

EVERYDAYCINEMA



THE FILMS OF MARC LAFIA

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THE EXTRAORDINARY EVENT OF EVERYDAY CINEMA

On the Films of Marc Lafia
by Daniel Coffeen, PhD

To me, the most conspicuous and intriguing thing about watching a Marc Lafia film is that it's clearly up to something. This is a different kind of cinema. Even the ways in which it challenges are not familiar. Sure, the films are generous, exuberant, and beautiful—but at the same time, they ask strange things of us.

And yet what makes them so odd is precisely their everydayness, their thorough engagement with the tools and means we all know so well—only we don't expect them in our “movies.” There's something uncanny going on here.

We watch videos all day on YouTube, Facebook, Vine, Vimeo. The recorded moving image has shifted from over there, up on the big screen, to right here, in front of me, at all times. Recording has become ubiquitous, networked, and computational. And yet our cinema remains, for the most part, univocal and monumental. Films today may include ubiquitous recording as something to represent—think of the Jason Bourne films or *Catfish*—but those films themselves remain monumental rather than computational and networked.

The always-on recording of the social Web is fundamentally changing our way of standing toward the image, toward ourselves, toward each other. And yet when it comes to watching “movies,” we have very different expectations—not just in terms of craft or quality but in terms of what counts as real, as scene, as screen, as filmic event.

As a trained filmmaker who once made feature films, Lafia has no doubt been afforded new methods and undeniable freedoms by new media. He doesn't need six truckloads of booms, cables, and grips—not to mention a truckload of money. He has an idea; puts together a cast; and films wherever he is—usually the streets of New York. Often, he has actors film themselves on their own, armed with some kind of instructions and a small HD camera. His process is open yet exact, somewhat “scripted,” always developing, adjusting to circumstance.

But this is not an inexpensive way to make a so-called indie film with quirky characters and redemption narratives. This is not a way to make a film on the cheap and avoid the Hollywood scramble for money. For Lafia, *new media* means new ways of going. In the words of Deleuze and Guattari, new media offer a line of flight from the state apparatus of the film industry. The everyday tools of cinema breed a different kind of cinema, with different narrative strategies, different notions of character, a different interplay of ideas, scene, and even screen. Lafia's films do not as much use or embrace new media as they *are* of this everyday cinema. This is not simply a new way of recording: it is a recoding—of cinema, of narrative, of self, of life.

I want to call his films a cinema of emergence, a cinema of the event, in which the very act of ubiquitous recording creates something new. The camera in this digital age—and

in the hands of Lafia—is not a means of mediating an encounter or representing reality. On the contrary, the camera is constitutive of the encounter. It doesn't just record something else happening over there; it forges events in which it is a player right here.

Hi How Are You Guest 10479 explicitly takes on the always-on camera of the social Web as we watch a woman alone in her Manhattan apartment seek intimacy and connection through adult chat rooms. At some point, it occurs to the viewer that there's no camera-man there. The incredible Raimonda Skeryte is not just the actor: she sets the scene and records herself—an elaborate Instagram selfie.

This is the condition of cinema today: we are all actors, filmmakers, editors, producers, and distributors. As we are all folded into the cinematic event, what is real and what is fiction becomes irrelevant—not because the recording and the flesh are the same but because the recording is real, too. The camera doesn't capture action that's been scripted elsewhere; it's not an illustrated storybook. As we all relentlessly record ourselves and are recorded, we become part of the cinematic fabric of life, the spectacle of which we are both constituent and constitutive.

These conditions demand a new mode of film. The contemporary French philosopher François Laruelle writes of “the necessity of addressing immanence via immanence in an immanent manner, not allowing for an all-seeing purview. . . .” And that is precisely what Lafia gives us: films of the cinematic everyday using methods of the cinematic everyday. Here, there is no outside the gaze, no all-seeing director behind the camera, no fourth wall. If monumental cinema stands back and films what's over there, Lafia's everyday cinema flourishes within the infinite web of lenses and screens, within the relentless event of recording—not as his subject matter per se but as his formal approach.

“Hi How Are You Guest 10479” is not a recording of the event of social media—as if Lafia were trying to put a finger on the pulse of the kids today. This is not old media capturing new media. What Lafia does is operate within the world of the always-on camera, the camera that we first read about in Bergson's *Matter and Memory* and which, with the rise of the digital, became externalized: from our heads to the world and then, as Debord notes, back again.

No, Lafia's films are not about this new world order. They are of this new world order, of the always recorded, always played back world: of everyday cinema.

Take *Revolution of Everyday Life*. The title, taken from the English translation of Raoul Vaneigem's situationist tome, declares that we're operating in a place of the spectacle, within that place in which we are always already recorded and played back, run through, not just with images, but with gazes both virtual and real, digital and flesh.

This film, which becomes part of a trilogy along with *Love and Art* and *Paradise*, moves through the streets of New York with intensity and intimacy. Thematically, it seems to be outdated—a radical performance artist trying to foment revolution with her S&M events. It feels very twentieth century. But that, alas, is not what this film reckons.

What *Revolution of Everyday Life* gives us is different modes of standing toward the everyday camera, a kind of ethics of the always-on camera. Once again, we have the incredible Raimonda, who welcomes the gaze not as a narcissist or even a friend but as a cohabiter, a companion. And we have her lover, played by Tjasa Ferme, fierce and brazenly sexual, demanding attention. Where one stands back and lets the camera roll, the other leans in, demanding the camera's gaze at all times.

Meanwhile, we get these small, beautiful moments in which other actors film themselves alone—with Lafia's open-ended instructions—telling these fantastically intimate details. But to whom? It's not the audience but the camera and its virtual eye, its possible eyes, its infinite eyes. With this film, Lafia tells us that this is the site of revolution: it is in the everyday and how we stand toward the ubiquitous recording event.

Making films of new media means being part of computation and the network. Which, for Lafia, means the screen need not be singular or univocal. In the incredible *Permutations*, Lafia proliferates the screen, creating a distinct viewing experience that is blissfully hallucinatory. Each permutation is made of short films all shot on the same day and then arranged on the grid of the screen in ever-different arrays. The multiplicity of screens, or of the desktop, in everyday life, has become the multiplicity of screens in cinema.

The first film of Lafia's I saw was *Exploding Oedipus*, a feature film, which showed at a festival on the huge Castro Theatre screen in San Francisco. Besides being gorgeous, what strikes me now about that film is that the main character, Hilbert, carries around with him a film projector and reels of film taken when he was a child. Which is to say, Lafia has always wanted to put film in his pocket, to project it on the wall, to move it from the outside to the inside, from the over there to right here, from the monument to the intimate.

The cinema of the right here, of the everyday, involves a shift in the economy of the screen, the scene, the story, the character, and the affective experience. This is what makes watching Lafia's films so uncanny: they operate in a functional and affective space that is at once known and unknown, everyday and extraordinary, familiar and unfamiliar. There are threads of story but his films operate more like social media, a smattering of moments, of posts, woven together to forge this experience. Characters and actors blur into each other without fanfare and pretense; this is simply the condition of everyday cinema. And the affect is intimate, at times uncomfortably so—intense, inchoate, confrontational.

With the rise of the digital, cinema is no longer monumental. Despite the best efforts of Hollywood, making a film no longer demands millions of dollars, booms, grips, lights, and cameras. We don't need theaters. We don't need studios. All we need is a mobile phone. Cinema has become everyday. What was once over there is now here, there, and everywhere.

But Lafia is not content with social media as substitute or replacement for cinema. Watching *Exploding Oedipus* in a grand theater and then, a few years later, watching his *Confessions of an Image* screened in a San Francisco loft apartment, and then all the others on my desktop, streaming via Vimeo, one thing is glaringly clear: Lafia knows, and Lafia loves, movies.

New media do not signal the end of cinema, as some maintain. Watching Lafia's films over the years, watching him wrestle and negotiate and explore and discover different forms, different expressions, it seems to me that cinema is just getting going. What I term the extraordinary event of everyday cinema is not the end of cinema. It's a rebirth. Watching Lafia's films, I don't leave thinking: Cinema's dead! On the contrary, I find myself exuberant: Cinema here! Cinema there! Cinema everywhere!

Lafia is not ringing the death knell of film. On the contrary, I see him as seeking to rescue cinema from itself. As Hollywood closes in on itself with desperately grander and grander special effects, Lafia sees open doors all around. Why are you doing all that, he asks, when all this is right here for the taking? Look! Screens are everywhere! Cameras are everywhere! We've created the infrastructure of cinema everywhere! Lafia's films don't mark the abandonment of cinema; this is its loving, passionate resurrection.

This everydayness of our social media creates a pervasive recording environment that is very much alive. Recording and screening are always right next to us, with us all the time. It is continuous—with itself as well as with the so-called real. We act now as though a camera were always present because, alas, a camera always is present. Lafia is tapping into the vast, living, breathing cinematic organism that our world has become. We live in a cinematic experience that is always already happening.

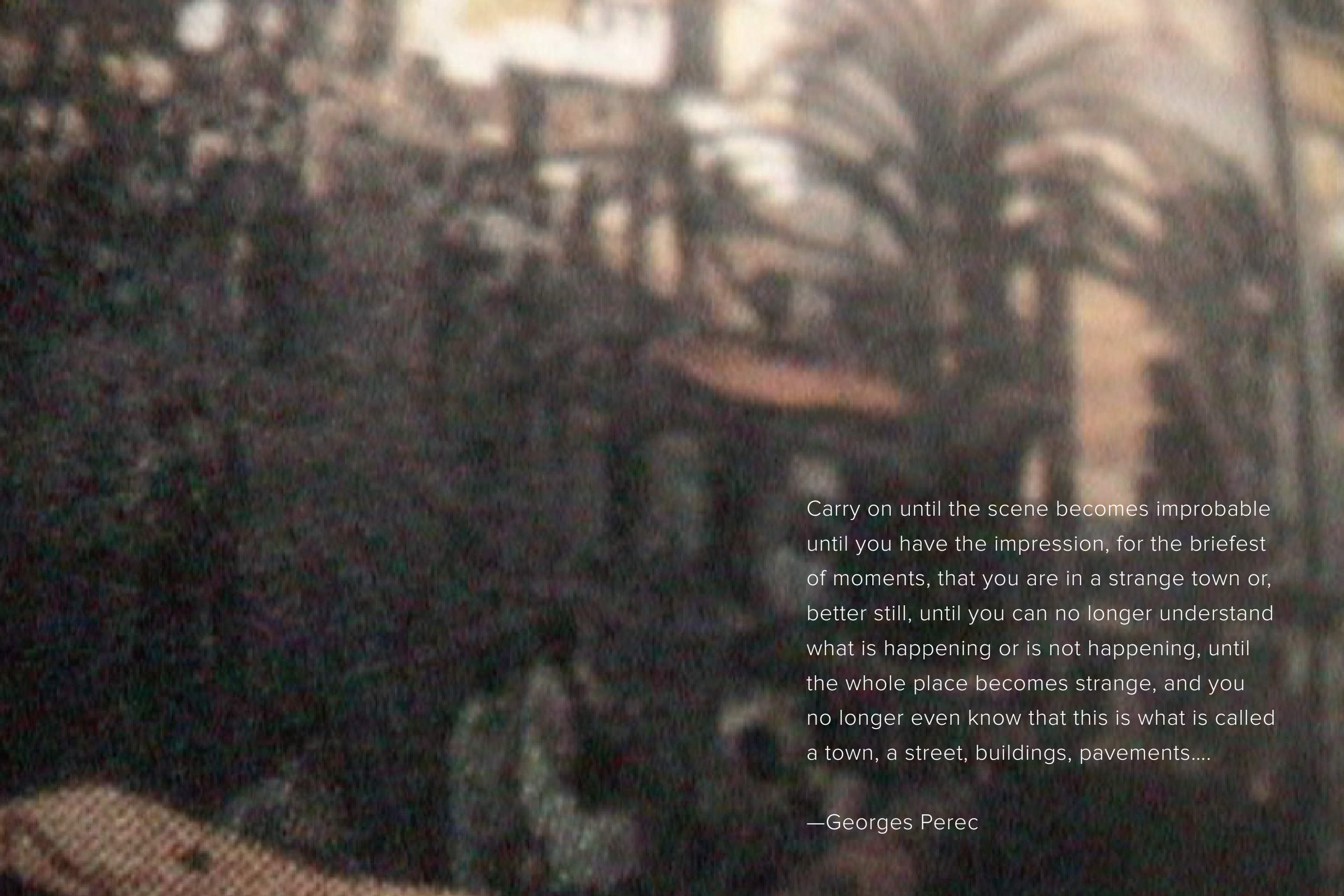
And, for Lafia, this introduces new possibilities of film. A hard and fast story line rarely prevails. Rather, all sorts of things happen that are unexpected and unpredictable. Everyday cinema is more like a conversation than a story. We don't need that old standby, the suspension of disbelief. All we have to do is go with the flow of images, a flow that happens on multiple screens and in multiple times simultaneously. If cinema has always told us stories about ourselves, inflected how we imagine ourselves, this new cinema offers new kinds of stories, new ways of imagining ourselves, new modes of perception and relating, ones that are vital and relevant to the now.

In this book, we see Lafia take up cinema—its history, its grandeur, its rules—and apply the conditions of this new, ubiquitous, always-on recording world in order to forge and proffer something new, something relevant, something beautiful: a cinema of the everyday that is anything but everyday. A cinema that is extraordinary.

There is much to be learned from Lafia's methodologies, his ideas, as well as from the kinds of reception his films have garnered. Obviously, after *Exploding Oedipus*, his film-making has operated outside what can even be recognized by the festival circuit. He speaks a different dialect of cinema. Screenings have tended to be discrete events at local theaters, select museums and galleries, and for those not local, from desktop to flat screen, thanks to Apple AirPlay.

This new cinema—what I call everyday cinema, but there may very well be a better name—still needs to be fleshed out. I see Lafia as neither an exception nor an institutional leader: he's an explorer and, lucky for us, at once a theorist and a practitioner. Questions remain: How might we create practices for the distribution of these films? Where can films that are still narrative, still "features" in the contemporary sense but outside the festival or star system, be screened? And then there is the question of the limits and possibilities of multiscreen films. What is the role of public viewing—a beautiful and important experience, for sure. What are the economics of such a practice?

But there will probably be no definitive answers. The computational is essentially plastic and the network is, well, decentered. Hard and fast structures such as studios and theaters are not the defining constructs of this cinematic experience. This new cinema is a cinema of questions, beginning with these relentless questions: What is cinema? How do we stand toward the camera? How do we go with images? There may very well be as many answers as there are films.

The background image is a dark, heavily blurred photograph. It appears to be a close-up of a textured surface, possibly a wall or a piece of fabric, with various shades of brown, black, and grey. The blurring is significant, making it difficult to discern specific objects or figures. The overall mood is mysterious and abstract.

Carry on until the scene becomes improbable until you have the impression, for the briefest of moments, that you are in a strange town or, better still, until you can no longer understand what is happening or is not happening, until the whole place becomes strange, and you no longer even know that this is what is called a town, a street, buildings, pavements...

—Georges Perec

INTRODUCTION

How can we make the world unfamiliar so that we can see again, so that it can be again, so that we may consume and inhabit it as Georges Perec invites us to in his book *Species of Spaces*? In my films, I have returned to this question again and again. Not in the same way, that would be impossible—and yet, it is in the same way, but differently. Taking heed of Perec’s countless inventive suggestions to find the infra-ordinary and commonplace in our urban and domestic space, films should bring us a new experience, letting us see anew our taste, thoughts, our being in the world. Films and their making should become a world unto themselves. It is this idea of world making, of making the event of filmmaking a new event of perception and production, that has drawn me to my films. They have made me find them and make them.

As a character of Georges Perec’s might sit down at a café, enjoy his coffee, a beer, a cigarette, his everyday, his habitual perspective begins to shake off and soon he does not stand apart from the world; he does not distance himself. On the contrary, he consumes the world with all his senses—watching, sipping, listening. He stands amid the world, amid its great teeming, and the world begins to taste unfamiliar. The strange, it seems, does not come from distance but from a particular kind of intimacy.

And it is this intimacy, with film, with the cinema, with movies, the possibilities of them today and within my possibilities, that are presented here. In the writings, notes, and essays produced over the years and projects, I present in one place these many encounters.

I want to record here how certain of my films have come about, what I was doing with them, what I see in them, and how they taught me to see and think. I want to see here cinema as a way to produce and shape both one’s reading of the world and one’s being and becoming it. After all, it is the many books, films, songs, spaces, and spices that have shown me the world.

How I returned to cinema is a long, long detour where I had to unlearn how it was I thought one was supposed to approach it.

I studied philosophy up until analytic philosophy, and then went into the theater while studying art history, then photography at Harvard Summer School. It was then that I became interested in film. Film had everything: it was ideas and people, shapes, forms, and colors. It was a beautiful form into which I could put all of myself. I went to the Nuart Theatre on Santa Monica Boulevard in LA, where they screened double features. I would drive home in the warm air, thinking about so many things. I like Los Angeles. I like the light, especially in winter. Film was light, color movement. At UCLA’s film school, I took more philosophy classes, experimental avant-garde film classes. I saw Michael Snow’s *Wavelength*

and Peter Kubelka's films. Film was a machine of duration, pulsating light. I had made a light box when I was nine. It was like a bass drum with transparent color paper on four sides. I loved punk and experimental music, from the Sex Pistols, Bowie, and Lou Reed to the Ramones then Schoenberg and Cage and Xenakis and Stockhausen, *Einstein on the Beach*. Light and sound. Film you could hold in your hand. I lived with an animator; each frame was just a small movement to the next. I did a class on the painter Frank Stella. Studying the black paintings. I was impressed with how he could do so much with slight variation.

Where my friends were making narrative films, I was seeing the movement of light. It seemed I was a cinematographer, an art director, or an actor. The noted American filmmaker Shirley Clarke showed up one day, and I took a class with her. First thing she said was to go into a room alone and film yourself. She was different. She was an artist who made films. I had written a play and done a lot of black-and-white photography to get into film school. Films started with writing, and then you film. I just started filming things and was looking for the film. Writing in film. I spent the last two years of a long time in school making a film from a short comic book. It was grueling, and I just wanted to finish, and I had to start working to make money. Over the next five years I was writing screenplays—this was the way to make films. You wrote a script, someone liked it and gave you money. At the same time I was writing music video treatments for David Fincher, screen adaptations of books and comics (*Iron Man*, *Judge Dredd*, Rudy Rucker's *Software*) for different film studios, and occasionally directing a commercial or music video. I was attempting to be in an industry.

In the meantime, my sister was going to art school, and I started to go to galleries and become aware of the LA scene—Mike Kelley and Paul McCarthy, for example. Artists seem to have a unique voice. Film was an industry with a very defined role for the filmmaker, a defined grammar and method of working. I was searching for an alternate grammar like that of William S. Burroughs, Kathy Acker, and Terry Riley. The films I loved at the Nuart were all made by artists; it was a time when film was an art form. But in LA, with the success of *Jaws*, *The Terminator*, and *Star Wars*, film was for the most part a producer's medium. Experimental energy was going into rock videos and game design instead. I worked on many rock videos, maybe ten for then commercial and music video director David Fincher, was introduced to Madonna, wrote *Express Yourself* for her and David, met Michael Jackson, many other rock stars. I was an avaricious reader, trolling used-book stores, going to shows, broke, always writing and imagining projects, playing around with the video recorder, coming up with video concepts very quickly.

I started to teach part time at Art Center College of Design. Everything had gone digital, and the network was just upon us. This was the most exciting thing happen-

ing, to me. I spent two years bringing forth, with two groups of design students, the work I would leave LA with. Between CNN, the violence outpouring from the Rodney King beating, the O. J. Simpson trial, working for producers, and being a writer, it was like being in Nathanael West's *Day of the Locust*. At forty, I left Hollywood broke and moved to San Francisco with my two demos and the one film script, *Suitcase*, I still wanted to make. Vincent Gallo, who was still early in his career, wanted to make that film, but no one was sufficiently impressed nor knew his recent work in Claire Denis's *Nenette et Boni*, at least not the people I was talking to, to give it a green light. Meanwhile the digital and the network just forming allowed me to imagine an alternate space of time and representation, where through software, form and content would be uniquely articulated, and once created, the work on the network would be received, would be social. How the network played out is all part of this story.

The network was the possibility of a new image of the world, a new kind of duration, a new format of time and representation. My first interest was to "see" the world in real time, not in film time or cable time. Not in crisis, not in sound bites, but simply to see it through the instrument of the Web, to literally see it in all its simultaneity. To present an alternate view, an alternate visualization of our planet, I designed an interface to see and navigate the world through pictures called Planet.

This was a film, a perpetual film, a new kind of recording. This was a way to record the world and allow others to navigate the recording.

This prosthetic of seeing, now at the desktop, as instrument of writing, reading, viewing, mixing, with access to all the vast archives of knowledge, this interface became my interest.

But I am not going to tell you that story yet, of how our network and software condition re-creates the terms of what I would look for in cinema.

Three decades ago Roland Barthes elegantly defined cultural text as "a tissue of quotations": "We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture." As Lev Manovich points out, in a software-driven production environment, these quotations come not only from the creators' memories of what they previously saw, read, and heard, but also directly from the databases of media assets, as well as numerous other words that in the case of the World Wide Web are just a click away.

Today we see a cinema that is and speaks to an always-being-imaged environment; a cinema that is always on, always imaging, but not necessarily recording—a cinema

that is so real time, so always on, it is not so much recorded but simply as pervasive as the air.

This names a condition of the network and a cinema of the immediate, which is a cinema of the intimate.

This always-on condition might be perceived to be below the level of the cinematic as it is too everyday. It is, as Marshall McLuhan would say, an extension of perception, and almost invisible. This could not be cinema as cinema frames the shot, orchestrates the event, creates the event of seeing and narrating.

Yet isn't this condition a new event for the cinema, an event that grows out of the cinematic, as television did from film—is not the network a new cinematic apparatus? In the network the cinematic event becomes very new, the event as constituted by the gaze, the shot, reverse shot, time, all this changes in the always-on, always-recording environment we live in.

If the cinema constitutes terms of seeing, what happens when the seer is seen and the seer sees the seeing, when all seers not only see but represent themselves to be seen, when offscreen is always on-screen, some other screen.

If the network condition is to be on camera, always already public, how is one at the same time private and public, that is, how does one bring one's self alone to the network that looks to the private to be desirably public? What is Facebook, after all, but the beckoning to be public, all of you?

From my early days in film school up until the present, I have been interested in the diverse ways that the means of recording inflect or constitute stories themselves, how the cinema itself is a narrative of film.

As a young filmmaker, I wanted to explore the way the stuff of cinema—the fabric of film, the camera and the lens, the actors and the word—do not just present (or represent) the world but inflect the world.

As the media landscape shifted toward the digital, the computational, and the network, my work began to ask new questions: In an age of digital proliferation, what becomes of an image that is always already reproduced to infinity, that is always already manipulated? What happens to individuality as we collectively create and curate ourselves within the global network? As our world accumulates and proliferates images and information, what new kinds of sensemaking emerge? How do images fit into this new world—their production, consumption, dissemination, their potency, their affective resonances, their possibilities?

If cinema can be read and considered as one narrative of film recording, what is the narrative of digital recording, cinema without film? Cinema without a starting point of film recording and projection, a cinema that is not based on film and fixed playback?

With the rise of digital technology—and with it the network and the computational—I wanted to (re)create a new kind of cinema, one that was no longer limited by the inflexibility of camera and celluloid.

After years of doing new-media work, I return to narrative cinema, presenting here nine feature-length narrative films made in as many years, an essay film, and my *Permutations*, a rules-based project consisting of making at least one multiscreen film a day over the course of a year. Most of the works have been made with very small crews, committed actors, and a very tactical, pragmatic, adventurous sense of filmmaking. Rather than starting from a place where we say, "We need this location, this actor, this amount of money," we ask ourselves, "What do we have?" The answer is simple: we have each other, myself, the writer-director; a very carefully selected group of actors; a committed, thoughtful assistant, an excellent camera and sound person (both filmmakers in their own right)—that's really what we have, and sometimes we have less.

So how can we make films, what strategies can we employ, and who will watch these films?

To Percec, one can only be intimate when one is rid of the familiar, when one allows the strange to speak. And this allowance only comes from proximity, when one throws away the ready-mades and reaches for the world—then falls in. How does Percec do this? He is algorithmic, he has a generative approach—he creates new flora and fauna with new DNA, new instruction sets—new limits—think only of his novel *A Void*, where the entire novel is constructed without the letter *e*. This limitation produces the uncanny, breaks the natural routine of the author, forces her this way and that.

What then are the possibilities for a cinema both commercial and personal, what does its form want to be? In the condition of the network, of computation, of the vast archive of images out there, if one wants to make a new cinema, a personal reckoning with cinema, as an artist, as a new cineast, for the love of cinema, as an ideal, as a beautiful possibility, how does one, like Percec, forge new openings, new instructions, new recordings?

EXPLODING OEDIPUS



A film about the complex relationships between a young man's memories, fears, and desires, and the reconciliation of his psyche, sensual appetites, and childhood recollections.

From an early age I remember seeing my father's home movies, shot in 16 mm, and his 35-mm color-reversal slides, both projected on a screen we had at our home. I can see the beam of light in the dark and hear the sound of the film moving through the gate and the fan's motor.

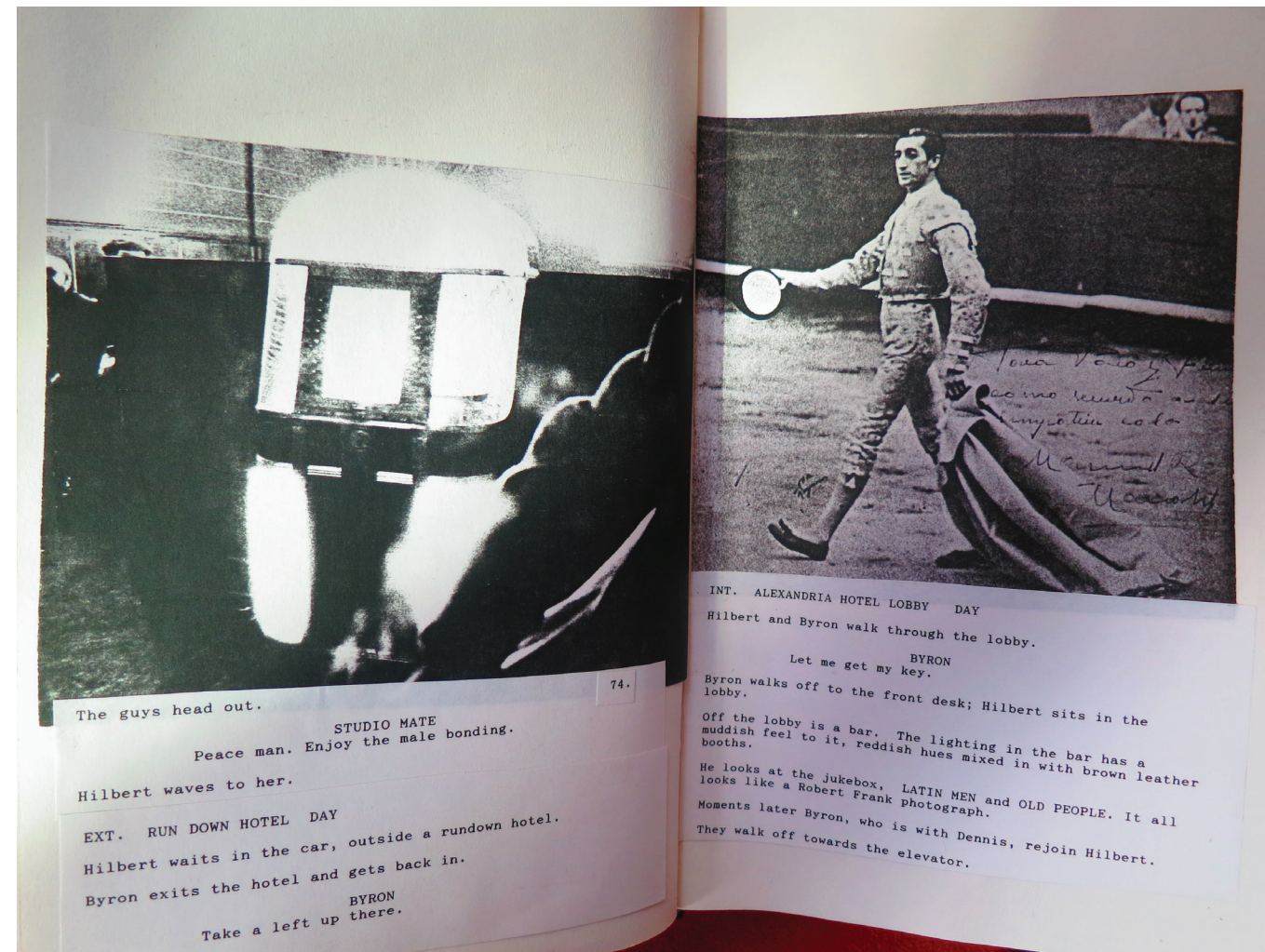
Often in the slides I could see the deep blacks and sumptuous colors, and projected, the images had a great presence and left a lasting impression on me.

In my midtwenties I was living in the American Hotel in a single room with a toilet and shower down the hall. The hotel, which was in the desolate and abandoned manufacturing part of downtown LA, had a bar and punk club on the first floor. I would often return to my little room from work to spend what amounted to another workday editing on a flatbed, and though the music was at full throttle below, I would eventually fall on my bed and pass out.

When I left the ad job and went to Propaganda Films, the most cutting-edge film and music video production unit then in LA, to write music video scripts, I was going to cinema houses and used-book stores, I was reading all the time, trying to have time while not spending much money. I had been writing spec film scripts, which is very demanding. It took me a long time to have a sense

of a scenario that was something more than a screenplay. In time a script for me would be a blueprint for a film—a direction, not the film itself—and besides telling everyone where to go and what's happening, it would continue to take on a life, evolving with its cast and the very shooting of the film. So what can a script be, with this idea that each page represents a minute and the film script needs to be 90 to 120 minutes long? Why so many words? The film scenario can be a three-to-five-page piece of writing, along with scenes and notes written along the way. But those three pages might be written, rewritten, twenty-five, thirty times and much of it thrown out. This kind of understanding of working took me a long time to develop, to in a sense hold the film inside me and to let it become what it wanted to be because it will never be that which is on the page. A film cannot be known and then recorded, it has to become an event of recording. It has to keep living and evolving.

My first long-form narrative as a director was originally titled *Suitcase* (eventually released as *Exploding Oedipus*) and was about someone quite alone, who only alone to himself could come to himself and open up a space to live. This could never be a compelling screenplay as it had very little dialogue, was very personal, and what happens is very moody and deconstructive of film and the image. I made a version as a paper movie, cutting the script up and placing it along with pictures that had the right mood. It is often the feel and mood of things that I want to capture and express in my films.



Before the talking cinema, film had to create a form that could rely principally on image and live music accompaniment. The film, though there were intertitles, would unfold by image, giving the audience direction about the time and place of events. In the films of the French filmmaker of the twenties Germaine Dulac, the essence of cinema was the visual, psychological, and poetic. The logic would be the visually associative, not the unfolding of plot or story per se, but the rhythm of the visual. Buñuel, Eisenstein, many cineasts took this up. With sync sound the expressive form of cinema became literature and the theater, privileging plot and language over picture and sound.

The more money to make a film, the more opinions, conditions, “restrictions” made on the film—unlike many other forms, cinema, like architecture, requires capital, and capital requirements came to shape film in the form of producers and studios. Most all of that shaping is done in the script and script approval. The script becomes the accountable document for the production of the film. Not always, as there are certainly some strong filmmakers who make the films they want to make and whose scenarios move and evolve with the production. But for the most part the script puts in the light of day, for all to see, the film before the film.



Exploding Oedipus is a 35-mm feature-length film shot on location in the San Francisco Bay Area. After his father's heart attack, Hilbert leaves his past behind, taking 8-mm films of his childhood to a cheap downtown hotel where he obsessively compares the films with contrasting recollections of his youth. He begins to ask, How do we create narratives for ourselves? How do we construct and rewrite our memories to situate the present? From the juxtaposition of narrated flashback sequences to surreal visions, drugs, open sexuality, interactions and conversations with incarnations of himself and his parents at various ages, Hilbert discovers the sublime beauty of the everyday.

In my first feature film, my attention moved from the materiality of film to what the film had recorded. What had the film seen? How did it see? And how was what it saw, what it recorded, seen through the cinema? How does cinema see and structure recording? This was and increasingly became very different than how film scripts and film writing works, which is a different event of description. Writing and seeing. Cinema, film, movies, television, they all teach us how to see. They all show us a seeing.

