

as is the case in radio.

Most of the images are of sparsely populated interiors. They are cool and minimal like contemporary Vermeers but quainter. Sometimes the rooms are full frame, sometimes distanced into a frame within a frame - a window or a doorway. More often the images become the subject of, and indistinguishable from the process of drawing. Within these interiors, the two figures play out their drama as fleeting images, just disappearing out of frame or gone altogether. They perform principally in the imaginative space of the soundtrack. The man approaches approaches

the woman; we approach the image - identifying; the woman pulls us back into the drawing, a representation within a representation. But like the sudden injection of a verbal narration in the abstract soundscape, a moment occurs when the elusiveness of the image is temporarily compromised. A sudden invasion of specific, physical images takes over, embarrassing us like a tramp pressing his face against the window. But the glass of the screen protects us. The figures are out of reach, locked into the technology. All is virtual.

WHAT I WANT THE SOUNDS AND IMAGES TO DO

GENERAL
Comments
9/2/93

Throughout the Seasons I have been looking for a precise balance between sound and picture, abstraction and representation, ambiguity and conventional storyline, video art and experimental television. I have always been concerned to activate the creative imagination of the viewer rather than preach or bombard her/him with a heavily processed cocktail of inter-textual/cultural references. In opening up the image space for the viewer, the risk is always of losing her in a sea of vagueness. How long should a durational shot last to convey time passing? At what point does she become more aware of the time passing to get through the sequence (the 'productive' moment of the '70s) and lose touch with the work? Part of the problem is that much of this is highly subjective and significantly affected by the cultural/social/historical baggage the viewer brings to the image. But we are not all so different that some general principles cannot be developed. There are images that hit you in the eye and others that induce somnolence. It just takes a little skill to sort out which is which.

Through the judicious use of powerful images and a carefully constructed

of the lovers will be shot in varying degrees of distance from the soundtrack, SUMMER will open an imaginative space in which the viewer will contemplate the experience of intimacy and separation, heterosexuality and loss, childhood formations and the adult psychological heritage. The details of the story will remain open to projection apart from the most basic structure of meeting-interaction-separation. The piece must nonetheless give a sense that it is FELT by its author. Although it is not a direct translation of a lived experience, it flows from the daily struggle of an individual woman to relate to a world in which, as a woman, she experiences herself as a minor player.

ON THE PLAY OF DISTANCES

The woman in SUMMER keeps her lover at a distance - most of the time. The tape charts the to and fro, the physical and emotional cha-cha they perform with the woman doing her best to remain in control. Structurally, the tape plays on notions of distance which echo the lovers' negotiations. Distancing devices were developed in early video art for their ability to expose the 'means of production' and the ideologies concealed therein. These techniques have been appropriated by popular culture to develop an ironic contemporary style of cross-referencing that sanctifies rather than undermines dominant codes. Women artists, myself included, have battled with structural invisibility by focussing on images of women making images. This continues to play a part in SUMMER although the drawing activity has been integrated into the narrative structure of the piece itself. In this respect, I have moved closer to mainstream representations of 'positive' images of women's creativity. The distancing nature of such an incongruous image is no longer so powerful and I would regard the affinity female members of the audience might feel as ultimately more relevant. SUMMER plays with distance in a number of other ways. There is the distance in time between the shooting and the viewing. This is tempered by the pseudo-antiquity of the furnishings pointing to a constructed timelessness. Temporal distance is echoed in the woman's drawn recreations of her encounter with her lover, conjuring up holiday snaps and home videos. When her lover gets too close, she sets up a distance between them by becoming the little girl in the story. The images

of the lovers will be shot in varying degrees of distance from the lens corresponding to the diageitic distances the woman imposes. At a simple level, long shots are legible, therefore close narratively but in terms of image, being small broken up patterns, they emphasise the surface of the screen and the woman's controlled objectivity. As the camera moves towards a scale in which the figure corresponds to life size, the sense of the image as a 'real' object increases. This draws us into a physical relationship with the 'object' parallel to the represented threat of intimacy between the lovers. There is a moment perhaps more significant in film in which the image overwhelms us with its illusory proximity only to break up as it moves into extreme close-up and abstraction. This is often where the imagination takes over and a different kind of proximity and intimacy with the viewer is achieved.

The soundtrack creates physical distances - the space beyond the frame that Chantal Ackerman draws out so well in 'Toute une Nuit'. The soundtrack may also retreat from and approach the image as it moves in and out of synch. (Bruce Nauman's 'Lip-Synch' is a perfect demonstration) The incongruity of sounds to picture can similarly mark out distance which sometimes reveals less obvious connections.

Video effects put a distance on the image partly by their association with popular culture and partly because of their ability to abstract the image onto a level of fantasy, closer to dream than an agreed reality. In SUMMER effects are used by the woman in an attempt to distance difficult images of intimacy as well as an aid to transporting both the woman and the viewer into an erotic realm from which they are soon rescued by narrative.

