

Straight women, gay porn, and the scene of erotic looking

by Laura U. Marks

A straight woman who likes to go to gay men's nightclubs knows the peculiar pleasure of seeing men on full erotic display yet remaining herself practically invisible. The gay club scene provides a voyeuristic feast for a woman who wants to look at men or to *learn* to look at men without the implications of a look back. In the clubs she can practice a dominant sort of look and enjoy the rare spectacle of a specular male. Like many women, I have experienced the fag hag's special voyeurism at gay clubs and also at gay film festivals. In the following I would like to explore how this sort of voyeuristic looking happens in film and what its consequences might be for notions of subjectivity, identification, and ethics.

Independent filmmakers are producing a wealth of work that I would call alternative pornography: experimental works that engage with porn conventions to both arouse and provoke. There has been a tremendous amount of lesbian and gay film and video in this genre—indeed, this work is what defines it. Still precious little porn appeals to a more or less straight female viewer. I suggest that one route by which a straight woman can experience porn is by watching some kinds of alternative pornography made for gay men.

The stumbling block to women's erotic gaze at men in film has been theorized most influentially in the contention that specularity, "to-be-looked-at-ness," is the inherent property of female figures in classical narrative cinema.¹ These figures, it is argued, appeal to a dominating, necessarily male gaze. Given such constraints, what, then, might constitute male specularity?

My project of male specularity has two main purposes: to reconsider the object of the gaze as male and to reconfigure the subject of the gaze as not necessarily masculine. As we will see, a female viewer faces some difficulties in occupying a viewing position that simply reverses the dominating gaze upon a passive object—a woman looking like a man. One possible mode of straight female looking at male bodies comes through masquerade—a woman looking through a man's eyes. According to another influential psychoanalytic feminist argument, to look at cinema at all, women must borrow the male gaze.² In this case, to look sexually at men I must masquerade as a gay man, i.e., provisionally borrow a

gay male gaze. Gay porn offers me a way to look at men, overtly sexually, without being looked back at, or in the process pulled into a heterosexual power relation that would inevitably disadvantage me. In male homoerotic imagery, because the male viewer and the male object of the gaze theoretically could switch roles at any minute, like "top" and "bottom," the power dynamic of looking is more flexible. As Kobena Mercer writes, "The gendered hierarchy of seeing/being seen is not so rigidly coded in homoerotic representations, since sexual sameness liquidates the associative opposition between active subject and passive object."³ Power dynamics do not disappear, of course; but gay porn suggests that the question of who lacks, or who is (relatively) object and who subject, gets a set of parameters other than gender.

In the years since the radical specularity of women in Hollywood cinema was first critiqued, the notion of the male gaze has been multiplied to include a range of lookers and ways of looking. Writers on gay porn, such as Julien Mercer, Tom Waugh, and Richard Fung, have suggested that objectness comes to be signified by other markers, such as age and race.⁴ By now, the appropriate answer to the question of what is male specularity is, "Who wants to know?"—that is, it depends upon who is looking. Ultimately I will argue that there are multiple sorts of erotic looks that are confined neither to particular subjects nor to particular objects, looks that may be dominating or submissive or take some other relation to their object.

In the following I will be looking at works by Katherine Hurbis-Cherrier, Curt McDowell, Deke Nihilson/Greta Snider, Ming-Yuen S. Ma, and Karim Aïnouz. They all draw on the codes of hard core gay porn but with important differences. They have in common their use of a fragmenting and objectifying look at a solo male, which makes these works seem to parallel the images of women in hetero porn; they include shots of erections or cum shots; and they all assert some kind of power relation among maker, subject/object, and viewer. These five works are by just a few of many contemporary independent film and videomakers whose work I could have considered; some others whose works offer male bodies to the gaze include those by Lawrence Brose, Jürgen Bruning, Shu Lea Cheang, Tom Chomont, Cathy Cook, John Di Stefano, Shari Frilot, Richard Fung, John Greyson,

Thomas Allen Harris, Mike Hoolboom, Isaac Julien, Bruce la Bruce, Karethe Linaae, Wrik Mead, Steve Reinke, Marlon Riggs, Philippe Roque, Carolee Schneeman, Chick Strand, and Andy Warhol/Paul Morrissey.

As you can see from this list, I have chosen to concentrate on mostly experimental independent works. Though such work is not by any means inherently critical by virtue of its alternative form, film/video that involves formal play and fragmentation often offers more routes and fissures along/ between which to try on different looks and positions. Another difference these works have from mainstream porn is that they are more likely to present a range of sexual experiences and cultural identities. Thus a viewer takes a position in relation to them knowing that she shares the space of their address with many different viewers. This sense of displacement, I will argue, is part of what makes these works erotic. Also, as I will discuss in conclusion, the production and exhibition contexts of independent and experimental film and video change the stakes of identification, making the process at once more fluid and more charged.

Let me begin this exploration of an erotic female look at male bodies by attempting to budge some of its theoretical stumbling blocks. First, most theories of imaging the male body still accept the notion of the gaze's phallic organization. Many writers have examined how the male body is erotically available in film, but most suggest that the body must be specularized and submitted to a *male* gaze. The male look at men does not necessarily, indeed does not usually, consist of an explicitly homoerotic look. In the context of structuring-male-gaze arguments, films offer men a covert look at other men in the guise of moving the plot along. In mainstream film, as Steve Neale has argued, male specularity must occur in the guise of plot.⁵ War movies, Westerns, and sports films, for example, permit men a variety of looks at other men—active, stripped, sweating, embracing other men—under the pretext of the story. Most of the hunky guys on display for female viewers fall into this category too—Stallone's rippling muscles seeming more like skintoned armor than like flesh—in order to remind us that while they are on display they also still remain in control, still agents of movement. Critics' derisive responses to some male actors' less-than-perfect butts—as with Michael Douglas's dorsal nudity in *Basic Instinct* or David Caruso's "cottage cheese" derrière in *NYPD Blue*—indicate the signs of horror that images of a soft, disarmed male body provokes.

The problem with men and spectacle, according to the filmic conventions we have come to accept, is that the will to narrative cannot countenance a male figure who is both subject and object, who functions both as carrier of the plot and object of desire. Richard Dyer suggests that the male protagonist, supposedly representing the phallus or phallic identification with the movement of plot, cannot very well also exhibit himself as object of phallic desire. Gay porn, Dyer writes, offers a particularly volatile site of masculinity construction. In gay porn, while the body is exposed in its finiteness and vulnerable uniqueness, it must uphold an image of hardness, impenetrability, and mastery.

