

## **Lousy Revolutionaries: Fiction, Feminism, and Failure in Ilene Segalove's *The Riot Tapes* (1984)**

### **Abstract**

In 1970, Ilene Segalove was a student at the University of California, Santa Barbara, during a period of violent protests against the American Vietnam War. In 1984, as Ronald Reagan was elected to his second term as US President, Segalove made a video art work entitled *The Riot Tapes*, which re-enacts those student days via the visual vocabulary of popular television. This article explores *The Riot Tapes* in the context of televised politics and the deployment of national and geopolitical historical narratives of conflict and protest. Drawing on Lauren Berlant's delineation of 'the female complaint' (1988) and Hayden White's 'practical past' (2014), I argue that in the video Segalove performs the position of failure, both in her quasi-autobiographical narrative of the "lousy revolutionary" and in her adoption of cultural genres historically deemed trivial and subordinate. She does so, I contend, in order to critique the gendered rhetoric of protest narratives, to resist the co-option of history in the era of the "televised presidency", and to reclaim affect and ambivalence as viable modes of resistance.

### **Biography**

Lucy Bradnock is Assistant Professor in History of Art at the University of Nottingham. Her research concerns histories of post-1945 art, criticism, and curating in the United States, focusing in particular on narratives of the American West and on the relationship between art, performance and countercultural politics.

ORCID: 0000-0002-2252-0440

**Lousy Revolutionaries: Fiction, Feminism, and Failure in Ilene Segalove's *The Riot Tapes* (1984)**

*There is no present or future-only the past, happening over and over again-now. You  
can't get away from it.*

Eugene O'Neill, *A Moon for the Misbegotten*<sup>1</sup>

In Ilene Segalove's 1974 collage work *Today's Program: Jackson Pollock, Lavender Mist, 1950* (fig. 1), the passengers of an airline cabin gaze in rapt attention at an abstract expressionist painting that takes the place of the usual drop-down in-flight movie screen. Avant-garde art is inserted into the realm of popular culture, granted the acquiescent spectatorship of a captive audience trapped in their seats. The notion that they will continue to gaze at the painting for the duration of the flight is absurd: as John Miller has noted, 'Nobody looks at a painting like that, no matter how good it is.'<sup>2</sup> On one level, the collage deploys that absurdity in the service of dismantling the still-lingering authority of Abstract Expressionism, the heroic individualism of which collides with the collectivity of mass cultural consumption in the era of the society of the spectacle. In cropping Pollock's painting to fit the space of the screen, the collage also enacts the neat art historical teleology that leads from Abstract Expressionism's expansive gestures to the contained surfaces of Pop. As such, it raises familiar questions about the limits of painting and popular culture alike, the politics of spectatorial attention and responsibility, and the role of art in the context of the everyday, made manifest in the high art object trimmed to fit its quotidian surroundings.

*Today's Program* deploys photocollage to juxtapose the present and the past via the temporal signifiers that begin and end its title, which emphasises the painting's

existence both in the contemporary moment and the post-war year of its creation. In light of the biographical subject matter of much of Segalove's oeuvre, it is also possible to discern a more personal impulse that seems more than coincidence: the Pollock in question – his famous *Lavender Mist* – dates from the year of Segalove's birth. *Today's Program* is not directly autobiographical in the manner of her later works, many of which more explicitly retrace the artist's early years, but the shift towards mass televisual spectatorship that the collage illustrates is nonetheless implicitly tied to the narrative of Segalove's own life by means of this chronological happenstance. It serves as a reminder that all autobiography is necessarily intersubjective, since identity is always contingent and relational.

In the video work *Why I Got Into TV And Other Stories* (1983), Segalove describes the medium of television in terms that stage it almost as a primal scene, intimately bound to familial relationships, and so to autobiography:

I remember coming home the day of Kennedy's funeral. My father was in the living room watching TV and crying. The TV funeral touched him more deeply than anything else I'd ever seen. I stared at him and at the TV and at the Kleenex box and realized it was the first time I ever saw my father cry. I decided then and there to get into TV. It seemed like a good way to get his attention.<sup>3</sup>

Her account is surely tongue-in-cheek, but it is also telling in establishing an affective chain from historical event to family dynamics, via television and product placement. Just as *Today's Program* links Pollock and Segalove via the in-flight movie screen, so in this quotation, the Segalove family drama plays out in the shadow of a key historical event, one that Kathy Rae Huffman has called 'the first television spectacle in history'.<sup>4</sup> National and personal histories merge in the glowing space of the television screen, as

they would later in the decade in the context of the American war in Vietnam; television constructs and mediates personal stories and historical grand narratives alike.

The visual strategies of *Today's Program* and Segalove's other photoconceptual works from the 1970s align her practice with that of a number of other artists who appropriated mass media's aesthetic and structures of signification in order to call into question the status of art, the power of language, and the construction of the self. Charles Desmarais' study of Segalove's photographic works from the 1970s describes those works as participating in a critique of history, documentary, and autobiography as unreliable, pointless, and reductive respectively.<sup>5</sup> In several works from the 1970s the dual projects of history and photography are made ludicrous by means of the juxtaposition of grand narratives with intimate details or populist cultural forms. In *All the Pants I Had Except the Ones I Was Wearing (Front and Back)* (1974), Segalove poses against a grid of flared trousers; in *Close But No Cigar* (1975) she masquerades as Louis Daguerre, Isaac Newton, Joan of Arc, and Barbie. *The History of a Woman Is the History of Her Jewelry* (1975) presents black-and-white photographs of former first lady Pat Nixon, with captions that highlight the precious stones worn by her on formal occasions. All three confront the modes that Desmarais identifies by means of triviality. Arguably they also undercut the seriousness of apparently avant-garde art practice, leveling an affectionate parallel critique at conceptual art, performance, and Pop respectively. In these and her later video works, ambivalence is directed as much toward the realm of high art as it is at the popular practices of history making.

If, as Desmarais argues, Segalove's photographic works debunk the claims to truth made on behalf of photography in particular, then his argument might productively apply also to those works that engage with television's role in the construction of history. This is nowhere more apparent than in Segalove's 1984 video

work *The Riot Tapes*, which takes as its subject Segalove's student days at the end of the 1960s, and which is the focus of this study. While Desmarais' interpretation rests on a critique of the practice of history in general, *The Riot Tapes* belongs to a generation of works produced in the 1980s that relate specifically to the contested legacy and history of the American Vietnam War and to the troubled status of public history during the Reagan era. Indeed, as I shall argue, Segalove's practices of appropriation and re-enactment are deeply embedded in the contemporary political context in which her work was made, specifically Reaganism's revisionist politics and its crucial deployment of television as both mode of communication and producer of meaning. Within the framework of my discussion here, the year 1950 therefore marks another significant point of origin, as the dawn of a decade much mythologized in the later political and cultural rhetoric of conservatism, particularly that deployed by the Reagan administration. An analysis of Segalove's work in this context addresses broader questions about the status of the so-called protest generation a decade after America's withdrawal from Vietnam. In disrupting at once the official narrative of the war as moral crusade and the counter valorization of the sixties protest generation, I shall argue that Segalove identifies a problematic similarity between these two apparently polar positions, both defined by the gendered rhetoric of failure. Segalove's video is not a protest in itself, but instead asks important questions about protest histories. Her retrospective tale of protest ambivalence and failure insists upon a more complex and nuanced understanding of art historical narratives of protest than is commonly presented, and troubles the still pervasive rhetoric of the moral, ideological, and culture failure of the countercultural Sixties.<sup>6</sup>

As in *Today's Program* and *How I Got Into TV*, the stories that Segalove tells in *The Riot Tapes* collide major national and geopolitical narratives with minor personal

ones, to make important points about cultural hierarchy, gender, and commitment. In Segalove's dual appropriation and investigation of popular culture's structures of signification, comparisons are invited with artists such as Martha Rosler, Barbara Kruger, Louise Lawler and Jenny Holzer, in whose work Hal Foster has identified a commonality of approach in that 'each treats the public space, social representation or artistic language in which he or she intervenes as both a target and a weapon.'<sup>7</sup> Foster's analysis of the 'subversive signs' active in these works through collage, appropriation, parody and pastiche sees language and other sign systems set against themselves in a manner aimed at highlighting and dismantling the gendered power structures that they delineate. Segalove is equally invested in critiquing the gendered structures of a public cultural sphere: in *Today's Program*, for example, the revelation of both overt and repressed cultural hierarchies plays out in the realm of mass culture and public spectacle.

