders — interpret that how you will!" Some feminists feel uncomfortable with that representation, but that's what those women chose to do. I did the same with the soundtrack: I gave the Rude Angels, a band from Berlin, free rein. I would go in every couple of days and listen to it, and if I really didn't like it, I would talk to them, but basically I didn't tell them what I wanted.

MH: Guns are a recurrent motif.

PB: For me it's amazing that they could take guns away in America and drop the murder rate by half. Guns are such a cold way of killing, you don't need any physical contact. In Europe, a lot of people are uncomfortable with my use of guns all the time, but I'm really uncomfortable with America's use of guns. People I would never imagine have them in their homes. The gun is an admission that you're prepared to kill.

MH: You show Keane murdered in the film.

PB: That's the one element that actually happened, this guy was killed, and for that reason I made it quite graphic. It's not a revolutionary dream; he died unjustly at the hands of the police. Not to forget.

MH: Most experimental film has very little to do with violence.

PB: Is it a collective denial? Perhaps there's enough violence in other forms of representation that we can leave it out of ours. *Pigs* takes place in New York, which is a very violent city, and the cops are everywhere showing their cocks, their guns. It's there in the papers everyday. But *Pigs* is also a criticism of revolutionary forms, because violence creates violence. Any revolution that tries to undermine a system often ends up using the apparatus they're fighting, and I'm against that. Unfortunately, though, to fight you often have to use the same method of destruction.

MH: It's a real quandary for makers — whether to use a

form people can understand, like narrative for instance, and then have it appropriated by the mainstream. On the other hand, you can find a different kind of form, which quickly leaves most in the dark. How does your work function — who would see a film like this?

PB: Generally I'm a kind of packrat filmmaker. I just take my films around, as I'm doing now, to the Euclid or the MOMA or the American Institute of Film in Washington. I move them myself, since my experience for short films and no-budget films has been that there isn't a lot of incentive for distribution companies to push them. There's no money in it.

MH: But do you see the films working as a form of direct action? How do they function politically?

PB: The reaction in Europe has always been very interesting because, although I live in Germany, much of my work is based in America and American culture. Even people in alternative cultures have a certain image of America which I think is incorrect. They assume a very glossy, complete picture, so people are often surprised at the decaying ghettos in my work. But most insight comes out of discussion rather than in direct response to the work, because when I show my films six at a time it's a real overload of information and images. People are overwhelmed. Response comes when we start talking.

MH: Tell me about *Disposable (14 min super-8 1984-86)*.

PB: It's about disposable North American culture, an ironic idea for Europeans because they're surrounded with tradition and history. They don't even realize how much tradition plays a part in their understanding, and those that do suggest it's an impediment to your freedom of thinking, a weight they're forced to carry. *Disposable* is set in an America which has turned its brief history into a throw-away culture of television and magazines which fosters a cultural amnesia. That leaves museums and institutions as the places of our public memory, and I feel uncomfortable with their agendas. If you're in Paris or Berlin, the shape of your space, the architecture, the statues and monuments, are a constant reminder of what went on before. In North America it's difficult to remember anything.

MH: From a European perspective, "North America" was founded on removing our indigenous people. Our foundation is already one of erasure and genocide. *Disposable* takes up this question of the custodians of memory. You show two men, one arguing for the importance of the past, the other lost in the present.

PB: Both have validity. Europeans envy America because an intuitive response to image making still seems possible. But I don't think we're children; it's not possible to be naive or to go back, any more than it is for the Europeans.

MH: Your filmwork is also straining the traditions of a certain kind of experimental film work.

PB: Even though I really enjoy working in an experimental vein, when I took my films around to places that didn't necessarily have educated film audiences, I would lose them when it became too obscure or experimental. I want to form another kind of narrative, a new narrative that's not linear in its juxtaposition of sound and image, and tries to disturb the typical formulas of narrative film. I want to make it entertaining for people to watch. I don't want to lose them. I'm very much against this tendency in North America, with its endless superimpositions and text, where I lose what's going on; it becomes intellectual masturbation. Maybe it works for other filmmakers, but my purpose is not to preach to the converted.

I've shown just about everywhere, in warehouses, cafés, and out-of-doors, really trying to reach other kinds of audiences. A lot of people's response is, "Oh, we've never seen stuff like that, this is really strange, I never knew work like this existed," and that's what I want to get at. I want people to realize there are other ways of telling stories or talking about issues or presenting opinions, but I think it's necessary to maintain a certain narrative line. So, in the last six years, I've turned much more towards narrative.

Llaw

MH: What about the people who say that your work casts off the tradition of fringe film entirely, that there's nothing left of it any more, it's not experimental, it's something else?

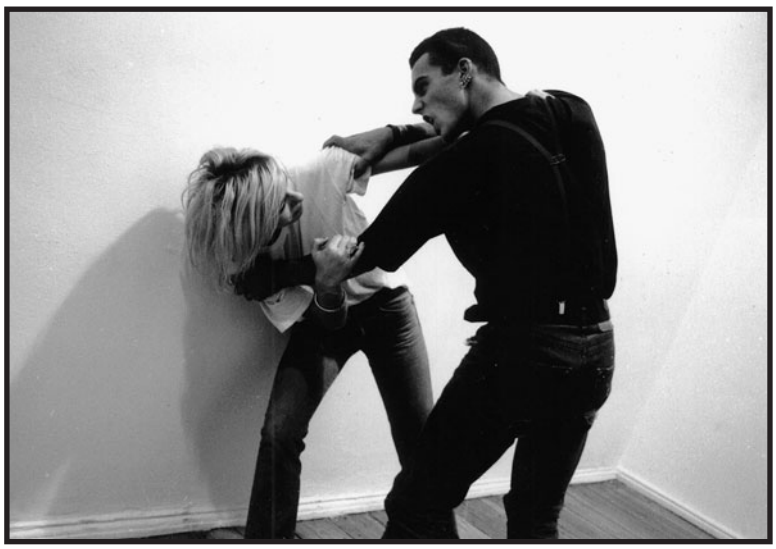
PB: "Experimental" means in any form or way in which you wish to make it. Experimental lies outside mainstream form and beyond that, I'd say it's free rein. At the Experimental Film Congress in Toronto (1989) there seemed to be an accepted definition of what constitutes experimental film, which I found shocking. How could there be? How could it continue being "experimental" if it could be pinned down with words? Curiosity about the forms of communication has dwindled because it's not so new any more, and a lot of

people are fed up with obscurity. At the Experimental Film Congress I really sat back and wondered, "What were they saying in that film?" I didn't understand some of the work, and I'm an educated film goer, so I can imagine for the uninitiated it must have been totally confusing. I'm not suggesting you need to dictate what you're saying, but why do you make images? You want to bring something across to people. You don't want to leave them totally confused when they leave. I think new narrative is a way we have to go now to be able to reach an audience that is fed up with experimental obscurity or endless superimpositions or layering text. I'm trying to make experimental film fun to watch, and I don't think that's such a bad thing!

Indifference

MH: Purely formal film experiments seem increasingly to emerge from a certain kind of privilege, a class privilege, that has the time to worry about things like "film as film." As well the increasingly academic and institutionalized context for work is heading production off in a certain direction.
PB: I agree. I'm continually surprised at the similarity of films in Canadian festivals. At the Insight Festival in Edmonton, all the documentaries took a form that was in the tradition of the National Film Board; the experimental work took a very obscure academic form, and when I showed my work, people were really shocked because it didn't fit. Although people think of German film as being innovative, they don't have nearly the history of experimental film that we do in America. It's not institutionalized like it is here. Generally film schools teach you how to make film, rather than film theory, and as a result they're not so patient with experimental forms.
MH: One thing that's different between your work and other German fringe films is that many makers have a strong aversion to language. Long stretches of work will have no dialogue or titles, whereas North Americans seem obsessed with text. Your work is relatively wordy when compared with other German work.
PB: As an English-speaking person in Germany, I have a different relation to language, even though I speak German. Many sounds provide a non-verbal dialogue. I think sound is an international form of communication — it triggers thoughts and associations. But particularly in Germany, where language has been abused by Hitler and other orators, filmmakers are wary of their own language. Words don't seem the same now. English can be brief and succinct in a way that isn't possible in German; it doesn't have the same freedom of juxtaposition. In English, you can put words next to one another in a stream of consciousness which is understandable because the words have an integral meaning in themselves. But in German, each word is very dependent on the words surrounding it. So you can't free it from its history. Because I'm not German I look at the way they've put their language together — like the word "geschlectsverker" which means copulation, and in it is the word "schlecht," which means bad, and "verker," which is traffic. I used to think it meant "bad traffic." But they can't see that the word holds its own moral. When you're in your own language you don't realize the way language has been impregnated by culture, the way your mouth shapes understanding. Or "Leidenschaft," which means passion, and "leid" is pain. The Germans never notice, of course, just as we don't. In the same way, experimental film is concerned with the form, of how you do something, and when you make the form strange you're able to see it, until the form becomes too strange and you can't see it at all.
MH: Tell me about *Indifference (20 min super-8 1988)*.
PB: That was shot in New York and Toronto with Samantha Hermenes. She's so talented but never uses it, so I invited her to New York to make a film. We wrote the script in a day and shot it in two. We wanted to show that city living requires an indifference to the horrors you see around you. I still get tears in my eyes when I see the bag ladies in New York. But to survive you have to build up a certain disregard in order to remain optimistic and creative. So this woman sees a lot of ugly things which she ignores; they're an everyday occurrence. She passes a murder, a dope deal, arguments, and corpses. She's even blasé about her personal life — her apartment is trashed, she gets kicked out — but nothing really gets inside. Then it turns out that these events have been planned by a guy who is trying to inflict his paranoia on her. He's bothered by the fact that she can live without being affected. All the things that have happened to her have been set up for her to see.
MH: Scripted.
PB: Yeah, it's very much to do with constructing a film. The paranoid guy is like the filmmaker who's saying all these events were no accident. She says she'll stay indifferent and survive. Some say that's a call for apathy, but I don't think so.

MH: The paranoid suggests to her that all of these circumstantial events — the murder, the dope deal, the person lying dead by the sidewalk — are coming from one place. They make up a narrative in which she's implicated. This is related to her in the form of a letter which she opens at the end, detailing the events of her day, showing their origin in the word. This letter has the form of a script, and this person then becomes analogous to a filmmaker.
PB: Most filmmakers are paranoid about understanding. That's why they make dramas.
MH: Two things in her apartment seem to offer her some degree of comfort: her parrot and her mirror. I think there's a distinct narcissism at work; she's able to escape from her surroundings in the image of herself.
PB: She's an exteme case. After she's cut off the world, all she has left is herself. The mirror falls because of the violent argument next door, and this splintering of the mirror shows the outside world really stepping into her life, breaking her image. That's when she gets the angriest.
MH: There's a suggestion that there is no inside, that it's impossible to be alone.
PB: That's why it all continues even when she gets home. The neighbours are fighting, the landlord boots her out, the paranoid telephones. In the film, I use a heavy soundtrack by Mechanik Kommando because in New York you never escape the noise. I couldn't live there because of the overwhelming sound. You're never out of New York when you're there. All my films are shot in ghettos, decaying parts of the world. It's not random where I shoot or who's in them. Fighting the Hollywood image thing is impossible, but despite their image overdose, people come out of my work with some sense of the unjust, fragmentary, dirty, decaying world. A lot of that has to do with the soundtracks. For far too long, sound has been secondary to image, but I try to bring it forward, to make them equal.


Llaw

MH: Which film is shot off the television set?
PB: *Combat Not Conform (4 min super-8 1987)*. It's basically a summary of activities and demonstrations. Now it's irrelevant because Reagan is in it. The demonstrations were against nuclear plants, which were only good for money in the end. Inside of all this a few people are trying to fight for something fundamental: no nuclear weapons in our country. I wanted to make an image of this resistance, to show it's still possible.
MH: You made a film about the Berlin Wall coming down.
PB: It's called *Llaw (9 min super-8 1990)* which is wall spelt backwards. It's a personal diary about the days leading up to, and succeeding, the crumbling of the Berlin Wall. I was in the woods of British Columbia this summer, writing a script, and I kept seeing via satellite all these reports about the mass exodus from East Germany. Everyone said to me, "You should be back in Germany, it's really exciting," but I wondered what difference it would make. It was deeply ironic sitting ten hours from any city and still seeing images of what was happening at home, or what I call home. I returned to Berlin on the third of November, and showed this in the film via pixillation.

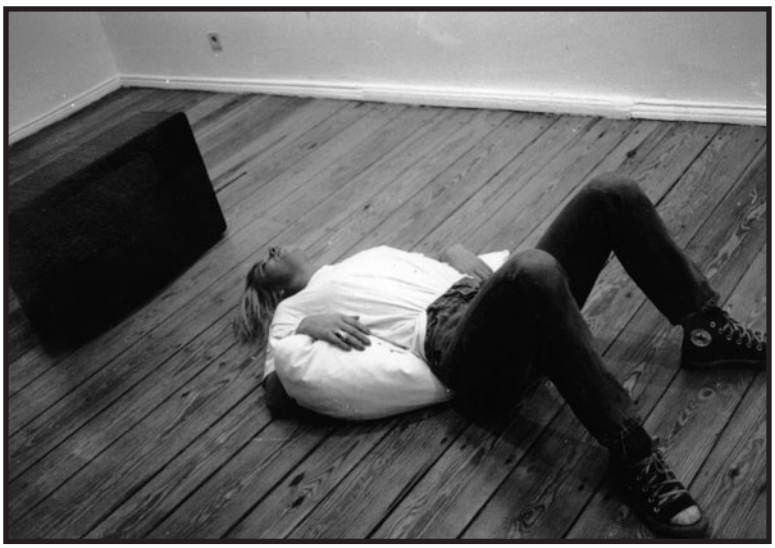
On November 4, there was a demonstration of one-and-a-half million people in Berlin Alexanderplatz, which was broadcast on East German television, and they were saying extremely subversive things, that the government should step down, they'd had forty years of oppression and now it was over. Writers, intellectuals, and poets spoke to the crowd. I watched it with a number of people who'd escaped from East Germany, and they were stunned at what was being said on television to the whole country. We knew then that there was no turning back, that it was just a matter of time. That broadcast said it all.

On November 9, the wall came down — I was on my way to a concert of Faith in the War. I heard the news on the subway at 7:00 p.m. and everyone started shouting. My equipment was locked in my apartment, which had been confiscated. I was having personal problems, so I didn't get my camera until November 11, so visually I shot off the TV and shot a lot afterwards.

November 10 begins a metaphorical dialogue between East and West. It's set in the hallways of Brittania House, and revolves around the idea that we've been enemies for forty years, but all of a sudden we've decided none of that was necessary anymore. We see the camera move into a room where a couple beat up on each other and kiss in the end. This is intercut with images of 1961, when the wall went up

and images of today, when guards are standing atop the wall and people are handing them flowers. That's the power structure metaphor.

The next day is November 11, photographed in the next hallway. It's about East Germans getting 100 marks when they come over, the whole money game. Inside the room, a business man opens up a suitcase filled with money and tries to give it to the same woman as before, now dressed as a typical communist. [laughs] She's reading a book and tries to ignore the money, but eventually she takes it and stuffs it in her pocket and eats bananas. Bananas became a symbol of capitalism and exoticism because they didn't have bananas in East Berlin, so when they saw this fruit in West Berlin...



Llaw

MH: They went bananas.

PB: Exactly. The third scene had to do with the marketing of the wall, the selling of freedom and democracy. An American consortium offered fifty million dollars to buy the wall, but I don't think they're going to get it now; both British and French Museums have stakes. The whole world wants a piece of history. There's not going to be much left at the end of it, everybody's chipped away so much of it. I call it the pet rock of history.

The last section shows a woman lying in front of her TV. An American survey taken after every major broadcaster was talking live from the Brandenburg Gates, showed that after five minutes most Americans switched the channel, so history brought the ratings down. [laughs] The film's about the media spectacle, cashing in on the change of borders. The last statement goes: "History makes me suspicious; who will be the next enemy?" It's about the artificiality of politics.

MH: When the news reports started coming in about the wall, I imagined all the filmmakers I spoke with in Berlin beginning to make work about it. The wall would create a whole new genre of filmmaking. No sooner did I get back than you arrived with *Llaw*.

PB: Everyone was there with a camera, looking at everyone else who was there with a camera. A lot of people were chipping away at the wall, which is a crime because the wall belongs to the East. At the beginning they tried to arrest a few people, but in the end they gave up because everybody was doing it. It's not that easy to get a piece because cement doesn't chip that well, and the only people who made a profit are the ones who came with jackhammers. West Berlin became horribly crowded, the subway was impossible, the shops were filled, the smog was unbelievable because the East German cars have no emission controls, and everything was sold out. So, all of a sudden, your normal everyday life was like New Delhi. A lot of West Berliners were fed up with the whole thing just in practical terms. I left on December 23 and it still hadn't gone back to normal. Friends of mine were disturbed because they'd spoken up in the past and had to go to prison or leave as a result, but when a mass movement begins, everyone sings along. My friends from the East are looking at all these right-wing assholes who never said anything before and wondering what's up. The reforms are good, but does that mean Eastern Europe will become another capitalist stronghold, another market? There's a striking juxtaposition between the events in Eastern Europe and the American invasion of Panama — is this the freedom everyone's moving towards?

MH: The real question is — what kind of shape will an oppositional force assume? How is it possible?

PB: There was a crazy euphoria that's still going on in a way. When I go back I'm going to show my work in East Berlin and take my bike into the countryside. But the artistic world is frightened, because Berlin's peculiarity came in part from being surrounded by a wall; it had something special. The strangeness of its circumstance brought many international artists to Berlin. That's over now. Everyone's wondering how the culture of Berlin will survive.

MH: How did you find your way to Berlin?

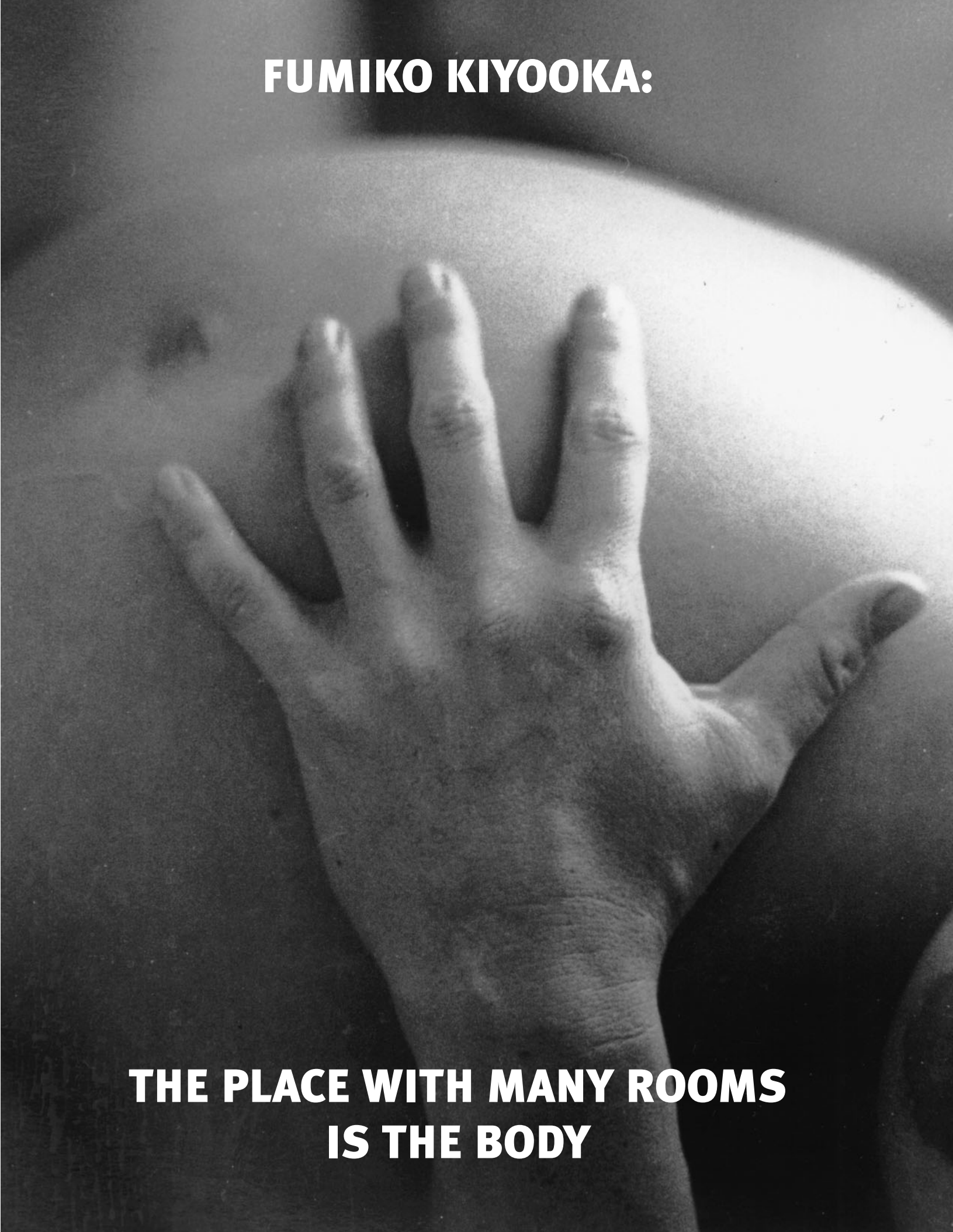
PB: In 1984 I made a film about squatting in London, Amsterdam, and Berlin, *Alternative Squatting (15 min super-8 1984)*. I was fascinated, and it was really cheap, and where I was living at the time, in Paris, it was very expensive and there was little alternative culture. So I moved to Berlin. There aren't many places that have a strong alternative movement with an audience and press. Berlin is fantastic. Super-8 in Berlin is respected; I get a whole page in the newspaper about my work. People are really curious, and I never found that anywhere else. It's cheap to work, there's a co-operative mentality, there's not a hierarchy of importance. They're more interested in what you're showing, not the format. Now I'm quite well known, and there's the possi-

bility of doing longer, more expensive things. Everything's possible there because in Berlin there are no rules. I think Germans are quite open to seeing different kinds of work. I don't think that's true in Canada.

Penelope Buitenhuis Filmography

Word Continuum	8 min super-8 1983
Disposable	14 min super-8 1984-6
Alternative Squatting 1	5 min super-8 1984
Periphery	30 min video 1985
Framed	15 min super-8 1986
Combat Not Conform	4 min super-8 1987
Indifference	20 min super-8 1988
They Shoot Pigs Don't They?	15 min super-8 1989
Llaw	9 min super-8 1990
A Dream of Naming	7 min 1991
Trouble	92 min 1992
Pass	15 min 1994
Boulevard	95 min 1994

FUMIKO KIYOOKA:



THE PLACE WITH MANY ROOMS IS THE BODY

Fumiko Kiyooka owes her beginnings in film to Simon Fraser University, where a fractious faculty midwifed a new generation of fringe filmers that includes Valerie Tereszko, Mary Daniel, Oliver Hockenhull, Penelope Buitenhuis, and others. With Kaja Silverman's rigorous feminist psychoanalysis, Michael Elliott Hurst's staunch Marxism, and Al Razutis's anarchic avant-gardism, a generation of students were torn between competing pedagogies. Many would not survive these conflicting agendas, but for those who did, a renewed sense of critical cinema emerged — one that is imagistic, historically informed, and politically concise. Amongst their number, Kiyooka has emerged as an enduring and innovative force, marrying the personal and political in a weave that emblematizes the once and future Vancouver fringe.

In the four films she has made spanning the past decade she has taken aim at the threat of nuclear annihilation in *Clouds* and *A Place with Many Rooms*, the dysfunctional family in *Says* and childbirth in *Creation*. Formally trained as a dancer, her films give voice to the body, its cycles of menstruation and maternity caught in the vice-grip of history. Her work speaks of generations of displacement — of migration and diaspora, of broken marriages and single parenthood, all bearing witness to the past without succumbing to it.

MH: What does your name mean?
FK: My first name is Jan, my second name's Fumiko, and my last name's Kiyooka. Fumiko's meaning depends on how you write it in Kanji. There are three written languages in Japanese — two phonetic languages: Hiragana and Katakana. Katakana consists of the foreign words within the Japanese language. And then there's Kanji, which was borrowed from the Chinese. The meaning of a word in Kanji depends on how it is written. But I'm third generation Japanese-Canadian so my Dad had no idea what my name meant! [laughs] I was named after a friend — Fumiko — and I found out later that the characters can mean "rich and beautiful" or "culture." It could be literally translated as "letter-child." I like that one better, so that's how I write it in Kanji. Kiyooka means "small hill."
MH: You were a dancer before you turned to film?
FK: Yes. The very first dance I did was in 1970 with Yvonne Rainer when she came out to Vancouver and did a number of workshop performances. Most of the work she did at that time was improvised and very much connected with natural movements. She would give you a word like "frightened" and you were supposed to express that. Then I started taking classes with Paula Ross, Anna Wyman, and at studios in Vancouver, New York, San Francisco, and Indonesia. I'd studied some Bhuto dance in New York as well. It's a Japanese dance which began after the bombing of Hiroshima-Nagasaki. Bhuto is basically about death and life, which has to do with sex and birth. The guy I studied with — Min Tanaka — would paint his whole body brown and make these really slow movements, rolling from one shoulder to the next and pivoting on all the muscles along the way. The whole performance depended on these small moves of muscular control. He worked completely naked. He'd shave his body and paint it brown, but he kept getting arrested in France and New York, so after that he covered his penis. I thought he had a huge penis for a Japanese guy until I realized it was wrapped in cloth.
MH: And then you took dance at Simon Fraser University?
FK: Yes, but I didn't like the dance department because it was very competitive and the whole idea of being graded for dance seemed pathetic.
MH: Did each of the schools have a different style?
FK: Simon Fraser was interested in modern dance, which came out of jazz and ballet. It's better taught in New York because the dancers are extremely well trained, although generally they don't have much to say. It's just a question of form and technique.
MH: What is it that separates modern dance from the dance that came before?

Creation

FK: Well, ballet has a set number of movements — there's first position, second position, third position, fourth position, *jeté, grand jeté*... Every movement is stylized and the way you piece all those movements together is the dance. Everything is turned out. There are big leg movements and pretty little fawny movements. When African dance hit white culture it became jazz — like the way rhythm and blues became rock and roll. Jazz is much more earthy and

sexual than ballet. Jazz and ballet are done everywhere; they're the two oldest forms within the Western culture of dance. Modern dance started around the time of the First World War and it brought the grotesque and the ugly — movements which weren't normally presented in dance. It started in Germany then spread to New York with Martha Graham, which became a school unto itself, articulating its own forms and standards, its own rules and disciplines, and finally its own style. There's a Martha Graham style whose movements you can learn. The more styles you study, the more you're able to do with your body.

MH: You learn a repertoire of others' styles?

FK: Yeah, but at a certain point you have to find yourself, and schools aren't able to do that. You learn to do what they want, and if you copy well you're fine. Copying is the general rule of education.

Clouds

MH: How did film come out of that?

FK: In 1984 I was doing quite a bit of performance art, and sometimes film was involved. I did a big show at SFU, where I built a transmutator — a large black box that can transform one person into another or blend them together. Also in the piece, a film showed two dancers moving, so the two live dancers danced with their own images. It asked questions about presence and absence, reality and illusion, and I called it *Reflextions* — as in muscular flexes.

MH: Then you moved from the dance to the film department at SFU?

FK: Yes, I was late coming back from Europe, and they wouldn't let me into theatre, so David Rimmer let me into the film department.

MH: That's where you made *Clouds (26 min 1986)* with Scott Haynes?

FK: Yes, I was in my second year, and Scott was in his fourth, and we decided to collaborate. Since Scott had been in the film department longer, he became more involved with the camera and the technical side, and because I'd done performance I worked with the actors. *Clouds* was born from a shared feeling that the threat of nuclear war is the most pressing issue. We started by getting into a car and driving in search of a backdrop against which we could film a movement evocative of the dread of total war. We found that location south of the border and began with what takes place at the end of the film — what we called "the nightmare montage." Later, we came across the name of Kinuko Laskey in a peace movement sourcebook which described her as the founder and president of the Canadian Society for Atomic Bomb Survivors. Kinuko has lived in Vancouver since the war. From our first discussion with her, which lasted eleven hours, we were struck by her experience as a sixteen-year-old nurse in Hiroshima when the first atomic bomb was dropped. We realized that the horror and suffering that happened in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which is often blocked by American accounts of the war, should never be forgotten. If nothing else, we felt *Clouds* should convey some of Kinuko's story.

Japanese-Canadian internment is also touched upon in *Clouds*, implicating our responsibility as Canadians in the sort of "us/them" mentality that is at the root of war. The scene in the cattle stables was shot at the actual site where Canadian women and children of Japanese descent were interned and held, to be shipped to camps in the interior. We relied on first-person accounts of people who had lived through war in the Pacific. Rather than statistics, we wanted to unearth the horror of war on an emotional level in order to arrive at the question of how we step beyond histories of conflict.

MH: Was your family imprisoned?

FK: Not directly. I found out about it through fairly recent attempts to exact apologies and payment from the government. The first and second generation Japanese wanted to bury the issue because they were so hurt by the racism. They just wanted to fit in and make amends and get on with their lives. It was the third generation Japanese that made a big stink, and they were finally joined by the second generation, who were really the ones put into camps. Thousands were put away, including many children, and they weren't released until seven years after the war. When they got out, all their homes and possessions had been seized by the government. The Canadian government didn't put German-Canadians into camps, so it was definitely a racist issue. I haven't had much racism directed against me, but I'm half-Japanese, so it's diluted. [laughs] In my father's generation, there was a denial of history in order to fit in, and now that's changed as people are reclaiming their heritage. But it's become romanticized. Japanese-Canadians here are really old-fashioned

compared to people in Japan because they've got a 100-year-old idea of Japan — it's a period that no longer exists.

I was brought up by my mother. She's British, and her parents were very racist. Her grandparents were colonizers, and my mother rebelled against them by marrying my father, for one thing. She brought me up to be proud of our difference, making that an asset rather than trying to hide it. The only time I felt discomfort as a child was seeing a National Film Board film at school about "Japanese people" and I thought, "Omigod, the clichés." I wanted to hide under my seat. I felt awful. [laughs]

MH: Do you feel debates around issues of race in the art community are helping?

FK: There's only a certain length of time you can put a lid on something before it's going to start boiling over. I don't think it's happening strongly enough anywhere to make much of a difference, but it's gotta happen.

MH: How do you see your work in the midst of all that? Do your films have anything to do with that change?

FK: I don't make political activist-type films or even films that are trying to move towards some kind of "correctness." I think the personal is the political. I think that kind of change is something not many people want to face — it's easier taking on issues outside of oneself. There are so many people waving flags that art no longer comes from a person. It takes up causes.

MH: Tell me about *A Place with Many Rooms (15 min 1987)*.

FK: It's also dance inspired, although the movement is minimal. The film is more of a meditation on the body and identity. It started with a search for a place. Three of us piled into my car with some gear and drove south, looking for an appropriate desert we eventually found in Death Valley, California. It was Christmas time and on the way we'd hear bomb testing reports — how they had to be postponed due to weather conditions until after Christmas, things like that. The film starts with this travelling, with very quick images shot out of the car, sun flares, the dead coyote, and we're moving somewhere. Judy Radul reads her poetry about the body. And then it shows the desert with two people lying in the sand. The camera moves over the bodies, then we see the man running through the dunes, then his footsteps in the sand as a flute plays. The woman lies in a foetal position while the man walks slowly past. The man rolls onto the woman, who's asleep. We see them together, superimposed over clouds. His hand touches the sand very slowly, then her dance begins, intercut with trees. The man runs for the last time, then they walk together. Finally they're lying down, and we see details of the body.

MH: Did you arrive with a script or score?

FK: We worked out the movements when we were there — there was no way to plan them. Initially, I wanted more of a relationship between the couple, but it's better the way it is because the space between them is something the audience has to fill in. It's like the desert that's around them, a paper waiting to be written on.

The only time I felt discomfort as a child was seeing a National Film Board film at school about "Japanese people" and I thought, "Omigod, the clichés." I wanted to hide under my seat.

MH: The problem with an open text is the way formulas and clichés quickly take the place of suspended judgment, of anything uncertain.

FK: I don't think you can get around that. We're all brought up with the image of mom and dad coming together and creating life. You can't get away from it, but you can play with it. *A Place* disconnects from stories because of the presence of the landscape, the sense of loneliness and separation, being unclothed and alone in the world.

MH: Northrop Frye recites a biblical thematic of separation-initiation-return, of leaving home on some kind of quest, being initiated into another way of knowing, and then returning home to share that understanding. The initiation invariably happens in places like the desert or in those periods in your life where nothing feels very certain. The desert's a place of wandering, testing, and limits. But your film seemed less about these stringent trials of separation because of the lazy sensuality of these two young bodies warmed in the sun. Behind them there's neither vegetation nor civilization and they lie very still at the beginning, slowly coming into movement. Then you show footsteps in the sand, which are signs of some kind, an early alphabet perhaps, as these sleepers begin to make a world out of this blank Eden.

FK: The place with many rooms is the body, and when you take everything away you find out what's inside. The film tries to invoke that in the viewer by drawing away context and narrative and setting the body in this featureless place. The viewer has to go into it in their own way, and journey through these spaces.

MH: Why the repeated shots of the clouds superimposed over the two of you?

FK: Maybe that's all there is — the sand and the sky. They're lying together, but they're not really being lovers — they lie still while the clouds move, their emotions turning

over the quiet of their sleep.
MH: It reinforces their sense of being together because they're anchored amid all this change.
FK: They're separate a lot in the sand, but in the projection they're brought together. This is where they can join with one another — as an image — dreaming the old dream they've been brought up with.


Says

MH: *Says (90 minutes 1992)* is your longest film to date — an amalgam of dramatic scenes, television parodies, dance, and structural interludes all circling around the family. How did the film begin?
FK: It started with my son, Kai. I was actually pregnant in *A Place*, but I didn't start *Says* until he was quite a bit older, eight months or so, and I just started scribbling down notes and things. This was around 1987. I was walking around Chinatown with a baby stroller, and every year the needles and prostitution were increasing, the downtown was going yuppy, and the food bank lines were growing, and I had this child in the midst of this place that was becoming a city.
MH: What was the biggest change after your son was born?
FK: When you have a child you have to re-live your own coming into the world. You reinvent the world. But it's brutal to have to show them what it's like. They always ask, "But why is it..." and then you have to explain.
MH: There's a focus throughout *Says* on the nuclear family as the locus of industrial exploitation, emotional bankruptcy, media manipulation, impossible relationships, sexual dysfunction...
FK: I think most problems stem from the family. Its isolation and self-serving relationships make it a breeding ground for incapacities. I show one extended family in *Says*, who aren't seen together until the wedding at the close of the film. The mother of this family married very young and had four kids. She says, "It's no wonder Ed got into his work routine and drinking with so many mouths to feed." After they split up, the mother becomes a lesbian and the father re-marries. They each take two of the four children they had together. The two kids who went with the father are Bill, the businessman, and the daughter, Linda, who's getting married. The others are the two youngest and they're the left-wing of the family — both boys involved in relationships. Needless to say, the two sides of the family don't really get along. But the personal problems of the right-wing side of the family are just as present in the left-wing side of things.
MH: The father used to be a pilot in the war.
FK: He's the father of all of them. Having gone through the war, he's experienced all kinds of guilt and trauma that live on in his children.
MH: He seems a little out of it. His son is trying to talk to him, but dad's dreaming about flying war planes.
FK: Yes, that's often the case with military fathers. They've gone through extreme experiences, which were the most intense time of their lives, and they dissolve back into them. They're doomed to repeat it, like an endless tape recorder. And these unconscious memories are played out through the children — whether through rebellion or conforming.
MH: *Says* seems very much inhabited and inspired by your own family. You're present throughout the film, as well as your son and your father. He plays the grandfather who relates family history to his grandson and delivers his own poetry in a moving voice-over.
FK: Sure, this film is also about me being part Japanese, and growing up in a WASP environment, and the roles I'm expected to assume as a female. So at one point you see me wearing a long white dress and a blonde wig, or as a Japanese woman wearing a kimono. But all these roles are deconstructed. I play the Japanese woman standing in the woods holding a child, but the close-ups reveal that I'm holding a baby doll with a clock head. Japanese society doesn't have room for children anymore because it's so ruled by the clock — kids are put into school at an early age and made to compete. In Japan there's a certain nostalgia for women in kimonos, especially with a baby. It means subservience, care giving, maternity. My critique suggests that "mother" describes a role which requires "baby" to become a clock.
MH: The first time we see you in the wig you're in the woods and you blow up a large, transparent balloon with a map of the world etched on it. Then you throw it offscreen where it floats down a river, and finally a child finds it in a beautiful slow-motion shot where he enters the water. The next time we see you, you're entering an abandoned house...
FK: ...and I'm knocking on the stairs with a stick, and then I slowly drag a toaster across a floor as if it's very heavy. I always think of that role as having a lot of anger because of

all the dames who were forced to play it out, and all the times it led to situations of abuse. The role of a sex queen was always a lie — it could never be made concrete except when it was stuck inside the home dragging the toaster. [laughs] I wanted to pantomime the roles women are cast into. I also play a hysteric, dressed in white, skulking around graveyards or abandoned houses. The hysteric is connected with death and virginity. She's always hitting herself and doubling over in pain, having hysterical fits. Hers is the classic place of the female within our culture because the roles of our society are masculine ones and all the others have been shoved away. When people act out their problems they're "insane" or "hysterical." The dance of pain I do was projected very small and then I cut it apart with scissors because this image needs to be destroyed.

MH: *Says* shows a statue of Christ between titles that insist all patriarchal structures are based on an ideal model of Greek homosexuality that is exclusively for men.

FK: The church, the government, the legal system, and the universities are all based on writings by and relations among men. When Christianity was established, it wiped out the matriarchies and said that females were devils and witches and we can't live by their cycles, so the calendars were changed. You wonder how long we can continue to deny that we're a part of what surrounds us.

MH: Is it different in marginal cultures?

FK: It's the same everywhere. As it says in the opening titles of the film, there have been forty thousand years of matriarchal existence on earth and only the last four thousand years have been patriarchal. And these last have been based on greed and exploitation through war, and have completely conditioned our thinking of what it means to be human.

MH: The images of women in the film are deconstructive — is it possible to make an image that exists outside of patriarchy?

FK: To replace it is very difficult. There's a scene in *Says* where one of the sons is taking a bath while his lover recites a text about the nuclear family. Some worry that in getting rid of the family, we'll lose the last refuge of matriarchy which exists today in the figure of the mother. I think there's a longing in each of us for that; we've all come out of that. Later, it talks about the medieval paintings of Jesus that show blood and water flowing from a wound in his chest — just like a woman in childbirth. The Church took away women's power to give life — because all life comes from God the Father. Women were only a vessel, empty until filled by men and male ideas.

MH: It seems these ideas have endured in part through images, and part of the point of making another kind of work is to try to make an image of something else. Or to take the images that exist and put them in a different order, to dis-arrange them. What is the relation between marginal culture and the mainstream?

FK: If you're making work whose sole aim is to effect change, then sure, you go out and make a documentary and fit it into the received forms. But independents move through discoveries, you find things along the way. The problem with the reception of marginal art is that the public doesn't accept it because of where they find it. The context destroys it before it's even begun.

Says

MH: *Says* features new narrative trappings, actors, and borrowings from television styles. Were these familiar tropes introduced to broaden the context for your work?

FK: Definitely, the loose narrative line gave people something to grab onto and then destroy.

MH: Why the mosaic form — the bits that are stitched together?

FK: I guess it's just reflective of the fragmented way we live. In a day you do so many things, and there's no continuity, no cohesion between all the aspects except you're going through it. There's no time, only moments. It's just a film of the time.

MH: The performances are very flat. Everyone seems a caricature.

FK: In the script they were even flatter — in some ways the film's a bit nasty. It's like the National Film Board film I mentioned earlier about the Japanese — only now I'm doing it to the WASP family. It's a bit rude. [laughs] But I tried to present different aspects of personality as well — like Bill the businessman who is usually making deals and adding money. But I also show him at night when everyone's gone, upset over what he's become. He's trying to play out his role as his father's son and finds sometimes that no matter what he does, it's not enough.

MH: After Bill picks up a prostitute he comes home and the

family is lounging by the television. The boys want to watch action pictures while the little girl is trying to see pony cartoons. They out-muscle her and put the action flick on while their mother looks stoned on downers. When Bill arrives, he switches the channel and a mud-covered, many-breasted woman shows up on screen and he says, "I don't want my kids watching this stuff." But he can't change the channel and slowly they all collapse on the floor as she dances.

FK: Within the classic suburban home I've projected a character who is not allowed to exist there. She's like the classic Greek form of the mother of fertility, the earth goddess, and she shows up on the boob tube — hence the boobs. They're unable to get rid of her because she's that part of themselves they can't know, but she still has power and overtakes them.

MH: Later on in the film one of the other sons — the guy you're dating in the film — has a visitation by the gods of plenty. They bring him big plates of food. He's sitting alone at the desk and things aren't going well and the door opens and these guys walk in.

Says

FK: He's supposed to be the starving musician — so he dreams of food. But there's also a sexual aspect; it also shows his fear of birth. As he looks more closely at the food, he sees that the cake has all these spermy things on it and little babies with bottles, and he's thinking, "Oh no, wait, what are you giving me?" and then I come in. So the feast is what he wants and what he doesn't want. I tell him I'm pregnant, but we don't have a kid; I get an abortion, and break up with him. I come into the food room and walk to the balcony, and when I look out I see the landscape from the beginning of the film and see myself dancing naked beneath those mountains — going back to something.

MH: How long did it take to make the film?

FK: Three-and-a-half years. I got bits of money all the way through, and each took me a bit further. It came from the Canada Council, BC Film, the Secretary of State, and the National Film Board, but never much at once. The editing took a long time. I'd never edited anything that long before, and I still feel I could've taken another six months and cut it down even more.

MH: Were you shooting for a certain length?

FK: Yes. I wish I hadn't, but I talked to a distributor, and they said it should be ninety minutes. Eventually I dropped our correspondence because every time we talked they said they wanted to see a certain kind of film. And that's not how I work.

MH: Tell me about your next film, *Creation (15 min 1992)*.

FK: I worked on it at the same time as *Says*. For maybe two years there were little pieces of it that I shot and I did a photo series with a pregnant woman, Hilda Nanning, which the film grew out of. *Says* is all metaphor. The woman throws the world/ball to the child instead of actually giving birth, so in this film I wanted to show the struggles of creation, the fear of your own death and the child's, the glorious and frightening aspects of it.

MH: Was the woman a friend?

FK: I didn't know her that well. I put an ad in the paper and she answered it. Gretchen and I had beepers and we're waiting day and night, you know, like when's she going to have this baby? You have to be ready all the time. I called her to say I was leaving for San Francisco in three days and was worried I'd miss it and she said...

MH: Fine, I'll have it tomorrow.

FK: Right. She's that sort of person. There are some women who are so organized that they have their whole body function to fit their schedule. She was really good to film because she was so calm and natural with her body — this was her second child and she was very much in control the whole time.

MH: So this is in a hospital?

FK: It was at home, and we had lights and a video camera and a film camera and a midwife. It was a very smooth birth because of the midwife. It was amazing to watch her choreograph it, attuned to all the needs of the woman. We were called at six, and by nine the baby was born. A short labour, although it felt like forever. It was such an intense time because of the contractions and the pain, the stillness and tension in the air, but really it was just so smooth.

MH: This birth is part of a weave which shows a darkly lit dance between mother and child, roomfuls of babies...

FK: Those are like little flashes of babies — babies as far as the eye can see! There are flashes of a mother nursing and of a woman pulled on a cart through a barren space. She looks dead and she shows the fear and dread that accompany the screams of birthing. The placenta is presented as the climax of the film because it represents the complete cycle — both birth and death.

MH: There's a strong feeling of child-mother sexuality in the

film.

FK: I'm glad that came through because that's the main theme. Child sexuality is very much taboo, but children are born as little sexual beings and their first experiences are with their mother — and it's important in shaping what happens later as adults.

MH: The birth is so beautifully photographed, it also becomes a sexual experience.

FK: Some births are even more so. In a Tennessee commune called The Farm they would actually jerk the woman off so she's orgasming while giving birth. Or suck on a woman's breasts during labour, which induces birth and eases the pain.

MH: The film opens and closes with children speaking in voice-over — what are they saying exactly?

FK: They're saying, "I didn't want to get out of my mom's tummy. I liked it in her womb. So I grabbed onto my mom's bone, but my hand slipped, and I came out and I hated that." And the other boy says, "Yeah, but then I saw my baby toys." And then they talk about angels — angels wear stockings, not shoes. Angels are God's helpers and you can tell someone's an angel because they wear white with wings.

MH: How old are these kids?

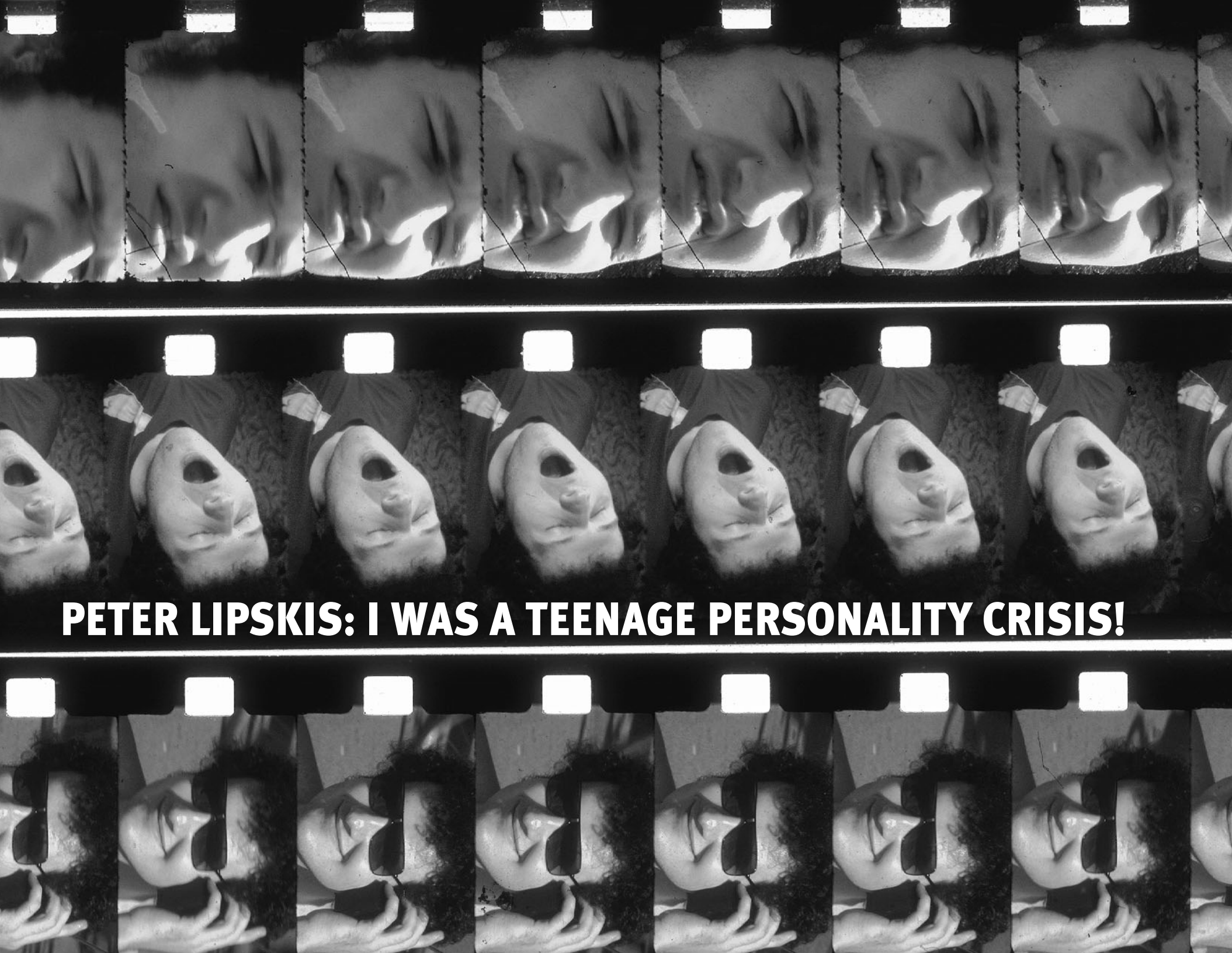
FK: They're five.

MH: And they still remember their birth. Is that usual?

FK: I think it's part fictional. Gretchen recorded that dialogue. She led them through the birth experience. She had them lie down and close their eyes and try to imagine what it was like, and that's what they came up with. They were really quiet, remembering what it was. When a baby is born, its brain is completely open — you can think a thought and watch a baby's face take it on. You don't have to verbalize; they pick up whatever's happening. Then you slowly see them close in on themselves, growing tighter and tighter, their views and how they decide things until a certain point is reached where they're locked. It's physical. The body grows out from the middle, but it can't be joined because in birth the bones have to cross over so the skull is still soft and malleable. After the baby's born, there's a hole in the centre of the skull and slowly that hole grows over and your consciousness becomes locked.

Fumiko Kiyooka Filmography

Clouds (with Scott Haynes)	26 min 1986
A Place with Many Rooms	15 min 1987
Says	90 min 1992
Creation	15 min 1992



PETER LIPSKIS: I WAS A TEENAGE PERSONALITY CRISIS!

Peter Lipskis is the mad hobbyist of the Canadian fringe. Fast cars, teen flicks and early colour processes have all shuddered past his wandering attention. He has worked for two decades, producing twenty-one short films and a handful of videos. Across Canada there are fewer than a dozen who have been occupied with the task of artist's filmwork for as long — none have been as prolifically obscure as Lipskis, nor could any boast his range of expression. Taken as a whole, his *oeuvre* displays frank contradictions and shifts in interest, alongside enormous thematic and qualitative differences.

He began with the feeling that we live in a time already too filled with images, and devised a series of mathematical systems into which "found footage" could be incorporated. Lifting shots out of prison dramas, dating films and sports documentaries he hurled them back onto the screen in delirous spasms of disarray, asking that we look again at the world we are busily reproducing. *Spare Parts* (1976), *Processed Gello* (1977), and *It's A Mixed Up World* (1982) were all produced in this fashion.

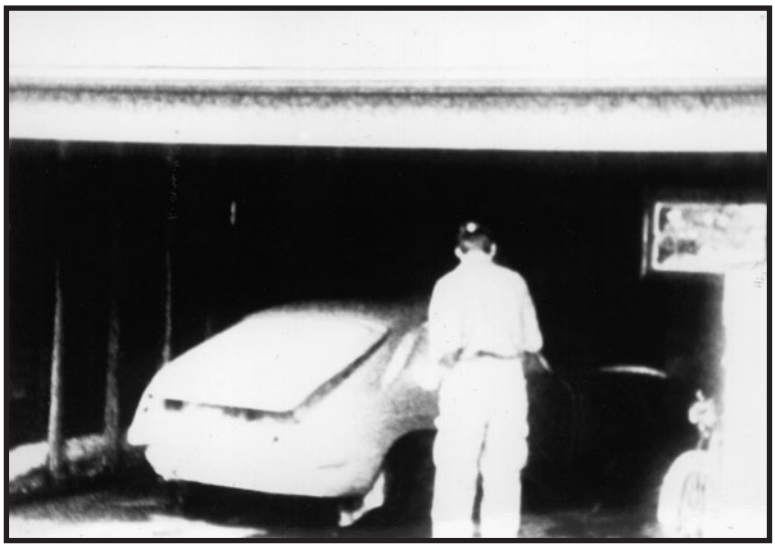
When Lipskis has taken up the camera, it has often been to produce images of his own life and travels, as in the cross-America *Trance America Impressions* (1977), his devastating family portrait *Home Movie* (1977) or the touching *Dance Masks: The World of Margaret Severn* (1981).

In the early eighties, the chilling alarm archivists had long sounded finally hit home: much of our motion picture heritage was being lost. While Hollywood scrambled to restore early classics, Lipskis devoted himself to a study of early colour processes, producing a quartet of hallucinogenic documentaries.

No mention of Lipskis's prolific output would be complete without mentioning his love of the automobile. In *The Red Car* (1985), *GT86* (1986), *GT88* (1988), *The Green Flag* (1988) and *On and Off the Road* (1991) he celebrates a mechanical universe, where the merely human has been replaced by a transcendent technology. A passionate model builder as a child, each of his movies offer up worlds in miniature, turning in an orbit some have learned to call home.

PL: My interest in film began around 1970 while listening to records. For me, sound came first and the image followed. Pictures arrived with consciousness-altering drugs and rock concert light shows — these were formative experiences that some of my work has replayed. My first film was called *Julia Dream* (3 min super-8 1973) after the song by Pink Floyd. I timed the music, wrote out the lyrics, made a storyboard, and began shooting. It opens and closes with an old man dreaming on a parkbench — though at the end of the film only his coat remains. In between we see his dream which shows a white-robed woman who wanders through a number of pastoral settings and ends up in a cemetery. The film suggests a connection between love and death.

In 1973, I travelled to Europe to visit the sites of classical culture. I was very inspired by this work and wanted to continue in that tradition, I felt a strong connection to antiquity. These small gestures that have survived the loss of their political ideals, the changes brought over centuries — they've assumed a weight over time, and you can't help seeing at them without the feeling that they will endure long after you're gone. I decided to study art and enrolled at the University of British Columbia where David Rimmer happened to begin his first year teaching. I also attended Al Razutis's first teaching job — in 1974 the Vancouver School of Art (later Emily Carr) offered a three week multi-media course taught by Al. This was very influential for me. Al was using films, subjecting them to video feedback, filming the results off a monitor, then taking them onto the optical printer. So from the beginning I was interested in film and video, I never understood the separation other artists demanded between the two. Al had built his own optical printer which we could use there, and he was into holography and ancient Egypt. It was all very mysterious and mystical.



The Red Car

Madcap Laffs (12 min super-8 1974) was made in my first year at the University of British Columbia. It featured a narrative frame with a long dream set between. I filmed at night so that a black field would allow patterns of light to

move through the frame — it's mostly reflections in water and glass, shot in the city. It's about alienation. Like much of my work it develops from some emotionally upsetting experience. Some of my films have romantic leanings which are dismissed today because they fail to take account of social and political issues, but it's simply about feelings. People have feelings. Often I'm interested in looking at a work and seeing what state it reflects in the artist. When the whole society is out of balance it's manifest in the art created in that society. When I began work in the early 1970s the trend was to regard film as film. Today the trend is towards a politically aware and correct cinema.

In 1974, I went to the church where I'd been an altar boy for years. I hadn't been there for a long time and arrived on Good Friday, the day commemorating Christ's death on the cross. I felt it wasn't right to go inside the church to film the mass, so I decided instead to shoot the people walking out. I shot one roll of 8mm film and later re-filmed this on a variable speed projector. By reviewing it at a slower frame rate,

It's a Mixed Up World

each face, each gesture is exaggerated. It allows you to see this line of mourners that runs back over two millenia. This became *Good Friday (13 min 1975)*. This slow evacuation from a death many still haven't gotten over wasn't visible in normal time. It taught me that some actions aren't visible at normal speed, like flowers blooming or clouds passing over a city. Often time has to be compressed or expanded in order to see what's really happening.

MH: In the Vancouver Art and Artists Catalogue, Al Razutis wrote: "*Good Friday* evokes a Catholicism that is medieval, ritualized and somber. The grainy, step printed procession of people exiting from a church on Good Friday is framed within Gregorian Chants that suggest an ironic counterpoint to grace and conversion. This steady procession is evocative of Standish Lawder's *Necrology* where humanity passes through the gate of the camera on its way to some deadly destiny." Do you agree with that reading?

PL: What people get out of the work doesn't necessarily speak to my intentions. It doesn't mention the film's three movements, for instance. The second section evokes stained glass in its use of changing colours and the third section was made at a different time altogether. I went back a year later and filmed the same scene with my 8mm camera. Only I shot the second part of the roll upside down and didn't have the film slit, which produces a four-screen effect in 16mm. So a title announces "One Year Later" with these four screens — the two frames on the left show the people leaving the church while the two frames on the right show the people walking backwards into the church, because this side is being projected backwards. Some of the faces are the same as the previous year.

In 1975, I attended a course on avant-garde cinema in Massachusetts, and one of the guests was Ondine, who showed Warhol films like *Vinyl* and *Chelsea Girls*. They took a very different approach to avant-garde film, and when I got back to Vancouver I set about making my own underground films. *I Was a Teenage Personality Crisis! (20 min super-8 1975)* follows the sexual frustrations and misadventures of my friend Fred. At the beginning he masturbates, then browses through girlie magazines which inspire him to go the beach where he meets Liz. He invites her to a party he's having but her biker friend arrives and beats him up. He invites another woman, but she's in bed with another couple so she doesn't come either. The party that ensues is 100 percent male — just a bunch of guys getting high. The soundtrack edited together bits of popular music and Fred ad-libbed the voices in one session. I did it as a parody, not thinking of it as a serious film at all. I think it does capture a certain spirit of the times, it's my *American Graffiti*. [laughs] I made *Personality Crisis* in the summer and the next year at school I began work on *Spare Parts (10 min b/w 1975)*.

In *Spare Parts* I was inspired by modern music scores that broke from tradition — especially composers like Cage and Stockhausen. I was also reading the cut-up novels of William Burroughs, whose techniques I tried with various paperbacks of my own until I learned to read in a different way. In *Spare Parts* I related some of these interests to film. At the University of British Columbia they'd received a number of discarded films from the National Film Board which I used as source material. The first of the film's four movements shows a trio of divers jumping off a board into the water, and then repeating the shot backwards until they're back on the board. It's a "trick shot" and the original voice-over says: "And the cameraman puts them right back." I took

this original trick shot and had it printed twenty times or so. After showing the entire shot, I divided the shot in half and showed it A.B., then B.A. In the third repetition, I divided the shot into five equal parts — A.B.C.D.E. — and showed all the possible combinations of these five, eg. C.D.A.B.E., C.D.A.E.B., etc. Then I divided it into thirteen sections, because the shot was thirteen seconds long, so each shot was one second.

For the second section of the film I decided on a prison sequence using four different sections from an individual film entitled *After Prison —What?* One shows a prison guard, another a prison yard, the third a prisoner banging his cup against the bars, and the fourth shows the guy getting out of jail. With four elements there are twenty-four possible permutations and the film plays out these variations. Unlike the divers sequence, these prison scenes don't repeat, but develop simultaneously. Because the sound lamp on a projector is twenty-six frames away from the gate I made every shot twenty-six frames long, which means that you're always hearing the sound from the previous shot.

In the film's third section I took six sequences from six different films — all dealing with some kind of anxiety. One shows a boy asking a girl out for a high school date. Another is from a film called *What Makes a Good Leader?*, which shows various people talking about the qualities of leadership. The third is set in a living room where a couple are cleaning up and wondering what's going to happen to their daughter who's going out on a date. The fourth shows a dive bomber in the Second World War. The fifth shows Arctic explorers entering the unknown. The last shows people watching a film. I thought of this section as a meditation where the mind watches itself because it allows an audience to see another audience, who are watching another audience, who are... After selecting the sequences I needed a way to organize them. So I let each one correspond to one side of a die — one through six — which I rolled 360 times to determine the score. As in the previous section each shot is twenty-six frames long. So if the die showed three, then I cut twenty-six frames of number three in; if it showed one then I cut twenty-six frames of number one in, and so on. I felt their simultaneous presentation was a kind of miming of consciousness. What's incredible is the way these six different films seem innately connected. In the film's fourth and final section, I took twenty-four single frames and performed twenty-four permutations. This section is twenty-four seconds long. Most of the images are industrial — heavy machinery and the like which relate obliquely to the apparatus of cinema. The soundtrack is just sprocket holes. I called the whole thing *Spare Parts* because it's made out of these used, discarded films. It's like a junkyard of images. There's a West Coast tradition surrounding found footage. I think people's approach to image making on the West Coast is very playful. It's a form of collage, an ecology of images that recycles garbage, it's the blue box of filmmaking. The East is more cerebral, it's where the criticism comes from, where the academy resides. Still, it's hard to generalize too much. I remember that when Ed Emschwiller came into town he said that in the late 1950s, his work was characterized as abstract expressionism. Ten years later people said the same films were about the psychedelic drug experience. In the 1970s people said they were about male-female relations.

MH: It's like that line from Culler: that meaning is context bound, but context is boundless. I think the real problem comes when the work stops speaking at all, except as a kind of historical curio.

PL: When MTV hit the airwaves in 1983, they used so much stock footage that I became discouraged from using it — now it seems like a mainstream technique. Everything from perfume commercials to the introduction to "Saturday Night Live" uses stock footage.

Reflections

In my last year at the University of British Columbia I made *Eye Dentified Image (5 min 1976)*. It was a portrait of a friend. I shot eighteen frames of him puffing on a cigarette and used these in a series of variations to produce the film. It was photographed indoors in a very orange light against a very strong dark background, like Rembrandt. The smoke patterns become visible in the slowed motion of the film, each frame is frozen and chain dissolved together. I zoomed closer and closer before the final sequence shows a superimposition of close-up abstractions which look like solar flares. It ends with a zoom-out which shows the entire frame. This

burn-out was my good-bye wave to the university.

That summer I began work on *Processed Gello (5 min 1977)*. I was on a macrobiotic diet and increasingly aware of food, so many of the film's images relate to eating. I found them in a tourist promo film for Florida. Searching for a way to order the images, I turned to Schoenberg's twelve-tone musical scale and adapted it for film. Each of the twelve tones was assigned a colour — with white corresponding to silence. It's a further evolution of *Spare Parts*, whose mathematical permutations provided a visual score that the image was subject to. I built a contact printer with David Rimmer to make the film on, bi-packed two loops, and ran them through a simple colour melody. I see these four films — *Good Friday, Spare Parts, Eye Dentified Image* and

Trance American Impressions

Processed Gello — as my art school period. Eventually I cut pieces out of all these films to make *Experimental Rhythms* — it's a structuralist "greatest hits" reel. All four films begin with footage that's optically manipulated in a calculated way, using strategies that are foreign to the original material.

In 1975 I was twenty-one and embarked on a Greyhound bus trip across the United States. I bought a super-8 camera with three rolls of film, hoping to shoot thousands of miniature slides, one frame at a time. Sitting opposite the driver at the front of the bus I began to shoot roadside Americana out the window. Later I blew up the footage onto a number of 16mm stocks — giving each section of the trip a distinct feel. Each of the single frames is frozen for five, ten, or twenty frames — a duration derived from my heart beat. If the heart beats seventy-two times per minute then one could produce temporal fractions — a ten-frame duration acting like a half-note, a five-frame shot like a quarter-note. This would eventually become *Trance American Impressions (30 min 1977)*. The film follows my trip down the West Coast from Vancouver to San Francisco where there were some pretty tough looking guys hanging around at five in the morning when we pulled in. I'm not very tall, so I just sat in one of those plastic chairs where they have the coin operated televisions and tried to avoid making eye contact with anybody. I took a trolley through San Francisco running to the end of the line, and shot some of that. Then I travelled south to Tijuana where I walked to the Mexican border shooting from the hip, frame-by-frame. Then it moves through the southern States and arrives in New York. The New York section runs from Harlem to the Bus Depot and ends with one of my musical heroes, Miles Davis, playing at the Bottom Line. During the trip I'd been taping radio stations across the country and I finished by taping this concert. I made a shortened version of the film called *Western American Impressions (20 min 1978)* which ends in Texas. A lot of the footage in the southern States shows black people which I cut out. I just wasn't sure how it would be interpreted.

MH: You mean simply showing blacks on the screen might be considered offensive?

PL: Yes, because I was photographing people.

MH: Were they doing weird things?

PL: Not particularly. Nobody ever said anything, but I didn't feel comfortable because of people's sensitivity about how ethnic groups are represented.

I was alone during most of the trip. It's good not always feeling tied to someone, you need time to think. But sometimes it gets too much, a long way from home, looking out of the camera's dark box, the dark box of the bus, into a road that replaces one infinity with the next. And money makes the world go round. If you're not throwing money at hotels and restaurants you're not treated in a friendly manner. [laughs]

In the fall of 1976 I got $5000 from the Canada Council to make *Trance American Impressions*, and I also made *Home Movie* and *Reflections* out of that grant. I left home in May 1976 and when I'd come back to visit I'd bring a camera along — usually video or super-8. When my parents came to Canada they left all of our family behind. I never had the problem of getting sick of my relatives because we never had any. One day I took my Bolex over and began to shoot my sister and parents, using extreme close-ups — forehead, nose, ears, mouth. It was a way of pointing out my origins, the physical links between us, of showing myself as a physical extension of my parents. I included some photographs of my parents when they were young to contrast with the way they look now. It's the same person, but they don't look the same. When I see the film today it's evident that my father was close to death, the lines on his face show excess drinking, bad lungs, and imbalanced diet, but it's tragic because they were his only real pleasures. He died shortly

after I shot the footage. It was very difficult emotionally to work with these images with him gone. It became a kind of ritual, a way of dealing with his death and the breakup of the family. That film became *Home Movie (12 min silent 1977)*.

MH: The film literalizes the notion of the home movie by shooting the home itself, and using it as the exclusive location. Was that a conscious strategy?

PL: Yes, at the time I was also shooting *Reflections* and I felt they were two aspects of the same gesture. One dealt with family relations, the social and personal, and the other dealt with being connected with a greater natural world. One was inside and the other outside. *Home Movie*'s construction is very simple, just one shot cut to the next without sound. The fact that it's silent is appropriate because in our immigrant household there wasn't much language, only simple expressions. Often there's very little movement in the scene except for the changing qualities of the light, and this was enhanced by periodically opening and closing the aperture. The camera often takes a turn at the window and opens the aperture, as if the outside is opening up to admit the presence of the inside, to allow us to see what's inside. The aperture's movement seemed to bring in the two polarities between which the film was forced to work — between the white-out that washed away the image and the darkness that made everything disappear. It's a very quiet and meditative film which allows the intimacy to come through, which is one of the reasons I was reluctant to exhibit it. I didn't just want to throw these personal images out in the world where people would be insensitive to something so personal. The film scene was still obsessed with structuralism so it seemed out of place there. And the art scene in Vancouver featured a lot of parody — Mr. Peanut running for mayor, leopard-skin saxophone quartets, all this Dada-meets-conceptualism-meets-Canada-Council-grants.

Home Movie

MH: Your early work breaks down into two parts. One stream is taken up with *Good Friday, Spare Parts, Eye Dentified Image, Processed Gello* and *Trance American Impressions*. These are structural works which are trying to develop new compositional techniques. You generate material and then subject it to a number of ordering strategies, whether *Trance American*'s heartbeat radio patter, the spatial mathematics of *Spare Parts'* montage, or the mathematical schema that generates the colour overlays of *Processed Gello*. Then there's another strain which deals in diaristic psycho-dramas. *Julia Dreams, Madcap Laffs, I Was A Teenage Personality Crisis!,* and *Commercials For Free* are all dramatic expressions keyed to the emotions of a male lead who is trying to connect with the outside — whether through woman, nature, or music.

PL: There are always these twin peaks: on the one hand the act of representing people, which invokes identification with the subject; on the other a more abstract work, which invokes identification with the image itself. These compositional strategies often came from modern music or painting. I never wanted to make just one kind of film, to develop a single, personal style which had to be repeated over and over — like Bruce Conner or Michael Snow. There's a diversity to my work that explores a number of interests. When I started making films I was quite concerned about newness and originality; fifteen years ago you always felt that what you were making was new because it was an avant-garde film. That isn't true anymore, because the avant-garde has become so institutionalized. As far as being on the leading edge is concerned, it's not really an issue for me. Everyone has so many influences now, our thinking is so dependent on so much that's around us, that it's more difficult to make the necessary separations that define something like an avant-garde. I remember after showing *Good Friday* I was approached by a Vancouver artist named Tony Onley who felt I should go out and film people walking out of movie theatres, bars, restaurants, everywhere. But the last thing I wanted to do was to get locked into doing a series. That's good for the galleries who sell artists. I'm always trying something new for myself even if it's not new for others. In the 1980s I started experimenting with some of the very earliest processes used to generate colour on film. So while it's an old technique, it was new for me, and that's always been important. If it's not a discovery, then what's the point? Perhaps the art world would have accepted me more readily if they'd been able to identify a Pete Lipskis style but I've done just the reverse.

MH: Is there an avant-garde now in Canada?

PL: A lot of what's considered avant-garde looks like a recycling of old avant-gardes. I think avant-garde resists the temptation to conform. Today there isn't much of a technical avant-garde — where are the technical frontiers? They're in

the corporations; expanding the language of cinema is being taken care of in the boardrooms. After punk rock in the 1970s, outrage has became a style, hardcore pornography is mainstream.

MH: Tell me about *Eclipse (5 min silent 1979)* .

PL: Astronomers announced a total solar eclipse in Goldendale, Washington. There's a wonderful miniature replica of Stonehenge thereabouts where I hoped to film the eclipse. But the hotels were full and it was raining so hard you couldn't see the sky, so we ended up driving back to a hotel in Portland. In anticipation of the eclipse I set up the camera looking out on the street and in the corner of the frame is a television set which showed live coverage of the eclipse. I ran one hundred feet of film at sixteen fps (about five minutes) during what they call totality. So the film begins in darkness, then slowly gets a little brighter on the streets. I kept changing channels, which were all showing different versions of the eclipse. The film juxtaposes the reality of the eclipse on the city streets with its media version. As you probably guessed, one is a whole lot more sensational than the other.

Dance Masks

MH: You touched on the documentary with *Home Movie* and *Eclipse*, but *Dance Masks: The World of Margaret Severn (33 min 1981)* takes a more conventional approach to portraiture.

PL: *Dance Masks* features dancer Margaret Severn who was born in 1901. There were no ballet companies in North America so her mother left for London. There she saw Nijinsky and Pavlova performing in the Russian Diaghilev ballet and was very inspired. After the First World War broke out, she went back to the US, taking odd dancing jobs where she could find them. There she met an artist working in New York who made beautiful theatrical masks. She worked in some big productions and was a hit in the 1921 *Greenwich Village Follies* but decided not to follow the company on tour. Instead, for the next seven years she performed with her masks in vaudeville shows across the country. Vaudeville was a bit like the Ed Sullivan show — they showed movies, musicians, comedians, acrobats, and magic acts. She performed before thousands of people but she wasn't an innovator or a dance modern like Martha Graham, so she was forgotten. During the 1920s she was one of America's most famous dancers; there are press books full of articles lauding her work. I guess that's how it goes — some people are famous for fifteen minutes and others are famous forever. *Dance Masks* was a way to remember, to bring something back. Like my later colour experiments it's a way to resuscitate a forgotten spirit.

The film combines old photographs and films, Margaret's paintings, and studio dances using her masks. From the beginning I was against shooting a talking heads documentary. I wanted to show her artistic vision at the height of her creativity, not concentrate on what this seventy-nine-year-old woman looks like today. The soundtrack was recorded one afternoon in which she answered a series of questions. She's very articulate, and I cut the track to produce the voice-over that runs the length of the film. When I finished editing picture and sound I applied to the Canada Council for a finishing grant. I asked for six thousand dollars for this thirty-three-minute film. They said forget it. I got a phone call from a local documentary filmmaker who'd been on the jury, who felt I should shoot some more NFB-style interview footage to make it longer. I explained I'd intentionally not shot any of this footage. He thought I would have more success with the film if I added another twenty minutes because I could sell it to television. But Margaret and I were happy with it the way it was. She was the oldest person I'd ever known and I was worried that she would die before I finished the film.

Margaret was the oldest person I'd ever known and I was worried that she would die before I finished the film.

MH: You made four films whose theme is colour — each borrows and reworks antiquated colour processes. How did you get interested in these old technologies?

PL: In the early 1980s people woke up to the fact that we were losing our film heritage because the original negatives were unstable. They called it the red scare because old

colour films were turning pink. Reading about efforts to preserve these films got me interested in colour separation and early colour processes in film. The Technicolor process, for instance, didn't have this problem of fading because they ran three black-and-white film strips through the camera at the same time, with red, blue, and green filters in front of each strip. Black-and-white stock is much less susceptible to fading than colour, so Technicolor prints look as good today as they did when they were shot. But Kodak introduced the Eastman monopack, a single strip of colour film which replaced the three-strip Technicolor, and that's the stock that's causing the fading problems. In 1982 I received a Canada Council B grant to research colour separation. What I discovered was that there's a lot more to the history of film colour than Technicolor. And the more I looked into it, the more I was fascinated by the inventors working in the early decades of this century. They were inventing a new apparatus and exploring uncharted territory. I learned about the differences between additive and subtractive colour — today's motion pictures are based on subtractive principles, where a white light moves through coloured emulsion projecting that colour on the screen. Additive colour on the other hand, is the basis of colour TV. There, white light is created by combining the three primary colours — red, green, and blue.

Motion picture exhibition in the early part of the century was becoming increasingly standardized — everything from projection rates, screen ratios, equipment, and the type of colour process used were subject to a uniform standard. Two additive methods developed at that time died out because they weren't practical for mass exhibition. The two types of additive printing were called "optical shared area" and "mechanical successive frame." In the successive frame process, the black-and-white film is filtered with a rotating disk in both camera and projector. One frame is filtered with a red-orange filter, the other with a green-blue filter. When they're projected, the frames alternate colour but because of our persistence of vision they blend, producing a flickering colour effect. It was patented in 1906 and called Kinemacolour. Before that films were tinted, toned, or hand painted. This was the first time that filters had been used to induce colour. *The Red Car (4 min 1985)* was produced using this method. Using colour film, I shot a friend painting his car. This was re-photographed onto black-and-white; alternating frames were exposed with an orange filter and a blue-green filter. I also re-photographed it with red, blue, and green filters, alternating every three frames — so I used both a two-colour, and a three-colour additive process. It flickers a lot and this is the reason the process failed — because it caused eye strain and "fringing" on fast moving objects.

Colour Experiments (13 min 16mm on video 1985) continued my interest in colour separation, using a method to simulate the three-strip Technicolor process. I set the camera up on a tripod and filmed parade scenes successively with red, blue, and green filters. I edited the original footage onto three parts and had them printed together. Everything stationary in the shot would be rendered in "natural" colour, while moving objects would show some variation of primary and secondary colours. The film opens with Queen Elizabeth in Vancouver in 1983, filmed in Kodachrome super-8 and blown up. It shows the whole state apparatus gathering steam around the Queen — the Mounties, the escorts, and motorcade. The final section of the film shows a fireworks display, a closing moment of spectacle. I shot the original in black-and-white, had a high contrast black-and-white copy made of the fireworks on double perf film, then flipped it around so it would be backwards, and printed both rolls with two different colours. So the image is essentially symmetrical, while the colours aren't.

2-Tone (Aquarelle)

2-Tone (Aquarelle) (10 min 1986) was originally a film I bought from a collector in the States. It's a documentary short about a French Olympic swimmer in the 1964 Tokyo Olympics. It's very artistically done and much of it was shot underwater, which is nearly abstract. I felt if I did something with this film it could be seen again. I printed the whole film onto double perf stock, which I flipped around and printed with its original — so they form a semi-symmetrical image. The A roll was printed with red light, and the B roll, the mirror image, was printed with blue-green light. The result is a symmetrical movement through water, washed over by both dominant colours. I didn't think it was necessary to add a soundtrack, especially in the age of music video where everything has a music track overlaid. There's a beauty to the silence — when you go to an art gallery you don't need muzak to appreciate a painting.

The Green Flag (7 min 1988) is another film that reworks found footage. I took the first minute from a 1970 documentary about the Indianapolis 500 auto race and repeated it seven times, subjecting it to different colour variations. In auto racing the climax of the race is really its beginning because all the cars are close together, everything building to a moment of maximum speed. In *Colour Experiments,* I simulated the three-strip Technicolor by shooting chronologically with red, green, and blue filters. With *The Green Flag*, I wanted to make a colour separation of something, so I chose this one minute of exciting film footage. I had it printed onto three black-and-white negatives — once each with a red light, a green light, and a blue light. Colour separation demands three black-and-white stencils, one for each emulsion layer, which are printed together to produce a colour image. What I did was shuffle these layers and come up with some variations — each a minute long. The film's seven minutes begin with the race footage in black-and-white, followed by six colour variations.

MH: Is there a relation between the colour variation and the race?

PL: No. I liked the footage because it had a green flag which acts like a green light, as well as a yellow flag in the pace car, so you can follow their colour changes through the variations. The cars move very quickly, and fast moving objects are one way to test for registration. If it's off, you get a lot of blurring and fringing. But the registration was perfect.

MH: *GT 86 (18 min 16mm on video 1986)* follows your interest in cars and racing. What does the title stand for?

PL: "GT" stands for grand touring. It's a kind of racing car. For me these are like avant-garde automobiles, not made by struggling artists but by multi-million dollar corporations. Part of being a filmmaker is the machinery, a fascination with tools, hardware, and technical processes. I've carried on a love affair with race cars since I was young and wanted to convey some of the excitement, as well as the ritual ambiance of the race. It's like a modern Valhalla in there, an old male ritual of fire and noise. In the second section of the film, cars are running through the pit lane while the sound rolls at half speed. In the third section the sound is restored to normal speed.

MH: Does art preach only to the converted?

PL: Of the thirty people who came to my show in town last year, half of them were my friends. But I don't intend to change what I'm doing to reach a larger audience. To reach the most people in this country you might as well work for Hockey Night in Canada.

MH: At what point does the practice become elitist and self-serving?

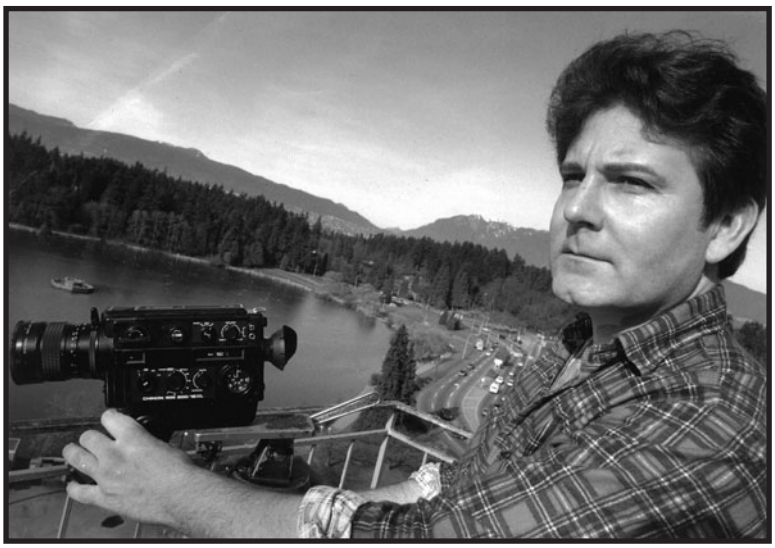
PL: When the artist becomes arrogant. Art's suffered because of the art bureaucrats but as long as people go to art school, there'll always be someone who wants to do something different. I remember the review Debbie McGee gave Dave Rimmer's films in the *Georgia Straight*. She said these films are a good argument for abolishing the Canada Council.

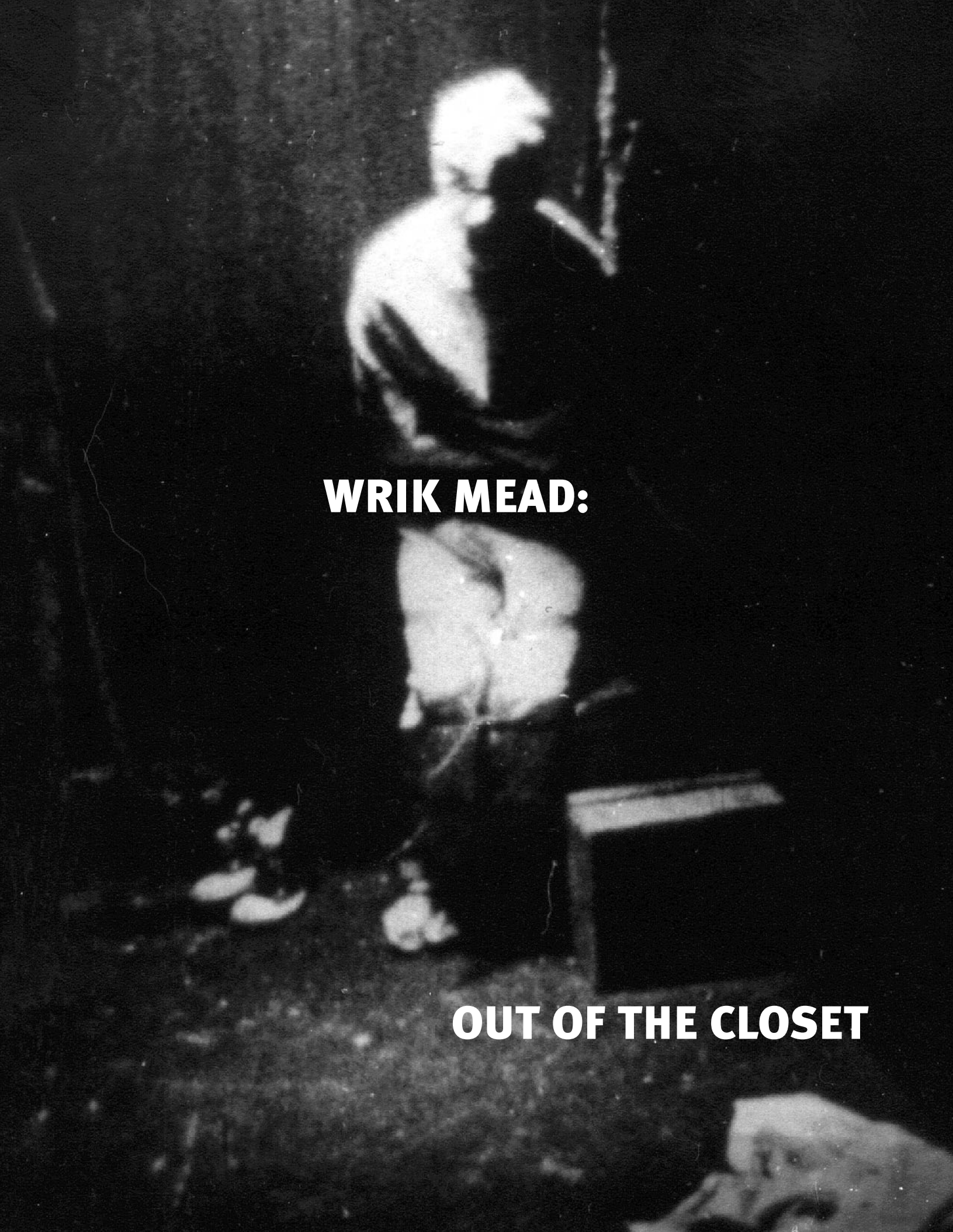
MH: But that reviewer is likely expressing the views of most of the audience.

