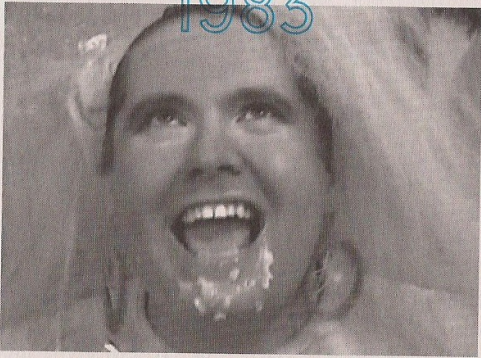


Regarding Miss Edmonton Teen Burger 1983



by
Jon Davies

Weak and inadequate, words merely crumble to dust when confronted with the glamour and the glory of Miss Edmonton Teen Burger 1983 – almost as if crushed underfoot by this cult Canadian drag creature concocted by Matthew Fithen and immortalised on video by artist and animator Amy Lockhart. At the dawn of the 21st century, Teen Burger roamed the earth just long enough to star in two of Lockhart's videos – *It's Party Time!* (2001) and *You're Eternal...* (2002) – as well as a follow-up Teen Burger bukkake video. She then disappeared as mysteriously as she arrived, taking her rightly earned place in the trash-drag pantheon somewhere between Divine and the avatars convulsing through Ryan Trecartin's movies. (Re-watching the videos again recently, I also found Teen Burger and friends' antics reminiscent of the debauchery in Harmony Korine's *Trash Humpers*). A decade on, I hope to spread the Teen Burger gospel as best I can beyond those already blessed by her formidable presence.

It's Party Time! was commissioned by filmmaker and programmer Alex MacKenzie of the great Blinding Light!! underground cinema (1998–2003) in Vancouver, who provided filmmakers with a meagre \$10 budget to produce something on the theme of the abject. Miss Edmonton Teen Burger 1983 was a character Fithen had apparently recently created for an exercise workout performance at an art opening. Friends, Fithen and Lockhart collaborated on this commission and the result was an improvised, slapdash bacchanalia introducing Teen Burger to the world as a faded-beauty-queen-turned-high-maintenance-mother-from-hell.

Deeply lo-fi from start to finish, *It's Party Time!* was shot with a shaky camera and bookended by hand-drawn credits (which linger on screen a touch too long, recalling Tony Conrad's 1965 film *The Flicker*). The first sounds we hear are the inane, squealing goo-goo noises emitted by Baby, Teen Burger's attention-craving daughter, also known in the credits as 'Jean Benet' in a topical nod to the recently murdered Colorado pageant tot. Played with disturbing zeal by Fithen's sister Kiley, Baby sprawls on the floor, outfitted with massive papier-mâché legs and feet crafted by the directors from Lockhart's drawings. The mega-chubby legs are crowned by what looks to be a very full diaper and, on top of Baby's bald head, a single obscene curl is tied daintily in a bow.

A hysterical Teen Burger begs for help from Nancy, her "great, great, great, great grandmother" inhabiting a painting on the wall, who was based on the palsy-afflicted host Nancy Zieman of the American public television show *Sewing with Nancy* (the painting's arms are visibly manipulated by a puppeteer perched below). Teen Burger is portrayed as a shadow of her formerly glamorous self, holding on to the – unseen, distant and perhaps fictional – past that defined and named her. Once ostensibly a beautiful star, she is now stuck in a domestic prison: "I used to be so famous in a distant land called Edmonton... we ruled the streets!" Her self-pitying tirade competes with the mocking squeals of her annoying baby's gobbledygook, creating a sense of frenzy in the decrepit, closed-in house. Their relationship simultaneously doting and abusive, Teen Burger aspires for Baby to lead a similar life of pageant success, forcing her to dance "Faster! Faster!" and rewarding her with ketchup potato chips, a uniquely Canadian junk food treat and a recurring motif in the Teen Burger cosmology.

The character of Miss Edmonton Teen Burger 1983 was entirely Fithen's creation, with her magnificent, plus-size physique squeezed into lumpy outfits incorporating a lot of shredding, fringe and mesh, accessorised with janky jewellery.



Stills from
It's Party Time (2001)

Stills from
You're Eternal... (2002)

Teen Burger's signature 'reverse raccoon' eye makeup is matched with ratty hairdos pumped up with blonde extensions (and dark roots, *naturellement*).¹ As Lockhart recounts it, Fithen based his Teen Burger persona on many of the girls he grew up with in the Canadian Prairies, kitted out with faux-Native trappings of "dreamcatcher earrings and oversized mukluks." For those not in the know, Edmonton is the second-largest city next to Calgary in the Canadian province of Alberta, and the Teen Burger a highly popular member of the 'burger family' from A&W's Canadian fast-food chain, which featured (according to Wikipedia) a beef patty, lettuce, tomato, bacon, processed cheddar cheese, Teen sauce, ketchup, mustard, pickles and diced onion on a sesame seed bun.

