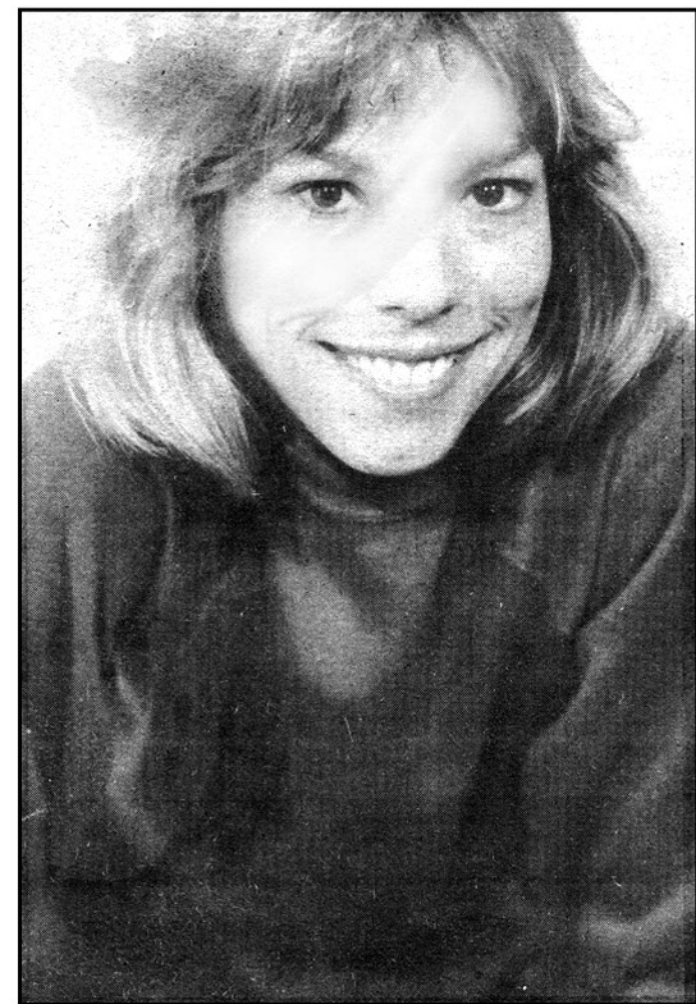
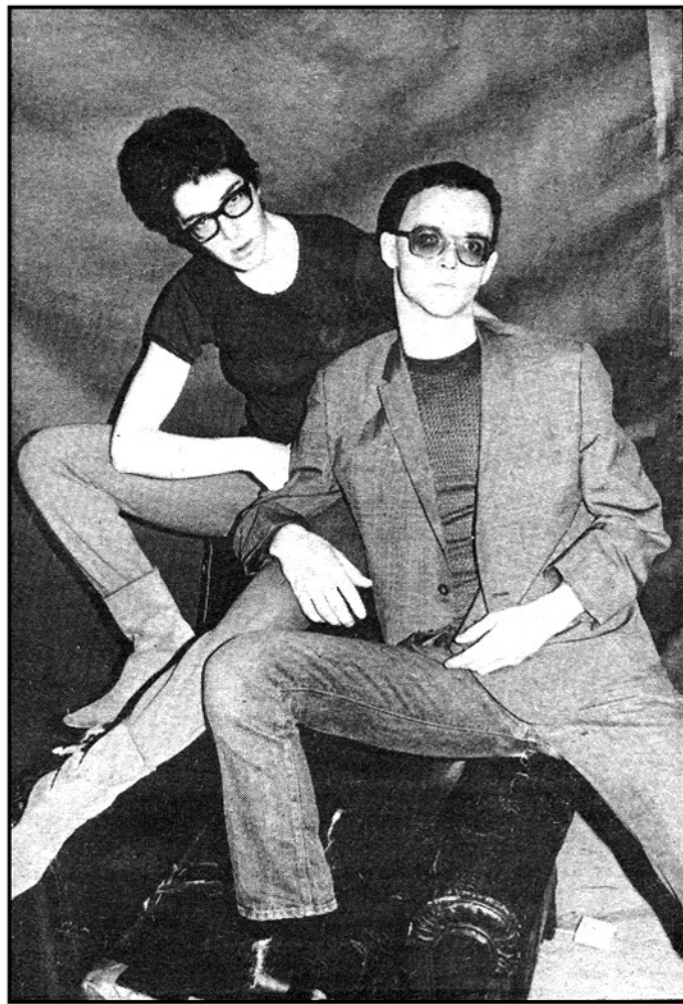


the village VOICE

Behind the Super-8 Ball: A History of Home Made Movies



JOHN COPLANS



MARCIA RESNICK

By Carrie Rickey



Antinarratives are practically a synthesis of the varieties of 8mm experience. The best I've seen are by Erica Beckman, Manuel de Landa, and Scott and Beth B. Beckman has a New Musician's ear for tempo and a New Yorker's ear for composition, as if she were grafting Fernand Leger's *Ballet Mecanique* onto Philip Glass's repetitive cadences. *We Imitate, We Break Up* (1978), and *The Broken Rule* (1979) have a game-show competitive edge to them (in the former, Beckman herself, a cross be-

tween Debbie Harry and Joni Mitchell, "competes" with a puppet, aping its gestures; in the latter, two teams run-relay races). Although her movies have stories, Beckman discloses them in disjunctive, anxiety-ridden sequences, using fleeting images subliminally, as advertisements do.

The Bs—Scott and Beth—are attracted to chiaroscuro politics and images; their movies star authoritarian characters from the victim's point of view. Like Beckman, they get to the core of their subject not by characterization, but via menacing images. *Letters to Dad* (1979) is typical of the subject matter of a B movie: individual actors, dramatically framed, reading letters written to Jim Jones by his acolytes.

The meteor of antinarrators, a filmmaker whose 16mm work I'd seen and admired but whose Super-8 was unknown to me, is Manuel de Landa, maker of *Ismism* (1977-79) and *Harmful or Fatal If Swallowed* (1975-80), the two most powerful examples of the style. His urban interventions—the former a document of his graffiti activities in Manhattan, the latter the result of his using a camera to harass people on the street—are shocking, aggressive, and explosively paced. De Landa

proves that whoever's behind the camera is in charge; who controls technology controls all. *Ismism*, a movie documenting De Landa's disfigurements of Camel cigarette billboards, and in process sending up all advertising, is like looking at Che Guevara politicizing a Willem de Kooning collage. No one working in larger formats has De Landa's manic energy, his jumpcutting frenzy: De Landa's movies are the *Mean Streets* Martin Scorsese would make if he had a social conscience as well as an aesthetic one.

The irony of 8mm and Super-8 production is that the kind of film that is easiest to use is hardest to distribute. But many of the younger practitioners are out to change that, seeking new venues for their movies. Scott and Beth B's 8mm serial *G Men* appeared in installments, like a 19th century newspaper novel by Dickens or Thackeray, at Max's Kansas City, underscoring the immediacy and antipreciousity of the Super-8—that it's as quick and direct as journalism. Its speed and lack of pretension notwithstanding, though, the Super-8 format can be overwhelming. Minuments, *Home Made Movies* proves, are as enduring as monuments. ■