

# Enlightened Nonsense

A Deirdre Logue Monograph

ED Mike Hoolboom



# Site Specific Symptoms

## By Deirdre Logue

### #1 Night Diary

The overnight sleep study showed difficulty initiating and maintaining sleep, associated with a significant alpha-EEG disturbance. There was no polysomnographic evidence of significant bruxism on this particular night. Psychologic self ratings indicated considerable emotional distress including symptoms of depression and anxiety, which may require further psychiatric assessment. She indicated an average consumption of twenty alcoholic beverages per week, which may be compounding her sleep related symptoms. Sleep questionnaires indicated a tendency to restrict sleep, especially during her work-week. Please advise as to whether you require further assessment for this patient in this clinic.

### #2 The Sky is Falling

I can't remember if it was Chicken Little or Henny Penny or both, but someone spoiled optimism for me with their insane story of the sky falling onto the fragile heads of all the adorable farm animals. I can't recall if the sky falls or if it's bread crumbs, acid rain, a plague of frogs, or a swarm of locusts. Or if it's simply the threat of something that final which makes this story so terrifying to me still. Its stupid ideas have set

into motion a group of associated symptoms that in turn have provoked a set of associated films. A syndrome.

It is on uneven ground that I have felt my unconscious body for the first time. My body is alive, and in the moment that I discovered this, I also discovered that the harder the ground under my feet, the worse the anticipated fall. A sinister side of me that I have never really known has worked its way out and grows more beautiful as each day passes. It becomes more threatening as I move through these ten films.

### #3 Directions to Phil's Farm

After the Mount Forest exit, things get a little dark no matter how bright the day. The last half-mile to the farm is the best part. A bridge built for one swings slightly, and it is there that the coolness catches you. Once you've passed the first bend in the dirt road and can't yet see around the second, you leave one place for another. When I travel to the farm I always get a headache, which makes me salivate and think about basketball, and my best conversations of late have all been in the darkroom. These conversations remind me of dreaming, and leave me unsettled. Standing in Phil's driveway, I realized that a tree is glorious when ripped from its root hold and thrown across a pathway, and that it's not just about a place but what happens to you in that place.

Conversation with Bill the Barber, Mount Forest, Friday, June 23rd, 4pm.

D: Hey.

B: Hey.

D: You got time to give me a quickie?

B: Pardon.

D: A haircut.

B: Don't do women's hair here.

D: Well, I went to the salon across the street but they are all busy, prom weekend you know, so they told me to come and see you, and seein' as you're not busy...

B: Don't do women's cuts.

D: I don't have women's hair.

B:....Sit down.

D: Are you sure? I don't want you to do it if you're going to give me a half-assed haircut. I got a big weekend myself...

B: I'm sure.

D: Last chance...

B: Yep.

(Trimming back and sides)

B: Where you from?

D: ...just in town for a couple of weeks, up at Phil Hoffman's farm, you know Phil Hoffman? He's got a nice place out the berry farm way, does these film workshops in the summer. People from all over the world go there to make films.

B: That so.

(Clipping top and thinning sideburns)

B: What kind of farms did you say you make films about?

D: Oh, we make films about all sorts of stuff.

B: You go to different farms?

D: No, we pretty much stick around Phil's farm, but folks go all around Mount Forest to shoot stuff...

(Shaving Neck)

B: Yeah, they came in here last summer. One of them got a haircut...

D: Yeah, yeah, made a great film too. Shop looks great in it.

B: That right.

D: Yeah.

#4 Plan A: Excerpt From Grant to The Ontario Arts Council

The works rely on myself as the primary source. This approach to my production, a way of making works 'internally,' has contributed not only to its performative style but to the formal aesthetic of each piece. They are process-based, further emphasized by hand-processing and tinting techniques, surface manipulation and in-camera editing. The subject matter ranges from gender ambiguity and sexual difference to masochism, psychoanalysis and somatic illness.

Each work begins with a specific physical action, e.g. a ball hitting a head, which is compulsively developed through repetition and intercutting related images, sound and text. Sexual deception, humiliation, injury, fear and failure are common themes, however, humour plays a critical role. Though dark, the works have a curious, nonsensical quality, which provides the viewer with some distance from the complexity as well as some

comic relief. It has been my experience that humour can act as a savior of sorts.

#### #5 Backup Plan and Other Psychic Noises

Since my first visit to the farm four years ago I have shot ten films. Having completed six of them to date, over the next three weeks I will finish the remaining four. Now, as I write and edit, I can feel the essay and the films about to collide, like siblings running in opposite directions around the kitchen table, each thinking they know what the other's strategy is, trying to watch themselves, each other, the floor and the table at the same time, picking up speed and hysteria along the way. When I write all I can think about are the films, and when I work on the films all I can think about is what to say about what I am doing. I start to wonder what I've begun, what I am trying to finish, and what will be left when it's over. Or if it will ever be over. And if it isn't what will I do? It makes me think that if I'd just spent more time preparing (scripts?) instead of wandering around myself like a tourist and eating whip cream from the can and biting my nails twice as badly as I really want to so that I have an excuse to wear band aids, and if I could just stop dancing like a drunk and hoping for the best, playing in the toilet and licking the bowl, and pressing my face up against the glass to see what will be left behind... Everything was fine until I started taking pictures: putting myself in between you and me, waiting for the flying object to land and watching the clock, stitching up my wounds, controlling my control, processing my

process and trying to fix my mistakes. Now the monsters move and they move faster than my camera can.

#### #6 Trouble

**Step 1: Try to Calm Down (Fall and Scratch)**  
This can be accomplished in a number of ways, though two come recommended. First, let your body go limp and allow your dead weight to drop directly to the ground. While on the ground try telling yourself over and over that you will survive this, and that if you really think about it, this is the best time of your life. You are making some really interesting work. It's difficult, yes, but imperative that you keep things in perspective. If this doesn't work, carefully insert one small handful of common garden thistles into your underpants and wait.

#### **Step 2: Call a Friend or Your Local Therapist (Milk and Cream)**

Under trying circumstances it can be very useful to pick up the phone and have an intimate conversation with your therapist or an old friend. They will tell you that the ideas you are working with are difficult and hard to manage, but that you are doing fine while trying your best, which is what really counts. This conversation might compel you to drink twelve to fourteen litres of ice cold, vitamin-enriched homogenized milk while lying on your back. After all, being a filmmaker is an honorable and fascinating

profession and people admire what you do. (Note: Milk may cause drowsiness).

#### Step 3: Try to Identify the Problem (Tape)

If you don't know what's bothering you sit down for a moment and think. While sitting and thinking, take a three inch wide roll of clear plastic sticky tape and wrap up your head so that your thoughts can be contained. Hold your breath. Wait several seconds before removing the tape. Upon removal, notice that the problem is stuck to the recently discarded tape. Look at the problem and ask yourself, what is its shape and size? Continue breathing in and out.

#### Step 4: Fantasize (Water)

Creativity is uniquely linked to your imagined self, to fantasies of who you are and who you may wish to be. Let this concept take hold of you for a moment. Inhale deeply and plunge your head into a bucket of cold water. With your head submerged you can imagine that the things you wish for are real and that these things make you feel fulfilled, satisfied, even if it's just for a second or two.

#### Step 5: Call Back and Tell Them You are Fine

Having survived all of this, you realize that it's not so bad, that this is the best time of your life, that your films are the most important thing right now, that you have things in perspective, that you have great friends and a terrific therapist, that ideas can be difficult, that internal chaos is part of the process and that you can be anything you want to be. Go directly to the phone

and call those in whom you have confided. Tell them that you have figured out a few very meaningful things and that you are back on track and doing fine now, thanks. Thanks a lot.

#### #7 Cure (A Syndrome)

I am the primary performer, director and technician. I arrive at the events through fantasy, impulse and intuition. I perform the actions with a repetition that I have come to know so well in myself. I am most often there alone so that I can see myself without your reflection. The films demonstrate that I am permeable. When I am there, I feel relaxed with this idea, even though it frightens me. I have found a place where I can drown out my sorrows, doze off, fall down, lick the ground, bite off more than I can chew, chop off my head, watch it split open, patch it up and tape it back on. All those empty fields make it possible for me to hide in the tall grass and sneak up on myself when I least expect it. I can pretend I am the surveillance camera's well hidden lens, the physician looking for a diagnosis, the patient looking for the cure. I am the site. I am the specific. I am the moving target, the illness, the antigen and the antidote.





# Deirdre Logue Interview

By Karyn Sandlos (September 2000)

KS: *Enlightened Nonsense* is the title of a series of ten short films that you are in the process of completing. These films explore complex themes through repetitive patterns of self-abuse—you fall down, pick burrs out of your underpants, take hits to the head from a basketball, rip your face off, and drown yourself. Your films are as hilarious as they are dark. Can you talk about the juxtaposition of masochism and humour in your work?

DL: You mean apart from masochism being inherently hilarious? I think it's important to say that I would never use a word like self-abuse. Because for me the films are performances, not necessarily abuses. The fact that the performances rely on a certain level of found masochism in the performer or in the setting is important. But I wouldn't think about the films with masochism as a singular source. If the films were just about humour and masochism I think the juxtaposition would be a natural one. It's like cynicism, and cynicism is a kind of wit that draws on despair. Not all horrible things are funny—only the funny ones. So if there is a connection between humour and masochism in my work, I would say that it's a connection only when it's funny. *Moo-Head* and *Fall* aren't meant to be hilarious movies.

KS: I think your films make people laugh and wonder why they are laughing at the same time.

DL: Yes, but that's not about my masochism. They're laughing because they don't understand. I think people laugh sometimes because they would rather not think about what they get thinking about when they look at the work.

KS: *So you think humour makes it easier for the viewer to deal with the subject matter of the films?*

DL: Sometimes, yes. It helps me make the work. But that aspect is not necessarily intended to help the audience out. Having said that it's not my intention to make it difficult for an audience either. But there is an element of the ridiculous, and there's an element of nonsensical stupidity in the films, and I suppose being able to see that in the work does make the subject matter more digestible. I don't want to make work that people can't stand to watch.

KS: How would you describe the subject matter of your films?

DL: I'd probably make a list of themes for you. I would say the films are about testing one's physical limits. Masochism would be the second, and number three would be humour. Number four... I would say that the films are about dreaming, and I don't mean that in that

get me the fucking unicorn way, I mean that the subject matter of my dreams is translated into the films sometimes. I would say that the films are about sex and sexuality in a very confused way. They are about sexual discomfort, perhaps. They are very much about despair. Each film is about the body versus fill in the blank...so water, tape, whatever. The films are about relationships: me and the world, me and somebody else, me and my job. You'll notice in the films there is always a pairing of at least two things. And they're about repetition—how we proceed through various stages of our psychic life having to reconstruct and redefine the same things from a few years ago. It's about habit. Love it or hate it, repetition for me has been a pretty profound concept. And, number ten; the films are about filmmaking.

KS: What about fantasy?

DL: When I first started making films I was describing them as fantasies of my own demise and in fact that's written in many descriptions of my work. And I would say that's still quite true. But fantasies of one's demise are very complex. They don't come in a tight little package. So my fantasies of my own demise might be a film about me going shopping. It's not necessarily what you would think. So I think fantasy plays an important role, but now that I'm ten films down the road, maybe not as much as it used to. Maybe it's reality now. I mean, rip tape off your face for two days and tell me that's not about reality.

KS: Can you talk about your method? Do you know what film you are making when you start shooting?

DL: No. No more so than one might have a million ideas before one goes to make something. For me it's usually whatever idea knocks the hardest, or is most easily accessed on a given day.

KS: At what point do you know what film you are making?

DL: Well there are two answers to that question: One is when I start and one is when I finish. I might wake up in the morning and think, 'OK I have an afternoon and I want to shoot something, and I thought maybe I would shoot this but it's going to be too hard, or I don't feel like getting wet. Maybe I'll just try this one thing'. And I might find somebody to help me out, or I might just go sit in a field, or I might just whip out my camera and try it.

KS: So it's quite spontaneous?

DL: Totally spontaneous. And the process loses its spontaneity when something doesn't turn out and I have to re-shoot. But I usually use every scrap of film I have that's worth looking at. That's an aspect of my filmmaking that I have imposed. I tell myself that there's only so much I'm allowed to do. I'm allowed to do whatever it is I'm going to do for the film, and I

allow myself to shoot it a couple of times and after that it's like three strikes you're out. After that if it's too hard, or I can't get the shot, or it's like it wasn't meant to be, I just trash it and do something else. I try to remain very committed to the experience of what it is to shoot the films and how I see that contained in action.

**KS:** Do you work alone?

**DL:** I try to work alone as much as I possibly can. There are occasions, especially when I use a Bolex, when I can't work alone because when I wind the camera and get set up to do whatever I'm going to do, by the time I'm doing it the camera's wind is over. There are times when I can't stay close enough to the camera, and there are other times when I'm too messy for I can't see.

**KS:** Do you prefer to work alone?

**DL:** Absolutely. Because I think it does something to the relationship between me and the camera. When you shoot yourself it always looks and feels different than when someone else shoots you. When I made *Fall* I shot 500 feet of film of myself running away from the camera, throwing myself on the ground and then running back towards the camera. And all that stuff in between is some of the best stuff I shot. In the films where I'm right in front of the camera and I have to

lean forward to turn it on and off... so much gets made there.

**KS:** Have you always worked this way?

**DL:** As an artist generally it's hard to say because I've done a lot of collaborative work. I would say that my practice has been split fifty-fifty: Work of my own and work that I've done with other people, which I really love. The work that I've done myself has been primarily performance based, self-sufficient, process based and narcissistic.

**KS:** Filmmakers tell personal stories in many different ways, but it strikes me that your work represents quite a unique form of diaristic filmmaking. You are always the subject of your own films, and as the subject you are typically engaged in some bizarre performance. Can you talk about who or what has influenced your work?

**DL:** Psychoanalysis has influenced my work. I see my films as autobiographical, but I don't see them as stories. Cumulatively they may tell a story, but individually they tell things, stuff, ideas, feelings. I don't think they tell you as much as autobiographical work typically would. The films tell you a little bit of something about me, but it's so specific that it's almost as if you are looking at my arm as opposed to all of me. I think there is something withholding about the work. I'm not giving that much away, because I



only give the viewer a certain range and quality of information about myself. So the films tell the audience things that I have been thinking about over the last few years, which are the result of spending five days a week on an analyst's couch trying to understand things about myself that are complicated and rather dark. And I think that it is inevitable that those things would have to find a voice outside of analysis eventually. It's really hard to talk about that stuff and although it's cliché, I feel like I'm better at talking about it as an artist than I am as a human being. Eventually I felt as though I was going to have to get down and dirty with some skeletons in the closet, with some things have been unconscious fuck ups for me. I'm not as interested in psychoanalytic theory as I am in the process of talking about oneself in a concentrated way for a long period of time, and what the implications of that are for the psyche, and what the implications are when you leave that room. What does it do to you? That's a question. And I think making these ten films has been about asking that question.

