

free

To ensure the feeling of hopelessness
The gallery will be painted black.

To imply the attitude of commitment
The entire gallery, including offices,
Will be painted black.

To reveal the relationship between shelter
And privilege
The walls will be chained together.

To portray the false association of wealth
With spirituality
The walls will be chained to the ceiling.

To depict the limitations of form
The walls will be chained to the ground.

To evoke the stance of postmodernism
The chains will be slack.

To convey the bad faith of commerce
The chains will be heavy.

To emote the baseness of complicity
The floor will be chained to the door,

And the door will be locked.

47 Clarion San Francisco
CA 94110 (415) 863-1860

Editor
Aaron Noble
Production Administration
Lise Swenson

Vince Oresman, Chelsea Bailey

Editorial Assistant

Brian Cross

Contributing Editor

Liz Kotz

Contributing Writers

Laura Brun, Jennie Currie, Egostag, Scott Macleod,
Michael Peppe, Peter Plate, Leslie Singer, Suegee,
Marshall Weber, Jon Winet

Photo Editor

Kirk Schroeder

Staff Photographers

Julie Alland, Paul McCarthy, Julie Murray

Formatting

Raegan Kelly

Data Entry

Judith Figlio, Arda Ishkanian, April Jones, Stephen
Perkins, Leslie Singer, Jon Winet

Paste-up

Scott Macleod, Missy Montgomery, Julie Murray

Printing

Tim Badger, Bill Daniel

Executive Committee

Chelsea Bailey, Aaron Noble, Lise Swenson

Acknowledgements

Bloatstick could not have been published without the
contributions, favors, and expertise of the following, for
which we are more than grateful.

Brutal Pumpkid Rubs & Ribs, Margaret Crane, Todd
Edelman, Judith Figlio, Guy Geduldig, James Hagler,
Lou Hawthorne, Marc Heffels, Janet Janet, Orson
Maquelani, Tara Marlowe, New College of
California, John Rhico, Charles Rotter, Charlie
Spaeth, Mark Taylor, Curtis Tom

Special Thanks

Artists' Television Access, The Lab, Alan Millar, Peter
Wells Press

Cover

Marshall Weber

Proposal for Artspace

Bloatstick magazine, Volume I, Number 1, Fall 1988.
Published quarterly. Contents copyright 1988 by the
individual contributors. Bloatstick is interested in publishing
unpretentious critical writing related to arts in the Bay Area.
Unsolicited contributions should be accompanied by a
stamped, self-addressed envelope. We accept no
advertising. Address correspondence to: 47 Clarion, San
Francisco, CA, 94110. Telephone: (415) 863-1860.

bloatstick

volume one, number one fall 1988

Contents

Land Parcel Survey
page four

San Francisco:
Towards the Other Country
by Peter Plate
page twelve

Meet the New Boss
by Michael Peppe
page fourteen

Divorce Decree
by Leslie Singer
page eighteen

On the Edge of Documentary
Films by Amos Gitai, Trin Minh-Ha, and
Craig Baldwin
by Liz Kotz
page twenty

Reviews

Festival of Plagiarism
page twenty-eight

"As if" he were an airplane crashing....
page thirty-two

Mission is Bitchin' Festival
page thirty-four
Necromancy
page forty-one

Photographic Memories
page forty-three
Barney Haynes and Barry Schwartz
page forty-seven

Inflated Sheep
page fifty-four

Land Parcel Survey

It's unfortunate, but quite revealing nevertheless, that you should title your survey a "land parcel survey", for isn't the dominant aesthetic and its whole machinery permeated through and through with this idea of property, and as a consequence a whole set of dominoes fall neatly in line....real estate, investment, blue chip art, speculation, the recent auctions, in short, commodity culture. (10)

Not only the dominant aesthetic and its machinery, but also the "alternative" aesthetics and their machinery, to the extent that these are at all separable, are permeated with the idea of property. Our title was a very intentionally ironic reference to our own inevitably compromised position. To be as clear as possible, our suggestion that the art scene could be parceled out and sold, and that our attempt to fight that possibility by focusing discussion could just as easily promote the marketing process, and our titular identification with that packaging function, should all be taken as a warning that the most you can trust are our intentions.

Acreage

This survey was distributed to about forty local artists chosen on the basis of our respect for their work or opinions or both. Virtually all forty are at least acquainted with at least one of Bloatstick's executive committee members. Most have significant personal connections with at least one member of that committee.

"If conservative work silently reinforces the existing social relations, then some dissenting work posits a correction, a didactic cure to the ills of those relations. In the former case the viewer is placed in the position of the child who is praised and rewarded for being in her proper place; in the latter she is corrected and thus positioned in a new proper place. There seems to be no place made for the viewer to doubt the centered sources of legitimation, to question who is speaking and the stakes of particular articulations." (13)

When I look at the S.F. art scene and exclude all the fakers, hip-hoppers, fashion fadders, and the rest

Land Parcel Survey

of the stylish flotsam and jetsam, I actually see a very small number of people who are working in a sustained, rigorous and intentional manner. (10)

I know less than ten genuine artists as friends (that like me back). One...two tops, live here. (6)

The size of the art scene here is about a block circumference outside my front door; spanning to global proportions. (2)

You are my circle. I have a wider, more diffuse circle as well. Maybe five hundred people. We are almost all young, white, pretty, and speak English. (7)

Size: at best--intimate; at worst--incestuous. (15)

I have a substantial audience in San Francisco just from the artist community here. (4)

My audience is spread over four continents but only numbers about 85 people. (6)

In the past few years I have been exploring performance as a tool and form for therapy. In particular I have drawn upon my experiences as an artist/therapist working with emotionally disturbed children and their families. This work has opened up a vast new resource and brought an emotional intensity to my work. The fact that it connects me to a broader community and that I function in very different role than just as an artist is a benefit also. (4)

Certain members of the band are encouraging their body to grow extra limbs. (3)

Naivete, love, surrendering and trusting others are my personal goals. (6)

As for my current concerns I would characterize them as centered around exploring strategies for negating commodity culture, and the creation of independent cultural networks. (10)

My intentions are to sympathize with what I would normally hate or avoid. (6)

People are scared and lonely everywhere all the time and a symptom of this is the need for everyone of our generation to call themselves "artists". Being a person isn't enough. (6)

There are a lot of coaster artists in S.F. mindlessly puppeteered by slogan mongers who's pat incantation is

Land Parcel Survey

the imaginary: "Everyone's an artist". That sublime banality is why S.F. will remain a 3rd rate art zone for generations to come. (1)

To define art in the narrow terms provided by patriarchally-based theories is nonsense. Why is someone's rambling on canvas any more important than the way that one arranges flowers or approaches life? That truck driver has a beautiful dream or a particular vision of the world, but he doesn't think of himself as an artist because the "art world" didn't tell him he was. Perhaps he, like many artists I know, thinks artists are born with something special. This belief is one of the biggest tragedies we are faced with. (8)

People I know pretty much all have the production disease and do some kind of art. (11)

Topography

Of the original survey sample, about 10% were non-white; about 10% were over 35; and about 25% were female.

As a community we need to specifically resolve the issue of race as we exist in a predominantly white milieu. The work we see and the work we produce fails to include the ethnic mix which will/would strengthen our culture and vision. (15)

The issues of individual art fame and fortune vs. collective achievement and gain demand our ongoing attention. (15)

We are basically a mature formation (individually). We are still insular. We are pointing the finger at ourselves. (7)

Just because we all play at each other's benefits doesn't make us a community. I'm not convinced there is one, a "scene" maybe....(10)

Real artists don't need scenes, and, more and more, vice versa. (6)

The S.F. art scene (especially the "buddy system" types) is only of use to pedestrian, self-impressed fake artists. All scenes are like that. (6)

A good school will have taught you not to rely on or be impeded by things as trivial as "scenes". (6)

Land Parcel Survey

The insularity of the new American art scene provides a forum for the exchange of business cards and resumes rather than an exchange of artistic or social ideas. The atmosphere also leads me to question the basic value of my work within the larger social context. (5)

Groups: a fragile balance. Tendencies: community and careerism. Trends: commerce and creative production. Fads: ego and integrity. (15)

The current brand of angst is the agony-that-comes-from-not-having-any-agony agony. That's not only romantic, it's dishonest. It's OK to be boring, and your boringness can be more worthy of making into art than your contrived morbidity and forced temper tantrums. (6)

The S.F. Bay area is a classic example of a big mouth with no teeth. Mark Pauline, Barry and Barney, and a few others are obvious exceptions. Everything else is reactionary neo-primitivist tripe or transcendental visionary guru tripe or skin deep, texture-crazed post-modern tripe or marxist pol agit-prop tripe or schlock/funk garbage pail kids tripe. These are all visceral (tripe...visceral, get it?) forms definable as "Nouveau radical fundamentalism". (1)

I think fads or trends are an unavoidable part of the development of the artist. Emulation is often the first step in self-expression. (11)

The fads themselves don't matter, except as part of human communal instinct. (11)

Little tasks, rituals, and symbols give some lives a meaning. (3)

Fuck your groups, tendencies, trends, fads, styles and conventions. Now you've made me mad. I'm a Lakers fan, but I won't be next year. We're starting to decide who we want to be. (7)

As far as I can see, the current terrain is depressingly flat. Outside of the shithouse that dares to call itself a museum of modern art (and S.F.'s at that), the downtown blue chip/boutique galleries, and the rest of the art bounty hunters, I see very few places that are showing work, offering space, or indeed exploring strategies necessary for any sustained challenge/critique to the dominant aesthetic. (10)

"Anything is happening. All things are terrible when they occur". (14)

Land Parcel Survey

"Autonomy is a way of acting collectively. It is made up of a number of organs and fluid organizations characterized by the refusal to separate economics from politics, and politics from existence. Autonomy never unifies." (13)

I see a movement toward a stronger coalescence among artists, people are beginning to talk about things, to discuss larger issues...I believe that is this dialogue which will produce solidarity and greater exploration of new ideas within the arts. (5)

All too often artists are prepared to fuck over other artists in bagdog by the bay. (1)

Borders

For the survey we accepted only written responses, no "artwork". We compromised on one diagram that seemed to address our questions very articulately.

"Autonomy has no frontiers. It is a way of eluding the imperatives of production, the verticality of institutions, the traps of political representation, the virus of power. Political autonomy is the desire to allow differences to deepen at the base without trying to synthesize them from above, to stress similar attitudes without imposing a general line, to allow parts to co-exist side by side, in their singularity." (13)

Art is a silly thing where people set up this 3 letter word to put something over on someone else, on what's an important function from their body. (3)

There are artists in Bali. In fact, the Balinese are a society of artists. But they don't call themselves that. In fact, they have no word for "art", because all acts of creation in everyday life are "art". All is art. All is just all. There is no art. Just living. And life is for pleasure. (8)

I think in general that we have managed to allow lust and artistic purity(?) to coexist. We have stared the enemy in the crotch and they have blinked. Money is much trickier. I haven't really figured that one out at all. You're damned if you do, you're damned if you don't. (7)

The most obvious and pressing border is that of money and all that accompanies it. (5)

I've never thought that the whole universe is on

Land Parcel Survey

someone's fingernail. I have thought that there is an end to the universe and that it's white like a blank canvas. (12)

South: Managua. North: Exploratorium. East: New York. West: Steinhart Aquarium. (15)

We have more of a desire to play Williamsburg Virginia than New York City. The lust is there, we can see a picture of George Washington's bleeder and our eyes bulge like Hoss's muscles. (3)

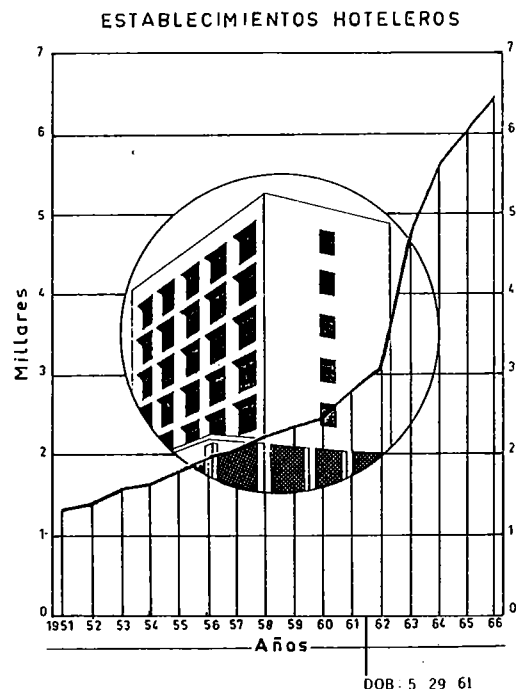
The possibilities include personal borders as well as exterior borders. Drugs can create a completely different outlook which can foster creative work. (5)

Our borders need to extend out into the bush and in into the bush.(2)

Does anyone ever let their guard down long enough to talk about art stuff that is really important to them or is everybody too afraid? (10)

The art ghetto: a lot of borders we impose upon ourselves. (10)

After a nice breakfast, am on train back to Amsterdam for sole purpose of hunting down address book. Will try to finish land survey. There are lots of cows here. (7)



Land Parcel Survey

Soil and Weather

Out of the forty artists surveyed we got responses from seventeen (two of these are running as separate essays). In terms of discipline, accomplishment, or close connections to Bloatstick, there seems to be little difference between them and the 23 who did not respond.