Foster warns in his essay against the reduction of ideology to a singular language to be critiqued and against the too-easy adoption of an oppositional stance that reinforces binary positions together with the very language that is at fault. In this light, Segalove's video raises important questions about the gendered economy of protest and the power structures that conventional histories articulate via protest's oppositional status. A closer examination of *The Riot Tapes* challenges straightforward histories of protest art that tend to valorise the committed artist who tells truth to power, often inadvertently reiterating modernist notions of the singular male artist-protester, even as they advocate collaborative or collective action. Her work also complicates art historical accounts of experimental practices that have sought to subvert television and thus critique it. In drawing on cultural and sociological studies of television as a contested site inhabited by politically empowered bodies – both famous and anonymous

– my aim is to read Segalove’s work beyond the rhetoric of postmodern appropriation, as one that expresses a genuine and ongoing ambivalence for protest, television, and history-making. In contrast to the work of Kruger et al, I argue, Segalove ultimately aims not to undermine television by highlighting its triviality but to deploy that triviality to activate television’s potential as a space of resistance.

### **Life on TV**

Segalove’s oeuvre contains clear allusions to a range of popular cultural forms, including romance fiction, film musicals, girls’ magazines, comics, and school stories. Her video work borrows in particular, however, from the narrative, aesthetic, and conceptual conventions of television, especially soap operas and sitcoms, during an era that is considered a golden age for those formats. Segalove’s exploration of personal development and familial relationships parallels the subject matter and narrative conventions of programmes such as *General Hospital*, *Days of Our Lives*, *Happy Days*, and others. These serials charted the relational exploits of central family groupings that became household names and emotional surrogates across America during the 1980s, blurring real life scenarios with fiction, fantasy, and melodrama. They are echoed in works by Segalove, including *The Mom Tapes* (1974), *I Remember Beverley Hills* (1980; fig. 2), *Why I Got Into TV and Other Stories* (1983), *The Riot Tapes: A Personal Memoir* (1984), and *My Puberty* (1987), in which apparently innocuous everyday activities become fraught with angsty symbolism. Hammy re-enactments of scenes from the artist’s youth are accompanied by dead-pan voice-overs that layer emotional drama onto minor occurrences, mirroring those strategies adopted by soap writers, as well as the experience of adolescence and the structure of memory. Segalove has

described *My Puberty* as being ‘like a cartoon story of my childhood growing up, in Technicolor’, hinting at the qualities of earnest wonder and ironic camp that characterise this and other works.<sup>8</sup> At once corny and almost embarrassingly earnest, these videos narrate the fraught, intersubjective politics of American families and the anxieties of childhood and adolescence. In doing so, they explore consumerism, cultural identity, middle-class mores, and their impact upon female experience in Southern Californian suburbia. That is, they enact a preoccupation with the American Dream and its failure. Her work was included in exhibitions such as *The People Next Door*, held at Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE) in 1984 and *Suburban Home Life: Tracking the American Dream*, at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1989, alongside others who explored the politics of the suburban condition.

Segalove’s autobiographical recollections play out like television programmes in part because she belonged to the home movie generation and her early identity was one intimately shaped by pop cultural references (indeed her first adolescent love, she explains in *My Puberty*, is Moondoggy from the 1961 teenage surf movie *Gidget Goes Hawaiian*). ‘For children growing up in the ’50s,’ Dierdre Boyle has written, ‘television was a family member.’<sup>9</sup> With the arrival in the late 1960s of portable video cameras, including the relatively inexpensive and light-weight Sony Portapak, ‘a generation whose childhood had been dominated by broadcast television was now able to get its hands on a means of TV production.’<sup>10</sup> Home movies represented the vehicle by which a generation was defined and defined themselves. Segalove is, in many ways, paradigmatic of that scenario: the video works that she produced between the mid-1970s and the late 1980s not only reflect that imbrication of technological and personal maturation, but actively perform it.



Segalove's turn to television resulted from more than a generational identification with that medium's formats and an increasingly widespread access to its apparatus on the part of amateur home movie makers, however. While at the University of California Santa Barbara (UCSB), she was part of the video collective Telethon with Billy Adlert, John Margulies, and Van Schley. In 1972, they organised the exhibition *The Television Environment* at the University Art Gallery, staging the space with living room furniture and television sets showing videoed interviews about popular culture and people's lives. The following year, they co-edited a special issue of the magazine *Radical Software* entitled 'The T.V. Environment', which outlined the components of the exhibition, as well as including interviews with television actors and watchers, a TV salesman, serviceman, and rental man, and photographs of TV stands, chairs, and dinners.<sup>11</sup> These project marked an early encounter with life narrative as a subject and method, as well as with the technologies and artistic potential of video. Following graduation, Segalove moved to Los Angeles, where she represented, as Thomas Crow has noted, a unique conduit between that experimental CalArts milieu and the sphere of professional television production, by virtue of her concurrent enrollment on the Communication Arts programme at Loyola Marymount University (LMU) and attendance at John Baldessari's now-legendary Post Studio Art class at CalArts (though she never registered there as a fee-paying student).<sup>12</sup>

At LMU, Segalove's professor was the director of the popular soap opera *General Hospital*. At CalArts, Baldessari devised a programme characterized by its conceptual and progressive pedagogical focus, a desire to break the boundaries of the studio, school, and medium-specificity, and an embrace of the relatively new apparatus of video, supported by generous funding for equipment.<sup>13</sup> Both influences are evident in the video works Segalove produced, in which playfully romantic narrative and a

deliberately brash commercial aesthetic go hand in hand with serious conceptual points, albeit ones that play on the idea of seriousness itself. The deadpan humour that pervades Segalove's work was a hallmark of the Southern California art scene - her work belongs in the company of Baldessari, Jack Goldstein, Susan Mogul, Barbara T. Smith, and Eleanor Antin - though her production values tend to exceed those of her peers and she remains less well known than them. Although made with the technological, aesthetic, and narrative procedures of a television programme, her videos were produced not for broadcast but for exhibition among a distinct video art community developing in Los Angeles and elsewhere. Segalove may have been unusual in the competency with which she handled the technical aspects of television production – some of her later works, including *My Puberty*, were filmed with a professional crew and equipment – but she was characteristically ambivalent about the relation between television and experimental video practice. In an interview conducted in 2007, she described her attraction to video as being in part about this obscurity: 'I remember people asked me what I did. I said I was shooting video. "What is that?" And I'd say, "It's TV but it's not TV, because it's not on TV." So then they'd say, "Well, where can I see it?" and I'd say, "Nowhere".'<sup>14</sup>

Despite this apparent antipathy towards television's mass public, Segalove's intimate knowledge of the strategies of television production are clearly evident in her videos, which perform television's visual and narrative conceits ostentatiously. They incorporate crude, handmade or emphatically two-dimensional sets shot in Technicolor; an artificial sense of space; serial narrative inhabited by stock characters often conforming to gender or family-unit stereotypes; hyperbolized romantic scenarios, conveyed via melodramatic gestures and phrasing; corny or do-it-yourself edits, transitions, and title cards (fig. 3); and lighting and sound conditions that indicate

a professional production environment. In *My Puberty* (fig. 4), for example, the Segalove family backyard is constructed out of garish Astroturf, artificial flowers, a two-dimensional cardboard sun umbrella, and a barbeque that is patently not alight, despite the exaggerated serving of cooked meat from it. Even lighting and an absence of background noise suggest a studio location (indeed the video was shot on a professional sound stage). As is routine practice in both the television and film industries, even Segalove's outdoor locations are closer to home than they purport to be: her teenaged vacation to Venice, Italy, in *The Riot Tapes* is patently shot in Southern California, with its pink and turquoise buildings, English-language signage, concrete sidewalk, and the beach under the Santa Monica boardwalk as a stand-in for the Adriatic. In all cases, the artifice is overt to the point of hyperbole, and reality and fiction are blurred.

