

**BRING THE PAIN:
Bob Flanagan, Sheree Rose and Masochistic Art during the NEA
Controversies**

by

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BFA., Concordia University, 2003

**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF**

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

Art History, Visual Art and Theory

UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

SEPTEMBER 2005

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Abstract

Poet, performance/installation artist, self-proclaimed “supermasochist” and life-long Cystic Fibrosis sufferer, Bob Flanagan and his partner, dominatrix and fellow artist Sheree Rose created art derived from their personal explorations of sadomasochistic sex acts and relationships. This work used the lens of S/M practice to deal with issues of illness, death, gender and sex. Throughout most of their 15 year collaboration (late 1980- early 1996) Flanagan and Rose lived and worked in relative obscurity, their work being circulated mainly in small subcultural circles. It was during the years of controversies surrounding the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), roughly 1989 to 1997, that Flanagan and Rose experienced unforeseen professional success and fame, propelling them from underground distribution in L.A. to the international art scene. These controversies arose from objections by various rightwing Christian politicians, individuals and groups who felt that the NEA had misused American tax dollars by awarding grants to artists who created and agencies that displayed “obscene” art. Flanagan and Rose were two such artists. This is a case study of the situation of Flanagan and Rose within these controversies, a situation in which there was opportunity, experimentation and heightened awareness despite (or perhaps because of) heated conflicts between opposing sets of ethics, aesthetics and lifestyle.

Areas covered include: How the NEA controversies evolved and affected cultural production and dissemination in the United States. The strategies, motivations and moralities of both pro- and anti- NEA activists. How S/M practice is a sexual practice of resistance and how this practice can be perceived as a threat to the status quo. The strategies and

circumstances which allowed Flanagan and Rose to attain success rather than ruination during NEA controversies. What sort of effect the work of Flanagan and Rose had upon the climate of the mid-1990s art world. How the life and work of Flanagan and Rose is integrated into the larger socio-political and historical circumstances in which it was produced.

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Dedication

For Michael, Judy and Angie

Acknowledgments

Many thanks the following people for all of the support and advice they have given me: Jessie Caryl, Travis Cross, Jon Davies, David Fargey, Melissa Harendorf, Gwen Haworth, Kristen Lambertson, Heidi Ravenel, Graham Sheard, Kathleen Wyma and the rest of my family and friends who have seen me through to the end of this journey.

Acknowledgement is also due to the Department of Art History, Visual Art and Theory as well as my advisors Bill Wood and John O'Brian for all of their help and guidance during this endeavor.

For granting me interviews in which they shared their experiences, perspectives and memories I would like to thank Lelia Amalfitano, Thomas Rhoads and Laura Trippi.

For sharing memories and impressions of her work, love, life and more with me, I am immensely grateful to Sheree Rose.

Finally, I would like to thank Bob Flanagan, a man that I never knew personally, but who has had a profound effect on my life.

This work would not have been possible without the financial support of the Fonds Québécois de la recherche sur la société et la culture.

Introduction

The story of Bob Flanagan and Sheree Rose is a romantic and dark comedy about pain, pleasure, death, life, masochism and art. The story of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) controversies and the late 1980s/early 1990s culture wars is a fiery drama in which the issue of government funding and the arts in America became a clash of opposing social agendas and concepts of morality. This work is an attempt to understand how these two stories intersect and how this intersection reflects back on either tale.

Poet, performance/installation artist, self-proclaimed “supermasochist” and life-long Cystic Fibrosis¹ sufferer, Bob Flanagan spent most of his adult life and career exploring the pains and pleasures of masochism both as a personal practice and something he shared with various and overlapping underground groups of artists and sex radicals.² His partner, collaborator and dominatrix Sheree Rose is a photographer who fell in love with a bizarre masochist. Through her encouragement, documentation and direction, Flanagan became a short-lived but dynamic art world star and cult icon. Their sometimes controversial and always playfully insightful body of art, Flanagan’s several books and innovative collection of poetry, and the hit, cult documentary film made about them by director Kirby Dick³ have carved a place for Flanagan and Rose in the histories

¹ Cystic Fibrosis (henceforth referred to as CF) is a genetically inherited disease that affects the lungs and digestion. Sufferers cannot absorb nutrients properly which results in both intense stomach pains and perpetual low body weight. Also, the lungs produce thick, excess mucus that attracts bacteria, causes infection, lung scarring and, eventually, death by suffocation. Until recently, most sufferers died in adolescence.

² I use the term sex radicals to refer to individuals who intentionally engage in sexual practices outside of the prescribed norm.

³ Sick: The Life and Death of Bob Flanagan, Supermasochist. Dir. Kirby Dick. Prods. Kirby Dick, Sheree Rose and Bob Flanagan, 1997.

of contemporary art and late 20th century cult iconography, even if they remain fairly unknown in mainstream culture.

Though their relationship, the sadomasochist (S/M)⁴ explorations and the artistic collaboration of Flanagan and Rose began in 1980 and lasted more than 15 years, more than half of that time was spent in relative obscurity. During most of the 1980s the bulk of their work came in the form of Flanagan's poetry (both performed and published) and their participation in the developing Los Angeles S/M play⁵ scene (whose genesis was partly due to their own efforts). Until the early 1990's the duo were primarily counter-culture characters whose names, though famous amongst some, rarely went beyond a particular niche of subcultural interest. Yet when Flanagan died of CF in early 1996, he was at the peak of an unforeseen professional success and fame. Artforum magazine ran an eight page farewell tribute to Flanagan,⁶ a man that had his first and only institutional, solo art exhibition – ever – barely 3 years prior. In six short years Flanagan, in collaboration with Rose, took his work from the underground S/M dungeons and small poetry circles of L.A. to the international art scene. This begs the question: what exactly occurred around this time to cause such celebrity for Flanagan and Rose? How was it that their activities suddenly garnered so much attention and moved from one plane of distribution (the local alternative art/sex scene in L.A.) to another, highly exclusive one

⁴ The terms S/M and BDSM both refer to organized sexual subcultures in which individuals engage in safe, sane and consensual sex practices that involve any/all of the following elements: bondage, discipline, dominance, submission, sadism, masochism. These may also involve or be referred to as 'kink' and incorporate such elements as exhibitionism, voyeurism and any other number of fetishes.

⁵ Play is a term used in BDSM culture to refer to the general activities engaged in by its participants. These activities are acts performed for the enjoyment of the participants and occur within specific boundaries negotiated by the players.

⁶ Dennis Cooper, "Bob's Thing," Artforum 34.8 (1996): 74-77. [&] Deborah Drier, "Rack Talk," Artforum 34.8 (1996): 78-81, 126.

(the international art scene/market)? Why was it in this exact period that Flanagan and Rose would see their work catch on and that they would be catapulted into the spotlight? Also, having received such attention, what sort of effect could the work of Flanagan and Rose have had upon the climate of the mid-1990s art world?

I will argue that a number of converging factors during this period led to the rise of Flanagan and Rose. It would seem that not the least of these were tied to the cultural controversies of the NEA debates, which directly correlated to the time frame of Flanagan and Rose's biggest successes (1989-1996). Over the course of the following pages I intend to explore these factors in an attempt to give a socio-historical grounding to the work of these two artists and to explore the ways in which the NEA controversies evolved and affected cultural production and dissemination in the United States.

The first chapter is mainly historical. Both the work and lives of the artists and the political movements around the anti-NEA campaigns and culture wars of the late 1980s and early 1990s will be discussed so as to give the reader a better understanding of the context. There will be a recounting of the series of events that comprised Flanagan and Rose's art careers and a (mostly formal) introduction to their art focusing, in particular, on a working description of the Visiting Hours installation and key performances leading up to this exhibition. The discussion of the anti-NEA campaigns will be an opportunity to discuss not just the events which occurred in the media, Congress and art institutions of the United States, but also the strategies, motivations and moralities of either side in the controversy.

In chapter two, the content of the work will be examined within the context of its controversial nature. Although the work combined disparate themes of illness/death and

sex/gender exploration, the core principle that held the work together was S/M and it is the presence of S/M that made the work so fascinating and innovative for fans and absolutely enraging for naysayers. S/M itself, as a practice and a social/psychoanalytic phenomenon, will be discussed at length. I will employ a wide methodological framework which will include social and political investigation as well as psychoanalysis in an attempt to understand the importance of Flanagan's S/M-based work within a specific cultural context. In this way I hope to avoid the pitfall of pathologization too often employed in studies of sadomasochists and artists who employ sadomasochism in their work.

Chapter three will look at how content and context were brought together by various players within this narrative. How were Flanagan, Rose and their work managed and molded, by whom and to what end? Why was it that their careers were not destroyed or severely endangered by the witch hunts of the NEA controversies like others whose work and lives were extremely similar to that of Flanagan and Rose? How was it that instead of being destroyed they shot to success? What sort of contributions were they then able to make to the art/sex world under attack?

Through these explorations my greater goal is to integrate the life and work of Flanagan and Rose into the larger socio-political and historical circumstances in which it was produced. In doing so I will be able to delve into a case study of a pocket of social space in which there was opportunity, experimentation and understanding despite (or perhaps because of) heated conflicts between opposing sets of ethics, aesthetics and lifestyles.

Chapter 1:

Perverts and Puritans

Part 1 - The Story of Bob and Rose: The Evolution of a Painfully Profound Art Practice

Bob Flanagan was born with Cystic Fibrosis, a disease that caused him pain and suffering throughout his life and eventually took that life. The torment of his medicalized childhood gave way to an adulthood in which Flanagan claimed his early impressions of pain and medical restrictions produced for him a fetishized connection between pain, bondage, desire and pleasure. Over the years Flanagan undertook a practice of intense masochistic auto-eroticism in which he developed an impressive capacity to endure pain. It is during this time that Flanagan made his first ventures into practices that would later break into his artwork and make of him an infamous cult character: genital mutilation.

At the age of 28 Flanagan became involved with Sheree Rose, a feminist photographer. Long before it became a moderately common practice in S/M circles, Flanagan and Rose entered into a 24/7 S/M partnership¹ in which Rose dominated Flanagan physically and mentally at every moment. They experimented with various forms of endurance bondage and sadomasochistic play including piercing, cutting,² asphyxiation, flogging, pain infliction, coprophilia and humiliation.

¹ A '24/7' relationship is BDSM terminology for an always on, full-time master/slave relationship (twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week). In this kind of relationship, ideally, the 'play' never stops.

² A practice in which the flesh is cut by a knife or another sharp object and blood is allowed to flow from the body.

Though the unswerving centre of his identity and inspiration was masochism, the practical origins of Flanagan's art world career find themselves in the written word. Throughout his career, even as his work became progressively more visual, the written word was always a guiding star and narrative a core element to his style. A staple within the Beyond Baroque³ alternative writers scene of Los Angeles, Flanagan had several short books of poetry published by small presses during the 1980s, among them The Wedding of Everything,⁴ Slave Sonnets⁵ and Fuck Journal.⁶ The earliest writings had either very little or very veiled references to Flanagan's masochism and the activities that Rose and he were involved in. As the decade progressed, Flanagan and Rose's S/M relationship intensified and slowly began to appear with more confidence and honesty in Flanagan's writings, as did descriptions of his declining health. In the mid to late 1980s Flanagan and Rose began bringing their sadomasochism out of their private life, beyond the written word and into public view. The couple became connected to a small but growing underground network of sex radicals in L.A. and California. In this way their alternative sexual and romantic relationship became progressively more public as they shared their activities, experiences, experiments and knowledge with others in the fledgling BDSM community. Rose embarked upon a long term photographic interest in documenting the characters and activities of this hidden world in addition to her already substantial project of documenting her own activities with her personal slave. Flanagan

³ Beyond Baroque is a grass-roots, non-profit foundation in Los Angeles. Beyond Baroque was the site of numerous readings, writing workshops and helped many writers publish their work in the form of chapbooks and zines (small circulation, independent publications).

⁴ Bob Flanagan, The Wedding of Everything (Los Angeles: Sherwood Press, 1983).

⁵ Bob Flanagan, Slave Sonnets (Los Angeles: Cold Calm Press, 1986).

⁶ Bob Flanagan, Fuck Journal (New York: Hanuman Books, 1987).

began combining spoken word performances and stand-up routines with demonstrations of autoerotic sadomasochistic acts for audiences at private S/M clubs (such as the Threshold Society and the Society of Janus) and at various Beyond Baroque events. During this time Flanagan was also performing with the improv troupe The Groundlings and a number of musical bands, namely Planet of Toys and Idiot Bliss (an improvisational noise project undertaken with Mike Kelley). It was this interesting intersection of musical/theatrical, comedic and autoerotic talents that would eventually define Flanagan's artistic aesthetic.

In 1989 RE/Search books published Modern Primitives,⁷ an exploration of new body modification trends and practices in western culture. The appearance of this book was an indication of growing interest and popularity of alternative cultural practices. A chapter in the book had been dedicated to Rose's S/M photo-project and, due to his obvious connection to this work, Flanagan was asked to perform at a series of lectures and demonstrations that had been organized to celebrate the book. Nailed was billed as a performance "not for the faint of heart" on the RE/Search handbill (Fig.1.1). Nailed, which Flanagan performed semi-anonymously as "Bob F.", took place at the Olio Theater in L.A. and the Southern Exposure Gallery in San Francisco. Both venues were small alternative art spaces that would offer Flanagan a transitional space where his demonstrations began to evolve into performances. Nailed consisted of a variety of self-mutilations performed along with storytelling and a slide show of Rose's photo-documentation of their private S/M acts. The climax of the piece came when Flanagan

⁷ Andrea Juno and V. Vale, ed. Modern Primitives (San Francisco: RE/Search Publications, 1989).

wrapped the flesh of his scrotum around his penis, sewed his penis inside of his scrotum, nailed his scrotum to a board and then suspended himself by his wrists from a scaffold.

The appearance of this type of action in a gallery was not unprecedented. There is a strong history of self-mutilating body artists to which Flanagan's work could be directly related. Chris Burden, Gina Pane, Vito Acconci and Marina Abramovic were all individuals whose work involved some form of pain, endurance, or measured destruction of the artist's body.⁸

It was the performance of Nailed at the Southern Exposure Gallery that first brought the attention of conservative Senator Jesse Helms to Flanagan and Rose (Appendix). Helms, already deeply entrenched in the battle to cut funding to the National Endowment for the Arts, was in the practice of employing researchers specialized in tracking down artists of "questionable" moral practice whose work could be used as cannon fodder in the battle he was waging in Congress. It is not coincidental that once Helms began to ask questions about the pair and bring their work to the attention of both Congress and groups such as the Christian Action Network (CAN) and the American Family Association (CAN) that Flanagan and Rose suddenly became of much greater interest to the mainstream art community. To quote Flanagan on the matter: "suddenly other people started asking us to do work and were far more interested. We were *nobodies* until he targeted us - I should send him a thank you letter."⁹

⁸ Kathy O'Dell. Contract with the Skin: Masochism, Performance Art and the 1970's (Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 1998). [&] Amelia Jones. Body Art/Performing the Subject (Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

⁹ Andrea Juno and V.Vale, Bob Flanagan: Supermasochist (San Francisco: RE/Search Publications, 2000): 63.

