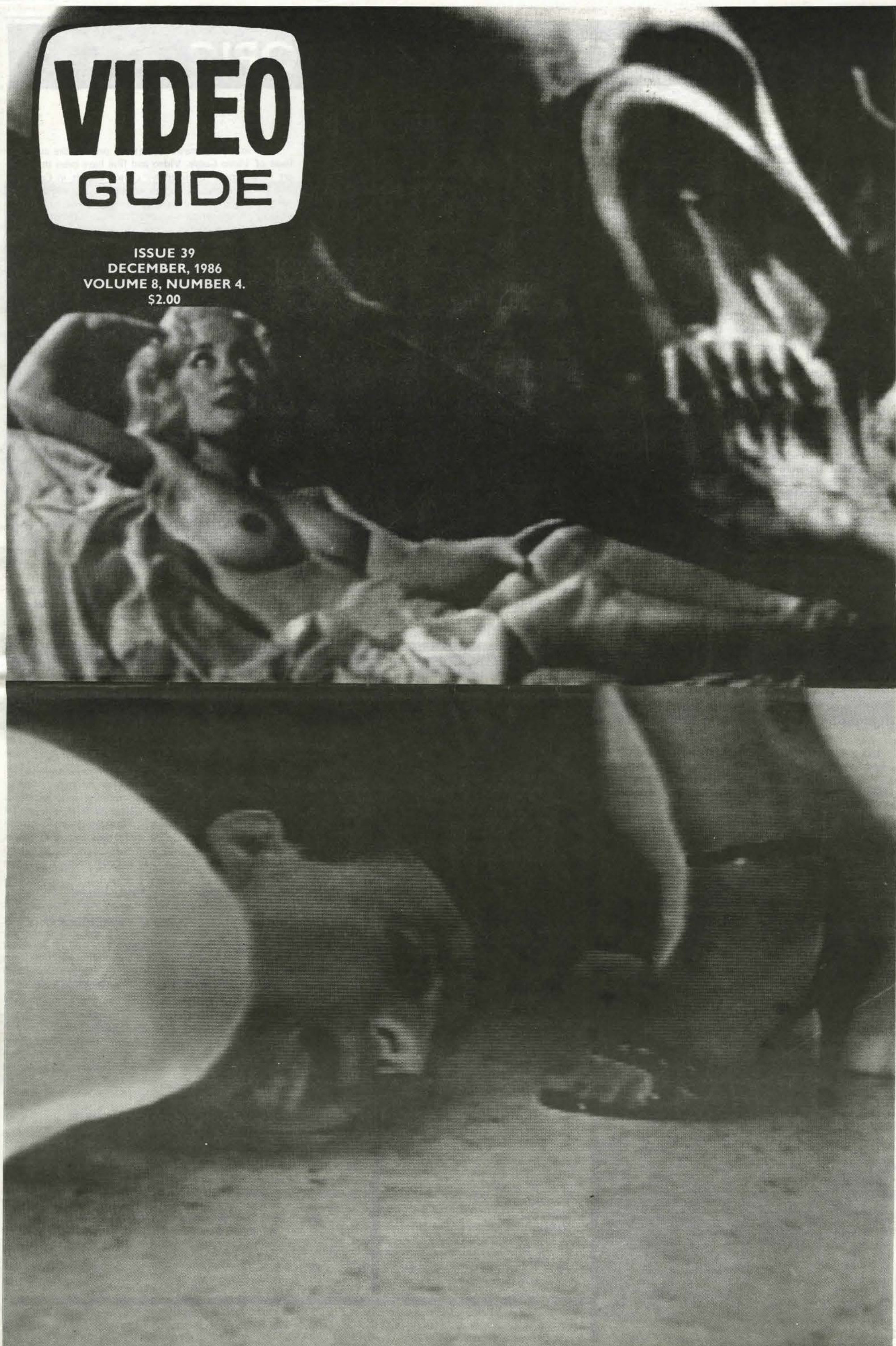


VIDEO GUIDE

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VIDEO SEX: HOT TOPIC

by Sara Diamond

Sexual representation has become a central concern within Canadian critical thought. This consideration is not surprising or novel. After all, sexual imagery and issues of sexual representation have long been of interest to artists. The Impressionists explored the transformation of popular sexual imagery (pornographic postcards and photos) into the art context and subverted the traditionally self-effacing female gaze. The Surrealists emphasized the importance of psychoanalytic theory and repressed sexual image and metaphor. Critics have used theories of personality and sexual identity to explain artistic motivation. Sexual representation has been at issue in the content of works, as a function of a finished work, in providing pleasure to specific viewers, and in motivating the production of works.

This historical context has widened and become politicized within the past period. Some of the increased interest in sexual imagery within art making has been a forced attention. Interest groups in society have begun to mobilize against certain kinds of images, in particular the explicit sexual images of pornography and sexual imagery including representations of violence against women and child sexuality.

The critique of sexual images has come in part from the feminist anti-porn movement, which has tried to address violence against women by removing images of sexual violence. Other arguments have flowed from the right-wing fundamentalist desire to suppress imagery in conflict with the traditional family and subordinated position of women. More recently, mainstream legal voices have turned to legislation as a tool to reach a consensus about what images are acceptable to Canadian society. Work by artists and media of use to artists have been targeted for state censorship as laws are devised and implemented. Qualities of artistic merit or feminist principle have not been of assistance in protecting art works from seizure by authorities.

This process of government control over images has a direct impact on what artists can show, state, and circulate. The debate about censorship has permeated all levels of the art community and penetrated Canadian society as a whole. The actuality of censorship has had a direct impact on what work major galleries will show, on what risks artists are willing to take, and on how work is read. The context of compliance or defiance of a work to specific legislation has become an issue in Ontario, where artists have been forced to deal with the active suppression of exhibitions and work by the Ontario Film and Video Review Board and the police using the Criminal Code of Canada. Video artists in British Columbia will be subject to regulation as of December 15, 1986, as a new classification and censorship system for video comes into effect in our province.

Yet there is another level at which the issue of sexual representation has asserted itself. The visual and critical discourse has moved far beyond the traditional strategies, in which art was seen as repressed and channelled desire or in which sexual images were displaced into various contexts or pleasure celebrated. The advent of the social movements of feminism, gay liberation, etc., and their link with artistic challenges to existing forms of sexual representation has led to previously marginalized groups of artists (women, gays, and lesbians, artists of colour) speaking to issues of sexuality, sex, and power, within sexual representation and relationships in ways that have further disrupted traditions of representation. That this discourse coincides with a heightening of censorship by conservative forces seems more than coincidental. The issues of censorship and the process of representing sex and exploring strategies to represent sex have become increasingly intertwined.

It is in this framework that we present the current issue of *Video Guide*. Video and film have been the two art media most regulated by censor boards in Canada. The following articles provide different and contradictory perspectives on commercial and artist-produced sexual imagery in the video medium. These are offered in the spirit of stimulating production and debate, a process that in our opinion is a viable option to the removal of sexual imagery by state authorities.

Three articles in this issue represent a debate on the potential of the video medium to develop and contradict dominant sexual images. These are the contributions by Karen Knights, Jamirte Trott, and Paul Wong. Wong examines the context of broadcast and private viewings as sites for sexual imagery; Trott argues that male voyeurism is intrinsic to sexual representations and a fundamental assault on the power of women, and Knights poses the possibility of reclaiming sexual imagery as a terrain for women's viewing and production.

John Greyson explores the growing genre of video art about the experiences of gay men. Lisa Steele and Kim Tomczak describe their collaboration *In The Dark* in a comprehensive interview, and Jackie Larkin reviews the work. Reviews include critiques of the work of Lydia Schouten and Rodney Werden and an artists' page by Byron Black and Reece Metcalfe.

Video is of particular interest in representing sex because of its affinity on one hand to the commercial sex-stereotyping of television and on the other, the advent of a home medium and market for pornography through commercial distribution. It is this configuration, the history of sexual representation in the medium and our own interests in video that combine to present this set of articles. We hope that you find its contents of value.

EDIT

This issue was guest edited by Sara Diamond, and we would like to express our thanks and appreciation for the time and effort she put into this issue. The issue discusses the topic of sex and censorship. The collection of articles does not represent, nor was it meant to represent, the whole picture of sex and censorship. But we hope it will begin an ongoing awareness of what are and will be the issues artists and producers face.

I hope that anyone interested in responding with an article will, and that the discussion will go on, and will not go back into the closet. I found after reading the articles that I was ready to sit down and write my own point of view, which differs from many of those expressed by the authors in this issue. It has stimulated a lot of interesting discussion.

Video Guide's next issue takes a look at distribution: how to, where to, and who is. If you have any articles or photos, or would like to submit something for this issue, please do so as soon as possible. Guest editor will be Jeanette Reinhardt. Write to her c/o *Video Guide*.

Video Guide is committed to the continued awareness, appreciation, and development of the Video and Media Arts, and we encourage those of you out there who see this as important to contribute. *Video Guide* office is open to suggestions, inquiries, compliments, and criticism, so please feel free to contact us.

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IN THE DARK: TALKING SEX

by Jackie Larkin



"The Heat Is On." Conference, Women In Focus, Vancouver

Is sex important? The question seems ridiculous given its presence in so many instances of everyday life: in our interactions, in our response to visual images and to bodies and faces anywhere and anytime, in the fantasies which spring from our imaginations at the most unexpected moments. All this, before we get down to "making out."

But has it been an important issue for the women's movement? At first glance one is tempted to answer yes. Certainly there is a widespread public perception that feminists spend a lot of time talking and thinking about sex.

The fight for control of our bodies has always affirmed women's right to enjoy sex on terms which women determine and without fear of unwanted pregnancy. Raising the issue of sexual harassment has expressed a refusal of male determination of what kind of sexual attention women like or want. Similarly, the decades of protest against sexist advertising have asserted that neither men nor capital should define and package female sexuality.

On these fronts and others, feminist approaches to sex have attempted to carve out some space — by refusing the patriarchal framework. This has meant a rejection of definitions and 'desires' which are imposed upon us and a refusal of the idea that good sex for women means pleasing men. But the end result has been that our activities, energies, and organizing have produced a negative critique, a series of statements about what we don't want.

In recent years, the anti-pornography campaigns of the women's movement have reinforced this dynamic. Confronted with the explosion of written and visual pornography, women have responded from the gut with: "get rid of it". Again, a statement about what is not wanted, even though it can be very difficult for feminists to agree about what is acceptable. The demands for state censorship of pornography bring to the forefront fundamental questions: what is good sex? What is erotic? What variety of 'turn on' falls within the framework of acceptability? Even... Is sex good?

To some it may appear that sectors of the women's movement are anti-sex, or at least hold the view that women (and men) cannot enjoy egalitarian and passionate sex given the pervasive nature of male dominance in the society. I'm not much concerned if some men say this, especially the powerful who make money through the exploitation of our sexuality. But it's a serious problem for the women's movement if women are not able to find a resonance among feminists and feminist artists for their own very powerful sexualities.

A central strategy for shifting the nature of the debate must be the creation of a broad terrain in which our sexualities may be explored and developed.

This entails discussion and exploration of our sexual possibilities from the point of view of what we want. It means attempting to understand the creation of desire and indeed, to support efforts to create it. Where is the feminist erotica that we need if we are to look into the future? Where is the sex education for youth which might nurture alternative approaches to sexuality?

The alternative media has largely been caught in the same framework as the women's movement. Women on Art on Sex, a milestone conference organized last fall in Vancouver, looked at the approaches of feminist artists to sex and sexuality. Most pieces were critiques of prevailing treatments of female sexuality, and little could be described as erotic. However, some of the critical approaches posed the question of what is erotically acceptable from a feminist standpoint and underlined the difficulty in giving an answer.

In this context, the performance video *In the Dark* by Lisa Steele and Kim Tomczak assumed a special, and welcome, place. Described as "one of the first Canadian works to critically approach the explicit representation of sex", it did so, in an unexpected fashion.

Twenty minutes of Kim and Lisa making love. Stationary camera. Seated at the front of the audience, the two lovers speak quietly into the mikes, describing their sexual identities; layering their lives into the visual images of sex between two people. Allowing and demanding an immediate intimacy. Refusing anonymity.

Their voices are counterpoint to moving limbs, flexing muscles, and shifting positions. Moods slip through heat to tenderness.

Obviously a relationship between equals, where passive and active are alternating states of desire, of giving and taking, of knowing one's sexual power. And two who have loved over time. Intense sexual excitement rides on the comfort and familiarity of sexual years together.

Sensual and erotic, it also elicited intense emotions from many participants: sadness, joy, and relief. Where else had we seen two people making love as we ourselves do when loving is going well? The experience was affirming, validating, and healing. It claimed what this society would hide and distort — the possibility of the equal and honest expression of desire between women and men. Where in film or video can we find our own joyful experiences reflected? Mostly we search for scraps.

In the feeling of relief was another insight. What we saw was powerfully ordinary. No flashing lights, no mounting crescendo, no camera angles to catch the right curve of breast, no fragmentation of view. All our lives we are bombarded by packaged sexual representations that titillate the imagination and create needs that are never realized. We become perpetually unsatisfied consumers.

Even the search for "real erotica" has within it the promise of a new and spectacular product, yet to be discovered by feminists.

Giving us a part of their daily sexual lives, Lisa and Kim remind us that experiencing great pleasure can be simultaneously amazing and very ordinary. They focus on one of the starting points for the developing of feminist erotica: our own sexual experiences that the forces of the market have been unable to overwhelm.

In the Dark is banned in Ontario. The Censor Board says it has no redeeming social value. Yet it stands as one of the few efforts by artists to reach beyond the critical/negative stance towards sex which has tended to characterize the women's movement.

It points the way towards the creation of alternative images and expressions of sexuality and sexual desire. Such a route will not be easy. Any movement, including its cultural wing, develops ideas of what is acceptable. When that movement is weak, when it faces a powerful, sexist society, it is not surprising that it focuses on developing a critical stance. But the result is that not much is considered acceptable. Too often, only the lowest common denominator is judged as passing the test as non-sexist, non-racist, and therefore "correct".

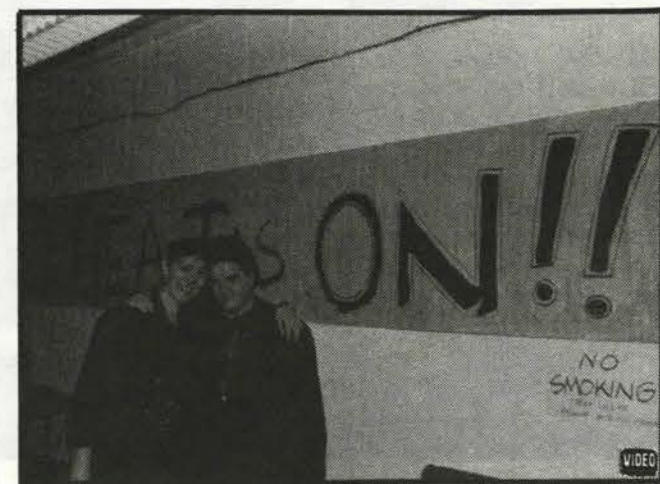
Opening up the space for alternatives means broadening what is 'feminist sexuality', what is acceptable in the sexual realm. Saying at least a partial goodbye to the feminist superego will be hard. What will be our anchors? Does anything go? No. We can continue to make critiques, to refuse the garbage which threatens to drown us. And we can do it by relying on the unifying feminist themes of control, choice, and equality.

For the rest, a wide terrain has to be left open for the expression of differences. Our sexuality is rooted in the world in which we live and grow. Our desires, fantasies, and sexual practice draw on these experiences. And they vary greatly. Creating something new means working with what exists, playing with it, challenging it, transforming it in different ways.

I don't want to appear facile or naive about the possibilities for challenging dominant definitions of sexuality. So long as women are economically dependent and politically powerless, their sexualities will be greatly constrained. So long as the system rests on male power over women, so will male sexuality be deformed and limited. And even if we begin to contest the terrain of mass culture by developing our own alternative views, the odds against us are enormous. The porn industry has huge resources at its disposal. We don't. But there are artists, filmmakers, and writers working in this field who are often isolated and unsupported. There are radio and TV stations that are accessible, if only partially.

"Opening up" possibilities isn't only applicable to cultural production. The social boundaries of the women's movement must also crumble. Too many women feel alienated from a movement which appears judgemental and rejecting of their sexualities, of their presentation of themselves as sexual beings, of their complex and 'not-so-correct' desires. Even of their relationships. Too many sex workers reject a movement which frowns on women who 'flaunt' their sexuality. Too many young women see only another moral system in the women's movement which is as restraining as the dominant sexist culture (even if its content is better).

Expanding our sexualities and developing new attitudes towards sex will come from the womb of the old — deriving and contradicting. Who are we to say?



