

# Queer Looks

## Perspectives on Lesbian and Gay Film and Video

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## Shortcomings:

### Questions about Pornography as Pedagogy

RICHARD FUNG

The camera moves, hand-held, down a corridor lined with rooms. A handful of men dressed only in towels are chatting further down the hall. A white man passes, looking lasciviously into the lens. The camera peers into a room in which another man is sleeping on a cot, and then looks into the next doorway, where a white man, in his fifties, is seen reading a book. As he looks up, the frame cuts to a reverse shot of a young East Asian man in the doorway. A faint smile crosses his face as he moves on. The camera continues down the hall with the frame now cinematically identified with the point of view of the Asian man—the cruiser. The ensuing doorways reveal: a young black man in a leather harness, an East Asian man lying on his stomach who at first looks into the lens and then rapidly averts his glance, a young white man who mouths the word “no” while shaking his head, and finally, a South Asian man who smiles directly at the camera. Cross-cutting produces a mutual smile. The cruiser enters the room and the two men begin to kiss and caress. After a series of shots of the two men licking and fondling each other, there is a brief negotiation. The South Asian man puts a condom on the cruiser (in close-up) and then sits on his penis (in medium shot). The camera pans away to show a mirror reflection of the two men enjoying anal sex as text rolls up the screen:

Fuck safely,  
use a condom!

The message is repeated in Tagalog, Hindi, Chinese, and Vietnamese.<sup>1</sup>

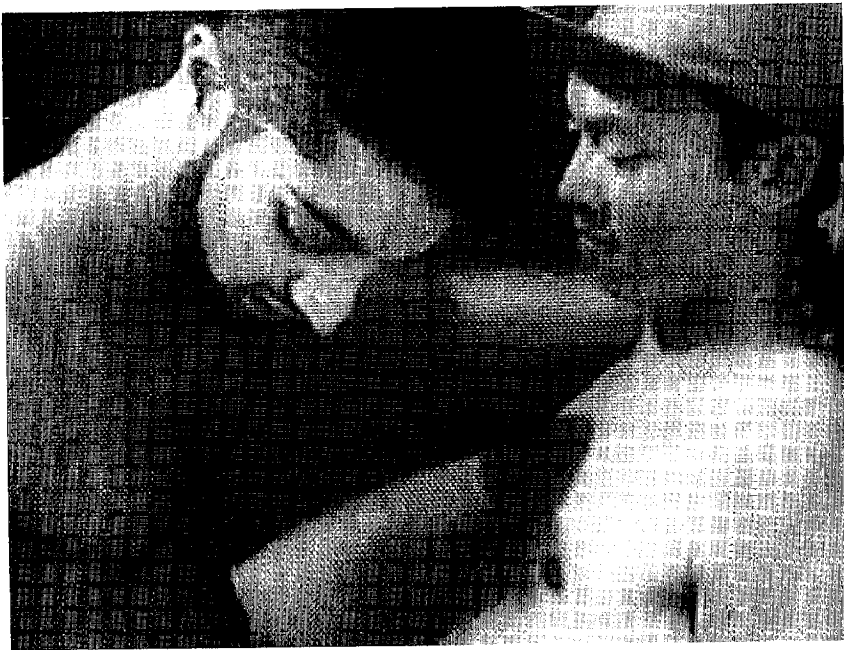
The videotape I’ve just described is *Steam Clean*, a three-and-a-half-minute piece I directed in 1990 for New York’s Gay Men’s Health Crisis, the largest grassroots service agency for AIDS and HIV-related issues in the United States. This tape is one of GMHC’s “safer-sex shorts,” a component of its educational program in fighting the spread of HIV in the lesbian and gay communities.

I met Jean Carlomusto and Gregg Bordowitz, video production coordinators for GMHC, in 1989, at a conference on gay and lesbian representation. Although I am based in Canada, they approached me to produce the “short” for Asians,<sup>2</sup> presumably because they knew and liked my work, but also because they could not locate an openly gay Asian videomaker in the United States who would undertake such a project. For my part, I was interested in producing the tape because it offered the chance to create sexual images of

gay Asian men; images that represent them as sexual subjects in the process of realizing their desires; images that disrupt the various racial/sexual clichés about passivity, premature ejaculation, small dicks, and so on; images that challenge our almost total exclusion from the North American gay erotic imagination.

