

THE ART OF MEMORY
The Loss of History

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THE NEW MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART, NEW YORK



THE ART OF MEMORY/THE LOSS OF HISTORY

BRUCE BARBER

JUDITH BARRY

TROY BRAUNTUCH

SARAH CHARLESWORTH

LOUISE LAWLER

TINA LHOTSKY

ADRIAN PIPER

STEPHEN PRINA

RICHARD PRINCE

MARTHA ROSLER

RENÉ SANTOS

HIROSHI SUGIMOTO

CHRISTOPHER WILLIAMS

REESE WILLIAMS

“RE-VIEWING HISTORY: VIDEO-DOCUMENTS”

PETER ADAIR

NANCY BUCHANAN

DOWNTOWN COMMUNITY TELEVISION

DAN GRAHAM

VANALYN GREEN

ULYSSES JENKINS

MINERS CAMPAIGN TAPE PROJECT

PAPER TIGER TELEVISION

DAN REEVES

DAVID SHULMAN

EL TALLER DE VIDEO “TIMOTEO VELASQUEZ”

WITH ESSAYS BY

DAVID DEITCHER

WILLIAM OLANDER

ABIGAIL SOLOMON-GODEAU

THE NEW MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART, NEW YORK

THE ART OF MEMORY/THE LOSS OF HISTORY
November 23, 1985-January 19, 1986

Library of Congress Catalogue
Card Number: 85-72522
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ISBN 0-915557-52-5

This exhibition is supported in part by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency, Institute of Museum Services, a federal agency, the New York State Council on the Arts, Mobil Foundation, Inc., ART QUEST, The New Museum's Collectors' Forum, and by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs.

Cover: Plaster casts (Hermes from Andros by Praxiteles and Roman copy of the Doryphoros by Polykleitos) photographed at the Queens Museum while being restored with funds from the Chase Manhattan Bank. On permanent loan from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Photo: Louise Lawler, 1984.

Frontispiece: Christopher Williams. *On New York* (detail), 1985. Cibachrome print, Ilford Cibachrome II Paper CRC .44 M, 10 x 14" (image), 17 1/2 x 21 1/2" (framed). The Image Bank

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■ Foreword

To have a clear perception of what has been called post-modern culture, it is important to understand the concepts of both history and memory. This exhibition attempts to initiate a critical discussion of these terms, to show that they are not necessarily intertwined or synonymous, but rather how they interact. History, with its illusion of neutrality, has more to do with ideology than with actual events while memory can recoup history by critically examining how, by whom, and for what purpose history is being inscribed.

My thanks to curator William Olander, who organized the exhibition, to David Deitcher and Abigail Solomon-Godeau, whose contributions to the catalogue are invaluable, and to the members of the staff, volunteers, and interns, who helped bring the exhibition to fruition.

Each year, Art Quest, The New Museum's collectors' forum, sponsors an exhibition, and it is as a direct result of their generosity that this exhibition has been made possible. We are also grateful to the National Endowment for the

Arts, the Institute of Museum Services, the New York State Council on the Arts, Mobil Foundation, Inc., and the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, for their continued support.

Above all, we are grateful to the artists in the exhibition for sharing their work and vision with us.

Marcia Tucker
Director

■ Acknowledgments

The art and critical theory on display in this exhibition have been developing simultaneously, within a much larger textual field than one program can possibly suggest, since the late 1960s. Though they emerged full force only since the late 1970s, it did not seem too soon to mount an exhibition which, while undeniably contemporary, implicitly possesses, because of its subject, a "retrospective" character. To everyone participating, I am deeply grateful for your continuing commitment to a broad range of ideas and issues, and for your enthusiasm, generosity, and cooperation with regard to this particular project.

I would like to single out the following individuals: David Deitcher, a contributor to this catalogue, a long-time friend and colleague, has been there since the beginning; Rosalyn Deutsche and Abigail

Solomon-Godeau offered important advice at an early stage; Martha Gever was instrumental in shaping the video portion of the exhibition; Robert Beck, Electronic Arts Intermix, Joanne Kelly, Video Free America, and Neil Siesling, University Community Video, provided access to tapes; and Judith Barry, Troy Brauntuch, Nancy Buchanan, Sherrie Levine, Stephen Prina, and Richard Prince all made valuable suggestions that have helped make this project possible. To the lenders, whose names appear elsewhere in this catalogue, I am very grateful for the loan of seldom seen works, and to Mary Boone, my thanks for facilitating the loan of Troy Brauntuch's pieces. Of course, I have appreciated the support and assistance of my colleagues at The New Museum, including Marcia Tucker, Lynn Gumpert, and Brian

Wallis; Marcia Landsman, who initiated and coordinated this catalogue, and Jean Foos, who designed it; Pam Freund and Jeanne Breitbart, without whose help Stephen Prina's concert could not have taken place; Lisa Parr, who managed all of the exhibition details; and John Jacobs, who installed it with patience and understanding.

Finally, I want to thank the Foundation for Art Resources, Los Angeles, for its support of the rehearsal and preparation of the score for Stephen Prina's performance; Symphony Space, New York, for the contribution of their concert hall; and the National Endowment for the Arts for its continuing support of not only this exhibition but of contemporary art and issues in general.

William Olander
Curator



Adrian Piper.
Aspects of the Liberal Dilemma (detail), 1978.
Black-and-white photograph, 20 x 24".

FRAGMENTS

■ WILLIAM OLANDER

In 1978 Adrian Piper first presented a work entitled *Aspects of the Liberal Dilemma*. Adopting in part the form of an acoustiguide (the pre-recorded tours of museum exhibitions), the piece consisted of a large black-and-white photograph, mounted under highly reflective glass, and an audio-tape. The photo depicts a group of black South Africans, descending a staircase, while the tape contains a monologue, spoken by Piper, which is addressed to the viewer:

You want to have an aesthetic experience: to be fulfilled, elevated, edified, irritated. You would like to have your criteria of good art confirmed, or disrupted, or violated by the art you see here. You look forward to being challenged by this art to see things around you in an aesthetically heightened way. In short, you want something new and exciting to think about, and not to be bored or antagonized.

These comments introduce a series of questions, which begins with "How do the images in this picture relate to each other?" passing through "Are these the right questions to ask about this work?" and ends with,

Why are you increasingly impatient with all of these questions? And with the lack of information you seem to be getting in return? Is this supposed to be part of the piece too? What exactly is the aesthetic *content* of this work? And what is it trying to tell you?

Although Piper's concerns may seem naive or idealistic several years after their writing, the genuine faith in at least asking these questions vividly contradicts today's polemical certainty regarding the nature of art and artistic experience. Producers of aesthetic ideology, from the right to the left, all too frequently claim to know the correct form and content of contemporary art. In-

deed, the limits are so firmly defined, that if one expresses doubt or simply refuses to name names in favor of something more thoughtful, more complex, then one runs the risk of being dismissed as nothing more than an "ideological abstraction" or a "spectacle" rife with hypocrisy.¹ Doubt is not expressed easily by those who are attached to certainty.