### **Protest ambivalence**

If works such as *My Puberty* and *I Remember Beverly Hills* visualise the expanding middle classes and the spectacle of conspicuous consumption that shaped the experience of America's post-war Baby Boomer generation, then *The Riot Tapes* more explicitly enacts the intersection between the 'technicolor cartoon story' of Segalove's life and the geopolitics of the Cold War period. In the thirty-minute video, the artist revisits her first two years as an arts student at UCSB, between 1968 and 1970, during the height of political unrest on the so-called campus by the sea and its adjacent student community Isla Vista, which witnessed significant student militancy in the late 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>15</sup> Escalating youth protests were motivated by several factors, including the Union oil spill off the coast of Santa Barbara in April 1969; the firing of

a popular anthropology professor;<sup>16</sup> growing opposition to the American Vietnam War; and police responses to protests elsewhere, in particular the shooting by police of a bystander at the Berkeley People's Park confrontation on 15 May 1969. Several weeks of intensive protests in February 1970 culminated in an arson attack on the town's Bank of America building in the early hours of the morning of the 26th, shortly after which some three hundred armed National Guard troops placed a twelve-square block area of Isla Vista under martial law, arresting those who refused to disband and disperse.<sup>17</sup> That summer, protests erupted once more and the bank again became a target for unrest, including as the site of a "smoke-in" on 5 June, in which protesters set light to stationery, deposit slips and dollar bills, forcing the bank to close. That night, despite the strictest curfew in the city's history, demonstrators threw railroad flares and Molotov cocktails.<sup>18</sup>

Contemporary news reports described Isla Vista in apocalyptic terms: as 'riot-scarred',<sup>19</sup> 'a battlefield',<sup>20</sup> 'the scene of nothing less than guerrilla warfare',<sup>21</sup> its bank 'in ruins, burned to a shell by rampaging young demonstrators'.<sup>22</sup> Images of the burning building were widely published, as were scenes of young protesters corralled by police. In a piece for *The New York Times* titled 'The Isla Vista War', Winthrop Griffith described in apparently clichéd terms the mass of 'deeply tanned' UCSB students who exchanged expensive cars and surfboards for slingshots and missiles. At the centre of this characterisation of the Isla Vista protesters is the figure, cited in the article, of 'a sweet-faced girl hurl[ing] a rock towards a sheriff's deputy'.<sup>23</sup> In fact, Griffith's apparently rhetorical dialectic of disengaged leisure versus engaged activism was not so far off the mark. His assumptions were borne out in a sociological study published the following year, according to which the disaffection expressed by the student body at Santa Barbara was noteworthy since 'unlike the students at Berkeley, Chicago, or

Columbia, [those at UCSB] were noted for their surfboarding, sun bathing, and conservative political apathy.<sup>24</sup> Thus the events in Isla Vista were remarkable not only for their duration – unrest would continue to the end of that year – but also the widely acknowledged sense that these were unlikely protesters: middle-class kids known more for the affluence of their parents and their tendency to embrace a lifestyle of leisure on the California coast.

Segalove's video account of the events of 1970 plays on this tension between seriousness and triviality, substituting the prevalent dramatic black-and-white newspaper photographs of scarred buildings, riot police, and angry youths, for a technicoloured and kitschy version of events in the visual language of entertainment television. The video comprises three parts - 'Blondes, Blacks, Biafra', 'TV, Chaos, Love', and 'Drugs, Death, Art'- and an Epilogue. Segalove has explained that her motivation in making the video work was 'to put my pseudo-college life into some kind of shape, to honor my old boyfriend and his ideals, and to build some humor into a pretty serious time.'<sup>25</sup> The boyfriend is the principled Ricky, a sociology major who reads Marx and Mao, and starves himself in an attempt to evade the draft. The work's exploration of sixties politics is mediated in Part 1 of the video (figs 5-6), which sets a series of clichéd SoCal signifiers – surfboards, cheerleaders, girls in shorts performing handstands, Snoopy – against a creeping awareness of significant political events – the Biafran War and its reporting in *LIFE Magazine*, the trials of Bobby Sears and Eldridge Cleaver, the death of Ho Chi Minh, and the draft. Against this backdrop of world politics, Segalove sets an account of her doomed relationship, which plays out as an ever-widening gulf between commitment and its lack. she performs her younger self as superficial in comparison to Ricky, managing to sleep through the protest at Isla Vista, and opting instead to partake of a symbolic cup of coffee, play-acting at revolution.

While the first part of *Riot Tapes* is located in Santa Barbara, the second is set in the Segalove family living room back in Beverly Hills, where the young Ilene and her parents and brother flick between news of the war's latest casualties and other TV programmes (fig. 7). The sequence makes literal the notion that Vietnam was a war fought (and lost, as Marshall McLuhan famously pointed out)<sup>26</sup> as much in American living rooms as in foreign jungles. In this entertainment-saturated version of conflict, characters from fictional programmes occupy space alongside US soldiers, casualty figures are accompanied by ice cream. The fictionalization of the war itself also pertains to the anti-war protests it engenders, presented in Segalove's video by means of historic documentary footage tinted in candy colours and intercut with re-enactment. Similarly, Ilene's developing political consciousness is presented in the context of her affluent, middle-class adolescence, two positions that overlap but are not fully reconciled. An episode that recounts a family holiday in Italy, for example, sees Ilene warding off the amorous attention of Mario by waving a packet of contraceptive pills at him: holiday romance clashes with the politics of sexual liberation. That interlude is followed in part three by Segalove's return to college as an art major and her turn to art as a vehicle of protest, though her choice of medium – lithography and ketchup – again blends the serious with its opposite, revealing protest and consumption to be inter-related.