While *Steam Clean* was produced as one of the “shorts,” it was completed several months after the other tapes, which had already been distributed together as a package. This compilation had been screened at a wide variety of venues, including workshops, bars, gay theaters, conferences, and film and video festivals. By the time I produced *Steam Clean* I had the benefit of having seen the “shorts” with different kinds of audiences, and I had developed my own thoughts about what worked for me in each of the individual pieces, as well as in the package as a whole.

Convincing people to practice safer sex by depicting it as pleasurable is a currently favoured AIDS prevention strategy of progressive public health educators, as well as lesbian and gay groups. However, this necessitates promoting the pleasure of sex in itself, and entails depicting sex in a more or less explicit way. These are always points of conflict with religious and



*Steam Clean*, Richard Fung

political conservatives, for whom the only acceptable approaches in inhibiting HIV transmission are sexual abstinence and (heterosexual) monogamy.

Given the struggle over the right to produce and disseminate sexually explicit safer sex materials,<sup>3</sup> I feel a knee-jerk reaction to rally behind the “safer-sex shorts”; to uphold their efficacy and to vindicate the progay, proporn lobby. *Steam Clean* has now been screened in several film and video festivals, and has been used in workshops and elsewhere. Feedback has been positive on its “hotness” and its usefulness in triggering discussion. However, I have increasingly begun to question the assumptions that shaped the tape’s form and function. How do gay Asian men actually watch video porn? How do they derive pleasure from what they see? How does the inclusion of Asian actors affect the tape’s reception by gay Asian spectators? Can the pleasure premise of porn coexist with the pedagogical? *Steam Clean*, the other “shorts,” as well as a significant portion of safer-sex propaganda all rely on a set of interlocking assumptions about pedagogy and pornography that warrant continuing interrogation.

### The Premise of Pornography

Jean Carlomusto and Gregg Bordowitz sum up the purpose of the safer-sex shorts as “getting the message out that you can have hot sex without placing yourself at risk for AIDS.”<sup>4</sup> According to the GMHC’s information sheet, *Safer Sex Porn: Format and Design*, each short is to be designed by a specific task group, which decides on the scenario, the characters, and the kinds of sex acts to be depicted: “The objective of this project is to come up with a number of culturally sensitive tapes addressing the needs of a number of communities regarding safer sex.”<sup>5</sup> The sheet also uses “advertisements,” “music videos,” as well as “pornography,” as references to the way the tapes should look—“extremely slick”—and interact with their viewers: “These ‘shorts’ must be conceived as consumable.”

Apart from the obvious parameters of length and sexual explicitness, the shorts reveal other similarities of approach. For instance, most of the tapes use fictional narrative only minimally, to set up a scene for sex. In *Current Flow*, for example, a woman is masturbating with an electric vibrator when another woman pulls the plug. The intruder then lays out a “tool kit” of safer-sex aids, which the two try out on each other. In *Midnight Snack*, a man opens a fridge in a darkened kitchen. Suddenly, the lights go on and another man appears and begins to rim him, using a dental dam as a barrier. *Something Fierce*, *Law and Order*, and an untitled piece with voguers are even more minimalist. Of the five original “shorts,” *Car Service* is the only tape that is based on a fairly developed scenario: A black businessman in a

suit and with a briefcase takes a taxi. During the ride, furtive glances are exchanged between him and the chatty, black driver. When it is time to pay, the businessman finds that he is out of cash and has only condoms in his pocket. The driver accepts these, and the tape ends with the two men having sex in the back of the car. Supplementing the narrative, each “short” ends with a brief printed text on the screen, which reinforces the specific aspect of safer sex promoted in the tape. *Midnight Snack*, for example, closes with the instruction: “Use latex condoms. Cut condoms lengthwise to use for rimming.”

Whereas the mode of address varies from tape to tape, all of the “shorts” incorporate very prominent music tracks, from club hits to Sinead O’Connor. The music is used to create a sense of sexual energy, but it also serves to constitute the tapes and their message as fashionable and “in the know” for the target audiences. The repositioning of the appropriated lyrics with the queer sexual imagery at times endows the tapes with a layer of wit and campy humor. Whenever I’ve seen *Current Flow* with an audience, for instance, women always respond to the O’Connor sound track with chuckles.