The media doesn't care (why should they?) and the audience won't because they're all artists too and need the myths. (6)

The media around here plays NO role in anything I or anybody else I know does. It usually boils down to one or two reporters with nothing to say. All notices are xeroxed flyers and all reviews are word of mouth. (11)

When there is coverage, it is inaccurate and poorly done. (5)

The only secret that I know about Madonna is an incident my boyfriend told me about. Back in late 1982/early 1983 New York filmmaker/playwright John Jesurun was showing a film at the club Folk City. Madonna was there in the audience and was being loudly bored and rude during the movie. Her first single, *Everybody*, had just been released, so quite a few other people in the club knew who she was. After the movie was over a couple of Jesurun's women friends came up to Madonna at different times and bumped into her hard, pretending it was an accident. (12)

With one or two possible exceptions there are no alternative exhibiting spaces in S.F. Let's rethink this whole idea of "alternative" anyway, it's a 70's concept that we're dragging into the '90's. (10)

In the schools, particularly at CCAC, there is a fragmentation among departments. But there seems to be movement towards funk-art that is crossing these boundaries. (5)

The art schools/academy never really helped anyone who knew what they wanted to say and explore. Why don't the veritable "gutter academy" of well educated S.F. artists get together and start something of their own along these lines. No one here knows shit about what's been happening post WWII (particularly outside of the country). (10)

A friend of ours went to a school for a long time learning to be like Dali Parton and others, but found out

Land Parcel Survey

feeding a bird in a blown up out of proportion way was way cheaper and much more personal than learning a country-western-vocal-painting technique. And looking around saw hundreds of people doing things that they do and flushing and feeding and getting money and satisfactory mind feelings from their tasks. (3)

Most people I know work in absurd clerical stints. (11)

If I could get a job, I could get some money. If I could get some money I could make more art. If I could make more art then more people might see it and if they don't it still makes good Christmas and Birthday gifts. (14)

This city is a meat grinder for artists. Mark Pauline goes to Amsterdam and the Dutch government puts a surplus helicopter and tank at his disposal! In S.F. we are on the other side of the earth. Case 1 - City vs. Artists: Niccolo Calderaro is given assurances from Susan Montana (artists' ally in the city planning dept.) that an application for a permit of occupancy would be handled in a spirit of generosity with allowances for gradual code compliance for currently illegal work/live spaces. Niccolo tells an artist household to go ahead and apply for the permit and wouldn't you fucking know it, the hooters from the permit dept. evict everyone. Case 2 - Artists vs. Artists: Bill Maher wrote the artist work/live legislation for artists only and who tries to sabotage the artists only clause but a relic from the Goodman building with half a million federal dollars to sink into a big development, but can't because the Fed won't let the money be used if an exclusionary covenant is in effect. (1)

Art and work, work for money, shitty jobs for years on end....is this the fate of artists who refuse to compromise? Is anyone talking about new solutions to this one?(10)

KEY

(1)Walter 'Batman' Alter, music/installation; (2) Lawrence Andrews, video; (3)Caroliner (group response), music/performance; (4)Amy Elliott, performance/drama therapy; (5)Barney Haynes, performance/video; (6)Dale Hoyt, video; (7)Scott MacLeod, writing/performance; (8)Caitlin Morgan, theater; (9)Julie Murray, film/collage; (10)Stephen Perkins, various media; (11)Fred Rinne, music/painting (12)Leslie Singer, video; (13)"Matthew Sommerville", video/writing; (14)Mark Taylor, film/writing; (15)Jon Winet, collaborative installation.

San Francisco: Towards the Other Country

by Peter Plate

at the gate to a new century, amidst the jostling investors and consumers, an unknown tendency is replacing the current bearers of ideology, and their differing brands of identification, with intelligence.

this displacement is riveted upon prospects forwarded from society's bottom margins to the point of no return: from the jails, the streets, and towards the artist's isolation, from wherever radical subjectivity is being cultivated as language of shared and opposed experiences, the story of art against profit is being told.

to begin the narrative is to appropriate a public architecture made private: of real estate imprisoned on the sidewalks, and of beautiful paintings trapped inside large, provocative windows.

the squatters who take abandoned buildings in the neighborhoods of their choice, the discerning reader stealing the books of her fancy in the stores that kill desire, they move ahead into an exploration for authenticity without permission. the free exchange of products and dreams is conducted under the malevolent gaze of publishers and realtors....

meanwhile, poetic pleasure comes to you direct and live from the violation of social control. in paradox and sabotage, the price tags placed upon our work are crushed under the maximum weight, the unchecked movement of our contradictions.

art wrenched from political strife and individual necessity leaves behind the disposable garments of career and ambition. paint and print become weapons which fuel the motor of revolt in the hearts and minds of a dying nation. we share these dangerous greetings from the interior, from the other country, without the barbed wire mediation of critics and agents.

wholesale and retail, these two words are a pair of handcuffs placed upon hands already suffering from epileptic seizures of American loneliness.

in art galleries, bookstores, and movie houses, wherever ideas are being circulated, oxygen flows into the lungs, and we learn to appropriate freely whatever pleases us.

....we were born under the shadow of global destruction and local eviction. time is disappearing into quicksand, the years slip into revulsion and dread.

if there is anything left on the table after the shadows pass, we will seize it, you bastards.... i build a house from the books i have stolen. i undermine the merchants at the bazaar, ridiculing profit's code, the closeted illness of repetition and banality. random elements, each and every one of us, we forgot the rules, and gave it all away....

we are accused of black marketeering.

the city is monument to politics, extracting life from an awareness of death. the city is a cenotaph, an empty tomb highly charged with the emotions of the living. i am lost on the footpath, reeling in the wake of capital's flight toward west coast art.

san francisco possesses a bohemian tradition but that means nothing because los angeles has more money, someone laments for the broken past.

the marketplace is intent upon buying and selling our most secretive and traumatic dreams. i am a sleepwalker floating through the walls of hell. i close my eyes and bend over, submitting to the highest bidder, his cold hands grasping my hips.

i am bleeding from the mouth, but nonetheless, i am able to say:

to the entrepreneurs of the mission district and elsewhere, to those centers heralding the gentrification of the arts and education on valencia street, we remind you of the ghosts in your buildings, of those vietnam vets and AIDS victims who lurch down your halls after hours.

....the homeless huddle religiously in your doorways, the rain pours down from the real estate heavens, and the renovation of your lobby has begun with fanfare and exultation....

to those seeking art for profit, the death of a subject, and the flesh that lingers behind, we admit your property is rising in equity, and your names are preserved in the rear view mirror of history, but please, raise your hands up high, and give us the future before we turn into rioters and looters because we must be realistic: the "open" and competitive market you foist on us as the final solution, the masks we wear in the game of terminal survival, they can no longer hide the appearance of our disgust at the simulations you have provided in lieu of real life.

Meet the New Boss

by Michael Peppe

At one time San Francisco's reputation as a center for creative risk and formal experimentation was second only to New York's, for which it was considered a kind of an aesthetic Triple-A farm team, in which young hotshot Bohos could work out the bugs in their styles before hitting the Big Time. At various moments in its history, in fact, it has even taken the lead, producing work unequaled anywhere in the U.S. During the now-legendary Punk/New Wave explosion of 1977-82, San Francisco was home to some of the most adventurous and exciting art, in a half-dozen mediums, in the world.

Unfortunately, as I'm sure you're all-too-well aware, that era is long past. The bracing, vigorously experimental work of the Punk/very early Reagan era has long since been obliterated by that era's own worst tendency; art-as-entertainment. Though its proponents in all fields hotly denied it at the time, it is now wrenchingly obvious to everyone that the "crossover" phenomenon that was all the rage two years ago, and which launched the mass mega-stardom of the Soho pantheon (Anderson, Glass, Tharp, Monk, Grey, Schnabel, Haring, etc.) and to a lesser extent their S.F. counterparts (Whoopi Goldberg, Bill Irwin, Margaret Jenkins, Kronos Quartet, etc.), and which brought the avant garde to the mainstream, has lead inevitably, for reasons far too complex to go into here,* to the complete commodification of creativity, and the end of art as an experimental, and possibly even as a spiritual, project.

This occurred, of course, during the Great Yuppie Nuclear Winter of 1983-87. Needing to validate their relentless commodity fetishism and seemingly limitless greed with the rubber-stamp of high art consumption, the generation of educated urban hipsters born 1940-60 required their entertainment both hipper and higher of brow than the Johnny Carson generation did. Giddy from the breathless puff-pieces and regurgitated press releases on their favorite local and national art stars in the Pink Pages, *Image* magazine and the *Bay Guardian*, they throng the hippest galleries and theaters in the Bay Area, each publicity-soaked brain firmly encased in a haircut trendy enough to fell a large museum director at ninety feet. Needing to be diverted from

* See "Why Our Art Is So Bad", *High Performance* magazine, Fall, 1983.

lives of alienated labor, empty consumerism, liberal conformity and intellectual narcolepsy, they require also that that diversion carry a patina of seriousness and a bouquet of depth, but without sacrificing the security-blanket conventions of stand-up comedy, rock 'n' roll, sitcoms, movies, and comic books

The artists themselves, loins a-quiver over the prospect of Major Alternative Weekly Validation, naturally lost no time obliging this audience with precisely what their vanity demanded: shallow, titillating content with a pinch of "off"-ness, often conspicuously garnished with high production costs that blatantly manifest an ideology of purely material values. But of course the art-world also needed The Justification, which went something like this: "We're not really renting out our butt-holes for a few bucks and some petty notoriety because the availability of our challenging, cutting-edge work to the swinish bourgeois art-masses cannot help but elevate their brutish Philistine consciousness to the rarified Olympus on which we urban Illuminati hold forth." The result was a very slight improvement in the quality of entertainment, a dizzying decline in that of art, and the nauseating homogeneity which now pervades all of the arts, making almost all avant-garde film, video, theater, gallery, book and magazine viewing one big, fat, experience of obnoxious, unrelenting hipness.

And that's the good news. The bad news is, it's gonna get a lot worse before it gets any better. The production of beauty, the discovery of universal truths, the exploration of the spiritual and the other true missions of art having seemingly become discredited by their commercialization; artists both here and elsewhere are finding it considerably less taxing to avoid re-shouldering those ambiguous tasks and to simply seize upon the easiest art of all, and the closest at hand today: political art. Or rather, to drop the euphemism, liberal art. Loath to examine the predominant role of the liberal and "alternative" press, media, art establishment and audience in the current predicament, much less their *own* complicity, leftist artists both in S.F. and elsewhere prefer to blame a shooting gallery of fat, easy targets: conservatives, Christians, W.A.S.P.s, pre-baby-boomers, middle-Americans, and of course, the juiciest clay pigeon of them all, Reagan, every liberal's scapegoat Antichrist. This not only lets them off the hook for art's quagmire, but relieves them of the often painful self-examination and the difficult inquiries into reality that art requires, since they can take refuge in the news of the day, particularly in blaming the straw men the liberal establishment aims them at, for the problems that establishment boiled them up about

in the first place. San Francisco being easily the most liberal major city in the nation, it's also the most egregious offender in this regard. Hence the endless flood of lame, shallow, trendy, easy art about the U.S. in Central America, minority issues, women's issues, Reaganism, racism, fundamentalism, South Africa, etc., all content to swallow unexamined all the assumptions, biases and manipulations of the "alternative" media establishment.

For the liberal Yuppie Service-Industrial Complex that produced the Yuppie Nuclear Winter in the first place, this presents an unprecedented opportunity to make permanent the gains of their economic revolution and extend the Night of the Trendy Dead indefinitely. Since today's artists are only too willing to squander their talent dramatizing the political orthodoxy of "alternative" weeklies like the *Bay Guardian*, public radio and T.V. stations like KQED, the liberal dailies and the art press, in exchange for breathy feature-story canonization and an official halo of political correctness, the Yuppie media can fabricate a completely fake political counterposition, about a hair to the left of their reigning liberal dogma. This of course has the brilliant effect of creating an appearance of free dissent and debate, simulating a dialogue where there is in fact only monologue. By keeping activist artists on a short leash as ferocious radical housedogs, and training them with worshipful interview-biscuits, the new liberal Yuppie Moral Majority can crush out all possible dissent in the most brilliantly effective way possible: by impersonating it. This also extends the Yuppie revolution from the economic and social spheres into the cultural and political ones, and conceals the fact that the so-called "alternative" is rapidly becoming a monolithic cultural establishment--but one to which we can never have an alternative, since it supposedly already is one.

