



## Lydia Lunch

interview by Craig Elliot

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**Craig: You know, you do a search on "Tough Love" on the internet, and you sure do find a lot of sites offering reprogramming services for parents with misbehaving teens.**

Lunch: Makes sense!

**I thought that was kind of funny in its own special way, and it gets funnier still because the actual reason I did the search on "Tough Love" is because I misread the URL for [www.gettingit.com](http://www.gettingit.com) and entered [www.gettingiton.com](http://www.gettingiton.com) instead, which takes me, of course to a porn site.**

Well, I mean, it's just a small stretch from one extreme to the other.

**It got me to thinking about porn, anyway. It's funny because already, it's everywhere, and still the industry grows, and yet "nobody" is interested in it.**

Yeah. It's the great mysterious nothing. It's just so bizarre that there's still such an incredible taboo against sex in general. I think that's where it begins, especially with it being one of the largest, and still growing as you said, businesses in America. It's one of the biggest businesses that we have.

**It's interestingly dysfunctional, I think.**

That's the problem, and that's why I've gotten into many debates and lectures, conversations, interrogations with both pro and con in favour of pornography. I think the problem with pornography is that we need better pornography, we need alternative pornography, we need a different type of pornography than what is generally out there. Part of the problem is like who makes it and who it's made for. That's where the trouble comes in, that's why if you walk into a porn store, you're bound to be highly disappointed with the material that exists unless you know what to look for, and how do you know what to look for when there's really only one decent adult video guide. I proposed writing porno reviews for a number of magazines, more mainstream magazines, men's magazines, and they didn't...even *Esquire*. I'm like, 'You have a magazine that deals in a lot of different issues, but you have nothing about adult entertainment on that level.' They just don't want to hear about it. I thought it could be a great service.

**I think so, too. For women's magazines, for that matter.**

Exactly. Exactly. To me, the whole issue is anything that furthers especially with women, an understanding and acceptance of experimental sexuality is definitely an important and

necessary thing. It's just an urgent thing. We're still so far behind even a European standard of what ultimately the bottom line of sexuality is, which is allowing, especially women, speaking from that viewpoint, to find the power in pleasure as almost a tonic to everything that is unpleasurable that we have to deal with in our lives, whether it's slave labour wages, the boss, work, kids, the time constraints put on us, or the lack of in--depth and understanding alternative voices which speak about pleasure. We need more investigation.

**The last thing anyone wants is women getting pleasure out of sex, goddammit! That'll change everything.**

Well, exactly. It was interesting because someone I was talking to yesterday, when I asked why we could still have two to 200 people being massacred in a film and it's out there for general release, yet dare show a mutually consensual, even lightly erotic lovemaking scene in a film, and it's going to have a completely different rating. So murder is still allowed, yet the ultimate act of self and mutually fulfilling pleasure as the tonic to everything else is still banded as a taboo. My concern was, if this is not just, and I use the term conspiracy lightly, a conspiracy against the power that pleasure brings people.

**My mom used to say that, too. 'I'd so much rather have you watching the sex than the violence.'**

Wise woman! If there was only some good sex to watch. The thing is, fortunately, a difference has been made in the face of pornography, if one has the time or the energy to seek out where these differences lie, in the last decade or so. With the uprise of Annie Sprinkle or Candida Royal or Michael Nin or various filmmakers that have purposely and with intellect, have tried to make a better, a different genre that deals with mutual satisfaction and not the way that pornography is often tainted. That's the problem. The problem is the taint that's placed onto it because of the majority of videos which are just churned out by a certain type of person for the same, as opposed to...there's still such a stigma attached to it, too. No one wants to admit to being an alternative pornographer.

**Dirty Little Secrets Tour. The gist is you'll be doing readings and helping the audience out with a little live advice?**

Well, perhaps, if they can simulate some interesting questions into the box we'll be leaving at the front door. I'd love to give some advice. I'm going to try and cover as many topics as I can in the columns that I've already finished. I'm sure there'll be some fetish, kink or dilemmas that just about anyone in the audience is going to be able to relate to. If the individual finds it urgent that they get my advice, then we'll see how the evening goes. I'll also probably be throwing in a few short stories, maybe a piece from my book Paradoxia, and maybe just other short stories that I've written that could lead into the 'Tough Love' columns. I'm not completely definite, other than the Tough Love stuff-- I'm going to throw a few other things in there, too, just to paint a more well-rounded picture of what we're dealing with here.

