

S I G N A L T O N O I S E

SHIFTERS AT ARTPLACE

In linguistics, a shifter is a word whose meaning shifts depending on where and how it's used. The word "I," for example, means one thing if I say it, and something altogether different if you say it. Same word, totally different designations! This slippery metamorphosis is the unifying theme of the pieces collected by curator Leonardo Bravo for the "Shifters" show at Artplace, but it is particularly apt for Los Angeles video artist S.E. Barnet's *Mistakes* (2000), a five-minute looping video situated in the rear of the gallery. In the tape, a series of quick shots of a woman's face is intercut with black; the images stutter and repeat, almost as if the tape is sticking. Similarly, the woman's voice stammers, chopped into initially indiscernible pieces and totally out of sync with the picture. She continues to speak, but sound and picture, voice and speaker, remain disjointed. The resulting portrait is one of linguistic discombobulation and visual fragmentation; it's a picture of subjectivity slashed into a mishmash of pieces. Although we finally glean a complete sentence, Barnet never lets the portrait coalesce, keeping the voice separate from the body and refusing to link identity with corporeality. After all, she seems to say, the sense of coherence and certainty that we imagine when we say "I" is a mistake. The sense of shiftiness in Lynne Berman and Kathy Chenoweth's humorous video installation is somewhat different. The piece documents several constructions of the Modu-Port, a tangle of aluminum poles tied with rubber bands that two jump-suited, hardhatted artist/workers busily assemble in an array of locations. Given that industrial capitalism is about productivity, work that doesn't produce commodities becomes a radical, even threatening, gesture, one deftly illustrated in the pair's subversive performances, which elegantly shift our understanding of work and labor. (*Artplace, 12611 Venice Blvd., W.L.A.; thru March 18. 310-398-7404*)

—Holly Willis