Intimate Lives?
(orig. Blue Movie)

an exploration of gender, sexuality and masked autistic identity, as ‘performance’

The black and white silent 16mm film shows a close-up of two silk moths mating — white fur bodies rub against each other with the occasional vibration of a gossamer-like wing across the frame. This has a seductive quality, which in some senses, contradicts the repulsion we might feel; sensuality is not a quality normally associated with insects.

Two thousand years of domestication/cultivation have the ‘performers’ going through their paces like well rehearsed actors (the life of a silk moth is non-stop sexual activity) in the service of the production of one of the most sensuous and desirable materials in the world — silk.

The grainy black and white image is reminiscent of early low budget films or of something recorded clandestinely, as if a hidden act has been revealed.

The work was originally shown as a 16mm film installation, consisting of a 30 second film loop, projector, free-standing projection screen, PA system, and viewing sofa.

The sound of the projector’s machinery was amplified by a mic/PA system. The screen was a portable home movie screen suggestive of the projections of original ‘blue movies’ (another expression for ‘pornographic films’).

The projector, film loop, screen and amplified sound were not extraneous elements to be edited out in favour of the projected image but were an integral part of the ‘production cycle’. With the addition of a viewing sofa, the ‘consumer’ becomes a physical part of this process.

A personal journey reflecting on past experiences, and gaining much needed insight from the perspective of an autistic self, is echoed in the process of reassessing past work, revealing layers not accessible before. ‘Blue Movie’ made in 1998, explored gender and sexuality as ‘performance’, and now also reflects the performances required of autistic people by a predominantly neurotypical culture.

A new version made for the conference — as a silent 24 second video, looped to play continually on repeat, with no obvious additional elements or equipment — allows the viewer to focus on the image alone, and adds another layer to the work. A personal exploration of autistic sensuality, in the repetition, and in the soft tactile qualities represented in the image — a visual, tactile evocative, stim.

The original work was shown at —
*Private Views — Spaces and gender in contemporary art from Britain & Estonia*, 1999, Estonian Art Museum, Talin, and Modern Muveszetert, Budapest — and prior to this at —
*Virtue and Vulgarity: A feminist conference on Art, Science and the Body*, Reading University.