SPECTACULAR INTIMACIES: Tanya Mars from Performance to Video and Beyond

As a performance artist, Tanya Mars has never felt any strong necessity to banish rough elements or theatrical embellishments. Before deciding to commence working with video, she had already been collaborating with other performance and theatre artists. The video artists whom she developed friendships with also resisted technocratic formalism and demands to make themselves accountable by making "television." Even after relocating to Toronto and bonding with formative artists such as Colin Campbell and Tom Sherman, Mars felt overwhelmed by the video medium, with its cables and connectors and adapters.

But videotape offered a preservation or permanence that, by definition, was not possible with the ephemerality of performance. For Mars, unlike many other performance-rooted artists who made transitions to video, there has never been an either/or dichotomy. Mars does not see video as a progression from live performance, nor as simply a vehicle for greater dissemination of documented performances. Her best live-performance to video adaptations engage the medium on its own terms. Also, Tanya Mars has never been one to scorn "popular culture."

By the time Mars decided to test the video waters, the practices had shifted away from direct-address testimonial performance and more formalist sculptural approaches.1 It occurred to the artist that her performance piece *Pure Virtue*, comprised of four five-minute stations, would be an ideal vehicle for video-adaptation.

Pure Virtue was developed during the early 1980s, a period characterized by aggressively-optimistic capitalism and an accompanying art boom. Performance art and video were relatively invisible on the art boom's radar screen, as these media had traditionally problematized definitions of "the art object." Perhaps not coincidentally, many video artists—Campbell, Sherman, Lisa Steele, Rodney Werden, Vera Frenkel, John Greyson, and others—had begun to merge their narrative interests with personal/political concerns that the contemporary art-politic tended to discourage. The early 80s was the period of Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan, and Brian Mulroney, as well as a moral conservatism partially camouflaged by a nearly hysterical level of economic transactions. However, it was also an era defined by feminist political and aesthetic concerns, queer representational and health anxieties, and many other long-simmering concerns of access, equity, and body-politics.

This was also a period marked by a reclaiming of traditionally-scorned film genres, particularly melodrama and "women's pictures," by feminist and other scholars. Many of the films being reclaimed and recovered were not directed by certifiable auteurs, and they featured performers who clearly were not male mogul-manufactured "stars" but rather obviously-talented actresses with idiosyncratic faces and bodies. (Bette Davis and Katharine Hepburn particularly come to mind). It made sense for many performance and video artists to co-opt narrative strategies associated with theatre and film, despite the purist tendencies entrenched within official and other artistic hegemonies.

The 1980s also saw the emergence of younger video artists with varying visual strategies and political agendas. Some wholeheartedly embraced the notion of the personal as political and others, both high and post-modernist, rejected this assumption along with other biographical elements. Many videotapes of the period blended dramatic elements with trappings of social realism, emphasizing location shooting, natural lighting, and everyday wardrobes. While professional actors were often employed to portray psychologically-complex or

"believable" characters, theatricality, persona, and extraneous artifice frequently appeared suspect.

Such narrative-driven, dramatic tapes contrasted with seminal body-centered works made in the 1970s. Videos such as Kate Craig's *Delicate Issue* (1979?) and Lisa Steele's *Birthday Suit* (1974) subjected the artists' own bodies to the video camera almost as if the camera were a microscope. *Delicate Issue*, in particular, plays with blurring of subjectivity and objectivity—just how close can the camera get to the body and its skin while retaining reflexivity? *Birthday Suit* deploys a more clinical strategy. The scars marking the artist's body are itemized, thus forming a litany or list of "real" markings routinely airbrushed out of popular and historical representations of women. The artists in these two tapes use their own bodies without employing theatrical strategies. Tanya Mars in *Pure Virtue* also focuses on her own female body, but concerns herself with theatricality—both as a stylistic device and with the historical role-playing vocabularies of women in and out of power, within contemporary popular culture or media as well as in the 16th century.

