

# Narrating Our Histories

## A Dialogue Among Queer Media Artists From the African Diaspora

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Narrating Our History is a collection of thoughts; reflections and remembrances that recount the collective and individual histories experienced by a group of avant-garde queer film/video makers from the African Diaspora. This is by no means an official history but the beginnings of a dialogue around the past several years of making and exhibiting our work, curating and lecturing, panels and festivals. The contributors to this dialogue represent a cross section of artists who have been navigating various cultural, spiritual, and political spaces. Our works encompasses the geographical regions defined as the United States, Canada, Central and South America, Africa, Asia, and Europe. Despite the respective differences in our backgrounds and practices much of our work engages the subject of autobiography in its many and varied manifestations.

Raúl Ferrera-Balanquet and Thomas Allen Harris, Editors.

### **Historical Recollections: How We Met at the Crossroads**

**JT:** The first time I spoke in public about my work was during the Los Angeles Lesbian & Gay Festival in 1990. Cheryl Dunye was the only other woman of color on the panel. When I asked a

question regarding funding, I naively stated that funding was not a problem for me considering the fact that my work at that time was of medium to low production quality. I had minimal access to a low-end production facility and my piece was only five minutes long. I was alluding to the fact that it has been “easy” for me. I was swept up into the politically correct chic of the queer festival. I have been “discovered” as it were, as a new woman of color video maker. Every queer festival was calling me about my little five-minute piece. I thought it had been pretty simple to get a lot of exposure as a new maker. Being on a panel with Cheryl really opened my eyes to the hypocrisies existent within the queer festival circuit. Naturally, we engaged in dialogue.

That was a historic moment for me. It was an entry into a burgeoning network of queers of color. Many encounters at many more festivals have occurred since then. The network has been solidified because we have sought each other out. Any unfamiliar name in a festival schedule for a program of black queers is taken note of and maybe even contacted by another black queer maker, programmer, academic, or writer. We all want to know what people are doing and how it may or may not be connected with what we’re doing. Many of us wear more than one hat and function both as makers and writers or makers and programmers and further facilitate the network.

**CL:** In October 1989, three months after I moved to New York City, I attended a conference entitled “How Do I Look? Queer Film and Video,” which took place at Anthology Film Archives and at the Bleecker Cinema. This was my first opportunity to hear Isaac Julien and Kobena Mercer speak. I attended a screening of Isaac’s ground-breaking film *Looking for Langston* which addressed fantasy, memory, desire, representation and the gaze. These concepts inevitably

became central themes in my first video works. Kobena's paper explored what he calls "aesthetic ambivalence in visual representations of the black male nude." His analysis of Mapplethorpe's photos of nude black men, and his discussion of aesthetic practice by black lesbian and gay artists in the US and the UK had a strong influence on the issues I chose to address in my work. My video, *Significant (Br)other*, is constructed around a text in which Isaac and Kobena collaboratively examine some of these same ideas. It also seems that Isaac's and Kobena's work provided a foundation for the discussion we're now having about queer media from the African Diaspora. I finally got to know Isaac and Kobena years later, but it was their presence at this conference that provided me with a validation of my black gay identity and the necessary inspiration to pick up a camera.

In 1992 I attended a program entitled, "Fire!," a film/video program curated by Cheryl Dunye & Thomas Allen Harris. FIRE! was one of the most successful screenings up to that point. The sold out theater was filled with hundreds of black people, watching EXPERIMENTAL film and video! I was thrilled. I was finally able to identify an audience for black queer film and video. My first video premiered at MIX 1993. In 1995 I moved from New York to San Francisco, in search of a supportive environment for film and video production, in search of cheap rent and a chance to 'decompress' after 6 years in New York. In 1995, Cheryl Dunye, Isaac Julien & Jocelyn Taylor all came to present their work at the Pacific Film Archive (three different screenings, all in the same month!). I was happy to have a chance to catch up with what everyone has been doing. Shari Frilot and Thomas Allen Harris also passed through San Francisco since I arrived.

**Thomas Allen Harris:** The festival circuit for experimental lesbian and gay film played a critical role in my development as an artist by providing me with a community of African diasporic artists who were attempting to create a new space within the American media landscape. In 1990 Martha Gever, the editor of *The Independent* had asked me to review DCTT's *lookout festival* curated by Catherine Saalfield. The seven days I spent at the festival represented a pivotal juncture in the formation of a very special community of media artists. In this festival, I first saw the works of Dawn Suggs, Jocelyn Taylor, Richard Fung, Ming Yuan S. Ma and Cheryl Dunye and began to dialogue with these artists both personally as well as through our work.

It was at subsequent meetings at different film/video festivals that we began to express our dissatisfaction with the way our respective work was ghettoized in mainstream lesbian and gay film festivals while at the same time were ignored by black festivals. In an effort to have more control over the context in which our work was screened -- as well as reach our audiences -- many of us began curating our own programs as well as panels. The results of our work changed the way Lesbian and gay film festivals curated the work by lesbians and gays of color while at the same time established solid audiences for our work. It also served to bring us into contact with other African diasporic filmmakers from around the nation and the world.

In 1992, for instance, Cheryl Dunye and I curated a program for the Experimental Film and Video Festival entitled FIRE - a program of films and videos, which explored sexualities within the African diaspora. Shari Frilot, Associate Curator, and I conducted an extensive outreach program in black neighborhoods. FIRE sold out and was a huge critical success. These organizing efforts directly led to Shari Frilot taking over the MIX festival. Having an

organization of our own represented a major coup. Subsequent to this, the New Festival in New York also chose Wellington Love, a black gay man as director.

**Yvonne Welbon:** Thomas Allen Harris and Cheryl Dunye organized the first panel of black gay and lesbian artists that I know of. It was at the Gay and Lesbian Studies conference at Rutgers University, Mason Gross School for the Arts in New Jersey in 1991. There I met a number of you for the first time. Those on the panel included: Michelle Parkerson, Cheryl Dunye, Dawn Suggs, Thomas Allen Harris, Jack Waters, and myself. Both Jacqueline Woodson and Jocelyn Taylor were in attendance at the conference and I got the chance to meet both of them for the first time too.

That conference was a jumping-off point for some of us. We would organize programs where we could, and invite each other. For instance, I was involved with the Women in the Director Chair in Chicago and helped to organize a black lesbian program as part of the festival in 1992. We invited Cheryl Dunye and Michelle Parkerson to come.

Aarin Burch was involved with Frameline Gay and Lesbian Film Festival in 1993 and she and Shari Frilot organized a panel where both Dawn Suggs and I were invited.

These invitations were not paying gigs but they did provide airfare and the chance to spend hours upon hours with each other. And it was an opportunity to screen our work with each other. These meetings helped to build bonds between us.

