



● "The victims' only hope is an indomitable self."

## Holly Dale/Janis Cole's **P4W: Prison for Women**

The title establishes a process of humanizing, of fleshing out a formula. "P4W" is the formula, an administrative convenience, a reduction. The second part reveals the humanity behind the formula: "Prison for Women." The film itself celebrates the humanity of the convicts in Canada's only federal women's prison, in Kingston, Ontario. By film end we have fulfilled the order of convict Susie's closing song: "Look and see what you have done."

**P4W: Prison for Women** is an examination of the effects of prison upon female convicts. Co-directors Janis Cole and Holly Dale interview several inmates who were convicted of major crimes but are extremely engaging characters. The message is two-fold: the dehumanizing horrors of incarceration and the marvels of the human spirit that still survives.

The film celebrates the women's survival instincts. Forced into uniformity, they sustain their individuality by personalizing their cells. These are plucky gals. But the last image threatens to run out of control. The liveliest of our convicts sits cockily on a washing machine and spits out a defiant and extravagant optimism. Her wrists are taped. The quavering voice, the dreary setting, and her slightly mad spirit may lead us to read the tape as a sign of slashed wrists. But no. This gal remains hale and resolute. Cole and Dale say the wrists were taped for tennis.

Although the directors see their film as being primarily about the inmates' spirit of survival, a firm feminist voice emerges more strongly. We don't see any men in the film, but enough men are bitterly mentioned to make the prison signify the oppression and restriction of the patriarchal macrocosm.

So the only rehabilitation the convicts get is training to be a hairdresser. One lady bristles against serving three years in the laundry. Frequent complaint is made against the powerful and unsympathetic warden, a Mr. Caron. One

convict is told she upsets him because he can't stand her impression of happiness and security. A male judge vetoed a convict's writing to her children. The convicts complain that when a riot broke out the male guards stood aloof and apart, watching amused as the female guards struggled to curtail the riot. The male authority is not seen but it is felt — cold, commanding, compelling.

More dramatically, all the crimes we hear about are directly related to the women's oppression in a patriarchal society. One woman was sexually exploited, another habitually beaten by her two men. A third, who was sentenced to 25 years after her robber husband killed himself, seems to have been damned for standing by her man. In sum, the women's prison becomes a powerful metaphor for a society in which men rule and repress women. The victims' only hope is an indomitable self. And their bond.

Of course, any honest and thorough film about life in a women's prison must do something about lesbiansim. It will either skirt the issue or address it. Dale and Cole do something else. They transcend the issue of sexuality by showing — with an almost unbearable intimacy — two lovers preparing for their separation when one's time is over. This tender, dramatic episode typifies the delicacy and discretion of the film as a whole. The issues are explored, but with neither coyness nor sensationalism.

From this romantic relationship the film cuts to the convicts' relationships with their children. One recalls recent meetings, after the courts forbade their communication. Another makes a videotape to send to her little girl. We get a close-up of her singing to her child. But for her telling a Peter Rabbit story we shift to a long-shot of the videotape machine and monitor.

The medium and the message are much improved over what convicts used to be able to do. But the dominant impression remains of a cold, mechanical, remote interference with the warmth of human normalcy.

Maurice Yacowar ●

**P4W: PRISON FOR WOMEN** d./p. Janis Cole, Holly Dale cam. Nesya Shapiro sd. Aerlyn Weissman ed. Janis Cole & Holly Dale asst. ed. John O'Connor original mus. Susie & Kas asst. to p. Beverley J. Whitney p.c. Spectrum Films running time 81 : 23 min. dist. Pan-Canadian Film Distributors Inc.

## Bonnie Sherr Klein's **Not a Love Story** **A Film About Pornography**

*Not a Love Story* is a sensitive and sensible survey of pornography. Bonnie Sherr Klein directed the film, with a major contribution by Linda Lee Tracey, for the National Film Board's Studio D, founded in 1974 as a filmmaking forum for women on social issues.

The film is structured on the principle of expanding range. We are eased into the subject, then gradually confronted with an increasing sense of its scope and danger. Of our two guides, Ms. Klein is the innocent outsider becoming introduced to the porno terrain, and Ms. Tracey the more experienced explorer, extending her understanding.

Linda Lee Tracey is the former stripper who started the Tits for Tots strippers' benefit in Montreal. In her old act, as Fonda Peters (!), Ms. Tracey played a comic insouciance against the usual straight-lace of strip. An excerpt of her act establishes the frankness of the film and introduces the topic on a note of comforting humor.

But there is cold comfort from the ensuing revelations. First we are shocked by the size of the porn business. To wit: there are more hard-core peep shows in North America than there are MacDonald's outlets. With an annual gross of \$5 billion, the hard-core porn industry out-grosses the straight film and music industries combined. Those are compelling stats.

The greater shock comes from the kind of things shown in pornography. Klein was careful to select moderate material, within the pale, but she still shows a horrifying pattern of torture, mutilation, and violence against the female form.

