

Three Decades of Rage: An Interview with Al Razutis

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Al Razutis is a Canadian iconoclast, an artist who was instrumental in the formation of two West Coast film distributors, a short-lived union of Canadian film artists, a production co-op, magazines on fringe film and holography, and a much publicized battle with Ontario's board of film censors. Along the way he taught media production at the Banff School of Fine Arts, the Vancouver School of Art, Evergreen State College, and Vancouver's Simon Fraser University for a dozen years. He has completed some forty-odd films and videos alongside various performances, paintings, holograms, and intermedia productions. While he has worked hard over the years to secure an institutional base for all aspects of fringe cinema, he is better known for his anti-institutional stance. A self-appointed moral standard bearer, Razutis has done much to politicize and galvanize the possibilities of a Canadian avant-garde.

Born in Germany in 1946, Razutis studied chemistry and physics at California Western University and did post-graduate work at the University of California. After dropping out of university, he began screening and producing fringe films in 1967. Shortly afterwards, he moved to Vancouver and ran film shows at the Intermedia Artists Co-operative. Razutis's earliest filmwork is *2 X 2* (17 min 1967) — a double-screen confabulation whose original elements were sold and subsequently lost. Taking parts of this film, Razutis later made a single-screen version entitled *Inauguration* (15 min 1968). A frank celebration of sixties counterculture, it reveals a domestic interlude of communal consciousness, transported from the commonplace through narcosis and montage. Awash in a luxuriant sensuality and informed by Jung's archetypal symbology, *Inauguration* simulates the drug state with a multiphonic superimposition driven by an electronically processed version of Velvet Underground's *Heroin*. It shows an individual's ecstasy interleaved with media images of an upset social order — riot police and marchers, soldiers martialling arms in foreign lands — as the counter culture trappings of drugs, sex, and music announce their anti-authoritarian presence on the street. Later *Inauguration*, fragments of *2 X 2*, and additional footage were collaged to make *1967-1969* (15 min 1969). The resulting film is a sixties time capsule which draws together images of war and pornography as a reflection of a social order gone wrong. It pits the

administration of consent against a hedonistic and personal despair, its drug-addled protagonists lost in a storm of fleeting impressions. Cast on two screens set inside a single frame, 1967–1969's binary oppositions energetically replay the personal/political dynamics of a society in upheaval.

Poem: Elegy for Rose (4 min 1968) concerns an American prostitute, photographed at night in a blurry cluster of tenements and high rises. Razutis uses this collection of the disenfranchised as a ground for his writing, inscribing a poem in black marker over the image. But there is no way this writing can be read in the act of projection; instead, it needs to be taken off the projector and examined by hand. *Poem* is a kind of anti-film, serving notice of film's double status — as an object in the act of its making and handling, and as a process in the act of projection. The words pass through the projector gate like strangers past a car window, and Razutis insists that if we hope to find out more about our subject, we have to get out of the car. Razutis's cinematic scribbling replaces the voyeurism of film with a personal notation, drawing the viewer away from the body of the audience in order to confront an eccentric address that can only be understood alone.

Black Angel Flag ... Eat (17 min silent 1968) begins with a length of black leader into which images are periodically intercut. This random assemblage revolves around two conceits. In the first, a woman walks through a patently constructed set, taking up and tearing down portions of this movable assembly. In the other, found footage is used to evoke a televised media reality. Its frank and outraged tone alienated audiences. Razutis reacted by destroying the film.

The collapse of Intermedia sent Razutis into an uncertain tailspin, wondering just what to do next and how to do it. For two years he scrambled to pay the rent. Then a job offer arrived out of the blue from Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington. Evergreen had a vast array of new colour video processing facilities, far outstripping the black and white possibilities which remained the cutting edge in Vancouver's video scene. Working with feverish intensity, he produced half a dozen film/video hybrids which he claimed would visualize the inner-workings of the mind. These films include *Aurora*, *Watercolour/Abstract*, *Synchronicity*, *Software*, *Vortex*, *Aeon* and *Fyreforks*. Each of these seven films is marked by a refilmed video raster; each begins with film imagery which is transferred to tape, manipulated by a video synthesizer or optical printer, then transferred back to film.

Owing to the nature of the video synthesizer, most of these films possess a theme-and-variation structure, a single image made to endure a cyclic flow where shifts in colour, contrast, and motion are introduced. All of this work is abstract, and while Razutis has introduced other non-representational moments

in his filmwork, they are inevitably interwoven with a concretized surround. They reveal abstract plays of light and colour as part of a universe transformed through technology. Razutis forgoes the movement of light to illuminate an object; he concentrates on the movement of light itself, reshaped here in the scan of the monitor. Psychedelic patterns and space-age mantras emerge, electronically circling the deliriously tinted palette of its spectator. The question remains — has he managed to produce only an image of the machine which has aided him in transforming the pro-filmic (engendering a kind of technological narcissism in which a machine produces images of itself) or are these "experiments" a harbinger of things to come, a foresight into the cross currents of that synaptical reality which fires across the brain, producing images from the chaos of illumination before us?

A year later, in 1973, Razutis left Evergreen College and returned to Vancouver, where he set up an interdisciplinary studio entitled Visual Alchemy. He began work on holograms, video synthesis, and a new series of films. With a vast array of equipment, Razutis's self-sufficient chambers occasioned a production that was individual in focus, artisanal by design, and celebratory in its optical refigurings of the world around him. Film after film would plumb the depths of an individual psychology for traces of a visionary core, hallucinogenic fragments appearing as cadenzas between the dark spaces of dreamtime. Evoking the transfigured state of narcosis through a battery of image-manipulating machines, Razutis set to work with characteristic intensity, churning film after film out of his sheltered enclave.

Le Voyage (8 min 1973) revolves around the repeating figure of a storm-tossed ship. Appearing intermittently between lengths of black leader, it flashes onscreen as if illuminated by the fork lightning which rages overhead. Optically refigured through rephotography, the distorted palette of this ghost ship shimmers in the darkness, its ancient hulk appearing like a recurring nightmare. Owing to the film's disjunctive rhythms of blankness and stormy passage, *Le Voyage* recalls an upset mind's obsession, trying to put to rest the memory of an unforgiven moment. And like those ancient sea tales of obsessive mariners, this ghost ship cruises the infinite shore of time, a transporting reminder of all that cannot be silenced.

Visual Alchemy (8 min 1973) was made entirely in the filmmaker's studio. It takes up Razutis's longstanding interests in intermedia production — in this instance, marrying his pursuits in film and holography. *Visual Alchemy* seeks to animate the image and apparatus of several still-life holograms, lending a lyrical impressionism to its scientific survey. It begins with a series of snap zooms that convert the vanishing point into lines of attention and redress. Each of *Visual Alchemy's* camera shifts is designed to move its subject from one angle to the

next, turning over the facets of a three-dimensional concern. Skirting over the red lamp of the laser, the camera dances between their rouged stares, always seeking out new perspectives from which to glimpse the workings of the machine. Finally the holograms themselves are revealed — simple geometrical shapes informed by opposing lasers. The filmmaker's hand appears outstretched in the foreground as if it were supporting this collection of dice and octagons. Cast in a dark surround, the soundtrack's low tuned hum is braced by a murmuring of voices. Its vague incantations are met in a darkened pyre, relieved only by the light of a hallucinatory geometry, primitive outpourings in this celebration of a machine birth.

Moon at Evernight (9 min 1974) is a cyclical loop cast in a theme-and-variation structure which mimes the obsessive recall of some nighttime visitation. Like much of his work from this period, *Moon* emerges from a black ground, hallucinogenic figures recurring amidst dark and silent stretches of leader. The images have been transformed through rephotography, the saturated and contrasty colours lending its subject a frankly abstract expression. Emerging from a scrum of tape effects, the filmmaker's breathy whisper evokes the "riders of the night," cast here beneath a moon, its colourized moments of annunciation strewn between the lapses of a dreamer's sleep.

Portrait (8 min 1976) is a home movie miniature — a paternal gesture of embrace that rejoins the divided generations of family and film. Razutis begins with an 8mm fragment of his young daughter walking through a doorway, then journeys into the surface of the image, magnifying its granular constituency until the means of representational support, the substrate of the image, is raised to a level of equivalency with the film's subject. Drawing together figure and ground, he collapses a linear perspective which arranges space according to a centred observer, attempting to see this child as she would see herself, rearranging the enforced relations wrought in the original super-8 footage. Returning over and over to a single rhymed figure, the filmmaker seeks a moment of entry in a nostalgic scan that inscribes the wounds of returning. *Portrait's* swarming and impressionistic surround traverses its original footage in a scanning motion. The filmmaker mimes the retinal patterns of recall, his film's crossing gestures accumulating details in a fragmentary constellation of orbiting miniatures.

By 1977, having completed a one-man show of holography, film, and film/video hybrids, the exhausted Razutis sold all his equipment and left North America. He journeyed to Samoa, where he taught math for a year. Once again a call arrived out of the blue — this time, a job offer from Simon Fraser University. In 1978 he travelled back to Vancouver to establish a film program that would blend ideological critique with formal innovation. In the next ten years he would forge a new body of work remarkably different from the self-enclosed,

mythopoeic, musically structured studies of the early seventies. He began to take aim at the media, assuming a more overtly political stance towards his own images and those that surrounded him. Using technologies of copying and retrieval, he would borrow from film after film, panning through the archives for images that could be used against a mainstream manufacture. While he continued to employ an optical printer, his transformation of the image was not intended to further aestheticize it, but to wrench it from its original context. This unsettling displacement is carried out in the name of a deconstructive project which Razutis furiously impelled through the eighties. With characteristic obsession and a boundless capacity for work, he set about making two collections of films which remain among the most enduring expressions of the Canadian avant-garde: *Visual Essays* and *Amerika*.