VISUAL DEMOCRACY



An Interview with Lisa Steele and Kim Tomczak

by Sara Diamond

Sara: *Your work in the last while has become a team effort. I'm interested in how you work together. How do you construct your scripts? How do you work as co-producers? How do you deal with conflict or difference?*

Kim: It's almost easier to say what we don't do. We try to avoid a division of labour wherein one person might be the scriptwriter and the other person the cameraperson or the editor. So we each write the script together as much as possible, we edit and shoot together. We take turns.

Lisa: It starts even before that. We're interested in an idea, and we begin to discuss that idea and the conceptual development is quite collaborative. We have a lot of conceptual conflict at those points. We really challenge each others' ideas: "Why are we going to go in that direction?" That's where we actually have more overt conflict than when we get down to shooting. Even script-writing is very unconflicted comparatively speaking, and production itself and editing, which is in a sense more mechanical after the ideas are starting to get out.

The development of the ideas requires us to have a great deal of give and take and also to put yourself on the line. By the time we get to production, we've already put ourselves on the line, and the work has become our two works, both of our works. The process that we have evolved has assisted us in keeping a division of labour from happening. The heavy stuff has come out already.

Kim: We draw it out by going in wildly different directions. One person will start with a visual reference and the other person will start with a literal reference and they'll miss each other and eventually you end up with a mutual vocabulary for the visual and literal references based on their particular production.

Lisa: We intentionally set out to collaborate. I had never collaborated before personally in a major sense. I had worked with other people to bounce ideas off of and certainly to do text with, but I really maintained pure control over every aspect in a sense. We discussed for a long time before we collaborated. We discussed the pros and cons of it and would we be interested. We didn't drift into it, we intended to collaborate and then the opportunity arose to collaborate, and we did.

The first collaboration was very mechanical compared to the ease which we have now. It was *In The Dark*, the piece on sexual representation. Establishing the visual was quite easy for us because we'd had prior discussions. We knew what we wanted, we did some experimentation, and then we did the visual.

Kim: The writing was quite difficult and we actually had to go our separate ways to write it.

Sara: *Where did the impetus for *In The Dark* come from?*

Lisa: There was a lot happening in terms of the anti-censorship campaign that we were involved in, plus an analysis of sexual imagery itself.

Kim: There was some analysis that suggested that there was no way to represent sexuality pure and simple. That became an initial challenge to us to do something that did represent our sexuality, at least visually. And to try and see if that was realistic or not.

Lisa: We tend to choose as collaborative projects topics that we know the primary audience will, at some level, be saying, "We know this already." The next project we did, *Working The Double Shift*, was much clearer that way. We feel like we say things that are floating around or that people have heard, but we want to organize the material in a certain way and present it back, particularly to the visual arts community, which was what *In The Dark* was made for the first time. It went to the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston. In that environment we wanted a discussion of the production of sexual imagery.

We went back and forth about it, and finally arrived at the piece as a performance within the audience itself. Boston was probably the only place where the performance itself worked in the way it was set to work. The people literally didn't know us from anybody and did not know that it was us on the tape. Not until we turned around did they see our faces and start to make those connections. People just poured out their ideas about it. It was very conflicting and contradictory, and one person would contradict him/herself within ten minutes as to whether or not he/she liked it or didn't like it, or think it worked or didn't think it worked. It was a wellspring of being able to sit in public and discuss with people who'd actually made sexual imagery. It was so powerful. I don't think that we really understood that when we made it. We understood that it would be difficult for us to do it. We didn't understand how difficult until we actually got into the situation. To show it was hard — it wasn't difficult to make it.

We were dumping this content into a place where it didn't belong. That was what we were forcing an audience to deal with, that it belonged down the street, where it could be rejected or put in that context, but at no point

would the image and analysis come together like we were trying to bring it together, and the experience of discussion, because never, ever, would it happen without the discussion or without us. The whole experience crossed a taboo line, by standing up and being there while it was being shown. It was a very basic, basic attempt to try and counter the hysteria around simple representation of sexuality. We had a real base line and then there was nuance on top of that.

Kim: We weren't experts in terms of analyzing pornography. We had impressions about what had been produced in the pornography industry and how people had been represented. We had no detailed experience. Even from that naive or innocent perspective, we did reflect on the industry in a fairly accurate way and produce something that was different. We listened to the critique coming specifically from the feminist movement around the way people are represented, and power and control. We definitely wanted to do something that didn't maintain an obvious control in the way sexuality was represented.

Lisa: One of the things that really informed that piece was the context. We made that piece to show within the image display system. It went into the Institute of Contemporary Art; it went into the Harbourfront series, it went into the Western Front. The most specific sexual context it went into was "The Heat Is On", the conference. Lots of the references are to representation and image making. That's its context, rather than an intervention into the industry at all, the porn industry. We knew that this content and its almost overly earnest presentation format was "not done" at all. We did understand that there would be resistance. We had tremendous resistance in Toronto, of all places — where we live.

Kim: There's the mythology that artists should deal with the larger picture. If they're going to deal with an issue it should be international in scope or other-worldly. The main criticism of our work has been that we've been concentrating on our own environment or on the art system. In retrospect, that's been to our advantage — there's a longevity to some of the pieces that we've produced that were very specific and were produced for very specific points in time. For example, *In The Dark* should have had a fifteen minute shelf life. It was done at a moment, because of a situation, because of a discussion that was going on.

Lisa: To historicize that — I had just done that long series of interviews for *FUSE*, which was "Freedom, Sex and Power". That panel had just happened. Kim gave me

lots and lots of feedback and assistance in producing that material. We did some of the interviews together for that issue of *FUSE*. All of our pieces have been located historically, they have been very site specific.

Sara: *The approach fits into the history of video because video artists have always said, "We don't have to make generalizations, as opposed to broadcast, we can produce a piece of work that has a specific audience in mind." The reason the works continue to have relevance is that the issues continue to have some resonance.*

Lisa: Part of the reason why we did this and decided to actually put sex on the screen was sitting through panel after panel of the discussion of the sexual representation even from a positive sense, without any images up there. We really did say, "We're going to take it out there. We're going to put it up in front of people and then we're going to enter the discourse with a self-created set of images." We were sick to death of the theory, even in the positive sense. It became so enervating, it just drains it all out of you. You can think of positive and negatives, and this example and that example. You just have to do it then, after awhile. It's a gesture, in that sense. Consequently, as it gets further away from that time when we made it, it is harder to show it and do the performance, because it was so much of the moment.

Sara: *Do you have a method of working? Do you do research, do you work intuitively?*

Kim: It is a real combination of both. We're not heavy researchers, nor do we shy away from references or trying to discover something. We're not economists, so we are not trying to explain problems in those terms.

Lisa: With *In The Dark*, we did all the reading we could about what was the current dialogue about sexual representation. Then we discovered that we couldn't do anything right, so we went ahead and did it. That's when we ended up in this incredible conundrum as to what we would say.

Sara: *The visual structure of the tape is in contradiction to the norms of pornography. That must have been a conscious decision, or was it simply the production context?*

Lisa: It was conscious. We chose not to use closeups and no fragmentation.

Kim: And no cutaways. We tried not to dislocate the viewer from what was going on, but we also tried to make it pleasant to watch. Its only construction was that we wanted to be able to live with it and for it to be pretty to watch.

Lisa: The only thing that we absolutely couldn't live with was the sound track and that was an interesting revelation to us. It was too intimate to share for the purposes of what we are doing. We allowed ourselves a distance, knowing that we would be there when it was shown. We made those decisions really one at a time,

rather than setting it up consciously. But the framing device was quite conscious.

We did attempt to do a collaborative script and we couldn't — we split our little pieces of paper and wrote our own scripts and came back together and cut them up and we didn't take out a single line of either of them. It was very literally an intuitive process after the two weeks of worrying it to death.

Kim: Stuart Marshall pointed out that the two different dialogues were quite interesting, because the male's — my dialogue — discusses body parts, which one would have presumably heard from the feminist critique. That already twists the audience's perception of what is going on, because they're hearing the man talk about body parts and sizes and standards and living up to different ideals, and Lisa's dialogue is personalized and identified. In other words, hers would often be the male discourse about sexuality.

Sara: *Part of what is quite interesting about the dialogue is that men who begin to radicalize around the whole issue of objectification of women will say what you say in your statement, but the logic is also incredible guilt, and therefore the pro-censorship position. Yet this dialogue talks about those issues without denying the value of representation. Or of desire. You allow your audience some kind of erotic connection with it.*

Lisa: Kim is the person in it who says that this is pleasurable to do, but it's hard to show. Being our first collaboration, I think that it did establish some ground rules for us, being intensely personal. Collaboration is based on a kind of trust and a certain kind of communication where neither one of us feels that we have the final answer in the final work. There isn't any kind of rank-pulling around anything, whether it's technical or conceptual. So that probably was established in that first production where it was so edgy and so berserk.

Sara: *When it was shown at "The Heat Is On", the reaction was that "this is a really viable piece of erotica", yet that is not what the work is about.*

Lisa: That's something that we did understand. We would set out to create something quite different if we set out to make a hot video tape, but we did understand that there are back and forth parts to that. We did try to create an understanding of what the sexual experience is like — in terms of actually making it work within a framework that people would relate it, rather than having it totally clinical.

Kim: The conference isn't our usual audience environment. Once we go outside of that to community centres or schools, we're always pleasantly surprised that people understand what we're doing. Which contradicts what most people would presume which is for the whole supposed basis for critics and curators. Everyone explains the context and unfolds the work to the general public. In our case we address the audience directly. "The Heat Is On" was the ideal situation because the topic was dis-

cussed. In most other situations it produced a momentarily reactionary environment.

Sara: *It's very emotional. People aren't used to dealing with sex in a public way.*

Lisa: But usually not coming to terms with that emotion. That's where "The Heat Is On" was really different. People really said, "I felt something," and "That's what we're here for." It was a real culmination of a shared experience which was a real treat for us, to finally resolve that piece in a way and put it into that context. Then it felt like it was put to bed finally.

Sara: *It's romantic, too. Dissolves give that sensibility, and it looks like the lights had pink gels on them. There's also an emotional quality to it because there's a relationship. On the visual level, there's passion and caring. That's the demand of many feminists. The work fits into the feminist criteria, but it challenges it, too, because it is very explicit. It makes you examine any discomfort. If there are certain qualities you want in a work and you don't have problems with sexual representation, well, here it is.*

Lisa: We really copped out in a sense by making a naturalistic representation because it is literally a relationship, and then we come out of it and make the reconnection with the audience. In order to reject that image, they have to reject us. It's a very polemical piece in that sense. People do react, but they're cautious, and that attests to the civilized behaviour of people. I also know if you're talking truly about representation, the kind of stuff that we were doing is not going to be the kind of stuff that's going to be out and around. We came from a very different place than where most people's perception of any kind of representation of sexuality comes from. It is never them, it is always "other" and it's always fantasy. We undercut and truncated fantasy totally. We put it off to one side and never dealt with it.

Sara: *It sets up a problematic situation for any work that is to follow in terms of being forced to return to narrative structure in terms of representing sexuality and therefore back to the discourse dominated by pornography and True Romance. How do you return to narrative and fantasy? Do you make fantasy that is other than the porn industry fantasies, or do you make work with the porn conventions, but more equality?*

Kim: *In The Dark* doesn't answer that question. I don't think there's anything wrong with replacing parts of a story with other kinds of representations. I would never try to be prescriptive and say, "This is how the eroticism of the future should be created." But I do think that everything should be tried. And however women feel comfortably or accurately represented, that should be introduced into the scenario, or, if it should be a story, then it can be a story or a non-narrative, naturalistic representation. It is important and people do want to see it. There's no doubt about that.



In the Dark



In the Dark

EXPLICIT BUT EQUAL:

by Karen Knights

The past few years have seen a dramatic increase in the number of video exhibitions curated solely around sexual representation. In Canada "Desire" (Ottawa, 1985), "Images of Sexuality in the Arts and Media" (Ottawa, 1985), and "The Heat Is On: Women On Art On Sex" (Vancouver, 1985) are just a few examples. Artists and audiences alike have expressed the desire for not only work about sexual politics, but for explicit, non-exploitive video which would celebrate sexuality without the misogyny, racism, and lack of vision that plagues pornography today.¹

When examining strategies for producing such work, it must be recognized that all such alternate imagery is informed and in some sense constructed by heterosexist porn, by both its ideologies — masculine and feminine models of sexuality — and its structures — narratives of male defined pleasure. Nor can we separate pornography from the sexual hierarchy it is symptomatic of. In constructing a new pornography, it is essential to develop a theory of sexuality that addresses the right to pluralism in sexual experience, presents realistic gender models, and allows for both a new realism in sexual imagery as well as the artful illusions of sensual fantasy.

Visual artists, critics, feminists, and gays have already begun the lengthy process of discourse. Heated debate arising out of the feminist critique of porn, the growth of gay culture, and the resulting right wing threat of censorship has at the very least eliminated complacency. Like all good crises it has divided once indivisible camps. Independence has led to extreme proclamations, theories, and even the admission by some women that maybe explicit sex could be fun to watch. It has also led some to speculate that there *can* be a visual portrayal of sexuality without the exploitation of one sex, age, race, or preference over another.

EROTICA/PORN: DEBATING DEFINITIONS

The past decade has seen the debate on sexual imagery revolve around the definitions of erotica/erotic and pornography/pornographic. Even after all the analysis, explicitness is still regarded by many as the verboten element separating the two, and it is still the issue of explicitness which governments pinpoint as pornography's criminal characteristic.

Early feminist condemnations of pornography, while presenting an analysis of its exploitive and misogynist elements, failed to validate explicitness. Having defined pornography, it was then necessary to define erotica, or what has become to be euphemistically branded "positive imagery": representations of a sexuality of equality. Unfortunately, the literalness which arose from the definitions debate hampered a creative approach to sexual imagery. Several slide shows were produced. All were didactic and flaunted the most cliched of erotic conventions: soft focus, nature, tasteful nudes, sunsets. Worse yet, some insisted on pronouncing that "This image is erotic, this one is not". This approach meant that some of the audience were first aroused by a picture and then collectively punished for it. Some were simply not aroused at all.

Although the feminist discourse initiated a popular demythologizing of pornography and ultimately human sexuality, illuminating the sexist trappings of the so-called 'sexual revolution' of the sixties, it succeeded in creating a new mythology of its own. Ignored in this debate was the classism which still defined the erotica/pornography split, as well as the rise of a new moralism which promoted a monotypic ideal of sexuality no more progressive than that of the predominant ideology. Blurring sexuality and gender, feminism articulated a compelling thesis of male power, but not of female desire.

The inevitable backlash to the concept that there was a politically correct sexuality has spurred a pluralism unprecedented in women's history of expressed desire. Sadly, the women's movement divided over the issue. As the pro-censorship faction grew, so did a current which was committed to defending a woman's right to sexual

pleasure, no matter what deviation or imagery.

Today, more often than not, women who theorize on the potential of non-exploitive but explicit sexual imagery use erotica and pornography side by side, perhaps only a hairline slash separating them. Porn has been reclaimed by those who do want and believe we need explicit sexual imagery and don't want to ignore its lusty and graphic connotations.

ENDING THE MYTHS

Obviously re-educating ourselves about sexuality is the first step to producing explicit sexual imagery that is non-exploitive. We must move beyond the early feminist critique of pornography. No investigation of sexual representation can ignore gay porn, S/M images, the sexuality of those under the legal age of consent, etc. There must be an investigation into the construction of sexual identity and a body of work which examines pluralistic sexual response. In Canada, several video artists have attempted such work, succeeding to varying degrees. They include John Greyson, who accentuates issues of gay youth and the gay ghetto; Rodney Werden, who gives voice to the most marginalized of sexual minorities — the fetishists and "deviants"; Lisa Steele and Kim Tomczak, who successfully construct images of heterosexual equality; Richard Fund, who challenges racist assumptions around sexual issues, and Paul Wong, whose *Confused* series, through sheer volume, legitimizes individual sexual history.

It is important to look at what has happened in the two largest groups stigmatized by the current sexual hierarchy, gay males and women, and their relationship to sexual images to understand what is needed to make pornography a liberating rather than repressive genre. The gay male is in the dubious position of existing simultaneously within and outside of male culture. As a male, he has always viewed access to sexually explicit material as his right. Women on the other hand, have been decidedly separated from man's visual culture, accentuating their passive relationship to sexual imagery: the watched rather than the watcher.

WOMEN AND SEX: SEEN BUT NEVER HEARD

While women have explored gender politics with video, there are few explicitly erotic works by women. This could be seen to confirm research which claims women are not as visually aroused as men are. Yet my experience, and that of women I know, is that we do find certain images erotic. Many exist in mainstream pornography or media, others in the sparse collection of feminist art. The latter is almost non-existent and still very tentative; the former outside women's experience. It is only recent statistics from home video and satellite use which show the first trends of female voyeurism.