In place of certainty, I want to propose both memory and history, for today each informs the other with an ease of substitution that is distinctly not modern, neither separate nor unified, but equal. Memory. It is unstable, fragile, and problematized. At present, it is not a matter of whether or not one is capable of remembering, but of what is remembered and its relation to what is remembered, or to its "reality." History. It is no longer constituted by the facts but by just so many memories, informed not by events but by their representations. It is as elusive as anything else in today's society; it possesses even less materiality than a memory might, for history today is seldom more than just another electronic transmission, an over-produced broadcast of imminently forgettable events manufactured for our pleasure, only to be discarded:

nothing is seen for any length of time, there is no assumed collective memory, and little carry-over from day to day. There is no background, but only a moving foreground. There is no accumulation of history...²

This is one aspect of the post-modern condition and it is here, on this constantly shifting terrain of current representations, the results of memory machines and desire factories, that we first encounter the art of memory and the loss of history, fragmented, dispersed, and then embodied in

the spectacle of late capitalism. Memories circulate and history unrolls, but seldom does anything emerge as a discrete event. Rather, as Judith Barry calls her newest work, we are always confronted by yet another "Mirage," an "odd hybrid... Now you see it, now you don't. And can you trust what your eyes are seeing. Would you even know it if you could?"

.....
If the resurgence of memory figures prominently in post-modern practice, then its absence may be seen in retrospect as a principle characteristic of modernism, at least since the late nineteenth century and the full deployment of aesthetic experience, i.e., since the complete separation of art from society and its transformation into an autonomous, organic unity which possesses no memory.³ Though the historical avant-garde (primarily dada and surrealism) attempted to disrupt this homogeneous whole by injecting a memory—the fragment lifted from both the unconscious and the social reality of daily life—into its practice, the absence of memory has figured more significantly in other, more avant-garde developments of the twentieth century. Malevich's black square is a singular example—a revolutionary act of forgetting. The expansive fields of Barnett Newman are another—works free from the "impediments of memory, association, nostalgia, legend, myth" and understandable only by anyone who would look at them "without the nostalgic glasses of history."⁴ Newman's text, written in 1948 and entitled "The Sublime Is Now," unlike Malevich's 1913 painting, coalesced too easily with the emerging, postwar devotion to the "new," a ready aspect of bourgeois modernism, which also played a major role



(above) Troy Brauntuch. *Floorboards*, 1984. Pastel on cotton, 108 x 144". Private collection; photo courtesy Mary Boone Gallery, New York

(right) René Santos. *Untitled*, 1984. Oil on linen, 30 x 42".

in the liquidation of memory, time, and recollection. Newman's concept of the sublime as the obliteration of memory thus collapsed into the new, a category which would seem at odds with the former, but, in reality, dialectically functions as both a break with tradition (the new negates convention) and as a characteristic feature of the escalating commodity universe, in which art increasingly participated following World War II.

Since the late 1960s, however, a new generation of artists, diverse in character and conversant with a rapid succession of art styles, has initiated a dramatic turn in the opposite direction. They have sought to recoup memory, to locate it and occasionally pin it down, to retrieve it at a relatively close distance and, in some cases, at no distance at all. Many have abandoned faith in the new; they traffic neither in progress and innovation nor nostalgia and myth. Rather, their memories are imaginative acts of appropriation, which may be as precise yet evocative as those displayed in a work by Troy Brauntuch, for example, whose production has always rested uneasily in that place "between two informations" where "nothing happens," where memory renders activity still, where thought is impossible, and the question "Is it

happening?" hangs in midair.⁵ He has remarked, "Everything becomes a detail, really, . . . No matter what it is, . . . It's all fragments. It's the dilemma of consciousness trying to decide what to make us see." At this place, drifting is a natural state, where we attempt the impossible—to distinguish one memory from another in order to resurrect a version, any version, of someone's past:

As I think back, the VC was really *right there*. He had accepted that he was going to die and all his energy was now focused on *how* he was going to die. His pleas for a gun death began to cut through the roles we were playing. Suddenly, Jimmy became quiet, and his face turned ashen; it must have flashed to him what he was actually doing. And that made him vulnerable.

Jimmy drew out his revolver and the VC's eyes lowered in animal submission. He moved him right up next to the open door, we didn't want to get blood all over the floor of the chopper, and raised the gun up to his temple. A split second before he pulled the trigger, the VC struck like a cobra. His hands flew up and clamped on Jimmy's wrist, the gun fired as he pulled with all his body weight and they tumbled out the door together.⁶

To locate a memory, of course, is not the only concern of artists like Troy Brauntuch, Reese Williams, and others, for they also seek to examine the place where memory resides—the unconscious, the void, the black hole where "nothing is happening," or, in the words of Michel Foucault, the "empty space left by the author's disappearance."⁷ Put another way, they seek new responsibilities that are not "purely academic"; instead, they keep alive both "the memory of a tradition and make an opening beyond any program, that is, toward what is called the future." This implies "multiple sites, a stratified terrain, postulations that are undergoing continual displacement, a sort of strategic

rhythm."⁸ They shift attention away from the ruins of memory—Robert Smithson's desire buried in the *Spiral Jetty*, a work of art few of us ever saw yet one which retains itself as an image within our memory—and toward Borgesian labyrinths, shifting from one to another and back again, retrieving from the modern archive something perceivable as history even while that history continues to unfold.

What is, for instance, "Remembering Vietnam," when it is presented as a multinational corporation's (United Technologies) version of history appearing as an advocacy advertisement in *The New York Times* on the tenth anniversary of the U.S. withdrawal? What is *Remembering Vietnam* a second time when it is reinscribed by Bruce Barber into what is the more authentic version of America's intervention in Southeast Asia—a chunk of history that many of us experienced only as the images Barber has selected, and these, of course, thanks to their circulation in the press, are among the only ones we know and remember.

What is "modern history" when it is presented by and in the media, whether printed or electronic? What is *Modern History* when it is represented by Sarah Charlesworth as ten events reported in over one hundred and fifty newspapers, from "September 1977" as preserved in *The International Herald Tribune* to "Movie-Television-News-History, June 21, 1979 (Death of a Newsmen)," the murder of ABC correspondent Bill Stewart in Nicaragua by a national guardsman during the revolution of 1979? We remember the images and the way the event was represented (the text in these works is usually negligible) but little or nothing of their contents. This version of modern history makes no claims to the "record," yet in a curious twist, the record can be reconstructed, in an alternative fashion, from the images alone. Two diplo-

mats meet and shake hands on a daily basis (“September 1977”); the Pope greets his followers, with a gesture of transcendence, in the midst of day to day turmoil (“No News from the Vatican”); and an eclipse is charted across a continent, “all the while pretending it is the viewer and not the cosmos upon which the shadow has been cast” (“The Eclipse [A Science Fiction]”). Charlesworth lets loose these images as if they originated as the original in the unconscious—the seat of memory—and in the process demonstrates that “perhaps there is no story in the end—but only stories.”

Another memory possesses a similar character in this exhibition: three photographs, each elegantly matted and framed include a very large black-and-white one, showing an execution presumably in a Third World country; the same photo much reduced in size; and an expensive Cibachrome print of a view of Manhattan. This is a work called *On New York II* by Christopher Williams. No information is provided on the wall labels other than the title of the piece and the three photographs’ vital statistics—medium, size, and provenance. Everything in this work—the elegance of the prints, the matting and framing, the careful hanging—aspire to the status and condition of the museum (thus underscoring the lack of history conventionally ascribed to art objects) and it is only here, in the catalogue, that we can learn the origins of these photographs.

