

VIDEO POLITICS

EARLY FEMINIST PROJECTS

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Historically, women have had a difficult relation to facts. Scientifically gathered information has often been interpreted as proof of women's social, psychological, and physical inferiority, or the data collectors have ignored us entirely. At the same time, realist or documentary representations, which depend on a factual base, have predictably maintained the same bias. Perhaps because social realism, documentary, posits a correspondence with truth, this has also been the form chosen for many contemporary feminists' critiques of the status quo and for attempts to counter old oppressive patterns. These feminist documentaries generally rely on established codes of realism, but employ them to create new social meanings. As such, the works are direct descendants of the nineteenth-century fusion of social realist art and scientific socialist philosophies (Marxism, *et. al.*), and more recently, the radical left-wing cinema and photography of the '20s and the '30s.² For feminist artists, then, making documentary films, photographs, and now videotapes (not to mention realist paintings, theater, and all types of literary realism) usually proposes a redefinition of "reality" by asserting the validity of women's existence and experiences, or by challenging accepted ideas about those experiences, or by a combination of both strategies.³

This article is limited to a discussion of feminist video documentaries in the U.S. in an attempt to narrow a potentially vast subject. This is not an arbitrary choice. It is based on the coincidence of two important political and cultural phenomena: the renaissance of the feminist movement and the proliferation of alternative, progressive media in the late '60s. Among other effects, this overlap (not to be confused with a causal relationship à la McLuhan) led to the involvement of a number of women in video production and in the video groups which emerged throughout the U.S. in the early '70s. During this period several women's video collectives formed⁴ and an annual women's video festival was organized,⁵ all this in addition to various women video artists working more or less individually. Although the tapes produced by these women are not uniform in any sense, many reflect feminist concerns and documentaries prevail.

The four video tapes I have chosen to represent the genre of feminist video documentaries for the purposes of this analysis are works which have variously affected my thinking about political documentary, but I do not intend to valorize these four tapes as masterpieces. Indeed, one of my main theses is that they are tentative examples of the convergence of a popular political movement, a form of cultural production and distribution, and an aesthetic approach. Collectively, they belong to a genre generally neglected by video historians and critics and unknown to many feminist historians and critics. It is a genre now virtually in eclipse but one, I would argue, which has hardly been exhausted. First, however, without regressing much beyond 1968, let me sketch some of the relevant political, technical, and aesthetic influences which shaped this genre and these four tapes.

When relatively low-cost portable video equipment (\$1,500-2,000 for portable recorder, black and white camera, and a monitor) became widely available in the U.S. in the late '60s, portapak and light-weight cameras were quickly assimilated as tools of the "counterculture." The annals of these early years of independent video are filled with optimistic rhetoric on the revolutionary potential of alternative television. For example, Michael Shambert, a propagandist for what he called "guerrilla television," borrowed language from the New Left vocabulary: "Survival in an information environment demands information tools ... [There is] potential in Guerrilla Television [as] an information infrastructure for Media America, a grassroots network of indigenous media activity."⁶ These projections for the future of video, afterwards seriously modified by experience and a shrinking economy, were sometimes colored by entrepreneurial ambitions, but were more often founded on genuine if naive visions of democratic and decentralized communications networks. The names which various early video groups gave themselves is indicative: Video Free America, People's Video Theater, Videofreex, Global Village, Media Access Center, etc. All revolutionary allusions aside, however, the prominent figures

among the first generation of video activists were almost all white, middle-class, and male, with most women, blacks, Latinos, Asian-Americans, etc. playing supporting roles.⁷

