

SOAP VIDEO

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In Michel Auder's videotape of Gary Indiana's play *A Coupla White Faggots Sitting Around Talking*, two wealthy bored individuals drink excessive amounts of coffee and rehash the insufficiencies of their separate love lives. This is where the comparison to John Ford Noonan's over-rated play, *A Coupla White Chicks Sitting Around Talking*, ends, except in the differences of their titles. "Chicks" are to housewives what "faggots" are to homosexuals — colloquialisms that parody people in oppressed positions.

So I expected *White Faggots*, which was screened at the Kitchen Feb. 5, to be

a satire (it's billed as a "restauration satire") of the gay world. Or at least, a satire of Noonan's housewives. Instead, the videoplay, as it is called, is a satire on daytime TV by virtue of its medium, and a satire of the media and popular culture in general, by virtue of its content, fame and sex. Okay, it's a satire on many levels.

The satire goes further by Auder's combination of what is now the darling medium of the avant-garde video, with some of the most conspicuous affiliates of the downtown art/theater/performance scene. Local poet Gary Indiana wrote the piece, and it features many of his friends — Taylor Mead, Cookie Mueller, Jackie Curtis, Jackie Raynal, Madeline LeRoux,

even painter Alice Neel playing a cameo, as writers, artists, dominatrixes who are nonchalantly living on the fringe of perverted Manhattan. To take analogy a step further, art video is to TV what this so-called "underground" is to the societally accepted art elite.

Auder has cleverly shot and edited *White Faggots* to look like a regular TV soap opera. It is composed of short loosely related sequences about the same characters, backed by mood music. Dom (Indiana) and Rippley (Taylor Mead) are two gay neighbors who love to dish. Dom is independently wealthy; his conservative California (I thought that was a contradiction in terms, but Ronald Reagan exists) family pays him off to keep his gayness closeted in New York. The Rippley character is a parody of Truman Capote; he's a fat and fallen writer who's obsessed

with himself. The pressures of his former fame lead him down the inevitable path to the only place in today's media world where such fame is possible — TV. He's the host of a talk show called *Adventures With Myself*, a kind of televised version of a Capote book.

All the characters, as bizarre as they are — like Mavis (Cookie Mueller), the dominatrix-next-door, find much more interest in TV than they do in their seemingly weird lives — the kind of lives network television exploits constantly (*That's Incredible*) because the average person craves vicarious excitement. Although sex is more than accessible in this perverted world, "if you have to go looking for it," Rippley advises, "it uses up the energy you need to watch TV." On real TV, sex is a hot commodity, although it is sub-

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duced. In this sexed-up world, TV is hot.

But there's a lot of sex on the screen in *White Faggots*. Mothers sit bare-breasted in leather at the table with their kids. Mavis lashes her victims, even pees on a magistrate's Afro and tells him to "drink it." All the sex is oral, gay, perverse, and it's shot head-on, as if these occurrences were rather commonplace, making the

way TV cameras hedge around even the most missionary positions more prissy and ridiculous than they are.

As with characters in the soaps, nothing really "happens" to these people. We don't learn anything about the gay world except the cliches. They talk, fuck, get depressed, do drugs, go to Danceteria, go to 1/5, go to the Ninth Circle. What the media loves to glamorize as perverse is only the source for normal dramatic interac-

tion to advance the plot — whatever plot there is. It's like the pregnancies on *As the World Turns*. Indiana knows that anything seen on TV becomes accepted, normal, practically real, no matter how foreign it started out to seem.

His sharpest jab at the media is the character of Liza, a kid no more than 12 at best (ironically played by Alexandra Auder, daughter of Michel Auder and Viva), who, like Brooke Shields, dresses like the big girls, only the big girls she knows, her mother and other dominatrixes, wear leather and carry whips. She uses "fuck" every other word and sings a punky song, and drinks like a fish, pops Quaaludes, and is thought of as cute for her imitation of adulthood — like Brooke in her Calvins.

White Faggots is funny, but its jokes are limited — mostly to its cast members and their friends and people who follow that scene. If it were performed as theater, and had not been done as video, the satirical element might be absent entirely, since *White Faggots* does not really attempt a point of view on gay life in Manhattan. It might more appropriately be titled *Soho*, since it's more like a downtown *Dallas*. At worst, it's just an attempt of some of downtown's personages to get on their own TV show. When Indiana reads a treatise on art in the tape, he quotes, "Art is useless; it simply admires itself." This satire does have many levels. ●