Visual Essays: Origins of Film (1973-1984 68 min) is a collection of six shorts comprised entirely of "found footage." Each work takes up a figure from film's history and re-interprets the original footage using a dominant formal trope. In taking up this old footage, Razutis does not simply copy film for his own purposes, but transforms it formally, lending each of these six "essays" a particular look which is both an organizing principle and the film's central metaphor.

In 1970, I began to collect films (and extracts) which I believed would soon "vanish" from contemporary, historical and cultural discourse. These films reproduced work by Lumière, Méliès, Dulac, Deren, Richter, Cohl, Gance, Buñuel, Griffith, etc..., and became the source of an "underground" (i.e. non-commercial) memory bank that was featured in screenings and exchanges. Much of the library dealt with the phantasmagoric, dream-like, expressionistic film, and also included the horror genre. In 1973, selecting from a wide range of shorts by Méliès, I undertook to "represent" this work in an interpretive form: as "visual essay." And, rather than resorting to the usual process of "writing about" the work, I incorporated the work itself (as pro-filmic facts) within the discourse. These essays would be typified by chosen modes of "framing" (as formal design) and proceed via contextualization and interpretation... In overview, I thought it necessary to engage the original film texts by creating a process of "discovery" wherein the viewer could partake in the "myths of creation" without being encumbered by the full questions of ideological significance, historical placement, and authorship. Thus, the focus of these essays is on the nature of the cinematic apparatus as specifically represented in the original works, and its abilities to engender both regression and synchronicity. The

original texts would be "violated," but with the purpose of gaining understanding. (Al Razutis, "Visual Essays")

Razutis's crowning achievement took him eleven years and eighteen films to complete. Taken together, these eighteen films make up *Amerika* (170 min 1972–83), one of the great achievements of the fringe. The filmmaker describes it as follows:

A feature-length experimental film which was created one reel at a time to function as a mosaic that expresses the various sensations, myths, landscapes of the industrialized Western culture... The predominant characteristic of the entire film is that it draws from existing stock-footage archives, the iconography and "memory bank" of a media-excessive culture, to locate its subject. (Al Razutis)

Amerika is constructed on three one-hour reels, each roughly corresponding to the sixties, seventies and eighties. Its biblical imperatives cast America as a wasteland of empty highways and motels, fuelled by an amoral progression of media images whose ferocity numbs its inhabitants. Their expression is an anonymous graffiti, sprayed beneath the shadow of the bomb, homeless and disenfranchised, wandering in a world of signs which have lost all direction. Razutis paints *Amerika* as a patriarchy held in the thrall of its technology, bent on cruelty and self-destruction, its atomic science groomed as a metaphor for more personal relations.

Amerika opens with an evocation of cinema's beginnings, cynically reviewed in a bas-relief, mock ethnographic study detailing the machines, parades, and amusements of "Eden." This "Eden" is set in the infancy of the machine age, in which a newly drafted middle class avails itself of a scientific positivism, each mechanical stride drawing nearer to a last inventive stroke: the creation of heaven itself. *Amerika*'s opens by casting a long pall over democracy set before the effects of our technologies could be accounted for. Whoever voted for steam engines, or automobiles, or telephones? We watch as the technocratic march continues of its own accord, shedding all pretense of serving any end but its own will to efficiency, arriving at a conclusion which is both inevitable and tragic: an atomic explosion. The "new beginning" heralded by the bomb inaugurates the film's technological swoon, showing a city re-formed in the patterned light of the video screen before opening up in an immense psychedelic display of swelling colours and lights. A further evocation of the apocalypse ensues. While we watch a series of submerged plants growing with time-lapsed abandon, the soundtrack is filled with NASA chatter as another bomb is tested. *Bridge at Electrical Storm* follows, the first of *Amerika*'s many road films. Razutis subjects an 8mm trip across San Francisco's Bay Bridge to a virtuosic optical treatment producing a

furious structural exercise undertaken with exquisite rigour. Layer after layer of colours pass over the bridge, an electrical storm scoring the heavens with a deafening succession of thunderclaps as a fragmented radio chatter shudders between the speakers. In the words of the filmmaker, *Bridge's* technocratic apocalypse provides a "spatial image of the transition from an industrial society linked by transport to a post-industrial society linked by communications. In terms of human perception, a transition from linear, materialistic, and concrete modes to simultaneous, surrounding, more abstract representations (the electronic media)." The second of three *Motel* films ensues. While the first pictures an abandoned house, its remains filled with a random graffiti chatter, the second cruises the neon vistas of Reno, Nevada. Intercut with tracking shots through the nighttime streets of the city are motel interiors, empty save for the interminable glare of the television. The filmmaker has matted in a number of images including pornography, commercials, and violence — by now the established staples of the vulgar society which *Amerika* has become.

After a reprise of *Bridge at Electrical Storm*, Razutis hurls himself into the televisual vortex with two films that remain his most controversial to date. *The Wildwest Show* displays a number of nighttime cityscapes, but in place of billboards, Razutis has matted in a number of images which devolve around a game show theme. As a succession of atrocity images ensue, contestants are asked to indicate whether the images are true or false. As the execution of political prisoners gives way to western shoot-outs and the Nazi concentration camp murders, the filmmaker indicts the ahistorical fictions of the media, as well as its insatiable appetite for spectacle and excess. He follows with *A Message From Our Sponsor*, a nine-minute collage of commercials which are deconstructed to reveal their hidden sexual content. After deconstructing the media, the filmmaker takes himself apart in *Photo Spot*. Here he receives a number of phone calls from someone who poses alternately as a fan, critic, curator, and, finally, a psychoanalyst. Razutis's gruff outbursts are contradictory in the extreme, leaving *Amerika's* viewer the task of negotiating authorship, of deciding who to believe and why.

The final reel opens with *Exiles*, a musical of sorts, in which a young couple spray-paint slogans on abandoned buildings. Another travel montage follows, joining passing cityscapes from East Coast to West before the car settles on the tracks of a young woman who shoots out the windshield. In the most sustained dramatic sequence of the film, the filmmaker returns with a stretch of panty-hose wrapped around his head, drinking and smoking with one hand while lifting weights and pistols with the other. While the radio tunes in a screaming evangelist, the television replays the death of an anonymous black man over and over. Finally Razutis turns to the camera and shoots out a Plexiglas screen placed just before it, eradicating the point of view. The closing two films function as

epilogues, both a reflection and repudiation of all that has passed. *Fin* is a kind of elegy for the mass media, its flashy images appearing in mirrored state while electronic graffiti lend scrawls beneath. It reflects on the film (“this film is about robbery-image robbery”), on the vulgarity of America and film theorists (“Did Lacan suck Freud’s dead phallus?”) and ends with a plaintive cry for the homeless. *Amerika* signs off with *O Kanada*, a closing brief which ensures that Canada is not left behind in this surfeit of evangelical uproar and violent repasts. While the Canadian national anthem stutters on the 1960s soundtrack, two flags planted on the moon carry images of the French separatist bombings in Quebec and the resulting police crackdown.

The period from 1978 to 1987 completed another cycle for Razutis — his return to Vancouver, involvement with organizations, and renewed engagement with political and aesthetic issues. In 1987 he resigned his tenured position as professor of film at Simon Fraser, sold much of his film equipment, and left for Mexico, where he designed and built a home in the desert.

AR: I was an undergraduate in San Diego studying chemistry and physics on a basketball scholarship. On my way through the library I noticed a book open on the table. It had a series of colour plates dealing with things I'd never seen before, and the more I flipped through the book the more it enchanted me. What I was looking at was the history of modern art in large colour panels, and that day I went out and bought acrylics, oils, and watercolours, and started painting. I painted for a month and took it to an art teacher who said it was all shit and that I should take an art course, which I did, and got totally bored. I didn't know why you had to study art because I was experiencing it directly. I was writing poetry at the time and somebody said you should take this poetry course, and after I read my stuff they said it was shit, and that I should read the following people. They wanted me to organize my art around a number of antecedents I thought were bullshit. None of my art ever came out of formal education.

In the late sixties I started an underground cinema at UC Davis, which is between Sacramento and San Francisco, where I was doing some graduate work in nuclear physics. Then I wanted to expand the underground cinematheque by flying down to San Diego and setting up another one there. I would rent work from Canyon, the money would come from the gate, and the audiences were huge. I got my first camera by starting a cinema club at the university, applying for money from the dean and using it to buy myself a camera. It was pretty sleazy, but I had to make work. I made my first film there — *2 X 2* (17 min 1967), a dual screen film obviously related to Conner and Warhol. It dealt with sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll, a typical topic in the sixties. When I finished the film all I had was the original, I didn't know you could make a print then. Some guy in L.A. named Bob Pike was running the Creative Film Society, which distributed a

lot of underground work. He said, "I love this film — I'll buy it — but you have to sell me the original, and if I want to recut it, I can." And I said, sure. I needed the money and I got \$2,000, which is when my Vancouver girlfriend decided to go to Canada. We drove to Vancouver in 1968. I hooked up with an organization called Intermedia which was a four-storey warehouse on Beatty Street comprised of artists of all disciplines — four floors of free studios, sculptors, dancers, painters. Anybody who was doing crazy, innovative work was doing it there. I convinced them that I wanted to run underground films on the weekend and they said nobody here comes to anything. I asked for the second floor Saturday and Sundays, promising to pay for everything, and I would keep the proceeds. We made hundreds of dollars every weekend — the place was packed. By that time I had some experience of curating for the audience. I never curated auteurs, the Bruce Baillie night or whatever. The audience was interested in looking at the best examples of a certain approach to work. From the money I made showing these films I financed my own work. Intermedia was a place where different sensibilities could rub together without the usual bureaucracies or jealousy.

