



Frames from *5dim/MIND*, by Ken Feingold.

Cuts and sketches

5dim/MIND
by Ken Feingold

Business at Pete's Store
produced and directed by the Theater Project
at the Kitchen, New York City,
October 1-31, 1983.

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MUCH RECENT experimental video has been concerned with using, or rather finding ways of using spoken language and written texts without resorting to traditional lulling narratives or conversely to polemics that preach to audiences. This seemingly simple project of linking visual and verbal components is in fact quite difficult, and the majority of these tapes employ language to editorialize or to point instead of as expressive elements on a par with visual images. The result is video that is often awkward, sometimes dull, and frequently only illustrative. But even more important than the awkwardness of this kind of video is its failure to reach a wider or at least more diverse audience with its didactic intentions.

Ken Feingold's *5dim/MIND* offers a refreshing solution to this knotty problem by treating moving pictures discursively—like written or spoken language—but without using words. The tape has sparse textual overlays—a few running subtitles and soundtracks that are part of his found material. *5dim/MIND* is primarily a visual montage of broadcast television, original video, and some Super 8 film footage depicting volcanoes, waterfalls, bits from Hollywood movies, streets in India, nuclear missiles, a robot solving a Rubik cube, and so on. These discrete segments are juxtaposed in ways that make unusual, provocative connections: a volcanic eruption shifts to shots of goldfish swimming; a baby-faced punk from MTV is displaced by the scared/innocent face of an Indian child running alongside a cart; a railroad car full of missiles cuts to a Hollywood movie titled *Male/Female*. Feingold's purpose here is neither formal play, spoof, nor

kitsch. He manipulates this variegated material with profound seriousness in an attempt to show social and political contradictions at their most extreme. The content implied by this surfaces because Feingold has chosen sufficiently jarring images and ones that are relatively unique. *5dim/MIND* isn't filled only with found footage from network television or commercial films but instead with a personal image collection which reflects a point of view.

Having said this, my major complaint about *5dim/MIND* is that it's unclear *exactly* what Feingold is trying to do in this tape and, perhaps more importantly in this case, just who he is hoping to reach. There is obvious political content in *5dim/MIND*: dealing with current issues—militarization, "first world" domination, sexism, overpopulation, etc.—as well as the subtler politics of perception—how we shape meaning by the ways in which we see and are taught to see. Given this kind of content, the issue of audience becomes, I think, one as crucial as questions about the tape's structure. Experimental videomakers who clearly intend to explore politics and explicit political content can't afford to direct their work exclusively to avant-garde audiences, or simply locate audiences haphazardly. This particular tape loses its power as provocation/propaganda and foregrounds the already existing group consensus on certain political perspective at the expense of asking serious questions about the implications of the material Feingold has incorporated. In Feingold's case, the contradiction between the content of *5dim/MIND* and the audience which frequents the Kitchen's viewing room is especially troubl-

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ing. At the same time there seem to be few easy solutions, but it is imperative that videomakers working in this mode attend to this problem.

As political critique, the strongest thing *5dim/MIND* offers is its fragmentary vision of profoundly disturbing and globally interconnected scenes from life. Given Feingold's style and treatment, *5dim/MIND* is disappointing in one respect: it seems to lack a dynamic pace even though the tape is meticulously constructed. Perhaps more abrupt rhythmic changes which either jar or coincide with the image/meaning structure of the tape would have strengthened his essayistic imagism. Some of the panning shots of Indian scenes and views of spectacular waterfalls and crashing waves do mobilize movement, but the whole work could have been more forcefully choreographed. Furthermore, since Feingold combines such disparate imagery his inattention to kinetic structure is especially disappointing. The absence of a coherent pace renders the passage of time in *5dim/MIND* simply a sequence of images falling into one another, neglecting the function of time as history—a factor which is at least implied in Feingold's chosen material.

Business at Pete's Store, shown along with *5dim/MIND* at the Kitchen, is the product of a collaboration between videographer Traci Sampson and the Theater Project, a performing ensemble of artists with developmental disabilities. It's a sensitive videotape that deserves notice for its ambitions rather than for what is achieved in the tape alone.

The main characters in the tape are an internationally-known country and western star, a washed-up baseball player, and an

aspiring, but jobless classical singer who meet at Pete's Store, a candy store in Queens which is also a front for the proprietor's loansharking exploits. All the characters in *Pete's Store* were developed individually, and, between scenes from the play, videographer Sampson interviews each member of the cast about his or her participation, how the characters evolved, and how they became involved in the Theater Project.

The Theater Project was originally organized by Joanne Gere, who began working with clients at a large New York City mental health agency in 1980. Eventually Gere engaged about 100 disabled adults in writing scripts and improvising roles. Funds for the project were cut in 1982, but some members decided to continue despite the withdrawal of institutional support. *Pete's Store* is the outcome of the Theater Project's first experiments in creating dialogues between characters, and as the group's initial video project, the tape is in many ways a success, especially since it is also their first collective collaboration.

The tape's format—part educational (about the Theater Project) and part entertainment—doesn't work particularly well, however, because both types of content are insufficiently developed. We aren't given enough of the original play to take it seriously as drama, and we aren't given enough information about the actors either. In short, *Pete's Store* seems too sketchy and incomplete. The basic premise of the Theater Project is promising, though. Given this first attempt, I'm convinced that this endeavor and others like it should be encouraged and extended.