The fact is that the penis isn't a patch on the phallus.

The penis can never live up to the mystique implied by the phallus. Hence the excessive, even hysterical quality of so much male imagery. The clenched fists, the bulging muscles, the hardened jaws, the proliferation of phallic symbols—they are all straining after what can be hardly achieved, the embodiment of the phallic mystique.⁶

Of course, gay homoerotic imagery offers alternatives in which the construction of masculinity becomes more complicated—the stereotyped gentleness of the Asian male, the softer masculinity of the bearded "bear," the slim, graceful youth (what Waugh calls the *ephebe* in his forthcoming study of early homoerotic photography),⁷ the erotic subject of the pierced, tattooed, or bound male body. In many cases these images, arriving from the fringes of film and video production, find a place in commercial porn. Nevertheless, the hard body with its unmistakable signifiers of masculinity remains the standard, and the deviations are threatening as well as arousing. Given this volatility, gay porn offers a site of crisis not only for conventions of filmic narrative but also for masculinity.

In light of this crisis, it is fun to see how some gay porn plays with the "action" pretext for looking at male bodies. Using the most minimal signifiers of active, masculine narratives—boot camp, cop stories, etc.—gay porn abandons the story the instant the male body is under specular "arrest" to exploit instead the male body as spectacle.⁸ Gay male porn does not have exact parallels to female specularity. Does the specularized body still function as a fetish, reassuring the male viewer of his wholeness by contrast with another's lack? Yes, insofar as close-up shots of fucking insist that one partner "has it" while the other does not. But no, insofar as the positions can and do switch. Another writer on the filmic representation of the male body, Peter Lehman, argues along the lines of Dyer that pornography represents a site of crisis; in order to keep up the myth of male mastery, on which the conventions of narrative cinema depend, the male body can't be shown. Lehman argues that hardcore porn "constantly attempts to link the penis to the phallus."⁹ In other words, hardcore conflates the structure of filmic signification, which is based on the phallus as a privileged signifier, with the male stars' actual endowments and activities. Like Dyer, he argues that the genre cannot tolerate small or unerect penises because that organ is supposed to carry the symbolic weight of the film.

All these ways of describing the gay male gaze present a problem for me. While Dyer is talking about gay porn, Lehman about straight, and Neale about straight cinema that affords a homoerotic look, they all rely on a similar notion of the structuring male gaze. These theories of imaging the male body still assume a masculine viewing subject. Thus the look, in addition to being male, remains dominating, penetrating. The straight female viewer, then—in fact, anyone who wants to undertake a different sort of look from the one here proposed—still faces a problem of how to look. The male body remains like Teflon, off which female looks glance with nary a scratch.

To get around this problem—to find a "way in" to the

male body, as it were—we need to wrestle once again with the theory that the look at film is fundamentally phallic, a theory based on a particular model of subjectivity. Perhaps the reader shares my own frustration with the tortured psychoanalytic arguments that still seem to be *de rigueur* for a theory of film spectatorship. Nevertheless, at this point in film theory's development, I think one can only move on to other theories of looking after carefully considering these arguments. My chosen method is to begin with the Lacanian doxa and withdraw via psychoanalysis' ugly stepchild, object relations theory. Let us briefly consider some ways to complicate the phallic basis of masculine subjectivity. By showing that masculine subject formation is in fact a fraught and inconclusive process, these approaches reconfigure the notion of the phallic look and support the idea that indeed the male body can be the object of the look.

A critical Lacanian analysis attempts to posit a non-phallic male subjectivity, a subjectivity that acknowledges its fundamental lack of power.¹⁰ Since the all-powerful gaze, which exists independently of any viewer, is quite distinct from the look, which pertains to the eye of an individual viewer, the dominating gaze is *not* male. Men are just in a better position to identify their individual looks with an abstract, omniscient gaze. Yet this identification occurs asymptotically: watching a porn film, one occupies a position of mastery over the film's eroticized object only to the degree that one submits to this dominating gaze. Thus Kaja Silverman argues that voyeurism, far from being a dominant viewing position, presents a situation in which one is *least* in control. The problem is not that the female is looked at and the male looks: men are just as specular (and as powerless) as women are. Film can help us realize this by literalizing male powerlessness at the same time that it foils the gaze. However, the pleasure of voyeuristic looking seems to evaporate: to adopt a position like this is to deprive any viewer of a powerful viewing position.

Something in the psychoanalytic program to reveal lack at the foundation of male subjectivity makes me uncomfortable. My unease crystallizes when, in order to invent a non-oppressive model of desire, Silverman offers up as ideal erotic object the "fantasmatic kissing organ." This would function like a roving pair of lips, capable as well of vision and smell, similar to what Proust evoked as the instrument for his love for Albertine. Silverman writes about the importance of this impossible object (which for some reason I visualize as a tropical fish): it is not defined in terms of sexual difference. Rather, it has an importance as "an organ which is absent to every subject" (despite its markedly labial quality). In an eroticism based around such an organ, not only women but also men would have to confront their lack of the defining object of sexuality—in other words, their castration. I can't help finding the notion of a sexuality based on detumescence and non-penetration, à la Andrea Dworkin, rather depressing.¹¹ Videomaker Hürbis-Cherrier captures this discomfort when she writes "I have trouble with a desire based on lack, even if it is an equal-opportunity lack." Accepting Silverman's argument, it would seem that there is *no* erotic way to look at the male body, since to make it the object of the gaze is simultaneously to deflate it, castrate it, make it

undesirable. Once again, just as I get the opportunity to look, my object gets seized from me! Yet it seems appropriate to ask, if indeed nobody owns desire, doesn't that make it safe to pretend that I do?

In Lacanian psychoanalysis, one cannot attain subjectivity; in psychoanalysis focusing on pre-linguistic, pre-oedipal phases, attaining subjectivity is just difficult. The pre-oedipal register of subjectivity is not structured around phallic power. It is less of an all-or-nothing scenario and more one of ambivalence and vacillation. And as far as the issue of the male gaze goes, pre-oedipal subject theory radically disputes the idea that there is only one such gaze, that it is solely dominating, and perhaps that only men have access to it. This approach to male subjectivity breaks down both the driving power of the male gaze and the requisite "hardness" of the specular male without shattering them completely.