**KS:** Does the unconscious speak directly?

**DL:** No. The unconscious is very tricky. It doesn't always speak directly. For instance, it can take on years to decipher a tic, or a symptom. What does having a psychosomatic pain in your leg mean? It might be related to something specific, but something so defended against that is so complicated that you

may never know what it means. The unconscious is like someone went in and pulled all the plugs out and then put them all in the other way.

**KS:** Are your films like performances of unconscious expression?

**DL:** Yes. But I wonder about your use of the word 'bizarre' when you describe the performances in the films. Why bizarre?

**KS:** I chose the word bizarre because I think that it describes the nonsensical quality of your work, the feeling of not quite knowing what you're up to when you are doing what you are doing on screen.

**DL:** Can you give me an example?

**KS:** For instance, when you are standing in the middle of a field getting hit in the head by a basketball that someone is repeatedly throwing from off screen.

**DL:** Well that happens, that's not so bizarre. But the notion that something is bizarre implies that it is completely out of the ordinary. And I would like to suggest that the things that I do in my films are not that out of the ordinary and not that bizarre. I use fairly common objects and scenarios that are familiar, and in some ways it's simply the repetition of the interaction with the object that makes it unusual. Basketballs, packing tape, water whip cream, dirt,

underwear—these are objects of the everyday. It's the relationship and the intensity that gets made through repetition and through the scenario that is unusual. If there is anything bizarre it's in the experience of making the films.

**KS:** Why does it bother you to imagine that your films might be taken as bizarre?

**DL:** Because I think that can make them freakish, and I don't think the things I'm trying to articulate in the films are freakish things. Humiliation or discomfort or any of the things that might be experienced by me in the making of the works are pretty normal kinds of feelings. I suppose the majority of people would see the films as bizarre or weird or masochistic and self-abusive. I'm not trying to suggest that the works aren't complex, but I want them to be accessible.

**KS:** Do you see this as a tension in your work?

**DL:** I fully accept the responsibility for a level of masochism in the work. What I object to is the focus people have placed on the idea that the action in the films is self-abusive. I just don't find that a very useful or productive description and I don't think it reflects much on the content of the work. I don't make films where I stick my head in a bucket of cold water over and over again so that I can prove my machismo. I don't make films to show people how much pain I can

take. I would say that ninety-five percent of the things I do in the work are not painful.

**KS:** Any other influences on your work?

**DL:** Daytime television is a big influence. I'm a terrible sponge. I love television, but you can't see it in my work. I love commercials, and noise, and rapid fire eye candy, and terrible sit coms with melodramatic oversensitive characters with empty lives and bad track pants.

**KS:** Do you have a favorite film star?

**DL:** Well you know whose performance just totally rocked my socks? The abominable snowman in Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer. He was so ferocious initially, and then once he got all his teeth taken out he became really helpful. And I thought to be able to play both the dark, sinister and aggressive monster, as well as the loving, caring, big fuzzy-wuzzy character was quite a challenge. And there was a great supporting cast in that film as well. The little fag dentist was excellent.

**KS:** Your films come out of years of participation in the Phil Hoffman Independent Imaging Retreat. Why do you keep going back to Phil's farm?

**DL:** I'm fond of the farm for all sorts of reasons. I'm fond of the people that go there. I have an emotional

attachment to the people and the place. And I haven't really got any time to make work in a given year. So I'm attracted to the idea of going somewhere for a week where that's what I'm supposed to do. You could call it a condition of my process that I have to be extracted from my life. And I respect the principals of the farm. I have a lot of admiration for what is taught and learned there, and I prefer that to other institutions of learning. There is a cult of Phil's farm, and its reputation has been built on something very positive. It's a process based learning environment that has a very collective body. People go there to spend a week learning the Bolex and hand processing. Then there is the other ninety-five percent of what you experience at Phil's, and that has to do with a shared investment in the importance of making films through processes that are outside of industry norms and outside of institutional norms. It's a complicated place with complicated people, and I find that very attractive.

**KS:** What kind of conditions do you seek out in order to create? What would be your ideal set of conditions?

**DL:** You mean like a big bag of money? I would keep making films the way that I make them, but what I would want is more psychic time, and more physical time. Having said that, without all the chaos I don't know if I would make films in the same way, and if I wasn't making films in this way I don't know if I'd be

making films. Someone asked me the other day if I have ever thought about making a feature. And I thought, 'Sure I could make a feature but I'd have to make it in two weeks or I wouldn't know how to make it.' The conditions that I have applied are spontaneous and performative but at the same time they are very disciplined and very rigorous. I shot and processed over the two weeks that I was at Phil's in June, and I did a tiny bit of cutting, and then I went ahead and made seven films in eight weeks at home. Without the discipline of time as a container of opportunity I'd probably be sitting around at home with my thumb up my ass trying to figure out which roll of film is in which box. The ultimate conditions would be that I would dedicate one week per month for the rest of my life to shooting, processing, cutting and finishing a film.

**KS:** Do you enjoy making your films? How would you describe the experience? How do you feel before, during, and afterwards?

**DL:** I feel mixed up. Sometimes the things that I deal with in my work make me feel very confused. Generally I feel physically hypersensitive. Sometimes I get really goofy and nervous, and I run around like a chicken with my head cut off. I run out into the bushes and I come back and I forgot my light meter, and I run back over there and I need a pen, and I go over there and I realize I haven't got any film in my camera. I can be very scattered at times, especially if there's something that I'm going to do that I'm not sure about.



That's always underlying, but there is also a fair amount of ease because I don't rely on anyone else and what I need to do is usually not very complicated. So there's me, a bucket of water and a roll of film. I try to make it easy on myself to execute the plan. With that comes a kind of calm that can override feeling freaked out or panicked about something psychically. It's helpful that people I know have supported the kind of films that I make. The more I make films with that kind of support in place the less mixed up I feel about making them. Having said that I don't expect that the confusion will ever go away and I don't expect that it should.

KS: How do you feel about watching your films?

DL: It depends on who I'm watching them with. Part of me wants to say that anybody who says that they don't enjoy watching their own films is a liar. For me there is something fundamentally important about making films: You have to be interested in your own subject matter. If you're not interested in what you made your film about then I can't understand why you made it. I can't deny being truly self-indulgent on that level. I like to watch my films, especially in the dark by myself. When I'm watching them with large groups of people who I don't know I feel like it's just a matter of time before somebody in the audience recognizes me and comes up and says something really weird. So I try to sneak in and sneak out. I'm totally open to feedback about the films. If you are going to be an

artist you should be able and willing to talk to people about the work. But I can't help feeling insecure about it sometimes because the subject matter is very personal. So sometimes watching my own films is uncomfortable.

KS: Is it important that your films are hand processed?

DL: As often as possible, yes. I like the way it looks, and I also feel very attached to manipulating the work at that stage of the process. It's like drawing. It really accentuates the subject matter. The fact that the surface of the film has been touched so much makes a big difference to me. If I had no choice but to take it to Exclusive, who I love, but who don't make my films all scratchy, I just put them under my boot when I get them home, so that there is something of the surface that is alive.

KS: Is it important that you cut your original footage on a flat bed?

DL: Yes. I think that working with your original footage is like working with an object that you should get to know really well. I'm not afraid of working with the original footage, although sometimes I make irreparable mistakes that make me wish I didn't work on the original. But boy you sure learn fast how not to make that mistake again! There's no interface. Nobody's fooling anybody. You've got an original print



and an hour or two to work on it on your Steenbeck and you'd better be sober and you'd better be clear about what you'd like to do.

KS: In the film *Scratch*, we see rapidly cut found footage of cups and dishes breaking and a bed being made and unmade. In *Moo-Head*, we see little kids ogling their Jell-O spoons. In *Always a Bridesmaid*, *Never a Bride of Frankenstein*, we see a mother and daughter having an awkward conversation on the phone. In fact, there often seems to be a rather enigmatic conversation going on between the found footage in your films and the footage you have shot. Can you talk a bit about this interaction?

DL: When I use found footage I prioritize the sound over the picture. I'm actually after the sound. But obviously I choose sound with pictures that are interesting. *Moo-Head* would be the best example of how I work. The sound head and the picture head on a Steenbeck are in different places. There is two frames difference, so your picture is running at 24 fps and your sound is running at 26 fps. In *Moo-Head* I used the difference to sync the found sound up with the impact of the ball. The image became relevant, but it wasn't as relevant as the sound. I would make equal cuts: five frames of found image, and five frames of my image. When the found footage is going through the sound head my image is going through the picture head. I try and sync the two by linking the found footage soundtracks up with my action. So you

see the found footage and there is no sound. I want the found footage sound in my image.

KS: Do you think about sound when you are shooting your films? How and when does sound enter in to the process?

DL: My films are mostly silent. If there is sound I make it from the sounds of the splices and the hand processed film. I just mark up the space where the optical track is with pins and markers.

KL: So the static that we hear on films like *Scratch* is from the scratches on the sound strip?

DL: Yes, or from the splices, or the popping and snapping is from the hand processing, which creates irregularities throughout the emulsion of the film, and that has a sound. And what I'm doing for the films in the show is taking sound from screw ups and irregularities on the film surface and cutting it into soundtracks. For instance, I'm trying to use the difference between optically printed color stock and regular 7378. They sound different. There is an ambient white noise with the color stock, which is clear on the surface of the film. I'm creating loops for the soundtracks. I like the sound of film, and so the sound sources are generally from film. I don't bring music into it.

KS: No folk songs?

DL: No folk guitar, no tambourine, no Beatles records played backwards.

KS: Rapid cuts and a repetitive use of images characterize your films. Do you have a method for editing? Can you describe it?

DL: Probably not without some awkwardness. I tell myself I'm going to edit this film in three days, or two days or I'm going to be done by the end of tonight. I always set a time frame. I think it was Mike Hoolboom that asked me 'Why would you do that?' And I don't know. When I sit down to cut something I want to know that there is an end to that process. I like fast cuts a lot. It's like, 'I don't know very much about art but I know what I like.' I like to be overstimulated.

KS: Is there a rhythm in your editing process?

DL: Yes, there is. It's more like a nervous tic. I sort of count it out. I want a film to feel like it flows. I tend to cut footage up into chunks that look more or less the same length, so the rhythm is built that way. There is a synchronicity between the cuts and what's happening with the action in the image. And I also spend a lot of time deciding how I'm going to cut something before I start cutting it. So if I've got 350 feet of footage of tape going on my face forwards, and 350 feet of tape going on my face backwards, I'll join the two heads together in the middle and work my

way out. I try to do things with the mass and physical presence of the footage—things that you wouldn't normally do. I don't rough cut and then fine cut and move shots around all over the place. I just start somewhere, anywhere, and hope for the best most of the time. I don't have any formal training. It's pretty intuitive.

KS: Why are you making a series of films?

DL: I had some spare time. I've worked with the idea of a series before. I like multiples. I like ten boxes that are related. I like ten films that are related. I like twelve ears of corn. I like the idea of having one problem and ten solutions. Because I think there are usually many answers to a question, and by working in a series I get to see myself play it out in different ways. Also because of the brevity of the work—some of my films are thirty seconds long—I think some things get revealed only when they are rubbing up against other things. When you make a series all sorts of relationships occur between the works that you only see when you group them together, and I'm interested in what those things can be. Rarely do we see painters show one painting. People who draw don't show one drawing. People who write songs don't play one song. It seems logical to me to make a group of work.

KS: Are you finished with this particular body of work, or will you continue making films in the same vein?

DL: I think this particular body of work will have implications. It's going to take me a long time to get through the material that I've dredged up psychologically and physically in the work. So I suspect that I'll make more work like it, and have twenty more ideas for work like it that I won't have time to execute because I ran out of time and resources. And it's tiring. I will make more work like this, but every time I make a piece it changes things: the criteria, the subject matter, and the interests change. I don't know where making this kind of work will take me. It won't always be the same, I hope.

KS: How will you know when you are finished with this particular series of work?

DL: I'll know on September 13<sup>th</sup> that I'm finished, for now. I don't know. I guess I have that question. People have expressed to me that they worry about my work, because every time I make a film I up the physical ante. I don't think that's actually true. I think what I'm actually doing is calming down. It doesn't look like that but it feels like that. There probably isn't an end. I don't think I'll ever know with any confidence when I'm finished, and I don't necessarily think that I have to have an answer to that question. But it does cross my mind a lot.

KS: *Someone said to me recently that art cures all. Is art a form of therapy?*

DL: It depends on one's definition of therapy. Having outed myself as an analytic subject, as one of those weirdoes that pays god-knows-how-much per week for analysis, I don't actually think that art is a very therapeutic activity. The relationship between art and therapy really drives me crazy. I think the idea that art is a cathartic expressive thing that one does to heal oneself is ridiculous. I don't think that art cures anything. It may answer fundamental personal questions for somebody, but I think of art as a political activity. I think of it as a complicated personal and physical activity. If I wanted to do something that was easy and self-reflective I'd probably do something else. The idea that art is therapy romanticizes art practice, as if art has no political or cultural value. It's just for you to fix yourself. And if it is true, it's true in a very small way compared to all the other things that filmmaking or writing novels or anything else is about.

KS: So what's political about your films?

DL: Nothing. There's nothing therapeutic about them either. Making art is not a form of therapy for me. The fact that I'm in therapy is irrelevant. What interests me about art making is that it has things to say that are beyond the self. Art says things about the human condition and the human psyche. I think that is one of the functions of cultural practice, and one of the functions of media. You don't have to make politically overt work to be a political artist, or to have a political



position or a cultural awareness. I do think that my work has a very strong political message on some level.

*KS: Is it that your work is political in ways that aren't traditionally defined as political in filmmaking?*

DL: Do you mean like Nicaragua political?

*Like Nicaragua political, or like any effort to make the world a better place, or represent the underrepresented in artistic practice, for instance. Are you suggesting another way of thinking about the political?*

DL: What comes to mind is the body politic: articulating something through the body and through action, be it live, or a recorded, or mediated action. What that provokes has social implications. The action says something about the impact of larger political ideas on the body—on my body. The body is what we have to use as a tool to express our discomfort, or our distaste or unhappiness. For me it has very significant meaning when people choose an art practice over the civil service or a government job in Ottawa. I feel like artists have a lot of things to do, and a lot of responsibility. I guess I used the word political when we started talking about this because I feel like there are lots of important decisions that we make when we decide to be an artist for real, for life.

