



WORD · IS · OUT

stories · of · some · of · our · lives

MILLIARIUM ZERO PRESENTS A FILM BY THE MARIPOSA FILM GROUP



"Stunning... unquestionably a landmark film" — Los Angeles Times

NEWLY RESTORED FOR ITS 30TH ANNIVERSARY

A MILLIARIUM ZERO RELEASE. A FILM BY THE MARIPOSA FILM GROUP. PETER ADAMS, NANCY ADAMS, ANDREW BOYD, BOB EPSTEIN, TONY WADDE PRIMA, VERONICA STEVENS. PRODUCED BY PETER ADAMS.
PRODUCTION DESIGNER: THE SANDY BROWNETT FOUNDATION. AND ORIGINAL SCRIPT WRITER: THE ANDREW J. ROSEN, JR. FOUNDATION. AND BY WRITER: PETER ADAMS. RESTORED BY THE QUEENSLAND LEGACY PROJECT.
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WORD IS OUT STORIES OF SOME OF OUR LIVES

A film by the Mariposa Film Group: Peter Adair, Nancy Adair, Andrew Brown, Rob Epstein, Lucy Massie Phenix, Veronica Selver.

Cast (in alphabetical order)

Achebe "Betty" Powell

Ann Samsell

Bernice "Whitey" Fladden

Cynthia Gair

David Gillon

Dennis Chiu

Donald Hackett

Elsa Gidlow

Freddy Gray

George Mendenhall

Harry Hay

John Burnside

Linda Marco

Michael Mintz

Mark Pinney

Nadine Armijo

Nick Dorsky

Pam Jackson

Pat Bond

Rick Stokes

Roger Harkenrider (Tom Fitzpatrick)

Rusty Millington

Sally M. Gearhart

Tede Mathews

Produced by Peter Adair.

Camera, sound, interviews and editing by Peter Adair, Nancy Adair, Andrew Brown, Rob Epstein, Lucy Massie Phenix, Veronica Selver.

Women's Music composed and performed by Trish Nugent with Carol Ventrillo, Marcia Bauman, Robin Osborne and Kristen Brooks

Men's Music performed by Buena Vista: Dickie Dworkin, Michael Gomez, Freddie Gray, Terry Hutchinson, Joe Natan Johnson, Jon Raskin, Kenny Ross, with Donn Tatum.

"*Make Your Way*" composed by Kenny Ross

"*He's Okay*" composed by Blackberri, arranged by Jerry Kerby.

Sound Department: Mark Berger, sound re-recording mixer

The film premiered in December 1, 1977 at the Castro Theater in San Francisco.

Restoration by UCLA Film & Television, funded by The David Bohnett Foundation with additional support provided by The Andrew J. Kuehn, Jr. Foundation and the members of Outfest

Preserved as part of the Outfest Legacy Project for LGBT Film Preservation in collaboration with the Mariposa Film Group and the SFPL James C. Hormel Gay & Lesbian Center. Restorationist: Ross Lipman. 1:1.33. Color. 1978. 132 minutes.



WORD IS OUT

In 1978, WORD IS OUT startled audiences across the country when it appeared in movie theaters and later, television. The first feature-length documentary about lesbian and gay identity made by gay filmmakers, the film had a huge impact and became an icon of the emerging gay rights movement of the 1970s. When audiences saw the film, thousands wrote to the Mariposa Film Group's post office box number listed at the end credits to express how much the film meant to them — and many of them on how viewing the film saved their lives. Newly preserved to 35mm by the UCLA Film & Television Archives and the Outfest Legacy Project, WORD IS OUT is now available for a whole new generation. Ripe for rediscovery, it is at once a record of past struggles, an occasion for reflecting on how far we still have to go, and a masterpiece of the documentary form.

WORD IS OUT presents a mosaic of interviews with 26 gay and lesbian individuals who describe their experiences coming out, falling in and out of love, and struggling against prejudice and discriminatory laws. These interviewees — who range in age from 18 to 77, and in type from bee-hived housewife to sultry drag queen — include poet Elsa Gidlow, political activist Sally Gearhart, inventor John Burnside, civil rights leader Harry Hay, and avant-garde filmmaker Nathaniel Dorsky. But all deliver their testimony with extraordinary intelligence, grace, honesty, and conviction, creating a work of oral history that is profoundly engaging and deeply moving. Thirty years later, it is a record of the gay and lesbian experience in America near the start of the movement. WORD IS OUT is a precious and moving document whose relevance is almost entirely undimmed today. Thanks to the then-budding talent of an incredible roster of documentary filmmakers that made up Mariposa, the film is an important demonstration of the enormous power that can be achieved through unadorned, unadulterated personal testimony. It is truth told with humor, courage and tears.

PETER ADAIR

Peter Adair was born in Los Angeles County on November 22, 1943. Adair entered the film industry in the 1960s and first gained critical attention with his 1967 documentary “Holy Ghost People,” a film record of a Pentecostal snake handler worship service in the Appalachians. From 1975 to 1977, he collaborated with his sister Nancy Adair and other members of the Mariposa Film Group to produce and direct “Word Is Out.” The film, the first of its kind to present gays and lesbians in a positive light, was a critical hit nationwide. “Word Is Out” inspired Nancy to collaborate with Casey Adair, Peter and Nancy's mother, on a companion book, published in 1978. Peter Adair always chose the subject matter for his film based on his current passions, and “Word Is Out” was as much a vital part of his own coming out process as it was an attempt to show gays and lesbians in a very human and non-sensational manner.

In 1983 Peter Adair produced “Stopping History” and in 1984 acted as consultant and did additional camerawork on “The Times of Harvey Milk,” directed by former Mariposa Group member Rob Epstein. That same year he worked with the Project Read adult literacy program of the San Francisco Public Library to produce a series of tutoring videos. As he began to see his friends in the art and film communities succumb to the plague of AIDS, Adair co-directed, with Rob Epstein, “The AIDS Show: Artists Involved in Death and Survival,” one of the first films to examine AIDS' impact on the arts community, in 1986. When he became aware of his own HIV status, he wrote and directed “Absolutely Positive,” an examination of how asymptomatic HIV positive people live with uncertainty. On June 27, 1996, Peter Adair finally succumbed to complications of AIDS at the age of 52 in San Francisco.