But perhaps even more ominously, the rapidly-spreading assumption that underpins all this is that the only alternative to the Yuppie materialist/consumerist/conformist nightmare of the early 80's is a political one. Accordingly, common wisdom has it, the solution then requires artistically whining and droning on about the Baby-Boomers' above-mentioned pet media-issues: U.S. foreign involvement, minority and women's issues, the evils of conservatism, etc.-- issues the information-addicted Baby-Boomers consume like so much trail mix, and excrete undigested. But the Yuppie materialist disaster is not a political problem to begin with: it's a spiritual one, and requires art with a spiritual, intellectual and emotional solution. Unfortunately this homely fact has been completely forgotten in the political hysteria, and artists have

once again, as in the artistically forgettable thirties, taken refuge in the safe, comforting, simplistic notion that all possible perspectives on a given issue take place on a one-dimensional linear axis leading from the extreme Right to the extreme Left. Especially in places like San Francisco, this has resulted in a kind of an hysterical bunker mentality, of Us Against Them, a paranoid reverse-McCarthyism in which the devouring Other is middle-America, conservatives, W.A.S.P.s, the satanic U.S. government, or whatever. This white-hat/black-hat paranoia can easily breed and multiply because in the total electronic- and print-media saturation of the art-world hothouse, artists have very little relationship to any reality beyond the issues pushed by that media, and hence quickly become incapable of even thinking or feeling deeply, much less making art, about such trivialities as existence, time, truth, God, death, language, the mind, good and evil, and the other true subjects of art. And, in the final irony, they often justify this moral cowardice with the excuse that such "apolitical" investigations had been the concerns of the now-discredited Post-Modernist phase, and that such subjects have in any case all "already been done," and even that they constitute an "escape" from the "reality" of the mass media!

To summarize, then: Art, having squealed with delight and dropped giggling to its knees to suck off mass pop culture in the early eighties, turns in surprise to find itself in the late eighties getting bum-fucked by the Left, which fancies itself thereby engaged in an act of cultural criticism. Granted, perhaps art deserves what it's getting, but does mass pop culture? And does the Left?

Divorce Decree

I, Leslie Singer, on this day of October 10, 1987, hereby divorce myself from the term "video artist". From this day on I will no longer refer to myself as a "video artist" or "artist" except in the manner that Whitney Houston is referred to as a recording *artist* or Peter Gabriel was voted *video artist* of the year by MTV. The grounds for this divorce are as follows:

1. Video does not fit into the Art World. It is ignored by the Art Press and it does not fit into the economic system of the Art World (collectors buying objects endowed with uniqueness from galleries that exclusively represent an artist). In the *Village Voice* video is not reviewed by the art critics but by the film critics. Art periodicals such as *Artforum* or *Art in America* print reviews and articles pertaining to video with less frequency than does the arts & entertainment section of the local newspaper. As video artists are finding out now, they can make copies of their tapes and sell them. They can show their videos and charge admission. That puts video art into the economic world of entertainment, e.g. Rock Music and the Movies. (You think you can make it solely on the grant/patronage system but meanwhile everyone else is going behind your damn back and distributing their videos to discos in Dallas.)

As for independent and avant garde filmmakers, the amount of grant money they receive, if any, is so small that most films are financed by individual contributions and out of the filmmakers' pockets. Some independent filmmakers now transfer their works to video so they can either sell or rent copies. As with the video artists, this lumps the filmmakers into the economic world of entertainment.

2. Who would want to be in the Art World anyway? Art people, while claiming to be hip and knowledgeable, actually live and think within their closed little ghetto. The Residents once said, "It's uncool to be ignorant of your culture." It is not cool to be ignorant of any part of your culture, whether it be high or low. It is not enough to know the work of Robert Wilson and Barbara Kruger; you also have to know about Expose and Bruce Springsteen. It is all part of our culture and has equal relevance. The following is an example of typical Art World ignorance: Video Free America showed some videotapes in April of 1987 as part of a program entitled "Not New York." These were tapes made in the last year or so by various San Francisco video artists. Several videotapes featured soundtrack music reminiscent of the album *My Life in*

the Bush of Ghosts by Brian Eno and David Byrne, which came out in 1981. Another tape featured music reminiscent of Philip Glass, whose style has changed very little in twenty years. Another featured a male performer dressed in a suit, wearing glasses, and making body and hand movements distinctly reminiscent of David Byrne in the *Once in a Lifetime* music video (1980). Brian Eno, David Byrne, and Philip Glass live in New York. So much for "Not New York." Should not artists, if they have to steal, steal from people a little more current like Whitney Houston or a little more ancient like the Everly Brothers?

When the Art World is not busy pretending to be hip and knowledgeable, it is pretending to be outrageous and innovative. But I cannot think of any art piece or artist that is more outrageous, hip, innovative or anything than the New York Dolls. Look at their first album cover. Be lucky enough to have seen video clips of their TV performances. The lipstick, the shoes, the scarves, the hair, the clothes, the music, the lyrics, the whole band doing exaggerated imitations of rock star poses right into the TV cameras, never missing a beat. It is not just seeing guys in drag or hearing loud, raw, rocking proto-punk music. It is more. Yeah, I have seen some great shows by Johanna Went and Karen Finley but ultimately they lose out to the Dolls. As Ben Edmonds wrote in 1973 concerning the NY Dolls, "Perhaps the reason the Dolls have been so misunderstood is that they don't play to an existing audience; it's an audience that has yet to reveal itself. More than simply latching onto an audience, the next phenomenon will be that which *creates* its audience. The Dolls have very little choice: they either create that audience or they have none at all. They don't really belong to anything else." Went and Finley play to the same old audience. Finley plays to the Art audience, and as she gets more popular she may cross over and play to the Rock audience. Nothing new has happened or been created. These days both audiences and both worlds are equally limiting.

In conclusion, I divorce myself from the term "video artist" because I cannot be happy or satisfied stuck in something I do not identify with or fit into. I have to go on out and try to find the right thing for me and my videos.

ON THE EDGE OF DOCUMENTARY:

FILMS BY AMOS GITAI, TRINH MINH-HA & CRAIG BALDWIN

by Liz Kotz

The recent "Representing Colonialism" series at the Pacific Film Archive (co-sponsored by the UC Berkeley Group for the Critical Study of Colonialism) presented a rare Bay Area screening of *Bangkok Bahrain* by Amos Gital, "one of the few filmmakers engaged in rethinking social documentary" (J. Hoberman, in the *Village Voice*). This kind of film, working at the edges of the documentary genre and yet not inscribed into the cocoon of established "Experimental" art cinema, seems to have a great deal of difficulty finding a venue, much less an audience, here in the hyper-compartmentalized world of Bay Area exhibition.

Yet I think that this film has a lot to say in relation to some of the most exciting work being done here by two local filmmakers working on that edge between documentary and experimental, Trinh Minh-ha and Craig Baldwin. In provocatively different ways, each of these filmmakers traces challenging possibilities for "documentary" work in the context of films that attempt to explore and redefine the relationship between the first world and the third world.

Gital, a leftist Israeli filmmaker -- some of his earlier works on the uneasy co-existence of Arabs and Jews in Israeli society were banned by the national TV system that commissioned them -- produced *Bangkok Bahrain* for Britain's Channel Four. Broken into two parts, the film traces the sexual division of (excess) labor in post-war Thailand, the displaced women working in the sex trade in the capitol -- Bangkok -- and the men in construction in the Middle East -- Bahrain. Trinh's ground-breaking anti-ethnography *Reassemblage*, also shown in the UC Berkeley series, is a theoretically rigorous effort to undermine the cinematic positioning of the other as "Other" in its shifting portrayal of village life in West Africa. Her more recent work, *Naked Spaces: Living Is Round* is a slower, more meditative film on the relationship of rural west Africans to their living places -- as tool, art object and sanctuary. Baldwin's *RocketKit-KongoKit*, assembled from found-footage, tells the story of the incredible militarization of Zaire (formerly the Congo) through the forces of West German and American war industry -- while integrating everything from Disney cartoons to Lydia Lunch in its rush of images and sounds.

Whereas traditional documentary filmmaking, with its strict division between filming subject and filmed object, was historically modeled on the neo-colonial relationship between "Western" filmmaker and non-western subject matter, *Bangkok Bahrain*,

Reassemblage, and *RocketKitKongoKit* all situate themselves in a post-colonial model of First and Third Worlds as inter-dependent, inter-penetrating realities. This has important consequences for their approaches to filmmaking, since it so deeply challenges the stance of the filmmaker as uninvolved observer. As Trinh writes in her introduction to the special "Third World Women" issue of *Discourse*:

What is at stake is not only the hegemony of Western cultures, but also their identities as unified cultures; in other worlds, the realization that there is a Third World in every First World, and vice versa. (*Discourse* #8, 1987)

The three filmmakers refrain from the reductive moralism of many issue-oriented documentaries to approximate something closer to an archaeology of modern life: charting the places individuals occupy, the relations between positions, the flows of power, and the intrinsic role of filming in this process. An important strategy in this is their shared use of assemblage to construct their films. Rather than using a more conventional documentary construction to lay out a linear analysis that follows a clear path from introduction to conclusion, working through assemblage suggests that there are multiple ways of putting elements together and that more complex and politically-informed meanings can be created through selection and juxtaposition of elements which retain their own discursive histories.

Viewed together, their films offer a critique of the moribund representational conventions of documentary filmmaking and the ways these representational codes, particularly in their demarcation of space, construct and maintain an opposition between First and Third Worlds. (To understand how representations construct, rather than merely reflect, these two worlds as separate, distinct spheres, we can consider the two poles of this opposition: the Hollywood-style feature film as the First World's ultimate filmic self-representation -- all white -- and the ethnography as the First World's representation of the other -- all Black, all native, etc. In each instance, the representational code excludes the actual heterogeneity of our world, artificially isolates personal and public/international spheres and hides the neo-colonial political/economic relationship that constructs First and Third Worlds as opposed, mutually-dependent realities.)

Breaking with some of the constraints of technical professionalism, the three films experiment with different uses of camera, sound, and editing techniques to open up the filmic structure to more complex relationships between the materials depicted on screen. They also play with appropriation of existing genres -- travelogue, ethnography, and science fiction -- to extend and critique modes of representation familiar to western

audiences and address problems of how these filmic discourses structure our reception of non-western realities.

Bangkok Bahrain has a compelling story to tell: how after the Vietnam war built Bangkok's enormous sex-tourist industry, some 300,000 Thai women work as "bar girls" catering to the international business tourism that replaced American military involvement in the region. Gitai interviews one young woman from the impoverished north-eastern Thai/Laotian border area, who came to the city to work; unable to make enough to send home as a domestic, she turned, like many of her compatriots, to prostitution. Gitai follows her back to her village, and interviews the men there who continue to scratch out a living farming land they don't own. Then the action shifts to Bahrain, in the Persian Gulf, where Thai village men, like workers from many southern Asian countries, go to provide manual labor for an oil rich Arab world.

A sort of anti-travelogue, Gitai's films trace the routes of transnational flows of money, labor and resources. His earlier documentary *Pineapple* followed that Dole product from the fields of the Philippines to packaging in Hawaii to the shelves of your neighborhood Safeway, charting the degree of control required to manufacture a transnationally-produced commodity. In *Bangkok Bahrain*, the commodity followed is labor: Thailand as a labor-exporting country. The individuals interviewed in the film are not, in themselves, presented as good or bad; even the wealthy Bahrain businessman who's built a veritable palace of kitsch from the labor of Thai, Pakistani and Indian laborers is presented sympathetically. As described by Hoberman, these individuals -- both the exploiters and the exploited alike -- represent "sites in the international flow of capital and labor." Distancing the viewer from identification with or judgment of the subjects on screen, the strategies of address deployed in the film instead provoke consideration of this more abstract set of relations.

Shot in rural Senegal, Trinh Minh-ha's *Reassemblage* focuses the viewer's awareness on the process of looking at another culture -- particularly the overdetermined images white westerners have of Africa from news reporting, ethnographic films and National Geographic-type documentaries. Starting with a reflection on the impossibility of making a film "about" Senegal -- "I do not want to speak about, just speak nearby" -- Trinh gathers brief scenes of women going about the activities of daily life -- cleaning, weaving, preparing food -- intercutting these images with non-sync music, comments, anecdotes and silence, to compose a multi-layered meditation on colonialism and its obsessive sciences of observation and control.

With a disarmingly "amateur" style; Trinh's shaky pans, haphazard superimpositions and relentless jumpcutting aggressively interrupt the viewers' expectations of well-ordered, well-explained, "exotic" images. Stopping and starting somewhat aimlessly, the camera traces actions

without beginning or end; some segments repeat, some are out-of-focus. The very randomness and fragmentation by which the film is assembled constantly remind the viewer that seeing does not mean understanding. Trinh states: "The strategies adopted in *Reassemblage* in the shooting and editing stages ... prevent the viewers from appropriating the content of the images by their brevity and dispersion" (*Millennium Film Journal* #19).