PL: There's so much entertainment out there the market is saturated. What can you do? Line people up at gunpoint to watch your films? It's a dilemma. The bottom line for me is to keep making work I think is interesting. I don't lose sleep over audiences. I've remained pretty much outside of the official institutionalized art scene. I've lost faith in the integrity of the Canada Council and the film co-ops. I'm not optimistic, I'm cynical about a lot of people's motives. But as long as I'm fascinated by moving images I'll keep making work. There's always something new to discover.

Peter Lipskis Filmography

Julia Dream	3 min super-8 1973
Madcap Laffs	12 min super-8 1974
Good Friday	13 min 1975
I Was A Teenage Personality Crisis!	20 min super-8 1975
Spare Parts 1	0 min b/w 1976
Eye Dentified Image	5 min 1976
Processed Gello	5 min 1977
Trance American Impressions	30 min 1977
Home Movie	12 min silent 1977
Experimental Rhythms	20 min 1975-77
Western American Impressions	20 min 1978
Reflections	15 min 1978
Commercials For Free	20 min super-8 1978
A Face in the Crowd	30 min super-8 on video 1978
London	5 min 1979
Eclipse	5 min silent 1979
Dance Masks: The World of Margaret Severn	33 min 1981
It's a Mixed Up World	8 min 1982
Hollywood and Beyond	12 min super-8 on video 1984
Colour Experiments	13 min 16mm on video 1985
The Red Car	4 min 1985
Crystals	4 min 1985
Time Capsule	37 min super-8 on video 1985
2-Tone (Aquarelle)	10 min 1986
GT 86	18 min 16mm on video 1986
GT 88	18 min super-8 on video 1988
The Green Flag	7 min 1988
Another Day	7 min super-8 on video 1989
On and Off The Road	80 min video 1991





WRIK MEAD:

OUT OF THE CLOSET

Wrik Mead is the maestro of low-tech portraiture, working with a small group of friends to produce a gestural cinema of ritual and intimacy. Invariably photographed in super-8, his films are pointedly grainy, dirty, scratched, and ravishingly beautiful. They often last just three minutes, the length of a super-8 roll, showing a one-person performance directed towards the camera. If he prefers his actors naked, it is because he hopes to read, in their exposed flesh, the way the body has been bent to the rule of another's desire, subject to the gravity of opinion and consent. His figures struggle against the desire to conform, longing to touch, to be allowed to express a same-sex abandon. Over and over, Mead renders the act of "coming out" gay allegorically, showing his actors struggling against unseen forces which he creates by shooting one frame at a time. These live animations push and pull at the body, trying to find a way out of a universe they seem to inhabit alone. Pitilessly unromantic, often pessimistic, but filled always with a luscious materiality, bargain basement means, and a wry sense of humour, Mead's darkly drawn schemes of desire mark him as a potent new force of the Canadian fringe.

WM: I was a very bored waiter who'd been in the restaurant business for ten years and saw painting as a hobby. I had a friend who'd applied to the Ontario College of Art and told me about the process — that you sit with three different teachers and they critique your work. That interested me. I didn't want to go to school; I just wanted someone to look at my work and tell me if I should continue. Three months after the interview I got a letter saying "You've been accepted." I'd never taken an art class before, so it was a struggle at first. I thought a colour wheel was a way you applied colour, like a brush on a wheel, and I was too proud and embarrassed to ask what I didn't know. That's how I became friends with John and Dan [Moyen, the subject of *Deviate*] — we were the lamest in the class.

I tried to get into film my first year, but everything was full except for an animation course which was terrific. It was a very basic introduction, but I didn't take it too seriously because what I really wanted to do was paint. The film thing was just to have fun. In second year I was still focused on painting, but I wasn't learning anything. Basically I was getting studio time when what I wanted was to learn the right brushstroke. The teachers were alcoholics who would yell at us for showing up to critiques which they'd scheduled — and that was it for painting, I gave it up.

By then I'd started taking photography courses — I'd never done any of that either. I met Nancy there, Nancy Drew — the waiter at the Cameron. D'you know her? I loved her approach because it was like mine, playing around with what was possible, whether it was solarization or double exposure. We didn't have an enlarger so we used a slide projector, putting negatives and objects inside. And because there was no timer, you'd just flash the paper for a second, and we found amazing things there. That same excitement about discovery leaked into my filmmaking. I approach them both the same way, less technically than aesthetically.

I took Ross McLaren's class for two years, and he showed me there were others who did crazy things with film, that you didn't need a love story or an action thriller to be a filmmaker. I never had the skill to make perfect, straightforward looking things, so I had to do something else. I was never one of those photographers who took profound pictures of real life situations — I don't see them. I like playing, building up an image using layers of glass and collage until I get the right mood.

(ab)Normal

MH: What did you make of the experimental films you saw?
WM: I didn't connect with a lot of it; I still don't. But a few of them get me so excited, like the beautiful colours in Stan Brakhage's films. When I looked at work, I wanted to steal emotions. I would watch how someone could take a pan over a wall, slow it down, add a red filter, and all of a sudden it looked horrifying. I liked bits and pieces of movies for very selfish reasons.

The first film I made is called *The Face of Freedom*, which has my friend David in it. I didn't distribute it because it was too corny to take seriously. It was an experiment that showed me what was possible. Years later I asked David if he would be in another movie, *Closet Case*, and I reworked the same soundtrack. Both are about getting out of some-

thing. In *Freedom,* David was wrapped in this huge fishing net in a smoky red room. I asked him to move very slowly and shot it a frame at a time, which is how all of them are done now. Well, no, I have done things which aren't like that, but I don't like them. [laughs] It's a drag — you get to a point where everything you do now goes into distribution and you have to live with it. I wish I could erase certain films and only keep the good ones. At the time I think they're good, but a year later… Anyway, *The Face of Freedom* was too grand and too silly. He breaks out of the net at the end and walks past the camera and that's the end of the film.

MH: Why shoot a frame at a time?

WM: I can't hire real actors so I work with friends, and they don't know how to move properly. By shooting single frames the movement's abstracted and it gives me time to direct people. If we're shooting in real time and I want them to move from that tree over to the stairs and they turn, I can stop them and veer them off in the right direction without it looking too bad. And I loved the magical things you could do with animation, like in *Warm*. He can be up against one wall and then appear against the other, or dragged across the floor without anyone pushing him. I did do some things which I shot in real time and I hate them; I wish I'd pixillated them.

MH: Tell me about *It Helped My Mind Relax (3.5 min 1987)*.

It Helped My Mind Relax

WM: Many of the films are portraits; I ask people to do things that are my interpretation of them. My brother Kevin and I were going to art school together. He was a chronic smoker, very impatient, always worrying, didn't know what he was doing at school, skipping classes, panicking. We lived in a one-bedroom apartment and the living room where we shot the film was my bedroom. I had a very simple idea. I had one roll of film and wanted to shoot without editing. The roll of film that's in distribution is the same roll I put through the camera.

MH: Kevin never leaves the couch in the film and he's alone until someone appears briefly to light his cigarette.

WM: That's me, but I'm wearing sunglasses so no one would know. I have the cable release in one hand and with the other I'm lighting his cigarette. I thought it was necessary to have someone show up and light it for him. Later on I burn the back of his hand, punishing my little brother on film. I wanted something to set him off because he's quite complacent; he's reading a magazine, he's bored, he can't sit still, he needs people around all the time. Even now he's a party animal. He can't be alone. He always used to freak when we were young because I'd be in bed reading and listening to music by myself, and he'd be out with millions of friends and asking me, "How do you do it?" So I wanted to put him alone in a room without being able to deal with it. Burning the back of his hand was meant to set him off. That's when the blanket entraps him. It chills him out.

MH: What makes it look so gauzy?

WM: All my films are shot through glass. I wanted to get the feeling that you're watching someone through a window. I put dead flowers in front of the glass so that there's something between you and the scene. There's a shine off the glass, the light making layers. I wanted to break all the rules. The only lighting for *Relax* is from the table lamp beside him. My instructors told me, "You can't do that," and I said, "Oh yeah?" For me they were all tests, playing with the medium, seeing what's possible.

MH: Your next film, *What Isabelle Wants (3 min super-8 1987)*, was made in the same year.

WM: I did *Face of Freedom*, *What Isabelle Wants*, *It Helped My Mind Relax* and *Jesus Saves* all in third year at art school. Isabelle's a dear, dear friend, but a very selfish one. We were shopping at Goodwill, and I found the doll that's in the film and thought it was the most brilliant thing I'd ever seen. I fell in love with it. I'd never had a doll before in my life. I'm a fag, but I've never played with dolls. And she wanted it. I had it at my place for about a month and every time she came over she had to have that doll. One of those nights, about one in the morning, she bugged me about this doll and I said, "Okay, if you act in a movie for me, I'll give you the doll." It was very late, we were both stoned, and she was wearing the same crinoline dress the doll wore. We shot the whole thing in an hour with a couple of five-hundred-watt bulbs. It was something I'd already thought about, and when it had to happen, it did, and I loved the immediacy of it. *Relax* was shot in an hour as well. I find if I labour over something too much, baggage gets in the way. The film is about her wanting that doll so much, and she has such a way of getting what she wants that she makes it get up on its feet and come right on over to her, and she's got it in the

end. Then she says, "Isabelle gets."

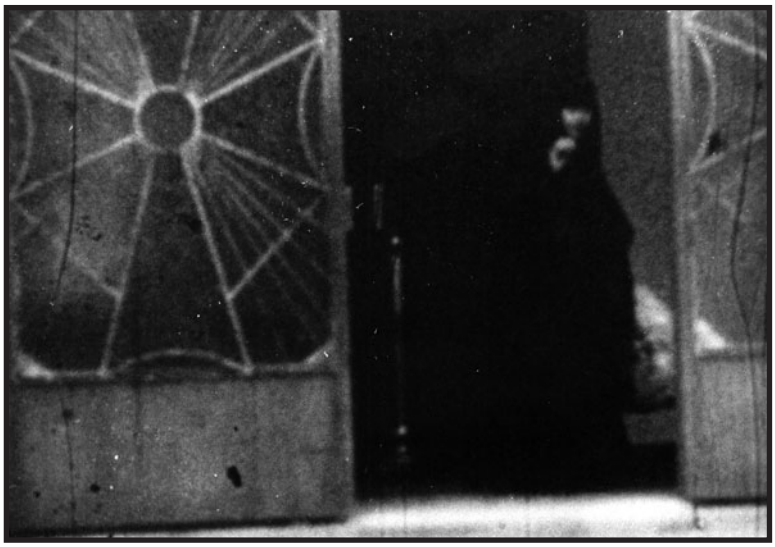
I used outdoor film indoors to give it a warm look and had her dress up like a ballerina. With her white hair she was very colourful, like we all were in the punk rock days, but in the background there's a pitchfork, and all sorts of rusted equipment. So there's a very pretty, childlike person with this mechanical background. She moves mechanically, like a big wind-up doll. In the first films I did I always yelled, directing the action like crazy. I still do that, I skip being friendly when it comes to making the film. I want it the way I want it; the Mr. Nice Guy routine dissolves. I feel like a different person. In real life I would never tell people what to do, but in film you've got to. I was pretty passionate about making films, watching films, making art. I had a fantastic time at art school after I gave up painting. In films you can build props and proportion and depth, you don't have to paint it.

I want it the way I want it; the Mr. Nice Guy routine dissolves. I feel like a different person.

MH: It's funny you arrived all at once at your style in film.
WM: I think that's a flaw. I wish I weren't so in love with that way of making films. I wish I could do something different. I try every now and then. The sad truth is, it's not interesting. I still find there's a lot I can do with pixillation. I'm not beating myself up that much. I wish I could get as excited doing things with film that aren't pixillated. In third year *Face of Freedom* did it for me; I knew it was what I could do.
MH: *Jesus Saves (3.5 min super-8 1988)* is different.
WM: I've always been fascinated by horror films, I've watched all the *Halloween*s. *Hellraiser* is one of the most beautiful films I've ever seen. I wanted to make a film that would disturb people, unsettle them without necessarily having blood and guts. I'd been a vegetarian for fifteen years and found the process of butchery that many took for granted horrifying. At the time I was preaching a bit. I wanted meat eaters to see what I saw, and putting meat on the shelf wasn't enough. I had to push it one step further and actually make this butcher a little more twisted. One day he realizes his customers are the meat they eat. He tells his story to a priest in a confessional on the soundtrack. My favourite shot was the last in the film. I happened to see a nun walking by and had my super-8 camera. Everything I'd done was so staged, but this was totally spontaneous. She's walking with her groceries and I'm setting up my camera — omigod, omigod, she's going to go — and I didn't say anything, but she turned on her own and waved at me and then went inside, and I knew that was the end of the film.

I shot pigs in butcher shops, pigs hanging in windows, and the "Jesus Saves" sign I happened to pass on the street, so the film built piece by piece. Then I wrote the soundtrack, and we watched the film while we recorded it, plugged directly into the projector, so when I say, "I nearly cut the nose off one of them," you see the animation panning down the pig with its nose cut off. At the end I say, "I nearly cut my damned finger off," and the animation shows someone chopping their own hand off and putting it in the frying pan and serving it up after. The optical printer was used to edit all the parts together without splicing tape. It was all optical printed, from super-8 to super-8, just for economic reasons. Recording the soundtrack directly onto the mag stripe of the film eliminated the expense of optical sound. I couldn't afford anything else.

I really liked the films but didn't expect others would enjoy watching them. I certainly didn't expect them to be as interested as they seem to be now. They were little art projects and that's it, and my film teacher had no idea what to make of them, so I assumed they were bad. Isabelle and Dan were great supporters; I could've pooped on paper and Dan would've loved it. After I left school, I dropped film. I'd been exhibiting artwork in galleries and I guess it was in 1990 that Kika Thorne called me. I didn't know her at all.



Jesus Saves

She said she was programming some super-8 stuff, and I asked her how she'd heard of me and said you don't want to see what I've done. But she programmed them in a series called *Token and Taboo* and that's when people started talking to me about them. Kika was so enthusiastic about them that I started thinking about film again. Later Kika asked me about showing in another program she was

putting together, and I didn't want to show the old stuff so that's when I made *Gravity (4.5 min 1991)*. I wanted to do something different because I felt that those were my student films and I didn't want to repeat that — I wanted to move on. *Gravity* was my getting back to rediscovering film and super-8.

I was doing faux finish painting, and Dan was my business partner and my absolute best friend in the world. I loved him to death; he knew every secret of mine. We were having a feud because he was always passing out and very tired. He was HIV-positive, but didn't know it. He went into the hospital with a bit of a cough and three months to that day passed away. It's hard for me to talk about it; it turned my world upside down. Just before going into the hospital, he was moving in with a boyfriend and I was moving into his apartment. He had this great apartment that was really cheap, and he didn't want to give it up in case things didn't work out. When Dan passed away, I went down to tell the super. Twenty-four hours later I was locked out of my apartment and told I was a trespasser, that I wasn't on any lease. I couldn't believe he was gone. It was far beyond anything I'd ever dealt with, and then to lose my home... I started working for others, doing a lot of film work, scenic painting, so I didn't have to think. In the middle of these jobs, I went to court to get my stuff — I was locked out for thirty days. The lawyers wanted me to ask Dan's parents to come down in front of a judge and say that I lived there, and I just couldn't — this is a mother and father who just spent three months in the hospital watching their son die. He turned twenty-six in the hospital, I could not do that to them, they were going to the cemetery every day. When I got back in, I saw my apartment had been ransacked while I'd been locked out. My boom box, 35mm camera, all the super-8 home movies of my childhood, my whole growing up was stolen. That's when I made *Gravity*, when my life was nothing more than waking up, going to work and watching TV. It's all shot backwards. It suggested a cycle that could run backwards or forwards. It was the same either way, you wind up in bed sleeping in the end.

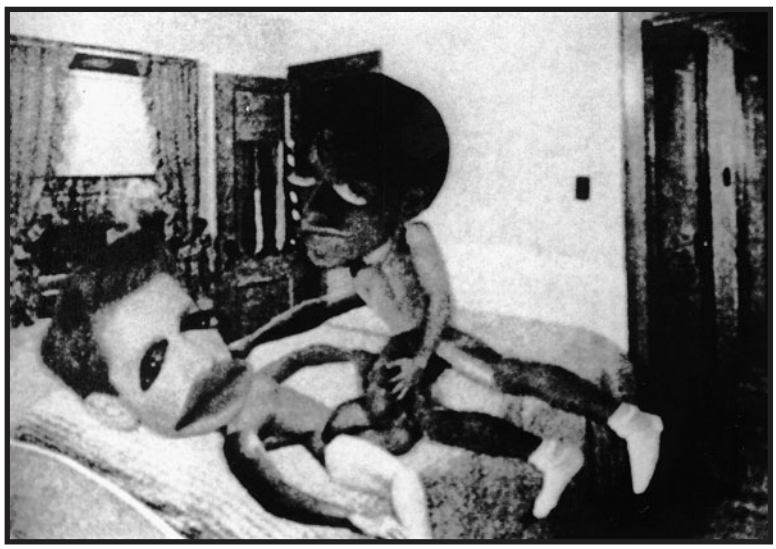
Gravity

MH: *Gravity* shows a man waking up, getting dressed, watching TV, then getting undressed and going back to bed, all the while listening to an exercise program.

WM: I was used to being in control of my life, especially at work, but now I was a baby again. That's what the soundtrack was for me — get up, stretch, move your legs; it's Jack Lalanne very aggressively telling this lethargic person what to do. The film shows a cycle which opens and closes in bed. I don't like that film right now, but I do like the soundtrack. I couldn't have written anything that worked better than what I found. That film got me out of the closet of not making films.

MH: Tell me about *Haven (2.5 min 1992)*.

WM: *Haven* was a reaction to the RCMP witch-hunt of gays in the 1950s. They invented this thing called the fruit machine, which was a box where you looked at lewd images of gay men while holding a bag of crystals, and if you started to sweat, the crystals reacted and set off an alarm. The RCMP also read lists of words while you held the crystals, and certain words showed you were gay: circus, dyke, grass, trees, bagpipe. All civil servants who were suspected of being gay were made to take the test, and if you sweated, you were fired. This experiment was hushed up until 1992 when I made the film; no one had ever heard of it. On the soundtrack I asked my brother to read the newspaper report on the experiments, including the long list of words that would show you're gay — camp, sew — and as he says these words, the two cartoon characters are getting turned on, you



Haven

know, like "camp," that's a real homo word, that'll get you going every time. [laughs] They just get right into it as soon as they hear those words.

MH: How did you make the characters?

WM: They're parts cut out of magazines. A piece of thread runs through each of the parts, so they have enough flexibility to move. This animated stuff comes from my art work. I do a lot of collage work, cutting out the guys and putting them in scenarios, so this film was an attempt to bring my film and my art together. The collage work shows slightly warped gay domestic scenarios. There's one where a guy makes breakfast wearing an apron, and the other is like Dad coming home from work with a three-piece suit and a briefcase, only he's wearing a bondage mask. *Haven* allowed these characters to move. I made the film from start to finish, from making the characters to shooting a single roll of film, in a couple of hours. I just thought, oh I'll make a film today. When they start having sex, the camera tracks in and you see very blurry pornography stuff, it's the nasty, close-ups of anal sex and blow jobs and stuff like that. After the guy orgasms on the soundtrack, it pulls back to the cartoon characters.

MH: I thought the out-of-focus footage was a direct response to the voice-over, which is attempting to code the homosexual. There are two people with big sad eyes, sad because of what he's saying, yet as they come together we can't really see this, their feelings. You can't hold a bag of crystals and understand anything about love, and you can't hold a camera in front of it either. That's why it has to be out-of-focus.

WM: I find really graphic stuff, especially close anal penetration, not as beautiful as the blurry stuff was. I wanted something smutty that wouldn't be graphic or greasy, which they always are in pornography. When I was through, Michael Balser curated it for the "Bodies In Space" show, and I was terrified. I thought it was just a silly little film and that people were finally going to figure me as an idiot. What does he do with his spare time? He gets these little characters to do the wild thing. But people seem to like it.

MH: *Warm (4 min 1992)* shows a naked man alone in a room struggling to get to his feet, to approach the camera, and then a hand extends and pulls him free, and he embraces his lover.

WM: *Warm* was the first film I started storyboarding in a loose way. It's about being alone and beating yourself up. I'm no good, I shouldn't have done that, I won't succeed. The force that's knocking him around is actually himself. It's not until someone reaches in and says you're all right that he calms down, the soundtrack calms down. I wanted to make another in-camera film but when I got the footage back the pace was all wrong. He was falling into walls too slowly, falling down too slowly. It just didn't move at all. So frame-by-frame I marked out where it needed to change — between frames 895 to 950, shoot every other frame, from 950 to 1050, double every frame. It was a horror story. I laboured over it so much to get it to the way it is now I became sick of it; I couldn't look at it any longer. It took me a few years to pull it off the shelf and make a soundtrack for it.

I've always had a problem with clothing in films. I love the human body. Clothing always tells the time, so I've started removing clothes and getting people naked. It's much more compelling to watch, more personal, and you can really see what these people are going through, instead of watching their clothes.

MH: Tell me about *Homebelly (8 min 1994)*.

WM: It's a portrait of Donna. We went to school together, and each summer she would go back to Alaska to work in the canneries. She was always wondering whether to stay in Toronto because of her friends or go to Alaska which felt like home, and the film narrates this dilemma. She's collected about five or six rocks, each about ten to twenty pounds, and each waxed and polished. She's travelled extensively and the rocks always go with her. I always said I have to make a film about you and your rocks. So there's a battle between her sleep and this rock which is trying to wake her up, and I had to be careful that it wasn't beating her up; it just gently leans up against her. Originally the whole film was just that bedroom scene. Then I wanted to show her dreaming, so I went out into a terrible storm on the island, got frostbite in one finger, and shot the snow and the trees. I superimposed that with the bodies of two women. The first time they appear, the bodies are back to back. The second time they turn to face each other, and in the third they embrace, but their embrace can only happen once she's made peace with her rock, once her decision's been made. The rock is an

Homebelly

image of her problem. She's trying to get into this other state, and it keeps waking her. Finally she falls asleep. She's having this dream, and just before the two women reach for each another, the rock wakes her and won't let them. Because the rock moves when she's awake, the line between dreaming and every day is blurred, as if it's all going on in her mind. Donna wasn't too thrilled about that angle. Though she's lived with and dated women for many years, she's now dating a man. She felt it named her as a lesbian and she feels very bi, very open, but if I'd used a straight couple then she would have been named as a straight person. It had to be one or the other.

MH: *Closet Case (3.5 min 1995)*, like *Warm*, shows a single male figure caught in a room, trying to rise and move towards the camera, but always pushed away by unseen forces.

WM: I called it *Closet Case* because I wanted to make a coming out film; it's my ode to the gay world. I think people, even gays, forget how difficult it was. I had it relatively easy. When I was eleven, my mom told my brother and I that if we were gay that was fine, that it would be a very difficult life, but it was okay with her. I broke my virginity with a guy when I was thirteen. He's now straight and works as a butcher. We got totally pissed drunk and it happened. I woke up the next morning and it absolutely horrified me. He came to my place the next morning, my straight friend, knocking on the window like nothing was wrong, "C'mon let's go

Closet Case

out," and I said I wasn't feeling well and then I couldn't be friends with him anymore. We'd done something that was too real for me, something I'd tried to repress. All my fantasies while I was masturbating were always about men, ever since I was seven years old. But I was dating lots of women, sleeping with lots of women, trying to prove something. I had a negative feeling towards homosexuals when I was a teen because you're always told you'll want to wear dresses, lisp, and have a limp wrist. You'll be a waiter or hairdresser for the rest of your life, or worse, an artist. I don't think a lot of people understand how horrifying it is to grow up and think what you are naturally is bad. I think I had it easier than most and still went through hell.

You're always told you'll want to wear dresses, lisp, and have a limp wrist. You'll be a waiter or hairdresser for the rest of your life, or worse, an artist.

When I was eighteen I slept with my best friend, whom I didn't find sexually attractive in the slightest. But I thought, here are all my straight friends sleeping with any woman just to get inside them, and if I was truly gay I should be able to sleep with any guy. My best friend was hot for me and constantly pressuring me to sleep with him. Well, I did it one night and I was horrified, crying on the inside that this is not right, I don't love this person, I should never have done this. I remember walking home after and thinking I've got to be straight, that was too terrible for me to be gay. It's absurd to think I've gone through that, but there was no encouragement. No one ever said, "Oh Wrik, you like that guy Bill, isn't that sweet." They would say you're warped, you're a faggot. Many people in my high school were beaten or tied up with pink ribbons. You watched TV and the only homosexual you ever saw was the object of ridicule, or a drag queen, or assaulted. There was no one to look up to, no regular guy who was a phenomenal person. Then there's the negative stereotypes, that if you're gay you must sleep around. You know, Steve and I have one of the best relationships of anybody I know. It's been seven years now, and it's still absolutely phenomenal. He's the kindest person I know. It's a lot of work but...

Closet Case came about because of all those struggles. Like when a friend told me about his brother who made him suck him off. The film itself is very simple. It shows the struggle of a man to come out of his bondage suit. I wanted to do a threeminute, in-camera film. There's no splicing; everything's shot in sequence. I was frustrated that *(ab)Normal* was taking so long, and I thought I'd burst if I didn't do something. I wanted to re-do *Face of Freedom*, my first film, keeping the soundtrack, but narrowing the scope. This film isn't about everyone's freedom, but gay freedom. I sewed the

costume in a lovely tan cotton with light brown leather straps. I didn't want a bondage outfit of rubber or leather. Because it's made out of cotton it's softer, it's a gentleman's bondage outfit, with a strait jacket and mask.

MH: You'd never collaborated with anyone before making *(ab)Normal (19 min 1995)* with Isabelle Auger. Why the shift?

WM: I'd never dealt with a crew, so I thought it would be out of my league to do a twenty-minute film by myself. And I wanted Isabelle to start making films again. So I asked her, why don't we make one together? There was a Canada Council deadline for film grants a week away and we didn't have work for a week. That's when we came up with a storyboard and a budget. We think very much alike, we see the story happening rather than writing dialogue. I had an idea for a film where someone would be caught in a box that would get smaller and smaller. That's one idea Isabelle fine-tuned. She thought of a crate with light coming through the slats, which worked wonderfully. But that couldn't last for twenty minutes. So maybe we should make a bunch of short films. I had an idea for another film where this guy masturbates with something which comes to life. It would be a dildo that would run in and out of the body, and wouldn't that be cool to pixillate. Then Isabelle said, what if there were two guys? We'd bounce back and forth until we found what we wanted. She wanted to make a scene where things are stripped away, objects disappear throughout the scene. There's a couple and while he's frozen in front of the TV, she opens the curtains, and as soon as she walks away from them, they disappear. Then she waters the flowers, and as soon as she leaves them, they disappear. She picks up the phone, as soon as she hangs up, it's gone. At the end, when the camera's closing in, whatever's at the edge of the frame, just before the camera passes it, it disappears, and when nothing's left in the room they see each other and embrace. That whole scenario was organized by Isabelle. None of these ideas could last for twenty minutes, so what about piecing them together with something that connects? As we talked, we realized that the common theme was couples — they all had couples in them.

MH: Was the progression of couples deliberate?

WM: The straight couple are so wrapped up in the objects in their lives they don't appreciate they have one another. They take one another for granted and don't realize how lucky they are — and find out at the end when everything's disappeared. The box scenario was about two women who smother each other and disappear. The last scenario is about bad timing, when people aren't in tune with one another. Two men lie in bed, one wants sex but his partner has rolled over, asleep. A dildo appears and crawls all over him, and when he's done he falls asleep. Then the other wakes up because he wants to have sex but it's too late. The title insists that these couples are all natural, from nature. Homosexuality is natural, straight is natural, lesbians are natural, the way we fight with each other is natural, so we used nature and animals as themes to draw it all together.

The scenarios are connected with landscape pans which people talk over. Initially we were going to appropriate phrases from talk shows but I couldn't find any gay representation; gay couples only talk about politics, never their intimate relationships. I taped every talk show for two months and it was painful. There's all these straight people going on about themselves, but gay couples have no part in any of this. That's when we decided to do something more personal. We asked a couple of friends if we could record a conversation about relationships. Carol is a new lesbian; she's mostly dated men but now sees women. John used to be married but now he's gay, and it was important for us to have people who could talk about men and women, to get gay and straight viewpoints.

(ab)Normal

MH: They speak a lot about power and intimacy and the heart's turf, which wraps well with the wordless couple scenarios we watch throughout the film. Each couple seems to play out their lives in the background of these words. They're like a Greek chorus.

WM: We wanted to hear the bad stories, the relationships that went awry, like John's marriage ending badly, but when it got to taping he didn't want to talk about it. But the more we played the tape the more we heard. We gave them the background of the film, and brought the storyboard and talked them through all the ideas, and while we didn't tell them what to say, in the end Carol says it all comes back to territory and then she laughs because it's what she was supposed to say.

MH: *Deviate (3.5 min 1992)* is a work of mourning that

returns to your friend Dan. It seems motivated by anger at how he was treated after death.

WM: Yes. The priest at the service made many fatal errors in describing Dan, saying a young man in his thirties shouldn't be deprived of his life. He was twenty-six! We all looked at one another. He said something about being a practising Christian. Dan studied Buddhism. His parents were devout Catholics, but he was one of the great experimental thinkers at art school. I was shocked that he wasn't kicking the grave open. If anything was going to make him come back, this service would have. But to make his parents feel better, we all had to hear these lies. They invited people Dan hated, like childhood friends who would beat him up for being a faggot. He didn't like his parents, never saw them. We were his family, but because he didn't have a written will, the decisions were left to them. It broke our hearts. We knew he would've been horrified to learn he'd ended up in a devout Catholic cemetery out in the middle of nowhere with electric towers all around. It just hurt so much to deal with all of that.

I wanted the real Dan, not all this phony priest shit about how great he was.

I was in the hospital with him at least every other day for three months, and he disintegrated quite rapidly. It was very difficult to watch, for his parents as well. His mother and sister and I became very close. I helped them get through a couple of really difficult moments. It was frantic. At the funeral his father embraced me and said, "We consider you family, anytime you want, please come visit, you're wonderful people."

I was asked by the curators of Clamorous Intentions to make a film for their AIDS art exhibition, but the film was secondary to the experience which led to it. I talked to Claire about it (she grew up with Dan, they were childhood friends), and another childhood friend, Dave Sermon. We'd been talking about going up to the grave, and the film gave us a reason to go. I decided not to cry, but to celebrate our lives and our memory of Dan. We even poured a little champagne onto the soil so he might get a little drink if he was thirsty. We were looking for flowers or something to take to him and it happened to be Halloween time. I don't know whether you can see it in the film, but there's a pop-up skeleton head, a toy skeleton on a spring. We took him a bouquet of flowers with this little skeleton head sticking out and left it there. Apparently his parents came soon after and were horrified at something so satanic and evil, and I was sickened, I have done an evil thing, I've hurt two people who've suffered enough. Later I talked to my friends and told them we'd really hurt the family. They laughed and said we had a wonderful afternoon, it was so difficult to go out there, that was our ceremony. We were his family, the ones who really loved him, and we hadn't called them and told them how hurt we were by their Catholic rituals. If you said the word "shit" in front of them, they'd dismiss you forever, so don't be upset. We had a wonderful day. We sat on his headstone and talked about Dan, and I brought a tape recorder along. I wanted the real Dan, not all this phony priest shit about how great he was. He was a pain in the butt. He was the most beautiful human being on earth — that's who he really was. But it's all said in love. I didn't care how the film came out. That's Dan on the couch yelling at people and saying "fuck off." Claire took that of Dan when he was fourteen, and I slowed it down so all the zooms were a little gentler. I projected it inside the frame.

MH: Why the frame?

WM: The old artist in me. It's like a bedside tableau. I have framed pictures of Dan all over the place, so it was like having a live bedside picture of someone you love. With flowers and a little plane because he collected them, and a watch. Not much happens visually; originally that bedside image was going to be just a part of the film, but I wanted people to listen because the words were so important.

MH: Why the title *Deviate*?

WM: Because the film was about Dan. He was the thorn in normal people's sides. He thought differently and was aggressive about it. He would tell you you were stupid for being straight, you're just following the norm, you're not really straight. He was really into extreme thinking — he would pick his nose because he knew it was socially unacceptable, he would tell you the graphic things he'd do while masturbating because he knew it would make you uncomfortable. That's the kind of guy he was, very aggressive and

Deviate

the sweetest friend you could ever have. He left us in a way no one could have guessed. He was such a life force. That's why I called it *Deviate*.

Wrik Mead Filmography

It Helped My Mind Relax	3.5 min 1987
What Isabelle Wants	3 min super-8 1987
Jesus Saves	3.5 min super-8 1987
Gravity	4.5 min 1991
Haven	2.5 min 1992
Deviate	3.5 min 1992
Warm	4 min 1992
Homebelly	8 min 1994
Closet Case	3.5 min 1995
(ab)Normal by Wrik Mead and Isabelle Auger	19 min 1995
Frostbite	12 min 1996

ANNETTE MANGAARD:

HER SOIL IS GOLD

Annette Mangaard's work explores the relation between a traveller's fleeting impressions and their dreamed double in art. The maestro of the oblique autobiography, she has culled events from her own life and refashioned them into meditations on power and femininity. Her movies have taken her around the world — from Egypt and Venice, the Arctic and Belize, all in search of a matriarchal lineage she is intent on reconstructing as an image of home. Her first films were made in super-8, while her more recent works have been made entirely in 16mm. And while her early films take up the two genres most closely associated with the super-8 form — the home movie and the travelogue — her work in 16mm is informed by more overtly public concerns. She has increasingly turned to the family as the site of reproduction — of values, memory and character. With a keen wit and an eye for surreal juxtapositions, Mangaard shows us that the police are to society what dreams are for the individual.


Annette Mangaard

AM: I went to the Ontario College of Art between 1976 and 1980, mostly doing painting and printmaking. After I was through, I headed up to the Arctic for a year. I brought a super-8 camera along and that started my life in the movies. While I was there I was so lonely and isolated I decided that when I got back to Toronto, I would start doing all the things I'd always wanted to do — like act and make movies.

MH: Why film?

AM: It's a mixture of power and romance. The National Gallery boasts an average attention span per painting that's twice the time people spend looking at work at the Metropolitan in New York. At the Met the average time per work is one-and-a-half seconds, and at the National Gallery it's three seconds, but I need more than that. For an audience, cinema begins at the box office; they invest in the work, and then they wait for their return. And in a dark theatre there's no distraction; there are many ways to look at a film but only one direction to see it in. Finally, movies are a part of our lives. Everyone sees them, even people like my parents who have never gone to a theatre. Now with TV, the films come to them. Everyone can relate to what I'm doing because everyone watches moving pictures.

MH: You didn't have any kind of training?

AM: When I started making films I audited Ross McLaren's classes at the Ontario College of Art, but he didn't get into the technical side of things so I stopped going. I just needed someone to tell me how to splice, how to take a light reading, so I joined the Funnel Film Co-op and asked people there. I never studied film; I just picked it up as I went along. I don't like schools.

MH: Is that when you started watching different kinds of film?

AM: I never saw films analytically, as how-to demonstrations. I'd get so engaged, I'd just watch. I'm the kind of person who goes into a theatre, and even if the film is terrible, and I have to go to the bathroom, I won't go because I'm involved, I'm inside it. Sometimes I'd go watch films at the Funnel, and to tell you the truth, I had a hard time with a lot of them. Often I didn't understand what the filmmaker was getting at, or why different kinds of material belonged in the same work. I don't know if people feel the same about my stuff. I've given workshops in communities that don't see a lot of work and I never get that response. But maybe that's because my work isn't really experimental.

MH: What does "experimental" mean?

AM: Nobody knows. [laughs] I'm talking about experimental as a genre — filmmakers dealing with aspects of cinema (sound, image, grain) as pure objects of inquiry. Whereas I'm exploring something and using those devices to get inside the subject. The formal aspects of filmmaking are not what I'm interested in making films about.

MH: Tell me about your first film.

AM: I began several films at once. In 1984, I accompanied Eric Snell to an arts festival in Bath, England. He'd been commissioned to create a line out of pink plastic between two art galleries in Bath. It took two weeks to hang. It was raining the whole time, in freezing cold weather. We worked from sunrise to sunset on slippery English slate roofs, and I'm afraid of heights. [laughs] As I was there helping with the line's construction, I thought, why not shoot it? *Line Through Bath (15 min 1984)* was shot on super-8, edited on video, and then I packed it off to the artist. Now I don't even have a video copy myself, so the work's fairly invisible. Like *A Dialogue With Vision (1990)* it's a documentary about art.

MH: And like *Dialogue*, it's focused very exclusively on the art itself, as opposed to its context. Given that this pink line re-marks the city it would seem an obvious impulse to document the setting and its population.

AM: Maybe I'm anti-social. The same is true of *A Dialogue With Vision*. I don't know why I didn't shoot anybody looking at the art but it didn't occur to me. *Bath* begins with a series of jump cuts which show the town before the line runs through it. It ends after the line's completion and runs through a similar series of jump cuts.

MH: You deal with art and artists a great deal in your work and your statement remains consistent throughout: that creation is essentially solitary, removed from the everyday.

AM: When Eric built the line through Bath he had all kinds of people working for him, climbing buildings, searching out points where it could be tied off. But ultimately it was his decision — which cornices on which buildings would be tied off, with how much tension and how much material.

MH: Did *Nothing by Mouth (10 min super-8 1984)* follow this film?

AM: I worked on both at the same time. *Nothing by Mouth* is based on three poems by Karen McCormack, and the film is really an audio-visual duet of image and text. I walked with the poems in my brain and noted things I thought would fit. Then I would come back with my camera and start shooting. It was very relaxed and intuitive. Over the course of its ten minutes, the film describes a solitary passage through a number of spaces, drawn from glimpsed and isolated moments. The second poem, which gives the film its title, is given the most literal treatment. I had a friend who worked in a hospital and she snuck me in after hours to shoot. I'm wheeled into an operating theatre and put under an anesthetic, but you only catch glimpses of me — my feet are poking out from the sheets. I'd had an operation and almost died and this sequence replayed that experience. It has a feeling of doomed solitude, that you'll never wake up again. By showing my feet on the hospital bed as it's wheeled into the operating theatre, I suggest the body of the patient. But by withholding its representation, by not showing this body, I allow the viewer to enter into it, to feel it as I did.

Let Me Wrap My Arms Around You

Any way you look at it, someone is either sticking something into you or taking something out of you.

MH: What does "nothing by mouth" mean?

AM: It's a sign nurses put over your bed when you're having an operation — you can't eat or drink, so you're fed intravenously.

MH: Tell me about *She Bit Me Seriously (20 min super-8 1985)*.

AM: I talked a couple of friends into shooting and acting. I wanted to make a film about sex using two women who would talk about men in very different ways.

MH: So this wasn't scripted?

AM: It's all real, very natural dialogue. We'd usually drink a bottle of wine and then roll the tape recorder. I hadn't been in a relationship for three years, and she'd just been through a bad one so the timing was right. I felt that unless there was a deep intellectual bond you shouldn't have sex, and she just wanted to go out there and do it all the time. So the film carries these two sides. Each side is represented by themes that symbolize our differences. My character is always making pasta, looking for recipes, shopping, cutting, drying pasta. The other woman is constantly seeking out new and exciting places to play pinball. The pinball metaphors are accompanied by these very blatant sexual images: like a big pneumatic drill boring into the pavement or shifting the throttle of a car. In the end, you see assembly line chickens getting their guts sucked out of them, which shows that you're fucked either way. [laughs]

MH: What does this say about sex?

AM: [laughing] I thought at that time it wasn't a good thing — that you couldn't be happy and have sex. Any way you look at it, someone is either sticking something into you or taking something out of you.

MH: The visual metaphors are so obvious, yet because of the way the soundtrack is broken up, you don't know who's speaking or about whom. It offers details of these women's lives without any sense of the whole picture. And somehow

the visuals work off these fragments.
AM: The music's important as well. About two-thirds of the way in we see a woman punch up a tape called "Tell Me About Your Love." It goes: "Tell me about your love — is it possession, is it passion, is it destruction, is it deception..."
MH: What about the opening passages?
AM: They're home movies of me as a child. I'm wearing little sunglasses and dancing with a doll. I wanted to suggest a vulnerability and innocence. In the end, the opposite's happened because you're seeing workers on the assembly line sticking nozzles into dead chickens. The film moves from innocence to experience using a home-movie style.
MH: With your later work you've been successful in getting it shown but your earlier stuff is relatively unseen. How come?
AM: I didn't think of doing it and didn't know how. But now I realize that unless the films make money, I can't continue anymore.
MH: Why the change?
AM: I'm older and have different expectations. When I made *She Bit Me* I lived above a fishstore in Kensington Market with no heat and it smelled so bad no one would come visit me. The rent was cheap, but I don't want to live like that anymore.
MH: Did you think of yourself as a filmmaker when you were making these early films?
AM: No, that happened about a year ago. [laughs] My first screening was in the spring of 1985 at the Funnel's "Cache Du Cinema" which showed over 100 films in seven nights. If you were a member of the Funnel, you were asked to screen your first film, so I showed *She Bit Me Seriously*. I was very excited, but there were some people who spoke with my friends and said it was terrible. I was devastated. I didn't really know what I was doing. I never learned how to make "films," but I had a gut feel the film worked. I was hurt when they called it unprofessional. Now I think it's one of my best films.
MH: One of the great ironies about independent film production is that the clumsy, dramatic-style shooting with lights, cameras, cables, and crew obliterates its environment but creates a very accessible surface for its audience. Rushing out with your super-8 allows you to move in concert with your surroundings, to become a part of it, but this kind of filmwork creates a very alienating surface for audiences.
AM: People understand stories. I'd like to use a mix of constructed scenes and spontaneous shooting — that's the way *A Dialogue With Vision* developed. We shot a great deal with the crew, but I also shot with my Bolex, and we ended up using a lot of that. The spontaneous stuff gives it a more intimate, personal, human aspect.
MH: You've always worked very hard — where did the motivation come to make stuff that wouldn't have a public life, that didn't even offer the slim returns that age and reputation bring?
AM: Innocence and determination. I really enjoyed the making, and the feeling when you finish is unbelievable. I'm not sure that's true anymore. I've become a lot more critical, and when I've finished something, I feel the film isn't enough. It should be more complete, or larger, or more together. I used to be very naive about cinema and could therefore continue. When I started in 1984, I was happy to work at the library three days a week, not own anything, drift, make these films.
MH: Why did you shift to 16mm for *Her Soil is Gold (10 min 1985)*?
AM: I wanted to make 16mm films then the way I'd like to make 35mm films now. I was tired of being excluded from programs because my films were made in super-8. They simply couldn't be shown anywhere. If you sent them to a festival, you might get a film back or you might receive a can of spaghetti. I wanted something more permanent. I still love the look of super-8, but between the limited possibilities of post-production and impossible exhibition, it was time to move on, to go public. The work needed to become more accessible and that was partly reflected in the larger gauge.


Her Soil Is Gold

MH: Can you describe *Her Soil is Gold*?
AM: It's about a trip to Egypt which is shot in super-8 and optically printed. It moves through the streets of downtown Cairo, into the suburbs and out to the pyramids. I thought it was a laugh that the pyramids are in the suburbs! Then it moves onto a boat in the Red Sea where tourists float towards a little white-sand island and make a barbecue.
MH: Tell me about the title.
AM: "Her" is Egypt, and "Her soil" is the stepping ground for thousands of years of riches and ruin. Like a typical Canadian, I understood its history in terms of its geography.

MH: The film is careful to make a distinction between the urban poor of Cairo and the pyramids beyond, a distinction based on money. The pyramids were built for the rich by their subjects, and while the poor continue to work in the shadow of these monuments, the pyramids are never revealed as a part of their lives. On the other hand, the tourists are also cut off from these pyramids. The history of these fairy-tale leftovers has been replaced by travel posters and King Tut greeting cards. Both groups are alienated from the past, the first because of their wealth, the second because

There is in Power…Seduction

of their history.

AM: I've always had this image in my mind of what the pyramids would look like. And when I got there I thought they looked just like all the pictures, only the pictures were better!

MH: Over the centuries we've accumulated an enormous image archive of ancient Egypt. Today we mummify with our cameras. Your images are a part of this long line of pictures. How do they relate to what's gone before?

AM: I don't think mine were any different, I probably took them from the same angle. No matter how the camera approaches, we never learn any more about them — they're simply sitting there. And this place where knowledge stops — where you can't understand anything more — that's death. There's never any question of understanding death, only accepting it.

MH: You recite a text in the film — what's that about?

AM: There's been a very heavy tourist industry in Egypt for hundreds of years. The text relates the destruction that tourism has wrought over the centuries. The film closes with the tourists on the boat and a song by The Palace At 4:00 A.M. called "White Guilt." The title says it all. But I still felt like an invader. That's one of the reasons I'm more interested in fiction now — it avoids the ethical problems that plague any kind of documentary making. And much of experimental film shares a documentary base. When I lived in the Arctic, I didn't shoot much because pulling out a camera would have been the biggest *faux pas* in the world. So the film that I'm making about the experience, *Let Me Wrap My Arms Around You (28 min 1992)*, narrates my own feelings but shows a more exterior view. It doesn't push into people's homes. The only shots of other people come from a public day of celebrations, games and sports. Anything else would have been trespassing.

MH: How do you feel about the camera in your own life — when it's introduced into intimate situations?

AM: *Let Me Wrap My Arms Around You* includes footage of myself and my lover, though not in a particularly intimate way. I felt strange about it and debated endlessly over using it or not. Finally, I made a video copy and sent it to him and he laughed and thought it was fine, and then I felt okay. I wouldn't have included it if he felt he was being used. I decided to make a fiction out of it and leave the explicitly personal material out. I don't want to use my life to make autobiographical work anymore. If I was making *She Bit Me Seriously* today, I'd turn it into a drama. I just wouldn't ask someone to expose themselves for a film like that. Making personal work and entering a foreign country are both acts of appropriation. You're not living your own life anymore; it becomes a script for the film you're always working on.

MH: Can you describe *There is in Power... Seduction (5 min b/w 1985)*?

AM: Like *She Bit Me Seriously* and *A Dialogue With Vision*, it features two women. The first is a corporate type complete with business suit, heels, and purse. She sits in an office behind a grand desk filled with telephones and files. Her voice-over narrates a series of meditations or axioms on power. It runs through everything from body language to answering the telephone, showing how these simple gestures express power. The second woman is seen through a projected slide of the jungle, moving to music. It's very lyrical and abstract, often using in-camera superimposition to suggest a soft-edged seduction. Her voice-over narration is taken from a book called *Aphrodite*, and the passage concerns the preparations of a courtesan. She employs a slave to braid her hair, rouge her nails, soak her skin in oils. These two situations run parallel, comparing the corporate and the sexual, office power and bedroom power.

MH: There's a whole series of divides in the film — between the mythical and contemporary, passion and reason, decoration and utility. But by the end, the binaries seem aspects of the same thing.

AM: The voice-over is the bed track. It's the bed for the viewer — you lie down there, it's comfortable. Both women exercise power, and even though they arrive there from different directions, the effect is the same.

MH: Both women are cut off from the world that's surrounding them, like the protagonists in the rest of your work. They're photographed in studio settings. The woman behind the desk suggests the ego at work, while the other seems to exist entirely on the surface of her body.
AM: I feel the veiled woman is finally more seductive because of the tone of the voice-over, which is very soothing and quiet. And the uncertainty of her shape demands that the audience imagine the rest of her. The woman behind the desk is all there. What you see is what you get, so there's a balance between the two. They come together across the splice bar and their mutual pursuit of power. Power exists in the smallest things we do — having breakfast, tying shoelaces, replacing lightbulbs. What these two women make explicit is the way power already inhabits our bodies, and knowing that means we can exercise it when we want to.
MH: Can you tell me about *The Iconography of Venus (5 min 1987)*?
AM: *Iconography* deals with representations of the ideal and the way this has come to reside in the bodies of women. I collaged a number of women photographed in super-8 with artists' renderings of Venus through the centuries. There's Princess Anne in England getting out of her limousine, an old woman in Greece walking along a wall, a pianist, a woman slowly moving in a tub bearing reflections of leaves and branches, a woman paddling a canoe, and crowds of photographers gaping at the Mona Lisa. The soundtrack is an operetta — I wrote the words and Suzanne Palmer sang it *a cappella*.
MH: The Venus of the film's title relates to a number of Venuses shown in the film: the earth mother *Venus of Willendorff*, Botticelli's *Venus*, the *Mona Lisa*, but also yourself. You open and close the film by laying the film's titles, lettered on transparent sheets, over your own stomach. How do you relate to these Venuses?
AM: I feel I've been set up by society because of the way I look. As a woman, I'm surrounded with images I'm expected to copy and it's very intimidating. And then there's pressures about having kids before a certain age, after which your body becomes even less perfect. I'm not as concerned about all this as I used to be, but when I was nineteen I felt overwhelmed, and the film returns to that time in my life. You're only a body, a surface, and if there's something not quite right, then you don't get work. It has to do with paying the rent.
MH: Tell me about the portraits.
AM: I was trying to show the life that resides behind the image, to depict something of the character of these women. I didn't want to take the traditional documentary route of having them tell their stories. I wanted to use the materials of the film in a distinctive way, like a signature, to underscore their activities. The woman seated at the piano is pictured very blue, and because there's no sync, what's emphasized is the gesture of her playing, and I underlined this by slowing the picture down with the optical printer.
MH: Each of the women seem quite enigmatic. The woman who is walking by the wall — where is she going? What is the canoeist rowing towards? Or the pianist playing?
AM: I simply wanted to suggest that the everyday activities of these women are every bit as mysterious as the Venuses who will not speak. The contemporary women emerge from the old, but with the addition, now, of character.

The Iconography of Venus

MH: Some feminists would argue that the only way to unravel a troubled history of images of women is through a movement of separation.
AM: But I'm not a feminist, though I believe and work for many of the same ideals. These images don't make me a feminist — that only comes in the intent of its production, distribution, exhibition.
MH: Is it a problem being a woman filmmaker in Toronto?
AM: If you're dealing with the independent community, it's not a problem, even though there is a boys' club. I don't like to call my work "experimental," but it gets put into that very male-dominated category. I can't say whether we're thought less of, but perhaps with older filmmakers our work isn't taken as seriously.
MH: Why are there so many more men than women?
AM: Audience accessibility is one reason why women aren't moving into avant-garde film. Another is that the avant-garde is perceived as a closed community.
MH: Do you feel it's closed?
AM: Yes, it shows in people's attitudes. These attitudes have emerged from the work's academic base, its masculine history of division, and the fact that it's a very small pot. The more people who dip into it, the worse for those already there. So people are encouraged to stay away. Another reason fewer people are making experimental films

is that the avant-garde is getting older and they have new needs of security and stability which require a more accessible work, work that isn't so "experimental." The survivors are looking around as the smoke clears and thinking, "I need a little more now, I need to make some changes in the way I work, in the way I live."

MH: Your first three 16mm films — *Her Soil is Gold*, *There is in Power… Seduction* and *The Iconography of Venus* — all contain historical references without making these references explicit. Historical detail enters your work with your next film, *The Tyranny of Architecture (10 min b/w 1987)*. It's also a return to the more overtly autobiographical concerns of your super-8 work.

AM: All my work is autobiographical, *Tyranny* more explicitly perhaps than some of the earlier films. The story I tell on the soundtrack begins with my family moving to Canada when I was four and living in a tent, then goes on to describe my homes from Queen Street to the high Arctic to central America. The film's beginning describes an architecture sympathetic with its surroundings, feeling close to nature in the tent. At the end of the film, I talk about wandering into a village where people are living in grass huts and the feeling of closeness returns. This is contrasted to the place where I'm staying in the village, a stone church that admits little of the outside.

MH: The image track shows a juxtaposition of two kinds of pictures — the first taken in Venice, the second in Nefta, a holy oasis in Tunisia. Why these pictures with that story?

The Tyranny of Architecture

AM: In Venice there are a lot of buildings which are very close together. There's very little space for people because the architecture is the city. I photographed it using superimpositions to increase the feeling of claustrophobia, and the sense that these buildings are only in dialogue with other buildings. Whereas in Nefta, people fill the space. The dwellings are simply there as a temporary shelter for the meeting of communities. It's photographed single frame in super-8. I carried the camera in a pocket underneath my clothes with just the lens sticking out because I didn't want people to see I was shooting. This camera has an intervalometer on it which automatically shoots single frames at variable rates — one every four seconds, or four minutes or whatever — so you can just set it up and let it go. The Nefta shooting basically follows the rhythm of my walk in optically printed freeze-frames slowing my back-and-forth motion. This super-8 shooting contrasts with the in-camera superimpositions shot in Venice. There I used elongated pans and tilts, often pointing the camera up into the buildings to avoid any sight of people. I developed all the footage myself in a little Russian tank.

MH: There's an image that opens and closes the film — it shows a woman in Nefta, her face covered with a dark veil.

AM: You can ascribe any symbolic meanings you want, but I used it because I thought it was a great image. [laughs] It shows a woman standing at the edge of the Sahara Desert.

MH: How does the feel of the open horizon or living without walls relate to filmmaking?

AM: Standing inside the adobe dwellings in Tunisia or the huts in Belize, I felt both inside and out. In the same way my work has a structure, a frame, in which people come to sit for a time, but while they're inside they're expected to negotiate some of their own way, to bring to the work their own histories and emotions. I'm not making work that looks like a one-way street. There's always room to move in there, and it's room that you make for yourself.

MH: How did *Northbound Cairo (27 min 1987)* start?

AM: I wrote the script first and pre-visualized the whole thing. I saw it all in my head before we started shooting.

MH: Did you like working with actors?

AM: They weren't professional actors, which is part of its downfall. I knew how I wanted them to say the lines, down to the intonation, the pauses, everything, and they mimicked me, just like I pictured it. We rehearsed four weeks, meeting once or twice a week. It's about a family driving up north — a father, mother, and two teenagers. The father is an installation artist whose inspiration comes from a summer house on Georgian Bay. He employs a younger artist to come up with the family to document his work and its origins in nature. This young man is joined by a woman. The two finally arrive at a hotel, have sex for the first time, and the woman feels their relationship has been cemented while the man feels more distant than ever. Upset over his indifference, she abandons the car and walks away alone. All of the driving sequences take place in a fake car with a large front-screen projection showing images of Egypt, Turkey, Greece, Cairo, and Paris behind them. They speak in a parodic fashion about the

possibility of artmaking versus family/financial responsibilities. If you get the jokes, it's quite funny, but I find that people have to see the film three times before they hear the humour. Everyone's too distracted by the passing landscape. There's so much happening in the film the audience finds it difficult to follow.

MH: The family seems hopelessly caught up in their own monologues, never really connecting with one another. They've learned to live as a family using a coded call and response that never threatens their easy-going surface of amicable eating. At one point, the young daughter is trying to explain her loneliness to a father who can only respond to the fixed image he has of her, an image that can't permit her alienation and solitude.

AM: Most families are like that. Talk in my family has to do with dinner, what's on TV, and what I'm wearing. We can't talk about the meaning behind the film I just made. Do people in families talk about their real feelings? My experience is that they don't; this kind of intimacy is reserved for friends or passing strangers. And this feeling of intimate distance is rehearsed in *Northbound* through parody. Ruled by their stomachs, they eat in the place of relating, and I think this is quite normal. Eating is a great social convener that assigns everyone a place and function — it suggests an order that may never exist anywhere else.

Annette Mangaard in performance

MH: Two people in the film exist outside the family: Max and Mara. Max is the cynical younger artist. Mara is a bright, friendly art student. What could she possibly see in such a bastard?

AM: I don't think he's that bad — he's got sexual appeal, he's smart, and has some very incisive things to say. And I don't think the woman, Mara, is that terrific. Granted, she's funny and outgoing, but she's also a bit of an airhead, a wide-eyed innocent. The film traces her move from innocence to experience, culminating in her decision to leave a bad situation and become self-sufficient.

MH: She's the only one in the film who manages to acknowledge the strange landscapes. At the film's close she steps out of the car, looking like a cross between King Tut and Blondie, and walks towards an enormous, overlooking sphinx.

AM: I wanted to show the family's indifference to their surroundings, an indifference they show in their personal relations as well.

MH: Why all the Egyptian stuff? Mara looks Egyptian, shots of Cairo play behind their drive, they build a sandy pyramid, Max watches the pyramids on TV...

AM: It was done for fun. I called it *Northbound Cairo*, contrasting the strange and familiar, forcing this Canadian family to drive through exotic locales on their way to Georgian Bay. The landscape that passes behind them moves from urban, downtown settings through factories, suburbs, pastoral farm lands, and, finally, arrives at the pyramids. It's a progression that tracks back into history, showing the decline of our feeling for the land. But even as they're ignoring what's around them, as soon as they hit the beach they make this pyramid. It's as if they've unconsciously absorbed this travel footage, mimicking it in spite of themselves. The film's black-and-white sequences signal a shift, and these begin after their arrival at Georgian Bay. Once again, the black-and-white scenes signal reality for me, and the characters speak with one another in a much more natural fashion.

MH: There seems little hope offered in the film about the making of art — a theme *Northbound* returns to over and over again. Each person's view seems to lead to blindness instead of insight, isolation instead of community.

AM: Will artmaking only end up alienating the people who make it? I hope not, what else would I do?

MH: How much do your films cost?

AM: *Nothing by Mouth* cost $150, *She Bit Me Seriously* $300, *Her Soil is Gold* $1,000, *There is in Power... Seduction* $1,000, *The Iconography of Venus* $1,000, *Northbound Cairo* $7,000 and *A Dialogue With Vision* cost $46,000. I've made nine films and never received any type of funding from either of the arts councils. I paid for all the films myself, except for *Dialogue*. That meant that everyone who worked for me never got a cent, and I always scrounged and cobbled things together, and I feel the work's suffered for it.

MH: Is there no way to make a different kind of work which could strike a new balance between your life and your art?

AM: I hope filmmaking offers that possibility. I feel that *A Dialogue With Vision (25 min 1990)* is a move in that direction. I think it has the potential to sell. It's exactly what I wanted to make. It's true to the artists and accessible at the

same time.

MH: Why these two artists?

AM: I met Spring Hurlbut in Brazil while she was making a piece. I was very impressed and thought it would look terrific on film. We spoke about making a film when we got back to Canada. That was four years ago. I'd seen Judith Schwartz's work earlier — her shadow plates and concrete body impressions. It speaks of people and their relation to materials, about the way a body fills a space. I looked at other artists and considered a lot of different kinds of work. I thought about shooting men but felt there were already lots of films about male artists, and I wouldn't have the sexual barrier with women artists. When a woman talks to a man there's always sex between them. And I just couldn't bear working in intimate spaces over a long period of time with a man, with this kind of tension. Who needs it? Sometimes I feel the same with men on my crew, that they use my gender as a means to get what they want, when it's really what I want that matters. I employed as many women as I could on the shoot but it was difficult to find enough who were qualified.

A Dialogue With Vision

MH: Why two sculptors — why not choose performance artists, video artists...?

AM: The film isn't about sculpture, or even Spring or Judith. It's about making art. The film doesn't say where they're from, how long they've been making art, where they show, or their place in the contemporary art scene. I wanted to show the making of art without all that dressing. At one point it was a drama about a man and a woman who were caught inside a relationship, intercut were scenes of Spring and Judith, their art acting as a metaphor for the relationship. I shot a couple of scenes and canned it. It just wasn't fair to the artists. Then there was the version of the film with a voice-over which spoke of a third person struggling with creation, and that was me trying to make this film. That voice-over was in the film until Christmas (the film was finished in April) when I finally decided to toss it.

MH: Why two years to shoot?

AM: It took the artists that long to get their work together. Spring had a commission when I began the film, but it kept getting postponed and lost in red tape. She has to go through as much paperwork to make a sculpture as I do to make a film. She couldn't get the money or the city's permission to build it. Judith went through a creative slump. She just wasn't feeling inspired and wasn't feeling good about herself or her work. We spent a lot of time talking about artmaking. This was all compounded by my own depression over my personal life.

MH: Did you show the film to them while it was in progress?

AM: Several times, and it was very difficult. They'd never seen themselves on film and weren't happy with how they looked or how their work appeared. So I had to make some moves because the film is a celebration, not a burial. But sometimes it was difficult to find the line between what was okay and what wasn't. For instance, after watching one of her drawings on film, Judith said, "I really don't like that drawing and I don't want it in there." And I'd say "I really like it." And she'd say, "Well, I'm the artist, and it's my work, and it's representing me, and it's shit." And we'd argue back and forth, and finally I took it out. In retrospect I agree with her. It wasn't her best drawing. Hours of dialogue were transcribed and I selected moments I felt were meaningful, revealing, relevant. But when they heard it, there were always objections for one reason or another, and I had to decide whether they were right or just over-anxious. I got a lot of other opinions, and one of the best came from Kim Moodie, an artist in London. At the time Judith felt like the underdog, and we couldn't see why. Kim said it was because Judith was always saying negative things about artmaking, its difficulties and uncertainties. Meanwhile, Spring is climbing ladders singing, "I love being an artist!" So we had to go back into the tapes and remake the balance, to find positive material that wouldn't change what Judith was saying. The act of editing was very collaborative; we tried to build a consensus around the film at different stages.

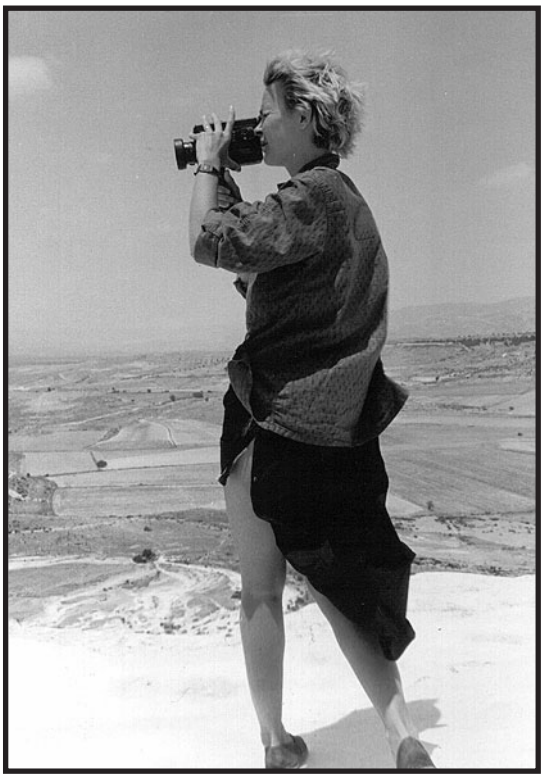
MH: You began with an art documentation film, moved into personal, experimental work, made an experimental drama, and now a documentary. What's next?

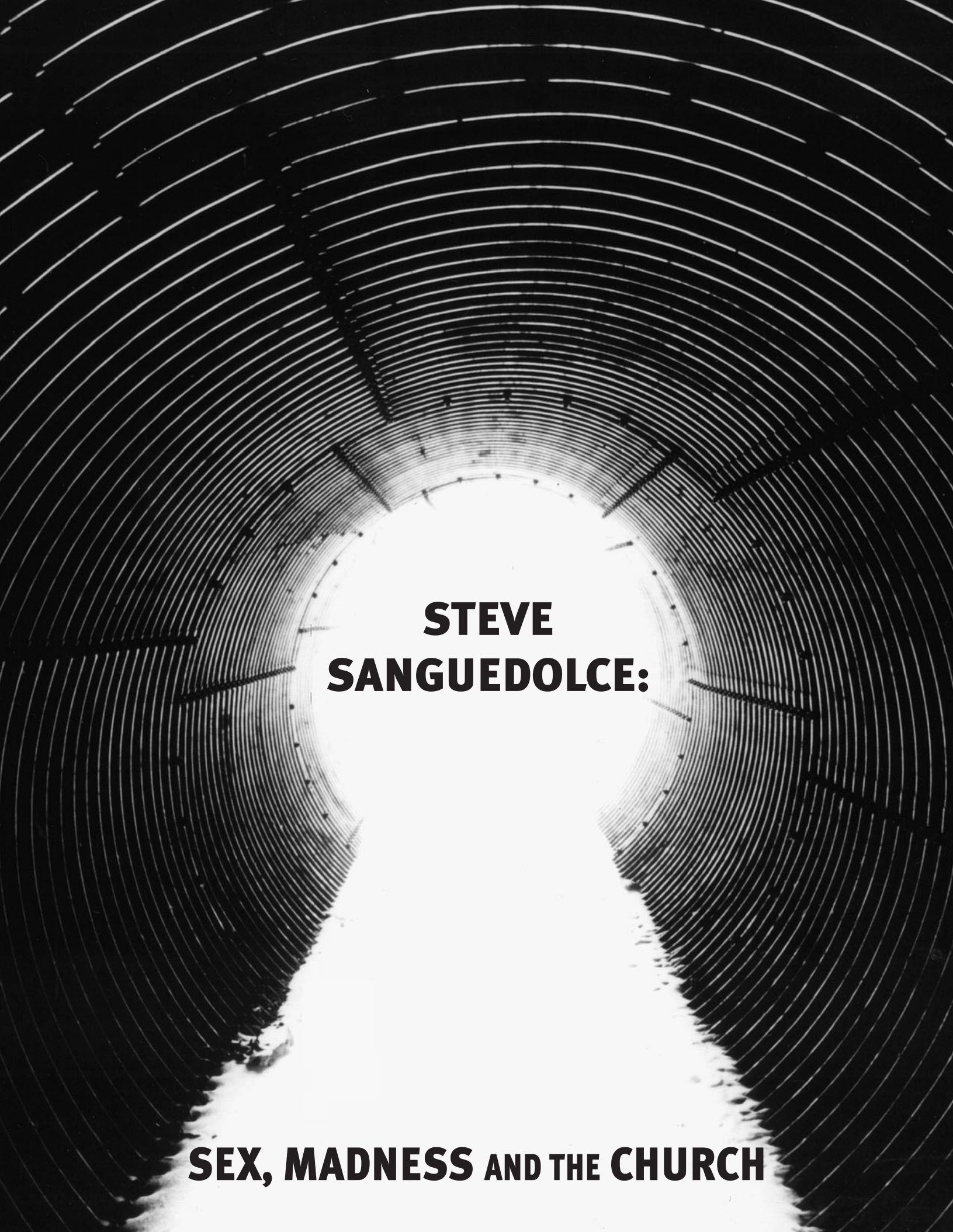
AM: I've scripted a ten-minute drama about abortion, and I'm still working on *Let Me Wrap My Arms Around You*. That doesn't mean I wouldn't make another documentary, or something people would call experimental. My interest as a filmmaker is in making work without respecting genres. I'm trying to convey a message, and whether you do it by

showing two women making art, or a group of actors reciting lines, or by photographing people in a foreign country — it's all the same in the end.

Annette Mangaard Filmography

Line Through Bath	15 min super-8 1984
Nothing by Mouth	10 min super-8 1984
There is in Power... Seduction	5 min b/w 1985
Her Soil is Gold	10 min 1985
She Bit Me Seriously	20 min super-8 1985
The Iconography of Venus	5 min 1987
The Tyranny of Architecture	10 min b/w 1987
Northbound Cairo	27 min 1987
A Dialogue With Vision: The Art of Judith Schwartz and Spring Hurlbut	25 min 1990
Let Me Wrap My Arms Around You	28 min 1992
94 Arcana Drive	22 min 1994
Fishtail Soup	90 min 1996





STEVE SANGUEDOLCE:

SEX, MADNESS AND THE CHURCH

The relationship between bodies and desire is among the oldest subjects in the cinema, underpinning its movement from music hall curiosity to causal narrative assembly. With the invention of 16mm film stock, movies took another kind of turn. Though primarily intended for military use, it allowed an avant-garde of a different sort to flourish, as well as a burgeoning interest in "home movies." Decades of these home-made flickers have passed and were those films to be joined end to end, they could easily circumnavigate the globe a dozen times or more, providing in their orbit a hitherto secret and alternative history of the movies. These first-person signatures have also found their place in the hands of artists whose domestic recollections shed new light on identity, memory, and naming. The homing instinct of the fringe has never been more acute than today, when a new generation has emerged to shape a transgressively personal work, exposing a once-private experience to the unblinking stare of the fringe's public. This emphasis on personal expression has marked the project of filmmaker Steve Sanguedolce, whose work continues to forge new links between movies and home.

SS: My old man was always saying, "You can be young without money, but you can't be old without it," and it seems like my brother Sam and I spent most of our time together trying to work out our big score. When we were six or seven Sam got it into his head that if we could grow a third arm we'd be right for life, and for weeks we'd argue about where to put it. Sam figured it should come straight out of his chest for the surprise knock-out punch while I thought it should run out of my butt because I figured that furniture would just die out as we got older and that I'd want something to sit on. We made a lotion out of eggs and arm hair and a little blood and every day we'd rub it into the spot where we wanted our new limb to grow. We never did grow that extra arm — but Sam did have three nipples, just like Goldfinger in James Bond. I guess it's not that unusual. Sam always said that was the beginning of his double, that he was growing from the chest out. He figured that one day his double would appear in the world to take his place and he could get on with his real business, or maybe, he'd wink at me, maybe he was already gone.

I got a movie camera when I was thirteen for my first communion. The first connection with God and film. My uncle told me, "Start shooting right away. But never move the camera too quickly." In Grade 12 we had a screen education course and I made some films. There was a Kodak competition and we took first prize in the Borough of York. The next year I made films instead of essays in English class. I was good in math — everyone said I should be an accountant — but I didn't want to do that, so I headed to Sheridan College to learn more about filmmaking. 1978 was my first year there and I left in 1981, at the age of twenty-one. I made two films — slick, fast, and commercial. They're consistent with what I'd do later, trying to get the camera to become performative, though it was done in a more rigid way. I did some commercial work, then I got a Creative Artists in the Schools Grant to teach super-8 filmmaking at my old high school. I met Carl Brown there. We had gone to high school together and met up again at college. He said, "I'm going to make a feature-length documentary on mental illness, would you be interested in working on it?" I was skeptical but said okay. We spent a year together working, fighting, and basically living together.

We based *Full Moon Darkness (with Carl Brown, 90 min b/w 1984)* on Thomas Szasz's book *The Myth of Mental Illness*. Szasz speaks of mental illness as a metaphor, and the need to separate psychiatry from the state. He relates the forced incarcerations and mandatory doping to an extension

Full Moon Darkness

of the church's power — today psychiatrists determine who's "crazy," who should be shocked, etc. We talked to people in the mental health establishment who agreed with Szasz but wouldn't appear on film or write us letters of support. We ended up with a group called "On Our Own", a self-help group of ex-psychiatric inmates (as they refer to themselves). They publish a newsletter called "Phoenix Rising" which Carl edited for eight months. In order to make the film, we felt we needed to come to terms with what these people were doing, how they were living, how they felt; we didn't want to roll in like an NFB documentary, ask a lot of fast questions and leave. So we hung around, met a lot of the inmates and got to know them pretty well. We were close. We decided that we wanted to interview some of them.

These interviews would be relieved by "demonstrations," showing via subjective camera work my interpretation of what they were feeling. These rolls showed the living conditions in Parkdale, the landscape of their surroundings, but also their inner landscape.

Woodbridge

An Italian scientist named Ugo Cerletti invented the whole notion of shock treatment by applying cattle prods to pigs' heads, making them more docile for slaughter. This set the stage for human shock treatment. I snuck into a slaughterhouse with a camera taped under the sleeve of my lab coat; we ended up with a whole roll of images that dealt in some way with mental illness — the incarceration, the entrapment, living in these close quarters. A year and a half later, in early 1983, we got $8,500 from Canada Council. Then we started the interviews. Thomas Szasz was the first. Don Weitz, an ex-psychologist and ex-inmate, was very keen to speak. He was very powerful and outspoken. Then there were three ex-inmates, two women, and a man. The last interviewee was a priest because the history of mental illness begins with the church. Foucault talked about it some, claiming that at the moment lepers disappeared from Europe, the insane began to show, and that this kind of outcast had its origins in the church.

Szasz was the first person presenting the film's argument about the history and the pitfalls of psychiatry. He was shot in a very straight documentary way by Phil Hoffman with virtually no camera movement. Then I shot Don Weitz and the camera started to become part of the dialogue. As he became more and more enraged with the crimes against humanity (as he called them) the camera would jump closer and closer to him, following the intensity of his speech and the patterns of his room. Then we filmed John Bedford who was one of the inmates — he's very soft spoken — and as he spoke he became more and more faint. When I took the magazine off the camera, it accidentally flew open and I shut it in a hurry and thought, shit, we've lost it all. We got it back and he starts off properly exposed and as his voice gets fainter the image becomes more and more fogged and as he finishes, the film totally whites out. It was amazing for all that to come together. Once we finished filming it took us a week to edit.

MH: Did you cut it together?

SS: We had battles. Carl often had the final word since he had the clearest idea of where the film was headed. This was the first time I'd edited anything over four minutes long. Carl was very dictatorial in the way he worked. Unless I was strong in what I wanted there wasn't much allowance for change. It took me three years to cut *Woodbridge* and *Rhythms*; why should *Full Moon* take a week? There were real problems between Carl and me over the ownership of the film. All of a sudden, I was only getting tech credits and Carl would get "a film by." We haven't spoken to each other since.

MH: How did *Woodbridge (32 min 1985)* begin?

SS: The first time I met Ermanno Bulfone, the priest we shot in *Full Moon*, we were playing ball hockey in the school gym. He came by and stuck this hockey stick in my chest and said, "Who are you?" I asked him back. He was the school priest and everyone was supposed to be nice to him I guess, but... He invited me to his place to talk about a film on Woodbridge. I wanted to talk about the first line in Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* which reads, "God is dead." He didn't like that but he was fascinated with me, and felt someone should make a film about Woodbridge. It's a small town just north-west of Toronto that has 70,000 inhabitants, eighty per cent of them Italian. It's become a place where middle class Italians can keep the dream alive.

MH: Why did you leave Woodbridge?

SS: It's funny you know. You live in a place for ten years and all of a sudden you realize it's not the centre of the universe. So one day you leave just because you can. I remember when my cousin Marco came back to Sicily in a dazzling suit telling tales of Canada. It wasn't until later that he revealed his secret to us — when he opened his mouth, his teeth were uniformly gold. He invited the family to feel them, to assure us all that Canada was indeed the land of opportunity. My father said that Marco owed his optimism to his profession — Marco was an undertaker. His prosperity impressed upon the family two things — that Canadians were consumed with the task of burying their dead, and that in Canada each of the bodies they passed on the street was filled with gold. We imagined the very rich had gold livers and spleens, each one a walking treasury, and rubbed our hands in anticipation of the day when we too would carry our wealth in their bodies.

MH: When you made the film you were coming back to a place you once lived. How would it have been different if

you'd made it inside the community?
SS: It would have been a bitter film. When I started it I was still living there; a year later I moved out. I felt the community was stifling, the machismo, the sexism, the closed circle of belief, family problems. There were no choices in Woodbridge, only ways out. I began shooting around the house, showing the structural support for the institutional pressures of the community. The film was about trying to reconcile myself with my past, about the way out of history. I shot children playing hockey, a community picnic, eating potato chips in church during communion. After shooting *Full Moon Darkness*, my camera became much more involved and subjective in filming its environment. I could shoot something that everybody sees a million times and make it my own. So the Woodbridge activities — the picnics, the church, the baking, events in my house — were one thread, the personal, subjective stuff another, and the alleyways a continuing motif. I'd go into alleys at night, shine highbeams from my car, and shoot these really dark images pushed two stops so that the grain would start to elicit all sorts of images. I think the film ends quite optimistically now. I come home and there's a portrait sequence where my family pose before the camera; I showed it to them later and recorded them talking over it. At the end of the film they ask to take my portrait and all they get is an overexposed frame of my face, which is a movie image of the flash going off — I look almost ghostly. For me it suggests trying to give myself but not being quite willing or ready yet. What remains is the gesture of our coming together, of reconciling ourselves through this last image.

During our big fight over *Full Moon Darkness*, Carl would say, "You're not a filmmaker, you'll never be one, you're just a technician," and I wasn't sure. I was twenty-two when I started *Woodbridge* and I began it with a lot of pressure because what had I done? I'd done some work at Sheridan, but nothing in my own way except *Full Moon Darkness* and that was with Carl, not by myself. *Woodbridge* took me a long time and I felt a lot of pressure doing it, so after it was finished, I went away.

I wanted to leave the whole film thing behind. Going away allowed me to say, "fuck this," and when I got back I just wanted to shoot without knowing how it would fit into a project. I started with Niagara Falls. I tried to get into the mist and the colour and the constantly rising haze while a woman is asking behind me, "Excuse me, are you finished, can I get in now?" The best thing about my landscape work was losing expectations, realizing that what I wanted and what I got didn't have to be the same. I shot a couple of thousand feet in the summer of 1987, an hour north of Lake Superior. I'd drive along, watch the landscape, get out and start caressing it with the camera. I filmed a waterfall and clouds, walking over rock and forest fires, not knowing how or where it would be used. I couldn't find anything I wanted to shoot in Toronto. The images aren't literal, they're quite abstracted, but they speak of what's inside. If I take your portrait, it's probably as much a portrait of me as it is of you. It's an interpretation. I could make an abstract representation of your face in which no one would recognize a human form. I think that's what the landscape work is doing; it's taking the outside and moving it through the veins. It's not important to name the falls or forest fire, they're important for their emotive power, for what they might represent.


Sweetblood

At the end of 1987 I got my first grant for *Rhythms of the Heart (43 min 1990)*. I showed them the landscape footage. I got $7,500 from OAC and $10,500 from CC. While I was struggling with the film, I was going through a relationship breakup. Breakups always take so long — this took four or five months — and we started filming together, not with any intent. First we shot ourselves working together, then we started shooting everything — drinking, fucking, sleeping, crying, laughing — everything that lovers do. I started cutting this stuff into the film but it became very one-sided because I was so careful about how I was pictured. So I didn't use it. After that, I started seeing Alex. She was already in the film because I'd filmed her dancing on the rooftop. Two months into the relationship we started filming together. We both held the camera, both equally vulnerable.
MH: How did she feel about the camera?
SS: At times it was very erotic, being in bed and fucking with the camera was like being voyeur and participant at the same time. I won't speak for Alex, but it was definitely not a deterrent to our sex. Then it became really complicated, because we started breaking up. She was sleeping with some other guy, and I was heartbroken.