**BH:** One of my fondest recollections is of Thomas Allen Harris performing FIRE by Harlem Renaissance writer Wallace Thurman! Thomas eased onto the stage in leather pants and occupied the capacity filled theater with his drama. Since that time, years ago, I've looked

forward to attending festivals, especially in New York City, in order to be around such creative intensity.

My most recent high was probably at the Black Nations/Queer Nations Conference held at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. The conference gave me a rush to be working collaboratively with so many filmmakers of color as we documented the event, which became videotape entitled, Black Nations/Queer Nations. I was proud to be involved.

**Raul Ferrera-Balanquet:** In the summer of 1992 I went to the San Francisco Gay and Lesbian Film and Video Festival. David Olivares had curated the most complete Latino program to that date. I went there on my own. Bruce Karl Knapper hosted me. I met Thomas Allen Harris and Alfonzo Moret the opening night. The late Mark Finch asked me to participate in a panel called “True Colors” to talk about Multiculturalism with Thomas and Alfonzo. Cheryl Dunye was there. I remember sitting at an outdoor cafe having breakfast with Thomas, Alfonzo, and Cheryl. She was talking about how we belonged to a NEW WAVE. We decided we were the New Wave. We were charting new ground in the history of media making. One day, we all met at Karl’s house - Cheryl, Thomas, Alfonzo, Karl and I. We cooked brunch, talked, videotaped, and processed a lot of stuff. That conversation strengthened our future network.

In July Thomas and I met in Los Angeles for the “Color Me Here” panel. The 1992 Gay and Lesbian Film Festival treated us badly. Dawn Suggs was ignored at the office. When I called they dismissed me because “on the phone I sounded like I was one of those Latinos from East Los Angeles.” Alfonzo came from San Diego. We met Joe Castel, a Latino queer media maker, and a schoolmate of mine from the University of Iowa. That time together was for processing and action. We wrote a flyer and then that evening we passed it to the audience. Our panel was

great. But by that time we realized that a lot of gay and lesbian festivals were using us to get money and then the only thing they paid for was the plane ticket. It was true intellectual racism. Shari Frilot and Lyle Ashton Harris arrived the following week. We spent a whole day at the beach. Yemaya was blessing our friendship. The discussions were long. We had so much in common.

**Shari Frilot:** The first independent work I produced which found its way through the queer festival circuit was a twenty-minute video entitled *A Cosmic Demonstration of Sexuality (1992)*. I had quit public television to produce it and I spent nearly all of my savings doing so. Nevertheless when Meena Nanji, who at the time was a curator for the 1992 Los Angeles Lesbian & Gay Film Festival, solicited the tape I managed to scrape together the funds to go and attend the premiere screening.

Going to that festival changed my life. That is where I met you, Raul! That is where I also met filmmakers Tamara Murphy, Darisha Kyi and Pratibha Parma. I also saw my old friends, filmmakers Dawn Suggs, Thomas Allen Harris and his brother, photographer Lyle Ashton Harris. We spent time fawning over each other, exchanging ideas, and encouraging each other's work. We all took a fabulous trip to the beach: Lyle brought his camera and we all took photos of each other. It was a tremendous time and marked both the beginning and a solidifying of most of the important friendships and alliances I have today.

The 1992 Los Angeles Lesbian & Gay Film Festival also provided an immediate introduction to the shortcomings of the queer festival circuit for artists of color. The festival was held at the Director's Guild in Hollywood, which has two large theaters and one thirty-seat video. The majority of the works made by people of color were screened in the micro-theater to

audiences, which were overwhelmingly white. Some of my filmmakers of color received poor treatment by the festival staff. As other queer festivals screened *A Cosmic Demonstration of Sexuality*, I found that the conditions I encountered in Los Angeles were systemic and were likely to be perpetuated since none of the directors of these festivals were from communities of color.

**Dawn Suggs:** The first formal dialogue I attended for black queer filmmakers was the panel organized by Cheryl Dunye and Thomas Allen Harris as part of the Gay and Lesbian Studies conference at Rutgers University. The following year, I attended the 11th Annual Los Angeles International Gay and Lesbian Film & Video Festival, where a group of us formed an informal “Coalition of Film and Video Artists of Color” and developed a flyer, which recounted and called attention to the discrimination against queers of Color at the festival.

In 1992, I got together with the late Dellon Wilson, a veteran producer of social and cultural events for Black lesbians in New York City, and founded **Through Our Eyes**, a program of Black lesbian films and videos. This program offered a sampling of works by Black lesbian filmmakers in a club setting followed by a discussion and reception. This small festival was one of several that sprung up nationally around this time in an effort to develop self-reliant networks for screening Black lesbian work within Black lesbian communities. The following year, Shari Frilot co-directed the festival with Dellon. The *Through Our Eyes* festival also sought to challenge the domination and appropriation of black lesbian films and stories mediated by a system of white patronage.

In 1993, Aarin Burch curated the “Sistah Action” program as part of the 17th San Francisco International Lesbian and Gay festival. Aarin Brought several Black Lesbian



filmmakers to San Francisco and contributed to a dialogue of black lesbian filmmakers on the West Coast.

**RFB:** Then came the 1992 New York Experimental Lesbian and Gay Film Festival. I was invited by Cheryl Dunye and Thomas Allen Harris to be part of “FIRE”, a program of queer media artists from the Africa Diaspora. It was a sign of relief. After years of being denied for my African self because I spoke Spanish, my brothers and sisters now were seeing me as a true brother. That year Cheryl Dunye and Jocelyn Taylor organized Lookout, the DCTV lesbian and gay video festival. Ming-Yuen S. Ma and I were the guest artists. My sisters created a great program. Shari Frilot designed the poster.

In 1993, the newly created MIX had another program about the African Diaspora, “Moto and the Human Touch” organized by Vejan Lee Smith and Thomas Allen Harris. Karl Bruce Knapper and Alfonso Moret put on a great program for the festival. The discussion after the program was insightful. They really produced the type of audience response they expected. I wonder why MIX doesn’t have after screening discussion any more. That year MIX gave Thomas and I a birthday party.

In 1994 during the Society for Photographic studies conference Thomas Allen Harris, Lyle Ashton Harris, Yvonne Welbon, Jocelyn Taylor, Coco Fusco, Zenabu Irene Davis, Ayana Udongo, Nereyda Garcia Ferraz and myself got together in my apartment. The men cooked a meal of yams, collard greens, and chicken. We ate a lot and did a whole workshop - watching everybody’s work and discussing critical issues within the works and works in progress. It was a special occasion.

The Black Nations/Queer Nations conference in March of 1995 was a great meeting place. A lot of us were there. Cheryl Dunye, Jocelyn Taylor, Thomas Allen Harris, Dawn Suggs, Shari Frilot, Karl Bruce Knapper, Lyle Ashton Harris, Kobena Mercer, Coco Fusco, Robert Reid Pharr, Isaac Julian, and myself among a lot of great powerful warriors.