NEW YORK TIMES OBITUARY
Peter Adair, 53, Director, Dies; Made Films With Gay Themes

By DAVID W. DUNLAP

Published: Sunday, June 30, 1996

Peter Adair, a documentary film maker who used the eloquent voices of ordinary people to chart the progress first of gay liberation and then of the AIDS epidemic, died on Thursday at his home in San Francisco. He was 53.

The cause was complications from AIDS, said Rob Epstein, a friend who was the co-director of Mr. Adair's best-known work, "Word Is Out" (1978).

Mr. Adair grew up in New Mexico, where his father, John, an anthropologist, studied the Navajo people. He began making films when his parents gave him a movie camera as a high school graduation present.

"Being in the minority, and sometimes the only white kid around, started me looking at everything from the eyes of an outsider," Mr. Adair said. "So in a sense, all my films, even if they are about my peers, are cultural studies." (In a curriculum vitae, he listed his hobby as eavesdropping.)

Toward the end of his academic career at Antioch College in 1967, Mr. Adair completed his first major documentary, "Holy Ghost People," about a fundamentalist Christian sect in Appalachia. After several unhappy years working for others, he struck out on his own.

"My movies have always been a way of exploring subjects of personal interest," Mr. Adair said. "When I wondered about religion, I made a film about it. When I realized I was gay, I made a film about it."

That film, "Word Is Out," took 5 years, 200 interviews and 6 co-directors to make. Mr. Adair shared directing credit with the other members of the Mariposa Film Group: his sister, Nancy; Andrew Brown; Mr. Epstein; Lucy Massie Phenix, and Veronica Selver. Mr. Adair also produced the film.

"Word Is Out" was deceptively simple, with 26 people telling their stories to the camera, among them a lesbian who had served in the Women's Army Corp in World War II, an assembly-line worker who recalled gay saloon life in the 1950's.

Understated though it was, "Word Is Out" had a remarkable impact, coming at a time when images of homosexuals as everyday people, as opposed to psychopaths or eccentrics, were rare. "The silence of gay people on the screen has been broken," Vito Russo declared in *The Advocate*, a national gay newspaper.

Janet Cole, who worked on the movie, said thousands of letters arrived in response to it. "People who were alone and hopeless in Idaho, Utah and Kansas for the first time saw realistic and positive images of gay people on screen," she said.

In 1984, Mr. Adair directed "Stopping History" for the Public Broadcasting Service, which examined ethical questions around nuclear weapons. Two years later, he and Mr. Epstein

directed and produced "The AIDS Show: Artists Involved With Death and Survival," which followed members of a theater group in San Francisco as they developed pieces about the epidemic. It was broadcast in November 1986.

His last film, "Absolutely Positive," told how 11 men and women, Mr. Adair included, learned that they were H.I.V. positive and how they adjusted their lives to the disease.

"The nice thing about having a serious disease is that it's O.K. to say anything you want, and people put up with it," Mr. Adair said in the film. "I don't know if it's because they feel sorry for you, or because they think, since you're facing death, you're somehow wiser. Both attitudes should be encouraged, however."

Last year, Mr. Adair and Haney Armstrong completed "In the First Degree," an interactive CD-ROM featuring live actors. It was published by Broderbund Software.

Mr. Adair is survived by his life partner, Rudy Norton; his father, of San Francisco, and two sisters, Margo, of San Francisco, and Nancy, of Albion, Calif. His mother, Carolyn, who was co-editor of the book version of "Word Is Out," died in March.

Nancy Adair

Soon after the original opening of *Word is Out*, the book of the same title was released compiled by Nancy and her mother Casey. Nancy lives in Willits, in Northern California, where she is a yoga teacher and artist. See www.nancyadair.com.

Andrew Brown Ph D

After moving to San Francisco in 1975, I heard from my roommates that Peter Adair was accepting videotapes from people who were interested in working on a film about gay people. After working on this film, I decided to get a doctorate in psychology from the Wright Institute in Berkeley. I've been doing mental health work since the 80's and am presently running a Geriatric Mental Health program in San Francisco.

Rob Epstein

Rob Epstein is a partner in TELLING PICTURES, a production company he founded in 1987 with Jeffrey Friedman. Their current film is HOWL, written and directed by Epstein and Friedman, stars James Franco and John Hamm. HOWL is having its world premiere at the 2010 Sundance Film Festival.

Epstein and Friedman produced and directed numerous hours and short segments for national broadcast on HBO, NBC, MSNBC and PBS, in addition to their celebrated feature documentaries: PARAGRAPH 175 (2000), narrated by Rupert Everett, about the Nazi persecution of homosexuals; THE CELLULOID CLOSET (1995), a hundred-year history of gay and lesbian characters in Hollywood movies; COMMON THREADS: STORIES FROM THE QUILT (1989), about the first decade of the AIDS epidemic in the U.S. and the government's failure to respond.

Rob began his career on WORD IS OUT. He then made THE TIMES OF HARVEY MILK (1984), about the assassination of California's first openly gay elected official. Named by

American Film Magazine critics' poll as one of the best documentaries of the decade; chosen by the UCLA Film & Television archive for restoration and preservation. The Criterion Collection will be releasing an edition of the film in 2010.

In 2008, he was awarded the International Documentary Associations (IDA) Pioneer Award for career achievement.

Rob has taught in the graduate film program at Tisch School for the Arts at New York University, and is currently chair of the Film Program at California College of the Arts. He is a member of the Directors Guild, as well as the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, for which he also currently serves on the Board of Governors. Career retrospectives of Epstein work have recently been held at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London and at the Taipei International Film Festival in Taiwan, China.