I made a number of films — *2X2* became *Inauguration* (15 min 1968); *Sircus Show Fyre* (7 min 1968), a film about the spectacle of the circus using four layers of superimposition; *Black Angel Flag... Eat* (17 min silent 1968) which is mostly black leader with very intermittent shots, so you don't know when the film is over or not; and *Poem: Elegy For Rose* (4 min 1968) which featured a poem written on celluloid. I hated redundant work, which was part of my take against the institution of art. I thought galleries were a total sell-out, and any artist that would create a style was a sell-out. In any formative or dangerous time of making work, the worst thing you can do is bag your own style. I used to call it a paper bag because you'd throw all your shit into it and shake it around, and it would always come out the same. In every work, I'd try to negate what I'd done previously.

MH: Did you feel a split between formal and political moves?

AR: There was no split at all; that's the thing that was so peculiar and beautiful. This is going to sound extremely sentimental... Take a film like *Lapis* by James Whitney, for example — it's a computer graphic mosaic set to sitar music, an abstract film which serves as a meditation on a state of mind. It externalized what some people experienced on LSD. Formally eloquent in its own right, it had a place in a counterculture drug culture because people were experiencing these things on a daily basis. What they were celebrating and experiencing was completely connected to their political beliefs, which were similarly anti-establishment. It was not a problem in that culture to accommodate a whole range of anti-establishment moves. Everyone was trying to break down conventions and look for alternatives to message systems which they'd grown up with, family systems they'd inhabited, professional systems which they were obligated to. That's why none of this work was touted as art, because the

institutions of art were already suspect. How could you reject middle-class America and not reject its art history and universities? The same universities that were teaching a European history of art were teaching the military sciences that fed the war machine. In the time of Intermedia there was no connection with grant agencies, art galleries, any institutions of any kind. Later on Michelson, Sitney, and Youngblood began making schools and movements, which was the beginning of the end: its professionalization, anthologization, academicization. Underground film became art, and that was the demise of the form. They made it pedagogical, voyeuristic, and auteur based. That's when the rush for the museums began. If you wanted to become a fixture in the museum of the avant-garde, you had to be legitimized somehow. One way is to make a large body of work, or how clean is your technique, or how innovative is it, or who would write about you, or where did you show? And that's part of the difference between then and now — expression didn't depend on mediating influences twenty years ago. The legitimate and legitimizing histories offered by film schools are a total distortion of what was happening at the time.

MH: It's part of our museum's culture propensity to serve and protect — like a cultural police force. The rise of modernism was accompanied by the rise of a museum culture which relies on academic models that cut history into periods, periods into movements, movements into great artists, great artists into important works, and serves up the whole dish in a series of anthologized screenings and permanent holdings. The degree to which fringe cinemas have been co-opted by museums and the academy seems a mark of its growing conservatism.

AR: There's a lot of people who went through the process and vanished, whose work in its time was just as important as those who are remembered today. It's a rear guard thinking that doesn't account for the networks of influence as they're played out at the time. I think a lot of stuff has gone down unsung and unknown and it's terrible.

So I was doing weekly screenings at Intermedia and including the work of local people like Rimmer and Gary Lee Nova and realized that people in Vancouver were starting to make work. So I thought, let's make a co-op along the lines of and inspired by Canyon or New York Filmmakers. In 1969 I talked to various filmmakers who thought it was a great idea, but they didn't really have the time, so I said, I'll do it. I became the founder/manager/bookkeeper/floorsweeper of the Intermedia Film Co-op, and I drew up some packages and toured them down to the US. It was a distribution co-op that held mostly Vancouver work but also others from the US. Like the co-ops in the US, we had no submissions policy; we took whatever people offered. We had an office and published a catalogue. We probably had about 100 films in the collection and tried to distribute them as best we could without worrying about colleges and universities. Most of the work went to cinematheque, underground-type film screenings. There was a network

of venues down the coast which I'd made contact with as a programmer in the US. The only money we could get was what we took from our cut on the rentals. We ran a couple of years, and my energy evaporated because there weren't enough people willing to go the distance with it. The birth of the Pacific Cinematheque with Kirk Tougas happened around the time of our demise. He was coming to our screenings and running the Cinema 16 Film Club at the University of British Columbia with an eye to setting up something more permanent. So he started the Pacific Cinematheque, which began screenings in 1971 after I stopped. In 1971 Intermedia moved to a new space, and new factions grew up which eventually brought the house down. But the different people who left Intermedia formed up a number of satellite organizations like Western Front, Video Inn, Intermedia Press, the Grange, so in a sense it evolved, it transformed into these other places. After Intermedia collapsed, a number of organizations started up. I tried to set up an underground film theatre with Keith Rodan. We had a storefront and built a huge screen and projection booth and pulled some chairs in. We advertised in the *Georgia Straight* and that's where we made our mistake. The fire marshall showed up and said he'd been asked by the BC Censor to check the premises, and we got shut down. They just didn't want us running work. I ran out of money and sold all my equipment. It was a bad time.

There's two people on the institutional side from the late sixties, early seventies, who deserve greater mention. Peter Jones at the National Film Board helped underground filmmakers with stock and processing. He came from the old guard of the Board and had an interest in supporting independent films even though it wasn't part of their mandate. He would come down to Intermedia and offer people assistance; he was amazing. The other guy was Werner Aellen, who was the director of Intermedia; he was my godfather, got me jobs, lent me money. He kept me going for the year or two I had nothing going. Keith Rodan and I went out to Alaska and made a documentary on the Alaska pipeline. Then suddenly this teaching job appears from Evergreen State College, and that's when I walked into a Disneyland of equipment: one-inch broadcast studio video, all kinds of synthesizers and cameras, and a very interesting academic program. That's where *Amerika* started. It's where I made *Software* (3 min 1972), *Vortex* (14 min 1972), and some of the video components of *Bridge at Electrical Storm* (13 min 1973). We were doing bio-feedback experiments at the college — setting up film loops and wiring ourselves into EEG machines in order to induce states of meditation. Then these outputs from the brain were fed through amplifiers and directed into a second monitor which mixed the image signal with those from the brain to see if you could affect the image directly through your response. Some of that is in a video called *Waveform*. There were a number of film and video hybrid works begun there. At the college I got access to equipment and money and was contemplating staying on until I made an application to the Canada Council for holography and, astoundingly, they gave me a senior artists grant. I don't know

how much money it was then, but it was top of the line, like getting \$80,000 today. So I decided to come back to Vancouver, quit teaching, and set up a media studio called Visual Alchemy. I'd finished building an optical printer, built a video synthesizer, had audio equipment, editing rooms, animation stand, a complete holography lab in the back, living quarters, and a projection/living room space. The Canada Council grant paid for some of it, and I started to do optical effects for people for a fee. By 1972 I had the final version of the printer built. Then it became a production machine where I could make special effects for people like Rimmer and Tougas, and I became an optical service for a lot of commercial people. If anybody wanted a freeze frame they could only get it from me. It was the only optical printer in Vancouver. I rented out my editing facilities. I offered courses in holography. I was trying to make a commercial and experimental venture, and the whole system was available for my own work. So it was a very productive place for me, a completely enclosed interior space. Gordon Kidd got his start there. He was an art school student who came over one day, with a rainbow-coloured bow tie, asking to be an assistant, and I took him on. His films were made at Visual Alchemy. I created *Le Voyage*, *Visual Alchemy*, *Portrait*, and *Amerika* was continued with *Bridge at Electrical Storm*.

Bridge at Electrical Storm (13 min 1973) was contrived on the optical printer at Visual Alchemy. An extremely labourious film, it was created one frame at a time; sometimes twelve frames would take over an hour to do because it had so much bipacking and combinations of film and video. The video was transferred to film which was then reprocessed on the printer. It's funny, because when *Bridge* came out, some people from Belgium looked at it and said, that's not film, it's video. For them, the only legitimate film practice was the one that had nothing to do with video. But I kept trying to explore film/video hybrids, to exchange formal values between the two, trying to achieve a new form of filmmaking and a new form of videomaking. But the film/video hybrid was not an acceptable form. The policy of Canada Council was that video synthesis was not art. They accepted conceptual video, the beginnings of narrative video, drag queen video, Toronto video.

My work in holography had a parallel to my work in video in that it didn't have a place in contemporary practice. Most people were doing toy trains and broken wine glasses, and I was trying to integrate sculpture and holography, make a number of interdisciplinary gestures. I didn't have much contact with the holographic community because I thought their work was shit and they couldn't understand what I was doing. So I was having problems with film because I was using video; I wasn't accepted as a videomaker because they said it was all done on film; and the holographers said my work wasn't pure holography. It allowed me a kind of escape from the containers of arts and institutions, and the acclaim people try to achieve early in their careers without doing the work, all of which

tended to perpetuate an alienation and anti-social strategy I've already remarked on.

While most of the films made in this period ended up in *Amerika*, there were some autonomous works like *Portrait* (8 minutes 1972). It's a study of my two year old daughter Alicia. I made a kind of pointillist examination of her by magnifying the super-8 grain through generations of rephotography. I used a saccadic process to re-scan the image. The eye scans an image, and remembers this scan pattern which is called "feature rings." This is the basis of our visual memory, the second time we see something, we remember it according to this feature ring. So I was trying to create a new way of looking at essentially repeating images. My wife and I had broken up, and I was moved to make this film through the loss of my daughter.

Le Voyage (8 min 1973) was done as a further exploration of black leader and image/sound discontinuity. The title recalls Méliès's *Voyage to the Moon*, which was for me a voyage into the unconscious. The image shows an optically refigured ship in a storm, set into a ground of black leader. It appears intermittently, between irregular lengths of black leader which are used as duration, spacing, and erasure. The image always appears suddenly, sometimes in sync, sometimes preceded or followed by sound. Its discontinuity gives a sense of arrested process, of subconscious recollection. There was also *Moon at Evernight* (9 min 1974) which explored abstraction and subliminal imagery. MH: Many of the films from this period evince structural concerns. They show a contained figure which is made to move through a series of themes and variations.

