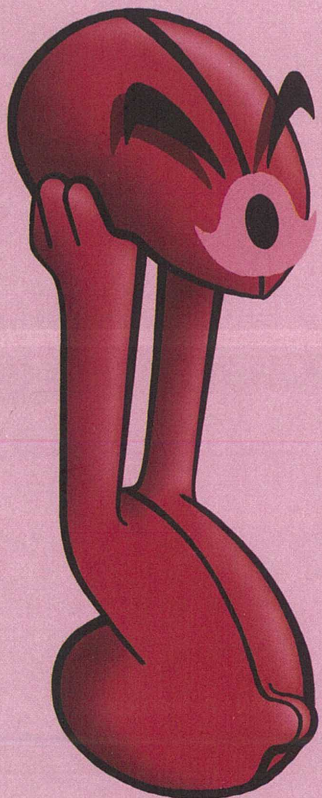


# Libi\_doc

## JOURNEYS IN THE PERFORMANCE OF SEX ART

by Libidot and Dr. Jacobs



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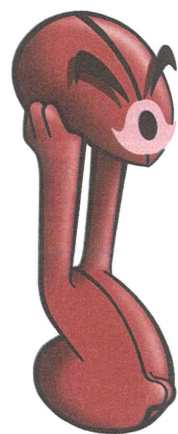


*I have ascended into a company of great minds. I have my  
guts to explore the rules of their minds. Will they come  
down, will they crack on occasion and come into mine?*

Mr Lif

## Introduction





## INTRODUCTION

XXX

It is with great pleasure that I present *Libi\_doc*, the book of sex art journeys written by Libidot and Dr. Jacobs. They are my colleagues in the emerging field of sex art studies and I would like to elaborate on their contribution to this area of research. Libidot, whose real name is unknown to me, appeared in my life several years ago, when she approached me to collaborate on a study on the widening orbits of 'sex art' and 'indie porn' cultures in the age of digital media. I had no idea what to think about this proposal and was busy with other intellectual engagements, so I suggested that she contact Dr. Jacobs. I told her about the work of Dr. Jacobs, a well-respected theorist in the field of digital media studies, and reassured her that he would probably be the best person to help her. After a few days of silence, Libidot finally replied in a very short email that said: "Ok, I will do it with Dr. Jacobs." I then approached Dr. Jacobs who responded immediately that he would have to see some of the installments of the research before actually making a commitment. I put him in touch with Libidot. And so the project started its unusual collaborative authorship and slowly came into the world.

Over the years 2001-2004, Libidot initiated her field trips to different cultures and sent her primary materials to Dr. Jacobs, who followed up on her journeys through theoretical contemplations sent to her by email. At first it seemed that he was not impressed by her work, as he wrote me one day that he would only be able to carry out this project with minimal involvement. I was able to read their correspondences and internal affairs and often thought that the project would be a huge catastrophe. But I became their confidante and



regularly corresponded with both of them and now will take a moment to clarify their different backgrounds and the cultural histories surrounding *Libi\_doc*.

The formal educational and ethnic background of Libidot is unknown to me. In my early correspondences with her, she was elusive about her family background and educational training or artistic work, yet she was charming and very personable and immediately let me in on some kind of 'work crisis' she was dealing with. Since her problems seemed quite palpable, I decided to hear her out about them. Libidot acted like she was on the verge of a breakdown, but she could not articulate her exact state of discomfort. She said that she thought her work motivation was shattered and that she would need to take a leave of absence from her job. She refused to tell me where exactly she worked and why she was having such a crisis. I asked Libidot to explain more exactly what she was feeling. Then came a series of lengthy explanations, in which she indirectly informed me about her unusual personality, her hyper-sensual ways of entering the material world, fueled by delusional fantasies. I decided not to share this information with Dr. Jacobs, whom I knew would react badly to a fragile woman-artist exploring dark and fantasy-based psychic states. I wanted to give Libidot a chance to work with him and present her insights to him, so I kept mediating their collaboration.

But let me try to summarize what I remember from Libidot's early delusional episodes, because it is important to understand the psychic impetus of her journeys, her unusual research methods, her obsessive-compulsive search for sex artists, her tendency to be overly empathic or to get totally carried away, her inevitable clash with Dr. Jacobs. When I asked Libidot why she wanted to do this research, she told me that she thought she was being possessed by some force or invisible entity, her 'ghostie' as she called it. I encouraged her to tell me more about her ghostie. She said that she could feel her ghostie move around inside her body.

She wrote me that she believed that she was actually possessed by this force, even though she could not believe in such a thing. She had no idea whom or what had demonized her that way, and she was not sure of this kind of terminology was even correct. I asked her if the force was male or female, small or big. She answered: "huge, strong, and smooth." The ghostie also turned out to be her lover. He often played with and joined her on her office couch, cradling her when she was totally mad or exhausted, kissing her gently and kneading her inner thighs with his fingers. He made her laugh. But then the next moment, he would pull a trick on her again. One day he brought her a cup of coffee at her desk, then suddenly grabbed her by her feet and suspended her upside down in front of the window: "Look there," he said, "Drop all your work and pack your bags and move your cunt eastwards. Let's go!" I asked her what he looked like. He had a shaved head and wore regular black clothes. He was handsome and his mind was powerful. He stroked and slapped her

buttocks and made her come. He fucked her on her desk and laughed hysterically when she was out of breath.

She thought she knew when exactly he had entered her. It was the day of the annual Christmas party at work. She had had a couple of glasses of red wine when she knew her ghostie wanted her to visit the toilet on the second floor. She excused herself from the party and ran to the toilet. She almost peed on the floor before reaching the toilet. When she rolled down her pants, he grabbed her by her feet and slowly kissed her and pressed his stiff cock inside her. When she was past her second pee, she felt like she was two beings in one. She stood up and somebody was taking her hand and walking her feet, and feeding her thousand of ideas to shut up the enemies. She was going to smash them to pieces, she said. I asked her if she was actually trying to tell me that she was having an affair with a colleague who made her pregnant, but she reassured that she was menstruating on that exact day when they had fucked on the toilet. Thank god it's just a fantasy, I thought.

Libidot was happily making love to her ghostie. She also left the office on that very same day. She sent me a copy of the memorandum, which she sent to through interoffice mail to all her colleagues, in which she described her reasons for departure from the 'small' and 'suffocating' space where was trying to make a career. What she did not write on the memorandum was the following: The handsome ghostie had totally fucked with her soul, forcing her to drop her life and everyday routine duties, visit places unknown to her and last but not least, make a comprehensive and unprecedented study on sex art. She packed her laptop computer, a few other belongings and made arrangements to go to Amsterdam. "Why Amsterdam?" I asked her. Libidot had been there before and had already met a few people involved in the sex art scenes. I still did not understand what exactly was going on with Libidot, but I assumed that it must have been a nervous breakdown. Even though I suggested to her to go seek counseling, I also wanted to support her in her desire to visit Amsterdam. This could have been a dangerous suggestion to make, but I do believe in the therapeutic qualities of art, research and travel. I asked her to tell me a bit more about her research project. It read as follows: "I want to meet all the great sex artists of the world. I want to record the commotions of my special journey meeting theirs. I do not mean this to be a solo-journey, a trek into the desert or meditation retreat, but rather the opposite, a journey into abundant lives and bodies. I vow to share all my information with Dr. Jacobs and will also post my ongoing journals on the world wide web."

I played along with Libidot's fantasy of the grand voyage and hoped that she would find herself again doing research into sex art. I contacted Dr. Jacobs and warned him that I did not know Libidot very well, that he would have to see for himself about her actual abilities as a scholar. Dr. Jacobs would be her most suitable supervisor, I thought. He is an older left-leaning scholar in the field of media studies, who had become a name in the field of sex art and pornography. He had published several major articles about the return of sex-



ually exuberant primates in digital media networks. I knew Dr. Jacobs as a solid figure whose theoretical knowledge and astute feedback was widely appreciated. He would be the kind of person able to consult his book collections and maintain scholarly integrity while Libidot would visit the artists, the 'sex art species' as he came to call them. (I once reminded him that this term could be considered inappropriate or even offensive, but he reassured me that he had good reasons for using it.)

Let me give you a little glimpse of the mind and appearance of Dr. Jacobs. He is an erudite and self-conscious figure who tends to dress in plain American clothes, occasionally wearing a vintage suit. This is his way of making a fashion statement, this loner type of U.S. East-coast intellectual who loves to explore the digital networks and who never leaves his office. A classical introvert. I also found out in indirect ways that Dr. Jacobs is gay, that he has his affairs with younger men and may feel a natural discomfort with the 'feminine' ways sex artists approach the body. It is interesting for us to know this information about him, since his actual theories are predicting the return of the bonobo, the female-run of primate species who engages in extensive love games as queer types of sexual activity.

When I asked him later if it had been interesting for him to work with Libidot, he answered that he wanted to use her data to test his thesis on the bonobo. He would use the work of primatologist Frans de Waal and biologist Bruce Bagemihl to write about the qualities of sexual inclinations in digital media networks. If de Waal had observed in chimpanzees hierarchical and violent methods of sharing power, he had observed a different display of gender and power dynamics in the much rarer species of the bonobos. Dr. Jacobs believed that Libidot's data could point to a global surfacing of a bonobo-like species. I asked him how it could even be possible to study all these different artists within a narrow biological-evolutionary framework and thus classify them as a 'species', but he seemed unperturbed by my critical remark and did not reply. Dr. Jacobs worked with Libidot to refine his thesis on the bonobo in digital media networks. He wanted to prove that the networked bonobo worked with biological-evolutionary instincts in seeking out sexual partners and pornographic communication. He wanted to show that these artists, cross-culturally and regardless of gender and sexual orientation, were mimicking each other's heightened sexual instincts as artistic 'talents' and distributed aesthetics. Now, don't imagine Dr. Jacobs himself to be anything like a bonobo himself. I believe that he needed Libidot to be his partner in even shaking hands with the species.

Libidot visited artists influenced by different cultural traditions, religious beliefs, social norms and sexual subcultures, but they all seemed to respond to her call for a social network structure and climate of exuberance. She traveled and searched diligently for sex artists – in Tokyo, Ljubljana, Amsterdam, Istanbul, Boston, Chicago, Sydney, Melbourne, and so on. The sex artists clearly wanted to participate in her project. They did not belong to a school of sexual difference, did not adhere to an artistic credo and made art with all

kinds of objectives and media – their bodies, sweat, lips, blood, needles, live performances on the stage, in public spaces, sketches and fragments in journals, paint, photography, video, web-based works. Their artworks and conversational wisdoms were often blunt or contradictory, yet astute and honest investigations of 21st century bodies, media and sexuality. Libidot was very deeply and proudly immersed in the network, their emotional-physical intelligence, their peculiar moods and visions, their lived and unlived fantasies, their daily life habits and sexual engines. All these talents, their works, their evocations of the sex force, really affected her, more thoroughly than she ever could have imagined. It took patience to mediate between the hot approach of Libidot and the cold attitude of Dr. Jacobs. Dr. Jacobs wanted to withdraw from the project on several occasions. But in the end, he did give me permission to publish his commentaries, which he had sent to Libidot while she was traveling. I thus decided to structure the book around Libidot's bulky travel journals and interviews with artists, and Dr. Jacobs's sparse commentaries.

The journeys encapsulate the death of the academic researcher, i.e., the crisis of progressive academia culture in dealing with sex art phenomena. The journeys also happened against a backdrop of political turmoil and conflict: first and foremost, ongoing fits of belligerence by crusty and well-behaved academia; secondly, the general scorn and hardening censorship of this work by political authorities and art establishments. The journeys witnessed a tide of brutal repression of vital bodies in art and academia. Libidot and Dr. Jacobs started the project a couple of months before the collapse of the World Trade Center on 9/11, the moment branded in history as the catalyst of new waves of political repression and rule of Southern 'bubba'. The G.W. Bush's administration fortified its 'emergency' mechanisms of surveillance of a wide range of people and activities called 'terrorism'. What came along was a subtle war on the 'Id-Evil', a simultaneous pushing and punishing of radical art as pleasure, imposing patriotic obsessions and values on pleasure, causing a severe deregulation of sexual fantasies in relation to otherness. The Id-Evil, as defined by Slavoj Žižek, is Evil structured and motivated by the most elementary imbalance between the Ego and jouissance (bliss) and ruled by the tension between pleasure and foreign bodies.<sup>1</sup>

The book aims to show that we have been experiencing this deregulation in our treatment of sex art, even though we are swamped with elaborate and multifold types of sex talk and countless waves of fetish bodies and pornography. But even though we are more than ever surrounded by the products of porn empires and indieporn media, sex art as public manifestation of the body often results in audience discomfort, rather than empathy. The many instances of censorship witnessed by Libidot and Dr. Jacobs indicate that our institutional venues of art and academia can hardly be freed of the habitual modes of performance and perception. For instance, during the *Porn Ar(t)ound the World* festival (2002)

<sup>1</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute: Or, Why is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* (London: Verso, 2000), p.8.



in Mechelen, Belgium, Yoshie Suzuki (Japan-USA) and Adam Zaretsky's (USA) showed an experimental video piece *Squart*, which shows digitally altered footage of Yoshie sitting on the toilet and releasing excrements. When this art work was officially condemned and removed from the exhibit by the Belgian vice-squad, the artists issued an official grievance statement in a letter to the police. The statement argued that the excremental body could be a valuable site of knowledge for the contemporary artist, and ended in the following punch line: "Every society shits every day, including yours." The artists wanted to make a public statement about their sexual fantasies and use of artistic media, but the public institutions hosting their work were unable to provide a supportive environment.

And one can read in chapter four, 'Belgium: Black Magic and The Holy Media,' Libidot witnesses many other artworks being removed by the Belgian police. Or you can read her interview with the Taiwanese sex activist, professor Josephine Ho, who was almost sentenced to jail over her sex activist website and her arduous fight against an alliance of fourteen Christian organizations. Are these truly dark times to be a sex artist? The finale of *Libi\_doc* coincided with evidence of the mediated torture and sexual abuse of Iraqi prisoners by the American military, as a new kind of 'web pornography'. It thus became even harder to see the trees through the forest of pleasure and sexual representation, to distinguish fictional or fantasy-based pornography from the daily lure of political repression and war crimes. Fortunately, this totally obscene cultural climate in the U.S. has started to be addressed by scholars, as in Coco Fusco's 2005 College Art Association panel on the effects of the Patriot Act on American Art, which seeks to look at censored work, such as "translations that have been criminalized because the texts come from 'enemy states', arts professionals whose ability to travel to and from the US has been restricted or curtailed, arts professionals whose work intersects with Middle Eastern Studies who have come under scrutiny, etc."

As it turns out, the list of submissions to such a panel could simply be enormous, if one would include the reactions from everyday control authorities and fearful individuals and social-intellectual circles to sex art. The U.S. is living in the era of fear and self-censoring intellectuals and artists. Libidot and Dr. Jacobs thus came to agree on the following insight: the sex art species is under attack by governments and corporations and needs to be protected. It took them a while to wake up to the fact that academic circles and inner voices were constantly thwarting the work. So, I tried to push their work despite the difficulties. I hope that this book will reach readers who can relate deeply to the pleasures and pains of making these kinds of journeys and a very unusual book.

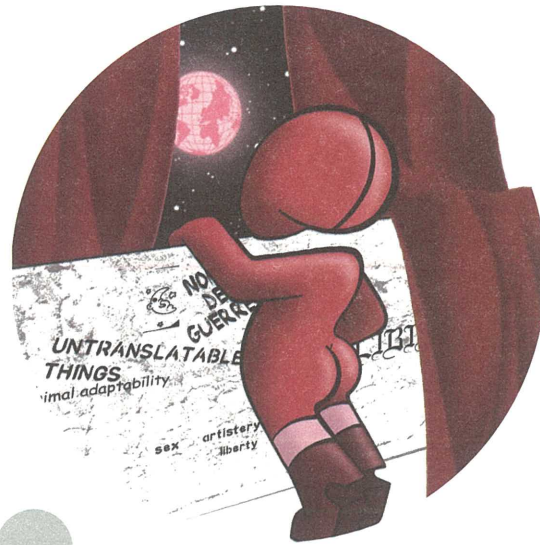
A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Katrien Jacobs". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Katrien Jacobs, Boston, June 26, 2005



## Journeys



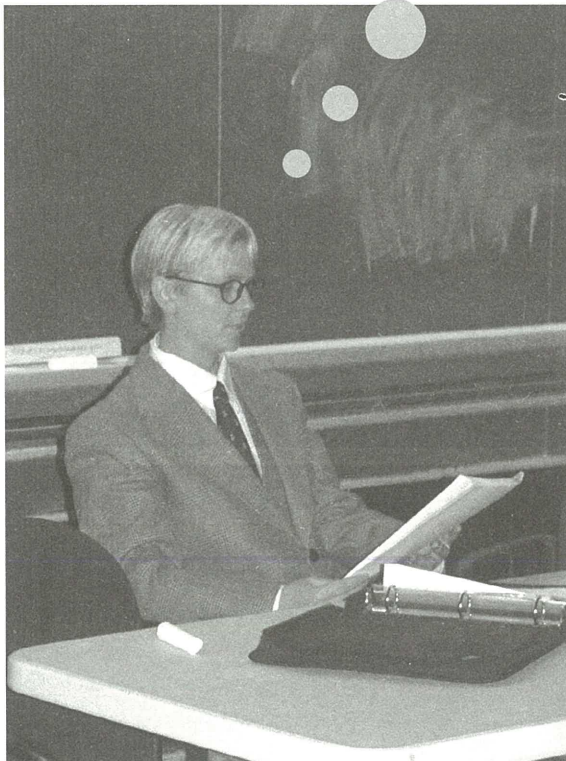


## 1. The Netherlands: Fuck of(f) Media

December 26, 2001. AMSTERDAM.

I am riding the Belgian train from Brussels to Amsterdam, feeling a nervous heaviness like a light misery before a storm, making me even more desperate for a little fuck. I did not escape like a donkey with a heavy load of junk on my back. I had no idea what to do with all the cluttered documents on my desk – memorandums from the boss, drafts of overdue proposals, print-outs of probing emails. I dumped it in the trash, packed my laptop in its brand new suitcase, and took off for the airport. Once there, I ran into a boy. We talked quietly in the check-in area of British Airways, then I knew for sure I wanted to screw somebody.

I cannot put it in other words. I traverse the Belgian-Dutch lowlands on a glittery gliding train, contemplating sexual longing amongst eternal dark skies, feeding my hunger with coffee, chocolate and tobacco. And I am close to my research destination: Zoot and Genant. Snow falls as I exit the Amsterdam train station and walk to Genant's apartment in the red light district. Escaping from the monotony of the office, my raging hormones release, enjoying the girls on display in the red light district. I love watching these girls as they whisper gently, smilingly, to hordes of curious tourists. They have occupied the 'ghettos' of this renowned red light district – Suriname girls to the left, Turkish girls to the right, American girls in the hidden alley – some or all of them working for violent pimps or money-smelling madams? I like walking and snooping around among all the different



girls with soft skin. Girls straddling poles and sliding across bar surfaces. Big-boobed girl getting fucked from behind by well-hung boy on a rotating platform. If only I got it like that myself, like a doggie, feeling cock in different positions. Not to mention the different tastes, fetishes, styles – excremental sex from Germany, the whip from Slovenia, golden showers from Belgium, a trio from France, women in veils from the USA. I would like, simply, to live in these peepshows and porn videos, a mess of porn showers for the seeking girl; but I am here to do my research and talk to artists.

I take a glance at stoned tourists hanging out in coffee shops, packs of American college students on their quest for freedom, then I wait for Genant in bar *Thai Ten*, where Asian pimps watch music videos in the back of the bar. They are plotting deals, screaming out loud at a clip of chimpanzees spinning records on a turntable. Genant is one of the first sex artists who invited me. She beckoned me to visit her in Amsterdam and explore the red light district: “The red light district gets dark early now, but all the lights are glowing. I live in the ‘clit’ of my city.”<sup>1</sup>

She arrives in the clit on her bicycle. She is out of breath and jumps all over me. We enter her small and charming apartment with a magnificent view of the old canal. She shows me around her place, and tells me that she needs to change clothes after a day of work. I ask her if I can start filming her (because she is already bubbling with mind spunk). She agrees, continues chatting, starts taking off her clothes, and shows me her naked body and sperm-stained G-string. She has worn her panties for three days in a row. Wow! She now discards them and puts on a new pair, then her blue corset-shaped dress. She has long brown hair and stark blue eyes, Genant, a friendly dominant female, looking good and having had sex every day for the last three days with her boyfriend, Zoot. What I am doing here in the middle of the red light district? I have departed from my office in the nunnery of intellectual virtuosity.

### Interview: Zoot and Genant, Amsterdam, December 26, 2001.

‘All these cooked out roles. You can be ‘gay’ or ‘lesbian’, you can be ‘frigid’ or a ‘nymphomaniac’. And every role prescribed by society comes with a porn movie release, at least here in the Netherlands. And these rigid roles are taken so seriously.’

**Libidot:** One of the first things you organized with the Dutch collective Artporn was a ‘Post-Kinky Party’ (1996). One of your slogans was “We are bored and all our friends have whips.” What does that mean, ‘post-kinky’?

**Genant:** We call it ‘post-kinky’ because ‘kinky sex’ or ‘plain sex’ – once one gets involved in the sex scenes – comes with a number of very rigid rules. We were ‘post-kinky’ because we wanted to transgress the boundaries associated with the rules of ‘kinky’. ‘Kinky’ means that sex is a little

bit exciting. ‘Kinky’ is associated with spanking, leather and fetishism. But since these cultures were becoming so commercialized, it was not really exciting anymore.

**Libidot:** You’ve stated that ‘kinky’ sex styles have been imported from Anglo-American cultures. Were you looking for something more ‘Dutch’?

**Genant:** No, we were not looking for something ‘Dutch’, but something closer to everyday sexuality instead of sex presented in rigid forms. You can take the role of the ‘master’, or you can take the role of the ‘slave’ ... All these cooked-out roles. You can be ‘gay’ or ‘lesbian’, you can be ‘frigid’ or a ‘nymphomaniac’. And every role prescribed by society comes with a porn movie release, at least here in the Netherlands. And these rigid roles are taken so seriously.

**Zoot:** It was also a very political sex movement. We were interested in the role of politics and the influence of different political parties. When we started out, we knew immediately that we clashed with the old Christian party, also with the new liberal party that had emerged in the Netherlands, as well as the mass media. As we clashed with those three entities we then conceptualized a new identity called ‘s-m-m’ or slave-master-medium’. Mostly, we tried to play with media-making, because the media played the fixed role that we tried to overturn.

**Libidot:** How did you find your own roles?

**Genant:** We arrived at those roles that did not hold an essence. We wanted to return to the essence of pleasure, and at that point it did not matter if you would be ‘master’ for one second and ‘slave’ for the next second.

**Zoot:** Our other roles did not matter so much. We looked for a happening, a space, and a concept, took along our own media machinery, and then looked for the audience to reveal themselves. It was more important to see what kind of sexual roles other people would reflect into the space and the happening. We used the space to sexualize it in a kind of happening (*‘ervaringstheater’*) where people could present themselves sexually and other people could watch.

**Genant:** We did not think it out that way, but felt such a lack in the commercial porn cultures and role-patterns that we thought: “Where is the human being in all this?” And so, for instance, I did not shave my legs and Zoot had a little stomach. We were no beauty ideals. We did not have expensive costumes and we did not have a rehearsed act that we were going through.

We just jumped onto the stage as we had a certain experience that we shared. It was not about the roles we played but about the happening, so it was a liberation from the roles. For instance, when I stuck a marshmallow up somebody’s arse, this might have been something that I had to discuss with this person, because it was something that we had never done before. I had never seen a person drop marshmallows while I was dancing with them. This was liberating to me because I saw something that I had never seen before and it did not have a role because I could not place it. And I liked that feeling a lot, to experience something that did not become a role. The body has so many more possibilities than that of ‘cunt’ and ‘dick’ and ‘tits and ass’ and ‘blow jobs’ and ‘excrements’. There is so much more than that.

<sup>1</sup> Personal email received november 19, 2001.



**Libidot:** In your *Irotic Manifesto* you stated that you wanted to incite the audience by questioning the separation between performers and audiences. There was a performance movement in the 1960s and 1970s, inspired by Antonin Artaud, when performers tried to break down the fourth wall of theater and include the audience in the happening. Did you try to engage the audience?

**Zoot:** We tried to make people trust their feelings and sensations of desire and peace because we noticed that these have disappeared. People have become so insecure that recognizing these sensations was the difficult point.

## December 27, 2001. AMSTERDAM.

Even if they see the 'malleability' of 'roles' as the 'essence' of pleasure, I can see a Dutch kernel in both of their personalities. We sit together and go through an extensive archive of photographs and video-recordings of Artporn performances. In one video clip, I see Genant sitting on the radiator inside a toilet stall and letting her piss flow. Then she shows her pale butt cheeks to the camera. It is a fragment of a larger melange of scenes, which typifies her: young, radiant, fierce, mercurial, absolutely sexy.

We look at the performance/installation *Anal Restaurant* (1996), where a naked performer is tied face-down to a platform and his/her bottom is stuffed with mashed potatoes. The performer is turned around on the platform and rotates more and more quickly. When the rotating platform is abruptly brought to a halt, the potatoes are released from the performer's anus. Sometimes the mess is smeared on a canvas and hung on the wall of a gallery, but sometimes the shower hits performers and spectators. Would you want them to dump shit on **your** face?

In *Oysterbarpiece* (1996), Genant opens her legs and encourages members of the audience to suck an oyster from her pussy. Wouldn't you want to try and do something like that? She stands on her head with her legs wide open, holding a camera in her hands, and invites you to come closer. Why is she holding a camera? She wants a photograph of your face and mouth while eating pussy. Have you ever seen a picture of **yourself** eating pussy?

She wants to make audiences aware of their role of 'voyeur' by 'reversing their gaze', or looking back at those who look at her. She thinks that every person can be a sexual being to somebody else's gazing eye. Reversing the gaze means opening up a new circuit of visual pleasure/power, as both 'naked performer' and 'voyeuristic audience' become more aware of their flows of energy. As they write in the *Irotic Manifesto*: "The historically situated gaze is turned upside down and no longer do we stare into a void."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Artporn, *Irotic Manifesto*, Unpublished Text, 1996. My own translation



Zoot en Genant, *Oysterbarpiece*, Performance, 1996

Zoot and Genant also use performance modes to deconstruct popular images of the 'sexy' body or fetishism that circulate widely on billboards, on television ads, on the Internet. For instance, in their performance *Meat Sexu Taco* (1996), performed in the P-House Gallery in Tokyo, they investigate Japanese fetishism by going to bed with a live octopus. As they write in their artist's statement: "In Japan the use of Tako (octopus) is found on every street corner in the shape of fried octopus snacks. The animals live inside Japanese bowls and are eminently present in Japanese people. The animal has to be beaten for a long time before it can be eaten, otherwise the meat is tough. In every Manga strip we open, a woman is strangled by the 8-legged creature. The octopus is the ultimate sex symbol, strangling, sucking, pulsating, tying up, penetrating from every side. This fantasy is mythologized like a common cultural symbol and inscribed in erotic heritage."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Zoot and Genant, Artist Statement, *Meat Taco Sexu*. 2002. My own translation.



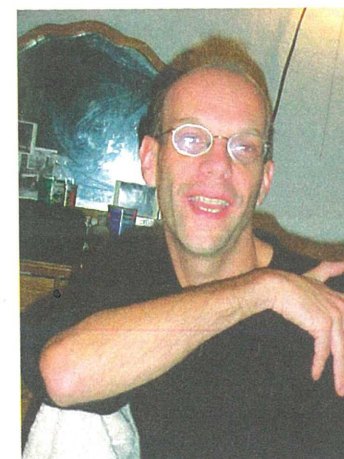
Zoot en Genant, *Meat Sexu Taco*, Performance/Installation, 1996Lesley Goren Drawing of *Meat Sexu Taco*, 2002

The performance *Meat Sexu Taco* is a performative gesture that materializes an exotic fantasy, or a commercial Japanese fetish, with roots in Japanese art and mythology. But the materialization goes out of control, as the animals react violently and attack the couple, using their tentacles and biting them with their beaks. The performers are pained and bleeding (Zoot has to pee from the intensity). The Japanese audiences seem unaffected by the turn of events. Zoot and Genant's plan to deconstruct the octopus fetish is too difficult for the audience

to digest. As the fetish itself, the octopus is depicted as an omnipotent creature out to invade (mostly young female) bodies, strangling their organs and penetrating cavities. In the material performance of two artists going to bed with an octopus, the sex is impossible and certainly not 'sexy', but a good example of provocative and stumbling sex art.

## December 28, 2001. AMSTERDAM.

After going through the performance archives of Zoot and Genant, I meet with Geert Lovink, a writer and media theorist who also used to be a member of Artporn. We meet in an old café to have coffee and apple pie with whipped cream.



Geert Lovink



De Waag, Nieuwmarkt, Amsterdam



After coffee, we visit *De Waag*, and old city fortress from 1488, which was once a weighing company for food, and for the Dutch witches. *De Waag* later became Europe's first public anatomical theater where surgeons demonstrated dissections of the body, as documented by Rembrandt in his famous painting *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Tulip* (1632). In 1812 *De Waag* became a site for capital punishment of criminals, then later a women's prison. Currently, it houses a café, restaurant, and the well-known media arts organization, Society for Old and New Media. After *De Waag*, we take a walk into the red light district, and visit an old pharmacy, then the little shops with hash and marijuana, colorful pipes, mushrooms, herbs for male and female sex drives.



Heritage style dildos



Liquid 69 for Him/for Her

Lovink shows me the old house where he used to live as a squatter and gives me a bunch of books that he wrote with the collective *Bilwet* ("Adilkno" in English). Adilkno stands for the 'Foundation for the Advancement of Illegal Knowledge', founded in 1983 as a collective of five artists/authors. One of their most influential books was entitled (*Cracking the Movement. Squatting Beyond the Media*). The Dutch word 'bewegingsleer' has a double meaning and can be translated as 'teachings on how to move' or 'teachings on how to be part of a movement.' One can move, and be part of a movement, by being an autonomous media producer and operating 'outside' or 'beyond' the media. In a foreword to *Bewegingsleer: Kraken aan Gene Zijde van de Media*, Patrick Van Ijzendoorn explains that the squatters were autonomous media makers. They used homemade media to record and broadcast events, and to create a liminal reality, something different from actual events, and also different from the



De Walletjes



commercial media. They understood that the distinction between 'private' space and televised 'public' space was disappearing in their intensely mediated society, so they tried to occupy the doorway between realities. Interestingly enough, they also believed that this strategy would come with identity metamorphosis, a unique process through which individuals or collectives undergo renovation. However, since the mass media always tried to record the squatters for their own purposes, the movements underwent a crisis. Van Ijzendoorn states that it was important for the movement to disappear in time. For example, when the squatters of *HP Kade* decided to abandon a formerly-occupied building, they incited the attention of police and TV journalists. When the media arrived, all they found was an empty space.

This emptied out space to them was not a dead space, but a space of metamorphosis. As Bilwet defines metamorphosis: "A metamorphosis is possible when one enters an empty space at exactly the right moment, in order to appear as someone else somewhere, not knowing what it will be."<sup>5</sup> The notion of metamorphosis was also inspired by Hakim Bey, more specifically, his idea that temporary gatherings in selected spaces (Temporary Autonomous Zones) could lead to identity renovation. Bey equally believed that media saturation had created a crisis, and emphasized an urgent need for face-to-face communication. In an interview with Geert Lovink, entitled 'Breast-to-Breast Anarchy' (1992), Bey explained that renovation starts with materialities of bodies sharing ideas in particular spaces. Bey predicted that such 'breast-to-breast gatherings' could cause a cultural upheaval and cleansing in media-saturated societies: "I have a feeling that the average American will look at the sky one day and call out 'Fuck This Shit!' and an entire wave will go over the USA and will return carrying positive, utopian elements in the middle of it. It is about a powerful physical voice, a smell, a touch. This is how the message is carried across."<sup>6</sup>

But even if don't you share Bey's optimism about 'touch', or about the future of the USA, you will start to understand the ideas of Bilwet and how they influenced the work of Zoot and Genant. Zoot and Genant explored the ideas by using the performance body as autonomous medium. By staging and recording exuberant sexual bodies, they made the audience more aware of their own sexual agency and power, including moments of exhibitionism and voyeurism. In June 1996, on the occasion of launching the Artporn web-site, Bilwet wrote a pamphlet to formulate the new sex era: "It is no longer about liberating sexuality or materializing perverse forces, but about circulating sexuality. (...) Sex does

<sup>5</sup> Bilwet, *Bewegingsleer: Kraken aan Gene Zijde van de Media* (Amsterdam, Ravijn, 1990), p.13. My own translation. The book was also translated as *Cracking the Movement. Squatting Beyond the Media* (New York, Autonomedia, 1993) Translation Laura Martz. Online copy available at: <http://www.thing.Desk.nl/bilwet/Cracking/contents.html>

<sup>6</sup> Geert Lovink, Interview met Hakim Bey 'Breast-to-Breast Anarchy' Online text. <http://www.thing.desk.nl/bilwet/TXT/BEY.INT.txt>. (accessed 11 november, 2002)

not need to be repressed or liberated, but circulated."<sup>7</sup> Bilwet links their proposal to 'circulate' sexuality to a hallucinatory searching for new spaces. Eros becomes the impulse, the game, the child-like curiosity and impulse to break into the sealed doors of empty spaces. For Zoot and Genant, one of the empty spaces is the clean body of the spectator. In most conventional forms of theater, the body of the spectator is approached as a neutral space, with a passive or timid demeanor. But these performers gaze back at spectators' bodies and make them aware of their own sexual livelihood.

## July 15, 2002. AMSTERDAM.

A year goes by, Zoot and Genant contact me to let me know that they are doing a new performance piece, *Fucking Retreat: 8x8x72*. This time there will be no live audience, as the sex performance will take place in a gallery and be broadcast on the Internet. They are holding an eight-day 'sex retreat' in the gallery *De Praktijk*, using autonomous media (computers, web-cameras and video streaming software) to broadcast their daily sexual intercourse on a web site. The performance is a remake of an old Taoist sex ritual, in which two partners have sex a specific number of times every day, for a specific number of days, with a specific number of thrusts on each particular occasion. In Taoist sex manuals, such as *The Sexual Teachings of the Jade Dragon*, written by Hsi Lai, it is commonly believed that a number of games and techniques can be used to restore the sexual energy between partners, harmonizing the 'yin' and 'yang', or complementary energy-bodies of 'water' and 'fire', of a healthy sexual pair. It is often recommended in the Taoist tradition that partners accumulate sexual energy through meditation, through voyeuristic games, and through the withholding of climax/ejaculation. In *Fucking Retreat: 8x8x7*, Zoot and Genant also tried to withhold orgasm during their eight-day fucking retreat. In their case, they had sex eight times a day, for eight days in a row, with seventy-two thrusts on each occasion. You may think that seventy-two thrusts is a lot of fucking, but try it yourself and you will see that it is only a short fuck. And then when you get to seventy-two, it is important to keep the orgasmic snake inside your body, rather than let it come out.

My interview with Zoot and Genant takes place right after the performance has finished. They have left the gallery *De Praktijk*, they have gone home and spent a couple of days making total love to each other. But do you really believe that they did not have an orgasm during their fucking retreat? They were locked inside a gallery and had sex eight times a day...

<sup>7</sup> Bilwet, *Prolegomena to the Bilwet Sexbook*, Unpublished Text, 1996.



## Interview: Zoot and Genant, Amsterdam, July 15, 2002.

'Lots of nice reactions resonated in the city. I believe that people started experimenting...'

**Libidot:** Did you intend to have a monogamous 'fuck-fest' and distribute it as 'free porn' on the Internet? Why did you decide to publicize and make art out of your sexual intercourse?

**Genant:** 8x8x72 was an abstraction-exercise in making love within our relationship. We did not intend to make pornographic images. For many years we have separated the realm of excitement from that of pornography. We wanted people to participate in the experiment.

**Libidot:** How did people participate in this Internet performance? I presume the Internet gives the audience a chance to send you some feedback on your performance?

**Zoot:** Lots of nice reactions resonated in the city. I believe that people started experimenting. I heard from the 'real' men that they found it hard to believe that we fucked 64 times in eight days. "Wat does he think, Zoot?" Of course I can fuck 20 times a day, but I don't understand why people look for quantity, piles of images, rather than for quality?

From reactions in the chatroom and in our mailboxes, we could tell people were startled about the contents of the experiment and curious about the rules of the game. They started to count during their own fucking retreats and tried not to ejaculate, tried to imagine a heightened state of sexual excitement of the body by means of a simple method. CD's of the project were ordered on a daily basis. It was a success because it spoke to people's imagination. People were imagining their own version and that was the ultimate aspiration.

**Libidot:** Would it be possible for your performance to be perceived as just being part of the expanding webcam porn industry? As Bianca Stigter's review in *NRC Handelsblad* indicates: "Their webcam is in tune with all the other webcams on the Internet that give access to life here and there, everywhere. In a zoo in Singapore a monkey is eating an apple. Tourists in Times Square are crossing the road. In the Lauriergracht in Amsterdam, two people are fucking."<sup>8</sup>

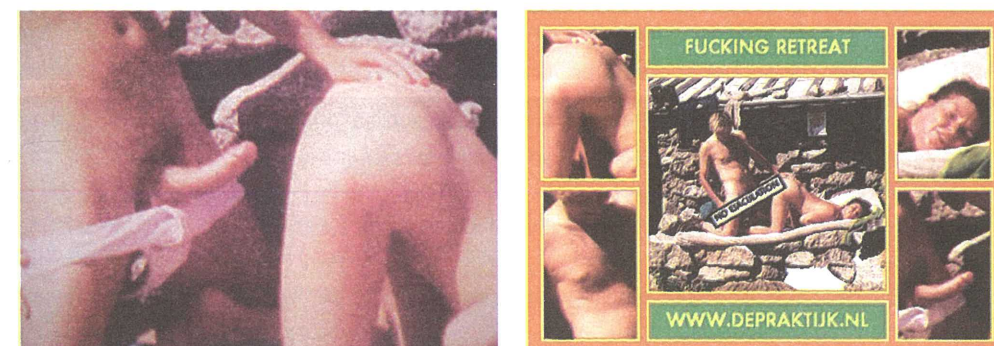
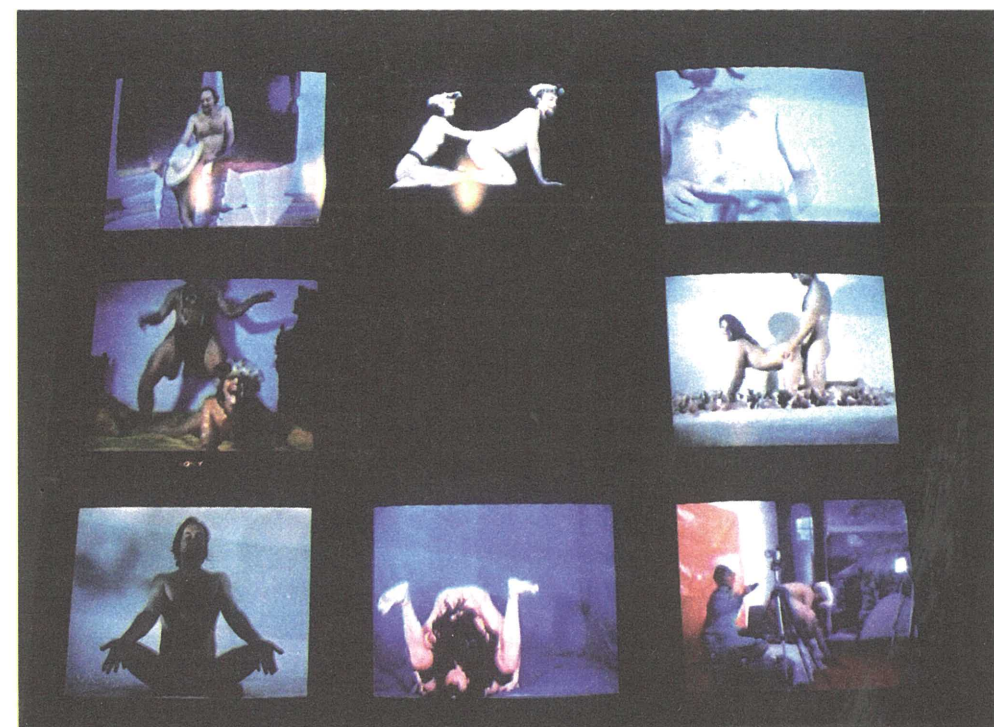
**Genant:** Again, we do not want to add anything to the porn industry. To be honest, it was an art experiment, a physical performance on the topic of love, physical love that is. Maybe you can rather compare it to a Tour de France or American football game. Of course we got a big kick when we found out through the statistics that we were visited by forty-eight different countries, with Easter Island being number seven. That was a heartwarming discovery. We looked in the archives to see what kinds of movies the people there on Easter Island were watching, and it was the one where we were wearing their feather crowns.

They probably found it embarrassing to see us like that. We had never fucked publicly and have never watched others fuck publicly. But fucking is a natural activity, also on Easter Island where they also like doing it outdoors (30 years ago they did not have houses yet). So, just the idea that on Easter

<sup>8</sup> Bianca Stigter, "Een Hobby als Vissen," *NRC Handelsblad*, 5 July 2002. My own translation.

Island, on the other side of the globe, in Rapa Nui, in winter time, they are watching a performance in an Amsterdam gallery (without ejaculation), and chatting with somebody from Japan about the difference between the performance they imagined and the actual happening. That was a big 'opening' for us.

**Zoot:** The performance was also a game of perspective. We wanted to target the subconscious pornographic image in the back of your mind. As 'sex architects' we materialize abstractions and blow them apart. All consciousness is *a priori* oriented towards things outside the body. Your eye



Zoot en Genant, 8X8X72 Fucking Retreat, Performance/Installation, 2002



attaches itself to an object and your body consequently moves in that direction. Zoom! It was about the transformation of this inner orientation, from the track of pornographic 'in-z00m-sex', towards the unknown fields somewhere 'off-the-road'. The act of watching sex on a machine influences the position of the body, and vice versa. If you sit in front of machine, that position will influence the manner in which you watch us. You sit, as it were, locked into your machine, and this position influences your performance.

**Libidot:** You did a similar Taoist action when you visited Tokyo in 1996?

**Genant:** We just did it wherever we were when we were 'due', at gallery openings, on toilets, in large sewage lines on construction sites, or on the automatically steered mono-rail. Behind the fishmarket. In the bathtub at our host's place. It seemed as if the city sexualized through us. Seagulls were circling above our heads. Horses were getting erect. Managers were waiting for us outside the bathroom door. Excitement levels arose with this action. We were introduced to a museum director. We were offered dinner and got commissions, as if magnetically. We have always wanted to tell our friends about this experience and so we took the occasion of gallery *De Praktijk* to tell this story to the global viewers. But the action *8x8x72* was less nomadic, confined to the gallery space and delivered to an Internet audience.

**Libidot:** Why did you decide to perform this action for an Internet audience, rather than a live audience?

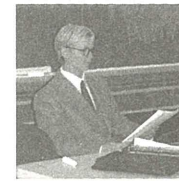
**Genant:** A technological disposition towards 'live' events has become essential after 9/11. There is big fear momentarily about using autonomous media, to be voluntarily live in front of a camera.

**Libidot:** So how did the Taoist ritual affect your sex life?

**Genant:** It was about making a commitment to a partner, and cutting right through random animal attractions and irritations. Artificial seduction rituals fell apart after a couple of days. There was no extended foreplay or afterplay either, just an abstention of climax. The body recharges energy and goes back to remembering moments of enjoyment, each time a little bit more quickly. You get an incredible energy charge from top to toe, and by the time you want to surrender and come completely, your bodily cells are exposed to their routine patterns. Not coming then is like a coitus interruptus, a spectacular thing to feel from a partner whom you love. You look at each other because you had forgotten why you were not supposed to come.

For me, the numbers 8 and 64 are magical. I felt the symbolism of an alchemical wedding as we tuned into the mantra of a fully controlled network. It felt like deafening energy, not like lust, nor procreation. We awoke these forces, the kundalini snake, in our very own way. The effect of the action was very rewarding. Afterwards, we lingered in creative energy for a week. When we arrived at home we were free to do whatever and let the holy juices flow, and love was a blessing. We made love day after day and gave energy to each other, as if we were in love for the first time. Sweet monogamic love, we embraced her and worshipped her.

## Dr. Jacobs 9:10am 7/16/2002 Fucking Eight Times a Day



Libidot,

I am reading your diaries again as I have a moment to sit at my desk and think about them. I am 'fucking' frustrated trying to follow your ideas because they are all over the place. I would like to sit down with you and go through some of this information that you have been posting on the web. I guess I just don't get it about those Dutch sex art people. Fucking eight times a day, thinking their fellow sisters and brothers will equally copulate to their mantra, and harmonize the essential forces of 'yin' and 'yang'?

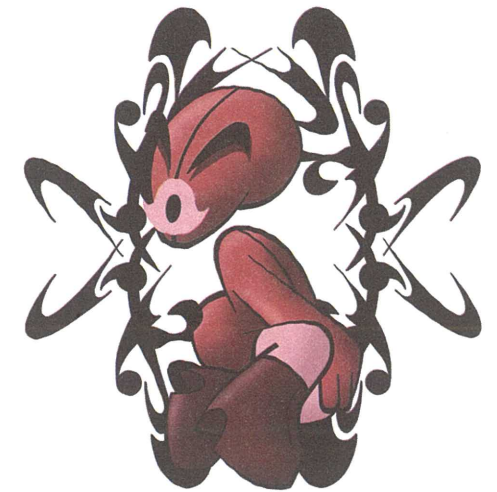
Libidot, these ideas from Zoot and Genant are very 'Dutch', almost biblically so? Or perhaps they are an example of Amsterdam libertarian new age thought? And by the way, may I warn you about using these ideas by Hakim Bey as they are totally naïve and outdated! Walter Benjamin already showed us that we have lost 'breast-to-breast' as a form of communication: "It is as if something that seemed inalienable to us, the securest among our possessions, were taken from us: the ability to exchange experience (...) One reason for this phenomenon is obvious: experience has fallen in value. And it looks as if it is continuing to fall into bottomlessness." (*Illuminations*, p.83) Moreover, in *One Way Street*, he explains further that one can no longer rely on a body to transfer knowledge in the field of art. He suggests instead that we use the 'memory-body', a body tied to abstract information signals that affect the nervous system. The memory-body is a wanderer into fluctuating abstract data and even invisible terrains, reinventing the 'lost' and 'missing' bodies and unfolding futures. The memory-body archives all the good and bad flesh experiences while connecting with new spaces and times. Wake up, you little girl!

You wander through the coiling streets of pleasure districts. I sit on a cushioned chair in my small office. I stare at my walls while rain is falling down the streets. I go online and read your diaries and write you responses and give you feedback. Aren't these signals part of the millions of thousands of 'bodily' impulses that you receive on your journey? You want, as a 'sexual being' to be in touch with this sex art species; their smells, their eyes, their hands. You feel 'messages' in the radiant movements of their bodies. Your final dream is a bodily encounter with their hands. You move to taste from their fingers, but why is it that their fingers would taste better than mine? You are lost little girl, living and sleeping with this naked body of our civilization. Grinding, spitting out odorous nails as if they were caviar.

But I don't want a taste of your caviar. So, will you please exercise your brain more forcefully, when you interview these artists and go 'breast-to-breast' with them?

Dr. Jacobs





## 2. Japan:

<http://softimage.penis.co.jp>

June 23, 2001. TOKYO.

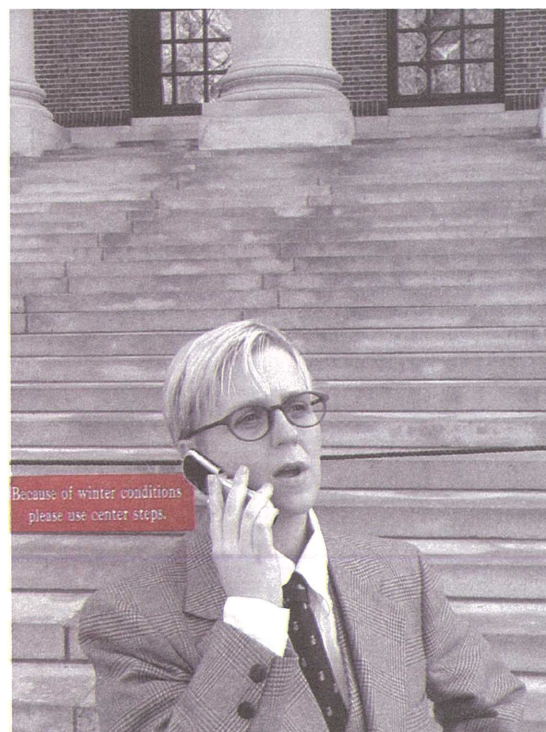
My dear ghostie, I can feel you are rocking my skirt again, but why did you take me with you to this city of the senses? What did you give me while rocking me to sleep: melatonin on the US Airways airplane?

Now, on my second journey into the bliss of sex art, I have arrived in the city of Tokyo. I had no other choice. I found a pile of money on my bank account wired by some distracted Australian retirement agency. I walked into the adjacent travel bureau in Chinatown and bought my discount ticket to Tokyo. Upon arrival, I found a magnificent and affordable place to stay, right in the center of the upper-middle class neighborhood of *Roppongi*: The International House of Japan, complete with an ornamental Japanese garden, a library with free Internet access, free breakfast and Japanese hospitality from a bygone era.

Here I am sipping from my beer in the hotel restaurant, tipsy and calm, brainstorming my immediate goal, research into the guts of sex art. *But why Tokyo, Libidot?* Suffering from nervous depression after breaking up with a



The International House of Japan, Roppongi, Tokyo





Japanese boyfriend, a punkrock emperor who dumped me during an extended visit by his mother. It was very hot for us to play out Japanese eroticism during sex, attempts at ecstasy with one party pokerface and the other whimpering submissively. It was pretty hot stuff until the day his mother arrived. But I am ready to go to bed and enter my small bedroom across the hall from the public showers. I take a shower, put on the hotel kimono, masturbate on the usual scenes of anger, spanking and urination, and fall asleep.

### Dr. Jacobs 8:48 am 24/6/2001 Nothing behind the beguiling surface



Dear Libidot,

Yes, then maybe it is simply time for you to get over your boyfriend, your boyfriend's mother, and get on with your research? In my limited experience, turbulent love relationships can be very distracting to the scholarly-creative mind. And sometimes it is really not a bad idea to abjugate the desire for people and get immersed in thoughts, or books and movies. As I wrote you before, you could become more aware of your states of 'intoxication,' in the Benjaminian sense of the word(!), or view the bodies as abstract signals that invade your world, dreams, desires and nervous system. I repeat my point: There is no such thing as an 'non-intoxicated' 'physical' body.

Dr. Jacobs

### June 24, 2001. TOKYO.

I wake up in the International House of Japan and receive a fax from Aky Narita, a friend of Zoot and Genant's. She shows up sharply at 10 am, this perky petite with sharp eyes, muscular body, and boy-ish or dyke-like features. We click immediately and vow to have fun together, spending days checking out the dazzling city of the senses, having coffees and meals, and seeing art shows. I tell her about my ex-boyfriend and ask her why Japanese men always want to ejaculate on your face. She tells me that it has been the exact same thing with her boyfriends.

But Aky is really a night person. She shines and looks more happy and talkative after midnight. We visit her favorite noodle-house, where she starts joking around with the chef and waiters. Free meals and beer arrive on our table. Everybody is laughing heartily. Aky introduces me as the guest of honor, the researcher of sex and pornography. More laughter while free dishes are served on our table. Later that night, we go to the International House of Japan and look at photographs of her bondage performances. She started out

doing bondage performances as a young college student, together with her boyfriend and roommate, Mira Kurumi. *Look – don't you think they look pretty cute, these two young college students playing with latex and ropes?* She became a more professional bondage performer later in life, trained by the very famous bondage master, Denki Akechi. As she tells me, these bondage sessions changed her identity completely, making her feel 'feminine', whereas she always thought of herself as more 'masculine'. And it is true, in the landscape of Tokyo hyper-femininity and highly polished body types, Aky sticks out as the 'boy' or 'tomboy'.

I try to interview her but we don't have a common language for this conversation. We talk to each other in zulu English and try to understand each other's ideas as much as possible. It is almost impossible. The conversation stumbles along until it is very late. She emphasizes the collaborative aspect of bondage performances – bondage 'master/mistress' and 'apprentice' work together to find shapes and forms that force the body to surrender. It is good to use a mirror in this process so that both parties can closely look at the body.

### June 25, 2001. TOKYO.

Today Aky brings along a friend of hers, Yuji Kitano, a self-avowed *alternative* porn director with connections to the Tokyo porn industry. Yuji and Aky take me to a massive adult videotape outlet in *Kabukicho*, owned by one of Yuji's friends. We wander around endless rows of videos, and I look at the covers – images of pregnant women, huge women with lactating breasts, overweight women, underage girls in white underpants, girls peeing on polished white toilet bowls. Yuji then points to a 'porn' video that he made himself, featuring Zoot and Genant from Amsterdam.



Aky Narita and Mira Kumuri in bondage



Aky Narita and the famous bondage master, Denki Akechi





Aky Narita and Yuji Kitano having 'eel' lunch in Kabuchiko



Zoot and Genant, Cover of Japanese production of Pissy Pyramid performance

Ah!— the infamous 'porn' video with the footage of their performance, 'Pissy Pyramid'. In this performance, the performers would drink 3 liters of water, then get together to build a pyramid structure of bodies to 'artfully' release their urine together.

Yuji takes us out for lunch of cooked eel on rice, and then onto a striptease club. Feeling out of place as the only females in the audience, Aky and I hide in the empty back rows of the theater. The rest of the audience members are Japanese business men on their lunch break. They look at the beautiful girls taking off their clothes on a slowly rotating stage, ultimately showing their pussies. I can see the men's heads tilting left and right depending on the exact position of the legs, their eyes following along with the dancing pussies.

In the second half of the program, the girls act out ghost scenes. One of them shrieks and shakes her arms as she is attacked by a monster, who opens her legs softly and cries for help. Is her pussy, too, visited by a nasty ghostie? The master of ceremony rings the bell at the end of her performance. We leave as the next round of girls approach the stage.

I ask Aky why the Japanese men are so polite and well-behaved in these strip clubs. They don't put their hands in their pants. They are very quiet and don't groan at all. Aren't they having a hard time controlling their erections? I guess Japanese men are shy and don't want to talk to each other during these strip performances. Like *hey did you see those slimy lips in front of your eyes?* Aky tells me that these pussies are fuel for their private memories. Going home later, they will feel the girls and pussies when they go to bed. Then they will masturbate and ejaculate. Is this an example of the image-intoxication that Dr. Jacobs keeps talking about?

#### Dr. Jacobs 8:28am 25/6/2001 RE: The Memory-Body



Libidot,

Just think a little bit harder. How do these masturbating men awaken their memories of dancing flowers? In the olden days, people would evoke the memory of the dancing flowers through their private memories, or through collective memories recorded and mythologized in 'tales'. Modern citizens, on the other hand, are different, driven by a desire to fuse their memories of the flesh experiences with new phenomena and signals, culling from many sources such as pornography, advertising, movies, perhaps even, but to a minor degree, the phenomena of 'sex art'. Rather than relying on totally private memories or collective mythic memories, they select fragments of experiences to fuse or collage together a flexible and malleable memory-body, as this body is the raw material and glue for our physical desires and world-views. It is not even entirely thinkable that one of these Japanese business men would pull out his digital camera later that night and ask his wife to show her 'dancing' flower to him. So what, then, is he watching when he stares at her flower?

I hope that this idea is becoming a little bit more clear now.

Dr. Jacobs





Erotic Comic Strip,  
*Naked Earth*, Monster  
Assault on Female

## June 26, 2001. KYOTO.

Today is my birthday. I visit Kyoto upon the advice of Francesca da Rimini, an Australian 'cyberfeminist' artist who mixes radical political ideas with erotic role-playing correspondences (but uses the word 'gash' instead of 'flower'). When I told her of my plan to escape from the office, she sent me a poem. This poem shook me out of a state of doubt and lethargy, moved my little wandering **cunt** – her words like milk and cocaine for my nervous system. Here is the poem:

Such are the voices of the body called flesh

Liquid nation says:

I'amor is a hard blade that cuts heaven open. Whoever is given the liquid path. May her posturing cease and may she shine

Come, dress yourself in love  
Let the journey begin  
Take soft slow steps

Through the whisperings of nurses, the barking of dogs

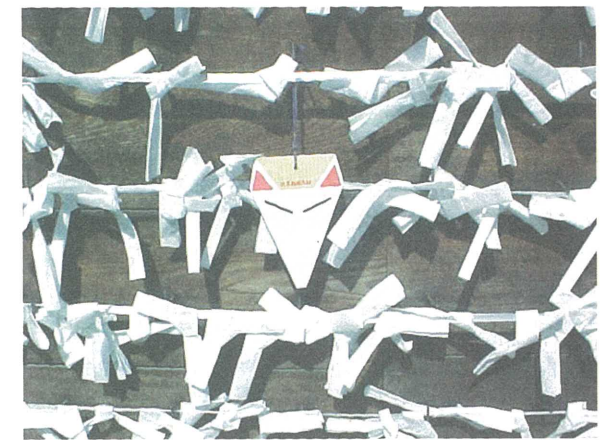
The places of nightdemons, improper words and bawdy gestures

At the seventh gate sits a virgin  
radiant as the moon, but don't go to him stay on the path till you arrive be speechless

I take the bullet train to Kyoto and enjoy the military salutes of Japanese train conductors. I locate the Shinto shrine, built in 1629, which reveals thousands of scattered statues of foxes. I start a long walk and climb the mountain, breathing fresh air and heavily moved by the sacred grounds.

The wooden message-boards hold hand-written fortunes that people receive from the gods, but they leave them behind if they are negative fortunes. (I wonder if the negative fortunes ever get cleaned up by the park guards). But how can they trust these words, which are written down as simplified statements on wooden sticks, lanterns, pieces of paper, or cloth?

Why did da Rimini send me to the fox-shrine? She was visiting a friend's house while recovering from one of her own very intense love affairs. She then found a lake where thousands of baby girls had been drowned at birth, as was the custom in Japanese and Chinese societies in past centuries. Da Rimini merged her suffering spirit with the dead girls in Kyoto and named herself 'doll yoko', a Japanese ghostie reappearing from the waters, from the mists.



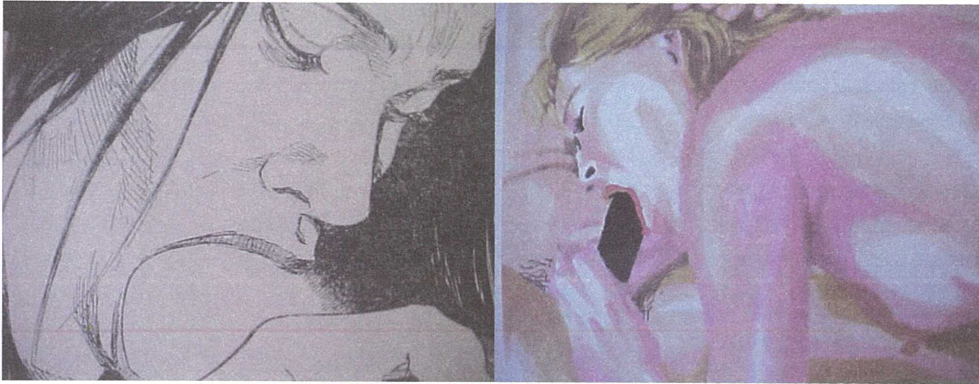
Fox-Shrine in Inari, Kyoto

## June 28, 2001. TOKYO.

Today I am meeting with nomad-artist Shu Lea Cheang, born in Taiwan, but at times living in Japan. In Tokyo, Cheang made a 'sci-fi porn' movie *I.K.U.*, which I saw for the first time at the Asian-American International Film Festival in New York City (July 2000).

'Iku' is the Japanese word uttered at the moment of orgasm, meaning 'I am coming!' though its literal translation would be 'I am going!'. In the movie, porn stars demonstrate a wide range of 'Japanese' sex practices, from *Shinjuku* sex shows to traditional bondage. The movie also portrays a fantasy universe of sex seekers, as people move around and insert computer-chips into the body to wake up desires and memories. Desire 'overcomes' people when they insert the chips, and they are guided by 'coders' who move between places and people. The coders come and go between all these encounters, speeding up and multiplying their own sex acts.





Phallic-shaped filters used to cover genitalia in Japanese pornographic or erotic cartoons.

Cheang's coders rely not only upon human memory, but also use sophisticated technologies to construct and/or erase memories. Unlike the human memory of sexual acts and relationships, which often lead to obsessive desire, possessiveness and/or suffering, *I.K.U.*'s sex seekers have gained the freedom to use media and build a new pleasure principle of intoxication.

In developing fantasy sci-fi sexuality, *I.K.U.* also recalls the aesthetics of Japanese animated video porn (*hentai*) or cartoon magazines (*anime*). One of the most compelling animation scenes in *I.K.U.* involves the apparition of a 'digital penis' in the penetration scenes. Traditionally, the penetration scene in much mainstream Japanese porn is censored, yet this imposed limit has often encouraged filmmakers to establish a new code for porn by substituting the moment of censorship with a fetishized mosaic edited onto the genitalia. In *I.K.U.*, Cheang plays with painterly 3D digital effects to reconstruct the penis and the act of penetration.

### Interview: Shu Lea Cheang, Tokyo, June 28, 2001.

'It is pretty much routine, as in Japan you cannot show genitalia. But I still cannot imagine where the '70' spots are that had to be covered up.'

**Libidot:** When did you first decide to go to Tokyo?

**Cheang:** I went there in 1994 because I had a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship in the visual arts for a six month residency in Japan. The person who introduced me to the gay scene and the drag queens here was Teji Furuhashi, the director of *Dumb Type*. *Dumb Type* is a performance group who do large-scale, technical, 'cyber' performances. The year I was there they made a piece called *S/N* which tackled the issue of AIDS. The director of that piece had AIDS himself and posi-

tioned himself that way, challenging a conservative Japanese society. This was stunning at its time, because Japan really was the society that never talked about AIDS.

In Japan you have a kind of so-called mainstream society, which is very conservative, what they call a 'salary men society'. Most males work as salary men and women work as office girls, or office ladies, called 'OL'. They are the main force of society. Within alternative society, there are artists and a mixture of gay and straight communities. These communities are much more mixed in Tokyo than in New York City where people go to 'girls clubs', 'boys clubs', or 'straight clubs'.

**Libidot:** When you shifted your workspace to Japan, did it become more exciting for you to explore underground communities?

**Cheang:** Generally in my travels, in almost every society I go, I manage to find the ten percent of people that I know I can belong to. In Japan I enjoyed connecting with the queer scenes. At the same time, I was working on art projects that were very 'official', like the installation pieces for NTT/ICC.

**Libidot:** Your movie, *I.K.U.*, suggests that technology will help us to prepare new kinds of sexual encounters and even 'chemistry' between people?

**Cheang:** There is, for instance, the Nokia Sex Tracer, a small gadget that you can wear in order to track the kind of people you would like to meet. If you are within an area (short-range) and you have the same interest, the tracer would beep and let you know that somebody is around who likes you. These different technologies use different types of languages. That is what makes cyberspace so exciting – it uses such coded systems. Coded languages always differ from one another. But I also believe that if you were to visit a material body physically, even if you were not wearing any gadget, such coded language would still exist. There would be certain things you do or don't do. This is the coded language that you need to learn in order to meet people. There is no such thing as free communication.