Lucy Massie Phenix

Lucy Massie Phenix has an astonishing track record in the documentary field. She has been involved in a slate of groundbreaking and critically acclaimed documentaries on nearly every major American political issue. Massie Phenix grew up in a segregated Lexington, Kentucky. She played in the Central Kentucky Youth Symphony Orchestra, and went to Connecticut College for Women where she graduated with honors in Philosophy before going to Eastern North Carolina with the American Friends Service Committee and working there as a community organizer from 1965 to 1967. She then attended Antioch Putney Graduate School in Education, where she received her MAT. Following this, she began teaching in the Children's Community Workshop School on W. 88th St. and Columbus in New York. It was in New York that she and her partner at the time Roger Phenix became involved with other investigators and filmmakers (known as the Winterfilm Collective) in the filming of the *Winter Soldier Investigation*. The documentary they produced, *Winter Soldier* won a prize at the Berlin International Film Festival.

In 1974, she produced Roger Phenix's short documentary *Wild Yeast* about a wandering folk singer. She then went on to direct the "Galapagos" episode of the television nature series "The Big Blue Marble" before working as an editor and producer on *Word is Out*. The film won the DuPont Citation for Excellence in Broadcast Journalism. In 1980, Phenix edited the National Film Registry-selected WWII feminist doc *The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter*. In 1985 this she returned to the director's chair with her first feature documentary *You Got to Move*. Following this, she directed the 1994 Sundance-nominated doc *Cancer in Two Voices*. She then edited the Oscar[®]-nominated 1998 Vietnam documentary *Regret to Inform*, which won numerous awards, including a Peabody and two prizes at Sundance. In 2000, she edited Elizabeth Barret's award-winning *Stranger with a Camera*, about the murder of a documentary filmmaker in the Appalachian region of Kentucky and the intersection of morality and filmmaking. In 2004, she edited a short doc on immigration, *The New Americans*, which aired on the PBS documentary program "Independent Lens" and won an International Documentary Association award. She recently finished a documentary about pottery entitled *From the Inside: The Work of Karen Karnes*.

Veronica Selver

Veronica Selver is a Bay Area filmmaker who has worked on social issue documentaries for over thirty years. In 2000, she completed *KPFA On The Air*, a film on the Berkeley-based radio station, KPFA, and its 50-year history of independent, alternative broadcasting. The

documentary, which she produced and directed, was part of PBS' P.O.V. series and aired nationally in the fall of 2000. Her co-directing credits include *You Got to Move*, a feature documentary on the Highlander Folk School and community organizing in the South; *First Look*, a documentary on contemporary Cuban artists; and Columbia Dupont Excellence in Broadcast Journalism winner *Word is Out*, the first feature documentary on growing up gay in the United States. Her editing credits include these films as well as many of public television's most highly regarded broadcasts: *On Company Business*, a three part series on the history of the CIA; Academy Award nominated *Berkeley in the Sixties*; *Harry Bridges: A Man and His Union*; *Absolutely Positive*, on people living with HIV; *Coming Out Under Fire*, on gays and lesbians in the military during World War Two; and *Blacks and Jews*, a feature-length documentary which premiered at Sundance and aired on P.O.V. in 1997. She also worked as an editor on *Brother Outsider: The Life of Bayard Rustin*, a documentary portrait of the Civil Rights activist and architect of the 1963 March on Washington. The film was shown at the Sundance Film Festival in January 2003 at the same time as it was aired nationally on PBS in honor of Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday. Between 2004 and 2007 Veronica Selver completed two short films as producer, director, editor: *Raising the Roof*, on a pioneering collective of women carpenters from the Bay Area, and *Cape Song*, a documentary on music and art in Provincetown, Massachusetts. She directed and edited the DVD extras for *Word Is Out*. She is currently editing Mark Kitchell's history of the environmental movement, *A Fierce Green Fire*, due for completion in 2010.

Peter Adair's Speech presented to Artlink, October 2, 1993

I'll talk a little about the work...

Back in the nineteen-seventies when the modern gay movement was just beginning, our biggest problem was invisibility. Who homosexuals were was largely determined by straight people. It was bad enough that the public image of gay men and lesbians was defined largely by stereotypes — after all, I want other people to have an accurate picture of who I am. But these stereotypes created by outsiders largely defined our perceptions of who we thought we were. What a state of affairs. One's reference for "What was Gay?" was a few nasty images, and, if you were lucky, your immediate circle of queer friends.

Word Is Out, finished in 1977, was on its surface a very simple idea answering the simple question, "Who Are We?" For the film, I, and the five other principle people I worked with spent a year doing research interviews on videotape of 250 lesbians and gay men all across the country. In the end, twenty-two were chosen to tell their stories in the film. *Word Is Out* played innumerable times in theaters and on television all over the world. And I can say, with little modesty, it had a tremendous effect on people's lives. We got literally a thousand letters of thanks. To this day, when gay people (they tend to be older gay people these days), learn that I had something to do with the movie, they often launch into stories of how it changed their lives.

Needless to say this is gratifying, and ample proof to me that art can make a real difference. But is *Word Is Out* art or simply compassionate journalism, agitprop theater? I think it's art — certainly the aesthetic form that it took was radical for the time and has since been copied ad infinitum by other films.

The aesthetics grew out of the needs of the content which is the way art "otta" be — at least in film. We wanted to create a kind of collective portrait — an absurd idea — trying to describe a whole people in a single film. But we had no choice as our intended audience was so starved for

accurate images that we had to at least attempt to depict the variety we felt was out there. So we had to portray a lot of people. The second requisite was that the portraits had to be inherently dramatic. By this I mean they had to be stories. No one will watch more than a couple minutes of "This is Mary at her job. This is Mary and her Horse. This is Mary's Lover. This is Mary's photo album of growing up. This is Mary talking to her Lesbian friends..." You get the picture, B-O-R-I-N-G. Especially so, if we then launch into "This is Juan. This is Juan growing up. This is Juan's apartment etc."

The only way around this problem is stories. "This is Mary growing up. This is a picture of Mary at her three-year-old birthday party refusing to wear her pink frilly dress. This is Mary running away from home at fourteen with her special friend Henrietta who she calls Hank..." So we told stories, twenty-two of them as a matter of fact.