When independent video made its debut, media-consciousness was extremely high. The politically engaged arm of the alternative television movement set about recording events and issues of the day: anti-war organizing, prison reform, rock music, Black Panthers, Native American activists, ecology, and women's liberation. The tapes which resulted borrowed heavily from two different traditions: television journalism and cinema vérité. These politically committed documentarians hoped to give attention to subjects and viewpoints which felt commercial television ignored or opposed. Cinema vérité, U.S. style,⁸ provided an aesthetic model for many of these tapes since this form allowed personal, emotional elements to structure presentations of social reality. These documentarians preferred the economic advantage of video as compared to 16mm film, defending this choice with aesthetic arguments for the enhanced intimacy of the small-screen image. The chief political claims of these tapemakers, however, hinged on potential systems for video distribution. Community viewing centers, the public television network (PBS) and its affiliated stations, public access channels on cable TV, even communications satellites, promised decentralization and an audience for independent video. Some projects, most notably the National Film Board of Canada's Challenge for Change, were practical experiments in community-based media production where the process of making tapes and films was integrated with other programs for community self-definition.⁹ Most media activists in the U.S. lacked the generous financial support of a government agency like the Film Board (or compensatory fundraising skills) and had to settle for more modest community invol-

FROM THE "POWER" SECTION OF POLITICS OF INTIMACY (1972-73), BY JULIE GUSTAFSON.

I WAS 17 WHEN I MET HIM, AND I COME FROM A FAMILY THAT'S VERY STRICT. MY MOTHER NEVER LET ME DO ANYTHING. THE BIGGEST THING TO ME WAS TO TURN HIM ON.... WE WENT TO THE BEACH ONCE AND, BOY, DID HE GET—OH, WOW, IT'S INCREDIBLE—HE GOT HOT, HOT, HOT. AND THERE WAS NOTHING HE COULD DO, AND MY DEFENSE ON HIM, TO KEEP HIM FROM DOING ANYTHING WAS, "MY MOTHER KNOWS WHERE I AM..."

DURING MEZOLITHIC TIMES, BEFORE CIVILIZATION BEGAN THE WOMEN WOULD HAVE BEEN MUCH FREER. THEY WOULD HAVE BEEN MUCH MORE SEXUALLY AVAILABLE.... HOWEVER, WITH THE ONSET OF ANIMAL HUSBANDRY... AND THE ONSET OF AGRICULTURE WHICH REQUIRED SETTLED HOMES AND THE PRESENCE OF MANY CHILDREN... IT BECAME NECESSARY FOR LAWS OF INHERITANCE TO COME INTO BEING AND WOMEN'S SEXUAL ACTIVITY HAD TO BE CURTAILED.

IT'S IMPORTANT FOR ME TO HAVE SEXUAL SATISFACTION, BUT I THINK THAT I'D MUCH RATHER MAKE SURE THAT MY HUSBAND HAS SEXUAL SATISFACTION, YOU KNOW. IN OTHER WORDS, IF HE IS REACHING THE POINT OF COMING TO A CLIMAX, I DON'T WANT TO SAY, "WAIT," AND PUT HIM OFF. I WANT TO SEE MY HUSBAND SEXUALLY SATISFIED.

ments. With a few exceptions, their revolutionary fervor faded by the late '70s, when the complexities of financing community media centers became apparent and the "so simple anyone can do it"¹⁰ approach resulted in hours of out-of-focus, badly lit, and not very compelling tapes. At that point many tapemakers either changed tactics or abandoned the field.

Against this scenario of energetic video activity in the early and mid-'70s let me superimpose the more familiar recent history of the women's liberation movement. As issues like women's health, sexuality, marriage, rape and other kinds of physical abuse, gender roles, etc. were claimed and defined as feminist concerns, books, periodicals, films, and a steady stream of videotapes appeared within the feminist arena. The tapes which I will analyze here must be considered as part of that movement.

In 1968 Anne Koedt published the first version of "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm,"¹¹ a short but widely circulated and influential feminist essay on the implications of Masters and Johnson's research on sexuality. In 1972 Mary Jane Sherfey published her book, *The Nature and Evolution of Female Sexuality*,¹² a detailed biological and physiological refutation of standard beliefs about female sexuality, which also drew on the work of Masters and Johnson. Both works added to and were part of feminist conversations which identified the female body as a site of political struggle.

