

Body Politic

A MAGAZINE FOR GAY LIBERATION



JANIS COLE AND HOLLY DALE

Hanging out,
camera in hand, with
Hookers on Davie

A talk with
Andrew Hodges,
biographer of Alan
Turing, gay father
of the computer



BODY, MIND AND MACHINE



NATIONAL INQUIRER

Superstar lives in fear of dreaded question!
IS MICHAEL JACKSON

GAY?
SEE PAGE 47!



"The liberation of homosexuals
can only be the work of
homosexuals themselves."
— Kurt Hiller, 1921 —

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THIS ISSUE

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photo: Sonja Mills



photo: Gerald Hannon

31: Hookers on Davie

It's a rare kind of film — one that belongs to the hookers, transvestites and transsexuals whose lives it probes as much as it does to Holly Dale and Janis Cole (left) who made it. But in their attempt not to moralize or impose their own point of view, did the filmmakers leave the hardest questions unasked? Sonja Mills profiles the two virtuosos of "direct cinema," while Chris Bearchell turns her own probing lens on the assumptions behind the camera.

28: The enigma of intelligence

Alan Turing's top-secret code-breaking work helped win World War II, and his mathematical theories laid the foundations for the modern computer. And he was gay. British gay activist and mathematician Andrew Hodges (above) has written a brilliant biography of the man, and TBP's Richard Summerbell and Rick Bébout explore with Hodges the quandary of gay people caught in the web of the national security state, the role of sensuality in the development of intelligence, and the importance of asking "embarrassing questions."

15: The battle of the baths

Rumours were flying: on Friday, March 30, San Francisco's public health commissioner, Mervyn Silverman, planned to announce the closing of the city's baths. And he nearly did. Kevin Orr reports on the sequence of events leading to Silverman's ultimate decision to impose controls rather than closure, and ponders the effect the whole ruckus might have on the fight against AIDS.

7: The Divided Church?

A United Church task force recently recommended that sexual orientation be no bar to the ministry. The move has been praised by some as a step toward overcoming two-thousand years of oppression; others condemn it as pandering to sin. Will the debate split the United Church of Canada?

19: Power and morality

Can a gay man working for the arms industry have the same sense of ethics as a gay man picketing outside his plant? Do a gay cop and a street hustler share common interests? Sociologist John Alan Lee deliberates on the utopian quest for a comprehensive and consistent gay morality.

47: The big question

Direct from the Pink Pussy Motor Hotel in Encino, California — A Body Politic exclusive!!! The question the whole world wants to ask Michael Jackson — and it's not about his nose job. Follow Stephen Stuckey on this "thriller" assignment, and get the real dirt on Diana Ross's dresses!!!

Regular departments

- 4: Letters to *The Body Politic*
- 20: Out in the City, our regular Toronto calendar and listings section
- 37: Joy Parks's "Shared Ground"
- 39: Classified ads
- 00: Network, our regular listing of gay and lesbian groups across Canada, does not appear this month, but will return in June

On the police beat

News writer Glenn Wheeler pays a cautious visit to Toronto's new police chief in the first installment of a new column, "Copwatch," on page 14.

The cover: Holly Dale and Janis Cole, in a photo by Sonja Mills; Andrew Hodges photographed by Gerald Hannon; Alan Turing, in his Royal Society portrait, peeking out from a 1984 model Turing machine. Design by Rick Bébout.

We forgot to credit cover work last month. The design was by Rick Bébout; the photo for "You've got a nice body... for an Oriental" was by Gerald Hannon. The body was by Lloyd Wong.

A profile by
Sonja Mills

HOLLY DALE & JANIS COLE

are two great filmmakers who make great films together, and when they aren't researching or making films together, they can be seen on Toronto's Queen Street, glue pots in hand, hanging posters together. They are inseparable friends.

In fact, I'm still not convinced that Holly and Janis aren't one person made to look like two. Mirrors? Trickery of some sort. Nevertheless, Holly and/or Janis are together, and have been for ten years.