Paul Smith introduces an intriguing *scrotal* metaphor of male subjectivity in his essay "Vas."¹² Rather than subtracting the phallus from the equation of the male imaginary, Smith makes it part of a larger baggage. He draws from Michèle Montrelay's theory of a dynamic instability in the male imaginary. Montrelay uses a biologism that I find disarming, given the historical tendency of psychoanalysis to mire only women in their physical bodies. She posits that ejaculation is experienced as a threatened destruction of the subject. Smith posits this kind of vulnerability to suggest not, as Silverman does, that masculinity is founded upon an irremediable crisis, but that the phallus is only a relative term in male subjectivity. It follows, if we continue to accept the phallic structure of signification, that at the same point that the phallus ceases to be central to male sexuality, there is a loss of the power of symbolization—and instead, a power of *va(s)cillation*. Despite the essentialist ring in Smith's essay, it is rather welcome to posit a male closeness to the body, an inarticulateness, of the sort that has been theorized about female subjectivity. Men, the scrotum metaphor suggests, carry around a lot of baggage, have both desire and anxiety.

To this source of male multivalency we may add the bisexual yearning of the oral stage, a source of fragmentation that is not castration anxiety but a desire for the sense of completeness with the mother's body. Gaylyn Studlar opposes the Metzian/Lacanian paradigm in which a film viewer identifies with a phallic and sadistic gaze, arguing instead that spectatorship is fundamentally masochistic. The pleasure of looking, she argues, is based on the *submissive* pleasure that an infant has looking at its mother.¹³

Spectatorship defined this way becomes less a matter of aligning oneself with an all-powerful gaze or perish, and more a matter of trying on various viewing positions, not untraumatically but not entirely destructively. Based on pre-Oedipal subject formation, the masochistic model of spectatorship affirms a fundamentally bisexual or multigendered sort of look. Also, because it draws on a formative phase in which the subject is testing out its differentiation from the mother, masochistic spectatorship permits exploration of different sexual identities without the sort of trauma that accompanies Oedipal-phase identity formation. Oral-phase identity formation has its own traumas, more associated with

the question of whether a discrete identity exists at all than with gender identity or sexual preference.

A look compounded from these difficult phases of subject formation will be anything but phallic. If the structuring look at cinema includes all this, then surely there are ways for female viewers to get into a masculine viewing position. These approaches offer ways to think of the male body as open to view, and to think of the so-called male gaze as a highly unstable and shifting one. Now, is looking still any fun? Let's consider the above a toybox of ways to look, and thus equipped, experiment in looking at men on film.

Katherine Hurbis-Cherrier's videotape *YOU(R) SEX AND OTHER STUFF* (1993) offers a rare example of an erotic work that invites a straight female look at a male body, which she eroticizes according to certain conventions of pornography. We see shots of a naked male body (but never his face) in different playful settings. While the man reclines in an armchair, little paper balloons gently bombard his genitals from off-camera. While he prepares breakfast, his penis and balls are reflected in a shiny toaster—no doubt an homage to the use of a similar shot in Stan Brakhage's masturbation film *FLESH OF MORNING* (1956). As in conventional porn, the man's body is fragmented and fetishized; most of the shots are medium shots of the torso and genitals. Unlike in conventional porn, the penis is rarely shown erect. A voice-over reads a playful ode to a woman's lover's penis. The tape constructs an alternative phallic iconography, e.g., using a time-lapse science film of unfurling sprouts, the balloons, and the poet's inventive words to celebrate the penis' buoyancy, its retractability—"I draw you out like a turtle."

Clearly the fragmentation and objectification of this male body take place within the context of a love relationship, not least because the videomaker credits her spouse at the end of the tape. Nevertheless, the strength of *YOU(R) SEX AND OTHER STUFF* is that it makes room for an *unequal* power relation. It overtly turns the tables on conventional sexual representation, putting the male body squarely in the position of object and the female videomaker and viewer in the position of voyeurs. But this delightful videotape has a coyness which is perhaps inevitable. Watching it makes me keenly aware of the woman behind the camera. That her male subject granted permission works against the spectatorial position of pure voyeurism. Such mutuality is desirable in a world without preexisting configurations of power. Given the structures Hurbis-Cherrier must work within, the standard is that the male looks and the female is looked at. A viewer who shares Hurbis-Cherrier's aim cannot help feeling that the positions of voyeur and looked-upon in *YOU(R) SEX AND OTHER STUFF* could too easily switch. The female viewer of *YOU(R) SEX AND OTHER STUFF* thus remains aware of her position as a potential object of the gaze as well.

Let us take a look at Curt McDowell's 1972 *RONNIE*, a film in which power relations are at least as complicated as they are in *YOU(R) SEX AND OTHER STUFF*. Like other *vérité* films McDowell made about the Bay Area gay scene in the '70s, as well as some Warhol/Morrissey productions, *RONNIE* explores and exploits the filmmaker's relation of power to the hustlers he picks up. They are usually poor and

black, though Ronnie is white. The short film consists of McDowell's shots of the young man in the filmmaker's apartment, drinking a beer, talking into a microphone, gradually disrobing, submitting to the scrutiny of McDowell's camera, briefly letting the filmmaker fellate him, and jerking off. On the sound track Ronnie describes the afternoon's events and frankly celebrates himself.

A mimic by trade, Ronnie is open to the projections of anyone who buys his time. His disavowal of being gay is part of what makes him available to a variety of fantasies. He tells us, for example, that after the filmmaker "did something" to him, even though it is something he "doesn't do," "I hit my climax. So imagine if I was with a pussy, a nice warm juicy pussy." Even Ronnie's misogynist protestations are duplicitous, as in this part of the monologue, which is accompanied by increasingly intimate shots of his body. His excuses for letting the stranger give him a blow job refer to performance—you have to act for the camera; women ("cunts") do this all the time. Ronnie both disavows and embraces a comparison to women, particularly to female prostitutes. His specific comparison of himself to a woman makes a viewer (one who is pursuing this project of looking at men through men's eyes) keenly aware that it is easiest for a man to place himself as the object of erotic looking if he borrows a feminine position. But Ronnie longs to be other than he is, which makes his mimicry all the more complicated. "I wish I was black, he says. "It's not my favorite color—I'm sorry, sisters and brothers, blue is"—but, he tells us, he's writing a book on relations between black and white people. In this parodic collage of stud, "cunt," wanna-be black, and other self-images, Ronnie constitutes himself as a spectacle in the way Silverman describes.