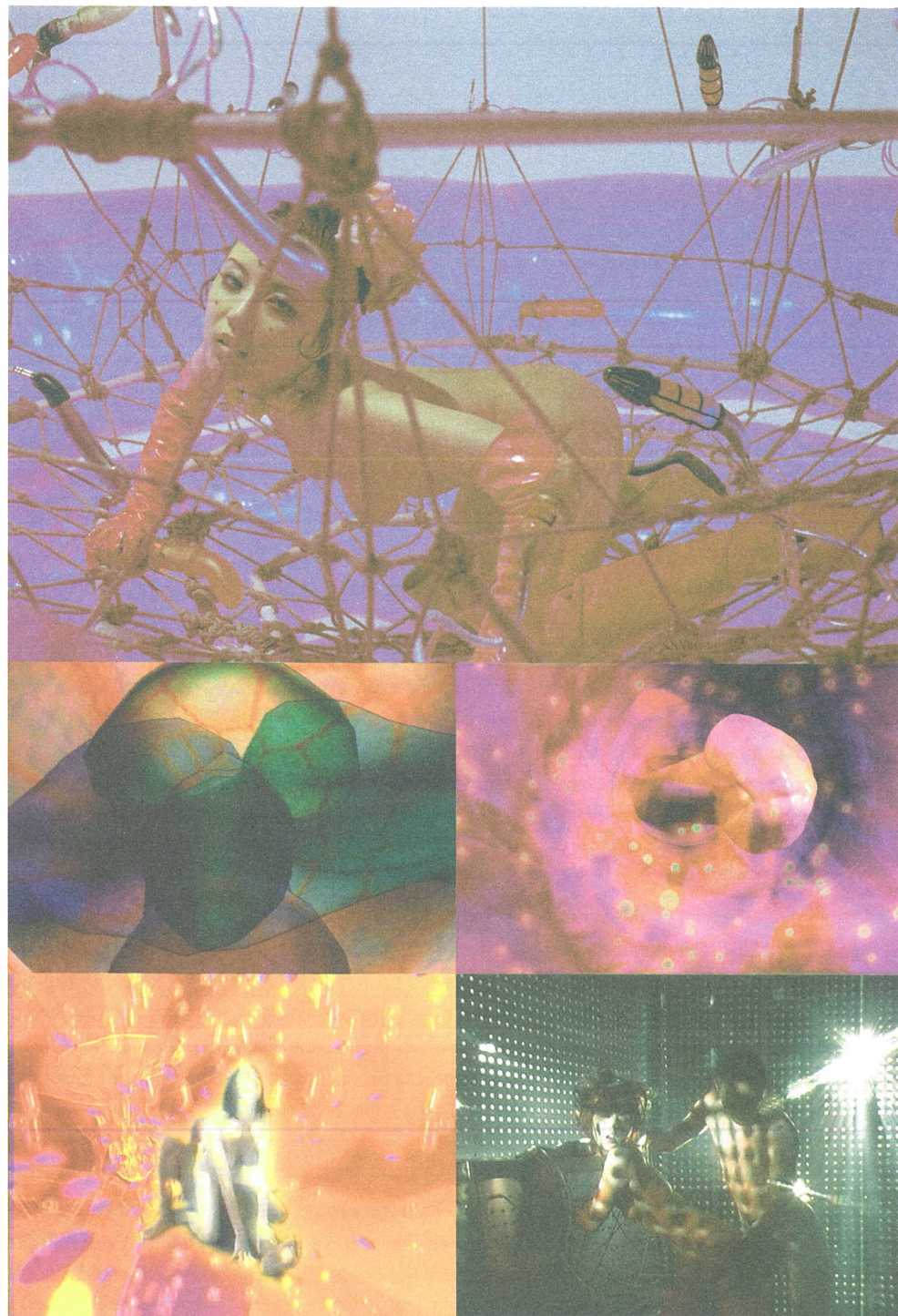
**Libidot:** Can you tell me something about the Japanese responses to *I.K.U.*?

**Cheang:** I did quite a lot of interviews and publicity for the release of *I.K.U.*, so we were in all kinds of magazines, like *Flash* magazine and mainstream magazines, sci-fi magazines, S&M magazines, etc. There was a lot of coverage when the film opened up in May 2001. It played for six weeks at a cinema called Cinema Palace in *Shibuya*. That is quite a popular commercial cinema. At the end of the month of July it will play in *Nakano*, which is another area that is also very populated with young people. When it was released here, in Japan, though, the producer had to go through the censorship board and it turned out that he had to ... scratch out 70 spots of genitalia.

**Libidot:** How do they do that?

**Cheang:** I think in the end they just did it directly onto the film print. At first I thought he said '17' spots, but no, it was '70' spots. I haven't even seen this copy yet and I don't want to see it. Right before the opening of the film he kept going back to the censorship board and they would request more and more coverings and so in the end, he said, it was '70' spots.





Shu Lea Cheang, stills from I.K.U, A Japanese Sci-fi Porn Adventure, 2001.

**Libidot** You had already worked with a gigantic 'psychedelic' mosaic in *I.K.U.* to cover up the actual genitals. Do you think they were scrutinizing the film, or was it just a Japanese routine?

**Cheang:** I guess that my mosaic was still not enough. It is pretty much routine, as in Japan you cannot show genitalia. But I still cannot imagine where the '70' spots are that had to be covered up.



**Libidot:** The Japanese sex industry seems very developed but not very open to women. Did you try to make the film more open for female audiences?

**Cheang:** Well, I shot a lot of genitals, and particularly a lot of women's exposure, women's 'pussies'. And I shot them at angles that force you to look at them. For me, that is almost like trying to reclaim the body, and the body parts of women. But, of course, here in Tokyo it's all 'mosaic'. All these positions would get a mosaic, so it really misses the whole point of the female body. So for example, I gave a lecture in a school and I just showed some sequences without a mosaic, because I really wanted to ask them about how they felt about that. The students said that it was very different to look at it without the mosaic. It really is difficult at the same time, here, as sex is so much for male consumption. So, for me it is like being able to reclaim the body parts, and that is very important.

**Libidot:** Are you making some sort of 'cyber-feminist' statement with this movie? As you have stated: "The pussy is the matrix" ... what does that mean?

**Cheang:** Well, particularly because I think that pussies have been exposed so much that we can almost not claim them anymore. I just wanted to reexamine them and reclaim them. But the film got attacked by feminists in France. They said that I was showing the female genitals, but I wasn't showing male genitals. And they also felt that there were too many penis 'symbols' in the film. It was very interesting for me to see females take on the film like that, particularly a lot of hard core French feminists. Somebody said that it looks like the film is supporting patriarchy. If anything, I think the film is actually trying to deconstruct 'the big dick'. That, for me, is actually the theme, trying to deconstruct 'the big dick', while claiming the pussy to be the center of the matrix.

## June 29, 2001. TOKYO.

Today I am out again with Aky, who takes me to a gallery where a group of Tokyo celebrities are parading 'junkfood' suits (designed by Annette Meyer) for the exhibit *Bodywrap* at the Spiral Gallery. I later upload some pictures of the celebrities on my website, and get an immediate response from my ex-boyfriend, who tells me he wants a junkfood suit like that. He even asks me to bring one back for him.

But I have to go now. To Amsterdam. To Tokyo. I have become a horny wanderer, Dr. Jacobs! No time for my 'ex'. I place myself on a mattress in the guest room, a chair in the kitchen, a couch in the living room, a sofa in the office. I am a dreamer and stumbler; but still, they give me a cup of coffee. I fumble along until I can find an entrance, an entrance into them. I suffer when I cannot find their entrance. I am always searching for people, browsing the streets, writing down my notes. There is no rest.

I am also processing the information I received from Shu Lea Cheang. As usual, I take the information a bit too seriously, and I wonder if I could use the *I.K.U.* techniques to alter

my own memories, specifically the sad or pathetic ones. I also wonder how coders and computer chips can help people access fresh memories, or uncover the ones that are hidden in public culture?

Cheang then recommends a visit to Minori Kitahara, a Japanese sex activist and entrepreneur who owns *the Love Piece Club*, a sex shop specifically for women. Kitahara invites me over for a visit. She runs the sex shop from her apartment in the chic neighborhood of *Chiodaku*. The store is tiny, yet packed with neatly-arranged selections of dildos, as only the Japanese could do it. Kitahara also designed her own vibrator, *Swan*. *Swan* looks like a little animal that wiggles on the body. You cannot just 'stick it in a cavity'. As you can see from the instructions, it can be used for soft pinches on nipples and testicles, or for firmer tugs and bites on fingers and toes.

Next door to the store is Kitahara's office space. When I enter the office space, I feel a glow streaming through my body, as if my ghostie wants to tell me something. Kitahara, a pretty Japanese girl-artist with enormous ambitions, places herself on the chair for an interview. While I ask my questions, I hear chattering from behind the computer. The buzz comes from the mob of women who have visited her website to hang out and buy products. It is a safe place for Japanese women, both lesbians and straight, to check out toys and access activist information. I have noticed that most Japanese women do not show or express sexual energy in public spaces. Even though there is a Japanese market of pornographic literature and movies geared towards women, it is only men who can publicly show their erotic or sexual attachments. Tokyo is home to a massive commercial porn industry, which mostly makes products for male consumers; hence, it is difficult for women to comfortably enter these industries as entrepreneurs or clients.



Tokyo Celebrities in junk food suits for Annette Meyer art exhibit.



Minori Kitahara, Swan Vibrator



## Interview: Minori Kitahara, Tokyo, June 30, 2001.

'The G-spot makes a lot of women feel nervous, so they come to me and say: "I cannot find the G-spot. I cannot find the G-spot!"'

**Libidot:** Can you explain the image that you made of your Japanese prime minister?

**Kitahara:** The image has the face of our prime minister *Junichiro Koizumi*, who is very popular at the moment, and who had 90% of the country's support when he became a prime minister in 2001. I made this image as a critique of our prime minister who is now arming the country. As you know, our constitution says that we cannot go into war with any other countries. After the event of '9/11', however, Koizumi argued that the country was not safe anymore.

**Libidot:** So you are a political activist writing about sexuality and censorship?

**Kitahara:** I am writing a book about censorship and pornography in Japan, and I am interested in cultural perspectives on obscenity laws. Nobody knows exactly what an 'obscenity' is in Japan, as the government judges 'obscenities' on a case-to-case basis. We have to get a special license to open a sex shop or to produce porn videos, and depictions of the penis and the vagina are considered to be 'obscene'.

**Libidot:** Do you believe that Japanese porn should be able to portray genitals?

**Kitahara:** I think that women should get more involved in a social culture where they enjoy watching porn. I would also like to eliminate the prejudices people have against pornography and the sex industry. But it is difficult to be a political activist in Japan. Before going to the USA I participated in actions for *Women in Black*, a collective of women for peace who wear black clothes, stand still in certain public spaces, and keep their mouths closed. We recently performed in front of the Israeli embassy in Tokyo. There were only ten women there, but about fifty men surrounded us, and some of them were undercover policemen. And I am sure that these policemen were also reading our emails, because they seemed to know everything about the next actions that we were organizing on the net. And that is scary to me, as we know that they can follow our tracks so easily. There is nothing we can do about that. We now have a new law in Japan that allows the police to read our email correspondences if they feel that there could be dangerous activities going on. But I am not scared that something will happen to me, because I have many activist friends to connect with.

**Libidot:** How did you become engaged in sex activism and the sex industry?

**Kitahara:** That came very naturally to me. After I opened my sex shop *Love Piece Club*, I realized that a lot of people responded to my work, so I started to expand. I believe that some people might discover areas of pleasure because of their bodies and masturbation practices, but even more people actually ignore these feelings and the fantasies. I think that it is hard for women specifically to feel close to their bodies, but I can only really talk about the situation in Japan. I think that the mass media in Japan, such as the television and movie industries, are reinforcing the idea that men are very dif-

ferent from women. The main idea is no longer that women have to be submissive to men but that women are 'too' different from men.

**Libidot:** Do you know where this image of male aggression and female victimization comes from? I suppose that in reality there is more equal play between men and women, also in the sense that women attack men too?

**Kitahara:** The media insists on this dichotomy by showing submissive women as role models. So many people are influenced by television these days, and we only really get to see one type of woman. In Japan this lack of female strength is also present at the college level. At the most important art college, Tokyo Art University, there were no women teachers until a few years ago. It seems that nowadays, still more men than women are passing the examinations to become teachers. I believe that we have to get equal numbers in all these industries. For instance, if there were more women involved in running the sex industry, then there could be a change in the sex culture.

**Libidot:** Can you say something about your own position as a woman within the Japanese sex industry?

**Kitahara:** There was a man who asked me to start doing business with him a few years ago, and right now I am the only woman with a female consumers market. There are other women who run stores for male markets, but I am the only woman who has a very big female market. On my website, I have 150,000 hits a day. A lot of women just want to look at my essays or look at the catalogue, as opposed to buying products, but still *Love Piece Club* has the largest female market in Japan. That female market has never been visible, and now men, too, are getting interested in this market. I am a businesswoman as well, but I am really interested in reaching out to women.

I am not so much interested in reaching men because they use my products more for massage purposes, as opposed to masturbation. I am really interested in women's masturbation. I think that vibration is a very good way for women to masturbate and therefore I want to reach out to as many women as possible through my vibrators.

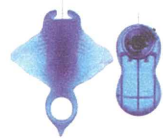
**Libidot:** What about the vibrator, *Swan*, that you designed yourself? This vibrator does not really fit into the vagina, does it?

**Kitahara:** It is designed for sex partners to stimulate each other's erotic sensations. It looks more like an animal-like object with small fingers rather than a penis. There is a funny story behind that vibrator, because when I brought the design to the



Minori Kitahara, political cartoon with G.W. Bush and Junichiro Koizumi





Vibrators sold at  
Love Piece Club

manufacturer, I wanted to make it look like a crab. The manufacturer, however, decided to use a Japanese 'animal face' on the claws of the crab to circumvent obscenity laws, which is a common practice in Japan. My design had no animal face. Mostly sex toys cannot suggest the shape of the penis and that is why manufacturers work with animal faces, just in case the police might turn up in the shop. In that case, the shop owner can say: "Look – this is not a penis, this is more like a doll."

**Libidot:** I keep wondering why vibrators still need to rely on the simulated penis shapes? Do women want to feel something as close as possible to the penis? Vibrators have been changing a lot, like the soft silicone vibrators that are used now instead of the ones made of hard, plastic materials. Are these softer silicone toys used to simulate the 'skin' sensation of the penis?

**Kitahara:** For some women it might be like that, but for me the quality of vibration is more important than the actual materials of the vibrators. A lot of the materials used in vibrators can be bad for the body, including the ones made of silicon materials. A lot of these materials are banned for use in children's toys because they are harmful to the body and the environment. I think that this is a controversial issue in the same way silicon breast implants have been so controversial. It is not so important to my own masturbation practices, since I use a condom on my Japanese vibrators. But I have to care about materials for the customers; otherwise, I will get a bad reputation with my customers.

**Libidot:** Do you have a group of women test out the vibrators?

**Kitahara:** I just try them out myself.

**Libidot:** What are some of your favorite vibrators?

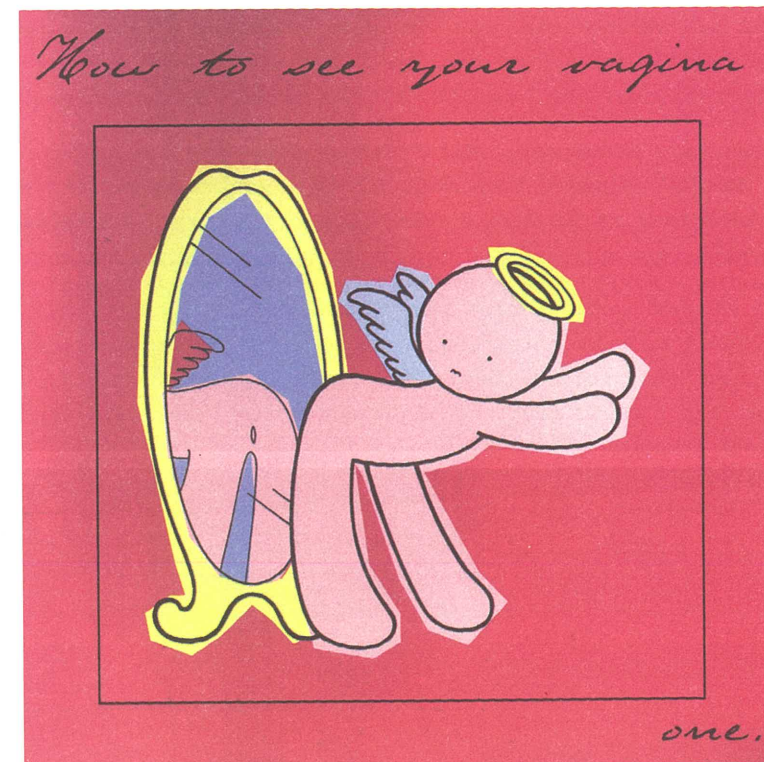
**Kitahara:** I have not found the perfect one yet. A lot of vibrators make too much noise, so that I cannot concentrate. Some of them wear out their batteries too easily when you use them.

**Libidot:** Are you interested in how vibrators can stimulate the G-spot?

**Kitahara:** That is not so important to me, as the G-spot makes a lot of women feel nervous, so they come to me and say: "I cannot find the G-spot. I cannot find the G-spot!" In pornography, there is a popular image of a man inserting a finger into the woman's vagina and finding the G-spot. But that is just a mythic image. However, I am very interested in the clitoris, as some women don't have much feeling in the clitoris. This is all amazingly unexplored information, and that is why I make and sell vibrators.



Minori Kitahara



Cartoon from *Vibe Girls Magazine*,  
published by Love  
Piece Club



## Dr. Jacobs 9:24am 6/30/2001 Born Again



Libidot,

So she is saying that some women don't have much feeling in their flowers and need instruments to fondle them, to look at them and investigate them more closely? But again, think for a second, what is it that can really stimulate the flesh experience? A vibrator? No, something for the flower's need for **intoxication!**

Anyway, today I had lunch with Mitch Hampton, a fellow academic at Northern University. He is a bit of a special character, always wearing an old-fashioned hat and three-piece suit. Mitch looked pale. He told me he had spent the first half of the night fooling around in bed with his ex-girlfriend, the second half trying to fall sleep after she left.

This topic was discussed after all the other ones, as his sex life is one of his least favorite topics. He always seems a little uncomfortable when we meet, and never finishes his food, either. On our way back to my apartment, after we had swapped business cards (his looked like it came straight out of the trash), he suddenly stopped in front of a blue metallic SUV with a bumper sticker that read *Equal Rights For Preborn Women*.

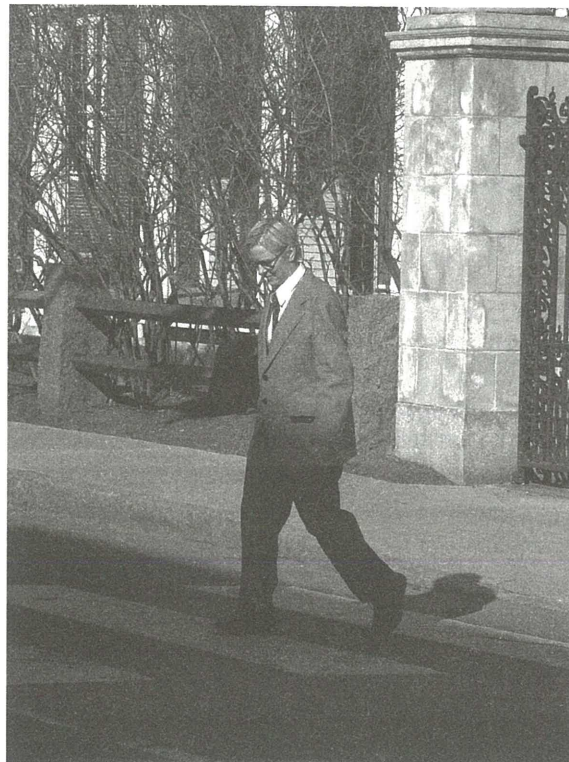
'The U.S. is very negative about sex,' Mitch said. 'Very, very negative.' He explained that the SUV belonged to a sect of 'anti-abortion Christian feminists'. Mitch said that if he were a baby girl to be born into these circles, he would rather get aborted and be dumped amongst medical trash.

With that, we both laughed and stumbled back home after a day out. And, of course, this incident made me think about you, your naive explorations of the sexual high. In some sense, these fundamentalist Christians produce the sexual low. But I would say: What is there so intrinsically fantastic about the flesh flower?

Dr. Jacobs

p.s. I think that your interviews are getting a little bit better!





### 3. Australia: The Ghosts Downunder



**July 6, 2001. PERTH.**

By now I think that Dr. Jacobs is beating around the bush with his critique of the idea of pure flesh, and besides, why can't he properly name the female genital? But anyway, I do still feel lonely, as I fly from Tokyo's Narita Airport to Australia, soon to land in Perth, capital city of Western Australia, located on the desolate west coast. I am restless on the plane and try to read the information brochure: "Welcome. In Western Australia there is sun, adventure, friendly people and an awesome natural environment. Dive with the world's largest fish – the whale shark, snorkel with manta rays, swim with wild dolphins, walk amongst ancient treetops, sleep under a canopy of stars in the desert, or explore the incredible outback landscapes. Meet real Australian characters, enjoy the relaxed life style and experience the friendly hospitality Western Australians are famous for ... "

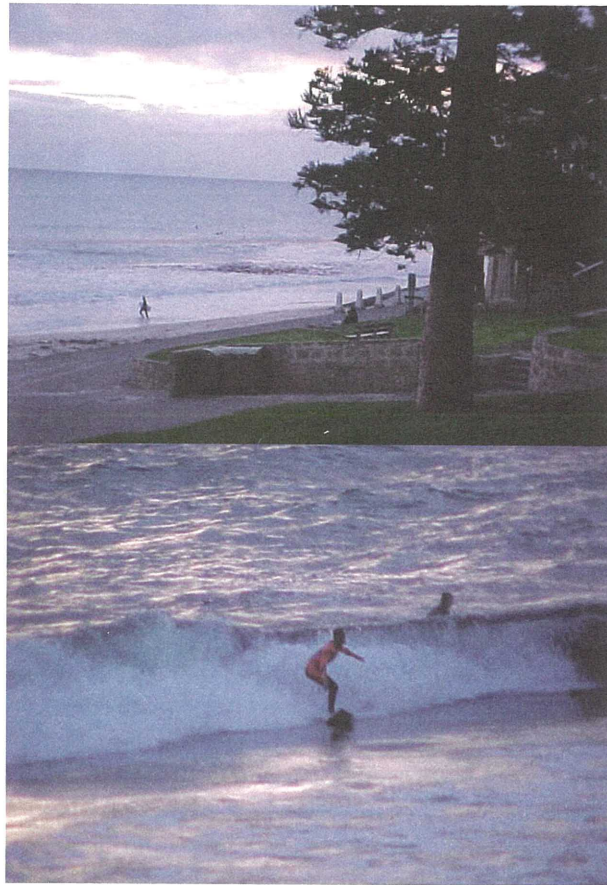
Too bad it is wintertime in Australia, too cold to swim with the large fish, too cold to sleep with the large human. Dr. Jacobs, I guess it's masturbation time again!

**July 7, 2001. PERTH.**

I decide to take a train out of the capital city of WA. The skies are stormy on Cottesloe beach. Nobody is out today, but for the 'surfies', the most fanatical of surfers. I walk by gigantic lime-stone mansions, then 1960s redbrick apartments, ugly ducklings amongst the millionaires. Where would I rather be living? In one of these actual mansions or some kind of ephemeral home? Western Australia has a bizarre effect on me, my loneliness



rumbling with its trashing waves, the cold skies and green lawns are merciless, the lack of life on the street, sparse conversation. Where is that large friendly human?



Cottesloe Beach, Perth



Coogee Beach, Sydney

### Dr. Jacobs 11:00am 7/15/2001 Tread Slowly, Pauline!



Hi Libidot,

I think you are on the right track, looking for 'abstract qualities of sexual probing in art,' rather than some actual moment of sexual encounter. You are only seeing shadows and remains of artworks and artists, rather than their real bodies. I am myself working on an essay that is due next week. Maybe you can give me some feedback as well? Researching the work of Gregory Pauline, the other remarkable French writer who was very influential to Barthes's *Fragments of a Lover's Discourse*. Barthes' affection for Pauline was based on a 1950s book of photographs de Fruits de Mer (Editions La Decouverte) made by Pauline when he was a young sailor. In that book, Pauline includes photographs of several remarkable brothel scenes, including one picture of himself with Indian royalty. As it turns out, I managed to read Pauline's (not so easily available) journals in the Musée Nationale when I was in Paris in 1999.

You may be interested in this information because it is really also centered on a love story. This is what I can find in the letters: Pauline met the Indian monarch when visiting a prostitute in Brussels. He felt a strange feeling throughout his body, as if it suddenly it became clear to Pauline why he had wanted to become a sailor (i.e., leaving behind his family and his wife in Paris). Pauline's command of the English language was not so great, but he managed to make a decent impression on the Indian man. The Indian man was an aristocrat and known in the gay sailor's community as a 'gentle' sadist. When they met, the Indian man replied to Pauline in perfect French. Pauline felt like he had met a god. He was experiencing a stroke of sexual pleasure in his soul. He had never experienced something like that before. He had never made love to a male. They had sex throughout the night (no, I don't know which kind). They said good-bye the next morning. Pauline wrote him often, hoping and begging to get a response, though his words were never reciprocated. He seemed unable to go beyond a sad state of longing, and then wrote some remarkable erotic poetry, you wouldn't believe it. He was lovesick, as we sometimes call it, when we regurgitate sad memories endlessly, bathing our memory-bodies in the complexities of emotional bondage, rehashing impossible sweetness, recreating encounters and replaying the impossibility of union with the other. No, we cannot blame the lover for this state of depression. The lover is gone.

What I am saying to you? If for Barthes and Pauline, their existential loneliness produced great results, it was nurtured on a sound philosophy of art and *angst* and literature. Again, I can see you are trying to formulate one for yourself, but you are going in weird directions. Would you drop me a line and let's discuss your agenda for the next weeks?

Dr. Jacobs



## July 9, 2004. SYDNEY.

But it is the ghost who pulled me out of my gloom. Get out of Perth, she said. Take the red-eye to Sydney. They have beaches there as well.

The next day, I take a walk on Coogee Beach and make an appointment to meet with Virginia Barratt. Like Francesca da Rimini, Barratt was a member of VNS Matrix, a 'cyber-feminist' art collective made up of four women who were active in Australia from 1991 to 1997. They made several artworks together, employing female sexuality as a critique of workaholic geeks and/or the corporate colonization of cyber space. Their output included a manifesto in text and images, which was printed out on a billboard on King's Road in Newtown (Sydney), six meters by three meters in size

The central image of the Manifesto is of a half-naked woman with a shaved head, in a pose with a bubble on the back of her neck, which happens to be a molecule. The manifesto is written within this molecule, and the background is also a deep field of molecular structure.

The cyberfeminist ideas of VNS Matrix were often playfully anti-academic, as they believed that academic knowledge often lacks a passionate body and a sense of humor. They separate their intentions from academic 'cyberfeminisms', such as the writings by Sadie Plant and Donna Haraway, although they were, admittedly, inspired by some of the theories. For example, Donna Haraway's famous essay, 'A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century', equally emphasizes the contributions of women to new technologies. Haraway proposes the idea of the cyborg, a 'self' not constrained by biological matter or constrictive notions of gender.<sup>1</sup> The cyborg breaks with 'essentialist' feminism to promote values of irony, imagination, post-gender identity, psychic loss of origin, breaking down of boundaries between species, fractured identities, and life in the integrated circuit. Haraway summarizes her rage against 1970s feminism in the last line of the essay: "Though both are bound in the spiral dance, I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess."

VNS Matrix, likewise, sees females merging with machines rather than goddesses, but suggests a polluted, orgasmic and humorous union. Barratt explains that the molecular structures in the manifesto points to the building blocks of aberrant life. The manifesto places the image of a woman, a strong and different woman, in the center of the technological universe, giving birth to new notions of the body and sex.

<sup>1</sup> Donna Haraway's 'A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century' first appeared in her book *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London, Free Association Books, 1991).

Barratt loves standing very close to the edge of the cliffs on Cogee Beach, and then looking all the way down. She tells me she started out writing texts as a performance artist, reciting them with her body suspended upside down. After we walk and talk, we go to her cozy seaside apartment, where she makes tea and introduces me to her girlfriend, Holden. Holden is very skinny and tattooed, sexy, young and angry.

### Dr. Jacobs 2:00am 7/9/2001 Hakim Bey Essay on Love



Hi Libidot,

Reading some of the postmodern feminists, such as Donna Haraway. I can see that her idea of the 'cyborg' is very valuable for your work. And anyhow, isn't that what I have been telling you all along? These women of VNS Matrix obviously already show signs of being a mixed species, don't you think?

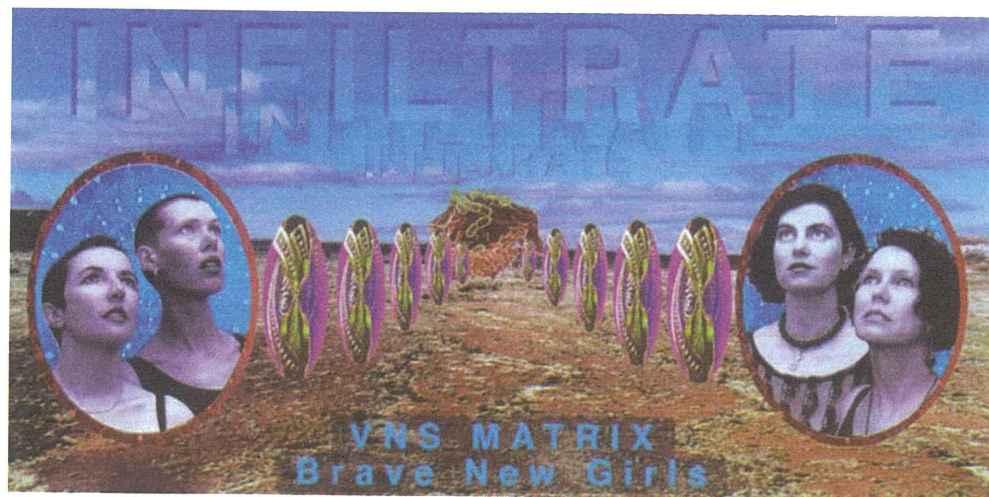
I was doing some further research on Pauline and there found an essay by **Hakim Bey** about 'obsessive love'. I would normally not have read it, as you know what I think of his work, but then I noticed it's quite a little clever piece of writing. In this essay, he outlines a cultural history of 'obsessive loving'. For instance, in early Islamic and European texts this notion refers to 'romantic love', an impossible type of union based on excessive emotions. The lover is constructed as a person who occupies a forbidden category and therefore cannot be reached. Moreover, romance appears as a kind of 'gnosis' in which spirit and flesh always occupy antithetical positions. (Maybe you yourself have the primitive mindset of troubadour, after all, looking so clearly for instance of 'flesh'?) In our modern culture, Libidot, and according to Hakim Bey, we have new philosophies which investigate how union can be a form of supreme enlightenment. According to Bey, there have been two types of enlightenment: a surrealist 'amour fou', where fantasy and crazy love are seen as the parameters of a lover's quest, and a more classical idea of love based on 'erotic friendship' and 'generosity'. Bey himself prefers to cultivate the latter, he writes, as the union of crazy love and the creative mind almost always brings him misery.

What do you think about this, Libidot? What really are your views on relationships?

Erotic friendship—do you like it—or what?

Dr. Jacobs





VNS Matrix, *Infiltrate*, Lightbox Image, 1993.

### July 15, 2001. SYDNEY, ERSKINEVILLE.

Linda Dement, another pioneer of cyberfeminism in Australia, welcomes my visit to her home in the quiet 'burb Erskineville. She is friendly and skinny, hair dyed blue, and offers me bread and homemade soup. Her two well-fed rabbits are snoozing behind her gas stove, as we settle on the couch and start a conversation. I feel like I am Alice in Wonderland, whenever I take a look at the rabbits. We talk about her artwork in Australian art movements, and her connection to VNS Matrix. She shows me her oeuvre of interactive artworks on the computer and gives me copies of *Typhoid Mary* (1991), *Cyberflesh Girlmonster* (1995) and *In My Gash* (1999) – all darkly moody, sensual, vital, sad tales of violence against women.

When I enter *Typhoid Mary*, I see a multi-hued environment filled with breathing glands, cut-out genitals, poetic words, stray clothes, jewelry. Typhoid Mary is a punky girl who is forced to speak and stay alive in a world of debris and violence, where she would much rather be dead. "No words," says Mary, "A broken bottle in the belly would let the pain out."

Navigating the story is purposefully complicated. As Dement writes in her statement: "A viewer can click anywhere on the image on screen. There is no apparent interface, so they move blindly along the paths that connect images, animations, sounds, quotes, diary

extracts, medical information, statistics and stories (...) Levels of intimacy with the bleak, sexual and violent content are kept safe by the technological media: the flesh is not really flesh, it is pixels and so can be touched. Unless the work is touched, nothing happens."<sup>2</sup> The viewer is asked to 'touch' chaotic female sensibilities of violence and sadness.

Dement mixes writings about illness, violence and sexuality with a punk and baroque rebellion. Her tableaux look like the ecstatic fantasies of Hieronymus Bosch, or Cronenbergian species. This strand of cyborg society also harkens back to the Cyborg Manifesto, which predicts that humans will evolve through their triadic couplings with machines and animals. But the narratives of bodily decay and violence are non-redemptive, portraying visions of total psychic dead-lock and despair. We meet the girl who finds the dead body of her girlfriend, wrists slit, and experience an utterly painful moment of futile longing: "She peels back the lids of the closed eyes and holds them open with one hand while she pushes bloodied fingers into the dead cunt. Crying, she fucks her. Nobody comes."<sup>3</sup>

The work *Cyberflesh Girlmonster* focuses on random acts of violence and monstrosity, and was made up partially of female body parts. As we can read in the synopsis: "Donated body parts were collected (...). About 30 women participated in the original event by scanning their chosen flesh and digitally recording a sentence or sound. These have been animated and made interactive. When a viewer clicks on one of these monsters, the words attached to that body part could be heard or seen, another monster may appear ..." <sup>4</sup> These monsters are surreal apparitions announcing our experiences of bodily fragmentation, mergers with other creatures and technologies as artistic creativity and pleasure.

Dement also shows me a series of photo-collages that she had been making for a forthcoming gallery exhibit in Amsterdam, based on the writings of, and dedicated to, Kathy Acker.

<sup>2</sup> Linda Dement, *Typhoid Mary* artist statement, [www.lindadement.com](http://www.lindadement.com) (accessed November 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Linda Dement, *Typhoid Mary*, Interactive Media, 1995.

<sup>4</sup> Linda Dement, *Cyberflesh Girlmonster* artist statement, [www.lindadement.com](http://www.lindadement.com) (accessed November 2003).





Linda Dement, Stills from *Typhoid Mary*, Interactive Media, 1995.



Stills from *Cyberflesh Girlmonster*, Interactive Media, 1995.

### Interview: Linda Dement, Sydney, July 11, 2001.

'So I guess you grow up going "Okay, it's a war zone out there, and I'll just have to be a bit tougher," or else you shrink into the corner of your bedroom.'

**Libidot:** How did you first get involved in making interactive art works? How did it all get started?

**Dement:** The first digital work that I made was a CD-ROM called *Typhoid Mary*. It is the story of 'Typhoid Mary', who is a very depressed stripper. She's really depressed. And the story goes around and around between ten main images and ten stories and poems.

**Libidot:** Your second work *Cyberflesh Girlmonster* became a really big hit? How did you make the cyberflesh monsters?

**Dement:** VNS Matrix put on an event for the Adelaide Festival in 1991. So I asked them and other women at the event to donate body parts. All these women came and lined up at the door and donated a body part. We had a scanner and a computer and that was about it, and I saved all of the scans and took them back home and made the monsters out of them. The women would sit or lie on the scanner... and when they were happy with the picture, then that was the picture I kept. And it has got stories. Just about all of the characters are women who are a bit bad. So there are thieves and an armed robber, and there's another one who has committed suicide.

**Libidot:** When did you actually start making art with computers?

**Dement:** In the late 1980s, I was forced to learn to use a computer because the electric typewriter I was using was broken. I would go into this little room at the university where there were these boys who would talk to each other in megabytes and pretend to be really clever. I would sneak in with the manual and learn to use the bloody thing. After a couple of weeks, I discovered that I just loved working with computers. I was a photographer, and I have always loved toys and cameras and flash units and things that click and dials that turn, etc. But more than that was the idea that it was a whole new type of media and whole new way of putting your work out there. In those days it was really primitive, little black and white screens, but there was something really phenomenal about the ways that you could have non-linear time and non-linear elements happening, and you weren't limited to one kind of media. You didn't have to go just make photographs, and then go somewhere else and write a story and then go somewhere else and learn how to do sound and do a sound piece. You could put them all into one work. I just thought that was phenomenal, that you could combine all these different elements and then build from there.

**Libidot:** Were there any other female artists that were your source of inspiration here in Australia?



**Dement:** I would say Francesca da Rimini. She is a friend from those years – another wild girl, still wild. I have toned down, she hasn't. She's still wild. She is a friend from the punk years in Adelaide.

**Libidot:** So how was that kind of punk scene for women?

**Dement:** Well, generally it was atrocious for women. For instance, one party I was at with all the heterosexual boy punks, there was a girl being fucked with a Coke bottle. You might as well have been at a biker party half the time. But there was this great group of 'us', mostly gay, I guess, punk women and there was a real strength in that to be able to be really loud, and dance and be wild and have music without those stupid adolescent boys just wanting to fuck someone else. That is what all the heterosexual girls would have gotten if they wanted to be a punk. And so I think we had a degree of daring and freedom and life that you may not have gotten in a normal sort of punk scene. It was really strengthening. I mean we thought we could do anything.

**Libidot:** What did you think about the work of *VNS Matrix* when it had just come out?

**Dement:** I thought it was just fantastic. It's almost like a rebellious feminism that breaks away from the kind of feminism that people like me have been brought up with – a very hard-core, sort of overalls, 1970s, mousy brown hair kind of thing. And we were all being stupid young punks, thinking, "I'm not a feminist." I just want to get out of it. And then to bring that kind of rebellious bodily experience, it's sort of the kind of feminism that can include madness and violence and rejection as well as all of those sorts of more socially responsible types of feminism. That was part of what I really loved about *VNS Matrix*.

**Libidot:** Did the cyber-feminist movement grow out of anger or was it nurtured by more supportive queer sex cultures?

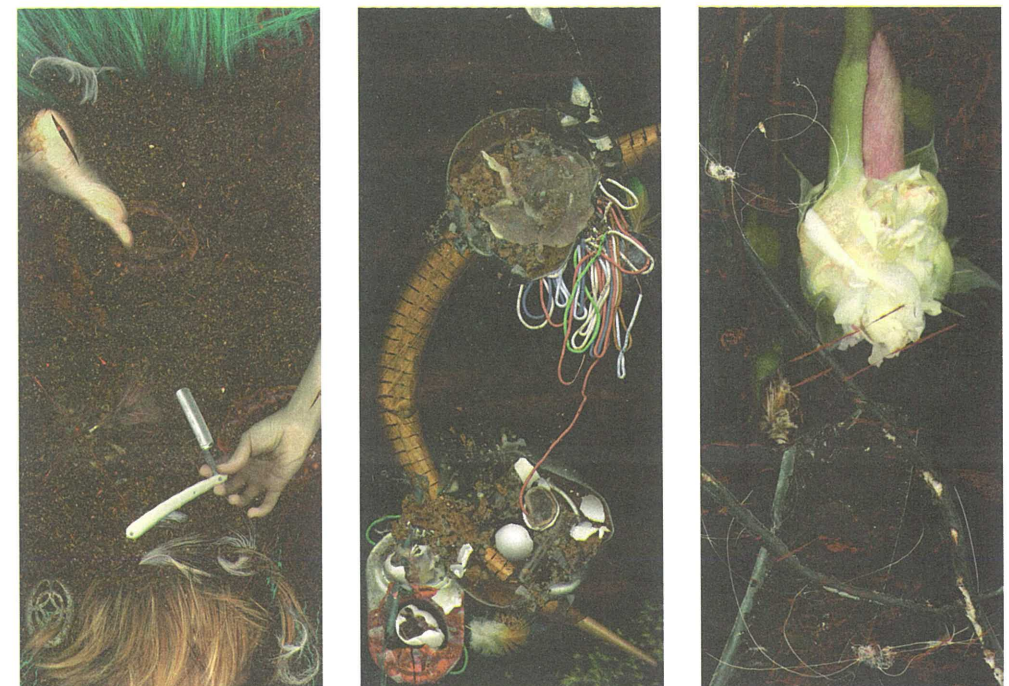
**Dement:** I couldn't call Australia advanced in its thinking about sexual politics. I don't know for sure, but I suspect that a lot of that powerful work comes out of rebellion and, I guess, a certain toughness that you grow up with in Australia knowing that the culture is totally sexist. It's getting better all the time, but very slowly. It seems that Australia has one of the highest incidences of domestic violence in the world. And it has a worse domestic violence record than even America, much worse. It's a good thing we don't have guns here or there'd be more deaths and sexual assault. The Australian Bureau's statistics of a couple of years ago stated that between one in three and one in four girls were sexually abused. That's a lot. So I guess you grow up going, "Okay, it's a war zone out there, and I'll just have to be a bit tougher," or else you shrink into the corner of your bedroom. And, of course, it's not like that for everybody.

There is a movie that was made years and years ago called *Shame*. It's about a woman who goes on a trip around Australia, and she ends up in a small country town. And in the town the boys are steadily raping all the girls. A friend of mine from overseas said, "you know I saw this Australian science fiction movie, it was just horrific." But it's not science fiction. It's really quite true. When I was growing up in Queensland in one of the towns down the road, the boys were doing exactly this. It's a common thing.

**Libidot:** Your work is sexual and often very graphic. I'm interested in finding out reactions to your work. Have you interacted with or been able to talk to people who have seen your work?

**Dement:** The stories that are in *Typhoid Mary* are quite sexual and violent, and one man in Queensland took offense that that was presented to him. There were warnings and everything, but he still found that too difficult. So there was that kind of reaction, but there were some that were really good. Some girls came to see the show *Typhoid Mary* and they weren't artsy crowds at all, they were just girls, and one of them just found that she felt that something about herself was totally expressed by this work, and she was really thrilled that it was up there. That was great. And then there was another day in a show when a little old lady who came in, and I was like, "Oh god, here we go. She's going to have terrible trouble with this." She just started laughing, and she came back and said, "I know exactly how she feels," and that was just wonderful.

So, I've had some good reactions. Most of the people are pretty good. Well, one of the things was that after it had been exhibited in Queensland, of course, *Typhoid Mary* was brought up in parliament as an obscene work. There was a bit of *hoo-ha* about that for a while. So, some critics just stopped right there and stated that the work was obscene. I think what happens is that they just don't write anything about it. I had one man who said that I was evil, and a feminist review that said my work had put feminism back ten years or something.

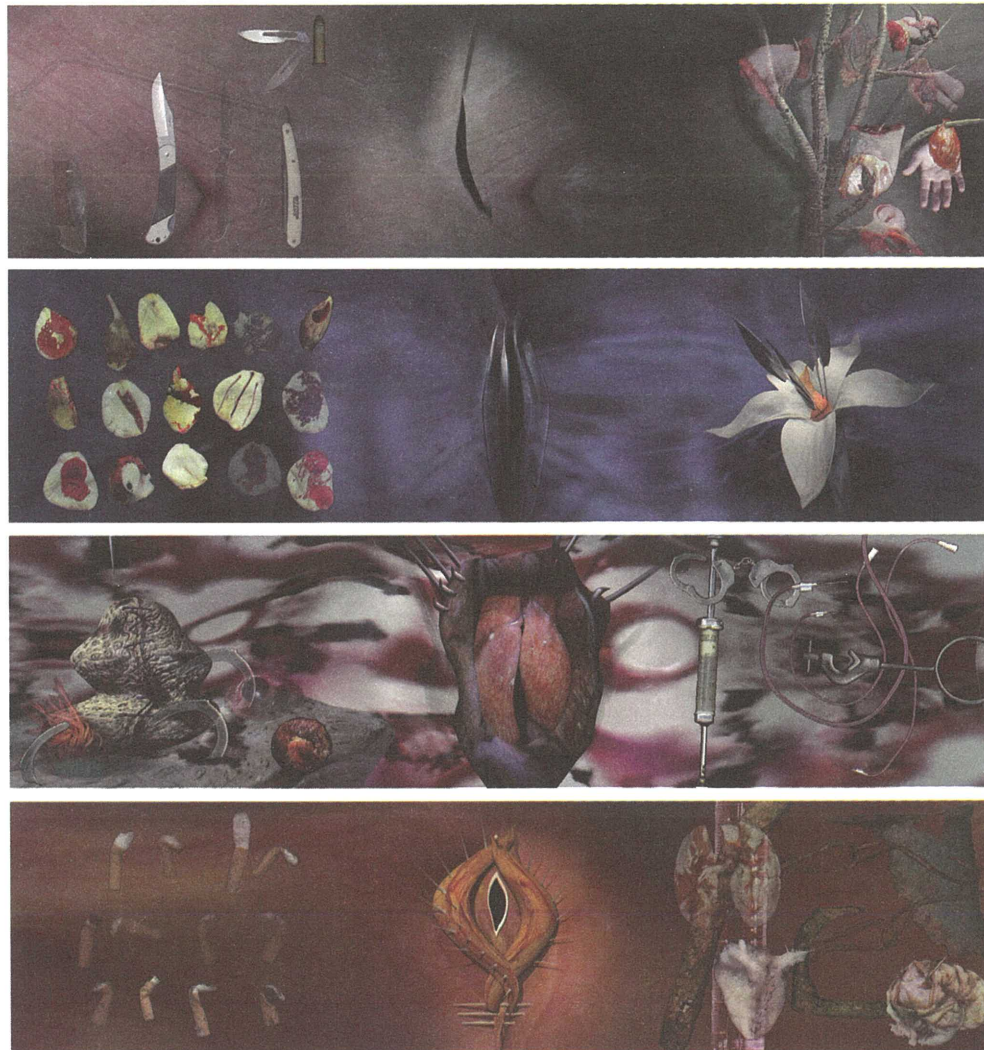


Linda Dement, *Eurydice*, Mural Prints, 1 x 2.25m, 2002.



**Libidot:** Can you tell me something about your collaboration with Kathy Acker?

**Dement:** I first read one of Kathy Acker's books when I was about twenty-one. It was kept locked in a library in Adelaide. They wouldn't let it out, and so I'd go in there everyday and they would unlock it for me and let me read it, and then they would lock it back up. And I just thought this is the most amazing thing I've ever read in my life. It was *The Adult Life of Toulouse Lautrec: By Henri Toulouse Lautrec* (1975), one of her first novels and I was just blown away. I'd never read anything like it in my life, and I just thought "this is for me, I want this."



Linda Dement, Stills from *In My Gash*, Interactive Media, 1999.

You know that kind of feeling that you get? And then, years and years later, after I'd made *Typhoid Mary*, someone interviewed me about it, a British guy, and for his same publication he interviewed Kathy Acker about a work of hers. I think he showed her *Typhoid Mary*, and she liked it and contacted me. A couple of years after that I had the chance to get some professional development money. And so I emailed her and asked if she would like to be my professional development manager, because I was starting to write a lot more, and I thought maybe I could write and Acker could criticize it for me. Anyway, she wrote back and said, "No, I don't want to do that, I'd much rather work together." So, then I just fell on the floor and it was just great, and from then on we just kept emailing, talking about the beginnings of this work with the piece she'd just written, which was *Eurydice*, and we started.

All we had was the plans that we were making, and when she died, I tried to go on because she had wanted an interactive piece, that was what we were building toward. I tried to work with it some more, but it just felt dead. I mean, you know, she was dead. There was no more collaboration. And so I just changed my focus and just started to make images. Big, still images. They felt more memorializing.

### Dr. Jacobs 2:00am 7/11/2001 Tears of Eros



Hi Libidot,

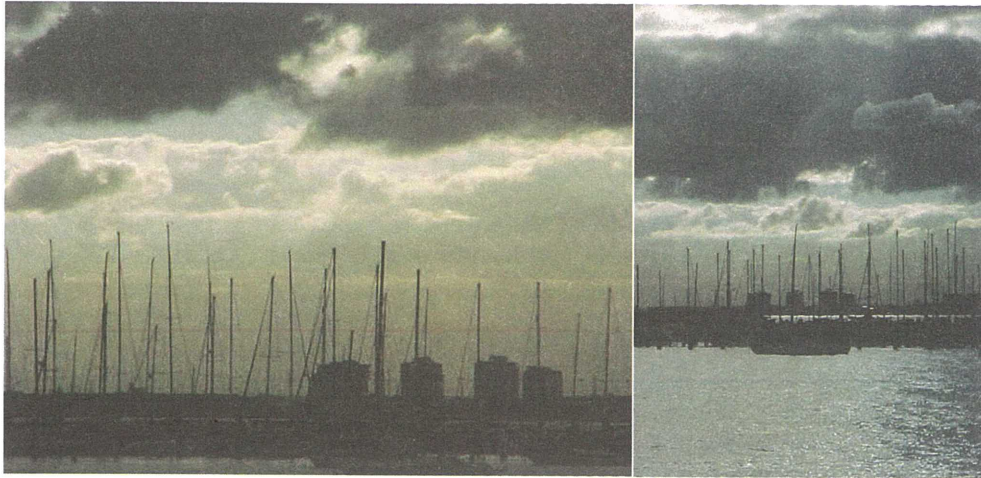
Thanks for writing me, finally, and yes, I can give you a hint about how to think about the relationship between violence and eroticism, or love and death.

In his final work about death and eroticism, Georges Bataille sees the major difference between 'animal sex acts' and 'human eroticism' as being a human fascination with the diabolical nature of death. From the early Paleolithic era onwards, humans have expressed their fears of death through extreme emotions and signs of rich erotic life. As he writes: "But Upper Paleolithic man, Homo Sapiens, is now known to us through signs that move us through the fact that they bring us abundant evidence of his erotic life." (*Tears of Eros*, p. 31) Bataille also believes that the only way we can really understand such sexually abundant signs expressing knowledge of death is by **trembling**. Of course, this is not to be taken literally, but as a kind of metaphor, a merged state of shock and pleasure in mind in body.

Did you or did you not experience something like that during your visit to Dement?

Dr. Jacobs





St. Kilda Beach Pier, Melbourne

### July 13, 2002. MELBOURNE.

Maybe I did feel something like that, but I was not fully aware of it, except I felt very sad when Linda Dement talked about the illness and death of Kathy Acker. I feel sometimes like I am walking a rope towards death, and yes it makes me dizzy, a little high and sad at the same time. I fly From Sydney to Melbourne and try to call the sex toy manufacturer Downunder Toys. The city of Melbourne is sophisticated. I eat well, sleep well, and go shopping. I call people and set up interviews. I ride the tram to the suburb of St. Kilda, walk around on the pier and desolate beachfront to spot other craving souls. Shaved heads. Dark brown eyes. Fierciful mouths. Words and bloody teeth. Nobody appears to be walking on the beach.

### July 16, 2004. MELBOURNE.

I meet with Ian Haig. We meet in a dark brown café right in the happening city-center of Melbourne. Here is my friendly human. He is a bit of a storyteller, too, as if he is standing on a stage when talking to me. In this way, he tells me about his work in Japan, gives me some photographs taken in a sex museum in *Toba*, near *Nagoya*.

The museum in *Toba* was erected in the 1960s under the theme of 'future of sexuality'. The *diorama displays* in the museum were influenced by futuristic ideas of sexuality, of women merging with aliens to create a super-race. On the bus home, I look at Haig's photographs and his statement on the Japanese sex museum: »Newly formed reproductive organs give the exciting possibilities as sexual co-workers appear over-stimulated because

of the extreme excitability and the infestation of new hybrid species success." But don't these women look a little sad receiving super-species sperm?

### July 18, 2001. MELBOURNE, NORTH COTE.

I am off to interview Ian Haig. I look for Wally Street in the suburb of 'North Cote'. Sounds like an old village on the Coast of Normandy. I hope to get clarity about his past work in Japan and about his new project on acts of shitting and toilet technology. I wonder what Dr. Jacobs would have to say about that? I read a synopsis of his project *Excelsior 3000: A Bowel Technology Project*: "The toilet stands as the base level of all technology, a vessel for connecting our bodies to the biological world. Bowel movements are the great equalizer, where no amount of sophisticated technology can replace the everyday bodily requirement to lay some cable. The toilet reminds us that we are human, probably more so then any other form of technology."

Even though cultures have developed different types of toilets, with or without toilet-paper, and different hygiene habits for 'washing up' afterwards, few artists have constructed entirely new types of toilets. Rather than building a functional environment for shitting, Haig's toilet emphasizes its hyper-mediated nature, enriched with audio and video displays that would affect bowel movements. The toilet thus epitomizes our development as a very sedentary human species. (Like Dr. Jacobs, for instance, sending me a piece of his 'life' and 'flesh' from behind his computer.) As observed by Darren Tofts: "Human-computer interaction has become another form of quotidian banality. As such, we have also lost sight of how it has changed us in the process. We forget that computers have made us more sedentary than at any other time in human history."<sup>5</sup> Taking a shit on a comfortable toilet, riding the train, sitting on a bench in a station, working on the computer – indeed, our buttocks and bowels must be in a state of near-death.

### Interview: Ian Haig, Melbourne, July 18, 2001.

'... and stomachs and bowel movements and constipation and all this kind of stuff, and I started to fantasize about a toilet, this device that could almost be seen as coming from another planet. It has landed here on earth to relieve me of this burden and to relieve me of this problem.'

**Libidot:** I'm traveling through Australia and interviewing artists about their 'porn conscience'.

**Haig:** I think it was David Cronenberg who, years ago, said that he was interested in a form of pornography that was about alternative body parts that could be used for titillation or sexual stimulation. That's always fascinated me, the idea that there is some kind of body part we've got that is lying dor-

<sup>5</sup> Darren Tofts, 'Floating Thoughts on Toilets, Media & Technology', (accessed May 17, 2003).



mant, and as we evolve, maybe, it will eventually start to kick in. And we'll use that as some form of sexual gratification.

Here in Australia, I think pornography goes back to the original kind of definition that we have of it, which is like a 'marital aid' kind of thing. In some ways I think it's more in vogue now than what it used to be, with the Internet and the accessibility of it, but certainly in Australia it's been a weird situation because the hard-core stuff has only been available via mail order from places like Canberra. Everything else you can find is soft core.

**Libidot:** How would you describe your position as a sex artist in Australian culture? Was it different when you lived in Japan?

**Haig:** In Tokyo, where I spent a little bit of time, there's really a major shift in how you actually define 'high art' and 'low art', and it seems to be fused together in some ways, so I think that's a healthy way to think about contemporary art. So, it's not necessarily seen as something that is elitist. You see contemporary art in all sorts of environments there, whether it's a magazine ad, or billboard, or whatever, and that's a really kind of fantastic situation. However, there is also the issue in Japan that some of the contemporary art is almost like a retreat from pop culture. It has the sensibility of a Zen garden or something, simply because everyday life is so in your face.

In Australia, we still have the divisions set up between 'high art' and 'low art'. As much as the art world tries to sometimes be connected with popular culture, if you want to look at art, you go to an art gallery. It is a high art experience, and often, I have to say, artists that deal with themes in contemporary popular culture do so in a way that is very digestible to the art world. It is often in a very distanced kind of way. It's not obsessive or crazed enough, but more about notions of style and 'coolness'.

For new media artists it is very common to talk about issues of consumerism, or nature, or even the body. There is something a bit safe about it all because already they're kind of validated and very worthy themes within the context of new media art. I prefer to do things that are not covering the same ground that other people are dealing with, so I prefer to look at things that are genuinely different, that are genuinely fucked up, that fuck with your brain, like a good horror movie or something. I have real issues with art that is politically invested in this idea of being good for you, of it being socially redeeming; I find this to be very conservative. In many ways I really believe art to be a useless thing. That's what's interesting about it in a way, its uselessness – I like that.

**Libidot:** Can you tell me something more about the work you did on Japanese sex museums?

**Haig:** I was in Japan just about six months ago, and a good friend of mine had some details in a book on some of the museums that exist in the countryside throughout Japan. All sorts of museums. Everything from sex museums to pregnancy museums, to menstrual museums or bulldozer museums. You name it, it's there. There's lots of regional museums spread right throughout the country, and there was a short chapter on the sex museums. I knew they were in an area down on the coast called *Toba*, but I didn't have an address or anything. So I had to search around and ask around. I eventually managed to find one of the museums. The owner was really friendly, and I

explained in broken Japanese what I was attempting to do, and he was cool with that.

The museum looked like it was like an amazing 1960s *2001 Space Odyssey* era of retro futuristic sex center. It just so happened to be 2001 when I was shooting it. In its heyday the museum would have been really amazing, because there was all this lighting, and they were playing this sixties fuzz guitar music, and I think it was actually meant to be interactive, but they had no repair money to fix anything. It wasn't really functioning that well, but you could walk by certain mannequins and they would start waving their arms and moving their torsos and stuff like that. Because it was so broken down, a lot of the stuff wasn't working, and the hands were missing, and things were really dusty, but it was absolutely incredible. In some ways the run-down nature of it was even more interesting. The idea was that this was a view of human sexuality for the future in the past – and now we were in the future.

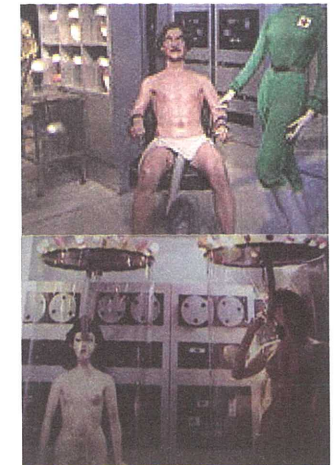
**Libidot:** Was it an art museum or a sex educational museum?

**Haig:** Mostly it was for young couples to check out on holiday. Above it was the standard 'Sex Throughout the Ages division,' like samurai sex and all the rest of it. That was interesting, too, but it wasn't as fascinating and freaky as the futuristic one. There was a weird narrative running through there. From what I could ascertain through the images, super vixens or super bimbos were captured from Mars, and they were impregnated in these capsules with some kind of alien sperm of some description, basically under the guise of creating a superrace of superhumans that were nymphomaniacs or sex bimbos. The video that I shot of it can in no way do justice to the museum, because it was a constructed environment with incredible sets and dioramas.

**Libidot:** I saw the image of a human being connected to a tube. Can you explain that image for me?

**Haig:** Yeah, the tubes were like enemas fused with sperm donation. I think that they researched impregnating these women to breed a new race, a kind of hybrid species. But the first time they did it, according to the story in the museum, it didn't work. So, there's a mutant strain of superhumans. But the thing about the sex museum, also, is that the minute I saw it I just fell in love with it, because it was a merging of retro schlock horror science fiction, fused with something really quite perverse and mutant. When I exhibited this work, I presented it as an installation consisting of an alien sperm bank type thing, very much influenced from the museum, with these tubes so you could potentially make a sperm donation while you were watching the video.

**Libidot:** And do you use a similar theme of mutant hybrids in your most recent installation-piece on Japanese toilets?

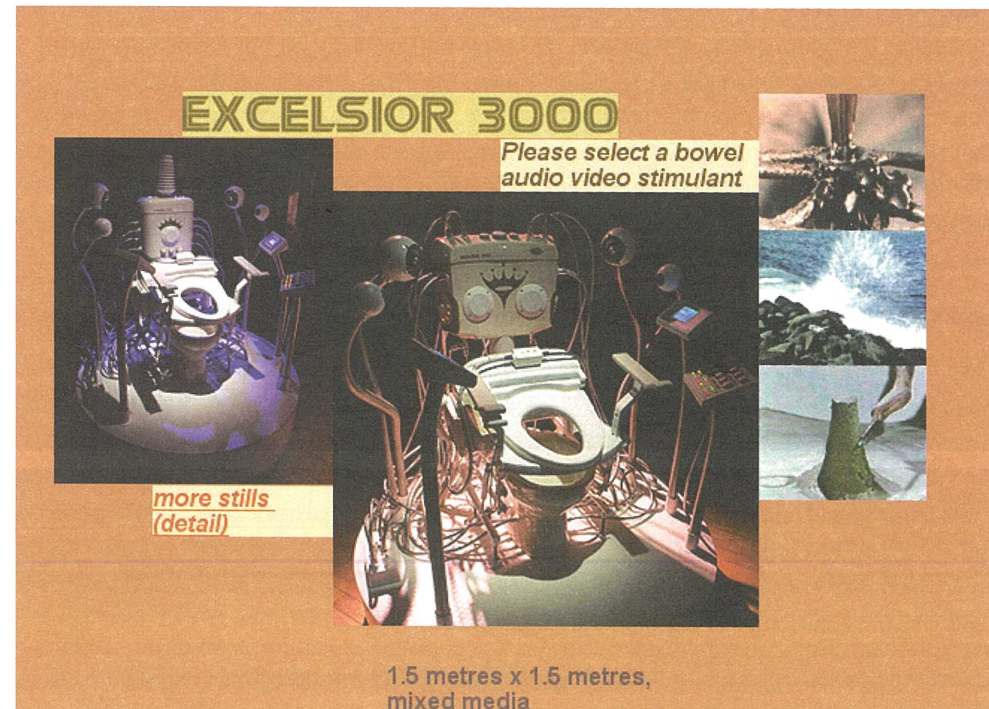


Ian Haig, *Superhumans*,  
Video Stills, 2000



**Haig:** It is called *Excelsior 3000* and it came about from my previous experience in Japan, as well and the kind of fascination with toilets that they have pretty much in any kind of domestic situation, the idea of the 'super-toilet'. My friends had what I think is referred to as 'princess toilets', amazing things that look like they are from another planet or something. But before I went to Japan, I was in Mexico City just for a holiday, and I came down with a really bad case of a stomach parasite. It was a major infection that got more and more complicated. So I then started to think about toilets and think about bowels, and intestines, and stomachs and bowel movements and constipation and all this kind of stuff, and I started to fantasize about a toilet, this device that could almost be seen as coming from another planet. It has landed here on earth to relieve me of this burden and to relieve me of this problem.

I was having this kind of fantasy when I went to Japan. I visited bathroom showrooms and it just kind of clicked from there. So basically, I'm in the process now of finishing off a customized Japanese toilet. It has a hydraulic system, so the seat goes up, and all this other stuff is attached to it, all this other plumbing. It has video screens and audio. The audio is going to play a soundscape with themes like bowel movements and the digestive system. I was very interested in this idea of the video/audio sequences, like it could be pornography for your bowels, playing naturalistic scenes to put you in the mood... I was looking at this idea of the toilet being an interface of sorts, an extension of our own digestive system, and the toilet as a form of technology we use everyday and don't really think about.



Ian Haig, *Excelsior 3000*, Mixed Media Installation, 2003.

I was also very influenced by a Japanese anime called *Rogin Z*, that featured a hospital bed that was housing an elderly guy, and this hospital bed became more and more monstrous, to the point that it was overtaking the whole room. It overtook his whole body in this hospital bed. So that stirred the idea of having a toilet that looked like it could have been from another planet and was some form of life support system for your bowel, which kept you alive. The center of your universe is your bowel; you've got to keep your bowel alive no matter what.

Also, in some ways, the installation is a comment on the body and issues in new media in particular. Artists are often delving into these themes of the contemporary body and body modification in all sorts of different ways, whether it's an artist like Stelarc or whoever. But still, there is a real kind of resistance and shying away from anything 'a bit too icky'. What's going on there with the menstruating body or the defecating body or the pissing body or the mucous body? On an everyday level, this is how we relate to our bodies. We shit, we fuck, and we piss.

**Libidot:** In this sense, your work is perhaps a bit more aligned with feminist body art?

**Haig:** There is a connection there, because often when a male artist deals with the body, it's in a very romantic way. Maybe it is a male thing, to depict the body in heroic kinds of ways, I am not sure. I like some of Stelarc's work, but how can you separate the sex from the body? You can't. You must get more messy, more wet.



A basketfull of Downunder Sex Toys.



## July 18, 2001. MELBOURNE, ST. KILDA.

I once again take the tram to St-Kilda. I am on my way to *Downunder Toys* and a meeting with the owner of this business, JD Ryan. I am talking to a babbling man on the tram. He looks friendly indeed and stoned out of his brain. He asks me if I am German and where I am heading. I tell him I am heading towards JD Ryan. He tells me he knows JD Ryan and shows me exactly where to get off the tram. Before I exit the tram, he tells me that he is actually her ex-boyfriend. "JD has done very well for herself," he tells me ...

I enter JD's large loft space, stumble over plastic buckets filled with sex toys. I see her in the back of the room. She looks cuddly and smart, a no-nonsense woman, red cheeks, short red hair. She is a business woman.

