

Anne Charlotte Robertson
Interview by Caroline Koebel
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Telephone: Buffalo, NY - Framingham, MA
Condensed published version with an introduction
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After a quarter century of filmmaking, Anne Charlotte Robertson has thirty titles to her name—thirty titles, that is, outside her film diary. Begun in 1981, the diary is thirty-eight hours and, as Robertson says, "just continues." The small gauge—mainly Super 8—films are the fruits of a fiercely independent process; the filmmaker admits to having used a crew "only once" while in art school and has "asked someone to hold the camera maybe four or five times."

No wonder, given the autobiographical nature of the work, that Robertson herself plays all roles of production. Previewing titles on her compilation videotape, ranging from *Snooze Alarm* (1979) to *Melon Patches* (1998), it becomes clear that the more exclusively—and obsessively—about Robertson, the more riveting the film. When I raised this point in a phone interview, she replied that especially in her early work, making films was a form of self therapy, a means to stop various cycles of self-destruction. For example, the frenetic *Magazine Mouth* (1983)—featuring animated pictures of Robertson, eyes bulging, said orifice wide open and entryway into her 'body-self' for all kinds of crap,—"got [her] out of the cycle of binging."

Though the veteran filmmaker from western Massachusetts could not be more comfortable with a film camera, she is not even an amateur regarding the computer; Robertson is a self-dubbed "computer phobe." In contrast to so many of her contemporaries and younger filmmakers, she has not "gone digital"...not yet, that is. Recipient of an NEA-funded residency at Squeaky Wheel, Robertson will test/taste digital film/video production for the first time. She plans to make a diary—using digital video (production and postproduction) technology exclusively—of the residency, a work that will premiere at her Buffalo solo screening on November 28. The first show she will present to the anticipatory local audience, however, is a curated program of films by Marjorie Keller, Stan Brakhage and Maya Deren on November 21.

Last night I had the pleasure of Anne Charlotte Robertson sharing insights with me into her life as an artist. What follows are some excerpts of her multiple elucidations.

About *Suicide*:

Ann Charlotte Robertson (ACR): In 1979 I was locked out of my house one night and my film teacher [Dave Perry] was a diarist. He had said, "carry your camera all the time" and I carried my camera all the time. There's a scene on the street with people digging a gas main in the middle of the night, the guys with the yellow suits, and I just filmed that and I just talked spontaneously. From then on I just kept filming little things and talking about fantasies about suicide. The thing is that I didn't want to kill myself, but I had the voice going on about how I wanted to kill myself. Basically, I wanted to get out of the relationship I was in. I figured the only way was he would kill me or I would kill myself. It just kept going and going and going. But when I shot the film I put it together with all these little snippets and fantasies and I edited at home. Then I took it into school on the night that we were to project it and I went into the hall with a dubbing recorder and projected the film and overdubbed and overdubbed and overdubbed. The voice kept coming and coming and coming; the only way I could get rid of the voice was to go to sleep. Anyway, we showed it at the very end of the class night of showing films. At the

end—everyone else left after their film had shown—there were only two or three of my best friends and the teacher. They showed it in this BIG hall and then after we all just sat there and the lights came up and suddenly it was like my mind was as clear as a bell. The voice had just shut off.

About *Apologies*:

ACR: I noticed that I apologized a lot; it was a reflex action. I started noticing EVERY WOMAN I KNEW said, "I'm sorry" just to kind of smooth the conversation out. I noticed my mother said, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry." A couple of friends of mine who are fairly feminist had challenged me on it and said, "Why should you?" [My mother's] always demanding an apology of me, and she's always apologizing herself. She uses it both ways. She demands it and she does it. I once asked her why she says, "I'm sorry" all the time and she said, "*I have sorrow.*" I thought, "Oh wow great! this is depression. This is another way of masking the underlying depression." So, I thought of all the apologies I ever would want to make and I said them in the course of a film. The thing is that sometimes people *laugh* at apologies that are *strictly* serious, like I say, "I apologize to all the starving children of the world, I'm sorry I spent the money on cigarettes instead." It's a sincere apology, but people laugh and it drives them bananas. The thing is one of the first times I screened [*Apologies*] in New York City it was the weirdest thing. All the way through there are these props of coffee and cigarettes, in almost every scene I'm drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes, it used to drive me bananas because while I was screening it, I'd want to have a cigarette. If I couldn't smoke in the theater, I'd step outside. Well, I stepped outside and I sat down on a stoop of a door; a couple young women stood there and asked me if they could have a cigarette. I gave them a cigarette. They sat down next to me. They each had a cup of coffee. In the course of asking for a cigarette and sitting there just chatting about nothing they said "I'm sorry" about ten times; it just drove me bananas.

Regarding the curated program:

ACR: Basically, it's films by filmmakers I admire. The only thing is I have kind of mixed feelings about Maya Deren.

Caroline Koebel (CK): What are they?

ACR: She's supposedly the first avant-garde filmmaker and *At Land* was her first film, but I've seen other films of hers that I hate.

CK: What films do you hate?

ACR: *Meshes of the Afternoon*

CK: That's the most popular one. What do you hate about it?

ACR: *Her lying there at the end, glass all over her, as a victim. Oh, sick; sick, sick, sick! You don't need another film in which women are treated as the victim. I don't like the knives, that scene with her...no, no, no! I like At Land.*

CK: What do you like about *At Land*?

ACR: Well, for one thing it's really weird that she's out in the middle of the sand. I was out in the middle of Point Hatteras where the wind blows all the time, the sand dunes, sandstorms all the time, in the middle of a sandstorm sitting on a fence was a chess piece and I thought, "oh my god, the spirit of Maya Deren has come and put this chess piece

here!" This place is *scoured by sand*, the wind is constant, this little chess piece is so fragile and frail and it was *just sitting there* and I could have sworn that Maya Deren was on the earth and was there until five minutes before and had put that chess piece on, because some human being had walked along and put that chess piece there, and they had done it just a minute or so before we got there because the wind would have knocked it off, it would have gotten buried by sand. It was just so eerie. I feel connected to her.

CK: Marjorie Keller, did she die in the '90s?

ACR: Yes, she died very suddenly. She was on vacation in Florida. Her mother came into the bathroom in the morning and Margie was lying dead on the floor. They never found a reason.

CK: Was she somebody whom you knew personally or whom you just knew through her filmmaking?

ACR: I knew through her filmmaking and also she had been one of the few women who had applied for a teaching post at Mass College of Art and I had been on the selection committee, so I saw a lot of her films that way. Margie Keller, she just does these very intimate portraits of things like houses and gardens and other people. I thought they were beautiful enough that I could do the same thing. And she was very, she was very, I don't know how you can say it, she supported me. In fact, she wanted to write about me. She was working on a book on feminism and filmmaking and she had interviewed me for it and asked me for copies of my films and things like that. She interviewed me several times over the telephone and she'd been helpful in getting me shows in New York City and all of a sudden bingo! she died.

CK: Did anybody pick up her project, the book of interviews with women filmmakers?

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