Tensions between voice-over and image in *Ronnie*, and between the film's production and viewing contexts, permit a wide and even conflicting variety of looks and desires in relation to the film. The production context was doubtless exploitative, though the degree of exploitation partly depends on the viewer's view of prostitution. The film's gesture of "giving voice" to the hustler can be understood as either generous or cruelly mocking. Thus identification with the filmmaker's look already is charged with the spectator's uneasy awareness of power. While Ronnie makes his contradictory *spiel*, the film opens his image to a number of ways of looking that both corroborate and undermine his words, making this film viewing positions even more multivalent. Even the hustler's tape-recorded address to posterity sets up a means for identification that ironically contrasts with the film's visual information: "I have to go now, so I just want to say I'm a wonderful person, and all youse blondes, just look me up in California, I'll be waiting for you, it's up to you, I'm not forcing you." This appeal to straight, white women plays over a cum shot, his spurting penis towering from a low camera angle, which is right out of gay porn.

Ronnie's last words to his audience are "A word to the wise: As they say, love the one you're with." His ambiguity, his disavowal of his position as a hustler makes a number of different fantasy scenarios possible for viewers. We're invited to be with him to the extent that we can accommodate him to our own desires. It is easy for me, a straight woman,

to take advantage of this invitation and drop in on McDowell's intimate looks upon Ronnie's body. They include a near-portrait of Ronnie sitting on the floor smoking, talking easily; fetishizing close-ups of his lips, his dick and balls, his butt, his hands; a rather poetic image with a sheer curtain billowing around him; a survey of his rigidly posed, prone body that renders Ronnie an inviting landscape. My pleasure in looking derives partly from taking advantage of the filmmaker's privileged view, partly in seeing Ronnie differently through his eyes. I may enter as an interloper in McDowell's look at the hustler's body, but the film lets me not only borrow that look but use it to see different things.



YOU(R) SEX AND OTHER STUFF

The first two works I have described involve a straight women's and a gay man's erotic look upon a man; in both cases, these views were also the look of the cinematographer. Now I offer a look at erotic male nudity that does not explicitly imply any outside viewer. This is a section of Greta Snider's compilation film *SHRED OF SEX* (1991). To make this film Snider invited her many housemates to enact their fantasies for the camera and she hand-processed and compiled the results. Shown at a rent party, *SHRED OF SEX* only later achieved its cult status on the independent film circuit. This fragment, which is sometimes singled out for exhibition separately from the rest of the film, contains a narcissistic, autoerotic display. Its subject, Deke Nihilson, simply left Snider's camera running while he performed. Nihilson, a muscular young man with a mohawk haircut and a big penis, masturbates (a little awkwardly) lying on his skateboard until he comes.¹⁴ The film aestheticizes this hard-core image by the solarizing effect of hand-processing: the young punk's body gleams and flows like mercury. Snider's processing plays up his exotic looks and his muscularity while also involving the viewer in the erotic tactility of the film's surface. Because he is performing alone for a static camera, the way we look at Nihilson is ambiguous. Since we watch so far removed from the scene, we enjoy him from a space of extreme voyeurism as though through a one-way mirror. Yet also we seem to occupy his own adoring gaze upon himself. However, since this film was made in collaboration with Snider, we participate in her eroticization of his image, similarly to Hurbis-Cherrier's treatment of her subject. A final possible viewing position, that of a member of a coalition, I will suggest later.

Karim Aïnouz's *PAIXÃO NACIONAL* (1994) provides a brief meditation on the many inequalities that underlie erotic fascination. Unlike the other films I have discussed, this film invites a viewer into a fictional narrative. The entire film is shot as though from the point of view of a Northern

tourist in Brazil, organized around his gaze upon the landscape and upon the Brazilian young man who embodies his "national passion." The tourist is never pictured. While the camera sweeps verdant landscapes, the tourist's voice-over describes how he feels the sensuality of this country seeping into him. "His" camera greedily follows the brown-skinned, lightly clad youth who, running on the beach, laughingly eludes it. Finally he reclines and submits to an intimate pan of his body, the camera nervously moving over his genitals. The overdetermined relations of north and south, rich and poor, john and hustler, tourist and native redouble themselves in these images and the fantasies on the sound track.

The youth's voice tells a very different story of the seduction; his words come to us only in a text over black leader. Throughout these scenes in which he gambols for the camera, the words suggest that his thoughts remain elsewhere, with his sister, his friends, his desire to get out of the country. The disparity becomes more violent when the words reveal that the boy has smuggled himself into the cargo of a plane to the U.S.. Indeed they are his last words. He grows cold; he becomes afraid. We have to assume that he dies in this desperate attempt to trace the route that so easily brought the tourist to Brazil.¹⁵

In *PAIXÃO NACIONAL* the power differential between tourist and Brazilian remains uncomfortably acute. The boy's objectification is not limited to a few shots in the surf but caught up in the relation between poor and wealthy, South and North, the one who lives in the daily reality of home and the one who abides in the temporary fantasy of travel. Although the film shows an encounter between hustler and camera-wielding john, as in *RONNIE*, the contractual character of the exchange becomes less certain, given the international and intercultural dimensions of the relation be-

tween tourist and local.

In PAIXÃO NACIONAL the viewer is practically forced to inhabit the tourist's vision since he is never seen and all the images of young man and landscape seem to originate from his camera. This utter voyeurism has an unnerving effect. The viewer identifies with a look that extricates itself from identification with one individual and becomes the gaze of power itself. This sense that omniscient looking comes at the price of annihilation of the self recalls Silverman's argument that voyeurism sets up a situation where there's loss of control. The tourist's individuality, and the viewer's insofar as she takes his position, becomes annihilated in the broad gesture of mastery, in the sweep of the camera across the landscape. Meanwhile the presence of the young Brazilian's subjectivity, expressed only in subtitled Portuguese voice-over, keeps a viewer from forgetting or naturalizing this power relation. A female viewer searching this work for a way to look at a male body must confront the mutually destructive implications of a look of mastery in a way that probably overtakes the pleasure of looking.

