

American documentary video : subject to change : a video exhibition

Co-organized by the American Federation of Arts

and the Museum of Modern Art, guest curator:

Deirdre Boyle

Date

1988

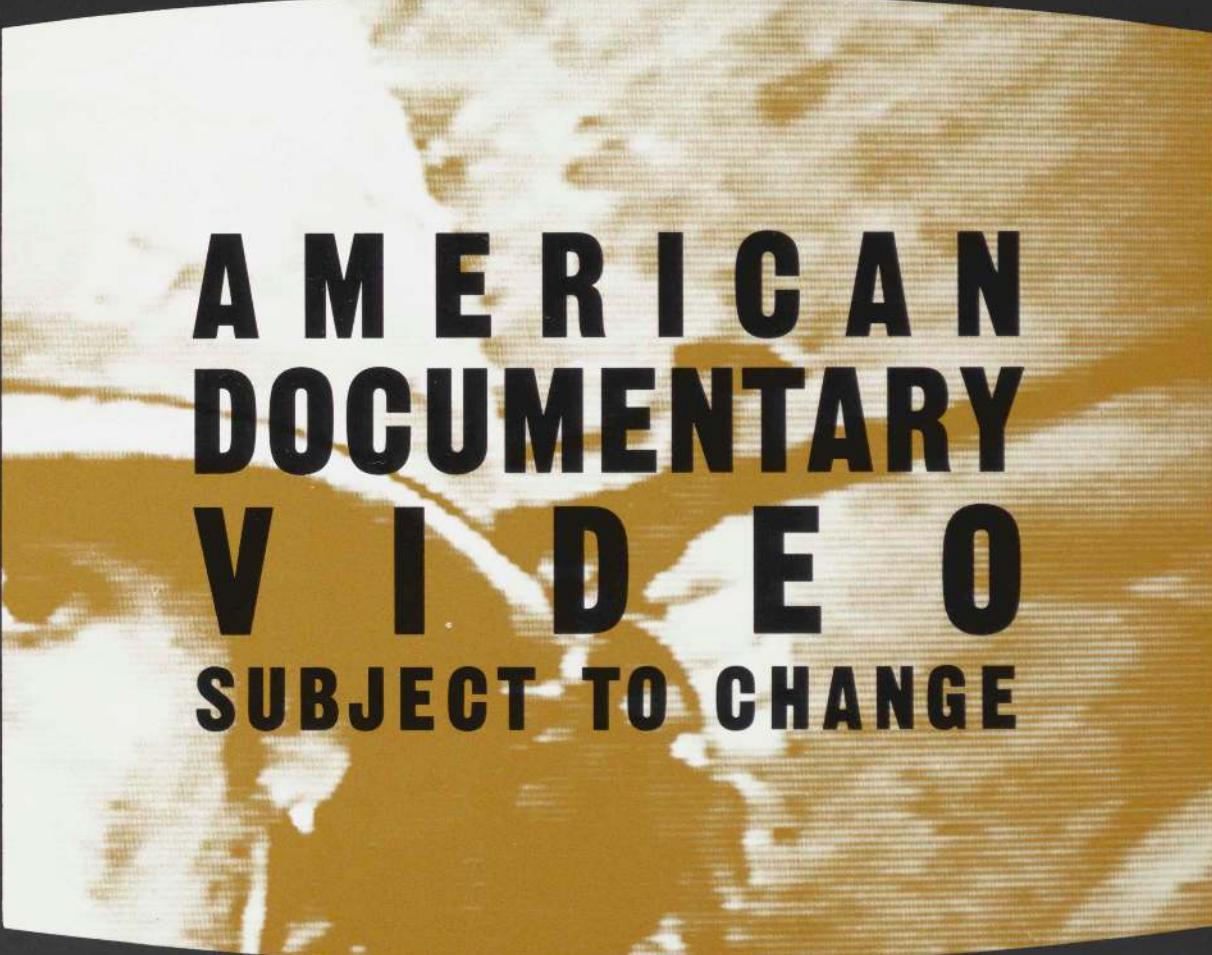
Publisher

American Federation of Arts

Exhibition URL

www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/2139

The Museum of Modern Art's exhibition history—from our founding in 1929 to the present—is available online. It includes exhibition catalogues, primary documents, installation views, and an index of participating artists.



**A M E R I C A N
D O C U M E N T A R Y
V I D E O
S U B J E C T T O C H A N G E**

A Video Exhibition Co-organized by The American Federation of Arts and The Museum of Modern Art

Guest Curator: Deirdre Boyle

Archive
MoMA
1505

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The American Federation of Arts and The Museum of Modern Art have co-organized *American Documentary Video: Subject to Change*, the first traveling exhibition devoted exclusively to the accomplishments of the American documentary video movement, from the introduction of portable video equipment in 1965 to the present. We owe a special debt of gratitude to the many videomakers represented in this exhibition for their cooperation and participation.

It is the intention of this project to give greater exposure to the work of our country's most innovative video documentarians, through a comprehensive exhibition presented to a wide-ranging audience. Following its premiere at The Museum of Modern Art from November 17, 1988 to January 10, 1989, *American Documentary Video* will travel throughout the United States and abroad under AFA auspices.

We wish to acknowledge, first and foremost, the participation of guest curator Deirdre Boyle, who wrote the introductory essay and program notes for this publication, and selected titles for the traveling exhibition. For over a decade, Ms. Boyle has been a leading teacher, critic, and scholar in the field of independent video. We are grateful to her for the extraordinary energy and critical acumen she has brought to this project.

We would like to express our thanks to Barbara London, Assistant Curator of Video, Department of Film, The Museum of Modern Art, and Sam McElfresh, Film/Video Program Director, the American Federation of Arts, who together coordinated the exhibition with enthusiasm and commitment to important and ongoing directions in the

field. We wish to acknowledge our appreciation to the AFA Film/Video Advisory Committee for its invaluable support during the formative stages of the project. Thanks are also extended to AFA Film/Video Program staff members Tom Smith, Assistant Director, for his important role in organizing and fundraising for this project, as well as Chuck Vassallo for securing video loans, and Bill O'Donnell for coordinating publication of these program notes. The notes benefited from Steven Schoenfeld and Ruth Santer's handsome design and Janet Cutler's insightful editing. Special thanks go to Lisa Ann Weiss for her negotiation of the contract agreements underlying this venture and Alon Salzman for coordinating production of the exhibition and circulation copies of the show.