The next problem which faced us was that no matter how compelling they might be, you can't tell more than a few stories serially, one after another. You might get away with "This is Mary's Story", "This is Juan's Story", "This is Louise's Story", but that's about it. All right, maybe you could add Bob, but any more simply do not work. So somehow we had to find a way to tell these separate stories simultaneously, in parallel. It took three of us two years to figure out how. Either we were very dumb or the problem was very complex. We actually cut twenty-two little movies to make sure each individual story worked, was consistent to itself, was dramatic and true to it's character. Then we interleaved them.

This is Mary in the third grade picking a fight with the boys. This is Juan entering seminary. Back to Mary being punished for beating up the boys. This is Juan falling in love with a priest. Back to Mary joining the WACS. Back to Juan running away to San Francisco with the priest. You get the picture, and this is just two stories. We did a lot more at once. This technique is used a lot now, the simultaneous telling of multiple stories but I think we originated it.

Suffice it to say that the whole movie worked as a piece of art and a piece of social activism. And to point out the obvious, it would not have worked as the later, no matter how good our intentions, if we did not find a way of making it compelling, of making it art.

**Word Is Out: Stories of working together
by Rob Epstein**

from *Jump Cut*, no. 24-25, March 1981, pp. 9-10
Used with permission of the author.

WORD IS OUT was made by six people: Peter Adair, Veronica Selver, Andrew Brown, Lucy Massie Phenix, Nancy Adair and myself. Our collective name, which we gave ourselves mostly for the purpose of credits, was Mariposa Film Group.

First of all we always avoided the word "collective" whenever we could because we were never sure whether we really were one or not. But now that it is all over, we agree that we did indeed work collectively. I will attempt to show through my un-collective perspective how and why this group evolved and some of the reasons why I think it worked.

We each came to the project from diverse backgrounds in terms of film experience and how we identified ourselves as gay. Peter came up with the idea for the film, recognized the need for it, and designed the basic structure for the movie. This was around the idea of people telling their personal stories to the camera/interviewer/ audience, and intercutting these stories/characters

into a dramatic form. Peter had 12 years experience as an independent filmmaker and producer for public television.

Nancy, who had no prior film experience (at the time she was driving a cab), joined her brother by initially doing videotape interviews with lesbians for a video compilation to be used for fundraising. At this time their relationship, loosely defined, was that of producer/ director and associate producer, respectively.

When an initial bulk of money was raised (\$30,000 in the form of investments from people who believed in the idea and wanted to see the film get made) it neared time to begin production. Peter and Nancy asked Peter's longtime friend, Veronica, to work with them. They felt Veronica, who had just finished working as an editor on ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST, had a political and filmic approach that would both compliment and contrast with theirs.

It was also decided to hire a production assistant. Andrew and I were both applicants for this job which was advertised in a local magazine. The ad read: "We are looking for a non-sexist person to work on a documentary film on gay life. No experience necessary, just insane dedication and a cooperative spirit."

Neither of us had any prior film background to speak of. Andrew had worked as a schoolteacher and I was a recent college dropout from the east coast, beginning to take classes at San Francisco State and living on unemployment. It was decided that Andrew would be the paid assistant, and I was offered the opportunity to join the project as a volunteer.

During the first phase of production, the crew roles that were assigned remained consistent and unchanging except perhaps for Veronica's. Peter and Nancy traded off as interviewer/camera operator with Veronica, who was the soundperson, eventually becoming more actively involved as an interviewer. Andrew was the assistant. Peter, because of his experience, always supervised the technical aspects, including the lighting of every shot. I participated in the last two shoots as a gopher and began working in the editing room syncing up footage.

From the very beginning, there was never any authoritarian edge or arbitrariness to how we were working with each other, largely because of Peter's general attitude of openness and his ability to include people in a process. Also I feel because we were all gay and working on a project so close to ourselves, we shared a certain commonality from the beginning which made it difficult to assume a traditional working structure.

After the initial eight people were filmed, we screened the rushes together (some 15 to 20 hours). When we viewed the footage, each person had a written transcript of each interview, and we made notations of our responses in the margins. There wasn't much discussion as a group yet — other than to share excitement over the obvious "moments." But we each began forming our own relationship to the material and our own perceptions. The fact that we were using this transcript process was an acknowledgement that we each had something to say about the material. We knew that it was important to have more than just one person's view. A group dynamic was being developed, not in just a working relationship with each other but toward the material itself.

Based on our input, Peter cut together a three-hour assembly which we screened to predominantly gay audiences for feedback and financing, not necessarily in that order. We realized then that people were somehow seeing the film as a definitive statement on gay life. So we felt it needed to be broadened beyond the scope of the eight people we had already filmed.

The community screenings produced a flow of response. Involving an audience in this way critically shaped WORD IS OUT and the film was rapidly growing bigger in every way than Peter originally conceived. Audience involvement also influenced the way in which we would work in the future. Individually we saw different needs for the expanded film (as did the audiences). It became evident that a group, working as a unit with several different points of view, would be more likely to produce a "broader look at gay life" than several people working together under a more hierarchical set-up functioning to bring the "director's singular vision" to life. And the thrust, so necessary in forming such an alliance, was forming as a result of our work.

During the time of these screenings, as a group we began to discuss the expanded film — who/what to look for, first for the video pre-interviews, and then eventually for the film itself. Each member had their own priorities as to what "kind of persons" had to be included in order to achieve the certain balance each felt was important. We decided who would go to which part of the country to pre-interview on video tape which types of people. Andrew, Veronica, Nancy and I each went on our own search for gay United States, while Peter and Lucy remained in California raising money. (At this point Lucy had joined the group. While visiting the Bay Area, editing another film, she came to one of the screenings and afterwards approached Nancy, saying how excited she was and offering to do anything that needed to be done for the project. She started by working as the office manager and helped with the fundraising.)

