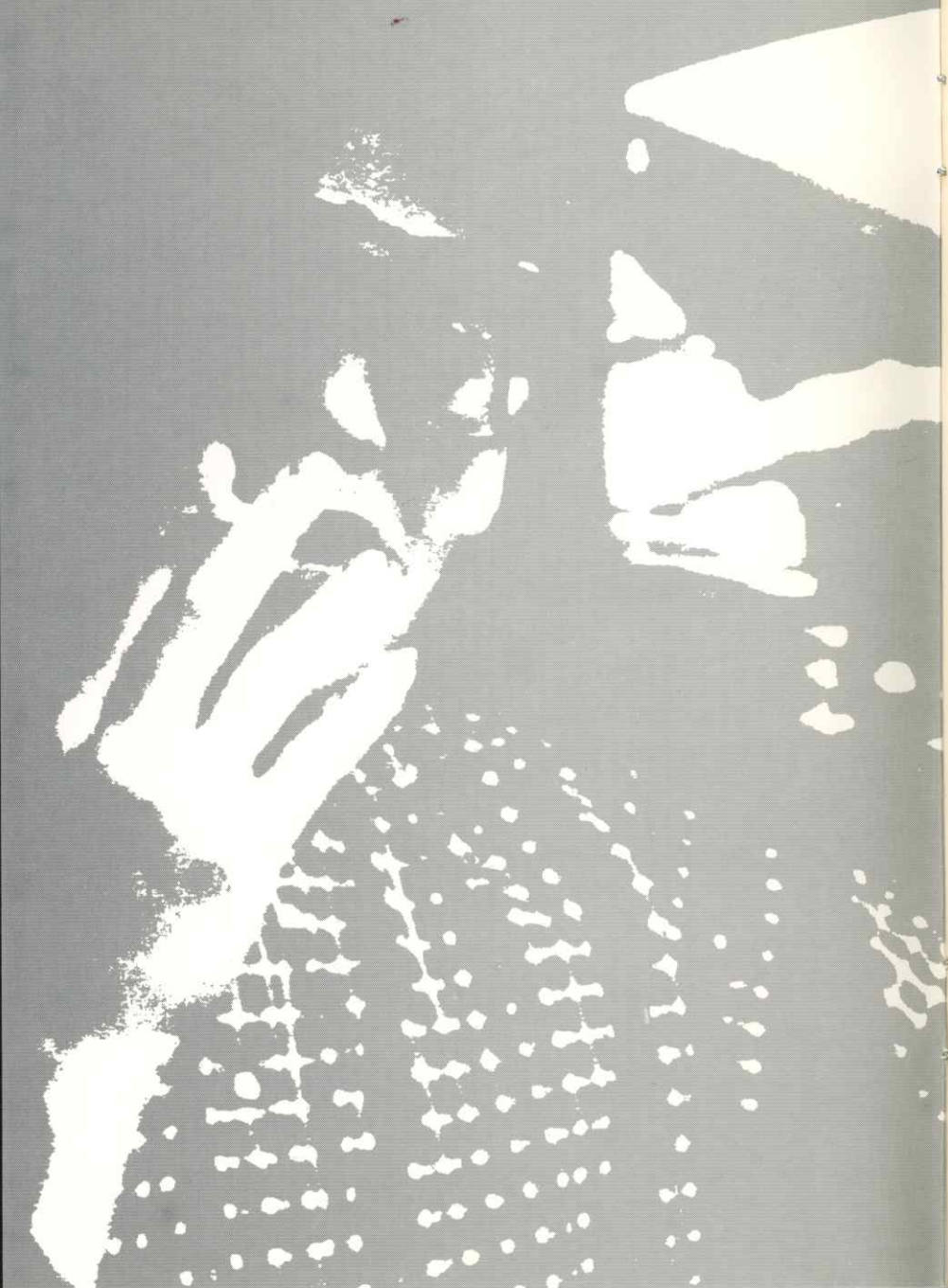


Lyric Director



Force of Vision



Lyn Blumenthal:

Force of Vision

Video Exhibition

L A C E

Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions

June 13 - July 9, 1989

Curated by Kate Horsfield

*1804 Industrial Street
Los Angeles, CA 90021
213~624~5650*

Program

>> *LYN BLUMENTHAL: VIDEO ART WORK*

Social Studies, Part 1: Horizontes
color 1983 20 minutes

Social Studies, Part 2: The Academy
color 1983-84 18 minutes

Arcade

Lyn Blumenthal and Carole Ann
Klonarides
in collaboration with Ed Paschke
Music by A. Leroy
color 1984 11 minutes

Doublecross

color 1985 8 minutes

What Does She Want:

Women With A Past
b/w and color 1987 70 minutes

>> *LYN BLUMENTHAL MEMORIAL TAPE*
1988 20 minutes

>> *LYN BLUMENTHAL: INTERVIEW TAPES*

Agnes Martin, An Interview

b/w 1974 55 minutes

Louise Bourgeois, An Interview

b/w 1975 30 minutes

Joseph Beuys, An Interview

color 1980 55 minutes

It is truly an honor to present the retrospective video exhibition of Lyn Blumenthal's work. Her untimely death in July of 1988 at the age of 39 was a shock and a great loss to all who knew her. Lyn was a woman of diverse talent. She was an artist, administrator, writer, speaker, initiator, feminist, a real character and a friend.

She was committed to the ideology that spurred the artists' space movement and continued to contribute to that dialogue throughout her career — a commitment to artists, new ideas, subversion, self-determination, and innovation. In fact, I first got to know Lyn when we were fervently trying to form the National Association of Artists' Organizations in Washington, D.C. (she was one of NAAO's first board members), and I last saw her at the NAAO conference here at LACE in March of 1988. It is therefore not a coincidence that this first memorial exhibition of her video work is being shown here at LACE.

I want to thank Kate Horsfield, Lyn's colleague and collaborator, for curating this exhibition in the most professional, personal and thoughtful manner. On behalf of Kate and the Board of Directors of LACE, I would like to thank the many people who made this exhibition possible: the writers

and critics who have so eloquently described aspects of Lyn's life and work, Martha Gever, Robert Storr and Judith Kirshner; Chris Straayer, Bruce Yonemoto, Adriene Jenik and Lisa Steele for wrapping words around Lyn's style, commitment, objectives and process of working; Roger Gilmore, Provost of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago for unearthing the very first Video Data Bank proposal; all of the people who participated in the making of the Lyn Blumenthal Memorial Tape, for sharing their time, effort and stories (several of these stories have been selected for this catalog); Gail Sax for her patience and dedication to this project; Mindy Faber, Suzie Silver and Kelly Parr, the Video Data Bank staff, for their extensive back-up efforts; Carole Ann Klonarides and Michael Smith for their witty and humorous suggestions; Branda Miller for being who she is and for being what she was to this process; Susan Sifton, who once again has designed a successful catalog; and the LACE staff for their diligence and commitment, particularly Anne Bray, Video Coordinator, and the VideoLACE committee for the enormous hours they contribute to LACE's video programs.