AR: I think I was more interested in the structure of cognition and to liberate the unconscious processes filmically. I wasn't interested in the machine of cinema — the zoom lens or the long tracking shot. I did a lot of video and holography work, made a lot of films, and was burning myself out. We had long parties, some substance abuse; it was a very intense period that lasted from 1972 to 1977. We were going out on the streets and projecting films on billboards. Gary Lee Nova and I had a screening on the front of the Scientology building, projecting the most violent images we had while they were having their big meeting inside. In 1976 I launched a one-man show of holograms. Then I applied to the Canada Council to finish *Amerika*. I'd finished a dozen fragments, and all I wanted was stock and processing. They rejected it and I went bananas. Later on I found out who was on the jury and I was going to punch out Peter Bryant who was sitting on the jury at this party in Vancouver. Picard intervened. Gary Lee Nova and I were behaving like gangsters, which probably had to do with overwork, stress, and generally inflated egos, right? Anyways, I burned out, didn't get my grant, finished my holography, and film work and decided to go to the South Pacific. I started to sell all my equipment. I took all my stock footage and shipped it down

to Los Angeles, and what I couldn't sell I left in the studio, left a key under the mat and told all my friends to help themselves. I just walked from the whole scene with my wife-to-be pregnant. Off we went to Samoa, and I never wanted to come back to North America; I thought it was all bullshit. I didn't want to have anything to do with any technical forms. I just wanted to write novels. In Samoa I taught high school math. A year later I received a message out of the blue asking me to teach film at Simon Fraser University, so we headed back to Vancouver. This was the beginning of my political phase, because I realized you can't hide from North America and that it was possible to work in institutions. There was a compulsion to explore new things, and to realize there's another form in which you can keep doing. And that started a new cycle of works which runs from 1978 to 1987, another nine year cycle. When that ended I left Canada again and headed south to live in Mexico.

AR: When I got back to Vancouver from Samoa in 1979, I began work on a series of films that would restage moments in film history — and these became *Visual Essays*. They deal with filmmakers like the Lumières, George Méliès, the Surrealists, and Sergei Eisenstein. Each film reworks found footage according to a dominant formal strategy. The first essay *Lumière's Train (Arriving at the Station)* (9 min b/w 1979) concerns itself primarily with the mechanistic quality of cinema. The Lumières were concerned with creating a motion picture record without being overly concerned about further refinements, usually shooting single reel films from a fixed vantage. What they were presenting were the effects of their invention, the magic of sequential movement. I chose three sources which dealt with trains: the first Lumière film, Abel Gance's *La Roue*, and a Warner Brothers short, *Spills for Thrills*. The film begins with a series of freeze frames with these three- frame aperture opening and closings, so the image seems to breathe a little, and then the train begins to move, the images link one to another, and motion is born. The Lumière's film is subject to stop-motion printing which slows it down, and the image rapidly alternates between negative and positive, creating an optical effect where the viewer would be made more aware of the intermittent quality of the motion picture image. I used the sound from train recordings to produce a rhythmic pulse against which the image could be measured, especially as it's changing speeds through the step printing. The sound conceptually stands in for sprocket holes. It speaks of the mechanical universe the Lumière brothers created. The narrative elements introduced are consistent with this mechanical universe — they introduce spectacle. Whether recording fiction or documentary, the apparatus leans towards the larger than life, the extraordinary versus the mundane, the spectacle. Abel Gance's film is explicit on this point, showing a train derail at the station and unleashing havoc in every direction. The Warner Brothers film is a series of stunts which show trains crashing into cars, chases, special effects. Which goes back to the story of the first projection — the story has it that Lumière's film was mistaken for a

camera obscura, and upon seeing a train come into the station, the audience leapt from their chairs to avoid being hit. I have a photo of a French train actually going through a wall in a station and the locomotive is resting on the street. Similar incidents were reported in Canada when the movies hit these parts. But after the initial shock of motion is over, the medium has to reach for this feeling in other ways.

MH: Are you suggesting that Lumière's first film unleashes a spectacle of destruction which naturally follows the invention of motion pictures?

AR: Realist cinema was headed towards hyper-reality and greater impact. The audience demands that the value of the spectacle be increased for every generation — creating vistas and panoramas which are more than real.

MH: It's an interesting idea in the face of Noel Burch's theory of the development of cinema. He figures the so-called "primitive" period (1895–1905) as an Edenic mixture of styles and genres which is then appropriated by American business, who recast film into illustrations of nineteenth century literature — following McLuhan's dictum that each new medium will take on the content of the last one. And it's here that film is subject to a rigidly defined series of encodings: the shot/reverse shot ploy, spatial continuity, following the action axis, matching eyeline glances, all of the dramatic baggage that continue to inform the passage of the movies. What you're suggesting is that some of these propensities existed from the very beginning. The first film, after all, is also a narrative of ownership: the factory wages of the workers assured their presence before the camera, which was already trained from the bosses point of view.

AR: When George Méliès showed up looking for a way to spruce up his magic act, the Lumière's told him it was an invention without a future. The second film in *Visual Essays* is called *Méliès Catalogue* (6 min silent 1973). I'd collected a number of Méliès films, which were part of a piracy network that people were lifting from the Cinémathèque in Paris, and I was concerned that none of this work would be seen. I wanted to create a kind of Sears Catalogue celebrating the mythic, visual vocabulary of Méliès. His films contained an overriding quality of surprise, shock and spectacle that naturally extended from his work as a stage magician. Many of his stage techniques were utilized in film — like appearance/disappearance, levitation, or instant transformations, which he used in imagery borrowed from classical mythology. I wanted to make a film that could accompany screenings of the films — we'd show the Méliès films in my studio all the time and I would show this alongside. It's not an academic treatment of the material; it's poetic and personal. I wanted to internalize, ingest and recreate it.

MH: The images are framed inside burning celluloid, the dominant formal motif of this film. Why the burning?

AR: Because his work was done on a very flammable nitrate stock, much of which was lost or simply disintegrated. What wasn't lost was sold to the military for shoes. He went broke during World War I, and the government seized his

studio and converted his films into industrial cellulose which were made into shoes for the army. The third of the *Essays* also concerns Méliès. It's called *Sequels in Transfigured Time* (8 min silent 1976) and works to interpret his *mise-en-scène*. I used a bipack technique, running a mid-contrast colour stock with a high contrast black and white negative. Their slight off-register reduces an image to its edges, so as the film begins you're looking at what seems like cave paintings, or stained glass, but it's only lines. Then out of that you're encouraged to discover the *mise-en-scène*, and this happens as the freeze frames which begin the film accelerate into motion, so the viewer can synthesize a landscape. Often the film will slow down to reveal Méliès's invisible cuts, where he turns an omnibus into a hearse or midgets into puffs of smoke. I wanted to show how he's making the transformations. There's a series of subtitles relating the elegy I wrote for Méliès. It closes with a passage where Méliès, as a necromancer, dances before a pyramid in order to raise a spirit from the dead. The spirit is conjured, growing finally into a twenty-foot mass before leaving as I recite the elegy, and the film ends. We saw a magic act a week ago which is exactly the same, where a guy grows inside a shroud. It all goes back to Méliès and beyond.

Ghost Image (8 min b/w silent 1976) is the next film. Its dominant strategy was the Rorschach produced when images are mirror printed, the original image superimposed over itself in reverse. As these two images come together, they create a new space between them, a dark interior which needs to be read in a new way. These were isolated with some primitive rotoscoping I did, projecting onto a mirror which beamed the image up to a sheet of paper and drawn one frame at a time, then rephotographed onto high contrast stock to produce the cut-out mattes for the film. The film describes a narrative trajectory that runs from surreal films like *Un Chien andalou*, *Ghosts Before Breakfast* and *The Seashell and the Clergymen*, to German expressionist films like *Nosferatu* and concludes with more contemporary horror films. All of these images are suggestive of interior states, extreme states of psychosis, and for the surrealists, this was a wealth of information that occasioned celebration and the derivation of new forms. But this process degenerated in horror films, until the unconscious became something to be feared, and aided by a developing ciné rhetoric, it became the object of threatening transformations that positioned the viewer as an object of attack. *Ghost Image* describes this process of degeneration — from Surrealism to horror films, from representation to revenge. I wanted to show the development of an alienated film practice based on the utilization of surreal practices to produce phobia, not images that are outrageous in their juxtaposition, but used to induce fear in its spectators, most commonly threatening the body's mutilation, which is a stock feature in horror films.

For Artaud (10 min 1982) is not explicitly about a filmmaker, but a practice more closely associated with theatre — Antonin Artaud and his theatre of cruelty. He

released a series of manifestos which were designed to rid the theatre of its reliance on literary forms and return it to a ritualized state of trance, ecstasy, and madness. I wanted to create a piece that would speak of the self-destructive urge motivating many of the German expressionist films. I wanted to explore this from a poetic perspective and recreate a kind of madness, a cacophony of voices, a situation of heightened anxiety which would be incorporated with its filmic equivalents. I began with Dreyer's *Joan of Arc*, a film which is concerned about Joan's possession by what she claims to be angels, but which many others take to be satanic beings. Her only sympathizer is a young priest, played by Artaud. I used a bipacking technique similar to *Software* where I photographed the white noise from a television set, controlling the number of dots by cranking the white level. This was then used as a matte for Dreyer's images, which grow more visible as the exposure on the matte is increased, causing halation and a starry quality to the image. The soundtrack is a group of people chanting phrases like, "We are the inquisition — speak," and a fragmented monologue from Artaud's writing ("shit to the spirit") which was then cut up and electronically transformed so the words are rendered unintelligible. It closes with a section entitled "Wedding for Artaud" which shows an immolation; this time it's not Joan who will burn at the stake, but Artaud. The only way this cycle of madness could be completed would be to have the protagonist burned alive with anyone else they could draw into the fire. It's a marriage of your Other through fire, through immolation. It's a union with that which you are not, but one that's only possible through death, which is the underlying expression of Artaud and that cultural tradition. Artaud could only create his state beyond the logos, which is madness, and beyond madness there's only death.

