

British videomaker John Adams integrates film, performance and video to examine the codes and conventions of the personal and popular narratives of a media culture. Ironic and self-referential, his contemporary tales take the form of fragmented, multi-textual pastiches, constructed from adroit juxtapositions of on-screen text, original footage, and media appropriations. Adams tells stories that analyze the significance and contrivance of storytelling, ultimately crafting a meta-discourse on the semiotics of narrative. Often shot on 16mm film, his deftly edited collages merge autobiographical and popular sources, recasting everyday anecdotes, jokes and memories within the context of appropriated television and movie images, advertising, and pop references. Works such as *Sensible Shoes* (1983) and *Intellectual Properties* (1985) deconstruct mass media and personal narratives to investigate the collision of fact and fiction in everyday life, love, art and representation. Image, sound and text are reassembled in inventive inquiries into the collapse of the imaginary and the real. With wit and style, Adams illustrates the relation between the construction of personal identity and the internalization of the tropes of popular fiction.

Adams was born in England in 1953. He received a B.A. from the Newcastle Polytechnic Fine Arts Institute in Newcastle, England. A member of the Basement Group, a Newcastle-based exhibition and production venue for performance, video and film, from 1979 to 1984, he has received awards from the Arts Council of Great Britain, Northern Arts, and the Massachusetts State Council on the Arts and Humanities. Adams has taught at institutions including Newcastle Polytechnic and Sheffield Polytechnic in England; the Museum School of Fine Art, Boston; and the Chicago Art Institute. His videotapes have been exhibited throughout the world, at institutions and festivals including the Berlin Film Festival; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; San Sebastian International Film Festival, Spain; Bonn Videonale; Museum Folkwang, Essen, West Germany; Institute of Contemporary Art, London; and The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston. Adams lives in Newcastle, England.

Stories*by John Adams.**1981, 12:17 min, color, sound.*

In *Stories*, Adams fuses storytelling and performance in a reverie on reality and fiction. The artist sits alone in near darkness while, in voiceover, he relates a series of seemingly autobiographical anecdotes — "inside information" marked by irony, loss and black humor. This stark interrogation of self is accompanied by evocative narrative signifiers: a ringing telephone (an Adams signature), a ticking clock, a naked light bulb, dice, flickering TV images of a porn movie. The ambiguity of his stories — memory? dreams? fictions? — implies a tension between the construction of personal reality and the internalization of the conventions of popular fiction. As Adams writes, "The stories are all true. The character, of course, is fiction."

Bob and Jill (Pt. 2)*by John Adams. With: Chris Wainwright, Candy Guard.**1982, 10:26 min, color, sound.*

In *Bob and Jill (Pt. 2)*, the relation between fact and fiction in the personal and popular narratives of everyday life is rendered in an assemblage of soap opera conventions, performance and documentary. Opening with on-screen text that relates "The Story So Far" ("Jill crashed the Volvo...."), Adams intercuts several parallel story lines. He assumes a fictional role to recount the personal histories of Bob and Jill, as Bob is seen boiling an egg for breakfast and artists discuss the politics of criticism and art-making. These narratives are linked with the "real" information of a radio forecast. Will Bob and Jill reunite? Will artists and critics ever agree? Adams writes a happy ending, concluding, "Life goes on..."

Sensible Shoes*by John Adams. Film Camera: Ken Slater.**Narrator: Veronica Latham. Script/Direction: John Adams.**1983, 11:10 min, color, sound.*

Sensible Shoes is a witty collision of fiction and reality, ironically rendered as a multi-textual pastiche of mass media and personal narratives. Adams' fragmented collage is structured on the stream-of-consciousness monologue of an unseen woman, who collapses fantasy and the everyday as she "zaps" the television dial and skims the newspaper. Seamlessly integrating her daydreams of romance with appropriated images of violence, love and consumerism from popular British TV programs

Intellectual Properties

It Seems Strange But It's Almost Dinner

Time Margaret



Sensible Shoes



Intellectual Properties

and ads. Adams tells the story of how the mass media dictates the construction of personal narratives. Visuals, voiceover and on-screen words are juxtaposed in a tightly edited assemblage of off-air TV imagery, shrewd wordplay and visual puns. The source of the handwritten text that propels the spoken and image-driven narrative is revealed in an ironic twist at the tape's end.

Intellectual Properties

by John Adams. Camera: Peter MacLauren, Ken Slater, John Adams. Sound: Ted Evans, Ken Winokur. Music: Ken Field, Ken Winokur. Editors: Terry Bracey, John Adams. With: Jon Bentley, Amy Kaczur, Danny Mydlak, John Adams, Louise Rogers, Joy Nicholson, Marc Whalen, Don Burgie, Hazel Dormer, Jane Gilchrist, Ken Winokur, Bonnie Donohue. 1986, 60 min, b&w and color, sound.

Adams' strategy of simultaneously constructing and deconstructing a narrative text finds its most accomplished expression in *Intellectual Properties*. Shot on 16mm film in Boston and Newcastle, England, this six-part feature is an ironic, stylized discourse on representation, reproduction, production and reality. "The theme is power, as related to politics, economics, mass media, advertising, modern myth, art and business, money and personal life illustrated by means of jokes, stories and

anecdotes, both autobiographical and observational," writes Adams. Deftly manipulating the cinematic and media codes of narrative fiction, he tells a meta-story of contemporary art and life. Tales of John Wayne, Rolls Royces and filmmaking are linked by a lecture on copyright. Formally structured on the concept that sound qualifies image, each segment uses a different anecdotal soundtrack to recontextualize recurring visual material, until the narratives converge in the final sequence.

**It Seems Strange But It's Almost Dinner
Time Margaret**

by John Adams. With: David Rogers. Voice: Jon Maher. Pianist: Julia Rogers. 1986, 60 sec, color, sound.

A lurid collage of images and text appropriated from the British mass media — TV news, tabloid headlines, advertising graphics — is accompanied by a narrator's wryly delivered anecdote on the "non-event of the year." Boy George, Royal Couples, political scandals and Halley's Comet vie for the title in this vivid, sixty-second media time capsule.