

Using Images and Imagination to Challenge Documentary's Conventions

Emiko Omori won the 1999 Sundance Film Festival award for Best Cinematography for *Rabbit in the Moon*. Through her lens Emiko approached the history of the Japanese camps as a personal, family, and collective memory. In her most recent documentary *Passion & Power, the Technology of Orgasm*, she constructs a provocative history of the vibrator dating back to the Victorian doctors from the 1880's to the 1920's while challenging the usual conventions of documentary work.

Q. In relation to your latest documentary *Passion and Power*, how did you choose the subject?

A. For me, most of my subjects have come along. An early documentary called *Tattoo City* was because I met a tattooist at a party and that went along with my interest in Japanese tattooing so I started to do a little film with him. That started back in 1970...and I went to film school and I went to filmmaking and when I got out of film school I realized that you could not just advertise yourself as a filmmaker and get a job. You have to specialize. Then the right thing and the right time happened. KQED was starting a program called *Newsroom* and they were looking for people to work on it. And I was fortunate enough to meet two men who were okay with a woman working on their news show and I started off as an editor and then in about a week or two I started doing camera...and then I started doing news and on that show we shot and edited our own stuff every day five days a week for live television. For me it was like a graduate school. I started attending graduate school and I dropped out and so I got out to see the world. This was my graduate program and you were not allowed to use certain kinds of crutches that other news stations did. By that, I mean an edit to avoid a jump cut...they would have the reporter. In fact, one of the very first stories I went on...and I had been editing...and my boss Alan Willis who was a black filmmaker, cameraman, who was waiting to interview one of the Black panthers...Charles Garry was his lawyer. Huey Newton, and at that point and I never worked on a news program so that I didn't know this...it was a tiny room and they were letting in one crew at a time. And Alan called to ask for more film, so I took a magazine...at that time we were shooting with those Auricon with those Mickey mouse ears...and so I took him over the magazines and he was waiting for our reporter...but what I learned while waiting...and the other stations would go off down the hall and they would re-ask the questions...on film...and the reporter would ask the question. I thought...that's a cheat...and I came from purist verité documentary...so I found out they had the reporter repeat the question. This is how they managed to get the two-camera look. And so that was lesson number one on how the real world works. In our newsroom, that was forbidden. We could never show the reporter...that was rule number one...Well, that made you think on your feet. It made you change focal lengths during an answer. It made you have to listen and be alert to what to do because you had to cut this piece when you got back.

Q. So, did editing form the way you had to shoot it?

A. Yes, it didn't always work. So, you learned to depend on hands...and I have never used that in so many years...because you couldn't use the reporter, so you start looking around the room to see what's on the walls...for books...and a lot of it was to listen...and so when you knew it was a complete answer so you could change your focal length. Not that, as a camera person, you had any control...you couldn't ask the reporter...but I would ask them very quietly...I would say...you know, I just missed the last part of that answer. Would you ask them that question again. Another rule is...because I've worked with a lot of directors who told too much technical stuff to the person they are interviewing...I hate telling people to please talk in complete sentences. It throws them off...it makes them nervous. I'm saying...that's our job...is to pose things in a way so that the person will answer the way you want them to answer. You don't ask them to do the work for you. "Would you stop and start that answer again." That kills the spontaneity of the moment. That makes them nervous. That's rule number one. I never ask them to do that.

Q. So how do you frame a question?

A. Well, to make them comfortable is to try to be comfortable with them. This is what I require of my crew. I don't chat with the person; I let the director do that. I don't try to make a relationship

with the person we are doing a doc on during that time period. Maybe afterwards, maybe at dinner. When we first come in, I always leave it with the director to be the one who establishes the relationship with the person.