While the writing in this catalog addresses Lyn Blumenthal's work and her contributions, it also gives one an

idea of her character; unfortunately, that character exceeded in size what can be captured on the written page. Lyn was always outspoken and an original thinker, bringing new ideas and the initiation of unique programs to the field of contemporary art, particularly to the field of video art and its distribution. The loss of her presence is tremendous. I miss Lyn's feistiness and her humor — she continues to give me faith.

Joy Silverman
Executive Director
LACE

In the dreary months following Lyn Blumenthal's death, I found myself engaged in many deeply meaningful (and often amusing) conversations with colleagues and friends as we tried to work our way through the loss to a better understanding of the overwhelming effect she had on our lives and on the field of video art. I hope that these people can imagine how important these conversations have been to me personally and to the shaping of this show and catalog.

Kate Horsfield
Curator

Lyn Blumenthal: A Brief Work History

Kate Horsfield

THROUGHOUT HER LIFE, LYN BLUMENTHAL was concerned with and worked simultaneously on many ideas which centered on the need to develop a meaningful personal expression as a working artist in video, and to contribute to an understanding and analysis of cultural, political and art issues in which video and media play an important role. Sometimes these two forms of working remained separate but often they overlapped. One led to the founding and developing of the Video Data Bank, to participating on grant panels, writing articles and lecturing; and the other led to her personal creative output. Her early sculpture, drawings, and

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The day we opened the library in the new school building here on Columbus Drive, Lyn and Kate appeared at the door at nine o'clock in the morning and said "We're the Data Bank, where's our office?" We said "Office? What office?" Nobody ever even thought that to run the Data Bank you might need an office and a telephone, and even a desk. So we opened up a little closet in the back of the library which was about three feet by three, and we put in a counter and a telephone and we said "There's your office!" And for at least a year, or maybe more, the two of them, well not both at once, but one at a time, sat in this little closet; and from that tiny little place, they built this world-wide operation called the Video Data Bank. That is how I remember Lyn, is building something that good and that big out of this tiny little three-by-three broom closet.

—Nadine Byrne

video installations can be seen as interwoven fragments and progressive examples of a process that grew into the construction of her own video tapes and expanded into a political analysis of feminism through the *What Does She Want* series.

I first met Lyn in Colorado in 1972. When we returned to Chicago, we began meeting to converse in the afternoons. Both of us were working artists: Lyn made sculpture, I made drawings; but each of us felt a level of dissatisfaction with the development of the work we were doing. We were still searching, and the early feminist dialogue that was becoming a source of nourishment and a dynamic for change in women's lives became a force in trying to reach a higher level of personal self-definition.

Lyn was driving taxis and saving money to buy an open-reel video portapak. When she finally gathered enough money to make the purchase, I quickly became engaged with her in the video process. From the beginning, the commitment to feminist dialogue and the need to work from our own personal frustration as artists led us to a desire to examine the working patterns of other women artists.

Alternative video seemed the perfect tool to break through the prevailing cultural and mythical constructs of male creativity. We chose the video interview format to reveal a better understanding of the serious commitment and accomplishments in women's work. Lyn and I made six tapes on women between 1974-75. All of these tapes were open reel half-inch, and unedited. The shooting format which we have used for all subsequent interview tapes was determined in the first interview (with Joan Mitchell)—single fixed camera, tight focus on subject, off camera interviewer. Lyn was behind the camera; I did the interviews. We felt that the ease and low-production demands of half-inch video were perfect for presenting the intimacy, and depth of an artist describing the development of her work. This was the beginning of a very long, very meaningful collaboration between us.

After completing our graduate degrees at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1976, we wrote a proposal to oversee a small collection of 125 video works which was called the Video Data Bank. The Video Data Bank consisted of student works in video and documentation of lectures by the school's visiting artists. That original proposal stated:

In order for the Data Bank to operate as a full-range facility it needs to become someone's major focus. The way we conceptualize it at this point is that it requires more than the regular amount of energy that goes with whatever one assumes to be a "regular job." Assuming responsibility for the Data Bank has no connection with clock hours or even job title categories: what would you call us—teacher, artist, babysitter, janitor, curator, grantwriter, technician, secretary? It has more to do with doing something someone loves.

—LYN BLUMENTHAL/KATE HORSFIELD
March 31, 1976

In addition to assuming our new administrative responsibilities in the Video Data Bank, we continued to make interview tapes with women artists, but became more involved with the notion of expanding the Video Data Bank collection of interviews into a balanced public record that reflected the concepts, attitudes, and working styles of contemporary art and artists. The accumulated production of these tapes also led to their distribution as an education tool for other young artists. This collection of taped interviews developed into the

On Art and Artists series and, in 1983, we organized another distribution collection called *VideoTape Review*. This collection consists of experimental video work by artists and independent producers. Gradually, all of the distribution programs and methodologies currently employed in the Video Data Bank were put into place.

As Lyn became more focused on the growing demands of the Video Data Bank, she also began to identify more closely with video art rather than with the drawings and sculpture on which she had previously worked. She began producing her own tapes: *Social Studies, Part 1: Horizontes*; *Social Studies, Part 2: The Academy*; *Arcade* and *Doublecross* were all produced between 1983 and 1985.

Lyn had a unique method for constructing and editing video tapes which was somewhat incomprehensible to others but completely clear to herself. She built up her vision of the tape by shooting Polaroid SX-70 shots of each in and out point for the edit and then she constructed a paper cut with typed dialogue under each shot. She would line up the paper cut on the wall with push pins and adjust the images until she had the sequences right. Then she would take the paper-cut to the on-line room for the post-

production. This process reveals Lyn's charmed ability to abandon rules by abbreviating the tedious procedures of logging information, and refining the conceptual process by making a rough cut, in favor of following her own internal sense and vision.

In 1984, the Video Data Bank sponsored and developed a project called the Video Drive-In. The purpose of the project was to create an innovative (and spectacular) venue for presenting independent video to a non-art audience of persons from around the Chicago area. This project was a highly experimental one in which the Grant Park Band Shell was to be converted into a video drive-in (no cars) and independent video would be displayed on a giant outdoor screen in the park for two nights. More than any other project, this one was emblematic of Lyn's grand-scale sense of adventure—a quality that permeated everything she did. A thirty foot scaffolding structure was built, a huge 18 by 24 foot screen was designed for the project, 60,000 pounds of cement block were used to anchor the screen against the wind blowing off Lake Michigan. One-inch playback equipment was set up outdoors in the park and a G E Light Valve was flown in from the East Coast for the

I had heard about Lyn long before I met her in the mid-'70s and I had heard strange and wonderful things. When I finally met her, suddenly there she was across the room, and because there were so many wild and fantastic stories and rumors that had sprung up around her, suddenly I felt pretty much like the way a hunter feels when they first see a deer that they've been stalking for years. There she is! I had been cautioned that she was somehow dangerous and yet I liked her right away. I started talking to her and I liked her, and I thought: this person isn't the terrorist that I've been told about.

