Those who attempt to establish a cultural mythology that is different from the Western patriarchal view of the world comprise the social 'other.' Women, minorities, gays, and sometimes even artists, often raise issues that the dominant culture has suppressed in order to survive intact. Women do perceive the world differently than men, yet these differences can be subtle and so pervasive in the texture of our lives that they are difficult to isolate. Nevertheless, there are numerous topics—the domestic cultural domain, media representations of women, and the struggle of women to change well-entrenched, discriminatory social values—that are deeply important to women artists, topics which are threatening and hence ignored by their male counterparts.

To define videotapes by women, or by feminist women, as comprising a specific isolated genre risks a reduction of the work and a denial of its diversity. For an art medium that developed during the "sexually liberated" yet deceptively sexist '60s, video art contains an impressive number of female voices. While the medium also sports its quota of "old boys' clubs," these are balanced by highly visible women curators, administrators, and well-established women artists. Two recent shows of video art attempted to define issues of feminist video. While neither succeeded absolutely in its definition, both shows attempted to the presence of strong feminist video tapes and revealed the variety of issues being dealt with by women artists. The first, "Revising Romance: New Feminist Video," was a traveling exhibition organized by the American Federation of Arts (AFA). It was curated by Linda Podhesser, assistant professor at Emerson College, and Bob Riley, video curator at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston. The second, "Difference: On Representation and Sexuality," was at the New Museum of Contemporary Art, and included a film and video program curated by film critic Jane Weinstock. Although their intents were different, both shows were predicated on the premise that there is a particular feminist aesthetic, or message. The New Museum exhibition explored the question of sexual difference and emphasized psychoanalytical approaches to discussing art. The AFA show broached the issue of romance—a subject associated, of course, primarily with women—and ads, in effect, "What are the psychological, political, and aesthetic consequences of popular ideals of eternal passion and transcendent love?" These video tapes analyze stereotypical sexual roles and address the use of romance in popular culture to exploit women's dissatisfaction with themselves and their bodies, but they also tend to parody romance rather than propose any alternative to this brand of consumer culture. Perhaps these video tapes represent the first stage of a revisionist perspective: identify the structure of the opposition's hierarchy and the inherent vocabulary of his language, then attempt to redefine this vocabulary.

"Revising Romance" is an admirable attempt to isolate one topic within a panoply of issues relevant to women working with the narrative form. It is also a risky attempt to construct a specific premise out of a broad tapestry. The work is divided into four parts: "Domestic Drama," "Revisionist Romance," "The Double Bind," and "Video Picaresque.

"Domestic Drama" is comprised of three tapes that explore the reality of housework in juxtaposition with the domestic ideals presented in daytime television soap operas and advertisements. The housewife, the quintessential victim of the consumer culture, provides these artists with ample fodder for examining the consequences of confining women to the cultural domain of the home. In Deana Sargent Wooster's Soaps, Koppel sits in uncomfortable close range before the camera that assumes the place of her television. Sniffing and blowing her nose, she bemoans a failed romance while dialogue from soap operas is intercut with her attempts to perform domestic duties, such as cleaning the bathroom and mending a pair of pants. The parasitic effectively portrayed by Koppel is offset by her humor: comic interplays between her inner voice and the dialogue of the soap, and her deliberate overdramatization. However, the first, "Revisionist Romance" more like a personal catharsis than a commentary on romance. Ann Sargent Wooster's House, shot in an equally claustrophobic style, also uses the audio tracks of soaps and game shows as a backdrop for a view of housework. Wooster combines spoken words on the sociology and mythology of housewives and the domestic domain, ranging in tone from the angry to the poetic, with scenes of a pair of hands roughly performing household tasks—feeding a babylot, washing dishes, cutting vegetables, arranging things—on make-believe props to actual settings. While the logic of Wooster's shift from make-believe props to actual settings is unclear to me, and her visual metaphors often seem too obvious, her interweaving of feminist commentary and fragmented visuals can be persuasive.