MH: You begin with a photo portrait of Artaud and zoom in, and as one of his eyes fill the frame, the dot-matte begins to take over, as if he's dissolving into the material itself. Or that there's no way for him to assume the wholeness, the seamless unity of an image. So he's returned to a ruined and fragmented state, a constellation of points without a centre, a consciousness scattered across the cosmos, madness. The voice seems to function in the same way — a broken electronic cacophony that seems to move with the dots in a guttural cadence that exists before or after language, as if the whole body were speaking at once, its hierarchy of organs and senses collapsed and abandoned.

AR: These dots form themselves around faces which become more and less visible as I'm overexposing the matte and allowing the faces to burn through. I show inquisitors and priests, forces of death and redemption, in order to establish the collapse of a moral order. I'm not happy with the piece these days because it's too long, it's too structural, and has nowhere to go. It's an echo that keeps reverberating and how long can you keep hearing it?

The sixth and final essay is called *Storming the Winter Palace* (19 min b/w 1983). It replays the films of Sergei Eisenstein. I've always been fascinated by the whole

issue of didactic, political cinema and the way it's been the subject of a historical revisionism, which sees it as little more than a series of formal gestures rather than for its political context. The intent of this essay was to reintroduce the political stature of the work. The political and the formal operate together in his work, but the techniques of montage were later adopted and psychologized through Hollywood.

The film opens up with sections from *October* which are shown backwards, and this sequence runs towards an intertitle which reads, "You're all under arrest." I think that's an appropriate conclusion to the Stalinist dictum which affected formalism in general. You will now cease to make work that doesn't advance the party cause as Stalin sees it. Even in *October*, which is a chronicle of the Russian Revolution, you've got Trotsky and his ilk written out of the film. It's printed backwards because this whole policy is reactionary — time isn't marching forwards; we're going into the dark ages. When you're working for the boss you're part of the corporation, and the fact that Eisenstein couldn't escape those conditions is tough shit; he ended up being a propaganda lackey for Stalin. Stalin authorized the making of his films. Take the story of *Alexander Nevsky's* missing reel. There's five reels in the movie, but when you read the script you can see that there's a reel missing. And the story as Jay Leyda writes it is that Eisenstein is sleeping on the editing room floor. Exhausted. Every day he's editing to an impossible deadline, and one day these party guys show up and say that Comrade Stalin wants to see the film, the final cut, so they take all the reels except the one that's sitting on the editing machine. They take the five reels and Joe approves it. Eisenstein can hardly go back to the omnipotent one and say, uh, it's missing this one reel.

Winter Palace examines Eisenstein's rhetorical strategies. Some are well known, like his montage of conflict, his juxtaposition of opposing elements which is supposed to create a politically enlightened state in the viewer. In the Odessa steps sequence, step printing is employed to show the way in which compositions are generated according to graphic considerations, which probably restates the obvious to film scholars. At the end of the film I go through a saccadic eye movement technique. I start scanning the image itself. I added a texture to the screen so you're aware you're scanning an image field, the boundaries of which are uncertain. That was an acknowledgment of Eisenstein's engineering ideas, which are related to the engineering of perception, which is what saccadic eye movement is all about. Saccadic eye movement is the way we perceive things — when scientists are trying to figure how humans look at an image, able to recognize their feature rings, then how does that implicate duration, which is a critical element in montage? What's too short an image? What's too long? All these questions are parts of an engineering issue, the engineering of a political vision. The final sound quote (from Benjamin Buchloh)

is about how the work of collage/montage in surrealism and formalism became appropriated by advertising and propaganda and remains "radical" only in a few instances of the "avant-garde."

AR: For eleven years I made a number of short films which were intended to fit together to produce a single work. It was finished in 1983 and called *Amerika*. Three hours in length, it's made up of eighteen short films laid out on three reels which roughly correspond to the sixties, seventies, and eighties. These films are a mosaic expressing the various sensations, myths, and landscapes of the industrialized Western culture. The predominant characteristic of *Amerika* is that it draws from existing stock-footage archives, the iconography and "memory banks" of a media-excessive culture. *The Cities of Eden* (8 min 1976/79) is the first of the eighteen films that make up *Amerika*. All of its images derive from the 1895–1905 period, and its formal treatment echoes the disintegration of the nitrate stock employed in this work. I used a bas-relief effect to amplify the fragility of the medium, its tentative beginnings. It closes with the woman from the Paramount logo, which dissolves into an atomic explosion, the first of many "endings" evoked in *Amerika*. After this annihilation the second film begins, as if attempting to begin again.

Software (3 min 1972) is a film that begins with random noise which slowly takes shape around the outline of a nighttime city. I began by shooting the white noise from a television set, using the white level to determine how many dots you saw on the screen. The higher the white level, the more frequent the dots. I bipacked this matte into the optical printer with a shot of a New York cityscape. The television matte starts with a few dots and grows in density until the cityscape becomes visible. After the creation of *Software's* synthetic landscape we move into *Vortex* (14 min 1972/73) which occupies and articulates that landscape. Its video feedback universe is engineered by a mythic science, undertaken as a sensational process featuring technical virtuosity.

MH: *Vortex* was created with video synthesizers and optical printers and suggests that these technologies have been pressed into the service of an individual vision, a radical subjectivity. Its mode is romantic, poetic, and heroic, all hung beneath a sixties banner proclaiming the marriage of art and technology.

AR: *Vortex* is a frankly psychedelic film with synthetic improvisations of picture and sound which obviously recalls the sixties. It's an extravagant light show that features one technique after another in a completely undisciplined fashion. It represents an aesthetic excess which mirrors a scientific excess. Psychedelia attempted to simulate some aspects of the nervous system that people were experiencing stoned. It exteriorized these states in multi-screen spectacles that allowed audiences to participate in a sensorium. *Vortex* is an electronic sensorium, proceeding through discrete movements from the simple to the complex. Remember, in the sixties, the reconfiguration of space craft and atomic

blasts into a colour and light show was an everyday expression. Everything was translated into a happening, and the stoned were processing everything in a very ecstatic way. The politics of that is a very mindless form of sensational experience — to sit and watch an A-bomb go off and say, "Wow did you see the colours in that thing!" is a pretty reactionary thing to do. The film acknowledges that and lets the viewer proceed from that point, mindful that this moment has happened.

MH: This sensorium seems to be domesticated today in the form of a forty channel television set; a channel converter makes an avalanche of experience simultaneously accessible. I think it's replaced the Statue of Liberty as our present-day icon of freedom because it more perfectly symbolizes our freedom to choose, to consume.

AR: The next film is *Atomic Gardening* (6 min 1981), which operates in a very different register than the film which preceded it. After this film, it's apparent that *Amerika* will proceed by using radically different strategies progressing through a collision of ideas. It's a mosaic construction which is made up of seemingly incompatible elements.

The soundtrack of *Atomic Gardening* is filled with military chatter — NORAD boys talking shop. It is lifted from a documentary on NORAD, which visits their missile sites. The image shows a series of time lapse shots — circuitboards, with NASA stamped on them, immersed in a solution of chemicals out of which crystals are growing. These crystals looked to me like a growing military virus, the virus in the machine, growing like simultaneous launch patterns. Meanwhile the boys are talking about the two-key system, one to turn it on and the other to finish the sequence, and once the second key is turned the missile is away. They run through a simulation and launch a missile as the end of the film whites out. This white screen burn-out reappears in a television set in an empty motel room. Three of *Amerika's* films are called *Motel Row* because a motel is a temporary residence for the traveller like so many of these films. In the first of these *Motels* (11 min 1981) I moved from the white screen of the television to a walk around an abandoned, graffiti-filled building with a wide angle lens. I wanted to establish the absence of the protagonist, and a neglected, shattered landscape.

MH: The emphasis on the graffiti walls emphasizes the gestures of the hand-held camera and the gestures of painting. Both marks are a contradiction in terms: anonymous signatures.

AR: The contradictory graffiti slogans are symptomatic of an American malaise. It's a culture that assimilates contrasts by celebrating and then exhausting them. What I'm presenting is a cacophony of speaking subjects rendered anonymous through the act of graffiti — a superimposition of ideas, slogans and clichés. It's a wall of noise and political alienation. You put that together as a backdrop for an absent subject in a ruined landscape and I think the viewer is cognizant of a growing emptiness, all juxtaposed with the fullness of the images we've seen earlier.

MH: It extends the absence of the human subject: the disembodied voices of *Atomic Gardening*, the techno universe of *Vortex*, the mushroom clouds of *Cities of Eden*. It also brings us “back to earth,” away from the more stylized, technologically reprocessed imagery which we've seen so far.

AR: The second part of the *Motel Row* is entirely different. It combines three elements: a series of mausoleums, Hollywood soundtracks, and my own film *Egypte*. The mausoleums were shot in New York and Hollywood. It's funny that all the East Coast graves are crammed together while the West Coast folk have manicured gardens separating everything. As in life, as in death. The corpses occupying these mausoleums are obviously on the opposite end of the economic/political spectrum from the anonymous graffiti people in the previous section. It's really a send-up of the rich — showing their excessive spending to reside in a false mysticism they think will place them closer to heaven. The Egyptians as a culture believed that the afterlife could only be acquired by a ritualized process that was reserved for those who could afford the embalming process. So the Egyptians built these immense tombs called pyramids, just like the mausolems I show, which are similarly intended to convey the rich into the after life. Joining the two via montage implicates a mythology which rationalizes money and death. It suggests the metaphysical underpinnings of the ruling class — the Protestant ideal of material riches in one world, spiritual riches in the next. I joined the two by moving into the mausoleums until the screen blacked out, then moving out of the dark of the Egyptian pyramids, or by match cutting Egyptian hieroglyphics with graffiti. The hieroglyphics were a sacred language, so these cuts join the sacred and the profane. After we've laid the dead to rest, we see the first road movie in *Amerika: Bridge at Electrical Storm* (7 min 1973).

