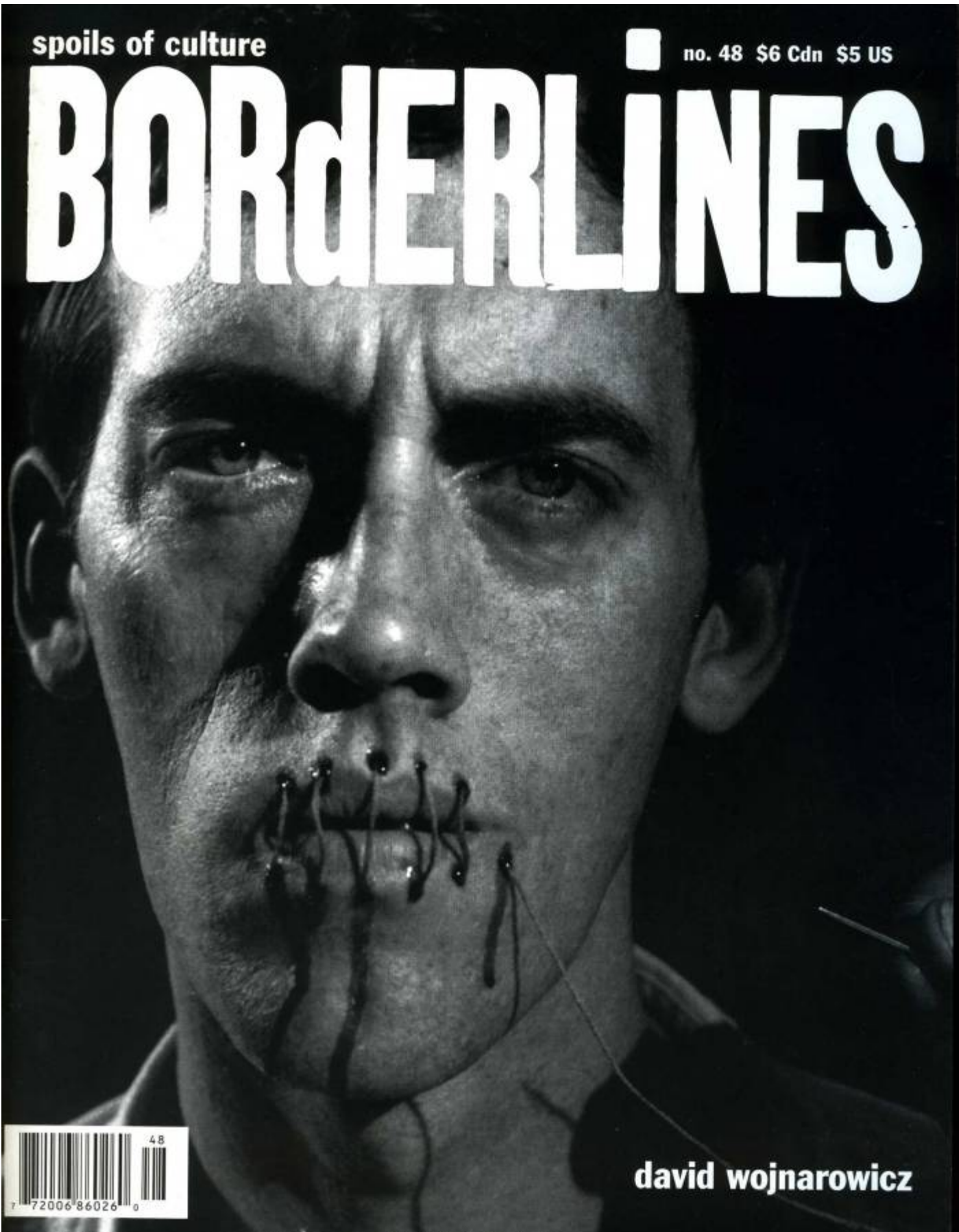


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**Cover: David Wojnarowicz**  
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Courtesy, Deitch Projects, NYC.