Also the Queer Conference at University of California at San Diego in January of 1995 was a great encounter. Dawn Suggs, Robert Reid Pharr, Lyle Ashton Harris, Thomas Allen Harris and myself got together at this conference.

**Leah Gilliam:** I've been trying to get it up to write something re: a collecting queer black history but to say the least it's been, well, hard. Mostly because for the past month since MIX, I've been speechless. Now this is a term that is over-used, I know, so I'll explain what I mean. What I can do: daily bullshit conversations with colleagues-walk the dog-worry about my fate-watch reruns of the Rockford Files (as far as I'm concerned the opening sequence is a cinematic masterpiece)-watch *What's Happening* and then *What's Happening Now* which comes on right after and are also totally neglected according to my research in the annals of African diaspora history (They're based on Michael Schultz's 1975 film *Cooley High* which brought black \$\$ and black teen fuck ups to the silver screen. The *What's Happenings* give great 70s fashion black nerds and a star: Dee, the original mouth as weapon gun non hieroglyph black body just what a downtrodden relief from the body I have me needs) - reread Ntozake Shange's letter again where she squashes Greg Tate for Calling her/categorizing her/pinning her/taming her in the Village Voice- field a phone call where I'm asked to be on something or another and bring all of my black queer friends (if you knew me you'd be laughing now)-surf the net and

pretend to be a liberal white fag trapped in the netnoir chat room-diss my colleagues (powerless empowerment) and talk on the phone.

### **Wiring the Network**

**YW:** This network is informal. We send each other tapes. We call each other up with questions. We send each other script's. Sometimes we take suggestions and sometimes we don't.

I know when I wanted to make a black lesbian film short I called a few people for suggestions. I wanted the film to be more than me. I wanted the film to be of our community. And it was a conversation that I had with Jacqueline Woodson that inspired me to tell the story that I choose to tell in *Sisters in the Life: First Love*. Jacqueline said, "we need coming of age stories." That was all I needed to hear.

One person, who I met at the Frameline Festival in 1993, is not a filmmaker but she is an important part of our black lesbian network. Margaret R. Daniels is the Founder of the Women of Color Festival in Santa Cruz and in independent curator. She was an incredible help to my on my last film *Remember Wei Yi-fang, Remember Myself...* She read draft upon draft of my script, critiqued different edits of my tape and basically wouldn't't hesitate to tell me that I needed to work a little harder in some areas and that I had definitely made my point in other areas.

**RFB:** The network among ourselves takes place at these festivals and also during the phone conversations, letters, and postcards. When I made *Cities of Last*, Thomas Allen Harris provided me with footage. We have talked a lot on the phone about our projects. Shari and I are always calling each other and helping with projects. I feel that there is a community here with a lot of potential. Some of us have taken time to become real good friends, creating a space where we

can talk about our emotional, psychological states, our desires, critique our works, and create fantasies about our plans for the future.

**CL:** What's most productive about these encounters is the opportunity to see or find out about each other's new work, get crucial feedback and encouragement, exchange information, and experience those fleeting moments where some of us are in the same room at the same time and we can "carry on." This network of film/video makers, curators, (and writers, academics, and cultural critics) has provided the opportunity for my work to be received and reviewed by my peers. It's not always necessary for us to physically be in the same place. Our 'virtual' community thrives, as information transmitted (by phone, fax, email, letters, festival catalogues, publications, exchanging tapes, etc.) about "who is working on what." Most of the time it feels like I'm working in isolation; but the existence of this network and the eventual reception of my work by this audience has been vital.

**BH:** I was first introduced to this "set" by Cheryl Dunye. At the time, we were friends based in Philadelphia. Through working together, we have since developed into extended family members. Cheryl often made the pilgrimage to New York City to fraternize with makers from the Gay, Lesbian, Black, Academic, etc. communities. A fierce contingency to be sure!

The extent of my dialogue with other makers has occurred through our perspective works. I'm often astonished at the distance my work seems to have from theirs - notably, many makers involved in this dialogue expose themselves so bravely through their work. This is especially true of the video/film work of Thomas Allen Harris and Jocelyn Taylor. Whereas my work tends to be fictional although it contains many personal references. However, only my confidants know what part of myself is on screen.

Being in Philadelphia I feel isolated from the “queer” film/video community. In fact, since the departure of Cheryl and then Christopher Leo Daniels (cinematographer), I’m the only black male “queer”, actually bisexual, filmmaker in town. Although the phone lines are alive and well here, we have not ventured there yet. I must say though, we connect when it counts. Yvonne Welbon gave my co-producer and myself great press in *The Independent*, and Jocelyn provided me with my first New York showing. But all in all, I have no ongoing dialogue with anyone directly.

**JT:** The network among ourselves is both born from necessity and proximity. Many of us are closely connected to alternative media networks, know each other from our fields of activism and have maintained those relationships. We are friends who have started making work under similar circumstances for similar reasons. Here’s a proximity example: makers whose work has evolved around questions of identity and/or sexuality have gravitated toward one another to talk about programming issues, give critique, and analyze style. (That actually includes most people we know.) We run into each other, touch base, maybe have dinner, then pass the word on to another maker at another event about what so-and-so is doing. Since many of us are busy representing black queer culture (if such a monolith does exist), it is necessary that we discuss the reception of our work by our various audiences.

**TAH:** Since the beginning, I have always collaborated with colleagues directly or indirectly. This type of collaboration has been integral to my work. Shari Frilot was my Associate Producer on my first piece, *Splash*, and Raul Ferrera Balnquet introduced me to the concept of Esu – the subject of my third tape, *Heaven, Earth & Hell*. Some of the early inspiration for *VINTAGE* were Jocelyn Taylor’s *Father Knows Best* and Dawn Suggs’ *Chassing the Moon*. There has been

constant feedback between myself and fellow filmmakers on all of my work. In 1991, Dawn Suggs, Vejan Smith, Reggie Woolery, Lorna Johnson and I began a film/video workshop in Fort Greene, Brooklyn. In this workshop we got together every two to three weeks over the course of a year to show and discuss work. It was out of this workshop that I began producing *VINTAGE-Families of Value*, a feature length documentary film which looks at three African-American families through the eyes of siblings who are lesbian and gay. *VINTAGE* is itself a collaborative project. The subjects of the film interviewed each other, operated the camera and wrote the fantasy sequences in which they performed. This type of shared filmmaking parallels the working relationships I have had with a number of media makers over the past 5 years.

