

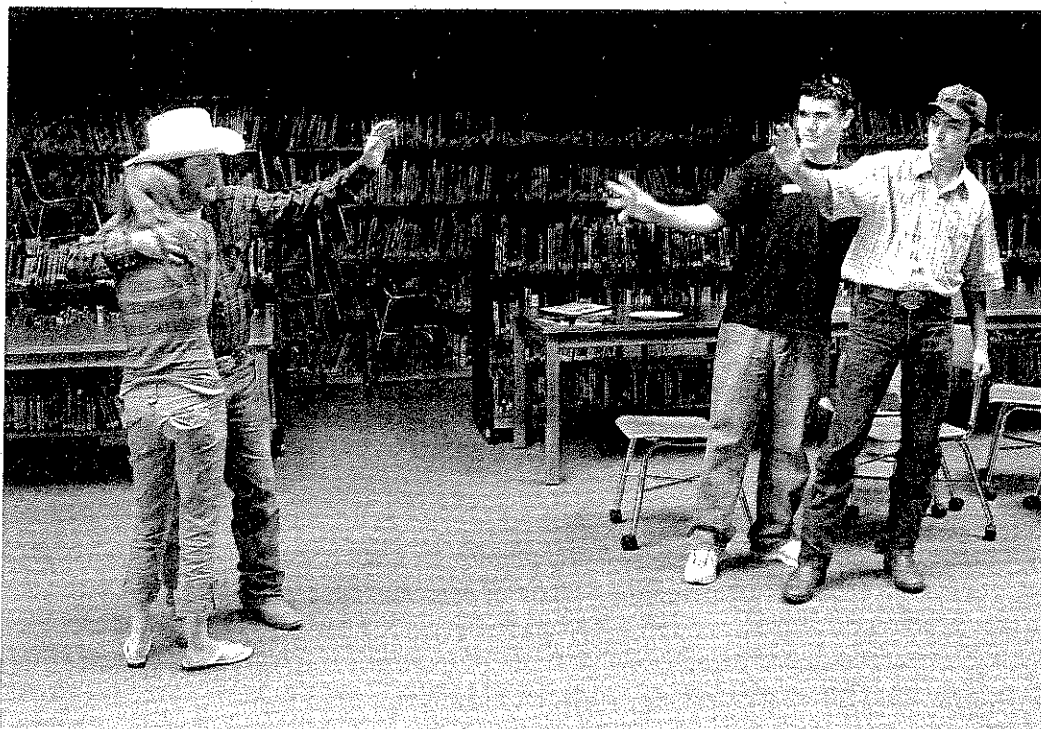
millennium FILM JOURNAL

No. 51
Spring/Summer 2009

EXPERIMENTS IN DOCUMENTARY



Barbara Hammer, *Available Space* (1978-79)
PERFORMANCE AT NWAA, PORTLAND, 1979, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.



Adele Horne, *Playas* (work in progress)
VIDEO IMAGE CAPTURE, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

film a theater workshop in which the local community acts out the history of their town as they see it. I think of this documentary as interventionist because it juxtaposes a type of play-acting that we originated with the existing play-acting of the government's training exercises. This film explores the transformation of public space and the curtailing of civil liberties that have taken place under the Bush administration. In that sense, this observational/interventionist/essayistic documentary is the most directly political of the films I'm currently making. But I strongly believe that the form of experimental filmmaking is political in itself, in that it creates little stoppages in the flow of corporate-produced images. Experimental forms asks viewer to see differently, to think, to question and puzzle things out, to meet an image rather than consume it. In a culture where images are so powerful and norm-enforcing, image-making is always political.