KS: Do you think there is a future for experimental film practice?

DL: Sure. People will remain attached to an experimental filmmaking practice for as long as they possibly can. If they care about it they will do it.

KS: Even though the labs are closing?

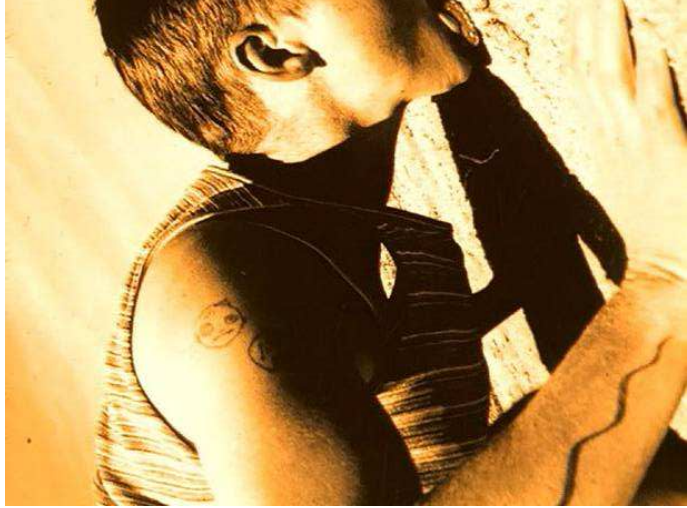
DL: Sure, yes. Little underground's will form, and people will send their stuff to Boulder Colorado, or wherever the hell they have to send it. Maybe Deluxe won't exist, but Steve Sanguedolce will process film for you in his basement, or somebody will be doing it somewhere. As long as people have cameras and film they will make experimental films. It doesn't matter where the hell they get it processed.

*KS: What do you make of the current fascination with low-tech and hand processed film?*

DL: I think the fascination probably says something about what we need socially or culturally in this country right now. I think self-sufficiency is one of those needs. A lot of people have suffered enormous crises of confidence with the influence of major technologies on image making. I haven't got a fucking G4, and I don't want one. That doesn't mean I don't want e-mail, and I'm not a complete Luddite, but I feel like there are lots of ways to do things. These heavy-duty processes are causing people to feel like



they can't make work. There is an attraction to accessibility. I think people will always be attracted to things that are raw, and that openly show the hand of the maker. Not everybody, but those who are always will be.



# Deirdre Logue's Enlightened Nonsense

by Mike Hoolboom

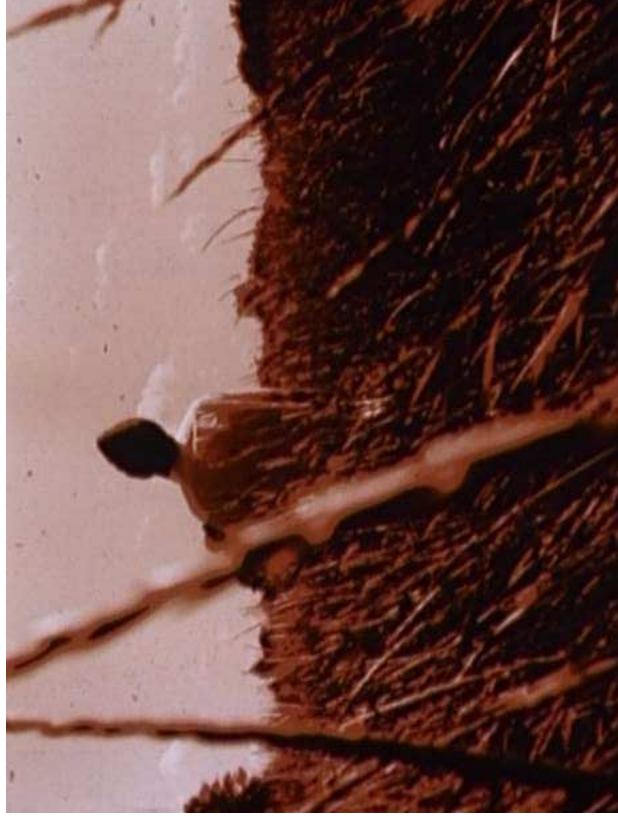
Nothing ever happens for the first time. History, my history, is an echo. Like the words that come out of my mouth. I have never used a word for the first time, though I want to, desperately. I want to get out of the trap of repeating, of using someone else's words (whose?) to describe my own experience. I want to invent, to make art with my mouth. But whenever I try, I stop making any sense at all.

Deirdre Logue's *Enlightened Nonsense* is a series of ten 16mm films, mastered on Betacam SP, and transferred to DVD so it can loop in gallery settings.

Everywhere I see her hands. Touching, scratching, toning, erasing. These pictures have come out of her hands. Out of her body and the body of film. She has kneaded this emulsion, allowed it to bear its secrets, to impress upon its transport of emulsion and acetate, the beginnings of witness.

This is an action movie with one protagonist. A monologue of the body. Not a confession, but a testimonial. It is a portrait of everyone who looks, a study of compulsion and repetition, in other words, the way we make meaning. Our selves. It is photographed of course in close-up.

Each action is as simple as falling down. Starting over. Getting hit by a ball. Drinking milk. Removing



tape from your face. Wishing it could change but it can't. Putting magic marker stitches on your arms and face. No action appears just once, but over and again. This is the way the body remembers and forgets. Or better: this is the way the body performs the join of the past and present. In order to remember, it must forget.

These are letters from the department of redundancy department.

I have always loved titles. Imagine my delight, my delirium even, in discovering 'foreign' films which typically featured hundreds of titles. Walter Ong: "If a picture is worth a thousand words, then why does it have to be a saying?" Perhaps it's because I don't have children, denied the task of naming. Deirdre Logue has produced titles for each of her labours, which appear like headings on a specimen jar. Here is a list, beginning with my favourite, in a descending index of pleasure.

1. Always a Bridesmaid...Never a Bride of Frankenstein
2. Sleep Study
3. H2O Oh Oh
4. Fall
5. Moohead
6. Milk and Cream
7. Patch
8. Scratch
9. Road Trip
10. Tape
11. Enchanted Nonsense

Deirdre's work is a kind of departure for what cannot be rehearsed in life. The artist performs in each film. This work is too important to be left to others. She never leaves the stage of the frame, and never speaks, she lets her body do the talking. She shows, demonstrating the cost of living in a body. She offers us the trial of ideas and their execution, her skin appearing as a book, written over and over, and without end.

Perhaps the collection of our habits is what we call personality.

Sometimes she needs company. She doesn't invite someone else because there is no way to share this making, this reproduction. She is giving birth alone. But still she needs company. She finds it not in other people but in other pictures. She speaks as a picture to other pictures. An advertisement for Jello. Broken glasses. A bed making and unmaking itself. A mother speaking to her daughter.

"It would be a lot more convenient if we could talk tomorrow unless it's something very very important."

Last night I dreamt of Deirdre Logue. In my dream I walk to the fab corner store newly opened. It has everything: melons from Guatemala, ice cream from the Ivory Coast, one-piece acrylic chairs from New

York. I happily stuff my shopping cart and proceed to the check-out where I point to a brownish mound of something that looks suspiciously like shit. "What is it?" I ask. The handsome man at the counter finishes stuffing a human-size chocolate egg into one of the bags. "That's time. And I'm afraid it's been reserved for the artist." When I look behind me, Deirdre Logue stands with a look of apology on her face.

I imagine a film portrait of a friend. I will photograph only the most typical of his activities. Every day I will shoot him shaving, brushing his teeth, washing his dishes, eating. Using video technology, viewers will be able to swap their face for his, trade clothes, remap genders. In this way, it will become a portrait of everyone who looks. It will be a study of compulsion and repetition, not the highlight reel, but the things we do every day. Our selves.

I don't see much art anymore, I just don't have the time. I make appointments with my friends the way galleries book exhibitions—many months in advance. When I make it to a show, I look at everything as quickly as I can and tick it off my list: groceries, keys cut, gallery, call mother. Of all the things on my list, art is the only one that reminds me, constantly, of how little time I have left. So mostly I've stopped going. It's too depressing.

*Enlightened Nonsense* is one film in ten parts. Or ten films in one part. There is no dividing them now. They have been married, so even as they draw to a close,

they get nearer to the place where they will begin again. Somehow this comforts me. I leave the gallery, knowing she is still there, unwrapping and falling, drinking and scratching.





# Transformer Toy: an interview with Deirdre Logue

by Mike Hoolboom

Deirdre Logue's work returns to the first person stage of early video art. They are monodramas made for the camera, and the artist performs in each film. They are wordless, demonstrating the cost of living in a body, her skin appearing as a book, written over and over, and without end. Perhaps the collection of our habits is what we call personality.

For years she worked to celebrate the work of others, beginning a fringe film/video festival in Windsor and rejuvenating Toronto's Images Fest. She has sat on endless boards and committees, part of that vast corps of volunteers which keep the wheels of the fringe turning. Over the past years she has been at work on a cycle of her own, a ten-part movie whose flickering, hand-processed surface examines the darkest of human leanings with compassion and humour. It is photographed of course in close-up.

MH: Can you take me through a bit of your history?

DL: My partner Kim was accepted to the graduate program at the University of Windsor, so we moved from Vancouver and there was a job opening at Artcite, Windsor's artist run centre. After working there for a year Artcite decided to do some film/video programming. Hoping to encourage local production outside the university setting, I started the House of Toast with four or five others, a collective which

scrapped together all the equipment we had between us. Our first official project was called Two Minute Videos, where anyone could come and make a short tape over a weekend and be fully supported. The collective did all the technical stuff, we made ten over that weekend and had a screening. It was a way to introduce video and some of the tapes were really great. Later we teamed up with the Detroit Filmmakers Coalition and started up the Media City festival which I ran for a couple of years, and it's still running.

People became interested in seeing images of themselves, and we were their eyes, taking on a documentary function for a while. We documented the Heidelberg Project in Detroit, Tyre Gysin's neighborhood art renovation project, and were hired by local rock band Luxury Christ to document their Jello Sex Cult CD release. Windsor is a lonely place for artists, so they do more than go to board meetings together.

At the same time I took a course at the university and made two films which aren't in distribution because I consider them student exercises. The first film was called *Sniff*, and it shows a woman crawling across a gravel parking lot sniffing something out, about three minutes long. Sound familiar? I was one of three women in the class, along with future directors of *National Lampoon 5* and *Die Hard 56*. They were all wannabe monster movie makers, awful young people

who made films in their dorms, drinking beer and killing each other with fake guns.

To supplement my income I was working in a homeless shelter for women and this job was killing me. I'd worked in transition houses and rape crisis centers before, but this particular shelter was very violent and poorly managed. One woman came with her husband from New Brunswick only to lose everything at the casino, and now she's sharing a bed with a sixteen year old junkie from Detroit. It was like a prison, you couldn't do any real work there. So when Kim finished university we moved to Toronto and I got a job with the Images Festival, a ten day event held every spring which runs mostly short film and video work by artists, as well as installations and performances.

MH: Tell me a story about Images.

DL: In 1997 we moved to the Factory Theatre in a bid to regain a sense of tribe. We had to clear out the barn and put on a show, and were unprepared for the level of rehabilitation the venue required. We did a lot of cleaning, built a booth, hung a screen, hauled in a portable 35mm projector, took out seats, the works. Under my stringent direction we were, of course, behind schedule. So it's about three in the morning the day before opening, and we're beyond exhausted, people are freaking out, and the projector won't fit in the booth so we have to cut part of it open. Then we all settle back and watch *Black Ice*, and it looks so beautiful, the image large and clear, it's the first thing

onscreen after all that work. Then someone asks, 'Do you smell smoke?' And our projectionist says, 'Holy shit!' and we look back to see the projector's on fire. We opened later the same day.

I think that festivals are social events, as much as a site for discourse, though a lot of fests hold onto the idea that it's really about the work, as opposed to a context within which people can talk about cultural activity in general. Too often festivals create a mandate which becomes a code of behaviour. A festival's mandate should change at least every year, as the cultural climate shifts.

It wasn't until I quit Images that I could make my own work.

MH: Could you describe *Enlightened Nonsense* (22 minutes 16mm and video 2000)?

DL: It's a series of ten thematically related films. They were made over a three year period, from 1997-2000, and each of the films was shot, hand-processed and edited in about a week. I am the primary performer, director and technician. This method has made it possible for me to leave behind scripts and crews in favour of a more immediate, self-contained workplace. When I started this cycle of films I described them as fantasies of my own death. But these fantasies are very complex, they might include going shopping for instance. On the other hand, having performed these actions, there's something very real about ripping off your face for two days. You return to the present.

I've had a lot of different responses to the work, many negative, but none without fascination. What was I expecting? The work is not made to disguise itself. What compels an individual to draw stitches all over her body, to wrap her head in tape, to gorge on milk and cream, to fall repeatedly, to soak her head in water, to be hit on the head by a basketball over and over, to put patches on her face, or thorns in her pants, to lick up the road? The work urges its audience to ask questions. What would compel me to do this? What might compel them to do this? As an artist, when I perform these actions alone, the audience is already there, on the other side of the camera.

MH: So you're not really alone when you're making the work?

DL: Metaphorically true. There are three parties in the primal scene: the child and two parents. The child is the witness, the parents are having sex, devouring each other, or so it appears. I am one of the parents, paired with the audience. The camera is the witness, maybe, I don't know. The camera is an object that views, even though I set up the shot and pull the trigger, part of it is still outside my control. It translates experience according to a machine dynamic. It creates a point of view that I respond to. In *Roadtrip* it's supported by pebbles on the roadside, forcing the audience to lie on the ground and watch a horizontal experience. Every time I take my camera out of its case there's someone behind it. Someone other than

me. If you want attention or affection you behave in a certain way, you perform, and it's the same when you're in front of a camera. You perform in order to elicit certain responses. In the end, the audience looks through the camera, the seeing machine, in order to witness my behaviour.

There was a group of women, all around fifty, who came through the YYZ gallery while my installation was running. They watched the piece and then I joined them for a discussion. One woman said, "I feel so sorry for you, and I feel sorry for your body." Another said that any young person could walk in here and be completely traumatized, you should put a sign up on the door. But I stuck it out. I asked the woman why she felt sorry for my body, separate from me. I spent an hour with that group, don't ask me why. They went from *Enlightened Nonsense* to the restaurant for blue cheese tarts and a glass of white wine, then off to see the Manets. It was important to talk to them, maybe, because words are familiar to them, while pictures are strange, unless they're on TV.

