

Interview with Joyce Wieland*

Kay Armatage

This interview was taped and transcribed early in October 1971. Since then, Joyce Wieland has rewritten some parts of the interview, and has added some explanatory material. —K.A.

KAY ARMATAGE: Can you tell me about *Hand Tinting* [1967–1968] and about the . . . was it a school or a retraining center?

JOYCE WIELAND: It was a retraining center in West Virginia run by Xerox and we made a documentary—

KA: Who's we?

JW: Another Canadian, Sylvia Davern, who was working in animation at the time and two American girls, one doing sound and another shooting. The job came through Sylvia's company.

KA: Were you commissioned to do it?

JW: Yes.

KA: And where was it to be shown?

JW: TV. Anyway I took some of my own outs from the film—some of which were genuine old-fashioned cutaways, and which I felt very strongly about, and began to make *Hand Tinting*.

KA: It's a lovely film.

JW: I think it has more to do with what was going on at the center than the commissioned film.

* Reprinted from *Take One*, 3, no. 2 (February 1972). Additional material supplied by author.

KA: Some of the images that are repeated . . . I began to feel very warm, for instance, toward that girl with the bathing cap.

JW: Yes, there's a lot of repetition in a small space.

KA: How do you feel about the subjects that you're working with?

JW: I hardly know whether to laugh or cry about those girls. The center was about eighty percent black kids who had come from everywhere. They were lonely, rebellious, funny, restless, and hopelessly poor. What they were offered in the way of education was humiliating to me—some rooms with typewriters, and a machine that spoke to them as they typed. Most of them wanted to make movies when they met us. It was a corporate pacification program. I wanted to do my own film about them. I was sorry—so was Sylvia—to see all their swearing and astounding wit cut out of the final version.

KA: In a film like *Hand Tinting*, how much of your concern is just working with form, or how important is your subject? I'm trying to think of showing this film to my class of women, and to think of the way that they as women would understand that film, women who aren't interested in art or film.

JW: It could be interesting to them to know that I dyed the film with cloth dyes and punctured it with my sewing needles.

KA: The images that you used as well . . .

JW: When I first did it, I thought it might not be useful to anyone. It was a poem. There's nothing out of the way in it, it has mystery and rhythm and some repetitive portraits of some beautiful faces. The editing and the girls are the subject of *Hand Tinting*. The editing and the so-called subject matter are equal. You can look at the editing or you can look at the girls. Just as in *Reason Over Passion* [1967–1969], you can look at the permutations, the images, listen to the beeps, or count on the flag inserts—or, just let it happen.

KA: Well, the feeling I got at the beginning of *Reason Over Passion*—I went through a gradual transition from the feeling that was there when everyone in the room spoke at once and a friend of mine said this is my hometown. We felt very strongly that we were watching Canada. Then gradually all the elements of the film come