When I finished film school, I wrote screenplays, scenarios for music videos, directed a few commercials, and in the evenings with my sister made the rounds of the burgeoning LA art scene. The screenplay is a very concise form with very rigorous rules, almost to the page, at least when it's commercial.

I had a good go of it and did enjoy it, more so when I was hired and it would be my telling of the story I was hired to write, mostly adaptations. But after writing maybe ten or more screenplays, the form could no longer work for me. I was more interested in new forms and new modes of recording that allow us to see ourselves imaged and narrated, forms that can give shape to a new kind and space of cinema. To have cinema look at recording itself.

After writing a number of film scripts, more and more I knew I wanted to make a personal film, to take account of things. The late seventies and early eighties presented for a brief moment an openness to explorations and experimentation in consciousness and sexuality. With the growing awareness of AIDS and gender and queer politics, things hardened into more of an identity politics, where it was all about taking a position. Play and experimentation was what you did when you were young, a passing game. I did not get to make *Exploding Oedipus*, which really was to be a reflection on things in my early twenties, until some fifteen years later. It asks the question, How do we come to know ourselves, how do we love. It sees the cinema not simply as a mirror but its own becoming. What is the relationship between the mirror, seeing, the law, and violence, both to oneself and others? Sounds rather heady, but it was all filtered through the pop idioms of all the books, criticism, philosophy, films, and music I loved, it was to be a reckoning, a coming to terms. It was to be behavioral and the analysis of behavior.

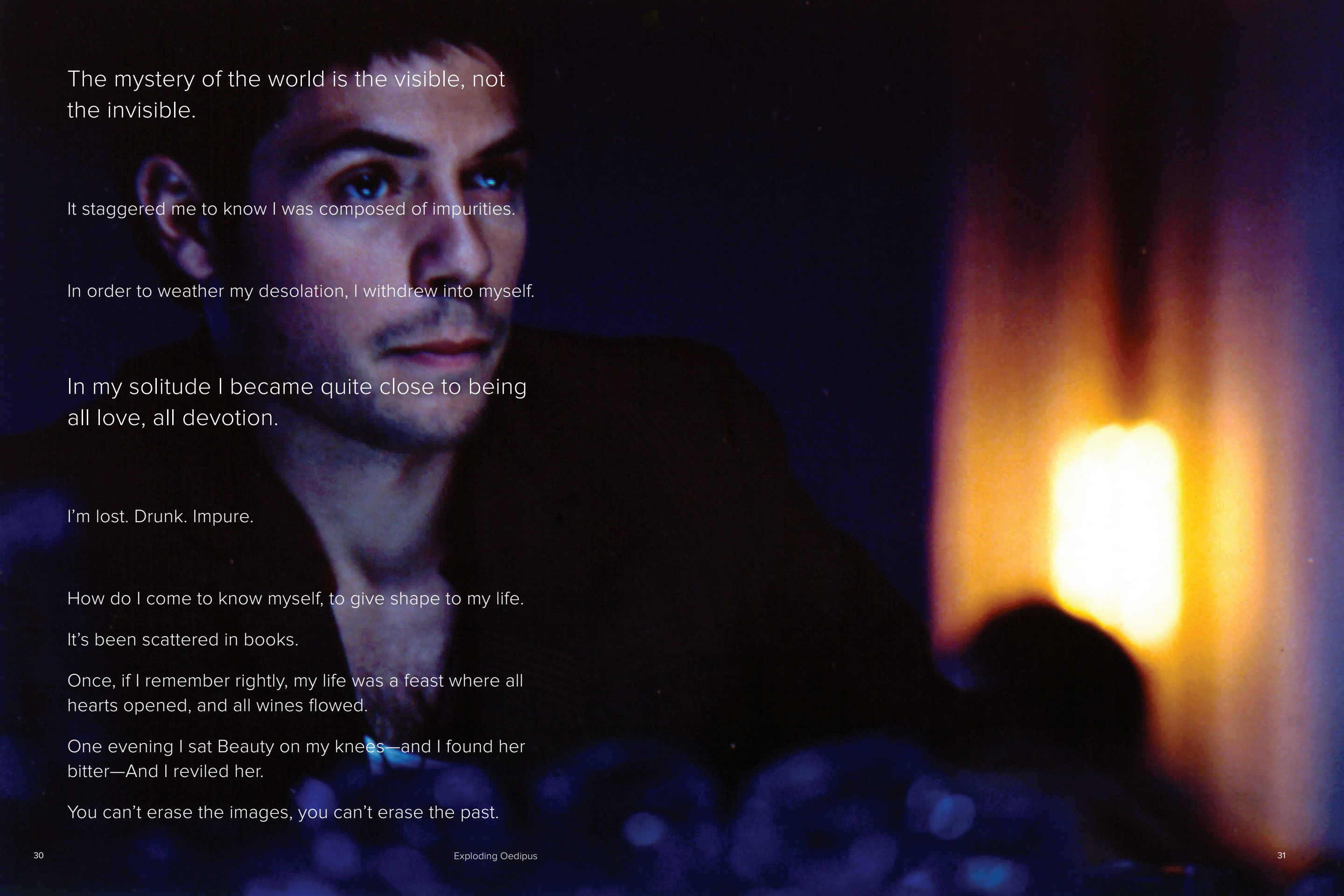


If you explode the mirror and put into play your image repertoire, let yourself be abandoned, where are you, without mooring, without tether? You would ultimately need to find a boundary, a limit. More accurately, that limit would find you.

How do we come to shape ourselves, form a self in the mirror? A self that is seemingly complete in the imaginary, in our image repertoire. Is there no bottom to the image repertoire—the feelings, thoughts, and dialogue inside, that set of relationships that both exist and not in the world—that seduces and alludes, that affirms and disparages us, that constitutes us? It will be a film about the spaces of the real and the imaginary. Those limits that prove to myself I exist.

I tape up my body, the wounds and hurt of it, I tape up the feeling to keep them from spilling out, to make an outward visible sign. I produce the visible sign of a body unwinding, of me unraveling—she is my mirror.



A close-up photograph of a man's face, looking slightly to the right. The lighting is dramatic, with a strong blue tint on the left side of his face and a warm, yellowish glow from a light source on the right. The background is dark and out of focus.

The mystery of the world is the visible, not
the invisible.

It staggered me to know I was composed of impurities.

In order to weather my desolation, I withdrew into myself.

In my solitude I became quite close to being
all love, all devotion.

I'm lost. Drunk. Impure.

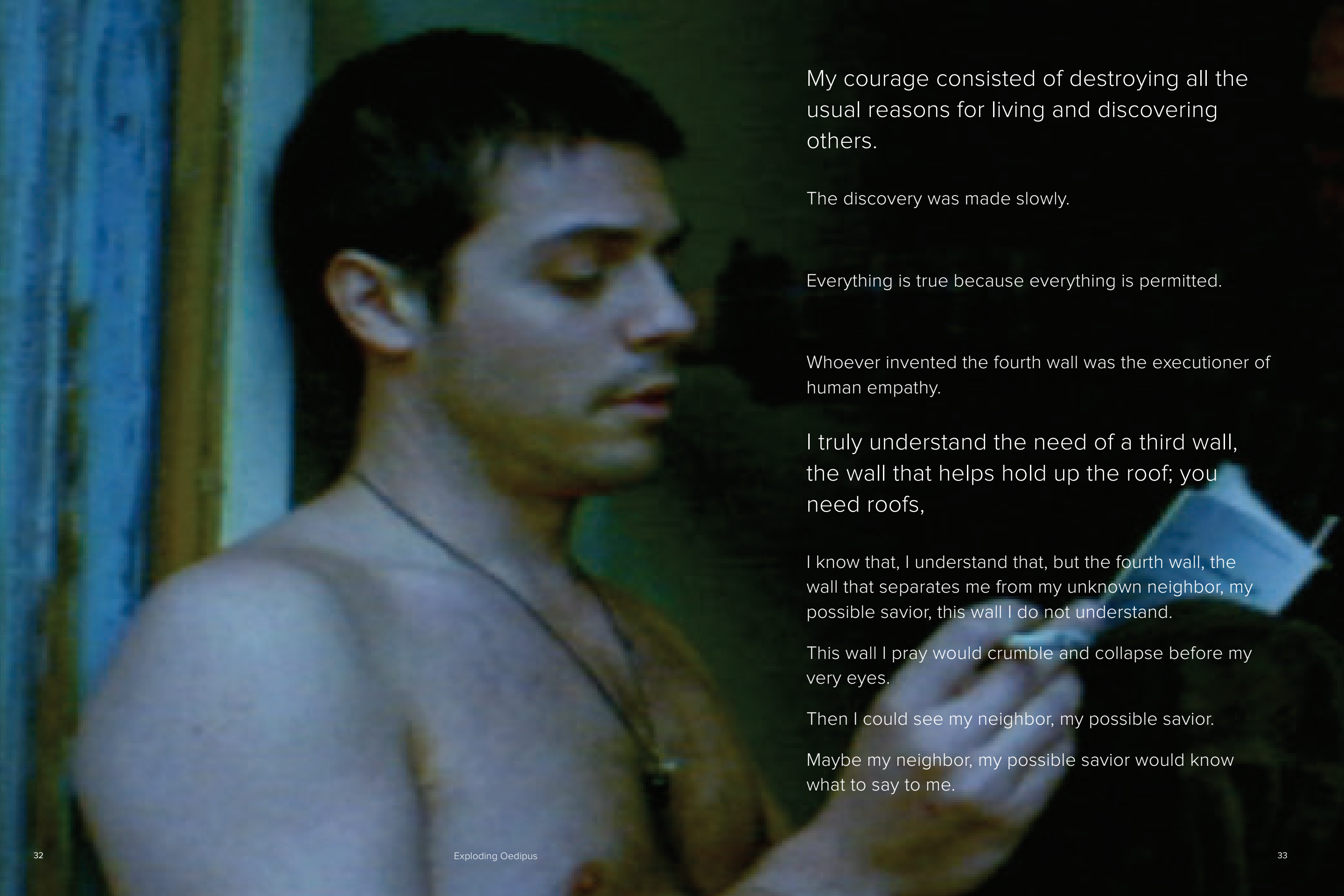
How do I come to know myself, to give shape to my life.

It's been scattered in books.

Once, if I remember rightly, my life was a feast where all
hearts opened, and all wines flowed.

One evening I sat Beauty on my knees—and I found her
bitter—And I reviled her.

You can't erase the images, you can't erase the past.



My courage consisted of destroying all the usual reasons for living and discovering others.

The discovery was made slowly.

Everything is true because everything is permitted.

Whoever invented the fourth wall was the executioner of human empathy.


I truly understand the need of a third wall, the wall that helps hold up the roof; you need roofs,

I know that, I understand that, but the fourth wall, the wall that separates me from my unknown neighbor, my possible savior, this wall I do not understand.

This wall I pray would crumble and collapse before my very eyes.

Then I could see my neighbor, my possible savior.

Maybe my neighbor, my possible savior would know what to say to me.



I'll buy him a beer, tell him a joke, he'll listen.

He'll let down his wall.

Not like my father.

It's a good feeling, like I've known him my whole life.

The phallus is the law, the tin star, the sheriff,
I can see, feel the phallus as a fertility
symbol, a cult object.

It divines a religion, a class, a sexual enchantment of the
world.

I chase a beautiful boy, we take each other home.

I thought that love with a man would be different, but it's
not.

It's the same.

It's still two hearts, two souls.

I had opened up something in me that was very private, I
enjoyed it, but the liberation I thought was there was not.

It's just love with all the neediness and desire
to be tender like all love.

When I found my mother drinking in this horrible
ugliness, in her own disgust, my mother slapped me,
I ran past my father and hid in the closet over and over
and over again.

I kept saying: Why didn't you protect me?

You're my father; you're the law; the tin badge.

You're supposed to be Gary Cooper.

And so I dream of killing him, but I am
becoming him.

I am you.

The tin star, the sheriff.

I'll shoot you dead, Dad.

A beer? Want a beer, Dad?

It's all right.

Fucking Gary Cooper.





I'm awakened, my soul, my emotions.

I have the anger to kill him.

But then his death is my suicide, a final separation, a final withdrawal, the beginning of a great travel, the ultimate sacrifice.

The ultimate narcissism.

I can imagine so many other solutions.

I'm ready to go back, I'm ready to crawl back into the earth.

Let the worms eat my body, and return as a sunflower.

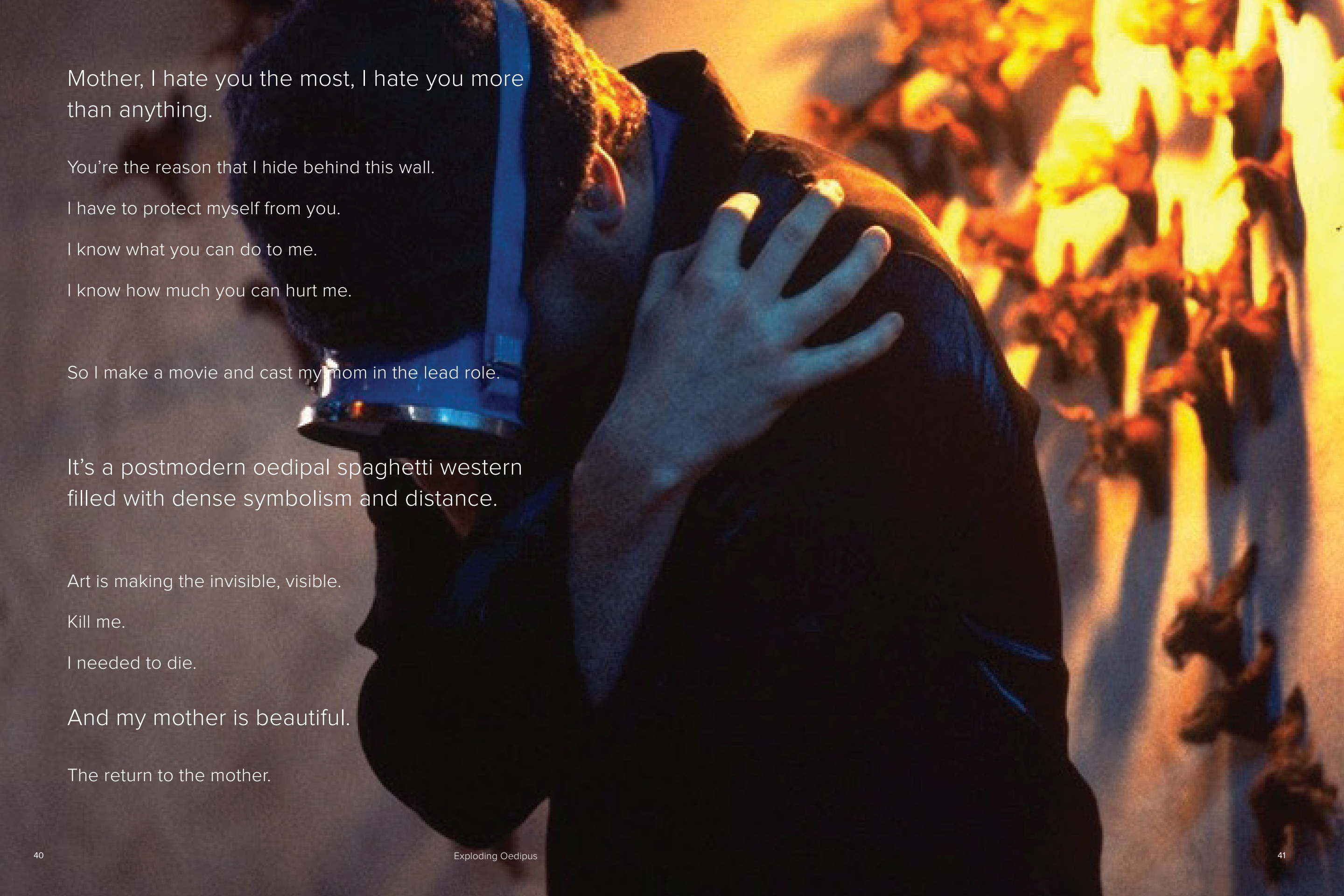
My mother's gone mad.

She's a lunatic and they've finally locked her away.

Mother.

Mother.

Life is a vast embrace of enormous beauty.



Mother, I hate you the most, I hate you more than anything.

You're the reason that I hide behind this wall.

I have to protect myself from you.

I know what you can do to me.

I know how much you can hurt me.

So I make a movie and cast my mom in the lead role.

It's a postmodern oedipal spaghetti western filled with dense symbolism and distance.

Art is making the invisible, visible.

Kill me.

I needed to die.

And my mother is beautiful.

The return to the mother.



Sexy, my first wet dream, wonderful.

More charming than Sophia Loren, Jeanne Moreau.

Mother, I hate you the most.

I know what you can do to me.

Self-loathing, disgust—so I experience her as she experiences herself.

A unity of suffering.

My desire to love is my hope for her to love me.

I love you, Mother.

(I love you, Mother.)

It yearns so deep, so loud (I love you, Mother) within me.

In this incest, everything is suspended: time, law, prohibition, all desires are abolished.

Nothing is exhausted, nothing is wanted, all our embraces, Mother.

Through my mother's embrace I see myself anew.



Loved, lovable.

All our embraces, Mother.

I will persist in wanting to rediscover them.

Life is a vast embrace of enormous beauty.

This beauty, sometimes piercingly cold
sometimes torridly hot.

We can consider any road valid if it helps us come closer
to the object of our disgust:

the heroic male, the gunslinger.

I cast my father as the villain.

(On the horse)

We hunt each other down like we used to (Navajo) and
he lets me get close and closer (Landscape) finally he
lets me kill him.

The Trojan horse, Stagecoach, John Ford,
the Lonesome Cowboy, Andy Warhol,
cemetery in the middle of nowhere.



Now I'm the sheriff, I'm Gary Cooper, and I leave town in the Stagecoach.

I'll shoot you dead, Dad.

Why didn't he protect me?

I'll shoot you dead, Dad.

I want to be Gary Cooper.

This time, he lets me kill him.

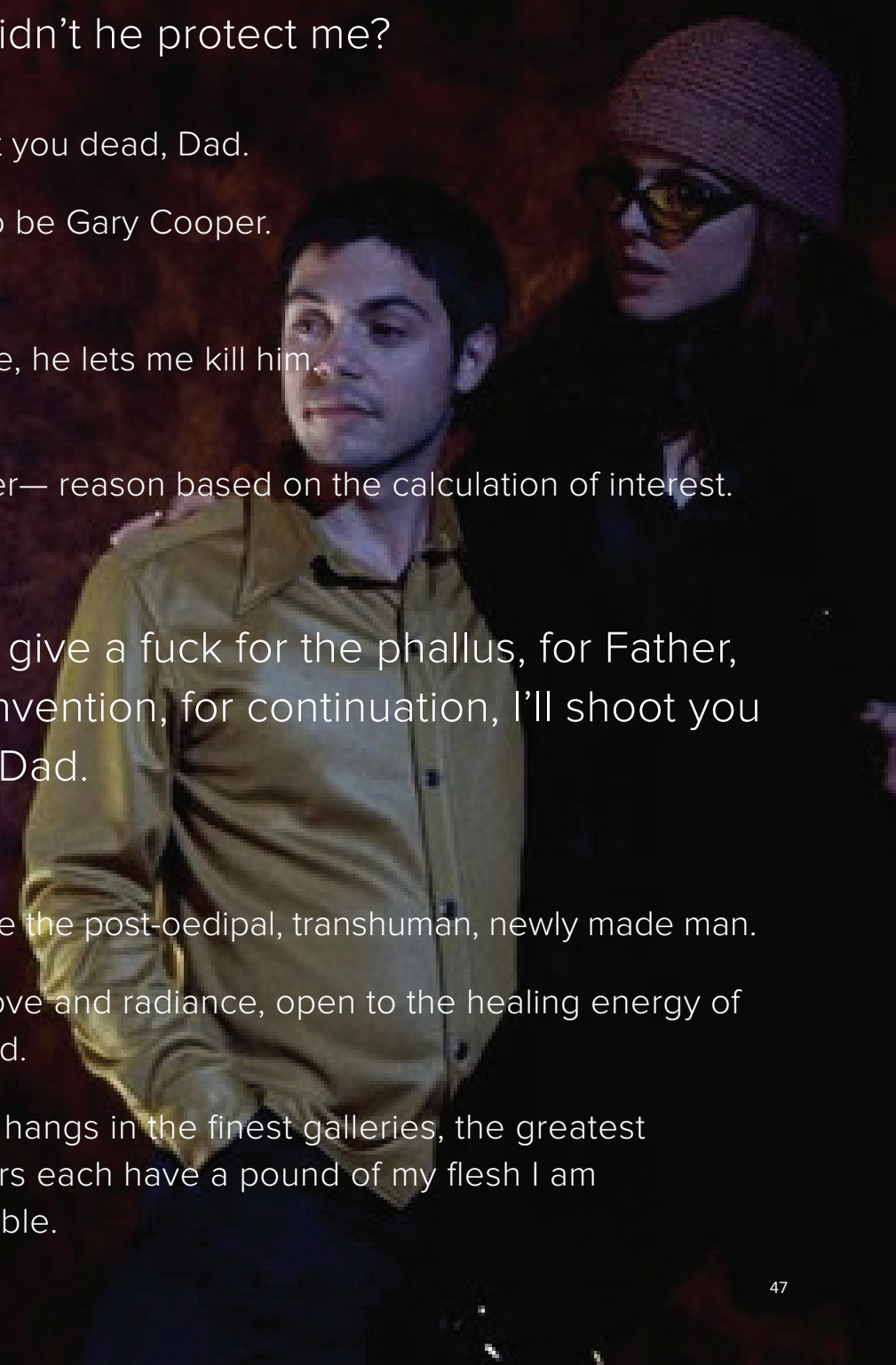
My father— reason based on the calculation of interest.

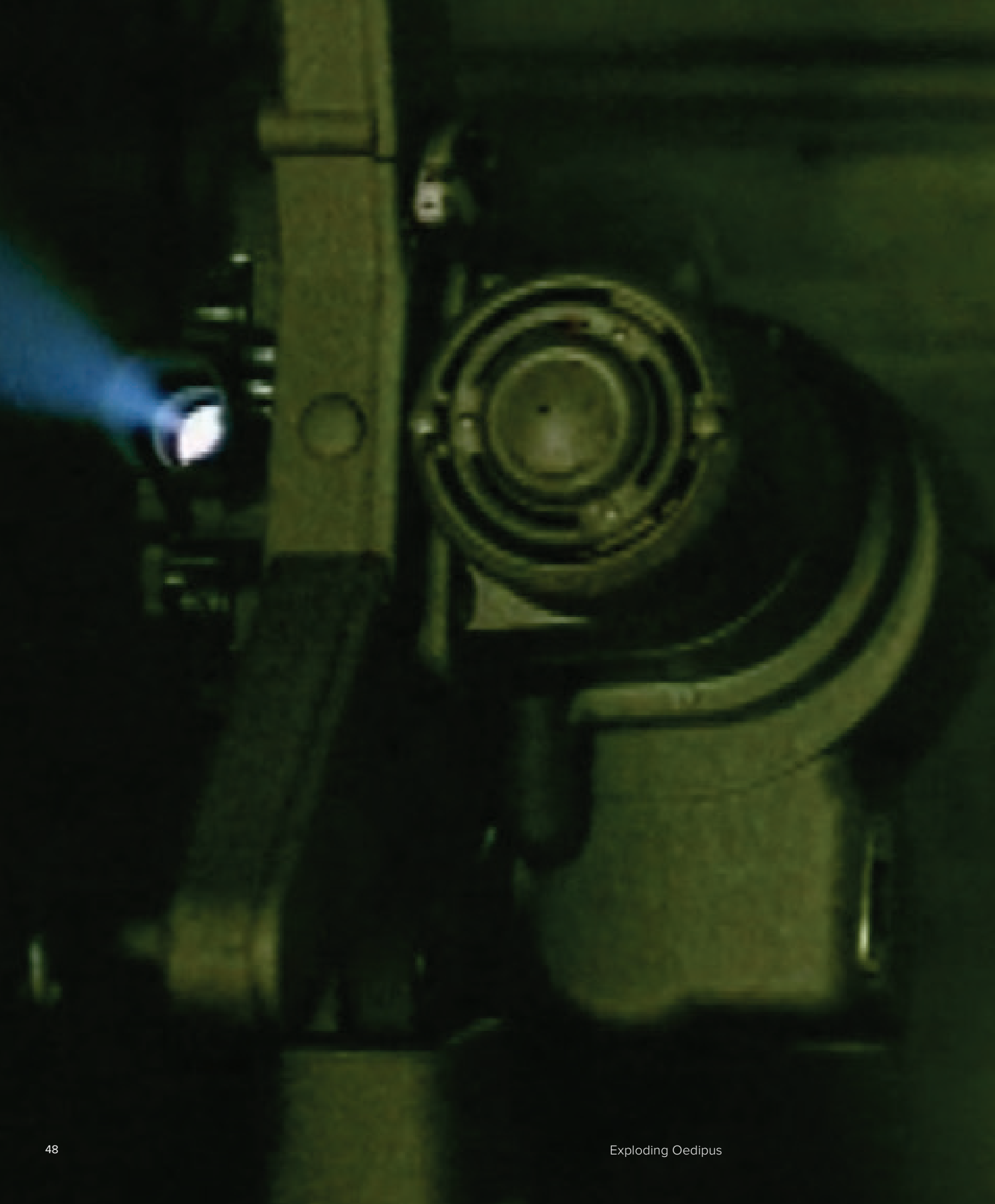
I don't give a fuck for the phallus, for Father, for convention, for continuation, I'll shoot you dead, Dad.

I become the post-oedipal, transhuman, newly made man.

Full of love and radiance, open to the healing energy of the world.

My soul hangs in the finest galleries, the greatest collectors each have a pound of my flesh I am marketable.







EXPLODING OEDIPUS

F D FILMS LLC PRESENTS BRUCE RAMSAY IN "EXPLODING OEDIPUS"

WITH JULIANA HATFIELD TANIA MENEGUZZI MICHAEL JACOB CHARLOTTE CHATTON

JOHN DETWILER JAMES GOTTON MUSIC SUPERVISOR MARY JORDAN

CINEMATOGRAPHER HONG-WEI JOPLIN WU FILM EDITOR JOE BINI

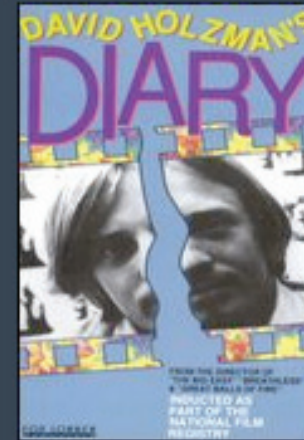
PRODUCTION DESIGNER LEONARDO EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS BILL KALM SUE CAMPBELL

ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS CHRISTINE SREAKS IRENA ROGOVSKY

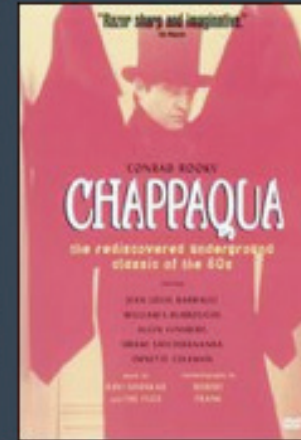
PRODUCED BY KENNETH WAYNE WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY MARC LAFIA

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Exploding Oedipus: Related Videos



David Holzman's Diary



Chappaqua



The Loss of Sexual
Innocence



Requiem for a Dream

CONFESSIONS OF AN IMAGE

If *Exploding* was an enactment and analysis of “existential revolt” against the symbolic, *Confessions of an Image* would be a questioning of image and imaging itself—not so much cinema, but the image event.

In making *Exploding*, there were many delays, money problems, control issues—so it took some time to find a way to make films going forward.

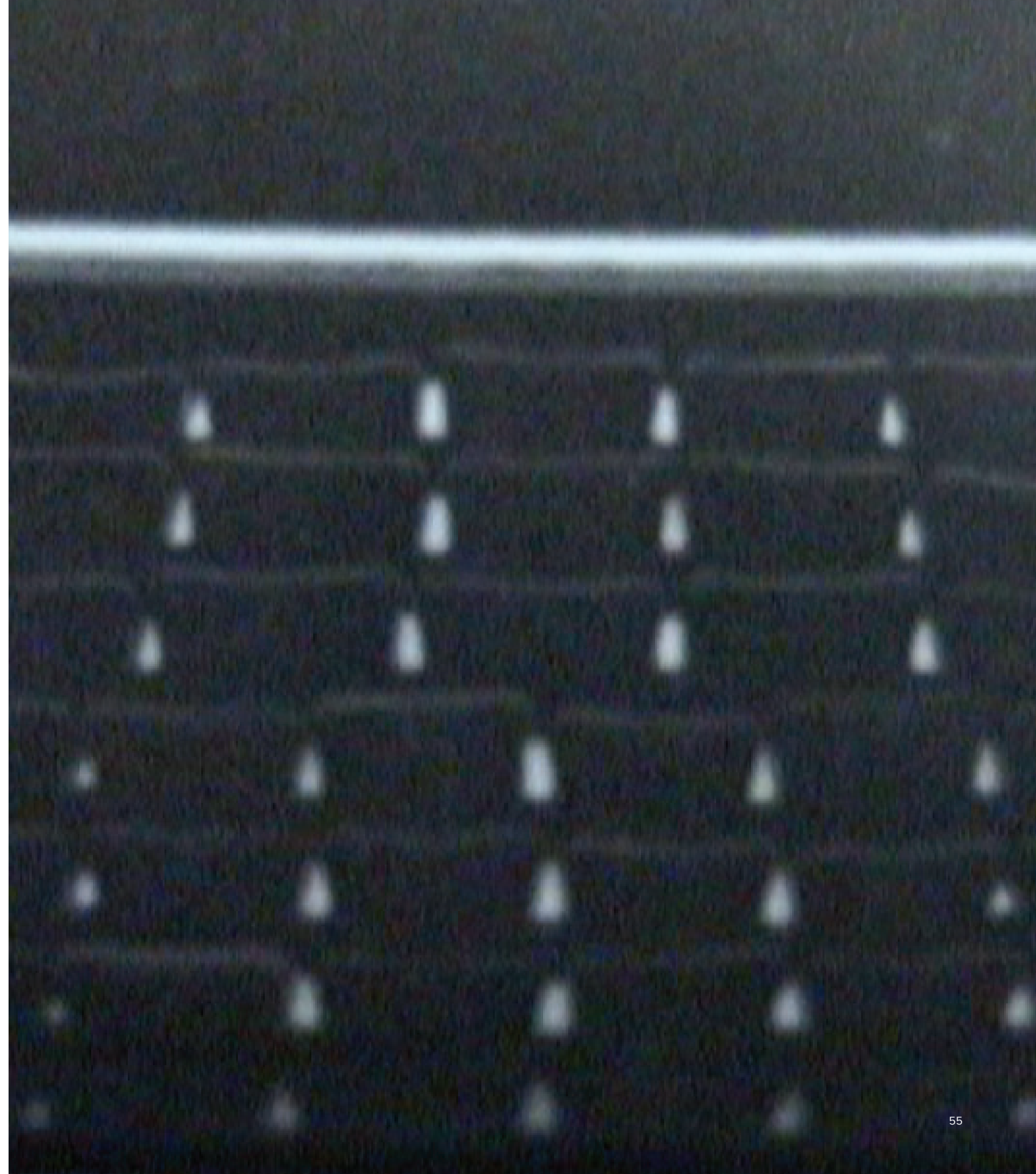
I turned my attention to writing again, while at the same shooting more and more material with these newer and newer small digital cameras.

In *Confession of an Image* I ask what is it to make an image, what is this realm of the image and imaging, what happens when incandescent light becomes electromagnetic light, when everything becomes seen and imaged?

Confessions is an essay film on the image, on the image as it moves and stops, how image in movement and sequence becomes a language of cinema. It is made mostly of still images and voice. I would shoot the film with my Sony digital micro-tape camera and record the voice track with a separate cassette micro-tape recorder. Both recordings happening in parallel, each with a life of its own and each reflecting the fact that cinema is a technological construct. In the digital and in the network environment of ubiquitous recording, narrative, its beginning, middle, and end, all of this would begin to take on very new meanings and usage.

Confessions was my end of cinema as a medium essay. At least the cinema that I knew. It is a series of twenty-one visual essays, about the image, cinema, and memory, written, filmed, and edited by myself.