### **Symbolic times**

Segalove's deployment of the past in the present moment via the mode of fiction that I have outlined is arguably an example of what Hayden White (following philosopher Michael Oakshott) calls the practical past. As such, it represents the past put to use in the service of the present, rather than viewed from an objective distance; the practical

past is, according to White, ‘invested less in the interest of establishing the facts of a given matter than that of providing a basis in fact from which to launch a judgment of action in the present’.<sup>27</sup> White describes the procedures of the practical past in terms of the complex relations ‘between history and literature, or factual and fictional writing, or realistic and imaginative writing.’<sup>28</sup> While Segalove’s work deploys the aesthetic and narrative economies most easily associated with (television) fiction, its referent exists in the real world that is, in White’s words, ‘historical, empirical, and documentable’.<sup>29</sup> In Segalove’s video, this historical “fact” is perhaps most explicitly manifested in Segalove’s presence acting her younger self. It also finds expression in the inclusion of brief segments of archival footage from the 1970 cult documentary film *Don’t Bank on Amerika*, documenting the riots and their aftermath (fig. 8).<sup>30</sup> In the realm of television that is Segalove’s frame of reference, this juxtaposition conjures the abrupt and incongruous move from current affairs to entertainment fiction; but this intermingling of historical document with highly subjective fiction also invites us to read the video as an example of the practical past. In its mingling of fact and fiction, its examination of the past via the realm of emotion and imagination, and by virtue of being ‘self-consciously fashioned and assertive of its “techniques”’, *The Riot Tapes* fits plausibly into White’s category of the practical past, notwithstanding its status as something distinct from the kind of historical novel that White has in mind.<sup>31</sup>

If the practical past embodied in historical fiction is, according to White, driven predominantly by an effort to ‘come to terms with the past’, then with what is Segalove coming to terms, and why particularly in 1984? The answer to this question may lie in another common denominator (albeit implied rather than explicit) that haunts both eras represented in Segalove’s video faux-memoir: Ronald Reagan, Governor of California at the time of the Isla Vista protests, was re-elected for his second presidential term

with the largest mandate in American history, in 1984, the year that Segalove made her video. *The Riot Tapes* brings together two periods in American history in which politics was shaped by television, and vice versa. While Vietnam was the “Living Room War”, the Regan administration became known as the “primetime presidency”.<sup>32</sup> It was not lost on commentators that Reagan had forged his first career as a star of television and film, and that he drew on this experience to forge a populist presidential persona in a new era of twenty-four hour televised news coverage.<sup>33</sup> Writing in 1988, the scholar of presidential communication Robert E. Denton, Jr. observed that over the course of that decade, ‘television has become the primary medium and tool of both campaigning and governing.’<sup>34</sup> As Denton and others noted, political and social success was increasingly contingent upon mastery of the medium of television, and this mastery demanded that ‘the messenger became the message – molded and shaped to fit the requirements of television.’<sup>35</sup> In this model, television functions as much more than a mode of communicating an already established idea or action; it becomes, according to Denton, ‘the instrument of governing.’<sup>36</sup> To this end, it is possible to discern in political discourse of the 1980s in particular the qualities and structures specific to television, including an emphasis on personality and celebrity, and the construction and promotion of compelling and easily understood narratives.

Also important for understanding Segalove’s practice is the strategic deployment of nostalgia and historical revisionism that many have identified as being a feature of the Reagan administration.<sup>37</sup> Reagan invoked the 1950s in particular as an era of conservative family values, economic stability, and national pride, a strategy that historians have read as an attempt to overcome the social and political turbulence of the previous decades. If postmodernism’s recycling of the past by means of historical appropriation or pastiche exposes cultural hierarchies and their implications,



Segalove's restaging of the past in the form of her own personal histories is enacted against the specific backdrop of the politics of Reaganism, in particular its cynical appropriation of history. In the context of a political rhetoric predicated on historical nostalgia, which conjures through strategic sentimentalism a semi-fictional past, Segalove's Technicolor depictions of her Beverly Hills childhood might be read as mimicking both the visual rhetoric and the historical revisionism of Reaganism. In particular, it invokes such campaign advertisements as Reagan's famous *Morning in America*, which aired in 1984. The advertisement conjured a romantic, conservative vision of America that harked back to the conservative values of the post-war decade. The cliché-laden visual sequence, soaring music, and rhetorical voiceover emphasise marriage and family, economic prosperity, and unquestioning patriotism, all demonstrated via the material comforts of the American middle class. The scenario of the idealized and co-operative nuclear family cited in the campaign is undercut in Segalove's videos, where familial tensions and gender stereotyping are overt, from the creepy uncle who tweaks her bottom in *My Puberty* to Ilene's brandishing of the contraceptive pill to ward off her Italian paramour in *The Riot Tapes*. Furthermore, the constructed nature of Reagan's idealized America of white picket fences and perfect suburban lawns is made explicit in Segalove's artificial sets and crude acting, which, in parallel with the paradoxically unconvincing tenor of her self-performance, make no attempt at realism. Thus we are reminded throughout that the scenario in front of us is a staged version of the past re-imagined for the purposes of the present.

The context of Reaganism's reconstruction and reuse of the past attains particular significance in the case of *The Riot Tapes* by virtue of the video's account of draft dodging and protests against the American Vietnam War. As California Governor, Reagan was an aggressive supporter of the pursuit of American victory in Vietnam at

all costs, and a staunch moral critic of antiwar protests on University of California campuses.<sup>38</sup> As President, his administration staged a symbolic recuperation of the figures of the Vietnam soldier and veteran and a concomitant demonisation of the draft dodger and the protester. Consistently describing the latter group in negative terms – as naïve dupes who played into the hands of the enemy – Regan’s political rhetoric staged collective memory in unambiguous terms.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, the rhetoric was overtly gendered, in the way in which it established a clear polarity between (feminised) weakness, on the one hand, and (masculine) strength of purpose, on the other. As such it reinscribed the ‘hard/soft dichotomy’ that historian K.A. Cuordileone has noted as being a feature of the immediate post-war years. As Cuordileone observes, that polarization ‘reflect[ed] a political culture that put a new premium on hard masculine toughness and rendered anything less than that soft and feminine and, as such, a real or potential threat to the security of the nation.’<sup>40</sup> From the perspective of the 1980s, nostalgia for a pre-Vietnam America informed the mode of discourse as well as its message.

The Reagan administration’s reinvention of the history of the American Vietnam War represents the explicit use of fiction to facilitate historical revisionism in the name of political expediency in the present. As such, it highlights the constructedness of all historical narratives by means of a particularly cynical example. Marita Sturken cites veteran William Adams’ observation that ‘the Vietnam War is no longer a definite event so much as it is a collective and mobile script in which we continue to scrawl, erase, rewrite our conflicting and changing views of ourselves.’<sup>41</sup> Self and nation are intimately bound in this understanding of the war as terrain that is continuously renegotiated according to shifting agendas. It is not difficult to read Segalove’s video, in which the past is filtered through the lens of entertainment fiction,

as engaging directly with this contemporary act of writing history: one presents truth as fiction, while the other presents fiction as truth. In *The Riot Tapes*, the war and its opposition are similarly entwined with personal narrative and the politics of recollection via the technologies of communication and their ability to deceive or empower, as well as to entertain.

In contrast to those who decried Reagan's narrative by re-asserting the righteousness of the protest generation, however, *The Riot Tapes* does not recuperate the protesters' position and thus reiterate the terms of Reagan's rhetoric by means of their reversal. Indeed, as her coloration of the documentary images included in the video demonstrates, Segalove is also interested in "rose-tinted" narratives of the protest movement itself. These shots are not included for the sake of authenticity or testimony; rather Segalove's story is one characterised by ambivalence and disidentification. Furthermore, Segalove's performance of the inequalities within the group of protesters dismantles the implication of coherence and non-differentiation that the notion of "The Protest Generation" assumes, while her failure to attend the Isla Vista demonstrations calls into question the dual assumption of political engagement and anti-materialism upon which that generational designation relies.<sup>42</sup> If the social and political movements of the American counterculture ostensibly promised Segalove's generation freedom from social norms and traditional values, Segalove's performance reveals this freedom to have been limited in actuality.