The interview is conducted by email later that year. I send her questions and she answers all of them the next day. I send her a couple more questions and the answers again arrive promptly the next day. A pleasure to work with you, JD!

## Interview: JD Ryan, Melbourne, July 18, 2004.

'Our work is in the fringes and margins of society, even now, because the education of women about their own sexual power is the basic fear.'

**Libidot:** I read that you started manufacturing your dildos several years ago in response to a certain restrictive climate in New Zealand and Australia. I am just trying to imagine this climate. Was it that it was hard for women to discuss or publicly express aspects of sexuality?

**Ryan:** The primary issue in New Zealand and Australia is that the entire sex industry at that time was geared towards men as consumers and women as consumables, whether as sex workers or in the presentation of video, magazine and product packaging. Women were not welcome in sex shops. They simply were not considered customers by staff or by merchandising of product – it was unpleasant for a woman to go into a sex shop. I didn't want to spend my money in such an environment, why would any other woman? As young women in the supposed 'post-feminist' world we were really starting to want more access to sex products as a matter of exercising our freedom, if nothing else, and to be restricted by good taste was not enough to stop us. After wasting my education on government policy jobs for a few years I went back to that freedom issue and decided to launch myself into a career of creating change.

Some of those dinosaur sex shops still operate, but they are no longer the only outlets for traditional products. The dildos available in the old days were universally awful; we used to joke about them as 'toxic sticks'. They smelled bad, degraded in their packaging (i.e., chemically breaking down), just awful. Vinyl ones were a little better (at least they remained chemically intact), but were cold and hard to use and tended to leave the user with abrasions and a rash. Nasty!

**Libidot:** Minori Kitahara told me that she is selling your products in *Love Piece Club*. How do you think Japanese women are reacting to your products?

**Ryan:** I have had a varied success rate with my toys in Japan. Kitahara has been fabulous as a filter of what Japanese women will buy. Some designs I made especially for her customers, but they didn't sell.

I saw Kitahara's own design, a Strawberry toy in a catalogue from Hong Kong. The strawberry toy is essentially a large strawberry with a vibe motor. The control wires lead out through the stem of the fruit; it's very cute and is made from soft vinyl. I knew it was hers, as I had admired it and it was part of my professional respect for what Minori is doing in Japan. I contacted her to say we could manufacture that work for her and refrain from passing her intellectual property off as our own, the way the Hong Kong folks had done.

**Libidot:** I am interested in the potential of online spaces and networks and I believe that online sex shops are creating an expanded space for customers. Who are your online customers? How is the Internet helping you and your business to grow and contribute to political change?

**Ryan:** Our online customers are varied. We have had the most success with our website as a point of contact from retailers around the world. We even negotiated a distribution contract via email and the contact had come through the website. I also made my most valued professional contact through the website, with the women at *Womyns' Ware* Canada. These women are phenomenal in their efforts to educate consumers about the health safety and suitability of sex products ([www.womynsware.com](http://www.womynsware.com)). These women would have done the most to motivate me to continue my small efforts in working toward developing educated and confident consumers. Jana and Ottr have a very smart approach to their business and add so much value in this industry. I have a huge respect for them both. They also know how to run a business, and their staff are very well trained and all are 'on-brand' within the business. It's a joy to work with them.

Retail sales are currently only a small part of our web activity, but we are working on making our site more interactive in the areas of chat and relationship/sex issues advisory services. We want to have live online discussions about real issues, concerns and advice any of our customers care to share. We have learned an awful lot over the years, and that knowledge should be shared. Of those customers who are the toy users, we find that many are people who would perhaps not go to a retail store to purchase a product, and who find the discretion that the online purchasing offers a key aspect of their purchasing motivation.

**Libidot:** I agree with you that this knowledge should be shared online. I believe that sex shops are building communities and knowledge bases that would never come out of a university, for instance.

**Ryan:** I think that a lot of the information is already available for free. *Womyns' Ware*, for example has a consumer awareness section to their site called 'Buyer-be-womyns-ware', essentially an essay and information section where they regularly post essays written by a lawyer for the benefit of customers



and anyone who cares to check out their site. We readily share information, which both our businesses use to add value for the consumer.

The biggest issue in the gate-keeping function is through the major mainstream businesses who are protective of their toxic products, because they are addicted to the ridiculous profit margins generated by Asian-made plastic and vinyl products which, in the context of use in sex-play are highly toxic to the user.

I think it's a great idea to suggest that 'someone' should be responsible for ensuring adequate education and information is available, but you could consider the lost opportunities that lead us to this situation in the first place. A good example of which are the Judeo-Christian influences in primary and secondary education of young people that routinely refuses to educate in relation to sex and relationships. Those of us who are both ethically motivated and in the business of educating adults about sex play and sexuality, health and safety, do so in the absence of approval from government institutions. Our work is in the fringes and margins of society, even now, because the education of women about their own sexual power is the basic fear – what does it mean to have a society in which women are truly in full knowledge of how fabulous and powerful they can be?

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You don't have to leave home to play with a marsupial. The bill and tail are amazingly effective. Perfect for fans of perineal stimulation.

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Voted second among the World's Cutest Animals. We photographed this cutie near our factory one day and made a vibe in his honor. Irresistible fun!

**SYDNEY STARLET**  
This unique tribute to the Sydney Opera House not only masquerades as art but also provides cheap thrills... well, cheaper than a ticket to La Boheme. You don't have to be an architect to appreciate the art deco styling of this great 6" vibe.

**OZ ELEMENTS**  
Take home the colors and images of the 'Great Southern Land'. Rich earthy red and gold, ethereal reef green. Etched with designs inspired by outback rock art, these sensual vibes celebrate the elemental and ancient aspects of Australia.

A selection of products from Downunder Toys.

**Libidot:** How do you find adequate medical information about female genitals? You told me that you work with a team of women to give you feedback. Do you keep reports of this information?

**Ryan:** First, I keep biology books in my office and large poster-size images of the female genitalia as reference points in the design process. My staff insisted I take some of the more detailed images down from the walls, as they felt it could be a little too confronting for visitors during business meetings! I am aware of work done from the 1960s by a range of feminist doctors, such as the development of the *Our Bodies, Ourselves* book which has been updated since its first printing. I later learned about the clitoris as being a large organ, much bigger than just the hood part, which was pretty exciting for me as a designer and as a Lesbian! Now I know a lot about biology and am always learning about how individual women relate to their bodies. It all adds up to an endless supply of inspiration for developing toys. I also ask detailed questions of the test pilots and a couple of them have allowed me to observe them during a product test. It is important to have an understanding of the intuitive aspects of product use. I take it pretty seriously and protect my team very carefully in terms of privacy and respect. I do not take extensive notes and really only write down details which are critical to the development process. Everything else is in my mind when I start developing a new product.

**Libidot:** One of the biggest issues for me with vibrators is the phallic shape. I just don't understand very well why we need this shape in sex toys. Isn't it a bit of a historical accident that most vibrators are shaped like a penis? Why, if we move away from the biological penis as a source of pleasure, do we shape toys like the penis?

**Ryan:** Ah yes, we can assume that a phallic shape relates to a penis, even when the design is not realistically styled on a Penis. I look at those shapes and think 'Vagina shaped'. Essentially the biology is that male and female parts are designed to fit together. We know that the internal shape of the vagina is more elliptical than cylindrical so we try to pay attention to that (look at Snuggle-Puss, for example), so sometimes those cylindrical shapes are attempting to be vagina-shaped. But I get what you're saying. Really, the guys in Hong Kong or China have always made their product according to the demands of adult industry owners, and most often they are men.

There is no mistake that many toys are Penis shaped. That should be more threatening to men, but I think the rationale is that 'the generic wife', at least, is playing with a plastic penis, which keeps her male partner in the picture of pleasure, and control. There are misogynist undercurrents in the mass-produced product arena that I could discuss at length, but suffice it to say, as women become involved in product design, we find that the range of products is increasing to meet the desire of many more women than was the case ten to fifteen years ago.



**Libidot:** What about the real-looking penises in 'cyber-skin' designs?

**Ryan:** I can't comment on the popularity of 'cyber-skin' designs. We only manufacture in silicone. The material used in those products is pretty toxic stuff and impossible to clean, so for my money I'd say there's nothing new about them. I do see their appeal, and variations of that material keep appearing in stores, so someone is buying them. I would like to hear from any woman who has suffered a medical problem/infection from using those materials. It's going to be useful one day in the same way that the breast implant court case exposed an absolute scandal. I believe that the same will happen in the sex toy arena, given that absolutely no safety regulations are in force in North America, and a number of other countries. Like most of these things, women's health and safety is defended by no one but women themselves, forcing corrupt practices out into the public domain. It happened with contraceptive devices (e.g., *the Dalkon shield*); it will happen with sex toys.

**Libidot:** I know that you are an expert on silicone and wondered if you could make a quick statement about breast implants as a way to alter women's bodies.

**Ryan:** I think you have to consider the mix of issues, which include how societies like to raise females to have low self-esteem and no confidence, and a medical industry, which is outright misogynist. Breast implants point to a problem but are not the underlying problem. My understanding of the medical side of the breast implant scandal is that the surgeons didn't know or didn't want to know about the chemical nature of silicone. The implants from *Dow Corning* were essentially un-cooked silicone, similar to the material we use for toys, before we cure the material and render it chemically inert. Silicone is safe when catalyzed, but as a raw material it is not something you can insert or implant into the body! Surgeons continue to use silicone in its safest form as covers for surgically implanted pacemakers. The interesting aspect of the pacemaker application is that the vast majority of those devices are implanted into men, and the medical profession has a much better track record of protecting male patients.

## July 26, 2001. ADELAIDE.

I have reached Francesca da Rimini's home in Adelaide, South Australia. She lives in a large loft-like home overlooking blue mountains. I am at the end of my trip in Australia, totally exhausted. She gives me her bed to sleep in – satin sheets in blue. Black. Red. She herself is jetlagged because she has just returned from Italy, visiting her boyfriend, Marco, and doing political work.

We are both fried. Other artists are staying in her house as well. Francesca is very sexy, a great writer and artist, a stylish dresser, a very original thinker, and a very good cook. I meet also meet her 80-year old mother, her son, Simon, and his girlfriend, Stacey.



Francesca da Rimini as 'doll yoko'



Francesca da Rimini, self-portraits

As we know, da Rimini was a member of *VNS Matrix*, but also a writer and archivist of remarkable 'erotic' correspondences (as in Bataille's definition). She has published many of these writings in anthologies and a forthcoming book, entitled *Fleshmeat*. Her website gives an overview of her writings, where poetic role-playing and critical notes are combined with layers of text, image, sounds and animations.

For instance, there is a character 'doll yoko,' who wakes up from a pond of dead girls to meet with other characters. There are the other girls: 'gashgirl,' an abused Italian girl, or the 'puppet mistress,' a triumphant dominatrix who knows the classic games of sado-masochism. As the mistress writes: "I slide through one hundred reality checks, break one thousand locks, enter ten thousand hearts, whisper my poisonous ideas to an infinite number of minds." Da Rimini explains that her role-playing correspondences grew out of the idea of contractual play, as in a prototypical sado-masochistic contract, where parties agree to submit fantasies of dominance and submission.



## Interview: Francesca da Rimini, Adelaide, July 31, 2001.

'... an homonculus, a tiny man, resembling his embodied self, but for me he was, and will always be, a baroque kind of pinocchio ...'

Dr. Jacobs 2:00am 7/31/2001



Hi Libidot,

There you have it, exactly there in the title of this interview, this sex artist Francesca da Rimini, or 'doll' as you call her, seems to be hitting a nerve here, as she asserts the power of the appearance of the lover, over the person's embodied flesh. I really cannot wait to dig into the interview and check out some of her work also.

And to answer your questions, then!

1. No, I don't feel like telling you what I look like. I look like an average male intellectual. Can't you guess a bit from my writing-style what I would look like? And why would like to know anyway? I don't need to know what you look like, for instance, but I picture you like a little chubby girl with glasses. We have a lot of those dyke-looking or boyish looking student girls around here, ('soccer girls' as I call them) is it a new tendency or what? Is that what you look like?

2. And to tell you what I think about the work of Ian Haig. I am not sure but he strikes me a bit like a 'base' mind with 'base' work, despite his interest in building sophisticated toilets for the 'post' human. I was just hoping the post-human would be interested in other sounds besides those banal ones, urination and/or excremental big farts? Wouldn't it be nice to get some Wagner or some of the speeches by Mussolini, when sitting on the toilet?

But yes. Let me shut up about the aesthetics and get onto your interview!

Take care,

Dr. Jacobs

Libidot: When did you get hooked on role-play and using the net to develop sexual correspondences?

Doll: It was happening in the period 1994-1997, before the net was so colonized by commercial interests, domain wars, and various national attempts at legal constriction and censorship. Looking back, it seems like a concurrent Renaissance and fin-de-siecle. A time of sweet dirty innocence. When I think about that time in my life, I experience the same kind of nostalgia as I do for the time of queer punk in my hometown of Adelaide in the early 80s – the other time in my life where sex, writing and addictions utterly consumed me. I miss the energy of both periods deeply, but it is impossible to return; these are lives which have been lived at a particular moment in time, and there's no way back.

Libidot: Did you experience the sexual encounters on the web as actual ongoing affairs or relationships?

Doll: Everything was real, nearly everything that had any meaning for me was happening in the continual soft dissolve of netspace. There was no virtual, only viral. We played as minds without bodies, but our bodies were constantly leaking desire, we were wet and hard, we experienced each other even when we weren't connected, because in a way we were always connected; logging in was just a formality.

Libidot: How is it possible to desire and fall in love with players over the computer?

Doll: Language creates desire, affection and love, at least on-line. Offline perhaps it is more often action that creates such deep emotional and physical connections, and physical chemistry, but when you are squatting the screens it's words that count. Street style measured in pauses, ellipses, an elegant turn of phrase, a dirty whisper, hysterical grammar, busting a move with alpha-numerics. If you play your words right, you can be River Phoenix at twelve. My first erotic encounter was with 'the\_Unborn', a vampire, and I imagined him exactly as he described himself. There was 'Puppet' fashioned as a well-crafted small wooden puppet. I know he viewed his character more as an homonculus, a tiny man, resembling his embodied self, but for me he was, and will always be, a baroque kind of pinocchio. The 'wolf,' in reality a transgendered female-to-male, I imagined as a wolf, bursting out of the realm of fairy tale and Angela Carter's bloody chamber to GenderFuckMeBaby's Palace of Unparalleled Cynicism. And 'Mr.Manhattan,' I imagined him a tall, dark, buff yuppie, dick constantly out of the pants, generic high powered e-commerce nasty exec type. In reality, we met on the platform of the train station in Linz ... Well, he was a blonde, can't remember now if he was holding a red rose.

Libidot: Were these correspondences mostly driven by literary/artistic ambitions or were they written in the realm of everyday romance? And how was romance experienced by your correspondents?

Doll: For a couple of the people with whom I was deeply involved, the Puppet and Mr.Manhattan, I believe it was equally intense for them, the erotic imagination which needed to write itself daily, the body which both disappeared and became magnified. Our characters were bound to one another by contractual understandings, but again and again we more than fulfilled the terms of agreement, living and archiving thousands of hours of play. We were not making art, but there was an art of living, an artful way of being. We were not constructing theory, but an intellectual base underscored our



games. We were not writing literature, but a literary approach to writing lay beneath our communications. I don't believe that the computer, per se, is erotic, but the space of meeting and imaginative play that the internet allows, is, or was, deeply erotic. Or maybe the computer becomes fetishized in a similar way that the fit, the needle, that glass and metal technology, was our fetish object in the 80s. It provides a path to an imaginative core, a path less fatal. (seriously ... wow ... I love this)

**Libidot:** I find the sequence with the puppet intriguing, because it embodies the state of constant arousal that goes hand in hand with cybersex. There seems to be "always something wet and soft between your legs" ... something a bit more versatile and articulate than a penis?

**Doll:** The versatility was only constrained by the imagination. Within the tight construct of our roles that we had created together everything was possible, the impossible made real. It's hard for a real life penis to compete with this, it still is. Well, I guess I always liked playing "let's pretend" games when I was a kid. In fact, what was happening at LambdaMOO, I would say to my friends, it's like playing dress-up or let's imagine. It's the closest I got to feeling like a kid again, in that very pleasurable aspect of childhood where anything is possible. So, in a way, maybe it was like going back 30 years to that point of being 7 or 8, when you're playing, and it's as if not much had happened in the intervening years. But, of course, I had lived my life and had a kid and been part of the sort of punk scene in Adelaide and had a miserable relationship and had done lots and lots of things, but I don't know if any of that influenced those characters, because they felt they were coming from a lot further back.

**Libidot:** How did you experience cybersex in your body? How would you describe these interactions?

**Doll:** I was experiencing my body in new ways, far more sexualized, responsive to suggestion and far more physically sensitive than it had been before. Spaces of shared auto-eroticism were deliciously and delicately unfurled, colorful ribbons of desire, feathers in the winds of time. This went hand in hand with a driving need to write, to write daily, hourly, to never leave the screen, to record the psychic and emotional development of the characters I was inhabiting, and the passages of the relationships they were forming with other minds played out within the liquid space of the net.

**Libidot:** Meanwhile, your participation in the cyberfeminist collective VNS Matrix also started in the early 1990s?

**Doll:** Yes, the summer of 1990 and 1991. We basically started out because we wanted to produce erotica for women. And the first name of the group was *Velvet Down Under*. Josephine Starrs was a photographer and was moving into computer graphics. Two of the women were studying feminist studies at the university, and Virginia Barratt was a performance artist. I was writing and making videos. Between us we had a lot of different skills. We were doing work around viral art and vaporware and we thought that it would be good to do some feminist viral work. My lover's collective was called *Cyberdada*, and we thought that we should be *Cyberfeminist*, a play with the word. The first thing that we did was *A Cyberfeminist Manifesto for the 21st Century*, which we did in 1991. A Billboard with the manifesto was displayed in Sydney on one of the main roads, Paramatta Road.

At that time none of us had computers of our own. A couple of people were working in arts organizations and they had access to really basic computers for word processing. I was writing my text in a book with an ink pen. I mean, I was living in a really compromised circumstance. I had moved back home in my mother's house. I was sharing a bedroom with my 16 year-old son, and I'd sit in the hallway of Mum's house and write these kind of cyber-feminist visions with ink-stained hands.

The first person who showed me web-based work in the MOO was Sandy Stone. VNS Matrix brought her over for a day of 'Art and Technology' that we curated (1994). Stone was doing a lot of work with MOO'S at that stage, and she took us online to Lambdamoo and Mediamoo. The first time I logged on with Josephine Starrs we went to Lambdamoo, and we were fortunate enough to meet the 'Unborn'. I think if I hadn't met somebody so interesting and willing to play with the character, I wouldn't have spent any time there.

**Libidot:** Where did you get the inspiration to play as other sexually aggressive characters?

**Doll:** The original character 'gash girl' was an Italian peasant, under the domination of a sadistic *padrone* (husband) called "Papa Gash". She was based on an imaginative extrapolation of what I knew about the life of my grandmother and of what I imagined of the women who came before her. When I went online I decided that I wanted to work with a reincarnation of this original wounded and most passive gash, who had been a repository for male contempt, reconfiguring her as an unfettered and powerful female presence, liberated from the physical confines of the village, the land, poverty and the limited social possibilities for women, to the seemingly infinite potentialities in spiralspace.

**Libidot:** Do you think of yourself as a trickster in your writing?

**Doll:** A trickster perhaps in the sense of shape-shifting, creating in unison with others, discrete intelligences that flow in and out of screenal bodies, and perhaps in the sense that everything which occurs in these writings (compiled in the book *FleshMeat*) is framed as 'Lies. All lies.' I'm not prepared to say, "yes, it all really happened." You can read it as an autobiography, or as fiction, or as poetry. And, it's all true; but, at the same time, it's all lies. Nothing ever really happened, there were no others, I never went online, I never killed young boys, I never fucked a wolf, there was no puppet asleep in my pussy. It's completely fakeshop, very tricky of me.

**Libidot:** What kind of copyright and artist agreement did you have with your players?

**Doll:** It was a field of reciprocal exchange, a free trade zone. With the exception of the wolf, with whom I fell into an insane and completely deluded love, and whose words I decided not to use in the book, because they formed part of an experience that was intensely devastating for me, I felt free to use the gifts I had been given as source material for both my book *FleshMeat*, and online projects such as 'dollspace' and 'princess valium'. The contracts I established with my playmates allowed me to use transcripts of our correspondences and online interactions in whichever way I chose, and it was understood that I had an editorial power, but not the right to alter their words. I had no interest in making a direct financial profit from these gifts. That wasn't part of the deal.



I don't see the various projects as 'art', they are meditations, perhaps they are poetry, perhaps they are letters and diaries, or perhaps they are archives of lives lived squatting the screenal realities. They're definitely not 'digital art'.

**Libidot:** How and when did you "wake up" from the experience of cybersex affairs? Is it possible to get into a similar trance-obsessive state doing other types of art?

**Doll:** My life was online, so most other realities slipped away in the face of my contractual obligations to my playmates. Day became night before I would realize it, too late to go to the shops, there wasn't much food in the house, I lost weight, the phone was connected to the Internet, headphones on, hard to hear the doorbell, it was hard for friends to contact me. My life became a kind of soap opera, with friends asking for details of the latest installment with Puppet or the wolf or Mr.Manhattan. I had quit my job as a marketing manager and spent day after day in my pajamas – jacked in, jerking off. It was infinitely more fun than corporate work.

The brutal ending of my affair with Mr.Manhattan, which followed a year after having my heart ripped out of my chest by the wolf, led to GashGirl being declared 'Missing In Action', and in her place the character of doll yoko slowly developed, born in a pond of dead girls in the mountains of Kyoto.

**Libidot:** Could you say something more about the work you did in the mountains of Kyoto?

**Doll:** I went there for a holiday for six weeks. I met an Australian girlfriend who was staying there. I went only about a month after the relationship with Mr.Manhattan had ended. I was still feeling really devastated from that even though I was really never in love with him. But it intensely replicated a feeling of love. The night I arrived we were riding our bicycles up the mountain to the little hut where we were going to be living. On the way my friend Keri pointed out this pond, a very small pond. And she told me this is where the locals have said that, for centuries, women had drowned their baby daughters. That was a really strong image to get within a half-hour of arriving in Japan. When I was there I asked some people about this pond, but noone had much information; although, everyone concurred that it was a historical or mythical place within that culture of Kyoto. And the name of the



Francesca da Rimini, photographs of life-size dolls taken in department stores in Rome and Nuremberg, 2002.

pond, Midoro-Gaike, meant something like 'deep bottomless mud'. That immediately gave me the image of infinite mud because there were so many dissolved bones of little baby girls.

So then I had already created for *VNS Matrix* a character called "Doll Yoko" as one minor description for our game *Bad Code*. I had to create a lot of characters and scenarios, so she was originally a bit like the borg bodyless bitch in one of those *Star Trek* movies. She was fairly evil in the original incarnation. I really liked that name "doll yoko." I thought, I am going to re-use her but completely change her. She is going to be the vehicle to carry the spirits of all these little girls. When I was living in Kyoto, I wasn't doing very much myself at all. I was living by myself in a beautiful traditional rice paper house in the mountains. Every day I would go down into the city. There was a ladies' gym, to check your email. You could have a swim and check your email. It was like heaven. Everyday I was writing to a young woman back home. She was like a cub, like my daughter. I was writing to her in the voice of doll yoko and she wrote back to me, and they were very short emails and quite poetic.

And I was also writing to Ricardo Dominguez, who I had met on email, and had not actually met in real life. He was really great, and he was writing back in the voice of a daemon, powerful sexualized male energy. So, we had a correspondence over the six weeks of about 90 emails. Also, I was sending my cub the emails that he was sending me. She became witness to my correspondence, which was a bit like my friends who were witnessing the relationships I was having online with various people at *LambdaMOO* and Mr.Manhattan.

In Kyoto it was autumn going into winter, a very melancholic, potent season for my imagination. Over those six weeks the character of doll yoko was formed. I went straight from Kyoto to New York. That's where I met Ricardo Dominguez, and about two weeks later, he arranged for me to do a reading at *The Thing* in New York. I read some of the texts from *FleshMeat* but also wanted to write something new. I went back through all the emails with him and wrote the piece *Dollspace*, which ends the book *Fleshmeat*.

**Libidot:** *Dollspace* has links to information about the Zapatistas movement, for instance, which brings vitalism and eroticism into the realm of politics.



Francesca da Rimini, photographs of life-size dolls taken in department stores in Rome and Nuremberg, 2002.



**Doll:** That came through my friendship with Ricardo Dominguez. Before I met him, I knew nothing about the Zapatistas. It was Ricardo who made the connection between doll yoko and the small brave women within the Mexican Zapatista movement.

**Libidot:** In real life these connections would be very hard to make between, let's say, a woman from Australia and the Zapatistas, because they are very different cultures.

**Doll:** The Zapatistas often talk about themselves as being ghosts or the living dead. There was a connection with death and coming out of the mountains, and doll yoko came out of the pond. It is coming out and finding a power after being so squashed, so oppressed, and it's the way the Zapatistas use the net as a zone for fighting.

**Libidot:** What about your site *Los Dias y Las Noches de los Muertos*. I saw you working on it yesterday. What kind of changes did you make to the project?

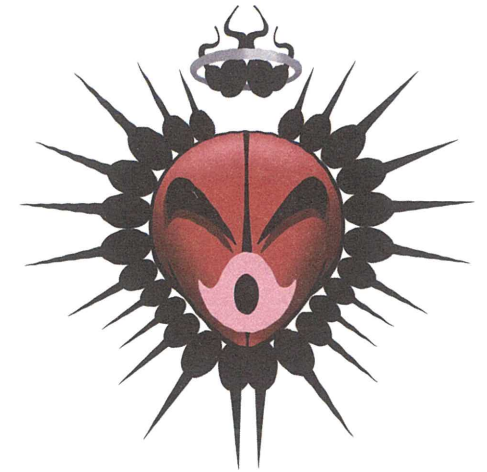
**Doll:** It means 'the days and nights of the dead'. I started it in 1997 and sort of finished it a couple of years ago and decided to add some more components to it. It's a non-interactive narrative that works by association of different images and text, and it's an exploration of globalization and power. It uses text from the Rand Corporation, which is a U.S. military and strategic think tank, and from the U.S. Space command, which is the arm of the United States military which now coordinates all the militarization of space activities of the Army, Air force, Navy and Marines. It also includes some maxims about war from Napoleon Bonaparte that have been translated into English text. They're counterpointed by fragments of text from the Zapatistas, which are presented in another frame and are written in Spanish and English. So, it's looking at power from the point of view of those who have power and who create the spectacle; juxtaposing this are those who are in opposition, specifically the Zapatistas. They are the coalition of different indigenous people in Mexico, particularly in Chiapas.

Today is Wednesday July 31st, 2001. Friday July 20th, 2001, was the second day of the G-8 Summit in Genoa in Italy and the second day of protests against that summit. A young protestor, Carlo Giuliani, was killed during the protests by the military police. That marks not the first step in the anti-globalization movement, but one of the most crucial. In June, three protestors were killed in Papua, New Guinea, and, of course, thousands of people have been killed in their protests in various forms against globalization of power and capital. I was in Italy when that was happening, and I wanted to incorporate some of the images from G-8 and from the death of that boy.



Dollspace, web-based media, details, 1997-2201.





#### 4. Belgium:

## Black Magic and the Holy Media

October 21, 2002. GHENT.

I am riding a train from Antwerp to Ghent. The cabin reeks of old toilets, wet muddy shoes and cigarette smoke. I am about to meet Piepke. He told me that his name is pronounced *peepka* and means 'Little Peep'. We agreed to meet in his home-town Ghent. It is one hour by train from Brussels and located in the Flemish section of this miniscule Belgium. He sent me photographs of his cartoon-like paintings: bubbly creatures spawning orgies in front of televisions, ghost-like underwear figures roaming toilets. I am a bit curious about *Peepka*.

I arrive in Ghent's *St-Pieters* Station, and there he is, waiting for me in the central hall. He turns out to be skinny and shy, speaking softly and with a cute Flemish accent (one of the features being his odd pronunciation of the word Mickey Mouse. Mickey *Mousse*, he says, as if it would be a type of chocolate mousse.) We hop on the city bus and travel to his tiny house just outside the city-center.



## Interview: Piepke, Ghent, October 21, 2002

## 'WE DON'T NEED ANOTHER FASCIST GROOVE THING'

**Libidot:** When did you start using the name 'Piepke'?

**Piepke:** I have had this name for about twelve years. It was Minouche, a famous art model who lives here in Ghent, who invented that name for me. I used to meet her once and a while and but she could never remember my name and started calling me 'Piepke'. So I kept the name because people around me liked it, because they thought that it suited me. It also encapsulates my painting style. That is also why the name feels like 'me'.

**Libidot:** Have you always thought of yourself as being an artist?

**Piepke:** I started out making art as a fashion designer.

**Libidot:** Did you aspire to be a model?



Piepke

**Piepke:** No, my legs are too short. And I did not get along very well in the world of fashion design. I had just come out of my shell and started to absorb what was going on in the 'outside world' and I immediately thought 'Fuck this outside world.' I don't want to be more specific than that, but it has to do with how personalities work together and how institutions work. My paintings were also a way of processing these tensions. I am the type of person who acts before analyzing situations, so my paintings have offered some type of release. This is one of the primary functions of art for me, as in making them, I become more aware of how I do things and how I make things.

Since I was a fashion designer, the first things I made besides paintings were clothes. But much more importantly, I lived in a world of fantasies and images. My goal was to try to materialize these fantasies, and that was often a real struggle and turn-off. Now I experience that to be totally different. My work is still very personal, but it is no longer driven by frustration. It just is a manifestation. This is who I am and this is my experience.

## Dr. Jacobs 8:48 am 10/21/2002 Piepke



Dear Libidot,

A very good example of artistic psycho-babble! Can you make sure to get to the point a bit faster? And don't forget the document 'interviewing sex artists' I sent you the other day? Did you even look at it?

Dr. Jacobs

p.s. Thanks for posting the picture of Piepke himself. He does look like a tender soul.

**Libidot:** I would think it is especially difficult to give shape to sexual fantasies because we live and breathe sexual fantasies day in and day out. How would one ever be able to give shape to that?

**Piepke:** It is not so difficult for me personally to materialize my fantasies. What is more difficult is to show them around to other people. Some of my work is very personal and goes deep inside my personality. And that makes one very vulnerable, especially in today's society. But this is the road that I want to take. I want to be an 'open book'. Here and there the pages of the book are glued together and I try to tear them apart.

**Libidot:** Your early paintings are mostly 'bubbly' creatures who are groping and fucking happily, but your later work on sex is so much more dark. Could you say something about your painting *We Don't Need Another Fascist Groove Thing*?

**Piepke:** This painting and the entire *Allez-Lujah* series makes references to Catholicism, which I believe is an almost fascist institution. I think that we should have the right to select or discover our own religion. And the Catholic Church is a very good example of that tendency, and it is very close to me. I chose 'Pinocchio' as a symbol of the fixated idea of religion, because Disney characters are another fixation, and perceived to be the norm of animated cartoon characters.

## Dr. Jacobs 8:52 am 10/21/2002 RE: Piepke

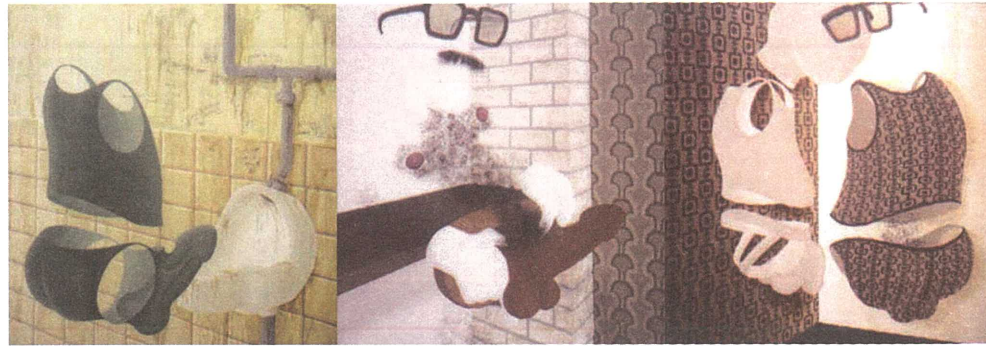


Ok! Here he seems to be opening up a little bit. Maybe you can ask him to explain Christian references in his paintings. Or ask him how the Belgian Catholic Church has reacted to his work.

**Libidot:** Could you explain the painting *f\* Fragile*?

**Piepke:** It depicts a hanged Christ-like figure (Bambi) who is also lacking a leg. I guess I painted it when I felt handicapped about my own desires. This is my painting that gets the most extreme reactions from audiences. Some people actually spat on it during the *Dimensio* exhibition in Barcelona (2001).





Piepke, (Th)underwear, paintings, 2002.

## Dr. Jacobs 8:55 am 10/21/2002 RE: Piepke



Libidot! Use a follow up question! You simply tend to jump around too much in your interviews. I wonder what your next question will be.

**Libidot:** I was wondering about these ghost-like figures in your paintings? Why do you paint these ghost-like figures? Are they figments of your desire?

**Piepke:** Yes, indeed. But my personal desires are supposed to remain obscure. The first painting in the series *(Th)underwear 2002* is 'Piss, homage'. I wanted to pay homage to something and I chose a toilet. I admire toilets because they tend to have life on the walls, graffiti, etc. I was looking for a new type of figure in my painting and it wasn't sure how to go about it. But then I came up with the idea to depict the human figure by only revealing their underwear. In some of these paintings I also use real pubic hair to depict hair on the chest, so it becomes a body that actually does not exist. It is a kind of imaginative body that does not exist.



Piepke, Vive La Fuck, paintings, 1997.

**Libidot:** But you also paint a life-like penis attached to the underwear.

**Piepke:** The penis has a comforting function, as in the painting *Untitled*, where the two underwear figures are standing close to each other. The younger person wears a mask and is comforted by the older person. I invented this scene because I was interested in painting underwear from the 1970s, the kind of underwear that looks like wallpaper.

## Dr. Jacobs 8:55 am 10/21/2002 RE: Piepke



But what is the relevance of this question? Ask yourself next time before asking the question, ask yourself. Is it really relevant? If you must know, I do happen to have some of this underwear myself. I once had a sex affair about ten years ago and my partner got so turned off by it (it was also a little bit faded) that he could not even get an erection. Is it disturbing or interesting how fashions can be recuperated?

**Libidot:** It reminds me of the work of the Australian artist Francesca da Rimini. She works with ghost-like personalities as well, figures that appear and disappear, and her work radiates a similar dark longing. Your work also shows a sexual development. Did you make sexual art from your early days as an artist?

**Piepke:** It was quite strong when I started out as an artist, now it has evened out a little bit more. The beginnings of my art work were purely sexual, and I think that had to do with the fact that I experienced dissatisfaction and frustration. The problem was that my work could not capture my state of mind. My paintings were too colorful and happy. When my paintings got darker, I was more able to analyze and translate my state of mind. Previously, I was just producing art without thinking about what I was doing.



Piepke, Allez-Lujah, We don't Need Another Fascist Groove Thing, Painting, 2000.



Piepke, Allez-Lujah, F\* Fragile, 2000.



A lot of my work is about maturing and getting older, about the different stages one has to go through. What does it mean to get older? On the one hand it means that you have to become more responsible, on the other hand you are swamped with possibilities and choices. My work is personal in that it shows how this process can be blocked.

When I was younger, I was also completely lost in a world of disco and drugs. I was painting a lot but I was living a very isolated existence. I was heavily into drugs and had to go through intensive detoxication. That was a very difficult period for me. But we have a piece of legislation here in Belgium, *Article 66*, through which one can get employment when trying to overcome a drug addiction. This is how I got my first job as a curator at the *Centrum voor Jonge Kunst* in Ghent. This center is located in an old retirement home and organizes low-budget exhibitions for emerging artists. First I worked in the cafeteria of CJK, then I worked as a technician and later I was promoted to curator.

### Dr. Jacobs 9:10 am 10/21/2002 RE: Piepke



Now, here is a little bit of interesting information about good old socialist Europe, the Belgian 'article 66' as 'detoxication' program for young artists. Ah! I can't believe it!

**Libidot:** Can you tell me something about your more recent interest in digital art? How does that tie-in with your goals as a painter?

**Piepke:** Painting is my most important means of expression, but I don't want to create my profile on one platform. I really don't like the look of a lot of computer animation. As long as it depicts puppets and animals and monsters, it is still all right, but I find the depiction of the humans really ugly. Technically, I like using software programs to color my drawings. I make the drawings by hand but I scan them in and color them with the computer.

If you look at the early animations from the 1920s, for instance the early Mickey Mouse figures, you notice that the figure moves in many different spots. They were over-animating the figures because they were carried away by the technical innovation factor. I think that this has not changed in contemporary computer animation. They realize that they can create many new types of movement, and they do want to be able to do everything. It is of course very impressive how computer animation has developed motion graphics in the last years, but there are other things one can do.

**Libidot:** What are your most significant influences as a filmmaker or animator?

**Piepke:** I try to be as open as possible towards diverse ideas and styles. But I have been enormously inspired cinematically by Matthew Barney's *Cremaster Cycle*. They are long movies packed with esoteric images without any dialogue. Visually breathtaking. Another important trend to mention is a new wave of European animation movies with sexually explicit themes, which is now featured in annu-

al film animation festivals. I do think that this genre is currently packed with idiotic scenes, which I don't like that much, but they are definitely a trend in animation.

But I am fundamentally a painter, so I have a different way of conceiving images. Also, I want to go beyond existing erotica genres and traditions, I want to make something entirely new.

**Libidot:** Is it still feasible in this day and age to make analog animation movies, working with white gloves on celluloid film?

**Piepke:** There are many techniques one can use, such as animating with oil paint or with sand. It is usually a real multi-media adventure (in the old sense of the word) as you have to do everything from casting characters to designing sets and costumes. Of course, once you become a 'professional' animator you end up animating predesigned characters in a little cube.

**Libidot:** Do you want to end up in the commercial animation circuit?

**Piepke:** I want to find the golden midway between art and commerce.

**Libidot:** How would you describe your relationship with computers and the Internet?

**Piepke:** It is a world-wide exhibit that stimulates our exhibitionistic urges. I am guilty, too, perhaps more so than anyone else.

### October 25, 2002. MECHELEN.

Hold on, who is really the needy soul here in this book? I keep getting emails but not sure what to do with this ivory tower feedback. Like I am sitting in his classroom or something? Forget it, Dr. Jacobs! We don't need your fascist groove thing! Why don't you get off your ass and walk with me, and then write some useful information for my journey? See! I am off to Mechelen to visit the *Porn Ar(t)ound the World* festival, one of the major events in sex art



Sint-Rombouts with its Unfinished 'Head'.

history! I will first take the train from the capital city Brussels to the small town Mechelen, and upon arrival, walk through Mechelen's main shopping street. I will land in a rustic open square with cafés, restaurants, and the 16<sup>th</sup> century cathedral, *Sint-Rombouts*.

At one point in history, Sint-Rombouts was supposed to be the highest church tower in the 'low lands' of Europe, but the Catholic Church ran out of money, and the tower was never finished. What does it look like here?



The town of Mechelen, the seat of the Archbishop of Belgium, is an old-fashioned, 'sleepy', and provincial-looking town. It is also strangely hot in this country with pissing rainstorms and perennial grey skies. I take a look at Sint-Rombouts. People are queuing in front of a bank machine mounted right in the middle of its wall, to take out money and go shopping in nearby streets, have a meal, a beer or two, coffee and pastries.

Let's do this step by step. I go to café *Den Engel* to get a cup of coffee and a Belgian piece of cherry pie (*kriekentaartje*). The Belgian pies and coffees are noticeably better than anywhere else in the world. I sit down and open the local newspaper, *Het Laatste Nieuws*. The other customers are having cherry pies too, chatting very quietly, staring at each other and patting their dogs. Ah! I see an article about the *Porn Ar(t)ound the World* festival, about Yoshie Suzuki, a Japanese performance artist in town who is wandering the streets of Mechelen to offer people mutual and consensual French kisses. The article shows a photograph of Suzuki in front of Sint-Rombouts, kissing a tall handsome blonde Belgian boy. I take a sip from my coffee and glance at an old lady quietly kissing and licking the tiny tongue of her dog. How come this old Belgian tart is allowed to kiss her little dog? Dr. Jacobs? Can you explain this to me? Why is there all this commotion in Belgium about a Japanese artist walking the streets and kissing people?



Newspaper Headline, 'Entire City gets a French Kiss'.

## Dr. Jacobs 4:03 pm 10/28/2002 Frozen Doctors of Philosophy



Libidot,

This is such a new challenge for all of us frozen doctors of philosophy. We need to practice the philosophy of shaping sex art experiences, the philosophy of looking at sex art, the philosophy of thinking about it, the contemplative afterglow, the pure abstraction. Doctors of philosophy, my hard-working sisters and brothers, we need your cooperation to further develop a fair, if not advanced, methodology for the study of sex art. Please let's not get discouraged by our lack of immediate sex art experiences. We need to find out how to experience and grasp what is going on here in Belgium.

Dr. Jacobs

p.s. Anyway, on a personal note, Teo just came around again and asked me: "Well. Do you like this idea that we discussed yesterday?" And from there on I uttered a string of promises and roller-coasted into an agreement about supervising his thesis. Of course, you never know exactly what is going on in these situations. Especially with the younger students, who can get so infatuated with their teachers, hoping you will fuck them like the understanding father they never had. Still, I went home with a but-tery feeling in my arms and legs, thinking about smiling boys in old-fashioned white underwear. Teo said that he found one of my articles in the library at Brown University and was taken by my ideas about avant-garde cinema. Do you think that this was some kind of sexual move?

## October 27, 2002. MECHELEN.

Ah! Dr. Jacobs! Maybe it is just one of Piepke's ghost figures visiting your underwear? Maybe he is just a little ghost who wants to make you babble like a crazy fool? A ghost who will seduce you with his youthful flesh, and then drop you out of the blue. You told me yourself! Beware of appearances! And anyhow, please don't get distracted now because I will need your help in Belgium. I am visiting the first *Porn Ar(t)ound the World* festival, which aims to "present international expressions of art and sexuality at a time when commercial pornography has flooded the Internet and pockets of artistic and political activism are budding alongside the Internet porn boom."<sup>1</sup> When I arrive in the festival headquarters, the curators and artists look completely stressed out. They tell me that the festival is in a big

<sup>1</sup> *Porn Ar(t)ound the World Festival catalogue.*



crisis, as they are being chased by hordes of Catholic journalists after an official condemnation by the archbishop, the ex-prime minister, and by the city officials of Mechelen.

As a result, Belgian people are flocking from all over the country to see the 'obscene' porn art shows. All the sex artists have arrived – Zoot and Genant from Amsterdam, Annie Sprinkle from San Francisco, Shu Lea Cheang from London, Francesca da Rimini from Adelaide, Yoshie Suzuki from Chicago. The artists have arrived safely in Mechelen, but their plans and work schedules are constantly being altered under the immense pressures of a whipped-up media, angry politicians, and a deeply worried board of directors.

I wander around and enter a big old print-shop, converted into artists studios and rehearsal spaces, painted in astro-bright colors. Closed to visitors for the time being, technicians are running around, building a computer lab for student workshops that will be hosted by Francesca da Rimini, Shu Lea Cheang, and Annie Sprinkle.

## October 28, 2002. MECHELEN.

Victor Turner's anthropological theory of ritual postulates that a culture's renewal through sexual transformations was traditionally displayed in 'in-between spaces,' liminal zones where people could try out tabooed identities. Turner shows that communities go back to orthodox living after such break-out periods, hence the impact of festive events may be slow or difficult to measure. The *Porn Ar(t)ound the World* festival wants to construct a safe ground for people to collectively test out sexual fantasies and pornographic images. The curators invited Francesca da Rimini to hold a workshop on sex and cyber identities entitled *Strange Packets of Desire*. As her synopsis explains: "Small group prototyping of fantasies. Beta-testing expression of the personal and the pornographic. The creation of a discourse of love to give everyone the right to claim each personal sacred legend. Each participant an individual packet of desire, forming a node in a network of other body/minds."<sup>2</sup>

The 'lab', run by da Rimini and her two assistants, Dale Nason and Agnese Trocchi, turns out to be a workspace inside the converted print-shop, hidden away from journalists and the public. University students are constructing magazines. They are working on networked computers, with text, photography, video, web design and computer animation programs. There is a separate room with a scanner, and an extra table with documents and magazines. An important goal of the workshop is to investigate 'spaces-between' bodies and pornographic images. Students make websites and participate in exercises, such as the 'plastic relaxed bodies' exercise where they move and record body parts moving in differ-

ent ways. In another exercise, participants are blindfolded and whisper words around the exchange of chosen objects. 'Strangeness' is the keyword of the workshop, as it is an experimental space to try out and share fantasies while getting to know each other. Curiosity and shyness are aspects of 'strangeness' that need to be allowed for. The fluid transitions between 'strangeness' and 'togetherness' make them feel inspired and grounded, to work together on erotic/pornographic projects. Exercises such as web-based chatroom dialogues make participants aware of the potential to experiment with collective states of communication. Their individual identities become larger 'packs' when they enter liminal zones that allow to experience collective variations of sexuality. Sexual personas and cultural modes are 'packed together' and presented to audiences as a group experiment in aesthetics and sexual imaging.

The 'lab' is also used by the students of Shu Lea Cheang, who is teaching them how to conceive of futuristic porn movies. Cheang introduces the students to her forthcoming movie, *Fluid*. Set in the year 2030, *Fluid* shows men and women with a new sexual fluid, 'Milk', containing a potent mix of chemicals. For instance, on skin contact, 'Milk' gives an addictive sexual-sensual high. But of course the people who have Milk are considered illegals by the State. They are hunted down by undercover agents. The students in Cheang's workshop write their own scenarios based on *Fluid* and will later present them for an audience during the festival.

## November 1, 2002. MECHELEN.

Today I am off again to the festival in Mechelen to take part in Annie Sprinkle's workshop, *Super Sex Technologies*. Trained as a porn star, sex worker and artist-performer, Annie Sprinkle was one of the first women to bring her experiences as a sex worker to art institutions. In *Post Porn-Modernist and Post-Post-Modernist*, (1990-1995) performed in New York, Amsterdam, Adelaide, Toronto and other cities, she stood on a stage with a *Public Cervix Announcement*. After giving herself a warm water douche between the legs, she made small talk to the audience. Moving to an armchair, she explained the female reproductive organs – the ovaries, the uterus, the fallopian tubes, and the cervix. She then opened her legs and inserted a speculum inside her vagina and invited audience members to come onto the stage and take a look at her cervix. In her most famous performance, *Herstory of Porn: From Reel to Real* (1997-2003), Sprinkle analyzes her own involvement in the medium of porn-making, the fluctuating porn industries, outlining her development from being model to independent producer, going through the stages of plain porn, kinky porn, lesbian porn, and new age porn.

The workshop *Super Sex Technologies* teaches women to discover and strengthen their sexual energy. The idea is to have pleasant or sexual sensations (or orgasms) by moving sexual

<sup>2</sup> Francesca da Rimini, Synopsis, *Strange Packets of Desire*.



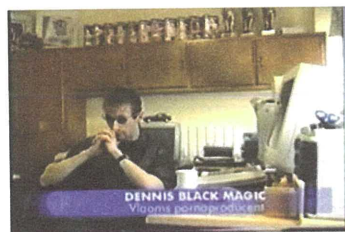
energy throughout the entire body, without touching genitals or touching partners. We learn practical techniques, exercising the muscles around our *pussies*, breathing through *pussies*, taking *pussy* energy through the seven chakras – from the root up to the heart, the throat, the third eye, the crown – changing the pitch of noise, emitting higher sounds, and if necessary, *fake the orgasm*, until we make it. Sprinkle has a thing with language. She believes that all forms of orgasm should be named. We are lying on the floor and she encourages us to breath rhythmically and have an orgasm. *Fake it until you make it*, she says. She has done this a million times, breathing her way through life's hot romances and shittier episodes. Even though the workshop is very intimate and well organized, some of Sprinkle's students are not ready to experience the energy orgasm. Maybe they were too shy, too nervous or too cautious because of the Catholic backlash on television?

### November 1, 2002. MECHELEN.

But the festival is going more and more beserk. I drink whiskey in my hotel room in Brussels and find another TV talkshow about the festival. Two teams are debating the validity of the festival and the debate is orchestrated by a tanned media celebrity, Ex-Miss Belgium and pop sexologist, Goedele Liekens. The curator of the festival Dirk Verstockt is in good shape to beat up the opposition – a Catholic journalist Matthias Danneels, a representative of the local organization *Real Men Against Pornography*, and a local porn producer, Dennis Black Magic (wearing black jeans and sunglasses).



Dirk Verstockt, curator of Porn Ar(t)ound the World.



Black Magic interviewed by VTM television.

Black Magic looks skinny and depressed, acting as if he walked straight out of an asylum run by a Catholic brothers. Towards the end of the show, in which the debate unfolded in favor of the festival team, Liekens asks Black Magic to make a statement. He stands up calmly, adjusts his sunglasses, but then suddenly loses his temper, uttering some incomprehensible sounds. He shouts out that the festival is full of shit. It is unfair that this festival of obscene works is being funded by the government while his own productions are being scrutinized by the police.

Verstockt argues back, explaining that the art in his festival is different from pornography, but that art is necessary as it raises questions that are difficult to process for people in this largely Catholic society. But Ex-Miss Belgium has lost control over the situation. Black Magic is fuming mad. He shouts that he is

going to make sure that the festival is shut down within 24 hours. He wants to stop government funding and to protect Belgium from this kind of art. He is gaining momentum, attacking the artsy-fartsy opposition, spitting out his disdain for art.

### November 3, 2002. MECHELEN.

As a result of this tide, Yoshie Suzuki appears on TV explaining that she cannot seem to get any kissing partners in Belgium. I report back to the festival headquarters the next day and ask them to explain the 'TV coup' of Black Magic. The Catholic journalist Mathias Danneels had initiated the obscenity charges in the Catholic newspaper, *Het Laatste Nieuws*. Under the headline 'Stop Banalizing Preciousness,' Danneels had written that the festival's program was full of 'bad taste', that the minister of culture must have been 'stoned' to provide funding for this public event. His second argument was against pornography itself, asking artists not to replicate the 'low' values of porn, as it prevents young people from discovering peace and self-confidence and destroys their dreams, expectations and desires.

Danneels and hordes of other Belgian journalists have started to attack the festival right after the first press releases were sent out. They especially condemned the event *Bring & Show Your Favorite Porn*, where invited guests would discuss their favorite porn movies, and amateur filmmakers would show their home-made porn movies. They argued that the festival was aggressively encouraging people to produce obscenities, that porn consumption and production should be a legally contained business and private affair. The festival argued back, saying that 'the people' had become saturated watching silicone-manufactured porn stars, announcing a new era for do-it-yourself porn, where artists and amateurs could use low-budget technologies to make their own erotic art works, or to collectively consume porn.<sup>3</sup> Former minister Luc Van de Brande was asked to comment on the tense situation and he called the festival 'perverse and pure provocation.' Mechelen's mayor Bart Somers and his representative of culture, Frank Nobels, declared that the festival was creating a negative image for Mechelen. They would make sure the event "would never happen again."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> KC nOna's artistic director Dirk Verstockt paraphrased this objective in "Tussen Kunst en Commerce: Festival" *De Standaard*, 15 November 2002.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Verbruggen, 'Pornokunst bezorgt Mechelen fikse kater' *Het Laatste Nieuws*, 15 November 2002.



## Dr. Jacobs 4:03 pm 11/3/2002 re: RE: Frozen Doctors of Philosophy



Hi Libidot,

Yes, why are these Belgian authorities so afraid of sex artists or porn artist visiting their art centers? And how can they be so repulsed and close down this work?

Let me make a comparison with an artist from the olden days, Antonin Artaud. In 1933, Artaud was invited to give a lecture at the Paris Sorbonne University. He titled his lecture 'The Theatre and the Plague'. He asked his friend Anaïs Nin to attend the lecture and fortunately for us, Nin wrote down a detailed account. Nin describes how Artaud appeared on the stage and argued for performance modes that affect the audience like a virus - a life of artistic integrity and intensity, a heightened form of feeling as 'cruel' gestures emanating from the performer body. But his Sorbonne audience was cold. Then he suddenly changed tactics and started shouting out his speech. He babbled for a while and started making all kinds of strange noises, and then he "screamed out in agony." The audience, however, remained cold. They gasped and laughed hysterically. Then they walked out of the auditorium, slamming the door with a bang!

Bang! So that was the brutal reaction to our little man, Antonin Artaud. But let us rather learn from his awkward appearance, and speculate in hindsight, what he had **tried** to communicate to his audience. The plague to him was like an intense awareness of complex functioning of organs of the body. As he explains in his famous treatise: "We cannot control the filtering of body fluids by the liver or the redistribution of blood by the heart and arteries, cannot restrain the digestion, arrest or accelerate the elimination of matter from the intestine. Thus the plague seems to manifest its presence in and have a preference for the very organs of the body, the particular physical sites, where human will, consciousness, and thought are imminent and apt to occur." (*The Theater and Its Double*, p. 21.) Precisely because he was trying to evoke consciousness in his lecturing organ, Artaud made a primal scream as an appropriate method of communication. But his audience did not react well at all.

Artaud's use of the word 'cruelty' does not entail sadism or violence but is to be taken in its broader sense, as a responsible and focused way of acting out impulse, exhibiting consciousness in specific physical sites: "From the point of view of mind, cruelty signifies rigor, implacable intention, irreversible and absolute determination." (Ibidem, p.101) Cruelty is also a mythical source and vigorous mode of art as eruptive embodiment, that can be cultivated in live performances or with media. Cruelty underscores empathy for these sites of communication as experiment, a call for outsider to undergoing the performance body, to watch and mimic those who use sex to break with the older sites of art and scholarship.

The Artaudian concept of cruelty has been influential to post-1950s body art and sexual revolutions, when artists such as Hermann Nitsch, Charlotte Moorman, Hannah Wilke, Vito Acconci, Yoko Ono and Carolee Schneemann started to stage sex as cruel sites of the body. They struggled politically to exhibit these sites, fought for their right to aesthetics and empathy, to fight censorship regimes and approach the moral crusaders with Artaudian cruelty. Oftentimes, these artists sought to liberate sexual representation in popular culture and the emerging porn industries. As Joseph Slade writes in *Pornography and Sexual Representation*, the images and devices of this generation of artists "assert the classic function of pornography to subvert, to satirize, to expose - or, as current jargon would have it, to deconstruct - sexual and gender assumptions of the established social and political order." (p.74)

This goal is still present in the recent wave of artists, whose work is more indebted to the cultures of digital networks, cybersex and Internet pornography. Even though we are more than ever surrounded by pornography, sex art and porn art seem to result in audience discomfort and censorship, rather any type of discussion or empathy. The events in Belgium indicate that performance venues and movie theaters can hardly be freed of the habitual modes of performance and perception, and also that this country must have its specific fears that are harder to grasp for an outsider.

Dr. Jacobs



November 3, 2002. MECHELEN.



Marc Dutroux  
Mugshot

The attacks on the festival are all over the newspapers. I have not seen such lack of empathy with art since I started this journey. The arguments harken back to an era of Catholic dogma and repression. Yes, what the hell is going on in this country? Journalists evoke the memory of the famous Belgian child-murderer Marc Dutroux, and the famous White March on Brussels in October 1996, where two hundred thousand Belgians paraded in Brussels, wearing white clothes and carrying white balloons. In a gridlock between the police and the court system, the Belgian state had been too slow to locate Dutroux, who claimed six victims, four girls buried and two found alive in his basement after his arrest. Belgium was deprived of national pride and experienced the kind of obsessive media onslaught that is typical to the United States. Six years later, as the festival is being shut down in sleepy Mechelen, Belgian citizens are still demanding a just treatment for Dutroux.



Yoshie Suzuki interviewed by VTM television, explaining that she cannot get seem to get any kissing partners in Belgium.

The memory of Dutroux and his (unproven) relationship to child porn inspires the festival opponents to brutally attack the participating artists. For instance, *Real Men against Pornography* are picketing outside the theater on the last day of Annie Sprinkle's *Herstory of Porn: From Reel to Real*. They are distributing brochures, citing murderer Ted Bundy's addiction to porn and arguing that: "God is the founder of sex. Sex is a unique bodily experience a man and women can share when they love each other in marriage ... Porn is a disgraceful invention that prevents people to discover the pearl of true divine sex."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Information Brochure Real Men Against Pornography distributed during Porn Ar(t)ound the World Festival.

Dr. Jacobs 4:03 pm 11/3/2001 The Nagging Question of Art and Pornography



Libidot,

Pornography is in flux, as entrepreneurs invest money in electronic networks and construct offshore markets through the Internet, television markets and video distribution. Some of your sex artists seem to want to ride this tide of pornographic excess. The boom of pornography on the Internet is of course first of all the result of greedy capitalist markets, but it coincidences with a transforming of the libido. The main purpose of the porn industry today is to make money out of the urges of the consumer, but the varieties of products made by amateur and artists who use 'do it yourself' media and alternative distribution, is enormous. The older porn industries and masturbating audiences are slowly changing and making room for spectators trained on home-made varieties and and artistic representation.

Doctors of philosophy, I hear you shout now, porn can never change, porn is just porn. But if pornography is mostly an industry of works of common taste for the arousal of global consumers, let's just redefine its as amorphous bundle of sex scenes made with divergent goals in mind.

For instance, there is a new trend in pornography by female entrepreneurs to make products that would be more attractive to female consumers. Or there is the example of Zentropa Pictures, who in 1999 opened Puzzy Power, a porn branch inviting female and other directors to make pornographic films. The company was recently sold to Innocent Pictures, which came out with the 'Pornouveau Manifesto'. The manifesto stipulates that movies "must be innovative and quality films that turn people on." The portrayal of sex should be as real and true as possible, yet also exploring diverse forms of energy and sensuality. Sex scenes should be integrated into cinematic narratives and written for the enjoyment of both women and men. Hoping to create positive and inspiring images of human sexuality, pornouveau filmmakers try to make films that they themselves would like to watch. They might not believe that films are better than experiencing real life sex, but a welcome addition to this experience. (Pornouveau Manifesto)

But even if I would say that porn can never be better than sex itself, neither can art. Art can only be there to experiment with these new tendencies, or to highlight to hidden contradictions or absurdities visible in culture. Here in Belgium we have a group of international artists squashed between the demands of an angry local Catholic Church and a pissed-off hysterical porn producer. What are they going to do about that, even if in close analysis, their works are smart and witty, more multi-layered and diversified than 'pornography'. Even if we can see that these sex artists are the experimental engineers and visionaries of future types of art, sex and pornography, how are they supposed to defend themselves against the Black Magic's of the world? And where are the parties that can support and defend them in this chaotic story?

Dr. Jacobs



## November 4, 2002. MECHELEN.

Mechelen's vice-squad arrives to investigate Black Magic's official charge against the festival. They take away the majority of the artworks from the gallery exhibit, work by Yoshie Suzuki and Adam Zaretsky, Zoot and Genant, Francesca da Rimini, Alex McQuikin, Annie Sprinkle, and Libidot. The festival is not completely shut down, but shot in the arms and legs. The vice-squad insists on pre-screening all the videos and performances for the evening shows and warns the curators to take out the following types of pornographic depiction: child pornography, excremental porn, urination porn, sado-masochism, beastiality, anal sex, and fisting. These are the categories they used to take away certain works, *Meat Taco Sexu* by Zoot and Genant and *Sexy Flowers* by Libidot because they show 'urination' scene, the *Sluts/Goddesses workshop* by Annie Sprinkle because it has a 'fisting' scene, *Dollspace* by Francesca da Rimini because it contains 'child pornography'. Several events have to be canceled, such as the live performance by Zoot and Genant, *Surfing Precious Porn Waves*, where they project their interactions with Internet porn cruisers.



Newspaper headline.  
'Porn King disapproves of porn festival'

Cartoonist Kim places her response in the newspaper *De Morgen*. Her first cartoon depicts an older man visiting a prostitute and phoning his wife: "Hey, darling, You got what you wanted, I did not go to that festival." The second cartoon is a hallucinatory image, depicting two huge octopi swimming by and grabbing the nose of Michael Jackson. This cartoon refers to one of the censored artworks, Zoot and Genant's *Meat Taco Sexu*, their 1996 performance where they went to bed with an octopus.

The vice-squad reported back that it was 'ok', not an instance of beastiality as it did 'not contain sex with a mammal'. The idea that the octopus could be a legal bed-partner in Belgium became the running joke of the festival. When the vice-squad returned to remove *Meat Taco Sexu* after Black Magic's 'complaint', they did not mention why it was suddenly removed.



Newspaper cartoon

The unofficial charge was that the performance would offend people because it contained an illegal urination scene. This act of urination, shown on blurry video-footage document, was the actual result of immense pain as Zoot was being bitten by the octopus.

## November 6, 2002. MECHELEN.

I finally track down Marijs Boulogne. We find a cafe in Mechelen to sit down and chat. I am curious to see how her work is received by the Catholic Church in Belgium? Boulogne's actions and stories are based on fantasies that incorporate rebellious forms of spirituality. Important themes in this spirituality are an erotic fascination with the process of death and the suffering body, a mystical evocation of material deficiencies, and absurd forms of sacrifice often imposed on young and innocent members of society —beautiful children and babies. It is this aspect of Christian spirituality, often expressed by women and female sects as a longing for union with the body of Christ that was officially banned by the Catholic Church.

I notice again how quiet Belgians are. They stare at each other and utter an odd sentence here and there. Boulogne, on the other hand, has a loud and rolling mind, as she tells me the stories of her performance characters, and her experiences with art-making as ecstasy.





Marijs Boulogne

In her performance pieces with the group *Buelens Paulina vzw*, she uses different language registers and performance media, as I understand from her written statement: "Through improvisation with theatre, performance, contemporary music, video art and elaboration we relate stories full of humour, tenderness, madness, cruelty and eroticism. The power of the stories lies in naivety, complex in their simplicity, blurring the boundaries between Flemish and Walloon, between children's art and adult art, between madness and reality."<sup>6</sup> Boulogne displays a peculiar type of madness, of 'being possessed' in her tales by young female characters who aspire to find erotic contact with god through obsessive actions, awkward abstinence rituals, and strange physical desire to meet and marry the 'highest unknown.' She shows the process of ecstasy in her installation piece, *Fuck Me Dead*. This piece consist of a video which is shown in a foyer, showing the earth, a doll, fish, shells, and bones as elements manipulated by the hand of an invisible creator, who plays a game of life and death. After seeing this video the visitor enter a dark room where s/he can watch a doll's dress in a glass vitrine. Intense embroideries are marked on the dress as scars. Across from the dress is a slide-installation which focuses on the ecstatic landscape that is hidden in these scars.

<sup>6</sup> Kunstenfestival Des Arts, Brussels 2004, artist statement Buelens Paulina.

### Interview: Marijs Boulogne, Mechelen, November 15, 2003.

#### 'AS JESUS, SHE HAD SEX WITH ALL THE OTHER NUNS'

**Libidot:** Can you explain the commotion in this festival? Have you experienced similar reactions to your work in Belgium?

**Boulogne:** I think the situation is quite pathetic here in Belgium, as we still have so many sexual taboos. I think that our mothers were focusing on other things besides sexual liberation. I believe that because of their Catholic roots, they want to sacrifice themselves. Apparently you become almighty by offering yourself and committing self-sacrifice, just like Jesus Christ did. I think that this is the crux of our culture, which isn't the case in other cultures. I believe that for example in Australia feminists have been moving faster because there is not such a strong Catholic heritage, based on the figure of Jesus. The feminists in Belgium have only done half of their job as they sacrificed themselves for their children and their families. My mother founded a club *De Wandelende Wifven* (The Wandering Wives), a group of women who organize hikes with backpacks. On the one hand, they are very free, but on the other hand they are not free because they do all of the housework. Our mothers have to sacrifice themselves utterly.

Similarly, my mother does not like the look or the style of some of my art works. Then she says that they are well made, but not beautiful. Or she will call my family and say: 'Don't go look at her work this time because next time she is going to make something beautiful.' My mother does not like the stories I tell. For instance my performance, *Endless Medication*, tells a story of a person who has a fantasy of innocence, like she wants to be a nurse and cure everybody's festering wounds and as a result she can transcend everything. Or she has to clean out clogged toilets with bare hands. Just going straight through all the shit, which is my mother's experience, so I do acknowledge these fantasies in myself.