The making of the world is inevitably a becoming, precisely because it is happening anew before our very eyes. How could I make such a cinema?



Where do we begin?

With the great luminosity of the sun?

In its radiance, in its warmth, in its travel we mark the day.

This great engine in our solar system, as it moves along the horizon, intimately connecting us to life and all its force.

Our images were a celebration and awe of this terrific force.

All of this changed with cinema, with a construction of an image projected by an artificial incandescent light.

Only in darkness could we see.

The light of the world gave way to the light projected mechanically through the celluloid of still image.

Projected light has now been replaced with electronic information.

Information is now part of the equation of energy and matter.

This is the story of that transformation.

This is the story of the disappearance of astrophysical luminosity, as it becomes the pulse of electronic signal, of total vision.

Our vision has been absorbed such that we can no longer see.

Cinema is a machine to forget.

It is a history of disappearance.

This is the story of the disappearance of astrophysical luminosity, as it becomes the pulse of electronic signal, of total vision.

Our vision has been absorbed such that we can no longer see.

We are blind.

As such the world becomes image, and the world is imaged and arranged for us.

As the world is arranged so are the people.

Constructed as a subject of image.

The arrangement of image gives construction to a worldview.

We no longer go to the world but the world is brought to us through image.

We now move to the organization of our sight.

In mise-en-scène we move along, a relay of the gaze and the author arranging the gaze for us.

We now see through others' eyes.

Cinema becomes an instrument of artifice.

The camera is an instrument in the construction of suspense, mystery, and melodrama—cinema is a mirror.

Who is it that we see in this mirror?

Cinema is an illusion, and yet every illusion has its truth.

The succession of episodic narrative and the media notion of perception in time through video and further scientific instrumentations of recording and visualization placed us in an extensive field in which perception moves in varying kinds of repetition and scales of visualization always on, always available, always in play.

How then do we situate ourselves in a world of pervasive images and imaging?

What responsibility do we have in making an image?

Perhaps images for a moment give us the illusory perception of stability.

This stability is the stability of time itself.

Cinema, a motor, an engine to see the world.

It now enacts the world and replaces it—until of course catastrophe.

Each singular book now becomes one book, each one electronically interconnected to the other, each discrete text as spoken to by contemporary philosophy is the organization of a series of fragments of other books.

No work stands alone.

Each book here isolated, individual.

Each book a book of books.

Is this our memory?

Our story?

When does knowledge become lived? And a living force?

When does knowledge become understanding?

When it becomes feeling.

When we are one with understanding.

That is when knowledge is felt.

When knowledge is innately one, invisible with the process of life.

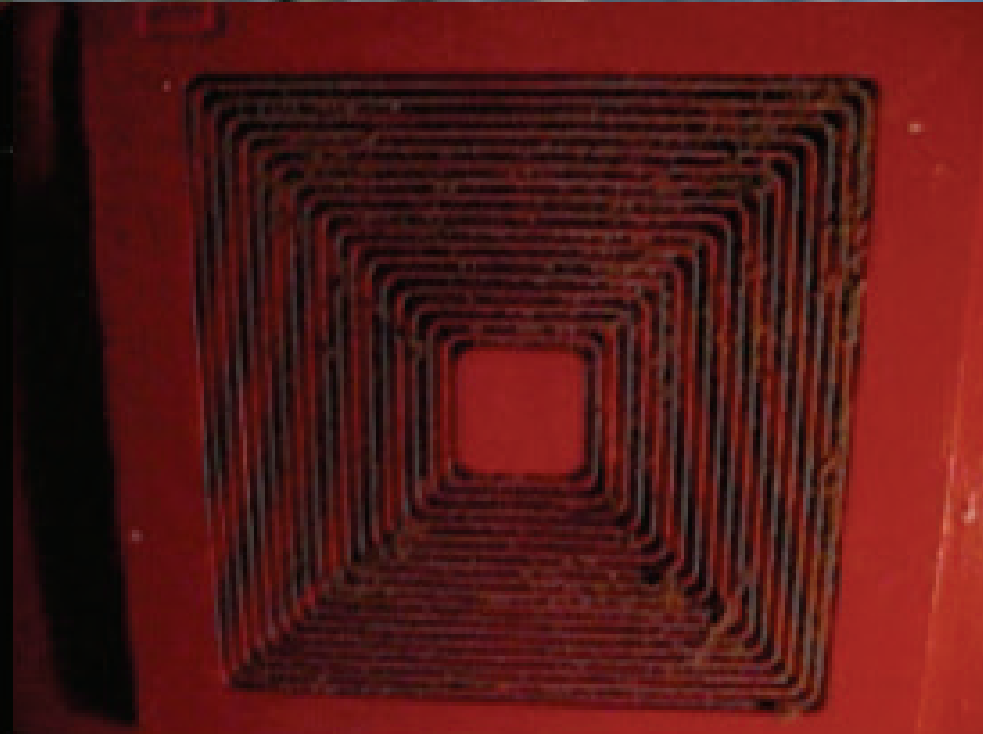
And so this innate curiosity, this need to understand, to give ourselves a sense of being—it is the struggle to tell the story of ourselves.

Everything in process.

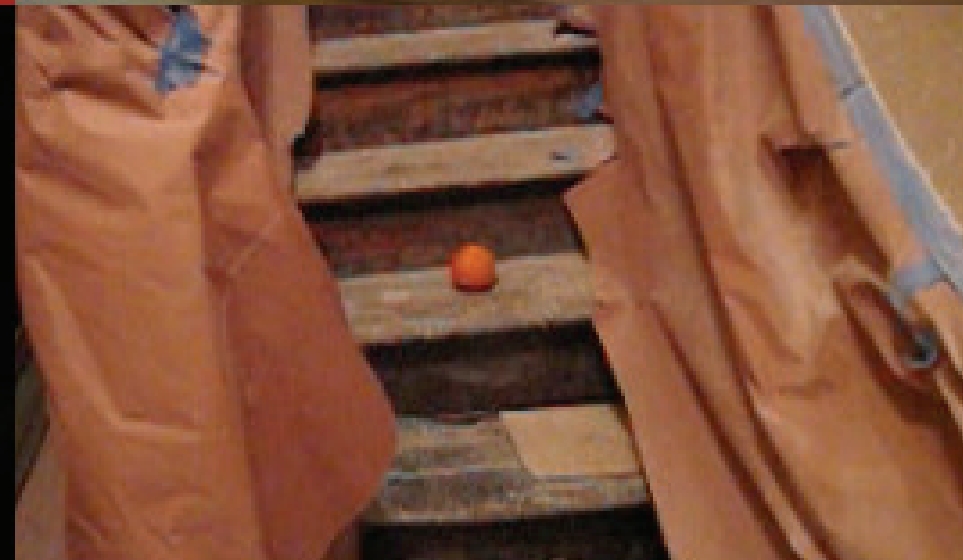
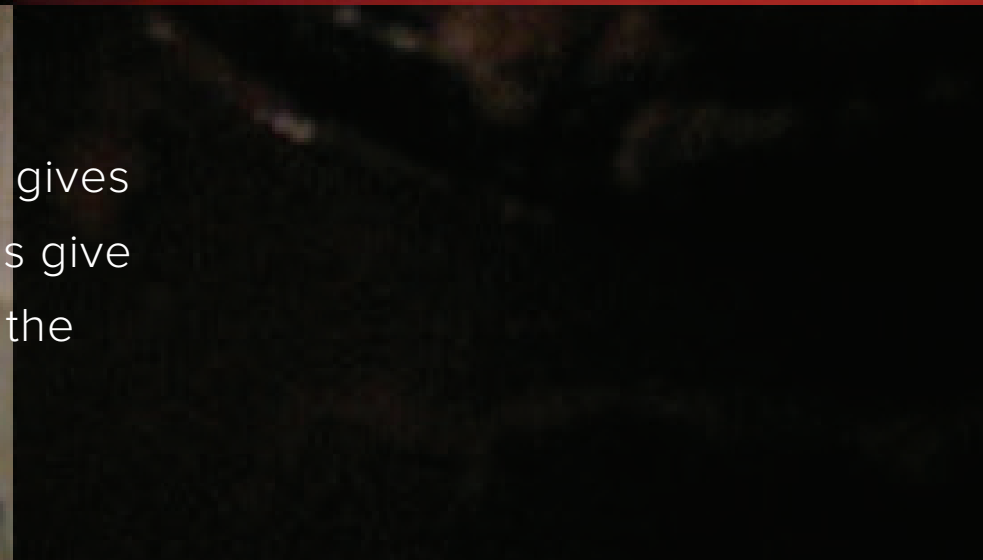
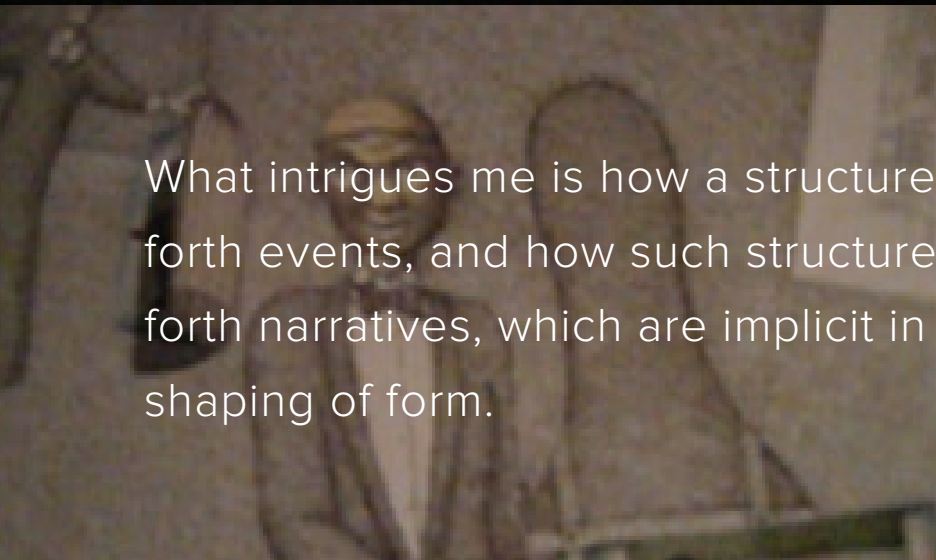
Everything changing.

Open to reengage and immerse ourselves in being.

PERMUTATIONS



What intrigues me is how a structure gives forth events, and how such structures give forth narratives, which are implicit in the shaping of form.



01

Becoming the Agent of the Image

(Daniel Coffeen)

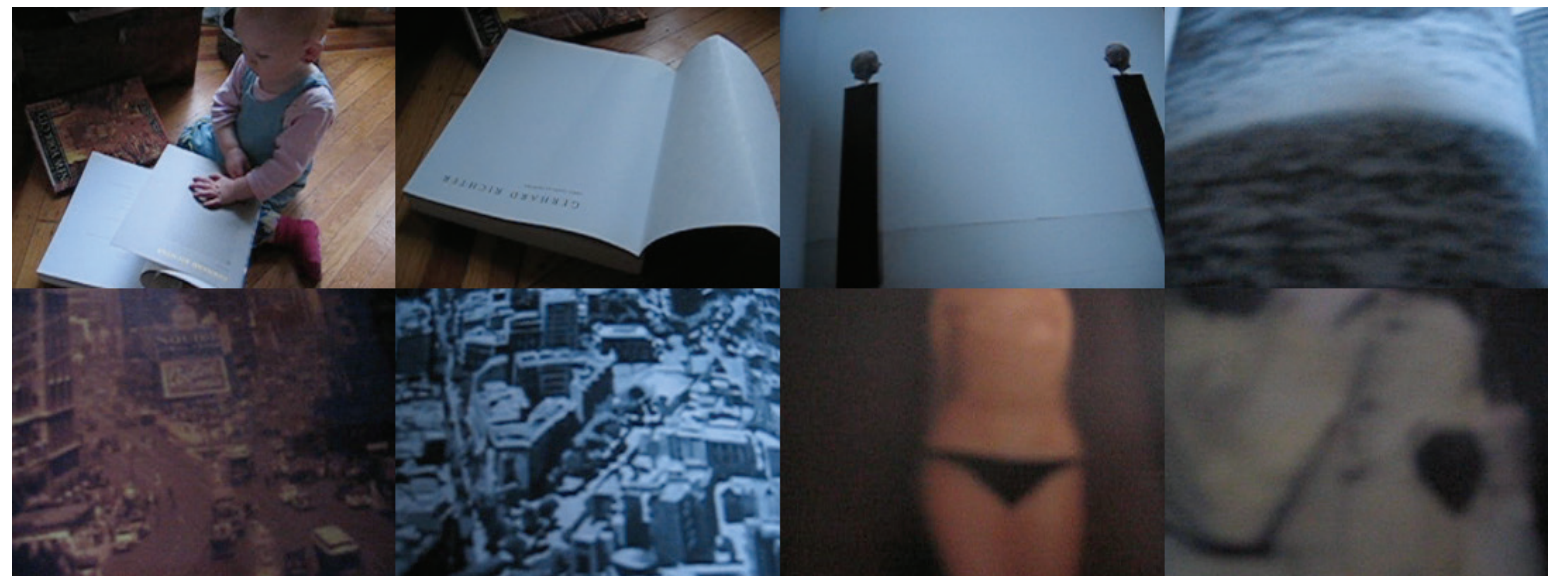
Why the rules?

There are rules:

1. All images are created on the same day (in this case, an image is a video clip).
2. There is no postproduction—no editing of the images, no sound added.
3. The artist chooses which images will appear in the final form; he is not obligated to choose all the images from that day.
4. The images are displayed in a grid of 1, 3, 6, 9, or 12 screens.
5. While all the images move simultaneously, we only hear the sound of one playing at a time. When the sound of the first image is done, we hear the sound of the second; then the third, and so on. The film ends when the sound of the final image ends.

But why rules?

The answer is simple: to render the artist a productive cog, a facilitator. Not so as to self-efface or deconstruct the artist's authorship but rather to allow the image its force, the force immanent to it. By following these rules, Lafia becomes the agent of the image and its momentum, power, consistency, rhythm, duration.



02

Imagining the Rise of the Banal
(Daniel Coffeen)

Why these rules?

What is the status of the day in this production?

The images may all come from the same day but this is not a diary, this is not a capturing of the everyday, a recording of this beautiful life. The Permutations are not a testament or confession; they are not the expression of a person's life; they are not a record.

Just look at them.

Images of *The Matrix* playing on a TV might help fix these films in time, but when we see *Taxi Driver* as well, we are no longer in a given historical moment. A Modigliani painting as it lies in a book; shadows cast on some wall, somewhere; a black workman speaking French; disembodied hands scrubbing a wall:

these are not markers of memory, records of events, but pure sense affects.

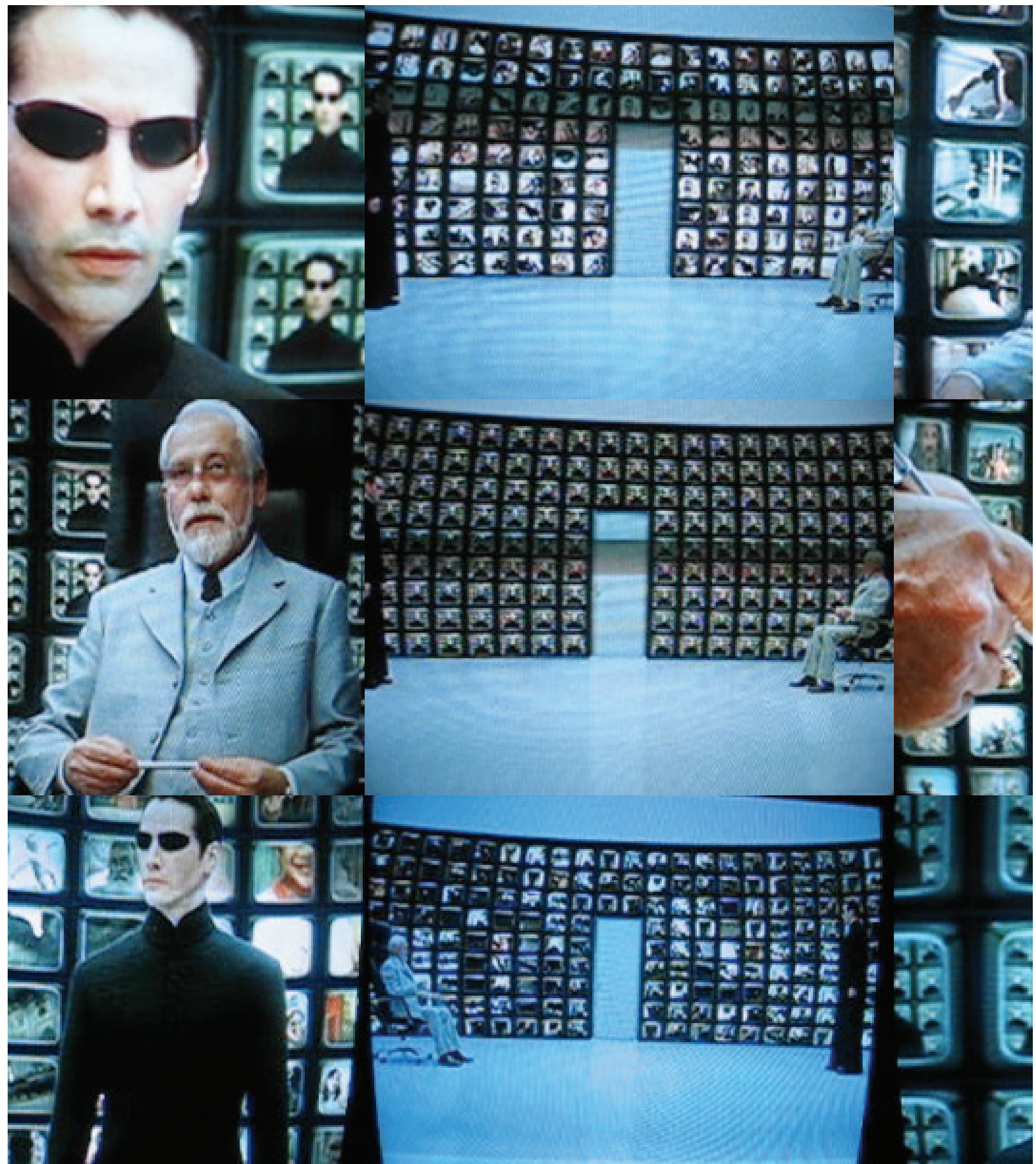
The image is not a symbol of something else; that would be a symbol, not an image.

And image is an assemblage of sense affects.

The camera—and perhaps we're all cameras—does not look behind the world as it is happening.

How could it?

It does not peel back the surface of the world to reveal what lurks below or within; it proffers the world precisely and solely as it appears. In this world of the image, all there is is what happens. The image is not a monumental event; it is an everyday occurrence.



And the Architectonics of Film

(Daniel Coffeen)

Sound, Space, Sequence

It is a mistake to assume that the image is visual.

There are sound images, smell images, concept images, touch images, emotion images.

An image is a local assemblage of affect. Etymologically, there is no necessary correlation between the visual and the image.

When we say, then, that *Permutations* harnesses the force of the image, we are not just speaking of what we see.

Sound plays a conspicuous role in *Permutations*: it is the duration of this or that film (can we call a single permutation a film?).

In fact, if we are to say that these films have any sequence, we would have to say that it is a product of the sound. The sound of the individual images play sequentially, moving from left to right along the grid; when the last image is done saying what it has to say, the film is done.

If the stitch between images in most movies stems from the movement of the film through the projector, the stitch between the images in *Permutations* stems from the sound.

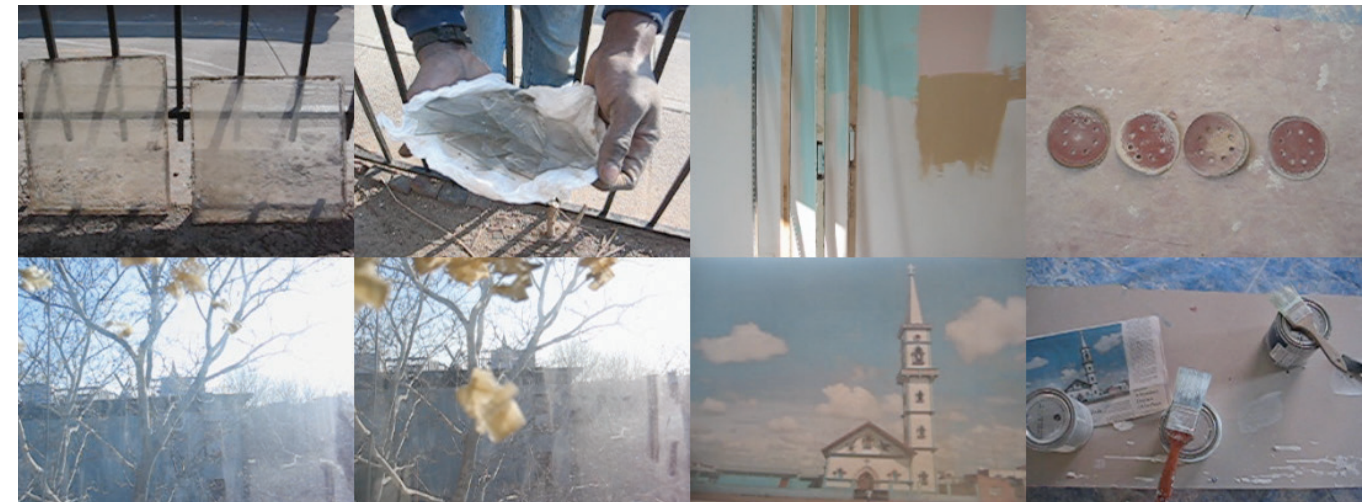


Permutations radically recast the architectonics of film.

We are not confronted with linear time, with a contiguous sequence, but with a spatialization of the moving image (the phrase is the artist's). The reel has been consumed by the computational and splayed.

Lafia's great discovery is that we don't have to run films through projectors, through a technology that begs for linearity. This is not to say that all projector-run films are linear, that there aren't great films that move in multiple directions even as they wind their way through their reel.

There are hundreds of great examples, from Antonioni to Welles to Greenaway to Lynch. But Lafia's work marks a disjuncture, a lateral leap, a fundamentally different way of thinking about film—its creation as well as its consumption.



Permutations

Permutations

And so we return to our question: how are we to watch these films? So far, all we've discussed are the conditions of these films. These conditions are no doubt quite complex, fundamentally recasting the space, production, and consumption of cinema. They shape the work, inflect it, limit it, steer it: the medium is the message.

But what of the films themselves?

As they are permutations, there is no one effect or affect, no general claim we can make that will sum them up, put them in their place. Each goes as it goes. Taken together, *Permutations* forms a performative topology of the image, showing the diverse ways images can go, the ways they participate with each other. In some sense, then, *Permutations* is an ethics, or what Deleuze would call an ethology, of the image. That does not mean *Permutations* proffers the ways images interact with so-called real life, as if there were life and then there were images. Rather, it is an ethics of the image, of the way images interact with each other.

Permutations is an ongoing exploration into the limits of the image as it asks:

What is an image? How can it go?





TALK SHOW



At this point two directions become increasingly interesting to me—if recording and playback collapse in computation, if the networked archive increasingly becomes a remix tool, what about recording itself, where is the possibility to make a living recording, to create an event distanced from the event many narrative filmmakers make—that is, the reenactment or performance of a scripted text, the screenplay—and to instead put on the event and create an event of recording. Certainly this was what the talk show claimed, to stage, put on, and create the combustible, the live event that I always read Godard's and Korine's claim as the same: cinema is truth not because it reveals all but because it doubles, plays, because it doesn't draw the distinction between itself and life.would truly be eventful.

I became fascinated with the confessional talk show and set out to place an absolutely sincere, absolutely tender and open character into this world in which, after all of the deception around the character was confessed, the character would enact all the things this new world demanded: murder, deceit, conspiracy, double dealing, revenge, and so on.

It was full of bathos, my take on Nathanael West's *Miss Lonelyhearts*. It is eight-seven minutes long. I shot the film in New York on tape with a two-person crew. I debuted the film at my home, screening it for nine people—which I enjoyed a good deal.

But first, the backstory. Though I was disenchanted with screenwriting, I wrote a screenplay for *Talk Show*, which I had written first as a novella. I sent it around to a few burgeoning producers and the whole process of getting the most bankable actor started all over again. Of course I wanted Joachin Phoenix before he was Joachin Phoenix; but of course the producers wanted Eric Stoltz. Don't get me started!

How to do it myself then? We went through the usual process, script breakdown, locations, characters, time required, actor required, minimum budget—which of course was always too much to self-finance. I couldn't produce the film.

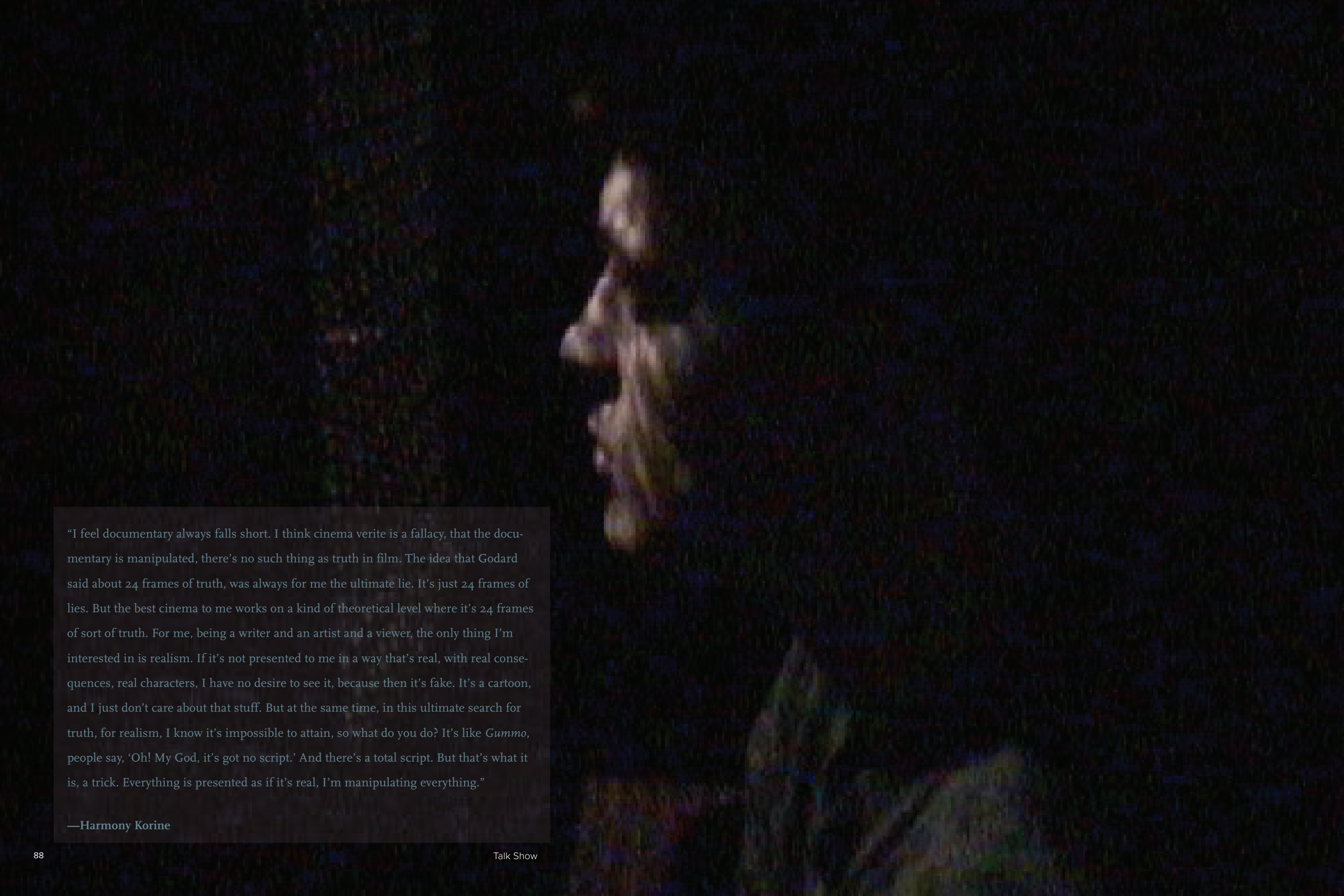
I was teaching a class, acting for camera, and soon the students wanted to do more than exercises—they wanted to make a movie. I thought about it and said, you know what, I am going to give them one of my movie scripts and assign them characters. So the following week I showed up to the class with printouts of the scenes I thought we could get through. I handed them to the young actors, saying you play this character, you this; said a few things about the characters; and very quickly, go over there and we'll shoot it there—just there, against that wall or in the hallway. Then soon, let's just go down to the deli across the street and shoot there and then round the corner. And I saw, wow, it's kind of happening, the actors so believed who they were playing that the idea of exact location did not matter. I saw that we could shoot a film almost anywhere.

Yes, we were making a film; there was no location prep, no clearance, and no traffic control. I edited the footage together in Final Cut. I could see a film that was immediate and honest.

Where is the frame when you are outside of the event of the narrative? When are you outside the film? In making this film I realized there's no outside of the film, in a way. The film always recuperates what's outside itself.

Talk Show, absolutely tender and open.





“I feel documentary always falls short. I think cinema verite is a fallacy, that the documentary is manipulated, there’s no such thing as truth in film. The idea that Godard said about 24 frames of truth, was always for me the ultimate lie. It’s just 24 frames of lies. But the best cinema to me works on a kind of theoretical level where it’s 24 frames of sort of truth. For me, being a writer and an artist and a viewer, the only thing I’m interested in is realism. If it’s not presented to me in a way that’s real, with real consequences, real characters, I have no desire to see it, because then it’s fake. It’s a cartoon, and I just don’t care about that stuff. But at the same time, in this ultimate search for truth, for realism, I know it’s impossible to attain, so what do you do? It’s like *Gummo*, people say, ‘Oh! My God, it’s got no script.’ And there’s a total script. But that’s what it is, a trick. Everything is presented as if it’s real, I’m manipulating everything.”

—Harmony Korine





HARRY, ZELDA AND ANTOINETTE



During the course of working on *Permutations*, where I made one film a day for a year, I became fascinated with the idea of narration, where this legibility happens and how.

I had for some time been thinking about rules-based art, algorithms and ideas for a database cinema, which I had been using in various projects. My interest in cinema had now morphed into new media and the venues for the works I was making tended to be museums, Kunsthallen, galleries. In fact I debuted *Permutations* at a gallery, the Sara Meltzer Gallery in New York.

I wanted to proceed with the ideas from *Permutations* in an internalized way, procedurally, not literally. I wanted to engage these strategies as approaches to shape, and perform narrative. I had written a film scenario for *Harry, Zelda and Antoinette* called *Zanzibar*, my last great effort at screenwriting. I knew the dramaturgy very well. But again, the process of financing, even getting some good interest in the script, was achingly slow. So after a few years and having done *Permutations* and *Talk Show*, it occurred to me to make the film myself and to work with all the restrictions that entailed.

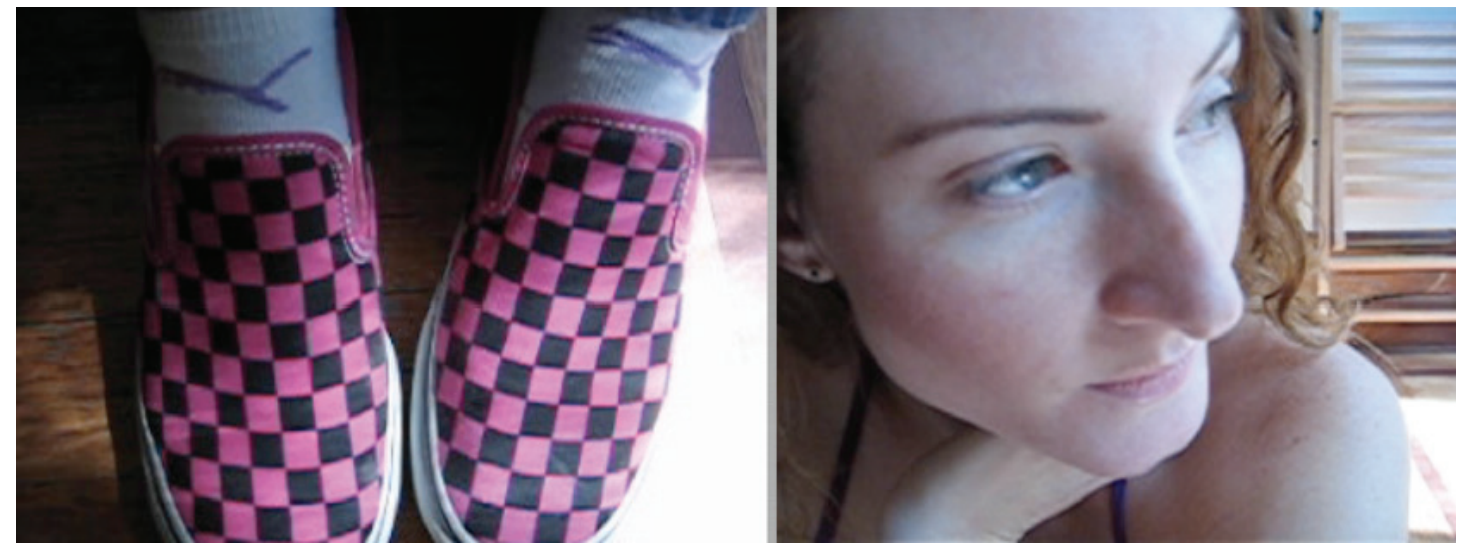
The recording event in this new approach would now also more prominently need to become an event of continuous narration. The *Permutations* were in a sense one scene, one mise-en-scène, presented as an all-at-once film. This new work would

need the momentum of story, scene following scene.