**DS:** The network among ourselves was initiated largely through our dialogues at festivals and university programs. My first exposure to queer works of color was at the screening of Michelle Parkerson's *Storme* in 1989. Work as an Assistant with Parkerson and Griffin on *A Litany for Survival* (1995) introduced me to a large community of lesbians of color filmmakers.

Programming of black lesbian works by black lesbians over the past five years has helped develop an informal network of black lesbian filmmakers. I had many discussions with Ada Griffin of Third World Newsreel in 1991 regarding the need for more distribution of new works by queers of color. Around this time, several queer filmmakers of color found Third World Newsreel to be more receptive and appreciative of our works than some of the Distributors who had large collections of works by white queer artists.

I regard my friendships with other queer African American filmmakers as home base within a large film community. While some friendships are more active than others, I believe that all of us have expressed a willingness to assist each other in navigating and negotiating production and distribution. I find a few close friends, queer African American filmmakers, provide me with the strongest critical feedback on my work.

### **Documenting History**

**DS:** There was a collective of Black lesbians in the early eighties, which produced a traditional documentary on Black lesbian life, which is distributed by Women Make Movies. Parkerson's documentation has been extensive over the last fifteen years or twenty years. More recently, over the last seven years or so, fiction and non-fiction experimental and narrative films by black lesbians have documented our experience, personally and collectively.

**JT:** The documentation of the growth and development of this network of queer black media folks would be a great project. As with any history however, I would want to question who it would include. Our particular clique perhaps? If we're all friends writing our own history, well...it's been done before. History is not absolute truth; it's merely a documentation of selective memories and events. Even straightforward testimony has gaps and is misleading and irresponsible at times in relation to the truth. I am freaking out now. Okay. History is fine. Nuff said.

**SF:** As a curator, I have not only witnessed a tremendous mushrooming of works produced by queer artists of color internationally, I am also noticing the influence these works are having on the development of the community of emerging media artists. The opportunity to historicize this

important cultural phenomenon in the *Black International Cinema Anthology* is a vital one. It will serve to preserve the dimensions of this important artistic movement by preventing them from being lost in the unconscious, if not outright racist and homophobic documentation of various, white-dominated venues and texts.

**RFB:** This is where the issue of documenting our history comes to play an important role. I have seen how “queer cinema” has become so commercialized, and also how the white queer media makers have capitalized the audiences and watered down the real issues affecting us. The two books about queer cinema don’t say anything about our works, our critical writings, our friendships and all the history we have gone through together. A lot of us have published in different and disparate venues - we should bring all of those critical writings together and produce a book.

### **Autobiography**

**RFB:** The critical autobiography is an issue that must be examined in a large context. All of us have produced work from our experiences. I think that we are markers and makers of history, and our bodies represent a map that is in a constant dialogue. Like the African American slave narratives, we have turned the autobiography into a weapon to decolonize ourselves. I think that the economic means of production have obligated us to do autobiographical works also.

**DS:** I find traveling inward to be a very important part of the decolonization process. It has been a formidable struggle for me to trust my instincts and sensibilities, which counter the Hollywood standards within a film school, which increasingly depends upon and gains viability within the Hollywood system. While the political and social climate had changed tremendously since the time of the “L.A. rebellion” of the seventies within UCLA’s film school, the legacy was largely



initiated through the works and efforts of many black film-makers, including Billy Woodberry, Zeinabu irene Davis, Julie Dash, Charles Brunett, Haile Gerima, Carol Parrot Blue, Sharon Alile Larkin, Barbara Mc-Cullough, O. Funmilayo Makarah, Larry Clark, and many others.

I see third cinema as cinema that goes a step further than convention-ally depicting the conditions of our existence. It proposes alternative ways of seeing things and aggressively counters the hegemony of dominant cultures.

**YW:** African Americans have always been interested in testifying and telling it like it is. I just wrote a paper on black lesbian film and video artists. My survey included twenty-one artists and sixty-eight short films, videos, and interactive computer media. I found out that virtually all of the artists had done some work in which they included themselves. I feel that this act closely parallels the choices African Americans made when they began to write slave narrative in the eighteenth century. It was so important for our ancestors to make themselves present in a world in which they were not considered human. It is still important. Ours is a political act of self-affirmation. We choose to make ourselves subject in a world that has always considered us an object, an other—rendering our once invisible selves visible.

**TAH:** The late twentieth-century, postcolonial autobiographical film and video works should be read not only in terms of content but also in terms of form: the narrative structure, the gaps, the language, repetition, and rhythm—all of which are imbued with an awareness of the risk as well as the empowerment involved in using this type of articulation. Such a reading is critical to the understanding of the new and emerging languages that we are creating within the medium of film and video.

Personally I employ autobiography within my work to critically engage questions of ethnicity, the body, sexuality, and location. Situating myself within an African American literary tradition of autobiography, I employ autobiographical strategies as a way to further explore postcolonial subjectivity and the construction of diasporic identities. Constructing self through various sites, including family, history, nation-states, and the psychic realms of fantasy, places such work within what Teshome Gabrial, author of *Third Cinema in the Third World*, refers to as an expression of a nomadic aesthetic, which he defines as one that “smashes down boundaries between documentary, ethnographic, travelogue, experimental and narrative fiction.” The act of self-construction is an autobiographical act. It is a place of comfort and a source of power. It is a personal, political, and liberatory action. I am speaking about an autobiography that continues to push beyond the boundaries of disclosure and self-explanation on the level of content. And there are risks. For example, history shows us that Zora Neale Hurston’s autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, was sharply criticized for not disclosing enough of the particularities of her life. However, Hurston wanted to use her text to create or construct an intellectual self with controversial views on the national and international contemporary issues- a space that was not allowed here, black folklorist, in the 1920s, 30s, and 40s. In fact her editor and publisher censored whole chapters of the book.

### **Production Values**

**YW:** There is an urgency to create work. Sometimes that urgency takes precedence, leaving the production values of early black gay and lesbian work lacking. For the most part we are a young movement. Most of us have been producing works for one to five years. We need time to learn

about our craft and about ourselves as artists. We need time to grow. And I have found that as we grow the production values of our work improve.

**DS:** Generally production values for a film or video refer to a film's slickness and seamlessness—its professional gloss. I'm interested in considering a film's aesthetic value based on its use of film language in a broad creative and artistic sense. Many black queer works have been made under severe technical restraints and limitations; nevertheless many achieve a lyricism and poignancy that films with "high production quality" in a traditional sense may not.

**RFB:** "The camera is my weapon and style is the immediate response to an aggression."

Production value is a hard topic among us. Let's face it. How many of us have gotten enough money to produce what we want or need? I produced because I have a network of friends who are constantly helping me to produce the work, and because I teach to get access to postproduction—not the best, but it helps. The grants I have gotten have been very small. Technology is an issue since a lot of us don't have the time, the money, and the space to be trained in new technologies.