**Libidot:** Can you tell me something about your video-installation 'Orgasmic Faces'—why do you record people's faces experiencing orgasms? Why do you zoom in on the face?

**Boulogne:** I want to depict the automatic movements of eyes and the mouth during orgasm. I also work with a soundtrack of snails making sounds when they come back to life after being deprived of water. It has been interesting for me to watch spectators in the gallery react to it as they are standing in the gallery and having a drink, just to see their faces and conversations change when the orgasm is happening on the video.

**Libidot:** Most of your performances and installations are based on hidden histories of medieval mysticism? Can you explain that a bit more?

**Boulogne:** I have been interested in mysticism for a long time. In the 11th Century there was a *Beweging Van de Vrije Geest* (Movement of the Free Ghost) where a lot of men stopped acknowledging the concept of original sin. They suddenly were allowed to fuck and to travel, and it became a very powerful movement. I think it was a bit like the Flower Power movement in the 1960s. The movement has been completely eradicated from history, as the 11th century saw a complete revival



of Catholicism, as well as other sects. What came out was this movement of the Free Ghost was the 'Beguine' women's movements in Belgium, although of course some of the women were also burned at the stake. They were not witches but mystics, and some explored free love and explored the free spirit with their bodies. And then they started to ask themselves 'What is God?' and 'How can I reach god?' They were trying to have a direct line of communication with God without having sacraments or without consulting priests. They would fast and flagellate themselves in order to obtain a state of ecstatic union.

For instance, there is Christina who used to starve herself, or she used to sit close to the stake when somebody was being hanged and was singing out loud. Or she was just sitting in a tree. I also read in a Ph.D. doctorate written in Italy that a female mystic wanted to marry Jesus and started to make extensive wedding preparations. All the other women were helping her out with these preparations, and she acted out the roles of 'priest', 'Jesus' and herself. As 'Jesus', she had sex with all the other nuns.

**Libidot:** So you see some similarities between these performances from the 11th century and your own ritual performances?

**Boulogne:** I believe in ecstasy without thinking of a God. I have had an interest in ecstasy for a while and felt a need to isolate myself and undergo physical experiences. This resulted also in the performance, *Endless Medication*, a piece about about a girl who can never cry and wants to become a fakir.

She performs all kinds of actions, as she walks around in cemeteries and gathers plastic flowers and plants them inside her veins. She will look for insects and string them together on a thread and then she knits sweaters out of these threads. On another occasion she walks into a supermarket and punctures holes in cardboard soapboxes. She lies on the floor waiting for the powder to fall on her until she is entirely covered in white dust. Then she runs to the canal and jumps into the water. She foams and she feels like she is in heaven. She tries to taste her own orgasm and she realizes that orgasm tastes like all the things she likes eating. It tastes like tagliatella and strawberries and banana. At one point she is tasting her orgasm and a big shit comes out of her mouth. She realizes that her bowels are constipated and that she is pregnant in her bowel. She wonders whose child this could be and realizes that it must be God because she still a virgin. God descends from the sky and orders her to stop eating, as she does not want the child to be born in shit. She gets orders to only breathe air but she still craves other oral stimulæ and her mouths starts bleeding. Her mouth is like a little variety theater, where the sad audience can see a red stop light that says 'stop, be happy'. She goes on and on and gets completely exhausted, telling god after three months that she needs to undergo labor prematurely. But God is not there and she commits abortion. After that she gets pregnant two more times from God. But then she gets taken to a mental hospital. The baby gets thrown out of the window.

**Libidot:** Was she trying to find a state of ecstasy in pleasure and orgasm?

**Boulogne:** No, it is a philosophy of suffering. Like, you have to stick poles inside your vaginas and stir them really well. Also, she is condemned to 'endless medication' as she is charged with blasphemy, fundamentalism, false prophesies, innocence fantasies and endless pregnancies by God.

**Libidot:** How did you get interested in embroidery?

**Boulogne:** Yes. I myself, started to explore ecstasy through repetitive acts of embroidery. I decided to do embroidery for fourteen hours a day. The other hours I made love to my boyfriend, which meant that we made love about seven times a day. I was embroidering a funeral dress for a baby, as part of my installation 'Fuck Me Dead'. I wanted to focus on the experience rather than see this embroidery as a product.

It is amazing how you can start seeing the world if you look up from the work. It is complete chaos. In my installation 'Fuck Me Dead', I present the macroscopic images of the stitches. I also show the making of the embroidery in a video-narrative. Then, in a second dark room, I show the actual dress.

The video portrays a doll that is in ecstasy and walking on a path of glass. She looks at the snails and picks one up and breaks its shell. Then it starts raining milk from the sky and she cries white tears. Then there are rotten fish coming out of the water. They don't recognize the boundaries between water and air. And the entire landscape is on fire. The branches of the tree are on fire, but the trunks remain untouched. And then the doll is buried.

This is like forever dying and forever living, and that represents my experience of ecstasy. I stopped eating and sleeping when I was embroidering, and started to have visions. I started to experience unusual physical effects. For example when I pricked my finger with a needle, it caused an electric shock.

**Libidot:** So you are trying to convey the obsessive state of mind that comes with embroidery? What does that really feel like?

**Boulogne:** You feel captured by something, like there is nothing else you could be doing. You don't want to do anything else anymore. Even smoking a cigarette is too much.

**Libidot:** Does it always work?

**Boulogne:** For me the process always works, provided I take enough time to get into it. Then I can make a 'soft' journey through the world and start asking myself all the important questions, because I have seven hours a day to think about these questions.

**Libidot:** What are these questions?

**Boulogne:** For instance, I ask myself why exactly am I making this thing? Would it be an act of love? And then I conclude: No, it is not an act of love. Then you start trying to make sense of the world and intertwine these questioning with the threads of the embroidery. And that is your universe. At the end of the day you cannot walk anymore because your legs have gone numb.

**Libidot:** So you stop nurturing your body then?





Marijs Boulogne, Fuck Me Dead, Performance/Installation, 2003-2004.

**Boulogne:** Yes, you stop nurturing your body and it starts feeling like custard, not a very nice feeling. Your lover says 'huh, what is that?' because you are filled with colors and lines. So you start analyzing the embroidery in terms of lines and colors.

**Boulogne:** How were the reactions in Belgium to 'Fuck Me Dead'?

**Libidot:** People reacted very strongly and the critics understood what is about. Generally my embroideries are not elegant. People do not want to recognize a skin with scabs and rotting skin with puss in a piece of embroidery. They would rather see a bird sitting on a tree. Embroidery is generally so much associated with a female romantic-submissive attitude.

**Libidot:** When did you start doing embroidery?

**Boulogne:** When I was a child. My grandmother was really into it as well. She saw my piece 'Fuck Me Dead' and thought it was fantastic. My boyfriend, on the other hand, sometimes had a hard time with it when I was doing it all day. I have friends who do embroidery for their kids, and they do understand my work better. They understand my wild style and recognize the different stitching styles and working with knots, whereas an outsider may think I am totally incompetent.

**Libidot:** Are you planning on working with other kinds of embroidery in the future?

**Boulogne:** I have recently been interested in looking at photographs of dead babies. It is enormous what kind of shock one receives when looking at the body of a dead baby, as it embodies 'the perfect imperfection'. I would like to talk to people about it and find out about their tactile experiences with bodies of dead babies.

**Libidot:** How do you want the audience to perceive your fantasies?

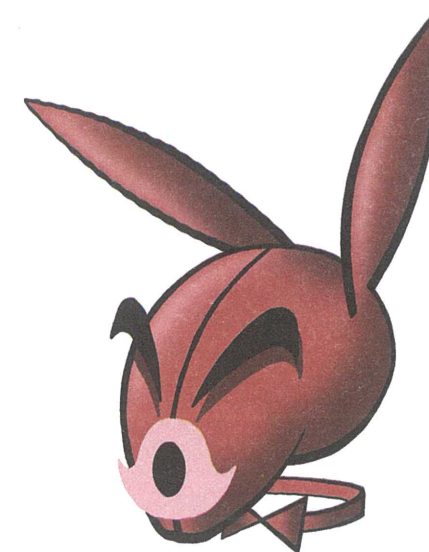
**Boulogne:** I want them to become mad and have a great wild time. They are voyeurs to my world and it often turns them on. I have a friend who is a psychiatric patient, and he is unable to sit through my performances. He would start shouting. I told him the stories one time, when we were sitting in a park, and that gave him a big erection. He experienced my performances very intuitively, and had a strong reaction. For him it was clear that the story was mainly erotic. Other people find it hard-core pathology. During interviews, people ask strange questions like "Have you had an abortion? Have you been psychotic yourself? Do you masturbate?"

I want to make audiences wild and horny. I think that a lot of artists, dancers for instance, have this as a unconscious objective, but I think that I am just more conscious of it. People want to see the taboo, that is why they sometimes scream and shout during our performances. When I do the performances in another language, it gets even a little 'sexier' as we always work with making mistakes in the language, and the audience grooves on that as well.





## 5. USA: Naked Nerds, Barbie Girls and Puritanical Bitches



May 16, 2002. Denver, Colorado.

The Westin Hotel is bursting with intellectual energy. Scholars from all over the world have gathered to share their work at the Society for Cinema and Media Studies Conference, hanging out in small crowds discussing topics such as 'classifying avant-garde cinema' or 'archiving sexploitation movies'. They are meeting with each other and sharing ideas, reading their papers aloud in small conference rooms, and then continuing their talks in the corridors and bedrooms. I am waiting for a panel with Dr. Kerry Milli-Bergel, a media scholar from Sweden, who will give a talk about web-based pornography and eroticism. A hunter in the wilderness of academia, I grab my red fur jacket and wander towards the Westin Hotel.

I walk over to the 'Buffalo' room at 2:00 PM sharp. Dr. Milli-Bergel introduces herself and the topic of her paper: the coming of age of pornography in the era of digital networks. She is skinny, with long black hair, pale lips, Barcelona-style artsy skirt and matching blouse. A sharp-looking female with a husky voice who argues that the art and entertainment industries of pornography are merging, as 'peer-to-peer' routes of porn and erotica distribution are gaining popularity on the web. Then, she opens her slender Sony laptop computer to give some examples of 'peer-to-peer porn', projecting [www.nakkidnerds.com](http://www.nakkidnerds.com) on a video screen in the back of the room. She explains the site: Nakkidnerds.com is a porn site for 'nerdy girls' maintained by Cloei, a 24-year-old woman who lives in Cambridge, Massa-





www.nakkidnerds.com, screenshots.

chusetts. Cloei describes herself as a shy woman with a fetish for nerds. Her website is a forum for 'nerdy' girls – tech girls, web designers, or art students – to show their naked bodies and communicate with viewers through webcams, chatrooms and messageboards.

After concluding remarks about the naked nerds, Dr. Milli-Bergel closes her laptop and receives comments from the panel moderator, Dr. Annie Gainsbourg (USA). Gainsbourg stands up and starts reading a lengthy and overwrought statement, denouncing Dr. Milli-Bergel's proposal and calling her a neo-liberal. She quotes the German Marxists and explains their ideas on pleasure: "Pleasure, as the object of modern sexual consciousness, becomes increasingly available as commodified products and is eventually entirely extinguished in fixed entertainments."<sup>1</sup> Economic monopolies within capitalist society, says Gainsbourg, produce pleasure industries, an industrialized way of presenting sensuality and sexuality, characterized by a lack of human involvement and a growing gap between art and entertainment industries. She gains momentum, evoking many other major and more contemporary theorists of pleasure (e.g., Slavoj Žižek) to publicly derail the work of Dr. Milli-Bergel.

Later that night, I sneak into the pool area of the Westin hotel to take a relaxing steam bath. I notice Dr. Milli-Bergel sitting amongst a circle of babbling women. I decide to try to join her. Just when I am about to step into the tub, however, a weird shudder invades the group of bathing women. They look at the door and abruptly leave the tub, hurrying to leave the room. What the hell is happening? Another scholar has just entered the pool area, the lesbian-marxist attack dog, Dr. Annie Gainsbourg. I fleetingly contemplate sliding into the pool also, but I can see the blood on her teeth.

<sup>1</sup> Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1993: New York Continuum), p. 106.

## Dr. Jacobs 11:25am 5/16/2002 The Nagging Question of Art and Pornography



Libidot,

Was her attack an instance of old school marxism or dogmatic dyke scholarship?

You just observed how academics can wound their enemies with a perfectly callous brain. And, of course, it didn't help Dr. Milli-Bergel's case that she delivered her statement wearing a fashionable outfit, and with a Swedish accent and all. American academics love to ravage that kind of 'appearance' (even though there may be some hidden affection there as well). So, yes, Libidot, stay clear of the Marxist-lesbian attack dog, as she may even try to get to come onto you tonight! Her flower may be more succulent than you think it is.

I have some good news. I was searching for definitions of pornography on the Internet and found an enticing article about porn by Rana Dasgupta, entitled "Sexworks/Networks: What Do People Get Out Of Porn?" (posted on <http://www.sarai.net> May 9, 2002). I really agree with the insights of this man. He says that it is hard for us to truly understand concepts like "Internet" and "porn consumer" but that net pornography more than any other culture gives us insight into the nature of the new technology. So what is the nature of this new technology?

Dasgupta: "Technology is not about losers who can't get enough and so turn on their computer to find women; it is in great part about the dream of being conjoined with technology itself." He explains this dream is a desire to close the gap between the body and the dispersed organs of sight, hearing and information processing. Second, this dream has to do with the human desire to comprehend that which is 'sublime' and 'mercurial'. In short, the dream is to understand the glistening eroticisms of the future, knowing that that will be something other than we can presently comprehend: "It's almost as if sexual union with the Internet is the only means available at answering its erotic call and properly internalizing its amazing, unimaginable possibilities."

But though Dasgupta is a little bit over the top, it is a valid definition of netporn. But let's take an example. Here is your Dr. Jacobs masturbating while looking at porn images on the Internet. I search through tons of databases and images, clicking and masturbating. Once and while, I print out the images and I keep them in a folder next to my bed. Also, I do evoke these images on a regular basis, when I am sitting on the toilet, walking through an alleyway close to home, I think I feel the



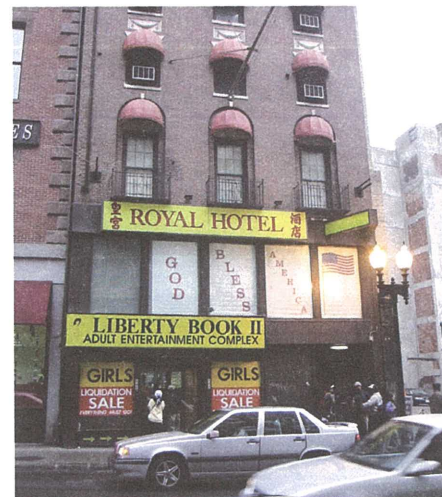
bodies of the people to which I masturbate. These images of bodies that have carved desperation and repetition into my typing fingers, always keep me thinking of a future encounter, e.g., I search for pictures of naked Estonian boys tied to trees. Maybe one day I will really met one of them and rescue him and make love to him?

Or perhaps, as Dasgupta reveals to us, porn may be the medium through which we discover what is sublime and mercurial in life, as we are always searching and not sure what we will be meeting. I am still waiting for this call while I keep browsing databases and also reading your texts.

Dr. Jacobs



Oni Gallery in Boston's Chinatown.



Sex shop in Boston's Chinatown.

## June 16, 2002. BOSTON.

What a creepy encounter that was in Denver! Fortunately, I get orders to leave and fly to the East Coast, to meet the Japanese artist, Yoshie Suzuki, the 'Kissing Girl' from Chicago. Suzuki is visiting Boston to show videos of her 'Kissing Project' at the Oni gallery. Suzuki is a student at the School of the Art Institute in Chicago, and a member of the collective 'Oriental Whores/Nipporn Productions'. The other members of the collective are Mayumi Lake, a Japanese photographer, and Isaac Leung, a gay cybersex artist from Hong Kong. Together they make art that comments on the American fetishization of Asian sexuality.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Personal email received March 26, 2002.

When I enter the Oni Gallery, Suzuki and some other artists are getting ready for the show. She is wearing a transparent triple-layered dress, which she tells me she bought in a thrift-store in Chicago for 99 cents. She has also bought a red-haired wig to make her look a bit more 'whorish'. She puts on some dark purple lipstick, and she asks me if she should wear her brown woolen stockings underneath the dress. She looks even more like a little girl now, as I watch her walk around the Oni Gallery, restlessly, watching and filming the other presentation until it is time to show her own videos for *Vital X: Kissing Project*.

We see her standing in the middle of the streets of Chicago, passionately kissing all kinds of people, one man after the other, and then a woman. She seems to 'go with the flow' of the kissing project. It is a casual and intimate event, a real turn-on to the audience. She walks through the city streets, talks to men and women, asks them to kiss her, then she records the kissing scenes with her camera. There is no other camera person involved. She asks people for extensive and full 'French' kissing. Her kisses are real, as we can see, the kissing partners are getting turned on and holding her little body tightly. She has an eye for all kinds of kissing partners, as they happen to be walking by, the dueling forces of everydayness and surprise melting into her unusual spectacle.

When Suzuki jumps on the stage after showing her videos, she totally captures the audience's attention, who give her loud applause and call out questions: "What kinds of places do you go to kiss strangers?" ... "What happens when the kissing gets out of hand?" ... "Why do you kiss mostly big black guys?"...

**Interview: Yoshie Suzuki (conducted with the help of Lydia Eccles, Oni Gallery), Boston, June 16, 2002.**

'all these women made such specific sounds. It sounded like they were screaming for help. But I remember when I first had sex when I was young, I did not know what kind of sound I was supposed to make.'

**Eccles:** Looking at the video of *Vital X: Kissing Project*, I feel like you come across as very innocent and shameless. I was wondering whether 'shamelessness' is something that you developed into these performances. Did you grow up with shame and learned how to get rid of it? I have noticed that a lot of people who deal with sexuality are very self-consciously 'slutty', but you don't come across as very 'slutty'?

**Suzuki:** I actually mentally identify a lot with sex workers. But a lot of people whom I worked with in the Japanese sex industry were fashion-victims who spent a lot of money, and they did not look happy.

**Eccles:** You told me before about your own suicide attempt though. What were the circumstances that made you want to commit suicide?



**Suzuki:** That is a very difficult question because I don't remember very well. It happened during my first serious depression. I grew up in a hippie culture in Japan until I finished high school, and suddenly I had to go into an entirely different world. I had not watched any television, for instance. I lived in a commune in Japan, and I perceived 'regular life' as very stressful. I struggled and was unhappy, while most other teenagers were into keeping up with Japanese culture, which is very capitalistic. I was ashamed of my hippie culture for a long time. That actually made me depressed because I think that it was the happiest moment in my life, as I was being creative and was having fun. If I had gone to a public school in Japan and I had not had my hippie background, I would have turned out to be similar to other sex workers perhaps.

**Eccles:** I often wonder why women decide to become sex workers. Is it that some people have traumatic lives and end up being sex workers, while others just end up in 'happy' middle-class lives?

**Suzuki:** Most Japanese people are upper-middle-class or middle-class. The girls that worked for our company, for instance, were not poor, but they did have all kinds of problems. And there are other ways to make money in Japan. The women intentionally wanted to be in porn videos. They also could have been escorts and earned a lot of money that way. Of course, if you are working for a good company in Japan, you are quite secure. My own company was very strict about protecting girls. They had contracts to make sure that there were no drugs involved. It is different from the American porn industry, which is more controlled by drugs and the mafia. But my company was pretty clean.

**Eccles:** Do you think that sex workers are actually searching for love? Do you think that they don't understand the boundaries that our society teaches us to have?

**Suzuki:** It's hard to find your own happiness. It is equally hard to satisfy your love. Some people go shopping and some people look for sex. It is a very obsessive idea to somehow satisfy your love. Some people in the sex industry were sex-positive, but other women were depressed looking. And they were unhappy to be there. There were the hyper-girls and the depressed girls.

**Libidot:** I am also interested in how the Japanese porn industry is regulated by the government. There seems to be a total sexualization of culture on the one hand, but censorship of genitals and pubic hair on the other hand. Could you explain the Japanese censorship boards to me?

**Suzuki:** There is a union that goes through all the videos that are made. They watch the scenes from the very beginning until the very end of the tape. And if they see that certain mosaics are lacking, they stop and mark the tape. They are old men sitting in little rooms, watching porn all day long. They sit there having conversations about Viagra, and so on. I had really never watched porn, and there I sat in a smoky room watching five hours of porn with these dirty old men. When they hired me in the company, they asked me if I knew anything about porn. I actually told them that I did not know much about porn, but that I made my own porn.

**Eccles:** So you actually returned to Japan from the USA to get involved in the porn industry? Why did you do that?

**Suzuki:** I was curious. The Japanese economy was going down, and lots of high-school girls started to get involved in the porn industry, and I wanted to know what was happening. That was a year after I went to art school and was starting to get involved in pornography or 'sex art' as an artist. And I also had to make money because it was very expensive to go to art school.

**Eccles:** And you had already made a lot of movies. What kind of movies were you inspired by?

**Suzuki:** I was very much into French New Wave movies. I made a lot of collage-movies. I watched all kinds of movies and loved French movies. I would take images of Godard movies and bring myself and my own footage into it. They were always very suicidal and dark and romantic. I made a movie about insomnia called *Sleepless Nights*. I also made a movie about me eating peaches and talking about killing a bird. There was usually an element of boredom in them.

**Eccles:** Is making porn movies a commercial objective for you? Or is it a personal thing?

**Suzuki:** It is totally personal. I have always liked videotaping aspects of my life. I have lots of weird footage, like footage of myself licking appliances. I plan to have cameos of the footage on a website someday.

**Eccles:** Can you describe some of the other things you do in these movies?

**Suzuki:** I walk around in a superhero outfit, wearing the American flag and leotards. I walk around in buildings. Or I am trying to behave like Man Ray models. I plan to name my website 'My ten years of fucking', and I plan to launch it in 2003. I am actually working out legal issues and looking for a server that can hold the pornographic materials. And it will be like a video-website. I have been videotaping a lot of my sexual partners as well, but not all of them.

**Eccles:** What do you think is the difference between what you are doing and mainstream porn?

**Suzuki:** My work is not made in order to make people come.

**Eccles:** I think that your 'enema' movie, *Squart*, is indeed very different from mainstream porn. All the regular cues are missing, like girls and nail polish, for instance. It takes place in a setting that is not all set aside for sex, just like the kisses taking place in a laundromat.

**Suzuki:** It's more about a personal journey. I don't plan so much when I shoot. I am not good at that. I like to keep shooting and capture something and try to find beauty in what I see. I myself find fetish scenes more interesting than sexual intercourse shots, because you could actually fetishize almost anything you like. For instance, you could fetishize this forgotten object on your table.

**Eccles:** Is sex necessarily a genital kind of thing anyway?

**Suzuki:** Well, pornography is commercial. It is a business, and it differs from art, and the business focuses more on genitals.

**Libidot:** But your objective is also to turn people on, no?



**Suzuki:** Everybody has a different level of what turns him or her on. I myself am a big giggler when I have sex. I laugh a lot in bed. And for some people that is a big turn-off. I noticed that when I started worked in the porn industry in Japan, all these women made such specific sounds. It sounded like they were screaming for help. But I remember when I first had sex when I was young, I did not know what kind of sound I was supposed to make.

**Libidot:** To which extent are orgasmic sounds habits conditioned by the social norms of a specific culture? I think that Japanese orgasms sound different from other ones.

**Eccles:** This leads me to another question. What if we did not have any cultural information about sexuality – how long would it take for us to discover genitals and fucking?

**Libidot:** I don't think it would take very long at all.

**Suzuki:** I don't think so either.

**Libidot:** In *Vital X: Kissing Project*, you are the one selecting the partner. Is that because you want to explore forms of control? Or is the project also a way of giving up control, because you get involved with so many people at once?

**Suzuki:** I wanted to have control, and I wanted to violate codes. In the first version of the project, I tended to select people between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five and a lot of black men. For a while I thought about kissing only black people.

**Libidot:** Because you like black people?

**Suzuki:** Not really ... I like everything.

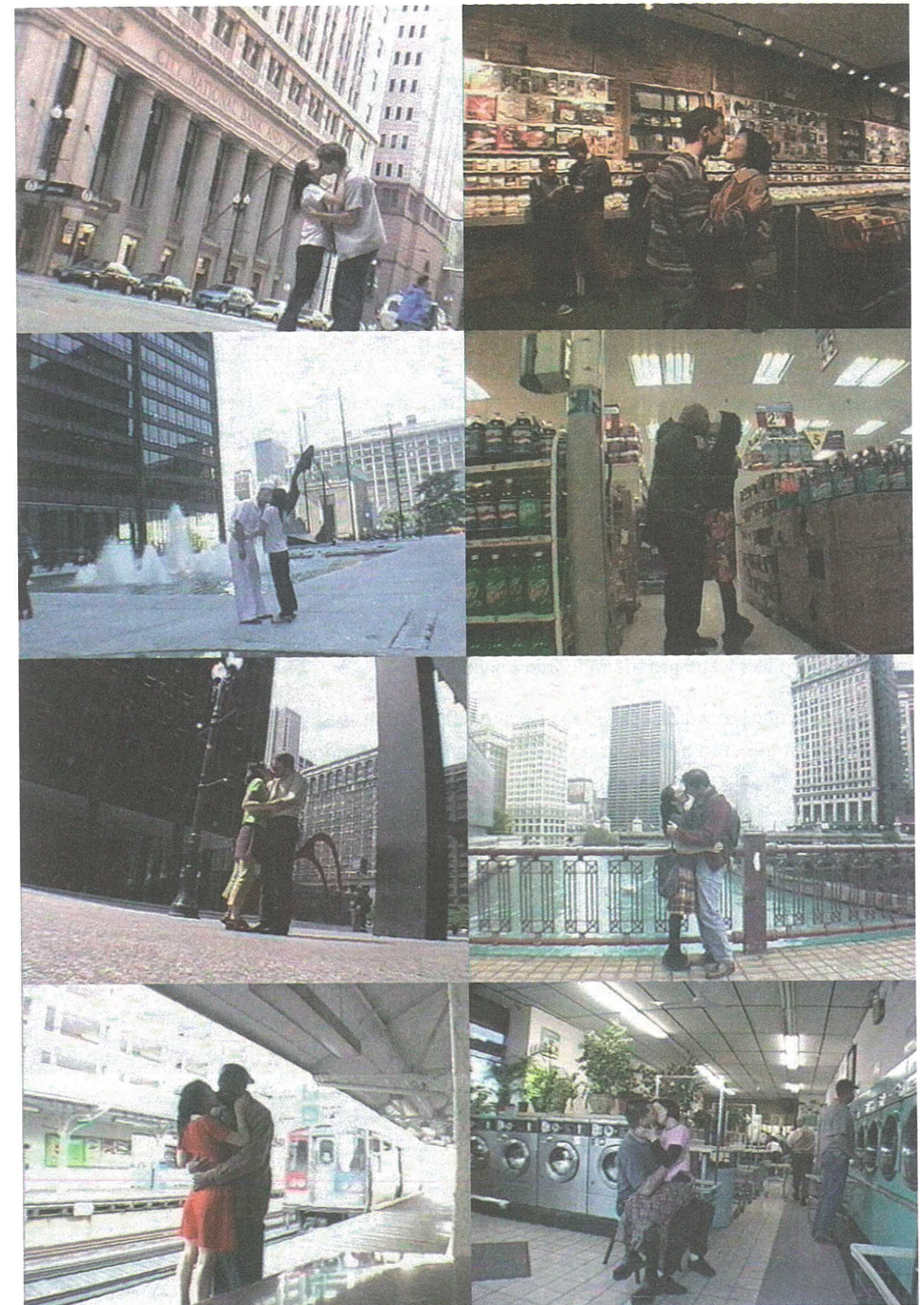
**Eccles:** When you select people, do you try to select people that you think are attractive? Or do you try not to make your own personal taste enter into it?

**Suzuki:** That depends on the day. Every day is different. Sometimes I get attracted to a certain person and I want to talk to them. Other times I just find that the background, or the way they dress, looks good to me. It really depends on the day. I just go with the flow, as they say. It was part of the original concept that I would not have to plan it that much. I just wanted to go out with my camera and do it.

**Eccles:** *Kissing Project* made me very aware of work environments and street environments. In a certain way you are intruding into banal environments, like going out to meet guys in work uniforms who have to lay down their tools. Did you think about that at all?

**Suzuki:** Yes, I like these places where you are not supposed to do this kind of thing. That is why I like supermarkets. I did it once in the vegetable section of a grocery store. I tried to kiss in Home Depot. I noticed that a lot of guys there are either married and very domestic, or gay. I often wondered why I couldn't get a man in Home Depot.

**Libidot:** Did you try to do it in the CVS drugstore?



Yoshie Suzuki, *Vital X: Kissing Project*, Performance, 2001-2002.



**Suzuki:** I did one at Walgreens and one at the doctor's office. Yes, one day I came on to my doctor. I thought that he was sexy. But we did not have a real kiss, just a short kiss.

**Eccles:** Did you have an imaginary idea about how your kiss might affect people's lives?

**Suzuki:** Yes, because I myself was very much affected by a person's kiss. Several years ago, I wanted to leave Japan and wanted to be in London for a while and took a school trip. I needed to get away, as I had just disconnected from a major relationship and was very sad. I met this guy in London on Christmas Eve. I did not think that I would kiss any other person in my life besides my ex-boyfriend. This guy came on to me and we danced a slow dance at a club and he tried to convince me to kiss him. In Europe, they dance these slow dances. We started making out on the dance floor. I thought that that was an important change because I thought that his desire for me seemed more pure than my dying relationship with my boyfriend.

**Eccles:** Is that how you invented your slogan 'How can I find romance when I have lost my faith in true love?'

**Suzuki:** Yes, now I am more into these moments that I can share with a particular person.

**Eccles:** *Vital X: Kissing* Project also reminds me of a bee flying from flower to flower, like cross-pollination. In other words, bees make all the flowers grow, rather than picking out just one flower. The whole project leads to an intermingling of many people, unlike a one-to-one restrictive type of relationship. Did you like watching the outcome on video?

**Suzuki:** I was scared to watch the videos because it is odd to see yourself kissing other people. At the beginning, it took me a while to go back to the footage and look at it. But then I thought that it looked really good, and I decided to do more of them.

**Libidot:** Do you also interview those people?

**Suzuki:** I don't have contact information for these people. I do have a certain reputation in Chicago, where people often approach me and say "Hey kissing girl, how is it going?"

**Libidot:** Do you know instinctively when a person is going to participate in your action? Or is it really a hit-or-miss kind of situation?

**Suzuki:** I don't convince them. I know right away whether they are into it or not. When I started out, I used to explain my project more to them, but I try not to do that anymore.

### October 4, 2002. Wicker Park, Illinois (Chicago).

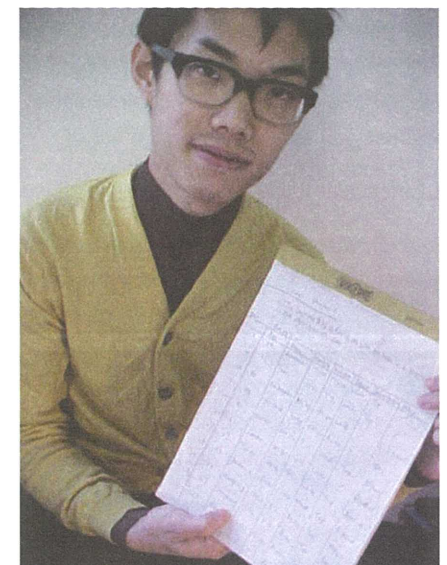
I fly from Boston to Chicago to meet with the other 'Oriental Whores', Mayumi Lake and Isaac Leung. Airport security is very tight in Logan Airport. We are ordered to take off our shoes, coats, belts, jewelry, and drop everything on the security belt. Once dressed again,

on the other side of the belt, we are body-searched all over again. Our passports are checked several times before boarding, one more time at the entrance of the plane. Once we are stuffed inside the airplane, it is announced that we will have a major delay, as president G.W. Bush's Airforce One is also currently making a departure from Boston's Logan airport. We wait in the runway for about two hours, everybody pissed off, and announcements about the situation are sparse.

A few hours later, I arrive in Chicago and am welcomed in Suzuki's and Leung's house in Wicker Park, an urban neighborhood of Chicago. Blistery cold winds permeate the city, and Leung himself is recovering from a cyber sex binge, an art project entitled 'The Impossibility of having Sex with 500 Men in One Month. I am an Oriental Whore'. Leung looks like a well-dressed dandy, his appearance and ideas wanting to speak to peripheral society. He admits that his interest in art stems from obsessive fantasizing about the perfect boy. He was introduced to cybersex long before he ever had any real sex. In his installation piece, 'The Impossibility of Having Sex with 500 Men in One Month: I am an Oriental Whore', he wanted to analyze his sex experiences. He disguised himself as an 18-year old Japanese boy and worked daily to interact with gay cruisers willing to 'accept' his profile. He tried to have satisfying sexual experiences, but also researched and categorized the cruisers by nationality, age group, weight and other features.

### October 5, 2002. Chicago.

It is three o'clock in the afternoon when Isaac Leung finally gets out of bed. I have waited around in his apartment for hours and now hope for him to wake more fully and get ready for the interview. He tells me he got sucked into cyber affairs again last night. Once he adapts to the daylight (around four-thirty in the afternoon), he becomes a happy conversationalist who carefully narrates and relives all the details of his sexual affairs and art project.



Isaac Leung in his bedroom, showing his research statistics.



**Interview: Isaac Leung, Barnes and Noble, Downtown Chicago, October 5-6, 2002.**

'You can cheat easily because the image is so pixilated. But I love cum shots myself. You can put it on the chest or on the table and ask to lick it.'

**Libidot:** You told me that the first time you ever fell in love was over the Internet? How did that happen?

**Leung:** When I got my first computer I immediately got into the chatrooms. I would go online and find the sites where I could chat with people. I was also amazed by the gay porn sites I could find on the Internet. Five years ago it was very difficult to find any gay porn in Hong Kong. I really do think that the Internet changed people's idea of sexuality. So I went online and had cybersex before I had any real sex, and I was always searching for lovers. Then I started chatting with a guy who is currently my boyfriend. I immediately liked him because he was so smart. He had a Master's degree in science, and I already had developed a fetish for professional people, like scientists or accountants or business people. I also grew up in a family of scientists, and I was named after Isaac Newton.

**Libidot:** But you had not had any real relationships?

**Leung:** No, until the present day he is my only boyfriend.

**Libidot:** Have you ever had any girlfriends?

**Leung:** No. I met my boyfriend when I was 18. We had sex after we chatted on the Internet and that was my first experience with sex. We admired each other a lot. He admired my paintings, which I had been doing for more than ten years. We chatted online, then we were on the phone for an entire night, and then we also became boyfriends. We became boyfriends on July 1, 1997, the day that Hong Kong was handed over to Mainland China. We did not have sex right away, but on the third time we met we had sex. That was great.

**Libidot:** Was it like you had imagined it would be?

**Leung:** Not really. I never imagined that I would be having a relationship. But soon after that I came out to my parents. That was a horrible experience because they were very upset and did not talk to me for a week. I also stayed away from high school for a couple of weeks. I could not meet with my boyfriend anymore except through the Internet. I kept meeting with him by going to the website <http://www.gay.com>. We would go to the Hong Kong room of gay.com and chat in one of the private rooms. My parents had no idea that we were still meeting and thought that buying a computer for their son was a very good idea. My boyfriend would still meet with me and pick me up from high school.

**Libidot:** So how did your sex life with him turn out?

**Leung:** I myself have high sexual energy, but that is not the case with him, which is why we also started having sexual difficulties. In the first year our sexual relationship was perfect, but after that we had sexual problems. When I moved to Chicago to go to art school, I started chatting again online with

various people. It is a complicated feeling. On the one hand you want to believe that you are hooking up with somebody and have a relationship. On the other hand, you just want to stick to your cyber-relationship. So you don't know where you are going, as you don't want to believe that you are just sticking to cybersex either. I also tried to have one night stands with people but my boyfriend got very upset when I told him, so I don't want to do that anymore.

**Libidot:** But you are still having sex with people online?

**Leung:** Yes. Then I also started to search in urban spaces like underwear clubs in Great Britain or porn theaters here in Chicago where people masturbate. When I lived in London last year, there were a lot of theme-based clubs like S/M clubs or clubs where people wear underwear or XXL/super-chubby clubs. I liked that a lot, because there is always an area where you can do things. So, the bottom line for me became that I could masturbate somebody or be masturbated, but not have sex.

**Libidot:** How is the cybersex scene in London? Is it more developed than in Chicago?

**Leung:** Yes. I think that webcams specifically are not so popular in the United States. And anywhere in the gay community, cybersex is not as popular, since gay people still prefer to go to clubs to pick up people.

**Libidot:** So, how did you move into your webcam project?

**Leung:** Two years ago, I started to experiment with webcams, and I was having a great time. I was using existing video conference software, such as 'Netmeeting'. That is a very popular software program that splits your screen into two areas and has a chatbox at the bottom of the screen. Then you log in and look for different IP addresses of other people with webcams from different countries, with different themes and profiles. When you log on, you see thousands of people and a little icon tells you if they are on their webcam. If the person is a voyeur, for instance, you don't want to connect to them. I would say that 90% of the people who go there through 'Netmeeting', go there to have sex. If you click on an icon, a person shows up on your screen, and you can either 'ignore' or 'accept' to have a session with that person. But right away you can see yourself and the other person on the screen, and based on that you can 'accept' or 'ignore'. Then you can also start chatting immediately or talk to each other through a microphone.

**Libidot:** So then you decided to turn these webcam experiences into an art project where you tried to have 500 men in one month. And then you started to demographically analyze the group of people who were attracted to your profile, which you made up to be an 18-year-old Japanese boy. What was your methodology?

**Leung:** My research methodology worked as follows. I was masturbating and typing with one hand and recording information with the other hand. I was hiding my mouse, yet opening another software for copying and pasting images. I asked everybody about their age, where they came from, their height and their weight, their sexual orientation, and whether they were a 'top' or 'bottom'. These last two parameters are very important in the gay community as they are always looking for nice bodies



and muscular types. Of course there are also people who are attracted to chubby guys, but they are kind of segregated.

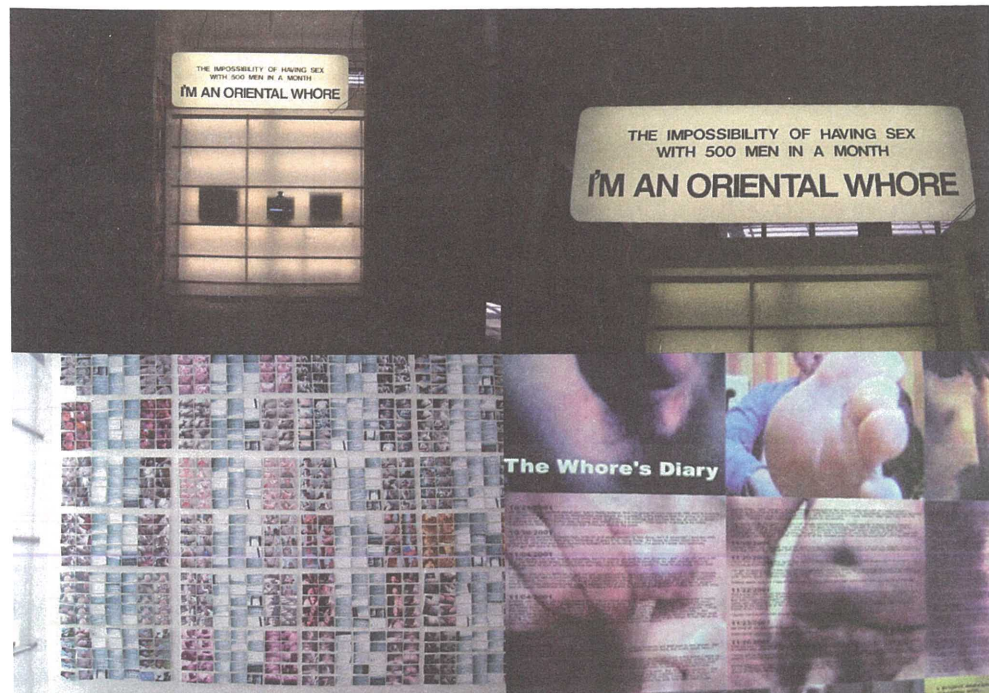
**Libidot:** So what kind of people did you attract through your profile? Was it mostly older men?

**Leung:** Yes, but the thing that fascinated me about webcam sex is that it does attract people who are exploring fantasies. You can explore your fantasies together because there is a real distance, and when the session is over, you are not left with any baggage.

**Libidot:** Do people disappear immediately after they have an orgasm?

**Leung:** Yes, usually it is good-bye immediately. Men are very interested in seeing the actual cum. It is just like in porn, if you don't see the people cum it is as if the porn has not ended yet. It's the same deal in cybersex. But, because I cannot come twenty times a day, I would just fake it and write "Oh my God I came...". You can cheat easily because the image is so pixilated. But I love cum shots myself. You can put it on the chest or on the table and ask to lick it. A small number of people actually were interested in talking to me and meeting with me, but I wanted to stay in my character and not get into that. There is one person from the project whom I now have a crush on, which is nice, but it also gives me this feeling of loneliness.

**Libidot:** Is language an important part of the webcam experience?



Isaac Leung, *The Impossibility of having Sex with 500 Men in One Month. I am an Oriental Whore*, Mixed Media Installation, 2003.

**Leung:** Language is very important to me because it brings up the politics of identity. I can look at a couple of guys masturbating, for instance, but that doesn't do much for me. I want to know what kind of identity people are creating and the extent to which they are lying. Another aspect of cyber-language is that it is an international language based on English, but people are allowed to make mistakes, that never seems to be a problem. This is a language that nobody speaks in daily life, but you can actually speak it anywhere online.

**Libidot:** Is there often a discrepancy between what you see and what you read?

**Leung:** People always lie about their dick size, because they always say at that it is at least nine inches long. That is a real joke in the webcam community, as you can see with your own eyes the discrepancy between the actual size and the advertised size.

**Libidot:** Do you confront people when you see that they are lying?

**Leung:** No. I just leave it like that and document it in my project. It is just a real cybersex phenomenon. I also tried to really cater to people's fantasies because I was trying to push the limit of what people will do on the Internet. When people profiled themselves as 'dominant', which was most often the case, I became 'submissive'. Or I was 'dominant' when they wanted me to be.



Isaac Leung, *The Impossibility of having Sex with 500 Men in One Month. I am an Oriental Whore*, Mixed Media Installation, 2003.



**Libidot:** The statistics of your research shows that a majority of people having sex with you were married or bi-sexual.

**Leung:** Yes. I think of cybersex as a subtle medium through which people can resolve their problems or conflicts in sexual orientation. It would be a big step for them to actually go to a gay bar, as opposed to gay people themselves who feel very comfortable going to bars or bathhouses. Cybersex seems to be more attractive to bi-sexual people or people who are really into exploring distant lovers and fantasies. Another important demographic encompasses wealthy regions where they have advanced computer technologies in their homes. Also, you don't get people who are over 60, as they don't know anything about technology, nor do you get very young people because most of them don't have access to technology. Most of my lovers were white and between the age of 30 and 40. Most of them were from European countries such as Holland, Belgium, Germany and Great Britain. Next, there are Asian countries, with Hong Kong and Taiwan being the most prominent ones. I did not get so many cyber-lovers from Japan, as Japan has created its own online language.

**Libidot:** Looking at your chat-dialogues, I noticed that there is a real obsession with genitals. Gay cybersex seems to be so totally down to earth?

**Leung:** Yes, in real life when you meet people you are covered in clothes.

**Libidot:** Yes, and you wouldn't open your asshole right away I suppose.

**Leung:** But in a webcam, the first thing you show people is your genitals, which is arguably the most private place that you have. It actually takes a long time for people to show their faces on a webcam; you have to push them to show their faces. I have to make people comfortable in order to get that result. But then again, I was trying to push the limit of what people can show in front of a camera. And some people would get creative and show themselves sucking a remote, or something.

**Libidot:** Was the webcam project overall a positive experience?

**Leung:** It was overall a positive experience until the point that I was overdoing it, and it was becoming a mechanical thing. After the project I had to stop doing cybersex for a long time, but then I went back to it just a little bit and enjoyed again. I was opening myself up all the way to the cyber-community, which was a lot to take, even though I was aware of what I was doing. The project was my identity, and the project dictated that I had to give up control and have sex with those people who wanted to have sex. I just wanted to be as scientific as possible and engage in the experiment. And then I noticed that so many of the people were older, and they were a 'daddy' type of personality, and I was rarely meeting people of the same age.

**Libidot:** You did get in trouble at the School of the Art Institute in Chicago (SAIC) because you revealed people's identity without asking their permission through a model release form. Tell me about how and why the School of the Art Institute removed your piece from the exhibit?

**Leung:** People are just out there, and I was just documenting these experiences. The day before the opening of the end-of-year graduation show, the SAIC told me that they did not want to display my piece and that I would have to alter it. They told me that it has to cover the 'identity' of my partners.



Isaac Leung, *The Impossibility of having Sex with 500 Men in One Month. I am an Oriental Whore*, Mixed Media Installation, 2003.



We negotiated about what part of the body constituted 'identity' and agreed that it was the face that had to be covered. I agreed to cover the face, provided the SAIC administration would give me a clear, signed letter on letterhead explaining why they asked me to cover the face and who would take responsibility for this gesture.

On the day of the opening I received a Xerox copy of the letter from the lawyer of the school, which was not on letterhead and it did not have the name of the person who wrote it and no signature either. I wanted the Vice-President to sign the letter, but since he lived in the suburbs, they said he could not give his signature until after the exhibition opening. I totally gave up my trust at that point, and I decided to take away the piece. They covered the entrance of the piece with paper and took away all the images. I then covered the monitor with wood and left a stack of empty CD-Roms there as well. Three minutes after the opening all the CD-Roms were gone and people tore down the paper and started writing their reactions on the paper. Somebody wrote 'censorship sucks', but the guard renewed the paper and stood very close to the empty installation.

I did not go to the opening myself but went to an after-opening party for the rich people and managed to talk to the President of SAIC. The President said that he thought that it was a very interesting project and that he would hold a forum at the school to discuss legal issues in contemporary art. But then we had a meeting of about thirty people with students and student activists and talked about how to change the school system. We also held a meeting with the administration. Everybody was upset about what the SAIC had done. I believe that the institution should be more open about their ideology. Even though the SAIC is known to be open and up front, they should realize that our pieces are not toys.

**Libidot:** It is interesting that SAIC asked you to cover the faces as opposed to the genitals. That made the images more pornographic in a sense?

**Leung:** Yes, and I am more interested in seeing the face and the facial expressions. I am interested in seeing the environment around the body, such as the bedroom. I was exploring a new kind of voyeurism and exhibitionism. The basic concept of the project was questioning if Internet space is a private or public space, and whether cybersex is virtual or real.

**Libidot:** You see cybersex as a public experience as opposed to a private bedroom experience?

**Leung:** It is a bit like a gay bathhouse perhaps, although conceptually it is more like you are walking on the street and you see the person. If there was no sex involved, there probably would not have been a problem with the model release.

**Libidot:** So do you believe that cybersex is 'virtual' or 'real'?

**Leung:** Before I did the project, all the experiences I had with cybersex were very real. I met my boyfriend online, I made a best friend online, and all the sexual experiences I was having were totally crazy. But as I describe in my journal, after going through the middle point of the project I started to find it depressing. I did not have a connection with the people, even though we had very successful sexual experiences, they were totally gone the next day. In real life I have to work through stuff, dealing with my long-distance relationship and sexual frustrations.

## Dr. Jacobs 11:11am 5/10/2002 One Thousand Money Shots



Hello Libidot,

While jerking off in front of webcams, gay men contact each other, check out each others 'porn' profiles, zoom in the genitals, jerk off with a little bit of word-play, then climax externally and move on. One could see in these multiple money-shots a cold and unromantic way of exploring sex, or one could see these penis/anus landscapes as consumerist sexist environments and perhaps lacking a human and aesthetic dimension.

But how does gay porn and the aesthetics of webcamming portraits impact impact on fantasies and the choices and rituals of gay men? I am reading Roland Barthes again and I am still wondering about the power of words, seductions, utterings of love and affection, pictures and presents as gifts, as embodied processes to more explicit demonstrations of genitals and orgasm Words and ideas, fragmented memories surfacing in online communication and images, a stated of consciousness which Roland Barthes so powerfully predicted in *Fragments of a Lover's Discourse*. The amorous subject has a database of 'figures' that have no logic but s/he will use to express contact with the lover. To Barthes, there is no higher order that brings logic to these fragments. And let's face it, lovers are those humans that are powerful muses, soul-engines that make subjects live and give up other logic: 'My lovers cannot be classified.' 'I am engulfed by my lovers.' 'I must have done something wrong because my lovers don't reply to me.' 'I am curious to know what my lovers are truly like.' 'I want to refrain from possessing my lovers.' etc. These are the old-fashioned figures of speech set up around sexual loving. It seems that these figures of speech might be replaced by the colder porn cultures and star-discourses offered by the markets. Fragments of a lover's discourse are still at work for web users willing to insert a fragile state of mind and outbursts of intimacy and seductions into streams of money shots. Even though we have now started to receive ads in our inboxes that try to imitate the mysterious and seductive figures of cybersex speech, I think that we will always construct the lover differently from the marketer-in-disguise. I suggest that we think of the gay webcammer standing on a floating device between the 'lover' and the 'marketeer-in-disguise' - marketer of his body, marketer of his firm muscles and his unrelentless cock.

Warmly,

Dr. Jacobs

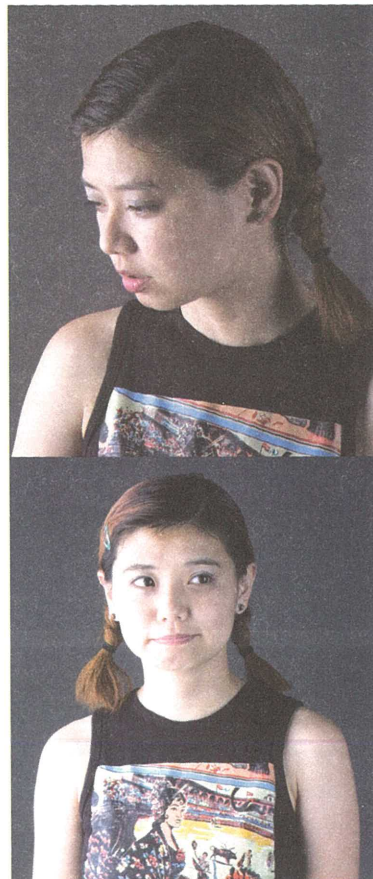


p.s. No, I did not wake up yet from my life of lonely musings. I think he is, after all, a little freaked out about me, Teo. Yes, we have been mostly meeting about his thesis and discussing his romantic interludes at Brown University, and hanging out in coffee shops. It seems to me that the student-professor romance thing is much more alive at Brown than it is here in my college. I guess it must come with the aura of the Ivy League, red-brick buildings, antique dormitory furniture, dark cafeterias with chandeliers, velvet arm chairs. How could one remain insensitive to the sexual need of a young person's education in these superior establishments?

### October 6, 2002. Wicker Park, Illinois (Chicago).

I meet with the third member of the 'Oriental Whores', Mayumi Lake, in the basement of a bar at Wicker Park. Upstairs, customers are having food while watching black and white samurai movies. Yoshie Suzuki also takes part in the conversation (as a matter of fact, she nearly runs away with it). Lake is a pretty petite who speaks with a raspy, dark voice. During the conversation, she manages to show her rough edge, the other side of her 'cute girl' personality. We conduct this basement interview on empty stomachs, until Suzuki volunteers to go out and get some pizza. Lake obtained an MFA degree while making a series of erotic photographs, and was later commissioned by Nazraeli Press to publish them in a book called *Poo-Chi*. The book is shaped like a little girl's coat, a fantasy object that one can open and close. The book was printed in China, where a local printhouse was commissioned to produce a satin cover, made of cheap white underwear fabric.

A Poo-Chi is a 'faux portrait' that tricks the viewer into seeing genitals and pubic hair, exactly those areas that are firmly censored in Japanese porn and erotica. Some of Lake's photographs show dolls and young children, others evoke girls' white underpants as a dominant Japanese porn fetish. Lake plays with the beauty of intimate fabrics and manipulates the



Mayumi Lake

encounter with the eye of the beholder. As she writes in her artist statement: "My artwork deals with the interaction between the real and imaginary. I confront viewers with images that suggest a pre-pubescent sexuality. This is accomplished through the careful framing of adult bodies. These images arouse complex emotional responses in the viewer: excitement, fear, disgust. Extended viewing reveals the illusion." As a young girl growing up in Japan, she was controlled by an absurd set of conflicting expectations: well-behaved 'good girl' or sex kitten? She questions the Japanese female sexuality inhibition, yet it is still present in her system and mind.

### Interview: Mayumi Lake, Wicker Park, October 5, 2002.

'THEY MIGHT KNOW THAT IT'S NOT A VAGINA, BUT NONETHELESS ...'

**Libidot:** I wondered if you could explain the title of your book of photographs *Poo-Chi*?

**Lake:** *Poo-Chi* is a nick-name for the armpit, as I was told by one of the *Poo-Chi* models, a Chinese-American friend of mine. After I started to do the series, a robotic dog came on to the market called *Poo-Chi*. You can see that dog around now in many stores, but I was the one who coined the name.

**Libidot:** Have you always thought of yourself as an artist?

**Lake:** I actually wanted to be a graphic designer when I came to SAIC. One of my teachers early-on asked me what my major was going to be, and I told her I wanted to be a designer so that I could make money. She said I should do fine art, so I changed my mind. I think that I have always been an artist, but when I lived in Osaka, I was too chicken to go to art school.

**Libidot:** What other kinds of photography projects have you done?

**Lake:** When I was an undergrad I did a series that mixed cutouts of body images and organic objects. Before this *Poo-Chi* series I made a series of videos called 'Mimicking', showing images of my body parts acting like they are other body parts, mostly sexual organs. It is a really simple video and the framing is very tight, and my body parts look like they are 'masturbating' or like 'two bodies having sex'. When I made this series I was living in an isolated place on the East Coast, and I really missed my friends. I felt like I was disconnected from human relationships, and so I was sad and lonely. It was too hard to shoot myself in photography, so I decided to use video so that I could watch myself on the monitor. In one of the scenes, I used my armpit. Since I have a really meaty armpit, I always think that it looks just like a little girl's vagina. Then, when I moved to Chicago, I started asking other people to come to my studio to photograph their armpits. The *Poo-Chi* series does not have my own armpit but other people's armpits, both male and female.

**Libidot:** What is it that interests you so much about people's armpits?



**Lake:** I am not interested in seeing actual sexual organs because I am interested in seeing hidden things. In Japanese porn, for instance, there are many rape scenes, but the women are always wearing something, and it is more erotic than just seeing a naked rape-scene.

**Libidot:** How have people reacted to your work?

**Lake:** I showed the *Poo-Chi* Series for the first time in Chicago when my *Poo-Chi* was not wearing an outfit yet, and people were freaked out. They were 20 by 24 inch photographs and they also looked like a little girls' vaginas, but less compared to later *Poo-Chis*. The reaction actually made me happy though. As I said in my statement, I don't like actually showing genitals, but I like to suggest it to people. When viewers see this image, they might know that it is not a vagina, but nonetheless they realize what they have been thinking, and they know that it is in their mind. I really enjoy watching their faces when they come to this realization.

**Libidot:** Can you try to explain why people see genitals in your images? Is it because we are so conditioned by porn to see those genitals?

**Lake:** My selection of clothes is completely fetish. I choose the costumes very carefully. There are references to bondage, for instance.

**Libidot:** And how are the *Poo-Chi* fetishes related to your interest in erotic cartoons?

**Lake:** I used to be a really nerdy anime fan. The videos that get exported from Japan to the USA are all 'straightforward' – the object is a girl who is cast for a desiring boy, but a completely different mar-



Mayumi Lake, *Poo-Chi* photographs, 1999-2000

ket exists in Japan, which shows a different dynamic, called 'Yaoi'. They are homo-erotic stories for straight girls and women, who have partners but enjoy the sexual pleasure of looking at beautiful male teenage bodies. I was definitely one of those girls. I tried to transfer some of the Yaoi eroticism to my *Poo-Chi* series, as some of those images were of boys, but they did not end up in my book. I am influenced very much by erotic comics, but it is not easy to mimic them, even though it is where my interest in eroticism started.

**Libidot:** It would be quite unusual for young women in other countries to go out and buy their weekly erotic comics.

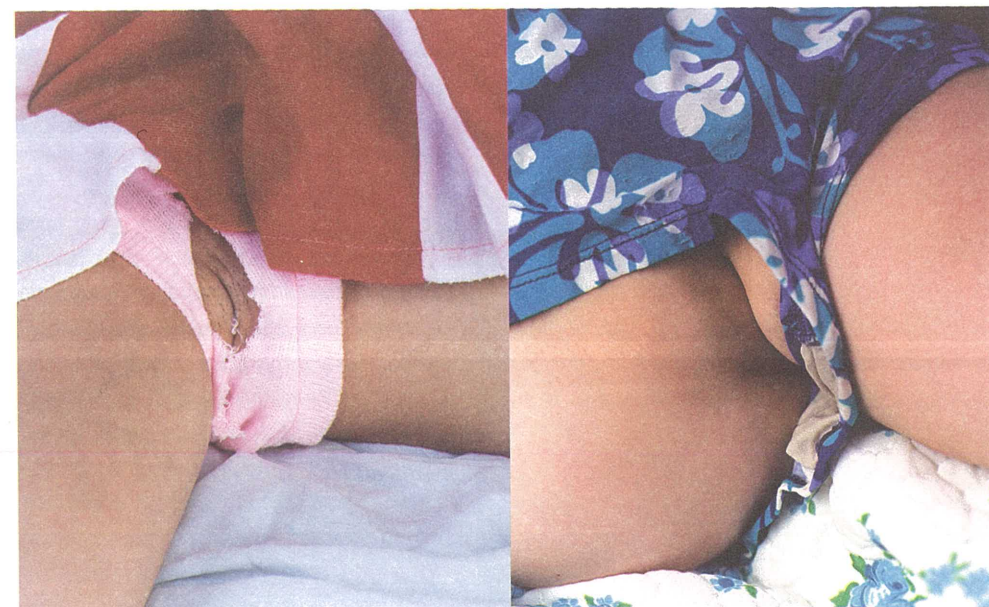
**Lake:** Yes, but it is really fun. It is true what they say about Japanese porn – that "there is something for everyone." It is also true that homosexuality is widely accepted, or at least, that used to be the case.

**Libidot:** I wondered what you think about the portrayal of women in commercial Japanese porn, with all the scenes of violence towards women and the infantilization of women?

**Lake:** I find a lot of it quite sexy, as do many other women in Japan. My mother always told me that you can control men by playing a 'weak' position, so that is what some women still do in order to exert some type of control in the company of men.

**Suzuki:** Japanese porn is really made for Japanese men.

**Libidot:** Yes, but Mayumi is saying that women like these images, too.



Mayumi Lake, *Poo-Chi* photographs, 1999-2000



**Suzuki:** Yes, that is true. Women's porn magazines in Japan have a lot of rape scenes. I also think that there are a lot of 'date rapes' in Japan. But Japanese men are usually shy and 'feminine'... I think that it is their fantasy to rape women.

**Lake:** Yes, this is also the case in the 'Yaoi' comics where boys often rape each other, and straight women seem to enjoy that. I think it stems from an interest in power, as Japanese social life is so tightly structured, you cannot subvert the order. Japanese housewives may like the porn images because they can identify with the person who rapes, the person who overpowers. Women are used to seeing the images and are more 'trained' to like them. You know, Japanese women actually hardly ever talk about sex and masturbation.

**Suzuki:** The average consumers of Japanese porn are young men between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two. They have a lot of pressure in life, as they are trying to get through high school, graduating and starting an 'adult life'.

**Libidot:** Can you tell me something about your involvement with the Asian-American collective Nipporn productions?

**Lake:** It started as part of an Internet porn exhibition in New York called Fictive Netporn in Fall 2001, organized by the Point gallery, an exhibit about artists' responses to porn. The curator, Paul Klee, asked Yoshie and myself to do something. We decided to do something humorous, as we don't like heavy instances of 'artporn'. So we decided to combine sushi and the body, since sushi is such a fetish item for yuppies in the USA. Yoshie had just moved in with Isaac and decided to do a housewarming party with sushi that we would document on video/photography and put on the web.

We decided to call it Nipporn, since two of us are Japanese and it was a contribution to the Fictive Netporn exhibit. Then we called ourselves 'Oriental Whores' after Isaac's famous installation piece 'The Impossibility of Having Sex with 500 Men in One Month: I am an Oriental Whore'. Isaac helped us make the web site, since we did not know any web design. For this party, we had to make all the sushi ourselves, as we could not afford to hire somebody to do it. We quickly learned how to make sushi; it was not that difficult. We bought tons of raw fish in one of the suburbs of Chicago.

We asked people to make reservations and about seventy people made reservations, and many more people crashed in at the end. But the people who made a reservation knew that they would have to participate by wearing sexy Asian costumes. It was not like an orgy, but people were eating, kissing, licking and touching. We, however, needed to stay sober, as we had to take care of documentation. It was a lot of fun and a lot of work. But we decided to continue with our parties anyway. We have organized four parties since then, with a different theme each time.

**Libidot:** Are these events a mixture of partying and 'art'?

**Lake:** We wanted to make a party as a new art medium.

**Libidot:** How does that differ from regular parties?

**Suzuki:** (enters the basement with pizza) We had a couple of rules for people to go by, and we actually kicked those people out who did not wear costumes or people who were late. We did not accept any voyeurs either. We were encouraging people to go somewhere where they had never gone, as an artful experience. We were also inspired by a performance piece with sushi at the SAIC, a guy who was wrapped in plastic wrap, and they served sushi on the body. This performance was based on sushi eating style 'Nyotai-Mori', in which sushi is served on a naked woman. I think that the plastic wrap was used as some kind of health restriction, as in Japan, plastic wrap is never used for Nyotai-Mori. We thought that it was stupid to use plastic wrap, as the whole point for us is to eat sushi off the body.

**Libidot:** You say people have to wear sexy clothes ... but where do you draw the line?

**Lake:** We had one guy and he was chubby and his underwear was torn, but he did not know that. We discovered it when looked at the documentation. Show off your rear-end as you eat sushi, that's the perfect Nipporn way.

## October 8, 2002. Chicago.

Today I am meeting with Barbara DeGenevieve, Professor at the School of the Art Institute Chicago, who maintains the website [www.ssspread.com](http://www.ssspread.com). The site is marketed towards lesbians and transgender individuals, encouraging them to become producers and consumers of porn, paying participants to the web community through a membership. The *ssspread.com* members have access to weekly updated slide-shows of porn movies, scripted by members and other participants and filmed in collaboration with the *www.ssspread.com* team.

*www.ssspread.com* solicits participants who agree to be showcased on the site, who are paid a nominal amount of money for each film shoot, and who do not necessarily conform to beauty norms. For instance, in the 'Road Side Service' slide-show posted on October 30, 2003, Chicago-based singer Nomy Lamm acts out a macho-redneck scenario as a 'male trucker' who received a blowjob from a 'transman' partner, then penetrated the partner anally with a dildo on the carhood, only to finally reveal her true phallus in the form of an amputated leg.



Barbara DeGenevieve



[www.ssspread.com](http://www.ssspread.com) also encourages social activities between members. The site contains links to pornographic stories in the 'Story Lounge' area. The 'Articles and Interviews' area has had interviews with sex scholars and activists such as Shannon Bell and Annie Sprinkle. The members have also given feedback to the weekly still-images by writing messages on a messageboard.

### Interview: Barbara DeGenevieve, Chicago, October 7, 2002.

'Of course there are tons of people who will never tire of watching 'perfect bodies' as they're presented by advertising and mainstream movies, but there's a large enough population either bored with this hollow ideal or....'