A few recent films and filmmakers that have inspired me are: Mercedes Alvarez's *El Cielo Gira/The Sky Turns*, Vít Klusák and Filip Remunda's *Czech Dream*, Agnes Varda, Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Rithy Panh, Jeanne Liotta

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ALEXANDRA JUHASZ

Over the past twenty years, I have made experimental, personal, political documentaries about and within communities with which I engage: AIDS activists, media feminists, queer, feminist, and leftist families. My scholarly work on activist media has pushed me to pursue an ethical practice, veering from the tradition and tactics of the victim documentary

(taking pleasure in another's pain) and instead imagining community-bound, communally-produced feminist visions of radical political subjectivity. My politics—which are theoretically informed and consider the relations between power, subjectivity, community, and control of representation—are communicated through the way I organize the documents I produce about my collaborators' lived experiences and our ideas about the historical world. Aesthetics is one way to name the structure or organizing I contribute to this collaborative process; it is the mark of my hand—or mind—on the documents of the real world that form the primary material of what I call my femi-digi-praxis (the integration of media theory, digital production, and feminist politics in an historical context).

Below I offer a reinvention of Dziga Vertov's "WE: Variant of a Manifesto" (1922)⁸ to (post)-modernize and feminize his foundational praxis.

I call myself MP:me (MediaPraxis:AlexandraJuhasz⁹)—as opposed to "cinematographer," one of a herd of machomen doing rather well peddling slick clean wares.

I see no connection between true femi-digi-praxis and the cunning and calculation of the cine-profiteers.

I consider manipulated corporate reality television—weighed down with music and narrative and childhood games—an absurdity.

To the American victim documentary with its showy dynamism and power disparities and to YouTube's direct-to-camera dramatizations of so many individuals' personal pain or pleasure, this femi-digi-practioner says thanks for the return to real people, the hand-held look, and the close-up. Good ... but disorderly, not based on a precise study of Media Praxis (the hundred year history of theoretical writing and related political media production). A cut above the psychological drama, but still lacking in foundation. A Cliché. A copy of a copy.

I proclaim the stuff of YouTube, all based on the slogan (pithy, precise, rousing calls to action or consumption, or action as consumption), to be leprous.

–Keep your mouse from them!

–Keep your eyes off those bite-sized wonders!

–They're morally dangerous!

–Contagious!

I affirm the future of digital art by hacking its present and learning from its past.¹⁰

I am MP:me. I build connections to history and theory and inter-relations between individuals and committed communities. With my small cheap camcorder, my laptop, and internet connection, I make messy, irregular feminist video committed to depth and complexity.¹¹

"Cinematography," the earliest male tradition built on sizeable machines, stylish form, and solo cine-adventures must die so that the communal art of femi-digi-praxis may live.¹² I call for its death to be hastened.

8 Dziga Vertov, *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, ed. Annette Michelson. Trans. Kevin O'Brien (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 5-9.

9 See my blog, *Media Praxis*: www.aljean.wordpress.com.

10 See my course, *Learning from YouTube*, where we attempted to retool YouTube for educational and political purposes at: www.youtube.com/mediapraxisme.

11 My most recent documentary is *SCALE: Measuring Might in the Media Age* (2007), made with and about my sister Antonia, an anti-war activist and policy wonk, as she engaged in a "scale-shift"—leaving her grassroots community behind to pursue a corporate book-tour. We consider how the stress and connection between sisters mirror larger stories of power and intimacy. See: www.scaledocumentary.com.

12 As an AIDS activist videomaker in New York in the late '80s and early '90s, I collaborated with other video makers and activists committed to re-imagining AIDS in making quick, low-budget videos seen and used by others in the community. While new access to machines enabled our work, it was our shared politics and communal processes that registered most radically in the work. See: <http://kcet.org/explore-ca/web-stories/age-of-aids>

I protest against the smooth operator
theory, real people and their chaotic, mu

I invite you:

—to flee—

the sweet embrace of *America's Nex*
the poison of the commercial send-u
the clutches of technophilia, the allu
to turn your back on music, effects, ;

—to flee—

out into the open with camcorder in l
+ practice), in search of your own mater
commitments to social justice.

Mp:me is made visible through a ca
video aesthetic connected to a lengthy hi
retical media production.



Leandro Katz, *Exhumación* (2007)
FRAME ENLARGEMENT, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

LEANDRO KATZ

I have always set my fiction and non-f
that there is a documentary element
operating as a kind of meta-language

13 In *Video Remains*, (2005), I layer digital video of a
on to 15-year old VHS footage of my best friend, J
Present-day voices of lesbian AIDS video activists