Mars' videotape *Pure Virtue* makes it clear from the beginning that it is intended to be viewed as a creative adaptation rather than a documented performance.3 *Pure Virtue*'s first few minutes are as much about the performer's costume (or her armour) as about the performer herself. The video depicts and even fetishizes props and costumes—it delights in them as art-objects worthy of their own elongated close-ups rather than as conveniences or as merely incidental. The close-up videography permits a concentration that would not be possible in live performance despite both the theatricality and the size of the costume artifacts.

It is the performer's hand that provides a editor's trajectory linking all of her cosmetic preparations. Not only does this Queen do her own make-up, she also performs miracles. Her hand is that of a magician or alchemist, capable of so much more than simply pulling tricks out of a hat, whether in live performance or by virtue of good editing. The magician has a power to defy logic as well as create narratives, and therefore she has something that her audience or subjects can only envy. "In the uneasy pairing of power and womanhood , Mars's Elizabeth takes on the skills of a magician , proficient in the practice of 'feminine wiles'—seduction and deception, feigning allegiances to paper lords and patriarchal values."4

Mars defies both conceptualist and naturalist disdains for theatricality and its ornaments. Mars, in her persona of Elizabeth of Essex (England's Queen Elizabeth 1st, who reigned from 1958-1603), presents herself as a woman who protects herself with artifice and the artificial. She is hereditarily, if not biologically, expected to play prescribed roles or functions, but by George she will do her damnedest to play them on her terms and by her own rules.

Elizabeth reigned from 1558 until her death in 1603, and did not produce (or reproduce) a male or in fact any successor. In high-school history courses and throughout much popular media (Hollywood movies, as well as historically-dramatic theatre), Elizabeth has been presented as an iron-willed and even ruthless ruler who sacrificed any personal life due to the overwhelming duties of her throne. She was consequently known as The Virgin Queen, and both the American colony and subsequent state of Virginia as well as its native tobacco were named after her. Elizabeth of Essex was the daughter of the infamous King Henry VIII, who ran through six different wives in his unsuccessful search for a male heir to the throne. The wives and mistresses who failed to satisfy this biological and constitutional demand were systematically cast aside or executed.4

An elaborate Elizabethan corset and dress designed for the artist by Elinor Rose Galbraith are worn by the performer, who we see rigorously applying her make-up and preparing her face. There is a brief glimpse of a boy-toy, yet the performer prefers the mirror. Like any good queen—whether head of state or serious drag—Tanya Mars needs that mirror.

The montage of close-ups also allows Mars to introduce text at an independent synchronization. *Pure Virtue* collages various text sources throughout its duration. This permits associative rather than literal readings—text functions as images and as a component of the mise-en-scene, not merely words in the performer's mouth.

In *Pure Virtue*'s second segment, the camera pans upward to reveal Mars wearing that fabulous dress, or her shield. Mars "wears" the role of Elizabeth as much as she plays it. Mars' portrayal of this historical prototype is relatively non-matrixed focusing on exteriors rather than interiors.5 Although certainly an accomplished performer in terms of camera presence and dynamics, Mars' presents Elizabeth as more of a persona than a dramatic characterization. Such a deployment of persona has many illustrious precedents in performance art , in video, and in film. Ancestors include Duchamp's rRose Selavy and Colin Campbell's Woman from Malibu and other androgynous figures, as well as his prototypical Art Star.6 These personae are posited portraits rather than dramatic portrayals, yet their theatricality diffuses any assumptions of either naturalism or autobiographical verité.

But before the Queen actually speaks to the camera, the camera observes her spreading her legs and hatching a plucked and gilded chicken with a bejeweled hood on its head. After this miracle, she retrieves not one but three eggs from the sacrificial bird. What in a live performance situation would be theatrical but also small-scaled is amplified by the camera, yet this is done quite nonchalantly. The static positioning of the camera allows a performative conceit to be presented as a routine or everyday behaviour, even though the magician has performed another of her tricks. The performer retrieves the bird as if this act is simply a preparation for events to follow.

