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SKOWHEGAN SCHOOL
OF PAINTING & SCULPTURE
Skowhegan, Maine

Transcript of lecture: Shirin Neshat
Summer, 2001

Transcriber: Judith Stoodley

Introduction: (background conversations off-mike) Hello, hello. Shall we start? I'm of course delighted to be introducing Shirin tonight… (laughs) and I just want to say a few words of introduction. She was born in a small religious city in northeast Iran… came to LA in 1974 for high school… and then went to college and graduate school at Berkeley, in California…moved to New York and co-directed the Art and Architecture, an important non-profit space that many of us remember in lower Manhattan; it's just a few blocks from my studio… and… a wonderful place. In 1997 both of us were in the Istanbul Biennale; and… it was a show that was spread across the city of Istanbul, and we both happened to placed in the same location, which was an incredible Byzantine church on the grounds of the Topkapi Palace. So… to see her work there, in Turkey, in that context, was… of course particularly wonderful, and also disturbing… and… something that I took particular note of, and, of course, as did a lot of other people. In 1998 I… She had a show at the Whitney Philip Morris… of a black and white film piece called "Turbulent;" and… I was teaching a graduate seminar at the time, and had a long list of shows—We had one day where we were going to go see shows in New York—I mean, we were *in* New York, but we were going to go see the shows as—as we all do, make this list of thirty shows and… ambitiously start off the day. And we began at the Whitney Philip Morris, and we were just so blown away… we stayed for over an hour; and then moved from there to a coffee shop… and sat around and talked about this piece… and… kind of the rest of the day kind (laughs) of

dwindled off and we never made it to that other list of galleries that seemed so important beforehand. It was a… particularly courageous, powerful… formally really beautifully—gorgeous, in fact—piece; and… as I noticed it, and the grad students noticed it—and again a lot of other people noticed it-- and… in 1999 she was awarded a Golden Lion at the Venice Biennale… And… to give you just a little bit of an idea of what else has gone on… just in the year 2000, a small list of some of the shows—The Serpentine in London; the Pitti Palace in Florence; the Kunsthalle in Vienna; the Dallas Museum of Art; and the Wexner Center. She's here having just worked on piece at MASS Mocha… and… we're just delighted that she's been able to make; so I introduce Shirin Neshat. Thank you very much. (applause)

SHIRIN NESHAT: Thank you… I wanted to say first of all… it's a really pleasure to be here. I wanted to thank Linda to invite me here. I have not done these kinds of things very often; and I'm very happy to be here. And I'm glad for all of you to have this environment to work. I thought, for tonight, I'm going to mostly focus on the most recent work that I've done; but I will give you a very brief overview of the way in which my work has developed since I've been active as an artist, which is only since 1993. And I thought that I could share with you… the way in which my work—the development of my work has taken place; which… even for me sometimes is difficult to understand… or how it all has happened… since… I think in this very short time the work, both conceptually and visually, has gone through major shifts. And… so I'm going to go through this various work; but the points that I wanted to make is… before I was—I started to be active again professionally as an artist, I studied painting at UC Berkeley; and… soon after I graduated I… sort of—for about ten years I became very *inactive* as an artist. And I think that a lot had to do with my frustration with schools and my own potential as an artist, I think…. And so… when I came back to finding the subject, and a reason to make art, I had to sort of re-question everything… and… a purpose to make art. And I think, well, photography was the first medium that I used; and it was the subject matter that really compelled me to use photography. So the point that I wanted to make is that, since then, it's not been the medium that has ruled my work, but it's the subject. And therefore, whatever medium seems to suit me best to be able to convey my ideas, I seem to reach for that medium. And… my frustration with school partially was that I really never seemed to feel comfortable with the models that I was confronted with; so I've had to sort of go through these series of rejections of

the education that I had, and sort of, you know, invent my own way and my own models to pursue. And… I think my only explanation for me now, for the way the work has evolved, is that… there have been various issues in my life, both personally and otherwise, that have really been important to me, and that have… been strong enough reason to produce a work that responds to that… but also people and… certain fields that have been very inspiring to me that have been somewhat outside of the visual arts. So… the photography—when I started with photography—it was me and collaborating with a friend, who was—I sort of asked for his help. And I did the performance part of it; and I came up with the idea. Soon that moved on to video… which again became me directing it and me performing in it, and two or three other people, sort of with the camera. And then it came film… which was me trying to direct… and… develop the ideas, which became much more cinematic, and nearly two hundred people to direct. And so… And I keep thinking again, this has all happened since 1993/94; and I think that what is really made me brave in sort of allowing to be expansive, and allowing myself to experiment… is partially again… the field of video and film—not so much photography. And I think that… the world of film and cinema seems to be very… grand in its—and ambitious, in its allowing the director to really allow the world to be the studio as opposed to the visual arts. And… culturally it seems to be very inclusive; but also just the nature of film-making allows you to do so much more. And I think throughout the process… I've become more and more and more attracted to the world of cinema. And so the work that I'm making today, I see a kind of a fusion between visual arts and cinema; and I think that, although I still think of aesthetically… every piece that I make… is a moving photograph, a moving sculpture, a moving painting… but I'm very interested in the narrative; I'm very interested in the kind of attention span that people give to a film, as opposed to an object of art. And I'm saying this to you with hesitation because all of you are art students; but I'm only telling you this to tell you the reason why I have arrived to what I have. And I think that film, basically *includes everything*…. It includes theater, and dance, and performance, and theater and… so many different things; so for me it's just… a world of possibilities. Can you project the first two slides; or can I start this?

SLIDES

I think what I'm going to do to just make it simpler; and I'm going to spend much less time with the photographic work, is… to explain how I started. This is a group of work called the "Woman of Allah" series that… It started in 1993 and sort of concluded in 1996. This was a work that… I sort of consider a kind of—Is this focused? I can't see very well from here, so you have to tell me—This was the work that I produced immediately after I returned to Iran, my country, after I'd been absent for over a decade, since the Revolution. And…if I had to just describe it very briefly, without elaborating, because I could speak about just this series for a good hour, is that… it reflects a point of view of an artist with—certainly not one who has been living inside, but outside of Iran. And…this is a work that it was after several trips that I made after the Revolution…. I sort of became intensely interested, and almost obsessed with this study of the Revolution, the Islamic Revolution, which had so… amazingly transformed the country socially, politically and culturally. And… And so, at this moment, I—since, again, I had not been active as an artist, this work came as a totally a personal journey, an interest of mine to… through a sort of a visual… you know, manifestation, sort of enter a kind of an analysis and a sort of interpretation of issues that were much larger than me, and very, very complex. But at this moment I sort of developed my own methodology, a very kind of minimalistic approach of a few elements that sort of seem to repeat themselves in… dealing with the issues, which, just to touch very briefly, was the subject of Islamic philosophy and ideology, which was so difficult to comprehend, sort of—if you were looking from the Western perspective. And I was fascinated and sort of… just… curious about the type of ideology that was, which… so closely brought together issues of religion, spirituality and violence. So… I came on to develop a group of photographs which… the female character became the central character. And again, the reason that became the case was that I believed, and I still believe today, that in Islamic cultures, women, much more than the men, embodied the values of the society. In a way, by studying the woman, you can go about a culture study. And so… I was very interested in sort of…you know, creating a body of work that conveyed that kind of paradoxical quality of… a sort of an action that sort of closely bordered ideas of love, of God, devotion… and self-sacrifice so closely with ideas of hatred and cruelty and obsession with death. So…