One of the most obvious aspects of the “shorts” as a group is the attention paid to race, and specifically, the consistent presence of people of color. *Car Service* features two black men, *Something Fierce* a single black man, and the entire cast in the voguing tape is black. *Midnight Snack*, *Law and Order*, and *Current Flow* depict interracial sex with one black and one white actor. *Steam Clean* might also be said to portray interracial sex, since Indian and Chinese people are seen in this society as “racially” different, in spite of the fact that they are technically both Asian.

The frequent use of black and Asian actors, together with the common depiction of interracial coupling, sets this body of safer-sex propaganda apart from commercial porn. This perhaps reflects the proselytizing aspect of AIDS educational material aimed at high-risk populations, combined with greater sensitivity on the part of white AIDS educators to the politics of race and racism. Yet it is a mistake to think that the spectacle of queer miscegenation would only draw criticism from the racist right. At the How Do I Look? conference,<sup>6</sup> *Current Flow* became a subject of controversy because the black woman in the tape is the “top,” reproducing, it was felt, the common stereotype of black hypersexuality. Carlomusto and Bordowitz denied any racist intention and stated that the black woman in the tape chose the role she would play. Carlomusto also pointed to the burden placed on a work when there is only one of its kind: “If this tape existed within a series of tapes about lesbian sexuality, there wouldn’t be as much tension around this particular frame or that particular image.”<sup>7</sup>

As producers, it is crucial to understand the discourses embedded in the

depictions we fashion. It is our responsibility. At the same time, there is sometimes an unrealistic expectation that representations transcend, or even solve, problems that exist as social relations outside the text. The fact is that images of interracial sex cannot magically escape the burden of racism in the history of cinema, indeed in history itself. The possibilities for any portrayal of whites and people of color having sex are already overdetermined. If the black woman were the “passive” partner, or had there been a completely symmetrical reciprocity between the two women, the underlying problem would remain.

In producing *Steam Clean* this became very clear to me. As described above, the tape involves anal sex between a Chinese and an Indian man. I already knew that in depictions of sex between East Asian and white men, the Asian man was almost invariably the “bottom.” I knew that this reproduced a stereotype that Asian men resented. I could not, therefore, portray the Chinese man as the “passive” partner in anal intercourse if I wanted East and Southeast Asian men—the target group—to get pleasure in the tape. But what about the other man? Was it less problematic to show a South Asian getting fucked because, as a group, they are rarely represented sexually in North America? And how did all of this relate to the privileging of penile pleasure and patriarchal assumptions about the superiority of penetration? In the end, I had the Chinese man penetrate, though I attempted to “equalize” the situation by having the Indian man sit on him, thereby asserting the pleasure of the anus.

I don’t feel that my solution in any way resolved these crucial problems, because the fact of racism lies outside and beyond the tape, overdetermining the possibilities for maneuver within it. An option could have been to foreground the problem in a deconstructive manner; to produce a meta-pornography, a tape focusing on the workings and underpinnings of porn. I had already ventured such a strategy in an earlier video called *Chinese Characters* (1986). However, that tape didn’t attempt to produce pornographic pleasure, but rather to analyze it. It seems difficult to reconcile deconstruction with eroticism in a single moment. In the context of a three-minute piece such a task strikes me as nearly impossible.

### Talking Sex

What is peculiar to modern societies, in fact, is not that they consigned sex to a shadow existence, but that they dedicated themselves to speaking of it *ad infinitum*, while exploiting it as *the secret*.<sup>8</sup>

—Michel Foucault

Whenever I write or talk about sexuality, there is always the ghost of Michel Foucault, looking over my shoulder . . . laughing cynically. The

project I embark on is inextricably tied up with what he identifies in sexual terms, as the two “modes of production of truth: procedures of confession, and scientific discursivity.”<sup>9</sup> I talk with people about their sexual lives and I document, analyze, bringing together the confessional and the scientific.

