

## VIDEO PRODUCTION GRANT APPLICATION/SARA DIAMOND

### 1. INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT

PATTERNITY is a two part project: a feature length videotape (60 to 75 minutes) and a video installation work (with approximately 3 hours of narrative, 3 of landscape and a loop of gesture, as well as sound and photo elements, which functions both as a biographical/autobiographical study of my father Jerome Diamond and as an examination of the complex workings of intergenerational dialogue, in this instance father/daughter, mother/son discourse.

The B.C. Film grant will be applied to completing production and post-production for Patternity, a video exploration of an individual's personal history and memory. It is a collaborative work, driven by the producer, but requiring and assigning a high degree of authorship to the biographical subject (more so than in the conventional testimonial interview tape). The work will include narrative; footage of urban environments where events transpired (often sixty or seventy years ago and now completely transformed) and scripted sequences based on simple gestures, that capture the nuance of familial interaction and mood, fictionalized by the producer.

At this stage, the vast majority of production has occurred, with two long shoots in Toronto and New York City. Thirteen rolls of black and white film were shot for use in the installation. The Toronto material is logged and ready for post-production planning, the New York material has JUST been transferred to 3/4" work tapes. The daughter sequences can now be scripted and shot in Vancouver and the installation elements finalized. The Vancouver Art Gallery has offered a premiere for this ~~New~~ work in the fall of 1990 or the early spring of 1991. (See letter). As well, the Perspektief Center for Photography in Rotterdam, Holland has expressed strong interest in this project as part of their international bienelle in 1991.

The Canada Council contributed to the production element of this project. The V.A.G. is applying for exhibitions assistance for the realization elements (Photo mounting etc.) for the installation. B.C. Film funds would go to:

- 1) The completion of the single videotape in post-production.
- 2) Editing the video elements for the installation.

work) about exhibiting at least the videotape if not the  
installation.

## 2. DETAILED TREATMENT

→ PATTERNITY is a collaboration between myself, Sara Diamond and my father, Jerome Diamond. Using various memory-triggering processes such as the life history interview; the physical placement of the subject into locations or in relation to objects from the past (mnemonic devices) and letter writing, my father and I explore his memories and reconstructions of the years of his life before he moved to Canada in 1960, nearly thirty years ago.

→ This videotape functions on a number of planes. On the most simple, it is an intimate biography of an individual up to a point of rupture or change.

→ In its production, we rekindle and invoke experiences that were buried: because of the exigencies of adulthood; because of the sharp separation into another culture, that of post-war Canada; and because of the death of his wife (my mother). PATTERNITY is as much about the pressure and need to forget as it is about the function of memory.

→ It is a collaboration between myself, in the role of daughter, and of course my father. I am cast as the insistent, nagging, anxious and at times overly protective guide for the voyage backwards into time, a time that exists simultaneously with the present, as memory. I am an intense pressure on my father to come to terms with his death, by facing his past, by literally returning to it after thirty years (some locations seventy years) of absence. The relation, between daughter and father is ever present in Patternity, in the places of memory that are open to my probing and those that are closed.

→ As we move through the discourses of his life (from theorization, to intense relivings of childhood experiences, to awe and surprise at the intensity of stagnancy and change), the identification and separation of the Oedipal circle is ever present between us. His journey into the closed terrain of New York City from the vantage point of my adult present, becomes a journey for me into realms of childhood, into the moments of bonding and separation with the Father, with his Law and Language that daughters find so difficult to access and sustain.

Patternity is also about the geography, the site of historic construction. The hours of material shot in New York invoke a city and an order that is rooted in the past that my father knew but represents a yawning chasm of present difference. We entered New York in its depth of crisis, a collapsing infrastructure peopled by thousands of those abandoned by the economic and social powers that surround them. → In placing the memories of the past against the visual landscape of the present the disjuncture between the reassuring sense of identity provoked by personal

memory and the jarring present of fragmentation will be invoked.

→ Patternity explores the changing process of narrative, from the oral tradition carried by my father's grandparents and to some extent his mother (in which stories were object lessons to be repeated and passed on), to the intermix of theoretical analysis and narrative story telling that characterized my father's statements of truth and even more so his embroidery of truth, to my fictionalizing and visual impulse even with the most material of realities. What is this interplay of the word, between generations and genders?