Central to the dynamic of Ricky and Ilene's relationship in *The Riot Tapes* is the question of how best to protest (or, more pointedly, how to be the best protester). Near the beginning of the video, Ricky pronounces his disdain for protest art as a disingenuous genre incapable of bringing about real change. He has little time for the symbolic gestures of visual culture at large. He accuses Ilene of a lack of feeling and of

failing to understand symbolism. In one scene (fig. 9), he excoriates her for bringing food on a picnic they have arranged, since he is fasting to avoid the draft, but also since it reveals her over-enthusiasm for consumption. He exhorts her to read Mao – ‘If you want to know the taste of a pear, you must change the pear by eating it yourself’ - but criticizes her for taking the text too literally by actually taking a bite: ‘don’t you get it?’ Ricky exclaims, ‘the pear is a symbol.’ Where Ricky’s understanding is gained via intellectual means, Ilene’s is embodied and emotive. In *Close But No Cigar* (1975), a photographic re-staging of figures from art history and contemporary culture, Segalove performed a similar pitting of brain against stomach when she posed as Isaac Newton eating, rather than contemplating, the famous apple. Symbolism and its pitfalls is an ongoing concern: ‘these,’ Segalove’s voiceover in *The Riot Tapes* explains in faux-solemnity, ‘were symbolic times’. Yet Segalove’s symbols – a cup of coffee, a box of Kleenex – are perceived as insufficient alongside Ricky’s. They are too banal and are morally and politically tainted by consumerism.

Segalove’s deployment of the visual and technical language of television and the way in which consumer products appear as narrative touchstones in *The Riot Tapes* thus articulate a loaded dynamic of gender, commodity, and moral responsibility. As David Joselit argues, television and commodity have always been intertwined, the former developed according to a scenario in which the network is a function of the commodity that is the television set, and in turn enables the circulation of other commodities within the ‘environment of persuasion’ that the network delineates.<sup>43</sup> Television advertising in the fifties and sixties ‘served as an intensive educational program for consolidating a new middle-class,’ particularly via the construction of women as aspirational consumers, for whom commodities represent entrée into the middle-class.<sup>44</sup> The implication of television networks in

this moral and social system of commodity thus has gendered implications that parallel Nancy Walker's description of women's magazines as 'guidebooks and how-to manuals' for obedient feminine subjects.<sup>45</sup>

The uncomfortable dynamic that plays out between Ilene and Ricky in *The Riot Tapes* locates in the apparently countercultural realm of the protest movement an exchange that is driven by parallel peer pressures that are equally implicated in the politics of commodity. What Ricky delivers is a sermon on how to occupy the moral high ground by being an effective revolutionary. Ilene is presented as physically, intellectually, and emotionally weaker than he is, lacking in self-control in that age-old domain of feminine experience, food, which at once symbolises her failure to resist temptation and a lack of control over her own body. Ricky, meanwhile, though physically puny, represents moral strength and dedication to a cause, emotion correctly and effectively directed towards resistance rather than submission. Just as the adoption of *Gidget* as a key reference point in *My Puberty* reflects 1950s anxiety about the temptations facing teenaged girls,<sup>46</sup> so we might read *The Riot Tapes* as equally engaging in an exploration of gender roles via the rhetoric of impulse control, this time within the context of a 1960s protest movement widely criticized as sexist.

A similar kind of performed non-seriousness is chronicled in *Conversations with Stalin*, the semi-fictional memoir written by the artist Eleanor Antin, in which the youthful Ellie dates Clarence from her Marxist discussion group, though remains ever fearful that he will deem her too bourgeois and naive.<sup>47</sup> Clarence acts superior. His principled gestures – owning only one suit, and declaration that their sexual encounter in a hay barn is 'how farm workers made love for centuries' – are juxtaposed with Ellie's concern with romance and comfort. She considers Clarence's suit 'Byronic' rather than austere, and she dislikes the hay because it is spiky and pricks her skin.

Crucially, she does not complain because she '[isn't] in the mood for a lecture'.<sup>48</sup> Like Segalove's, Antin's work merges fiction with autobiography, harnessing the mode of the confessional to chronicle the process of maturation and self-discovery via the interpersonal relationships established in protest groups. In both, the female protagonist occupies an inferior position within the group hierarchy, on account of being too preoccupied with personal, material, or trivial concerns, too bourgeois and not properly revolutionary.

In both *The Riot Tapes* and *Conversations with Stalin*, affect, ambivalence, and lack of seriousness are deployed as both subject and method to undermine the apparent earnestness of youth protest via destabilizing clearly-delimited subject positions upon which the oppositionality of protest narratives relies.<sup>49</sup> The riots in Isla Vista garnered international attention, but Segalove's account refuses dénouement by focusing on her failure to participate in, let alone influence, the key political actions that characterised her generation in dominant narratives of the countercultural Sixties. In short, and by her own assessment in the video, Segalove emerges in *The Riot Tapes* as a 'lousy revolutionary'. If, as Desmarais has noted, *Today's Program* functions in part to deflate the heroic myth of Jackson Pollock,<sup>50</sup> then this tendency towards bathos is also directed towards herself and her peers in an oeuvre in which 'retrospection tends to deflate rather than romanticize experience,' as Michael Renov has argued.<sup>51</sup> Segalove's account of half-hearted commitment, protest anxiety, romantic cliché, and middle class cultural guilt poses a counterpoint to the narrative of heroic countercultural protest that frequently informs accounts of the art of that period: she is as interested in holiday romance as she is in stopping the war in Vietnam, but at neither is she conventionally successful.

Segalove performs the fraught negotiation between the individual and the collective, both in terms of behaviour in the social realm (what is expected, what is allowed, and what is performed via symbolic signifiers of political sociability such as coffee), and in terms of group versus individual memory. In its refusal to conform to the accepted collective narrative of heroic anti-war protest, the work resists the construction of a national identity that masks the national trauma of conflict with the image of earnestly idealistic youngsters (the Rickys and Clarences of this world). In presenting the 1970 protest via the mode of fiction, Segalove circumvents the serious claims made for documentary and thus questions the procedures of history formation. The practical past, as White elucidates it, is aimed at uncovering narratives previously inaccessible or those deemed unimportant or somehow unsuitable for rigorous study; as such, it also works to question the methods and implications of the historical project *per se*:

[...] what kinds of questions could be asked by the present of the past, what kind of evidence could be adduced in any effort to ask the proper questions, what constituted properly “historical” answers to those questions, and where the line was to be drawn for distinguishing between a proper and an improper use of historical “knowledge” in any effort to clarify or illuminate contemporary efforts to answer central questions of moral and societal concern.<sup>52</sup>

In dwelling on an ‘improper’ history that ‘pollutes’ the serious business of war and protest with apparently trivial elements – a momentarily amusing holiday romance, a picnic, a cup of coffee – Segalove’s work unsettles widely accepted narratives of the American Vietnam War from both sides, that is those that valorise protesters as well as those that demonise them, revealing both versions of history to be equally compromised.

## Getting into TV

If Segalove casts herself in *The Riot Tapes* as a ‘lousy revolutionary’, then the work also plays on television’s similar reputation as antithetical to serious aesthetic or avant-garde experimentation. Writing in 1979, the philosopher of aesthetics Curtis L. Carter explained that ‘In an era of television in the U.S.A. dominated by situation comedies, detective stories, violent thrillers and advertisements, aesthetics and television appear to represent opposite poles, the one representing the interest of the arts, the other what is assumed to be popular culture.’<sup>53</sup> The recuperation of popular culture that attended Pop Art seems to have had little impact in raising the status of television. As Kathy Rae Huffman has observed, ‘TV remains the single most important reference point for determining uniformity in American culture,’ by virtue of its appeal to the greatest common denominator.<sup>54</sup> If newly available video technology ‘allow[ed] baby boomers access to the tools to make their own television,’<sup>55</sup> it also resulted in the denunciation of populist television via the development of deliberately alternative positions and strategies of intervention or subversion. In her study of 1970s guerilla television, for example, Deirdre Boyle describes a community that sought radically to transform and democratize what was perceived to be a cumbersome, repetitive, and stale medium.<sup>56</sup> The products of their efforts inhabited television’s fringe, shown in galleries and lofts, or on alternative networks to significantly smaller audiences than those of the subject of their critique. For many video artists working in experimental workshops of the 1970s and 1980s, the broad appeal necessitated by television’s commercial imperatives represented either a problematic constraint to be avoided or an inimical terrain to be conquered, as in the subversive practices outlined in David Joselit’s book *Feedback:*



*Television Against Democracy*. For Segalove, however, it represented a productive territory within which to explore questions of individual and collective storytelling as identity construction.