Q. What do you do as a cinematographer at that point?

A. Well, you are trying to set up your shot. I mean, they've probably introduced you and offered you a cup of coffee or something... all the niceties...but you never want to talk to them as crew members about the subject that you've come to talk about...because you want some freshness because unless they are professionals, they aren't good at telling you a story, so they say...well like I told you before...I ask my crew members to be crew members...quiet efficient...so you are observing correct etiquette in their home. Now, when we were in Japan, I always had to keep reminding my folks to take their shoes off.

A lot of times when you travel in a foreign country there are customs you should honor. That's all crew members. For instance, if you notice that there's a lot of shoes at the door and then you look around and you see that your hosts are not wearing shoes...just slippers...so you kind of think...well maybe I should do that. Well, even a western home...as we all say...I would never let a film crew in my house because film crews can be like a bull in a China shop because you can be bumping into things and you can be setting up a light and there's a ceiling light that gets hit and you need to be observant and ask permission...like...can I move this. I mean, everyone is usually very nice but they just want to feel like they are in control. Anyhow, just be polite and listen and look and not be involved in the conversation that the director is having with the subject because they are just warming them up. They are just talking about their kids, their dog, and all that, because they are saving that for the interview.

So, a trick I would use...and by judging things as a cinematographer I knew I could do things just if they started an answer and you could say...I haven't started rolling...and that kind of an interruption isn't as bad as others where you shout Stop, I'm not rolling. If you were intrusive. I've always told the director that if they wanted to somehow get another answer to blame us technically. Just stop and look over at the camera person and then these are little signals and the director can say...well that answer...well we had a little technical problem so can we and just ask the question again. It's a little tricky. Just a little interruption. And now here's a cardinal rule. Never make them feel like they have done anything wrong, like it was their fault...that they are the ones who are causing the repetition. So, if you listen to answers, you can always find a spot where you can pick it up...and I do this because I listen to radio a lot and I'm listening to answers there. You know the journalists have the how what why when where question. You don't want yes or no answers. Suppose you say: Did you feel said? And there you are about to get a yes or no answer. How'd did you feel, and you get a better answer out of that. When I listen to radio and Teri Gross...she would drive me crazy because I always felt she would ask leading questions but when I listened to the answers...what they'll usually do, they'll answer that and start a sentence, so I'm not always so hard and fast about rules. And I'm also not hard and fast about cribbing out the interviewer...like a question posed off camera is a perfectly legitimate thing to me. I mean, we all loved the verit people and we loved the Maysles...but even the Maysles would address a question to the camera...I mean, she just addresses a question to the camera in Grey Gardens, I mean she says, "How are you doing Albert." So, I guess I came at a time when there were various theories being formulated. I entered the field just at the time when the cameras were getting small and could be used in the field. Prior to that, cameras were big and there had to be scripts and it had to be much like a feature film. And as the cameras became smaller and the recording devices were portable, a whole new school of thought came up...the direct cinema or fly on the wall...and that was greatly exciting for those of us.

So, okay so now you are in the school where you don't want to even think the cameraperson is in the room, so now you are in that school and they are trying to find all these ways to edit out the questions. But the British have all sorts of things going on, including questions. And now we have these things where the filmmaker is part of the subject and they are asking the questions.

In my most recent documentary, *Passion and Power: The Technology of Orgasm*, I decided and partly from teaching where I told my students what to do here's how you do an interview, how you set up the interview and so on, this time I decided I am going to break every one of those rules, so in this documentary, I did not put people in the proper part of the frame, I ditched everything...using angles, I filled the background with clutter. At first it was just an intellectual theoretical thing but eventually it was about a Victorian story...and they had a lot of clutter in their lives...and having shot 30 years of interviews and tried to perfect those clean wonderful interview looks. And I still love them, you know Frontline or Nova they have those

wonderfully composed, beautifully lit background, understated with slashes of light...and all my fellow cinematographers are good at that, I just said "Screw that" and having made *Rabbit in the Moon*, my other documentary about internment of the Japanese American community in World War II, I was kind of evolving to where I was today, which was. What I learned in that documentary is that there was very little stock footage available so it has been used over and over again... and when you see the Pearl Harbor footage with the big ship going over and black smoke and when you see people getting off the buses, and when I watch it in other documentaries that my mind starts to tune out...and I am only using myself here as an example of an audience.

