

# PROGRAM GUIDE

## “TV/VIDEO”

ALEX BAG  
DARA BIRNBAUM  
JOHAN GRIMONPREZ

November 11 – December 16, 2010

### ESOPUS SPACE

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Esopus Space Hours: Monday–Tuesday 12-8pm; Wednesday–Thursday 12-5pm

# ALEX BAG

Program screens at 1:40 pm, 3:10 pm, 4:40 pm, and (Monday and Tuesday only) 7:25pm



## ***Untitled (Project for the Andy Warhol Museum)*, 1996, 22 min, color, sound**

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In this 1996 video, Bag replicates the experience of channel-surfing, portraying a gamut of TV personalities and advertising stereotypes against a backdrop of intermittent static. Bag's types are cathode creatures of the '90s, perfectly tuned to that decade's aesthetic of overwrought edginess and carefully cultivated grunge.



## ***Harriet Craig*, 1998, 12:08 min, b&w, sound**

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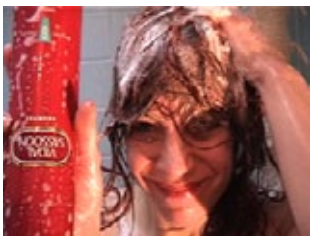
Bag created this video for a 1998 group show titled *Harriet Craig* at Apexart in New York. Curated by David Rimanelli, the exhibition focused on the 1950 melodrama *Harriet Craig*, which starred Joan Crawford, and its themes of "domesticity, femininity and the underbelly of potential madness in both." In her condensed remake of the film, Bag plays the titular character as a meddling, maniacal, and despotic housewife: She terrorizes her servants, ruins her cousin's love life and belittles her husband. Bag's campy, histrionic portrayal of Crawford channels iconic drag representations of the actress.



## ***Le Cruel et Curieux Vie Du La Salmonellapod (with Ethan Kramer)*, 2000, 11:48 min, color, sound**

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Bag's mock nature show stars an amphibious, carnivorous flying animal, the Salmonellapod. A hushed narrator cheerfully describes the Salmonellapod's lethal male pregnancy, inborn female sadism, and infant cannibalism with light Casio-keyboard accompaniment. Performed entirely with marionettes made of animal parts, *Le Cruel et Curieux Vie Du La Salmonellapod* is not merely a satire about human interpretations of the animal kingdom, but a darker joke about the mirth and horror of living



## ***Coven Services*, 2004, 14:40 min, color, sound**

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A snapshot of popular culture in the early aughts, *Coven Services* mixes vignettes of Bag in multiple guises—a spokeswoman for Haliburton, Chase Bank, AOL Time Warner, Bechtel Corporation and other brands—with footage from Paris Hilton's infamous sex tape. In this disparaging look at the daily consumption of tangible and intangible products in a service economy, Bag brings the same pained smile to her promotions of laundry detergent, debit cards, and the war in Iraq.

# DARA BIRNBAUM

Program screens at 1:10 pm, 2:40 pm, 4:10 pm, and (Monday and Tuesday only) 6:55pm



## ***Technology/Transformation: Wonder Woman, 1978-79, 5:50 min, color, sound***

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Explosive bursts of fire open *Technology/Transformation*, an incendiary deconstruction of the ideology embedded in television form and pop cultural iconography. Appropriating imagery from the 1970s TV series *Wonder Woman*, Birnbaum isolates and repeats the moment of the “real” woman’s symbolic transformation into superhero. Entrapped in her magical metamorphosis by Birnbaum’s stuttering edits, *Wonder Woman* spins dizzily like a music-box doll. Writing about the “stutter-step progression of ‘extended moments’ of transformation from *Wonder Woman*,” Birnbaum states, “The abbreviated narrative—running, spinning, saving a man—allows the underlying theme to surface: psychological transformation versus television product. Real becomes Wonder in order to ‘do good’ (be moral) in an (a) or (im)moral society.”

