

NATIONAL VIDEO FESTIVAL

Olympic Screenings



Presented by
The American Film Institute

J. BRADERNAN

THINKING TELEVISION: LOW-TECH REPRESENTATIONS

Curated by Catherine Lord,
California Institute
of the Arts

Sunday, July 15, 4 pm

Television is at once the alterego and nemesis of video: an identity born of opposition cannot divest what it claims to oppose. *Thinking Television* presents examples of contemporary work produced in full awareness of this dichotomy. The makers of these tapes have no illusions about eventual acceptance by a corporate broadcast structure. Neither do they seek success within the increasingly codified genres, or the increasingly inflated production values, of video art. ¶ If this implies a tricky territory in which to work, it follows that these three tapes are difficult to classify. One unifying element is low-cost production: all were budgeted under \$500. The point of choosing such work is not to promote thrift for its own sake, but simply to show, in a "video" event, independent productions that place more weight on intelligible statements with the potential for wide distribution than the ability to pay for access to state-of-the-art technology. ¶ Of necessity, the makers of these tapes take a critical position on issues of media, representation, and spectacle. Equally of necessity, they are able to address (though they decline to replicate) conventions of narrative construction and aesthetic pleasure. ¶ Joan Braderman Reads the National Enquirer: Or Natalie Didn't Drown was made for cablecast on Manhattan's *Paper Tiger Television*. In Braderman's tape, funky sets and lurid special effects reflect the *Paper Tiger* strategy of showing something sufficiently amiss, to tempt channel switchers to pause for media critique. Braderman's approach is double-edged: as an unrepentant addict, she points out that the *Enquirer* provides a community of gossip. As a theoretician, she dissects the construction of a closet market for sensationalism. (As she observes, "Nobody reads the *Enquirer* in the subway.") In counterpoint to publication statistics, banter and psychological analysis, the visuals consist mainly of Braderman's talking face inset over a parade of *Enquirer* covers: DI AND CHARLES IN SEPARATE BEDROOMS. TRUTH DETECTOR REVEALS REAGAN BUDGET... ¶ Braderman's hilariously tasteless critique of the sensation industry has its echo in the minimal elegance of Lyn Blumenthal's Social Studies: Part II. A freeze frame of the unpeopled Academy Awards stage comprises the entire tape, neatly eliminating visual pleasure from the entertainment battlefield. As our attention is forced to the unedited soundtrack of the best picture section (movie clips, applause, commercial plugs, even the legendary envelope being ripped open), vignettes from *E.T.*, *The Verdict*, *Missing*, *Tootsie*, and *Gandhi* become idiotic simplifications of matters like aggression, sexism, and bigotry. ¶ Blumenthal's intent is to question the ideology of entertainment. Sherry Millner's episodic narrative uses an ordinary domestic environment, cheaply fabricated props, and humor to examine dominant myths about pregnancy. Millner's approach is something like a parody of docudrama in the combination of chapters like "The Agronomy of Desire" with scenes of deadpan comedy. Take the episode in which Millner uses the Aruba strategy of naming the child for whatever the mother first sees to invent nomenclature for our civilized world—"forceps," say, or "placenta." Spectacle is used both to structure this tape and to implode the contradictions which underlie conventional wisdom.

—Catherine Lord



Joan Braderman
Reads The National
Enquirer . . .

Independent video production at the California Institute of the Arts is an activity of both the School of Film and Video and the School of Art. In both Schools an emphasis is on a broad exploration of the medium and personal statement rather than on any one genre or style. Students and faculty may have access to a range of equipment, from 1/2" recording systems to computer editing and graphics.

Joan Braderman Reads the National Enquirer: Or, Natalie Didn't Drown, a Paper Tiger Television episode directed by **Joan Braderman and Manual De Landa, made by Diana Agosta, Paul Adamo, Pennee Bender, James Camp, Shulea Cheang, Mike D'Elea, Dee Dee Halleck, David Shulman, Mary Feaster, Melissa Leo, Roger Politzer, Caryn Rogoff, Alison More, Lorna Smith, Nancy Hyland, and Nadine Kolowrat. 28:00, color, 1983.** Braderman enacts the comic but unsettling spectacle of a woman at once conscious of and addicted to the voyeuristic pseudoworld promised by the tabloid, now on the rise again. The show was produced for *Paper Tiger Television*, a Manhattan cable series, conceived by Dee Dee Halleck, which critiques the communications industry, particularly the print media.

Social Studies: Part II, by Lyn Blumenthal; edited by Richard Feist. 17:00, color, 1983. To investigate television entertainment, Blumenthal juxtaposes the audio from the 1983 Academy Awards nominations for best picture with a still image of the empty Academy stage. In her words, "the standard Academy fare of introduction, applause, film clips, commentary, personal plugs and professional banter shifts the banal mise-en-scene into proto-fascist theater."

Womb With a View, written and directed by Sherry Millner; camera by Sherry Millner, Ernest Larsen, and Micki McGee. 40:00, color, 1983. To construct a record of her pregnancy, Millner borrows freely from anthropology, art history, soap operas, physical fitness scams, sex education manuals, and psychoanalysis. The result is an irreverent, often outrageous epic that transcends its personal base to examine, as Millner says, "a biologically determined condition that forces a woman artist to rethink her past while in the thrall of an unprecedented present."