Very clearly, pornography cannot be excused as celebrating female beauty and natural, open sexuality. As Kate Millett puts it, "We got pornography when what we needed was eroticism." Pornography is opposed to eroticism, not its aid and support. It slavers for the notion of torturing and dominating the female figure. Hence the recurring image of women under two kinds of related suppression: in chains and gagged. The implicit theme of this monstrous machinery is that women are objects of sadistic violation.

Klein's larger point, and the principle on which her material is organized, is that pornography exerts a pervasive influence. Obviously one is affected if one participates in the sexuality business; so Linda Lee Tracey quit. One is more grossly affected if one cashes in on the exploitation of others; hence the interviews with merchants and clients of sleeze.

But Klein's key observation is that porn damages people who never experience the thing itself. For even non-indulgers are affected by the recurring images that wash over from hard-core to soft. Worse, we all suffer the insidious habits of thought, associations, reflexes, that this dominating imagery projects.

In this light, Klein sensibly includes male victims of this pornographic abuse of women. One member (so to speak) of the Men Against Male Violence Group admits that men are victimized by these fantasies, "the male myth of perform-

ance, goal orientation." In one of the most moving scenes a writer and her husband probe — to the point of tears — their battle for a reasonable sexuality in a world of subversive excess.

*Not a Love Story* is a sober, responsible film. It achieves a balance and restraint that seem positively saintly, considering the enemy. And yet the film has aroused a furious opposition.

This attack upon pornography has been censored by the Ontario Censor Board (although one uncut screening was allowed at Toronto's Festival of Festivals). So the film suffers the irrational fate of Al Razutis' *A Message From Our Sponsor* in Ontario. The porn flows on, but a thoughtful analysis of (and warning against) the porn gets censored!

On other fronts, there has been some newspaper editorializing against the NFB spending taxpayers' money on a film about pornography. To this complaint there is a simple response: go see the film.

But there is no such simple answer to the irresponsible hatchet job done by Jay Scott, film reviewer for the *Globe and Mail*. Scott called the film "bourgeois, feminist fascism." To Scott it must be feminist to include males discussing their victimization by pornography; fascist to complain about continually seeing one's gender fragmented, exposed, tortured; and bourgeois to undertake critical analysis of a major social phenomenon. His real objection to the film seems to be that it omits gay porn. By that principle he would attack a western for omitting ships and a pirate film for leaving out agebrush. All in all, Scott's review was his worst job (and of a telling piece) since he used Altman's *A Perfect Couple* as an opportunity to deride Marta Heflin's rib-cage. Such insensitivity to the image and such disrespect for the predicament of women are astonishing in a film critic who quite often commits responsible film criticism.

Even more astonishing was Scott's closing salvo, a call for the Board to censor this film for its hard-core insets. Scott's shriek validates the film's point about the pervasive attempt to silence completely the voice of victim women. As Susan Griffin remarks, "Pornography is filled with images of silencing women. Our silence is the way in which our status as objects is made real." In this line of thought, women must be obscene and not heard.

*Not a Love Story* is a search and a report that had to be done. It should have been made long ago and it should be seen and discussed as widely as possible. We are fortunate that the film was made by such responsible and intelligent artists.

But this film is one of those delicate, afflicted roses that must be defended against the invisible worms that fly in the night, be they defenders of a sick status quo, senseless censor boards, or wrong-headed personality-peddling columnists.

Maurice Yacowar ●

**NOT A LOVE STORY** d. Bonnie Sherr Klein with participation of Linda Lee Tracey assoc. d./ed. Anne Henderson p. Dorothy Henaut assoc. p. Micheline Le Guillou cam. P. Letarte 2nd cam./asst. Susan Trow loc. sd. Y. Gendron loc. business man. Andree Klein ed. Jackie Newell asst. picture/sd. ed. Micheline Guillou graphics layout Gayle Thomas animation cam. Raymond Dumas original mus. m. d. Ginette Bellavance lyrics Tina Horne vocal. Cathy Miller mus. rec. Louis Hone exec. p. Kathy Shannon p.c. A National Film Board of Canada (Studio D) production. running time 70 min.



## Not a Love Story...

(A second view)

Hey Meester, Wanna See a Dirty Picture? If you do, *Not a Love Story* fits the bill, even though it obviously wasn't intended that way. One has to admire the courage and determination of the women who made this film, on a topic which is so controversial and laden with emotional charge. Just the mention of the word pornography sets off an extreme reaction - either pro or con - in most people. And until now, few people have been willing or even dared to enter this arena and open it up to public scrutiny. This film, which opened at the Toronto Film Festival in September, has already triggered vociferous response from critics, and is likely to generate a lot more.

