

FILM

ON DUTY

BIGELOW'S *BLUE STEEL* SEDUCTION

Violence can be captivating on screen," says Kathryn Bigelow. "In a cinematic context, violence is perceived as safe. You can live out certain fantasies that in real life you'd never want to experience. It can be enjoyed in a vicarious way."

There are few women movie directors working in this country today, and fewer still who talk so easily about cinema's power to seduce by violence. But violence has been a leitmotif running through Bigelow's film career. Her first movie was a leather-tough biker drama, *The Loveless*, which featured Willem Dafoe in his film debut. *Near Dark*, her follow-up effort, was a perverse, violent and visually arresting vampire Western that received deservedly good reviews and became a cult hit.

Bigelow's new movie, *Blue Steel*, which she wrote with Eric Red, is a psychological action thriller about a female New York rookie cop (Jamie Lee Curtis) who becomes unwittingly involved with a psychotic serial killer (Ron Silver). While the movie also features Clancy Brown, Philip Bosco and Louise Fletcher, Bigelow says that the other central character is a .44 Magnum.

"The gun is the trigger that sets this man off," explains the 37-year-old director. "This gun has a psycho-erotic, spiritual potency for this man, while for her, it's just a necessary piece of equipment."

Although Bigelow wasn't out to make

Below, a scene from Kathryn Bigelow's new movie, *Blue Steel*. Above, a few peeks at Obie Benz's *Heavy Petting*.



JOEL WARREN

any grand sociological statement in *Blue Steel*, she says, "You definitely come away with an anti-IRA sentiment. You're for gun control. You want guns only in the hands of stable, trained professionals."

For the movie, Bigelow learned to shoot several different kinds of handguns. "There's an undeniable—and very dangerous—sense of power. It's instant power, instant gratification. It might sound simplistic to say this, but it's extraordinary when you think that a handgun is designed to be used to do only one thing—to harm or kill another human being."

Bigelow will soon start shooting her next feature, called *New Rose Hotel*, based on a short story by William Gibson, the pioneer of a sub-genre of science fiction known as "cyberpunk." A romantic thriller about corporate espionage set in the near future, the movie centers on an American in Tokyo with no home or identity.

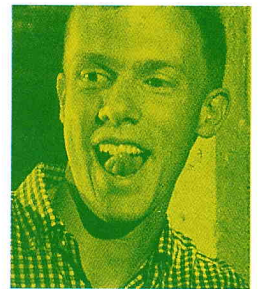
"I'm drawn to action in cinema, kinetic drama," says Bigelow, who pauses, then adds with a short laugh, "sometimes I wonder why I don't do lighter material that leaves people more reassured when they leave the theater. I question myself constantly on that. I don't really know the answer, except that I like high energy, less cautious material. I like pushing at the limits of the form."

CELEBRATING *HEAVY PETTING*

The first image is of David Byrne of the Talking Heads looking a bit uncomfortable, as if he'd been coerced into confessing something he'd rather keep private. Speaking haltingly to the camera, he says: "There was kissing with your mouth closed. Arm around. Kissing with your mouth open and French kissing. Feeling the girl's breasts with her bra on, then with her bra off. And then beyond that, kind of all hell broke loose. If you wanted to feel someone's genitals, or the girl felt yours or you felt hers, or whatever, then it was just like you were getting beyond the bases, I

think, by then. The steps, they didn't go in order anymore."

So begins *Heavy Petting*, Obie Benz's you-were-(are)-not-alone "docucomedy" about teenage sexuality, as seen from a decidedly 1950s vantage point through feature film clips, newsreels, educational films and the testimony of "witnesses." In



addition to Byrne, people like Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs, Sandra Bernhard, Spalding Gray, Josh Mostel, Abie Hoffman and Laurie Anderson talk about their personal experiences and feelings on the subject of, well, heavy petting. The result is a funny, warmhearted pastiche about the wonders of sexual discovery, when everything was still new and naughty.

Benz and his team of researchers looked at more than 10,000 hours of footage related to the subject and spent two and a half years editing the film.

"Initially, we were looking for really atrocious anti-sex propaganda that was inherently funny," says the 39-year-old Benz. "The original idea was to do a spoofy, goofy, laugh-a-minute romp on sexuality. But it soon turned into something more sincere, more genuine, especially when we decided to use the witnesses."

For people his age, Benz thinks it'll be a ticklish reminiscence. For teens today, he'd like the movie to help alleviate the anxieties that peer pressure produces.

"Sexuality has this aura about it, and everybody at that age thinks that everybody else has it all together," says Benz. "The truth is that 98 percent of us are awkward, confused, unhappy—trying to figure out what's going on. I hope that the humor helps to humanize things, that people will feel that they've seen a slice of themselves and not feel bad about anything."

Kenneth M. Chanko

Taxi Magazine Sept., '89