**I was at a writing workshop this past weekend. In the seminar on interviewing skills, the guy says we should try and make it so that our subject is not entirely at ease, in order to elicit the most interesting answers from them. Now, I agree with him, but at the same time, I doubt this guy is familiar with you or your work, and I'm hard put to imagine a way that I could make you uncomfortable.**

Thank you! How true! I was just going to say, 'Shoot for below the belt.' Uncomfortable? I mean, the entire genesis of my 23-year career is based on that which usually makes others uncomfortable because there's such a deep-seated root in reality and my frame of reference, dealing with experience. So it's MY job to deal with that, which makes others uncomfortable; I rarely feel uncomfortable myself. But try your best. I can only relate it to the amount of people I've collaborated with, and I always find it's best to use a subtle form of intellectual seduction to get people to reveal more of themselves than trying to back them into a wall, which only makes them put up fraudulent defenses. You take from it what you will, your seminar.

**It struck me as funny because at the time, I already knew that this was coming up sometime in the near future, and I'm like, 'Think, Craig, think! When YOU were 16, what were you doing?' (At 16, Lunch had arrived in NYC and was founding Teenage Jesus and the Jerks; at the same point in my life, I was wasting a lot of time, listening to Van Halen, and jerking off a lot. Shoplifting, too.) I think I saw 'Fingered' sometime in my relatively early 20's.**

I hope it didn't damage you too much, but now that you've brought up that film, I find

what's very interesting about it in retrospect, and I mean, it's so difficult to have distance, especially when you're isolating one small part of your historical body of work--I'm now playing the interviewer--it's so difficult to isolate any one thing because if I was to stack my entire catalogue of creative by-products in front of me, to me, it's natural that I did everything that I did, in the order that I did it, and then the ways that they manifested, whether it was music, spoken work, film, photography, what have you. It all has been a very natural process of trying to understand what made me the way I am and how, ultimately, I want to disburden myself of a condition that it's very easy to fall into, due to circumstances. In other words, I don't want to be victim to my own obsessions, my own habits, or my own endless rituals, and that's why I've used performance as a public psychotherapy to try and not only help others to understand, who might be involved with the same kinds of madnesses, but to understand, first and foremost, myself, and helping me to prevent myself from falling into endless cycles. With *Fingered*, which is a very harsh and ugly film, of course when I first saw it, my first thoughts were that it wasn't violent and it wasn't sexual enough, but I had lived these types of experiences. Film is never going to translate into real life. It's as real as it can get, considering that it's only a movie, and of course everyone has a different reaction to that film, depending on their life experiences, depending on the mood they're in and depending on the company they're viewing it in. I mean, we have everything from radical lesbian feminists thinking it's the most accurate portrayal of abusive relationships they've seen, to other types of feminists protesting it as exploitative pornography, to fratboy beer parties, to the Whitney Museum having it as the penultimate moment of independent cinema, which ran for three months. In retrospect, it's just one more investigation into my personal psychosis which I've been generous enough or horrifying enough to expose the rest of the world to, hoping that somewhere...the bottom line of all of it is underlining my own guilt and asking other people, especially with that film, 'How guilty are you of this same kind of behaviour, and what are you getting from this?' You mentioned it-- it just sent me into a rant. What did it do to you?

**I watched it in relatively comfortable surroundings; I was in a friend's apartment, and he was like, 'Check out what someone loaned me the other day.' Even in comfortable surroundings, it's a very uncomfortable movie.**

What's interesting about that film specifically, is you can't really, I've never set out really in my career, if we have to use the terms, I never feel I'm exaggerating anything; I'm telling the truth as I see it. I never set out to shock people. Although people like to paint me as a 'shock artist', what is so shocking is that I'm telling the truth according to the way that I've lived it. Everyone will have a different response to that film, but it has really horrified a lot of people, and that in itself is a goal you can't even set out to do. If it makes someone uncomfortable, you must be really hitting someplace even deeper than bone. And certainly, you don't think at the time that 10, 15 years later it's going to end up in a museum retrospective. That's just the ultimate topper of irony; it's so perverse and so outlandish.