After Helms' first inquiries into the work of "comedian Bob F." and Rose it appears that they became a part of a growing group of artists whose work was considered obscene by Helms, CAN, the AFA and other right wing Christian politicians and activists. The work of these artists was used throughout the anti-NEA campaigns to shock and enrage the voting public and members of Congress into action against the Endowment. In perhaps the most theatrical example of this, Flanagan's and Rose's work was misconstrued and misrepresented in a renegade anti-art show curated by CAN.¹⁰

After the production of another highly successful and instantaneously notorious performance series in 1991 coyly titled Bob Flanagan's Sick, in which Flanagan screened a now infamous video of himself driving a nail through the head of his penis, the media hype around him grew. Flanagan was approached by the Santa Monica Museum of Art to write a proposal for a solo-exhibition. From this proposal came Visiting Hours, an interactive, full gallery installation that was exhibited in late 1992/early 1993 as part of the LAX (Los Angeles Exhibition) project, a city-wide biennial celebration of L.A.-based artists and performers. This project would be the largest of Flanagan and Rose's careers.

It is of note that Flanagan was advanced as the public face of Visiting Hours and Rose was billed as a "collaborator" and not a "co-artist". According to Rose, this was in line with her interests in the possibilities of reversing roles by putting the submissive forward and the male, rather than the female, on display. It could be said that, though this tactic speaks directly to gender imbalances in the role of the object of display, her step back only reiterated gendered notions of the male as the master author. This question of

¹⁰ CAN's anti-art show, and the presence of works by Flanagan and Rose in it, was recorded in the documentary film The NEA Tapes (2000) produced and directed Paul Lamarre and Melissa Wolf. Also, an account of this exhibition appears in Linda S. Kauffman's Bad Girls and Sick Boys (1998).

the master author is perhaps addressed by statements made by Rose in which Flanagan's public personae is characterized as being a conscious production of Rose's mind: "I wanted to mold him into this person and make him a star."¹¹

This exhibition was a playful and intelligent ode to the pleasures and origins of both voluntary and involuntary suffering. Described by the artist as "the culmination of all my work...focus[ing] on where Cystic Fibrosis and S/M converge,"¹² Visiting Hours was a transformation of the gallery into a twisted hospital space where the uncomfortable truths of being seriously ill and enjoyably perverse were expressed with a carnivalesque sense of humor and showmanship.

Because of his rapidly declining health and the desire to adapt his work for this new art world venue, Flanagan mostly did not perform the sort of violent masochistic acts that had previously predominated his work. Instead the installation explored Flanagan's S/M practices and his medical tribulations through video and photographic documentation, multi-media sculpture and an endurance performance that made Flanagan "genuinely available"¹³ to the public for discussion. It is perhaps because CF was having an even stronger presence in his life that Visiting Hours became an opportunity for Flanagan to embrace his twin sicknesses, S/M and CF, in order to create what he called "sadomedicine". Throughout the installation the medical met the masochistic and the viewer was invited to discover that pain, pleasure and death can be enlightening, frightening and funny.

¹¹ Sheree Rose, Personal Interview, 12 June 2005.

¹² Juno and Vale, Bob Flanagan: Supermasochist, 66.

¹³ Lelia Amalfitano, Telephone Interview, 21 April 2005.

The entrance of the space was designed to resemble a patient waiting room decorated with uncomfortable chairs, potted plants and various distractions with which waiting visitors could pass the time (Fig.1.2). Copies of Highlights, a children's magazine, were placed on the coffee and end tables for visitors to peruse. Characteristic of the entire installation's brand of double-speaking dark humor, if readers actually opened the children's magazines they would discover that the interior pages of the magazine had been replaced with S/M porn mags.

From this starting point the visitor was guided by the text of Flanagan's 1985 poem Why? which was printed as a single, unbroken snaking line along the perimeter walls of the exhibition. The words seemed to both follow and pull the viewer along, feeding them various answers to the most prominent question Flanagan was asked throughout his life and this exhibition: why do this to yourself, why masochism? Unstoppable in their drive to guide the viewer, the emotional and self-assured confessions of the origins of Flanagan's desires appealed to the audience due to their confidence, honesty, and straightforward language. It is easy to identify with many of Flanagan's experiences and emotions through the words of Why? as he calls upon commonly shared memories of cultural icons such as Houdini, Cinderella, members of the Addams Family and Jesus Christ. Attention is drawn to the various ways in which all these beloved characters speak to the embedded presence of masochism within our culture. According to Thomas Rhoads, Visiting Hours' Santa Monica Museum curator, this masochistic element was already present in the culture: "It wasn't that he [Flanagan] was so alienated from that culture, he was a representation of it... anyone who would

view those things selectively and through the prism of his illness or through some identification with S/M would see that it was part of the culture.”¹⁴

Following sections of the gallery were a series of twisted pediatric play areas full of medical objects turned into bizarre sex toys and childhood playthings recontextualized to reflect Flanagan’s specific medical troubles. A hospital gurney of nails, a butt plug medical stool and a playpen-turned- cage (Fig.1.3 & 1.4) complemented a toy-chest full of whips, dolls, crops, crucifixes, and handcuffs. A wall of 700 photographs of Flanagan’s face contorted into various expressions of pain and/or pleasure (Fig.1.5) mirrored a wall of 1400 toy building blocks engraved with images of nipple clamps, clothes pins, hammers and letters arranged to spell “SM” and “CF” over and over (Fig. 1.6 & 1.7).

On a play table with coloring books was found The Visible Man (Fig. 1.8), a clever new take on a classic children’s toy. This educational anatomy doll was refitted by Flanagan to perpetually leak fluids indicative of both orgasm and illness, forever disgusting as it performed the acts Flanagan claimed took up most of his time: “cumming and coughing.”¹⁵ The sanctity of the body and the sanctity of the artwork were both broken down by indulgence in the abjectness of illness and ecstasy. Being sick and being sexy, suddenly no longer mutually exclusive, were simultaneously revealed as both disgusting and ridiculous.

Masochism also transgressed the boundaries of the body in Video Scaffold (Fig. 1.9 & 1.10), perhaps the most challenging element of the installation. Seven monitors,

¹⁴ Thomas Rhoads, Personal Interview, 11 June 2005.

¹⁵ Sick: The Life and Death of Bob Flanagan, Supermasochist, prods. Kirby Dick, Sheree Rose and Bob Flanagan, dir. Kirby Dick, 1997.

each a stand-in for a body part (hands, feet, head, torso and crotch), hung from a bondage scaffold as if the monitors themselves had been tied up spread eagle. Each monitor played video of that body part undergoing various manipulations. In an overwhelming and constantly changing display, Flanagan was seen eating shit, urinating all over himself, piercing his skin and being tickled, tied or struck by various implements. These sometimes brutal images were looped and mixed with found footage and audio clips from mainstream movies and cartoons, such as Mutiny on the Bounty or Porky Pig, in which the characters are subjected to various tortures. Bringing together pediatrics and popular culture in order to expose what he believed were the complex roots of his own masochistic desires, Flanagan made connections with an audience who likely remembered similar images from their own mass-market influenced childhoods.

At the very center of the gallery, a separate area was constructed in which a hospital room was recreated, complete with Flanagan installed as the permanent patient, receiving visitors all day long. Visitors to the gallery involuntarily became hospital room visitors and were confronted with the artist, the patient and the masochist all at once. Flanagan reported that visitors would sit and speak to him in a steady stream all day, sometimes for hours at a time, about various topics including their own illnesses, interests in S/M or their objections to his work and/or lifestyle.¹⁶ During these conversations and according to his mistress' desires, Flanagan would be hoisted up to the ceiling of the gallery by a system of ankle cuffs, ropes and pulleys operated by an off-scene Rose. Flanagan would ascend from his hospital bed silently like "a soul departing from its

¹⁶ Linda S. Kauffman, Bad Girls and Sick Boys: Fantasies in Contemporary Art and Culture (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998): 33.

body.”¹⁷ His hospital gown would fall off and leave him suspended naked and upside down slowly turning red in the face and coughing up mucus. Eerily, it must have been like watching an enactment of Flanagan’s expected (and eventual) death scene, passing away in a hospital bed, leaving the familiar scenes of his life behind as he somehow would just drift away.

Finally, at the end of the installation, the viewer would come upon a lone coffin. Inside the coffin was a video monitor from which Flanagan’s blinking and pierced face stared out, standing in for his actual person. On the open lid the following words were carefully embroidered: “I was promised an early death, but here I am, some forty years later, still waiting.”

Throughout the exhibition the viewer was simultaneously titillated and nauseated, cringing and laughing as Flanagan made the abject body sexy, the pain of illness a pleasure and the humiliation of both masochism and dying comical. In Visiting Hours the instinct to live (manifested as a peculiar and overactive sex drive) confronted a medically mediated concept of death; Eros and Thanatos got down and dirty, and the viewer was left to wonder, “who is the Top and who is the Bottom?”¹⁸

Visiting Hours was a success at The Santa Monica Museum, receiving favourable reviews from the local media and numerous visitors. After the success of Visiting Hours Flanagan and Rose enjoyed a sudden surge in their popularity. The couple was invited to perform, speak at or contribute work to various exhibitions, conferences and events all over the United States, in Europe and Asia. At the prompting of Santa Monica Museum

¹⁷ Ralph Rugoff, “Torturing the Child Within,” L.A. Weekly 14 January 1993: 27.

¹⁸ A ‘Top’ is the person who would fall into any/all of the following categories: dominant, active, sadist. The ‘Bottom’ is the opposite: submissive, passive, masochist.

curator Rhoads, and following a proposal then written by curator Laura Trippi, Visiting Hours traveled to the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York (Fall/Winter 1994). There it was seen by Lelia Amalfitano who arranged for the show to continue on to the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston in 1995, albeit in a pared down state due to Flanagan's declining health. Within six months of this final showing, Flanagan succumbed to CF and passed away in hospital, leaving Rose behind.¹⁹

Part 2 - The Modern Crusade: The Culture Wars and the Christian Right

Bob Flanagan, Pain Journal :

June 24th, 1995

Spent the day on the computer, mostly. Put a Jeffrey Hunter Jesus head on my penis head with Photoshop. It really looks beautiful. My response to the Christian Action Network. "He is Risen".

June 27th, 1995

I'm thrilled with myself. I got an idea for another Jesus print: the photo of me lying in the bathtub with a big hard-on and the head of my dick nestled comfortably into a pile of Sheree's shit heaped onto my abdomen. I'm going to photoshop another movie Jesus head onto my penis head and call this one "Copro

¹⁹ Flanagan died January 4, 1996 at Long Beach Memorial Hospital, Long Beach, CA.

Christi"... again, I'm thrilled with myself, and that's a good thing, because a lot of people are not going to be so thrilled.²⁰

The National Endowment Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act, signed in 1965 by President Lyndon B. Johnson, states,

While no government can call a great artist or scholar into existence, it is necessary and appropriate for the federal government to help create and sustain not only a climate encouraging freedom of thought, imagination, and inquiry, but also the material conditions facilitating the release of this creative talent.²¹

And so was created the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), a public agency, accountable to Congress, with the goal of supporting and promoting the arts in America. Since its inception the Endowment has awarded more than 100,000 grants amounting to hundreds of millions of dollars to arts organizations and artists throughout the United States.²² Its presence has seriously strengthened the arts in America, witnessing and facilitating growth in all sectors including theater, dance, music and the visual arts.

For artists the NEA was a source of non-partisan funding that opened up doors to newer and larger artistic undertakings. For politicians who supported the creation of the NEA, public support of the arts was a sign that the United States had reached a level of

²⁰ Bob Flanagan, The Pain Journal (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e)/Smart Art Press, 2000): 73, 75.

²¹ NEA Office of Communications, The National Endowment for the Arts 1965 - 2000: A Brief Chronology of Federal Support for the Arts 2000, 12 Sept 2005
<<http://www.nea.gov/about/Chronology/NEAChronWeb.pdf>> : 5

²² NEA Office of Communications, The National Endowment for the Arts 1965 - 2000: A Brief Chronology of Federal Support for the Arts 2000, 12 Sept 2005
<<http://www.nea.gov/about/Chronology/NEAChronWeb.pdf>> : 5

stability and civility where it was ready and able to invest in its own cultural identity and heritage. Though not essential to the pragmatic functioning of government, the arts and humanities were framed as essential to ensure the place of American culture within the larger history of humanity. At the inaugural meeting of the NEA council Johnson stated:

Our civilization will largely survive in the works of our creation.
There is a quality in art which speaks across the gulf dividing man
from man and nation from nation, and century from century. That
quality confirms the faith that our common hopes may be more
enduring than our conflicting hostilities.... The stakes may well be
the survival of civilization.²³

In light of these words, I seriously doubt that Johnson ever imagined that the NEA would become the center of a cultural clash that would bring the borders of competing social agendas and concepts of morality in America into crisis, despite his faith in art's abilities to transcend "conflicting hostilities."

The instigators of the attacks against the NEA (and by chain effect the artists whose works were supported by NEA programs) were a number of conservative groups whose tactics, motivations and goals varied within the spectrum of anti-NEA sentiment. Most of the attacks came from conservative Christian activist organizations, high-profile televangelists such as Pat Robertson and zealous politicians, preeminently Jesse Helms. Their goals leaned more towards heavy budget cuts, content reforms and/or privatization whereas other, less extreme anti-NEA proponents²⁴ continued to support federal funding

²³ NEA Office of Communications, The National Endowment for the Arts 1965 - 2000: A Brief Chronology of Federal Support for the Arts 2000, 12 Sept 2005

<<http://www.nea.gov/about/Chronology/NEAChronWeb.pdf>> : 10.

²⁴ Examples of such arguments can be found in the writings of New Criterion (a Neoconservative monthly arts/intellectual magazine) editor Hilton Kramer.

for the arts but pressured the NEA to "return to traditional, elite and supposedly universal cultural forms".²⁵

The most powerful and devoted of the anti-NEA involved Christian activist groups were Reverend Donald Wildmon's National Federation for Decency founded in 1977 which became the American Family Association (AFA) in 1988 and Martin Mawyer's Christian Action Network (CAN), founded in 1990. Both organizations were formed under the banner of protecting and advancing the interests of the Christian Right in America and claim to stand for traditional family values. In this instance, "traditional family values" are specifically patriotic, anti-feminist, pro-life, anti-sex, pro-church and anti-homosexual conservative Christian values. These beliefs, they claim, are firmly based upon, "biblical principles, values, traditions and truths"²⁶ which they consider to be, "the infallible Word of God."²⁷ In its mission statement, CAN espouses its conviction that, "the Bible has established the principles and truths that lead a nation to peace, prosperity, freedom and unalienable rights."²⁸ Similarly, the AFA's philosophical/mission statement reads,

The American Family Association believes that God has communicated absolute truth to man through the Bible, and that all men everywhere at all times are subject to the authority of God's Word. Therefore, a culture based on Biblical truth best serves the

²⁵ Carole S. Vance, "Reagan's Revenge: Restructuring the NEA," Art in America 78.11 (1990): 53.

