

***The Fall of Communism as Seen in Gay Pornography*** (1998, 19 min.) *Los Angeles Premiere*

Music by Jean-Pierre Bedoyan

I noticed a flood of porno from former socialist countries that began appearing in U. S. video stores in the early 1990s. The main titles were produced in the former Soviet Union by a Swedish man with a limited budget and a taste for young ruffians. He sought out a certain kind of guy – poor, masculine, and above all, a bit desperate – that reminded him of the kind of boy who tormented him during his upbringing in rural Sweden. The videos that came from his erotic quests, called *Young Russian Innocents*, had a devoted following. I realized that the atmosphere of coercion accounted for much of these videos erotic appeal. The fantasy of making another person do whatever one wishes is fairly common, and many get to realize such fantasies, if only in a limited way, in the sex tourism of the third world. With the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe, it became possible to enact these fantasies on a whole new group of people.

The scenes of *Young Russian Innocents* were “auditions” for subsequent productions. The young men were given the impression that they could become stars if they performed well. The \$50 that the director offered as payment for an audition gave him license to ask the boys all about their personal lives and to poke and prod them in various ways. Many of the young men seemed frightened, albeit relieved that they were the playthings of a middle-aged amateur pornographer and not the victims of kidnapping. The subjects often looked at the camera, but it was not at all clear what their gazes meant...

Film descriptions adapted from W. E. Jones’s texts unless otherwise indicated.

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

**William E. Jones** is an artist and filmmaker who grew up in Ohio and now lives and works in Los Angeles. He has made two feature length experimental films, *Massillon* (1991) and *Finished* (1997), several short videos, and the feature length documentary *Is It Really So Strange?* (2004). His work has been shown at the Cinémathèque française and Musée du Louvre, Paris; International Film Festival Rotterdam; Oberhausen Short Film Festival; Sundance Film Festival; and the Museum of Modern Art, New York, as well as Outfest and Los Angeles Filmforum, among others. His films and videos were the subject of a retrospective at Tate Modern, London, in 2005. He was included in the 1993 and 2008 Biennial Exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art. He has published three books: *Is It Really So Strange?* (2006), *Tearoom* (2008), and *Selections from The Anatomy of Melancholy by Robert Burton* (2008). His work is represented by David Kordansky Gallery in Los Angeles. He has worked in the adult video industry under the name Hudson Wilcox, and he currently teaches film history at Art Center College of Design under his own name.

See: [www.williamejones.com](http://www.williamejones.com) for more information

“William E. Jones’s métier is homosexuality; his vernaculars, gay pornography and experimental documentary film; his landscapes, Southern California and suburban Ohio; his mode, dandyism... Focusing his lens on the intersection of Labor and Eros, he offers a study of the economy and legislation of the aesthetic as it is discombobulated by the erotic... Jones acknowledges pornography and experimental film’s differences, but he relishes the potential of their becoming each other, pancinematically—pornography turns into a kind of experimental cinema and experimental cinema into pleasure.” – Bruce Hainley, *Artforum*

Curated by Bérénice Reynaud.

Funded in part with generous support from Wendy Keys and Donald Pels.

## UPCOMING FILM/VIDEO PROGRAMS

May 11: Cheryl Dunye: *The Watermelon Woman*

# WILLIAM E. JONES: LE GRAND MASH UP

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May 4, 2009

8:30 pm

presented by

REDCAT

Roy and Edna Disney/CalArts Theater

California Institute of the Arts

CALARTS

REDCAT

# WILLIAM E. JONES: LE GRAND MASH UP

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Monday, May 4 | 8:30 pm  
Jack H. Skirball Series

Brilliant experimental provocateur William E. Jones delves into his collection of embezzled French soundtracks (Isidore Isou, Godard) and vintage gay pornography to present a heady “mash up” of his ever-growing body of work. The program is bookended by *two Los Angeles premieres*, starting with the ongoing series **Discrepancy** (shown as a double-screen event) and ending with the brutal melancholy of **The Fall of Communism as Seen in Gay Pornography**. In between, a series of incisive, spirited shorts explores the gaps between images, the erotics of montage, the elusive poetry of desiring bodies, and the banality of repression: **Mansfield 1962**, **All Male Mash Up**, **More British Sounds**, and **Film Montage (For Peter Roehr)**.

## In person: William E. Jones

“Jones’ repetitions feel luxurious, seductive, like the hook of a slow jam that breaks the moment when the needle skips – and, yes, poetic... ‘Poetry’ meaning that in Jones’ newest work, pornography, which like most all mass culture abides by a mandate of frictionless transmission of a specific and somewhat predictable message (someone fucking someone else), is broken open. Its horizontal language is rearranged, revealing new possibilities for vertical meanings, compressed energies, interstitial and even illicit desires.”  
– *CinemaScope*

**Discrepancy** is the generic title for a group of works, potentially infinite in number. Two examples of the series will be **world premiered** as a double-screen event: *Discrepancy (Americans Will Die If They Don’t Give Up the Bombings)* (2009), and *Discrepancy (A New All Around Leap Forward Situation Is Emerging)* (2009). These pieces, as well as all subsequent versions existing or planned for *Discrepancy*, have the same soundtrack, and are the same length (9 minutes, 30 seconds). Only the image tracks vary.

I derived the soundtrack from Isidore Isou’s film *Traité de bave et d’éternité* (1951) – in which an actor declaims his manifesto of *cinéma discrèpant*. The film’s images are only tangentially related to the sound, almost random at times, and often in a state of decay. The fundamental principle of “discrepant cinema” is a disregard of the image in order to privilege written narration. Isou’s film—an important predecessor to the cinematic provocations of the Situationists—engages in a perverse iconoclasm in a medium conventionally understood to be primarily visual.