The work consists of six parts, each composed of some twelve to twenty multi-screen films. I released it in two ways: first, compiled as a single film, and second, using my Max MSP player, with each film or video playing simultaneously as a discrete file, one next to the other, cycling through each audio track, one after the other, until that set finished and the next set of videos started.

The work, initially a study for *Zanzibar*, became a work in its own right about narrative as a performed event. It is cinema both as a language always entwined with its technological armature and an event of narration of cinema itself.

Two brothers, one an intellectual, the other, a man of appetite. Two wives, an artist and a madame. Three children—one shared between them. Each character in love and in search of beauty and ideals.





LOVE AND ART



A Cinema of Immediacy and Intimacy

“It Is Love; It Is Art,” a review by Daniel Coffeen

There are at least two threads that run through Marc Lafia’s film *Love and Art*. On the one hand, there’s a love story, a sensual, sentimental tale of two lovers. On the other hand, there’s the world of art: artists, openings, museums, seeing and being seen.

These two threads—love and art—are absolutely distinct and simultaneously one and the same thing. Both are forces that act upon us just as we act upon them: we don’t quite choose to love, just as we don’t quite choose to make art. And yet to say that we do not choose is not right, either. Love and art happen. They are forces that take us up but that don’t exceed us, *per se*: we become their equals. The lover becomes love, is love; the artist becomes art, is art.

And both birth and are birthed by a supreme generosity. It is a generosity that this film not only captures but also performs. For this film is itself supremely generous. It never seeks to reduce the world of love or the world of art; it is never didactic. And even when letting academics speak, it is never academic. Rather, it indulges its world—love, art, and the viewer alike.

The two threads of love and art find themselves taken up by an eye that sees multiply, that allows both love and art to go as they go, in all of their texture, ambience, play, ambiguity, pleasure. This film makes us privy to the clamor of gallery voices, the not-so-subtle scent of cheese meeting not-too-expensive wine, the pitter-patter of museum shoes, the intent looks of befuddlement, interest, and boredom, the whispers of tongues, the grace of a metered caress, the drive to live well.

This is the rare film about art that is itself art. The camera here does not just capture the world; it makes the world by letting it happen in all of its teeming multiplicity. Just as the lover becomes love and the artist becomes art, this film is not really about either love or art. It is love; it is art.



MY DOUBLE MY SELF



While I was in Palm Springs, my wife was having a kind of nervous breakdown, and we had become so accustomed to filming that I filmed her during this period and used it as the basis for *My Double My Self*, a film about both a man and a woman falling apart.

The man, over the death of his father; and the woman, in the midst of postpartum depression and general life crisis. Again I would record these real-life situations and along the way invent a bit of story to give the work a trajectory. I was never filming things to take to the editing room, to find a story; I was always filming the narrative that I saw as the film, there and then. Of course there were pictorial things that I shot later to add to the works, but the works were always—might I say—scripted, or shot with intention. At this point, having Irena and myself in the scenarios, having the art world and extended family and my home, I could always invent a new scene or retake, restage a scene; I would have Irena shoot me, and I would shoot her at any time and use the real-time situation of our lives to roll into the scenario or adapt the scenario to be reinterpreted by the living moment. Or I could use the feeling of a moment there in front of me and adapt it slightly and have some things said that would more aptly fit the scenario of the film I was making. I have to wonder if this was a way John Cassavetes worked.

A man and a woman, husband and wife, their parents, and their children are closely and intimately observed as these two films unfold, one of him and one of her, each doubling the other and the marriage they look at, revealing a deep interdependence and fragility in love. While about to undergo anesthesia for surgery, the husband reflects on his children and his ailing father, who is moving closer to death. While vacationing with her extended family, a young mother is overtaken by anxiety.

Together the two stories fold into each other, doubling and intertwining, revealing the tentativeness of life and love.

“A rare insight into the intimacy of a New York family. How they live, how they love.”

—Iki Nakagawa





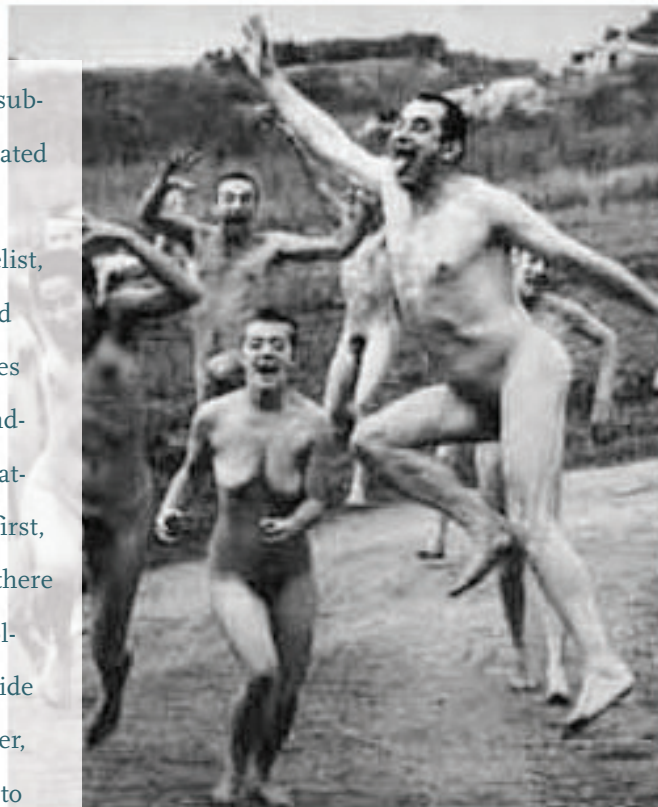
PARADISE



Everyday Recording

“It begins as a Godardian abstraction of a Bourne thriller; but when this story submerges, *Paradise* comes into being: a deconstruction of the messianic, sugarcoated Matrix fantasy. Characters become authors who create characters who become authors: a Hoffmannesque nesting of consciousnesses begins. Solange, a novelist, dreams her family into the future, conjures her characters into the present, and leaves them haunted by an unremembered past. She renames her children Jules and Juliet, makes them lovers, siblings who like to pretend that they are pretending to be sister and brother, and who keep love and memory alive by impersonating each other. Her husband, Roman, haunted by a chill presentiment of that first, malevolent thriller, finds himself receding into the infinity of other lives, as if there were no death, only dissolving. And when the thriller resurfaces, it is Juliet, Solange’s conjured daughter, who returns, filled with the horrible dream of a suicide bomber—hands on the plunger, she walks into a café where she and her brother, still just children, sit. But she, too, dissolves away beyond death and rebirth, into an endless roiling cloud of being and becoming.”

—Duane Dell’Amico



Documentation, fiction, the everyday, recording the immediate and intimate—the authentic had become now a way to work. But could my method scale up for a larger production?

I wrote a new scenario, *Atlas*, which I worked on for some time. I put a casting notice in *Backstage* in New York and received over five hundred submissions. I narrowed this down to some eighty people whom I interviewed and had read. There were many good actors from all over the world with very diverse kinds of training. I got down to a small group, and as I read them and had them read to me, soon enough I realized again I could not pull off a film that required very specific locations, controlled environments, permits, demanding days with actors and crew.

Against this limit, I decided to set up the film scenario as an acting or theater group that goes to the park to rehearse and put on a show. This way I could easily fold the fiction into the real of the park and its environs. I would be documenting the group in this setting. In this context of the troupe discussing the staging of this fiction and the real, they began to enact a fiction, which of course bleeds into the real both in terms of their surroundings and themselves putting on the show and the enactment of the text of their fiction. In this way there was no outside the text, outside the film, outside the fiction. It was a fiction inside a documentary.

This way we would not have to control the background. Everything was and could be part of the film.

As a location the park could be used for many things: at times depicted as something utopic and public, at others something untamed and unruly, or then landscaped and orderly, and in some places, behind a fence or large plastic sheet we had, we could depict what was called the Wonka Camp, a place of human confinement. We would use available light and Prospect Park, with its great diversity of landscapes, from rolling meadows to wooded areas to tropical streams and junglelike groves, all this would let us move from location to location while being in the same place, Prospect Park. All this went well, except for our last shooting day in early October. It was already fall weather and though fortunately we had great sunlight, the cold and fall clothing throws us off that midsummer night's feeling we had going in much of the film shoot. As much as I wanted to, I could not work around this, so it seems at times in the finished film we see the same group in the heat of summer and then the brisk cool of fall. Continuity is certainly one of the biggest issues that film shoots must control. Continuity of light, place, actor, time, performance, it must all be uniform and consistent, all these ways to suspend disbelief for the audience—and all this requires enormous infrastructure.

The film was finished and titled *Paradise*. Through the work I felt very close with the actors and continually adapted the scenario to them and our situation.



Notes on the Process

I want to set out to fold fiction with fact, to use the everyday, everything that is in front of us, that we don't have to move out of our way. Within this I want to convince us of the invented, to know that imagination becomes reality, that our inner and outer selves can be the fragments that can become stories that become behavior, suggestions, whispers, hauntings, a narrative.

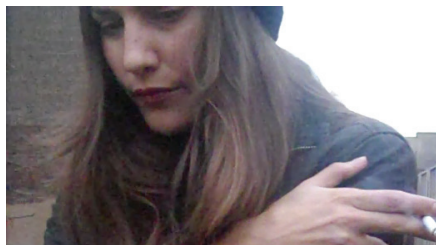
The process sets out to find new ways to record and observe, to invent character and behavior, to create an emergent narrative in the distributed space of both personal and collective recording.

It's an interweaving set of stories, both fiction and real, drawing on exercises, instructions, a script, snippets of books and writings produced by multiple authors with a core group of actors and their "private lives," "private moments," "friends," "families," and others—mixed in with invention, and of course within the frame of photography and editing, that which sets off the fiction and creates it.

The work reflects the new modes of personal recording, personal revelation.

These are the notes I gave the actors, drawing them together with me to continually adapt the text, our fiction, our story, to who, where, and what we could do within the limits we had. Just like adapting the story to varied possible locations, I would adapt the characters and scenarios to the actors I found and to who they were. In this sense, like the fiction of an acting troupe putting on a play that was our film script, the living actors creating a fiction became extraordinarily collaborative in making these films, each of us adapting to each other and creatively inventing something specific and particular to what we could do. Within limits there are always possibilities.

To represent the body of desire, of beauty, of being, of love, of becoming. The world of linguistics and order and law and logic becomes for a brief moment something else, a certain play.





“... the boy and girl, lying together in the grass, sharing grapes and grape lollipops, the presumed original and imitation sharing equal privilege of taste, neither a derivative of the other, each going with the other as well as with tongues and tastes. Bodies move on and over each other. Emotions, too—or, better, affects, as emotions are too human, too familiar; affects are indifferent to humanity, exceed humanity: affects move in, out, in, over each other....

“This is paradise (and *Paradise*), where all the world’s a (sound-) stage, where there is not first a world and then what we do in it, what we do to it. Paradise is the temporal ooze within humanity, a way of going with the world, not in the world. (This is not to say that paradise is being one with the world; I’m saying it’s being many with the world, many ways of going, many desires and speeds and rhythms and consistencies and shapes all commingling. Lafia gives us a paradise that supersedes God and Darwin by offering creative evolution—a Bergsonian paradise, all differentiated becoming.)”

—Daniel Coffeen

Peter Duhon

I really enjoyed that scene. Your characters are extremely complex in a good way. They are happy, they are sad, they are lost, but they are also experiencing what we call the free will of negativity. I noticed that, for example, in the hide-and-seek scene, and it plays out through the entire film. Your characters are losing something but at the same time gaining something else from that loss in return.

Marc Lafia

Salman Rushdie, whom I love very much—his writing and thinking—is always talking about how we leak into one another to the point that we each become the other. We set up certain boundaries, which are often self-imposed. But these boundaries, from a psycho-cosmic, psychedelic, or Buddhist point of view, are very artificial. I created this membrane in the script and called it the “Wonka camp,” a place where the characters are captured.

At some point in the narrative I position the actors inside this membrane, and they are all forced to bridge boundaries —psychic boundaries, political boundaries, their own personal boundaries, boundaries in terms of language, and so on.



Peter Duhon

There is a strong coherent use of metaphors in your film. What are your sources and inspirations? You tend to use traditional and classic metaphors, but also you create some of your own and, at the same time, encourage us to create our own ones too. What is the process you are going through in order to achieve that?

Marc Lafia

When making this film, the park set a limit for us. We had only a certain amount of time to shoot, so the demand of time and the given circumstance forced us all to come to decisions. I always find that this is the best way to work—to be up against a limit. So the process is going through the thing, having to be logistic, realistic, centered, bounded, to think through how to distribute the event of narrative in space.

At the same time, I tend to surprise actors. I found out that if I gave them glasses, swimming caps, some accessories that are strange to them, they became even more inventive. When you create a space for them of trust and appreciation, things really happen.



“How do we find this paradise? How do we become? Well, it is certainly not by following the same old rules of containment. We need to begin from somewhere else entirely, where we can jettison the assumptions of identity, of cause and effect, of linear time. We need a new grammar—of film, yes, but perhaps also of life—that will allow, facilitate, and amplify becoming.”

—Daniel Coffeen



**REVOLUTION OF
EVERYDAY LIFE**



Whereas *Paradise* was all shot in nature, all over the varied gardens, waterways, groves, and wooded areas of the park, I wanted now to shoot something urban, in the city.

So after a while I discovered an area I liked, the fashion district, Twenty-Third Street and Broadway in Manhattan. With new zoning, car traffic had become very minimal and the diversity in the neighborhood, very compelling.

Taking its cues from Raymond Queneau's *Exercises in Style*, I wanted at first to make one short scenario sixty-nine ways—Queneau did a hundred, but I was in love with the Magnetic Fields's *69 Love Songs* so sixty-nine was the number—yes, I would make one love story sixty-nine different ways, maybe even in sixty-nine different countries.

But doing the same thing in a different style sixty-nine ways takes a good deal of control and exactness and this, as I kept learning, cannot happen without money, permits, control, et cetera. So I went from the one story told in different styles to a series of interconnected and overlapping stories told, in a sense, from the perspective of the neighborhood. The neighborhood would be the story, how it goes on, changing at a very different pace than those that inhabit it. At this corner today these things happened, and here, other things happened, and then at night, other things. Six girls went to this wig shop and

put on wigs; three of them also stepped into this perfume shop, not all for perfume, and others took this subway, and so many others took that subway too. It was going to be about repetition and difference, about place and the persistence of place and the slow change of it.

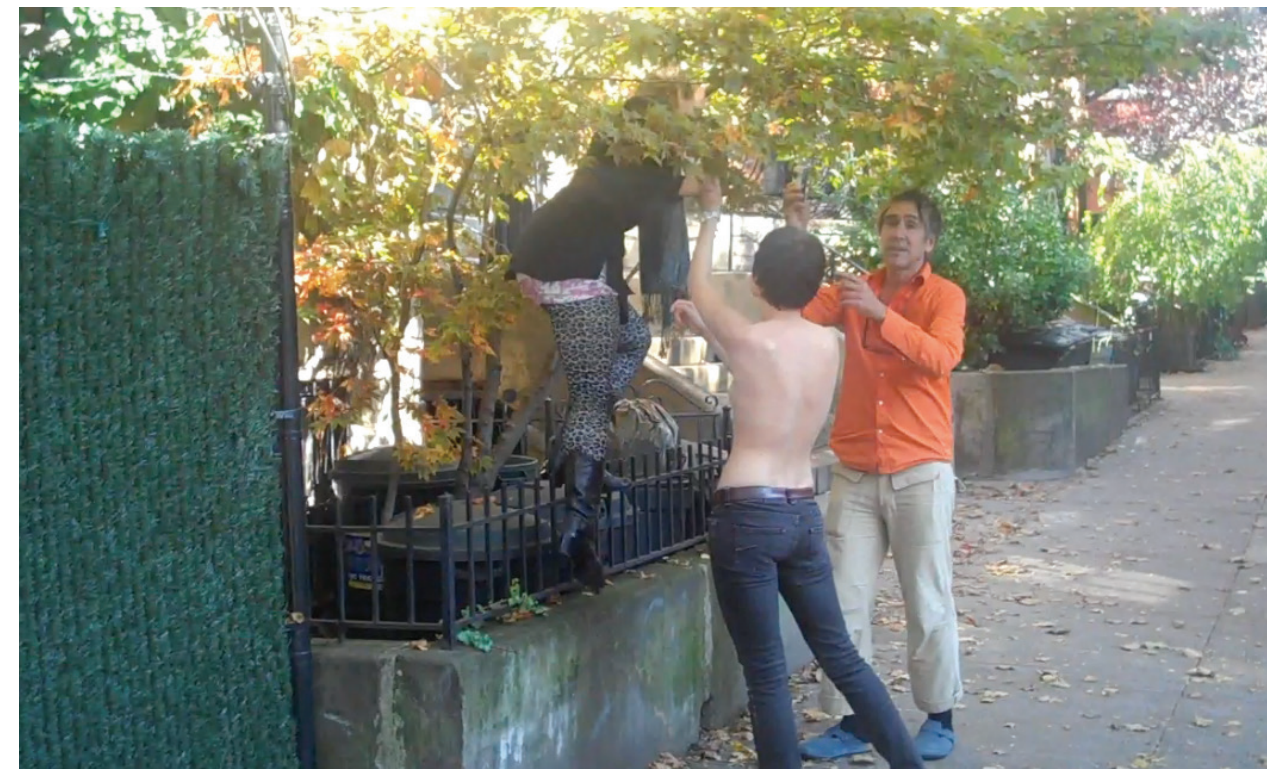
I went about shooting it and a number of things clicked and I got a forty-five-minute cut, but I felt it was too pat and so, except for one scene, I started over and continued seeing actors.

In one of the auditions I had the female actors read lines about women, power, and sex. It was spring, and so I took the actors outside under the trees along the side of my house. I was filming them as I often do, and one of them, Raimonda, who I knew from auditioning for another project and whom I liked but could not find the right part for, asked me if she could take her shirt off to do the reading.

If you want, yes, I said. The two actors, Raimonda Skeryte and Tjasa Ferme, get up on a stone wall, under a flowering tree, and fireworks! Tjasa says to Raimonda, "You're so beautiful," they kiss, they connect and kiss more—I am delighted, and then Tjasa tells us she has to go. But before she does, I ask the two of them if they would like to shoot the next day. Yes.

So of course I have to think of something for them to do.

We meet the next day and I have Raimonda placed under a spell by a young satyr and then she goes to a perfume store





where Tjasa enchants her and the movie becomes their movie, and so *69 Love Stories* became *Revolution of Everyday Life*. But I am still not sure what the film is. And at some point I sense I will never intimately know either of them, so I ask them and a number of actors to take a flip camera I will give them and to go home and make recordings of themselves. I asked them to be a body in space. Not to do anything really. Just to be. To do small, quiet things. Now this is a very open-ended and difficult instruction, but I had to hold back from asking for more, I had to let them explore themselves, present themselves as they would want to be seen or show themselves. I wanted to see their world, them—with minimal direction, I wanted them to set about to see and create themselves, not in a dramatic sense but in an everyday, banal sense—but what would that mean, how would they interpret this?

I very quickly find out as the cameras come back and everything I need to know about the actors is in the recordings they make. They are to me extraordinary. Of course they are performative, acted and enacted,

very raw, very simple, with a strange sense of urgency and intimacy. And the two modes of the two girls are radically different. One lets herself be seen, she is a presence for the camera to see. She does not do anything but be there. And you can't stop watching her. The other presents herself to the camera, addresses it directly, we never see her, so to speak, she talks to us, performs for us and so she is her performance. What a difference, letting yourself be seen and seeing. The two would be fascinating and perfect, their difference would speak on many levels.

I have the other recordings from eight other actors. Also interesting. So the film will be *The Idiots*, a collective that gets together not only for private and public performance, but recordings, and as in *The Idiots*, they will argue about what it is they are doing and why. In the center of this the two girls are falling in love. Until, that is, they see each other through the group that sees them and through the group, each recognizes the great distance between their views of love, society, revolt, and art.



Without a script, not unlike Warhol's Screen Tests, the actor, as an artist, alone with the camera, comes to the camera and the camera asks, without asking, how do you know yourself? What do you want to show me? How am I to look at you? This is the question Hilbert asks himself in *Exploding Oedipus*. The very question the Warhol Screen Tests set up. How it is that we construct an image of ourselves? That is your test. Show me the image of you. Know that you are the image you show me.

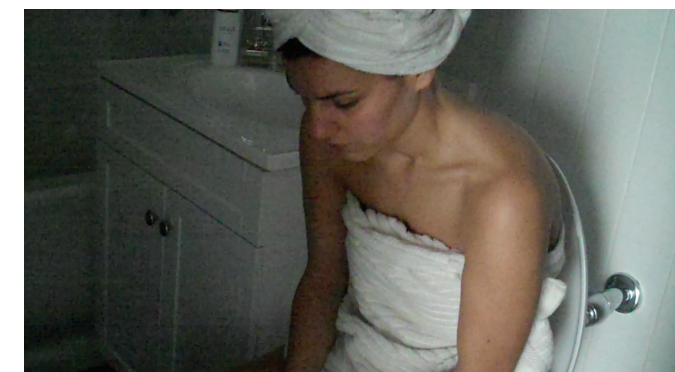
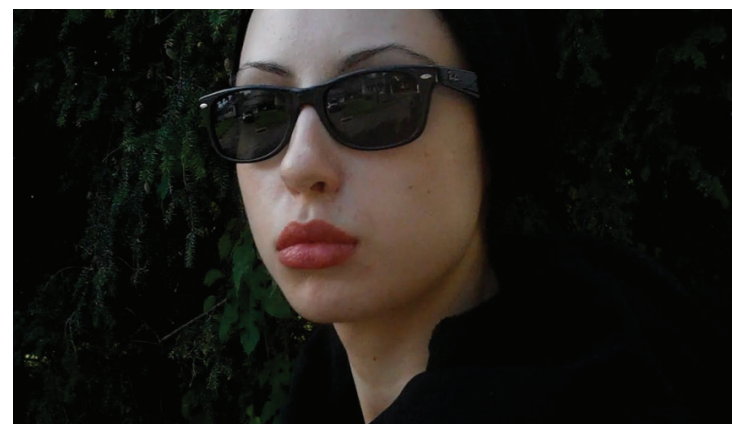
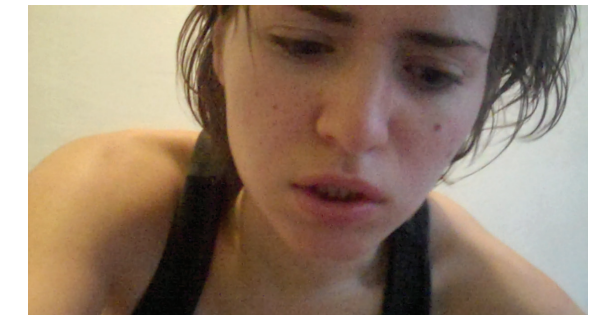
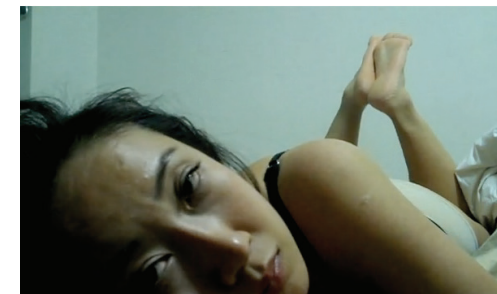
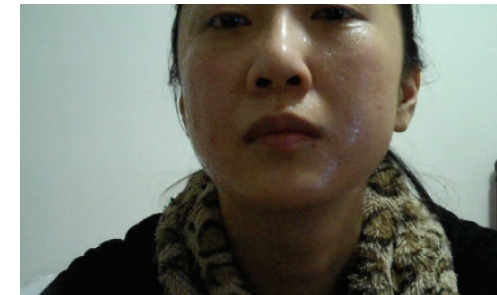
In *Exploding* Hilbert obsessively looks at childhood movies his father used to make. In one of those home movies, he sees himself as a young boy walking away from his mother's vanity, where she, terribly drunk, has seen him in the mirror, looking on at her. She gets up to slap him for his intrusion, when his father comes in shooting his 8-mm camera and records her hitting him. In his hotel room with a projector and a sheet on the wall, it is this piece of film that Hilbert keeps looping. He watches night after night. To break this film, this film that has become his memory, he makes his own film, he creates a new narrative, a new image, what he calls a postmodern oedipal spaghetti western. And in this film he shoots his father dead-dead. But here in *Revolution of Everyday Life*, there is no oedipal, the actor sees themselves in the image of their own recording. Not in the image of film, but in the primacy of the image itself, the image they author. It is the construction of the image and how the image is made that is the subject of *Revolution of Everyday Life*. What is the image we want to make?

With digital recordings and social media we are always constructing an image of ourselves. We are always already recorded and recording and hence recoding. We change our profile, our picture, and our story—is this not the project of any psycho-schizo analysis? Of any self-knowing? To create an image that is a double of us, that in fact is the only us, the image proliferating and multiplying.

This will then be a film about the image and representation, about the body and presence. Far away from its point of origination, the film will be about actors recording themselves alone. No, not the same story told again and again but the same action enacted that leads to different representations. But it won't be about only these private actions but the collective as they get together as an experimental arts group hotly debating the value of their private work and whether to do public performances. And what would a public performance mean? For Tjasa, a way to engage and change the world.

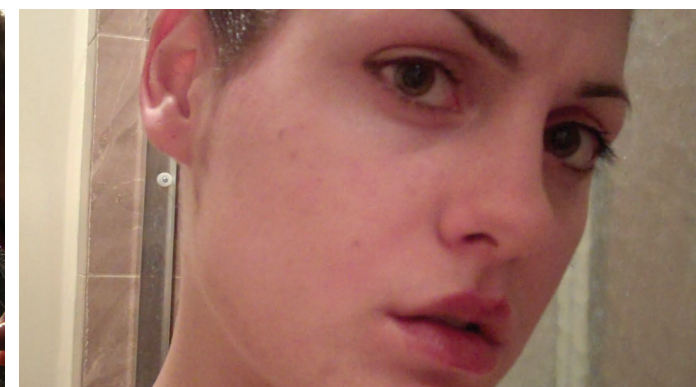
It becomes a story of one young woman as she becomes obsessed with her lover, the leader of this group, imagining an idealized love while the other wants her to find the revolutionary part of herself. *Revolution of Everyday Life* becomes a document of actresses playing actresses who play characters who fall in love. It is at the same time a love story that happens in the realm of fiction and in the realm of recorded reality.

The result is a documentary film within a fictional one. The film becomes a site



not for representation but discovery. It is a structure for things to happen, it becomes the site for performing, not acting, not representing desire, but enacting it—it is a longing for politics of desire and an expression of its urgency.

Revolution is a document of actors and artists playing artists who play characters, two of whom discover a higher-contested self than love. It is a love story that happens between the dimensions of fiction and the realms of recorded reality. It is a documentary film within a fictional form where the film, through instructions, catalyzes a site for representations but a structure for things to happen, not representing desire, but a situation to enact it—it is a politic of desires expressed and the urgency that these expressed desires bring upon us to change our world into love, beauty, violence, and expression.



Revolution of Everyday Life

Notes on Recording

Consider the film script as instructions for a recording event. When shooting you are recording this event of recording. In postproduction you are rerecording. The situation of recording is in fact what is recorded. The subject of the digital is our relation to recording.

Recording is now ubiquitous, happening all the time and at many levels and all scales: while typing here, using the ATM machine, blogging, Skyping, chatting, on the network live, under the surveil of cameras while shopping, walking across the street, under the instrumentation of a physician, in devices inside our bodies, our homes and cities under the sights of satellites.

If cinema was a way to image the world, to narrate the recording event, to create an event that would allow us to see, recording now turns on us, us seeing and imaging ourselves, in this saturation of recording.

Warhol early on gets fixed at the sight of seeing through the camera, there is no need for *mise-en-scène*, no boredom of seeing, just an endless fascination, compulsion to see as recording sees, not necessarily to play back, but to see and possess that seeing in recording.

Something far better than memory, recording, has more details and takes no effort to remember, you only have to find the file and it is all there. In fact, knowing it is there, you never have to look for it.

It's already remembered.

And then there is being seen, wanting to be watched on camera. Think of Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom*—to see is to predate, devour, consume, to be erotically charged; to frame is erotic, to murder and orgasm while recording was Powell's *Peeping Tom*'s desire. Recording is augmented seeing, like Google Glass—better than seeing, amplified and directed.

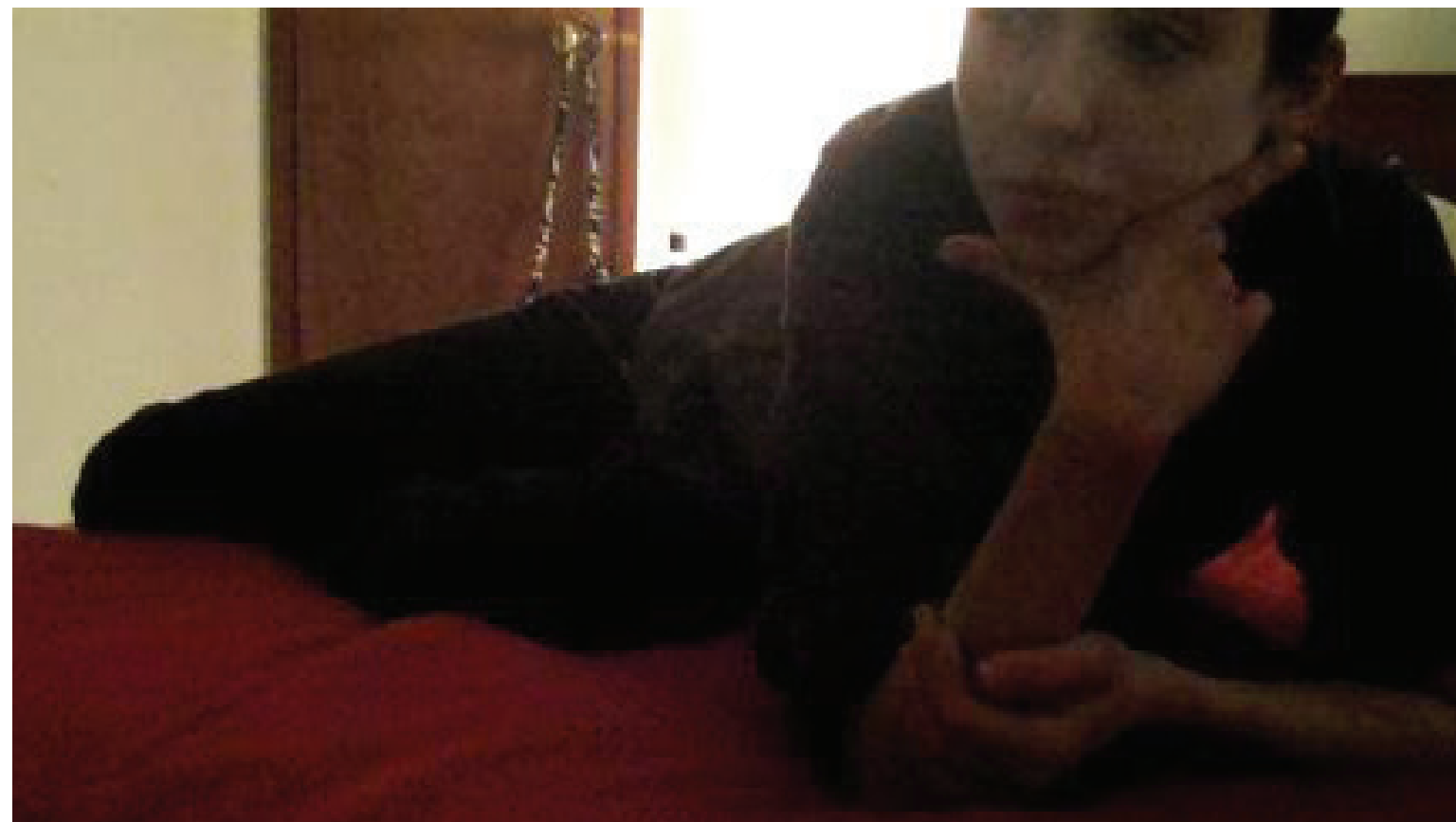
Sunset Boulevard, the glorious Gloria Swanson under the klieg lights—"All right, Mr. DeMille, I am ready for my close up"—how long she had to wait and exhaust herself before Mr. DeMille and his camera crew of minions appeared. If she waited longer, she could have been on Chatroulette.