²⁶ Christian Action Network, About Christian Action Network 12 Sept 2005
<http://www.christianaction.org/about_can.htm>

²⁷ Christian Action Network, Christian Action Network: Mission Statement 12 Sept 2005
<http://www.christianaction.org/mission_statement.htm>

²⁸ Christian Action Network, Christian Action Network: Mission Statement 12 Sept 2005
<http://www.christianaction.org/mission_statement.htm>

well-being of our country, in accordance with the vision of our founding fathers. [my emphasis]²⁹

In this way CAN and the AFA both align themselves with an imaginary American essentialist Christian vision and claim a position of infallible authority over right and wrong.

From this ethical high-ground (or what was claimed to be a high ground) a number of campaigns were launched. Product boycotts were threatened against 7-11 convenience stores in order to stop their sale of soft-core pornographic magazines³⁰ and against the Pepsi corporation in order to have them pull their 1989 commercial featuring the taboo-breaking Madonna and the song Like a Prayer.³¹ In both instances CAN and the AFA didn't have to flex their membership's buying-power muscle (both groups have far reaching mailing networks totalling hundreds of thousands and connections with churches across the nation) because both companies caved to demands. This strong commercial boycott network was easily transformable into congressional lobbying power as either group threw the power of countless voters against their most well-entrenched foe: the National Endowment for the Arts.

The Endowment had faced threats from conservatives before. During the Reagan years there was a major push by the President to see the agency financially crippled by budget cuts, replaced with an independent agency or abolished as part of a campaign to,

²⁹ American Family Association, American Family Association: General Information: Mission Statement 12 Sept 2005 <<http://www.afa.net/mission.asp>>

³⁰ Matthew L. Wald, "'Adult' Magazines Lose Sales as 8,000 Stores Forbid Them," New York Times 16 June 1986: A1.

³¹ "Pepsi Cancels Madonna Ad," New York Times 5 Apr 1989: D21.

"privatize government functions and impose a conservative cultural agenda."³² Reagan's economic program framed federal support for the arts not as an investment in the nation's identity but as an expensive luxury that the nation could not afford. Reagan's assaults were only partially successful. The NEA had their 1982 budget cut by 19% rather than the 50% Reagan proposed.³³ Despite the fact that this was the first time in 17 years that the NEA had seen a decrease in their budget the relatively minor cut (it still constituted a \$32 million loss) was seen as both a loss and a victory for the arts community which had rallied an impressive defensive protest campaign. No other President during the anti-NEA campaigns would push the issue as hard as did Reagan and the long term influence of his initial campaign cannot be underestimated.

In April of 1989 Rev. Donald Wildmon of the AFA became aware of Andres Serrano's Piss Christ³⁴ and its inclusion in an NEA-funded touring exhibition organized by the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Outraged by what he viewed as publicly supported "bias and bigotry against Christians,"³⁵ Wildmon set in motion the second coming of intense anti-NEA sentiment within the right wing contingent of Congress, the media and the general public. By mid-May of the same year Senator Alfonse D'Amato ripped up a reproduction of Piss Christ on the Senate floor declaring, "This so-called piece of art is a deplorable, despicable

³² Vance, 49.

³³ Vance, 51.

³⁴ Piss Christ is a photograph of a crucifix immersed in the artist's urine.

³⁵ Donald Wildmon, "Letter Concerning Serrano's *Piss Christ*, April 5, 1989," Culture Wars: Documents from the Recent Controversies in the Arts ed. Richard Bolton (New York: New Press 1992): 27.

display of vulgarity.”³⁶ Jesse Helms, on the same day, called Serrano a “jerk” in Congress.³⁷

The media and public response to these theatrical outbursts and to letters written by Wilmon and Mawyer sent to hundreds of thousands of CAN and AFA members (which included over 100,000 church communities) was overwhelming. It was not long before dozens of examples of ‘obscene’ art were dug up by anti-NEA campaigners (amongst these examples were works by both Flanagan and Sheree Rose) attempting to make a case against the Endowment. An editorial war began in which left and right wingers attacked each other in an attempt either to defend³⁸ or condemn³⁹ both the NEA and the artists. On the grassroots level letters were written, petitions were circulated and protests organized.⁴⁰ Their goals were to push for content restrictions to be put in place for all grants, funding to be cut and, most radically, for the dissolution of the Endowment.

Their rationale was that the NEA had used their federal budget irresponsibly by funding art that went against the values and beliefs of tax-paying Americans from whom the NEA budget came. Declarations were made that tax payers would no longer bankroll an institution that supported art which promoted left-wing causes, was anti-religious

³⁶ Cong. Rec., 18 May 1989: s5594.

³⁷ Cong. Rec., 18 May 1989: s5595.

³⁸ For example: Carole S. Vance, “The War on Culture,” Art in America 77.9 (1989). [&] Steve Durland, “Censorship, Multiculturalism, and Symbols,” High Performance 12.3 (1989).

³⁹ For example: Frederick Hart, “Contemporary Art is Perverted Art” Washington Post 22 Aug 1989 [&] Jesse Helms, “It’s the Job of Congress to Define What’s Art,” USA Today 8 Sept 1989. [&] David Gergen, “Who Should Pay for Porn?” U.S. News and World Report 30 July 1990.

⁴⁰ See documents by Rev. Donald Wildmon (27, 71-72), Jesse Helms (100-101) and Pat Robertson (123) in: Richard Bolton, ed. Culture Wars: Documents from the Recent Controversies in the Arts (New York: New Press, 1992).

(specifically anti-Christian), sexually explicit or encouraged perversion (namely homosexuality and sadomasochistic practice). Essentially, by using the argument of abuse of taxes rather than directly attacking the artwork, activists and politicians found a roundabout way of pushing for content restrictions. Through threats of funding blackouts for artists engaged in making objectionable art, censorship of expression could be effected through coercion rather than outright ban. By relocating the debate as an issue of the ethics of funding rather than free speech, obscenity and censorship could be debated in the media and won by means of mob frenzy rather than tried in the courts where Christian activist groups, high profile preachers and right-wing politicians could exert little to no strong-arm power. If the NEA refused to impose content restrictions on art by reason of First Amendment rights of the artists then, argued the protesters, perhaps it was not the government's business to be patrons of the arts.⁴¹

These tactics continued for years, intensifying as the 1990's progressed. Beginning in 1995 and continuing until 1997, CAN organized a series of what could be called "degenerate art shows" that traveled across the country but targeted the nation's capitol in particular. One must wonder how conscious CAN was of the 1937 degenerate art shows in Nazi Germany⁴² when, in its own bizarre carnival of media manipulation, CAN displayed, amongst many others, poor reproductions of Serrano's Piss Christ,

⁴¹ Republican Senator Slade Gorton: "The state must confine itself to its own interests, and art must be free. Neither subsidy nor censure are appropriate, for the state, with its unrivaled power, must not take sides in purely symbolic disputes." quoted from: Richard Bolton, "Introduction," Culture Wars: Documents from the Recent Controversies in the Arts Ed. Richard Bolton (New York: New Press, 1992): 5.

⁴² The Entartete Kunst exhibition took place first in Munich in 1937 and then traveled to 11 other cities in Germany and Austria. During this exhibition, works which had been confiscated by the Nazis as "degenerate" art were put on display as a sign of the party's official condemnation of modern art.

Robert Mapplethorpe's X Portfolio, Joel Peter Witkin's The Kiss and images of Flanagan's performances to predictably scandalized Republican congressmen. Of course, the show violated the moral rights of all the aforementioned artists, but CAN was not phased by such minor infractions. Martin Mawyer called the works cited, "some of the most disturbingly twisted and anti-religious 'art' ever known to mankind,"⁴³ and venomously defended the campaign not as censorship but as a call for responsible government spending that reflected the ethics and morals of taxpaying Americans.

As with the last time the NEA faced attack from the right, counter-protests were mounted from the left. Artists, art professionals, celebrities and liberals rallied to the cause. As during the Reagan years they pointed to the importance of federal support for the arts. Conservatives attempted to define the issue as one of government sponsorship scandal. Liberals framed the crusade as an attack on the First Amendment rights of artists and as a censorship issue. Still liberals, artists and the NEA were losing ground fast as public emotions were riled up into rage by claims that artists were producing filth and getting rich off of it, all on the taxpayer's tab.

NEA supporters such as Hugh Southern, a former deputy chairman for programs at the NEA, attempted to point out the ways in which the conservative campaign tactics and arguments were ripe with "disregard for the truth, habitual exaggeration, deliberate misunderstanding, and blatant distortion."⁴⁴ Invocation of "traditional American values" called on an imaginary American tradition that excluded large portions of the melting pot population. The ethics and values of the artists and their supporters (also American tax

⁴³ The NEA Tapes, prod., dir. Paul Lamarre and Melissa Wolf, 2000.

⁴⁴ Hugh Southern, "Counterpoint: The National Endowment for the Arts: Fostering America's Artistic Enterprise," The Journal of Arts Management and Law 21.1 (1991): 57

payers) were never invoked. There was never any mention of non-controversial projects funded by the NEA or any representation of the scope and variety of projects the Endowment supported. Artists were characterized as lazy, greedy imposters who made of themselves an elite class superior to the average working American whose money they grew fat off of.⁴⁵ This constructed conservatives as working class allies despite the fact that "conservative activists and officials have consistently opposed government programs that would benefit the typical worker."⁴⁶ Considering consistent conservative opposition to minimum wage raises, welfare programs, public health care, education and job training, this concern for the interests of the working class' pocket book seemed like "a convenient strategy to tap popular resentment of wealth and privilege, while directing this resentment toward an entirely different agenda."⁴⁷ Allegations relied on fuzzy details which were never confirmed through any sort of hard evidence, effectively turning falsehoods and rumours into central issues of concern.

Still, the heart of the dispute was the art. Wildmon, Mawyer, Helms and others habitually misrepresented the artworks, reducing complex works to de-contextualized sound bites that contained only the most shocking or difficult details. Many in the arts community believed that the best defense was education, filling in the contextual gaps left out by right-wingers, explaining the value of problematic works and affirming, "its value and its place in the spectrum of artistic activity to which government support

⁴⁵ American Family Association, "Press Release on the NEA, 25 July 1989," Culture Wars: Documents from the Recent Controversies in the Arts ed. Richard Bolton (New York: New Press, 1992): 71-72.

⁴⁶ Richard Bolton, "Introduction," Culture Wars: Documents from the Recent Controversies in the Arts ed. Richard Bolton (New York: New Press, 1992): 11

⁴⁷ Bolton, 11.

should be given.”⁴⁸ Often, the works used to invoke outrage were never directly funded by the NEA; rather they merely received monies filtered down through a chain of private funding agencies, were exhibited by institutions which received NEA grant money or were never connected to NEA monies at all. The attacks were carefully worded double-speak, despite being filled with omissions and inflammatory exaggerations, they were effective at eliciting negative public reaction and causing negative public controversy. This had not been the case during the Reagan attacks.

What was this difference in public response that made the 1989-1996 attacks so much more effective than those waged in the early 1980s? The Reagan administration’s cost-cutting rationale could not capture the interest and imagination of the voting public and earlier frontal attacks on the content of art could not overcome free speech arguments and art world opposition. In the later attacks the public was swept up in the drama of the conflict, the old-hat issue of free speech was overshadowed and defenders of the arts were either drowned out or cowed. According to Carole S. Vance, the difference between these two attempts at the same prize, “lies in the power of what are often called sex panics” which “paralyze moderate and liberal opposition, whether in the political sector or the art world.”⁴⁹ By calling upon fears associated with diverse sexual practices (fears that are connected to the premise that sex is polluting, sinful and dangerous, fears already at frenzy levels due to continuing HIV/AIDS hysteria), conservatives and fundamentalists infused their campaign with the thing whose lack had resulted in their earlier failure: blind emotional response of the public. It is important to note that not all the artworks that were found objectionable (nor was the entire campaign) based on sexual content

⁴⁸ Southern, 63.

⁴⁹ Vance, 49.

disputes. Many of the controversies were based on objections to religious, racial, national or left-wing political positions represented by the artists. And though the anti-NEA campaigns were just as much about issues of race, religion and conservative patriotism as they were about puritanism, as a political maneuver, the NEA sex panic intensified and accelerated the debate like nothing else, allowing for the bypassing of almost any counter argument that was not as emotionally inflammatory.

It was in the wake of these sex panics that NEA supporters who had successfully fended off Reagan's attacks were now "cowed, terrorized and all too ready to compromise."⁵⁰ When stuck in the middle of a public panic, politicians are trapped in a position where logic seldom turns the tides. Spin-doctored public opinion has always been crucial to political victory. As Senator Patrick Leahy bluntly stated in the Senate, a vote for continued NEA support would undoubtedly result in smear campaigns by conservatives back home in their constituencies. Imagining the sound-bite political commercial NEA supporters were bound to have aimed at them Leahy predicted these words:

Senator So-and-So voted for pornography tonight. Senator So-and-So wants to waste taxpayers' dollars so that you do not have enough money to buy your home. He wants that money to go to producing pornographic pictures of children, or people performing....unnatural sex acts.⁵¹

The facts, context and details of the work of artists interested in sex and alternative sexual practices ("unnatural sex acts") was never fully discussed either in

⁵⁰ Vance, 49.

⁵¹ James Cooper, "After the NEA Firestorm, What Happens Then?" New York City Tribune 27 June 1989.

Congress or in wide-reaching public forums. Rather the idea of these works and their content was left hanging in the atmosphere as a foreboding threat against the American public, doing its work to bring down the NEA and restrict the activities of the art world by proxy. In the anti-censorship camp there was worry that if the NEA lost funding and/or began to impose content restrictions (and private funding institutions would potentially follow suit) artists might soon feel a need to self-censor their work in order to survive financially. Though this "economic censorship"⁵² may not be as blatant as other kinds it is important to recognize that "censorship is not only the repression of an utterance; it is an attempt to impose order by limiting social experience."⁵³

This begs the question, why is sex, and especially sex radicalism, one such social experience that many wished to limit? Why is radical sex so threatening? Where does the need for fear and loathing of liberated sex practices, such as S/M in the case of Flanagan and Rose, come from? Why does sex radicalism need to be eradicated by a conservative agenda?

⁵² Bolton, 8.

⁵³ Bolton, 24.

Chapter 2 :

BECAUSE YOU ALWAYS HURT THE ONE YOU LOVE

Part 1 – S/M: Introduction to a sexual practice of resistance

...because it's in my nature; because it's against nature; because it's nasty; because it's fun; because it flies in the face of all that's normal (whatever that is); because I'm not normal;...¹

Despite attempts to project a uniform (and predominantly negative) meaning onto S/M activities, there is no single model of masochism. Rather masochism is a broad spectrum of interests and practices that are linked by their common desires for a certain mode of sexual pleasure that is connected to pain and/or punishment. Due to the incredibly negative social anxiety which surrounds any intersection of sex and (what is perceived as) violence, BDSM is often confused with criminal acts of pedophilia, rape and assault -all acts which involve non-consensual force antithetical to the very core principles of BDSM practice.² Because of this practitioners have understandably clung to their anonymity as a means of protection from prosecution. The practices of BDSM have therefore always, despite their longstanding presence in western culture, been relegated to the most secretive and inaccessible of underground social circles. It is of paramount importance to this discussion that an

¹ Bob Flanagan, "Why?" Bob Flanagan: Supermasochist (San Francisco: RE/Search Publications, 2000): 64.

