CINEMAD

INTEGRITY INSPECTED since 1998.

In 1998, I started Cinemad as a xeroxed zine about underappreciated or unknown films and filmmakers I liked. In 2002 it seemed to make more sense, obviously with cost, especially with outreach, to make it a website only. In the past year, I found interviews on my computer that aren't online anymore. I have completely spaced out on why everything isn't on the website, probably moved, but here we go, some interviews compiled together as a book, with more to come in the future.

Also, I really missed paper.

Lately I have been attaching the term "personal cinema" to anyone working under the mass distribution system of movies. If you make a film, you can go and find theaters, museums, galleries, microcinemas, basements and warehouses to show it in. You can go on the Internet and invite people. You can get in touch with a newspaper and they may write about it. The screen may not be 50 feet tall, and it may be only two speakers, but it's yours, you made it happen, and strangers might come to see it. It's cool if it's all friends in the audience, too.

-Mike Plante, publisher

Inside cover: BREAKAWAY (1966) by Bruce Conner.

Bruce Conner passed away in July of 2008. He was one-of-a-kind. It's a hyperbolic term but it's easy to throw out with Bruce. His films from the 50s on to recent years are beautiful to look at and keep you thinking, not just with the editing, but what they say politically and with a healthy dose of humor. He would get angry talking about the film and art worlds. Then he would get instantly happy talking about what it was like shooting his films and editing and re-editing. After this interview he made the installation EVE-RAY-FOREVER, consisting of three screens from the COSMIC RAY footage, the short film HIS EYE IS ON THE SPARROW (2006), containing four minutes of a never-finished film about the Soul Stirrers, and EASTER MORNING (2008), a re-working of 1966 footage, which would be his last film.

CINEMAD

#7 (summer 2009)

All interviews appeared online in Cinemad from 2002-2008.
Unless noted, interview conducted by Mike Plante.

IBlameSociety.com

Cover image: WAR (2004) by Jake Mahaffy.
Back cover photo of Animal Charm's floor by Plante.

The duo of Rich Bott and Jim Fetterly as supervideohero ANIMAL CHARM are masters of video reconstruction. Taking found footage out of many sources – educational tapes, homemade music videos, b-movies, resume reels, pyramid schemes, and the worst (best) self-help tapes – the Charm create their own world of seeing, letting the rest of us understand what's really under the surface, our own personal Rowdy Roddy Piper out of THEY LIVE. They've performed live as sort of video DJ's in all kinds of places, from basements to museums and film festivals. Bless them, bless the charm. Do their bidding.

CINEMAD: We'll start easy. When did you guys first hook up? Were you doing work on your own or did you start doing stuff together?

JIM: We can't hear you.

CINEMAD: When did you guys start!?!

JIM: We each had done videos on our own, but as far as probably like one specific moment…

RICH: I didn't make any videos. I made films, but not videos.

JIM: No, but you made videos in Amsterdam.

RICH: Well, that's true.

CINEMAD: What were you in Amsterdam for?

RICH: To go to school my last year. We used video on reel-to-reel. There were no computers or anything.

JIM: Not reel-to-reel, just deck-to-deck.

RICH: Yeah, deck-to-deck.

JIM: Rich and I met…we went to a summer school for the arts at the Arts Institute of Chicago. Rich moved in where I was living downtown. There was one time where we pointed a camera at a TV and changed the radio and tried to change the TV really fast. Remember that? That little fast tape we made? But then it wasn't until like five years later, out of school, we went to the library and got some videos from the library and it happened to be a "How to Take Care of Your Pet" video and something on bacteria and petri dishes. There was one image that was a Q-tip in a petri dish, and in the "How to Take Care of Your Pet" video it was a Q-tip cleaning the nose of a cat, and I had just learned the Avid at work. I just put the shots back-to-back, then I cut to *Cat Fancy* Magazine's over a Donovan-like song called "Sunshine Kitty." It wasn't Animal Charm, it was just kind of a response to a lot of the stuff we found online in 1994, like sample music and Stock, Hausen and Walkman.

1)*****NOTE****(Stock, Hausen, And Walkman are a mid 90s plundering improv group from UK. There name is a play on words for 3 famous pop music producers as well as the Stockhausen reference which often gets misquoted like you just spelled it. Actually, at the Wexner Center for the Arts, at an exhibition we were involved in called, "The Church of What's Happening Now," we were asked to supply a list of inspirations and they were going to include some of them in the exhibit before our performance. They didn't know Stock, Hausen, And Walkman, so they put an audio tape of Stockhausen in a Walkman cassette player and hung it museum style on the wall! That was pretty funny, but sad because the translation made it seem as if we were inspired by this composer that neither of us had much more than just a pop knowledge of. It's like the specificity of each cultural reference got mixed through confusion and the end result did turn out to be close to what actually happens in our videos but by mistake.)

CINEMAD: That's when the internet first started to be happening, right?

JIM: Yeah, John Oswald and Plunderphonics and getting that online, and ordering from Stalplatt, which is in Amsterdam, this label putting out people like us.

2)*******NOTE******(People Like Us is the moniker of Vicki Bennet from the UK who has been cutting and pasting audio for years and recently accompanying video. She has a great show on WFMU. Check www.peoplelikeus.org for more info)

It kind of just started slow. Right before Rich left for Amsterdam, we started collecting vinyl like crazy, right before the Incredibly *Strange Music* books came out, and it was really cheap because there was a lot of it in Chicago. So then he left for a year, and we just sent mix tapes back and forth. And that one video you made was to a mix tape.

RICH: Yeah, with some Moog sounds.

JIM: And then he came back and we had a studio set up just for audio, like four-track recording, home recording stuff.

RICH: We first started to do this live when we first got the video mixer, in an apartment without using computers. Just recording to VHS tapes and using the video mixer and the sound mixer. We made the whole tape that we got distributed by the Video Data Bank (VDB) that way.

JIM: The whole reason we bought that thing was because we made some shorts…LIGHTFOOT FEVER and SLOW GIN SOUL STALLION were done in one night. And we had this one tape of these two, like our single, that we'd just come home and show to friends and then dub it to friends of friends, and that's what got shown at Chicago Filmmakers, I think. It just ended up climbing the world of experimental video and film. That was like '95, '96, and it was under a different name with different people, **Janet Anglosaxophone Jackson Junior.**

RICH: That was our best name.

JIM: Nobody could ever say that.

RICH: "That's too long, man." They could never remember it.

Figure 2: Ninja Charm.

JIM: Like some John Oswald super name. We performed ASHLEY live before it was even done, so it was always this really local thing for us there in Chicago, different cafes.

3)******NOTE*******(We performed ASHLEY live in the basement of The Logab Beach Cafe with our friend Paul Deuth who was in Janet Anglosaxophone Jackson Junior at the time)

CINEMAD: So it just sort of made sense for you guys just being video DJs?

JIM: Well, no, after making those single channel videos, then we decided to keep going in and rigorously trying more experiments until we had a number of them and had sent them off, through tape-trading networks, to Matt McCormick at Peripheral Produce. He decided to put a tape compilation out and go on tour, so that was already three years later, by that time we had already bought a mixer, because we trying to figure out how to go on tour and show. When we do these shorts, we'd have to do them from 7pm to 7am the next morning where I worked. We had to get it off the hard drive right away. This is when a 9-gig hard drive was $4200. I'm serious, and it weighed like a fucking brick. So we'd have to wipe it in the morning and everything got laid off to VHS, we never had beta masters, all the beta masters we had that our tapes got distributed on were bumped up from VHS of just those initial outputs.

CINEMAD: That's how it's gotta be.

JIM: And then we thought, how are we gonna play all these back, like pop a tape in and have a blue screen and it says "Channel 2 - Play." So we got a four-channel mixer to just do that one way after another, and then on that tour from Vancouver to Los Angeles we got really bored halfway down the road. I mean, even by the time we were in Portland, we were playing the sound of one video with the picture of another, kind of like, wow, we can constantly re-edit these things over and over and it's different and the audience doesn't know, except for Matt, who we're torturing.

CINEMAD: We're all sort of the same age, coming out of the '80s sensibilities. It seems like everybody just started doing stuff at the same time throughout the '90s, and it's sort of this weird process of figuring out that everyone's doing the same thing, just in different cities.

JIM: In Chicago, it was cool going to a school and seeing a video databank. It didn't really set in until later, but it kind of erased my entire knowledge of TV and made me think about it in a really different way. I went to the Chicago Filmmakers for the first time, and it was Sadie Benning like, 18 years old, showing all of her videos. I thought, "Wow, I understand this. I don't understand art school. This stuff's not making any sense but she's saying these things that are really understandable and just making things really easily."

CINEMAD: What kind of stuff were they teaching at the Chicago Art Institute? I thought that place was better than usual?

JIM: It was good, it was just radically different than my high school. I think the art program in my high school was kind of like, "Oh, look through a magazine and find a picture you want to draw," which ends up being what I do in video. It's pretty freeform, no grades, pass/fail, no major, lots of people there were just kind of like taking four years off to go to summer camp because they were really rich. I met a lot of really rich people I'd never met in my life. I don't know, what were some of the videos you remember? At the summer school, we saw the entire Andy Warhol retrospective, that was fucked up but I didn't really think anything of it.

RICH: We took Tom Pazzollo's class. He made great breakfast on Sundays, we could drink in there and smoke, watch films, shoot films.

JIM: And he'd just support anything that you did.

CINEMAD: Did you guys just slowly start moving away from shooting stuff?

JIM: We never shot stuff.

RICH: We started doing things better, taking samples of things.

JIM: I had started on like a totally different track, like I didn't even want to go to school anymore and started working at Kartemquin, the documentary place in Chicago that ended up doing HOOP DREAMS at the time. I remember that being a whole secondary education. They were a bunch of radicals from the '60s that were: do it grassroots, make a film, show it in a basement to a labor organization or a youth group or whatever, and that's the fun part, traveling around with a film. I'd bring home all those old Chicago newsreel films that were basically like the Indymedia of the late '60s, little documentaries. We had a film in the basement that was "I Was a Teenage Werewolf," but it was re-edited about "I Was a Teenage Marxist." It was like an introduction of how to get people to get into ideas of Marxism in an ironic way, just a cut-up.

CINEMAD: Had you seen Craig (TRIBULATION 99) Baldwin's stuff by that time, too?

JIM: That was like a big catalyst, seeing his SONIC OUTLAWS. There was really a strange synchronicity. I kind of went wandering around looking for Baldwin on foot while I was in San Francisco working on a job. I just happened to go to the ATA (Artists' Television Access) and just said, "It looks like you would know where I could find Craig Baldwin," and they were like, "He lives here." That was the beginning of our relationship with Craig, and I remember at the beginning he would say, "You don't know about that? You don't know the Tape Beatles?" He was just shocked at our naivete and giving us all these little drawings to go out and eat in the neighborhood. We got a show with the Beatles during the summer, when SLOW GIN SOUL STALLION got into the San Francisco International Film Festival and won a New Visions Award in 1996.

CINEMAD: Were you guys called Animal Charm by that time?

JIM: No, that was Janet Anglosaxophone Jackson Junior still.

RICH: For the New York Video Festival the following year, Gavin Smith called and asked for videos from Animal Charm and Janet Anglosaxophone Jackson Junior, and didn't know that it was the same thing. In San Francisco, it was just under our names, Jim and Rich, but then we had this whole, big, convoluted idea to be anonymous and try to maintain that.

CINEMAD: So Animal Charm, somebody else gave you the name?

RICH: No, it was based on a drawing in a Rob McEwen book of poetry. It's kind of weird to describe it.

4)*******NOTE*******(That's spelled, Rod Mckuen, the poet and hot air balloonist)

It's also a spell in Dungeons & Dragons. Like, you control animals to do your bidding.

JIM: It's like Beastmaster, but it's Animal Charm, you cast a spell and they do the works for you. But, no, the whole Animal Charm thing, I don't know if it was something we came up with.

RICH: No, it was. I know it was. It was for the NCA thing in Chicago, that's when we had to do it. We did a show at the NCA and they said, "You guys have to have a name." They pressured us into making a name and we came up with that.

*******NOTE******** (That was the MCA-- Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago)

CINEMAD: The NCA wouldn't just let you use your names?

RICH: No, we said we had a couple of names, and they were just like, "You have to have one name so people know what the fuck's going on."

JIM: Mckuen has a ton of poetry and records that we've been collecting for years, but there was this image of a peacock, a line drawing…

RICH: That we were using for a logo anyway without any words.

JIM: Yeah, there were no words, just that logo, so that tape then became Animal Charm. It was kinda going to be the name of the compilation, but then it took off as just that name. It was a bumbling beginning but it definitely wasn't planned and it kind of just took off in a way that neither of us expected, which was incredible. Sending out tapes to festivals because they're calling you because somehow it got dubbed and went somewhere, and it's not like we put them on the internet and it becomes some sort of ongoing download thing. It just spread in a very strange festival to festival type way.

CINEMAD: We must be the first generation to do that because we're the first ones to have VCR-to-VCR recording at home.

JIM: We were really excited about this idea of having, **instead of a 7" label, you release VHS tapes. To go out and literally say, "Oh hey, I loved your movie, here's one of ours," and trade**, like a zine, a video zine.

CINEMAD: That how outsider artists can survive. Like the great Laz Rojas, who acted out scenes from his own scripts, playing every single character himself. Adults, children, two lesbians, a sci-fi script….

JIM: Just like Blazin' Hazin'.

CINEMAD: Yeah, that's right. Where did you find that?

JIM: Kent Lambert. We met him at the Fall Festival in '99 or 2000 and he gave us a tape.

RICH: I found Hazin' on the internet. He lives in Canton, OH, the home of the Football Hall of Fame, and he's a cameraman for the Cleveland Browns. We just did a search for his name, and found an online ministry that ended up being his parents. They have an online Christian church. I wrote him and we got nine more videos in the mail, plus a headshot, plus a resume and a cover letter from his manager, thinking we're a record company that's going to release his music out here. We don't know what to do with it. We would love to just put that on DVD and sell it out there, but he's such an earnest guy and he's such an outsider…I mean, we'll show them at shows or remix them in.

JIM: Did you ever see our tapes on Bat Dance?

CINEMAD: No.

JIM: Remember when you could go to the mall and you could record a song, but they give you a full video production at the end? They give you costumes and everything. This is a whole crew of people doing Prince's "Bat Dance," somebody dressed up like Batman, a gypsy, a cowboy, a ninja…

RICH: Jason.

JIM: Jason from Friday the 13th, all of these different costumes.

RICH: No, it's Halloween. It's like an office party went to this place on Halloween so they're all dressed up in these different Halloween outfits and Batman's all like, "Yo, pump it up."

JIM: With video effects, too. Total toaster culture, too, like those early 2-D animations. That's like those Bear Aerobics, that ancient animation of teddy bears doing whiirrrrr. I know we played that at CineVegas for a really annoying long time. What's that song? They sing a bunch of songs, but we played the "Disco, Disco Bear" song.

CINEMAD: So you guys were grabbing tapes from where you worked and people and trading and everything?

JIM: Where I worked, that documentary place, we would receive all this stuff as people's cameraman demo reels in Chicago. Plus we'd go scouring in the thrift stores. And then there's stuff that we would go and shoot the original material, like "Pieland, USA: Where All the 'Bama Pies Are Made." I actually shot footage of like a million pies a day being made, then we use it in a mix later. I remember my boss coming up to me at a show at the Empty Bottle, he saw all the shorts and said, "Oh, my daughter really loves it," but she was like four, she really liked it like children's television. Then all of a sudden I realized this tape I'm playing was the CEO from McDonald's. I was at the company, at Hamburger University, which is where they teach all the managers in Chicago. There's this image of this guy that we edited just being like, "Ahhahaha." You can't even recognize him because he's laughing but his eyes are blinking and we called him the laughing blinking man and we throw it on every now and then. And I'm there and Jerry's behind me and **I thought, man, Jerry's gonna be pissed because that's someone we were just videotaping two months ago and I told him that I would never, ever use any of that.** Because that was the thing at that job, after a while, it got to be known what we do. It's the same thing out here when I was working at Art Center in the video library, they were like, "Yeah, you can work here, but don't take any of our videos for your performances." Which sucks so bad because at first, my job was to dub 35 hours of director-cameraman reels, little two-to-five minute reels, I had to sit and watch and burn VCDs of and see the most inane, disgusting commercials from like '85 until now. I couldn't touch them. It definitely made me insane. But the Bat Dance came from the projector booth at Otis.

RICH: No, Art Center.

JIM: Oh, Art Center. Something came from Otis that was really good.

Figure 3: The mantle at Animal Charm house.

CINEMAD: One of my favorites is FAMILY COURT, the all-sports-court-in-one for your family, with Dad screaming while making a shot.

JIM: That's the one that I think we got at a thrift store. That product's actually called Family Court. "Portable play yard for your artificial lifestyle."

CINEMAD: So now do you guys take more time now that you have your whole set-up?

RICH: We've got like 40 grocery bags full of tapes that we've got to go through, that we haven't even used. That's kind of the first project.

JIM: That's why we bought all those computers and stuff. We are gonna perform live, record the output and sell them at the end of the show

RICH: Franchise our show, like Taco Bell. We could do it all over the place.

CINEMAD: What other sub-communitites have you found?

JIM: The all-guy duck-hunting weirdos from Wisconsin. Remember that duck-hunting video? It was very strange, not like hunting… this guy videotaping ducks out in the pond and they keep falling. He's like hunting them with the camera, he's never shooting them. Probably like a thirteen year old.

RICH: Camera Hunt.

JIM: Camera Hunt. Camera hunting ducks at a lake.

RICH: And someone gave us one a kid made of cats having sex.

JIM: A four-year-old girl was videotaping cats having sex and asking questions about what's going on, and the mother awkwardly laughing and also being fascinated in the act but you don't know what to say to a kid, like it's the early sex-ed with

animals. Often, we've asked people to bring their own materials, and then once we've started to do our thing, we started inserting their tapes.

CINEMAD: So did you guys focus more on goals as it went along, or has it still been more of like what's been dropped in your hands or what you've found and then destroying it?

JIM: It's kind of a combo. Now that we're conscious and can do stuff like that, it's like every video store, every library collection is your source. There's no real need to have to only find it, like when we did the TOOTSIE VS. KRAMER VS. KRAMER idea. That's what we went out to do, but KRAMER VS. KRAMER wasn't available that night, because we're not gonna go out and buy KRAMER VS. KRAMER or even spend weeks preparing to go and make sure that they have it that night. It was just that night at 7, "Oh, maybe at Video Journey, they have it. Oh, no, they don't? OK, what else do we got? Let's use WHITEY from Bass Finder and, oh, SHAOLIN SOCCER."

5)******NOTE******(That is WHITY from Fassbinder)

RICH: And BARRIO WARS, like Latin gangbanger movies they make here in LA, low-budget.

CINEMAD: What was TARGET?

JIM: TARGET is the video of driving around in circles in the Target parking lot and Rich was dressed up in bandages. Have you ever seen that? I'm sitting on the hood shooting, and it's to Carol King's…uh, what song is it?

RICH: "So Far Away."

JIM: "So Far Away." And he changes the station on the radio and then it goes to "Level 42." And the whole video changes but it's the same circle of driving and we cut in Jumpin' Jim Brunzell and Red Gagne from wrestling, but they're not wrestlers, they're dressed as…on one of their training tapes, they're doing military-style boot camp…

RICH: It's Sgt. Slaughter.

CINEMAD: Why'd you guys pick LA from Chicago?

RICH: It's like a warm Chicago.

JIM: It was random. I mean, it wasn't that random, we had done a show here at Film Forum.

RICH: I met my biological mom here. That was the first time we were here. The second time we were here was for Film Forum, then we came back again for Film Forum. Then a little later, Jim was out here working with a friend of ours. We had never been out west until that first time in San Francisco. It was just like, where could we move in America that would be different than Chicago but still not fucking lame, too small, or expensive like New York?

JIM: And isn't like subculturally indoctrinated. There isn't a scene, so to speak.

RICH: And it was affordable. I didn't really move, officially. I was also breaking up with someone at the same time.

JIM: He came out in February and went back in April to get all of our stuff. It was like a two-week ticket you dissed. I mean, that is the coolest thing. **Animal Charm is just like a way to make art with a friend.** I don't know

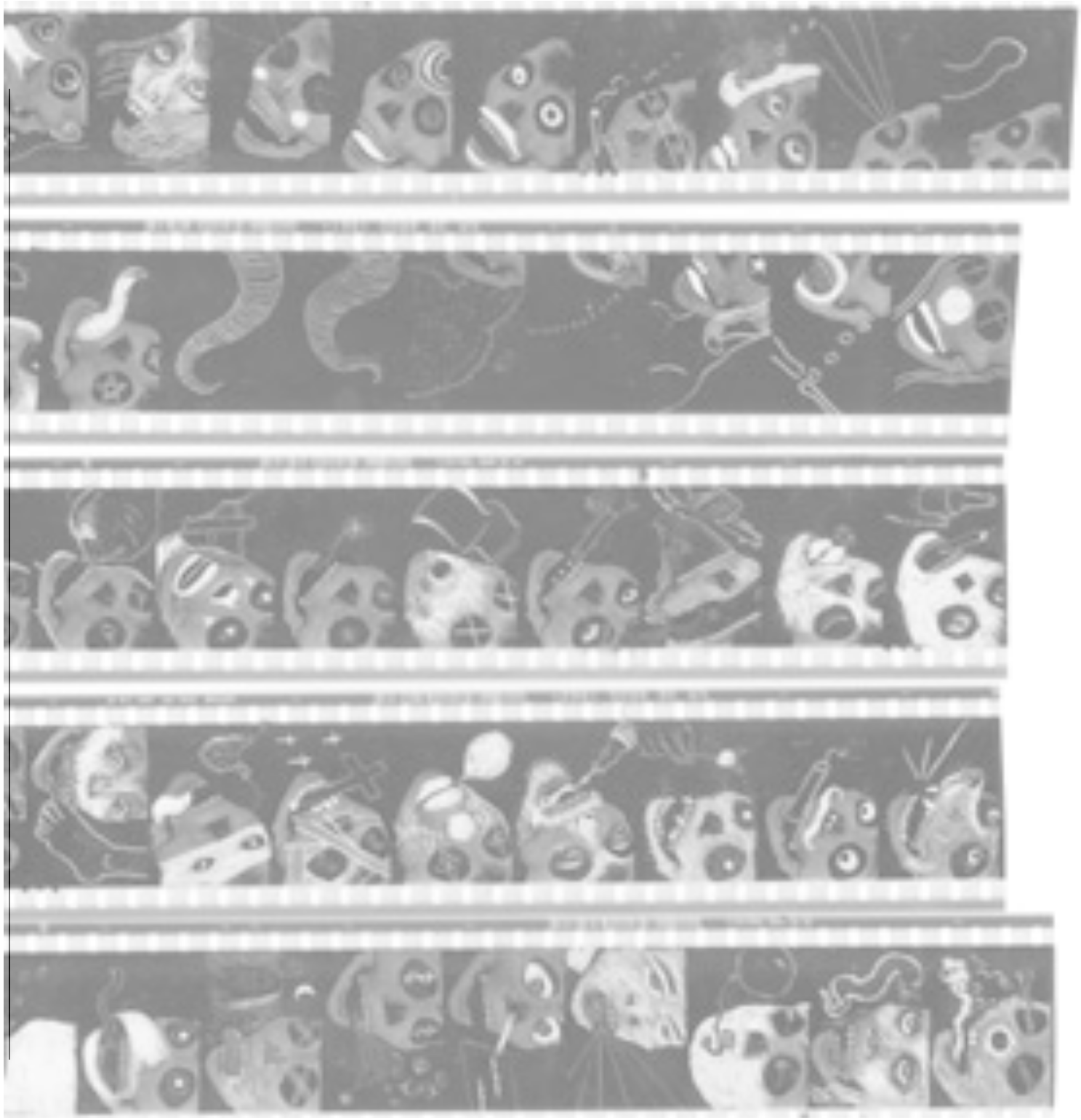
Figure 3: Animal Charm at CineVegas.

if I would make or do things on my own just because it's getting off on myself and having fun and it's a social…not just Rich, but other friends or meeting other people like-minded, it's a way more social activity that allows for learning and all that stuff. The weird part is we meet people out here because we came out here with this whole history behind us and people thought we were these career artists or career bands.

RICH: And people in Chicago think that we came out here to be successful art stars, and they kind of have this idea that we are because we live in a house and have cars and stuff, like we're living the high life out here. It's so retarded.

JIM: Those tapes are also adopted in the fine art world and there are all these people out here that are machinating, making careers, and aligning with friends to talk about how to get their next show and let's curate this and let's curate that, and it's all really revolting for the most part. I mean, there are some very interesting individuals, but the really fake part of it, which is the networking, like any industry whether it's like plumbing to Hollywood filmmaking, where it's not about the content of what your interests lie, but it's about where you want to get, an end result, that made this place kind of like, "We can work in film and video in a vaccuum here." And there's all these other people here working in film and video that I have no interest in starting a conversation with, but at the same time, there's all these other interesting folks to go meet and see.

www.animalcharm.com



I liked MARTHA COLBURN's own bio so it's the intro:

COLBURN: I grew up in the Appalachian Mountains of south central Pennsylvania. When not farming ,collecting firewood, or skinning animals, I spent my time drawing and sculpting some of our eighty animals, which included such oddities as two-headed turtles, turkeys that thought they were chickens and pet opossums. Weird things happen there. A mountain man who lived in a hole shot 2 camping lesbians when he discovered them fucking, there were many shotgun, tractor and chainsaw accidents/casualties, plenty of rapes and a few suicides. Then I moved to shit-town Baltimore for ten years and lived cheap with no heat in the worst ghetto shit hole. My favourite pass-time was following bloody speaker prints and splashes of blood from my block, as far as I could, and volunteering at a drag queen cabaret. But managed to not die /be killed and released 6 records,and taught myself animation/filmmaking.

I worked shit-jobs for those 10 years, ranging from counting 1000's of cars driving through intersections for the state of Maryland , to assembling Christmas trees with heroin addicts, and nude modelling for pervo-old-men-pseudo-wanna-be-art-photographers and as a construction worker. I would always quit jobs when I got physically ill, got fired for not "putting-out" to the bosses, or due to always being generally scared of things. Also got into doing a lot of painting of theatre /opera backdrops/sets, faux painting DC politicians bedrooms, and painting the random taco stand or animal-lovers' living room. Then I was on a European film-tour-from-Hell and somehow got into the Rijksakademie Van Beeldende Kunsten in Amsterdam, But first I returned to Baltimore for the sweltering summer months to pack and move. While there, my stripper-neighbour tried to jump down the elevator shaft, there was a huge, white rat loose in my now-destroyed warehouse (left there by these two speed junkies that were warehouse-sitting), and I puked a lot from the heat and humidity.

For now, I've moved to Amsterdam, and am at work combing my films, music, murals and other work into environments of a Gothical/Biological/Cinelogical/Sexological/Criminological sort. Also looking forward to opening a cinema/porno/fashion/art venue, and having a show at The Entomology Society. . I toured playing music and showing films in USA and Europe.There were released 6 records of my duo group 'The Dramatics", 4 on Megaphone, one on Lissy's, and one on Stomach Ache. My films are distributed by the New York Film Co-Op, Canyon Cinema, and CFMDC, Women Make Movies and Jack Stevenson Film Distribution. I taught at San Francisco Art Institute, and showed my films everywhere ranging from caves in France to the MOMA in New York.

CINEMAD: Did you have a knack for instinctual creation, coloring out of the lines as a kid?

COLBURN: …always an obsessive creator of things. It is my escape. I was a prolific poet, ceramicist, draw-er, printmaker and painter as a child/teen. I would do shocking things like paint portraits of imaginary black men (in the land of the Klan!) and clay sculptures of homeless beggars. I've always had a deviant humor and a need to express some level of my/other's pain. I did paintings of Heaven and Hell as a 11 year old and had little interest in Heaven, but put great detail in rats eating living people in

SPIDERS IN LOVE: AN ARACHNOGASMIC MUSICAL (2000)

Hell, yet I had never seen a rat or read the Bible. Teen years; just a backwoods wild child hanging with bikers, truckers and rednecks (all more entertaining than farmers!) all the while doing art somehow. Fuel for the fire!

Any art background in your family? Farmers, ministers, china painters, postal workers. Mother does weird watercolors and Father keeps old tractors running(which is an art).

Do you see the total film in your head or is it all Martha steamroller, make it as you go? To try to visualize the final design/goal/direction of my films is impossible. I don't like "talk". I have an extreme view of life, verging on phobic in many areas. I find animation to be an efficient language/ full of high detail and explosive energy. Regarding a recent slant towards hand–coloring each frame, for SKELEHELLAVISION (2002) it was a conceptual part of the film, but for THE SECRETS OF MEXUALITY (2003) it was to save a film discolored by incorrect lighting and incorrect printing. So I hand scratched-out the poorly colored areas and hand painted them in with ink using my usual toothpick frame-by-frame technique.

How do you complete so many projects and keep a normal job? Since living in Europe I've not had to work dumb jobs, but one: painting a TV set in which Dutch dwarfs were to eat some weird Dutch breakfast goo called "Vla". I do film-J-ing at parties, sell and exhibit artwork, films, books, and installations. Though the trade off is dealing with residency permit issues; the problems/stress of foreign living. Which makes me tear my hair out.

What is the beauty of living in downtown areas? I liked it in Baltigore because no people lived around me. You're on the outside if you live in the inside of some American cities (white flight hit Baltimore hard in the 60's). I come from the wilderness and the ghetto is, in some ways, its parallel universe. Just instead of ghosts in the trees, there's ghosts in the rows of empty crack houses. Guns killing people replace guns killing animals. Skinny pre-teen drug dealers on dirt bikes replace fat rednecks on four-wheelers. The buzzing air conditioners replace the crickets.

You were near Gettysburg as a kid? I didn't grow up in Gettysburg. Hardly! That was the "big city". I grew up in Brysonia, an area known as somewhere between Bear Mountain and Caledonia, the tip of the Appalachian Mountains. The woods and our small farm were my playground. Filling my socks with duck shit from the bottom of the pond, f*ing around with tractors, taking care of animals, picking fruit and vegetables and doing art is about all there was to do. Oh, and raise Hell!