MH: Did the filming have anything to do with it?
SS: No, it was all so fast, so intense, we were getting along so well, but it was too much at once. We were both scared. Then I phoned her and said, "Look, I know we're not seeing each other and you're with this other guy and that's cool, but I'm trying to finish this film. I don't have enough images, would you be interested in filming some more? I can pay you some money; it would be strictly work." Was the camera a way to re-enact what we had, or to continue things in a way that we couldn't anymore? I guess it was a way of being with her. This was two days after we broke up. She was very skeptical. She wasn't sure she could trust me, she was worried about me changing the film out of anger or bitterness because I was so hurt. I asked her later if she thought that happened. She said no, but at the time it was very awkward. But she agreed. She came back for two nights, and we shot everything. The dancing, simulated sex, it was all well executed, smooth, comfortable, and it worked.
MH: How did she feel about being part of this film you'd already started?
SS: I think that was sort of attractive. In some strange way, film has a sordid kind of glamour, and personal film especially. She'd seen the original footage of my first lover and liked it. She wanted to help. It's strange to bring a camera into a relationship. It gives it a fixed perspective that experience doesn't have. What I think I've done is to express a pattern I've developed in relationships. I get close, uncover a mutual vulnerability, then I get frightened, and emotionally withdraw, finally forcing the other person to leave. It happens time and time again.
MH: As you talk in the film about a relationship that's finished, we see images of the two of you together in happier times. It's as if we're asked to look into these gestures of everyday life, and wonder which already bears the sign of separation. It's a reminder of how ambiguous the image is and how direct the word is by contrast.
SS: It's how we've learned to speak, not like music or poetry, but like accounting.
MH: The film re-figures your diary images, your personal experience, according to its own needs. When you say that the film grants you a clarity or clairvoyance, how is that possible?
SS: It's all a lie, it doesn't have anything to do with what's happened. I reinvent the story while trying to be fair to the people involved. The problem is that images take the place of memory; the super-8 films of my childhood are what's left in the mind when I look back. The image has stopped simply standing in for something else; it's all there is. I have an obsession with organization and for me making work is an attempt to create order out of the mess that's around me. In my twenties I was an idealist, I thought my work was going to change the way people saw themselves and the world. And after every film I had a major "post-partum" depression thinking, "Omigod, nobody cares about this." Making film is just so insular. You spend all that time in the dark, working out the relations between pictures. Getting smaller. Narrowing focus. Wondering if someone else will understand.


Rhythms of the Heart

MH: We should talk about ~~*Mexico*~~ *(35 min 1992)*.
SS: ~~*Mexico*~~ was something we made together. It's one of those films where you point the camera at your head and you end up making a film about your ass. It was supposed to be a film about love. After we'd given up on that, it became a rock 'n' roll comedy, a two-screen abstract short, a family/buddy narrative, a mock ad for the tourist bureau. We finally found ourselves home, feeling that this film was about Toronto after all, about the need to die. It's set up like a series of postcards that carries the traveller through Mexico. Only we realize, as an audience, that the narrator, the traveller, is not able to see anything but where he's come from. There are several scenes where he's describing Mexico, only we're watching Toronto. The whole film narrates this slippage. For instance, the narrator watches guys welding dinosaur bones, putting together skeletons that stand in the museums. He imagines that these are not archeologists at all, but artists, just stitching bones together. He says, "You walk from one monster to the next, admiring the craft and skill these Frankensteins possess. You think: this is how the present understands the past — as a terrible and devouring monster, looming hideously over the population of the present. What they are making, then, is not an image of the past as it used to be, but an image of the past as it is, not a faithful rendering of times long forgotten, but an image of memory itself." This insistent conversion of Mexico into Toronto is like that old saying, "I know what I like means I like what I know." Because there's no way to escape where

you're from; home is something you pack into the suitcase along with the underwear and the shaver.

MH: Home is also the subject of your next film, *Sweetblood (13 min 1993)*.

SS: *Sweetblood* begins with my name, the name of the father. "Sanguedolce" in English means "sweet blood," so it seemed an appropriate way to title a diary film. In the film I look at a photo of myself and say, "The picture is me, the lines on my face are my father's." It began with my collection of still photos. It's part of growing up Italian — you don't throw anything out — so I had all these pictures. I started pasting them up onto boards. One filled with old family portraits, another showed friends and lovers, another showed pictures of adolescence — Bob Dylan at the Gardens, vials of hash oil, and Pabsy painting the Scrooge's face while he's passed out. They were snapshots, a life's journey in pictures, an archival committee I wanted to reconvene. I filmed them off the boards with a close-up lens, squeezing out frames like an action painter, adding motion to these still shots, reassembling the family in-camera. I figured the film would be a comedy, a parody of the personal films that I and others had made. I spent a few months writing a voice-over that was supposed to be comical, witty, and insightful. It wasn't. So I left the film for a few months. When I came back, the visuals still looked good, I just had to toss the sound and start over. The pictures replayed an archive of photographs, and I decided to take the same approach with the sound, so I began compiling sounds collected over the past twenty years — interviews and late night jams, telephone calls and drunken talks, and cut them together as a fragmented mosaic. So now I had photos and voices. But something was still missing.

I've been trying to imagine a time when you would actually have to go somewhere to see an image.

At the time I was sleeping with a Walkman next to my bed in order to record my dreams. I wrote them all down and then pulled out moments or images that related to the pictures. These became a kind of dream poem that appears in the film one line at a time, overtop the pictures. So you watch the photos through these dreams, the dreams of the past and present joined in the film.

I start crying because I have no shoes
Until I see a man crying because he has no feet
At night
I see a flowered meadow
In it a black coffin
I'm afraid my father is in it
I open the lid
Luckily it's not him
But me

(text from *Sweetblood* by Steve Sanguedolce)

Ironically, the film isn't comical at all. Since all the photos were taken from my past, the film turned towards my relation with my father. When I looked back that seemed the most important thing. After *Rhythms* I realized that diary filmmaking, with myself as the subject, was a difficult way to make work. It leaves you exposed in ways you can't predict. I now feel a lot more comfortable showing *Sweetblood*. It's still personal, but I'm not in the raw. There are many layers, and the viewer has to work through them, negotiating it in their own way.

MH: What kind of images are worth making now?

SS: I've been trying to imagine a time when you would actually have to go somewhere to see an image, and having taken that walk, what that encounter would feel like. Things changed after reproduction switched from the womb to the factory; it's hard to hang anywhere these days without wandering into images of every kind. You wonder if there's any point to adding your own imagery to a world already too full. I still wonder about the effect pictures have on our life and am continually amazed that parents blithely expose their kids to thousands of hours of television without a goddam clue as to its result. How does an image work? And what possible place could the very marginal images I'm interested in making and viewing have?

When I look at television, I look at rock videos because MuchMusic or MTV is television in its purest form. MTV has essentially taken the efforts of a generation of down-and-out American Bolex wankers from the sixties — rolled the works through a perfume factory, added a drum beat, and beamed it across the known universe. All the movies the underground made twenty years ago are back, this time

Sweetblood

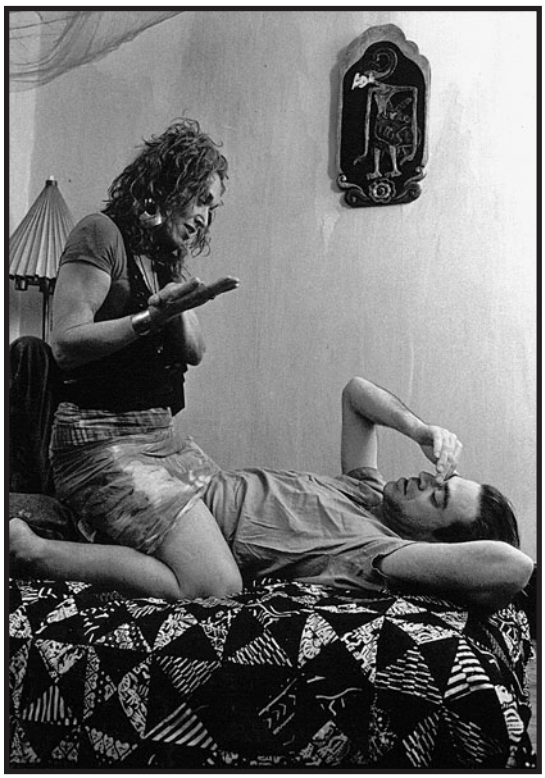
converted into advertising, into money, which is exactly how capitalism works. Is this why I'm making work, so some yuppie bloodsucker can find my stuff ten years down the road and turn it into toilet paper commercials? Where is the possibility of opposition in all this?

MH: What about your own work? What are you working on now?

SS: What I'd really like to do is to make a film that would cure hangovers. A useful film. A film you would want to put in your toolbox. A film you could eat if you had to. I'm interested in the notion of a medecine, of a kind of cinema that could be used to heal ailments. I was speaking recently with a friend of mine who is virtually deaf, who intends to do for sound in the cinema what Brakhage has done for the image. She says that they never play music for the deaf in school, and that this is a great mistake, because no one appreciates music like the deaf. If you ever saw her eyes fill while she's listening to tunes you'd know just what I mean. This is the kind of music I would like to make. But I don't know whether I'm deaf enough to hear it. It pains me to think that the next generation's filmmakers might never look into a camera, or take up a guillotine splicer, or hold a camcorder.

What I'd really like to do is to make a film that would cure hangovers. A useful film.

We're busy constructing another world right now, a world that exists parallel to our own; in *Blade Runner* they called it the off-world, and we enter it every time we open a magazine, or turn on the TV, or go to the movies. It's the image world, and we recognize immediately that it's a little more real than we are, that people are dying out there while we are stirring our coffee, standing between a grave and a difficult birth, wondering where next month's rent is going to come from. It's like the story Nabokov relates in *Despair*. A middle-aged chocolate salesman with loving wife, home, children, and car ventures off on a sales trip where he spies a man who is his exact double. A dead ringer. Excitedly, he plans an elaborate murder scheme whereby he can kill his wife and his double and relieve himself of his dull and unwanted identity before collecting insurance money and beginning a rich new life in the South Seas. The hitch? His double doesn't look at all like him. He only thinks it does. He has a problem with the image, in recognizing himself.



Away

MH: Tell me about *Away (60 min 1996)*.

SS: On our way for pictures and prints at Fifty-One Division, my brother Sam started dumping these hot sapphire rings out the back of the paddywagon, ankle-cuffed together with me and two greasy wops. He said, "One of us is going to get out tonight and it ain't gonna be me." I promised him the next time I saw him outside we'd spend the rest of our lives together. It looked pretty bad at first, they pulled everything out on him: the time he went across the border in a hot van, the bank job he pulled with a baseball bat and a note that the tellers couldn't read. But they let him off on a technicality, and he skipped town because one of the *paisons* had paid off the judge. That's how *Away* started. It's about finding my brother. I got word he was stumbling through Thailand, so I went there and shot thirty-odd rolls of super-8 footage, made some street recordings, and caught up with rumours of Sam. Three fellow travellers busted for exotic tobaccos. I shot the cock fights, a cremation ceremony, kick boxing, music performances, shadow plays, live sex shows, and opium dens. I blew it all up to 16mm and the National Film Board agreed to process and print everything. That's when I received the first money for the film, a LIFT co-production grant of $8,000. I tried to cut together what I had, but what was it? A travelogue? A diary movie? I spent two years cutting it into small bits and putting it all back together again. Every time I just hit the wall, until we talked one night, you remember that?

MH: Yeah.

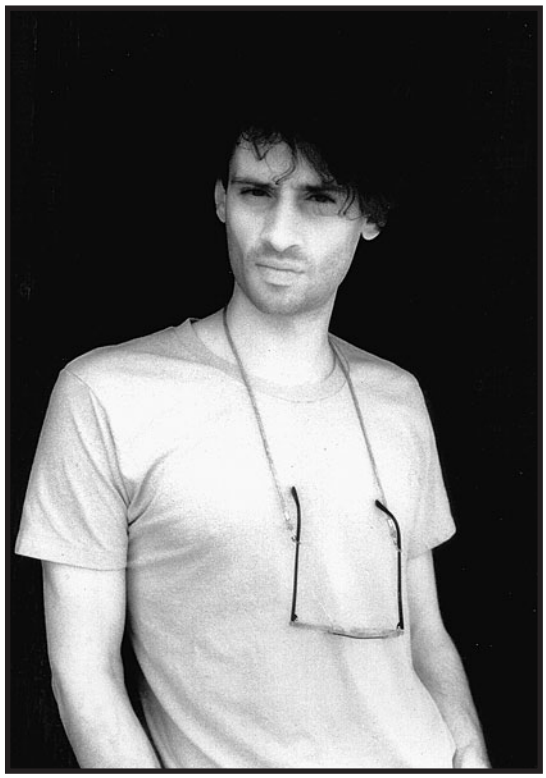
SS: You had the bright idea to lose it as a documentary. Now it was going to be a fiction film, set on the shoot of *Apocalypse Now*. I'm hired as an art director, along with my errant twin brother, Sam, who I go looking for on days off. That's where all the original super-8 stuff came in. Casting seems impossible, until I watch Earl Pastko playing the Devil in Bruce McDonald's *Highway 61* and realize he's perfect to play me. In *Away*, Earl meets up with Scriber, an old childhood friend, played

by Vancouver diva Babz Chula. We start rehearsals and Earl blows my narcotics budget and almost breaks my back hugging me. But it's okay, we're starting to feel more like family. The Canada Council kicks in with $20,000 and we're set to shoot. It takes three days with a five-person crew and two actors. I hear that Sam's in Laos and is planning to return home. Another year of cutting follows and the damned thing's ready. The Ontario Arts Council comes back with another $20,000 to finish it and Sam finds his way home. Somehow he manages to make it for Christmas this year just in time to see the film up on the screen, and he laughs so hard and parties so late we nearly have to book him into the hospital with alcohol poisoning. So that's *Away*, six short years, released beneath the moniker, "Where there's a will, there's a relative." I just hope the next one won't take so long and that Sam can stay close.

Can I go now? My bookie's on the other line.

Steve Sanguedolce Filmography

No Mime Game	4 min 1980
Everlast	2 min 1981
Full Moon Darkness (with Carl Brown)	90 min b/w 1984
Woodbridge	32 min 1985
Rhythms of the Heart	43 min 1990
Sang Song	2 min silent 1991
~~Mexico~~ (with Mike Hoolboom)	35 min 1992
Sweetblood	13 min 1993
Away	60 min 1996



GARY POPOVICH:

LIES MY FATHER TOLD ME

Gary Popovich wields his trademark Bolex like a switchblade, cutting out moments of everyday life with keen precision. But unlike other diarists, he is not interested in opening his private life to public discussion. Instead, he is engaged in a wrestling match with history. He feels that we are ghosts haunting machines of thought built long before our time, and which invite us to live only if we are faithful to the ideas of the dead. Popovich raises his hand against the departed, who appear in his movies like a procession of fathers. In his portraits of Irving Layton and Friedrich Nietzsche, and his travelogue about his father's homeland, the former Yugoslavia, he grapples with the ruins of modernity. This mythic cinema would find its most compelling expression in his acknowledged masterpiece, *Archeology of Memory* (1992). Part home movie, part history of representation, its multiple picture rolls show a boy growing older amidst a teeming life of animals and passing landscapes, ancestors and friends. This simultaneity of consciousness, shown in cascades of overlapping pictures, is an image of memory itself. Like the rest of his cinema, it is a time machine that makes a lie of Nietzsche's expression: that no one dies of fatal truths these days. There are too many antidotes.

GP: Sitting alone in my father's hotel office, I would look out at Lundy's Lane, a long row of Niagara Falls hotels, and wonder what it was like when it was a bush path the Natives used to take. That's when I started writing poetry, though it probably sounded a lot like Hallmark cards. Later, at university, we studied all these dead poets, and I wondered about the ones still living, probably all working in hotels, writing up bills. Film seemed a way out of that.

Although poetry created and inspired images, film could deal more directly with the world of pictures I was growing up in. I headed to Sheridan College in search of a technical education, figuring it offered the shortest program. I thought at some point you have to get out and do things because it's a long exploration, this exploration of yourself.

MH: You made *Layton Symphony (4 minutes b/w 1982)* there, a film about Irving Layton which seems directly related to your interests in poetry.

GP: Layton came to the college to teach a course on modernity — how romantic genius, usually his, grappled with the Holocaust or sexuality, how the changing world affected the individual's sense of a centered self. For me, Layton was a name on a bunch of books, a celebrity. Now I was riding the train back to Toronto with him every week while we read our writings. It was a way to make him more human and fallible, which was an important lesson — that my heroes were living, pissing, shitting human beings that could fall from the grace I'd bestowed upon them.

MH: How did you proceed with the film?

GP: That was difficult. He didn't give me any time at all. He said if you want to film me you can do it before class one day, I'll come in fifteen minutes early. The audio interview I did was about an hour, and the filming took fifteen minutes. I brought in images of Layton on video and filmed him looking at it, waving his arms around, talking as he's watching himself. I put together a four-minute super-8 film, joining those images with the interview we did. But the images didn't do much for me. A year later we learned about the optical printer and took hand-processing workshops. I took the original footage, blew it up to 16mm in six versions, hand-processed with different scratches, water blotches, and grain structures, and made the images dance to his words. I laid a piece of music over it. At the beginning he says, "I like to have a symphony being played when I compose, it helps to lubricate my thoughts," so it's as if the Mozart symphony is calling him to attention, organizing his thoughts, and then his voice erupts and the images sing along with the music for a four-minute bacchanalian foray into Layton's image of himself. The film is called a symphony because Layton is a holdover from the last century, there's something symphonic and grand about his way of thinking.

MH: The title seems ironic. This grand symphonic form has now become a scratchy, handmade film which works to deflate the myth of Layton. Because he's insistently looking at himself, the subject of the film is really Layton's image.

It profoundly disturbed him, that he saw his own death in these images.

GP: Yes. He had great difficulty with the film. I gave him a private screening and as soon as the film was over he turned over and went to sleep, dozing on the floor. Total silence in the room. Very awkward. I heard later from his wife that it profoundly disturbed him, that he saw his own death in these images, that it seemed a memorial to him. He wasn't too thrilled with it.

I was thinking about film only in terms of desperately wanting to make work, though not necessarily knowing why, having an incredible need to be a filmmaker. I was coming from a lot of uncertainty and insecurity in terms of being an artist. It wasn't encouraged in my household. As a kid I was pushed to enter law, and business school was my compromise between my parents and my poetry. From business and law I went into literature, and then went to Sheridan to study film. Art didn't seem like a legitimate

activity, it was for charlatans and entertainers. My father had them in the hotel, and they were usually a bunch of bums according to him. They were r+b crooners who just wanted to drink, fuck, and lead an aimless existence. I was afraid of that but that's what I wanted. I was in the dark about it for a long time, whether film was for me or not. But after school I went on the mandatory European tour. [laughs] I studied at an interdisciplinary arts program in Paris for a couple of months. There, art was legitimized, the state had buildings where art was honoured and "museumized," so I came back with a lot more confidence and arrogance.

What turned me on when I got back was feminist film theory, which became a way to talk to people. There was a

Immoral Memories 1

desperate kind of loneliness driving that search, a desire for both something sexual and something intimate based on friendship. I didn't talk very much, but I learned how to ask questions. The pretense is we're going to talk about Laura Mulvey's essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" but what we'd actually do is talk about each other. It was safe because I wasn't on the make, I was making a film. The cock wasn't going to get in the way. What I really wanted was to get close to people, to figure out my own sexuality. What's the difference between watching a stripper or a lover? I was watching both. I wanted to talk to strippers. I wanted to go to therapy so I could fall in love with my therapist. I wanted to go to a bar and make a film with a stripper and maybe she would take me home and tell me secrets about her sexuality. In the film that came out of all this (*Choral Fantasy 25 min 1985*) there are three women and three men. The women appear throughout the film like a Greek chorus, one reads Mulvey's text, and they arrest the flow of the narrative, just as Mulvey's essay prescribes. The men propel the action, make deals, wander alone, confused, unable to say what they feel or mean. So it perfectly sums up where I was at the time.

MH: Is that why you pulled the film from distribution?

GP: I don't mind showing the confusion I was going through at the time. But I don't think the ideas and their expression have joined strongly enough to make it worthwhile for the viewer, so why burden them with it? It was a personal exploration. It's possible that it will speak to me differently later and provide clues to what happened. But right now it doesn't feel like it should be a focus of anyone's attention. For similar reasons I've thought of pulling *Self Portrait*, I don't feel it's representative of where I'm at right now. But then they never are because they're done, and you're already moving on, creating someone else who looks at his past as a primitive and rather foreign relation. Can I stand to look at that level of immaturity? I'm not mature enough to stand that immaturity. Maybe in a couple more years.

MH: How did *Immoral Memories 1 (10 min b/w 1988)* begin?

GP: From the feminists I turned to reading Nietzsche, grappling with a strong figure who takes on the shallowness, the lies, the self, the people around him, all in a rigorous examination of his own emotions. I needed to build strength. I saw confusion. I wasn't certain I was really onto something at all after my first films. Foucault said you don't really study Nietzsche unless you become him and I did. I have black books full of notes in his style, yet his style was to say find your own style — don't be like me, become yourself. I started by copying. I think that's okay, to allow yourself to be taken over, to discover and identify what you need to give up. I imagined Nietzsche's emotional turmoils as my own; they reflect maleness and the role fathers play. Wagner was a father he was moved to embrace and then rebel against — but it wasn't clear that Nietzsche was a father for me, or that I was pursuing the same path with my own father. I needed to throw myself into conflict with these people to work it out. You need to see how ugly you can be, how much you'll deny about your feeling. It's like tearing apart a watch you can't put back together. As a kid, I'd tear everything apart, needing to know how it all worked, what was inside. But I had great difficulty putting things back together again. It took a lot of hard years to start learning that process.

MH: After two years of reading you made a film without words.

GP: I wanted to grow as a filmmaker. If you're a writer you have to deal with words, as a painter with paint. I knew that hiding behind books and dead people would only take me so far. I wanted to make a piece of music, using light and rhythm to relate the story. I wanted to convey a person's movement through a pivotal moment in history, where the arrival of photography and cinema heralded an overthrow of

humanism. The revolution wasn't just industrial and technological, but metaphysical. My film is an ode, a Nietzschean dance of celebration in three parts, using his life as a structural bind. *Immoral Memories* begins with the early machinery of cinema — praxinoscopes, zoetropes turning — then Christ crucified, images from the earliest days of cinema, photos from Nietzsche's youth and Muybridge's motion studies of human locomotion. There's an image of two men wrestling which I re-photographed to make it look like one is fucking the other up the ass, trying to suggest the sexual charge that informs male fraternity, trying to echo things in his life I was feeling. Churches, icons and heroes are "shaken" or ripped apart by camera movement, dismantling them as an image, as Nietzsche had dismantled them as ideas.

The second movement depicts Nietzsche's travels and friendship through the accelerating frenzy of train tracks, photographs of friends, pictures of objects such as Nietzsche's typewriter, and two Muybridge characters coming at each other on horses. It's like a convergence of lines that leads to obvious collisions. It also sets up the need for solitude and reflection, which is the tone of the opening of the third movement.

Nietzsche spent a couple of years in Venice and Turin where I went to shoot the final section. Legend has it that in his last few conscious moments he was in his room in Turin writing when he heard, then saw below his window, a horse being whipped by its master. He charged down the stairs and threw his arms round the horse before falling down onto the cobblestones and lapsing into an insanity that would last a dozen years. That's what I used to structure the final few moments of the film. When I arrived at his apartment there was a sign by his door that read "Cinema." A block from the apartment is the fading Shroud of Turin. It struck me that the film was about this triangulation — Christianity and fathers; Nietzsche; and cinema. This very old representation of Christ, the fading metaphysician, was one block away from the anti-Christ physician of the modern, Nietzsche. And as darkness gathered around Nietzsche, a new industrial father, Lumière, was sending his camera operators around the world to begin new forms of worship.

I took a Lumière film that showed the funeral procession of the assassinated American president, McKinley, the casket drawn by horses. I re-photographed the scene in close-up, until all that's visible are the light reflections on the carriage as the funeral train pulls in, so that the last moments of the film are final glimmers or flickers of conscious perception progressing toward abstraction. The final title, "1900," is both the year of Nietzsche's death and the beginning of the new century. It's an ode to the last century, a film that taught me how you can connect one image to another in terms of tonal quality, shapes, and forms, to crystallize emotional ideas as opposed to literary ones.

Caress

MH: How did *Caress (1.5 min silent 1989)* begin?

GP: I lived four years in my Lakeview apartment and every day I looked out the window at a tree. Then it was time for me to leave, to say good-bye. That was part of it, but also the blue sky, the buds, something about the silvery branches without leaves. I love trees; they seemed to be the only stable living things in the crazy hotel environment I grew up in. As a kid I wanted to live in a subdivision. I wanted to be normal. The time at the Lakeview apartment was my first sense of stability in Toronto. But I was changing again, about to move to a much less secure dive on Queen St. above a store in Parkdale. I suppose I needed to film the tree as a way of embracing it and carry part of it with me to the uncertainty that lay ahead. I shot four rolls of super-8, a frame at a time. In the pixillation, many of the individual frozen frames looked like the cave drawings I was studying, so once they were edited together there was this rapid procession of drawings that flickered in front of your eyes. It recalled generations of that tree, of representation, like an ode or a wave good-bye to something that was loved in the past.

I needed to film the tree as a way of embracing it and carry part of it with me to the uncertainty that lay ahead.

I was breaking up with Louise at that time, going separate ways in two weeks. I knew that wasn't a healthy situation, I was probably feeling that I needed to embrace other things, not only in terms of dealing with her or other women, but needing to move outwards. That's when I started working at the LIFT film co-operative, joining committees, trying to talk in ways she and I couldn't. From then on, what was inside was going to have to come to the surface a lot more, so it wasn't just about generations or the past, it was more about being able to say this is what I need to embrace now, it's you, it's the tree, it's everything. *Immoral Memories* and *Caress* were ways to shake my body, to open it up, to embrace these things that my mind was just toying with for awhile. I was shedding a lot.

MH: This memorial uses an expressionistic camera rhetoric which conjures the outside as metaphor for interior necessities.

GP: Someone suggested once that *Caress* is an inappropriate title — it should have been *Frisk*. At the end we hugged and went away. It was a way of continuing what was happening in *Immoral Memories*, taking an emotional experience and translating it not with words or ideas, but allowing the ideas to become rhythms and compositions on their own and see what shape they can take.

MH: How did *Elegy (21 min 1989)* begin?

GP: I was travelling to Yugoslavia, my family's homeland, and decided to take a camera and a tape deck with me. I was filming intuitively and whatever happened was fodder for what I imagined as a documentary of divisions — between Serbian and Croatian, father and mother, anger and sensitivity. I started shooting in Split, where the architecture's been marked by four distinct periods. The Roman emperor Diocletian had a palace there, the Byzantines left their mark, as did the Venetians and others with Romanesque styles, and now there are modern apartments set into the ruins of palatial walls. In a single wall you could see each of these periods, parts would be broken off and rebuilt into a palimpsest of remnants set in jarring relation. It seemed like a metaphor for Yugoslavia and how I was feeling at that time.

Elegy

My father was travelling in Europe at the same time, my sister and brother-in-law too, all travelling separately until we converged in a mountain village in Yugoslavia, at my uncle's. We'd wander round the mountain, see the place where my father tended sheep, picked chestnuts, and drew water from the spring. It was a way of getting a sense of his past. But the present was always ruining his stories. Everything he'd talked about had changed. Instead of seeing this wonderful idyllic river, I'd be looking at a stream that was a few inches deep with old fridges, stoves and garbage dumped in it. It drove him nuts. He got into arguments and fights: "This is shit! You've let this country become a junkheap, a pigsty!" For me it was just a different place I wanted to explore. So we walked on. Following his past. Chris and Jim left after a few days, I was leaving for Greece soon. Then someone brought a message to my father about a friend of mine back in Canada. When I got out of the shower my father came into my bedroom and said, "Shawn's dead." We looked at each other for a few minutes. Is this real? Is this true? I didn't believe it. I thought it's not Shawn, it's Ticker. Ticker wrapped himself around a pole, he was drinking. Shawn couldn't die. He was okay a week ago. He was coming up to Toronto for his chemo so there was no way he was dead. It was someone else. That's what I believed for the next five days, still knowing it was probably him. I was paralyzed. My relatives said, "Well, that happens. Do you want some yogurt?" I was confused and angry that no one could talk about it, but what did I expect? I hardly knew them. So I took my camera and just wandered all over Skopje where everything shook with its own history. Like the Turkish fortress, which is a tourist site now, but for me became a warning of future wars. I was in shock, confused, five thousand miles away, surrounded by all these reminders of death, with no way of sharing what was going on inside me. A group of kids called me over to take their picture, Muslim boys. I'd been shooting churches and mosques, rewinding the camera to set one image overtop another using some planning and lots of chance. It was a way of working architecturally with layers of images inside the camera, of allowing the camera to show this history of layers. I shot the boys, rewound the film, and then shot a Serbian church which cuts through the image of the boys, burning their image out. Which is exactly what's happening now. The Muslims are being wiped out by the Serbian Orthodox church. All those wars have begun again.

Elegy runs through three movements. The first shows a passing landscape slowed to different speeds, fields with haystacks and houses in beautiful greens and yellows overlooked by mountains — that seemed an opening for me, a way into this country, this past. Folk music from the villages plays while my aunt reads my coffee cup grounds. Her reading was a troubling list of opposites, "Lots of friends but at the same time emptiness and darkness. Your road is long but your road is empty. There's a message coming over here on your masculine side. But over here on your feminine side there's something nice going to come." Intercut with the landscape are glimpses of statues, architecture from Split, and people from the village. It's a portrait of this fragmented country, the ghosts, Shawn's death, a portrait of myself being split, my doubles loosed on the landscape. The first movement ends with water flowing into barrels, and my voice-over intoning, "Hopefully when I get through this I'll be able to cry." The second movement begins with family documentation and ends in reflection. A little girl recites a poem about the partisans slaughtered by Bulgarian fascists, as she sits in front of the partisan monument. My father recalls a childhood friend dying, crying as he holds his portrait. There's a family picnic and then a movement up the mountains, an attempt in voice-over to conjure the join between sound and image: after Shawn's death these relations seemed arbitrary, the pull from one moment to the next another chance procedure. History's rewritten until you can't hear anymore the echo of things long past.

The second movement closes with water pouring over a vast wall. I imagined it like the wall of a cinema and wrote: "Fate weaves its light, casting monuments of moving images. The picture screen unfolds to drape an empty wall and when it's over rises up to set itself beside its own nature." That seemed the function of art, as a model or mirror. The final shot returns to water with deeply buried branches moving underneath the surface. With the sense that there's something more, something that can't be said, or won't. Not yet.

Three days before I found out about Shawn's death, my father told me about a friend of his who had died — they didn't get him to the hospital in time. He was nineteen years old. I thought that was an incredible coincidence, that he'd lost someone coming to Canada, and I'd lost a friend here. His story begins the third movement which is shot in black and white and gold. Begun with a look inside a house, it moves outside as his story ends, unable to reach out and touch his friend. A terrible wail begins, the mourning howl of the Serbian women, which lasts until the film's close. We see a woman lighting a candle for her dead brother, it's one of those chilling moments — she was willing to give me anything, looking at the camera like, "Do you want more?" and I keep it running, and she turns to the monument, and embraces it. It's one of those things you deliberate over for a while — do I leave this in? Is this too raw and revealing? But it was so touching. The last image of the film looks like a tombstone except it has a spout in its midsection, with mountain spring water issuing. This seemed to sum up the film, it was an image of both sides, life giving and death recalling.

Elegy

I suppose I mediated my feelings about Shawn through the film during the four years I took to make it. A year after it was finished, in 1990, I was invited to show the film in a Swiss festival. A French translation was sent to my hotel room and as I read it, I started crying. I received money to finish a film and travel with it because of Shawn, it was the most puzzling thing that I should benefit from his tragedy. You can juggle the personal tragedy and the beautiful sunny day but, under all these images, under every cut, is Shawn's death. For me, film was a job, I wanted to become a filmmaker, but not till that point did real life arrive. I lost this wanting to become a filmmaker. Now it was a way of life. That moment in the hotel room shook me. That's when Shawn died for me, and everything changed.

MH: The next film you made, *Antigone (8 min b/w 1990)* also relates to death.

GP: *Antigone* is about trying to bury something that won't go away. We were shooting a retelling of the Oedipal myth, and I thought that everyone, experienced filmmakers, the Canadian film industry, everybody's still dealing with the old story. Maybe you should comment — it was your idea.

MH: I wanted to make a diary film using several image rolls printed together. The first roll would be like a stencil, a high-contrast print that all the other pictures would appear inside, and I figured what better for a stencil than the Oedipal myth, patterned imprint of unconscious ideals. So I

asked you and Barbara Sternberg to act it out with me, and Steve Sanguedolce to shoot it.

GP: I decided to bring my camera along and shoot in between takes, when there wasn't any action happening. I thought I'd shoot first and ask questions later — if a film came out of it fine, and if not, that was okay too. It begins on a rooftop with four of us walking around in slapstick fashion and the voice-over announces, "This is the Ex-Patras studios of Hollywood North... Here they meet to bury a ritual...if they can...the story that unfolds in one's sex; the one that presents violence in genitalia and love of the classics. As with any good story, at the end of this one there will be bodies to bury." Shots of the production follow, much of

Antigone

it rendered in a farcical way. But the film was a serious attempt to deal with Canadian cinema, how the people who came before us affected our own, how the past eats the present.

The final shot shows us piled in a heap of bodies while the witness circles and the voice-over says, "But these ex-patriate experimenters are retiring this tired old story. It is too confusing when actors play too many roles that always amount to the same thing. They have taken the door of the father and refused to breathe more life into this eternally recurring fairytale. Here they lie waiting to be buried; here, at the crossroads of nature and history, the Canadian Shield and Hollywood North, documentary and fiction, Queen Street and Bay Street. And what rough cinema, its hour come round at last, slouches towards Toronto to be born?"

MH: Do you think an avant-garde exists?

GP: I'm not part of an avant-garde. That was an important term when we were starting out. I don't see what value it has anymore. It was important to study those events, it gives you a sense of belonging to that long line of history. Perhaps the term characterized our idiosyncratic curiosity and risk taking in filmmaking and gave us a sense of security against "mainstream" audiences and critics who seemed indifferent to us. I guess there's still safety in numbers.

MH: What about the audience?

GP: A few years ago I thought audiences didn't matter, that it's not about what others bring to your work. Now I really believe it. For me the communication isn't with my audience, it's with my tools, my medium. It's become most meaningful to me to pursue an exploration of who I am. The self is such an infinite layering. I can't be turned on by many of the cinemas around me. I used to have a lot of anger over what films got made. But this anger is also turned onto my own work; often I think it's a bit shallow, that it needs to go further, whip myself. And that's good. As my desires and interests coincide with others, my work reaches more people. I'm doing exactly what I want to do in film and it's still fun, even though the motivating factors are purely ones of exploration. I don't need to be avant-garde and attack everything. I know that's a kind of posturing or stance.

MH: Tell me about *33 (3 min 1997)*.

GP: I was 33 when I shot it. Those two numbers are infinity with a bit missing. It was my birthday. I'd spent a harrowing night reflecting on my past and threw the I Ching with three pennies chosen at random, each with different dates. Each date corresponded to a grouping of three friends, at three very different times in my life. I never had any brothers, except for them. One was already dead; another was sick. And I started feeling the fragility of life, I was shaking with tears and tried to write. I turned on the tape deck and mumbled for an hour-and-a-half, finally picked up the camera, and went for a walk. *33* begins in my apartment with the three pennies in my hand, then moves to a hydro pole and wires, then to a church with stained glass windows — two different kinds of power. I filmed some very old people, many in wheelchairs with young kids racing around them. My nerves were right on the surface, I was feeling everything. I just wanted to protect the world and I channeled all this through the camera. I photographed layers of stone tracing generational lines, then the movement of light through trees, another image of generations. I filmed my journey through a park, busy intersections, past fences, bunches of flowers, to the lake where silhouettes pass back and forth in quick, ghostly glimpses, and a sunset sinks on the horizon. I asked John Black to make the soundtrack. I described the film in terms of an emotional progression. There are different forms of energy expressed — the spiritual energy which propelled it; light energy from the church; the motorized energy of the children. I told him what that meant to me, and he composed a track using his own electroacoustic sounds. It was another wordless exploration, and summed up a stage I was going through. I was trying to find a structure that expressed the fragility of life. It's easy to see now that people are dying,

but back then... I wasn't going to let the world affect me because I needed to protect myself and stay alive. To be vulnerable is insane. I didn't know that's how you have to grow. But you need something to anchor yourself. I was finding it in isolation or books of the dead. The groups of three helped that day. Those two years in Parkdale were harrowing because I'd opened myself up, but didn't have a home, a place I could return to find myself.

Archaeology of Memory (14 min 1992) began in December 1985. I was doing some pans along the lake. I shot off eight rolls of black-and-white high-contrast film and processed it myself. I was studying the pan. What does it mean? How do I use these tools? It was an experiment. But what did I hope to discover with this? Eight rolls of pans across water? It was very strange. I processed it all. Seven rolls were fine. One roll was empty, black except for the swirling grain and scratches. I threw away the seven rolls and looked at the scratches over and over, thinking that they looked like cave paintings from forty thousand years ago. That began the process of finding out how these early forms of representation narrated the condition of my own life, the way I was marked. I jumped into the skin of what I was exploring, I started living in those times. I imagined how people communicated, living at the mouths of caves, and travelling deep inside them to perform their rituals with torches, shadows, music and masks — a lot like cinema. I started arousing those states which led me to an archaeology of my own family history. Old home movie footage my parents had shot. Then I started gathering animal images. Animals are part of an evolutionary strand that we belong to. "Animal" is an echoic word that replicates meaning in its pronunciation, it means breath or soul or spirit. This led to sexuality and all the other forms of energy that we witness and contain. That's what would hold these threads together. At the time I was very confused about sexuality and its representation. I wasn't sure what gave me pleasure, what I was afraid of — men? women? And then I met Lisa, who was exploring the same ideas — sex, power, politics, aggression, tenderness, pain, pleasure. We talked naked for a year. We'd get together, have our clothes off in minutes and talk. That's when sex became less of a mystery. But there was still a question of its doubling, its representation. How do you shoot this? Much of these explorations became part of *Self Portrait*, while the actual sexual representation became a form of energy in *Archaeology*, explosions of light, heat, intensities, and chemical reaction. All of these elements, home movie images that revealed the patterning of social structures and stereotypes, the animals, sex and landscape were woven together, laid overtop one another to make *Archaeology of Memory*. Randy Smith and I talked about the musical aspects of the film over seven years as it evolved, then he composed an amazing *musique concrète* piece that really punctuates the humour in the film. It's an interpretive work that's very precisely measured and intricately woven, like the images.

From the outset, I'd intended to make a film in two parts — the opening would be *Archaeology*, and the second part called *Self Portrait Taking Stock (72 min 1992)*. Both films took seven years to figure out. *Self Portrait* was an expression of a time where some of the most fundamental changes in our country occurred, not only our identity as Canadians, but the future of how we might live together was being debated. It was an important part of my own identity. I grew up knowing I wasn't a WASP, I wanted to live in the suburbs with a normal name. Now difference is being celebrated a lot more. Thirty years ago it was different. You identified with the British establishment. Especially in a small town like Niagara Falls. Now all that's started to change and occasioned an identity crisis in all of us I think.

Self Portrait of Taking Stock

Self Portrait was a way to grapple with what was happening in the country, the film co-op, my neighbourhood, my relationships, my body. Along the way I made over 250 personal tape recordings — telephone messages, parties, conversations with friends, personal musings, television and radio. Maybe twenty-five hours of diary images. The camera and tape deck were with me all the time. Three years into the film I figured what it was about, in a night I called the sermon on the toilet. It was one of those harrowing nights of introspection and self analysis aided by drugs. Sometimes you need those things. At other times just a prayer will do. Please let me see this clearly. That night was the middle of the project and I sat in my washroom for six, seven hours looking at the cleanliness of the things we use, the places we send stuff from our bodies. I thought about how my parents prepared

our house, how certain parts of the body are hidden, how we hide from each other in this architecture of the invisible. Why does this washroom have to be so clean? Then I knew that the film had a spine that held it together, patterns of interest and development, and that in order to go on, I needed to break its back. That's what I set out to do. After that it was, "anything goes," don't worry about how you look or feel — expose yourself. I broke it slowly over the next three years, three new years of gathering, and after six years I had a lot of broken pieces. So what was all this? Well, it was the process of breaking its back, which I had to reconstitute and then show how it was taken apart. That's what the film shows.

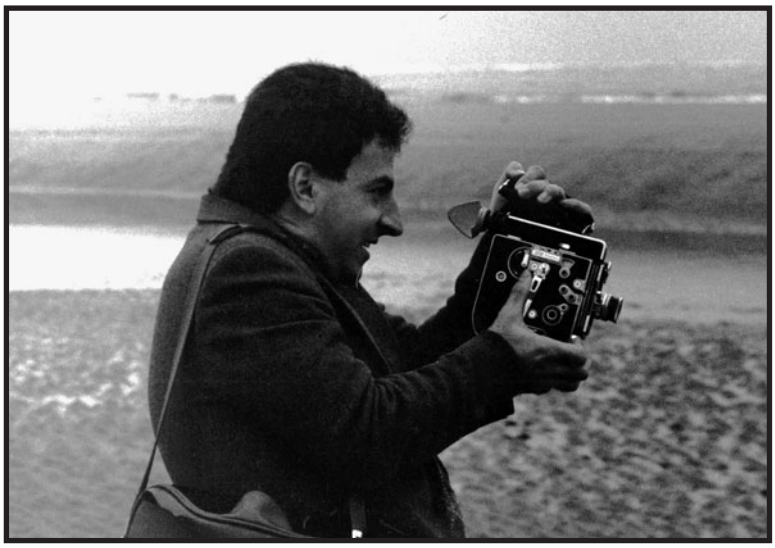
Immoral Memories 1

Re-united with *Archaeology,* it begins with a mythological expression of beginnings. After this storm of animals and sex and water, *Self Portrait* begins with an image of the universe, no bigger than a baby's hand, published in *Maclean's* magazine. It begins again in my childhood, with home movies, audio recordings of me as a child pretending I'm a deejay, showing how this child absorbed the outside, and how this progression becomes family, and then community and then a country. Its midsection deals with the fractious film community, showing how I was broken by it, and then a gallery of friends in an extended train metaphor, sometimes meeting, sometimes colliding. That was the beginning of healing, to know my part in it all. The film converges in the figure of the self, stuffed with the flotsam and jetsam of pop culture, images of myself in the mirror montaged with the *Wizard of Oz* and *Batman* comics and a litany of radio voices. That's the real film, that's *Self Portrait*, and everything around it was a tracing of how I'd arrived there. After the mirror phase, there's a refiguring of the personal and political, which makes sense because it's coming from a reconstituted self, one that makes connections with the world. Oh yes, and of course it ends with the O Canada sign off.

***Self Portrait* and *Archaeology* began in 1985 and the time of their making, from 1985 to 1992, represents a period that's over now. It was a period which explored myself using the diary form in an obsessive and documentary way. Needing to understand the relation between intimacy and technology, between the needs of the looker and the subject. All that's over now but you know how it is, repetition is a form of change. My father always told me that if you haven't made it by the time you're thirty-five you never will. I've just turned thirty-eight. And I feel like I'm ready to begin.**

Gary Popovich Filmography

Layton Symphony	4 min b/w 1982
Choral Fantasy	25 min 1985
Immoral Memories 1	10 min b/w 1988
Caress	1.5 min silent 1989
Elegy	21 min 1989
Antigone	8 min b/w 1990
Archaeology of Memory	14 min 1992
Self Portrait Taking Stock	72 min 1992
33	3 min 1997



PHILIP HOFFMAN:

PICTURES OF HOME

The films of Philip Hoffman have revived the travelogue, long the preserve of tourism officials anxious to convert geography into currency. Hoffman's passages are too deeply felt, too troubled in their remembrance, and too radical in their rethinking of the Canadian documentary tradition to quicken the pulse of an audience given to starlight. He has moved from his first college-produced short, *On the Pond* — set between the filmmaker's familial home and his newfound residence at college — to a trek across Canada (*The Road Ended at the Beach*); from Amsterdam, where he was invited to the set of Peter Greenaway's *A Zed and Two Noughts* and made *?O,Zoo! (The Making of a Fiction Film)* to Mexico for his haiku-inspired short *Somewhere Between Jalostotitlan and Encarnacion*; from *passing through/torn formation*'s pan-continental dialogue of madness and memory to *Kitchener-Berlin*'s oceanic traversal; and finally, to *river*, a landscape meditation that leads inevitably home.

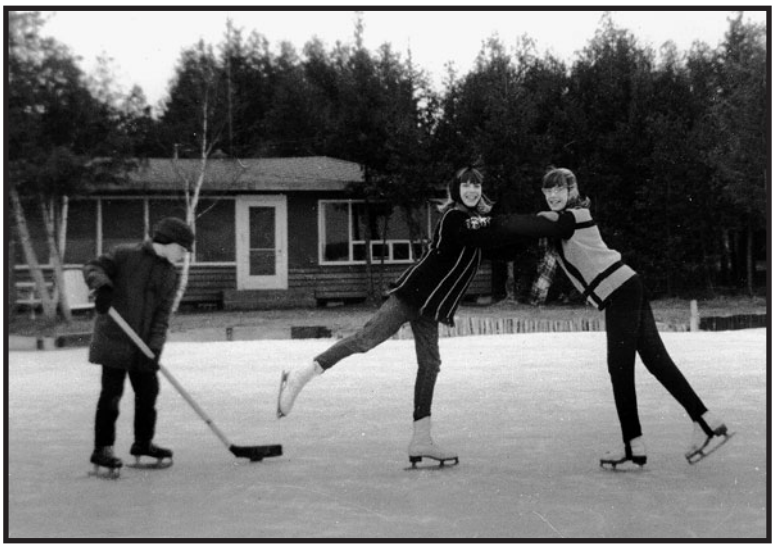
Denoting the family as source and stage of inspiration, Hoffman's gracious archeology is haunted by death, the absent centre in much of his diary practice a meditation on mortality and its representation. His restless navigations are invariably followed by months of tortuous editing as history is strained through its own image, recalling Derrida's dictum that everything begins with reproduction. Hoffman's delicately enacted shaping of his own past is at once poetry, pastiche, and proclamation, a resounding affirmation of all that is well with independent cinema today.

MH: Any early experiences with pictures you can remember?
PH: The first one I can think of was my grandmother, who used to shoot from the hip, without looking through the viewfinder. These low angle shots always turned out and made us look as big as John Wayne. That was the perfect size when we were little. I didn't think of it until years later when I realized I was shooting like that sometimes, using the body to find the picture. I had a box camera for years but didn't get into photography until I met Richard Kerr. He was a couple of years older than me and was going out with my sister. We set up a darkroom in my basement and figured out how to work it ourselves. I was writing poetry, but never showed it to anyone. The photography was different. It was a language I could use to talk to people because I didn't have words. I was shooting a lot of family stuff — moments of everyday life. I played hockey and tried the accordion unsuccessfully because there were always rules. I was made to play scales which gave me an ear for rhythm, but killed the play in it. Kitchener was a very business-oriented city; you had to look around to feed your interests. I managed to find small pockets where I could work, and those were private places, caves. That's where I did the writing and the photography. I went into business in my first year of university which was just remote control — everyone in the Hoffman family went into business. But after one year, that was enough, and I took English literature and some film courses, still trying to decide what to do. To support myself I was working in a factory making boxes and figuring out all week what I'd do at the weekend farm house. I would go up with friends and get blasted and shoot these crazy skits on super-8. There's a rift between what the poet desired and what I thought was desired of me: to be a good citizen of Kitchener-Waterloo. It's just driven into you there.
MH: Were you expected to work at Hoffman's Meats?
PH: My grandfather expected me to. I was Philip III, you know. [laughs] I was kind of the heir. My father always wanted to be something else, but he had to work in the factory. His father was one of those staunch Germans, so he never got a chance to do what he wanted. He was quite open to letting me go, giving me the chance he never had. When he was selling the business he asked if I wanted in, and I told him no. Then I decided to go to film school. I tried York and Queen's, which dropped me because of my business marks. Then I called up the chairperson at Sheridan College, and I was so welcomed that it seemed like the place to go. Richard had been there a year already.

passing through/torn formations

MH: That's where you made *On The Pond (9 min b/w 1978)*?
PH: Yes. It was a personal documentary because it makes sense to begin with something you know. It wasn't so different from the kinds of writing and photography I'd done up to that point, which dealt directly with people around me. *On The Pond* began with a slide show. I was fairly quiet in the family. I had three sisters who were a

couple of years older than me — triplets. They garnered lots of attention. But this was my birthday, so I knew I had the full attention of the family. I miked the whole room and showed slides. I constructed another slide show for the film and cut the comments down from a couple of hours to a few minutes. The slides showed moments with the family. There's one picture taken from behind my mother. My dad's looking off in the distance as if he's discovering some new world. We were out in the bush where we would go for walks. In the film you hear voices saying, "Oh do you remember when we went out on that walk?" And then to my mother, "Oh, that's when you were feeling lousy." Except it's not "feeling lousy"; there's an incredible amount of trauma which is being dismissed, and the photo shows the shadow of her sickness. You can hear the way her memory is being taken away, how her voice is being levelled. We were taking "good care" of her pain. And then someone says, "Oh look, there's Phil and he's smiling," because I'm smiling in the corner of the picture. So, what's taken up isn't my mother's problems, but the face I made for them. The smile has to do with pleasing her, hoping to make things better. So everything's there in that photograph. It was shot from the hip, unposed, and it was exciting going through these photos for clues to a past I'd slept through. I think childhood is so traumatic we sleep through most of it.



On the Pond

MH: Was the whole film going to be photographs?

PH: No, I wanted to make a kind of docudrama. I got my cousin to play me as a little boy, getting up early, skating out on the ice, stickhandling with the dog. Then the social space enters in the soundtrack, breaking his solitude — you hear the coach yelling and other voices while the boy does push-ups alone on the ice.

MH: The film moves between these two arenas — between hockey and the family — as if you have to choose one or the other, or that hockey was a way to leave home.

PH: That's what happened in my life — the year I made *On The Pond* I quit hockey. I was playing for the college team, and we had an exhibition game at Kent State where there was a big demonstration. The university was trying to build a gym on the ground where the students had been gunned down. There were cops on horseback trying to gas the demonstrators, and I grabbed a camera and filmed it. That was the point where I left hockey. It was becoming apparent that hockey players weren't the people I wanted to spend time with. The competition was so draining. So I simply transferred the energy I was putting toward sports into filmmaking.

I finished *On the Pond* in a very heavy Marxist time, and some people were taking a lot of knocks for making films about their own experiences. "Personal" filmmaking was considered self-indulgent. But now things have come round again. Now you can't just run out and point a camera at someone. Personal work wasn't thought of as political back then, but to my mind it's the most political.

MH: How did *The Road Ended at the Beach (33 min 1983)* start?

PH: Before I went to Sheridan I used to go on trips through Canada. I'd work the first part of the summer then travel for the last month and go back to school. In those days, in my late teens, I carried a super-8 camera with me just to shoot stuff, not thinking or knowing anything about making films. While I was at Sheridan, I continued travelling and collecting footage and called it *Road Journals* — it was an ongoing sketch pad. After school ended, I planned a trip with some cameras and sound gear, and this became the central trip the others would weave in and out of. Jim McMurray and I started in Ann Arbor because that's where the van was, then drove north to Kitchener to pick up Richard Kerr. Then we headed east and visited Robert Frank in Cape Breton. And Danny, a friend who'd gone to school with us, wanted to make films, but got dragged down with his life in Nova Scotia. You see this idyllic setting with the dogs playing in the water and then he says, "Well I have to

There were cops on horseback trying to gas the demonstrators, and I grabbed a camera and filmed it. That was the point where I left hockey.

work in the fish plant — you have to do that if you want to live out here." The trip was staged — we'd travelled together in the past — and we were trying to remake what we'd already done, to recapture that feeling. But that didn't work at all. I'd known Richard for ten years; it would have been different if we'd gone five years earlier, because then we were in the maturity of our relation. The same with Jim. All that comes through in the film. This isn't *Highway 61* or *Roadkill* because the romance is gone. We're travelling through a cold Canadian summer and not meeting any "girls." [laughs] It's a different kind of journey. By the late seventies the road film was dead. And these three guys can't really talk with each other. We're all waiting on an experience that isn't coming and no one's sure why. It has a lot to do with how men relate to each other, dealing with outer realities, getting the job done. Filmmaker Mark Rappapport said that it's a record of the time — when Kerouac travelled, things were opening up, but by 1980 everyone was hunkering down for Reagan, everything was closing up. Everyone on this trip is alone and isolated: Frank's retreated to Mabou, the guys on the road are caught in dead-end jobs, and nobody's relating to each other in the van.

MH: *Road Ended* pictures a series of imagined homes to which the film attempts to return. Some of these homes are from past trips, or past times spent with folks in the van, and these are presented against a backdrop of fifties Beat writing, especially Kerouac's *On The Road*.

PH: Well, that's the myth right there — it's confronted by drawing these different decades together in the editing. The Beats were the fathers I took on the trip, but their roads are closed now. I was attracted to the possibility of spirituality that Kerouac held out through his Zen practice, even though he died an alcoholic far from the lotus tree. But it was one of the first expressions of Eastern culture I'd encountered. It wasn't the drugs or parties, but those simple moments of description of what's there in front of him.

MH: Kerouac's trying to live in the moment, to conjure the present through his writing, and finally to make life that moment.

PH: Kerouac was writing while he was on the move, but when you're filming the camera gets in the way. Personal relations become performance when a camera is there. Have you ever seen that old Neil Cassady film when he's on camera? It doesn't work. The mythology isn't there. The camera says, "I'm immortalizing you." The present moment can't be returned; the camera takes it apart. But you can go off alone with the camera and create energy — like the last scene where I'm dancing on the beach. That kind of thing expresses the Kerouac ideal of pure energy in movement. As far as Robert Frank goes, even though nobody was making photographs like him in the fifties, he was still taking the moment and stealing it from someone. I've always had trouble taking pictures of people I don't know. He had a social reason — he was trying to show America's spiritual bankruptcy. I was making a personal film. That's why the photography in *Road Ended* is so careful, so unlike a road movie. There's no barging into strange places and waving cameras around. That was done in *cinéma vérité* in the sixties, and I have problems with that.

The Road Ended at the Beach

MH: How did *Somewhere Between Jalostotitlan and Encarnacion (6 min 1984)* begin?

PH: There was a reunion of Beat poets in Boulder at "Jack Kerouac's School of Disembodied Poets," at least that's what Ginsberg called it. I drove down with my sister and a friend. Robert Frank was there, and I wanted to ask him if I could use one of his photographs in *Road Ended*. But every time I tried to talk to him something would happen, some guy would walk up, "Are you really Robert Frank?" Finally, I bumped into him by accident, smashed right into him, and he was his normal humble self. He remembered our dog. So that was fine. I wanted to go to Boulder before going down to Mexico where I had this romantic notion of shooting very simple events — I had been reading haiku. The Bolex is a camera powered by a spring that you wind up and it runs for twenty-eight seconds. I wanted to use the length of its wind as my frame for these haiku shots. The Bolex was perfect because it's light and doesn't need batteries, and I'd worked with it so often I knew when the shot would end. I used its so-called limitation to my own advantage as a structuring principle. I went with ten minutes of film. I'd met Adriana Peña on one of my *Road Ended* trips and was going down to see her. She was taking me around, and I became involved with her family. It was a bit strange. She was showing her family the man she was maybe going to marry, and then I realized that this was perhaps not such a good idea. [laughs]

MH: Can you explain what a haiku is?

PH: Haiku is a three-line poem with a five-seven-five beat structure. It usually describes everyday events. The three images, or lines, go together to form a new expression — Eisenstein used haiku as an inspiration for his ideas about montage. So I shot things for twenty-eight seconds, each shot the same length, and in the midst of this shooting found myself on a bus between Jalostotitlan and Encarnacion. The bus stopped, and a woman came screaming across a field. Her little boy had been run over. I watched from inside the bus with the camera in my hand, trying to decide whether to film or not. And that's what the film becomes. When I got back to Toronto, I decided to try and make a film about that moment without the image.

MH: Why didn't you film it?

PH: Gut reaction. I can intellectualize it now. I could say: I didn't want the camera to get in the way of the experience, or I wasn't ready, or it would have made a lot of people uncomfortable, or I didn't want to be like some reporter "getting" the scene. In the editing I inserted intertitles which talk about the boy on the road in a bastardized kind of haiku. It has to do with my own working through death. I've been taught that death isn't part of life — it happens on television, or in life as a theatrical event at the funeral parlour with make-up and masks. The title *Somewhere Between Jalostotitlan and Encarnacion* suggests, for me, the passage from death to birth — the bardo state in Buddhist terms. Between these two places is the death of a boy. Jalostotitlan has, in its centre, an ornate graveyard that we passed by on our way to the death. Encarnacion suggests "incarnation," an embodiment in flesh. Visually the film is bookended with shots in black-and-white. The death is rendered metaphorically in colour superimposition, before the film returns to black-and-white for the last shot, which shows the passing water of a river, the rebirth.

Somewhere Between …

I was working on the film in my basement apartment when I heard a religious parade pass by. I went out and filmed it, not sure of how I'd use it or which film it was going into. I count on this kind of coincidence to make my work. I was experimenting with multiple layers of pictures — shooting a roll of blue brick wall, then winding the camera back and letting chance have its way. The work I'd done up to that point had been more representational and used static camerawork, even in my Mexico shooting. My ideas of documentary had been quite traditional, but what I'd learned in *Road Ended* was that there's always something outside the frame, and that's what *Somewhere Between* is about.

Bart Testa was the first person to offer this work some public attention. He programmed the Grierson Documentary Seminar in 1984, calling it "Systems in Collapse." The seminar doesn't happen anymore, but back then it was important in my theoretical development as a filmmaker. There were people making television documentaries and others making experimental work so there were very heated debates. Bart's programming was critical, and he said he wouldn't do the seminar unless he could show *The Falls* by Greenaway. He also invited *Road Ended* and *Somewhere Between*. There were people complaining they only had $100,000 to make a film while I was showing *Somewhere Between* which was shot on three rolls of film. So Bart was making a point by inviting me. At the seminar, my work was paired up with a guy named Don North, a news correspondent who'd made a number of films about Vietnam. There was one bloody massacre after another, and he said that was the stuff they didn't cut. Then my program came on, which also dealt with death but never showed it. Because television and violent movies have conditioned us to see pictures of death in a certain way, when we see it for real it's just the same. My film argued that you could deal with another side of death or that the possibility of mourning lies in the unseen.

MH: There's something very Catholic in this refusal. Death is granted a power because of its secrecy; there's an awe and mystery that its revelation could only trivialize.

PH: Not showing death wasn't because of fear, but respect. I didn't want to barge into its territory, to try to exploit it for my own work. It was a ceremony that didn't belong to me. I was honoured to be in its presence, but, at the same time, it wasn't mine. So after the seminar North approached me and said, "Phil, I really enjoyed the discussion, but you know when you were in the editing room, didn't you just wish you had the footage?" Some things don't change.

I think Peter Greenaway connected with the independent filmmaker in me — the idea of making work with what you have available. He was really moved by *Road Ended*. He

talked about the poetry in the images. I asked if it might be possible to see one of his film shoots and he said sure and wrote me a reference letter. The only way I could arrange financing was through an apprentice program, but he's not into "learning from the father." He felt my work would develop on its own. In his letter he said I needed opportunities to make work and that I should get funding to make a film about anything I wanted and that I didn't need to use a script. That was the other thing, I was working without a script, just collecting images over a long period of time and making sense of them in the editing. So in the summer of 1985, I got $3,500 to go to Rotterdam and spend two or three months gathering pictures. I had about forty minutes of film. I worked the same way as in the past, shooting about thirty seconds a day, whenever the light and my inclinations met. I shot on and off location while Greenaway

?O,Zoo! [*The Making of a Fiction Film*]

was making *A Zed and Two Noughts* in the Rotterdam zoo. *?O,Zoo!* begins with images the narrator says are made by his grandfather who was a newsreel cameraman — it's a Greenaway-type ruse. Then it shifts into the making of the film around *A Zed and Two Noughts*. The diary starts with the trip to Holland and fairly mundane images — of animals, a huge wooden apple in the park, a headless statue — while the narrator speaks of what happens before and after the shot, with what's outside the frame. Then the

> "From a distance I heard the scream of a beast. Moving closer to the source of the sound, I saw that an elephant had fallen down and was struggling to get up. Outside the enclosure, I noticed that a group of people had gathered to watch and inside some elephants and zoo workers had surrounded the fallen animal, trying to give it encouragement as it rocked its huge body in the sand. As I watched, I tossed over and over in my mind whether to film the scene or not. I've come across this problem before. Like the crowd that had gathered, I was feeling helpless; I wanted to assist the beast and filming would make me feel that I was doing something constructive. Maybe the television network would buy the film and show people that tragedy is right at their doorstep. I took out the tripod, set up the camera and looked through the viewfinder. The compressed image caused by the telephoto lens intensified the sounds coming from the huge rolling body. I pulled the trigger: listen to the spring slowly unwind, and watch the elephant's painful rhythm. I wind the camera tight and press the trigger for another burst of twenty-eight seconds. Now the zoo keeper is shoving bales of hay under the elephant as the others surround it. This only gets the elephant more aroused. The heat is intense and in its excitement the elephant plunges back into the sand and with one last scream, stretches out its body... and then it stops moving. The attendant says that the elephant has had a heart attack. My throat is parched, and sweat pours off my body; I watch the dust settle. I go looking for a drink, pushing through the crowd, fixed on the image I'd filmed; as if my mind was the film and the permanent trace of the elephant's death was projected brightly inside. Somehow it's my responsibility now. I wonder why I took the film. There seems no reason to develop the negative; my idea of selling the film to the network seems just an embarrassing thought, an irresponsible plan. I decide to put the film in the freezer. I decide not to develop it."
>
> *(From the script of* **?O,Zoo!** [*The Making of a Fiction Film*]*)*

screen goes black and the narrator speaks:
This is another example of the unconscious speaking. I wrote the story after the event happened, then realized it was directly connected to one of the first deaths I experienced. After my grandfather died, my uncle asked me to go to the funeral home and take pictures of him in the casket. I showed up and didn't know what I was doing there. I'd been making photographs for years and didn't want to document him in this fake place. But I took the pictures and put the film in the freezer for eight years. In a way, the film was a way to act this out, to return to my grandfather. It keeps coming back in my films so whether I've laid him to rest or not...

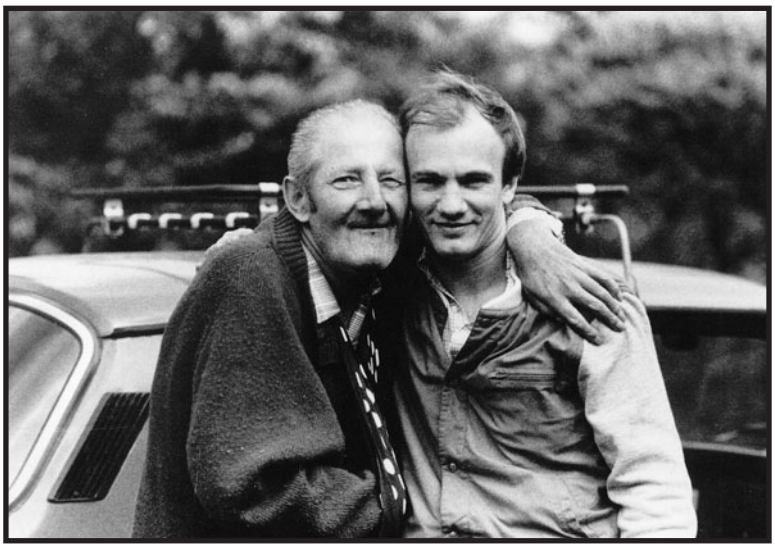
MH: How does *passing through/torn formations (43 min 1988)* **relate to your previous work?**

PH: In terms of my film work, *On The Pond* **relates to my boyhood and family.** *Road Ended* **deals with travelling and friends and adolescence.** *Somewhere Between* **and** *?O,Zoo!* **deal with fathers and a documentary tradition brought down by fathers from which I'm trying to make something of my own.** *passing through/torn formations* **is the first film to deal with my mother's side of the family — it's filled with passion and chaos. The previous work features a locked-down camera in confined spaces. But** *passing through* **begins with a camera floating through a nursing home, hovering over my mother as she feeds my grandmother Babji. I couldn't show death in my previous work, but here I had a very close connection. I loved my grandmother very much; she was the first to tell me that dreams were important, so her decline had to be dealt with directly. The film unravels from her; she's the matriarch. But it doesn't begin there. It starts with a Chris Dewdney poem called "The Quarry." A boy opens a rock which has a moth inside, destined for fossilization, and as he opens it, the moth flies out "like dust from a dust devil." The moth that's**

being freed is the uncovering of family history, making it an open, interactive system. My purpose in making the film was to try to return my uncle to the family. He's a street person who's been cast out because his mental instability and violence caused a lot of grief. Idealistically, I felt that I would make a film with him and make an interjection into a family history that never moves, where things aren't spoken.

MH: You remarked earlier that while making *?O,Zoo!* you'd assumed some of the form of Greenaway's work — that this was part of your diary approach. In *passing through* I felt you'd assumed or mimed your uncle's demeanour — the film is rife with splits, multiple exposures, simultaneous address, broken subjects, departures, wars, and arguments.

PH: One of the stories my uncle told me was about his accordion. His father made him practise every day because he was going to be a great musician. But the instrument isn't balanced. You play the melody with your right hand and the bass line with your left, so you have to split your mind in two. He felt that's what led to his "manic depressive" or "schizophrenic" behaviour. I have a different take on it. I think he had a great capacity as an artist but wasn't allowed to express it except through the accordion. His parents had come to Canada from Czechoslovakia — at that time, the Austro-Hungarian Empire — and were already in their forties when he was born. He wound up in the pool halls listening to Elvis Presley and playing jazz accordion, but they couldn't accept that, and this rift grew into a psychosis. He thought it was bad to split your mind. But in order to watch the film you have to split, you have to think in a non-linear way. Because many stories are being told at the same time, the viewer has to choose how to move through it. The form relates not only to his ideas about the accordion but to the way he is, as if I were him.



passing through/torn formations

MH: The film also tries to heal some of these splits, and the central image of this integration is a corner mirror your uncle builds.

PH: He made it because he'd heard someone talk about left/right-brain differences. He felt that when you shave in front of a mirror you're actually seeing yourself as a reflection — you don't see yourself as others do. He felt that all the years he'd been shaving helped split him apart, and he could solve this with the corner mirror: two mirrors which reflect into each other. He had to re-learn how to shave because the reflection was the reverse of what he'd grown used to. He felt that ritual would exorcise his demons and heal him. He did the same thing in prison when he rewired an electric organ so all the low notes started at the right and left ends of the keyboard: they were symmetrical and moved to a central note in the middle. Of course, he was the only person who could play that organ. [laughs] He was trying to unlearn conventions of the past, the way he'd conditioned himself to live. That moment of creation and transformation is the moment of freeing the moth from the rock. It's the moment where the image comes to the paper when you're making a photograph. It's magical because you're totally in the present watching what's becoming. That's what I got from him, that living instant, but on the other hand there were other things attached to him that became too difficult. He was like the elephant in *?O,Zoo!,* or the dead boy in *Somewhere Between* — the image that couldn't be looked at because he would be judged. So he's hardly shown.

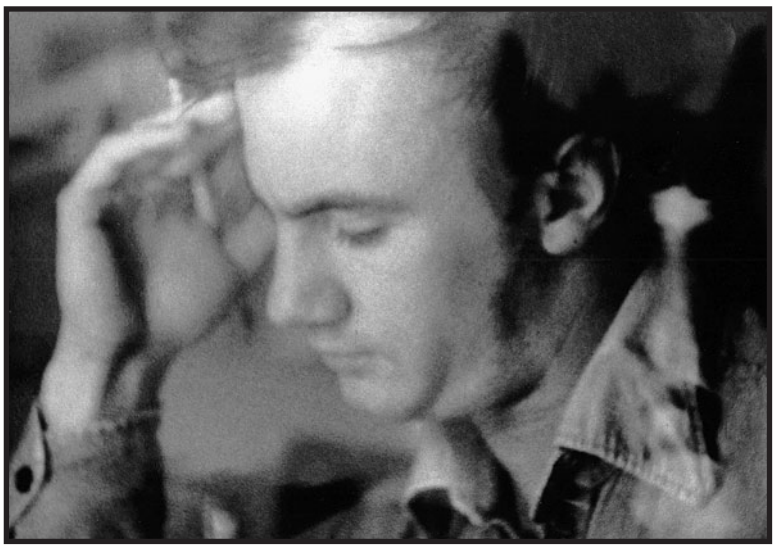
My brother Philip died at birth. My uncle Wally wasn't much older than me, so he became the brother I never had. Wally was born during the Second World War, while my grandmother was in great anguish over her brothers and sisters. While she was pregnant she grew a huge boil on her neck, and I use this as a metaphor in the film — as a poison coming to the surface. My grandmother was hearing stories about her brother's wife being raped by Russians and Nazis as they went through the country. After the war, my grandmother, mother, and Wally went back to visit. I guess Wally was about five. There were still blood-stained walls and ruins, and Wally got sick. No one went again until I did in 1984. That's the trip I show in the film where I asked my grandmother's sister to tell me what happened with Uncle Janyk, who was shot by his brother. There was an argument over land. The son had built a house on land which had been promised to him but the father refused to sell it to him. He wanted to own his son. So the son killed the father. All these stories are strewn through the film, which has been deliberately made so you can't follow it like a *Roots* chronology.

I should say something about Marian McMahon's involvement with the film. With my life. We've been together a long

time now, and she's changed the way I look at things, and I thought it was important to have her present in the film. The film ends with her voice making a very simple statement: "When I was eight years old, I skipped a flat stone six times across the smooth surface of Lake Kashagawigamog." This recalls the Dewdney poem at the beginning of the film, which is also spoken in darkness. Her speaking returns the film to Canada, or to a pre-Canadian continent, because Kashagawigamog is a Native word. So even though all these ethnic migrations are going on, both ends of the film deal with a time before the Europeans came. Dewdney's poem refers to geological time, and Marian's to a time belonging to the Natives. The kind of relentless uncovering that the film attempts is something I learned from her. I had been working with "personal" film, so these interests attracted each other, but she showed me a way to go further. She's a companion in this uncovering of our own histories. She taught me that our past is living in our present, in our bodies, and that it's worth the dig. If you don't uncover the past, you freeze up. There's pain involved in both states but the continued uncovering is alive — it feeds a living cinema.

MH: How did *river (15 min b/w 1978-89)* begin?

PH: It started off as a shooting exercise when I was studying film at Sheridan. The idea was simply to make a film that would be edited in-camera. So I went to the Saugeen River with a Bolex and a Rex Fader that allowed me to dissolve from one shot to the next. Richard Kerr steered the boat. The Saugeen goes through Lake McCullough, where my parents have a cottage, and we'd go up there in the summer. I would fish for trout or just drift down the river. I wanted to come back now that I'd decided to work with images instead of fishing poles. To see what was there. I shot parts of the boat, and the water and the light, looked at it and put it away. Three years later I got hold of a black-and-white video port-a-pack, an old Sony half-inch, open-reel deck. I wanted to drift down the river and let the camera run. The microphone was on the bottom of the boat, which amplified the sound in a weird way — it picked up anything the boat hit. This time I went down the river without anyone paddling; the boat just followed the current while I stood up holding the camera. What ensued was the chaos of the trip. The sound is important because every little nudge and scratch is very loud which contrasts with an idyllic floating-down-the-river scene. To my surprise, when I first showed it, people found this section quite humorous — the person's struggle in the boat, a confrontation of "romance" with chaos. That became the second section. Then I duped the in-camera edit onto video with a looping soundtrack — instead of seeing the dissolves fade to black, you see the screen it's being filmed off, which deconstructs the romance of the first scene. That was the third section, and each plays sequentially, one after another, moving on like the river. The last scene is shot underwater. I went with a couple of guys who were helping me because they had underwater housing for the Bolex. On the way up, I phoned my mother to tell her I was coming and she said, "Your uncle was found dead by a river, we think he shot himself." Pretty gruesome. It really coloured my thinking about the river, deciding what to shoot in this last scene. It's all filmed underwater with a high-contrast stock, and unlike the other sections, which flow smoothly, it's fast, almost Brakhage-like. In the editing I worked on the death-rebirth motif. Three times the camera moves up into the light, and the film ends with light. Buddhists believe that the Bardo state is the moment where the spirit dissolves into the universe, and it's commonly represented as light. I felt I needed to mark the death of my uncle because of the way it happened, the way it came to me. The only guide I've had in my filmmaking are these so-called coincidences.



Kitchener-Berlin

MH: I remember when you started working on *Kitchener-Berlin (34 min 1990)* you said that you'd spent so long working on your mother's side of the family that you wanted to turn to your father — to tell his story.

PH: I related my visual nature to my father's side, the silence and image-oriented expression that were a part of my earliest experiments with photography. I used home movies that my uncle shot (my father's brother). There's no story, just home movie moments mixed with photographs of Kitchener back when it used to be called Berlin. These are joined with newsreels from the other Berlin during wartime. Then the film re-visits both sites in the present, using a Steadicam camera. It floats over surfaces, looking as if it can move without gravity, gliding in space.

MH: Why the Steadicam?

PH: There's an obvious kind of spiritual feel to it, because you're floating in a world where the sky and ground are equivalent. It's something we can't do with our bodies,

except through technology. So it's a metaphor for the spirit released. I wanted to contrast that with the low technologies — the home movies which take a familiar form and subject. The Steadicam provides a solitary and other-worldly stance, an emptiness and separation from anything it shows. There's something that separates the people sitting in front of these old buildings, that separates the remnants of German history from the present, and the camera signals this. This relates to masculinity. The Steadicam is part of the technology that can take us to far-away places or destroy the world. I wanted to show different aspects of technology through the century, using the Steadicam to create a feeling of introspective space

Kitchener-Berlin

where one can look back and account for what's happened.

MH: Juxtaposed with images of the past, the Steadicam is filled with a sense of returning. Because its movement isn't attached to a body or person, and its movement is so uniform, it's as if the ghost of technology had ventured back to visit what it had occasioned, to look over all that's been constructed in its wake.

PH: Yes, that's the journey. The Steadicam floats over continents, adding layers until there are three, four, five images over top each other. They show an old Austrian churches, Berlin's bombing, an orange crane that looks like some technological beast, the Pope shaking hands with Native peoples, and machineries of the city. It builds to a point where the camera moves toward the sky, and then it breaks, overloaded, and the film dips into another strata. I went to the National Film Archives in Ottawa, looking for images of Kitchener during the war. An archivist named Trap Stevens said, "You should look at this old film — it's quirky." He pulled it out, and I was really moved by it. It touched something in me. The film was made by Dent Harrison, a British immigrant who came to Canada in the early part of the century. He arrived penniless and went into the bakery business, where he figured out how to cook a lot of bread at once by using rotating ovens. He made enough money to travel and own a movie camera. He made what I think is the first Canadian surrealist film. It pictured a dirigible flight from England to Canada, which I saw as technology coming to North America. I'd already related Kitchener to its German roots in Berlin and suggested how the philosophical bent of these new technologies related to the rise of fascism — how humans tried to become machines.

At first, I couldn't legitimize using Harrison's footage since it didn't have to do with Germany, but I realized I was neither German nor English, and that the English presence had been very strong in Kitchener. Harrison crosses the Atlantic in a dirigible and on a boat, and speaks of himself and a double making this travel. He's split himself in two in order to shoot the trip from two different perspectives. Later, he begins to edit his film and he uses a superimposition of himself, so you see him and his double in the same space. After that, when he's asleep his double moves out of his body. Then a subtitle reads: "Have you people seen all that I have in my dreams?" Then my film breaks into another section, which is more meditative, where the technology digs up the earth, using National Film Board footage of miners, interspersed with stuff I shot of a more ethereal nature. There are more home movies and wheat fields and footage I shot in a cave, all defying meaning. The way the images arrive is a surprise — they don't seem to connect and, formally, they're hard to follow.

In the first section, you expect certain patterns to recur, while the second section tries to deal with images in a way that's less filled with "meanings"; it moves into a flow of dreams. After screenings of the film some people have spoken about unremembered images from their past. That's an area I'm working with in my new films. Among the images of the underground, the last picture shows a red dress — the little girl slips into the emulsion — which says to me, "Stay tuned. We'll see what comes out." The whole film is a rendering of what I see as my male Germanic side. The first section is a walk through physical realities connected to the effects of technology, the male hand, so it includes the war and the Pope and the co-opting of Native cultures, all glimpsed through an ethereal camera. The second section is an inward journey. It's that simple. This shift is signalled by Harrison's old home movie, which begins in a very analytical and documentary fashion and then slides into a dream reality of doubles. The voyage over the Atlantic is linear, but once he's home, things begin to unravel. That's the inward journey.

MH: After finishing *Kitchener-Berlin,* you gathered up all of your work and named it as a cycle. This series of films progresses through the familial and the formal, through a

number of documentary styles that seem finally bent on shaking off narrative or any traditionally understood sequencing of events.

PH: It has to do with transformation. When I named this work as a finished cycle, I had to start again, and was as lost as I'd been at the beginning of my making. That's where I am now. Rick Hancox said the last films I've done all look very different. I feel that recently I've gone through a lot of changes very fast, and that's not always easy. You do it with your work, and then there's your life. So to imagine work in a cycle is useful. Finishing closed a way of working with the past, of dealing with the uncovering of family history. I'll always be able to return to that, but now it's time to make something else.

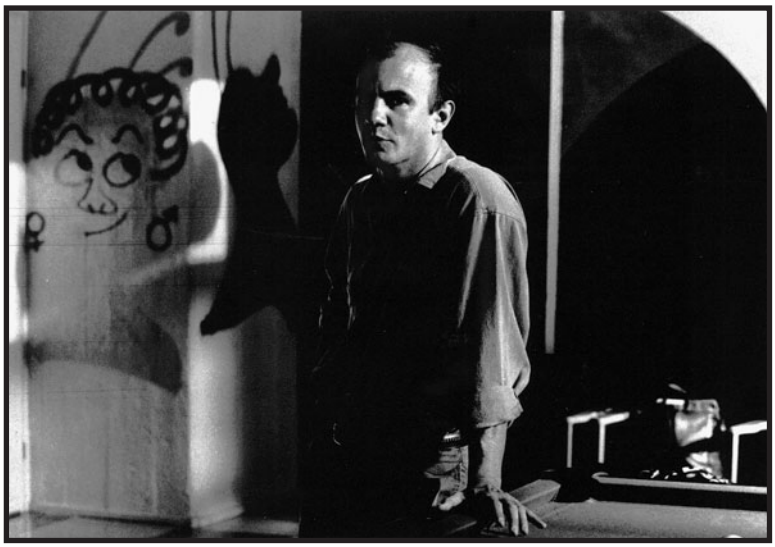
I went back to shooting super-8 without a plan or film in mind. This started in Banff where the first films I ever shot — some of the super-8 footage in *Road Ended* — had been made. I returned in 1989 and new ideas came up. Two ways of shooting developed. One came out of the haikus of *Somewhere Between*, shooting events of everyday life in a static frame, but this time in super-8. The other way was a single-frame zoom. Maybe I'm contriving this new cycle, but it's a path to follow in the midst of all this chaos. The single frame shooting will find its way into *Chimera (15 min 1996)*, while the haiku project is called *Opening Series*. The idea is to make twelve short films, using three shots for every film. They'll all be silent and wordless except for the title *Opening Series*, which is a reference to Olsen's "open form" and free association. It can't be pinned down as a static work of art or exhibited as my new film because it's always changing. These twelve films range from a few seconds to three minutes, and each has a picture on the cover of its box. I've been making paintings and xeroxing them and putting them on the covers; these serve as the titles. To decide on the order of the films, you look at the pictures and choose. So the film has many possibilities of flow. Every screening is different because it's connected to the person who picks the drawings, or sometimes the audience decides the order collectively. I was working on the paintings at the same time I was editing the films, so there's an organic connection between the two. I keep track of the different screenings and what I get out of them, the relationships between the films. They're images shot around the world. One begins with a wave cutting the screen diagonally and cuts to a bird sitting in remnants of old Egypt. The bird flies off and then there's a half-second shot of the falcon god. Images in other films have more formal connections. And then there are more "personal" pictures, images of home...