² The universal motto of BDSM communities is "safe, sane and consensual". This sets their practice apart from acts of actual violence (hurtful acts committed against unwilling victims).

understanding be reached that these communities, despite the social disgust they garner, be recognized as not criminally violent.

Masochism and its partner categories of kink (sadism, domination, bondage, etc.), though having become more socially acceptable in the last decade, remain highly misunderstood even in situations where they are tolerated (and it must be noted that they are very often not tolerated in mainstream society at all). Though the question "why?" is a valid one and continues to be asked and answered in various ways by various people, to stop there is to limit masochism's significance as mere pathology and refuse to see that, as a social practice, masochism has far reaching meanings and effects. Therefore, the following will be an attempt to integrate the psychoanalytic discussions of these behaviors with an investigation of the social and cultural meanings and socio-political possibilities that are produced by these lifestyles and the communities that form around them.

Until very recently most institutional thought and discourse on the topic of masochism categorized it as perversion. This is not surprising considering the investments of the psychoanalytic and mental health industries have within maintaining sadism and masochism as perversions and therefore treatable illnesses. Perversion is often simply defined as "aberrant" or "wrong," which solidly places it within a restrictive binary so that perversion can only have meaning in relation to a single, static normality -i.e. heterosexual "vanilla" sex. Yet there is a possibility for a restructuring of the concept of perversion. This involves an essential shift in the way that perversion is viewed: mainly perversion must be severed from moral hierarchies of "right" and "wrong" (socially acceptable or non-acceptable). Without these value judgments perversion breaks away from binarism and can be re-visioned as change, alteration or difference from the norm rather than the depraved flip-

side of virtue. As alterations from the norm we can look at the ways in which these differences (perversions) say something about the society that produces them.

The exercise of “perverted” sexual acts, “strips sexuality of all functionality, whether biological or social; in an even more extreme fashion than ‘normal’ sexuality, it puts the body and the world of objects to uses that have nothing whatever to do with any kind of ‘immanent’ design of purpose.”³ Under these circumstances perversion(s) challenge the repressive order of sexuality as it remains tied to procreation (and therefore heterosexual, genital, penetrative sex). This would imply a rethinking of sex itself and an opening up to possibilities of various modes of sexual interaction/gratification in which expression or experiences of pleasure and desire are made various, mobile and intrinsically queer. Sadomasochistic practice would be part of this revisioned sexual landscape.

Sadomasochism, as a practice and preference, is an expression of pleasure and desire in which the fetishization of power and pain are fundamental. As a socially-produced perversion, how does the convergence of pain with pleasure and sex with power speak to the experience of pain/pleasure and the exercise of power themselves? Of particular interest is the question of masochism in which it is the experience of suffering and powerlessness (two ordeals generally avoided rather than sought out) that excites the subject.

Michel Foucault offers interesting insights into these questions considering that a paramount characteristic of his work was that it, “described the way in which different instances and stages in the transmission of power were caught up in the very pleasure of their

³ Kaja Silverman, “Masochism and Male Subjectivity,” Male Trouble ed. Constance Penley and Sharon Willis. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1993): 35.

exercise”⁴ and therefore speaks to the fundamental connections between sex and power.

Foucault established that sex and power were closely connected in ways that were not simple planar crossovers but in ways that he very visually described as, “spirals in which pleasure and power reinforced one another.”⁵ In these spirals, sadomasochism -here referred to as a psychological/emotional/social function rather than a practice- emerges as the means by which the unpleasant products of power, such as repression, can be converted to pleasure and therefore found not only to be enduring but also to be desirable. As Suzanne Gearheart explains,

Power implies the existence of inequality, subordination, humiliation, or pain, and it is primarily the concept of sado-masochism that can account for the conversion of such an experience of displeasure, whether it is inflicted on others or on the self, into a source of pleasure.⁶

Masochism therefore is revealed to be a potential mechanism for survival for the objects of the exercise of power or even a means by which the oppressed may “cheat the oppressor” by deriving “surreptitious pleasure from mistreatment or tokens of authority”.⁷ It must be pointed out that, conversely, it can also be the means by which the oppressor relentlessly continues to keep the oppressed beneath them. In either situation sexual sadomasochistic practice stands as a means by which these functions are made into spectacle

⁴ Michel Foucault, Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977 ed., trans. Colin Gordon (New York : Pantheon Books, 1980): 186.

⁵ Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Vol 1, An Introduction trans. Robert Hurley. (New York: Vintage, 1990): 47.

⁶ Suzanne Gearheart, “Foucault's response to Freud: Sado-Masochism and the Aestheticization of Power,” Style 29.3 (1995): 391.

⁷ Patrick Califia, Speaking Sex to Power: The Politics of Queer Sex (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 2001): 390.

and the erotic pleasure of power revealed (whether that pleasure is derived sadistically or masochistically).

The sadomasochistic pleasures harvested from power are seldom acknowledged within society and are perhaps easily ignored since, despite their potential to disrupt, they also offer the means by which the business of repression and (forced) social cohesion proceeds as usual. A revealing of the desire for powerlessness creates discomfort for the very people who perform this desire because admitting to pleasure would be to admit complicity in their own oppression. The same is true for those in control, their power is only made vulnerable through the self-awareness of the masses and therefore consensual ignorance of the people must be produced in order to achieve stability. The mechanisms of control function most smoothly and comfortably for all concerned if they remain invisible. On this topic Leo Bersani writes,

S/M makes explicit the erotic satisfactions sustaining social structures of dominance and submission. Societies defined by those structures both disguise and reroute the satisfaction, but their superficially self-preservative subterfuges can hardly liberate them from the aegis of the death drive. S/M lifts a social repression in laying bare the reality behind subterfuges, but in its open embrace of the structures themselves and its undisguised appetite for the ecstasy they promise, it is fully complicit with a culture of death.⁸

Bersani's employment of Freud's concept of the 'death drive' is here used as a way of engaging with the instance when the ability to endure powerlessness (and all the accouterments of powerlessness) evolves from a masochistic psychological / emotional

⁸ Leo Bersani, Homos (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995): 97.

function (present in us all to some degree) into a practice. This is the transfer from the enduring of oppression to the active seeking of one's own subjugation and suffering. The will to power is here reversed as the will to powerlessness. It is this pleasure from pain, humiliation and oppression/repression where the radical implications and potentials of masochism begin to reveal themselves and here we return to speaking of masochism primarily as a practice.

Bersani locates the primary site of the experience of power in the individual's body and therefore positions it as the most effective venue for the forfeit of control and the pursuit of powerlessness.

The very aping in S/M of the dominant culture's reduction of power to polarized relations of dominance and submission can have the unexpected - and politically salutary - consequence of enacting the appeal of renunciation. The most radical function of S/M is not primarily in its exposing the hypocritically denied centrality of erotically stimulating power plays in 'normal' society; it lies rather in the shocking revelation that, for the sake of that stimulation, human beings may be willing to give up control over their environment.⁹

This pursuit of loss of control would have, as its final destination, the achievement of a "radical disintegration and humiliation of the self".¹⁰ This self-annihilation, which Bersani posits as central to the fulfilling of masochistic sexual desire, releases the individual from the constraints and responsibilities of self-preservation into the ecstasy of non-existence, even if for merely the moment of climax. In this way we can say that the masochistic orgasm is the

⁹ Bersani, *Homos*, 95.

¹⁰ Leo Bersani, "Is the Rectum a Grave?," *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism*, eds Leo Bersani and Douglas Crimp (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988): 217.

jouissance of temporary identity suicide (dissolution or destruction). Politically this destruction of the self, "makes the subject unfindable as an object of discipline".¹¹ In other words, giving in to the pleasures of power can lead to momentary escape from it.

In a final twist of irony and interest, it is by consenting to masochistic self-dissolution that the individual who has been, up to this point, the object of power/discipline, can become an agent of power. Here lies the crux of an argument towards the permeability of the boundaries that separate slave and master, top and bottom, sadist and masochist, and the mobility of the subject: masochistic self-annihilation is both an escape from and a seizing of power.

Taking a moment to summarize this discussion up to this point, I have basically posited S/M as a psychological/emotional function and a social practice that undermines authority by firstly laying bare the processes of power, secondly by serving as a mechanism of survival for the objects upon which power is exerted, thirdly by offering an escape from/reclamation of power through self-annihilation and lastly by demonstrating the permeability of the boundaries between power and powerlessness, revealing a mobility that is safer kept under wraps. Though Bersani would have the most important of these functions be that of self-annihilation, in the following paragraphs I would like to offer what I believe to be the most radical avenues of the social practice of S/M, avenues that create a space for S/M practicing individuals to stage actions of resistance and counter-cultural creation.

Before continuing I must accentuate the fact that as of now I will be talking almost exclusively of S/M as a sexual practice rather than a psycho-emotional function. Specifically S/M is an organized subculture that partakes in the following exercises consciously and

¹¹ Bersani, *Homos*, 99.

willingly, even if the following results are not the primary output of these actions. Perhaps it is because these avenues are self-conscious products of sadomasochistic practice that they are the most radical or resistant of all S/M's consequences.

In this discussion of S/M we are specifically dealing with an highly organized theater of signs in which the everyday is appropriated and played out, not according to the laws of "nature" or society but according to the desires and pleasure of the actors. In this theater, "S/M reverses and transforms the social meanings that it borrows."¹² In a world where "reality" is read in a singular, normative direction, S/M "plays the world backward"¹³ and (through ritual, artifice, imagination and context) temporarily re-writes everyday culture. This is illustrated in various ways by the plethora of fetishes which populate the world of BDSM sexual play: whips, chains, uniforms, gender, race, age, weight, domesticity, feces, urine, hair and food (amongst many other things) are each revisioned in various ways to the service of sexual pleasure. Once removed from the boundaries of the fantasy each returns to their previous positions within the world. And so we have a situation in which one thing becomes something else, "master to slave, adult to baby, power to submission, man to woman, pain to pleasure, human to animal and back again."¹⁴ Through its own invention of meaning S/M reveals that all meaning is invented, all social order is unnatural. Consequently S/M, often criticized as "against nature", is revealed as merely another inventor of nature and that nature itself is imaginary. Social order is therefore sanctioned not by predestination but

¹² Anne McClintock, Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Context (London: Routledge, 1995): 143.

¹³ McClintock, 143.

¹⁴ McClintock, 143.

“by artifice and convention and thus radically open to historical change;”¹⁵ it all just depends on who is in a position to effect said change.

Bersani disputes the value of such temporary transitions, pointing out that just because these theatrics offer the opportunity to play privilege backwards, “this doesn’t mean that privilege is contested.”¹⁶ Though Bersani would warn against confusing such *perversions* with *subversions*,¹⁷ I would argue that these perversions are subversive for the people who enact them and that this politicization of the personal/sexual has value (both for those involved and those outside of the scene). Despite the fact that these actions never leave the ‘stage’ upon which they are performed, their mere performance that makes them significant and of interest. A pocket of resistance, despite its boundaries, is still a radical creation with larger implications.

Within the re-written spaces of S/M, practitioners of this pleasurable artifice are granted “temporary control over social risk.”¹⁸ Anne McClintock explains, “by scripting and controlling the frame of representation, in other words, the control frame... the player stages the delirious loss of control within a situation of extreme control.”¹⁹ Through reinvention, a situation of risk, anxiety or trauma can be enjoyed as a situation of comfort, excitement and even healing. Patrick Califia, an S/M theorist, activist and openly queer sadist, explains the same function through practical experiences when he writes, “we eroticize fag-bashing, arrest, rape and other scary stories and invest them with the happy ending of our own

¹⁵ McClintock, 144.

¹⁶ Bersani, *Homos*, 86.

¹⁷ Bersani, “Is the Rectum a Grave?,” 208

¹⁸ McClintock, 147.

¹⁹ McClintock, 147.

orgasms, thus drawing the sting from them.”²⁰ In this way the loser becomes symbolically triumphant and the trauma of oppression can be acknowledged and reframed, empowering the disempowered.

The diversification of meaning and the mobility of these multiplied significations comes to form an “economy of conversion”²¹ that I feel directly relates to the new economy of pleasures that Foucault spoke of. For it is in S/M’s economy of conversion that the various understandings and experiences of sex, pleasure, power, pain, humiliation etc. can be destroyed, altered, exchanged, recreated, reversed, released and reborn. It is this transformative power that I am most concerned with for it grants those who wield it power (even if only within certain boundaries) over the most precious commodity in culture: meaning. Here lies S/M’s truest strength and potential for resistance.

It is at this juncture that we return to the world of Bob Flanagan and Sheree Rose, individuals who themselves created their own theater of signs, their own control frame, in which meanings were transformed to the service of their own pleasure and triumph. In their art meanings were definitely cycled through the economy of conversion that they created with their own S/M practice. In this particular economy the most significant and challenging transformations were those of illness, death and gender/sex, which will be discussed, each in their turn, in the following three sections of this chapter.

²⁰ Califia, Speaking Sex to Power: The Politics of Queer Sex, 391.

²¹ McClintock, 143.

Part 2 - Illness Transformed

...because I'm sick; because there was so much sickness; because I say FUCK THE SICKNESS...²²

As an enemy of survival and an agent of suffering, illness has forever been an unwelcome yet generally unavoidable presence in life. Modern western society, through the pervasive spread of the medical industry, has rather successfully effected the segregation of sickness to the halls of clinics and hospitals. The medicalization of our bodies, our health and our illness has resulted in a severing of our bodies/health from our subjectivity. Medicine sees not the person, but the disease and, consequently, the ill person in our society, as Donna Haraway suggests, becomes merely a host for the sickness that they carry.²³ Although this may facilitate the process of treatment by granting medical professionals the luxury (illusion?) of objectivity, it "doesn't go very far toward honoring the experience of the thinking, conscious subject. Or give that subject, perhaps the ultimate 'other,' much to work with if he or she wants to speak for or represent him- or herself."²⁴

Flanagan, as one such silenced host of illness, used his art to reclaim his subjectivity. In Visiting Hours Flanagan created a infantile, medicalized world (what he called a "medical exploratorium") from where he illustrated the original processes and experiences from which he believed his masochism emerged. His masochism, represented as the sister sickness to his CF, becomes the lens through which we envision Flanagan's long life of endurance.

²² Flanagan, Why?, 64.

²³ Donna Haraway, Simians, Cyborgs & Women: The Reinvention of Nature (New York: Routledge, 1991): 213.

²⁴ Deborah Drier, "Rack Talk," Artforum 34.8 (April, 1996): 78.

Flanagan's motto, "fighting sickness with sickness"²⁵ reveals how he not only combated that which was killing him but also transformed it and the signs it had written upon his body into something more positive and enduring, something that kept him alive. In bringing together his disease and his perversion he came to represent himself as more than either of these elements. So as "illness concretizes the body, forcing the subject to become hyper-aware of her/his body in pain,"²⁶ so Flanagan's masochism allows him instead to feel his body in pleasurable pain.