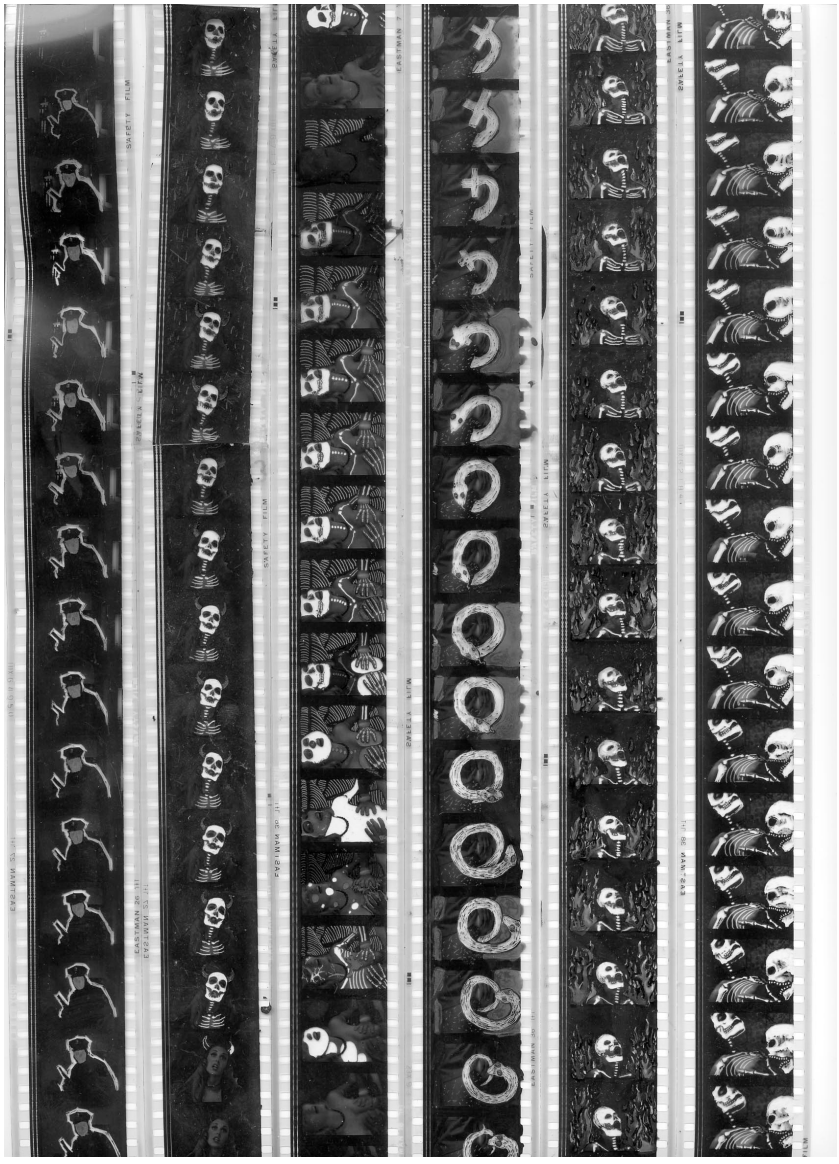
Gettysburg vs Baltimore. The Civil War is still going on in both? Or never happened? Or is going to happen?

Baltimore vs Amsterdam. Both are full of bad theater, drug addicts, and deranged artists. The difference is that in Holland they're funded. Even the Hells Angels got funding here! Really! Every minute further I am away from Baltimore, life is brighter (even in Holland where the sun doesn't shine for months). Get my drift? Baltimore blows!

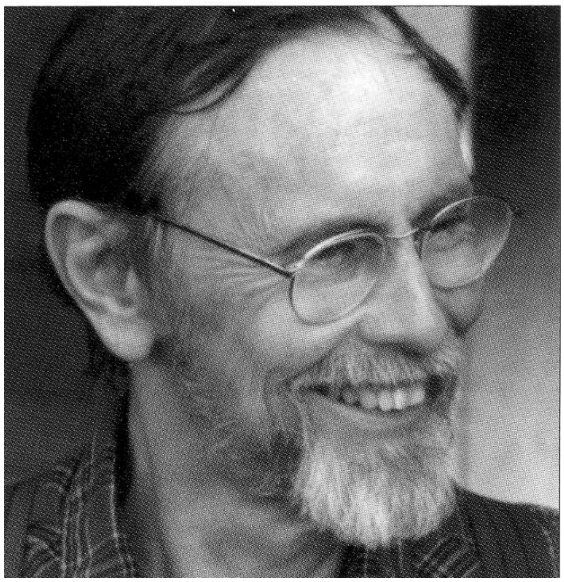
How have the different theater settings felt? I feel like my films (after completion) are like a bull with a ring in it's nose getting yanked around and I'm the rider. I go where it takes me. So when I'm the spectator (often as projectionist) I am not altogether "there", much preferring to be scratching film on my portable light box or writing letters. A drunk audience in a dirt-floored club in Slovenia/ a carpeted Euro-snob non-popcorn-eating Art house in Denmark full of Master degrees in Film Theory/ an old chocolate factory brimming with 17 year old Dutch boys:I just lose my powers of audience perception. Save File As: "More Strange Screening Realities". The variety of venue situations my films end-up in is absurd.

www.marthacolburn.com

CINEMAID



first page: SECRETS OF MEXUALITY (2003). this page: SKELLAHELLAVISION (2001).



You may know BRUCE CONNER as an experimental filmmaker. You may know Conner as an influential artist. You may know Conner as a deceased artist in *Who Was Who*. But he is still alive. I thought I had a clue about his work from seeing all his films – which 50 years later still dominates its bastard grandchildren of music videos in style, form, humor and commentary. I thought I had a clue by seeing his amazing not-a-retrospective 2000 BC: THE BRUCE CONNER STORY PART II – compassing collage, assemblage, sculpture, photography, print making, painting and conceptual art. Isn't it enough to be a legend? But I still hadn't seen all Conner.

Last year he presented a "new" film, LUKE (1966/2004), at CineVegas as part of a selection of his filmwork. Invited to the set of COOL HAND LUKE (1967) by his friend Dennis Hopper, Conner spent one day filming the cast and crew working on regular 8mm film, edited entirely in the camera. Now he has slowed the footage down and added a score by longtime collaborator Patrick Gleeson to make a new, 22-minute version.

And to start off 2005 with even more unseen work, Conner has a show at the Barbara Gladstone gallery (NY) of 53 photos that capture 70s punk rock glory. In the last exciting rock and roll movement in America, Conner documented the San Francisco scene at Mabuhay Gardens in eye-catching black and white photography. He was 45 years old at the time.

CINEMAD: Your film LUKE is showing at festivals.

BRUCE CONNER: It had a sneak preview at CineVegas, and then it premiered at the New York Film Festival and the London Film Festival. It's also showing at the Barbara Gladstone Gallery in New York from January 4th until the 29th. That's in conjunction with an exhibition of fifty-three black and white punk photos that I took in 1978 at Mabuhay Gardens in San Francisco.

How did you find the punk rock scene? In 1977 Toni Basil called me and said, "You gotta go to Mabuhay Gardens tonight and see the world's greatest new rock band, Devo." So I went there and I liked the show, the place was pretty interesting. I started going back to see if I would find another band just as interesting. There were a number of events there, some of which I photographed. Most of my photographs are of San Francisco and California punk bands; some of the bands were obscure and only played once. There are pictures of Toni Basil and Devo and a few others that are better known.

"Devo: Airborne".

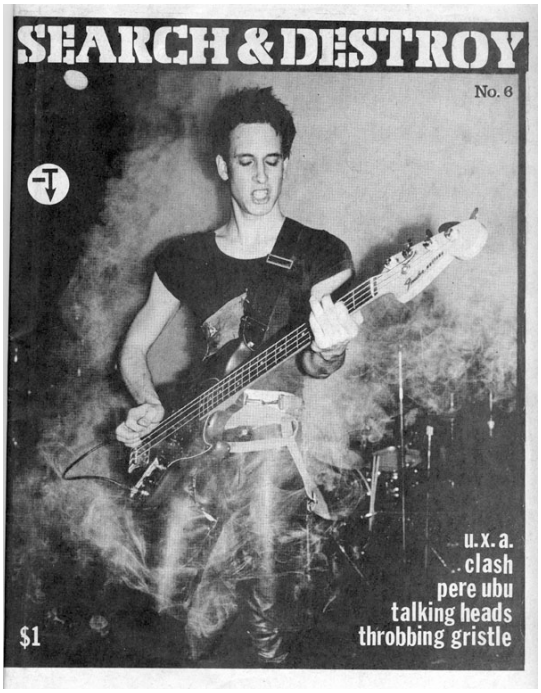
The *Search and Destroy* you showed me had great photos of The Avengers and Negative Trend. Also in the show are Crime, UXA and the Mutants. Usually there's more than one photo of each band. There is one photo of a band called Ointment that gave a great performance and then disappeared.. Vale, who published my photos in *Search and Destroy* magazine, told me recently that he thought they were the best punk band he remembered seeing at Mabuhay Gardens.

But were you drawn to the scene quickly? In its own way, it reminded me of the energy of the poets, artists, filmmakers, and dancers who had been characterized as the Beat generation in the 1950's. Then in the '60s some of the same people were called the Hippie generation. This creative phenomenon appeared to become publicly conspicuous in San Francisco every ten years.

You must have seen it differently than everybody else since you had lived through the other two angry youth movements. They weren't always angry. They were complicated periods of time, just like we are in right now. I wish we could find more people with that kind of intensity today. It's worth gravitating towards that type of environment. A kind of activity that compels people, despite the limits of their technological or professional abilities, to produce, perform, and have their say.

Were the punk photos pretty conscious, or more snapshots? The second time I was there, I saw Vale, who worked at City Lights Bookstore, he said, "What are you doing here?" I said, "Well, I'm interested in this stuff." And he said, " I'm starting a new magazine called *Search and Destroy* about the punk scene." I said, "Maybe I could take some photos for that." During the next year, I probably wasted too much time trying to take photos that would be appropriate for the magazine.

I had no idea which of three bands playing each night would turn out to be really unique and interesting. I ended up being at Mabuhay Gardens several days a week. I also conceived creating a photographic document during the year of 1978 at Mabuhay Gardens. I didn't receive any money for the photos printed in *Search and Destroy*. But, over the years, I've gotten used to paying people to look at my work.



cover image of Negative Trend by Bruce Conner.

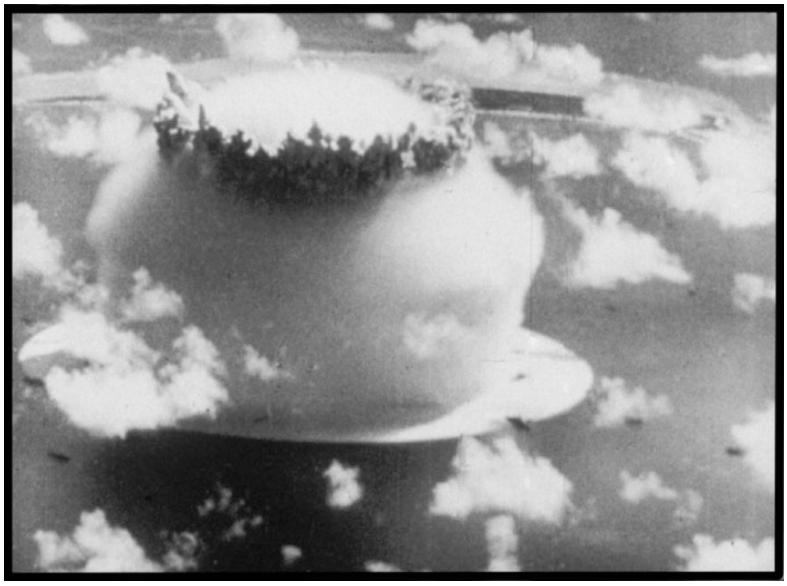
The reverse of the mainstream. Well, people think they're paying me when they go to a film festival, but as you and I know, festivals don't pay the filmmakers when they show their films.

Do you get paid for books and art gallery sales? I don't get paid when any of my words or work are published in books. Art galleries sell my work once in a while. I distribute my films through Canyon Cinema. It's questionable whether I've ever made back the costs of more than a few of the short films. Beyond the initial cost there are the expenses of maintaining and producing new prints, transferring, archiving and all the rest of it. I like to support Canyon Cinema because they are the only viable 16mm distributor of short independent films. The films they distribute are about as independent as film can get. They are usually produced by one person who has conceived the work, filmed it, edited it, and distributed it.

What was the impetus behind finally putting out the DVD of some of your shorts (2002 B.C.)? It was produced as a fundraiser for charitable organizations. It was available through the galleries where I exhibit.

People could obtain a free copy if they made a donation of fifty dollars to a non-profit organization such as Haight-Ashbury Medical Clinic or the Food Bank in San Francisco. The dealers and I dealt with it as public service in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago and Manhattan. It also brings people into the gallery to see my drawings, prints, photos, paintings, etc. My justification, in terms the IRS understands, is that the films are nothing except a form of publicity for me to bring people closer to the work that is for sale at the galleries. If I were to actually try to deal with this as a business, there isn't any business. [laughs]

People seem to have the illusion that, because they see these films and they read about them, it means substantial cash in the pocket for the filmmaker. In contrast to the '50s, many of the short films that get shown at film festivals, are there for practical reasons such as getting jobs in video or commercial film. Or it's necessary for academics who must publish or perish. Or it's pure vanity. I guess I fall into the latter category.



A MOVIE (1958).

In the '50s and '60s, these types of films were in a different economic community that had created its own distribution, venues, literature, and news. There were film groups and film societies all across the country. People did make money, but after a while, it became clear that these people had to be "helped" by others who were not artists. They took "pity" on these poor artists. They decided it was time that there should be grants administered by non-profit organizations (that would take all the money that was available) so artists could present their wonderful hobbies to the world. So everything was transformed to the point where that earlier film community no longer existed. It had been a classic example of free enterprise before the takeover. It's now totally monopolized by non-profits who do wonderful things for the filmmakers and take the lion's share for themselves.

It's nearly impossible to start a film group because every city has a film festival that is charging filmmakers to display their films, collecting all the money at the gate, and having nice parties for their friends. I'm not sure how long things like this will go on. After a while some filmmakers won't want to do it. Many people are going to be making low-cost video productions that are available on the Internet or elsewhere. Perhaps the festival environment for these types of films won't be so promising for promoters.

A lot of the festivals' job is connecting filmmakers to meet an agent, a manager, financers, other film production folks, to continue to produce work. It's a big trade show. Many of them do a good job of showing the films, but at least half of it is trying to further yourself with these things. Do you think the answer would be that the film festivals simply rent the films they show? I think that would be nice, but why would anybody want to do that? Independent filmmakers pay for it and the festival pockets the money. I've tried to ask for film rentals at film festivals. The New York Film Festival says, "Well, you get the honor of your films being shown in our festival in New York." The festival burns up the audience in the area. The people who see it there are unlikely to see elsewhere in the city afterwards. No second run theaters.

Right now, LUKE is doing the trip around to festivals. [Producer] Henry Rosenthal is handling all that for me since he has entered his productions in film festivals before. The theoretical goal is to find a sale to cable or commercial television. We're not renting it, we're not selling copies, and if that doesn't pan out, I'm not quite sure what we'll do with LUKE. It's possible that it will never be available, because if I need to pay people to see my movies, why bother? It means a lot more work. 2002 B.C. is no longer available. We accomplished what we wanted to do. Now I have another DVD with CROSSROADS (1976) and LOOKING FOR MUSHROOMS (1959-1967). It is distributed by the Michael Kohn Gallery in Los Angeles. It seems more sensible to the gallery to have it for sale even if we don't end up making a profit. It makes it seem a little more reliable and business-like.

LUKE (1966/2004).

How have you made a living? Being an artist of fifty years, that's not job security. Well, at one point in the '60s, I had four jobs simultaneously. My wife was also teaching. In the '70s, my grandmother died and left me some money. My uncle died and was equally generous. My father left me some stock in a company that has since been absorbed by Kroger. So, after a while, I could pay my basic bills. I've assumed that I could live off this mainly because I bought my house here in San Francisco in 1972 when the costs were very low. We just take care of ourselves in a simple way. I've been telling people for ten years I've made enough money to live on from my work for the last 10 years. I started assuming that was the case in the 1990's but I didn't know what it really cost to live in San Francisco, the most expensive city in America. I was living off some of the inheritance that I received.

Buying a place back then was a smart move. I made enough money to live on in 1960. The next year, I made absolutely nothing and it pretty much stayed that way with minor improvement for years. Then I slowly started to have more income selling my work. I had a dealer, Paula Kirkeby, who told me, "I want to have a show and we need to raise the prices." I said, "I don't think people will buy this stuff at a higher price. We're already charging $250 for these drawings and we only sell two or three out of the twenty-five we put in a show." She said, "You might as well not sell them for $500 as $250." We raised the prices and we sold two or three from the show.

I had a show in Los Angeles in 1991. The prices had gone up so much that I thought, "This is outrageous." But I remember hearing somebody at the opening say, "Oh, these prices are so reasonable." It seemed to make a difference when people realized that the work was at a certain economic level. Now the galleries will raise the prices and tell me afterwards, "Here's the extra money."

I expected people to value the work for what it was and not its prestige. I didn't sign a lot of my work in the 1960s. If I did sign it, I would put my name on the back. I always thought that a signature on a piece of artwork represented an advertisement for Coca-Cola or Salvador Dali (interchangeable entities). I wanted to see that each piece had the character of a phenomenon that could be experienced without any predispositions or expectations about who made the work or when it was made or anything else. I want the work to live and succeed on its own merits, nothing else.

COSMIC RAY (1962).

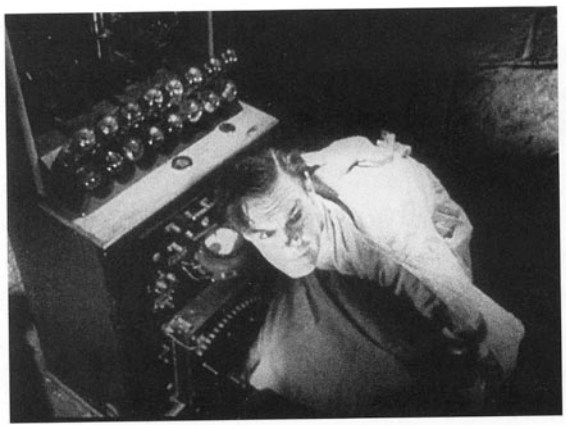
In fact, you can see that a number of my films don't even have my name on them. I would complete them and, sometimes as an afterthought, I would add titles. I was more interested in finishing it and showing it to people and I would forget to ever put a title on it. COSMIC RAY (1961) did have my name in it at one point. My credit was only three frames long among all those flashing frames. Since I edited the film linearly in an A-roll and didn't use a work print I would lose a frame every time I made a splice. After a while my name disappeared. It was a gratuitous demonstration that my ego involvement was too demanding.

And when you do get your name in there, you just stay on it, like in A MOVIE (1958). In A MOVIE, I decided that the credit concept was so absurd that I would just sit on it long enough for people to think that the name credit was all that the movie was ever going to be. Rushing movie music and "Bruce Conner" on the screen forever and ever. I just assumed when I made A MOVIE that every film I made afterwards could be spliced onto the end of it. The other movies would be like a continuation of the same film so I wouldn't have to make any more titles. But of course, each of the following films changed character.

At CineVegas you told me you waited on LUKE because you didn't want to release it without music? It was shot in regular 8mm and was intended to be shown at five frames per second. It had a production cost of less than four dollars. The camera and projector were very inexpensive because regular 8mm film was being phased out for Super 8 in the 1960's. I could photograph using the features available on an 8mm camera that are more awkward or costly with 35mm. It was possible to fade in and out while running the camera, advance the film forward and backward by hand, film at fast speeds so things were in slow motion or do single framing of one picture at a time. I could take thousands of individual photographs with an 8mm camera and look at them in a little viewer.

I put my 8mm films in the Museum of Modern Art Film Archives in New York, and they made 16mm enlargements of them in 1984. I used that 16mm copy when Patrick Gleeson decided couple of years ago that he wanted to create another musical soundtrack for a film of mine. He has worked with synthesizers in advance of everybody else, introduced synthesizer to modern jazz, and created a lot of wonderful music.

He was able to do a stereo track for LUKE with such precision that I knew I could never turn it back into film after synchronizing it to 3 images per second on digital tape. LUKE will only be on video. I have been working more with video, in part because it gave me the opportunity to put the original stereo soundtrack by Terry Riley into CROSSROADS.




REPORT (1963-1967).

How did you come to create a new version of REPORT (1963-1967) this year? One of the projects I've had in mind was to recreate the character of one of the seven unique edits of REPORT before it was finalized in 1967. Between 1963 and 1967, it went through seven transformations. My concept was to make every viewing print similar using the same soundtrack, but the images would change with each print. People could see this long process of various images at different viewing times. The experience would be similar to people's memory of seeing films when they are shown again. There is sometimes a moment of wonder when the images seem to be different or in a different order than when the film was first seen. I have been told by people after they viewed A MOVIE a second time that they were sure that I had re-edited it. In the 1960s, it was possible to make unique reversal prints. I would just edit the A-roll of REPORT (one single line of 16mm film) take some images out, move them around, put other ones in. During the first eight minutes of the film, I used one image that would repeat over and over and over as a film loop. The prints went into distribution or into people's hands, and then they would someday disappear from wear and tear.

All on 16mm? Yes. So after transferring REPORT to digital, I went back and tried to recreate the character in one of these earlier versions. There's a series of repeat images during the first eight minutes. The repetitive image I chose had been used in the third or fourth version. All of the various repetitive images were consolidated into the negative that was finally made in 1967. Obviously, coming back to this some 35 years later, it's not going to be the same thing. Of course not, it's on digital video. I changed the edit of the last five minutes, moved some images around or added other ones into it.

I can't put it in Canyon Cinema because they don't rent videos. They sell videos. A problem with selling videos is that the wonderful people who care so much about films and lecture about them in schools or present them in museums will sometimes cheat the filmmakers and Canyon Cinema by making copies for their multimillion-dollar non-profit organizations. This problem came up with the DVD of 2002 BC. There were people showing it in classrooms. The Los Angeles County Museum of Art put it on exhibit in the worst possible manner by exhibiting it next to a sculpture by Ed Kienholz called *Backseat Dodge*, which had a transistor radio in it running at all times. My video was on a monitor inside a clear plastic box with sound coming through the box. It was in a brightly illuminated environment. Of course, on the DVD it says that it is not for be shown for public performance.

Canyon Cinema also told me that rentals were dwindling for some of the titles available on the DVD. I want to preserve Canyon Cinema as long as possible. They have one and a half employees, they're always on the edge of dissolution, and they're the only viable distribution that I know of. They take care of the films wonderfully, they're knowledgeable of what the films represent, they treat filmmakers with respect, they pay rentals immediately on request, and they treat the clients who rent the films very well. They're dependable, unlike some non-profit organizations.

MARILYN TIMES FIVE (1968-1973).

How did you feel, seeing all the images in REPORT again? The film itself? It always takes care of me. I was passionately involved with the subject matter. I try to make films that would have interest to me in the long run since I must continually look at them again and again if they're going to be distributed or exhibited. REPORT is one of them, and it's gone through a lot of transformations. I was so emotionally involved initially with REPORT that I would have to leave the auditorium while it was shown. It would disturb me so much that I would be physically shaking. I find it very difficult to convey my feelings or how I experience these films. I know they aren't the same as other people's experiences because many haven't lived through the whole process. Perhaps they've only seen it once.

I try to structure the films so that there's something new that can be found in them each time they are viewed by using the techniques that I've to found work with memory and kinetic relationships. I am aware of the way in which things will change in people's consciousness when re-experiencing something. I had become aware that these experiences are like part of a movie in my consciousness and other people's consciousness. When you recollect these images or even recollect other movies, they get are assembled differently. Invariably, if you see a movie a second time there has to be something else that's rewarding in order to enjoy it another time.

When I saw one or two of your films in college there was this pressure from the instructor to interpret the film only one way, the "official" way. "Grrrr"(the artist growls.)

Which I never understood, especially as you made multiple versions. Sometimes when academics take over and write their books, they take all the fun out of it. They try to knock the balls off of them. I remember being at a college in the Midwest. I was invited to do a film program, exhibit in the art gallery, and visit a film class. We were watching A MOVIE in the classroom, and some of the students started laughing at the beginning of the film. The teacher said, "Shut up! This is a serious movie!" God, I could have throttled the guy!

So wait, he thinks you having your name up there for ten minutes was serious? This was at the first part, where all the cars are racing, one after another. There's other stuff that's intended to be ludicrous, but it's not really a comedy. It has had an undeserved reputation for being a comedy. Andrew Sarris wrote a review of the presentation of the History of American Avant-garde Film in the Museum of Modern Art. He took vengeance on Jonas Mekas and all the independent films he had to look at. He had exploited his position at the Village Voice writing reviews of movies under Jonas Mekas's authority. He must have hated all of the films that Mekas liked. Unfortunately the commentary and presentation at the Museum of Modern Art would make this reaction totally justifiable all by itself. Every part of the juice was excised, analyzed, historicized: use a lot of big words that people don't commonly use for communication.

It's important to analyze things to a certain point. But chances are, somebody, somewhere has beat off to MARILYN TIMES FIVE (1968-1973). Well, yeah, the music is wonderful. Sometimes you hear groans as the audience starts to see the third or fourth repetition of the song when it's shown publicly. The audience was looking for an erotic girlie movie and it wasn't catering to them.

Once they started to get "invested," then you'd cut away. Things just kept repeating over and over. It was a girlie movie but it wasn't following the girlie movie format. I was turning it around and beating those jocks over the head with it.

Well, porn gets used and consumed, and then thrown out. That's kind of my feeling about Marilyn Monroe, too.

About how she was consumed and then thrown out? Yeah. That's the tragedy.

Do you ever connect that film with REPORT? Yeah, I recently put them back to back. It's hard to judge how people relate to this since they've become historical icons. Back in the '70s, I thought nobody would be able to understand REPORT again because they wouldn't know the details of the assassination of President Kennedy. The media celebrated the 25th anniversary and the 30th anniversary, and then Oliver Stone made the movie called JFK (1991).

Did you see the movie? I did after a while when it was on VHS. People told me that it was a lot like REPORT. I didn't think it was. He used a similar style of presentation with his own simulated media coverage. The only thing I really liked about the JFK movie was the clip of Eisenhower when he left office as the President of the United States. He warned the American people about the military industrial complex. His message was profoundly ignored at the time. It's an amazing statement by someone who should really know, who led the American forces through a successful campaign in Europe during the second world war. Although it appears to me that we lost the war against the Nazis.

You think we lost over time? I recently looked at some anti-Nazi movies made during the war. The American view of the cruel Nazis actually looks kind of benign compared to the way things are here in the States. Almost like a travelogue to encourage to vacation in Nazi Germany to get away from the loss of civil liberties, stress and invasion of privacy here.

Encyclopedia Britannica had an educational film in the early '60s about despotism. I think it's something that the current administration would not like to see presented today. It depicts how people lose their freedom piecemeal and the characteristics signs of despotism. I have this definite impression that, over the decades, we didn't really win the war. This country kept taking over characteristics that were attributed to the Nazi regime. You can look at some of the old posters and books about life in Nazi Germany from the Second World War depicting people pulled off the street and thrown into jail without a trial. A so-called President or Fuhrer can take anybody off, doesn't need Congress to declare war. The Bill of Rights is treated as a sort of nostalgic, quaint document.

I remember a time when politicians would tell you exactly what their point of view was and you would either vote for them or you wouldn't. When they went into Congress, they usually did what they said they were going to do.

BREAKAWAY (1966).

Now, the assumption that a candidate should tell the truth is shrugged off and the subject of amusement. The bigger the lie is, the more support people give to it, apparently. As Goering said, the big lie wins. There are a lot of things that Hitler had initiated in running his empire that have been implemented in ours.

You told me something one time when you were wearing an American flag pin. I had an American flag pin on my jacket. Some people who were opposed to the war or the Bush administration said, "Why are you wearing that flag?" I decided a long time ago that that flag belongs to me; it doesn't belong to the government or George Bush or the war makers. It's my flag, and I'm not going to surrender it to them just because they misuse it.

Completely proficient in a variety of mediums, KEVIN EVERSON has been the recipient of numerous awards including a 1999 National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship, a Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship in photography, and the Peter Wilde Award for Most Technically Innovative Film at the Ann Arbor Film Festival. His films are personal, distinctive studies of his working class background and surroundings. He is incredibly down-to-earth. After a number of shorts, Everson has just finished his first feature, SPICE BUSH (2005).

CINEMAD: How did you get into art? Is it what your parents did?

KEVIN EVERSON: No, no, I got into art because I couldn't do anything else.

Why, what did you try to do? Well, nothing. I wanted to do botany and shit, but in high school I didn't do anything other than play sports and chase women. But I had a camera, so I decided to do photography. I didn't know what I was doing, that I was journalizing or that it had to be art. I started liking that art so I kept doing that art.

So you didn't ever want to go to college? I did want to go to college so I wouldn't have to go in Reagan's military. It was either that or work in a factory, but the factories were closing up in my hometown.

What was your hometown? Mansfield, Ohio. I wanted to go to college because I just wanted to be around stimulating people and meet people from all over the world, although I did go to Akron University, which is the global mecca. [laughs] But there were a lot of Nigerians and Angolans that were going there, so that was cool, meeting cats like that. They had a good engineering program, so I think they were all dealing with that kind of stuff. I just wanted to get away from home, and for me, driving an hour away to go to school was faaaarrrrrr.

Was Mansfield just basic small-town America? Yeah, small industrial town, and then the factories closed. But then when I went to Akron University and started doing all that art… You know, I was never a really good student. I mean, I was smart in high school, I just didn't know how to study, but then something clicked in college. Well, first of all, I came home and worked in the factories for a summer. That sobered a motherfucker up hardcore. After that, I was on the Dean's list every year and I really liked learning. I figured out how to study, started taking art history and philosophy, started making art, started working hard. Using that working class background. And then from there, they had just gotten this new art building and they were trying to put it on the map, so they said, "Hey, don't you want to go to grad school?" I didn't know anything about college. I really liked school and I didn't want to stop, so I just went straight through and got a Master's of Fine Art in photography. But I did films as an underground. I did a lot of artist books, and I thought the pace and the regimen were the equivalent of short experimental films. I did a lot of Super 8 junk and flicker films, film installations, too.

So was this all at the same school? No, I went to Ohio University for my master's. Ohio University is in Athens, Ohio. It's like a state liberal arts school. I didn't really start making films until like five years after I got out of college because I was just showing a lot of art around the country, and around the world, actually. I had a couple of international exhibitions by that time.