The black and white is a Pulitzer-Prize-winning photo, taken in 1971, showing the execution of several Biharis accused of treason during the Bangladesh war; the execution is considered by many to have been a “photo opportunity,” i.e., an event constructed to be photographed to which the press was invited. The color photograph of New York City is a “stock” image related to the business of tourism, purchased from a commercial

firm. In previous installations in Amsterdam, Ghent, and Paris, this photo has been replaced with another, equally touristic, photograph of the corresponding site; thus, the work, begun in 1984, is always and never the same—a constantly shifting proposition. Yet, this explanation is supplementary and is not meant to imply that without it *On New York* has no meaning. On the contrary, in its most straightforward form, as displayed, the work reads as execution-execution-tourism, and this is disturbing enough. In its elaborated form, when read as a series of complex procedures, from documentary photo opportunity to image-for-sale, our moral indignation may be aroused—lives expended for a photograph; prizes awarded for such a fabrication; the whole recirculated in the art context and remarketed as an expensive commodity; a Third World tragedy reframed as art. All of these readings are possible and none is correct, for each part operates as a missing totality which, like a memory, can never be grasped in its entirety.

.....
 Memory. In a late work, *Note on the Mystic Writing Pad*, Freud characterized a memory as a “trace (*Spur*) . . . left in our psychological apparatus of the perceptions which impinge upon it.”¹⁰ Jacques Derrida has elaborated the concept of “trace” in a more complex fashion, as “the origin of the origin,” “(pure) trace” as *différance*, and memory as “the

very essence of the psyche: resistance, and precisely, thereby, an opening to the effraction of the trace.”¹¹ In his analysis of the metaphor of writing (also “trace”) as developed in three essays by Freud, who was attempting to describe the content as well as the apparatus of memory, Derrida extrapolated by characterizing the memory construct (Freud’s “Mystic Writing Pad”—the wax tablet used by children) as joining “the two empirical certainties by which we are constituted: infinite depth in the implication of meaning, . . . and, simultaneously, . . . the absolute absence of any foundation.”¹² There, in that region, which for Freud was both the unconscious and conscious and for Derrida is life as death, lie thousands of received messages, the endless accumulation of “events” experienced moment by moment, year after year, which we call our memories.

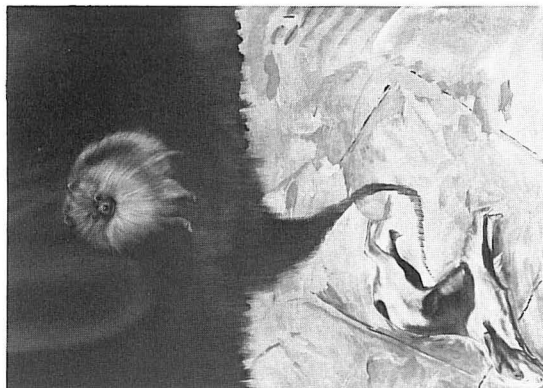
Today, however, most of what impinges on our selves is not a “trace” with any narrative sense, but rather an endless succession of simulations, impossible to remember other than as image without either depth or foundation. The process has been winding and unwinding for so long (at least since the late nineteenth century) that we have forgotten how to remember, how to recall those signals buried in our psyche. This condition no longer approximates Freud’s writing pad but is more like a projection screen upon which anything can be fabricated—

not a memory but another simulation exhausted by its manufacture. Tina Lhotsky has specified it in relation to Los Angeles (“Report from the Moon”):

There is no visible nightlife in Los Angeles. A soft hush comes over the city at 7:00 p.m. The real guide to L.A. nightlife is the TV Guide. No one goes out of the house at night. Everyone who works in this company town goes home to watch on Television the pre-fabricated reality they have created in studios earlier that day, the sit-coms, the game shows and the TV movies. It’s a circular television reality and the biggest deception.

Under these circumstances, neither remembering nor forgetting possesses many positive attributes, at least in the sense that Nietzsche, for instance, called “active.” Indeed, our behavior, in a conventional opposition, is “passive” in the extreme. There is little willfulness in today’s remembering and forgetting. Our memories drift and we court forgetfulness as the implication of the preservation of everything, as if our authoritativeness will automatically put us in touch with the past. Gayatri Spivak writes: “Simply to recognize that one is shaped by difference, to recognize that the ‘self’ is constituted by its never-fully-to-be-recognizedness, is enough. We do not have to cultivate forgetfulness or the love of chance; we *are* the play of chance and necessity.”¹³

The art of René Santos is one demonstration of this position, if we allow into our frame of reference Derrida’s definition of position as “resisting and disorganizing . . . without ever constituting a third term. . . .”¹⁴ I want to focus on this artist’s production—a group of paintings, drawings, and photographs, begun in the late 1970s, which possesses no center, dedicated, as it is, to slippage, displacement, rupture and, in its most extreme case, a form of Derridan erasure. That is, if Santos, in his own practice of decon-



struction, places painting under erasure, to use Derrida's term, it is not to eliminate it, signal its end or engage in any outmoded theorizing on the fate of painting, for that would be to risk forgetting the issue of painting or believing it solved. Rather, crossing out the relevant term, liberates it. Painting is thus freed from fixity, from single-minded polemics that seek to cancel it out as a further possibility; it becomes like any other alternative site of significant aesthetic practice (the act of painting) and production (the painting itself). In some ways, placing painting under erasure is the ultimate act of appropriation, for the only way to use painting is by crossing it out so that we are no longer captive to its mythology but are receptive to its experience (for Santos, each painting must have another painting as its referent). Santos's crossing out of painting thus provides the memory of painting itself, "the origin of the origin," the trace. And this particular act of resistance (placing painting under erasure so as to liberate it—the latter usually ascribed to the acts of the neoexpressionists who have only revived painting rather than crossed it out) is a strategy of delay and contradiction: to subvert meaning so it is never singular and thus may always be encouraged; to use painting and erase it at the same time, so that the practice may be constantly charged with desire for an object (art). And if the subject is immersed far enough in the zone of memory, that object can be si(gh)ted.

.....