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Jessica Bushby

**Gordon Brent Ingram,  
Vancouver, 1998.**



Savor a Mi

# OUT ON SCREEN

Film stills: (pages 44-47) courtesy Karl Uhrich and Out On Screen;  
(pages 48-49) Sasha Dryden, the Vancouver International Film Festival

**Screened at Out on Screen,  
1998 Vancouver Queer Film & Video Festival**

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With its tenth anniversary, Out on Screen further established itself as a major forum for independent and regional film and video on sexual minorities. Out on Screen remains a significant venue for work on sexual minorities outside of North America, but with the proliferation of similar festivals in Europe and elsewhere, the positioning of Out on Screen remains primarily regional. Out on Screen often reflects Vancouver's queer scenes as scattered at the edge and as a fecund locale of cultural "fusion."

As queer culture has become big business, the larger film festivals have not been able to provide sufficient screening opportunities for the makers of short films. Because of these trends, Out on Screen is playing an increasingly strategic role for marginal queer video and film. In the world of gay and lesbian film festivals, Out on Screen is a crucial stepping-stone for artists getting their first screening and review. Consequently, the most important contributions of Out on Screen have been in providing spaces for screening well-curated series of shorts and the lower budget features. For example, the Vancouver International Film Festival will screen more features with significant queer content than were shown at Out on Screen. But only a small number of queer shorts will be included.

(unless otherwise indicated the piece is 35 mm film in English)

**Savor a Mi (Savour Me)**

Dir. Claudia Margado-Escanilla,  
Canada, 1997, 21 min

A new genre of Latina-lesbian-erotica coming out of Vancouver? It is too soon to tell. When this magic, unrealistic tale of requited love is not exceptionally sensual, it is exquisitely kitsch. The candles, the altars, and the angels have all been done before, but not with this kind of bad-girl sex. Perhaps the first half of the film works too hard at being slow and frustrating. Midway through *Savor a Mi*, every viewer is turned into a consenting voyeur—well almost. This sarcastic flick speaks most to lesbians and heterosexual male voyeurs—if the latter group really gets it. The peepholes between the rooms with women watching each other masturbate, is a predictable device. The room-to-room sex vistas work in drawing the viewer further into the social intrigue. Alas, the last minutes are too hot to go by as quickly as they do. If *Savor a Mi* is not porn, it must be high art. Mustn't it?

**SPF 2000**

Dir. Patrick McGinn,  
USA, 1997, 16mm, 11 min

If you are one of the millions who, at this *fin-de-millénaire*, are wondering what ever happened to plain, wholesome, sardonic, and bitchy camp, *SPF 2000* is a beacon of hope. This flick could almost be the anthem for the so-called "post-queer" intent on recycling the myths of the Cold War HOMOsexual. When there is not impossible angst, there is always the unbearable lightness of superficial romance to fall back on. But it is difficult not to be seduced by this cross-dressing, homosexual reinvention of early-sixties Italian beach flicks. Let's see, is there enough of a plot to relay? This was the genre where style was everything and content tedious. Drag mama and her boy go to the beach. Or was "he" really a "she"? True love is just down the beach in the persona of a studly young man. Soon the courtship begins and mama is forced to deal with the existential angst of her little one leaving the nest. The rest is history—well sort of. But is this supposed to be the netherworld where romance and soft porn meet? *SPF 2000*'s core statement is how this "location" (to use the cliché), is so flaccid as to verge on exhausting.

