

**Reclaiming the Pieces:
Transgender Representation in the Moving Image**

by

Ethan Bach

An Abstract of a thesis submitted to the graduate

faculty of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute

in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

The original of the complete thesis is on file
in the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute Library

Examining Committee:

Shawn Lawson, Thesis Adviser

Kathy High, Member

Branda Miller, Member

Jim deSeve, Member

Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
Troy, New York

April 2008
(For Graduation May 2008)

ABSTRACT

As a video artist who has over fourteen years experience studying the moving image, I see a clear historical correlation between societal structure and its representation in the moving image. As a transgender person, I take notice of the ways in which transgender people have been represented throughout the history of the moving image; I am concerned about the affects those representations have on the transgender community. In my own work, I strive to create positive representations of transgender people and to share my knowledge of the moving image with the transgender community in order to encourage diversity and freedom of choice.

Through learning media literacy tools, the transgender community can analyze and inform their understanding of the community's social status and the ways that status is affected by moving image representations of transgender individuals. The experiences of other underrepresented groups who utilized the moving image to organize social change can help inform the transgender community. This knowledge can empower the transgender community to utilize similar approaches to media to create a more representative image of the diverse transgender community and to encourage social change. This envisioned social change would allow transgender people unequivocal equal rights.

In order to move forward in the creation of a new paradigm of social acceptance for the transgender community, it is important to first understand the historic representations of the community. Unless there is literacy of the moving image within the community, transgender people will continue to struggle for their liberation without knowledge of the cause of their own oppression. It is my vision of unequivocal equal rights for the transgender community, that drives me to create imagery inspired by my own views of the transgender community and that motivates me to help other members of my community to proactively participate in social change through moving image representation.