**TAH:** In my previous life I produced documentaries and public affairs programs for public television. I think that experience informed the way I think about image production. Although I shoot on hi-8mm and 8mm video and Super-8 mm film, I find ways to online on beta, which is still much cheaper than film. I keep cost down by shooting myself and collaborating with other artists, friends, as well as seeking out artist residencies that offer access to equipment and support, such as the Banff Center for the Arts in Canada and the Experimental Television Center in Oswego, New York. I have chosen to take a position as an assistant professor to have time and

equipment to produce my work. Economically the production of work is still a difficult and challenging proposition.

**JT:** I've always thought that as it gets harder and harder to get money to make projects, more folks will choose to work collectively as a means to make work. I have a personal objective or mission, if you will. I would go as far as calling it an artistic vision. That vision is located in a desire to address the collective group. Actually it's a desire to fill a lack expressed by the collective. Though I separate myself out as an "artist," I belong to the collective as well. Making media toward a collective desire is like placing salve on a wound. Artists have the skill to heal very deep pain. The stuff of being an artist is also about embarking on a critical path for the sake of collective discussion and analyses.

Grassroots is the key word here. I've always stayed with a certain framework of immediacy, quickly piecing together inexpensive alternative resources, using minimal technology, background, and equipment. I've just started paying the people who work with me because I appreciate getting paid for working on other people's stuff myself. My production values have gotten increasingly better, aided by grants I've received in recent years.

### **Narrative Strategies**

**JT:** We have, I believe, become disgruntled with well-known studied conventions of media-making and understanding. Constant exposure to mediocre modes of storytelling—after all, for the most part they are not our stories—have encouraged us to stretch the narrative to encompass both our story and our creativity. One question: Have we been afforded the opportunity to employ fantasy in our work? I've found that when I choose to conflate fantasy and desire, I get

to the question of audience. Who is it? Non-folks of color so readily identify with the story of “identity,” but when that identity is assumed and not coded as a marker within the work, white folks want to ask me why I have an all-black cast. They might even tell me they feel like they’re “intruding” because I dare to show my fantasy to them rather than cloak it in a discussion of identity politics. They must “see” me. I’m tired of looking at them all the time.

*Frankie & Jocie* (1994) and *Father Knows Best* have specifically addressed the prevalence of homophobia in the black community. Neither of the pieces resolves.

**TAH:** In vintage I introduce each of the subjects/characters of the film as starring in a show about them and us. Then I construct the narrative along the lines of a thematic dialogue (much like the one we are engaged in) between individuals and families. I allow the emotional arcs to emerge throughout the piece. Through the composition and juxtaposition of images that move between time, documentary, fiction, fantasy, and memory, I attempt to reveal a constructed whole through its elusive parts.

**RFB:** Narrative style is intriguing to me. There was a time when I wanted to do fiction based on my real experience and when I wanted to document my imagination. Then I was experimenting with form and I found out that the old modes of cinematic address were not satisfying my voice. That was the time when I started mixing everything and finding out how a hybrid text was the closer narrative style to my experience. Somehow the mixing of these styles reflects my mestizo self.

**LG:** What I can’t do is work. I can’t push my tape. Can’t think. Can’t fuck. Can’t make money. In short, I can’t help. It just seems too ironic furthering/teaching/theorizing the cause of experimental media and doing millions of bullshit gigs so I can afford the luxury of my

indentured servitude. I've never been an optimistic person. I've always been completely cynical and negative, and now it seems to have caught up with me. The last time the credits rolled on my tape I realized that all but one of the funding sources had disappeared and the one remaining was the least supportive, most cheap, most "lift up the race," most queer-unfriendly one left. Within a historical trajectory I know things have been worse. More repressive, more insane, less coherent, and that I am but one more grumpy mongrel dog black riot artgirl raggedy poor white trash white girl friend having no happy to be queer not happy to be anything Prozac-loving Ritalin-needing thing who is not on the street not married not in advertising not waiting on my feature not someone I should meet and mostly not a fictional character.

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In *Sisters in the Life: First Love* I took the liberty of creating black lesbian home movies of childhood because I couldn't find any real ones. There were none of my life, but that didn't mean my life didn't happen. So I felt that creating the home movies after the fact was okay. Many viewers actually thought the home movies were real movies at first.

In *Remembering Wei Yi Fang, Remembering Myself: An Autobiography* I offer cross-cultural stories of migration as I parallel my grandmother's movement from Honduras to America at the age of twenty-two, and my movement from America to Taiwan at the same age. I look at my Latin American heritage and the influence on my life of the six years that I lived in Taiwan. These things have shaped me just as growing up black in America has shaped me. In my film I stress the importance of claiming my past and present.

### **Exhibition**

**SF:** In 1992 Thomas Allen Harris and I were approached by Sarah Schulman to direct the New York Lesbian and Gay Experimental Film Festival. Thomas was busy with his film vintage so I took the festival on with the Brazilian filmmaker Karim Ainouz. We changed the name of the festival to mix: The New York Lesbian and Gay Film/Video Festival in the interest of expanding

the focus of the festival to encompass the intersection of race, class, and ethnicity as well as gender and sexuality. Of the twenty programs we presented in MIX 93, seventeen contained entirely works by people of color. (So much for that old excuse “We don’t program work by people of color because there is just not that much around”!) We were able to increase the number of works by people of color not by relying on the festival’s mailing list but by aggressively scouting out works as well as working with guest curators of color who had entirely different networks than the festival had access to.

In 1993 we also founded, in conjunction with the Brazilian guest curators André Fischer and Suzy Cap, the first lesbian and gay festival in the history of Brazil, MIX Brasil: Festival das Manifestações da Sexualidade (Festival of Sexual Manifestations). MIX Brasil tours São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Curitiba, Belo Horizonte, and Fortaleza every year. The festival also maintains the first gay computer network via the Bulletin Broadcasting System.

Now I direct MIX in New York and Suzy directs MIX Brasil. We are sister organizations that operate independently from each other but support one another by providing programming and advice. Together we are building a network of festivals that offers unprecedented exposure for queer work. Through the New York festival and our program with Free Speech TV, a national cable access program, the films and videos in MIX reach more than fifty million people across the United States. Mix Brasil reaches more than ten thousand people all over Brazil each year. And MIX has premiered more work by queer makers of color than any other festival in the world.

Mix has been an incredible opportunity to bring new voices to the media circuit, celebrate exceptional artists and their work, and bring together audiences of color to screen work intended



especially for them. Film festivals are critically important in the process of building community and professional networks. They open doors of opportunity to media artists by bringing their work to the attention of other curators. The festival also brings artists together with their audiences, and thereby plays an important role in the critical dialogue of artist and media work.