And so Flanagan makes of himself the Supermasochist (Fig 2.1), an absurd hero whose powers include a spectacular threshold for pain and whose secret weapon is his oxygen mask. Flanagan explained his adoption of the superhero persona:

There are a lot of things I can't compete with or do as a normal person, but in this area I'm a superman: I can nail my dick to a board and can endure long periods of bondage. I can't do sports and a lot of other things, so I'm not able to do what a lot of people do, but I have this area where I can soar and definitely excel.²⁷

In the image of the Supermasochist, which became the greatest icon of Flanagan's public identity, the accouterments of his power are exactly those that indicate to us his disability, and conversely, those signs of illness are reconstructed: hospital gown becomes hero's cape and oxygen mask turns into the protector of the Supermasochist's secret identity. A disabled body in drag, this image, "works to de- and re-construct his [Flanagan's] shattered body

²⁵ Juno and Vale, Bob Flanagan: Supermasochist, 3.

²⁶ Amelia Jones, "Dis/Playing the Phallus: Male Artists Perform their Masculinities," Art History 17.4 (1994): 573.

²⁷ Juno and Vale, Bob Flanagan: Supermasochist, 76.

exhibitionistically,”²⁸ reaffirming his personhood and his abilities. Instead of envisioning the sick person as weak, the sick person makes his vulnerabilities strengths and is represented as powerful, as one whose survival takes more effort than any human born in good health.

As someone whose entire life was spent in and out of clinics and hospitals, Flanagan’s associations with the paraphernalia of the medical world were ripe fodder for both his wicked humor and super masochism. By encountering the altered medical paraphernalia strewn throughout the installation (described in chapter 1, page 12), the painful regimes of medicine and the process of “getting better” are revealed as incredibly painful, arduous and humiliating experiences. Yet these alterations accentuate these characteristics of the medical items in a specifically erotic fashion. In this way items associated with medical humiliation (the making of an individual’s body into so much abject meat) are converted to items of both sexual and comic joy.

Through these works which fuse medicine with sadomasochistic practice, Flanagan “forces us to speculate about the unthinkable: the sexuality of diseased bodies.”²⁹ Fear of contagion and disgust with the hyper-abject body often negates our ability to see the ill body as a sexy body. Especially during this period of continued pandemic and panic in relation to HIV and AIDS, “the notion that those afflicted go on feeling sexual, or having sex, or being desirable to others”³⁰ was taboo. Yet Flanagan assures us that, despite his poor health, he’s getting all the sex and sexual pleasure his sickly body desires.

²⁸ Jones, 574.

²⁹ Linda S. Kauffman, *Bad Girls and Sick Boys: Fantasies in Contemporary Art and Culture* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998): 31.

³⁰ Kauffman, 33.

Part 3 - Death Transformed

...because I felt like I was going to die; because it makes me feel invincible; because it makes me feel triumphant...³¹

Death has become an extremely abstract notion for people in western culture. Just as the medical industry has severed contact between the sick and the healthy, so too have the processes of dying and the rituals of death been extracted, managed, sanitized, and resold to us as a softer, more palatable experience. The deaths of our elderly and our ill now rarely occur in the homes of their family or friends, but in specified locations of death (clinics and hospitals). The rituals of body disposal (burial or cremation) are wholly handled by professionals who are paid to relieve us of any contact with the unpleasantness and hardships of death. Encounters with our own immanent deaths are therefore mostly distant until we finally do experience the, now surreal, "end." As Linda S. Kauffman states, "death, not sex, is the last mystique and doctors seldom pull back the curtain and give us a peek."³²

In Flanagan's world, which Visiting Hours presumably gave us some access to, death is a long overdue caller. The idea of death had been a near constant companion for Flanagan. As viewers lean in to the open casket of Video Coffin to watch Flanagan on the an upward-facing video monitor they are suddenly confronted with their own faces in the monitor, care of a hidden camera. In this way Flanagan reverses the roles and invites the viewer to wait for death with him and, in so doing, we too must confront our own ticking clock.

³¹ Flanagan, Why?, 65.

³² Kauffman, 35.

Through enacting the metaphors of death, such as the ascension of the soul from the body (described in Chapter 1, page 13), Flanagan assures himself and the audience that he is still alive, despite his proximity to that which few of us -if any- understand. In this way he is triumphant, even if just for a moment. And though his ascension romanticizes the process of death, his enduring suspension in which he remains motionless yet growing redder, reminds us of the simplicity, staleness and perhaps even boredom that might be that which finally awaits us.

Part 4 - Gender / Sex Transformed

...because I learned to take my medicine; because I was a big boy for taking it; because I can take it like a man; because, as someone once said, he's got more balls than I do...³³

Masochism (and by extension sadism) are highly gendered sexual practices. In his writings on sadomasochism Sigmund Freud contended that female masochism was more natural than male masochism and that male sadism was almost natural stating that "the sexuality of most male human beings contains an element of aggressiveness - a desire to subjugate."³⁴ Because sadism and masochism fetishize (and therefore recreate, to a large extent) power divisions, the medical and psychoanalytical establishment's mapping of normative gender roles onto sadomasochism - the submissive mirroring the female and the dominant mirroring the male - is sexist but not surprising. It harkens back to simplistic

³³ Flanagan, Why?, 65.

³⁴ Sigmund Freud, "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality," The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works ed. James Strachey. (London: Hogarth Press, 1953): vol. 7, 149.

patriarchal hierarchies in which the male is the top and the female the bottom. Yet it is this matching of sadism with the masculine and masochism with the feminine that makes the male masochist, for example Flanagan, so deviant.

[Masochism] is an accepted - indeed, a requisite - element of 'normal' female subjectivity, providing a crucial mechanism for eroticising lack and subordination. The male subject, on the contrary, cannot avow feminine masochism without calling into question his identification with the masculine position. All of this is another way of suggesting that what is acceptable for the female subject is pathological for the male.³⁵

Whereas female masochism is described as being an exaggeration of nature, a stretching of feminine subjectivity, male masochism is a complete abandonment of the self and a "passing over into the enemy terrain of femininity".³⁶ The stereotype of the male masochist is the picture of the anti-masculine: weak, submissive, beaten, servile, sexually passive.

When it enters official medical and psychoanalytic discourses, male masochism is often made distinct from female masochism through yet another iteration of sexist divisionism. Because, in these discourses, female masochism is merely exaggeration, it is typified by desires for submission. Male masochism, because it is a reversal and refusal of "correct" male subjectivity, is typified by aggression that drives the male masochist towards self-destruction. As already established, I agree that masochism can comprise a strong desire for the annihilation of the self, but this desire can be present whether the masochist is male or female. Though I feel strongly that these gendered distinctions reflect stereotypes more than

³⁵ Silverman, 37.

³⁶ Silverman, 38.

they reflect any kind of reality, I wish to continue to develop this theme of the male masochist and the self-destructive impulse in order to illustrate how male self-annihilation plays into and against broader notions of masculinity.

In the fall of 1989 Flanagan twice performed a piece entitled Nailed, which was described in the introduction to this paper. The two acts performed during this piece that are central to this discussion are the sewing up Flanagan's penis inside of his scrotum and the nailing of his scrotum to a piece of wood (Fig. 2.2). These acts were repeated for the video camera in a later work entitled Video Scaffold, which was completed and exhibited as a part of the Visiting Hours installation. Also included amongst the hours of videotaped self-torture presented in the video scaffold was the act that would make Flanagan internationally infamous; he nailed the head of his penis to a plank and then removed the nail, filling the camera screen with blood.

Sewn up like a wound, it could be claimed that the folding of his penis inside his scrotum is an act of transformation from penis to vagina. Although I acknowledge this as one possibility, I would like to forward the notion that this is not an attempt to replace the penis but to remove it. Flanagan has stated that Nailed was an act of castration since one would "look down and see nothing there."³⁷ For Flanagan this was an extremely erotic act stating, "castration is the ultimate extreme of everything I do or fantasize about,"³⁸ adding that the enacting of the castration fantasy was a part of his exploration of, "gender demolition."³⁹

The metaphorical removal of the penis (the sewing) or the wounding of it (the nailing) are both ways of violently striking out against the monolithic position of the

³⁷ Juno and Vale, Bob Flanagan: Supermasochist, 63.

³⁸ Juno and Vale, Bob Flanagan: Supermasochist, 63.

³⁹ Juno and Vale, Bob Flanagan: Supermasochist, 63.

penis/phallus and all that it/they represent in contemporary western culture (patriarchy, masculinity, the centrality of genital pleasures). This nailing of himself to a board draws forth images of crucifixion and self-sacrifice, the death of God. According to Linda S. Kauffman, Flanagan's attack upon his own genitals, "confront[s] the audience with their own psychic investments in the penis (the piece of meat) and phallus (the symbolic privileges masculinity confers)."⁴⁰ By transforming the genitals from source of pleasure and site of worship to source of pain and site of destruction, Flanagan strikes out at the central object of gender assignment and attempts to "expose the processes of gender construction, particularly its weird ridiculousness."⁴¹

Yet Flanagan's acts do not completely refuse the gender stereotypes of masculinity. Rather he plays with those stereotypes and exaggerates them as farce. Flanagan transforms the act of hurting oneself into a heroic feat of endurance and sacrifice, and the act of simply living into the incredible feat of survival against all odds. Through this model of pain and submission Flanagan derails traditional notions of masculinity and reroutes them through ideals of servitude and suffering, satirizing macho bravado. The Supermasochist also draws our attention to the ways in which male masochists exemplify typical masculine criteria such as strength of will, endurance, loyalty and dedication.

At once eunuch and superhero, building a shrine of the male sex only to tear it down, Flanagan creates a confusing vision of deviant desires that replaces the primacy of gender/genital-based desire (hetero/homo) with a sexuality that has mode of pleasure and context as its central axis. Essentially, desire is refocused from sex partner to sex act. This representation of masochistic practice by Flanagan is an important reflection of

⁴⁰ Kauffman, 37.

⁴¹ Kauffman, 26.

sadomasochistic dynamics which are "...not bound to any one gender, class, race, ethnicity, or sexual preference but take shape only in specific contexts and under certain conditions."⁴² By refusing normative gender roles and by refusing sexual desires based upon those genders and by relocating desire within a specific contextual mode of pleasure (or anti-pleasure), masochists effectively break away from established categories of sexuality and forge new ground.

Part 5 - The Threat of Desire Armed

Because it feels good; because it gives me an erection; because it makes me come;...because my parents said BE WHAT YOU WANT TO BE, and this is what I want to be;...⁴³

Flanagan's work, as a part of a theater of signs and the economy of conversion that masochism creates, is able momentarily to resist the dominant social order. There is a revealing of the socially constructed institutions of masculinity, normative sexuality, death and illness as, despite being firmly entrenched and guarded by various keepers of the status quo (mostly those who are most comfortable within current social order), malleable, evolving social dynamics. And though it must be stated that such acts of resistance are relatively small and their consequences often drowned out by the tidal wave of opposing actions, they still

⁴² Lynn S Chancer, Sadomasochism in Everyday Life: The Dynamics of Power and Powerlessness (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992): 45.

⁴³ Flanagan, Why?, 65.

pose interesting questions and exist as thorns in the side of an oppressively normative status quo.

Visiting Hours explores the roots of desire as well as the lengths to which those desires will compel us to action. To perform one's sexuality publicly, especially desires and fantasies so far outside of mainstream acceptability, is an act of defiance against the systems of control that impose upon us a notion of normalized morality. Even the action of arming one's desire in the secrecy of one's private sex life could potentially -and all too easily- slip into the public realm as social dissidence. Living with one's desire armed is a direct retaliation against systems of morality that are circulated and enforced through the apparatuses of church and state. It is this type of back and forth between social forces that occurred during the culture wars.

Despite the fact that the maintenance of the status quo and the boundaries of the moral good depends upon the existence of individuals such as Flanagan and Rose who transgress those boundaries, an institutionally legitimized transgression like Visiting Hours or Nailed must be resisted by the protectors of the status quo because legitimized art transgression subverts the social process by which deviants are made to be socially excommunicated examples of unacceptable behaviors and practices. The only way for subcultural practice to be safely brought up from the underground is through the highly ritualized legal and penal system. In the 1980's and 1990's there were a number of high profile trials, such as the Spanner Case in the U.K.⁴⁴ and the Houghtons Case in the U.S.,⁴⁵ in

⁴⁴ In 1987 a police investigation called "Operation Spanner" began following the discovery of a videotape of gay male S/M sex acts. The defendants were prosecuted to the extreme letter of the law so that even those men who participated as submissives were charged with conspiracy to assault themselves. In December of 1990, 16 gay men shown to have been involved in the making of this video were given prison sentences of up to four and a half years or fined for engaging in consensual

which practionners of S/M lifestyles were transformed into criminals.⁴⁶ The confusion of BDSM practice with criminal violence is a misunderstanding of surface resemblances that “level all experiences and histories into sameness,” which is tantamount to cultural erasure based upon uninformed comparisons. The criminalization of sexual minorities serves to establish an outer boundary of normality and an example of deviation that “normal” society can fear, hate and disapprove of as part of re-establishing and reaffirming their own normative status. In the words of Lynn S. Chancer, “societies get so caught up with the content of deviantized behaviors that the repetitious forms of their own not entirely innocent involvement are overlooked.”⁴⁷ At the core, sadomasochists become one of the many scapegoats of social anxieties and displaced culpabilities. The evidence suggests that society is much more comfortable with sadomasochists who end up in prison or mental health institutions than with masochists like Flanagan who end up in movies, music videos and on magazine covers.

Art and artists stand as one of society’s arbiters of imagination and producers of meaning. Just like content of media and entertainment, the content of artistic production can influence and inform the public. From this vantage the NEA controversies, at their core, were battles over the means of meaning production. It was in the interest of the fundamentalist

S/M activity. Despite appeals to the highest human rights courts in Europe, the convictions were upheld, the defense of “consent to assault” was denied. More information about this case can be found on the Spanner Trust website, <<http://www.spannertrust.org/>>. The Spanner Trust exists to defend the rights of sadomasochists.

⁴⁵ The Houghtons are a New York couple that had their children removed from their custody in January 1996 after police were given a videotape of the couple engaging in private, consensual SM. More information is available in Leather Briefs, Issue 3.3 February 1996/March 1997, printed by Cuir Underground.

⁴⁶ Both of these trials as well as other instances of the intersections between S/M sex practice and the law are discussed by Patrick Califia in his books Public Sex: The Culture of Radical Sex (1994) and Speaking Sex to Power: The Politics of Queer Sex (2001).

⁴⁷ Lynn S Chancer, Sadomasochism in Everyday Life: The Dynamics of Power and Powerlessness (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992): 176.

conservative agenda to keep the content of art in the United States on a short leash, especially in regards to content which may have sparked interest in alternative ideas and practices -such as sadomasochistic practice and its radical possibilities for social resistance and transformation.