To accomplish this exploration, Patternity will use three elements of video image:

→ 1) This is footage of my father against a black lumikey backdrop recounting memories of his early childhood, adulthood and life up to his decision to leave for Canada. With very little interruption, he spoke for four days about family life, sexuality, education, religion, work, landscape, politics and the people of his early life. At times this velvet black dislocated space will be replaced by the background landscape of New York, element two.

This testimonial element was shot in the summer of 1988. The stories vary from intense confessionals (his first love affair, his return home from the war, his financial anxiety afterwards, my uncle's affairs...), to historical analyses of his social and political context, to surface skimming platitudes about factors motivating family members behavior, to attempts to interrogate me about my response to events.

→ 2) This comprises footage of our return to New York City in the early fall of 1989. We move from the Lower East Side, through East New York and Brooklyn, through Harlem, into the South and then the East Bronx and finally the North Bronx, paralleling the course of my father's family.

→ Actual locations interweave with footage of travelling up and down the avenues and streets of New York and its boroughs searching for sensory stimuli that trigger memory. It encompasses my father's search for architectural and visual clues to the past, his process of cognition, his interactions with the people who now inhabit the transformed landscape of his childhood and early adulthood.

The separation of as much as seventy years from these sites and his relocation in Canada, with a strong identity as a Canadian citizen intensify a sense of poignancy. The contrast between driving through areas of New York and being present on foot within environments is a powerful one. In relational terms, it is the difference between being the outside voyeur and implicated by

and within a community.

On foot, there are encounters with current residents ranging from local children, to long-term residents struggling for neighbourhood renewal, to crack dealers impatient with the impact of a camera on their business, to merchants committed to remaining despite economic downturn, to the Days of Rage protest again the killing of a black youth in Brooklyn. From the van, there are images of people staring back at the camera, a gaze of hostility and at times despair.

→ The question of where my father stands, is he forever outside, or still a part of a continuity provides a subtext to this geographic enquiry. His ability and interest in re-entering neighbourhoods which fell victim to the upward mobility aspirations of my father's generation of New Yorkers, ultimately rested on his separation from the present reality of that city. It relied significantly on his connection to the past, yet equally on his disconnection to the present (on his Canadian-ness).

→ This raises a fundamental question about the whole project of looking back into history. Is it an act of constructed nostalgia (the Lower East Side tourist jungle); a form of reassurance with little reference to one's lived experience? Is it empowering to those who remain, trapped in a history not of their making. (In Brooklyn and the Bronx residents were relieved that a white Jewish man would return with curiosity and without fear, to the streets where he had played as a child). The footage imperically raises these issues; they will be reinforced through text and sound.

As well as the visual component of the footage, there are instances of narrative, in which my father remembers a detailed story about a site, or comments on the kinds of transformations that are present. This material provides a different vantage point on memory and story when placed against the black space of the first footage. The map of New York's boroughs, with each sector circled provides a transitional image from location to location.

→ 3) The final video component comprises of a series of interventions by myself, the daughter. My role varies: I provide text-based fictions of my father's story. I ask questions and express anxiety. I intervene to search for a framework to understand varying processes within this search for memory. These interventions occur as a series of close up slow motion gestures modelled on my father and my shared body characteristics.

→ The gestures are peculiar to our family's personal/social history and at time function as poses, posturing and at other times gestures. They refer to learned behaviors, intergenerational patternings. This reference to body, to the physicality of the

→ father/daughter paradigm seems crucial because of sexual difference and the denial of body inherent in the incest taboo. There will be audio and/or text generated over some moments of these sequences. (In the installation, these will be photo texts).

4) In the installation as part of the sound track, I will introduce my grandmother's point of view on parallel events. In the video these will form part of my texts as quotation.

5) Additionally, the installation will include a set of still images that were shot while in New York. These will have text imposed on their surface or matched to them. The text includes my musings and elements of my father's diaristic letters. The photos represent details of neighbourhoods: building facades, peoples' faces, reactions to our presence that provide a textured surface that surrounds the video elements.

To conclude the Paternity video project examines these key elements, which provide a framework for post-production organization:

1) MEMORY: The concentrated gathering of interview footage with my father as subject. This are a series of key incidents or issues around which other elements of the work also touch. These include his mother's illness; his small size during childhood; his conflict with his father; religious vs secular identity; childhood poverty. This sequence will be in English with occasional subtitled Yiddish. This element of the videotape: my father's effective story-telling technique will bind together the sequences.