Their latest film, *Hookers on Davie* (see Chris Bearchell's review, below), has just been released. Both filmmakers grew up very close to the street, and find they are happiest making films about alternative lifestyles and people on the fringe. Their first collaborative project, *Cream Soda*, was a twelve-minute film about a private strip-tease club on Yonge Street in Toronto. Janis stayed in a storage room with the sound mixer, listening in to each of the wire-tapped rooms, and recorded whatever sounded interesting. Holly sat in the lobby with a camera and filmed the tricks as they came in. They would often ask what was going on, but the prostitutes would cover for Holly by saying she was a kid sister doing a project for school.

Holly's and Janis's second project was called *Minimum Charge, No Cover*, which they thought would be about a transsexual they met during the shooting of *Cream Soda*. "She's extremely beautiful, and all the guys would hang around the editing room while we were cutting *Cream Soda*, saying 'Oh, she's gorgeous,'" commented Holly. "So we thought it would be interesting to let them know about her in the next film." The woman was unable to complete the film, however; instead, the filmmakers profiled several of their friends, including homosexuals, transsexuals, drag queens and prostitutes, and pieced together a collage of alternative lifestyles.

Next, Holly and Janis decided to look into the factors that lead to crime. Their research led them to Penetanguishine, Ontario, where they made a half-hour documentary about the people in a hospital there for the criminally insane. They used the film to raise money to work on another project: they wanted to get into the Prison for Women in Kingston, Canada's only women's prison. Its officials, however, would not allow the film. But the filmmakers were persistent. "It took us four years to get into the prison, but we were determined. We decided that we really wanted to go there. We kept being told no by everybody until they finally wrote us a letter asking us not to write them anymore so they could close the file. We wrote back saying that if we could meet the warden and get a no from him in person, we would never write again. So they arranged the meeting, we spent the whole day with the warden, and finally he said that we could go ahead and make our film." The highly acclaimed *P4W: Prison for Women* was the result.

The twenty-one days they spent shooting there were a very emotional time for Holly and Janis, and also for the inmates. "We hated to leave when the filming was over; it really tore us apart and tore apart a lot of the women we left



THEY CALL THEIR TECHNIQUE "DIRECT CINEMA," AND IT'S TAKEN THESE TWO FILMMAKERS FROM A TORONTO STRIP JOINT TO A WOMEN'S PRISON TO A STREET FULL OF PROSTITUTES IN VANCOUVER. BUT HAS IT TAKEN THEM FAR ENOUGH?

DOUBLE DIRECT

behind. We keep in touch with most of them still, especially the ones that are still inside. We visit and write letters a lot and they're really happy with the film, which is a very good feeling for us.... We definitely became like the inmates. They were our people, we were their people, and the authorities couldn't stand that. They didn't want us to eat lunch with the inmates and we said, 'How can we film these people's lives all day and then go have lunch with you instead of them?' That got them really mad. And because we wouldn't eat with the matrons, the inmates used to sneak food up from the kitchens for us to eat. At one time, we

were called down to the head security offices and were told that the inmates were going to be put into segregation if they continued to do this. We felt really bad and told them to stop — so they started sneaking twice as much. The only thing Aerlyn could eat was cole slaw because she's a vegetarian; so they would bring her a big bucket of it every day for lunch."

Aerlyn Weissman worked as the sound recordist for both *P4W* and *Hookers*.

The inmates at the prison named her the "official sound being," and she became very much a part of the Cole/Dale team.

Very soon after *P4W*, Holly and Janis decided to begin research for *Hookers on Davie*. After some preliminary advice and assistance from Margo St James of COYOTE (a prostitution resource centre in the States) and Sally de Quadros of ASP (the Alliance for the Safety of Prostitutes in Vancouver), they landed on Davie Street.

"When we were making *P4W*, a few people we were filming said to us: 'Nobody will want to hear about us; they don't care about us.' We would assure them, even though we didn't know ourselves, 'People will care about you, they will,' and it was really great when they did. We hope that the same thing will happen with this film, because prostitutes are misunderstood a lot. They're very invisible people and there's not a lot of real information available about people who are working as prostitutes. These people have come out of their closets, out of an invisible community and have said, 'Okay, fine, we're going

to tell you about how we live.' We feel committed to that and it's really important to us that people take it seriously and understand it — not accept or love it, but try to understand it. It's very important to us that people just listen — decide what you want afterward, but just listen. Don't let anything get in the way of that."