—John Manning

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projection. All of these elements were brought together on the day of the projection and no one was sure that it would work. It rained during most of the day and the staff in the VDB was nervous. But, at the last minute, the bad weather rolled off across the lake and people began to arrive for the big event. The project was a huge success—over 10,000 people came to the Drive-In, most of them never having seen “video art” before.

The curatorial process applied to the two programs, *The Science of Fiction*; *The Fiction of Science*, used in the Drive-In, initiated a new direction for Lyn. The Drive-In demonstrated that there was an audience for experimental video work outside the parameters of the art world and she wanted to design a methodology for reaching this audience. The conceptual process of organizing these tapes gave her a larger, more comprehensive sense of how to produce a collection of videotapes chosen from different genres and styles of work, and structured into one thematic unit. She saw this as a potentially viable packaging concept that could extend video beyond the confines of the art world to individual users in the home-market.

In the fall of 1985, she began work on the *What Does She Want* project, a series of 6 videotapes on VHS

format (*We Are Not Sugar and Spice and Everything Nice*; *Bad Attitude*; *Fact Is Stranger Than Fiction*; *A Crack In The Tube*; *Variety Is The Spice of Life* and *Women With A Past*) which compiles many of the most important works by women in performance, film and video. *WDSW* was constructed as a distribution strategy to resist the art world's tendency to ghettoize women's work. As Adriene Jenik, assistant producer on the project stated, “One response to this structural resistance was the development of alternative venues of exhibition and distribution that strive to promote visual art by women exclusively in order to more effectively connect answers to an audience which was interested, even invested in, seeing artists give them....”

What Does She Want, completed shortly before Lyn's untimely death in July of 1988, encompasses many of the issues she had struggled to define and chose as focus in her video work: the private versus the public persona; the meaning of personal identity and expression in a “media packaged world”; the construction of “self” in relation to sexuality; the fragmentation and re-construction of visual images. Lisa Steele described Lyn's commitment to progressive art: “Always outspoken, often abrasive, she spoke up on behalf of content, focused political critique,

feminism and the right of artists to make work with a ‘message’.”

Lyn was a very dedicated artist and worker; but she was hardly chained down by her serious dedication to work — she loved to have a good time, she had an outrageous presence — she was a “grande dame,” equally known for her high style of dress, shopping sprees and dinner parties. In her, the life force was at an extreme. Bruce Yonemoto describes her passing eloquently: “Her Image now magnifies as it moves from the world of the real to that of the dream.”

Kate Horsfield is director of the Video Data Bank of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Video Data Bank was co-founded by Lyn Blumenthal and Kate Horsfield in 1976; both were co-directors until Lyn's death in 1988. Kate is an artist, teacher and videomaker. Her most recent video tape was *Ana Mendieta: Fuego de Tierra* a collaboration with Nereyda Garcia-Ferraz and Branda Miller. She has just completed production on *Video Against Aids*, a VHS series of three 2-hour programs consisting of 22 individual titles, bringing together a persuasive, involved cross section of independently-produced works addressing the AIDS crisis.

social studies doublecross women with a past

Martha Gever

I BEGAN WRITING ABOUT INDEPENDENT VIDEO and alternative television — work that is sometimes called video art — only a year or two before I first met Lyn Blumenthal. At the time, Lyn lived in Chicago and New York City, and I lived in Rochester, New York. I thought my distance from the big cities provided a great advantage, as a critic, since I had no social contact with the artists whose work I wrote about. And, as a consequence, I felt neither ties of loyalty nor pangs of antipathy toward the makers of the various tapes I reviewed. Then I changed jobs and moved to New York, and Lyn befriended me. Eventually, I even acted a small role in one of her

On our first plane trip together, Lyn and I were flying to Chicago to make *Arcade*. I'm not a great flyer, but Lyn flew all the time and I figured I'd feel calm. We were on the plane, buckling up, getting ready for takeoff. I look over, and all of a sudden I see Lyn all bent over. I yelled: "Lyn, Lyn, what's the matter, Lyn?" She says, "It's crash position, we have to get ready for a crash." Well, the stewardess comes over and says "Ma'am, would you please not do that because you're making the other passengers a little bit nervous." Lyn informs me that she does it on every flight, and usually the stewardess is already aware of her behavior, so I was prepared for a very rough flight. And it continued to be a bumpy one for us as long as I knew Lyn, but I have many funny stories—stories that you couldn't even believe were true except that Lyn told them so you figured, well they must be. This was a person for whom anything was possible, she was completely extravagant, had a complete flair for life. Food, generosity, good talk, the girl would laugh at anything, I'm gonna miss her.

—Carole Ann Klonarides

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videotapes, *Doublecross*. At the time, I cautioned her that I could never write about the tape, due to my participation and the conflicts of interest that would entail. She acknowledged my position. Now, some months after Lyn's death, as I attempt to comment upon her personal video work, including the tape I appeared in, I again realize my complicated relationship to her and her work.

In considering Lyn's tapes — the ones she made apart from the numerous videotaped interviews with artists that form the backbone of the Video Data Bank collection — I want to proceed in a reverse chronological order. In addition to simulating my own memory process, this method places *Women with a Past* (1987) at the top of the list. Since that tape incorporates some of the earlier Data Bank interviews and, through its attention to the work of four women artists, indicates several of her consistent interests, it seems a particularly apt beginning.

Women with a Past is disarmingly simple in its form — a quartet of talking heads only briefly interrupted by examples of the works by the artists featured. Martha Rosler, for instance, mentions her videotapes *Vital Statistics of a Citizen*, *Simply Obtained* and *Losing* and scenes from the tapes appear on the screen; Nancy Spero explains some of the thoughts that informed her series of drawings dealing with the atom bomb and a few of

these drawings are shown. At this level the tape's function is primarily didactic. A spectator might well regard it as an introduction to feminist issues in art-making, since each of the women featured —

Rosler, Spero, Christine Choy, and Yvonne Rainer — is an established figure in contemporary art and media circles. A screening of the tape could easily serve as an introduction to the Data Bank collection of full-length interviews with these artists and others.

