



**JANUARY 19 - MARCH 3, 1991**

**SARA  
DIAMOND:  
PATTERNITY**

VANCOUVER

ART

GALLERY

**"ULTIMATELY ONE NEEDS TO CHALLENGE THE ASSUMPTION  
THAT YOU CAN TELL IT LIKE IT IS."<sup>1</sup>**

Throughout the last decade Sara Diamond has used video to reveal and record the experience and daily struggles of women. Her works combine social history, personal anecdote and archival film footage to articulate a practice "involved in a larger history that takes in class, race, culture and esthetics."<sup>2</sup> All of Diamond's videotapes and installations emphasize remembered and retold stories. Cultural histories have a special fascination for Diamond, how they are recounted and the personal memories which prioritize them. Using techniques common to television production, aural history and social documentary, Diamond's videotapes trace out alternative histories to create an open, polyvocal space into which images and stories can flow and from which critique can emerge.

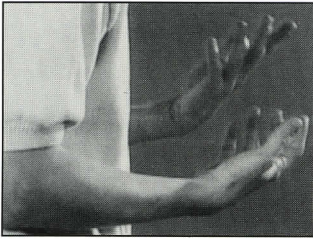
Diamond's first videotapes were produced with Amelia Productions, a small collective active in Vancouver between 1980 and 1982. Two 1981 productions, *Union Rights are Mothers' Rights* and *VDT's: Very Dangerous Technology*, are typical. Developed collaboratively, they focus upon historical and contemporary issues of women in organized labour. This emphasis followed on initiatives Diamond took as a participant in the Women's Labour History Project.

This organization, founded in Vancouver in 1978, undertook research that provides a base for much of Diamond's work. The process of compiling oral histories, while endeavouring to retain the texture of multiple voices, has led her to use a wide range of collage and montage strategies. In keeping with the spirit of collaboration, Diamond has not claimed a singular authorial/directorial voice but instead established frameworks within which multiple, and often conflicting, voices can be heard. The form of her videotapes acknowledges "... the inherent dialogism of language and culture by means of ... its subtle and complex interweaving of various types of speech — direct, indirect and doubly-oriented (e.g. parody) — and its carnivalesque irreverence towards all kinds of authoritarian, repressive, monologic ideologies."<sup>3</sup>

Diamond's work, which is a blend of documentary and fiction, embraces images found in the dominant social context. These images are subtly re-contextualized so that the foundations, underpinning their

socially constructed meanings, are thrown into doubt. Concurrent with her efforts to establish a visual and vocal presence for women within histories of the women's movement and organized labour, Diamond began in 1982, to articulate her own identity and subjectivity as an artist from a more self-reflexive perspective.

*The Influences of My Mother*, a single channel videotape produced by Diamond between 1980 and 1982, merges fragments of personal memories within the histories of organized labour in the 1950s. Throughout the five sections which structure the videotape, Diamond sketches out her own



*Patternity* (detail: video)

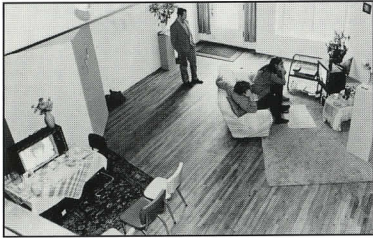
identity and the parameters of her relationship with her mother — a relationship which ended abruptly with her mother's death. The video is built around Diamond's recollections as stimulated by her mother's possessions and family photographs. These memories are contextualized within extended narrative sequences. Diamond allows this narrative to shift reusing photographs, familiar from previous sequences, within changing contexts. Her efforts to locate an identity for her mother achieve a distanced poignancy in Diamond's attempts to establish the specifics of her mother's activities within published accounts of American organized labour movements. Out of this confluence of public and private, using fact and fiction, Diamond reconstructs her memories by locating both herself and her mother within generic histories (mother, child, labour organizer).

*Patternity* extends Diamond's interest in storytelling, elucidating fragmentary aspects of her father's recollections and memories. The project, conceived jointly by father and daughter, began with their regular exchange of letters. *Patternity* explores the experience of memory as it is transferred between generations. Stories, recounted in the studio and against the backdrop of the city, are used to explore the relationships between parent and child. These stories and visual representations allow layers of personal history to converge in a shared psychological space. Each story is told and retold, from father to daughter, but events have transformed the urban landscape about which he speaks, thereby disrupting and multiplying meanings which surround his narrative.

On a surface level *Patternity* makes visible the fragments from which it was assembled. Each of Jerome Diamond's stories is told across eight monitors with images constructed by editing from five basic types of shots.