What kind of art were in the shows? Photos, I want to say street photography, in the genre of Gary Winogrand and Robert Frank. Then I did a lot of sculptural work, and that's how I got into film, because I liked making all this stuff that looked like it belonged in a black American working class kind of home. I would always relate to things in an art manner, like whatever I'd see was art and then I'd remake it and present it on a white wall, like at a gallery. What I really liked was the fact that I knew people, like my parents or my uncles or neighbors or whatever, would go down to Bing's Furniture and pick out frames for family pictures and assemble them in their house. I really liked the task of selecting and putting stuff up. For me to portray that task, I had to use a time-based medium, so I started making films in like '95.

What were you doing at that point? Were you teaching already? Yeah, 'cause right when I got out of college, I taught at my old alma mater Akron University, taught there for like three years, taught at Oberlin College for a year, and one year I got a bunch of grants and didn't teach at all. Then I went down to Tennessee and taught for four years at the University of Tennessee, and I've been here (Univ of Virginia) for four years also.

What do you think about teaching? The kids are fun, every day is different, you get a steady check, and you get resources. I know my New York colleagues go down to Kinko's and spend hundreds of dollars, and I just have to walk down to the copier. I got staples, office supplies, I'm telling you, man, long-distance phone calls… That's the shit that really helps the factory. The press is still saying that TARNATION (2004) cost $213 to make, but the fuckin' external drive costs $270, so I know that ain't true. You can't put all those hours on a fuckin' iMac. But I'm talking about stuff like gas and copies, that's the real money stuff, the nitpicking. I can see how easy it is to get married to the universities. It's like how these NYU kids take forever to get out of college because they want to use the equipment. That's why they take forever to make their thesis films. It's just a strategy so they don't have to rent equipment. Even when I was doing photos and sculptures, you can't use printmakers outside of an institution. It's impossible. So I started gearing up for leaving an institution and still being able to make that art, so I taught myself to paint in grad school. That's the kind of stuff I can always do.

What's an example of the kind of stuff you do for the artist books? I'd make all my covers and my bookbinding. It would be photo-based or some drawings or prints or transfers. Just kind of image-based stuff. I also did a lot of sculptural things out of wood. I had some power tools, so I could make art outside. My strategy was that if I had an idea, I had to make drawings of it in several different mediums. There'd be a short film version of it, a photo, an artist book, whatever, and whichever one was cheapest at that time, that's the one that would get done. All that stuff is the real world when it comes to that art. That's what I always tell my students. This shit is not the kind of stuff you've got to prepare yourself for. In '95 or '96, I started doing more films because I could kind of afford them and do them on the cheap. Then it was all digital editing, started cutting on Avid in Columbus, Ohio.

I come across more and more people who screwed around for a long time before they figure out what they want to do, or how to do it. It's funny. I think a lot of people just don't finish stuff and don't have that kind of mentality. Right before I finished SPICE BUSH, I started writing a new film. I don't want to linger on stuff forever, and I think that comes from an art mentality. You just want to make a body of work. I just have a regimen, like in

SPICE BUSH (2005).

the fall, I should be doing this. Even when I didn't quite get SPICE BUSH finished, I had already started doing what I was going to do anyway.

You've got a thing with numbers as far as the work goes, like you're obsessed with numbers in your films. Is that something like what you were doing in the art, too? Yeah, I was always into lottery and chance, permutations, that kind of thing. But mostly like the working class thing, the relentlessness of everyday life.

Like wanting to win the lottery? Yeah, which is a poor people tax. When I show that stuff to an academic art crowd, they don't know what the fuck that is. It's totally exotic to them. I showed a rough cut of SPICE BUSH the other day and people were asking me all kinds of questions about the lottery.

What'd they ask? Well, first of all, the neighborhood black folks that came, they were actually happy that nobody died. [laughs] I think that [the art crowd] were waiting for a narrative to pop at 'em. But then again, it's slightly a documentary, so they got comfortable with that, and then it just switches on these people forty-seven minutes into it. They were slightly impatient, but they actually kinda liked it, I guess.

They can relate to the "characters" at least. It's not even that. It's how they relate to cinema and cinemaspace and what they anticipate on screen. If you position African-Americans in a way that you weren't used to seeing, people get either intrigued or annoyed or impatient or whatever. It's just a different kind of language.

So the academics were more interested in the lottery. They were into the political aspect. They automatically see black as political. For me, I'm a formalist. I try to make things look handsome straight up and down and have art references in it. There's social issues going on in it, too, but that's something that I think about very late in the game, when I'm designing films.

Right, you don't go into it like, "Oh, I've got to show this so the crowd thinks that…" No, I'm not that kind of didactic when it comes to that. SPICE BUSH is set up as, no matter what you think it is, it's not a window, it's a total film. It's like a language. It's got narrative, it's got documentary, a little experimental, it's got all these collages… Hopefully, you never think that you're not watching the film. I think the biggest question in the film was when the little girl was watching the TV show. In those three segments, you are *definitely* watching cinema, like that one, GET CHRISTIE LOVE (1974). You can tell it's not real. And the one with the dinosaurs…

The one where they use a real lizard that's slowed down. Yeah. I like the fact that it's all self-referential and it's all kind of fake, although I like to use reality as a device.

How do you find yourself preparing for the films, then? Are you actually doing a lot of the drawings for the films now? Actually I'm writing more, because I'm not looking at things and drawing them, I'm listening to stories and writing them down.

What about your short VANESSA (2002)? Oh, there's drawings for that, because I was in Rome and I was looking at all that Michelangelo. All those circle images, that's just mimicking *Doni Tondo* by Michelangelo.

What was the deal in Rome? I had a fellowship at the American Academy, so I was there for like eleven months. They give it to four American artists a year. I made four or five films over there and I made a huge body of photo work. That actually screwed me up from teaching because I realized how much I could get done if I wasn't teaching. I literally have not been the same since then, because I'm really resisting it.

What else did you get out of that Rome experience? Was it the first time you've been in Europe? No, I had shows there, so I had gone there for shows and visited people there before. It was the first time I lived there.

What did you think about the art scene as far as Europe versus America? In America, we always complain about how in Europe there'd be more support. Well, Romans are very nationalistic about their art, whereas here, people don't go out and support Ohio artists. It just doesn't have that kind of history. But Italians don't have a lot of contemporary art, because they're all into restoration and shit. I think the American art form is probably film, but they haven't really done a good job with that.

How much film history did you do? Did you feel like you had to go back and see what had been done? Nah, because every time I'd start a film, I'd just look at paintings and other artwork. It's based on formal devices, not just cinema. I think this next feature is gonna be cut like a thriller because it's going to be about a bank teller and a race car driver.

In SPICE BUSH, did you feel like you had to do everything yourself? Yeah, it was one of those things that I did by myself.

Was it partly resources, or you just like doing it? Or both? It's that stuff, it's that I came in late in the game, I had a rough spring where I was doing a lot of travelling. Also, I just wanted to see if I could do it. I had it all scripted out, I just had to make sure I got all this information.

How did you feel working with non-actors? Did you have to convince them to be in it? Well, I haven't convinced them yet. [laughs] You know, it was a nightmare. More so than I thought it would be, because people back home think I'm playing, like I'm not serious, so it became that kind of thing. My uncle was really into it, I think because it was about him. He liked the script because he thought I made it up. All the other locations, they would just not respond to me. This time, I'm gonna have the Virginia Film Commission lock down locations for me. There was two weeks where I couldn't do anything for SPICE BUSH because I was just waiting for this one location and it just would not happen. It was one of those things where I couldn't afford to do the film and I couldn't afford not to do it in a weird way. I didn't get any grant money so it came out of pocket. It's probably about six thousand dollars now.

SPICE BUSH (2005).

What's the documentary that you're working on? I'm working on this feature film called LOWNDES COUNTY. It's about the teenage bus drivers in 1959, Columbus, Mississippi dealing with these secondhand school buses. It's a script of 102 pages. We gotta clean it up a little bit. That's a narrative film, we're just waiting for the cash.

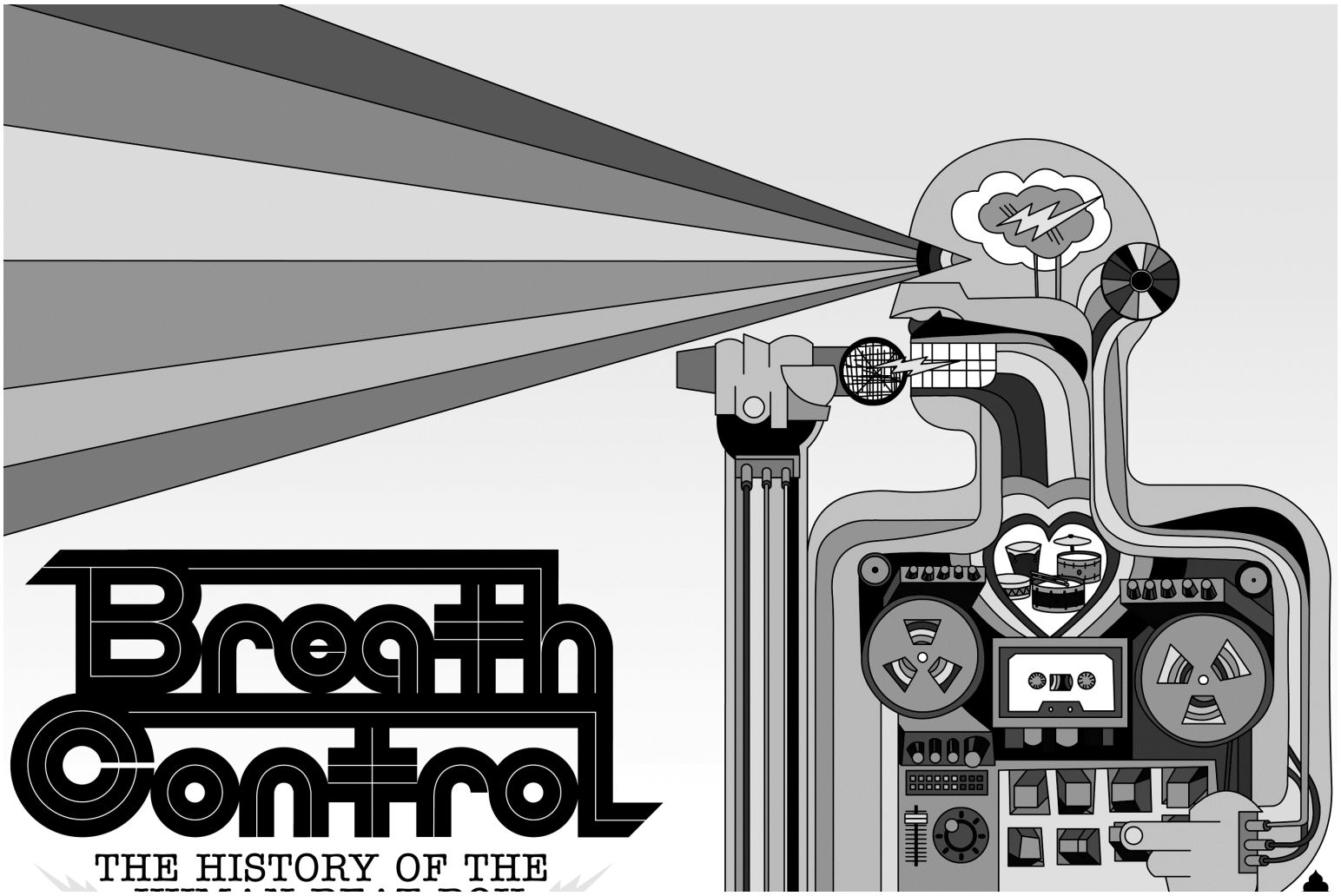
And they were teenagers driving school buses? Yeah. My two uncles and my dad, they drove school buses when they were 14 or 15. Everybody worked during segregation. The movie's actually about these sisters that took attendance on the bus. We just used that situation to create this experimental narrative. My producer budgeted it $450,000. So I've got that.

Nick Flynn has a book called *Another Bullshit Night in Suck City*. The book got great reviews a few months ago. It's a memoir about his dad. Nick worked in a homeless shelter and one day his dad showed up. I did some films about poets. When I was in Rome, there was this resident poet named Mark Holiday, he actually wrote something for me to shoot. And this guy named Vincent Katz who was also a resident poet, I did a little film on him, too. And I'm doing one on Nick Flynn, too. He's got this poetry book called *Blind Huber* about this French cat who studied bees in the 18th Century. I took a student to Blacksburg, Virginia and we shot these beehives on the Virginia Tech campus.

I've got some other short films floating around here that I can't even make sense of, and I want to do that film about the race car driver and the bank teller. You've heard of the de Medici family, the ones that bought art back in the day? One of them was black, Alexandro de Medici, and I'm thinking about putting him in there because he was a banker and a traveler. Maybe have a little classical soliloquy about that. That would relate to the speed of the race car and the money in the bank. And he was also killed by his cousin.

The thing I saw about that family was that they were trying to figure out what happened and they were like, "Yeah, we don't think a lot of that stuff happened, but they probably did kill each other once in a while." When you've got money and power and greed and ass, it's gotta be done. Anyway, it'll be about that kind of stuff. I think it'll be a feature, like 60 minutes or more. The film's also about landscapes, because if you're a banker and you're giving out loans, you're really dictating who lives where. Plus I've got to do these SPICE BUSH paintings, like the colors and stuff. I have some descriptions of spice bush butterflies, so I want to make some paintings.

Is that going in the film? Nah, that's just art.


Breath
Control
THE HISTORY OF THE

JOEY GARFIELD is co-director (with Jacob Craycroft) of the great new documentary BREATH CONTROL: THE HISTORY OF THE HUMAN BEAT BOX (2002). An important, clever and funny doc on one of the unique facets of early hip-hop, the feature-length doc combines new interviews and performances with amazing archive footage, making what must be the first comprehensive document of the subject. It is screening in film festivals across the country and currently looking for distribution. Garfield was also a major contributor to the Beastie Boys' short-lived yet influential magazine, *Grand Royal*, and recently created the extras for the DVD release of STYLE WARS.

More importantly, Garfield has played a rubber monster at least 5 times. When I found this out during the 2002 CineVegas Film Festival, I asked Joey to explain. "Oh, if the opportunity arises, I'll lace up."

CINEMAD: We gotta start with the famous ones first. How'd you get the gig for the Octopus Monster (in the Beastie Boys video for *Intergalatic*)? Because you were already writing for *Grand Royal* Magazine?

JOEY GARFIELD: I was working on their magazine, doing a couple articles for different issues. I was playing basketball with them, and I guess they just checked my dimensions, you know, gave me the once over, and realized which one of their teammates they could torture the most. (laughs). And, you know, I fit the suit.

That's awesome. That was basically it. The only thing they didn't check was how to breathe well in that kind of mask thing. And stinky and hot. Foggy. It fogged my eyes up.

We've gotta talk about smashing buildings, everyone's dream. Well, we had to be really careful. You can only do it for a little bit. But at the end, I got to die, I got to fall and splat in a bunch of shit. We got the couple karate chops here and there. A little defamation and shebuyah. You gotta love it. I was given these oven-mitted lobster, oven mitt claws. The robot was just serious business, man. He could really do some damage. But he could only look forward and punch forward. I could only look left and right-- like from sides, like a horse. So it was this messed up challenge in the first place.

You already did something before that, though – another rubber suit… (Octopus Monster) was my third performance. First was the giant chicken from the *Get to Know Your Chicken* music video by Cibo Matto. Then the giant potato for Conan O'Brien. And - this is kind of obscure - I was in this French video, this thing called The Mud Man.

But it was a suit. Not mud on you. In the video it was a suit. It was manufactured. They didn't design the suit. Mud Man, he's in a diaper in this giant-- just looked like a big old dookey.

And then the pterodactyl. The pterodactyl was with the Bert Fershners Comedy Group. That was actually our own conceived thing. Everything else was, you know, puppet man for hire.

So how did you get the first one [the chicken]? I'd been spending time with the director, Evan Bernard, we were friends. And we kind of came up together in film. He was thinking of going with this other guy. He goes, "Yeah, 'cause you know, he's a little bit taller." I said , "Well, anyone can fit the suit. But you have to fill the suit."

Genius. My ingenious ideas got edited out. But that was fun. I got to morph.

How'd that lead to the potato? I was in this comedy group with the Bert Fershners. Conan O'Brien, they're always looking for fresh new talent. They called the Fershners just to get a rundown of what anyone could do. So I got pegged for a puppet role. It was actually a baked potato. It had a big lump of butter on it. I think at one time we shot it with cellophane wrapping around it. And another time they think I was just au gratin.

What was the skit? They were introducing new characters for *Star Wars*, the new one with Darth Mal. So… Giant Potato. They superimposed me with this big, flaming hallway. This giant wallet, which was next to me, didn't fare as well. But I wasn't filling the wallet. Your whole head was covered, it was hard work.

The giant pterodactyl, that was a sketch where we're in the middle of this happy, beautiful song we did for Comedy Central. It was this really happy song about learning to try and be yourself. It's a real kid song. In the middle of it these two raptors walk on stage and decimate the two guys singing, but the soundtrack still goes, "You can make it if you try." So I was a pterodactyl in that.

Once in a while, you know, I put on the pterodactyl costume, walk around the house. You know, just get that feeling back. I was always jonesin' to be the mascot in my high school. I wanted to do a mascot so bad. This was the era where the San Diego Chicken was coming up. And I was, "Yo, get me in the suit!"

He had his own baseball card. That's sweet.

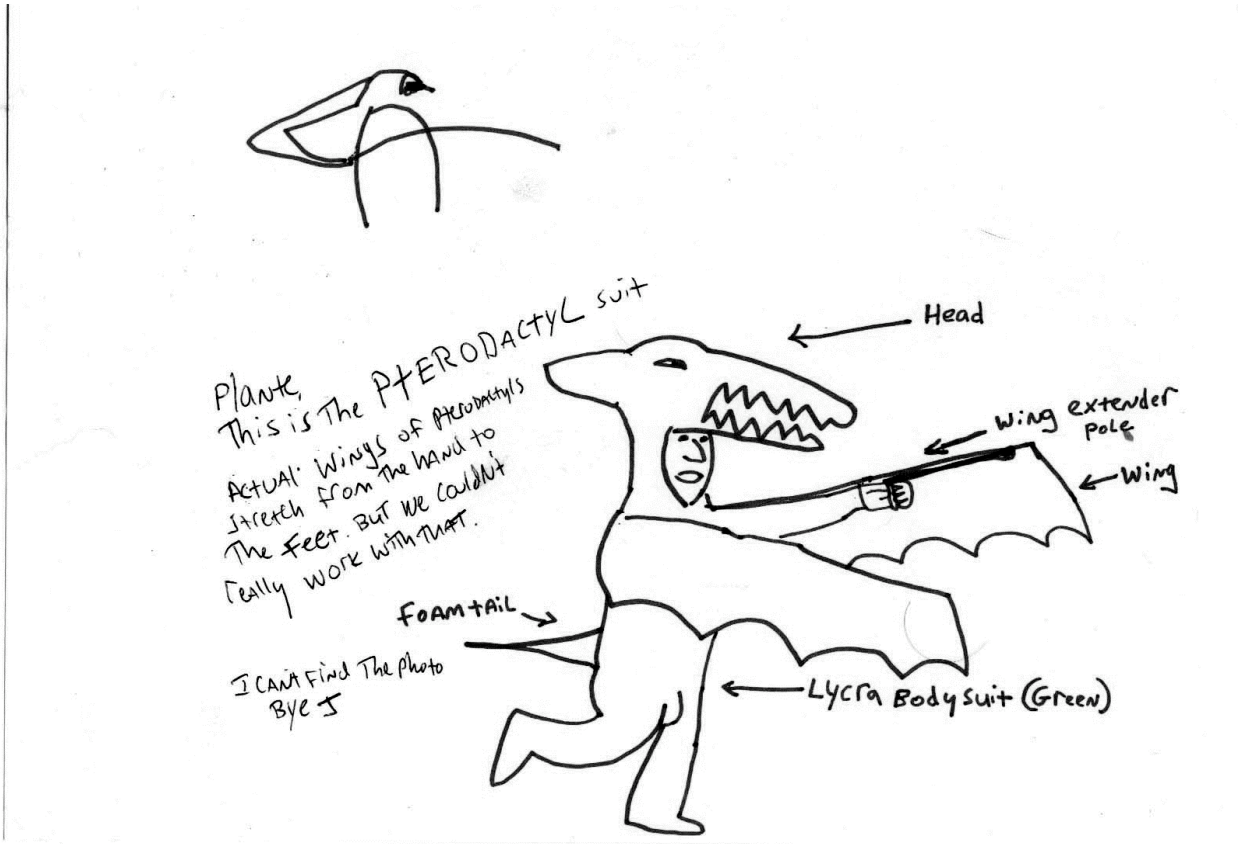
The '60s didn't have that, did they? They must've had mascots, but it wasn't the same thing. It wasn't Giant Cornhusker. Right, well, I think they had mascots, but then I think people learned how to work with foam -- the tools got better. The Muppet era came around. I think the biggest demise for (the chicken) was when he took off the mask, you got to meet the real guy inside. I think that really killed it.

Yep. There's no point. I saw that on *Real People*, or something. "Real Peep," it totally ruined it.

I saw a Mexican reality video show, like the reality shows here, but it's mostly just little kids puking. They showed two mascots at a high school football game getting into a full-on fistfight. Really? What was it? Like an alligator and a wildcat?

No, it was perfect. It was a Cowboy and an Indian. It was so perfect. It was at a high school game. And they even have interviews of them. But then they dubbed Spanish over it, so you can't hear what they're saying. It was just like the wrestlers trying to rip each other's masks off. Oh, that's fun!

I think the Indian actually won. I think he pulled the Cowboy's head off. They went down, and all these adults that are trying to hold back their laughter, ran up and separated them. It's a man's game.



What kind of direction do you usually get? "Go crazy and then come back over here. And then sit down. Can you pick that up?" "No, I can't. I have giant frying pans for hands. And that's a cell phone." Or whatever. (laughs)

How are all those suits? Are they comfortable? Not one of them was comfortable. Not fucking one. The mud man, I had so much chafe. Head chafe, leg chafe, belly reaching chafe. What happens is when you're a puppet, you just gotta think different. You gotta move differently than what you're normally used to. So when someone taps you on the shoulder, and you look to the right, that doesn't matter in puppet world. My (real) nose is right against all the hard foamy shit. You gotta, you know, slump along, and make the big turn right. By then whatever they're doing, it's probably over.

Chicken? Chicken was good. Little hot, but overall I could really get my groove on. I (the chicken) had a cool anarchy T-shirt on.

I thought they were starting to get smart and put fans inside heads now. That's like, you gotta wear a helmet in hockey, but the old school veterans, they don't wear the helmets. I actually got to go to Sesame Street. And met Carol Finney.

Big Bird? The Bird. And he had a little TV monitor in there. Totally cheated. But I won't get into that. He could see what was going on…

But The Bird's an institution. The Bird is a complete institution. And his right arm doesn't work. I don't know if we can get in trouble for saying that. But his right arm doesn't work. Only his left arm works.

Kids probably figured that out by now. Hopefully. For the chicken, I was not only a chicken, but I was a red chicken. I guess in Japan they paint these chickens different colors. Kids aren't willing to buy yellow chicks, but if they see a blue chick, they want it. Or a red chick. It really happens. Then they die within a week, because they've been exposed to toxic paint. So I

was the red chicken that, you know, what happened when they lived and because of the toxicity became this angry, fuckin' chicken that grew fast and serious. I actually took in a human wife… uh, it got really crazy.

That's epic. That's what you look for when you're a giant puppet. You look for the epic. You look for the good work, you know? It's like shaking hands, letting little kids take pictures with you. If you're a giant puppet and you're (really) smiling when they take a picture, and it's not even your face, you should really think about the job.

So am I the only person who hasn't heard of the Fershners? No, a lot of people haven't, in fact. But we did some promos on MTV. We had a TV special on Comedy Central in '97 I think. Ran through the summer. But we kind of came and went real quick, 'cause we got -- you know that show Viva Variety?

Yeah, I remember that. So we got beat out by those guys.

We should say some stuff about BREATH CONTROL. What do you want to know? It's a movie, there's no puppets. I wish, I wish. I wish.

It's an amazing documentary on the history of the human beat box. And you were working on it forever. Yes, I worked on it for six years on and off. It started off, again, for a branch of the Beastie Boys. I was really pushing them to do something on Buff and the Fat Boys. There was something there that needed to be talked about. By the time I convinced them to do it, Buff died. Then I decided, "All right, I'm gonna really do this thing." These pioneers are getting older, and hip-hop is getting older. And the information you get-- there's not as much documentation as we need or want. This was something that's really important to hip-hop. And I come up from an era of hip-hop where it was about teaching one another. Trading information was the key. Now it's a whole lot more braggadocios.

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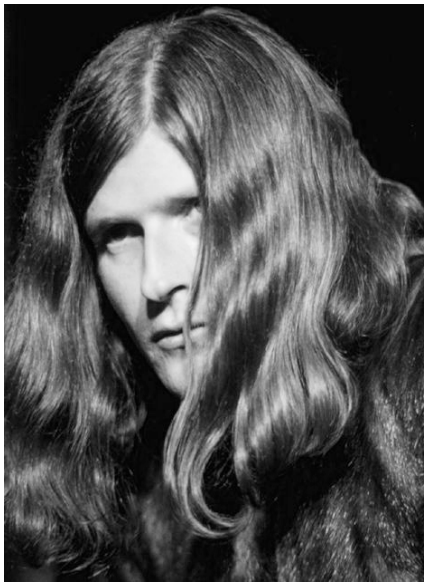
So how did you and co-director Jacob Craycroft work together? We call each other our second wives, always in the studio. We made a little ten-minute piece that got some height behind it, it showed at the Smithsonian Museum, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, and at the Brooklyn Museum with the hip-hop exhibit that was going on. So we did the feature.

But we're not trying to really get it into theaters. I want it on TV. 'Cause back in the day, you'd record breakdancers. You'd pause it and watch it over and over and over again, to get it down. And that's how you learned your moves. That's what I really want people to do with BREATH CONTROL. Watch this on TV and record it and copy it

The Biz Markie thing in the basement with the rats and the girl, it's weird, where was all that? That's like - there are certain things I don't like to reveal where, because it's too great where people's minds are. I got to go visit the set of Sesame Street. I got to go into Oscar's garbage can. People ask, "Well, what's it like down in it?" I'm not going to ruin it and say what was down there. Everyone's imagination is what's down there. Their garbage cans are probably a whole lot better than what I'm gonna say.

We were lucky enough to meet the late, great John Ritter briefly in June 2002 when he came to the CineVegas Film Festival in support of a film. While some stars wanted free flights for their agents, Ritter told us he was bringing his wife, nanny and their young child, but would pay for whatever we couldn't afford. He went to a local radio station and promoted the fest and film without us asking him to. After his own film played, he went to the UNLV student showcase (again on his own accord), watched all the films and stayed afterward to talk to the beginning filmmakers.

The next day he was in the hospitality suite signing autographs. We weren't sure what was going to happen as someone approached with a life-size Bride of Chucky doll. Ritter laughed and yelled for his wife to come look. Below is a photo from the event, as Breath Control co-director and rubber monster actor Joey Garfield got to meet the Tripper. Mr. Ritter did a human beat-box riff for the pic. And, a couple of days after quickly meeting us and tons of other folks, Ritter even remembered our names. A true class act.



CRISPIN HELLION GLOVER has finished his long-awaited, legend-surrounded, controversial, stunning debut feature film WHAT IS IT? Glover plans on personally touring with the film across the country, then following it with parts 2 and 3 of the trilogy. I guarantee a set of images and sounds you have not experienced before. Glover is easy to talk to, intelligent and cheerful.

CINEMAD: I saw the film many years ago; you came through Tucson and showed a rough cut. I've noticed some sort of changes.

CRISPIN GLOVER: That was a long time ago. What did you notice most changed?

It seemed to be much more structured. I did show it in various stages. That might have been an earlier cut. It was always approximately the same length it is right now [72 minutes]. It was never a shorter film than this. There was less information at certain points. When I was touring around with it I had almost everything I have now in it. There are two sequences in a graveyard, one is a graveyard set that has a lot of actors in it. That was the last thing I shot. And I did tour around without that bit. There's a lot of information in that section. I put a lot of subplot elements in that sequence. It could feel more structured now.

I read things that say, "This is the weirdest movie…" or whatever. And yet really there is a very simple, basic structure that has been there since it was a short film. There is somebody that gets locked out of their house and they go on an adventure trying to get back home, various things happen and then he gets back home. But there has been more added on since that basic structure.

How long has the film been in production? It's been 9 ½ years. This summer it will have been 10 years since I started shooting.

Did the film or your plans for it change over the long production? Yes, very much. It started out as a short film. After I'd done the first edit of the short film, it came together longer than it is now, I think 80-something minutes. I knew that was too long for the film. I also knew that I could make a feature film by adding some more depth to it. I knew I could put myself in it as an antagonistic character.

How do you know it is finished now? I had locked the film about six years ago. It really hasn't been a problem about me finishing it in terms of the artistic conception of it, as much as it has been about the material elements of finishing and working with people that could really help me as opposed to hinder. The worst thing of all for the film that really delayed it for five years was it got stuck at an optical house in New York. They gave me so many excuses. I was afraid to pull the negative away because the element of responsibility of it. If there was anything wrong with the negative and I paid money already, something wrong could happen. The fact of it is, they did damage my negative. As soon as the sound edit was absolutely completed, I went to

New York, I saw that the lab had not told me the truth and taken advantage. I brought the negative back to Los Angeles. There was a lot of restoration work that had to be done. A lot of damage had been done by the negative sitting around. A lot of dust, which digitally is a very extensive thing to get rid of. I had a hair in the gate [in one sequence] and that was digitally removed. The damage that the optical house in New York did was they cut the negative too close to where the cut was supposed to be. So when I telecined it the image jumps and ripples. It still is in the film, there are some small jump elements, I've had to live with it. Much of it has been restored and corrected.

Of course it was frustrating to talk to people about it because nobody really… you get the feeling that people end up thinking you're being flakey about it. It really wasn't the case. There were other issues as well, other technical problems but that was the culmination. I got caught between the optical house and the negative cutter who kept pointing fingers at each other, they've got to do this and they've got to do this. I didn't live in New York. And then I'm working and away some of the time as well.