This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close

them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.¹⁵

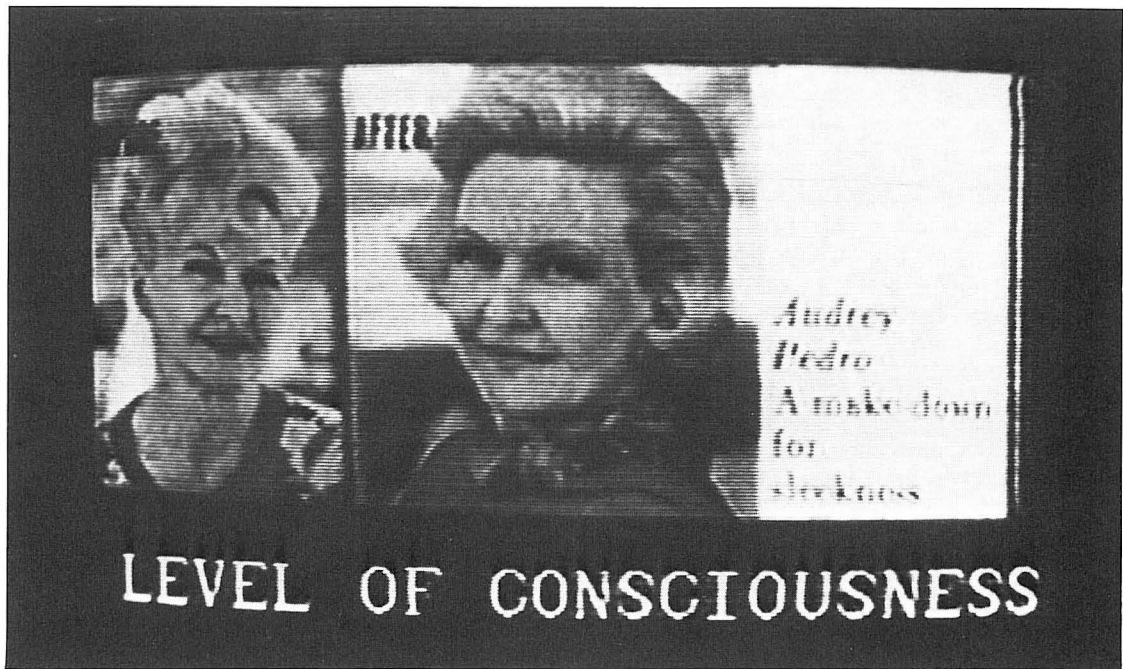
In 1940, Walter Benjamin was describing, in metaphorical terms, the extraordinary rise of fascism, "one single catastrophe... piling wreckage upon wreckage." Nearly half a century later, separated by decades of failed dreams, the disillusionment of utopia lost, it appears, from the vantage point of Western culture, we are meditating once again upon a field of wreckage: urban ruins are juxtaposed with ostentatious display. (A sleek limousine cruises past a burned-out tenement.) Third world countries are threatened by imperialist intervention. (Smoking villages that are the result of U.S.-provided arms.) Jails are filled with children and police are ordered to shoot to kill. The wreckage accumulates. (The bodies pile up.) Here, fragmentation is among the key terms. Eclecticism, exhaustion, depletion, destruction, and disintegration are also relevant, as is repetition—the last of particular importance since it is so ambiguous, so malleable, and yet so useful. In its most superficial manifestation, repetition is marketed in the current artworld as the latest neoavant-garde, which in turn is validated and legitimized as a repeat of the original (today's phenomenon of New York's East Village as a repetition of the Tenth Street School of late abstract expressionism).¹⁶ But repetition, in cases like this, leads to simulation, not to sameness, despite the fact that sameness is what would validate most explicitly the repetition.

Repetition, however, can also be viewed in a different light, as the postmodern condition of memory: we remember through the medium of some other representation. Richard Prince's photographs and texts are repetitions of this peculiar sort—fragments of images selected from literally hun-

dreds of other identical or similarly generic images; images of images, representations of representations. For Prince, flipping through a magazine—scanning the photographs—is a critical practice. He scrutinizes these pictures, searching for the right look, the correct pose, the appropriate quote that will become the new fetish, the new object of our desire. Fascinated by the spectacle of high capitalism in action he pries loose the image to play against the established code. The result is always a question: what is the significance of nature, for example, when it is rendered as a repetition located in the media (sunsets)? Indeed, what is nature in its photographic form but the evocation of representational collapse, or the ability of representations to collapse into each other? Hiroshi Sugimoto's version of nature displays this dilemma in its process of becoming—another reality (the museum) becomes the representation of another reality, supposedly more real (nature), and it is impossible to differentiate the former from the latter. Thus, nature cannot be experienced in any manner other than its representation as "natural history," and the latter is more "real" than its referent. The irony is that through this paradoxical form of repetition an artist like Richard Prince or Hiroshi Sugimoto can provide access to an extremely problematized version of the past as an experience of the present (the present as the past). Edward Said has linked the two together in the following manner: "... never mind if epistemologically the status of repetition itself is uncertain: repetition is useful as a way of showing that history and actuality are all about human persistence, and not about divine originality."¹⁷ Prince himself has articulated a similar idea:

His own desires had very little to do with what came from himself because what he put out, (at least in part) had already been out. His way to make it new was to *make it*

Martha Rosler. Still from *Domination and the Everyday*, 1980. Color videotape, sound, 30 min.



again and making it again was enough for him and certainly, personally speaking, almost him.¹⁸

To focus on the present as history is to review the past from the position of the present, to revise what has occurred according to what we know now. Revision, of course, is among the standard practices of late twentieth-century historical practice, a result in part of the liberation movements of the 1960s that laid the foundation for a revisionism that has subsequently spilled over into the academy. But revisionism—despite significant work on the part of feminist, gay and lesbian, black, and Third World historians, among others—seldom addresses the questions “What is the past?” or “What constitutes what has preceded?” Rather, the past, or fragments of it, is reconstructed into “new” or “rediscovered” histories without examining the basic issues of what our points of reference are with regard to writing history as an ideological practice. Even revisionism, in this sense, is part of the extreme fragmentation of postmodern culture and, as a practice within the academy, it has not brought us

any closer to “real” history than any standard modern history has already managed not to accomplish. To speak of revisionism today is to speak of the most conventional rewriting of history.

If revisionism has failed, what then? How does one intervene in a process that seems to be out of control or carried along by its own rapid momentum? How does one separate out art (or culture) from any other social activity in a society increasingly dominated by spectacular consumption, without resorting to ideologies of transcendence, autonomy, or transgression? One theory, proposed by Fredric Jameson, is that culture cannot be separated, but has been dissolved to the point at which its dissolution is transferred throughout the social realm: “everything...from economic value and state power to practices and to the very structure of the psyche itself—can be said to have become ‘cultural’ in some original and as yet untheorized sense.”¹⁹ We can turn this around: the terms of culture have changed so dramatically that cultural practice must extricate itself from every other social practice while continuing

to participate in the alternatives. Following are some examples of works that clearly succeed as both art and alternatives to high culture:

In a piece first performed in 1980, *It's Just Art*, Adrian Piper attempted to locate the spectator (and make that spectator conscious of his or her location) outside the conventional space of aesthetic experience, in a space not marked as strictly cultural. The performance, incorporating many forms of popular culture (film, slides with cartoonlike thought balloons, disco dancing, and Rufus and Chaka Khan's “Do You Love What You Feel?”), was devoted to the history of Cambodia after the Vietnam war and the compliant response of many Americans to the regime of Pol Pot. The work, however, also included several incidents of direct address, such as “With your presence here we collaborate to create a context of comfort, insularity and aesthetic enjoyment,” and ended with the phrase, “Against impinging political realities.”

In a 1980 videotape, *Dominion and the Everyday*, Martha Rosler presented the privatized existence of a mother and child as an “in,” in her words,

to discussing our relation to information about what the world is about. That information includes a text on the 1973 American-backed *coup d'état* in Chile; images of advertisements devoted to the ideal family; and a continuous voice-over conversation between a mother (the artist) and her son, foregrounded against a radio interview with art dealer Irving Blum. Not only does the density of this tape make it nearly impossible to digest on the first or even second viewing, it is this very density of enormous contradictions which the tape is about. As Rosler simply states: “Life is said to mean one thing while we experience it otherwise.”