Julie Gustafson's videotape *The Politics of Intimacy* (1972-73) is predicated on these and other debates on sexual politics at the most personal level; indeed, it is a tape constructed from pieces of such conversations. The tape is all talk, almost entirely talking heads. The women who speak could belong to some ideal consciousness-raising (c-r) group, though this is unlikely.¹³ They vary in age, color (one woman is Black), in sexual experience and orientation (there is one obvious lesbian), and in marital status (some mention husbands). All, however, seem to be middle-class North Americans. Brief lectures in physiology by Dr. Sherfey (the same) are the only exceptions to the predominant tone of subjective, personal testimony. The c-r temper of the tape is enhanced by its structure; the 10 women seem to be commenting and building on each other's statements, but the changing backgrounds soon reveal this as artificial. Not that Gustafson was trying to deceive anyone. Consciously or unconsciously, she chose a form which reflected the feminist sources of her tape.

The impression of the tape as a polyphonic discussion among trusted friends is furthered by several devices beyond the participation of diverse women. First, facial close-ups are frequent. The reiteration of closely framed, animated faces telling intimate truths puts the audience in the position of a trusted friend. Several times the camera reveals that two of the women are actually talking to each other, although this only becomes clear midway through the 50-minute tape. In general, the listener is off-screen and silent.





FROM AMA L'UOMO TUO (ALWAYS LOVE YOUR MAN, 1974), BY CARA DE VITO.

NOW YOU ASK ME WHY I MARRIED HIM? I USED TO LIVE WITH MY BROTHER AND MY SISTER-IN-LAW WHO WAS VERY MEAN TO ME... AND ONE DAY I SAYS, "IF THERE COMES A HORSE WITH A HEAD ON AND A PAIR OF PANTS, I'M GOING TO MARRY HIM, AS LONG AS I GET OUT FROM HERE.... HE'S A BUSINESS MAN. I'M SURE THAT A PIECE OF BREAD, I'LL NEVER MISS IT. IF I RAISE A CHILD, I'M SURE THAT HE'S NOT GOING TO MISS ANYTHING."



Second, the conversations which comprise the tape's raw material have been cut and spliced to construct plausible conversational sequences around six topics like "power" and "self-love."

These techniques establish a sense of continuity and direct the viewer's attention in predictable ways, but it is the editing of *Politics of Intimacy* which most clearly shapes its meaning. Oddly, the choice and ordering of material results in two distinct and essentially contradictory meanings. As I have suggested, the basic reference for the tape is the c-r group where accounts of personal experience contribute to analyses of the operations of political power. A plurality of views is necessary to ensure collective accuracy, and Gustafson provides variety. Some of the women enjoy sexual activities; some don't. Some like to masturbate; others think it's stupid. Some want to please their husbands; others think that men are a waste of time, that women are invariably better lovers. Etc. One woman declares, with resignation, "I think it's just a lot of hard work."

In addition to plurality, Gustafson also gives us a moral. For some of the women, speaking about sex is difficult, even painful, whereas others easily recall private desires and experiences. Consequently, the ones for whom language is an acute problem, the ones who talk with hesitant, quiet voices, fall into the stereotyped characters of "repressed women." Watching them becomes embarrassing. Meanwhile, a desirable standard is set by the relaxed, multi-orgasmic woman or the cheerful, uninhibited Jesbian.

These hierarchical relationships, antithetical to the democratic principles of c-r, can be attributed, I think, to the reliance on a fairly conventional documentary format. If speech (confession) is the primary method of developing a theme and the major building block in the editing process, as it is here, performance ability, not honesty or accuracy, will control the tape's effect. Certain characters are more appealing, more attractive, than others; hence their words are more convincing.