Yet the material included in this composite portrait of women artists, circa 1987 is, in a sense, more than the sum of its parts. In laying out the dimensions of feminist concerns in art by using the vehicle of autobiographical speech, *Women with a Past* acknowledges the collective and social character of women's artistic production while crediting the singular voices of particular artists. Choy, for example, speaks as a filmmaker whose interest in radical social change preceded and still supercedes her involvement in film production and describes her documentary film *Mississippi Triangle* (co-produced with Worth

Long and Allan Siegel) in this light. Spero, on the other hand, quotes the French feminist writer Hélène Cixous on the subject of women writers and the politics sexual difference while



distinguishing her involvement in art production from more instrumental political work. Rosler and Rainer, too, present distinct positions related to, but different from, those taken by Choy and Spero.

The effect of this variety is that the category of "women's art" or "feminist art" — the setting that unites the four women in *Women with a Past* — becomes fractured and rendered multi-faceted. More important, though, the intensity and intelligence of the four individual artists signal the breadth and profundity of feminist contributions to art and to theories of representation. At one point, Rainer speaks about the reasons she has in-

ABOVE: *WOMEN WITH A PAST*

eluded psychoanalytic material in her films and describes several of her strategies for problematizing representations of women. Then, in a long passage, she describes a scene from



Film about a Woman Who... in which a woman's sexual fantasy of being slowly and sensuously undressed is enacted, with the camera eventually panning to a close-up of another woman character (played by Rainer) who has scraps of newsprint pasted to her face. These short texts are excerpts from newspaper reports of the trial of George Jackson, where Angela Davis's diary entries concerning her relationship with Jackson were used as evidence. On the soundtrack, Rainer recites a bit of this material and explains, "My point was this woman with this public persona of being a radical, a militant, a Marxist, whose most private diaries are being revealed in court

to betray - or being used by the prosecution to establish - Angela Davis's connection to George Jackson in this conspiratorial situation."

Later in the tape, Rosier voices similar interests when she elaborates her decision to employ tropes from soap operas in her videotape *Losing*, which, she explains, "by its presentation, denies the premise of the work

itself... that the private world is disjunct from the public world." Although the work done by each of the subjects of *Women with a Past* looks and sounds distinctly different, the tension between private and public is repeatedly articulated in the tape.

The intersections of private and public crucial to contemporary feminist analysis and variously addressed in *Women with a Past*, also informs *Arcade* (1984) and *Doublecross* (1985), two tapes Lyn made prior to embarking on the *What Does She Want* series, for which *Women with a Past* was conceived and executed. Instead of the pared down presentation of the latter work (the footage of all four artists is black and white and each is

In the summer of 1984, the Video Data Bank was doing the first Video Drive-In at Grant Park. They were presenting *The Science of Fiction/The Fiction of Science*, which were two evenings of video projected onto a big screen that was hung in the bandshell in Grant Park. The crowds were expected to be about 5,000 people each night and it was also supposed to rain that weekend. Both Lyn and Kate were very worried that this was going to ruin the drive-in. As part of my professional duty working in the Office of Public Programs and Information at the School of the Art Institute, I was asked to call a special pilot's weather service every hour to find out the forecast. I would report in every hour, but most of the time I couldn't get them on the phone because they were over in Grant Park cleaning off all of the 5000 metal chairs with paper towels, so that when the audience did come they could sit on dry chairs. To me that's an image of their generosity and how important it was that video reach the public.

-Cynthia Chris

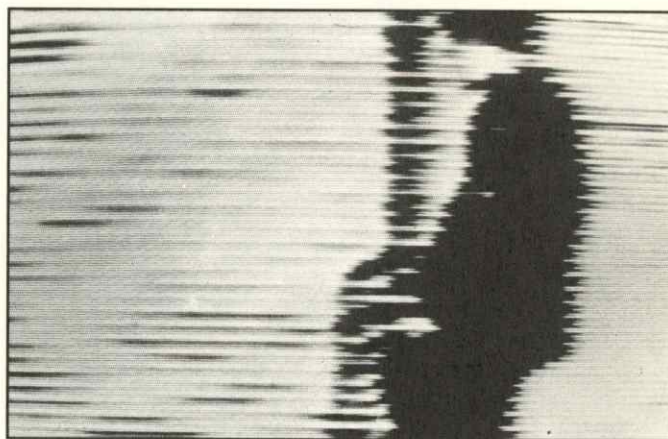
shown either in close-up or medium close-up shots, all positioned against plain, flat backgrounds) both *Arcade* and *Doublecross* consist of an excessive barrage of pirated mass media imagery cut with stagey bits of drama — either material shot documentary-style in the theaters of urban America or scripted and taped under studio-like conditions.

The rapid cutting and frequent repetition of imagery in both tapes is accompanied by a collaged soundtrack of sync sound, some wild sound, and the sounds of pop culture, laced with original music composed and recorded for the tapes by A. Leroy. The two tapes are similarly constructed in an associative manner, and the relatively short duration of each — *Arcade* lasts eleven minutes and *Doublecross* is eight minutes long — seems contradicted by the mass of material jammed together in these works. But *Arcade*, a collaborative project coproduced with videomaker Carole Ann Klonarides and with additional contributions from painter Ed Paschke, bespeaks a social space, whereas *Doublecross* exhibits a subjective psychic logic. The latter work begins with a blank screen and a young girl's voice, inflected with the intonations common to Hollywood movies in the 40s. The girl seems to be conversing with her mother and eventually asks her, "Do you love Daddy better than me?" "That's a different kind of love. You'll find out when you grow up," Mother replies.

The references to mass media and popular culture in *Arcade*, on the other hand, contain few hints of incest or other family ties, but rather evoke scenes of public display and spectacle. The final few moments of the tape replay in distinct glimpses of chaotic movements by men in business suits — showing, I believe, TV footage of John Hinckley's attempted assassination of Ronald Reagan in 1981. Although the tape gives no specific information that would assign a historical place to the blurred events on the screen, these disorderly fragments of newsfilm look uncannily familiar, as if the events depicted can be read from the gestures of panicky Secret Service agents and jerky camera movements.

In retrospect, this observation supplies a possible method for decoding a number of the components of the otherwise cryptic work. A disco beat underscores much of the action, supplying an aural complement to fast-paced sequences of high-tech, souped-up images. Excerpts from the routines of an aerobic dancer and a circus acrobat perform alongside

ominous images of teenagers hanging out, shot surveillance-style, and street action flashing on and off as if lit by the electronic strobe of a news



photographer or a nightclub dance floor. These various jigsaw puzzle pieces cumulatively comprise a mélange of mass media effects — a kind of frenetic, colorful, alienated, vaguely threatening, fragmented picture that recalls, perhaps, the crazy quilt video constructions of Nam June Paik and his various collaborators as well as the paintings of Paschke.

Made a few years later, *Doublecross*, too, relies on mechanisms of imagistic accretion, where the order of presentation and use of repetition imply relationships between otherwise disjunctive sights and sounds. Here, though, the chains of meaning seem

ABOVE: *DOUBLECROSS*

more personal and often less determinate than those constructed in *Arcade*. There are several passages from pornography, obscured somewhat but depicting sexual action nevertheless.