Another take on male specularity, Ming-Yuen S. Ma's *SLANTED VISION* (1996), takes an equally complex approach to the gay male look across nations and races, although the tone is not elegiac, as in PAIXÃO, so much as manic. This tape is concerned with both the image of Asian men in the North American homoerotic imaginary and the use of porn among gay Asian Americans. Ma points out that Asian men, if they are visible in gay porn at all, invariably become positioned as "bottoms" for studly white actors.¹⁶ His sets up a double intervention: First he nails the way homoerotic representations stereotype Asian men as gentle and receptive. In one sequence, set in a bar, a variety of people address pick-up lines to the camera as though to an Asian man, showing the easy slippage between orientalism, objectification, and domination. "You're beautiful," one man says. "Turn around...and over..." In reverse shots, the silent recipient, who wears a sort of Madame Butterfly drag, gradually removes his outfit in a non-verbal rebuttal. Later, interviews with a number of Asian diaspora men critique stereotyping by highlighting range of sexual practices and attitudes among them.

The second aspect of *SLANTED VISION*'s intervention is to claim the *pleasure* of being a bottom. One Asian porn actor explains, "It made me feel desirable to be objectified"—he finds pleasure in a renunciative position, even if one supposedly masochistic. Another interviewee tells how he enjoyed a sexual encounter in which he was humiliated, because the other man was giving him so much *attention*. To introduce this theme is a bold move, for Ma faces criticism for reaffirming the racist stereotype of Asian passivity. Yet he makes a compelling case that the masochistic or passive or feminine position can offer a site of pleasure.

Sexually explicit scenes in this tape reframe commercial gay porn to question of who owns the look. One complex sequence combines two views of the same scene of two Asian men making love, played by Ma and Napoleon Lustre. The first view is composed entirely of medium and long shots with few edits and avoids the fragmentation of bodies, rather

like the "natural," unobjectifying porn films made for female audiences by companies like Femme Productions. Its sound track breaks the narrative illusion, though, because on it we hear the live sound from the video shoot. (Additional sound tracks further complicate the scene, including a prayer-like poem by Napoleon about having AIDS and his mother taking him to Lourdes for a cure.) The other view, a series of aestheticized images shot so close that particular anatomy is unrecognizable, comes from cameras the lovers are using. It has a quite different eroticism, more of an Irigarayesque intimacy between eye and skin. Music plays on the sound track. The effect of these two sequences is to let the viewer experience two very different forms of erotic looking, one narrative and one abstract. Halfway through the sequence, the sound tracks for the two sets of images switch. The effect is astonishing: initially, the intrusion of the other sound track deconstructs each scene's naturalness. Yet ultimately it compounds its erotic effect by playing with the viewer's awareness of the different levels at which eroticism can work.

Ma organizes one erotic scene around a female gaze at a male body. In this scene, a female hand guides the camera's slow pan across a male body. The hand holds a 3" monitor on which plays a conventional gay porn tape of an Asian man being fucked by white man. As in the sequence I just described, the film presents two different modes of erotic viewing in the same scene. Ma, whom I met while I was working on this article, asked me to provide a voice-over describing why I like to look at gay men's images of men. What I said turned out to be a version of this essay with its glasses removed (and maybe in stilettos). Here is an excerpt:

"When I look at images of gay men, made for gay men, I can look all I want, I can devour the image, let my eyes move over ass thighs cock nipples, like my eyes are hands or a tongue. I can do whatever I want to this image with my eyes, can fantasize being in that position of domination that would be very hard to if directed to me as a woman.

"Looking at gay porn, I borrow a gay man's look at other men, drop in on a man's desiring gaze at another man. Because it's two men, there's a feeling of playfulness I long for between looker and looked at, taking turns looking/being looked, touching and being touched, fucking/being fucked, top/bottom. There's a feeling that they can switch. At the same time the vanquishment of a man, a man giving in to pleasure, to being *done* to, is exciting because it's so rare in hetero images.

"I hate theories that we must disarm the phallic, objectifying gaze upon others' bodies. Gives too much power to this kind of look; says in effect that phallic looking is so dangerous *nobody* is allowed to do it. Just when I got a chance to get my own looks in! Don't want everybody to be disarmed, equal, touchy-feely, always treating each other like full subjects. It's a tedious democracy of looking. It's a bore.

...What I want is for the power to flow around more. I want a chance to have a phallic female gaze—given that this power is short-term and contingent as any other kind of looking. I don't think anything wrong with dominating ways of looking. But I want to think they're ways of looking that people can trade around, like you trade being top and bot-

tom. I'm not interested in women objectifying men, to make up for all that history of the other way around. But I do want to see men a little more permeable, subjectible, susceptible."

Gay porn offers a good site for female viewers to test out the power of our own look. In male-male exchanges in film, power differences are usually an overt thematic. This maintains even in homoerotic representations, where the difference that impels the narrative is often one of power—in myriad, unstable relationships such as hustler/john, black/white, master/protégé. For a female viewer to enter such an erotic scene means entering a power relation as well. In the above statement I introduced a model of spectatorship based on s/m, which I will now unpack. This model, indebted to Gaylyn Studlar's theory of masochistic spectatorship, takes a somewhat more willful slant than Studlar does. I chose male homoerotic imagery as an object for a female look precisely because it affords a distant, dominating look, an ultimate voyeurism, in which the viewer is utterly removed from the scene. By disagreeing with (or disavowing) the Lacanian argument, I am fighting the notion of castration because I want a chance to have the phallus too! Rather than disempower the "male" gaze, I propose to phallicize the "female" one.

"Progressive" pornography faces the challenge of reconfiguring the relation between looker and looked-at such that that relation does not necessarily correspond to dominator and dominated. I do not want to argue in favor of replacing porn with what is known as "erotica," with its implications of soft focus, lack of power differentials (as if such a thing were possible) and bourgeois good taste. Indeed, erotica simply masks and maintains existing power relations. Rather, the redefinition of desire centers around reconceiving the subject-object relation in looking as a relation between two subjects. Not two free and equal, Habermasian ideal subjects but two people between whom power relations are continually being negotiated. Eroticism relies on this shifting and promising inequality. "What distinguishes Eros from perversion is not freedom from fantasies of power and surrender," Jessica Benjamin writes, "for Eros does not purge sexual fantasy—it plays with it. The idea of destruction reminds us that the element of aggression remains necessary in erotic life; it provides an element of *survival*, the difference the other can make, which distinguishes erotic union—which plays with the fantasy of domination—from real domination."¹⁷ Domination provides a necessary part of erotic relations, in other words—and thus so does an "objectifying" gaze. What Benjamin's work on intersubjectivity suggests is that we can have no erotic relation when there is an *utter* division of subject and object, or in the case of visual imagery, of looker and looked-at. Eroticism depends upon a tension between the sense of control and submission on each person's part rather than complete domination on one side and complete submission on the other. Similarly, visual eroticism plays with the *relations* of identification.