We are most grateful to the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, Sony Corporation of America and J. Walter Thompson, USA for their generous support of the project, and to the many museums, universities and media arts centers that will be presenting the exhibition in the coming years.

Mary Lea Bandy
Director, Department of Film
The Museum of Modern Art

Myrna Smoot
Director
The American Federation of Arts

The concepts explored by this exhibition could not have been developed were it not for the generous support I received to research the history of documentary video, and so I wish to express my gratitude to the New York State Council on the Arts, the Port Washington Public Library, the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, Oxford University Press, and Yaddo, the Millay Colony for the Arts, and the MacDowell Colony. This exhibition was first presented, in a somewhat different form, at the Long Beach Museum of Art and later exhibited in Barcelona at the Institute of North American Studies, and I am grateful to Kathy Huffman, Connie Fitzsimons, Antoni Mercader and John Zvereff for their early interest in this work.

American Documentary Video: Subject to Change opened November 17, 1988 at The Museum of Modern Art, and I am particularly grateful to Barbara London, Assistant

Curator of Video, and Mary Lea Bandy, Director of the Department of Film, for their support in mounting this exhibition. Following its premiere at the Museum, the exhibition will travel—in 10-program and 5-program versions—under the auspices of the American Federation of Arts. I am grateful to Sam McElfresh of the AFA for his patience and perseverance in making this tour possible. Special thanks go to my lawyers Christopher Hunter and George W. MacDonald, Jr. for excellent advice and service beyond the call.

Last but not least, I appreciate the kind cooperation of all the producers and distributors whose tapes are included in this exhibition.

Deirdre Boyle
Guest Curator

This video exhibition and accompanying publications are supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, Sony Corporation of America, and J. Walter Thompson, USA.

AMERICAN DOCUMENTARY VIDEO SUBJECT TO CHANGE

The first portable video equipment arrived in the United States in 1965, an auspicious moment. During the Sixties the role of the artist as individualist and alienated hero was eclipsed by a resurgence of interest in the artist's social responsibility; and as works of art became politically and socially engaged, their aesthetic and communication functions blurred. Everyone with a "portapak" was a video artist, nearly everyone made documentary tapes. Artists, journalists, filmmakers, students, and self-styled members of the "Now" generation were all attracted to this new medium without history, hierarchy or strictures.

In the mid-Sixties, video offered seemingly endless possibilities as a revolutionary tool. Just as the invention of movable type in the 15th century made books portable and private, so video could do the same for the television image; and just as the development of photocopying and offset printing helped launch the Sixties' alternative press movement, so video could spark an alternative television movement.

From the outset, most video pioneers adopted a critical relationship to broadcast television, determined to use video to create an alternative to what they saw as a slickly civilized, aesthetically bankrupt, and commercially corrupt medium. For those who grew up along with TV, video presented an opportunity to challenge the "boob tube's" authority, to replace television's often negative images of youthful protest and rebellion with their own values and televisual reality. Influenced by visionaries like Marshall McLuhan and Buckminster Fuller, they plotted a utopian program to change the structure of information in America.

Hundreds of hours of documentary tapes were shot in the late Sixties and early Seventies by such early video groups as the Videofreex, Raindance, Global Village, Optic Nerve, Video Free America, and TTVT. Their subjects were varied: tapes on New Left polemics, the drama of political confrontation, alternative lifestyles, and erotica. Some critics faulted underground video for being frequently infantile but also praised it for conveying an immediacy rare in establishment TV. Observers outside the video scene often found this early work guilty of inconsistent technical quality. The underground's response was to concede there was a loss in technical quality when compared to broadcast. Hollywood had also been fixated on glossy productions until the French "New Wave" filmmakers in the early Sixties created a demand for the grainy quality of *cinéma vérité*, jumpcuts,

and hand-held camera shots. Like the *vérité* filmmakers ten years before them, video pioneers were forging a new style. With the publication in 1971 of *Guerrilla Television* by Michael Shamberg and Raindance Corporation, the movement acquired a label and a manifesto.

Instinctively, these "video guerrillas" knew how to turn the limits of their technology into its virtues. Without editing equipment, they developed an unedited, real-time video aesthetic: process, not product, was the clarion call. Tripods—with their fixed viewpoints—were out; hand-held fluidity was in. Since video—unlike film—could be recorded and immediately viewed, producers could replay tapes to their subjects, and this "instant feedback" influenced production styles and afforded an enhanced sense of involvement for all.

Video guerrillas were opposed to the authoritarian voice-of-God narrator (ordained by the first film documentaries with sound and later institutionalized by television). Video documentarists eschewed narration, substituting unconventional interviewers or snappy graphics to provide context without seeming to condescend. Some challenged the so-called objectivity of television's documentary journalism (with its superficial "on-the-one-hand, on-the-other-hand" balancing of issues), forthrightly proclaiming their viewpoints. Distinguishing themselves from network reporters who stood loftily above the crowds for their reports, video guerrillas proudly announced they were shooting from *within* the crowd, subjective and involved.

Video documentarists invented their own hybrid forms, borrowing some from New Journalists like Tom Wolfe and Hunter Thompson, who wrote facts like fiction, and from *cinéma vérité* filmmakers, who let their cameras roll in the quest for an illusive unmediated reality. Some, like TTVT and Ant Farm, used humor bordering on satire as a method for puncturing the puffed-up egos of publicity and power seekers. Everywhere, a sense of freshness, vigor, and experimentation prevailed as the possibilities for creating new wrinkles in the old documentary form were tested.