Barbara Broughel goes beyond the rather straightforward style of Koppel and Wooster in Lesson 1: Trouble in Paradise to create a disjointed, unusual narrative. This tape is so laden with references to daytime commercials that it creates an eerie kind of afterword. Everything resembles an advertisement: shirts talk back to a housewife whose husband goes to work in his underwear; stairs constantly reappear on the carpet after they have been cleaned; and coffee boils over as the housewife (predictably defeated by her appliances in the end) is beset by salesmen. Broughel calls these crises in the tape the "external disruptions issued by a world of men and commerce" and pushes her style even further with a soundtrack that is either out-of-sync or backwards, and a loose, hand-held camera style. (The tape was originally shot in super-8, giving it a very grainy, fuzzy look.) Unfortunately this style gets increasingly irritating as the tape progresses, undermining the intelligent and original images Broughel constructs. While her assaults on classic narrative style and male economic dominance are admirable, her style is counter-productive.
possibility andromance also gives rise to a new kind of romanticism: a new kind of romanticism which has a new kind of romanticism... 

Possibly in Michigan there are two features which are common to both women: they both have two things in common—violence and fortune. The tape begins in a shopping mall, where the two women try on perfumes and are pursued by a man who alternately bears the head of a wolf, rabbit, or frog. When he pursues one of them, they band together and kill him, eventually making him their evening meat. Condition's imagery is vivid and unusual. The two women dance with a series of men with animals heads in a nightmare fashion party scene. References to childhood fairy tales abound, and superimpositions of characters allude to the relationship between sex and death and the roles of victim and perpetrator. Her heroines are hardly role models; they are mixtures of vapidness and eroticism (they eat their prey while naked). Condition never really lets us see either sex as either the victim or the oppressor. Her men are violent, but the women, who "have a habit of making violence seem like the man's idea," are, too. The do-untos - them as they did-untos under conditions of the tape is only mockingly angry. As the soundtrack chant of "life is hard that feeds me" combines with images of falling buildings and fleeing figures, one senses both chaos and confusion, an ugly, unlament, realization that this male-female interaction is doomed. There is a subtle and creepy sense of despair in this tape.

The other work categorized by Podheiser as a double bind is Mother, a stylized film noir detective story by John Knop and Shap poured. The tape is a very smooth, realistic acted drama, beautifully framed in black and white, about a woman who kills her unhurtful husband one night in rage and buries him in the garden. As the story unfolds, she becomes romantically involved with a chauvinist police detective who catches on fairly fast that she has something to hide. Ultimately, he uses his knowledge to blackmail her into submission; she has replaced one cruel tyrant for another. Podheiser describes Mother as distinct from the traditions of