Holly and Janis hope their next project will be a drama. Janis Gamble, one of the inmates in *P4W*, was sentenced to twenty-five years in prison for being party to a crime her husband committed. "If we can raise the money, her life story will be the next film we make. We don't think she should be ignored or forgotten, because we don't think her prison sentence is fair. Twenty-five years with no parole is a long time, especially when you didn't kill anybody."

In one scene in *P4W*, Janis Gamble expresses her feelings about Debbie, another inmate of the prison, who is about to be released. Janis becomes very emotional about the loss of her friend. "When we first saw Janis and Debbie in the prison," says Holly/Janis, "they didn't even seem like part of the prison community. They were always by themselves, always together, and we wondered if they were just two pretty girls in prison who stuck with each other so they wouldn't be muscled by other women in the prison. Then we found out that there was this incredible love story. They were really in love. It was beautiful."

Holly and Janis have always worked extremely well together and have said, only half jokingly, that if one were to die, the other would probably not continue making films. They are very tight partners; they have a wonderful working relationship; and they are a family. Last Christmas, Holly's mom cooked Janis a turkey and Janis's mom knitted Holly a sweater.

Personally, I can't imagine one without the other. They complement each other almost ridiculously well. So, whether Holly and Janis actually exist, or whether they are a very convincing split personality, I expect to see them/her together for a very long time. □

A review by
Chris Bearchell

HOOKERS ON DAVIE

affords lesbians and gay men a couple of unique opportunities: the chance to compare our own sexual-minority-turned-subculture with another; and a chance to see how members of our community fare within that other. Hustlers, transvestites and transsexuals receive their fair share — or more — of the filmmakers' attention. And the parallels between the experiences of hookers and queers goes far beyond the common contempt of the law-makers and enforcers who see all of our bedrooms as bawdyhouses — places resorted to for the practice of either prostitution or acts of indecency, according to the Criminal Code. From the confusion and anxiety of our mothers to bashings on the street, from the anger of a new-found political voice to the fear or shame that prompts some protestors to don black masks, we share a lot of common ground.

Research took the resolutely independent team of Cole and Dale to Vancouver — "the prostitution capital of Canada" — where the Alliance for the





Safety of Prostitutes (ASP) directed them to Davie Street, not because it's typical, but because it isn't. Hustlers and hookers, some of them transvestites and transsexuals, work the same territory on Davie, and help one another cope with the hassles of the street. Once introduced by ASP, Cole and Dale had to gain the confidence of their would-be subjects. Eight people — men and women — eventually became the characters whose stories are told in the film. Cole and Dale seem to have developed the closest connections with Tiffany, a transvestite, and a transsexual named Michelle. The end result is a dramatic portrait of a vibrant, if not always kind, street and of some of the most interesting people who live and work on it.

Cole and Dale call their approach to documentary filmmaking "direct cinema," a combination of *cinema verité* — in this case consisting mostly of footage shot from a van while the characters ply their trade — and interviews (minus the interviewer). Direct cinema requires, or perhaps creates, a rapport bordering on identification between filmmaker and subject. Davie Street belongs to the filmmakers almost as much as it does to those whose world and perspective are documented in the film. And the film belongs to Michelle and Tiffany and the other six characters almost as much as it does to Cole and Dale.

The straight residents of Davie and the cops who walk the beat are not included — Cole and Dale do not pretend to be objective. (The only "outsider" to take up substantial space in the film is Michelle's mother.) The voices of the hookers on Davie come through loud and clear. And unexpurgated. Like all targets of anger and violence, Michelle dishes out her share: she blows up at Tiffany in a bar, admits to stabbing tricks in self-defence. Yes, stereotypes are confirmed here, sometimes even embraced, in the process of revealing the surface for what it is while, at the same time, revealing the underlying humanity. There is no way for a sensitive viewer not to feel sympathy for the characters in this film.