This critical evaluation can be turned around, however, since Gustafson introduces several variants into the verbal documentary formula. Women doing all the talking on substantive topics like sexuality is still unusual. Women talking freely about sex and their own pleasure is even more uncommon. While several of the women are sexually naive or confused they are not typecast in familiar media terms. None of the women, save Dr. Sherfey, are presented as extraordinary, and no authoritative voice frames their conversations. Ultimately the technical flaws and even the moralistic layer is neutralized by the power of women speaking for themselves.

Intimacy is not only a topic for discussion in *Politics of Intimacy*, it is also the precondition for most of the conversations which supplied Gustafson's raw material. It is not incidental, then, that Gustafson's mother and sister appear in the tape, though they are not identified as such to the audience. Nonetheless, this information underlines the basic role of family relationships, especially female kinship, in many women's lives. In *Ama l'Uomo Tuo* [Always Love Your Man] (1974), an easy rapport between the tapemaker, Cara de Vito, and her grandmother Adeline Lejudas similarly depends on an atmosphere of familiarity which encourages personal disclosure. The tape is based on Adeline's life, but it relates only a partial biography centered on her 50-year marriage and her husband's violence toward her.

The narrative line which structures *Ama l'Uomo Tuo* begins with a recollection from Adeline's childhood in Italy—her mother's suggestion of a possible fiancé and her response, "Married? Me?" It ends with a gruesome account of her near-death following a botched, illegal abortion which she didn't want but her husband, Benny, insisted she have. In between, she recalls Benny's authoritarian attitudes and several beatings. A few times de Vito interrupts the sequence of bad memories (Benny is now dead) with scenes in the present tense depicting Adeline as a capable, active person. Early on,

for instance, a series of brief vignettes show her cleaning, gardening, visiting with friends, etc., edited to the cadence of an Italian ballad. The upbeat tempo and mood of these scenes relieves somewhat the intensity of Adeline's vivid descriptions of Benny's brutal behavior.

What would attract and hold a woman like Adeline to a man like Benny? The question seems obvious, the answer less so. Adeline understands her own motivation and answers unapologetically: she opted for financial security for herself and her children in a culture where not marrying, even divorce, was unthinkable. Her concluding words (de Vito's chosen finale for the tape) betray another, less rational factor governing such relationships. "Ama l'uomo tuo. Always love your man, no matter what," she intones. When all the parts of de Vito's composite portrait of her grandmother are added up, the impression of Adeline as a victim—of her husband and of social codes—persists.

Just like Gustafson's ambiguous use of established documentary forms, de Vito's tape subverts and is subverted by assumptions about depictions of reality. In this tape, too, unaffected, personal observations about fairly ordinary (though in this case, terrible) experiences manage to break time-honored taboos—not proscribing behavior as much as speech. Another strategy de Vito uses to avoid condescension is her obvious but unobtrusive presence behind the camera which establishes her relationship with her grandmother. Even more effective is de Vito's attention to the mundane details of housework and Adeline's domestic environment. The enclosing interior views produced by de Vito's wide-angle lens place Adeline in her familiar space and establish her as the central figure there.

Still, the pathos of Adeline's reminiscences risks turning *Ama l'Uomo Tuo* into a "human interest story." While a documentary profile of an individual often doubles as a sociological case study, an opposite movement also occurs: the conversion of social phenomena into personal conflict can defuse arguments for political action. No one could accuse de Vito of exploiting Adeline's trust; the respect and love

Frames from *Harriet* (1973), by Nancy Cain.



between the two is quite evident. But, there is a voyeuristic flavor here, perhaps because no substantial exchange between them takes place on screen. And, in contrast to the rather crude technique of *Politics of Intimacy*, de Vito's more sophisticated camera work, sound mixing, and editing tend to enhance entertainment at the expense of concentrating on issues. That is, the audience is led to empathize with Adeline, not analyze her experiences. I don't mean to deny the need for technical and conceptual precision, but to consider the complacency that an easy-flowing and emotionally gripping narrative can create.