I assume that I am not the only person in the world and I have to bring a freshness to these tired old images or it's not going to put people to sleep...they will just tune out a little bit. So that was the challenge of a historical documentary that has not been used over and over. This led me to the next idea that seemed interviews shot in the same old way also put you in the same frame of mind...so I want to irritate people a little bit to keep their attention and so the dutching irritated plenty of people and it still irritates a lot of people. We get a lot of comments...why did you do that...but the first time we did it...we noticed that people were a little leaned over when they watched it...so I did what I called a double dutch in the edit room...that undutched it...and the lines were no longer rectangular... and so I kind of liked that and in the black spaces...I put in other things. I put in what we call wallpaper...slow moving, dreamy...so there's something always moving in the image, even though our people are not. Because in this day and age...I based this on another idea...because it drives me nuts to watch CNN when there are three images on the screen or things running along the bottom...and I thought well somebody is able to grok all of these and so if I just add another element, people should be able to handle that. It's like the very clean kind of documentary...with just one topic...but now we are trained to read multiple parts of the screen...and I can't do it by the way...I miss all stories ...the stories being told and the stories on the bottom...but somebody can do that.

Q. But those decisions in *Passion and the Power*, you are making grammatical decisions in choosing the wallpaper...because they are an integral part of the story?

A. They were artistically picked to match the person in the picture ...what they were wearing...and it's sort of a Victorian feel. I never got to explore this phase...because our little company is called Wabi-Sabi. And I've found that in computer editing I've made interesting discoveries by accident. By pushing the wrong button, it has allowed me to do certain things that I didn't realize that I could. I've been trying not to rely on the first instinct...but not to overanalyze myself.

Q. So, you are experiencing a more personal, radical expression...freeing yourself?

A. So, in *Rabbit*, the other thing I discovered was that I never got to shoot a lot of long takes. What I discovered was that I'm one of these long take people. I don't like a lot of cutting. Maybe I'm lazy.

Q. I noticed that you had this rhythm in your docs. I noticed that you used the tripod elegantly.

How do you choose the style? Is it the director?

A. I can only speak for myself. But in *Rabbit*, there are some very long pans and when I was doing that...and I worked with?? ...she and I worked very well as a team. I said I never got to shoot these for other people. A long zoom in, a long pan never gets used because the editor is like...it's too long. I don't know what possessed me, but to cover what I call abstract ideas...and it isn't even abstract...or there's not a lot of money in your budget, so you've really and Pat Jackson? and I worked on *Rabbit* and we developed certain types of theories...we call it the wallpaper theory...so if someone is saying something important...and the documentaries I am making now are not the verit kind...they are the talking head kind...which I feel was the unfortunate result from television and from budgets... and it is the most efficient way to get information really fast and economical...and so I mean if you strung a bunch of talking heads with pictures...so there's a long pan of the Manzanar Internment Camp...that's the camp most known to people...I don't know why...but there's a tall monument there...it was built at the cemetery of the internment camp. So, I think the narration at that point is describing how the camp houses 120,000 people and we have the choice of showing a lot of pictures over it...the barracks and things over the years...so it is to get people to look at it a bit differently, so you pan and you pan and you pan and then it ends at the obelisk. You also cannot have things that go nowhere...so you can't just have random pans to nowhere...so the purpose of that shot is to have something to watch while you were listening but not too complicated. You don't want the person

to wonder what they are seeing. It's landscape. It's desolate and it's cold because that's what they did...they put the camps in these cold places. And so as it moves, you see more and more of the landscape and you become familiar with that you realize that you are at Manzanar. So these are kind of intellectual things you do when you are shooting.