**Libidot:** When did you first start looking at pornography?

**DeGenevieve:** I don't remember the first time I really looked at it, probably in my early twenties. I doubt that it was any earlier than that because my parents were very conservative. I didn't think very much about it until I was in graduate school. I must say that I adopted the party line feminist position about porn being a blight on western civilization. According to Laura Mulvey, the only position that can be assumed by a woman watching any kind of film including porn is one in which the male gaze makes her an object or a victim. The only role the female viewer can identify with, says Mulvey, is the (usually) submissive female. But as far as I'm concerned, there is no male gaze, or female gaze for that matter, just the gaze. The gaze does objectify, but a woman's gaze objectifies just like a man's gaze. I'm more interested in the idea that, as a woman, you can watch certain elements of even mainstream porn and insert yourself into the narrative. What's important about it is that it allows you to take up any subject position, and a subject position has nothing to do with gender. For instance, there are a lot of women who like gay male porn, or SM, or more violent porn. When you choose the role you identify with in the scenario, it could be a submissive position or a dominant one, and it has nothing to do with that role being played by a male or female actor. Men can just as easily relate to the subject position played by a female. Gender and role-play always comes into the act of viewing.

**Libidot:** So when you look at a mainstream product made for the male viewer, you can still see something different in it as a female spectator?

**DeGenevieve:** Yes, I can easily do that. I'm very aware that a lot of mainstream porn is silly, stupid, and violent. I'm constantly being spammed with unwanted junk. There's some really hideous porn on the Internet but there's a lot of harmless, if not culturally interesting, porn out there as well. Where, other than porn, particularly on the Internet, can you see so many types of bodies? Every fetish and every body type imaginable – hairy women, fat people, men with small penises, grandmothers, the list goes on and on.

**Libidot:** Do you think that these alternative body types are a new development in porn?

**DeGenevieve:** They're probably a relatively new development in terms of the availability and easy access that comes with the Internet, but they still represent a modest percentage of everything that's out there. I do think American culture is just becoming aware of the fact that not everyone wants to see the standard long nails, fake breasts, and exaggerated reactions. Of course there are tons of people who will never tire of watching 'perfect bodies' as they're presented by advertising and mainstream movies, but there's a large enough population either bored with this hollow ideal, or that never really found it fully satisfying to begin with. That's really exciting to me as it creates a kind of democracy that you don't find represented in the 'image' industries. There is also much more ethnic diversity than there ever has been in pornography, and I suspect it has a lot less to do with political correctness than with accommodating specific fetishistic audience desires.

The original idea for our project was to have some kind of non-heterosexual porn site. There were already enough gay sites on the internet and so much of gay desire is focused on specific stereotypical body types like the muscular hunk, the leather daddy, the man in uniform. Even though my photographic career began with images of naked men, I couldn't imagine being able to make something that would stand out in this genre. We decided it should be a site for dykes who identified as butch or femme. There were very few web sites that had the interests of that demographic in mind. We didn't have very much to refer to as a model, so we created a list of elements we liked and disliked about other porn sites. We ultimately wanted to create a space that would feel comfortable for a queer audience, without ads or blinking banners, where people would see themselves and their bodies represented in porn.

**Libidot:** Can you define what you mean by 'queer' sexuality? Also, how does your site interact with the queer community in Chicago? Is there a big queer community here?



Nomy Lamm and partner in a [ssspread.com](http://ssspread.com) photo-shoot



**DeGenevieve:** 'Queer' to me is different from 'gay' and 'lesbian'. Queers are more outrageous, less interested in fitting in or being culturally 'normal', and generally live within a community of social and political activism. Queer is very inclusive of gender deviations and variations that are not part of a more traditional 'gay/lesbian' sexuality. I make a distinction between 'lesbians' and 'dykes'; lesbians are often too involved with political correctness and usually quite dismissive of sexuality that involves power-play and icons that resemble male organs. I'm more interested in queer sensibilities and see openness about, and desire to alter, the body (either temporarily or permanently) as a defining characteristic of the queer community.

There is a fairly large queer and 'trans' community in Chicago, and there are a lot of trans-people who come through Chicago, who know about my work or my website and want to model. I've done a lot of photo shoots with female-to-male transsexuals. Fewer male-to-female models are interested in our site. One male-to-female was interested but declined after looking at the site because she thought the models on the site weren't pretty enough! I knew as soon as she said it that she had no idea what we were about or what we were doing on the site. She considered herself heterosexual at this point and more into mainstream pornography.

In contrast is Jenny, for instance, who is a tall and hefty male-bodied transgendered person from Chicago; her partner is a woman. On the surface they look like a heterosexual couple, but they both identify as queer and they're poly-amorous. It's a really complicated sexuality and body-type, e.g., Jenny is quite hairy and when she dresses as a woman, she usually wears a bustier. She embodies one of those visual contradictions that never cease to amaze me about gender queerness.

**Libidot:** Does [www.ssspread.com](http://www.ssspread.com) come out of your work as an academic at the School of the Art Institute? Is it difficult for you to make porn within the art institution?

**DeGenevieve:** [www.ssspread.com](http://www.ssspread.com) came out of my work as an artist in photography and video, as well as my research and writing about pornography. In 1994, I was defunded by the National Endowment for the Arts after my work was accepted by a peer panel. Andres Serrano, Merry Alpern and myself had our grants rescinded by the National Council on the Arts, which is a presidentially-appointed body that oversees the NEA. I have gone through a lot of similar censorship, and ever since I was a graduate student, my work, for one reason or another, has been called pornography. [www.ssspread.com](http://www.ssspread.com) is the logical extension of my visual work and all the theorizing I've done about sex, gender and pornography for the last 20 years. It's not 'art about porn' or 'art porn', but porn made by an artist. Art isn't changing fast enough, nor are attitudes in the art world. I still make art about sexuality within a conceptual framework, but right now I'm enjoying the web site, which is a much more literal and functional activity. It's so interesting – I've gotten much more publicity because of [ssspread](http://www.ssspread.com) than I ever received as an artist.

**Libidot:** Could you describe how you direct a video-shoot for [ssspread.com](http://www.ssspread.com)? How do you collaborate with your models?

**DeGenevieve:** I usually collaborate with the people I'm videotaping by asking them ahead of time to consider what they want to do in the session. Very often I just leave it up to them, and they come up

with a scenario that we discuss beforehand. I might add something to it or ask them to do something slightly different in certain parts. But overall, I want the models to orchestrate their own scenes because they know what their comfort level is and what they're willing to do. Besides, I could never come up with the variety of scenarios they do.

I shoot on video and we upload still-images from the videos to the site. I have to admit, video is much more interesting to me. Even though we're limited to stills, I shoot video because my plan has always been to use the video to make compilation tapes. We produced our first video, *Full Load*, using the tapes I shot for the site. We would like to start making money by producing our own videos. We also want to put video-clips on the site as soon as possible. We want to capture the movement because it's the essence of what's going on, the interaction between people. It has been frustrating to be restricted to still images.

**Libidot:** How long does a typical [ssspread.com](http://www.ssspread.com) photography-shoot take? And do you have a specific film aesthetic in mind when you go out? Or do you like to 'play it by ear' and be influenced by the actual set?

**DeGenevieve:** I try to keep it a 60-minute shoot, because we can only pay \$75 per model for each shoot. I haven't received any complaints about the compensation, mostly because the models are supportive of what we're doing and really want to be on the site. It sometimes feels like a community effort. So many people from all over the country know each other and are really excited when they see their friends on the site. I usually go to people's houses but try to shoot outside whenever I can, in alleyways, by the docks in San Francisco, along isolated roads, in the woods at festivals like Camp Trans. The whole notion of outdoor sex is something that people are really into.

**Libidot:** Webcammers seem to be more and more interested in checking out each other's living environments as well ... "What kind of bookshelf does this person have?" ... "What kind of suburb does s/he live in?" Are you interested in shooting these everyday environments?

**DeGenevieve:** There are a lot of details you can see in these shoots. A lot of people I shoot are young and into a punk aesthetics. The environments they live in are definitely not mainstream, and this becomes part of the ambience of a shoot. Yesterday we shot in a kitchen, with dishes in the sink, a skull flag on the window, food and all sorts of funky objects all over the place. It was interesting because the environment reflected an attitude about how the members of the house live. I think a lot of our members relate to this kind of "anti-domestic" domestic space.

**Libidot:** How many people subscribe to your site?

**DeGenevieve:** We have a couple of hundred subscribers, which isn't a huge membership but it is a significant community. It's a rotating community and we've had over a thousand people coming in and out of the site.

**Libidot:** Have you ever considered doing the site as a free site as opposed to a pay-site?



**DeGenevieve:** If we did it as a free site we would have to have advertisements because we could not cover our expenses otherwise. Most of our revenue now goes to paying the models. One thing that we all agreed on from the start is that we didn't want annoying ads, pop-up windows, and the gross commercialism you see on traditional porn sites. At some point we might have to start thinking about advertising, but so far we only have a small page with links to other sites we want to support rather than paid ads.

**Libidot:** Isn't it very difficult to try to make people subscribe to your site? As it seems to be for other porn sites on the web, who are losing subscriptions to free online materials.

**DeGenevieve:** In our case, I wouldn't say it's difficult to 'sell' it to people, because we actually have something no one else has, and we have an audience that likes what we do. The problem is, we serve an audience with very little disposable income. Most are young and gender queer, many have a transient life style, some are students. It's not the most economically independent population. And yet, the site seems important enough that they join for a month or two, leave and come back when they have money again. We work really hard to have an update every week because we appreciate the fact that for a lot of our members, it's a sacrifice. We start with a subscription fee of \$14.99/month and over a period of four months, the fee goes down until it reaches \$9.99/month, where it stays for the remainder of the time they're members. Compared to most other pay sites, that's pretty inexpensive.

**Libidot:** How do you get feedback from your members?

**DeGenevieve:** We have a forum on the site and we do get mostly positive messages when people write about their responses to the images. One time people started to write that they hated the title of a certain story called "1-900-Transman". Some people objected to the title because there were two people in the shoot who identified as trans, even though one was obvious a transman, while the other still looked somewhat feminine. The people who complained thought the title only referred to him and not to the other person. The argument was that 'transman' was singular when it should have been plural. So there was a heated debate back and forth about language. Language in the queer community is a very big issue. For instance, should we use the word 'boi' or boy' to refer to a female-bodied male identifying person. Some prefer to use to the word 'hir' instead of the male pronoun. Offense is taken when the right words aren't used, even though there is no uniformity of language that everyone subscribes to. Mistakes are rarely intentional unless the person has no idea about the community and says something out of ignorance.

**Libidot:** How did you get involved in the trans-community?

**DeGenevieve:** I got involved when I lived in the San Francisco Bay Area. I was on the organizing committee for a semi-academic conference on female sexuality and representation, and decided to invite Susan Stryker, a male-to-female transsexual who is an academic and an amazing writer. It was a panel on femininity and I knew a MTF person would have a very different perspective on the subject. Susan Stryker introduced me to Loren Cameron, who is FTM and one of the most well known transmen in the world. I met him a couple of years after his transition. He blew my mind more than anyone ever

had with photographs that challenged my views about masculinity, gender, and my own sexuality. I would look at his images and ask myself: "so where is masculinity located?" Obviously it was not in the penis.

Loren has been on testosterone for about fifteen years now and because of it, has a rather large clitoris. Depending on body chemistry, the clitoris enlarges and other male traits are enhanced as well. Loren's photographs of himself as a body-builder in typical hyper-masculine poses completely overwhelmed me. I think I had a sublime experience the first time I saw them. When I say sublime, I mean a completely destabilizing moment in which one's sense of self is called into question if not shattered. Nothing but a triangle of hair is seen between his legs, yet in every other way, he is the quintessential uber-male. I've both written and lectured about Loren's work. It's actually through him and his fame that I managed to connect to other trans-people through out the country, and became involved with the community here in Chicago.

**Libidot:** How come there are so few trans-people working as academics?

**DeGenevieve:** Sandy Stone and Susan Stryker are the ones who are out there and writing openly about transsexuality and issues of gender. Both of them have been supported by academia and art institutions, even though it is a small portion of academia. Sandy Stone manages to get support in Texas, of all places.

**Libidot:** Do you believe that people are becoming more exhibitionistic? Why do people decide to model for the site?

**DeGenevieve:** I suppose there's a certain amount of exhibitionism involved. A lot of the models are sex workers. They're sex workers with a male clientele, they dance, they strip, but they are obviously queer. They work in a sex community, mostly located in the Bay Area that is very accepting of different body types. The models are very comfortable with their bodies. Others I've worked with on the site are less used to modeling, yet are interested in the representation of queer bodies, both politically and artistically. These people have been very supportive in allowing me to video-tape them. I like working with them because they're not professional models. The sex is very real and even though it doesn't always end in orgasm, the models usually have great pleasure doing it.

**Libidot:** Does your site have mostly female viewers?

**DeGenevieve:** Women and trans-people make up most of our audience. We have some kinky straight men as well, who might even think of themselves as queer. It's so interesting; they write us that they're really turned on by butch-dykes or transmen. A few have even asked for advice in the forum. I get really excited when something like that happens. It gives me hope that even in some small way, the world is changing.



### March 15, 2004. Boston, Massachussets.

Kim Airs, owner of the sex shop *Grand Opening*, is organizing an annual screening of amateur porn movies. The audience in the screening is large and loud, at times shouting out reactions or laughing hysterically at how the filmmakers conceive of sexual positions and camera angles. In some movies, the scenes fail to be explicit or dynamic at all. For example, a female masturbation scene shows a moving hand on a hidden vagina, where the soundtrack consists of quiet and camera-shy moaning. This is 'real' amateur porn, a bundle of a person's sexual behaviors and their representation, approaching audiences to consider responses other than arousal and masturbation. The appeal of the event lies exactly in the odd mixture of makers and viewers, the untrained screen-performers and filmmakers, whose movies cause surprise responses in the audience.

As one man in the audience of *You Oughta Be in Pictures* tells me afterwards: "I have seen pornography before. I've seen quite a bit of it. But this was unlike any of those experiences. I am not exactly sure what is different about it, but the response that it generated made me feel asexual."<sup>3</sup> Another female respondent emphasizes the importance of humor in the implicit communication between the filmmakers and the viewers. As she says: "But I think it was the humor part that I really enjoyed. It allows you to step back from all the taboo-ness of sex. There is a give and take in the sense that some filmmakers will poke fun at audience response by deliberately putting extreme images on screen, while audience members will at points poke fun at the filmmaker's attempt at 'sexiness' at certain intervals."<sup>4</sup>

Who are the amateur porn filmmakers? Mike is a 'balloon fetishist' who stages a balloon-puncturing orgy. The audience laughs out loud at the end of Mike's movie. The audience also roars throughout the next movie, *Shotzee the Clown*, featuring a horny clown going out and having sex with a 'doggie' girl. Next comes a loving couple, Nicolette and Leo, who make a plain vanilla bedroom movie with a security camera plugged into their TV-VCR. Nicolette believes that people are not having good sex, and she wants to show them what good sex is like. I then noticed a very odd product, Tanya Bezreh's spanking musical *The Naughty Garden*, which tells a child-like fantasy tale of garden flowers, a strawberry, a bee and a snail, making a musical together. During the audition, Tanya, as 'strawberry', slips into the back room and gets spanked by the angry stagehand. The movie goes on to show the spankings as a sexual awakening leading to pleasure and orgasm.

I get a hold of Bezreh after the screening. A Boston-based artist with a degree in English from Harvard University, Bezreh first ran a puppet theatre at Harvard University, then

helped develop *Brain-Opera* (1996) at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. She also lived in New York City where she became a free-lance writer for *Artbyte* magazine and contributed to new media exhibits for the Guggenheim Museum and the Museum of Sex. Bezreh has also produced and archived a bunch of erotic self-portraits in digital video and photographs, such as the series *Bored\_Porn*. Her movie *The Naughty Garden*, together with the other movies screened at *You Oughta Be in Pictures*, was also screened on TV on the HBO program *Real Sex*. Bezreh became a web-based personality with her award-winning website, *New Century SchoolBook*, a magazine about electronic art that turned into a personal photo-diary and striptease.

### Interview: Tanya Bezreh, Boston, March 16, 2004.

'I like the ridiculousness of spanking a completely innocent being, for what could a strawberry possibly do wrong?'

**Libidot:** When did you discover the art of spanking ?

**Bezreh:** I grew up with a spanking fetish, and that could be at times completely lonely, as I was fixated on this fetish. From a very early age I had sexual fantasies about being spanked. I was not spanked as a child, but was fixated on the idea. When I started dating, I was always wondering when my partner would spank me, but it never happened because I was too embarrassed to ask for it. It was an obsession for me to find someone who was into spanking as much as I was, which is extremely socially limiting. It's not that I couldn't have regular sex, but unless I was extremely in love, I fantasized about spanking almost the whole time regular sex was happening. Having a fetish is really different from just enjoying the fetish, for me it meant I couldn't really enjoy anything else unless the fetishistic needs were addressed. This made for a very narrowly fixated sex life, an obsession, as it were.

**Libidot:** So you decided to make a musical and a movie about your fetish? How did you figure out that art was the way to go?

**Bezreh:** It was very difficult for me to figure out what I should do with my life because all my central interests seemed bereft to me. I think I read in a book that you should do exactly what most obsesses you, but it seemed so absurd to try to combine spanking and musicals. But eventually I had to streamline my art because I was too scattered, and I decided to give my central obsessions a shot. I wrote a musical called *Naughty Cherubs* in which, among other things, God spansks the Devil Woman after they sing a duet about it.

**Libidot:** When the HBO crew interviewed you on *Real Sex*, you stressed the fact that your entire crew was Ivy League-trained. You also emphasized your college background. Do you think they were also tapping into the commercial fetish of the 'dirty college girl' as amateur pornographer? How did they interact with your work as an artist shooting porn?

<sup>3</sup> Ewen Syme, Personal Interview, March 15, 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Titi Yu, Personal Interview, March 15, 2004



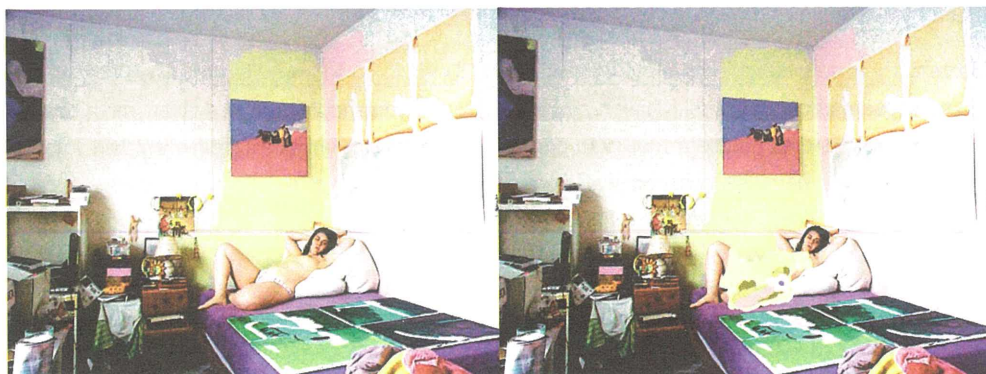
**Bezreh:** They showed up with a fifteen-person crew and shot us shooting our porn movie. They were actually very friendly and helped us out in many ways. We used our own cameras, and they shot their movie in film. We shot about five minutes of film, and they ended up excerpting about a minute and a half of their footage. They did rush us a little bit and try to make us come to the 'sexy' part a bit faster.

They were mostly very nice to us, and they did not talk during our shoot. They thought that the script for *Naughty Cherubs* would be too controversial, as it involved God spanking cherubs and the devil. HBO refused that: "We don't know if we can have God spanking any people." So then I came up with the garden scenario and the figure of a totally innocent strawberry being spanked. At first they weren't sold on the 'spanking' idea as being pornography, because only fetishists consider spanking a type of sex, and everyone except the fetishists would still be waiting for the "sex" to happen. Anyway, it is illegal in Massachusetts to consent to S/M, so I was worried about the illegality of making the movie at all.

**Libidot:** Would you even call it a porn movie, porn being about efficiency of time and production methods, and quick action?

**Bezreh:** Well, HBO *Real Sex* is an R-rated show. There is stuff called spanking porn, though that consists only of spanking, and no sex. So, in that sense, my movie could be considered porn. It is classified that way because, as a 'spanking porn', it has no sex (intercourse) in it. But I do have to admit that after making the movie, I realized that it is much harder to make a porn movie than you think it is. For instance, just finding actors was difficult. What I wanted to see in the movie is truth and love and real emotion in sex, and that very often does not make it to film. Porn is often the opposite of that. It was very scary for me to make this movie, as I was really scared of coming out about my fetish. But then I came out in a major big way on HBO, with eight million viewers watching every episode.

**Libidot:** Yes, and they decided to show the shot of your buttocks over and over again, in the opening credits and closing credits. You came out in a major way.



Tanya Bezreh, newcenturyschoolbook.com, 2000. Photo of herself naked/photo of herself 'dressed'.

**Bezreh:** Yes, for me it was like saying, "I am spanking."

**Libidot:** When did you make your first amateur porn movie?

**Bezreh:** I made some dirty movies when I bought my first Hi-8 camera. I took my camera home and made porn with my boyfriend the first night I had it. It was completely obvious to me to do that. We both thought, 'what else would you do with a camera?' I started keeping a video-diary, mostly just for myself, or who knows, maybe for everybody. As another example, I was at the opening of an exhibit in the Museum of Sex in New York in November 2002, hiding behind one of the exhibits and singing to my camera about all the porn stars that were in the room. I was talking to my camera about Candida Royale and suddenly this guy came into my hiding place and we giggled and kissed even though we had never seen each other before. And the camera stayed on, and then I showed him my breast, and he licked my breast.

**Libidot:** That's true instantaneous porn.

**Bezreh:** I made him say his name and state that he did not mind being in my movie. It was about the excitement of the camera, which is very different from pretending that the camera is not there.

**Libidot:** Maybe the HBO program is opening a new tide, as it is featuring amateurs and showing their artistic creativity – how the coalescence of artistic and sexual energy is a very powerful engine.

**Bezreh:** Well, sex and creativity have always been intrinsically linked, what is new now, I think, is the fact that amateurs have the power and the tools and courage to try out this new crazy medium.

**Libidot:** Yes, and it can be explosive or annoying to those people who can't feel that energy, or are freaked out by it. Has your work ever been censored? The Bush government now is so very reactionary, as in the "abstinence only" high-school policy that encourages young people to have no sex until marriage...

**Bezreh:** No sex until marriage, and no sex after marriage either. I haven't worried about censorship very much because I've been my own censor, like I have made tons of erotic digital photographs and videos, but I have never shown them to anyone. I made *The Naughty Garden* for HBO in an attempt get over my own shyness. I have been naked in art shows, but I am still very scared about showing my naked body.

Sexuality is about everything else, as well. When I keep my video diary, I will just talk about what I talk about, which are often very spiritual topics. Then I also may feel sexual and masturbate, in the bathtub with a camera, for example. How can sexuality be different from spirituality? For instance, in the final scene of *The Naughty Garden*, where the strawberry is getting fucked and she has her orgasm and she walks on the stage and is singing – that is just exactly right. Somebody who has sex on the screen is not just a porn star. They are also a singer and so many other things.

**Libidot:** How have people reacted to *The Naughty Garden*?



**Bezreh:** My old boyfriend from high school saw it on TV in a motel room with his girlfriend. And he wrote me: 'I finally got to see you naked.' I did not get a lot of negative comments, except for the 'shock jock' radio show I did to promote the HBO show. That was a whole learning experience, as they said a lot of very crude things; their 'schtick' is to try to shock the guests on their show. It really didn't work with me, because artists don't like to admit that they're shocked; it's like a point of pride. So, for example, they asked me if I had ever had anal sex, and I said "Oh, yeah, sure." Or they would give me a fourteen-question sex quiz, asking questions like, "Have you ever had sex when you had your period?" To most of them I said, "Yeah." Even though I am not nearly as sexually adventurous as most of my friends. I definitely felt a total culture clash there. Their formula is that they target celebrity guests with their shocking questions, trying to make people say things they would never admit ordinarily. But, for my generation it is not taboo to admit things. We are inundated with sex.

**Libidot:** Do you think it helped you to have the website *New Century Schoolbook*, where you were writing intimate diaries and uploading pictures of yourself?

**Bezreh:** I kept trying to figure out what I could write that would constitute a schoolbook. It started as a zine about electronic art, but I got bored with that, and it gradually became very personal, as I became more courageous and started thinking about myself as an artist. Then I made a self-portrait diary, writing pages compulsively, constantly, whenever I was lonely. And then I tried to make the site an e-commerce thing where I would sell, like, videos I would make for people. But all of these things were not really what could be called a 'new century schoolbook', and I left the site to rot for a while until I realized that each little experiment that I had done had taught me something, and then I articulated what I had learned from compulsively making all of this web art.

I started to look back at my work and write about how one can learn from compulsions and the mistakes one makes while carrying them out. You can click on each of the lessons and go back to the webpage that I was developing at the time. For example, I was taking a lot of naked pictures of myself, but I was too shy to put them on the site without painting blobby clothes onto myself in Photoshop. So the lessons that link to those images say things like, 'You are a wimp about nudity' and 'You



Tanya Bezreh, Screenshots from *The Naughty Garden*, 2003.

always take your clothes off, but you never put it on the site.' At some point I had to get over the fear of showing my sexier work, because I was hiding a huge percentage of my artwork. Doing the HBO thing was supposed to help break down the wall.

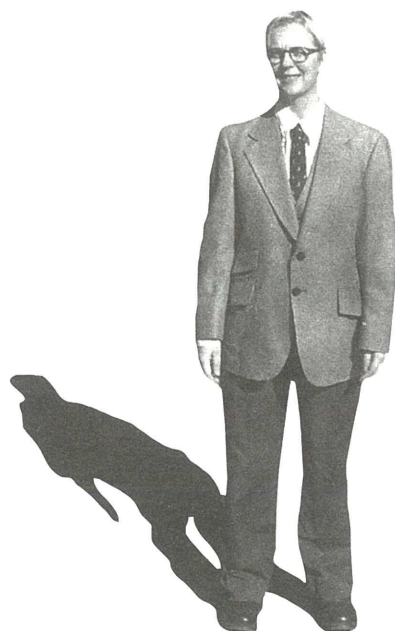
**Libidot:** How do you relate your sexual identity to being a performer in all of those different venues?

**Bezreh:** I wanted to 'do' things as opposed to analyzing things. Maybe I wanted to be Madonna, who was just so sexy to me and pushed every sexy button. She always represented the girl that got away with something. This made me think of the most wonderful use of the spectacle: to bedazzle. It was an acknowledgment of a transcendental reality – you do not have to explain everything, you can just *do*. I don't think so much about her or myself as an actor, but as somebody who gets rid of the fear by 'embodying' courage.

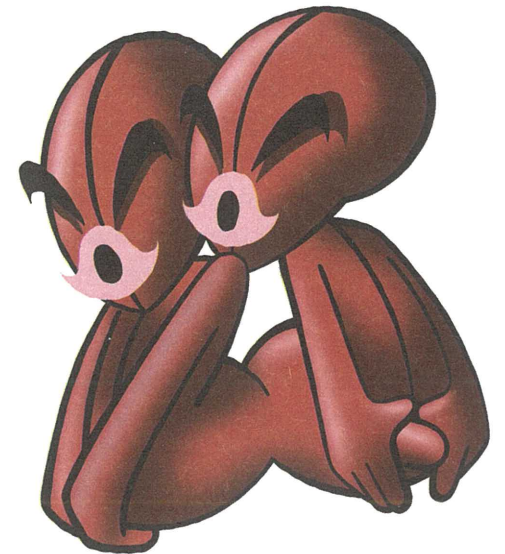
**Libidot:** You use a lot of costumes on your site and obviously in the HBO movie. Do you like to dress up in and embody different personalities?

**Bezreh:** I fetishize being objectified, especially as something extremely innocent. I like the idea of being inanimate. There is my *Red Shoes Diary* where a woman dresses up as a cake for her husband. I really liked that idea. In *The Naughty Garden*





## 6. Taiwan: The Alpha-male and the Phi-male



### Dr. Jacobs 9:11am 12/29/2003 The make-over of Dr. Jacobs



Dear Libidot,

Yesterday I went shopping with Teo. He dragged me along to one of his monthly outings after he told me that my clothes look a little bit worn out. He said it with such a friendly and empathic voice that it made me feel a little suspicious. I usually wear a regular pair of jeans and cotton sweaters ordered online from the Lands' End catalog. What is so wrong with all that, I wonder? But I came home yesterday with a new orange shirt and corduroy pants with colored stripes.

I guess things are looking up for me these days. I am working on my new essay 'The Sex Art Species: The Bonobo, their Schooling or Just an Instinct?' for the Asian Bulletin of Sex Art Studies (ABSAS) so please do get on with your diary and interviews.

Dr. Jacobs



## December 31, 2003. TAIPEI.

The last day of 2003, my journey is getting better and better, even though the travails of radical sex art and brutal censorship are thoroughly exhausting. I just wish I could be taken out on a gentle shopping spree myself. The Taiwanese clothes and markets are overwhelming, the women are so pretty and well-dressed. I am spending the evening with a young and attractive artist, Hui-Chan Kuo, 'Niki' Kuo for the westerners, and some of her friends. This is the western new year's, not taken very seriously by the Taiwanese, but a good excuse to throw another party. (The Chinese year is celebrated during the month of February.) The city of Taipei has a true social life and amazingly good food— all the varieties of Chinese cuisine, Japanese sushi bars and barbeques, Italian restaurants with huge selections of pastas, little Dutch pancakes 'poffertjes' (imported to Taiwan via Japan), English 'afternoon teas' with refined finger sandwiches, bread and cakes in French bakeries. Even the coffee from Starbucks is okay here. If Belgium is the country of people obsessed with good food, Taiwan is the country that has got it. I go out and eat fantastic meals with people whom I barely know at all, a wide network of artists, students, teachers, curators, scholars, and all of their friends. Their friendliness is simply overwhelming. They have a sense of humor and seem to be in a good mood most of the time. We walk around in little packs, spilling over and talking to other packs.

But my body does not adapt well to the city. I feel sick and flu-ish throughout my stay here, but coughing in public is not appreciated. As a matter of fact, the government has issued



SARS Warning  
in Taipei City.

a warning to wear masks when displaying any flu or cold symptoms. One Taiwanese medical researcher has been diagnosed with the SARS virus. People give me nasty looks whenever I have to cough. Many are wearing masks and everyone's body temperature is tested at the entrance to public spaces – libraries, shopping malls, universities. If your temperature registers above normal, you are sent to a hospital.

Generally, I cannot feel the sex in this city (though the American sitcom *Sex and the City* is omnipresent as the bestselling-pirated-DVD). My Taiwanese friend writes me an email and reminds me that there is actually 'too much' sex in the city of Taipei, but it is all hidden away and mostly reserved for male clients. It is more than the 'love hotels' of Taipei. There are the saunas, the KTVs (karaoke booths), the various strip clubs, etc. She adds a postscript saying that Taipei is a popular destination for male western scholars for that very reason.

It's New Year's Eve, I connect with Niki and her friend 'Anaïs Nien', an extroverted chubby girl who is a writer, a journalist, an avid reader of erotic fiction, and an aspiring installation artist. She is a loud and happening woman and loves to brainstorm her projects. Anaïs Nien, full-bodied and dyke-like, is a bit of an irregularity in this city, where women are, on average, small and skinny and quiet, and more than just a little bit obsessed with their diets. Their torsos and limbs are toned. Their skin looks clean. Their toes and fingers are picturesque and petit, nails nicely decorated in patterns and colors, improvements over my own peasant-looking hands and feet.



Taipei City  
market and  
motorbikes.



## Dr. Jacobs 9:37am 12/31/2003 The Bonobo Instinct?



Dear Libidot,

Sorry to hit you today with more intellectual questions, but could you help me look for examples of 'gender fusion' in the sex art species? I have been reading the work of the primatologist Frans de Waal, who has a very good eye for behavioral sex patterns in male and female primates and came up with some rather startling conclusions about gender fusion. The bonobo males and females both have very active sex lives (averaging 12 times a day) and they both have huge genitals. Their social patterns and survival techniques are characterized by excessive sexuality, between males and females, males and males, females and females. Females frequently fondle each other by rubbing their genitals against each other, a technique which is called 'GG-rubbing'. As De Waal describes:

As soon as caretakers at a zoo approach bonobos with food, the males develop erections. Even before the food is thrown into the enclosure, the apes are inviting one another to sex: males invite females, females invite males, and GG-rubbing among females is also common.<sup>1</sup>

Observations about GG-rubbing led to larger observations about the role of sex in culture, or the interrelated ethics of love and war. If de Waal had observed in chimpanzees hierarchical and violent methods of imposing power, he saw a different display of gender in this much rarer species of the bonobos.

So why are they doing this? Female bonobos use such sexual techniques to divert attention and change the tone of competitive encounters, especially when males are around, for instance, when they try to locate food, some of them will have sex, so as to diminish or alter the moment of rivalry.

Do you know of anything like 'GG rubbing' in the world of female artists?

Of course, humans are the most culturally diverse and sexually complex of animals, but still there is evidence that we as humans are becoming more prone to fused sex as something 'innate' to our psychological-biological evolution as a species. Could it be a species that harmonizes the 'male' and 'female' will to power in sexuality?

Dr. Jacobs

<sup>1</sup> Frans De Waal & Frans Lanting, *Bobobo: The Forgotten Ape*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997), 108; Bruce Baghemil, *Biological Exuberance: Animal Homosexuality and Natural Diversity* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1999).

## December 31, 2003. TAIPEI.

Well, Dr. Jacobs, that is a difficult question. But the next time I have another meeting with the 'sex art species', I will certainly ask them about the size of their genitals. Anyway, for now, let's focus on New Year's Eve in the gay and lesbian bookstore, where a number of people, mostly well-dressed gay men, are having casual drinks.<sup>2</sup> At midnight, they grab their cell phones to call or send messages to their friends. They don't hug, don't touch, don't kiss. But the night is virginal in this city of hidden delights, we decide to head over to the art gallery IT Park, where we have been invited to join Liu-Ching Tang for one of his barbeques. Liu is barbequing seafood and opening beers when we arrive. The gallery is a real social hub with many people stopping by, many parties to attend.

Liu is very interested in talking about the things I write about, but we cannot communicate in a shared language. Still, he simply takes care of me. His colleague, Chiao, has been helping me out since the moment I arrived in Taipei. I cannot communicate with her in English or Chinese either, but she understands me anyway and is extremely helpful. I start hanging out there right there after my arrival, and then things start happening. Chiao contacts the (very beautiful) translator Yining Shen (who did not want to be photographed) to translate the interviews. I carry out all my further interviews in the gallery, accompanied by Yining Shen and later by another translator, Ester Lau.

<sup>2</sup> The only gay and lesbian bookstore in Taiwan was raided and its shipment of legally imported gay graphic publications seized at the dock toward the end of 2003. The gay owner now faces the same Article 235 of the Criminal Code for dissemination of obscenities. Information obtained from Josephine Ho.



Liu Chin-Tang at IT park.



Liu Chin-Tang's bbq.





Betelnut girl photograph by Chen Chin-Pao.



Chiao at IT Park.

## January 2, 2004. TAIPEI.

I return to IT Park to interview Chiao about her work. She warns me that her work is about sensuality and dreams, more than about sexuality. But I am interested in her dreams of pain and needles, as they remind of the story of Sleeping Beauty. She shows me photos of installations pieces made of hundreds of cut-off flowers, pinned to surfaces with needles. When I look photos of the roses, they seem to be migrating across walls and tables. In her installation, *Then Sleep, My Love* (1998), thousands of needles are stuck into an inviting double bed. She explains her interest in dreams: "Dreaming is a parallel body within the body itself, where deep memory and emptiness reside. It naturally echoes and transmits energy (...) Here is a world made complete for emotion and awareness, and therefore, for truth. (...) Through steel, coldness and softness, I attempt to penetrate the world I know, and to awaken the desire to pay attention to life. Perhaps existence and creativity do not seek meaning, but seek respect for life within the rapid changing realm of reality."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.epistola.com/sfowler/scholar/scholar-betel.html> (accessed October 15, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> Hui-Chiao Chen, Artists statement, In *Revolve around Revolve*, IT park catalogue, 2001.

## Interview: Chen Hui-Chiao, Taipei, Jan 2, 2004. (Translation: Yining Shen)

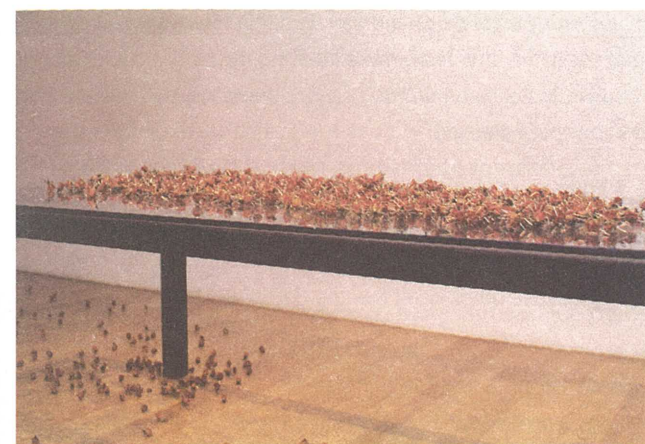
'IF YOU ARE DREAMING AS MUCH AS I DO, IT'S REALLY EXHAUSTING.'

**Libidot:** Why did you start working with flowers and pins? There is such an interesting contrast between soft red roses and sharp metal pins. As if the natural thorns on roses were not enough?

**Chiao:** Every girl loves flowers. I used to hang roses in this room to dry them and one day I found out that, particularly with orange roses when they're dry, the color is very attractive. So I started thinking about what I could do with the orange roses. And then I'd had earlier works with pins, influenced by a German artist who used a lot of pins. So one day in 1990, I started the series. I cut the stems off of the roses, and used the pins as stems for the roses.

**Libidot:** Before making this work, did you have any experience with sewing and needles?

**Chiao:** I was under the influence of my mother when I was a little girl because my mother did a lot of embroidery, so I've always been interested in it. I had a very strong memory that has stayed with me



Chen Hui-Chiao, *Thoughts of Flowers Go Deeper Than Looking*, Mixed Media Installation, 2004.



Chen Hui-Chiao, *Then Sleep, My Love*, Mixed Media Installation, 1998.



my entire life. At one time when I was a little girl, I refused to eat. One day, my mother held me really tightly. My mother was standing by the window, looking outside. Then she suddenly took a needle and stuck me in the cheek to make me eat.

**Libidot:** Was it painful?

**Chiao:** I was scared. Even later when I was making those works, I was still scared. At first I tried to have the flower and the needles together, but later I separated them. So it's like two series. But they're still going on, I'm still working with them.

**Libidot:** Why was it important to separate them? You made another installation *Then Sleep, My Love*, with pins sticking into a furry bed surface.

**Chiao:** I just needed a break. I thought that it was about time to make a change in my work. But the idea in the needle series stays the same. I want to emphasize the concept of sticking, sticking into something. I could accept that people can make a connection with sex, but it also works on the levels of dreams and fears. In dreams there's no pain, only fear. People don't feel pain, only fear exists. A lot of it. For instance, I had a dream yesterday that I died. And then I couldn't tell if I was dreaming or if it was real. I felt very strange and at the same time I saw myself leaving my body. I couldn't tell if it was real or a dream. Then I told myself in the dream that no, I cannot die, because I still have so many things to do and nobody would know that I died.

For me, when I go to sleep for those 8 hours a night, it's not sleeping, it's dreaming. Totally dreaming. If you're dreaming so much as I do, it's really tiring. When you're dreaming you just don't even think. But it's the time when you wake you would try to remember and think about what you dreamed. Why? It's important for me to remember because otherwise I feel the day would go by empty.

## January 2, 2004. TAIPEI.

Yining Shen introduces me to Liu Shih-Fen, who is a nurse and midwife who uses her knowledge of the birthing process and medical technologies to make installations. One of her pieces consists of neatly arranged bones and ribs taken from human corpses. In *The Feast* (1998) we can see a male skeleton figure in the process of giving birth. A human skeleton is mounted on a white enameled rococo table, the legs wide open with its feet strapped to medical instruments. A golden erect penis is shining between the legs of the skeleton, who wears a golden mask. I wonder why this figure in birthing labor is wearing a golden dildo and mask, but I forgot to ask her during the interview. But anyway, Dr. Jacobs some evidence for your article, a female midwife and artist who sees a male as giving birth. Is that an example of gender fusion? Or is she just angry at the male species for doing too little of the birthing work?

Liu Shih-Fen anyhow works with the themes of life and death. She uses the bones of the dead in her installation *The Manifold Debate of Ruses Between Membrane and Skin*. It reminds me of a current fascination with human and animal cadavers in Chinese installation and performance art.

For instance, the Chinese artists Sun Yuan and Peng Yu evoke the aura of the dead by using baby corpses and animal cadavers. These two main land Chinese artists made the installation *Honey* where we see an old man's dead face frozen in a large bed of ice holding a dead baby. With this installation, they tried to set up a very contradictory mood, evoking a highly emotional yet peaceful experience in viewers contemplating the dead bodies. There is a contrast in the work between the serenity of the human death scene and the ice-bed. There is a warm visual quality to the human cadaver but it is set in a very cold environment. As Peng explains in a catalogue of their work: "We fabricated a very emotional set so that the audience would freeze in the icy feeling upon arriving in the scene."

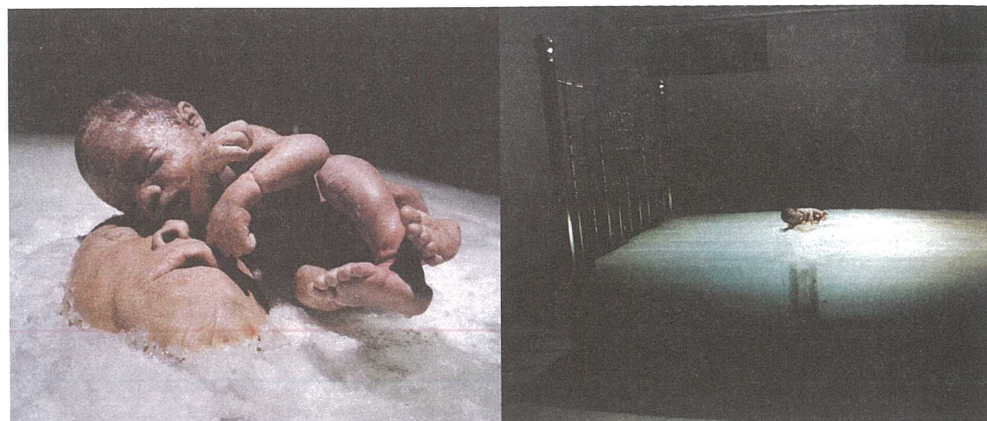
There is a discrepancy between the environment and the message. Life is something immaterial. When it leaves the body it is no longer there. The installation radiates the sense that the person still could be there, very intimately, as in a deep sleep, but the viewer also realizes that this is not true. These may be the feelings one experiences when contemplating the dead body of an intimate someone.

Sun Yuan and Peng Yu believe that we are often manipulated by the dead, as Peng Yu explains: "The bygone ghosts take the form of some valuation or cultural conception or even artistic conception and take charge of us ... Too many people have tried in vain to run away from that shadow. The point is try to exterminate something intangible with something else intangible."<sup>5</sup> There is a religious motif to the installation as well, relating to omens that are 'phony prophets' and that announce doomsday or some kind of catastrophe. The installation was inspired by a passage from the Bible, in which false prophets or 'omens' appear in order to announce catastrophe. It does not matter whether the prophet is false or not, according to Yuang, because they somehow do point to a catastrophe. In this sense, it is important for artists to emphasize the illusionary or metaphorical quality of a work.

In another piece, they used a dead baby's corpse and extracted oil from the blobs of fat underneath its skin. They then dumped the oil into one of Beijing's most polluted rivers, seeing it as an extension of their own human lives.

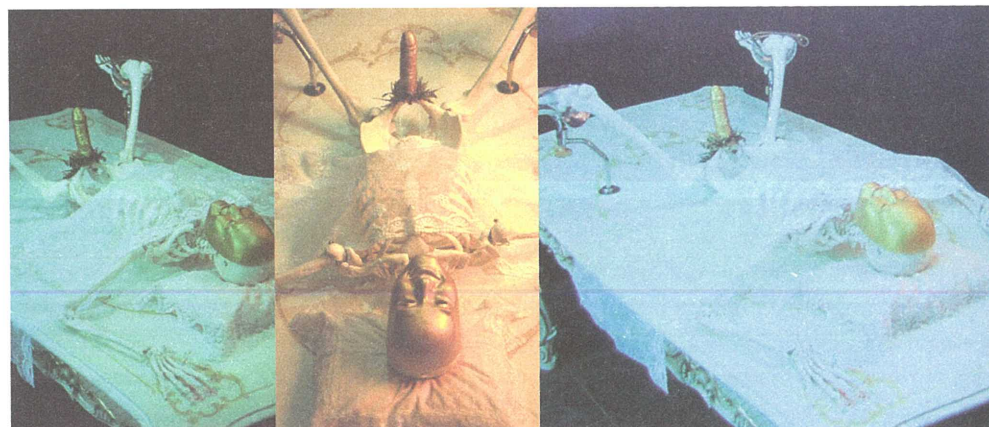
<sup>5</sup> Sun Yuan and Peng Yu Catalogue, Modern Chinese Art Foundation, Ghent, Belgium, 2004, p. 15.





Sun Yuan and Peng Yu, *Honey*, Mixed Media Installation, 1998.

The Taiwanese artist Liu Shih-Fen makes art with body remains and skeletons of the dead, evoking a similar complex mood of sadness-anger and serenity. But she also manipulates our notions of death and sexuality by playing with gender boundaries, suggesting a reordering of male and female bodies and mythologies. After the interview I tell Liu about the emails I am receiving from Dr. Jacobs. She tells me that there is also a medical instrument in her profession called 'jacob's' that is used to hold the cervix when surgeons perform a hysterectomy. 'Jacob's' is a powerful instrument that can be used with a lot of force, as the cervix does not have any nerve endings.



Liu Shih-Fen, *The Feast*, Mixed Media Installation, 1998.

# Interview: Liu Shih-Fen, Taipei, January 4, 2004. (Translated by Yining Shen)

'But when she was taken out from the mother's womb, she had a perfect body, and the parents decided to just let her go easily and naturally.'

**Libidot:** Your photograph, *The Gift*, is that a picture of an actual dead baby?

**Liu Shih-Fen:** This is an actual picture of a baby born without a brain, it's a picture from my operation room. This is exactly how this baby looked when it was born. The baby was part of a twin, her sister was perfect, and she in a way was perfect too, except for the brain. Usually when the parents know the baby is going to be deformed, within sixteen weeks they will decide to have an abortion. But these parents decided to keep it because they were afraid the other sister might have a weak heart, so they still nurtured both of them as if they were both healthy. For me, it was so touching that she was a deformed baby but her existence was pure, her will to either live or vanish. I feel that in every one of us.



Liu Shih-Fen portrait

The baby was missing much of her brain (i.e., 'anencephalic') and weighed only 2,188 grams. The baby died after three days in the hospital incubator. It's just that the baby had no idea that she was deformed or anything like that. This baby was a healthy baby for the baby herself, but for others to see, it was very touching. When I looked at this baby it was like watching a simple flower trying to grow up.

**Libidot:** Do you deliver babies everyday?

**Liu:** I delivered four babies today. And it's Christmas Eve.

**Libidot:** Do you want to have babies, too?

**Liu:** No, it's too expensive and too difficult. I think it's getting more expensive to have babies, more people are deciding not to.

**Libidot:** Is there pressure for women to have babies here? Are people nagging you about it?

**Liu:** Definitely, they start nagging you about marriage, then you get married, and they start nagging you about babies. The problems of supporting a family is not a priority for me.

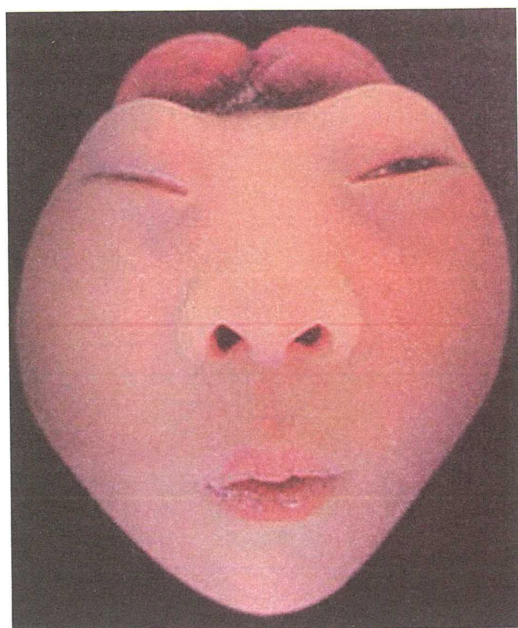
**Libidot:** You started making art in 1996. Were you connected with other artists at the time, or was it more of a solo mission?

**Liu:** I have my own studio, after I get off work, I go to my studio. I don't much associate with other artists. I pretty much work by myself.



Liu Shih-Fen, *The Manifold Debate of Ruses Between Membrane and Skin*, Mixed Media Installation, 1999-2000.





Liu Shih-Fen, *Gift*, Mixed Media Installation, 2002.

**Libidot** : What are reactions to your work in other countries such as Italy or Israel?

**Liu**: Mostly when people react to my work, they feel the strength of life very, very intensely. It's not my intention to create that appetite, but I think that it's because most of the elements are from the hospital. Peoples' reactions are so strong because they can relate some of the things to hospitals.

**Libidot**: Do people have negative reactions?

**Liu**: The piece *The Manifold Debate of Ruses Between Membrane and Skin* (1998) was shown in a gallery in Japan, and many journalists who saw it were quite critical because I used actual bones. They thought it was against moral standards. They maybe wanted me to fabricate fake bones. But the bones I used are waxed, so they don't smell or decay.

## January 4, 2004. TAIPEI.

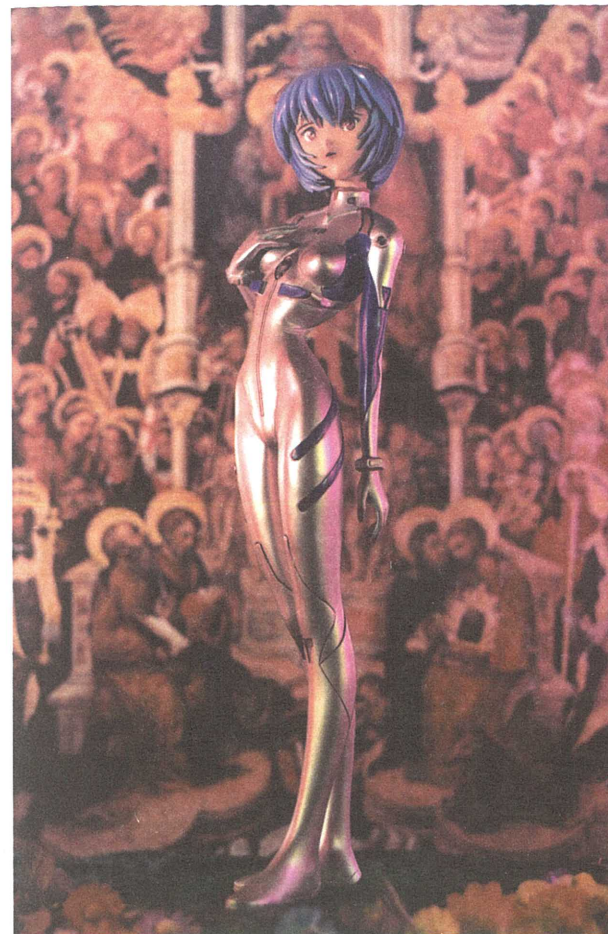
Today I tried to interview the male species, Tung-Lu Hung, but it was difficult, despite the wonderful simultaneous translation by Ester Lau. Maybe he was uncomfortable with the topic of sexuality. Anyway, there was some kind of enormous gap between us.

In some of his work, Tung-Lu Hung uses popular female Japanese cartoon characters and superimposes them onto medieval Italian paintings. He draws from Christian images by lesser known Italian masters of the 14th and 15th centuries. The Japanese cartoon-girls from popular culture replace the power heroes from religious tableaux. But why, Mr. Tung-Lu Hung, do you perform this kind of juxtaposition?

Tung-Lu Hung: ....

I often do not get an answer from these artists. They do not like to explain things. Often I have to wait for days, weeks, or years, before an answer emerges. And of course, you may have noticed, my brain is often fishing for information that is simply not there. Maybe Tung-Lu Hung does not belong to the sex art species?

In recent work, he invented a pink-colored pre-pubescent girl, *Hsiao-Hung*, in collaboration with VJs and composers of electronic music.



Tung-Lu Hung, *Evangelion*, digital print, (2001).

The prototype of *Hsiao-Hung* is the character of *Na Zha* in Chinese mythology, and he deliberately gave her an 'asexual' body. Her boots and legs are like those of the pretty girls in Japanese comics, while her hair tied in two buns is like *Shun-Li*, so she is a mixture of a Chinese and Japanese femininity. Hung admits that cyberspace has thoroughly affected his senses. Digital space for him has 'opened up a world where commerce replaces religion, and I can help propose and define new types of bodies and characters.'<sup>7</sup> He sees *Hsiao-Hung* as an 'asexual' hybrid character without a definite identity. But I see her as an example of Asian female doll-like innocence, so wanted and fantasized by males worldwide.

Tung-Lu Hung: .....

<sup>7</sup> Amy Cheng Huei-Hua, 'Interview with Tung-Lu Hung' Translated by Christine Chan. In *Yishu*, Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art, March 2003.



## Dr. Jacobs 10:26am 12/27/2003 RE: The bonobo instinct?



Dear Libidot,

Yes, in searching for new directions, you have to shut up and process information sometimes. Just like the young Frans de Waal when he was zigzagging through the Dutch polders on his bicycle to scoop up tadpoles and little fish, which would slowly transform in front of his very eyes. An eclipse of one species into another perhaps can only be comprehended by a thoroughly trained and peacefully observing brain. The transformation is based on an order that may not be so easily comprehended by trained scientists. De Waal admits that a trained primatologist has to question and even destroy the principles of scientific research, in order to sense and understand the everyday rituals and personalities of research subjects. One has to observe subjects for hundreds and thousands of hours, watch them act and interact with gentle care, showing affection, and even live with them: "Attraction to animals makes us forget the time spent watching them, and it sensitizes us to the tiniest details of behavior. The scientific mind uses the information thus gathered to formulate penetrating questions that lead to more precise research (*The Ape and the Sushi Master*, p. 39)."

But his research did not conclude that bonobos were animals born with an essential sexual 'nature', as he observed how they copied these tactics from each other through 'cultural' knowledge, specifically through very advanced modes of observation and mimicry. So primatologists are only at the brink of tracking 'sexual exuberance' in the animals species. What does this mean for our study of sex art? Despite the fact you feature all these artists influenced by different cultural traditions and social mores, many have responded to your clan. Would they indeed call it a new kind of 'animal instinct'? True, we can be misguided by our awareness of sexual instinct, as we are also drenched in sexual discourses and excessive 'pornography' through media. Anyway, Libidot, you have brought us evidence of a global sex art movement, but can we call it a new 'species'? And what are the characteristics of this species? Doctors of philosophy, you can hear my reservations about positing this idea, as it is not entirely unthinkable that this species will eventually mingle with your own.

Dr. Jacobs

## January 5, 2004. TAIPEI.

I spend some more time with Niki Kuo and try to get information about her photographs. She is a beautiful girl, a little bit shy, but very serene and sweet. She is fluent in English, still, it is hard for us to talk about her art works, as she seems to prefer to talk about other things. And so it goes between myself and the sex art species, Dr. Jacobs. Just imagine us sitting together in a nice restaurant in Taipei in the middle of a hidden red light district. We have a sense of happiness and excitement about this encounter that has to live its course. She talks about what is most important to her — her complex desires, her desire to be more free, to live and work in an inspiring place, to have time to play and think, time away from work and homophobic Taiwanese society.

So she moved to London to get a Master's Degree at the Chelsea College of Art and Design. Then she made her digital collage-photographs, superimposing her naked body onto different backgrounds. In some of the images, we see her 'bathing' in nature and serene surroundings. In other images, she walks naked through a polluted metropolis, looking for love, or just for a friendly soul. She is perhaps very serious as a person looking for freedom, perhaps too serious, working very hard to be a good artist, though she really hates talking about her art.

## Interview: Hui-Chan (Niki) Kuo, Taipei, January 5, 2003.

'I want to show love or affection for the physical ambiguity of androgynous forms. In addition to this, I try to find some proof in nature because I believe that androgyny is one of the most original forms of life.'

Libidot: Did you grow up here around Taipei?

Niki: I grew up in a small port city. My father runs a fish canning factory. He is a sort of typical businessman, but my mother's family is quite interesting. Her three brothers are all really good at Chinese calligraphy, which is regarded as a traditional art form in Asia. I used to see a lot of exhibitions when I was a kid. So, naturally I chose to study art.

Libidot: Did you feel different from the other kids growing up?

Niki: I do not know really, but I always felt very lonely, especially when I was young.

Libidot: What does androgyny mean to you?

Niki: I started thinking about it in the third year of my university, because at that time I had some problems of self-identity, I mean sexually, and that was the most important thing that I cared about during that period. Androgyny to me means that you can look ambiguous. I feel like I've always looked like I'm a mix between a boy and girl. Other people also think of me in this way. In a piece called *Bubble*



Niki Kuo, *Float*, Digital Prints, 2003.

I also wanted to pretend to be a baby. I have chosen a form of amoeba, which is hermaphroditic. These figures have no obvious sexual orientation.

It is also a reaction to societal gender roles, where a 'woman' for instance is expected to have a beautiful figure and be well-dressed. However, not everyone wants to obey these rules. I want to show love or affection for the physical ambiguity of androgynous forms. In addition to this, I try to find some proof in nature because I believe that androgyny is one of the most original forms of life.

**Libidot:** Have you ever dressed up in your photographs like a very masculine man or a feminine woman?

**Niki:** No, because I don't like that! But in one video for my degree show at the Chelsea College of Art and Design, I dressed like a woman. Of course, I am a woman, but when my friends saw the video they said, 'oh, Niki, you look like a transsexual.' I wore a long straight haired wig for the performance.

**Libidot:** Which color hair?

**Niki:** Black!!

**Libidot:** What kind of shoes?

**Niki:** Sandals!!

**Libidot:** Nail Polish?

**Niki:** No.

**Libidot:** Make-up?

**Niki:** A quite natural look! When I wore this wig and talked to my friends, the feeling was that I was a totally different person.

**Libidot:** What does nakedness mean to you?

**Niki:** Nature!!

**Libidot:** What kind of mood do you want to convey with your naked pictures?

Niki Kuo, *Tube*, Digital Prints, 2001.



**Niki:** Freedom!!

**Libidot:** Did you manipulate the shape of your body in your naked portraits?

**Niki:** I manipulated the backgrounds of the portraits because the bus seats were very dirty. I also did manipulate my body a bit – I erased my nipples. I have no breasts, so I did not have to make much effort to get rid of them. I hate not having breasts, but I don't want to get implants because it's not healthy and I could get breast cancer.

**Libidot:** Is it important for you to cultivate a playful or child-like image of yourself in your naked self-portraits?

**Niki:** The mood in these photographs isn't exactly one of playfulness, but images of people who are really are deeply embracing one another. It's more like the whole journey of finding an ideal partner.

**Libidot:** Have you ever thought about doing these naked performances in real life?

**Niki:** No!! Why should I?? It would be so difficult, and policemen would arrest me. Even in London I would get arrested for doing this. I would only be able to do that in an art space.

**Libidot:** What about the photographs of yourself naked amongst the flowers?

**Niki:** I made this work *By Niki* (2002) when I was working in Main Trend Gallery and I just disliked my job and my routine life. One day my friend called me because she wanted to find a club to go to and I accompanied her to dinner. On the third floor of the building was a flower shop with fake flowers. I was impressed by the space because it had a long and narrow shape, like the old style traditional Taiwanese housing designs. The entire room was covered with plastic flowers. And I thought it was so beautiful. It was a kind of spark from my everyday job because everyday I had to go to work. The space represented a fantasy because it was so different from my world, but at the same time it was still real. If you really want to find something special, it's probably right next to you. You just pay attention to what's next to you, and you'll find what you're looking for.

**Libidot:** Do you consider your work exhibitionistic?

**Niki:** Some people say the image and the figure radiate something. Do you think my work is a little narcissistic?

**Libidot:** Well, the viewer looks at your beautiful figure. It's more about the interaction between the image and the viewer. You stand naked and the viewer responds to your pose. Your image is very sweet and innocent. You construct an innocent persona. If you had a more aggressive persona, you would get a very different reaction from the viewer.

**Niki:** I think that most of my inspiration comes from the way I live, my society and my surroundings. I'm bisexual. I grew up in a rural area in *I-Lan* and my parents are very traditional. It is easier living here in the city of Taipei than in the rural area where I grew up. Then I moved to London when I was studying for my MA in Fine Arts and it was easier to do my work. I did not have to worry about my parents knowing what I was doing. They want me to get married and have kids, but I don't want to have kids. Never. Ever. It is so troublesome to raise kids.

In Taiwanese society, the role of the family is still very traditional and it is difficult to be different. My father thinks homosexuality is really immoral, so of course I can't tell him that I'm bisexual. I did tell my mom and she accepts that. I didn't say to her 'I sleep with women', that would be a mistake to say that. I did tell her 'I'm going out with a girl', I guess she can imagine what that involves. Among the older generation, there's a lot of bias against gays and lesbians. But the younger people are much more accepting of homosexuality. Still, I could not easily have a lesbian partner and it is still illegal for a gay or lesbian couple to get married.

**Libidot:** What do you like more these days, men or women?

**Niki:** Women ... although I do like men, but I really have problem communicating and getting along with men. I'm always thinking, should I try to find a boy or a girl? It's hard to maintain a long-term relationship with a girl because of my family's traditional values. But so far I think I like girls more, so I'll stick with the girls. Most Taiwanese men are immature and a little bit selfish. Girls are usually more mature than men of the same age. Girls are more attractive to me because they are more mature. It's easier for me to communicate well with girls because of their higher maturity level. I like lesbian women who are a little bit boyish but not too much. But you don't find them here in Taiwan. I met more of the kind of lesbians I like in London.

**Libidot:** Would you like to marry a woman one day?

**Niki:** Ya! if I can, why not? ... but marriage is not so important for me.



Niki Kuo, *By Niki*, Digital Prints, 2003.



**Libidot** When would you have to marry according to the Chinese horoscope?

**Niki:** It's not good to get married for the next two years. Because in the Chinese horoscope, every 12 years there's one year not suitable for marriage. It should be one year but somehow the year next is not very good for marriage as well. I don't really believe in Chinese astrology, but I have to consider my family. Maybe people don't really believe it, but it's a custom so they follow it to have a good life. I don't believe in my horoscope because it's too general. I do believe in types of blood. I think it's correct. I'm E. More careful and organized. I'm also a Dragon. Very popular sign. It symbolizes empire.

**Libidot:** Do you like white women, too?

**Niki** No...Taiwanese Only!!

**Libidot:** Did you get ever seduced by a white woman?

**Niki:** Never!!

### Dr. Jacobs 11:11am 1/5/2004 re: RE: Death of the Moguls



Libidot, another question for you. How can we learn to love each other physically across cultures? Or across sexual inclinations?

As De Waal suggests, we have to observe each other very carefully and then try to imitate each other, just like bonobos, who, from a very early age, learn to pick each other's hair in order to give comfort. This is how we can develop physical love, not as if magnetically, but gradually learning how to touch and make love to people across cultures. It is all possible, Libidot, but first observe how this Taiwanese girl shares affection with another, then put it into practice: "Imitation requires that visual input is converted into motor input, telling the body to reenact what the eyes saw." (*The Ape and the Sushi Master*, p. 119.) Wouldn't it be fun to be ghost and visit her bedroom? Imitation is a complex skill, clearly perfected by our ancestors, the apes. It requires that we build complex physical modes of relating, besides the linguistic abilities and subtle modes of perception and seduction.

Let it be the end of the era of talkers. Let us turn out the light at the end of the day. I am telling you all this because of my personal encounter with Teo, with all the problematics of age gap, culture gap, and incompatible desires. I am not sure where the barrier is located in regards to my physical loving. Can we ever encourage our bodies to reenact the strokes of love they share with others?