These video image groupings include studio interviews, landscapes, urban landscapes animated by her father's descriptions, gestures, and scrolling texts excerpted from her diaries, their exchanged letters, quotes from her grandmother, and lyrics written by her grandfather. Each new story precipitates a reconfiguration of the video images on the monitors. Brief intervals separate sequential stories; usually rehearsal and production instructions, they highlight the structures on which the installation is organized. In fact, the editing process, which is most often a linear sequence of shots in single channel works, is expanded horizontally placing each



*Heroics: A Quest 1984* (installation at Convertible Showroom, Vancouver)

image in a dialogic relationship to those with which it is temporarily grouped for the duration of each story. To consider the action of editing emphasizes process over product, the uncertain event over the definitive statement.

The monitors for *Patternity* occupy a comfortable, almost domestic space with sofas and curtains. The sofas are upholstered in fabric with maps of New York City and the repeating motifs on

the curtaining are drawn from Diamond's black and white photographs of sites throughout New York. Much like the juxtaposition of images within the videos, the presentation of the maps and photographs reinforces the multiple dimensions of the neighborhood locations revisited in 1990. The juxtaposed images consistently contradict and disrupt Jerome Diamond's stories.

Built upon multiple points of view, *Patternity* is reminiscent of an earlier work *Heroics: A Quest*. In this video and installation Diamond established three rudimentarily 'domestic' viewing environments — kitchen, living-room and studio — within which first-person narrative definitions of heroism from the perspectives of several women are presented. Each was invited to contribute her story in her own voice. *Patternity* also changes the usual manner in which video is presented in gallery spaces and reinforces mapping, as overlays with which we organize events and environments, constructing meaning from the association of dispersed fragments.

Diamond uses memory to map the present "...looking back to go forward as opposed to invoking nostalgia which demands of the present that it conform to the past. ... He [Jerome Diamond] can direct us, left turn right turn, as we move through the city and it [his memory] is surprisingly accurate." <sup>4</sup>

Within the stories that make up *Patternity* Diamond disrupts our expectation of continuity by linking events which are separated geographically, as well as generationally. She orchestrates discourses culled from multiple sources, oral and written to convey different ideological positions which are put into play without being subjected to totalizing judgements or interpretations.<sup>5</sup> Working from an awareness that every decoding is another encoding, Diamond says that "to write of your past is a highly censored terrain."<sup>6</sup>

Diamond acknowledges this while examining the recollections of her father within the patriarchal traditions of narrative. Often the psychological space of the story and the physical characteristics of the terrain traversed fail to converge. The visual diversity of the urban landscape competes with the stories, disrupting the seamless continuity of the representation constructed by the father's voice. Throughout the videotapes which form the core of *Patternity* are images of people excluded from his narrative. While their stories could, no doubt, be contiguous in time and location the narrative of others would reflect a separate experience of these neighborhoods. Shared experiences seem evasive as Diamond reclaims a vantage point for herself within her father's history. Her reenactments reveal and parody the subtle complexities of his gesture and speech. *Patternity* challenges the matrices of patriarchy by providing a composite of multiple voices, shifting roles and conflicting images establishing a shared territory where meanings develop reciprocally.

Gary Dufour

January, 1991

1 John Akomfrah quoted in Coco Fusco, "Sankofa and Black Audio Film Collective" in *Discourses: Conversations in Postmodern Art and Culture* ed. Russell Ferguson et al, Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1990, p. 37.

2 Sara Diamond quoted in Heather McLennan, "Video visions: an artist explores women's lives." *The Globe and Mail*, June 9, 1990, p. C7.

3 David Lodge, *After Bakhtin*, London: Routledge, 1990, p. 21.

4 Sara Diamond in *Patternity*, 1991.

5 Lodge, *After Bakhtin*, p. 90.

6 Sara Diamond in discussion with the author, December 12, 1990.

## BIOGRAPHY

Born: New York City, 1954  
arrived Canada, 1960

Education: Simon Fraser University,  
B.A.(Honours) 1975 - 1980; Video/Computer  
production technology at Simon Fraser University,  
Video In, Western Front, and Women in Focus,  
Vancouver 1980 - 1988

Academic Appointments: California Institute of  
the Arts, Valencia 1991; Emily Carr College of Art  
and Design, Vancouver 1985 - 1990; Kootenay  
School of Writing, Vancouver 1986 - 1988;  
Capilano College, North Vancouver 1983 - 1990

## SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

### SOLO

1990-*Video West: Sara Diamond*, Muttart Gallery,  
Calgary. *Video Viewpoints: Sara Diamond*,  
Museum of Modern Art, New York. *Images 90*,  
Euclid Theatre, Toronto  
1989-*Heroics: A Quest*, SAW Gallery, Ottawa  
1986-*Heroics: A Quest*, Gallery 911, Seattle  
1985-*Heroics: A Quest*, A Space, Toronto; Anna  
Leonowens Gallery, Halifax; Convertible  
Showroom, Vancouver. *The Influences of My  
Mother*, Women in Focus Gallery, Vancouver  
1984-*VIDEO: Sara Diamond video production*,  
Western Front, Vancouver