Our discomfort as women with sexually explicit images cannot be explained simply because we are unaccustomed to these, although this may account for the violent reactions of some women to non-violent pornography. It is often presumed that men and women approach neutral sexual imagery from equal perspectives, as if sexism and its mire of symptoms and symbols did not exist. Are we talking about women being aroused by pornography designed specifically to stimulate men? Are women supposed to be aroused by images mired in sexist values which speak of men's political and physical control over their lives? Are women, taught that pornography is the property and pleasure of men alone, supposed to feel, suddenly, a part of that subculture which has been hidden from us for most of our lives? Obviously, content and context are important to women's ability to take pleasure from pornography.

Lisa DiCaprio, writing on women's relationship to pornography, stressed the importance of context to the reading of images.² Her observation that pictures in *Playboy* could be arousing for women in a context other than a men's magazine is crucial to understanding women's response to pornography. As well, imagine the

private dilemma of a feminist attracted to images of bondage or domination. In a society which perpetuates the myth that women enjoy rape, it is difficult as a woman to explain the appeal of ravishment, yet it is a popular fantasy, one which should not be too surprising considering the eroticization of male power which dominates our literary and visual traditions. Fantasies of ravishment can release a woman from responsibility for her own sexual desires. Yet the fear is that this desire could be misunderstood as proof that women enjoy real violence from men. For heterosexual women, who are constantly in a process of consciousness raising in a sometimes confrontational manner with their mates, such erotic confessions come slow, and are guarded.

There is also continued persecution of heterosexuals, lesbians, and gays over sadomasochistic practices. A simplistic analysis of sexual imagery has resulted in all consensual s/m representations and practices continuing to be stigmatized. Gradually, women who have suppressed their sexual fantasies and practices to meet the ideals of their politics are beginning to open up to other sympathetic women about this dichotomy. The lesbian community has been firm in their insistence that they have a right to explore their sexuality, including controversial elements like power erotic and femme/butch roles which have been criticized as male manifestations of sexuality by some of their sisters. Explicit representations of these roles now exist in magazines like *On Our Backs*, as well as in videos produced by Blush Productions, the magazine's affiliate, but there are only a few examples.

Much has been written about video's strength as a tool of erotic documentation and exploration. Although women's lack of access to production and distribution channels have noticeably hampered production of commercial porn by and for women (except for the minimal productions listed above, all by women on the U.S. west coast), they do make up a large proportion of independent video production. Until now, video has been used more as a social tool than a personal one. Women have concentrated on deconstructing pornographic and media images as well as documenting alternative visions of themselves, on investigating politics rather than pleasure. One reason is that the educational work around those issues had to be done first: women had to understand their own body politic and analysis of media before producing their own erotic and other images. Part of it also came from a fundamental distrust of voyeurism and discomfort with the explicitness and realism of the video medium itself, since there are several women producing erotica in other media.

While women are viewing more explicit imagery than ever before, through video rentals, satellite TV, small circulation and mainstream publications, there is still a feeling that these images do not yet belong to us, perhaps because so few are actually produced by and for women. And still the debate rages as to whether women are misguidedly following the male lead in demanding explicit imagery.

VISUAL PRIVILEGES: THE MALE DOMAIN

Predictably, there is no discussion among men about abandoning explicit representations of sex. Images of masculine sexuality have always existed. Although significantly marginalized in comparison to the commercial porn industry, the quantity of gay productions available indicates some extension of male privilege: the right to possess sexual images, something neither gay nor straight women have. Gay porn is an important, integral part of the ghetto.

Ironically both heterosexuals and feminists have criticized the gay community for its perceived obsession with porn. Much of this criticism has been hypocritically anti-porn (in the case of straight men) or simply homophobic. Some criticism does however articulate concerns about the masculine model presented in gay porn. However, informed by the feminist debate, gay men are building a new visual culture, one which questions current

TOWARD A NEW PORNOGRAPHY

assumptions about masculinity. Like women, they are consciously constructing a new sexual identity within a heterosexist culture.

The recent series on sexual representation in *Jump Cut* included several analyses of porn by gay men. Richard Dyer questioned the narrative goal of male porn — ejaculation: "The basis of gay porn film is a narrative of sexuality, a construction of male sexuality as the desire to achieve the goal of a visual climax. In relation to gay sexual politics, it is worth signaling that this should give pause to those of us who thought/hoped that being gay meant that we were breaking the gender role system. At certain levels this is true, but there seems no evidence that in the predominant form of how we represent our sexuality to ourselves (in gay porn) we in any way break from the norms of male sexuality."³

Tom Waugh, while recognizing gay porn's function as a "progressive, educative, or ideological force", also saw it as a "potential regressive force, valorizing sexism, looks-ism, size-ism, racism, ageism, and so on, as well as violent behaviours; reinforces the closet by providing anonymous, impersonal outlets."⁴

John Greyson, writing specifically on art tapes by men produced for the art circuit, chastises the alternate gay press for ignoring independent work, highlighting instead, "straight mainstream cultural productions that traditionally are thought to interest a gay 'sensibility' (e.g., *Donna Summer*, the opera)."⁵

Perhaps the substantive difference between homo and hetero porn is that gay porn avoids the patriarchal male/female relationship and its equivalent in production — males as producers, consumers; women as labourers and consumed. Gay porn is produced by and for gay men.

CHOOSING VIDEO: A MEDIUM FOR THE VISUAL LANGUAGE OF SEX

Video has unique advantages and disadvantages over other visual media for the creation of a new pornography. On the positive side, it has a tradition of use by groups marginalized by the dominant mass media — among those, sexual minorities. Its easy access and affordability allows individuals to document their own sexuality and disseminate their visions one by one or to large groups. These personal legacies are perhaps the most important addition to the language of sex. Video's distribution is controlled almost exclusively by the same network which produces

it, making it possible to direct progressive work to sympathetic and specific audiences, without sensationalism.

This same situation, however, does not allow those interested in bridging the gap between polarized sectors and the rest of society to draw in the 'other'.⁶ Most producers are poor, their limited funding rooted in a variety of government agencies. This makes applications for overtly sexual work difficult when popular opinion swings against it. Until recently, video has been free from classification and censorship as applied to cinema, making it an ideal forum for sexual exploration, but some provincial legislation (Ontario being the most notorious) and pending federal legislation threaten the existence of not only erotic work, but educational tapes around sexual issues as well.⁷

THE BIG PICTURE IN THE LITTLE BOX

After all the debate around definitions and what is wrong with current sexual representation, we are left with a visual wasteland in terms of sexual imagery on video. Just as women especially are discovering the erotic potential of imagery, legislation is being adopted to eliminate it. Just released from its ignoble cell, sexual explicitness is about to be put back behind the bars of our social taboos.

As I stated in the beginning, no new pornography can exist without reference to the old. The trap which holds gay porn in its patriarchal grasp and the critical structures which pronounce on it will ensure a hybrid product at best, a mere imitation of sexist values at worst, until the problem is directly addressed by not only artists and critics, but the viewers as well.

This process is desperately needed within the women's community as well. Artists must reach beyond their own immediate art context and open honest discussion within other feminist groups (political, community-oriented, therapists, educators) about female sexuality. They must also act as intermediaries between their visual culture and that of women who have little contact with it. Very few feminists have had significant exposure to alternate video, especially narratives by women.

The hesitancy I have discussed on the part of women to actively involve themselves in creating a new pornography, and most heterosexual males' lack of interest in the same, or perhaps fear of criticism in this climate, have meant that no matter how marginal gay and lesbian porn

may be, heterosexual alternatives are even more scarce. Where are the tapes by women extolling the joy of having men in their lives, whether sexually or not. And when will women see themselves as they know themselves to be, in a man's tape?

When Gene Youngblood completed researching an idea for a book on erotic video in 1979, he concluded the exercise by proclaiming that, other than a few minor exceptions, it did not appear to exist. "I abandoned the project, having demonstrated once again that in our sex-negative culture no tradition of erotic practice in the moving-image arts will rise or flourish without a systematic institutional program to encourage and legitimize it."⁸

A systematic response of some sort, initiated by the arts community as a whole, is necessary. Gay and feminist communities must be brought into the process through interactions with artists and production centres. Men and women should discuss strategies around producing non-exploitive porn which recognize their unique problems. All producers must become active in the fight against censorship. The impact of Bill C114, Canada's proposed amendments to the Criminal Code, has been to cripple any production dealing with sexual representation.

If we are to legitimize this new porn, this celebration of desire, we must first legitimize sexuality — the two are inseparable. Before we have a completely non-exploitive pornography, we will have to have a society which does not accept exploitation. In the meantime, it is important that the process begin, that people with a vision of what sexual imagery can be begin to make it, and people who desire it can watch.

Footnotes:

1 "Pornography" in this article is as defined by The Concise Oxford Dictionary, New Edition 1982:

n. explicit description or exhibition of sexual activity in literature, films, etc., intended to stimulate erotic rather than aesthetic feelings.

"Heterosexist pornography" will be used to describe pornography which promotes sexism, thereby degrading or exploiting women and men in the process.

2 "Not a Love Story — The Film and the Debate", Lisa DiCaprio, *Jump Cut*, No. 30, p. 39.

3 "Coming to Terms", Richard Dyer, *Jump Cut*, No. 30, p. 28.

4 "Gay vs. Straight", Tom Waugh, *Jump Cut*, No. 30, p. 33.

5 "Homo Video", John Greyson, *Jump Cut*, No. 30, p. 36.

6 Commercial film has the potential to bridge this gap, reaching audiences independent video has failed to reach. Recent films that have portrayed gay sexuality honestly and effectively include Donna Dietch's *Desert Hearts*, Stephen Frear's *My Beautiful Laundrette*, and Bill Sherwood's *Parting Glances*.

7 Bill C114 will undoubtedly be resubmitted to the House after the fall session convenes. Even at its mildest, it is potentially fatal to any visual depiction of sex:

159.3 (1) Every person who imports, makes, prints, publishes, broadcasts, distributes, or possesses for the purpose of distribution any pornography*... is guilty of an indictable offence and is liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding five years.

*In this context, the definition of pornography referred to is that of Section 138 of the Criminal Code which states that "pornography" means any visual matter showing vaginal, anal, or oral intercourse, ejaculation, sexually violent behaviour, bestiality, incest, necrophilia, masturbation, or other sexual activity.

8 "Erotic Amateurs", Gene Youngblood, *Video 80 Fall Issue 5*.



Desert Hearts, Donna Dietch

SEX ON THE VIDEO SCREEN

by Jamirte Trott

This article intends to discuss voyeurism and the moving image as a direct component of sexuality, or the socio-sexual relations between men and women. Since these relations are determined by a hierarchy of male sexuality, two kinds of video enter this concern: the one focusing on the sexual act as a spectacle, and the one seeking to unpack some of the sexual constructions of patriarchy. The kind of video specifically concerned with coitus is directly related to the complexities of male/female social relations. It is in this context that this paper will discuss sex on the video screen. Pornography as a definition is entirely outside the concern of this article.

It is Thursday night. John Doe leaves his office, buys a couple of 12-packs, rents a number of videos loaded with sex stuff, invites a few buddies — lest he is a sexual loner — and heads to his apartment for an erotica binge. The sexual imagery of these videos may or may not involve male actors. If it does, the male will probably be seen in the foreground, or background as the "director" of the action.

According to the principles of the ruling ideology and the psychical structures that back it up, the male figure cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification. Man is reluctant to gaze at his exhibitionist like. Hence the split between spectacle and narrative supports the man's role as the active one of forwarding the story, making things happen. . . .¹

The woman, whether or not involved in heterosexual activities, is the "treat". She is the focus of the voyeur's sight. And as such, she is shot from all angles, from within and from without. Her emotions, real or feigned, are as much in focus as her legs, her tits, her sex. "Over-exposed", she cannot look back at the looker for she has no sight, no voice, and paradoxically, no sex. Rather she is sex, that is, she is reduced to a sex-object.

So what? Watching sex on the video screen may be amusing, entertaining, and a lot of fun. Yet, the production, distribution, and viewing of such videos — whether by independents or commercial enterprises — is motivated by feelings of sadism. Adult video seeks to punish women. It is a widely practiced form of negating female sexuality.

Within social modes of feminine sexual-deactivation, woman's representation straddles roles of saint, whore, sex-symbol, and the everyday, garden variety woman. Either way, she is structured and "understood" as a catalyst of male desire, and as such is the object of the male gaze. Paradoxically, the saint, the whore, and the others converge at the same point of reference, where they are all locked in a position of inertia. For the sake of sainthood, the saint is completely devoid of sex. Thus in the Renaissance, one finds her wrapped in yards and yards of cloth, completely absorbed in heavenly concerns. On the opposite end of the polarization is the completely exposed woman. These are, of course, impeccable models of the good and the bad. Within variations of these models there is yet another kind of Goddess: she is the sex-symbol widely represented in the movies. Such representations rework the image of woman as a sight in the function of maleness.

Whether held high on a pedestal or lowered to gutter-level, such modes of representation reduce woman to a

fetish. It is a rather comfortable and comforting palliative undermining sexual difference. In attempting to monopolize sexuality, the patriarchal system refuses to recognize the female sex. This refusal is primarily motivated by fear and guilt derived from the unconscious mechanism of sexual differentiation that occurs within the development of social consciousness. The desire to undermine sexual difference may derive from unconscious impulses, but its transposition to social praxis is often deliberate.

Everyone is free to make, distribute, or consume sex-videos, but awareness of how women are represented in them is crucial. Representation of women as a set of sexual constructions is so deeply ingrained in the social mind that it has become accepted as part of nature. This false consciousness continuum has for centuries kept woman outside: on the borders of culture, of language, of history, and of "being". Of course, woman does exist as a real person, but as far as the unconscious knows, the shape of her sex "means" the lack of it. As far as this is conveniently displaced into consciousness, a lack of sex reduces woman to the Lack — a desert land given to constant meteorological shifts. Or rather, a sign, given to constant shifts in meaning. As a result, woman is considered the second sex, the other sex, or simply the Other.

Whether or not in a pornographic context, the display of the female image as a target for voyeurism, or as Other, remains as a form of female debasement, even if disguised as uncompromising pastime. While producing distributing, or consuming these images, it is necessary to remember that the debasement of one, a few, or a hundred women directly implicates the species as a whole, or more specifically, as a "hole". It is understood that no one "twists" the arms of women in order to force them into the sex-business. No one has to, for these women's arms have long been twisted by the lines of the ruling ideology.

Adult video is big business. I have seen many students and independents trying to produce these, hoping to air them on cable. Ironically, woman as a sight is the product

offered by such business. Of course, such videos are often produced and viewed by men and women alike. It is no secret that women do participate in the process. Whether out of ignorance, fear, or indifference, woman's solidarity with her oppressors is part of the game. It is a familiar story in which the oppressed come to desire their oppression. This happens within a complex mechanism of desire manipulation. But woman as spectator does not really matter because hers is not the privilege of the gaze. That privilege is male. It has so been constructed, and it is so understood. Woman is the target of the gaze; man, the bearer of same.

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness. Woman displayed as sexual object is the leit-motif of erotic spectacle: from pin-ups to strip-tease, from Ziegfeld to Busby Berkeley, she holds the look, plays to and signifies male desire.²

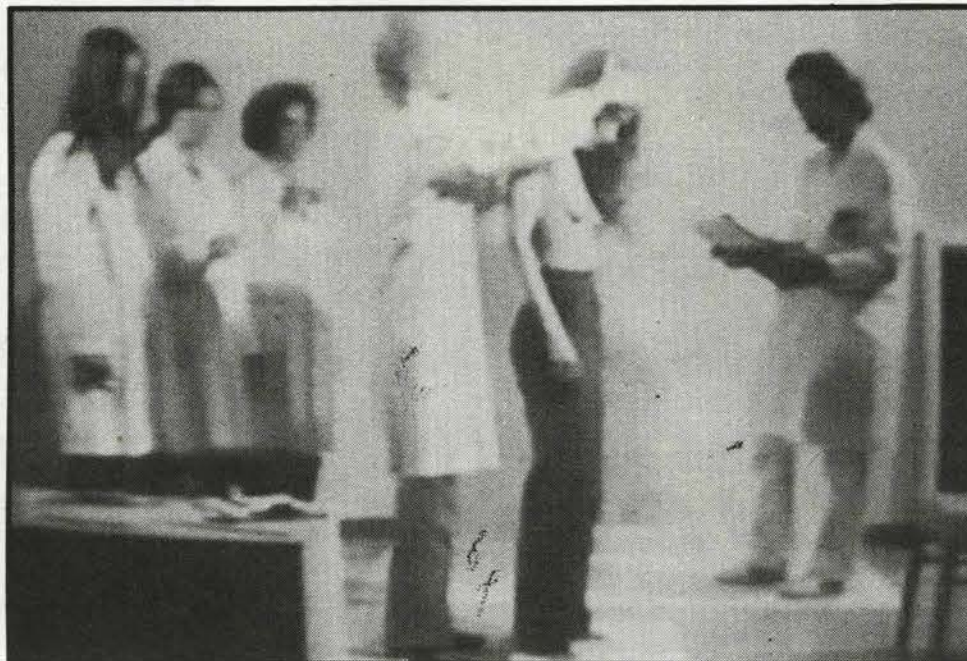
The media — including video, film, television, print, and photography — represent the major vehicle of dissemination of woman as sex object. Yet, video has simultaneously become a means of feminist discourse. Independent video producers such as Judith Barry, Linda Benglis, Jenny Holzer, Martha Rosler, Candace Reckinger, Max Almy, Dara Birnbaum, and many others, have been using video to deconstruct sexual structures, and to expose the myths of male and female roles. These women, among other media artists, are creating a discourse probing the ideological structures supporting our world of sexual imbalance. Among these, Martha Rosler's *Vital Statistics of a Citizen* is quite significant. This tape depicts two men who measure and map a woman's naked body, inch by inch, while three women dressed in white watch the process. The men survey the naked body more closely than they would survey a piece of property. After the map of the body is completed, the three women take the naked woman away and make her over. That is, they dress her in several "feminine" attires including a bridal gown, they style her hair, and arrange her facial make-up, thus condition her as a sight. As this imagery rolls on, a voice-over narrates histories and stories interrelating social fabrications of sexuality.