Were the actors friends or professional actors? There is one actor, the fellow doing the Michael Jackson stuff. He had done some films before and some television earlier on. He was really good at matching. The reason that all of the Michael Jackson stuff is in the movie is because he was just doing that on the set naturally, I didn't tell him to do it. So I shot that and then I worked the other stuff around him.

A lot of the way the film is made is like that, where there are happenstances. There are things that were brought in because they looked good. They had an interesting image quality or color or something. Then things were made around those elements. A lot of the outtakes end up becoming part of the dialogue.

Was there traditional auditions for the rest of the actors? There was when it was a short film. I've done other projects and I haven't always auditioned [the actors]. This time mainly I wanted to see the level of functioning of each of the people. Most of the actors with Down's syndrome I worked with were very high-functioning people. Because Down's syndrome is extremely varied in terms of functionability. In the short film much of the actors were very able to remember dialogue. In the last thing I shot, in the graveyard with the woman who has that repetitive element and they are interviewing the minstrel, there are people that are more around that section that aren't verbal. They are more low-functioning people.

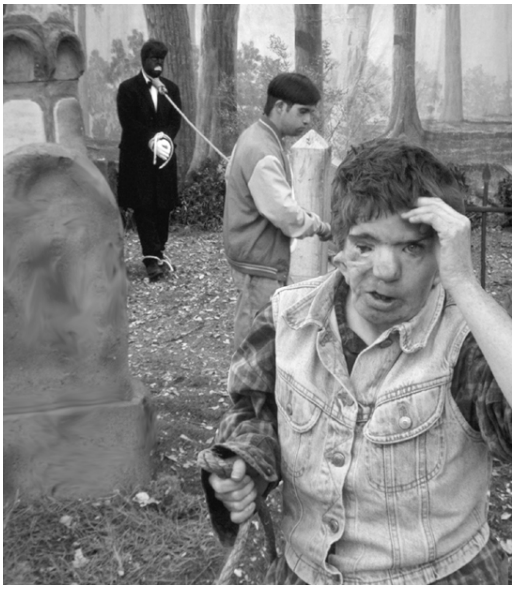
You know, the length of time the film is so irrelevant. A lot of people will think that had a lot to do with working with people with Down's syndrome. But that isn't the fact at all. I shot the film in 12 days all together, over a period of two and a half years.

Really the most important thing about the actors is I wrote it for them. I knew what they would be like in front of the camera. The most important thing for any kind of casting whether somebody has Down's syndrome or not is if somebody is enthusiastic. If they are enthusiastic and into the concept and enjoying themselves with it then really good things could happen. Every single person that I worked with was extremely enthusiastic.

You already knew Steven C. Stewart, the actor with cerebral palsy, right? Yes. I had known him already because he had written a screenplay. I had done an AFI film in 1982, THE ORKLY KID. That's a very good movie, I'm proud of that performance and the film. Its only 35 minutes but its still one of the few movies that I'm in that I think is an excellent film. That filmmaker, Trent Harris, was from Salt Lake, Utah, and knew a community of filmmakers including Steve Stewart. Steve had written a letter to the news station that Harris worked at. Another filmmaker named Larry Roberts worked there and did a news story about Steve's situation.

What happened was Steve was a man of normal intelligence but he was very difficult to understand, he had severe cerebral palsy. They called him an MR, a mental retard, and he was imprisoned in this hospital for at least 12 years. They did a news story on him and consequently Steve was able to get out of the nursing home and was able to live a relatively free life. He was still in a place for people with disabilities but it was much better.

The story [Steve Stewart wrote] has to do with, I like to say a psychosexual retelling of his point of view of life. But his point of view is naïve. So there's an almost folk artist element to it. They also call it "outsider artist" element. But its fantastical as well, its not just a straight-forward retelling. Its very unique and I'm glad we shot it. The money I made from the first CHARLIE'S ANGELS (2000) film I put straight into making the Steve Stewart film.



The minstrel betrayed by his concubine?

That was originally going to be a completely separate movie that was his own story basically. But there were concepts I realized in all these screenplays that worked together. Commercially it made sense for me to put him into the feature version [of WHAT IS IT?] and make his film a sequel. So then this dueling demigod auteur element comes between us. The second film is absolutely Steve's story. The third film is more my story. I co-wrote it with people but it's very pertinent to my own psychology. But Steve's film is 100% him. I co-directed that film and produced it. It's still ultimately his movie. I am very excited about it. It probably will be the best film I ever have anything to do with in my career.

That was another delay on WHAT IS IT? There was at least a year where I was just concentrating on Steve's film. He was 62 and even though cerebral palsy is not degenerative he was starting to choke on his own saliva and one of his lungs had collapsed. So it became pretty apparent that if we didn't shoot soon it wouldn't happen. We shot it and then he died within a month of us finishing.

If the third film in the trilogy is about you, how much of WHAT IS IT? would you say is you? That I would say is 100% [laughs]. It's hard to say, I won't say that everything is about me personally. There are things that come in, like I said, because they look interesting or because there is something amusing about it or something like that. In a very organic fashion I wrote it with the film blocks that I was editing with. There aren't too many films made like that. It has to come from your psyche somehow.

You have talked about how everyone is making pro-culture films now and not too many filmmakers are creating counter-culture work. I've been able to analyze what my interests are since I was quite young. You can call things various art movements or counter-cultural movements. But I realize that a lot of the things I've had interest in throughout my life are usually some kind of media that has to do with countering the culture that is at hand. Not necessarily this culture but other cultures when they've been reactive to certain things. Like the surrealists being reactive to the culture surrounding them. Right now there is a very different culture than what the surrealists or the hippies were reacting to.

I think it is very bad for the culture itself when there is only one point of view about things. That is what's happening today. If there's not discussion it turns into stupidity. It sounds a little bit overly polysyllabic but it's simple: There's a totalitarian esthetic of corporate pro-culturism. That infuses itself ubiquitously. [laughs] The thing of it is, when there's a generation or more of people that have grown up with only one point of view of what is considered right and how to think and what should be published and what shouldn't be published… then if anyone does anything about that at all, that person is really thought of in a bad way and very bad things will be said about that person.

I've written a lot of screenplays before I've finally made this movie. Its really just been a feat of getting the film made inexpensively. This doesn't really resemble the type of screenplays I've written previously. I've written much more structured screenplays that were to be shot in a certain time period and the film was to represent that screenplay. This was a different way of making a movie than I had planned to make it originally. I'm not upset about it, I'm happy to have taken this and made it work. I'm proud of that.

But I've noticed something while I've taken meetings or talked to people about concepts. I've written screenplays that I wanted to be what I would call a commercial type of movie. But there is always something in them here or there. They weren't necessarily as overtly counter-cultural as this particular film. But the was always something in it that had a concept or an idea. What I noticed in meetings was you'll get people saying, "We wouldn't want to say that." A very seemingly innocent thing to say. But if you think about it, well, why not? [laughs] Why not say whatever *that* is? Why be afraid of saying anything at all? I'm funding this [personally] because corporate kinds of entities were questioning the concept of funding a film that had a majority of people with Down's syndrome as the cast. It isn't just that they were concerned about working with those actors. It was the concept of a majority of actors in a film having Down's syndrome and the film not being about Down's syndrome. That is a counter-cultural concept. There was no interest.

So I thought I should explore that sensibility. Go 100% in that direction. Find the things that you are not supposed to talk about, you're not supposed to deal with, you're not supposed to say at all. It doesn't even necessarily have to delve into it, just have it be part of the fabric of the texture of the universe that the film exists in. Its funny to me. I personally don't find these things [in the film] offensive. I've seen some reviews where people say it is made to shock. I don't find anything in the film shocking in the least. Why are none of the elements of the film even delved into for an iota of a second anywhere in the media in the United States at all? The pro-cultural media state has become so ubiquitous that people don't realize that there is a whole universe of thought that is being kind of wiped out by the fact that corporate interests aren't allowing people to think on many different levels than they should.

When I toured around with the film I got positive reviews. Now I've gotten a few positive reviews but I feel I've gotten more negative reviews recently. I'm not certain what it is. I know the film hasn't gotten worse. [laughs] I know the film has gotten better. A lot has happened in the last six years since the film has been locked. I'll be curious about it. I do expect good reviews. I did get some from big magazines and newspapers before. Are people afraid they'll lose their job if they say something positive?

Think of the type of reviewer that the big paper would hire in the first place. They are not going to like the film. There isn't even groundwork there for you to deal with. Yes, yes. What is it that, if there is a generation or so raised in this thinking… But I know that's not 100% true because when I go on tour and show the film I have people coming up to me and get positive reaction and response. I would say from Sundance I've seen the most negative reviews for the film. I saw three separate reviews that all watched the same film and they even came up with some of the same references but they were references to things that were not in the film at all!

Blood ... Is it satisfying?

[laughs] I don't know if they were referencing each other or if they were genuinely thinking that they'd seen things that aren't in the movie. It's bizarre to me.

I think that ends up being a positive. Sure. Part of the film is to not dictate to what people think. I corrected one person because they said something that was so outrageous to the point that it would make it seem as though I was doing something that was illegal. They wrote that there were kids with Down's syndrome having sex with each other. That's just not the case! There are no children in the film at all. And nobody has sex in the film. There are definitely graphic elements in it. Strong imagery…

The real issue is handicapped persons are not allowed to be actors in this society, they are expected to play themselves and that's it. I always stress that this isn't a film about Down's syndrome at all. What I very much wanted to do is treat these individuals as competent actors exploring interesting things. I didn't want to point to the people as people with Down's syndrome particularly. Just as people in [the film's] particular universe and they are trying to accomplish certain things. I do not consider this film a 'cause' film at all. But if one goes into that level of it, I consider that much more of a positive outlook on the people than putting them in these cutified, puppetized, muppetized non-realistic elements that happens so much in movies dealing with people with handicaps. That to me is very irritating.

Did you know Adam Parfrey before the filming? [The writer and boss of underground publisher Feral House books plays a key role in the film.] Yes. I had known Adam quite a few years already. Of course he wasn't originally in the short film. That was another thing that grew separately. I knew I wanted him to be somebody that wanted to become like a snail and that he was jealous of certain things. A jealous type of character. I didn't know what he should look like. Everybody in the movie has kind of a look, including myself. Arbitrarily I had him in blackface. Then there's the fellow on the set doing the Michael Jackson thing. It didn't come in til much later that Parfrey's character was going to want to become Michael Jackson. One might think that these things were designed from the beginning but it's more that I'm open to, ok, these things can be connected together, that's fine. I wasn't connecting them together myself. Sometimes I did in my own mind. Often they were just things that happened and they correlated. A lot of that had to do with not censoring it.

Because of the surface level issues people have, I think audiences are going to miss the film's subtext of fame and celebrity. Part three deals with it even more specifically but this deals with it in a poetic fashion. No question, to me, what I am reacting to in this film, is growing up within this world. My father's an actor, my Mother's a dancer and an actor, I've grown up around the media and Hollywood and I've seen how people treat that and think about that. What it means within the culture. How there can be a certain kind of sensibility that I find disturbing. This film deals with that. It's hard to pick that out on some

Love between the minstrel and his concubine? Or is it betrayel?

levels but more than anything that is exactly what this film is reacting to. When I'm saying pro-cultural media, that is what I've grown up in. I've always wanted to be part of a counter-cultural film movement but there hasn't been one the whole time I've been acting. I started when I was 14, in 1978. My first film role wasn't until 1982. It's been frustrating for me.

Celebrity is another icon for people, a symbol, to the point where you can't walk down the street. When you say "you", what do you mean?

I mean a person who is a celebrity, whether it's literally you, or anybody that is in a movie that is recognizable. Personally I don't have a difficulty with that. I get recognized a lot. There's a way that people act about celebrity where they are both getting attention by pretending that they're not wanting to get the attention [laughs]. It has a hypocritical element to it. It's not like I wrote down ten sentences of what I was reacting to and then tried to visualize those sentences. If it fit in then to something, I was open to it existing. If it was on my mind, then some of those things come through. The minstrel character being jealous and wanting to be a special person that is recognized, it deals with that element, that is a big part of what people do in any art form. There can be a healthy element about that and there can be an unhealthy, neurotic element as well. Probably in this film it's dealing with it in the less healthy aspect [laughs].

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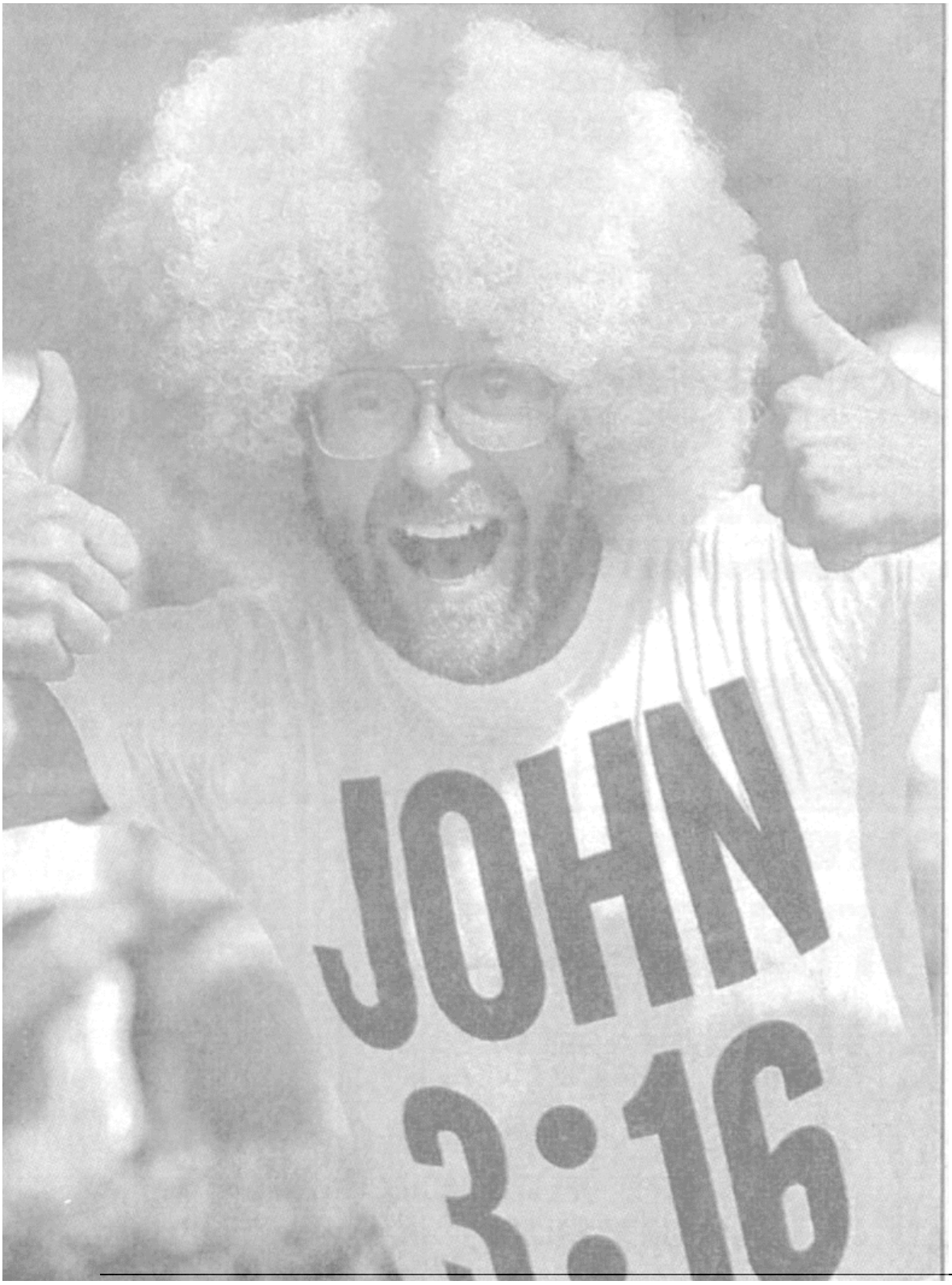
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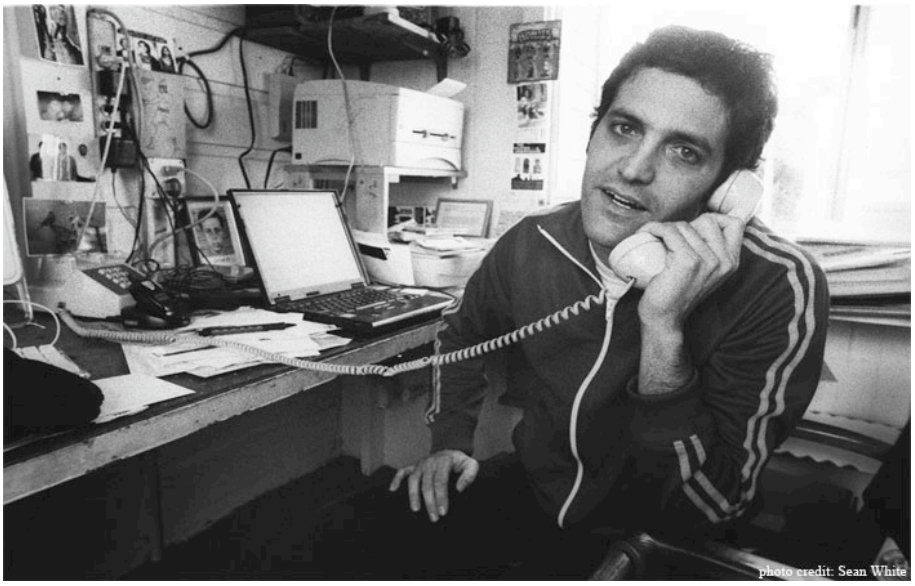


It is hard enough to make a documentary without overcoming the greatest obstacle: finding a worthy subject.

SAM GREEN has not had that problem, with his past films investigating The Rainbow Man, that guy who was always at sporting events holding up a John 3:16 sign and wearing a rainbow wig, a group of filmmakers attacking socialites with pies, a seminal girl band film and one of the most controversial, yet forgotten, group of 1960's radicals. His films (always made with collaborators) cut to the chase, offering sincere portraits of outside society, bring the audience closer to it's fringes. The films have played many film festivals and THE WEATHER UNDERGROUND (2002) just got Academy Award nominations for Green and co-director Bill Siegel. Other Cinema has just released a great DVD of his short films.

CINEMAD: Did you always want to make documentaries?

SAM GREEN: I never went to film school, but I did study journalism at UC-Berkeley, and Marlon Riggs, the documentary maker, taught there, so I studied documentaries with him, but it was all video. I never learned how to do film or anything. He was awesome. I got a master's degree. When I went there I wanted to be a newspaper reporter, but then I took this video class and it was really fun and writing was so lonely. I wasn't even that good at it. I would spend super long hours in front of a computer alone, being frustrated. And video, to me, was so much more fun and collaborative. After I took that class I changed direction.

What did he show in class? He showed all sorts of stuff. He was great because he, in a lot of ways, sort of showed me a direction that I wanted to go and ended up going, which was both a real rigorous journalistic approach, but at the same time, kind of an experimental impulse as well. I had not been super into film before that, and I saw some things there that really knocked me out and opened my eyes, like SANS SOLEIL (1983) by Chris Marker. Or SALESMAN (1969). …Seeing those movies kind of opened my eyes to this whole world that I really got sucked into, I guess.

Did you make RAINBOW MAN (1997) at school? I made some short pieces, but Riggs was dying at that time and the program was kind of falling apart, and there really just wasn't any support to do a longer film. So I graduated, and I figured I'd have to get a job, so I moved to LA and got this job working for Fox Television on this news magazine show. My job was to find footage of people, and it was a really dumb job and I needed something to keep me busy. I had read something about the Rainbow Man in a paper and really got curious. It really got under my skin, so I just decided to try to find shots of the Rainbow Man, because I could call up Major League Baseball to get stuff for stories, like they were doing a profile on Barry Bonds. I would just slip in, "Hey could I also have the 1977 World Series?" I started to acquire all this footage of the Rainbow Man, and at first it was just kind of a funny, goof, lark type of thing, but then after a while it started to become more serious. I was totally perplexed because my parents were kind of super-liberals, and so they didn't have a TV when I was growing up. I never watched TV, and I remember reading about him when I was in LA and thinking to myself, "How do I know who this guy is? How has he penetrated into my consciousness? I never even watch TV." So that was one of the things that interested me, that he had been so incredibly successful, in a way.

At least according to your film, it's misguided, but it's an interesting goal. The cult of celebrity is interesting, and then when you mix in the religion, and a crazy upbringing, the rest of the story. He sort of struck me as like the ultra-American. He seemed to have all the qualities of an American, only in super-extreme forms, like no family, no direction, no other values except TV. TV was his total reference point. That's obviously not a good recipe for having a stable, positive, peaceful life.

Was he pretty cooperative since you were another piece of his celebrity? I wrote him a letter. He'd been in prison for a couple years and nobody had ever visited him. He'd never had a single visit. I went once without a camera and talked to him. He was crazy about the idea because at that point, and I think it's actually still true, he felt like the world was still just about to end, and so I was a way for him to get the word out. It was weird when I actually did go back and interview him, I did this long interview, and you know how when you do an interview you save the more sensitive questions for the end, and one of the questions I saved in case he'd get upset was, "Do you think that the media, myself included, exploited you?" He had been really tense throughout the whole interview and it was the only time that he smiled. He actually smiled and chuckled. He said, "Actually, I'm the one that's exploiting you. Who else is getting interviewed in this prison today?" And it sort of knocked me back for a minute. You know, that's the way he thinks of it. He feels like he's using the press, although I would disagree with that.

He's still in prison? Yeah, he's gonna be there forever. I showed it in Europe, and the first question was always, "How is this guy in prison for life?" To them, it makes absolutely no sense.

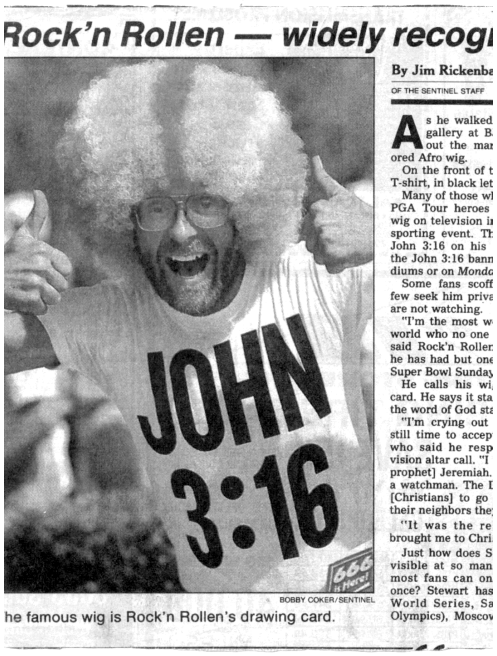
It's because we're scared of the mentally ill. Yeah, or just somehow this crazy guy is stuck in the non-crazy part of the criminal justice system, which is itself crazy.

Is he actually in a prison or is it a mental health institution? He's in Vacaville, which is like a prison, but it's prison for… not people who are certifiably crazy, but I think they pump them full of drugs and stuff like that. It's a medical prison.

When did you find out about the incident in your film PIE FIGHT '69 (2000)? It was probably like '98 or something. The year after RAINBOW MAN, I started working on WEATHER UNDERGROUND, and I was at the Bettman Archives in New York, which is this great photo archive that has since been bought by Bill Gates and is not accessible anymore. I was going through folders of photos, and one of the photos was this really funny one of a woman in a tutu throwing a pie, and it said, "San Francisco Film Festival, Opening Night, 1969." And it didn't say anything more than that and I was completely intrigued. So when I got back I got a couple of articles and read about what happened… the ringleader was Peter Adair, who was a huge hero of mine.

The first real film that had moved me had been… this is a little bit of a digression. I'd had a job in college showing movies in classrooms, and this was back in the days when you would bring a 16mm film into the class, set up the projector, and show it. Most of the movies sucked. I showed INSIDE THE HUMAN BRAIN in psychology classes like 400 times, and these were all old educational movies, but once I went to a comparative religion class and showed this movie HOLY GHOST PEOPLE (1967). It's Peter Adair's first movie, and it's a documentary he made when he was actually still a college student at Antioch College. It's about this church in West Virginia, Appalachia, in the late '60s where they handle snakes. Like that's part of their ecstatic approach to religion where they handle snakes and speak in tongues. They handle rattlesnakes. It's fucking amazing. This is a verite documentary in black and white. Unbelievable. After I saw it in class, my jaw dropped and I took it back to the office and just projected it on the wall and watched it again. I was amazed. I'd never seen a movie that movie me like that, so Peter Adair was always a big hero of mine.

When I got these articles about the pie fight incident and read that Peter Adair had been the ringleader, I was really intrigued, and also the articles had mentioned that the radicals had filmed this event with cameras and they wanted to make a film about it. I just started to ask around to find out about what happened to this film, and nobody really knew. So it became this big mystery, and then I talked to Bill Daniel, you know, like the Zelig of the underground film world. He said, "Oh yeah, I found that film once in the free box at Film Arts Foundation." You know in the lobby there's this box where you can put things if you just want to give it away. I was amazed. I said, "Well, what did you do with it?" And he said, "I gave it back to Peter Adair," who was real sick with AIDS and had subsequently died. So I asked around, I went to Peter Adair's family and his business partner and his old boyfriend, because now I knew that the film existed, but it had sort of disappeared again. Nobody had it and I went through


Rock'n Rollen — widely recogi

By Jim Rickenba

OF THE SENTINEL STAFF

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Just how does S visible at so man most fans can on once? Stewart has World Series, Sa Olympics), Moscov

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BOBBY COKER/SENTINEL

he famous wig is Rock'n Rollen's drawing card.

THE RAINBOW MAN (1997).

all of his stuff and I couldn't find it. This went on for a couple years so I sort of figured it was lost. Then one day, late at night, I got a call from Bill Daniel, saying, "Sam, you won't believe this. I was in the basement of ATA (Artists Television Access) going through some unmarked boxes and I found that film again." The odds of that, that's almost divine, there's no other way of explaining it. So I rushed over to look at it and it was amazing footage, it was beautiful. At that point, I was really inspired to make that little movie.

Were the people involved happy that something finally came out of the film and incident? Yeah, you know, the whole thing had been a complete disaster. It was like if somebody made a movie about your worst date or something, uncovered footage about it and made a documentary about it thirty years after the fact and people liked it. I think it'd be this bizarre but somewhat heartening experience.

What drew you to the Weather Underground? I had always known about the group and I loved the story. With RAINBOW MAN I really loved that story. It resonated with me emotionally and it felt to me like it was a story that was almost a parable. This is what I liked about it. It was a really fascinating story, but it evoked ideas and themes and kind of said something in a very indirect way. It was both kind of dramatic and sexy and interesting, but there was also a lot of substance at the heart of it.

And at that point, was it sort of a forgotten thing? I think it's more than that. It was always weird to me that when you work on a documentary, you have eight billion conversations with people about what you're working on. Anybody over 40 that I talked to about it, said, "Oh, wow, the Weather Underground," and 99.9% of people under 40 I mentioned it to would just have this blank look. They'd never heard of the group. I think, in a way, it doesn't fit into the sort of clean cartoon version of the '60s in history at this point. You know, the idea that everybody was a hippie and they all went to Woodstock and protested the war and then the war stopped and everybody got into disco and got jobs. I don't think it's a conspiracy to suppress a story like this so much as it's hard to write about it. You have to write about it in a sophisticated way to fit it into those narratives.

Were the people in the WU pretty much on board? Oh, no. They all initially said it was a horrible idea. None of them wanted it to happen at first. "Why bring this up?" It took a long time to get the people who had been in the group comfortable with us to the point where they would actually participate in the project.

How did you even find them? Some of them are kind of public, but most of the others, it became pretty clear early on that there were going to be good ways and bad ways to find them. Once I just got somebody's number off the internet and called

them up. I said, "Hi, I'm doing a documentary on the Weather Underground. Can I talk to you?" There was this long pause and she said, "I don't know how you got my number but never call me again," and hung up. I just realized then that that's not a good way to do that. We would talk to people and sort of develop a relationship with them and then ask them to help us get in touch with other people. You know, one person could call another and say, "These guys are doing some research and they're OK, they just want to talk to you in a very off the record way." Almost anybody will have coffee with you just to see who you are, and after a while we were able to impress upon people that we were serious and it wasn't Fox News, it was an independent film.

Did you at least have the RAINBOW MAN to show them? I was kind of uncomfortable with that. I didn't want them to think that I was kind of putting them on the same level as the Rainbow Man. The only person who really asked was Mark Rudd and he loved it. I was completely shocked. He said that he'd never really talked to anybody about it, and he had been sort of a famous guy, so certainly over the years people had tried to get him to talk. He said later that it was THE RAINBOW MAN that had made him decide to talk to us because he felt like it was kind of nuance and dealt with the subject matter in a kind of complex way and wasn't black and white. I was surprised but happy to hear that.

How is it that you were working with Siegel? I lived in New York in the early '90s and I got this job working on a documentary series about Muhammad Ali, just doing photocopies and then I started doing research. We had mutual friends and I ran into him one day when he was looking for a job, so I helped him get a job there. We ended up working together for a year on this series, this totally ridiculous project. It was a lot of fun and we became friends. We had these common interests in history and documentaries, so when I started to get into the Weather Underground film, I really like working with people and almost all my films have been done with somebody else.

How did you go about deciding what was important and what had to be included and how do you figure out what order all those things are? That was really hard. With documentary, you're always kind of subtly rearranging chronological events. The line between fiction and nonfiction is blurrier than most people think. I'm not making stuff up, but just sort of adjusting sometimes. With the Weather Underground, there were all these people who had a.) been in the group, and you had to have your shit straight for them, and b.) all the people who had lived through that time and had strong feelings about the group, either pro or con. I felt a huge responsibility to know what I was talking about and to get it right. The editing took a long, long time just to make the film communicate the story in a clear way and also to include enough context where it made sense and make sure that important things were in there, and on top of that to make it work as a narrative. Those are sometimes things that conflict. With a documentary, you show people a rough cut of the film and you do that over and over again, the most helpful person was Caveh Zahedi. He was amazing because I didn't know anything about dramatic film. He said real early on that you've got to make this work like a feature film. You sort of have to take that structure and use it, and I haven't got nothing against that. If those kinds of things work, I'm all for it. It's a real formula and I didn't adopt it a hundred percent, but the ideas behind it are really sound.