MH: Can you tell me about Phil Hoffman's workshop?  
DL: It was the first opportunity I had to focus on my work in many years, the fact that it was also a beautiful place in the country where I could talk about what I wanted to do, was icing on the cake. The workshop takes place on a farm with a screening



facility, darkroom, editing suites and cameras. It's one of those places where working through the night is so easy that morning is a disappointment. It puts pressure on you to experience, not to produce. During five intense days, you get to watch others making, their mistakes and successes, and everyone puts their heads together to solve different conceptual and aesthetic problems. It helps remind you that you're not the only person on the planet, that helping others and asking for help is one of our joys. Seven of the ten films were shot there.

When I made *Fall* I shot 500 feet of film of myself running away from the camera, throwing myself on the ground and then running back. All that stuff in between is some of the best stuff. In the films where I'm right in front of the camera and I have to lean forward to turn it on and off...so much gets made there. I try to work alone as much as I can. But sometimes when I'm using a Bolex, I don't have time to run into the frame and perform before the camera wind's over. Sometimes I can't see what's really going to happen. But I prefer working alone, the relationship between the camera and performer is so important.

My films are autobiographical but refuse storytelling. Each has clear parameters, so it's like you're looking at my arm as opposed to all of me. They are the result of spending five days a week on an analyst's couch trying to understand things about myself that are dark and complicated. I feel like I'm better at talking about

it as an artist than I am as a human being. The unconscious is very tricky. The unconscious is like someone who pulls all your plugs out and puts them back in another order. But the actions I perform in my films are not extraordinary or bizarre. I use common objects and familiar scenarios. Basketballs, packing tape, water, whip cream, dirt and underwear — these are everyday items. Their strangeness and intensity derives from repetition.

Humiliation and discomfort are pretty normal kinds of feelings. Masochism is how we get along with others. I'm just giving these feelings a different shape. While there is a recurrent masochism in the work, I have to object to labeling it self-abuse. This simply doesn't say much about the content of the work. I don't make films where I stick my head in a bucket of cold water over and over again to prove my machismo. I don't make films to show people how much pain I can take.

MH: You've foregrounded the surface of the film.

DL: The form and content are related. The film feels hand-made, it's been scratched on, sections have been tinted and toned, and it's all been hand-processed. I cut the original, bringing all the abuse of the film strip into the editing room. The body of the film and my body arrive together, they're both physical events.

The sound is brought into the film two ways, via the found footage, which has its own soundtrack, but because the sound is scanned later than the picture

on a projector, all of the sound appears about a second after you see the image. The second way sound is introduced is by drawing or marking on the area where the optical head will read it. Any variation in emulsion will produce sound, so when I'm tinting, toning and processing, this is also adding a sound element. These sounds are sampled and looped on the Avid (digital video editing machine), slowed down and fucked with.

MH: Tell me about *Sleep Study*.

DL: In *Sleep Study* I included footage of myself as a kid, precociously dancing out in front of my elementary school, and then it then cuts to footage of me during a sleep analysis (I suffer from various sleep disorders, and I photographed myself at the clinic, attached to wires and probes which monitor my sleeping). When it returns to the home movie footage I've fallen down and hurt my knee. I'm crying and walking home to my house which is in the background, and the neighborhood kids run into the frame trying to help but I don't want their help. I get to the front door and it's locked, no one's home because my parents are busy shooting a movie of me trying to get into the house.

MH: Is it more difficult for women to make work than men?

DL: No. Both genders are capable of experiencing equal pain, confusion and anxiety so if you make personal work it's equally difficult. I grew up in the artist run centre movement which was always a fantastic idea, but they needed women to come in and

run them. Art needs chicks. Festivals, publications, galleries, they're all being run by women. Why? Because women are good at diplomacy, collective communal behaviour, girls like to share, they're capable of interpersonal intimacy in the workplace, tidy, good with money, and have excellent penmanship. The primary cultural worker bees have been women, once you step outside that all the institutions are run by men. But I've never lacked entitlement or luck.

MH: Why are you making a series of films?

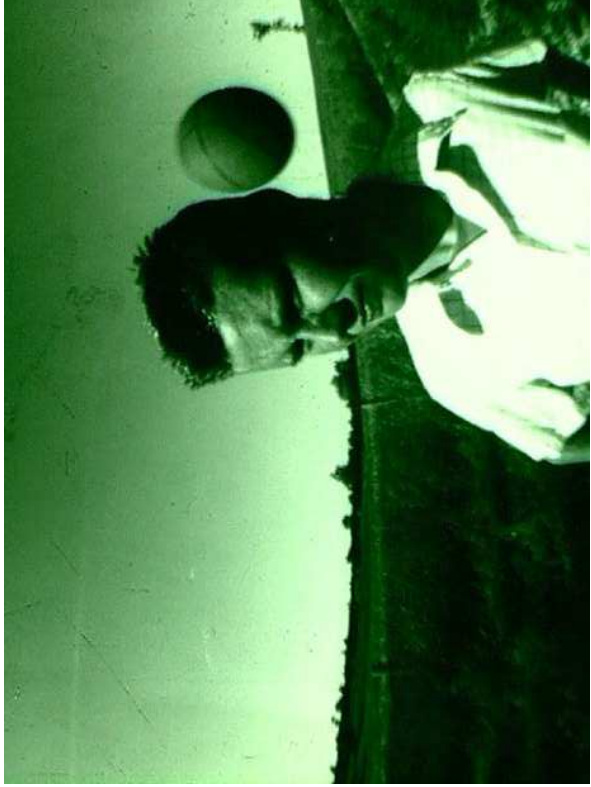
DL: Too much spare time. I like multiples, twelve ears of corn, ten related films. I like the idea of having one problem and ten solutions. Some of the work is very brief, just thirty seconds long, and they reveal themselves best when they're rubbing up against other things. This is considered pretty normal in the art world. Painters and drawers rarely show work one at a time. Singers don't sing one song, they release albums. This is my album.

What else do you want to know? I took lessons in dance and karate, played softball, went to girl guides, brought home stray animals, ate already chewed gum off the concrete, and was a chronic nose picker. My mother claimed I had a fecal obsession as a child which thank god hasn't panned out as anything serious. I was a TV junkie as a child and still am. My favorite's are the commercials. The first movie I saw in a cinema was *Oliver Twist*, and I cried the whole way through.

When I was a kid I had three favourite things: a drumset, (yes I was a child protégé on the drums), my collection of monster movie models, (Wolfman, Phantom of the Opera, Hunchback, Mummy), and a book of short stories that I still have, most of them extremely violent and uncompromisingly ruthless to children.

MH: Is there an avant-garde today?

DL: Only in fashion.



# Women, Nature and Chemistry: Hand-Processed Films from the Film Farm

by Janine Marchessault



The representation of nature has been a central and longstanding aesthetic preoccupation of Canadian art and iconography. Nowhere is this more in evidence than in a series of films that have emerged from Philip Hoffman's hand-processing film workshop located on a forty-acre farm in southern Ontario. Since 1994, the films coming out of this summer retreat have been remarkable in terms of the consistency of their themes and innovative aesthetic approaches. One finds here a new generation of experimental filmmakers, exploring the boundaries between identity, film, chemistry and nature.

The creative context for these films is no doubt shaped by the experimental films and critical concerns of Hoffman and his late partner, Marian McMahon, film (as) memory and pedagogy. Hoffman, weary of overseeing large classes and high-end technologies at film school, conceived of a different pedagogical model for teaching film production. Instead of the urban, male dominated and technology heavy atmosphere, the Independent Imaging Workshop would be geared towards women and would feature hand-processing techniques. The process encouraged filmmakers to explore the environment through film, and to explore film through different chemical processes. The result is a number of beautiful short films that are highly personal, deeply phenomenological and often surreal.



*Dandelions* (Dawn Wilkinson, 1995), *Swell* (Carolynne Hew, 1998), *Froglight* (Sarah Abbott, 1997), *Fall* and *Scratch* (Deirdre Logue, 1998), *Across* (Cara Morton, 1997) and *We Are Going Home* (Jennifer Reeves, 1998) are among the most striking, recalling some of Joyce Wieland's artisanal works and the psychic intensity of Maya Deren's "trance" films.

By artisanal I do not mean the aesthetic effect of "home made" movies produced by the uneven colouration of hand-processing and tinting techniques. I am referring to the process of making films that is embedded in the final effect, that is, the work of film. Joyce Wieland's work was often characterized as artisanal, a term that in the '60s and '70s was the opposite of great art. Famously, she made films on her kitchen table, bringing a history of women's work to bear on her productions. In a video document of the Film Farm three women sit at a kitchen table in a barn discussing the varying and unpredictable results of processing recipes: the thickness of the emulsion, the strength of the solutions, the degree of agitation, not to mention air temperature and humidity. Out of the lab and into the kitchen (or barn), film production moves into the realm of the artisan and the amateur which, as Roland Barthes once observed, is the realm of love. This is the home of the experimental in its ordinary meaning, of finding what is not being sought, of being open to living processes and to chance.

Like Wieland, this new generation of filmmakers is exploring the relationship between bodies, the materiality of film stocks and the artifacts of the world around them. The simple images of nature (daisies, fields, frogs, trees, rivers, clouds, and so on) and rural architectures (bridges, barns, roads, etc.) are exquisite in their different cinematic manifestations. This is not idealized or essentialist nature, rather the landscapes are grounded in an experience of place. In Dawn Wilkinson's *Dandelions* for example, the filmmaker speaks of her relation to her birthplace and to home: "I am Canadian." As the only black child growing up in a rural town in Ontario, she was frequently asked, "Where are you from?" As she tells us about her experiences of being connected to nature while not being included in the history of a nation, we see her with dandelions in her hair, she films her various African keepsakes in the landscape, we follow her bare feet on a road and later, she does cartwheels across fields. The montage of images is delicately rhythmic and is accompanied by a monologue directed at an imaginary audience. "Where are YOU from?" ... I was born here." Like so many of the films produced at the workshop, the film explores the relation between the natural landscape and social identity.

Several of the films display quite literally a describe to inscribe personal identity and history onto or, in the case of Carolynne Hew's *Swell*, into the landscape. In *Swell*, Hew, lying on a pile of rocks, begins to place the stones over her body. The film is structured by a

movement from the city into the country, but the simple opposition is undone by both the filmmaker's body and film processes. The quick montage of black and white city images (Chinatown, bodies moving on the street, smoke, cars) accompanied on the soundtrack by a cement drill, is replaced by feet on rocks, strips of film blowing in the wind and beautifully tinted shots of yarrow blooms. There is no attempt here at a pristine nature, at representing a nature untouched by culture. Rather, the film is about the artist's love of nature, her sensual desire to be in nature. Shots of her face over the city are replaced with images of nature over her body, yarrow casts detailed shadows on her thigh, a symphony of colours abounds-orange, blue and fuschia. Strands of film hang on a line and Hew plays them with her scissors as one would a musical instrument. The sounds of nature-crickets, bees, water-are strongly grounded in the sound of her own body, breathing and finally a heartbeat. There are no words in this film but everything is mediated through language and through the density of the filmmaker's perception and imagination. The film is laid to rest on a beautiful rock as she scratches the emulsion with scissors, the relation between film and nature is dialectical. Nature here is both imagined (hand-processed) and experienced. It is impossible to separate the two.

Deirdre Logue's two short and deceptively simple films, *Fall* (1997) and *Scratch* (1998), also convey the filmmaker's physical insertion into nature. This time the experience is not sensual release, but rather a

sadomasochistic and painful journey. In *Fall*, Logue falls (faints?) over and over again from different angles and in different natural locations to become one, in a humorous and bruised way, with the land. In *Scratch*, she is more explicit about the nature of her images as we read: "My path is deliberately difficult." Facing the camera, she puts thistles down her underpants, and pulls them out again. The sounds of breaking glass as well as the crackle of film splices are almost the only sounds heard in this mostly silent film. Intercut are found footage images from an instructional film, we see a bed being automatically made and unmade, glass breaking and plates smashed. This film is sharp and painful. Logue, beautifully butch in her appearance, is anything but "natural," it is clear that the nature she is self-inflicting is the nature of sex. Her body is treated like a piece of emulsion-processed, manipulated, scratched, cut to fit. What is left ambiguous is whether the source of self-inflicted pain results from going against a socially prescribed nature or embracing a socially deviant one.

Sarah Abbott's *Froglight* (1997) is even more ambiguous than either *Swell* or *Scratch* in terms of the nature of nature. The film opens with the artist's voice-over black leader: "I am walking down the road with my camera but I can't see anything." A tree comes into focus as she tells us, "But I know I am walking straight towards something, we always are." For Abbott there is something that exceeds the image, that exceeds her thinking about nature. She

experiences a moment standing in a field, a moment that cannot be reduced to an image or words, she "experiences something that is not taught," she does not want to doubt this experience because "life would be smaller." Abbott touches the earth, we hear the sound of her footsteps, we see a road, we hear frogs, and later we come upon a frog at night. In the narration, which is accompanied by the sound of frogs, Abbott attempts to put into words the idea of an experience that is beyond language, the idea that the world is much more than film, than the artist's won imaginings. Like the soundtrack, the film's black and white images are sparse. A magnifying glass over grass makes the grass less clear and is the film's central phenomenological drive: surfaces reveal nothing of what lies beneath. Towards the end of the film, a long held shot of wild flowers blowing in the wind is accompanied by Abbott's voice-over: "A woman gave me a sunflower before I came to make this film, and someone asked if it was my husband as I held it in my arm." The ambiguity of this statement foregrounds the randomness of signs (flower, husband) and language. *Froglight* affirms a nature that is mysterious and unknowable, a world of spiritual depth and creative possibility.

What first struck me about so many of the films coming out of the workshop is the tension between the female self/body and nature; each film is in some way an exploration of the filmmaker's relation to the land as place by cartwheeling, walking, or falling on it, and in the last two films that I want to comment on,

swimming and dreaming through it. Women's bodies in Jenn Reeves' *We Are Going Home* and Cara Morton's *Across* are not only placed in nature but in time. Temporality exists on two planes in all of the hand-processed films I have been discussing, not only in terms of the images of a nature that is always changing but also in terms of film stocks and chemicals that continue to work on the film through time. Where workprints serve to protect the original negative from the processes of post-production, the films produced at the workshop use reversal stock and thus include the physical traces of processing and editing, an intense tactility that will comprise the final print of the film. This is what gives these films their temporal materiality and sensuality. In *We Are Going Home* and *Across* this temporality is narrativized and it is perhaps fitting that both films experiment more extensively with advanced film techniques such as time-lapse cinematography, solarization, single-frame pixelation, split toning and tinting, superimpositions, optical printing and so on. Here is where these two filmmakers would part company with Wieland whose cinematic sensibility is, in the first instance, shaped by a non-narrative tradition. Both films are steeped in a narrativity that can be more easily situated in relation to the psychodrama of another founding mother of the avant-garde, Maya Deren.