During the Seventies, sharp divisions arose between artists and documentarists, with each producing work with different strategies and aimed at different audiences and channels of distribution. Federal rules mandating local origination cable programming and public access channels promised a new era of democratic programming for community video producers. When advances in video technology—color "portapaks," electronic editing equipment, and the introduc-

tion of the stand-alone time-base corrector—made it possible to broadcast portable video, many opted to produce documentaries for viewing on cable, public, and even network television—a factor that curtailed not only the once experimental approach to the documentary video form but also the possibility of creating a radical video alternative to broadcast TV. By the end of the Seventies, guerrilla television had evolved into a reform movement to improve broadcast TV by example.

During portable video's first decade, most productions were made collectively. By the end of the Seventies, teams and individuals replaced the collectives, a result of changing funding patterns, the end of an era of collectivism, and a creative need felt by many individuals to branch out and develop their own styles and subjects. By the Eighties, as the political climate grew increasingly conservative, new strategies had to be invented so that independent videomakers could continue to address controversial subjects without driving away their sources of funding and distribution. Challenged to discover new forms for their work and inspired by advances in production and post-production equipment, video documentarists veered in two directions, responding to the low- and high-tech options and funding available. Some opted for a stripped down, minimalist style of portraiture and storytelling, while others incorporated the aesthetic strategies of video art to produce personal essays and autobiographies that pushed the limits of the documentary genre. This overlapping of the narrower definitions of art and documentary not only served to bridge the chasm between the two but reanimated the video documentary in otherwise inhospitable times.

Video's arrival coincided with the rise of the women's movement. While video remained a light-weight, non-hierarchical, and low-status medium, women were free to move into the forefront as video producers, and their concerns represented a distinctive voice in early video work. As the technology acquired increased weight, cost, and concomitant status in the Seventies, it became increasingly difficult for women to compete for central production roles. But the development of new consumer video formats in the Eighties has made it possible for women and other disenfranchised minorities to seize the medium for alternative views. Although a variety of ethnic and racial minorities discovered video during its first decade, it was not until the Eighties that they came to power and prominence, producing works that resonated with the distinctive character of their own diverse perspectives.

The widespread diffusion of video technology throughout the Seventies meant that media production need not be restricted to large urban cultural centers like New York, San Francisco or Los Angeles. A broad assortment of regional documentary styles and subjects flourished during the Seventies, cultivated at regional video centers such as University Community Video in Minneapolis and the New Orleans Video Access Center. By the Eighties, new trends fostering

media artists of national stature superceded earlier support for regional subjects, styles, and documentary producers.

The last twenty-odd years have provided a considerable range of issues for enterprising documentarists to cover: Vietnam—from antiwar protests to the plight of the forgotten vet; the rise of cult religions; new roles for women; the growing crime rate and overburdened justice system; job-related diseases; war in the third world; criticism of the media; AIDS; and disarmament, to name only a few. Whether the subject of a documentary was a Presidential nominating convention or the oral tradition of the Hopi nation, video documentaries have invariably celebrated ordinary people. Their producers turned away from established spokespersons to get the viewpoint of simple people who believed they deserved to have a say about what happened to their world. This focus on people who had been systematically excluded from access to the mass media has been a fundamental concern of independents, themselves outsiders to mainstream media. In time, independent video's novel presentation of average folks was transformed by network television into mockumentaries like "Real People" and "That's Incredible," a stark reminder that television absorbs innovation and repels reform.

What happened to the video pioneers' often disappointed dreams of changing the television medium was as much influenced by the technological juggernaut as by the shifting political and funding climates, the failures of cable and public television at providing access to independent producers, and the new ambitions of maturing revolutionaries. Their work changed from the rough-and-ready reality of early "street tapes" to the polished, independent "minidoc" for prime-time TV news.

But a new generation of video documentarists is reviving the early goals of using video to decentralize television so that ordinary people have a voice of their own. A revival of guerrilla tactics and idealism has been sparked, in part, by the widespread availability of consumer video equipment and by a younger generation of video makers caught up in the issues of a newer age, yet tutored in the lessons of video's past. Like early video, their work is often rough and uneven, but it also possesses an energy and vitality born of commitment and idealism. Foregoing broadcast television and mass audiences for their work—a trap that derailed many video revolutionaries in the past—video's newest generation opts for closed-circuit distribution and public access exposure to local audiences. The successful syndication of community video programs over public access cable systems promises a new era for alternative documentary productions as the gauntlet is passed from one generation to the next.

With each new decade the video documentary has been subject to change, altering America's notions about art, documentary, and television.

Deirdre Boyle
Guest Curator

PROGRAM NOTES

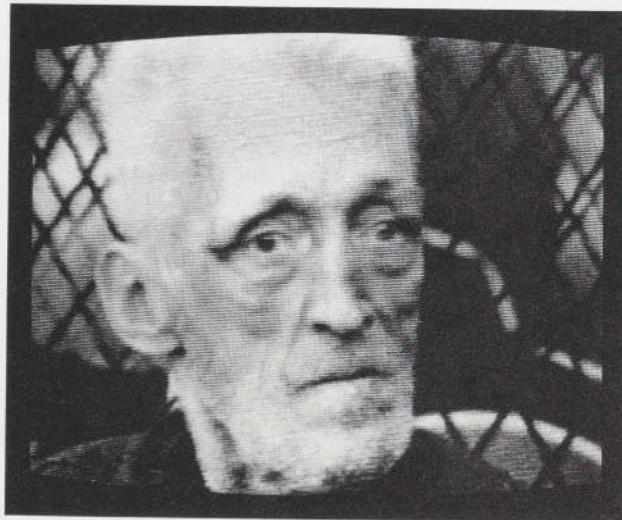
The ten programs presented in this retrospective are arranged in rough chronological order to demonstrate some of the different stages in documentary video's formal development, to explore some of the major themes that have preoccupied producers, and to showcase some enduring documentary classics.