There are exchanges between several actors speaking scripted lines, although the precise characters portrayed in these scenes and their relationship to one another remains mysterious (I play a lawyer, but without any indication of who I'm representing or why I ask the few questions that comprise my part). There are also, at the tape's beginning, cinematic signifiers of high drama: storm clouds moving rapidly across the screen, towering skyscrapers, fireworks displays—portents of a drama that never congeals into a narrative.

Doublecross is sprinkled with references to narrative film, begin-

ning with the mother-daughter discussion quoted earlier, cadged from the notoriously misogynist movie *The Women*, and concluding with music and voices dubbed from the sound-

track of *Entre Nous*. But any story contained in the tape remains at the level of suggestion. Like the title, which implies a betrayal at the same time as it might refer to the popular lesbian motif of two overlap-

ping women's symbols, the particular materials assembled in *Doublecross*, as well as their combined effect, refuse any single interpretation - not to mention a linear explanation. In a short essay on the tape, Lyn indicated the thinking behind such choices: "[T]he world is divided into 'his' culture and 'her' nature. My own resistance to this demands that I am forever dodging his projects of representation, of reproduction...of his grasp." In so far as dramatic narrative cinema centers around the story of masculine desire - as has been argued by a number of feminist film theorists - *Doublecross* tries to expose some of the components of this story and introduce disruptive elements, such as lesbian attraction.

One of my favorite Lyn stories is a trip we took together to the Berlin Film Festival in February 1985. It was freezing cold there and the snow was up to our knees. We checked out the festival and got our passes and festival kits, but we realized that something was really missing. Finally, we decided we needed a day to ourselves to partake of our favorite activity: shopping. So we went to the Kadimah, which is the ultimate shopping experience. It's a multi-level shopping center where every floor is dedicated to something completely different. Lyn found her place on the bedding floor. Within moments, we had the entire staff helping us with Lyn's bedding. She bought comforters, pillows, mattress pads, everything you can imagine, only the best and it was very exciting. We tested the pillows and the comforters. It was an entire afternoon and we were exhausted. It was probably the best thing we did the whole week, better than any of the films we saw, that's for sure.

-Kathy Rae Huffman

Putting into practice the feminist insights concerning the political agendas at work in systems of representation is an outstanding feature in all of Lyn's videotapes, not least of all in the two parts of her *Social Studies* project: *Part I: Horizontes* (1983) and *Part II: The Academy* (1983-84). But in these works, as in *Arcade*, the ideological mechanisms of mass media, and television in particular, is never separated from the operations of gender politics. Both *Social Studies* tapes rework mass media objects: *Part I: Horizontes* dissects and reconstitutes an episode of a Cuban telenovella of the same name; *Part II: The Academy* replays the sound from the Best Picture award portion of the 1982 Academy Awards ceremony, while a static image of the auditorium where the event took place occupies the screen for the tape's duration. About midway through this tape, various phrases and sentences appear against the background of the vacant proscenium, animated by means of computerized special effects processing.

Despite the contrasting kinds of raw material, both *Social Studies* tapes examine the function of television as political medium as well as popular entertainment. Indeed, these works emphasize this dual aspect of TV. The melodramatic story of political and personal intrigue told in the *Horizontes* segment is replayed along subtitle-like commentaries on its themes and its representation of so-

cial relations. Although in *The Academy* the viewer is denied the made-for-TV visual spectacle of the awards extravaganza, the textual graphics that play on the screen are, in fact, quite entertaining. For instance, in his acceptance speech *Gandhi* producer, Richard Attenborough, drones on about Gandhi's principles while words on the screen ask rhetorically, "Out of ideas?" Later, when Attenborough cites Martin Luther King Jr.'s and Lech Walesa's affinities to Gandhi, the words "everywhere is the same" occupy the stage.

Like Lyn's other tapes, the two chapters of *Social Studies* recognize the centrality of gender in the operations and enunciations of mass media. In *The Academy*, the use of the pronoun "he" in the on-screen texts highlights the connection between masculinity and authority assumed in Attenborough's speech as well as in his role as producer of *Gandhi*. These written displays can be read as critical captions, appearing as unspoken rejoinders with a feminine accent. Similarly, in *Horizontes* translation of the words delivered in Spanish by various male characters are presented by means of text superimposed on the screen, while most of the dialogue spoken by female characters is dubbed in English. In both tapes, these methods for graphically marking gender as a function of speech foreground the crucial position of language in establishing and maintaining the boundary between masculinity and femininity, the delineation of the terms of

sexual difference.

In *Social Studies*, as in *Arcade*, the political arena where representations are developed and deployed is largely explored in terms of public spaces — television, in the earlier tapes, and a mass-mediated urban environment in the latter. These tapes illustrate how TV "collects" and "corrects public memory" — as both parts of *Social Studies* repeat. But in *Doublecross* and *Women with a Past*, subjectivity — or what feminists have called "the personal" — becomes the organizing principle as well as one of the major themes in the work. Perhaps Lyn's attention to feminist theory led her in that direction. But, just as likely, she realized, along with many other feminist intellectuals, that the analysis of masculine biases and privileges in art requires an examination and elaboration of the female subject — her dramas and her descriptions of the world. For this work, Lyn returned to the kinds of material that the mass, public, politically conservative media wouldn't dream of: the words and objects produced by women artists, enabled by the political collectivity of feminism.

1. Lyn Blumenthal, "Doublecross," in *Resolution: A Critique of Video Art*, Patti Podesta, ed. (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions, 1986), p. 44.

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Martha Gever is a critic and writer living in New York City. She is the editor of *The Independent Film and Video Monthly*.

Artists for Artists' Sake

Robert Storr

IN THE COLLECTIVE MEMORY OF EACH CREATIVE generation there exists a distinctive icon of the Artist. A product of student "first impressions," most often such archetypes are in their embryonic form the composite portrait of vanguard figures of the day. Sometimes, however, they derive from a singular image. For many who went to school in the 1950s and 60s, a dervish-like Jackson Pollock attacking his canvas was "Action Painting" incarnate. Those pictures and the febrile energy that they evoked indelibly marked the consciousnesses of all who saw them. As the art of the past decade has taught, however, the mythic aura of Pollock's stance,

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Lyn was an adventuress, she was bad. She loved to cruise in her car, laughing and singing to the radio. One night, we were driving around the city with a fictitious video mission (shooting surveillance of the exterior of lesbian bars), and we parked near the docks. Lyn accidentally tapped a new cadillac and its alarm began to blare. All of a sudden there was this angry man running towards us. We jumped in the car, shrieking as we began a chase scene going a hundred miles an hour in the wrong direction down these narrow roads around Wall Street. Lyn loved this pursuit. She kept screaming for me to shoot, but I could barely stay on the seat. Finally, she cut the scene, which was extremely cinematic, as were so many of my experiences with Lyn, and decided to change her tactics and go on the offense. I was terrified, as she slammed her foot on the brakes! The guy drove up next to us and we could see his girlfriend, completely pale in the seat next to him. Lyn began to criticize the miniscule size of his motor. Speechless, he shrank and drove away, as tears of laughter rolled down our cheeks, and we sped off into the night.