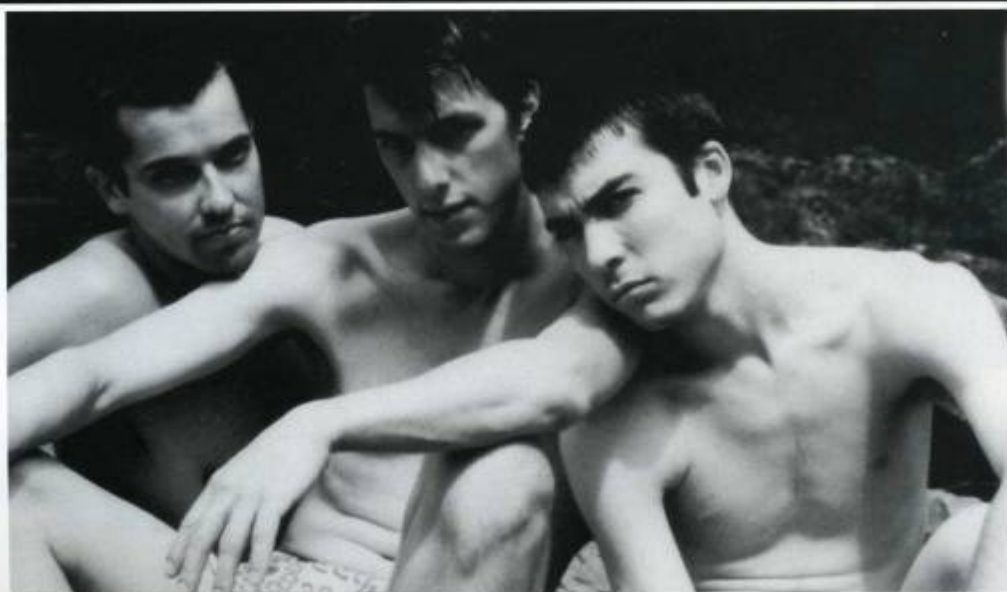
**Mrs. Craddock's Complaint**

Dir. Tony Ayres,  
Australia, 1997, 16mm, 12 min

*Mrs. Craddock's Complaint* is a playful look at conflicting notions of suburban propriety around washrooms and toilet sex "down under." For a topic that is still largely taboo even in gay culture, this look at conflicts over public toilets seems oddly out-of-touch with the reality of how many men's lives in North America continue to be ruined by entrapment. Perhaps this film's humour is its best weapon for building broader alliances around sexual freedom. A bored housewife notices that a lot of men are stopping in at the public washroom in the park down the street. She makes a series of complaints but cannot quite put her finger on what the problem is. Her obsession turns to vigilantism and she starts reporting license plate numbers. The drivers are soon coming on to her driveway to confront her. Mrs. Craddock becomes the laughing stock of the neighbourhood, estranged from her embarrassed husband, especially as it becomes clear that most of the authority figures who she has complained to are also frequent visitors to the "cottage" down the road. In the end, Mrs. Craddock is forced to give up, and rather than beat the fags, tries to join them. Perhaps this is the brave new slightly-less-homophobic world—but I doubt it.

# FILMS IN BRIEF

**SPF 2000**



**Gordon Brent Ingram and Claudia Margado-Escanilla. Vancouver, January 24, 1999.**

**This interview was conducted near where Claudia Margado-Escanilla lives—off Vancouver's Commercial Drive—the largest enclave of lesbian, as well as Latin, public culture in Western Canada. She was about to leave for the screening of her film *Savor a Mi* at the Sundance Film Festival.**

**gbi:** *Savor a Mi* was filmed in Vancouver but evokes a lot of other places.

**cme:** I spent a lot of time in Mexico. My partner is Mexican and I picked up on that aesthetic. We built all of the sets in Vancouver. I co-produced this film with Seanna McPherson. Lorie Hagan was the line producer. We had a whole crew to build the set as if it was somewhere in North America. The events are supposed to have taken place on the cusp between Hallowe'en and the Day of the Dead, the day after, which are both celebrated, sometimes together, in parts of Vancouver. But we forgot to put in the markers of Hallowe'en, like the pumpkins. This turned the film into something more surreal.