SLIDES

…these images, what they had in common was… the text, which became writings, poetry by Iranian women writers; and the veil, which obviously became a symbol of—sort of political symbol that has meant so many different thing to Iranian women… the body, which obviously… sort of female body in Islamic societies are so problematic, as they suggest ideas of shame and sin… and finally the (unintelligible, phonetically thepin, rhymes with weapon), which… was a symbol of violence in my mind. So… all these photographs sort of… I think confused many of the viewers; and I think that was intended… of sort of having this multiplicity of ideas of—in somewhat she seemed very sort of innocent and peaceful and beautiful and exotic; and yet so potentially aggressive and violent. And so it was not possible to read very easily the nature of this character, and the nature of this action. And so… to this day there is a lot of discussion about what these photographs were about, or what my intentions were. Some people call it… something like I was trying to be a radical sheik; or was sort of romanticizing revolution…but the truth is that at that moment I was just returning to art after really ten years of absence; and I was just trying to find my own subject that it really interested me personally, and that… a kind of vocabulary, a visual vocabulary that I felt comfortable with. And so… later on I became—I had developed certain frustrations, as you can see with these images, that they almost seem like sculptures; they seem so rigid in the way that they're so carefully carved, almost like monuments… and that I hardly ever used backgrounds… and I mostly pose for them myself…. And… so… slowly I became very… tired of this kind of work; but also all the handwork, the writing, the calligraphy, all the other decorative… pieces that you see were done by myself. And… I guess I just… you know, unconsciously became very resistant to this idea of getting too much into the crafts of writing and calligraphy and… people expecting me to continue this. And on top of it I felt that… I didn't want any longer to make work that became an object. And I really felt that… also as you see in the next group of work, that I wanted to produce work that… it became more philosophical and more poetic… and sort of less political—less directly political; although I'm, to this day as I stand here, I'm very, very interested in the social political realities of my country. And yet I felt that there was a way to enter this whole… area without being overtly symbolic of political iconography. So, after having done all this group of photographs, I just sort of wrapped it all up; and one time I hired to cameramen; I went to Istanbul to shoot this…piece, which is called the "Shadow under the Well…." And…just to expand on this… other aspect of video that, at the moment when I was thinking of this piece which was, in my

mind here you had the potential to be able to convey your idea in more than a single image… but a choreography of images; and that… there was a certain amount of ambiguity that I was missing from the photographs; that as much as I wanted to sort of stay on the poetic side, there is so much identification with the *image* that it was difficult to be ambiguous; and therefore became more and more almost didactic. With this piece, which was consisting of four simultaneous projections on a square room, where you—the viewer stood in the midst of these four projections that simultaneously showed a woman running aimlessly, on slow motion, in four distinct spaces… It really sort of created an experience, as opposed to an object, which I liked. It was me actually performing again on this piece—not *performing*, basically running around the city of Istanbul. The subject, the concept basically evolved in my interest in sort of spatial definition in Islamic societies traditionally. I was interested in how… space… how spatial boundaries sort of defined and controlled sexes, and separated them according to different types of spaces. I read some material, and I thought it would very interesting material to work with; for example, that… a public space is considered male space, or a private space is a female space—and the whole concept of how the veil is designed to conceal the female…body in the public space… to neutralize her presence. And that—So the—I'm sorry, the last two spaces that you saw… which, by the way was an hour loop, a continuous loop on each side—the image on the right is a still from… the section that took place on the public space on the Egyptian bazaar… in Istanbul, which was heavily male dominated. The image on the left it sort of represents somewhat of a private space, which is the alleyway that leads to the domestic spaces….

SLIDES

And here the image on the left is… a mosque, which in my mind was a sacred space; and the image on the right was an area that I found which was outside of Istanbul, the city of Istanbul, more on a natural landscape, an area that was not—really this was a ruin that was built during the Byzantine period, so it was pre-Islamic. So the experience that you had was this extreme sense of anxiety… that this woman that… continuously running and hardly ever stopping at any given space… that, as the space and the architecture continued to evolve and change in many different colors, the body remained black, almost like a silhouette. So, although the piece was very theoretically based, it became… rather poetic; and, I think, more philosophical; and it was more

experiential in a way that you could define it as you liked. However you really were going to experience a sense of anxiety. And for the first time I used sound, which was… the sound of my own voice and another friend's, which was heavy breathing, slightly arrhythmic. This piece was made in 1997; and basically, again it was this sort of radical departure from the photographic work that I had done, and just sort of resembled nothing like my photographs. And I think… for a lot of part, the art world sort of was caught by surprise, like What is this? or What is she doing? And they almost didn't recognize it was the same artist; but… And I didn't even think about it very much; but from then on I knew I wasn't going back to the photographs. I'm just… going—the last piece, the video, was one of the videos I've done. I've done other videos, but—not that many, but that was one of the ones. In 1998 I made "Turbulent," which became a major departure for me, where I moved from video to film… for one thing from video to sixty millimeter film…. For the first time I developed a piece that had a story line; it had a beginning and an end…. I was very fascinated by sort of experimenting with breaking a cinematic picture in two…. I was very interested in using that kind of sculptural quality that I had gained from the "Shadow Under the Web." I am bringing it into another type of experience where the viewer is actually—these two projections are on two opposite walls… and the viewer is sitting in between. And so… as they're exchanging their thing, you are going back and forth with your head, following one and the other; so in a way you cannot ever… simultaneously see both parts. So I thought it was really putting the viewer in a very interesting emotional and physical interaction with the work. And something that was unlike watching a movie at a theater, where you're sitting on a seat, and you're basically passive, looking at a film. Meanwhile… there was a story, although here the story was exchange of two songs. And also I wanted to emphasize that… this piece to me was very photographic; everything was carefully… sort of coordinated… carefully designed to interact with each other. The camera movement… on one side, where the man was was stationary the entire time, where with the woman it sort of turned around her eventually, when she started to sing. There were important decisions that was made all around the notion of *opposites*, which brings me to the concept of the piece. The main premise of this piece, "Turbulent," was… the absence of women in the scene of music in Iran, that basically women are deprived from the experience of singing for public performance—or even recording. So I took that point; but I think that… it went to different places after that; and I have to say that it was the first time I really discovered the power of music in being able to communicate an idea.