Revolution of Everyday Life, by your bed is your vibrator and your camera, interchangeable, inexhaustible. You consume, erotize, consummate yourself in the auto-affection of recording, continually multiplying yourself.

In the event of recording and being recorded, you are a *mise-en-scène* spliced into the saturation of the global brain.

We live in an ongoing cinema and the archive it leaves behind everywhere. It is not the society of the spectacle but the spectacle of society, put on by a society that wants to be spectated.

Film and cinema has become a new kind of recording. But this recording has yet to become the subject of cinema, a parochial form over there.



The Revolution of Modern Art and the Modern Art of Revolution

“The Juvenile delinquents—not the pop artists—are the true inheritors of Dada. Instinctively grasping their exclusion from the whole of social life, they have denounced its products, ridiculed, degraded and destroyed them. A smashed telephone, a burnt car, a terrorised cripple are the living denial of the ‘values’ in the name of which life is eliminated. Delinquent violence is a spontaneous overthrow of the abstract and contemplative role imposed on everyone, but the delinquents’ inability to grasp any possibility of really changing things once and for all forces them, like the Dadaists, to remain purely nihilistic. They can neither understand nor find a coherent form for the direct participation in the reality they have discovered, for the intoxication and sense of purpose they feel, for the revolutionary values they embody. The Stockholm riots, the Hell’s Angels, the riots of Mods and Rockers—all are the assertion of the desire to play in a situation where it is totally impossible. All reveal quite clearly the relationship between pure destructivity and the desire to play: the destruction of the game can only be avenged by destruction. Destructivity is the only passionate use to which one can put everything that remains irremediably separated. It is the only game the nihilist can play; the bloodbath of the 120 Days of Sodom proletarianised along with the rest.”

—Timothy Clark, Christopher Gray, Donald Nicholson-Smith, and Charles Radcliffe,
The Revolution of Modern Art and the Modern Art of Revolution (1967)



Daniel Coffeen

March 8, 2010 at 8:22:01 PM

Re: Lior's take on manifesto

I think you need to agree on what you want:

Angry?

Contemporary? Eternal?

Are these the conditions of cinema—its way of going—which you reveal?

Is your approach a move to keep apace of culture and its technologies?

Are you reacting to—in any sense, in any way—the hegemony of narrative/Hollywood cinema?

Is your claim historical?

Is it aesthetic?

Is it sociologic?

There are A LOT of ways to spin this.

Lior Rosenfeld

Mar 8, 2010, at 6:20 PM

No:

Angry—reacting to the hegemony of narrative/Hollywood cinema? Almost every independent filmmaker does that, also, we haven't tried hard enough to be angry, I believe that to be only reactionary today = boring and not innovative, we are not in the 60s, I saw the Oscars yesterday, almost none of the nominated films actually appealed to me as someone who loves cinema, and I think [the same is true] for other people out there, especially outside of narrow-minded America.

Yes:

Contemporary, eternal

A move to keep apace of culture and its technologies—yes.

Historical . . . aesthetic . . . sociological . . .

I think mostly historical in the sense of the recording because we talk a lot about a right way of achieving a narrative structure, which is a more breathing one, alive, a network of ideas, thoughts, and identities, for example by setting up the recording event, simulation of reality, to be in touch with what is now, to want to be always relevant, in control . . .

To reach audiences who are opened to a more contemporary approach of delivering information and cinematic experience, to dare. Not minimalist, not maximalist or naturalist, in between.

Cinema as an event changes.

As a recording changes.

As a form changes.

As an activity, as a format.

The feature film is but one shape of the recording and postproduction effort.

Today's cinema event is simultaneously authorial and participatory.



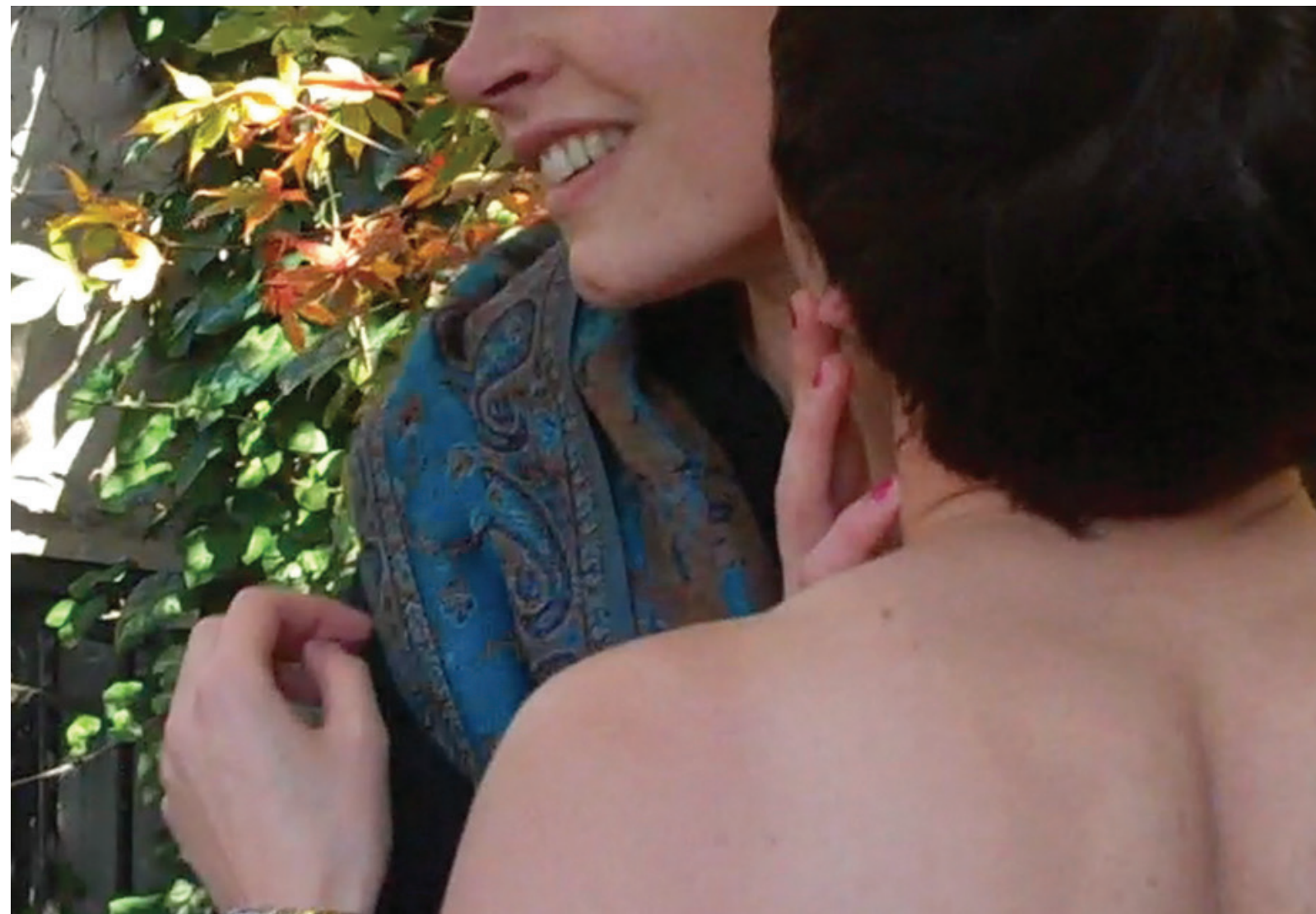
“*Revolution of Everyday Life* is not about the cinema event. It is a cinema event. The process of making the film and the film itself are so thoroughly intertwined it is often difficult to distinguish one from the other. But not through reflexivity—we don’t see booms entering the frame. Rather, we encounter a film in the process of making itself, characters in the process of making themselves—to a point where we’re not even sure if they are characters. They exist in a state of person becoming, character becoming, actor becoming, just as the film flourishes in the space of cinema becoming. Events are at once real and not, recorded and live simultaneously.

“*Revolution of Everyday Life* hence breaks down the rigid lines that separate creation from playback, writing from reading, and finally subject from object. The pervasive cinema engine, the everyday cinema engine not only rewrites cinema: it rewrites the private and the social, the very manner in which we present and are presented to the world.

”In the contemporary world of pervasive cinema, we present ourselves as something to be seen, something always already seen, always already being seen. And yet we do so without evacuating our individuality. We are turned inside out, splayed, but not eviscerated. On the contrary, we are multiplied, extended, disseminated, and proliferated.

”And this, alas, foments the revolution of everyday life. The title is taken from the English translation of Raoul Vaneigem’s great situationist treatise by the same title. The revolution, then, is not Tjasa’s ranting against capitalism. Nor is it her all-too-familiar spectacles of S and M. The revolution of everyday life is the proliferation of cinema within and through the everyday.

”If we live in a society of the spectacle, this everyday cinema engine decenters image production, proliferates centers, shatters the hegemony of the corporation’s will to quantity and uniformity. This pervasiveness of cinema—this ability to create, distribute, and screen on demand—fundamentally shifts flows of communication, introducing radical new possibilities of constituting the social. Images no longer solely flow downhill or in a straight line. They are no longer solely created by vast corporations and streamed into our houses. Images now flow every which way—up, down, sideways, diagonally—disrupting the painful banality of narrative, character, and cliché.



“As cinema takes up the everyday, it infuses life and is in turn infused. Engaging this everyday cinema engine, Lafia gives us a living cinema, a live cinema, a cinema that is always (and already) in the process of making itself, a cinema replete with affect, with the impossible complexity of the human: a cinema that is revolutionary.”

—Daniel Coffeen

“Watching *The Baader Meinhof Complex* last night, the film captures really well the winds of change that spread across the US and Europe in the late sixties—young, sexy, liberated people making a change by taking action at all cost, fighting fire with fire.

“What happens today, two generation after: we use Facebook to vote on how much we are against the American occupation in Iraq, Israel, Ahmadinejad, and all the other evil forces that are behind the destruction of progress, but how, exactly, does that help? The man on the street becomes smaller and smaller, we went back to the time in history when giants ruled the land—China, America, Europe, Iran, they are all giants—people do not want to take action because it is obvious they are going to lose. It is not an argument between ideologies, perspectives, ways of seeing the world, we now don’t want to hold any certain ideology because they all failed, it is all transparent now, humans are destructive creatures.

“Going back to *Revolution of Everyday Life*: the film tries to offer an alternative to the problem of the impotency we are all experiencing: to go back and become animals, monkeys, lions, swans, start again, recapture the moments of real existence.

“Two women love, fuck, hate, beat, shout, cry with no social context, Why?”

“To make sense of it all, shameless creatures that can’t handle it all anymore, this is their protest, this is what maybe we all should do, but we probably are not going to, unless we are true to ourselves or just crazy.”

—Lior Rosenfeld



HI, HOW ARE YOU GUEST 10497

Hi, How Are You Guest 10497: a woman, living alone in Manhattan, tries to find connection in the strange new world of the network. In this seeming simplicity, complex issues emerge: What is it to be alone? What is it to be a self? What is it to be a woman today? What is it to be real, to be naked, with another who is only on-screen?



A friend of mine introduced me to a Web site called MyFreeCams. I liked the image of what I thought he described (this was over the phone), and I knew I wanted to find out what this was and to make a film about it.

I asked Raimonda, who was so brilliant in *Revolution*, if she would like to join the site and record herself in the process of becoming a “model.” Once we worked out the details of getting the right computer and several cameras, we then talked about a scenario to give context to her getting involved in this network and what to record. We would meet and she would bring me her footage. I kept building the scenario with small scenes, asking her for more and more day-to-day details so we could establish an authentic and lived sense of her life as an online sex worker. I did not want to push her in any way, but for her to come to this in her own way.

We went on shooting for six months, quietly meeting and accumulating footage. Some takes went on for twenty, thirty, forty minutes. Before I started the edit I thought the whole thing a disaster. Like many of the above projects, I felt it could fall apart at any moment, or just not come together. But then I started watching and watching how completely Raimonda had invested herself in the project. How she patiently recorded, her initial steps and gradual immersion into this world.

In what became *Hi, How Are You Guest 10497*, the actress is never acting with a person physically in the room with her, it’s just a voice or a text line from the screen she’s immersed in. Though I wanted at first to see the men she communicates with, when I see the film now I realize the fact that we do not see them or anyone is what makes the film so compelling. To me it is *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* and *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, and Raimonda is brilliant and genuine. I can’t imagine any other way to have made this film but to have had Raimonda patiently record herself over the months.

I screened the film to maybe eighty people at the Tribeca Grand in the After Set program. A splendid and posh screening room. There, up on the big screen, the world of the one-to-one, of the small computer screen, that connects people all over the world in the most intimate way, in the privacy of our rooms, was writ large and shared publicly. If cinema was, for the longest time, before the DVD and Netflix, a communal seeing, what made it so was the consensual seeing of private and intimate events. The seeing of all of us, gathered in this dark visual and acoustic chamber, seeing one-to-one with everyone else, publicly yet alone, often the most intimate of relations, sometimes dangerous, promiscuous, shameful, abject, and exhilarating, what we called dramatic events was what the cinema could bring us. The language of cinema would parse, reenact, examine, take apart, shot by shot and put together again in its mise-en-scène, such events. And here on screen was Raimon-

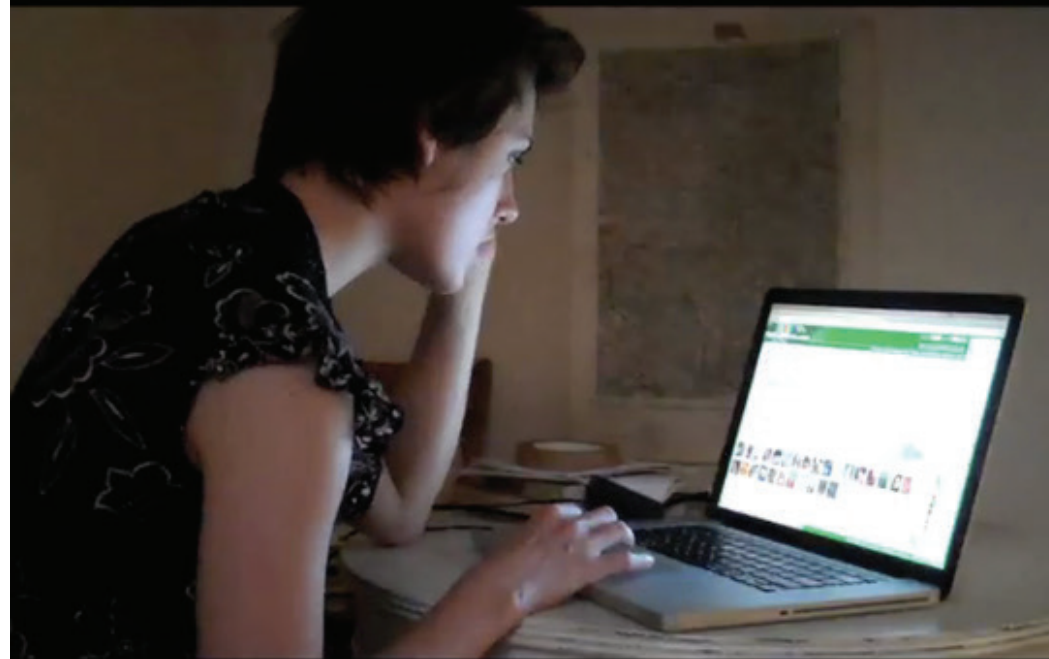
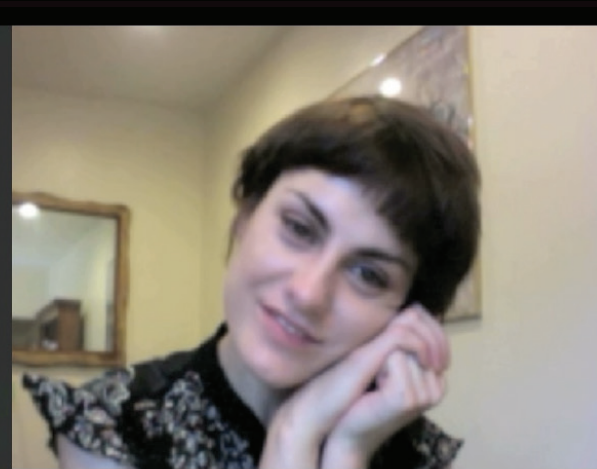
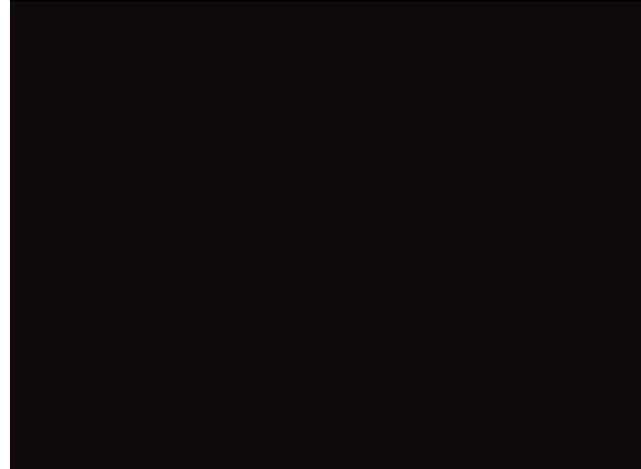
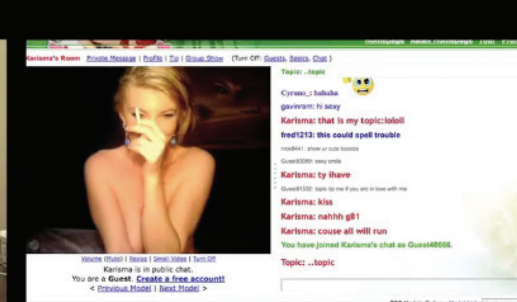


da and hundreds of other women placing themselves inside the cinematic for this new cinema audience.

Our film would use cinema to turn its gaze and apparatus onto this new circuit of seeing, this ongoing mise-en-scène that we step out of and into on a daily basis. *Guest 10497* would use the constraints of cinema's classic codes to allow the audience to look at this new circuit of seeing, the network. A circuit that would afford a proliferation of recordings yet to be formalized. A circuit of ubiquitous seeing, one-to-many, one-to-one, all-at-once, with anyone, everyone anytime.

MyFreeCams is one of many new regimes of sight, and as such splices us into its never-ending and multiple flows. If the early cinema was a cinema of attractions, a cinema of clips, really, and the classic, coded cinema, one that organizes the relay of the gaze, MyFreeCams is both.

In a similar way, the installation film, now pervasive at museums and galleries, allows us to enter at any point. It has no beginning, exactly, and at the same time any possible beginning; and it ends when we want to leave. I presented *Guest 10497* as a diptych at the Minsheng Art Museum in Shanghai on a large-screen monitor in an intimate corner of the gallery room. In the same room against a wall was projected large *Raindrop Ecstasy*, an eight-minute, three-screen film. Raimonda is in both films, and both have material of her working at the Standard Hotel on the High Line park in New York. The two films share content and the same actress



and in the context of the museum, start at any time, playing continuously through the day. That is, you can enter the works at any point. It is not simply that the works loop but that they interrelate and that they are distributed in time and space. In this way there are any number of beginnings, middles, and endings, and perhaps such notions no longer apply and are indistinguishable. In *Raindrop*, the characters begin and end at a karaoke bar, stepping up to an open microphone, not dissimilar to the open video camera of the worldwide karaoke of network culture. The network now is a cinema, a karaoke cinema, where we splice ourselves at the same time into the online real-time recording and the instantly archived.

If I go back to my first film, *Exploding Oedipus*, shot in 35 mm, about a young man who brings a film projector into his one-room living quarters, obsessively returning to film clips of his youth and waiting to make a film of his own, to remake the film of his past, and then I think of *Hi, How Are You Guest 10497*, about a young woman who records herself while video chatting with any possible person around the world from her very small apartment, both films are to me as much about cinema and how this pervasive networked event of recording has now absorbed the codes of cinema into a new apparatus of always-on recording.

The cineast must rewrite recording, which is of course not only the rewriting of montage but the site of what is seen. Just as video rewrote cinema, and here I mean video art and television, the network and social media have put an expo-

nent on this. Certain film historians have termed the first years of cinema as a cinema of attractions. Often cited is Edwin S. Porter, who went from city to city with reels of film. He would rent a hall, hire an organist, and get word out about his show. At these events, he would play his recordings, selecting for that crowd and that evening what felt right to him and his audience—so each event of projection was unique—there was not yet a highly codified cinematic grammar of shot, reverse shot, the eye-line match, relay of the gaze, et cetera. With the remote control we all became Edwin S. Porter in the way we watched television. And with the lightweight cheap film stock cameras in the hands of Andy Warhol, we were all on television. For contemporary network culture, like Warhol, it's not the playback that matters but the event of recording, only network culture has collapsed recording with playback by allowing us to seamlessly record and broadcast.

These two conditions of always-on recording and always-on playback are a now a constant. As such they constitute a new cultural techno-sphere, already having rewritten our printing press, our television, soon our politics—a contemporary cinema must inhabit this condition.

With digital recordings and social media we are always constructing an image of ourselves. We are always already recorded and recording and hence recoding. We change our profile, our picture, and our story to create an image that is a double of us, that in fact is the only us, an image in a never-ending recording.



Marc Lafia

Fri, Oct 8, 2010 at 9:34 PM

Subject: The global network

Hi Raimonda,

As always, wonderful to speak with you.

Here is the site my friend Daniel sent on to me.

<http://www.myfreecams.com/>

And here is what he told me about how you can join and work for them, which your character would do.

He says “there’s an application to be a model; it’s not automatic”:

http://www.myfreecams.com/mfc2/php/prospective_accounts.php

To look around the site is free. He suggest you “Go to lots of different rooms. See all the different approaches the women take—some get very crass; some quite playful; some sweet; some bored; some annoyed; the full gamut of life and the erotic.”

Raimonda Skeryte

Date: Mon, Oct 11, 2010 at 9:38 PM

Subject: Re: the global network

Hey Marc!

Sorry it took me so long to get back to you. But wow, I’ve just spent some time checking out MyFreeCams and I have to say I can totally see why you are interested in making a story about it. I am a pretty shy person myself and at first it’s a little bit uncomfortable and odd but at the same time so intriguing and I ended up looking up one girl after another. Just as you said, it is so interesting how they expose themselves and how people respond to them. A lotta girls are pretty “straight forward” and I know it’s today’s thing :) I don’t think I am a “fan” of pornography but I have to say it is very easy to fall into it and it always starts with something as simple as being curious. And you might easily end up with an addiction :)

Marc, I am very interested in this project and feel so happy to be offered a chance to take part in it. It is a side of me I’ve been wanting to explore for so long and I believe it could be done while making a film. Why not. And especially because it is you, Marc! Working with you is fantastic and I just love how you like to play with new ideas and explore unknown and shocking cinema.

I would be honored to create magic with you again. I don’t think I could ever say “no” to you :)

Please send me your thoughts and keep me informed.

Have a good night. Best, Raimonda



Marc Lafia

Date: Wed, Oct 13, 2010 at 9:18 AM

Subject: Re: the global network

Hi Raimonda,

I love your curiosity and appetite to adventure and explore.

So let's get going.

Raimonda Skeryte

Tue, Mar 22, 2011 at 12:20 AM

Subject: Checking in

Hey Marc,

I just wanted to let you know that the laptop and camera arrived successfully to my place a couple days ago. Thank you!

Raimonda Skeryte

Marc Lafia

Tue, Mar 22, 2011 at 11:02 AM

Re: Checking in

Hello Raimonda,

Thanks. Every day I think about this project. Think about you.

Though I like to invent stories, characters, and situations—I must tell myself not to. I like the beauty of you and the everyday, the banal, the routine.

Here are some thoughts.

So far we have seen you alone in your apartment, cooking, putting on your tuxedo, looking at your computer screen, watching you watch FreeCams.

We have yet to see you interact with anyone on the screen. We do not know that you are “working.”

Though I feel in the film you will already be “working” for FreeCams as it is part of your life, not unlike a person who trades stocks all day at the computer screen or other information workers, I think we should shoot now the following, which would see you joining and getting involved with the service. If we don't want to use it in the final film we don't have to but let's shoot it.\

With that said, let's still do this. Let's see you:

Join the service.

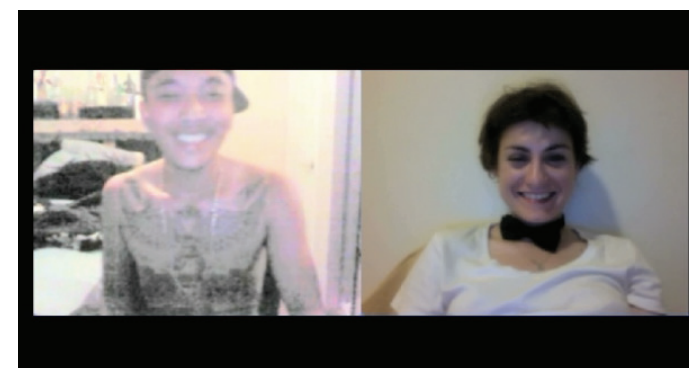
Open up the new computer.

Open up the camera.

Set up the computer.

Set up the camera.

See yourself seeing yourself on the screen (I am absolutely intrigued as to how you are going



to act and interact with others—I cannot say anything here but am so, so curious).
See you prepare yourself for starting to work.
See your very first ten interactions with “guests.”
Ten interactions is a lot but we really want to see the journey from the first to the tenth (please take your time and record all these sessions).
Let’s see the guests when possible.
Let’s see you (do change the angles once in a while).
Let’s see you when you get up, what you do—go to the bathroom, stretch, read, clean, prepare food, talk on the phone with someone (your mother, perhaps).
If there are other girls let’s see you with other girls.
Let’s see you watch the other girls.
Film yourself looking at the girls with the flip cam.
Film yourself—washing dishes, cleaning your bathroom—something very ordinary.
Film yourself dressing for work in your black tuxedo.
Go back to the computer—look at more of the girls.
Come home from work—open some bills.
Go to the liquor store, buy some vodka or gin.
Buy a bunch of carrots (maybe something else).
Some cleaning products, a small sponge.
Ask the man in the store to film you.
You film him.
The man at the register.
Film yourself walking home.
Come home, fix yourself a drink.
Two ice cubes.
Wash and peel the carrots.
Boil them.
Do everything very precisely.
Very neatly.
Look out the window.
Go to the computer.
Look carefully at some of the girls.
Really look at them.
Maybe eight different girls.
Study them.
Consider them.
Go to your closet and think of something to wear.
Decide not to wear anything.
Just be you.
Practice as if you were on FreeCams.
As if you were talking to someone.
Once you have done this—we will meet, talk, and if you feel there is something here for you—I would love to make another work with you—we’ll keep going.
I miss you, Raimonda—let me know how you feel about the above—and in what and any way I can be more helpful. Marc



I like the beauty of you and the everyday, the banal, the routine.

“When we see her dress and leave the house, it is in a man’s tuxedo. With her short hair and almost boyish body—although feminine through and through—we are witness to a certain twilight of fixed gender, a place of becoming where labels will not stick hard or fast.

“The gaze that would fix her as woman-object has been multiplied. If John Berger finds woman nude in the fixed point of the Renaissance gaze, Lafia finds her naked, criss-crossed with thousands of gazes. Indeed, the film performs this: we see her seeing herself be seen, the film’s camera often behind her computer, which itself is both camera and screen. The gaze has been proliferated and, with it, identity.”

“There is no doubt a great loneliness here. But to reduce her to lonely is to miss so much of what’s happening. Because as users of Chatroulette discover, once the meta-narrative of identity disappears—once we stop naming ourselves, stop declaring our social status, our taste, our social tethers such as work and education—we discover something else. Face to face—or screen to screen—with a stranger, free of all metadiscourse that would prefigure the interaction, we discover incredible intimacy. All there is is this encounter, these desires, this moment. Within the presumed mediation of the screen, we discover the immediacy of the encounter.”

—Daniel Coffeen



TWENTY-SEVEN



I was getting off the subway and heard someone call out my name in an excited manner. I turned round to see James Leary, a young artist who had interviewed me several years back for a project for his art group, Bruce High Quality Foundation, “a learning experiment where artists work together to manifest creative, productive, resistant, useless, and demanding interactions between art and the world.”

James let me know that he was keen on making films and wanted to get together and talk. After our first and animated outing in Chinatown, he asked me if I wanted to reenact our conversation so he could videotape it. So we did. As we spent time together he told me he was interested in acting, and soon I felt compelled to create a film around him.

So I started writing and sent him a note about how I was thinking of things.

It was to be a story of two dispositions, two friends, one appetite, the other intellect, one acting seemingly indifferent to consequence, the other, if you like, always calculating—it would be set in and between the worlds of art, academia, art dealers and drug dealers, trust-fund kids and kids working three jobs to keep afloat, about an increasingly disappearing “downtown” New York; it would be about the misadven-

tures and aspirations of friends, based on the real life of Dash Snow and his friends and their friends, and James Leary enacting that fiction as a documentary film. As the documentarist he would rely on judgment and intellect, and on the other hand, the artist would be driven by his appetites and intuitions. All along I was thinking it would be so good to have James play both characters. We as an audience are always delighted to see an actor command two contrasting roles in a film (for example Peter Sellers in *Dr. Strangelove* or James Fox in *Performance*). Imagine *Fight Club* with Brad Pitt or Edward Norton playing both roles rather than being split in two. Yes, the ideal would be for James to enact the two dispositions, to play the roles of director and artist inside the film.

To get going I arranged to meet with an actor I had worked with on several films, Aaron Schroeder. We talked about the recently deceased artist Dash Snow. As we talked I realized Aaron really wanted to dig down and re-create Snow’s life as he saw it in the photographs of Snow’s good friend Ryan McGinley. Aaron wanted to do a close study. He mentioned that Snow died at twenty-seven and that twenty-seven was the age many young artists died. This really intrigued me. What it was to be twenty-seven. I wasn’t so interested in the actual life but the appetite, the way of going that was Snow. Someone who refused to have a cell phone, who would come and go as he pleased, who defined and had success on his own terms and yet did not make it through this auspicious year. Twenty-seven, the age of Hilbert in *Exploding Oedipus*.



After more writing and research I met with James at Au Breve, a coffeehouse near Cooper Union, where he had gone to school. The small place was packed with very serious-looking young students. There was James in a corner with his newly dyed blond hair, bright eyed and pensive, with a copy of the Ionesco play *Rhinoceros*. As I thought of Snow and all the young careering people in the café, there was something so apt about Ionesco's insight. Maybe Snow had imploded as he turned away from the ever-growing crowd of rhinos.

We sat in the crowded corner. I unfurled my scenarios, uncertain as to how he was taking in my loose agglomeration of ideas, especially about the young artist, he himself being young and having met with quite a bit of success in the art world. He was very open and as always had real insight into these young men who were in fact his colleagues. And as he spoke my mind drifted off to Philip Seymour Hoffman playing Truman Capote, the voice, the wardrobe, the sets, all the accoutrements and support it took to make Hoffman, a truly talented actor, shine in that role. Hearing myself say this and from my earlier meetings with Aaron, I knew this was not the way to go. It was not the kind of production I could support logistically, financially, temporally. I could not do it.

What I was so convinced of and had researched for weeks vanished. Here I was again at that place where the imaginary meets the real and has to reinvent itself on the spot. Often when I am floating ideas, I am interested in not exactly the lit-

eral thing I am talking about but the space of emotions and affect around something. Often then people read it as more of an actuality than what I am thinking about. This is something I so often come up against that I just start making up other things and other things, all the while thinking, we are going to do something, what, who knows, as long as we are engaged in finding that something, things are good.