**RFB:** MIX 94 and MIX 95 were points of reunion. MIX has become the place to show since Shari Frilot became the director. It is the largest experimental festival in the world and the space where I have been most comfortable premiering my work. Now MIX sees connections that go beyond ethnic backgrounds and puts together shows about our experiences. This year Brent Hill and I were in a program about traveling identities curated by Eve Oshi.

**DS:** I am excited to see so many of us working in areas of exhibition and programming. I believe that many filmmakers involved in this dialogue, particularly Shari Frilot, have done critical work to develop new models of programming for works by queers of color. When I began frequenting queer film festivals in the late 1980s, I was appalled to see the sloppy and unapologetic manner in which works by queers of color, particularly African Americans, were programmed.

**TAH:** I've found that the curators who have been most receptive to my work—Particularly my latest work—have been African diasporic. For instance, Cameron Bailey programmed vintage in the first Planet African Program of the Toronto International Film Festival. Pearl Bowser was responsible for taking a group of us to the Festival del Art Negra in Brazil, and Shari Frilot opened this year's MIX Festival with my film. On the other hand, American and European festivals that do not have black representation on their curatorial board did not recognize the value of vintage and did not invite me to screen my film at their festivals.

### **A Festival Director's Concern**

**SF:** I have also learned many difficult things through my experience with MIX. I have witnessed that who gets shown in festivals and who gains entrée into the media circuit has so much to do with who you know and who is out there championing your work. I have seen too many victims of exclusion from those “in the know” networks. I have seen firsthand the hypocrisy of gay institutions that claim to be working for the good of the “community” but refuse to support organizations like MIX because they consider our interests to transgressive and abject.

Sadly I have seen artists of color who invest in the “politics of novelty”—of being the *only* one—to the extent that they do not reciprocate the support they receive from their communities to other individuals in those very communities. The political and economic pressure we face collectively as people of color makes this sort of cultural cannibalism both abominable and frighteningly insidious. It is difficult to call out perpetrators for fear of breaking the silent code of nationalist duty. At the same time, this tacit consent makes it as difficult to realize how we might be guilty of such perpetration as it is easy to become caught up in the illusion of rising to the nationalist call of “representing the community.” But it seems that if you can’t count to three in remembering the first and last names of the individuals in your community whom you helped this month in getting to where you are (members outside the community of

color do not count!), then if I might invoke the words of Audre Lorde, “you are not doing your work!”

### **Mapping the Diaspora**

**JT:** I’ve been thinking about the Diaspora from an ideological standpoint. Mostly from the view of experience, history, and memory. I wonder what exactly we claim by invoking the diaspora. It seems that one would have to connect to a “home” or place of origin then use history and/or memory to construct a connection between “home” and one’s present place. Personally, that’s a bit hard for me to do. Are we talking about appearance of the process of decolonization in the work of queer black filmmakers? Are we talking about actual “roots”?

**DS:** My interest in the African Diaspora contributed largely to my identity formation as “African” and influenced and inspired my development as a political activist. As an undergraduate, I studied the Afro-Luso-Brazilian triangle in some depth. My undergraduate thesis (1988) discussed the metaphors of madness in African women’s literature throughout the diaspora. I focused on a novel *A Question of Power* by the late South African woman writer, Bessie Head. An intensive study of African women’s literature throughout the diaspora helped me to contextualize my struggle as a young middle class black lesbian in North America. This experience gave me faith in spiritual transnational sisterhood.

**RFB:** Sometimes I am confused by the use of Africa in this country. Since I am African and Arab, I have to question constantly if we are talking about sub-Saharan Africa or Africa as a continent. For me these two identities open the door to Africa. But I have to stop first at the Caribbean - where I come from. That is how I see the African Diaspora working for me.

**TAH:** My experience is one that crosses boundaries of nationality, language, and class. My heritage is African-American and Caribbean and my stepfather is South African, a former refugee. Both my parents worked for and with the African National Congress (ANC) while I was growing up. Between the ages of 11-13 I lived in Dar-e-Salaam, Tanzania, East Africa, where I attended a national secondary school. Therefore, I have an experiential, historical, and imagined relationship to the African Diaspora. I consider the different aspects of each of these relationships equally valid because for me the diasporic is a position which simultaneously resides everywhere and nowhere in particular. It is a place, which opens possibilities for global communication while resisting the boundaries constructed by colonialism.

**CL:** In December 1991, I attended the Black Popular Culture Conference, held at DIA Center for the Arts. The conference featured presentations by several queer African Diaspora media producers and cultural critics, including Isaac Julien, Marlon Riggs, and Thomas Allen Harris. This non-queer conference had a decidedly queer focus. It was an important acknowledgement of black queer cultural production in the midst of all that straight-black-Blackness. Several other speakers also inspired me: Arthur Jafa's discussion of black film aesthetics influenced my ideas about film rhythm. Angela David's critique of contemporary representations of the late 60s/early 70s black movement led to my international revision of 70s black gay history in my video *Happy Day*. I think the importance of this conference (and the importance of some other events, such as the Black Film Conference at New York University in 1994) is that my concerns as a queer media maker can be seen as part of the larger, interconnected concerns of a bigger group of people from the African Diaspora.

## **ON NATIONALISM**

**DS:** I think that nationalism is strongly critiqued by so many of our works, which address the fluidity of identity and counter the myth of homogeneity within any of our communities. Exile and migration are discussed literally in some of our works, but are constantly used metaphorically within films by queers of color. Many of us are creating historical “fantasies” within our own work, which connect us psychically to our past, present and future. I see a growing interest amongst queers of color to discuss and address the multiplicities of our identities as we allow ourselves to be more specific about our positional ties as individual artists.

**RFB:** Nationalism is a hard topic. I love history and tradition, but I believe that there is a lot of patriarchy linked to nationalist ideology, which serves to produce the type of exile that I experience. Sometimes i just want to go home, stop speaking English, and run naked on Cuba’s sandy beaches. But I cannot because the exile marks my body. The movements - and traveling I am capable of - never take me back to Cuba in the physical sense. I get sad because my family is away and I have to restructure my communities around identity politics. There are moments in which your own blood could comfort your journey and where the wise advice of your mother is needed to continue the fight.

## **AUTOBIOGRAPHY**

**JT:** The Critical Autobiographies by Queer Media Artist from the African Diaspora - sounds like a book. It would be interesting to begin to understand each person’s entry into the world of media, and then make some critical connections between them.

**RFB:** The critical autobiography is an issue that must be examined in a large context. All of us have produced work from our experiences. I think that we are markers and makers of history and our bodies represent a map that is in a constant dialogue. Like the African American slave narratives, we have turned the autobiography into a weapon to de-colonize ourselves. I think that the economic means of production have obligated us to do autobiographical works also.