Woman as sex object is as old as the hills. Video making certainly did not invent her representation as such. She was the center of Greek art, the saint of medieval and Renaissance art, where she also returned naked as Botticelli's "Venus". She has been progressively denuded, from the naked goddess to the porno queen. This panoply of female representations may provoke a lot of laughs and fun. However, it is good to remember that whether motivated by castration fear, Oedipal guilt, sadism, or a mixture of these, the male ego — while undermining the possibility of sexual difference — demands the existence of only one sex: male. This creates a paradoxical space of homosexuality, which in turn, creates a kind of false consciousness. Women internalize a notion of femininity way below their human potential, while men internalize a vision of masculinity above and beyond their human limitations. The result is an overall false consciousness which insists in undermining the significance of two different sexes of equal value, in spite of the consequences.

Footnotes:

¹Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", *Screen*.

²Ibid.



Vital Statistics of a Citizen, Martha Rosler

EXPLORING THE SPACE BETWEEN HEAVEN AND HELL

The Work of Rodney Werden

by Karen Knights

Over the past ten years, Rodney Werden has produced a comprehensive series of video documentaries and dramatizations which detail sexual fetishes and the ideology which spawns and stigmatizes them; tapes which methodically tear at the soft underbelly of sexual normalcy and its supporting structure. Werden uses this dualistic private/public medium to mediate between 'normal' capitalist based sexual representations and the black sheep of sexual imagery, pornography, borrowing from the language of the latter, as well as melodrama and interview formats. Whether brutally graphic or singularly introspective, his work rides the leading wave of video art which examines sexual politics.

Sexuality is this society's outcast. Having denied it an integral place in our culture, we also lack an acceptable forum for an open dialogue of desire. The result is a decisive split between the public non-sexual persona and the intensely privatized experience of individual sexuality and fantasy: a brain/genital schizophrenia. Werden's choice of video underscores the fact that it is this medium most often chosen to exploit this split. Understandably our public/private sexual persona is also duplicated in video's two distinct virgin/whore roles of sexual imagery.

The first is that of broadcast television. For advertisers, television is where the money is, so it is also where sex is found — not graphically, but woven through plot lines and as necessary subliminal salt for any ad. In all cases it is used to reinforce traditional social values and uphold taboos, even if titillation is exploited in the process. This is the public space of televised sexual fantasy.

The home Porn market is its private space. The fantasy is hand picked, individualism triumphs over the inane democracy of network television. This sex is the antithesis of the broadcast experience: plot lines disappear; it is almost always extremely graphic, and taboos become the norm. In this guise, video mediates private passion and public propriety: the renters of video porn can purchase and watch it discretely without anyone but their local dealer knowing of their predilection. In this way porn has become welcome in almost any household without fear of detection or, in some circles, a loss of status.

In *Yes*, a post-T.V. evangelist tale of complete government control over sexual fantasy, it is observed that watching television lulls people into a completely passive state. The narrator goes on to insist that this state is in fact one of masturbation. At the very least it can be

said that most sexual representation today exists to feed desire and ultimately relieve sexual tension, not promote rebellion.¹

Werden chooses to eliminate this passive relationship with video sex by actively provoking confrontation/complicity between his subjects and audience by thereby accentuating this public/private split of Western sexuality. Using the audience as the norm and his subjects as representatives of subterranean obsessions, Werden articulates this gap, raising new questions about sexual mores, deviation, and conditioning. Werden's most infamous tapes of this type are his interviews *Pauli Schell* and *I'll Bet You Ain't Never Seen Nothin' Like This Before*.

Pauli just talks, fully dressed, casual as if part of a regular interview. It is the subject matter which distinguishes it. Pauli is interested in sado-masochism. She matter of factly explains the differences between this whip and that, and muses on the possibility of cutting herself with a razor blade. She also talks of her sexual relationship with her father, his desire to see her put ballpoint pens in her vagina as a child.

Tom, the subject of *I'll Bet* has learned to be entirely self-sufficient by mastering solo anal intercourse. He also masturbates with vibrations from his short wave radio. Unlike the previous tape, this one is explicit.

Yet it is less their individual components which make these tapes so infamous as the subjects' familial relationship: Tom and Pauli are father and daughter.

Werden never refers to this fact in the tapes themselves, though the audience is usually made aware of it. Seen separately they raise erotic curiosity; the latter may disgust or bore a few people, but it is Pauli and Tom's bond of incest which makes the tapes truly fascinating. Werden confronts us with a complex and sometimes contradictory picture. Tom and Pauli recount their personal pleasures referencing to one another, yet distinctly separate. The dialectic which results is unnerving. How does/should one respond when they hear Tom musing "... came from the fact that I enjoy sticking things in women. Flashlights, you name it. Candles. It's kind of fun." and in the next tape Pauli saying, "Then he told us you could shove things in there and he gave us

a ballpoint pen and we were trying to stick it in ... Can you imagine! I'd like to watch a little kid putting a ballpoint pen in her cunt!" Werden simultaneously exploits this culture's contradictory response to incest: while God, Queen, and Country are struggling to uphold the traditional values of family and sexual normalcy, incestuous encounters seem to be everywhere. While adults who were once abused are just beginning to spill their guts about the pain and anger caused by their elders' actions, children continue to be eroticized for adult pleasure in all forms of media. Pauli typifies this dilemma. She speaks both lovingly and angrily about her father's sexual advances. She acknowledges their eroticism, yet feels the pain which seems to spring inevitably from the incestuous experience. Those who listen to her and her father must recognize this dualism and fill in the gap with their own doubts about right and wrong, reality and fantasy.

In an interview by Gene Youngblood,² Werden talks of the gradual seduction of Pauli as a subject as well as the vulnerability of both her and Tom due to the democratic distribution of video and the subjects' own media 'naivete'. The vulnerability arises, of course, from the taboo nature of their actions, and the fact that Pauli and Tom are not actors. They are subject to the same social laws as we are. Ironically, Werden has placed his subjects in a situation of scrutiny analogous to the victims portrayed in his tapes *May I/Can I* and *Say*. ... which metaphorically examine the socialization process. Werden articulates this in his own analysis: "*May I/Can I* is about a group of people watching an individual who has submitted to a certain scrutiny. And these people are collectively assessing this individual. They maintain a personal point of view, but the ultimate decision is a collective one. ..."³

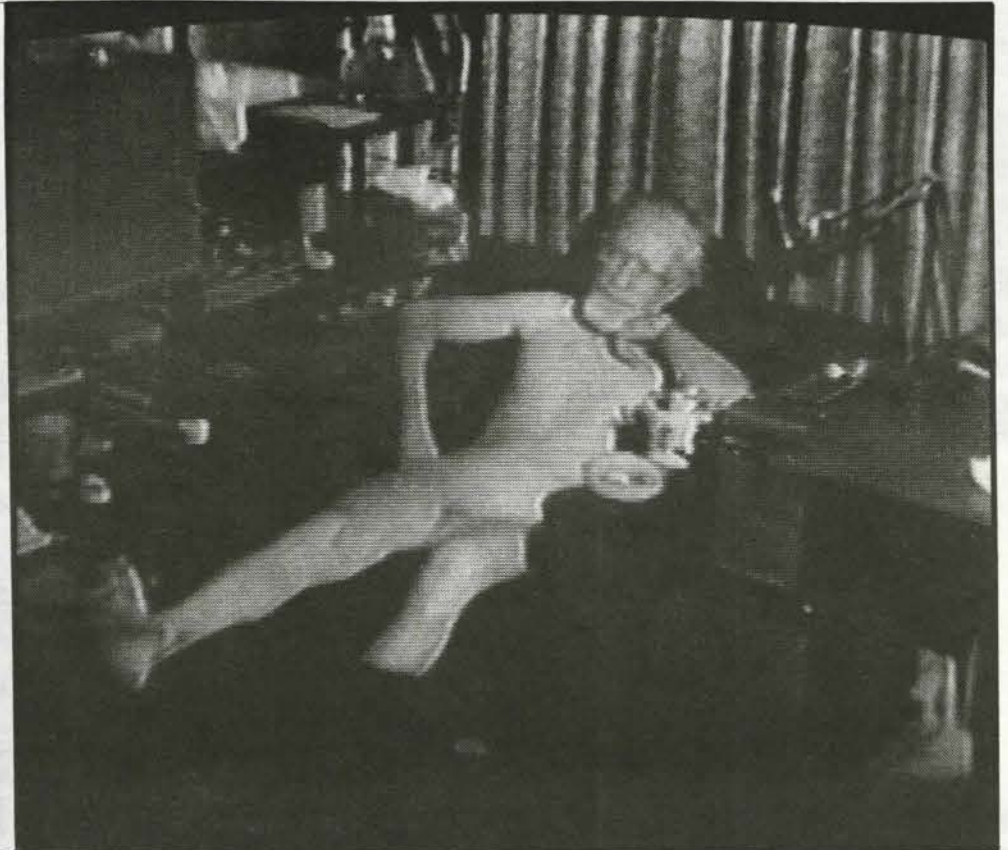
It is obvious from watching the tapes and hearing Werden's own feelings about them that it was not his intent to unfairly scrutinize or assess, rather to highlight the role of the viewer; to have viewers decide for themselves the rationale for their conclusions. Knowing these are actual people, not pornographic cut-outs, accentuates our own vulnerability as sexual/social beings.

Werden continues to make the connections between our sexual repression and personality in tapes like *A.M. Radio Was His Only Friend* and *I'm Sorry*, where he

Continued on page 19



Pauli Schell



I'll Bet You Ain't Never Seen Nothin' Like This Before ...

TWO MEN EMBRACING

A character in Colin Campbell's recent videotape *No Voice Over* is writing a script, and wonders aloud: "How do two men embrace?" Indeed. Seventeen years after Stonewall, six years into the AIDS crisis, surrounded on all sides by increasing tolerance and accelerating repression, we have achieved a relative plethora of TV shows (*Dynasty*, *Brothers*) and somewhat mainstream films (*My Beautiful Laundrette*, *Kiss of the Spiderwoman*) that dare to show two men in a clinch. Compared with ten years ago, the narrative consequences of that image have also improved. Nowadays, men expressing their love for each other don't automatically kill themselves, get killed, or end up incarcerated in some state institution. Only sometimes. So this is progress, right? Extending such subject matter to the non-commercial sector, this is what we call gay film or gay video. Or is it?

Most of the 'gay' video artists and filmmakers I know dislike the term for good reasons, no matter how consistently gay their work is:

1. It's not appropriate. Their work is about many other things, shaped by many other influences, and intended for more than the disco bunny crowd.
2. The term ghettoizes, for though it has great political importance in announcing its departure from the always-assumed straight norm, it also gets used politically by critics and curators to dismiss the work: "It's not art, it's gay".
3. Finally, growing contradictions within the so-called gay community (around experiences of class, race, politics, education, life-style) make it presumptuous to claim anything with an all-encompassing 'gay' for the gay community' moniker. Having organized a number of different 'gay' tape screenings in community settings, I know only too well that the bar crowd stays home. Activists, in-the-know art vultures, other gay artists, straight supporters — this is the 'gay' audience for such non-commercial work, a tiny percentage of Kinsey's one-tenth.

Nevertheless, this article *is* about gay video, after accepting these qualifications. It is about new tapes by gay men, all but one based in Toronto, who, in various ways, explore issues of their sexuality in their work. Three tapes are by recent graduates from the Ontario College of Art and the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, while the remaining four are by more established artists. Hardly emerging from a vacuum, these tapes acknowledge a debt to earlier Canadian video artists (not quite an earlier generation, since they're all still actively producing) who broke ground finding new ways to represent diverse sexual experiences: General Idea, Paul Wong, Kate Craig, Rodney Werden, Lisa Steele, and especially Colin Campbell, among others, created the precedents for such new work to emerge.

Equally, the seven tapes implicitly acknowledge a debt to the feminist and gay movements which created the social and theoretical terrain for their production. At the same time, there is hardly one art community or one gay community — hence the seven emerge from parts of both,

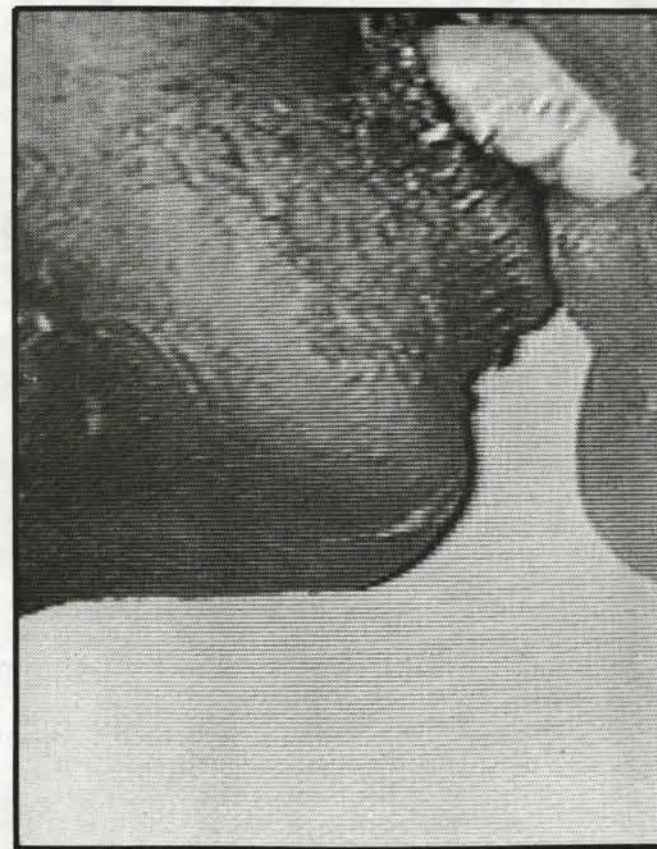
are experienced by parts of both, but share few of the lowest common denominator codes that made *Parting Glances* a 'gay' film or *Desert Hearts* a 'lesbian' movie. They are disconcertingly non-narrative; they refuse the process of positive character identification so cherished by Hollywood-fed audiences; they address non-gay issues simultaneously; they test received codes of communication and language. All seven demonstrate there is much more to representing two men embracing than a little romantic lighting.

Shadow Boxing, a recent tape by Rowley Mossop and Tom Bolatka plays out that universal domestic dilemma, "Who's going to do the dishes tonight?" While a pair of hands idly folds paper airplanes, his lover (at first off camera, then represented by a pair of knees) raises the delicate question, and getting no response, launches into a litany of clichéd platitudes: "We've got to get our lives in order. . . take control. . . Mother always said what saved her marriage was a dishwasher and a cuisinart. . ." (sic) There's no fight, however. They resolve the quarrel by going for a walk. The charm is in the ironic recognition that gay couples can more than adequately appropriate and inherit prescriptive gender roles from their straight counterparts.

The premise of Marc Verabioff's *Crossing the 49th* is a great one-liner. Roughly there are 23 million homosexuals in the States, approximately the population of Canada. So, why not just swap these populations, making Canada the first gay nation? The rest of the tape alludes to the implications of such a project in a truncated, decidedly anti-narrative manner. Blue and red faces (signifying sexual orientation), allude to the specifics obliquely. Large letter abbreviations of airports suggest the practical exchange, while US and Canadian bi-sexuals are promised a free Air Bus in southern California. Blue and red lips kiss: "I've just arrived from the north." The tape ends with the same image it begins with, a man's head and shoulders sleeping and dreaming in a white mist. "I saw you in an image last night. . . I was trying to hold on to our companionship. . ."