Program One introduces the work of video's Wonder Bread Years, highlighting the "street tape" with its process-oriented style and unconventional—often improbable—subjects. Program Two features a single-channel version of a multichannel installation (*THE CONTINUING STORY OF CAREL AND FERD*) that marked a unique—if shortlived—contribution of video to the documentary form and presents the cornerstone of guerrilla video style (*FOUR MORE YEARS*). Program Three showcases work produced by women intent on storming a different establishment and inventing new strategies for reinterpreting and analyzing their media images. Program Four features two of the first made-for-public television documentaries, suggesting some of the directions which many such tapes would follow. Pro-

gram Five highlights alternative video's constant critique of the media (*MEDIA BURN*) and video's *vérité* style (*THE POLICE TAPES*).

Program Six includes award-winning documentaries produced by prominent regional community video centers of the Seventies. Program Seven features two streams of Eighties' work: the high-tech marriage of video art and documentary (*META MAYAN II* and *SMOTHERING DREAMS*) and low-tech, low-budget minimalist portraiture (*FRANK: A VIETNAM VETERAN*). Program Eight showcases tapes by minority producers who have introduced new voices and concerns to the documentary video form. Program Nine gathers works by seasoned masters of video documentary, illustrating the mature, crossover forms of independent documentaries designed for commercial and public television in the Eighties. Finally, Program Ten reveals the resurgence of guerrilla television's inventiveness, flinty critical edge, and dedication to decentralized media in video's newest generation of documentary revolutionaries.

PROGRAM ONE



From *BUM* (1965) by Les Levine Photo by Kira Perov

BUM

Les Levine

1965, b/w, 46 minutes
Lent by the artist

Levine was one of the first artists to acquire portable video equipment when it became available in 1965, and with it he made one of the first "street tapes." *BUM* consists of a series of timeless interviews with the winos and derelicts who live on New York's skid row, the Bowery. Edited largely in the camera, the tape has the rough,

rambling shape of video before the advent of electronic editing. The unstructured, episodic nature of these "found" interviews—alternately dramatic, poignant, and funny—captures the street life of helpless men and the loose and easy aesthetic of early video documentaries. (Technical problems necessitated editing the original 50 minute CV tape.)

THE RAYS

Raindance Corporation: Frank Gillette, Paul Ryan, and Michael Shamborg

1970, b/w, 23 minutes
Lent by Electronic Arts Intermix

Produced by members of guerrilla television's "think tank," Raindance Corporation, this tape is a classic portrait of "stoned video freaks" theorizing about the pervasiveness and invasiveness of the television system they hoped to undermine. The title is a double play on words and refers to the location—Point Reyes, California—and the phenomenon of broadcast TV signal interference distorting the video picture. Raindance's Frank Gillette, Paul Ryan and Michael Shamborg take turns wielding the camera and delivering McLuhanesque musings on the potentials of this new medium.

MAYDAY REALTIME

David Cort

1971, b/w, 60 minutes
Lent by Electronic Arts Intermix

One of the earliest uses of portable video was to document the social and political movements of the late Sixties, from "love-ins" to antiwar demonstrations. *MAYDAY REALTIME* has a bit of both. David Cort, a founding member of the Videofreex—one of the best-known early video collectives—took his "portapak" to Washington, DC, to record his impressions of the 1971 May Day antiwar rally. His

tape is a period piece, a haphazard "happening" of a documentary, shot out of the front seat of a car prowling about Washington before and during the demonstration. It expresses the gritty reality of confusion, instant comradeship, and often shrill desperation of the antiwar years, a time of high purpose that often culminated in "getting high." Leaning out of the car, Cort shouts warnings to protesters and engages passers-by in casual interviews about what

is going on. Once the action has heated up, the scene shifts abruptly to a bucolic landscape where hippie women and children are skipping stones across a stream. The closing moments of abrupt, random camera play shot by a child seem to call for a return to simplicity and innocence, rounding out the romantic vision that underlies the work and its era.

PROGRAM T W O

THE CONTINUING STORY OF CAREL AND FERD

Arthur Ginsberg and Video Free America

1972-75, b/w and color, 60 minutes

Lent by Electronic Arts Intermix

When THE CONTINUING STORY OF CAREL AND FERD was first presented in 1972, it was billed as an "underground video documentary soap opera—a closed-circuit, multiple-image, videotape novel about pornography, sexual identities, the institution of marriage, and the effect of living too close to an electronic medium." This improbable chronicle of the marriage between a porn star and a bisexual junkie was originally designed as a multi-channel installation, a live theatrical event that incorporated cameras on the audience and the operators, as well as edited tapes with visual variations on the main narrative line. These sources were mixed together and edited live onto 12 monitors, a uniquely video version of the "happenings" of the era. Critically acclaimed in New York and San Francisco, CAREL AND FERD was later updated and edited into a single-channel tape and broadcast in 1975 in WNET/13's celebrated series "Video & Television Review." The single-channel version is shown here.

FOUR MORE YEARS

Top Value Television

1972, b/w, 60 minutes

Lent by Electronic Arts Intermix

Top Value Television (TVT) was an ad hoc group of "video freaks" assembled by Michael Shamberg, co-author of *Guerrilla Television*, to cover the 1972 political conventions for cable television. Their view of the 30th Republican National Convention, FOUR MORE YEARS, made video history, providing national viewers with an iconoclastic, alternative vision of the American political process and the media that cover it. Instead of pointing their cameras at the podium, TVT's crew of 19 threaded its way through delegate caucuses, Young Republican rallies, cocktail parties, antiwar dem-



From FOUR MORE YEARS (1972) by Top Value Television. Photo by Kira Perov

onstrations, and the frenzy of the convention floor, capturing the hysteria of zealots while entertaining us with the foibles of politicians, press, and camp followers alike. With a style loosely modeled on New Journalism and dedicated to making facts as vivid and entertaining as fiction, TVT used a sharp sense of irony to puncture many a puffed-up ego. These self-proclaimed video guerrillas caught establishment superstars off guard with nonthreatening, low-tech equipment that offered entry to people and places that network cameramen, burdened with the heavy equipment and seriousness of commercial TV, never thought of trying.