Considering the high stakes and panicked frenzy of the era of the anti-NEA debates (a time frame that directly coincides with Flanagan and Rose's cross-over into the mainstream art world and his climb to success) the question of why Flanagan and Rose were largely unscathed by the scandals remains. In order to answer this question an inquiry into the situation of artists who employed similar sadomasochistic themes in their art and of the particular curatorial framing of Flanagan and Rose's work must be conducted.

Chapter 3:

Tough to Beat: The Survival and Success of Flanagan and Rose

Part 1- Flanagan and Rose as S/M Artists during the Culture Wars

Flanagan and Rose stand as a case study of contradiction within the war against obscene art. Despite the sexually explicit and radical themes explored in their work, and despite the fact that this work was fuel for the controversy machine, Flanagan and Rose never truly suffered the brunt of right wing attack. They were publicly discussed a number of times by a variety of groups and spokesmen in the NEA opposition and their work was included within the infamous CAN anti-art show protests. This never impeded their ability to show their work (they were part of more exhibitions in the six years after being 'discovered' by Helms than in the entire decade previous), they were never refused funding (they never submitted a proposal to the NEA for funds but other private funding agencies gave them money) and they were never put into any official, legal turmoil. In fact, the biggest result of their inclusion within the controversies was to jumpstart their fame and recognition. These facts are especially interesting when Flanagan and Rose's situation is juxtaposed to that of Robert Mapplethorpe and, more poignantly, Ron Athey. These two artists, contemporaneous to Flanagan and Rose, dealt with sadomasochistic themes in their work and were called out by the NEA opposition because of it. Yet, for some reason, these two artists faced the fury of controversy ten fold to Flanagan and Rose.

Robert Mapplethorpe was one of the most visible figures in the culture wars. An NEA funded retrospective of his photography, which -amongst many other photographs- included images of naked children and gay kink, leather and S/M sex acts, became one of the most useful tools of the anti-NEA agenda. Involved in a highly publicized yet unsuccessful obscenity trial in Cincinnati,¹ Mapplethorpe's photographs were demonized by politicians in the Senate and especially in the mass mailings of Christian grassroots organizations. Wildmon stated in an AFA press release that Mapplethorpe's images were "nothing less than taxpayer funded homosexual pornography" making sure to include the detail that Mapplethorpe was "a homosexual who died of AIDS."² Patrick Buchanan went so far as to describe Mapplethorpe's photographs as being records of "the degraded acts by which he killed himself."³ Pat Robertson's Christian Coalition sent a package to their mailing list in which a sealed red envelope was included, described as containing "graphic descriptions of homosexual erotic photographs that were funded by your tax dollars" adding, "your hard earned tax dollars paid for this trash."⁴ Inside the envelope was a sheet of paper describing nine of Mapplethorpe's photographs as follows:

1. A photo of a man with a bull-whip inserted into his rectum. This piece of "art" is listed as a self-portrait of the photographer.
2. A close-up of a man with his "pinkie" finger inserted in his penis.
3. A photo of a man urinating in another man's mouth.

¹ Robin Cembalest. "The Obscenity Trial: How They Voted To Acquit," Artnews 89 (1990): 136-141.

² American Family Association, "Press Release on the NEA, July 25, 1989," Culture Wars: Documents from the Recent Controversies in the Arts ed. Richard Bolton (The New Press 1992): 71.

³ Patrick Buchanan "Pursued by Baying Yahoos," Culture Wars: Documents from the Recent Controversies in the Arts Richard Bolton, ed.(The New Press 1992): 86

⁴ American Family Association, "Press Release on the NEA, July 25, 1989," Culture Wars: Documents from the Recent Controversies in the Arts Richard Bolton, ed.(The New Press 1992): 125.

4. A photo showing one man holding another man's genitals.
5. A photo of a man's arm (up to the forearm) in another man's rectum.
6. A photo of young pre-school girl with her genitals exposed.
7. A photo of a man in a suit exposing himself.
9. A photo of a man with his genitals laying on a table.⁵

Robertson claimed that he would never send the photos, presumably because they were too vulgar for viewing, and encouraged readers to destroy the contents of the red envelope after reading.

Ron Athey is an HIV positive gay man whose elaborate and theatrical performance art uses masochistic practice to convey pain, trauma and transformation. Athey was, by many accounts, the anti-NEA scandal of the year in 1994 when his piece Human Printing Press was presented by the Walker Arts Center in Minneapolis and given, by them, \$150.00 of their NEA granted budget. During the performance Athey enacted a cutting ritual upon the back of an HIV-negative man, made prints upon paper with the blood from the incisions and suspended the prints above the audience on clothes lines. Within no time, and despite grave inaccuracy, word began to circulate that the NEA had funded a performance in which an HIV positive man endangered an entire audience's lives by splattering them with infected blood.⁶ The ensuing controversies did much to damage Athey's American career. Art agencies and institutions backed away from Athey, not wanting to implicate themselves or their federal funding in the fray. In 1999, after having established himself within the international art community and having received

⁵ American Family Association, "Press Release on the NEA, July 25, 1989," Culture Wars: Documents from the Recent Controversies in the Arts Richard Bolton, ed.(The New Press 1992): 125.

⁶ "NEA Criticized Over Bloody Performance" San Francisco Chronicle 21 June 1994: D6

acclaim and support from European, South American and Canadian art institutions, Athey recalled how abandoned he was by the community at home saying that "American institutionalized art treated me as a hot potato."⁷ To this day, Athey's performances remains largely unfundable in the United States.

I am comparing these two artists to Flanagan because all three of them used sadomasochistic practice as a lens through which they expressed their life experiences that were often full of trauma and illness, yet their involvements with the anti-NEA campaigns were radically different. The works of Mapplethorpe and Athey were used as torpedoes to blow the NEA out of the water whereas the work of Flanagan and Rose was merely one of many stones thrown across battle lines. It was not because of difficulty in tracing these artists back to NEA funding. I have already established that this was often a non-issue for the fundamentalist campaign. It is also important to note that just as Athey's work was thinly connected to the NEA through a funneled down \$150.00, so too could Flanagan and Rose be connected to NEA funding through a game of six degrees of separation (which was often enough evidence for the right wing to catapult accusations of misconduct toward the Endowment). Also, it was not because the art of the former was any more intrinsically 'shocking' than that of the latter. The idea of artist nailing his own penis to board is just as challenging as an artist with bullwhip inserted in his own rectum or an artist splattering an audience with HIV-positive blood. Rather, I believe the key factors responsible for the disparity in the intensity of these related controversies have to do with the interconnected issues of homophobia and AIDS panic

In almost every discussion of Mapplethorpe and Athey that came out of both the left and right wing camps there was a focus on the sexual orientation of the artists and

⁷ Matthew Hayes, "The Body Politic." Montreal Mirror (14-20 Jan 1999): 10.

mention of their HIV status. The elevation of these facts speaks to the ways in which these controversies were about much broader issues than the artists or art. Accessing pre-established prejudice and hatred against homosexuals and fears of a largely misunderstood and infectious disease did much to escalate controversy for the right. Use of the same issues by the left meant the support of formidable networks of queer and queer allied activists.

The situation of gay artists was precarious during the culture wars. In June of 1990 four artists (Karen Finley, Tim Miller, John Fleck, and Holly Hughes) had their grants vetoed in an unprecedented act by then NEA Chairperson John Frohnmayr.⁸ Of these artists, also known as the NEA Four, three were homosexual. The revocation of the grants caused a serious shockwave through the queer and arts communities, one that Rose remembered vividly, "their grants were taken away mainly because they were gay."⁹ Despite Flanagan and Rose's non-heteronormative sexual practices, their sexuality was generally perceived as heterosexual: "Bob and I weren't gay, we were considered queer in the larger sense of the word, but we were not 'gay' we were not 'homosexual'."¹⁰ Their perceived heteronormativity was only accentuated by the fact that Flanagan and Rose were in a long term, romantic relationship, not just a sexual partnership.

Wildmon, in the press release previously quoted, draws specific attention to Mapplethorpe's death due to AIDS related illness. In these instances, homophobia is merely bolstered by the pandemic, offering proof that homosexuality was against nature since AIDS was taken to represent punishment sent from God. And though Flanagan's

⁸ Brian Wallis, "Bush's Compromise: A Newer Form of Censorship?" Art in America 78.11 (1990): 59.

⁹ Sheree Rose, Personal Interview, 12 June 2005.

¹⁰ Sheree Rose, Personal Interview, 12 June 2005.

work shared the same trauma of dealing with illness and death that Athey's did, Flanagan's illness could not carry the same weight of divine retribution. Cystic Fibrosis, unlike HIV/AIDS, is a genetic disorder inherited from parents. Because someone with CF is born into suffering, rather than having it brought upon them later in life due to experiential circumstances, an argument could not be made that Flanagan's suffering was his 'fault' or due to divine intervention. Therefore despite their common experiences with fatal sickness, the fact that, "Bob didn't 'do anything bad' to get this disease, it was the roll of the genetic dice"¹¹ drew a crisp line between their similar sufferings. The point is well stated by Thomas Rhoads:

There's a certain sense, on the part of the Christian activists, that when these people [artists with AIDS] die that they are just getting what they deserve. The fact that the person dies is a kind of vindication of their point. Somehow, based upon the way that the person had lived, they deserved to die. With Bob, though, that was a tough case to make.¹²

Also, much of the HIV/AIDS panic was connected to fear of contagion, especially during a time when education about methods of transference was often suppressed. CF, unlike HIV/AIDS, is not passable from one individual to another. Consequently, art that combined mutilation and illness did not have the same ramifications when enacted by Flanagan as they did for Athey. Flanagan could not spread his illness through his activities.

¹¹ Sheree Rose, Personal Interview, 13 June 2005.

¹² Thomas Rhoads, Personal Interview, 11 June 2005.

To summarize, because Mapplethorpe and Athey were homosexual, HIV-positive men whose art could be made completely alien to the general public and framed as the decadent moral perversion of the spoiled upper class, their use as pawns in the anti-NEA game was much more effective. Though Flanagan's work was by no means exempt from fury, it was not, in the end, the most ideal candidate for demonization. In a war largely fought on the battleground of public opinion and voter support, it was the artists with the most strikes against them that would tip the scales.

In the end, Flanagan and Rose didn't become a Mapplethorpe, Athey or NEA Four not just because they weren't provoked in the same way, but also because they did not place themselves in harm's way either. Rose remembers protesting the censorship and rallying to the call that "art is not a crime,"¹³ but Rhoads also recalls that Flanagan didn't actively engage himself in the culture wars, saying "Bob really wasn't a political activist."¹⁴ In fact all involved in presenting the artwork to the public specifically worked to avoid controversy. It is in these negotiations that one of the mechanisms for the survival of such radical works can be found.

¹³ Sheree Rose, Personal Interview, 12 June 2005.

¹⁴ Thomas Rhoads, Personal Interview, 11 June 2005.

Part 2: It's All in the Way You Frame It: The Curatorial Handling of Visiting Hours

He was an easy person to demonize, because you can look at the work on its face and it can be given to a very sensationalist reading. But once it's contextualized it becomes understandable.¹⁵

All three curators of the different appearances of Visiting Hours -Thomas Rhoads (Santa Monica Museum of Art), Laura Trippi (New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York) and Lelia Amalfitano (The School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)- expressed serious concerns to the boards of their respective institutions when they prepared to display Flanagan and Rose's work. They warned of the potential for attacks from religious conservatives and/or the media. Apprehension about the installation by curators and board members was not undue; Flanagan was a controversial figure who had already been named within the anti-NEA debates and the installation itself was challenging to mainstream conventions and practices due to the openly sexual and sadomasochistic content. Yet the curators and board members at each institution felt that the installation was not only in line with their mandates, but also worth the risk.

All three institutions which housed Visiting Hours had well established reputations as progressive, liberal and perhaps even counter-cultural galleries that supported new and experimental art. Their positions on the battleground of the culture wars were clear. The Santa Monica Museum had done a highly controversial David

¹⁵ Thomas Rhoads, Personal Interview, 11 June 2005.

Wojnarowicz¹⁶ exhibition before inviting Flanagan and Rose to exhibit. The show following the couple at the New Museum of Contemporary Art was an Andres Serrano mid-career retrospective.¹⁷ The School of the Museum of Fine Arts had done a show with Karen Finley previous to its installation of Visiting Hours.¹⁸ All three of these artists - Wojnarowicz, Serrano and Finley - were high profile persons during the NEA controversies and were serious exhibition risks for these institutions. According to Lelia Amalfitano, the Boston curator of Visiting Hours, the NEA controversies that precipitated attacks on artists and attempts to censor their work, "galvanized the art community on a lot of levels and made us more willing to stand up and protest,"¹⁹ adding that these conflicts angered many on the short term but motivated them to act on the long term.

Having previous experience with controversy was a major contributing factor in the capacity of these curators to deal with potentially explosive exhibitions. According to Thomas Rhoads, having dealt with Donald Wildmon's demands and Christian activist groups picketing outside of the Santa Monica Museum during the Wojnarowicz exhibition taught him some essential tactics for assuring the safe and uncomplicated running of an exhibition with 'problematic' content:

¹⁶ Painter, photographer, performance artist and writer who became involved in an NEA related controversy in 1989 when the Endowment revoked a ten-thousand-dollar grant for an AIDS-related exhibition in which Wojnarowicz was to participate. He challenged the ruling and sued the AFA for misrepresenting his art. He eventually won both campaigns. His Santa Monica Museum exhibition was titled David Wojnarowicz: Tongues of Flame and took place from July 26 to September 5, 1990.

¹⁷ Andres Serrano Andres Serrano: Works 1983-1993 New Museum of Contemporary Art, January 27 - April 9, 1995.

¹⁸ Lelia Amalfitano, Telephone Interview, 21 April 2005.

¹⁹ Lelia Amalfitano, Telephone Interview, 21 April 2005.

I think that there was an assumption that we were a public institution, which we weren't. One of the first questions that they [the protesters] always asked was 'What's your funding?' and when we told them that we were private, that really got to them because they felt like there was no way in. So I think that led me to decide that we were going to make Bob's show privately supported.²⁰

And so the most effective safeguard put in place against controversy was a matter of book-keeping,

That series [LAX, which Visiting Hours was a part of], was actually supported through public monies. But when it came time to publicize this particular installation we chose to present it as a kind of one-off exhibition. We basically did not say that it was publicly supported.... We made a conscious choice of saying 'we produced this' and that it was the museum that did it and that public monies weren't used.²¹

In this way, anti-NEA campaign employed researchers -whose job it was to find NEA "abuses" of tax payer dollars- would have not been able to say that Visiting Hours was an example of funding misconduct. Still, it was common knowledge that such financial facts had not stopped crusading fundamentalists from pulling artists and exhibitions into the fray in the past and though the Santa Monica Museum felt that their accounting magic meant they were "sidestepping the kind of controversy that we thought the work might engender,"²² they also knew this was not enough to completely insulate the exhibition and their institution against attack.

²⁰ Thomas Rhoads, Personal Interview, 11 June 2005.

²¹ Thomas Rhoads, Personal Interview, 11 June 2005.

²² Thomas Rhoads, Personal Interview, 11 June 2005.

