

## **Ecstasy Unlimited: The Interpenetrations of Sex and Capital (1985) Laura Kipnis [60 min]**

For the complete script, see Kipnis, *Ecstasy Unlimited: On Sex, Capital, Gender, and Aesthetics*. Minneapolis: U Minnesota Press, 1993, pp 33-99. US distribution: Electronic Arts Intermix <http://www.eai.org>

"Ecstasy Unlimited is an engaging video essay on the social construction of sexuality. Kipnis attempts to historicize pleasure and politicize desire, to reveal within the current discourses on sex - and within an ensemble of current sexual practices - the production of forms of sexuality that work to guarantee social order, rather than subvert it. Through various narrative ploys and theoretical tactics, the tape attempts to recover traces of a "political unconscious" in contemporary social malaise. Kipnis practices humor as well as social critique; she employs fragmented situation comedy, documentary, songs, animation, and narration to develop an analysis linking discourses of liberation to thriving sex and therapy industries."

Electronic Arts Intermix: <http://www.eai.org/eai/tape.jsp?itemID=505>

Director of Photography: Raul Zaritsky. Editor: Taggart Siegel, Laura Kipnis. Music: Steve Rodby. Lyrics: Laura Kipnis. With: Paul Greatbatch, Trish Eliot, Vivian Davis, Sam Sanders, Bonnie Sue Arp, Fred Eberle, Bill Bush, Eileen Manganero.

### **Other Video Work:**

*Marx: The Video* (1990) (27 min)

*A Man's Woman* (1988) (52 min.)

*Your Money or Your Life* (1982) (46 min.)

### **Other Books Published:**

*Against Love: A Polemic* (2003) NY: Pantheon

*Bound and Gagged: Pornography and the Politics of Fantasy in America* (1996) NY: Grove

### **Current Work:**

Book in progress: *The Female Thing*, to be published by Pantheon. On the distinction between gender progress and female emancipation (do women themselves impede one or the other?)

**NOTES (from Kipnis' "Introduction: Crossing the Theory/Practice Rubicon" in her book *Ecstasy Unlimited: On Sex, Capital, Gender and Aesthetics*. Page numbers in parentheses refer to this essay, attached)**

1. Laura Kipnis argues that there is no place "outside" of dominant forms and ideologies from which we can think or speak. (Kipnis p.6)

2. All of her videos, including this one, are attempts at implementing a POPULAR POLITICAL AESTHETIC. HOW can video/film work be popular and critical, AKA, popular without resorting to simplistic ideas and approaches? Elements of Kipnis' POPULAR POLITICAL AESTHETIC:

a. ESSAYISTIC form: a mix of dramatic and documentary sequences (p. 5)

b. *appropriation* of forms and idioms of popular culture (p 5)

c. works against strategies of: (p 6)

"positive" images

"correct" images

humorless didacticism

ridiculing the stupidity of political enemies

political piety

elitist anti-popular tactics of the avant-garde

3. Kipnis: "the intellectual work of the [video]tapes is to produce theories about the ways in which what seems to us the most private (unique to us) and freely chosen is in fact structural, economic, political, and actually CHOOSES US." (This connects to French Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser's ideas about "Interpellation," which you'll read about in PL Ch 2, pp 51-53) (p. 5)

4. Kipnis understands her work as "of a particular time and place rather than [as a result of ] some sort of individual inspiration" (p. 4)

### **STUDY/DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

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1. In what ways can you describe *Ecstasy Unlimited* as more "of a particular time and place" than the result of Kipnis' original artistic vision? Why would a video artist want to think of and describe their work in this way? How does knowing her ideas on this shape your reception and reading of the video?

2. What are the various popular modes of address and languages Kipnis appropriates in this video? What submerged meanings or significance does her appropriation of them reveal about those popular modes of address/genres, and about popular media and culture more generally? (In the same way that your appropriated footage pieces, through the act of recontextualization, revealed structures, ideologies, etc.)

3. What is the overt argument made in *Ecstasy Unlimited*? What is the implicit argument made by the video's formal approach? Can you make some connections between the two? How are form and content intertwined in this video (how does content seem to dictate the form of the piece, and vice versa?)

4. What are some of the reasons why a film/video maker might appropriate "the master's tools" in an attempt to "dismantle the master's house?"