The script feels too impulsive, almost at odds with itself. In refusing to expand on its stated premise (the first gay nation), it is denying the follow-through resolution of a poetically sarcastic Orwellian wet-dream, but to what end? Reducing the narrative to scraps of the story in this case only frustrates. Deconstructing a familiar story like the bible is one thing, but shredding up this highly original fable full of potential metaphors for social planning and imposed segregation seems pointless. The highly-mannered visuals and soundtrack likewise are begging for development, and again it's denied. One gets the sense that Verabioff shot the tape too quickly, and got tired of it in the editing.

Snakes in the Grass continues that Ontario tradition of wacky direct-camera storytelling (a la Steele, Campbell, and Werden) in a highly idiosyncratic variation. Forget *Stand By Me* — this is the definitive coming-of-age story



Crossing the 49th

of two puberty-bound boys. Well, maybe not definitive. After watching Greg Woodbury (co-producer of the tape with Barry Nichols) being pursued through a field by the POV camera/gun, we hear him recount how he and his friend Cammy used to go to the local pond and collect up dozens of snakes in lunch-buckets. After bringing them back home, they discover one has been squashed to death, and try to feed it to the others. No go — snakes don't eat snake meat.

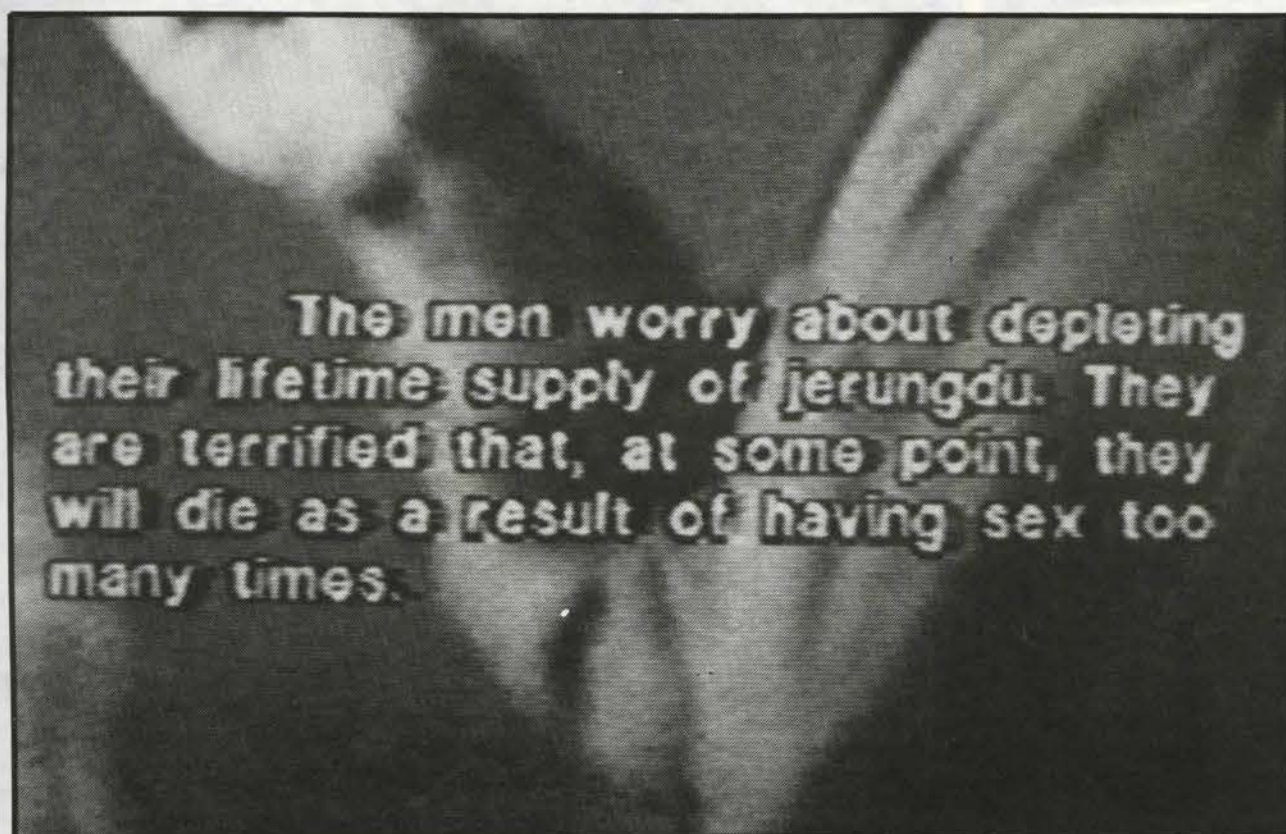
During this narration, Greg, sans shirt, is foreground in a field. A cop slowly approaches from behind, interrupting the shoot by apologizing, saying he thought Greg was a topless woman, which isn't allowed in public. The cop leaves, saying it's okay to keep going as long as Greg doesn't take off his pants. Greg resumes his story — while the cop, still visible, retreats through the field, Greg's hands (below the frame) unclasp his belt buckle and drop his pants.

There are other images: hands pounding out a rhythm in a park at sunset, passing time; Greg climbing into a bath and having his head dunked under water by someone else's hand. In their artists' statement, they said the tape was about exploring the root of sexual guilt. Well, sort of. It's more about the compromising of homoeroticism in a culture of denial, and that includes the culture (Ontario College of Art) that the tape was produced in. Its strength is in following through on its intuitive impulses — unlike Verabioff, who seems to have discarded and denied his.

In Michael Balser's eclectic oeuvre, *Jerungdu* stands out as the richest and most free-wheeling of his nine tapes. Thematic elements trace a continuity to previous work: soap-opera portrayals of nuclear couples in crisis; representations of Science (especially old sci-fi B-flicks, or in this case, space simulations of an orbiting capsule); a gay subtext emerging from the oppressive hetero context; multiple narratives that only partially overlap. In conversation, Balser admitted to editing together three autonomous video scripts which he felt wouldn't sustain themselves on their own. The result is a highly idiosyncratic, elegant collage of inferred connections and implied bridges between four overlapping elements:

1. Chopped-up scenes from "Leave It To Beaver", where Mom fixes a curtain rod and Dad gets beaten at golf by a woman;
2. A woman, stuck in the kitchen, attempts a Mildred Pierce-type liberation through self-employment, and ultimately fails;
3. Voice-over meditations on the impossibility of comprehending infinity, the beginning or the end of the universe; and
4. An ethnographic text describing the hierarchical sexual practices of a Sambian tribe, where boys at age seven are segregated from the women and initiated into sex with older, unmarried men. Ritualized blow-jobs are deemed necessary for the boys to start producing their own sperm or 'Jerungdu'.

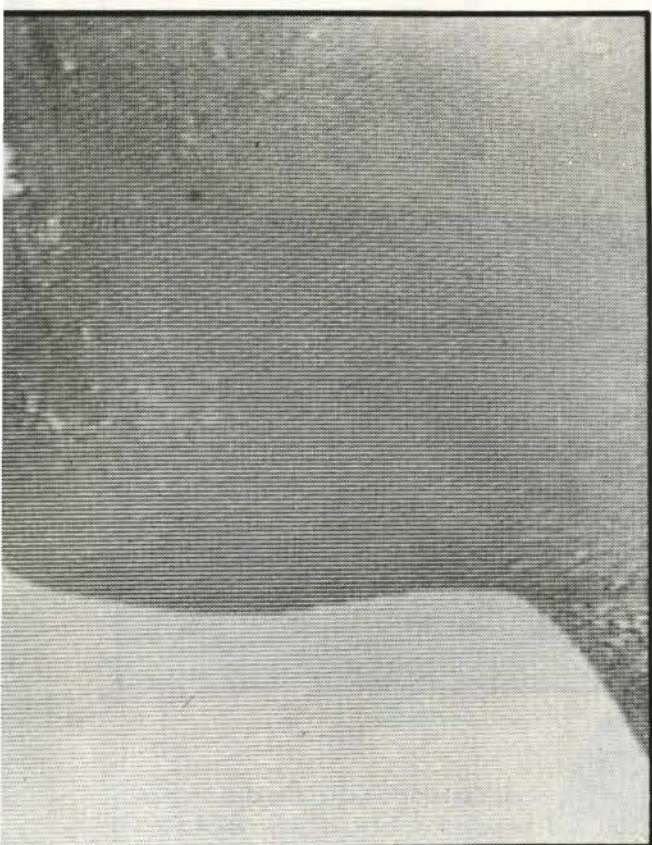
The viewer is left to connect the dots, and on a second viewing it's actually fairly straight forward. The parallels



Jerungdu, Michael Balser

G: GAY VIDEO IMAGES

by John Greyson



9th, Mark Verabioff

between the Beav's tightly structured social world and the Sambians' highly controlled sexual determinism are two sides of the same coin: society imposing gender and sexuality from above, in very different contexts. Similarly, the failure to comprehend the totality of the universe roughly corresponds to the woman's failure to analyze the systemic oppression she faces, again within a tightly organized gender role. Sounds a little stretched? It is. Like many tapes, *Jerungdu* takes on too many 'big' issues (of representation as well as space), sketches them out too economically, relying on pre-existing conventions of recognition (a few seconds of the Beav stands in for 'nuclear family'), and then mashes them all up together in a tightly-paced stew. It's easy to say it's too ambitious, it's unclear, it doesn't work. That's what everyone always says. It *does* work, within its own logic, and within a tradition of non-narrative tapes that specialize in the collaging of ideas as well as formal elements.

David MacLean, best known as a performance artist and actor, has collaborated over the years with Balser on numerous video projects, including *Lust for Fame* and *Any Hard Surface Will Do*. His penchant for accomplished drag brings with it the inevitable potential of misogyny, which he usually transcends or undercuts because his work is centrally concerned with examining the production of gender and sexual identity. In his newest tape, *Bon Voyage, My Love (A Sumptuous Montage of an Ignorance)*, a pulp romance writer talks to the camera about his latest heroine, Jessie. (Both roles are played by MacLean.) This gay writer's dilemma: he must suppress his own desires, to meet the needs of the straight marketplace, displacing them instead onto his typecast heroine who yearns for Martin, her unfeeling hunk of a sailor.

The writer gets lost within his narrative: he knows love stories need endings, but can't seem to find a satisfactory one for the clichés Martin and Jessie represent. After seeking solace in Barthes (whose texts on the pleasure of the text are sprinkled throughout the tape), and trying to write himself into the plot through a train station encounter with Martin, he (and the tape) implicitly conclude that his closeted fantasies, like his book, promise no resolution.

The tape needs a re-edit. While some of its lengthy scenes gain a certain hilarity through their self-conscious indulgence, the footage is stretched to the point of wafer-thinness by scattering key shots randomly throughout without effect. (The Patsy Cline soundtrack, in a year of Patsy Cline soundtracks, is also unfortunate.) Tightened to half its length, *Bon Voyage* could then more directly deliver its thoughtful perceptions on the dilemma of the 'gay artist' in a straight society.

Fourth Person Plural (A Sketch), a first tape by filmmaker David McIntosh, takes on the 'sensational' subject of father/son sexuality with forceful understatement. While a character-generated text describes the classic psychoanalytic case-study of 'The Wolfman' (Dr. Pankejeff) by Freud, a parallel narrative re-orders pain-

fully submerged memories of a father/son relationship. The focus is not on what happened so much as coming to terms with why the memories were suppressed. Using the classic B-movie Wolfman duality as a potent metaphor, McIntosh reverses the usual projection utilized to great effect by feminists, which makes the father the protector who betrays his trust to become a monster. Instead, the son is the wolfman because the psychological and societal pressures of the taboo relationship force a self-hating split in personality, where the confusing sexual desires the child feels for the parent, juxtaposed with the feelings of betrayal, must at all costs be denied and suppressed.

Viewers hoping for a definitive analysis of the subject will be frustrated. The shots and text are admirably sparse, ironically suggestive, and all about opening up the subject, not providing closure or 'answers'. Indeed, the memory that is referred to and returned to concerns an 'innocent' encounter where the naked father undresses the son and washes him in the sink, a warm, pleasurable, and sexually charged experience for the kid. The tape is adamant in its ambivalence, identifying not the sex, but the processing of memory as the source of pain. It plays with age effectively — through the device of children's stories, the father becomes a son, or rather the son becomes a father, suggesting the complexity of intergenerational sex between two men. At its most explicit, the tape tells of Dr. Pankejeff's lonely demise in an insane asylum, condemning a society which to this day cannot adequately acknowledge the needs and desires of such 'victims' because it cannot address its deep incest taboo which thrives primarily on silence.

After utilizing a sensitive, if fairly predictable, vocabulary of talking heads in his previous tapes, Richard Fung has moved on to a more associative and challenging formal language in his new 'documentary' *Chinese Characters*. Of all the artists discussed here, Fung has the longest ongoing involvement in gay politics (he was a founder of Gay Asians of Toronto, among other activities), and his tape assumes the stance of speaking directly to other gays, or at least to audiences well-versed in gay issues, particularly the current debates around pornography. *Chinese Characters* examines how gay Asians experience white gay porn, and in turn how porn shapes the norms of sexual desire within the gay community. Interviews with friends describe various experiences: how when one man bought his first copy of *In Touch* in Winnipeg, it was the first validation of his sexuality he had experienced, despite the fact that all the images were of white men; how another learned to 'talk dirty' while having sex by watching porn films, and how it's the only time he talks with a North American accent. As a counterpoint to whispered clichés about Asian men ("You're so gentle", "You've got a big cock for an Asian"), Fung lipsyncs in

a contrived interview situation to several of the interviews, making the point that in Canada, Asians of whatever origin are inevitably objectified, and not just in the sexual marketplace — "You all look the same to me."

Thus the tape insists on integrating porn as an integral (not separate) element in the landscape of western culture, and insists on incorporating the search for sexual identity within the larger framework of social relations. Two parallel narratives commence the tape: one, a retelling of a Chinese fable about an explorer searching for the source of the Yellow River; the other, a classic porn narrative about a hunky, horny guy going out for a hot encounter in the park. A young Chinese man plays both the explorer and the hunk, alternately wearing black slippers and clone boots. Through image manipulation, he is keyed right into the middle of a Joe Gage porn classic. Later, naked from the waist up, he's looking at unseeing shoppers pass him by on Dundas Street in the heart of Chinatown. Belonging and not belonging in both frames, it's not set up as a choice, but rather of always being half integrated in the picture.

By refusing to develop a 'moral' conclusion about porn one way or the other, and instead examining the complex contradictions that his subjects confront, Fung achieves a humorous, engaging, and highly original intervention into this 'hot' topic. Indeed, it should be required viewing at every pornography conference of whatever orientation.

How do two men embrace? These seven tapes offer different answers, more often than not, qualifying the question with other questions. Art criticism usually starts off with a theory, and then seeks to prove it by making its examples (be they paintings or tapes) jump through hoops. Trying to develop a 'theory' of gay video is at best a dubious endeavour. Someone could attempt (as others have done with theatre and literature) to identify a certain campy sense of humour that runs through the tapes and claim it as a definitive 'gay aesthetic'. Such a concept, not unlike claiming that all feminist video is nurturing, tends to do a greater disservice to the work than any useful perceptions it might accomplish.

'Gay video' is a social and political category, not an aesthetic one. As long as Lyndon Larouche, John Crosbie, et al continue their particular version of a decentralized sexual inquisition, it is necessary to keep claiming and exhibiting 'gay video' in a variety of contexts, both in the art and the gay communities. In particular, the gay community must acknowledge the radical media critique that these tapes imply through their rejection of commercial film and television values. Rather than simply being satisfied with Hollywood releases, no matter how progressive, we must start to validate the work being done in our communities. A good place to begin would be with tapes like these.



Chinese Characters, Richard Fung



TRUE ENOUGH

by Paul Wong

Those who own the media control the media — true enough. I won't deny the fact of the power, but at the same time I don't have to take it lying down on the casting couch or on my knees! Until recently, the production and dissemination, the cause and effects of television have been a monolithic one-way medium: *Television Delivers People*.¹ The so-called diversification of television, i.e., pay TV, specialized channels, cable, satellite, educational and home video cassettes, has in actual fact been only a diversified marketing strategy of the same old song and dance.

Over the past two decades we have witnessed the emergence of what is fondly regarded as 'videoart' and/or 'independently produced video'. The latter term usually refers to those works that do not clearly fit into the realm of videoart, thus not fitting into the domain of art galleries and art houses. In addition, it implies works that do not lend themselves to network. Independent productions are usually social, political, and/or documentary in content, flavour, and attitude.