Aware of the delicate nature of the situation, all three institutions produced a series of curatorial safe-guards against attack. Visiting Hours was an 18-plus event at all the institutions (even the School of the Museum of Fine Arts where some of the students were below the age of 18) and warnings were posted at the entrance of the show at each venue. At the Santa Monica Museum the warning was a page long and stated, "Just as Flanagan does not take his own experiences lightly, we urge visitors to carefully consider their own willingness to expose themselves to this highly individual expression."²³ At the New Museum strong warnings for teachers to preview the show before bringing students were printed at the end of all promotional materials associated with the exhibition.

Each museum also framed Flanagan's work with a variety of educational panels and written materials. Numerous essays about the work by curators and academics were produced and made available to the press and public.²⁴ The School of the Museum of Fine Arts had workshops about Flanagan's practice with students before the show even arrived in Boston. At each venue Flanagan and Rose were involved in numerous educational programs such as artist's talks, gallery tours, public readings and panels with other artists and art world professionals. According to Amalfitano,

One obligation that we had was to make sure the work was not misunderstood. We wanted to lay the groundwork so that when viewers walked into the environment, they were open... We wanted them to develop empathy with Bob so that it would give them a different framework to look at the work and at this subcultural lifestyle.²⁵

²³ Visiting Hours Archive Material. Los Angeles, CA: Santa Monica Museum of Art, 1992.

²⁴ Brochures available at the exhibition venues included essays by Thomas Rhoads and Margaret Morgan at the SMMOA, and Laura Trippi at NMCA.

²⁵ Lelia Amalfitano, Telephone Interview, 21 April 2005.

Throughout the texts produced by curators, whether brochure, essay or press release, the language speaks of caution and mediation. When attempting to explain the work, the discussion of CF generally preceded the discussion of S/M (as it did in Chapter 1 of this thesis), perhaps as an explanation of Flanagan's -sometimes challenging - sexual disposition. When S/M is mentioned in the texts, it is seldom referred to as such. Instead it is remixed as the more palatable "pain-based pleasure" or "a sexual identity that couples the experience of pleasure and pain."²⁶ This privileging of CF over S/M and the masking of S/M as the more digestible "pain-based pleasure" seems unfitting for the brutal honesty of Visiting Hours, but Rhoads explained the wording as follows:

Pain based pleasure, anyone can relate to that whereas S/M is so identified with a specific subculture, something that's not part of people's experience. So it seemed to be a better way to describe the work...We were very careful about how to characterize it. It was also an institution trying to mediate an experience. And I think that it was transformative for Bob and Sheree as well because suddenly they were going outside of their normal safe-zone and pushing the envelope. We were trying to find a bridge. And using language can somehow connect those thoughts.²⁷

Both Flanagan and Rose were very open to such mediations. They were willing to have their work slightly re-framed if it meant facilitating their migration from the underground art and S/M scenes - where they were well received and generally comfortable - to the mainstream art world. Rhoads recalls, "They loved attention. Any

²⁶ Thomas Rhoads, "Visiting Hours," Visiting Hours Press Release (Santa Monica: Santa Monica Museum of Art, 1992): 1.

²⁷ Thomas Rhoads, Personal Interview, 11 June 2005.

attention that we would give them that would put their work in a sort of art context was something that they'd really indulge."²⁸

The intrinsically approachable aesthetic of the show and Flanagan's own disarming personality were also often credited by the curators as major factors in the positive response of audiences. The use of text as a guide throughout the show made the experience of the installation an assimilable narrative that prepared viewers mentally for the physical and visual performance of Visiting Hours. The inclusion of Flanagan himself as an interactive artwork provided visitors access to his gallery/hospital room an opportunity to connect with both the artist and the artwork in a highly personal fashion: "There was something about being able to live with Bob - in real time - that somehow became transformative."²⁹

There were a number of interactions witnessed by the curators, Rose and various reporters where Flanagan effectively and honestly answered direct questions about his illness, impending death and masochism in such a way as to relieve tensions and bridge gaps between himself and his guests: "Bob had a way of making people think that this was the most normal thing in the world, he was just very matter of fact."³⁰

The preparations and precautions appeared to have been successful considering that the responses received by the institutions were generally positive. Of the entire experience Rhoads has said,

I was extremely nervous about it and we took a lot of precautions.
There were some complaints from some volunteers about it but

²⁸ Thomas Rhoads, Personal Interview, 11 June 2005.

²⁹ Thomas Rhoads, Personal Interview, 11 June 2005.

³⁰ Thomas Rhoads, Personal Interview, 11 June 2005.

aside from that it far surpassed my expectations in terms of popularity and the ease with which we were able to present it to people.³¹

After the surprisingly smooth sailing and public popularity at the Santa Monica venue (attendance, especially repeat attendance, was high) it was perhaps easier for the show to obtain other institutional sponsors. In the end, no official complaints were received by any of the galleries, no protests from religious conservatives took place and no negative press made the papers. Interestingly there was little or no critical press for Visiting Hours in New York or Boston and very few articles in L.A. (although the reviews published in L.A. were glowing, going so far as to call Visiting Hours, "the most intensely gripping and profoundly human installation-cum-performance this critic has ever pondered."³²) Of the articles that were published, S/M was generally the primary concern (and they called it S/M or masochism outright) and CF was secondary – unlike the official curatorial texts. The curators were surprised that not only was there no controversy, but that there was also so little press. Amalfitano claimed that in conservative Boston Visiting Hours was the, "invisible exhibition.... but tons of people saw it."³³

After his death, Flanagan received more critical and popular press than he received when alive. Numerous obituaries ran in newspapers across the country, especially in L.A. and New York.³⁴ Respected journals like Artforum gave his work more

³¹ Thomas Rhoads, Personal Interview, 11 June 2005.

³² David Pagel, "Visiting Hours". Los Angeles Times. 11 December 1992: F16.

³³ Lelia Amalfitano, Telephone Interview, 21 April 2005.

³⁴ Edward J Boyer, "Bob Flanagan; Artist's Works Explored Pain," Los Angeles Times 9 Jan 1996: B10. [&] Roberta Smith, "Bob Flanagan, 43, Performer Who Created Art from His Pain," New York Times 6 Jan 1995: 26.

critical attention than they had before.³⁵ It would seem that Flanagan's life and work became less threatening and easier to discuss once death had closed off its threat. The Artforum articles almost see Flanagan held up as an outsider hero, perhaps a figure that was sorely needed in the art community in 1996 as the NEA debates were coming to a disastrous head.³⁶ His life over, Flanagan could be used as an example for the art community without hurting his career or the institutions that had supported him.

³⁵ Dennis Cooper, "Bob's Thing," Artforum 34.8 (1996): 74-77. [&] Deborah Drier, "Rack Talk," Artforum 34.8 (1996): 78-81, 126.

³⁶ In 1997, in response to pressures from rightwing Christian activism, congress cut NEA funding by 49% and eliminated all individual artist grants.

Conclusion

There was a moment in time when it seemed like everything was very open to art in the United States, and then it sort of closed.

- Sheree Rose¹

Understanding the socio-cultural position of Flanagan and Rose's art involves the mapping of complex issues in the art world during a time when it was under attack. The work was controversial but excusable, shocking but engaging, popular in the mainstream art and subcultural world but critically ignored and politically vilified, and an honest expression of difficult realities but carefully mediated by those who chose to endorse it. To add to these contradictions I must draw attention to the fact that I have argued that S/M has radical transformative possibilities while simultaneously arguing that Flanagan and Rose's S/M laden artwork succeeded during the culture wars in part due to the ways in which curators were able to mainstream it for audiences. It is perhaps a testament to the malleability of the work itself –and to the practice of S/M- that despite these contradictions, both arguments still stand upon the evidence provided.

Through this research I have attempted to understand the motivations, meanings, ramifications and processes of both Flanagan and Rose's work and the culture wars, as well as their interplay, without overstating the correlation between them. There was a definite string of causalities in which the anti-NEA crusaders kicked off Flanagan and Rose's mainstream success, Flanagan and Rose gave art institutions the opportunity to take a stand without taking too big a risk and art institutions learned and employed new tactics of survival

¹ Sheree Rose, Personal Interview, 12 June 2005.

and spin-doctor skills to protect themselves and the artists that they exhibited from controversy. If we were to ask the question "who was using who?" the answer seems to be "everyone and everyone else." If I were to ask the question, "who lost?" the answer would be "everyone involved, to some degree." And if I were to ask the question "who profited?" the answer would be "everyone but the NEA."

There is a feeding between the emergence of new practices and the controversies they beget, one to the other and back again, which slowly brings each towards a crisis. It is this back and forth oscillation between eruptions and backlashes which creates pockets of opportunity for the dissemination of the extraordinary, the previously underground or hidden, and the potentially radical. It is this type of pocket, specifically tied to the circumstances of the culture wars, that I believe Rose remembers fondly in the quote I used to introduce these conclusions. It is in one such pocket that Flanagan and Rose found space to express themselves and carve out a niche of their own success. The result was the celebration and display of work that otherwise might have never made it out of the dungeon.

I'm damned proud of you, Bob! For a brief moment we had it all. You were the best slave a mistress could ever own. You were my sex toy, my collaborator, my confidante, my soul-mate, my ideal, the love of my life.

- Sheree Rose, "I'm Still In Love With You"²

² Sheree Rose. "I'm Still In Love With You." Suspect Thoughts Online Journal. 11 Sept. 2005. <<http://www.suspectthoughts.com/flanagan3.html>>

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Figures

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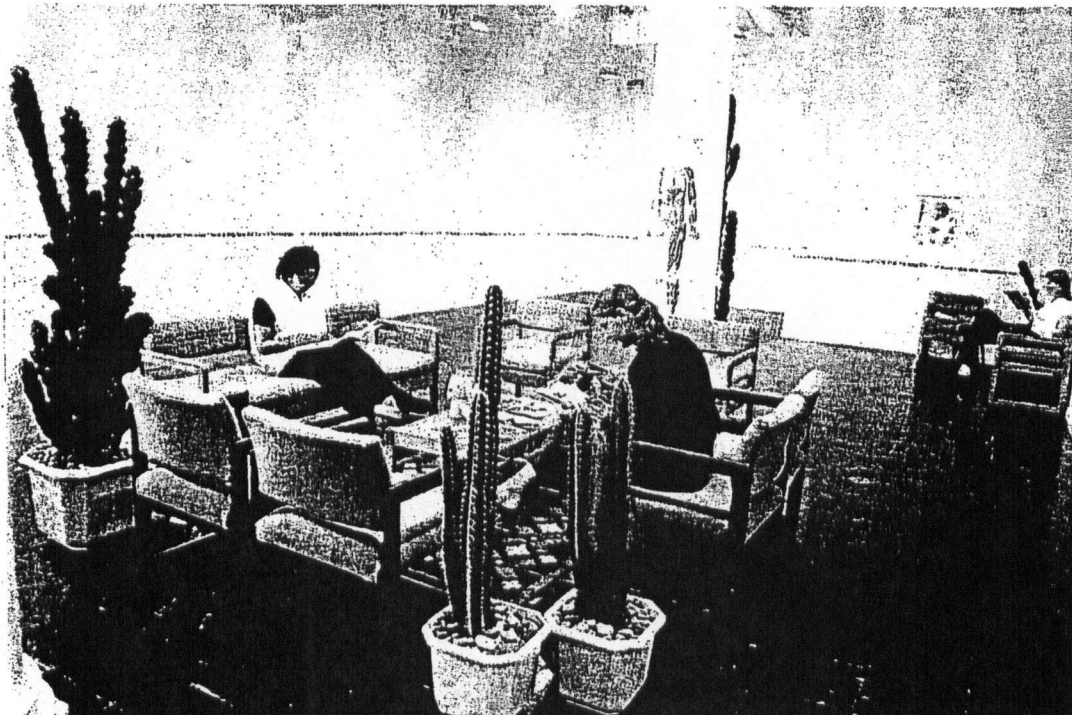
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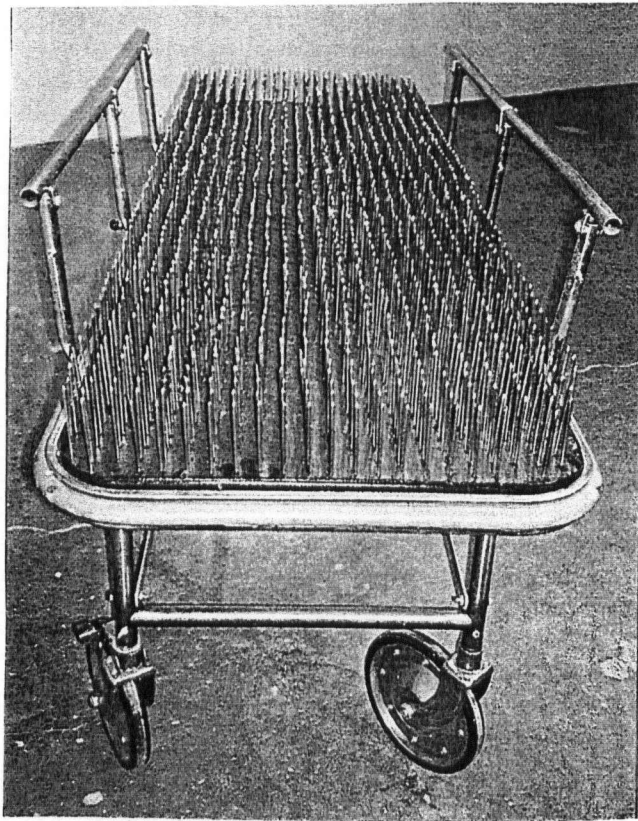
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(Fig. 1.1) RE/Search Modern Primitives at Southern Exposure Handbill, 1989.

Source: Juno, Andrea and V.Vale. Bob Flanagan: Supermasochist. San Francisco: RE/Search Publications, 2000.



(Fig.1.2) Bob Flanagan in collaboration with Sheree Rose, Visiting Hours Waiting Room, 1992.
Source: Sheree Rose.