Here I was trying to convey the place where the man stands, as opposed to the woman, in relation to this kind of social, cultural structure; where the man is allowed to have this experience, where the woman is not. The man is singing a beautiful traditional music that belonged to poetry of Thirteenth century; it's a kind of a Sufi music that was sung… by Shoja Azari, and actually performed by Shoja Azari, who is sitting here today…. And really sort of represented… he and his music and his colleagues represented the ideal men of the society, in the way that they were dressed… they way that they were supposed to…. He performed the music that he was supposed to, which is obviously very passionate and Sufi music… and he had the support of his peers. Yet, when he finished his song, and he came to the turn of the woman—she was Sussan Deyhim, who performed and also sang the music herself—it was totally opposite. The music broke every rule of traditional music; there was completely improvised… there was no language… it was free form… and… completely emotional and wild. And so—and obviously, in her space, she had no audience, where he had. And so this dichotomy—and again emphasized by other types of opposites that I tried to emphasize—again, the white, the black… empty theater, full theater… traditional music, non-traditional music… the stationary camera and sort of evolving camera…. Everything about this piece was trying to convey that idea. And it wasn't so much of a sort of direct criticism, or sort of… but it was more about experiencing the way in which those who have that kind of limitation, they would go about achieving that level of mysticism that this man was able to achieve through his traditional type of music. And so in a way the woman becomes the rebellious; she achieves that level of climax that he does through his traditional music, but totally in her own invented way. That piece became critical in my thinking about developing other pieces that again became a kind of a fusion between cinema and visual art; and more so. I think this piece, "Rapture," which was made in 1999, was the first epic, I could say, film that I made that I was frightened myself; and I decided to do this. But basically again it was designed as same idea as two opposites… projections, again putting the viewer in the same kind of a physical interaction with the piece… And it took this notion of masculine/feminine a step further… and I will speak about the concept; but I wanted to say that, in this piece, for me, other things entered which were not present in "Turbulent," which was the notion of choreography. As I was editing and shooting this film, I really thought I was doing a dance choreography. And the scenes became far more complicated than "Turbulent;" because in "Turbulent" basically the man sang and she answered. Here there's

a lot more going back and forth interactions; and Sussan Deyhim once again composed the music… again music shifting back and forth from the male side to the female side. Here the concept, for me, was basically taking a very simple question, which was, What is the relationship of Muslim women to nature; and that if… all women, due to biological reasons, are connected to nature, what about Muslim woman, because… everything about them is so seemingly artificial, in the way that they have to always cover their body… in the way that their behavior is always controlled… and that, mostly women in this part of the world that are very religious exist in the urban setting. In fact, to see these women in the context of nature, like sea or the mountains… the forest, it seems very odd. So what I wanted to do, again, to—this piece to me was the least political work I've done, and more philosophical than ever, was just to remove these women from the urban setting, and just sort of throw them in the context of natural landscape. And… where the men, from the beginning to the end, were seen in context of a fortress…. This was shot in Morocco; and the fortress was actually an incredible site, a Portuguese- made—built this in a city of Essaouira that—I loved this site, but Orson Welles actually shot in this particular location the film of **Othello**…. But it became a kind of an architectural maze… where the men sort of absurdly dressed in their administrative outfits, which is typical white shirt in Iran, were… in a very militaristic space… and… in doing things that wasn't leading to anything. So from the beginning to the end, very similar to "Turbulent," the men were seen in their most predictable activity, or sort of—at least exaggerated, of course; where the women… on the other hand, were seen at the beginning of the film, in the desert, completely abandoned and empty space… but by the middle and the end they ended up by the sea. And the very… message of the piece, I guess, it sort of tied into the very end, which was the way in which the women discovered the boat, and pushed it toward the sea… and eventually if you got on the boat at last…. For me this piece became very symbolic, in the way that the activity of the women suggested something very radical, which was an element of risk-taking, an element of being brave. Those few women, and the rest of the women who helped them leave—and whether this action of departure on this flimsy boat was… kind of committing suicide or reaching freedom… it was not clear. But what was clear was that they took an action. So, where the men from the beginning to end, exactly like "Turbulent," stayed within their conformed space… and… that… basically… that journey became the very heart of the story; and the rest became a kind of a conceptual, sort of… formulation of the idea. And so there are several—and to me this piece was incredibly

photographic—Every segment on the women's side was carefully composed to work with the men's side…. And the music was… quite beautiful by Sussan Deyhim…. I wanted to tell you a little bit about—This was my first experience at sort of picking up and going to a foreign country… and I also wanted to tell you that this was—Since "Turbulent," this was my second collaboration with a team of Iranian film-makers, two of whose—two of the people are here tonight… Shoja Azari and "Shadam Karami" (phonetic)… where they sort of pulled me more and more to the field of cinema, and sort of gave me the trust to be able to suddenly find myself in a position of directing two hundred people—We had a hundred female and a hundred male… cast; but also directing the crew, etcetera; and… the way in which we went to recruit the cast was… basically we went to this town, and we put the word out in town, and about—over a thousand people showed up… women and a thousand men; and we had to go carefully and audition, and… it was incredible… incredible experience of working these local people, be able to create such an abstract and conceptual piece with these people, who were also Muslim, but yet they were playing the role of Iranian women… and how to convey the idea, how to get them to act and… it just became an extraordinary experience which—Since after that experience it was very difficult for me to ever think about going to studio art.

SLIDES

This is another piece which—actually I made this film for the Whitney Biannual, the last Whitney Biannual, which was called "Fervor;" and, together with "Turbulent" and "Rapture," sort of created a trilogy--in my mind this piece sort of closed the chapter on that kind of a masculine/feminine… study; and this piece was actually two projections, but side by side, not on two opposite walls. And… this piece really brought the question of the extreme taboos that exist around the notion of sexuality and carnal desire in… where I—in Iran; and that basically any man and woman is sort of confronted with this sort of constant personal and social control… and… sort of denying some things that are very natural and instinctive. And so my interest was to develop a film that really went in depth to sort of exploring—again both on a personal and social level, of what it's like experience that. So the first scene of the film you basically saw a man and a woman sort of crossing each other while walking… in totally two different paths…. And their paths cross; and they take a note of each other; they're very attracted to each other, but

they control themselves from even making contact or speaking to each other, so they each go their way. Second part of this film is that, again this man and woman find themselves in—but yet in a totally opposite context, which is… a public event. And the nature of this event, it's very dubious…. In fact it looks something in between a religious event and a political event; and not unlike a theatrical event, like… people going to see a theater. And there is a character who's a spokesman, who… His role is not very clear. And again these are all inspired by… the kind of events that we are used to in Iran, where, for example, we have massive Friday prayers, where we have a mullah that comes and gives speech of the week to the mass. And the women are sitting separate from the men… and in this speech he uses particular focus and gives a particular kind of a lesson. And here, this man—ironically, by the way, this man and woman are sitting—find themselves sitting very *near* each other, by the curtain which is dividing the men and women, and… listening to the speech of this man who's—happens to be that speaking about the story of Yusef and "Zolekhov" (phonetic), which is equivalent of… the Romeo and Juliet, or something like that, from… the Koran. And the whole… premise of the story is to use the story to teach everyone, men and women, to sort of restrain and hesitate and sort of—from allowing themselves to have any kind of temptations toward the opposite sex—uncalled sexual temptations… And that… in this story of Yusef and "Zolekha", Zolekha, which was the female character… seduced Yusef. And so… ultimately the female is sort of characterized as the problem… as the hunter… and the male as the hunted. And so, as this man and woman—they candidly again—this is done very carefully with the camera movement and the movement, where we're going back and forth between this sort of very candid exchange and gazes between this man and woman… they're confronted with this narrative that very obviously… sort of reiterating the sin and the shame that arises from these emotions.