Which, of course, it is. The Queen gaily announces "Lunch Time!' and her announcement is followed by the hilariously anachronistic sound of an approaching motorcycle.6 But the queen's coterie of lords and peacocks are hardly an intimidating gang of testosterone-fueled bikers. They are more akin to paper tigers, plucked from the picnic basket and quickly revealed to be dispensable.

The picnic scene is introduced by Mars' own sketchily-drawn rendition of Manet's *Dejeuner Sur l'Herbes*. In the live performances of *Pure Virtue*, Mars projected text and drawings on slides, using them as primary light sources as well as scenic backdrops. In both theatre and narrative performance-art, this is hardly an unusual practice. But the deployment of drawings in video was still relatively unusual in the early 1980s. Artists such as Tony Oursler and Eric Metcalfe were making videotapes that made extensive use of their own drawings, creating idiosyncratically hyper-realistic zeitgeists. Both these artist's practices placed bodies against sketched backdrops and manipulated live elements in a manner bordering on animation.7 Mars more literally uses scale and materials to make her points. Queen Elizabeth was most definitely a consumer, and she ruled not only subjects but rivals as if they were her toys. Video allows Mars to use close-up framing for this beheading sequence, using relative performer and props scale to make the scene deliciously humourous.

Pure Virtue now continues to use anachronisms to pointedly humourous effect, as its narrative continues to progress. Queen Elizabeth stands on the street loaded down with shopping bags, on the

verge of giving up hope of meeting someone she is expecting. Is she waiting for a superior, a mentor, or actually hoping to encounter someone else (a male?) who inhabits physical and mental planes somewhere in vicinity of her own plane? Two sculptural tableaux show the Queen first of all devouring a bunch of green grapes, theatrically lowered into the frame, in a truly Bacchanalian manner. Then the corseted monarch is witnessed lifting weights, as the Gregorian soundtrack informs viewers that "she waits." The pun borders on being cornball, as do most puns. But the allusion to muscle-building and power has a resonance beyond the obvious pun, and the juxtaposition of the corseted madam and the 20th century gym-bunny is both comical and disconcerting. Elizabeth of Essex may indeed be weighting her future narrative trajectory, as a forceful woman in power she is highly aware of fateful historical precedents. She is attracted to strong men, who may or may not be attracted to her as a woman but who definitely covet her kingdom.

A voice-over announces "London, 1601," along with the obligatory Pachelbel Canon in D Major. But the following tableau with the Queen and her boy-toy, the Earl of Essex, only suggests Masterpiece Theatre or Merchant/Ivory films by trashing them. Royalty and aristocracy are playing cards and eating fried chicken courtesy of Colonel Sanders. They are also using vernacular language antithetical to formal courtship as well as to historical drama.

"I don't fuckin' cheat!"
"You don't fuck either!"

Powerful women, whether by birthright, relative wealth, or intelligence, have always too frequently sacrificed their personal lives. Do potential lovers want them for themselves or are these lovers really after the titles and rewards? If Elizabeth were to marry, then her husband would also become king and thus the ruler of the kingdom. Her personal pleasure would be compromised by her serving as a means to his end. So she uses virginity as defense, revealing Mr. Essex as being hopelessly locked into the mother/whore dichotomy. But the Queen, of course, is neither. And so the Queen and her aristocratic boy-toy continue to throw American chicken nuggets at each other, and neither the sexual tension or other struggles of romantic love are ever resolved.