Working further out on the edge of the documentary form than either Trinh Minh-ha or Amos Gitai, Craig Baldwin composed *RocketKitKongoKit* entirely out of found-footage and re-photographed materials. Some of this footage is "factual" -- i.e., it depicts what the narration describes -- but much of it is from other sources, old newsreels and propaganda films.

In order to "illustrate" the story, one gets the sense that Baldwin used whatever footage he could get his hands on; sometimes it is actual footage of the West German-financed OTRAG missile plant executives, but in its politically-informed garbage can aesthetic, the film is just as likely to use WWII footage to represent a scene of missile tests conducted in the early sixties -- wildly breaking with a "factual" relationship between image and text, yet suggesting the historical continuity between the Nazi scientists and those at work for OTRAG. While the verbal text tells one specific story, set in the Congo in the 1960's, the visual images, initially tied closely to the storyline, begin to veer further and further away, wildly conflating different historical periods and geographic locations, then pulling in cartoons and old movies, as the movie starts to rupture on its own notion of truth and the themes of militarization and state-sponsored violence career further out of control.

Like Trinh, Gitai works through assemblage of material shot on location, and does not attempt to "speak for" or in place of the Third World people he films. His work builds its analysis on a careful juxtaposition of information to present a dense, inter-related picture of the world. Unlike the disjunctive camera and cutting strategies used in *Reassemblage* to break the distanced, objectifying gaze of the Western ethnographic cinema, *Bangkok Bahrain* uses a minimum of editing, juxtaposing together several long pieces -- five to ten minute "real time" segments or interviews -- that illuminate and scrape against each other.

These long takes, almost un-cut, give the viewer time to observe, consider, and digest information. For example, in a lengthy interview/conversation with a Thai couple who run a business sending poor Thai workers to rich middle eastern countries as manual laborers (the husband's prior job had been as national movie censor!) the camera slowly pans back and forth between husband and wife in their crowded office as they discuss their livelihood and its implications. In the sometimes joking interplay between interviewer and interviewee, the camera records their awkward moments and resistance, which speak as clearly as their repeated statements that what they do is, in fact, a public

service.

This "building-block" approach encourages the viewer to read the relationships in the film, the tension in the interviews, and the contradictions inherent in them. Although carefully selected, these blocks are presented raw, without the voice-over analysis or tight, point-by-point editing that gives many leftist documentaries their pat, one-dimensional, pre-digested form. Yet an at-times aggressive attention to the presence of the camera keeps this technique from falling into the illusion of non-manipulation that plagues much cinema verite.

Following the standards of professionalized production techniques set by the television industry, many American documentaries tend increasingly to adopt and reproduce the technically controlled, compartmentalized reality of American feature films. These films take the form of neatly-packaged commodities, technically flawless and sumptuously over-produced. Viewed from almost anywhere else in the world, they are yet another example of First World over-development and rigidity. Among the best-enforced conventions is the acceptable relationship of image to sound in this American film grammar, in which any interruptions of sync continuity -- other than highly-codified forms of voice-over, of course -- are ceaselessly excluded.

Viewed in relation to this practice, all three filmmakers exhibit an aggressively "amateur" and experimental approach to sound to open up the structure of the films to a multi-dimensional reality. In *Reassemblage*, the separated sound and image constantly juxtapose information, breaking up the smooth sync unity and continuity and resisting any aesthetic or semiotic closure -- "the habit of imposing meaning onto every sign." The multi-layered sound composition of *Naked Spaces* extends this dispersion of the voice-over, breaking the text into three voices emphasizing the heteroglossia -- the diverse sources, logics and histories -- of the discourses used and the multiplicity of the filming subject. Environmental sounds and music, rather than playing a cosmetic role of enforcing continuity or providing "local color," are also incorporated as determining elements of the film.

In *Bangkok Bahrain*, the soundtrack often provokes and challenges the visual image: the camera follows the woman interviewed from her nightlife work to her rural home, but the soundtrack lags, as the disco score drones on over the voiceless conversation between two village women. One reality haunts the other, conflicts, overlaps. Discussing his previous film, Gitai notes:

"In *Pineapple*, there is this song of the earth which comes and goes throughout the entire film. You have an interview with a slick looking executive but the sound at some point comes in and opposes the image because it registers a memory of something else. It supports the kind of structure where the story is opened up again and again." (*Framework* #29, 1985)

Location is never effaced in the name of technical perfection: buses pass by, people cough, and machines drown out conversation. Instead, the relationship of individuals to their physical environment -- their home, office or place of work -- is constantly foregrounded by the wide-framing used throughout the film, constantly tying their "subjective" lives to the reality of material systems, work, architecture. The hand-held camera rests at a shoulder height medium shot, neither pulling back for an overview of the city, nor closing-up on objects. This resistance of the conventional cinematic grammar of omniscience and intimacy, where punctuation is provided by the close-up, both reinforces the distance/de-identification of the viewer and re-emphasizes the role of sound in providing rhythm and structure.

Unable to interview the foreign workers in Bahrain -- evidently, a condition of permission to film there -- Gitai lets the camera tell the story: workers are photographed picking up their pay, and smiling into the hand-held camera that has come to record them at work. The film moves back and forth between the interiors: first the tour of the businessman's lavish mansion, walking from room to room as the host proudly displays his domain; then the cramped, dark quarters of the construction workers.

Bangkok Bahrain's repeated situation of individuals in cultural space is not surprising given Gitai's background in architecture (he earned his Phd at UC Berkeley). This rigorous concern with space and dwellings -- the relationship of individuals to their physical environment -- is also very evident in Trinh's work; although her professional background was in music (composition and ethnomusicology) and comparative philosophy, she collaborated with her companion, UC Berkeley Professor of Architecture Jean-Paul Bourdier on a book, *African Spaces: Designs for Living in Upper Volta*, that opened up some of the concerns later developed in *Naked Spaces*.

Both Gitai and Trinh tend to focus on settings, on locations -- be it a downtown Bangkok bar with David Bowie's "China Girl" blasting or a sun-parched Senegalese plain -- as sites in which specific histories, specific colonializations, can be read, inseparable from the lives of the people who inhabit them. In *Naked Spaces* (an almost 2 1/2 hour film) Trinh switches from the fast cutting of *Reassemblage* to an extended pace of very long takes that develops a slow, very sustained way of looking -- at people, at landscapes, at dwellings -- that gently develops the viewer's sensitivity to the relationships between the Africans and their living spaces.

Like *Reassemblage*, *Naked Spaces* uses carefully crafted camera and editing techniques to undermine the smooth seamlessness of conventional filmmaking, interrupting the continuity of space and time, always incomplete. Linger on the edge of a doorway or window, Trinh's beautiful overexposures and underexposures play with the edges of intense light and intense dark, as the sun

enters the dwelling, sculpting with light the rounded contours of the place. Rather than artificially lighting everything, offering every detail up for the viewer's gaze, the camera follows the interruptions of light and dark, respecting the power of the sun and the secretness of the dark.

Naked Spaces offers a grammar, not of oppositions but of thresholds: the threshold between light and dark, between the social and the personal, between the exterior and the interior. Like the camera, we are constantly moving in and out, back and forth. The recurring silences of the soundtrack add to this composition. Besides on the most obvious level simply interrupting the conventions of PBS-style documentary filmmaking, these abrupt pauses also reproduce this gentle back and forth movement: one moment, we are immersed in the flow of stunning images and sounds, the next pulled back by the silence which lets the film breathe.

While these issues -- of social organization of space and the spatialization of the social -- are touched on in *Reassemblage*, it is the inseparability of "private" lives to an international culture that the earlier film keeps coming back to: the traditional African dwelling with a sign saying "Entrance: 250 francs"; the tourists who toss candies to the village children who surround their cars; the stories about the visiting anthropologist. *Reassemblage* is the antithesis of the ethnographic film that attempts to exclude signs of encroaching outside influences from its depiction of traditional village life; instead it insists on these instances of cultural collision as "flat anthropological fact." The film suggests that an accurate charting of physical space anywhere would reveal this constant First World/Third World inter-penetration.

Rather than charting physical space, *RocketKitKongoKit* explores the places assigned by the socially constructed world of discourse. Baldwin works through assemblage of overdetermined images in which materials retain their own history, their own ambiguity; the collisions between them gives *RocketKitKongoKit* density. While Trinh subverts the neo-colonial filmmaker-subject-audience relationship through elision and removal -- interrupting expectations, taking out the familiar -- Baldwin adopts a strategy of bombardment, overwhelming the audience with an onslaught of popular images and materials. It is not a documentary "about" Africa, but about our received images and ideas about Africa. Playing with the rocket kit form, it's a documentary about the "other" made without leaving home.

RocketKitKongoKit's composition of found footage, music and voice-over sets up an aggressive juxtaposition of ways of representing and organizing information. This technique constantly foregrounds the density of the informational materials themselves; unlike many media-critiques, it does not signpost materials, demarcating which are "news," which are from Hollywood films, etc. Refusing to assign truth value to any set of images, *RocketKitKongoKit* questions the nature of what constitutes filmic evidence.

Reflecting its cottage-industry mode of production, the film incorporates a barrage of accidents, chance occurrences and random sounds and images into its hyper-permeated structure. The intentional randomness and compression of images and information creates tension as borders between fact and fiction, between western and non-western, fragment and dissolve. The relation between the visual materials and the soundtrack is often ambiguous, and the soundtrack itself is interrupted by a mixture of traditional African and contemporary noise/industrial musics that extends this breakdown of borders. Cut-up, synthesized, and sped-up, the assembled musical tracks establish a rapidly shifting set of relationships between the western and non-western materials that resist resolving into any coherent pattern.

Aggressively unauthentic and adulterated, the film would clearly be rejected as a "documentary" by most standard-bearers of the genre. Yet its technique of assemblage of artifacts, in which visual images are not subsumed by the text but instead extend and overrun it, creates a powerful document about military power and colonialism. The deep contrast between materials reflects the cataclysmic collision of historical forces represented in the film: the disruptive introduction of nuclear technology -- representative of the extreme concentration of resources of the First World -- into the survival-oriented, close-to-the-land life of the African villagers.

It is interesting to note the divergent places the three filmmakers have found home in the exhibition industry. Gitai, whose works have shown extensively on European television, is viewed exclusively as a documentary filmmaker and remains almost unknown to experimental filmmakers, at least in the US. Trinh, invited to that bastion of the documentary, the Flaherty Film Seminar, where her work was criticized as "amateur" and "un-objective," has nonetheless been screened at the Whitney Biennial and received extensive attention in the feminist film theory circuit. Baldwin, considered an experimental filmmaker, has screened at the S.F. Cinematheque and recently won the Braunschweig prize at the Oberhausen Film Festival.

The failure of such works to find a common place of exhibition and reception underscores a deep problem in San Francisco film programming, where film audiences and institutions are Balkanized to the extent that little real cross-fertilization takes place between increasingly specialized traditions. It's a pity, since almost by definition the most interesting experimental work is done between genres and across traditions -- and falls between the cracks.

NOTE: The writings of Paul Willemsen and others in *Framework* have been very valuable in developing this article, particularly in the readings of Gitai's films.

Reviews

Festival of Plagiarism

Artist's Television Access, 2/5-7/88

Curated by Laura Brun, Scott MacLeod, Stephen Perkins

In one of the numerous original/xeroxes generated for and by the Festival of Plagiarism (F. of P.), festival coordinators Steve Perkins and Scott MacLeod respectfully quote Karen Elliot in laying the conceptual base for the operation:

In our consumer society the 'antithesis' of plagiarism is 'originality.'

The idea of the 'original' (the first) is directly linked to privilege. Individuality and originality are only easily obtained by the privileged classes. In a fully-developed media culture, the concepts of originality, individuality and creativity are subsumed into a single discourse known as Style. Given the media's total colonization of daily life, we are forced to speak the received language of the media. Plagiarism attempts, through the theft and re-application of ideas, to break the cycle (of commoditization of impulse) which is turning human experience into a self-referential non-sequitur.

In another F. of P. tract, Mayakovsky, great Russian poet of the Revolution and Pittsburgh Pirates third baseman, is credited with a far more succinct tale of the tape:

Plagiarism is taking back what was stolen from us in the first place.

Over a continuous fifty hour period from February 5th through the 7th, 1988, the F. of P., held at ATA (Artists' Television Access) in San Francisco, undertook that task, to seize the moment and the means of ideological production. During this rare weekend of non-stop performance, panels, theater, visual arts and unstructured time-outs, dozens of artists/plagiarists overcame the overwhelming odds which stand in the way of positive art production and meaningful lives to manifest a disarmingly pure anarchist and collective



Clockwise from upper left Marshall Weber; Janet Janet and Steve Perkins; McZiggy's; the Zendiks; Scott MacLeod; Swenson/MacLeod/Bailey: *American Gulag*; the audience.

creative spirit dominated by a great sense of irreverence and humor.