In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault identifies the two historically predominant procedures for producing the “truth of sex.”<sup>10</sup> On the one hand is the *scientia sexualis* of contemporary Western societies, and on the other, an *ars erotica* that developed in Asia, the Arab and Muslim societies, and Rome:

In the erotic art, truth is drawn from pleasure itself, understood as practice and accumulated as experience; pleasure is not considered in relation to an absolute law of the permitted and the forbidden, nor by reference to a criterion of utility, but first and foremost in relation to itself; it is experienced as pleasure, evaluated in terms of its intensity, its specific quality, its duration, its reverberations in the body and soul.<sup>11</sup>

This passage, tinged with both romanticism and orientalism, warrants many qualifications. First, the circulation of an erotic art among a privileged sector of certain societies, or the use of sexual motif as religious practice, do not in themselves indicate an absence of sexual regulation, simply different regulations and taboos. Secondly, through continuous contact (including colonialism), the existence of two such mutually exclusive systems is no longer plausible. Finally, whatever the discourse and practice of sexualities may be in contemporary Asian societies, among diasporan Asian communities in North America, the legacy of an *ars erotica* has not resulted in a particularly candid or nonjudgmental discussion of sex.

I have been involved with the group Gay Asians Toronto (GAT) since its inception in 1980. One of the primary reasons for starting the group (as well as for its continuing survival), has, in fact, been talk. Not surprisingly, in both our formal (discussion groups) and informal (gossip) talk, constant themes are: sexual self-image in relation to the dominant representations of white masculinity; our desire (or lack of it) for other Asian men, white men, men of color; our absence from gay pornography; boyfriends. The sense of unburdening we feel—the pleasure of the talk—is precisely rooted in the “secret” nature of sex in North American (and Asian) society, and thus in our “confessing” it. Although there are profound differences—of class, language, culture, ethnicity, politics, and very importantly, (life-)style—the group offers a rare place where we can talk safely from roughly similar places at the intersection of race, gender, and sexual orientation.

To explore my investigation of porn and pedagogy, I interviewed three gay Asian men. Two are active members of GAT, and all are friends or acquaintances. Such a small and idiosyncratic sample precludes any claim

to quantifiable findings, and I’m certainly not interested in constructing any uniform category of “gay Asian men.” My purpose in these interviews was not to produce a Kinsey Report based on an “average” or “typical” gay Asian spectator, but rather, to see how porn figures in the actual life of *any* gay Asian viewer. Finally, as it was known that I directed *Steam Clean*, I didn’t feel it possible for me to elicit candid discussion of the tape. It would have been as appropriate as writing a review of my own work. In any case, my interest lay in the men’s reaction to the “shorts” in general, and not in generating a critique of the individual pieces. *Steam Clean* is certainly implicated in whatever criticism or questions I raise in this paper.

In choosing the men to interview, the principal criteria were that they be East or Southeast Asian (the target group for the tape), that they watch video porn to some extent, and that they would talk candidly with me. As a result, there is a certain similarity among the participants in terms of their age, class, educational background, and participation in the dominant gay male community. Further, while I had spoken about sex with these men before, the “scientific” purpose of these conversations shifted our relationship with each other—from friends to the roles of interviewer and subject—and hence our talk.

Ken is second-generation Chinese-Canadian. He grew up in rural Ontario where his family owns a restaurant. He is in his mid-twenties and has a degree in semiotics. He works as an arts administrator and lives in Chinatown. Frank is an engineer, born in Hong Kong. He works for the government and has a second job in a music store. He also packages music for fashion shows. He was, at the time of the interview, involved in campaigning for the New Democratic Party (Social Democrats) in the municipal elections. Li is also from Hong Kong. He supported himself through art school, and after working for two years in a yogurt store, he is now employed in a graphic design firm.

The men I interviewed watch porn only on an occasional basis. Frank owns about a dozen tapes, which he watches rarely because he does not particularly enjoy watching the same tape more than once. Neither of the others own any tapes, Ken because he is “too cheap” to purchase them, and Li because he lives in a rooming house and can only watch porn on the house VCR when his landlady and his heterosexual roommate are both out (both know he is gay, but his landlady does not approve of pornography). All three men rely on friends as a source of tapes since, until recently, censorship laws in Ontario have necessitated the communal sharing of out-of-province purchases.<sup>12</sup>

For all three men, porn is linked primarily to masturbation, though Frank has looked at videos while having sex with a partner and finds it particularly exciting, “like having sex in a car.” All have watched tapes socially, with

friends, during and after which no sex followed. Li also watches porn in gay bars and finds it exciting.<sup>13</sup> However, he tried not to be seen looking at it because he is afraid of being judged negatively by his peers: “This generation! I’m sure they do it at home, but when they get into a bar, they don’t want people to think that they like porn. It’s associated with sleaziness.”