The voyeuristic nature of the tape, the inevitable peep-show spectatorship it engenders is continually used as a distancing device. It works to frustrate and stimulate the viewer whilst making him/her aware of the controlling aspects of desire - who is watching who, who is calling the shots, who determines the distance between the lovers and their distance from us as image?

These considerations and the ultimate inaccessibility of the video image and the Other are at the centre of SUMMER'S plays on distance.

BRIEFLY, THE PSYCHOLOGY

The themes of distance set out above connect to the underlying psychological model that informs the tape. Following the theories on women's psychology proposed by Luise Eichenbaum and Susie Orbach in their book 'Understanding women' (Pelican '85) I regard the problems of intimacy and distance as a major stumbling block in a woman's ability to achieve a sense of a 'true' self. A confident experience of clearly delineated, safe boundaries is extremely hard to achieve. The push-pull nature of early indoctrination within the family tie a woman to a strong identification with her mother. She quickly learns to develop similar emotional antennae which will serve her to serve others whilst burying her own emotional needs. She develops flexible ego boundaries that enable her to empathise principally with others. Her sense of self is dependent on her ability to successfully connect with others. To stand alone as a separate, autonomous being spells failure as a woman - a childless spinster with all its negative connotations. But intimacy with another similarly provokes anxieties that stem from the pressure of female socialisation. In order to train her daughter in the psychological service of other people, a mother may deny her the emotional connectedness that enables an infant to internalise a sense of its own boundaries and successfully achieve separation. She is left with a deep sense of insecurity and an urgent need to experience the essential bonding that never took place in infancy. This neediness and a shaky sense of personal boundaries dog a woman's attempts to form relationships in adult life. For heterosexual women, intimacy with a man is doubly threatening. At a psychological level, she fears being engulfed and taken over by the Other leaving her vulnerable to manipulation and/or abandonment (failure). A feminist consciousness may bring with it another more realistic fear- that of invisibility. As a student I was wary of male collaborators who could take over my ideas and present them as their own. It was very easy to do. People almost always assume that the male partner is the leader particularly if he is older with a previously established reputation. Men's identities are not subsumed into their female partners. In order to survive as a 'separate' social and professional entity many women chose to remain alone or keep their relationships with men superficial or temporary. I have frequently

observed this response and the inevitable frustration and loneliness it brings. At a psychological level, this tape is based on similar stories exchanged within a therapeutic group over a period of 2½ years.

A NOTE ON THE WOMAN AS VIDEOMAKER

Over the years, there has been much discussion of the problems women artists face when attempting to speak within the language of male culture. It has been argued that televisual languages are fixed and as women we are automatically relegated to the position of Other to the male subject. In our difference we speak with the non-voice of the M/Other so that our unveiling of the M/Other's subjectivity is akin to '..an encounter with meaninglessness.'¹ In her inspiring article on Nina Danino's films, Jean Matthee identifies the '..oscillation of irreducible ambiguity ' as a provisional response to the problem of femininity as represented in film. My concern is that such a strategy could appear to reinforce conventional views of women's art as lost in unfathomable female mysteriousness, a 'natural' counterpoint to the rigour and clarity of men's art. Another view characterises women as a kind of linguistic irritant giving vent to the monstrous ravings of a maternal economy returning from the repressed.² This too has a familiar ring to it. How often is women's emotional expressiveness dismissed by men as 'mad' incapable of logical thought and structure. My own feeling is that although spoken language is founded on hierarchical sets of opposites that rarely favour the feminine, visual and aural languages never were and never will be fixed. Neither are our positions within those structures fixed. If I am to formulate a position, I would say that although the images I use are often open to interpretation, they are rarely ambiguous for ambiguity's sake. The feelings that I attempt to evoke are extremely precise - anger, fear, desire, conflict. What the anger is about is open to interpretation within a carefully defined range of meanings. Sometimes I make a direct statement or break off to tell a story 'straight'. I employ a number of narrative devices from storytelling to an almost tactile confrontation with a static image.

I see all my tapes as a proliferation of narratives attempting to define

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1. Jean Matthee, 'On wounds, artificial flowers, orifices and the Infinite; A response to the films of Nina Danino' Undercut 19
 2. For a useful discussion of this position, see Jean Fisher 'Reflections on Echo' Signs of the Times catalogue, MOMA Oxford '90

the boundaries of the female self that remain so obscure both in the culture and in the psyches of individual women. To follow an Object Relations model, I see the video narratives as an externalisation of a continual internal dialogue, an interplay of relational objects that are difficult to control in the male culture out there. If I take the analogy a little further, I could say that the multiple elements of an authentic femininity become potential objects that are continually being worked and reworked. In the same way that the infant constantly revises her internal cast of objects in the light of experience, a woman artist rewrites her narratives, redefines herself in the light of social and cultural change and the life experiences that each age brings her. In this way she may take control of the definition of a female self that is traditionally experienced as formless, negative, Other and un-speakable. The alternative is to remain silent or reactively point up the cracks and fissures in dominant languages with wild assertions of her Otherness.

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