Along the way most pitfalls were avoided. Unlike most San Francisco art events, where time is of the essence and schmoozing an anxious priority, participants acted with a deep sense of respect for their fellow travellers and for the temporary Utopian ecosystem in operation. Remarkably absent was the habitual careerist posturing of many Bay Area art functions. Clearly, participants were not in this one for the exposure, fame or fortune. Below is a sampling, in no way exhaustive, of a few of the many acts perpetrated over the weekend in the name of plagiarism. What I retain most of the event, and the eight hours I was privileged to participate, is this fresh and youthful radical feeling.

Opening shots/Friday Night Fights

The audience sets the stage from the get go: in a knock-down, rivaling in speed Tyson's ninety-one second wonder, ATA king pin Marshall Weber and his deputies, in a loud and incomprehensible opening performance effort, were dethroned by a gathering more interested in their own exchanges. Clearly unready to assume a passive spectatorial role in the proceedings, the F. of P.'s masses unanimously overthrew the order of artist/audience, gleefully matching the performance's volume level, decibel for decibel.

The tone was set for the evening, as the F. of P. worked out its internal dynamics to become a multi-track, multi-layered reverse *Exterminating Angel*, a situation no one wanted to leave.

Say what?

The balance of Friday evening's performers continued on, entertaining at the very least themselves in the execution of often thoughtful and intense pieces. Note the work by Carla Harryman and Steve Benson, veterans of the Bay Area writing scene and long accustomed to being their own best, and at time only, audience. A brilliant coffee klatch cut-up exchange of the over heard and noted: maddeningly false consciousness tid-bits, regurgitated perfectly in conversational dysynchronous harmony.

Side Orders

McZiggy's, curated/operated by Sigi Torinus out of the backroom's of ATA, the F. of P.'s finest fast food outlet, featuring marshmallows, Salisbury steak TV

dinners, chicken pot pies, twinkies and appropriated McDonald's personnel forms. By midnight, over 23 had been served and more than one prospective McZ's employee's application was being considered.

F. of P. TV

Tucked away in ATA's cozy living room/screening room, Lise Swenson and Scott MacLeod's gushing looped *American Gulag*, featuring R. Budd Dwyer, the Pennsylvania State Controller and definitive mediaholic, in his ultimate suicidal performance, perhaps the product of one too many Metallica tunes heard one too many times, blowing himself away for the 6 and 11 o'clock news, recorded and replayed, over and over and over again into the wee dark hours of America's, and the festival's, multiple time zones. Footage too perfect to edit, Swenson and MacLeod, who shared director and writer credits on the carefully produced titles, had the sense to leave the material intact and the meaning of the work to its recontextualization.

& on the walls

Looking more like a Haight Street telephone poll or giant refrigerator door than a gallery, the F. of P./ATA's walls were quickly covered with a massive amount of work, mostly xerographic. Consistent with the loosely organized non-static activities of the festival, and very much in the same way people feel uninhibited about curating the outsides of their refrigerators, the work got put up progressively where there was space, where you were tall enough to reach and finally where the merits of your contribution warranted overlapping pieces earlier installed. My favorite - Martin Cox's endearing embrace of his cultural roots - an exquisitely framed sofa-sized copy of a Gainsborough complete with an elegantly label identifying Brit transplant Cox as the artist.

JUMP CUT TO SUNDAY AFTERNOON (Prior commitments/getting ahead kept me from much of the F. of P.'s offerings)

....where one could feel the F. of P. experiencing a premature nostalgia for the tremendous creative outpouring the event had produced. The mood had shifted from Friday's edge to one of familial comfort. Performances took place without contest from an audience now sure of its active role in the proceedings.

My strongest memory of this stage is of MacLeod, standing silently for a moment in the center of ATA's

main room; dwarfed by fatigue, his XXXL official uncopyrighted F. of P. tee shirt, and the remarkable events of the last forty some hours; and drained into a state of existential bliss.

Madame Townhouse's send-off

One last swing through the premises brought me to ATA's dark basement where an elaborate Fortune Telling booth was set up. In it Madame Townhouse had constructed a mystic milieu made up primarily of Safeway artifacts, complete with a soundtrack of the catchy corporate jingle "You work an honest day and you want an honest deal". It was closing time for Madame T, but she consented to one last tarot reading. Put away the Alastair Crowley deck, only Safeway recipe cards will do. In an abbreviated one-card reading, I drew the Lamb Shank over Rice. "The rice looks like maggots," Madame T. observed quite accurately. "But don't be afraid of them," she reassured me, "They are your creativity." Utterly charmed, I moved back to ground level, past McZiggy's and continuing events in progress, out into the street.

There, groups of survivors were engaged in animated conversations. One sensed a resolve to continue the important work begun. Clearly the F. of P. unleashed a vast amount of pent-up social and creative energy. Events like it, guided by a sympathetic perspective of inclusion, defiance and reclamation may serve to encourage our best ideas and tendencies.

Bloatstick, any one? -- Jon Winet

"As if" he were an airplane crashing....

New Langton Arts 7/7/88

Conceived by Amy Elliott

Performed by Amy Elliott and Karen Goodfriend

Directed by Stephen Pocock

In her last performance, *Knight Zoo*, at Artist's Television Access, Amy Elliott demonstrated that her experience with drama therapy allows her to avoid the sentimentalism often endemic to a subject like disturbed/abused children. Transferring the actual process of drama therapy to the stage in the form of childplay is intriguing as a re/presentation of real situations, "artified" by the cool distance of an analytic approach. In *"As if" he were an airplane crashing* . . . Elliott crosses over to the public sphere, making an

analogy between familial relations and societal structure. Using the "case" of Ollie North's abused childhood as a vehicle to take us from the private to the public sphere--and back again in a kind of cultural tape-loop--she correlates individual with mass psychosis: North is molded to follow in his father's militaristic footsteps (his father was a general), while similarly, the secret hiring of Nazi war criminals in the late 1940s helps mold the CIA after the German Gestapo.

Both Elliott and Goodfriend are energetic and charismatic performers. The clarity of their characterizations of Ollie at different ages (Goodfriend does a perfect mimic of his sincerely creased forehead), Oliver North Sr., and Ollie's mother--combined with the use of simple props such as a military jacket and hat - ameliorates the potential confusion of a production which combines constant role switching with a non-sequential narrative. The set is integral to these transitions: a podium provides an "official" place for Ollie to defend himself as a grown man, while a kitchen dinette in the center of the stage creates a space for child-Ollie's interactions with his mother, establishing a kind of simultaneous past and present on the stage. Likewise, Ollie's life is presented in fragments as the plot jumps from enactments of his childhood to adulthood, teenhood and back again, recalling the structural intricacy of Elliott's earlier work. Under Pocock's direction, the performance is entertaining, fluid and well-paced.

The portrayals of Ollie as a child and teen constitute the strongest moments of the piece. The adult characters generally fall short--the mother too much of a stereotyped mad housewife and the father too much the military disciplinarian. Although the overdone farcical element--the aproned housewife saying "I love my Ollies" and too many jokes about falsifying documents and document-shredders--weakens the power of the family portrayal, the adults become multidimensional in the manic moments when they revert to childhood nightmare/fantasy: when father Ollie pretends to execute the blindfolded, praying Ollie Jr., and when the mother enacts a role-reversal game with her son, forcing the unhappy young Ollie to play Mother.

Elliott's work, because of her use of child-language to address the constant reproduction of horror within the system(s), has depth which is often missing in "political" art. The private world of the child is echoed by the adult characters: North saying, "Casey was like a father to me," and militant activists being accused of smearing excrement on draft files just as young Ollie is accused of putting shit in a bucket. But when the performance departs completely from the subjective, sympathy-invoking child-language, and moves into adult testimonials and political fact-giving, it falls into the twin traps of predictable liberalism and preaching to the converted. Particularly in a segment towards the end, in which planted witnesses are called from the audience to testify in a mock trial, the "objective" language takes on an uncomfortably sermonizing tone. Still, Elliott's combination of drama therapy, social theory, and performance is ambitious, and an intriguing direction for her work.- Laura Brun and Jenni Currie

The Mission is Bitchin'

Intersection 4/20-4/29/88

The Mission is Boring as its represented at Intersection for the Arts where the (proposed) first annual Mission is Bitchin' festival explored possibilities in performance ranging all the way from theater to bad theater, with excursions into music, dance, and standup comedy. Intersection for the Entertainments they should call it. Then we could just leave it to *Calendar* and the *Bay Guardian* to tell us that Marga Gomez was funny, Ernesto Sanchez charming, and that Connie Champagne would brighten any cocktail lounge.

Somehow National Disgrace got booked for the last night (actually Jefferson Toilet Bowl, a splinter group) and the sight of Intersection's placid liberal audience scrambling for the doors, whining about self-indulgence (!), and writing outraged letters to the management ("such trash that I feel forced to leave") was easily the most, if not the only, exhilarating aesthetic event of the festival.

I'd be happy to leave it at that but since Intersection was so nice about press passes, and we went to so much trouble to have reviewers there for so much of it--this was before we decided that the lame artists could start their own magazine if they wanted (more) coverage--here are capsule reviews of almost everything we saw, plus a couple of longer reviews. In general the work often seemed to be thrown together, excerpted from longer pieces, randomly programmed...mainly the festival provided a sampler of lite alternatives to performance art. Here's our buyer's guide, for those who care to buy. --A.N.

Shane Carroll 4/20/88

Shane Carroll came on with what looked like a minimum of preparation and did a meandering stand-up routine based on the premise that he was campaigning for the office of presidential assassin. From the self-indulgent guitar playing at the beginning to the incomprehensible politics of his speech, right down to the externals of a banner, ugly in the wrong way, and a suit that not even a minor politician would be caught dead in, Carroll failed on his own formal terms. The stump speech is a great performance genre. Carroll doesn't respect it enough to make it his. --Egostag



Top Left Chris Brophy Top Right Flying Buttresses
Center Jefferson Toilet Bowl Bottom Left, Karen Sternik; Right, Amy Elliott.

Joel Ben Izzy 4/21/88

Izzy, a self-proclaimed storyteller in the ancient tradition, intermingled stories of different cultures with stories of his own travels. Although his text was well-conceived, his delivery had problems. Relying on repetition of phrases, as people often do who tell stories to children, he lost the attention of the adult audience early in the reading. Those who followed the text closely were rewarded with a well-woven story beginning with an old Yiddish folk tale and ending with Izzy's final performance for his father in the audience of a nursing home. --Suegee

Jon Lefan 4/21/88

We see Lefan wandering around stage talking to a bucket of smoldering ashes we soon come to realize are the remains of his former girlfriend. From his monologue we learn that the earth has, for some reason, been thrown out of its orbit and is rushing through the universe out of control. Without being cynical, the piece contains many analogies to the chaotic pace of modern life. Instead of whining about the human condition, Lefan attempted to make us aware of what we have and what we could lose overnight. --Suegee

Amy Elliot, Karen Sternik 4/21/88

Knight Zoo was based on the portrayal of disturbed children who are metaphorically "acting out" the living nightmare which is their childhood. These children are attempting to make sense of lives in which their parents are their worst personal monsters come to life, and where a child can be treated so poorly that he comes to think of himself as "manure boy". At the same time, these children are also locked in a struggle with the mental health system, as Elliot illustrates by stepping out of character to read excerpts from psychology textbooks. The piece ends with a childcare worker restraining a child in the throes of a violent seizure, gently but forcefully pinning her to the floor while telling her that it's alright and to just calm down. The violence and frustration in this piece were depressingly believable and disturbingly understandable. --Suegee

Chris Brophy 4/21/88

Beginning with the song *You're Nobody 'til Somebody Loves You*, Brophy's cynical, humorous, very theatrical piece follows a broken narrative through several relationships to suicide and a final relationship with God. Superficial but action packed and very well staged (spectacular pratfalls). --Suegee

Hyena Cabaret 4/28/88

A hodge podge collection of dancers, singers, filmmakers, actors, and storytellers, unconnected by any noticeable philosophical glue. Their parodies of Hollywood and other established show business forums that they seem to want to be a part of were lightly entertaining, but I see and enjoy as much in my kitchen with my friends after a couple of beers, and at least my friends don't act out from such a compromised position. Well, not the same compromised position anyway. --L.S.

Kill the Messenger 4/28/88

I was immediately won over by the big, brash, electro-acoustic garage sounds of Kill the Messenger. The six musicians (and 3 puppets) artfully engaged us in their condensed (30-40 minute) version of *The Threepenny Opera*. I think Brecht and Weill would have been amused at least. --L.S.

Elbows Akimbo 4/28/88

This large group of dancers and musicians are really energetic and attractive, especially this one hot boy dancer, so that was good, but then on the other hand, watching them made me feel ugly and dumpy, just exactly like Caliban in Shakespeare's *Tempest*, which was the main source for the piece (but they didn't ask me to play the role). No one ever talks about how we entertain and torture ourselves at the same time, or is it only me? Their last piece was better anyway (*The World of Beatrice*). --L.S.