In the films of Maya Deren, nature and the search for self are always an erotic and deeply psychological enterprise. Dreams allow passage to a human nature

and mysterious self that cannot be accessed through conscious states. Her films have been characterized as "trance" films for the way the foster this movement into the deepest recesses of the self, a movement that is less about social transgression as it was for the Surrealists, then about the journey through desire. *We Are Going Home* is a gorgeous surrealist film that has all the characteristics of the trance film and more. It is structured around a dream sequence that has no real beginning or end. The first image we see is of a vending machine dispensing "Live Bait" in the form of a film canister. A woman opens the canister to find fish roe (eggs). The equation of fish roe and film, no doubt a nod to the Surrealists, opens up those ontological quandaries around mediation and truth that *Froglight* refers us to. It is this promise of direct contact along with the return "Home" in the film's title, that give some sign that the highly processed landscapes belong to the unconscious.

The film is structured around a network of desire between three women. One woman dives into a lake and ends up feet first in the sand. Another woman happens by and sucks her toes erotically at which point everything turns upside-down and backwards. Characters move through natural spaces (the beach, fields, water) disconnected from the physical landscapes and from each other. Superimposed figures over the ground move like ghosts, affecting and affected by nothing. Storm clouds, trees in the wind, a thistle, cows are all processed and pixelated to look supernatural. Toe sucking complete, the

second woman lies down under an apple tree and falls asleep, the wind gently blows her shirt open. A third woman, adream figure, emerges from a barn, skipping through fields she happens upon the sleeping figure and cannot resist the exposed breast, she bends over and sucks the nipple. The film ends with a sunset and romantic accordion music that is eerily off-key.

*We Are Going Home* is an erotic film whose sensuality derives both from the sublime image processing and from the disunity between all the elements in the film: the landscapes, the colours, the people. The sounds of birds cackling, water and wind that make up the soundtrack further intensify the film's discordance. It is precisely this disunity that charges the sexual encounters which are themselves premised on an objectification. Home remains a mysterious place that exceeds logic and rationality, it is a puzzle whose pieces are connected in a seemingly linear manner but which will always remain mysterious.

In contrast, the psychic space in Morton's *Across* is shaped through unity rather than disunity, the film is about crossing a bridge. the central tension in this lovely film, which accomplishes so much in a little over two minutes, is built upon a desire to connect with an image from the filmmaker's past. The metaphorical journey forward to see the past is conveyed through a hand-held camera travelling at a great speed across a dirt road, through fields, along



fences and through woods. Different colour stocks combine with high-contrast black and white images of the bridge while on the soundtrack we hear a river. As we travel with the filmmaker through these landscapes, we encounter a high-angle solarized image of a woman sleeping in a field, a negative image of a woman swimming in the river below the bridge; a static shot of Morton staring into the camera, and home-movie images of Morton as a young girl running towards the camera. An intensity and anticipation is created in the movement and in the juxtaposition of the different elements. These are quietly resolved at the end of the film: the young girl smiles into the camera to mirror the close-up of Morton's inquisitive gaze, the swimmer completes her stroke, stands up, brushes the water from her eyes and seems to take a deep breath.

The workshop films that I have written about reveal a renewal of avant-garde concerns with experimental techniques—they are unabashedly beautiful and filled with a frenetic immediacy. To some degree their aesthetic approach grows directly out of the workshop structure: location shooting and hand-processing. Participants (which now include equal numbers of men) are invited to shoot surrounding locations and to collect images randomly rather than to preconceive them through scripting. The aim of the workshop is not to leave with a finished product but rather to experiment with shooting immediate surroundings using a Bolex and with hand-processing techniques. Many of the films produced at the workshop are never

completed as final works but stand as film experiments, the equivalent of a sketchbook. This is the workshop's most important contribution to keeping film culture alive in Canada. The emphasis on process over product, on the artisanal over professional, on the small and personal over the big and universal which has been so beneficial for a new generation of women filmmakers, also poses a resistance to an instrumental culture which bestows love, fame and fortune on the makers of big feature narratives.



# Beyond the Fringe- handmade filmmaking still finds its place in experimental film

by Larissa Fan

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When I was thinking of possible subjects for my first column for Take One, I was startled to realize how many experimental filmmakers produce what are being referred to as handmade or handcrafted films—those created by working directly with the material of film. Techniques encompass hand-processing, colour toning, "cameraless" methods such as scratching, drawing and painting on the film with dyes and even homemade emulsion. Handmade films foreground the material, chemical surface of the film and the filmmaker's unique artistry. These are particularly potent qualities in an increasingly homogenized and digital world.

Handmade films are not new. Most of the early avant-garde filmmakers came to film from other disciplines—Man Ray was a photographer, Hans Richter and Viking Eggeling were painters—techniques such as photograms and hand-painting were natural extensions of their work. Records of hand-painted films can be found as early as 1910, and Len Lye and Norman McLaren were making hand-painted films in the 1930s. In the past decade, there have been enough filmmakers working in this fashion both nationally and internationally that it can be seen as a trend. Toronto filmmaker Gariné Torossian makes intricate collages by cutting and taping different film formats together in layers (*Girl from Moush*, 1993). Izabella Pruska-Oldenhof has

made two photogram films (*Light Magic*, 2001; *Song of the Firefly*, 2002), in which objects placed on the film surface create the film image. In *Her Carnal Longings* (2003) she explores the emulsion-lift technique, which involves lifting the emulsion off the film surface and re-adhering it. Calgary's Richard Reeves (*Linear Dreams*, 2001) creates cameraless animations by drawing and scratching on the film surface, frame by frame, even going so far as to draw his soundtracks.

Much of the recent upsurge in handmade filmmaking in Canada, and particularly Toronto, can be attributed to Phil Hoffman and the week-long workshop he has been running on his farm in rural Ontario since 1994. The Independent Imaging Retreat (commonly known as the Film Farm) is a crash course in shooting, hand-processing, tinting and toning. Deirdre Logue, Christina Zeidler and Sarah Abbott are just a few of the experimental filmmakers whose films have been shaped by the workshop.

There are a number of reasons why handmade filmmaking has currently gained such prominence in the experimental film world. On a purely economic level, handmade films are cheap to make. More pertinently, they free the filmmaker from a reliance on film labs and services that are rapidly disappearing in the wake of digital technology. It's clear that as analog technology becomes obsolete, experimental filmmakers, already masters of invention, will have to become increasingly self-reliant. A critique of mass-

consumer culture and the drive toward technology is implicit in handmade filmmaking. Handcrafted films are by nature personal films, indelibly containing the mark of their maker in their idiosyncrasies and imperfections. Hand-processing, for example, results in scratches on the emulsion and patches of irregular development. There is a direct physical connection between the artist and the film itself, whether sloshing it about in a bucket of chemicals or painstakingly scratching through the emulsion. With their intimate connection to the body, artisanal processes reintegrate the physical senses into filmmaking for both the maker and viewer. However, handmade filmmaking should not be viewed as a naive rejection of technology. Indeed, many filmmakers blend handcraft and digital technology as it suits their needs. Rather than drawing attention to the means of their construction, handmade films counteract the illusionism of mainstream cinema in much the same manner as other experimental strategies. And in a sea of mass production and cookie-cutter sequels, handmade films are an assertion of the importance of the small, the unique and the individual.

# The Performative Body: From Primal Fantasies to Perversion

Carol J. Moore

March, 2001

Windsor, Ontario

**Part I: Involutio: Latin, meaning involution, the action of involving or the fact of being involved; an entanglement; intricacy....**

The more exaggeratedly narcissistic and particularized this body is—that is, the more it surfaces and even exaggerates its nonuniversality in relation to its audience—the more strongly it has the potential to challenge the assumption of normativity....the narcissistic, particularized body both unveils the artist (as body/self necessarily implicated in the work of art as a situated, social act), turning her inside out, and strategically insists upon the contingency of this body/self on that of the viewer or interpreter of the work. As the artist is marked as contingent, so is the interpreter, who can no longer (without certain contradictions being put into play) claim disinterestedness in relation to this work of art.

Amelia Jones, *Body Art: Performing the Subject*, p. 9

I want to begin by saying something about the impossibility of claiming “disinterestedness in relation to this work of art”, this series of films, together entitled *Enlightened Nonsense: Ten Short Performance Films About Repetition and Repetition*, which are screening here this evening. I want to try to understand, to account for in some way, why – by what means – they speak to us as viewers, as interpreters, marking **our** bodies as contingent, so that we can no longer (without certain contradictions being put into play) claim a comfortable disinterestedness. But I also don’t want to say too much, to give away the game right at the start, and spoil this deliberate seduction by foreclosing on it too soon.

**Part II: Invocatio: Latin, meaning invocation, to invoke. The act or an instance of invoking an authority; an appeal to a supernatural being or beings, e.g., the Muses, for psychological or spiritual inspiration; in Christianity, the words “In the name of the Father,” etc. used at the beginning of a religious service, as the preface to a sermon.**

In *Totem and Taboo* (1913) Freud is at pains to point out that while certain cultural practices such as art and religion may share “striking and far-reaching points of agreement” (p. 130) with certain forms of psychopathology, they are in fact quite different in their origins and purposes. The neuroses, as Freud



points out, are “asocial structures,...essentially the private affair of each individual”, whereas cultural practices, such as art, are “effected in society by collective effort...based upon social instincts” (pp.130-131). Although both the neuroses and cultural production share their origins in the sexual instincts, and this is no doubt why they share so many “striking and far-reaching points of agreement,” their difference—and this is a critical difference—lies in the way the ego comes into play in the production of culture. For example, it is through the workings of the ego that the artist places herself in an identificatory relation to the history and culture of artistic production. For our purposes, here, this evening, Freud’s distinction between individual neuroses and cultural production is an important one, because of the way in which it both implicates the artist in her films (we will be looking at how the work of an individual artist represents certain psychical events) and allows us to separate the two. In other words, while the discussion of the films will seek to articulate the presence, in the work, of primal fantasies of seduction, castration, and the primal scene, it will also lay the groundwork which will enable us, I hope, to say something about the work of the artist as a cultural or social, rather than individual, production, and perhaps as well to say something about how it is and why it is we, as viewers, respond.

At this point, I want to say something about performance, performativity, and the critical gesture of performance art. The films you’ve seen are films inasmuch as that is the medium, but really they are

performances, in the sense of “performance art”—they are, as works of art, inseparable from the artist’s actions, as a performance. As such, there are certain things we can say about how they function. Amelia Jones, in Body Art: Performing the Subject, makes a distinction between performance art and what she calls “body art,” along lines that could be useful for our purposes: the term “body art” foregrounds the body and the embodiment of subjectivity with a specificity that can be lost in the broader term “performance art;” secondly, “body art” allows for works of art that did not perhaps originally take place in front of a live audience, but have been documented through photography, film, video, etc.; and lastly, as Jones has stated, body art, “in its opening up of the interpretive relation and its active solicitation of spectatorial desire...provides the *possibility* for radical engagements that can transform the way we think about meaning and subjectivity (both the artist’s and our own)” (p. 14). However, the term “body art” suffers from a kind of colloquialism in its current association with the practice of adorning the body with tattoos and piercings, which while interesting and provocative, don’t engage or implicate the viewer to the same degree in the radical, interpretive, intersubjective relation that the notion of the “performative” which is embedded in performance art does. For this reason, I would prefer to refer to the films in question here not as “body art” or “performance art,” but “performative art.” My reasons for asserting this are as follows: the body, which Jones wants to make sure is foregrounded in the works she discusses, will not allow itself to be missed in the films we have seen this

evening; in fact, the presence of the body is rendered so insistent by what it does and has done to it, that in the face of this I feel the need to foreground the “performative,” just in case we need reminding.

How, then, do we understand this notion of the performative? “Performance as bounded ‘act,’” writes Judith Butler in Bodies That Matter,

is distinguished from performativity insofar as the latter consists of a *reiteration* of norms which precede, constrain, and exceed the performer’s ‘will’ or ‘choice’; further, what is ‘performed’ works to conceal, if not to disavow, what remains opaque, unconscious, unperformable. The reduction of performativity to performance would be a mistake (p. 234).

In other words, what Butler draws our attention to in distinguishing the performative from performance is that what is at stake in the performative belongs to the register of the “beyond” of the performer’s conscious will or choice, “beyond” here used in the same sense Freud uses it in Beyond the Pleasure Principle. What is beyond the pleasure principle is not the reality principle, but the death drive, the “beyond” referring not only to a sense of “after” -- what is produced -- or is in excess, but “before”, what conditions and constrains, our desire. The performative is the beyond of performance.

Butler, of course, writes about the performativity at stake and at work in the construction of sex

and gender, and this is certainly apropos of our discussion of the primal fantasies of seduction, castration and the primal scene. The performativity of sex and gender, for Butler, IS the continual reiteration—the *saying again, or doing repeatedly*—of regulatory norms, during which process, sex and gender are both produced and destabilized. To quote Butler at length:

As a sedimented effect of a reiterative or ritual practice, sex acquires its naturalized effect, and, yet, it is also by virtue of this reiteration that gaps and fissures are opened up as the constitutive instabilities in such constructions, as that which escapes or exceeds the norm, as that which cannot be wholly defined or fixed by the repetitive labour of that norm. This instability is the deconstituting possibility in the very process of repetition, the power that undoes the very effects by which ‘sex’ is stabilized, the possibility to put the consolidation of the norms of ‘sex’ into a potentially productive crisis (p. 10).

The notion of performativity, then, seeks to acknowledge that through reiteration, through the very process of repetition, we apprehend the power of discourses to produce effects, “...a set of actions mobilized by the law, the citational accumulation and dissimulation of the law that produces material

effects, the lived necessity of those effects as well as the lived contestation of that necessity” (p.12).

What produces this doubled effect, what allows for the dissimulating element of reiteration to be always present, is that regulatory norms also produce their “remainders”, their “outsides”, what psychoanalysis has called “the unconscious,” or Butler calls “a domain of unlivability and unintelligibility that bounds the domain of intelligible effects” (p. 22). But furthermore, and most importantly, the “remainders” or “outsides” or “domains of unlivability” call our attention to the inefficacy of norms and thus the potential for their resignification, subversion, a call to “work...the weakness in the norm...[by] inhabiting the practices of its rearticulation” (p. 237). This would be the work of performative art.