2) SITE: A tour through the landscapes described in the stories: a geographical narrative of locations of activities referred to in the first element of the work. The transformation of these sites over time as compared to their existence and life within memory will engage the viewer with some of the elements of transmission between generations and epochs referred to above.

3) CONTEXT: The extension of the testimonial footage and research for the brief text and visual sequences. It will be a challenge to build on the testimony in scripting and not sentimentalize, yet retain the emotion. These sequences will give some clues to the tensions and resolutions within recounted events and within our communication. It will also serve as analogy (authority/subject; parent/child) to issues that emerge within the linear recounting of history by my father.

4) TRANSITION: My response by analogy to the issues and stories that emerge through the testimony. A set of parallel narratives between my father and myself, expressed in text and voice.

The sound track will be supplement the location audio. It will be composed from elements of music and of sound that reside in both our pasts, such as: mandolin playing of traditional Jewish and protest songs, a record of my father's interview with me at the age of four, car doors slamming, location ambience, news reports of the funeral of the Black teenager killed by white youths.

### Process

We are well into the process of research and production together, through an extensive oral history interview (see support materials), then through a "video sketch" session with a one tube camera (also see support material), the lumikey shoot and New York sequence. The final production with its scripted elements will evolve from ongoing discussion and experimentation.

### 3. Rationale

This production was shot Toronto and New York City using Betacam video. Production in Vancouver will take place using the Eyes Betcam system with which I am very familiar. Rough-cutting will take place in Vancouver at the Video In and at Charles Street Video in Toronto (to make use of visualizing the lumikey potential.) At this time Charles Street does not allow for Betacam a/b roll or 1" mastering, so final post-production will occur at the Eyes in Vancouver.

Over the past seven years my work has concentrated in the area of social documentary and its interaction with video art. My social documentary productions have attempted a critique of the NFB and television documentary tradition. Early strategies included replacing traditional expert authorities with the voices of the subjects of events; restating a clear advocacy position instead of a false news media objectivity; using cinema verite techniques to document process within issues and decision-making; and more recently, experimenting with dramatization and editing techniques to interrupt objectivity; working without narration and producing for a specific, limited audience with a defined consciousness.

At the same time, I have produced works (Influences of My Mother; Heroics: A Quest), which push documentary issues into the realm of video art. These works have explored the ways that historical consciousness and subjectivity are structured. Heroics allows personal "truth" to be told in a completely static and manipulated "television studio" environment, while Influences constructs the identity of an individual through others' perceptions and feelings.

Influences used a script in production, while the documentary works and Heroics drew on scripting based on material elicited in production (the found art quality of documentary, where the intention of the questioner is often hidden).


I am the producer/director of the Women's Labour History Project. My scripting, direction and production with this organization has involved a wide range of strategies. Keeping the Home Fires Burning combined documentary techniques with manipulation of historical footage and photos that replayed with increasing levels of distancing, ultimately functioning as background for chromakeyed agit-prop. More recently, Ten Dollars or Nothing used intensive editing and layering of historical footage to make comment on the displacement of historical narrative into the present, the constant manipulation of the historian and reaser and the possibilities of a range of reworkings of history, from the sensory, to narrative, to fictive.

In Patternity I will combine pre-production scripting using both sound and visual sequences with the interview and spontaneous elements of documentary. My work has used the spoken word (testimony, narration), although there has been attention to visual images, often through photographic elements (see Heroics as example). In Patternity I want to use more purely visual verite and gestural sequences with constructed, layered sound tracks. The photographs when present will be external to the video text.

Like Heroics, which used three and one half hours of video testimonial materials in the installation, Patternity will also employ tightly edited story elements which tie together all the other portions of the work. This presence of narrative will contrast with the continual movement of our quest through New York City, a quest that never reached a full resolution, but simply ended, due to the constraints of linear time.

This videotape continues an interest in the texture of personal events and patterns that intersect with the public world that we commonly define as "history". Despite shared social and economic structures, human experience is diverse and subjective. Representation allows personal history to enter into the stream of public life and consciousness.

Heroics, The Installation, used testimony from many different women to place the "feminine" experience into a reconstituted definition of heroism. It bridged documentary ("objective") and art ("subjective") to challenge a finite definition of historical truth or cultural value. This tape will move furthur in that direction--melding testimony, site and disrupted narrative sequences to speak to individual and family identity.