Nancy's answer to Miss Edmonton Teen Burger 1983's woes is to have a party (cause-and-effect in these videos is distinctively loose). Dismayed with the state of her house, Teen Burger harnesses her magical powers and points her finger to make crap decorations appear out of nowhere on the apartment walls. The guests arrive and are introduced: Popsicle, Lambchop, Horace, Long Neck Cum Guzzler and beautiful Kerrie-Anne. They soon start playing raucous party games like the limbo, charades, go-go dancing, arm wrestling, hockey fighting, spinning the bottle and interpretive dancing ("classically trained!" Teen Burger appreciatively coos). The climax arrives in a torrent of puke as the partygoers' delighted consumption of the cheap vanilla cake – replete with theatrical yummy noises and close-ups of faces enthusiastically smeared with icing – sours and everyone vomits it up (ideally onto each other's hair and clothes), groaning and moaning all the way.² Before the closing credits arrive, an off-brand Mickey Mouse-like character named Licorice Whips emerges from the remains of the puked cake and grows to human size to do a little dance for the assembled partygoers. (Whips' appearance and enlargement is just one of several animation techniques Lockhart used in the video.)

It's Party Time! was shot in Lockhart's small apartment – mostly in one room in fact – giving it a claustrophobic vibe, but the video's narrative slackness counteracts this with a feeling of time distended, a kind of black hole of bad taste. The party decorations were all sourced from the trash outside, as was Long Neck Cum Guzzler's bulbous fake head. Other costumes were cobbled together from whatever Lockhart's game performers could find at home: Kerrie-Anne's stars-'n'-stripes bikini, Horace's

¹ Fithen studied fashion design at one point, and apparently later ran his own fashion business in Vancouver.
² The puke's constitution was based on a published John Waters recipe.

foam and yarn wig, Popsicle's leotard and thong combo.³

Fithen and Lockhart reunited for a second collaboration with *You're Eternal...*, conceived as a prequel to *It's Party Time!*⁴ and commissioned this time by production centre Video In – also located in Vancouver and now known as VIVO – as part of their thematic programme on drugs. Lockhart again used very crude animation effects to bring Teen Burger's world to life, in this case some DIY green-screening – actually orange garbage bags duct-taped to a wall – which gives this “dark after-school special with mean-girl drama” (as Lockhart put it) an otherworldly atmosphere compared to the grubby domestic strife in *It's Party Time!* On Fithen's counsel, they also amped up the fantastical elements; the video begins with a confused Teen Burger flailing about in a dream state or alternate dimension. She meets a magical unicorn⁵ (whom she briefly speaks ‘unicorn’ to) and a singing wizard, who warns her that “princesses of evil” are out to get her, but that the unicorn will protect her – “he's righteous and he's true” – and that she is “eternal”. Soon enough, a trio of mean girls with conspiratorial, high-pitched voices lures Teen Burger from her treehouse tower, peer-pressuring her to join them in huffing one inhalant or another from paper bags. They then attack her, cutting off her bangs and sending her spiraling into hallucinations. “Reconfigur[ing]” her “mall energy”, Teen Burger channels the wizard's song (“Your bangs are radiant/You're special and you're true”) and joins the unicorn in an “almighty union”. She is finally rescued by a scruffy, mullet-sporting bloke who had earlier catcalled her on the street, and she snaps a victorious “smell you never!” to the defeated drug-pushing princesses.