Q. You are thinking, as a cinematographer, in shots. Every shot has a name. When you are being a cinematographer with a director? What kind of communication do you like to have with a director? Is there a language? What kind of language is used to describe a style?

A. This is an urban myth, this thing called style. You can always start by discussing a style but whatever style you end up with is whatever you get when you get out there. There's no real styles in documentary. Earl Morris is the one who comes to mind who actually consciously attempted to define style. And I was greatly influenced by his Thin Blue Line. He shot everyone from the same distance with the same lens; he never moved the camera. He has changed somewhat now. I mean, I don't know why someone puts these rigid things on oneself but. Okay style is: Would you like me to change focal lengths between lenses?

Q. But you talked about dutch angles in your latest documentary.

A. Oh yes, but I did some things in my own documentaries that I would never ask another director to go along with me on. They're risky. The dutch angle has gotten us into trouble...not surprisingly...and it would jeopardize someone else's project. So you shoot straightforward...you want to look good...but you can ask do you want to interview the person off to the side...or do you want them in the middle and this is something else I tried...I mean I put them at the bottom...and so on. So I ask: Would you like their heads completely in the frame? How close is the close up. A lot of people like super close-ups. I don't. Maybe it is a certain distance I like to keep from the person. I also was someone who would zoom in when emotion happens. Basically, I just like to let things play themselves out. What I do try to do is listen. The most important thing is to listen because later on if the person talks about something, you can act on that...oh yeah, I should get that. If they talked about their chicken coop in the backyard, you should go get that before you leave. I mean it may not make the story...but it might.

Q. So as a cinematographer you are keeping track of the story too.

A. Oh yeah...and sometimes there may be a big noise and you'll note that in your head. When that answer is over...I might lean over and say...we had a big noise in that answer and you might want to do it over. Again, I do not ask crewmembers to ever interrupt...but the interruption has to be gentle...so not to freak people out.

One of the things, that is invaluable is to edit your own stuff. You could watch someone else do it but it's better to do it yourself. When you look at your own stuff you are always saying...why didn't I zoom in at that moment or why did I pan off...When I look at someone else's rushes...I'm always saying why did they do that. So, I can always watch what the crew is doing. I was watching this animal show...and I know what's going on. You see the animal running and then you see this big tussle but you don't see the kill and I know why...they ran out of film. And everybody is going that's terrible. Because they had to change the film reels. I remember watching a documentary about the eclipse of the moon when everybody went to Mexico or Hawaii for it and this guy had these two cameras and this computer and then when the eclipse is happening... you can see that the camera person is fiddling with something...and I'm thinking...Oh, his camera jammed. There's a pretty remarkable moment in the documentary about Tarkovsky... making of Nyquist is the cinematographer...and there are two cameras and it is the burning down of the house they had built and I am watching the footage and I am thinking...Oh man, something has happened to their camera. And we've all had those moments...and you have to turn to the director and say Oh the camera jammed or we ran out of film...and I could see...the house is burning down...it's a big emotional moment and they had two cameras...but one is on some other thing. And I thought Sven Nyquist had to tell Tarkovsky that the camera jammed and the director couldn't deal with that for a year.

There's a lot about the mind of a cinematographer and the editing can cover it up.

Q. When you shoot for other people and someone else edits. How do you feel about the way it is edited?

A. I don't take it all that personally. Although I had to work with someone's footage who doesn't edit and they don't shoot for cutting. Practically impossible.

Q. What's a common mistake for that kind of footage?

A. One is not to hold long enough and the other is not to wait for something to happen. You have to be patient. And if you are impatient, you will miss. With videotape, there is no excuse about

waiting. Coming from film taught me to be thoughtful and plan...although these days I may record my rehearsal of a pan whereas I wouldn't have with film. I would have done the pan. With video, I will allow the camera to roll and you need startup time...in Japan when I was recording a process, I just allowed the camera to roll...so I wouldn't miss the start of the process. I've found that when I pushed the button...it takes time to start up...so I've found to just keep rolling and run around.