Was there anything that you thought would work and you ended up taking it out? I went through all sorts of crazy ideas. I had this great footage that I loved and this whole section I put together. I was trying to develop this sort of sub-theme for the movie about the consolidation of the media and sort of explain why nobody under 40 has ever heard of the Weather Underground. I was in the middle of editing and I read *1984* which I'd read in high school and thought was cool, but I read it again and I was flabbergasted by how good and how sophisticated it was. There was this quote in there, and I'm paraphrasing here, "Whoever controls the present controls the past, and whoever controls the past controls the future," and there's a lot to that. The idea that whoever is in power now controls what we know of history or how we think about history and people's notions of the past inform what they're going to do in the future.

I tried for a long time to work in this more experimental thread through the film that evoked these ideas in a very nondidactic way, and it never worked. Eventually I had to cut it out. That kind of broke my heart because one of the films that I loved and was kind of an inspiration for me in making WEATHER UNDERGROUND was DIAL H-I-S-T-O-R-Y (1998). It's amazing. It's a really smart movie about lots of big ideas but never explicitly so. It's very experimental in that it's just this weird history of the hijacking phenomenon without anything else that's explicitly articulated and it's just a compilation of great footage. I was aiming to do something that was in that direction in terms of being experimental but I kept getting pushed in a more straight direction just by the nature of the story and the kind of responsibility that I felt to make it clear.

So did you show the people in the Underground rough cuts at all or was it just understood that they would just see it at the end? There was never anything said about anything like that, but we did all the interviews before September 11th, and before September 11th, the story was just this odd piece of forgotten history that nobody really cared about. After September

THE WEATHER UNDERGROUND (2002).

11th, obviously the context was so much more charged and people were going to take it a lot more seriously, so it was important to me to show it to all of them when it was done, not so much to get their feedback, but just so they would know what they're getting into. I wanted all of them to be OK with it. We really hadn't thought what would happen if they weren't, but we went around and with everybody watched it, just a VHS tape. They had criticisms of it, but everybody was on board. They've all done a lot of screenings, except for David Kilbourn, who's in prison.

Was there anything that you found out about them that you didn't expect or was everything pretty well-reported? I had always thought that if you bomb a building, they go out and buy the bomb and put it in the building and that's it. Takes a couple hours. But it was a really big, pretty impressive operation. They would get a hotel room a couple days before and people would fly in from around the country who knew about how to do the different parts of this, and they had to get all the parts in ways that couldn't be traced, and get people to take care of things and build it and test it, and it went on and on for a couple of days and involved a lot of people. Then they'd all split, disappear, leave the town after that, go somewhere else for a while. That was kind of surprising.

Instead of a comic book sort of way with capes and masks and shit. Right.

So after that, when did you finally finish it? We finished it at the end of 2002 and showed it for the first time at Sundance in 2003, so a little more than a year ago.

Was it preaching to the converted, or was it a lot of mixed feelings? It depends. In general, it depends on where I'm showing it. In a way, it's never preaching to the converted, though, because even if it's an audience of a lot of people who are on the left, a lot of them hate the Weather Underground anyway, so it's a controversial subject even on the left. Those screenings, there's often a lot of people who stand up and have a lot of negative things to say, and at a lot of more mainstream screenings, people will say, "Why are you supporting terrorism?" Stuff like that. To me, that's like a softball pitch because that's a very easy question to deal with. I don't necessarily consider this terrorism. Terrorism, to me, is killing or hurting innocent people to make a political statement or to achieve political ends. This was the destruction of property. Bombing is a strong word for what they do. They put like a stick of dynamite in a bathroom and blow up a couple of toilets. They did 25 bombings and never hurt anybody, so to me, it's closer to the Boston Tea Party, which was the destruction of property to make a political statement and those people are revolutionary heroes, they're not terrorists. But anyway, Sundance was cool. It was the first time I really showed it, and it got a lot of buzz and the screenings were all sold out and two of the people from the film were there. It was a pretty phenomenal way to premiere the film.

Do people in the industry and distributors take documentary filmmakers seriously as filmmakers, or is it just that you're stuck with the content and that's all people care about? Yeah, it's pretty much that. At this point, some documentaries are making a couple million bucks, so they kind of get taken seriously in that sense, but it's still like nobody cares

about it, which I love. I think one of the bad things about documentaries starting to make money is that I'm afraid it's going to attract a lot of assholes, the same assholes who are in the feature film world.

So are you supposed to go to meetings about the Academy Awards, or do they just send you a pamphlet about what to wear and where to go? The weird thing was is that for a couple days I never even heard from them.

So you just heard that you were nominated? Yeah, but never heard from them, and I started to wonder if maybe it was a mistake. But eventually I called them and was like, "Hey, it's me," and they were like, "Oh, we were gonna call you," like when you're trying to blow off somebody, it was the same thing. They don't really tell you much, like what to wear or anything. I went online and looked at what other people wore. I had always heard that you could get free clothes, although I didn't know how to do it. Like, do you just go into a mall and yell out, "I want some free clothes!" But you know who hooked me up?

Who? Elizabeth Subrin.

Really? How did she know? She lives in New York and moves in rarified circles, you know, and she emailed some friends of hers at this designer Mark Jacobs, who I didn't know about but I think people are impressed. They were like, "Yeah, have him call us." So I called him and the guy was like, "Yeah, no problem. We'll FedEx you a tuxedo." It was like they don't realize that it's just me.

And this is assuming just because you're going to be seen on TV at the awards. I mean, for them, they want people to see their clothes, but I was still just like, God.

What else? Did you get like a gift bag or fruitcake or what? Nothing, man. Nothing. They don't do nothin' for you. The whole thing ended up nearly breaking me financially. It's funny. I just get poorer and poorer. People sometimes look at the box office totals on Yahoo, and they'll see Weather Underground on there and get in touch with me and say, "Dude, you must be rich! The money's pouring in!" And I'm literally getting poorer and poorer. I'm going to wearing a barrel in a couple months. But it was really fun, that was the most amazing thing and kind of surprising thing. It was super fun. I ran into Prince. That was the high point for me. I turned into this hallway and literally ran into him, like I was face to face with him, and I was so starstruck and shocked that I screamed and I went, "It's Prince!" He kind of just looked at me like I was a total idiot and went around me. But that was the high point for me.

How fast did people realize you aren't a celeb? I think they realized that when we walked up. I mean, I'm not going to get a limo. Those things cost tons of bucks. We all walked up and I think that was a dead giveaway. When you walk up in LA, you might as well be carrying a neon sign above your head saying, "I'm nobody."

So what did you guys drive? We took taxis to the hotel next door.

Did you have some badge saying, "It's cool, I'm supposed to be here." Yeah, and that was weird because the red carpet is divided into two halves. The riff raff goes down one side and everybody gets kind of hustled along, and all the stars are on the other side, and the nominees as well. That was so bizarre. It was one of the most surreal spaces I've ever been in, because it's like you're in this thing and there's like hundreds of screaming photgraphers, literally this wall of photographers and they're all screaming, like, "Nicole! To the left!" And then to us they were screaming, "Get the fuck out of the way! Security! Get those people out of there!" We just kind of started to lurk in the background, and it was totally fascinating. This'll sound a little new age-y, but the energy was totally bizarre, because there were also bleachers where people had camped out for days to get these seats and they're all screaming, so you're just kind of at the focus point of this intense blast of energy, and I was just sitting there phoning people trying to explain to them how fucking weird it was. I had never been in a weirder place. It's like Vegas where it's so far beyond weird that there's no point in judging it. It's just pure spectacle. For ethnographic value, it's completely fascinating.

Did they seat you high up or what? I knew this was going to happen. All I wanted to talk about was my serious work and all you want to do is be a starfucker. No, we got four seats right down about ten rows from the front, and my whole posse, we got about a million seats for them in the back. But we were sitting next to Ted Turner and in front of Faye Dunaway, so that was pretty weird.

Sam Green at the Academy Awards.

Is there still no way for somebody who wants to make documentaries to kind of navigate making a living? I'm convinced that the only way to do it is to make films really fast and make 'em for TV and get paid while you make 'em. Anybody I know who's done that has started to make shitty films. I'm just going to keep doing it as long as I can. I do a few college screenings and make a little money off that, but I teach and that's how I make money, and I also live in a pretty low-budget way.

I think it's age 50 where people just kind of… Fall off. "It's a young person's game."

Or then it's the wine commercials, the comedy with Robin Williams… The bad corporate videos.

Yeah, I mean, you gotta plan your eventual sellout. The problem is at that point it's going to be for such little bucks, an exercise in humiliation. At that point I'm going to go to law school. In California, you don't actually have to go to law school, you can just take the bar exam. Very few people do it, but I'm just gonna study hard for a year.

Do you have another film lined up? I'm doing something, it's a real messy idea at this point, but I want to do something that's more experimental, a documentary that weaves together unrelated stories to kind of make a meta-narrative, in a way, that would be about idealism and utopia, the idea of utopia, and the limitations of human nature. I'm approaching things differently than I have in the past where I've always had a story that evokes ideas, and here I'm sort of starting with the ideas and putting together a few stories. I don't know, it's still real unformed at this point. I gotta figure out a way to work in a celebrity, though. I'm trying to see how this idea can incorporate the rapper Ol' Dirty Bastard. If I could get ODB in this, I'd be really happy.

www.samgreen.to

The following is a near-exact transcript of a video interview done by me and filmmaker Michael Galinsky [HALF-COCKED (1994), HORNS AND HALOS (2002)] in the summer of 2000. At the time, we both worked for Insound, an internet company, and had been flown to Chicago to attend its underground film festival. Mike and I had been producing a series of video reports from film festivals and other events.

ALEJANDRO JODOROWSKY was the guest of honor at the Chicago Underground Film Festival that year. Mike and I were excited for the chance to interview him, since at that time, interviews with Jodorowsky were rare. We arrived at the hotel where Jodorowsky was staying, and I remember being quite hung over from the night before. Mike shot the video, and I asked most of the questions. The whole tape was meant to be edited down for sound-bites, to use in a five-minute digest of things happening at the festival.

Years later, I started to transcribe the interview. Since Jodorowsky's English was not the best, I quickly realized how difficult it would be to clean up the transcript for publication. Doing so, it seemed, might distort the flavor of our interaction. Instead, I decided to transcribe it, as best I could, word-for-word. This took over four years. In retrospect, my hung-over interview questions seem just as grammatically unstructured as Jodorowsky's imperfect English.

Despite this, our time with Jodorowsky proved quite profound. He had the air of a guru, and we found ourselves hanging on every word. — Ed Halter

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Ed Halter: Would you—I haven't been able to find much information on what went on in your life prior to filmmaking. Before you were a filmmaker, what kind of things were you involved with?

Alejandro Jodorowsky: [lifts eyebrows a bit] Before to be a filmmaker?

EH: Yeah

AJ: First, I am not a filmmaker. You know? I am a human being. I was a human being, doing a lot of things. Before to make picture, in art, I make one hundred theater plays, in Mexico. I work with Marcel Marceau. I make pantomime. I write for him masque. – a lot of pantomime, I write. I direct Maurice Chevalier, who was a singer, very, very well known, French. I direct a musical in Paris. I create in Chile the mime theater, eh? of 60 persons, who work for me. I make puppets, marionettes, also have a theater when I have 18 years old. When I have 15 years old, I was a Communist. Putting dynamite.

EH: Was this in Chile? Or in France?

AJ: Chile, Chile. I start in Chile and go to France, Mexico. And when I have served the seven years, I make FANDO Y LIS (1967). Because I have a whole life in art. I write poem, novels, histories, theater play. I make costume, music. I have a group that makes music. Well, I did everything in art, no?

EH: Now, prior to FANDO Y LIS, um, was your art part of any of the social or political movements of the time, that grew out of your earlier—

AJ: I was all the time anarchist. [grins] I hated politics. I hated. I all my life was in art, from 18 years old. I was worried about politics when I have 15 years. 15 to 17. And then I hate it.

EH: How did you come about making EL TOPO (1970)?

AJ: Ah…well, how? [raises eyebrows, rocks head side to side, smiles] I made made FANDO Y LIS in Mexico. With a money some person give to me, no? And it was a big scandal in Mexico. They showed that in the Acapulco Festival. They wanted to kill me, the Mexicans. They close the Festival forever. It was an enormous scandal. The picture is now innocent. In that time for Mexico—[spins hands around his head]—the mind of Mexico broke. I have an associate who sells the picture to America. For me, for me America was some kind of fairy tale. I think here was the most beautiful opportunity. It was marvel! They love art! I was very naïve, you know? And I then I came to New York and the producer say, "We'll cut the picture, because it's not for America." I say, "They'll do what they want." And they did what they want—was shit. Was three days in the theater, no more. An enormous failure. I want to have an interview. No one wanted to make an interview to me, no, not a newspaper, nothing. Was the biggest failure in my life. And then I say, okay, they are not making interviews to me. The next time, they will ask it to make interviews, and they will beg to make interviews. I came to Mexico. In Mexico, the fashion was to make cowboys picture. Very bad, awful. Then I say I will not—I will make a Western. But in reality, I was meditating Zen, no? With a Japanese master, in Mexico. He say to me, I make an Eastern picture, not a Western. I start to make EL TOPO, no?

EH: And, now, were you surprised at, uh, or, at its reception in the U.S. and how popular it was?

AJ: Yes! I was thoroughly surprised. I didn't expect anything. I did it because I wanted to do it. And, ehm…Alan Douglas was a hippie. [laughs] At the time, all the persons were taking drugs, no? And he knew John Lennon and Yoko Ono, and in the Elgin Theater they will present this night at 8 o'clock. He shows picture where, picture where three-hundred… [slaps his ass with his hand]

EH: Bottoms?

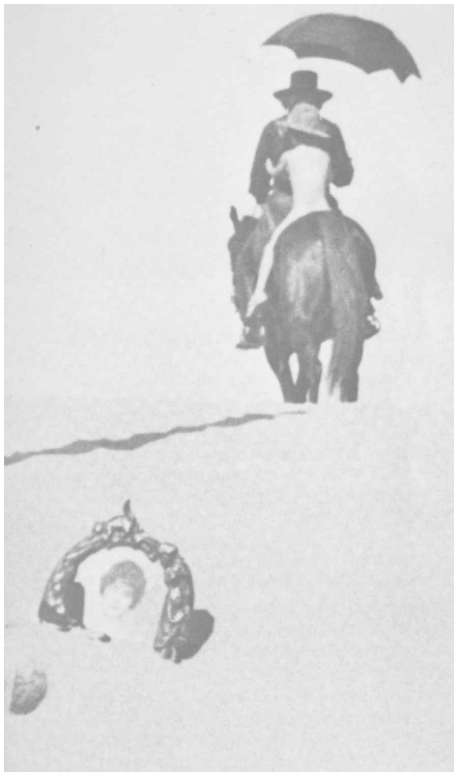
AJ: Bottoms. Yeah.

EH: Yoko Ono's film?

AJ: Fly go onto the body. [pecks at his chest with his hand] Idiocies like that, no? And then he say to John Lennon, all the critic will be there, and see this picture, and if you like, show this picture after your picture. And they agree.

EH: So the first time, you showed after John Lennon and Yoko Ono's films?

AJ: Yeah, because he want it. He like it. He introduce the picture. He was my first fan. And all New York was there, no? The critics. And they like it. And it started at the Elgin at midnight. They start to show EL TOPO. For the first time in United States, they show a picture at midnight. And then I came to New York. I went to the theater to see all the persons. The smoke of marijuana—[circles in the air with his hand] —was completely full of marijuana! Went I went to the screen to speak with



EL TOPO (1970).

them, they put in my hand cigarettes. So I came with the full hands of marijuana. And it was some kind of culture, you know. And then Alan Klein buy the picture, and et cetera, et cetera.

EH: Now at that time, many people perceived it as what they called a "head film" or "trip film." That was supposed to be a film to take LSD for. How did you feel about that perception?

AJ: I think that my picture was on LSD. I did not take LSD myself. Listen, went I went to the theater, then I came from Mexico…it was at midnight. I did not expect nothing, no? And one day I receive an invitation. First class travel in plane, to come here, New York, courtesy of the consulate. Bangladesh Consulate. Why me? I came there in the airplane. I come in New York was a big limousine, white limousine, and a very fantastic beautiful Indian girl. "I am for you." "For me?" "Yes, for you." "In all the way?" "Yes, in all the way." And I make love with her, what do you want? [laughs] Very interesting. Was a gift of heaven. They bring me on the first line of Bangladesh concert. And when the concert was finished, they bring me to a cabinet, or restaurant. All the rock musicians were there, no? Leon Russell, John Lennon, the Beatles, all them. All the musicians that were in the concert. And then I realize I was a cult artist, no? There, no? That was happened, really.

EH: Now that popularity helped you get your next pictures made, I assume.

AJ: Yes. THE HOLY MOUNTAIN (1973), was John Lennon who recommend to Alan Klein of Apple, his company, to give me one million dollars. For that time for me one million dollars was fantastic! I think I will do whatever I want. I made The Holy Mountain.

EH: And how long did it take to make THE HOLY MOUNTAIN?

AJ: Six months.

EH: That's it?

AJ: Yeah, six months, because six months of shooting. Because in the middle of the shooting, my associate escape with three hundred thousand dollars, to Israel. He's still there. Whisking, still. And then I was without money. How I will—in six week, eight week, I need pay to all the persons waiting. I have an assistant, an American assistant, and he say to me, "What will you do?" And I say, "Well, I will wait. God will give me six hundred thousand dollars." [Ed and Michael laugh] Envelope…what is envelope? In the newspaper, I win three hundred dollars.

EH: You won? In a lottery?

AJ: What is "envelope"? Like a packet. A packet in a newspaper. Three hundred thousand dollars. Do you understand that?

EH: You won a contest in a lottery?

AJ: No, I say, God will send me.

Michael Galinsky: No he's waiting....

EH: Oh he's waiting…

AJ: I was waiting, God send me the three hundred thousand dollars, without doing nothing. And then he say, "You're crazy." The next time, two day later, he came with the three hundred thousand dollars, in newspaper.

EH: Who?

MG: The assistant.

AJ: The assistant. Because his father was enormous fortune in United States selling shoes. And he gave me the money. And then I finish THE HOLY MOUNTAIN.

EH: Did you design the sets yourself?

AJ: Yes. The sets, I collaborate with the artists, but I make the sets, costumes, shoes, hats, everything.

EH: Incredible.

AJ: It was a beautiful experience. I was happy to do that.

EH: Now was it with the release of THE HOLY MOUNTAIN that you began a falling-out with Alan Klein?

AJ: No. Alan Klein didn't like the picture. He was scared. He think it was not American, or anti-American, or not commercial, not public, too underground. I don't know. He was scared. He hate it. And then he propose me to direct a pornographic picture, who was THE STORY OF O (1975). I escape it. I didn't sign. He hate me. But he have a surprise when he open THE HOLY MOUNTAIN in Italy. It was an enormous success. He make—the most commercial picture was first James Bond, then second THE HOLY MOUNTAIN, in Italy. See I have a lot publicity in France. They prefer THE HOLY MOUNTAIN, not EL TOPO. And then I was the star in that time as the maker of THE HOLY MOUNTAIN, not EL TOPO. In Europe, it was THE HOLY MOUNTAIN. Very well known. They say I changed the culture of these countries. In that time, no?

EL TOPO (1970).

EH: And how did it, uh, how did it fare in the U.S.?

AJ: Eh?

EH: How did it do in the U.S.? What was the reception to THE HOLY MOUNTAIN?

AJ: They never opened.

EH: It never opened.

AJ: It never opened. Only the…only in some videos…they never *The Holy Mountain* here. And Alan Klein is pissed to today, to show the picture. EL TOPO also. I am happy I find a negative in Mexico. Then I can give to the robbers to show the picture to a pirate, no? I give myself! And then all the persons can buy the picture. But he say, "I will kill these two pictures," he say. He's a criminal. Because you kill two pictures is a criminal, is to kill two human beings. He tried to kill FANDO Y LIS, but FANDO Y LIS was lost. And then they find in San Francisco, they find the negative. And now you have on DVD.

MG: Now that's kind of interesting though because the film was such a kind of critique of mass-market kind of culture, and so it is something that they can't allow to exist, in a certain sense. And you certainly don't see anything like it coming out today. You know? There's nothing that kind of critiques – nothing - the culture. Whereas at least there was a kind of history of things going on at that time with PUTNEY SWOPE (1969) and other films that were kind of critiquing consumer culture. But today you don't have anything like that.

AJ: You have Marilyn Manson.

EH: Yeah, a parody.

AJ: He criticize really well, yeah? The only monster alive no?

MG: But he's still not even—

AJ: He's a rock singer, but he's very … I like him.

EH: Now at the time when you were making HOLY MOUNTAIN…it reminds me very much of people like Shuji Terayama, Dusan Makavejev…

AJ: Ah, Makavejev! Was he came because he was very impressed by EL TOPO. He knew he was there.

EH: I just had the pleasure of meeting with him a few weeks ago, he was in the US.

AJ: Yes, you could say we were some kind of good friends. Yes, he was very good.

EH: Whose other films at that time did you enjoy?

AJ: Well, at that time was a Brazilian. ANTONIO DAS MORTES (1969), [by] Glauber Rocha. Was a fantastic filmmaker, but did so many drugs, he died.

EH: So many rocks?

MG: Drugs.

AJ: [gestures with hands like he's popping pills into his mouth] Drugs, drugs. He died. You know, when you take drugs, you drink a lot of wine, and you smoke a lot, you die. They die. They think they are immortal, they die. And then PINK FLAMINGOS (1972) in that time was a very funny thing, no?

EH: Now you said [in your introduction before the screening] that HOLY MOUNTAIN was not a film, it was a book, which made me think—

AJ: Something like that. I say 'a book' to say something. But it is not a picture. Because you are not there seeing history. You are there having an experience.

EH: And also, it draws from other books of the past—I mean, the Tarot is also a book, the Stations of the Cross is a book, but they're picture books — and you also did comics — what do you see as the power of the kind of —

AJ: They're language with words. They're language who are optical. You can speak "Optical." It's a language. The Tarot, it's like German, like English, like Spanish, it's a language. You speak it.

EH: A universal language.

AJ: Hmmm…*Bueno*, you learn to speak Tarot. You don't know how the meaning of every card, you cannot read. I study the Tarot for 40 years in order to came to read it. I put the card, and I read. He speak. Maybe sometime he say idiocies, the Tarot. Because he speak in idiocies. But it is a language. Pictures are a language also, no? Need to learn how to understand what is happening there, no?

EH: So after THE HOLY MOUNTAIN, how did you get funding to make more films, how did that work?

AJ: I never — listen — I never try to make picture. When Bhodhidharma came to China — Zen — he did nothing in this enormous country. He sit in front of the world and wait eight years. And then came the person and he make the transmission of the knowing. He didn't search search. Myself, I am atheist-mystical.

EH: Atavist?

THE HOLY MOUNTAIN (1973).

AJ: Atheist. When you don't believe in God.

EH: Atheist.

AJ: Atheist-mystic. I am a mystic atheist. I act as a mystic. And I wait. When I finish HOLY MOUNTAIN, I waited. And then one day came an Italian from—the brother of Dario Argento. Claudio Argento. After eight year, he propose to me to make SANTA SANGRE (1989). Not, to make something. I make SANTA SANGRE.

Now ten years passed from the — I don't pick out two other pictures, RAINBOW THIEF (1990), something like that — because did in order to want some money to live, no? But I hate that picture. I suffer a lot doing that picture, no? They are not bad, but they are not me. They are not bad, good picture, but they are not me. Why it's not me: because they do not have violence. For myself, art needs to be violent. If it's not, it's not art. That is the reality. And then now coming here I have offering to do picture, a new time. They are searching me. Every few years, they search me to make a picture. But I think I will live 120 years, myself. And then I have a lot of time to make pictures. Now I have 71, nobody will believe me. I am 71. And my mind is completely aware. I have more creative than ever. I have no physical problems. My wife has 37 years less than me, but she's happy and on her way. I make love normally. Maybe I will have another children, I don't know. I think I will live a lot of time more. I will make something like four more picture. [laughs]

EH: Now you've been working on comics as well lately.

AJ: Now they are opening in United States, no?

EH: Now they're available here?

AJ: Yes. When I make the project of *Dune*, and we didn't do *Dune.*

EH: And who was going to be in that?

AJ: Actors, a lot. Music, a lot. Drawing, a lot. The drawing was Moebius, a genius. Giger, who made the monster for ALIEN (1979), Giger. There are so many. It is so in the past. O'Bannon, Dan O'Bannon, who writed the ALIEN and other tings. A lot of things. And the actors were…Baron Harkonnen was…em…*Citizen Kane*…Orson Welles. And the priest, the old priest woman was Gloria Swanson. We spoke with them, they said yes. The mad Emperor of the Galaxy was Dali. Fantastic to speak

with Dali a lot in order to convince him. Big discussion. He will do it. Pink Floyd were ready to make the music. We have a lot of reunion. Something like that. In that time, was very, very well known television show series, was about Chinese and the cowboy…*Kung Fu*. David Carradine will make the Duke Leto. Yes. Udo Kier will make traitor, homosexual traitor, who is in the *Dune*. He say yes, also. Everything was fine, real interesting. The woman I find is so beautiful, the woman. The most beautiful woman I find in all my life was make Jessica. Was Dalila Di Lazzaro, who was a fantastic beautiful Italian actress. Later did nothing, but was the most beautiful woman I ever find in my life.

EH: What was her name again?

AJ: Dalila Di Lazzaro. Find her, find her! Because is the most beautiful woman you will ever find. Oh, so beautiful! And I say to her, I say, in order to know you, as a director, I want to make a massage to you, no? You know? Yes, okay, I'll be naked. I was naked. And she start to massage me. I think I go faint—I go fainted. It was so beautiful. She says yes. Bu later we didn't do the picture.

EH: How far did it get?

AJ: Well we make all the scripts. Three thousand dollars, yes? And all the costumes, the décor, everything. But Hollywood didn't want to give the distribution. It was the finished capital no? And they realize, if they could do that, they did not think it was possible to make this "opera space"—this fantastical opera-space. It was in [the film] 2001 (1968). And this is why we have the rights, to release it, the right of the movie. It was impossible to do it. Another day I will put that in [gestures across the room] in Internet.

MG: You mean put up the drawings you did?

AJ: Yes

MG: You should make a book. It sounds like a beautiful book.

AJ: A book I cannot not do it because everything I could not say that all the images was mine. I start to make comics and then in Europe … I sell 7 million of comics. 7 million. In all Europe. It was *Incal* was the name. I was very famous. .. And now they are publishing here in America. Humanoids is editor now. He is publishing my comic every month. There are six months, there are six numbers in the series, and they are publishing everything in English. But in Europe they are very well known. Comics are a fanstastic art, but in you in America all you know is Superman, Spiderman, superheroes. Its very "pow pow" – it's very, very limited for you. In Europe comics are an art. And you have prize, the minister come, the president reads comics. It's an art, with a lot of respect, all the time.

EH: It seems to me that your films are part of a making of art, not so much a making of film. It's part of—very few filmmakers today or very few artists today seem to be able to work in many mediums in many different ways and attack many different subjects. Do you have any idea why there seem to be so few artists today that are willing to take on such enormous subjects?

AJ: Basically because the modern art needs to be "ploy valentic." Jean Cocteau was an artist who made movies, was a big poet, a painter. Leonardo da Vinci, Pasolini, was a person who made not only one thing but a lot of things. Could make a log of things. But our civilization specialized you, starting with Ford. Make a part, the other make a part, the other make a part. Or the specialization of the doctors. One is the ear, the other is the nose, the other is the throat, the other is... But they are not generalists now, because they are like that. But into the future is the generalist, I believe myself, no? In Europe I create with Topor and Arrabal, two artists, I create a movement, after the Surrealism, I create the Panic Movement. And in the Panic Movement, the artist needs to be polyvalent, needs to do everything. That is the position, no? And another thing is, for America, in almost all the world, movies are an industry that is completely relationated with the business, with the money. That came later in the painting—this is the decadence of painting. Because the painter started to be businessman, lot of money, with the painting. But in reality, maybe, we need to make picture out of money, out of lot of money. Maybe we need to make pictures for twenty persons in the audience, or ten persons, five persons in the audience. No? With the modern technology now, we can be here making a theatrical play, in a room, a little room. Money is the problem, no? You have that problem, because for you your

SANTA SANGRE (1989).

god is money, is the dollar. And you are going to a big, big spiritual decadance, with your materialist civilization. When I go here in the States, I see a skinny woman or fat woman, a man fat, you are getting fat, fat, fat because you are making money with the food. And what you eat is poison, and you will start to be a country of fat persons very soon.

EH: We already are.

AJ: Very soon. It's coming, very quickly. And you don't drink natural juice. You drink Coca-Cola, you drink colored water with cola, you eat bad. You take drugs without limit. You will start to die at 40, 50 years old. It's a big decadence. And more and more weapons, and more and more pollution, illness. What do you want? What do you want… You want to be an artist, you need to broke with money. Not to make that in order to make money. You need to work in order to have yourself, to find yourself. That is the problem. To find yourself.

MG: Well that's what we were talking about on the train over, and what I was getting at a minute ago. But that film, HOLY MOUNTAIN, is something that Americans, they need to see it today. Because its completely relevant again. Because it seems that it—that type of film that was going on, made some people aware of the consumer culture, and critical of it. But somehow in the 20 years, 30 years since then, they've twisted it back, so there's no criticism of consumer culture in any art form. Except for something like Marilyn Manson, yet at the same time that's very tied up in the…

AJ: We need to find the persons, maybe, and I will work with him. He says in his book that he likes my pictures. I have a book with him, I can show you. And maybe he want to work with me? I will say yes. I will say yes. They are Kirk Wong who make Hong Kong picture. He want to see me, maybe I will write for Hong Kong pictures.

EH: For which director—Kirk Wong?

AJ: Kirk Wong. Crime mystery, he makes. Maybe they are fine. Listen, when somebody search for me, the miracle is there. And then I will do. Its possible to do things now, very possible. But you have to not think in big theaters. Think directly in DVD. Direct to there. Direct there. Direct in internet. We need to finish the tyranny—do you say 'tyranny'?

EH: 'Tyranny', yeah.

AJ: Of theaters. Because in the beginning, was the directors, the writers, no? And then came the tyranny of the stars. Then came the tyranny of producers. Now, we are in the tyranny of distribution. The idiots that have theaters are the masters. Because they give the money to make. And we need to kill that tyranny, of theaters. WE need to abandon the theaters. And go directly on internet, and DVD and this is all.

