

Hebrew Israelite Nation of Jerusalem, a group of black Jews from Tennessee who were less concerned with Bermudan nationalism or Black Power than with Old Testament communal living (including vegetarian diets, polygamy) and showing that selected blacks, now settled in the Negev, are the original Jews. Their conference did, however, produce a splinter of the underlying tinder that might be ignited by a well-placed match. A black lawyer, trained at Osgoode no less, pointed out how the police and the judiciary discriminated against blacks in Bermuda, a view based in part on experiences in court. Certain members of the Bermuda Bar Association called for disciplinary action and disbarment, which, as it happens, was not followed through. Clearly, the natives are restless, but we can be sure that if anything was tried, wrists would be slapped quicker than you could say "Grenada".

The three million Europeans and Polynesians who occupy the islands between Samoa and Antarctica represent the ultimate in civilized retreat from northern metropolitanism, and, as might be expected, are cautious about anything that imposes on them from the rest of the world. So far they have managed to avoid cable TV, satellite dishes (Bermuda, which has no TV of its own, is littered with them), expressways and post-structuralism. Only recently, as befits a city built on seven relatively extinct volcanoes at the southern tip of the Kermadec Trench, has Auckland constructed buildings taller than four storeys. The main concessions to the underside of urbanism are an abundance of massage parlours, a flourishing marijuana industry, several punk and new wave groups and the importation of British cops to keep the parlour owners, the dope peddlers, the punks and the anti-apartheid demonstrators in their place. Otherwise New Zealand is a country where the quality of life is central to all public debates, parochial in the best sense of the word, because it is a debate which is shared in by all sections of the population, in the North and South Islands. The issues, not surprisingly, are sexuality (focused most recently by the decision of the government to implement the UN resolution on equal rights), Maori rights, environmental control (including nuclear energy), standard and cost of living, and censorship, all of them fighting on territory which seeks to preserve the essence of what is and challenging reformers to show why changes offer a qualitative better way. Signs at the entrance to each borough — "You are Entering Mount Eden - A Nuclear Free Zone" — emphasize the community strength of the environmental case and trace the connection be-

tween foreign policy and husbandry. The resistance to nuclear warheads is a profoundly conservative position, but no less conservative than the spraying of aircraft to prevent the importation of alien pests who might blight New Zealand crops. Conservatism is a shrewd perception of the Other who might disturb the social/ecological balance.

In these terms, David Lange's Labour government is therefore echoing communal concerns. In other respects it is not. His economic policy is more monetaristic than Reagan's or Thatcher's, calling for drastic cuts in government spending. Even the government's stated support for Maori rights, sexual equality and reduced censorship cut across the New Zealand sense of conservative totality. (All are commonly described as impositions from outside even if the movements for support are strong and very energetic.) But what these issues have done is provide a focus for debate and for social organization. As a regular feature of New Zealand life there are continuous debates on TV, radio and in the newspapers on all the issues, complementing the action in the streets, churches and community halls. The sinking of the "Rainbow Warrior" has emphasized to New Zealanders that the battles being fought there are global, and, as the shaking of the Mitterand government has demonstrated, the "conservatism" of New Zealand is fundamentally more radical than the James Bond black comedy of the French secret service.

None of this struggle for green peace ranks high in our photographic sense of New Zealand, but for good reasons. The photography of social struggle, of identity-formation is of low priority in our conception of what "news" is all about.

Two photographic images have been with me in writing this essay: the nuclear sharks lying on the Sargasso Sea-bed waiting to destroy Atlantis, and a Pacific farmer leading his sheep through the streets of Wellington to affirm the unity of humanity and nature. This is the real news and those are the dialectical choices by which the fate of "civilization" will be decided.

Ioan Davies

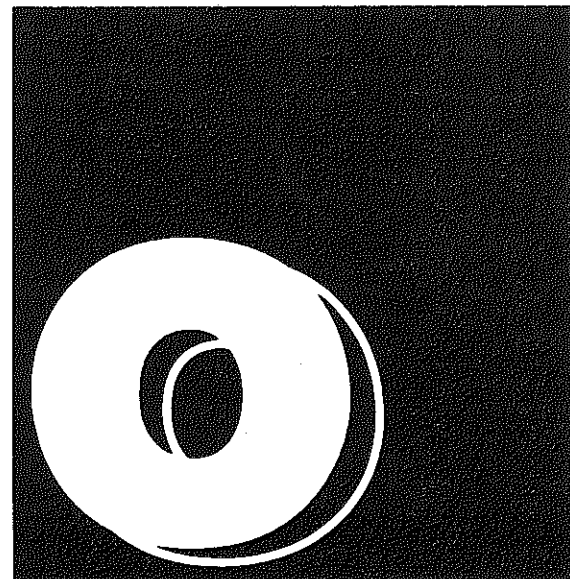
is a member of the *border/lines* collective and teaches sociology at York University.



