

the village

# VOICE

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BARBARA ROSENTHAL

Young and restless: Barbara Rosenthal's January 10, 1986, Savannah, GA

M A N O H L A D A R G I S

CounterCurrents

## Change of Direction

N E W Y O R K

**J**uly: petulant heat, beached rats, Bruce Willis. If adequate arts funding existed, perhaps the Collective, the Kitchen, and Millennium could program for at least part of the summer.

One of the few experimental screenings that did take place was at the Gas Station, an outdoor performance space at Second Street and Avenue B where a towering scrap metal fence cordons off the art scene from the street scene. The Film World of Big Yank presented a number of Super-8 films, including old beauty-pagant footage projected onto white balloons (*Booty Pigeant!*) and condensed, subtitled versions of '50s and '60s science-fiction flicks with found soundtracks. Also shown was Big Yank and Azalia Snail's visually raw and lysergic *Inside Her Mind*, with music that swerves between industrial noise and oddly delicate refrains.

One place to get a summer fix is under the peaked roof of the Downtown Community Television Center, an ex-fire station cum video center with a year-round Tuesday evening video program—for the bargain price of just a buck. One recent program included two Barbara Rosenthal short videotapes, *A Boy and His Father Butcher a Deer* and *Jan. 10, 1986, Savannah, GA*. Rosenthal's work is incessantly personal, even naked, with an emphasis on language realized through stories, puns, songs, names, and confessions in her tapes. Over the image of the title in the 30-second *A Boy and His Father*, Rosenthal reinvents remorse as elegy. She describes how, while fixing her VW bus years earlier, she missed the opportunity to film the butchering going on in an adjacent garage: "I had video equipment with me and should have set it up."

In the sentient, artless *Savannah, GA*, Rosenthal's point-of-view is fixed. She rides shotgun in a car and, from this position, moves the camera restlessly across the confines of the auto for 10 minutes of uninterrupted real time—over the rain-streaked windows, a rearview mirror, the dash, the driver's feet. She foregrounds the camera and the act of filming: The lens becomes visible during refocusing, pages of a notebook are awkwardly turned and flattened with her one free hand. Ubiquitous pop music, sports bulletins, the sounds of children playing, the admonishments of a father ("Do you see Mommy is busy?") fill the air. Occasionally, during the wanderings, a partially obscured newspaper with a photo is glimpsed on the floor of the car. Suddenly, the camera finds its story: The hand reaches down to pull the paper close into view. That very morning, while this family traveled through the state, Georgia executed a man for murders committed when he was 17. After a few moments, the paper is set down, the camera looks up and out the window, then down again at the paper, then abruptly turns to a new landscape, the back seat where Rosenthal's two young daughters are playing. It lingers, luxuriating in their presence; the girls smile. The older girl explains, "She's taking a picture of me."

*Women in the Camps* and *Leah Gluck: Victim of the Twins Experiments*, Rosenthal's formally rigorous video testimonies from concentration camp survivors, are part of a superb exhibition entitled "Time and Memory: Video Art and Identity," at the Jewish Museum through September 1. There is something significant about sitting in the museum's plush viewing room, surrounded by elderly women and men, and watching Nam June Paik and Shigeko Kubota's funny, poignant *Allan 'n' Allen's Complaint*, in which Allan Kaprow takes a stroll on the Sea of Galilee, and Allen Ginsberg relates how he first told his father about his "homosexual tendencies."

"You mean you like to take men's penises in your mouth?" Ginsberg's father asks him.

"No," Allen replies, then says confidently, "I lied." ■