In 1985 Louise Lawler executed an installation called *Interesting* at Nature Morte Gallery in New York's East Village. Several parts were combined to transform this gallery into another type of enclosure, one more familiar even to habitual gallery-goers than the gallery itself, one “that is redolent with the institutionalization of self-interest, where money gets money.” The gallery was redesigned to simulate the lobby of a bank or, more correctly, that secondary space of Instant-Cash machines. A shelf was

mounted on one wall; the title of the work, painted in appropriately corporate logo fashion, on another; and three conventionally framed Cibachrome photographs on a third. No traditional labelling accompanied the installation. Instead, a fable, "The Dog and His Shadow," was stencilled next to the photos:

In time past was a dog that went over a bridge, and held in his mouth a piece of meat, and as he passed over the bridge, he perceived and saw the shadow of himself and of his piece of meat within the water. And he, thinking that it was another piece of meat, forthwith thought to take it. And as he opened his mouth, the piece of meat fell into the water, and thus he lost it.

We all remember this fable, or one like it, just as we recall, once the events have been re-narrated, the invasion of Cambodia by American jets at Nixon's behest in 1970 and the CIA-backed overthrow of the Allende government in Chile in 1973.

With these works, it becomes possible to see how memory, or remembering, when attached to narrative, or the function of storytelling, can provide access to history, not in its spiraling postmodern form, but as a new, original form of forgetting—not the reverse of remembering, but its logical extension: a *real* con-

sumption of the past not as a succession of images, but as interruptions, interventions, and breaks which we consume (forget) as knowledge and which are useful not as master-narratives but local variants. And though the referents of the latter may seem to belong to the past, in reality they are contemporaneous with the act of recitation. In each case, the narration drifts into the present, demanding consideration of the *now*. Piper's exegesis on Cambodia is equally an examination of our relationship to current aesthetic practice and experience; Rosler's discussion of the takeover in Chile is equally an analysis of power relations in the United States (including the artworld) and Latin America; and Lawler's deployment of a fable in a simulated bank environment is equally a commentary on our current obsession with wealth, status, and power.

This is not an attempt to unify these three works and transform them into one grand narrative, nor is it intended to focus on these localized narratives at the expense of others that are not so obvious. Christopher Williams's *On New York*, for instance, calls into question the very distinction between the "localized" narratives posed by the photos of Ghent, Amsterdam, Paris, and New York, and the "universal"

narrative of the news photo. Yet, the three instances of narration by Lawler, Piper, and Rosler are particularly cogent examples of a progressive state of cultural inquiry that "has no more need for special procedures to authorize its narratives than it has to remember its past."²⁰ Their past requires no legitimation, no fabrication, and no validation, since these narratives simply do what they do. They *are* the past inserted into the present—disruptive fragments that give rise to new works which seek to defamiliarize the familiar. After hearing Stephen Prina's *An Evening of 19th- and 20th-Century Piano Music*, it will be difficult to hear Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" quite the way we thought we remembered it. Of course, what we hear today is not what was heard a century ago. And what we see today is not what was seen even a decade ago, for the art of memory and the loss of history imply a remarkable shift in our perception whose special effects we are only beginning to discover.

■ Notes

1. Hilton Kramer, "Professor Howe's prescriptions," *The New Criterion* 2, no. 8 (April 1984): 3, 5.
2. Edward Said, "In the Shadow of the West," *wedge*, nos. 7/8 (Winter/Spring 1985): 8.
3. See Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).
4. Barnett Newman, "The Sublime Is Now," in Herschel B. Chipp, ed., *Theories of Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p. 553.
5. Jean-Francois Lyotard, "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde," *Artforum* 22, no. 8 (April 1984): 40.
6. Reese Williams, "A Study of Leonardo," in *Hotel* (New York: Tanam Press, 1980), p. 58. This section, altered, also appears in "Gift Waves," in Richard Prince, ed., *Wild History* (New York: Tanam Press, 1985), p. 9.
7. Michel Foucault, "What is an Author," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected*

Essays and Interviews (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1980), p. 121.

8. Jacques Derrida, "The Principle of Reason: The University in the Eyes of its Pupils," *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* [The New School] 10, no. 1 (1984): 21–22.

9. Sarah Charlesworth, *Modern History* (Edinburgh: New 57 Gallery, 1979), pp. 18, 37.

10. Quoted in Jacques Derrida, "Freud and the Scene of Writing," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 216. Freud's text is also discussed by Dan Graham in "Theater, Cinema, Power," *Parachute*, no. 31 (June-July-Aug. 1983): 13–14.

11. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), pp. 61–62, and "Freud and the Scene of Writing," p. 201.

12. Derrida, "Freud and the Scene of Writing," p. 224.

13. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Translator's Preface," in Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, xlv.

14. Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 43.

15. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zorn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), pp. 257–258.

16. See Irving Sandler, "Tenth Street Then and Now," in *The East Village Scene* (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1984), pp. 10–19. A radically different view of the East Village phenomenon is provided by Rosalyn Deutsche and Cara Gendel Ryan, in "The Fine Art of Gentrification," *October*, no. 31 (Winter 1984): 91–111.

17. Edward Said, "On Repetition," in *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 113.

18. Richard Prince, *Why I Go to the Movies Alone* (New York: Tanam Press, 1983), p. 63.

19. Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review*, no. 146 (July-Aug. 1984): 87.

20. Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 22.



Louise Lawler. *Interesting*. Announcement card for exhibition at Nature Morte Gallery, 1984.