**And when you set out with a specified goal of 'I'm going to SHOCK people,' you might succeed on some limited basis, but it lacks a certain authenticity.**

I think what's always been my most shocking attribute, is just because we have been denied until quite recently aggressive, intelligent, articulate feminine icons that speak really powerfully from the gut, I mean we just don't have that many examples in contemporary literature, performance, music. There's a handful, and I think just my rage and my aggressiveness were what made people feel so shocked, moreso than what I was ever actually saying or doing, because we have just been denied that kind-- it just doesn't exist. It's either always glamorized or romanticized or softened, especially considering the early '80s. There just weren't that many examples of women really raging, which we always need more of.

**So who do you think is doing it now, besides you?**

Diamanda Galas, Karen Finley, Vanessa Skantze, who just has a new spoken word CD out called *Pariah*, which I produced. She's out of New Orleans at this point. Wanda Coleman, Exene Cervenka, just to name a few. Most of these, except for Vanessa, are people that have been on a similar path for many, many years. Hopefully, none of them have disappeared or gone away; hopefully they're still working in a public format. We always need more feminine voices that are speaking from, specifically feminine, yet humanist and universal problems.

**Okay, on a possibly related topic, how are you on your pop culture?**

What you mean? (laughs)

**For example, could you or do you see similarities between you and the likes of the Courtney Loves, the Jennifer Lopezes, even the Britney Speers of the world...**

(hoots, laughter) Jennifer Lopez? Well, baby's got back, and I gotta give her that. I wish she wouldn't have lost that extra ten pounds. She was looking pretty cute before that happened. I encourage all women to GAIN weight. Every woman should gain ten pounds. EMBRACE the Venus within them! I mean, especially this new Hollywood standard of, you know, size 00, superanorexic, bulimic...

**Is that insane or what?**

Well, I don't know who wants this! I know no man who wants a stick-figured, teenage boy-looking girl, woman-child. I don't understand why women don't foresee that this is absolutely physically devastating in the very near future to this. It's such a perverse ideal to hold up. I mean, 'My size is zero zero'? Does that not just say 'I am nothing'? Does that just not mean that I am trying to eliminate myself and everything that is truly feminine, piece by piece, pound by pound? It's so astonishing! Of course, I've been holding onto the thought that there'd be a backlash for almost five years now. Maybe I'm one of the few outstanding, upstanding people that just refuse to shed that ten pounds, promoting all women to gain weight immediately. I just don't understand. I really just think that it's so self-negating and so female negating. And the thing is, for who? Who wants that? Nobody wants that, and it's a disease that's being inflicted upon young women, who are being held up these nonexistent, disappearing before your very eyes, feminine status icons. It's so incredibly perverse and ill and sick-making. I have no clue how one, other than one personally, makes a physical revolt against that. It's just shocking. You didn't specifically ask me about that, but I'm referring specifically to...and of course, Jennifer Lopez is not anorexic, but she did make a concession to remove that extra bit of voluptuousness that she was so blessed with just a few short months ago.

**And isn't it so funny that they're still cracking jokes about her big, fat ass?**

Yeah. WHAT big, fat ass? You want a big fat ass; I'm going to stick it in your face where it belongs. I mean, please! Be proud! Why do we want to, as women, break down the divide that exists between the species? I think, as human beings, we need to integrate within ourselves, both the male and the female aspects of our personality. That's a real problem that the world in general has, especially in politics. If more male politicians could embrace what is classically cited as feminine traits-- if they could embrace their nurturing, if they could embrace their compassion, if they could embrace their life-giving feelings, and if women, on the other hand, could embrace the more ambitious and aggressive and powerful elements within themselves, if we could integrate as human beings, the world would be a lot better place to live in. We'd make a lot more strides in the evolution of the combining of the two separate species, which we are as men and women. I don't think that we need to break down the barriers, especially by a physical duplication of adolescent malehood, to try to bridge that power gap. I think, if anything, we need to really embrace our separateness and come together at a mutual bridging of this.