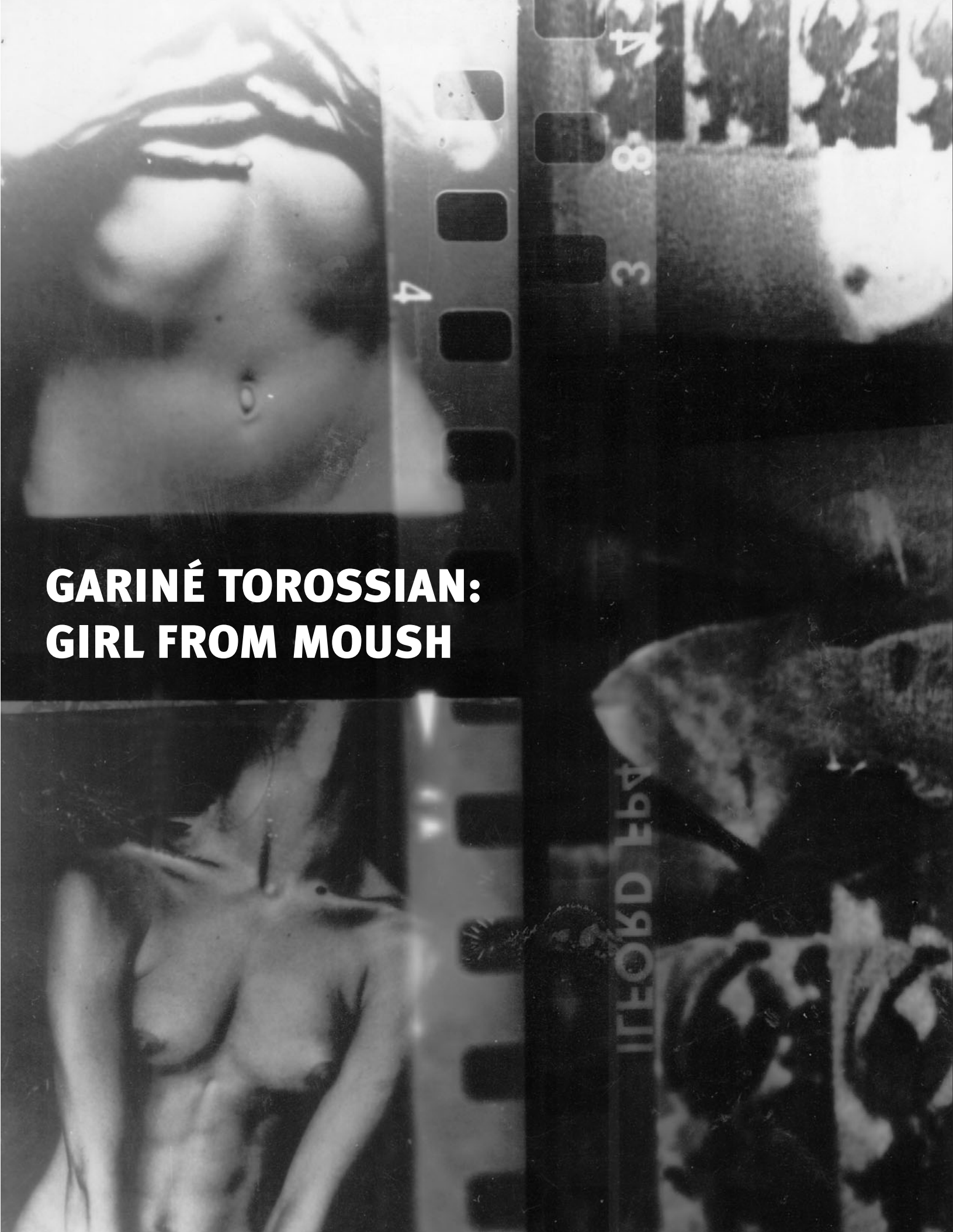
MH: Will you put this film in distribution?

PH: Maybe after a while, but I want to stay with it at this point just to see how it's working, because it all happens in connection with the people who make the choices. I need to see whether that works. I have a lot of fear in pinning down the films. I don't have a drive to repeat what I've already learned.

Philip Hoffman Filmography

On The Pond	9 min b/w 1978
The Road Ended at the Beach	33 min 1983
Somewhere Between Jalostotitlan and Encarnacion	6 min 1984
?O,Zoo! (The Making of a Fiction Film)	23 min 1986
passing through/torn formations	43 min 1988
river	15 min 1978-89
Kitchener-Berlin	34 min 1990
Opening Series 1	10 min silent 1992
Opening Series 2	7 min silent 1993
Opening Series 3 by Philip Hoffman and Gerry Shikatani	5 min b/w 1994
Technilogic Ordering	33 min 1994
Sweep by Philip Hoffman and Sammi van Ingen	32 min 1995
Chimera	15 min 1996





GARINÉ TOROSSIAN: GIRL FROM MOUSH

Young, glamorous and prodigiously talented, Gariné Torossian has introduced the world of knitting to the fringe. The plastic strips of which dreams are made are transformed in her hands, scissored into small lengths and scotch-taped back onto new turns of emulsion. These home-made quilts show a world of pictures in delirious collision. This personal archive is also an image of home, because Torrosian insists that our histories of looking, canonized in museums and picture books, have offered us a landscape where we have learned to recognize ourselves. And nowhere is this felt more directly than on the body, whose gestures of opening and closing re-play the ideals of dead poets and painters. Torossian stitches these still lives back into the light of the present where they might offer, in their new combinations, the possibilities of a new body, a new way of looking. Her imaginary historyscapes suggest a place where the body might escape its disciplines of understanding, and appear again to its beholders, infinite.

MH: Where are you from?
GT: I was born in Beirut, and came to Canada in 1979. I'd visited three years earlier, when I was six, and didn't like it. The landscape, the weather, the people — everything was cold. In Beirut there's no mask, everyone says what they feel and we all missed that. I was used to being outside where there's something happening everywhere, at every minute, and you're at the centre of it all. In Toronto I felt isolated, especially when we lived in the suburbs.
MH: Why did you leave Beirut?
GT: In 1978 civil war broke out for eight days. There was a lot of bombing. We couldn't sleep in our rooms because it was too dangerous, so everyone went to the centre of the building and camped in the hallways. From the kitchen you'd see fires in the hills. I'm very used to sounds of gunshots and bombs, they're both comforting and scary because as a child you're worried a bomb's going to fall in your bed. Our area wasn't so bad; the Palestinian section had the most fighting, and we were in the Christian part. During the eighties it got worse on both sides.
MH: Were there soldiers in your neighborhood?
GT: Yes, we were stopped going to the airport. It was only half an hour away but we took the six-hour route because the other road was too dangerous. We lied to the soldiers and then flew to Cypress. For two months we camped in a tent at the Armenian Community Centre in a field with a lot of other families, those who couldn't afford to stay in a hotel. We enjoyed it as kids, but I don't think my mother liked it much. We'd sold our apartment and my father's business, the auto body shop. We couldn't go back because Beirut was getting worse. When we arrived in Canada we didn't speak any English, and everything was very grey and ugly. Even the war seemed more interesting. I enrolled in grade two and learned English there; until then I had known only a few words, like "cat" and "dog." We learned pretty quickly.
MH: Did you feel estranged from your new classmates?
GT: Even in Beirut I was a kid who was always on her own and mixing with everything. So it was a continuation. But over there I had my cousins, and I was the leader of the pack. We experimented with things — burning insects, stealing. [laughs] In Canada we lived in the suburbs around Toronto, in Downsview for six years, Scarborough for nine, Richmond Hill for two, and then to Aurora. When I was twelve I had a girlfriend who was into the arts scene so we'd go into Toronto. In a few years I was downtown every day, already part of the city. I wasn't part of the suburban scene because there was nothing there. It was very sad.

Passion Crucified

MH: Did you already know you'd make art?
GT: I admired the artists in Beirut. There weren't any galleries but there were painters. I used to play with dolls and deform them. My grandmother and all my aunts were knitters, and when I was making my experimental films it reminded me of that meticulous kind of work. By grade ten I'd started making photographs; there was a darkroom in school where I experimented. I didn't know how to use a camera properly — I still haven't learned about f-stops — so the film would never turn out perfectly. But I liked to play, splashing chemicals on the paper. That's where my experimentation really began, out of lack of knowledge.

When I was seventeen I met Atom Egoyan at the Armenian Community Centre. Atom was giving a lecture on his films and I showed him my sketches and photographs and he bought three of them. He was the first person in the film community who really encouraged me. A year later I made

my first film, *Body and Soul* (12 min 1989). I videotaped myself in various costumes, holding fruits, or standing in water with plastic over me. I was living in Aurora, and spent a lot of time driving down empty highways. There were interesting churches where I would stop, set up, then step into the frame and walk toward the camera. When you're living in a place like that there's nothing to do, so you end up creating, whereas in the city there are so many distractions.

Visions

It was all shot on video, then re-photographed off TV using a super-8 camera. It was an incredible experience, seeing what you could do with film. The original video used a tripod but now I could go back to it and make changes — shifting the frame by zooming in, changing the speed and colour. It was very exciting, and I edited everything in-camera. I showed it at Pleasure Dome (a Toronto film and video exhibition collective), which was hosting a show at the Purple Institute. I had my film in the trunk of the car and asked if I could run it. They said okay. Atom really loved it. He's loved everything I've ever done. My very first screening.

MH: At the time of the show you were still in high school. Was it made for a course?

GT: No, it was just something I did.

MH: Did you feel this was the beginning of something?

GT: I was very curious to see how people would react. I wanted to show it around. I did submit to one festival but when they rejected it I hated myself. [laughs] Then I decided to study English and philosophy at York University, and took a course in cinema. That's where I made *Visions (4 min 1992)*. The teachers weren't supportive at all — they said it's impossible, it won't go through a projector, it's not a film. I projected it several times until it got caught in the machine and started burning. Nobody told me I could optically print it and have a negative made. I finally figured that out, struck a print and got into the Toronto International Film Festival. Then I quit school. [laughs]

MH: How did *Visions* start?

GT: It emerged out of my photography which I continued with Michael Semak at York. He loved my experimenting, even though I didn't have the patience to make twenty-five prints of the same negative like the others. I wanted to thank him for his support. He was a photographer who made pictures of violent, beautiful nudes. Women with bags over their heads, their bodies opened, shooting themselves with guns. They're very tense and angry. It showed how women feel about rape, how the body goes rigid. I saw a dancer at York and the way she moved reminded me of his pictures, so I videotaped her. I also shot Michael's photos onto video, then re-shot it all off the TV onto super-8. I wanted to make a 16mm film but they wouldn't give me a camera. So I found all this 16mm magnetic film in the garbage and pasted the super-8 onto it. For the soundtrack I used the opening of a piece by R. Murray Schafer with a singer screaming "Woman." The hand-scratched intertitles were from Michael Semak, taken from a book of his writings and pictures. I'm not good with words, so I used his.

MH: It's a very angry work.

GT: Its style gives that effect. And his images are like that, very hard and disturbing. I don't work by planning, I follow a feeling — the film only means something if you feel something, and this has to do with the experience you're able to bring to the images. As a woman I can understand those poses, how you come to that state. Your body is frozen because you've been struck by something. That's why there's anger. There are also repeated images of the cross which appear over a vagina. Recently, I've realized how much religion has affected me, so that image seems to fit.

MH: Because the woman's giving birth?

GT: No, the cross shows how sex and religion are connected through the Virgin. I went to church every day in Beirut; even my school was part of the Orthodox church. Its leader lived in the rear of the school and my teacher was also a priest who carried a gun.

MH: For discipline?

GT: Safety. I haven't been a religious person since coming to Canada. Going to church is not part of life here, though it's part of life there, where you're surrounded by Christianity. In Beirut, women are virgins until they marry — that's what you learn as a kid, that women should be the Madonna. I never believed those things, but somehow they're inside, they're a part of me. So showing the cross in front of the vagina makes sense.

MH: Because only the cross belongs there.

GT: Yes. When I made the film I wasn't aware of why I loved that picture, though I repeated it several times. It relates to the many church images in my next film, *Girl From Moush*, especially the transparent picture of my face

overlaid on the church. Gariné the saint. [laughs]
MH: You showed *Visions* at the Toronto International Festival.
GT: It was incredible, it felt great. I became part of the film community, met people, the Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre asked if they could distribute my film. It was exciting. I showed it in a lot of festivals.
MH: Tell me about *Girl From Moush (6 min 1993)*.
GT: It started with Atom Egoyan's film *Calendar* which greatly affected me. We always talked about what it would be like going to Armenia, and while I knew a lot of Armenians, he was the only one I felt a strong connection with. I imagined it would be very beautiful, but his experience wasn't like that, because reality is not romantic. In the film he plays a photographer commissioned to make twelve photographs of churches for a calendar. Because he's always behind the camera, pointing at images, he never becomes part of Armenia.

Atom asked me to design the poster for his film and gave me his church photographs to work with. I used all of them for my film. The only filmmaker who represents the Armenia I long to see is Paradganov. In *Colour of Pomegranates* he photographed the real Armenia, the Armenia in my mind. So I used images of Paradganov as an homage to him. And images of myself looking, pursuing the dream of this country. On the soundtrack I'm making a call to Armenia. I wanted to reach someone the way Paradganov had reached me. Obviously I didn't find anyone.
MH: Are all the images in the film photographs?
GT: All but one. The churches came from *Calendar*, they're very conventional shots you could buy anywhere. There are also images of landscapes, paintings and dancers, all photographs from books. I shot them onto 16mm and video, then shot the video back onto film. Instead of using whole strips of super-8 film, like I did in *Visions*, I cut little holes in the 16mm and, frame-by-frame, inserted the super-8. I had shot images on the 16mm and put the super-8 on top of them. Some parts have black backgrounds, some have images, and some have 16mm on top of 16mm. Sometimes I cut a 16mm image in half with scissors and taped it together with another image I'd cut in half. It was like knitting and took a long time. The only real moving image in the film shows me walking across the street. There's also an image of my face, which was a transparency laid over a church, and because the wind blows the image moves. You can see the church behind it.
MH: How does your image function in the film?
GT: I'm shown thinking of Armenia, wanting to be part of it. After making the film I realized this is just a dream, a fantasy about a country I could never visit. No one could. You make it because you're blind to something. Afterwards you see what's there. I needed to make the film to grow up, to become wiser. On the soundtrack I say, "I feel connected to every Armenian I meet." But afterwards I met a group of Armenians in Paris for an Armenian Film retrospective. I was so excited, thinking we'd all bond and love each other, become family. But it wasn't like that at all. I was just another stranger. They couldn't accept me without knowing who I was first, all these old Armenian filmmakers.
MH: How did you decide on the film's length?

Girl from Moush

GT: I used everything I had. Atom gave me his Bolex and two rolls of film and I made it with that. I paid for everything myself. It cost about a thousand dollars.
MH: Tell me about the title.
GT: It's from a song. I found a record store where an Armenian woman worked and asked if she could find something with songs from home. She gave me a disc, pointing out a song called *Girl From Moush*. It's about a young woman looking at beautiful pictures, and she's being sung to by an older woman. I related to that. Part of my dream of Armenia is meeting a wise woman who's lived there all her life, working her land by a church. [laughs] The soundtrack is all Armenian music. There's a mountain song with a man singing over images of churches and hills. There's more melancholy music by a dudek, a flute-like instrument, and upbeat dance music accompanying the dance images. Each provides a different emotion; it's like going through a picture book of the interior. I always cry when I listen to Armenian music. Everything has a depressing, tragic sound to it. It's about connecting to something that doesn't judge you. It's land and sky, not a person, so it's unconditional.
MH: That film showed around the world.
GT: It was surprising. I felt very emotional about it and I can feel people responding to it the same way. I never sense any coldness, only warmth; somehow I'm touching people. It's still playing everywhere, still wanted.

MH: How did *Drowning in Flames (25 min 1994)* start?
GT: I met the Starn twins in Toronto when they gave a lecture on their work. They're photographers from New York. They make collages of other people's work, multiplying and manipulating original material. After their lecture I asked whether they would mind if someone appropriated their images the way they've done with the paintings of Picasso and Rembrandt. They said fine. Because all of their work is collage I felt we were doing similar things, but instead of working on 16mm, like I do, they use large layers of clear ortho film. For example, they might start with an image of a face on ortho, then add a second layer showing just half the face, along with bits and pieces of other pictures to provide depth and colour. The Starns are twins, an important factor in their work. They've given voice to a dualism inherent in myself and others. Their work is not intended to be resolved, but serves as a source of reflection. For me, the purity of their voice is overwhelming. I gave them a copy of *Visions*. They wrote back saying they really loved it and would like to see what I might do with their images.


Drowning in Flames

I had their book, and began shooting stills from it onto video. In the spring of 1994 I went down to their studio in New York and shot them making new work while they were getting ready for a show. The main image they used was *Portrait of a Young Lady* by a Dutch painter, which I show throughout my film. She looks like the Virgin, her face very clean and pure. It was accompanied by a lot of hand images which I shot from a dancer friend. I knew intuitively that the position of the Virgin's hands is very important in her depiction — this was verified just last week when I spoke to an artist doing work around the Virgin and her hands — and put these two images together: the Dutch image of the Virgin and the hands of my friend. In the Starns's work this portrait was accompanied by a text from Dante and pictures of fire and I used those too.

I shot both film and video. Then I put the video back onto film by shooting it off the TV, and from there did collages. When I shot the Starns's work it looked flat, so I added layers of film, pasting one image overtop another to make it look more like what they do. It took a long time because I had so many beautiful images. I was at my desk with a viewer and splicer, the floor covered with mounds of film. I worked with two strips of film at a time. I would put one strip on the splicer. Then I would take the second and cut off both sides of it — the sprockets and the part where the sound is supposed to be, and tape the two together. There are up to four layers of film, all pasted together. I added colour by using food dyes.

My film introduces a temporal element into the art of the Starns, which deconstructs it in the same way they've reshaped the work of others. The Starns say that "Art cannot be excused from time." They allow their pictures to deteriorate and metamorphose into living entities that change like anything else. This film is an homage to their practice, like *Visions* was to Michael Semak and *Girl From Moush* was to Paradganov. I felt we were seeing things in a similar way, and wanted to thank them. One of the highlights in life is to meet people like that and feel connected. When you feel alienated it's a nice feeling. Not that I do feel alienated. Not anymore.
MH: Where's the title from?
GT: The images of the young woman with very hot, orange colours overlaid suggest drowning. It comes from a Charles Bukowski poem: "Burning in water, drowning in flames."
MH: What does the juxtaposition suggest? The end of innocence or the impossibility of preserving these ideals?
GT: I don't know. It's been difficult to think of the film because I was so disappointed at the reaction. A lot of people didn't respond. I couldn't sit in the theatre; I had to leave because I felt a great pressure from the audience. I felt them wondering, why is this so long? It was awful. *Drowning* isn't something that should be shown in a theatre where people have to sit. I'd rather see it in a gallery where people could just appreciate it as a visual experience. But it's never shown like that.
MH: There's a stark contrast between the woman pictured in the film and the repeated scream on the soundtrack.
GT: The portrait of the woman has been painted by a man with a very religious background. It's perfect.
MH: What do you mean by perfect?
GT: She embodies a religious view of women — she's pure, untouched and framed. She'll never age. I used Tilda

Swinton's voice from *The Last of England*. It's a very dark scene, lit by orange candlelight, and with her hair pulled back Swinton resembles the portrait. But the woman in the painting doesn't have the energy or the guts to scream. Someone would have to do it for her.

MH: Like you?

GT: Yes. [laughs] This painted portrait appears throughout the film, wearing a tight necklace and dress, her hair drawn back by a headpiece. Everything is pulled back and exposed. Because she's stuck. She has to behave the way she does because she can't think of anything else. That's the way the painter sees her. As a man, he can't find what's inside. She's a body without organs, a doll.

MH: You appear in the film.

GT: Just once. I made a colour photocopy of the painting and wore it as a mask which I take off. And there are images of roses which have been ripped apart, collaged to pieces. And pictures of saints and the Starn twins looking angelic. After *Drowning* I made a decision to stop doing collage because I needed to tell stories. I never wanted it to be just an experimental, visual film. It needed to be more than that, but in the end it wasn't.

MH: Can you tell me about the feature you started?

GT: It's called *My Own Obsession* and was entirely improvised over a week with friends and a two-person crew. I play a woman who wants to go to Armenia. Her girlfriend and the men in her life never get to know her because she's unable to express her emotions, she only has relationships to get something from them. She meets an Armenian singer but she's only interested in the singing, somehow it brings her closer to home. Finally she marries an Armenian who's come to North America to forget the suffering he's left behind. So he can't give her what she wants. Like all the relationships in the film, this one doesn't work. At the same time she pursues her obsession, photographing herself in different costumes and personas. I'm thinking about going back and making something short out of it. It was originally intended as a feature.

MH: Are you obsessed with your own image?

GT: I've changed so much, I don't know whether I am anymore. Now I'm adapting a book about a character who is very obsessed with himself, art, and his isolation. I think this character is very close to the one in *My Obsession*.

MH: Do you think art is isolating?

GT: I think you have to be alone to a certain degree. When I'm with people too long I lose my identity. I can't even be around my good friends too long before I start feeling guilty because I'm not working.

MH: How did *Passion Crucified (22 min 1997)* begin?

GT: I wanted to talk with characters or figures, rather than pictures. Most of my work is made up of photographs, and each was inspired by a still. That changed when I met Cornelius Fischer-Credo, a dancer who was workshopping a new piece at the National Ballet. He saw my films and liked them, and we applied to the Banff Centre for the Arts to shoot his new performance. Because it was incomplete, a work-in-progress, I added a prelude which shows a man living in an aquarium environment. He watches a television interview with an intellectual talking about the archetypes of Adam, Eve, Christ, Joan of Arc, and Salomé. And dreams of becoming them. These hallucinations become a series of performative dances. He appears as both man and woman, learning how to live inside these bodies which appear like schools, schools of thought. There were problems because he's a dancer, not an actor, so I had to lose the framing device. And it was my first time dealing with a crew of technicians who weren't there to create with me, only to follow orders. I built the sets using transparencies, slides and video projections. I became seduced by the set and the visual

Passion Crucified

aspect of the film, not really judging the dance at all. When I went into the editing room I used the computer to enhance the look of the film, changing the colour, mirroring the images. I stopped judging the life of the work and followed the image, which is what I've always done in the past. And because it lacked structure to begin with, it was difficult to cut. That was the problem in the end. The relation of sexual identity to a Christian history of the body fascinated me, but I know what my weakness is. I don't tell stories. I don't work with a plan.

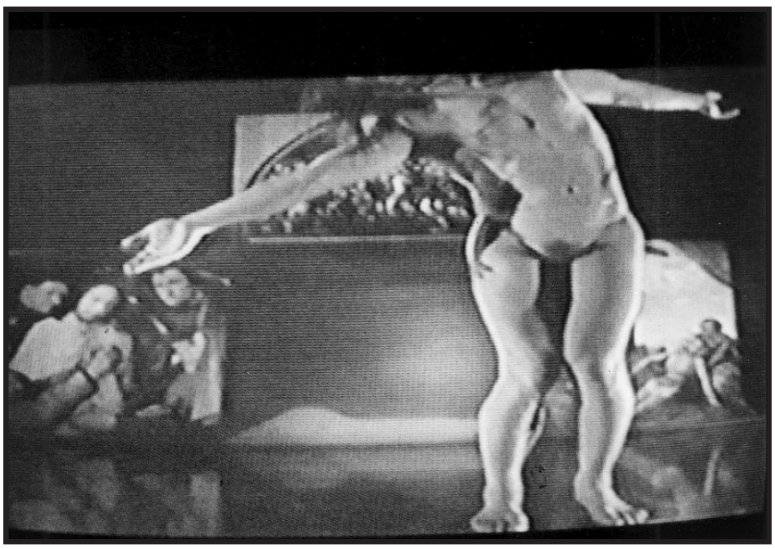
MH: What do you think of experimental film?

GT: I don't think of films in genres. I think of work that has a vision, where I can see something honest and individual. It's like any other art form. Or a person.

MH: Do you see yourself making films your whole life?

GT: I don't know, I can't say what I'll do. I've never really

said I love film. I do love it, but it seems primitive. It's so old. I'd like to explore other mediums.
MH: Do you worry about how to support yourself?
GT: Yes. Right now I have no money at all. My only industry work was with Paul Cox, the Australian director. He was making an Imax film, and I made some storyboards for the film within the film. I did it for a month and it was great, but I have to do my thing. Why should I work with another director? And be the last one on the credits? I'm very selfish that way. It has to be my creation.
MH: Do you feel pressure to make feature films?
GT: Yes, because of the success of the American independents. It has to do with some insecurity, wanting to be accepted. But I don't think I'll ever do it. I don't seem to go in that direction, although I'd love to be part of that scene. A cool filmmaker. I have an integrity that I can't control. There is a force more powerful than my little mind that



Passion Crucified

makes me do other things.

Garin é Torossian Filmography

Body and Soul	12 min 1989
Visions	4 min 1992
Girl From Moush	6 min 1993
Drowning in Flames	25 min 1994
Passion Crucified	22 min 1997

RICHARD KERR: LAST DAYS OF LIVING

Richard Kerr is the most patient of cowboys, venturing into the no-zones of North America to corral rare pictures. His filmmaking invariably finds him driving with his seeing machines in tow, looking for that moment when the road will steer him toward an understanding of his own sex. His eyes are trained always on the myths of masculinity, stopping to examine baseball stadiums and truckstops, loading docks and military bases.

But far from celebrating a cinema of testosterone, Kerr obsessively returns to places where duels have been fought and lost long ago. There are no bloody hands here, only the corpse of geographies that bear the scars of forgotten ideals. Far from the teeming crowds of the metropolis, he waits, patiently, in order to turn cities into deserts, shipyards into funeral homes. Uninterested in whodunit story telling, he chooses instead to show the wounds of our stories, the places that remain after sunset swoons and happily-ever-afters. His cinema insists that the only place death and life may be deemed separate is in the individual.

RK: In the eight years I've taught at Sheridan College and the University of Regina, I've had maybe five hundred students. Not one comes to mind who is still making their own work. Lots of them come out of the gate with interesting ideas and stop. It's hard. You don't have financial support but you've got to pay the same price as the mainstream guy. And there's no revenue for your product in the end. If you're making dramas, you get paid twice — once to make the work and once to sell it. But if you're making art, you do your own distribution, and the hustle is hard. There are no easy nights out. Do you really want to leave the kids after dinner and head for a screening where someone's going to give you a rough time? There's only one return — you get to make another film.

We're fortunate in this country to have government funding; you step up to the plate and the money's already there. We can choose where we want to work in the system. Do we want to get money from the provincial arts board, the university, Canada Council, Telefilm, DOC...? There are many doors you can knock on to find money. But almost all favour mainstream dramatic work and are geared to take you up to bigger and bigger budgets. There's never been a real home for the R&D filmmakers in this country — I'm talking about the documentary filmmakers in Quebec and the experimental folks in English Canada. There's never been a place where these people could go and just make work. Why not a Studio X at the National Film Board? What would it cost for the Board to put up two or three filmmakers a year — pay them a decent wage and waive their lab costs?

MH: The Canada Council is an organization that dispenses money to artists, including fringe filmmakers, and to the organizations that support them. Some would argue that if it was eliminated, it would mean the end of Canadian art. Do you feel the Council is oriented toward the production of feature-length dramas?

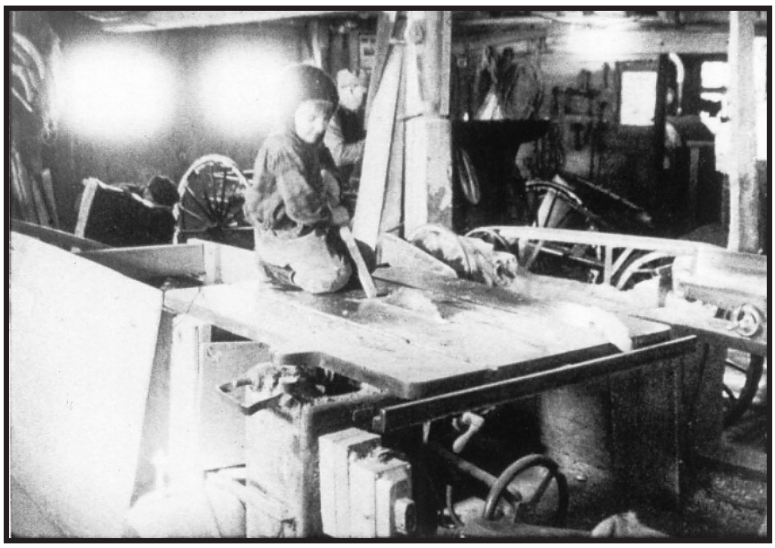
RK: They've changed with the demand of the market. But I've yet to have an experience up there where a serious experimental work has been turned down. They support experimental film, no question. That doesn't mean it gets the most money. In this country there are only a dozen experimental filmmakers who've been making work their own way for more than a decade. Canada Council will never exist for just one kind of filmmaking. And I'm not so sure that in a utopian world people would make experimental film, even if the money was there. I don't know that people want to work alone like an experimentalist does.

MH: Is there anyone making avant-garde film today?

RK: I think of it as historical periods, not something I'm a part of. If I were a sports fan it would be like the original six in the National Hockey League. There was a period of time when it was contained, the facts were in, there was measurement. When Snow was making *Wavelength* in New York, that was an avant-garde period. I just hope that people working now can go on, and it's all right if the work isn't so new. Sometimes you have to go back and relearn an old stroke. That isn't the way I used to think. I used to feel that the next work had to be bigger and more complex.

MH: Tell me about the beginning.

RK: I quit playing sports and was looking for something to replace it. I always had my own business in the summer — a furniture company that needed pictures of the merchandise.



Hawkesville to Wallenstein

I got myself an old camera and sat down with a stack of *Popular Photography* magazines and taught myself how to develop pictures. I had dropped out of first-year high school to play hockey and was wandering around Conestoga College when I saw these hippie-types with film cans under their arms. I said to myself, I want one of those, I want to make a movie. There was something about how big it was in that small container. Big emotions in a small can. Little did I know. So I showed up at Sheridan College with a borrowed portfolio and next thing I know Roger Anderson is scraping emulsion off film, and Jeff Paull is projecting images on garbage bags and the world changed. It was the only time I experienced a hierarchy where the people who made experimental films were at the top. A lot of good people came out of that school — Phil Hoffman, Steve Sanguedolce, Gary Popovich, Carl Brown, Louise Lebeau. If you were doing your own thing, people recognized you for that. No cops and robbers in this group. We were told to make a film about ourselves first before turning these powerful tools on the rest of the world. I was never one for making directly autobiographical work, so I made a film about something I was very close to at the time — the Amish community in Kingston. That became *Hawkesville to Wallenstein (6 min b/w 1977)*.

Hawkesville to Wallenstein

MH: At one point the camera passes over a sign that reads "Welcome to Eternity," and as we watch these people working it's as if life would never change. Because they look the same as they did a century ago. They appear like a living photograph.

RK: It's a documentary. If I had had more money I would have put talking heads in it; that was the kind of making I was involved with. *Hawkesville* set up the template for all my work, where I start at a distance and get closer both physically and psychologically. I haven't changed my way of working since then. I showed the film to Don Haig at Film Arts, the distributor, and he came back with a box of film — 1000 feet of negative. It was a pretty big deal for a second-year film student to go into Film Arts and hustle a box of film. He said go shoot the same thing in neg and in colour. Take it down to PFA and get it processed and when you've run out come back and I'll give you some more. So I went out one weekend and shot the same thing in the fall and realized I didn't want to do this. It was too easy. That was a key moment. So I returned the film to him and thanked him and realized I wasn't destined to have a business card that year.

MH: You still feel very close to your first two films.

RK: They say more about me as a filmmaker than any of the others. They share an observational documentary sense, a rhythm in the images; what Brakhage would call the "moving visual thinking element" is pretty consistent. Why do we need to try all these different styles and genres? I think that's natural when you're developing your muse but not when you've hit the time of your maturity. It takes a while to get there, though — ten, twenty years, just like a writer or poet.

MH: What do you mean by developing your muse?

RK: What you're saying and how you're saying it. How you're relating to the world as you get older. I'm not overly prolific. I make something every couple of years. I wish I didn't have to work. I never thought I'd say that because I've always enjoyed teaching. But partly it's a sense of time running out. I'm dying now. Talking to you. I hope that as I'm approaching my most productive years in my forties, I'll be able to work the least and make the most. For the first time there are films I want to make and that keeps the temperature up, but there's a different kind of pressure now. I don't even know if it's fun to make. Walking around in the spaces between the work. Those awful voids where you're trying to figure how to put it together. What happens if you wake up one day and you can't make films anymore — you're dried up? I think every film I make is the last one.

I'm not a lover of film, I'm a practitioner. Hollywood film? I've seen two in the last three years. I don't need Woody Allen spending ten million dollars to tell me fifteen jokes in an hour and a half. If I want to hear stories, I'll go to the pub. That's when stories are the best, with the warm breath in your face. I don't need a story when I go see a film, I go for something else. I'm interested in seeing new forms, new constructions of the world. I get so much content just passing through life. Alternative cinema excluding jury work? In three years I've seen two Derek Jarman films and a Bruce Weber documentary. That's my diet of film culture outside my own work. And what I bring to the classroom, which is all the stuff I've seen before twenty times but I still like seeing it. I don't go out to the

movies. I don't like sitting in the dark for two hours. Or going back in the past. I don't like editing for the same reason. I can't stand sitting down. How can you like swimming if you don't like water? Editing means reacting to footage I made six months ago. But you have to keep chipping away at it and find the film waiting inside those first intentions. That's why it takes two years to make something. Being alone with your images is a tough one because they can control you, put the whammy on you. I'd rather be in the world with my kids but that isn't how films are made; they're made in the dark.

So I'm in film school. Needed a project. Had four hundred feet of film. Interested in continuous take. Interested in Toronto all-night culture because, coming from St. Catharines, I'd never seen that world. I go with the sole intention of letting the camera run for eleven minutes, just to see what it would look like. And something might happen. If you're there in the right way at the right time you can cause something to happen. This sounds like playing hockey. If you head into the corner, you're going to get the puck but you're going to get hit. That's the verité in cinema verité. I ask a friend who's driving cabs where we should go, and he tells me about this all-night diner. We head inside and check out the long counter that splits the three cooks from the people eating and decide to shoot down one end of it. We don't tell them who we are; we just bring the gear in and start shooting. The camera guy had instructions to let the camera run no matter what. Later I thought of coming back every year, just running a roll through the camera and collecting them. But once was enough. The camera gets you into places you wouldn't find otherwise. But once you get there, you find that having a camera changes a place.

MH: *Vesta Lunch (Cookin' at the Vesta) (11 min b/w 1978)* seems less a documentary of the people in the diner than a record of their reaction to the camera.

RK: You have to remember this was just before the news was shot on video, so the experience of reporters walking in with cameras was relatively new. If I went today, it would be completely different. I also directed the film as far as that was possible. I was the sound person, so I put the tape recorder on normal, laid it on a cushion in a corner and pointed the mike around and made hand signals. At one point someone comes in and asks, "Why are you here?" and I say, "Best coffee in town." And the cook who's hamming it up the whole time says, "Yes, yes, best coffee in town. Still twenty-five cents." So without entering the picture I was in it as much as I could be. Someone else would have run into the shot. That was the thinking in those days, to personalize everything. But I refuse to have my own image in my work. My voice is in all of my films, but never my picture.

MH: The cash register is at the front of the image. It's all business while the background shows the comedy — the cooks and customers. The counter is like the theatrical thrust stage with the cooks performing for the camera. They're hamming it up trying to advertise their place, but they wind up neglecting their customers. One refuses to pay for his "garbage soup," and all of sudden you realize that the comedy of the background has turned the seriousness of the foreground into farce. The most striking moment comes when someone buys cigarettes and gets the wrong change. Or says he does. After a lifetime of making change the cook is unsure. He freezes up because the camera's on.

RK: Making that film was a hunting expedition. I sit down and think, "I'm going to make a film this summer" like some people say, "I'm going after the big horn." I say, "I'm going after the missiles in the Mojave Desert" or, "I'm going after this all-night diner." Your outfit depends on how big a beast you have to bring in. Some of us have pistols, some of us shoot with elephant guns. I make documentaries about places. What's the best way to structure this world? How do you give this place a shape? How much time will it sustain? I go and try to recognize the ideas already there. I'm not really interested in hauling around lights, but I'm very interested in the natural patterns of light, the content in natural forms.

Vesta Lunch

MH: The first films made in Canada were done in just the same way. Small crews were sent out with a camera to places of scenic interest. These short films were shown by people travelling with projectors in the trunk showing strange new work to people unfamiliar with this type of experience. There's a lineage.

RK: We're really making documentaries in the Canadian tradition. We're like the Group of Seven; we're isolated, we're trying to grab a spirit and deal with it in an abstract manner. We go out into the world, *plein air* style, then bring it back into our studios and change the scale.

MH: What's Canadian about Canadian film?
RK: It's more personal. It has a documentary quality, it's more meditative and we don't laugh at ourselves much. There's much more adherence to process, it's more "my world" as opposed to "our world." There's a lot more intimate camera work, especially shooting without sound. If there is a national cinema, it's certainly what we're doing. Our work reflects more about this country than any other kind of filmmaking.

I think abstract work is central to cinema. The feeling of the individual is strongest in abstract work. And that's so important now because we have to return to the individual. Our corporate communities aren't working. The world needed the work of Jackson Pollock. And it needs our work. When I look at the films of other makers today in Canada, I see a lot more people dealing with abstraction. I don't think we're satisfied with a realistic-looking image. I think we're looking for new models, new ways of working.
MH: The values you're espousing are distinctly white and male: strong makers, tradition, the importance of the individual, Canadian nationalism, formal innovation. What does formal innovation mean to families living on welfare?

Canal

RK: It's Saran Wrap philosophy. You cover the whole scene with the same sheet. Let's look at the work. Some critics are looking at where the work is coming from. It sounds like the argument I got at the Grierson Documentary Seminar, where the Marxist stands up in the back row and asks, "How dare you make a poetic film about the struggles of these boat workers?" I said the film is all about workers, but it's also about poetry. I can't control the agenda or the dialogue. Rather than try to gear my work toward the flavour of the week, I'll just do what feels right. It's like the carpenter who builds the house; he's not thinking about what colour the garage door is going to be, or whether it's going to match the car. He's thinking: is this Georgia Spruce better than the Mississauga Pine? I understand the present critical climate, and there'll be a time when my work won't get programmed. But I can't worry about that — none of us can. I remember one of my teachers sitting me down at film school and saying, "Richard — you're in the top one percent of the world. You're white, male, under thirty, and you've got all your hair." What we're doing now is working outside the pack. We're heading in the same direction as these critics, we're not fascist filmmakers, we're not denying gender or race — but we're not making media. We're making objects. Media flows in a circuit, but we've jumped outside that circuit.
MH: Why did you dedicate *Canal (22 min 1981)* to your brother?
RK: Because I haven't seen him since then. He left home when I was fourteen or fifteen, shortly after we moved from the canal. I've seen him at funerals, that's about it. We're from two different backgrounds. We've spent more time apart than together. I've spent more time without a father than with one. Now with my kids I think, well, my father was forty-two when he died, and I'll be that old soon, so what if my kids don't know me? My father left behind sports scrapbooks from when he used to play ball. So there's this fiction I've always had. If I pop a gasket in the next few years, it's important for me that I've made films. It'll take my kids all their lives to get through them. That's enough reason to make them. To leave a record so people understand.
MH: In *Canal* you seem to arrive at your "style." It's a documentary shot out-of-doors with many of your favourite themes: fishing, water, men at work, natural light, and landscape. You fragment space and rearrange it into a mosaic of personal details that come together to make a moving picture of your past. This fragmentation takes you away from the more strictly documentary styles of *Vesta Lunch* or *Hawkesville*.
RK: I get my material from the real world rather than fabricate. I grew up there, learned to swim watching the boats go by. When I was making the film I spent a lot of time driving up and down the canal, taking in the rhythms of my subject. I knew I had to use a 10mm lens and get in close to the subject, these huge dinosaur boats, not to stand way back and use a zoom lens to pick things out. *Canal* has a tableau mentality. The camera stays on the tripod and lets the world come into the frame. For me shooting has to do with waiting. There's only an hour or two a day to shoot my subject. When I'm shooting, the lens cap goes on after ten in the morning until four in the afternoon. That's the kind of light I'm interested in. The kind of emotion I'm interested in. The least technology with the maximum result. I was proud that I got out of film school not knowing how to use an Arri or a CP. I

knew I'd never use them as everyday tools; I always use a Bolex. Someone asked if Faulkner would've been a better writer with a word processor. I think it's a myth that you need big equipment to make good work. It's what you're used to. The Bolex is very practical — it's light, doesn't need batteries, and the lenses are very sharp. It's a brush we prefer, that's all, and not necessarily the most expensive one. I've gone back to an editing bench recently. It's partly a political move — the students come into the office and see a bench and a lightbox. It's a way of getting close to the materials. That's why video doesn't interest me. The materials are always in the machine and you can't pull them out.

MH: *Canal* is filled with a lot of stopping and looking, and when you stop you hold up, you suspend. A suspension not of disbelief, like in a fiction film, but of narrative itself. There's a flow that runs through the whole film — of water, and boats, and men working, but in order to see them you have to step out of the normal course of events. So you stop looking for a narrative founded on causality, and turn instead to a narrative of attention. The camera examines the shore markings like Egyptian hieroglyphs, staring fascinated at a natural evolution which it attempts to read like obituaries. They show the passage of all those ships which have crossed the canal, even as these ships pass ceaselessly through the frame. In the ships' momentary appearances and the camera's patent refusal to follow them, *Canal* becomes an obvious metaphor for our own mortality, for a current bearing us all inexorably towards our own end.

RK: I'd be happy if that was the critical epitaph. I work on film because it all rests in one can. They're tombs. Markers. You make it and leave it behind. It comes from finding my father dead in his bed and having to close his eyes. And going out to sit on the porch and wait for my mother. And tell her he's dead. She died shortly after that. Now that I'm starting a family again there's a different sense of mortality, a different reason to make work.

MH: How did *On Land Over Water (Six Stories) (60 min 1984)* begin?

RK: I was taking pictures while living out in Waterloo County and started seeing the Northern Ontario equivalent of the mirage — these heavy skid marks on the road. I thought there must have been a hell of a story behind those tracks. They were icons of the rural experience that had been my whole life and that's where my next film really started, with these road signs. There was a lot of interest in those days about new talkies, new narratives; whatever was new seemed to have something dramatic attached to it. So I started thinking about making a fiction film. It was going to be called *Rural Stories*, relating myths of the guy who could drive the fastest, talk the loudest, drink the hardest — real rustic male scenes. That's what eventually became *On Land Over Water (Six Stories)*. It would just be guys telling stories — all dramatized with real people and actors. I got $10,000 from the Canada Council and headed down to Key West, Florida, to start shooting. When I was fifteen a bunch of friends decided to drive south to the Keys. The car broke down outside of Ingersoll so we hitched the rest of the way. Never thought of heading back; it seemed easier to go two thousand miles south rather than hike the sixty miles back. It was the trip of my life. Rides with drunks, with guys packing guns, sleeping on doorsteps, meeting homosexuals for the first time, running out of money, panhandling, sleeping on a marine base and then Tennessee Williams's front lawn. It was every trip a neophyte dharma bum could ask for. So I wanted to go back and recreate this trip — the first of my drives into America to shoot. I filmed all-night garages, the hucksters on the dock, the fire eaters, the baton twirlers and a lot of shadow characters. Impressions of the area. Meanwhile I still wanted to work with actors. I made a big casting call but couldn't give anybody a script. I thought: you're the actor, I'll let you know what I'm interested in and you act. I was really resisting this kind of filmmaking but thinking it's important to do because everyone's talking narrative.

On Land Over Water

I was very impressionable then, really resisting the film I should be making. Phil Hoffman and I are looking at people and shooting video. We cast a woman — the first in a line of films without men. We're up at Phil's cottage. The first weekend the light's not right. I make the call and we head back. The next weekend we go up and shoot *At Her Cottage* in two days with this woman and her child. The best collaboration I ever had. This woman understands what I want. I've given all the Hemingway to her. It's all improvised and it's working great. But there's no lip sync and she says: When do I have my monologue? When do I talk? So we set up a shot at night lit by the fire and the camera's panning through the trees and I just tell her to wing it and she comes

out with this story about Jack the drunk falling through the ice and dying. I stand back floored, thinking she got it all; everything this film is about is coming out of her mouth and there are no mistakes. Because you shoot one-to-one on these films, there are no second chances. This is all live. She just ran it flat off the top of her head. I was excited.

I had two weeks, a truck and a little bit of grant money left to make this film. So I took the equipment — a CP and a Nagra — and I drove around Toronto. I'd call up Phil everyday and we'd look for things. We went down to the boats, Cherry Beach; I know that area. So we made *Drive To Work*, which just shows a ten-minute take out the window of a car looking out at the boats on the dock. I'm wondering how I'm going to connect this with the other stuff. You don't get to do this very often where you've got the gear, the truck and the dough. You're living your film but the clock's running. We drive around some more and see these two little black girls skipping in front of graffiti which says "Spirit Astray." We go, hey, that's a shot. These kids could be related to the guy who's in Florida, who goes to work on the boats, who's with this woman at the cottage. Jump out of the car, buy some popsicles for the kids, and one tells a story about crossing the street against the light and the teacher suspends her from school. It all connects — they're outsiders. Young kids with a story to tell. Once again I didn't have to make up the story. Momentarily, for that hour, I'm feeling good. Then we cruise north and I see this guy who looks like Davy Crockett standing outside this store. It says "Four Seasons Taxidermy." And I say, hey, that's the guy. That's the guy who's down in Florida, who works on the boat, who's with the woman, and he knows these kids. All these crazy stories are going through my head. We go in and the hustle isn't easy. He thinks we're cops, so I buy a case of beer and try to talk. He's burned out by the glue that he handles every day. But this place is just a rich museum of Canadiana, filled to the roof with stuffed animals of every kind. I'm starting to have these plans that he'll invite us north to go trapping and we'll go along and shoot but it doesn't work out. We decide to do another one-take wonder. We start up the camera and I say, "Tell me the story about the shotgun" and the camera starts walking into the store. He's telling this story and I'm flashing Eugene O'Neill — you know, if you show a gun in the first act you have to use it in the third. It's one of the laws of drama. It's all coming together. He keeps talking and though we haven't rehearsed anything, he walks straight to the back of the shop and stops like an actor should stop and picks up a shotgun and cracks it open and delivers his story. It's about a friend of his who let off a shotgun to scare him and he did the same to his friend and that's why there's a hole in the ceiling.

Now my two weeks are up, the equipment has to go back. So I check into the Penthouse to edit, the cheapest steenbeck in town. It was always too high for me; I thought I'd jump from that height. I like to cut on the ground floor. I start putting the film together figuring all these sequences will intercut. And they don't. I even brought the script doctor, Alan Zweig, in to have a look at it, and he'd look everything over and run back to his apartment and write something to tie it all up and it would come close but never quite seal the works. Just to take my mind off this nightmare I was reading short stories at night and material around short stories — why doesn't anybody write this stuff? What's happened to this form? And then it dawned on me that's what I had — all these short stories. I had five of them. I was reading a lot of Hemingway and especially *Indian Camp*, which is my favourite and thematically covers everything I was doing. I had a first edition book and one of the letters was smeared, one of the t's from the typewriter dripped and I thought, wow, that's like the skid mark, one of those beautiful imperfections. Then I started looking at the shape of the words, after reading the story for meaning. Thinking "jack knife" would look great blown up on the screen. Hemingway was good at using words like that; physical language was part of his modernist bent. I got the pages blown up big and filmed them in my apartment with a Bolex, and when that was finished, I knew I had it. It would be called *Six Stories*. I went back and cut it pretty quickly after that. Once I became aware of the film's themes it was a little frightening. About masculinity and male myths. I wasn't overly conscious of that. I haven't looked at that film in a long time. It comes out of a very lonely period. My last bachelor film. I realize how slow going it is. Once in a while, not very often, I put on one of my own films. To find out something about myself. Not about the work but — what is this point of view? How clear is this guy?

MH: So what does this film say about masculinity?

RK: That men bring darkness and evil. If you read the first story closely it talks about a doctor going into an Indian Camp and delivering a child. After the delivery he finds the woman's husband on the bed is dead, his throat cut open. But there's an implication that the doctor's brother killed this guy, so whenever the story refers to him, the screen goes black. In the *Shotgun Story* this guy isn't selling subscriptions to the Red Cross, he's selling stuffed animals. The male myth ends in death. The junkies in Key West. The drowned drunk in *At Her Cottage*. It's not a romantic world, there's not a lot to celebrate.

I got a print at Northern Labs, which was just going out of business so they never made me pay for my last bill. I was flat broke but I had a print. This was 1985. I tried to show it at the Funnel and they said it was a "masculinist" film. People don't go to their toughest critics first. They go to their friends at the co-op who tell you everything's all right. I

showed it to some people straight from the lab and one woman, a cultural critic, told me, you can't do that, Richard, that woman on the boat in *At Her Cottage* is being held hostage with your penis-like camera. Penis-like camera? I got excited. I said, no waitaminute there are all these themes running through an hour's worth of film and a lot of it's symbolic, etc., etc. I did what any filmmaker would do — I stayed up till four in the morning buying them drinks defending the work. She said no. Then it didn't get shown at the Funnel for almost a year. Then Bruce Elder took it up and wrote on it for *C Magazine*. That helped a lot; it legitimized the work. It got into some festivals, so it worked out in the end. It was a tough struggle because it became an issue film. It's weird that such a cumbersome film would get taken up like that. There were other films that cut to the bone a lot quicker.

It didn't help resolve my narrative itch. That was still in the air and I wasn't absolutely anchored in my own filmmaking. I was still listening to people. I wanted to leave Toronto. Too much film in the air. Too much careerism. Too many movements. Art had changed by then, all this postmodern stuff. Everybody's talking about it, but nobody can define it. It's like boxing with shadows. I'm married with a kid, I'm making eight thousand dollars a year, fire breaks out in the apartment next door and I'm not happy here. I don't want to make films anymore but I gotta. Then the opportunity to teach at Regina comes up and I leave. I don't know anybody here. No one does, no one's ever been here. In 1985. The momentum of my film along with some rock videos I made for the Parachute Club landed me the job. A little bit of show biz and a little bit of your own poetry — ostensibly a perfect mix. [laughs]

The Last Days of Contrition

There was a long time and a lot of miles between *Six Stories* and *The Last Days of Contrition (35 min b/w 1988)*. It began as a grant proposal about this fire boy — a *Rumblefish* type that lived in Port Colborne, an industrial wastesite where they used to take apart the great boats. His mother dies and he begins to search through photographs trying to put together her life. That's obviously not the film I made. I write the proposals so they make interesting reading — they're just the starting point. Still thinking I'm a dramatic filmmaker, I head back to Toronto to do some more casting. We found a guy, headed out to Port Colborne and everything was terrible. Wasted two thousand dollars. Bird shit on the lens. Fired the cameraman, fired the actor, and started over. I decided to head south to Buffalo, packed up the Bolex, and drove to the ballpark, where I spent the two best days of my life filming. I was in a medium I knew so well. The War Memorial Stadium. If you wait long enough with that kind of shooting, you're going to find something to bring home.

Then I drove with a friend down to Taos, New Mexico, and we stopped en route at SAC airforce command to shoot missiles. That's when I moved to Regina, found a house and hunkered down with this baseball footage. I don't have a clue what do with this stuff, but I'm gaining this incredible enthusiasm for filmmaking again. All of a sudden there's no one to talk to or distract me. So I started tinkering with film again — back on the rewinds, getting drunk and putting images up on three projectors with cassettes running in every direction. Film is fun again. I took another trip into the southwestern States through the deserts and the mountains. I picked up some more military imagery, and started filming abandoned landscapes — broken down trailers, abandoned cars, that kind of thing. When I came back I needed one more item and remembered the Moosejaw air show in the fall. I went out to shoot the jets like there was an invasion coming on. Soundwise, I'd saved all this late-night American radio chatter — the weird freaks, the hypemongers and conspiracy nuts — and started laying some of that in. Hemingway resurfaced with *Poem for Mary*, read by the author for a record that came out in the forties. I still felt there was something missing, so I went back to the actors one more time. Found a man and woman. Shot about an hour of sync studio footage, which I thought would wrap it all together. All stationary camera.

For the longest time I had an hour-long film I felt was finished, complete with mix. For all intents and purposes, the film was done. I hadn't shown it to anyone because there was no one I could really show it to. By chance it was a weekend I'd organized at the film co-op, which brought

together Stan Brakhage and Bruce Elder. I asked if they would look at it. My first feedback in three years. As soon as I laced it up, I knew it wasn't finished. I thought, "I don't like that shit with the actors in it. It slows it down." So I put it on, the film is running and Brakhage is saying, "Omigod, why do you guys hate America so much?" But he's landed in the middle of nowhere and he's watching some rigorous stuff. He's liking the film until it gets to the acting bits and then it just dies. In vaudeville they'd have the cane out. There's another montage sequence, which is fine, and then the actors return preceded by an intertitle which reads "Out There." And Brakhage turns to me and says, "Oh I'm sorry, I thought it said 'Cut there'." [laughs] That's the kindest way to put the cruelest thing you could ever say. After they left I just snipped the actors out and the film was finished. I didn't even have to redo the mix. The actors came out like a circuit board from a computer, like it was modular. It felt like a first film. The first film I made outside Toronto.

MH: How did you come up with the title *The Last Days of Contrition*?

RK: I cut the film in this room — the NFB outpost in Regina. I was finishing up the film, so it was just about title time. You know what it is, now you got to name it. The Film Board was throwing out a lot of film which I dutifully hauled in a truck back to the university. I came across one which read *The Last Days of Living*. So that's what I called it. I was developing film through the National Film Board when I got a fax saying, "We will no longer do any work on this film. This is a Film Board title." I could have protested, but who cares? If you've got the money, I can change the title. I had all the Hemingway poems out and came up with the word "contrition." I was cutting with a woman and wrote out six titles. She was a lapsed Catholic so "contrition" rung heavily with her, so we went with that one. Wherever I go, the first question is always: what does the title mean? I had to make a few "Pope" calls to my Catholic friends to check out the meaning, not the dictionary meaning but the sense they made of the word. And it was all right.

MH: It gives the film a despairing and biblical air. You enter America only to find it abandoned, a land of deserts and ruins filled with the sound of voices without bodies. Then the military motifs are introduced providing a rationale for all that went wrong, the endless trains transporting tanks across the wilderness, the jets looming overhead, the aggressive sounds of military hardware and computer terminals. The film is a kind of elegy for the promise of constitutional ideals left behind in the pursuit of arms and arsenals. Why were all the spaces you photographed abandoned or ruined?

RK: That was the task at hand, so that's where my eye took me. To look at a world and find the emptiness in it. My eye focused on that for a year and a half, and you're only good when you have that focus. There's always a turning point for me — some image that lets me know where the rest of the film is headed. In *Contrition* it was the train carrying tanks and my daughter playing in the desert behind it. That's when I knew what the film was about. It took a lot of driving, close to 20,000 miles. Some people sit and write scripts. I have to drive and look.

MH: There's a lot of driving in *Plein Air (20 min 1991)*; it looks as if the whole film is shot from a car window.

RK: After moving to Regina, I drove back to Toronto several times over the next few years and started shooting the landscape of northern Ontario — the Canadian Shield. *Plein Air* was shot with an Eclair because it has a variable shutter. I knew after shooting the hoodoos in *Contrition* that stopping the shutter down to ten degrees produced a strobing image because every frame is very sharp. I knew I could apply this strategy to the northern Ontario landscape and flatten this landscape out as I went along, shaping it as a painter or sculptor would shape renderings of the same landscape.

MH: That recalls something Brakhage once said: that when he looks at a painting he sees how a painter has fashioned a tree out of a single gesture of paint. These gestural renderings are similar to his own, as his camera inscribes a tree in space, signing it like an autograph.

RK: It's a very modernist consideration. Here was another place I wanted to live with and document. It starts out with many layers of the Canadian Shield, fields of rock with up to four images superimposed. That lasts about eight minutes. Then there's a section of road construction and roadside technologies that pass in a kind of catalogue collection: steam shovels, satellite dishes and logging trucks. Then we move into a sequence still heavily layered with the Canadian Shield. All of a sudden a train appears travelling in every direction, superimposed on three and four picture rolls printed together. Most of the natural footage is green, but the train is red and orange and rust coloured, so there's a nice colour intersection. A sunset follows looking out over a lake as the sun goes down and a family boating expedition packs it in. The same shot's repeated on different rolls and printed altogether. The film finishes by going through landscape showing staggered repetitions that move over a hill into the space of the horizon. It moves into a Northern Ontario village before flattening right out to blue sky, physically and metaphorically "into the blue."

MH: Much of your work's been characterized by an almost stately, deep-focus documentary style photography which relates isolated individuals to a rugged environment. This film seems a real departure.

RK: *Plein Air* is true to my experience of Northern Ontario. It would be false setting up the camera on the sticks and making calendar shots. Believe me, I've tried it. The footage didn't work. Physically the Canadian Shield is very claustrophobic. It's not the kind of space you want to see in detail; you want to see it in massive abstract chunks. Because

there's so much of it. Because it takes you two days to go through it. It's a landscape I'm so familiar with, that I had the confidence to impose a structure on it before shooting. There's no questioning in this film. The form is locked in from the first frame. The Canadian way to deal with our landscape it to mediate it through technology — to frame and contain it. The car is the movable garrison that takes us through this hostile environment.

I made a whole film of Canadian icons, the same thing I did in *Contrition*: totem poles, outpost hot dog stands, the big muskie. But they just weren't very cinematic. The weird guy at the outpost talking about moose, I got all that on film. But I didn't use it in the end. It became this very formal work. It just didn't have what the American stuff had. The American stuff is much more extreme. The North is scary; there's nothing like it in the States. In Northern Ontario you can drive a day and a half without coming across anything, whereas even in the northern-most part of the States, there are drive-ins and hot dog stands. It's a different way of looking. America is more fun to go through; there's always something to look at. It's like that song by Gordon Lightfoot, "The silence is too real."

MH: What about *Plein Air Etude (5 min silent 1991)*?

RK: That was made at the same time. It's five shots, each repeated many times. It begins with a seventeen-second, single-frame shot of these round stones up at Lake Superior. They resemble giant film grains, very organized in their arrangement. I made five different seventeen-second gestures sweeping across the rocks. Then I laid them out on five image rolls, taking ostensibly abstract images and moving them inside a methodical structure so they'd play off one another. I followed the same basic method with each of the five shots of the film. I took the images of the sunset into the darkroom, pressed colour filters onto it, and used a flashlight to generate different tones. Is it a film? I don't know. It communicates nothing. There's no content in either of these films. I think there are ideas about painting and filmmaking. Maybe all this modernist stuff is a cry that film is near the end and there are certain things you want to do. Who knows how they're going to look at film twenty years from now? My guess is people are going to be very interested in formal experiments like *Ray Gun Virus* and Tony Conrad's films. I'd like to bring some of these modernist ideals back as ways to express emotion. Someone said that I'm really making a series of chase films. I thought that was an interesting comment — all of a sudden my films have a lot of movement in them. I think he was right, that I am being chased. By time.

MH: You're involved in another project right now which is quite separate from the modernist concerns of *Plein Air* and the short study. It's a relatively big budget, feature-length dramatic work with actors and crew and script.

RK: I got on the industrial model machine just because I can, that's all. I'm not about to mortgage my house to make a feature film. I'm very calculated about the whole process. It's a business. Because I've done a little bit of commercial work for the Parachute Club band and received a couple of Juno nominations, I can almost be sold to Telefilm even though what my real work stands for has nothing to do with them. If the film gets made, I have a chance to do something very different in my filmmaking. That's the worst case scenario. The personal element is really removed from this so it's easy to deal with. It's being written for me. Someone else is producing it — it's all just being carried under my name. The minute this film becomes personal to me in any way, then I'm fucked. Then I'd become the victim of the system because I'd really want to make this film and do anything to get it made. I can justify that with my own films to date — going overbudget, taking two years to finish, making radical cuts at the last moment. You can justify all that because you're so passionately involved with it. This other film is a venture. Experimental filmmaker gets to make low-budget drama. It's a long shot that any of these big films get made anyways. But it just so happens that I'm living in Saskatchewan, they have a film fund, they're giving away money, and because I'm one of the few filmmakers here, they're going to give me what I need to do this. So I can hire a writer and lawyers and producers. I've spent more money than I've ever had for one of my own films and I haven't shot a thing or had anything to do with the project. I picked out a photograph and asked the writer to make me a story about it. So he wrote a story. It's weird. But people tell me this is how you make films.

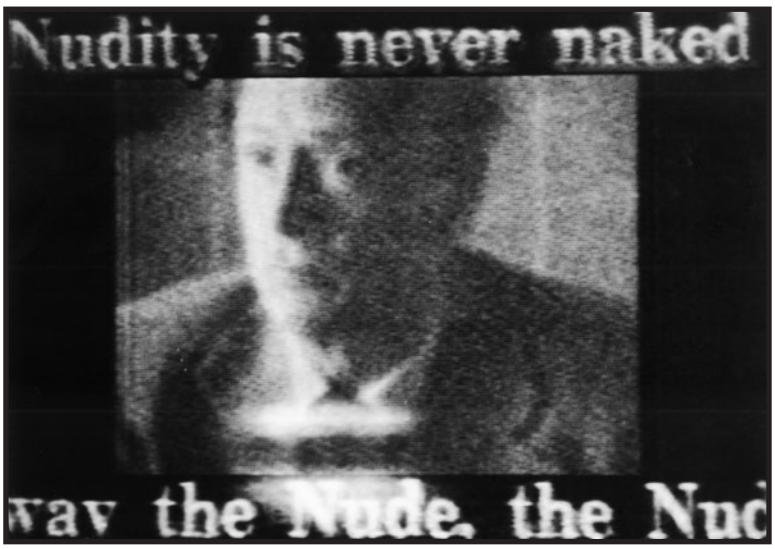
MH: What you're describing is a real schizophrenia in your making — between private and public, between a solitary, abstract artmaking, and a big-budget drama with actors and crew. There's even a moment which signals this divide. You're sitting at the Steenbeck looking over the shoulders of Bruce Elder and Stan Brakhage to see your own work, which is part dramatic, part experimental film. That's when you decide to toss the drama, feeling that the two parts don't belong together. And as the dramatic urge grows into a more public expression, adopting a film form the public has learned to understand, the experimental urge likewise deepens, becoming increasingly hermetic, enclosed and abstract. It's a curious duality, and one which I think is not untypical of what many makers are feeling in this country.

RK: I also have my first gallery show coming up. They're going to screen all my work and have asked me to make some wall art, and they're going to do a catalogue with all the trimmings. So what will happen in 1992? The gallery show will definitely happen. Most features don't get made. Where will I go with my single screen work? If I go the visual art route, then my films would become more modernist, which means working by myself. If I go the other

route it's the country club. I come up with ideas and get a crew to execute. Like Yogi Berra says, if you see a fork in the road, take it.

MH: How much do your films cost?

RK: *Hawkesville* cost $600 in 1976, *Vesta Lunch* $230 in 1977. For *Canal* I got a grant for $4,500 and it cost about that much, maybe a bit more. *Luck is the Residue of Desire* was another out of pocket film. I got a small grant from Ontario Arts Council to finish it, around $3,000. Then *Six Stories* got a little out of hand at $15,000. *Contrition* was more expensive because of the travel — $30,000. *Plein Air*, $10,000 because of the lab work, the A,B,C,D,E rolls. *Cruel Rhythm* will come in at $65,000 because I'm hiring people — an editor, composer and camera crew. *McLuhan* cost virtually nothing — $2,000. None of this is labour — otherwise they'd be million dollar films. *Willing voyeur* has a global budget of $600,000 which is full of deferrals, services, and training money. We're state filmmakers, so films have to be made a certain way. We're not truly independent. Canada is a socialist country which allows us to continue to make work through the arts councils. But there are films I want to make that I'd never approach the Council with — more abstract work. Shorter films.



McLuhan

MH: With these new possibilities to make dramatic work, do you feel differently about including stories in our fringe films?

RK: I'm a high school drop-out, so why expect to see a lot of words in my work? I never did pass a grade in high school. It's ironic that I'm a tenured professor now, but... I've never dealt with the theory stuff. I'm a pretty verbal person, I just don't feel that film is a good conduit for that verbalization. I don't make films about stories or theories. I make films about places. *Plein Air* is about Northern Ontario. *Six Stories* is about six different places. *Vesta Lunch* is about a city diner. *Canal* is about the Welland canal. *Contrition* is about the American southwest. I don't know whether I want to deal with memory so much; memory drives something, but it's not finally of interest. At some point you just go there with a camera and hang out and wait for something to happen. I try not to philosophize or theorize before getting there. You're looking for the pearl, and once you've got that first shot everything rolls from there. It's like going fishing — sometimes the fish are biting and sometimes they're not.

When I met people I used to want to know all about them — where they're from, where they work, do they have relatives — all those questions. But I've lost that feeling in the last few years. There's no need to know about anyone's past anymore. It's become so prevalent in Canadian film, returning to the past, the family, it all looks the same to me, it all looks like the same family. I don't want to start my films in the past. I don't want to begin with the past in order to go on. I need to start now. As a culture, we've sorted out our past. The imperative is to deal with the present. The white male ways. The gay ways. The working class ways. The people of colour ways. We have to go on. Looking.

[The next part of this interview was conducted four years later, shortly after Richard finished his feature film.]

MH: Your next project was a video called *McLuhan (60 min video 1994)*.

RK: It began with some of the first images I ever shot. I was just standing around Sheridan College when the dean came looking for someone to document Marshall McLuhan. I didn't know who he was. We were given a quick workshop on those old reel-to-reel video portapaks and sent down the highway to the School of Design. McLuhan gave an hour-long monologue about media and literacy. For twenty years I hung onto the tape and didn't know what to do with it. I'd pull it out once a year and look at it, and over the years learned more about him. Finally, it's more important what I didn't do with the tape — I didn't edit it. I tarted it up a bit, superimposing some video snow to give it rhythm. Then I put McLuhan in a box with a back frame around him. On top of the box there are headlines, bytes taken out of his speech like, "Nudity is never naked" that flash on and off. I had his rap transcribed and ran it as a scrolling text below the box, which sometimes runs ahead or behind of what he's saying. There's no additional sound, no music or effects. It was probably one of the more pleasurable pieces to work on because there was so little at stake; it was about someone else. The "catharsis investment" was low and that was nice. I'm glad after twenty years I found a form for it.

MH: Your next film *willing voyeur (75 min 1996)* was something of a departure — a bigger budget feature with actors.

RK: The whole dominant cinema, now that I've had a taste of it, is too much like manufacturing. You make a blueprint, the script, you organize everything, you get a schedule, everything runs on a clock. You're working in a medium that's all about time, but time is the biggest enemy. To me that's manufacturing; it doesn't leave anything open enough for serendipity or spontaneity. I'm a hunt-and-peck type of filmmaker — I have to go out and gather these images from the world and then rework it in my studio.

MH: There's a sense in much of your work that something is missing, and that you've come with your camera to record its absence. In *Contrition* America has been devastated and emptied; in *Canal* these ships are passing away and your brother's absent; in *Machine* space itself is erased entirely.

RK: There's always been a sense of loss. You feel the clock ticking all the time. I tried to break that conditioning with this feature film, but it never happened. I had all the machinery to make it accessible — with a beginning, middle, and end in that order and the right beats on page ten. But I couldn't do it, I don't know why. No one dropped an anvil on my head that killed narrative when I was a child. I don't think I was excessively lied to and therefore distrust stories.

MH: How did you find your way into this kind of making?

RK: I spent two or three years getting hooked on Stan Brakhage. I got to know him, mostly through correspondence, and became as deeply affected as one can be. I'd done *Plein Air*, *Machine in the Garden*, and enjoyed them but felt exhausted by the whole idea and thought maybe he's the only guy that should be making experimental films. You know? It was time to fold my tent and quit working, which is virtually impossible. They'd have to cut off your hands and gouge out your eyes and still... But I didn't know where to go.

With the feature I saw an opportunity and went for it. I made a pact with the devil and paid for it. I knew from the get-go that it probably wasn't going to happen the way it should. There was a kind of deceit I was carrying in myself. I sold the film on the fact that I would train the B team; the A team are the ones that do the commercials. I was going to take ex-students and upgrade them, take a guy who was a camera assist and let him shoot — that kind of thing. That's how I talked them into giving me the money. They could sell that idea to their bosses. So you got everyone sitting around a room lying to each other. It was frustrating because that's not the world I come from, you never talk about where the money comes from because there is none. After awhile I didn't even read the scripts Alan sent me because I sensed that when I got out there and started shooting, the script wouldn't matter. I like to set up the shots, tell the actors what the film's about, and let them find their own words.

Voyeur started with a photo made in Buffalo by Russel Sorgi called _Suicide_ which shows a women jumping from a window while people below are doing their business. One guy's getting his hair cut; there's a cop walking down the street, and they don't look above them to see this women falling to her death. We came up with this notion that there would be a snuff photo session, shocking tabloid photos. There would be a couple who find a victim, take her picture, publish it, make some money and split. The murdered body's found later at the train station. You don't see the session like you would in a melodrama, but it's recounted in voice-over by various characters. There's an eight-minute dolly shot in an abandoned VIA Rail station that's been broken up in the editing and appears throughout the film. There are six body bags, and a bunch of generation-X street kids sitting around listening to an old man tell tales. It has a round-the-campfire feeling. He's the one who tells the story of the photo session. His monologue touches upon how these bodies turned up at train station.

willing voyeur

MH: Two women appear often in the film.

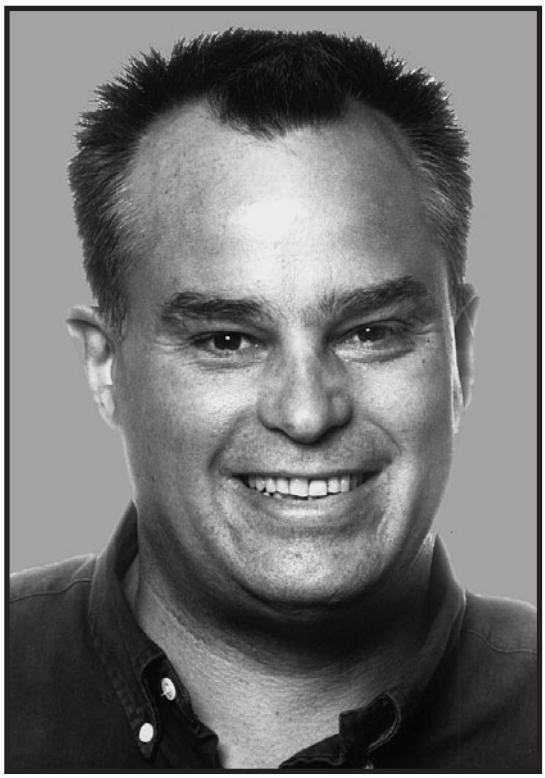
RK: When Alan Zweig wrote the script it was a guy and a woman. I start working with guys and hear the stories they tell and they sound too much like me. There's nothing fresh about it. So my curiosity wanes pretty quickly. Inevitably, I start looking for women because there's something else there. Against his strong recommendation I changed it to two women. In terms of giving them direction in the traditional sense, I didn't. I changed their character from scene to scene — I'd say now you're the bad one. They'd ask, "What do I know?" And I'd say, "I don't know." This worked because it kept them off guard and gave them a jittery quality. Their uncertainty projects itself. There's no money-back guarantee with these stories. That's purposeful. To

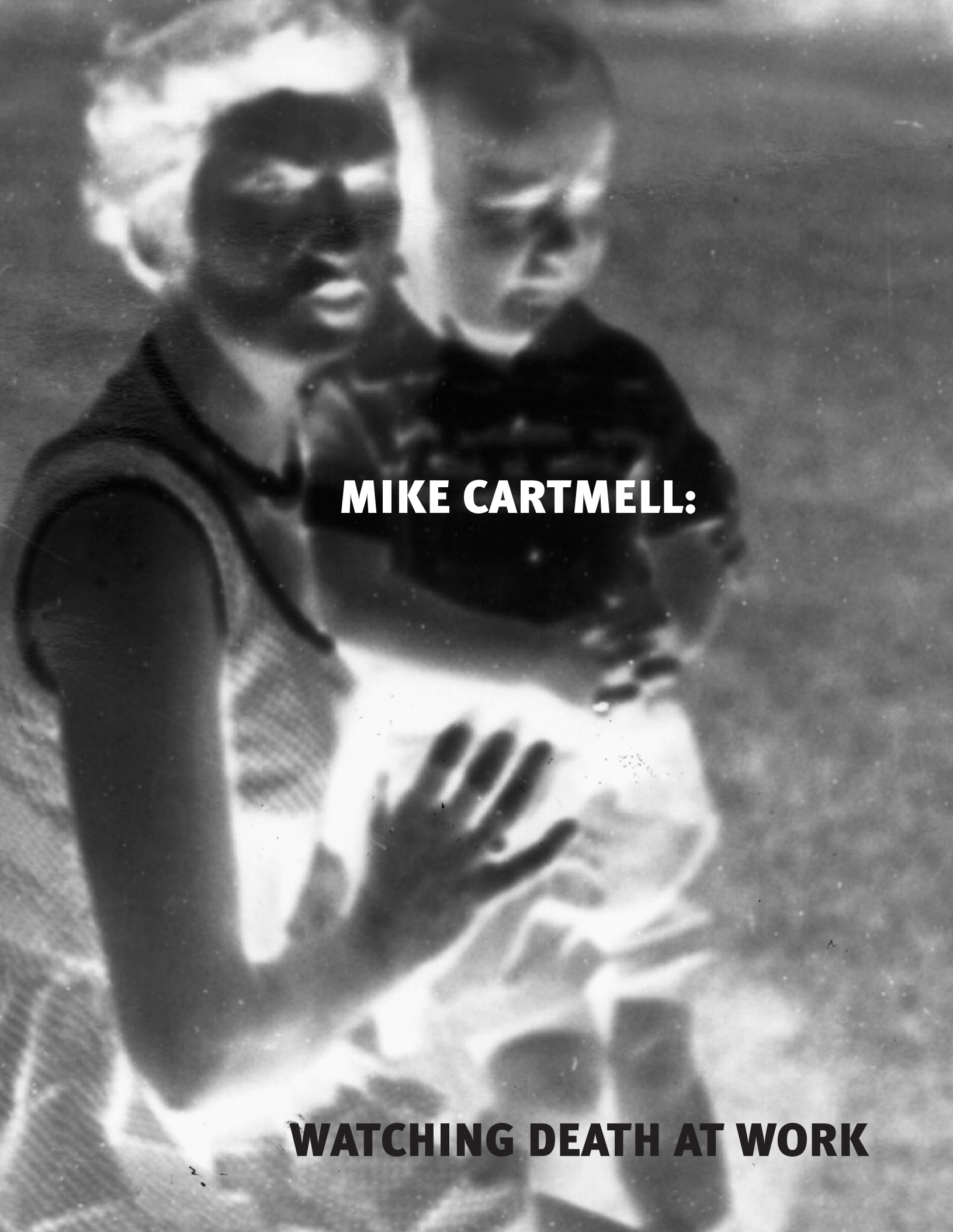
leave them open. That's also why this film will have a hard time finding an audience. One by one I'm finding a fan here and there; that's the way it's always been.

It's a good sign that films are a little difficult. Marginality is a good thing for all of us. I think it protects us, gives us some room to move. This conversation is full of comments like "Twenty years ago, fifteen years ago..." There's a feeling that we've sort of made it through, because we're still making work after all that's happened. And that's what is important now. I think I'm just getting the hang of it. I think I can start shedding some of that white, WASPy, inhibited skin that's surrounded me for so many years. I tried to do that with this film but couldn't quite get at it. It's a certain honesty about what you really want to say, picking the scabs off your consciousness and getting it out there, thinking about the life you've led and haven't lived. I've never articulated the most dramatic moments of my life, like finding my father dead, or finding an aborted baby in a field with a crucifix around its neck when I was twelve years old. Those things drive home an existential nature, the distrust of everything. I never expected to make it this far. Making this film I thought the program was finished, and that's an awful feeling, that was the System getting to me, not the filmmaking. I come back now in the third act of my life feeling more rage than ever.

Richard Kerr Filmography

Hawkesville to Wallenstein	6 min b/w 1977
Vesta Lunch (Cookin' at the Vesta)	11 min b/w 1978
Dogs Have Tales	9 min b/w 1979
Luck is the Residue of Desire	15 min silent 1980
Canal	22 min 1981
On Land Over Water (Six Stories)	60 min 1984
The Last Days of Contrition	35 min b/w 1988
Plein Air	20 min 1991
Plein Air Etude	5 min silent 1991
Cruel Rhythm	45 min 1991
Machine in the Garden	20 min 1991
McLuhan	60 min video 1994
willing voyeur	75 min 1996





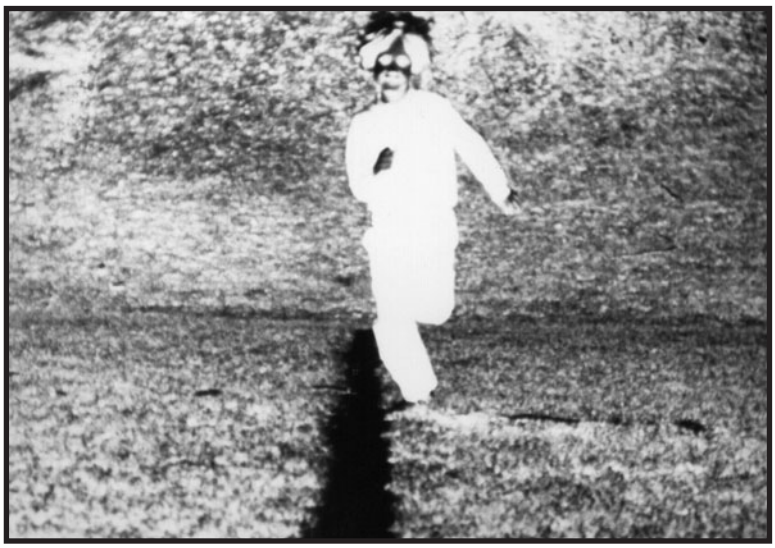
MIKE CARTMELL:

WATCHING DEATH AT WORK

In 1957, the United States fired the first missile founded on the explosive power of hydrogen. This inaugural launch of the H-bomb proved to have an unexpected fallout. A cadre of state scientists nicknamed the missile "Mike," and for the next three decades "Mike" would become the most popular first name for North American males. The folklores of naming hold a special fascination for filmmaker Mike Cartmell, whose adopted beginnings have lent a fictional air to his autobiography.

In 1984, Cartmell began *Narratives of Egypt*, a four-part series that deals with the father in *Prologue*, the son in *In the Form of the Letter "X"*, the lover in *Cartouche*, and the mother in *Farrago*. Using a speculative etymology, Cartmell "adopts" the American writer Herman Melville as his father, using selected passages to ruminate on death, language and paternity.

Narratives of Egypt, like *Ça Tombe*, *It's Coming*, *Secretions*, and a host of others are still unfinished. They may never be finished. Speaking of his own work, Cartmell remarked, "I don't build grand buildings, I make the architect's equivalent of beer stores. Somebody builds these buildings — but who? And who cares?" As we spoke it became obvious that the gestures of Cartmell, while resolutely filmic, are not inscribed in emulsion, but in the place of theory, in a waiting game he is playing with the fin-de-siècle.



In the form of the letter "X"

MH: How did you become interested in film?
MC: After high school, I went to Europe and stayed mostly in Paris, where I went to the Cinémathèque every day. They showed five films a day, and the program changed daily. When I came back from Paris, I studied philosophy at the University of Toronto. In the mid-seventies, after finishing our bachelor of arts, Maureen and I went to Buffalo and entered a cultural studies program. A couple of years went by and our marriage ended, so I had to leave because we couldn't live there separately. And I went insane, so I couldn't do any work anyway. I don't know what this has to do with film. In 1973, I got a super-8 camera and shot with much less inhibition than I do now. I had no way of seeing my film; I didn't have a projector or viewer so I just kept shooting. Later I borrowed some money and bought a Bolex for next to nothing. I certainly wasn't thinking of myself as a filmmaker, but I thought, well, I can just make still images; I can shoot 4,000 images every roll. But I couldn't afford to put any film in it. In 1979 I came back to Hamilton from Buffalo and began working at a steel plant, and suddenly I was making piles of money. So I could shoot again. But it never occurred to me to make a film.
MH: What were you shooting?
MC: Self portraits. I think it was because I was crazy, or I'd been crazy. I'd spent a little while in the nutball factory on my own initiative, and as soon as I got there I realized, oh my gawd, why am I here? So I got myself out. I stayed seven days. I read about six Henry James novels in a week, so you can imagine how bad it was.
I remember Michelle McLean showing a one-reel 8mm film of a bunch of stuff on a picnic table with the wind blowing. She said, "I really like the way the light is in that." I thought: How can you take this seriously? How could you have an entire industry devoted to this, to continually talk about the way "the light" is? There seemed to be an awful lot of posing in that direction. To be honest, I think there still is. Cinema could be an art form that talks about itself, but I think it's almost exhausted that moment. I wondered what else you could use the cinema for. Can you do philosophy in writing any more? Who would read it? Nobody reads any more. I don't mean read literally, I mean read powerfully. I think we're going through a transformation in dominant communicative paradigms. There are people coming along with powerful viewing skills that animate their thought processes, and it's got to do with television and movies even though they're filled mostly with crap.
MH: But people only understand film to the extent that it mimics literature — look at Hollywood. Marshall McLuhan said that each new medium would pick at the corpse of the one which preceded it for its content. So cinema took shape as a book.
MC: I'm suggesting that one day there won't be any more literature and that if you want to do philosophy, you have to turn to film. Like in Greece, the oral tradition was supplanted by writing. It didn't happen in a day. So Plato writes in the *Phaedrus* and the *Seventh Letter* that writing is poison to thought; it's a terrible way to do philosophy. Too

bad we can't talk. But there aren't enough people to remember it and say it after I'm gone. But at one time there were. How did the *Odyssey* get passed on? People remembered it and were able to recite it. But our literacy changed the way we remember. Eventually we'll run out of people who can read something as complex as *Ulysses* or the Bible.
MH: What does that mean — philosophy?
MC: I'm using the term in the ancient sense where it embraces logic and nature and spirit. It has to do with everything. Not just an esoteric body of thought harboured in a tiny wing of the university, but philosophy as knowing activity, all activity engaged in inventing and exchanging and developing knowledge.
MH: You said once that all art is either paranoid or schizophrenic.
MC: So what does paranoia mean? In what sense would you say that Joyce or Shakespeare were paranoiac? I would say in the sense that everything has meaning. I'm taking Stephen Dedalus' view of Shakespeare, that "a great artist doesn't make mistakes." That's not my view of a great artist; it's his. Here's a guy who would spend two weeks writing one

Cartouche

sentence just getting the wording the way he wanted it. Paranoia is the interpretative desire gone wild, and any form of interpretation is paranoid in principle. In any effort to close, to complete the effort of interpretation, paranoia exists. The problem is that there isn't any closure to the operation. The alternative would be not to care, to engage in interpretation for *jouissance*. That's the Barthean or Derridean position — that one's life, one's being, isn't at stake in the interpretative act; that it's a gesture made among others. That's why you can introduce chance procedures. Look up all the words in the dictionary that start with the phoneme "phil" and use that to interpret Phil Hoffman's films, for instance. But you'd only do that because it's not crucial to know everything. You produce one reading. Paranoia wants control over everything so nothing can harm it [the paranoid subject]. I don't want to control everything; I want someone else to guide me through it. I'm infantile in that respect.