This tape was made when the widespread incidence of rape and woman-battering was first being publicized and politicized by feminists.¹⁴ Difficult and as yet unresolved debates about the portrayal of victimized women arose from the conflicting needs to describe the nature and degree of these forms of terrorism and the considerably tougher problem of changing social relations. Seen in this context, *Ama l'Uomo Tuo* describes more than it analyzes or even agitates—remaining, therefore, well within the domain of documentary portraiture. De Vito, however, does not seem unconscious of the dilemmas she proposes. Even the title, which sounds like a motto for defeated women, must be reinterpreted. Recited by Adeline as a kind of postscript to her history of marital violence, the phrase brings home the power of ideology. De Vito concludes, then, with an obvious contradiction which lays bare the social foundations of her grandmother's individual experience.

Housework and childcare, for centuries termed "women's work," have naturally been subjects of much feminist theoretical discourse.¹⁵ In the past, the question, "Does your mother work?" might have been answered, "No, she's just a housewife." Now those conscious of the fallacy of that statement ask, "Does your mother work outside the home?" But, in most cases, the changes thus registered remain superficial. Adeline in *Ama l'Uomo Tuo* argues for the dignity of housework, but she undermines her plea by her acceptance of the double standard of the concept "women's work." *Harriet* (1973), a documentary tape by Nancy Cain, also portrays a woman whose work is housework but one who doesn't share Adeline's unquestioning acceptance.

Cain follows Harriet Benjamin, her neighbor in the rural Catskill Mountain town of Lanesville, N.Y., through her daily chores. The tape opens with a longshot of Harriet seeing her older children off at the school bus stop. She washes the dishes, hangs out the laundry, prepares lunch, watches the soap operas, etc.—the familiar paces of domestic life. All these actions are recorded in a straightforward "direct" style, i.e., no overt intervention by Cain. The frequent wide-angle views and skewed camera angles accentuate the crowded, claustrophobic space of the Benjamin's trailer home but don't render it grotesque. Cain relies mainly on camera movement, emphatic sounds, and dramatic editing to make ordinary activity interesting.

Like hints of an anarchist rebellion, flashes from a different scenario momentarily invade Harriet's domestic routines: Harriet throwing a suitcase in a car, Harriet getting behind the wheel, Harriet driving away laughing. These recur irrationally, and eventually these events are played out. The tape concludes with a long sequence of Harriet driving down the highway away from Lanesville singing, "Roll out the barrel, we'll have a barrel of fun." This escape from domestic responsibilities is transparently fictitious, but the dramatization of her desire for autonomy rings true nevertheless. Like other feminist artists who have stretched definitions of reality to encompass resistance to accepted and expected female behavior, Cain uses the realistic connotations of documentary to describe actual experience and to indicate dissatisfaction with the status quo.

Harriet is not only Cain's portrait of her neighbor presented as a feminist fable, though. It was made within a specific social context for a specific audience. In 1971, Cain and other



members of the Videofreex, later renamed Media Bus, migrated from New York City to the small town of Lanesville. The group brought with them a low-power television transmitter with a broadcasting radius of about three miles and established "the world's smallest TV station" without a license. For six years they broadcast a weekly program, live and taped, from their farmhouse headquarters; *Harriet* was one of many videotapes produced by Media Bus artists about and for their immediate community.

It is not too presumptuous, I think, to propose that Cain's video portrait would be seen differently by an audience of her neighbors than by strangers. For instance, aired in the impersonal context of nationally broadcast TV,¹⁶ *Harriet* easily becomes a symbolic, charismatic character—though not in the TV star mold—since her spontaneous and good-natured personality is very attractive. In the process, social issues become individualized, identified with the main character. To a Lanesville audience, *Harriet* is likely to appear as a less abstract character, and, therefore, the feminist questions raised in the tape will be more pointed precisely because the people and situations depicted are close to home.