**Well, it's an election year for you...**

Yeah. Not too hopeful. Who ever is, though? It's all down to finance. Ralph Nader's not running, and he wouldn't even run when he was almost forced to run, in a sense. He refused to take money, the guy's going to lose because he tells the truth, it's all very simple, the problems we have in this country. I'd vote for Michael Moore. He should be the president, the most compassionate humanist individual out there-- absolute hero. HERO. What a genius. What a fantastic, superlative human being. And Ralph Nader's not too bad, either, but outside of that, he's not running, and we don't have much choice.

**I found it at least a little bit amusing yesterday to find out that George W. Bush lost the New Hampshire primary.**

I'm kissing the statue of Kali in front of me. At least THAT has happened; we'll see what happens in the long run. Of course, there's the short-term memory loss for all the American public, especially in politics. Erasure until it's time to really stridently stress the most ridiculous and redundant past detail that someone may have fallen victim to in their youth. At least John McCain suffered for five years, being tortured. There's gotta be some compassion for human suffering, once you've been through it, as opposed to being spoon fed by daddy. But the problem with Bush or McCain, they both had their hands in the S&L scandal. McCain was right there. Short-term memory loss. Billions and trillions of dollars, ripped out of the American taxpayers' pockets, which we'll be paying for hundreds of years, but what? Who? When?

**But there is something, like you said, the thought of perhaps having a Republican candidate with some inkling of what it is like to suffer.**

Because pain is ultimately, and this could wind up on my tombstone, not that I'll have one, pain is the great educator. Whether it's physical or emotional, and all of us, somehow, somewhere, have had to deal with trauma, no matter how spoiled our existences have been. Pain is the great educator, and it forces you to learn some sort of compassion. That's been the basis, from a very early age, of what I was personally creating out of-- taking my pain, my frustration, my anger, and attempting to turn it into something positive. That's the whole goal of all of this, rabbiting on now for decades. (laugh)

**Do you have a favourite medium?**

No. Whatever suits what I'm trying to document at the moment. In my own psychological progress toward being a better human being is the goal, and also the fact that I need to diversify. To me, to have to carry on in one format or with one project or one group is just brain death. It's anathema to everything I stand for. I just have to dabble; since I'm not a specialist or an expert; I'm neither musician, author, photographer-- I refuse to have a category that I must stick to, and all media except painting are open to me bastardizing in one form or another to try and get the point across, to try to vocalize from my point of view what's up at the moment.

**Is there any amount of ego involved in this?**

Oh, I have a humongous ego, which is above any kind of criticism or praise. Criticism and praise, to my reality, are equally moot subjects. I know I'm creating for a minority, an intellectual, sexual and political minority. If I was creating only for myself, in a void, I'm sure the speed at which I create would not be altered. However, I do feel there is a minority that I'm speaking to. But my ego is very strange. Obviously, I have a big enough ego to have pursued, stubbornly, with no support, no major record label contracts, no mainstream attention, and a plateau of a fan base that has not altered for the past 23 years and has remained exactly steady. There has always been the same amount of people at my shows-- not one more, not one less. It doesn't matter what I do or what format I do it in, and that's certainly enough. I have my army. We're small, but we're strong. The ego involved is just being stubborn enough to enforce that everything is documented, but at the same time, it's not as if anyone or anything either given to me or denied to me is going to change what I do in any way. So in one sense, it's very selfless-- I'm speaking about issues that in the past have often been painful to deal with, both for myself and the paying public. They're not spared my agony.

