



Still from Blood Risk

Focus on Michael Balser

by Andrew James Paterson

Michael Balser's earlier videotapes (roughly 1981 to 1988) have seldom been seen to their best advantage as the tapes have tended to resist easy categorization or pigeonholing. Perhaps that is because many of Balser's tapes are not so much complete autonomous entities; rather they are collages of different yet temporarily-parallel works. This loose, perhaps even flippant approach to narrative and to structural cohesion allows Balser to freely alternate and associate different visual strategies. *Jerungdu* (1986) and *Astroturf* (1987) stand out as examples of this collagist approach. However, even Balser's more narrative works frequently deploy visually shifting approaches, allowing him to address different subjects within the same tape. Balser's tapes have referred to such seemingly disparate subjects as astronomy, biology, science-fiction technologies and gay male sexuality within their loosely-unified structures.

Another motif running throughout many of Balsler's earlier works from *Roberta: Interior Designer* (1981) to *How Do They Make It Rain In the Movies* (1984) to *Fear of Everything in the Universe* (1987) is that of the corporally dysfunctional mainstream film or television production. Balsler has consistently and comically characterized industrial production as consisting of feuding crew members, out-of-control budgets, special effects wizards who inhabit different planets than story-editors, and other big-budget occupational hazards. This hands-off-by-default approach to media production stands in contrast to direct hands-on involvement characteristic of independent media arts production. Balsler's tapes have specifically addressed television as well as gallery and festival audiences, and while refusing to separate different audiences he has been acutely aware of the different viewing situations involved.

In 1987 Michael Balsler began collaborating with painter Andy Fabo as both artistic and life partner. This collaboration, beginning with *Pogo Stick Porno Romp* (1987) and *Survival Of The Delirious* (1988), has led to a substantial body of activist but also radically-subjective media artworks. Both artists, as politically and culturally active gay men, are directly concerned with the survival of the figure/body in this contemporary environment of corporal, cultural, environmental and other corpophobic pollutions. *Survival of the Delirious* in particular achieves a unity between computer-generated imagery, landscape location work with natural lighting, and the viscerality of Fabo's drawings. In contrast with many artists' videotapes in which the body becomes displaced within production and post-production technologies, *Survival of the Delirious* asserts the body as an active partner in a necessary co-existence with technologies.

Andrew Paterson is a Toronto video artist and writer.



*He: "Are my ears red. Gosh—we
haven't oiled our projector in
a month of Sundays."*