SEX/TEXTUAL POLITICS

Tracing The Imaginary In The Films Of Valie Export

By
Brenda Longfellow



WHERE
are the boundaries to be drawn between inner and outer "realities"? How to separate the observer from the observed, subject from object, desire from projection?

ne of the first images in a published collection of Valie Export's photographs and drawings from 1968-77¹ is a black and white reproduction of the famous Velasquez painting, "Las Meninas", which was analyzed by Foucault in *The Order of Things*. The painting represents a self-reflexive inscription and over-turning of classical relations of representation, of the classical distinction between subject and object. Framed by a large mounted canvas on the right, the tableau features the artist with palette in hand and a variety of figures: young girls, a midget, a dog in the foreground, all of whom are staring out of the frame at the ostensible subject of the painter's painting — a space and a position occupied (equally) by ourselves as spectators. Here then, the gaze is foregrounded, circulated in an exchange that confounds the distinction between observer and observed, subject and object.

Export joins that particular convergence of concerns to modernity with a wry twist — placing the image of a 35mm still camera in the painter's extended right hand. This additional inscription re-situates the critical frame, and relates the problematic of representation to the 20th century field of photography and cinema — to the field, that is, of Export's own work.

Indeed, what circulates around the signature Valie Export (a.k.a. Waltraud Hollinger) is a rich currency of cinematic images. Bizarre. Brutally witty and devastating in their psychic immediacy. Her images blazon themselves on one's memory with all the tragic vitality of an obsession. Frag-

EXCURSIONS

ments: A woman, nude, stands before a bathroom mirror, clips tufts of pubic hair from herself and glues them under her nose in a manic parody of androgyny. A woman, asleep on a bed. Overhead a dream projection: figure skates. A woman walking through the streets of Vienna on skates. The skates transformed into an accoutrement of masochism: the blade etching a fine line over thigh. A woman drawing on her naked body. She runs into the street where others have been transformed into life-sized cardboard cutouts. A live fish. Palpitating. Decapitated suddenly on a kitchen table. Along with a rat. A bird. A fridge with a frosty black and white photograph of the director on it is opened to reveal a live baby. Six hundred positions of lovemaking. Omnipresent men jerking off in broad daylight.²

The body/obsessions/violence/sexuality. They are the resonances which run through the incredibly diverse output of this Austrian artist, whose work ranges from the expanded film experiments in the 1970s, through to video and performance art, photography, drawings and body actions — "body/material interactions".

Export's first feature, *Invisible Adversaries* (screened at Canadian Images, 1983) presented a compilation of her work in performance and video installation. *Adversaries*, a disjunctive feminist sci-fi flick, traced the growing paranoia of Anna, an Austrian photographer, who alone perceives a massive psychic invasion of Hyksos, malignant creatures from outer space who invade men's bodies, transforming them into aggressive, fascist beings. Through her photography, Anna is able to capture images of the creatures, but as the world wends its ineluctable way toward destruction, she is unable to alert anyone of the danger. But — and this is the question posed by the film — are her observations and documentary records real, or simply projections of her increasingly paranoid state? Where are the boundaries to be drawn between inner and outer "realities"? How to separate the observer from the observed, subject from object, desire from projection? How to inscribe the resistance of female desire against the violence and indifference of contemporary society?

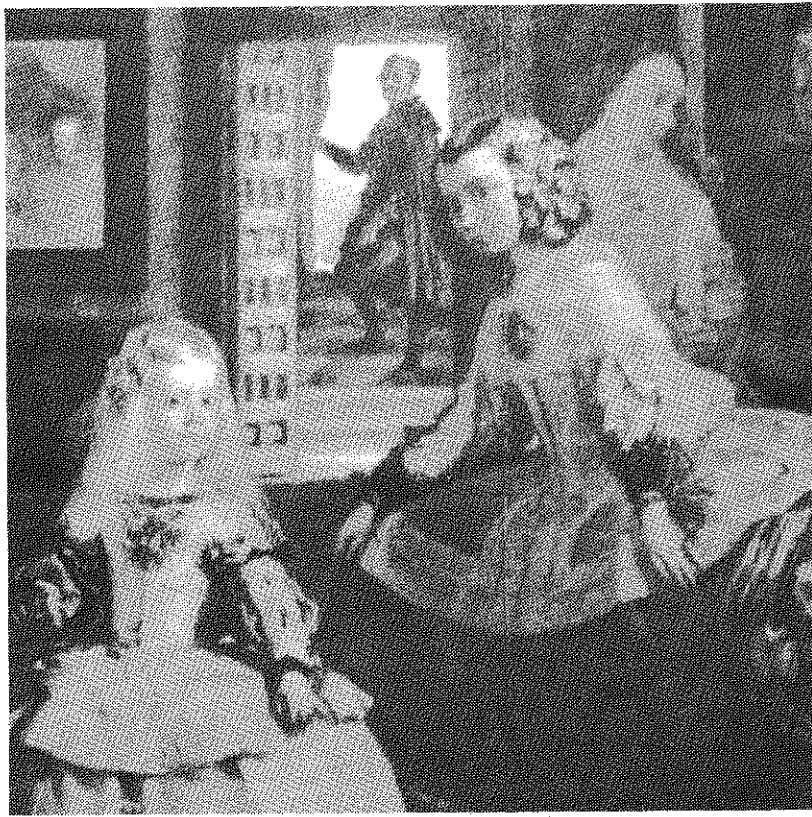
The Practice of Love, Export's third feature³, which had its Canadian premiere at this year's Festival of Festivals in Toronto, continues these explorations, tracing the quest through discontinuous temporalities, memories, fantasy and image fragments of the contemporary landscape. Judith, a Viennese video journalist, is shooting a documentary in Hamburg on pornography. She runs into an ancient lover, Alfons, who (unbeknownst to Judith) is involved in some shady dealings with mafia look-alikes. They quickly hop into bed. Upon leaving the hotel after this amorous encounter, Judith witnesses the death of a young man who is crushed by a passing car. She returns to Vienna and to her long-standing and neurotic affair with Josef, a married