A common premise circulating among video groups in the mid-'70s was that independent documentaries were ideal vehicles for progressive political interventions in mass media territory. Public television seemed the most attractive outlet for this work, and those able to secure the support of a local station were considered exemplary. Though both de Vito and Cain's tapes were aired on WNET's "Video Tape Review" (VTR) series, neither was produced for that purpose. In contrast, *Fifty Wonderful Years* (1973), a tape produced by the San Francisco video collective Optic Nerve and edited by members Lynn Adler, Sherrie Rabinowitz, and non-member Bill Bradbury for PBS-affiliate KQED, bears all the marks of television journalism. The producers of this tape about the 1973 Miss California pageant appear neutral; the tape is less personal, less engaged with its characters than the first three works discussed here.

As in *Harriet*, the producers of *Fifty Wonderful Years* remain practically invisible. I'd argue that anonymity is more pronounced here since the camera work and audio techniques are essentially the same as those used in network public affairs products like *60 Minutes*. The difference is that there is no narrator/reporter to guide us through the pageant, and the camera, microphone, and editing assume this function. Whereas a documentary videotape about a beauty contest will not necessarily reflect feminist concerns, one made by an alternative collective in 1973 probably will. Superficially, no critique of homogenized feminine beauty as glorified in such contests is made by Optic Nerve. As a result, an audience of beauty contestants and their mothers would probably not be offended or threatened by this tape. The few scenes of a feminist demonstration protesting the Miss California competition might seem an irritating but undeniably real part of the whole event. Only the concluding sequence, where the winner confronts a group of media men who act like birds of prey, might appear unusual and slightly unsettling.

Closely examined, Optic Nerve's treatment of the subject implies an understated but definite critical position.¹⁷ A great deal of tape is devoted to pageant organizers, supervisors, and chaperones—in other words, the ideologues of standardized, contrived beauty. Often these women (they're all women) are heavily made-up (ex-Miss Something?) and are shown in unflattering close-up shots. Camera zooms bring the sprayed hair and mascara-ed lashes into even closer range as if to reveal greater truths. This visual device is merely rhetorical, though, borrowed from the repertoire of TV news. On the other hand, the young women are generally shown without voyeuristic delight. A further critical comment is added through shots of a male judge juxtaposed with the presumed objects of his fixed gaze—the pretty young ladies in evening gowns. From these few but not uncharacteristic examples, we might deduce that beauty contests are cultural institutions perpetuated by mothers and fathers (the pageant functionaries and the judges) with various rewards for compliant daughters. Though I wouldn't dispute this position, which is similar to that taken by the *ad hoc* feminist group that organized the legendary protest against the 1968 Miss America contest, the express political attitude of the producers of *Fifty Wonderful Years* is never enunciated. Instead, the ironic attitude displayed in the tape can only be perceived by those predisposed to agree.

The producers of *Fifty Wonderful Years* may have hoped to disguise their unorthodox views using conventional formats and techniques and, thereby, bring their message to a wider audience. In doing so, they sacrificed political analysis for the look of objectivity: all data has been coolly collected, the relevant facts extracted and presented, and any conclusions are, therefore, informed and reasonable. That such conclusions are intended to be feminist is strongly implied, but the tape so closely resembles the network norm that any subversion remains subtle. The result of this infiltration is bland at best.

I have written about these four tapes as if they were contemporary work. Though Gustafson, de Vito, Cain, Adler, and Rabinowitz are still active producers, these tapes are artifacts of the past. For the most part, the questions posed by these and other experiments in feminist political video have not been pursued. Tracing the causes for this can be easily as complicated as the original project of analyzing the genre, but I will be succinct. 1. The economic position of most women in relation to men has deteriorated in the past decade. Inflation and rising unemployment add to the overall economic inequity. Therefore, the expense of video production makes it a less attractive artistic option for women. 2. Many of the feminist analyses arrived at in the late '60s and the '70s re-