Elizabethan London segues into nineteen-eighties MTV or Music Television. Mars as Elizabeth is joined by the Clichettes and choreographer Odette Olivier in loosely re-staging the promotional video for Pat Benatar's song *Love is a Battlefield*. Mars approximates the costumes, but not the choreography, of Benatar's video. Benatar was an American singer whose brief career coincided with the advent of "music videos' as a promotional necessity for pop records. She enjoyed a few hits,9 but wasn't a continuously self-reinventing chameleon like Madonna or David Bowie or other Warholian media-manipulators. "Video killed the radio star" according to novelty pop act The Buggles, and it is true that primarily older and less telegenic musicians either had to adapt to the medium or else retreat into postures of traditional musicianship and "authenticity'. Many stars of the early 80s were practically invented by the music video industry, and various musicians and cultural analysts condemned music videos for their superficiality and shameless extravagances. Yet music videos, like so many other artifacts of popular culture, have their excesses and therefore their slippages—their possible readings by independently-minded consumers. A song with a title like *Love is a Battlefield* might indeed be interpreted by feminist observers of popular culture as a small but significant nugget, within a medium that systematically and routinely

objectifies women as both performers and as props for male performers. Neither male performers nor props are visible in Mars' re-staging of the Love is a Battlefield video. The video contains a caress once removed, still transgressing taboos of royalty. The monarchy and its trappings may be fetishized and eroticized, but hands must be firmly kept at distance. And, within MTV land, a superficiality of gender fluidity was often invoked, but predominantly within straight parameters. Men could kiss and caress each other, with only a couple of examples transcending neo-glam rock quasi-bisexual chic and an ultimately heterosexual homo-sociality. Among female performers, same-sex bonding was pretty well restricted to smaller-market acts or "independents," who usually couldn't afford to make elaborate music videos. Both the Pat Benatar video and Mars' re-staging precede the heyday of lipstick lesbians and Madonna-like "acting out."

On *Pure Virtue*'s soundtrack, the big-production rock music fades and is succeeded by a haunting operatic voice. The soundtrack's deployment of *Misere My Maker* radically shifts the videotape's tone as a somber quotation now occupies the entire frame.

"I think it's really important to go, sometimes you know, nuts."

This quotation announces the following sequence like a silent-movie title, and is an excellent example of highlighted text speaking words that would sound desperately inarticulate if spoken. The author of this quote is Tanya Mars and Elizabeth of Essex and everybody else who has wanted to, you know, just say it but is all too aware that the intended "listeners' will never get it. By visualizing the words rather than restricting them to a singular voice, Mars speaks for many historical and contemporary women who have been silenced.

After providing ample time for these words to register, *Pure Virtue* cuts to an ax positioned on top of a stump. The ax both waits and weights. This image is followed by a montage of drawings from fairy tales, conflated with the image of Elizabeth sewing her gloved hand shut in preparation. She recites a litany of famous women ultimately driven mad in their attempts to resist mother/whore dichotomies and the demands of powerful men who would only permit autonomy with prices attached. The litany mixes Elizabeth's contemporaries (her prime rival Mary Queen of Scots and her mother Anne Boleyn) with proto-historical figures (Eve, Medusa), and tragically-fallen tele-visual entertainers (Marilyn Monroe, Judy Garland) among others. According to Mars, these women have been linked by processes of "fictionalization"—they "are real, but their fame has fictionalized them for us. ...what the reality of the Queen is, is very different from the fairytale version—that Elizabeth was a true ruler and had very real things to deal with." 10

Then the drums begin rolling as Elizabeth of Essex places her left hand upon the stump and raises the ax. The placement of the hand mirrors Pure Virtue's opening sequence, in which the hand is controlling the spectacle. Now the hand is powerless and therefore must go. The magician's repertoire of tricks can only maintain The Big Illusion for so long before reality kicks in. But, on the verge of mutilating her hand, Mars and the drum roll both stop abruptly. The performer directly addresses both the camera and the viewing audience as "Mom'. The Queen wants to know if Mom is present or watching She has, as a child and as a ruler, been surrounded by Dad.