-Branda Miller

and the many (although sometimes fertile) misconceptions regarding his persona and studio practice that have emanated from these pictures are in truth more a reflection of the medium than of the "facts." More than Pollock's *agon*, their content is a matter of Hans Namuth's theatrical use of "decisive moment photography" to personify the vigor of a new avant-garde.

The image of the artist carried by many of us who went to school in the 1970s is radically different, not least for the different technology by which it was first transmitted and the conscious demystification of the bohemian ideal it embodies. Projected in our minds is the spectre of a large head. Whether specific and detailed or the flickering average of several countenances overlaid like William Wegman's genealogical self-portrait, the picture we conjure up moves, pauses, thinks, confides, and jokes. Frequently out of focus, often grainy, it is an image as deliberately undramatic as Namuth's is heroic, as intimate as his seems romantically remote, as articulate as his is mute. A genii that escaped from the "tube," this restive "talking-head" is the creation of the Video Data Bank.

My first encounter with the Data Bank interviews was at the Art Insti-

tute of Chicago, where in a denuded utility room, Lyn Blumenthal and Kate Horsfield, Data Bank's founders and at that time sole representatives, screened tapes during lunch hour to a random and self-selected audience of painters, sculptors, media artists and lost souls. As it happened, the voice I first overheard from the corridor outside and which drew me into this circle was that of Louise Bourgeois. Familiar to me only as a name credited to a large marble piece I had once seen at the museum, Bourgeois was otherwise completely unknown to me, too famous to be considered a part of the world we as students inhabited, yet still not famous enough for us to have ever been taught about her work or its importance. It was a limbo, I subsequently learned, that harbored most artists of importance to my own development. Meanwhile, there in the dark safety of a room permeated by the sweet stink of adjacent painting studios, Bourgeois spoke in the most personal and at times breathtakingly frank way about her life, her motivations and her struggles. It was a revelation to me, as were many of the other tapes I watched during the next months.

To understand the impact of these tapes on students of my generation and our feeling that the vast gap separating us from the art world had

suddenly been reduced to near zero, it's crucial to appreciate how different the Data Bank material was and still is from the common run of "interviews" available to the public. Most of the latter are found in magazines and on educational TV, which of course guarantees that the artists featured address their imagined interlocutors as laymen if not as an audience to be entertained, teased and otherwise seduced. By contrast, the circumstances inscribed in the Data Bank interviews are those of a direct exchange between the artist-speaker and an off-camera artist-interviewer, over whose shoulder one looks. In short, it is a dialogue among peers, in which the subject understands that their usual shtick is neither needed nor called for, and the listener knows that deference is not required.

Serving as that listener's unobtrusive proxy while gently pressing for information of particular concern to other artists, Lyn and Kate's achievement is inextricably connected to the simplicity of their format and their paradoxically warm use of a cool medium. Concentrating in each tape on a single individual, the choice of those included in the series and the implicit dialectic established among their separate aesthetic positions reflect a clear and comprehensive agenda basic to the value of the ar-

chive as an artistic and social document. Following their own instincts, curiosity and doubts, Lyn and Kate spoke for a generation whose frustration with the notion of an aesthetic mainstream led to a rediscovery of the vitality of the so-called margins of the art world, a process that in the end helped to upset the institutionalized hierarchies of the 1960s and 70s. Specifically this meant that special attention was paid to women, to older artists working in the shadows of their more lionized contemporaries, to artists of "eccentric" sensibilities and to younger artists who had chosen new materials, new technologies and new situations in which to do their work. Moving backward and forward in time and across disciplines, the catalog entries of early interviews plainly manifest this will to see art in terms of its possibilities rather than in narrowly stylistic or art historically deterministic ways; on that list along with Bourgeois, who fits almost all of these misfit-categories, one also finds Joan Mitchell, Agnes Martin, Alice Neel, Robert Irwin, Hans Haacke, Lucy Lippard, Sol LeWitt, Betty Parsons, Meredith Monk, Eleanor Antin, John Baldessari, Laurie Anderson and Joseph Beuys, all of whom, though well known now were by no means so when Lyn and Kate first searched them out.

Consonant with the process and

real time approach of much post-minimal art of the 1970s, Data Bank's early tapes were shot one-to-one. An expression of their aesthetic moment as well as the complete account of a sequence of lived moments, little editing was done and was undertaken only to eliminate obvious repetition and further diminish the role of the interviewer, narrowing the distance between audience and subject. Refusing, beyond that, to stage-manage the conversations or adjust their actual and often erratic flow, Data Bank's discreetly naturalistic methods allowed one to follow the pace of each artist's thinking rather than simply presenting the viewer with the contents of that artist's mind artificially packaged as a seamlessly joined series of sound bites or pithy remarks. One minute halting, the next racing full tilt, the variousness of an artist's imaginative rhythms is one of the things non-artists understand least, yet artists most want to know about one another. At first difficult to grasp for those in the habit of being fed facts stripped of any context, Data Bank tapes taught a lesson in paying attention, while to an ear already attuned to the silences of John Cage, they made immediate and perfect formal sense.

The very awkwardness of the

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We were at the AFI Festival, and Paper Tiger had been commissioned to make a tape about the Festival, and then we were gonna play it back at the last session. We were really behind schedule. We'd taped too much and were trying to edit. It was a frantic feeling and Lyn was incredibly calm, she sat in the editing room with us and she was never intrusive but she was just very helpful. It was nice to have her there. The most significant contribution she made to that edit was—one morning, after we'd been up all night editing and were exhausted, Lyn appeared at the door with a wicker tray with an incredible, embossed napkin on it and a plate that said *The Hotel Roosevelt*, and on the plate there were about 400 raspberries. That was our snack for the morning. Lyn had ordered something like twelve orders of raspberries and poured them on a platter and brought us the whole tray. It was such an incredible gesture and it was done in the most self-effacing, simple way. I always was amazed at the kind of style Lyn had. That was the snack with the most style I've ever had.