**And why the hell should they be?**

(laugh) Come on, let's get real. What are they paying for? Who are we dealing with here? But at the same time, it's a strange ego because it doesn't demand anything from you in return. As a matter of fact, I despise applause. I prefer if the audience is left in a stunned silence. Criticism or praise has never impacted what I do; it does not impress me; I do not fucking ultimately care what anyone thinks or feels about me, and I'm happy to remain at the same level that I've always been-- creating in my own small, army of one ghetto. And force-fisting upon the world my view and my vision. FINE! And I'm force-feeding it to anyone, or force-fisting it because if you don't want it, you don't buy it. You don't come. Simple as that. It's pretty fucking simple, it's natural as talking to you on the phone, as getting up and breathing, as having a cup of coffee. It's what I do. I find new mediums and new dimensions all the time, or at least I strive to, in which to express the basic concerns of my human condition. There's no magic or mystery involved. I've had an incredible amount of luck, just in my tenacious ability to corral all the musical collaborators and film collaborators that I have into my own world over the past two-some odd decades. I've been very lucky with all the people I've worked with, and beyond that, I've been very lucky that I've found labels or places in which to release my material. There's a lot of really visionary people out there that just don't have, at the end of the creative day, the energy or the time or the devotion to really make sure that it's being documented and to some degree, available.

**They say you've got to be good to be lucky...**

Well...sure. I'm just stubborn, that's it. And I think, what saves me, and we can take it back to ego, but from a very early age I realized, even though I didn't know the route that my meanderings would take, it's not as though I had a 30 year plan; I just flounced from one thing to the next as the mood struck me, but I always realized that I had a social duty to say and do the things that I do, and that's where ego is both concerned and it's disconcerned. I feel that if there were a handful of doppelgangers that suddenly were

dealing with the same issues that I have dealt with, in a politically and sexually, interpersonally and psychologically, that I felt were able to carry on in the same tradition that I've done, I might be more than happy to just do photography and sculpture, but I feel that there's still a real urgent place where my voice must be heard, hopefully just to encourage others to find their own voice. That's the bottom line. You want to extend that hope to other people, and especially when dealing with spoken word. It's something anyone can do: you find your voice, there's no budget, all you need are the balls to get up there and do it. It's not as if you have to wait for the guitar player to shit out a song or you have to wait for someone to publish your book. If you have the urgency to do it, there's nothing else involved but the stamina to make sure it happens. And that's why, I think with all the mediums, I still will always continue to do spoken word because I think it's urgent to encourage other people, even though I haven't seen an uprise in the amount of spoken word performances from the time I began in 1982. I don't see more people doing it now than I did then; I wish I could say I do. Obviously, I have to keep forcing myself out there, hoping that one out of a hundred might actually climb up onto the stage and speak from the gut. Or writing something and finding a place to get it published. Or self-publishing. That's really urgent in what I do. Especially because so much in every medium has become such a fucking expensive piece of shit. Movies cost \$50 million. Rock videos cost a hundred thousand dollars. Albums cost half a million dollars. I once said in an interview that my entire fucking career hasn't cost as much as it takes the Red Hot Chili Peppers to rehearse for one album! That's shocking! It's mind-boggling! It doesn't take a lot; it doesn't cost a lot, when you're speaking from your gut, it's like a cannonball that should resonate on the power of what you're doing alone, without the fucking pomp and circumstance that the whole industry, whatever industry you want to relate it to, has forced everything to escalate into the expensive, therefore they hold you hostage over the money you've wasted in what? Trying to make more money!

**We just had a little go 'round a couple of weeks ago because the federal government was going to dole out money for tax breaks for NHL teams up here. The Canadian people react very strongly to strange things, and in this particular case, there was a significant reaction and two days later they had to back down on it.**

Exactly! Tax breaks for the richest people. Corporate welfare. Let's spend this amount of money to make this amount of money. Fine, but why has money filtered down into alternative music and alternative films? I'm living in Los Angeles now and I'm surrounded by the fraudulent waste of money to create massive pieces of fucking shit! Love it! I could fight against the whole fucking city! Wonderful! I've always been outnumbered, but I've never felt it. 9 billion to one? I can live with that statistic. No problem, as long as at the end of the day, you know you're doing the right thing from the right place. Who can say that in this town?

**Los Angeles is a strange place...**

Well every place is a strange place, and as a writer, that's why I've lived in so many cities and will no doubt continue to adhere the call of my gypsy blood.

**Can we backtrack just a little? No tombstone?**

Oh no! I'm going to be stuffed and sent on tour with a voice box when I die, just because I don't think the public will have been force-fed enough of what I need to say. My own personal wax museum-- I've always wanted to be stuffed.