POINT OF VIEW

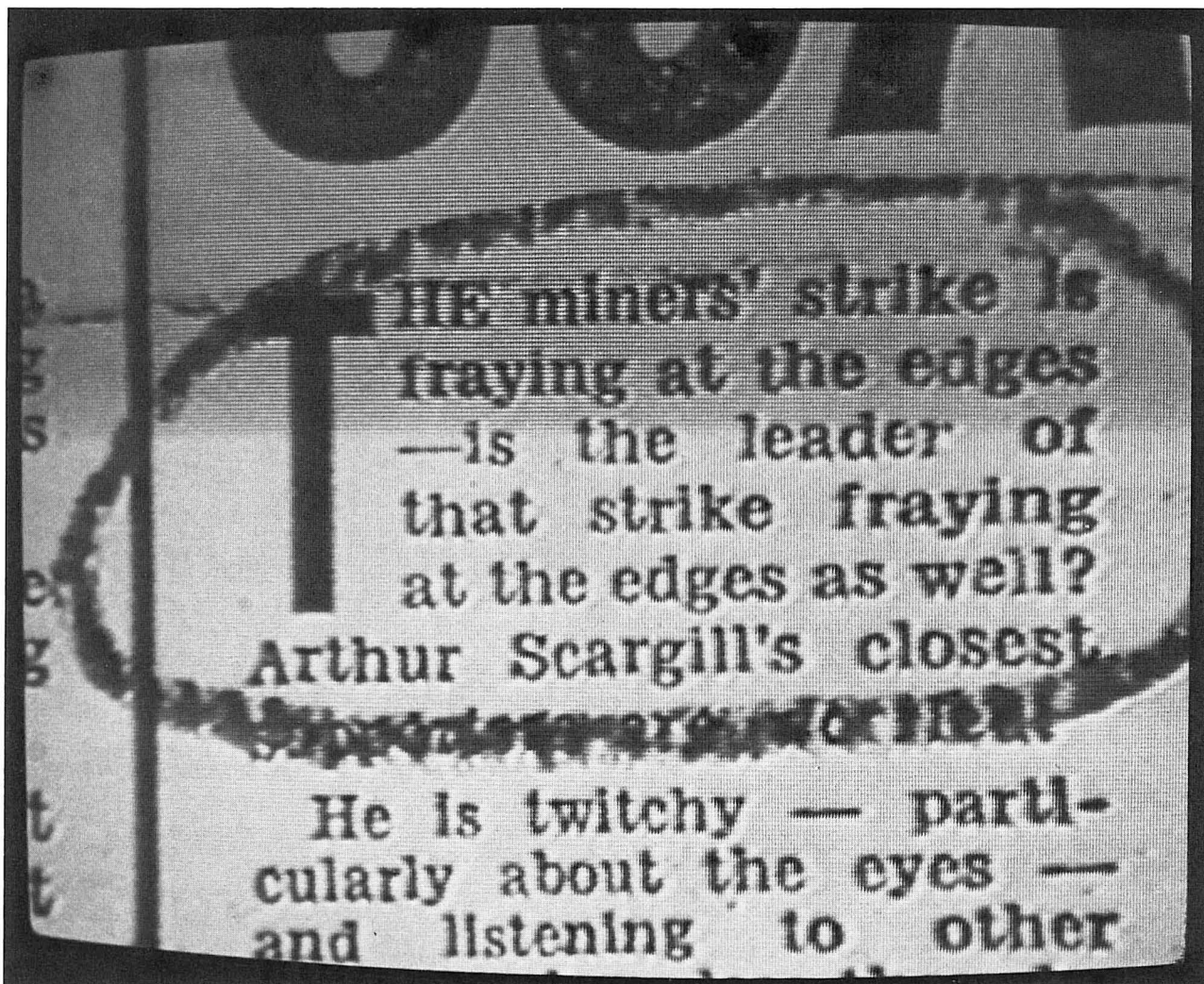
■ WILLIAM OLANDER

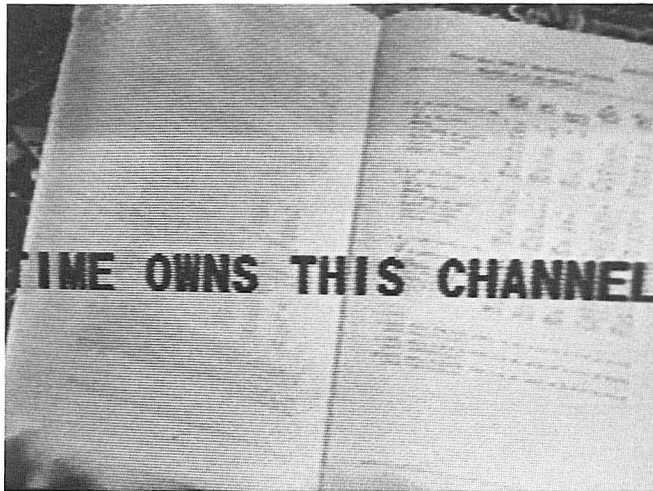
Miners Campaign Tape Project (A.C.T.T.). Still from *The Lie Machine: The Media and the Strike* (Tape #5), 1984. Courtesy Platform Films, London, and Paper Tiger Television, New York

In an exhibition devoted to the art of memory and the loss of history, the category “documentary” plays a major role, for documentaries are presumed to be records of history. Most of what comprises them are memories—someone’s recollections of “what happened” or even, “what’s happening.” Yet, whose history is recorded in such a work (that of the documentarian or his or her subject), and why should we trust or believe an individual’s testimony? These issues are the subject of at least one videotape included in this program:

In Peter Adair’s *Some of These Stories are True*, three men tell three different stories, some or all of which may or may not be true. The audience does not know which of the narratives, or parts thereof, is true until the end of the tape, when the credits roll. The point, however, is not to devise a guessing game (it is never clear that any of the three *is not* true), but to raise the general issues of what constitutes documentary “truth” and “objectivity.” The stories themselves are so compelling — each explores the relationship between sex, power, and aggression

among males — but seldom during the viewing does one consider the question of whether any of the stories are true. It is only afterwards, when we know if one is true and one is false, that we want to re-view the work in order to discover its truth or falsity for ourselves, and to question our very ability to tell them apart. This deliberate confusion may have been responsible for the elimination of the tape from the Public Television series for which it was originally made. According to the CPB, who financed the work, it was not aired because “the audience





(top) Nancy Buchanan. Still from See / A . . . , 1981. Color videotape, sound, 10 min.

(above) Paper Tiger Television. Still from Murray Bookchin Reads "Time": History as a Television Series, 1981. Color videotape, sound, 30 min.

(right) Dan Reeves. Still from Smothering Dreams, 1981. Color videotape, sound, 23 min. Courtesy Electronic Arts Intermix, New York

(opposite page, top) Downtown Community Television Center. Still from El Salvador: Nowhere to Run, 1983. Color videotape, sound, 27 min.



might have trouble separating fiction from reality.”¹ Precisely the point.

As Adair’s tape suggests, the documentaries presented here function very differently from what we have come to expect from documentary, even though their content, when listed in a menulike fashion, could be the stuff of broadcast television. The role of the media in shaping (or unshaping) history, the continuing revolution in Central America, alcoholism, rock ‘n’ roll history, and the struggle for black liberation are just some of the subjects of these tapes (though “subjects” hardly begins to describe their complexity). What motivates these works so significantly and what distinguishes them so completely from other documentaries is their point of view and a willingness to express it, an awareness of their own role in the construction of history, and increasingly, a desire to disrupt the conventions of the medium, or in this case, a category, in order to challenge the so-called neutrality of the documentary. Most of these tapes participate in what re-



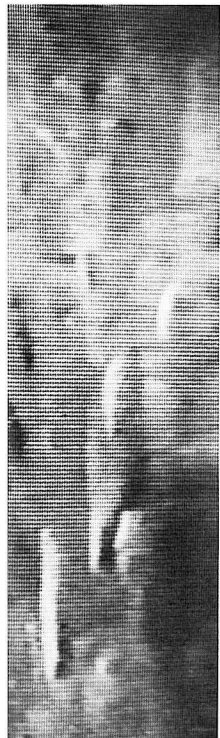
mains of the consciousness industry rather than the culture industry in the late twentieth century: “it is in our power to offer an array of more socially invested, socially productive counter-practices, ones making a virtue of their person-centeredness (that is, on their emanation from an artist).”²

For instance, Nancy Buchanan’s *See I A...* (originally twenty-eight minutes, now cut to ten) is unquestionably an artwork, yet it is composed of standard elements associated with the documentary—interviews, some original footage,

and on-location excerpts from one of Buchanan’s performances called *If I Could Only Tell You How Much I Really Love You*. Though extremely artful without being high-tech, *See I A...* manages to convey, in extremely condensed form, information that links McCarthy-style communist witch hunts, the role of “black propaganda” produced by the CIA in the 1973 takeover of Chile, and the current struggles in Central America.

