

stop-action animation to a French chapter played by an all-French cast. The plan is epic, but in keeping with Tea's commitment to produce cutting-edge, indie art.

"When I look back on it, I realize I had this idea for a long time, but I thought it was crazy to ask 21 filmmakers to do this film and I had a bit of fear about it being arrogant, like, 'Make a film about my life why don't you?'"

Tea says enough time has passed now that it doesn't really seem like a story of her life. "I feel an oddly detached affection for that book," says Tea. "It's like I'm a different person and it's far enough away. I feel like I had the ability when writing it to detach myself from the story. I have to detach myself in a different way for the film."

Part of that detachment may be that, in many of the shorts, the Michelle character bares little resemblance to the one in the book. "I am allowing the directors to do what they want. I have no set idea about what it will look like," says the author turned producer.

But in the cases when the character does resemble her 20-year-old self, Tea says the reality of a movie about her life has come crashing down on her. "I wasn't expecting to feel so weird and vulnerable," says Tea of seeing herself in one of the shorts. "I expect that it will just get weirder and weirder as it's finished."

In Good Hands

Like all of Tea's projects, the movie is as much about creating art as it is fostering community. Just as she does with *Sister Spit* and Radar Productions, the non-profit literary organization she runs, *Valencia* the movie is community-centric, a project that pulls together both big name and budding queer directors from across the country.

Tea's selection of directors reads like a who's who of the indie queer arts world. Among the list of auteurs are legendary dyke director Cheryl Dunye (*The Watermelon Woman*), queer porn icon Courtney Trouble, trans artist Amos Mac (*Original Plumbing* magazine) and documentarian Hilary Goldberg, who directed

Ani DiFranco's feature documentary, *Render*.

Goldberg is directing Chapter 5, the "buffalo hallucination scene," where Michelle is mourning her breakup with Iris, while watching the buffaloes in Golden Gate Park. Goldberg is shooting the hallucination scene in stop-action animation, a new medium for her. "Approaching stop-action animation for the first time has been dreamy," says the San Francisco documentarian. More than the creative freedom, Goldberg says she's excited about the collaboration. "I love that this is a collaborative feature film project where queer indie filmmakers join their visions to form a whole."

Trouble is taking more of a narrative approach to her film. She is directing Chapter 1, the first five minutes of the film, which spans five weeks—and includes one epic fisting scene. "I am excited about offering up a prolonged second of real, actual queer sex happening in a film...an explicit image that's outside of the worlds of pornography and cinema. Just one second of real life," says the porn director.

The only non-queer director is Jill Soloway who Tea describes as "culturally queer." Soloway brings a bit of Hollywood to the otherwise indie production—she was a producer of *Six Feet Under* and the

voice of Claire, the series' main female character. She will also take on the daunting roll of the final chapter. "Jill is going to do a great job with that vignette," says Tea. "She has a romantic sensibility, as does my last chapter. I think she's going to do a great job of capturing that."

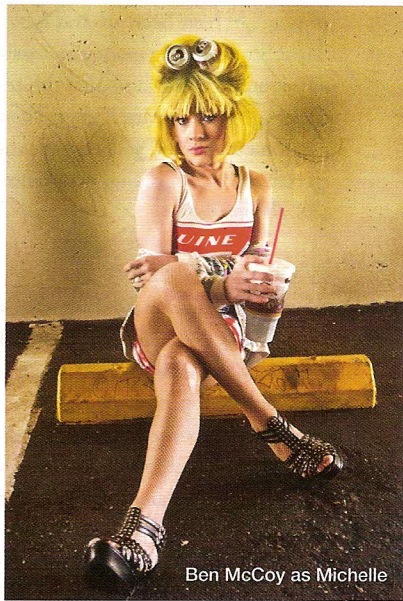
Tea says that in the beginning, trying to organize a team of 21 directors was "a bit like herding cats," but all of the pieces have fallen into place now. The filming was completed in August and they are currently in post-production. Tea hopes to get it into the film festivals in 2012, but right now she's focused on her tried and true method of distribution—on the stage of *Sister Spit*.

Tea Today

Eleven years after *Valencia* was first published Tea is more focused on community organizing and art than crazy dyke adventures. Even with her wild, curly hair and tattooed arms, Tea, now 40, is a much tamer version of her *Valencia* protagonist. She has moved from the Mission District, the setting of *Valencia*, but still lives in San Francisco, a city she describes herself as "being happily trapped" in.

Seventeen years after it began, Tea is still at the helm of *Sister Spit*, which now welcomes all writers, not just queer. This year, Chronicle Books gave *Sister Spit* its own imprint label, a major victory for LGBT publishing. She is also the Executive Director of Radar Productions, her non-profit that helps writers in all stages of their writing—from idea genesis through performing.

In the last decade, Tea has published five books, including a graphic novel, and the soon-to-be published biography of Beth Ditto, *Coal to Diamonds*. In addition to *Valencia* the movie, Tea is currently working on two new books—a young adult fantasy novel and a 400-page novel that is half memoir and half science fiction. Even with all the other books and projects, *Valencia* still holds a special place in Tea's heart, just as it does for her readers. "I feel such an affection for that book," says Tea. "It is my story." ■



Ben McCoy as Michelle