*Technical Assistance: Ed Slopek/Nova Scotia College of Art and Design; Ted Estabrook/Jim Peithman; Exploring Post #1; Devlin Productions Inc. Original Television Footage: CBS Inc. Wonder Woman. Sound: The Wonderland Disco Band. RS International, Hippopotamus Productions.*



## ***Kiss The Girls: Make Them Cry, 1979, 6:50 min, color, sound***

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Birnbaum manipulates off-air imagery from the TV game show *Hollywood Squares* in *Kiss The Girls: Make Them Cry*, a bold deconstruction of the gestures of sexual representation in pop cultural imagery and music. Minor celebrities (who Birnbaum terms “iconic women and receding men”) confined in a flashing tic-tac-toe board greet millions of TV viewers, animating themselves as they say “hello.” Birnbaum isolates and repeats these banal and at times bizarre gestures of male and female presentation—“repetitive baroque neck-snapping triple takes, guffaws, and paranoid eye darts”—wrenching them from their television context to expose stereotyped gestures of power and submission. Linking TV and Top 40, Birnbaum spells out the lyrics to disco songs (“Georgie Porgie puddin’ and pie/kissed the girls and made them cry”) with on-screen text, as the sound provides originally scored jazz interpolation and a harsh new wave coda. The result is a powerful, layered analysis of the meaning of the gestures of mass cultural idioms.

*Yellow Bird: Spike and Allan Scarth. Vocals: Dori Levine. Audio Mix: William and Allan Scarth. Technical Assistance Thanks: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Fred McFadzen/Ed Slopek, Exploring Post #1, Ted Estabrook, Halifax Cablevision, Bruce Nickson, Madelaine Palko. Soundtrack: Found a Cure, Ashford and Simpson, Georgie Porgie, Toto. Television Footage: Hollywood Squares. Aired in NY on CBS/NBC.*



**Pop-Pop Video: *General Hospital/Olympic Women Speed Skating*, 1980, 6 min, color, sound**

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In the dynamic *Pop-Pop Video* tapes, Birnbaum appropriates standard television genres—the soap opera, sports event, action drama—to deconstruct the idiomatic meaning of TV’s structural codes and conventions, such as the intercut and reverse shot. *General Hospital/Olympic Women Speed Skating* is a fragmented collage that cuts between two sources of off-air television imagery—the TV sports event and the soap opera—to analyze the syntax and gestures of what Birnbaum terms “TV treatment”—in this case, the cross-cut and the reverse shot. The “cross-over” in an Olympic women’s speed skating race is juxtaposed with daytime drama *General Hospital*’s “whites” in reverse angle shots. A couple tries to reach an understanding. Skaters continuously return to the starting line. Frustration and exertion combine with originally scored soundtracks of disco, rock, and jazz. The female soap opera character’s emotional stress, her gestures and rhetoric of paranoia and self-doubt are countered with the pure physical performance of the female sports figures.

*Vocals: Dori Levine, Sally Swisher. Instrumentation: Robert Raposo. Disco: Donna Summer.*

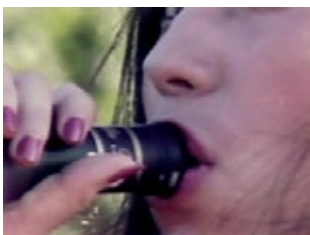


**Pop-Pop Video: *Kojak/Wang*, 1980, 3 min, color, sound**

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Layered with a tension-laden crescendo of rock guitars and gunshots, *Kojak/Wang* is a volatile pastiche of fast-paced, repeated images from *Kojak* (commercial TV), an ad for the Wang Corporation (TV commercial), and color bars. Birnbaum equates the violence of the crime drama shoot-out and the violence of corporate America, as signified by the telecommunications industry. Images and music burst in a staccato rhythm as she cuts back and forth between rapid gunfire, Kojak interrogating a criminal, candy-colored lasers, and a woman at a computer. Within the ritualized violence of Kojak’s gunfire and Wang’s lasers, a condensed narrative dialogue between cop and criminal is articulated in shot/counter-shot images: “No! No! Listen... I did wrong. I’ll take the blame for that. But don’t ask me to give you his name.” “I’m asking.”

*Instrumentation: Rhys Chatham.*



**Remy/Grand Central: *Trains and Boats and Planes*, 1980, 4:18 min, color, sound**

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Commissioned by Remy Martin for a public exhibition in Grand Central Station in New York, *Remy/Grand Central* is an advertisement with a deconstructive twist. In a syncopated collage of appropriated footage (including a TV commercial for Sergio Valente jeans) and a young woman drinking Remy on a commuter train platform, Birnbaum calls attention to how mass-media advertising uses a woman’s body as a vehicle for selling products. In a stylized pastiche that she terms “a snack-en-route with a pretty girl, animated trains, updated Bacharach muzak (Brazilian style), and pouring Remy,” Birnbaum turns the tables on the media’s use of woman as commodity.

