

SOME CONSIDERATIONS RE: NOT A LOVE STORY

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1. NALS must be examined in terms of its social impact. Its value lies in its success in raising the problematic issue of pornography to diverse audiences; its problem lies in the ways that it chooses to address this issue and its conclusions. Unfortunately, NALS has been used to argue for censorship of existing sexual representations, a position which I cannot accept as a feminist, or as an artist. It poses little positive terrain for women to acknowledge desire, including visual pleasure. There is a contradiction embedded in a film that relies on the shock value and emotional charge from SHOWING certain images in order to make an argument ~~to censor~~ those very images.

2. The film is structured to encourage anger as a primary response. This is done by consistently telling the audience HOW to read images and contexts of pornography. There is no space, especially for women, to experience responses other than anger. There is no discussion of how images, and porn images in particular, work as a language, thus there is no sense of being able to deconstruct or create images, simply a sense of being victimized by the images. While the film produces anger, I do not believe that it empowers women in dealing either with our own sexuality or with the way that commercial media represents oursexuality.

3. The film imposes an American context onto primarily Canadian viewers. The availability of certain forms of pornography is different in Canada. The experts in the film are American feminist authorities. This is unfortunate, for the Canadian women's movement has been more concerned with an analysis of social structures than with images, unlike its American counterpart.

4. A tradition in new feminist documentary has been the empowerment of the subject. Perhaps most offensive in NALS is the treatment of the repentant stripper. Rather than being empowered by telling her story as she experienced it, Linda Lee Tracey is a vehicle for the filmmaker to describe the stripper's reality as SHE (Bonnie Sherr Klein) experiences it. The filmmaker is an outsider to the stripper's lifestyle. She constructs the stripper as OTHER in a more damaging way than the glimpses of pornography throughout the film construct women as OTHER. We experience the classic virgin/whore, prude/slut division as we judge the central character, and we are unequivocally placed in the position of virgin(prude). The film is reassuring in the sense that traditional documentary reassures by reaffirming our security and difference. We are reminded that we would never collaborate in the production of such imagery at the same moment as we are prompted to take offense at the pornography that we are shown.

The epitomy of this process is the porn pose scene. Every time I

watch NALS I ask myself: why didn't the filmmaker pose for the porn picture, instead of the stripper? After all, the latter is not a porn star but a dancer: both of them are engaged in producing images. The pose is an exercise in curiosity. Or is there an assumption that a stripper is already degraded and therefore beyond harm/humiliation? Is the filmmaker committed to retaining total control?

I find it a double entendre that the narrative in this section of the film is directed at a critique of women who work as photographers within the porn industry at the same moment as the filmmaker directs Linda Lee Tracey in her pose for pornography, for the film.

It does not surprise me that as sex industry workers have begun to organize they have spoken out against the image that this film reinforces. They have demanded recognition that their work is not fundamentally different from other service work that women perform. They have demanded that the story be retold from their point of view and that they not be constructed as victims.

5. Pornography in this film is presented through the male gaze. We are placed as voyeurs, in general through the use of the direct images, and in specific in the way that the camera shots of pornography are constructed and described by the narrative. This is a problem when the viewers of the film are often women. It gives no allowance for the woman to construct herself as viewer and to experience ambivalence, displeasure or pleasure. The gaze is instead proprietary and aggressive. In viewing NALS we recognize the gaze and know, as women, that it may be in part our own but not fully our own. It makes it very difficult, again, for women to deal with any pleasurable responses they might have to the images, or even the whole subject, without guilt. It returns women to a place where OUR sexual response is judged as good or evil, this time by feminism.