

THIRTY SECOND SPOT RECONSIDERED - Voice Script for a videotape by Joan Braderman
@ 1989 (11 minutes; NTSC, color, sound)

For a Bicentennial Without Colonies

This is the story of a thirty second spot -- which you will see on this tape -- It's the story of how and why I made it, where it was broadcast and where it was blacklisted. It is also a parable about free speech in TV-America-land, where we're supposed to have a Bill of Rights which guarantees us freedom of speech but where, in fact our right to speak out, in the mass media, the only place anyone will ever hear you, is radically limited; not just by the size of your bank account [by who's got the dough] but by out and out censorship, the quiet, Big Brother of broadcast TV, a system of subtle and powerful control over what you can and can't see and hear in this great land of ours, a system you can't read about in TV Guide, because the people who own it don't want you to, and they don't have to either because it's theirs.

Thirty seconds is not a very long chunk of time but in Northamerica-TV-land, it's sometimes worth a hundred thousand dollars, you got it, folks, 3-4 times what you will earn in a good year. The spot you will see very soon on this tape was made on 16 mm film. It started out to be 60 seconds. Then we realized how much 60 seconds of network time actually cost and it was cut in half--in about thirty seconds-- as fast as you can say Jack Robinson. My challenge in the spring of '76, when USA media country was saturated with apple pie images of white people thanking their lucky stars that the American Revolution had won basic rights for white male slave-owners was this: make a thirty second spot. Make it say, in thirty seconds, mind you, that lots of different kinds and colors of people, you know { not your basic white male slave owner} -- women, minorities, renters, workers, gays, anti-militarists, those people not represented by the N.Y. Times, a bunch of them, passionate about democracy and unwilling to take the next spoonful of corporate shit lying down -- a large coalition of people -- disagreed about a lot of things, but agreed that the American Revolution still had a way to go before it meant equality for everybody.

Yeah, I thought, let's go for thirty seconds of something other than happy TV clones with Betsy Ross outfits on. Sell the spot to national and local TV networks -- sell it like an ad, any old ad, for tater tots or your basic poison, explode in your mouth, bubble gum. I mean, hey, I thought, these folks with this idea were pretty smart. Now, it's a banality, I mean a total cliché to say that TV runs us, even the Sunday Times yesterday announced that the political life of our so-called democracy is run by media moguls who could buy and sell you and me before breakfast. They came right out in our journal of record and said that we don't even elect real guys for president, anymore, just stencils of guys, you know, packaging. Then these guys-- at the Times -- they write this shit and then just go out for another martini, business as usual, you know. Maybe you can take this shit but it makes me nuts. And back in '76, you had to be kind of nutty -- let's say farsighted -- even to think stuff like this, much less act on it. And it scared the hell out of you then too, if you could see the writing on the wall. The New York Times puts it on the first page now, but back then you got called a commie pinko slob for saying stuff that

everyone takes for granted now. That's right, just take another big bite of that CHEESE WHOPPER, that's FREEDOM for ya.

So anyway, when these July 4th Coalition people approached me with this idea that they would raise money specifically to buy time on TV to say something a little different for a change, I thought, far out, this should be interesting. Let's see if there's really free speech here in the only place it really matters anymore - on TV . I'll work on this. I mean weren't you sick of being preached at by the Heritage Foundation that year, adding insult to injury after the rest of the crap on TV, over which I might add, neither you nor I have one bit of control or say-so, as you already knew, despite that flood of expensive ads for democracy and the American way.

The first question we asked ourselves was an aesthetic one, believe it or not. How do we compete with a beer ad that will be shown twenty times for every time we can afford to put on our thirty second spot? The film and video geniuses of the period said, "Try to say something different in a different way." Our meaning, they said , would be compromised if we used the same tactics as the sleazeball advertizers. So -- should we have one long take, you know, like no cuts at all, avoiding like the plague imitating the marketeers who use forty quick cuts of close-ups of ecstatic teenagers in the Pepsi Ad? Or should we have absolute s-i-l-e-n-c-e? Gee that would be really effective. Ooooh or woow, a hand drawn animation -- ARSTY. Well, after a lot of hair pulling, we followed Pepsi. I mean you can't even get a range like from housing to the CIA infiltration of everyday life in the same thirty seconds -- (this tiny little spot) --if you don't have any cuts. Look, no sense throwing out Eisenstein's good idea about radical editing just because the marketing execs on Madison Avenue picked up on it too. Then a bell. What about a bell? How do you talk about democracy gone awry with a sound? OK, look, you show the liberty bell and zoom in on the crack. At the same time this bell sound kind of peters out. Weeeeeaaaaahhhhhh -- OOOOH - somethings not quite right. The Revolution here is not quite perfect. Then the bell rings over and over like a call to arms. DING DING . OH great.