I move on to other things that were also interesting me, that were to be part of the scenario. I told James that I had met this Italian professor of philosophy at the New School, Chiara Bottici. James would be taking a class with her while making the documentary.

He would play Lucien and would be in her class, and she would be lecturing on power and sex, and during the course she would take her students to Benjamin Britten's two-act opera *The Rape of Lucretia*. He would meet her at her office and be very turned on and enamored with her intellect.

As he leaves her office and walks down the hall another female professor (an actual colleague of Chiara's) would see Lucien walking away. The two professors would talk about him, about bedding him, maybe even making a bet about it.

Late one evening, Chiara runs into Lucien, who is out with a group of friends, including fellow students. Something is not right and Lucien walks off and the two of them find themselves together. He



is drunk and Chiara takes him home. We discuss how this happens. I mention two films, *Storytelling* by Todd Solondz and *Bad Timing: A Sensual Obsession* by Nicolas Roeg.

So she seduces Lucien, she “rapes” him. I tell him at the opera I will film select scenes, cutting between him and the two professors, and at the end-of-the-semester lecture, when the class discusses opera, power, and rape, we would see the three of them critiquing the very dynamic they had enacted.

I also suggested he would be making a documentary on writers all twenty-seven or around that age, and I told him I had set up an interview with Tao Lin. James did not know Tao’s writing but had lots of thoughts on the post-ironic and the said posture of new sincerity. I was interested in Tao as someone who truly grew up online. I wanted to give description to that moment when you find you’re inside a mode of narrative or that moment when you see yourself depicted by others while at the same time you actively narrate yourself practically in real time. Yes, something performative, narrative in its very constitution.

So the film would be a documentary of him making this fiction film about these artists, me making a documentary about him as an artist, about him starting up painting again, interviewing figure models and writers, getting involved with some of them and this woman professor and him, and his studio. We would have a go at all these things.

Perhaps one of the writers or models would be a college student who tries to make ends meet as an S and M bondage person-for-hire within a world of wealthy businessmen and lavish penthouses. The quest for true love and happiness contrasts with the dark nighttime in NYC, ridden with perverse sex and drugs (taking cues from *Tokyo Decadence* here)—that could be another line in the story, all depending on who we meet, who showed up for auditions.

It would be about him making this documentary, university politics, the art scene, his friends, dealing with studio mates across the hall or rather the theater troupe that has subleased from him—they are putting on a process play and are always doing exercises that include shooting, running around—a living theater.

About the drug-addled couple downstairs, Aaron and Morgan (the Dalton girl and her weapons-obsessed boyfriend).

The professor, the rape.

I went on and on and over the weeks sent him e-mails and more scenarios.

With James’s interest, I began casting, asking around to meet young writers and academics through friends at the New School and the editor of an online magazine, *Thought Catalog*. I also placed an ad on Mandy and craigslist:

“Part fiction, part documentary, 27 follows the interwoven lives of seven twenty-seven-year-olds. It maps them as a network of nar-



ratives and affects, along twenty-seven nodes of anything and everything—a fold where all things touch in dreams, in algorithms, in a kiss mapped into any number of vectors and correlations of love, death, ambition, euphoria, confusion, desire, mystery, addiction, wonder, disgust and mania.”

So I wrote to my editor friend with the ad and added, “With that said, I would be most grateful if you could introduce me to ten people: writers, thinkers, storytellers, journalists, actors, designers, technologists, artisans, etc.—anyone that you think of interest—there are so many good writers on your site and I would like to talk to and interview as many as I can and readers as well (they will be in stellar company)—around the age of twenty-seven.”

Chris Lavergne’s response:

“I gotta condense this into something very palpable to recruit people.

Can I call it a mock documentary? Or ... do I say it’s just an experimental film?”

A friend turned it into this, which Chris passed around:

“A film that is a bleed of fiction and documentary entitled 27. It’s a taking on of this moment in people’s lives today: What is it to reckon the world at twenty-seven today? What turns you on in every sense? How do you go, what do you think, what do you do? This is not an exposé but a reckoning, a putting on, a play.”

“Been talking to some people. Making progress on putting together a roster. One concern: people are freaked out by

the ‘fiction’ element. Any way to ease this concern?”

—Chris Lavergne of *Thought Catalog*

It was so odd to read that line for me—people who write fiction “freaked out by the fiction element.”

After all, what I was interested in was the event of recording, the performance of it, the multiplicity of ways people were now documenting and presenting themselves, in their tweets, hash tags, social media posts, Vine videos, Instagram pictures, blogs as “real” with the exponent of “fiction.” How was it possible that their participation in the “real” would not invite them to see it as “fiction”? Weren’t their fictions, as had always been, the piecing together of both documentation and invention?

This narrative space was what was now becoming most interesting to me. After making *Hi, How Are You Guest 10497*, I did not think of making another film, as it was so close to what my interest had been in constructing an image for the screen, not the big screen, the cinema screen, but the screens of the everyday. There was something that continued here in the idea of constituting narrative in a world where we are always narrating ourselves in our pervasive social media. How was it that all these parallel, asynchronous postings constituted a narrative coherence and how might they inform a way to think about and author a contemporary cinema? Not in literally showing them, but by using them as a constructed language along the new ways, they have entrained



us to be authors and readers of dispersed, open, and parallel narratives.

As things gathered momentum, with all these people to meet and casting to be set up, I contacted Sasha Sakhar, who was an intern on a documentary I was making, *Revolution of the Present*, on network culture. She invited me to the New School and introduced me to a number of her student friends, including Divina Hasselmann, an extraordinarily bright grad student whom I came to see would be perfect to match up with James as they were both extremely articulate. That evening, as I often do with my camera with me, I interviewed her, in a casual way in the setting of her peers. The things she said about love, death, sex, intimacy, so easily, caught me as all the things I wanted in the fiction I was looking for—and here she was, right in front of me.

Days later I invited her to be part of the film and told her we would meet at St. Mark's bookstore in the East Village. I only had to give her enough of a scenario that could be a starting point for her. At this point the Italian professor told me she was up for tenure and that my scenario would not be looked on very favorably by her peers. (Of course I thought it was exactly what a professor should do, to enact the text she is teaching.) With Chiara out of the picture, Divina would be my "professor," and as a peer to James, we could explore the same issues of intimacy, freedom, power, sex, and closeness in a more intimate, if less conceptual, way.

I would create a fiction that would allow me to document her, James, and the other

cast of nine that I had interested in making a film.

I had simply to give them enough fiction for me to document them. This then would become the project, to find, discover, catalyze a recording event that can put on the now of these twenty-seven-year-olds.

In the end I needed all these narratives and fictional armatures to give both the actors and non-actors a beginning, otherwise I would be straight-up interviewing them. I could not do all the stories I had researched and written, per se—the enactment of a scenario from A to Z—rather the film would have to be this encounter between my fictions and imaginings and these people, in the lensing and time dimension of the event of recording of us together. Shooting the ficiton would allow us, give space and permission to all of us, to explore all the ideas that were brewing, that now the group of us were brimming with and ready to reckon with. It was time now to shoot.

In order to take hold of us, writing, art, and cinema needs to define our most contemporary sense of our perception of ourselves—so with the group of actors, writers, and artists, I now set out to find a new form that would include all these varied kinds of recording events—documentary, fiction, selfie, social media, theater, and performance art.



More impressionistic than plot—what is plot, to you?

“The idea of a plot is unattractive, because I never liked people who plotted out their lives. I don’t like people who plot too much. I try to stay away from people who plot. But a story can be more liquid. It can be without a point. It can be more impressionistic.”

—Harmony Korine

“[After the screening of *My Own Private River*], an audience member made a comment that in this film, it took a while for the story to kick in. James [Franco] said he feels sometimes that a narrative can ‘strangle a film’ and he prefers to not rely on a strong narrative when making films.”

—On Location Vacations

“I work in waves ... and I take liberties I wouldn’t have taken before ... I got all kinds of wonderful effects that I never achieved before. They all have beautiful passages, such large passages, not like those early paintings.”

—Cy Twombly



At St. Mark's Church James and Divina walk along under the night sky, conversational and easy. James listens:

"You're sure about this—not being attached to each other."

"I've thought about this, and yes."

When Divina tells James "we can be with other people," he begins to doubt his existence—his language, his appearance, and his mind.

He soon sees himself split into another young man, Aaron, as if his shadow has run away.

He chases him, fragments of language and narratives, deliriums and pleasures, all these doubling all over the film, dream, reality, time, biography.

Soon James is acting in a surrealist Mexican movie.

And so those initial ideas of James playing two characters come up from the unconscious and find a way into the film.



Andrew L. Rogers

Fri, June 14, 2013 at 2:46 PM

Hi Marc,

Hope everything is going great! Just wanted to again thank you for the opportunity to work on your film—after working on other productions, being a surreal Mexican director pretty much beats everything else. I've also begun revisiting my Jodorowsky films and rediscovering what a great filmmaker he is.

The above is a note from the young Mexican actor Andrew Rogers after our shoot. Having met him in auditions, I knew he was someone with whom I could work. There was also the very knowledgeable Shakespearean actor Tim Eliot. In finding them, I began to write for them and adapting the text to them. Everything I had written began to morph and pursue its potential, given what was in front of me.

Marc Lafia

Tue, Apr 30, 2013 at 11:15 PM

Subject: scenario updated 1-14 please read

Hi Tim,

This is what I have as of tonight—please give this a read. Thanks.

Scenario

1.

- On a ferry, Tim and his elephant proclaim a new world.
- Aaron rides his bike in elephant mask.
- Divina reads in St. Mark's Bookshop a book on utopia.
- James draws Emma.
- Andy takes ecstasy.
- Andrew in the park stages the fight scene of his surreal Mexican epic film.

2.

- Tim disembarks onto the mainland and introduces his new creature.
- The public says, he is foul, a beast, a monster.
- Tim insists this is the beginning of a new sense of love.
- Andrew discourses on the meaning of the fight to James and Aaron.



[And from here I go on and on, writing to Tim scenes and lists and ideas until I get to the part about the elephant. All of these lists and notes and dialogues are written through and through again and again.]

So the elephant and you.

After I had interviewed Divina and she told me her thoughts of new possibilities of love, sex, and intimacy, I went around and asked a number of people—if you could, how would you reinvent sex? Many people said they would like to have both sex organs. With this the film begins to turn on questions of inventing new relations, new languages of the possible, a new man—utopias and their discontents, one to one and many to many.

You, through, I am hoping, your knowledge of Shakespeare, will bring to bear a number of soliloquies on these topics, all the while parading about with your “elephant.”

I imagine you coming off the ferry into New York—the new world. And with you is this creature, a Caliban, an androgyne, a monstrous but beautiful new being. Is it chained to you? I don’t know. Are you its master, its lover? I don’t know.

He/she will be dressed up as a kind of fantastic creature of both sexes—many people whom we have talked to about reinventing sex wish not only to have both organs but all the relations of those two organs, of man and woman in one being—this is what I interpret “elephant” below to be.

So you will walk around with him/her in the Village, the East Village.

I think of this creature as being the dream of some of the actors and wonder if we can find the right costuming so that more than one actor can be your elephant.

Does this person wear a strap on, have an externalized penis, a vagina? (Think about how to do that, maybe without being literal.) This creature to me is something beautiful and strange and oddly utopian—in the end, the other of ourselves, our possibilities, our repressions. We will, in the end, sacrifice this creature, the brave new world will demand it.

So what I’d like from you, if this is okay, is your choice of a number of texts that speak to this, and you will perform them as you come into New York on the ferry, passing the Statue of Liberty and then disembarking. I am imaging you crossing lower Manhattan and Wall Street with this “elephant” with the sex of a man and a woman.



You are walking through the park and streets as if in a new world—along the way, you perform various passages from *The Tempest*, enact Prospero and Caliban and various novels or just more Shakespeare.

The idea is to narrate from your viewpoint something we do not see—because we see it as all too familiar. There is a world right in front of us we just don't see.

And from one of the East Village punks interviewed in the film: “If I had a pussy and a dick I could just fuck myself all the time. I wouldn't need anyone else.”

O, wonder!

How many goodly creatures are there here!

How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world,

That has such people in 't!

—The Tempest



The film continued to adapt to its circumstances and what it could be and what some of the actors and artists wanted from it. That seems odd, this notion of what they wanted—after all, I am the writer and director. But I found that we collectively were in search of what it was to be an author, what it was to write ourselves, to unwrite what and who we were, those things we thought were expected of us, those things we put upon ourselves,

our representations and self-representations. Divina wanted to ask from the very beginning, is there another way to have intimacy, to get close; is there another way we can think of death, not as finality, but a beginning. Film, as the site to enact fiction, became the site to engage these issues and document that engagement. As the author I then made a film about this process, and in that, captured what it means for me.



“Reminds me of *Love and Art*. But this is subtler.

“I like the idea of having this young man as the narrator of this film. You take him, and through him, yourself, into a complex fictional territory.

“I like the fact that his ideas mirror your footage with the family, the actors. The film is shaped as a crystal. You, him, his art, your art, his life, your life, the film within the film and then you, in that film/dream. Just need more development, clarity. Kāla thinks your editing is good and poetic, as is your camera work. We both like the parts when you manipulate the image. Gorgeous. You are making art while filming. Again, it is self-reflective like only you can be!”

—Lior Rosenfeld

As it turns out I worked with Kāla Mandrake on the final edit of the film as I had done in the past with editor Keren Weinberg. I always make the first assemblies and edits of my films. I am the only one who knows the script, the logic of the narrative. Once I have the film, then it is always watching and watching and compressing down, and at that point it is helpful to work with someone else. And so for this film and the others, the film became the film—that is, it became what it needed to become, and I had only to follow it.

It became a film of narrative enactment and documentation, not so much about twenty-seven-year-olds but as a contextualizing or putting into relief the age twenty-seven as a turning point, a passageway, one of many. It is a portrait of a young man as an artist, James Leary, and a young woman, Divina, an academic and burgeoning filmmaker, their “friends” and the twelve-year-old Lola,

a young girl with great feeling and poetic sense of a larger world, and myself, double James’s and Divina’s age, artist, husband, lover, parent, in the act of creation, swinging between pleasure and doubt. Twenty-seven this way would be seen against youth and age, a middle passage.

In the end I would present a very specific group of twenty-seven-year-olds. In a sense the cinema, or film form, became a stage, a platform, to enact, perform, dialogue, and communicate who they were, what cinema was and could be; a multiplicity of narrative tropes, a method for them to reveal themselves. This shared sense of “a film,” this agglomeration of tropes, was the event around which we came together. Here our bodies, philosophies, and emotions, tested and untested about love, desire, pleasure, performance, came unfurled and were reckoned with. Through fiction we come to the real.



INTERVIEWS



Jisu Song (TriBeCa Film Institute)
Peter Duhon (Anthology Film Archives)
Kevin Farrington (Mubi)
Daniel Coffeen (The Aesthetes)
Lior Rosenfeld (191)



Interview with Jisu Song, TriBeCa Film Institute

Q: In your film *Exploding Oedipus*, there's experimentation through the editing using straight, quick cuts, harsh coloring, low, noir lighting, and fragmented images. How would you describe the style that you're using in your film, and how is your style experimental? Why did you choose an experimental style for this film?

A: Hilbert, a young man who can only see things through books and films, wants to find something more, so he withdraws to the Tenderloin in San Francisco, to be alone, to be invisible. In the small room of his decrepit hotel, he wants to figure out where his feelings are, where he is going. He begins to explore the art scene, the possibilities and spaces of his sexual desires and the use of drugs. He's experimenting with himself. And so the film has this look and design that is as you say, experimental.

Q: I see those two things together. Yes.

A: He wants to know who he can be. He has to explode the image of himself, his past, his sense of self. He sets about this tentatively, self-consciously, in a bookish kind of way. He

wants to know how he came to construct an image of himself. He comes to ask, how can the cinema be more than a reflection of ourselves? He wants both to run from himself and to discover himself, the self that he is not in touch with but wants to find and connect to.

In the small hotel room he repeatedly watches 8-mm films of his childhood taken by his father. In one of these home movies he sees the image of himself as a little boy, walking away from his mother's vanity. She finds him in the reflection of her mirror, looking on at her, drinking in a stupor. She gets up to hit him when his father comes in, shooting his 8-mm camera. In his hotel room he plays this scene projected on a sheet on the wall, it is this piece of film that Hilbert keeps looping and returning to. So to break this film, he makes his own film, he creates a new narrative, a new image, what he calls a post-oedipal spaghetti western. And in this film inside the film he shoots his father dead-dead.

Unconsciously he wants to explode the cinema of seeing, the cinema that is a mirror. He wants to create a cinema of sight. He wants cinema to do more than represent the world that already is and wants with cinema to bring something new into the world, to be a way to see the world anew. So this experimentation you speak of performs his desire to explode Oedipus, cinema, himself, everything.

Q: In your film *Revolution of Everyday Life*, the characters' use of recording devices such as the camera to document their personal lives contributes to the film's experimentation and blurring of genre. It appears the use of technology is the impetus for cinematic experimentation. Why did you choose to experiment using technology in this piece?

A: In *Exploding Oedipus*, Hilbert makes a film to see an image of himself. In *Revolution*, the two girls ask, What is the image that we want to bring to the world, to make the world? How is the world our image? With social media we create an image, a narrative of ourselves. We are always already recorded and recording. We change our profile, our picture, and our stories—the project of psycho-schizo analysis. Of any self-knowing. To create an image that is a double of us, that we can say is us, that is us becoming.

We are always an image today, a profile, that's the larger technology you are talking about. The long wish of writing ourselves into "history" has happened. But what does it mean, to be one of millions of stories. The use of the camera and the actors documenting themselves does blur this line of fiction documentation, what's staged, what's really happening. This is the very same line we have blurred in our use of contemporary and social media. What happens when you turn the camera on and speak to it, perform for it? When you use it as a way to say things about yourself, about your everyday?

I got to a certain point with *Revolution* where I could sense that to know the actors intimately, and more so, to have them reveal themselves intimately, I should ask them to record themselves, alone, away from me. When I brought this up I was surprised by how keen they were to do it. So over the next months I gave out flip cameras and asked

them to make recordings of themselves. I gave them very open instructions that came from performance and video art, asking them to simply be a body in space, for them to have no fear of the mundane, to just be. Which is not easy. Actors want something to do, a script.

The cameras come back, and just seeing them is extraordinary. They are performative, acted and enacted. You see them, their rooms, their lives, their rhythms. And the two modes of the two actresses who are to be the leads in the film are radically different. One lets herself be seen, she is a presence for the camera to see. The other presents herself to the camera, addresses it directly, we never see her, so to speak, she talks to us, performs for us, always coming to the camera. The other is there, allowing the camera to see her as if the camera is not there.

I have everyone's recordings. And each of them in every way is extraordinarily revealing and interesting. I asked them then to form a collective that gets together to do private and public recordings. Together they will argue about what it is they are doing and why. And in all of this, the two girls are falling in love. Until, that is, they see each other through the group that sees them. Through the group each recognizes the great distance between their views on love, revolt, and art. And then everything falls apart.

The recording became part of their everyday, and the conflict, how do we stand toward it.

Q: What drove you to transition from filmmaking to media installation work such as your exhibition *Eternal Sunshine* in Shanghai? Why did you choose this direction rather than make another film?

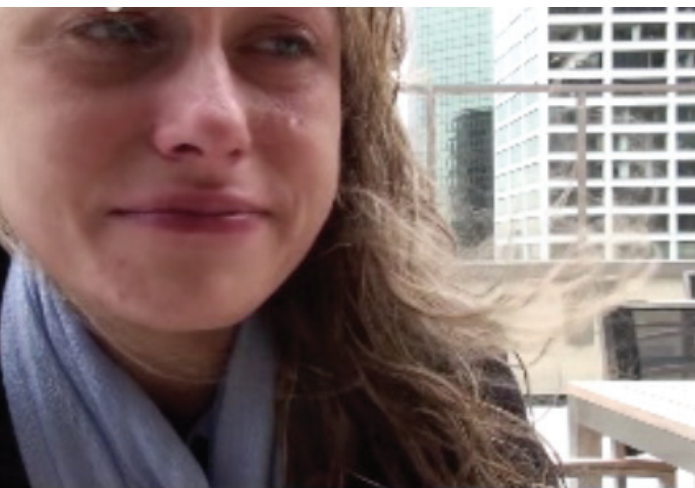
A: I wanted to make a different kind of film, to find new ways of making film, that's one reason. The other is that, while in the film business there's been this continued, intensified commercialization and narrowing down of the film form and language, contemporary



art conversely locates cinema within the broader landscape of visual culture. And in this environment there is more freedom to openness of form and format. At the Minsheng Art Museum in Shanghai, for example, I could play the eight-minute video *Raindrop Ecstasy* and the feature *Hi, How Are You Guest 10497* together in one room, as they share narrative elements. In the museum space it does not matter when you enter or leave the film, you pick it up where and when you do and leave when you want. This is much more in keeping with the way people watch films at home and in the art context today. Also one film is a diptych, the other a triptych, and so the mise-en-scène is multiple, moving in many directions at once. This kind of film viewing and making has a different sense of resolution and tension, it's a different order of expectations and the demands of a more commercial cinema.

Though there are always exceptional films made year in and year out, filmmaking today is for the most part a producer's medium. Most filmmakers are spending their time looking for money, not making work. And soon enough they internalize what the cinema demands and what it should be. So if you are interested in cinema as a possibility, as a language, a means to discover something new, you have to define your own agenda. You can seek refuge and find it, at times, in the visual arts in such places as museums, galleries, and biennials.

Q: Most articles and reviews define you as a new media artist. How would you describe yourself as a filmmaker and artist? What does new media mean to you?



A: I went to the UCLA film school, which is right next to the art school. So I was going between the two departments. Shirley Clarke was teaching in the film school, and she had a very different sense of making films then, let's say, the screen-writing teachers. For her film was a process, a search, you found your way in the making of it. In the writing department, you made a film on paper, it was all in the writing. It was made on the page. In the art department, I was taking more theory classes. During and after film school I was doing a lot of music videos, mostly as a conceptualist, and I was teaching at Art Center College of Design, courses on game design and music videos, and there with some students I started designing a number of interfaces and applications that I took to San Francisco, which eventually led to the founding of artandculture.com. At the same time I was always going to art shows and openings.

In the late nineties there was interest in the digital, in new media, from the art world, not quite yet the network. They were also interested, as was everyone, in the new condition and disruption of Internet culture. During this time I made a number of works, including the *Vann demar Memex* or *Lara Croft Stripped Bare by Her Assassins*, *Even*; *Ambient Machines*; *Variable Montage*; *The Battle of Algiers*; and other works that started to be shown in museums and at art festivals. It was just before this that I made the 35-mm feature *Exploding Oedipus* in San Francisco after trying for some time to find financing in Los Angeles.

Q: So you were doing both films and new media work?

A: Very few films then. Though I was writing all the time. I still had not figured out a way to make narrative films in terms of how to put on a production and think in a new way. It was still you write, you find interest from an actor who is worth so much at the box office that you get attached to your film or you find a small production company. You needed all those things to mount a production. Today the issue is distribution, getting your films seen. In time if I wanted to make films, I had to work outside of those constraints and let myself be more of an artist looking for ways to explore film language and its reading. And with that, as things became more and more digital, with Final Cut and digital cameras and phone cameras, and the culture became more networked, I started working to find conceptual approaches to the problems of how to make a film. Not just logistically but how to make a film speak, from the very way it articulates itself to the way it moves. How to make a film alive from the inside.

As to new media, its defining characteristic is software. In software, all the hard-wired technology constraints of film can be rethought, the things we don't even think of or take as natural, the things we think are constitutive of film, one screen at a time, a beginning, a middle, an end, the short format, the long-form format, the use of sound, the linear production processes, et cetera. These are all industry standards. When you think of film as software, it all becomes rewritable. There is also computation and the network, both with distinct properties challenging our sense of what cinema might be in

Intermedia Art

New Media, Sound and Performance

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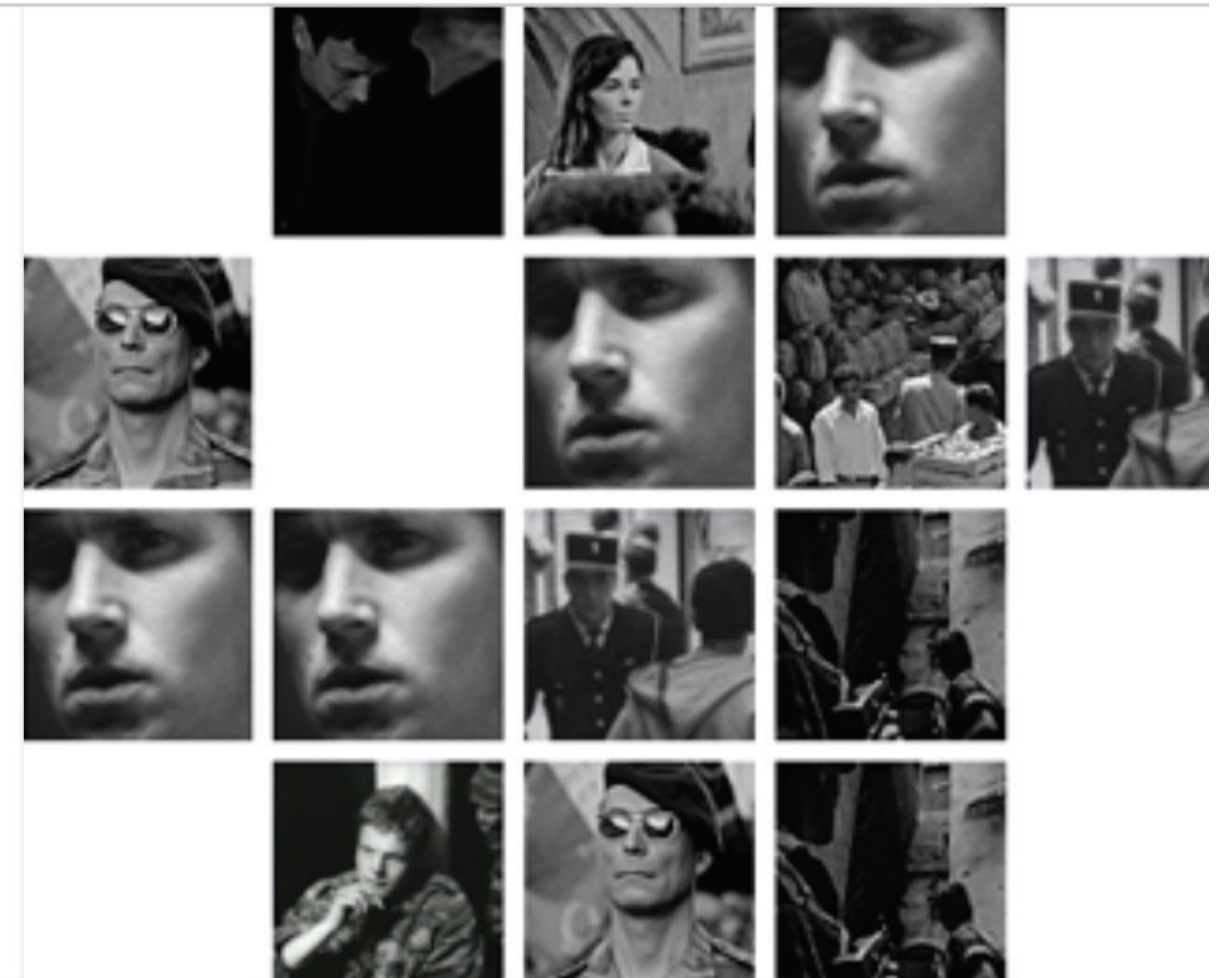
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2006 The Battle of Algiers

Marc Lafia and Fang-Yu Lin



The Battle of Algiers, screen grab c. Marc Lafia 2006

terms of time, duration, grammar. There is this but there is also the necessity to rethink how to make films. Most filmmakers use these new tools to simply streamline the older production processes of filmmaking.

Cinema is based on a technological substrate of recording and playback and has for the most part in narrative cinema been generated from a written format that is then photographed. In contrast, cinema in software and computation is generative, responsive, iterative, often driven by algorithms and correlative instructions, even crowdsourcing, so its characteristics or properties as a technical substrate, as an instrumentation, have changed. Similarly, cinema and its history in the network becomes both an archive and a set of files for remixing, renarrating. But we've hardly explored this, because there is no standards for it, no industry for consumption of it.

With cameras on our computers and phones we continually create images and narratives of ourselves, we transact through moving images. Though network culture is pervasive in the way we think and represent ourselves, in the way we image ourselves and narrate ourselves, you don't find any of this in today's cinema. Why is that? Well, not only is the cinema an industry that wants to protect itself, it's also a language that has to be reinvented. It's a form that demands we reinvent it, discover it, undo it, and make it our own.

Q: How do you define your movies? They're not narrative or documentary, they're on the borderline between video-art experimental and narrative. Looks like a new genre of cinema. Do you have a name for it?



A: I had to come to invent a way to make films for myself. Not to depend on other people's money, proscribed locations, the perfect actor, reproducing a set script—none of this would do. I saw that I had to fold my reality into fiction. To see fiction in my everyday. To film my scripts in the environment of my lived life, with those around me, to see in the everyday the fiction I was writing, and to see the real as having the potential to become fiction, and to bring these two together. I don't know what to call the films, but a filmmaker friend of mine from Japan reminded me of John Grierson, who believed in cinema's capacity for getting around, for observing and selecting from life itself, and that cinema could photograph the living scene and the living story, which was everywhere. To add to this I think the living scene, as he calls it, can also interpret the scenario or fiction in your head, to be folded into it. As William Burroughs found, all the words and images are there, you've got to put them together through you. So yes, they are experimental, but not in this old school, antinarrative or structuralist way, and yes, they are video—as video can record in only a way that video can—they are both immediate and constructed, found and invented, and they use direct recording of sound and are not there to then narrate an argument on top, but the recordings are their own argument, a becoming recording. They seem to me a very contemporary cinema, a cinema of the everyday, a cinema not made by numbers.

Q: You work very intimately with your actors. Where do you find them? How do you establish such a strong and intimate relationship with them?

A: At some point you realize an actor brings him or herself to the role. It is the actor playing the role. There is no role in that sense, there is the actor who invents, plays, plays with and along with this role, that he or she goes on inventing. To do that inventing I want the actor to feel completely at ease in taking on this role, making this role, becoming it, bringing themselves to it. The actors are essential to me, the key collaborators. We spend time together, doing physical exercises, improv, dance, trust exercises, just talking. Seeing if we can get on. Just being with each other. Really taking time with each other. After a while you get a feel for those who want to be creative. Who want to invent. To collaborate. Then I e-mail them a lot of images, film clips, music. In the new film, they take home cameras, film themselves in some cases. So through this physical work and exercising and conversing, we come to understand the situation we want to construct, and the language, their dialogue reflects that, so the language becomes theirs, as they and the role are now inseparable. We do not shoot many days, but we prep a long time—just enough, not too much—so that when we shoot, there is a lot inside that comes out.

Q: In some of the work it is almost as if you are documenting the actor finding the role, bringing themselves into a relationship to the ideas of the work.

A: Yes. Very much so.



Q: What is the future of the cinema?

A: There are a lot of cinemas, but it all becomes one, all competing for the same spaces and attention. I am not the person to answer about the future. Today the movie has already started, is always playing, you get spliced into it, take up the story. Maybe that's simply what reality television is or immersive multiplayer online video games are or what it means to be in an always-networked environment. As a language, the availability and immediacy of self-representation through digital recording suggests a new kind of mise-en-scène, very new kinds of narrative, a different distribution of logic, of a story that has already happened. But who knows. Maybe for some time, because what I am describing is so everyday, most cineasts will look for the extraordinary. There are few films like Michael Haneke's *Amour*, quiet and intimate, or *Spring Breakers*, that bring you into the delirium of wanting to live inside pop culture and live out the media. Two films very much about the ordinary.

Q: A lot of filmmakers find your movies inspiring. Who is your audience beside filmmakers and film theory people?

A: I don't know about "a lot." My films are rarely seen. But I suppose people who like film, visual arts, literature, music, who see something of themselves in these films. Who see something of what it is to approach film as a medium. Who see that we do not know what film is. That film is always a possibility in front of us, that we are always inventing the cinema, film, video, its formats, forms, and possibilities. This excitement of its invention is the experience. The audience, then, are those who want to make cinema with me. That's a very small group. Very small.

Q: From *Exploding* to *27*, how would you describe the difference?