**Part III: In vitro: Latin meaning performed, obtained, or occurring in a test tube, culture dish, or elsewhere outside a living organism.**

The “outside” of the living organism, the “culture dish” of the artist and the interpreter, is this room, this space, in which, like Dr. Frankenstein’s laboratory, we will attempt to patch together something which is greater than the sum of its parts, made up of components whose remainders also produce something over which we do not have conscious control. What we draw from, and what we construct,

exceed the limits of our abilities to perform them. While our fantasies – as artist, psychoanalyst, and audience – constitute our desire, provide the coordinates with which to map our desire, literally teaching us **how** to desire (Zizek, p. 191), our desire always exceeds our ability to articulate it, there is always a surplus, a leftover, which takes us someplace else.

**Part IV: In vivo, Latin, meaning taking place in a living organism.**

The primal fantasies of seduction, castration, and the primal scene direct our attention to the question of origins: the origin of sexuality, the difference between the sexes, and of the individual herself. “Like myths,” write Laplanche and Pontalis in their now classic paper, “Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality,” primal fantasies

claim to provide a representation of, and a solution to, the major enigmas which confront the child. Whatever appears to the subject as something needing an explanation or theory, is dramatized as a moment of emergence, the beginning of a history....We are offered in the field of fantasy, the origin of the subject himself....If we ask what these fantasies mean to us, we...then see that they are not only symbolic, but represent the insertion, mediated by an imagined scenario, of the most radically formative symbolism, into corporeal reality (pp. 11-12).

In other words, primal fantasies function to both situate the subject in a field of pre-existing meaning, and as a means through which to comprehend the insertion of fantasy into the lived body. **Structures exist in the dimension of fantasy** which cannot be reduced simply to the individual subject's experience. Sexuality, as psychoanalysis understands it, is a drive which conditions and determines psychical reality; there are important differences between this conception of sexuality, and one which sees it either as an instinct or a product of the subject's environment. Primal fantasies, then, function as the organizers of that sexuality.

We must also keep in mind that while these fantasies provide the coordinates for, or a mapping of, the construction of desire, what is staged in fantasy is not the subject's **own desire**, but the **Other's desire**. Thus, as Žizek reminds us (pp. 194-5)

Fantasy, fantasmatic formation, is an answer to the enigma of *Che vuoi?*: 'You are saying this, but *what is it that you effectively want by saying it?*' This renders the subject's primordial, constitutive position. The original questioning of desire is not directly 'What do I want?', but 'What do *others* want from me? What do they see in me? What am I for others?' ...While being aware of this...the child cannot fathom what kind of object it is for the others, what the exact nature of the games they are playing is. Fantasy provides an

answer to this enigma; at its most fundamental level, fantasy tells me what I am for my others.

In other words, fantasy is always a description, for the subject, of the Other's desire.

In the first constellation of films I want to turn to – H2Oh-Oh, Road Trip, Milk and Cream, and Fall – the body is compelled to come into contact with another surface--drawn to a ground or a substance which is powerfully suggestive of the body of the other--by a force, which is the gravity of seduction. The significant element of repetition suggests not only the struggle to master seduction's effects, but the very inevitability of its occurrence; the exquisitely uncomfortable, even battering effect of the moment of impact, which we cannot help but feel also as we watch the scenes repeat themselves, is testimony to the traumatic nature of the seduction. Each of these film segments stages the artist (and the viewer, as I will argue later on) as both acting subject and receptive object, returning us to the originary moment of imagined primal seduction, when such a distinction was first introduced and grounded, literally grounding the organization of the body at the hands of the other. In returning us to this scene, we are repeatedly faced with the insecurity, the instability, of either identification--acting subject, receptive object. The body falls repeatedly, almost hypnotically, to the ground, compelled toward contact by gravity, need, and desire; water falls away from the face only to be flung repeatedly back, leaving her/us gasping for breath; milk and cream become piss and shit, the



tongue licks the dry dirt, each scene, repeated, overwhelms the fragile bodily limit between inside and outside. Materially as well as metaphorically, the surface of the body is an envelope, a limit, one which functions as a permeable membrane between inside and outside, but it is also the site of their joining (see Jones, p. 207), and their “joying” – the site of jouissance. These films work so powerfully to represent the enigmatic and traumatic nature of seduction when what must be an often-pondered question -- what is the artist doing to her body and why would she want to do that? – necessarily becomes: What compels the body to fall, gasp, choke, taste, make or suffer contact? What does the ground, water, milk, cream, dirt want from me? Where we make contact with the Other, where what comes from the Other repeatedly constitutes, penetrates, and re-constitutes the skin envelope, where this joining in pain and pleasure takes place is where and how my desire comes into being.

There are several things at stake in this fantasy of seduction as the origin of sexuality which need to be accounted for, in particular, the notion of trauma. That trauma is embedded in sexuality, in a--dare I say it: “normative” sense--may seem hard to accept. In order to understand this, we will have to venture into a contentious area of psychoanalysis, namely Freud's seduction theory. Many of you are no doubt familiar with the problem: Freud's earliest thoughts on the etiology of hysteria contained the conviction that hysteria had at it's root an actual scene of sexual seduction, whose traumatic effects were to be seen in

the florid somatic symptoms of the hysteric; Freud was forced to “abandon” his theory of actual seduction when he began to realize the ubiquitousness of unconscious fantasies of seduction. For Freudophiles, the “abandonment” of the seduction theory is a cause for celebration in that it establishes the primacy of psychic reality over material reality for psychoanalysis; for Freudbashers, this becomes a moment of pure vilification of Freud, who is accused of doing great harm in not believing his women patients. But Freud, in fact, did not abandon the seduction theory; he enlarged and refined it. In laying this out I take my lead from Jean Laplanche, who in Life and Death in Psychoanalysis, is at great pains to explain that the value of Freud's understanding of how sexuality is implanted in the child extends far beyond the reality of instances of sexual seduction.

Freud, of course, was accused in his day and since, of reducing everything to sexuality. In fact, what he really did was to demonstrate that sexuality is at work in everything. And he privileged the sexual drive for very specific reasons. “Why sexuality?” asks Laplanche.

Freud's answer is that sexuality alone is available for that action in two phases which is also an action “after the event.” It is there and there alone that we find that complex and endlessly repeated interplay--midst a temporal succession of missed occasions--of “too early” and “too late” (p.43).

What does this mean? In this passage we find Laplanche alluding to one of the two reasons why the implantation of sexuality into the child is traumatic: it's two phase nature of being both too early and too late. The too early refers to the child's biological immaturity; sexuality comes to the child, from the other, but the child's body is not ready to act on it until puberty. The too late, then, refers to the fact that by the time puberty arrives and the body is sexually matured, it has been already **saturated** with sexuality, imported, as it were, from the world of adults (pp.43-44). This too early-too late conundrum is vital to understanding the nature of trauma: an event becomes traumatic, not because it is necessarily so in and of itself, but because of it's associative link to an earlier event which was enigmatic because the child had yet to be furnished with the affective and ideational correlatives which would allow her to assimilate this earlier event. The too early implantation of sexuality becomes for Freud the template for trauma precisely because it alone of the drives bears this too early-too late legacy of the physical immaturity of the child.

And how, precisely, does sexuality come to be implanted in the child? The answer to this question provides the second key to understanding the traumatic nature of sexuality. To quote at length from Laplanche:

Beyond any seduction scenes by the father, and beyond any openly genital seductions, [Freud] refers to seduction through maternal

care as his primary model....It is thus through excitation by means of maternal care that we can imagine the original form taken by seduction. But here, we should go a step further and not restrict ourselves to the pure materiality of stimulating actions, if indeed such "materiality" can ever be conceived of in isolation. We should, in fact, consider that beyond the contingency and transiency of any specific experience, it is the intrusion into the universe of the child of certain meanings of the adult world which is conveyed by the most ordinary and innocent of acts. Such, we maintain, is the most profound sense of the theory of seduction....(p. 44)

Thus sexuality always comes to the child from the Other, and is traumatic because of the disjuncture between it's "too early"-ness and "too late"-ness which is the legacy of physical immaturity; because it impacts on the child from "without" ; and because it comes to the child in an enigmatic form, prior to the child's ability to decode its meaning, leaving the child unable to answer the question, "what does the object want from me?" Fantasy, then, becomes the means through which this enigmatic question is confronted.

It is significant that Fall is the only one of the films without a soundtrack, and that H2Oh-Oh, Milk and Cream, and Road Trip make use of sound tracks that are limited to random and accidental pops and hisses. The silence, as well as the randomness of the pops

and hisses, I would argue, invoke a kind of hypnotic reverie in which the assaults to the body are both accentuated in their physicality, and “mentated”—moved from without to within, recalling Laplanche’s statement that “everything comes from without in Freudian theory...but at the same time every effect—in its efficacy—comes from within, from an isolated and encysted interior” (pp. 42-43). These four films also suggest in a sense a sightless reverie, for the artist’s eyes never engage the camera/viewer. Thus, we could venture to say, it is as if in *Fall*, *H2Oh-Oh*, *Milk and Cream*, and *Road Trip* there is no other to the other, no third term, whose function it would be to move us from the near-solipsistic imaginary universe of primal seduction, into the symbolic. I would also suggest that the traumatic effects of seduction enacted here, as the body of the artist painfully encounters the body of the other, will only be fully realized in later events, in what is further suggested by the play of castration that takes place in *Scratch*, *Patch*, *Tape* and *Always a Bridesmaid* *Never a Bride* of *Frankenstein*, and in the violence of the primal scene staged in both *Moohead* and *Sleep Study*. To the workings of this temporal disjunction, Freud gave the name “*Nachtraglichkeit*,” which has been translated variously as “afterwardsness” or “deferred action,” and which Lacan brought into prominence as the “*Après-coup*”. As Laplanche and Pontalis remark in The Language of Psychoanalysis, “it is not lived experience in general that undergoes a deferred revision but, specifically, **whatever it has been impossible in the first instance to incorporate fully into a meaningful context.** The traumatic event

is the epitome of such unassimilated experience” (p. 112, emphasis added).

Let us turn now to the second constellation of films -- *Scratch*, *Patch*, *Tape*, and *Always a Bridesmaid* *Never a Bride* of *Frankenstein* -- and see what happens when we think about them in relation to the primal fantasy of castration, that fantasy which purports to convey something of the origins of the child’s efforts to comprehend the mystery of sexual difference. These segments, I will argue, not only stage the scene of castration, but through a certain erotised playfulness especially evident in *Scratch* and *Patch*, suggest not only a fantasied solution to castration—the fetish—but also a reading of fetishism that is in keeping with what psychoanalytic-feminist theorist Parveen Adams has proposed as the subversive power of the fetish, under certain circumstances, to displace the phallus.

The fantasy of castration arises, as I’m sure you all know, in response to the child’s confrontation with the reality of sexual difference. The fantasy contains several important elements, not the least of which is the idea that everyone originally had a penis, but for some unknown reason some people have lost their’s. This realization in turn produces fantasied explanations and solutions, for example, perhaps some people have had their penis cut off as punishment, or, the penis hasn’t been really cut off, it’s alive and well and living somewhere else. The fantasy of castration is also the condition for the raising up, in a symbolic sense, of the biological penis

to become the phallus, that signifier for Lacan of the function of the Law. We are all familiar with the ways in which psychoanalysis has formulated the normative function of the primal fantasy of castration as the castration complex, that psychical process by which little girls and little boys come differently through the oedipal struggle. I'm not going to go into that here, because what I'm interested in instead is how these films suggest an attempt at an alternative solution to the troubling effects of the castration fantasy. I take my understanding of castration from Lacan, who speaks much more often about castration than the castration complex per se. While following Freud in seeing castration as first and foremost a fantasy of the mutilation of the penis, Lacan sees this fantasy as acquiring its symbolic power from its earlier roots in a series of infantile fantasies of bodily dismemberment which are formed in the infant's psychical struggle to construct an image of a whole body out of the bits and pieces of a fragmented one. For Lacan, it is only much later that fantasies of dismemberment come together around the specific fantasy of castration, a castration fantasy that now bears not on the penis as a biological organ, but on the imaginary phallus (Evans, pp. 21-22).

The alternative solution to accepting castration, of course, is to be found in the fetish, that which both stands for the missing penis and suggests the ability of the phallus to circulate independently from the biological reality of "I have a vagina, not a penis." The fetish is also significant for its ability to signal the presence and workings of the defence mechanism of

disavowal. Laplanche and Pontalis tell us that Freud used the term disavowal in a very specific sense, to describe a mode of defence "which consists in the subject's refusing to recognise the reality of a traumatic perception—most especially the perception of the absence of the woman's penis" (p. 118). The fetish, that object put in the place of the missing penis, functions as a memorial to castration, and as such operates by allowing the subject to hold two incompatible positions at once: to simultaneously disavow and acknowledge castration. The fetish functions as a substitute, but in the very act of substitution acknowledges the absence of what it stands in for.

That the theme of castration figures prominently in Scratch, Patch, Tape and Always a Bridesmaid Never a Bride of Frankenstein, is, I think, obvious. What is less obvious is the way in which a certain "playing" with castration, and the "play" of the fetish function to suggest the availability of a complex alternative solution. Leaving aside for the moment any questions about the presence or workings of a perverse strategy, let's think first about what we can actually see in these film segments. In Scratch, the artist positions herself and the camera to focus our attention on her sex, or should I say more accurately, on the ambiguousness of her sex, for there are none of the familiar reference points for determining the sex of the body on screen. The performance at the centre of Scratch is the display and dismantling of the fetish, which is signified by the bundle of burrs, revealed to be entangled in the artist's pubic hair, which are then



picked out and brushed away, signalling both the detachability and displacement of the phallic signifier, a move also repeatedly suggested in Patch, as the patch of baseball “skin” relocates to different sites around the artist’s face, and in the production of a multitude of “incisions” and “stitches” suggested by the marks made on the surface of the body in Always a Bridesmaid Never a Bride of Frankenstein. The playfulness which I alluded to a minute ago is evidenced most clearly in the gestures which embellish the shots of the artist doing her pants up again—the little jig of to-fro movement of the hips--and the masculine gestures of straightening the fly of the pants, and placing the hands on the hips when finished, as well as in the final grimacing smile at the end of Patch. The staging of a series of scenes involving the fetish is, when taken as a whole, suggestive of a series of provocative questions and statements suffused with attitude: “What do you think? Have I got it? Is it there? Yes? No? It’s not what you think! Or is it? So what to you think? Have I still got it? Maybe.... Maybe it doesn’t really matter.” With the final gesture – the tug on the fly, the smile -- the viewer is left with the undecidability of the question; in the end, the play of undecidability is secured by the belief that the play can continue, the smugness of the final gesture suggesting she’s still in the game.