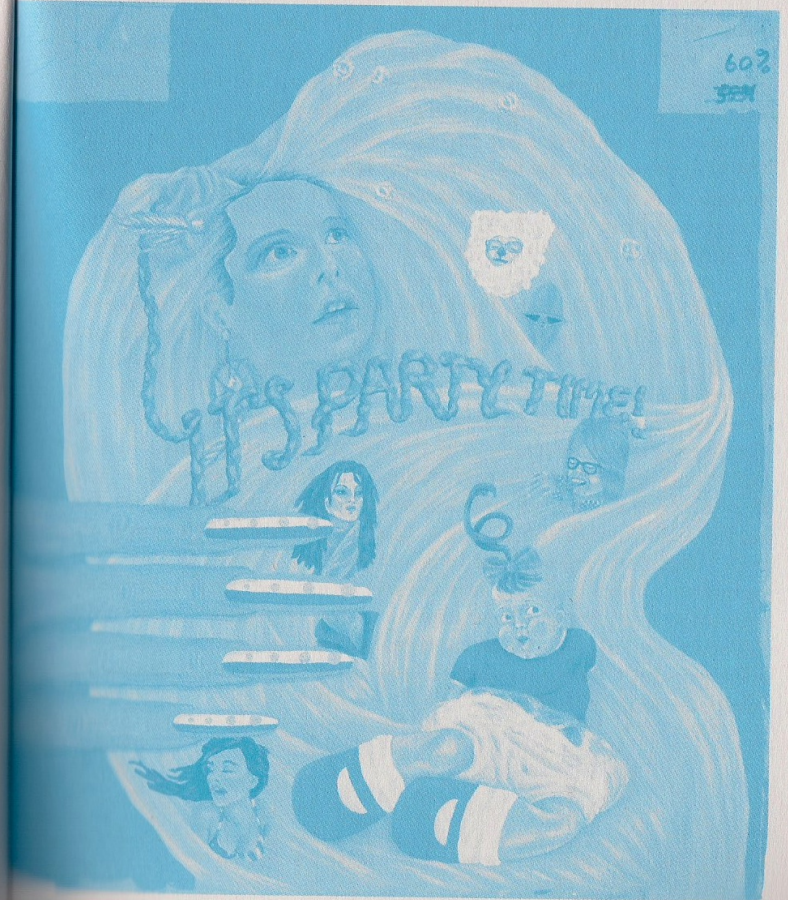
The overall effect of both videos is of chaotic mess punctuated by instances of precise wit: a perfectly delivered line or look. As Lockhart explains it, her directing aimed for “capturing Teen Burger's genius moments. The ‘flourishes’ that make it so special were made up on the spot while working around a skeleton of a story.”

The third, and as far as I can tell, never-distributed, Teen Burger video was produced and directed by Fithen and shot by Lockhart, who also assisted in fabricating the copious fake jizz required for ejaculating on Teen Burger's face in the ridiculously

³ As Lockhart recalls, “Holly [Ward, who played Popsicle] wasn't sure at first whether to wear the thong on the outside or inside... Hello?? Outside of course! An ass isn't for hiding!”

⁴ According to Lockhart, that's why Teen Burger boasts merely swollen nipples rather than full-scale boobs in this production.

⁵ “The unicorn was made out of cardboard with a hinged head, covered in some white fabric I had lying around, painted, with fake eyelashes and hair extensions (!) for a mane,” Lockhart explains. “Cardboard: a great free and easy material to work with – can't say enough!”



Amy Lockhart
Cover for VHS tape of *It's Party Time!* (2001)
Acrylic on board

protracted 'soft porn' bukkake scene. Lockhart described the video's aesthetic as "a Japanese, tweaked version of *Little House on the Prairie* or something, with Teen Burger in a big white bonnet, pink frilly little dress and petticoats." The video was used as a backdrop for a performance at one of Toronto DJ, artist and activist Will Munro's notorious Vazaleen parties, and was shown at least once more in a survey of Lockhart's film and video work organised by Pleasure Dome, also in Toronto, that same weekend in summer 2005. As the bukkake video played from VHS in the background, Teen Burger appeared live on stage – posing, lounging, dancing – in the same outfit as in the video, with Lockhart in a 'big lady' costume (again based on her drawings) attacking Teen Burger before being fought off by Toronto comics artist Mark Connery decked out in a cloak.

In hindsight, the distorted rhythms of Teen Burger's speech – including overly dramatic pauses and the open-mouthed double, triple and quadruple 'shock' takes – seem precursors to the dizzying, self-conscious performative mediations that Trecartin puts his characters through, an ADD twist on Divine's "glamour fits."⁶ Standing among this noble company – and acting as a precursor to the boom in homemade internet drag videos – the infamous Teen Burger deserves to be more widely known and celebrated as a piece of trash video history, a prime example of underground Canadiana and an immensely appealing exercise in dumpster drag fabulation.

Jon Davies is a writer and curator based in Toronto. In 2009, Arsenal Pulp Press published his book on Paul Morrissey's film *Trash* (1970). He has curated numerous screenings and exhibitions primarily for Pleasure Dome, The Power Plant and Oakville Galleries.

It's Party Time! and *You're Eternal...*, as well as many of Lockhart's other films, are distributed by the Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre cfmdc.org

⁶ The mother-daughter dynamic in *It's Party Time!* is also indebted to the Dawn and Taffy Davenport (Divine and Mink Stole) relationship in Waters's *Female Trouble* (1974). Similarly, when she is anxious before the party, Teen Burger soothes herself with a mantra about being "such a clean girl... clean and famous" while applying her makeup, which invokes the mad, eyeliner-injecting Dawn.