main viable, but the women's liberation movement has dropped the word "liberation" and the tenor of feminist political action has become subdued. 3. Broadcast television, the outlet for many social documentaries, is not known for financing or airing truly radical videotapes. As in the case of *Fifty Wonderful Years*, work made with backing from public television tends to be oblique or insipid in order to pass inspection by station and network censors. 4. Other distribution systems, like the educational and library circuits for 16mm films, do not exist for video. 5. Within the field of video art, where radical documentaries might expect to find support, such work is often regarded as a variety of television journalism,¹⁸ and therefore thrown back into the compromised embrace of public television or into the back alley of public access channels on cable TV.¹⁹ 6. The criteria used to evaluate proposed video art projects and those designed for public TV demand ever-increasing technical sophistication and the attendant funds needed to achieve those production values, thus circling back to women's economic disadvantages. 7. In the art world, feminism is supposedly taken for granted, while women's advances are quietly being reversed.

In sum, power and money have assumed virtual control of independent video within its fifteen year life-span. Elaborate, flashy, and expensive tapes of the '80s make the black and white, cheaply-made feminist documentaries of the '70s look crude, even primitive. Clearly, the factors which have led to the effective demise of this genre are highly political: the politics of job segregation and income distribution which reflect sexist social structures, the politics of broadcast TV, the politics of art are all implicated. At the same time, feminist documentary experiments, like those described here, challenge definitions of video art which exclude outspoken, political work, social realism which excludes experimentation, and video histories which credit only singular artists—mostly men. Above all, feminist documentary videotapes contribute



Frames from *50 Wonderful Years* (1973), by Optic Nerve.

to a social history, already recorded, which should be studied and understood, not denigrated or discarded. Otherwise, the mechanisms of forgetting, already set in motion, will deny that the work and the history ever existed.

NOTES

1. The use of the word "documentary" has been persistently problematic in discussions of what John Grierson more accurately, but also more awkwardly termed "creative interpretations of actuality." Theories and practices of the field of documentary, camera-based media—photography, film, and video—vary widely, and my use of the term here is intended as broad and vernacular. Various histories of documentary are especially relevant to a full consideration of the evolution of that form in the U.S. and as background to this essay: *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film*, by Eric Barnouw (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974); *The Documentary Tradition: From Nanook to Woodstock*, edited by Lewis Jacobs (New York: Hopkinson and Blake, 1971); *Cinema Verité in America: Studies in Uncontrolled Documentary*, by Stephen Mamber (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1974); *Documentary Expression and Thirties America*, by William Stott (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973); and Martha Rosler's essay "In, Around and Afterthoughts (On Documentary)," in *Martha Rosler: 3 Works* (Halifax, N.S.: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1981). To date, no history of independent video documentary has been published.
2. Again, a thorough description of the relation between art and progressive political movements—the legacy of contemporary social documentarism—must be sought in other texts. *Realism*, by Linda Nochlin (New York: Penguin Books, 1971) describes nineteenth-century precedents. *Cinema Strikes Back: Radical Filmmaking in the United States, 1930-1942*, by Russell Campbell (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1982) is an excellent history of the Workers Film and Photo League, Nykino, and Frontier Films, three left-wing film organizations in the U.S. Campbell's introduction, tracing the roots of this documentary work, was useful to me in my conceptualization of more recent developments. *Film on the Left: American Documentary from 1931 to 1942*, by William Alexander (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981) covers much of the same territory as Campbell's book but is less rigorous and less radical, though more easily available. *Photo Notes and Film Front* (Rochester, N.Y.: Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1977) is a collection of