Less artful, primarily because the work does not participate at all in the homoge-

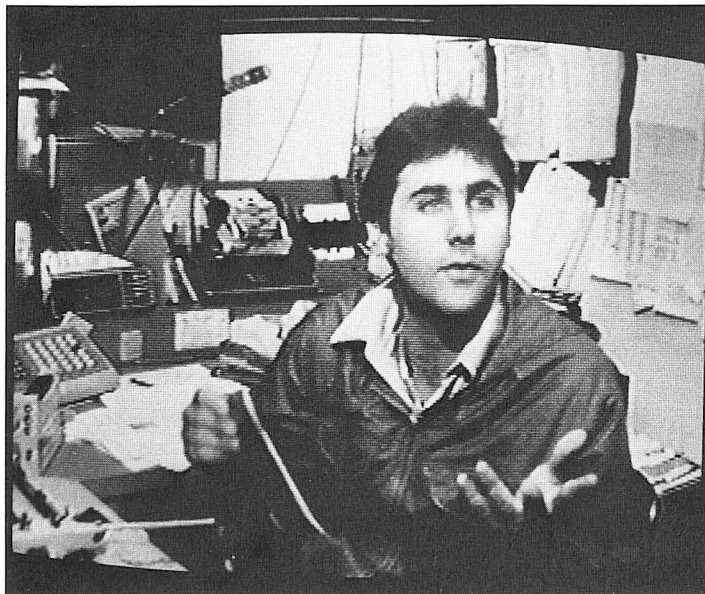
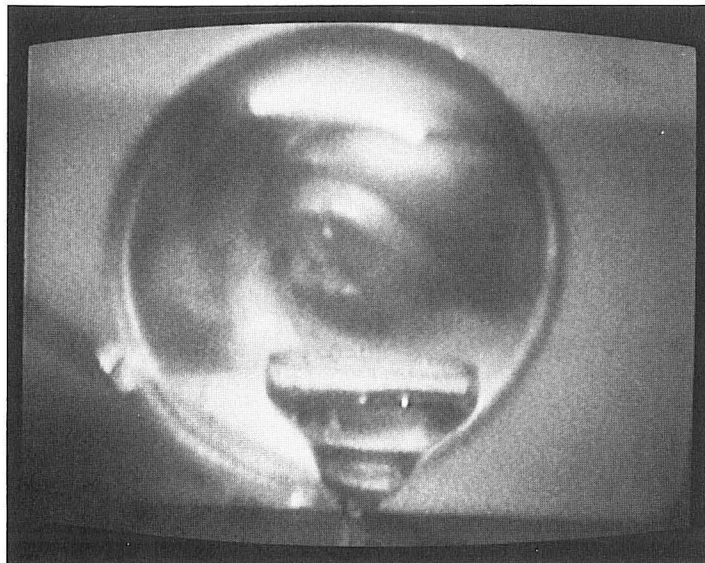
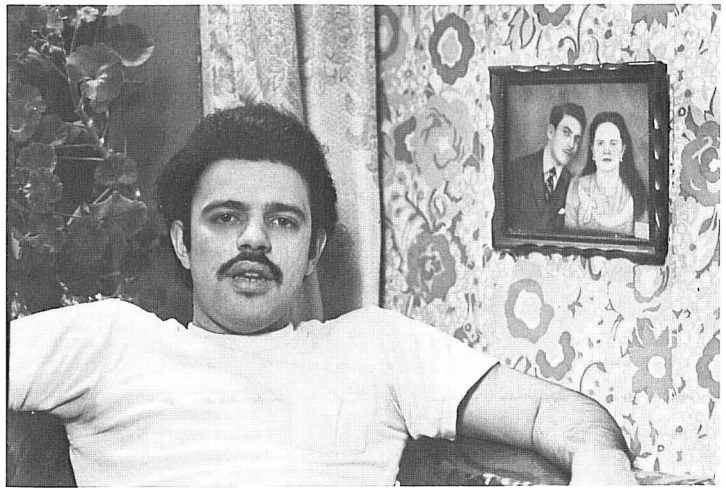
neous practice of corporate television, the tape produced by the Nicaraguan collective, *El Taller de Video “Timoteo Velasquez,”* entitled *Asi Avanzamos (And So We Proceed)*, is nonetheless a moving record of the formation of a cattle farm collective in an area of Nicaragua besieged by U.S.-backed counterrevolutionaries. Approximately fifteen minutes into the tape, comprised primarily of people talking (peasant farmers, administrators, and government officials), the scene shifts abruptly to the smoking ruins of a village de-



(right) Peter Adair. Still from *Some of These Stories Are True*, 1981. Color videotape, sound, 30 min. Courtesy Adair Films, San Francisco

(below) Ulysses Jenkins. Still from *Without Your Interpretation*, 1984. Color videotape, sound, 13 min.

(bottom) David Shulman. Still from *Race Against Prime Time*, 1984. Color videotape, sound, 30 min. Courtesy New Decade Productions, New York



stroyed by *contras* and to footage of Somozan soldiers being trained by the CIA in Honduras. This material is so shocking in light of what has just preceded it that the viewer really does perceive what it must be like to live under such conditions. This is very different material, obviously, from what one sees on the evening news or in broadcast-produced documentaries, which must subscribe to false (ideological) notions of objectivity and are inevitably compromised by such a necessity.

These are two examples of works with a "point of view" — videotapes which seek, through the memory machines of the media, to counter the loss of history produced by the industry of corporate broadcasting. Imagine Paper Tiger Television's reading of the news juxtaposed with Tom Brokaw's, or Dan Reeves's reenactment of a Vietnam ambush programmed alongside any of television's specials devoted to the history of Vietnam. This, of course, would never happen. Such a powerful indictment of war as that in Reeves's *Smothering Dreams* could never be shown alongside so-called objective reporting of the war. Indeed, of all the works presented here, only *Smothering Dreams* has been broadcast on television other than cable, in a very recent Public Television series called "Alive from Off Center," which is devoted to master-

pieces of video art. Though I have no desire to deny this work its status as art, its presentation and reception as such jeopardizes, particularly at this moment, its value as history. By recontextualizing it in this exhibition I hope we might be able to retrieve it and others from the neutralizing pool of television. Though much has been made of this tape's "universality," we should not forget what prompted it: one man's experience of a war which "has been digested by the U.S. political system with hardly a trace." The art of memory can prevent the loss of history, if only our acts of appropriation will allow these memories to speak.

■ Notes

1. Mark Perry and Michael Mariotte, "New Works," *City Paper* [Washington, D.C.] 2, no. 6, May 7-20, 1982. Also see Kathleen Hulser, "Is Public TV Doing Its Job?" *The Nation*, May 15, 1982, pp. 583-584. Might Adair's tape not have been aired because one segment included writer Lucian Truscott IV recounting an incident with a homoerotic subtext which occurred with then Colonel Alexander Haig at West Point?