We live, you could say, in an age in which the dominant technologies of communication are undergoing a radical transformation. The capacity to access knowledge, information and culture through written works has declined in favour of more passive and more audio-visually oriented modes. What are the possibilities opened by these new and popular electronic media? What sort of "writing" would be appropriate for an audio-visual culture? How would the transmission of ideas, information, emotions, aesthetic experiences, take place in this milieu? Is "transmission" the proper metaphor here: would "exchange," or "engagement," or "articulation" be more apt? What would be the most useful structural motifs for the production and circulation of "texts" within such a paradigm? These are just a few questions that have only begun to be addressed.

In some of his later books (for example, *Dissemination*, *Glas*, *Truth in Painting*, and *The Post Card*), Derrida elaborates a theory of "writing" proper to the practices of a number of postmodernist artistic (both literary and plastic) texts — a theory which finds inscribed in those texts manifold extensions of the author's proper name, and obscure details of his or her life. These inscriptions or "signatures" become the clues both to the decipherment of the works (in the sense that phonetic rendering of foreign names on funerary monuments [cartouches] were crucial to Champollion's eventual decipherment of hieroglyphic writing), and to the extensions of meaning beyond the texts and authors themselves. The central operating principle here is a kind of semiotic, homophonic, etymological, and metamnemonic play, in which the proper name and its variants are subject to a massive dispersal across and beyond the textual field, opening pathways for the interminable (on the part of the reader/viewer) production of meaning and interpretation in opposition to any notion of consumption or closure. Whew! Texts, in this view, are precisely games, ones that are subject only to laws and rules of overflow, of slippage, of over-determination and excess.

I believe that the unconscious articulates itself in one's work. And it does so unconsciously — a fact overlooked by many. Take someone like Phil Hoffman. To me, it would be stupid to look at Phil's films and regard the instances of landscape as symptomatic, as pointing to some kind of unconscious relation, that it has to do with the maternal earth body, or something like that. The things that are symptomatic in his film would be the things that Phil doesn't think are there,

that people wouldn't notice in the film without moving through the work with a particular kind of address, the gaps in the film, the things that don't systematically crop up because the unconscious is not systematic. So, if there's a systematic address of the landscape, that's not where the real nub lies. I think you have to look at the partial and the fragmentary in any work to find out what the work is articulating on the level of the unconscious. I think that stuff is well hidden in any systematic discourse about work or criticism, especially when it's only achieved the level it has with Canadian avant-garde film, which is very programmatic and preliminary. There's not a great discourse about avant-garde film, but what there is is clearly defined and dogmatic. So any work that doesn't conform to the rubric is not work. It doesn't count; it isn't art.

MH: Do you think that matters?

MC: It's certainly had effects. Not the least of which is the availability of funds for people to continue to make work. That's the most damaging effect. Many makers haven't got money to make films because it's harder to see their work as part of that "tradition." And yet it seems to me the concept of tradition, the concept of canon, if they have any meaning, have nothing to do with notions of "experimental" or "independent" or "avant-garde."

MH: But avant-garde film is most often screened in the classroom where a very strong canon and tradition exists. Patricia Gruben's work goes to universities as an example of Canadian feminist new narrative; David Rimmer's films serve as an introduction to structuralism; Joyce Wieland is the avant-garde patriot...

MC: But what if the point of the course was not to articulate a tradition, a history, and a canon, but to engage a number of issues with respect to audio-visual art? Today's university program hasn't budged since Hegel invented it; it transmits knowledge from the supposed master to the supposed disciple by presenting a canon of object material which is reviewed with students, who then rehearse that review in exactly the same form — the essay. You're going to run into the problem that things are changing. People's capacity to think and learn has changed, and I'm not saying degraded. We're not literary anymore; we're something else. The fact that we face in universities a generation of students who aren't literary is a particularly great opportunity for a culture that isn't based in letters, and film culture is exactly that. Or it has the potential to be exactly that. Where it's most that is in the avant-garde. The instances where that potential is most developed is by the inventors of cinema. Most of these are in the avant-garde.

MH: What do you mean by inventors?

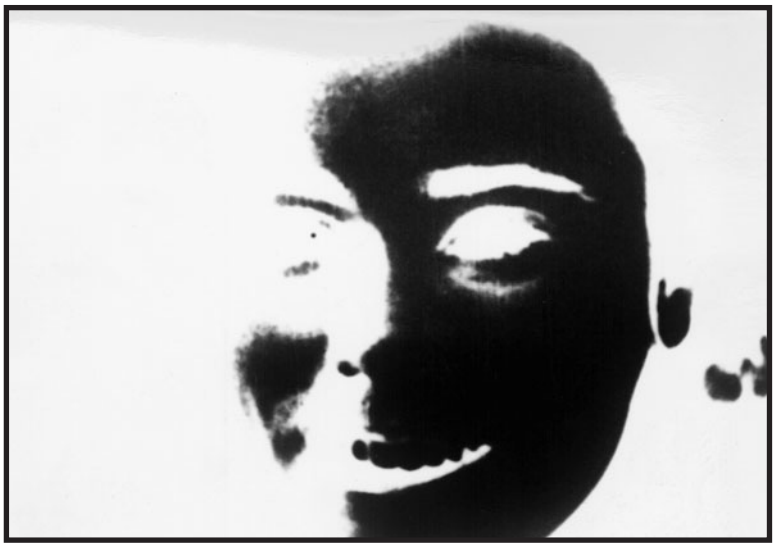
MC: People who aren't imitating literature or theatre in cinema. Like Eisenstein or Godard. We're dealing now with students whose cognitive apparatus isn't formed by reading but by watching and hearing stuff. And we have to do something about this. We're going to miss the brilliant people — because the standards by which we evaluate these students don't have any application anymore. I think students shouldn't have to buy books but should be made to buy a video camera. And if you take a philosophy class you should be making a philosophy video. Obviously, the institutional inertia against that change is massive, but it's a historical shift which will take a long time.

MH: What's the effect on makers?

MC: To isolate them from the institution. It's far more possible for someone like my son to be able to take a video camera at the age of twenty and do something useful, powerful, and moving than do what I'm about to do again. Go to university to study and write, in the academically sanctioned fashion. If you look within the universities, the people who are doing the most interesting work are violating all of these sanctions. They're not writing books anymore. They're writing, but writing has become something else, not transmission of knowledge, but dissemination of writing. So meaning is no longer something that proceeds through a text in a linear fashion to its conclusion. Meaning is something that explodes from a text, in fragments, in pieces. So if I'm the subject reading these texts, I may be interested in taking something here and taking something there. In other words, knowledge becomes something constructed, rather than something that's available to be transmitted. And isn't that a lot like...

MH: Art.

MC: But even art has been conceived in these terms. This is one of the problems of the avant-garde. There's an avant-garde that erupts at a certain time that's radical and distinct, but eventually it's recuperated and becomes part of a canon



Cartouche

and a tradition. So now we can look back and study Dada. Here's what I always talk about in film production courses. There are basically three steps to making a film: *découpage*, collage, and montage. *Découpage* busts everything into bits, then you start to articulate the relation between one bit and a context other than its original because the original context has been lost. Yet there's a trace of it left in the bit. That's the collage process. And montage is putting it back together in a form which either has continuity or it doesn't. So it's a constructive process; it's producing something. But the relation is not the phenomenological relation of mediation which comes out of a romantic tradition, which says, oh yes, the photograph is the way I mediate the world to myself. It's not that at all. Your relation to the world isn't one of mediation — it's one which breaks the world apart.

TV erases history. It's why advertising works.

Gregory Ulmer is dealing with this. He argues that film techniques should be used to present material in the classroom and receive the work of students. It'll be ages before that occurs. But maybe not. Look at the kind of changes that have occurred over the past fifteen years. It's unbelievable. If we don't blow ourselves up, there may be an equal pace of change. I'm talking about everyone's daily life changes; I don't mean the space race. Daily life is about microcomputers of enormous power and everybody's got 'em. They change the way you think. Computers aren't literary either. With a computer you can marshal information in ways you could only do with one skill and a dogged determination in the past; namely, going to the library and looking them up and reading them. You can access the Betman Archive on two disks — literally millions of historical photographs. Just think of your desktop publishing program: the way you can articulate text and image on a page, the shape of a page. You can be Mallarmé, but with vaster potential because you can access stuff faster.

In the form of the letter "X"

MH: What kind of implications has this had for filmmakers?

MC: It's what I'm thinking about now. One effect is to make me much less productive at the moment. I'm thinking about it. I wish to inscribe some kind of major break, and it's causing me all kinds of problems personally. In terms of this condition in education, it hasn't had any kinds of effects because no one's explored it to any great degree.

MH: What about how our changing technologies are engineering a shift in how we live?

MC: Video has brought about profound structural changes in the way we think, in the way we act toward one another. The VCR is the technology that marks the eighties more than anything else. It's done two things. It allows for archival retrieval of material. But the main difference is that you can tape everything, and only watch on tape, which Paul Virillio suggests is the only way to watch TV. So instead of watching the news at six, you watch the news at seven, after you've taped it, and then you can analyze it. That's a big move. Think of the power you gain over the news broadcasts and the ways in which events are represented. If you can stop the tape and look again.

MH: It takes you out of that flow which finally operates to erase memory and history. Without the opportunity to position yourself, there's only the present.

MC: Precisely. TV erases history. It's why advertising works. If you could look at commercials carefully, they wouldn't work. They work because you can't watch them; they just happen to you. It's like getting a virus. They repeat things in a way so you don't notice, so eventually you're conditioned to accept certain propositions that are ridiculous. You know the expression "knowledge is power"? The question is: For whom? The knower? Or the entity that put the knowledge into you? Everybody knows the saying: "Winston tastes good like a cigarette should." It doesn't matter whether you buy it or not because you already know it. And you're right — it has to do with being in that flow. But as soon as you tape everything, you are in charge of the information. You can see how it works. Now what you do with that is another issue. You can make a videotape and be a video artist in Canada, where you decry the use of television ads and their techniques. Or you can use those same techniques to make a commercial about something more worthwhile than shampoo.

MH: But why has that project been taken up so often by video folk and so seldom by filmmakers? Watching avant-garde film you wouldn't even know media existed in this

country.

MC: Video technology has intrinsic retrieval and copying abilities.

MH: But people have shot off screens, used optical printers...

MC: It's easier in video. It's exactly the same as the difference between scratch music with turntables and digital sampling. Film is scratch music with turntables — there are certain things you can do which are the same as digital, but they're just so labour-intensive. And film has another history. Some filmmakers seem reasonably interested in articulating issues in that history — the history of ethnographic cinema, for example. So they're not interested in media as a general topic, but cinematic media. I was born in a TV era, but I'm a literary person, which is a disadvantage as a filmmaker. Many filmmakers don't feel like this because all they're doing is making literature — in their case, audio-visual literature — and my work is too. That to me is its weakness. In other words, it's not inventing cinema. Now maybe I'm not capable of inventing cinema. I'm obviously vastly less capable than plenty of people. But the gap I notice between myself and some of my students is that I can come up with all kinds of ideas for films, conceptualize what I want to do. They have a great deal of difficulty doing that. Why? Because the way I conceptualize is literary. Right now the only easy way to conceptualize is using literary methods. There may be other ways. In fact, this whole position implies that conceptualization ought to have another form. But one of the things students are good at is taking an idea and then going on to put stuff together. If you can do the *découpage*, busting up the world, and hand them a bunch of fragments, they can put it together with more grace and ease than I ever could. And that suggests something about the way their minds work. They've been advantaged by not reading.

MH: If most avant-garde filmmakers aren't inventing cinema, what are they doing?

MC: I don't know. I don't think that most people aren't inventing cinema because they can't, but because it doesn't occur to them. I think there are lots of people making work in the tradition of avant-garde film. There are others whose practice is enervated by something they've read in a book; they've embarked in film because of an encounter with theoretical issues they've gathered in some non-filmic way. And that doesn't necessarily mean that work will be bad, though it has great potential to be bad. Influence is a very difficult question. But finally I have to agree with someone like Harold Bloom who feels that, at some point, influence has to be resisted. All art begins with imitation. We all have some reason to start to work in a certain way. Nobody is going to make a film never having seen one.

Let's suppose you're a woman and you're interested in feminism generally and feminine *écriture* in particular. There's all sorts of material you'll likely read, there's conferences you'll go to, there's magazines you might look at, and then you go and make a film or video. All that stuff is going to have an influence. It's going to give you certain aspects of a recipe.

Prologue: Infinite Obscure

The extent to which you follow that recipe will get you in trouble, I think, although you may be successful. It may get some attention. Reviews. Notices. Even for work that isn't very good. And that may allow the maker to make an advance. And these advances may get strung together, and suddenly there's a career at stake. If you want to look at things from the point of view of art, then this kind of procedure can't be good. Yeah, it can be okay as a start. But at a certain point, someone has to invent rather than just copy. You've been making pound cake. Then you start to make another kind of cake. But pretty soon you're going to have to make *coq au vin*. And you won't have a recipe to do it. You have to invent.

MH: What do you mean when you say it doesn't occur to people to invent?

MC: Well, what are the rewards? What are the sorts of parameters that come into play in terms of whether or not a work is successful, is well received? I don't know that radical difference is one of them. Not radical. I think that particularly in this town — obviously it's imagined because I seldom go out anymore — but I don't think it's unfair to say that in Toronto there's notions about what is correct practice. Like the depiction of sexuality. It's bad if this sexuality is heterosexual and male. Lots of men make art that has something to do with feminism. Some of the work I've seen seems quite forced; it seems to lack something. I'm not saying that good old heterosexuality is the only way, because much of what feminists complain about in terms of how sexuality is articulated in our culture is exactly right. It's like

Adam and Eve. She's there for your companionship. For you. Even if we can reject that, and I hope most of us can, there's still a residue in our culture that's impossible to avoid. Even women participate in it.

MH: What about the argument that avant-garde film is now, and has traditionally been, a white, male, and middle-class preserve. That it's racist and sexist by exclusion.

MC: First of all, I think it's true that it has been that. And to the extent that it remains that, it deserves to be attacked. I wouldn't be comfortable in a community which could be legitimately conceived as male and white. But at the same time, I don't think being black and female, or Native and homosexual, automatically warrants greater authenticity. It's the problem of affirmative action. If only white men can control the field of avant-garde film, then it's no good. They'll simply reproduce themselves. This also explains why video is much more issue oriented, or why work by people who aren't white and male tends to be more issue oriented. Because they have an issue. They have a legitimate issue. In the best of all possible worlds there might be white men and black lesbians doing work about the same kinds of things, and you could look at the work together — at the work, not the makers. But because of the position that people are placed in now, it's not possible for someone not to have their personal history, sexuality, and race attached to their making. These aspects thoroughly invest people's work — it's as true of white men as everyone else. It's just that white men have tended to be the standard, the norm, which is a problem. It's a problem of authorship, believing that work is the vision of its maker. This is another thing which I think is changing. It's just impossible for me, at an intellectual level, to conceive of authors having anything to do with work.

Cartouche

MH: But you suggested earlier that one should read the work as an unconscious expression of its maker.

MC: Not the unconscious of its maker but the unconscious of the work. I think our culture has an unconscious. Inasmuch as anything produced now shares in its culture, it shares in the unconscious of its culture. So the fact that Phil Hoffman's work is Phil's doesn't matter — knowing him might be a disadvantage only because it might lead you to say, well, Phil wouldn't think that. For example, one of the things that interests me in *passing through* is that there's lots of ways in which it articulates what Hegel or Levinas would describe as a Jewish sensibility. But Phil's not Jewish. I don't think he's even knowledgeable about Judaism. But for me, it's legible in his work. We participate in a range of symbolic structures and elements and materials — the Jewish sensibility, the Hellenic sensibility — and the themes elicited by those sensibilities are often what we stupidly term "the great themes of art." So statements about the unconscious of a work don't have anything to do with their maker.

MH: But in an environment in which makers are asking for grants, where reputations and bodies of work are at stake, in distribution catalogues where works are listed beneath the names of the author, how is this non-author position tenable?

MC: Yeah, we still sign. Someone like Derrida, who has done a lot to disrupt traditional notions of the academy and writing, still signs his work. And his books, which aren't books, are in books! Here's a prediction: if he doesn't die, Derrida will make a video, an audio-visual text which will be a philosophical text. He'll actually be inventing philosophy, not repeating it. He's done this in a performative way by giving lectures in two voices. All these are jokes, which is one of the things I like about Derrida. He's got a good sense of humour. When you look back historically on occasions where there have been quite radical ruptures in tradition, it's most effectively been done by people with a sense of humour, Socrates, for example, not dour old academics.

MH: Is there any point in making avant-garde films now — given its marginality, its inability to see beyond its own formalist history or respond to newer agendas of race, representation, and the media? Given the preponderance of white male hegemony, the absence of critical discourse, the lack of exhibition outlets?

MC: People who make narratives are real filmmakers, and I'm just a joker and you too; we're just dorks. I haven't done what I want to do. I know what I'm going to do — it's to make things and describe them later as not what I want to do. In other words, I'm going to fail or stop entirely. There's a future in avant-garde film if we begin to understand "the project" differently. You claim there's an audience out there for work, but they're uninterested in the kind of modernist shit that's in the canon. And you're right. But we're not going to be supplying them with anything they'll be interested in unless we change. The deal is, only so many people can be admitted to that canon, and there are people in our

midst to make sure we won't get admitted. One of the difficulties you might have in putting together cohesive programs that don't have to do with the canon or the author, that violate the codes that organize material, is that a lot of people are at a stage where they don't really know what to do. They know what they don't want to do, but not the reverse. I can't believe I'm the only person not doing anything.

MH: Many have stopped. But, for most, it's less out of aesthetic confusion than material necessities — it's just too expensive and too difficult.

MC: That's always part of it, but at the level of a social unconscious, there are those whose current projects are consistent with their previous projects. They're building a reputation and a career and a consistent body of work, and they're getting grants because they're doing that. There are other people whose next film bears no resemblance to their past work.

MH: That's considered to be a great failing.

MC: Well, it would be, wouldn't it? Because it's not in keeping with the notions of authorship and continuity and tradition that we ascribe to. We may not aspire to these notions in our own practice, but we ascribe to them in the way in which we articulate our practice. If your next film is different in style and aim and goal and content, it's likely also different in quality. You might make a film to your own mind that's a success and another that's a complete catastrophe. If you look historically at other times of rupture, and there haven't been all that many, this has been pretty usual.

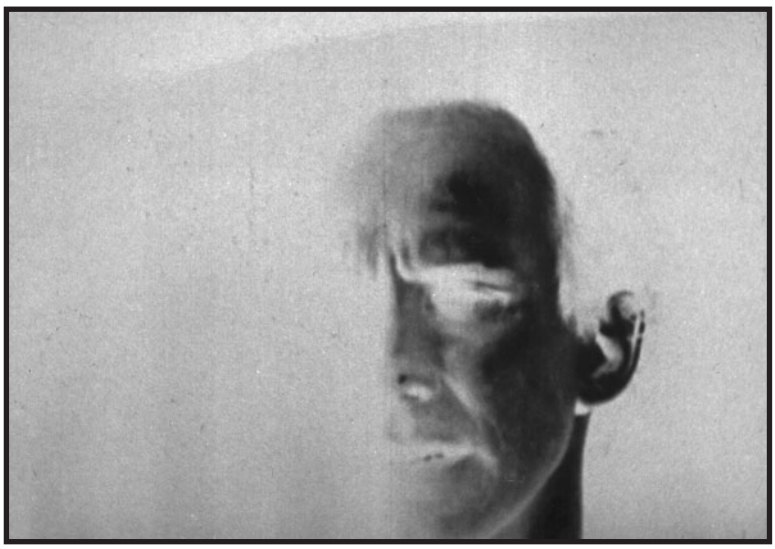
MH: What do you mean by rupture?

MC: A kind of catastrophe that signals a new beginning. It's a period of more than just change. It means a radical transformation of the way in which cognition and perception take place, the way work is done, technological shifts and changes in relation to language generally. It's absolutely certain that we're in one. If you look back, you find that there are artists of all sorts whose entire careers are occasional successes amid massive catastrophes. Most are forgotten. But even those who have survived as the great signals of transition have uneven careers, especially in their formative period — from thirty to forty, sometimes in their youth. For someone like Joyce it happened all at once, early on. But if you look at Joyce, none of his work resembles his previous work. Freud is another example. He didn't conceive psychoanalysis all at once. He did a lot of stuff that was a total disaster, like his studies on cocaine and hysteria. Even people who may not necessarily think about all the social, technological, historical, or aesthetic issues of the present moment are in tune with them in some respect. Some repress this and continue. Others can't repress it successfully, though they may not be able to articulate its eruption. They live its eruption, but eventually they may do something radically different that may turn out to be important. I don't know.

There are artists of all sorts whose entire careers are occasional successes amid massive catastrophes.

It's like when the angel comes down to tell Adam about how the world was created. The first thing he says is, "I'm going to tell you the story, but I'm going to tell it to you in terms that you can understand. Using words. This will radically distort the truth." So I'm saying something about what someone like you or me might do, but I'm still talking in terms consistent with the ideology of art making, which is a romantic ideology — the artist as stalwart, intrepid visionary, and white and male for all that, who has a destiny and a vision. Even somebody who is farting around and in a state of disunity may ultimately emerge as a strong maker. It is really difficult to find a way to talk about this in terms that actually address what might be on the other side of this transformation. How long did it take for the oral tradition to be completely supplanted by the literary? Hundreds of years. In fact, there are remnants of the oral tradition that still exist.

MH: So how does one go about allocating funds to artists?



Prologue: Infinite Obscure

MC: I would rather have three-billion dollars for arts activities in this country than a submarine. We're getting eight submarines. Why not seven? Do they come in eights? Like hot dog buns? My position would be not to build one nuclear submarine and just throw the money on the street. It

would be a special kind of money only good for film — eight-billion dollars on the road all over Canada. Anybody who finds it can use it. Can't be transferred to dollars, and it's a capital crime to sell it.

Clearly the situation as it exists is bad, not just because there's not enough money, but the method of dispersing money is bad because the money goes to friends, because juries may have a particular complexion, or no complexion. But the disbursement of money isn't the problem. Meagre though it is, there remains public money available to us which isn't similarly available in the United States, for instance. I don't think money is the problem. I don't think the solution is don't give any money, because then only the best will survive and only the work that has to be made will appear by the people who have to make it. None of that will change the essential problem of transformation. The nature of things is in flux. So it's always going to be more possible to repeat the same successfully, rather than doing something radically different successfully — up to a point. I'll bet that there are dozens of powerful filmmakers who have never made a film. They simply wouldn't go in that direction because the field is so circumscribed by certain codes. A lot of others have stopped. It's why I stopped. It makes me uncomfortable in ways it shouldn't — even to go to screenings if I think I'll have to talk to certain people. If I have to defend something outside the paradigms being presented, I can't, so I don't want to go at all. It's possible now to make that decision. But by the end of the century, it won't be possible anymore. That person will do it anyway. Right now we've got a lot of apocalyptic thinkers in avant-garde film who feel that it's over, that there are no great filmmakers left — Camper, Elder, etc. But that's not true.

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MH: Why are they saying it?

MC: Because what is happening is that more and more people are unable to continue in the tradition, and yet they're still unable to develop the new. But they will. We're also talking about a generational thing. We're part of a generation that's been slow to mature in certain respects. I think the fact that many of us lived in terror that we'd be blown up any second has had profound effects. We had all kinds of material abundance and a nurturing environment in terms of goods that's almost unprecedented. But at the same time, there was this supplemental insecurity. I think it explains why people who are almost forty right now, like me, don't know what the fuck they're doing. They have no career, no prospects, no job. They're like kids. I feel like I'm twenty years old. There are lots of people at loose ends on the threshold of their chronological maturity who are not doing anything. But unlike other times in history, there isn't any kind of radical outlet for them. You can't go to Paris like you could in the twenties. You can't go to the States and drive across the country for a year and write a book. You can't do this kind of stuff, because it costs too much to live. I'm out of money. I can only stay here till the end of the month. I don't know what happens next.

I think the fact that many of us lived in terror that we'd be blown up any second has had profound effects.

MH: You've suggested that what happens "next" is the invention of cinema — the creation of an audio-visual text which is no longer content to illustrate literature, but which "makes sense" in a different way.

MC: Ultimately, I think invention will occur in cinema, or the next technological version of cinema. It may occur at the level of avant-garde film or at the level of pedagogy. Maybe someone like Derrida will make a videotape that will create something unseen. Maybe it'll occur in the organization of family life. Right now this has been reduced to its lowest common denominator on *America's Funniest Home Videos*. But there are people around who are recording everything, stuff you wouldn't put on TV, and sooner or later some orphan after the funeral is going to go through the parental attic and look through thousands of hours of tape and make a life project out of that. It's going to be unbelievable and it won't look anything like what we know.

MH: You think it's going to be unrecognizable?

MC: Is daily life recognizable as narrative? First of all there's an initial *découpage*. In the eighties, everyone had VCRs. In

the next century, everyone will get cameras which will be the size of your hand with great resolution and digital sound. Maybe you'll have two or three, one in each hand with one on the top of your head looking backwards, who knows? The point is, there'll be this ongoing recording. Then twenty years later everyone will die. That's important. They'll die and somebody will see this material that they've never seen before. Cleaning up. Going through Dad's shirts. In some cases it'll be a lot of *Funniest Home Video* stuff. But sooner or later they'll come across a psychotic family, a family in disunity and disarray, a family that is the family of the future, a family that doesn't resemble the family as we know it ideologically. Some kid will get this stuff, and this won't be a kid plagued by the literary. It'll be a kid who lives in a different culture, a kid who is totally digital, and this kid will be someone who needs to make art, and this will be the material. What do you usually find in the history of sons and daughters going to the attic? Letters. What could be more literal than letters? But now it's going to be images and sounds, and this kid is going to make something out of all that. An unbelievable work of mourning, which is what all art is. The reason we do it — grief.

Because we're always mourning, we always want to make sure that we will be remembered. Making work helps because it remains — archival permanence and all that. It's a deeply unconscious part of it, individually and culturally. There's the knowledge we're going to die. There's also the threat of total annihilation which makes our culture different than any culture, ever. There may not be anybody left, and that's a new idea. We must be a culture that's radically grieving to want to set up the potential to completely annihilate ourselves so that there won't be anyone to mourn. That's the radical Other of civilization — nobody to mourn — inasmuch as civilization exists so that those who die will be mourned. That's why culture is organized. Every moment of culture is the setting in place of memorials and monuments. Certainly art is. When the threat of annihilation is posed precisely by technology, what better way to address an impossible future than with other instruments of high technology.

It's unfortunate that the cinema is so geared to capital; is always making a gesture in the direction of capital. That's the problem. Why should makers live way below the poverty line all their lives? Maybe making work is always a compromise between money and ambitions. I don't do anything at all. It may be the highest mode of non-compromise. Silence.
MH: Gregory Markopolous and Robert Beavers used to pursue that end — deciding to screen their work just once a year on an island off the coast of Greece. Attendance by invitation only.
MC: If art could become more private... One of the present taboos has to do with the degree of intimacy in work. It's usually located in the sexual, but it can be located in other places. One's anger, for example. Or one's death. But to take sex as an example — nobody makes a film which simply records sex. Sure, you can send away for home porno tapes made by "amateurs," but it's not the same because these people are still performing sex rather than doing it.
MH: What's the difference?
MC: What they do is constrained by the presence of the camera. Because it's so unaccustomed, it's not usual. But what if that presence were not unaccustomed? What if over a long duration, that presence became ubiquitous and thus unobtrusive? Then what kind of decoupage have you got? What kind of fragments have you got to make something out of? Almost unbelievable ones. Couldn't you do something to achieve it now? Couldn't we construct a world that we could

Cartouche

fragment and make a film out of, which would be that intimate? Couldn't I make a sex scene that was actually like sex, that would have the horror, the intimacy, the ecstasy, and the grief that real sex has? Instead of being a show, which is what all sex is in cinema — either an appeal to voyeurism, or a deconstruction of voyeurism. Neither of those has anything to do with actually doing sex. Watching sex is another activity as far as I'm concerned, and one of my most enjoyed ones. But it's different. It appeals to different parts of the libido, zones of gratification. I can imagine living without doing sex. I can't imagine living without watching it. That's a terrible thing to say. Only a white male could say that. But someone else might say that's expressly perverse; this guy must be Artaud-like or something. I don't know. Maybe one of the defenses of staying at home and refusing to go out is to keep the hope alive. You seem unhappy and I can understand why. But in a way your reporting isn't real for me, though I believe what you say because I'm in my house and

keeping my hope alive — for myself, which, I admit, is not doing you or anyone else any good. But I haven't abandoned all hope. Sooner or later something will have to be done.
MH: My hope is waning.
MC: But you're in the arena.
MH: This is my exit from the arena, my parting wave. I thought this book would be a celebration of different people's attitudes, understandings, and achievements.
MC: Oh, it's by no means a celebration, unless you think a funeral is a celebration. You're performing an act of mourning.
MH: That's what it feels like because everyone says, this thing that you're after, it's not there anymore. It's finished. All we can do is talk about what it was.
MC: You're attempting to recover the remains as you depart, and then you're going to monumentalize these remains in some fashion which you hope will be a book. That's a reasonable and, I think, thoroughly typical endeavour. It's proper in every sense of the word. At the same time, I would say news of my death may be premature. It may turn out that what has occurred is that a kind of periodization has ended — a period of your development, for example. But something else may happen. Certainly I don't think there's any reason to be optimistic. But it's astonishing how things change. A stupid invention in someone's garage can completely change the way everybody thinks. And there are garages in which the lights are burning all night.

Mike Cartmell Filmography

Prologue: Infinite Obscure	19 min 1984
In the form of the letter "X"	5 min 1985
Cartouche	8 min 1986

RICK HANCOX:

THERE'S A FUTURE IN OUR PAST

Rick Hancox has been loading up first-person cinema for three decades now. Using the most modest of means, he has crafted an exquisitely edited, often brash and moving body of filmwork which is openly diaristic. Working the divide between private and public space, this is an intimate practice, made with friends and lovers, photographed in familiar places where the camera, as well as the conversation, is shared. Often transplanted as a boy, Hancox began in the 1990s to revisit former stomping grounds, crafting an elegant quartet of land and scape and memory which cuts to the heart of the Canadian Imaginary.

For years he taught in Oakville's Sheridan College, primal scene of the Escarpment School, offering many their first exposure to the work of the fringe. He continues to teach in Montreal's Concordia University, championing a cinema that begins with a thorough shakedown of its first witness and the machines that make subjectivity possible.

Reunion in Dunnville

RH: I began playing music pretty early in my life and by 1961 had a rock band called the Viscounts. The next year I had another, called the Tempos. They were cover bands, and I played guitar and sang. My parents suggested that rather than become a rock star I go to Mount Allison University for pre-med. I proceeded to flunk out two years in a row. They called me "the Cox" and I'd have these "Coxian auctions" standing on my residence bed, selling my books for booze money. I continued playing music, this time in a Mount A rock band called the Loids. By the third year the university wouldn't let me back in.

I headed to the closest big city, Montreal, to get a job in the real world, and wound up selling encyclopedias door to door. I was so good at it they paid me to teach others and I won a free trip to Rome along with the best salesmen in North America. We stayed in the Hotel Excelsior with live chamber music for breakfast. They gave us spending money, which I blew on hookers in the first forty-eight hours. I did manage to go on a tour of the Catacombs of San Sebastino, a maze of tunnels which run for miles underground. But when the tour was over I snuck back down on my own, running with glee. And then the lights went out. I froze. It was completely black and so quiet I could hear my heart echoing off the walls. I was wondering which direction to head in when the lights finally came back on, and I ran like hell to the door. Apparently they have frequent power failures, and people have disappeared in the maze, never to be seen again. I wrote a poem about my Rome experiences called "Yankee Via Veneto" which is quite entertaining. All my poems were based on real experiences. They're documentaries. Later on I realized that my music and poetry could both find a place in film.

I wanted to go back to university and the only place that would take me was St. Dunstan's in Charlottetown, which eventually became the University of Prince Edward Island. I had a good year there, and took a summer course called Eastern Thought which changed things for me. Despite my C grade I enjoyed it immensely. I remember lying in a hammock on the seashore wondering whether the tree was really there. How could we know for sure? I was starting to head out as a solo guitar act, writing my own folk songs, touring coffee houses in the Maritimes, until I missed so many classes I had to drop out of St. Dunstan's my second year there. I started to feel my voice and guitar playing weren't good enough, so I dropped out of music, too. I wound up driving taxi in Montreal for most of the winter. It was a pretty lonely job, working weekends, with people in the backseat heading somewhere better. One day, between shifts, I was in a bookstore and a couple of film books happened to catch my eye. There was a collection of Ingmar Bergman's screenplays and Sheldon Renan's *Introduction to the American Underground Film*.

MH: An early crossroads.

RH: I bought the Sheldon Renan book because it had great pictures! And was immediately sold on experimental film. I hadn't seen one, but he describes the films so clearly and with so many illustrations, it was the next best thing. That spring I moved back to PEI and got a job as a night janitor in the student coffee shop. It was pathetic. My girlfriend in Charlottetown had broken up with me when I was in Montreal, and she was going out with some jock on campus. One night when I was cleaning, this mangy cat arrived carrying a mouse, and I watched with fascination as it methodically crunched the skull and then the body, until just the tail was hanging out like a piece of spaghetti. When the cat sucked in that tail, that's when I knew I'd really hit bottom.

That summer I bought a broken 8mm camera for a dollar, fixed it, and started experimenting on my own, as no one else I knew was making movies this way. I was shooting things that were around me, my personal landscapes. I started university again on the other side of town at Prince of Wales College the year it became a university, before it joined with St. Dunstan's to form UPEI in 1970. George Semsel had come up from New York, where he was part of the underground film scene, to teach for a year. It was great timing. He taught PEI's first (and last) course in 16mm film-making, and he showed us documentary and especially experimental work — still called underground film then. I don't know how he did it all. The film department was in this old house which had flooded, ruining a lot of film stock, which George promptly used for the class anyway. We played with it, punching holes, scratching, projecting loops — George said we did everything to that stock but throw it up in the air and fill it full of buckshot. I made my first film, *Rose (3 min 1968),* with footage George gave me plus hand-coloured leader and scenes from the local news station's garbage bin.

For my major project in university I shot another film, a short "poetic narrative," but most of the negative was lost in transit and I had a month left to come up with something else. My father, who was publisher at the newspaper, said, "There're so many stories in the paper, why don't you see if there's something there?" I came across a story about a taxi driver who'd won a Maritime Service Award. Before his regular calls he'd go around Charlottetown, picking up handicapped children and taking them to school. I shot it over a weekend, put the pieces together, and *Cab 16 (6 min b/w 1969)* won the Best Documentary Film Award at the first Canadian Student Film Festival in the fall of 1969.

That summer, wanting adventure, I set off for New York to live with George. He wanted to introduce me to his mentors, Willard Maas and Marie Mencken. They had a rooftop apartment in Brooklyn and Willard answered the door in his underwear. They were both notorious boozers. I'd brought my film *Rose* and Marie said, "I'm sorry, we don't have a projector, but let me have a look at it anyway." I was so flattered that Marie Mencken was looking at one of my films I let her unravel the whole fucking thing on the floor. She was saying, "This is amazing. Incredible." Actually *Rose* looks even better that way, as an object, because of all the work I'd done dyeing and tinting. That was great.

I hung my hopes on film-crew notices and volunteered until I got hired on for pay, just moving from film to film and looking after people's apartments when they left town. I found work on this ridiculous film in Jersey City as a sound playback man. It was like a Busby Berkeley outer-space musical, made in 3D Techniscope for Expo '70 in Japan. The director, who had flunked out of NYU, shot in Jersey City to get around the unions, so the set was filled with kids and drifters. One inexperienced rigger fell to his death from the scaffolding. My girlfriend had said, "There's a great concert happening this weekend in upstate New York — why don't you come with us?" I thought, no, I have to stay, I'm learning things here on set. That concert turned out to be Woodstock, of course.

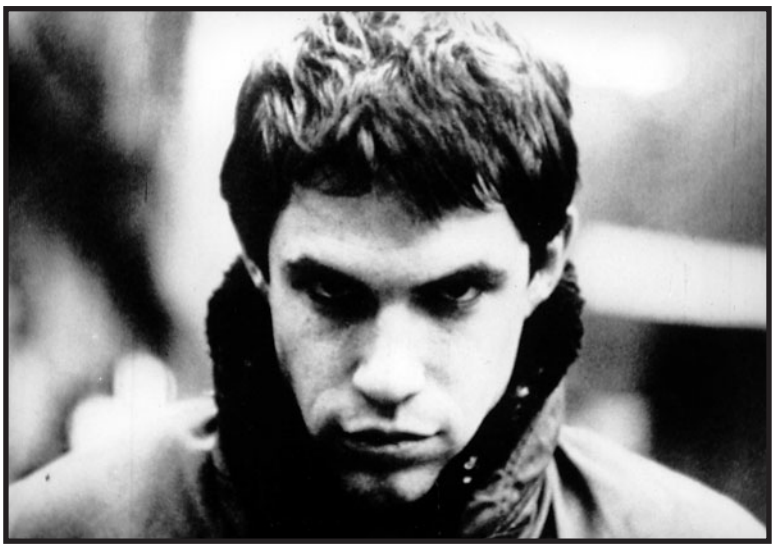
MH: Didn't you make *Rooftops (5 min b/w 1971)* during that period?

RH: Many buildings in New York have these old wooden water towers up on their roofs. One afternoon, I climbed on top of the recording studio where I was working and set up a tripod. I shot *Rooftops* there. Using a telephoto lens, I could pick details out of the surrounding rooftop landscapes and reanimate these later through editing. Without any final form in mind, I began by simply recording what was there in front of me.

Tall Dark Stranger

After that summer I went back to college in PEI. Because there were no film courses, I started a film club and began doing workshops so other students could catch the fire. I was doing an English major, but I turned everything into a film course. *Tall Dark Stranger (15 min 1970)* was the result of some obscure independent reading course. I'd seen and liked *Easy Rider* in New York that summer but thought it was unfortunate the hippies got blown away at the end. One dream in the sixties was to turn on anybody from the establishment: the straight world, your parents, anyone. *Stranger*'s about a PEI farmer who's visited by a hippie dressed like Christ. The hippie turns him on to hashish and the farmer has a vision of squealing pigs in positive and negative film, upside-down cows, and farm tractors. I hand-dyed this stuff

like I'd done in *Rose*. The next morning the farmer's still sleeping it off when the Christ figure packs up, leaving behind a big block of hash (actually toasted chewing tobacco) and walking across the water of the frozen pond in his sandals.
MH: There's an odd sexual tension when Christ reaches into his toga.
RH: He's got the hookah stored underneath his robe, and when he reaches in to get it there's a lot of cutting back and forth between him and the farmer, who's wondering what's going on. After the hookah comes out they get stoned.



Next to Me

MH: It's wonderful that this psychedelic western should take place in Prince Edward Island. The dope communion is something these two generations can share, allowing the son to triumph over the father, but in a very gentle and funny way.
RH: After school I taught film at summer camp, where I met Barbara Holland, piano accompanist for the ballet program. I moved into her upper-west-side New York apartment along with her two teenage kids. Barbara was sixteen years older. We loved each other but she carried her family's troubles. Her mother committed suicide and killed Barbara's baby sister in the process. Her father was a gold-mine speculator, which kept them moving from town to town, where he'd start up his scams and have to move again. He wound up hiding in Guatemala with Barbara's brother, who had abused her, and she hasn't spoken to them since. After her mother died, she was brought up by her wonderful grandmother near Buffalo. Barbara studied piano, read voraciously, and went to New York City to seek her fortune. She was eighteen and got in with this artsy crowd, well-known up-and-coming actors and musicians. She'd gone out with Marlon Brando when he was on stage in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. She told me some funny stories about Brando. There's a scene in *Last Tango* that's right out of something he said to Barbara, about how he arrived at the school dance with shit on his shoes from milking the cows. To a kid from PEI she was a sophisticated, remarkable woman.

I spent a year at New York University. The film program was very restricting but I learned a lot about photography from Paul Caponigro, and also from John Szarkowski at the Museum of Modern Art. His notion of photography included amateur and chance photography, things that were never intended to be art. That was important for me. We studied Cartier-Bresson and I wondered how his notion of the decisive moment might be adapted to cinema to create an extended moment in motion. That's when I started work on *Next To Me (5 min b/w 1971)*. I started living inside these documentary photographs. Seeing them everywhere. I'd make lists of decisive "movements" that couldn't be defined by a single picture — like garbagemen throwing refuse in slow-motion. A single photograph wouldn't have captured the ironic grace of that.

Next To Me begins with a man who comes to a stoplight, and while he waits for the light to turn he starts to think about his Canadian angst in the big city. The film proceeds for about five minutes, then the light changes and he disappears into the crowd. He sees things that are metaphors for his own psychological state — a liquor store window with an inflatable Santa Claus which collapses, a woman falling naked on the camera, Bowery bums with squeegees — and later he contemplates jumping off the 59th Street Bridge, but can't muster up the guts to do it.

The funny thing is I didn't know it was a personal film until editing it a year later. It was about the people and events in my life, but obscured by my "theory" of the decisive movement. Then I realized the actor is playing me! So the soundtrack includes bits of theory read in voice-over as a self-parody. I sort of satirize myself in several of my films, I don't know why. When you can see yourself as a character walking through life ... it's a coping strategy, I guess. It disturbs the hell out of some filmmakers. Bashing presents over each other's heads in *Home for Christmas* was seen as a threat by conventional "concerned" documentary filmmakers. You just don't do that if you want to be taken as a serious artiste.
MH: You finished your schooling in Ohio.
RH: Yes, George was teaching there by the early seventies and invited me to come and finish my MFA degree. One of the things I found in film school, especially at NYU, was that people were inordinately impressed with the biggest cameras they could find. Real filmmakers used an Arriflex and a big crew and drew a lot of attention to themselves. When it was my turn to use that technology I said no. I used

a Nagra tape recorder but also a wind-up Bolex, wondering what would happen if we tried to make lip-sync films without the proper equipment. I loved the Bolex because it was portable and felt more natural with its spring-wound motor.

Wild Sync (11 min 1973) is in two parts. Lorne Marin had come down for Christmas, so we're opening presents, playing music, and clowning around. Barbara's on piano and her daughter, Nicole, appears as a Spanish dancer. That's intercut with black and white shots of me filming myself in a mirror reading a script about how to make the kind of film we're actually watching. As I'm speaking it's drifting out of sync and I say, "You can just cut out a few frames like this," and you see the splice right onscreen and the film goes back into sync. The idea is to do everything myself. I've got the tape recorder over one shoulder with the microphone sticking out of it, the camera's on the other, and I'm holding the Bolex on my shoulder by gripping its auxiliary viewfinder in my teeth, so my hands are free to make the sync mark by clapping my hands.

MH: It's hilarious watching you wrestle with all that equipment. And the other scenes have great warmth and intimacy.

RH: We all had fun doing it. It's a real document of the time. As you can see in the film, Barbara and I had got back together. We broke up in *House Movie*, made the year before, but by this time we were married.

MH: How did *House Movie (15 min 1972)* start?

RH: One of Barbara's favourite composers was Rachmaninoff, and we liked to listen to his second symphony. That led me to thinking about our troubled relationship. I'd left New York partly to get away from us, then got lonely in Ohio, and coaxed her and her daughter to move in with me. And once again we tried to break up and take separate apartments. Rachmaninoff became an accompaniment and underlining of this impossible relationship. I'd already made a couple of autobiographical films and thought this one would make some sense out of things. We talked about it a lot and she participated in it very willingly. She didn't feel it would amount to much, but it was part of my thesis work and I guess she could see it meant a lot to me.

I shot in our rented house that December, panning over photos on the countertop, the furniture, little details of personal life. There are shots of us eating supper, going to sleep and turning the light off, me getting into a bath. Then I arrive with the moving trucks and our stuff is taken away. I go up the stairs of my new place, this godawful bare room. The final scene is a recapitulation, in which the camera tilts up the outside of the old house again, only snow has fallen. In the spring Barbara moved back to New York. I edited the film when she was gone, following the Rachmaninoff. I studied the score and gave the film a symphonic structure, with repetition and recurring motifs.

MH: Is it hard to show because it's so personal?

RH: A little. I think it's a really well made film, but I was always concerned about the music being too much. I've considered releasing it as a silent film, because the music would still be there in the structure.

Home for Christmas

MH: How did you wind up teaching at Sheridan College?

RH: I wanted to get back to Canada; I'd been in the States for three years and missed it. George Semsel was a model for me not only as someone who made personal films but as a teacher. I liked the fact he could teach and keep learning and earn enough money to pay for his films. I went through lists of film schools and liked the way the media arts department at Sheridan College sounded. When I got the job I wasn't planning to stay long. Whenever I got pissed off I'd say, "Well, that's all right, I'll just quit. I'm either doing it my way or I'm leaving." I didn't have family, debts, or commitments, I could teach what I wanted, and I was finally able to wrangle an apprentice course where I could work on my own films with certain students helping. That's how all the poetry films were made.

MH: You made a lot of films in the early seventies and then slowed down.

RH: There was a five-year break until *Home for Christmas (50 min 1978)* came out. Why? In Toronto I lived with Barbara in a now-condemned apartment next to the National Ballet School where she was working. Our tormented affair kept on: living together, splitting up, living in little rooms — I must have moved six times in one year. This went on for several years. Those first two years (1973–74) were a write-off. I was an emotional basket case. Finally we broke up and that fall I decided to shoot *Home for Christmas*. My father had a heart condition and I was afraid that every shot I took

of him might be the last. I phoned him and said I'd be bringing a camera and he said, "Aw, Richard, you're going to ruin Christmas." Of course he turned out to be the biggest ham in the movie. It was all shot in December 1975 and edited over the next three years. It was made on a two-to-one shooting ratio and used the wild-sync technique seriously this time, all shot very spontaneously. It was a direct cinema impulse — whatever happened happened, and I'd film it. I figured if I shot enough, the editing would show the relationships between various family members, between landscape and memory, and would evoke certain rituals of Christmas and homecoming and trains in Canada.

After shooting the film there was a hiatus. I was missing Barbara again, so I'd go see her, then still see other women and feel guilty. I was totally depressed, living in this hellhole of a bachelor apartment while Barbara lived not far away, knowing I shouldn't see her and thinking it would never end. Suicide even crossed my mind that summer. Needless to say, I did no film work. The next fall I met Cara, now my wife, and started to enjoy living again. A year later the film was finished.

MH: Your parents are central to the film. Are you close?

Home for Christmas

RH: I really admire my father. He's well liked and has an admirable capacity for work that would be hard to equal. At 76 he was in charge of raising corporate donations for the University of Prince Edward Island. I respect him but we don't have a lot in common. He's been a pretty good father. My parents weren't unsupportive of film, though at first they didn't know what the hell I was doing. Which is okay. I learned long ago that in this fringe type of filmmaking you have to pat yourself on the back.

My mother doesn't like many of the films or she's not interested. I don't think she's a very contented person; something stopped for her during the Second World War. When she was fifteen the Germans blitzed Manchester, and they had to leave in the middle of the night on Christmas Eve. She never saw her house again. She married in England at nineteen and came to Canada right away. I was born in Toronto sixteen months later. There's a line in *Home for Christmas* when my mother says, "We grew up together." We were close during my first five or six years, before my brother and then my sister were born. My happiest memories of her are from a long time ago. On the other hand, it's really thanks to her I was brought up with an interest in the arts at all — certainly the public schools I attended never encouraged that kind of creativity, especially for boys.

But I've had a troubled relationship with my mother — both her and my dad had parents who were born in Victorian England, where children were to be seen and not heard. There were, of course, proper ways for a boy (a.k.a. "a young man") to behave, and young men should follow certain career paths and not others. Along came the sixties just in time for my teenage years, so experimental film became a kind of home base, a place where I could escape formalities and dissent and be irreverent.

MH: You took *Home for Christmas* to the Grierson Film Seminar.

RH: The Seminar's no longer held, but it was a retreat hosted by the Ontario Association of Librarians, which brought together makers and users of documentary films. Every year different curators brought new work, and each screening was followed by a long discussion. Some British Marxists were invited to show their work, mostly polemical political tracts, which quickly developed an atmosphere of confrontation. Along came *Home for Christmas*, which was immediately criticized for being self-indulgent, a celebration of bourgeois values with "frenetic" camera work. Someone asked how such an amateurish film could be programmed at all. How could I be teaching film? Hadn't I ever heard of a Steadicam? It seemed like I was going to fall into one of my deep depressions. I knew Mike Snow and Joyce Wieland fairly well at this time. I'd served on the Board of Canadian Filmmakers with Mike and done the neg cutting for *Rameau's Nephew*. I felt I had no one else to turn to. So I phoned them both in Toronto from the Seminar and they were really supportive. Mike said I must have done something right; the fact that it provoked so much discussion and controversy proved I was onto something original. That saved me.

MH: Your next film was *Reunion in Dunnville (15 min 1981)*.

RH: I was thinking about making a film that included scenes about my father and his World War II experiences in the Air Force. I did some research into the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan, which had bases across Canada during

the war, and came across a newspaper article that said that every year since 1946 there was a reunion of these veterans in Dunnville, Ontario. I wanted to go down and check it out and mentioned it to one of my students, Rick Hannigan. Rick said that both his parents trained in Dunnville, met and married there, and still return each year for the reunion. Four of us went down, including Phil Hoffman, and shot everything we could. What I didn't know was that the base had now become a giant turkey farm. Filming from the car, we rounded the corner of one of these big hangars, and all of a sudden there were thousands of turkeys everywhere. That evening held one of the most incredible epiphanies of shooting I've ever had. The sun was setting, we're out on this tarmac, weeds growing through it, and you could almost see all the layers of time simultaneously — a real temporal landscape.

MH: Could you describe the film?

RH: *Reunion* is my most conventional documentary. It centres on the day of the reunion. The memorial service is held in the shadow of an old Harvard training plane. The veterans stand at attention while the names of those who died in the past year is read aloud. Then I had the narrator read the names of those who died in training accidents during the war, while the scene dissolves to the empty airbase with its weeds and rusting hangars and the sounds of planes taking off, and then we go back to the service. The past is evoked through the soundtrack music, making a continuity between past and present. They'd recorded some of their early reunions on 16mm Kodachrome, and I used that as well. It's one of my favourite films I've made.

MH: What was the Toronto filmmaking scene like during the seventies?

RH: I was involved for several years in the Toronto Filmmakers' Co-op, a place run by and for filmmakers. But a new coordinator got railroaded in, moved the place, bought a lot of equipment no one could afford, and it went bankrupt. They thought they could turn the co-op into a commercial venture as part of a feature industry concocted by the infamous tax shelter. Meanwhile, at Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre they wanted to separate the "commercial" work, which would sell to libraries, from the "experimental" work, though when I joined all the work was experimental. I felt it was a way of ghettoizing experimental film. The Distribution Centre, the Co-op, and *Cinema Canada* used to share the same building but finally they all went their separate ways and then the co-op collapsed. Out of its ashes were born two institutions: LIFT and the Funnel. The Funnel represented the experimental side and LIFT hosted the folks who wanted to step up to feature films. The Funnel was not the friendly place the co-op used to be. It was run by Ontario College of Art graduates who wanted desperately to be recognized as artists. They invented a publicity machine with the idea that all you had to do was tell people it was art and you'd receive grants and recognition. It wasn't about making good work but good rhetoric. The Toronto film scene became an unwelcoming place, overly conscious of image and trends. By the mid-eighties I'd had enough of an arts scene that was increasingly insular, divided, and ugly. When a job came up in Montreal, I took it.

Waterworx (A Clear Day and no Memories)

MH: Tell me about *Waterworx (A Clear Day and No Memories) (6 min 1982)*.

RH: My father grew up on Neville Park Boulevard at the east end of Queen Street in Toronto. We lived with his parents in that house for the first year of my life. When I was a baby my mother would push me down to the waterworks at the foot of the street and look out longingly over Lake Ontario. There weren't lakes that size in England, where you can't even see the other side. The waterworks was named after my grandfather's boss, Rowland Harris, Commissioner of Public Works, who lived across the street on Neville Park Boulevard. Grandfather was a city engineer who was working on the Toronto subway when he died — the same year I was born. When I moved back to Toronto as an adult, I'd drive around these buildings, thinking they invited some kind of filmic treatment. I wasn't terribly interested in the fact that it was a water filtration plant. For me it represented an intersection of time, memory, and technology.

I made tests in super-8, shooting from the car with twenty pounds of air let out of the tires. Then, on a cold, clear November day, using a low-speed colour reversal stock, I drove around these buildings. But I didn't know what to do with the footage. Like all of the poetry films it was shot years before it was finished. Years later I came across a poem by Wallace Stevens called "A Clear Day and No Memories," which seemed to be relating the mood I experienced with the

waterworks. The film was just three minutes long, the soundtrack a mix of wind, radio static, and the wartime song my mother sang to me, "The White Cliffs of Dover." Then all of the images repeat for another three minutes with the same soundtrack, but attenuated, and you see Stevens's poetry stamped out on the screen by a computer. The notion of a technological memory imposing itself was very important, preventing access to the eidetic imagery in the background.

MH: Seeing the film repeated draws memory into the act of viewing.

RH: Viewers can't have the images the way they see them the first time because words are in the way. The film transforms a sensual, visual experience into an intellectual one, which is how memory recall works. My father told me that before the plant was built there was a park where children with tuberculosis gathered to take air. Others told me you can still find pieces of beautiful worn glass on the shore, because a glass factory preceded the park. It's another one of these places with layers of time. While my personal memories were the only ones I was aware of, they brought me in touch with others.

MH: *Waterworx* began a trilogy of poetry films.

RH: *Landfall (11 min 1983)* and *Beach Events (8.5 min 1984)* were both shot in the seventies. The experience of making *Waterworx* helped me to go back and rework this footage, this time using poetic texts.

Landfall

Landfall was shot on the south shore of Prince Edward Island, where my parents had built a house, and the film was shot after I'd come home for Christmas. There was a big storm the night before, with ice floes forming in the straight, and I felt inspired that morning. I grabbed the camera and began dancing with it on top of the cliff, then down on the beach, making figure eights and lasso movements. I shot in slow motion, with the shutter closed down to enhance sharpness. That became the first third of the film. The rest is slowed down even further; I had every frame printed twice and then mirror printed. A copy of the original was made backwards and upside down, then printed back onto itself. So the two pictures move towards each other, circling around the still point of the centre. The only time the image stops is when I freeze-frame it onto my shadow or a glimpse of my hand.

I came across a poem by D.G. Jones called "I Thought There Were Limits," which fit very well. He wrote it after the breakup of his first marriage, so while he's writing about limits to gravity and Newtonian notions of physics, he's also speaking of emotional limits. The poem is spoken in the first third of the film, then reappears later onscreen. I used selected words, treating them as visual objects, parking the word "limits" at the extreme corner of the image, having others float up the frame, while some are upside down, defying gravity.

MH: The film has a tremendous exuberance and joy.

RH: One of his great lines is "Relax. The void is not so bleak." The space of the film, where sky and ocean meet, seemed a void, but there wasn't anything frightening about it to me. I find it rather comforting to know nature is greater than us. Historically, the Canadian landscape has been regarded as terrifying because of its vastness, but I've never seen that as a threat.

Landfall was shot in the winter of 1974 and finished nine years later. It was named after the house my father built there. When you're on ship and sight land, that's called landfall. And of course the film shows land falling away. We had that ocean property for years before the house was built.

I shot *Beach Events* the next year. I went down to the same area every day for a week, determined to shoot something different each day and make a seascape diary film. It begins with long shots and each day draws closer to the marine life. I remember showing the footage to Tom Urquhart at the Distribution Centre who said, "You don't need to edit this film. It's fine the way it is." I thought he was crazy. I started pulling it apart, trying everything, but it never amounted to more than a lot of pretty seascape shots. Finally the workprint was so ruined I had another made, which showed me the original order of the shots. And it dawned on me that Tom was right! It's an imprint or index of my experience. I move closer to nature, disturbing the flora and fauna. There's a sort of backlash as the tide forces me into a cave. I seem to re-emerge a changed man, realizing I'm part of all this. Then the film reveals a merging of beach events above and below the surface of the water,

closing with a shot of the horizon in which you can't tell where the ocean stops and the sky begins.

The text is inspired by Polynesian poetry, which is much like haiku writing; both are concerned with the present tense, describing simple "events." I wrote a poem based on what we see in the film and superimposed it on the picture. There's another poem spoken on the soundtrack written in an "automatic" style by George Semsel in response to the film. I read this poem and at the end I put this reading through a pitch changer. It becomes an anima or child's voice merging various selves and nature. Like the rest of the poetry films, it's a meditation on a personal landscape.

It's another one of these places with layers of time. While my personal memories were the only ones I was aware of, they brought me in touch with others.

MH: Each of the films in the poetry trilogy tells the story of a place that is re-encountered through language. The movement between a thing and its naming is conjured here as the work of memory.

RH: So many of my films had been direct autobiography without commentary, but that changed in the eighties. I was very influenced by Wallace Stevens, who felt that poetry was a way of bridging reason and imagination. Words were allowed.

MH: Tell me about *Moose Jaw (There's a Future in Our Past) (55 min 1992)*.

RH: It started in 1978. After the Grierson Seminar, which had a lasting political effect on me, Cara and I decided to get the hell out and drive across Canada. I took a bunch of films from the Distribution Centre and showed them across the country. When we arrived in Moose Jaw I just started shooting without any idea of making a film; I just didn't know if I'd get out there again. The footage of Moose Jaw on this first trip was mostly exteriors of buildings that I recalled: my old house, church, and school. I was overcome with feelings while I was there, frozen into long, passive camera takes, and while I was having dinner with Cara she asked, "What's wrong?" It took me twelve years to answer her.

MH: When did you live in Moose Jaw?

RH: We moved out there in 1948. After spending the first two years of my life in Toronto, the next eleven were spent in Moose Jaw. Dad talks about what it was like when he arrived, still a kind of frontier town, full of WWII optimism. It used to be a frontier boomtown, chief red-light district of the Prairies, hide-out for Chicago gangsters and important rail station. Everyone seemed young, starting afresh, with no interest in the past. There was a military base built south of the town during the war as part of the British Commonwealth Air Training plan I was telling you about. A lot of my earliest memories are accompanied by loud Harvard training planes flying overhead. One of them crashed into a passenger plane above the city and forty people died. My father was one of the first on the scene, and I've been afraid of flying ever since. That's why I always take the train. Our leaving Moose Jaw for Prince Edward Island after I turned thirteen in 1959 happened to coincide with the end of my childhood, the beginning of the sixties, the "jet age," and the start of Moose Jaw's long decline.

Like a lot of prairie towns, it was built because of the railroad, but that's lost its significance. The province always relied on one crop, wheat, and they've just gone through nine years of drought followed by too much rain. Moose Jaw has the largest over-sixty-five population in Canada. When most return to their hometown they don't recognize it because it's grown so big, but Moose Jaw was just the opposite. In the years I was away, it shrunk. The town looked just the same, with the same buildings, only now they were closed or boarded up. The Temple Gardens, for instance, was a big-band dance club during the thirties and forties. Now there was a sign saying, "This building will soon be gone but the memories will linger on." I went over to the newspaper where my father used to work and asked if they knew anything about it. They confirmed the building would be torn down, but no one really cared. I filmed the

Moose Jaw (There's a Future in Our Past)

Gardens with the sign attached and we pushed on to Vancouver. When we came back a few weeks later the building was gone — only the sign was left. That was really the beginning of the film.

I needed to get back and shoot more. Every excuse I had to go out west for a screening or conference, I took a train and stopped in Moose Jaw. Chris Gallagher was teaching at the University of Regina and offered to shoot for me. He got into the Moose Jaw archives and found stacks of unfiled pictures: a store that sold tombstones, a mechanical dinosaur. We'd confer on the phone about what to do next. One year I shot the archives myself. The camera tilts down over binders

Moose Jaw (There's a Future in Our Past)

containing tattered newspapers in this dingy old room. Mining through the strata of time.

When I moved to Montreal in the mid-eighties I met Arthur Kroker, who was also teaching at Concordia. I showed him some footage, and he invited me to show it in his class each year as it developed. He called late capitalism an excremental culture. In the summer of 1988 all the sewers backed up in Montreal and our basement was flooded. When I opened the cans this terrible smell came from a culture growing inside, and because it was backup from the sewers, it was really an excremental culture! I had it rewashed at the lab and restored it, but as I tilt down over the archives you can still see some excremental stains flashing.

One night Alan MacKay visited in Montreal. He's a Toronto painter, originally from PEI, and I've known him since we went to school together. I showed him some of the footage, saying I just wasn't sure how to approach it. I had thousands of feet of film, newspapers articles, research on the history of the west, the subjugation of the Natives, the killing of the buffalo herd, radio reports. But how to put it together? The film was still composed of these very long shots, and midway through I got up to adjust the screen, casting a shadow of my body. Alan said that was the best part. "You've got to do more of that. Interact with this footage." I decided to head back to Moose Jaw one last time. They were killing the rail service through the southern Prairies, so I hopped on the last train with a script in my hand and a cameraman waiting for me on the other end. He'd shoot scenes of me filming with a Bolex. There's a sequence where I'm in the Transportation Museum filming a Model-T Ford, and I got the urge to hop up on the display myself. I became one of the wax figures, holding my old Bolex, because Moose Jaw couldn't care less about the problems I was having with my personal memories. I was a relic, too. It all came together in 1989.

MH: Tell me about the Moose Boosters.

RH: They were a gang that dominated Moose Jaw politics for years with crazy financial band-aid schemes to stimulate the economy, like turning River Street (the former red-light district of the Prairies) into a giant casino. After voting themselves raises during the worst Prairie drought since the thirties, they were voted out. This is revealed in an interview with councillor Brian Swanson, who was part of a new generation at City Hall that frankly admits Moose Jaw's economic plight and the need to look after its aging population. My discovery of him in the film marks the turn of my satire inward. After a street parade, I disappear, and the camera commences a kind of search, only to wind up at the Western Development Museum again, this time tracking by what looks like a wax figure of me, Bolex in hand, arrested in the midst of filming one of the displays. Part of the waxworks.

There was a tour of the Museum of Civilization in Hull a month before it opened during which an official bragged about how he was going to implode all of Canada in his establishment. It was unbelievable. The country had spread from Ottawa as an act of parliament, but was now collapsing like a dying star. I used his voice while we're looking at scenes of Moose Jaw and shots out the train window, as if this was also museumized. There're bits from the Moose Jaw radio station — Brian Mulroney's speech after Meech Lake, CBC items about the closing of the railway.

The film ends with me desperately trying to film inside the closed and darkened railway station before I leave in the middle of the night, headed back east on "The Canadian." The scene outside my window gradually becomes a blurred view of rushing scenery, first going east, then west, then east again — shot at various times of year. Finally I'm shown asleep, head thrust back against the window, as the Canadian

landscape flashes by in perpetual motion, gradually burning out as the film roll comes to a flaring end in the camera. Meanwhile Brian Mulroney's electronically distorted voice announces how he is "Saving VIA Rail," while the cuts are detailed through the train's broken PA system.

Because I've lived all over Canada, I don't feel like I have roots in any particular place. I feel at home both anywhere and nowhere at all. That's why the film ends on the train. As if it were home.

MH: Why did you subtitle the film "There's a future in our past"?

RH: During the eighties there was a renovation project where you could get a matching grant from Ottawa to renovate your main street. Moose Jaw received funds and rebuilt their beautiful old light standards and really dressed up the street. You'd never think it was the main drag for a town of only 30,000. At the foot of Main Street looms a beautiful CPR train station. But there were a lot of "false fronts" and behind there's not much. The motto of the project was "There's a future in our past," which seemed to symbolize everything that had gone wrong. It had been a young progressive place and was now turning into a city whose only future was in commodifying its own past.

Moose Jaw (There's a Future in Our Past)

MH: It's been years since *Moose Jaw* and you haven't finished up anything yet.

RH: It was so hard to make that film, it took so much out of me. And you always want to do something more than your last film. I just don't know if I can do anything much better. I put everything I had into it. I still love film, but I'm not sure anyone really wants the films I make.

MH: Tell me about "redeeming time."

RH: My wife was looking into the history of the Hancox name. Many names have a slogan or emblem attached, and she found out the Hancox motto was "Redeem time." Which is what I've been trying to do all these years.

Rick Hancox Filmography

Rose	3 min 1968
Cab 16	6 min b/w 1969
I, a Dog	7 min b/w 1970
Tall Dark Stranger	15 min 1970
Next to Me	5 min b/w 1971
Rooftops	5 min b/w 1971
House Movie	15 min 1972
Wild Sync	11 min 1973
Home for Christmas	50 min 1978
Zum Ditter	10 min b/w 1979
Reunion in Dunnville	15 min 1981
Waterworx (A Clear Day and No Memories)	6 min 1982
Landfall	11 min 1983
Beach Events	8.5 min 1984
Moose Jaw (There's a Future in Our Past)	55 min 1992

DEIRDRE LOGUE:

Deirdre Logue's films return to the first-person stage of early video art. They are monodramas rehearsed for the camera, and the artist performs in each film. They are wordless, demonstrating the cost of living in a body, her skin appearing as a book, written over and over, and without end.

Perhaps the collection of our habits is what we call personality.

For years Logue laboured to celebrate the work of others, beginning a fringe film/video festival in Windsor and rejuvenating Toronto's Images Fest. She has sat on endless boards and committees, part of that vast corps of volunteers that keeps the wheels of the fringe turning. Over the past three years she has been at work on a cycle of her own, a ten-part movie whose flickering, hand-processed surface examines the darkest of human leanings with compassion and humour. It is photographed, of course, in close-up.

H2Oh Oh

DL: A woman with a mouth like a catfish is showing me her whiskers. They work like snake tongues, emerging and retracting from tiny holes at the side of her mouth. When visible, they move as if sensing or smelling. They are incredibly articulate and delicate. They also seem to present a danger, as if able to transmit a poison. I can tell right away that she is not who she appears to be. These whiskers are part of her but also a deliberate disguise. I am hypnotized by the movement of her tiny tongues, unable to move. I am both terrified and amazed.

As the body is broken down into its transmittable lines per inch, it can then be reconstructed into other forms of transmission. This breaking apart takes no prisoners.

I have always been in love with performance art. Even as a child I was fascinated with the potential for both eliciting and sustaining a performative tone. Changing my name for strangers was just the beginning of what would fast become a lust for an increasingly fluid sense of self. Scolded on a regular basis for lying about who I was, I began to realize that this desire was never purely intuitive but rather a strategy for surviving a serious case of ambiguity. As well as being myself, I was also names, genders, and identities I made up: Michael, DJ, Corey, Maggie, Paul, Sara, Kevin, and Gary. I was all six of the *Brady Bunch* siblings (though I never identified with the kid added in later episodes), five out of *Eight is Enough*, Jodi from *Family Affair* (unlike the actual character, however, I knew kung fu), Sabrina from *Bewitched,* and the star of Gilligan's dysfunctional coconut isle. I refused to answer to my given name enough that I forced my mother and father to call for their daughter Kevin in the school parking lot. My patient parents eventually drew the line after one full week of watching their eldest child eat out of a dog bowl in the corner of the kitchen under the guise of Pal, our long-dead family pet.

Early shape-shifting prepared me well for adolescence and I survived, as many of us do, by developing new identities over and over again, depending on who was asking. Once past the threshold of my sixteenth birthday, I felt I was entering a new era of self — a directed adult self who knew what she/he wanted — though I never lost my fascination with performing several selves. I am who I need to be when I need to be somebody else. I am in a constant state of becoming, a sign of the future of who I may become. I am not singular.

In my dream I am a Transformer toy, the blue one that is a motorcycle that turns into a Power Ranger character. I am in the middle of the transformation process when I hear my mother crying out for help. I must get to her or she will surely perish. In a panic I rush the assembly and put myself together in all the wrong ways. My head is in the right place but I am quickly becoming a jumbled mess of man and machine. As my mother's cries intensify, parts are everywhere and I accidentally break off one of my arms. In its place grows a spoon. I can see my reflection, and as if seeing myself for the first time, I begin to weep.

I remember a girl in my first college art class who was obsessed with the image of the horse. We were given a 2D metamorphosis project to be executed in gouache. We were to take the simple self-portrait and expand its potential into the symbolic by moving from portrait to object in five stages of visual transformation. I spent a weekend at the kitchen

table turning myself, rather unfortunately, into a cherry. I ended up looking like I was the Jackson Five. She, on the other hand, went from a timid, self-conscious soul into a complex, dark, and unpredictable brooding stallion. I was deeply jealous.

We easily lose sight of the body yet it is always in view. She has been stolen and replaced with another of herself. We have a hard time keeping track of her position, her placement, her subjectivity and identity. She is all and none of what we need or expect her to be. She is in motion, shifting when and as she chooses. Her mediated image is constant yet her survival requires that she never stand still.

MH: Can you take me through a bit of your history?

DL: My partner, Kim, was accepted to the graduate program at the University of Windsor, so we moved from Vancouver. There was a job opening at Artcite, Windsor's artist-run centre. After I had been working there for a year, Artcite decided to do some film/video programming. Hoping to encourage local production outside the university setting, I started the House of Toast with four or five others; the collective scraped together all the equipment we had between us. Our first official project was called Two-Minute Videos, where anyone could come and make a short tape over a weekend and be fully supported. The collective did all the technical stuff. We made ten over that weekend and had a screening. It was a way to introduce video, and some of the tapes were really great. Later we teamed up with the Detroit Filmmakers Coalition and started up the Media City festival which I ran for a couple of years — it's still running.

People became interested in seeing images of themselves, and we were their eyes, taking on a documentary function for a while. We documented the Heidelberg Project, Tyree Guyton's neighbourhood art renovation project in Detroit, and were hired by local rock band Luxury Christ to document their Jello Sex Cult CD release. Windsor is a lonely place for artists, so they do more than go to board meetings together.

At the same time I took a course at the university and made two films which aren't in distribution because I consider them student exercises. The first film was called *Sniff*, and it shows a woman crawling across a gravel parking lot sniffing something out, about three minutes long. Sound familiar? I was one of three women in the class, along with future directors of *National Lampoon 5* and *Die Hard 56*. They were all wannabe monster-movie makers, awful young people who made films in their dorms, drinking beer and killing each other with fake guns.

Milk and Cream

To supplement my income I was working in a homeless shelter for women and the job was killing me. I'd worked in transition houses and rape crisis centres before, but this particular shelter was very violent and poorly managed. One woman came with her husband from New Brunswick only to lose everything at the casino, and now she's sharing a bed with a sixteen-year-old junkie from Detroit. It was like a prison, you couldn't do any real work there. So when Kim finished university we moved to Toronto, and I got a job with the Images Festival, a ten-day event held every spring which runs mostly short film and video work by artists, as well as installations and performances.

Early shape-shifting prepared me well for adolescence and I survived, as many of us do, by developing new identities over and over again.

MH: Tell me a story about Images.

DL: In 1997 we moved to the Factory Theatre in a bid to regain a sense of tribe. We had to clear out the barn and put on a show, but were unprepared for the level of rehabilitation the venue required. We did a lot of cleaning, built a booth, hung a screen, hauled in a portable 35mm projector, took out seats, the works. Under my stringent direction we were, of course, behind schedule. So it's about three in the morning the day before opening, and we're beyond exhausted, people are freaking out, and the projector won't fit in the booth so we have to cut part of it open. Then we all settle back and watch *Black Ice*, and it looks so beautiful, the image large and clear, it's the first thing onscreen after all that work. Then someone asks, "Do you smell smoke?" And our projectionist says,

"Holy shit!" and we look back to see the projector's on fire. We opened later the same day.

I think that festivals are social events as much as sites for discourse, though a lot of fests hold onto the idea that it's really about the work, as opposed to a context within which people can talk about cultural activity in general. Too often festivals create a mandate that becomes a code of behaviour. A festival's mandate should change at least every year, as the cultural climate shifts.

It wasn't until I quit Images that I could make my own work.

MH: Could you describe *Enlightened Nonsense (22 min 16mm and video 2000)*?

DL: It's a series of ten thematically related films. They were made over a three-year period, from 1997 to 2000, and each of the films was shot, hand-processed, and edited in about a week. I am the primary performer, director, and technician. This method has made it possible for me to leave behind scripts and crews in favour of a more immediate, self-contained workplace. When I started this cycle of films I described them as fantasies of my own death. But these fantasies are very complex; they might include going shopping, for instance. On the other hand, after performing these actions, there's something very real about ripping tape off your face for two days. You return to the present.

Milk and Cream

I've had a lot of different responses to the work — many negative, but none without fascination. What was I expecting? The work is not made to disguise itself. What compels an individual to draw stitches all over her body, to wrap her head in tape, to gorge on milk and cream, to fall repeatedly, to soak her head in water, to be hit on the head by a basketball over and over, to put patches on her face or thorns in her pants, to lick up the road? The work urges its audience to ask questions. What would compel me to do this? What might compel them to do this? As an artist, when I perform these actions alone, the audience is already there, on the other side of the camera.

MH: So you're not really alone when you're making the work?

DL: Metaphorically true. There are three parties in the primal scene: the child and two parents. The child is the witness, the parents are having sex, devouring each other, or so it appears. I am one of the parents, paired with the audience. The camera is the witness, maybe, I don't know. The camera is an object that views; even though I set up the shot and pull the trigger, part of it is still outside my control. It translates experience according to a machine dynamic. It creates a point of view that I respond to. In *Roadtrip* it's supported by pebbles on the roadside, forcing the audience to lie on the ground and watch a horizontal experience. Every time I take my camera out of its case there's someone behind it. Someone other than me. If you want attention or affection you behave in a certain way, you perform, and it's the same when you're in front of a camera. You perform in order to elicit certain responses. In the end, the audience looks through the camera, the seeing machine, in order to witness my behaviour.

There was a group of women, all around fifty, who came through the YYZ gallery while my installation was running. They watched the piece and then I joined them for a discussion. One woman said, "I feel so sorry for you, and I feel sorry for your body." Another said that any young person could walk in here and be completely traumatized, that I should put a sign up on the door. But I stuck it out. I asked the woman why she felt sorry for my body, separate from me. I spent an hour with that group, don't ask me why. They went from *Enlightened Nonsense* to the restaurant for blue-cheese tarts and a glass of white wine, then off to see the Manets. It was important to talk to them, maybe, because words are familiar to them, while pictures are strange, unless they're on TV.

MH: Can you tell me about Phil Hoffman's workshop?

DL: It was the first opportunity I had to focus on my work in many years; the fact that it was also a beautiful place in the country where I could talk about what I wanted to do was icing on the cake. The workshop takes place on a farm with a screening facility, darkroom, editing suites, and cameras. It's one of those places where working through the night is so easy that morning is a disappointment. It puts pressure on you to experience, not to produce. During five intense days, you get to watch others making, their mistakes and successes, and everyone puts their heads together to solve different conceptual and

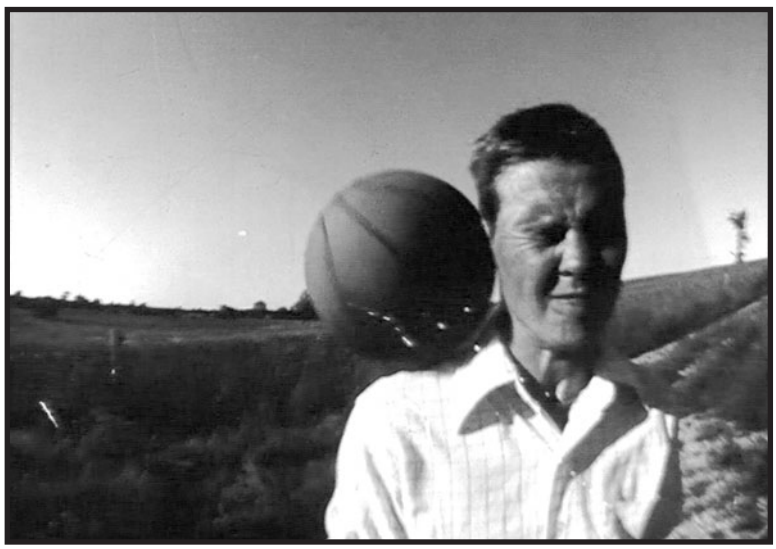
aesthetic problems. It helps remind you that you're not the only person on the planet, that helping others and asking for help is one of our joys. Seven of the ten films were shot there.

When I made *Fall* I shot 500 feet of film of myself running away from the camera, throwing myself on the ground and then running back. All that stuff in between is some of the best stuff. In the films where I'm right in front of the camera and I have to lean forward to turn it on and off … so much gets made there. I try to work alone as much as I can. But sometimes when I'm using a Bolex, I don't have time to run into the frame and perform before the camera wind is over. Sometimes I can't see what's really going to happen. But I prefer working alone — the relationship between the camera and performer is so important.

My films are autobiographical but refuse storytelling. Each has clear parameters, so it's like you're looking at my arm as opposed to all of me. They are the result of spending five days a week on an analyst's couch trying to understand things about myself that are dark and complicated. I feel like I'm better at talking about it as an artist than I am as a human being. The unconscious is very tricky. The unconscious is like someone who pulls all your plugs out and puts them back in another order. But the actions I perform in my films are not extraordinary or bizarre. I use common objects and familiar scenarios. Basketballs, packing tape, water, whipped cream, dirt, and underwear — these are everyday items. Their strangeness and intensity derives from repetition.

Humiliation and discomfort are pretty normal kinds of feelings. Masochism is how we get along with others. I'm just giving these feelings a different shape. While there is a recurrent masochism in the work, I have to object to labelling it self-abuse. This simply doesn't say much about the content of the work. I don't make films where I stick my head in a bucket of cold water over and over again to prove my machismo. I don't make films to show people how much pain I can take.
MH: You've foregrounded the surface of the film.
DL: The form and content are related. The film feels hand-made — it's been scratched on, sections have been tinted and toned, and it's all been hand-processed. I cut the original, bringing all the abuse of the film strip into the editing room. The body of the film and my body arrive together; they're both physical events.

The sound is brought into the film two ways: first, via the found footage, which has its own soundtrack, but because the sound is scanned later than the picture on a projector, all of the sound appears about a second after you see the image; the second way sound is introduced is by drawing or marking on the area where the optical head will read it. Any variation in emulsion will produce sound, so when I'm tinting, toning, and processing, this is also adding a sound element. These sounds are sampled and looped on the Avid (digital video editing machine), slowed down, and fucked with.
MH: Tell me about *Sleep Study*.
DL: In *Sleep Study* I included footage of myself as a kid, precociously dancing out in front of my elementary school, and then it cuts to footage of me during a sleep analysis (I suffer from various sleep disorders, and I photographed myself at the clinic, attached to wires and probes that monitor my sleeping). When it returns to the home movie footage, I've fallen down and hurt my knee. I'm crying and walking home to my house, which is in the background, and the neighbourhood kids run into the frame trying to help but I don't want their help. I get to the front door and it's locked; no one's home because my parents are busy shooting a movie of me trying to get into the house.


Moohead

MH: Is it more difficult for women to make work than men?
DL: No. Both genders are capable of experiencing equal pain, confusion, and anxiety, so if you make personal work it's equally difficult. I grew up in the artist-run-centre movement, which was always a fantastic idea, but they needed women to come in and run them. Art needs chicks. Festivals, publications, galleries: they're all being run by women. Why? Because women are good at diplomacy, collective communal behaviour; girls like to share, they're capable of interpersonal intimacy in the workplace, are tidy and good with money, and have excellent penmanship. The primary cultural worker bees have been women, once you step outside the fact that all the institutions are run by men. But I've never lacked entitlement or luck.

MH: Why are you making a series of films?
DL: Too much spare time. I like multiples, twelve ears of corn, ten related films. I like the idea of having one problem and ten solutions. Some of the pieces are very brief, just thirty seconds long, and they reveal themselves best when they're rubbing up against other things. This is considered pretty normal in the art world. Painters and drawers rarely show work one at a time. Singers don't sing one song, they release albums. This is my album.