Independent video producers fall into categories. There are those who are currently producing independently, but who would gladly produce for networks or for an institution if given the chance. Then there are the independent producers who have accepted the facts of working outside the existing broadcast realities and conventions. These producers have accepted the restraints of low-budgets and distribution to specialized markets. The productions of this latter category are usually either issue-oriented and provide coverage of concerns largely ignored by mass-media; productions that are critical of the dominant culture; or productions that look at power and powerlessness. These tapes are not often referred to as 'refreshing, exhilarating, or slick', but as 'disturbing, captivating, and raw.'

Unlike film, the inexpensive and thus more accessible video production and distribution has encouraged broader and more extensive coverage of non-populist issues. The most-heard criticism directed at these 'low-end' video productions is that if produced in the more expensive film medium, they would have been more 'professional', with better research, development, scripting, cinematography, and editing. True enough, but would they have been produced at all?

Due to a lack of new possibilities we continue to foster an ongoing love/hate relationship between producers (the artists) and the exhibitor (art galleries and museums) for the validation of videoart. The presence of video in these traditional art institutions is that of a tenuous tenant. The exhibition formats often do not lend themselves well to the display or appreciation of video. This continues to marginalize and to neutralize the very concerns of videomakers. Acceptability of videoart is defined by curators and directors. Acceptable videoart is the mixed-media installation; video by artists who normally produce in other traditional art-making media; videotapes that are about art or about current 'referenced debates' of

the art world, and tapes that are distinctly 'visual art'. Continuously problematic has been the acceptance and programming of artists' videotapes that are considered borderline: tapes that are not masked in abstraction (i.e., technology); tapes that utilize and extend recognizable television formats; tapes that critique power; tapes that provide alternate views of dominant culture; above all, tapes that are overtly political and subversive; and certainly tapes that deal specifically with sexual representation. The presence of social/political video has a limited tenure in the gallery and museum. It is an unholy marriage made in hell.

Those who own the media control the media — true enough? Since the invention of photographic reproduction, the owner/user of the camera with darkroom facilities has had unlimited access to subject matter — in this regard, to paid and unpaid subjects willing to pose nude, semi-nude, in erotic poses and settings. The 'layman' who owned a camera but did not have the knowledge or access to darkroom procedures was hindered creatively by the 'moral standards' imposed by obtaining public darkroom facilities. The 'polaroid' was a revolutionary breakthrough that helped personalize the photographic medium — it provided the amateur and the professional with endless sexual play and sexual image making. The very nature of the 60 second polaroid, the limitations of its framing, resolution, the lack of negatives created a special photo-language between the photographer and subject(s). It created an intimate sexual dialogue of situation/pose, through to development, to the souvenir of the moment.

Half-inch video formats have virtually replaced super 8 film as the fave consumer medium. The ease of the video playback systems has replaced the cumbersome, noisy, and mechanical projectors. The video player is a joystick offering remote control over playback modes of freeze frame, rewind, fast forward, and slow motion. The availability of x-rated, soft/hard pornographic and erotic material, for the first time in sexual history, provides previously denied access and opportunity for the intimate and personalized viewing of sexual materials between men and women, women and women, husbands/wives, friends and lovers, in the privacy of one's own living or bed viewing rooms. This is a far more open and healthy environment than the x-rated male-dominated cinemas, private clubs, the peep show, or the curtained-off booths found at the back of seedy magazine and sex toy shops. As far as I can tell, video porn production values have far surpassed the low budget 16mm or 8mm porno flick. The home market has directly influenced the 'new look' in soft/hard core porn materials.

Growing up and getting laid was made far easier if one had access to privacy. Access to a car, preferably your own, insured getting a date. Next best was access to a bedroom, preferably when your parents were gone for the entire weekend. This allowed for the creation of an 'adult' sexual atmosphere: freedom. The actual discussion of sex



Confused

was out and not cool. Creating the right sexual ambience was difficult and awkward at best, which called for the assistance of 'sexual aids'. Back then a favourite pre-sex lubricant was supplying the girls with 'panty remover' (lemon gin); later, drugs were added: 'orgy biscuits' (qualudes), the 'love drug' (MDA), and in recent times Xstasy. Nowadays, instead of saying, 'Mom, I'm just going out for a drive with Johnny,' it's, 'Mom, I'm just going over to watch movies on Johnny's VCR.'

It's true, one can easily lure a potential score into your lair by simply inviting them over for a quiet evening of watching movies on your VCR. This is advantageous to going out in public, being seen or distracted. In the safety of your own home, you are in total control of the atmosphere and the programming. Your date is already in the home and in close proximity to the bedroom; he/she is in a much more difficult position for getting you to drop him/her off at home. Suave control over the video is essential etiquette. Careful foreplay is in the programming — a pre-love story and/or horror flick will insure cuddling and intimacy as a lead-in to the arousal of a soft or hard porno. . . .

The use of video aid to heighten sexual experience is used in many different contexts: from pure education, to information, to masturbation, to fantasy, and as prelude to sexual activity between friends, lovers, and spouse. 'Love Hotels'² are a fixture in our urban culture. These hotels offer fantasy settings of mirror walls, ceilings, revolving round and heart shaped beds, satin sheets, and the obligatory videos to enhance sexual stimulation. A favourite piece of gossip of a local love hotel is the story of the senior couple who often frequented this establishment. Registration included requesting the types of videos to suit your fantasies. To be different, on this occasion the couple requested sexually explicit material involving an older heterosexual couple. Barely settled into their room, the TV came on with a tape that showed no other than themselves. The tape had obviously been secretly recorded of them during a previous visit. Needless to say, too much reality shattered their fantasy.

Voyeurism is the ability to view the intimate from a passive perspective. TV continues to be used to pacify and to play the part of a cheap babysitter, as in the case of the mother who went to the local videomart and came home and put on *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. She disappeared into the kitchen and came back sometime later aghast to find the kiddies in fact watching *Snow White Making It With the Seven Dwarfs*.³

Those who control production tools, control the image making — true enough. Back in the wide-eyed late sixties and early seventies, artists obtained access to low-cost video systems. The video revolution began with personalization of the medium, with the artists turning the cameras on themselves, their friends and lovers. Classified as conceptual, body art, performance, narcissistic, or indulgent video, this nevertheless created a whole new form and look of 'self-expression'. Real time 'fuck tapes' abounded as did tapes of home births and frank discussions of sex. In 1969, Les Levine produced *John and Mimi's Book of Love*⁴, an hour-long black and white fixed camera frame of the subjects in various positions of copulation. In 1974, Michael Goldberg in collaboration with Elke Town and Deanne Taylor produced *Orgasm*⁵, a



Confused, Daniels, Reinhardt



Confused, Wong, Bourgeois



Margo St. James: Prostitute, Rick Holyoke



Dominatrix Interview, T.T.V.

videotape of informal discussions on the then very topical topic. The tape was directly influenced by the publication of the same name.

Video producers recorded hours upon hours of material on the sexual, on the private, and on the intimate. From Alan and Susan Raymond's *An American Family*⁶, which chronicled the breakup of a family, to divorce, to the coming out of a son, to the fascinating continuum of works being produced by Rodney Werden, to the 1974 productions of Rick Holyoke, including tapes *Margo St. James: Prostitute*, *Dr. Morgenthaler*, and *Sexual Dysfunction*⁷. Sexual representation, sexual discussion, explicit sexual imagery is a part of the video tradition. In this arena nothing is new. The productions of the third generation, such as the 1985 *Dominatrix Interview*⁸, is nothing more than defining and refining the explorations and concerns of that early, bright eyed and bushy tailed, pioneering period.

What does differ now is the arduous task of process to audience. What has emerged is the growing numbers and the diversification of video producers that deal with the vast sexual terrain as subject matter. Producers can roughly be divided into two categories: commercial and non-commercial. Within the non-commercial sphere we have both amateur and professional production. The difference between these, aside from production values, is that professionals need to objectify for public consumption. This is achieved through editing. Not unlike the invention of the polaroid, the availability of home video recording equipment has given the consumer, the amateur, and the general public access to produce sexual imagery, to control the means of production and presentation of that sexual imagery, sexual imagery that is representative of themselves. The private becomes public by sharing those images and experiences with others outside of the original participants. The sharing of those recordings creates sexual media, sexual dialogue, and the heightening of sexual awareness of the viewers: family, friends, and lovers.

Home video is a threat to the status quo which has always attempted to control the discussion and practices of sexuality. Control of sexual ideology and practice is power and money. Independent video, and now the home market, are defying that control.

Fitting well into the current sexual terrain of non-commercial production is Toronto producer John Greyson. In recent years he has stitched together a collec-

tion of tapes that ostensibly deals with gay sexual representation. *The Kipling Trilogy*⁹ (1984-85) consisting of *The Perils of Pedagogy*, *The Jungle Boy*, and *Kipling Meets The Cowboys* is obsessed with youth and the coming out process of discovery and realization of sexual orientation. *The Perils of Pedagogy* is woven around the song "To Sir With Love", by Lulu, a late sixties pop song and the title of a movie that starred Sidney Poitier and Lulu. *Jungle Boy* is a narrative woven around appropriated scenes from the movie of the same title. *Kipling Meets the Cowboys* is intercut with scenes from the movie *Red River* starring John Wayne and Montgomery Clift. Greyson's humorous and complex narratives are jammed with 'meaning', touching upon unresolved issues of stereotyping, imperialism, racism, the gay ghetto, macho fetishes, and role playing. Greyson's rereading and reading into these pop icon films is an analysis of the influence of 'media' over desire. A certain campiness throughout each of the productions is injected using text (slogans) such as 'teach conformity'. In the next frame, 'then the gay ghetto' punctuates the disparity involved with gay orientation. Intercut snips of appropriated dialogue such as 'how do you thank someone who has taken you from crayons to perfume' or 'that's a nice gun you're scratching your matches on' gives new connotations to old cliches. In the closing scenes of *Cowboys*, he places these words: 'Imperialism has invaded the social and sexual claims of gay men', 'Imperialism has colonized the social and sexual autonomy of women', and 'We can fight imperialism'. These succinct remarks leave the viewer reeling in the vortex of unresolved issues in the trilogy.

Moscow Does Not Believe In Queers is based on the August 1985 visit of John Greyson to Moscow as a delegate attending the 12th World Festival of Youth and Students. Greyson attended as the representative of the International Gay Association, Toronto Support Committee. Although this tape is centered around that specific event, it unfolds as a narrative that constructs the similar and on-going denial and oppression of the gay/lesbian liberation movement by the dominant heterosexual cultures here in America and in Russia. This repression is echoed within the agenda of the World Festival of Youth. Again, the narrative is composed of chunks of experiences and blocks of observations that include recounting and reportage from different time frames, characters, media, and points of view.

Official facts butted against news headlines and magazine coverage of the AIDS and Rock Hudson hysteria,

click of tape recorder playback discussions with a Moscow lover, scenes of John and Bill having sex or having pillow talk, cut to tape of the World Festival, into more frames of a Rock Hudson 'nuclear submarine film' to snips of Warren Beatty's *Reds*.

These jointed sequences are contained within the opening and closing aerial shots taken from an airplane. *Moscow Does Not Believe In Queers* is not a documentary nor a report nor an autobiographical story. It does fit into the traditions of 'personalization of the medium' that assist us in the dispelling of media myths, deconstruction of propaganda, and provide the viewer with an alternative look at sexual/politics — true enough.

Footnotes:

¹ *Television Delivers People*, videotape, 1973, Richard Serra

² *Love Hotel*, title of videotape, 1974, 10min., Taki Bluesinger. Video Inn Library reference tape. Document of hotel in Japan.

³ *Snow White Making It With the Seven Dwarfs* is censored and unavailable in Canada.

⁴ *John and Mimi's Book of Love* was also released as a book. For further information on videotapes by Les Levine contact Art Metropole, Toronto.

⁵ *Orgasm*, videotape, 32min., 1975, Michael Goldberg. "Orgasm", A.S.A. Harrison, Coach House Press, Toronto.

⁶ *An American Family*, 1973, was a 12 week series of one hour programs produced and aired on PBS. The films and videotapes of the Raymonds are available from Video Verite, 927 Madison Avenue, N.Y., N.Y. 10021.

⁷ Rick Holyoke deposited seven tapes on sex issues produced in Calgary, Alberta, 1974. The titles are *The Divinity of Sex*, *Dr. Morgenthaler*, *Margo St. James: Prostitute*, *Prostitution Debate 1 & 2*, *Sexual Dysfunction*, and *Sol Gordon — Sex Issues On Trial*. Tapes are available at Video Inn.

⁸ *Dominatrix Interview*, 13min., 1985, T.T.V., distributed by Video Out, Vancouver.

⁹ *The Kipling Trilogy* comprises *The Perils of Pedagogy*, 5min., 1984, *The Jungle Boy*, 15min., 1985, and *Kipling Meets the Cowboys*, 22min., 1985. John Greyson videotapes are distributed by V/Tape, Toronto.



Moscow Does Not Believe in Queers, John Greyson



Moscow Does Not Believe in Queers, John Greyson

LYDIA SCHOUTEN:

by Karen Henry

The nature and purpose of myth in the context of media culture is no longer innocent. The classical function — as a rich, figurative repository of information about social roles and cultural meaning — has been superseded by the diversity of our contemporary situation and the efforts to deconstruct our own experience. Mysteries and metaphors are open to both scrutiny and manipulation. Roland Barthes defines contemporary myth as "a second-order semiological system," a form of speech in which "the meaning loses its value, but keeps its life, from which the form of the myth will draw its nourishment. The meaning will be for the form, like an instantaneous reserve of history . . . But at the same time this presence is tamed, put at a distance, made almost transparent. . . once made use of, it becomes artificial."¹ This artificiality is the character of myth within the domain of media culture: the myth of everlasting youth, sexual and social power, love and danger, simple right and wrong. These are forms of myth which Lydia Schouten has appropriated for her work in video:

That these codes are very artificial does not lessen our desire for them, for a kind of beauty has been created which is very fascinating: it is an artificial product which is the object of desire. Women are hardly allowed to age by the media — they must forever look young and pass through life at a glamorous pace. It has become a fight of culture against nature, a fight against loss of desirability. By creating a new style every year and by yielding to it, we ignore the process of aging . . . Television and film have taken possession of our daily lives. They have created a pseudo-existence in which 'youth' never ends and death is denied. The most important task of the media seems to be the destruction of chronological time.²

THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE HEROINE

Lydia Schouten has evolved as a sex symbol within the context of her own constructions. She takes upon herself the form and implications of female sexuality. As a performer, she is used to being the subject of the gaze, and as a female, the subject of the male gaze. Her early



Beauty Becomes the Beast

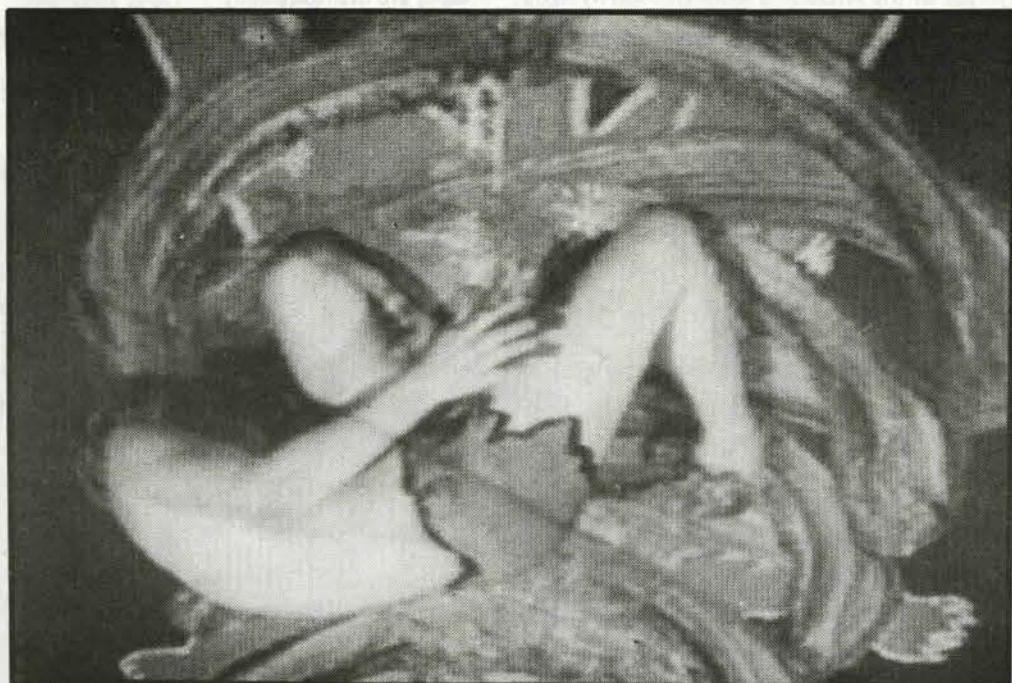
videotape, *The Lone Ranger Lost in the Jungle of Erotic Desire* (1982), is the transition between performance and video in her career. The tape opens with a beautiful design in rich blues and reds. It is made of fine chalk and covers the floor. Schouten begins to role and slither through the design, parting the sea of colour, her naked body becoming covered with the colours and the sweat of her exertion. The performance is intercut with a cutout image of fire in the jungle; the camera zeros in on the torso of a naked woman drumming on a log. Schouten ritualistically circles the fire, followed by a styrofoam leopard. The animal attacks in primal urgency. The colours swirl as Schouten struggles around the floor and comes to rest panting. From the back, the camera shows "The End" written across her buttocks, her legs spread. Acting out the primal, the provocative, she transgresses

the feminist sense of correct demeanor, isolating the truncated form of the drummer to accentuate her breasts, spreading her legs in familiar, objectified gestures of invitation and submission. And yet Schouten, as the artist, is the moving force of this production. Within the creative statement is the statement of the force of her own sexuality.

