



### **George Michael: *Outside* (Vaughan Arnell, 1998)**

This video should be seen in the context of George Michael's other videos, particularly in its use of sexual display, but could also be considered in relation to issues of censorship. It is based on the famous incident in which George Michael was arrested for lewd behaviour in a public toilet after being entrapped by a male LA cop. The officer who entrapped Michael attempted to launch a lawsuit against him for the stress experienced in what he saw as 'character assassination' by this video. Though drawing heavily upon this particular incident for its narrative, the video has a strong performance at its core and emphasises the theme of voyeurism, for example in its use of surveillance cameras.

The video begins in the style of a 1970s' porn film, complete with scratches on the film stock and sleazy saxophone music. We see a man, reflected in a mirror, washing his hands in a grubby public toilet. Onscreen credits in a phoney north European language – 'Eine film bi Hu Jarss' appear, indicating this is a comedy. As the camera tilts down we see, behind the man, a blonde woman in traditional costume, starting to undress. The camera cuts to a close-up of her face, as she pouts and looks at the man's reflection, accompanied by a sexual sigh dubbed over the soundtrack. The creaky state of the presumably often-played film is implied in the jump image at a close-up of the woman untying the strings of her dress. The camera cuts back and forth between the man's reaction and her look, accompanied by her (non-diegetic) sexual gasps and his untranslatable dialogue, as if in aural anticipation of their sexual encounter.

With deliberate lack of subtlety, the credits name the actress 'Heidi Kochenblauer as Cindy', and the director 'Marchelo Uffenvanken'. In a series of shots, Cindy pouts and beckons to the man to join her in a cubicle. In a camera shot representing the male point of view, her lips purse in a huge

out-of-focus close-up, only to be suddenly replaced by the pursed lips of a middle-aged sour-faced policewoman brandishing her badge, with sirens wailing in the background. The word 'Hollywood' is uttered as a zoom-in shows the same cop's face on a blue CCTV screen. 'Hollywood' appears onscreen emblazoned with the stars and stripes, as the American national anthem plays and a helicopter rises. The song finally begins.

This opening sequence is a stunning parody of George Michael's entrapment, which is further developed as the video progresses. With the heterosexual male fantasy ending as abruptly as George Michael's experience, it implies that this could happen to anyone, regardless of sexual preference. The use of police to harass people like this is exposed as absurd throughout the video, from the arrest in the next sequence to the deployment of the helicopter to spy upon sexual activity. The juxtaposition of filmic and CCTV images emphasises the idea of voyeurism, implied in spying on people having sex. In a further twist to the references to porn in this sequence, the actors used for the sex scenes were hired from the Hollywood porn industry.

The humour emerges through the interaction of character and *mise en scène*, with the gay sailors in the naval vessel, the couple in the camper van, the two construction workers on the back of the pick-up truck, the body builders in the locker room, the threesome on the rooftop by the swimming pool, the couple in the outdoor lift, the heavily pregnant newlywed and her Elvis-quiffed husband and so on.

The camerawork is fluid, emphasising the swooping of surveillance and the flow of the music, while the lyrics emphasise the idea of 'coming out' as George sings that he has 'done with' interior locations of sexual activity (the sofa, the hall, the kitchen table) and replaced  with 'outside' locations.

In much of the video the camera focuses on a close-up of George in three-quarter profile, leaning on a doorframe, intercut with the couples under surveillance. However, in the scene where the toilet is transformed into a disco, George is dressed as a cop leading a group of dancers, in a traditionally Country and Western line dance popular in some gay clubs, and reminiscent of the 1980s band, the Village People. Some of them are dressed as semi-clad cops. The humour is emphasised by the absurdity of the location and by the costumes, but probably most of all by the audience's extra-textual knowledge of the real-life incident which inspired the video.

As the helicopter camera spies on a penthouse suite where another couple are having sex, the soundtrack features what may be half-heard news coverage of the original incident. George Michael's name is the only audible element repeated several times during the musical break. A peroxide blonde on a rooftop leads a man on all fours like a dog as George sings, with further ironic reference to his arrest and punishment, 'I know I've been bad, you see I think about it all the time, I service the community, but I already have you see.'

As a series of arrests take place, a camera focuses on two policemen as they are attracted to then passionately kiss each other. This is the moment that outraged the arresting officer and the kiss was blurred out on most TV screenings, which tended to make it look even more sleazy.

The video ends with the helicopter flying over a rooftop where a neon sign reads 'Jesus Saves', and the words 'all of us...all' appear onscreen, again emphasising the message that this is not just about George Michael.