PROGRAM THREE

TATTOO

Susan Milano

1972, b/w, 28 minutes

Lent by the artist

Susan Milano, organizer of the first Women's Video Festival in New

York, also produced guerrilla television, but she—like many other women who flocked to the accessible, nonthreatening video medium—defined guerrilla activity in feminist terms. In TATTOO, Milano reveals the intricate process of tattooing and debunks the macho image associated with it. She explores what tattoos mean in the lives of a tattooed lady and a male tattoo artist: for the retired

circus performer; tattooing offered a means of personal liberation from the confines of small-town life; for the working-class tattoo artist, it offered an acceptable medium to pursue his artistic abilities and fascination with bodily adornment. Gently exploding misconceptions about this ancient and honorable art form, Milano's finely crafted tape breaks down sexual stereotypes and presents a freak as a female role model.



From AMA L'UOMO TUO (ALWAYS LOVE YOUR MAN) (1974) by Cara DeVito Photo by Kira Perov

FIFTY WONDERFUL YEARS

Optic Nerve: Lynn Adler, Sherrie Rabinowitz, and Bill Bradbury

1973, b/w, 27 minutes

Lent by Electronic Arts Intermix

This behind-the-scenes view of the Miss California Beauty Pageant follows the contestants during the week-long event up to the final moment when the winner is announced. Optic Nerve, a San Francisco-based video collective, adopted a *vérité* approach for its first major tape. A seemingly nonjudgmental stance veils a point of view that asks viewers to consider the demeaning nature of the pageant's policies and the images of women it celebrates. Lynn Adler and Sherrie Rabinowitz accomplish this, not by ridiculing the enthusiastic contestants, but by probing the event organizers—the judges, chaperones, past winners—for their views on the pageant. Surprised by the fine quality of their half-inch video production, public TV station KQED broadcast the documentary locally in San Francisco.

AMA L'UOMO TUO (ALWAYS LOVE YOUR MAN)

Cara DeVito

1974, b/w & color, 20 minutes

Lent by Electronic Arts Intermix

In this revealing, intimate portrait of her Italian grandmother, DeVito presents Adeline Lejudas through her daily life while focusing on a heart-to-heart conversation about her 50-year marriage, climaxing with the details of the forced abortion that nearly killed her. Adeline's deeply ironic, parting comment to her granddaughter—"Always love your man, no matter what"—expresses the code by which she lived and her own acceptance of it. Made during a time of increasing interest in family roots and growing feminist consciousness about the psychological and sexual abuse of women, this award-winning tape offers a complex view of one woman and the social structure that molded her.

PROGRAM FOUR

THE LORD OF THE UNIVERSE

Top Value Television

1974, b/w & color, 60 minutes

Lent by Electronic Arts Intermix

The first independent video documentary produced for national broadcast on public television, THE LORD OF THE UNIVERSE was an exposé of the Guru Maharaj Ji and his gathering at the Houston Astrodome. Millenium '73 was billed by the guru's followers as "the central event in human history," and TTVT covered the event and its preparations, interviewing guards, "premies," mahatmas, and the "Holy Family" with Sixties' radicals Abbie Hoffman and Rennie Davis functioning as pro and con spokesmen. Amid the neon lights, rock music, and Hollywood-style religious production, TTVT followed one devotee in quest of the "knowledge" that is later derided by "ex-premies" disillusioned by the materialism underpinning the cult. Much in evidence is TTVT's inimitable style—creative use of graphics, live music, and those wide-angle lens shots—used here effectively to convey the desperation of faded flower children seeking a leader.

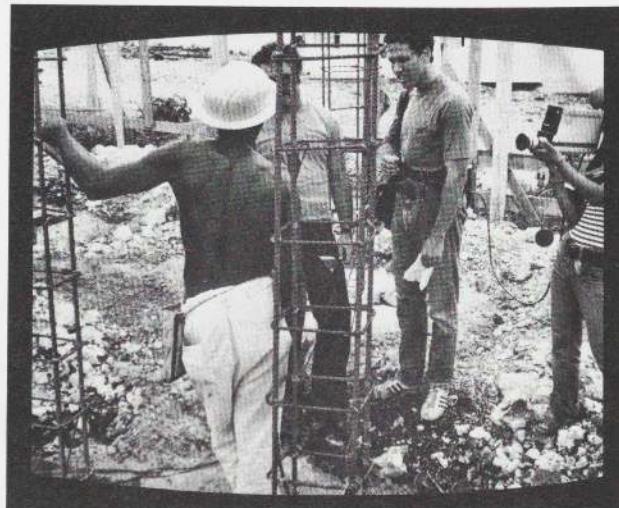
CUBA: THE PEOPLE

Downtown Community Television Center:

Jon Alpert, Keiko Tsuno, and Yoko Maruyama

1974, color, 58 minutes

Lent by Downtown Community Television Center



From CUBA: THE PEOPLE (1974) by Downtown Community Television Center

In this critically-acclaimed, fast-paced tour of life in Cuba, Downtown Community Television (DCTV) invented its well-known style of video journalism. Jon Alpert, Keiko Tsuno, and Yoko Maruyama toured the mountains, countryside, and capital of Cuba, talking with people about life before and after the revolution. Interviews with farmers, fishermen, musicians, construction and factory workers, doctors, teachers, students, religious leaders, journalists, and children are linked by Alpert's narration, full of irony, enthusiasm, and frequent surprise. They point up improvements since the revolution—universal education, new industry, enlightened care of the mentally

ill—without glossing over some deficits of life under socialism: food and clothing are rationed and public housing lags far behind demand. In sum, the Cubans come across as a happy people who find life better under Fidel. Public television agreed to air this tape, the first half-inch, all-color videotape to be broadcast nationally, but not without a wrap-around with Harrison Salisbury to stave off possible criticism. This affords viewers an unexpected and amusing contrast between old-style TV journalism and DCTV's direct, informal, advocacy style.