If the fetish stages the play of castration, it does so precisely because of its ability to signal the vacillation between an archaic fantasy of wholeness and the anxiety associated with lack (Homi Bhabha, p. 74,

The Location of Culture). This anxiety surfaces powerfully in Scratch (and is called up in us) by the presence of nearly subliminal images of knives, scissors, and a hammer, and by the visible and audible smashing of cups, plates, and glasses. But nowhere is this anxiety more strongly and frighteningly signalled than in Tape. The pain of repeatedly ripping packing tape off skin and hair is only surpassed in its suggestion of pure agony in the brief but palpable panic that surfaces when, while unwinding the tape, it breaks, and the artist struggles fiercely to gain a hold on some edge that would allow her to rip it from her face and breath again. Repetition as a project of the drive to mastery is nowhere more evident in these films than in Tape, where the artist cleverly and deliberately stages and re-stages the act of doing and undoing by intercutting the footage of winding and unwinding the tape with footage of the same but printed in reverse, creating the sense that some irresistible force is at work here as the tape appears to almost fly on and off her face.

My emphasis here on the function of the fetish raises the issue of perversion, of which I will have something more to say toward the end. However, for now, I’d like to briefly sketch out how this play of the fetish could bring us to see the possibility, in perversion, that desire can be, as Parveen Adams suggests, “freed into a mobility of representations.” Adams, in an article entitled “Of Female Bondage,” attempts to question the traditionally assumed relation between the fetish and the phallus. Let us recall that the fetish, in order to function, depends upon the operation of

disavowal; however, as we have seen, the fetish functions as a substitute, but in the very act of substitution acknowledges the absence of what it stands in for. It would appear then that the fetishist remains stuck in the end, within the very economy he wishes to refuse. In order to force an opening in this economy, Adams turns to the analysis of fetishism laid out by Bersani and Dutoit, who, in their book The Forms of Violence, claim that the success of the fetish depends upon its being seen as **different** from the missing penis. What saves the fetishist from being stuck in the economy of mere substitution is that for the fetishist the penis is not missing—it's somewhere, or something, else; it is, as Freud has put it, “no longer the same as it was before” (“Fetishism”, p. 353). “This penis, no longer the same,” writes Adams, “is the fetish, that which the fetishist now desires. Since the mother has not got the penis which signifies the phallus she has nothing that links her with the fantasy phallus. Since the mediating substitute is missing, desire is ‘cut off’ from the phallus; henceforth, anything can come to be the object of desire” (p. 258).

In a move to free the phallus, Adams asserts that the fetishist has accepted castration because he or she recognizes the gap between desire and its first object. However, whereas for the neurotic, the penis continues to represent the phallus, for Adams the operation of the fetish suggests that “the irreducible difference between the fetish and the first object demonstrates that desire itself might be cut off from its object and may therefore travel to other objects” (p.

258). “The entry into desire is necessarily through castration,” writes Adams, “and it is in the perversions that we see the possibility that the form desire takes will be freed from the penile representation of the phallus and freed into a mobility of representations” (p. 258).

Now, like Adams, I may be playing fast and loose here myself, but I would like to submit that in the image of the bundle of burrs as it is set to work in Scratch we have the suggestion of a signifier of desire that seeks to detach itself from the reference point of the penile representation of the phallus, something which refuses to operate within the field of sexuality to force a choice between “masculine or feminine.” Although phallic in its initial appearance, the bundle of burrs is dismantled and in the end is discarded, leaving in its place, through the gestures of the artist, the undecidability of sexual difference, and the suggestion that the phallus is somewhere else. It is to and through this undecidability that the text in the film finally speaks: “My path is deliberately difficult; my reasons endlessly repetitious; but it is through this that I know myself.” What is difficult, endlessly repeated, and through which we know ourselves, is not the fixity of a singular, stable, unified subject position, but the constant undertow of the unlivable “outside” that “bounds the domain of intelligible effects” (Butler, p. 22) resists foreclosure and undermines repression. The undecidability, or to use Butler’s term “instability” at work in Scratch is what makes it performative, is the “deconstructing possibility in the very process of repetition, the power

that undoes the very effects by which 'sex' is stabilized, the possibility to put the consolidation of the norms of 'sex' into a potentially productive crisis" (p. 10). In the closing chapter of Bodies That Matter, Butler asks the question I am posing also by way of Scratch:

Is there perhaps a specific gender pain that provokes such fantasies of a sexual practice that would transcend gender difference altogether, in which the marks of masculinity and femininity would no longer be legible? Would this not be a sexual practice paradigmatically fetishistic, trying not to know what it knows, but knowing it all the same? (p. 238).

In representing castration through the bodily play of undecidability – by dismantling and fetishizing the phallus, putting it into play by suggesting its ability to be sutured onto the body anywhere, by refusing to submit to anxiety and even taunting death – these film segments present us with a fantasy of castration while at the same time resisting submission to that fantasy through a re-deployment of repetition that produces some unsettling effects. I will have something more to say about these effects at the end.

The third and final primal fantasy under consideration -- the fantasy of the primal scene -- brings us to the remaining two film segments, Moohead, and Sleep Study. These two films stand in sharp contrast to the others for one very particular reason: although they

each make use of elements found in other film segments (for example, Moohead restages the force of impact found in Fall and H2Oh-Oh, while Sleep Study's nearly silent sound track recalls Fall as well), they break with the other films by introducing a material triangulation between artist, viewer, and another situated off screen: in Moohead, it is the person throwing the ball; in Sleep Study, we have the person behind the camera in the found home movie footage, as well as the invisible technicians and doctors who read and interpret the signals transmitted by the wires attached to the subject's body. This triangulation, this introduction of the third person, produces a shift from the "two" of Fall, H2Oh-Oh, Milk and Cream and Road Trip, to the "three" of the fantasy of the primal scene, as well as a shift in the position of the artist, from standing in the place of the child, to adult actor in the primal scene as proffered to the child-witness in Moohead, or adult survivor of the humiliation and narcissistic wounding experienced by the child when confronted by the primal scene, as suggested in Sleep Study. Moohead and Sleep Study also recall our discussion of seduction, in that following Laplanche once more, we will configure the primal scene as a seduction, and importantly, as traumatic. Lastly, these two film segments will return us to the question of how the viewer is called forward, implicated in and through the act of viewing.

You will recall that earlier in the paper I stipulated that primal fantasies are primal in that they direct our attention to the question of origins: the origin of sexuality in the primal fantasy of seduction; the origin

of sexual difference in the fantasy of castration; and the origin of the individual in the fantasy of the primal scene. “The origin of the individual” is sometimes commonly misunderstood to be suggesting something about where babies come from. Therefore, what I will not be suggesting is that the primal scene, as it is cast in Moohead and Sleep Study has anything to do with human procreation. What I am suggesting, as I think will become clearer below, is that through the actions of the two figures in Moohead (I will discuss Sleep Study separately)— the artist, and the person off screen throwing the ball – we have a representation of two observed bodies interacting to produce a series of messages, which are from the position of the witness, enigmatic and seductive, and thus function to draw attention to the fantasmatic origin of the subject as subject to sexuality, subject to seduction, now recast as a play between three figures. This calling forth of the subject into sexuality is further signified in Moohead by the ball striking the head of the artist. Why the head and not some other part of the body? Although there are no doubt many possible readings of this choice of body part, I would suggest that it functions powerfully to remind us of the joining of inside and outside that takes place as the impact of the other is made upon the body from the outside, then assimilated through a process of mentation, installing it, as it were, on the inside. The head, of course, is that mysterious place that suggests the impossibility of separating body from mind.

We all know what is referred to by the term “primal scene”: “the scene of sexual intercourse between the

parents which the child observes, or infers on the basis of certain indications, and fantasies. It is generally interpreted by the child as an act of violence on the part of the father.” (Laplanche and Pontalis, The Language of Psychoanalysis, p. 335) Much psychoanalytic ink has been spilled on trying to decide whether the primal scene as a fantasy requires the actual witnessing of parental sexual intercourse. Laplanche enters the debate on the same ground as he did with the issue of the seduction theory, and ties the two together by noting that all of the “other scenarios invoked as primal have seduction as their nucleus, to the extent that they too convey messages from the other, always at first in the direction from adult to child” (Essays on Otherness, p. 170); thus for the child, the primal scene is a seduction. And, as we know from the discussion above, seduction is always traumatic because the child is unable to decode and assimilate the enigmatic signifiers emanating from the other. Freud, argues Laplanche, focussed on two elements of the primal scene – perceptual reality and the child’s fantasy – but neglected the element of the “adult proffering the scene to be seen, to be heard...” (Essays on Otherness p. 170) What Laplanche sutures into the primal scene is the enigmatic desire of the other, which comes to the child in the form of messages from the adult. “The messages of the primal scene,” writes Laplanche, “are frequently ones of violence, savagery.... A message of exclusion is virtually inherent in the situation itself: I am showing you—or letting you see—something which, by definition, you cannot understand, and in which you cannot take part” (Essays on Otherness, p. 171) This notion of “I



am showing you” coming from the parent toward the child places an emphasis on the imposing nature of the enigmas, as well as on the importance of acknowledging that the enigmatic and traumatizing messages come as an address of the other, in other words, highlighting the significance for the child of where the message is coming from. Laplanche summarizes his understanding of the primal scene as follows:

Whenever primal scenes are observed or discussed, two worlds without communication divide, so to speak: on the one side, parental behaviour, the experiences and content of which are by definition beyond the subject's grasp; and on the other, the side of the child, a traumatic spectacle, more often glimpsed or guessed than seen...which the child must then fill out, interpret, symbolize. My point is that between these two worlds something is missing: the supposition...that showing sexual intercourse is never simply an objective fact, and that even the letting-see on the part of the parents is always in a sense a making-see, an exhibition....The primal scene only has its impact because it bears a message, a giving-to-see or a giving-to-hear on the part of the parents. There is not only the reality of the other “in itself”, forever unattainable (the parents and their enjoyment) together with the other “for me”, existing only in my imagination; there is also-primordially-the other who addresses me, the other who “wants”

something of me....(Essays on Otherness, p. 78).

Turning now to Sleep Study, I would like to argue that this film segment, in fact, functions to knit together the three primal fantasies here under consideration. It accomplishes this by bringing together several disparate elements under the rubric of the suggestion of a dream or repressed memory submitted for analysis. The three primal fantasies, seduction, castration, and the primal scene, are all represented in the archival home movie footage, interwoven in the little story that unfolds before our eyes. The fantasy of seduction is represented by the little girl (the artist as a young child) playing to the camera presumably held by a proud parent, dancing, performing, and oh so adorable. This is a mutual seduction, as all good seductions are meant to be. This cannot last, and it doesn't. Wounded and crying (from a fall? Has she skinned her knee?) her pleasure and sense of bodily integrity is spoiled. The camera keeps running as she looks over her shoulder, and figures out she's on her own with this thing called castration. And lastly, staged as it is clearly in suburbia, the entire setting of the home movie footage calls upon us to interpret the family romance and primal scene. Mommy and daddy have a relationship that excludes me, evidenced by the appearance of a little sister. If we were to string it all together, it might sound something like this:

**What do you want from me?** How can I seduce you? Wanna see me dance? Wanna see how cute I am?

**What do you want from me?** I'm humiliated, wounded, and I have to take care of this myself. How do I do that without you?

**What do you want from me?** To take my place, as daughter and sister. How can I be satisfied with so little? How can I be satisfied with being so little?

In Sleep Study we also have footage of the artist wired up to a monitor, with electrodes dangling from her head. She's having a sleep study done; to sleep, perchance to dream. When taken as a whole, the suggestion here is that the home movie footage represents a dream, or perhaps a repressed memory, which the good doctor will interpret from the blips and lines produced on his machine. Then, perhaps, the patient will no longer be doomed to repeat what she cannot remember.

I'd like to end this discussion of these film by gathering Moohead and Sleep Study together to suggest, as you might already have guessed by now, that they not only represents a staging of the primal scene, they function, for us as viewers, as witnesses, as a primal scene. It is just such a spectacle, a making-see, an exhibition, as Laplanche is describing above, and you've been peeking through the keyhole. But there's more: by the time we've cycled through the loop of films a few times, it is Moohead that

solidly inserts the viewer into the primal scene through "the look". In the final few seconds of that film segment, all of a sudden, the artist looks directly into the lense of the camera while waiting for the ball to hit her. In doing so, it is as if she is looking directly at us, and through this, we are suddenly made conscious – self-conscious – of our own looking at her. In that moment, it is no longer possible to maintain our (more or less) comfortable position "outside" the film; we are knee-deep in it for sure, if not in over our heads, our involvement all the more secured by the realization that the ball is now being thrown from the position of the camera – our position. It is as if we are now throwing that ball. The viewer's position in the triangle shifts, from the place of the child watching and hearing, to being implicated in the act of violence.

As if this weren't enough to convince us of our implication, the final shot of the little girl does: we follow her eyes as they dart quickly back and forth between the camera (us) and the wiggly-wobbly substance on her spoon, once again drawing our attention to our own act of looking, which at that moment we cannot help but become conscious of as both pleasurable and anxiety producing. The sexually precocious look returned in the final shot is what Krips would describe as "a knot or singularity in the visual field around which looks anxiously circulate with a mixture of horror, fascination, and pleasure" (Krips, p. 175). What is returned to us in the final moments of the film is the "too soon"-ness of our own seduction and the "too late"-ness of comprehension. This temporal gap, it should be noted, is present in the

soundtrack, the jarring memory traces of which are not erased by the final conflation of sound and impact when the ball is thrown for the last time.

**Part V: In situ: Latin, meaning original or proper place.**

I want to end by saying a few things about perversion. Perversion is one of those troubling psychoanalytic concepts that has been the subject of a great deal of misunderstanding, on the part of the public, as well as psychoanalysts in general. These closing thoughts are here borrowed from a much larger project in which I am trying to work out whether or not the notion of the perverse can be separated from its historical association with the pathological. Time will not permit me to provide more than a sketch of what I have in mind. I hope you won't be too disappointed or confused by what I have to say, because I will not be talking about the perverse as we usually think of it, as bizarre or kinky sexual acts. Instead, I want to say something about what constitutes the perverse position, and see if we can find evidence of it at work in what we have been talking about and doing here this evening.

