

Oxford

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Dear Alix,

Apoologies for the lateness of this info. Finishing the chapter knocked me out & I couldn't do anything but sleep and fester for several days - Anyway, the now subsided so.

① This is my usual statement for Kensington Gore (August '81 15 mins)

The story of an accident on a film set is read, mimed and ad-libbed while a throat is being carefully slit with a knife, wax painted and Kensington Gore (theatrical blood). The narrator is the make-up girl. Her inability to separate reality from illusion is both a testament to her skill and a reflection of the media's power to simulate and stimulate violence.

What I have found interesting in people's reactions to the tape is the almost unanimous "ugh" that escapes as the knife goes in. Even tho' they have seen the build up of wax, paint etc., that splitting of flesh comes across as "real". Media magic? - or perhaps this is a similar process to the suspension of disbelief that children employ in games (I always remember kids coming backstage after the Basil Brush show and talking directly to the puppet as if the arm that animated it wasn't there). I'm sure this make believe is an important part of learning, it has certainly been useful to psycho-therapy. The anti-illusionism of the last 20 odd years has assumed the passivity of traditional spectatorship which may well be its active ingredient! ~~A more obvious explanation~~ The "ugh" might more simply be explained by the fact that my knife slides thro' the wax without extracting

blood. This could be that terrible hiatus when you've just cut yourself and, before the pain, before the blood, you contemplate the vulnerability of your flesh. Alternatively, a well-worn nightmare of the horror movies might be operating e.g. the faintly sinister strangers that moved into the local community reveal their extra-terrestrial origins when a young housewife attacks their leader with a kitchen knife and ... no blood! In retrospect, I'm reminded of a recurring nightmare in which I got repeatedly slashed by some assailant and felt no pain, shed no blood. I think this is less ~~just~~ a confirmation of Freudian castration anxieties than a buried memory of being operated on as a child. Whatever the image may conjure up in each individual, audiences are generally relieved to laugh at the slapstick or get structuralist about the distancing devices of the fragmented narrative, alternative modes of storytelling etc. The actual violence, both self-inflicted and as perpetrated on an extremely phallic male neck (not to mention the violence of the editing) Much of this goes undiscussed.

② Nostalgia 15 mins May 1982 official text as follows:
"This tape explores and indulges a fantasy of the past, other people's pasts. " It all seemed very simple then very straightforward. We just got on with it, didn't make a fuss. " The work fusses lovingly over details - black lips, tight hair, a toy piano, an old time and "despair" scrawled across the picture in turquoise ink. It pretends to find refuge from an impossible present in an improbable past."

It is a self-centered tape, some kind of attempt to re-introduce the va queries of my personality into my work without justifying it with feminism or theories of spectatorship. Not surprisingly, it has been criticised for being uncritical, i.e. not offering a seering

critique of media manipulation. For me, it explores the ambiguities I experience in relation to a rather pernicious form of nostalgia which steals our abilities, our imagination and locks them into obsessive dreams of the past, cheating us of our autonomy in the present. All kinds of romantic fiction offer similar escape routes from reality. The tape presents a nostalgia "trip" with all the absurdities of artifice and self-deception. Finally it concedes a simple, sensual pleasure in the pretence, in dressing up like mother did with her black lips, and sculpted hair, in playing with the magic of video which can make the dream come alive - if only for a moment.

(3) The Critic's Informed Viewing 28 mins (17 July '82)

The passivity of your average TV consumer has been contrasted with the discerning eye of the video artist who is alert to the hidden ideologies of narrative and entertainment. I am convinced neither of the viewer's imbecility (witness mass switch-offs this Christmas) nor the ideological purity of an art audience's spectatorship. My own viewing habits oscillate between complete identification with/escape into narrative and objective analysis of formal devices with their ideological slips and sometimes blatant displays of sexism which of all the ills depresses me most. There are moments when my mind wanders off on a chain of associations and memories sparked by some name, an object or a sound. When the TV becomes boring and repetitive, I ~~leave~~ follow suit. The oscillations between active and passive viewing are reflected in the slow zooms in and out from the TV screen. The broadcast picture shifts smoothly from illusion to a visual track on the front of a box, itself an illusion of the box that contains it. My thoughts interrupt Top of the Pops or the ads "Just

as I was getting into it". The pulling power of television is given a free reign - long enough for the pleasure of imaginative escape to take effect; then it is withdrawn. Desire is perpetually renewed and inadequately gratified - fantasy being a constant reminder of absent pleasure in the real world. When I was at school these fantasies embodied the "outside" world beyond the convent walls - critical insight and self-awareness may never entirely break those old patterns of desire and gratification. Fantasies of omnipotent glamour still offer temporary shelter from the necessities of everyday life. Do we condemn these moments of escape as weakness or can some kind of distinction be made between abdication of responsibility for one's life and a conscious use of fantasy and pleasure for rest and psychic regeneration?

This last one could do as a statement in itself. The first two beyond the official bits are quotable addendas. I hope all of this is of some use, and I look forward to your own comments on the work. Do you have the facility to freeze frame on your machines? i.e. get a stable (whole) picture which can be photographed on a 1/4 sec exposure - best way of doing it! If you have, it would be easier to do the pictures than plead for 1/2 ton at RCA. I'll still be in Ox! ~~under~~ under doctor's orders when you get this, so give me a call as above. I hope to be back Tues. for Steve's tapes. Apologies for not typing this - temperature goes up ~~at~~ on sight of the machine. Hope all is well with you -
Best wishes - Kate E.
P.S. If I have a choice, I would prefer the later date in Feb - or even March.