Through a combination of Mars' theatrical audacity, her cross-referencing of Elizabeth Regina with her most popular screen portrayal by Bette Davis, her linking of these two powerful women and their historical contemporaries, and her intelligent collaging of seemingly disparate video-art strategies, *Pure Virtue* stands as one of the most exemplary of performance-art to video-art adaptations. Although many of

her source materials are either full-blown theatrical or classically-cinematic, Mars and Campbell's awareness of how these works have themselves been shaped by television viewing and distribution clearly informs this groundbreaking adaptation to the television-sized frame of video.

AND NOW.....ANOTHER QUEEN

Christian and other theologies, as well as so many classical narratives, must divide women into the virtuous and the wicked, or into mothers and whores. The bad sister is an omnipresent doppelganger to Snow White, who drifted and thus became an interesting person. *Pure Virtue*'s litany of virtuous women driven mad by contradictory role demands and conflicting loyalties implies a roll call of bad seeds or sisters who were so bad that they became very good indeed. The idea that Lilith begot Mae West is not such a far stretch at all.

Pure Sin (1990) was adapted to video from a performance of the same name, initially presented at Toronto's A Space gallery in 1986. Pure Sin the performance featured Tanya Mars inhabiting or hosting the persona of Mae West, legendary and popular burlesque entertainer, all-around bad-girl, not to mention gay icon and alleged drag-queen. The Divine Miss Mars as the Divine Miss West, the second historical figure in Mars' Women and Power trilogy, was surrounded by a cast of men not-in-power (although frequently under the delusion of entitlement).10 The five uniformly-dressed male performers or "The Men," although variant both physically and stylistically, functioned as props for the star, rather than as significant characters with their own agencies. Not that the gentlemen didn't perform or present non-matrixed characters—the performer embodying a historical character in one scene would present an iconic or tragi-comic figure from a very different century in the next. Mars' own sculptural props augmented her chorus of male props, so to speak. In the live performance, Mars not only chewed the scenery but also her props. With the same five male performers, this became a matter of how many ways she could subjugate these hapless objects. After all, the girl did have quite the repertoire.

In the video adaptation of *Pure Sin*, each scene from the performance is transferred or adapted to video, closely corresponding to the original's script. There are more than five secondary male performers, not only in order to distinguish the characters but also because video does not demand continuous cast as the live-performance does. There are no secondary female characters, let alone performers. Many of "The Men" are dancers as much as actors (which they were not in the original performance). By the time of the *Pure Sin* production period, Mars had made plans to undertake a large-scale performance piece combining all three segments of the Women and Power trilogy, and it had become apparent that movement skills were as much a performing priority as learning dialogue and hitting the lights.11 Dance and video have often combined to make formally intriguing tapes, since dance is so much concerned with bodies, movement, and spatiality. But, in the *Pure Sin* video, the dancers are documented as live performers more than choreographed for video framing. This and other factors make *Pure Sin* seem more like a documented or literally-adapted live performance than either *Pure Virtue* or the later *Mz. Frankenstein*, even considering the obvious studio-effects.

Too often, *Pure Sin* does not appear to have been scaled to the video-frame. In *Pure Virtue*, Mars knows that the Queen's fire-breathing will not have the impact on video that it does in live performance, so she frames the action tightly to maintain its effectiveness within the video-narrative. Pure Sin's dancers and many of the other performers,

by contrast, appear still to be performing on stage.

This adaptation was undertaken when video works conceived for the television-sized monitor were being shown in film and video festivals at least as frequently as in art-galleries (let alone on television). The festivals preferred to project the tapes as if they were film, and there was an onus on video artists to be thinking in terms of at least a 16mm cinematic frame. Artists should theoretically have been conceiving and then framing their images with the larger scale in mind, yet such was not always the reality of production and even post-production. *Pure Sin*'s special effects are gigantic, campy, and transparently artificial, and Mars as Ms. West gleefully chews the lush and elaborate scenery. But the video medium, not unlike its televisual host, prefers either strategic close-ups or scaled choreographies of bodies moving within that relatively compact frame. *Pure Sin* the video too often appears to be recording a performing-arts event rather than adapting that performance to the frame.