psychiatrist whose jealousy and possessiveness provoke increasingly aggressive responses in Judith. Having decided to investigate the death of the young man, Judith finds herself embroiled in a densely convoluted intrigue which ends by implicating the young man and Alfons in an arms smuggling deal. Alfons is eventually arrested. His wife bribes the hotel clerk to cover up his affair. Judith finds masturbatory solace with her shower head.

Beyond the story, however, — a story whose telling is always episodic, disjunctive and elliptical — the film offers a rich meditation on desire, representation and sex-

pressed, the unspoken of discourse, a desire that explodes violently in gesture: the murder at the end of *Jeanne Dielman*, the violent wrestle of the lesbian love-making scene at the end of *Je Tu Il Elle*. A chain of desire which is also traced in the critical scene in *Les Rendez-Vous D'Anna* where Anna, naked, in a hotel bed with her mother, describes with a kind of wondering detachment her first lesbian encounter. Here, a gentle violence that converges around a symbolic return to the mother.

In Rainer, too, desire is off-screen, in the wings — like the central female character in the film whom we hear but never see. Here



ual difference through its variegated textual weave.

What I offer here, by contrast, is neither rich nor variegated. Not a full reading (which, in any case, is prohibited by a single viewing of her two films) but some fragments, a few reflections that endeavour to trace the relations between Export's work and a feminist politics of representation.

I

Writing Desire

What does it mean to speak of our desire in a culture where "woman" figures so massively as the figment and object of patriarchal fantasies? How to speak, to represent female subjectivity and desire "while still caught," as Laura Mulvey puts it, "within the language of patriarchy"? It is the question and paradox that have animated feminist film theory for over a decade.

They are questions central to the work of Chantal Akerman (screened in the first major retrospective at the Toronto festival — for those of us lucky or privileged enough to get in), to Yvonne Rainer's new film, *The Man Who Envied Women* (also screened at the festival) and to the cinematic investigations of Valie Export.

The strength and relevance of these films lies in the fact that the question of desire is always presented as a problem and a contradiction, as a struggle waged within and against the terrain of representation. In Akerman, desire is traced in the silence of the films, in their resistance to language. Feminine desire figures here as the re-

desire as radical exteriority is mapped onto an obsessive logorrhea (it is an interminably discursive film), which climaxes, finally, at the end of the film with a feminist theoretical polemic.

If it is the dialectic of language and silence, the imperviousness of language to desire which grounds and structures the investigations of Akerman and Rainer, in Export's work, by contrast, the issue of desire is situated first and foremost in relation to imaging, in relation to a necessary (if, however, impossible) struggle for a true image. A struggle mapped through the operations of narrative as a quest for authenticity in an image-saturated world.

For Export, as for Akerman and Rainer, female subjectivity cannot be experienced or thought outside of discursive institutions which conspire in the social production of identity and gender. Indeed, her films suggest that so all-pervasive and insidious are these forces — like the invisible adversaries in her first film — that the only form of resistance is to exploit the contradictions from within. Like the woman Judith interviews who works as a model in a peep show, who would not do it if men actually touched her, but who finds pleasure in touching herself. Self pleasure as resistance: a chain picked up and recalled in a scene of Judith masturbating. Like the hallucinatory images of a female body that are juxtaposed to the voyeuristic visual inscription of

women in the peep shows. The body in the former is translated through the grain of the film as a rich tactile surface, without boundaries. Desire written in the flow, the doubling and superimposition of this body rubbing against itself, ending with a Magritte finality of eyes, nose and lips on the torso — a body that speaks.