Dr. Jacobs

### January 6, 2004. TAIPEI.

I think that would require a whole new type of sex education, which seems to be absent in contemporary culture. In Taipei, the job of progressive sex education seems to be carried out by big teaching organ, Josephine Ho and her colleagues at the Sex Center. Everybody knows professor Josephine Ho in Taiwan and everybody has an opinion about her. People shudder when I mention her name. Some tell me they admire her, others hate her because she threatens the 'superior status' of the academic profession in Taiwanese society. Ho works as full professor in the English department of Taiwan's National Central University, where she founded the *Center For the Study of Sexualities* in 1995. Ho's 'Sex Center' is a vibrant enterprise of sex research and activism, where Ho and a group of people work daily to archive information, assist sexual minorities, correspond with scholars, and organize conferences.

One can find a breather from the hidden sexualities in her Sex Center, a nice and cozy room painted purple and pink, with a space heater and coffee and sexy visuals on the walls and tables. The Sex Center also houses a collection of books and newspaper clippings, publications on new sex issues, and colorful educational bulletin boards with pictures and stories. Finally, the Sex Center has a progressive web site with plenty of information about sexuality, including the fatal hyperlink to images of 'animal love' (Taiwanese term for 'bestiality') which recently brought Ho into serious trouble with the court, as she was sued by an alliance of fourteen Christian organizations.

Ho is now a besieged sex activist, a person in trouble, enemy of the state and the Taiwanese Christian organizations. But she is very energetic and answers my questions with soulfulness. She is a person with a good sense of humor, offering lunch, lengthy discussions and a pragmatic attitude about her own plight. I would characterize her as a sensitive woman with balls. She is also very smart and very articulate. Her statements about pornography, globalization and the future of sexual politics are often pessimistic yet elucidating – straight to the point.



Josephine Ho with boards used during demonstrations. Translation, left: "When the temptresses walk the night, 10,000 will not be able to keep them down." Right, "When women rule, the world will be at peace."



In June 2003, Ho was accused by an alliance of fourteen organizations of distributing obscene images through the Sex Center web site. Even though the beastiality images were only available by means of a hyperlink, and were but a small detail in this large academic archive about sexuality, they were a sufficient reason for Ho's enemies to start an ugly fight and try to remove her from her academic position. After Ho got sued over these images, she was asked by the university to remove all the information about 'sexual emancipation' from her site and keep it within the boundaries of the 'strictly academic'.

**Interview: Josephine Ho, National Central University, Jong-Li, January 6, 2004.**

**'SUCH IS THE DISCREET CHARM OF OUR BOURGEOISIE...'**

**Libidot:** The first time I heard about you was through the online mailing list 'Whorenet'. Are you a member of Whorenet?

**Ho:** Yes, I am. It just so happens that I am about to write an entry to Whorenet about our Taipei contribution to the International Day to End Violence Against Sexworkers on December 17th, an action to commemorate the victims of the Green River serial killer, a 'respectable, normal-looking, middle-class' man, who had killed at least forty-eight prostitutes or women who looked like prostitutes. For a long time, the police refused to believe that he had committed those crimes, but they finally nailed him down and he recently confessed where he had discarded the bodies of those women that he raped and choked to death. Whorenet has been organizing an international day of action in quite a few cities in the US and Europe, too. The Sexworker's Rights Group in Taipei and other marginal groups organized a direct-action event on December 17th, at the exact hour when many other groups all the world were also remembering that incident.



Josephine Ho

We gathered about thirty people in a small temple in Guang-Zhou Street, an area of Taipei where a lot of street sexworkers are located. We gathered there and we told the story of the Green River serial killer and explained the international nature of the event. Then one of the Taipei ex-licensed prostitutes sang a song to tell of the lives of prostitutes in Taiwan. A daughter of a prostitute spoke about her discovery of her mother's career and how she felt that there was nothing to be ashamed of. Then there was a neighbor who lived in that area who came forth and talked about sex workers in her neighborhood and how she thinks it is alright, as it is their way of making a living and she doesn't find

fault with that. Then I read a poem written by US sexworker Daisy Anarchy about sexworkers' need for respect and safety and dignity. Then we held candles and walked toward the local police precinct, demanding that they take better care of the street prostitutes. The police were quite angry at the presence of the crowd because if a crowd gathers in front of a police station, that usually means a challenge to state power and they don't like that. There was a brief confrontation and they were trying to disperse us. They brought out a sign that said: 'This is an illegal gathering. If you don't disperse, we will take the leader into custody.' We then moved to another street corner to continue our vigil and talk about how important it is to maintain safety for prostitutes.

**Libidot:** What is the status of sexworkers in Taiwan? Do they have licenses to do their work or are there any organizations to protect them?

**Ho:** Sex work is now almost totally illegal here. There are only a few very small pockets of prostitutes who still hold their licenses in the not-so-metropolitan cities in Taiwan, and even they are under pressure to lose their licenses. Everybody else is working illegally and if they get caught, they can be put away for three day's detention under the present law. Because of the illegal status of sex work, prostitutes are subjected to a lot of violence, extortion, harassment, and even rape.

We do have a small sexworkers' organization that grew out of the 1997 prostitutes' uprising, which took place when the mayor of Taipei, Chen Shui-Bian, who is now our current president and represents the ruling DPP (Democratic Progressive Party), decided to revoke their legal licenses. The DPP had been known as a traditionally male-oriented party, and Chen was trying to appeal to the women's groups and women voters by promoting middle-class values such as 'rescuing' women from the sex industry and putting them into other 'respectable' businesses so that they would not disturb family values. That was his ploy to get the approval of the middle-classes and it really worked. The religious women's groups, specifically Christian and Catholic groups, have been promoting the same conservative middle-class values and they strongly supported the city government in the abolition of sex workers' licenses in 1997. By the way, they are also the same groups that are prosecuting me right now.

To go back to 1997, one hundred and twenty-eight licensed prostitutes took action by going to the City Hall in Taipei and demanding their right to work. This was the first time that they came out in the open as a collective force. They petitioned on a daily basis for almost a year and the city council finally decided that they could continue working for two more years. After that, their licenses would be revoked and they would have to terminate their work. The sex workers have been working underground for three years now, which makes their profession much more difficult. For instance, they cannot go to the police if a client refuses to pay or when a client applies force to them during transaction. The DPP is a so-called progressive political party and they promote freedom of 'political' speech, but they have been making a lot of backward moves when it comes to the freedom of 'sexual speech'. They are prohibiting any speech that affirms sex work, claiming that it would confuse the values of teenagers and children. And there is a rigidifying tendency in monitoring sex-related information, i.e., sexual information is allowable only when it adheres to middle class marriage-oriented



values. Actually they would prefer that teenagers do not come into contact with sexual information or sexual behavior at all – such is the discreet charm of our bourgeoisie.

**Libidot:** Do you believe that this is a development that is taking place in other cultures besides Taiwan?

**Ho:** Yes, we are living in quite conservative times. But I think Taiwan is much more vulnerable to the sway of conservative politics right now, because Taiwan is dying to achieve world recognition of its nation-state status. In other words, Taiwan is trying to achieve morally what it cannot achieve politically. The desperate need for nation-state status is now pushing this country to reach for a higher moral ground, I would say, probably higher than any other nation. We have very rigid laws regarding sex-related representation, discourse, and behavior and with quite severe punishments. So we are living in a strange atmosphere. Whereas some rights in relation to politics are becoming more accessible, other rights in relation to sex rights have suffered oppressive measures. The government has recently instituted a law for referendums so that one day, if needed, it could hold a referendum about the issue of obtaining nation-state status. We are hoping that while the government is intent on using the referendum for nation-state status issues, we could also use it to open the door to decisions on a whole range of other issues. So we are hoping to include other questions and debates into the referendum, including the question of whether or not we should decriminalize or legalize sex work. If we could have a referendum about that question, it would dilute the strictly nation-oriented nature of the upcoming referendum. After all, politics should include sex politics.

The conservative tendency in regard to sexual matters in Taiwan also involves other larger forces at work. Within the general trend of globalization, the United Nations and many international NGOs have been trying to establish new strategies for global governance on issues such as children's rights, women's rights, sex work, pornography, and sex trafficking. They are hoping that the whole world would abide by their set of rules and moral values. These international NGOs work with local NGOs to push for legal reforms that would promote their conservative moral-sexual values through instituting new standards into the legal system. For instance, right now in Taiwan it is prohibited by law to say anything positive in the public about the merits of sex work and sex workers. The law says that such statements would mislead children and teenagers into practicing sex work itself, which is a felony punishable with up to five years imprisonment! In that sense, the law practically rules out any positive statements about sex work or sex workers.

A second trend that contributes to a rigidifying sex atmosphere is a new kind of subjectivity that is being created around parental power, as parents try to compensate for whatever power and control they have lost in the process of modernization. There is an abstract notion of omnipotent parental power that says: 'We need to watch whatever is happening in society in order to protect our children.' A purity campaign is now underway to clean up TV programs, getting rid of any liberal sounding talk shows. Another one is cleaning up the internet, getting rid of any licentious graphic representations. And when parents speak on behalf of their children, there seems to be a certain moral righteousness that is hard to resist.

**Libidot:** That definitely comes out in recent child porn debates globally, which dictates that any discussion of porn and sex should be framed around the position of children as potential victims or consumers. Do you also feel the influence of 'superpowers' such as the United States whose government is pushing porn markets and conservative sex politics at the same time?

**Ho:** Yes. I believe that the concepts of 'pornography' and 'children' need to be thoroughly reexamined when people resort to these new conservative values. In the past, nation-state governments have been primarily formulating rules around values in regard to national security. Now that we live in a 'democracy' and are part of international political debates, a different card is being played by politicians, that of children and generational politics. In Taiwan, generational politics has risen to the very top and become even more important than gender politics. With raging feminist debates over sexuality and sex work, the differences among women have become well-known and gender can no longer be considered a problem-free concept. But what is left mostly unexamined is the concept of children. In Taiwan today, when you talk about the protection of children, nobody will dare to say anything critical about it, perhaps except a handful of us.

**Libidot:** Is that also one of the problems in your approaching court case? Could you explain your case to me?

**Ho:** Well, in June of 2003, fourteen (!) so-called NGO organizations in Taiwan jointly filed a legal complaint against me for disseminating obscenities. Half of those groups are Christian and Catholic religious women's groups that have been working to 'protect children' and have been debating me on issues in relation to sex work since 1997. The religious women's groups had previously gathered in November 2001 to complain to the Ministry of Education about the *Enjo-Kosai* (Japanese for 'compensated companionship') page on our website that posted many articles criticizing and ridiculing their condemnation of such casual and part-time sex work popular among the young.

Yet between 1999 and 2001, over a thousand such cases were convicted. As we criticized such a law and such expanded execution of it, the groups proclaimed that I was ruining the work they have been doing with teenage girls. That incident made my university require that our website be removed from the university network, forcing us to pay for commercial space in order to put up our academic website.

Then in April 2003, the Catholic Good Shepherds Sisters were tipped off by a dirt-seeking journalist that she had found some graphic pictures of bestiality on the 'animal love' webpage on the academic website for sexuality studies that I had built for our Center for the Study of Sexualities. The journalist had wanted to hear what the Sisters had to say so that she could make a sensational report on it. As expected, the Sisters were furious and quickly called together the other religious women's groups and claimed that I was circulating obscenities and pornography through my website, that these can hurt children as anybody can have access to those pictures. In June 2003, the religious women's groups rallied parental groups and censorship groups into filing the formal legal case. The prosecutor held two investigative hearings in September and, despite the evidence and arguments that I presented, decided that there was enough evidence for prosecuting me for the dissemination of obscenities. The first court date has been set to be January 16, 2004. As to the graphic pictures



in question, they belong to a US beastiality website for which we had made a hyperlink to one of its posting pages so as to demonstrate the anatomical possibility and variety of beastiality. Our academic website was very well developed and was accumulating information to build webpages for about fifty varieties of sexualities, including sexwork, pornography, surrogate motherhood, fetishism, necrophilia, incest, pedophilia and beastiality. We were developing this archive because I think that people in Taiwan are generally quite naive about sexuality, thinking that it is merely the missionary-style of bodily act between a man and a woman (his wife mostly). So the pages would present serious articles as well as news stories about each variety of sexuality. Some of the topics were more developed than others, depending on the information that was available to us. The webpage on beastiality, or what we call 'animal love', contained a dozen or so articles detailing philosophical debates or literary/cultural texts of beastiality.

On the bottom of the page, in order to demonstrate the possibility of beastiality, we included a hyperlink to a photo-album on a US beastiality site which, when clicked, would show the discouraging words "alternative pictures of animal love, those who do not favor it need not enter". Only when further clicked would the viewer reach the other end of the hyperlink. Interestingly, at the hearing, the staff member of the Good Shepherds Sisters said that she found the pictures by following the journalist's instructions to click on certain choices on the many pages she encountered. In fact, she did not even bother to look at anything other than the instructed choices, not even all the articles on the beastiality page, not even all those website choices that bear titles such as pornography and pedophilia. They just one-track-mindedly followed the journalist's instructions. That is why I felt totally absurd when I heard them say that they were worried that since the webpage material is so 'readily available' to all, that kids would come into contact with these graphic pictures and would be misled into beastiality.

**Libidot:** Is that the main counter-argument that you are using in your defense, i.e., that web users cannot approach these pictures out of context?

**Ho:** Absolutely! They paid no attention to the context in which the issue of beastiality is discussed and presented. To them, anything graphic that has to do with sex is considered 'pornography'; in other words, sex should not have any representation. And if that were true, then the whole academic fields of sexology, urology, obstetrics, or sexuality studies would be pornography. The second thing is that we are not 'displaying' those pictures; we are merely providing a hyperlink to a webpage in the US. A viewer will have to make the decision to click on it to see the link. We are not 'disseminating' the link either; we had never advertised the link nor sent the link to anyone. As an academic site, only those who are interested in research would seek us out. And thirdly, our Constitution says that there is freedom of research, freedom of teaching and freedom of education. That freedom must be respected. I am very well-established academically in this country in the field of sexuality studies. These images constitute just one element of my work and are part of my huge databank. If they think certain sexualities are off limits for academic studies, I would like the court to rule on that and see how that stands up against the constitution.

**Libidot:** So what do you think is going to happen in court?

**Ho:** According to Taiwanese legal statistics, if you are prosecuted, there is a 90% chance that you will get convicted. This is because our legal system is built in order to protect itself. I have a good lawyer who can help me but I am actually waging the war myself, because I know the most about my web site and about sexuality studies. I will try to prepare statements whenever I go to court so that I can turn this case into an opportunity for social education. And if I lose on the district court level, I will certainly appeal. If I lose again, I will file a case with the supreme court, demanding that the judges of the supreme court explain the constitution decree of freedom of research and speech. This does not just concern me, but concerns the future of the Internet, the future of sex research, the future of freedom of speech.

If my case goes down, that means sexual issues on the Internet will enter a deep dark winter period.<sup>8</sup> It is indeed a historical case and I will have my arguments ready. I will fight. But the judges do not really understand the Internet and see it as a real world. They think that anybody who turns on a computer immediately sees those images.

**Libidot:** Just like John Ashcroft in the USA wants to uphold COPA (Child Online Protection Act) arguing that all minors and children automatically get exposed to pornography on the Internet. Do you feel that there is at least a healthy discussion going on of all these Internet-related issues?<sup>9</sup>

**Ho:** No, people are actually not discussing it much. Sex-related issues and controversies carry the weight of a huge stigma that makes it difficult for people to speak up. That's why obscenity sweeps can be waged by the most despicable politicians, because most people would not dare stand up for the stigmatized people and businesses. The moral halo on the heads of the religious women's groups in this case has already helped them get a lot of laws passed that infringe on people's freedom. The censorship and parent organizations, on the other hand, are actually the same bunch of people who have been very eager to control print material, in particular romance novels and comic books. When the news broke around my case, you can just feel the atmosphere around you freezing up, as if you have suddenly become a disease-carrier. And I think that's part of the goal of the religious women's groups. They have a common interest in keeping sex-relation information out of this world, but I have been the most outspoken critic of their obscurantism and sex-negativism. So they wanted to damage my credibility and social influence and the hyperlink is also just a triggering point. It is most heart-warming that at these difficult times, it is the sexually marginal groups, the gays and lesbians and sex workers and HIV groups and many other nameless individuals, that have stood up to support me.

**Libidot:** Are your colleagues and the president of National Central University reacting to international pressure, e.g., the petition that has been going around at [www.gsrat.org](http://www.gsrat.org)?

<sup>8</sup> After a year of litigation under Article 235 of the criminal code (which has to do with the dissemination of obscenities), Josephine Ho's sexuality studies website has finally been cleared of any criminal conduct by the Taipei District Court on June 25th, 2004. In simple terms, the verdict was "not guilty".

<sup>9</sup> COPA was overturned in June 2004, when the USA Supreme Court rejected Congress's latest effort to curb children's access to sexually explicit materials on the Internet. Linda Greenhouse, 'Court Blocks Law regulating Internet access to Pornography', in *The New York Times*, June 30, 2004.



**Ho:** International response has been overwhelming and I am deeply grateful for the support that has come from academics and activists alike. I don't know how much impact it would have on the university, but having such support has helped affirm the importance of this issue and hopefully it will do some good for the case, too. Fortunately, my own academic record is immaculate, as I am one of the best teachers around and I have one of the longest lists of researches and grants. I am elected to numerous committees on different levels of the university structure as I am quite active and responsible in university affairs. Ironically, even someone as academically accomplished as I am could still suffer such defamation; it only goes to show how tremendous the power of sexual stigma is! This case will be a test of how people see this situation. If people feel strongly enough about it, they will come forth and fight for this case because it concerns them as much as it concerns me. I am more interested in seeing how people





## 7. Slovenia: Mystify the Body, Elevate the Mind.



January 8, 2004. LJUBLJANA.

It all started with Jurij Krpan. I met him several years ago in the office of Galerija Kapelica, located inside one of the buildings of the University of Ljubljana's student organizations. This was a particularly blue period for me, as I had just gone through a break-up and also crashed on a very turbulent 'intellectual' collaboration with a lesbian s/m filmmaker. The filmmaker and myself had tried together to convert the s/m classic *Venus in Furs* (by Leopold Von Sacher-Masoch) into a screenplay for contemporary arthouse cinema. But we failed miserably, being too 'intoxicated' by the novel, begging the Venus to come and beat our flesh. Instead, she sent us chemicals, cocaine, viagra, marijuana, and bad vibrations over how to convert the last chapters of the novel. The utterly pathetic and drawn-out ending of *Venus in Furs* seemed to mirror our own break-up and our relationship crashed completely as the project fell to pieces.

Thus I had decided to visit Ljubljana to take a break from troubles, to see some new people, and put my mind into other things. I somehow ended up in Krpan's office and listened to his very detailed oral history of *Galerija Kapelica*. His stories and photographs had a big effect on me. In the years that followed, I became hooked on the idea of interviewing him and trying to recreate the mesmerizing narration he had created. I was slowly developing an addiction to these kinds of conversations. Krpan was a 'storyteller' on my journey, long before I had decided to leave the prison of my office, travel and write a book.



I visited *Galerija Kapelica* many times during those days in Ljubljana. My cybersex affairs demanded that I go, as I needed a computer to write daily to my lover(s). And of course, the art works on display in *Galerija Kapelica* gave me ideas about how to conduct my affairs, as the gallery was modeled after a dark chapel. Inside there was an exhibit on cyberbodies, large photographs by the Australian body artist Stelarc, who augments his flesh with complex electronically fabricated limbs. Then there was *CyberSM*, a body suit designed by the Norwegian artist Stahl Stenslie, and one of the first full-bodied fetish suits designed to be used electronically to cause mutual vibrations in remote sexual partners.

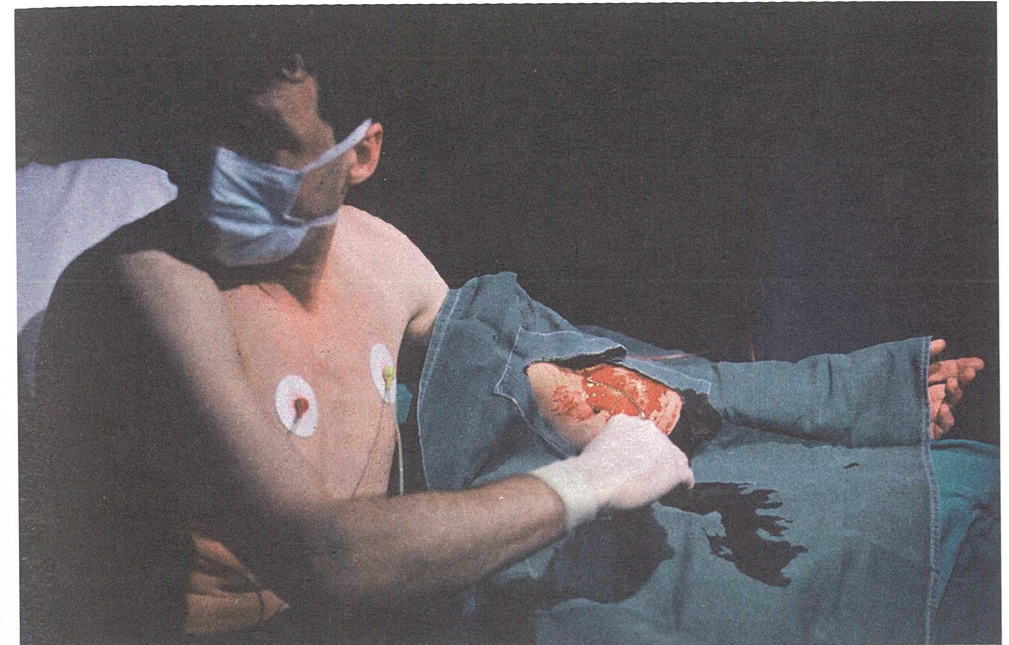
I ran into Jurij Krpan almost every day. I thanked him for his oral history and for the nice calendar he gave me (with photographs of the performances). He replied: "It is my job to give this information to the people." In *Body and the East*, Krpan describes the gallery's fascination with the human body as the ultimate topos of social engagement: "[...]forms of performance which are concerned with the body, presented in a thematic series at the gallery, are developed from the experimental character of body art performances from the sixties and seventies, where the possibilities and boundaries of the medium were investigated in relation to possible and new artistic expressions, and in many cases there was a fascination with the ultimate border-death." He further explains that this 'ultimate' quality in contemporary body-related works no longer means an appropriation of initiation rituals or exorcising rituals, as it did in the 1960s, as there is no longer a similar fascination with the material body, but rather an explicit critique of contemporary political myths and large ideological systems, which are fought on the bodies of artists.<sup>1</sup>

One of the institutions scrutinized was medical science, as in the performances by the medical technician, Ive Tabar. The first of Tabar's performances involved the application of narcosis, or the temporary halting of the life of the body, in everyday hospital practices used to carry out a medical operation. This moment has an 'ultimate' quality as something in reference to 'real'. We all have to rely on doctors to operate on us as 'patients', when we surrender ourselves to their knowledge and ethics, and become the topos where life and death meet. What else can we do when we have to have an operation? A demonstration of this principle illustrates the ultimate quality of discipline and strength of the scientific and ethical paradigms when surrendering the body.

And what about surrendering our sexual bodies to scientific and ethical paradigms and the field of sexual taboos? On November 30, 1998, Oleg Kulik performed *White Man*,

<sup>1</sup> Jurij Krpan, "Stressing the extent of the body as an answer to the terrible fall into culture." In *Body and the East. From the 1960s to the Present* (Ljubljana Museum of Modern Art), 170.

*Black Dog*. The 'white' artist from Russia tried to have sex with a 'black' dog. We may think of this demonstration as 'beastiality', a category of sex invented by the science of sexology to denote (to question or penalize) sex imposed by humans on the animal species. But do we actually know what this dog was thinking when he was involved in this sex play?

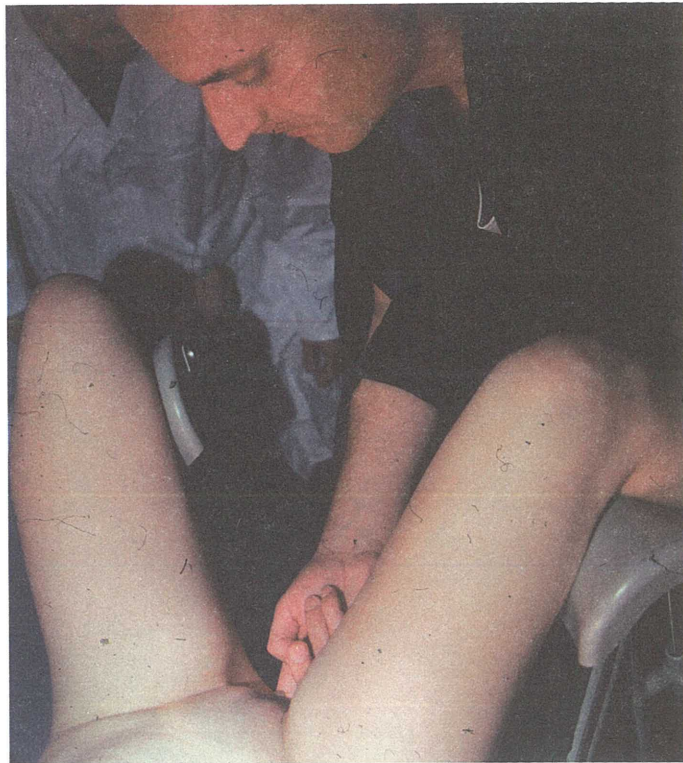


Ive Tabar. *El-En-i*, Performance, 1998.



Oleg Kulik, *White Man, Black Dog*, Performance, 1998.





Peter Mlakar, *The Point G as a Work of Art, Performance*, 1998.

On October 21, 1998, Peter Mlakar performed *The Point G as an Art Work*. He wanted to explore whether or not the G-Spot exists, and inserted a video camera inside a woman's vagina to show the possible location of the G-spot to the audience by transmitting the images to the big screen. As has been argued by Linda Williams in her book *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure and the Frenzy of the Visible*, that the pornography industry constructs ontological differences between 'male' and 'female' orgasm, showing how male orgasm only exists when scientifically proven (through ejaculation), whereas female orgasm is always vague and open to interpretation.

In the performance *The Point G as an Art Work*, Mlakar plays with this vagueness of female pleasure and takes video of something that cannot be seen to evoke questions in the spectator. This is indeed a very different route from the science of sexology or medical corporations, who would present the G-spot as an existing organ that can be positively located and stimulated. For instance, medical industries in the USA are now manufacturing the 'G-shot', a patent-pending method of operating on and technically augmenting the G-Spot:

<sup>2</sup> Ad appeared in LA weekly, August 5, 2004.

"The G-Shot results in a G-Spot that is always present, easily located, and in a perpetual state of arousal that is capable of volcanic eruption at a moment's notice."<sup>2</sup> The ad targets gynecologists and urologists to buy into a method of augmentation/alteration of the organ. But what use would this technology be to the sexual process? How many women would want to walk through life with constant volcanic eruptions from the G-spot? Or, if we would follow the theory of Linda Williams, isn't it also time for the 'male' orgasm to become more poetic and vague, rather than the 'female' orgasm more scientifically proven?

On March 1, 1999, Goran Bertok presented a sado-masochistic performance, entitled *Slave's Meat*. He called it an act of exorcizing a devil out of a slave's body, and an allegory of a highly urban sex-life. In this performance, the male slave was punished and his penis tortured with a burning candle by a dominatrix, who was dressed in a nun's uniform. Both performers were wearing masks, but the slave was naked, looking fat and 'well-hung' (which is, of course, an irrelevant detail). But why do we need to expose ourselves to this spectacle of a burning flame imposed by a dominatrix on a slave?

Many years later, in January 2004, I manage to return to *Galerija Kapelica* and do an interview with Krpan again. We talk for a few hours in a restaurant and then in his office. It is wintertime now, but the weather is behaving strangely, as the day passes. It is pouring rain outside and lightning bolts zip through the jittery winter skies.



Goran Bertok, *Slave's Meat, Performance*, 1999.



### Interview: Jurij Krpan, Ljubljana, January 10, 2004.

»WE DO FEEL THIS PRESSURE ON US, BUT THIS STILL MAKES US MORE DETERMINED TO WORK AND OPEN DIFFICULT QUESTIONS, FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND DIFFICULT ARTISTIC FORMS.«

[From the Calendar] Zoran Todrovic—installation—*Aspic*. July 2, 2002. Zoran cooked aspic from tissue remains of cosmetic plastic surgery of an ear and some suitable vegetables. The surgery and the cooking were documented and exhibited together with the served jelly, while the label reads: 'Thanks to the love of beauty, here you have the opportunity for a delicious mouth.'

**Libidot:** Did you taste this soup? What did it taste like? Did the people in the audience taste it as well?

**Krpan:** Of course I tasted it, and I knew that it is not the taste which is the problem but the mere fact that human flesh is cooked in there. The photographs that accompany the set-up showed the whole process, from the surgery and storing remains to cooking the soup, and it had a strong effect on everybody who came into the room. Those people who tasted it had to have a very strong consciousness about what they were doing because of all the taboos and moral obligations that society imposes on us.

[From the calendar] Oreet Ashery-GB-Performance—*Say Cheese*. 9 May 2002. Her alter-ego, Marcus Fisher, welcomes twelve guests, one at a time, in a hotel room and satisfies their wishes. He takes photographs of the encounters and exhibits them, together with the bed, the next day in the gallery.



Zoran Todrovic, *Aspic*, in the frame of the festival Break 2.1, Performance/Installation, 2002.

**Libidot:** Do you know if Ashery grew up in orthodox Jewish culture?

**Krpan:** She did not grow up in an orthodox Jewish household but is fascinated by the archaic demands of contemporary Jewish culture. She constructed an alter-ego, a male character, Marcus Fisher. This is actually the name constructed from 'Mar-cus', which is in Hebrew 'Mr. Cunt'. The name was dedicated to her former friend who converted to the orthodox Jewish religion. She works with the taboos from the Jewish culture and Jewish politics. She did a performance, in which she was receiving people one by one in a hotel room and asking them what they would like to do with her. She took a portrait with all the people who visited her. Then we exhibited those photos, which varied from a witness of an innocent talk to an explicit sex act.

**Libidot:** Do you have a lot of public cross-dressers in Ljubljana?

**Krpan:** We had three very exposed male-to-female cross-dressers participating in the Eurovision Song festival a few years ago. They represented Slovenia, which was extremely strange, because Slovenia is growing from a chauvinistic society into a moralistic society, where homosexuality is shifting from being characterized as 'excessive behavior' to 'illness and social handicap' (they are also treated and stigmatized almost like people with a physical handicap). However, the whole buzz in our society went by peacefully when somebody explained that those three are just funny men wearing female clothes, like everybody does on carnival. The song was plain and shallow like the standard Eurovision song, but the public relations effect, which showed Slovenia as a liberal country, was incredible.

[From the calendar] Kira O'Reilly—performance—*Succour*. June 21, 2002. Kira uses medical tape to draw a net on her body, and then cuts the squares of skin with a scalpel at an angle of 45 degrees. The performance takes place in absolute silence.

**Krpan:** This is a very beautiful performance because it is a slow one — it lasts one hour. She's very focused. It happens in silence, and it becomes like painting on her body. She's also going to make another performance, where she will let the audience in one by one, talk to them, and then they will be able to cut a line in her.

**Libidot:** Do you think the people will actually cut her?

**Krpan:** At least the audience who follow our program will do it.

[From the calendar] Valentina Čabro—Sound Performance—*Ultra-intro*. April 16, 2002. Ten days before giving birth, Valentina uses motion and breathing techniques to move the baby inside her body. The soundscape is composed of mother and child's heartbeats as detected by echocardiograph, breathing, and movements in the belly.

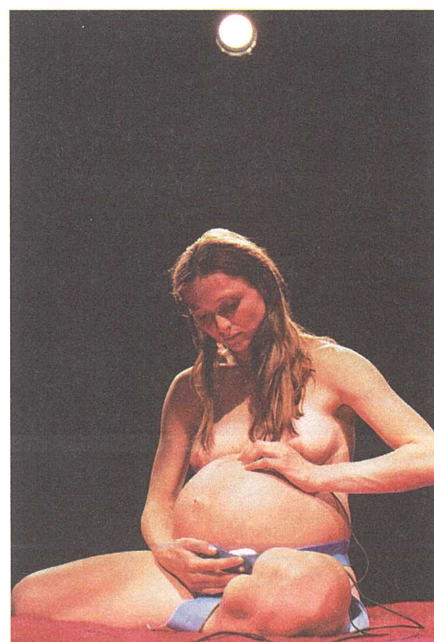
**Krpan:** They put an ultra-sound scanner on her stomach, so the audience could listen to her child breathing, and to her own heart. Her husband is a sound artist. He was mixing the two heartbeats as she was moving on the table and breathing in such a way that she was able to move the baby inside. It was a kind of dance between a mother and her child.

**Libidot:** What kind of works do you select mostly for your shows in Galerija Kapelica?





Kira O'Reilly, *Succour*, Atelje 2050, in the frame of the Festival Break 2.1, Performance, 2002



Valentina Čabro and Tomaž Grom, *Between Fruit and Flesh* (ultra/exo sonic event), Performance, 2002.

**Krpan:** I prefer all kinds of research investigations, contemporary investigative works that are trying to find out what the borders of art are, what the margins of artistic expressions are, what is resized, and what is being suppressed in everyday life. From the point of experience we favor explicit works which are building upon truth framed with ethical imperatives, and not metaphorical works that are framed with the criteria of the aesthetic.

**Libidot:** Do you think that Slovenian culture is generally becoming more open to your work?

**Krpan:** Not really.

**Libidot:** What's going on then? I mean, I myself think that everywhere it's sort of a very difficult time now.

**Krpan:** Well, it's a difficult time, but still, it all depends on how you build your discourse. I think that we manage to build it really well because it is consistent. So even when we are doing the 'questionable' works (e.g., with bloodletting, shooting, sexual explicitness, bio-hazard, tissue engineering) the people need to contextualize them within the framework of our previous works and our artistic discourse that we have been building, because we are quite strict in what we're doing. So by building this kind of credibility, you can build also the possibility of developing a larger display. We started out with works that were not so difficult, but we already had the more difficult works in mind.

**Libidot:** And are you managing to show these more difficult works now?

**Krpan:** Of course, because we had this tactical reasoning. We said to ourselves, it's not good enough that we prove to ourselves what we can do, because these are not our private issues. We have to effect the entire space, this city, this society, so we need to introduce these works, and then people can learn slowly.

**Libidot:** What about works that deal with sexuality? Who are the people here that mostly work on that?

**Krpan:** Well, we are now selling a lot of calendars by Tatjana Plahuta. She painted twelve typical Slovenian landscapes, and she overlaid pornographic scenes onto the landscapes. Everything looks like oil on canvas, and it's beautiful. Then we also have photographers whose topics are very often driven with sexuality. And of course, there is the *Eclipse* duo (two female performance artists), who have chosen a 'soft porn kitsch' aesthetic to pose some very difficult questions. The topics they are working with are derived from taboo sexuality and difficult social topics.

<THUNDER>

**Libidot:** It's strange, it's like summertime.

**Krpan:** But I think we're losing our openness ...

**Libidot:** Why is that?

**Krpan:** I guess because when we had a socialist society, culture was really something privileged. And nobody questioned that privilege. But now we have the opposite side; you know the conservatives are gaining power. Before, there was no official right-wing here, only left-wing. It was much easier to work within that. It's an interesting situation now because we have a male neo-liberal government, which has its own disadvantages, but it's still liberal, so we can still do things. Because of this male neo-liberal attitude, the response is not as we would like to have, because they allow (but do not accept) everything until it sells, but we also feel the pressure from traditional neo-right 'blut und boden' (blood and earth) ideologies. We do feel this pressure on us, but this still makes us more determined to work and to open difficult questions, freedom of expression and difficult artistic forms. We are perhaps the only exhibition place that is doing things like that.

**Libidot:** You mean in Slovenia?

**Krpan:** In Slovenia.

**Libidot:** What about other countries around here?

**Krpan:** In Italy it is very difficult to show these works. In Austria it is difficult as well. For instance, in the USA they have a very well-developed art market, selling art pieces, but no space for investigative art of that kind. However, the art market is something that we are not interested in at all. We are interested in the development of art. If you look at it that way, Galerija Kapelica is sort of phenomenal. We have been bringing all these interesting people here. We thought that this would bring the reflection of their urban experiences into our own non-urban society. I thought this way we can make Ljubljana more urban. But what I discovered lately is that they come here and they see what we're doing for years. And they say: 'This is something what we don't have! A public program like this is impossible in the West.' But despite this, our scene here is still so much paternalized by the West.

**Libidot:** Yes, it doesn't exist.



**Krpan:** And I also saw that they are actually defending their works by using our gallery profile, so it's a kind of schizophrenic situation for me now. What is urban, then? So, one of the projects I'd like to do is to move the whole gallery somewhere else for three months. For now, I think the first place would be New York City. The artistic and humanistic environment there is really hostile to artwork like this, so we would really have to defend our gallery credo there. I think there is a big deflation of this kind of art. We must reflect upon our work. After eight years, I think that our reflection project can really begin.

**Libidot:** You told me you visited the United States? How was that experience?

**Krpan:** Yes, yes. But I was so disappointed and frustrated because they are not going after art issues. They are interested only in the art market and not in the development of art and new artistic poetics. What I am trying to follow is a kind of distinctive research. We are insisting in our gallery that what we're doing is contemporary 'investigative' art. I am even pursuing work that does not even have any artistic ambition in order to test, challenge and rethink artistic means. I haven't been anywhere in the world where I have seen so much plain decorative art and so much weak, shallow and sub-elaborated contemporary art pieces! I felt offended by how the galleries are treating my visual intelligence and my knowledge of artistic production. The dictatorship of common taste obviously cramped them, and they are still sticking to the most archaic explanation of what art should be: pleasurable, of course. They are washing over people's brains with words like feelings, beauty, pleasure... in one word: entertainment. I never came across the word 'think', for example. There is no investigation but a market investigation. They have no guts to ask themselves: "What is the task of art today or even, tomorrow?"

**Libidot:** What kind of performance work would you say is making people 'think'? Can you give an example?

**Krpan:** Of course. There is one performance genre that could be of interest to you. We had an s/m ritual here several years ago called *Slave's Meat*. It was between two ordinary people who were practicing this at home, having no artistic ambitions at all. But the ritual (as most S/M practices) used the structure of a theatre play, so it was something from everyday life using something from art. In this way, we wanted to find the line between art and everyday life. What makes art *art*? Well, the experience was really strong for most people in the gallery and most of them could not simply neglect the overlapping approaches with identical dramaturgies. That fact was schizophrenic enough to question the boundaries of art.

**Libidot:** What about the medical performances of Ivo Tabar?

**Krpan:** Yes, he is a medical technician. He works in the Shock and Trauma department, where the worst cases end up. They are constantly dealing with the fact of life and death, you know, putting people together, with a lot of blood and open bodies. So, in the beginning, when he started with his artwork, he was using traditional ways of expressing what bothered him through photography and paintings, for instance. He was also trying to make installations, exhibitions, and so on. We met at one point, and I told him that I was not so interested in aestheticizing things to which he has immediate access. I said that I would like him to share the power of experiencing the limit between life and

death, in which he is so metaphysically interested on a performative level, to share that explicit reality with the audience in the gallery. He then proposed one performance, in which he was connected to a respirator machine. He drove the whole crew from the hospital into the gallery and they put him under narcosis. They connected him to the respirator for twenty minutes, and then they reanimated him. At that time, the audience realized what was happening, and there was a real happening.

The audience reacted really strongly because at the beginning they did not think that this was real. They thought that this was theater, something fake. But when the crew started to re-animate him, people noticed, saw and felt that it was real, thus problematic and difficult for them, because they were not observers anymore. They were witnesses, which also had different legal consequences from being a neutral observer, and they had to accept their own responsibility, you know. And they were not willing to do that. The media was chasing the artist and the medical staff who were helping him for weeks afterwards. There were several questions posed: artistic relevance, medical ethics, safety, responsibility ... There were suggested answers underneath that aimed merely at reestablishing traditional artistic and societal values. It was extremely difficult to defend this work because it was his first one, and his artistic idiom was not defined yet. That performance has tactical value, a promise to affirm his artistic poetics through future projects (but nobody can confirm that that will ever happen!). You have to believe your gallery credo, which is not built upon safely selecting artists with academic backgrounds, but instead investigate beyond comfortable art definitions, when producing such works.

**Libidot:** I heard that Tabar is now doing a performance to express his views about Slovenian entry into the European Union (May 1, 2004).

**Krpan:** Yes, that is Tabar's trilogy about Slovenia entering EU. He managed to articulate his artistic idiom and the sensibility needed to understand his points of view. In three performances, named *Europe 1, 2 and 3*, he did not argue anything in general terms, but focused on how Slovenian politicians argued, as in they actually forced us to accept confederation without another option. What he was bothered about was the fact that there was a policy with only one option, the policy of former Yugoslavia and the same lack of pluralism drew Yugoslavia into a bloody war. Now with independence and everything looking different, we basically have the same situation: no option to choose. In the first performance, he drank 'European blue' colored water and then he pumped it out of the stomach into a pump vase where yellow stars were floating on (now) slightly greenish liquid. In the second performance, when the actual political discourse excessively used the metaphor of 'stepping into Europe', he drilled a metal spin through his foot bone. In the third performance, when Slovenia joined the union, he made a performance where he pulled out his fingernail and fixed it on a small hymeric limb made out of his finger cast and a proteus, the Human Fish, which is a Slovenian national symbol. All the procedures were made strictly according to the medical profession, from local narcosis to the final recovery.

**Libidot:** What about the Croatian artist Boris Šincek and his performance about the war experience?

**Krpan:** This is actually the heaviest performance we have ever done. He is an artist from Osijek. He was casually dressed but wearing a bulletproof jacket. He stepped in front of a gun and faced the shot.

**Libidot:** And who actually shot the bullet?



**Krpan:** I did.

**Libidot:** You did??

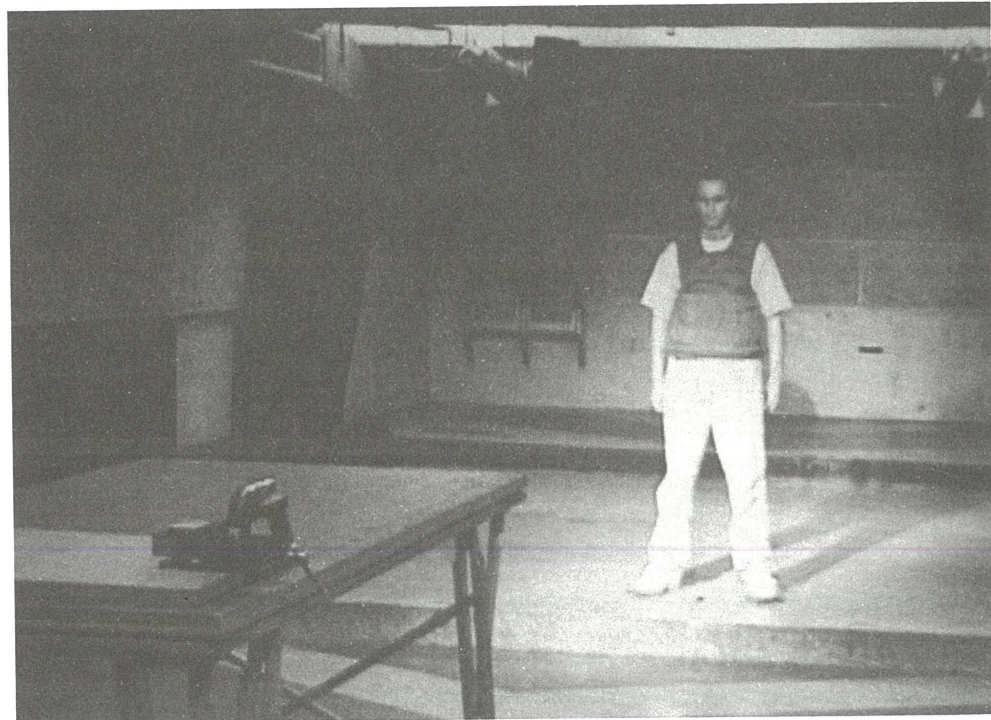
**Krpan:** Yes, but this was not a logical choice, because when he proposed to be shot with a bullet, I said 'Ok, you can do that, but you have to provide the gun and the man who will shoot at you.' He is veteran from the Croatian war and he was actually present in a few of the heaviest battles during that war. After the war, he was invited to officially join the army, but he left the army and went to an art college to teach.

Pauses...

**Krpan:** So why did I accept that performance?

**Libidot:** Why did you?

**Krpan:** After the war, the veterans had all kind of symbolic and practical privileges, because they were heroes, and everything became possible for them. So all these people were building their own identities around the fact that they were unique and special, like the best of the best. But just at that time, it happened that the high court in the Hague started to investigate the war crimes, so the military leaders were also questioned. The people who were heroes turned into criminals, or at least the



Boris Šincek, *The Bullet*, in the frame of the festival Break 2.1, Performance, 2002.

question was posed whether their acts were heroic acts or criminal acts. This was a big turning point, and a lot of people experienced a deep crisis of identity.

When Šincek proposed his performance, he partially wanted to face the situation that he was running from during the war, like facing a gun shooting at him. The other thing that he wanted to discover was whether or not he was guilty (symbolically), and he invested this mandate for decision into a gun. Because weapons have a certain metaphysics, they have their own eroticism. They are like a warrior's soul.

**Libidot:** Like the way the Black Panthers carry weapons?

**Krpan:** Or the Samurai, if you want. You know it's always like that. You have a special relationship with your weapon that is built up during the battles. So he wanted to experience that. But when he arrived, we saw that he had nobody to shoot him. When I asked him where is the guy who'll shoot, he said 'There is no guy. It is you who has to shoot me.' And he said that he had asked his captain, who is really a brave warrior, but he didn't want to shoot him. So I said, look, I can shoot at you because I can, and because I believe that this is a very important performance. But if I shoot you directly, from curator to artist, it will give the wrong message. Let us build a context where I will take the responsibility for shooting you, but I will not spoil the message. So we decided to build a platform to affix the gun (like when the technicians are calibrating the gun). The gun was affixed, and we gauged the direction of the shot, which was predetermined with a measuring device. We tested it, and it was working. The whole performance could only have ten people inside.

**Libidot:** Really ...

**Krpan:** We didn't want people who could not take it, and would jump on me maybe just when I was shooting. I took all possible safety measures I could remember. So I locked the door, and I just came in, and we had an agreement that when I approached the guy, he would close his eyes, and not move abruptly. I pressed the trigger and that was it.

**Libidot:** And did he fall?



Šincek's bulletproof Jacket.

**Krpan:** No, he just took one step back because this bulletproof jacket was a military edition, which is very hard, with an iron plate in it. It's not like a police jacket, which is soft and the bullet can break your ribs.

**Libidot:** What about this performance in relation to the American performance artist Chris Burden, who decided to be shot in the arm in the 1970s?

**Krpan:** Yes, but Burden's gun was smaller than ours and the shot-gun was pointed to his arm, not to his chest. But I ask myself, did he have legiti-



mate context to explain his action? He has never been in Vietnam, which is more or less like the shooting performance by The Bulgarian artist Venceslav Zankov, who shot bullets in a double-layered wall filled with red color. The performance took place in the Kapelica Gallery in 1997, when the Balkan war was still very much present here, and a cynical slogan was written by bullets holes 'Make War Not Love,' which had a very special meaning at that

time. However, the Šincek performance had a much stronger legitimacy, as he was questioning social problems, not only with his body but with his life. The difference is between the body as a metaphor and the body as real entity, a traumatic presence or something that cannot be justified by human conventions.

**Libidot:** Do you also select these works to make a comment about the war in Iraq and the tactics of the US government? Or is the US war in Iraq a bit far away for people here?

**Krpan:** Not so far. It happened in Serbia just before Iraq. I think the USA itself is experiencing a Hellenistic type of tyranny, a democracy that turns into a Hellenistic type of ruling. In the ancient democracies, they built the agoras so people could speak up loudly to everybody, and the agora functioned as their media. After a while the people in power found out who is thinking what and paranoidly attacked them in the back streets. They were supervising and ruling their interests because they thought they were different from others. Do you see any similarity?



Venceslav Zankov, *Make War Not Love*, Performance, 1997.

**Libidot:** I was also thinking about Joseph Beuys, when he came out of WWII and made actions around his involvement in the war. I guess at least he stepped forward with his vision and tried to have a discussion with the audience.

**Krpan:** The phenomenon is as follows ... everybody keeps repeating 'Come on, let's forget about this war. It's a different life now, we can go on... blah, blah, blah.' I think that this is totally wrong because by forgetting about the war, we are creating the conditions to make another war. I am not saying that we have to talk about war all the time, but we have to reflect upon it. Like ... look, in Slovenia the fact is that some Slovenians were collaborating with the Italians and Germans in WWII. It is still so traumatic that the political parties are still affected by it, but whom are ancestors of whom? Instead of building a new contemporary future-thinking policy, our political establishment is still handicapped with that unresolved historical fact.

The *Eclipse* duo made an installation this year where they shot two photographs: in one of them she is on a Partisan monument having sex with a red skeleton, while in the other photo she is on the monument to fallen collaborators, painted in red, having sex with a white skeleton. The photographs were superimposed like old stereographic postcards, so we were able to see both photos at the same time, only by slightly moving our heads. The photo plate was made like a lightbox cast into a huge frame (a kind of reliquary) with rays made out of shot-gun tubes (3.5 meters high). Everything was painted gold, very camp, very stylish.

The reaction to this piece was symptomatic. All the texts and reviews were enthusiastic about the camp aesthetics, but they were (only casually) talking about the content, they were claiming that the authors were kidding. In reality, the authors were dead serious. This was a clear proof that the opinion-makers can't even think differently. This idea was cast in their unconscious as a fundament of their identity.

#### Dr. Jacobs 9:29 am 01/10/2004 The Little Artist in a Puddle of Flesh



Hello Libidot,

This all made me think of Georges Bataille, a scholar I haven't touched in years. In *The Accursed Share. Volume 1: Consumption*, Bataille writes about the determination of 'excess energy' circulating in the biosphere, and how it can be altered by human activity. He juxtaposes secular economy with general economy, postulating that the latter has less restrictive ways of channeling excess energy. Whereas secular economies are founded on a pietist or frigid moral code which condemns idleness and luxury and affirms the value of enterprise, general economy is based on the notion of excessive gift which can only be consumed in a specific manner. The general economy makes us aware of a culture's 'accursed share', and is in conflict with capitalist economies that channel excessive energy by means of war.



So how should we react when looking at the sex art species? We have to realize that we have been offered an excessive gift. And how can we react to such a gift? Just consume it like a big piece of cunt or anus? No! Wrong again! According to Bataille, the gift has to trigger a counter-performance in the consumer which leads to his/her process of self-consciousness, or ritualized enactment of a culture's high point of exuberance, ecstasy, or intensity. The audience should not just consume and walk away, but articulate a feeling of being overwhelmed or swamped or even humiliated by this gift. Because this gift cannot be returned.

For instance, Bataille describes how in the Mexican Aztec cultures, community leaders possessing wealth were obliged to squander their wealth, recklessly waste vital resources, or surrender them without expecting return. And their neighbor communities had to endure the effects of these strange enormous gifts. Similarly, early tradesmen in Mexico learnt that the rule of profit had to be alternated with the economy of the gift, which turned certain objects into fetishes or 'inalienable possessions'. You cannot just have an orgasm to this excessive gift, nor destroy it, as that would lead to war. You cannot just stand up and applause smilingly at the end of a good show, or politely fart at the end of a good meal. It has to go further than that.

In his introduction to Bataille's *Visions of Excess*, Alan Stoekl explains that Bataille's methodology of citing cultures of excess does not privilege one system over the other: »The fall of one system is not stabilized, is not replaced with the elevation of another; the fall in Bataille's allegory is a kind of incessant or repetitious process. Thus filth does not replace God: there is no new system of values, no new hierarchy.« (*Visions of Excess*, xiv). Bearing this perspective on the excessive gift in mind, let's think of other ways of consumption.

Dr. Jacobs

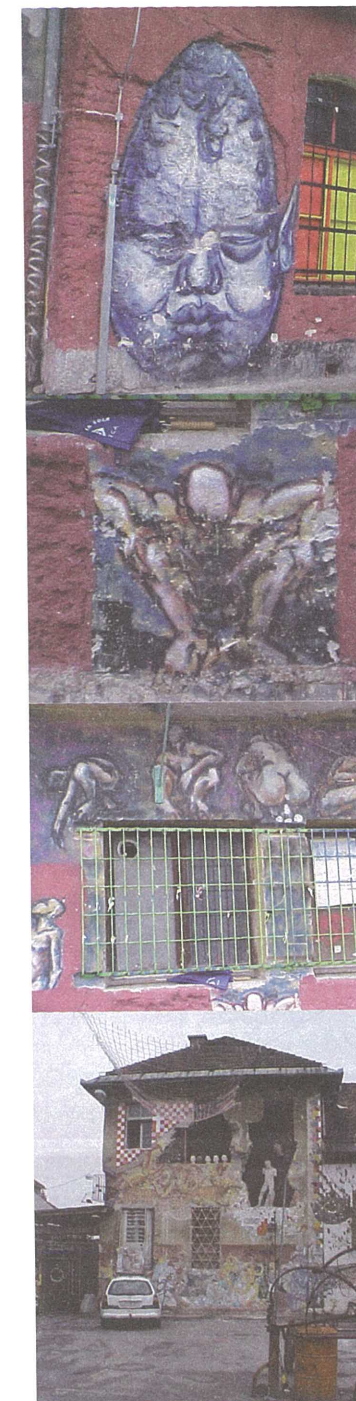
p.s. I am not sure how to bring you the news. Yes, it all happened very quickly, and I could not explain why love has to always have this rotten element. I mean, Kristeva is right, nothing seems to work - no two people can love each other as a given. Or is this paradigm of lasting love something that belongs completely to the past? Is love now almost always an archaic sort of ritual that eventually tears lovers apart? But to cut a long story short, I lost my young boy.

## January 10, 2004. LJUBLJANA.

Ljubljana is a warm and happening place in the summer, with energetic and sexy people, a cold sleepy city in the winter, with cranky people who like to complain a bit. I am staying in the suave youth hostel *Celica*, a renovated army prison located in the middle of the now sanctified arts district and graffiti park, *Metelkova*.

Slovenia was the first Yugoslav Republic to hold free elections in 1991, shedding forty-five years of communist rule. *Galerija Kapelica* is a cradle, and the artists seem to be tolerated by the culture, managing to create a large energy hole in the fabric of post-communist society. This is unlike the undergrounds in the USA, for instance, where right now art can only drill miniscule holes in the skin of Western white supremacy. Here in Slovenia, I hear tirades against the Western superpowers as invaders of the East. I visit and talk to many Slovenians who hate the USA and the EU, who stage types of body art as their own allegories.

The West was lost, so open up your senses to the powers of Eastern sexual bodies - the white man who gives sexual satisfaction to the black dog, the s/m master who tortures the slave. These males really do not have the power; rather, they stage it and wait for a response. From whom? The dog cannot comment on his blowjob, and the slave cannot really rate the performance of his master. The importance of performing cruelty, or sado-masochism, as a ritual investigation of totalitarianism is also developed in the work of *Peter Mlakar*, philosopher, performer and TV preacher who frequently addresses the topic of sex (unlike 99% of philosophers worldwide). Mlakar writes about totalitarian aesthetics in *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, an art collective dedicated to painting, performance art, and philosophy, and about their well-known band *Laibach*. In an online interview with 'Mr. Greg', Mlakar explains the 'transcendental principle' in their totalitarian aesthetics by making reference to the feeling of loyalty of a soldier in war. I hereby reprint part of the conversation:



Metelkova architecture and graffiti.



Mr. Greg: NSK, as I understand it, is focused upon absolute loyalty and discipline towards its own artistic vision and aesthetic. Just as soldiers swear *their loyalty to their country*, the members of *NSK* do so to each other and their vision. Is this accurate?

Mlakar: If we focus on a soldier's determination to be absolutely loyal, to obey the orders unmercifully, to submit to the will of his commander to protect his country, no matter what happens to him, and when death is very possible, this leads us to the analysis of the soldier's soul, to the essence of his own being, not to the importance of his country. In his determination, the soldier sees that something very strong is at work. It is something which transcends his own particular, concrete life, but in which his life has its meaning, namely something which manifests itself as some kind of necessity, in which he finds satisfaction, a final fulfillment of his life.

If we try to describe what this necessity is, this Law, which we must obey, we find that it is Nothingness itself, the very last station of every Sense, pure enjoyment in its very essence. It is nothing, which is connected with life and world, but this is what gives sense to life and world [...] So this in its description proves that last Station, last enjoyment, is absolutely transcendent. Therefore it is so empty, without a cause. Only when this Principle is at work, the obedience for country is meaningful and has its power.

Our discipline as NSK members is based on this Principle. To be submitted to something, which does not exist [...] and which does not have anything in common with this world. Our obedience to NSK discipline has no cause, perhaps 'in the sense of earthly pleasures' because of fame, women and money.<sup>3</sup>

Now I am very curious about the transcendental principle. How does it encroach upon simple earthly delights in the realm of sexuality, like the desire for fucking? I call him up, Peter Mlakar. His mother answers the phone and tells me that she will convey my phone message to him, as he is not at home on Monday nights, but in the TV studio.

Libidot: In the TV studio?

Angel Darling: Yes, he is there for his weekly sermon on sex.

Libidot: So what is the topic of the sermon this week?

Angel Darling: Female Ejaculation. The topic of this week's sermon is the value of female ejaculation!

<sup>3</sup> Published in 3am magazine.

[http://www.3ammagazine.com/entarchives/2002\\_dec/interview\\_peter\\_mlakar.html](http://www.3ammagazine.com/entarchives/2002_dec/interview_peter_mlakar.html)

## Interview: Peter Mlakar, Ljubljana, January 11, 2004.

'WITH THESE SMALL ELEMENTS THE WHOLE VAGINA WILL BE LIKE A CHRISTMAS TREE.'

Libidot: Maybe we can start with your ideas about sexuality? Why did you start writing about sexuality?

Mlakar: When I started with my ideas on sexuality, tracing one of the courses of what I am doing now, I was strongly engaged in a punk movement. At that time I developed two sides of one totalitarian entity: the position of extreme nihilism, and the position of radical sexuality. I wrote texts on sexuality, I wrote pornography, but all these texts had a philosophical meaning, which I developed further in my department for Pure and Applied Philosophy at NSK. These ideas that I am interested in are manifested in different forms: literature and philosophy.

Libidot: So what kind of sexual scenes did you describe?

Mlakar: The basic scene was a sado-masochistic paradigm of sexual life, where we can look for the truth of the connection between love and sexuality.

Libidot: Where does your interest in sado-masochism come from?

Mlakar: It comes from an idea that the primary and final object of all sexuality is something absolute, yes, God alone. Things in the field of enjoyment, which is the right word for sexuality, begin and end with the Absolute. It is obvious that the Absolute transcends ordinary practical life. In the real world therefore it shows itself through the character of enjoyment, which is structured as sado-masochistic. What does it mean? That enjoyment is undetermined unending, that means, if you want to materialize it, you must transcend your limited, empirical, factual being, which introduces destructive moments to that being.

The best argument for that idea in literature is de Sade. Everything there is so fantastic. All this torturing and massacring, which never ends and where people never die, but only suffer. In the real world this is not possible, for it goes beyond the physical condition of human existence. So here we can get in touch with the concept of the Absolute, which is limited by nothing. De Sade wants complete enjoyment, but this also means the annihilation of the human. Here I must emphasize the difference between 'pleasure' and 'enjoyment'. The simplest definition of pleasure is that it is the opposite of pain. When we deal with enjoyment, this is not the case. In enjoyment, pain, suffering, and unhappiness can be elements of its manifestation. Enjoyment transcends our pragmatic life and practical experience of sexual pleasure.

Libidot: How did you become a performer besides a philosopher?

Mlakar: Some years ago I started thinking that I could do philosophy or theoretical investigations of sexuality also in the form of performance. I spoke with Jurij Krpan of *Galerija Kapelica*, and I did my first performance on the existence of the G-spot. In the late '90s I also started with TV appearances on national TV. Also from this post, I introduced the topics of sexuality connected with theological entities. This became, and it is still, quite controversial for the audience. I also started to talk about

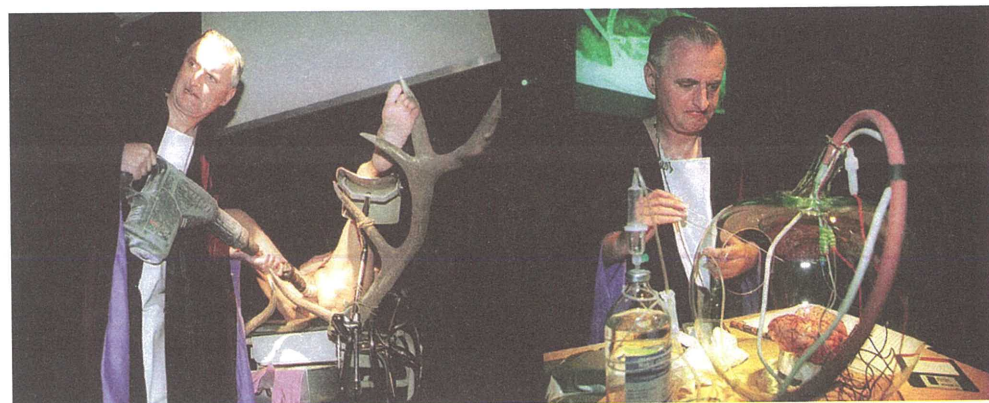


technological and scientific inventions attached to sex. You know, the digital world ... So my questions became focused on that, how sex in the light of its absolute Being will reproduce pleasure when it manifests itself in artificial, technological forms. Will we be witnesses of some kind of intensification, radicalization? Will the scientific knowledge develop its quality?

**Libidot:** Yes, that's an interesting phenomenon, the sex technologies being developed by the corporate industries. I am very interested in remote sexuality, for instance, like having sex with a stranger whose body is unknown. It's very exciting to me. But I think in some sense we've had a real boom of digital technologies and now people are losing trust in these technologies.

**Mlakar:** To experience sexual enjoyment, we face the unending exchange of fulfilling a wish, of relaxation and the appearance of tensions, which must cease. This chain, which is based on something undetermined, does not satisfy it, as more and more is structured as an eternal surplus, as *Aufhebung* (as would Hegel say), which finds no end, no sexual fulfillment in the real, empirical world, but in something, which transcends it, in Unreal, in Non-existence. To get to the very core of sexual demands is thus not the matter of technology, but it is only possible in its transcendence.

This is what I tried to investigate in my second performance at *Kapelica*, which was titled *Three Forms of the Absolute*, where I show that the perfect stimulation of the human, which can cause perfect pain and evil, is still not what we know under the term of perfectness of God, of the perfect evil, which can be only the work of Him. The performance finishes with a fantastic element, in what is nowadays an example impossible in science, which takes its possibility from the Einstein category of the unified field. This is of the field where all energies are one, where they are united in one principle. Therefore things can be also changeable from one substance to another. Chemical substances can be substituted with electromagnetic substances, human brains as structure of specific electrochemical processes can be changed into electromagnetic substances. So, if you suppose that the human soul consists of these activities, and if all these energies and forces are changeable and compatible (participating in one, common principle), then you can take and copy the psyche on a computer disk. If you suppose that the psyche is just a manifestation of the specific electromagnetic field,



Peter Mlakar, *Three Forms of the Absolute*, Performance Galerija Kapelica, 2001.

and if you put it on a disk and insert in the computer, you can manipulate this person's inner being as you wish, without limits.

On the disk you can induce immense pain and evil to this soul. It can be multiplied and preserved infinitely, and you can produce suffering eternally. But despite these possible 'supernatural' events in reality, which can be derived from the credibility of mysticism or metaphysics in terms of the truth, of the real, the Absolute is still not achieved. The Unending is still not realized. I wanted to ask if the Absolute is real. Yes, it is real, but as something non-existing, but real. And I wanted to show that idea in a magical way. I demonstrated it with a woman, who was suffering because of the drilling machine, which brutally stimulates her utmost sensitive points on, and inside, her vagina, as the unmercifully physical stimulation of her most sensitive points on her body. I demonstrated it on the same woman, when we separated her brains from the rest of the body, when a needle was sticking in her nervous pain center, and when I changed her into electromagnetic note on the disk, when her body disappeared but it was disposed to a free and unlimited manipulation in the digital world.