The primary ghost or host medium of video art is arguably television, not film. In many formative performative video works, television is present although never stated.13 Televised performances are a staple of relatively highbrow viewing—they offer evidence that the television set is not merely a squawk or idiot box. Many of the performance adaptations so commonplace on television compress the scale of the original performances by means of second and even third camera angles , or by suspended dissolves that permit different live playing areas to function as each others' shadows. *Pure Sin* seems to have been designed for a festival circuit and not for home viewing, for a theatrical screening mode rather than a more contemplative one.

HOME ENTERTAINMENT AND OTHER INTIMACIES

Mz. Frankenstein was adapted to the video medium from a very different style of performance than either *Pure Sin* or *Pure Virtue*. Mars was still concerned about women in power, but now she focused on contemporary women's' bodies in relation to mass-media and popular culture beyond the performing arts. *Mz. Frankenstein* took aim at the monstrous dieting industry, at conformity and uniformity and at "the beauty myth'. *Mz. Frankenstein*, as a performance piece, was also a significant shift away from theatrical prosceniums and spectacle. Mars dispensed with the additional performers, constructed props, and theatrical backdrops. She focused on presenting *Mz. Frankenstein* as site-specific solo performances. Her most frequent site was the locker room, surely one of the most competitive environments for bodily consumption (and also a male-identified location typifying the elusive borderline between homo-social and homo-sexual). The luxury of affording lucrative gym or fitness-club memberships does not necessarily make one an attractive commodity.

The performer would be confrontational rather than spectacular. She had audience members fill out forms, problematizing confidentiality. Then, she would isolate audience members according to whatever body parts they wished to have genetically-modified—nose jobs over here, tummy-tucks in this corner. Mz. Frankenstein referenced the bodily confrontation of seminal artists like Vito Acconci and Carolee Schneemann, while placing Mars' concerns with women in and out of power in dialogue with current discourses on body-modification technologies, the widespread obsession with perfection and potential perfectibility of bodies, and, ultimately, fear or acceptance of female aging.

It made perfect sense to adapt *Mz. Frankenstein* to video by recreating but parodying television info-mercials or product demonstrations. Mars as Dr. Frances Stein pitches the radically weight-

reducing machine the "Relax-a-cisor," which was manufactured and marketed to home (female) consumers in the 1950s. It promised to reduce fat without requiring any strenuous exercise or discipline. *Mz. Frankenstein* skillfully evokes the late-night infomercial that just won't shut up and thus demands viewer intervention. The tape contains the irritatingly catchy musical refrains, the endless roll-text at the bottom of the frame so typical of info-TV, and the aesthetics of being located somewhere geographically non-specific. Audio dispatches from neighbouring specialty or cable stations also bleed through as part of the tape's sophisticated sound-design. Commercial and cable television is after all a proto-virtual reality that must succeed in selling itself as being more "real' than life itself. Mz. Frankenstein manages to be both on the channel and in between stations, questioning whether the viewers really have any form of agency. The tape begs the ultimate question—just how far is the consumer prepared to go?

However, the endless roll-text is critical as well as informative. Mars has collaged various sources, from academic to "women's magazines" into both the rolling text and the voice-over. That voice-over is provided courtesy of performance artist Margaret Dragu, allowing Tanya Mars to position herself both as the haplessly malevolent Dr. Stein and as other female bodies throughout the tape without needing to literally adhere to specific texts.

Mz. Frankenstein's pace is parallel to the info-commercial television format it mimics and parodies until its conclusion, when Mars' tone becomes unashamedly didactic. The performer peels off her latex mask, and what's underneath is none too pretty. Everything the dieting and beauty industries have hysterically attempted to deny or banish is revealed in the horror movie close-up. *Mz. Frankenstein* concludes with dramatic action that is explicitly intended to inform consumers of the consequences of their delusional consumption.