MH: There's a sense in which *Bridge* recapitulates certain imaging strategies in *Vortex*, the constantly changing colours, the themes and variations.

AR: But it's a very measured structural movement. It was made one frame at a time, so I had a lot of control over the image. The storm is simulated through a variety of optical processes which changed the colour and contrast of the image frame-by-frame. The electronic processing is something that embellishes the movement rather than being the thing in itself. In 1966, I shot a heap of super-8 footage driving all day over the San Francisco bridge. It was the only bridge I could find where traffic ran in one direction. We drove from morning to night, and I wanted to release it as a forty-minute film with a radio soundtrack, but I'm glad I spared everyone that boredom. It was manipulated on the optical printer using a lot of bipacking. The introduction of video continues the movement of the image towards abstraction and a graphic extremism, an apocalypse and rapture. In the second part of the film I poured acid and hydroxide on the film itself to create bubbles and explosions, to attack the emulsion, then quickly washed and reprinted it before the image dissolved. So there was a whole number of procedures towards obliterating, altering, synthesizing, and making the image fluid, rather than fixing it in a documentary fashion. This was related

to the sense I had of broadcast and electrical energy. I used to get up early in the morning and noticed that as the city started to come alive electrically I could feel it in the air, like some people hear AM radio in their dentures. We're being inundated right now with broadcast information that's flowing through us, so the transformation of the image was simply a way to make that concrete.

MH: Hence the electrical storm in the film's title and its soundtrack, which features forty years of radio fragments. The bridge forms an enormous "X," which doubles your own spray-painted signature that figures a number of times in the film.

AR: It's a fortunate coincidence. I tried to have my name legally changed to an "X" but was told I'd need to have a witness every time I signed a document. I wanted to have an institutionalized anonymity.

The next piece is *Motel 2* (8 min 1976). It's a long tracking shot into Reno, Nevada. Now that you've done the bridge, here's another car movie. And everybody's wondering where are we going? Are we going anywhere? [laughs] It shows a series of motel façades lit up at night, shot out a car window. One sign simply replaces the next in a long row of spectacle, because spectacle works to evacuate any depth of expression, any emotional attachment, anything that can't announce itself on the surface. There's audio fragments coming in from various TV movies. The facades are intercut with a series of interiors which are basically empty except for television sets, where I matted in a number of found footage images: prehistoric women, male/female relations as perceived by Roger Corman, porno flicks. It shows the dichotomy of inside and out, glittering facades alienated from their abandoned interiors.

This is followed by the first of a series of *Refrains* which punctuate the film. Each one is a static shot showing a dummy and a number of theoretical questions which appear as subtitles. These sequences came on the heels of my profound disenchantment with the academic community. The questions were pilfered from my old colleague Kaja Silverman, who could speak this language like no one else. She'd written up ten film studies questions which were part of a proposal for an avant-garde/film studies conference. So at various points in the film these questions arise in a pseudo attempt to theoretically assess the work. The questions are printed over a dummy animated on a turntable with jerky motions, and a fixed, smiling expression on his face. The backgrounds were done with a front screen and often replay parts of *Amerika*. The soundtracks are taken from canned radio plays from the forties or fifties which replay famous comic routines which refer to the question. So the Bozo, the backgrounds, and the comic routines act to answer these preposterous film theory questions. The dummy faces the camera so he's not really cognizant of the film material.

MH: That recalls Godard's comment in *Scenario du Film Passion* — he's talking about news anchors who never face the images they're presenting, at which point he turns his back to the camera to face the image.

AR: One of the questions asks: Does sexual differentiation position the viewer?

MH: In other words, does it matter whether you're a male or female?

AR: Behind the dummy, a screen shows an image of a woman taking off her bra and revealing her tits, so it's obvious that sexual differentiation does position the male ("voyeur") and female ("looked at") differently. On the soundtrack there's a Marx Brothers skit, where they're talking about marital breakdown and the incompatibility of men and women. So the question is negotiated in these three different ways simultaneously — through the Marx Brothers, the woman undoing her bra, and the dummy. I felt film theory was wreaking havoc with practice, that it was an arrogant and elitist enterprise and I wanted to lampoon it in these sections.

The *Refrain* is followed by a film which used to be called *Runway Queen*. It's a forties burlesque number showing a woman stripping, which is run through a video synthesizer to create echoes of her image all around her, multiplying her gestures. This sequence follows from the images of alienated sex in the motels and the alienated visions of women presented by the film. In the early days of video processing, men would take images of women and fuck them with technique. This scene makes the uses of these technologies explicit; these image technologies work to transform passive and inert figures, which are most commonly associated with women. It's consistent with what music video has done to exploit the human figure. The narcissism involved in the portrayal of the singers is aestheticized and amplified with video special effects equipment. But in my case I don't think anyone could take it as an erotic image at all. She's dancing naked but dressed up with all these special effects.

MH: The echoes of the woman recalled the Busby Berkeley chorus lines where dancers shatter into echoes of the star.

AR: It's a burlesque image from the forties with bumpity-bumpity accompaniment. Its placement in relation to the fuck shots inside the motel rooms make it just another look at a displaced and alienated representation, like a floorshow in one of these hotels. And it continues to answer the question, "Does representation proceed along sexually differentiated lines?"

Then *Amerika* hits the road again for *The Wasteland and Other Stories* (15 min 1976/79). In 1974 I approached the National Film Board with a film about Egypt. After they agreed to it I conned the Board into letting me go down to Death Valley because it's plenty hot there in August. I said I had to check out my equipment, my stock, and myself to see if I can handle the Sahara. They gave me some stock and I shot *The Wasteland* — it was my camera test. I mounted the camera inside the car with an intervalometre attached and drove from Vancouver to Las Vegas. *The Wasteland* is the torture test — some people find it very meditative, and for others it's the beer break. The mounted camera maintains a fixed car hood and windshield position, while the intervalometre

knocks out a frame every three or four seconds. This was then step-printed onto different stocks to destroy the pristine look of the original colour negative. The step-printing that's used here is 2:3; the first frame is repeated twice, the second three times, the third twice, the fourth three times and so on. Three frames is about the limit of perceptible change, and two frames is just below that threshold, so the strategy was one of exhausting the viewer. Rather than allowing the viewer to move in a perceptual flow, you get this staccato movement on an almost subliminal level. This drive arrives in Las Vegas at night, which initially appears as a string of nearly abstract lights which become the nighttime façades of the city in a movement that's very much like *Software*. After passing through an electrical storm, again created optically, we arrive in an insane roller coaster ride with intercut images of gambling and car crashes, video games and violence. Many of these images are related to vehicular destruction because the notion of travelling is a fiction — you're not going anywhere. But the progression of my signs are not arbitrary; they organize themselves around the question of the male gaze. The male discourse is guided by machines: the fixed point of view of the car, the pornographic shot, the romanticism of the escape, the techno-fetishism of video effects, and what lies at the end of the road is destruction. But this amusement park of sensations only simulates these impulses, because your quarter runs out and the ride ends. So nothing's changed. The idea of getting anywhere is hopeless.

MH: *The Wasteland* takes up the biblical themes that run through the film — begun in an opening title copped from Genesis, its constant evocations of The End, and its obsession with sexuality, which the Bible is quick to maintain within a genealogical progression that becomes equivalent to knowledge itself. The Bible calls it knowing, the Stuarts call it dying, the Victorians called it spending, and we call it cumming. But in your film these blood ties have been long abandoned, replaced by anonymous fuck images that play without a viewer. Or perhaps instead of “play” I should say “work”; they've turned sex into an occupation that reshapes the body to the rhythm of the machine, into one more spectacle.

AR: Then the *Refrain* kicks in again asking: "Is identification the chief means by which a cinematic text structures their viewers?" Well, not in this film. [laughs] So I put the bozo in the driver seat pretending to drive, bewildered, with the backdrop of the casinos. The next question asks: "What does it mean for a viewer to distance him/herself from a film?" [laughs] Well if you haven't been distanced by this, I don't know what's going to distance you. Next question: "What is the relation between the viewer's subjectivity and that conferred upon him/herself by the film?" With an image of a roller coaster ride. What is subjectivity? One long scream down the tracks. The second part of *Bridge of Electrical Storm* follows — a four-minute recapitulation. *Bridge* brackets *The Wasteland*; it's a kind of way in and way out. This is the last heavy-duty visual display in the film. But by this point in *Amerika* its visual opulence only reads as empty technique, part of an

alienated sensibility that has moved men closer to their machines while ignoring everything else, everything but their own death perhaps. *Bridge's* redundancy is underscored by having it played twice.

The Wildwest Show (8 min 1980) follows. I shot a number of cityscapes, blacked out the billboards, and inserted pieces of found footage. So as we see cars passing through the streets, images of destruction are playing overhead. The images follow from a game show in which the contestants are asked whether what they're watching is true or false. The game show, like the media cauldron that follows, appears in the billboards. Most of the images presented are violent — and they're asked whether this war footage, these atrocities, the Vietnam protester going up in flames, the concentration camp victims are real or not. The film conflates fiction and documentary footage, sometimes in appalling ways. One sequence comes from a John Berger documentary which purports to show a man being executed. But looking closely you can tell there are no bullets in the guns, so they've faked the whole thing for the movie. On the soundtrack I cut a line in from the game show which says, "All of these people are actors." In *The Wildwest Show*, none of the cars pay any attention to the images they're passing, as horrific as they are. So images that would normally occupy our attention have become commonplace. I matted all of the images into billboards because I wanted to suggest the replacement of landscape with mediascape. It also extended my earlier practice of projecting into public spaces. We often went out and projected work on billboards and building fronts.

MH: There's an accumulation of atrocities in the film — from World War II, Vietnam, old westerns. The effect of their rapid-fire progression is to level them out, to strip them of their historical and political contexts and regather them under some essentialist heading of Evil Humanity. While it's clear your critique is aimed at North American media culture in general and television in particular, to what extent is your own film complicit with the practices it decries? Doesn't the effect of *The Wildwest Show* also depend on this shoot 'em up, car-crashing, body-burning historical wreckage? The film includes some of the most extreme examples recorded of real people dying on film. Isn't your act of deconstruction also complicit with the de-historicizing process of television?

