

BAY WINDOWS

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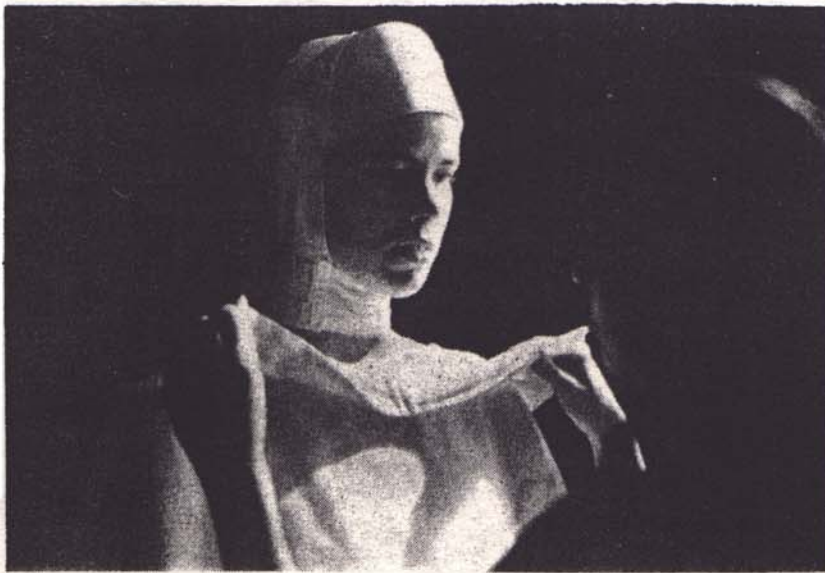
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A Laying on of Images

"A Queer Kind of Film"—*the Gay and Lesbian
Experimental Film Festival Disorients at the Brattle*

ANDREW RASANEN



Taking the wraps off. Peggy Healey and Ela Troyano as a lesbian nun and her lover in Su Friedrich's hypnotic "Damned if you Don't," Nov. 10 at the Brattle.

Su Friedrich's "Damned If You Don't" (shown on Nov. 10) is a real prize. Beautifully shot in black and white, it blends a "conventional" narrative technique with impressionistic camerawork, symbols, and voiceovers to create an intimate study of sexual repression and expression. A stylish old potboiler about an isolated convent is filmed directly from the television screen, in silence, but with plot narration and plenty of dramatic chiaroscuro close-ups. Its tale of passions leashed and unleashed provides the leitmotif for a young lesbian who watches it and the lonely nun she pursues and seduces.

As the two women's lives come closer to joining, voiceovers of excerpts from *Immodest Acts* (the biography of a 16th-century nun) and of an ex-nun's reminiscences of closeted romances at a religious school flesh out the theme. The young lesbian's needlework on an embroidery of Christ's face becomes an erotic message as the needle pushes through the thread and wags at the camera. She finishes only the mouth and hangs it in the nun's room. When they finally meet and make love, the woman's careful unwrapping, piece by piece, of the nun's complicated prison of clothing is both foreplay and liberating metaphor. The film is as hypnotic as a dream.