MG: Festivals like this are good to get people together as well.

AJ: Yes, festivals are good. You can show your things, no?

EH: Have you watched any other films here?

AJ: I was here, I could not watch them. Tomorrow I will see. I see one, only one the opening night. Interesting.

EH: I would recommend MIGRATING FORMS (1999).

AJ: Yes? You will tell me, no?

EH: An excellent film.

AJ: And how is? I can I speak English or not?

EH: There's hardly—there's very little dialog.

AJ: No, myself there.

MG: Oh, perfect.

AJ: What do you want more? The other day, an illuminate person was running saying, is running say, I have answers, I have answers, who have a question?

EH: You must have had people seek you—I mean, you mentioned, there have been many people who sought you out, kind of, fans of your work and people who have followed you. What are some—has anything interesting—there must be some interesting stories there. There must be some strange encounters you've had.

AJ: Listen, I have an email. Everyday I receive a lot of email. But I don't do all the pictures. I do therapy. In Europe I have a school of therapy. I invented the "psycho-magic" therapy.

EH: "Psycho-magic"?

AJ: Therapy. I use the traditional magic in therapy. I have a school of Tarot. I have a school of "initiatic" massage. And all these persons call me. The South American countries call me for, because I recommend acts, no?

EH: You recommend…?

SANTA SANGRE (1989).

AJ: Psycho-magic. An act: you do an act and this changes your reality. And they call me in Mexico for the election of the president. What act to do on the television, something like that. Where they consulted me for something like that. Well, I have a lot of…the comic book. There are persons who contact me for the comic book. In Italy I publish my poetry. I do a big book of – I make poems. I think always I think the artist needs to be a poet, in the center, and then make all the other things. And then generally they ask to sign, no? A person asks to you. And that's no good to ask it to you. I sign. When I am making the pictures, I am not the same. The same thing happens, I saw that in Peter Gabriel. You know Peter Gabriel? He came to see me, no? I see a very normal person. He was speaking very shy. I say, I don't understand how you can act, you come to see me. Then I go to London to see his show, it was incredible. When he came to the public, it was a projection. An incredible projection, nothing to do with reality, no? Myself also. When I am directing a picture, it's not me. When I am make my artistical work, it's not me. And when the admirers come, it's me. A simple person, no? When am making art, I receive nobody, no one. I don't see my friends, I sleep six hours, I eat not too much. Only doing these things, no? I think every shot you do is vital. You can lose your life. Every shot you do, no? You can lose your life. If you lose that, you lose for all your life your work, no? And then it's like a mortal fight, to shoot. You cannot lose your action. You need to be one hundred percent concentrated with what you do, without to be disturbed by anything. And there you can make images who last forever, no?

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BLACKHORSE LOWE premiered his debut feature 5TH WORLD at the 2005 Sundance Film Festival. A mix of beautiful cinematography, down-to-Earth acting and low budget glory, production took 14 days, shot on the Navajo Reservation which is Northeastern Arizona, Southeast Utah and Northwestern New Mexico. Lowe says it cost more than *El Mariachi* and less than *Garden State*. Part 1970s' road movie, part angst-love story, the film is a energizing voice not just for Native American cinema but for emerging filmmakers who have run out of ways to tell stories.

CINEMAD: I didn't have a chance to see your short films, but you have something like ten short films?

BLACKHORSE LOWE: Well, five that I'm willing to show and five I'm hiding.

Where were they made? I went to San Juan College back in '97 and '98, and I took a video course there where I got the opportunity to do editing on the first version of Final Cut pro and G3s and shoot with digital cameras. Basically we had open use where we could do whatever we wanted, so I chose to make a short film about a sheep getting butchered and I set it to opera music. I just kept on doing little short films here and there. I decided that I wanted to try out film, so I went to Scottsdale [AZ] Community College because it was the closest in the area and it was the cheapest. I didn't have to do fuckin' three years of theory classes, it was just, "Here's your camera. Get to work." It was pretty cool.

Did you enjoy working with video or did you want to dive into film? When I first began, digital was all that was there and it was free to use. So it was just something to pick up and learn the basic elements of filmmaking, like how to do wide shots, medium shots, close ups, and I kind of just learned the grammar of all that. It was a good way to learn film and not waste a shitload of money. There were a couple of short films while I was there where it would fit the story better to have it well-done on film or just… If I'm fuckin' going to make a short film about some dude farting, I'm not going to put it on film, I'm going to put it on DV so I can throw it away and not think about it. It depends on the money and whatever the movie is going to be about.

How much harder was it to make a feature than a short? Not too hard. It was a lot longer process. It wasn't like I took a giant step in terms of a crew or equipment or anything. It was basically stuff I had become familiar with at film school. I would do all the editing, my producer would do all the sound, I've known my cinematographer and producer for four years, so it was all the same crew. The only big difference was the time we spent on it. Other than the editing taking a lot longer than I thought it would, there was nothing really hard about it.

Was it harder to tell a longer story? You could have make this story a short but it wouldn't work the same way, it wouldn't be full. My first idea was to do this erotic fuckin' LAST TANGO IN PARIS (1972) type thing, but my actors couldn't really do that. So I thought, "Eh, I'll tone it down a bit more." But I at least kept it twisted a bit. The basic story elements were there after I finished last year's Sundance and the other festivals [with

his short SHUSH (2003)]. My executive producers who I had used on that film wanted to put some more money in another one, so it was something I was always kind of playing around with in terms of the storyline.

Many other Natives had the same experiences with love and tradition and all these different cultural aspects that go into developing a relationship. It was something that my friends and I could relate to in terms of going out and meeting girls and finding a girl that seems perfect for you but ends up being related to you. And you can't do anything about it, you just have to kind of push her aside and move on, or commit incest and not worry about all those cultural taboos. I wanted to make a story about that, but really take the influences from early '70s cinema like Terrence Malick and Russian cinema like Andrei Tarkovsky and Italian stuff like L'AVVENTURA (1960). Try to infuse that all within this one story and make a poetic, beautiful movie about incest in the Navajo culture. How do I combine all that shit in a way that'll make people want to stick around and watch it? Hopefully I did it just right.

Did you know the actors ahead of time or did you actually cast? Because they're pretty down to earth, straight ahead people. I had used Liva'ndrea Knoki and Sheldon Silentwalker in SHUSH. Sheldon played the abusive boyfriend and Liva'ndrea played the girl that gets abused. So they were already familiar with one another. On the set they were very comfortable with each other and constantly joking around. So, that was the main reason why I wanted to do 5TH WORLD with them, because I already had a cast was comfortable with one another and with my fucked up head.

How much did the film change in editing? I don't think any of my films except SHUSH stuck to what I originally intended, either in the production process or in the editing process. The tone and the feeling that I wanted to capture is there, but in terms of how I wanted to go from A to B, it changes a little bit. People still like it and it gets good recognition, that's cool. It doesn't hold up to my ideal of what I wanted it to be, but it's all a learning process, so I just keep on going and keep on working.

5TH WORLD is a lot like the '70s films that you mentioned, it's pretty naturalistic. When you watch it, you basically forget that it's long takes and you forget that there's not crazy editing going on. The audience is just investing in what the characters are saying and what they're doing. Instead of bing, bang, boom, a hundred edits. 5TH WORLD sets you up in the atmosphere and gets a feeling of the space, a feeling of the landscape. Because a lot of what they're talking about and what my parents are talking about in terms of all the cultural stuff that they talk about, lays in the landscape. That's all there from the Navajo culture, and they're just like, "It's pretty." But it also has a reason for being there.

How did you go about picking the locations? The first shot with elephant's feet where there's two giant pillars of rock -- when I used to go back and forth between Phoenix and New Mexico, I would always see that, and I thought, "All right, I gotta put that somewhere in a movie. How do I make a movie out of this landscape?" But in terms of using monument valley, that was just a choice that we had to make based on the dialogue in the scene. We had to comment on the films that had been shot there, which were primarily mainstream. This was the first time actual Navajos had used it in a film. It was like, "Hey, we're making our own movies on our own land now."

Definitely not like the other films shot there. I don't even think you have any horses in it, do you? No, all we're doing is slaughtering sheep.

That scene's awesome because it's so matter of fact. It was not some cutesy little history lesson. It was just kind of like a picnic, just eating and doing it. It's funny because every time I watch that scene, I get hungry and I just want to go back home. "Fuck! I want some mutton!" [laughs] If I show it to a culture that's not Navajo, they're like, "Oh, that's so beautiful," or, "Oh, that poor sheep." When I show it to other Navajo, they just get a hankerin' to go home and have some mutton and some fry bread. Different reaction each time.

I'm sure no one will get mad, because they'll be like, "Oh, that's just traditional. That's how they survive." They better, or else I'm going to start punching people left and right. [laughs]

Since you've been playing the festival game already, are you just getting used to the usual questions, or have you found any responses besides the politically correct one? With stuff like SHUSH and the other films I had done previously, it was usually the most ridiculous shit, "you're breaking through the culture barriers" and all this bullshit. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

5th WORLD (2005).

But I haven't been asked anything cool like if Paulene Kael would come back from the grave and ask me something. One time I was at Arizona State University doing a Q & A and I ended up cussing throughout the whole thing without realizing that there were kids in the audience. I was tossing the "fuck" and "shit" and all this stuff all over the place talking about movies, and they were like, "Do you realize there's kids in the audience?" My crew actually kept count of how many times I cussed. Oh well. At least I wasn't talking about doing coke or anything.

But now you've got a feature. I'll be shooting guns in the theater.

You made a great choice to use a tripod. There isn't handheld nonsense in order to cover up so-so acting. Today its more scary for filmmakers to lock the camera down and trust the actors. Exactly, it's gotta be all handheld and out of focus, with like fifty cuts in thirty seconds. What the fuck's going on here? Granted, I'll probably do that in my next film But between every scene in 5TH WORLD, there's no cutting or bullshit about it, it's just right there. You're experiencing it with them in the landscape. It's more intimate and a bit more real, hopefully.

It's basically a road trip romance with some comedy. Well, the last third of the movie is a little heavy, but for the most part, it's just teenagers (or twenty-something kids) figuring out what they're doing. Getting a crush on the road is awesome. I tried to capture that, really develop it. Not to do it in the traditional way, where it's like, "Oh, you're so cool," but have them just talk shit to each other. I find that a lot more real, him calling her a nerdy bitch and her being able to come back and call him a faggot, being able to play with him on the same turf and not really get offended by simple things. They talk shit about one another and everything around them and just adapt to one another and not really think about it. The original concept of the movie was that I wanted to make a love story about two people with common hate and how they came to fall in love. Because of their hate for the world and people in general, they come together and say, "Hey, we fell in love, how lucky. Too bad we're brother and sister."

I don't think it's been done. I hope it's something new.

Has this happened to people that you know? Well, not as far as banging them and then finding out afterwards. I'd be scrubbing myself with a steel wire. Me and a couple of my friends back in New Mexico, Navajos, Natives anywhere, especially in Northern California like the Hoopa reservation, it's really common to meet somebody and she might turn out to be your cousin or your aunt or your sister. You can't really do anything about it. But that's just me being a traditional Nav. I know a couple of Natives that don't really care about that kind of stuff. They think that tradition is a thing of the past and they don't respect that stuff. I was raised all traditional, so I'm like, "Ah, I can't do this. Pay for your own dinner and I'll see you later." [laughs]

I'm glad we got that line in. Have you shown your parents the film? I've shown them portions of it because my Mom was helping me with the subtitles. They've seen bits and pieces but they haven't seen the whole finished piece. Hopefully they'll get a kick out of it. They liked pretty much everything with the exception of SHUSH.

Too violent for them? A bit too violent, and the place I kind of brought it from was something really personal to the family, so it was kinda, "Why are you throwing our dirty secrets out there?" As a filmmaker or an artist, well, not an artist, I don't want to get too bigheaded about it, but how do I deal with the shit and piece it out in my own way? I took the negatives and turned them into positives, or else I wouldn't be here right now. But everything before that, everybody liked, because the emotional stuff before was experimental crap or comedy and that relates to Navajo culture. So they got a kick out of those.

But I'm sure sooner or later you want to bust out of that, too. Yeah, definitely.

Make a good genre film for sleazy money. Oh, hell yeah. All that fucking Grindhouse stuff. I'm just going to be like a Navajo Russ Meyer on the next one.

That will sell like mad. I don't even have to worry about being Navajo anymore, it's all about the breasts.

But Russ has that insane editing, too. That's gonna be even more "art" than 5TH WORLD. Although I like how you did the text credit in the middle of the film, when he started telling his new story. Was that something that you were planning to do all along, or did it just kind of fit after you were editing? It was something I planned all along. I had watched a lot of Godard films like MY LIFE TO LIVE (1962) and PIERROT LE FOU (1965). You would have all these dramatic sequences or these scenes, and all of a sudden a title card would pop up to comment on it. It kind of brought something new to it, like it's still a visual form, but hey, why not? Bring a little bit of literary stuff into it. I mean, it's just a fun comment once in a while to create a different space and see if it worked or not.

It feels fun watching it. And the girl's hot, so who can deny that?

I gotta agree. I cannot criticize that. I'll introduce you, Mike. Don't worry about it.

I'm not going to print that part. And again, why are we all doing this? Oh, yeah. Let's see, I'd say for the artistic means… aw, pfft, let's be real.

Chicks dig art. And I dig chicks, so it works both ways.

Who's the band that's in WORLD? They're rad. The Unofficial from Santa Fe. I saw them perform about two years ago, and the girl is a good friend of mine, she's a painter at the Institute of American Indian Arts. When I met her, I was like, "I want to put you in a movie one of these days." When we got enough money, we put them in a movie, and they were really fun. They came down to Albuquerque for a day and we shot two hours of footage of them performing. It ended up being only ten minutes in the film, but it worked pretty fuckin' well.

That's the thing: people are pent up under the surface, and then you get to a show and it all comes out. Exactly, and all the dirty little things come out. And they're probably one of the only decent Native rock bands around, so I just thought I'd throw them in to get them out there.

We've got to take an opportunity to bag on Phoenix. Yes, we do. Phoenix is the most backward-ass, white bread culture, heaven world. I should say hell world. But no, heaven for white people, because it's suburbs upon suburbs with nothing but golf courses and lame ass theaters.

On the set of 5th WORLD.

I think the only people I know that like Phoenix were born there. Exactly, either that or the walking dead. You have to be over eighty and waiting for death and playing golf. Or some fake ass, blonde haired, blue eyed model that enjoys the heat and wants to party with frat boys. I can't fucking stand it.

And then how did you end up there? Cheap film school.

Where did you live right before then? Did you live in Albuquerque or were you just around there? I was around there in this little shit town called Farmington. I was there for a little while but I moved on. Learned all I needed to, and especially since you can't get any decent foreign films, or any decent cinema at all for that matter, it was time to move on.

Do you know where you're gonna head, or what's the immediate plan? Right now I'm just waiting for some money to come through and hopefully I'll head to Albuquerque. A lot more of my supporters are over there and a lot more people that I want to work with are over there, and especially if you want to shoot on the Navajo reservation, it's such a short distance away.

Are you still having to work normal jobs? I haven't worked a normal job since last February. I picked up two jobs at the AIFI, the American Indian Film Institute, teaching kids on the reservation how to make films within a two week span. We got like ten different groups of kids and they all wanted to make a ten-minute short film. I got paid enough from that to support myself and totally concentrate on my movie. I picked up some more money in northern Arizona directing two commercials and then picking up a small dance piece which I got paid for. All that money accumulated into a nice chunk of change where I didn't have to work for a while, but that's dwindling away right now, especially after New Year's. Hopefully my movie sells so I never have to work again. [laughs]

Do you have more features planned? Right now I'm working on two screenplays that I've been playing around with for the past year. They're both period pieces, one's in the 1940s and one's in the 1880s, so I don't know if it's realistic for me to be writing about that stuff. But it's what's keeping me writing right now. Hopefully I'll get a screenplay done and have enough of a rapport to get some money and do it again. I had done two short films on digital that played around with the 1950s Navajo era. Even if I have to do it digital and all by myself, I'll do it. I've got the people and the resources to do it really low-budget.

SHUSH (2003).

The main guy in 5TH WORLD has a shirt from one of my favorite bands, the Lost Sounds. I had the opportunity to meet them and I gave them a copy of SHUSH since their music plays throughout the whole thing. They were cool about it. I didn't think they'd remember me, but I emailed Alicja and said, "I just want to promote you guys in the next one and have a guy wearing a Lost Sounds t-shirt through two-thirds of the movie. Is that cool?" And she was, "Sheeeeeeit, of course." So I got their blessing. Maybe I'll just make a documentary on the whole great Memphis rock scene.

Do you feel like you have to make Native American stories? Or is it just because it's autobiographical? It's more convenient for me to do that as opposed to something about a kid growing up in Anaheim. It's where I'm from and what I know. It's not like I'm gonna come out and do LETHAL WEAPON or NATIONAL TREASURE or some shit, that's not who I am. Especially since the movies I watch are about specific cultures or specific places and putting your people and your ideas forward. Me coming from a traditional Navajo background, that's who I am and I'm not gonna bullshit you. This is the kind of movie that I want to make and this is what I want to show. Especially with all the Native shit out there, I feel a responsibility to make actual good Native cinema as opposed to the shit they're putting out now.

It's like any new cinema that's starting. People feel like they're gonna treat it with kid gloves. A lot of countries don't have it any different. It's still in its infancy. How old is cinema, like a hundred years? It's still like a new art form. All the Natives out there, I'm sure there's a handful of them out there that actually know the history of cinema, where it started and where it's going. Especially on the reservation, you're not really exposed to these different types of editing or composing a narrative or directing an actor or really using a frame to give it a different effect. They're used to THE BREAKFAST CLUB or BRIDGET JONES' DIARY, so that's their idea of a movie. Hopefully they'll see 5TH World and say, "Hey, that Native movie was different from all that other shit that stuck to conventions. It took something from the culture and applied it to something cool."

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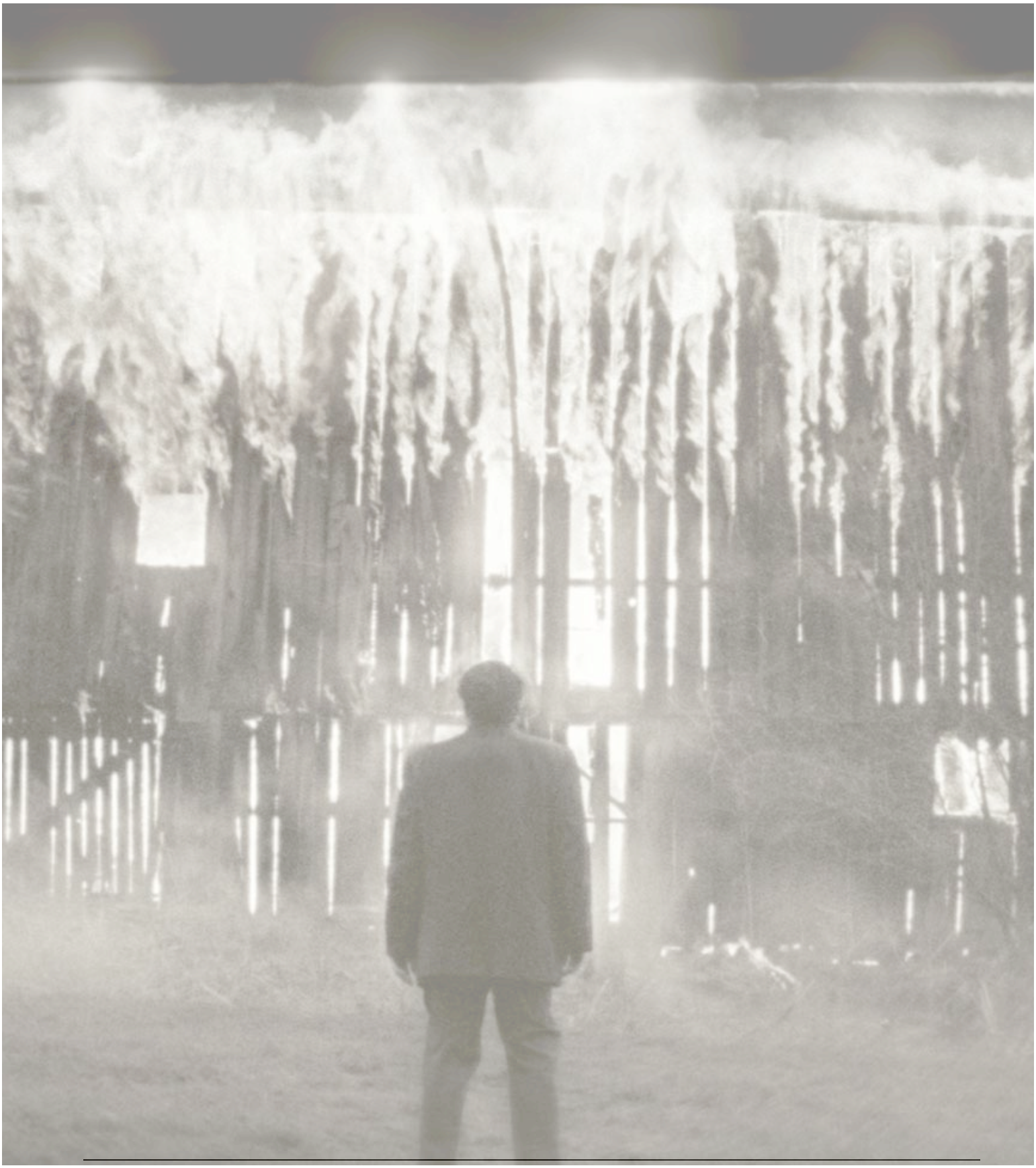


Mahaffy and collaborator Will Weatherby.

Born and raised in Ohio, filmmaker JAKE MAHAFFY attended the Rhode Island School of Design. There he made the innovative and beautiful short film EGYPT HOLLOW (1996) using the earliest film technique: hand cranking. By winding the camera motor by hand, the film exposure flutters and jumps, coming alive. At the Art Institute of Chicago he started his first feature, WAR, which he finished years later and recently debuted at the 2004 Sundance and Rotterdam film festivals.

Set amid the disappearing world of family farms, WAR (2004) reveals an unseen America, wrapped in the fog of a centuries-old conflict. In this stark and mysterious film, the gradual decay of the country is depicted as a subtle apocalypse. We are witness to 'the New World' gone old: the transmissions of evangelical AM radio drift though the barren landscape like ghosts; and the film's black and white realism recalls civil war photographer Matthew Brady.

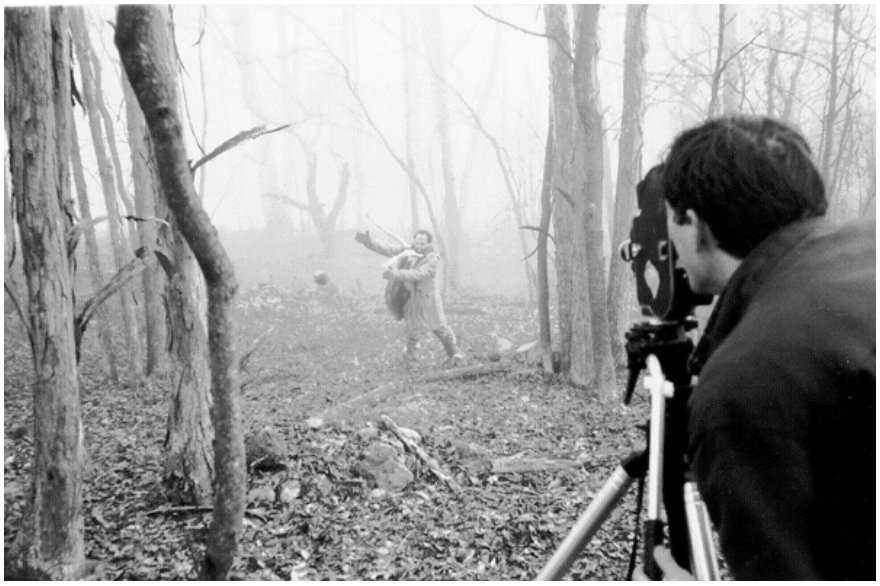
WAR centers on three isolated characters struggling to survive in a dying society. A door-to-door preacher confronts a quiet dread; a father tries to raise his son as his farm slowly falls apart; and a junkman labors to keep the land and all its contents in order. Through occasional humor and patient observation we are slowly drawn into each character's inner world, all the while becoming more aware of our own brutal fragility.

Mahaffy studied cinematography in Russia, which may account for the film's extraordinary dreamlike atmosphere and its hauntingly beautiful imagery. Mahaffy single-handedly made this film without a crew, producer or budget. His solitary perseverance over four years, filming on the abandoned farms of northwest Pennsylvania has resulted in a unique, intense and authentic vision of hope in despair. Not just a movie, WAR is a spiritual declaration.

CINEMAD: Did you learn filmmaking in school or have you always been doing it on your own?

MAHAFFY: I learned a lot at school - saw films I never would have seen - worked with some talented people. Most of what I learned at RISD (Rhode Island School of Design) was observational drawing and art history. The technical things you can learn in a week. I learned how to run a Bolex in a couple of hours. Everything else about film I learned while doing it. What matters is how to actually use the equipment – not just operate it. It's different for every project. Most movies follow a standard production methodology - no matter what the subject, no matter what the case, it's almost always the same, even if it's got a little arty 'edge' to it. What I'm saying is every time you make a film, you have to forget everything you know and start all over again. It's a new thing… because it shouldn't be about you, as a filmmaker, building yourself a career, but about the individual subject of each project finding its way to film as plainly as possible.

There is even a certain expectation in avant-garde filmmaking. People like it more if they're the ones who discover you. That's a shame. They're only going to discover you if they can recognize what you're doing. Or maybe it's even bad - maybe it is a bad movie as movies go. But how important is that really? In the larger scheme of things? I wasn't even trying to make a good movie. What I was trying to do was make the *right* movie. If you're thinking, "I want to make a good movie," then you're not thinking about what you're actually doing but how you hope others



Mahaffy filming WAR.

will perceive what you do. You're relying on circumstances that you have no control over, which is whether people are going to like it or not. In my mind, no movie can be good if it's not right first. Just trying to be good is relying on some common idea of success. If it's right, it will be honest and true to the subject. And that's the point. Then maybe a film will be great. But sometimes you may have to be truthful at the expense of proper form. The subject of the film, how it's made, is always more important than the final film itself, as a movie. The subject should determine the form of the film - what is being shot determines *how* it is shot - it's instinctual - not a matter of some arbitrary plan or standardized method or arty concept. That's what I mean about the subject being important. There are people who make movies because they like movies and there are people who make movies because they have a specific interest in the subject at hand.

You shot WAR by manually winding the film through the camera? I handcranked it like a silent movie because I didn't have an electric motor. I said, "why not?" I have to - it's the practical thing to do and nobody else cares what I do anyway. You're either going to make a film or you're not going to make it. It's not about realizing what's in your head but realizing what's right in front of your face- just accepting what you have to work with. It's that commitment that really matters more than anything else.

The best artistic decisions are really practical decisions. You know the quote, "The budget is the aesthetic." That's sort of the same thing. If I had an idea to do something clever or expressive, I tried not to do those things. I wanted to avoid craft and intentionality. All of the things you see in the movie are the result of necessity. The fact that there's no dialog is because I didn't have a sync-sound camera. But it all works out. It is what it is.

The problem with video is that people get in this trap of thinking, "Well, I have a video camera, I have to make a film." That's what I'm talking about. In that case, it's not about filmmaking, it's about one film. With this project, all the "limitations" are what makes the film. I go in with ideas of what I want to do but in the end, it's not so relevant. All that matters in the end is what's actually projected on screen. That's the actual, physical empirical reality, and it's hard to accept because you might have an idea, but what you end up with is something different. That's what I've learned to deal with. Reality is better than my best intention and more relevant than my best idea. Films that are open ended or created in the process - there's more to them than what the director planned. No amount of clever planning or brilliant technique can substitute for a film that is its own self-sufficient living entity - a living, breathing event.

WAR is essentially about the land. Is it based on an area that you knew growing up, or something that just attracted you? It's a lot of different things. On one hand, I just wanted someplace timeless. Dates are not important. There's no Nike t-shirts or Britney Spears billboards. I have an affinity for that land, that geography. On a visual level, I just like the textures and the colors. There's rotting corn in the fields and rusted metal on the barns, burning leaves, hay. It's a living, organic, dangerous and beautiful world - something very familiar to me. That environment has an inherent character and history.

On top of that, I had this idea about identity. It is a disappearing world. I don't really know much about agriculture. I'm not a farmer activist. I understand the politics of it, but that isn't what this particular film is about. It's really about a world that doesn't exist. The farm is this guy's entire life. All of his relationships, responsibilities and individuality are associated with this land. And when that's gone, what are you gonna tell him to do? Get a job? He has to keep the farm, otherwise he ceases to exist; he's not a farmer anymore. That's what interested me, and that's where the whole apocalypse theme came in. This is the end of the world. It's the end of *his* world.

Is the cast all locals? Pretty much. I got there (Warren County, PA) and just started looking for people. I was on the front page of their small town paper, which wasn't hard to do. In the story, I said, "Let's make a movie… meet at this local theater," and people showed up. It's not like I had a lot of options. The kid (Dustin Bertch) was the only kid who showed up who had a mother that would drive him around. The other guy - the guy with the beard (Andy Yurick) – didn't really have a job so he was available. The other guy, the big guy (Jeff Clark), was just excited to be in a 'movie'. And then my dad…

Well, they all have a strong presence. They all worked out. I did this local TV interview when I was trying to raise money and the news guy asked, "There are three characters in the movie - the junk man, the farmer and the preacher. Is this the trinity?" I said, "Those are just the three guys that showed up." That's a fact – these were the only people willing to spend four years, day after day, in the cold, mud and rain for nothing in return. I told them at the start we're going to make a movie and nobody's gonna see it. This all came out of nowhere. We're not artists or professionals, not even the slightest ties to the commercial industry or the art world, never got a grant - grass roots, not a joke.

What was your relationship with producer, Willard Weatherby? He just showed up (to the casting call), standing in the back. He's a shy quiet guy. He's standing there with a big Abe Lincoln beard and long hair like Moses. Finally, he just walked up and said real slow, "Hullo, maybe I could help." So he gave me a tour of his town. He owns an entire village. He has barns, fields, dozens of tractors and old cars, farm equipment, wooden wagons… anything I could ever want or need. I'm grateful to a lot of people for helping me, but if there's one person I couldn't have made this film without, that would be Will Weatherby. He also knows the area, so I'd ask him, "Will, I'm looking for a certain kind of fence," and he'd find it. Or, "Will, I need to burn a barn down." He'd call somebody and we'd burn the barn down.