**DS:** I find traveling inward to be a very important part of the decolonization process. It has been a formidable struggle for me to trust my instincts and sensibilities, which counter the Hollywood standards within a film school, which increasingly depends upon and gains viability within the Hollywood system. While the political and social climate had changed tremendously since the time of the "L.A. rebellion" of the seventies within UCLA's film school, the legacy was largely initiated through the works and efforts of many Black filmmakers including: Billy Woodberry, Zeinabu Irene Davis, Julie Dash, Charles Brunett, Haile Gerima, Carol Parrot Blue, Sharon Alile Larkin, Barbara McCullough, O. Funmilayo Makarah, Larry Clark and many others.

I see third cinema as cinema, which goes a step further than conventionally depicting the conditions of our existence. It proposes alternative ways of seeing things, and aggressively counters the hegemony of dominant cultures.

**YW:** African Americans have always been interested in in testifying and telling it like it is. I just wrote a paper on black lesbian film and video artists. My survey included 21 artists and 68 short films, videos, and interactive computer media. I found out that virtually all of the artists had done some work in which they included themselves. I feel that this act closely parallels the choices African Americans made when they began to write slave narrative in the 18th Century. It was so

important for our ancestors to make themselves present in a world in which they were not considered human. It is still important. Ours is a political act of self-affirmation. We choose to make ourselves subject in a world which has always considered us an object, another - rendering our once invisible selves, visible.

**TAH:** The late twentieth century post-colonial autobiographical film/video works should be read not only in terms of content but also in terms of form -- the narrative structure, the gaps, the language, repetition and rhythm -- all of which are imbued with an awareness of the risk as well as the empowerment involved in using this type of articulation. Such a reading is critical to the understanding of the new and emerging languages that we are creating within the medium of film and video.

Personally, I employ autobiography within my work to critically engage questions of ethnicity, the body, sexuality and location. Situating myself within an African American literary tradition of autobiography, I employ autobiographical strategies as a way to further explore post-colonial subjectivity and the construction of diasporic identities. Constructing self through various sites including family, history, nation states and the psychic realms of fantasy, places such work within the Teshome Gabrial, author of *Third Cinema in the Third World*, refers to as an expression of a nomadic aesthetic -- which he defines as one which "smashes down boundaries between documentary, ethnographic, travelogue, experimental and narrative fiction."

The act of self-construction is an autobiographical act. It is a place of comfort and a source of power. It is a personal, political and liberatory action. I am speaking about an autobiography that continues to push beyond the boundaries of disclosure and self-explanation on the level of content. And there are risks. For example, history shows us that Zora Neal

Hurston's autobiography *Dust Tracks on a Road* was sharply criticized for not disclosing enough of the particularities of her life. However, Hurston wanted to use her text to create or construct an intellectual self with controversial views on the national and international contemporary issues -- a space which was not allowed her, a black woman folklorist, in the 1920s, 30s, and 40s. In fact, whole chapters of the book were censored by her editor and publisher.

And one sees this type of censorship occurring on a global scale. For instance, I recently showed my work in Brazil at the Festival del Art Negra and I was overwhelmed by the warm reception by Brazilian (mostly straight) audiences. After seeing *VINTAGE* and asking me questions, they shared with me their own stories of their families and life in Brazil. One Afro-Brazilian woman Mali spoke candidly about being a recovered alcoholic. She showed me pictures of her family and friends as she celebrated the 300 year anniversary of Zumbi. Mali and others told me that despite the strong Afro-Brazilian cultural presence, the overwhelming majority of darker skinned people live in extreme poverty, without political representation and locked out of possibilities for economic advancement. Prior to coming to Brazil, I was not privy to such stories although I was vaguely aware of the incredible richness of the living Afro-Brazilian culture. I asked them why it was that one only sees fair skinned Brazilians abroad and I was told that for a long time it had been a practice to deny passports to Afro-Brazilians.

Time and again, people told me that the abolition of slavery was on paper only; the psychosocial and economic remnants of slavery remain, buttressed and maintained through the control of representation, communication and voice within the Afro-Brazilian communities. For me autobiography opens up a space to allow different communities to compassionately speak to ourselves and to each other.



### **Production Values**

**YW:** There is an urgency to create work. Sometimes that urgency takes precedence leaving the production values of early black gay and lesbian work lacking. For the most part we are a young movement. Most of us have been producing works for one to five years. We need time to learn about our craft and about ourselves as artists. We need time to grow. And I have found that as we grow the production values of our work improves.

**CL:** The queer activists video coalitions that produced work in the late 80s/early 90s (Diva TV, Testing the Limits, etc.) encouraged people to pick up a camera (with or without prior experience) and to represent themselves and their communities. Spontaneously picking up a camera was a political act, an intervention to counter mainstream media representation. The values of this work can be seen in the tapes made about ACT UP. Low production values or no production values were the norm; a kind of 'shaky-cam' activist visual aesthetic developed. A similar spontaneous shooting strategy is still being employed by many people, including queer African Diaspora makers, BUT as artists we should also think in terms of exploiting the properties of the medium.

**DS:** Generally, production values for a film or video, refers to a film's slickness and seamlessness -- its professional gloss. I'm interested in considering a film's aesthetic value based on its use of film language in a broad creative and artistic sense. Many black queer works have been made under severe technical restraints and limitations; nevertheless may achieve a lyricism and poignancy that films with "high production quality" in a traditional sense may not.

**RFB:** "The camera is my weapon and style is the immediate response to an aggression."

Production values are a hard topic among us. Let's face it. How many of us has gotten enough money to produce what we want or need? I produced because I have a network of friends who are constantly helping me to produce the work, and because I teach to get access to post production - not the best, but it helps. The grants I have gotten have been very small.

Technology is an issue since a lot of us don't have the time, the money, and the space to be trained in new technologies.

**TAH:** In my previous life, I produced documentaries and public affairs programs for public television. I think that experience informed the way I think about image production. Although I shoot on hi-8mm and 8mm video and Super 8 mm film, I find ways to on-line on beta, which is still much cheaper than film. I keep cost down by shooting myself and collaborating with other artists, friends as well as seeking out artist residencies that offer access to equipment and support such as the Banff Center for the Arts in Canada or the Experimental Television Center in Oswego, New York. I have chosen to take a position as an Assistant Professor to have time and equipment to produce my work. Economically, the production of work is still a difficult and challenging proposition.

**JT:** I've always thought that as it gets harder and harder to get money to make projects more folks will choose to work collectively as a means to make work. I have a personal objective or mission if you will. I would go as far as calling it an artistic vision. That vision is located in a desire to address the collective group. Actually, it's a desire to fill a lack expressed by the collective. Though I separate myself out as an "artist", I belong to the collective as well. Making media towards a collective desire is like placing salve on a wound. Artists have the skill to heal

very deep pain. The stuff of being an artist is also about embarking on a critical path for the sake of collective discussion and analyses.