SLIDES

This film… it's called "Soliloquy;" this was made—actually "Fervor" was made in 2000; and this one was made in 1999. This film was actually our project—unlike the last three projects that were made in Morocco—or the last two—This one we shot in Turkey and the United States. The main idea behind this piece, which by the way I went back to performance after not having done it for a long time—I played the main part myself… was two opposite productions and two

opposite walls again…. One was filmed in Turkey… on the right; and one was filmed in Albany and Manhattan in the United States. The main idea behind the piece was… really sort of concentrating on sort of an understanding of the emotional and psychological state of a woman who is standing on the threshold of two very, very opposite cultures, one very traditional, very communal; and one very modern and very individualistic. And that… there was really… no really concrete narrative other—and it was piece called "Soliloquy," which is means, internal monologue, which was sort of she exchanging back and forth stories to herself from one world to the other. And the architecture became very dominant in this piece, which in *my mind*, here the architecture represented the culture that it was speaking about. And that… in both worlds, ironically, it was never really a strong sense of belonging… in that in both given cultures there was extreme sense of isolation and anxiety. And that… there was a kind of a modest narrative going back and forth, one telling the other, which I won't elaborate right now; but that at the end of the film, this female character sort of runs from both realities, that…in that—this film probably is the most autobiographical film that I've ever made, and I guess it really speaks about the experience that I've had as an Iranian woman, living outside, in the West; and sort of that kind of cross-cultural… kind of dilemma that one has, that never quite feeling centered at any given space…. And that… if one is… very suffocating, which is the East, the traditional… culture that is always controlling your behavior and your emotions and your behavior; on the other side it felt incredibly isolating and lonely…. So… here we went to the far Eastern part of Turkey to a location that was on the border of Iran that… the architecture really in my mind sort of resembled most closely Iranian architecture. It turned out to be a very dangerous spot; again, I worked with the same crew, they're all Iranians; and we found ourselves to be sort of immediate suspects as we arrived to these Kurdish towns that we found in fact there'd been a lot of activity with the fundamentalists that were being trained by Iranians on the border…. So we naively arrived into this town; and also they had the… Kurdish rebels, which were very militaristic; so there was this heavy military base there…. And there was curfew; and so we were really under the gun (laughs) over there…. But the experience, that *tension* that existed in that location in the middle of August in the middle of the desert, I think sort of helped sort of intensify the kinds of reality that I was trying to speak about… in that part of the world. And again we employed… I think about a hundred men and women of the Kurdish population; and I must say all of these people are paid, because extremely poor… and they're happy to do it; but as a result they have

interesting experiences too…. I wanted to say that, aside from the film portion of this work, I also do some photography; but the photography becomes and extension… or is sort of secondary to the film… and the photographs become sort of more narrative…. And a lot of the photographs actually are not necessarily a documentation of the film, which we'll speak about more; and I had to really go and redefine my interest in photography and how… was it not going to be like a kind of a souvenir of the film, but something that could stand on its own—which we could speak about later. I would like to go through this because I would like to be able to have a discussion—question and answer; and I'm going to show one video at the end… the most recent film, so—Now it brings me to the most recent work, which actually the show ended today in New York, (laughs) at Barbara Gladstone Gallery. I made three new works… and again, I think, in these three works I wanted to experiment—each one sort of experiments in a totally different territory, both conceptually and visually. I had a lot of interest in… sort of some ways go back to the simplicity of "Turbulent," in making work that was very concise and very simple in its message, but extremely emotional, and… again concise. And this particular piece was called "Pulse." And it was shot in black and white; and these are not very good slides; but the reason I have the color on the right is because actually I produced some color photographs here. But… just to explain what the nature of the piece was… that the camera enters this very, very dark room… that… at first you couldn't see anything other than some shadows… and we really played with the contrast—the light and dark contrast. As the camera came closer, we soon discovered that there is a woman, a woman sitting—sort of kneeled down—by a radio. And… soon we hear this incredible music coming from the radio, which is… actually a sound of man—a male singer. And then we, as we get closer, we hear a female voice following. And so the woman who is sitting by this radio, sort of repeating every song that—every word of… the song that is being sang. The camera movement… and the voice of the—actually the sound of the film starts with a series of pulses, the sound of pulse that was—again this music was composed by Sussan Deyhim… And, so the way that this piece was designed was actually one completely long take; there's no edit. The camera comes closer… a very, very slowly… with the sound of this pulse… And… to me this film really sort of suggests a very solitary and sensual moment of this woman fantasizing alone in her bedroom—or whether it's a cell or a bedroom—just sort of allowing herself to drift away into the song; and… imagining… whether it's love… or imagining anything else. But—So the way the camera moves, and the way that the music works, and the

way that she sort of touches her body, is all to sort of emphasize and exaggerate that sense of sensuality… and that, by entering to the interior of this space you're also entering the interior of her mind, and her moments of her fantasy. And as the song sort reaches the end, and the pulse again goes… the camera exits the room. It's a little bit like a trance; it's like everything is organized into that—it's extremely simple.

SLIDES

This piece is called "Possessed;" and actually it's a single projection—and the last one was a single projection. For this show I just made three films; and all of them are single projection. They're no longer sort of playing around with this idea of opposite wall projections or installation; I just wanted to go to the purity of the idea of making a short film. So they're—I guess—three short films. The last one, "Pulse," was shot in Morocco; and it was shot in 16 millimeter; and it was about eight and a half minutes long. This film is actually shot in black and white; and again, I—as usual I shoot both color and black and white photographs. But this piece is a story about a woman who has gone mad; and she—at the beginning of the film we see her in very sort of strange… mental… state, you know, sort of talking to herself… and the camera is moving around her head… With the camera movement we *really* sort of exaggerated her madness… with the cinematographer; we really played that out. And… she's… eventually she's walking through these many passages and alleyways… she enters a public space. Now this woman, as opposed to everyone else, is dressed very differently. She's dressed as she likes; she's not wearing the veil; and she's behaving obviously very differently than everyone else. There is this large crowd, that again, we kept—we sort of coordinated very carefully, with these men and women in Morocco. They're just sort of… afternoon in the square; and… soon after she enters, people… take notice of her. And she goes up to that… platform; and she begins—very similar to "Turbulent" in the kind of a very strange language that didn't belong to anywhere—she's—sort of goes through these various motions and—*emotions*—and before you know, there a large crowd that have surrounded her. And as she reaches-- again Sussan Deyhim with her own voice, these very strange sounds that she makes—she… sort of exaggerated her madness, and her being possessed and her… communication. And the way that this film was, sort of, I think, organized was that at all time… the viewer, what they were experiencing