PROGRAM FIVE



From MEDIA BURN (1975) by Ant Farm

THE POLICE TAPES
Alan and Susan Raymond
1976, b/w, 90 minutes
Lent by the artists

Using the new low-light video cameras, noted filmmakers Alan and Susan Raymond elaborated upon their *cinéma vérité* past ("An American Family") to create a highly visible video *vérité* classic. THE

POLICE TAPES is a disturbing view of ghetto crime as seen by the policemen of the 44th Precinct in the South Bronx, better known as Fort Apache. The tape is structured around the nightly patrols, focusing on ten real-life dramas and the leadership of an above-average commanding officer. Episodes include: a street gang spoiling for a fight; an argument between neighbors; a bloody murder in a social club; a rape; an elderly woman charged with whacking her daughter with an axe; and the investigation of a brutal knifing. Interspersed with these real-life dramas, Commander Bouza explains police psychology and his own frustration at "commanding an army of occupation in the ghetto." Distilled from over 40 hours of videotapes, THE POLICE TAPES was produced for public television and then reedited into an hour-long version for ABC. It later served as the model for the popular drama series, "Hill Street Blues," and the short-lived television series, "The Street."

MEDIA BURN
Ant Farm
1975, color, 25 minutes
Lent by Electronic Arts Intermix

Media criticism at its most imaginative, this tape documents an art and culture "happening" (A.K.A. "media event") sponsored by the San Francisco art and architecture group, Ant Farm. Two men drive a souped-up 1959 Cadillac Eldorado through a pyramid of burning television sets in an effort to help Americans kick the TV habit. By contrasting commercial TV's coverage of "Media Burn" with their own, Ant Farm highlights the media's role in staging events as news. Turning TV conventions upside down, MEDIA BURN parodies the news, Sixties' space launches, Presidential speeches, and America's fascination with destruction, power, and information control.

PROGRAM SIX

A COMMON MAN'S COURAGE
**University Community Video: Jim Mulligan
and John DeGraaf**
1977, b/w, 30 minutes
Lent by Intermedia Arts Minnesota

A COMMON MAN'S COURAGE is a portrait of John Toussaint Bernard, an immigrant laborer who became a U.S. senator in the Thirties, a Capra-esque hero of and for the people. Though in no way experimental in form—with a voice-over narrator borrowed from conventional television documentaries—this oral history of the char-

ismatic Bernard and his populist, progressive causes is a fine example of the award-winning portable video journalism produced by University Community Video during the Seventies. Selected as best local public TV program in 1977 by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, A COMMON MAN'S COURAGE aired as part of the "Changing Channels" series on Minneapolis' KTCA-TV. Broadcast from 1974 to 1978, "Changing Channels" was one of the first independently-produced video documentary series for public television with features on local issues and cultural affairs produced by students and community activists.

THE CLARKS

New Orleans Video Access Center:

Andy Kolker and Louis Alvarez

1978, color, 30 minutes
Lent by the artists

Over the course of two months, Andy Kolker and Louis Alvarez documented the everyday lives of Mary Louise Clark and her family of ten in the St. Thomas housing project in New Orleans. Mrs. Clark is on welfare, separated from her husband and unable to work for health reasons, yet she manages to keep her family together in the face of unemployment and poverty, making the best of the situation. This provocative and sensitive vérité study was part of a documentary series, "Being Poor in New Orleans," broadcast on the city's commercial independent TV station, WGNO, and produced by the New Orleans Video Access Center, a hub of community video activity during the Seventies and still in existence today.

HEALTHCARE: YOUR MONEY OR YOUR LIFE

Downtown Community Television Center:

Jon Alpert, Keiko Tsuno, Karen Ranucci, and Victor Sanchez

1977, b/w, 58 minutes
Lent by Downtown Community Television Center

This devastating analysis of the disparity in health care for the rich and poor was shot at two neighboring New York City hospitals: Kings County Hospital and Downstate Medical Center. A prime example of DCTV's investigative style and community video



From HEALTHCARE: YOUR MONEY OR YOUR LIFE (1977) by Downtown Community Television Center

activism, the tape opens with proclamations by U.S. presidents that health care is a right in this country; by the time the tape ends, viewers will seriously question whether it is a right or a privilege. Vérité footage is matched with a tightly woven narration which provides background information on each hospital while pointing up the major health issues in the country. DCTV explores the underlying political issues that perpetuate inequity, pressing the case not through interviews with bureaucrats but by seeking out the stories and opinions of the people affected: the poor, the sick, and the frightened, as well as the beleaguered hospital personnel who try against dramatic odds to serve them. By presenting a mosaic of stories of ordinary human beings, DCTV offers otherwise mute and hopeless people a voice to protest against their health care options—or lack of them.

PROGRAM SEVEN

META MAYAN II

Edin Velez

1981, color, 20 minutes
Lent by Electronic Arts Intermix

In this nonlinear, poetic documentary, Edin Velez accentuates the natural rhythms of the mountain Indians of northern Guatemala to underline the depth of an ancient culture in conflict with the hostile outside world. Threading images of the four elements through the tape like the brightly colored yarns in a native embroidery, Velez fashions a striking visual equivalent for the complex interplay of forces at work. An American news broadcast of fighting by leftist peasants is heard as a woman walks down a country road; the droning voice violates the quiet and announces the danger surrounding her. She stares at the camera, and her arrested gaze mingles suspicion, veiled anger, and grudging curiosity. Her slow-motion passage becomes an emblem of the Indian's plight: like her, they are suspended in time and space, vulnerable to external forces over which they have little control.

SMOTHERING DREAMS

Dan Reeves

1981, color, 23 minutes
Lent by Electronic Arts Intermix

In his searing recollection of war, Reeves recreates an ambush on the Cua Viet River in Vietnam in 1969 which has haunted him ever since. Weaving together childhood dreams of military glory with adult nightmares of gruesome death, Reeves' autobiographical essay is a cathartic reenactment, a burning antiwar statement, and a devastating analysis of the mass media's role in inculcating violence and aggression from childhood onward. The final scene of a child wandering amid the havoc of bodies lying glassy-eyed in a swamp is an image of hope as well as warning, sending one back to memories of "the six o'clock war," but stripped of media-perpetuated myths of glory.