sings 'I've got to shake my wonder maker' in breathy, seductive tones, and the real source of wonder—and power—is obvious. Judith Barry's Casual Shopper is in the vein of the "Revising Romance" narratives. She follows a pair of prospective lovers through a shopping mall as they pose like dolls, singing "I've got to shake my wonder maker" in a breathy, seductive voice. The tape is divided into four allegorical scenes of modern romance. In one scene, we see "Modern Marriage," a female voice describing her man in a plethora of adjectives from good to bad. "Modern Romance," immediately after, "Modern Communication," self-centered and one-sided, and finally "Modern Sexuality," in which a woman's voice says, "I know exactly what I want," as we view parts of a male body. Alexyma succeeds in reversing expected sexual roles, yet she risks replacing the male power figure with a bitchy female stereotype, represented in many of her tapes by a woman's mouth (inserted by digital manipulation) that commands the action. The complexity of male/female power struggles that she constructs by refusing to present simplistic female images is not unlike that in Condit's work, whose Possible Feminist Theory is characterized by its refusal to establish positive-female/negative-male stereotypes and thus to gain by looking to Lacanian film theory for such "discovery." Weinstock asks us to restructure entrenched ideas about sexual difference. Why do we know that Cha's sensual and suggestive Paysage, Paysage is a three-channel, black and white piece that alludes to European culture and its institutions, has not yet been absorbed into the academic circles where it belongs, and more enigmatic before the camera. Other works included in this exhibition span a broad range of topics, defined by Weinstock as "about women who ...." The key issue of the influence of gender in social texts lies, however, not in media representations of sexual roles or in defining the structure of certain art forms in sexual terms, but in exploring the formation of a sexual identity. The one work presented in this show that begins to unravel the issue is Jean-Luc Godard's France Tour/Deux/Enfants, a series of 12-hour tapes which were made for French television. Godard has been dealing with issues of origin, power, language, and sexuality for a long time, and he feels the strength of many years of thought in these tapes, which continue issues of female identity and ideology from his film Three Women. Two or Three Times has a reading program begins with an image which seems to sum up wonderfully and definitively with the male-camera/female-subject dichotomy. It is a montage of a large television camera and holding the sound microphone. Just as the title of this film, "Three Women," is your ass"; a naked pregnant woman works in an office while a voice explains how our society isolates women for reproductive labor, a pop song with the refrain "ton style est ton cut," or, "your style is your cut." Women jog around a running track while the soundtrack plays a pop song with the refrain "ton style est ton cut," or, "your style is your cut." It results, instead, from the fact that video art has not yet been absorbed into the academic circles where it belongs, and more enigmatic before the camera. Other works included in this exhibition span a broad range of topics, defined by Weinstock as "about women who ...." The key issue of the influence of gender in social texts lies, however, not in media representations of sexual roles or in defining the structure of certain art forms in sexual terms, but in exploring the formation of a sexual identity. The one work presented in this show that begins to unravel the issue is Jean-Luc Godard's France Tour/Deux/Enfants, a series of 12-hour tapes which were made for French television. Godard has been dealing with issues of origin, power, language, and sexuality for a long time, and he feels the strength of many years of thought in these tapes, which continue issues of female identity and ideology from his film Three Women. Two or Three Times has a reading program begins with an image which seems to sum up wonderfully and definitively with the male-camera/female-subject dichotomy. It is a montage of a large television camera and holding the sound microphone. Just as the title of this film, "Three Women," is your ass"; a naked pregnant woman works in an office while a voice explains how our society isolates women for reproductive labor, a pop song with the refrain "ton style est ton cut," or, "your style is your cut." Women jog around a running track while the soundtrack plays a pop song with the refrain "ton style est ton cut," or, "your style is your cut." It results, instead, from the fact that video art has not yet been absorbed into the academic circles where it belongs, and more enigmatic before the camera.


NOTES
3. Ibid., p. 41.
4. Ibid., p. 41.
5. In fact not interested here in contributing to the current use or misuse of the concepts of sexual difference and sexual identity as a basis for any political statement. Postmodern feminism is a movement toward the articulation of a pluralistic approach and an effort to move away from an artificial construction of genres and subgenres as a means of facilitating mainstream acceptance of the female film. In his essay "The Discourse of Others: Feminism and Postmodernism," Craig Owens puts forth the intriguing premise that feminism runs parallel to postmodern theory. While he contends that most postmodern theory has tended "either to neglect or to repress" the "inconstant feminine voice," Owens advances the argument that "women's insistence on difference and incommensurability may not only be compatible with, but also an insistance of postmodern thought."

Like Owens, he credits feminism as being a force in "breaking the hold of modernism." The fall of modernism and recent upheavals of art theory have taken place simultaneously with the emergence of video as an art form, with less of the excess baggage of well-embodied, male-dominated theories and entrenched male hierarchies. This is part, if not why many women artists, such as the male-camerawomen, don't translate well into the medium, and even the (exclusively electronic) issue of survival of the smallish is much in the vogue these days, seems more medial than sexually oriented. Video by its very nature questions the symbolic order of television. In the art world, it has always been a part of the "other," a strange presence in its very existence, asks us to restructure entrenched ideas about what art is.