What else do you want to know? I took lessons in dance and karate, played softball, went to Girl Guides, brought home stray animals, ate already-chewed gum off the concrete, and was a chronic nose picker. My mother claimed I had a fecal obsession as a child which, thank god, hasn't panned out as anything serious. I was a TV junkie as a child and still am. My favourites are the commercials. The first movie I saw in a cinema was *Oliver Twist*, and I cried the whole way through.

When I was a kid I had three favourite things: a drum set (yes, I was a child prodigy on the drums), my collection of monster-movie models (Wolfman, Phantom of the Opera, Hunchback, Mummy), and a book of short stories that I still have, most of them extremely violent and uncompromisingly ruthless to children.
MH: Is there an avant-garde today?
DL: Only in fashion.

Deirdre Logue Filmography

Enlightened Nonsense	**22 min 16mm & video 2000**
This cycle includes ten short films	
Patch	1 min 2000
H2Oh Oh	2 min 2000
Moohead	1 min 1999
Road Trip	1 min 2000
Always a Bridesmaid...	
Never a Bride of Frankenstein	2 min 2000
Scratch	3 min 1998
Tape	5 min 2000
Sleep Study	2 min 2000
Milk and Cream	2 min 2000
Fall	2 min 1997

ANN MARIE FLEMING:

QUEEN OF DISASTER

Ann Marie Fleming is a prolific storyteller, keeper of her family's often fantastical narratives, and self-confessed "disaster magnet." The lighter side of her filmmaking features stick-figure animations, brief parables about the dangers of growing older in which the catastrophes that are such a commonplace in the world of cartooning are given a more personal touch. Much of her work lies on the fringes of documentary, founded in real-life experience that is replayed in associative images and a riveting first-person recounting. Fleming changes speed in her work, stopping to remember, to pick up the pieces, before accelerating into headlong encounters with death.

Funny, startling, and witty, Fleming's travelogues of disaster remind us that we the living are the exception while death is the rule, and that we bear traces of the dead in our speaking, our bodies, and our imagination.

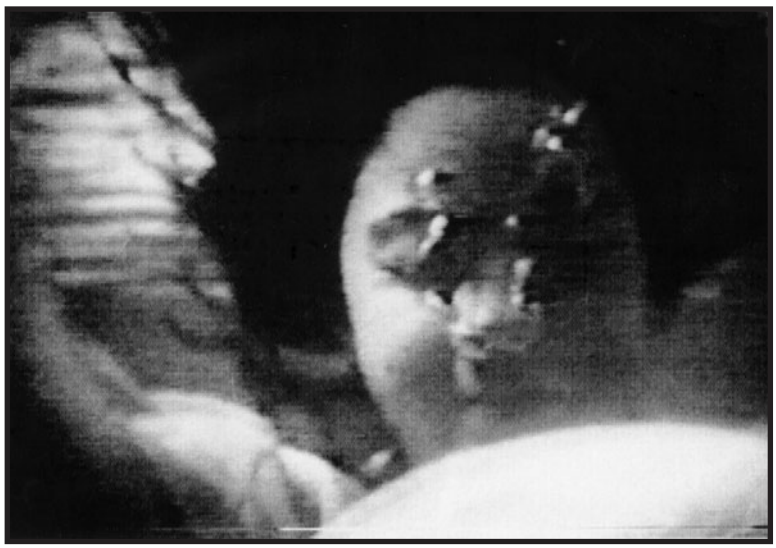
This interview was conducted in three parts over the course of a decade. It begins in 1990.

AF: I had this strange dream. There were all the usual things in it: falling down, not being able to walk or speak, my mother making out with her hairdresser ... and there were all these animals in it. The only reason the animals were moving was that their bodies were filled with maggots. Later on in London, a bird fell on my head in the middle of the night. My calling. [laughs] Then I saw this film by Peter Greenaway called *A Zed and Two Noughts* where a swan crashes into a car, killing the wives of two biologists in the Amsterdam Zoo. They become obsessed with the decomposition of flesh and begin making time-lapse films that show the rotting corpses of animals. Which looked just like my dreams. It was déjà vu all over again. But what could I do? I wrote to Greenaway begging to become his lackey, but he didn't find this of sufficient interest to write back. So I went into film. Film animation to be precise.

By 1984, I'd finished a degree in English literature and started handpainting T-shirts, teaching flute, doing stand-up comedy, and writing a biography of my great-great-grandfather. Two years later I saw a couple of animated shorts I liked from the Emily Carr School of Art, so I thought that's where I had to go. I wanted to make short, didactic animation pieces. You know, "A noun's a special kind of word, it's anything you've ever heard/I find it quite interesting, a noun's a person, place, or thing." Those little educational spots really made an impression when I was young, and I wanted to do more of them. Then I discovered I wasn't very good technically, so I just started making something else — my own films. I made an animated short called *Audition (1.5 min 1987)* which shows mostly black leader as the director's voice sets the scene. He says, "It's midnight. You're thirsty. It's dark. You go downstairs to get a glass of milk. But when you open the door of the refrigerator, instead of finding milk, you find the severed head of your boyfriend. Suddenly, you feel a hand reach towards your throat. What is your reaction?" The rest of the film shows a blue-green frog woman screaming. After a few seconds the director says, "Next," and the audition is over.

There was another film I was working on at the same time, *Waving (7 min b/w 1987)*. *Waving* began by interviewing a number of mothers and daughters on video. In much of my work, I'm really just trying to find a way to let people tell their stories, to preserve an oral history. My family has thousands of photographs but I'm the one that has to point out, "This is you and this is your mother and your cousin," because they don't remember anything. They document everything but don't have any memory. It's really funny. So the mother/daughter video was an extension of those concerns. And I wanted to work with my grandmother. She used to be a ballerina in vaudeville and would have stayed on stage if she hadn't gotten married. That ended everything. So here was a chance to tell her story. Less than a month after I did the interview, she had an aneurysm and fell into a coma for several days. All of my family was out of the country and I was left in charge. No one had expected it at all. I just sat there talking to her all the time because some believe that people in a complete coma can still hear things and you should just talk. And as I went every day to visit her in the hospital — hoping against hope that she would wake up and everything would be okay and would go on like it always did, yet knowing full well that it wouldn't — I had this image of a woman falling. Falling not necessarily to death, but away from me. Away from everything. We had been told that one of my grandmother's frontal hemispheres had completely collapsed and if she were ever to regain consciousness she would be a vegetable. Vegetable. What a strange word. So, one morning, at ten minutes past three, I watched almost with anticipation as the line on the monitor told me she was dying, even though another machine was still breathing for her. It was the monitor that told me she was dead. And then the quick creep of cold up her fingers. And I felt so tired. So relieved. So angry. The funeral was three days later, after an open coffin lying in state. The next day I shot *Waving*.

At the Aquatic Centre there's a porthole by the diving board for the coaches. I wanted to show someone falling slowly through the air but got footage of a woman swimming in a pool. I was so disappointed. When I watched it slowed down on a Steenbeck it looked better, but I was running out of time. There was a week left in school and I'd never seen an optical printer, so I took a video-8 camera and shot it in slow motion off the editing machine. I dubbed in the voice of my grandmother talking and had it transferred back to film. *Waving* is all shot underwater and shows me floating up and down with these large, viscous bubbles streaming from my nose. I put my grandmother on the soundtrack and felt the connection was so strong. She's talking about having to marry a Chinese man because her father demanded it, and how her daughter married a European and the stink that caused, talking about things I've heard her say her entire life. But when I showed it to my family my grandfather wouldn't speak to me any more. He thought I'd drugged her to say those things, even though she'd said them a million times. It was like he'd never heard her before.



Waving

And then I showed it to other people. Who didn't get it. What did this voice have to do with this image? What did the history of this old woman have to do with me? "Okay," I said, "I am going to make it so clear that you will have to understand. This is a film about death. About how we have only empty rituals to help us deal with this inevitable part of our lives. This is a film about how I feel when I lose forever the most important person in my life. And I want to communicate that to you, because that is why I am making a film. Because I want you to know. This is an elegy to my grandmother." This is the voice-over of the film:

> "Throw her in the water," my father said, "It's the only way she'll learn." Plunging down for what seemed like an eternity, only to float to the surface on inflatable wings. My mother has a picture in her album of my grandmother teaching me how to swim. But I don't remember that at all. I remember, later, floating in the water, waiting for the jellyfish to bite. I used to scream when I saw them, so, mainly, I just kept my eyes closed.
>
> Instead of smacks, she offered me chocolate. Chocolate till I was sick. I wore chapsticked lips and blew kisses to everybody. I was just like Granny. I was four years old. At five I was alone in cold Vancouver, writing, "I miss my Granny." But I don't remember that at all.
>
> At six, she came to be with us, beckoned by my letters, no doubt. She was always up early, and snored, too. Grandpa and her shared a bed for the first time in thirty years.
>
> I think that's when my time stopped for Granny. The measurement now how far from then I'd come, how far from that lonely little girl. The doctor told me to get away from her. Spreading nerves from generation to generation. When I refused to go to graduation, Granny wanted to wear my cap and gown. She hated all my friends and loved everything I ever made. I wrote a poem for her.
>
> My mother and I discussed her to no end, trying to explain things. How she was a Eurasian show-biz princess, a ballerina, a saxophone player, a magician's assistant who never knew where the doves went to. She borrowed Andrew's saxophone this year, but I only ever saw her play cards, short of breath from all those cigarettes she sneaks.
>
> You know, as long as I've known her, she's never done anything except walk the dog, curse in Austrian, attempt to bake bread, buy pyjamas for Grandpa, cross me when I went on a trip, and ask, "What do you want out of your young life?" Last time I talked to her she said, "Ann Marie, be careful, it's cold out. It's snowing." And as I said goodbye, I couldn't see she was not waving but drowning.

I wrote a script that took me half an hour because I had spent my entire life writing it. And now I have to put it in festivals where people tell me that I'm not technically proficient, or that they didn't like the "Ave Marie" that my aunt sings at the end, or that I speak a little fast, or that the Satie music (which isn't Satie) is too familiar. But some of them say, "Haven't I seen that somewhere before?" And of course they have. They dreamt it. The title comes from a poem by Stevie Smith called "Not Waving But Drowning." It's about someone drowning in a lake who's ignored because people think she's just trying to get attention. I thought that was a metaphor for my grandmother's whole life. It was a film that was never supposed to be seen, it was just for myself. But once you show it, it becomes something else, it has its own life. That's why it had to keep changing until I was actually communicating with other people. A lot of people were really touched by it, but I don't know how to react to that, because it has nothing to do with me, the film is separate.

MH: The film is so personal and yet it's enjoyed a very long public life, and far from retreating from that division you deepened it with your next film.

AF: I find my work really painful. I don't know why I

choose to make these films, they're all hell. Since I started I've aged fifteen years, and they all scare me because each reveals more or less than I want to. Every time I finish a film I swear it's the last one.

Two events precipitated the next work; both were unexpected and violent. The first was a rape in Brindisi, the second a car accident in Vancouver. I saw these two events as related and wrote a text that became the voice-over for *You Take Care Now (11 min 1989)*. Chronologically, my grandmother's death in *Waving* fits in the middle of these events, in the bit of video snow in the film's middle. But this was so different from my grandmother's death. The rape happened in a different country, you don't know how to react. The second occurs right outside your door but completely incapacitates you. There's no context for either of these events because they're not supposed to happen. It's odd, because you're distanced from the situation. It's not a shared experience until you go through it, and then you have this thing in common with others who have. Like being a mother. The car is much more real and emotional for me than the rape. While I was being raped there were a million things going through my mind. If I was being passive physically, at least I wasn't passive mentally. Whereas getting hit by the car, there was no time for thought. Just a few seconds of screaming terror, like an animal, and then nothing, a void. I'm a complete nihilist now because when you get to the end there's nothing there. Nothing.

I find my work really painful. I don't know why I choose to make these films, they're all hell. Since I started I've aged fifteen years, and they all scare me.

There's a lot of guilt involved in both situations. I still haven't gone to court yet. Lawyers for the drivers are going to try to blame me for being in the street. Because we have different stories, my word is going to be doubted. But it's not my fault. I don't even know whether it was the car's fault. Someone turned wide on a dark, rainy night. These things happen. I get defensive because so many people suggested I was jaywalking, that I ran into the street. And with the rape a lot of people wouldn't agree that it was rape or might feel that I had more control than I took over that situation. Not knowing whether I'd get hurt, I chose to be completely passive. I just wanted to get out. I didn't want to do anything that would leave a mark, so no one could tell I'd ever been in that place.

It was important for me to acknowledge that these things happened, but to show them in a balanced way, without prejudice, to get people to listen without turning off. I don't know how many times I recorded the same words to get the right tone. It was important to do it in one take, to have it be all of a piece, like the voice in *Waving*. It's a performance, and when I'm saying it, I'm there, I'm in it. I'm seeing it. After recording the text I began collecting images evoked by the experience.

> Now you're lying there waiting for something violent to happen, to be hit or beaten or for yourself to do something, like scream or fight or maybe pull out that ever-handy Swiss Army knife. But nothing like that passes. Because you're afraid you might hurt him, or you're afraid he might get angry and hurt you, or he'll call the police and tell them that you stole something and you don't speak Italian. And you've heard all about the police. So you lie there, passive and violated, feeling like someone told you you were going to win an award, and then you didn't get it. Except the award was your dignity, your sanity, your middle-class inviolability. It was taken away and given to someone else who never made the mistake of going to a hotel room, in a strange place, with a strange man. And all you were worried about was how to get out of there with your luggage intact, how to avoid upsetting this man who not only had a black belt in tae kwon do but also your ticket for the boat out of that nightmare land, and how to get somewhere safe to sleep. God, you wanted to sleep so bad. But he'd told you that you look just like *La Gioconda*, and she hasn't closed her eyes in over four hundred years. You take a picture of yourself so that you can remember what the Mona Lisa looks like when she realizes Leonardo is just another letch.
>
> Outside again, amidst the shuffling feet of grapepickers waiting for a job by the Piazza fountain, you find yourself followed by a midget who says you look like Brooke Shields. All tall women probably look like Brooke Shields to a small man. You've already had your life's worth of trauma so you're not expecting it when he locks you in a small room and tries to push his tongue down your face. You don't throw him across the room but push him gently under the rock where he came from and go out into the street with his tiny, offended ego following you, crying, 'Slut, bitch, not good enough for you, am I? Slut, bitch. You don't think I know your type? Slut, bitch, hey, wait up? What's the matter? Wait up? Did I say something wrong?'
>
> You go back to your ticket taker, now your board of refuge; after all, what else can he do? He gives you a lecture on how you're too trusting, and to remember that men here are assholes. "Even I'm a little bit of an asshole. But then, you know that. He he he." So, he buys you dinner, kisses you on the cheek, and tells you to keep in touch. Gives you his name and address. Oh, sure. You take a taxi to the pier. It's dark out. Your friend from the train is there, and asks how your day was. You say, "I had a really bad day, a really bad day." But then you look down at yourself, and you're all in one piece, and you think, "At least I'm still okay." [voice-over excerpt from *You Take Care Now*]

Originally, I was going to do the whole rape scene from my point of view. Then I started going into this personal iconography thing. It was Peg Campbell who suggested maybe I should film details of rooms, like ceilings and floors and corners, all those things you're looking at when

you're trying to pretend you're not being raped. She said I should go to this hotel in Victoria, so I did. Nothing worked until this bird started tapping at the window. I don't know why I filmed it. The seagull is like the bird that fell on me in the park in London. It's the bird that made me want to make films when I saw it rotting in Peter Greenaway's film. It's the same fucking bird. And I show myself flying through the air, like a bird. All the women in my films wear white and have pointy hats like beaks and they're always around birds. They look like birds. I don't know why. The bird is pecking at a piece of glass trying to get in, reminding you of something you can't ignore. Like memories that have to return.

Then I wanted to get footage of roads from Brindisi, until I realized this story could be happening, is already happening, everywhere. So I filmed from a car, moving through the streets here in Vancouver.

I wanted to use footage from *Raging Bull*, but people said there would be copyright problems, so I found an amateur boxing league under the Astoria Hotel. And this guy went crazy. Tony was standing behind me with the sun gun to get some light on the boxer and I asked him to punch towards my hand which I held just off-camera. He started punching me for real and I fell back into Tony who was holding me up, and I realized he'd completely lost it. Mr. Boxer's covered in sweat and breathing hard and I'm trying to tell him it's over, it's finished.

Except for the re-enactment of the scene in the ambulance and the midget harassing me in Brindisi, all of the images are associative. They remind me of things. The images are a place where the audience can begin to make their own Brindisi, their own violations.

MH: You show two photographs in the film, one in each half. The first shows you in a mirror. The second closes the film, showing you resting in bed.

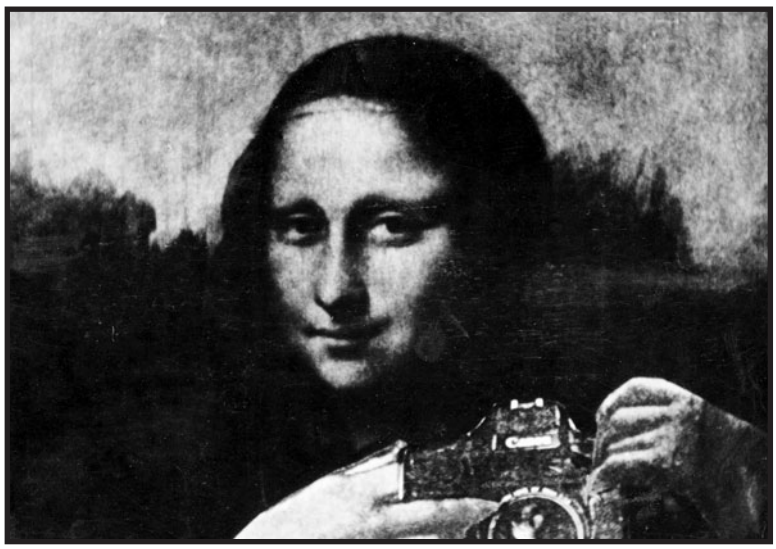
AF: They're the two real things in the film. After I was raped he left the room and I took a picture so I could see what I looked like. And it doesn't look like anything. Because you can't tell from looking. Just like at the end of the film when Ross takes a picture of me, it's just me lying in bed. But no, it's the evening I've been run over by two cars and I can't move.

MH: What about the ambulance re-creation?

AF: I wanted to bring the film back from its lyrical images to something real and to put the title in context. I lay on their stretcher and said, "Just pretend you've come upon an accident, and I'm a suspected spinal injury." When it was over they said, "Is that it? It's just like work." That's what they do every day, it's a routine catastrophe. People are always getting raped or run over. You could be there later on tonight.

MH: Can you describe your early relationship with pictures?

AF: I was brought up with images I can't shake. They showed me what I'm supposed to say and look like, what is an acceptable image and what isn't, the wrapping on cheese slices ... There are a lot of things that disgust me, I can't help it. I have a problem with skin because I was brought up with cartoons. I hate the way I am, but can't change it. The way I think has so much to do with what I've been allowed to see and what's been in the minds of those creating the images. Now I want to do it. Not simply as a reaction, but to show they're okay, too. I'm amazed I can put my gritty pictures up there. I'm not happy with them because I've been so conditioned. That's why my work is so hard for me to look at. I don't like the kind of films I make. I like what's out there. Movies are rarely inventive and often boring, but the way they're presented and the way they manipulate you — I buy into that and I'm happy with it. But I'm not happy that I'm happy with it. That's my whole life, this dissatisfaction. I always feel there's something wrong. I have ways of being and seeing that are different from what's out there. I'm making films that look the way they do because I can't make them look any better. But that's okay. People are more open to it now — I don't think I would have been as well received five years ago.

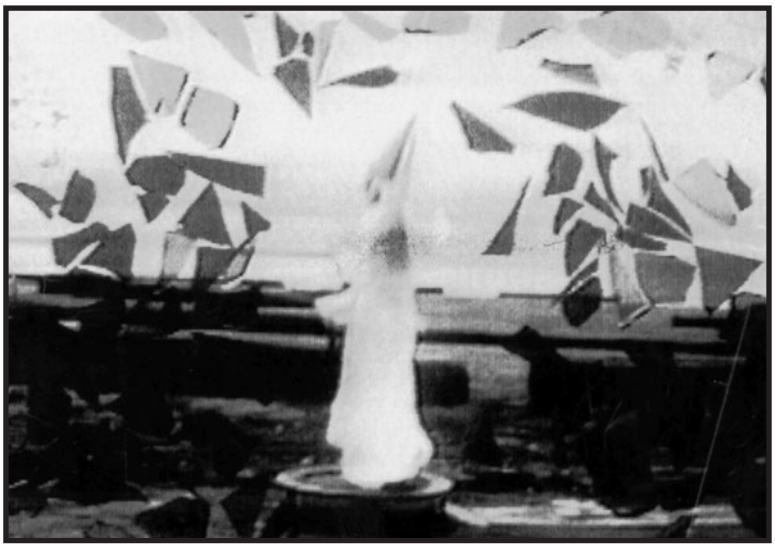


You Take Care Now

MH: Your next film was called *New Shoes*?

AF: I wanted to make an experimental film about a friend of mine who was chased down an alleyway and shot in the back by her ex-fiancé. He didn't realize she wasn't actually dead. I'm a disaster magnet and related to this story

because it was so much like nightmares I've had myself. Then the National Film Board announced a competition that allowed fifteen women to make five-minute films with a budget of $10,000 each. I was lucky enough to get one and made *New Shoes: An Interview In Exactly Five Minutes (5 min 1990)*. Gaye tells her story in a documentary style, talking-head shots intercut with videotaped scenes. They show a fairy princess with a long blond wig and pointy hat, jumping on a trampoline, playing with birds, laughing and being shot and falling. I broke up pieces of coloured glass and animated them on top of a video monitor to show the shattering of my childhood conventions. The film is framed with a tune by a local singer: "My old flame/can't even remember his name ... / my old flame/my new lovers all seem so tame ... " I bet they do.



New Shoes: An Interview in Exactly Five Minutes

In *New Shoes*, I was completely concerned with Gaye. I wanted her to come across as a multi-dimensional person, not just an onscreen prop for my own ends or, worse, as a victim. Fuck, all my films are about guilt; in this one I felt guilty about Gaye and wanted to do her justice. Gaye told me the story many times, she's very glib, together, in control. Then I film her and what happens? It falls apart. I wanted to show how manipulative documentary can be. I wanted to coach her, ask her why she didn't say it like the manuscript. But with the crew, the equipment, and the artificial importance film imparts to everything, she crumbled and I tried to work around that in the editing. I wanted to undercut the authority of the documentary form, which insists, "This is the truth." That's bullshit because all filmmaking is exploitative and documentary tries to hide that. Because this film had to be cut to fit a five-minute length, a format as artificial as the notion of truth in film, I made the time of the film a central theme. Just as she gets to the most dramatic, gut-wrenching part of the story, I pick up the watch and say, "We have ten seconds left — tell me about the new shoes." Flustered, she responds, "I was lying on the ground and turned my head to see Albert lying beside me, but all I could see was the soles of his shoes. He wore new shoes and I wondered why he bought them if he knew he was going to kill himself."

MH: Why do you laugh hysterically when she describes his suicide?

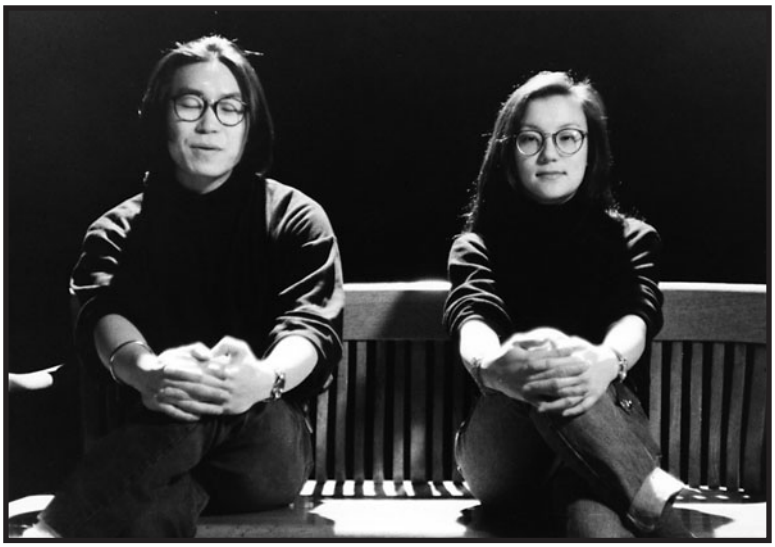
AF: The laugh is the fulcrum of the entire film, it contextualizes everything. People are offended until they realize they've been laughing all along, because the film's beginning is funny. Gaye replies, "I don't think that's very funny." This is the only chance she actually gets to participate in the film. The film is about a woman and her story until I laugh, at which point it becomes the filmmaker's story. It draws attention to the film's making, of who's letting you see what you're seeing. It's all shot from my point of view, looking over a table at her.

But this was just one aspect of her story, so I began work on a long film, also called *New Shoes (75 min 1990)*. Together they make a pair of new shoes. [laughs] After Gaye became pregnant, I wanted to tie these two events together — the life and the death, the shooting and the birth. The film follows a day in the life of a young woman (played by me), interrupted by past events. One of these is a long dinner conversation with the actress who plays Gaye, who tells her story — about being shot in the back by her ex-fiancé before he blows his head off. There are a number of animated sequences that show a woman photographed through nine months of pregnancy and video inserts of the fairy princess playing in a soap-bubble universe. Meanwhile, the film's lead is trying to make a film and deal with a couple of lovers, and she has her purse stolen.

Nothing big happens in the film. Many things occur, but at the end of a day how different are you from at the beginning? There's a point to every moment, but it's not a big point. *New Shoes* is about living on different planes at the same time. Did you ever read *A Wrinkle in Time*? It's an elementary school novel which poses the question: what's the shortest distance between two points? Normally you would say a straight line, but sometimes there's a wrinkle, which forms a loop, and I think of experience like that. As something you can't get over.

A lot of my interest in Gaye's story was with her guy, someone who felt so disenfranchised that his reaction to rejection was an attempted murder/suicide. My whole life

I've tried to fight the violence in myself. I think people like me are completely lost. Some people are reaching back to older values — the family thing, money, falling in love. A person like me who has a lot of opportunities: why all the anger, frustration, the total dissatisfaction with everything? It's some core that's missing. Everyone has something to fill that hole with. A thinking person today knows the hole is real and there's no way to fill it. But you can't live like that, or you can individually, but not as a society. That's why the film raised the possibility of the central character's pregnancy. I did it to fill the hole, but you don't know whether she's really pregnant or not, it's just a worry that moves through the film. I don't know if it's even hopefulness, because I don't feel hopeful. This film is about being a woman my age, living now. All I'm doing is showing patterns of experience. It has a number of threads, it's like embroidery, except in the end you don't get a cloth you get ... a bunch of threads. [laughs]
MH: Because most of the characters in the film deal with images of each other in place of relating, the film demands that these images be held accountable to some kind of moral structure. It suggests that violence isn't a random


It's Me, Again

event but an integral part of our sign systems.
AF: My work comes out of anger, but that isn't what I want to get across. It always surprises me that people are shocked by my stories, because they're the same ones you hear every day on the news. But when you make it personal, attach a name and a face, it becomes something else. I don't want to be shrill because I want to be listened to. I feel all of my work is constrained because I don't want people to be afraid of it.
MH: How much have your films cost?
AF: The feature will cost $60,000 which came from Cinephile, BC Cultural Fund, and the Canada Council. The National Film Board gave me $10,000 for the small *New Shoes* film. Before that I paid for everything myself and it didn't cost much.
MH: Does an avant-garde exist in Canada?
AF: I don't like the term because it's elitist and filmmaking is elitist enough without those labels. I don't think anyone's ahead. There have to be different ways of speaking and many haven't been explored. I have a problem when it comes to innovation because I can't just manage it. In elementary school, we had a project where we had to invent something, and all I could dream up was an automatic grape peeler. When I was eight, I thought that everything that needed to be invented already had been.
MH: So what about the avant-garde?
AF: It's like an east wind. No matter where you are something moves through you. All over the world people are working on the same idea at the same time, like a virus. There's something in the air — the avant-garde?

(The remainder of this interview was conducted via letter and then in person, seven years later, in 1997.)

MH: What are you doing now?
AF: I'm back in Germany, a month sick with some stomach bacteria from Egypt, and my grandfather is dying. As of the day before yesterday. I saw him in Vancouver, and he's old (really old), but I was confident when I last saw him that he would easily make a run of it for a few more years. Unless a miracle happens, which I'm always counting on, now I think it is only a few more days. It was very all of a sudden. He has kidney failure and pneumonia and can't walk to the bathroom. So much for dignity. He is also about three feet tall now. After the initial shock, we're into a holding pattern. Morphine has replaced whiskey. Not as much fun to take, I think. For me life has been sleep, trying to eat, and rushing to the bathroom. Hmm ... sounds like Grandpa, but with fewer drugs and visitors.
MH: Wasn't your grandfather's house haunted?
AF: A few years after my grandmother died, my aunt in Virginia began to hear strange noises. It was the sound of wine glasses coming from nowhere, two bell-like tones a fifth apart. And the smell of Shalimar, which was my grandmother's perfume. At Christmas there was a big family reunion and everyone had been hearing/smelling the same things, all in separate places at different times. I don't believe in ghosts, but the mind is a strong thing, so I thought there was a kind of mass family hysteria that allowed everyone to hear it.

Over Christmas, most of the family stayed at my grandfather's house. The night before my three cousins were to leave, my uncle got up for the toilet, but when he passed

the living room he found them wide awake and terrified. Every hour on the hour the bells sounded, and the hour was about to strike again. They waited. Sure enough, the bells sounded again, and my uncle began to pray to the ghost of my grandmother, saying she could rest now. She responded by insisting that she didn't want to share

Pioneers of X-Ray Technology: A Film about Grandpa

Grandpa after death. And everyone went, "Uh oh."
After my grandmother died, my grandfather did something no one's ever forgiven him for. He looked up his old girlfriend from before he was married. They'd met in Hong Kong when she was a translator for the Vatican. Seventy years later she's had a stroke and lives in an English nursing home where he visited her. He took a video camera with him, and later we all watched Grandpa showing an affection we'd never seen him give to Granny. Everyone was pissed off. So my uncle figured this is what the ghost meant, that there were two women waiting on the other side for Grandpa. The next day, after the cousins had gone home, my uncle was sitting at the piano playing Grandma's favourite song, "I'll Be Seeing You in All the Familiar Places." And he hears Granny's voice saying that everything will be all right, and that Ann Marie should make a film about this, a small film called *I'll Be Seeing You*. But it turned out he'd got it wrong. He wasn't playing that song at all, and couldn't remember her words exactly. So what was going to be another small autobiographical film changed into something else.

La Fabula della bella Familia auf du Monde (15 min 1993) was made at the Canadian Film Centre. I wanted to make a film out of this ghost story, to show what happens to a family after the matriarch dies. I wanted to make it without language or with a multiple, tower-of-Babel language to get away from my monologue-based work. The multi-ethnic cast reflected the mixed races of my family. The Film Centre allowed me to make what is basically an experimental film with a television crew, studio conditions, and decent equipment. It is the first and only film I did not touch myself in the editing, which was the hardest part for me. Everything else was quite wonderful, having all that stuff at my disposal.

MH: Can you describe the film?
AF: It begins with a family worried about Grandfather's health. His wife looks after him, then we see her feeding the dog and she dies. Which is basically what happened. My Grandmother was cleaning up her dog's vomit one morning and had an aneurysm. In the film, her death is followed by the opening of a door with white light pouring through it. After Granny's death, the family comes together for the will. The doorbell keeps ringing and people keep disappearing into the white light. At last the grandmother and her little dog come back to see how Grandpa's doing. You think maybe she's bringing death but she's not, because Grandpa doesn't die. The granddaughter in the film is clearly me; she's watching the situation unfold without exactly being a part of it. I'm the one who's been reporting via all these films on the various machinations of our history. I've taken myself out of the situation so I can present it.
MH: What's been the reaction?
AF: Not too many people like this film. A lot of people said I'd let the infrastructure of commercial filmmaking run me over. I disagree. I'm quite happy with it, and more than anything else I've ever made, it looks exactly how I thought it should. I wanted the music to be a tango because that's what the film is: life, death, and overly dramatic symbols. Some issues can't be handled in naturalistic ways. I thought I was being blatant but most think it is obscure and alienating. So go figure.
MH: You've made three animated films: *So Far So (1.5 min 1992)*, *I Love My Work (2 min 1994),* and *My Boyfriend Gave Me Peaches (2 min 1994)*.
AF: They happen when I don't have the energy to do the other films. In 1991 I had this little film I wanted to shoot, but I was hit and run over by two cars. I was in a wheelchair for a while, but wanted to do something in film, so I drew these stick figures that presented my life from birth to the age of 26. Three years later I applied for money to finish it and to make a couple of other small films. Except for getting a bad neck, I find animation very relaxing and fun, especially after the hard slog of my other work. I don't define myself as an animator, so I don't have to worry about it. *My Boyfriend* is a schoolyard ditty I sang as a kid. Everyone thinks I wrote it but I didn't, it's a clapping song from school. The whole idea is that from the start you're prepared for dysfunctional rela-

tionships. Shall I sing it for you? It goes like this:

My boyfriend gave me peaches,
My boyfriend gave me pears, pears, pears,
My boyfriend gave me twenty-five cents,
And kicked me down the stairs, stairs, stairs.

I gave him back his peaches,
I gave him back his pears, pears, pears,
I gave him back his twenty-five cents,
And kicked him down the stairs, stairs, stairs.

My boyfriend gave me punches,
My boyfriend gave me glares, glares, glares,
My boyfriend took away fifty cents,
And kicked me down the stairs, stairs, stairs.

I gave him back his punches,
I gave him back his glares, glares, glares,
I took back my fifty cents,
And kicked him down the stairs, stairs, stairs.

An ambulance arrives to bear the bruised boyfriend off, and then the police lock her in jail. The fantasy over, one of the girls on the soundtrack says, "Let's do something else." And then they begin to sing again, laughing in their evocation of lives to come.

MH: Do you remember all the songs from your childhood?

AF: Sure. That's what we were singing when we were six and seven. Everyone knows these songs. Girls, that is. And they're still singing them. But we forget these things. It came to me 25 years later. I've been learning guitar and singing cowboy songs and they're all about people killing others because they're pissed off. Stories of jealousy and unrequited love. But even after learning all the words you don't know what they're about, they're just background somehow. That's why I like these short films; I'm just showing what's right in front of your face.

MH: How did *It's Me, Again (45 min 1993)* begin?

AF: My best friend's mother had been adopted as a child. When she was 60, Lois discovered that her birth mother had secretly looked after her and her twin sister all their lives. Her mother had loved her after all. Lois's relationship with her adopted family was terrible, she felt it ruined her life. I was interested in how she reinvented herself according to this fact, although her twin sister didn't want to hear about it. She thought it was all fantasy. It was a story about love, family, and twins. Everyone would like to imagine we're not alone, that there's someone else who has shared everything from womb to tomb, and this perfect union is suggested by twins. I wanted to make a film that would tell Lois's story while we watched the making of a buffet. Lois and her sister inherited things after people died, and because Lois wound up with the buffet, they don't talk any more. There's obviously more to it than that, but it was a symbol. I wanted to show this big family heirloom getting made, and the love, care, and craft that go into its making. It sits in the living room and watches everything. After it was finished, I wanted to show it getting destroyed, except it's so well built I wouldn't be able to burn it completely. A metaphor for family. You can never separate yourself completely. But after I got the money, Lois didn't want to do it any more. She was worried it might cause more problems with her sister.

It's Me, Again

I started doing research on twins as well as systems of organization — chaos theory and coincidences. I wanted to present so much conflicting evidence you wouldn't know what to believe. I began shooting twins in a studio setting: identical twins, fraternal twins, and fakes. I didn't have much money or time, and people weren't always familiar with the camera, but because they came with their twin they felt instantly comfortable. They brought their own space with them, it was really sweet. The film plays with theories, but it's really about how people need others. Even in a two-minute studio meeting you can feel the history between people.

Once the film was finished I went back to Vancouver to do my thesis defence. When I was in town I dropped off a new script to Praxis, a script development workshop, only the woman there said they already had my script. And I said, "What script?" And she handed me something called *Let's Get Mad* by Ann Marie Fleming. I said, "This isn't my script," and she showed me the signature and it was one of my signatures. Then I went to a party and met a woman who said, "Remember me? You used to have a big crush on my roommate," and I didn't know what she was

talking about. It turns out that in Vancouver there's a woman my age, Vietnamese-American, named Ann Marie Fleming, who's making films. And she looks enough like me that people mistake us. At my going-away party someone came thinking it was the other person.
MH: You haven't met?
AF: No, never. We could make a film together. By Ann Marie Flemings. I never want to meet her. It's horrible. There's someone who's watching her stuff and getting us mixed up. It's very strange. A name means something. It's your profession, something you grow into.
MH: Like a trademark?
AF: Yes. It's not a big name, but it's mine. My friends don't call me Ann Marie Fleming, they don't call me anything. I don't need a name for people who know me, I need a name for those who don't. My name is shorthand for all I've done.
MH: Will you continue making autobiographical work?
AF: Absolutely not. I've spent parts of the last fourteen years working on the biography of my great-great-grandfather. I lived for a year in a castle writing a book about a friend of mine. And my grandfather just died. And that's it. I can't do personal work any more because it's too painful, it's too hard to put yourself on the line all the time. Many artists begin with autobiography and then move on, and I feel that need now. I'm going to live in Germany where I can't rely on language any more, so I have to find some new way of making work. I define myself by my speaking, but over there I sound like a three-year-old.


It's Me, Again

MH: Tell me about *Automatic Writing (85 min 1996)*.
AF: My great-great-grandfather wrote an autobiography which was translated into English fourteen years ago. He was born in the middle of China, in the middle of the nineteenth century, amidst famine and rebellion. His father died when he was five. His family was so poor his mother was forced to remarry a man from another village. After they left the village he had bad dreams and returned to his grandparents. They died and he begged on the streets for three years until he was kidnapped and taken to Hong Kong, where he was sold to a madam who ran a brothel on a junk. She sailed to San Francisco and set up business, leaving him in the care of one of her johns. When he was fourteen she came back, wanting to take him back to Hong Kong. On the journey there was a big storm, they thought they were going to die; he said a prayer that calmed the waters, and he underwent a Christian conversion. He quit the brothel and worked as a houseboy for a German doctor, and then returned to China to study medicine. He became an ocular surgeon. He married, had seven kids, and then at the age of 38 he heard a voice that reminded him of the voices he used to hear in his native village. He didn't know his own name because he only had a nickname, so he returned to his village, learned his real name, found his birth mother, and tried to bring her back with him.
MH: Big story.
AF: He had a bed that combusted regularly, and there were flaming hands which were the bones of dead slaves igniting in the dungeon. Legend has it a wealthy lady had once tortured her slaves down below. I couldn't get the funding to do the *Gone with the Wind* epic version, so I made a little deconstructionist film where his ghost returns and worries about the telling of his story. He struggles with me over his representation and the size of the budget. It's more about searching than telling. Trying to understand who this person was. It's a film very much about God. That's the point of his diary. He's a real bible-thumping fundamentalist; his writing was about his search for God. That's what he wanted to share first of all. And I don't want to make fun of that. But I also wanted to make my own point.

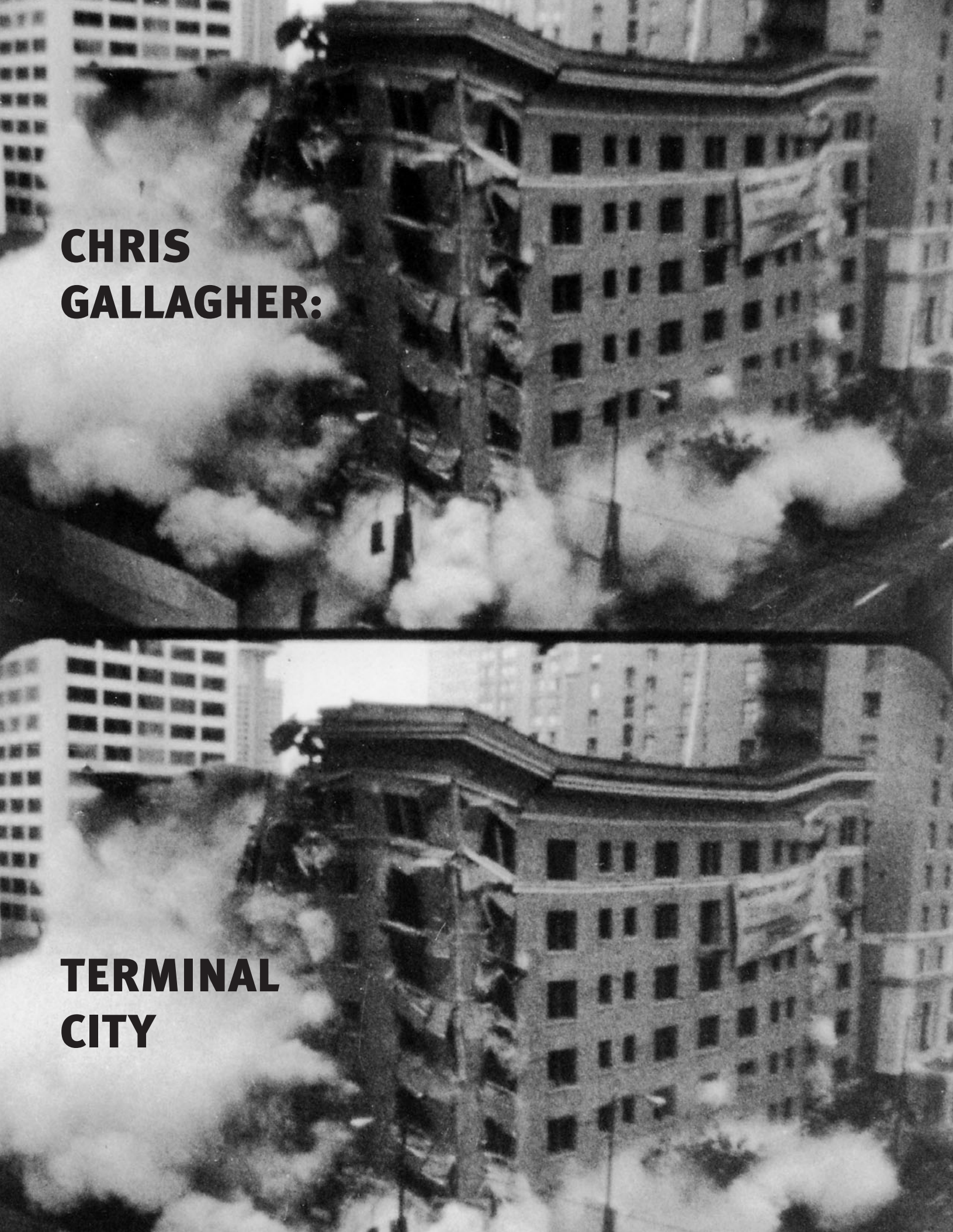
(The following was added, via post, a few weeks later.)

AF: *Automatic Writing* was about trying to make work with someone looking over your shoulder all the time. There's responsibility as long as there is someone who cares. And now there is no one. It was a great, sad shock when Grandpa died, even though there was really very little else for him by that point. Apparently he died after tasting a drop of whiskey off a syringe. Don't ask. It was very frustrating not being there while he was failing, and the funeral and the whisking away of all his things. Everything is gone. The house is sold, his ashes are spread on the water. All in less than two weeks. I can't stand it. I got off lucky, I think,

because I was only fond of the old coot, and didn't have the problems his children had. Still, I think you may have had an idea of how important he was to me. He'd outlived almost all his friends and relatives. How depressing. As far as deaths go, it was okay, I guess. I've spent the entire year writing a book on grief, about my friend Anne's suicide. That was something I couldn't deal with at the time, because of the distance emotionally and physically. Grandpa's death came at the end of a long life. He didn't suffer so much, he still had a nasty sense of humour, and he was very sweet. I got to see him before he went downhill and shared him with so many by talking about him and the films. Everybody knows him through those films he doesn't even like. So I feel happy about that. Well, not happy, but it doesn't feel strange, so much.

Ann Marie Fleming Filmography

Audition	1.5 min 1987
Waving	7 min b/w 1987
So Far So	2.5 min 1988-92
You Take Care Now	11 min 1989
Drumsticks	2 min 1989
New Shoes: An Interview in Exactly Five Minutes	5 min 1990
New Shoes	75 min 1990
Pioneers of X-Ray Technology: a film about Grandpa	15 min 1991
So Far So	1.5 min 1992
It's Me, Again	45 min 1993
La Fabula della bella Familia auf du Monde	15 min 1993
Buckingham Palace	7 min 1993
I Love My Work	2 min 1994
My Boyfriend Gave Me Peaches	2 min 1994
Pleasure Film (Ahmed's Story)	5 min 1995
Automatic Writing	85 min 1996
Great Expectations (not what you're thinking)	1.5 min 35mm 1997
The Day My Grandfather Spied on Vladimir Ashkenazy	5 min video 1998
AMF's Tiresias	5 min 35mm 1998
Hysterical: the musical	2 min video 2000
Lip Service ~a mystery~	45 min 35mm 2001



CHRIS GALLAGHER:

TERMINAL CITY

The fringe has always counted among its membership a group of soft scientists who wield their cameras like computers, examining the machines of reproduction and the new worlds these machines make possible. Chris Gallagher is one of their number, coolly offering reflections of ourselves in the mirror of technology.

Gallagher is part of the first generation of the Canadian fringe who learned their chops in film school. Here, fringe film was served up as a course option, with survey histories founded on an American model of lyrical poetics. Without the possibility of earning enough income from an artist's manufacture, many fringe makers have returned to Canada's post-secondary school system, taking advantage of in-house facilities and secure revenue. Gallagher has joined their ranks, teaching at the University of Regina before finding permanent employment at the University of British Columbia. But his tenure has not been a simple one. Plagued by rising unemployment and ballooning provincial deficits, ministries of education across the country have demanded a job-oriented curriculum. Inside Canada's film schools this has meant a renewed emphasis on technical training in the hopes that skilled craftspeople will find employment in an American film industry lured north with the promise of cheaper productions and a skilled labour pool. The commercial climate that pervades Vancouver is fuelled by a colonial press consumed with an American manufacture. All this has done much to found a conservative climate in the educational settings of the West Coast, in which the relevance of the fringe is increasingly suspect. For his part, after spending four years on the feature-length *Undivided Attention*, Gallagher seems to have completed a cycle of his own. Turning away from his own interests in the avant-garde, he completed a feature-length drama entitled *Where is Memory?* His most conventional film to date, it relates the story of a man whose sudden amnesia impels him to return to Germany to restore memories of the Second World War. That the fringe should be forgone in favour of an absent memory is an apt enough metaphor for its ongoing struggles to restore relevance to its idiosyncratic eruptions. That it should pale in the face of a world at war underscores the necessity of its political engagement in a climate ever more attuned to pacifying media spectacles. Renegotiating the links between marginal culture and mainstream practice has long been an imperative in the explosive sideshows of filmers like Chris Gallagher.

Plastic Surgery

CG: I began painting in high school and went on to study fine arts at the University of British Columbia. I continued painting, made sculptures and mixed media, and was introduced to experimental films. It seemed to me that you could speak more clearly to an audience without the pretext of a story. Stories kept people interested so you could slip in a message; experimental films were more direct. The first film I made was called *Sideshow (4 min b/w 1972)*. It opens with a man dressed in a loud sportsjacket walking onstage, opening his briefcase and taking out a baby. Grinning, he sits the child on his lap and puts his hands in the baby's back, as if the child is a puppet and he's pulling the strings. Then he puts the baby away in the suitcase. After he sits back down a stagehand comes out, rigs a harness on him, and he's lifted up to the rafters to wait for the next show. There are strings attached to each performance and the film unravels these in a potentially infinite series.

I graduated in 1973 hoping to work in film, so I applied to the Canada Council for a grant and received $2,500, which was all the money in the world then. That's when I started working on *Plastic Surgery (19 min 1976)*. I saw it as a dialogue between two worlds: nature and technology. I gathered images of rocks, trees, and water and pitted them against images of high technology, especially the space program. Life in space depends on science, and I tried to match the movements of the astronauts with natural movements, cutting between a whale's swimming and an astronaut's space walk. The similarities are striking. There was a lot of optical printing using mattes and superimpositions to layer the images. I'd recently broken my ankle and the doctors held it together with two screws, eventually removing the screws and sewing me up. I shot the operation in super-8 and it's a marvellous image, this screwdriver poking into my ankle. As soon as you cut into the skin it becomes a mushy, undefined mass, whereas technology is always so clean and precise. Although the operation looks unpleasant, it's really an image of these two different processes working in harmony. There's an obvious relation between the surgery and film editing; both doctor and filmmaker are plastic surgeons. Apart from

"doctoring" the image, filmmakers assemble their work like Dr. Frankenstein — they go out to a graveyard to gather pieces, then stitch them together and give them life through lightning. A film is such an impure thing, it forces together all these elements which are lit up in the end, staggering across the screen.

MH: The way natural elements are replaced and transformed by technology seems emblematized by images of David Bowie and Evil Knievel, two showmen who have created their personas through the media. The film's landscapes are transformed via video synthesis into mediascapes. This movement of separation and replacement grows until the atom bomb explodes, signalling a final separation of the planet and its inhabitants.

CG: I think every film had an atom bomb in it then. Much of our public Imaginary is obsessed with violence, pictures of death, which don't seem to be able to prepare us for our own end. Why is the mainstream filled with death? They're fantasies of control. I think people share a dream of killing others, of taking charge of death. An early placard advertising the new invention of cinema claimed that with the advent of portable equipment, colour, and sound, home movies would ensure that death would no longer be final. Why would people be more fascinated watching death than sex? I think they're part of the same axis, at least in the male media world. The more sex is denied the more killing we see. They form an alternating current.

MH: In *Plastic Surgery* you used other people's images without crediting them — the image of the bomb, for example, or the astronauts. How would you feel about someone using your images?

CG: You don't make an image, you put a lens in front of a scene. There're images all around us right now, but we don't have the camera to "take" them. Making images is never a private act, they're free to be taken up by anyone else and re-ordered. I feel the same about people walking through public space. It's all public domain — being visible implies consent.

MH: Image theft, or appropriation, has a long pedigree in art, but is much more prevalent here in Vancouver than in a place like Toronto.

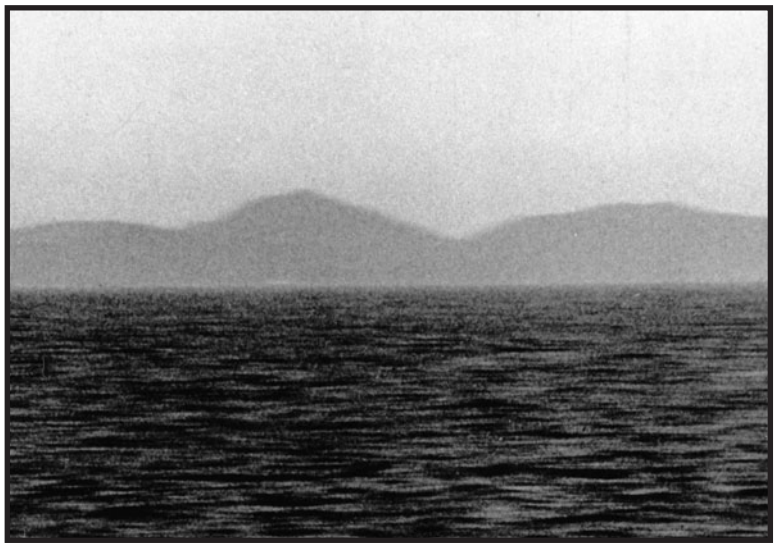
CG: There's a difference between the two cities. In Vancouver I'm surrounded by mountains and ocean, whereas Toronto is more human-made, its beauty is more intellectual and interior. Here we walk along the beach and find things, or you pick through a reel of old movies.

MH: Your work after *Plastic Surgery* was much cooler, more restrained and observational.

CG: *Plastic Surgery* was a big, enjoyable mess, but it was difficult to pin down, and in reaction I wanted to make more empirical, almost scientific work. The first of these films was made in the same year and called *Atmosphere (9 min b/w 1976)*. I got the idea from seeing a weather vane moving back and forth, changing with the direction of the wind. I thought it would be interesting to mount a camera up there. I loved the idea of taking myself out of the picture and letting the elements take over.

I built myself a weather vane out of old bicycle parts, steel rods, and fibreglass. Strong enough to hold the camera. It was strangely beautiful. After the wing was built I started looking for locations. Originally, I wanted a pure horizon of water and air, but that was too difficult to find out here, so I set up on Hornby Island instead. The ocean fills the bottom half of the frame, with mountains in the distance and islands on the extreme left and right of the pan. I just set it up and let the wind direct its motion. I shot it three times. Like the three bears and the porridge, the first was too calm, the second too windy, and the third was just right.

MH: Does the wind really change direction that quickly, shifting back and forth?



Atmosphere

CG: Yes, which is odd, because the actual point on the island is quite isolated. The trees are swept back, so the wind prevails from one angle, but it gusts and turns. The camera was on a telephoto setting to exaggerate movement, but it does manage to sweep through 180 degrees. At one point, I thought it would actually turn right around.

MH: Would that have been all right?

CG: It wasn't my intention but that would have been okay. I remember standing behind it thinking what should I do: hide or just stand here? [laughs] I just set it up, hit the trigger and waited for the film to run out. I wanted to give an explanation of how the images had been made, so at the end I show a photograph of the contraption. The wing is responsible for the images, but it's only revealed at the end, so it causes the viewer to review the film from this new vantage.

MH: Why didn't you shoot in colour?

CG: Black and white is part of the film's economy, it's part of the process of distilling the necessary elements to make the film work.
MH: There's a sub-genre of folks like Chris Welsby who have set out into the landscape attaching the camera to things, allowing us to watch the natural world in a different way — from its own point of view.
CG: I didn't see that work until this year. He's attached cameras to the boughs of trees and windmills. I think *Atmosphere*'s sound and rhythm make it more than a science experiment. I started with an appropriated drum track which I cut into small loops and recomposed. The track is very manipulated and staccato and percussive, whereas the shooting is continuous. The track is composed of small manipulated segments, so it's the opposite of the image, but the two come together nicely.

I became interested in the 400-foot roll as a self-enclosed unit. Ten minutes is a wonderful length; it's like a little lesson. If you assumed a ten-minute length for your work, and tried to be so rigorous you didn't need editing, film-making could become a practice of attention. I thought of releasing a whole series of 400-foot films and ended up making just four — *Atmosphere*, *The Nine O'Clock Gun*, *Terminal City,* and *Seeing in the Rain*.
MH: Why the four-year gap between *Atmosphere* and your next film, *The Nine O'Clock Gun (10 min 1980)*?

Seeing in the Rain

CG: Is there? It must have been because of my photography and performance art, but I should have kept making films. I don't know what made me start again. I remember experiencing [Vancouver's daily] Nine O'Clock Gun as a growing expectation that climbed to the point of its firing and then subsided, beginning the day-long wait for the next blast. Its cyclical nature recalled film's relation to cycles of repetition and ritual. The best way to represent it was to film in real time the audience in the theatre waiting alongside the audience at the gun itself; for both, the gun's firing comes as a surprise. While the firing's inevitable, like a film's climax, there's no foreplay, no indication of just when it will happen. There's something ambiguous about the gun because it's housed in a metal box, so it looks more like a tin shack than a gun. You wouldn't know there's a gun there apart from the title. On the soundtrack you hear kids sitting on the same hill the camera's resting on, asking questions like, "What time is it? When is it going off? This is boring." There's an everyday sense about the film which is interrupted by the very short firing of the gun and its aftermath.

This narrative of waiting reduces the entire action to a single moment. Among the film's 12,000 frames it boils down to just one. The bang comes in the middle of the film, lending equal weight to the anticipation and the effect. In the end, like in *Atmosphere*, there's a little coda which features nine repetitions of the event, seven in real time and two slowed down. The last frame of the film freezes the red fire coming from the cannon's mouth — the frame that's given shape to the movements of the people around the gun.
MH: The woman who has come to sit with her two children raises her arms in a gesture of surprise, but viewed in this series of repetitions her movements seem worshipful, her arms raised in praise and exultation. The waiting and repetition draw attention to the transcendental impulses that underscore our everyday activities.
CG: The firing's an event peculiar to Vancouver, and I liked the idea of making a work that would export this local practice. The first films made in Canada were made in that spirit — travelogues showing off waterways, fertile farmland, and local curiosities.
MH: A year later you finished another 400-foot film, *Seeing in the Rain (10 min 1981)*.
CG: I was interested in taking a scene where one small element of perception was changed, and seeing what followed. *Seeing in the Rain* is photographed out the front window of a bus running down Granville Street, Vancouver, in the rain. The windshield wiper runs back and forth across the frame, and I synced the sounds of a metronome with each pass of the wiper. I simply recorded ten minutes of this trip in real time, turned the camera on and waited until the film ran out. This ten-minute strip was cut into pieces according to whether the wiper was on the left or right side. If the wiper is on the left I cut to another shot where the wiper is on the left, so the wiper looks continuous, but the view outside the window changes. Any notion of continuous time is shattered. The bus moves from A to B, but not directly.

At one point in the trip, the bus I'm in follows another bus which has a sign on its back, "What's stopping you?" But while the bus makes many stops, none of them are final. It's a hint that time doesn't have a beginning or an end. Like much of my work, the main character is time. The sound of the wipers suggests a clock working, and their apparent continuity in the face of the disjunctive trip creates a bewildering paradox; the time of the film is correct but the film's space is upset. Cinema's a beautiful place to work out theories of time because time is one of its plastic elements. Cinema can serve as a model for different notions of time. Someone should open a department of time, a study of time through its representation in photography and film.

MH: Tell me about *Terminal City (10 min 1981)*.

CG: I wanted to keep things extremely simple, get the best view I could and let the camera run. I set it up in front of the Devonshire Hotel, which had been readied for demolition. With all the glass taken out of its windows, it appeared like a death mask with its eyes burnt out and blackened. When the gunpowder's released, the building collapses in extreme slow motion, its destruction obscured by the rising smoke. I used another ten-minute take, figuring how much I'd need to get a preamble, the explosion, and then its aftermath.

A camera is just a projector turned inside out, and both generally run at twenty-four frames per second. But some actions are only visible at forty fps, or eighty, or one hundred and twenty. Recording in "real" time sometimes obscures an event instead of revealing it. While editing, filmmakers grow used to looking at the world very quickly and very slowly, and it's uncanny the way slowing down gestures of a crowd scene, or familial gestures in home movies, uncovers the relations between people. Often their gestures speak in spite of their words, and in a lot of experimental films or home movies there're no words to rely on. So you learn to follow something else, to direct your attention in a different way.

The Devonshire was a classic old hotel which was being destroyed to make way for a new office tower. What was unusual was that they weren't simply going to dismantle it, but to use an implosion technique. There were other filmmakers making a documentary about the hotel, interviewing the waitresses and the patrons before showing the building collapse. But while we photographed the same event, our work is completely different. The grand old bar and its guests were significant to the other film, but mine was more metaphoric. The smoke looks like ghosts leaving the building. This is underlined by the soundtrack which, like the image, was slowed down. I recorded onlookers whistling and hollering; once slowed it took on a strange, ethereal quality, like a wailing banshee. It was like the spirits of the hotel being released, finally freed. Vancouver used to be called Terminal City because it was on the end of the CPR rail line. The film foreshadows the end of our cities and civilization; it has an apocalyptic feeling.

MH: Tell me about *Mirage (7 min 1983)*.

CG: I went to Hawaii in 1977 and shot travel footage as well as the Kodak Hula Show. Here's an instance where Kodak provided not only the film and cameras, but also the subject. While tourists wait in the grandstands, hula girls dance and men climb trees for coconuts. This show had been running for fifty years already, so I shot it as a kind of document without a film in mind, and it stayed on the shelf like a good wine before I came across related footage that suggested a film.

Mirage

I bought a three-minute roll of super-8 film entitled *The Naughty Wahine*, "wahine" being Hawaiian for "women." It was a roll of soft-core porn, a classic example of objectification at work. While there was much more to it, I used just the initial sequence where she takes off her skirt, gets up off one knee and dances. I made a loop of it, then looped Elvis singing "Dreams come true in Blue Hawaii" for the soundtrack. The naughty wahine and Elvis run throughout the film. The repetition shows the way our culture continually repeats the same messages, until we can't even hear them any more. They become subliminal.

When I found the porn I hoped it would be a sequence in the film. But as a loop, as a central metaphor, it worked better. This became the film's A roll. Then I cut together a B roll which would show through the body of the women. These were later joined on an optical printer, so both rolls appear at once.

The B roll begins with romantic natural scenes — colourful fish swimming in water, palm trees and surf. With the naked

virgin on the beach, it's quite Gauguin-like. I'd come across a reel of home movies made years ago, very innocent stuff of men surfing. These surfers are followed by the Kodak dancers, more trees, and then we see bombers beginning to take off from aircraft carriers, flying through the air and dropping their loads on Pearl Harbor. Then a lava flow interrupts, a natural disaster following a human one, and finally someone opens the doors to a balcony and looks on and the film ends. The juxtaposition is a simple one: you don't think of Pearl Harbor happening in paradise, let alone the earth's turmoil. And while this woman is presented as an object of desire, she's stuck in a series of stylized movements, just like the Kodak dancers. She's just there on display, and like the Kodak show, she has to do more with the parts of the world the tourists are from than Hawaii. Meanwhile the male's voice drones on about dreams coming true as things are getting worse, until this guy wakes up and opens up the door to find out what the hell is going on. The mirage of the film's title is that paradise could exist on earth.

MH: Doesn't the objectification of the original porn loop continue in your film? She's naked throughout, her body serves as the projection screen on which all of the other fantasies are shown.

Undivided Attention

CG: The repetition works against prurient interest. At first it's eye-catching and voyeuristic, but after a while this feeling fades — repetition exhausts the image. It's the same with Elvis's voice — by the end of the film you don't hear the words any more, it's just another rhythm.

MH: Your work from *Atmosphere* to *Mirage* has been described as structural, narratives of attention where the film's shape is clear from the outset. Do you think that kind of work has reached its limit?

CG: Audiences aren't interested any more. But one could still do valid investigations into the material qualities of film. Just because we spent a decade where a few people made some work doesn't mean it's finished. For myself it's over, I'd like to make different kinds of films. I don't want to become a researcher working in a specialty area. And I don't want to make the same film for the rest of my life. I was interested in that field because of its simplicity and economy. But after a while I had so many short-film ideas I just couldn't see cranking out one after another. I want to make feature-length works now because I can't deal with complex issues in ten minutes, and because shorts offer little recognition, they're difficult to distribute, and they're invariably shown in the context of other's work. After *Mirage*, from 1983–87, I worked on a feature-length film that was constructed in episodes, like a series of short films tied together in a road movie format. That became *Undivided Attention (107 min 1987)*.

The opening shot shows a dark tunnel which a train passes into. This darkness is the film itself, from which we emerge at the end of the film.

MH: *Undivided Attention* contains references to nearly all of your previous work. You show a building being destroyed, obviously recalling *Terminal City*. But instead of dynamite, wrecking balls and workers are taking it apart layer by layer in time lapse. They work with such care it looks as if you've photographed a building's construction in reverse.

CG: The sound is from an old film describing the attack on Pearl Harbor. The building looks like a war ruin, and if you were a Pearl Harbor survivor it might carry this association. It's like a moment of time slipping through a crack and ending up in the wrong place, or the way small events in our lives trigger seemingly unrelated associations. I appear in this scene looking into the camera from fairly close up. I wanted to create a tension between background and foreground. The audience can see what's happening but I can't. I watched it for the first time on film, just like the audience, so even though I was there I didn't see any more than they did.

The next scene shows a traffic cop standing in the middle of the road. He's there as a sign of logical order, but the cars are moving past in all directions so his gestures seem futile. A number of questions taken from a personality test play on the soundtrack. The cop's work-related isolation is reflected in the discipline of psychology, which begins with the premise of an "individual"'s uniqueness and isolation. Both models are used to organize experience, only it doesn't seem to be working. The next scene brings us to a demolition derby where everything is out of control. There's no sign of a cop here and the rules are simple: destroy the other cars without stopping yourself. The last car still running wins. It's all set in a dirt pit like a rodeo, and a dozen cars bash away like gladiators. In many ways it's a perfect model for everyday life — everyone for

him/herself, smashing headlong into others. Because it's filmed in real time without any camera movement, the wrecked cars accumulate in the frame like bits of a composition.

Undivided Attention

The camera looks down at the policeman and the demolition derby, and then begins a movement upwards, attached to a car driving into the mountains. Then the camera comes off the car and follows the flight of snowflakes, mimicking them. After the falling snowflakes, we see a snow shovel at work. The camera was attached to the shovel by drilling through the handle and putting a bolt through it into the bottom of the camera. The shovel can be operated quite normally, and while shooting, the shovel is always centred in the frame because it's attached to the camera. While I'm shovelling the walk, the snow appears to defy gravity because it looks like it's flying off the shovel into the sky. That's because the shovel is always right side up, with the camera, while the background turns upside down. It's like the perceptual puzzle of looking down the railroad tracks and watching them disappear in the distance. The fact is that they don't draw closer together at all, so do you believe your eyes or your understanding? *Undivided Attention* plays out this question in a number of scenes, trying to unlearn some of the "facts" of our vision so that we can learn to see in another way. I was thinking of attaching the camera to objects in different categories — at home, at work, at play. I thought of attaching the camera to a tennis racket or a baseball bat, or a lawn mower.

MH: The National Film Board should hire you for a year to travel around the country attaching your camera to different objects and demonstrating their point of view.

CG: The notion of artists at work appealed, so the next scene showed painting, then a writer, an analysis of vision, and then a horn player. There's a continuity of expression which begins with the painting scene. I attached each of three brushes, one at a time, to the camera and made three separate paintings in red, green, and blue, the three primary colours of film. The camera itself almost dips into each paint can and moves across the canvas, leaving a visible mark as it moves across the white backdrop. The paintings literally become evidence of someone's seeing, because the path of the camera and the brush are the same.

MH: Later we see an image of a cloth clown blowing in the wind, with interruptive glimpses of fire and neon signs. On the soundtrack, two boys attempt to recount a story which becomes impossibly muddled.

CG: They started telling me the story of the movie they'd seen and it was so interesting I got my tape recorder and asked them to tell me again. Their rendition was as wonderfully confused the second time as the first! They remember elements and impressions which don't follow in any kind of narrative order, so it really became their own story, not someone else's.

MH: Norman McLaren said movies never bored him because when the plot died he would watch the scratches. In their retelling the kids are remaking the movie they saw into a film that resembles *Undivided Attention* more than it does the Hollywood treasure film they watched. Once again, *Undivided Attention*'s decentred scenes ask us to remember this childhood state, to suspend not our beliefs but our disbeliefs.

CG: The last scenes of the film all feature couples. For the first of these scenes, I built a little scaffolding and laid a heavy piece of glass on top, about seven feet high, with the camera pointing straight up from the ground. People offscreen threw dishes up in a wide arc that smashed on top of the glass. The voice-over features fragments from daytime soap operas, very clichéd situations in which men and women are arguing. Glass is a magic substance because it allows us to see through it while stopping the objects that are moving towards us, so it's opaque and transparent at the same time.

The mirage of the film's title is that paradise could exist on earth.

After the dish breaking, we turn to a couple speaking in sync in a room. While she flips through a *Vogue* magazine, he lies in front of her on the floor surfing TV channels with a remote. The movie he settles on is *King Kong*. The camera is mounted between them on a device that allows it to make a continuous 360-degree tilt, so it can show her sitting, him

lying or the upside-down television set. The paradox of the scene is that while everything is set into motion by the camera's tilt, nothing is really changing between the two of them. They're frozen. All of the couples in *Undivided Attention* and many of its surrounding scenes are caught in unchanging circles, as if our attentions or desires naturally took a circular shape. And often these circles don't overlap, they're stuck inside their own orbits, their own habits.

The next dramatic scene takes up this circularity. It begins with a woman reading a postcard sent by a man who is on his way to meet her. The postcard is also a picture disk, a record. He writes, "I don't understand the words but I like it just the same." So she puts it on the record player. The camera was placed directly above the turntable and follows the movement of the turntable by means of a crank I built out of a bicycle wheel, so it seems as if the room moves while the postcard/record lies still. It's as if the record is the real thing, and everything else is "listening" to it. As she moves to the couch the camera follows her, eventually drawing in to a close-up of her eye, which continues to spin like the rest of the room. This is intercut with a scene of the man cycling to see her. I took the door off my car, laid the camera on the floor, and set the bike on the curb, so the bike's wheel and the camera were on the same level. I had a two-by-four sticking out of the car which was tied to the bike seat, so we moved at the same speed. As the bike moves the camera spins, so it seems again as if the world is rotating around the wheel instead of the wheel turning. I used the bicycle and turntable as vantage points that underline this circular motif. I think what's implied is that these two are already locked into their own circles, their own habits of understanding which will make it impossible for them to speak to one another. This scene shifts to a drive-in where they watch a film called *Valley Girls*. One of these girls in the movie decides to break off her relationship. The guy responds by trying to cover up his emotions, saying, "I don't need you anyways. You'll be sorry." They're caught in the same dumb clichés the previous couple were. This movement of separation prepares us for the final scene, which again is set in two parts. There's a man dressed in quasi-military garb, as if the war's over and he's looking for scraps. He comes upon a pile of books and tries to put them to use by burning them and warming himself, or eating them, or using them as a bed and blanket. This is intercut with a photographer trying to take an image of a nude model. It was filmed off the back of an eight-by-ten camera so she appears upside down. We see him constantly adjusting her pose and the camera, but he never finds what he's after because it doesn't exist. The act of photographing already distances him from the kind of sensual experience he's really after. His response to sensuality is to try to contain it, like the guy in the *King Kong* scene. The music is very grand, almost like an anthem.

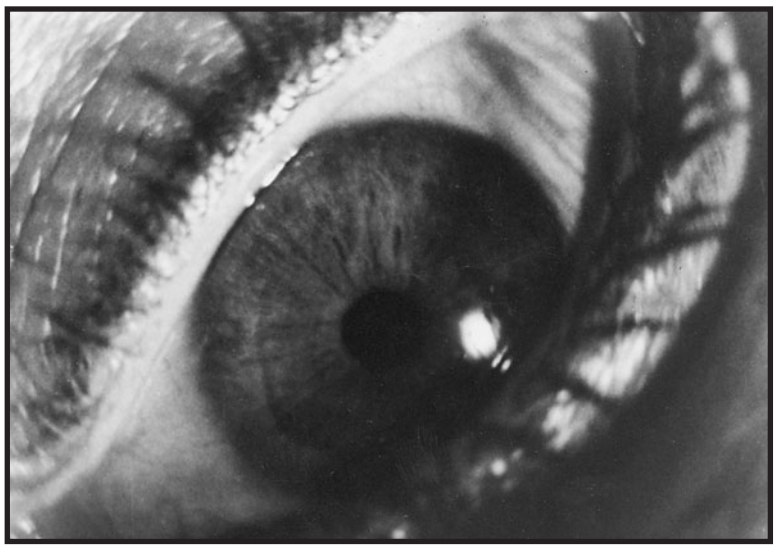
The entire film is framed by shots that show a train enter a tunnel in the film's beginning and emerge from the tunnel at the film's end. It reminds us of the first film of the Lumières, so the film's suggestion to turn back to childhood also brings us back to the childhood of film. Having chased the light at the end of the tunnel, we're left to our resources, back in the real world outside the tunnel. The film is finished.

MH: What was your shooting ratio?

CG: Four to one.

MH: *Where is Memory? (93 min 1992)* was a kind of departure for you, moving away from your more strictly experimental work. Can you tell me how the project began?

CG: Both my parents were in the forces in World War II. My father was in the Winnipeg Rifles and my mother worked as a radio operator in the Royal Air Force. My parents met and married during the war and came to Canada in 1946. As kids we would watch TV documentaries and play war games; some kids had to be the Germans and agree to fall down when they got shot.



Undivided Attention

I wanted to make a film on WWII, but it seemed that the subject was almost exhausted from the Allied perspective. Then I came across a magazine called *After the Battle*, which offers then-and-now stories and photos on the war. To see the actual sites where these historic events happened was powerful for me because North Americans were not touched in the same way Europe was. I began to wonder how a German veteran might remember the war — it must be very difficult and paradoxical. I developed this idea of a German with amnesia (regarding the war and the Third Reich only) who returns to former war sites to see what he can find. The sleepwalker is like a visitor from the future who tries to return to the WWII era, 1939–45, but misses it by about

fifty years. Instead, he lands in the present and tries to discover things about the Nazi period retroactively. Since we can't go back in time, perhaps we can return to the original space and find traces still there.

Historic sites were researched in early 1989 and a crew of six went to Europe in May and June of that year for six weeks of shooting. Some individuals who were interviewed for the film were prearranged but most were discovered during the shooting. I had some idea of what I wanted but all of the action with the sleepwalker was improvised. The film was really shot as a documentary in that I didn't know what I would find or who we might encounter on the shoot. The film is based on a fictional premise but shot as a documentary. Perhaps it could be called a ficumentary.

We rented a van and a car and went from location to location without knowing how long we would stay in one place. This was very exciting although sometimes hard on some of the crew who couldn't keep up. There were quite a few incidents during the shoot. The main actor (Peter Loeffler) and I were arrested by the Munich police. We were shooting a scene at the Marienplatz in which Peter was dressed in a Nazi uniform. Someone complained and soon a contingent of police arrived and Peter and I were taken to the station. Peter was photographed in the uniform and they threatened to detain us for displaying a Nazi swastika (hakenkreuz). After some fast talking and profuse apologies we were released. This incident scared Peter and the crew, so I had some difficulties getting them to do things after that; for example, the crew refused to go to East Berlin as they were terrified they would be arrested and never get out.


Undivided Attention

From the original idea to its completion took me from 1988 to 1992. The editing took a long time, as I had to develop a structure and a story. The film went through many versions, and it was a very difficult but creatively exciting process. I also had to raise more money to finish the project. The total budget was about $120,000.
MH: How much have your other films cost?
CG: *Plastic Surgery* cost $3,000 and was paid for by the Canada Council. *The Nine O'Clock Gun*, *Atmosphere,* and *Seeing in the Rain* were about $500 each, *11–12* and *Sideshow* $200 each. *Undivided Attention* cost $30,000, $20,000 of which came from the Canada Council. *Mirage* cost $2,000 and was paid for by the Canada Council.
MH: Do you think we've ever had an "avant-garde" film practice in Canada? Is anyone making that work any more? Is it still relevant?
CG: I think we've had one, but the emergence of video has taken away much of its impetus and pushed film into a marriage of commercial and independent film. Because avant-garde film can't find a partner in that marriage, it's left out. Films have to be more narrative now and I'm not really sure what's avant-garde any more. It's been so marginalized. I show my students interesting work and they hate it. It seems that people have lost their curiosity about the world; it's ceased to become important. As if everything's already been done.

Chris Gallagher Filmography

Sideshow	4 min b/w 1972
11–12	4 min 1972
Plastic Surgery	19 min 1976
Atmosphere	9 min b/w 1976
The Nine O'Clock Gun	10 min 1980
Seeing in the Rain	10 min 1981
Terminal City	10 min 1982
Mirage	7 min 1983
Undivided Attention	107 min 1987
Where Is Memory?	93 min 1992
Mortal Remains	52 min 2000

DAVID RIMMER:

FRINGE ROYALTY

For more than thirty years, David Rimmer has been making some of the most exquisite work in the fringe microverse. He has the uncanny ability to take small moments — the view from a window, the tiniest scrap of discarded footage — and rework them into panoramas of attention. From the very small he is able to extract the very large. He is led in his choices not by calculation but by intuition; given his luminous body of work, he may be regarded either as the luckiest filmer alive or else as someone who has become a student of chance, working at it, cultivating it the way others reshape their bodies through exercise or tend small gardens.

Not incidentally, his work offers a typology of the city he has lived in almost all his life: Vancouver. Its multi-storied histories — its growing industrialization, the divide between nature and culture, the Elite Directory, its love affair with the British monarchy, its Asian ties, and the increasing influx of American television production — have all been restaged in Rimmer's work. The secret history of the city is written in his practice, though no one would be more loath to discuss it than Rimmer himself, who has guarded with silence his lifelong romance with intuition. In this beginning there is not a word but an image.

Real Italian Pizza

DR: I graduated from the University of British Columbia, majoring in economics and math. After graduation, I decided to take a couple of years off to see the world, hitchhiking, working on freighters across the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, and travelling overland through Asia, Europe, and Africa. When I got back to Vancouver I realized that I didn't want to be an economist after all. So I went back to university to study English, though that wasn't entirely satisfactory. The problem was that I wasn't a writer myself, and I couldn't see spending my whole life writing about other people's work. I needed a more direct involvement with what I did.

MH: How did you get word about fringe film?

DR: The Cinema 16 film society at the university presented programs each week, showing Dada and Surrealist work and European cinema. I had no idea what they were about, but they were more interesting than what I was seeing downtown, so initially I tried to make that kind of film. I had brought an 8mm camera along on my travels and began to make films with a group of friends in a very naive way.

Brakhage came to the university to show *Dog Star Man* and although I couldn't make any sense of it at the time, I thought, "Here's someone who's really doing something different." While I was pondering his work, a poet friend of mine, Gerry Gilbert, gave me a book by Brakhage called *Metaphors on Vision*. That book changed my ideas about film. I realized that anything was possible, that there were no rules. I started in a new direction, using the camera in a more expressive way. But I was still working in somewhat of a vacuum. In 1969 Al Razutis came up from California. He'd left the States because of the Vietnam War. Al began bringing programs of experimental or "underground" film into town, and I quickly saw that there were others working in this field, in a tradition of artists' films that ran back to the Dadaists and Futurists.

Al's shows ran out of Intermedia, an experimental arts workshop set up by the Canada Council to encourage artists to work in interdisciplinary ways. I had no formal training in art, so Intermedia became my art school. We did a number of very large performances at the Vancouver Art Gallery where we combined film, videos, performance, sculpture, music, poetry, and dance. It was a very exciting time. Sony gave us a half-inch black and white portapack to experiment with. The camera came with a razor blade and tape so you could edit, but it left horrible glitches, so we mostly made tapes lasting the length of a roll — about twenty minutes. It was liberating because it didn't cost anything. I did a lot of installation work at that time; the most elaborate one featured sixty television sets displaying a mix of prerecorded material, local TV, and closed-circuit work showing other events in the gallery. Some of the monitors had been smashed by hammers, others had small scenes constructed inside the monitors. No one knew anything about video, or ever heard about coaxial cables, so in order to make the connections we just scraped the wires and joined them end to end. This allowed the image to escape from the cables, fly through the air, and wind up on a different monitor entirely. I also made videos that accompanied dance performances. So far as film equipment went, Intermedia had only rewinds,

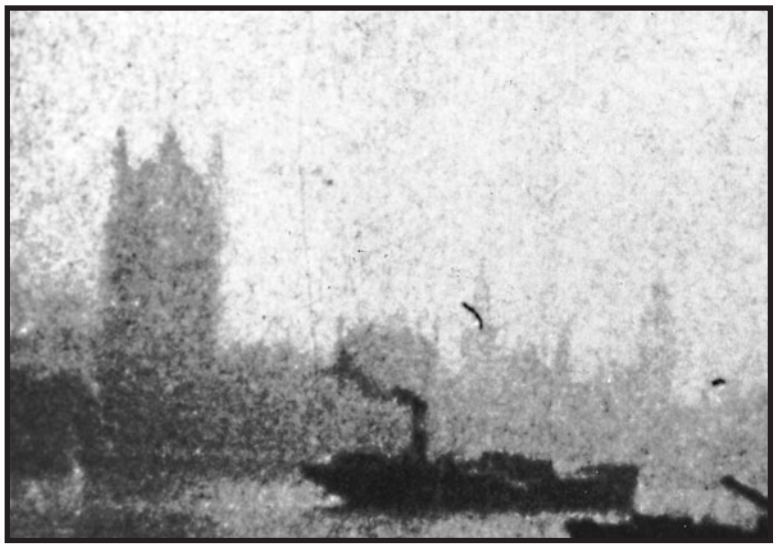
a tape recorder, and a camera, but no one complained — that's all anyone ever needed. I didn't know what the rules were, which was a blessing. We had a lot of old footage from worn-out National Film Board prints and educational films. In some of our performances we'd have a bank of four or five projectors running loops while musicians hit the notes and poets read. I started playing with this loop of a woman shaking out a sheet of cellophane, running it backwards and forwards, putting coloured filters in front of the projector, and that was the beginning of *Variations on a Cellophane Wrapper (8 min 1970)*. The entire film is made from an eight-second loop, and I worked in a deliberate way to arrive at a fixed form for the loop's transformation. The first half is contact printed, showing successive generations. You see the original, then a print of the original, then a print of a print, as the loop slowly gains contrast. In the second half of the film, I rephotographed the image using two projectors running simultaneously, one with a negative loop, one with a positive loop. I mixed the two, playing variations like a jazz musician might, introducing colour filters which gave a colour-separation effect. By the end of the film the image dissolves into a flickering abstraction, reduced to lines and shapes.