II

Seeing Is Not Believing

A common narrative mode in both *Invisible Adversaries* and *The Practice of Love* concerns a woman who discovers violence and destruction: in the former it is the invasion of the Hyksos, in the latter, the arms smuggling intrigue. In both, the central character is compelled to confront evidence of her startling perception, a project that implicates her search for herself, her authenticity as the affirmation of her own vision. Yet this project is bound by the structural limitations of the technical apparatus she employs: in *Invisible Adversaries*, photography; in *The Practice of Love*, video. In both, her method of proof is inseparable from her own subjective vision. In *Adversaries*, the status of Anna's perception as truth is undermined by her increasing psyching that her perceptions may lie more in the realm of hallucination and fantasy than of reality. In *The Practice*, her video documentaries of the porn industry and the arms smuggling intrigue are refused by her television station because "they lack objectivity". Here the problematic stature of her perceptions is less a matter of psychic upheaval than of institutional resis-

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tance and refusal to accord authority to female vision.

Yet, beyond the institutional rejection of woman's vision, what the narrative works on in its posing of enigmas, in its tracing of the convoluted pattern of intrigue, is a problem — the status of the photographic image in relation to truth and evidence. What sets Judith's investigation of the arms smuggling intrigue and the murder in motion is her discovery of half a photograph on which is imprinted the image of the young man who had been killed in the subway. The resolution of the enigma is thus figured as a tracing of the circulation and exchange of the photographic image — a search which results in the discovery of the missing fragment (which features Alfons, the ex-lover). Or is it? What can we say of the status of the image in an era in which digital reproduction and computers can construct a seamless photograph of flying saucers on the streets of San Francisco?

III

Textual Excess

Beyond the deconstruction effected at the level of narrative, the problematization of the relation between truth and the image occurs, as well, on the level of the formal strategies of the film. As I have suggested, this implies the possibility of female subjectivity and the affirmation of identity. On the formal level, the narrative is reworked, bracketed and suspended by the forceable random? abrupt? disjunctive? insertion of video, stock footage of military build-up in Austria, memory, fantasy and dreams. Here, in contrast to the operations of classical cinema — which function to contain heterogeneity and excess by harnessing each image to narrative meaning — the image asserts its autonomy. It testifies to the persistence of social and psychic forces in the construction of subjectivity and identity.

This disjunctiveness of the film, this heterogeneity, suggests the ineluctable interpenetration of the unconscious and the conscious, the impossibility of separating subject from object, aggressive fantasies from social violence, individual identity from its historical determinants. It eliminates, as well, the possibility of securing any singular level as a site of meaning or identity. In the fragmented universe of the film, meaning and identity are dispersed across its own boundaries.

Notes

1. *Korpersplitter*, Bandi, 1980.
2. These memory fragments are from *Invisible Adversaries*.
3. Export's second feature, *Menschen Frauen*, is a feminist melodrama about three women in love with the same man. I haven't seen it.

Brenda Longfellow
is a Toronto filmmaker and writer

INVITATION

border/lines is planning a series of articles on feminism and contemporary culture. If much of the concern of the first wave of feminism in the 1960s had to do with the struggle for equality, recognition and reproductive freedom, many of the issues being raised in feminist cultural politics in the 80s have to do with difference — the specificity of female experience, psychology and desire, and the manner in which this difference is inscribed or repressed within cultural representations.

We invite proposals for work that would be in the form of short or long articles, book reviews, etc. Please send abstracts to **border/lines** by 15 February 1986 at this address:
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Mr Ramp's "Image and Remembrance" (No.3, Fall 1985, pp.7-8) misses an important aspect of Barbara Ehrenreich's argument in its haste to show sympathy and common cause with contemporary feminism and the women's movement.

In *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight From Commitment*, she states that men began to develop the so-called "Playboy" philosophy alongside concerns about health and negative views of work and commitment in the mid to late 1950s, and that this development occurred before the emergence of contemporary feminism in the early 1960s.

Indeed, Ehrenreich believes that much of the contemporary women's movement is a *reaction and response* to this earlier "flight from commitment" by men. Of course this is not to ignore the fact that the long-term result of this flight has been what she calls the "feminization of poverty".

H.T. Wilson
Toronto

Filmmakers, video artists and others: If you feel that you have been unjustly rejected by the Canada Council or excluded from its political process, please contact: Julian Samuel, filmmaker video artist, 360 Terrasse St Denis, Montreal, PQ H2X 1E8. I am trying to set up a coalition of critical artists who will politicize against the Council's jury favoritism and exclusion of blacks, women and minorities. Democratize the Council now.

Julian Samuel
Montreal

LETTERS