Jefferson Toilet Bowl 4/29/88

Originally scheduled to go last, JTB were mysteriously switched to the opening slot at the last minute, starting the show off on the worst possible foot for many in the packed audience, and creating the conditions for what will probably stand as the band's greatest triumph. Scandal doesn't come easily in the art world these days, even for these prominent exponents of what I think Walter Alter is referring to with his phrase "garbage-pail-kids tripe" elsewhere in this magazine. I plan to discuss this tendency in a future issue of *bloatstick* but for now, let the unsuspecting patrons and patronesses (as one woman signed her letter of complaint) of the arts convey the pain and confusion of the scene in their own words:

It was hurting my ears.

A new low in popular entertainment.

It certainly doesn't do much for the reputation of Intersection.

I think this is a really terrible way to treat people.

--Egostag

Contraband 4/29/88

The rigorous anti-integrity of Jefferson Toilet Bowl, to say nothing of their galvanic effect on the audience, made them a hard act to follow. The dance troupe Contraband came on with a tough attitude but they're such goody-goodies that it didn't really wash (I mean this affectionately). Anything but "pretty dancing", Contraband works hard to keep the audience thinking about things like what dance is and what might be some good things to do with your ego. They have a good joke that says a lot about their intentions: God says, "I try and try to explain it to them, but they just don't get it....(beat).....it's too simple." --Egostag

Ernesto Sanchez 4/29/88

Responding to joking accusations by the show's M.C.s, Sanchez insisted "I would never do mime at Fisherman's Wharf....my mime can mime the mind." Well....he may not wear white face and a striped leotard, but with his baggy pants, Chaplinesque presence, and tinkly old music, I don't see any reason that he couldn't do very well at Fisherman's Wharf. His work is a lot more original than Shields and Yarnell's, but it's not what you'd call difficult. A little "conceptual" non-joke stuff, a little risque material with dolls, impeccable slower-era timing, witty use of film conventions....Sanchez got the enthusiastic applause he so richly deserved. --Egostag

Bob Ernst 4/29/88

When it comes to theater I'm pretty much in the Artaud/Grotowski camp. I want it primal, ritualistic, cathartic, profoundly involving. Ernst seems to be more in the Actor-Displays-His-Craft-to-a-Respectful-Audience tradition. Accent, costume, prop, spotlight, melodramatic monologue: he sure was doing some acting, no question about that. Bonus points for socially aware Plight-of-the-American-Farmer message.--Egostag

Flying Buttresses

Intersection for the Arts, 4/20/88

The opening act of the *Mission is Bitchin'* festival at Intersection this April, the Flying Buttresses, did a set of five more or less theatrical pieces which, though unconnected, maintained a fair thematic unity.

First an inflated sex doll was hoisted and turned slowly on a rope, accompanied by a halting, repetitive sound poem for female voices evocative of childhood and alienated sexuality.... the old soul of a mannequin

routine. The F. B.s do a lot of work on the topic of being the object of a gaze and they've made their doll a spectacle here, but I'd guess that in the real world of marketing and consumption a toy like this is more of a screen for the projection of an imagined sex object than a fetish in itself. In other words it's for fucking, not for looking at. If this perversion of function had a point, I missed it. Just seemed like a waste of good plastic

Next was a dance routine performed by Herman in a cast, which everyone but me found funny. For some reason I thought it was quite lovely and touching.

The third piece was a long, comic scene between two beauty contestants. The broad performances were a bit self-congratulatory-- that's almost my definition of camp acting style, which I am almost ready to condemn across the board as a witless cop-out--and the debunking of myths about beauty queens is a local standby that feels neither fresh nor stale here; but this scene also introduced a thematic thread that raises the stakes considerably and which achieves at its best a twisted poetry of cannibalistic gazes in which the consumer and the consumed change places with liquid ease. It begins unobtrusively with the neophyte pageant queen's comment, "I really want to win, but I guess my eyes are bigger than my stomach." Soon the seasoned contestant is giving suggestive advice: "It's more like you're swallowing the audience's eyes..... you have to open up to let it all run in so you don't gag," and later, "Keep wanting even after you have lost all desire or interest. It doesn't make you fat. It makes you LOOK BETTER," which is as pointed a summation of consumer society's operating principle as I've heard.

The next segment, a portrait of a women's wrestling coach (*pro* wrestling, you know the kind) continued the theme of women training for their roles in the spectacle ("no scratching unless absolutely necessary"). More documentary in nature, this monologue featured the strongest acting of the night-- more closely observed, more grounded--by Ellie Herman.

The Flying Buttresses ended their set with another monologue, this one from a sentient photograph: the image of a model on a billboard. "I'm sitting here for a pretty long time," she begins and goes on to taunt her audience with lines like, "How about some nourishing desire," and, "I see all when you stare at me," working more kinks into the relationship between the viewer and the viewed than we can easily follow, carried on by the irrational momentum of an orgy of projection and consumption that has progressed right out of anyone's control.

I'd like to see the Flying Buttresses get a lot less chummy with the audience, and take us on this cruel, disorienting ride without the softening comforts of schtick. --Egostag

Who is Andres Santiago?

And why is he looking for American culture among....

Intersection 4/22/88

Directed by Rene Yanez

Presented as an improvised theatre workshop, *Andres Santiago* is the tale of a contemporary Mexican artist coming to San Francisco looking for culture and finding frustration: all the artists he meets complain endlessly about lack of money and attention, the curators complain that his work isn't Mexican -- i.e., folkloric -- and as for critics, well, he doesn't get to meet any of them, at least not in this work-in-progress version featuring a cast of local characters including Laura Farabough, Satchiko Nakamura, Eva Garcia, and other art-scene regulars playing themselves and a mix of fictional characters.

Played by Phil Jimenez, Andres is a great character, reminiscent of friends in Mexico City who prefer punk and rap to salsa or rancheras, and who are about as interested in Diego Rivera as I am, well, in Winslow Homer. Even his clothes are right, as is his art: photographs of the earthquake. And the San Francisco he wanders into, of new age performance artists and careerist arts administrators, is quite familiar, which is part of the problem I had with the piece. Given the down-home audience, half of whom were probably on the guest list (people shouldn't be asked to pay \$7 for loose works-in-progress) I found myself wondering whether anyone present was challenged by ideas they hadn't heard over breakfast for the past decade.

Which is not to say that the piece is not attempting to tackle some very important issues, particularly around the ways in which Latino art is received in the United States, and how this is reflected in local institutions. Rene Yanez, playing the Master of ceremonies, rants about the humiliating "folkloricization" Latino artists are forced to undergo to fit into that small place reserved for "ethnic art" in the US. From Andres' perspective of the internationally-oriented Mexico City art scene, this practice is ridiculous and even incomprehensible -- and reflects a sad ignorance on the part of the US artworld, given the current strength of the visual arts in Mexico and much of Latin America.

But as Rene's character complained about the obligatory *altares* and *calaveras*, and yes, the *Fridas* -- "if you want to make money, Andres, make *Fridas*!" (given the present state of her cult, it is a real genre) -- I found myself feeling that the work, while accurately criticizing the way only folkloric Mexican art is accepted in the US, seemed to promote uncritically the oh-so-hip "cosmopolitanism" of Mexico City art. Through the twists of history, the dominant Mexican culture

represented in the US is the rural, working class culture of Northern Mexico -- a culture which is routinely denigrated in the glorious, urban (and much more Europeanized) South.

The psycho-drama approach of the "workshop" format, with thinly veiled swipes at local figures, presented a vaguely uncomfortable mix of genuine insight and oversimplification, well-targeted humor and bitterness. Coming not that hot-on-the-heels of Yanez's fiery public departure from Galeria de la Raza, where he was formerly the curator, the piece seemed to balance on the edge of public discourse and private conversation, unsure of how much to reveal.

If *Andres Santiago* is really aimed at an arts-aware audience, its analysis needs to be a lot more provocative -- and it may have to commit itself to being a little more informative and direct, so that audiences less versed in local comings-and-goings have a shot at understanding the battle over "ethnic" arts being waged in the background. The workshop format, despite its wierd mix of artificiality and improvisation, could be very well suited to present a contradictory, quickly-changing reality. In the ensuing post-show discussion, the main criticisms revolved around the show's lack of models of community or resistance, and the one-dimensionality of the characters other than Andres. -- Liz Kotz

Necromancy

The Lab 5/20/88

Written by Scott Macleod

Produced, directed, and performed by Dede Puma and Scott Macleod

Necromancy is a carefully structured work set in ancient Egypt and modern suburbia, with stops at archaeological sites, lecture halls, and the psychiatrist's office. The play is made of variations on a single invasive intellectual act, committed in different eras and different roles by a man whose only character trait is his obsessive need to impose his own structures (like, it is implied, history and psychoanalysis) on buried objects and women. Early in the play the pith-helmeted Macleod discusses the grandeur of his scientific achievements while walking like a giant over the Egyptian landscape. Arriving at the sphinx, briefly incarnated by Puma (who later plays Macleod's lover, assistant, patient, and the first female pharaoh of Egypt), he nonchalantly straddles it.

This is the first metaphor of a play that runs on metaphor, not on plot or character development (the play cartwheels through time and space with panache to spare; nevertheless it's a still-life, as charming and ironic as a natural history diorama), and metaphor itself is shown to be masculine. It is the man's primary tool of seduction, manipulation and conquest. Throughout the play, sometimes as analyst, sometimes as husband, he says the same thing: "Let's play a game." His games are metaphors: "You be a station wagon and I'll be cub scouts." They put her into roles of his devising. She participates in kind (I'll be a blackboard and you can spend all your time erasing me") to please him, or because he won't communicate otherwise, or because she sees a chance to score, but even scoring a point is only scoring a point in his game.

What games she might like to play are forever out of his view, but we get glimpses: having briefly finagled an opportunity to speak outside of his structures, she assumes a mode of magic realism, surreal and without metaphor (the surrealists despised metaphor. Their startling juxtapositions were never a code for something "logical"): "the noise her shadow makes in the darkness is erotic." Her syntax is literal, no attempt is made to distance or qualify the fantastic. Parenthetically, I think these monologues, while important structurally, are the weakest part of the play. Big chunks of gooey poeticism, they lack the bite and memorability of MacLeod's dialogue. They also depict femaleness as essentially non-linear and cosmically attuned, something like the nineteenth century ideal of the noble savage. This makes the play a critique of sexism from a sexist perspective, so it's not surprising that MacLeod's portrait of a chauvinist is hilarious ("I'll be the husband and you shut up") and sharply observed-his body language contributes as much as his repartee-or that the play offers no way out of the trap it depicts. Despite an equivalence of lines and stage time the play favors the male part and lays subtle traps for the woman, the biggest of which is that she doesn't initiate action and remains a perpetual victim, preserved in the calm atmosphere of eternity that is one of the production's accomplishments.

There is an acting coup when Puma starts repeating everything Macleod says. He treats it as a particularly stupid game while we are amazed to hear that her repetitions carry far more force and validity than his originals. It's an act of appropriation more direct and successful than any of his and it sends him into a rage.

Still, nothing changes. He never sees her but as he constructs her. In the plays last, sad, line she vacates her body to accommodate his need to extend himself. "I'll be my pocket," she says, "and you be my hand."

- Egostag

Photographic Memories

Camera Works, 4/22/88

Curated by Mark Durant

Christine Tamblyn *A Germ of Truth*

Laura Brun *Anywhere But Here (Mediations)*

Harvey Stein *Passion, The Monster*

Minnette Lehmann *Modern Confessions*

In her program notes, Christine Tamblyn wrote that her piece "challenges the...cultural taboo against contemplating or discussing death." Maybe I've never come across that taboo and so wouldn't recognize it if I saw it in the mirror, but for me the focus of Christine's piece lay closer to this world, at the ambiguous interface between what we as an audience were led to believe and what we might decide to believe.

By walking onstage wearing a brilliantly tie-dyed sundress and what I will call "Miss Death" makeup, i.e. very definitely "in costume," Christine cast herself as "performer". At the same time, her costume implied an ironic attitude towards this performer. She began to read a long intricate text which followed twisting passages, doubled back on itself and turned corners into new perspectives. Dreams, flashbacks, digressions, historical anecdotes and LSD episodes were presented along with references to a "Christine Tamblyn" who was the central figure of the text.

As is the case with much text/image work, juxtaposition became a mystery to be solved. What was the relationship between the Christine Tamblyn on stage and the "Christine Tamblyn" referred to in the text? Was an essentially authentic (though decorated) Christine reading a story about a primarily artificial character construct named "Christine Tamblyn", or was a stage character (Miss Death) reading a story about an essentially authentic Christine Tamblyn, or both or neither? I can't help it, I like to know things.