When looking at porn, Frank and Ken both rely heavily on the search functions of the VCR, which disrupts the narrative and allows the viewer to reconstruct the tape according to his taste.<sup>14</sup> Ken describes his viewing style as follows:

I just zoom to the sex scenes. I zoom through all the stuff where there’s no sex happening and I stop at the sex scene and watch for a bit to see if I think it’s exciting. If it’s not, I zoom to the next. Sometimes, I zoom through sex scenes too, ’cause I think they’re too long . . . ’cause they’re kind of boring to watch.”

Ken also says that while he prefers written porn over video porn—because narratives build up slowly to sex—he dislikes most narrative in video, because “it’s mostly so hokey.” When watching tapes in repeat viewings, he simply zooms ahead to his favorite segments. Li, on the other hand, watches tapes right through, from beginning to end. Yet he rarely finishes them in one sitting, moving through each tape, section by section, over a period of time. Li prefers older tapes because they have more “story,” as well as for the kind of men they feature. In fact, all three men express dissatisfaction with the “new” aesthetic in actors: in Ken’s words, “clean, their pubic hair shaved, mostly blond and a lot younger.”<sup>15</sup> The word used by all three to sum up the shortcomings of the “new” porn is “mechanical.” Yet what the three men look for varies considerably.

All have various ways of negotiating the mode of spectatorship with the tapes they are watching. “Totally as a voyeur” is how Ken describes his viewing position. And here are two excerpts from Frank’s interview:

Looking at porn while having sex with someone, the other person can forget who you are and imagine you are the idol on the screen. They can forget about whatever shortcomings you have.

If it’s a hot scene with people I find attractive I would sometimes just watch it as an observer. There is an excitement of voyeurism, in terms of you seeing things that people do very privately, especially of people that you might never really meet in real life, and the kind of situation you might never get into in your real life.

Li’s lack of identification with the tape—not imagining himself as part of the action—is a very conscious decision:

I made this point to myself a long time ago, before I looked at tapes. I always look at tapes purely as fantasy. I never associate tapes with reality. For me the two don’t mix. I know it’s not good for me to want more because I know it would never happen.

Fantasy is a common enough mode for viewing pornography. However, the unattainability of the (all-white) pornographic scenario in one’s real life is often interpreted as having racial significance for Asian viewers. Men often say, “This couldn’t happen to me because I’m Asian.” Because the tapes that do include Asian men and white men are produced for a white audience, they don’t offer productive avenues for sexual fantasy either.

All three men do in fact avoid racially mixed porn with Asian and white actors because of what they describe as its “offensive” or “stereotypical” quality regarding the Asian actors—they are always the “submissive” characters. However, this is not a statement regarding the extent to which they imagine themselves within the scenarios they are watching (identification in an active sense). It is more a question of how others might view them because of these stereotypical representations (identification in a passive sense). This also emphasizes that in many instances the men’s relationship to what is occurring on the screen is distant and purely observational.

As for other options, Ken says that he would like access to all-Asian porn, but did not find the single Japanese tape he had seen exciting. It is the image of explicit sex that turns him on and the Japanese tape featured the “roving dot.”<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Li says he only watches tapes with white or black men.

### Conflicting Agendas?

What do the viewing habits and preferences of the three men interviewed suggest about the efficacy of the GMHC tapes? Two of the men—Ken and Frank—had in fact previously seen the “shorts,” but in very different circumstances: Ken at the lesbian and gay film festival, and Frank at a “mixed” (gay and straight) nightclub in Montréal, where the tapes were screened in a video room away from, but accessible to, the main dance area.<sup>17</sup> Li had not seen the “shorts,” but there were scenes of men using condoms in some of the porn that he watched.

In examining how the men read what they saw (and what they didn’t see) in the “shorts,” I want to begin by looking at how safer sex fits into their lives and their fantasies. Li has “come out” only since the mid- to late eighties; since the advent of safer sex. One of the main reasons he cites for his attraction to older porn tapes is their depiction of unsafe sex—something he has never done, but fantasizes about:

the idea of having unsafe sex and having people actually come without using a condom . . . I know that's not right to actually do it—but, with video you're only *watching* people do it, right?

