



Clark Ferguson

In Search of Desire

"Why is Clark Ferguson wearing his gitch?"

A conversation between Graham, Jaimz, and Clark

C. Graham Asmundson: *Teenage Wasteland* has a teenage boy sensibility and sense of humour. Lots of close-ups of Clark's crotch! Crotch shot, crotch shot, crotch shot. It's almost as if he really wants to take his gitch off. He's a skinny guy with a big dick and really wants to show it.

Jaimz L. Asmundson: Maybe his balls are too big?

CGA: Maybe the rats are in his gitch. Are the rats a fetish?

JLA: They're probably just his pets.

CGA: It took a lot to hang himself in that harness. He wants us to see his crotch from every angle but doesn't want to expose it. It's interesting that there is all this homoerotic subtext in his work.

JLA: Until he makes *Dead Meat*. Then it's no longer a subtext. It seems like he's falling into this whole objectification of the male body but he's this skinny lanky guy. Then all of a sudden he has this blonde buff guy.

CGA: He's meat, but he's dead meat. I wonder if that's part of his idiom. He knows he's goofy looking but he wants to eroticize his body, so he keeps taking his clothes off.

JLA: Adolescent humour to explore a certain generalised image of the straight male. He and his friends are probably hanging around making it together and

having a big hardy-har-har about Clark in his underwear. The actor in *Dead Meat* is a dead-ringer of a young Joe Dallesandro...

CGA: Yeah, the whole point of the video was to get the blonde hunk to take his clothes off. There was only a flash of his underwear; maybe he was too afraid to centre this one around the crotch when it wasn't himself that he was exploiting.

JLA: How do you explain this to somebody? "I'm going to have these shots of your crotch, but it's in an ironic, teenage humour kind of a way. Now I want you to take your gitch off."

CGA: It's all very romanticised. I think the most bizarre part is when he sticks his head into his pants and keeps talking about "white grape juice." Clark Ferguson obviously wants to be fucked by his blonde bombshell. Seriously, how is water "juicy?"

JLA: I don't know. Maybe we should ask him. Clark? Clark!

Clark Ferguson: There is no question that I won't answer either specifically or in a roundabout nearly answering sort of way.

JLA: Ok, well then can you tell me why you would refer to a glass of water as "juicy?" I guess it seemed obvious to me that the comments about "juicy" water and the "white grape juice" imply that the main character is unable to process any higher thought because he only has, well, cum on his brain. Also, I'm wondering what kind of epiphany you can have while looking into your pants that's not entirely narcissistic.

CF: I sometimes think that my own thought processes would be higher if I hadn't been sex obsessed in my twenties. I'm twenty-fourteen now.

CGA: While we are on the topic of pants, why are you wearing your gitch in *Teenage Wasteland* and why white briefs in particular?

CF: I was wearing tighty-whities in *Teenage Wasteland* because I felt it represented an unsightly solitude or degeneration. It's that embarrassing moment when the door opens and you're sitting on the couch eating a bag of chips when Mr. or Mrs. wonderful waltzes in and sees you at your habitual worst. I wish I didn't do it, but I can't self-censor in retrospect. I can take a joke. The tighty-whities covers all types of the masculine but it's kind of like clowning as a male. There's something

about the crispness and cleanness of tighty-whities that seems ridiculously comical.

JLA: You found the actor for *Dead Meat* in a 7-11 parking lot, so he must have had a certain look that you wanted for the film. Or, was it that you just wanted to get him out of his clothes? If so, why does he still have gitch on?

CF: I was actually looking for a rockabilly dude, and short on time, I went for hippie rocker. I drove to the 7-11 and got the guy a couple corn dogs to act in the video. We're friends now. I did pick him 'cause of the bod and I did pick out the underwear myself. You're right though that it's pretty cool to get someone to take their clothes off in the name of art. I thought, "This is why people draw."

CGA: In your statement for *Teenage Wasteland*, why do you say, "The work thereby questions whether the creation of meaning is as meaningless and circularly irrelevant as time spent masturbating?"

CF: Nothing wrong with it at all. I've never done it myself but don't have a problem with people who have experimented with it a couple of times. But in a sense, I'm suggesting that art is a masturbatory autoplay. Maybe it's the way I myself make art that is masturbatory or perhaps the way I masturbate, if I did, would in a sense be artful. Either way it's a reflection.

JLA: How do you feel art is similar to masturbation? I find it is closer to making love in that you are creating something in the end and there is a residual record of the time you spent with your work. Masturbation however, is closer to human sacrifice as nothing is really created. But I'm sure my dear old dirty pa will argue that point.

CGA: I would agree that if the end result of masturbation is merely ejaculation, then yes, perhaps meaningless and irrelevant, but if the end result is orgasm, then it's a whole different ball game (no pun intended) and if desire is delayed in the interest of sublimation, well then?

CF: I'm more interested in who's there to clean up the party than what happened at the party itself. The piece created obstructions similar to a masturbatory episode in that I had to make the work entirely with no help; so all cameras are shot with either a remote or a timer. The point was to create a piece in a bubble. The images become an attempt to reference the obscure

absurd moments of creation as an artist or creator of things. Take your pick. It's a staged/staged reference of the 'creative.'

CGA: Why are issues of male sexuality so predominant in your work?