Cole's and Dale's direct-cinema techniques were used effectively in *P4W*, where the bell-jar world of a women's prison was particularly suited to them. Davie Street is, in their words, a less-controlled environment, and one that seems to illuminate the limitations of direct cinema. Documentary filmmaking is fraught with pitfalls for a cinematographer with a conscience. The very term "documentary" creates in a viewer an unreasonable expectation: the direct rendering of reality on film. Cole and Dale have a conscience, and direct cinema seems to be their way of trying to reduce themselves to extensions of their equipment so that their preconceptions do not influence their films. But distortion is inevitable: regardless of conscious intentions, the camera cannot simply passively record. It selects, frames and shapes experience, information and ideas. By scrupulously trying to avoid imposing their own interpretation, Cole and Dale don't provide us with quite enough context to understand fully what we are seeing on the screen. The film explains, for instance, that Davie Street is unique, that the collaboration among hustlers, queens and female hookers keeps the street "pimp-free." But how is the viewer to appreciate the significance of that without something to compare it to, without the knowledge of how prostitution is carried on a few blocks from Davie on streets where hookers are controlled by pimps?

In contrast to their usual role as pimps in uniform (see *TBP*, January/February), the cops on Davie are shown as disinterested. The film doesn't say anything about the current nationwide police campaign for stronger laws to allow them more control over prostitution, or hint at the tension they've helped create between hooker and their neighbours by claiming that, without these laws, nothing can be done to deal with the "problem."

Cole's and Dale's desire to avoid a script made up of their own preconceptions is understandable and admirable, but it doesn't mean that a script doesn't get written along the way. Just as inter-

"Hookers on Davie puts on the screen contradictions that could have been enlightening if they'd been explored. Prostitution is just a job, the characters insist; they have a right to be proud of what they do. Yet they wear masks to demonstrations. Why?"

pretation without information produces an incomplete picture, so too does information without interpretation. The conscientious filmmaker is one who *distinguishes* between the two, not one who eliminates either one in favour of the other.

Hookers on Davie puts on the screen contradictions that could have been enlightening if they'd been explored. Prostitution is just a job, the characters insist; they have the right to be proud of themselves and what they do. Yet they wear black masks to demonstrations. Why? The movie implies that they are not in the sex business by choice. But are most of us ever in any line of work completely by choice? At the demonstration, the hookers demand "Alternatives not laws." Alternatives to the law? To working the street? A straight audience could read the hookers' placards as a plea for alternatives to prostitution *per se*. The film doesn't attempt to explain the enigmatic picket signs, but it does present an unrelenting picture of violence, drugs and despair. Sure, that's part of their reality, but presenting victims — even in their own terms — without asking where the victimization comes from is not enough. Are the people in this film victimized by bad upbringing? Or by the way our social system exerts control over them? These questions are too impor-

tant to leave to implication, to the hope that the camera will catch the answers by accident. It's one thing for a film to produce sympathy, quite another for it to generate pity. Perhaps the characters who shape the film are so injured to disapproval that they don't distinguish between sympathy and pity. But surely they don't want sympathy translated into a desire to save them from themselves, to force them off the streets. The supportive filmmaker should ensure that no such misinterpretation is likely.

Cole and Dale have done what no other Canadian filmmaker has done: they have opened the door on this once-hidden world and invited us to look in. But our glimpse is limited. We want to learn, but our learning would be easier and more thorough if they'd provided us with a map of the terrain. While they have produced a powerful portrait of an unusual street and the men and women who populate it, they've left some of the hardest questions unasked.

Perhaps these questions cannot be properly asked or answered in the medium of documentary film; maybe they can only be asked by natives of the world that is under scrutiny. The men and women of Davie Street may be the only ones who could produce a really useful map for us. Cole and Dale have taken the first steps to educating people; they ask that we listen, and we should. The next examination of the issue has to go further. It has to ask the tough questions. That kind of political analysis can best be done from the inside, looking out. Next time, the prostitutes should step out of the roles of characters, subjects, victims, get their hands on the cameras and aim them not simply at each other, but at the world that shapes the lives of hookers on Davie Street. □

Hookers on Davie is currently showing at the Carlton Cinemas in Toronto. The film will have its Vancouver premiere at the Ridge Theatre May 17 at 9:30 pm, during the Vancouver Film Festival, to be followed by a continued run at the Bay Theatre — on Davie Street. *Hookers* will also be screened at the Victoria Film Festival May 26.