A: Where *Exploding* was a presentation and analysis of desire, of things that had already happened, the recent work of *27* enacts the tactics of film to propel a real-time search—the film becomes a site not for representation but for discovery; the film is this set of rules that everyone knows, it's like a game we are all going to play, it's a construct, a structure, for things to happen. It becomes the site for performing, for acting, for asking questions, it's the documentation of that. It's not so much about representing desire and memory, but enacting it or enabling it—it becomes then an expression of a certain immediacy and urgency and a way of seeing the world.

Q: Between 2005 and 2010, you made five long-form narrative films that you are only now beginning to show. I am curious to hear how you made these films and why you haven't shown them.

A: In 2005 I was coming out of a period of making small film works with algorithmic instructions called *Computations*. I had created in software a programmable "film" projec-

tor to assign an envelope of iterative values to any number of film files—each generating sound. Many of the films were made from sequences of still images, so it was as much a way to look or relook at photographic practice and the imaging event as to the precise image and now see the image in time and in variable time—not quite a moving image but an image that moves.

Q: So then what happened?

A: Well, I started using these small Canon PowerShot cameras to shoot more and more videos. And so I wanted to find a way to order these videos. So I started a project called *Permutations*. With *Permutations* I again wrote a film projector in software, but this time one that played the audio files, each separately, one at a time, from left to right, while you are seeing all the video files play simultaneously. Very quickly the viewer learns to look at the video whose sound is playing. So yes, they are seeing all the videos at once but truly focusing on the one whose sound is playing. Once they locate or learn this way of seeing and reading they begin to see both the one event and the whole of the piece. Again, like in the computations, I was playing multiple recordings next to each other, but in this case the recordings were played without any manipulation other than their arrangement, each being looped while the audio track of any given video would narrate the videos playing left to right, going through the entire tableau or set of videos on the screen. What we think of as natural in the *mise-en-scène* of film language today is simply something that we've become habituated to learn to read and see in a particular way. But it is an industry standard. Just as painting moved from the wall and frescoes to the portability of canvas and then to outdoor or *plein air* painting, this in turn changing the content of painting, or album recording moved in the digital era back to the focus on the single, the *technosphere* and money change the images and sounds we produce.

Q: Your software cinema sounds very technical.

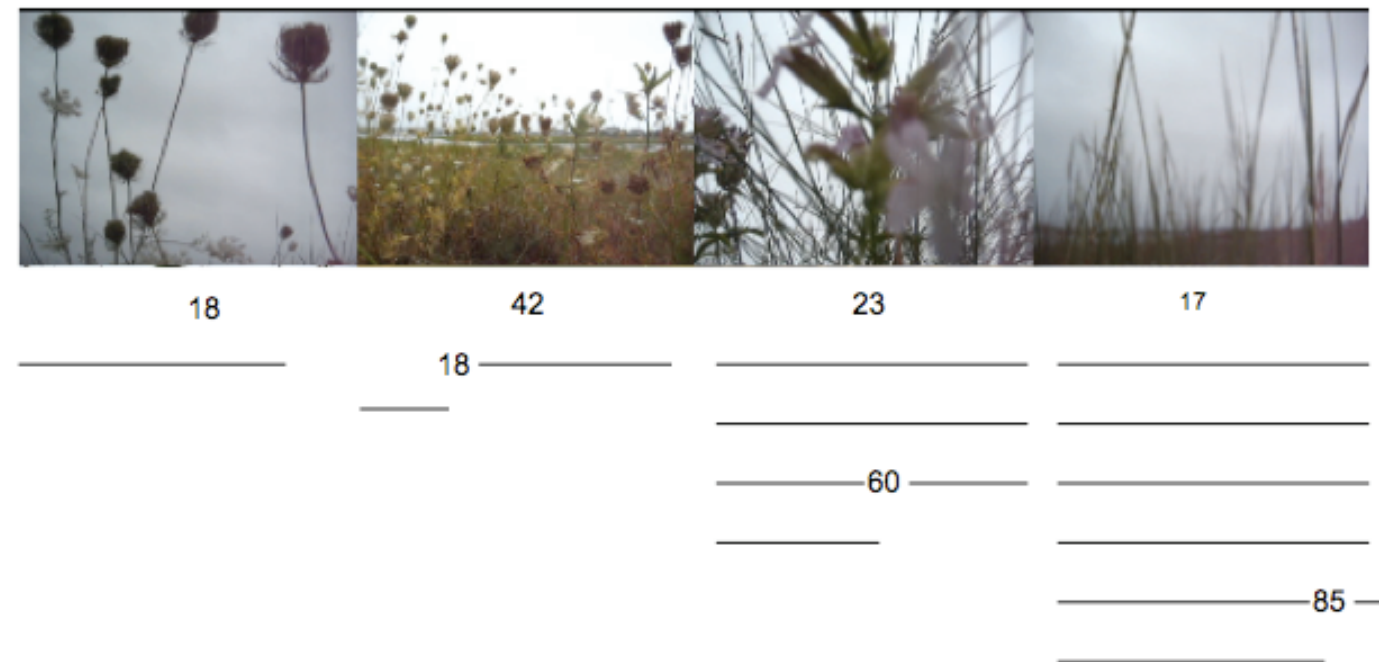
A: It isn't, really. It's only that our contemporary film playback system has become so invisible to us that we don't need to explain it. In fact, we learn how to read film as a language. It came to a point where to create a new kind of cinema required that I think about it from the ground up, that I think about recording and playback. Recording and playback are particular kinds of events, particular kinds of effects of instrumentations. For the viewer, this technical underpinning, the program, the machine limit, or constraint, is most often not thought about—but if we think about vinyl records, for example, or our iPods as one big variable record, you can begin to sense how these apparatuses both allow and constrain meanings. When an audience today goes to see Christian Marclay's video *Telephones*, a 7.5-minute compilation of brief Hollywood film clips, it creates a narrative of its own, one that allows them to see film history; as they follow the image of the phone, they soon see more and more things.

Sound Instructions for online cinema engine.

When a folder opens, in this case, a folder of 4 video clips, all video clips play immediately and, loop. But only the sound of the first clip plays. When it finishes the sound picks up at the next clip.

The sound plays left to right.

It picks up at each subsequent clip at the point where the previous clip finished in the total aggregate number. So sound most often start after the first clip picks up in the middle of the following clip, goes around to the start and finishes where it picked up. So at 18sec into the 2nd clip, at 60sec into the 3rd and 85sec in 4th. When the final clip of sound plays, the app brings up the next folder.





Permutations

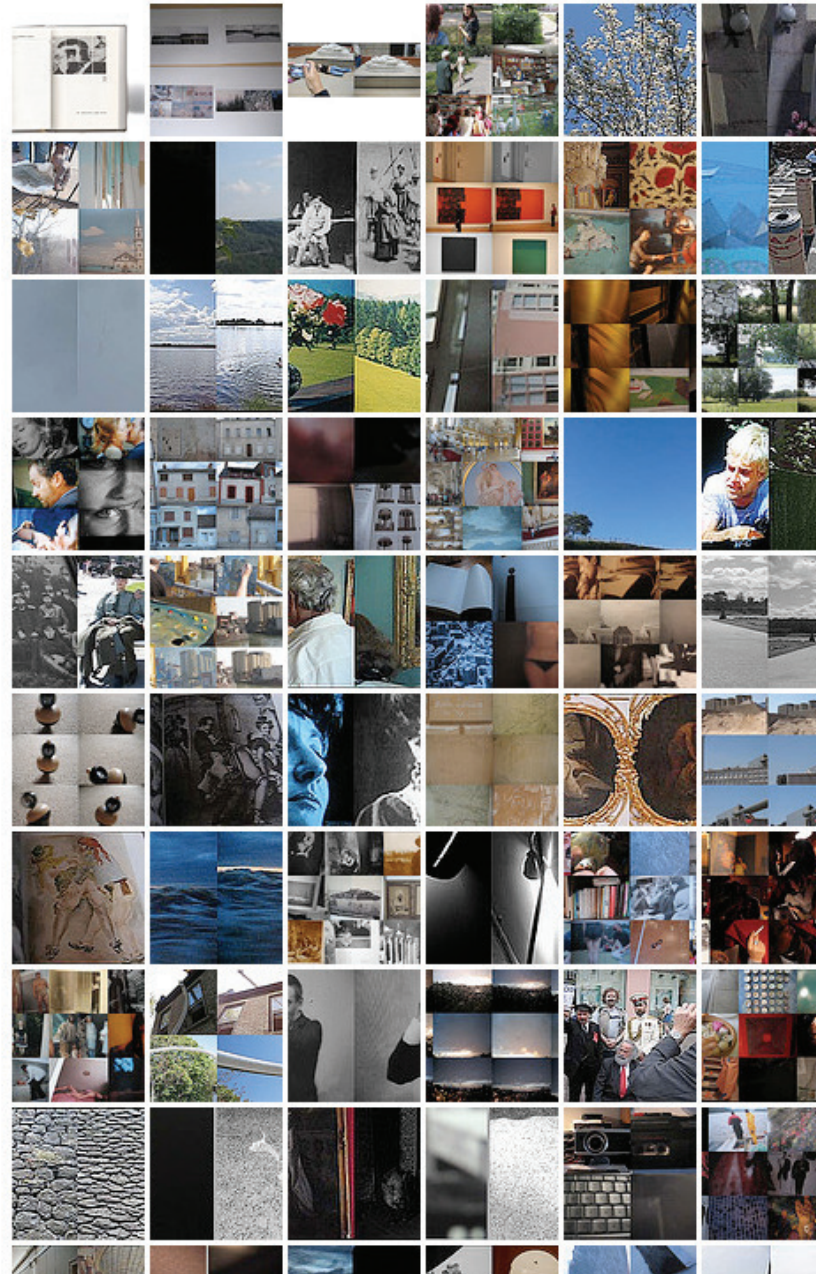
Thumbnails Detail Comments



These are stills from computational videos I have made of small video clips playing side by side. The sound moves from one image to the next to the next to the next.

61 photos | 29 views | [Add a comment?](#)

items are from between 24 Sep 2005 & 26 Jul 2007.



Audiences very quickly learn how to read these works. The *Permutations* were all multiwindow works, and there were any number of ways to organize these images, these recordings, these sounds, not in a sequence, one shot after the other, but all at once, simultaneously. Each sound rereads the video before and after it. Sound reads the image. Sound tells us what to see. The image sees the sound. Narrative is a way to read the world. Narrative happens with the constituent elements of sound and image. And so yes, we as readers and as an audience read them, even if they are ambient, structural, experimental; this legibility is in the realm of a large sense of narrative. We are always finding new articulations to narrate narrative.

Q: So how do you go from a tableau or single-sequence film to multiple sequences?

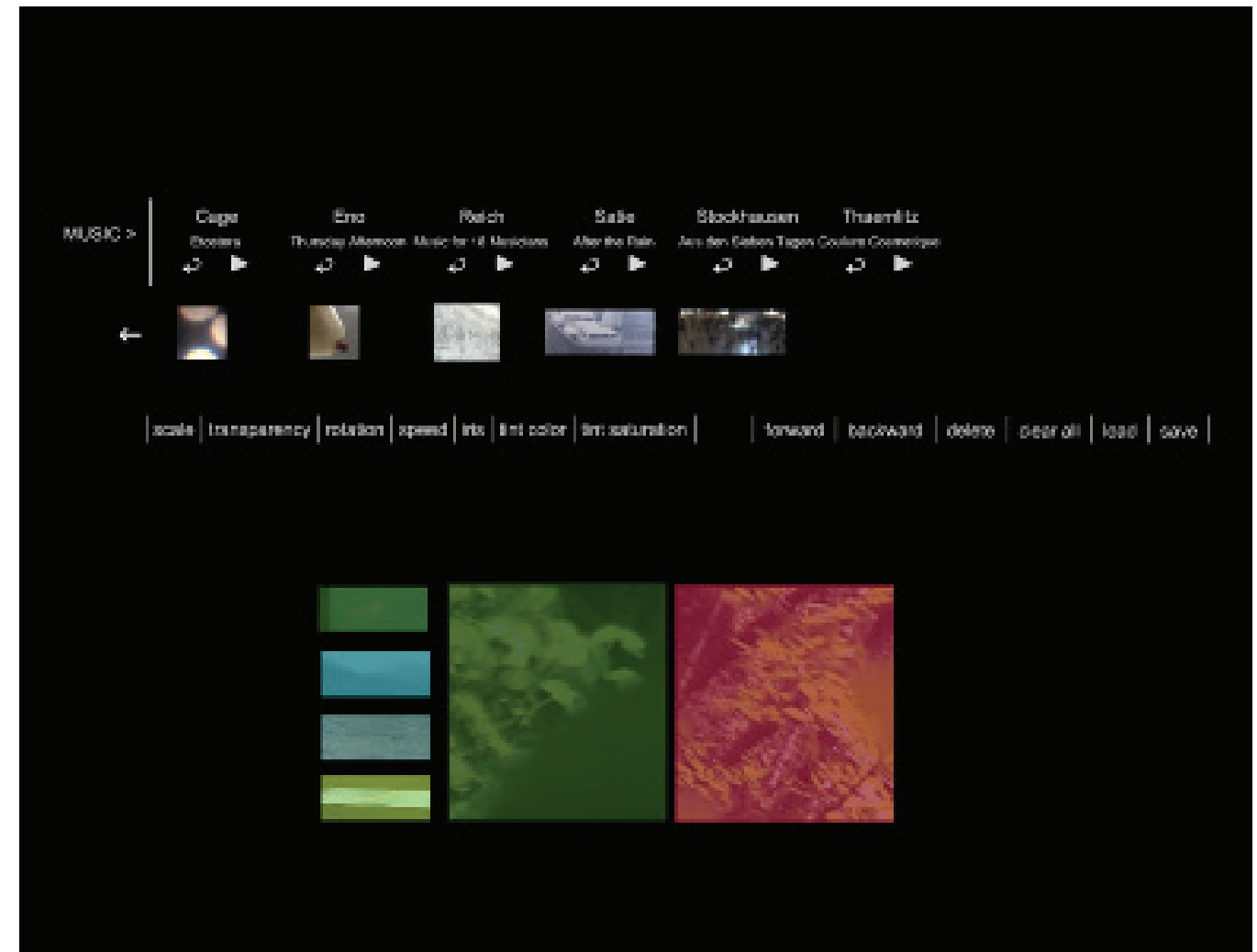
A: That's exactly it. In *Permutations*, each film is an all-at-once event, an all-at-once sequence, whose simultaneous shots are rearticulated by the sound of each distinct recording moving shot by shot, from one to the next, through the entirety of the film, in a sense narrating, renarrating the same and a different film again and again.

Q: It sounds complicated.

A: When you see the films, it becomes so easy and obvious. Most people are not even thinking about the how. What they see is relationships.

Q: How do you go from this to narrative?

A: I made a great number of permutations, these small little films, and found many ways to order them—these were films made by rules—each day I had to make one or more films from the material I shot. Each would be a multiscreen film using the source sound of the films. With that in mind I was always recording image and recording sound. Arranging images and arranging sounds. I was seeing sounds and images, and while recording seeing, hearing a possible sense, until I would get home and with all the recording at hand find yet another sense of arrangement, of montage, narrative, which is a kind of sense, a logic of sense, with a repertoire of devices and strategies. So these small films, these permutations begin to delineate a tropology of narrative. Remember, I am not going home and editing these films in Final Cut. No, I am placing them inside my software player. I am arranging them and the player plays them. I have made in software an instrument that plays, composes, if you like, my film, multiple films. For the most part I am producing my own recordings. In that sense I am not remixing, I am not sampling; in these works the meaning comes from the arrangement and sequencing of the recordings. Though I used the software instrument for samples later on. So the more I made the films, the more I could then in recording seek them out.



Q: So you are recording these little clips with what in mind?

A: Yes, just seeing, observing things around me, everyday things. As I was doing this all the time and with these very innocuous small cameras, I was in a habit of recording anything and everything around me, art openings, conversations, dinners, things on the train, family events, time with friends, artworks, books, the sky, the city, cinema, myself.

Q: I see. So the rules gave you a way to organize this material.

A: Yes, exactly. At the end of the day there was at least one film, more often two to three films or more. Each complete unto itself. Each with its own sense. Each demanding their own sense. Some of these are fifteen seconds, some as long as two, three minutes.

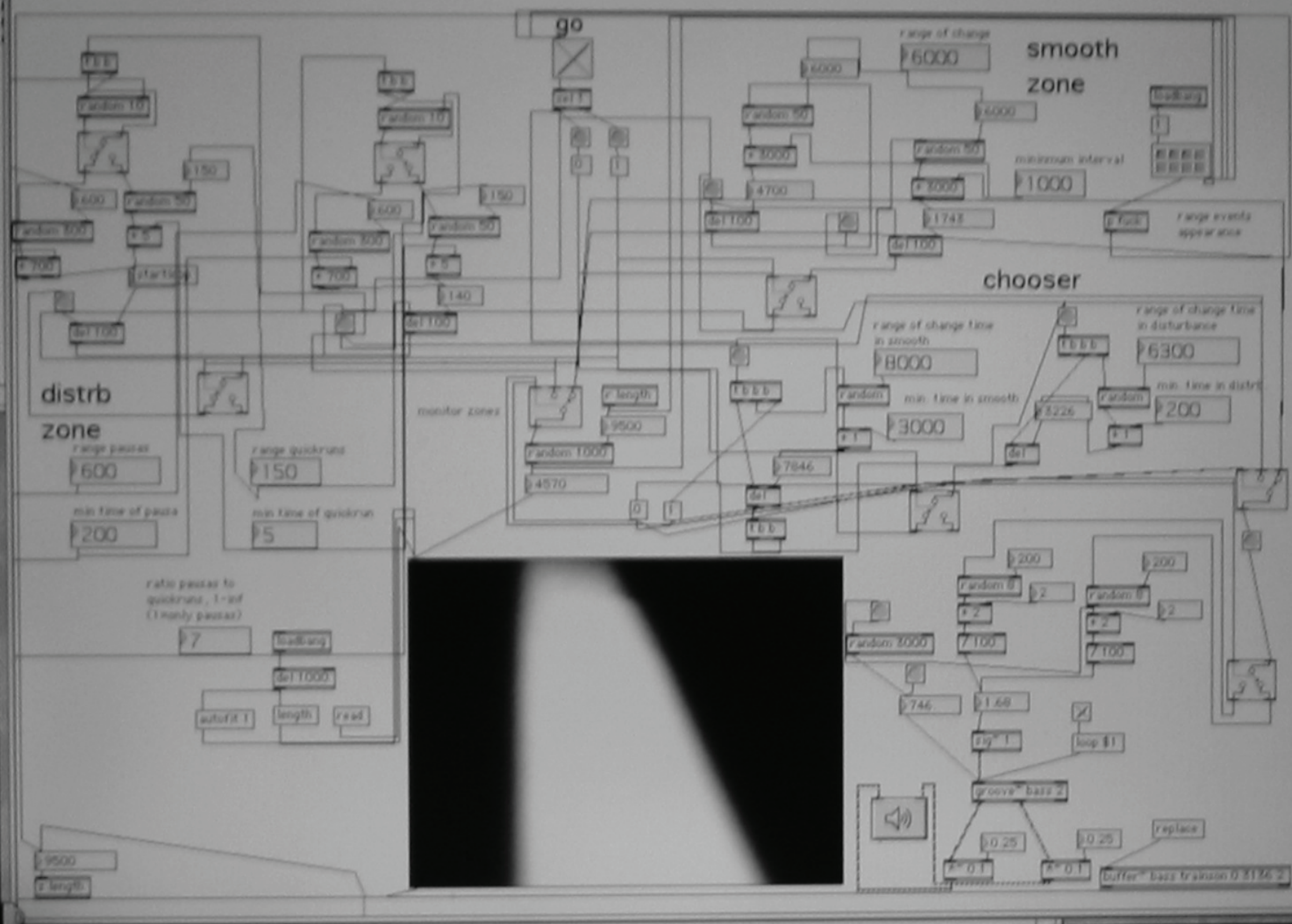
Q: Was it difficult?

A: Yes and no. I wanted to come up with any number of new tropes. So I kept looking and looking. So it occurred to me that this was a way I was looking at the day, where was the event, the event of recording, and to get into the space, it happens in time because you're

recording, recording, recording. Warhol was doing this. He was after the good recording, the tape. All his phone calls recorded, everything, he was living in recording. Nan Goldin, the same. They both explored recording and lived within their recordings.

Q: I don't think they explored how to present the recordings.

A: That's very true. Warhol accumulated the recordings. Playing them back wasn't what he was interested in. It was his way to be in the world and to be in it forever, in a sense. When he says the world is pop, it is the world recorded, from the *Electric Chair*, to *Silver Car Crash*, *Jackies*, on to his films, his modeling work—they all turn on the recording, self-recording and recording—his seeing through recording his time and taking possession of time, being recorded.



Q: Is this why in your most recent film each of the actors records themselves?

A: That happened because I wanted to get to an intimacy that could only come from the actors being alone and wanting to reveal themselves, as they could only do, alone. Again, with Warhol, when he would do a screen test, he would turn the camera on and walk out of the room. There the subject was left alone, confronted with the camera, without questions or directions. In his absence Warhol was saying to them, “Show me what you want to show me.” In a similar way all these questions came up for the actors alone with themselves and the cameras—they must figure how they want to be seen. This is very akin to our confrontation with social media. How do we want to present ourselves for social consumption with only our own narratives, with no roles to play but ourselves? In the possibility of narration, who are we, who might we be? The default to that profound and wonderful question is, be authentic. But what does that mean? What is the mode, the genre of authenticity? It seems an all too easy and unexamined modality.

Q: I can see now how you got to your Chatroulette project, but let’s get back to the films.

A: Well, as I was making the *Permutations*, everything I saw was the possibility of a recording. Once you see recording—recording means to look here and not there—it means looking, seeing and hearing in a particular way. In a way that you see and record what you see to be somewhere else. You see it already in your film. If I could see the things in front of me and overlay them with the film scenario, then reality with a little tweaking could be the film. I started then to see that I could fold the everyday by slightly adjusting it this way and that way, into the context of the film inside me. I had a film script I had written several years earlier called *Zanzibar*, and at one moment while staying at a lake house with my family, I could see *Zanzibar*. I could see those around me—myself, my wife, Irena, and our child, Lola—as this story. I was staying by the lake and I was shooting in my permutations way, and in front of me I saw the narrative of *Zanzibar* unfolding. I could see that I could narrate an abstraction of the scenario into the everyday. I had internalized the story so well through the written script that it gave me the scenario to bring to the world or to see the world in. I realized I did not need to film the script, per se, I just needed to film things around me through the “lens” of the script.

Q: The film in a sense was happening before you?

A: Yes. At times they were just perfectly in the right setting, doing the right things, and at others, I would move the narrative along by asking Irena or Lola to say this or that in the setting they were in. I am certain Godard at some period was working in a similar way. This is why his films remain so vital and alive. Just look at *Notre Musique* and *For Ever Mozart*, let alone so many of his other films. They are happening in front of you, in front of him.

Q: And you’re in the movie.

A: Yes. Out of convenience more than anything, I came to be more and more in my films. I was always available, and those around me were too. This way when I needed to shoot something and the moment was right, in that moment they became and were on the set. In front of me I am seeing the scenario, seeing them, myself in this movie.

Q: So now you are on the set. And that set happens to be where you are.

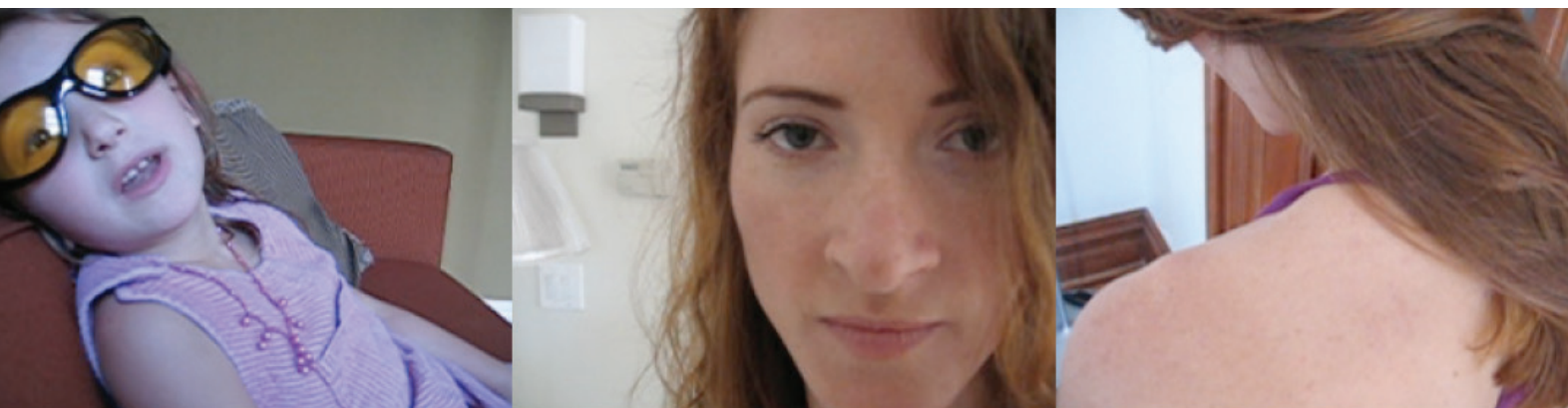
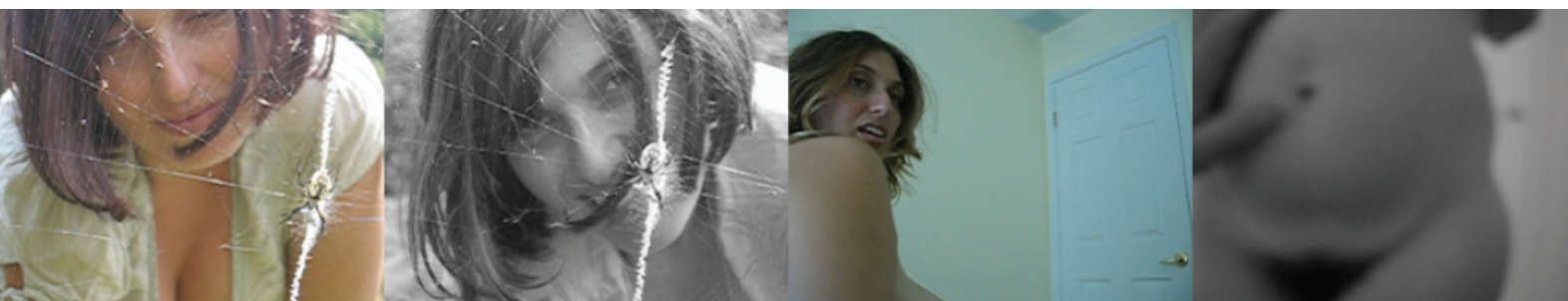
A: Yes. I had to create my own set. The set of the films, it turns out, is always the part that is so hard to produce. Art direction and sets, you can control. That’s the backbone of films. That’s why, for example, with *Paradise* I had to stage it in a park. It had to be open and possible at any time with available light and it had to fold into everyday life.

Q: So let’s go back to *Zanzibar*. You made a version of it as *Harry, Zelda and Antoinette*. In this movie you also have actors, and you’re in it.

A: Yes. I had worked on a proper screenplay for a long time. I sent it around, got some interest, and then it was, oh, Asia Argento would love to do it, but is she not bankable for the States, or can you make her a cash offer, she won’t even read it without an offer. That whole cycle starts again. And then questions of the locations and then this and that, and you’re spending time getting the film to become a production—that’s what you spend your time doing, so after a while I just stopped and put it away for a couple of years. Then doing the *Permutations*, as I mentioned, I suddenly saw that the film was happening right in front of me. That my state of mind was Harry’s, the character, and looking just this way, the scenario, with a little inventiveness, was there. I could see the film, I was living it, and I could make it on the go. I had to make it on the go.

So yes when I returned to New York, I had readings with actors, and right away when I liked them, I would stage the action, make the film right there. There were no callbacks, no, it was all about making it happen in the moment.





Q: How did you work with them?

A: These characters in the scenario, I began to visualize them in a much larger sense then, this known actor or that actor, I could see them as living people right in front of me. At first you think Philip Seymour Hoffman or James Franco, they would be so perfect for this role. But you have to let go of that and see the guy on the subway across from you as that character. When I saw this actor was right, these two or three together were just perfect, I started to film them right away as if they were in the movie. And creative actors are quite wonderful this way, they want to play and invent, and that's what we did, staged and blocked the scenes and got on with it. So, yes, there is a mix between actors and family members playing the scenario, the everyday, and then me, both on camera and narrating while recording my search for the film in the everyday.

There is a metanarrative to this work and to so many of the works, but it is something more or very different than a kind of self-reflexive cinema.

It is not about being a film, but How is this film and recording making sense and What is the sense we are looking for in making recordings? Because that is the sense you bring back to the cutting room. If it is not in the intention of the recording it will not be in the film. The film sees, presents the thinking of recording, which is at one and the same time emergent, in the logic and sense of the film. Not in the sense of coverage or shot to shot but in the event unfolding in front of you on screen, its sense. That's actuality in the film, the film event is that.

Q: The next film, *Love and Art*, there are no actors in this film.

A: Yes and no. It appears to be a documentary and that everyone plays themselves. In the end that was the best way to make the film, to let it appear as if everything between this couple is real and they are playing themselves. But after doing *Zanzibar*, I could see that people want to move along trajectories or narrative hooks. They, the reader, the audience want to say to themselves, oh, this is about this—once they are looking for the “this” then you can move along other lines, all the while building on the suspension of narrative urgency.

Q: It is a documentary though, yes?

A: Maybe it is a fictional film within a documentary or vice versa. All films are some version of the two, no.

Q: It documents the New York art world very well.

A: I think so, a certain affect of it, yes. I had been living in New York and knew a number of artists, and I was making permutations in real time and was recording every day. I wanted to ask, what is it that compels one to make art? So I started to do that and look



around and ask that question at openings, at fairs, to friends, at conferences. Again, just observing and listening in, in a seemingly very casual way, but in a way that was already seeing the recording inside the film I was making. Wherever I was, I would set up or perform the film I was in search of. I would fold it into the context of my own given reality and produce a fiction inside this world I was documenting.

Q: How do you do that?

A: By already having a certain dialogue going on inside me, so it all seems very continuous or natural, by seeing the situation already, by seeing the event as the film event, by writing with the camera into the event. By bringing people into the scenario in a very easy way for them. And of course I am using available light and cameras so simple in that film to use that with a simple explanation I could give the camera to someone around me and they can record me and I'm in the movie.

Q: You do that seamlessly with Irena, her filming you, you filming her.

A: She is very good with the camera and on camera, and she is so often with me. So in this film, folding Irena and myself into this personal story while framing a documentary about art in a larger sense, in the sense of being in the world and her and I being in the world and enjoying art, it made sense. By doing this, I could more easily shift from foreground to background, putting one thing, ourselves, or art, in relief and taking the other away. In such a structure I have many narrative places to go.

Q: Are you really suffering in the movie?

A: Well ... it's a film.

Q: The next film, *My Double, My Self*, that's definitely a documentary, no?

A: To me, whether it's a documentary, which of course it is a document, or not, isn't really the most interesting question. It's really about the recording event, where does it start, where is it going, and when do you know it is going in some direction.

Q: Tell us more.

A: Sometimes I am just recording, and the more you record, like Jeff Koons, says, in *Love and Art*, once the recording or object is there, the recording moves into this objective realm and stands by itself in the world. But not quite, not yet, it has to stand envisioned inside a reading envelope, a context, and a form. It needs to have a shape, and that's where all these strategies of fiction, the "real," cinema, video art, documentary, acting,



nonacting, narrative, installation, long form—these are all mobilized to create a reading event, a viewing event. Film, or video installation, or seen online, these become contexts, environments, and situations that allows something to be seen— they create different “kinds” of legibility. So recording is an event of the above that leads to a legibility. That’s what the films turn on, the bringing together of events of narration through strategies of recording and instruments of forms, of playback. It is the construction of film as that syntactical event that is to be read.

Q: Is that what you are going for in *Paradise*?

A: There it widens to question narration itself and ask how, as social beings, we narrate ourselves and are narrated. How do we speak, who has power and in turn whose narration speaks us.

Conversation continues with Peter Duhon
(on the occasion of screening *Paradise* at Anthology Film Archives)

Q: Your film confronts a typical Hollywood narrative and convention. It also questions—even challenges— politics, testing borders, boundaries, and the notion of excess and what encloses excess. You use, for example, the element of the bomb in the film. What were you exploring there?