In *Romeo is Bleeding*, the same primitive scenario is set up. This time, huge spotted cutout men loom around the fire, and Schouten dances around them, waving her spear, and then smears the paint on her buttocks with the spear in an openly erotic gesture. By this time, her study of the media has provided her with an array of comic icons: exotic places, leading men, guns and intrigue, as well as more sophisticated erotic, sado-masochistic scenarios. These are intercut with the primitive, nature sequences. The forces of passion and destruction and unchained libido are at work here, as well as the stories with which we clothe these impulses. The question is, is the tradition of exhibitionism with which Schouten colludes, a passive acceptance of her own subjective impotence as woman/nature within the myths of male heroic culture, or is it an attempt to acknowledge and come to terms with the passionate forces which make up her own sexuality. To what end does she manipulate the images of traditional and media mythology, subjecting them to the alchemical force of subjective passion?

In the traditional anthropological interpretation of myth, nature signified the dangerous, unpredictable forces (female) which were held at bay by the structures of culture (male). In feminist psychoanalysis, the socially constructed role of the female is to be seductive, narcissistic, to desire to be desired. The male both desires and fears this temptress. The female denies herself to become the object of his passion and, at the same time, is vulnerable to the dangers of being consumed.³ Thus on both sides of this dynamic, sex and death — death of culture, death of identity — are corollaries. These are persistent themes within Schouten's videotapes.

In *Split Seconds of Magnificence*, the goddess lives the dream and the reality unfolds. The tape evokes the illusions of sex and power and the antagonism of the sexes



The Lone Ranger Lost in the Jungle of Erotic Desire

THE PERSISTENCE OF MYTH



Romeo is Bleeding

within this dynamic. Schouten maintains the role of the cinematic (blond) heroine/idol, but this time in relation to real actors instead of cutout figures. The fantasy is dream-like; the text tells the story of the visuals as though it were in the past. The tape is full of symbols — a gold spike heel threatens the man's hand on the floor; a snake glides through the hollows of a skull; Grecian pillars flank the goddess. The first image is a line of banners on long poles, a reference to knighthood games and the favour of ladies. The idolization of the perfect woman is set in the context of history, along with the classic mistrust which accompanies it: "She always sounded like she knew what she was talking about. He didn't want to listen. He knew she was lying." The woman is attacked, strangled, and retreats (in death) to a utopian island where a prince slays the fire-breathing dragon. The blond beckons him and his companion into the 'hidden cave' of the goddess and the story ends as it began, with "no memories, just shadows and sensations of disaster." (quote from the tape) There is no romantic hope in the reiteration of the fantasy; rather it is a tragedy associated with the loss of individuality, the repetitive, mythical trap of the icon. The sophisticated awareness of the myths and the reality, both theatrically and within the subjective script, is the work of a woman who sees the forces at work within the image. The work identifies the function of the female sexual psyche within the terms of history and the persistence of myth.

Feminism states the imperative that the "image is accountable for the reproduction of norms."⁴ This implies a compelling directive to change the image for women. The complexity of this transformation cannot be acknowledged in the terms of didactic politics. In "Sexuality and/in Representation," Lisa Tickner states:

Both the history of the social ordering of sexuality and its psychic organization oblige us to rethink the relations between sexuality and representation. That is, to remove them from any conception as two distinct domains (representation and sexuality), or as a given, homogeneous, and anterior sexuality (the representation of sexuality), in favour of the recognition of how each is bound up in the processes of the other.⁵

At this point, the terms of women attempting to represent

their sexuality are still hindered by conditioning. However, addressing the role of fantasy and the cinematic idol would seem to be a place to start the deconstruction. Laura Mulvey discusses this in the terms of psychoanalysis of these images.

There is an obvious interest in this analysis for feminists, a beauty in its exact rendering of the frustration experienced under the phallogentric order. It gets us nearer to the roots of our oppression, it brings an articulation of the problem closer, it faces us with the ultimate challenge: how to fight the unconscious structured like a language . . . while still caught within the language of the patriarchy.⁶

Lydia Schouten does not deny her own sexuality. She

uses myth not as the final answer, but as part of the process of discovery, of manipulating the mystique of power. In *Beauty Becomes the Beast*, a woman grows a tail; she climbs after the golden stone (the future) and falls to her death, as insignificant as a feather in the wind. In the water she is transformed and taken in by the merpeople. Through copulation, the combination of human, animal and fish creates monsters. The search for pleasure takes her beyond the social into an unknown region of prehistory which also bespeaks of the present. The woman creates monsters in the discovery of her own lust.

Simple answers to the problem of creating a new language of sexual representation for women are not forthcoming. Monsters and phantoms may surface in the process. In native cultures, only witches and holy men had the power to survive the manipulation of symbols, the repositories of culture. As women begin to author their own images, they take on the power and the danger. We have, on the one hand, an analysis, on the other, the convoluted forces of desire. Authenticity requires that we allow ourselves to own and manipulate the symbols of our experience in the process of remaking sexual representation in terms which remain in touch with the inspiration of passion and sensuality.

Footnotes:

¹Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, first published in French 1957, trans. by Annette Lavers, Hill and Wang Publishers, New York, 1972, pp. 114 and 118.

²Lydia Schouten, "Desire", in *The Image of Fiction*, Infermental 5, Stichting Con Rumore, Rotterdam, 1986.

³Kate Linker, "Representation and Sexuality" in *Art After Modernism*, The Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, 1984, pp. 391-415.

⁴Jacqueline Rose, "Sexuality in the Field of Vision", in *Difference: On Representation and Sexuality*, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, 1985, pp. 32-3.

⁵Lisa Tickner, "Sexuality and/in Representation", in *Difference: On Representation and Sexuality*, *ibid*, p. 23.

⁶Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", in *Art After Modernism*, *ibid*, p. 362.



Romeo is Bleeding



PERIODICALS

VIDEO BY ARTISTS 2

"Video by Artists 2" closes with a probe into the future. Tom Sherman's "Message to Electro-Culture" addresses the issues of video and interactive electronic art in a series of succinct statements and stories. Here, the most radical and entrancing views of video's future emerge, where possibilities threaten to become probabilities as video's very nature as an independent medium is engulfed by the magnitude of our electronic future.

"Video by Artists 2" edited by independent critic/curator Elke Town, former video director for Art Metropole, is the latest volume in Art Metropole's "By Artists" series. English texts throughout including original French and German essays.

Paperback \$18.00; 152 pp, profusely illustrated. For information, contact Lynn Cummings, (416) 977-1685.

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Index/Directory of Women's Media

With today's communications system in the hands of a few individuals and corporations, permitting a minority to control the flow of information, it is more and more critical that new sources of information be opened up and that thought be given to the restructuring of the communications system. The *Index/Directory of Women's Media* provides both the network of existing women's media as well as ideas women have on the overall issues of restructuring the communications system.

The *Directory*, with nearly 500 periodicals and over 1,000 total entries in all the various categories, is an aid to networking and is published to increase communication among women, nationally and internationally.

The *INDEX / DIRECTORY OF WOMEN'S MEDIA* is available for \$12 from the Women's Institute for Freedom of the Press (WIFP), 3306 Ross Place, N.W., Washington, DC 20008 (202) 966-7783.

EVENTS

VISUAL EVIDENCE: Representing Sexuality in the Canadian Context

The Vancouver Artists' League in cooperation with the Coalition for the Right to View, Vancouver's anti-censorship alliance, is organizing a series of video screenings, workshops, and multi-media events. These will occur in the spring of 1987.

The series will allow Vancouverites to push forward the discussions on the meanings and strategies of sexual representation initiated in 1985 at "The Heat is On: Women on Art on Sex". All screenings will be accompanied by discussion or debate. Artists, art historians, critics, and social activists will facilitate the interchange between the works and the audience.

"Visual Evidence" will provide a direct challenge to the recently introduced classification and censorship of video in the Province. The works will not be submitted for review, audiences will not be restricted to the limited membership of artists' centres (as the law now requires), and public venues of various natures will be included as locations for screenings and performances. By choosing quality works, albeit of a controversial nature, the organizers hope to argue for representation and criticism and against censorship.

There are seven parts to the series. It centres on video as a medium, although it includes performance, vulnerable under impending federal legislation. Video as a forum for representing sexuality has received high profile public interest, manifested in the recent B.C. laws and in Ontario prosecutions. Video art provides an analogue for video pornography and television's rendering of sexual identities. Video art has built a popular audience for itself in Vancouver, with the recent successes of "Luminous Sites", "The Heat is On", screenings at the Western Front and Video Inn, and the popular premiere of *Confused* at Graceland.

The series will end with a seventh overview session to discuss the impact of censorship in Canada and British Columbia to respond to revisions of the Criminal Code by the federal government. It will include an artist, social historian, and sex trade worker as panelists.

The organizers are currently calling for works appropriate to this exhibition. For information on submissions, call Sara Diamond at 688-4336.

"Visual Evidence" is part of the ongoing organizing by Vancouver anti-censorship activists to oppose all forms of state censorship. For information on CRTV activities and meetings call Karen Knights at 688-4336.

1987 ATHENS INTERNATIONAL VIDEO FESTIVAL

To promote the medium of video as an art form, the Athens Center for Film & Video presents the 1987 Athens International Video Festival. Call for entries: January 16, 1987.

Eligibility: Videomakers, producers, and distributors are invited to submit their original work to the 1987 Athens Video Festival. All entries must have been completed between November 1985 and February 1987 and not have been entered in previous Athens Video Festivals. All entries must have been produced in video. No film-to-video transfers will be accepted.

Entry fees are not refundable. Once the entry form and fee have been processed, the entry is considered definite and no refund can be made. The entry fee covers registration, pre-selection, judging and return shipping (insured for \$100 per entry).

Return shipping is extra for all entries to be returned outside the United States. These entries should indicate on their entry forms how the entry should be returned and must include the return postage costs with the entry fee.

The official deadline for all entries is January 16, 1987. All entry forms, fees, and videotapes with their publicity must be mailed or shipped to reach Athens by January 16, 1987. If you anticipate a delay in shipping of an entry, please advise the Festival staff and forward the entry form, fee, and publicity to reach Athens by January 16, 1987. All entries received after the deadline will be considered as late entries and require the additional fee of \$10.00. No entry will be accepted postmarked after January 31, 1987.

Cheques or money orders (in U.S. currency only) are to be made payable to: Athens International Video Festival.

Entries forwarded by mail should be sent to:
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Please send a double-spaced 250-500 word summary by March 30, 1987 to Dr. Metin B. Akgun, Program Chairman, HDTV '87, Department of Communications, 300 Slater Street, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0C8. Telephone: (613) 990-4669.

Notification of acceptance together with an author's kit will be sent by May 1, 1987, and camera-ready manuscripts must be received by August 15, 1987. For details of registration, accommodation, sightseeing, etc., write or telephone:
Secretariat HDTV '87
c/o Conference Coll Inc.
1138 Sherman Drive
Ottawa, Ontario, K2C 2M4
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VIDEO SHORTS SIX WINNERS ANNOUNCED

Video Shorts has announced the winners of its sixth national festival of short video artworks. Winners were selected from 141 entries representing independent videomakers from throughout the U.S. and Canada.

The ten winners are:

Before the Concert, by Ben Woythaler, New York, NY
The Sleeping Man, Mary Lou Pilkinton, Austin, TX
Train of Thought, Eric Bicker-nicks, Norwood, MA
Crash Your Car, Kevin Olden, Bellingham, WA
Out, Alain Thibault/Miguel Raymond, Montreal, PQ
Flying Morning Glory (on fire), Skip Blumbert, NY
A Mosaic for the Kali Yuga, Dan Reeves, New York
Bombs Aren't Cool!, Joan Jubela, New York, NY
Kalyan, Barbara Sykes-Dietze, Chicago, IL
Play Thing, Larry Kaufman, Venice, CA

Two runners-up are also included in the program. They are:

Context Galore!, by Terri Hanlon, Long Island City
Balloon, Robert Jaye/Lynn Leatart, Malibu, CA

Winners of the festival receive cash prizes. A compilation tape of the winning works is available for exhibition. For more information on tape sales and rentals, contact Video Shorts, 932 - 12th Avenue, Seattle, WA 98122, or call (206) 322-9010.

THE STRATEGIC ARTS INITIATIVE

An informal group of artists concerned with the use of communication media and networks for artistic purposes.

The SAI originates in a joint project of the McLuhan Program, the Photo-Electric Arts Foundation and Arts Culture Resource Centre, so far it has been active in Italy, France, and Canada with many more projects to come. The McLuhan Program in conjunction with SAI runs two parallel projects: (1) a monthly series of seminars called Communications in the Arts; (2) an electronic data bank called EMA (Electronic Memory of the Arts) which collects information related to arts and communication in combination.

This letter is sent to all art organizations which might find interest in such a venture and potentially contribute artists for the seminars and the events and information for the data bank.

The McLuhan Program in Culture and Technology
 David Olson, Derrick de Kerckhove, Co-directors
 University of Toronto
 39A Queen's Park Cres. E.
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CALL FOR PAPERS

Manuscripts are now being accepted for a special issue of the *Journal of Homosexuality* devoted to human sexuality and mass communication. Theoretical, empirical, and/or historical research is being sought that relates to homosexuality, bisexuality, heterosexuality, sexual identity, social sex roles, and other aspects of human sexuality as they influence or are influenced by mass communication processes. There are no methodological restrictions and both qualitative and quantitative papers will be considered. Manuscripts need not be based only in the more traditional social and psychological sciences, but may also develop critical, cultural, philosophical, political and legal analyses. This journal, now in its 13th volume, has an international readership and is published by the Haworth Press. Potential contributors should note that accepted manuscripts are also likely to be republished as an anthology.

Completed manuscripts should conform to the requirements of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, 3rd Edition, and should be postmarked no later than March 1, 1987. Send manuscripts and inquiries to the special issue editors: Dr. Michelle A. Wolf and Alfred P. Kielwasser, Broadcast Communication Arts Department, San Francisco State University, 1600 Holloway Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94132.

2001 (-14)

The Present and Future of Electroacoustics in Canada

May 1987: Fourteen years before the year 2001 will see ACREQ, McGill University, Université de Montréal, and Concordia University hosting "2001 (-14)", a conference / festival of Canadian electroacoustic music, the theme of which is the present and the future of electroacoustics in Canada.

"2001 (-14)" is presented within the framework of "Printemps electroacoustique 87 de Montréal" of ACREQ and will have presentations and workshops during the days and concerts during the afternoons and evenings. Beginning on Thursday, May 7th, 1987, and running until Sunday, May 10th, 1987, the events will take place in and around the three universities involved. You are invited to participate in this national event by submitting proposals for papers, works, or performances.

C.E.C. - Canadian Electroacoustic Community
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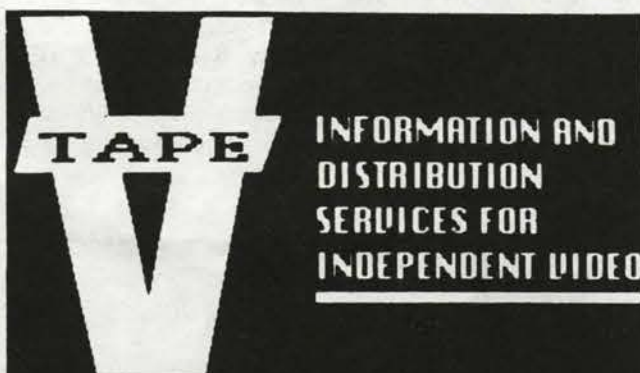
What is the American Film and Video Festival? Founded in 1959, the American Film and Video Festival is one of the oldest and most prestigious Festivals in the U.S. It is the major showcase of the best new film and video productions produced during the previous year available for purchase, rental, or lease in the non-theatrical market. The Festival is sponsored by the Educational Film Library Association, a non-profit membership organization founded in 1943 to promote the production, distribution, and use of films and other media in institution and community programs.