sonically was almost like they were inside of her head—not the outside. Everything was sort of more focusing on what was *her* experience as a mad person. So we took out a lot of the live sound, like the sound of the public interacting; and so, when she reaches that kind of climax of her madness and her behavior in public, the crowd becomes… very divided; and there's a group that is sort of rather insulted almost by her presence and her behavior; and they're sort of trying to pull her down. And then—yet, there is other group that… are amused by her and sort of *happy* by her presence, and sort of want her to stay. So before you know, her… presence sort of agitates the public; and the public themselves become involved into a sort of a conflict. And… she exits; and the public continues to… to fight. This piece in my mind, sort of very symbolically, refers to the sort of social reality of Iranian society today… which is sort of extreme sort of absence of individual space and freedom; and that… perhaps only in the state of madness you can really achieve that… freedom. And that… not only that is that a mad person is the one who sort of reminds other people of their absence of individual freedom; and that it really creates social chaos. And that… I was very interested when I was thinking of this piece in the kind of connection between madness and being an artist and being a writer; and that kind of historical evidence, both in my part of the world, and in the Western culture… that so much of artists and writers have been considered mad…. And that… And so there's, we in this film again very symbolically touches on the social realities of Iran, and… a really—it's open for interpretation in a way that you like to read it; but more—I think the actress was actually—this was the second time since "Fervor," that I actually worked with a professional actress—She's an Iranian actress—that very well known in—among Iranians, and… that I had to really communicate this; because I'm not interested in theatrical performance; and that how I was going to bring out of her… this personality and this character. And something that I hadn't really worked on very much, because most of my films are dealing with crowd versus crowd; and here, this film very clearly dealt with…character. And that I was interested in, for example, how like a mad person… and… almost like schizophrenic, where your personality continues to change and evolve; and so, at the beginning there are moments where she is very peaceful, almost in a trance; and soon she becomes very paranoid; and then she becomes angry; then she becomes frightened; then she becomes very proud… and then eventually she goes berserk when it becomes to the climax, the confrontation with the crowd. And eventually when she leaves, she reaches again this kind of a trance state of mind. So we—we had to really with the help of my

colleagues, sort of develop this character, and work with her; and this is something that I never really experienced with… before. This brings me to the final piece which I'm going to show you the film tonight…. It's a piece I did in collaboration with composer Philip Glass…. Philip asked me to make a short film as a group of… Actually he asked four other film-makers to make short films; I think Peter Greenaway… Atom Agoyan… Godfrey Reggio; and another visual artist, Michal Rovner…to develop a new piece of music; and that, sort of, to play live… with the film. And… all along I'd been working with… Sussan Deyhim, who's the Iranian composer… and… and so this collaboration was just an immense challenge for me to… think about an idea that works within Philip's music… and also to—for us, to work together was… also—I think for him was quite a challenge, because, obviously my subject, it's very Islamic; and yet… I wasn't expecting him to make Islamic music. But yet we had to somehow—both of us had to come forward a little bit, and yet stay within our own sort of territories…. What I think I did do at the end… was… the major part of this film was employing a lot of the landscape. I felt that this piece had to be the most visual piece that I've ever made in a way that I saw his music that… had no… vocal, like Suzanne's music, but mostly just sounds—that landscape really suited… his music very well…. And that I wanted to go back a little bit to… the element of choreography that I'd sort of experimented with in rapture; and… so those kind of major decisions that I made at the beginning; and then I sort of… negotiated with him the concept, which was… the concept of this piece was—For a long time I had been thinking of developing an idea around the notion of apocalypse…. Actually I was invited to *make* a piece for a show of apocalypse which I withdrew, because I wasn't ready enough; but something that really sort of went around the experience of death, mourning, and… the ritual that involves that—I'd been really… taken by images and—that I'd been seeing from certain events; for example the Israeli and the Palestinian… conflicts, and many, many, many amazing images came of young men that were dead being carried by other men on this kind of wooden structure; and women standing on a corner… and… sort of crying. Actually I'm not going to elaborate too much on this film, because you're going to see it very much; but all I could say was that it was this choreography of… a group of men on a very linear way, walking across various landscapes from the sea to the desert; and a group of women who were involved in this very peculiar activity, which we end up discovering that is they're digging the grave…. This was really an ambitious piece for me; again it's mainly because it was—we were filming in the middle of deserts—very, very hot; and then

again, through various landscapes—again in Morocco. The cast was, again, quite large… and… and I think at the end—we can talk about it more when you see the piece; but I think that… the collaboration really worked for me; and it taught me a lot about this possibility of… expanding my idea to the point where it's still very—somewhat culturally specific; but yet…the ramifications or the meanings behind it becomes extremely universal. And I wanted to be able to expand on that later, when we have a discussion… the kind of iconography and the kind of system that I've sort of managed as an artist to find, where, again, I am not willing to sort of compromise the ethnicity—that I'm interested in the subject that I'm interested, but yet I'm not interested to make work that is considered ethnic work, or sort of categorized as something *other*. And this, I think, truly be—the combination of the visual choreography and the music, which in my mind the music has been a sort of a substitution for the text that I use to work in my work, has helped me to achieve, to some degree, that kind of flexibility that it's very difficult, I think, to achieve when you are so culturally specific. So these are some of the images of… the women digging the grave…. You're going to see this…. Now I'm going to show you just some images of us working… again in Morocco; it just—It's—It just becomes a really intense experience working with—this is some of the crew that I'm working with. (pause) Actually we were just in Massachusetts, shooting a film, which is very unusual for us; and it turned out to be just as amazing as… anywhere else. (pause) This was in our last… shoot. These are just some fun things—And on this note I just show you the video; and then I'm—I'd be happy to answer your questions.

(VIDEO runs, soundtrack heard)
Speaker: We can turn the lights on…. (laughs) (applause) Is Shoja and "Chaja" still there? Or they probably for a smoking a cigarette. (laughs)

Comment: (unintelligible)

Speaker: (laughs) They're… chain smokers. You want to--? Anyway, I'm happy to answer any of your questions if you're not too exhausted already by my very long… talk. And… also if any questions you have for my colleagues…. Yes?

Question: (unintelligible)

Speaker: … I've never shown any, Ron; there hasn't been an opportunity. I've been recently sort of invited and approached… officially, but… there is complications… mainly because I think most of my work would—most of them, not all of them—would have… run into some problems in terms of… you know, the message. But also… I've had some issues that, you know, it's a little bit right now waiting and see…. (pause) Yes, in the back.

Question: (inaudible)

Speaker: I'm sorry; I didn't hear very well.