Both Ken and Frank, on the other hand, had been “out” before the AIDS epidemic and express difficulty with actually practising safer sex, finding the condom disruptive to the flow of love making.

KEN: It's really difficult to have safe sex with intimate partners. Safe sex with a stranger is easy. When sex is about intimacy a condom interrupts that meaning. This isn't addressed in the safe-sex propaganda.

GMHC guidelines state that the “shorts” should demonstrate that “safer sex is fantastic and explosively pleasurable.” The five “shorts” show condoms as coming naturally to the men in the scenarios. Frank finds the unproblematized presentation of safer sex valuable in that they remind him that, if he keeps trying, condom use will eventually come naturally to him as well. Having the tapes, and other safer-sex informational material available and visible also creates a context that makes it easier for him to negotiate with his partners around condom use. At the same time, I believe that the attempt to transcend the distaste many men have of condom use—by simply showing it as pleasurable—could also have liabilities. Men such as Ken may feel inadequate or inferior because of their discomfort with using condoms. In *Steam Clean*, I attempted to address this problem by depicting at least a minimal negotiation around using the condom: in the middle of lovemaking one man leans over and whispers to the other, who then reaches for the condom.

Ken's overall assessment of the “shorts” is that he “didn't find them exciting.” Although all of the tapes except the voguing short contain depictions of at least one sexual act, Ken's memory of them is that “there wasn't any sex going on in them; it was all telling you.” He adds that, as a body of work, “it doesn't disguise itself very well as porn.” Frank similarly finds the tapes lacking in their ability to excite him:

I don't find them sexy because they carry more of a medical or a social message than a pure porn film, where its purpose is different. There's a barrier there for people to really enjoy the safe sex because there's too much of a purpose to it. . . . They were something else trying to be porn.

This last sentence sums up my sense of what both Frank and Ken find lacking in the “shorts”: that while they contain sexually explicit material and purport to be porn (the word is used by GMHC in reference to the “shorts”) they do not look like the porn the men have seen and do not fulfill their sexual fantasies: because either the men, the narratives, the structure, or the aesthetic are “not right” according to their tastes. It is interesting to

note here that in the structuring of the tapes around single pieces of music, they owe as much to music videos as to pornography. Yet no one I interviewed complained that the “shorts” were lacking in relation to their own expectations of that highly produced and competitive genre.

All three men claimed that they had sexual types or “favorites” in the porn tapes they watched. They all used the search function of the VCR to locate segments featuring their favorite actors and to pass over others. GMHC (and I in *Steam Clean*), on the other hand, have made a conscious effort to eroticize ordinary people, as opposed to relying on the conventions of age, beauty, and race described by Ken above. Whereas the men (and women) in the “shorts” all have “good” bodies, *Law and Order* is the only tape in which the actors embody the beefy look of commercial pornography. But while all the men interviewed expressed dissatisfaction with existing gay porn because it does not eroticize men who look like them, they find the men in the “shorts” lacking in comparison to commercial porn actors: in the case of *Steam Clean*, both race and body type break the rules. This reception is not as fickle as it might at first appear. For the tape to function well, two mechanisms are assumed. On the one hand, the Asian viewer must be asked to relate the message of the tape to his own experience and sexual practice. But the tape must also engage his libido, offering him the pleasure of pornography. However, people are not automatically attracted to others who look like them, and many gay Asian men are not interested in other Asians as sexual partners. For these men, the two criteria do not coincide. At the same time, everyone wants to be attractive to others. So it is important, even for them, that Asian features and bodies be shown as desirable. And since neither the commercial porn conventions nor our individual sexual tastes are monolithic and static, the eroticization of different types of men and women as seen in the shorts could be viewed as a positive change in our sexual environment.

The “cultural sensitivity” of the “shorts” assumes that, to reach out to and educate men of color, the tapes have to portray men of color. This goes hand in hand with the notion that in order to communicate with gay men, the tapes must speak in a language that they understand and like—namely porn. However, rather than work together, my conversations suggest that these two agendas actually point toward different strategies. “Trying to be porn,” in Frank's words, means that the “shorts” open themselves up to be judged by the highly personalized criteria each individual viewer brings. So the tapes may fulfill their pedagogical function *in spite of* their pretense at being porn, rather than because of it. The mechanisms of producing pleasure and viewer interest, and the mechanisms of imparting information to that viewer, while mutually reliant, are not the same.