The process of looking for people to interview and doing the pre-interviews gave me and the other three a new kind of involvement and ownership in the film. Until this point, although we certainly felt a part of the project, we were still somehow replaceable employees. The process of going out on our own gave us a new confidence and relation to our work. We were trusting our own intuitions, making our own discoveries, and coming to our own decisions. This made way for individual growth, It was a challenge which each of us was now ready for and which at the same time the film demanded.

After two months on our own, we all met in the East (Peter and Lucy flew in from California). All six of us went to Cape Cod for a two-week retreat where we lived and worked together screening tapes and discussing them for long hours each day. If there was a turning point when we began to think and talk in terms of working collectively, it was during this time. If there was one person who was responsible for the push and who encouraged the group to move in this direction, it was Nancy. She pointed out that each of us was now bringing something of unique value — no longer transmitted through Peter and Nancy herself. The new process and relationships were muddled at first, tangled by emotional frustrations. No one wanted to be pulling a power play or to be caught in one. But by the same token no one wanted to give up their new relationship to the project.

During this retreat I think we were at the most open point we would ever reach during the course of the two years we were to work together. There were marathon sessions talking openly about what the film should say and what it should accomplish. To quote from Lucy, as she remarked a year and a half later at the opening, "The film was never bigger than it was to us at that time in our minds."

What happened on the Cape was less of a struggle for power than an acknowledgement that we were beginning to share it. Yet for Peter this was a particularly anxious time. Prior to the Cape, while we were having the growing experience of traveling and getting the feeling of the new expanded film, he and Lucy were in California having to raise money. And if we were indeed going to be working in new ways together, how would this affect the film he originally set

out to make? His confusion was felt by all of us. On the one hand he knew something very positive was happening. But he was worried that his original vision of the film, and his drive to see it finished, would be lost in the collective confusion if he had to share too much creative and managerial control. What we did on the Cape was to expand on Peter's original concept without altering its basic form. Looking back, I think it would have been incredibly more difficult for us if, during our initial experiences of working together, we had to come to an agreement on what the form of the film was to be.

By consensus we chose 16 more people to be in the film and decided who would interview each of them. When we then started production, the person doing the interview became more or less the director of that shoot and (with some basic guidelines) was responsible for the content of the interview. We usually worked in crews of threes and on different shoots assumed different roles. Peter taught those of us who had little or no technical experience the basic use of the equipment. Most of the shooting situations were simple enough to make this possible.

All of the crews successfully carried out the mandate of the group. An additional 16 portraits were now on film, and it was time to cut a movie. When we were shooting, people changed role assignments to correspond with our attempts to work collectively and to meet the requirements of the film itself, which needed different people to act as camera person/interviewer, depending upon who was being shot.

When it came time to edit the film we had to figure out new relations and roles all over again. This was not just because we had never edited a film together. The very nature of the editing process — as opposed to shooting — does not lend itself easily to group work. The primary responsibility for the day-to-day editing of the film was eventually taken by Veronica, Lucy and Peter (who simultaneously had the responsibilities of producing), and to a lesser degree myself. Nancy and Andrew, by their own choice, had little to do with the daily functions of editing. Andrew transferred sound and produced the men's music shoot. Nancy worked on the book (co-edited with her mother Casey and later published by New Glide/Delta). We had screenings for the whole group so that Andrew and Nancy could criticize various proposed cuts and suggest any changes which either of them felt important, so everyone was involved in critical decisions.

Towards the final editing stages I was beginning to feel trapped in the editing assistant role. I can remember often working over the editing bench while Lucy and Veronica were having heated creative discussions over at the flatbed on a section one of them was cutting. I would be envious and resentful that I was not included in the dialogue. In my more rational moments I realized that things shouldn't be any other way because I did not yet have the experience. Someone had to do the assistant work and it was most logically me. And if I really wanted to be an editor when I grew up, I had to pay my dues. This may not have been a problem in a regular job situation where I had no choice but to accept the hierarchical structure, but in this situation it was difficult. Perhaps it is a necessary contradiction in a collective situation — being absolutely equal in some situations (i.e., shooting and critiquing the rough cuts) and unequal in others (they were at the flatbed and I was at the rewinds).

At one point it seemed evident to me that the film needed a fourth editor. I felt that I was ready to work on some smaller scenes. (Also, Amanda Hemming, who had been working as a volunteer, took over the responsibilities of the assistant.) All of this says three things: (1) I learned to be more pushy, or to put it in current terms, assert my needs. I think this is largely because 2) there was an openness in the group which enabled us to make demands; we were able to give and take. And 3) the project itself was expansive enough to allow for and sometimes require this kind of personal growth.

We allowed a lot of time for "process." As with most meetings, people would often get frustrated with the amount of time we had to spend "discussing", but ours were structured to help to diffuse that frustration. We used a simple process at most meetings called "pass the rattle" (a method which Nancy introduced to the group borrowed from a Native American tribe). When we "passed the rattle," we would go around the circle allowing each person to talk without interruption for as long as they wished. If we were in a hurry for some reason, we would apply a time limit but usually we didn't. We used this technique in a variety of ways: 1) To evaluate and improve working methods, for instance after a shoot. 2) In dealing with interpersonal problems and tensions related to work. In this area sometimes we went around the circle criticizing each other member and in turn criticizing ourselves. Also when a person had a conflict with his/her role within the group, time was set aside to deal with this after passing the rattle. 3) Most of these sessions were devoted to "working meetings"; that is, we used this structure to talk about the film. For example, we used it in selecting interviewees, in critiquing rough cuts, in most decisions that were made.

The main rule was that no one could interrupt, except in asking for a point of clarification. The process encouraged equal participation, and it meant everyone got listened to. It was also a way to express anger and frustration within a structured process (several explosive situations were diffused). If we needed to reach a consensus and hadn't the first time around, or if points were made which an individual wanted to respond to, we always had the option of going around again.

While we were working on the film, we each got paid \$100 a week, except for the office manager who got \$25 a week extra for doing the dirtiest work. Also, early in post-production it was decided that the "office manager" and anyone else who worked on the project from that point on, would not be considered as part of the "core group." Although Kathy Glazer, as office manager, Amanda Hawing, as assistant editor, and Tracy Gary, as fundraiser, were very much a part of the making of WORD IS OUT, we made a conscious distinction at that point as to who made up the core collective, based on the history we already had with the project.