You really, as a cinematographer, need to understand the principles of filmmaking...the wide shot...the medium shot...the close-up...not that you can't jump cut and you don't have to follow those rules. I myself am getting tired of shooting that way and am looking for other ways...but in thinking of the editor you give that kind of coverage because they can go from wide shot to a close-up and to something else. Every shot I try to do has to be related to the subject. I hate the term b-roll because everything should be the a roll...the visual material...and you should have some relationship...you can't always do these things...is to come up with the reason I am shooting that shot...why I am going from a to b or why I have included that shot. It could be as simple as it expresses a texture. It doesn't have to be precise. I have to have something in my head or it's hard to shoot. I did something for Lourdes in Mexico City and we are in the bowels of an archeological dig...and we are in ancient times and you pan up and you are in Mexico City. That was kind of a wonderful relationship. I guess that's what I like to think about. Relationships, comparisons, contrasts...it's like a still photograph where there's an element commenting about another element in it. It's difficult to do and I must say I have to not be tired to do those things.

Well, Rabbit was the place to give some context to photographs and once again, this isn't reality. It's a place to be evocative...and when I saw walkabout and the kids are wandering around in the desert and when they come to an old abandoned farm and when they find a photograph attached to a piece of a wall and the farm has disintegrated...there was something very evocative to that so in Rabbit I took photographs of these characters when they were very young...and then I beat the copies up so they looked aged and then I kind of tapped it on some kind of wall and we went to Hart Mountain and there was a building or two left and so we would discover these photographs there among the debris. It seemed I just was struck by the evocativeness...other than flashing a picture on the screen...the equivalent would be a scrapbook...it was experimenting with context...and we thought about putting dirty glass over another picture...the idea was that things get left behind...and forgotten and I had read an account...a diary kept by one of the administrators at Hart Mountain and he had said that when he had gone to the camp...the people had been evacuated out of the camp there was a jar of half-eaten peanut butter and it was the same as finding bits and pieces of people's lives left behind...so the wallpaper concept came into this new one...sometimes I used actual wallpaper...and frames...and this challenge was the challenge of trying to do something erotic and sensual...and you know...what do you do about that. So your first thought was...well I once saw this museum exhibit with real close-ups of a naked body...so that it looked like a landscape rather than a body...and I tried to do that but I couldn't get it to look like that. I had a little camera and tried to go over it...and kind of put that up anyway. Although there are many beautiful nudes in the still photography...so I had to speak to Chris Marker who collects images and when I got my first mini-DV camera I just started collecting images and thinking this might work with this and that and I tried to collect things that might appear sensual to me and people are kind of amazed that we used flowers but they are sensual. So, people might think it's corny that we use flowers and stuff but they are kind of wonderful. They are amazing...but it was to try and bring freshness to it but not to use the perfect flower but instead one that is over the hill. I mean there is that photograph of the tulip...that is in a single vase and has fallen over...it is droopy...but we don't want the impression of droopiness but in my estimation that it is just a little bit imperfect. So, I don't know what camera first...being at the Monterey Aquarium or seeing a lot of underwater docs. I love nature docs using sea creatures as our replacements for flesh and body parts. So that's what I ended up using but basically what I have found beautiful and appealing to me I just stick in because I think it must be appealing to other people. I got over the notion that I was only talking to myself...and with so many billion people in the world. If you find it beautiful then there are plenty of other people who will find it beautiful or erotic or whatever. And so that freed me up to collect a lot of images of sea creatures and flowers and again not of perfect ones in the setting...not what I would call calendar art. It's a bit more earthy.

Q. Did you mix formats?

A. Well, when we started we didn't have 16:9 so with our weird framing...it allowed us to do what we wanted. There was no like "What format is this?"

