

## SOME THOUGHTS ON 'GROWN UP'

Catherine Elwes March '92

When I started to make the central image of 'Grown Up' - the wounded leg, I was thinking about how frustrating the video image is. It seems to promise everything, it rekindles desire but never satisfies it. It evokes a presence but like a photography, it acts principally as a reminder of absence. In this respect it echoes the need each of us has to seek intimacy with another human being. We hope to re-discover the oceanic feelings of fusion we experienced as infants. It also evokes the failure, the disappointment which the barriers of age, experience and language itself soon bring to bear on the magic of those brief moments of union.

The physicality of the leg, the sense that it is pressing up against the glass of the television set appealed to me too. I find the artificiality and surface gloss of much video imagery lacking in 'guts', in that fleshy sense of physical presence and the unpredictability that was a feature of '70s & '80s Performance Art.

The wordlessness of the piece is important. 'Grown Up' is a short visual essay that depends on the interaction of sound and image to create meaning. Words restrict and fix meanings, images and 'natural' sounds set off chains of associations. They open up and imaginative space in which the viewer can actively participate in the 'reading' of the work.

The wordlessness and the physicality of the image hark back to a pre-lingual period of infancy when instinctual drives and the notoriously polymorphous perversity of an emerging sexuality was untainted by the gender restrictions of cultural roles.

Having made the tape, I can now see other meanings at play. The leg of the adult is wounded and stitched. The child's hand 'heals' the wound. A year's healing is condensed into a few seconds. The child's hand then becomes absorbed by the adult's body, taken in as a 'good object', a healing spirit. Perhaps this is the spirit of the child in all of us, the child who needs to be befriended and nurtured.

Formally, the work is spare, minimal even with a very precise use of pacing, build up and release. In this way the feeling is as raw as the wound itself. It is unhampered by autobiographical detail, social and historical context. It is unashamedly essentialist.

In the end the tape is optimistic. Time passes, healing takes place and a new energy arises. We need not be bound by old wounds. We can heal and grow at any time and there is nothing more healing than the creative process itself.