AR: The argument that *The Wildwest Show* sensationally obliterates the historical subject is exactly the point: that's what the film is about. In order to illustrate my purpose I've proceeded with such exaggeration and hyperbole that the viewer can't help but feel no sympathy for this process. It had to be presented as a case in the extreme. The viewer can't help but notice the disparity between sound and picture, fiction and documentary, to read the game show as an ironic ploy. The film's not proceeding as an analysis of these events and how they appear on television; it's dealing with our awareness or non-awareness of this mediascape. Is it any more moral to ignore this train of images — the daily atrocity of the news, for instance, or the late night movie? Mainstream media is constructed as a

one-way communication system, and this was a way to talk back. Halfway through this film it's interrupted by *A Message From Our Sponsor* (9 min 1980) which reworks a series of commercials to show the rhetorical strategies at work. It concentrates on the sexual subtext of the beauty industry, its privileging of style and surface, all of which takes us back to pornography and the objectification of women. The film mimes commercial rhetoric in a way that makes it intelligible and explicit for the viewer. When *The Wildwest Show* returns, having been interrupted by this long commercial, the host says: "You've been a great audience. You've applauded just at the right time. You've laughed at the right time." And now what do we do? We go on, right back into the destruction; it's fucking relentless. Television is our coliseum — we used to watch Christians fed to the lions; today we can watch 40,000 kids starve to death every day, or the latest blood-letting in the Middle East. It trivializes morality or makes it impossible. And what are we doing about these images? Who is managing them and why? Well, after the Censor Board banned *Message*, we knew who was managing the images. Obviously *The Wildwest Show* and *Message* are obscene films. But where is the obscenity? In the acts that were depicted? In their recording? Or their consuming?

A Message for Our Sponsor was the first film I made in 1979. It came out of my collections of stock footage, in this instance, mostly commercials from the sixties. I began looking through them for patterns of organization, rhetorical strategies, and began a work which would deconstruct these practices. I optically printed the footage I wanted, cut the film together, added the semiotic intertitles, mixed the sound, and promptly forgot about it. I went on to finish *For Artaud, Lumière's Train*, revised *Ghost: Image*, and made the *Motel* films for *Amerika*. Then the shit hit the fan for *A Message from Our Sponsor*. Canada's National Gallery was putting together packages of avant-garde film, which were purchased and circulated, and *Message* was included. I was thrilled. Then suddenly I got a call saying the Censor Board has stepped in and that the Gallery had to remove this film from the package, otherwise the curator, Darcy Edgar, would be arrested. I said, "What! You've got to be joking." It was the first I'd ever heard of the Ontario Censor Board.

MH: So they couldn't even show it in the National Gallery?

AR: That's right. Darcy called in tears and said, "I'm in a no-win position; I want to show the work but I can't, and how would you feel if we...". But you know me, I said "no fucking way is this film going to be cut or withdrawn; everything remains status quo." I thought this would remain a local quarrel between the Censor Board and the National Gallery. Then the Funnel, who were going to show the package, were also advised by the Censor Board that if they showed the work they'd have their ass arrested. So the Funnel withdrew from showing it; they didn't get behind it. Then I got a call from Susan Ditta at the Canadian Images Festival in Peterborough, who invited me to show a program of my

work. I told her that I would bring *Message*, which others had been told they couldn't show. She said she would talk to her board, and they gave it the okay. They were warned by the Censor Board not to show the film, and a couple of board members resigned as a result — Anna Gronau and Ross McLaren, both from the Funnel. So we hit the screening and the place is jammed, people are hanging off the rafters. We start the films and there was this young projectionist there, and I said, "I don't want you to have any problems tonight, so let me turn on the projector." The whole time everyone's waiting for the cops to show and we had a big discussion about censorship afterwards. Two days later the Board charged everybody — the director of the festival, Susan Ditta; the director of the space I showed in, David Bierk; a member of the board, Ian McLachlin (who was the intellectual spearhead against censorship); and myself. Violation of the theatres act, they called it. We began with a freedom of expression, constitutional defence which was dismissed by the judge. Then the judge agreed that *Amerika* had to be seen in its entirety, that *Message* needed to be seen in context. What was notable in the proceedings was that Mary Brown, the head of the Censor Board, testified on the stand. She was completely dissected by the defence when she tried to explain the Censor Board's basis which she termed "community standards," but which turned out to be pretty vague. She also alluded to special considerations given "important" artists. I was always saying no deals, and my friends in Peterborough said the same. The crown offered a deal — you people plead guilty and we'll get you off on probation, and we told them to forget it. It tended to divide the film community between those who would deal with the Board and those who wouldn't. I thought the Peterborough action had to come down, somebody had to get charged and go to court and show how ridiculous and dangerous these laws were and why they needed changing. It was important that the practice of the Board, their lies and contradictions, were exposed. One member of the Censor Board who opposed the film took the stand, and when he was asked what his background was he said he'd been an usher in an Odeon Theatre. [laughs] It became apparent that the make-up of the Board wasn't representative of a community, but of a position that was religious in its inspiration. After four or five days they dismissed the charges against me because they couldn't prove I had anything to do with the screening in a direct way, which I found bizarre. They proceeded with the others, who were eventually convicted and fined \$500.

After *Amerika* was banned, a group of people came together to fight censorship in Ontario, called the Ontario Film and Video Appreciation Society. This group included Anna Gronau and David Poole, and they wanted to take *Amerika* to the Supreme Court and clear it, which they did. By that point Mary Brown was back-peddalling, figuring all this for bad publicity over stuff nobody sees anyways.

MH: It's typical that you should run into censorship problems showing actors fucking in *Message* as opposed to the real people getting killed in *The Wildwest Show*.

AR: Both these films were made shortly after coming back to North America after Samoa, where I couldn't help but be struck by the daily ferocity and excess of the media. After this onslaught I felt the filmmaker had to be introduced — because the absence of a personal perspective has been growing, along with an absence of accountability. If *The Wildwest Show* presents a series of questions which are finally about morality, I felt it was important to introduce the filmmaker to answer some of these charges. What follows is a film called *Photo Spots/Terminal City Scapes* (10 min 1983). It's set up as a series of three phone calls to which the filmmaker responds. In the first of these exchanges the caller purports to be a fan of my work, in the second a curator, and in the third a psychiatrist. As a fan he wants to glean technical information, which I deny him; as a curator he wants to contextualize my work according to false historical paradigms; and as a psychiatrist he says my work shows I'm psychotic, and he offers to psychoanalyze me. This all goes down on the soundtrack, and you hear only my voice on the phone. What you see is something else again. Each of the three calls begins with a set of technical diagrams that relate to scientific principles of perspective or colour saturation. And each set of diagrams is followed by an example of these principles, as if they were applied experiments. On the phone I talk about *Amerika's* two orifices — Anaheim and Berlin, Disneyland and the Berlin Wall. The orifice is the place where you eat and excrete — culture comes in, products come out. I think there's a connection with the fantasy city of Disneyland as a perceptual orifice that excretes fantasy on people and Berlin which is the barrier between the illusions of *Amerika* and Russia. Here is the place where real terror, suffering and death have been institutionalized for decades.

I wanted to insert a voice of “the filmmaker.” Once the media's strategies of fabrication have been exposed through their excessive representation, then it was time to turn to the deconstruction of the filmmaker. So *Photo Spot* is followed by a discussion between Samantha Hamerness and myself about the continuation of the film. We're arguing about the accessibility of *Amerika* and its political efficacy. Samantha argues that without a narrative anchor, the viewers are left adrift in a universe of signs that escape decoding by any but the already informed. In order to take apart dominant ideologies, does one assume their form or create another? And where does that leave the viewer? Samantha argues that for a viewer who isn't aware that the media is predicated on sign systems, my film is largely incomprehensible, its effects relegated to a subliminal level. I reply that all images work on a subliminal level and that it's a reasonable political tactic to be able to articulate the subliminal. This defence is really the attitude I began the film with, and reel three (the last hour of *Amerika's* three hours) opens with an

acknowledgment that this isn't enough. This acknowledgment signals the shifting strategy in the last reel, which features less image manipulation, a more direct political engagement, and an evocation of several mainstream genres: the musical, the chase scene, the psycho thriller.

MH: But if most people can't understand work on the level of the signifier, regardless of its message, is formal work, or even art, still politically viable?

AR: I'm not talking about reaching mass audiences; I'm talking about reaching an effective audience — work that's impacting on the culture. If it doesn't impact there, then it's an elitist preoccupation between maker and mirror.

MH: But virtually all of fringe filmmaking is removed from an audience by virtue of its form and the failure of its delivery systems to adapt to a changing media climate. Its fixed museum mentality has been unable to respond to the fluidity of cable television, home video sales, computers, and satellite dishes.

AR: If the work can inspire some people or unpack different points of view, that's enough. Fifteen years ago I toured a show of holography across Canada and I met up recently with a woman from Hamilton who saw that show and was moved to make holographic work of her own, a practice she still continues.

MH: John Cage tells a similar story of the worst concert he ever gave: the train arrived late, the dancers were exhausted, the equipment malfunctioned.

Everyone agreed it was a disaster. Years later in a reception in Washington, he was approached by a young woman who was so inspired by what she'd seen, she had devoted herself to modern dance from that day onwards. But is this microlevel the only level on which the avant-garde impacts?