This is not to suggest that the “shorts” are failures in their pedagogical

task, but rather, that the ways they work may be different from what has been assumed and intended. Neither does this mean that educators should give up the use of sexually explicit material for demonstrations of safer sex: explicitness seems to me a prerequisite for clear education, at the very least. However, if safer-sex educational material is going to attempt to disguise its pedagogical intention with a sugar coating of sex and pleasure, then it has to negotiate the conventions of porn with the impulse to depict a wider range of ethnicities, ages, and body types with more savvy.

The existing GMHC “shorts” fulfill a particular and significant function. But while it is instructive to analyze and assess how they operate, they don’t carry the whole burden of safer-sex education. That task involves both the continued and expanded production of different types of safer-sex shorts, straight and gay, using a range of representational, pedagogic, and pornographic strategies. It also involves dialogue with the commercial porn industry, about the representation of both safer sex, and racial and ethnic difference.

I would like to thank Tim McCaskell, Kerri Sakamoto, Lisa McCaskell, Kari Dehli, and John Greyson for their generous comments and criticism.

## Notes

1. In the Canadian version, preceding the English text there is a French slogan: Enculer en securite, Utiliser un condom!
2. Although Asia encompasses a wide variety of peoples, from Turks to Japanese, the term “Asian” is generally used in the United States (and to a lesser extent in Canada) to refer to East and Southeast Asians. In producing *Steam Clean*, I worked under the assumption that this was my primary target group.
3. See Jean Carlosmusto and Gregg Bordowitz, “Do It! Safer Sex Porn for Girls and Boys Comes of Age,” Allan Klusacek and Ken Morrison, eds., *A Leap in the Dark* (Montréal: Vehicule Press, 1992) pp. 180–181.
4. Carlomusto and Bordowitz, p. 177.
5. The word “communities” here is used in racial, ethnic, linguistic, and sexual terms, and there is an attempt to make up for the significant gaps in safer-sex information available to groups not considered part of the mainstream of the gay communities. Because *Steam Clean* was not directly produced by GMHC, there was no task group, and I developed the scenario on my own.
6. See Bad Object Choices ,ed., *How Do I Look?* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991) discussion, p. 62.
7. Bad Object Choices, p. 63.
8. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990) p. 35.
9. Foucault, p. 64.
10. Foucault, p. 57.
11. Foucault, p. 57.
12. As of the writing of this essay, pornography is still officially illegal in Canada. Canadian Customs continues to seize lesbian and gay materials, and the various provincial censor boards and police forces occasionally organize raids.
13. Porn is shown on monitors in some gay bars in Toronto. The monitor is usually placed above the counter or elsewhere, and alternates between football games, music videos, as well as the porn tapes. The tapes are edited to take out all “hard-core” images, that is, shots that depict any form of genital contact between actors. Since explicit sex acts constitute the majority of screen time in porn tapes, the resulting videos produce very discontinuous narratives.
14. Many of the “new” tapes rely more on display—the sheer spectacle of sex—than on constructing eroticism through narrative. However, most gay porn tapes are structured episodically, with perhaps a loose organizing scenario that functions as a context for the subnarratives.
15. Gay porn from the seventies and early eighties generally favored a more mature masculinity signified by the use of older models than those of today, mustaches, and visible body hair.
16. Due to censorship, Japanese tapes made for the internal market use different strategies to hide the genitals, including what would technically be described as a “circle wipe,” which moves across the screen obscuring the actor’s exposed loins. Otherwise, careful camera positioning and the inventive use of curtains, screens, and other objects serve to guard the offending articles from visibility.
17. Frank at first said that he had not seen the GMHC tapes. However, when he described the safer-sex tapes he had seen at the club, it was clear that it was the same material. This is the second account I have heard of the tapes being shown informally in Montréal (the other was at a large party). To my knowledge, in Toronto the tapes have only circulated formally at workshops and public screenings organized specifically to demonstrate safer sex.