**gbi:** There was an inversion of stereotypical Latin culture around romance and eroticism.

**cme:** The editor was Ricardo Acosta—I have done three films with him. We added a whole element with the music. We subverted a common style of Latin love song, the bolero. In the love-making scene, we used the very famous song, *Savor a Mi*. When one of the women was masturbating, we use the love song, "Think of Me" *Piensa en Mi*, sung by Chavela Vargas who is a major Mexican icon for lesbians. The film is supposed to play at many levels, often like an opera. It becomes one big operatic moment.

**gbi:** You moved in-and-out of different kinds of enclosed views of female eroticism.

**cme:** The peepholes acted as frames. I wanted to re-represent the classical painting where the image of the eroticized woman was constrained by a small number of possible poses. I took the painting framing of the naked woman, the nude in art history, the "reclining Venus."

**gbi:** But why did you use peepholes that suggest a two-way gaze?

**cme:** The women who were being watched are now watching each other. This implicates the viewer as the other voyeur. And the woman who is being watched is an active participant in the way that she is being watched. For example, in the scene where the woman is masturbating, she stops and looks. She acknowledges that she is being watched. Or maybe she was just looking at a fly on the wall. There is a little bit of a mystery. But for one moment she makes eye contact and the viewer is caught as the voyeur. The other thing is that typically, the peephole is for men. Women are rarely the viewers. Women are usually being watched. The most important thing for me about *Savor a Mi* was to express my sense of erotica and sensuality as a woman. The challenge for me has been to try to find an aesthetic where I can assert my own eroticism even though "the nude" as the woman is loaded with so much political and symbolic baggage. The challenge for me has been to find spaces in those unresolved borders among soft porn, erotica, and sensuality, and to define an aesthetic and a language for putting these experiences all together.

**gbi:** Why the little girl who "mediates" between the two lusty women?

**cme:** She is not only the neighbour's daughter but the angel. She becomes Cupid and the matchmaker. *Savor a Mi* is a lustful and operatic fairy tale.



Dakan



Everything Will Be Fine

### Rash

Dir. Vicky Smith,  
UK, 1997, 7 min

*Rash* is one of the most powerful and contemporary pieces of animation that has ever dealt with sexual politics. Exquisitely brutish, *Rash* is a montage in the aftermath of a breakup of a lesbian relationship. *Rash* paints the way that most animation just draws outlines. Each still invades the mind like a list of nightmares. *Rash* captures a sense of loss and nausea that few other films could. This gem of a short suggests almost a new genre of animation that is as painterly as it is filmic.

### Everything Will Be Fine

Dir. Angelina Maccarone,  
Germany, 1997, 90 min, German with English subtitles

This slightly over-done farce based in middle-class Hamburg charms even when its analysis of racism in Germany is skin deep. *Everything Will Be Fine* centres on a love triangle between three women, two Afro-German (Nabou the lesbian protagonist and Kim the initially straight career woman) and a blue-haired, white club-hopper (Katja). Nabou has just been thrown out by Katja who lives in the apartment under Kim. Kim needs a housekeeper and her best friend is threatening to go back to Ghana with his young son. Katja-obsessed Nabou gets the job cleaning house for Kim, abuses home and clothes, and then falls in love with her employer. Kim who has been sleeping with her boss (who is a partner in an advertising agency) is under pressure to marry him. She passes Nabou off as her psychotically anti-racist sister—while she begins to sleep with her. Nabou, now a tad withdrawn from Katja, fucks her one more time only to have Katja desperate to have her back. The rest, they say, is history. The ironic line in *Everything Will Be Fine* is Kim admitting to her friend that sex with Nabou was "nice" but that she didn't want to be just another black dyke in Germany. Did I miss something here?