This kind of brilliant brainstorming went on and on. Finally I had to sneak into a lot of friends' studios at night and get actor pals to donate their voices on the track... (THE SPOT soundtrack)

DING DING

Male voice: "After 200 years, we, the peoples of America are still fighting for our freedom.

Female voice: "Freedom from poverty,

Male voice: "From inequality, from exploitation.

Female voice: "Freedom to live in peace. Freedom to make our voices heard.

Male voice: "Our basic rights are under attack.

"If we don't fight for them, who will?

Female voice: In Philadelphia, July 4th, let the men who run this country know that WE ARE STILL FIGHTING FOR OUR FREEDOM .

Anyway Noel Burch was in town from Paris. He worked like crazy with me on this. Cause at Grey advertising the least you could make this little piece for then was about 15 grand. We made it for 200 dollars. Lab fees. Film processing. No way around it. And we had to save the big bucks for buying time, after all.

Hey, our money is as good as the next guys, right? OK, this ain't no PSA (Public service announcement, you know where some guy stands up against a chartreuse backdrop and asks you to support his basketball team. They show em at about 2 AM. (Freedom of speech, right?) Now we actually were a public service since we weren't running for political office, just sharing an idea or two, but never mind, this is America, you got something to sell, you buys yer time. So I put on a skirt, you know and some lipstick and head for CBS...

REPEAT TEXT FROM ORIGINAL 30 SECOND SPOT as above.

So I put on a skirt, you know, and some lipstick and head for CBS, which still has the rep for being the "liberal" network. Now there's a word that's gotten pretty thoroughly trashed lately. Anyway the sales rep is this young blond guy who asks me out and is very smiley and says, oh no problem and yeah, I marched in an anti-war demonstration in 1970, right on honey, your place or mine. He books our ad. I leave the film and go home.

Then about thirty seconds after I enter the house, the phone rings, it's the legal department. We can't take your filthy money to put this ad on our network, they say. This is ideology, for chrissakes, not an ad. I say, I agree that my piece is ideology but so is that beer commercial. But they don't want to discuss it. Anyway they don't have to. It's their network.

Back into the skirt and I trot my ass to three more stations running into the so-called "legal department" at each one. At Channel 5 in New York, this well dressed, ambitious young black woman named Nancy I met in the sales department was so disillusioned when this blatant cencorship reared its ugly head, that she almost got canned for going all over the network up in arms about what had happened. And hey, you'll see the ad, we didn't even cuss or say nasty words like capitalism or racism.

So, here's a suprise ending to the story. The station that took our ten thousand bucks was owned by the most conservative media people in the city. The Daily News Station, -- good old Channel 11. And you know why? They were fuckin' hungry for advertising. They were starving. Lee press on nails just wasn't paying their salaries, get it? They didn't give a damn what the ad was about. They were smart too, you know? If we could only afford to put it on five times, between various David Niven and Loretta Young movies, who the hell would remember it anyway? The Press-on nail people had a cheap ad too but they ran it over and over and over and over. It won't surprise you to know that we couldn't even think about prime time, which cost, even back then, between 30 and 60 grand for thirty seconds. It ran though, our little spot. And a small army of smart, media-wise organizers all over the country busted their nuts getting it on their local stations too, in the weeks leading up to the fabulous bicentennial with its big war ships and ticker tape costing hundreds of times what our whole budget for our message from these hundreds and thousands of otherwise unrepresented folks cost. It showed in Boston, San Francisco, New

Orleans, Cleveland ST. Louis and a bunch of other places, I can't remember cause I can't find the list. I looked for it once before when the Columbia Journalism review did an article about this challenging of the owners of the airwaves, showing how they have an information stranglehold that's turning the good American people into a bunch of brainwashed bozos. So that's the story. An ad for a march for a bicentennial without colonies, see? We still own Puerto Rico just like England owned us when our revolution got fought, get it? Were you watching TV that week? the big ships maybe? Have you heard of Lee Press on Nails or did you see our spot? Are you voting for the lesser of the two evils in this presidential election (a Democrat, by the way, if you give a damn about freedom of speech, and it's an important vote to cast. Or if you're happy being somebody else's dumb pawn you can you just stay home and watch thirtysomething, in which guilty yuppies will take at least thirty minutes just to hire some babysitter so they can go watch empty expensive movies themselves.

REPEAT TEXT OF THIRTY SECOND SPOT.....WE ARE STILL FIGHTING FOR OUR FREEDOM...DING DING.... APPLAUSE.