



By Miriam Budner

"Politics" and "Art" do not have to begin with capital letters and remain controlled by an elite. In her work, Joan Braderman, associate professor of television production, explores the politics of everyday lives. In her mind, questions of art and information cannot stay separate.

Placing video in the School of Communications and Cognitive Science (CCS) makes sense to Braderman. Video was originally studied at Hampshire as television news reporting, a natural extension of communications. She believes that documentaries and print journalism, also parts of CCS, belong on the same long continuum as her genre of video. They use different tools with the same

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mean you have to dump on other women." She produced the show in 1983, for New York City's Paper Tiger Television, a weekly independent television series where "various literati and intellectuals talk about print media."

The next year she and her co-producers won the Best Documentary Award from Global Village Festival for *Waiting for the Invasion: U.S. Citizens in Nicaragua*.

Braderman's next major project addressed television and popular culture, as reflected in the prime-time soap opera *Dynasty*. She believes that *Dynasty* has forced itself into everyone's lives. Even if people don't watch it, they know its publicity, spin-offs, and product lines. "The show should be in the public domain. I stomp on it with my big boots and my big mouth. In a world where I feel my enemies are in power, I can't make a quiet art film. I feel like I have to yell to bridge the art world and the people who are not largely considered by the art world," she says.

Joan Does Dynasty was finished in 1986. In 31 minutes, Braderman "vandalizes" the show. She superimposes herself onto scenes, sometimes wearing a blue halo or appearing upside down. Often she cuts a Mexican mask into the screen images. From behind the mask she comments and snarls and laughs. By encouraging viewers to identify with her persona, instead of with the actors and actresses, she hopes she can reveal the show's absurdity, even to a devoted *Dynasty* follower.

She edited 12 hours of episodes to find the best examples of the themes she wanted to explore: pseudo-feminism, homophobia, incest, materialism, familial wars, rivalry between women, and older women's sexuality. Shows like *Dynasty*, she believes, are political tools of "the powers that be, who use them to shut people up by feeding them trash."

The video was shown in galleries, including the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, the Institutes of Contemporary Art in Boston and in London, and the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. Also, it was shown in classrooms at many major universities nationwide, including New York University, Brown University, and the University of California at Los Angeles. Eventually the prestigious Whitney Biennial chose the video to be part of its 1987 collection. And it was shown at the 1987 Edinburgh Film Festival.

She is not the first person in her family to get involved in cultural politics. After emigrating from Russia, Braderman's grandparents became involved in socialist movements in Philadelphia. Her grandmother, a pharmacist at a time when there were few women professionals, associated with radicals Margaret Sanger and Emma Goldman. Braderman always shows "Union Maids" to her classes. Combining footage of turn-of-

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Joan Braderman blends the personal and the political in her video productions.

intent. She and her colleagues teach theory, production, and history in a way that doesn't "ghettoize" any of them. Each is profoundly related and can't stand up without the other.

Her cognitive science colleagues do analytic work, while she practices art-making in a related way. "One reason I'm so comfortable in CCS is that I think of art-making as work. If you say to students that you have to wait for divine inspiration, that's not very empowering. I tell my students you can think of projects in many different ways. I'm interested in demystifying art-making."

She believes video does this naturally. "I love the accessibility and control in video. I can shoot, edit, design, and do minor equipment repairs. In film there are all those labs and 80 middle-people. I love the idea that I can be involved in the technical world and have a lot of artistic control. But electrical signals are fragile. One day a video is fine, but the next day, after it encounters an X-ray or intense humidity, it's a corned-beef sandwich."

Her first major project used old musical soundtracks and clips from *The National Enquirer*. In *Natalie Didn't Drown*, inspired by the publicity about actress Natalie Wood's death, Braderman explores gossip and star worship. She explains, "I wanted to be irreverent. I wanted to be smutty, so people would see a female using language she's not supposed to use. I wanted to publicly address my own complicity in mass culture while showing how manipulative it is. I also wanted to show that being funny doesn't

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ILLUSTRATION BY SARAH WELTON SHOR (877)



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The frames on the left are from Joan Does Dynasty

the-century Chicago, and recent interviews, the film explores these women's lives as labor organizers. After showing it, Braderman says she always "sheds eight tears," and blesses her grandparents and their comrades.

She continues their traditions in her work. In the 1960s, while studying at the New York University film school, she abruptly realized that the media often controls people's ideas of truth. "It was very dramatic. You'd go to a rally or march and then see the television news which was way off. We thought we could do better in alternative film." First she made art movies, then political films.

She joined a group who wanted to form an alternative to Hollywood and the major television networks. Because they could not afford film, they taught themselves video. She came into video when few considered its potential as an art form. She also took advantage of the women's art movement, co-founding *Heresies: A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics* in 1976. The other women on the staff had struggled in the art world for much longer than she, and they served as an inspiration.

After teaching for 16 years, and at six different institutions, she says, "Hampshire students are the best I've met anywhere." In her first year at Hampshire, she had three students who were so extraordinary that she thought she would never have that many again. But the next year, the same thing happened! "These students are more open-minded about everything, and slightly rebellious. If they find something they love, they are passionate about it. Since they're sort of alienated, they are critical of who they are, but also of the world," she says.

Braderman began teaching at Hampshire two and a half years ago, and recently received a ten-year reappointment. In addition to teaching, her future includes three projects, similar and different from the others. She has received a grant from the Jerome Foundation to produce a piece on nonfiction television shows, from animal-training to exercises, from Julia Child to Conragate. She is also working on a script for a "feminist horror film" about a woman's struggle with her body. Later, she plans to produce a piece on women's friendships. She will explore how her own and her friends' coming of age coincided with a huge movement of change in this country. She will use the scripted voices of her actresses, layered over photographs, paintings, and other images of women walking and talking. Many of her friends will appear on the tape.

If Braderman moves away from media analysis, she will remain true to her own tradition, and continue to examine connections between the personal and the political.

Miriam Budner (85F) is a Hampshire student.