In thinking about the construction of male subjectivity we have seen that the subject-object division and identification with the phallus as symbol of power are by no means perfectly replicated in the production of masculinity. If masculinity is indeed constructed around vacillation, then spaces are opened up in male representation for multiple desires. If

we can acknowledge that power does indeed circulate, that intersubjective relations are based upon negotiated relations of power, then we have room for a contingent form of control. If the gaze is dominating, at least we can take turns wielding it—as in meetings where whoever is sitting in the "rotating chair" gets to speak. To recognize the contingency of power upon position makes it possible to enjoy the privileges of power in a limited way. This includes the privilege of temporary alignment with a controlling, desiring, and objectifying gaze while acknowledging its contingency on shifting power relations. Mulvey's argument about spectatorship did not refer to an erotic form of looking but to fetishism, the reduction of another to an object. Perhaps a rigid division between subject and object underpins the "phallic" gaze. But in an erotic look a fluidity of movement occurs between these positions. It includes both a position of absolute voyeuristic control and of experiencing oneself as an object.

I am thinking of s/m as a model for this sort of looking relation. The model I propose is not "sadomasochism in everyday life," the banal normalization of dominance and submission that pervades our patriarchal culture. Hence my use of a term that describes a bedroom practice, s/m, rather than one that pertains to a psychoanalytic condition, sadomasochism. I am thinking of s/m as performance—a relation more like the intense but transient relationship of viewer to screen image. I define s/m quite specifically as the limited, contractual relation in which two people consent to play out a fantasy relation of dominance and submission. In this ideal definition, the arena created is a safe space, at a remove from other patterns of life and of this particular relationship. Roles of "subject" and "object" (words that, I acknowledge, no longer adequate to the situation I am trying to evoke) are acknowledged as roles. An s/m model of spectatorship permits the contingent playing with power that I advocate as a model of looking. Film spectatorship, Studlar argues, is organized around a masochistic relation (and not the sadistic relation of the Metzian paradigm) insofar as the film spectator allows herself to be seduced into a mutually contracted agreement.

S/m uses theatricality as a central feature: a fundamental trust that the partners can suspend their roles functions throughout the fantasy. This relation is, of course, similar to that which obtains in a movie theater when a viewer indulges a powerful, objectifying look at an object while disavowing/acknowledging that the relation is limited to a specific space and is fundamentally fantastic. As play—sex play or fantasy or the temporary immersion in the movies—s/m can intervene in conventional alignments of power and spectatorship. Studlar argues that by returning the player to a state of polymorphous perversity, masochism "demonstrates the easy exchange of power roles that are rigidly defined within the patriarchal sexual hegemony. In masochism, the power plays of sexuality are made explicitly theatrical and ritualized so that their naturalness is exposed as a construct."¹⁸ Far from reaffirming cultural power roles of dominance and submission, to accept an s/m-based spectatorial relation actually mocks those roles.

In a seeming paradox, this role playing aligns with what Studlar defines as masochistic spectatorship. Studlar is talking about the masochist in every viewer, and I am interested

to find the dominating gaze in every viewer, especially those who aren't used to having one. This is no paradox, for both these positions become possible as role plays within the delimited fantasy space of the cinema. The masochistic viewer, in a position to test out various identities and relations, operates like the participant in s/m scenarios, experimenting within a safe, delimited space.

In the films and videos I have discussed, relations of looking are constructed like s/m relations. Domination and submission occur within the viewing situation's consensual and limited space. A viewer who in other situations might be loath to assume a dominating role can try on power like a costume. In *YOU(R) SEX AND OTHER STUFF*, a female viewer can try out looking in an objectifying way at a man, though the heterosexual exchange implicit in the video means that she still may feel subject to that look herself. With a male homoerotic film like *RONNIE*, she remains an utter voyeur, not present in the picture at all; she thus gets to occupy the intimate and invasive look that McDowell extends toward his subject. Since *SHRED OF SEX* was made through the auto-erotic look of Deke Nihilson, she gains a degree of permission to look at him objectifyingly. Nihilson is a self-styled specular male, a punk-rock Garbo, whose beauty is a function of his narcissistic gaze upon himself.

In *PAIXÃO NACIONAL* the position of voyeur begins to get in trouble. Here the contractual fantasy relation between viewer and subject does not obtain in the first place. One senses that while the exchange remains fantasy for the tourist, whose images comprise the film's visuals, it is in deadly earnest for the Brazilian boy. Thus the position of voyeur brings with it a sense that the boundaries on which the s/m exchange depends have been irrevocably breached. The film suggests that some parameters make the power relation between viewer and viewed especially fraught. Power differentials that obtain outside the s/m relationship, such as class and ethnicity, test the participants' ability to play with their mutual boundaries. *SLANTED VISION* plays knowingly with these differentials in contractual relation between voyeur and viewed, in effect testing the viewer's ability to disavow power responsibly.

In conclusion, let me explore how independent, experimental porn films of the sort I have described invite coalition audiences for erotic identification. The negotiation that characterizes the sadomasochistic looking relation particularly characterizes the spectator's relation to independent films. In a large-scale commercial film, we more accurately characterize primary identification as identification with the apparatus itself. In independent films, with their smaller crews and multi-functional director, the relation of power in viewing becomes closely tied to a relation among the individuals involved in the production. In *RONNIE* and *YOU(R) SEX*, as well as works by artists such as Chomont, Harris, Hoolboom, and la Bruce, the filmmaker performs as cinematographer in what is more or less a documentary encounter. All the works I have mentioned represent, at some level, the relation between filmmaker and imaged subject. A viewer's identification with the look of the camera becomes more volatile, because it is more likely to be closely aligned with the filmmaker's look, partly because many filmmakers are both

director and cinematographer but also because the entire project tends to be more hands on—perhaps more authorial—than commercial cinema. Also, such films more often critically explore the apparatus itself: *SLANTED VISION* and *PAIXÃO NACIONAL* are explicit examples of this, as are works by makers such as Reinke and Snider.