What is the story behind the house falling down? I spent weeks driving around looking for places. They were gonna tear this one down and put up a trailer park. The house was built by the Amish, so there were no nails. It was all wood joints, a real bear to tear apart. The last guy who lived there shot himself in the stomach and didn't die for three days. He was just lying there, half-dead on his couch before they found him. He finally died and nobody's been there since. The new owners wanted to tear the house down because they didn't want to live in it. I told the owners that I would tear it down for them if they let me film it. We went in there and spent weeks just chewing away at this thing with chainsaws and sledgehammers. For three days we tried to tear it down. The shot in the movie that's 10 seconds long? It takes place over three days. We slept there a couple of nights with the camera set-up.

What kind of people populated the town? Did you encounter them that much? There aren't a lot of people around. A lot of it was shot on my dad's land. He grew up on a farm. At the oil pumps, the guy was easy. They were actually pumping oil then. I tried to get back and re-shoot some scenes but the guy had shut it all down. That's how he made his living and a year ago he just stopped. Doesn't pay anymore. This machinery is a hundred years old – guys with horses and chains hauled that engine up into the woods after the Civil War.

This is what is important: These places are just disappearing. The bridge fell down! This summer, one of the guys up there sent me a picture. A huge windstorm came down and blew it over a few months after I was shooting a scene on top of it. The barn, the house, the oil pumps… all gone.

That's pretty much all the structures in the film. Well, there was a fence. But everything else in the film is gone. That's all that's left. It really is a lost world – I didn't make it up.

How is it that you grew up without a TV? We had one. I was a kid and there was a thunderstorm and lightning hit the antennae and the TV just blew out. The antennae was completely cocked. I remember going up on the roof and chopping it off the side of the house. I think it was divine. I never had one since. There was a lot of stuff I didn't know about. I didn't watch MTV. When the Berlin Wall came down, I didn't know about that. I think in the end, it has affected me only in good ways. Like when you talk about how people are conditioned to want everything in 30-second burps, I'm not on that schedule.

What was your general impression from taking the film to Sundance and Rotterdam (film festivals)? I'd never been to a festival before. I'm thankful to the people who showed it. They didn't have to. But with this kind of movie you're dependent on festivals for an audience. And it requires thoughtful programmers to take real risks on something nobody is supposed to care about. So, now it's being invited to other festivals as well. WAR got a whole range of reactions from audiences. At one of the shows a woman just wept quietly through the entire film, start to finish. After the screening she said that she has 'been there too'. But that same audience, you know, was laughing at me as I was going up front for the Q&A. Overall, it's been good to meet people and get help for my next project. But it's funny, in the town where I'm living, some people got so excited about Sundance. They were surprised to see me back in town after the festival. They didn't expect ever to see me again. As if I'd ascend to the clouds after having set foot in Utah. But life does go on. Keep the shoulder to the plow.

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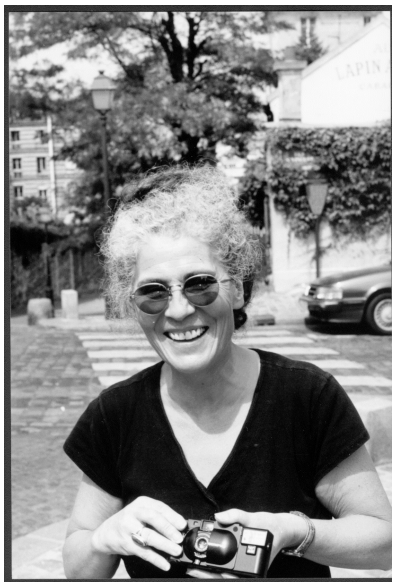


BABETTE MANGOLTE is a prolific cinematographer/photographer from the 1970s and '80s who worked on landmark feminist films such as Yvonne Rainer's FILM ABOUT A WOMAN WHO… (1973), and films with Chantal Akerman, most notably JEANNE DIELMAN, 23 QUAI DU COMMERCE, 1080 BRUXELLES (1975), which won an award at Cannes.

JEANNE DIELMAN is not distributed on video yet, but if you get a chance to see it, you must. It's the first feature film by a woman that expresses a cinematic language of a woman's world (a Belgian housewife who does prostitution on the side to support her son) from a woman's perspective. JEANNE DIELMAN boldly breaks almost every Hollywood rule; the film is 3 1/2 hours with long takes ranging from 12-20 minutes, the constructed space is mostly medium to wide angle, with no close-ups and elliptical editing. Come to think of it, there's no musical score or any special effects.

You leave the film, as with any film you've seen shot by Babette Mangote, with a strong sense of the visual, sometimes it's the framing such as in HOTEL MONTEREY (1973) and NEWS FROM HOME (1977) or sometimes it's the color such as THE GOLD DIGGERS (1981) or the lack of color such as JEANNE DIELMAN.

Three years ago I met Babette Mangolte at a Van Gogh retrospective at LACMA. We sat in the little sculpture garden with the Rodin discussing my work (she was interviewing me for a teaching position at UCSD), and Van Gogh's painting. I was impressed with Babette's extensive knowledge of art. She would talk about Van Gogh then Robert Frank then Henri Matisse to Andy Warhol, all of course in an interesting context.

Since that time, I have learned about Babette's own films, which she has written, produced, directed, shot and edited. Unlike some filmmakers who seem to repeat the same visual style or formula, Babette's films are all different. She's made about nine films, which have similar themes. For example, Babette's first three films are about looking and subjectivity, and the second three films are about landscape (Babette had moved to California and was dealing with her relationship to the alienating world of the "west coast"), and the third series of films are about looking at art. *Interview by Minda Martin*

CINEMAD: What triggered your interest in image-making?

MANGOLTE: There was no cinematography school that accepted women when I went to film school in France in 64. But I wasn't aware of film school any way then.

I just learned about their existence of film school when I was seeing a retrospective of George Cukor at the French Cinematheque. I was the only person with somebody else who was seeing every film twice. I sat next to him and asked him why and he said he had to write a paper on George Cukor for his film school and he explained to me how to apply and where. At the time they were two film schools in Paris. I applied to both, was accepted in the two but one denied me entry in the section cinematography because I was a woman. The other one was a state school and couldn't deny me entry. You see when you took

the exam they didn't know your name. So it is at the oral exam that they made me aware of the fact that cinematography wasn't for woman but I didn't believe them.

So I started my film education not by going to film school but by watching films.

Why cinematography not directing? I had no idea at the time why I was more interested in the image making than the story telling. Seeing up to five or six films a day I was very aware of how stories were repeats of each others following formulaic models. Sometimes those stories were very well told by a John Ford and not as well told by another filmmaker. So the fabric of the film was for me the image and the sound and those were more important than the story the film was telling. When I got interested in film I saw mostly Hollywood and French films. One of the first films I saw was Max Ophuls, LOLA MONTES (1955), also Jean Renoir's GRAND ILLUSION (1937). I saw those two films in the late fifties with my father.

Now my first strong visual expression came not from film, but from painting. My mother took me to the museum and to galleries a lot. At the Easter vacation the family would go to Paris for two weeks and go to museums or gallery shows all day and to the theatre every night.

I remember a show in the early 50s. It was a show of Monet Cathedral of Rheims and the Westminster Bridge. The paintings were a series of paintings by Claude Monet where he used different color patterns with the same motif, either the Cathedral of Rheims the famous gothic facade of the cathedral of the city where they make the champagne wine or the London site of Westminster Bridge.

I saw Monet's show of twenty variations on the same motif, I was absolutely bulled over. When you are eleven years old it's kind of amazing to realize that variation is the essence of what art is about. I obviously couldn't formulate that at the time, but I was amazed by the rich experience of seeing almost the same thing but not quite the same thing.

For me looking at painting is still one of my greatest pleasures.

But you don't paint? Oh no, I never studied painting, but I still feel that it's important in term of reactivating my energy in terms of visuals. In the past it wasn't the case, I really discovered the American landscape by looking at American film. And vice versa, I discovered the Film Noir aesthetic through urban decay in American film. Film has given me an iconography, which is so rich. But film now doesn't give me any new iconography. It's not new. The only iconography I feel is new is in painting.

But no, I'm not going to ever be a painter. But if you are visual person, you need visual stimulation. Frankly, I think the young people have a very hard time to get visual stimulation now because there is a degradation in the visual stimuli provided by the culture around us that's extreme. And it's coming from the abundance of advertisements at the exclusion of all other visuals in magazines, on the web, the low resolution of films see on VHS as well as TV. Nobody gives much attention to the quality of the image anymore.

So was there a particular style or painting you were thinking of when you shot JEANNE DIELMAN? When I work on a film I don't think about painting. I really feel you have to be an athlete if you are a filmmaker. You have to exercise the two senses, which are used in film, which is the ear and the eye. So in relation to JEANNE DIELMAN I never thought of a pictorial reference. The reference was a consciousness of time and the work of Michael Snow that I shared with Chantal when she was in New York in the early seventies. We worked on short experiments like THE ROOM (1973) or HOTEL MONTEREY, which was made in '73 in New York. Those films went to a festival in Nancy (town in the east of France where there was a well known theatre festival, which also presented some films) and were seen by Delphine Seyrig the well-known actress of LAST YEAR IN MARIENBAD (1961) and MURIEL (1963). Delphine had lived with her husband, an abstract expressionist painter, in New York. She had her first film role in PULL MY DAISY (1959), the Robert Frank movie. It is in Nancy that Delphine befriended Chantal and two years later, she agreed to do JEANNE DIELMAN.

Really, without her, the film does not exist. You see, she's key to the imagination of the film and why the stylisation of the character works. Delphine was an actress able to make an interpretation and not be the real thing. The key to

JEANNE DIELMAN, 23 QUAI DU COMMERCE, 1080 BRUXELLES (1976)

the film JEANNE DIELMAN, is making Jeanne Dielman a character embodying a certain archetype, which at the time had not been expressed in film. The only person who attempted to do something similar was Germaine Dulac in the 20s in THE SMILING MADAME BEUDET (1922).

So this is how JEANNE DIELMAN started, meeting Delphine? It's more than that. Chantal went back to Europe in '73. In May or June, she wrote me a letter and said, "I have a job for you. Are you coming to Paris this summer?" It was director of photography work for a group of women who wanted to shoot 35mm feature film, and Chantal was hired as assistant director. The group of women was actually a feminist group. Although I knew about feminism from the American context, I had met Kate Millet and others then but the French context was quite different. I met all the people who were important in the feminist movement in New York between 1972 and 1973. But during that summer of 1973 in Paris for the first time I was in contact with people who felt that there was a feminine language that had to be invented. Unfortunately they also were quite extremist in their views and were convinced that if you were speaking to a man you were tainted. And I had problems renting equipment, because the only places to rent equipment were owned by men and managed by men, so I had to speak to them to get the permission to hire a trained assistant to test the camera. Only a man was available, there was hardly any woman then in the field. I'm not going to make camera tests without a trained assistant. I had that kind of problem to solve.

The experience that I shared with Chantal on the aborted project was instrumental in the making JEANNE DIELMAN. It's not that we don't love our father. But indeed in terms of relation with authority, the father figure is not like the mother figure. We can think there are two languages-- the language of the father and the language of the mother. And we as feminists have to try to invent a language that will not be mimicking the language of the father. Wrestling with that utopian idea was very empowering for me.

Yes, it has been explored for some time in literature. I had read Virginia Woolf and even discussed it with my mother when I was a teenager. My mother had been a feminist in her twenties, I think. When her father who was bankrupted told her that there was little money left for a dowry, she told him "I don't want a dowry. I want an education". So she went to the university and that's where she met my father. In any case, I felt the language of the mother is the woman sensibility that you bring to your work. It doesn't have to be a work whose subject matter is only concerned with women issues. And that is my kind of feminism.

In all my work I have privileged woman protagonist because I know about woman more than man. I have privileged expressing something that is under represented in mainstream culture or in experimental work, you know something no one else has done before such as making a film about making photographs from the perspective of the photographer. Nobody had done a film like that when I did THE CAMERA: JE (1977). I call that my feminism, my brand of feminism. It's a woman doing something that no one else has done. It's the same thing with JEANNE DIELMAN**.** The story of a woman doing her chores had never been done before because no one had thought it was possible to show somebody doing dishes and little else. It's not dignified,

it's not interesting, there is no drama. But fuck it, our mothers, our grandmothers, us, we have been doing it every day for ages and therefore at some point we have to look at it and show it to the world, because it's there. That's the idea. It is there and film is about what is there!

When did you know that JEANNE DIELMAN would be made without ellipsis, in real time? After two days of the shooting, we realized the duration for each shot was going to be long. Chantal didn't want to cut. She wanted to let her have her space. We started by shooting the dining room scene. There is some dialogue. We did everything by angle in relationship with the room. My light was changing with relation to the time of the day in terms of color and light.

I used photographs as a training tool. My practice was to use my still camera to scout film locations. And I used contact sheets, which I gave to Chantal for planning HOTEL MONTEREY and JEANNE DIELMAN so we could refer to the framing. I had three lenses, 35mm, 50mm and 85mm and I used those three lenses on every room. And those framings were not copied when we shot the film but just a reference for the image. The only film for which I didn't do that was for my film THE SKY ON LOCATION (1982). This is a film about landscape and about light, which makes the landscape move. So you have to capture the light, the framing isn't what you capture. You capture a movement in the light that enfolds through time. You have to be very quick with the camera getting it on the tripod. So the speed of working or driving the car and packing the camera was of the essence. The light was all over moving so fast. If you were too slow in setting up the equipment the light effect was gone by the time you rolled the film stock.

I wasn't anticipating how light would be important into the making of the real time aspect of JEANNE DIELMAN, which I think is the fundamental striking feature of it. Because that sense of real time is connected with undervalued gesture… somebody waiting for potatoes cooking, a woman alone with no drama. The theme became emblematic of a desire for woman to speak their world, a world that was never represented before. So it was obvious it was conceptualized by Chantal in the script and it was realized by the cinematography and the acting.

It came to MOMA and I was sitting next to my friend Annette Michelson. We saw the film and we looked at each other and we knew we had seen a masterpiece. The film is not yours and it's as good as RULES OF THE GAME (1939). It is out there. It's very strange. The film is greater than Chantal, greater than me, greater than Delphine.

How do you prepare for "the look" of a film? In relation with the way cinematographers when I started thought about what they were doing, I hated that concept of "the Look," which has nothing to do with the story. That is one of the first things I became aware off in the late 60s when I started shooting films. So JEANNE DIELMAN is definitely informed by something I had rationalized previously about what not to do.

As a cinematographer, you do not impose a style. You serve with a style that is appropriate to the story. So when people ten years later say "Oh we admired so much the cinematography you did in JEANNE DIELMAN, can you do it again?" That was enough to turn me off. "What do you think? That cinematography is just a recipe out of a bottle that it's going to work the same way?" It's bound not to work if it's not the same story.

There's a certain style in your framing such as frames within frames and a lot of sky when shooting landscapes. Definitely the framing is informed by painting and also by the fact that you look at the screen from a lower point of view in a movie theater than at home on your TV set. The classical cinematographer in the 60s was told to distinguish film framing with more head room and a lower centre of gravity for the image and TV framing with less head room and a more compacted frame because of the proximity of the TV set to the viewer that is so different from the distance of the film viewer in a movie theatre.

I feel that being at eye level can often look down. It's a position, which can be awkward in that it can make people fatter -- which in the Hollywood canon is a no-no, and it can be difficult to move the camera. Also, when I started, I was not that experienced so I did things out of ignorance, but realized it worked. The best complement I ever got was from Robert Frank. I was shooting a documentary with him. "Oh you photograph people like if they were giants." I thought that was a huge compliment.

I give presence to people. That's something I learned from American film, from John Ford in particular. It is the classical idiom of the American film of the 30s and 40s. Visual Presence is making the star. And the cinematographer is the one doing it. The presence is coming from the cinematography, coming from the light, from the framing, from the concentration on the figure. I'm very keen on delivering an image that's simple enough that there's no ornament, but par down enough that it's become emblematic. You want something that doesn't have clutter, but can be seen very quickly, and proportioned and balanced, so that you can look at it long enough without being bored. The viewer is sucked into the shot, because of the physical presence. I'm very keen on that since the beginning.

I notice a strong sensibility of color in your films. My sense of light and of color is coming from my grandmother who was a peasant and she told me how to observe the color of the sky and how to guess from it if it was going to rain the next day. I learned that when I was eight years old. Color is how you predict the weather in France and the weather is extremely variable and quickly changing. What I learned as a child informed the making of my fourth film THE SKY ON LOCATION. Now that I think of it, I realize that I was visually trained by those two women my grandmother and my mother. I wish I could you show a photograph of my grandmother and my niece, her great-great-granddaughter. My grandmother is in front of a modest house at the bottom of a short staircase leading to the front door. On top of the stairs is my five-year-old niece with hands on her hips mimicking the same gesture than her grandmother at the bottom of the stairs! They are both looking up and far away at the sky. You have the symmetry of the small body of the child and the aged, slightly hunched-back body of the ninety-three year old. I took that picture in 1975.

I really learned cinematography in black-and-white like most film students. And I worked on a film as an assistant in 1969, that was mixing black-and-white film stock with color stock on 35mm, which was really important to it… LE PRINTEMPS (1970), by Marcel Hanoun, that I discovered color cinematography. The art director is really very instrumental in the quality of the final color, by his choice of color in costumes and set design. On this film, I was lucky enough to be trained as an assistant cameraman with a crew where the art direction was beautifully designed and done with skill. This is rarely the case now, specifically in independent and cash poor productions. People don't actually put much thought on the color palette nowadays. But it's also the time. In the sixties and seventies the use of color was toward avoidance of complementary colors, using few colors and taking color out.

Originally, I learned photography because I wanted to be a cinematographer, not a photographer. But I couldn't afford to practice with motion picture film. I've always done better work if I frame and light; doing both camerawork and DP work. I need to see the framing to refine my light. The two things are combined. Photography was just a way to make a living; same for lab work

When I came to New York I worked as a lab technician. The owner of the lab was very generous and sympathetic. He gave me free paper and chemistry. This is how I did all the dance photographs of my early years in New York. This was an enormous gift, which made possible all the photographs I made from '71 to '74.

Looking at something deeply is helping you intellectually. The problem now is not due only to a transformation of film where people making film do not know film, but think in terms of money; of marketing or think in term of a product to sell. For me photography was a way to train my eye. It's more difficult to find money to shoot a film than to shoot photographs. But the process is very different.

How so? In photographs you have to be reactive. In film you have to invent, be organized, and know what you want. You don't have time to decide while you shoot if you don't have preconscious-ness of what you want to do. You have to be extremely organized and in photography you don't. One doesn't train you for the other, but one helps the other.

It helps because you have to look at contact sheet, looking at foreground and background position. We know we are moving in a three-dimensional space. If you don't shoot an image, you don't realize it. That thinking around one static image helps you.

I did photographs of dance and theater. The decisions when you shoot photograph are on the fly. It helped me become very quick in my framing. Same thing occurs in film; somehow it's because I know the script. The choices are never haphazard. It's very important to realize that every choice in framing signifies.

You've shot quite extensively choreography. When I was a kid I liked theater. I like the stylization of theater, I like the costume, the light. I love spectacle. That's the reason I like Hollywood movies because they are spectacle, so I'm not just an experimental filmmaker. Now the dance that I discovered in the early seventies was just the opposite of spectacle. It was essentially bare movement. It was a certain category of modern dance that influenced by the desire to renew dance movement with gestures from daily life performed by dancers who were not necessarily trained as dancer. That school of modern dance was about a simplified movement that did not require skill.

It was a question of duration. Very often the movement was repeated for a long time. There was no repeat of the movement. There was no narrative unfolding. It was abstraction. Most of 20th century early modern dance has been tied with story telling as in Martha Graham. But suddenly the movement did not symbolize anything. Its just there as a fact. That aspect interested me. I'm fascinated by people moving and people who are beautiful. I like to look. I think looking at dance it trained me to be a better cameraperson and a better filmmaker.

The gesture of the body is so beautifully captured in JEANNE DIELMAN. So why didn't you continue to work with actors on your own films? It wasn't the case at first. The performers presence creates the interest of the shoot for me. My first three films WHAT MAISIE KNEW (1975), THE CAMERA: JE (1977) and THE COLD EYE (1980) had performers. And now my current project is totally structured by the question of what is an actor? The project is a documentary on the actors in PICKPOCKET, the film by Robert Bresson shot in 1959.

One reason I stop working with actors in my own films is because one of my subject matters is the presence and absence of the self. One way to make absence felt is the absence of the representation of the body, letting the voices without bodies the task to evoke a subjectivity free from the boundaries of the body. It used that strategy in the three films I made that I called my landscapes films; THERE? WHERE? (1979), THE SKY ON LOCATION (1982) and VISIBLE CITIES (1991).

But in THE COLD EYE, which is the most traditional of all my films, I never was totally satisfied with the acting. And I think it is one of the reasons I focused my energy away from the performer's body for a decade. The story is about a young painter. You never see the painter. The camera eye is the painter's eye. The film viewer sees what she sees. It is a modern version of the subjective camera techniques of point of view shots used by Robert Montgomery in LADY IN THE LAKE (a Philip Marlowe story shot in 1947). In THE COLD EYE, there is practically non-stop dialogue. It's regular dialogue between the painter, a young woman and the people she is talking to or who talks to her. When they talk they look straight into the camera lens and it is great. But when she speaks it is not the viewer who is speaking and the effect for the film viewer is unsettling. What is discussed in the film is art making. It's the only film I don't have a video of. I think there was problem in the acting. There was a lot of English dialogue.

I think I didn't really understand the voice the intonation of the English dialog of THE COLD EYE because of my French accent. I used mostly non-trained actors. The unseen lead actress was putting too much emphasis on certain words. She was playing with the text. The delivery of the line was a bit awkward. The film went to Berlin and got me money to make THE SKY ON LOCATION. But I felt I failed as a director of actors. Because I think the actor is absolutely key to the success of the film. Delphine Seyrig is key for the success for JEANNE DIELMAN

That's surprising, because in your films, I notice you pay careful attention to voice. I don't believe in commentary voice, voice that tells you things. In my landscape films the voice is conversational, but still elaborate, still a learned voice, a voice that is informed. It's not small talk. It's somebody saying something and somebody saying something else which is complementing it. In VISIBLE CITIES, I structured the text around two voices that are not equal. One's is of a woman older than the other. They don't say their age, but you understand their age differences. When they are imagining things, when they drift in the landscapes, imagining the utopian cities, the older one imagines structures exploring organizational concepts of the cities, when the younger one imagine things based on pragmatic assumptions and money.

In THE SKY ON LOCATION I was not interested in character differences. I wanted two women's voices and a man's voice where those voices were more or less taking the relay of each other's, like an echo. My voice, with my foreign French accent, was more or less representing the naïve look on the landscape that an immigrant can have. It reflects the position of somebody from the outside who discovered with wonder the new consciousness of what wilderness is about.

Indeed there is no wilderness in Europe. It just doesn't exist in Europe. That's a concept that has probably lost one or two millennia ago.

WHAT MAISIE KNEW (1975).

The three voices were equivalent in terms of knowledge, age, and one had an accent and therefore brought a different perspective because of the accent. But in VISIBLE CITIES I really wanted character and it's a film that is totally structured by the narrative.

Who is Maisie? Maisie is the name of the child from my first film, WHAT MAISIE KNEW. In 1975 I made that film which is about the child who is four years old. The story is inspired by a novel by Henry James and her first name is taken from the James novel. I thought that if Maisie was four or five in 1975, sixteen years later she would be twenty-one years old. It is the Maisie who lives in California. In the other film she was in New York. It's just an in-joke.

As a woman cinematographer in the sixties and seventies, did you have had to deal with extreme sexism? When I came to New York in late October, 1970, people were distinguishing their day job that was paying for their living expanses and their work, meaning their artwork in general was not income producing or even cost the surplus money they were earning at their job. I also learned to distinguish between job and work. And thank God since the mid-70s I have managed to survive by doing my work and nothing else. I could dispense with "jobs."

When I left film school I couldn't find any work as a cinematographer or as an assistant. I had a very hard time finding even replacement AC work, and if I was doing AC work it was just replacement work for a one-day job. But the cameramen, who was getting me as AC, was always put off with me because I was a woman. They could not tell me the same dirty jokes they had used with a male AC. They felt awkward when they saw me carrying the equipment, which is the job of the AC, so I couldn't stay in a job. I couldn't hook up with a cameraperson and I was starving. So after really being in duress, I had no other choice than to take a job as an editor. I knew nothing about editing. I wasn't taught that in film school because it was a school on cinematography only. In my class there were 30 students, 28 men, one woman who wanted to be an editor and I who wanted to be a cinematographer. Two years later I had not achieved it but she had. So I called her the day before I went on my first editing job to get some sense of what I needed to know. And I managed fine thanks to her help!

My luck was that I was working alone at that editing job, so I was slower but I manage to get it done. I learned a lot about sound. I felt it was very important. Now I think it's very important for a cinematographer to know editing. You shoot better coverage and provide for shots that match! I didn't know it at the time.

Was there a difference as a cinematographer between working with female directors and male directors? If you work with a woman there is a sense of a film language to be claimed, which has to be specific to woman's language so you are much more involved in making experimental work because of it. You know you are doing something that few women have done before. In the momentum of the feminist movement of the seventies that necessity to do work related to women's concerns was

very important. You had few role models and they had to be women. In the eighties, it became irrelevant and the sex of the director didn't change anything. And now what is relevant is that producers still don't trust women at the camera. In production the bulk of the money is the camera department and even now most men don't trust women with what they think is their bad days, feminine troubles and lack of logic. Things have not changed much in thirty years!

What inspired you to make your own films? Frankly, it's Chantal. In 1973, she decided to go back to Europe because she wanted to make fiction films and felt that New York was not the place to do that for her.

In winter of 1972, I had shot Yvonne Rainer's film LIVES OF PERFORMERS (1972). Strangely that film was a real success. I think it's a wonderful film. It costs very little money and little know-how. Suddenly I was in New York working on a great film as a DP. I thought I should stay in New York. For Chantal, New York had been a very exciting place for her, but she wanted to go back to Europe. Before she left somebody gave her black-and-white film stock that was outdated and she said, "I don't want to take the stock with me. It's too heavy. Why don't you keep it and make a film?" And so I started to shoot some footage. An idea comes to me about the exploration of a child's subjectivity that I got from the Henry James's novel and I finished the project WHAT MAISIE KNEW.

But I wasn't very convinced when I finished that (directing is) what I wanted to do. I went to Brussels to shoot JEANNE DIELMAN. I was committed to be a cameraperson and my films weren't really important to me. But because MAISIE got a prize in France, I got money to do a second film, which is THE CAMERA: JE. During the making of that film I realized that I had a unique experience as someone who was totally structured by the idea of the gaze and by looking. In my years in New York I had been functioning essentially outside language and lived by looking. I was learning English but I mistrusted language. But in shooting CAMERA JE, I also realized I wasn't interested in storytelling but in communicating my experience.

Do you still want to shoot for other directors? I've given up camerawork. I was supposed to be DP for a film in France. At the last minute the production didn't want me and axed me out. They were not sure I could work fast enough. They really respected my work and knew I could do it, but they were afraid that for the quality I would demand they didn't have a budget that could provide for it.

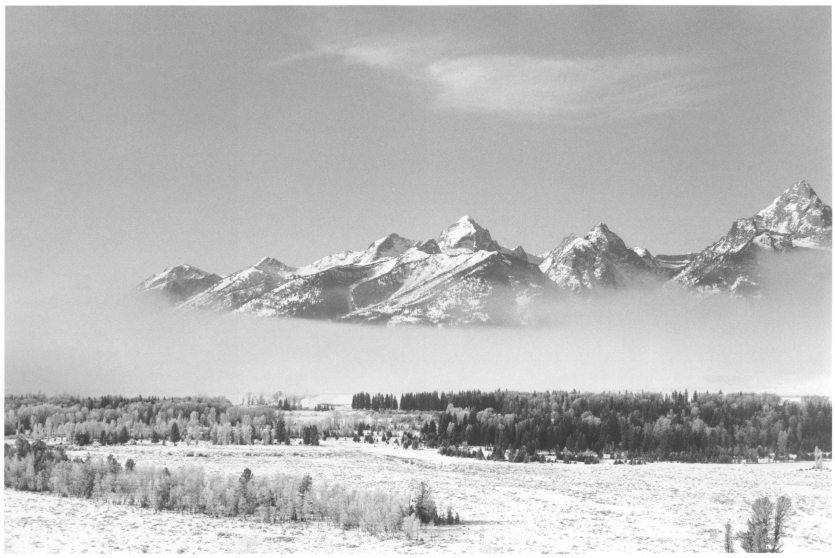
I loved to shoot and I love being a cameraperson. But I think it's over. Ageism again. The fact is because most of the people deciding are now young enough to be my sons and few could be daughters I must say. It is not a good time for visual people. The film world is very much against them, and most films aren't visually interesting anymore.

Do you want to talk about ageism? Ageism is more or more prevalent in the culture but for me it is a new sprout of the good old misogyny of my youth. I have devised my own strategy a long time ago.

Somehow I always knew I had to delude myself. Somebody told me in the mid-sixties, "You can't go to that school to study cinematography because there is no woman cinematographer." I didn't want to hear it. I'm going to go to that school although I'll be the only woman. So I always felt that it was better to avoid looking at certain facts. Because if I look at them there's no room for a woman to exist, especially in the film world. So you have to delude yourself. In the seventies I did it very successfully. In the eighties I kept doing it but my first problem came because I was very sick and didn't work for two years and when I went back I competed for jobs and I didn't get any.

Interestingly, being a filmmaker, although not known at all, and being a well-known cinematographer does not help you build a career. Because as a well-known cinematographer you upstage the beginning director, and it is compounded by the fact you are also a filmmaker. So in the late 80's I got into that problem. I was well known as a cinematographer, but that was creating a problem. It really blocked me.

Now in my work I use the difference between generations in VISIBLE CITIES. The fact that the average film now speaks only of the psychology of a twenty year old is deeply distressing to me. You know there is not a diversity of generation. Certainly it is a far cry from the Hollywood classical period.



THE SKY ON LOCATION (1982).