While I tried to garner clues from the text itself, Christine complicated matters further by standing aside from the podium at which she'd been reading, in order to visibly caress her body with her hands. She touched her breasts and crotch and other "taboo" parts of her torso. She exhibited a kind of hesitancy which was not really a shyness, and if the touches were meant to be sexual, they were slightly inept or at least listless. This odd hesitancy further confused me. Were we watching (the "real") Christine Tamblyn touching herself in front of us? Were we watching Christine Tamblyn performing "touching herself" in front of us? Were we watching Christine Tamblyn performing Miss Death touching herself in front of us? Two facts were

certainly clear enough: Christine Tamblyn did touch herself and we were in the room watching her do it. How far beyond that we as observers went in trying to decide why she was doing it was up to us. At some point I relaxed and simply let the different possibilities emerge in my mind without trying to pick the one I liked. My last thought was of how very different the same performance would have been if performed by a man.

Laura Brun's *Anywhere But Here* (*Mediations*) dealt very much with what Christine's piece had stirred up: that need to play detective, figure out the clues and finger the culprit, Meaning. In front of a screen on which slides shot from video of films noir and western were projected. Martin Cox and Jennie Currie played "Characters" engaged in a dialogue culled mainly from detective films. The resulting dialogue dealt mainly with love/passion/and desire as a stylized instrument of control and violence. The disjuncture between the actor's stances, gestures and vocal tones and the actor's words undermined the integrity of the film noir genre at the same time as it celebrated the conventions of the form. By placing the "romantic" scenes on stage in the flesh, separated from the two-dimensional filmic space represented by the projected slides, these romantic close-ups were exposed as shams and tricks, unreliable clues to the power relationships being portrayed. The audience became, in a way, editors rather than observers.

The piece ended with a clip from a similarly self-referential work, the iconic final scene of *Sunset Boulevard* ("Okay Mr. DeMille, I'm ready for my close-up now.") Brun has it topped, though, with a live "Norma Desmond" arriving on stage and speaking directly to the audience. This risky maneuver succeeded only because Judith Olson's portrayal of Desmond was exactly balanced between camp, familiarity, pathos and threat. Olson as Desmond asserted that we were now on the other side of the camera, but we'd been there all evening and I was starting to feel like I couldn't trust anyone to be who they appeared to be.

Laura's work has always focused on the processes by which visual narratives are constructed and read. To me this piece represented a great leap forward for her; she is finally showing rather than telling, enacting rather than strictly analyzing. In this piece Laura seems to have let herself relax and let some humor and life flow into the characters and the other stage activity. I'm not sure to what degree the collaboration on the text with Cox and Currie helped this along, but their distilled, edited Bogart/Bacall (or Garfield/Astor) certainly added very much.

Harvey Stein's work has always shown both "pop" and "avant-garde" sensibilities. His monologues tend to place very direct and accessible (even "conventional") language within a rhythmic narrative structures which subtly alter the ways audiences are able to respond. I think "Passion, The Monster" is his most successful attempt to walk the fence. A video monitor plays a tape of Harvey loudly asking personal and sexual questions of an offscreen character, implicitly his lover. The TV Harvey is vulgar and aggressive. Harvey in the *Flesh* freezes the video image at several points and imitates the character's more exaggerated facial expressions. He then begins to analyze the TV character and rhetorically questions the audience about our reaction to the TV character. Finally he plays the tape all the way through and again discusses an analysis which centers on how the audience reacts to the issues raised by the taped character. Issues such as sexual jealousy, the proprietary nature of passion, emotional torture and the appropriateness of public revelations of private intimacies are examined in both the tape and in Harvey's very direct relationship with the audience. Like Christine and Laura, however, Harvey is also inviting us into the editing booth, showing us the decision-making procedure out of which images are made. He very directly asks us the question: what do we believe? Are the "revelations" really about Harvey the person and his situation? As someone who knows a thing or two about Harvey, I have to say to myself that yes, there is a very close relationship between what is being presented and what is "real." But the exact nature of that relationship is uncertain. By fomenting suspicion about the intimate material he's presenting, Harvey manages to jerk us both ways at once. We end up with the possibility of believing that what is fictional is true and that what is true is fictional. Which is fine because it's not really any of our business anyway, and also very unsettling because we see that Harvey is nonetheless placing himself in a position of extreme vulnerability. Power and vulnerability are what passion is about, and Harvey's piece captures the workings of passion in a very interesting way. I think that if Harvey crawled a little further out on a limb, played it even a little less safe, this could be a truly powerful piece.

The evening's performances formed an uncanny and extremely effective progression which culminated in Minnette Lehmann's "Modern Confessions." As a last minute replacement for Paul Kwan and Arnold Iger, Minnette's piece was a deceptively simply-structured one which I would not have been as attuned to without the unsettling barrage of image-suspicion from the first three performances. Minnette read a text which

alternated passages from Baudelaire with sections of Robert Chambers' confession to the murder of Jennifer Levin. Chambers is the then-19-year-old playboy who testified that he accidentally killed Levin because she was fucking him too violently in Central Park NYC. While Minnette read her text, black and white slides of gaunt, austere fashion models were projected behind her. I will admit that it took awhile for me to make the connective leap between the text and the images of these cool, modern young women, but I was finally well-rewarded. The piece was full of tension due to inversions of commonly-held perceptions. Chambers' assertions of powerlessness certainly seemed very odd to a generation used to picturing inter-gender power dynamics in a very different way. But finally the fashion photos seemed to support Chambers' assertions in a very strange way. Though they were easily recognized as images of objectified, commoditized women, there nevertheless seemed to be a kind of power emanating from these models. These slides pictured women as aloof, even scornful--why was that? Why were these icons of "sex for sale" staring back so threateningly from the screen? For me the point was that the process of commoditization of women's sexuality has become a two-edged sword; as women become the objects of a masculine sexual desire, that desire is removed from the body of the male and interred in the representation of the female body. This creates a situation where both sexes are isolated from their sexual desire; desire no longer springs from within but is imposed from without. Not being intrinsic, sex can no longer be fulfilling, causing frustration and confusion. These austere and threatening women (images of women) become both the ultimate allure and the ultimate impossibility. Power has been stripped from both the female and the male, and now resides solely and imperviously in the image. In light of this, and in light of a certain connection between the commercial image-making caste and Robert Chambers' caste, Chambers' view of the events surrounding Jennifer Levin's death became even more pathetic and sinister than they already seemed. Minnette's piece was a simple, understated shocker.

A very provocative, entertaining evening of performances by artists at or approaching the top of their form. --Scott MacLeod

Barney Haynes and Barry Schwartz

A.T.A., 7/2/88

Nature

I want to convey the completeness of the installation. I've been in this basement many times for many shows, but this is the first time I've seen it so completely taken over by the work. It seems organically transformed by an approach which embraces every existing quality of the site. Where the basement had been dim it is dimmer, and small steady lights glow in it. The smell of dust and mold is iced with ozone and rubber. The debris long buried in the brick oven set into the back wall is extended by the rubber shavings, dessicated furniture, and unmusical instruments that clog the performance area. Of course the electrical system has been expanded many times. Wires hang from the ceiling in thick bundles. Single cords crisscross the floor.

The room grows even darker than it already was, and as the audience noises subside, various electrical hums and statics rise in the mix. At least half a dozen randomly placed Jacob's ladders start spitting current into the atmosphere (standard equipment in old mad scientist movies, a Jacob's ladder is a pair of metal rods, closer at the bottom, on which arcs of electricity climb, fizzling out as the gap becomes too wide). The environment is so dense that I only gradually notice that some figures are moving among the hanging cables and rusting shop equipment. It will be some time before I know definitely that there are three of them, no less or more, and even longer before I start to see a connection between their shadowy movements and the other things I see and hear (and feel and smell).

Now the air is filled with sound. Barry Schwartz has appeared from somewhere in the stacks of hot-wired debris, and is spastically involving himself with a rusted bedspring he found in a vacant lot near Doug's Ribs in West Oakland and wired for sound. Each spring and wire is a throat, each bend and joint another mouth. The shrieks of the bedspring rise, teeter, and plunge, again and again, deafeningly.

Rising from the bedspring, Barry lurches deeper into the heap. I can't see what he is doing. Someone, probably Barry himself, shines a flashlight on the guitar strings attached to a used welding tank he bought for five dollars from Atlas Welding Supplies. In the small circle of light I can make out a hand, strumming the tank like a banjo.

Barry wanders through the pile like a new animal learning to cope with a complex environment. He touches a thing and it vibrates and sound explodes from somewhere else and quite often electricity is discharged into his body. These jolts are unavoidable. He appreciates the jerkiness it gives his movement. He takes the shocks as a reminder to concentrate, or else, like a kitten, he's shocked for one moment and forgets it the next.

Membranes

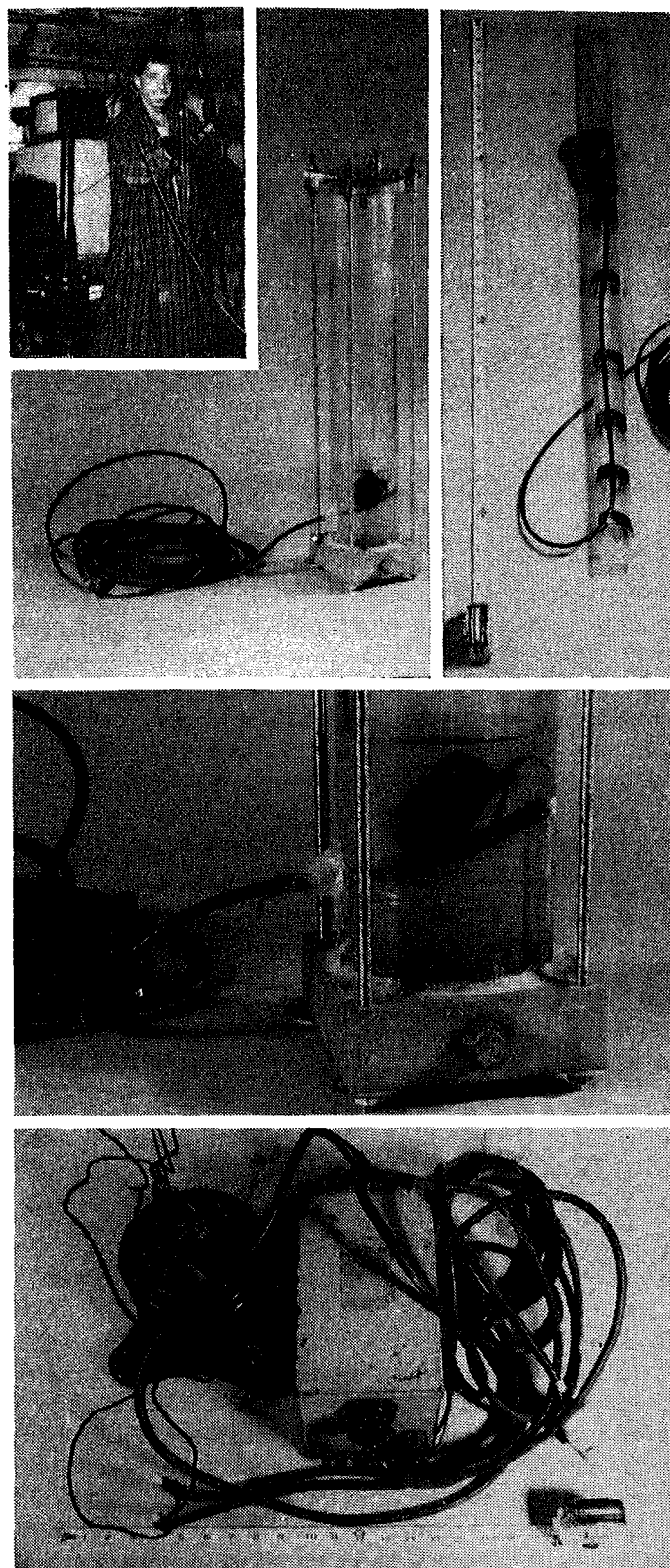
I have noticed that Barney Haynes, wearing a filthy, ill-fitting suit under a cumbersome camera harness has been videotaping these events, and soon I will realize that one of the four or five television sets placed high in the rubble is taking a live feed from his camera. Often there are hardly any common points of reference between what I am seeing and the images on this monitor.

The Navy uses what they call hydro-phones to monitor sounds underwater. Barry got a couple of these for nine dollars each at the Alameda Naval Surplus auction, and silicon-sealed them inside a water pump he found in a dumpster behind Ray-Chem. Batting at the amplified slinky hanging over the bedspring, he carries the Slosh-Tank over to what I will later regard as Barney's section, and plays it (rubbing, shaking, striking) against an I-beam stolen from an East Oakland construction site, stringed, and amped. Tiring of this, he moves on to the bow, a squared rod from a metal scrap dumpster augmented with a single bass piano string and a pick up. This is attached to the main wooden support post, which is miked and which also transmits vibrations from the bedspring, also miked, and the concrete floor.

Barry puts his mouth to the support post and drags his teeth against it. The sound is overwhelming. The taste reminds him of something. He sees his image in a tank of water--tape from previous shows playing on a submerged television. He pulls it out of the pool and holds it out to the audience. Streams of water run off the plexiglass case and splash in the front row.