For the sake of brevity, I want to concentrate on two aspects of what defines the perverse position, firstly, that the perverse subject makes him or herself the instrument of the Other's jouissance, and secondly, that while neurosis is characterized by the subject posing a question ("what does the other want of me?"), perversion is characterized by the lack of a question, a certainty. The perverse subject knows

"that his acts serve the jouissance of the Other" (Evans, p. 140). I would like to propose that implicit in what I have called performative art is the certainty, the absence of question, that characterizes the perverse position. If what is at work in the performative is a reiteration of norms which produces, in Butler's words, a "domain of unlivability and unintelligibility" that signals the potential for the resignification and subversion of those norms, then this practice is, as Butler would have it, "paradigmatically fetishistic." In fact, I would argue, the performative takes perversion one step further than the fetishist. The fetishist relies on disavowal, the "yes...but" that allows for holding two contradictory positions at once: "yes, I know she doesn't have a penis, but I believe she does all the same." The fetishist uses the second half of the sentence to cover over the first. The performative, I suggest, relies on the certainty of the "yes...and". Far from a need to cover something up, in the performative, everything gets displayed. It's the certainty of the "yes...and" that gives away the perverse structure at work in the performative.

That the performative also requires an audience further suggests how we might understand the perverse structure at work here. I need to make you exist, as an audience, in order to be the instrument of your jouissance. And this is where the perverse certainty of the performative is at its most visible, for it insists on displaying what you **think** you don't want to see. Like the perverse subject, the performative body never stops fighting against the acceptance of castration, for to do so would be to relinquish certainty

to lack, and to cease functioning as the instrument of the Other's jouissance, to stop being the phallus for the Other. Thus the performative functions to subvert norms by ceaselessly calling into play the transgressive effects of jouissance.

It is this jouissance which makes Enlightened Nonsense ultimately so disturbing. In order to understand better what I mean by this, let us end with a consideration of one attempt to define the undefinable term "jouissance". Dylan Evans has written:

It is only in 1960 that Lacan develops his classic opposition between jouissance and pleasure....The pleasure principle functions as a limit to enjoyment; it is a law which commands the subject to 'enjoy as little as possible'. At the same time, the subject constantly attempts to transgress the prohibitions imposed on his enjoyment, to go 'beyond the pleasure principle'. However, the result of transgressing the pleasure principle is not more pleasure, but pain, since there is only a certain amount of pleasure that the subject can bear. Beyond this limit, pleasure becomes pain, and this 'painful pleasure' is what Lacan calls jouissance....(pp.91-92)

In its exceeding of the limits of enjoyment, the performative body in Enlightened Nonsense insists on revealing a domain of unlivability and unintelligibility that exists in each of us. This is why we only **think** we

are seeing something we don't want to see. In doing this, for us, the films make themselves the instrument of our jouissance and are certain of their ability to do so.

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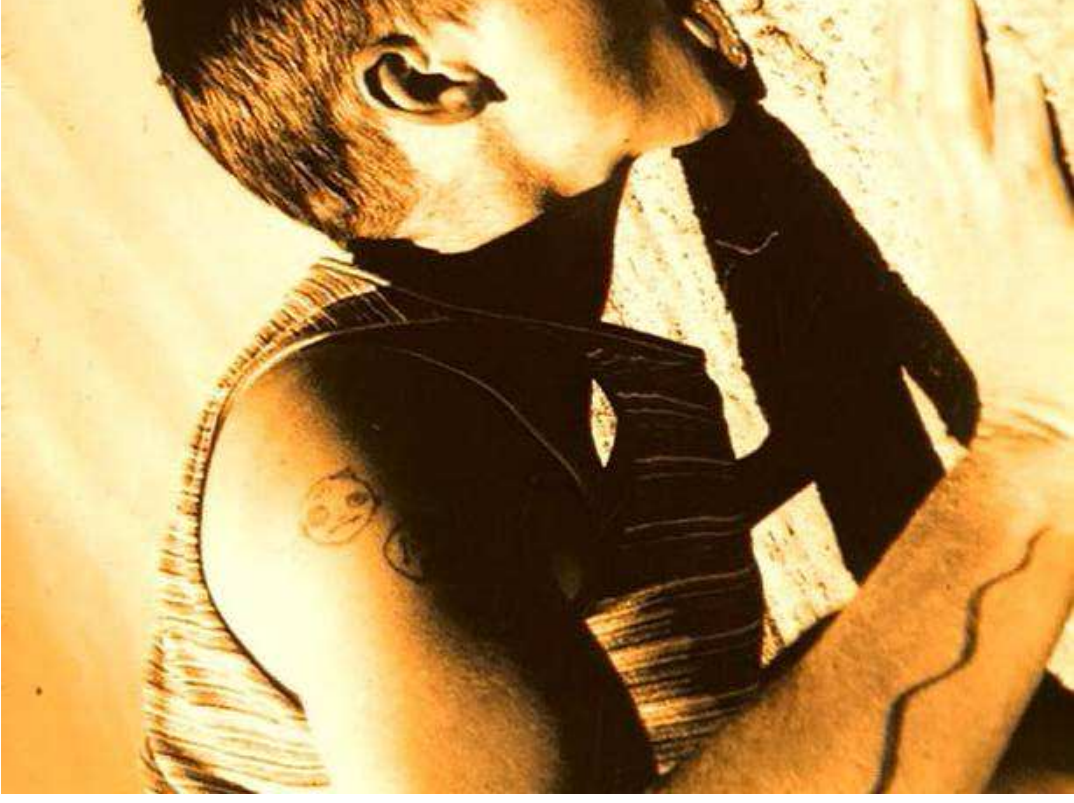
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# Enlightened Nonsense

(22 minutes Beta SP 2000)



A series of ten thematically related film works entitled *Enlightened Nonsense*. These works were produced within a similar framework and with the same minimal resources. Each film was shot, hand-processed and edited in approximately one week. Each seven day performance inhabited self-imposed limitations leaving behind scripts, crews and pre-production planning, favouring instead an immediate, self-reflective and self-contained workplace. I am the primary performer, director and technician. This "internal" production is process-oriented, further emphasized by hand-processing, tinting, manipulation of the film's surface, the use of surveillance technologies and in-camera editing. The subject matter ranges from gender ambiguity, sexuality and sexual difference to masochism, psychoanalysis and somatic illness. Each begins with a specific physical action, for example, falling or being hit in the head with a ball, which is then developed through repetition and intercutting related images, sound and text. Together they explore the complex relationship to our physical and psychological limitations. Sexual deception, humiliation, injury, fear and failure are common themes, however humour plays a critical role. Although dark, there is a funny, nonsensical quality which provides distance from the complexity of this work as well as some comic relief. These ten short performance films about repetition and repetition were made between 1997-2000.

Patch :40, 2000; H2Oh Oh 2:00, 2000; Moohead 1:00, 1999; Road Trip 1:00, 2000; Always a Bridemaid...Never A Bride of Frankenstein 2:00, 2000; Scratch 3:00, 1998; Tape 5:00, 2000; Sleep Study 2:00, 2000; Milk and Cream 2:00, 2000; Fall 2:00, 1997 Installation on DVD

"YYZ Artist's Outlet (Toronto) is home to another world premiere—Deirdre Logue's *Enlightened Nonsense*, a collection of experimental shorts, shows from Sept. 13 to Oct.14. The theme of these ten films is repetition, but "sexual deception, humiliation, injury, fear and failure" also figure prominently. An artist/filmmaker who shoots and edits her own work, Logue employs techniques that manipulate and distress the surface of the negative to produce unusual visual effects." (YYZ Artist's Outlet Press Release, 2000)

"It takes a great work of art mounted in a gallery window to cancel the frustration of finding a "back in five minutes" sign on the door. But the prelude to Deirdre Logue's *Enlightened Nonsense* is enthralling—and worth the wait. Nine small video screens are mounted in a grid pattern on the gallery window like hard-wired suction cups. Each screen is surrounded by semi-opaque plastic lit from behind by white light. The green circuit board and its components are visible from the sides, and wires run down to the floor. Two video tracks run on the screens, alternating across the grid. The videos, originally shot in film for better quality, are tinted in

rich reds, blues and oranges that blend to form a shifting grid of light. Inside, ten videos are playing on a larger screen mounted high and close so that you feel as though you are in the front row of a theatre—too close for comfort really.

The works are about "repetition and repetition." The films have been developed to give them an intentionally scratched surface, choppy editing has been achieved with in-camera cuts and imperfections have been created in the soundtrack to create a crackling rhythmic accompaniment. In one piece, Logue, who is the central subject in these performance works, wraps and unwraps tape from her head. The cuts are frenetic. Accompanying the piece is a deep, thudding beat created from the popping soundtrack. The piece is unnerving; it feels like a minimalist music video that prods your nerves with its incessant images and beat.

In another work, Logue falls down over and over in a large field. In yet another, she is hit in the head with a basketball repeatedly. Intercut at jarring intervals are images and sounds from a pudding commercial in which children play with the mushy dessert. It's quite an amusing piece." ("Caught You Looking!" by Thomas Hirschmann Originally published in National Post, October 7, 2000)

"Toronto-based film and video maker Deirdre Logue's work is a unique hybrid of personal and political

provocation." (Tom McSorley, Canadian Film Institute)

"Deirdre Logue is an independent curator and an established film, video and performance artist who has created a series of ten short films about repetition employing intimate performative moments, actions and responses." (Neutral Ground Gallery)

"A marathon of unsettling performance videos about repetition, they explore personal limitations through compulsive, near comic fantasies of self-annihilation." (REHAB 2001)

"Perhaps the most striking entry in the REHAB Festival is *Enlightened Nonsense*, an evocative collection of ten short films "about repetition and repetition," directed by and featuring local performance artist Deirdre Logue. What most distinguishes *Enlightened Nonsense* is Logue's uncanny sense of rhythm. The staccato plunk of *Moohead*, in which the filmmaker is repeatedly and inexplicably beamed in the head by a soccer ball, gradually gives way to the scorched-earth feedback of *Road Trip*, which finds her literally eating dirt. While the masochism of the pieces is occasionally difficult to endure, *Enlightened Nonsense*—which will be shown in a separate viewing location as an "ongoing installation piece"—is ballsy stuff, a departure from convention that speaks not only to the talent of its creator but also to the generally subversive spirit of

the festival." ("Reel Addictive" by Adam Nayman, Eye Magazine 06/14/01)

"I recently watched Alfred Hitchcock's *Spellbound* again, in which Ingrid Bergman plays psychoanalyst to Gregory Peck's amnesiac. Pursued for a murder he didn't commit, but unable to remember who he is or what really happened. Peck's character (Dr. Edwardes) falls under Bergman's (Dr. Peterson) spellbinding probe for the truth. Over and over again she prods him with questions, but he is too convinced of his guilt, too fraught with anxiety to answer. He slides into a trance and faints often. His memory is finally cracked open when he recalls a dream to Dr. Peterson; it's through her interpretation of the dream that the case is solved.

Everything in the dream stands for something else. A man on a rooftop holding a wheel (in the Salvador Dali-designed dream sequence) is really, according to Freudian science, a man on a mountain-side holding a revolver. In a reenactment at the murder scene, Dr. Edwardes recalls a deadly childhood trauma and we are led to understand that his repression of that memory is the reason for the current attack of amnesia.

Not unlike Hitchcock, Deirdre Logue gives us a set of psychologically loaded circumstances that must be puzzled out in her new show at YYZ entitled *Enlightened Nonsense: Ten Short Performance Films About Repetition and Repetition*. In each, Logue



enacts scenarios that are variously masochistic, repulsive, frightening and not, in some cases, without humour. They are indeed about repetition, whether it's to test physical and emotional limits or to plumb the depths of her own repressed memories until something takes the bait.

Each film is between one and five minutes and by hand-processing her 16mm stock they are given a rough and ready look. Camera angles are close, often distorting images that are reversed or negative: colour is monochromatic. The films look like dreams.

In *Road Trip* she licks, inch by inch, a gravel road as she crawls across it; a basketball is repeatedly bounced off her head in *Moohead*; in *H2Oh Oh* she repeatedly dunks her head in water, gasping for air, only a hair-breadth away from drowning. In *Tape*, the only one with sound throughout (a crashing heartbeat), Logue takes five long minutes to wind and unwind and wind again packing tape around her head.

A pivotal film is *Sleep Study*—coming midway through the twenty two minutes it takes to watch all ten films. Archival footage of a young girl (we believe it's Logue herself) playing to the camera is interspersed with scenes of the adult Logue kicking a soccer ball down a road, or with wires taped to her head. Science is studying her dreams, recalling her childhood, connecting past to present.

On the surface, the films appear to be about extreme states of adult experience—suffocation, pain, guilt, doubt. Everything in *Enlightened Nonsense* stands for something else and it's this dream-like quality that eases our way through the symbolic and surreal corridors of Logue's mind. ("Dream Weaving" by Kim Fullerton Originally published in Xtra! Oct. 5, 2000)

# Enlightened Nonsense Credits

## Patch

Camera: Deirdre Logue

Hand Processed 16mm, Negative  
:40, 2000

## H2Oh Oh

Camera: Deirdre Logue

2 minutes, 2000

## Moohead

Camera: Deirdre Logue

Additional Camera: Karyn Sandlos, Christine Harrison

Hand Processed 16mm, Reversal  
1 minute, 1999

## Road Trip

Camera: Glynis Logue

Hand Processed 16mm, Reversal  
1 minute, 2000

Always a Bridesmaid... Never a Bride of Frankenstein

Camera: Karyn Sandlos

Hand Processed 16mm, Reversal  
2 minutes, 2000

## Scratch

Camera: Deirdre Logue

Additional Camera: Tracey German

Hand Processed 16mm, Reversal  
3 minutes, 1998

## Tape

Camera: Deirdre Logue

Hand Processed 16mm, Reversal  
5 minutes, 2000

## Sleep Study

Camera: Deirdre Logue

Hand Processed 16mm, Reversal  
2 minutes, 2000

## Milk and Cream

Camera: Glynis Logue, Karyn Sandlos

Hand Processed 16mm, Reversal  
2 minutes, 2000

## Fall

Camera: Deirdre Logue

Additional Camera: Jennifer Reeves

Hand Processed 16mm, Reversal  
2 minutes, 1997

Technical Support: Rob Butterworth, Phil Hoffman, Christine Harrison, Kim Truchan, Tracey German, Karyn Sandlos, Kim Tomczak and V Tape  
Compilation edit: Deirdre Logue, Rozlyn Kalloo  
Credits: Deirdre Logue, Rozlyn Kalloo  
Sound Design: Deirdre Logue, Rozlyn Kalloo  
Avid: Charles Street Video  
Processing, Printing and Transfers: The Independent Images Filmmaking Workshop (Mount Forest), Exclusive Film and Video, Niagara Custom Lab, Nu Century Media

All works were shot on location in Mount Forest, Toronto and Phoenix, Arizona on 7378 reversal stock

All works were produced through the encouragement and support of the Independent Images Filmmaking Workshop in Mount Forest, Ontario, facilitated by Phil Hoffman

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