- newsletters published by the Workers-Film and Photo League and its successor, the Photo League, between 1934 and 1950.
3. In "The Political Aesthetics of the Feminist Documentary Film," in *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (Fall 1978), pp. 507-523, Julia Lesage defines feminist documentary films as a genre. I have borrowed her formulation and taken her work as a starting point for this discussion of the related feminist documentary videotapes. These two media depart mainly where technology and attendant cultural institutions differ.
 4. Many of these women's video groups have disbanded without any record. Two I had personal contact with were the Women's Video Collective in Rochester, N.Y., and the Women's Video Project at the Women's Building in Los Angeles. In 1976 women's video groups in 14 cities exchanged tapes in a system of "Videoletters." Groups like Women in Focus in Vancouver, B.C. and Iris Video in Minneapolis continue this tradition.
 5. From 1972 to 1976 Susan Milano and various other women in New York City organized the Women's Video Festival, first at The Kitchen and later at the Women's Interart Center.
 6. Michael Shamberg and Raindance Corporation, *Guerrilla Television* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), pp. 8 and 9.
 7. See Beryl Korot's letter to Shamberg, *ibid.*, p. 13, in response to Shamberg's "personalized history" of independent video, pp. 10-19. Shamberg mentions no women other than Korot and Phyllis Gershuny, the founders of *Radical Software*.
 8. In a 1982 CBC radio series "Styles of Truth: Decoding Documentary," produced by Seth Feldman, Brian Winston differentiates the U.S. brand of cinema verité, *direct cinema*—the fly-on-the-wall approach developed by Robert Drew, Donn Pennebaker, Richard Leacock, Al Maysles, Fred Wiseman, et al.—from the French interventionist cinema pioneered by Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin. Also see Mamber, *op cit*.
 9. An extensive study of the ideas and accomplishments of the NFBC's Challenge for Change project has yet to be written. For now, the record exists in the film and tapes produced, in the issues of the project's publication *Challenge for Change Newsletter*, in the files of the Film Board, and in the recollections of the various filmmakers, videomakers, and community residents involved.
 10. This expression of media idealism, a quote from the tape *Video: The New Wave*, produced by Fred Barzyk for WGBH in 1973, exemplifies the democratic impulses behind many early independent documentary projects and tapes. These iconoclastic



- tapes, however, were rarely allowed airtime by public TV stations, least of all WGBH.
11. In *Notes from the First Year*, New York Radical Women, June 1968, p. 11. Reprinted and expanded in *Radical Feminism*, edited by Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine, and Anita Rapone (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1973), pp. 198-207.
 12. Mary Jane Sherley, *The Nature and Evolution of Female Sexuality* (New York: Random House, 1972).
 13. See Lesage, *op cit.*, pp. 514-517, for her analogy between 1970s feminist documentary films and c-r groups.
 14. Concurrent feminist publications included Erin Pizzey, *Scream Quietly or the Neighbors Will Hear* (London: If Books, 1974) and *Against Rape*, by Andra Medea and Kathleen Thompson (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1974), along with numerous magazine articles which analyzed the everyday physical abuse of women in feminist terms.
 15. See Ann Oakley, *The Sociology of Housework* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1975); Pat Mainardi, "The Politics of Housework," in *Sisterhood Is Powerful*, edited by Robin Morgan (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), pp. 447-454; and Betsy Warrior, "Housework: Slavery or a Labor of Love," in *Radical Feminism*, *op cit.*, pp. 208-212.
 16. *Harriet* was aired on WNET-TV's nationally broadcast series "Video Television Review," as part of the composite tape *Lanesville TV*, on June 26, 1975.
 17. My interpretation of *Fifty Wonderful Years* as a feminist critique is confirmed in Optic Nerve's synopsis of the tape which appeared in the catalogue for the American Film Institute's 1981 Video Festival: "Fifty Wonderful Years" reveals the people responsible for the pageant and [for] perpetuating the images of women which are so oppressive to us all" (p. 63).
 18. The 1982 media panel at the National Endowment for the Arts, the arbiters of \$200,000 in fellowships for video artists, decided to deny support for "video journalism" but rather award grants for documentaries on the basis of artistic merit. No precise criteria for either "journalism" or "artistic merit" were defined, however.
 19. Public access cable TV, I should add, is where experimental political video seems to be flourishing.

DISTRIBUTORS

Politics of Intimacy: Global Village, 454 Broome St., New York, N.Y. 10013
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