Low-budget porn films often attempt to imitate large productions anonymity and authority. However, porn, by virtue of its documentary kernel (attested to by a concern with the cum shot, the veracity of female orgasm, etc.) also calls on a relation of identification that is different from the fantasy relations at work in fiction cinema, such as the Sternberg films on which Studlar based her study. Identification in porn does not simply rely on an immersion in fantasy but also on a relation to the dynamics at work between filmmaker (director, cinematographer) and actor/subject. Thus the power relations at work in these films are not simply those of the narrative but structural.

In the independent, quasi-pornographic films I discuss here, these qualities combine to complicate the spectatorial process. The viewer of *RONNIE* may choose to identify with the filmmaker's controlling, manipulative stance. This identification is much more than identification with the look of the camera (Metz's primary identification). McDowell's relation to Ronnie as pickup, patron, and (briefly) lover, as well as framer, offers a complex position with which the viewer makes some sort of alliance. Similarly, in *YOU(R) SEX AND OTHER STUFF* the viewer takes a position in relation to Hurbis-Cherrier's playful objectification of her husband's body. Snider's role as impetus, accomplice, and (in other scenes) actor in *SHRED OF SEX* forces the viewer to take a position in relation to her while gazing upon Nihilson's gleaming body. *SLANTED VISION* makes it quite clear that the viewer of a porn scene is implicated in its production, through Ma's self-conscious use of the apparatus. Only in *PAIXÃO NACIONAL* does the viewer have some distance from the position of filmmaker Aïnouz. The viewer becomes uncomfortably aware of her alliance with the invisible tourist's dominating look and loaded wallet, but because of the fictional narrative, she need not trace the hungry gaze upon the Brazilian landscape and the laughing youth back to Aïnouz's camera. Because these films foreground the powerful position of the filmmaker, they exploit the adversarial relation between filmmaker and subject. Rather than disavow power, these films are produced out of the very process of struggle or negotiation between the two.

Like s/m, spectatorial identification is a contingent, experimental process. The contractual character of the viewing situation I have described implies that a viewer can make a pact with many viewing situations. One agrees, under limited circumstances, to occupy a certain position. What I am describing is not simply the process of cross-identification but the shifting, volatile relation defined by a viewer's membership in a mixed audience. In an audience that includes a coalition of different interests, the spectatorial contract exists not just between the viewing individual and the screen space but among a group. *RONNIE*, for example, was re-released in 1992 as part of "Flesh Histories," a two-hour program compiled by filmmaker Tom Kalin. The difference between

its original and new context suggests other ways the film is available to a number of erotic engagements. The entire program contains about thirty works, ranging from abstract/activist to feminist/punk, which appeal to all sorts of sexual identification. They have in common an interest in redefining desire; it is with that awareness that the viewer sees RONNIE. The "address" of these works is disputable because of the way they abut and seep into each other, changing each other's meanings. Whether or not one knows the sexual orientation of the makers and characters, they all come out queer. Similarly, the wonderful thing about SHRED OF SEX, of which Deke Nihilson's self-imaging forms a part, is that this a compilation film represents a dazzling range of sexual preferences and practices. Nihilson shares the celluloid with same-sex and mixed-sex individuals, pairs and groups whose activities range from tender to violent, from partner-switching to golden showers.

This mix of identifications and addresses characterizes compilation works such as SHRED OF SEX, FLESH HISTORIES, and Shu Lea Cheang's THOSE FLUTTERING OBJECTS OF DESIRE, a collection of 20 works by women involved in interracial relationships.¹⁹ The works are also similar to the mixed screenings at lesbian and gay film festivals, such as the late night "Cruiserama"-type program at the New York Lesbian and Gay Film Festival. As one might expect, audiences at these mixed screenings become extremely volatile. Sometimes the audience has an exhilarated sense of cumulative eroticism where, for example, gay viewers borrow the thrill of lesbian style, lesbians groove on gay male eroticism, bi women enjoy both lesbian imagery and the borrowed look at male bodies, and all viewers have the opportunity to enjoy the eroticism of a sexuality different from their own. At other times, audience members become anxious during the minutes when their own sexuality is not interpellated on the screen, and they make catcalls and other protests until images that "speak to" them return to the screen. This most likely occurs in a context where lesbian and gay representations are relatively rare and embattled, and any lapse in these representations may be perceived as a threat.²⁰

All these works and events appeal sequentially to a range of sexual identifications, such that a viewer, rather than waiting for her particular practice to appear on screen, negotiates a desiring relation to a number of other practices. It is interesting to learn where particular viewers of these compilations draw lines with regard to what turns them on, what they find mildly interesting, and what repels them. The mutual participation of a group of people—an audience—in these fantasy situations enhances the experience of forming identifications *across* identities. Douglas Crimp points out that identity "is always a *relation*, never simply a positivity."²¹ The "identification across identities" of which Crimp writes means that identities are never static but always relational, capable of creating links among different groups that *transform* those groups.

Let me return once more to Silverman's argument that the gaze belongs to no one. According to this, it won't help my project in the long run to claim the gaze for women, because that only maintains the phallogocentrism around which it's constructed: it's kind of a liberal-feminist gaze. Instead, I

want to make a claim for the specificity of looks, for their contextuality, and for how erotic and political relations change with the situation. Love the one you're with: look in a way that is contingently phallic and contextually erotic.²²