**It's like the old joke about all those dead guys like Jimi Hendrix and John Lennon whose record companies keep releasing stuff from "the vault": 'a man so talented, he can release music from beyond the grave!'**

Well there's nothing left in my vault. I've had the good fortune of making sure that almost everything I set out to create is documented in one way or another, but that doesn't mean that death is going to silence me. If anything, my voice is going to be louder, and of course I say this metaphorically. My voice will be louder post-death, like Marquis de Sade, like so many writers, like so many artists. It's only when they die that they're truly understood or appreciated. I can wait to that point. It might be a long fucking wait-- fine. I'm not going anywhere. I don't care.

**Would it bother you at all...what sort of measures are you taking to make sure that some scumbag doesn't make the millions off you once you're dead?**

Well, I really doubt...I really believe it would be decades if not centuries after my death that anything I've created afore that would make millions of anything, other than decibels

spewed into the void we call this planet. I don't see it. It's not a concern of mine. If they can squeeze millions out of this career, let 'em have it! (laugh)

**Okay, one last question. We're talking about the Dirty Little Secrets tour, and in an interview with Jerry Stahl (author of Permanent Midnight), you said, "No matter how much we reveal in our writing and readings, I find the most satisfaction in gloating over the things that people don't know." What don't they know?**

(laugh) Well you're catching a glimpse of it, how absolutely delighted with life I am, which certainly doesn't appear in my work. I tend to concentrate on the dark or the negative or the obsessive details. I have such sheer delight over the entire absurdity of our very existence. In my personal life, no doubt I daily veer on comedic reverie. I guess my personal happiness is just not something I'm ready to share with the rest of the world. I think there's enough other happy-go-luckies out there that people can glom onto for inspiration. I think that I still need, to some degree, until my self-help book for the apocalypticists comes out some time in the distant future, that I still need to give a voice of reason to our darker desires and our obsessions. However, I'm not a gloom and doom type, I'm not miserable, I have no artistic angst, I never anger except for in the political realm; I just do not waste my energy. Obviously, I have a copious amount of energy, which I try to put to good use; I never waste it in petty squabbles. I'm a pretty well sorted-- of course I consider myself, and this could be a sign of the deepest sociopathic schizophrenia, as the most sane woman on the planet, and I just fucking get on with it. Where's the mystery? It's very ninja-- the great nothing. Very Buddhist. I think it's my humour, which you seem to have brought out in me, although it could be the three cups of Armenian espresso I had before you called... I think it's the humour, it's very dark of course, but that has been a malignancy in all my work, which is so often overlooked because people are panicked by the aggressive energy.

**They're so busy being freaked out...**

Exactly! That they don't see that there is within all of this, which the Tough Love will show, is that there is, certainly there's compassion, but there's also a humour. I don't want to turn into a comedian; I don't consider myself a comedian and I don't even respect comedy all that much unless it's from George Carlin or that type of scathing political rhetoric, who's just genius and brilliant. I never understood how I could even apply comedy, although I think I'm one of the funniest people I know in more ways than one, but these are the secrets, these are the mysteries--Mystery of the Great Nothing--these are the things that I tend to keep to myself and dish out on a personal level, that I just refuse to unleash onstage at this point. There's other things that need to be focused on. Of course, you'll be pissing your pants and slapping your thighs at this show because you fucking get it! The thing is, look: we're in such a fucking universally serious and horrendous, murderous economic, political and power-hungry stranglehold on a global level. Always! No different now than the middle ages. To not have humour somewhere, and to not kick and scream and force your own satisfaction and happiness as the ultimate rebellion against how they try to kill us every step of the way, that's just so fucking important. To kick and scream and force your way into your own private, if not utopian, then at least safe, planet-- that's the ultimate rebellion in the face of what we have to face on a daily basis, with our eyes wide open because we know what's happening in the world. And we can either be crushed by it, which is not difficult for a sensitive intellectual. It's crushing when you see clearly what is happening and you see how powerless the individual truly is. But to be crushed is just to accept our natural state of victimhood, which I have fought my whole life to climb out of. That's the secret, is you have to find a way in spite of how they try to kill us and hurt us and mutilate our souls and psyches. When you have an understanding of the greater picture, to force yourself out from under the huge Sysiphean rock and find some moment, some peace, some pleasure. Thank you.

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