 Influences of My Mother was about the interlock of subjective experience and events within history. It looked at locating oneself as a woman and setting the controlling and controlled mother of childhood free. Feminism has argued the importance of embracing and accepting our mothers and their impact on our



→ lives, of validating the nurturing traditionally female world and protecting it against deprecation. Taking from the father that which was traditionally his to give: the assertiveness, the authority, worldliness, goal-orientedness has been perceived by many women of my generation as an oppositional relationship within patriarchal society. The choice was to reject masculinity in all its forms or to become masculinized.

→ But the relationship to the father is not necessarily one of total conflict. Some fathers can nurture as well as control. The father/daughter relationship is a difficult, but potentially powerful one--when the father can transcend the impervious ideology of masculinity and when the child can survive the scars of previous rejection to share power. This tape and the process of its production explores such a possibility.

→ Intergenerational communication provides a sense of how information and self-representation is passed on (perhaps described as culture). Do the tools and motives for relating history change through generations? Are they stripped of meaning and function and made into artifact--has modernism and kitch drowned the specific narratives of our elders?

→ Narrativity has been theorized as a masculine construct. Judaism is patriarchal and rational, but the oral culture (based on Yiddish) contains a gleam of irrational power and humour. The acceptance of a framework of CONSTANT interrogation means that stories are told and retold, but their meanings are disrupted and transformed to adapt to changing conditions.

→ My grandmother's stories functioned as tools, as lessons--to maintain identity, to give direction and resolution. These tales were passed on and changed--my father informed these with the studies of the new age: psychoanalysis and liberalism. The analysis began to be imposed onto the text not emerge within it. My versions are even farther from the original style--the detail is stripped bare and the context is replaced by nostalgia. It becomes necessary to find a way to represent this past and to speak to the dilemma: thus this videotape.

→ My father, in his lifetime was and is able to live out a relatively linear chronology: of poverty in childhood, class and then world war, of achievement, of career, of crisis, of loss of the beloved, of children, of retirement, of old age....But is the narrative really linear, or is the human aging process the linear element, while the personal experience circular and unresolved. My father says that this tape is about, "A sad, old man who goes back to his past to try to understand his rage at his country and his abandonment of memory." In his story-telling my father assumes the childhood voice, and I, the child, as facilitator and interpreter, become the parent.

While this work continues the video art tradition of autobiographical and biographical works by artists, it moves into a somewhat different arena with the subject matter. It is essentially a co-production, one which was initiated if the truth must be told, by the biographical subject (my father) and then taken up by the artist. It is a work in which the older adult is constructed as a child and the child as the "in control" biographer. Nor is it simply a distanced documentation of the parental figure (either by the parent's absence or by the artist not acknowledging the relationship).

The final production will be between 60 and 75 minutes in length. This grant will allow the completion of the production and post-production phase of the single tape and the video element of the installation.

#### 4. SCHEDULE

December-1989-April 1990: Logging of New York tapes, planning of post-production. Scripting of gestural, daughter sequences. Production of sequences on Betacam.

April-May 1990: Final design of of installation.

June-September 1990: Roughcut Video In, Vancouver, Toronto, Charles Street.

October 1990: On-line edit, Vancouver.

November-December 1990: Release of tape.

January-February 1991: Installation, Vancouver Art Gallery.

#### 5. DISTRIBUTION

This videotape will be distributed through the key Canadian independents: Video Out, Women In Focus (Vancouver), V/Tape (Toronto), G.I.V. and Videographe (Montreal). These distributors all carry my works successfully. As well, as with all my other works, I will proceed with self-distribution, producing a small poster and circulating it.

I am also planning to assertively market the installation. Its premiere at the V.A.G. will assist in its movement, hopefully in international circles. I hope to move it to galleries in England, (I have recently been screening work there regularly), to Holland, to the USA (also a fertile ground for my work currently) as well as other galleries. I assume that the V.A.G. will be interested in assisting with the work travelling. I will also move towards its acquisition by the Art Bank and other public institutions. I will be in contact with the Museum of Modern Art (where I have a show in January of 1990 of current

PATTERNITY

Opening in November, 1990 at the Vancouver Art Gallery, Patternity will explore the relationships between different forms of memory, history and generational transmission. Using still, monumental photo images of New York City