I retranslated parts of the film’s voiceover and rendered the title as *Treatise of Slobber and Eternity*. I also modernized the film’s narration slightly and condensed it radically. I edited out the manifesto’s many digressions and repetitions, shortening the voice over to 9 minutes, then put the text through a computer-generated voice program.

**Discrepancy (Americans Will Die If They Don’t Give Up the Bombings)** contains images of the Vietnam War from the point of view of the Vietnamese. A film captured by the U. S. army, it contrasts the destruction wrought by American bombers with the Communist war effort, including anti-aircraft guns in action. *Americans Will Die If They Don’t Give Up the Bombings* (1965) suffers from advanced nitrate decomposition, which at times creates a psychedelic effect.

Its images taken from a Technicolor propaganda film in lurid color, **Discrepancy (A New All Around Leap Forward Situation Is Emerging)** presents nuclear tests made by China in the 1960s. Though the source film was made a few years after the policies known as the Great Leap Forward were implemented, a reference to them occurs in a phrase from the film’s English language narration that has been adopted as this *Discrepancy* video’s subtitle. Two sequences of the original film, edited in ever-quicker alternations, culminate in an apocalyptic, stroboscopic mushroom cloud.

## Mansfield 1962 (2006, 9 min.)

In the summer of 1962, the Mansfield, Ohio Police Department photographed men having sex in a public restroom under the main square of the city. A cameraman hid in a closet and watched the clandestine activities through a two-way mirror. He filmed over a three week period, and the resulting movie was used to obtain the convictions of over 30 local men on charges of sodomy. With some of this footage the Mansfield Police later produced *Camera Surveillance*, an instructional film circulated in law enforcement circles. It showed how to set up a sting operation to film and arrest “sex deviants.” I found a degraded version of the film on the internet, then reedited the footage to make *Mansfield 1962*, a haunting, silent condensation of the original.

## All Male Mash Up (2006, 29 min.)

This new body of work was inspired by my parallel career as an archivist in the gay adult video industry. In the course of viewing hundreds of hours of porn, I developed a fascination with its marginalia: establishing shots revealing urban landscapes of the recent past, charmingly inept dialogue scenes, and close-ups of performers, many now dead. This material can be seen as an invaluable document of a lost world of eroticism and sociability.

In a variation on what DJs call a “mash-up,” I combine segments of sound with segments of picture, making decisions based upon the length of the segments rather than their content. *All Male Mash Up* draws from the non-sexual scenes of gay porn films produced before 1985, such as Tom De Simone’s *Confessions of a Male Groupie*, Fred Halsted’s *L. A. Plays Itself*, and Joe Gage’s *Kansas City Trucking Co., El Paso Wrecking Corp.*, and *L. A. Tool and Die*. The somewhat arbitrary juxtaposition of diverse “found” materials often yields surprisingly appropriate results, suggesting a new narrative space, and paying tribute to a former era of gay life and cinephilia.

“In **More British Sounds** (2006, 8 min.), Jones conducts an uncivil union between two works which display surprisingly complementary fantasies of the political sphere while emerging from very different modes of masculine address. The audio track is from *British Sounds* a. k. a. *See You at Mao* (1969), an out-of-circulation 16mm agitprop film by Godard’s Dziga Vertov Group collective. The images are taken from the 1986 gay anglophile porn film *The British Are Coming...*

Jones’ use of material from *The British Are Coming* emphasizes boot-licking and other labor-intensive acts of humiliation, and when combined with Godard’s Marxist discussion of class antagonism, a fascinating frisson emerges. Sex looks like work instead of pleasure, and the fact is these porno guys are hard at work. Meanwhile, the right-wing condemnation of freedom and perversion is undercut rather than illustrated by the porn sequences. With this small yet elegant gesture, Jones cracks both film-texts open and reveals their contradictions. Pornography is ambivalent, its industrialized sex-utopias providing undeniable pleasures in spite of what Adorno would have called their “total administration.” – Michael Sicinski, *CinemaScope*

“Godard once remarked that all anyone needed to make a film was a girl and a gun; this revision of *British Sounds* makes do with three boys and a locker room.” – William E. Jones

## Film Montage (For Peter Roehr) (2006, 11 min.)

German artist Peter Roehr (1944-1968) made collages, sound montages, and films employing the guiding principle of strict, mechanical repetition. He used identical fragments from multiple prints of advertising films to show the same thing over and over. In the only English language book on Roehr’s art, there is a frame enlargement from one of his films, a shot of two nearly naked men wrestling. Inspired by these films, and by that shot in particular, *Film Montages (for Peter Roehr)* suggests one avenue his work might have taken had he lived.

The hard sheen of butchness and 1970’s high tech, accoutrements of leather men, mounds of flesh and eager faces, an invitation to phone sex, and the shrieks of an analogue synthesizer all present themselves with a seriousness befitting totems of high modernism. Scenes from anonymous gay bondage porn, a boxcar orgy from J. Clinton West’s *Dreamer* (1975), the introduction of Joe Gage’s *Handsome* (1980), and the “leather queen” sequence from Rosa von Praunheim’s film-provocation *It Is Not the Homosexual Who Is Perverse, But the Situation in Which He Lives* (1970) replace Roehr’s wrestlers and shampoo girls. Only the city lights remain.