Question: (unintelligible)

Speaker: Well, actually, you know, because I came so strongly from the use of language and calligraphy in my work, that has become a major… element; and also that I've always used *poetry*, as opposed to any kind of other text, of sacred text, in my work… so when it came down to choosing a song, for example, with—Shoja and "Chatham", you want to come here, so they can—the men in white shirts. (laughs) (laughter) I think we discuss in length… the type of song and the type of poetry. So far we have used poetry by Rumi quite a lot, which is a Thirteenth century poet…. So it's extremely important to us… the content of the poem, and its relevance to the piece…. (laughs) (laughter) But… actually (unintelligible)—I'm sorry, did I answer?—and in terms of the… Farsi versus the English… credits, it just seemed to make sense, because so much of it is about opposites, and etcetera; and it was also for me to be able to be informative, both to an Iranian and Western audience…. I just want to say briefly that "Shaddam Karemi" himself is a visual artist, a painter mainly, a poet and… an installation artist, a video and photography artist; and he's helped (laughs) me with—as art direction—with art directions in the most recent films… and Shoja himself is a filmmaker; and has made his own films; and I've collaborated with him on his films… And he was also the one who performs in "Turbulence," the role of the male singer…. And one could say that he's been one of the main influences while I've been pulled towards cinema, as opposed to video… and so we have Sussan Deyhim, who's

the composer is not here; and… they… also the cinematographer who's also Iranian is a filmmaker…. Anyway, any other question? Yes?

Question: I'd like to know, when I'm watching this (unintelligible), I don't really fully understand… everything that you're talking about, or (unintelligible): and so I'm wondering about how (unintelligible) for… Western audience to see (unintelligible), and… how does that… work? I mean, how do you feel about showing these to the West; and it gets into…reestablishing the sort of romantic, mysterious ideas that we have in the Western (unintelligible)

Speaker: Yeah. You've obviously never seen the pieces… live; so you're just seeing documentation, which is very difficult for me to give you the type of experience that I try to create by these pieces… because… at the end I think, of course, for each person, according to who they are and what their cultural background is, and what their understanding of that part of the world is, the experience changes…. But I think at the end something happens—you could add or correct me if I'm wrong—is that I think that… although this piece becomes very Iranian and very specifically about the issues of Iran, they seem to transcend some of those; and they become something like any woman can identify… with some of the issues of, for example, the "Turbulence." Or "Rapture"—the issue of these women… being able to make this journey and leaving on the boats; and that… it becomes so symbolic—almost… it doesn't matter where these women are from… so, what I'm trying to say is that, although they start with—from the very culturally specific point of view, the message, or the reading of it becomes almost… very universal. And I think at the end… that becomes end result. In terms of whether…-- You want to add to that?

Comment: I just wanted…to mention how… I think one of the things that we're very conscious of… is exactly the issue that you raise. And… by looking at the history of Orientalism, and the view of the Orient from the West, it has been always… The Orient has been always the subject of… basically knowing… That the Westerner—The West's *attitude* toward the Orient, or Islamic world, has to be bundled together and… basically represented as people's—as people who are *not*… basically capable of representing themselves… and… basically… they're subject of Western knowledge. So… they're very conscious of this; and in fact, you know, in our

discussion is basically, how do we go about… to deconstruct the images… and the clichés that is developed through the Western media… and through the entire history of the… Orientalism. So, in a way, you know, these pictures deal with those subject matters that you deal with; but it engages you in a different way; and… it forces you to look at the piece, to look at these people… in a much more… in a much deeper way… and question your own judgment and attitudes… basically.

Speaker: Any other questions? Yes.

Question: (unintelligible)

Speaker: No, he approached me and asked me to make a film. But he, of course, wanted to know what I would come up with; and so I thought about this idea… so I told him that I wanted to make a piece about death… and about… the subject of this imaginary ritual that happens, that I've been… you know. And he liked it. So I went on to Morocco; we shot the film, and came back and gave him a rough draft of an edit. He started to compose the music, although from the beginning, when I told him the story, he said he already had some instruments in mind, you know… for example, the trumpet and the… And then he played it in piano for me; I liked it; and then, you know, he went on to…record it with full orchestra for *my* use; because, you know, for him he's going to play the film silent/play live. So… the film came first; and then the music came second. And he's just actually opening up in July at the Lincoln Center for the first time of it; he had not seen it live, you know. Yes.

Question: (unintelligible)

Speaker: That's a very good question. I mean… I don't use color unless there's a very strong reason for it; because to me color is so seductive and… almost distracting. But here… very similar to "Soliloquy," where it was this idea of the silhouettes, these figures in—that become anonymous, you know, against this moving landscape, the changing landscape. So… there was—and also the film was so much about this dialogue between nature, landscape and human beings… and these other elements of fire and water and earth and… all of that; so I had to create some kind of dichotomy between those two very important elements. And if they diffused… if it

was black and white, the blackness of their body and the landscape were going to be blending; and I couldn't… clearly separate them. So I needed you to always to think about *these people* in black—versus the color of nature. And… it worked aesthetically very similar to "Soliloquy," because, again, she was the silhouette versus the moving architecture, the changing architecture. Yes, in the back.

Question: (unintelligible)

Speaker: Well… we do sell it as video, as work of art. So we do sell it as video installations… you know; it does sell as object of art. I don't distribute it in videos, you're right; but they become… an artwork; and so…which usually I insist that museums… buy—you know, take it, as opposed to individuals; but it… is sold like a painting or a sculpture. And… But yet they're given the specification for… how it's supposed to be presented, so they *must* follow, you know… They can't—Also they can't copy it. But also, for the past two years I've begun to be involved in film festivals… and started to be… more and more involved in that part of the world, you know… (unintelligible) And it's interesting, because it's a totally different audience and… reactions and things. But in terms of profit, it comes from the arts. Yes.

Question: (unintelligible)

Speaker: Yes, I'm really interested—I've been—We've been discussing a lot. I want to be very careful; and I think I say that to all of you who are ex—

(AUDIO BREAK)

--and this work gets—(pause) need to go to study it. So that's number one; however, the group that we've gathered around each other is far more than that… in that it's a situation where I could really check myself, both artistically and intellectually… conceptually…. And so, since the subject is so connected to the social, political and cultural realities of Iran—and I don't even *live* in Iran—and all my colleagues are Iranians… and this work gets… visited internationally; and we want to make sure that we're making something that is very serious and relevant, not just some ideal. So we do quite a bit of discussions; and… so when I come up with a concept, usually Shoja and I get it to the point where I can present it to my other group; and… once everybody feels comfortable… we go location scouting and—But through the whole process,

from the beginning to the end, I have many people who are always checking on it… with me. But I'm involved in every section of it, even on the technical level, and the editing—I'm one of the editors Shoja uses—one of the editors; I work with "Chah Ram"; for example, with the film "Pulse," which was that black and white film with the radio, I can't emphasize enough how the art direction was so critical in sort of expressing the… sort of feeling of the piece… And that we… so carefully looked at so many radios, so many beds, so many plants; and it just seemed very random, but it was very carefully constructed…. So it was with the help of him… and he really understanding, again, not just being Iranian, but artistically being able to connect… that; I have that help. So I won't take all the credit at all by myself. Yes…

