

INFERMENTAL

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7

A Travelling Exhibition
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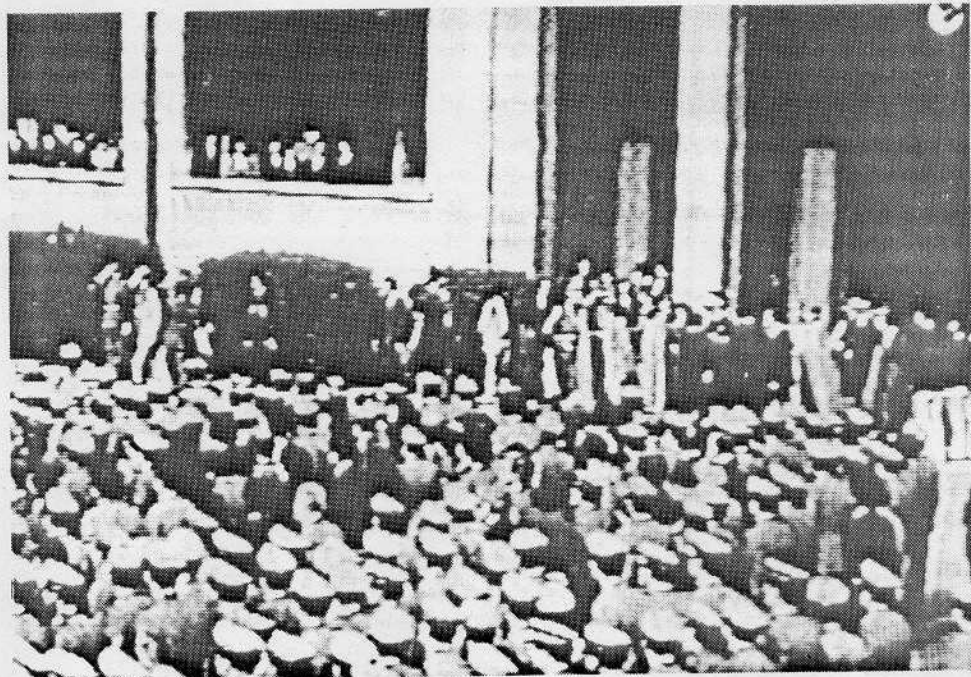
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Juan Downey - *La Madre Patria*

In describing Pre-Columbian America, Tzvetan Todorov concludes that "the necessary memorization of laws and traditions imposed by the absence of writing determines, as we have seen, the predominance of ritual over improvisation."⁸ Television, of course, dispenses with writing, requires eidetic interpretive sophistication, and achieves audience empathy through devices of recognition, of ritual. Perhaps this is to say that writing (reading) is technologically superior to television — though the praxes of each entail parallel trances, analogous social traces. Some works (e.g. **David Smith** and **Lee Murray's** *Continuous Entertainment* (USA), **Petr Vřána's** *Mediapornesie (Media Pornetics)* (West Germany, 1987), **City Group's** *Valvegrind* (New Zealand, 1985/6)) incorporate specific ritual, performance, or quasi-shamanistic elements, which serve to emphasize the works' distance from social norms, or more specifically from text, from writing. **Steina's** *Lilith* (USA, 1987) uses focalplane shifts and frame-grabbing to enthrall our gaze, to transfix and hypnotize us; then her protagonist, cobra-like, darts across the paradoxical landscape (that has become Steina's signature), with a sibilant and ambiguous voice; her image inscribes, indelibly, the fact of presence, but — ironically and impossibly — without the content or context of presence.

Woody Vasulka's *The Art of Memory* (USA, 1987) is strikingly analogous in its aims, if not whatever in its strategies. The linchpin of the work is his title's invocation of *Ad Herennium* (Anon., ca. 86 BC) — the founding text for the memory techniques of Roman rhetoric — and (more particularly) of Robert Fludd's *Ars Memoria* (1619), which introduced the "Memory Theater."⁹

Juan Downey's *La Madrepatria (The Motherland)* (USA, 1987) is an intimately personal yet "traditionally" artistic (balanced, elegant, judiciously articulate) echo of his Chilean homeland. Here, the interplay between surrealist/psychological elements and formal design rhythms is translated into a reciprocal but immiscible flow between the intimacy of home and family relationships, on the one hand, and formal societal contexts, on the other.

Armin Heurich's *Last Rites* (USA, 1987) "colonizes" technology — demanding "my tools," over and over, in an overbearing and theatrically authoritative tone — a gesture focused more pointedly by the decontextualizing device of his continuous swish-pan — an invasive gesture that makes of "tools" an Other. This fascination with *claiming the terrain* of tools functions as a decentralizing mechanism, since it implies *ownership*, either personal or collective. Heurich has

5 IMAGE DIALECTS



Woody Vasulka - *The Art of Memory*

Stelna
Lilith
1987 6:00 (excerpt)
Santa Fe, USA

Hermann Würzer
Flim
1985 5:00
Linz, Austria

Ardele Lister
Zoe's Car
1987 6:30
New York, USA

Walter Gramming
Groszgen
1987 12:00
Berlin, West Germany

Karl-Heinz Hahnemann
Kaspar Hauser Stirb
1987 5:00 (excerpt)
Berlin, GDR

David Smith & Lee Murray
Continuous Entertainment
1986 5:00 (excerpt)
Dallas, USA