Twenty-six people are in the final film. There were eight before the role of "director" (Peter) evolved into the "collective process" (six of us). As six individuals we each had different methods of working and responding. This was reflected in the many different aspects of how the movie was made (i.e., in finding potential interviewees, selecting of interviewees, screening rough cuts, absorbing community reaction, etc.). Different people articulated different needs and priorities for the film. Yet always the individual was functioning as part of the unit. When someone stated their own particular idea or priority or reaction, it was then put forth before the unit to either absorb or reject.

This to me is the key breakdown of our collective process and how it shaped the larger film. The individual in a variety of situations had a certain amount of autonomy and power always with the support, encouragement, and feedback from the group. What was produced by the individual — be it as interviewer or editor or whatever — was then integrated as part of the work of the unit/group. Despite the differences in experience, age, backgrounds, we saw ourselves and each other as equally involved and committed to the unit.

Although we were consciously working collectively, we all sometimes had ambivalent feelings about the process. This ambivalence was related to the fact that we couldn't come to a practical definition of the collective process. We would never come to an ultimate definition or conclusion of how we were working together because it continually changed.

We tried to set up a structure that encouraged everyone to give their maximum. For this to be possible, our process at all critical points allowed for equal input. We were able to work as a group because we shared a similar vision of the film, the same vision that attracted each of us to the project. Only at the very lowest points of working together when under extreme tension did we ever see in each other critical differences in perspective, which for the time being overshadowed our singular goal. We were able to fight and hate and struggle and love, all the while growing and coming out stronger through the process. And we made a movie.

After the film was finished, and realizing that we needed a name, we decided to call ourselves Mariposa Film Group. Asked in a press interview, after the film was released, "When did you become a collective?" the response was, "In retrospect."

Note:

This article was originally written for a "Workstyles" workshop at the Alternative Cinema Conference at Bard College in June 1979.

A selection from
SO YOU WANT TO BE A COLLECTIVE
or **LET'S TIE OUR SHOELACE**
by Peter Adair

Word is Out was made more or less collectively. I say more or less because everyone did not have equal responsibility for doing everything all the time. Nonetheless, I think that we were, indeed, a collective (more or less).

Actually, while making the film we always avoided the word. We started out with me holding the title of Director, and everyone else essentially titleless (commoners), In about the middle of the process we came to the conclusion that this was not the way we wanted to work, and that it did not reflect accurately the way we were often working, so we decided that there would be no hierarchy (some people would call this a coup-d'etat). After the film was finished, and realizing that we needed a name, we decided to call ourselves the Mariposa Film Group. We were, as Rob put it in a press interview, a collective in retrospect. Anyway, whatever labels we use to describe our operating methods, I think that it worked; we made a film together which we are all proud of, which says things that each of us, as individuals, felt it was important to say, and no one felt exploited in the process.

I am not really sure if there is a single definition or model for working collectively, but it is obvious that the system is based upon equality between the members — equality (hopefully) in a number of different ways: equality of ownership, equality of responsibility, equality of the opportunity for input.

When the method works the advantages are obvious. Not only is an atmosphere created whereby individuals can grow stronger because they have real responsibilities and because their interpersonal relationships are based upon honesty rather than hierarchy, but a very powerful product can result when a collective consciousness is tapped. The advantages are obvious, but I would like to stress that I do not think that this is the only good way to work. In the first place, the method is clearly inappropriate for some kinds of projects. And secondly, even for those projects like *Word is Out*, which can clearly benefit from group production, there are real disadvantages and pitfalls. Management by committee can be a disaster, a disaster in two ways: It is often monstrously inefficient, and sometimes it can actually stifle creativity.

Any system of human organization (simply because it is a system) can become dehumanizing. If the maintenance of the system itself, by strict adherence to its rules and rhetoric, supersedes human needs, or the achieving of the goals for which it was formed, then it is no longer useful. No rigid system should

ever be a substitute for taking on personal responsibilities, for clear-headed thinking, for honesty, or for respect for and love of each other. This sounds obvious but I think that for us, raised in a hierarchy and usually so inexperienced in working cooperatively, it is easy to adopt wholesale a naive and simplistic version of working collectively in the name of right-on-ness, and this can be just as destructive as what we are running away from. New collectives, in an effort to be pure, will often attempt to make practically all decisions and do all the work together.

In the Mariposa Film Group, whenever this situation got absurd someone would bring up the analogy of trying to build a house collectively (Maybe a People's Medical Center?). Now in this situation the one and only way that we would know that all decisions, all work, were being done collectively would be if all six of us would go over and grab a brick, carry it, and place it together on the wall. (This, of course, providing there was agreement on where to place it, and if not we would have to have a meeting and arrive at a consensus). The point is obvious — if anything is going to get accomplished, the group is going to have to distribute tasks and responsibilities. ("You pick up the brick and I'll put it down." "No, I'll pick it up and..."). The problem becomes how to divide responsibilities. This task would be difficult enough in constructing a building — given the usual inequities of experience, willingness to do the dirty work, etc. — but the process is particularly critical when a product such as a movie is involved, which often requires an unusually high degree of original problem-solving and creative thinking. This process of human creativity is so delicate that it can be destroyed by the sheer clumsiness of a group.

So, if the initial tendency is to do everything together, but both efficiency and creativity require division of labor, one of the first skills a group must master is how to decide what work is best done by the group, and what work should be assigned. In the first place, tasks which do not require a high degree of decision-making should, as often as possible, be done by individuals, unless, naturally, the nature of the task requires a lot of bodies. The problem becomes a little more difficult when the creative process or decision-making is involved.