To obtain entry forms, write or call the American Film and Video Festival office, 45 John Street, Suite 301, New York, N.Y. 10038. Telephone (212) 227-5599.

All entry forms must be received by 6 pm, Thursday, January 15, 1987. Entries arriving after January 15 will not be accepted. Entry Forms must be accompanied by full payment of Entry Fees.

Deadline for receipt of prints or tapes is February 13, 1987.

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NEW INTERDISCIPLINARY PROJECT FUND
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The Canada Council board, at its June 1986 meeting, approved and allotted \$1 million for an Interdisciplinary Project Fund (IPF). This new fund will permit the Canada Council to respond more generously to projects proposed by professional artists, groups, or non-profit organizations which request assessment and funding from two or more sections of Council. The Council's sections are Dance, Theatre, Music, Touring Office, Writing and Publication, Visual Arts, Art Bank, Media Arts, Arts Awards, and Explorations.

The IPF is based on one-time-only funds transferred to the Council by the Minister of Communications, Mr. Marcel Masse, in March 1986. It is a project fund to be used this fiscal year, which ends on March 31, 1987.

Although the Fund will have a short life, the Canada Council wishes to realize two objectives through it: to begin to respond more adequately to project proposals requesting support for professional interdisciplinary arts activity; and to use the process of assessing and funding interdisciplinary projects to establish new patterns and methods of cooperation between sections.

Artist Page

Reece Metcalfe and Byron Black

The following two perspectives reflect co-producers' Byron Black and Reece Metcalfe's views of their production Topsy vs. Autopsy. They shot this work together in Bangkok in 1986 and then prepared separate edits from the same original footage.



photos by Reece Metcalfe

TOPSY vs AUTOPSY

by Reece Metcalfe

During the past nine months in South East Asia, I was confronted with the realities of both Third World and Eastern life. There, survival and hardship are concrete problems. These issues gave insight and triggered a series of personal developments. Living and working with "Achan" (teacher in Thai) Byron Black enhanced and accelerated the rate of these personal traits. Together, we completed a short ¾" PAL video tape called *Topsy vs. Autopsy*.

The idea surfaced spontaneously late on a hot Bangkok night. We shot and performed the piece all in one sitting, using the central image of the spinning tops as a metaphor for the individual's journey through life. As gravity is to the top, so the series of struggles that humankind is faced with are equal to its development. Thus, if the top is not strung or spun properly it will soon fall down. Similarly, as the top gains equilibrium, a person matures and strengthens. Late that night I was faced with the difficulty of using the top for the first time. However, as the tape proceeds, my proficiency with the hand-painted bamboo top increases.

Just as one must develop an efficient method when spinning the tops, an artist undergoes the same process as his or her work evolves. At my stage in life, a man may view himself as the single top spinning awkwardly, without direction. As he begins to focus on his craft, he is presented with even more hurdles and decisions. When a second top enters the scene in competition, it may be illustrating the foil of his own fears, potential danger, an ambitious comrade, or even the archetypal fight for a mate. Suddenly the aggressor strikes, demonstrating the tone of the competition. A battle is waged and the ability to remain on one's feet is the determining factor. This can be clearly compared with any sport and those tests that life is inextricably woven with.

Throughout *Topsy vs. Autopsy*, Byron and I demonstrate this competitive spirit. That spirit did not end there. It continued when we were editing our separate U-Matic versions of the tape. Writing our different articles for this publication was yet another example of this inherent trait. Furthermore, our individual understanding and concept of the tops' philosophical significance was formed from our underlying knowledge of how the tops reflect our lives.

by Byron Black

The male struggles for supremacy in unconscious automatic auto-victimization. Males strike, smile, convince, argue, sue, and slaughter. The issue of victory gradually loses its opacity, becomes a less obligatory ritual. Strategic

thermonuclear exchange achieves a scale of violence that renders it perfectly absurd: Mutually Assured Destruction. But the possibility still lurks, trying to overcome the logic of prudence. Will human males mutate out of these attitudes, to face a different world with an appropriate attitude? Or will the competition simply find another way to go on?

Reece Metcalfe and I went to his room and stripped naked about 1:30 am. Even the Bangkok dogs were quiet by that hour. The warm air lay heavily in the room. I turned on the light, fashioned from an aluminum washtub and tungsten bulbs. The two bamboo tops lay on the hardwood floor, ready for action.

I exploited my considerable advantage over Reece, to offset his youth, his beauty, the natural attraction viewers would have for him. First were the tops: he'd not spun them before, whereas I won 200,000 Yen in the Osaka Video Contest with a tape featuring fighting tops, entitled *Capital In Crisis: Japan's Top Corporate Spin Practice*.

We two Cock Asians were good pals, not lovers, not adversaries, though we had boxed on occasion, under the fierce tutelage of Professor Horseplay. Reece is about as straight as you could get and I'm as queer as can be, though like all oversimplifications, that's oversimplifying the issue. I knew how to spin a top so it howled for forty

seconds, gyro pointed at the centre of gravity of the planet Earth. As Reece got more proficient with his top, it danced neatly up to mine, the two howls dopplerizing in and out in a fashion that drove the audio on the video crazy with delight. The tops tapped, circled, clipped one another. We sat side by side in front of the camera, spinning, not touching.

Neither of these two vertebrate goofballs were real smashimindaface competitors. Reece related to the camera how he was raised by his mother only from an early age, and came to compete with himself, in swimming, climbing, bicycling. I recounted my youth as a wary lazy fairy standoffishness from others born of the knowledge that as a sexual deviant, I was a natural outcast . . . and had no intention of becoming anyone's victim in the White Devils' Wonderland of Hetero-Paradise. I was one of the few homosexuals to take part in the Isle of Man Senior TT Race, the most dangerous road race in the world, and survived my years of racing with honour.

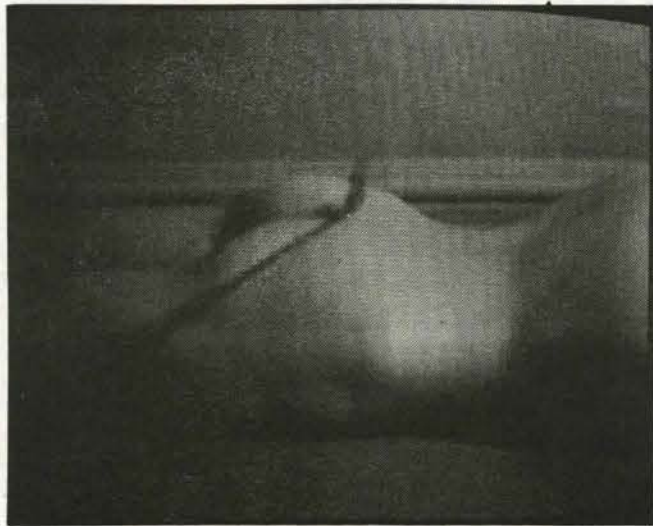
The tops spinning make very nice video, as they have a slightly anthropomorphic character which is visually charming . . . like whirling cylindrical colour bars . . . out of focus in the background the penises lay lazy and hazy, out of focus in the background.



Topsy vs. Autopsy

Continued from page 9

illustrates traditionally non-sexual themes with traditional pornographic imagery. In the former he narrates his feelings as an artist over a close up of sexual intercourse; in the latter, "an externalization of guilt"⁴ a man is whipped across the ass, the camera focused on the rising welts. The images are at once sexual and non-sexual, a dichotomy which, he points out, extends to the subject.



I'm Sorry

The sexual situations in Werden's dramatizations are capsules of our social constructions of power with emphasis on its inevitable sexist division of erotic response. His male characters are white collar workers. The women are prostitutes, or, as in *Blue Moon* a porn star and mother as well — a working class girl. The men end their days work with the desire to be humiliated, to eroticize their failures. The women become the disciplinarians, the givers of comforting pain. While the women in *The Story of Red*, *Yes*, and *Blue Moon* imitate wife, mother, and lover

respectively, their actions are distortions of their role as mothers, not lovers or companions.

The Story of Red documents the visit of a middle class male to a prostitute working out of mobile motor-home typical of those that glide into Las Vegas on their way to Reno. Ironically, in seeking sexual fulfillment he has chosen to duplicate his suburban wasteland. The woman gives him a beer, puts on a slip. He goes into the bathroom: pees, farts — time's up! As he is tossed out of the trailer at the side of the highway he shouts accusingly, "I paid you to make me feel like I failed."

In *Yes* a businessman enters a Pleasure Station where he dons a corset and stockings. As he washes out his underwear a woman off camera nags him about how his father would make him dress in his mother's underwear and then laugh at him until he ripped it off.

Blue Moon's john is never seen or heard on camera, but the prostitute is. Putting us in the john's place using a subjective camera, we are questioned: "Why can't you do this with your wife. How can you be so many people, one for her, one for me?"

While all of the above examples stress sexual fulfillment through self-victimization, guilt, and humiliation, it is not that specifically, but the politics which fall between desire and practice which are at issue. The questions raised in Werden's tapes are not exclusively sexual, they invariably must be political as well.

Theorists of subversive art tend to err on the side of naive optimism. Art's subversive elements are most often subtle and serve to bolster the resolve of its devotees rather than fire major revolutions, yet within that context they are an important part of any political change. Kenneth Anger's film *Fireworks* is one such example: a landmark of American underground cinema, it signaled the beginning of gay cinema. So it is in video, just as in film, that the independent producers, working in limited and specifically defined venues are the most pure sub-

versives. Werden is certainly one of them. His work is unpretentious, chillingly frank, and a necessary, if controversial, addition to the ongoing debate over sexuality's place within video and the art context.



May I / Can I

Footnotes:

¹While subversive art theorists have failed to adequately identify pornography's misogynist components, feminist theorists have likewise failed to recognize pornography's subversive imperative — to break social taboos.

²"Rodney Werden, Sickness or Logic?", *Video*, Winter, 1983.

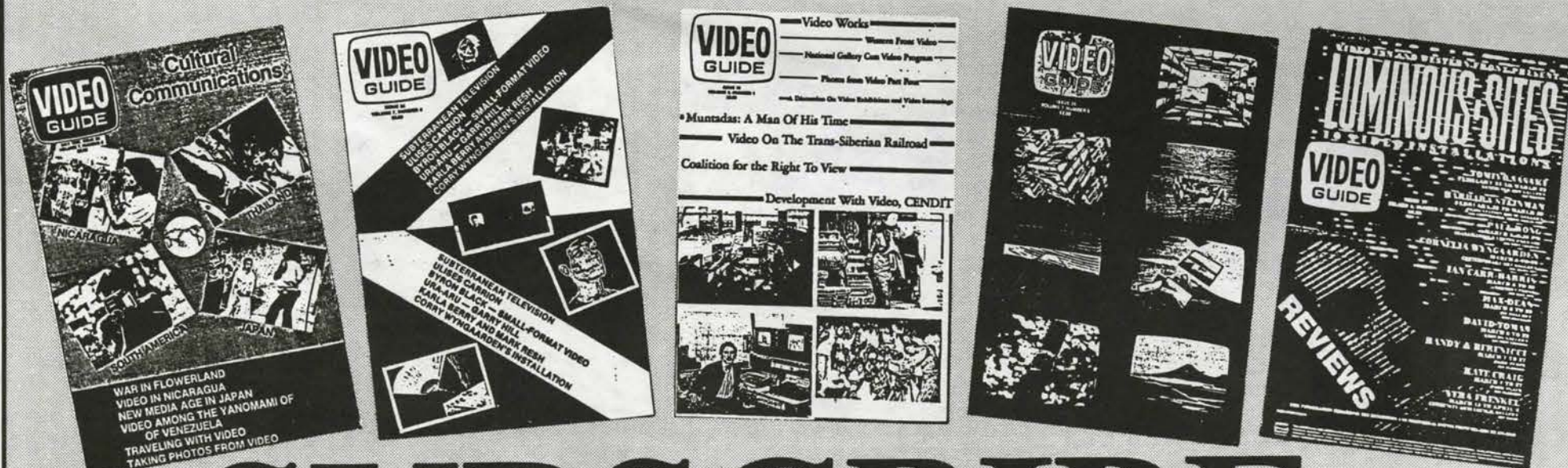
³"VIDEO 2: Rodney Werden talks with Peggy Gale", *Centerfold*, April 1978, page 16.

⁴Excerpted from the tape description found in the Video Out Distribution Catalogue 1.



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KATHY

"Marriage is very important . . . I have my dream to get married to a lawyer or a doctor or something . . . have kids and a home . . . it's important . . . your life is awfully empty if you want to stay single all your life . . . hickies make me sick . . . bisexuality kind of turns me right off . . . to me it's rather sick . . . it's not normal . . . it disgusts me."

TIM

"I think that the pre-occupation is interesting, that it is status quo is inflexible, intelligent or humane people many options, homosexuality as tot culture, I would like to and in the process I less ghettoized."

TOMMY

"skin touching skin . . . the rhythm is very s everyone has the potenti the sex of the person . . . I don't have sex much . . . that much . . . once my be interested in having a no . . . it was very hard way I look . . . the way I

JOCELYN

"if you're into water spe rubber, if you're into nine people are willing . . . we perverted to talk about your what you did last night, who you went through or whatever night stands where you met never seen before . . . it's aut you never have to talk about it

JOE

"I'm trying to be asexual . . . make it sound like a hobby . . . with people quickly when I'm with them. . . I find few w attractive that I would like to h I find very few men attractive th like to have sex with . . . I guess

MARLENE

"7 years old . . . I had the unfie of being a victim of a child this man exposed himself . . . I went to find out, my sister ran i direction . . . 'come on little gi have something to show you' . . . stairs, went under the bed and g mother was at her wits end . . . lingering smell of someone in the bed . . . I like to throw myself onto the bed after someone has left and lay against the sheets."

SARA & KELLIE

"we went with one boy each, we decided to trade, we traded boys . . . I got bored, I wasn't into it and suggested that the girls go together and the boys go together, it seemed perfectly natural to me . . . at that point I realized it wasn't o b since I've come out th

WALTER & TERRY

" . . . together for six years . . . we like each other one on one . . . it's difficult to find activities that we both want to participate in . . . I like fishing. she like

MICHAEL

"Sex without drugs, you can compare to acoustic or organic sex or sex with stimulants is like sex with a little DDL, a touch of flange, reverb and lots of echo. . . . chinese boys are really hot, blond californian surfers have their nish . . . guys in Trans Ams with tattoos listening to heavy metal on the radio . . . a lot of construction workers give me an erection . . . librarians . . . guys with glasses can be really neat."

MARK & DEIDRE

"6 weeks . . . under the table in a restaurant . . . we spend most of our time in bed . . . the longer we're together we get more emotional . . . just lustful . . . lust is still there and loving . . . catholic upbringing . . . it was very d for me, but I did regret it afterwards . . . e were perverse aspects . . ."

L

"the course of a summer, she allowed a er of us boys to have sexual experimentation her . . . she did it all . . . she was what young lad needs as an introduction . . . it emotional like we're going to get married purely sexual . . . she was aggressive, she all the ropes, she knew how to please, she how to get pleased . . . she knew what she y, the rest of us didn't . . . it wasn't sex as sex for gain. . . my sexual preference is y becoming more confused weekly."

"sucker for a dry sense of humour . . . erence between sex and love is a guilt ing . . . I don't think I've met anyone fallen in love with, but I've fallen into times, sex keeps happening . . . love to find . . . twice a week seems to be ge . . . in the woods, it's quiet . . . of risk of being caught."

"with strangers . . . it could be any- n a midnight flight from San Francisco k . . . on an elevator. . . in an alley ar pulls up either you get in or you a shoe fetish . . . I don't like men thing, women I like stockings . . . german movies, wide shoulders, . . . it was the only thing I had to sell inutes I had my rent paid."

" . . . triple x movies are hilarious . . . two girls getting it on with me in the middle . . . in one sense I want to say the big jock going out and playing baseball . . . golfing and boating . . . on the other hand I kind of think a masculine guy would be a more open person, they don't have to show off to prove their masculinity . . . a swishing man . . . limped wrist and waving arms all the time I would consider effeminate . . ."

CONFUSED



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" . . . today . . . it would come together, the weather was fabulous. . . it was totally love at first sight . . . a complete connection . . . amazing . . . we are made for each other . . . I knew I could live with this man forever."

" . . . mother, Jason is 10, Brad is 9 . . . we've been on our own for seven years . . . I didn't know what love was at 14, I mean I was just in love with the thought of having someone with me all the time, to care and to share . . . I guess by having a child, I would have someone . . . I didn't believe in abortion. . ."