Library

After Barry has activated the Tesla coil, which I'll describe later, Barney begins his performance, *Phantom Limbs in the Satiation Pool*. Puttering about in the stacks of old things with his camera and harness crippling him like a sort of external arthritis, unaware or unconcerned that his dirty black jacket is twisted up in the camera brace and his unbelted trousers leave the top of his ass exposed when he bends over, constantly



Inset Top Left Schwartz with dental retractor Top Left Pelham Chamber: acrylic cylinder, steel rods, coaxial cable, hydrophone Top Right Seep Phone: plastic tube, hydrophone, coaxial cable, electrical tape Center Seep Phone (detail) Bottom Jacob's Ladder: welding rods, ceramic insulator, 15,000 volt transformer, cable

bumping into things, many of which are amplified, he eventually finds the loose end of a length of surgical tubing hanging from the ceiling beams and loops it around his wrist, videotaping all the while. I see him stumbling around, performing ambiguous actions at his own pace, but the image on the monitor gives a different impression: a trapped hand, twisting in a noose or falling limp like a puppet hand, supported by the tubing.

Barney's main lighting is a harsh white bulb attached to the camera which has to be turned off periodically to prevent overheating. He tapes throughout the performance, with or without the light, constantly manipulating the zoom and focus rings, and often switching to color negative mode, which produces a fairly sensational version of the event.

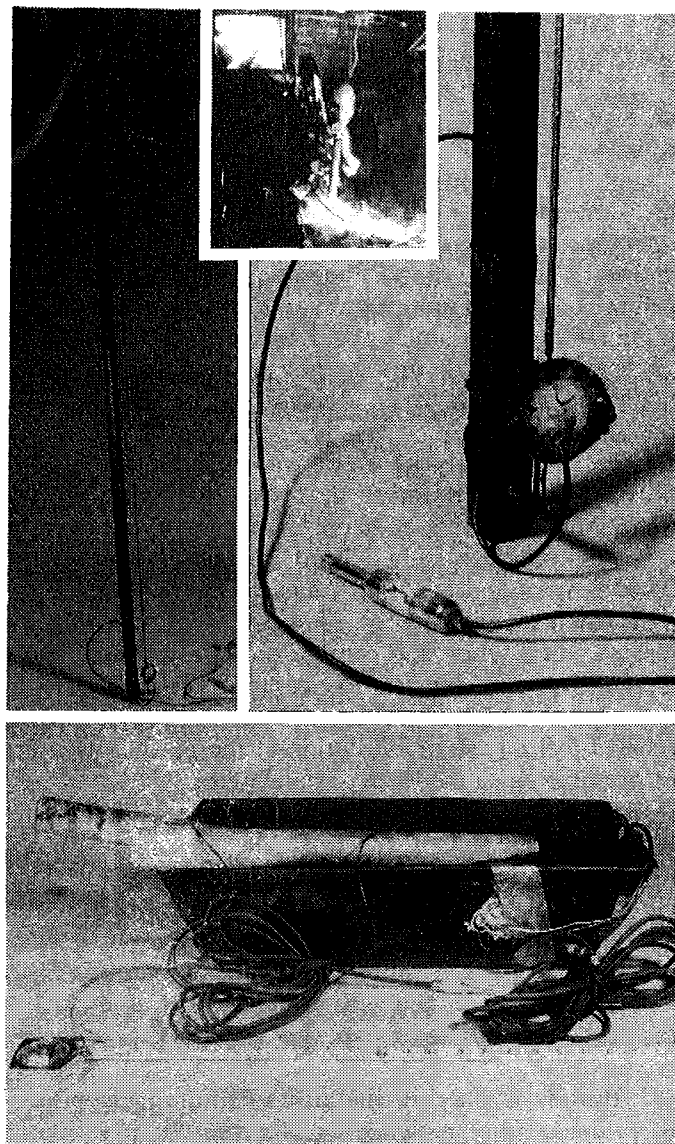
The surgical tubing runs up out of sight into the beams and what slats and plaster are left on the ceiling. Barney sets the camera and gives the line a tug. Dust begins to sift down, vividly illuminated and almost magical. The dust collection is made up of sweepings from previous shows. Most of this dust came from the ballroom of the Alice St. Hotel in Oakland.

Barney shambles around in his bare feet, stepping on his trouser cuffs, panning across the floor and over all the elements of the show. "Panning" isn't really an accurate term though. Where a professional cameraperson might try to move in imitation of a tripod or a dolly, Barney's style is more organic. He accepts the nature of the body holding the camera. His images are sometimes jerky and unpredictable but his choices, often influenced by random factors, suit his subjects and don't distract from them or formalize them as much or as insidiously as a more "controlled" technique would.

Steadying the camera with one hand, he reaches out and flips a few switches with the other. All the monitors but one switch to pre-recorded tape. With everything that's going on it's impossible to keep track of this imagery, but I sometimes notice correlations.

Barney turns on a fan sitting on the floor. The draft is luxurious in the stuffy, electrified basement. I have the good fortune to be in the front row, wearing shorts. Soon I will need to rub my legs a little with my hands to keep the chill off, and that will also feel good.

In front of the fan is a metal tray filled with water. I can see its rippling surface on the monitor. Barney pours Lysol into the water and the fan pushes the odor of it deep into the audience, filling me with a general sense of recollection. At the same time, since the smell is not a relaxing one, I become very aware of present physical reality. Partly, Barney is an archivist, organizing and making available certain peripheral experiences related to working in old shops, wandering through



Inset Top Center Haynes with Aqua-Pella **Top Left** Pork Bao: iron bar, transducer, audio cable, brass piano string **Top Right** Pork Bao (detail) **Bottom** Aqua-Pella: steel pipe, grease pan, audio cable, Piezo electric transducer pick-up mikes

abandoned buildings, childhood experiments in cellars and kitchens, and so on.

Phantom Limbs

Barney Haynes is standing on a chair, hunched over beneath the low ceiling, operating a video camera with one hand and trying to breath Lysol water through an amplified plastic tube. He can't get the water more than a third of the way up the tube. As he does after each action he takes his temperature and records the reading on videotape.

His main work area is a crowded section on the right side of the installation. Against the wall is an old Wurlitzer organ to which Barry has added the large I-beam. Barney turns this on and taps the strings. Defining the other edge of his space is an old wooden refrigerator from the Alice St. Hotel. He takes out a chunk of ice and starts chewing it, letting the water dribble out of his mouth onto an old double-burner hot plate resting on a small stand between Barney and the audience. Backing up, Barney videotapes a pot of boiling water. Steam condensing on the lens obscures the monitor image.

In his capacity as a one man production studio, Barney values material that the television of the dominant culture expends enormous energy repressing. With his single attached light he easily explores the dark corners and constant physical phenomena of the performance environment. I happen to be watching the live monitor when the camera suddenly dives into a drawer of the dessicated ice-box, the white light throwing each bit of crust and filth into sharp, shifting relief. I feel a rush of exultation at the undeceptive use of television as a medium of revelation.

Barney pours a shot of Jim Beam on the bare burner. I breathe in as sharply as possible, and listen to the little sounds of pleasure rippling through the audience. He chases it with a bottle of Rainer Ale, which foams and evaporates so fast on contact with the burner that it appears to bounce around like beads of mercury. Later he will echo this image with a shot of dust bouncing on the paper membrane of a speaker as he plays bass notes on the organ.

Barney is playing the Aqua-Pella, an instrument Barry made from an old grease pan he found in front of a machine shop, a contact mike, and a length of heavy guage conduit pipe. The grease pan is filled with water. Barney puts one end of the pipe in the water, the other in his mouth, aims his camera straight down the pipe, sets his focus, and gurgles. He takes a pair of shoes out of the refrigerator and holds them up to the light. They are partly encased in ice. He drops them in the floor, where they immediately start to make mud of the heavy dust, and tries to put his feet in them, but

there is no give in the frozen leather. He kicks them around and leaves them to thaw. He throws dry ice into the Aqua-Pella and yells into the pipe as the white mist, with its chemeical smell, curls into the audience. he pulls a steak out of the ice box and throws it directly in the hotplate, cooking each side for a few seconds. The audience has its various reactions to the smell of burning flesh. Covering the lens with his hands and still looking through the viewfinder, Barney stumbles around blind. This is the cue for Kevin Deal, an intermittently visible assistant who has been operating the Jacob's Ladders and playing a small stringed I-beam, to start throwing objects on the floor upstairs. Barney arches his back and does a shaky zoom in on a chicken foot hanging in the rafters. He starts a pre-recorded tape of a hand flopping on a piano keyboard. Taking off the camera and brace he drops it on its side on the muddy floor, then hunches on the chair, and holding onto the seat, tries to jump up and down, an awkward parody of walking. He concludes his performance rubbing the strings of the large lightbulb, illuminated and painted red. On the monitor we see that the latex paint skin can't withstand either the heat of the bulb or the scraping and is rapidly shed.

Dinosaurs

After a few minutes of improvisation with Kevin on the various instruments while Barney continues taping, Barry leaps up with a scream and sends the Optic Nerve, a working television removed from its casing and hung on pulleys, with its wiring extended for yards into the recesses of the studio, swinging out over the heads of the audience. Getting this under control, he activates the Tesla coil, a pole about four feet high, tightly wrapped with copper wire, which discharges bolts of purple lightning from the top. Earlier in the performance he had held a flourescent bulb near the buzzing pole and the current had arced in midair and lit the tube. Now he pulls over a hospital I.V. rack from which another TV screen swings and pushes it up to the coil. The connection is made and the abstract washes of light we see before the tube blows end the performance with the most primeval television of the night.

Light Wheel

After the show flourescent tubes are handed out. The audience gathers in darkness around the coil, the flickering white tubes radiating out from it like spokes. Everyone has the opportunity to be part of a circuit. Some people touch others and pass the charge onto them. It's a unique communal experience and typical of Schwartz and Haynes' generosity toward the audience.

--Aaron Noble

Inflated Sheep

This column, which will be a regular feature in bloatstick, exists to provide a formal recognition of the most self-important statements connected with the arts that come to our attention in each publication period. We urge our readers to submit their nominations. Few of us in the art world have our egos entirely under control and we hope that not only those honored but also those whose inanities have gone unnoticed (for now) will take the awards in good humor, as an opportunity for self-examination. And now, the winning remarks.

If it weren't for me , all the young artists would move to New York.

--Ann Walker, director of Artspace, quoted in Jerry Carroll's heroic Chronicle profile, 5/10/88.

What is really being said is that women have begun to reject the various ghettos that have been offered to them by modernist thinking. Change is obviously afoot, with a shift not only in the terms of the argument but of the arena of politics itself. What this work does is instigate the discussion to follow. New Langton Arts is proud to host the beginning of that colloquy.

--Nayland Blake in his curatorial statement for the *Contention* show at New Langton Arts.

How good is [Julian Schnabel]? How original is he? Some serious questions are raised in....a *San Francisco: the magazine* exclusive that is likely to stir nationwide controversy in and outside of the art scene.

--Ted Venetoulis, publisher *San Francisco: the magazine*, in his "publisher's note" in the May issue. The essence of the scoop seems to be that Schnabel has used elements from Rodchenko's paintings in his paintings. The article runs reproductions of works by the two artists side by side, and by golly they are quite alike. We at Bloatstick are still reeling from the shock.

Bloatstick: Statement of Purpose

We are active members of a healthy arts community which lacks any critical forum other than that afforded by the chummy selection process of the art establishment bosses. A whole generation of artists has risen up in an information vacuum: no one reviews their work, there is no formal body of documentation, and standards are arbitrary. We feel this situation hampers artistic growth, limits appreciation, and makes the community extremely vulnerable to careerists, entrepreneurs, and historians. We hope that Bloatstick will serve three functions:

1) To discuss work by Bay Area artists which has gone largely undiscussed before now, identifying tendencies, relationships, influences, and other things which would otherwise pass unnoted.

2) To collaboratively develop forms of criticism which serve the art of this time and this place, and which give as little help as possible to the forces of commodification and elitism.

3) To promote strong work which engages the audience on the social, intellectual, spiritual, and aesthetic levels, and to expose work which seeks to amuse and praise the wealthy and their followers.

Bloatstick: Plea for Help

Carnivorous? Lovesick? Reticent? Purblind? Jocular? Waspish? We need help and professional advice in virtually every area of production. Partial list: Administration, PR, Copy Editing, Proofreading, Word Processing, Formatting, Statting, Printing, Correspondence, Bookkeeping, Distribution. Many of these don't even exist as structured departments yet.

We also need access to equipment and leads on donations or real good deals on supplies. Partial list: ink, paper, paste-up board, filing cabinets, xerox machines, desks, stat cameras, computers (we favor the Macintosh), laser printers.

In addition to reviews of local work, we're also looking for investigative articles and essays, which aren't restricted to local topics. Rule one: Fuck Jargon.