Q. Do you prefer certain tools? What's crucial in a camera?

A. My complaints with the mini-DV camera are the complaints of every cameraperson. It should sit back on your shoulder but then we'll talk about a later camera because it's very hard to hold anything steady just with your hands...I'm a bit crooked most of the time. Not being able to change your exposures easily...there's a lot of things about the controls that are inconvenient. Those are the ups and downs. A motion picture camera is a simple device. With only a few moving parts. You had the exposure, zoom, and the focus and you could deal with those easily. With the little cameras, there are too many settings...I just leave them alone, and ultimately it's about the content and not the form. If you look at the Zapruder tapes, they are all fuzzy but it's the content that's important and about form...who cares. I have that in mind all the time and I am trying not to beat myself that I don't have the money to do this in HD or in 35...well you don't, so you had better have a good concept...and then it doesn't matter. So that with the little cameras...they are getting worse. I can't see things close-up and all those little controls. And I have to rely heavily on auto focus because I can't see focus in those little viewfinders. You just have to learn how to do things with it that you cannot do with the bigger cameras...for instance...different angles like getting under something or over something...and getting angles I couldn't have done without a crane...learn to do the things it can do well.

Q. Do you like handheld shots?

A. The other thing I got into with this last documentary was that I didn't like the stability of tripod shots. It seemed always too rooted to the ground. So I handheld...so I started this way and then altered. With the first interview we shot, I rested my hand on the tripod but I handheld it so there was a slight floating quality. When I breathe, it breathes.

Q. Was it warmer?

A. I find it to be that way...I mean when I see a NOVA piece I say...well, it's rock steady and looks gorgeous because it's HD. And, I also don't have a great tripod anymore. Because with Rabbit I had a great tripod. I mean, I wasn't about to pay more for my tripod than for my camera and it would be very heavy. So now, I'm doing a lot of everything on my own...and the point of it is, not to weigh yourself down with a heavy tripod.

Q. Do you like to have less equipment?

A. Equipment to me is an equation of diminishing returns. You can have too many lights...and if you are lucky, there are only two of you. You need a camera. If you are lucky and you might have an assistant, a sound person, and a gaffer. You might be able to put up four or five lights. Now, I'm going to start having a budget that only allows two of you. It's you and the sound person. There's only so many things you can deal with on a two-person crew. The first thing that goes is the backlight, because I hardly ever use it anyhow. It's a lot of trouble to put up and I've never liked them. So for me, it's location, location, location. You find a beautiful way to shoot with available light. Now that it's me shooting, I take one chimera and I hardly ever get that up...no because you don't have time. Sound is problematic because I'm not very good at that. And so, along the way, I discovered that you could bring a bunch of C-stands and a bunch of flags. You could bring little lights for the background. And if there are only two of you, you barely get the person lit and then all that stuff you've been dragging around never gets used. Especially when you are working outside, you might bring in a 6 x 6 canopy or diffuser...and if you don't anchor it, and a little breeze comes up and then it's gone. And so you have to bring sandbags, and then find someone to hold it. And ultimately when you have those giant crews for all that so that things don't fall over. If you put up a giant 12 x 12 you really need a lot of stuff to make sure it doesn't blow away. I should make a little formula up with crew versus equipment and the diminishing returns. It's like with the *Passion and Power* one, this is what we never got done in the movie. If it's a historical documentary, I wanted to spoof the historical documentaries so I wanted to make a little graph that there are this many orgasms...and then in the Victorian age there were this many orgasms...and then the vibrator came along and there were this many so I could kind of make this pseudo chart and equipment and crews and since it is down to myself. I understand that there is this little light...it is a soft light...that you can mount on your camera and these are like the real pros. I think it is a light that costs several hundred dollars and you just mount it on your camera and you can go around with one of those. So I just try to work with natural lights...and one of my other personal heroes is Ellen Bruno and goes around with what she can get in her rucksack...just her baby and her ...and if anybody wants to see a really beautiful example of natural light and someone working just for herself, they should see "*A Prayer for the Enemy*" Living Nuns that are in India I think. That's what I aspire to.