Grassroots is the key word here. I've always stayed with a certain framework of immediacy, quickly piecing together inexpensive alternative resources, using minimal technology, background and equipment. I've just started paying the people who work with me because I appreciate getting paid for working on other people's stuff myself. My production values have gotten increasingly better, aided by grants I've received in recent years.

### **Narrative Strategies**

**JT:** We have, I believe, become disgruntled with well-known studied conventions of media making and understanding. Constant exposure to mediocre modes of storytelling (after all for the most part they are not our stories) have encouraged us to stretch the narrative to encompass both our story and our creativity. One question; have we been afforded the opportunity to employ fantasy in our work? I've found that when I choose to conflate fantasy and desire, I get to the question of audience. Who is it? Non-folks of color so readily identify with the story of "identity", but when that identity is assumed and not coded as a marker within the work, white folks want to ask me I have an all black cast. They might even tell me they feel like they're

“intruding” because I dare to show my fantasy to them rather than cloak it in a discussion of identity politics. They must “see” me. I’m tired of looking at them all the time.

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## **ON EDITING**

**CL:** I've been profoundly influenced by Arthur Jafa's essay in *Black Popular Culture* (p 253-54, 265-66), in which he uses the term "Black Visual Intonation." He analyses the rhythms, notes, and tones of Black music and discussed the possibilities of translating these into moving images. He says, "...the visual equivalences of vibrato, rhythmic patterns, slurred or bent notes, and other musical effects are possible in film. You could do mamba beats, reggae beats, all kind of things" I think that a subconscious element of this might already be present in some of our works, i.e. editing in relation to the use of slow motion or fast motion, fades to black and various other effects. I'm also wondering about text. a common strategy among many queer African Diaspora makers (including myself) is the use of text, both titles and as voice over. What is this about? Is

this the “video art” portion of our production? Is this a reference to a certain oral or literary tradition? Is this as effective in a visual medium as it seems conceptually?

**RFB:** I work from a fragmented traveling space. Rupture is the site from where the creative juices come from. It is there on that space where I see the cultural connection-taking place. I don’t believe in linearity. Sometimes I need to break the event and spread it across the narrative. As the film viewing takes place the audience begins to pierce the narrative. For me, this is a way to avoid ideological manipulation as I allow the audience to construct its own reading.

Every piece has its own rhythm, I could feel, but it is not until I am in the editing room that I can actually accentuate the editing rhythm. In a way it is a formalist approach that allows me to create new patterns or recreate some traditional patterns within my Diasporas.

**JT:** It’s hard to describe my visual sensibilities and how it translates to tape in the editing room. I am experimenting more with camera movement because I’ve become dissatisfied with many of the static shots I tend to shoot. I end up having to supplement my camera work with my editing. *Frankie and Jocie* and *24 Hours a Day* are edited very evenly, while *Bodily Functions* changes pace constantly moving from incredibly quick cuts to slow more melodic edits. I can see the effects of watching TV when music videos became a big thing. I have borrowed some MTV conventions of rhythms and camera angles. The way I edit to music is also influenced by music television.

**TAH:** The work of the late Marlon Riggs, Camille Billops, Martina Atille and Isaac Julien had a profound impact on opening up the way I think about narrative, and the new cinematic/video language that we all are engaging. In looking at our various work as a whole, one can get a definite sense of a common language in the approach to the editing strategy, the use of the body,

the relationship to family & home, as well as the importance of rhythm. Fantasy, pleasure, memory, and desire. This is not to say that our works are the same or even similar but instead that we are defining new languages with which we have been dialoguing.

Our respective work constantly reflects, responds, and calls into question the notion of the real and our investment in this “reality.” This is done through the poetics of the editing strategy (which also happens to disrupt linearity). Perhaps these poetics could be described as a marriage between a TV remote control and a drum. The poetics articulate a spiritual quest that can be read both within and apart from the spoken word. The image and the text articulate distinct narratives. Yet to comprehend the full narrative one must constantly follow the dance between the poetics of the word and that of the image -- separate, distinct yet wedded together isn’t meaning.

In all of our works one sees the evolution of the author over time. In any one of the works, one glimpses the past while in the present or the future while in the past, constantly playing, slipping between time and space, not fixed but always in process. In this way our narrative strategies destabilize hegemonic concepts of existence and identity and opens new avenues in pursuit of liberation, pleasure and meaning.

**DS:** I see the production phase as the birth of a work, and editing phase as the rearing of the child. Contrary to popular belief, I think that it is possible to revive a so-called dead horse in the editing process. I often regard the editing phase as a process of recreation; of course this depends on the intention of the work, and the availability of time and other resources.

**YW:** I almost always edit to music. Sometimes the music has nothing to do with the piece but creates a movement, a rhythm to which I cut. One example was with *Missing Relations*. It was



important that I find a song. I ended up using a song from the soundtrack of *Bagdad Cafe* called “C-Major Prelude from the Well Tempered Clavier.” It was the classical piece that the son of the cafe owner played in the film.

## **ON AUDIENCE**

**CL:** Although it’s easier for audiences to identify the works that might be of interest, do some of these “people of color” programs in queer festivals marginalize us? (Sometimes it sure feels like the margins.) An affirmation and validation of our identities is possible, but are we preaching to the already converted? Sometimes I’m not only speaking to people from the African Diaspora; it’s those other people that need to hear what I have to say. I am thinking less about **integration** and more about **infiltration**.

Conversely my work has been included in some brilliant programs featuring makers from the African Diaspora (like the BNQN screening, and the tribute to Marlon Rigg’s program in Montreal). And the rare opportunity to sit in a room full of queer colored people is thrilling; these gatherings also function as a major social event. But on some days, I feel like I might have more in common with a few white experimental filmmakers than with the more generalized “makers of color” or even with certain other filmmakers from the African Diaspora. I’m referring to common experimental aesthetic choices, and a similarity in ideas about representation of (transgressive) queer sexuality. To contradict myself even further, I am now seeking a straight audience from the African Diaspora to view my newest short video (it’s about revolution/The Black Panthers/homosexuality/revision of history, etc.)

**RFB:** Growing up in Cuba I learned that the only way I could help my communities was making sure of my personal needs and the needs of the communities, balancing them out. I am always in relation with my communities - The Latino, African, Arab, Arab-African, Caribbean's, Cubans, Queers of Color, and Queer Media Artists of Color. Shifting personal and collective identities is about mapping my Diasporic selves. I am a cultural warrior, an individual who is protected by the Orishas to keep the traditions and to transform those traditions in new expressions. My work is about social transformation, about helping the audience to create their own test and their own decolonization process.