### Sunflowers

Dir. Shawn Hainsworth,  
USA, 1996, video, 50 min

Mixing English and Tagalog/Ilocano with English subtitles, this superb documentary is one of the very best that has examined traditional strategies of how gay men in the Third World have been able to survive and coexist. This film is about a group of cross dressing gay men living fairly openly on a rural island in the Philippines. They are "accepted" in their communities by spicing up a Catholic festival through drag and for giving fashion shows afterwards. Numerous members of the Sunflowers, are interviewed, many of them express a lot of

internalized homophobia; various strategies for survival and cooperation, within a largely hostile social and cultural structure, begin to emerge. The subtext of this piece suggests how sexual minorities still often take on vacant and effectively undervalued service roles. In this case they revitalize and contemporize a religious festival, in order to be allowed some social space. The fulcrum of the documentary is the interview with a supposedly non-gay priest who states that these gay men giving the drag shows, encourage more people to come to the religious festival—making up for their sinful sexual acts.

### Dirty Baby Does Fire Island

Dir. Todd Downing,  
USA, 1997, 16 mm, 9 min

Bored with the Barbie Doll genre of short films on sexual politics? Try *Dirty Baby Does Fire Island*. Dirty Baby, an exceptionally innocent-looking doll, washes up on the beach just like one of those Franz Boas "snot boy" stories of the Northwest Coast—those overly encoded myths that drove the structuralists crazy. There had to have been some inspiration, possibly ripped-off, from Cindy Sherman's essay on contorted doll body parts from a decade ago. From her birth on the land's edge, pure Dirty Baby is soon corrupted by what she sees on land. Her doll eyes bug-out as she studies two men putting on a condom while having sex. Dirty Baby sees more than that. But don't try to deconstruct Dirty Baby, she will deconstruct you first. Soon enough, we will all be able to heal our inner Dirty Baby. Finally, there is an original film genre that moves the standards of homosexual poor taste beyond the early work of John Waters.

### Dakan (Destiny)

Dir. Mohammed Camara,  
Guinea/France, 1997, originally 35 mm (but this poor print involved video), 90 min, French with English subtitles

This drama is the most important portrayal, so far, of gay men and homophobia in West Africa. At times slow and difficult to comprehend (at least this print!), *Dakan* covers a huge number of experiences and social issues. With its portrayal of cultural conflict and the difficulties of defining homoerotic desires and relationships, *Dakan* warrants careful examination.

# FILMS IN BRIEF



Dirty Baby Does Fire Island

**Streetheart**

**Le Coeur au poing**

Dir. Charles Binamé

Canada/Quebec, 1998, 100 min

This disturbing and sensually crafted feature is based on an implausible story. A young woman, Louise, feels so marginal towards the two most important people in her life, her sister and her lover, a middle-aged man with a wife and two children, that she devises a "game" to offer herself randomly to strangers for exactly an hour. Time becomes the ultimate fetish as symbolized by her black hour-timer. The strangers that she chooses can ask her to do anything. The game goes from disposing of a woman's dog, to playing patient in a barely erotic ménage-à-trois to listening to people's less-than-coherent inner thoughts. Our protagonist always flees after exactly one hour.

Sexual politics have changed a great deal in the twenty years since *Looking for Mr. Goodbar*, with a recurring theme that precedes *Streetheart*. But the portrayals in this film barely recognize the shift. The world of *Streetheart* is like the walls of the protagonist's home: covered in images of powerful but necessarily tragic women. In the near climax of the film, a young gay man makes the promise to painlessly kill his lover "heroine" who is in the agonies of the later stages of AIDS. When she cannot complete the euthanasia within the hour, Louise exits the pained bedside with the distraught lover following her yelling "you have no right." The scene with these men exposes the voyeurism of Louise's game and her underlying attempt at empowerment through instant intimacy. Depressed, Louise takes greater risks with predictable consequences. *Streetheart* is Québécois morose, light, though the themes of *fin-de-millénaire* "all the lonely people," "longing for belonging," and "younger woman used by older man" are played out in surprising and carefully nuanced ways. The acting, script and cinematography make *Streetheart* compelling in ways that the passing references to gender relations, power, and alienation do not.