### GROUP

1990-*Video and Myth*, Museum of Modern Art,  
New York. *Median Operative*, Berlin Film Festival,  
Berlin. *Warsaw Film & Video Festival*, Warsaw.  
*Australian Film & Video Festival*, Sydney. *Fourth  
Video Bienele*, Canjarjev, Yugoslavia  
1989-*REBEL GIRLS: A survey of Canadian  
Feminist Videotapes 1974-1988*, National Gallery  
of Canada, Ottawa travelled to Vancouver Art  
Gallery; Euclid Theatre, Toronto; Agnes  
Etherington Art Centre, Kingston. *Video Positive*,  
Liverpool, U.K.  
1988-*Heroics: a critical view*, Walter Phillips  
Gallery, Banff  
1987-*The Diary Exhibition Journaux Intimes*, Art  
Gallery of Memorial University, St. John's travelled  
to Art Gallery of York University, North York;  
Galerie d'Art Université de Moncton, Moncton;  
Anna Leonowens Gallery, Halifax; Artspace,  
Peterborough; Art Gallery of Algoma, Sault Ste.  
Marie; Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa;

Stewart Hall, Pointe Claire; Mackenzie Art  
Gallery, Regina. *Video as a Social Tool*, Video In,  
Vancouver  
1986-*Vancouver Now Vancouver '86: Insertion*,  
Walter Phillips Gallery, Banff travelled to Optica,  
Montreal; Video Pool, Winnipeg. *Viewpoints*, City  
College, New York. *Breaking Through Conscience  
and the Status Quo*, A Space, Toronto. *Playback  
Cabaret*, A.K.A., Saskatoon. *A Retrospective of  
Canadian Feminist Production*, Women in Focus  
Gallery, Vancouver  
1985-*Women in Politics*, A.K.A., Saskatoon. *Recent  
Westcoast Video*, Museum of Modern Art, New  
York. *Video Culture Canada*, Harbourfront,  
Toronto. *The International Biennial: Women and  
The Medium*, Vienna. *Time Based Art*, Amsterdam.  
*Social Space*, Walter Phillips Gallery, Banff.  
*Artcity*, Video In, Vancouver  
1984-*A Different Face*, Robson Square Media  
Centre, Vancouver. *Artists and Cable*, A Space,  
Toronto. *Going Public*, A Space, Toronto travelled  
to Anna Leonowens Gallery, Halifax; Walter  
Phillips Gallery, Banff  
1983-*Amelia Productions Retrospective*, Video In  
and Women in Focus, Vancouver  
1982-*Festival '82*, Robson Square Media Centre,  
Vancouver. *October Show*, Vancouver  
1981-*Woman to Woman Show*, Women in Focus,  
Vancouver

## VIDEOGRAPHY

*Patternity* (130:00) 1991  
*The Lull Before the Storm* (192:00) 1990  
(co-production with the Knowledge Network)  
*Ten Dollars or Nothing* (11:14) 1989  
*Keeping the Home Fires Burning* (49:00) 1988  
*Women's Voices* (26:00) 1986  
*Fight Back: Vancouver Transition House* (26:00) 1984  
(co-production with Speak Out Productions)  
*Heroics: A Quest* (210:00) 1984  
*Heroics: Definitons* (35:30) 1984  
*The Influences of My Mother* (28:00) 1980-1982  
*TWU TEL* (09:00)a 1981  
*Union Rights are Mothers' Rights* (26:00)a 1981  
*VDT's: Very Dangerous Technology* (26:00)a 1981  
*Concerned Aboriginal Women* (60:00)a 1981  
*This Line is Not in Service* (25:00)a 1981  
*Tatiana Maminova: Soviet Feminist* (60:00)a 1981  
*Wendow West* (25:00)a 1981

all videotapes in colour  
a indicates co-production with  
Amelia Productions, Vancouver.





PATTERNITY  
1991 (detail: curtain)

## LIST OF WORKS

PATTERNITY 1991, three videotapes simulcast on eight monitors (130:00), screenprint and multiple media on fabric, phototransfer on fabric and furniture.

Produced, directed and designed by Sara Diamond

Production assistants: (photography) Skai Fowler and Mary Alice; (upholstery) Arletta Murray; (video) Studio: Gary Kibbins and Kellie Marlowe; New York: Tami Gold, Vicki Stellar and Larish Productions; Gestures: Julie Warren; Post-production: Jennifer Abbott, Sara Diamond, Skai Fowler, Gregg Vallieres, Edit Point and Video In

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## CREDITS

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Computer Production: Robert Wall

Design & Production Co-ordinator: Randy Watson

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VANCOUVER ART GALLERY