

## Monika Oechsler *Strip*

Vaughan Allen

"We are all so used to seeing ourselves, our society, on film, that we forget the power of the techniques involved. In our haste to condemn the one-dimensional nature of the characters we see on screen, we forget how much of real personality, of real relationships, leaks through.

Monika Oechsler is one of a number of video artists who use the potentially interrogative nature of the camera and the edit suite, all the techniques of filming, in search of the human. Much of her work has focused on that troubled period of adolescence between childhood and maturity, where the character of individuals slides in and out of focus, where nothing is yet fixed; nothing is yet certain.

Oechsler's *Strip* (1997), for instance, focuses on a group of teenage and pre-teenage girls. These girls are stripping and re-assembling handguns, while a nursery rhyme plays over and over again. The girls involved were members of the only British gun-club licensed at the time to offer membership to children as young as eight.

In her earlier works, *Necking* and *Gold Diggers*, the period of play in pre-adolescence becomes influenced, altered, by the sexuality of near-adulthood. The camera focuses on this process of change, and pulls apart the inherent contradictions and confusions within. The artist uses filmic techniques to emphasise the ambiguities in adolescence, with changes in point-of-view and perspective unsettling any linear understanding of events.

*Strip* settles for a single, fixed, position for the camera. The disorientation here comes with the steady flow of dissolves, reverses and loops. The action of the gun-stripping girls continues, occasionally jarring, but evolving steadily into a dream-like performance. Evocative and touching in its use of nursery rhyme, it suggests the inevitable coming of violence, adult horrors into their innocent world.

The focus remains on the actions of the girls; we never see their faces. This is a violent striptease performed for the locked gaze of the viewer. This technique cuts out the individual personalities involved. The focus is on the process involved, the jarring collision between pre-adolescence and violence, the nagging sense of foreboding."

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