Question: I want to ask a question about… how the content of your work…positions itself in the (unintelligible)

Speaker: Well…let me explain that…first of all, I'm very aware—I have very distinct audience. One is the Iranian people; and the Western. For the Iranian people, it's a very different kind of… relationship to the work, because, again the subject of the work is very contemporary, and issues that they've dealt with. Therefore they have a very close connection; and often very difficult for them, particularly if they're not used to looking at contemporary art, to separate their own… experiences from the work of art—or even, you know, considering it as a work of art; and it becomes a very sort of convoluted sort of discussion… although… there is a great degree of support for this work too. With the Westerners it's another type of—kind of a dilemma. There are those who come into the work with this pre-existing cliché, or stereotypical image… about us Muslims and… our realities; and there are those who are really looking for something deeper than that. So, from both sides I get… different kinds of feedback. What I wanted to say is that… what becomes very critical is the issue that I select to work with; and that reflects me… and I think… in the work, in the construction of the work, in my mind there's two things that run parallel. One is the issues, the subject matter, that is much larger than me, as a person; and although I'm part of it, it's far larger than me. But the other is *me*; and is my own thinking, my own emotional… sort of reactions to things… and interest in things… and the way I frame it. So… I've always thought that… it's finally, after looking at so many works that… the music… and the visual impact of the work… it's really reflects a very personal aspect of me; but the information, the narrative, the iconography… those reflect something that is outside of me. And

I think they're done—a lot of times—very subconsciously… they go hand in hand; so it's very difficult to separate them… but… at least this is the way I approach it. I don't just choose a subject because it's a "hot" subject… of Iran, or something that I think would be very controversial… but something that really personally grabs me, you know…. (pause)

Question: (unintelligible)

Speaker: I think my frustration that I had at the time when I graduated, and I—was mainly that, when you're studying at art schools, the entire emphasis seems to be… the artist having to go inside… to find something marvelous to be able to express to the world. And I found later, when I actually moved to New York from Berkeley, and I started to work at the Storefront for Art and Architecture, where I worked about ten years… where it became my true education; and… the main emphasis there was not so much the product, but the process in which artists or architects or… philosophers, or different kind of people who worked—the program is very cross-disciplinary—the way in which they developed a methodology to work with, which really depended so much on information and research—and at the end there was some product, but that you were able to back it up with some kind of information…. And it became clear to me that so much of the art work is so—the art *field* is so isolated, and so unrelated to so many other important things… and that I wasn't really interested as an Iranian artist to expand on art history…. I wasn't interested in that anyway; I never felt quite comfortable—Therefore, what I wanted to do was… somehow… in a subject, a way of making… work that had some contact with reality and popular culture. And so it was very difficult for me to feel—I mean, immediately after I moved to New York I knew this wasn't going to be my thing; and I just said, "I have no agenda for this;" but—So eventually… that training that I worked at the Storefront I think really helped me to discover… that yes, I could develop my own methodology of going about things; but I didn't have yet the subject matter to go about… So when I went back to Iran, after a long time, and consequent visits… I found a subject. And so I had this… system that I'd been already really attracted to… and this subject. And then it happened from then on. But what I'm trying to say, to this day… I don't ever do any work, no matter what subject it is, that…it's—that it doesn't depend on some level of research or discussion… discourse that is way outside of the arts. Yes.

Question: (unintelligible)

Speaker: Yeah, well, if you notice the last two films, "Pulse" and "Possessed," the central characters they didn't have the chador, and therefore… that itself sort of in my mind represented… sort of their rebellious act of… aside from being sort of… radical woman, but it's also being an individualist. And again the woman usually be the one who… seems to fight for that, more than the men, perhaps. Shoja, (speaks a few words to him, Iranian?) He doesn't have much comments about that—And so I think that, in the past there's been a lot of discussion why I've used the chador so much… and whether, in fact, I've been even criticized as… even by Iranian women that were… living outside mostly, that… the reason I'm using the chador is because I'm supporting it; or I think it's a good idea, or whatever…. For me it's a type of iconography that is very—*certainly* attached to the Iranian culture. Very often I use it for aesthetic purposes; but also because it's what people wear… and it's not something that is my invention, but *of course*, being a visual artist, or I mean, even the white shirts—Not every man in Iran wears a white shirt like these guys do, (laughter) (laughs) but it's become a kind of an iconography for typical accepted… (laughs) And so… you know, I exaggerate things… to make my points… you know. Over there?

Question: (unintelligible)

Speaker: Well, I think if you know me or my work, you'll see that slowly… the work is becoming… is changing and is becoming far less… sort of attached to… the idea of ethnicity; I mean, they become more and more and more symbolic… I think that I have learned—every work that I do I learn a lot from it; and I try to take it to the next level… and I think, like when I stopped making those photographic pieces that, in my mind became just too much… too… political or too… much connected to the political orientation of that country…. I think that even some of the video work I felt that… but I want to become more and more abstract…. But yet… I think all of this has to be dealt with very delicately… and I think the last three pieces that I made make that right step, where… I was also getting very scared of being overly narrative, you know; and there are certain challenges that it seems like every artist puts yourself through; and each time you make a progression, then you learn from it and you go to a different level. And I think at this moment… I'm very, very pulled by… cinema, and sort of expanding this visual language

into a full scale, you know, cinematic experience; but yet… I'm a little bit trying to be cautious… you know…. And so… the only thing I could say that every piece that I make becomes a tremendous learning experience for the future…. But I have lost a lot of my fear, which is a great thing… Special thanks to these guys… because I think… that's the nature of film-making again; it really… allows you… to…really expand your mind and your potential; and I think this is part of the problem with the arts is that… you know, that even art criticism is not open enough to certain… experimental… approaches. And I think… my kind of work are not so much similar to video art of today; it's more about artists wanting to get more connected to the… film—the world of film… and music—I mean, my work—Music, it's like fifty percent of my work… you know? And so… a lot of times there's not a lot of tolerance for that, but…we seem to be just continuing and see where it goes—where it takes us. Yes.

Question: (unintelligible)

Speaker: Well, I think that's sort of what we tried to do in "Pulse," which was basically… to capture that moment where… she's actually… quite sexy, and letting go of everything, including her… you know, bodily expressions, and… it's incredibly erotic, where she's not even wearing stockings and… I mean, I have to do this very gradually also because, like the gentleman said, I'm very careful about… not overly disrespecting the codes, although I have started to do many things that would not be possible for an Iranian filmmaker—in Iran—But yet, I don't want to be making work that is shocking, because that's too easy…. I'd rather find a way of… sort of interjecting some kinds of things in a very candid way, where—like, *of course* when there's a woman alone in her bedroom she's not wearing the veil. How could I make—So that's my comment about that film—

Question: (unintelligible)

Speaker: Well, like I said, it's very recent for me to do these kind of character-based films; I've really usually dealt with masses versus masses, one person versus—I haven't made many films; and I think in the future I will have to see… but this character study is very delicate, because, you know, then you become involved into this very theatrical, you know… scene that I want to

be very cautious about, because I'm not interested in acting like… you know, script writing… or things like that. So whatever it is, there has to be some potential for choreography… and movements, and… abstraction of activity, as opposed to concrete activities. And so I have to be careful about—I don't know yet how I'm going to deal with that. Yes.