Segalove's recourse to the language of television parallels the lack of seriousness that her character in *The Riot Tapes* enacts in the context of committed protest. In her emphasis on affective experience in place of the rigid pursuit of ideological truth and her account of ambivalence and failure in the face of political action, Segalove's work might be aligned with what Lauren Berlant has described in *The Female Complaint* as the 'space of disappointment' that characterises female experience as a continual negotiation between the imagined space of romantic fantasy and the lived reality of intimacy.<sup>57</sup> Segalove's use of television also suggests an explicitly gendered critique via its deployment of cultural forms traditionally gendered feminine and that Berlant identifies as 'modes of containment' that delineate female experience and within which resistance is paradoxically enacted.<sup>58</sup>

Berlant's notion of containment articulates the historic assumption that discourse uttered by and for women is less serious and less rigorous. Historically, "women's genres", those based on television in particular, were for the most part repudiated by scholars of visual culture and feminists alike, on the grounds respectively that they were aesthetically inferior and that they operated as sites for the construction and reiteration of patriarchal definitions of femininity and the family. The latter accusation rested on their apparently stereotypical portrayal of women and on the grounds that they were complicit in structuring the restricted lives of their predominantly female viewers according to the repetition and mundanity of domestic time. Thus soap operas, sitcoms, and other forms of popular culture occupied the paradoxical position of being deemed both trivial and harmful at the same time.

By the late 1970s, however, the empowering potential of such formats was recognized both within feminist discourse and in film and television studies as being capable of validating those groups once deemed trivial or subordinate, without reinscribing that trivializing or subordination.<sup>59</sup> Recognition of shared kinship on the part of female viewers and the sense that their emotional lives are acknowledged as culturally significant implicates women's culture in the creation of what Berlant describes as an 'intimate public' delineated by common affective experience.<sup>60</sup> By virtue of a shared kinship with other fans, and the establishment of discursive networks that extend beyond the text of individual episodes, women's genres were capable of enacting what Mary Ellen Brown, writing in 1994, termed 'the pleasure of resistance.'<sup>61</sup> In her anthropological study of soap opera gossip networks, Brown finds that these groupings function 'not only to set boundaries for themselves where they can discuss their own cultural concerns but also to resist aesthetic hierarchies concerned with knowledge, accepted cultural capital, and domination by men'.<sup>62</sup> Thus they carry with them the possibility for resistance on the grounds that their members share a status of cultural oppression but are allowed the space to acknowledge this via conversations about their subject position. The emotionalism of the soap narrative and the stock characterization of the soap and the sitcom alike allow subjectivity and apparent lack of seriousness to take on the properties of social and cultural resistance.

The politics of so-called women's genres offers a useful framework for thinking about Segalove's use of television as a format with feminist potential insofar as it involves an acknowledgment of subjectivity, instability, and emotionalism, without attempting to subvert or question those states. According to Berlant, 'the *a priori* marking of female discourse as *less serious* is paradoxically the only condition under which the complaint mode can operate as an effective political tool.'<sup>63</sup> In reiterating her

own failure, and in doing so via ‘trivial’ female discourse that traditionally contains the female subject, Segalove resists exactly those hegemonic structures and assumptions that she appropriates. Her target is the assumption that some modes of discourse are more worthy than others; yet her ability to make this critique rests on the designation of failure, since she must occupy that position to articulate her ‘complaint’. *The Riot Tapes*’ merging of narratives of the past with the modes of fiction, myth, and cliché, is thus aimed at resisting the hierarchies of seriousness that have tried to separate these realms and that have structured the spaces of protest. According to Brown’s model of the discursive space of the soap opera as one that facilitates resistance, we might interpret Segalove’s proposition as follows: those actions that Ricky dismisses as insufficiently committed – conversation over coffee, popular cultural forms deemed trivial in comparison with “reality” – characterise the feminine intimate public that operates as an alternative mode of resistance to the patriarchal notion of protest as a lonely quest that he embodies. (Indeed, though poignant, it seems uncoincidental that Ricky’s position, which values cerebral learning over lived experience, ends when his body wastes away.) For Segalove, in line with that intimate public, protest is mediated through the medium of television, both in order to reflect on its shortcomings and also to reinvigorate it according to new cultural conditions in an era of televised politics. Against the backdrop of the Reagan presidency, television is a loaded and contested space that structures ideologies along gendered lines; protest must therefore be resituated from the barricades (and the banks) to the airwaves.

In merging the space of conflict with that of consumption, *The Riot Tapes* invites comparison with Martha Rosler’s pioneering Vietnam-era photcollage series *House Beautiful: Bringing the War Back Home* (c.1967-72), which punctures the flawless consumerism espoused by the eponymous lifestyle magazine with photographs

from Vietnam, images that laid bare for those back home the horrors of the war “over there” (fig. 10). The differences between these two projects are revealing, however. Rosler’s housewives Hoover imagined specks of dirt from the perfect homes in willful ignorance propped up by the kinds of images that she appropriates, their domestic labour juxtaposed in contrast with that of young men fighting abroad and Vietnamese civilian victims, with the ideological implications that the metaphor of cleansing might imply.<sup>64</sup> Rosler has described the process of this and other works as ‘inserting public narratives into private ones’, a procedure that invites comparison with Segalove’s merging of the realms of personal and collective memory via exaggerated narrativity.<sup>65</sup> The two projects belong to very different times, however: one was produced at the height of the war and its opposition, and disseminated via underground channels that partly delineated the anti-war movement; the other recalls the war from a distance of over a decade, and was made to inhabit the spaces of art.

Whilst Rosler has described her work as occupying the literal and figurative spaces of activism, *The Riot Tapes* does not belong in the category of protest art *per se*.<sup>66</sup> Rather, it takes political engagement as its subject, in order to reflect on protest’s relationship with personal narrative, collective spectatorship, and historical shifts mediated by the mass media (whether news bulletin, presidential address, soap opera, or sitcom). As Berlant asserts, ‘When women sentimentalists turn to politics, it is not usually because they view politics as a resource for living but because they see it as a degraded space and a threat to happiness and justice that needs reforming so that better living can take place.’<sup>67</sup> For Segalove, that politics includes the sixties countercultural protest movement, of which Rosler was a part. Rosler’s works claim the political and cultural authority of Dadaist photomontage in order to critique US spectators for their consumerist complicity, while aligning her subjects with the fascistic target of those

earlier avant-garde practices. *The Riot Tapes*, in contrast, recounts the failed collective experience of protest and political engagement, or at least its maturation into something more circumspect. From the perspective of 1984, in Seglove's words, 'life isn't as symbolic as it used to be'. *The Riot Tapes* implies that the power of straightforward protest art is limited; it also envisions what comes in its wake.

If Rosler's collage series deconstructs the very visual culture that it appropriated in order to critique it, Segalove seems to identify a renewed political potential in the populist and quasi-fictional spaces of television and magazines. Her adoption of the medium of television in particular is aimed not only at highlighting the manner in which geo-political narratives are mediated for those at home, but also at suggesting one way in which those viewers might reclaim historical and social agency against a backdrop of media manipulation. For Segalove, that is, television is not merely the problem, but is also the solution. In adopting the intimate mode of women's genres at the same time as she occupies the historically feminized position of failure and triviality, Segalove at once critiques the hegemonic history of protest and regains the lost political and symbolic potency of collective, affective action.