AR: My own effectiveness as a filmmaker stopped when I left Vancouver. While I was there I was effective on a number of fronts — politicizing the censorship issue and participating in some shit-kicking provocations. In 1980 I tried to start ACFA — the Association of Canadian Film Artists. Noting the fact that avant-garde filmmakers were destitute and had little political clout, I suggested in a series of letters and manifestos that we should form an association similar to CARO. I felt we should establish a minimum scale for screenings — moving away from the \$2 per minute rate to fixed rates for group shows and one-person events. Should any institution not agree, we would boycott. We would lobby Council to get jury lists changed, to insure representation by artists. We would lobby galleries to show work and pay scale. I proposed this to filmmakers in Vancouver who thought it was fine. Then I pitched it to Anna Gronau, who was the director of the Funnel, and she thought it was a good idea. She suggested I come to Toronto and chair a meeting. There was heated discussion about it, various views presented; some thought it was a leftist plot, but the upshot was that we agreed to do this. We set up a bank account, Anna took on the responsibility of chairing the organization and dedicated a lot of energy towards it. We asked people to submit union dues (\$20 per year) to cover the costs of mailing and administration. But since there were a lot of people with reservations, it was by no means a unified front. At that point not much

happened; a lot of people had second thoughts about how extreme this organization might become or felt boycott was impractical. So the whole attempt to unify and organize everyone came apart very quickly. The organization reached a state of inertia because there was nothing it was prepared to radically implement. As a result, it quietly died.

So what is the conclusion of the chat between Samantha and myself? Let's invoke a narrative of sorts — a musical set to the Velvet Underground's "Black Angel's Death Song." The film is called *Exiles* (10 min 1983) and it's a kind of boy-doesn't-meet-girl story. It's shot in two separate locations and both spraypaint signs and slogans on a number of ruined walls. I like this section. It's very restful after all the hard stuff that precedes it; we can just sit back and watch a couple of people write stuff on walls. Formally, I joined the two by a number of flare outs. I took a 400-foot roll of film and flared it in the darkroom and cut it on the B-roll so the image continually goes to white. This eradication of the image echoes the nihilistic iconoclasm in the film. What follows is the longest film in *Amerika* called *The Lonesome Death of Leroy Brown* (25 min 1983). The first of its two parts shows *Amerika's* final road trip — cityscapes across North America shot from a moving car. The film cuts between shots that move left and shots moving right, moving closer to its subject until it arrives at a woman who is stalked into a vacant lot where she draws out a gun and shoots at the camera.

MH: Why is she being followed?

AR: Because we're still not finished with the issue of the representation of women in cinema and I wanted to give it a simple reading. This is about as simple as it gets — voyeurism on a basic level. Male gaze equals violence. Like all of the films in the *Amerika's* last hour, *Leroy Brown* takes off from the discussion that Samantha and I had. Samantha argues that what this film needs are more literal stratagems of identification, so I'm capitulating to the argument. The formal techniques haven't worked, so I'm giving you the pop version, complete with chase scene and guns. This is followed by a long interior scene where I'm sitting in a chair with a stretch of pantyhose over my face, drinking beer, smoking, watching TV, and pointing guns around the room. It's a real send up of psycho thrillers — all set in a motel room. The TV is playing out a documentary loop of a black guy getting blown away by the cops. The radio is playing Jimmy Swaggart talking about hell, damnation, and all the shit that's going to befall you. So this room is a meeting of two worlds of violence — moral, religious violence, and authoritarian police violence. I called it the "lonesome" death of Leroy Brown because the black man's death on television is one which occurs anonymously, without history, without context. In the end I turn my gun on the camera and shoot out a Plexiglas screen set up in front of it. At a screening in Vancouver a lot of people were upset about this, claiming that I was directing my aggression against the viewer. I said, sure, I'm shooting out the field of view.

We've experienced brutalizations of a secondary nature when we're watching images, but this leads on to the point of view itself getting shot out.

MH: It's as if the camera itself is to blame for images that can only lead to estrangement, alienation, bad sex, violent imaginations.

AR: The film has delivered the viewer to a number of excesses. It has attempted to show how meaning is fabricated, and attempted to implicate itself as a film working, at least in part, within this system of signs. It has demonstrated that the filmmaker/author is capable of lying at any time.

MH: If *Amerika's* first hour has demonstrated the visionary wonder of sixties filmmaking, its second leads on to an examination of signs and surfaces — Las Vegas fronts and television — and its structural strategies are in keeping with the seventies. This hour closes with the enigmatic *Photo Spot*, a film which tries to reaffirm the filmmaker as an isolated technician, working out problems in the paranoid seclusion of his studio. *Amerika's* third hour begins the task of constructing a social order — of raising questions of engagement and accountability which are simultaneously personal and political. This social order is staged in a number of narrative fragments which are no less brutal than some of the borrowed media fragments which have preceded it. It's filled with ruined buildings, smashed television sets, attempted murders, women who are stalked by anonymous drivers. It also makes explicit a theme which grows in importance as the film progresses, namely, a male-female dynamic which insistently returns to the question: what is a women's place in patriarchy? The answer: brutalization, neglect, abuse, taking the part of the hunted, or answering the violence of their surround with a violence of their own.

AR: It parodies the male discourse by taking on the film theory fave notion that the male gaze is perverse — it fetishizes, disavows, and fears castration. You've got this played out to its logical extreme. By the film's end the male has become a drunken terrorist, repeatedly consuming images of violence and responding by shooting out the camera. His attitude to women: we'll either fuck you or kill you. If we can't control you, we'll murder. To control we'll use everything we've got: media, pornography, fashion, glamour, money, the works. Males have been controlling the production, sexualization, and dissemination of images, and this is the process that *Amerika* explores. The technological fetishization of the image in the first hour deals with astronauts, cars, wars, and atomic bombs, all aestheticized in a romantic, universalist fashion. But then it turns to an examination of the media itself, examining these effects in terms of male-female dynamics. And then things get ugly. And stay there.

As far as my work is concerned, there is an early interest in pop-culture and political agitation in the late sixties, non-oriental mysticism (alchemy) in the early seventies, hybrid media in the mid-seventies, openly political and anarchist stratagems in the late seventies and early eighties, with a heightened dedication to political avant-garde practice in the current phase. I think it's important to see

avant-garde film generally as occupying a relationship to the era and culture within which it exists, and that each form of the "avant-garde" is but a moment in a larger process of perceptual change and perpetual revolution which derives its legitimacy from engagement rather than fixity and essential qualities. I use the term avant-garde instead of experimental because I think it better identifies the kind of cinema that I refer to (the political, the transformational, the artistic, and those historically linked to the other avant-gardes); I don't believe it is "dead" or has outlived its usefulness in shaking up the status quo. If ever there were a time where shaking up is necessary, it is now, in the age of mass communication, mass propaganda, mass conformist lifestyles, an age that is dangerously close to a holocaust. An art for this age is an art that responds, in part or in total, to these world-wide issues or is at least conscious of the context; 'Experimental,' to me, connotes apolitical isolation.

As I perceive it, the choices facing most are: pass the toilet paper and sit in your cubicle until the sewer system plugs up (that is, until the next academic conference). Get used to the smell of it all and maybe soon you'll develop an appetite for shit (symbolism, obfuscation, the flag, name-dropping, experimental film ghettos, travel grants to safe (sponsored) exhibition houses, mention in sponsored/subsidized publications). Become a clever plagiarist; make your work in a "theoretically informed manner" (don't forget the flag); act non-committal in all political issues, and as soon as regionalism, censorship, or any number of causes arise, make sure your work is included (along with an appropriate quote by you). Or... finally free yourself of this and all kinds of bullshit and be unconcerned whether you fit that school of thought or another, whether your films are "modern" or "post-modern," Canadian, Kanadian, or international. Free yourself from determinations and the obligation to identify your inspiration as being the tundra, factories, television, people, and/or "Michael Snow." And free yourself from intimidation by scribblers and quasi-theorists (they're looking for a warm place to shit, you need not worry), and free yourself from the notion that history and theory will exclude you. And then you can discover your own praxis and that creative imagination which is not celebrated in the cancer ward of suffering romanticism.

Al Razutis Filmography

2 X 2 (17 min 1967)

Inauguration (17 min 1968)

Sircus Show Fyre (7 min 1968)

Poem: Elegy for Rose (4 min 1968)

Black Angel Flag ... Eat (17 min silent 1968)

Aeon (30 min 1971)
Le Voyage (8 min 1973)
Visual Alchemy (8 min 1973)
The Moon at Evernight (9 min 1974)
Fyreworks (1.5 min 1973)
Aurora (4 min 1974)
Watercolour/Abstract (6 min 1974)
Synchronicity (11 min 1974)
Portrait (8 min 1976)
Excerpts from Ms. The Beast (20 min 1971-81)

VISUAL ESSAYS: ORIGINS OF FILM (69 min 1973-84)
Lumière's Train (Arriving at the Station) (9 min b/w 1979)
Méliès Catalogue (8 min silent 1973)
Sequels in Transfigured Time (12 min silent 1976)
Ghost Image (12 min b/w silent 1976-79)
For Artaud (10 min 1982)
Storming the Winter Palace (16 min b/w 1984)

AMERIKA (170 min 1972-1983)

Reel 1 (56 min)
The Cities of Eden 8 min 1976
Software/Head Title 3 min 1972
Vortex 14 min 1972
Atomic Gardening 6 min 1981
Motel Row Pt. 1 8 min 1981
Refrain 1 min 1982
98.3 KHz: Bridge at Electrical Storm 7 min 1973
Motel Row Pt. 2 8 min 1976

Reel 2 (58 min)
The Wasteland and Other Stories 15 min 1976
Refrain 4 min 1982
Motel Row Pt. 3 5 min 1981
98.3 KHz: Bridge at Electrical Storm Pt. 2 6 min 1973
The Wildwest Show 12 min 1980
A Message From Our Sponsor 9 min 1979
Photo Spot 10 min 1983

Reel 3 (56 min)
Exiles 10 min 1983

The Lonesome Death of Leroy Brown 25 min 1983

Fin 10 min 1983

O Kanada 5 min 1982

On the Autonomy of Art in Bourgeois Society... or Splice by Doug Chomyn,
Scott Haynes and Al Razutis 23 min 1986