The simultaneous respect for and parody of television conventions serves to move Mars' performative impulses and her body politic into the living room. Television is, even more than the larger screen, the medium primarily responsible for the onslaught of diet industry-related self-abjective images. *Mz. Frankenstein* marks a shift in Mars' adaptations of her performance works, toward home consumption and also individual agency. The tape's hyper-theatrical conclusion reinforces Mars' innate theatricality, which will never be scaled down for very long and why should it be? *Mz. Frankenstein*'s address to home-viewing conventions anticipates Tanya Mars' movements toward non-linear formats that permit theatricality without demanding linearity.

As Mars' live performances had already begun shifting from quasi-dramatic presentations to a more durational and even body-sculptural mode, she begun experimenting with digital technologies in her media works. While retaining her ongoing interests in media and spectacle, particularly with the O.J. Simpson-trial related performance *Bronco's Kiss* (1996), Mars indulged in seemingly offhand and personal projects involving a long-term companion, her dog Woofie. Her videotape *HOT* (1998) promises something pornographic with its title, but viewers are instead treated to the small-framed spectacle of the frisky artist asking whether or not her pet loves her. Sometimes the almost non-matrixed performer is sure the dog returns her affection, and sometimes she is worried that the emotional relationship is infinitely more complicated. Mars may need to know where she stands with Woofie, but she is also talking to humans.

Tanya Mars and Woofie also starred in *Alpha Girls* (2002), a DVD-project, curated by Midi Onodera, with a DVD adapted from a live performance called *My Dinner with Woofie* (1995), humourously referencing Wallace Shawn's play (and Louis Malle's feature film) *My*

Dinner with André. The film adaptation of Shawn's play, released in 1982, was a particularly extreme example of a film that appeared to be one long theatrical take, framed by one character's arrival and departure. *My Dinner with André* was a play of ideas, a theatrical dialogue that might well have benefited from not being locked into a rigidly linear exhibition or viewing format.

My Dinner with Woofie's DVD format or menu allows both gallery and home viewers to oscillate between two parallel conversations. The dialogues over dinner, one between Mars and her friend David and the other between David and Woofie, riff on quite weighty topics such as human cloning , fears about potential loss of natural selection, the current prominence of Franken or synthetic pets, and even the ethics of humans playing God. Meanwhile, David is breaking the news to Woofie that Ms. Mars has decided to clone him. In the event that Woofie might die before Mars, this is a scientific possibility and a serious ethical conundrum. 14

Many observers dismiss art involving animals as being either sentimentally trivial or merely "domestic," an instance of the personal being nothing more than only the personal, or "local' rather then credibly global in their focus. "Local" can also refer to stereotypes concerning mental illness—it's not only the popular media that considers a preference for animals over people to be a symptom of craziness. Mars, in contrast, knows very well that many aging people have stopped investing emotionally in relationships with people and instead enjoy an "uncomplicated, unconditional love and companionship" 15 with pets. What if the animal had to be put down ? Then what exactly are the ethics of cloning processes, with regards to animals and, by implication, humans? These are hardly local or trivial questions , they are in fact rather timeless. Elizabeth of Essex was denied unconditional love and companionship because she was a woman who had inherited regal power, but she certainly wanted a loving companion. Mars is not only addressing her contemporaries, she is acknowledging a common historical trait.

She has also began making personal projects involving her two grandchildren, in the process referring not to cloning but to biological extensions and bloodlines. *The Granny Suites* are a projected series of ambient videotapes dealing with the relationships between a grandmother and her grandsons. The first of the suites is titled *Happy Birthday to You*, a projection depicting scenes from her grandsons' birthday parties. Most of this DVD-projection utilizes not one but four frames, permitting vignettes to exist in a parallel symphonic relationship with one another. The traditional happy birthday tune is sung somewhat slower that its usual tempo, and by what sounds like a chorus of definitely adult male voices. Then all four frames are fast-forwarded, which transforms all of the voices into the register of very young and hyper-active children. But after this ecstatic frenzy, the party now seems to be over and a child, still multiplied by four, is seen crying. However, here the tape's speed is delayed so that the crying sound is that of a very sorrowful old man. *Happy Birthday to You* concludes with a single-frame image of a grandson at first holding onto a balloon from his party, and gradually letting it go. He seems to want to retrieve it, but Mars cuts before any further movement. Does the child regain the balloon, or does it inevitably slip away? This is an image that literally pulls on strings.16