NOTES

1. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16:3 (1975). There is a bracing effect in beginning with this most rigorous and indeed pessimistic set of arguments posited by feminist psychoanalytic film theory when discussing spectatorship. Here I trace them to their conclusion, perhaps cul-de-sac, in more recent psychoanalytic work on spectatorship and subjectivity. I then open up the argument by invoking psychoanalytic work that takes a certain distance from Lacanian theory. More important, the independent films and videos I describe are produced and exhibited in contexts that, as Mulvey was the first to note, offer alternatives to the scopoc regime of mainstream cinema. Significantly, Mulvey not only critiqued the dominant gaze but in her own filmmaking explored an inherently critical kind of looking; this legacy is evident in contemporary independent, experimental work.
2. See Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).
3. Kobena Mercer, "Skin Head Sex Thing: Racial Difference and the Homoerotic Imaginary," in *How Do I Look? Queer Film and Video*, ed. Bad Object-Choices (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991), 182.
4. See for example Mercer, *ibid.*, Thomas Waugh, "The Third Body: Patterns in the Construction of the Subject in Gay Male Narrative Film," in *Queer Looks: Perspectives on Lesbian and Gay Film and Video*, ed. Martha Gever, John Greyson, and Pratibha Parmar (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1993), and Richard Fung, "Looking for My Penis: The Eroticized Asian in Gay Male Porn," in *How Do I Look?*
5. Steve Neale, "Masculinity as Spectacle: Reflections on Men and Mainstream Cinema," *Screen* 26:6 (Nov./Dec. 1983): 2-16.
6. Richard Dyer, "Don't Look Now: The Instabilities of the Male Pin-Up," *Screen* 23 (1982); reprinted in *Only Entertainment* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 116.
7. See Thomas Waugh, *Hard to Imagine*, forthcoming from St. Martin's Press, 1996.
8. An amusing and surprisingly touching videotape by Robert Blanchon plays on this tension between narrative and sexual spectacle in gay porn. LET'S JUST KISS AND SAY GOOD-BYE (1995) isolates those micro-narratives that set up the sex scenes in gay porn films (for example, a camper meets a park ranger: "Hi. Nice hat." "You want to try it on?"). Blanchon edits them into a fractured story of hypermasculine intimacy. Playing on the sound track, the title song gives these brief meetings a feeling of unbearable nostalgia.
9. Peter Lehman, *Running Scared: Masculinity and the Representation of the Male Body* (Philadelphia: Temple U Press, 1993), 93.
10. Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (NY: Routledge, 1992).
11. Julia Lesage points out that in Dworkin's case it is also disingenuous, for she chooses to ignore that many lesbians practice penetration and, in fact, are probably better at it than some men given the skill acquired with dildos, fisting, etc.
12. Paul Smith, "Vas," *Camera Obscura*, 17 (Spring 1988): 89-111.

13 Gaylyn Studlar, *In the Realm of Pleasure: Von Sternburg, Dietrich, and the Masochistic Aesthetic* (Urbana: U of IL, 1988), 48.

14. Incidentally, this work belongs to a microgenre of skateboard porn that also includes Candyland Productions' *SEX BOMBS!* (1987) and G.B. Jones' *THE YO-YO GANG* (1992).

15. Happily for those of us curious about the look in the other direction, Ainouz plans to resuscitate the young Brazilian in a sequel.

16. This issue was first broached by Richard Fung in his tapes *ORIENTATIONS* (1984) and *CHINESE CHARACTERS* (1987), and has come up more recently in works such as *GOM* (1994) by Kirby Hsu and *SEVEN QUESTIONS FOR STICKY RICE* (1994) by Hong Nguyen.

17. Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Problem of Domination* (NY: Pantheon, 1988): 73-74.

18. Studlar, 52.

19. I discuss "Those Fluttering Objects of Desire" and other works in the essay "Sexual Hybrids: From Oriental Exotic to Postcolonial Grotesque," *Parachute*, 70 (Autumn 1993).

20. For example, in the Rochester Lesbian and Gay Film and Video Festival, where I have been a programmer for three years, our programs with titles like "Sexy Shorts for All Sorts" met with such per-

turbed reactions that in the most recent year we returned to separate "boys" and "girls" erotic programming.

21. Douglas Crimp, "Right on, Girlfriend!," in *Fear of a Queer Planet*, ed. Michael Warner (Duke University Press, 1993), 12.

22. I would like to thank Douglas Crimp, John Greyson, Katherine Hurbis-Cherrier, and Lyndal Jones, as well as my editors at Jump Cut, for their comments and encouragement.

YOU(R) SEX AND OTHER STUFF is distributed by Katherine Hurbis-Cherrier, Dept. of Film and Video, Tisch School of the Arts, New York University, 721 Broadway, 9th fl, New York, NY 10003-6807. 212-998-1540. *RONNIE* is distributed by Canyon Cinema, 2325 Third St., ste. 338, San Francisco, CA 94107. (415) 626-2255. "FLESH HISTORIES" and *SHRED OF SEX* are distributed by Drift, 611 Broadway, ste. 742, New York, NY 10012. (212) 254-4118. *PAIXÃO NACIONAL* is distributed by Karim Ainouz, 12-175 Thompson St., New York, NY 10012. (212)614-0454.

SLANTED VISION is distributed by Video Out, 1102 Homer St., Vancouver, B.C., Canada V6B 2X6. (604) 688-4336. "THOSE FLUTTERING OBJECTS OF DESIRE" is distributed by Shu Lea Cheang, 594 Broadway, ste. 908, New York, NY 10012. (212) 777-6912, and in excerpted form by Video Data Bank, 37 S. Wabash Ave., Chicago, IL 60603. (312) 345-3550.

The last word

JUMP CUT goes online, sort of...

The retail price of this issue is \$8.00, reflecting a necessary price increase due to higher paper, printer, and mailing costs. We're also raising subscription prices. For about the past year, realizing that we'd have to hike our prices, we've been spurred to consider some alternatives. In particular, we're evaluating the merits and problems of either producing *Jump Cut* as a totally electronic journal (that is appearing only on line or on digital media such as computer disks) or having an electronic version of it while continuing printed-on-paper publication. We surveyed many of our long-time readers and writers about this, and they overwhelmingly responded that they wanted a *Jump Cut* on paper, one they could hold in their hands. So for a while, at least, we'll continue our conventional publication.

As editors and writers ourselves, we've been putting out *Jump Cut* using computer desktop publishing since the late 80s, and we've conducted a lot of the business of the publication by electronic mail. And we've written articles together by sending drafts back and forth electronically. We're enthused about this new direction and think it offers new possibilities for *Jump Cut*. At the same time, we recognize that it is a new thing for many of our readers and writers. There are numerous considerations, and we want to share our thinking

with you. The key concern we have is balancing the availability of *Jump Cut* with the practical aspects of putting it out.

Our basic goals remain the same: to develop radical media criticism; to link media artists, academics, and activists; to develop and extend new areas of criticism. We've always wanted to make the publication widely accessible. We started *Jump Cut* in 1974 with a low-cost, feasible technology (offset tabloid newsprint from typewriter copy). From the start, we've modestly self-subsidized the production of *Jump Cut*. When we've had a bit more extra income, we've put it into areas that would improve the product (such as better quality paper), or we purchased services so we could increase the amount of time we spend editing. However, in the past few years some things have changed. One is that all three of the co-editors now have full time jobs, which limits the amount of time available for *Jump Cut* tasks. Another is that we're experiencing some financial tightening. For a context, you should be aware that our subscription base remains fairly stable, but bookstore sales (in the past always about 2/3-3/4 of our sales) have fallen off due to several factors:

- the loss of small independent bookstores (especially left, feminist, etc.) through chainstore competition; and