A: *Paradise* tries in a very abstract way to be an allegorical film, a kind of science fiction film about control and society. But of course we don’t have all the sets and costumes, so we have to take an approach of defamiliarizing the familiar, like *Alphaville* or *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm*. The present is so familiar and things gets so internalized it is hard to see it when you are in it. At some point in the film the characters go to this other side of what is ordinary or everyday. In the park we put up this large plastic sheet and thought of it as a membrane, a border, like you say, that has this place of isolation on the other side. A camp, a detention, where there is this neurolinguistic programing. By creating this zone we get this sense of both sides having within them containment, propaganda, border control—all the logic of capital. All those things we don’t see or want to see in the everyday.

As to the bomb, the two children who cross over and became young adults are the sensualists, and one of them convinces themselves that there is only one way to break through: by getting a weapon. And the other convinces themselves that the other side, whatever that is, is to be found through the poetic displacement of yourself.

Both then become strategies of excess to deal with what is presented as excessive and invisible, the runaway logic of global capital, algorithmic systems, and control.

Q: Your work allows the spectator to become the producer of text. It is a tough line, especially as a director and a writer. You are creating a certain narrative, certain vision, and at the same time you are allowing a certain level of plurality. Can you talk about that?
A: In the reading of the film, yes, that's true, you are rewarded if you are a productive reader.

Q: There is also the element of repetition, which seems to be a thread in your work. One thing that stood out is the scene with the student sipping from a bottle of water, and then spitting out the water over and over. Is there something you are trying to communicate through this element?

A: Maybe the water is the fountain of the garden, of paradise. I am not so aware of the repetitions—they are there, as we can't help but repeat ourselves, repetition and difference, it's our repertoire.

Q: I really enjoyed that scene. Your characters are extremely complex, in a good way. They are happy, they are sad, they are lost, but they are also experiencing what we call the free will of negativity. I noticed that, for example, in the hide-and-seek scene, and it plays out through the entire film. Your characters are losing something but at the same time gaining something else from that loss in return.

A: Salman Rushdie, whom I like—his writing and thinking—is always talking about how we leak into one another to the point that we each become the other. We set up certain boundaries, which are often self-imposed. But these boundaries, from a psycho-cosmic, psychedelic, or Buddhist point of view, are very artificial. But others are very real. And sometimes we do not know how to parse the two. And sometimes they are inseparable. As the characters move between this membrane on the one side, the “Wonka Camp,” a place where the characters are captured, and the other, the everyday, you begin to see there is this slippage between the two. At some point in the narrative I position the actors inside this membrane, and now there is this inside and outside and it becomes about bridging boundaries of space—psychic boundaries, political boundaries, their own personal boundaries, boundaries in terms of language, and so on.

Q: There is a strong coherent use of metaphors in your film. What are your sources and inspirations? You tend to use traditional and classic metaphors, but also you create some of your own and, at the same time, encourage us to create our own ones too. What is the process you are going through in order to achieve this?

A: I am not so sure. The films emerge contingently, poetically and associatively, moving along thematic registers. They can have a sense of something, or, as you say, metaphors.

I do a lot of work before I really know where I'm going, building up a number of images and narratives. I am constantly reading, looking at five, eight, ten, twenty things



at once, maybe, paintings, theory, a Nathanael West novel, let's say, some myth book, articles, interviews, comments sections, listening to music—so there are lots of sources.

Then when I meet with the actors and we start working together, it all becomes fluid. I come to a certain point where I am constantly thinking about everything and trying not to command things; I am feeling comfortable giving the actors a free will to move along the registers of themes and actions that I've explored and now we explore.

When making *Paradise*, the park set a limit for us. We had only a certain amount of time to shoot, so in the end, the demand of time and the given circumstances forced us all to come to decisions about how to take on the film. So the process is going through the thing, having to be logistical, realistic, centered, bounded. At the same time, the actors bring so much to the work, to the text, to the ideas. And if you create a space for them of trust and appreciation, things really happen.



Conversation continues with Kevin Farrington

(on the occasion of screening *Revolution of Everyday Life* at 17 Frost, Williamsburg, Brooklyn)

Q: Which brings us to *Revolution of Everyday Life*. How did this film come about?

A: Whereas *Paradise* was all shot in a park I wanted now to shoot something in Manhattan, in the city, so after a while I discovered an area I liked, the fashion district, Twenty-Third Street and Broadway. With new zoning, car traffic had become very minimal and the diversity in the neighborhood, very compelling. Taking cues from Raymond Queneau's *Exercises in Style*, I wanted at first to make one short scenario sixty-nine ways—Queneau did a hundred but I was in love with the Magnetic Fields's *69 Love Stories*, so sixty-nine was the number. Wanting to do this was how it started.

But doing the same thing in a different style sixty-nine ways takes a good deal of control and exactness, and this cannot happen without money, permits, control, et cetera. So after a while I had to let go of that. So then I tried to make it a series of interconnected and overlapping stories told, in a sense, from the perspective of the neighborhood. At this corner today these things happened and here other things happened and then later at the same places other things happen. Six girls went to this same wig shop and put on wigs—and then they did this and then that over here. It was all going to be about repetition and difference. But from the point of view of place. It was to be about how cities and spaces outlive us. I got a forty-five-minute cut of it, but it felt too pat, so except for one scene, I started over.



Q: You just started over, meaning you threw out what you had filmed and cut?

A: Yes. Actors don't like that, sure, but I have to be that way. Film is a search and if it's not right, you have to keep moving. Maybe I didn't know the place well enough, and the characters had come too much in the foreground and then I wanted more out of them, out of the situation, so yes, I started over. The idea of something that's documentary, that's fiction, that's real, that's everyday, folding your life into the situation, folding your scenario into the everyday—this creates a certain authenticity, and this was just too saccharine. I really wanted to make a film that dug a little deeper. I had been doing a number of art and photographic works on social media and self-representation, around Myspace and Chatroulette and later Tumblr. I was seeing how everyone was getting more and more comfortable with creating a public persona through their own photography and writing. They were constructing an image to be consumed, to reveal and present themselves. A social interface is a fiction and this became interesting to me. How to make a film then that had within it the energy of this pervasive imaging of ourselves.

How could this give us an opportunity to not only record ourselves but in some sense make this the subject of a film? The film then would ask the question, what is the possibility of an everyday politic in ubiquitous recording?

In one of the auditions, I had the female actors read lines about women, power, and sex. Something from a Greek play. It was spring and so I took the actors outside under the trees along the side of my house. I was filming them as I often do and one of them, Raimonda Skeryte, who had auditioned for one of my earlier films and whom I liked right away but could not find the right part for, asked me if she could take her shirt off to do the reading.

Q: Does that happen often?

A: No. Lots of things happen in auditions and readings. I was very surprised, because she is a very shy person, but something about the text seemed to make her just want to read the lines with her shirt off.

Q: She is fantastic in the film.

A: Yes.

Q: So this approach of social media as constructing identity, this was something you were in search of?

A: Yes. But not so consciously, I suppose. There were things people were doing and wanted to do for the camera and in front of the camera that cinema was always in search of. The forbidden, the obscene, the banal, the excessive, greed, callousness, courage, the exploitative, atrocity, tenderness, the dangerous and unimaginable, such a list goes on and

on. I wanted the actors to reveal this intimacy that I knew they would not in an audition but would perhaps privately. There was an intimacy that I felt was eluding me in the audition process. I was in search of the private person. That's why I bought those flip cameras and asked the actors to take the cameras home and record themselves. Just be with this camera alone. Just you, a body in space. Just be present to the camera, I told them. Each of them would get a camera for three days and bring it back and give it to the next actor. This was just before you could do this with your phone. And it was quite astounding what they revealed to me and how much was there for me to see. There is often something so banal and beautiful about the intimacy of recording, what it reveals often unknowingly about the persons recording. Then the movie became *Revolution of Everyday Life*.

It became about a group who record themselves, who want to make private actions of recording, public actions.

Q: What's it like to tell them, well, there's not really a character, per se, you're going to have to trust me on this, and then giving them a lot of what might appear to be extraneous information to build from? It can be really difficult for a lot of actors to interpret information like this unless they have had that kind of training, that kind of experience. So what's that like?

A: That's a good observation. In this case a lot of these recordings were fascinatingly insightful, very deep, real, and communicative, and so that becomes the basis of a conversation, an expression of a desire to work together. I am always writing ideas, scenarios, characters, situations, territories of interest, and then gathering people, or thinking about who might be a good collaborator, who around me can be in a film. So in this case, these recordings of theirs became a reality of what they were interested in, who they were, inward looking, outward looking, self-absorbed, narcissistic, et cetera. And knowing their interests, I could write them into a philosophical argument and have that ignite behavior. That's what you want to record. Behavior.

Soon I have them see this video, see this film, study this performance artist, read this dialogue. So they're getting a lot of things to situate themselves, to play with. If there's not something in them that's going to come out in reaction to what you give them, it's not going to happen. That's the whole thing, to make something connect with them, and then it's going to happen. And then there's just a part that takes off. There are things that are more than you, and you have to let them happen and catch them.

Q: Now you talked about working on a series of exercises—which kind, and where do they derive from? Or are they of your own devices?

A: Oh no, they're pretty well known. I spent a certain amount of time in the theater and studying as an actor. Actors want to feel trust and respect and comfort. I usually don't spend time with the actors one on one, or have them do a monologue; I work as a group,



with four or five of them at once. I talk to them about things that they like or things that they are interested in, their character, a book; then we get on our feet and then we interpret something physically, emotionally, and share it with each other.

I might give them a feeling, an idea which they can reinterpret as a dance, a voice—so we spend about forty-five minutes together and it's a very slow session, and for actors, their instrument is their body, their intuition, and their emotions, so in that process, they get close. They bond quickly. Film people have to get close and get going, so if the environment is right, things move along very fast.

The ones with this energy, who enjoy the openness and process, come back. After a month or so they self-select. You know the ones who want to play, who are up for a certain kind of experience. You see who's comfortable being intimate, not as an exhibitionist, but being very honest. In time they don't ask me "What do I say, what do I do"—they know.

Raimonda Skeryte

It's like brainstorming every day in your head, and sometimes you pretend that you're not sure what's happening, where I should go—but you know. You bring these ideas to me and say "Let's see what's going to happen," and it just gets very creative.

Tjasa Ferme

You don't know how it's going to play out. I feel like all of our love scenes or all of the revolutionary ideas were found right there on spot. As you saw it. Everything is pure truth.

Marc Lafia

The actors have such expressive instruments that if you get close to them and let them go—everything is there.

Raimonda Skeryte

Just from talking and doing exercises with him and just trying out little scenes and going outside and doing very short clips—actually outside his home or in the park. Just by experimenting and seeing where things take us, I actually discover the character. You know there's a lot of scenes, you saw a lot of people, a lot of action, a lot of things going on, people talking, and it was a real surprise for me how much was going on in my eyes on camera.

When I came here as a foreigner, I had a huge language barrier, and you absorb everything with your eyes, because your ears can't catch up so fast, and I kind of have always taken up everything in my eyes.

Q: And what's it like to edit all of this material?

A: Well, it's a very prescribed amount of material. I am shooting very economically, and when things are not happening I have learned to let them go and move in another direction, to find the things that are really living.

I will know while shooting that certain elements will not work—not that the film is not following the order of the narrative, but that it wants and demands to follow this poetic or associative logic, this sense of an argument on different levels. As to editing, I am not finding the film in shooting things, no, I am shooting this script that is inside me and I'm cutting the film I shot.

I am editing the film that I was making, and the only thing is, there is no continuity person, it's like I am the only person who knows what the instructions are.

Wherein most productions, the way production works is that you have this enormous team and these plans, including the script, it's like a battle plan. It's there so everybody knows the instructions. Locations will be locked, lighting set up, this setup will be shot with an 85-mm lens, this shot with a 28-mm lens, continuity then writes down what was recorded, this take was twenty-eight seconds and all that was one minute and all this is put into a book for the editor. But in my case there are no notes. Or many notes, to this actor, that actor, for me, to a few friends. There's no one except me who fully knows what's happening. So it has a sense of being very alive. And the actors just go with it. Not all of them. You have some actors who ask, "Just tell me where to stand and what to say." So mine is but one working method, the way I go forward and work. There is a certain beauty to this environment—but it is also very easy to fall off the cliff.

Q: How much of your day as a director is actually planned, and how much do you leave free for improvisation and experimentation? Or do you address that once you get out into the world—is it all about “Okay, I know what I have to accomplish now”?

A: Yes, it’s not set in that way, like it’s blocked. Or people know exactly what they’re going to say, it’s again, here’s the situation. It’s like us tonight, we know we’re going to get together, we’re going to talk, I don’t know what you’re going to ask me, I am a little anxious before we get together, but we just go with it, and it becomes a dialogue. And of course we have talked before, you’ve seen my films, we’ve e-mailed, so now we are ready and prepared to talk.

You say a few things and so it goes. What is demanding and how things go is that everyone does understand that we have very limited resources. So everyone has to give their best, and move, and go, and there’s not many retakes, let’s put it that way. There’s not time for redoing. People have to be very self-reliant and cooperative in that sense.

Q: Once you’re on-set, what’s your process with your cinematographer? What’s that like?

A: That’s, you know—I’m smiling because, you know, when I did my movie *Exploding*—I don’t know, we did maybe eleven setups a day, something like that. Everything is planned and choreographed, and it’s very slow, but the lighting and design is very nice.

In *Revolution* we have two people shooting, a flip camera, me shooting a camera, Marcus shooting his camera, since then I am always using multiple cameras, not always at the same time but throughout shooting.

I can give nothing but compliments to Marcus Burnett, who shot much of these last three films. We speak very little, I may say, “Don’t be afraid to shoot right into the light, or find the small textures along the way, the drops of rain, or follow the hands,” and that’s it. He records the event in multiple ways, he shoots what’s in front of the camera, behind the scenes, before the scene, he is moving between documenting the film being made and shooting the film. In this sense it all becomes one seamless event and the emotions and thinking never have a fourth wall, there is no division of inside the film and out.

Q: On to *Hi, How Are You Guest 10497*. Here you truly present the life of a person living in recording.

A: Yes.

Conversation continues with Daniel Coffeen

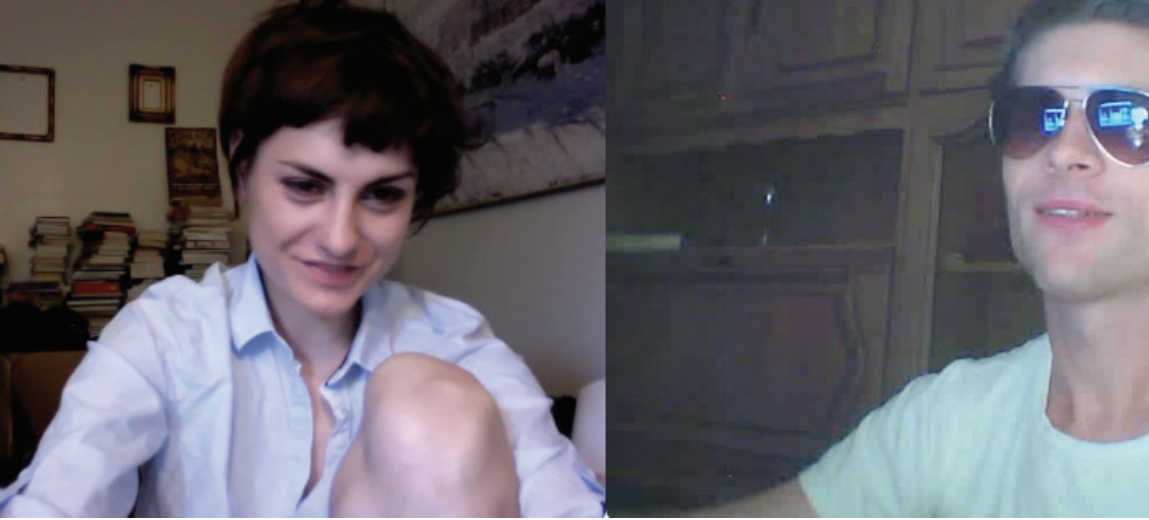
Q: It seems she’s alone. We rarely see anyone else—at least in the flesh. She lives alone in a small Manhattan studio. Yet she is always interacting with the world around her. Only the world around her is tele-presence.

A: It’s very much our contemporary life, living on screen.

Q: It’s more often than not women in these networks that construct an image of themselves—in some sense putting them in the vanguard of culture and technology. Constructing their own identities—this is so very different than being in the regime of being seen, being constructed by a male gaze. Sure, it is an economy of performing for that gaze. There is no doubt a great loneliness in the film. But to reduce her to loneliness is to miss so much of what’s happening.

A: Yes. I think that’s absolutely right. As users of *Chatroulette* discover, once the meta-narrative of identity disappears—once we stop naming ourselves, stop declaring our social status, our taste, our social tethers such as work and education—we discover something else. Face to face—or screen to screen—with a stranger, free of all metadiscourse that would prefigure the interaction, we discover incredible intimacy. All there is is this encounter, these desires, this moment. Within the presumed mediation of the screen, we discover the immediacy of the encounter. The screen gives us this remove, a certain safety allowing us to be more intimate. And then perhaps it is the removal of all intimacy.





Q: The gaze has been proliferated and, with it, identity. It's interesting how your film uses the codes of cinema to look at new media.

A: Whereas the new media was often used to re-create the old media, here the new media, the condition of the network, the network as recording and screen apparatus, is seen through and by the cinematic codes of classic cinema. Yes. It is of course a cinema that is informed by experimental cinema, the sixties and seventies cinema of Warhol, Jack Smith, Chantal Akerman, in that the takes are long, not much is seemingly going on, it is a strong and concentrated milieu, but something else is here, yes, the classic cinematic code of Joan of Arc, of Jeanne Dielman, in that the film follows closely a protagonist, there is a telling of a story, an arc and resolution.

Consider Warhol's Screen Tests as the essential building block of the Hollywood cinematic text. This test, where the camera is set up to test the cinematic potential of the actor, the charisma, the X factor, the sex factor, the screen power of pure presence, the photogenic raised to an exponent, the star power—where the cinema or recording brings to the screen that absolute pleasure of seeing, of seeing and not being seen, voyeuristic pleasure—in the new media seeing is being seen and seeing again.

Q: Yes, we see her seeing herself be seen.

A: Today we ask two questions: How can we be at the center of our network effects, and how do we create a screen presence that can afford us this? How do we pass the test? How do we construct an image of ourselves?

The online world, as an always-on recording rewrites the purview of cinema and splices us into this new social or über-cinematic apparatus, the network. Unlike the classic code or traditional form of handling recordings, in this film, the young woman works to create an image in real time of herself. It is a cinema for the network age. Her work is the work of the screen test. And of recording the recording itself, of bringing to the network her screen persona.

At another level the project, which is a twenty-two-hour installation, uses the film format, and in this case, film's classic codes, to condense installation's long, mul-

ti-ple, and spatial sense of time, what we might consider network time, in that we can enter at any point into film. Cinema here looks at the new formats of social networking, formats such as Chatroulette and MyFreeCams that bring us a new intimacy and immediacy and show us how these new screen tests exceed and extend the cinematic.

It's very simple but in that, complex issues emerge: What is it to be alone? What is it to be a self? What is it to be a woman today? What is it to be real, to be naked, with another—who is only on screen?

Q: I am sure both the film and its installation have their own rhythm and allows one to inhabit a different sense of time.

A: Yes.

Q: In fact, you might say that the film is a recording or a document inside and about a certain condition of network culture. But I'm not sure that the network is the best context to present the work, and I think that small screenings at a remove from the network are more effective to give visibility to this subject.

A: There is something to that. Yes. Things at a remove from their context, or recontextualized are easier to see.

Q: I'd like to see your installation. I do think you use the conventional cinematic codes in a very effective way in this film.

A: Perhaps cinema here returns to its earliest of beginnings, employed as an instrument of observation, an apparatus of heightened seeing and recording, as an instrument that does not turn away, does not blink, but surveys and examines untiringly. Exceeding human perceptual faculty, the human capacity to stay attentive to seeing, let alone seeing at micro and macro scales, here cinema as the instrumentation of camera and recording-playback returns to doubly seeing itself, both in its new incarnation as network, as cinema, and as a formulation of codes, of relays of prerecorded shots, of representations and genres as cinemas past. Here cinema looks both at itself and the new world in which it carries on, the network.

Q: It is simultaneously an exploration of what it means to make—and watch—film today; what it means to inhabit a system that is always recording, where identity is always and already enmeshed in the web of becoming. The cinematic code turns out to be a unique way to look at this condition, to look at seeing and looking, at representation and self-representation, at the always-recording, always-seeing condition of the network.

A: Cinema made sense of this event, very much so, yes.

Conversation continues with Lior Rosenfeld

Q: On to 27. I feel that there are a few narrative engines that you set in motion in this piece that intersect with one another in unexpected ways throughout the film. The documentary you are making about the contemporary artist, the documentary you are making about your family, and the fictional recordings of the actors making their own movies. These narrative engines try to deal with certain assumptions about ourselves as individuals and your own reflections about yourself. Do you use this technique frequently? Is it improvised or scripted? What can be said about the ways we document our memories, sensations, and personal stories through these way of making films?

A: All *techné*, all forms of recording produce as much as they constrain meaning. Just think of Twitter, it's what, 140 characters, or Instagram, which is social photography—the photo you take is made already to be seen—each of these forms and formats have particular constraints and possibilities. In this film, various narratives lines are taken up in multiple directions by multiple authors in the registers of various narrative regimes, which at any time and the same time can move between each other or even be one and the same, including documentary, fiction, documenting a fiction, family movie, confessional, social media, all of this in a context or culture of ubiquitous recording, texting, blogging, taking pictures, e-mailing, photo manipulation—such recordings have to come together in the poetry of form, not the didacticism of modalities.

Q: I see what you're saying. You are not foregrounding these things, but work from the cultural condition and literacy they produce.

A: Exactly. Our memories, sensations, and personal stories are all the time distributed, experienced, and authored in these multiple ways, and each of them have certain kinds of intensities due to their properties. So in the recordings that make up the film, there is a continual scale shift between these modalities of recording and performing. Any possible moment or place is the “film set.” There is also a seamless mixing of actors, artists, academics, myself, ordinary people.

Q: Your narrative is nonlinear. What are you hoping to achieve by doing that?

A: There are so many things happening in parallel today, the idea of linearity is a fiction. I am looking for something that comes together with its own sense, that internally coheres, that is more than the sum of its parts, to give a picture of the relations between varied feelings and senses as they pass through different characters and things—so yes, it's a *mise-en-scène* of affect and how these take possession of us, how it multiplies.



Q: Why do your actors have movement exercises? Is it a matter of aesthetics or does it echo the theme of this movie?

A: In the film, one of the characters, Divina, wants to find a new way to have sex that is not specific to the bodily organs. So how could we do this? What do we want in sex? Closeness, intensity, release, sensation—she wants to explore what might be possible, she wants to imagine this brave new world, this otherworldly creature, this other creatureliness in us that might afford a new experience of intimacy. The movement exercises move the exploration of this possibility into the nonlinguistic.

Q: You like to switch roles with the actors. You repeat some of the scenes on the ferry with you in front of the camera. Were you influenced by Fassbinder's *Beware of A Holy Whore* when you made that film?

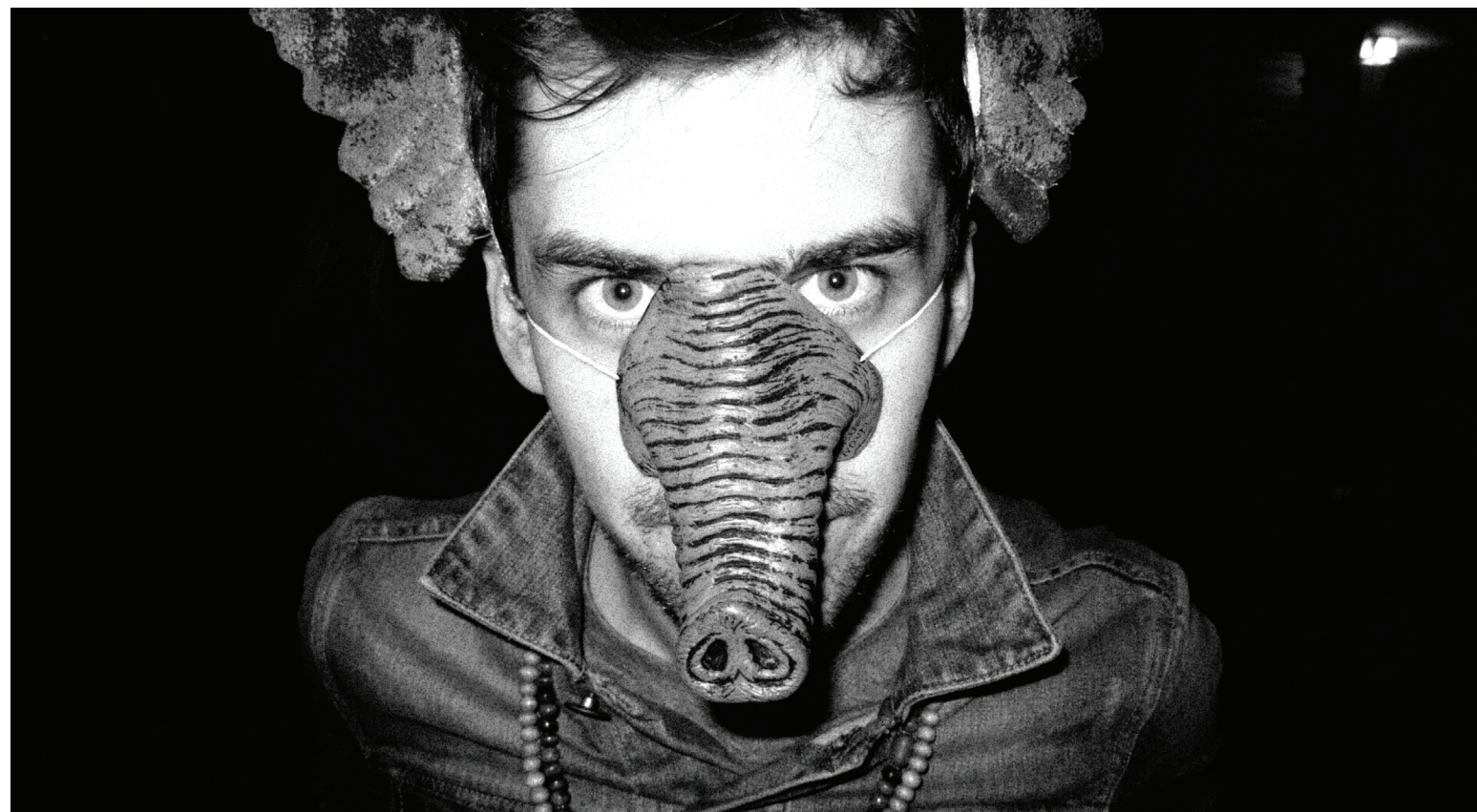
A: I had seen that film a long time ago, so I don't know. Inside the film is a film documenting a young Mexican director making a film about a brave new world that is promised by liberty, this pluralism we talked about, and in this film appears a double of Divina, a new creature perhaps for her or for James, whom she has left. So yes, I try there to have myself interchangeable with Andrew, the director.

Q: Why 27?

A: At some point I thought the focus of the project, the film and other projects around the film, would be this generation of twenty-seven-year-olds. I was sitting with a young actor who's been in many of my films, when in the very beginning I had set out to make a film about Dash Snow, a New York artist who died at twenty-seven, and the more we talked about it and did some readings and meetings, I came to know more people twenty-seven or somewhere near that age. I had already been filming James Leary, so then I thought I would have James make a film with a group of twenty-seven-year-olds. But as I heard them talk and documented this and then had them act in some of the story lines, I thought that layering this story with someone half their age and twice their age would give context to how the concerns and urgency of the twenty-seven-year-old continue to pass through us as we get older and are already there when we are thirteen. So 27 then, as a title, became this middle, this zone, this place that we pass through, that we inhabit, that we may never get to, nor remember, and I liked this, twenty-seven not in a literal or definitional sense, but as an assemblage of states and affects, all relational.

Q: You presented at the beginning of the film the artist's point of view about pluralism and art. He stated that only in years to come will we know what pluralism really means. What is your take on that? And did you answer that question in your film?

A: We try to explore it, yes, but not in any head-on or definitive way; yes, the film moves along it, both narratively as an approach and thematically.





Q: Your actors are doing different things in this film. Sometimes they are playing themselves, sometimes they play a character, and sometimes they are wearing an elephant nose mask ... What are you trying to achieve by this? Also, what is the meaning of the elephant nose?

A: In the register of documentation about a group twenty-seven-year-olds, I ask them to act in a fictional film. The fiction format gives them a chance to express thoughts and feelings in a different register than simply describing verbally their real experiences. In placing them in a fiction film, something more happens, they have a chance to enact, playact feelings and thoughts that are their “real experiences.” The elephant nose does that as well, it estranges them from themselves, making a double or another of them.

Q: The actors, like Hamlet, can only deal with their realities through the absurd, unreal, the fiction. But I think you author it all. The only thing I see as real, if you want to call it real, or nonscripted, is your interview with the artist at the beginning and some of the conversations you recorded. I think it fools your actors because they don't know which parts they are playing most of the time, so they start to unfold their true selves, in a way. It seems to me that this is a documentary about an artist who creates a fictional world for his subjects in order to fool them to explore their true identity and along the way, he finds his.

A: That's a good way to describe what's going on, yes. But I am not sure anyone is being fooled. Not at all. They are quite savvy, and in fact use the cinematic form and time to perform, not as in performance, but to put forward statements, a set of statements or po-

sitions. Perhaps not all of them, but many of them, used the time together to productively get at some real questions with their peers. And in that sense you are right, the fictional world propels them, seduces them, “fools” them in a sense to explore themselves.

Q: I like the idea of having this young man, the artist, as the narrator of this film. I like the fact that his ideas mirror your footage with your family and the actors in the film. The film is shaped like a crystal. You, the artist, his art, your art, his life, your life, the film within the film, and then you also acting within that film, which I see as a dreamlike sequence. Gorgeous. You play with the footage (black and white to color, audio running over the next scene) as if it is self-reflective—like only you can be!

A: Thanks. Self-reflective, I suppose, perhaps means here knowingly presenting a film, knowing something more than others in the film, and sharing that knowledge with the audience. That's the role of the author. The author shares a relationship through knowledge with the audience. In this film I wanted to make a work that performatively distributed authorship to the characters in the film, a film where characters are in a search of scripting themselves and each other. They want to know the script they are in, the role they are playing not in the film, they are so very comfortable being on film, filming. The film is simply that place that allows them to speak, to enact.

Q: Is the film about the connection between intimacy, relationships, and sex?

A: Desire and fear negotiated through this great unknowable of intimacy. Maybe the intimacy that can become love, the fear of intimacy that might create hate, the abjection to the intimacy of death that pushes life or living away from us because of that fear. How to be close and intimate with ourselves. So I think you say it well, yes, intimacy and that closeness to being alive, what defines our intimacy, or rather how to find it, where is the place of intimacy that allows an opening, a wounding, a being touched not just physically but in a way that allows for an encounter with ourselves and others, yes, we give it a go.

Q: You are an integral part of all your films. I see all of them in one way or the other as self-portraits. When you look back at your work from the moment you begin to record these intimate films, in what way has your relationship with people and nature changed?

A: You mean in terms of recording or interacting with them? Can you explain further?

Q: Let me try it this way. In many ways making a movie with video as opposed to film is no longer a continuous process; it is an ongoing process whose beginning you can't really pinpoint. Do you agree, and if so, in what way does it affect the ways we tell stories? Do we need to take different approaches to the medium altogether?

A: This absolute everydayness of our social media creates a recording environment that is very much alive, wherein recording is always right next to us, with us all the time. That's this sense that you are talking about, of it being a continuous and ongoing process such that it's already already begun. And like life, it has this element of the unknown, not in the sense of suspension of disbelief in traditional narrative, but in the way that things can happen and only happen as in a continued conversation, wherein uncanny things step in. This with our ease of multiple modes of address and recording, posting, texting, and picture taking, being here and there—there being on the network, being in both places, contiguously and simultaneously creates a new condition of being.

So yes, this affects the way we tell stories of ourselves and how we see ourselves, how we see and produce the recordings of ourselves and create cinema.



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Foreword: The Extraordinary Event of Everyday Cinema

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'In this book, we see Lafia take up cinema — its history, its grandeur, its rules — and apply the conditions of this new, ubiquitous, always-on recording world in order to forge and proffer something new, something relevant, something beautiful: a cinema of the everyday that is anything but everyday. A cinema that is extraordinary.'

Daniel Coffeen



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