---

I should like to thank the staff of the Getty Research Institute and Video Data Bank for facilitating this research. Thanks also to Catherine Spencer, Amy Tobin, and Harry Weeks, in whose session at the 2015 Association of Art Historians conference this research was first presented, and to Catherine Grant and Lara Pucci, who offered generous comments on early drafts.

<sup>1</sup> Eugene O'Neill, *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, in John Gassner (ed.), *Best American Plays: Fourth Series – 1951-1957* (New York: Crown, 1958), p.165.

- 
- <sup>2</sup> John Miller, 'Tomorrow is the Question', *Artforum International*, vol. 50, no. 2, October 2011, p. 262.
- <sup>3</sup> Ilene Segalove, *Why I Got Into TV And Other Stories*, ed. Charles Desmarais, (Laguna Beach: Laguna Art Museum, 1990), front cover.
- <sup>4</sup> Kathy Rae Huffman, 'Video Art: What's TV Got To Do With It?' in Doug Hall and Sally Jo Fifer (eds), *Illuminating Video: An Essential Guide to Video Art* (New York: Aperture, 1991), p. 81.
- <sup>5</sup> Charles Desmarais, 'A Kind of Truth', in Paul Schimmel (ed.), *Under the Big Black Sun: California Art 1974-1981* (Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art), pp. 86-7.
- <sup>6</sup> See Julie Stephens, *Anti-Disciplinary Protest: Sixties Radicalism and Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Simon Hall, 'Protest Movements in the 1970s: The Long 1960s', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 43, no. 4, October 2008, pp. 655-72.
- <sup>7</sup> Hal Foster, *Recoding: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1985), p. 100.
- <sup>8</sup> Ilene Segalove - My Puberty - West Coast Video Art, MOCAtv video, 8 October, 2012: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wvj7oFiTdvG> (accessed 9 November 2017).
- <sup>9</sup> Dierdre Boyle, *Subject to Change: Guerilla Television Revisited* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 3.
- <sup>10</sup> Paul Ryan, 'Genealogy of Video', *Leonardo*, vol. 21, no. 1, 1988, pp. 39-44, 40.
- <sup>11</sup> 'The T.V. Environment' *Radical Software*, Vol. 2, no. 2, Spring 1973.
- <sup>12</sup> Thomas Crow, 'The Art of the Fugitive in 1970s Los Angeles: Runaway Self-Consciousness,' in Schimmel (ed.), *Under the Big Black Sun*, p. 47.

- 
- <sup>13</sup> Christopher Knight, 'A Situation Where Art Might Happen: John Baldessari on CalArts', *eastofborneo*, no. 19, November 2011:  
<http://www.eastofborneo.org/articles/a-situation-where-art-might-happen-john-baldessari-on-calarts> (accessed 11 November 2016). Segalove obtained her first Sony Portapak portable video camera from the partner of Nam June Paik, who also taught at CalArts.
- <sup>14</sup> Ilene Segalove Interview conducted by Carole Ann Klonarides, in Glenn Phillips (ed.), *California Video* (Los Angeles: Getty, 2008), p. 202. In fact, *Riot Tapes* was shown in art venues, for example at The Museum of Modern Art in a 1985 programme of new video art from the West Coast.
- <sup>15</sup> UCSB students represented around 9,000 of the 13,000-strong community.
- <sup>16</sup> According to Robert B. Smith, William Allen was widely perceived to have been 'fired unjustly for his radical political beliefs and his permissive life style.' See Smith, 'The Vietnam War and Student Militancy', *Social Science Quarterly*, vol. 52, no.1, 1 June 1971, p. 139.
- <sup>17</sup> Robert Kistler, 'Riot Area put Under Tight Guard', *Los Angeles Times*, 28 February 1970, pp. 1 and 23.
- <sup>18</sup> 'Isla Vista Demonstrators Stone Bank in Renewal of Violence', *Los Angeles Times*, 8 June 1970, p. 1.
- <sup>19</sup> Kistler, 'Riot Area put Under Tight Guard', p. 1.
- <sup>20</sup> Kistler, 'Riot Area put Under Tight Guard', p. 23.
- <sup>21</sup> Winthrop Griffith, 'The Isla Vista War - Campus Violence In a Class By Itself', *The New York Times*, 30 August 1970, p. 11.
- <sup>22</sup> John Kendall, 'Isla Vista Bank Had Prior Warning' *Los Angeles Times*, 6 March 1970, p. 1.

- 
- <sup>23</sup> Griffith, 'The Isla Vista War', p. 11.
- <sup>24</sup> Smith, 'The Vietnam War and Student Militancy', p. 133.
- <sup>25</sup> Ilene Segalove - My Puberty - West Coast Video Art, MOCAtv video.
- <sup>26</sup> Marshall McLuhan, cited in *Montreal Gazette*, 16 May 1975.
- <sup>27</sup> Hayden White, *The Practical Past* (Evanston, IL, Northwestern University Press, 2014), p. 15.
- <sup>28</sup> White, *The Practical Past*, p. 6.
- <sup>29</sup> White, *The Practical Past*, p. 5.
- <sup>30</sup> *Don't Bank on Amerika*, directed by Peter Biskind, Stephen Hornick, John C. Manning. CA: Cinecong Films, 1970.
- <sup>31</sup> White, *The Practical Past*, p. 5. I am not arguing for soap operas as a practical past per se, but that in Segalove's hands these formats take on that function.
- <sup>32</sup> Robert E. Denton, Jr., *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: the Era of the Television Presidency* (New York: Praeger, 1988).
- <sup>33</sup> Toby Glenn Bates, *The Reagan Rhetoric: History and Memory in 1980s America* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2011). Reagan's 1980 election victory coincided with the launch of CNN.
- <sup>34</sup> Denton, p. xii.
- <sup>35</sup> Denton, p. xi.
- <sup>36</sup> Denton, p. xi.
- <sup>37</sup> See, for example, Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: the Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: The University of California Press, 1997), p. 88; Douglas E. Forster, *Deconstructing Reaganism: An Analysis of American Fantasy Films* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2014).



---

<sup>38</sup> See Jules Tygiel, 'Ronald Reagan and the Triumph of Conservatism,' in Marcia A. Eymann and Charles Wollenberg (eds), *What's Going On? California and the Vietnam Era* (Oakland: Oakland Museum of California, 2004), pp. 43-57.

<sup>39</sup> Bates, *The Reagan Rhetoric*, pp. 46 and 54. These highly partisan reconstructions of the figure of the protester went hand in hand with the recuperation of the figure of the Vietnam soldier and veteran in both political rhetoric and popular culture, including film and pop music.

<sup>40</sup> K.A. Cuordileone, "'Politics in an Age of Anxiety': Cold War Political Culture and the Crisis in American Masculinity', *The Journal of American History*, vol. 87, no. 2, September 2000, p. 516. See also Susan Jeffords, *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994).

<sup>41</sup> Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, p. 86.

<sup>42</sup> M. Kent Jennings, 'Residues of a Movement: The Aging of the American Protest Generation', *The American Political Science Review*, vol. 81, no. 2, June 1987, pp. 367-382; Henk Becker, 'Discontinuous change and generational contracts,' in Sara Arber and Claudine Attias-Donfut (eds), *The Myth of Generational Conflict: The Family and State in Ageing Societies* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1999), pp. 114-32, esp. pp. 119-20.