*Camera/Production Assistance: John Sanborn. Music: Burt Bacharach. Musical Arrangement: Clarice Taylor, Kelvyn Bell. Audio Mix: Bruce Tovsky. Sound Mix: Burt Brathwaite. Recorded at Brathwaite Studios, Brooklyn, NY. Post-production mix rough edit: Merc? Videotape Editor: Dave Pentecost. Commercial Footage: Sergio Valente. Created for Remy Martin by Dara Birnbaum.*



***PM Magazine/Acid Rock*, 1982, 4:09 min, color, sound**

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*PM Magazine/Acid Rock* is a spectacle of visuals and sound, a delirious collage of appropriated TV imagery and dynamic pop music. The introduction to the nightly television broadcast *PM Magazine* and a segment of a Wang computer commercial are the sources for the highly edited and computerized visual score. To the recomposed music of the Doors' *L.A. Woman*, a continuous flow of emblematic images of self-satisfaction—the American Dream or America's dream state—assault the viewer. Stereotypical TV gestures and icons of leisure and consumerism (ice skater, cheerleader, a little girl licking an ice cream cone) are framed and reframed, slowed and accelerated, colorized and abstracted. In a frenetic deconstruction of mass-media ideology, Birnbaum recontextualizes and subverts television's representations of consumerism and sexuality. The piece was originally produced as one of four simultaneous video/music channels for the installation of the same name at Documenta 7 in Kassel, Germany.

*Music Collaboration: Dara Birnbaum, Simeon Soffer. Vocals: Shauna D'Larson. Guitar: David Dowse. Drums: Jon Norton. CMX Editing: California Institute of the Arts. Post Production Editing: Long Beach Museum of Art, The Annex; Electronic Arts Intermix, New York.*



***Artbreak, MTV Networks, Inc.*, 1987, 30 sec, color, sound**

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Produced for an *Artbreak* segment on MTV Network, this dynamic “30-second spot” presents an abbreviated history of animation according to the representation of women, from the cell imagery of Max Fleischer's *Out of the Inkwell* series to the contemporary digital effects of television. In Birnbaum's vision, Fleischer's spilled inkwell releases cartoon bubbles containing images of women from MTV music videos. With wit and panache, Birnbaum reverses the traditional sexual roles of the producer and product of commercial imagery: The final image is that of a female artist on whose video “palette” we see a glimpse of Fleischer.

*Music/Audio Collaboration: Dara Birnbaum, Peter Eggers. Commissioned by MTV Networks, Inc.*

**All descriptions of Alex Bag's and Dara Birnbaum's video works are excerpted from the Electronic Arts intermix (EAI) catalog. [www.eai.org](http://www.eai.org)**

# JOHAN GRIMONPREZ

Screens at 12 noon and (Monday and Tuesday only) 5:45pm



## ***dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*, 1997, 68 min, color, sound**

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Premiering at Centre Pompidou and Documenta X in Kassel, Germany, in 1997, Grimonprez's hijacking documentary eerily foreshadowed 9/11. In it, we meet the romantic skyjackers who fought their revolutions and won airtime on the passenger planes of the 1960s. By the 1990s, such characters are apparently no more, replaced on our TV screens by stories of state-sponsored suitcase bombs.

Grimonprez investigates the politics behind this change, at the same time unwrapping our own complicity in the urge for ultimate disaster. Playing on novelist Don DeLillo's reflections in the novel *Mao II*, "What terrorists gain, novelists lose," and "home is a failed idea," he blends archival television footage of hijackings with surreal and banal themes including fast food, pet statistics, disco, and his quirky home movies to create a rollercoaster ride through recent history, best described in the words of one hijacked Pepsi executive as "running the gamut of many emotions: from surprise to shock, to fear, to joy, to laughter, and then again, fear."

*Made with the support of Documenta X and the Ministry of the Flemish Community, Brussels. Soundrack: David Shea.*