**Libidot:** This sounds totally impossible to me. How did you do that?

**Mlakar:** I learned it in magic, how to make a body disappear.

**Libidot:** No, really?

**Mlakar:** Yes, really, I learnt it from one magician.

**Libidot:** I would like to see that.

**Mlakar:** Yeah, yeah, you must see that. It's funny. I learned from that magician. It's a very simple trick but it's excellent. So the woman disappeared in front of the public, and then I explained that she's not present anymore in her natural physical existence, but that I had preserved her on the disk. Then I started to manipulate her psyche on the computer. The psyche was subjected to our torture, which was performed with a special programming language. The person's suffering was endless, and she is unable to help herself or somehow relieve the pain. But we could delete it with only one click of mouse.

**Mlakar:** And now I am in sort of dilemma, how to show this performance in Dublin on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May, on this historic day, to mark Slovenia's entry into the EU with all these incredible, metaphysical, sadistic ideas, when people can understand its message that extreme evil is the final enjoyment of the Power.

**Libidot:** So, to switch the topic from pain and suffering to the orgasmic female ... You just gave a TV speech about female ejaculation ... What are your transcendentalist ideas about female ejaculation?

**Mlakar:** First, I described how this phenomenon works, how doctors and sexologists would explain it. Then I continued with the thesis that in female sexuality we always find something that we are enthusiastic about, that we are surprised about. These are 'geyseric' eruptions of female ejaculation, about which we have thought that they are only the matter of men. Because the sole purpose of this squirting is enjoyment alone. There is no other function. We can compare the pleasure that women are experiencing in these eruptions with the strongest orgasms. This ejaculation can be taught. We can teach this



thing that some may think does not exist. And what is more beautiful in the body than discovering the powers of immense sexual joy. From its finality we can draw something that opens the sight onto a nature that transcends heights and comes to the position which turns off our thoughts on death.

When I did my performance on the G-spot in 1998, I showed a big picture, about one and a half by two and a half meters in size, of the anatomic structure of this organ. On this picture I demonstrated the possible intensification of the sensitivity of the vagina by implanting tiny neural elements in it. With these nanoelements we can make a whole vagina sensitive. With these small elements the whole vagina will be like a Christmas tree, shining in lights of stimuli. I still have this picture with all these small candlelights, and it is beautiful.

So, in sexuality we can always find something surprising. This is not only a psychological or medical problem but also always a philosophical problem. I chose these borderline phenomena of female sexuality to pose the question that points to the power of enjoyment. The essence of sexuality shows us that even if something doesn't exist, it still exists. This is something paradoxical, it can trigger speculations on something miraculous, but in enjoyment are hidden powers of the Absolute. Nice!!!

#### Dr. Jacobs 9:42 am 01/11/2004 RE: The Little Artist in a Puddle of Flesh



Hello Libidot!

And you know what, Libidot, the guy is absolutely right! I am so glad that you have at least one conversation with a real philosopher in your book. This concept of the Absolute is, of course, the essence of physical love and manifest in your sex art species. These sex artists show extreme sensations pointing to the eternal crashing of a divine impulse. In this way, they can better situate a post-material world of divine filth. As your species is ruled by divine assholes, so to speak. They approach us with gifts. We are average beings or 'little' selves who move like tadpoles, wiggling, small organisms that can melt into the larger slimy organism, the puddle of flesh. The puddle of flesh is baptism of the curious little selves.

Dr. Jacobs

p.s. I did experience that kind of Enjoyment when I tried to melt with the sexual parts of his youthful body. I felt like the faithful dog on duty and it made me very stiff. Yes, I can only weep now and ask the satyrs, make me stiff again as I search patiently for a new little boy of flesh. Fuck the philosophy, he used to say, when fucking my ass without too much care, another sign of youth? Maybe I need a little holiday, a break from this place where I think I am making intellectual progress?

#### January 14, 2004. LJUBLJANA.

And then in front me sits a sexy male, Goran Bertok. He is a viciously horny male born and raised in the Sadeian schools of torture and humiliation. It was very short meeting and the tape-recorder broke down in the middle of it. He sat down and after a little bit of babbling, started yelling at me. He told me to drop my work and follow him. He gave me many more orders. How can I write about sex if I don't have sex? When was the last time I had sex? And what were the things I had done so far? The science of sex is dead, let's go and have sex. Then he threw me some money and told me again to drop my work and go with him. I threw his money back at him. It was an insult, not enough money for the western art cunt.

He is well-built, dark-brown eyes and smooth skin, a little fragile physically, and his mind is sharp. He looks like boyish turbo-energy and now talks about free love. I need to stop my work and go with him. I cannot go with him even though I am very horny. I am not free and also menstruating. He is fuming and stands up to leave the table. I try to stop his razorblade, but it goes entirely wrong. He is getting more and more angry. We are still talking, but acts start taking place in another realm. It is a very strange and heavy atmosphere now, and he is about to leave me stranded. When he stands up to walk out, demonstratively, I pull together all my strength and reach out to give him a kiss. Before I reach his skin, he pushes me away.

And now we are officially in some dark moment of pain, ready to act out the war of souls. Nobody has ever done something like that to me. It's like, all of a sudden, I am ready to break his bones, so to speak, or perhaps bust his balls, or at least, spit on his face.

#### Dr. Jacobs 9:42 am 01/14/2004 RE: The Little Artist in a Puddle of Flesh



Dear Libidot,

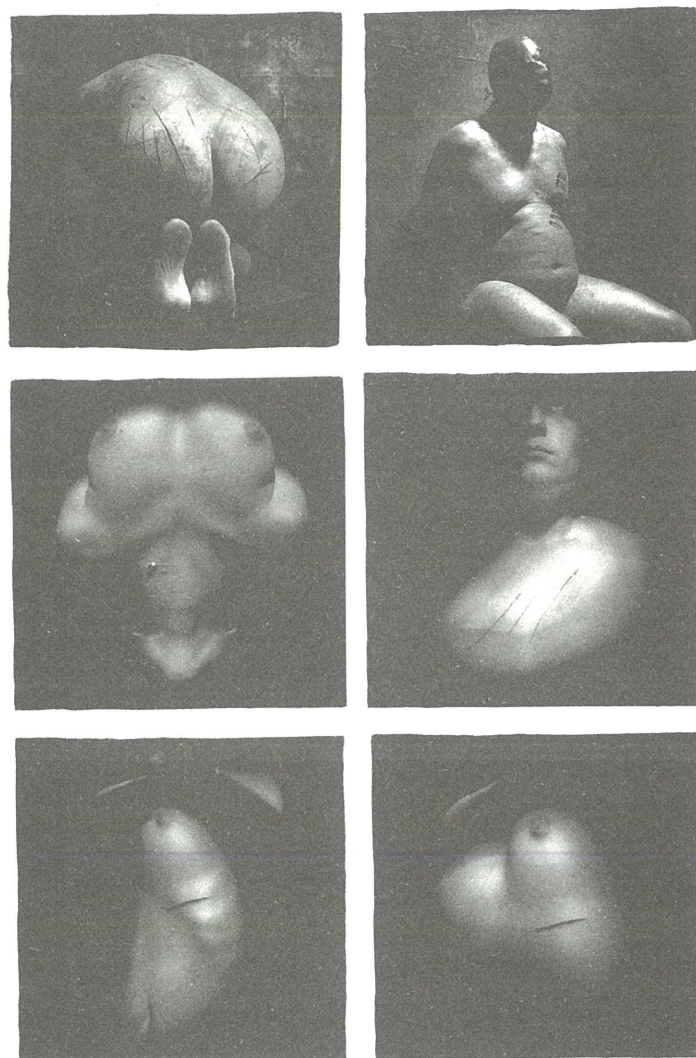
You are a little artist in a puddle of flesh. You are drowning in his rotten flesh. The ROTTING and BLEEDING flesh you have been waiting to enter since you started your journey. Ah! My god. Please go for it and write a **detailed** report to me later on today! What did it taste like? How did you go inside him? Etc., etc.?

Sincerely,

Dr. Jacobs



We make plans to meet again. He warns me again that this meeting will not be about philosophy, but about sex – shit, beating, torture, spanking, and blood. He tells me several times that my life is about to fall apart, and there will be no way back. Do I want to know a little bit more? I feel like I have no choice but to know more. We meet again at 11am and go to a small café around the corner from the Celica youth hostel. But Goran Bertok has changed. His big mouth is asleep as I tell him about my book. But still, every word about my book sounds 'fishy' to him. Every word of inquisition is returned with a cynical answer or existential muteness. We are two awkward sexual beings from two different books meeting each other. I try to ask him questions but he refuses to give answers. He controls my mind very easily, it is remarkable and cleansing, but my cunt is totally mystified.



Goran Bertok, Selection from *Omen, Stigmata I, II and III*, photography, 1998, 2002, 2004.

He takes pictures of the suffering body, pretty, young girls or hard-core male masochists, whipping their backs, burning their cocks, stitching their butt cheeks together. They have no faces. They are abstract human-less portraits that do not tell a little human story. They are the overly portraits of universal human suffering, and he is the cruel master of ceremony, who compiles, arranges and removes life from his shots. He refuses to reveal the processes behind his photography. In this sense, he is a real case study of straight artistic masculinity, the type that hates the babbling females, these loving bundles of heat and energy.

In many of his photographs, they do not have a face. But if they do, they are big motherfuckers, the males. These are the Slovenian men that tell a little story, the Slovenian male flesh-bags with emotional density chained by a photographer. They are the crystals of pathetic suffering, and he is the cruel master of the ceremony. At other times, he arranges and entirely removes the little human from his shots.

I takes me seven months to get anything from him. I am not going to tell you how it happened. It is a very long story and dealing with him made me break all the rules. But here is the product of this lengthy process. First of all, he sent me the 'Visitors' photos of corpses he took in a crematorium. These photos finally brought me the Enjoyment and relief I had hoped to find with him, his own rotting flesh. Then, many months later, I received from him a fictional statement. The story starts with his visit to the concentration camp Mauthausen KZ in Austria. But make sure you first pour yourself a glass of whiskey, and read very slowly.

#### The zulu man in his diary:

The same as in castles: alone, in silence, looking for an entrance, trying to go back in the heads of dead inhabitants.

Everything between nice, idyllic hills, meadows and woods. Farms in the distance, cows producing milk the same way as sixty years ago, but in much larger quantities.

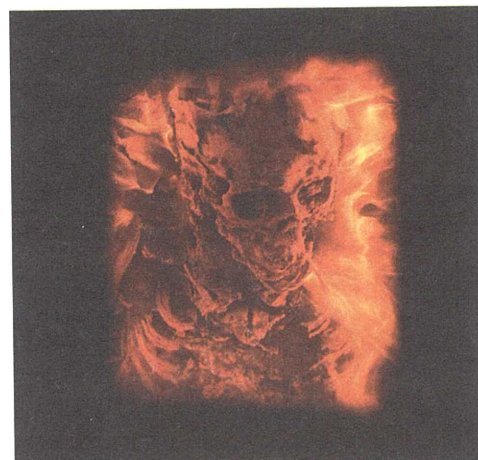
Mauthausen KZ is absolutely sexy. The combination of stones, cement, barbed wire, towers for guards, autopsy tables, gallows, the crematorium, and the bordello.

As a child I walked on the remains of the Mauthausen branch in Ljubelj, Slovenia. In May 2003, I paid a visit to Mauthausen KZ. I was on my way back from the 'Blut und Honig' exhibition in Klosterneuburg near Vienna. I was driving 'gegen storm' along the river Danube. Some ships were doing the same thing. Among the green hills, near a farm or two, in full sunlight, the medieval kitsch castle suddenly appears.

I am alone, for hours. The places inside the building. I'm interested in those places.

To be naked and to have sex on the green grass in the middle of the camp with all respect for the madness around me.





Goran Bertok, Selection from *Visitors*,  
Photography, 2005.

A surreal mad house with military police interrogations. I was in such a place in 1989, when I spent a month in the Yugoslav National Army – with their special nose for weakness, their logic of ‘ten against one’, the power of their ecstasy. They were fresh soldiers with erections and shoulderpads, with rank, playing SM games, but then were recruited 2-3 years later, when the war in Yugoslavia began.

Every day they do the same kind of work: work, work, work. It is evident that the work cannot be finished as the new transports are coming in every day.

I am skull. No violence, no sadism, no vulgarity. The older women, I tell them to work, work, or else ‘crematorium’. For the young and pretty ones, I have built an ‘art&joy’ division. The bordello building for prisoners.

Can you imagine a sex/fuck in the middle of that scenery?

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The same with castles, caves, ruins, coffins. Me, at about age four. I am watching a cartoon movie about pirates or robbers. I see an old house with a skull in the niche. I want to see it again. I like the skull – a nice, interesting thing, not so scary.

Then I would like to have a coffin and sleep in it. My parents aren’t worried. They tell me, when you have your own money, then you can just buy one yourself.

Then, at the age of five or six, I watch the cartoon ‘Conan’, with naked bodies, violence, and the smell of sex. I don’t mean any fucking, just ‘Conan the Barbarian SM’. I fantasize behind closed eyes. Perhaps for the first time, about bodies bound in ropes, a girl, a real existing girl, in a dangerous situation, with a hostile tribe. Me – I want to save her.

The skull arrives: with some hairs on it, a bald-headed skull with still some hairs. Everything belongs to a rich landowner. My mother and my grandmother arranged this skull for me. With some remains of a dead man’s clothes. It comes from a tomb in the church of my mother’s village. We put it near my bed, so I can see it before going to sleep and after waking up.

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I must have just inherited the madness of those people, everything different from how it is supposed to be.

I was a good boy in school, good grades, smart ass, and never beaten at home. But I loved the swastika. I got into trouble in elementary school because I had drawn a lot of swastikas,



and skulls. It was during the days of socialism. But I never really liked those Nazi people, the violence imposed by the stronger, in bigger numbers, upon the weak.

At age 18-19, I saw the movie *The Night Porter*, a story about an SM love relationship between a nazi camp officer and one of the prisoners. I had watched it before but saw it for the first time on the big screen. The result: 13 erections. The next year I saw it again, the result: 7 erections. I had been very attracted to girls from my earliest years, but also suffered from the asexual situation in which I had been dumped as a child, every child.

\* \* \*

At age 25-26, I was looking for work occasionally and walked around to find the morgue. I wanted to wash corpses, arrange corpses, and do make-up for corpses. I was thinking: the dead body of a nice, young woman. This time my erection made me a little worried. But anyhow I didn't get the job.

What I often felt after sleeping with girls then is the following.

I started with some attraction but after we were finished, after we had sex and were tender etc., I would sense a strange mood. It was an in-between state, not officially 'dead' like a corpse, but also not alive anymore.

I tried to destroy myself with alcohol. The violence was just an exercise in victory over my senses, my body, my feelings, my emotions. Like I loved the animals, and I felt that love was a weakness. So then I had to go kill some cats. I loved cats the most. I'm talking about 20 years ago now.

\* \* \*

We stepped into the water some meters away from the coast, it was her body floating with the face in the water. Her face looked like she had been in the sea for many days. With no signs of life. It was quite hard to take her out of the water.

On the coast we put her body into proper position. She was an older woman, maybe she had fallen from the tourist ship that had just passed by. And then she started to breath.

After that sea episode I visited a small morgue in my home town in Koper. I visited my friend who was working on the restauration of the old cemetery chapel. He knew the people working in the morgue, so they showed me the material without problems.

I remember a corpse in the fridge, a naked man full of blood, in a position which showed that he was not put into the fridge but thrown into it. Then we opened a sack or two. We discussed the old autopsy table in that room, which they were going to throw away. It was made from a solid rock.

I observed a corpse inside the coffin, his relatives were in the room next to us. He looked really insanely ill. My friend looked a bit reserved. I thought it was because of the color of the dead man. But no. I had told him about that strange phenomenon, the so called 'Lazarus effect', about the corpses moving.

And, as everything has already happened, in my head, or in the books that I read, this was nothing new to me, I could say, it is just became more palpable.

\* \* \*

Listen, this is all about my mother. Some years ago, my mother, or her remains, as she would have said, ended up in the same morgue. Then I was not in the mood for detailed observation, but I must say, it was as if she was alive and she was smiling.

I visited the crematorium to pick up her ashes.

## January 14, 2004. LJUBLJANA.

I then go on to meet with the photographer of happier flesh, *Rajko Bizjak*. Bizjak's first series of photographs, *Kanaan*, are extreme close-up shots of parts of the vagina. Any encounter with the wet vagina is like seeing an awkwardly shaped and dirty living thing? Peter Mlakar's describes his response to *Kanaan*: "[...] an open wound bordered by a wreath of scurf and folds. All this to testify to the wealth of creation and not to the imperfection of the Creator. All this unattractive appearance shall help us understand that the Creator is not only the Lord of those things that in direct contact are seen as good and beautiful, but also the one who controls the things that are in direct opposition to the splendour [...]"<sup>4</sup> There again is that dark premise of Slovenian Enjoyment again, as Mlakar argues that indeed, there is no such thing as a flesh vagina, a splendid vagina organ, though we learn to live with it and make acceptable figures out of its jelly textures.

But in a more recent series of photographs named *Flowers*, Bizjak makes photographs of 'nice' pussies, which he manipulates and names after flowers. Artificial colors are added to the flesh-colored organ. The color functions as a kind of fantasy screen, or a tincture for

<sup>4</sup> Galerija Kapelica catalogue, 1996.



marking a special body part, so that one can more clearly see it and inspect it. I wonder if people ever apply coloring devices to genitals and pussies during the sex act, so that the genital would be more marked, more clearly visible, more ugly, or more beautiful? These pussies, the *Flower* photographs, do they also give us a sense of Enjoyment, as in Mlakar's sense of the word? Do they take us beyond the garden of earthly delights?

After the interview with Bizjak is finished, I send him an email and ask him if he is a *vagina lover*, i.e., a male who adores and worships the female genital. I read about this phenomenon in an American magazine, where it was explained that only a very small percentage of men are naturally inclined to worship the vagina. No, he says, he is not a vagina lover. But I just can't stop thinking about him as a vagina lover. My ghostie tells me that I am right about this one. I can see him lying on the couch with a woman, his head stuck between her legs, staring very carefully at the organ in front of him, investigating it slowly and then taking his shot.

### Interview: Rajko Bizjak, Ljubljana, January 14, 2004.

'Let's say if you do a science fiction movie or a western or a drama with a \$5000 budget, it will look like shit.'

**Bizjak:** I remember a story that somebody told me about Eikoh Hosoe, who is a Japanese photographer. He did an exhibition of nude photography in the Unites States. Then he also wanted to bring this exhibition to Japan, but the customs officers did not allow him to enter into Japan because one could see the pubic hair on the pictures.

**Libidot:** Yes, pubic hair is censored in Japanese pornography.

**Bizjak:** Yes, and for the Japanese, it is that which indicates the division between 'pornography' and 'erotica'. Therefore he made the same pictures but he just shaved the models and then there was no problem.

**Libidot:** That's funny. And was it okay then?

**Bizjak:** Yes, as the story said, then it was okay.

**Libidot:** It's total hypocrisy, isn't it?

**Bizjak:** We could call that hypocrisy, yes. There are examples everywhere around the world, in the modern world and in the old world. In the Arabic world, they cover the female body with the *burka*, you know. The unveiled female body would be 'sin' or taboo. But why is that? Because Arabic culture teaches us that the whole body can be obscene and can provoke men to take a taste. So they cover the entire body. In our world, we think "This is primitive." So, we reduce the obscene parts only on the two square centimeters around the female breast, and two square centimeters between female legs. And we think "Now it is OK, we are civilized." So, asking a Muslim woman to walk around

with uncovered hair is the same as asking our women to walk around with naked breasts. Not everyone could do that. But then, only fifty years ago, our women could not go into a public bath and swim in normal swimming suits.

**Libidot:** I guess that's when they invented swimsuits with skirts to cover the nether regions.

**Bizjak:** I don't know, I don't know, maybe one day.

**Libidot:** Maybe one day we'll all walk around naked.

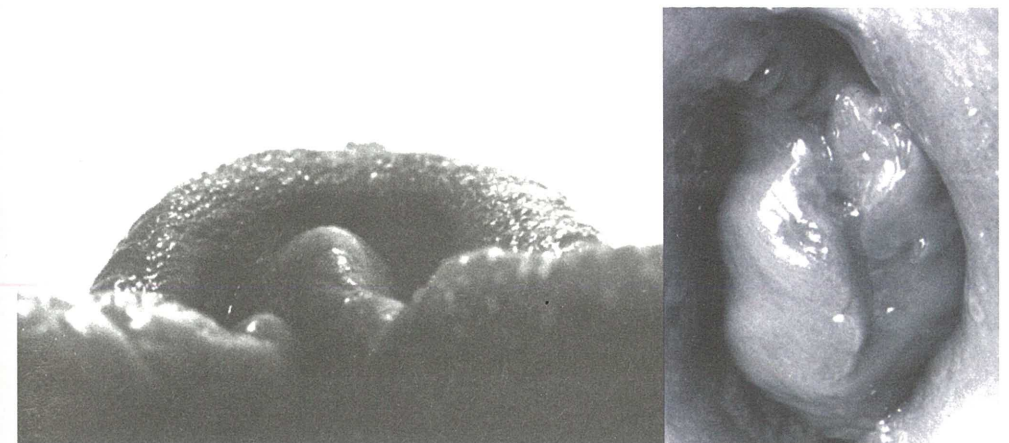
**Bizjak:** Maybe. The story of clothing is not just story of protecting our body against forces of nature, it is also the story of power against the personal, against people's pleasure, because the people who ask for their own definition of pleasures don't respect the government, because they don't need the government, they have what they need.

**Libidot:** Are you one of those people?

**Bizjak:** I think I am. Through my work I try to show how viewers can be one of those people too. I try to make people look at certain things in a way that they have not looked at them before. And my work simply shows you one way of looking between women's legs. It's not just 'a place to put your penis', but could be something else. There's a world that you can find and discover.

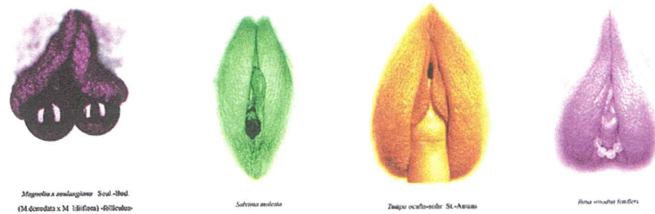
**Libidot:** So you're trying to make people look at pussies in a different way?

**Bizjak:** Yes, and maybe one day, this will be considered as an art form, you know? Art is never democratic, it's never for all the people or a mass that could understand its message. It's just for a small group of people. Someone must teach you to think in this new way, you know? If everyone understands your message, it is not art but social work. After an author's personal code becomes known and spreads into the public, art becomes a cultural form.



Rajko Bizjak, *Kanaan*, photography, 1999.





Rajko Bizjak, *Flowers*,  
photography, 1998-2001.

**Libidot:** What about Slovenian pornography? Is there like prohibition in showing genitals? What is the rule here?

**Bizjak:** We recently had a funny controversy here, when one person from a village was up until midnight watching the cable channels, and he found a porno channel and complained about this to the director of telecommunications. There was a huge debate on the TV and in the newspapers. But in the end they decided that it is legal to broadcast porn after midnight.

**Libidot:** Are there certain areas of porn that are illegal here?

**Bizjak:** No, as much as I know the only illegal categories are child pornography and necrophilia.

**Libidot:** The pussy photographs you make, why can't we call them 'pornographic'?

**Bizjak:** Pornography is not in the object. It's not in the 'pussy' or the 'dick' or in the 'sex', but in the intention. If you make a picture of a pussy or a dick, just to make someone masturbate, or make it the cheap way, let's say 'pussy, aha, click. dick, aha, click fuck, aha, you know'. This is pornography. Because you have no other intention than to earn money for this picture. But you can also show all these things in a way that it makes people think.

**Libidot:** But I don't think art is the solution. I get inspiration from commercial pornography, too. Because I think it can be very beautiful, too. I just don't look at it while masturbating. What is the problem with pornography?

**Bizjak:** Most porn movies are cheap, playing on the 'first ball', no story, only sex and cum-shot, nice bodies and a lot of sound effects. But we enjoy that and masturbate on that 'cause we know, that our sex never looks like that. I actually was a director and a cameraman for pornography in the early 1990s. The problem with porn is that it's mostly done with a low budget and, let's say if you do a science fiction movie or a western or a drama with a \$5000 budget, it will look like shit. You cannot develop the story, you cannot do the cinematography well, so nobody will look at it. In pornography, it is normal to make a porn for \$5000 and most porn is within this budget box.

**Libidot:** So you think that with a bigger budget, pornography would improve?

**Bizjak:** Yes, what we once considered as 'pornography' is already blurring into regular movies. Twenty years ago, you could almost not see full frontal nudity in the movies. Now we even have full

frontal nude speakers to deliver the news in the 'Naked Truth' show in Canada or England. But I think that there are some nice parts in each body. Not all people are as nice and beautiful as Pamela Anderson or Brad Pitt. My models are normal friends of mine who allow me to experiment with their sexual organs to make pictures and to discover some ideas.

**Libidot:** This process of working with models is interesting to me, so do you easily find models then?

**Bizjak:** It's not so hard to find models. The problem is, that for my pictures I need more intimacy that is in a normal relation between author and model. I need to explain to them that I need to come between their legs not just to see them naked. Well, of course, it was easier in the past than now. It is a bit harder because I'm older, and everybody's first reaction is 'What is this older guy doing here — looking for a cheap fuck?' But then I explain things and people know that I am serious and mostly there are no problems. Of course I do not ask everyone on the street.

**Libidot:** Can people use your pussy photographs to stimulate themselves? What is your advice for us who are more down to earth?

**Bizjak:** That visual stimulation plays an important role in human pleasure. That's why beautiful people have the advantage over others, because in our subconscious the presumption exists that you would get at least visual pleasure even if all else failed. But what we need in our relationship is time — time to show one to another our personality, our ideas, why we are the good choice. And for many people this is one more game to play, to make more pleasure in their relationship. Amen!

**Libidot:** Amen!

## January 16, 2004. LJUBLJANA.

We meet the three of us, at least two of us with a hang-over from staying out too late the night before. But we have a lot of coffee and some nice big chocolate cake. When I ask questions, they tend to both answer together, each one of course saying something a little bit differently. We are looking at many photographs of their work. They are like little female fairies who step out of the dead frames of art hand shake off the dust, seducing viewers with their superior young flesh and playful brains. But she also likes to embrace the soul of Death, as in her copulation with various skeletons, on top of sacred national monuments. She is after all the most competent ruler of the flesh, who can make any number of immaterial agents conform to her young beauty. We can see in Eclipse the body of the goddesses, who simply hunt for male flesh and leave it behind when finished. Eclipse are the Slovenian Wonder Women, as if the culture entirely had been waiting for this duo to clean the air, as making the most innocent gestures is also an important skill.



### Interview: Eclipse, Ljubljana, January 16, 2004.

'The feeling is like you are a little high. There is so much adrenalin when ideas start to materialize that we feel like queens of the world.'

**Libidot:** When did you start doing work as *Eclipse* and why did you choose to adopt that name?

**Eclipse:** We started using the name Eclipse in the year 1999, when we started with our first project, *Breakfast on the Grass*. One was a model and the other was a photographer and we started to work together. Our name indicates that one person is behind and the other one is in the front, like in an eclipse, and we make the concepts together. It means something special, something that doesn't happen every day, curiosity and a beauty that is black and white ...

**Libidot:** What is it like for you to collaborate as a collective or a duo, one more exhibitionistic, the other more behind the scenes?

**Eclipse:** This is for us the only way to realize ideas what we couldn't realize as individuals. Each of us lacks something that the other one has and, as you know, opposites attract each other.

**Libidot:** In your first project, *Breakfast on the Grass*, you made an installation of photographs and dildos on a grass surface. In your documentation, you select a text by Peter Traven: 'I am a domestic satyr, the master of the forest. I am spreading the vibration that fills up all things in it.' What kinds of objects did you decide to put between your legs and why?

**Eclipse:** The objects we chose to put between legs were completely coincidental. We took everything that would concern us in everyday life and used it. We were making the project for more than half a year so we tried to use really everything — from ideological objects such as the Bible, or European Union or communist symbols, to food, hobbies, sports, and pornodiva stuff. It was a process — a kind of ecstasy and so we did everything completely spontaneously, depending just on our mood of the moment. And then we put all the photographs in the glass, and also dildos, all these dildos with different condoms.



Eclipse, Pornorama 2001, *Birth is Such a Sweet Sorrow*, digital print, 2001.

Figure 18.

**Libidot:** I am interested in finding how artists use sexual energy to prepare art works. How do you describe the 'Eclipse' process of making art?

**Eclipse:** The feeling is like you are a little high. There is so much adrenalin when ideas start to materialize that we feel like queens of the world — there is nothing more satisfying than doing the things of your own vision. This is what we live for.

**Libidot:** What about your fantasies of naked femininity as a subversive statement?



Eclipse, *Breakfast on the Grass*, photography, 1999.

**Eclipse:** For this photograph we thought of Eve, the first woman, who didn't commit a sin with Adam, but decided to use a snake for sexual satisfaction. This photograph is *Moments of Innocence in Hunting*. There is a small detail on the picture that is crucial, but maybe you can't see it on your small version. The dog is eating a sausage from her vagina. Here we thought of ancient goddess Diana who took some time off from hunting to satisfy other needs she has.

**Libidot:** In some of your performances and installations, you portray a woman making love to a skeleton or the figure of 'death'.

**Eclipse:** We used this motif twice and with different purpose. First we took a photograph on Navje which is a very old cemetery (about 250 years) and where many of historically important Slovene artists were buried.

**Libidot:** You use the skeletons again in your recent installation *Pax Slovenica*? Can you explain the context of this piece?



Eclipse, Pornorama 2001, *Moments of Innocence in a Hunting Season*, digital print, 2001.



**Eclipse:** Since 1991, the beginning of Slovenian independence, the reconciliation between partisans and collaborators was one of the big issues here in Slovenia. At the end of every year, when journalists try to find out what the most important political issues of the year were, it was always among the top ten. The story is that immediately after the war, when the partisans won, there was a lot of killing of people on the other ideological side — the partisans killed the collaborators without any process or documentation. So there are a lot of unmarked graves in the Slovenian woods. People were not allowed to discuss that until the end of socialism and now the politicians use this subject for political votes. But also a lot of partisans and civilians died by the hand of collaborators — so this issue is for us completely absurd.

**Libidot:** Are you saying that it is useless to try to take a side in this issue?

**Eclipse:** We represent a generation that can't really relate to that problem anymore, because we didn't live it and also the guilty ones died already a long time ago. So we represented an act of reconciliation in this installation as an act of love between the red (color used for partisans and communists) and the white (color used for collaborators) to get it over with.

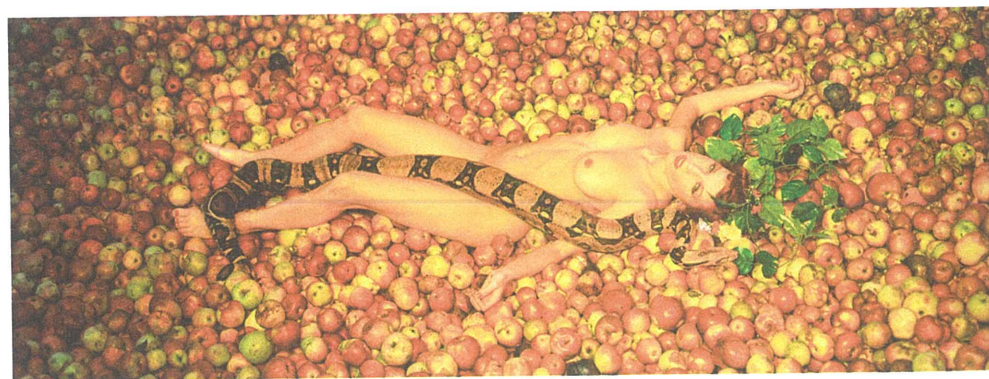
Our relatives fought on both sides. They had their own reasons for it, and they were killed by their own enemies (both partisans and collaborators). Our beliefs are different from theirs, so we do not take sides. Every ideology is repression for us. But also we are not making fun of those who think differently.

**Libidot:** Why did you use these guns in the installation? And where did you get the guns?

**Eclipse:** We actually got these guns from gun collectors. There's a part of Slovenia that has a lot of collectors, so we got their phone numbers and we paid them money. It was not that easy actually because we are not in touch with people that collect guns. And then we broke these guns into pieces and made the sculpture for our installation.

**Libidot:** Is 'peace' an important theme for your installation? Like breaking the guns into pieces and use them for another purpose?

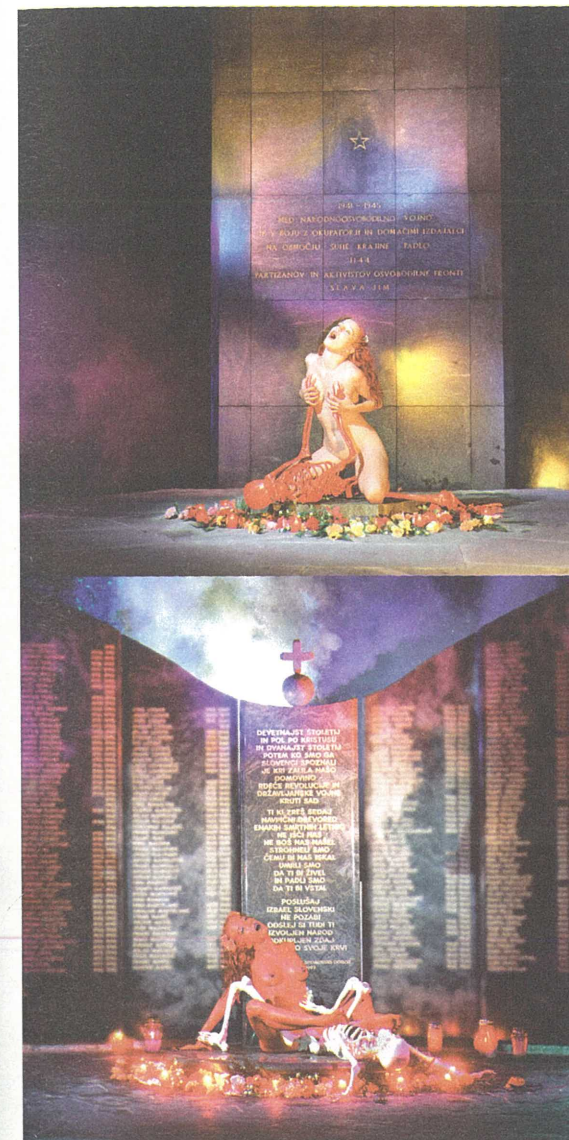
**Eclipse:** No, it is not like ... let's have peace ... or let's go to war, or something. It's more like talking about problems, not solving them. Art is not here to solve anything. It is meant to make us think. It doesn't want to convince you of its truth. It just points out some issues.



Eclipse, Pornorama 2001, *Among Sinners and Saints Lovers Dance*, digital print, 2001.

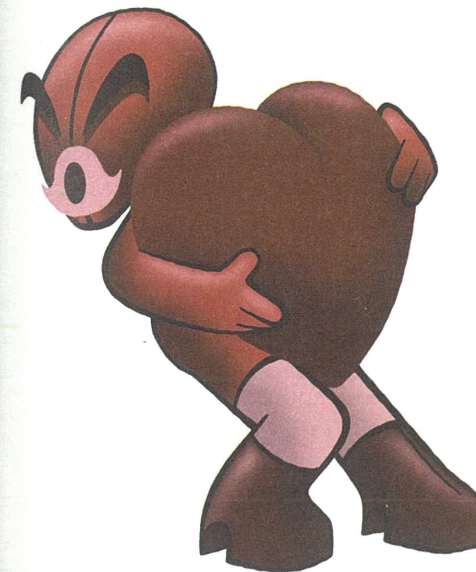
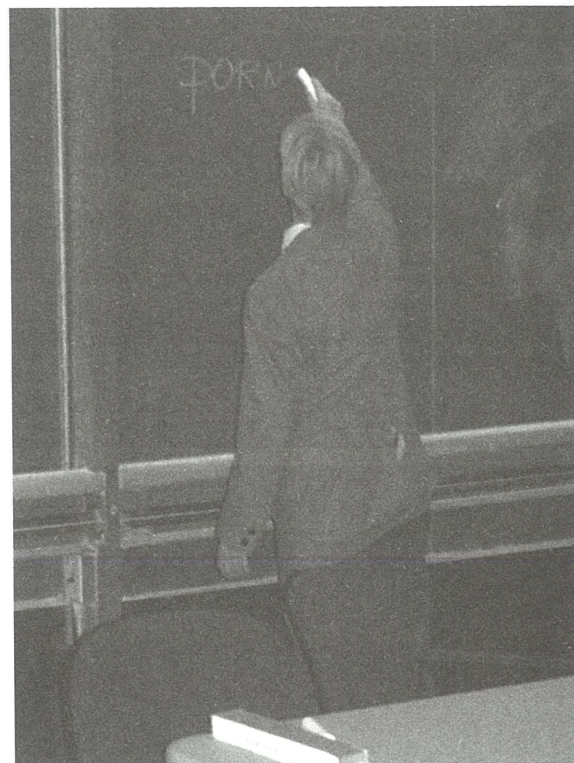
**Libidot:** I would also like to understand how your presentation of the 'sexy woman' in your works reacts to Slovenian mainstream culture? What is considered to be a sexy woman here in Slovenia?

**Eclipse:** Usually she is passive. Like an object, but a beautiful object. But what is interesting in Slovenia is that every year, readers of most popular female magazine vote for the female of the year, the Slovenian woman of the year. And this year, it's a woman that has no typical feminine side. You know for five years, she has been travelling on her motorcycle. It's a completely other type of woman and she really got a lot of votes. It's not like it was years before, we hope that means things are changing.



Eclipse, *Pax Slovenica*, print on microlens plate, 2002.  
(Photo: Rajko Bizjak)





## 8. England: Porn From The Heart Core

May 11, 2004. LONDON.

I am running around in the hub of London. Every time I enter stations of the 'tube', I see new sets of newspaper headlines scratched on white paper billboards. This week they announce a Sadean spectacle taking place in the Iraqi prison of Abu Ghraib, i.e., the evidence of systematic violent torture and sexual humiliation imposed by American military on Iraqi soldiers, including children. These stories exhibit pornographic qualities; first of all, in the 'scripting' and 'executing' of actions by the American military, and secondly, in the coverage of this sexually inclined prison torture by the mass media. Terence Blacker devotes a column in *The Independent* to the Abu Ghraib torture scandal, arguing that news media and Internet sites have started to cultivate an inherent erotic fascination with this type of cruelty, so it is harder to distinguish fiction-based porn scenes from those taking place at Abu Ghraib: "Already the pornography of cruelty and voyeurism has leached into the press, film, and TV, pushing back the boundaries of what is acceptable[...]. If the photograph of Private England dragging a naked Iraqi on a dog-lead symbolizes the clash of civilisations, there can be little doubt as to which culture is at which end of the end of its tether."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the US mistress is tied to her slave as she violently blasts apart the last defenses of the innocent victim.

<sup>1</sup> Terence Blacker, 'Pictures that Reflect the Depravity of the Internet Age.' *The Independent*, Friday May 14, 2004, p. 37.



I am in London to ponder the art of sexual openness vs. political violence, and to meet with the artists, Oreet Ashery and Brian Chalkley. Oreet Ashery is an Israeli-born artist, who migrated from Jerusalem to London several years ago, in order to escape from army duty. She calls herself a 'sinner' during the interview. It feels good to meet another 'sinner'. She is an experienced performer who makes appearances as the orthodox Jewish male, Marcus Fisher. In her project *Say Cheese*, a one-to-one live interaction performance in a hotel bedroom, the audience spends a short intimate time with Marcus Fisher together on a bed. A picture is taken of the participant which is sent to him/her later, or it is displayed in a gallery. Fisher will do most anything with the participants, but he refuses to impose or receive acts of pain.

As Ashery explains in a statement, the series of Marcus Fisher self portraits started in tribute to a close friend who 'left' when he entered Jewish orthodoxy. Her research of the specific cross-dressing codes for these portraits became fetishistic. Following Jewish folklore, she thought of herself as creating a 'Golem', or maybe a 'Dybbuk'. Golem is matter that comes to life. 'Dybbuk' refers to the sinful soul of a dead person who sticks to a living body and doesn't leave until professionally exorcised. Marcus Fisher is her queer way of investigating her Dybbuk. As she writes: "Marcus Fisher is experimental and has to be tested."<sup>2</sup> The research of her subject also led to a fascination with religious body rituals, such as the male-only ritual 'Tfillin', where men write the name of God on the arm by binding a leather strap tight enough to stop the blood flow, or 'Tashlich', when one symbolically empties their pockets of sins and throws them into the water, never to be seen again.

Oreet Ashery is happy to talk me and we have two long conversations. We have a preliminary meeting in her favorite pub in the burb of Holborn, then eat sushi in a nearby restaurant. The second meeting takes place in her flat. She appears there with her boyfriend Stephen, who is hung-over from a night out in the pub with his father. Oreet makes a pot of coffee for him and gives him two Advils for his hangover. He finishes the pot of coffee and then heads off to his reading group on contemporary philosophy. Meanwhile, I watch her construct herself as Marcus Fisher on video and photographs. I watch her go wild on a stage, dancing ecstatically and slapping around a big dildo. He is really happy showing off his 'cock'. I see can see a radiating body when he dances, it is very bright and electric and so secure of its job. I think Oreet has a ghostie just like myself. After watching the videos, I ask her a million questions and receive her answers. Now I am changed. I look at her after the interview and think of her as Marcus Fisher. It is a difficult and uncanny feeling. Her short haircut and affectionate-responsible female presence are incomplete. She is a man with Jewish locks, living on a different plane. He doesn't easily fit anywhere in our desire to meet and talk. I look at her again. She is a very girlie girl, but it now looks as if somebody removed her masculinity by force, which is sad. We leave her flat, walk along

<sup>2</sup> [www.sexmutant.com/ashery.htm](http://www.sexmutant.com/ashery.htm)

the markets in Holborn, both of us thinking about buying a coat. We both like this golden colored coat and we start babbling about this coat, then have lunch and chat some more. The ghosties are quietly having lunch too. All is well. Thank the divinities for this complex moment of love!

### Interview: Oreet Ashery, London, May 12, 2004.

#### 'THE MALES, THEY ARE NOT MEN IN SHINING ARMOR.'

**Libidot:** I'm really interested in how you started developing your personas when you were younger. How did they come along?

**Ashery:** When I was very young I used to dress up in my dad's clothes. I just kind of wore his clothes and felt strong and more empowered somehow.

**Libidot:** Did you go outside in his clothes?

**Ashery:** Yes.

**Libidot:** And did people react to them?

**Ashery:** I can't really remember. I just have this photograph taken in 1974. I can't really remember how it felt and what it was like. But I remember dressing up, always wearing my dad's shirts and trousers.

**Libidot:** But they must have been really big if you were wearing them when you were a kid.

**Ashery:** Yeah, they were huge. They were really big. I didn't look very good but I think I felt much stronger.

**Libidot:** And your parents were okay with it?

**Ashery:** Both of them were not around for it. They were not in the house, they were always working.

**Libidot:** Did you have any friends who were playing along with this idea, was it sort of more isolated?

**Ashery:** More isolated. I did hang out with many boys but it was kind of isolated. Also, it wasn't articulated as anything. My dad always said: 'Why are you not with other girls...You don't have long hair... You dress weird...' but I wasn't really aware of it. Pretty much later, in my early twenties, I became more conscious of what I was doing; I became more aware of it.

**Libidot:** Were you trying to be an artist?

**Ashery:** Well, in a funny way. Now I think about the stuff I used to do when I was very young, which is quite similar to my work now. I remember having a few friends around and I was trying to hypnotize this girl, and trying to convince everybody that I hypnotized her, and, I asked her to take off her t-shirt off and the performance was a ritual kind of thing. And later when I was about fifteen, I went to a very



dangerous high-road and started taking my clothes off on the side of the road so all the cars were skidding as they were passing by watching me. I was really checking the boundaries, using my sexuality and voyeurism, and kind of reversing the power.

**Libidot:** So I guess you have always been a performer then?

**Ashery:** Yes, but it was never about acting. I hate acting. It was about using my body, my presence to create situations.

**Libidot:** How have these characters influenced you? You've told me before you've done different characters – a black woman, Nelson Mandela, a rabbit, and so on. I wondered if can you still keep your own identity? Do you feel like you're still connected with a self?

**Ashery:** The other characters help me to express something that belongs to their world – black, farmer, rabbit – but somehow crept into mine, too.

**Libidot:** Yes, I'm curious about how the character comes about. Is it visual? Do you see an image?

**Ashery:** Mmm ... Marcus is definitely not an image. There's a whole thing connected to it. But the other characters, yeah they are like a visual, a vision, or a feeling, a sense of something, e.g., the different shades of color of the clothes, or their weight, but it very much comes from an image. The rabbit very much came from a visual image. Nelson Mandela came from a mask. My neighbor left it outside the door and I just absolutely loved it. But somehow everything else had to be covered, so you couldn't see my skin. So yeah, they're very much an image that comes alive.

**Libidot:** Do you write as your characters? Do you write stories or dialogues?

**Ashery:** As Marcus I do, yeah, a lot.

**Libidot:** Like what kind of writing?



Young Marcus,  
1997, photography.

**Ashery:** Well, as Marcus I write about the world. I also write dialogues, in relation to what's happened when people come to the bedroom. The premise was that Marcus facilitates any type of interaction apart from taking pain, and giving pain, but, anything else, I'd do. So people came to the bedroom to do what they want to do. They came one at a time and, whatever fancied their whims I did with them. So then I wrote stories with drawings and then I wrote a lot of dialogues, but the dialogues were also influenced by what other participants before had told me. I'd usually say, 'What do you want me to do, what do you want to do, what do you want us to do?' And this woman came in the bedroom and said, 'Oh, tell me you don't love me anymore,' and I was completely shocked because the sexual things are more what I expected; the physical things. But these psychological stories are actually a lot more challenging, yeah. A lot more intimate, and then, so, 'Tell me you don't love me anymore,' I said, 'I don't love you anymore,' and she said, 'Oh, is there somebody else?' and I said, 'No, its just because you never change.' and then I thought, oh where is this coming from? And then I realized that it is so much about kind of personal experiences.

**Libidot:** And, so people go insane when they hear this?

**Ashery:** I did the performance in seven cities and I got all sort of different reactions.

**Libidot:** Could you think about the performances as being measures of the different cultures?

**Ashery:** Definitely, I felt that in New York.

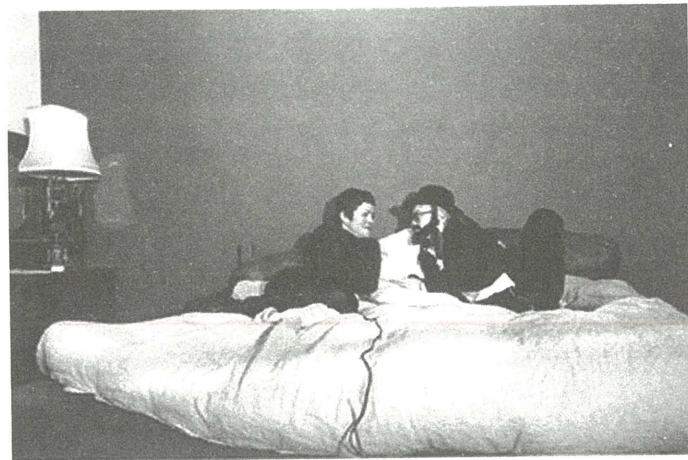
**Libidot:** Oh really, what was happening in New York?

**Ashery:** I just felt that people there did it like a talent show. Each person proposed a very definite thing that they wanted to do. So they came prepared with a dance routine, or an idea, or film script, or... and there was no space to improvise. Everything was kind of scripted. One of them wanted to



Portrait of  
Marcus Fisher, 2000





Oreet Ashery, Say Cheese  
London, Performance  
Photograph, 2001.



Oreet Ashery, Say Cheese  
Ljubljana, Performance  
Photograph 2001.



Oreet Ashery, Say Cheese  
Liverpool, Performance  
Photograph 2001.

teach me how to dance a certain dance routine; one of them wrote a whole script where they were to be blind-folded by Marcus and told me to lie on top of her and sing a Nirvana song to her.

**Libidot:** A Nirvana song?

**Ashery:** Yeah! It's a really hard one, too.

**Libidot:** I can't imagine Marcus singing a Nirvana song.

**Ashery:** It wasn't very good, but I did it. And another guy wanted this primal scream, he wanted us both to scream. But they really came prepared with everything. I really felt different. In New York it was really about how to be a good sport and, in London it was quite queer. People tended to go through more sexual things. In London, it was more sexual than anywhere else in the world I did it. There were forty participants and it really got very interesting.

**Libidot:** Has the Jewish community reacted to Marcus Fisher?

**Ashery:** I never experienced a direct kind of direct criticism from the Jewish community itself, but from the people who wanted to protect the Jewish community. A lot of times I was approached by television channels and at the last minute they would say: 'Oh no, the legal department told us to stop because we can't offend the Jewish community.' When I was going to perform in Israel, I was stopped in the last minute because I was going to offend the Jewish community. But I also had a lot of support from the Jewish community. For instance, a big essay was published about my work in a Jewish magazine by a woman who explores the Jewish gender perspective. She writes really well about gender constructs in Jewish culture, historically and contemporary, because they have the reversed gender roles.<sup>3</sup>

**Libidot:** Can you tell me a bit more about Jewish gender roles?

**Ashery:** Well, compared to European, Christian gender roles, the Jewish males, they're not men in shining armor, they don't ride horses or fight wars, they are like sissies. Because the men's habits are quite effeminate, they study all day, and then there is the whole homo-erotic thing – in Yeshivas – a 'men only' boarding school for Jewish studies – they all sleep together and work together and study together in pairs. There are a lot of homo-erotic stories about this kind of set up. And the women do the work, clean the house, they have connections to the outside world in that way, so ... they have a lot more masculine attributes. But that's all totally different in Israel because of the Israeli soldiers and the macho ... I think Israeli men produce a very 'macho' kind of masculinity, and a militant one, and so it's really a move away from that older European Jewish gender identity.

**Libidot:** So you're trying to reclaim an older order of Jewish masculinity?

**Ashery:** Yeah. And that has kind of really been eradicated in Israel, not among Orthodox Jews but in Israeli secular society.

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Rachel Greenfield, 'Transgressing the Sacred', *Jewish Quarterly*, Summer 2002.



**Libidot:** And you think it's because of the political situation of the war?

**Ashery:** Yeah. And in response to the Holocaust.

**Libidot:** So, when did you move to London?

**Ashery:** I was born in Israel and came here when I was nineteen. My entire family is still in Israel. I was in the army in Israel. All the women have to go as well. I was a weapons instructor.

**Libidot:** A weapons instructor, did you like that?

**Ashery:** Well, initially I loved it. Because it was amazing. It was very macho and it was like a game. But then when I realized it was for real, I just couldn't wait to get out, but you have to go through for two years.

**Libidot:** And so you did just two years or you escaped?

**Ashery:** No, I got married to an English guy and so was released after one year and then I came over here.

**Libidot:** How was it to come here? Had you been here before?

**Ashery:** It was a shock.

**Libidot:** Did you have culture shock?

**Ashery:** I was agoraphobic for about six months; I didn't leave the house. And I was in shock because I realized that I'd left all these things behind. I did everything I could to get out and then I realized, oh my god, I left my family, I left everything, so it was a big shock. And it was very difficult because where I lived, in the midlands, there were hardly any foreigners. The only foreigners whom I befriended were Asians.

[...]

**Ashery:** This is my film, this is a mock documentary *Marcus Fisher Likes Sex*. It was like a way to perform his death.

**Libidot:** His death?

**Ashery:** Yeah, I tried to kill him three times.

Soundtrack from *Marcus Fisher's Wake*:

*I tell you ... as soon as he could speak, the first words to come out of his tiny lips were... 'Give me a skinhead!' As a tiny child he really already wanted his hair shaved! No one knew why, but it made him so happy. What is it about shaved heads? I personally think it's so sexy. But on a child? Can you imagine? Why would a child have such desire? I guess that should have been a sign to his parents that he's not going to be an average kid, that he's going to be just a little bit different.*

*Oh yeah. A few years later something very strange happened. I'm not quite sure how it happened, but he joined an extreme Orthodox group in Jerusalem. He's only about eight here, it was one of the*

*mysterious dark groups within the Jerusalem Orthodoxy. Only God knows what that experience must have been like for him. Like I said, I don't know if he went there on his own accord, on a whim, or was seduced into it, or even kidnapped... Like they say, it runs in the blood. When he was about twelve, he moved to more respectable circles and was well adapted I would imagine.*

*Oh, this is his first pair of glasses; and what a cute jumper! You can just see him there on the left-hand corner, as a young man or old teenager. Typical. Everyone else is studying and he is daydreaming! What a daydreamer. Not a great scholar, but a fabulous dreamer. Always daydreaming about the world, he was bright, don't get me wrong. But studying wasn't his vocation.*

*This is why all the problems started.*

*Later on, everything became a bit of a mess. No one knew what was going on with him. The rumors were that he was hanging around the Orthodox neighborhoods in Jerusalem, running some kind of dodgy business. What kind of dodgy business? I don't know; I would like to know, but I don't. Only he knows. Anyway, they kept him busy. I think it was a rough time for him. This is around the time when he started developing a fetish or obsession for young pretty boys doing their thing ... Just like that. I think it was the leather straps that got him, the leather straps right in the name of God on the arm. Isn't it fabulous to write the name of God with a leather strap on your arm? He liked the way this intimate experience between One and oneself is publicly witnessed. He liked this combination of intimacy and public exposure, if you know what I mean. You're building up your own personal state of ecstasy while the rest of the world passes you by, and some watch. He had a knack for that kind of thing. But what he really liked is boys who do it really tight. He'd pull the leather strap so tight and tighter and tighter until the blood stops running into the hands and starts rushing to the head instead. Some boys would do it so tight... can you see how red the hand is? That's a real good one. Real men do it REAL tight, he used to explain. He loved everything about it. And he would just sit and watch, and the release... the release can you imagine the release when the strap comes off? ... Hmm and the blood starts to come back into the hand? He liked that bit, too. He liked the things that were kept for men only. I think they gave him a sense of belonging. At least, a momentary belonging.*

*This is the first time he came over to England, to London. He really knew how to smoke. And the problem in SoHo was that he never quite felt a part of it. He felt alienated, displaced. And people picked up on that and as he was feeling even more alienated it was like, a vicious circle. Don't get me wrong, he liked SoHo. But like I said, he didn't quite belong. Mind you, he always felt like he didn't quite belong anywhere. Some people just move freely between different states and different identities, but that's not him. He felt like he was too lost already for that. [Laugh]*

*There was always this distance between him and himself that was difficult to take.*

*Look – that's a cute boy picking up the rubbish. You see, he's trying to help him pick up the rubbish too, he's trying to be part of the scene, but deep inside I know what he's got because I'm rubbish. This is why he's collecting the rubbish around me.<sup>4</sup>*

<sup>4</sup> Oreet Ashery, *Marcus Fisher's Wake*, Video distributed by Rencontres internationales Paris



**Libidot:** Your other video *Dancing With Men*. Where was that shot?

**Ashery:** To the North of Israel where they've got a celebration every year with about 300,000 people attending, but only the men can dance. The women are supposed to wail and cry, in an area out of the way. I mean, their area is mixed; in the men's area it's men. And the men dance. So that was purely a gender intervention on my behalf.

**Libidot:** But did people notice that you were filming them?

**Ashery:** No, I mean that would have been, horrible, absolutely dangerous.

**Libidot:** So it's not a type of intervention where you want to make a point?

**Ashery:** No, no. It was just, really just, to be able to dance with them and just ...

**Libidot:** I think by doing that in a subtle way, entering this male domain, you're showing a very beautiful side of Jewish masculine culture. Because it's something I sure didn't know about and perhaps a lot other people wouldn't know either.

**Ashery:** It's a real pure celebration and a pure sort of religious ecstasy and the music is interesting because you divide it into two – the 'black' Jews and the Sephardic Jews with the little white pointy hats. They kind of use a very musical, electronic music, and the dancing is very hip, like break-dancing or rave dancing. And the Eastern Europeans use the one that looks more like, very traditional dance, with very traditional music ... so that was interesting.

**Libidot:** They come together in this festival? The different types of dances?

**Ashery:** Yeah, into different areas, they mix. So that was interesting for me to find out, but yeah, it's definitely a masculinity that's not exposed generally, when you think about Orthodox Jewish men.

**Libidot:** And also their hair is looser. Or, what is it called? The locks? The locks, when they're dancing, they become almost like long hair, almost.

**Ashery:** Yeah, well the guys who come to the festival are more eccentrics types who tend to be spiritual and they grow their locks in a mad way more like wild long hair.

**Libidot:** It's beautiful.

**Ashery:** Yeah, it's beautiful. They're really wild.

**Libidot:** It's sexy. In your other video, *Central Location*, you focus on the ritualistic shaving of heads. Marcus Fisher likes to have a shaved head, right?

**Ashery:** There's a few characters that do it. And it's different in different locations.

**Libidot:** What does it mean to you?

**Ashery:** I have researched this in how it is represented in six different Hollywood films. It is almost always an act of humiliation. In concentration camps, in nunneries, in the army; it means that the



whole body is being stripped. It is like the walk of shame that everybody has to have. One main area of interest to me is the skinhead. I saw lots of different skinheads when I was in Berlin – the fascist skinhead, the gay skinhead, and the kind of skinhead who is not fascist.

**Libidot:** So look at all these different ways in which people use the skinhead?

**Ashery:** Yes, and I don't differentiate. It's about the way people immediately read the complexities when they look at the image. For example, Marcus Fisher is not just an Orthodox Jew, because he may smoke, he may dance, his sexual orientation is questionable, the suggestion is pulling to complexity in a sense, you know ...

**Libidot:** You also mention the shaved head of Marcel Duchamp with the 5-pointed star. Were you influenced by him?

**Ashery:** Yeah, Duchamp is my main influence in terms of his ideas around the slipping between art and life, the whole playfulness of life. He really played with art, and he really played with life and with gender, and he had his alter ego, so he was really a big influence. But, in terms of the star – he did it to express his wish to become an art star – wanted to use this modernist idea of art star into the notion of identity politics.

**Libidot:** Are you also interested in Jewish occult knowledge?

**Ashery:** Yes, I found two relevant things in Jewish mythology. One is the *Golem*, which is matter that comes to life. It's very prominent in art; in terms of sculpture, and inanimate objects that come to life. Like Pinocchio. So Marcus is a bit like stepping out of a photograph and, coming to life. But also in terms of artistic agency, it works like an aura, he is bigger than himself. As the Golem is a big iconographic symbol in Jewish mythology – like it's protecting the whole city. And then the second one is the *Dibbyk*, when somebody gets possessed, usually by a bad spirit. It takes over you, and that's a bit of what Marcus is like. It took over me, and you need to exorcise it.



**Libidot:** I think I know about that, I had a similar experience. Is it a kind of affliction?

**Ashery:** It is when a dead spirit inhabits the body.

**Libidot:** So you really believed that it happened?

**Ashery:** Yeah.

**Libidot:** Okay. Um ... so and now you are trying to bring in an exorcist ... I can't do it, you know. [Laugh]

**Ashery:** I need to bring an expert to do it, you know, a ghostbuster or something.

**Libidot:** Really? And have you tried?

**Ashery:** No.

**Libidot:** You haven't found the right person?

**Ashery:** I haven't found the right person ... you know everybody wants to keep him and hold on and make it worse! [Laughter]

**Libidot:** But it's such a fantastic thing. I mean, you call it a bad spirit, but, obviously it's more complex than that.

**Ashery:** Well, he is not bad. But he is definitely a sinner. [Laughter]

I've got to read you this thing, it's about a guy, a Rabbi who tried to exorcise the sinner out of this person: "Suddenly he turned, took three paces toward the sinner, and raised his voice and ordered: 'In pure total maxima I command thee in the name of God, depart, hence, from this Jewish body in which the company of Satan did plan things.' All at once, a waning voice came forth from Moses' body. 'Oh God, where will I go? I felt so good here!'" [Laughter]

**Libidot:** Yeah. So you're saying that happened when you were younger. It wasn't a recent thing because, you know you've been with Marcus Fisher for a long time.

**Ashery:** And also it's continuously happening with people, like when I met with Peggy Phelan, and then the next day she just kind of came and said: 'I've dreamt about Marcus, you mustn't kill him, you mustn't kill him.....' I've never met anybody who has said, 'It's time for him to go'. Never. I bring different people to find that out. But, you know I've decided not to kill him anymore ... not to try it.

**Libidot:** Yes, I like Marcus too. But maybe you could let him just evaporate? I am glad that I saw you perform on the video, because it throws a whole different light on your personality. How did you develop that?

**Ashery:** I had a lot of problems with it because I'm not interested in stage performance. I'm always interested in interacting and reactions and people being active. In that way it comes slightly against the grain. But it was quite specific to really try to make entertainment out of it. So I tried to do it in clubs, something that is just away from high art. And there were certain Jewish rituals or Jewish religious symbolism that I just wanted to use, and the whole idea around masturbation is very complex

and it's obviously sinful. I was always interested in a kind of trendy shamanism where it's kind of a dance with music.

**Libidot:** It's ecstatic, though.

**Ashery:** Yeah, but at the same time it comes from a sort of spiritual tradition ...

**Libidot:** And so, the audience reacted well to you?

**Ashery:** Yeah. In a club environment, I mean people just got off on it and there's was live music and the dildos were very much a exploration of the Jewish penis, which is such another big area – It's where all the anti-Semitic propaganda goes, because Jews are portrayed in Nazi Germany either as having huge dicks, or as having tiny dicks. They're either kind of complete sexual animals or they're totally effeminate and have got tiny dicks. So that's when in the performances, I'll either have a tiny little finger that I'll just pull and throw to the audience. So it's just a tiny dick like, tiny, like a plastic finger you get from a magic shop. [Laughter] And you throw it and people just try and catch it. But I was never interested in drag performances or being a drag king entertainer. It was really to look at the bodily rituals that men do, in Jewish religion, and play with them. Sounds very light-hearted, but it's not, really, it's just kind of thinking through them.

**Libidot:** It makes you a sinner. [Laugh]

**Ashery:** Yeah, and you're not allowed to do it. So I did that, but then I'd do it, and then I kind of beat myself ... So the idea comes from Jewish religion, where every year there is a day that you fast and beat yourself, like that, and say all the bad things you've done for the year, so I've done this and this and this and that and that and that. I've done stuff with eggs, the way Jewish people are seen in the mass media like really messy eaters. Like in *Sex and the City*, Charlotte's boyfriend, Harry's like, really eating messy, he was eating and like the stuff was going into people's faces; the egg went everywhere, and the beer ... it really was disgusting and ah ...

**Libidot:** So you were snorting an egg ...

**Ashery:** Yeah. It's like eggs, drugs and rock'n'roll, so it was snorting egg instead of coke.

**Libidot:** Now, what about this performance you did in a Turkish cafe, in Berlin?

**Ashery:** I always just loved this environment and, of course, as a woman I can't go there, so I thought 'Oh, great, Marcus can do that,' so, I just went to one in Berlin and it was amazing because they were very welcoming. I went with a German friend and, he actually asked them if he could video. He said, this is my cousin from England and he came to visit and would you mind if we have a cup of tea and video the place, we didn't want to kind of do it without them knowing, and they were fine about that and it was.

**Libidot:** Did they know you were a female in drag?

**Ashery:** No, no. They are strictly men-only places.

**Libidot:** But then, your voice is quite high.



**Ashery:** I'm also not interested to change that.

**Libidot:** Or taking hormones, you're not interested in that?

**Ashery:** I'm not interested in that.

**Libidot:** Another thing that I wanted to ask you was, in one of your videos, you explain that Marcus is fundamentally lost.

**Libidot:** Yeah, I think it's on two levels. I think, one level I'm very wary of being part of anything, you know. Even if it's subculture, or the gay community as well, because I think that's just as coded, and exclusive as any other community. So the whole kind of identification with a lesbian community or a queer community, I find quite dodgy in any respect. Because having grown up an Israeli girl, where you've got us and them, it's all like, Palestinians vs. Jews, secular vs. religion, Black Jews vs. White Jews. You've got all these kinds of groups and it's all about power and exploitation and exclusion. But the other level of saying that Marcus Fisher is lost, is in relation to the philosophy of identity because, the philosophy of identity is changing all the time. Because I was saying that identity is multi-polar, so I mean where do we go from there, anyway? They say some people move easily between different identities, but Marcus is too late for them already.