Question: (unintelligible)

Speaker: Yes… actually. One thing I didn't mention is that… a major aspect of my influence, which is not discussed very much… is… my son. I'm sorry, you might want to tell to… quiet—is Iranian… cinema, a new genre of Iranian film that have been produced—since the Revolution, actually. And I've… come to know them quite closely and… I've never worked with them, but they've become a major influence on me; for example, Kiarostami, who's a great filmmaker. He knows my work well, and he's advised me a lot…. And so I am very involved with that scene… which is really outside of the arts; and I'm often invited to film festivals that include… Iranian film directors. Believe it or not, they consider me some time film directors, (laughs) and which is a quite an honor; like… recently it was London, was Iranian woman film directors; and we showed and… spent many days together; or… you know. So that's been a major part of my scene is to—In fact I'm more involved with that than I am with visual artists. I don't know if it's good or bad, but it's just part of my… world. Yes.

Question: Could you talk a little bit about fund raising? Do you have to do that yourself (unintelligible)

Speaker: Yeah, I mean that's a real—that's an issue that I think… for all of you. At the beginning I made my photographs; and so when I made some money from the photographs I invested—I think I spent fifteen thousand dollars to go to Istanbul to make the "Shadow Under the Web," which for me was a major, major investment. And soon after that someone invited me to make a project, a film—a video—and… for a thing called Arco in Spain, like a special project. So they gave me twenty thousand dollars; they said, "Do whatever you want with this twenty thousand dollars," so I went and made… "Turbulent." Then "Turbulent" was sold; and it was… got some attention; so then another investor came… And if—I wanted to tell you, whoever gives

you money, they want something back in return; it's never (laughs) like a grant. (laughter) I've never really…. Well, I take it back. I've had… at times, certain foundations have given me *partial* support. So I moved from the fifteen thousand to the twenty thousand level for "Turbulent," which was two day shoot… everybody got very modest fee…. Then the next project became very complicated, because suddenly I had all these people who wanted to *invest*, as a commodity; and it's my future, which was "Rapture." And I had a lot of second thoughts about it, because I didn't want people to treat my work like that. So I took one person's money; and the next project was a hundred thousand dollar project; and then put my own money; and—then he made *really* good profit. And then after that (laughs) I had everybody wanting to invest in it; and so from then on… I went to Barbara Gladstone Gallery… and basically… she has a history with… like Matthew Barney… who…she supports his film; and not support, but I mean they finance it; eventually the work pays for itself. So so far I exclusively… accept her (laughs) investment… only because…. I mean, she takes a lot of risk as well. Not every work that I make is a success—you know… so… But it's been like that. And now I'm… dealing with some film producers who would—really would change the whole thing, because they—that's box office money, kind, not *art work*. I've never dealt with that before; so… I mean, even I think these things are new… a lot of people in the art world don't even know how quite to deal with it. But we do sell the video, so the investor gets their money back—if the work sells, you know. Yes.

Question: (unintelligible)

Speaker: Yeah… Well, it's interesting because, you know, I don't have a great education on history of film. Only recently I've started to… catch up, because my colleagues are all into the scene of film… and so I'm looking at a lot of very contemporary film makers… such as, for example, recently I've been looking at Lars von Trier's films, or Kar-Wai Wong, the Chinese director, or Atom Agoyan to people more classic like Tarkovsky… to Orson Welles… to… some, you know, films like **Metropolis**; I mean, I'm… I've been told that I should really go back to study… you know… German Expressionistic films… because again the… you know the use of black and white; and the extreme use of… contrast; and also the absence of dialogue…. And so I'm just… you know, catching up a lot. But I have been looking at a lot of films… lately. Sorry, I'm sure a lot of you are getting exhausted—Yes?

Question: (unintelligible)

Speaker: Yeah. Well, like that piece was such a great exercise; it was about how through camera movement and the visual configuration, you could reiterate the emotional qualities of the male side versus the female. For example… for me the emotions of the men was very somber, very quiet, very sad—but very controlled; and like, to me, you know, a straight line seemed to be just the perfect configuration… you know, with their heads down; where the women were doing something incredibly aggressive… and strange, and… with their—and their emotions was just… heartbreaking; and the sound—I recorded that sound with the women… with "Shato Nashi" (phonetic)—we made these… women make these noises… so… So I wanted to go back and forth from this very calm…walk… to this incredible, you know, tensing… climac—How do you say?—climax of emotions with the women; and we talked a lot with the cinematographer, and… how to also… because not a whole lot happens from the beginning to the end—but how to maintain a certain amount of mystery by not revealing the activity until the end…. So he—I love his work because he understands the concept so well—he came up with this idea of first showing the women from a distance so you don't even know what they are; and as you get closer, you say, "Oh my God, these are a group of women!" And then you come inside… and you see there are the hands…. So finally you really put it all together, as opposed to saying it from the beginning; so this series of cuts and actions were to help to maintain some certain amount of ambiguity and mystery, but also the emotional impact; so by the time you get to the fire, you're up to here—You know what I mean? You're—and I think with Philip… we talked a lot about… that change of emotions back and forth between men and women; and of course that… child, that—was an interesting kind of a… mediator… in that she represented a more neutral space… something that was not quite as… death—you know, something very… youthful and colorful and—just everything that was opposed to death. And so—and using that… musically and visually as a place for the viewer to take a break from this intensity… you see. So all of that was very carefully—and the edit—You know, we… shot this film in November; I edited this film from November to… May; so we—for a ten minute film, we spent a year; I mean… details of… you know… like that…. I'm sorry, I know you guys are—Yes. (laughs)

Question: I'm curious about that child character. And I wonder if you think of her as an artist figure, like (unintelligible)

Speaker: You know, with this film, I have to say it's one of the pieces that… I think it's one of the most intuitive and unexplainable pieces (unintelligible) for myself; and I think it was the first piece that I don't even want to intellectualize it and articulate it in a very concrete way; but some people have claimed that that young child is actually *me*… that sitting outside… of this… event; and… just… you know, watching the whole thing take place…. But obviously, I mean, again, dealing with this… juxtaposition between these men and women and nature and death and all of that, I wanted this child to… represent something that was very hopeful and optimistic… and I think her clothes… the circle that she was making obviously refer to the circle of the women; and almost like a furnace that she was making… but… ultimately to me she represented something of a mutual nature….

Linda Earle: I want to thank you very much, Shirin…

Speaker: Okay, ask me privately. (laughs) (Applause)

END OF RECORDING