I see the creative process as divisible into two fairly distinct, but equally important, categories which I refer to as active thinking and reactive thinking. Reactive thinking is the easier of the two. If active thinking is writing, reactive thinking is rewriting. It is basically making creative choices. (Should a square or a rectangular window go here? Should we use the take where the camera wiggles or the one with the flare?). Active thinking is where there are no clear choices — the kind where you have to arrive at what these choices (or sometimes the choice) will be. The active process, for me, is the really scary part of making a movie or writing a script — or doing anything really creative. Unfortunately, this process is the most mysterious of human activity. It is also the scariest, most difficult, most painful, and the most easily undermined. And since I personally will do anything to put it off (I promise that I will sit down and write out that scene just as soon as I have cleaned behind the bath tub and have another cup of coffee) or avoid it, I will certainly welcome the cooperation of a group to help me thwart the process. (Yes, let's all sit down together and cut this scene. You push the forward button, and I the reverse.)

Both components of creative work are essential and I believe that both always go into any kind of truly creative endeavor which has made life worth living, whether it be a Bach concerto or a revolutionary historical analysis.

The problem in doing creative work as a group is that this procedure is appropriate only for reactive thinking, whereas the environment most conducive to active thinking is solitude — solitude for two reasons. The first being that the process, for me at least, involves allowing my unconscious to percolate for a while, which means I have to free myself from conscious, rational thought patterns. This process of encouraging the irrational, nonverbal side is absolutely antithetical to group-work situations where ideas have to be made rational, if for no other reason than to be expressed and defended to the other members. The second reason is that the very essence of original thinking involves great risk-taking, risks so great you can barely trust your self in your own company. We all, in one way or another, have spent our lives being told that we are dumb and worthless, and the one sure way to avoid proving it to ourselves is never to do anything. Suppose you write your brilliant story down and it sounds stupid to you, at least if you are working alone you can figure on keeping this new-found proof of your ignorance a secret.

So how does all this theory apply to working collectively? In this area I have found a system which worked well for us. The group should try and limit itself to reactive thinking and avoid active thinking by assigning this work to different individuals from the group. For example, in my experience, it is usually a disaster for several people to sit around and write something from scratch — say a narration. What works much better is for the group to discuss what purpose the narration is to serve, and perhaps other guidelines such as style, content, length — whatever, and then assign the job to someone in the group, hopefully, if things are working well, to the person who is most able to do the job. A draft of the work is then brought in for criticism. It is at this point that reactive thinking and group work are so effective and so powerful; because it is here that the different perspectives of age, sex, class and just individual experience are so valuable. The work should be criticized in as constructive, but totally honest way as possible. It can then either be revised by the group or be taken away with the new mandate (by the original person or someone else) and reworked for a second round. Because having something you worked on so hard being criticized by a group can be so painful, sometimes it is useful to go (with rough versions) to individual members initially, to get criticism on a one-to-one basis first, before presenting it to everybody (some people refer to this process as lobbying).

It might be valuable here to give an example of how the Mariposa Film Group, in our editing process, used this technique of dividing creative work into active thinking and reactive. Most of our footage involved people telling their life stories to the camera. We had shot an average of an hour on each person and had to edit it down to about ten minutes. Each interview was transcribed in full and six copies were made. We then screened the rushes together, without discussion, and everybody made their comments in the margin of their copy — marks for parts they liked, parts they hated, parts they couldn't live without, etc. The notes were then transferred in six different colors (were we ever organized) on to one transcript. Then one of the members of the group eventually four of us were actively involved in the day to day editing of the picture) would try to cut a coherent portrait of an interviewee, aiming at a length of about ten minutes, and using the marked transcript as a guide. It was at this stage of the editing that our process first became really critical, because it was essential that these mini-portraits be coherent, that each one work as a whole. The process of editing in any film is difficult and painful enough because it essentially involves giving up your favorite material for that which works for the whole. It is impossible if six people have to give up their favorites. The only way that you can give it up is that the whole is actually worth it. Therefore when the rough cut of the mini-portrait was screened, if it was fairly integrated it became relatively easy for members to give up material. If the piece did not work, or if there was something left out which one member felt essential, the original editor would take it back and try again.

The most important element in this process is, of course, trust. Trust that the person doing the work will do a good job; trust that the group will not trash you if they think you didn't do a good job. A couple of things can happen if there is a real atmosphere of trust and shared purpose. One is that a member can feel safe enough to say, "I have this idea for the way this scene should be cut, but it is unformed and I can't explain it to you, so trust me to go off and work on it by myself before presenting it to the group." And the other is that there can be so little need for individual "ownership" in the aspects of the work assigned that all boundaries become diffused. Some of the times I remember most fondly from *Word is Out* were when one editor had been cutting a scene — maybe all night — and would show it to someone else — just coming back to work — who would then simply sit down and continue cutting it, or start recutting it. In other words, we often got to a place where everyone felt enough personal confidence and support so that a criticism or reworking of their work was not threatening.

Unfortunately, this was not always the case, and of course we spent innumerable hours haggling — sometimes over interpersonal problems, sometimes on differing matters of opinion regarding an aspect of the film itself. (In retrospect these often may have been somewhat interdependent). Unfortunately, working in a group can, at times, exaggerate an individual's worst faults. Group decision and the dynamics of heated and heartfelt discussions can encourage those of us who are insecure about the value of our potential contributions to keep their mouths shut, as they can also encourage those of us who compensate — for ultimately the same fear — by never shutting them. Besides entrenching ourselves in our weaknesses, and being clearly unfair, the greatest toll in my mind is that group decision-making often skews the work because aggressive and argumentative verbal abilities often fall along class, cultural, and sex lines. At Mariposa we used a simple technique which encouraged equal participation