Everyone cut their original reversal film then because the price of a workprint would buy you another roll of film. When I finished putting *Variations* together I started looking for money to make a release print. I had heard that the National Film Board was giving out small amounts of cash to filmmakers at the end of their budget year (if they didn't spend it, it would be returned to the head office in Montreal). I called them up and made an appointment to show them my work. I was met at the door by Peter Jones, then head of the Board in Vancouver, and he put the film on the projector. The film had hardly started when Peter began chuckling. I didn't know what to think. When the film was finished he asked where I had got the piece of stock footage. I knew that it was from an old NFB documentary, but pretended I didn't know. He told me that when he was a cameraman for the NFB he had shot that footage himself. And then he gave me the $300.

The Dance (5 min b/w 1970) is another film that began as a loop in an Intermedia performance. Curtains open on a stage where a jazz band plays and two dancers come out. I looped their dancing so they perform the same moves over and over. Then the band stops, someone brings them flowers, and the curtain closes.

Surfacing on the Thames (9 min 1970) began with an eight-second piece of footage showing a boat moving on the river Thames. It was slowed down by printing each frame two hundred times and then using ninety-six frame dissolves to join them. The boat moves almost imperceptibly, but the dirt and scratches and texture of the film move a great deal. This old bit of film had run through hundreds of machines, acquiring a history of projection which my film reviews — I was interested in what was happening on the surface of the film itself.

I made *Treefall (5 min b/w silent 1970)* as an accompaniment to a dance performance. As the title suggests, it shows a loop of a tree falling. It was projected on a giant screen made of strips of white surveyor's tape, so the image was visible on both sides. The dancers could move back and forth, right through the screen.



Surfacing on the Thames

That same year I also made *Blue Movie (6 min silent 1970)*. I shot water and clouds in black and white, then made high-contrast positive and negative prints. Colour filters were introduced in the printing. It was projected from the ceiling of the Vancouver Art Gallery onto the surface of a geodesic dome twelve feet in diameter. The dome was covered with a porous cloth, and the image was visible both on the surface of the dome and the floor of the dome, which was covered with white foam. The audience could lie on the floor of the dome and look up at the image and also be part of the picture. Gerry Gilbert said it was like being inside your eyeball.

MH: You made five films in a year. Better drugs then?

DR: It was a very high-energy time. The Vancouver Art Gallery was run by Tony Emery, who was very open to any kind of experimenting. Each year he gave Intermedia two weeks to do whatever we wanted.

MH: How did you wind up in New York?

DR: I'd been driving taxi to support myself, then applied for

a Canada Council grant. Back then you could only apply for an arts bursary, no matter what discipline you were in. I looked down the list — music, theatre, painting — but no film. So I wrote "film" on the form, drew a little box beside it and checked it off. To my great surprise I received a grant for $3,700. That was enough to live in New York for a year.

My wife was a dancer who wanted to go to New York and study with Merce Cunningham. We moved there in 1970. At last I got to see everything that was going on in experimental film because everyone came through New York. The main place to show work was the Millennium Film Theater, run by Howard Guttenplan, and a show there led to an invite by Larry Kardish for a screening at the Museum of Modern Art.

I supported myself in New York by working at the MOMA library and as a carpenter for a theatre company and as a freelance cameraman. We lived in Mike Snow's working loft on Canal Street for a year. It was pretty bare, with cold water taps, a hot plate, and no bath. Mike had shot *Wavelength* there. At the far end, by the windows, he still had a picture of the sea pinned up. It was like living in a movie. One morning I set off for a bookstore and found my loft on the cover of *Artforum*.

Real Italian Pizza

I remember seeing *Wavelength* back in Vancouver. "Underground" film was in the air, which meant sex and drugs, so the place was packed. But there's not much sex in *Wavelength*; it's a very slow zoom down a loft, and after a few minutes the audience started throwing things at the screen, until finally the projectionist turned the film off.

I made my first documentary, *Real Italian Pizza (13 min 1971),* in New York. Most of my work since then is documentary in some sense. I wanted to make a film about New York, but I wasn't sure how. I sat at my window on 85th and Columbus Avenue, looking out at a pizza parlour across the road, and I realized there were all sorts of things going on there — people getting busted, fire engines, passersby, snow falling. I was afraid to go out with my camera in New York, but now I realized I didn't have to go anywhere. The window gave me focus. I framed up the pizza parlour and locked the camera down for eight months. Initially, I shot ten feet every day at ten o'clock, until I saw that nothing was going on. So I started checking the window periodically, exposing whenever a moment insisted. I shot about five or six to one. The record store next door kept the music coming, so kids were always hanging a groove. I tried to find some music to go with the film but ended up having a rock band in Vancouver make a soundtrack especially for it. Later, the film showed in Toronto at the Funnel. While it was running they hooked up a telephone to the sound system (the phone number was on the storefront) and they called, asking for me. You could hear the pizza guys asking at the counter, "David Rimmer? Is there a David Rimmer here?"

I found an old 16mm camera in a flea market, bought a keystone projector for three dollars, and made my own contact printer. I passed the original footage, along with the unexposed stock, through the camera. I took the lens off the projector, and replaced it with a cardboard tube which ran through a can with a light bulb in it. That was the printing light. I was working with another eight-second film clip showing people at the beach in the early part of the century. That became *Seashore (11 min b/w silent 1971)*. I broke the loop down into smaller sub-loops before running it through the printer. Sometimes it would jam, and sometimes I would deliberately jam it by grabbing the film and ripping the sprockets off. I recut the material to make a dance out of it, because dance has always influenced my work. The loop is covered with stains and watermarks; like in *Surfacing*, I was interested in the physicality of the shot, making the material visible.

I got involved with video again in New York, working with Rudy Stern and John Riley, who were running Global Village, an alternative news-gathering outfit. We shot with black and white portapacks, and at the end of each week these images were presented on a bank of sixteen colourized monitors in a loft on Broome Street in Soho.

One week, for example, we shot the Italian-American Civil Liberties Union, who were protesting the use of the word "mafia" in *The Godfather*. They felt Italian-Americans were being unfairly stigmatized. Everyone knew that Joe Columbo, one of the most notorious dons in New York, was behind

the protest. We packed off to the news conference and found the major networks already set up, but they threatened to walk if we were in the room. Columbo said he'd give us a private interview later, so we came back and turned him onto portable video — he'd never seen a rig like ours before. It was funny and scary at the same time. These guys looked like central casting's idea of the mafia, with their slicked-down hair and suits and a lawyer hanging over everything. That afternoon we interviewed another protest group called STAR, the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries. They were pushing an almost identical list of demands, so at the end of the week we ran the two stories together in a collage. Along with some footage of Abby Hoffman, that was the news for that week.

One morning I set off for a bookstore and found my loft on the cover of *Artforum*.

Most film artists considered video beneath them. I remember Stan Brakhage saying that video is one of those mediums that might never be an art form. I stopped making tapes after that, feeling I'd exhausted its very limited possibilities. We didn't care what happened to the tapes after they were shown, because video wasn't about later — it lived in the time of its recording.

When you're working with found footage, you always know where to look. I'd chance by the trash bins at the lab at the right time, and there were flea markets on Canal Street right outside my front door. *Watching for the Queen (11 min b/w silent 1973)* uses just one second of stock footage from a documentary about the Queen's visit to Canada. It's my most formal work. The first frame was printed for one minute, the second frame for half a minute, the third frame for a quarter of a minute, and eventually the film returns to normal speed. The shot shows a crowd of people looking at something, which in the original footage is the Queen passing by. The arrested speed allows you to look closely at each individual in the crowd, to scan the frame.

When I work with stock footage I look at it over and over again until it starts to speak back to me, rather than applying an idea of what it's about at the beginning. I work intuitively, wondering how I can make order out of it. Do I impose some formal arrangement, or let it flow and see where it goes? I try to give the image room and wait for something to insist itself.

After three years in New York, I got homesick, missing the mountains and wildness of Vancouver. I moved back to a loft in Gastown, the oldest part of the city. That's where I made *Canadian Pacific (9 min silent 1974)*. Like *Real Italian Pizza*, it's a window film. My windows looked out onto the rail tracks, the ocean, and the mountains. I locked my camera down for about three months and shot whenever something occurred. Boats passed, snow fell, trains arrived. There's one person in the film.

Then I was kicked out and moved next door, and set my camera up again at a window that was two flights higher than the first one. That became *Canadian Pacific II (9 min silent 1975)*. I sometimes show them as a double screen, they contain the same elements but with a slightly different view, both shot in the winter. Now I'm living about a block away and I'm thinking about doing a third film in this series.

MH: You've worked as a teacher most of your life.

DR: When I came back to Vancouver, I got a job at University of British Columbia teaching film production with a projector, a camera, and one splicer. That was all you needed then. I stayed about three years as a sessional lecturer, earning just enough to keep food on the table, then got into a political argument and left. I ended up at Simon Fraser University where Razutis and Patricia Gruben were teaching. I stayed there for about four years, got into trouble there, too, and quit. Then I went down to the Emily Carr School of Art and Design, which was looking for someone to teach video. I gave myself a crash course and signed up, and that's what I've been doing these last twelve years.

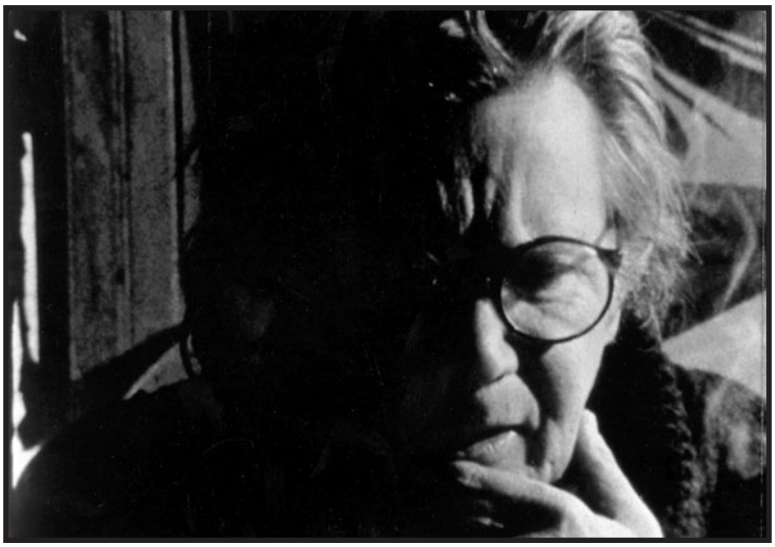
Canadian Pacific

MH: Your next film was a bit of a departure, a very intimate portrait of a friend.

DR: Al Neil seemed to have been making art for so long that

he'd started before anyone knew the meaning of the word. He was a jazz pianist and a collage/assemblage sculptor. He'd begun years and years earlier and I'd known him for a number of years. He was an important person in the scene, really sticking with it through all sorts of adversity, always continuing to surprise and amaze us. I proposed doing a film about him and he said, "Sure, man, do it." *Al Neil/A Portrait (40 min 1979)* was my first sync sound film — a mix of interviews with Al, his piano playing, and images of his sculptures and home.

Al played bebop for years at a bar called the Cellar near Main and Broadway. Later he rejected all that, determined to find some other way of playing music beyond bebop, which he felt had become too predictable. He went off on his own tangent, combining the spoken word, projections, performance, and music.
The film stays pretty tight on Al — one close-up follows another until the end of the film, when the camera pulls out and you see him in a social space, at a concert. The beginning also shows Al at a concert but you can't tell, you don't see anything but Al and his piano because that's all that was real for him when he played. Behind him there's nothing, just a void, a blank. And all those notes filling in the spaces.



Al Neil/A Portrait

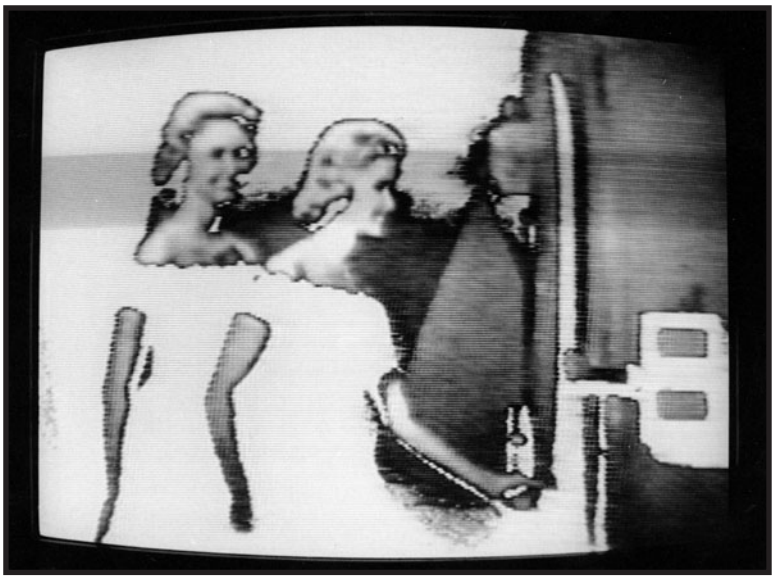
One morning during the filming, I asked him some silly question and he said, "Man, I want to tell you about my mother dying," starting off on a long ramble about the funeral and sharing the limo with other members of his family who he thought were also a little bit dead, and then I ran out of film. I changed magazines while the sound kept rolling because Al wasn't in a state where I could say, "Al, wait." I just had to let him go. So I wound up with picture some of the time, and then no picture, and then picture again, which created a dilemma when editing. I tried every kind of cutaway, slugging in some black leader just to keep sync, until I finally realized that the black leader was fine. This happens again near the beginning of the film when Al runs down a story about early jazz, finally pausing to ask, "Hey man, did you run out of film?"

After I finished the film Al thought a lot about dying. The doc had told him, "Al, your liver's really shot, you gotta stop drinking. If you stop I'll give you three years. If you don't, I'll give you a year." Al said, "I'll take the year." During his performances he'd project slides of his liver and talk about how much time he had left. But he's still alive today, playing concerts and putting on shows. Being Al.

The other portrait I made was about the painter Jack Wise. It was called *Jack Wise/Language of the Bush (45 min 1998)*. Jack was trying to get to the same place as Al; both were on a spiritual quest. Al's way involved excess. He took drugs and alcohol, whatever could get him closer. Jack used discipline and meditation, finally becoming a Buddhist and learning the Sutras. When I met him in the late 1960s he was studying calligraphy at a very deep level; eventually he went to Tibet and took up with a Chinese master. His free-form calligraphy was about letting the brush speak. He also painted very formal mandalas. I saw him intermittently and we'd talk about making a film. A couple of years ago, Jack called and asked if I was still interested. When I told him I was he said, "Well, you'd better hurry, I don't have much time left. I don't know if I can make it through the winter." There was no way to get funding for the film, so I rented a DV camera and set sail to Denman Island. But a quarter of the way there I realized that I couldn't steer the boat — the rudder had broken in the middle of the ocean. I turned around and sailed back to Vancouver using an elaborate series of curves, barely making it back to the dock. When I phoned Jack he quoted me something of the I Ching: "Difficulty at the beginning means success at the end." I repaired the rudder and returned, spending a week with him.

Jack had a rare blood disease which made him very anemic and weak. He could only paint for a couple of hours each day before he had to lie down again. I taped him working and talking. He's a very articulate talker, like Al Neil. He'd seen my earliest work, and I'd seen his, so there wasn't a lot of discussion about what we were going to do. Or how we were going to do it. We trusted each other. Then I returned to Vancouver, roughed up an edit, and was rejected by the Canada Council. Without anywhere else to go, I went to the National Film Board, which gave me enough money to go to Victoria and shoot Jack's delicate paintings on film and to

put the whole thing together. By that time Jack was dead.
MH: Did watching your friend die make you reflect on your own end?



As Seen on TV

DR: Jack looked forward to the adventure of dying, feeling it was the end of a cycle. While he had deteriorated physically, he was sharp in his mind. He knew he was dying and was very accepting of what was happening. I hope that when I go, I'll be in the same frame of mind.
MH: How did *Narrows Inlet (10 min silent 1980)* begin?
DR: Every summer I sail up the coast to Storm Bay, an isolated community on Sechelt Inlet. Nearby is Narrows Inlet, site of an old logging camp where many pilings have been driven into the ground and remain sticking out of the water. I sailed in at night, anchored my boat off the pilings, and fell asleep. When I woke at dawn, the whole place was surrounded by fog, so I couldn't see a thing. I started shooting a frame at a time, and gradually the fog lifts so you can see the pilings and shoreline. The boat drifts back and forth at anchor, which is reflected in the shooting. I exposed two or three rolls, and, while editing, saw that it was moving too quickly, so I printed each frame five or six times to slow it down. That became *Narrows Inlet*.
MH: It looks like line drawing at first — charcoal marks against a white page.
DR: The fog softens everything. The fog and the sea. It's boatcam. I have a forty-two-foot-long two-masted sailboat now, and I lived on it for a year here in Vancouver, docked out in Coal Harbour. But when my partner got pregnant, she said she didn't want to have a kid on the boat, so we moved back to Gastown.
MH: *Bricolage (11 min 1984)* finds you returning to found-footage loops, only now several fragments of footage are cast into relation with one another.
DR: *Bricolage* has three main images and three minor ones. The first shows an old television set with a woman saying, "Hello. Hello." The loop was in very bad condition because of the splices and scratches. I ran it alongside a slide projector that beamed an outline of a circle onto the image, like the site of a gun or camera. I shot these two off the wall. That's followed by a couple of shorter images — one shows a woman taking off her false leg. The second main image comes from a documentary on juvenile delinquency. A man walks to a window and smashes it, then another man comes out of a door and punches him. There are two main sounds, the punch and the window smash, and they trade places over time. The sound begins in sync and then drifts with each repetition, until the sound of the window smashing coincides with the moment of the man's punch. The final image was taken from a black and white television commercial. A woman holds a piece of glass up to her face, moving it from side to side. One side of the glass is clean, the other dirty. I did some very complex optical printing involving mattes and bi-packing to join this image with a shot of a brick wall breaking apart. Her negative image appears in the white parts of the brick, her positive in light sections, and there's a great deal of colour separation. It's a deliberate parody of an earlier work, *Variations on a Cellophane Wrapper*.

He knew he was dying and was very accepting of what was happening. I hope that when I go, I'll be in the same frame of mind.

MH: Your source materials share no obvious centre, yet they all work as an ensemble. Can you talk about how you bring them together?
DR: I'm always collecting stock images, pictures that resonate with things I'm thinking about. Theoretical ideas perhaps. Although I don't want to be illustrating theoretical ideas — that's a deadly form of art making. The images come together in an intuitive way and reveal their meaning sometimes despite my intentions. Until I see an image, I can't tell whether it's going to work. I can't call someone and ask for a picture of an exploding car. After finding something, I typically relearn it a frame at a time through optical printing or video processing, working the image up into something that speaks back to me.
MH: Tell me about *As Seen on TV (15 min 1986)*.

DR: Video had made great technical advances, so I returned to it in the eighties. *As Seen on TV*, *Divine Mannequin,* and *Local Knowledge* were all video-based works transferred to film. All of *As Seen on TV* was transformed through video processes like chroma key and luma key, shifting the texture and timing of the image. The central image shows a naked man lying on the ground who looks like he might be masturbating. In fact, he's having an epileptic fit. I found him by chance in the middle of a medical documentary on television.

The film opens with the Toni twins, who were quite famous when I grew up. Whether in magazines or television, one used the right shampoo, the other the wrong brand, and together they demonstrated the difference. As the film starts they move through a door and enter a steamy humidity chamber. The camera looks into the room through a window that steams up, which the twins occasionally wipe off. After spending some time shaking out their hair, they emerge, looking to me exactly the way they entered. Other images include a man jumping through a fire hoop, a Busby Berkeley clip showing a chorus line of women with great phallic bananas, and a test for the first sound movie from Edison, in which two men dance while a third plays the violin.
MH: The recurrent figure of the male epileptic, prone and twitching, seems analogous to the television viewer. He's alienated and alone, surrounded by spectacle.

Along the Road to Altamira

DR: I wouldn't call him the viewer. I showed it to Kaja Silverman, a feminist academic, who loved it and said it's all about male guilt. I said fine. It's about gender representation, how the sexes are portrayed in media.
MH: *Along the Road to Altamira (20 min 1986)* looks like it was shot entirely in Europe.
DR: Yes, my wife at that time was in Amsterdam for a dance performance and we decided to drive down to Spain to see the cave paintings in Altamira. I wrote the authorities asking permission to film the caves and they refused, which was good because going into the caves was so magical I'm glad I didn't have my camera mediating what I saw and felt. I bought a super-8 film about the caves in a nearby gift shop which I used — though the only reel they had left was in German.

On the way to Spain, I wanted to visit the cathedral at Rouen where Monet had done one of his series of paintings. He'd make ten paintings over the course of a day, a kind of time lapse in paint. I went to the cathedral looking for the spot he might have painted from. I found a likely building which turned out to be a museum. I asked the curator if I could shoot out the window and he said by all means. But there was a large French flag in the way, blowing back and forth, obscuring and revealing the image, and I slowed it down using step printing. The film arrives at the caves, and the German voice-over describes the cave's discovery by a young girl whose curiosity led her to the ancient paintings inside.
MH: Tell me about *Divine Mannequin (7 min 1989)*.
DR: It uses just three images, which are video processed then transferred back to film. The first shows feet running; after keying out all the white in the image, I keyed in pure white. By some magic, which I couldn't duplicate, it looks like a pencil drawing. It was actually shown in an animation festival, though it's not hand-drawn at all. The second is two large golden balls which rise in front of some Italian architecture and are caught by two hands. The third is a nearly white outline of a man's head wearing a pair of glasses. The film is about different kinds of energy: physical, sexual, and spiritual. This energy moves up through the body from the feet to the head.

I conceived of this film while I was running my first marathon. It's forty-two kilometres so you have a lot of time to think. On another day, I was running through the rain along Spanish Banks up onto the long hill that rises up to the university. When I reached the top, soaking wet from the rain, I leaned on a bicycle rack to stretch my legs and saw a piece of paper lying on the ground. The text described a religious practice in India. Inside the temple stood a wooden statue of a goddess; a male worshipper could actually insert his penis in order to commune with the spirit. Inside the hollow statue, a young girl with sandalwood oil would facilitate the devotional act. This found text called the wooden statue a "divine mannequin." I felt that my film was a divine mannequin, because it brought together different parts of the body, letting the energy rise through them. I put the paper in my pocket, ran home, and titled the film. I made another version as a video installation with

three monitors stacked one on top of another. The bottom monitor shows the feet, the middle monitor has the gold balls rising, and the top monitor shows the man's head. I blew up the text and laid it up beside the monitors. Each of the three images was on a loop, and every minute or so the loops would dissolve into the golden balls and the sound of footsteps.

Black Cat White Cat It's a Good Cat If It Catches the Mouse

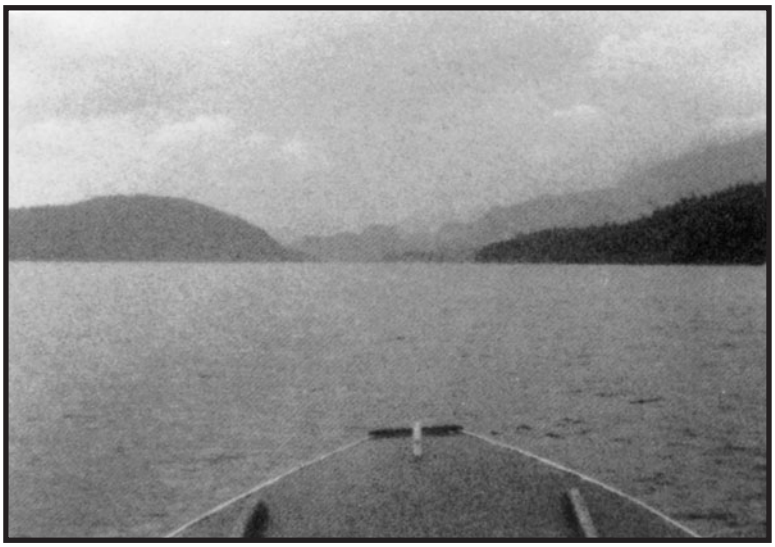
MH: *Black Cat White Cat It's a Good Cat If It Catches the Mouse (35 min 1989)* **was also made in the same year.**
DR: I took my Emily Carr students on a field trip to China with scheduled visits to the Beijing Film Academy, the Sian Film Studios, and the Shanghai Animation Festival. This was six months before the Tiananmen Square massacre. We showed our work to students who laboured under a rigid and hierarchical system, apprenticing for years before they could use a camera, whereas our students were given cameras on the first day of class. The work we showed was typical art-school fare: very experimental, political, sexual, off-the-wall — completely unlike what students were allowed to do in China. They were amazed.

I decided to make a film while I was there. I brought my Bolex and a bag of film and documented what I saw, getting up early and going out in the streets. I didn't have a plan, this wasn't political analysis; I was looking with fresh Canadian eyes at something I'd never seen before.
MH: What did you see?
DR: I saw a lot of people looking at me, because I was white and had a camera. They were the focus of my attention and I was the focus of theirs. I searched for fixed frames where I could set the camera down and let people walk in and out of it. Like the Scientology storefront in Beijing. I also recorded sound there. The radio ran English language lessons, and in order to teach the words, they made up stories which were unintentionally hilarious. A woman meets a foreign student on a bus, they discuss schooling and she shows him where to get off. As he's leaving she asks his name and he says, "John Denver." And the woman calls out to the driver, "Stop! I have to get off now!" I used some of these stories in the film, along with sounds collected independently by my colleague Dennis Burke. He's a musician, composer, and sound designer and we've worked together on a number of films since.

MH: I saw echoes of a lot of your earlier work in the film, which suggested that while you'd arrived in a new place you had brought familiar methods of seeing the world. I thought *Black Cat* **was not so much about China, but about how looking or subjectivity is carried across borders.**
DR: Filmmakers develop their own vocabulary over time, like a painter or a musician, which becomes the way you look at the world. The work comes out of this view, this kind of attention that is entirely personal.
After I premiered *Black Cat* **at the Experimental Film Congress in Toronto, I went back to my hotel to find the TV filled with scenes of the Tiananmen Square massacre. I realized my film had a different context now, and wondered how I could acknowledge what these students were doing. We had met many of them on our trip. Were they in jail now, or dead? The next morning I woke to the sounds of protest, and outside my window was a march of Chinese-Canadians heading to the Chinese embassy. I joined in and a Chinese student handed me a piece of paper, with transcripts of the last broadcast from the Beijing English-language radio service. They said, "Our colleagues have been murdered in the Square," and appealed to the world to stop the massacre. They signed off by saying that due to political relations in Beijing this was all they could report. I included this text at the end of the film.**
MH: *Tiger (5 min 35mm 1993)* **is your only film in a 35mm format.**
DR: One of my students found a 1927 camera at a junk store, and I lent him the $300 to buy it on the condition that I could use it for a year. I shot widescreen landscapes, water and waves, and also included a scene from a Mexican documentary showing a caged tiger. This film was in 16mm so I cut out all of the frames and taped them onto clear 35mm film with the sprocket holes visible. The caged tiger is like the taming of the landscape.
MH: *Local Knowledge (33 min 1992)* **feels like a summary work, combining time-lapse photography, found footage loops, and careful framings in an episodic venture into knowing.**
DR: The title came from my life as a sailor. When you sail on the coast here you have to be very careful about rocks and currents, always consulting the charts. "Keep the little rock to the left as you veer towards the shore ... " But some-

times when you arrive at a small harbour the passage is too complex to describe in a book, so they say instead, "In order to enter this harbour local knowledge is required." This knowing comes from the people who live there. The film is about the knowledge one has about the place one inhabits. It begins in Storm Bay, where I spend my summers, then moves out into the world, and eventually returns. The ocean is a strong image in the film; I shot from the boat, allowing the winds and tides to transport the view. Women emerge from the water in found-footage moments, women as muses and sirens. The centre of the film is a jog around a large ten-foot rock on a mud flat. As I circled the rock the camera was always pointing towards the rock's centre, recalling the Muslim pilgrimage to the great rock of Mecca. This circling achieves a kind of peace.

MH: What do you think about the state of the art?



Local Knowledge

DR: I think there's less interest in experimental film now, but people are more tolerant because they're exposed to different kinds of work. But experimental film — a term I never liked — is not as different now. The mainstream has co-opted a lot of technical things that were being done, so it's harder to surprise people. Experimental film used to exist in opposition to the mainstream, but that's no longer happening at a formal level, only in terms of content. Different kinds of stories are being told, and different kinds of people are telling them. But experimental film doesn't really exist any more.

For me, cinema begins with the image, and one of the problems with cinema today, with experimental cinema, is that it starts with the word rather than the image. This problem is even worse in video. I think we've all seen, or been forced to sit through, long videotapes with a lot of indecipherable text rolling over the top without any visual appeal at all. Somehow the image has become something that accompanies the word, a kind of visual aid — almost a slide show to go along with a lecture. This kind of filmmaking has been bothering me for a long time. I see a lot of these illustrated lectures masquerading as films whereas I don't think these should be films at all. They should be talks or books, or something in a different form. They don't really have a place up there on the screen. And this problem is compounded even further: we have the word being translated into the image, which is bad enough, but then, at the end of the film, they want to translate it back to the word again. There are a number of reasons for this. There seems to be a fear of the erotic power of the visual image, an inability to deal with this image on a direct level. Many feel a need to neutralize the image, to translate the image to another medium, the convenient one being, of course, words. There is an impetus to analyze, interrogate, demystify, and ultimately sanitize the image in an attempt to reduce its erotic power to something more manageable.

Perhaps it's that way with a lot of things today. We want mediation, a Reader's Digest version of reality. I think as filmmakers we must look at our images. I feel a lot of filmmakers don't see. They can't see their images at all. They've no idea of what they're putting up there. It's in their heads and not in their eyes. Audiences must listen to the images and try to experience them in a more direct way. Resist the temptation to explain them away. As soon as you've explained an image it's forgotten. Dead. That's the end of it. The beauty of an image is that it cannot be explained, it's ambiguous, it can hold many meanings at the same time which continue to reverberate long after the film is over.

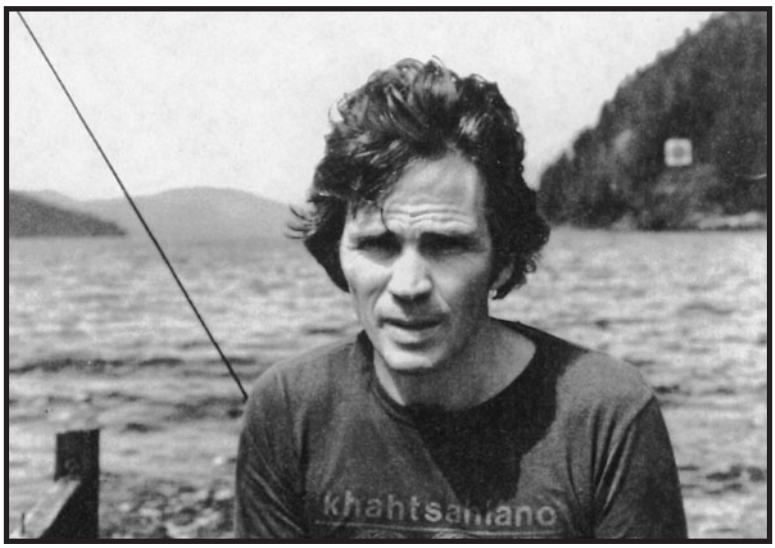
MH: You don't like talking about your films.

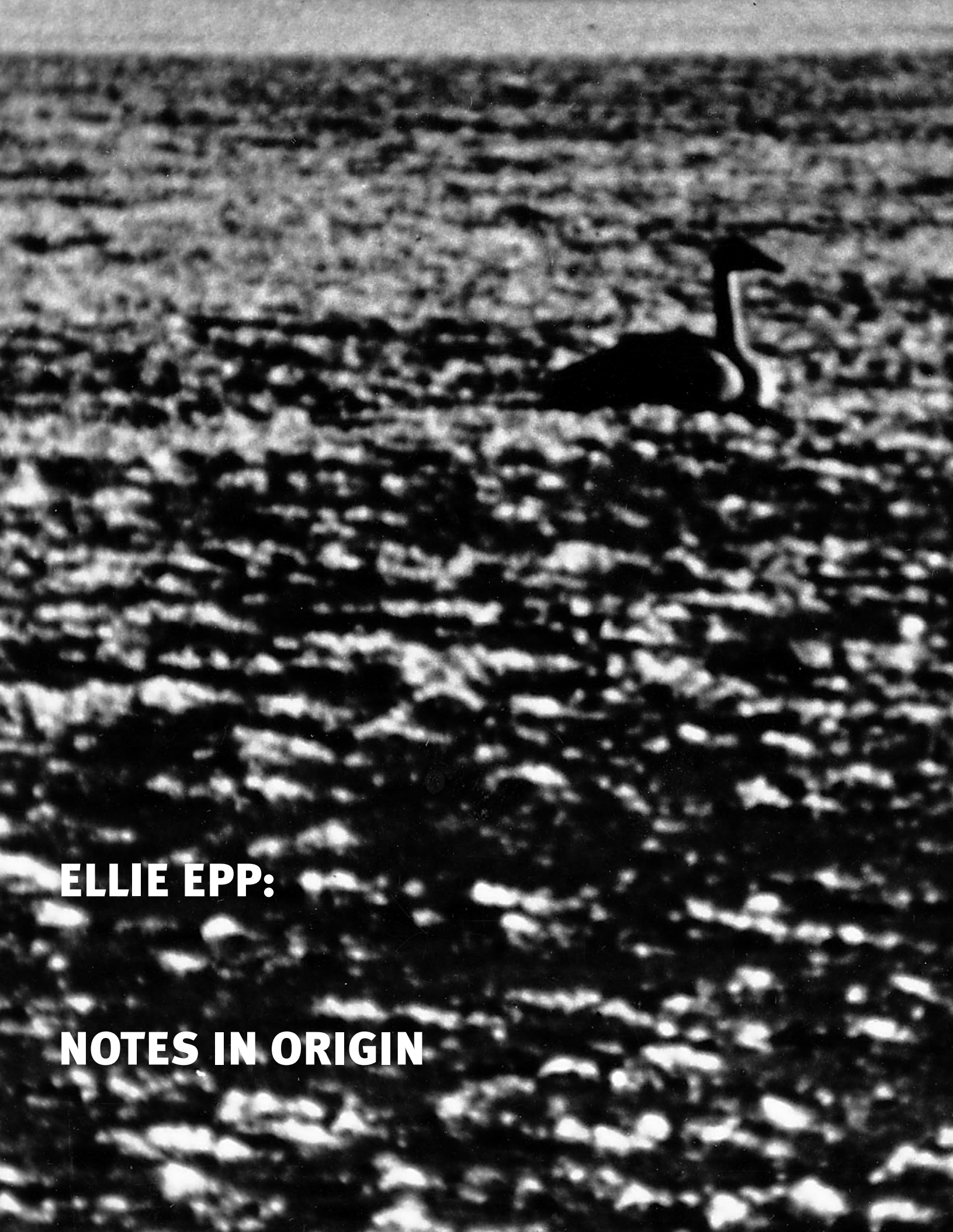
DR: Once you try to explain an image, it takes something away. If I were a poet I would do it; wordsmiths would feel comfortable. But asking filmmakers is not always a good idea. Do we ask musicians to explain what all those notes mean? Ultimately, it's the image itself that has the power.

Canadian Pacific

David Rimmer Filmography

Square Inch Field	13 min 1968
Landscape	8 min silent 1969
Migration	11 min 1969
Blue Movie	6 min silent 1970
The Dance	5 min b/w 1970
Surfacing on the Thames	9 min silent 1970
Treefall	5 min b/w silent 1970
Variations on a Cellophane Wrapper	8 min 1970
Real Italian Pizza	13 min 1971
Seashore	11 min b/w 1971
Fracture	10 min 1973
Watching for the Queen	11 min b/w silent 1973
Canadian Pacific	9 min silent 1974
Canadian Pacific II	9 min silent 1975
Al Neil/A Portrait	40 min 1979
Narrows Inlet	10 min 1980
Bricolage	11 min 1984
Sisyphus	20 min video 1985
Along the Road to Altamira	20 min 1986
As Seen on TV	15 min 1986
Roadshow	22 min video 1987
Black Cat White Cat It's a Good Cat If It Catches the Mouse	35 min 1989
Divine Mannequin	7 min 1989
Beaubourg Boogie Woogie	5 min 1991
Local Knowledge	33 min 1992
Tiger	5 min 1993
Under the Lizards	77 min 1995
Jack Wise/Language of the Bush	45 min 1998
Traces of Emily Carr	25 min 2001





ELLIE EPP:

NOTES IN ORIGIN

Ellie Epp is a Vancouver-based artist who has made four short gems in the past three decades. Largely silent and containing little camera movement, they celebrate an erotics of attention, taking as their subject a London swimming pool (*Trapline*), venetian blinds (*Current*), the Canadian wilderness (*notes in origin*), and film itself (*Bright and Dark*). Each of these films demonstrates the act of looking, carefully re-marking the line that separates the visible world from an offscreen eternity. Fascinated, languorous, and rigorous, they serve to reanimate the viewer, who is the real object of the camera's gaze. It is from these moments of attention, collected over a lifetime, Epp argues, that the stuff of personality is made — incendiary moments burned into the synaptical roots. Each of us is a frame for experience, looking out through habits of seeing which she makes visible in her work, suspending perspectives of the everyday.

EE: My family are Mennonites. They farmed in Holland for generations before religious persecution drove them first to Germany and then to Siberia. During the war between the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks, their lands were confiscated because they were *kulaks*. That's when my grandparents on both sides came to Canada with their many children. They settled in northern Alberta and homesteaded through the depression. My parents were married during the war. After the war both sets of grandparents moved to British Columbia, but my parents stayed behind because my father was attached to the land. I don't like my father, I think he's quite malicious. But there are times I'm grateful to him because he stayed and so we had the farm, and I loved the farm.

It's only recently I've realized how much of a shift my parents made. I thought of them as tied to an old culture, but they made important breaks very young. When they married he was twenty-one, she was nineteen. They insisted on being married in English, not the German they'd been raised in. That was unheard of in their congregation. As I grew up I was still hearing German preachers ranting about hell. Later, when I heard tapes of Hitler, I recognized the tone. Maniacal. My parents never left the church but they softened it for us kids.

I got my first Canada Council grant when I was sixteen. They had a program that sent high school students across the country to see plays at Stratford. We would sit in our berths on the transcontinental train and talk, and some of the wiser heads told me about Huxley's *Brave New World*. I read it when I got home and it de-converted me overnight from my family's Christianity. I thought, "I know doublespeak." That was an amazing thing for the Canada Council to do. It wasn't the plays, it was finding other people like me.

After high school I went to Queen's University because I wanted to go as far as I could from home. My parents hadn't been to university. I'd no sense of where to go until I saw a pamphlet that had managed somehow to get to my little high school in Sexsmith, Alberta. There were pictures of the university's ivy-covered buildings next to a lake. They said it was a small place. I won a scholarship and got onto a train in September 1963. My whole family came in the grain truck and stood on the platform eating ice cream cones. The train arrived and I got on with my portable typewriter and my blue suitcase and went three days and nights to Kingston.

They had a program where you could have three majors so I did philosophy, psychology, and English. It was great. After two years I went to Europe and hitchhiked around for a year. Then came back and finished. In the dorm there were all these Toronto/Montreal kids, and for them it was all old hat, but I thought it was really interesting, though socially hard. I had a lot of cultural catching up to do. I thought I was going to be a child psychologist. I'd started working at a children's centre called Sunnyside. What I discovered was that I didn't want to socialize the kids; I liked them as they were, especially the wild ones. So I got fired and had to figure out a different career.

I was in the library and opened up a *Sight and Sound* magazine, a new publication at the time, and there was a full-page ad for the London Film School. I thought I might do that. Peter Harcourt came to Queen's in my last year and taught courses on European and American film. He had just come from London and was full of the discovery that you could actually say what you thought. That was a radical discovery in those days. I couldn't but he could. He's the same way now but it was more unusual then. It wasn't so much the courses but I liked Peter. We became friends and he liked my film writing. I thought I would be a documentary filmmaker because I'd seen work from the National Film Board that I liked. You remember *Skating Rink*? It was just a rink with people skating circles in some small town. There was no story or narration, just a film showing someone looking.

The year after I finished at Queen's, I worked long enough to buy a still camera and began taking slides. There's one taken in a crouch from behind a bush. I'm looking through a fence at a horse, and when I see it now, it's like understanding you can make a picture of your present situation. In the sense of being hidden. The picture showed the person who was taking it, rather than what was in it. That was the discovery.

I left for London with Peter. He was going to a conference. When he went home again I stayed. He knew about the

Slade School of Art and urged me to apply. Their film program meant drinking tea with Thorold Dickinson, who'd made a couple of feature films in his day, so he was considered competent to teach. They took on four people a year who ate tea biscuits together, watched films, and once a week Thorold would tell stories about the old days in the English film industry. That was it. There was no filmmaking instruction at all.

MH: Did you see any experimental films while you were there?

EE: This was in the early seventies and the London Filmmakers Co-op had regular Wednesday night screenings. They had just moved to the Dairy, which was always cold, with old mattresses on the floor to sit on. Anabelle Nicholson was doing performances and Malcolm LeGrice was around, but it took a long while to get to know anyone. They would have these films that would go on a long, long time, and eventually I caught on to what one could be doing with this time. There was a lot of performance work and expanded cinema. If I wasn't going to movies at school, I was seeing them downtown, six or eight films a week usually.

I was living with a man who was friends with the anti-psychiatrists Laing and Cooper. That was a disaster. I had a child in December 1970. It was a really difficult time personally; the man I was living with was clobbering me and I had this little child to look after. There were no transition houses then. I had to find somewhere to live. I found a place and then daycare, which was the great salvation of the time. And then feminism was reinvented in London. It actually arrived from America. *Time Out* was a new magazine, with an entire section devoted to consciousness-raising groups; you'd find one in your area and go. I was very poor, on welfare. I didn't have money for babysitting. Sometimes I would leave my child asleep and slip out to a meeting. I'd walk into a roomful of people who were basically friendly and interested in each other. It was a moment when something turned around, when a whole era turned around. I went every week, made friends and began a political life, marches and demonstrations. On Women's Day we dressed as brides for a march to Trafalgar Square. I carried a sign that read "I won't," because in England the vows are not "I do" but "I will." I was marching with my boy in a push chair and had a chain around the waist of this bride's dress. All of a sudden there was a community and an understanding of politics, that it has to do with what takes place between any two people at any instant.

MH: Did it all seem like unrelated moments — the co-op, the women's movement, the child?

EE: I still didn't know anyone at the co-op. It wasn't an easy place to break into. But I hadn't taken my first step. There wasn't any way to be a part of that until I was a filmmaker. There are an awful lot of people in London. Why should anyone be interested unless you'd already demonstrated you were capable of doing something? In 1972 my child was two and began spending alternate weeks with his father, who was living in a commune. I knew the commune would look after him even if his father wouldn't, so I had those weeks free. I found a kundalini yoga class which was very intense. They did very hard postures and held them for a long time. It really did something, I don't know what. It gave me a little more gumption, a ferocity.

Trapline

Then we had the Experimental Film Conference and Rimmer was there and Joyce Wieland and Michael Snow. David was famous in London. He was so beautiful they put his face on the cover of *Time Out*. And he had those beautiful films. I saw Chantal Akerman's *Hotel Monterey* and that was the one that lit the fuse. I saw what I wanted to do. It was the sense that you could use film to engineer a change in consciousness.

During the festival I stayed in Ladbroke Grove near Notting Hill Gate. I wanted to stay somewhere other than home because I needed to have an adventure. So I pretended I couldn't stay at home. I went around telling lies for practice in those days; it was part of the exercise of liberation. I'd been so trained to tell the truth, I thought it would be interesting to find out if there was energy to be had in lying. And there was. It was quite a fantastic place I stayed in. There were a couple of sculptors living in a condemned house; most of the neighbourhood had cleared out except for some artists. On Silchester Road there was a swimming pool scheduled for demolition. It was attached to a Victorian laundry that had a huge room which housed washing

machines of the time and nine-foot doors that sealed drying closets. I knew I was going to make a film there, my life depended on it.

While I was at the Conference there was a feeling that unless I did something soon, I would never have any contact with anyone I wanted to know. First I had to figure out how to get hold of a 16mm camera and sound equipment. So I signed up for a course that Mike Dunford gave at an adult education institute. I did it out of pure calculation because I knew he had a camera. When I asked to use it he said half of it belonged to his girlfriend, Sally Potter, who I met and liked. She was a dancer then at the Place. I was terrified of breaking their Beaulieu and couldn't always get it. The sun is very rare in London winters, and I needed both the camera and the sun on the weeks I didn't have my child. There was a lot of tension waiting for these things to happen. My mother had given me some money for the film stock, and in order to get it processed, I worked as a domestic cleaner. Every two or three weeks, I'd get 100 feet of film and go stay in Ladbroke Grove with Tony Nesbitt, the sculptor. We were lovers at the time. That was the winter I shot *Trapline*. One of the things I see in it is what a good time I was having with Tony in bed. It was the first time in my life that I figured out what it was supposed to be like.

Trapline

I had signed up to do a PhD at the Slade but ran out of funding and dropped out. I was still trying to use the Slade's Nagra but they caught on and James Leahy, the new boss in the film department, would scream at me. There was always a fight at every level for the equipment; the barrier was learning how to do it as a timid female person. But suddenly I knew the film community, Sally and Mike and Anabelle and others. To look at developed film I had to go to the Co-op. There was nobody who would teach me anything, or if there was I was too diffident to ask. Finally I found this eleven-year-old boy who used to hang around the Co-op and he showed me how to use the editing equipment. That was in 1974. Then I took my footage to the Arts Council of Great Britain to get a completion grant. David Curtis was running the program. I just came off the street, he'd never heard of me, but they liked it and immediately gave me £400. I used it to come to Canada because I was frightened my child's father was going to kidnap him and take him to South Africa. I had to get away, so I came to Vancouver.

MH: Did you know people there?

EE: I'd been to Vancouver as a child because my grandparents lived up the road in the Fraser Valley. I got a job to get the money to finish *Trapline,* which wasn't cut yet. I didn't have access to anything but then I got to know some of the students of Al Razutis, who was teaching at the Emily Carr College of Art. They snuck me into the cutting room at night and I would lock myself in and the guard would come and go, not knowing I was there. I'd come out in the daylight. I cut it with rewinds, a viewer, and a squawk box. It was quite terrifying because it was like cutting blind. I got it from the lab and showed it to Razutis's class. Al said, "Well, it's got soul."

The film represents a battle between structuralism and beauty because at the time there was a great mistrust of beauty. But what drew me to the swimming pool was the way it looked — it was like being inside a crystal. And the sound was like life before birth. But I didn't know any of that then. It was made very intuitively. I knew you'd never see the whole space, that it would be developed through inference. I knew it needed a lot of black in it, spaces where you were only hearing the sound, to ensure you could really hear it.

There was something I learned from Marguerite Duras's *Nathalie Granger*. A group of women spend an afternoon in a house, and at the end of the film they look out a window and see a man, a stranger, walking on the street. He walks out of frame and the film stops. What I understood was that you could make the motions in the frame do what the film was doing. In *Trapline (18 min 1976)* the first image shows the surface of the pool and an ambiguous reflection. While the reflection appears right side up, it's actually upside down. There's a person at the far end of the pool who dabbles a foot in the water and this sets up a movement that comes down into the frame from the far end. It was like this image saying, "Here is the film starting to move. This is the rate of flow of the film." All the pool's spaces — the far wall, the water's surface, the ceiling — appear on a single surface. The opening shot summarizes the space in two dimensions.

The last shot shows three kids sitting in the shower. There was something in that shot I didn't see until years later, when it was projected on a really big screen. I'm convinced there's a large participation of the unconscious in taking pictures. Many of my slides, for instance, were taken by the unconscious in the sense that there's something right in the middle of them that I don't see until years later. From the way something's framed, it's obvious that *it* saw it. And theoretically this is all possible. The eyes have connections through more than one centre into the brain. Blind sight. That's a digression, but the last shot has these three kids in a warm shower, sitting and talking. You can't see the water coming down, but you infer it. Next to them there's a booth closed with a blue curtain, and something inside is jostling this curtain; it's quite comical, and just before the film cuts out you see a pair of bathing trunks hitting the floor. Because someone is changing. The gesture inside the frame is the gesture outside the frame.

I'd gone away and learned attention and now I was bringing that attention back to a place where I had all these physical connections.

MH: Was *Trapline* the beginning of a public life for you?
EE: It was a very quiet acclaim. It's done all right lately but for years it seemed surrounded by silence. Then a couple of years back I discovered it's a classic. And how it ever got there I don't know. It had no middle age at all. It wasn't until ten years after it was finished that it started to get shown in schools. I think if I'd been turning out more it would have been different. If someone called from the newspaper and wanted to do an interview I would say no. I didn't feel ready. I think that was the right decision. What was satisfying was that I had people to talk to, and that's what I wanted in the first place.

In Vancouver there were a lot of women artists doing multimedia work, a very intense community of writers and photographers. There were readings and Sunday afternoon salons with exquisite attention and devastating judgments of each other's work and being. These small groups of people worked ferociously and competitively, driving each other on. You always have particular groups of people who are your points of tension, that you feel you're up to in your work. What was wonderful about it was that you could bring in anything as far out as you could find to do, and there would be fine attention for it. It was also a drug scene and I was never very regular with drugs — I didn't get to them at all until 1979. I remember someone gave me a block of hash as big as a cigarette package for my birthday, and I forgot it was there and threw it out. Even a little bit of drugs went a long way, and I had to spend years thinking about it, rebuilding and reshaping things. I know that sounds strange to people for whom it's like coffee, but for me it was like a demon, a very powerful demon.
MH: Did you think of yourself as a writer, an artist, a filmmaker?
EE: I always felt my difference. I was rural and they were very urban. People who grow up with that kind of space around them have a different relation to everything, I think it goes quite deep. I was quite frightened of those people. They went out of their way to frighten me. Because I was frightenable. I was kind of a hick. I discovered gradually what kind of hicks they were, but it took a while. I was hick enough to be gullible, but it gave me a push.
MH: How was your work received?
EE: Ungenerously. I had to learn to hang onto my own sense of it. That was the exercise. I applied for a Canada Council grant to make a landscape film and sent them *Trapline* and they gave me $10,000. Many scrambled years later that turned out to be *notes in origin*. I bought a car, a 1962 Studebaker, and learned to drive. I was thirty-two. I drove up through the mountains, taking ten days to move eight hundred miles. I headed for the piece of land I'd been raised on in Alberta. It no longer belongs to my family; it's owned by a lawyer who bought it for an investment. But I drove straight on up to what used to be the yard about two o'clock in the morning and went to sleep. Woke up in the morning and camped for a while. I just sat there and saw this amazing space; you could see weather systems passing hundreds of miles away, moving through the sky. Why had I come? I'd gone away and learned attention and now I was bringing that attention back to a place where I had all these physical connections. When we were little, the three of us kids walked a mile and a half to and from school, through whatever weather or colour changes were happening. I rewalked that path, stopping at the halfway bridge to look at my reflection. I was going round taking pictures of things I used to look at. Like the dirt road with the weeds coming in between the tracks, the rock piles and fence posts, the bush and cow paths. It was all interesting.

It was bringing the London Film Co-op to La Glace, Alberta. Taking the attention that had come from those stoned artists in Vancouver to my family. It was fairly overwhelming. Sometimes I had to just sit still and remember to breathe. And in some of those painful times I would go out with my camera and there would be incredible things, like the slide where there's a rock suspended in what looks like the sky. It's really a reflection in water, but it looks like the sky. I

asked some people if I could live in a granary in their field, and they said okay. I left when the combine started harvesting.

I had my typewriter in the car and took to sleeping outside — I did that a lot in the next years. In the evening I saw the northern lights, this incredible curtain going across the sky, and when it got to be winter I found a farmhouse and rented it for seventy bucks a month. I didn't want anyone to know where I was. I had a tape recorder and would read into it at night, learned the constellations, watching the changes. Then I had to go away and find work. There was a lot of oil activity in Alberta so I went to Edmonton and got jobs as a substitute camp attendant or a janitor and moved all over the province. Every job would last a week and I would stay in my room and drink coffee and it was so quiet, so interesting. In the years between 1978 and '81 there was never enough money to stay in the country but it was getting harder to leave. After a while it was like being sunk in meditation the whole time. The physical place was so powerful,

notes in origin

the most ordinary life of the land. I would come out the door in the morning and just be staggered. I felt it was paradise, that paradise was a matter of slowing your attention down so you could see it instead of talking to people in your head. Being more at large. In Vancouver I lacked continuity; I was really a different person and felt drawn back to Alberta to remember, to make the connection between the new person and the one I'd been before.

MH: Tell me about *notes in origin (15 min silent 1987)*.

EE: The film that came out of that time was a pile of hundred-foot rolls. I really loved them that way, that's how I wanted them to exist. They were their own shapes. But there was never any way to show them. *notes in origin* is a kind of compromise because I think the hundred-foot rolls are better.

MH: There's a number that precedes each scene.

EE: I guess that's a literary convention. It's saying that these things are quite separate from each other.

MH: There's a time-lapse shot of the moon.

EE: It took two and a half minutes for the moon to rise into the frame. Exactly one camera roll of film. It had its own speed.

MH: Why two images of the porch?

EE: The porch I could watch all day, I find it really erotic. It works from inference again; there's a nettle but you never see it. You see its motion and the colour of its shadow — where does the green of its shadow come from? The first time it appears there's more happening, the way the nettle moves is nice in itself. The second part shows little going on except that the sun goes behind a cloud and comes out again. I suppose it's slight, but it feels very powerful, the way the exposure changes and the nettle's shadow disappears and returns. And then the bars of the porch start strobing. Because you have these white bars going through your vision, something starts to happen in concert with this changing of the light and the quality of attention evoked. The bars grow quite intense; it's as if they go into another dimension and your brain takes over from the film. It goes into another domain, which is what I wanted for the end of the film because it was true for the time.

MH: Why the long shots?

EE: Technically, duration is something quite particular — when you keep seeing something that doesn't change very much you stabilize into it, you shift, you get sensitive, you cross a threshold, something happens. It's useful for anyone to learn to do that. It's an endless source of pleasure and knowledge. And yet it's often what's hardest for people who don't know it as a convention. It's the central sophistication of experimental filmmakers. We all had to learn it. We probably all remember what film we learned it from. I learned it from *Hotel Monterey*, which Babette Mangolte shot for Chantal Akerman. Almost an hour, extremely slow. I made the crossing. It was ecstatic. What it is is this: deep attention is ecstatic in itself.

MH: Did it take a long time to collect the footage?

EE: A couple of years. I'd been so many years without anything to show for them, and there was no way to exhibit the individual rolls. It was during a bad time in Vancouver, a dead time. I just went to Cineworks [film co-operative] one day and asked Meg to have a look at it, because the only thing that made sense to me were these hundred-foot rolls. That was the end of my career, those rolls sitting there, and she said to just put them together. As notes. So that's what I did. I've never really had a feeling of satisfaction about the form of that film like I did with *Trapline*. But maybe something of the hundred-foot rolls has come through in the end.

MH: Do you ever worry about the mainstream stealing your work, converting it into ad styles for instance?
EE: I've had the opposite worry, that no one would ever use my work, that I was too isolated in my intuition to be taken up at all. I have sometimes seen films, even commercials, I could see *Trapline* in, and I liked that. I'm quivering now. Is it fright? I don't think there's anything in my work that's stealable. I would like commercial moviemakers to copy my work, because then there would be more people like me, I'd feel more at home.

I don't think I want to complain about financial marginality. I've always supposed I could make money if I chose to. It is an extraordinary privilege to have been able to choose. The margins have been livable — even the margins of the margins have been livable. I've been poor. I have sometimes actually starved. I've lost teeth. But I've had a lot of freedom. I've had time. I've been able to track things in myself. Every once in a while there's been a little burst of money from a grant, or a trip somewhere to do a show. I haven't been able to imagine being more famous. I don't like being booked up. It spoils the day. I feel quite rich. I'm rich because I can go places I know no one has been able to go. I'm well stocked. I have my own life probably more than any woman in the whole history of my family. It is amazing to have been able to choose the margins.

I'm not just marginal in work. I'm personally marginal. I can't separate the two kinds of marginality. I might do marginal work because I'm used to the margins. My work might not be seen as marginal if I weren't personally marginal. I'm marginal because I'm a woman, too. The boys of the community haven't taken me in either. And I haven't taken them in. I don't have the social complexity to be able to schmooze.

What I'd most want to talk about is the working process, but there isn't much to say about it. Making films is stressful, handling machines is stressful. Making films is machine-based to a horrible extent. The machines are so ugly and the images are so beautiful. The projected film image is the most beautiful image there is — pure coloured light. The colours of reversal stocks like Ektachrome. Coloured light is just bliss. Projected light is like light in the sky.

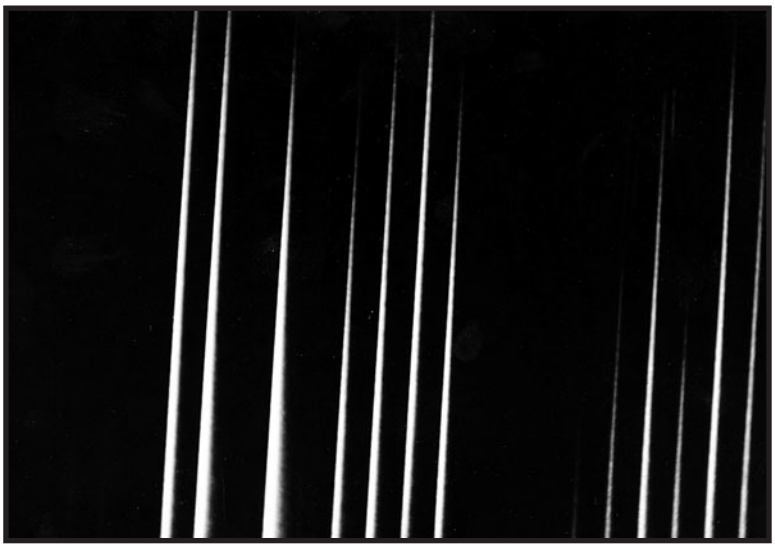
Technically, duration is something quite particular — when you keep seeing something that doesn't change very much you stabilize into it, you shift, you get sensitive, you cross a threshold, something happens.

MH: Framing seems important in your shooting.
EE: Composing an image is a strange knowledge, you have it or you don't. I know I can compose. I think cinematographers are born, you see it in the image as a kind of authority. When you are setting up a shot it's by feel. You feel the balance in the frame. It's very precise. You can't approximate it. I learned something odd about composition: I've always shot with my right eye. When I tried to shoot with my left eye I had no sense of composition at all. I had no feel. I don't know what that means.

I've always shot on reversal. It comes from shooting colour slides, which I liked for the discipline. A slide's framing is absolute, you can't fix it later. You only have one chance. People have said they can see in my work that I'm coming from still photography. I can see that, too, but I think the fixed frame is appropriate to the kind of film I make, that sense of someone standing and staring. The fixed frame says that I've given the stage to the thing I'm looking at, I'm letting it take me. It is a kind of erotic.
MH: Tell me about *Current (2.5 min silent 1986)*.
EE: It was made in the Anthropology Museum in Vancouver. It shows vertical venetian blinds which move because of the air conditioner beneath them. If you shoot through them to daylight on tungsten stock the light turns blue, so that became blue lines. It's like looking at the northern lights to me, the stately way they move. And then the black spaces, the blinds themselves, begin to move the other way.
MH: It's lovely. It's like a pause, a meditation stop.
EE: I like it, too. I had it sitting around for years as a hundred-foot roll and then it occurred to me all I had to do was put a title on it. I shot it in 1977, but it wasn't released until later.
MH: What happened after you were through living in farmhouses?
EE: I went back to Vancouver. Five hard years. A long time to be nowhere. My son was living in England and I didn't have money to go see him and that was difficult. I was working very hard to learn to write but it never came together, never turned into anything. It was a time of complete isolation and misery and a long, slow breaking up with a woman lover. She was an Ezra Pound scholar, an exquisite writer, and I was there to learn something about

writing. I endured this endless breakup on account of not being ready to leave what I was learning. I had another child. Which is, in a way, the last thing I wanted at forty. I was ill for nine months, miserable, malnourished, and broke. I hadn't wanted anything to do with the child's father. He was a smoker and the smell made me sick. So, this baby was born and his father turned out to be a marvellous parent. He said he wanted to look after his child, who turned out to be colicky, crying for hours every day. And he did. Rowen is now sixteen, living on Read Island with his dad. He's okay. I say that with amazed gratitude that mistakes are not always final. Mistakes and irresponsibility. But I had to cast myself into the opposite of what I wanted for it to turn out well. From that point everything began to turn around again. It was very mysterious. Having to pay dues to life again. It was like saying you've been esoteric long enough, now you have to join up with human beings again and do your work in the community.

I went on and designed and supervised construction on a three-and-a-half-acre park on the downtown east side in Vancouver. It's a community garden. We have worked with this land for sixteen years now. It is an established garden, a sort of people's estate. There is a large formal herb garden, a heritage apple collection on espalier, a grassy orchard, a wild area with willows and species roses, two hundred allotment plots, a long vine walk with grapes and kiwis, and a kids' area with a thirty-foot reflecting water tank made of reinforced concrete. Last summer we finished a house for our garden. It was built by young women who learned carpentry in the process of building it. Working with a community has been a revelation to me. Isolated art is not the only kind of life. It's possible to have fun. I got this community life where I could be a general and a polemicist, a farmer, an architect, and a designer.

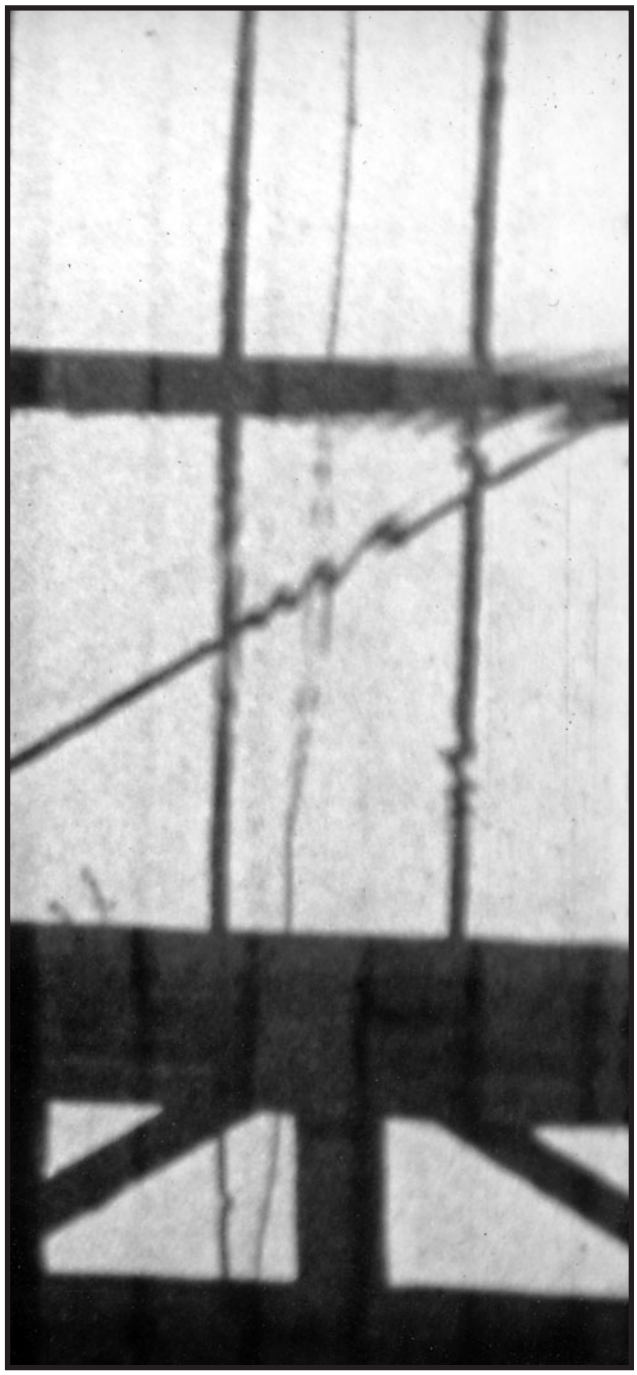


Current

In 1989 I went back to school. I've been using connectionist neuroscience to try to build a way of talking about perception and representation that would support my actual working interests. The theory we have doesn't at all.

My films have been beyond me. They are my best work in any medium, and yet I have thought much more about writing and I've been much more noted for making gardens. In film I have been as if respected and suppressed. I've been easy to suppress. It's as if the work most of the time is nothing. Then sometimes there's a moment when I'm in awe of it. I've worked so simply that there might be nothing there. It is always that I want to show something I love or to show my love itself, but even for me I can never know it's really there. At public screenings, I might feel it, or I might find the film unbearable and empty. It's not robust work. And yet the sort of liking there has sometimes been for it is very satisfying, as it is an unfailing test both of people and of moments. I think my films are erotic. Or maybe my sense of erotic, which is that kind of complete attention, entranced attention, to nuances of contact and motion. My films, when I am able to see them, are total pleasure. They're light-fucks. David Rimmer talks about the erotic quality of the film image and the way people often can't stand it to be that, basically can't stand to be fucked in so tender a way.

It's occurring to me that I was a child who often stood still watching other people move. I couldn't skate. I'd be standing on the edge of a lake, filled up with the beauty of other people's motion and the pain of not being able to do it myself. I took a strong imprint of those shapes of motion. I can unreel them at will. This is to say that maybe my films are marginal because people feel too much of the isolation in them. Its sting as well as its gifts.

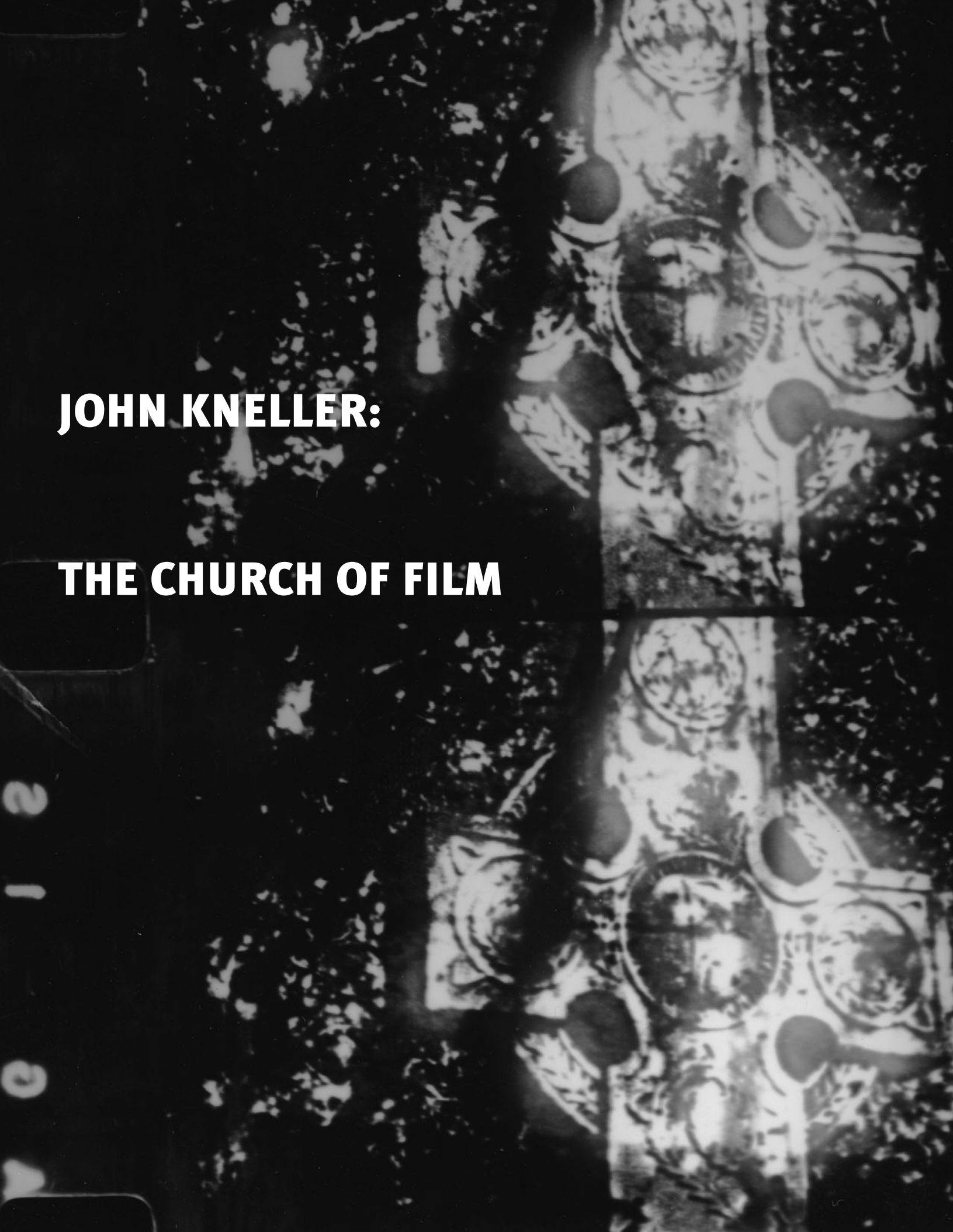


detail from Trapline

Ellie Epp Filmography

Trapline	18 min 1976
Current	2.5 min silent 1986
notes in origin	15 min silent 1987
Bright and Dark	3 min silent 1996

photo by: Lorrie Ettling



JOHN KNELLER:

THE CHURCH OF FILM

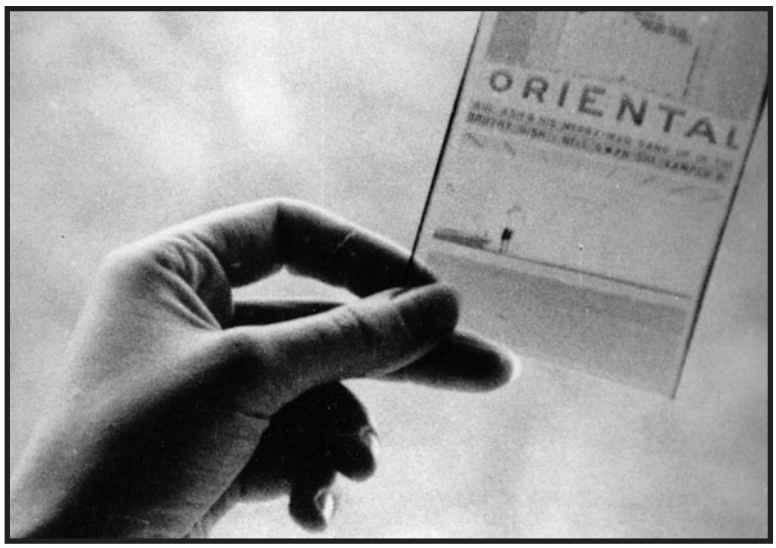
Kneller's work is a compendium of documentary practice and lush, multiphonic landscapes which appear often as figments of the imagination — abstracts which flicker between the lines of reason and wonder, finally conjuring both. But while his ongoing gathering of images leavens an eye learned in the ecstasy of uncovering, these pictures are typically rephotographed in order to heighten their expressive potential, adding grain and supersaturated colour or layers of other pictures to re-invoke the magic of a world never seen before.

Shot in marginal or neglected formats (standard and super-8), Kneller's films remained for years a persistent rumour, occasionally surfacing in open screenings or group shows. When pressed, he would usually insist that none of his work was really finished, that it existed in a myriad of variations, of test rolls and material possibilities which had not yet been exhausted. Through the years Kneller would return over and over to the same footage, resequencing it, adding more complex layers of matte work and superimposition via rephotography, eventually producing a body of work, like Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, where each piece seems part of an organic whole — where the borders between one title and the next seem blurred and indistinct, where the material of the film is aging along with its maker, changing as his eye changes. This flowering of possibilities has been undertaken with an exacting technical precision and boundless patience, producing an exquisitely hand-crafted corpus like no other in Canadian cinema.

JK: It's funny, people will wait at a bus stop or laundromat, but can't sit through a five-minute experimental film. Sometimes they get so angry. People take their movies very personally; they know what they like, which is what's been sold to them. A few years ago, I had to stop watching big movies. I just got tired of the way emotions are manipulated. Tears are welling up, there's a big lump in your throat, and you can't help thinking that all over the world folks you've never met are feeling just the same.

I grew up in a small town of 5,000 people and just one movie theatre, the Royal Theatre in Hudson, Quebec. The Royal turned into a sports outlet and now, of course, it's a video store. It's all changed. I remember many a summer afternoon matinee and the way the sun would scorch your eyeballs as you left the theatre. In our small town the Royal was something that kept people together. For parents, it was a chance to get the kids out of the house for a couple of hours.
MH: The communal babysitter.
JK: It reminds me of this guy who used to have small booths with super-8 cartoon loops. The show would last a couple of minutes and cost a dollar and he kept it running into the late eighties. Parents would send their kids in there with ten bucks just to get rid of them for a while. Now he's switched to videotape.
MH: When did you start making movies?
JK: When I was fourteen my friend got a super-8 camera and we made little films with kids in the neighbourhood. Everyone came to see them when they were finished. A few years later my parents worried about my going to the local high school, so they sent me to a boys' private school for three years, between 1980 and 83. At the time it seemed like the worst thing; having to wear the uniforms and being so anxious about girlfriends, sex in general. But now I think it was a good thing — I might have got stuck in a rut back in Hudson.

In CEGEP I enrolled in commerce because my parents didn't see much of a future in film. That's where I saw my first Brakhage and Anger films. Afterwards, I applied to the Concordia University for film but didn't make it. I still have

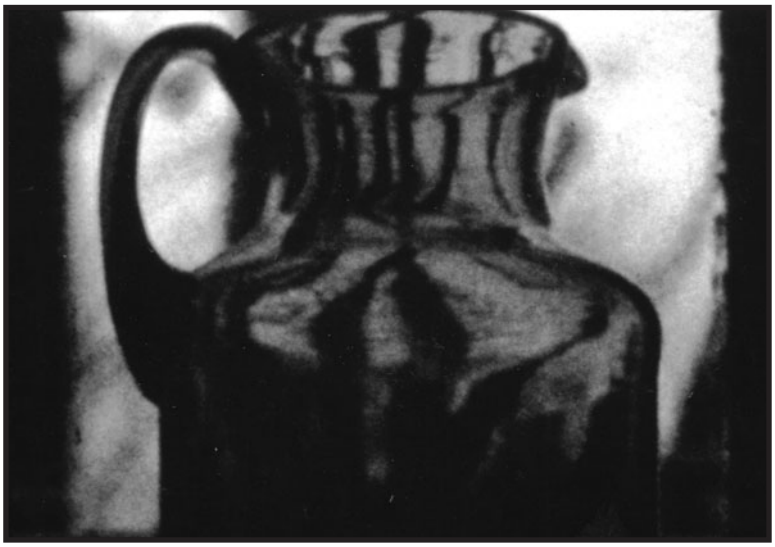


You Take the High Road

dreams about that interview and have spoken with other filmmakers who remember the terror of applying. I'd been going to movie nights run by a punk and when I told them what movies I was seeing they figured I wasn't for them. I think the interest was there, but in a small town you're limited in what you can see. You'll find *Faces of Death* but not *Dog Star Man* in your video store. I'd planned on staying in Montreal, but got accepted at the University of Toronto, and I've been here ever since.
MH: You made films at university?
JK: That's when I really got going, though it was frowned upon; we were told there were too many filmmakers out

there already. The university program is strictly film history, criticism, and theory, so I started to experiment with super-8 on my own time. I used to go to all the Innis Film Screenings and that's where I really saw experimental films. As soon as I saw those films I knew this was for me. It was a much more purist approach to film, unconcerned with demographics or test screenings. It was film for film. I loved Pat O'Neill's work, Paul Sharits, Michael Snow, all that structuralist work, Joyce Wieland. I admired what people were doing in the sixties. There were different approaches to lifestyles, and, as a result, different approaches to filmmaking; you sensed the changes in their world.

I saw some films that were optically printed and felt that's what I wanted to make, to use the printer to express a feeling or an idea, not to use it for standard movie-magic special effects. To fool people. That's when I made those three "S" films: *Spring (4 min 1991), Shimmer (4 min 1988),* and *Speck (4.5 min 1989)*. I knew a lab guy who could put



Shimmer

together three rolls of super-8, and I became fascinated with multiple exposures, marrying the images in the printing. I was doing a lot of time-lapse work shooting clouds and landscapes, which is what I'm still shooting now — a lot of the seeds were planted pretty early on. Especially this fascination with water. If you're printing with low-quality systems, water seems to hold its image quality longer than other kinds of images, it stays extra sharp on film. I was also fascinated with the feedback you can get through a reflex viewfinder on a super-8 camera if you look right into the sun. I'd set the frame up with the sun in the corner looking out a window, with the light spraying across the frame. You get your eye wet, and if you press your eyeball right up against the glass in the viewfinder, the light comes into the finder, bounces off your eye and runs back onto the film. That particular effect is evident in parts of *Speck* and definitively in *Picture Start (3 min silent 1985–90)*. The eyeball is magnified tremendously and luminous white eyelashes flutter about the focal plane. For a long time I was trying to perfect that. When I shoot I'm probably overly meticulous, spending too much time setting up, but I enjoy working that way, making every shot count.

MH: Were you shooting in a gathering mode as opposed to following a script?

JK: Absolutely. I still get the urge and decide I have to go out today and film something. Though I don't feel comfortable shooting strangers — filmers have a responsibility to not just take take take. It's amazing what's changed in ten years. Everything but me. I'm still doing exactly what I was doing then, I'm just a little better at it. I still go about filmmaking as a major part of my daily life.

In the late eighties I had an apartment down in Kensington Market which I set up as a little studio. I had a couple of super-8 cameras and a projector with a flip mirror so you could project on the screen. I had also been experimenting with slow-burning film frames and all kinds of crazy set-ups for multiple projection rephotography. I was interested in reflections of light patterns on various hand-held gels. I made experiments using single-frame rephotography. Some very crude methods were used, including filming from an editor/viewer screen. All of these limited techniques found their way into the three-part superimposition film *Speck*.

Spring's a bit different, though. I went into an old abandoned building and put it all together in my head before starting to shoot. There was a presence there. It was a place for the homeless, full of shit and pornography and glue bottles. I was pretty naive then; it hadn't occurred to me that people would ever have to live like that. At the same time there was a certain fascination because I imagined a life where you're not tied to anything, you're free. The last shot of the film shows an oval window which the camera moves toward, suggesting freedom — and its costs. Most opt for more regimented forms of freedom.

Toronto Summit (6.5 min 1988) is a document of the Toronto Summit rally and march. I'd become involved in the local activist scene, though I was reluctant to accept its easy equation of the personal and political. I had a friend who couldn't separate the two at all — whatever he felt that day was the reigning politic. Artists are guilty of this, too; you have to let things go in order to do the work, you have to be selfish to get it done, but it can create problems with your relationships. It takes a toll.

The G7 is a meeting of world leaders from seven countries, including Canada, and it was our turn to host. The leaders huddled at the Convention Centre, which was surrounded by a giant wall with helicopters circling night and day. We were going to march from the legislature to the walls and tear them down, or at least bring attention to this barrier between the elite and regular schmoes like us. It was my first taste of a big city rally. It all took about three hours, with singing and speeches and then a march. There were cops in riot gear and a sit-down protest. Anyone who tried to climb the barriers got arrested, and mostly it was very reserved. But with that many people it could quickly become dangerous. A newspaper box was burned and people danced around it, while endless rows of cops looked on. I could hardly imagine it was Toronto, it looked like something out of a war zone. That's when I saw how fragile democracy was. There was a line, and I wondered at what point the cops would take out their truncheons and start beating people. It was a scary time to be living. No one talks about it any more, but I'd grown up with the imminent threat of nuclear war. My teachers would pray that no crazy someone would take office and press the button. That was the fear. We knew there was nothing like a limited-scale nuclear war. It meant the end of everything.

Shimmer

In 1986 I lived in residence, which was very new for a guy coming from a small town. Steve Lerner lived next door and we got along like brothers; both of us were away from home for the first time. But to get anything out of the guy was murder. I had this little film I was working on and wanted to shoot in his room, but before he said yes I had to type essays and run errands, it was driving me nuts. He had a bunch of regular-8 home movies from his family and I had a projector. Every once in a while he'd have a hot date and, as one of his ploys, he'd borrow my movie projector and show his home movies. I was jealous because I wasn't getting any action at all, it was terrible, years went by. But things were going well for him because of these movies, and finally he showed them to me. He said there was something strange, there was something wrong with one of them. He put it on and it blew me away. It's a very simple home movie showing a baby being washed, playing, rocking, being held by his parents. A very basic home movie with in-camera cutting. But something happened during processing — the emulsion's not entirely there, it's peeled off and folded back, leaving lateral excisions. The overall effect is that this banal home movie has a beautiful new life given to it by the material nature of the film. That became *Traces, Fragments (4 min 1986)*.