From META MAYAN II (1981) by Edin Velez Photo by Kira Perov

FRANK: A VIETNAM VETERAN

Fred Simon and Vince Canzoneri

1981, b/w, 52 minutes

Lent by Fanlight Productions, Boston

Frank is one of 700,000 Vietnam veterans suffering post-traumatic stress syndrome. Hearing him tell the story of his life before, during, and especially after his years of combat is to accompany a man on a journey through hell. A brilliant storyteller, Frank captures the immediacy of his past through vivid anecdotes and painful insights, holding viewers enthralled by a brutal but human story that makes APOCALYPSE NOW seem like a Disney fantasy. It is the relentlessly compelling account of what it is like to love killing, only to live long enough to regret the bloody deeds. Simon's video style—utterly concentrated on the person talking—would, in the hands of a lesser artist, result in a banal "talking head," but Simon's compelling need to watch the lips move and see the messages in the eyes and in the facial expressions yields a forceful portrait.

PROGRAM EIGHT

GOTTA MAKE THIS JOURNEY: SWEET HONEY IN THE ROCK

Michelle Parkerson

1983, color, 58 minutes

Lent by the artist

This concert portrait of the radical black women's singing group, Sweet Honey in the Rock, centers on their ninth anniversary concert. Michelle Parkerson uses a deceptively simple narrative structure that masks a formal elegance as she interweaves cameo portraits of current performers with concert numbers that highlight each singer and her role in the group. Rhythmically punctuating the tape are statements by novelist Alice Walker, black activist Angela Davis, and feminist folk singer Holly Near which put Sweet Honey's contribution to social justice and American musical history into sharp focus.

ITAM HAKIM HOPIIT (WE SOMEONE, THE HOPI)

Victor Masayesva, Jr.

1984, color, 60 minutes

Lent by the artist

Masayesva's exquisite photography of the natural landscapes of Arizona poetically evokes the history of the Hopi people. Ross Macaya, one of the last male members of the Bow Clan, spins his stories for a rapt audience of little boys, weaving his own personal history with a version of the Hopi Emergence story and an account of the Pueblo Revolt of 1680. Masayesva slips effortlessly from realism to surrealism, colorizing images or speeding up actions, visually creating a mythic dimension that invites one to experience a different, Hopi sense of time, place, and meaning. Adapting state-of-the-art video techniques to serve his age-old oral tradition and culture, Masayesva preserves his people's heritage for them; by translating these eloquent, often poignant stories, Masayesva produces a bridge for outsiders to better understand and appreciate the Hopi worldview.

PROGRAM NINE

PICK UP YOUR FEET: THE DOUBLE DUTCH SHOW

Skip Blumberg

1981, color, 29 minutes

Lent by Electronic Arts Intermix

Chronicling the Eighth Annual World Invitational Double Dutch

Jump Rope Championship held in New York City, the tape focuses on four of the most popular teams in the event: the Fantastic Four, the DD Tigers, the Jumping Joints, and the Dynamos. Intercut with sequences from the championship meet are background interviews with coaches and team members and a behind-the-scenes view of practice sessions. PICK UP YOUR FEET is about the love, sweat,

and tears of competition—shed over victory as well as defeat. Skip Blumberg won an Emmy for this tape, which admirably demonstrates the intimacy and zest of the video cameraman-interviewer, a style Blumberg developed while working with such video groups as the Videofreex, Media Bus, TTV, Image Union, Videopolis, and Paper Tiger Television.

THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS **Julie Gustafson and John Reilly**

1983, color, 60 minutes

Lent by the artists

THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS is probably the most complex documentary video narrative to emerge in the Eighties. Intertwined are the lives of seven individuals who share a common link: prison. It's not just an actual prison but a metaphoric one which locks them into mental restraints as chaffing as iron chains. Gustafson poses hard, thought-provoking questions about the value of human life and the problems of love and loyalty in marriage. She examines what the pursuit of happiness means to George and Ida Petsock, the superintendent of the Pennsylvania State Prison and his wife; to two lifers and one man's would-be wife; and to Molly Rush, the Catholic peace activist, and her husband, Bill. All the players in this moving

drama are driven by their visions of a meaningful life, one that involves not only their own happiness but that of others.

HARD METALS DISEASE

Jon Alpert

1985-87, color, 52 minutes

Lent by Downtown Community Television Center

Produced originally as an investigative series for NBC's "The Today Show," the Emmy-award-winning HARD METALS DISEASE is a fine example of portable video's one-man, cameraman-interviewer style. Alpert's investigative journalism—more spontaneous than his earlier public TV documentaries, although no less directed—has a hard-hitting, even prosecutorial edge. He makes his point of view clear and persuasive, acting as a catalytic agent and frequent reformer. Here, Alpert reports on cobalt workers suffering from debilitating disease, following them as they defend their rights to adequate compensation for their work-related illnesses and as they try to warn unsuspecting Mexican workers of the dangers they also face. An update, produced two years after the original report, offers devastating evidence of the horrors suffered by afflicted workers.

PROGRAM TEN

HERB SCHILLER READS THE NEW YORK TIMES— 712 PAGES OF WASTE: THE SUNDAY TIMES

Paper Tiger Television

1981, b/w and color, 28 minutes

Lent by Paper Tiger Television

The weekly program "Paper Tiger Television" tackles the communications industry much as David tackled Goliath: with public access cable as the sling, and outspoken media critics furnishing the ammunition, it routinely topples the giants of the information industry. Herbert Schiller, outspoken media critic and author, helped producer DeeDee Halleck launch the new series in 1981 with his six-part, razor-sharp analysis of the *New York Times*. With this tape, Schiller established the series' inimitable low-tech style and high standards for witty, incisive media criticism informed by knowledge of the media's corporate structures. Since Schiller's acclaimed premiere series, "Paper Tiger Television"—now syndicated to cable systems around the country—has presented over 140 programs that cover not only American but foreign journals and television systems.