and largely diffused the kinds of frustrations and anxieties caused by arguments, by interrupting one another, etc. We simply set aside a good chunk of time, and went around the circle allowing each member to talk without interruption for as long as they wished. We used this technique in three different ways: 1.) Simply to evaluate and improve our working systems. For example, we would have an evaluation session after each shoot. This would improve our performance for the next one (particularly important if you are not holding to traditional crew assignments and responsibilities), and would also encourage each of us to work cooperatively during the critical and tense time of the actual location work, knowing that if someone made us mad, we could afford to hold our tongues because of this special time reserved for telling them what asses they had been. 2.) Sometimes it was specifically devoted to dealing with the inevitable interpersonal problems and tensions which come up when people work so closely together. In this arena it is very easy to get into some kind of encounter group or therapy, or perhaps a discussion of someone's personal politics or attitudes, i.e., to get into areas of people's personalities which are not relevant to the work of the group. In order to avoid this, we sometimes would borrow (liberally) from the Chinese, whereby everybody in the group would go around the circle and criticize each other member, and then in turn criticize themselves but only as concerned each person's working relationship to the group and the task at hand. 3.) But most of our sessions (we called them "Pass the Rattle", again borrowing liberally — this time from the American Peyote Cult), were devoted to getting actual work done. In other words, if we had a film problem to solve as a group, particularly one which people had strong feelings about, more often than not we would not discuss it in the ordinary way, but rather "Pass the Rattle". For instance, after screening a rough cut we would criticize it using this form of meeting. If we were in a great hurry we would apply a time limit, but usually people could take as long as they liked. (You would be surprised how brief some of us can be when there is no one to argue against). The only rule was that no one could interrupt; the sole exception we made was to ask for a clarification of a point that was not understood. (A technique which with some practice can be much abused).

The process is amazing; everyone gets listened to; if there is anger it usually gets diffused, and disagreements are worked out with a minimum of hassle. Oftentimes, either because there was no consensus reached, or because points were made which individuals wanted to respond to, we would go around again, and on the second round we almost always reached a consensus. The process sounds ungainly, but it really is more efficient than arguments, and certainly more democratic (at least in my experience) than other systems of group procedures such as parliamentary rules. Making good movies is hard enough, making them in alternative ways is really difficult. The lack of money for our films often requires that we work at survival salaries. This is onerous enough, but especially so when the choice is working in the mainstream industry where the money and power are so great, (\$100 per week for *Gay Pride* vs. \$250 for *Yellow Cab* could be called a "will of conscience", but as against \$750 for *Right Guard* borders on martyrdom). *Word is Out* cost \$250,000, paying everybody \$100 a week (except for the office manager who got \$25 a week extra as a dirty-work-guilt- money bonus). I have calculated that if the movie were made for union scale the cost would have been near a million dollars. So we had the choice of making the film working for a minimum wage, or not making it at all. We also, just like every other large film I have ever worked on, had to put in long, long hours....

WORD IS OUT RESTORATION

Preserved from the original 16mm color negative, a 35mm color reversal intermediate, the original 35mm soundtrack negative, and the original ¼" audio recordings. Special thanks to: Nancy Adair, Andrew Brown, Rob Epstein, Lucy Massey Phenix, Veronica Selver. Additional thanks to: Janet Cole, Michael Ehrenzweig, Susan Goldstien, Stephen Gutwillig, May Haduong, Tim Wilson, Jim Van Buskirk.

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FILMMAKER INTERVIEWS

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Douglas Dunderdale, sound recordist

DAVID BOHNETT INTERVIEW

Anne Etheridge, cinematographer
Christopher Buchakjian, sound recordist

SEGMENTS WITH PETER ADAIR

"Absolutely Positive" outtake interview
Jeffrey Friedman, interviewer

Volkswagen scene from "Smart Money"

Adair and Armstrong
Mickey Freeman, cinematographer
Michael Becker, composer
courtesy of Matt Shelley

MUSIC

"Nuages" Django Reinhardt
performed by Quintet du Hot Club
"Walking the Dog" George Gershwin
performed by Katia and Marielle Labeque
"Clockin' the Vic" Matt Weiner
performed by Matt Weiner and Del Rey
"Rose Room" Hickman and Williams
performed by Benny Goodman Sextet

MUSIC CLEARANCE: Mark Kitchell

STILLS: Janet Cole, Lou Dematteis and others

ADDITIONAL SOUND RECORDIST: Laretta Molitor

INTERVIEWEES

Nathaniel Dorsky	Sally Gearhart
Ann Samsell	Dennis Chiu
Cynthia Gair	John Burnside
Rick Stokes	Achebe (Betty) Powell
David Gillon	Tom Fitzpatrick (aka Roger Harkenrider)
Pam Jackson	Freddy Gray
Judy "Rusty" Millington	Harriet Trezevant Gray
Mark Pinney	

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WORDISOUTMOVIE.COM WEBSITE DESIGN: Nicole Coleman

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The Outfest Legacy Project for LGBT Film Preservation

The Outfest Legacy Project, a collaboration between Outfest and the UCLA Film & Television Archive, is the only program in the world devoted to saving and protecting LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) film - much of which is already in danger of being lost. We have established the largest publicly accessible collection of LGBT moving images in the world (over 13,000 titles and growing). Beyond actively collecting LGBT film and video media for permanent conservation and preservation, the Legacy Project strives to fund the restoration of damaged films and videos to their original release quality. In addition, the Project conducts LGBT public education and extensive outreach to filmmakers, archivists and educators.

The Outfest Legacy Project's film restoration projects have included PARTING GLANCES, WORD IS OUT, CHOOSING CHILDREN and QUEENS AT HEART as well as video restorations of the ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives.

For more information about the Outfest Legacy Project for LGBT Film Preservation, including how make a financial contribution or donate a film or video, please visit www.outfest.org/legacy or call 213.480.7088

Milliarium Zero

Milliarium Zero is a film distribution company specifically created to acquire and distribute films of strong political and social content. The co-founders are Dennis Doros and Amy Heller, who started Milestone Film & Video in 1990 and still run it today. Milliarium Zero translates from Latin to "milestone zero." In the US, this official landmark from where all roads in North America are measured, is located opposite the White House.

Word is Out is Milliarium Zero's second release after the Winterfilm Collective's documentary *Winter Soldier* on the Viet Nam veterans' 1971 conference. MZ's next film will be Lucy Massie Phenix's 1985 classic documentary, *You Got to Move: Stories of Change in the South* that follows the history of the famed Highlander School in Tennessee and a group of individuals in the process of becoming involved in grassroots social change in the South.

A Milliarium Zero release

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