Q. Does she work with natural light?

A. I think so.

Q. Does she bring down the shutter?

A. I think so. So you can deal with it so you can account for low light. So, it is to know your equipment and what it can do well and what you can do with it. I think when I was first coming over to digital that you were a slave to its limitations...like Oh Geez, it won't do this and it won't do that. Then you kind of get to know what it can do and then you get to be. It becomes a tool for you rather than being a slave to its limitations. Because it can do a lot that big cameras cannot do.

Mostly being able to use it in small spaces and be intimate with people. Be unobtrusive. I think that's really...and allow you to travel places that you cannot get into with a big camera. Like Ellen. I don't know if she went to Tibet but I know you cannot get in with a big camera but you can with a little camera. They are pretty hip to the big camera...Actually, they also look at the big microphone, so keep that off and then you can pass for a tourist.

Q. Batteries.

A. You can cram a lot of batteries and a lot of tapes and put them all in your pockets. You don't have a lot of baggage so now I usually take a tripod but when I'm there, I usually don't drag it out. I was just on this trip to Japan and we didn't have a lot of time. We'd just jump out of the car and shoot. This is when having a lot of tape is advantageous. If we didn't get that shot, we'd do it again.

Q. What were you shooting in Japan?

A. It was for a company that was interested in textiles and ceramics and they wanted a lot of process stuff to go along with their trade show stuff. Like we were in 18 places in 7 days. I did almost everything handheld and so you can keep doing it until you got it right...or you can try things two or three ways. So the little camera kind of frees you...and so I've become a slave to its limitations to trying to see what it can do for me and see what it can do in terms of slowing shutters and things like that. And, you know, basically have fun and mess around. And the computer editing is great. You know, Chris Marker said; "This is the last picture I am doing in film". It's very beautiful but the new tools allow me to have complete control. Which he didn't have before...it had to be sent to the lab and you never knew how it was going to come out. He was early into small digital cameras.

Q. Did you co-direct your last film?

A. Yes, with Wendy Slick.

Q. How did you negotiate that?

A. Well, it might be easier, in my case. I have certain skills and Wendy has other skills. I'll shoot it and do the sound and she'll do the interviewing and then I'll have some questions around the interview. One of us might put a scene together and then we'll look and re-do it. It helps to work with someone who has similar tastes. If you don't, forget it. It won't work otherwise. If they have different views of the world, it's never going to work. You never know that until you work with somebody. You both may love the same movies...but one might be more experimental and more of a risk taker.

Q. How long did it take for you to complete the project?

A. Over seven years. It's been that way for all of my projects. It's the usual spend more time looking for money than working on the film. There were certain things that happened that were good. There was a case in Texas that came up and brought it into contemporary times and I think this is a better time to release this movie than five years ago. Even though we are still pretty prudish. It's too risky for PBS and not enough for HBO. What I call the cable versus the non-cable. I don't know why these two worlds don't acknowledge each other. You can't say certain words on non-cable and you can say anything you want on cable. I wonder: What is this the difference between the two because the entire country gets both.

Q. Are these schizophrenic rules?

A. It's like acting, like parts don't exist. It's the righteous non-cable people versus the cable people. It's in the general psyche and public policy.

Q. Does this affect funding?

A. You know if the film has the word orgasm in the title, it freaks people out.

Q. You know, I've always thought it's strange that violence is okay, but major sensuality isn't okay?

A. It's the weird schizo idea.

Q. What have you encountered with this new work?

A. The public response after screenings has been great. The usual places have shied away from it but once the public sees it, they love it. We sent it to a place for distribution and I won't name it

but it's a woman's place and you would think ... they loved the content but hated the aesthetics...they thought the dutch angles made them sick...but they've never rejected something for aesthetics...like bad lighting or whatever, and if you are going to judge it on its aesthetics, then do that.