**Xiu Xiu- The Sent Down Girl**

Xiu Xiu: Tian Yu

Dir. Joan Chen

1997, USA/China, 99 min

Joan Chen's formidable debut as a director begins as a wonderful coming-of-age story, shifts to a tale of ill-fated love and ends as a cautionary tale. The film begins in the central Chinese city of Chengdu in the last two years of China's Cultural Revolution. Xiu Xiu is barely out of secondary school when she is sent to a brigade of young women to the grasslands of northern Tibet. Establishing herself as an exemplary worker, Xiu Xiu is sent further into the hinterlands to tend horses while being promised that she would soon be able to return to city life back in China. She is forced to share a tent with a Tibetan horseman,

Lao Jin, who had been castrated in prison. While Xiu Xiu is patronizing to Lao Jin, he supports her while become increasingly fond of her. Unbeknownst to Xiu Xiu, the Cultural Revolution is soon over and most of the young women in her brigade, the ones with better connections, had been given permits and have gone back to China. Xiu Xiu has been abandoned by the party and by the state. Desperate, Xiu Xiu is conned into sleeping with Chinese party officials in hopes of being permitted to go home. But she soon realizes that her compromises have ruined possibilities of making a life for herself. Having lost her innocence and many of her dreams, Xiu Xiu casts down the kaleidoscope given to her by her boyfriend waiting back in Chengdu. All the while, Lao Jin's love for her deepens as does his understanding (from the perspective of a Tibetan), of the nature of Xiu Xiu's exile.

The matter-of-fact nature of the rape scenes in the visits by party officials, often witnessed by Lao Jin, would push most viewers into discomfort. The finale verges on being excruciating for many viewers. *Xiu Xiu—The Sent Down Girl* barely transcends the didactic symbolism of a castrated Tibetan in love with a raped Han woman. The superb cinematography of the grasslands of Tibet is mixed with a lean script. *Xiu Xiu—The Sent Down Girl* disturbs while beautifully recounting a very sad page in history.

**No**

Dir. Robert Lepage

Quebec/Canada, 1998, 85 min

In a country with a tradition, a culture, and political farce, *No* ranks as one of the more successful and enigmatic of Canada's film comedies. Set in Montreal, during the October 1970 crisis (and at the same time in Osaka, at the closing of the World's Fair), *No* wrings out humour from those dark and unresolved events. "No" is a word play on the "No" of the 1980 Quebec referendum and the Noh theatre tradition of Japan. Sophie, a Montreal actor, is part of a Québécois troupe performing *Feydeau*, a nineteenth century French comedy, at the Canadian Pavilion in Osaka. Her boyfriend Michael is working with the FLQ as the War Measures Act is invoked. Sophie calls Michael after she finds out that she is pregnant only to have him hang up on her abruptly. She thinks that Michael is having an affair but he's actually hiding his FLQ friends in his apartment. Sophie then has sex with an uninspiring Canadian diplomat, a federalist, only to denounce him in front of his "abrasive" wife. Sophie finds out about the tanks in the streets of Montreal and rushes home to be promptly arrested as a sympathizer. *No* then flashes forward a decade to the 1980 referendum.

*No* rides the razor's edge between the weightiness of those events and the quirkiness of the times. The intercultural space of Japan to anglophone Canada to Quebec provides a quirky



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Life on Earth



No

vehicle. No's explosive mixture is mostly a delight. A scene around a poorly written communiqué and a bomb about to detonate—accidentally, is turned into a hysterical slapstick comedy. Misogynistic treatment of women is shown in a perverse way—funny while thoroughly disgusting. Anglo-Canadian chauvinism is shown to be pathetic and dumb (but funny). While looking at an apartment to rent, a hippie-like gay male couple worries, perhaps too stereotypically, about stains on walls, inadvertently botching an undercover surveillance operation. It would be difficult for anyone familiar with Canadian history and culture not to laugh hard and not to love No.