The film is a very thorough, objective overview of what pornography is all about. It shows the most explicit sex shots available anywhere - the strippers, the peek shows, the live sex acts and the incredible violence. We see the filmmaker interviewing and eliciting the reactions of purveyors, sellers, a research scientist, various women authors who have written books and attempted analysis of the subject, and anti-pornography groups. And at the end of the film the audience knows that, indeed, pornography is alive and well and has its headquarters on 42nd Street in New York.

The audience is expected to draw its own conclusions about what it means, presumably by identifying with the discovery process of the filmmaker. But somehow, although director Bonnie Klein has made her own personal foray into the big bad world and come out unscathed yet appropriately offended, the audience is left out in the cold... untouched.

The message is unclear. Is this really a

pornographic film disguised under the cloak of education? Or is this a pro-censorship film disguised as a dirty picture? Already the critics and commentators are calling it a sleazy picture, while others are staunchly defending the right to see whatever they choose. One can understand the dilemma facing censor boards. Is this film anything other than 42nd Street revisited?

At the heart of all pornography lies the distancing and dehumanization of its hapless victims. In *Not a Love Story* the divisions between "Us" and "Them" are clearly maintained. "Us": the straight, respectable, slightly puritanical but liberal world. "Them": those nameless bodies who appear to enjoy having a revolver, like some kind of surrogate penis shoved into any available orifice. They don't seem any more real to us than if we, ourselves, had gone down to Times Square for a peek. But we are left wondering vaguely, "How could they do this to themselves?" Instead, one could be asking: "What are the forces which coerce these women into such positions?" or "Are these acts really being performed voluntarily and with pleasure, as they appear?"

The film just doesn't focus on the real issues of pornography. It is not just a phenomenon affecting the woman shown in the film: bound, gagged and strung to the ceiling by her ankles inside a cage. Through the power and influence of the various media which disseminate her presence, she becomes a pervasive force in our everyday life - as a representative of all women. The way she is seen has a profound effect on the way all women are seen, by themselves and by the men and other women to whom they relate. If, as pornography suggests, women enjoy this kind of degradation, what is the message for both men and women about "normal" sexual behaviour? How can women react to this increasingly widespread image of them-

selves as submissive masochists, especially when most women do not feel this way?

The film is doubly tragic because it had within it the seeds for making these personal connections clear, and the potential for real drama. If the filmmaker hadn't been so mesmerized by her own discoveries, she might have focused on the experience of Linda Lee Tracey, the stripper with the humorous act who, throughout the course of this film, went through the painful discovery of alienation from her own body. During sequences in which she appears, her humanity shines through and saves the film from being another re-run of dirty pictures. But the audience never gets enough.

Klein's intrusive presence in her own film prevented the real drama which might have occurred between Robin Morgan, the feminist author, and Linda Lee. All we got to see was Linda Lee's tears in the background - somehow an interesting sideline? What really happened there? What was she feeling and why? Why didn't we get to find out?

Linda Lee's experience was real, dynamic and immediate. It had the power to touch all of us in a profoundly personal way because she actually felt the anguish of what it means to be objectified and degraded through pornography. The unfolding of Linda Lee's story had the potential to bring us to our own recognition of this agony and to allow us a better understanding of what pornography does to its victims. But the filmmaker missed the boat.

Klein failed to recognize the drama that was actually taking place during the shooting of this film. In a scene towards the end of the film, Linda Lee decides she will pose for pornographic photographer Suze Randall. She wants to know for herself what it feels like to pose for the camera. Although she has no intention of having an actual "pussy

shot," she finds herself unable to resist Randall's demands and submits to having her pudendum moistened and captured on film.

What the viewer does not see, I learned later, was that Linda Lee told Randall afterwards of her total mortification at this feeling of herself-as-thing. The photographer despite her years of experience in this market, apparently had no idea she was a partner to this kind of dehumanization. She had always assumed, like pornography suggests, that her subjects enjoyed it, and wept at Linda Lee's revelation. Linda Lee found herself consoling the disconcerted woman instead of worrying about her own feelings.

However, the audience of *Not a Love Story* was robbed of this moment. The camera was turned off right after Linda Lee's photograph was taken! Viewers don't find out how Linda Lee feels about her experience until she shares it with the filmmaker in a following scene. This scene, however, appears contrived and one is left wondering if Linda Lee's recognition of her own humiliation is a prerequisite for being welcomed into the "Us" camp with a hug.

The filmmaker - on-camera genre should perhaps be called into question. How relevant is the director's middle-Canadian perspective to the audience's understanding of pornography? Does it tell us anything about why pornography is so popular and how it affects our lives? One cannot help but suspect that this self-indulgent method is a reflection of an inability to present the subject in a more meaningful and imaginative way. The message of the film seems to be telling us that the effect of pornographic images is grim. Yet, the superficial approach to the subject does nothing to obviate this effect. In fact, it interferes with a more interesting, real-life story. The intentions may have been pure, but the result is still pornography.

Kate Jansen ●

● "More hard-core peep shows in North America than MacDonald's outlets." Bonnie Klein, Linda Lee Tracey, Suze Randall