DISARMAMENT VIDEO SURVEY **Disarmament Video Survey Collective**

1982, color, 30 minutes

Lent by the artists

On June 12, 1982 a rally in support of the United Nations Conference on Disarmament was held in New York City. As a part of that demonstration 300 independent video producers collaborated to record over 3,000 interviews with people around the world about their views on disarmament. Each interview had a standard wide-angle, head-and-shoulder shot—no internal editing of any statement was allowed. From those 30 hours of tape, eight hour-long compila-

tions were made and shown in New York City and other locations prior to the rally. DISARMAMENT VIDEO SURVEY is a half-hour excerpt from this massive undertaking. Taped when disarmament was the world's most discussed public policy issue, the "survey" reveals video at its grass-roots best, turning a frequently passive medium into an active one, a forum for an exchange of ideas and debate. Putting a human face on statistics, the "survey" goes beyond confirming them to provide the vivid presence lacking in signatures on petitions and percentages in opinion polls. Emerging from a tradition of political video begun in the late Sixties, it suggested the best impulse of guerrilla television—to decentralize TV as a medium of and by the people—is still alive.

DOCTORS, LIARS, AND WOMEN: AIDS ACTIVISTS SAY NO TO COSMO

Jean Carlomusto and Maria Maggenti

1988, color, 30 minutes

Lent by the artists

Outraged by the controversial January, 1988 article on AIDS in *Cosmopolitan* magazine, AIDS activists Jean Carlomusto and Maria Maggenti documented efforts to protest misinformation on the disease's spread to heterosexual women. DOCTORS, LIARS, AND WOMEN was produced for "Living With AIDS," a weekly cable access program in New York. Combining off-screen clips from TV talk shows like "Nightline" and "The Donahue Show" with their own coverage of demonstrations and interviews with AIDS activists, the producers explored how to organize a protest and document the opposition they met from mainstream media. Employing home video equipment as well as broadcast video, Carlomusto and Maggenti used strategies pioneered by early video guerrillas to disarm their subjects, thus continuing to assert the revolutionary potential of the video medium.

THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF ARTS FILM/VIDEO PROGRAM

Founded in 1909, the American Federation of Arts (AFA) is a national not-for-profit museum service organization. The largest and most comprehensive visual arts organization in the country, the AFA aims to broaden the American public's knowledge and appreciation of historical and contemporary art through the organization of traveling fine arts and media arts exhibitions. The AFA also makes available a number of special museum services, ranging from management training to reduced-rate programs in fine arts insurance and transportation of art.

The AFA's film/video offerings are unique both in their breadth and diversity. Guided by a National Advisory Committee composed of museum and media arts center directors, curators, educators, artists, librarians, and trustees, the AFA originates important exhibitions in many areas of the media arts, often collaborating with museums to ensure national tours for their most ambitious film/video series.

Since 1976, the AFA has assembled film exhibitions from the broad areas of "film as art" (animation, experimental narrative, lyrical documentary, abstract film) and "films on art" (documentaries on the lives and work of artists and on historical and contemporary art movements). These traveling programs are presented at educational and cultural institutions, accompanied by catalogs and program notes, press materials, stills and posters, and public symposia. The scholarship for each project is provided by a curator expert in

media studies. AFA staff, working with the curator, develop the scale, scope, and thematic content of each circulating exhibition and administer all aspects of its organization and travel. In 1983, the AFA began organizing and traveling video as well as film exhibitions. Today, *American Documentary Video: Subject to Change*, *New Video: Japan*, *Revising Romance: New Feminist Video* and the *1987 Whitney Biennial Video Exhibition* all tour under AFA auspices.

The AFA Film/Video Program is also a prime acquisition source of high-quality prints by film and video artists for media study collections. And the AFA makes available for rental a growing library of award-winning art documentary titles under its Group Booking program.

AFA offers an Exhibition Program, a fine arts insurance program (ART SURE), discount freight (AIRGO ART) and shipping (VANGO ART) programs, an annual publications design competition, educational institutes and workshops, publications, and other services designed to benefit art museums. The AFA also administers the Museum Management Institute, a program of the J. Paul Getty Trust.

The American Federation of Arts Film/Video Program is supported in part with public funds from the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York State Council on the Arts.

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART VIDEO PROGRAM

The Museum's involvement with video began in 1968, when two videotapes by Nam June Paik were shown in the exhibition *The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age*. International in scope, the ongoing video exhibition program was begun in 1974, followed shortly by the "Video Viewpoints" lecture series. The Museum has been developing a video collection, which to date includes over 650 titles by

independent and broadcast producers. In 1987 the Museum organized and presented a major exhibition featuring the installations and videotapes of Bill Viola.

The Museum's Video Program is supported by the Sony Corporation of America, and receives public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Inquiries are invited from institutions interested in presenting *American Documentary Video: Subject to Change* or purchasing individual videotapes from the exhibition. Institutions may also present additional AFA film/video exhibitions, schedule fine arts exhibitions, or add additional film/video titles to their holdings. For information, please contact:

The American Federation of Arts
Film/Video Program
41 East 65 Street
New York, NY 10021
(212) 988-7700
TELEFAX # (212) 861-2487

To obtain information about other services, please contact:

The American Federation of Arts
270 Sutter Street
San Francisco, CA 94108
(415) 392-9222
TELEFAX # (415) 392-9225

All videotapes are 3/4" NTSC U-matic cassettes.

Copyright © 1988 by Deirdre Boyle

Published by the American Federation of Arts in conjunction with *American Documentary Video: Subject to Change*, a traveling exhibition co-organized by the American Federation of Arts and The Museum of Modern Art, which premiered at The Museum of Modern Art November 17, 1988–January 10, 1989.

Designed by Steven Schoenfelder Design
Typography by Graphic Technology, Inc.
Printed by Conceptual Litho

Front and back cover:
From SMOTHERING DREAMS
by Dan Reeves
Photo by Kira Perov