#### Walo Fendo—Where the Earth Freezes

Dir. Mohammed Soudani  
Senegal/Switzerland, 1997, 65 min

This hellish view of illegal migrants and downward mobility in Italy centres on two Senegalese brothers. *Walo Fendo* chronicles their journey from the solidarity of their family and village to the alienation and despair of selling trinkets on the street under the control of organized crime. Starting with an understanding of underdevelopment linked to the dilemmas brought on by estrangement, *Walo Fendo* shifts to the brothers living as illegal tomato pickers in Sicily. After a labour conflict, they are out on the street in a more liberal northern Italy—but in a zone of only vague tolerance. There are allusions to a new kind of slavery though these are poorly explored. Italy is portrayed as a cold country especially as drug dealing and murder enters the equation.

#### Life on Earth La vie sur terre

Director: Abderrahmane Sissako  
Mali/France, 1997, 61 min

*La vie sur terre* is one of the triumphs in a series of films on the coming of the new millennium in the francophone world. This exploration of neocolonialism centres around the radio station in Sokolo, the major town in the rice-growing region of southern Mali. The radio debates about migratory birds (from Europe) who eat part of the rice crop. As the human population is increasingly economically marginalized, the birds become the metaphor for the struggle to cope with impoverishment while asserting a heartening level of *savoir-faire* dignity. Between the struggles of loosely connected individuals are dreamy views of exquisite mud architecture and rural landscapes.

#### Taafé Fanga

Dir. Adama Drabo  
Mali/Germany, 1997, 100 minutes

Feminist revolution on Mali's Bandiagara Plateau? Well, not quite. The Dogon have lived the iconographic (and stereotypical) traditions of rural Africa. The pleasure of this fictional story is in its contemporizing of the still dominant, animistic elements of Dogon culture. "Taafé Fanga" means "skirt power." This fictionalized feminist revolution does not tread lightly on the remaining notions of natural balances between the sexes. The film begins with the accidental misuse of the Albarga mask and soon "the skirt has defeated the pants." The resulting spell, cast over a village, sees women sleeping-in and bossing men around, who in turn fumble with food preparation and are cranky doing childcare. The ruling women soon get bored from lack of work and the men get increasingly stressed. Through a series of rapprochements, a compromise around power and roles are negotiated. Between superb views of traditional villages on the plateau, both genders come to conclude that "power is for making a better world" and "it is not about power, it is about equality in our difference."

#### Surrender Dorothy

Dir. Kevin DiNovis  
USA, 1998, 90 min

This "noirish" portrayal of two losers in a Manhattan loft has many charms. One of the favourites of the Vancouver International Film Festival, *Surrender Dorothy* has all the trappings of a gender-bending cult flick. This tour-de-force of misogyny centres on the relationship between two nominally heterosexual men. Wading into the muck where even most feminist and queer films prefer not to tread, *Surrender Dorothy* is disturbingly sexy. With both men getting strung out, their depressed sexualities combine fantasies of master/slave and husband/housewife. Well, sort of. A sex change could be right around the corner. But *Surrender Dorothy* is never that simple. There is a brilliant scene where the supposed "wife" tries to reassert his male prowess and picks up a woman. But heroin and the self-styled "husband" nix the project. Curiously, new director, DiNovis, was remarkably calculating about what he was trying to achieve. In the Q & A after the Vancouver screening, he inferred that just about everything in *Surrender Dorothy* was there to disrupt contemporary notions of masculinity and heterosexuality (and homosexuality). But *Surrender Dorothy* is so twisted that it transcends contemporary sexual politics. *Surrender Dorothy* is so much (bad) fun that it can not be reduced to a morality play on domination. ■

# FILMSTOCK BRIEF



Streetheart



Surrender Dorothy