2. Martha Rosler, "Video: Shedding the Utopian Moment," unpublished manuscript, 1984, p. 36.

3. Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, "The Pentagon-CIA Archipelago," as "Document 1: The Free World," *wedge*, nos. 7/8 (Winter/Spring 1985): 14.

■ Works in the Exhibition

Height precedes width. Unless otherwise indicated, all works are courtesy the artist.

Bruce Barber, Halifax, Nova Scotia
Remembering Vietnam, 1985 Three C-prints: each 60 x 40".

United Technologies: An Analysis, 1984 Color videotape, sound, 30 min.

Judith Barry, New York
Mirage, 1984-85 Color videotape, sound, 7 min.

Troy Brauntuch, New York
Untitled, 1980 Three photographic screen-prints: each 97½ x 25". Collection Dupuy Warrick Reed
Untitled, 1983 Graphite on cotton, 98 x 111". Collection Doris and Robert Hillman

Sarah Charlesworth, New York
"Herald Tribune, September 1977" (*Modern History*), 1977 Twenty-six black-and-white photographs: each 22½" x 16½".
Tabula Rasa, 1981 Photographic silkscreen, 67 x 93".

Louise Lawler, New York
Two Wall Displays: Arranged by Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Atmore Pope or their daughter Theodore, Farmington, Connecticut, and Standing in your own shoes, Reading, 1985 Two installations with black-and-white and color photographs and text: each 12 x 16½'. Courtesy the artist and Metro Pictures, New York

Tina Lhotsky, Los Angeles
Report from the Moon, 1985 Text and photo (pp. 22-23)

Adrian Piper, Ann Arbor
A Tale of Avarice and Poverty, 1985 Black-and-white photograph, 40 x 30". Six pages of text: each 11 x 8½".

Stephen Prina, Los Angeles
An Evening of 19th- and 20th-Century Piano Music World premiere, Wednesday, December 4, 1985, 8:00 p.m. Concert Program, featuring Trina Dye-Ballinger and Gaylord Mowrey, pianists, including a performance of: *Symphony No. 3 in E Flat Major, Op. 55, "Eroica,"* 1803 L. van Beethoven; Hugo Ulrich, arranger *Excerpts from The 9 Symphonies of L. van Beethoven, Für zwei Pianoforte zu vier Händen, Transcription pour Piano à 2 mains, and Für Klavier zu 4 Händen*, 1983-85
Stephen Prina, arranger

With the support of the Foundation for Art Resources, Los Angeles, and Symphony Space, New York

An Evening of 19th- and 20th-Century Piano Music..., 1985 Black-and-white photograph, 20 x 16".

Richard Prince, New York
Untitled (*Sunsets*), 1981 Nine C-prints: each 30 x 45". Collections Dike Blair, Bevan Davies, Phyllis Goldman, David Madee, and the artist

Martha Rosler, New York
Global Taste (Working Title), 1985 Video installation

René Santos, New York
Untitled (Adolphe Crémieux, 1796-1880; Alphonse Daudet, 1840-1897; Jean Jurnet, 1799-1861; Edouard Manet, 1832-1883; Alfred Musard, 1828-1881; Gioachino Rossini, 1792-1868), 1985 Oil and encaustic on linen, six works: each 32 x 28".
Untitled, 1985 Oil and encaustic on linen, two works: each 32 x 28".

Hiroshi Sugimoto, New York
Stanley Theater, Jersey City, New Jersey; Goshen Theater, Goshen, Indiana; Canton Palace Theater, Canton, Ohio; Prospect Park Theater, Brooklyn; United Artists Playhouse Theater, Great Neck, Long Island, 1977-80
White Rhinoceros; Mandrill; Ostriches and Wart Hogs; Hunting Dogs; Oyster Bay Bird Sanctuary, 1980-82 Ten black-and-white photographs: each 20 x 24".

Christopher Williams, Los Angeles
On New York II, 1985 Black-and-white photograph, 40 x 56" (image), 71 x 86" (framed), AP/Wide World Photos; black-and-white photograph, 10 x 14" (image), 17½ x 21½" (framed), AP/Wide World Photos; Cibachrome print, 10 x 14" (image), 17½ x 21½" (framed). The Image Bank—Francisco Hidalgo
On New York, 1985 (detail) Cibachrome print, 10 x 14" (image), 17½ x 21½" (framed). The Image Bank—Peter M. Miller. Exhibited at Marian Goodman Gallery, New York, 1985.
On Paris, 1985 (detail) Cibachrome print, 10 x 14" (image), 17½ x 21½" (framed). The Image Bank—Morton Beebe. Exhibited at Galerie Crousel-Hussenot, Paris, France, 1985.
On Ghent, 1984-85 (detail) Cibachrome print, 10 x 14" (image), 17½ x 21½" (framed). The Image Bank—Lisl Dennis. Exhibited at Gewad, Ghent, Belgium, 1984-85.
On Amsterdam, 1984 (detail) Cibachrome print, 10 x 14" (image), 17½ x 21½" (framed). The Image Bank—Paul Van Riel. Exhibited by Foundation De Appel, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 1984.

Reese Williams, New York
Conditions of Sensuous Perception, 1985 Text (pp. 13-14)

■ "Re-viewing History: Video-Documents"

Unless otherwise indicated, the following works are all 3/4" color and sound videotapes, courtesy the artist.

Peter Adair, San Francisco
Some of These Stories Are True, 1981 30 min. Courtesy Adair Films, San Francisco

Nancy Buchanan, Tucson
See I A . . ., 1981 10 min.

Downtown Community Television Center (Jon Alpert, Karen Ranucci, and Carlos Aparicio), New York
El Salvador: Nowhere To Run, 1983 27 min.

Dan Graham, New York
Rock My Religion, 1984 60 min. Courtesy Josh Baer Gallery, New York

Vanalyn Green, New York
Trick or Drink, 1984 20 min.

Ulysses Jenkins, Los Angeles
Without Your Interpretation, 1984 13 min.

Miners Campaign Tape Project (A.C.T.T.), London, England
The Lie Machine: The Media and the Strike (Tape #5), 1984 16 min. Courtesy Platform Films, London and Paper Tiger Television, New York

Paper Tiger Television, New York
Murray Bookchin Reads "Time": History as a Television Series, 1981 30 min.

Dan Reeves, Paris, France
Smothering Dreams, 1981 23 min. Courtesy Electronic Arts Intermix, New York

David Shulman, New York
Race Against Prime Time, 1984 60 min. Courtesy New Decade Productions, New York

El Taller de Video "Timoteo Velasquez," ATC-CST (Amino Luna, Iliana Streberg, Mirian Carrero, Roberto Alvarez, Sergio Gonzalez, Oscar Ortiz, Fco. Sanchez), Managua, Nicaragua
Asi Avanzamos (And So We Proceed), 1983 22 min. Courtesy Xchange TV, New York

■ Selected Bibliography

This bibliography, selected from those of the individual artists, begins with 1980. Biographies, exhibition histories, reviews, and more complete bibliographies may be found in many of these entries. This bibliography was researched and compiled by Ariel Berghash, Marcia Landsman, Valerie Susanin, and Brian Wallis.

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This publication was organized by Marcia Landsman, Publications Coordinator, designed by Jean Foos, typeset by Talbot Typographics, Inc., and printed by Fan Sy Productions, Inc.