Tanya Mars continues to explore the DVD-format , intending to revisit many of her live performances . The iconic and operatic performance *Bronco's Kiss* is on her agenda—it deploys an operatic singer, a famous car, and a woman marking that car while wearing another fabulous dress. She also intends to eventually adapt her multi-

stationed performance *The Tyranny of Bliss* (2004) for DVD, and this epic-scaled performance should indeed provide wonderfully-rich source material for Mars's propensity for theatrical tableaux and finely-detailed collage. DVD, and other potential digital formats, are well suited to a performative artist like Mars whose best work has combined theatrical tableaux, art-history plundering, and a healthy suspicion of normative linearity.

Notes

1. Colin Campbell has begun working with other performers and even professional actors, making narrative tapes that referenced melodramatic film in particular. Lisa Steele had in parallel deployed a soap-opera format with, in particular, her series of Gloria tapes.
2. *Pure Virtue*'s adaptation to video is credited as being a collaboration between Mars and Colin Campbell.
3. Shonagh Adelman, *Redefining the Female Subject*, C , Winter 1991, p.29
4. One wife was divorced, two executed, one died after childbirth, one marriage was annulled, and one wife actually outlived The King.
5. Kirby, Michael-On Acting and Non-Acting, *The Art of Performance: A Critical Anthology*, eds. Gregory Battcock and Robert Nicklas (publisher, date, page) Kirby uses the continuum of non-matrixed/matrixed in reference to modes of performance. For example, a non-matrixed portrayal of a cowboy will involve only visually recognizable costumes or basic props, while a fully matrixed portrayal will involve riding the horse believably in addition to Stanislavskian criteria such as motivation and other psychological factors.
6. Art Star is the palindrome interviewee featured in Campbell's video Sackville, I'm Yours (1972), as well as his revisionist sequel Disheveled Destiny (1999/2001).
7. Actually, it is the buzzing sound of a chainsaw!
8. Mars acknowledges the renowned American artist Eleanor Antin as a key influence in this regard.
9. Pat Benatar's breakthrough record, *Hit Me with your Best Shot*, is a fixture among the DJs at queer rock'n'roll events such as Toronto's Club V or Vazaleen. Tough rocker girls have always had their cults among younger lesbians and many gay men.
10. e-mail correspondence with the artist, July 25, 2003
11. In the A Space performances of Dec.15-17, 1986, "The Men," as they were described in the program credits, were Angelo Pedari, Kevin McGugan, Colin Campbell, John Greyson, and myself.
12. *Pure Hell*, adapted from *Pure Virtue*, *Pure Sin*, and *Pure Nonsense* and featuring actresses Kim Renders and Fern Downey as Mae West and Alice in Wonderland (Mars herself retaining Elizabeth of Essex) was presented at the Power Plant in October, 1990.
13. For example, in Vito Acconci's *Theme Song* (1972) the direct address performance implies a peep-show booth. In Campbell's *Sackville, I'm Yours* (1972), the presence of an interviewer, behind the camera, whose questions has been edited or deleted in key to the tape's direct-interview structure.
14. Since the making of this DVD, the cloning of a pet animal (a cat) has indeed taken place. Also, alas, Woofie has since died.
15. Tanya Mars quoted in Kim Fullerton, *Here Kitty Kitty*, pub. Prefix Photo, No. 8 , p.24
16. *Happy Birthday to You* was included in the group exhibition *Where She's At*, at Harbourfront Centre in Toronto from Nov. 11 to Dec. 31, 2006.