CF: I think male sexuality is considered in very black and white terms: gay and straight. I would even say that there isn't even a lot of room to talk about male sexuality generally and very, very little room to talk about straight sexuality. Anything in the middle gets muddled. I've dealt with sexual appetite, desire, and compulsion in past works and I have found it to be fairly quickly dismissed, which is fine.

JLA: We tried to count the number of times there was a crotch shot versus how many shots altogether in *Teenage Wasteland* and lost count. Although in *Dead Meat*, you catch a few glimpses of the gitch but it's not the focus as it was in *Teenage Wasteland*. I'm wondering whether it was because you, or your actors, were afraid to be nude, or that you feel the tighty-whities represent a certain archetype of straight male sexuality?

CF: I'm curious about fetish forms, though not necessarily turned on by them. For me, tighty-whities are an iconic male clowning tool. Also, there is nothing more unappetising than the male scrotum. Even the word *scrotum* is ugly. I don't think nudity would really work and it would send these works into an entirely different space. The tighty-whities are enough to keep it light and, more importantly—and I believe in this strongly—keep an audience.

JLA: Do you find that the typical bachelor filthiness is a turn on? It seemed that the piece led up to a dirty climax, beginning with the mess taking over the apartment, the giant rats and the giant hand. It seemed that the moment it became 'unsafe' (taking off the finger condoms), the character became aroused.

CF: I would say the filth is more a detritus of a situation, rather than an aspiration. The appeal of the fingers dancing for the character (or seduction of the character) is definitely referencing the turn on. The piece works like, "*What, Hmmn, Ha! Ooooooh. Per um pum durffff.*" So we could say that bachelorism is a state of being and the character and situation may or may not be an amplified real and created self and history. I'm pretty sure my hand can't get that big,

though. I would say the finger condoms reference lingerie and seduction. I like to create elements that subvert expectation or presumptions. That's why I like the cinematic convention because you think you're participating in something but you realise later that it was something else.

CGA: Your work seems to tread the line between character and self, between presence and play. Can you comment on those boundaries? Does the performative gesture function as an aspect of your life as well as your art? Or, are *character construct* and *self* separate aspects of your being?

CF: My life and separation between presence and play is nearly negligible. From what others tell me, I'm nearly never not at play.

CGA: Some say that identity results from performative gesture, rather than any stable categories of the subject. Do performative gestures in your work then, convey a fixed gender identity or a stable category of male sexuality?

CF: I would have to say these projects are written from the male identity perspective, excluding *The Ratspectacle*. My past projects all tend to be representative of the male gender. I'm very aware of the absence of a female presence. I don't think I can really write for a female gender identity, so I always revert to the male.

There is too much interplay between a perceived 'straight' character, homoerotic subtext, the male gaze from behind the camera, and of course, fetish wear. I don't ever really position my sexuality in relation to straight or gay, though I do choose to position it as not gay but not quite straight. Seduction is a key player in the works, for sure. Seduction can come from anywhere: that's why it's exciting.

CGA: If your performative gestures are intended to seduce, where, who, or what is the subject/object of desire?

CF: Mike Hoolboom asked me what was it that I was doing this stuff for? What was I looking for, and what exactly was it that I desired? So, not having an answer, I decided to create a body of work about 'searching' and the ambiguous term, 'desire.' I'm not sure that I'm trying to seduce with the works but the works are definitely about being seduced and placing oneself in a situation of seduction.

Clark Ferguson is a Saskatchewan-based visual artist interested in the spectacle, humour, and issues of gender and sexuality. His practice utilizes print-media, photography, performance, video, and installation to create experimental, eccentric projects. Ferguson's recent work has been created so as to work as either a gallery installation combining video, photography, sculpture with performative elements or as a single channel video work that can be viewed in a screening or festival context. He is also interested in working within self-imposed limitations that define in what manner work is developed and produced. These 'impositions' mirror the conceptual interests explored in the artist's work. This process not only effects the final product becomes part of the research and is in effect, a performative aspect of the work. Ferguson's projects utilize humour as a manner in which to explore ideas. <www.clarkferguson.ca>

C. Graham Asmundson has been active as an artist and cultural-worker in the Winnipeg arts scene for the last twenty-five years. His son, **Jaimz Asmundson**, has been experimenting with film, video, and electronic music since 1998. Having recently collaborated on the wildly-successful short film, *Drawing Genesis* (2008), this long-time creative team entertain similar sources of inspiration but approach art-making from differing mediums: C. Graham's drawings and paintings are made up almost entirely of autobiographical impulses and subsequent explorations, which have been labeled "quirky, queer, and sometimes controversial"; whereas Jaimz chooses the camera to tell subversive stories that have garnered him the dubious title of "Winnipeg's enfant terrible of transgressive cinema." <www.dirtyundies.com>

EXHIBITION

9 July–20 August, 2009

RECEPTION + ARTIST TALK

8 PM, Thursday 9 July

WORKSHOP

Let's Make a Video: A Four-Hour Relationship
[co-presented with Video Pool Media Arts Centre]
12 PM, Saturday 11 July

WORKS EXHIBITED

Teenage Wasteland
2007, 3:00 minutes, video

The Ratspectacle
2007, 9:50 minutes, video

Dead Meat
2008, 10:00 minutes, video, digital prints, installation

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