**Libidot:** It freaks people out, right?

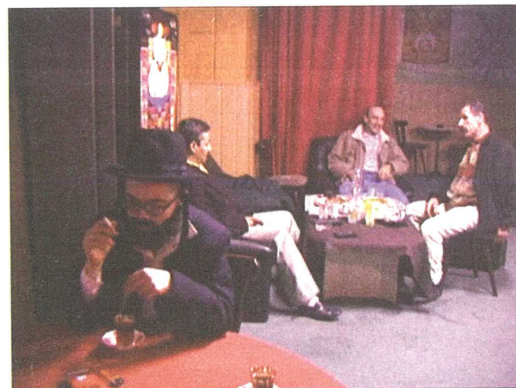
**Ashery:** People get very scared. But sometimes I've been in the street and people just say 'Can I help you, sir?'

**Libidot:** When you're not dressed up, you mean?

**Ashery:** Well just, that's been throughout my life, you know sometimes in public toilets people will say, 'Excuse me, sir, I mean this is a female toilet.'

**Libidot:** People get a sexual charge out of it, too, probably, the gender confusion?

**Ashery:** My main thing in my work as well is to say that female sexuality has really nothing to do with sexual orientation, it really has to do with being a woman, and that is what interests me. What is



Turkish Men's café, video still, 2000.

female sexuality? It's not really to do with sexual preferences and orientation, but it's also just to do with being a woman. As a female, what is our sense of masculinity?

**Libidot:** So how would you describe your gender?

**Ashery:** I'd say probably female with male fantasies, it would be the best way.

**Libidot:** To go back to your explanation of 'being possessed'... that also questions the way we think about sexual orientation and gender. I mean if you're feeling like that happened to you, then, you know everything else becomes different because there's no neat way of thinking about it.

**Ashery:** Androgyny is also completely fashionable. You know, for young women, androgyny is just trendy. And I feel that that's not accidental. It does point to some sort of authenticity. If you look at it environmentally, because of all the female hormones in water, animals and fish are becoming feminized. It's all kind of there but it's just kind of surfacing in a way. But again in the Bible there's a very interesting section which I found so fascinating, where they say 'don't mix meat and milk,' 'don't mix wool and cotton,' 'a woman mustn't wear men's clothes and men mustn't wear women's ...' so in the Bible already it had the idea that God created things in sections, so don't mess it up. Don't interfere with God's kind of divisions and order. The idea of that genetic modification is not healthy. Of course there is a great wisdom about this ordering, the warning to not mix, I think, you know, I mean on one hand ...

**Libidot:** There's reasons for those warnings, you're saying? I guess if you look at it that way, so that there's the big order and divisions, but there's some exceptions, let say, then we are exceptions, and my book is about these exceptions. But do you think these exceptions are getting more numerous?

**Ashery:** I think it's surfacing, it's surfacing to consciousness. I think what's happening is, for example in the medical profession, doctors just never knew much about transsexualism. Now there's just a lot more awareness about that. I think we're becoming aware of it. I think there's a growing awareness which allows people to be totally moving towards a kind of, dissolving of the female and male. I think that the main investment in the gender binary is capitalism. It's really making more men and women servants. And I think in the future, not when we're alive, it will be a whole different thing; I'm sure of that.



Oreet Ashery, Soho Intervention, video still 2001.



## Dr. Jacobs 10: 251am 12/27/2004 Ghostie Rises / The Kierkegaards



Libidot,

Could we now speculate that you are guided by an invisible entity that has supported your wandering self, like an intuition or a guardian angel? Do you really believe in these concepts? Or is it more like a constructed identity that you've used to carry out this trip?

I just wanted to tell you that 'Ghostie' and 'ghostwriting' is not unprecedented in the history of philosophy and critical writing. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the Danish philosopher Kierkegaard came out with the fact that he had been publishing his works under various alter egos in order to test out novel ideas. As a forerunner of 'postmodern' thought, Kierkegaard took issue with Hegelian philosophy, arguing that different types of consciousness may bring out different trains of thought and results in people. In his belief, there was no need to synthesize these 'minds' and 'findings'. In his book *Either/Or*, for instance, he used dual authorship ('seducer' vs. 'Wilhelm') to develop the trope of the 'dilemma'. As Door Ger Groot explains: "There is no unifying point of view that he uses to solve the dilemma. The dilemma lies in what he calls a struggle between 'ethical' and 'aesthetic' life visions. The seducer stands for enjoyment as the highest value and the decision to live freely in each transitory moment. 'Wilhelm' argues against this approach because it is 'empty' and does not lead to results and hence the seducer becomes tired of himself."<sup>5</sup> Kierkegaard mostly concealed his alter egos but at times would reveal fragments of his heuristic role-play towards critics and readers. He specifically used alter egos to work through religious questions and discuss aspects of love and seduction.

Is there anything to be gained by accepting a phantom personality into your life? This is the question that you asked the very first artists on your quest, Zoot and Genant from Amsterdam. They explained that there is a certain freedom associated with exploring alternate scenarios and personas in performance, without aiming to stabilize in one as an 'essential' nature. They believe that the essence of pleasure lies in the fact that there is no clearly defined natural role or essence to follow. And now you seem to get even clearer insights, when interviewing Oreet Ashery. Ashery is a female artist who makes appearances as an orthodox Jewish male, Marcus

Fisher. She seems to say that Marcus Fisher has changed her thoroughly and left traces, as she decided to cultivate his gestures and identity. She also suggest that such phantom cannot be just simply thrown away when the performer feels overly burdened, as it is the instigator for creating multiple existences, and alliances with others. Scary thought!

Many contemporary philosophers have argued for the dissolution of the 'little self' as an enhancing life-goal and a required political strategy. For instance, Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, wrote that the little self is always connected to varieties of 'packs' and 'masses': "Any individual caught up in a mass has his own pack consciousness ... an individual will live out in its unconscious the masses and packs of another mass or another individual..."<sup>6</sup> The phantom thus becomes alive and is linked to other packs (e.g., gay/lesbian clubs) or masses (e.g., readers of *Playboy* magazine) but they do not find homes as comrades in the commune - socialist club, feminist hippie houses, progressive sex clinic - they are the misfits to communes and their sexual connections are made in unpredictable places.

Many sex artists on your journey have phantom personalities and opted to make art with them - Jeannette Groenendaal became 'Genant', 'G-net' and 'Genet'. Francesca da Rimini (an Italian beauty whose story is immortalized in Dante's *Divine Comedy*) became 'Gashgirl', 'Doll yoko' and the 'Puppet Mistress' to engage in erotic role-playing correspondences on the web. 'Piepke' is the alter ego of a Belgian artist who paints gay sex scenes. Somebody invented this artist-name for him and he thought it was more appropriate for him and his work than his real name, so he decided to adopt it.

Hence, the phantom can be thought of as those visible and invisible human forces coming together, like the different guises of Kierkegaard having an intellectual picnic; becoming-feminine - warmth, giggles, unexpected love, unabashed longing, unusual alliance with other ghosties as the most truthful experiences. But the ghostie is also becoming-masculine - a fervent and introverted thinker who takes a break from the amorous self, to articulate darker wisdoms in the company of other artists and thinkers.

Do you think your phantom, or your 'ghostie' as you call it, has been having these kinds of meetings, too?

Dr. Jacobs

<sup>5</sup> Door Ger Groot 'Schaduwschrijver' De Groene Amsterdammer [http://www.groene.nl/2000/0017/gg\\_kierkegaard.html](http://www.groene.nl/2000/0017/gg_kierkegaard.html) (accessed April 29, 2002). My own translation.

<sup>6</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press), p.35.



## May 18, 2004. LONDON.

Niki Kuo just forwarded a naked picture of Brian/Dawn, her lecturer at the Chelsea College of Art and Design, and suggests that I go meet with him. I take a good look at the picture, he looks female on top and male on the bottom. As a matter of fact, he has got a huge cock. I email him that I would like to meet with him. The first time we meet, we have polite conversation in the Chelsea Faculty Club, an upper-upper class bar and restaurant for members only, located just around the corner from the Chelsea College of Art and Design, the renowned London art academy where Brian/Dawn is a lecturer.

The second time around, we go to his apartment, a sprawling loft-like space located in the suburb of Hackney. We sit down in his well-equipped kitchen and he gives me a book of drawings, *Dawn in Wonderland*, with a CD-Rom in the back cover. The drawings in the book and stories on the CD-Rom reveal Brian/Dawn's complex life as a trans-sexual. Dawn



London landmarks, Houses of Parliament, Ferris Wheel, Tate Modern, Tower Bridge.

is sitting on her bed, lonely. Then she is lying on her bed embracing another woman (a little bit uncomfortably). Oftentimes, she is tied to the bed with her butt sticking out, ready to receive a spanking from a masked figure. Way to go, Dawn! (Or how would you cheer a spankee in the UK?) She is wearing sexy lingerie, partially covering her huge erect cock. Then she is lying on bed next to a man, her cock sticking out of a hole in her lingerie. She has a slightly chubby body with two love cavities, an anus and a pussy. Somebody is sucking her dick, giving her a blow job.

The CD-Rom has excerpts of his/her 'back alley' stories. In one of the stories, Dawn goes to a club. She is very shy. She falls into a flirtatious conversation with a man, then agrees to receive a blowjob in the toilet. It happens to be a life-transforming blowjob.

And somebody told me 'You should go to London and meet so-and-so. His name is Brian Chalkley.' And of course I know that London is not the promised land that I am looking for. Somebody tells me about the charms of the city – Houses of Parliament, Ferris Wheel, Tate Modern, Tower Bridge – but I soon enough end up in Hackney in his kitchen (if not on his kitchen floor).

### Interview: Brian Chalkley, London, May 14, 2004.

'And then there's this kind of fracturing, when these other lives take over, like the guy that I'm talking about is walking by a club and he doesn't go by, he just goes "oomph!"'

**Libidot:** This is just a starting point. Because I mean, we don't know each other that well. I mean, I didn't give you questions or anything that's not my style. Because you know what, when I give people questions they mostly ignore them. I've tried that approach many times, I make my list of questions. I send them in advance. But when I arrive to see them, these questions are not very helpful at all.

**Brian/Dawn:** That would be a bit cold, wouldn't it?

**Libidot:** Yes, a bit cold. So, I mean, I do not know your work but I want to ask a simple question. Are you anti-smoking in this house?

**Brian/Dawn:** No. I can get you an ashtray.

**Libidot:** So you told me you that you are a story-teller. Are they made-up, these stories?

**Brian/Dawn:** The stories are not made up. They are based on events, although I tend to elaborate a little bit. I forget things. I add things. I invent certain things. But the basis of it is always something that occurred. When you're in a club or something, people might say very intimate things.

**Libidot:** So these are stories that people told you?



**Brian/Dawn:** Yeah, or they are like a series of events. I mean there is one in my book *Dawn in Wonderland*, where a guy tells me his story of going to clubs, and obsessed, really, with sex. And, ah, and living with his mother.

**Libidot:** Yeah? [Laugh]

**Brian/Dawn:** And going to sex clubs and things. And just becoming obsessed by it. And the point of the story really is to say that he got to a point in his life where he felt that he had to do something else, because it became like a drug, and he had to stop. I always remember him saying 'I have to stop these things.' But he is still there's in the club on Thursdays, he was just down there the other day. I'm sure that he probably is having a kind of quiet classic situation, where people have got a strong family life and then there's this point where they kind of, '*Oomph!*'

**Libidot:** They snap or what? [Laughter]

**Brian/Dawn:** Yeah! and they have to go to the club and meet strange people and ...

**Libidot:** So what kind of a club is that?

**Brian/Dawn:** Well Ted's is basically a gay club, but on Thursday nights it's for transvestites and transsexuals. And, and it's in a basement, and it's seedy, and there's a bit of dancing and drinks and that's it, really. But, I think it's one of those places that somebody like him might have that compulsive desire just to go in there. Because I think probably people in there are all involved with some compulsion or desire which they might, when they go out, sort of say 'Yeah, I'm not doing that again.' I think it's all sort of based on some sort of desire or obsession in a way.

**Libidot:** Obsession? Do you see it as a negative impulse then?

**Brian/Dawn:** I wonder, I might be coming across as saying that as a negative. Yeah, because I think that there is a part of me that sort of never entirely accepted it, so, um, yeah so I think I am battling with it all the time. Yeah, probably a bit like that.

**Libidot:** Ah, oh, okay... So you're like that, too?

**Brian/Dawn:** Yeah, a little bit, yeah. Yeah, I've never entirely accepted that position.

**Libidot:** Oh, you mean the double identity position?

**Brian/Dawn:** Yeah, yeah.

**Libidot:** But you made a book about it.

**Brian/Dawn:** Exactly, I mean it's very public on the one hand, but I think for me I've never really quite been at 'one' with it. Although, it's interesting because I've been out for a long time, and I went out last Friday and it just felt fantastic. And I thought 'Why do I resist it?' You know, because it just felt so good.

**Libidot:** It is difficult, I guess?

**Brian/Dawn:** Yeah, very difficult. I was interested in a statement by the Spanish director, Pedro Almodovar, who always uses transsexuals in his movies. There was an interview with him in *The*

*Guardian*. Somebody asked, 'Why do you always use transsexuals and transvestites in your films?' And he said, 'Well they set the tone in a way that questions everybody else's identity as well.' And the journalist said: 'Would you have ever wanted to be a transsexual or transvestite yourself?' He said no, because it's a very harsh reality, because you've got only ten years to do it, and then it's quite difficult.

**Libidot:** But why would you aspire to look young or attractive?

**Brian/Dawn:** You aspire to some kind of perfection. Why are you making that decision and what would be the long term consequences, is based on being a glamorous image.

**Libidot:** So it's about this glamorous image?

**Brian/Dawn:** I think it's more about ... when you dress it's like ... here's a different kind of history. So I don't have my own history.

**Libidot:** So you have two histories?

**Brian/Dawn:** Yes, exactly. So I have the history of Brian, and I have an escape from that history. So I don't have the same pressures, or the same set of memories.

**Libidot:** So you have memories as Dawn as well?

**Brian/Dawn:** Yes, absolutely. Yeah.

**Libidot:** A lot? I mean, a whole life now?

**Brian/Dawn:** Maybe there are several selves. But I mean we are talking about English society, which is structured particularly as a sort of shoring up of material certainties, jobs, and living out some sort of conventions, if you like; or what society might see as the way of doing it. And then there's this kind of fracturing, when these other lives takes over, like the guy that I'm talking about is walking by a club and he doesn't go by, he just goes "oomph!" and, yeah, he's suddenly, let go on it. And, I can strongly relate to that.

**Libidot:** You know, the libido is kind of a quirky thing, right?

**Brian/Dawn:** It can become extraordinary. For instance, I've got this friend who, who comes around occasionally, and it might be like 'God almighty why is this person here, because they've got nothing in common with me!' But, the thing is, the one great thing is that we can be here talking, and then we'll say 'Oh, we'll go out.' And then two hours later, an hour and a half later, he goes 'Oh, you look fantastic!' That is, like, an extraordinary transition that takes place in that relationship. It's so powerful.

I have a friend named Christine who is a woman. It was the same thing with her. She just wanted to see me as Dawn. She wouldn't want to see me as Brian at all. So every time I came around, I had to get dressed in order to meet her. But that became a complete and incredible strain on the whole thing. You know? There was a point where we said, well, I can't go on with this, you know?

**Libidot:** It's really the blurring of art and life, isn't it? Because if you're thinking about it in the theatrical tradition, the history of theater, or even acting for movies, then people become 'characters' and



change back into their normal selves. But here we have the backstage life of people, who all have their egos or multiple identities?

**Brian/Dawn:** I started going out in 1996-1997, and so that was the first time. I was horrendously scared, but I did it and then that was a great liberation, suddenly. Now, everything as a result...wasn't as great! [Laughter] Before I was always sort of shelving it, or sort of putting it back somewhere, or trying to avoid it.

**Libidot:** And what kind of art were you making?

**Brian/Dawn:** Painting, abstract painting. There was a period of big figurative paintings made in industrial landscapes in the North of England and then I went and did a residency in Rome. But it wasn't until I went out as Dawn that, I suppose, for a lack of a better term, art and life began to sort of integrate. Because I was never happy with that work. I was always thinking about the position of art and where I was in relation to that. But then I was coming back from clubs and, doing drawings. And thinking well, what do I do with these drawings?

**Libidot:** Because you were used to showing your work as a painter?

**Brian/Dawn:** Yeah, I mean I was known as a painter. You know, not doing anything wonderful or anything but a sort of serious painter. So it was quite a shock to a lot of people when this happened.

**Libidot:** Your friends who knew you as a painter, what did they say?

**Brian/Dawn:** I think one of the major questions was if this was an art 'move'. This was the term, whether it was an art 'move' or not. Well, I said, no, it wasn't. Some people sort of couldn't handle it. There were other people who sort of, kind of, embraced it more.

**Libidot:** What kinds of outfits did you try in all those years?

**Brian/Dawn:** I tried lots of different things. It got down to something sort of ordinary, a little sort of office outfit.

**Libidot:** Oh, really?

**Brian/Dawn:** It wasn't like, a big glam thing, you know. It was quite straight, in a sense.

**Libidot:** Like a two-piece suit, or what?

**Brian/Dawn:** Yeah, yeah.

**Libidot:** And high heels?

**Brian/Dawn:** Yeah.

**Libidot:** Do you like that, high heels?

**Brian/Dawn:** Yeah, yeah.

**Libidot:** And the wig...what kind of wig?

**Brian/Dawn:** It was a blond wig, well, not quite blond, but it was very difficult finding all these things that fit. Because it's searching for the image.

**Libidot:** It's very difficult, yeah. Did people help you, or did you do it alone?

**Brian/Dawn:** No, well, I picked up a lot from talking with people and then just looking at them, particular kinds of ways of doing make-up, and that was the most difficult thing. And now I've got it into a sort of exactly what I want and I just don't have to spend tons of money on make-up. You know, I just know the look, I can just do it, you know, straight up. There is a particular friend who, she's been a drag queen at Madam JoJo's when she was younger and she still looks fantastic. I just looked at her make-up and watched it.

**Libidot:** Can I see some pictures maybe?

**Brian/Dawn:** I knew you would ask that. [Laughter] I've also a video I made at night in the woods lit up with car headlights. It's called *I Guess I Want Perfection in Everything I Do, and a Little Bit More. Maybe That Will Be My Downfall*. That comes out of a *Dazed and Confused* magazine. A model wrote that a long time ago now. It has a still image of myself lying in the woods and the sound-track is composed of some of my stories. I like night scenes, when you're not sure whether the figures that are in this pose are dead or not.

**Libidot:** Why did you go outdoors to shoot this video?

**Brian/Dawn:** I like the relationship between the glamour and a very organic situation.

**Libidot:** So, yeah, these dialogues you bring as a story-teller, right... are they sort of like things that are going around in your head? They are based on a real conversation.

**Brian/Dawn:** Absolutely. There's nothing invented in these conversations.

**Libidot:** But you didn't record them?

**Brian/Dawn:** No, no. I didn't record them, but I did try to at one point to write them down. And, I think the fact is that writing is another language.

**Libidot:** Yes, it's very different. So do you have a lot of these types of conversations?

**Brian/Dawn:** Yeah.

**Libidot:** So you like talking to people?

**Brian/Dawn:** Yes, I do.

**Libidot:** Chatting? I mean, it's like flirting.

**Brian/Dawn:** Yeah, yeah, I do when I'm Dawn. Yeah, I like flirting with people.



**Libidot:** Yeah, more than Brian?

**Brian/Dawn:** Yeah, I do, yeah.

**Libidot:** And it's just the costume that creates the difference?

**Brian/Dawn:** I think it's partly that.

**Libidot:** So you're not an extrovert in real life, maybe? But you're also a teacher, so you talk to students all the time.

**Brian/Dawn:** But I'm meeting people and not artists, and people talking about their lives, and they're talking about things that have nothing to do with some kind of art thing. They're just telling me about an experience, and I think that's really interesting. Yeah, there's a kind of intimacy about that, which I really enjoy. And I really feel very honored sometimes, in that role. I mean, that intimacy might be shrouded by the fact that there's a sexual thing that's going on. Not always, but there's probably some kind of sexuality that's underlying that. But whether or not that happens is besides the point.

**Libidot:** So it's about the sexual component of communication?

**Brian/Dawn:** I think that desire is a kind of drive, if you like. But, that one is very particular because it's a bit more like 'I fancy you' and all that sort of stuff, whereas some other person likes telling me about his brothers, who are total criminals. I mean, they really are serious criminals, they're drug dealers, and he's a plumber. And he's into going to sex clubs and things. And he's married with a child, but his two brothers are serious criminals. They're all really heavy and they beat people up, and they do nasty things to people.

Then there is another guy, he's a high flying sort of financier who works for a bank, and he's flying all over the country. And I met him again at this club, and he took me out for a meal once. Now, he doesn't want to see me as Brian, he wants to see me as Dawn. So I get dressed up as Dawn and then he rings up my hotel room, and then he comes with his bottle of champagne. He comes with his food, and then he'll take me to restaurants. And then he's worried all the time that his son who's at Manchester College would see him walking about the street with this strange woman! He's saying things like, 'God I wish I had met you three years ago but I've gotten married again, you know.' It's so difficult now. What the hell is going on here!

**Libidot:** Are you really looking for people, also? You're looking to meet somebody more seriously?

**Brian/Dawn:** You know most trannies say this, that they really want a boyfriend, you know. And it doesn't matter what the hell they're like, you know, they go crazy! Because I think the boyfriend reinforces the persona.

**Libidot:** But it's different from having the boyfriend, as Brian?

**Brian/Dawn:** Oh, yes, that's totally different. Because then Brian wouldn't be thinking about the boyfriend.

**Libidot:** No?

**Brian/Dawn:** No. Maybe he hasn't come to terms with that... maybe he's only come to terms with that through the act of some disguise.

**Libidot:** So, that's the confusion.

**Brian/Dawn:** Yeah, that's a confusion.

**Libidot:** So, you can't say your bisexual for instance, either?

**Brian/Dawn:** No, I think that becomes a mess now. That's just something I'm trying to work with really, yeah.

**Libidot:** So, you're sort of like, as Dawn you want a man, and not when you're Brian? And that's the confusing part?

**Brian/Dawn:** Yeah, I think it is, yeah.

**Libidot:** Because I really thought you were gay. I mean straightforwardly gay.

**Brian/Dawn:** Yeah well I'm coming to terms with the fact that I probably am gay!

**Libidot:** I was just thinking when we met the first time, I was thinking, you're probably gay. But still you've had relationships with women?

**Brian/Dawn:** Yeah, I used to have lots of relationships with women. But, when I started going out with Dawn then that just stopped.

**Libidot:** So Dawn doesn't want a girlfriend?

**Brian/Dawn:** No, well when I went out with Christine, it's like well, we went out for five years and it still was off and on, but it was becoming crazy.

**Libidot:** And she only wanted you as female, right?

**Brian/Dawn:** To begin with, yeah.

**Libidot:** Man, it's confusing isn't it?

**Brian/Dawn:** Yeah, and then I said, well I might give up being Dawn. And she said, 'Well if you give up being Dawn there's no point in our settling in a relationship.' No, well really basically she's probably lesbian and she's not come to terms with that. She's only seeing it through this disguise. It might be the same with me, that I might be really gay, but I can only deal with it through this facade of being a woman.

**Libidot:** But then maybe you're going to get rid of the Dawn and just be a gay man? Can I smoke another cigarette?

**Brian/Dawn:** Yeah, sure.





Brian/Dawn Chalkley, Dawn 1, Performance, 2004.



Brian/Dawn Chalkley. Dawn 2, Performance, 2004.



Brain/Dawn Chalkley, Dress in Woods, Installation, 2003.

I AM NOT FOR THE RESPECTABLE FACE OF DRAG, AS PARODY, AS VAUDEVILLE, AS FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT.

I AM NOT FOR THE TRANSEXUAL WHO WANTS TO BE ACCEPTED AS A REAL WOMAN AND FIT COMFORTABLY WITHIN SOCIETY.

I AM FOR THE TRANNY STANDING ON POLK STREET IN SAN FRANCISCO SERVICING THE EARLY MORNING WORKFORCE.

I AM FOR THE BADLY APPLIED MAKE UP.

I AM FOR THE MIRRORED EXCESS OF BEAUTY.

I AM FOR THE VOID BETWEEN THE IMAGINED AND THE SO CALLED REAL.

I AM FOR THE PAINFUL LACK OF.

I AM FOR THE BROKEN AESTHETIC OF THE DESIRABLE.

I AM FOR THE MASQUERADE.

I AM FOR THE ATTEMPT AT THE IMAGINED.

I AM FOR THE ATTEMPT AT THE DESIRED.

I AM FOR THE FAKE FUR COAT.

I AM FOR BADLY APPLIED FALSE EYELASHES.

I AM FOR BADLY APPLIED EYELINER.

I AM FOR ILL FITTING PLASTIC TITS.

I AM FOR THE JOHN DESPERATE FOR A FUCK.

I AM FOR THE JOHN WHO CAN NO LONGER GET IT UP WITH HIS WIFE.

I AM FOR LIARS AND CON ARTISTS.

I AM FOR THE JOHN THAT GROPE ME IN THE DARK.

I AM FOR THE TRANNY WAITING FOR HER PAYCHECK FROM THE JOHN WHO SAYS HE LOVES HER.

I AM FOR THE TRANNY WHO GETS ME TO BUY A SLICE OF PIZZA BECAUSE SHE HAS NO MONEY.

I AM FOR THE TRANNY WHOSE CHEAP LIPSTICK MIXES WITH THE TOMATOE SAUCE.

I AM FOR THE TRANNY WHOSE MAKE UP HAS SMEARED FROM GIVING TOO MANY BLOW JOBS.

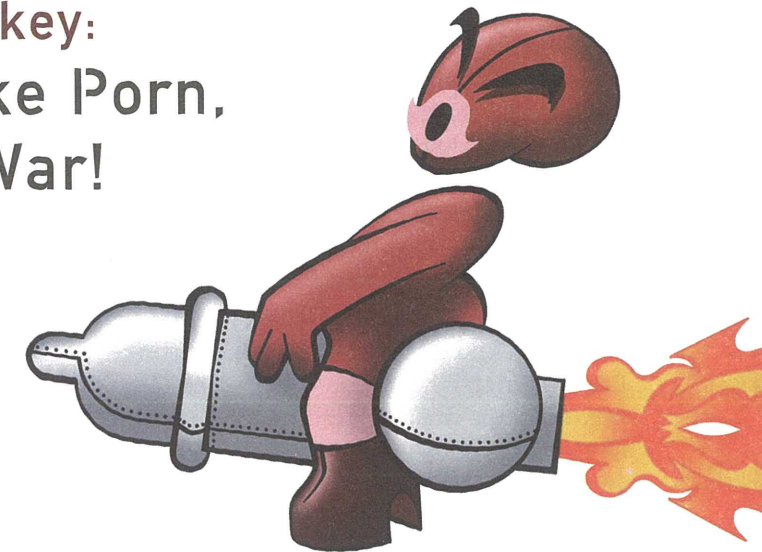


I AM FOR THE TRANNY WHO LIKES BEING FUCKED IN THE DARK.  
 I AM FOR THE TRANNY AFTER A NIGHT OUT STANDING IN THE QUEUE  
 FOR A SALT BEEF SANDWICH IN E1.  
 I AM FOR THE JOHN WHO LIKES TO WATCH ME DANCE.  
 I AM FOR THE JOHN WHO WANTS TO TAKE ME TO A CLASSEY  
 RESTAURANT.  
 I AM FOR THE JOHN WHO THINKS I'M BEAUTIFUL.  
 I AM FOR THE TRANNY WHO LOOKS IN THE MIRROR AND FEELS SHIT.  
 I AM FOR THE TRANNY WHO FEELS AND LOOKS LIKE A MOVIE STAR.  
 I AM FOR THE TRANNY WHO GETS HOME WITHOUT A FUCK.  
 I AM FOR THE TRANNY WHO LOOKS LIKE MY AUNT.  
 I AM FOR THE TRANNY WHO GETS SLAPPED AROUND WHEN THE FUCK  
 GOES WRONG.  
 I AM FOR THE TRANNY WHO CAN'T GO OUT.  
 I AM FOR THE TRANNY THAT SAYS FUCK YOU.  
 I AM FOR THE SEVENTY YEAR OLD TRANNY DANCING ON THE PODIUM.  
 I AM FOR THE TRANNY THAT WALKS DOWN THE STREET IN DAYLIGHT.  
 I AM FOR THE TRANNY WHO SHOPS IN M&S.  
 I AM FOR THE JOHN WHO SAYS I AM NOT GAY. I JUST LIKE TRANNYS.  
 I AM FOR THE TRANNY WHO GOES TO WORK WITH LAST NIGHT'S  
 MASCARA.  
 I AM FOR THE TRANNY WHO LONGS FOR A PERMANENT RELATIONSHIP.  
 I AM FOR THE TRANNY WHOSE DRESSING IS AN ACT OF SURVIVAL.  
 I AM FOR THE TRANNY WHOSE DRESSING IS FUCK YOU.  
 I AM FOR THE TRANNY WHO STAYS IN THE DARKROOM ALL NIGHT.  
 I AM FOR THE TRANNY WHO GETS HER BAG STOLEN IN A PORN CINEMA.  
 I AM FOR THE TRANNY STANDING ON THE STREET WAITING FOR THE AA.  
 I AM FOR THE AA MAN WHO SAYS, YOU LOOK GREAT. CAN I HELP YOU  
 INTO THE CAB?

I AM FOR THE TRANNY WHO LIKES THREE SUM'S THREESOMES.  
 I AM FOR THE TRANNY WHO CAN'T TELL HIS WIFE.  
 I AM FOR THE WIFE WHO DOESN'T KNOW.  
 I AM FOR THE JOHN WHO DID TWO YEARS FOR G.B.H.AND NOW WORKS AS  
 A COURIER?  
 I AM FOR THE JOHN WHO HAS A HIGH POWERED JOB WITH H.S.B.C.  
 I AM FOR THE JOHN WHO SAYS I WISH I HAD MET YOU BEFORE I GOT  
 MARRIED.  
 I AM FOR THE JOHN WHO SAYS I WILL PHONE YOU AND NEVER DOES.  
 I AM FOR THE TRANNY WHO WORKS 9-5 AND GOES CLUBBING EVERY NIGHT.  
 I AM FOR THE TRANNY WHO SAYS I LOVE YOU AND DOESN'T MEAN IT.  
 I AM FOR THE TRANNY WHO LONGS TO WEAR HER WIFE'S CLOTHES.  
 I AM FOR THE TRANNY WHO GOES OUT WITH NERDS, TRAINSPOTTERS,  
 ANORACKS AND CRIMINALS.  
 I AM FOR THE TRANNY WHO ARRIVES HOME FROM WORK AND PUTS ON A  
 DRESS.  
 I AM FOR THE TRANNY WHO CAN'T SEE THE ANALYST ANY MORE BECAUSE  
 HE'S SHIT.  
 I AM FOR THE TRANNY WHO WANTS TO BE LOVED.  
 I AM FOR THE TRANNY WHO DRESSES TO STOP THE PAIN.  
 I AM FOR THE TRANNY WASHING THE COME OFF HER SKIRT.  
  
 BRIAN DAWN CHALKLEY JAN 05.  
  
 IT IS FOR THE OTHER WORLD THAT THE MADMAN SETS SAIL IN HIS FOOL'S  
 BOAT;  
 IT IS FROM THE OTHER WORLD THAT HE COMES WHEN HE DISEMBARKS.  
  
 MICHAEL FOUCAULT.  
 MADNESS AND CIVILIZATION.

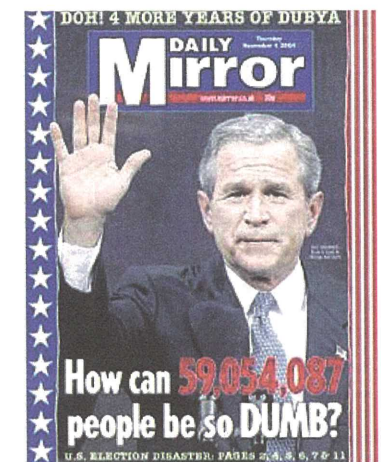


## 9. Turkey: Let's Make Porn, Not War!

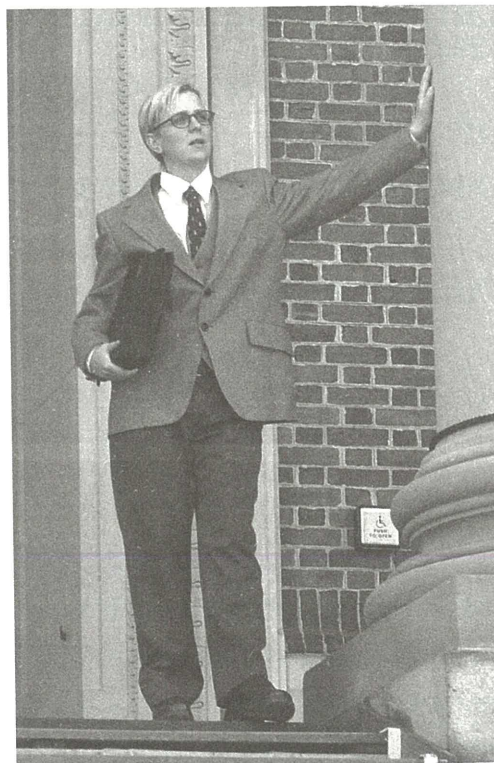


November 3, 2004. ISTANBUL.

Yes, the world has been waiting for the U.S. elections; polls have been circulating on the web suggesting that not only US citizens should be able to vote. But in this race between G.W. Bush and John Kerry, it looks like the extreme rightwing USA is giving the middle finger to the rest of the world. G.W. Bush wins his second term of presidency with a very small margin over John Kerry. Now he makes a plea for union, asking the 'whole' of the American people, his supporters and enemies, to support his leadership. The Turkish newspaper announces his victory and reprints a cover of the English tabloid paper, *Daily Mirror*, 'How can 59,054,087 people be so dumb?' Is that what most Turkish people here in Istanbul are thinking, and what about elsewhere in the world?



Daily Mirror Cover on outcome of U.S. presidential elections 'How can 59,054,087 people be so dumb?'



I look at the Turkish newspaper headlines and stumble over an image of a naked woman with Islamic words and red marks carved on her back. The story of the brutal murder of



Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh by the fundamentalist Muslim Mohammed B., who is a Dutch resident of Moroccan origin. Just like the right-wing politician Pim Fortuyn (also a friend of van Gogh) van Gogh was a racist thinker questioning Dutch multi-culturalism. He attacked Islam fundamentalism and thus became a target of revenge. Even in the Netherlands, one of the most 'progressive' of European nation-states, politicians are paralyzed by this terrorist plot and ensuing 'macho' responses from the Dutch far right. Mohammed B. murdered Theo van Gogh in ritual fashion, first shot him until he fell off his bike, then slashed his throat, stuck a note in his chest, a death threat to the next person on his list, Ayaan Hirsi Ali. Hirsi Ali, a renegade Muslim woman of Somali origin, is member of Dutch parliament for the conservative party VVD. She has often criticized Islam fundamentalism and helped van Gogh script his fatal movie, *Submission I*.

The Netherlands experiences its own '9/11', a terrorist attack as a catalyst for national turbulence and international crackdown on terrorist cells. Dutch people and politics are bathing in tears, confusion, hatred of these raw developments. Far-right groups are protesting the van Gogh murder on the streets, Muslim schools are burning, Christian churches are lit up in return, Jewish and Muslim politicians in The Netherlands and Belgium are receiving serious death-threats. Are the Dutchies now preparing for their own freaked out gestures towards the dictators of the Middle East? Are they too being paralyzed by religious war and extremism, Jihad, a blind hatred of first world civilizations: "I know for sure that you, Oh, America, will perish. I know that you, Oh, Europe, will perish ..." (lines on the farewell note of Mohammed B.) Besides the attack on symbols of capitalism, Jihad envisions ritual murder of infidels and 'others', as indicated in flurries of hate speech messages on the Internet: "Apostates, heretics, homosexuals, and Jews, they will all be vanquished under the Thousand Year Reich of Allah which is steadily approaching. (...) Women will have to keep their mouths shut and the punishment for all the other vermin will be terrible."

Fortunately, I have come to Istanbul to connect and hang out with another remarkable gay artist, Ismail Necmi. As a matter of fact, these political developments are barely sinking in. We met a year ago and volunteered to participate in each other's project: Necmi as subject in my book, Libidot as subject in his photography project, *The Image is You*. In this project, he asks people to send him concepts for their personal identity transformation by email. He selects concepts, engages in correspondence with people, then invites them to his studio to turn their idea into performances and poses for his camera.

We are experiencing a special moment of cross-fertilization, as we are spending most of our days inside his apartment, or just around the corner from it, but firmly shut off from the wider world. Necmi is my ideal man, a driven artist and sex fanatic who builds a stage of life within his own apartment. There is no need to go outside, all his ideas and digital cameras, art projects and fancy architecture, food and beverages, friends and sex partners, can be found within about a one mile radius. Necmi's apartment is majestic, breath-taking, a well-designed old mansion with high ceilings and exposed beams, arched brick tex-

tures, fantastic windows and wooden floors, which he bought in a state of collapse, for very little money, then transformed it into a apartment with modernist furniture, varieties of coffee machines, hyper-clean bathroom and white towels.

In his more recent sex art project, *Recycled Gay Porn*, Necmi invites his gay lovers to come home, to have sex with him and star in a porn-shooting session. He shows me the footage that he has shot so far. He is the seductor-man on top and plays successfully with the craving 'bottom', their fears and desires to fuck and be fucked by him and be a porn star. His partners are well-built men of his own age, he makes good love to them, with physical-sexual sophistication and mental sharing and control. Necmi at heart is a warm lover, but he is also totally obsessed with sex with strangers, a ruthless hedonist and pornographer. Necmi is influenced by the philosophy of the German artist Joseph Beuys who declared in the 1970s that most people have an inbuilt creative-artistic edge and can come up with innovative images and gestures. He helps people discover their sexual personas. He explains that thousands of young men from the Turkish provinces, and from other countries, have arrived in his area Beyoglu to try out a transgender life-styles, often carrying the names of Saints or religious figures such as Mohammed or Jesus. Many of the Istanbul transvestites are unable to find jobs though, and can only survive as sex workers and often end up in crime. These stories are very fascinating to Necmi, the tricks of transvestites with strong bodies who hide razor blades to fight brutal police brutalities, or as suicidal threat against the police.

Necmi is thinking about inviting a drag queen to participate in *The Image is You*, to help produce a 'transformation of the already transformed'. This statement made me think that identity transformation is an arduous enterprise, an unleashing of competing energies of stability and change that have to be nurtured with daily care and patience. And so I decide to send him my own concept.



Dear Necmi: I want to be a young man and show you my dick. It is not easy for me to try to be a man, because I do think that I am very feminine. What is my mood? I want to feel a penis. I want to feel the sexual energy that comes from a penis. I want to fuck. Have I ever been a man? No, I don't know any men like myself, as I am so very much a woman in how I think. But sometimes people see me as male. I think it is first of all the obvious things, the person who is independent and trained in intellectual masculine posing. But that is not so interesting. Where is my real man? When I was a kid, people often thought I was a boy because I looked so much like a boy. I want to be the kind of boy who packs his bags and leaves home at the age 16, a little boy and ready to fall in love.

Take care,  
Libidot



### Interview: Ismail Necmi, Istanbul, November 3, 2004.

'You can't help the different feelings that stem from their pain; I need that for the photos. I provoke a lot. I need to get a reaction from them.'

**Libidot:** What does living in Istanbul mean to you?

**Necmi:** It is a very mixed, cosmopolitan place and there are nearly fourteen million people living here. The city has two sides: the European and the Asian side. You can find whatever you want here, you can smell whatever you want. You can observe both very traditional and very modern lifestyles. It gives me good vibrations to live and to work here, especially in my neighborhood *Galatasaray*, which is in the area of *Beyoglu*, the heart of Istanbul and at the same time the old town of the city. A lot of young people, foreign people and all kinds of artists started to move and live in this neighborhood. And they all began to restore the old and historic buildings. In the more luxury places of Istanbul, people are more conservative. They tend to watch you: what you are doing, who is coming and going, etc. But in my building, which has a very unique architecture and a special atmosphere, we have no such problems.

**Libidot:** You have told me a couple of times that Istanbul is the place where you can breathe, and be free. Are there things about Turkish society that you find difficult to negotiate as a gay man?

**Necmi:** I think it's difficult in every society to be a gay man and at the same time to be an artist. In Turkey it's the same thing. But on the other hand, one can find special places to breathe in this specific area of Istanbul, *Beyoglu*. It is a very open-minded place with mostly young people, artists and intellectuals. There is also a lot of night-life and the area is also well known for transvestites. That is why I can be relaxed in here and would only want to live and work here right now in Istanbul.

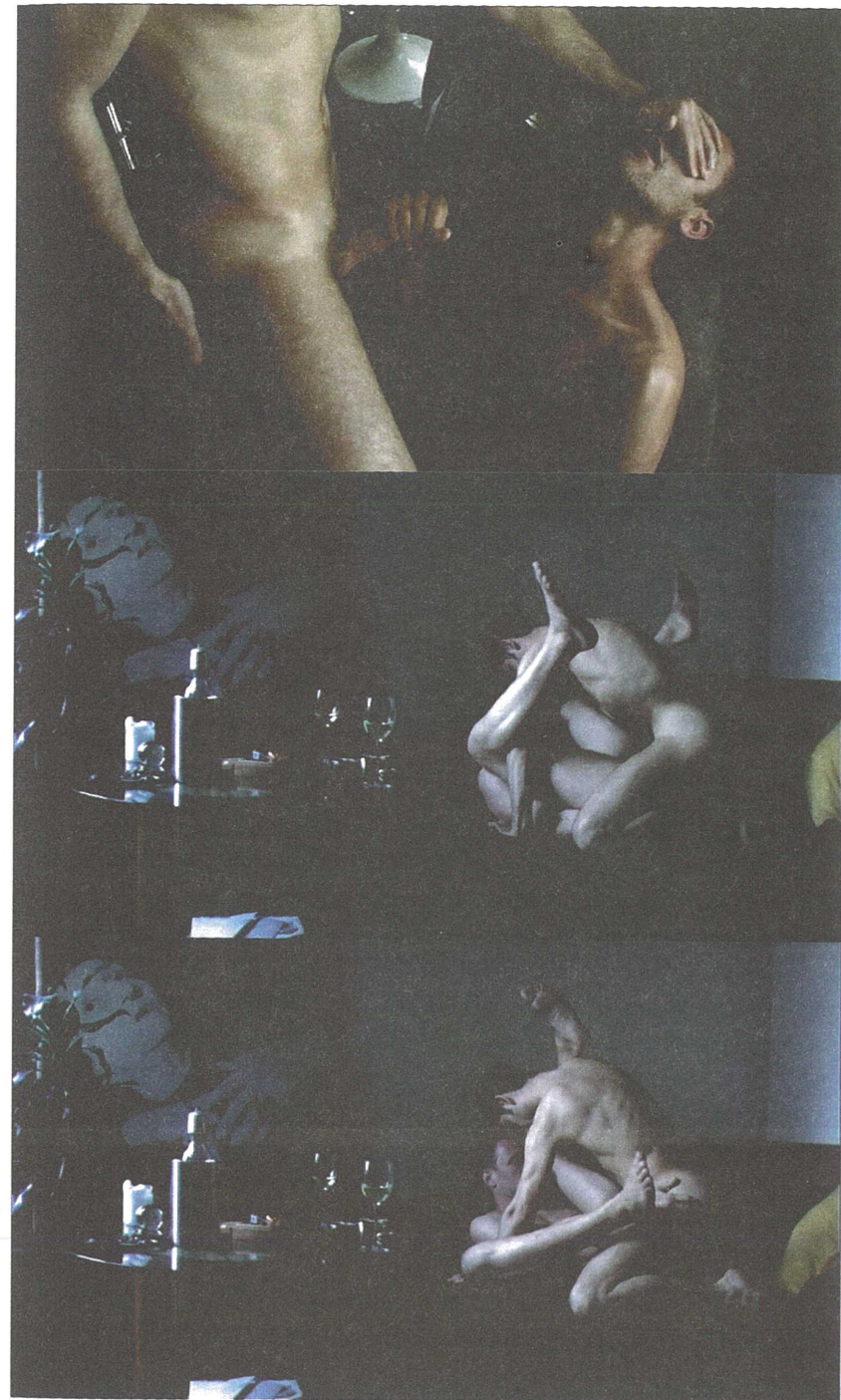
**Libidot:** As an artist, you have also started to make pornography recently. Can you tell me a bit more about that?

**Necmi:** I am working on a project named *Recycled Gay Porn*, where I act as a performer in my own movies, which I shoot on video.

**Libidot:** What kind of performances do you mean?

**Necmi:** They are my real sexual encounters that I have with different partners. My partners are not actors, but they somehow agree to be in one of my movies. It is not just home-made porn movies either, because I am also editing different materials into it, such as texts, sound, still photographs. The different movies will be presented simultaneously on a split screen and some movies will express different feelings like fear, passion, hate, violence, love or tenderness. These are the kinds of feelings we normally don't see in commercial porn movies. But on the other hand, as the title *Recycled Gay Porn* suggests, I am also playing with the codes of commercial porn and my partners know how to join this game.

**Libidot:** You have said that there is lots of legal and underground porn here in Turkey, I also wonder if there is any porn for women? There is a new movement in a lot of countries, where women are more involved in producing porn.



Ismail Necmi, *Recycled Gay Porn*, Video Stills, 2004.



**Necmi:** No, we don't have such a movement here. And lesbian porn is made for men here! For instance, in a lot of these movies the lesbian scene is followed by another scene where a man comes in to fuck the two lesbians at once. So it is clearly porn made for men here.

**Libidot:** When did you start making sex art? Were you trained to be an artist or photographer and filmmaker?

**Necmi:** Actually, I studied law and I worked in a law office for two years. But after two years, I gave it up. Now I work for T.V. and I do art projects just for myself. I'm not working on a commercial basis as a photographer. I think that's the best thing for me, because I'm not financially depending on it. If you feel you need to make money from your art, you lose your inspiration, because you need to pay rent, you need to pay the bills, etc. But I am free, and my projects are now also very independent.

**Libidot:** The project *The Image is You!* also moved you from photography to Internet-based work. How did that come about?

**Necmi:** When I decided to work on this project, I knew that the only way to do it was through the Internet, because one can use it very easily and comfortably in one's own home space. And other web browsers can also look at my work in the privacy of their own homes. Also, when I checked the statistics of my website, [www.ismailnecmi.com](http://www.ismailnecmi.com), I found out that people from all over the world have been checking it. My site is now in circulation. It's on air, so to speak, which is nice. At first, I got responses from Turkish people living in different parts of Turkey. But then I started getting responses from other places, such as Belgium, Spain, England, and a lot from Germany.

**Libidot:** Can you describe how you work with people or models?

**Necmi:** In most of my earlier work, I used to organize and arrange concepts, models, costumes, make-up, everything. I decided on all these elements before taking the photograph. But recently I started to twist that. Now I am saying to people who contact me for this project "you can decide everything yourself." I encourage people to first check my website and my photos, and if they like them, if they feel close to them, then they should join my project. Then I tell them to take a look in the mirror and imagine themselves as how they would like to be. Then, I encourage them to write me about it. They imagine themselves as how they would like to be, or what kind of situation they would like to be in – the costume, the make-up, the location, but the most important thing is their mood. I do not comment on their concept, and I do not give any advice. But I try to find out if the concept is honest and real and coming from their personal ideas, then it is good. Then at a later stage, when I have decided to meet with them and shoot an image, I'm totally free to make my own comment on it. I don't have to think about how to make them look beautiful or how to realize their initial concept. So, the people have power over the concept until the stage when it is ready for the photo-shoot. Then I take over control.

**Libidot:** So it is a collaboration, or a power fight between you and your model?

**Necmi:** Both! What people create for themselves is something I could never imagine myself, so I get all these different ideas coming in. But then I try to find my way into it. Maybe in the end we go into

totally different places, but we are still in a one-to-one situation and we try to finish the goal. When I'm shooting people's photos, I can't shoot when I don't get any vibrations or ideas from them, because it is a kind of a performance for me.

**Libidot:** So it is a performance? Do they change identity depending on what they think you want to see, maybe?

**Necmi:** No, the point is that they should think about what they want to see and what they want to look like. They stick to their performance, and I if see something else in it, I will focus on that but I do not want to interrupt their performance. But in the end what they see on the photo may be very different from their concept.

**Libidot:** Are these people giving you a lot of information about themselves? Do you know them fairly well?

**Necmi:** Yes. I receive ten to fifteen emails every day. It's almost like social work for me now, because this is a project where I try to answer everyone. It is good because they gain trust in me, and sometimes they write about very private, very personal fantasies and images. Most people (and I don't ask for it) put themselves in some kind of sexual situation, nude or something. Even if they are ugly or if they are beautiful, they don't care. It seems as if everyone is very keen on expressing something in terms of their sex or gender.

**Libidot:** How do you gain their trust?

**Necmi:** First of all, this is not a commercial project so there is no money involved. Secondly, I have enough photos on the website for people to check me out. And then I correspond with them carefully and seriously, so they understand that it is not a joke or a fashion-shoot. Sometimes they volunteer information when they are in different moods, for instance they are stoned or depressed, but I also take these moods seriously and answer them, even if they apologize in the next e-mail. At that point they trust me with the more private fantasies.

**Libidot:** What kind of ideas or people are you attracting?

**Necmi:** I'm not looking especially for exhibitionists, I also wish I could have housewives and businessmen in the project. I want to look at this from a wide angle. I want to look at how a transformation happens, be it inside a business man or a transvestite.

**Libidot:** How do the themes of sexuality come up?

**Necmi:** I don't ask them for that, and I also don't guarantee to do that. But, in the end, I don't know why, all concepts go in some kind of sexual direction. People just want to live their fantasies and somehow, and share them with other viewers. The recording and distribution of the fantasy-image is now part of people's sexuality, I think.

**Libidot:** How are you planning to exhibit these materials?



**Necmi:** In a book and in an exhibition, I plan to include the final written concept that they sent me by email, and fragments of the correspondence between us. Then, following that, you will see the photo that I made. Then you can see the differences between concepts and photos. The photo can be totally different from the concept, so you can read them in very different ways. There will be twenty-five concepts at a minimum.

**Libidot:** That's a lot.

**Necmi:** Maybe! People are finding me somehow and if they have a good concept, then I will do it... So, yes, there will be a minimum of twenty-five photographs. And, if there are more, then so be it, though I do want to print rather large photographs.

**Libidot:** I am curious to know, do you also get fantasies based on popular media images?

**Necmi:** Yes. I get some funny concepts like where people want to be snow-white having an orgy with the seven dwarfs. The sender of the concept wants to embody snow-white and all the dwarfs. Of course this concept is based on a cliché porn cartoon image, but I find it interesting and from my angle the final results will be very far and different. Of course, on the Internet and on television or on other media, people see sexual images every day, in porn or wherever. But, the important point in my projects is they are co-producing the image. When they write to me, they do write what they feel for themselves. When they sign on to the project, it's clear that they are responsible for participating in the image. Sometimes, after fifteen or so emails, people suddenly discover that what they are, and



Ismail Necmi, Blowjob Under the Sky, Maspalomas, Photography, 1999.

what they want to be, are so different. I say, look in the mirror, and say what you want to be. And sometimes they see the gap in between, and they say that they can't go on anymore, because they discover that they are not what they want to be. In this project, you have to be ready and responsible for your concept and results. They are your ideas about yourself. You can't say, "It's not my responsibility, I'm just a model," because you are portraying your own ideas. That is the point of the project.

**Libidot:** Do you get more men or women, or is it about equal?

**Necmi:** I get both. No, not just both, all genders.

**Libidot:** And you also work with states that are between genders?

**Necmi:** Often, it's not clear in my photos whether it's a man or a woman. For example, one time I did a photo of two men making love. It's a very private scene of them having sex, but some people look at them and see a straight couple.

My issue has always been transformation. I did an older photograph of a woman who acts like a dead fish.

Here is another one, where another old woman is really admiring herself in the mirror.



Ismail Necmi, Old Lady (As a Dead Fish), Photograph, 1996.



Ismail Necmi, Nesrin # 2. The Image is ME, photography, 1996.



I have photos of a boy. In these photos here.

You can see his transformation from boy to woman: make-up, and lighting. In the picture of him as a boy, he is very sad, you know, because actually he wants to be a woman. He is happy in the next picture because he appears as a very experienced woman. As another example, this photo here is of a woman that is actually a man. He was actually very muscular, but I used a special technique with the lights. And I did his make-up and hair to make him look like a woman. That is a type of transformation.

**Libidot:** Was this person used to undergoing transformation?

**Necmi:** Usually, I work with people who have not been transformed like this before.

**Libidot:** It's all black and white darkroom photography, too. Is that an important aesthetic element in your work?

**Necmi:** I want to create the right kind of atmosphere and I can only do that when I control the developing and printing in this specific method. My work is based on the classical photography method and I want to give people that kind of image. They are usually very happy to see that.

**Libidot:** Have you taken pictures of fetishists?

**Necmi:** [Shows Libidot another series of photos.] In this photo, you see a man with high heels. In real life he is just a businessman. Even though he is straight, but he is not a fetishist or a transvestite.

**Libidot:** That is interesting, that you are saying he is not a fetishist. What's the difference, then?

**Necmi:** If you are a fetishist, then you engage in your fetishes during the day or at night. But this man never does this. He only wore high heels for these particular photos. I didn't ask him to do this, though. He came to me with this idea. He wanted to wear high heels, and went to a special shop to have them fitted.

**Libidot:** So, the transformation that you work with is only temporary?

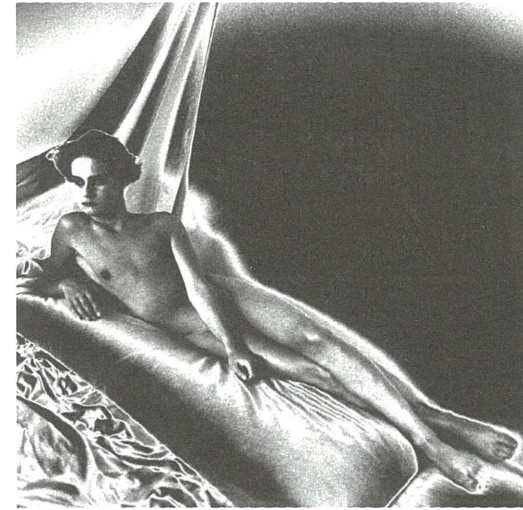
**Necmi:** Yes, it is temporary.

**Libidot:** Tell me how your project *The Image is You!* is affecting you, yourself?

**Necmi:** This project takes up a lot of my time, but it makes me really feel good. For me, it's not just shooting photographs, it's meeting people, all different kinds of people. And it's not just meeting people, you know, on the street or at a party, it's meeting people in a very special way. After this project, I will have new and different friends ... and connections!

**Libidot:** How do you appear yourself in those photo-shoots? How do you work with people?

**Necmi:** I am very visible: I make you cry, I make you laugh, I make you talk, I ask questions. This is the first time they have done something like this, so they don't know what they are doing exactly. You have to make them relax first! You have to give them motivation. Sometimes I make them really angry,



Ismail Necmi, Transformation I (As a Boy) 1992, Transformation II (AS a Woman) Photography, 1992.



Ismael Necmi, Libidot as Little Boy, Photography, 2005.

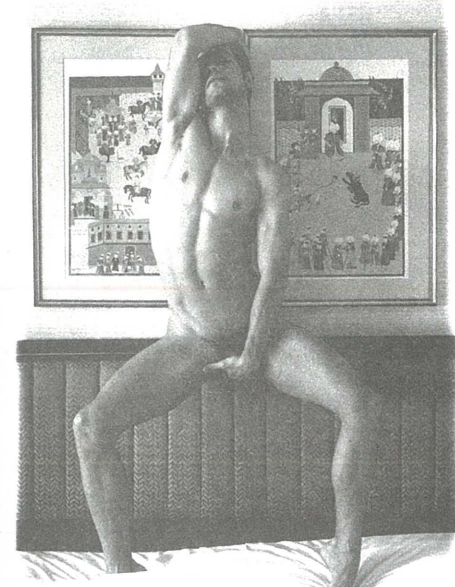


and sometimes I make them laugh. You can't help the different feelings that stem from their pain; I need that for the photos. I provoke a lot. I need to get a reaction from them. Some people react so easily. For example, the old ladies reacted very easily, which made me so happy because, at the same time, I was experiencing heavy reactions in return.

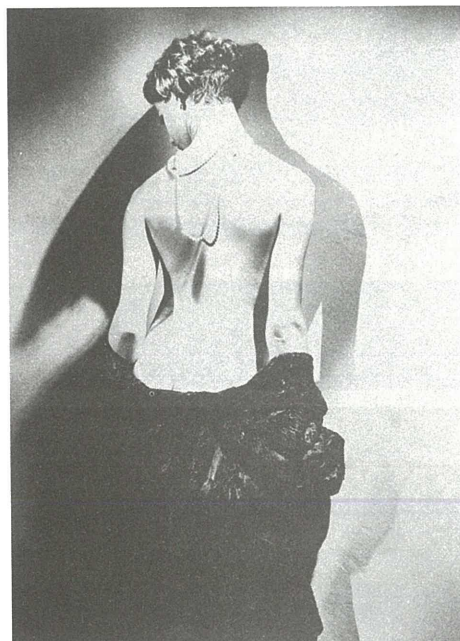
**Libidot:** What do you mean? Do you have any sexual feelings during the photography sessions?

**Necmi:** When I am shooting, I am totally without any kind of sexual feeling. I am very serious and I don't have sex with people during the shooting.

**Libidot:** But what about afterwards? ...



Ismail Necmi, Self-Portrait  
(As Marilyn Monroe), 2003.



Ismail Necmi, Male Nude (As a Woman),  
Photography, 1992.



Ismail Necmi, Cuff-Links & High Heels,  
Photography, 1996.

## Dr. Jacobs 2:25pm 11/04/2004 Au Revoir, Libidot!



Libidot,

Yes, of course, the whole world has been watching the US elections and hoping for some kind of fresh air, some kind of magical interference, somebody or something to put religious fundamentalism and the ruling elite into its place. So yes, the world has been watching these developments with a stupor. Guess what? I am sitting in a small café 'Morte Subite' ('Sudden Death') in the city center of Brussels. As a matter of fact, I am writing you this note on my brandnew laptop. I will email it to you the moment I come across an Internet café. This morning I had coffee with Dr. David Vandenberg, my colleague in the theory and history of architecture, who showed me the famous arcades (Galerie Du Roi/De La Reine) that inspired Walter Benjamin to write his contemplations on the ruins of commodity culture. These arcades were breath-taking - monumental old city structures almost entirely preserved in their original form. Yes, I do feel like I have walked into a different kind of order here - the skies are darker, the smells are more pungent, the cobblestones make contact with my feet.

I have not felt as good as this in many years. I took the overnight airplane to Zaventem Airport and then immediately took a shuttle train to the inner city. I exited the train in the 'Gare Central' and stared at streams of morning commuters rushing from their platforms into endless corridors. I left the station and saw daylight. Like one of Plato's prisoners who gets out of the cave. The sun was shining and the mood was extreme. I started walking down the hill into the old city center. I was getting completely carried away. As if something was walking my feet, touching my legs, shifting my radar of where to go and what to do, just walking and feeling the beauty of giant old buildings, old-fashioned store fronts, the smell of bakeries, the smiles of people. How quiet these Belgians are, I felt like one of them, like I had lifted a heavy backpack from my shoulders.

And, so I see you have taken refuge in the arms of a Turkish gay man, as I walk the streets of Brussels. I did go by that little statue of Manneken Pis and take a snap-shot for you! Would you consider this a good or bad example of sex art, Libidot? Tomorrow I am taking the train to Amsterdam and hope to make an early evening tour through De Walletjes, though I have to say my schedule for Amsterdam is pretty full (and I haven't checked my email yet).

How fucking weird life can be sometimes!

Dr. Jacobs



## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Emil Hrvatin, Bojana Kunst, Petra Pogorevc and Jana Wilcoxon at Maska for bringing this book into the world, for being sensitive to its special issues, needs and shapes, for being special and talented people – smart and humorous and sexy.

I would also like to acknowledge the individuals and institutions who provided feedback and funding, David Bogen of the Institute of Liberal Arts and Interdisciplinary Studies at Emerson College, Robert Sabal of the Department of Visual and Media Arts at Emerson College.

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I am heavily indebted to all the great sex artists featured in this book and want to thank them for their collaborations and patience, for helping me find materials, for giving me a good time, for keeping in touch. The book grew out of many get-togethers and neverending brainstorming sessions and interviews. The interviews were mostly conducted in real life and were later transcribed and fine-tuned online by both parties. It was great to conduct the interviews, though often difficult because of language barriers and communica-



tion gaps, and because we did not know each other as persons. Despite these difficulties, it was good to feel the support and interest of the artists. I also deliberately decided to record some of these awkward and raw moments into the book, so that readers can get a feel for the nature of ongoing work.

Most of the interviews were conducted in 'zulu' English. The interviews in the Netherlands and Belgium were conducted in Dutch and then translated by myself into English. In Taiwan, I received the help of translators; I thank Yining Sheng and Ester Lau for conducting my interviews with me. Of course, the input of these translators went far beyond just a simultaneous translation of the ongoing conversation from one language to the other, and they became quite involved in editing the answers and questions.

I would like to thank Piepke for hijacking Libidot and making her cute, for designing the Libidot figure, giving her a little body with fat ass and boots, and fiddling with her for many years as an artist. Maurice Methot was crucial in giving Libidot a voice and dragging her onto the stage of sound experiments and performance art. I don't think she would have survived her journey without some of these live performances. I would also like to thank Andrew Guthrie and Ismail Necmi for their help with Dr. Jacobs, for rescuing the poor guy from the trash one day, for taking him out on a shopping spree for a suitable costume, and for making the Dr. Jacobs photographs. I would say that this kind of support was really what kept me going despite the fact that the road to sex art was often muddy and full of obstacles

I am indebted to several artists who helped me design <http://www.libidot.org>. Arttur Kulvik made the original site, Shun Liang and Elif Memisoglu made a second version, which was active for many years, and Laura Fish made the final version. All these artists were very important for my spirit and very helpful for the direction of the project in general.

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All photographs reproduced in this book were made by the featured artists. In addition, there are photographs by the following artists: Rajko Bižjak, Igor Anđelić, Jurij Krpan, Miha Fras, Primož Lavre, Leonora Jakovljević, Manuel Vason.

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Then, my dear and smart friend and colleague Shujen Wang, whose insights, enthusiasm, inspiration and very solid support were always crucial to the making of the document.

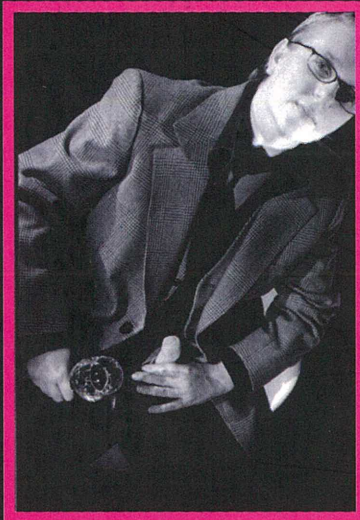
And, of course, Andrew Guthrie, for being my true lover, for seducing me at the Oni Gallery, for supporting me every day and every night, for 24/7 feedback on all the twists and turns of all my characters, for diving right into this book with me. For getting lost with me!



# Libi\_doc

## JOURNEYS IN THE PERFORMANCE OF SEX ART

by Libidot and Dr. Jacobs



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**Katrien Jacobs** is a Belgian-born scholar, writer, artist and activist. She works as assistant professor at City University of Hong Kong. She has lectured and published widely on art, digital media, sex/pornography, and censorship. She has a Ph.D. degree in comparative literature and media, with a thesis on dismemberment myths and rituals in 1960s/1970s body art and performance media. More information about book, author and sex artists can be found on [www.libidoc.org](http://www.libidoc.org)

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