—Dee Dee Halleck

Data Bank style underscored the authenticity of its project, and as much as anything that funkiness was an extension of Lyn's anarchic temperament. No split existed for her between survival work (Data Bank was, after all, a job) and artwork. The same resistance to convention, even "vanguard" convention, can be found in everything she did, but perhaps most of all in the tapes' visual syntax. Sometimes jarring, even annoying, the make-it-up-as-you-go-along mannerisms of the tapes are in the end completely winning. Those mannerisms could be revealingly funny too. To speak of "talking heads," for example, is not quite accurate—or at any rate much of the time it was not. Instead, think of muttering nostrils, laughing earlobes, expostulating stubble and other off-grid Chuck Close-ups. Lyn's genius was to break the frontal and essentially static format of talk show videography in order to explore the simultaneity of optical, auditory and even tactile events that take place during a conversation. Allowing the camera eye to wander while the camera ear closely followed speech, she detailed the separate states of concentration that go into any prolonged exchange. Thus while we listen attentively not merely to what is uttered but to all ambient sounds, we are equally free to inspect the physiognomy of

the speaker at will and without embarrassment.

This sympathetic demystification of presence created an intimacy TV journalism seldom, if ever, risks. In time, of course, the mass media absorbs all things. It is curious now to watch telephone ads in which Lyn's chaotically inquisitive framing has been appropriated to hustle ever more integrated and regimenting information systems, when in fact the believable quirkiness of her takes had all along argued for freedom and a hopeful deconstruction of enforced social uniformity. Aware, before she died, of the commercial expropriation of her ideas, Lyn took a certain entrepreneurial pride in having effected mainstream media. Had she lived, however, one can be certain she would not only have found new techniques but in all likelihood would have subverted the broadcast use of the very innovations for which she was partly responsible.

In the long run, perhaps, it is impossible to beat Hollywood and Madison Avenue at their own game, but, as the art of the late 1970s and early 80s has proved, one can at least lay siege to them. Of late even the will to do that seems to have weakened. In the art world publicity is all and in

publicity the look of "art" has the ultimate cachet. Now as the audience for aesthetic "infotainment" swells and video programs proliferate and strive for the look of network TV, the Data Bank seems more than ever important as a model. That model was based on collaboration, between Lyn and Kate its two principals, first of all, then between them and the artists they approached for interviews, and finally between individual artists attempting to make sense of their commitment and the viewers attempting to make sense of theirs. The test of the Data Bank's enduring relevance is the fact that after an avalanche of hype and a decade of changes in the structure of art production, the community described by that manifold collaboration continues to survive not only in its archival permanence but as a vital image. That image, imprinted in the mind of many who matured during the last decade, is a singular portrait of the Artist—plural.

Robert Storr is an artist, critic and writer living in New York City. He has written for *Art in America* and is currently working on a book about Louise Bourgeois.

Lyn Blumenthal: A Memory

Judith Russi Kirshner

IT IS ALWAYS DIFFICULT TO EXPRESS OUR LOSS, our appreciation and love for a friend and it is particularly the case with Lyn Blumenthal. Like most of us, I have wonderful and poignant recollections of late night calls, extravagant gestures and a particularly joyful drive down the coast of California attempting to flee the boredom of College Art Association Meetings for the tacky pleasures of Tijuana. Naturally we never got there. Lyn's accomplishments are numerous and have already been listed; her horizon of self-expectation seemed to expand daily and she expected comparable achievement from those around her. Although she might have grated on

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Lyn Blumenthal had a passion for Image, and the immanence of desire within the Image. She recognized the power of the media and desired to reconstruct it. Lyn was fearless, unafraid to be critical in a community that some consider too small for constructive derision. At heart, she was a feminist, a passionate supporter of sexual difference, and an outspoken voice for sexual preference. Lyn was a brave champion of all artists struggling to decode the hallucinatory world which has re-presented the world of reality, the spectacle (now fact) called television. She was a natural entrepreneur even before business became art. Lyn wore her many hats with the panache of high Japanese fashion. In my mind's eye she has scale, she is grande.

—Bruce Yonemoto

a number of personalities here, the School always supported and appreciated Lyn for her informed and caring teaching, the very crucial role model she provided for young artists, the excitement and energy she brought to everything she touched from the evening class on women artists – a class whose turbulence and provocation spilled students out into the halls reeling from her challenge to them to make work whose impact was not limited to the art world – to the ongoing resources of the Video Data Bank.

For me one of the ironies of Lyn's personality, a personality and a career founded on extremes, was that with all her individual idiosyncracies and complexities, on the most fundamental level she worked and lived collaboratively. Her contribution to Heresies, her work with the National Endowment for the Arts, her teaching with Kate Horsfield, and of course the Video Data Bank, are all testimony to that ability and need to work collectively. In spite of her extreme individuality, she was totally committed to distributing other artists' work to large

audiences.

Both art and life were a very risky business for Lyn. It seems to me that there is another wonderful irony



in the fact that her institutional contribution, the Data Bank, is one of great conservatism, dedicated to recording, documenting, preserving and even canonizing contemporary artists. But Lyn did not stop at con-

servation. She turned from sculpture to video for her art, she questioned the very process she had used to canonize others and took the risk of exposing herself, emotionally and artis-

tically, to the same kind of ideological critique she applied to others. Caught between doubts about her own work – her own tensions, striking intelligence and sexual politics – she transformed it all into powerful images and ideas in her art and video pieces, *Social Studies I and II*, *Arcade* and *Doublecross*.

My recollections of Lyn's weekly entrances into the art history office are still vivid and make me smile. She would appear at the door with a radiant look, a spectacular outfit and an emotional, almost electrical, charge – a challenge that left me simultaneously exhilarated and exhausted. Lyn was really too much, "a brainstorm," as Ken Kirby and Chris Straayer have said, and I miss her deeply and will always treasure her spectacular gifts.

Judith Russi Kirshner is a curator, critic and writer living in Chicago who has written for *Artforum* and other critical art journals. Currently she is the Graduate Chair at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

LYN BLUMENTHAL

Born in Chicago, Illinois, 1948
Studied at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina (1966-67); Roosevelt University, Chicago (B.A. 1969); School of the Art Institute of Chicago (M.F.A. 1976)
Died in New York City, 1988

SELECTED VIDEOGRAPH

See PROGRAM for Lyn's video art tapes.
Out of 110 interview tapes
co-produced with Kate Horsfield,
three particular tapes were selected by Lyn:

Yvonne Rainer: On Art and Artists

120 minutes color stereo 1985

Craig Owens: On Art and Artists

60 minutes color stereo 1985

Martha Rosler: On Art and Artists

90 minutes color stereo 1985 (in production)

SELECTED VIDEO INSTALLATIONS

The Pleasure Of His Company

Single channel video environment, 1983
Incorporating video from *Social Studies II*
For the Kitchen, NYC

What Americans Are On TV

Slow scan video between Chicago & Paris, 1982
Photo-text, single channel video, stereo
For the Paris Biennale, France

Clean Slate (part I & II)

Live Interactive Environment, 1978
Photo-text, two channel, camera/monitor display
For the Detroit Institute of Art, Michigan

Surveillance (part I,II,III)

Live Interactive Video 1977
Photo-text, four channel video, camera/
monitor
For the Krannert Museum, Champaign,
Illinois