I don't really consider it my film, I just found it. I bothered Steve for years about it, and in the end he acquiesced, knowing I was serious, that I was committed to this kind of filmmaking. I had ideas about turning it into a multi-screen extravaganza. In the clear areas of the image I wanted to show fragments from sixties newsreels — moonshots, the JFK assassination, the King assassination — along with scenes from the baby's later life. I tried to do all this on a contact printer at home on regular-8, but never achieved it. Kika Thorne was always urging me to show the original, insisting it was beautiful the way it was. In the end I realized she was right. For two years I made prints from the original and tried to rework it but finally had to stop.

Through the years I've assembled all my films on large reels, but then I start optical printing and they all get broken down again. It's like an endless expansion and contraction, never being able to decide what I want to do with this stuff. It's always been process first. From 1992 to 95 I worked intensely on the printer and pilfered materials from past work to make new things. I had the idea that *Speck* could benefit from a complete reworking given the new possibilities of the optical printer. As was the case with *Traces, Fragments*, this endless reworking of old originals did not prove entirely fruitful. So, I've finally decided (the hard way), to remaster all of the older superimposition films from the original super-8 A-B-C rolls exactly as originally intended.

MH: It's amazing to me that you work so hard, and for so long, with such exacting precision, on a single film, often poring over it frame by frame, with many layers of superimposition added, and when you get close to finishing something, you just abandon it and move on to something else.

JK: Honestly, I think I have to get away from that after going through this massive editing project trying to make some sense of it all. For the first time I'm going back and deciding what's a film and what isn't, and having proper prints made.

MH: Tell me about your leaf obsession.

JK: Every fall between 1990 and 93 I'd go out and shoot leaves. It would take me a month to shoot seven seconds because every shot was set up like a still photo. I remember Robert Breer doing frame-by-frame work in *Fist Fight*, using a different image for each frame. It had a fascinating kinetic effect on the screen, unlike anything I'd ever seen before. That shooting was the beginning of *Architectures and Landscape Compilation June 1994 (14 min silent 1993)*. I'd also been photographing a lot of water images which I processed by hand. Every day I woke up at seven and did a day's worth of processing. This went on for five months and the results were lousy — it was all very flat, lacking contrast. I thought maybe it needed more agitation, but then there were areas of oxidation and brown spots on the film. I cut out all the brown sections and the remainder became the backing matte for the colour leaves. They were run together in the optical printer, and that became a pretty important part of the film. It was my signature style for a while.

It's like an endless expansion and contraction, never being able to decide what I want to do with this stuff. It's always been process first.

I'd also collected all this regular-8 footage from garage sales. You shoot one side of the roll, then take the film out of the camera, turn it around, and shoot the other side. Usually when it's processed, they slit the film in half and give it back to you. But if it's not slit it can be cut directly into 16mm footage, producing a four-screen effect. It was all Kodachrome, so the colour was beautiful and saturated. This was incorporated with the water/ leaves and some stained-glass windows I shot. The windows are something made by humans which try to imitate the beauty of nature, to evoke those translucent, saturated colours. The film compares these two moments and reflects on its own making, its own evocation of colour. There's a shot of Hitler in the film and some said I should take it out, but it's followed by these pixillated flowers I shot slowed down on the printer, red against a black background, which have a very sombre quality, the idea being that there's beauty but such horror as well.

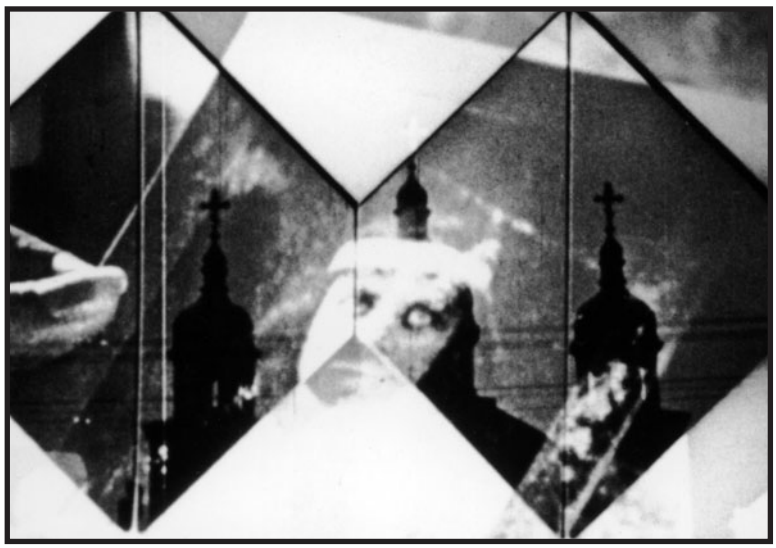
Working in black and white has never been of great interest to me. Black and white's in vogue now but even mainstream audiences don't always like it. It's funny, I remember this guy who made a beautiful video for the New Country Network TV station. After it aired, people called in saying, "Look, I just bought this big colour TV and no way in hell do I want to watch black and white videos."

MH: Do you worry about your audiences? Is there enough of an audience for your work?

JK: In 1990 I got a call from Pleasure Dome [an artists' film/video exhibition group in Toronto]. They asked if I wanted to show and I said, "I'm surprised you're calling me, I'm really just getting started, I'm honoured." And they said, "Well, actually, we wanted someone else but they cancelled." [laughs] But I think Pleasure Dome does a good job and has been supportive of my work. At the Innis Film Society, attendance became so bad it was embarrassing. I remember the Ernie Gehr show where six people came. You start wondering, "Why am I putting all this time into the work?" A show's never lousy though. Even if there's just one person out there, there's something happening. A good film is when you bring home images, when something sticks.

MH: Is there something political about making a film that has no use value?

JK: After Agnes Varda watched a program of Kenneth Anger's work she said, "Well, that seems like a pretty easy way to make a film." People think experimental filmmakers have it easy because of the freedom, but it presents a different set of challenges. I've always wanted to work on a film at my own speed. In my own way. I'd get the films so close to being finished that I'd lose interest because the challenge was no longer there, I'd learned everything I wanted to from that particular film. Then I'd move on to the next thing. Because I was so eager and excited to understand film, a lot of the early work was left in disarray. I was scared of the big film



We Are Experiencing Technical Difficulties.

labs, because I've always done everything myself, made all of my own prints. People are amazed that I'm able to keep going on my own terms. They imagine there's only so long you can be a film or jazz martyr, someone who plays just for the love of it. But it's more important for me to make films than have a comfortable living. I have a day job so I can keep going.

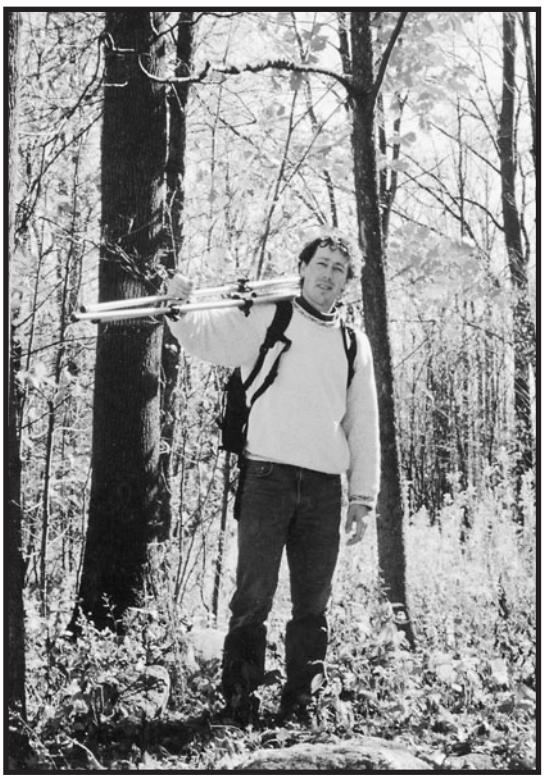
I made *Architectures and Landscape Compilation* in 1993, revised it a year later, then kept working on it until it became *We Are Experiencing Technical Difficulties. Regular Programming Will Resume Momentarily. (16 min 1996)*. It also shows an intersection of landscapes and architectures with humanity in between. But it uses more travelling mattes and images within images, and offers a different treatment of colour. I used a lot of high-contrast self-processed water imagery, which was rephotographed using alternating colour filters with a slide projector as the light source. This produces a flickering colour field against the high-contrast photography. The stained-glass windows return, but while they're shown in their pristine original in the background the foreground shows the same windows with fifteen added layers of superimposition. I used my projector to run into the printer so the images are very quick, fifty times faster than normal. This contrast between the two kinds of windows suggests that as much as religion strives for the best in human experience, it's also responsible for the boys in Mount Cashel or going to war. We're in such a high-tech age but in other ways we're completely backwards. Experimental film is the way and the truth. I do believe that. It has such freedom because you're not catering to a market, you're interested in ideas. But why make these films? Everyone who sticks with it is miserable, or they go crazy or shoot themselves. A lot of people show promise and stop. I saw a student film that was fantastic but now this filmmaker installs car antennas for a living. But I think there's a way. When I first saw *Dog Star Man* I was eighteen and very open and impressed, but as soon as people hit their twenties they just head for the dollars and leave these films behind. They're missing out on something great. I guess I'm a bit of a purist. I don't even work with a Steenbeck, I always work on a bench. People say, oh, that's so archaic, but I find it useful. When you're winding the film back you're thinking of whether your decision is going to work or not. Just because you can edit fast doesn't make you a good cutter. One thing about working on a printer is that you're actually exposing film to light, and as soon as you start taking film into the digital domain, you're getting further away from it being light and turning it into information instead. I still love the quality of projected light. And there's something to be said about taking time over things. I just prefer working that way. If that makes me a dinosaur, well ...

We Are Experiencing Technical Difficulties.

Toronto Summit

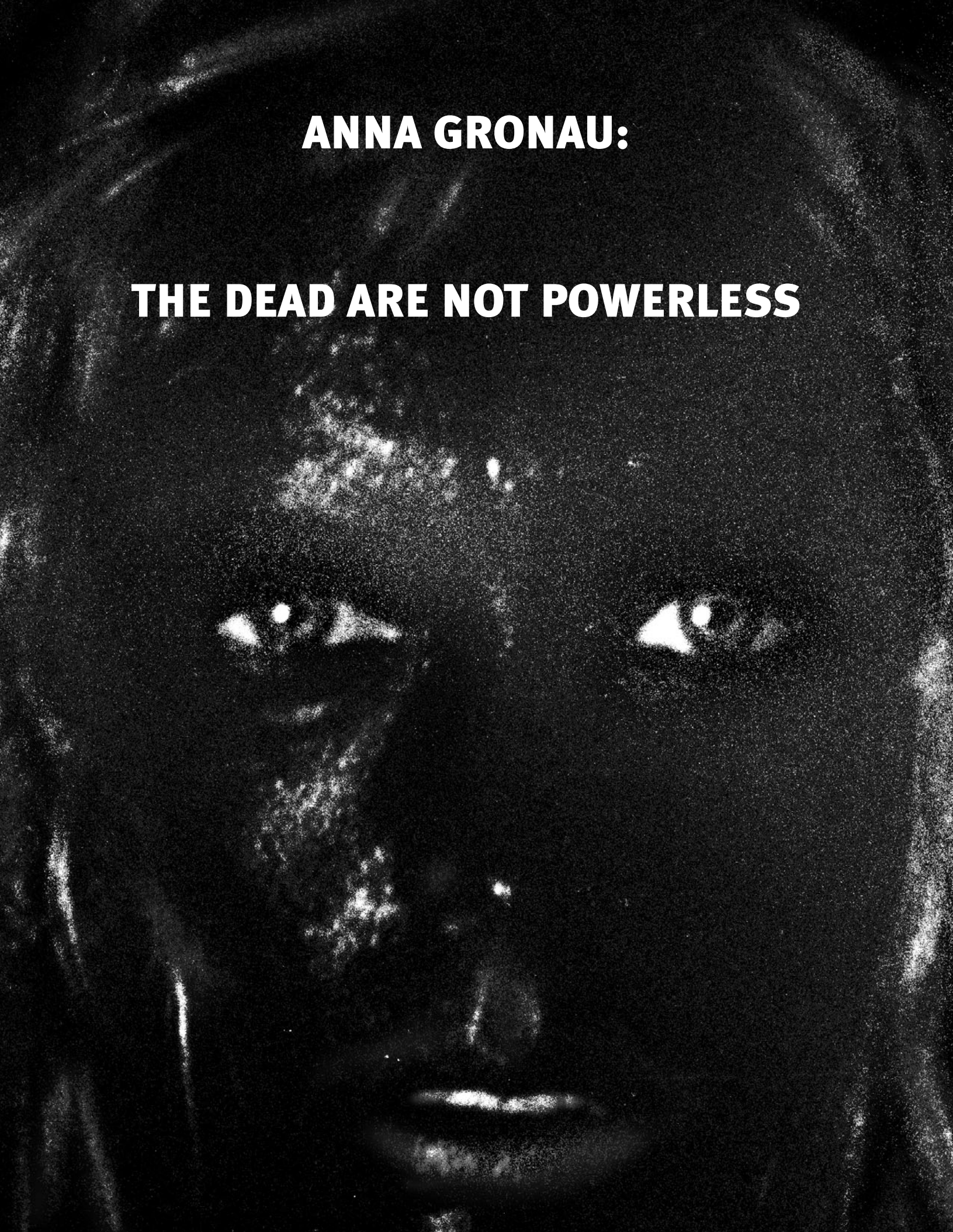
John Keller Filmography

Traces, Fragments	4 min 1986
Shimmer	4 min 1988
Toronto Summit	6.5 min 1988
Speck	4.5 min 1989
Picture Start	3 min silent 1985-90
Spring	4 min 1991
Tier Film	6.5 min 1991
Holiday Tattoo	1.5 min silent 1992
Architectures and Landscape Compilation June 1994	14 min silent 1993
Architectures and Landscape Compilation Dec 1994	6 min silent 1994
Drop In/Shoot/Drop Out	
version 1	2.5 min super-8 silent 1995
version 2	8 min super-8 silent 1995
Circle Takes	5 min 1992-95
You Take the High Road	6 min silent 1995
We Are Experiencing Technical Difficulties.	
Regular Programming Will Resume Momentarily.	16 min 1996
Separation Anxieties	9 min regular-8 1998
Sight Under Construction	35 min 2001
Synaesthetic Anaesthesia	40 min 2001



ANNA GRONAU:

THE DEAD ARE NOT POWERLESS



Born in Montreal in 1951, Anna Gronau moved as a teenager to Toronto, where she became a central figure in the city's turbulent fringe-film scene. Between 1980 and 1982 Gronau was Director/Programmer of the Funnel Experimental Film Theatre, and from 1983 to 1985 worked as video distribution manager at Art Metropole. She has written and lectured tirelessly on feminism and the avant-garde, touring work and championing marginal expression. She also led the charge against the intrusions of the Ontario Censor Board. Rallies, protests, and politicking were capped by many hours in the courtroom interrogating government agents, exposing the capricious judgments and ambiguous standards applied to motion pictures large and small.

While she was helping so many others, she was also quietly developing a body of work all her own. She appears in all of her early work, though it is the structure of cognition rather than the narrating of personal experience that impels her concern. The solitude that haunts her work is narrated in a succession of subtle and painful autobiographical moments — the ending of a relationship, the death of a friend's child. Many of her films suggest ways in which the self can interact with an outside world, negotiating the divide between inside and out, between self and Other. Her later work has taken up politics in a different register, often using dramatic elements to unwrap the layers of history that occlude relations in the present. Her work asks us to remember, while showing us how.

AG: I got involved in film by coincidence. Back in high school, in Hamilton, I had a friend at McMaster University. We used to hang out at the Film Board there. It was a place where some ambitious young filmmakers — some of whom went on to be famous — were watching a lot of movies and planning their first films. I saw my very first experimental film there, if you don't count the Norman McLaren films we saw as kids. Then, when I went to the Ontario College of Art, I met Keith Lock and Jim Anderson, who were studying film at York University. We all ended up living in a communal house around the time the first Toronto Filmmakers' Co-op [a non-commercial production/post-production facility] and the Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre were being set up. Jim and Keith and others in our house were very involved.

While I was studying painting and sculpture at art school the whole notion of "avant-garde" caught my interest. I understood it at the time in its relation to the military idea of an "advance guard" — leading the way. My belief as a young art student was that avant-garde art would be taken up by people at large. I never thought of art as a permanently separated cultural activity. The idea that there were avant-garde films seemed completely natural to me. This was around 1969/1970. The counter-culture was still something people believed in. There was a lot of performance going on and anti-object art was big at the time. Idealistically, I believed that the ghettoized, even despised, status of avant-garde film was only temporary. As I remember it, avant-garde film wasn't much different from alternative rock music in terms of the value that I and the people I knew felt it had. We saw all kinds of "youth culture" as being on the cutting edge — and leading somewhere. Otherwise, I don't think we would have been interested. Of course, as we know now, rock music *did* "go somewhere" — and avant-garde film went somewhere far less dazzling! Still, I had high hopes for leading-edge filmmaking, although at the time I didn't consider the problems of the notion of avant-garde, such as the way it assumes leadership and hierarchy.

The first film I made was for school, and Keith helped me. It was a "structural" film called *Inside Out*. I was living in an old farmhouse with a big picture window in the kitchen that overlooked an orchard. I set the camera on a tripod half an hour before sunset, turned on the kitchen lights, and filmed a kind of time-lapse out the window. I exposed a few seconds every couple of minutes. As the sun went down, the window darkened, revealing the reflection of me and the camera. The film was about ten minutes long, but I'm afraid it's lost to posterity now. [laughs]

After I graduated, I helped Keith and Jim with their films and went to screenings and meetings of the Film Co-op, but I hadn't had any technical instruction at OCA so I didn't have the confidence to try making my own films. I lost touch with film for a while, and then in the late seventies, Jim Anderson, his brother Dave, and Keith started holding screenings at a studio at the corner of Adelaide and John Streets. The building belonged to a company called Freud Signs! The screenings helped me realize that I still wanted to make films. Then I heard about a filmmaking workshop at a new organization called CEAC, the Centre for Experimental Art and Communication. The workshop was associated with the Funnel, a program run by CEAC, which had been holding biweekly experimental film screenings just down the street from Freud Signs. The Funnel was in the process of setting itself up as an independent organization and that's when I became involved. I felt it could help me both make films and see a lot of work. The first screening I attended featured films by James Benning. His approach to filmmaking showed the sensibility of a painter and poet, so with my art background, it began to look like the Funnel would be a good place to be.

MH: Can you describe CEAC?

AG: It released publications, staged performances, provided video access, and hosted conferences. CAEC also ran an

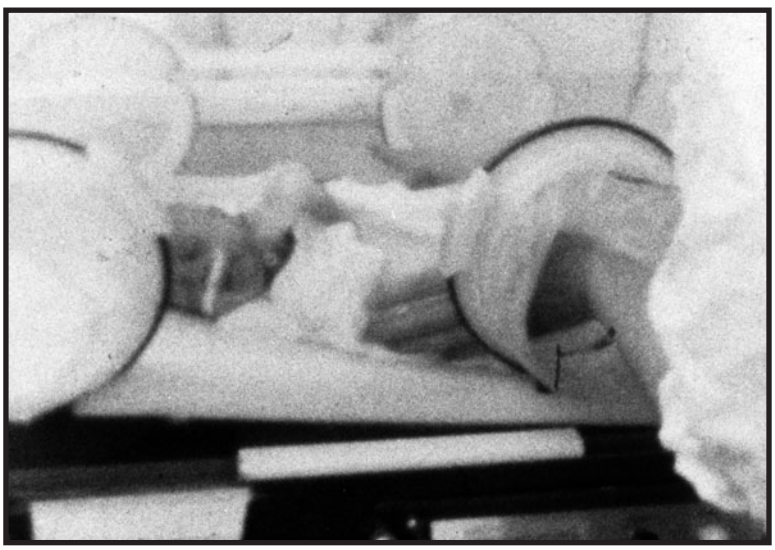
educational program which included the filmmaking workshops I attended.
MH: Why did the Funnel separate from CEAC? Was it a difficult transition?
AG: Separation started before I became involved, but I think the idea initially was that the Funnel had a strong mandate and could likely function well on its own — get its own funding and so on. But many things started to happen at once. The Toronto Filmmakers' Co-op was on the verge of bankruptcy. As I was told, it had lost its "alternative" approach and was being used as a low-cost quasi-commercial facility and was accumulating untenable debts. The Canada Council asked members of the independent film community to get involved and try to save the Co-op. A number of people who did so were also trying to help the Funnel get on its feet. The Co-op turned out to be in worse shape than we'd thought and eventually we had to declare bankruptcy and close it. But this wasn't a unanimous decision. I think some filmmakers felt that the new board was simply trying to kill the Co-op and grab its funding. To the best of my knowledge, this wasn't the case, but it made for a lot of tension.

Meanwhile, CEAC began to take a radical militaristic, guerrilla-type stand. They were starting to say that art isn't enough — to change society you have to go out and shoot politicians. [laughs] This became a political hot potato when the *Toronto Sun* got hold of a copy of CEAC's newsletter, *Strike*. The cover showed a picture of Italian premier Aldo Moro, recently murdered by a political terrorist group called the Red Brigade. CEAC's editorial voiced support for the Red Brigade. The *Sun* declared its outrage about this on its front page, and all public monies to CEAC were quickly stopped. This really split the arts community. A number of arts organizations openly condemned CEAC. The Funnel was in the strange position of already trying to separate from CEAC. When CEAC demanded a letter of support from the Funnel, they were refused. In retrospect, that seems like it may have been cowardly, but CEAC wasn't behaving very honourably, either. For a while there was a feeling that CEAC might try to seize the Funnel's "assets." In the end, we stored all the stuff — some chairs and tables and a projector — in someone's basement and searched for another home for the new and separate Funnel. So, yes, it was a difficult breakup.
MH: How did the Funnel's theatre get built?
AG: We finally found a location on King Street East. Within a month, using only volunteer labour, we turned a raw warehouse space into a one-hundred-seat theatre with a projection booth and an office space. We opened in January 1977.
MH: How many volunteers were there?
AG: About twenty. The "core" membership was always around twenty. Over the years people came and went, but the figure was always about the same.
MH: Was the initial idea to build a theatre for fringe film?
AG: Different people had different ideas. Ross McLaren, who had been involved while the Funnel was at CEAC, always wanted an equipment co-op. But that wasn't feasible politically or legally because the Toronto Film Co-op was going bankrupt. You can't declare bankruptcy in one organization and then start another that does the same thing. Some members felt from the start that the Funnel should be a cinematheque, and that's what it was initially. But after a while we started to get some production equipment — at first only super-8 cameras — that was clearly outside of the old Co-op's mandate. Later on, we also got post-production sound gear and 16mm cameras. We tried to set up an integrated and complementary facility in production and exhibition. For example, we purchased a good super-8 projector which could also be used to record sound in sync with the image as it was projected.
MH: How was it decided what kind of work would be shown?
AG: In the very beginning it was a mixture, based mainly on what we could afford: more established Canadian experimental filmmakers like David Rimmer and Mike Snow and Joyce Wieland, and younger local filmmakers doing personal, low-budget filmmaking.

By the time I started working at the Funnel, there was a little publication called the *Filmmaker's Newsletter* that came out of Minneapolis. They announced new films and screenings and screening facilities, and this created a circuit so experimental filmmakers could take their new works on the road. There was never any money. The Funnel had grants, which was more than some groups had, and we only paid an honorarium that may have just covered plane fare. But there was an international community that was excited to see and show work. We used to show experimental or avant-garde work from all over the world. There was a wide range; some films were very conceptual, some were highly politicized, others more diaristic. It was an exciting immersion. We held two different screenings a week, usually with the filmmaker present to answer questions and discuss her/his work. Frequently, our guests were from out of town or from another country.
MH: Did a lot of people come to screenings?
AG: There were a few devotees who came to everything. There were times when there'd be only ten people in the audience and others when we turned people away. It depended on the profile of the filmmaker. But we worked hard to spread the word. We made up little Xerox posters

every few weeks and plastered them on downtown hoardings. That was better publicity in those days because not many people were doing it. Eventually we sold memberships and mailed out calendars every couple of months. Occasionally we got a write-up in one of the daily newspapers or in an art periodical, but that didn't happen often. The best and worst publicity we got — it was inevitable that this would come up in a discussion of the Funnel — was from the Ontario Censor Board. I say this because the film censors made our lives extremely difficult. But the fact that we resisted their interventions resulted in a lot of media attention and the Funnel became much better known.

At first, the Ontario Censor Board insisted that we send them every film we wanted to show a week in advance of the screening so they could classify it and mark the print with an embossed stamp. They also wanted us to advertise the film's "rating." Even if we hadn't found the whole idea abhorrent ethically, it would have been impossible solely in practical terms. Filmmakers usually arrived with their work from out of town just a few hours before their screening.



Wound Close

We protested and got all sorts of high-profile supporters to speak on our behalf, but the Censor Board refused to give up their right to preview and "rate" — and potentially ban from screening — all films we showed. For a while they would even send someone down to the Funnel to watch films on our premises before the screening. It was ridiculous. But resistance began to grow because the Censor Board, having more or less stumbled upon the Funnel (as far as we could tell) suddenly realized they'd opened up a hornets' nest. I don't think they had any idea of all the independent film and video activity that was going on in Ontario. David Poole from Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre, Cyndra McDowell from Canadian Artists' Representation, and I eventually became the board of a small organization that took on the Censor Board through the courts. Our group was called the Ontario Film and Video Appreciation Society. We took the offensive, and charged the Censor Board with being unconstitutional under the Charter of Rights. The Canadian Criminal Code stated that if material was made public and the public complained, charges could be laid and judged according to community standards. But this was a hired board whose job was to decide for the public *in advance* what it could and couldn't see. We argued that this prior censorship was unconstitutional. We had some legal victories, although we were obviously the underdog in terms of resources. I think we won mainly in the sense that we revealed the ludicrous nature of many aspects of the current legislation. But it was an ongoing struggle. By the time I left the Funnel, we had won a small amount of leeway: the Censors required only that we submit a written description of films we planned to screen. They still retained the right to ban a film, however.

MH: Tell me about the Open Screenings.

AG: These started when the Funnel was still part of CEAC. The idea was that once a month anyone could bring her/his film and it would be screened publicly. Films ranged from home movies to student films to offbeat stuff that you might imagine strange people had obsessed over in basement editing dens. To tell you the truth, I liked the idea of Open Screenings better than the reality of them. They were often tedious and boring. Then the Censor Board made open screenings illegal because people who just showed up with their films couldn't submit their work to the Board before they showed them. We saw this as a real affront to the notion of freedom of expression.

MH: Did that affect public opinion about the Censor Board?

AG: I think it contributed to making the censorship laws look silly, but actually, I think it was the huge number of run-ins with the arts community that gradually undermined their credibility. The last straw was when they started to mess with the Toronto International Film Festival. That was truly politically embarrassing. The Censor Board had already lost a couple of times in court, but it was not until they found themselves in a standoff with the Film Festival that they started making accommodations. Unfortunately, not much has changed. We still have a Censor Board, and, just like before, the law is full of loopholes. Our argument had always been that the law was wrong and dangerous, and the fact that it might not be enforced to the extent of its full insanity didn't make things any better. The law still gives the government power to infringe extensively on freedom of expression if and when they are so inclined. Today most "fringe" media is exhibited in an underground setting — without the Censor Board's knowledge. We're back where we started.

MH: Was there a common ideal at the Funnel?
AG: The idea of community was the strongest link. But in the end, this ideal devolved into an us-versus-them mentality which entrenched marginality for its own sake. There was always a reluctance to discuss art issues in a very deep way. One reason may have been that many members were from working-class backgrounds. Intellectual posturing and intimidation has often been a way to keep working-class people "in their place," so I think there was a lot of wariness about any talk that smacked of academicism. Another reason was probably a fear of discussions that could exacerbate our differences and cause rifts in our small community. But ultimately the inability to deal with difference was what enabled that garrison mentality to take hold. The group was pressured from within because non-white, women, and lesbian and gay members were in a minority, and there was resentment and defensiveness about that. There was pressure from outside, too. We were the only place around showing non-narrative, independently made films, and a lot of people felt that the organization should be for them. It wasn't like the visual arts, where you may get turned down by one gallery, but there's another that would love to show your work. I think we hurt some people's feelings and I regret that.

But anyhow, that's dwelling on the negative. On the bright side, there may not have been an articulated "ideal," but there was great excitement and enthusiasm surrounding and within the Funnel for a while. Lots of outstanding work from all over the world was screened, including a lot of locally made films. There was a feeling for a time that something important was happening. We had a gallery for visual art there, for example, which made an important link with that community. Younger people, just coming out of film school, were encouraged to pursue filmmaking because of the sense that a vibrant independent film scene existed at the Funnel.

When I was doing the programming I did have a pretty clear idea of what I wanted to achieve. That was certainly an "ideal." I was interested in film as a kind of radical area between what was cutting edge and daring about visual art and what was powerful about the movies. I liked the way visual art was inventive in its uses of materials and its incorporation of unexpected elements in order to say important things. And I liked the way that movies get at you emotionally with their "realism." I still had a lot of belief in the idea of the avant-garde. I was interested in the ideals of some of the new feminist films being made at the time, the "New Talkies" they were called, and I did some programming using and referring to them. But frankly, I felt that some of them were better as theories than as films. However, it wasn't enough for the organization to represent the ideals of one or two people. As an organization, the Funnel's identity was too marginalized. To most people involved it rode on some hazy idea of being "alternative." I see now that just wasn't enough.
MH: The Funnel required an incredibly committed membership to ensure the organization could fulfill its ambitious program. There was a belief ...
AG: Yes, there was. It wasn't often articulated, however. Part of the belief was in a general sense of community, it was something to belong to. The Funnel had very little money with which it sponsored extensive activity and programming. Anything it accomplished it did on the backs of staff and volunteers who worked so fucking hard, myself included. When I was on staff in the early eighties my pay was $7,000 a year and I put in long hours — usually every day of the week. It was our dedication that allowed the place to exist. But it wasn't sustainable. Even without the more philosophical and political difficulties it was grappling with, the Funnel just didn't have the economic base to go on like that. It closed down after I had left it, so I don't know all the final circumstances. From what I could see, it seemed to lose steam and slowly disintegrate.
MH: What has it meant not having it around?

Regards

AG: For me personally, it was a relief. When I stopped being the Director/Programmer I joined the Board for a while, but already it felt like the organization was in a rut. The same arguments and difficulties came up again and again. So I left altogether. When it finally closed a few years later, I was glad. In its last years it seemed to be digging itself deeper into a mess and I didn't want that to be all that anyone remembered about it. In a bigger sense, its demise made room for LIFT and Pleasure Dome to develop.
MH: Okay, so let's get back to your own work. How did *Wound Close (8 min super-8 1982)* begin?

AG: Well, like most of my films, it started as one thing and gradually turned into something else. In the late 1970s, my best friend Eleanor gave birth prematurely to twin girls. One baby, Ona, died shortly after birth. The surviving twin, Rafiki, died tragically and unexpectedly at the age of four. I'd originally planned to make a birth film, but when the babies were born in such bad circumstances I couldn't bring myself to do it. I did, however, record a conversation between Eleanor and myself. The only image I shot was of Rafi in her hospital incubator. I just held onto the footage and the recording. When Rafi died it was a terrible, terrible thing. I felt then that perhaps I should have filmed the birth. At any rate, I decided I wanted to make a film as a memorial to Ona and Rafiki, and a tribute to Eleanor.

MH: There are alternating close-ups of you and your friend, lit to show half your faces, as if you're complementary halves. It reminded me of Bergman's *Persona*, this marriage of parts.

AG: I wanted to show how close we are, and also to reference the two children. I edited the film symmetrically, like a palindrome, with one central image and matching sorts of images on either side of that centre, all the same length. Using that kind of a structure was an attempt to find a form for something rather inexpressible. That film is the most personal one I've ever made. It uses images that probably have meaning only for Eleanor and me. For instance, the centre section was made from short takes of a drawing that Rafi made. Another shot was of a horrible artificial flower arrangement encased in a glass egg. The hospital where Rafi died sent it to Eleanor as a condolence. It was our belief that their negligence contributed to her death. I filmed Eleanor smashing that glass egg against the brick wall of the hospital. I never expected anyone else to know what it meant. I thought there was a chance that a trace of the emotions might come through. And I do think that some of the other images I chose might have an archetypal resonance — images of snakes, and a lake in winter. But this particular film was primarily personal in its intent.

MH: There's an openness of interpretation occasioned by much of your work.

AG: That's interesting. I hope that my work will point to some paradoxical and ambiguous places — and in doing so remind me, and the viewer, that we do well to resist hierarchies and situations in which one person's understanding is the law, the only truth. I think the "openness of interpretation" doesn't necessarily mean it could be about anything at all, but rather that within its parameters there's room to move and breathe. That room, that space, is important to me.

MH: Usually movies unify their audiences through identification. But in artists' films the reverse is often true: some hate them while others rave on. There's a large part the viewer plays in the construction of meaning within these films, but that also alienates a lot of people from fringe work. There doesn't seem enough to be able to hang on to because the terms of the usual theatre experience, the terms that unify the whole body of the audience, are no longer there.

The law still gives the government power to infringe extensively on freedom of expression if and when they are so inclined. Today most "fringe" media is exhibited in an underground setting — without the Censor Board's knowledge. We're back where we started.

AG: I agree. That's why I especially like films that both grip you the way the movies do *and* let you think and breathe and reflect.

MH: How was the critical response to your work, or to work made at the Funnel?

AG: Well, there was just about no critical response. Eventually I found the situation so ridiculous I decided to stop calling my films "experimental."

MH: What was ridiculous about it?

AG: Well, during the time when I was at the Funnel, we were making, showing, and distributing films, as well as being the audience and the reviewers, too. That's ludicrous. But it's the situation that has existed for experimental film — and video art, in a lot of ways — for a long time. It's come to be expected that these art forms comprise a more or less self-sustaining, closed world.

MH: *Regards (31 min 1983)* seems a departure from some of your earlier, shorter work.

AG: *Regards* was a more serious project, a bigger commitment. It was shot in 16mm and was, if not scripted, at least well-planned before I shot it. *Regards* dealt with perception, particularly vision, and other systems of knowing. I wanted to take these systems to such extremes they would fall apart. The idea was about certainty and knowledge being provisional tools at best, and ones which, when pushed to the limit, point us toward places that are *un*certain and *un*known.

MH: For example?

AG: There's a sentence in the film that appears as a subtitle: "What is it that makes breakfast so different from other

meals?" I recorded five people who didn't speak much French trying to translate that sentence. The result is five awkward translations heard on the soundtrack. I was attempting to show that middle point between these two systems. The place where translating occurs. There's a way to say the phrase in English and in French, but there's also this in-between place where the meaning exists without really being one or the other.

MH: And this place between, is that the image?

AG: I wouldn't identify it solely with the image either, although it arises in relation to certain images. For example, while the different voices ask the question about breakfast, the image is of a woman eating an egg. It's a looped shot, so she seems to be eating endlessly — far more than the contents of a single hard-boiled egg would require, and there's an arrow following her hand movements. A subtitle at the bottom of the screen reads, "What is it?" which seems to refer to the hand the arrow points to. But after a while, the arrow begins to ramble aimlessly around the screen. You think, "What is what?" Not just "What's the answer?" but "What's the question?" A space opens up between the sign and its referent. To me, this temporary release of the hold between experience and interpretation allows for a different kind of relatedness, or maybe an interrelatedness, to be suggested.

Regards

MH: What's the sequence that follows — is that the elderly woman reading from Bataille's *Story of the Eye*?

AG: Yes. She's holding an occluder, which looks like a round spoon with a long handle, used commonly in eye tests to cover one eye while reading charts. The woman reads to herself with one eye covered, and then aloud with the other eye covered. For most of us, reading with one eye is more or less the same as reading with the other. The exception is the case of so-called "split-brain" patients. The passage from Bataille she reads is about how keeping certain objects is the only way the author can remember. His other attempts to remember are blinded by the sun, his memory turns into a "vision of solar deliquescence." I thought it was interesting that light may obscure rather than help vision, and that the writer claims he can't trust what he sees in order to remember. I was also interested in the difference between looking at a text as something you can read and seeing it as an object.

MH: And how does it end?

AG: The final sequence involves a hand drawing a picture while the picture is superimposed over the portrayed object. But the object is also a portrayal — it's a model of a theatre proscenium. So there is a multiple layering of representations with no final or absolute "original" they can all refer back to.

MH: How are the different sequences connected?

AG: There's always a lot of invention that goes into reconstructing one's intentions from so long ago. Sometimes I think that I was concerned very much with negativity, the famed negativity of the avant-garde. I wanted to push its destruction of meaning so that the film would be negative about negativity itself. What I think I had in mind was to have an anti-structure — things connect, but they don't add up or pay off. But if you relax, it could be fun to watch all these little games the film contains going on and falling apart and then reappearing in a different way somewhere else. I was thinking about the word "regard" — meaning respect, esteem, acknowledgement, but with visual overtones. Like when we say "I see." It isn't the same as "I understand." It isn't as masterful as understanding. It's more of an acknowledgement.

MH: What's *Mary Mary (60 min 1989)* about?

AG: The "story" is about a filmmaker named Mary who goes through a period of intense withdrawal inside her home and gradually lets the outside world in.

MH: You worked on the film a long time.

AG: Yes. Partly because I work slowly and partly because I kept running out of money and not being able to get more. It began in 1985 and wasn't finished until 1989.

MH: *Mary Mary* quotes a lot from *The Secret Garden*. What's *The Secret Garden* about?

AG: It's an English children's book from around the turn of the century. It's about an orphaned girl who goes to live at her uncle's mysterious manor on the Yorkshire heath. She discovers that her uncle's son, her cousin, has been crippled from birth and locked away, and no one wants to talk about him. It turns out that the boy's mother died when he was born, and his father — a "poor hunchback" — was so grief-stricken that he abandoned his home and his son. Mary soon discovers the key to the secret garden that was lost when the mother died. She teaches her little cousin to walk, and becomes a revitalizing force for the household. The

book is objectionable on a great many levels from a contemporary perspective, but elements of the story appear in lots of children's tales. It has roots in fairy tales like "Sleeping Beauty," where a whole castle lies dormant after the princess's "death" until there's a rebirth. There are similarities to "Beauty and the Beast" as well, because the mother who died was a beautiful young girl, while her husband was hunchbacked (i.e., monstrous or beast-like). The garden coming to life also relates to the myth of Demeter and Persephone. I had a great time discovering all these interconnecting bits and pieces of mythical stories. I was amazed to find ancient tales about the marriage of a human woman to a not-quite-human bridegroom. The earliest were pre-Greek, yet remnants of them are apparently still acted out in folk rituals in some parts of the world. I hoped I could weave some nice seamless form out of all the tidbits I had unearthed. Eventually I realized that the only thing I could do was embrace the contradictions of these many stories and incorporate contradiction itself into the film. For instance, in the opening scene, the camera glides up a laneway toward a house as the voice-over describes Mary's approach to her new home. But gradually it becomes apparent that the voice is describing a different house than the one onscreen. Things like that happen repeatedly in the film.

MH: The film feels like a psychodrama in its use of surreal imagery, with M. always in bed, filled with dreams.

Mary Mary

AG: It focuses on the psyche, but I wouldn't call it a psychodrama exactly. As I understand it, psychodrama starts with an understanding of the mind as a cohesive but stratified whole, so while there is material that is not conscious, there's always a centre, a "self" that's fairly stable and acts as a central reference point. In *Mary Mary,* though, identity and self are much more troubled constructions. For instance, the film's protagonist, "M." or "Mary," is doubled in various ways. There's the old story about the "doppelgänger," that when you meet your double you disappear. And I think that's true to the extent that when the myth of our integrity as unique and separate beings is threatened it can seem that non-existence, annihilation even, is just a step away.

Nevertheless, I think the emotional appeal of the film is the lure which that deeper ultimate meaningfulness always seems to hold out. It's hypnotic. En-"trancing," even. You feel like you're discovering so many clues there must be a meaning, even if you don't know what it is. I suspect that's how we build our sense of a self anyway, from a surfeit of clues.

MH: Can you talk about the telephone calls? They run throughout the film as a recurring motif that disturbs M.'s sleeping solitude. The first one is from a guy, the second from an arts council, the third for a censorship rally, and then you call as director, or friend ...

AG: … Or who-knows-what, because M. turns the answering machine off before that caller has a chance to say anything much the audience can hear. The calls fill us in on aspects of M.'s life, but they also show how her identity is formed by people and events outside herself. And outside of the film, actually. I find the off-screen space of phone calls in movies really interesting because it is so utterly virtual. In most scenes it's unclear whether M. hears the calls or not. In fact, for most of the film, it seems as if nothing gets beneath her surface. It's like she has no interior. We see dirty dishes, but we never see her eat. The phone calls set up M.'s relationship with the world, but keep it distant at the same time. So when she finally picks up the phone, it's almost a shock. That scene is the first time the curtains in her room are open, so we can see something outside. It's the beginning of her movement away from her interior world.

MH: The scene where she watches television is strange because you use the music that started the film as the music that's supposedly coming from the TV. It's as if the film is starting over — that we'll again see all of the events leading up to this place on the couch. What is it that she's watching exactly?

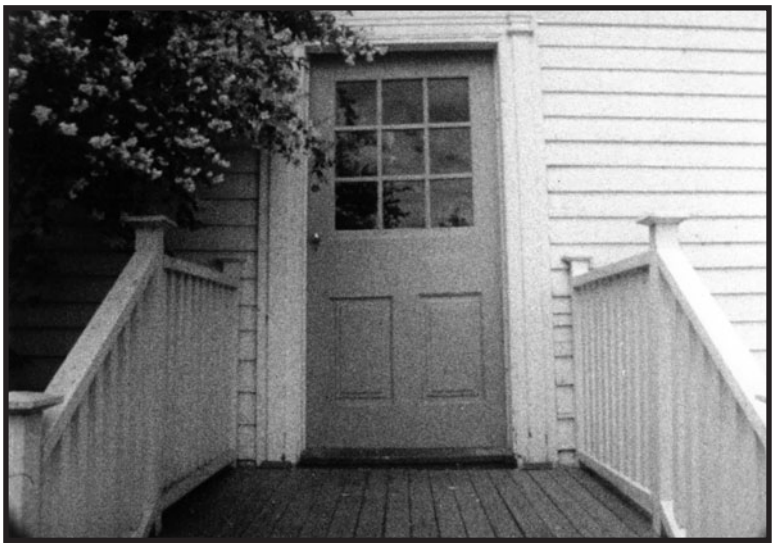
AG: Well, she turns on the TV, but she's looking at the floor. We can't see the screen and she's not looking at it. So it's like an empty space, more of that off-screen virtual space.

MH: Then she picks up the Polaroid camera and begins taking pictures of herself ...

AG: Once again there's a discontinuity, a gap. She's photographing herself in the dark, but she can't see the photographs or what she's photographing. We see her holding the camera. We see an approximation of the picture because of the flash. I intended it as a reminder that our place as viewers entails certain privileges, but also certain limitations.

MH: What does it mean when M. says, "Never dabble in autobiography unless you want a perfect world that perfectly excludes you"?

AG: One of the things the film tries to deal with is the urge to find perfection, original truth, the first and authentic instance of something. M. makes that remark. She's making a film about herself — presumably to find or show the truth about herself. But the more detailed and realistic or "perfect" any story becomes, the more it hides the mess and truth of its making, and the more it functions as a circumscribed world with its own rules — in other words, a world quite separate from the world it "represents."



Mary Mary

MH: At different points in the film, numbered lists of titles appear superimposed on the image. In several titles there's reference made to Indian mythologies and the relation of Native people to the land — and this seems to connect to the landscapes we see in the film that surround the house by the bay, the setting of the film. It also speaks of a relationship that is finished in a way, that's related to the mourning in the *Secret Garden* story now that the mother is gone. The Indians have also left their home, torn away from this land.

AG: "Place" and "space" are important themes in *Mary Mary*. M.'s house is in southeastern Ontario, and she tells the story of her great-great-great-grandfather, who was a settler. She also mentions the First Nations people who were there at the same time. I felt I couldn't discuss this specific place without talking about the histories attached to it. Again, there were stories behind the stories and I wanted to bring them forward.

All the quotes from First Nations sources are directed toward people of European descent, and are about European colonization and oppression of Native American cultures and societies. I didn't really use any Native myths per se. But it's interesting that you say that Native people have left their home. Because M. quotes the famous speech of the Duwamish chief Seattle at the signing of the Medicine Creek Treaty in Washington Territory in 1854. Chief Seattle was saying that his people were doomed now that their lands were lost and the reservations were being set up, but he also said that his people would never really leave this land they love, and even when the white man thinks they are all dead and gone they will still be present in all the places they used to travel and inhabit. One of the things he said was: "The dead are not powerless." It's an idea of a relationship to a place that's very different from the one I grew up with. My colonial heritage — the way non-Native North Americans tend to think — tends to treat a "place" as a commodity, a locus for the accumulation or representation of certain kinds of personal or corporate power. I wanted to suggest the value of recognizing a sense of space different from that colonial one. I used the quotations from Native spokespeople to get at these ideas, but the quotes represent a range of opinions rather than a homogeneous viewpoint. That was because I wanted that part of the film to remain unresolved. I wanted an audience to notice the question of land claims, for example, but I didn't want to put closure on the issue in terms of wrapping it up nicely with a bunch of pat answers. I thought it was better if people who saw my film were left thinking about the issues. The situation of land claims isn't solved yet in real life, and although I'm pretty clear about where my sympathies lie, I thought it would be false and less valuable to simply make another film that claims to have the answers for Native people — or for anyone else.

MH: How did *It Starts with a Whisper (25 min 1993)* begin?

AG: After *Mary Mary* I volunteered at the Native Women's Resource Centre for a while, helping with their newsletter. We were always running short of artwork, so I was frequently on the phone soliciting work from Native women artists. Shelley Niro was a great resource, always ready with small drawings we could use. I asked Maddy Harper, who ran the centre, if I could do an interview with Shelley for the newsletter and she said sure. So I went up to Brantford and Shelley and I really hit it off. Out of the blue she asked if I wanted to collaborate on a film and I said "Yup!" She wanted to make a film that would address 1992 — the 500th anniversary of Columbus reaching the New World. With funding deadlines looming, we fleshed out a story. It would be about a young girl and her aunts who go on a kind of pilgrimage to Niagara Falls on New Year's Eve. We received a bit of money and started building sets, making costumes and shooting backgrounds, still working on the

script. Shelley wanted to screen the film at midnight on the last day of 1992. I think it was about getting the last word in! That gave us just nine months to pull the whole thing together.

MH: Can you describe the film?

AG: It's about Shanna Sabbath, a seventeen-year-old Mohawk girl torn between traditional Native values and her need to come to terms with contemporary life — as represented by her miserable secretarial job in the city. She has three outrageous aunts who sometimes appear as "matriarchal clowns" or spirit guides. One of the aunts wins a weekend in a honeymoon suite in Niagara Falls. New Year's Eve is coming, so the aunts decide to take Shanna and make the trip to the Falls. Shanna is depressed, but her aunts are irrepressible. They poke fun at each other and at Shanna. What they are really doing is teaching through humour, trying to get Shanna not to take herself too seriously and to enjoy and appreciate life. When they get to the Falls, Shanna can't stand it any more and runs off. She encounters Elijah Harper in a dream. He symbolizes spiritual and political power. He tells her not to feel guilty about living her life, helping her put things in perspective. When she returns to her aunts she's changed; she's become one of them. Together Shanna and her aunts do a musical number in their hotel room and a little New Year's Eve ritual in front of the Falls. Then they watch as fireworks explode over the Falls and it's 1993.

It Starts with a Whisper

MH: How did you collaborate?

AG: *It Starts with a Whisper* was co-written, co-directed, co-produced, co-everything. It was a film about Shelley's experiences more than mine, but I had some film experience and she didn't at that point. I think we tried to respect each other's experience and listen to each other as much as we could. We never had any knock-down fights, although there were times when our different cultural backgrounds made it hard to understand each other. On the whole it was a great experience, and I'm happy with how the film turned out.

MH: The film makes a conscious effort to entertain.

AG: I guess the best example of that is the musical number in the hotel room. Shelley and I wrote the lyrics to a song called "I'm Pretty." It's a "he done me wrong" song, but it has a really strong political subtext. It starts out: "I'm Pretty, Yeah I'm Pretty, I'm pretty mad at you." But it was still fun and entertaining. The sequence was a parody of a music video, set in this schmaltzy hotel room, with the aunts in wild evening dresses and outrageous high heels. It was a big collaborative effort that was just a lot of fun, and I think it's fun for people to watch because of that. Shelley and I both felt that too many political films don't have a strong political effect. Shelley was particularly concerned that a lot of representations of Native people stress the depressing. But her attitude was that there's so much to celebrate, and many aspects of Native life have never been shown on film before. We were trying to be political by creating this celebration. I still think that's pretty important.

MH: What do you think about avant-garde film now?

AG: To me, the whole film-versus-art theme continues to be a mysterious phenomenon. There have been a few times when "experimental" film has overlapped quite substantially with visual art. In the 1920s for instance, and again in the 1970s with structural film. There was a big backlash against structural film that struck me as pretty illustrative of the differences between those two worlds. Structural film was accused of being co-opted by the world of cerebral, minimalist art — the colour-field painting crowd that was surrounded by lofty talk, big bucks, that kind of thing. A similar critique of that milieu was happening in the visual arts, which took the shift of direction in its stride. The Museum of Modern Art didn't close its doors, for example. Or the Art Gallery of Ontario. They just adjusted their curatorial directions slightly. And eventually all the anti-object art was co-opted (or incorporated), too. In experimental film, however, there was less accommodation, more purist beliefs. And big institutions for both art and film still continue to treat experimental film as a marginal practice.

But now we're in a more postmodern period, if you like, and divisions are breaking down all over the place. When I show my students really old films by Stan Brakhage or Kenneth Anger, they don't think they're outrageous at all (although they sometimes have trouble with films by Michael Snow). But many of the visual investigations those filmmakers were doing have been appropriated and even developed in mainstream media — like music videos and commercials. Almost all film now has at least one fuzzy edge

that blends with TV or video art and video technology. Even big-budget features use avant-garde techniques, and vice versa.

It's interesting to note the ways in which experimental film has remained oppositional. It's been taken up by lesbian and gay communities or different racial groups to express identities that have been suppressed. Sometimes films are avant-garde by default — just because their communities are small or marginalized. It doesn't necessarily mean the films are weird or inaccessible. They're just designed for specific communities, and I think that's great. So avant-garde film has kept its avant-gardeness. And of course it still gets accused of being elitist. Then there's the trend in visual art to show film or other projected-image work in a gallery setting. It seems unfortunate to me that there isn't more acknowledgement that the absence of that in the past was due to institutional policies, not to a lack of film that could qualify as art.

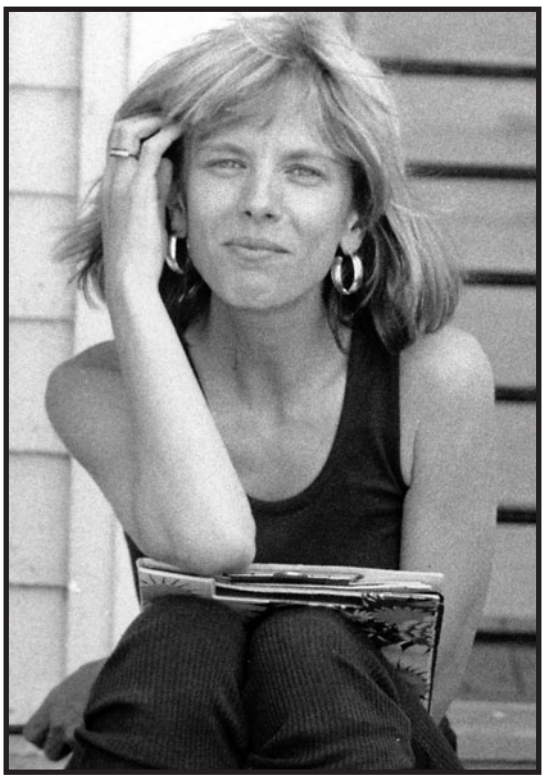
It Starts with a Whisper

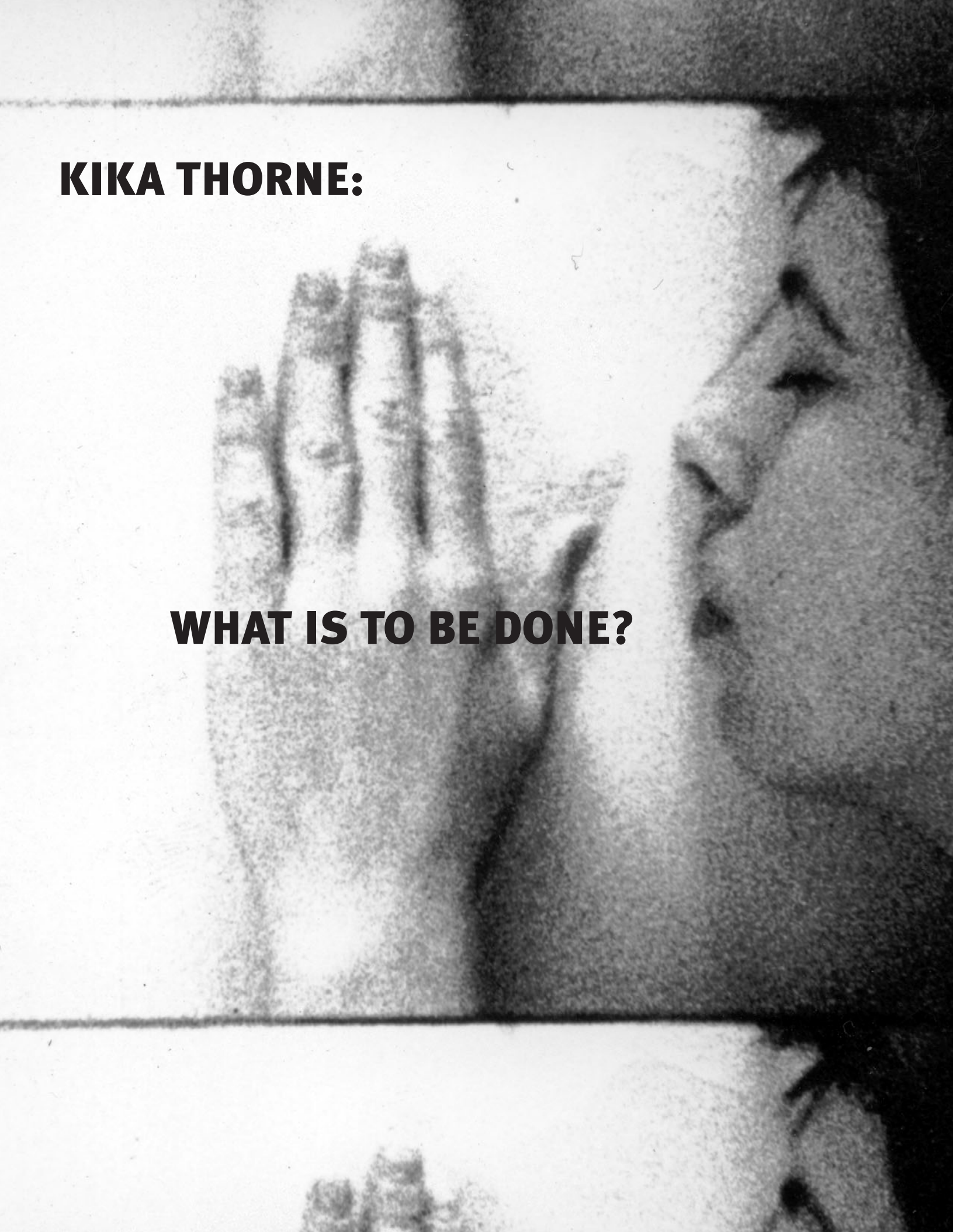
In answer to your question, I have to confess that I don't enjoy some of the avant-garde films I see, but I'm also compelled to defend what you call "fringe" film to those who dismiss it because it doesn't work the way "good" films are supposed to. It also irks me when people say a film is "experimental" — either seriously or as a joke — to mean that it's lousy. As though "bad" were synonymous with "avant-garde."

The unrelenting marginality makes me uncomfortable. I saw experimental art as heroic when I was younger and avant-gardeness as "leading the way." Maybe I miss those idealistic fantasies.

Anna Gronau Filmography

Maple Leaf Understory	10 min silent 1978
In-Camera Sessions	5 min super-8 1979
Wound Close	8 min super-8 1982
Aradia	2.5 min super-8 1982
Regards	31 min 1983
TOTO	2.5 min super-8 1984
Mary Mary	60 min 1989
It Starts with a Whisper (with Shelley Niro)	25 min 1993
Le Cristal se Venge	7 min 1996
Time Release Videos (with Robert Priest)	4 min 1998
Magic (work in progress)	4 min 2001





KIKA THORNE:

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

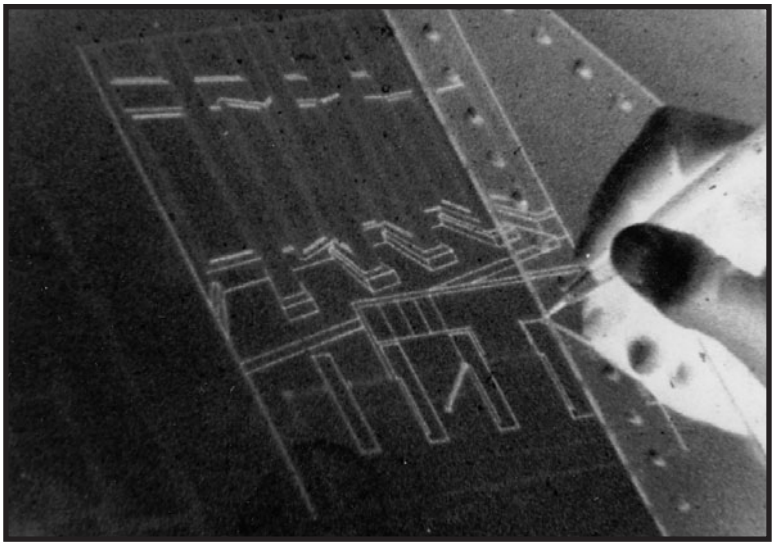
The work of Kika Thorne follows a trajectory from the private sphere to the public. Each of her films carries a diary address and arises from personal encounters, or as Kika describes it, "just hanging out." These casual, low-tech documents of the underclass come armed with a barbed politic, whether the sexy feminism of her early work or the address to urban homelessness in her more recent efforts.

While she has used a variety of low-fidelity methods, super-8 has been her most reliable companion, providing both portability and an accessibility of means. Whenever the need arises, the camera can be passed on to participants for their point of view, and its no-budget results serve as example to any hoping to commit their own dreams to emulsion. A thoughtful intimacy passes through these desiring machines as they demonstrate new kinds of pleasure, even as the unyielding pressures of capital seek to reshape the body politic, threatening the usefulness, even the existence, of fringe media.

MH: How shall we start?
KT: Women's voices are high-pitched so they can travel further to protect women from rape.
MH: Go on.
KT: The male and female voice are two different pictures, separated by pitch and vocal range. Often men can't hear women's voices at all. Sometimes women can't hear men because men are outside the range of relevance. I'd like to talk about the scream at the end of the Toronto Video Activists' Collective tape. Cops have chased down a homeless man and are busy laying a beating on him. The cameraperson finds them by accident; she's already seen too much, she wants to go home. And then, there they are in front of her, and she screams. That scream signals a level of concern not yet present in the viewer. It underlines the difference between how she witnesses and how we watch her bear witness. When you, as a viewer, recognize someone's real concern, it accelerates you into their space. In a very short time you move from voyeurism to engagement.
MH: Is that acceleration what you would call politics?
KT: It's engaged attention.
MH: If you engage your attention with a film showing dust falling off a wall for an hour, is that political, too?
KT: That's mind-numbing.
MH: Most imagine fringe film as a wall of dust.
KT: Most think of experimental film as confessionals with flickering difficulties attached. Dust falling from a wall is an art piece. It approaches sculpture. Meditation. Experimental film is more theatrical. So far as its politics go, all art is political. Some work is regressive, complicit with a neo-colonialist status quo. That's not to say that delicate forms of attention are inherently capitalist, not at all. The shift of attention those difficult works require opposes capitalism.
MH: Maybe attention could be thought of as a set of grappling hooks. The attention that being a consumer, or watching television, requires allows those hooks to become deeply embedded. Sometimes difficult work can slowly lift these hooks from their moorings and send their viewer somewhere else.
KT: A lot of fringe work is made alone, celebrating the solitude of an eccentric and hyper-individuated subjectivity. Unfortunately, this is exactly the state that capital would have us in.
MH: Let's talk about your latest vid.
KT: *The Up and the down (5.5 min video 2001)* is a didactic diptych about the Left and the Right. The left-hand screen shows footage from *Fighting to Win* by the Toronto Video Activists' Collective. It's a document of the June 15, 2000, riot at the Ontario Legislature in Toronto. The Ontario Coalition Against Poverty organized the event to protest the deaths of twenty-two homeless people, the loss of rent control and changes to the welfare system. The image starts with the protesters trying to get into the Legislature. They're met by riot police, who drive them off the public grounds and across the street. The cop violence worsens. You see six cops zeroing in on one protestor, beating her into the ground. The audio of the riot begins in silence and grows louder as the violence becomes more personal. When the images are at their most newsworthy you can't hear the sound, but as they become more subjective the sound asserts itself.

The right screen depicts a young, ambiguous, but potentially right-wing class. Two girls and a boy. They're just hanging out, playing and talking. Because of their dress and hair, they seem to be part of a counter-culture. Could these be cleaned-up images of the protesters on the other side of the screen? Or will these kids grow up to be website designers for the Royal Bank? There's no emotional centre in their interaction, because I incorrectly depict the Right as alienated. Meanwhile, the Left is still captivated by the energy of revolution; it can't let go of this romantic, violent vision of a society's transformation. The Right is insidious, collecting the culture of cool that comes out of the Left and transforming it into capital and allure. I wanted to create an experiment that would juxtapose these two kinds of political traps. The tape opens a space for dialogue. After it's over, once the tape is finished, that's when the real work begins.
MH: The tape also explores the power and politics that exist in intimate spaces.
KT: All of the scenes were improvised. When I was going through the rough-cut transcripts for *The Up and the down* there were 114 instances of Natasha speaking, 75 instances

of Jowita and 73 of Robin. It allowed me to track whose will won out. It showed me who was most attentive and engaged, but also who dominated. It's fascinating to observe methods of steering conversation, the way interruption is timed, and how stories are told. There's a great power in curiosity. It's a present, a gift. When someone's interested in you it's exciting. It's too easy to regard power as a negative force.



YOU = Architectural

MH: Can fringe work remodel this micropolitic, this place between people, effectively?
KT: I think the fringe is vulnerable in its co-optability. The way a Gariné Torossian film can become a rock video and then a corporate ad. It's a lewd transformation. It's a micro-version of the Einstein problem, how scientific research can lead to atrocity. Hans Haacke said, "Never develop a recognizable style." For me, the key is in the conceptual allegiance between form and content. You can't steal that because it only exists in a particular work.
MH: Do you feel your work re-presents moments from your personal life, your interactions with friends?
KT: It's not that I bring a camera with me everywhere I go, but that the trust we develop allows us to construct fictions. It brings us to the honesty required for me to manufacture a structural diagnosis of our relationship, which becomes the form of the film. *WORK (11 min video 1999)*, for example, features my friend Shary Boyle. Our relationship takes effort; the title is not incidental. Because it's a day in the life, it shows her working at the office, getting fired, talking with friends. There are ten scenes, each lasting a minute, shown in a succession of split-screens. It's about the work we do to make the work we love. With natural lighting, real people, two cameras, and long static takes, each double shot was made according to architectural constraints. After Shary agreed to play the focal role, (non-) actors were chosen from her circle of familiars. I cast according to intimacy. The strangers in the video, her boss and lover, are played by real strangers. Each take was about half an hour long, and I searched for the best minute from each scene. There are ten cuts in the video. Peaches (Merrill Nisker) composed beats in her bedroom while watching our video selections. Shary, Merrill, and I became friends. The day the tape was finished we went camping.
MH: How does power circulate in *WORK*?
KT: The most physical scenes, the singing and sex, are shared in a way that conversation isn't. Talking joins people here, but also keeps them apart. The real text is body language. Shary embodies an ideal that insists each moment be capitalized, she shows the transformation of daily life into a hyper production of meaning.
MH: Your direction of these scenes is fairly ambient.
KT: I'm almost absent. Directing is about casting, composition, and location. People have been chosen because of their familiarity with one another, and they're asked to talk on a certain subject. They're positioned according to the frame's geometry and then they talk. But when they're gassing around, that's usually best, after they've exhausted the possibilities of my direction and stop performing themselves.
MH: You've made a suite of works with Adrian Blackwell. Could you talk about those?
KT: Over a two-year period, Adrian and I participated in a series of collective actions that use architectural scale sculpture as a tool of intervention. These event/constructions operate in various ways, both as euphoric propositional structures and as criticism of the abject conditions of systemic homelessness.

During the 1996 Metro Days of Action, a two-day general strike in Toronto, the October Group installed a large inflatable structure over the air vents in front of City Hall. The 150-foot-long transparent tunnel bore a single sentence down each side. Shimmering on clear plastic, it read: "Have mercy, I cry, for the city, to entrust the streets to the greed of developers and to give them alone the right to build is to reduce life to no more than solitary confinement." The inflatable was a giant, noisy street toy referencing both public institution and temporary home to protest the erosion of our city. This was documented on super-8, then transferred to video to produce *October 25th + 26th, 1996 (8 min video 1996)*.

In our next action, the February Group placed sixty-six discarded mattresses on the plaza in front of Toronto City Hall. We stayed for twenty-four hours. The beds were found in late-night garbage explorations around Metro and arranged on the square in a loose matrix. They acted both as

a warning of the possible homelessness and migration a megacity could wreak and as a utopian structure that invited citizens to occupy the plaza. The mattress raft was a twenty-four-hour sculpture whose surface could be used to sit, run, bounce, or lounge on. Once again, we shot on super-8 and released on video. It's called *Mattress City (with Adrian Blackwell, 8 min video 1998)*.

The beds represent the neighbourhood, but they came from an individual relation. Someone slept here once. Lived here, loved here. Each bed represents a vote or two. It's important that they're stained. Even the AIDS quilt was pretty. These beds make a different kind of accusation. The bed is often a site of shame, and this most private of places was delivered to the town square.

When someone's interested in you it's exciting. It's too easy to regard power as a negative force.

In the spring, the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty asked a few artists to create individual memorials for the homeless men who had died in and around Allen Gardens, a park and conservatory in the downtown core. The April Group made a Sod Roll for Sean Keegan. Sean was a seventeen-year-old murdered in a parking garage by a john. In response to his death, we cut into the grass and rolled it back; the fresh earth vivid against the green, making a bed, a grave, a sleeping roll.

The political backdrop for these projects is the end of a thirty-year span of democratic liberalism in Canada, which developed housing co-ops, free healthcare, a welfare net, and an affordable education complex. Now, with the spectre of international economic competition, the system is under "reconstruction." The Ontario Provincial government, in an attempt to court multinational investment, has implemented a "Common Sense Revolution." This involves comprehensive cuts to all social programs, the end of rent control and public housing, and a muzzled local democratic process. The architectures we've been making in response argue that safe, affordable housing is a public responsibility, while simultaneously proposing new forms of engaging political space.

The October Group project was erected quickly, at night, without permission, and its short lifespan involved negotiation, civil disobedience, and solidarity with union groups. In February we purchased a permit to hold an action in this same public gathering space. We used the fear public officials shared about the impending municipal amalgamations to gain quick approvals for an unusual inhabitation of this symbolic space.

We have attempted to inscribe private spaces on the public realm. While clearly referring to "living on the street," these projects raise questions of political space. For most, the home is the last forum in which people feel they have control. It's also a stage where status quo modellings play out. The dialogue of domestic space must be made public if we have any hope of undermining conservative power structures.

We were interested in creating new forms of protest. Marching, placards, and speakers are too generic. One should be able to protest in as many forms as living (or dying) allows. This has reinvigorated a relationship between artists and the Left. I don't think community groups were fuelled by the avant-garde properties of our work, but they recognized the power of its media optics. And the energy was palpable, it's clearly visible in the tapes. One gets the sense of a living culture.

MH: Why make a film?

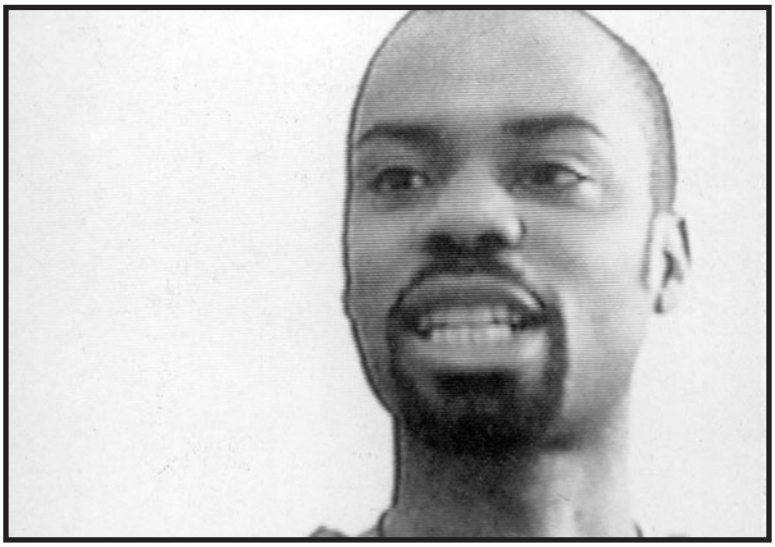
KT: The event is over but the problem remains. There was media coverage, but representations are fleeting and flawed and don't belong to us. When you can screen to only two hundred at a time, the work takes longer to circulate, but it gets talked about, and that talking sustains relevance.

October 25th + 26th, 1996

Mainstream media sound bites have a wide reach and a short lifespan. There's a different level of care in my making. It might be cruder, but there's more love and the fantasy that we can transfer euphoria to the audience. The event exists again onscreen. The audience participates again in their willingness to identify.

MH: Sometimes you show in art galleries, sometimes in festivals or co-ops. Which do you prefer?

KT: Artist-run centres pay better. The quality of attention that one brings to a gallery is appropriate for short media, which is often conceptually driven and rarely created for the purpose of mere entertainment.
MH: You don't find galleries elitist?
KT: Almost all fringe screenings are elitist. The hip-hop video artist Art Jones came up from Brooklyn, and it was embarrassing how few black people came to see his work at Pleasure Dome. Artists of colour don't come to Pleasure Dome unless they are filmmakers who live downtown.
MH: Aren't you preaching only to the converted?
KT: No. While most of the artists I know are politically astute, very few feel that their work should be political or used for political means. It's the taboo of didacticism. The fear of generating propaganda and, of course, sheer lack of interest.
MH: While your later work has taken on more overt political questioning, the first five years of your making developed a personal erotics. Do you feel that work is also


Whatever

political?
KT: Is it political to be a raunchy sexpot? Is it political to show your pussy to strangers? Some would say political, others pornographic. When I began making work, the only thing I could manipulate was my body. That's where I had to start.
MH: You've always made work on the cheap. Is that important?
KT: It's not a totalizing necessity, but it does allow me to communicate with younger makers and people who never thought they could afford to make anything. It's inspiring to see a fully developed practice, like Steve Reinke's for instance, that involves very little capital. Besides the effort, of course.

MH: Tell me about She-TV.
KT: It was a public-access cable-television show that ran from 1991 to 99. Women at the Maclean Hunter station were tired of the inequality of access, so we banded together to make television for women by women. My particular mandate was to promote a complete openness of format and genre, duration and production style, which could make experimental television possible. There was no shared aesthetic, but we were all feminists coming from a variety of cultural backgrounds. In the beginning, the collective was dominated by women who needed to shift from academic or journalist pursuits into television production. But by the end, fifty percent of the people involved were artists.

Since 1967, the CRTC demanded that in return for accessing Canadian airwaves, the cable companies would provide citizens with tools for "free speech" by creating production facilities open to anyone. These were used mostly by community groups. In the late sixties and early seventies, public-access TV was wildly eclectic. It featured Kent State from the protest lines, turtle racing, girls rating orgasm — nothing was too intimate or too political. There was an everyday feel soon suppressed because it too reliably provided documentation of dissent. In the ensuing years cable began to look like all the other channels. I became a public-access TV producer because of Paper Tiger TV, which broadcast activist resistance to the Gulf War. This material wasn't getting airtime on corporate media, which made it appear internationally that Americans were all in support of the war. This resurgence of political intensity brought a generation of practitioners into public space. While cable delivers only 8,000 viewers per program, we received multiple screenings and more audience than we could ever hope for at the local fringe joint.

In a 1992 anti-censorship symposium, dub poet Lillian Allen turned us on to the fact that the struggle for access to production and post-production facilities comes before the fight against censorship. It's easier to censor what hasn't been made. This is the most effective way to silence entire communities. I began to do interviews with Chris Poulsen, a sign-language instructor at the 519 Community Centre. He had grown up deaf, native, adopted, and gay. A complex set of identities. I thought he would be a good person to talk to about hearing. I also spoke with queer black activist poet Courtnay McFarlane, asking him to participate in an interview about talking and listening, though in the end both interviews turned around race. I made a tape that largely featured Chris but I had a problem shrinking lengthy interviews into sound bites, so I withdrew

it from circulation. The interview with Courtnay became *Whatever (22 min 1994)*. The central recurring close-up shows Courtnay talking about growing up black and gay. His recountings are collaged with avant white-girl doings — mirror make-ups, girl-on-girl sex in the forest, advertising.

The tape is about listening and identification. It's about the moment you hear someone narrating their experience and how you imagine yourself in exactly the same place. Only it's impossible to cross racial lines, to truly empathize or understand what it must have been like in that kindergarten class. I wanted to implicate myself in his story, to show how someone like myself, who has a desire to unwrite the colonial program of my own heritage, still misbehaves. My own act, the act of listening, is not enough. But it's a beginning.
MH: I understood the girl collage material to be a kind of active listening and response to what Courtnay was saying.
KT: Yes, but at same time, it's more images of white people. How does that help? Basically I'm eliminating his brown face with my white images in my act of concern and identification.
MH: This is the problematic the tape poses to its audience?
KT: Yes. That the invisibility of whiteness was obliterating the view. Again.
MH: You met up with one of my fave writers, Kathy Acker, and turned that conversation into a video.
KT: *Kathy Acker in School (8 min video 1997)* is comprised of two pieces. The backdrop is an earlier film of mine called *School (4 min 1995)*. It shows headmistress Barbra Fişch disciplining the bad student, played by me. She ties a shoe on my face and spanks me while Donna Summer sings "Love to Love You Baby." In the centre of *School* is a cut-out rectangle in the shape of the capital letter I. Kathy Acker is visible inside the I. The original 45-minute interview is placed inside the four-minute film *School* without any cutting, using only the fast-forward or rewind buttons. *Kathy Acker in School* is eight minutes long. It's an homage to the queen of cutting. She talks about conceptual art, digging herself out of hell, bourgeois narrative, and using myth to make another kind of life possible.

Margaret Christakos at *Mix Magazine* asked me to interview Kathy Acker. I was to show her the work I'd made that was influenced by her. She was watching *Sister* and *School,* and I was so nervous that every thirty seconds I took another swig, so by the time the interview started I was completely loaded. I asked about her relation to the New York underground cinema, wanting to uncover this moment of her formative life, knowing she'd been born out of that film scene.

> Thorne: I guess what I find alluring and disappointing is this idea that in the sixties you had complete disdain for the St. Mark's Poetry Group and the cult of subjective truth. Instead you played with a quantity of "I"'s. You juxtaposed fake diary with real diary. You stole. There was a formal commitment in your work that set you apart from the "storytellers," and now you are moving into terrain that could be described as indistinguishable from theirs ...
>
> Acker: I reached a point in my life where I was just sick of living in a black hole, only descending to the bottom. I said it's finally time to do something else: to ascend. To make structures. So I became less interested in this business of tearing everything apart, of saying no, of being angry — and more interested in how I could make. I started looking for ways that didn't reek of a world I disliked ... [Jack Smith] told me he wanted to have a dome in North Africa, a huge dome, and everyone in the world would come to it, a Pleasure Dome, and they'd tell him what they wanted most in the world and then he'd make what they wanted into a film ... (from *Kathy Acker in School*)

When Acker was just fourteen she started dating P. Adams Sitney. She would meet up with him and Jack Smith and Brakhage wearing her school uniform. And, of course, I'm dressed in that same uniform in the tape. Neither a whore nor a student. School uniforms are so easy. It's a place where we can all begin that's the same. It has the appeal and dystopian qualities of any uniform, but unlike most it prolongs the fantasy of childhood. I still wear them today. I was interested in how all these 30-year-old bisexual dykes were revisiting and appropriating earlier moments of their lives, the queer adolescence they didn't get to have, at least not in such a gregarious and hypersexualized manner. But don't you think school uniforms are just plain charming? They're at once respectful and dirty. When my parents left me with my horrible grandmother, she packed me off to an expensive boarding school, but she could only afford one term. She pulled me out and sent me to a slightly cheaper day school, and then the following term to an even more low-rent situation. Each term found me in a new school with a pricy new uniform, until at last, over a span of four years, I wound up in a state school. I have a vast collection of uniforms as a result.

But don't you think school uniforms are just plain charming? They're at once respectful and dirty.

MH: The cinema at times is also like a school, a school for beauty.
KT: Money is easier to target than beauty, poverty is easier to talk about than ugliness. There's nothing one can do about the way one's face is genetically constructed. But why are we so attracted to youth? Are we repulsed by our own decay? There's a series of platitudes that surround the acceptance of dying. Which is what aging is.
MH: You're showing young and beautiful folks in your

recent work.
KT: I remember Helen Lee saying that beautiful people look normal in cinema. I was appalled. But when I wanted to create images that look like they might co-exist with the mainstream, I felt I had to use beautiful people.
MH: The images that surround us take up inside. It's not just out there on the screen but inside me. I want to stay young, but my body is telling another story. It's showing me how to grow old.
KT: Part of what cinema does is celebrate the relation between light and young, clear skin. It doesn't have a lot of sympathy for saggy old cellulite. It's one thing to show your funny-looking body when it's fresh and lithe, but when you get older it takes insane courage. Indie media culture has no Jo Spence, the British photographic artist who made auto-portraits after her mastectomy. And she's very large. What's crucial is that Spence is middle-aged. Her body is not particularly unusual, but the only time we get to see this is in medical photography or freak shows. The British seem to be more open to that form of beauty than North Americans.

I was trembling when I saw *Nitrate Kisses* by Barbara Hammer. That's a successful film about aging because you see that love and sex are possible in the end. These two women have done a lot of living, and they lie together on the sunlit floor, finger fucking. You can see their wrinkles, the texture of their skin, their cunts, and it's not so frightening. It's sensational. I've never seen anything like that between a heterosexual couple. The fearlessness of lesbian culture laid the groundwork for those images to be created and received. "Female heterosexual" is not a subculture. Perhaps it needs to borrow some strategies, to make films about sex and flesh and health and death after thirty-five. To explode fear and the quiet retreat of the aging female into a million displays of desire and decay.

School

MH: There are moments of queer cinema, like the Hammer film you mentioned, that not only narrate different lives, but narrate them differently. The place of that difference is also a way of saying no, of refusing the occupation of pictures from Command Central. These pictures insist that politics is too important to be left to politicians. Sometimes these marginal pictures, seen by so few, are a very quiet no, barely a whisper. But in this collection of whispers, sometimes, it may be possible to find a way to speak again that most beautiful word in the English language. To invent the word yes for ourselves. To say yes.

Kika Thorne Film/Videography

The Discovery of Canada	4 min b/w video 1990
two (with Mike Hoolboom)	8 min b/w 1990
YOU=Architectural	11 min video 1991
Division	3 min b/w 1991
Fashion	3 min b/w 1992
Whatever	22 min video 1994
Suspicious© (with Kelly O'Brien)	6 min video 1995
School	4 min b/w 1995
Sister	11 min video 1995
Sheet Sculpture (with Adrian Blackwell)	8 min video 1996
October 25th + 26th, 1996	8 min b/w 1996
Intraduction	3 min video 1997
Kathy Acker In School	8 min video 1997
Petscene (a she-tv Collective Production)	27 min video 1998
Yearbook	3 min video 1998
Mattress City (with Adrian Blackwell)	8 min video 1998
Handslap (made with Daniel Borins)	8 min video 1999
WORK	11 min video 1999
Super Spirograph (with Barry Isenor)	5 min video 2000
The Up + the down	5.5 mins video 2001