<sup>43</sup> David Joselit, *Feedback: Television Against Democracy* (Cambridge, MA, and London: The MIT Press, 2007), p.18.

<sup>44</sup> Joselit, *Feedback*, p.18.

<sup>45</sup> Nancy A. Walker, *Women's Magazines, 1940-1960: Gender Roles and the Popular Press* (Boston: Palgrave MacMillan, 1998), p. 15.

<sup>46</sup> See Marie L. Aquila, *Movies as History: Scenes of America, 1930-1970* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2014).

- 
- <sup>47</sup> Eleanor Antin, *Conversations with Stalin* (Copenhagen and Los Angeles: Green-Integer, 2013), pp. 53-9.
- <sup>48</sup> Antin, *Conversations with Stalin*, p. 55.
- <sup>49</sup> I should make it clear that I am referring to protest *narratives* rather than the complex motivations of individual protesters.
- <sup>50</sup> Charles Desmarais, 'The Profound in the Banal' in *Why I Got Into TV and Other Stories*, 14.
- <sup>51</sup> Michael Renov, *The Subject of Documentary* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), p. 116.
- <sup>52</sup> White, *The Practical Past*, p. 8.
- <sup>53</sup> Curtis L. Carter, 'Aesthetics, Video Art and Television', *Leonardo*, vol. 12, no. 4, 1979, p. 289.
- <sup>54</sup> Huffman, 'Video Art: What's TV Got To Do With It?', p. 90.
- <sup>55</sup> Deirdre Boyle, *Subject to Change: Guerrilla Television Revisited* (Oxford University Press, 1997), p. vi.
- <sup>56</sup> Boyle, *Subject to Change*.
- <sup>57</sup> Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008).
- <sup>58</sup> Lauren Berlant, 'The Female Complaint', *Social Text*, no. 19/20, Autumn 1988, p. 244.
- <sup>59</sup> For example: Charlotte Brundson, 'Crossroads: Notes on Soap Opera', *Screen*, vol. 22, no. 4, 1981, pp. 32-7; Tania Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass Produced Fantasies for Women*, 1982; Annette Kuhn, 'Women's Genres' *Screen*, vol. 25, no. 1, Jan/Feb 1984, pp. 18-28. See also Natalie Fenton, 'Feminism and Popular Culture' in

---

Sarah Gamble (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Post-feminism*  
(London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 84-93.

<sup>60</sup> Berlant, *The Female Complaint*.

<sup>61</sup> Mary Ellen Brown, *Soap Opera and Women's Talk: The Pleasure of Resistance*  
(Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1994).

<sup>62</sup> Brown, *Soap Opera and Women's Talk*, p. 112.

<sup>63</sup> Berlant, 'The Female Complaint,' p. 243.

<sup>64</sup> Martha Rosler, 'Place, Position, Power, Politics', in *Decoys and Disruptions: Selected Writings, 1975-2001* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2004), p. 355.

<sup>65</sup> Martha Rosler cited in Susan Stoops, 'Martha Rosler: *Bringing the War Back Home*, 1967-2004, in David Evans (ed.), *Appropriation* (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2009), p. 58.

<sup>66</sup> Martha Rosler, 'Place, Position, Power, Politics', p. 355.

<sup>67</sup> Berlant, *The Female Complaint*, p. 3.

---

## Illustrations



**Fig. 1:** Ilene Segalove, *Today's Program: Jackson Pollock, Lavender Mist, 1950*, 1973, collage of offset lithographs, 35.6 x 43.2 cm (14 x 17 in.). New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Vital Projects Fund Inc. Gift, through Joyce and Robert Menschel, 2011. © Ilene Segalove. DIGITAL IMAGE © 2018 The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York/Scala, Florence.



**Fig 2:** Ilene Segalove, *I Remember Beverly Hills* (still – title card), 1980, video, 28 minutes, colour, sound. Image copyright of the artist, courtesy of Video Data Bank, [www.vdb.org](http://www.vdb.org), School of the Art Institute of Chicago.



**Fig 3:** Ilene Segalove, *The Riot Tapes* (still), 1984, video, 30 minutes, colour. Image copyright of the artist, courtesy of Video Data Bank, [www.vdb.org](http://www.vdb.org), School of the Art Institute of Chicago.



**Fig 4:** Ilene Segalove, *My Puberty* (still – title card), 1989, video, 11 minutes, colour, sound. Image copyright of the artist, courtesy of Video Data Bank, [www.vdb.org](http://www.vdb.org), School of the Art Institute of Chicago.



**Fig 5:** Ilene Segalove, *The Riot Tapes* (still), 1984, video, 30 minutes, colour. Image copyright of the artist, courtesy of Video Data Bank, [www.vdb.org](http://www.vdb.org), School of the Art Institute of Chicago.



**Fig 6:** Ilene Segalove, *The Riot Tapes* (still), 1984, video, 30 minutes, colour. Image copyright of the artist, courtesy of Video Data Bank, [www.vdb.org](http://www.vdb.org), School of the Art Institute of Chicago..



**Fig 7:** Ilene Segalove, *The Riot Tapes* (still), 1984, video, 30 minutes, colour. Image copyright of the artist, courtesy of Video Data Bank, [www.vdb.org](http://www.vdb.org), School of the Art Institute of Chicago.



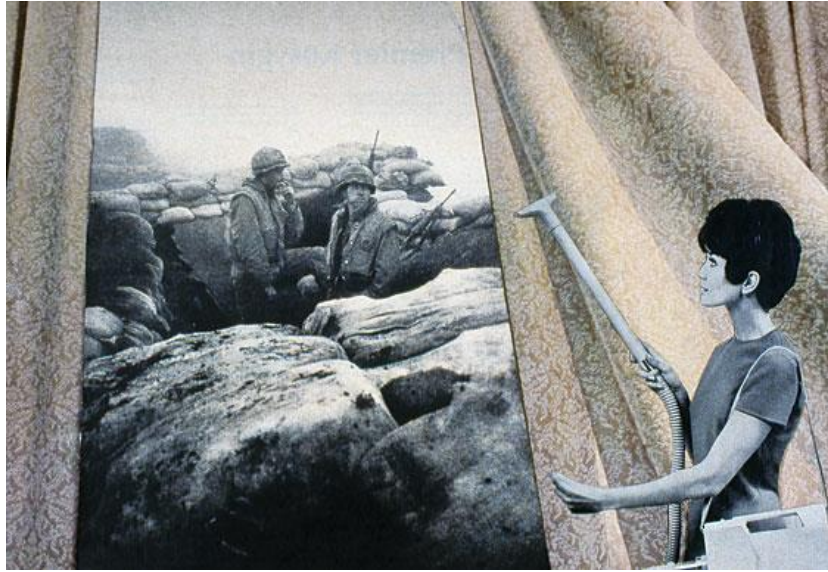


**Fig 8:** Ilene Segalove, *The Riot Tapes* (still), 1984, video, 30 minutes, colour. Image copyright of the artist, courtesy of Video Data Bank, [www.vdb.org](http://www.vdb.org), School of the Art Institute of Chicago.



**Fig. 9:** Ilene Segalove, *The Riot Tapes* (still), 1984, video, 30 minutes, colour. Image copyright of the artist, courtesy of Video Data Bank, [www.vdb.org](http://www.vdb.org), School of the Art Institute of Chicago.





**Fig. 10:** Martha Rosler, *Cleaning the Drapes* from the series *House Beautiful*:

*Bringing the War Home*, c. 1967-72, Pigmented inkjet print (photomontage),

17 5/16 x 23 3/4" (44 x 60.3 cm). © Martha Rosler. DIGITAL IMAGE ©

2018, The Museum of Modern Art/Scala, Florence.