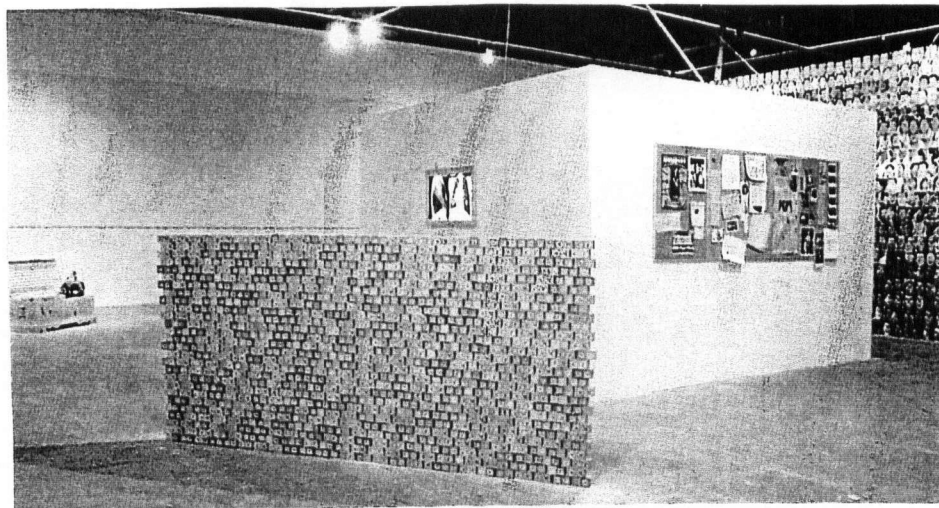
(Fig.1.3) Bob Flanagan in collaboration with Sheree Rose, The Gurney of Nails, 1992. Source: Sheree Rose



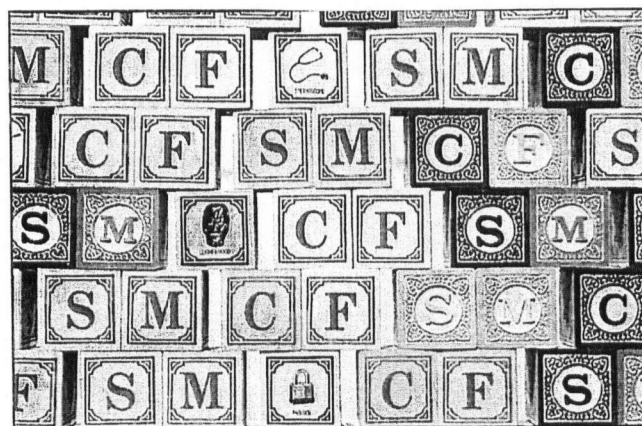
(Fig.1.4) Bob Flanagan in collaboration with Sheree Rose, The Cage, 1992. Source: Sheree Rose



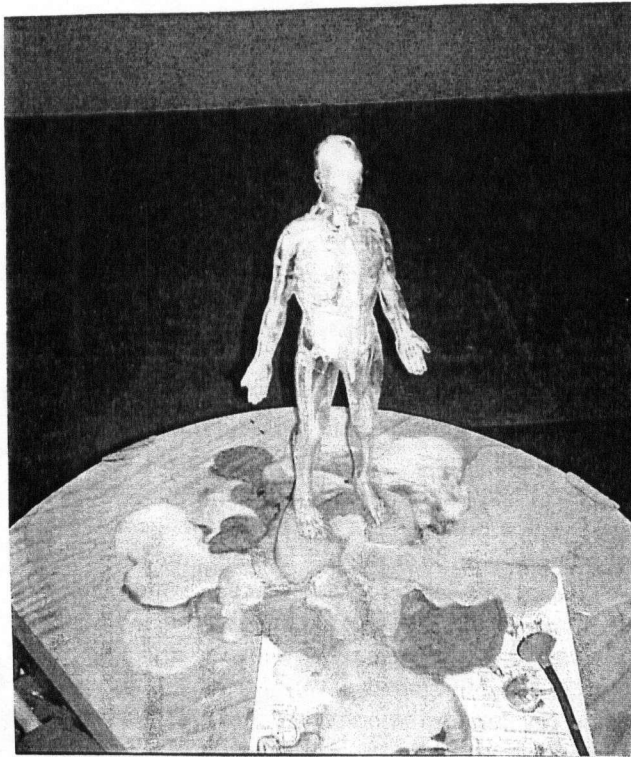
(Fig.1.5) Bob Flanagan and Sheree Rose, Wall of Pain, 1981/92. Source: Sheree Rose



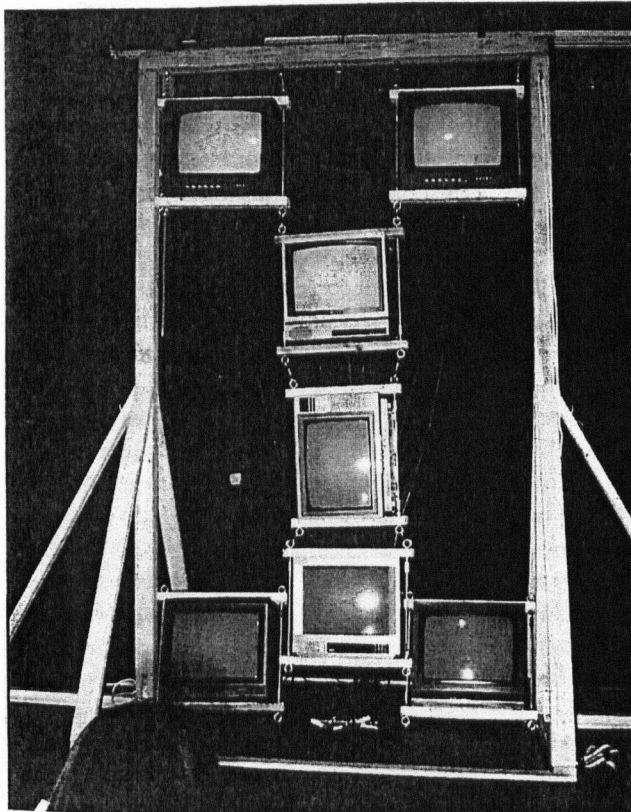
(Fig. 1.6) Bob Flanagan in collaboration with Sheree Rose, CF/SM Alphabet Block Wall, 1992.
Source: Sheree Rose



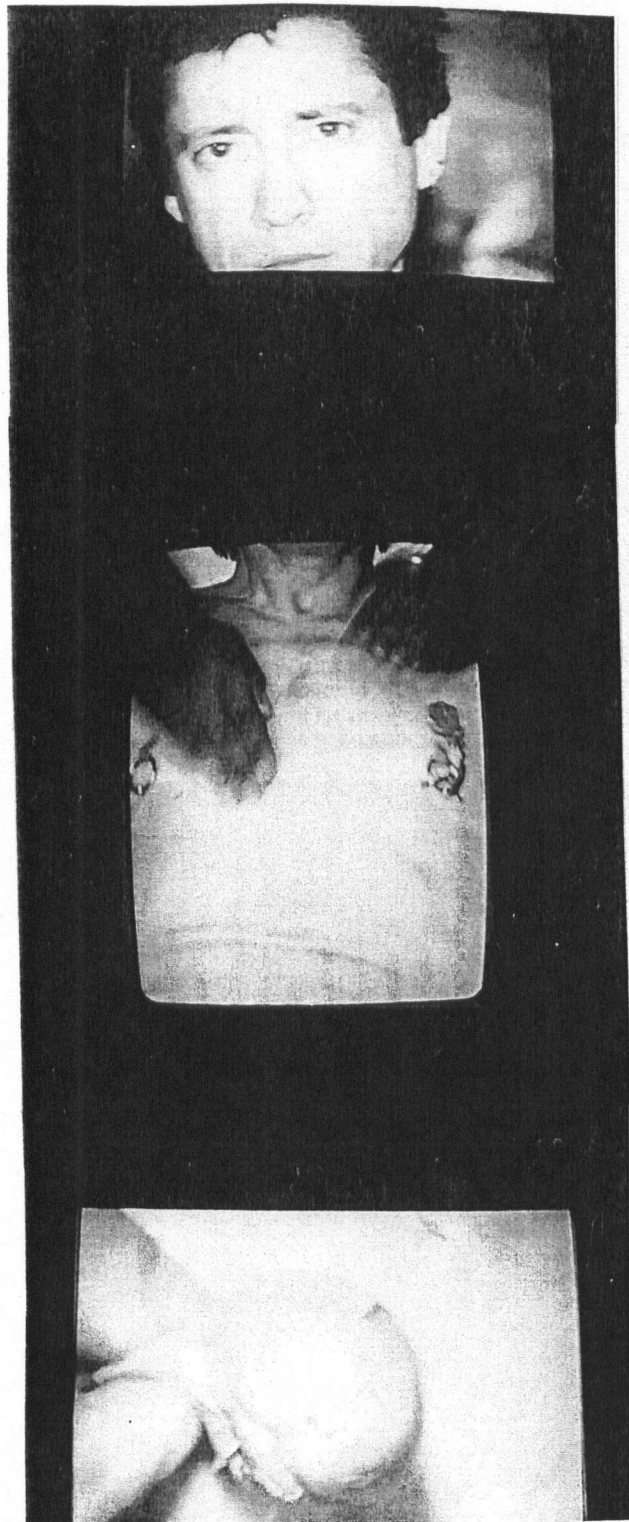
(Fig. 1.7) Bob Flanagan in collaboration with Sheree Rose, detail of CF/SM Alphabet Block Wall, 1992. Source: Sheree Rose



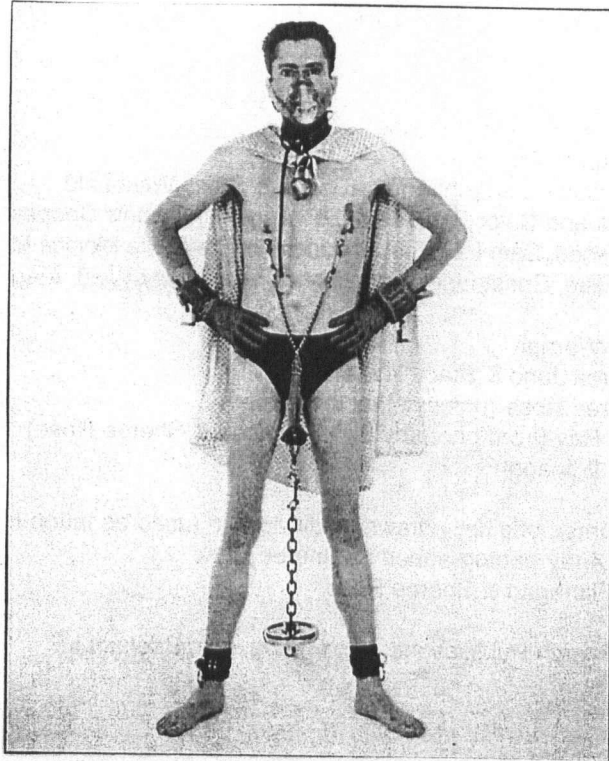
(Fig. 1.8) Bob Flanagan in collaboration with Sheree Rose, Visible Man, 1992. Source: Sheree Rose



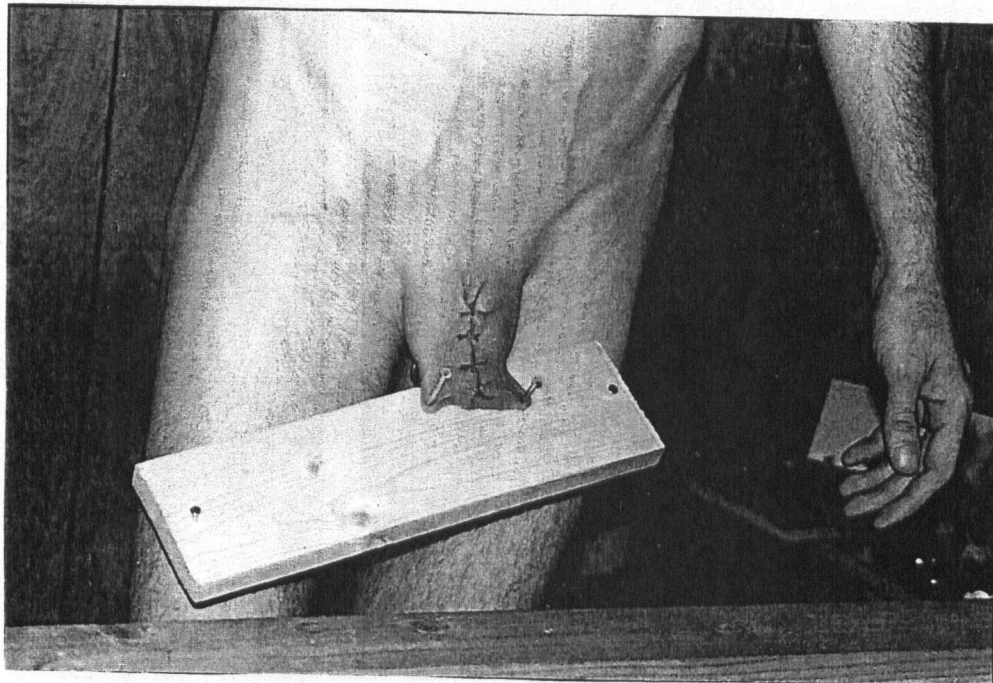
(Fig.1.9) Bob Flanagan in collaboration with Sheree Rose, Video Scaffold, 1991. Source: Sheree Rose



(Fig.1.10) Bob Flanagan in collaboration with Sheree Rose, detail of Video Scaffold, 1991. Source: Sheree Rose



(Fig.2.1) Bob Flanagan in collaboration with Sheree Rose, Supermasochist, 1992. Source: Sheree Rose



(Fig.2.2) Bob Flanagan, Nailed (performance still), 1989. Source: Sheree Rose

Appendix

Letter from Sen. Jesse Helms to NEA chairman John Frohmayer, November 7, 1989.

Source: Linda S. Kauffman, Bad Girls and Sick Boys: Fantasies in Contemporary Art and Culture. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998): 28-29.

November 7, 1989

Mr. John E. Frohmayer
Chairman, National Endowment for the Arts
1100 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C., 20506

Dear Mr. Chairman,

I am curious whether any of the institutions or artists listed below have received Endowment support since 1982, particularly for the enumerated projects or works, and if so, I'd like to receive the purpose and amount of the support granted.

1) Southern Exposure at Project Artaud - 401 Alabama Street, San Francisco, CA – exhibition entitled “Modern Primitives” (see enclosed pamphlet) - a visual exhibition and series of live events on Contemporary Body Modification, curated by Andrea Juno and V.Vale, featuring photography by Bobby Neel Adams.

- a) Andrea Juno
- b) V. Vale
- c) Bobby Neel Adams
- d) Center On Contemporary Art (COCA) in Seattle, Washington - original organizer of “Modern Primitives” show.
- e) Project Artaud or Project Artaud Corporation
- f) Art Matters, Inc.
- g) Allied Arts of Seattle
- h) Re/Search Publications
- i) Sheree Rose - video work featuring genital piercing / photography of tattooing, piercing, sacrifice [sic] combined with a provocative bondage & discipline bloodletting ritual.
- j) Leslie Gladsjo - video entitled “Modern Primitives”
- k) Comedian Bob F. [sic] - emotional presentation of his autoerotic scaffold.
- l) Don Ed Hardy - master tattooist
- m) Karen Bruhnaj - South American Scholarship

2) Durham/Chapter Hill Section of North Carolina Chapter of American Institute of Architects - grant to produce a document on an Affordable Housing Competition for the benefit of the Habitat Organization

3) David Strough, 3225 S.W. Cobertt, Portland, Oregon, 97201

4) Witnesses: Against Our Vanishing - show put on by artist's space involving 23 artists containing sexually explicit homosexual photographs. A catalogue of this show is requested.

5) Trouble in Paradise - show by Jay Critchfield which opened October 5, 1989 at the List Visual Arts Center at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, which sponsored the show.

I thank you in advance for your assistance in this matter. Should you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call Ann Dotson or John Mashburn of my staff at 224-6342.

Kindest Regards,

Sincerely,

Jesse Helms