Ice Piece (part I,II,III)

Live Interactive Video 1976
Four channel video, camera/monitor display
(part III, For the Museum of Contemporary
Art, Chicago, Illinois)

SELECTED SOLO SCREENINGS

"Lyn Blumenthal," Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions, Los Angeles, California, 1989

"Lyn Blumenthal: A Retrospective," World Wide Video Festival, The Hague, Netherlands, 1988

San Paolo Biennale, Spain, 1988

Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, Massachusetts, 1988

American Film Institute National Video Festival, Los Angeles, California, 1987

I Bienal De Video Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain, 1987

Documenta VIII, Kassel, Germany, 1987

World Wide Video Festival, The Hague, Netherlands, 1986

International Festival of Video 86, Madrid, Spain, 1986

The Berlin Film Festival, The Arsenal, Berlin, West Germany, 1986

Monte Video, Amsterdam, Holland, 1984
San Sebastian Video Festival, San Sebastian, Spain, 1984

The Kitchen, Video Viewing Room, New York City, 1983

Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions, Los Angeles, California, 1983

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

"Making Their Mark: Women Artists Move Into the Mainstream," Cincinnati Art Museum, Pennsylvania Academy of Art, 1989

"What Does She Want?: Current Feminist Art from the First Bank Collection," Carlton College, Minnesota, 1989

Videonale, Bonn, West Germany, 1988

"That's Progress," Los Angeles Center for Photographic Studies, Los Angeles, California, 1988

"History of Video," Institut de Londres, Paris, France, 1987

"Homo Video," The New Museum, New York City, 1987

"Recent Acquisitions," Museum of Modern Art, New York City, 1987

"Videonale: Internationales Festival und Wettbewerb für Kunstvideos," Bonn, Germany, 1986

"Made for TV Festival," Boston, Massachusetts, 1986

World Wide Video Festival, Kijkhuis, The Hague, Netherlands, 1985

"ASPECT/Maillon," Associan de Spectateurs, Strasbourg, France, 1985

"The Whitney Biennial," The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City, 1985

"Dal Video Alla TV," Galleria Comunale d'arte Moderna, Bologna, Italy, 1984

"Rencontres Video Internationales De Montreal," Video 84, Quebec, Canada, 1984

"The Three R's: Roles, Relationships and Eroticism," Millennium, New York City, 1983

"PS I Reopens The Sixties," Long Island City, New York, 1983

"Critical Perspectives," Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions, Los Angeles, California, 1983

"What Americans Are On TV," Bienale De Paris, Musee De Grand Palais, Paris, France, 1982

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY ON THE ARTIST

Stein, Judith E., and Wooster, Ann-Sargent, "Making Their Mark," *Making Their Mark: Women Artists Move Into the Mainstream*, Rosen and Brawer eds., Abbeville Press, N.Y., 1989.

Knodel, Helen, "Women Over the Influence," *L.A. Weekly*, June 10-16, 1988.

McGann, Nadine, "Consuming Passions: Feminist Video and the Home Market," *Afterimage*, Summer, 1988.

Nash, Michael, "What Does She Want," *High Performance*, Fall, 1988.

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Seiling, Neil, "New Works National Video Festival," *American Film Institute*, catalog, Fall, 1987.

Zimmer, William, "VIDEO," *New York Times, Arts And Leisure*, March 6, 1987.

Brody, Meredith, "VIDEO" *Film Comment*, February 1986.

Kirshner, Judith Russi, "The Science Of Fiction /The Fiction of Science," *Artforum*, Reviews, December 1985.

Wooster, Ann Sargent, "Voice Choice," *Village Voice*, June 27, 1985.

Gardner, Colin, "Political Perspectives," *Artweek*, November 21, 1983.

Zeichner, Arlene, "Re(Tele)visionists," *The Village Voice*, December 20, 1983.

Wooster, Ann Sargent, "Lyn Blumenthal," Voice Choice, *The Village Voice*, April 5, 1983.

Jackson, Issac, "Plugging Into The Video Circuit," *The Independent*, June 1983.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY BY THE ARTIST

Blumenthal, Lyn, "What Does She Want: A Video Debate," *National Video Festival Catalog*, pub. American Film Institute.

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Blumenthal, Lyn, "Re: Guarding Video Preservation," *Afterimage*, vol. 13, no. 7, 1985.

Blumenthal, Lyn, "Doublecross," *Resolution: A Critique of Video Art*, ed. Patti Podesta, pub. Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions 1986.

AWARDS

Illinois Arts Council, Artists Fellowship, 1988

New York State Council for the Arts, Video, 1988

New York State Council for the Arts, Video Production Grant, 1987

New York State Council for the Arts, Video Production Grant, 1985

New York Foundation for the Arts, Artist Fellowship, 1985

National Endowment for the Arts, Artists Fellowship, Video, 1986

Producers Initiative, Production Loan, (*Doublecross*), 1984

New York State Council for the Arts, Production Grant, (*Social Studies Part II*), 1983

National Endowment for the Arts, Artists Fellowship, Sculpture, 1977

SERVICES

Illinois Arts Council, 1985 - 1988

Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities, 1988

Ohio Arts Council, 1987

New York Foundation for the Arts, Video Panelist, 1985

National Endowment for the Arts, Washington D.C., Media Arts Program, Production panelist, 1985

Producers Initiative, The Center For New Television, panelist, 1983

National Association of Artists' Organizations, Washington, D.C., Board of Directors, Vice President, 1982 - 1983

Randolph Street Gallery, Chicago, Illinois, Board of Directors, 1982 - 1984

Heresies Editorial Board, 1981 - 1983, Associate 1983 - 1988

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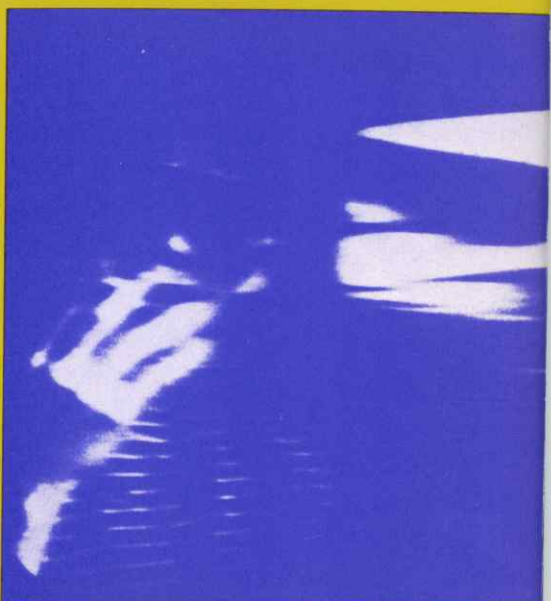
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Lyn Blumenthal



Force of Vision