Q. It wasn't formal?

A. It was too off the wall. I mean, it's just an angle. What's off the wall about that?

That was a shock. But you know, when people came out, they bought a lot of DVDs and the guy at the theater said that was unusual. But people came out and bought the DVDs and people came up holding the DVD and said would you autograph this...I want to give it to my mother. Some male crewmembers brought their daughters who were in high school and I thought, oh my god, they brought their daughters...but they loved it. And there was a woman who said...I'm buying this for my daughter who is getting married and I never spoke to her about orgasms or never used the word and I've giving it to her and her new husband and when they finish watching it, I want her to give it to her brother. We had one man who came by and said; "this is better than Viagra". So we are in the midst of the new distribution, which is the Internet. We are not going by the way the old ones...those mailing lists. Right now, all we have is the website. We are entering a new era, like politics, which uses the Internet to raise money in the campaign. We are trying to get on blogs and on the Internet. Get visibility on the Internet. It's an important movie for women. We thought it would be for our age but young women have a lot of interest. I got an email from a 17-year-old who had attended a screening and she said "I just gave my girlfriend a vibrator for her birthday...and it was just the perfect movie and we loved it." And then, because it had a very good opening run at the Mill Valley Film Festival, the Rafael picked it up and the Roxie did too and the Roxie is continuing to run it. (banter). So, little by little, it will get out there.

Q. So it is self-distributed?

A. Yes, but we are hoping that someday we'll get a distributor or rep. We don't want to keep doing this by ourselves...because it's time consuming...and you know you don't get paid for any of the film festivals. And now we've been asked to screen it at universities, like UCLA, where young women want to see it. And a neighbor called and said I just saw your movie and I bought a copy of it to show to my nieces in L.A. So, I think that eventually it will return enough to cover what we spent on it...you know we had to take home equity loans on our homes.

So, to answer your first question, how did I get myself into this? You know, it's like things that come to me. The first one...was the Tattoo City because I met this very interesting Tattooist. And then I get a narrative because I got a screenplay to be produced for American Playhouse and this is what I wanted to do...shoot feature films...and then my sister, who is involved in the reparations for Japanese Americans for the Internment. And she just started to tell me stories and I thought...well, someone should make a movie out of this...and I had avoided the Internment for years and I thought well, who better to make this movie than us...because we were there...I was one and a half when I was interned. So, I really don't remember about it but my sister did because she was 10 years old...and so we did that and I derailed my narrative direction...and Rabbit I am very proud of that...I got the award for documentary cinematography for Rabbit and one for Regret to Inform.

Q. It was nominated for an academy award?

A. Yes, *Regret to Inform*. It went to national television and won an Emmy. And about that time, a book came out called *The Technology of Orgasm: Hysteria, the Vibrator and Women's Sexual Satisfaction* And the woman who wrote the book, Dr. Rachel Maines, had been a consultant on Pat Ferraro's film *Hearts and Hands*, and she knew about the book and brought it to our attention and we said, this would be a great book and we tried to get it funded but we only got one small grant early on from the Robeson Fund, that's it. Never got another grant. We went the usual route, to ITVS, and I don't remember who else. PBS like some programmer would say...I can't run this so why would we give money to something we couldn't air. So the rest of it came from friends and out of our own pockets. One of the amazing things about this movie was that Wendy (the co-producer) has a group of women she exercises with...and they all got interested in it and helped us raise money and one is a great graphic artist and they supported it all the way and then the composer Mark Andrews is an old friend who loved it. I mean everyone really should get paid...a lot of people had faith in the documentary as did Phil Perkins who did the sound design and Terrence Sutherland who did a lot of the visual effects for us and Mandy who did some animation...supported by a lot of people.

Q. If you don't get the funding, you get more freedom. Do you have a hard time exercising control when people are working for you for free?

A. You really have to be professional. Once somebody agrees, you just have to act professional. But Mark had some music and we didn't alter the music but we moved it to another place and he didn't mind. We did have to ask the graphic person to change things on occasion, but that's it. Thank you.