I see you bought a digital camera. With DV you can practice, refine your image and shoot, you could do the same thing if you want to train yourself, potentially it's great because it is cost free or almost. But in fact I don't think you do train your self in any meaningful for a filmmaker. Film is not DV. One of the key difference is that you shoot sound with picture in DV and not in film, the other is you don't have to change your magazine every 10 minutes and never think of not shooting in DV, when it is basically the most important question in film. Why shoot this instead of that when you can shoot only five minutes for that scene? You have to conceptualise what you do instead of reacting to it after it is done. For me comparing film and digital, it is like night and day. DV doesn't have the same reaction to light, and the colors are very different. It's a new machine. There's very little I can apply from what I know in film to digital. Film cameras are not automatic. In DV you end up mostly as prisoner of software decisions and automatisms that are counterproductive.

DECASIA, the first feature by BILL MORRISON, premiered in Sundance's experimental Frontier section in January 2002. Consisting entirely of archive footage that is decaying, falling apart and bubbling, various themes of life, death and mankind play out over a heavy orchestral score by composer Michael Gordon. A co-production with the Ridge Theater in New York, where Morrison has lives, the original production of DECASIA was inside a three-story scaffolding shaped as a triangle. Morrison's film and slides by Laurie Olinder were projected from each corner onto screens in front of a 55-piece orchestra surrounding the audience on all levels.

Morrison's earlier shorts also rely heavily on archive footage and have played many film festivals. Five of his films (including the recently added DECASIA) are in the MOMA collection. By dredging through old footage Morrison is not just a filmmaker but a historian, who has actually saved films from being lost through his work. His films evoke a fresh look at historic images, making new emotions and designs through new editing, changing speed and analyzing bubbling images.

CINEMAD: How did you get started in film?

BILL MORRISON: I grew up in Chicago. (I've lived in New York since 1985.) Chicago's a spectacularly beautiful city that allowed for a lot of daydreaming. I spent a lot of my youth doing that. When I was in high school, I created some claymation short on Super 8 – borrowing a line from a Jethro Tull song – I think we called it "The Tidal Destruction – The Moral Melée." But now, thinking about it, that could have been a subtitle for DECASIA. (laughs)

At least you didn't go off into - what's that flute song – "Aqua Lung"? This is off of *Thick as a Brick*, I think. I hope you don't… (Aren't they all flute songs?)

No, there's no judgment on that. Ok.

So you were making films in high school? I don't know if you could call that particular effort a film. I was always into drawing and painting – perhaps more than reading and writing. I started out at an academic college – Reed College in Portland, Oregon. And after a couple of years, I switched to an art school where there was considerably less reading, writing and 'rithmetic. (laughs) I went to Cooper Union in New York which is a pretty intense Art School – I really got into painting and eventually film on an equal level to painting. I studied under the animator Robert Breer, who makes all his films on index cards and is also a former painter. He draws on the index cards and makes these beautiful stream of consciousness films that really subscribe to this whole notion, that of a film being any number of paintings per second, which I really adopted. I guess that's the binding thing in all my work – that treatment of each frame being sort of a painting.

How much original footage do you use with the archive footage? DECASIA is the only title which uses exclusively archival footage. Even THE FILM OF HER (1997) has some original footage, believe it or not. The entire vault scene is something I staged. All those paper rolls on the shelves; the clerk and everything. And for trivia's sake, the shot of the gurgling in the volcano is from Pozzuoli in Italy. That's just because I couldn't get clearance on the archival shot I was taking.

You actually went to Italy for the film? Yeah, that whole film is edited in Italy. There's this school that, for lack of a better word, is called Fabrica, that was a division of the Benetton Corporation. I was invited to come there for a year and do whatever. I ended up bringing in all my 16mm selects – what was to become THE FILM OF HER and editing it over there.

A shot of a volcano…. I was in the area anyway and needing the gurgling formation of the earth shot. I was using somebody's shot from wherever and I couldn't clear it. The guy was really adamant about it. So I went out and filmed some gurgling earth. In THE FILM OF HER there is a shot that's representative of every decade of the century from 1890 to 1990. And the original photography represents the 1990s.

The power and history of cinema is in all of your work somehow. It served like the beginning of cinema – the beginning of Western man and this whole art meets industry and the dangers inherent with it. I have an interest in seizures such as in epilepsy. Someone told me that in the old days, the epileptics in every culture, the Aztecs, the Mayans, the Aborigines – the epileptics were visited by angels and had contact with God. And in the industrial and mechanized age, those people are no longer valued. In fact, they are liabilities. The beginning of cinema represents this whole dangerous time where dreamers can also get tripped up. It's a whole new mindset that what we are able to convey as artists and also understand as viewers is approaching a dream state. Since we have access to the beginning of cinema, I can use it as an analogy for the beginning of whatever; the 20th century, of human consciousness, of rational thought… a Step One. (And this holds for) all the shorts leading up to DECASIA. Perhaps it helps to have seen the early works to know where I'm coming from.

The obvious question: Do the images come to you while looking through archive footage or were you interested in it and then went out and find what you needed to find? It's always a give and take – there's always a seed image that puts me on to a path. Then it's a fill in the blanks kind of thing. I need images that will get me from Point A to Point B to Point C. With DECASIA, I discovered the boxer footage and the nun footage and I discovered that there was something there.

The first choice will be made on whether (the footage) looks cool – on whether it shows deterioration (interacting) with an image in a interesting way – and then within that very small group which ones held my scenario.

When I describe DECASIA to someone, of course I bring up KOYAANISQATSI (1983, directed by Godfrey Reggio). That's the easiest relation as far as the style – the whole symphonic film, images with themes, no actors or dialogue. But then you've got decayed footage which is always amazing – easily because it looks cool - its bubbling. But then you slow it down and you start to realize what's going on and then you've got the problem of being in your body, of decaying, every section of life going down. There's birth literally and death literally and whether it's shots of the film lab or simply from the baby – creepy ass baby footage… That's Eisenstein footage. In a educational film from the 1920s – it was really intense footage actually, because it was showing that if you've got to get an abortion, get it from this sterile clinic, not this midwife. So it was showing what to do if you're pregnant and what to do to avoid getting pregnant. It was really an interesting film called "Frauennot Frauenglück" or something like that. But I got it from the Swiss Cinematheque and I cleared it and everything. Now I have those shots forever.

It ends up that you've become a lawyer of images – by how you know what you've got to do to clear now and how to do it – the basics. A lawyer -- I hope not. (laughing) I prefer not to have to. But there are times when you realize that like with Eisenstein, that somebody might know.

But have you learned by just doing it, what's you've got to do to clear rights? Yeah, a lot of my interest in early film is that it's cleared. In 1990 I starting hooking up with Ridge Theatre. I've made 15 productions with them. Really out of necessity and low budgets, I was drawn to the paper print collection because I knew I could get a hold of it for like a buck a foot. And there were interesting images that had all these layers of meaning in the right context and it was cleared. I wasn't going to have to go through any legal process with it. That got me onto that path. Then I sort of stayed on it once it became my aesthetic. Now I have to spend the money on the clearances and the original masters and all that shit.

DECASIA (2002).

Where have you found old footage at, meaning collectors or studios? The big cache for me was the Fox Movietone outtakes in the University of South Carolina, which both those scene images – the nun and the boxer -- came from. I was down there on the Orphan Film Symposium which has met now three times, most recently in October 2003. (It) brings together filmmakers and academics, writers and a bunch of cool people who are interested in lost film.

I was showing THE FILM OF HER there and then when the academics would have their lectures, I would duck off to their film library and start cruising for images. So I'm very much indebted to them. Then they hired me for a semester as a professor. I got to really explore their collections and built DECASIA around it. A lot of that footage was shot on nitrate.

Obviously you had to re-photograph that (nitrate film is very flammable) but did you have to re-photograph everything? Yeah, and those ones were all the original negatives and they were really cool about it, so I could shoot cord to cord; I could just have them send the negative to a lab and they could print only that part I was really interested in. Other places – for instance, MOMA, the Library of Congress, they've already made a master and they don't want to put that kind of stress on their master. So you have to reprint the entire reel that your shot came off of, which can really add up quick, particularly when you're dealing with fine-grain masters – up to two bucks a foot.

Have you worked much with the George Eastman House? Yeah, and with them, I was sort of like a mini reclamation project. They gave me access to their original nitrate that they were probably going to toss out – the stuff that wasn't fitting in and was going quick and was in danger of contaminating the rest of their collection. I chose five reels from them that I wanted in my film and I made (Kodak) a master copy. So in a way I saved those five films for DECASIA.

That's great. How would the nitrate corrupt the other stuff? First of all, it's heavily noxious stuff so it's bad to have around. But if one little piece in a roll starts to go, it's like a cancer and it starts to eat through the entire roll – it's like a sticky goopy thing in a can that starts to rot. So they always have to clip out parts… We lost most of our film history through fires because it's extremely flammable. There's stories of cans being opened up and just exploding in people's faces. A lot of gas gets caught in the can if its not stored in a cool dry place. It's really nasty stuff to work with. It can fleck in your eye. To work with that stuff, you have to have gloves, a robe, a mask...there's usually a vacuum hose in the high tech places that's sucking the fumes up as you work over it – it's really hardcore.

But it's got to be done. Yeah, and it's such incredible stuff – the silver content is so high, that the quality of the images just exceeds anything that we can see on safety (film that is not dangerous).

Can you look at something and figure out what general decade it from? Oh, no, I'm not that good. I'm more of a consumer. (both laugh). I'm looking for cool shots, you know. But there are people who are just wiz's at that (…). I just say, "I want that in my film!"

How do you even have a budget when you go into all the film lab work that is required? Oh my God, it can spiral out of control so easily. DECASIA was originally commissioned as part of a live performance (by Ridge Theater), so they put down a substantial amount of cash to get it started – probably more cash than I've made any of my short films for. And as it happens, I got a Guggenheim Fellowship the same year which is pretty much about the same amount of money so that doubled my budget. Then I got two more grants, Creative Capital and New York Foundation of the Arts, so I could deal with getting the thing to print. The rest of my expenses were out of pocket.

So you got the Guggenheim and you just put it all in the film? Every penny of it! But it was good – it came at a time when I was actively trying to buy footage.

I'm not trying to knock them, it's a necessity when you're poor, but many people get a grant and they buy a car or a house. Luckily I live in New York and have no need for either. (both laugh)

How have you been handling distribution? Obviously it's going to these festivals but has anyone approached you about getting it around? I'd love to see this play some theatres…play some universities and not have to do it myself because if I spend this whole year distributing DECASIA, I'm not going to have another film next year and probably not the one after that. I want to move on. DECASIA's done.

How did you get involved with Reggio? You know the last shot of THE DEATH TRAIN? That's a Reggio shot, that's an outtake from KOYAANISQATSI. An aerial of L.A. Becasuse we had friends in common through Ridge Theater, I wrote him a letter asking if I could use any outtakes from KOYAANISQATSI and he was like, "Oh, sure." A very generous guy.

Then I sent him THE DEATH TRAIN and he said, "How'd you like to work for me sometime?" That was about eight or nine years ago. After that he got a position at Fabrica, the Benetton thing, and asked me to come out there. By the time I got out there, he had left Fabrica. But they honored my contract and I ended up having an incredible year in Italy. Then Steven Soderbergh gave him the seed money for NAQOYQATSI (2002) and Reggio hired me as an editor through about September (2001). My skills as an editor were conceptual and placement-oriented and then the digital guys came in and I moved over to DECASIA.

Didn't you find stuff that was water damaged from peoples' basements? Oh, yeah. There's a credit to Hurricane Fran because there was an entire archive that was soaked by that Hurricane. (The water damage) created a sort of white spindly branches when the emulsion stuck to the base underneath and was peeled off – kind of like an electricity or lightning thing. You see that in a few shots, especially the more modern ones.

What did you think when you first saw the nun footage? That was just breathtaking – especially the soundtrack – the original soundtrack's just complete ominous bells chiming throughout it and dogs barking then just pzzst…pzzst…pzzst…of deterioration intercepting the soundtrack. I mean it's a film unto itself. I don't know if anything can be more powerful than that original soundtrack. But I just really got this ominous feeling from it and also the fact that these nuns were converting Native Americans into Catholicism, this whole: man trying to tame the wild beast thing. Which is what DECASIA is also about, you know, to beat back the decay and get a lid on everything and try to be in control. Meanwhile the decay is still eating up from underneath your habit.

Most of the shots are stretched out in slow motion, becoming an examination. Absolutely, I wanted the viewer to be aware of every frame, sort of like a slide show passing by. Also a lot of this stuff was shot at 18 frames per second so (slow motion) could give it the more beautiful, flowing effect.

The expectations we have from editing in the 1980s and '90s in general give us low expectations of really looking at an image. Then when you get to examine something that breaks them down. The full long shot of the camel walking across the screen very slowly; it ends up letting all these emotions go through you and its totally doing its job. You

DECASIA (2002).

really have to retreat into your own thoughts with DECASIA and I think the audience appreciates that. They appreciate this moment where they're not being told what to think and the viewer has to explore what they're feeling. You know their anxiety about seeing this camel go half-way across the screen and, lo and behold, a new camel has entered the right side and you have to watch him go across the screen. (laugh) It's the passage of time that's controlled.

I think DECASIA is more open, and I think the Reggio works are somewhat more pejorative. He's saying we're on a bad path and I'm saying this is what this film looks like…draw your own comparisons.

The connection with Ridge Theater is working out well for you? Yeah, because it provides a community and sort of a context for these short weird films. The Artistic Director of Ridge, Bob McGrath, will say, "How could you make a film that somehow relates to this?" Or, "Remember that idea you were talking about, the evolution film? Don't you think that would work here?" So they will give me a chunk of cash, a deadline and an opening which is great because there would be these theatre pieces that would have opening nights and reviews and chicks and audiences and all that – beer… Otherwise I'm just holed up in my little basement somewhere, fiddling away on my optical printer and my editing machine and when is a film done, you know? I mean I completely re-edited DECASIA after Sundance.

What sort of changes did you make? Well, I wanted to hit the beats more and I really felt like after watching it at Sundance five times and Rotterdam for another four times, there were like things that weren't hitting and it was bothering me. So I went back in with a list of 12 things I wanted to change and ended up, you know, when you're editing analog, it's hard to make one change. You end up having to really pull the film apart. Though it is structurally identical, you move from shot to shot in sometimes a different way.

How were you editing? Is there a positive work print? Yeah, I went back to the work print, dug my trims up – I have to be the only person doing this anymore… Finding the four frames I need at the bottom of the trash bag.

It sounds romantic. I did it at an editing place that cut me a deal, so I had my nightmare spread out across their offices. When other clients would come in I would scurry the footage under the couches. (both laugh) When you're 36 years old there are other words besides romantic….

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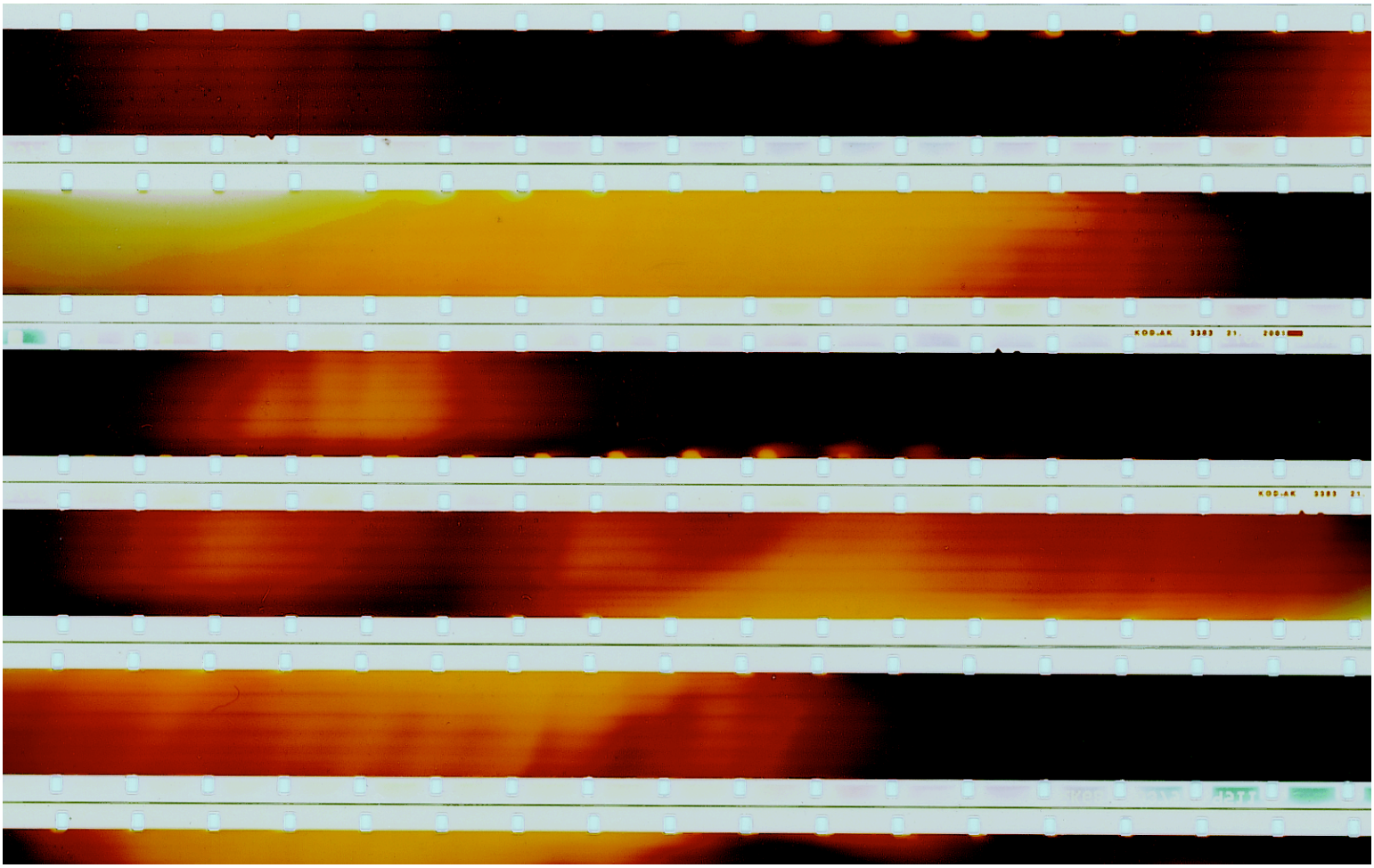
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Brian Frye and Luis Recoder.

In the hoopla surrounding independent film in the early 90s, few were inclined to pay much attention to American avant-garde film, which at the time seemed about as lively as the Socialist Workers' Party. But while the SWP hasn't fared any better since, avant-garde filmmaking has experienced a rather unexpected renascence of its own. Among those few paying attention while their classmates were chasing dreams of maverick semi-stardom a la Ed Burns was LUIS RECODER, whose peculiar, obsessively hermetic meta-cinema has propelled him into a kind of semi-stardom of his own. In the last three years, Recoder's films and film-performances have appeared in the New York Film Festival, the Viennale, the Rotterdam Film Festival and the 2002 Whitney Biennial.

An unconventional filmmaker even by the iconoclastic standards of the avant-garde, Recoder doesn't actually use a camera at all, and many of his films exist only when he performs them live. Even his fixed films - AVAILABLE LIGHT and SPACE, for instance - retain the light precision of the perfect gesture. Despite the obvious debt he owes structural filmmakers like Ernie Gehr and Paul Sharits, Recoder adds a wry Duchampian cynicism to the more muscular minimalism they pioneered. Generally, Recoder's version of filmmaking consists in the exacting execution of a single simple but utterly unexpected twist on standard filmmaking practice. Whether exposing entire rolls of raw color film to controlled light sources or making a positive print of a particularly distressed piece of clear leader, Recoder doesn't simply present the detritus of the filmmaking process as his art, but manufactures an unexpectedly sublime facsimile of trash. This renunciation of virtuosity allows Recoder's films to even better reveal the tactile beauty of film itself, foregrounding the expressive richness and texture of photographic emulsion in its purest form. *Interview by Brian Frye*

CINEMAD: Where were you born, and what year?

RECODER: I was born in San Francisco in 1971, and after two years we moved out to the East Bay to a place called Albany. I grew up in Albany until I was 10 years old, then we moved to El Sobrante. And from El Sobrante to Berkeley. That's pretty much it in terms of living.

So then you got to Berkeley, and that's when you got interested in film? Had you made any films before you got there? No film before I got there. I didn't even think about getting into film. I applied to U.C.Berkeley as an architecture student and was accepted. There had been architects in the family, so I figured, well, I'll be an architect too. Then I discovered the rhetoric program. And through rhetoric I discovered cinema. And through cinema I discovered experimental film.

So you started making films while you were at Berkeley? Yeah. With a guy named Brian Frye.

I've seen some of those, a long time ago. But you haven't really shown them since. I seem to have misplaced them.

Did you feel like the program at Berkeley was conducive to filmmaking or was it a place where it was difficult for you to make films? There was no pressure to make films. This had to do with the fact that we were not in a filmmaking program. Filmmaking was the result of discovering experimental/avant-garde film. The path of possibilities was set.

When you graduated from Berkeley had you shown films publicly? Yeah, there were a couple of pieces I showed that evolved out of classroom exercises.

Are those films you still show? No, they don't show, though several did at the time [1992-95] thanks to individuals like yourself and fellow classmate Steve Polta who programmed the work outside the classroom context; beyond the grade so to speak.

I remember seeing a lot of those films and feeling that what you were doing was not merely better, but of a different kind than what the other students were doing. You were making works of art, while the rest of the students were making class projects. Yeah, that's true. At least according to you guys!

After Berkeley, you went to the San Francisco Art Institute? What was the primary motivation for that? I went to the Art Institute primarily to sustain that feeling of wanting to make films and to be in a milieu where people would support my work.

Were there particular people you were interested in there? Ernie Gehr, Steve Anker, and of course people like yourself and Steve Polta.

Were there particular films that you saw that made you interested in filmmaking? Particular things that were important in terms of your development as a filmmaker? I was drawn toward things "critical" - the self-referential and reflexive nature of things filmic. But as time went on and I got deeper into my craft I felt the necessity to rethink my disposition towards criticality. I attribute this to my own work, in films like MAGENTA, BARE STRIP, MOEBIUS STRIP and BALLAD OF... where the gesture of auto-critique is frustrated, striking a delicate dialectic between analysis and something altogether missed in our reckless questioning of everything.

It sounds like you're talking about the difference between an academic relationship to film and an aesthetic one. Precisely!

Where did you start showing films publicly? At the Pacific Film Archive in Berkeley, the San Francisco Cinematheque, and the Artists' Television Access (Craig Baldwin's Other Cinema).

Okay, well one thing that I think is really interesting is that a lot of your filmmaking process, at least in certain of your earlier films like the one you showed at the New York Film Festival [MOEBIUS STRIP, 1998], takes place in the projector rather than in the camera or on the editing bench, and I'm wondering how you arrived there, and what steps came along the way. All my work is tempered by projection - the site for a cinema of immediacy and the potential for real-time manipulation.

Being in a position to see and make at the same time? Precisely!

Experimental filmmakers are well known for spending a lot of time working with the camera very extensively, and yet despite a few exceptions the projector seems like the one element in the whole filmmaking process - camera, editing table to presentation - that is intervened in the least. And one of the things that makes your films so engaging is that you draw this potential out of the projector, that one would never have previously thought was there. What was the path that led you to thinking about the projector in that way? The path which prevents me from fully straying headlong into this industrial shipwreck of an apparatus. In brief, the shortest path. With projector in hand, as opposed to camera, I imagined myself a filmmaker filming my hesitation to "inscribe" upon celluloid. I asked myself: is there a passivity proper and in tune with the silent passage of projection? A passivity that stems from the conditions of projection and yet refuses to posit a subject reduced to the sheer "inactivity" associated with sitting in the dark? Projection

seemed to awaken a problematic questioning of the subject running up against the ideal image of an active cameraman in pursuit of a subversive cinema.

One of the strange things for me about a lot of your films is the way that the narrative of the filmmaking process seems closest to the narrative of the laboratory. In a sense, you have a hypothesis that's tested. And the films are something like iterations of an experiment. The AVAILABLE LIGHT films, for instance, seem one of the cleanest examples of that sort of process. AVAILABLE LIGHT constitutes the first inscriptions of light on light-sensitive material. It is a document of how light - natural and artificial - has been captured, absorbed, and stabilized in the absence of a camera proper. If there are hypotheses and tests - experiments proper - it is in the way that AVAILABLE LIGHT has allowed me to explore, or shall I say investigate, raw stock unaided by lenticular inscription. What is important here is that the "camera proper" has not disappeared. There is a light-leak in the camera obscura. There are fissures all over this so-called laboratory of the experimental.

People are most likely to have seen films like MAGENTA, MOEBIUS STRIP, or BALLAD OF...in which you use a projector with a film bipacked in the gate of the projector to create the film. Somebody asked me a question awhile ago about how exactly it was that one could talk about the role of metaphor in filmmaking. And I feel like those films are some of the best expressions of metaphor in filmmaking that I've seen. Attempts to recreate a filmic version of a mechanism so specific to literature. That is a question of the script, or the notation of the film as it works its way through projection. With the bipacked films the doubling of the script calls attention to the footage as footage. The material transparency of film is shot through with none other than its own. This is not, as you say, 'a filmic version of a mechanism so specific to literature' but a mechanism of filmic transparency specific to film. Superimpostions! The gesture of doubling frames the metaphors as metaphors and lets us see them in the constructedness of their construction. The material is imbued with a reflexivity that rises to the surface of optical awareness. One allows the material to stumble onto itself long before it comes crashing down on the viewer's critical cogito.

But that's what's most difficult about the idea of metaphor in film. That it's so easy for a film to mean something, and yet metaphor is a meaning that's uncontainable. In those films you have two very discrete elements - the original film material, and a very rigidly defined process - the combination of which results in something totally foreign to either. There's a difference of kind, where you move from two things you can understand, to something you can't understand. The meeting of discrete elements is my montage. The collision created in the bipacking of an instructional film on wound dressing, a sports film, and a narrative western B film. In the bipacking there is a level of understanding that is specific to the original material. A filmic veiling that unveils. But at the same moment a veiling occurs that overdetermines the original production values to create something radically other.

It's like you find something in the source material that didn't originally appear. Exactly!

In another presentation you modified the projection of a Regular 8mm film with various lenses and pinholes, creating a continuous variation of a somewhat obscured subject. In a way it had a musical structure to it, as if I were seeing something in a series of movements. Does it have a title? You are referring to a show entitled OPTICKA RES EXTENSA [at the Robert Beck Memorial Cinema in 1999]. The attempt was to demonstrate the suppressed camera in the projector, or

simply put, the projector as camera. I wanted the audience to feel as if they were in the presence of an optical becoming, however crude and weak the articulation. The making of visuality prior to ground glass or in the nearness of its coming. Perhaps "hypothetical" as you say of the other work, but with the real-time participation of viewers like you aiding in the near-definition of optical aberrations and retinal abrasions.

In relation to that, I think it's pretty clear now that there was a period in the 70s and the 80s, when people were really interested in making films about film. The ontology of film, etc. Everybody was trying to make movies about spectatorship. And a lot of very interesting movies came out of that era. And I feel like today, a lot of younger filmmakers are coming back to a certain interest in the medium in a way that hasn't happened for a long time, and I feel like its a rediscovery of the material of filmmaking. And yet, there's something very different about the way at least the filmmakers I find most interesting today are approaching that aspect of filmmaking. And I find that the difference is primarily that younger filmmakers seem a lot more humble than the people who were working with similar ideas in the 70s, in that then the emphasis was on explaining how film works, whereas today the emphasis seems to be more on exploring, or looking into the way that film works. And your films are some of the best examples of that tendency. Each of your films has its own way of intervening in the filmmaking process.

I am interested in the particular light cast by the cinema of film. This light is better articulated in the wake of the so-called digital divide. The flood of conical light of diverse kinds allows us to experience film as if for the first time. There is no nostalgia for film. No disavowal of the new cinemas. There is instead a 'giving back' to film of what is inherently its own, which left by itself is in danger of losing this innermost insight. We are not in an epoch of a 'rediscovery' of film but the first witnesses of its coming into being in the nearness of its death.

JENNIFER REEVES is the proud owner of a painting by Christopher Walken, the result of winning Best NY, NY Narrative Feature film at the 2004 Tribeca Film Festival. Interesting, as her first feature THE TIME WE KILLED is far from the usual film about singles in Manhattan apartments trying to piece together work and young love and who gives a shit about what happens to them at the coffee shop. Reeves work is strictly different, with shorts about teenagers on the loose, lesbian fantasies and abstract colors, told in destroyed film processing, optical printing and hand painting. TIME contains the heaviest black and white contrast you are gonna see in a while, following a woman who consciously keeps herself inside her NY apartment from fear, yet with a fresh voice, thoughtful and even funny.

CINEMAD: Just in general, did you pretty much pick up filmmaking by diving in or was it in film school?

JENNIFER REEVES: I did my first videos in high school, just typical, using the home video camera making silly videos with my friends. Actually, a couple of them were kind of spooky and experimental. I feel like doing that got certain tendencies out of my system. When I went to Bard College as a student, I had wanted to be a filmmaker based on having seen foreign films on video at home. And basically at Bard it's about avant-garde film. In class there when I first saw Bruce Baillie, Maya Deren, Su Friedrich, I totally loved it. The films hit me really hard. I found I could actually communicate this way a lot better. I've been really shy and not very social.

Like when you were growing up? Yeah, my nickname used to be "Whispers" when I was growing up.

That's awesome. When I was introduced to avant-garde film as a kind of visual language, it didn't require a lot of verbal narrative. It was a way to communicate things that I felt and knew but I wasn't able to say verbally and directly. I think that's why I immediately clung to it. I made a few of the shorts in college, which have been shown. GIRLS DAYDREAM ABOUT HOLLYWOOD (1992) was my first short to show publicly. It showed at Pacific Film Achive, Berkeley, and I also went on a little tour with a group called Postmodern Sisters. Having that short show around made me realize that I can actually do this, be a filmmaker. This feeling of being able to communicate something and have people show appreciation for these personal or poetic films.

What is it about contrast and grain that's just so seductive? I actually think it brings things to their elements. You don't get distracted by so much detail. It also emphasizes the fragility of life in the world and people you know. One of the things that I'm not crazy about with video is that it feels a little too… I want to say "real," but it's not exactly that. It's more like video solidifies life to the surface. You're very aware of the surface and things being very solid and fixed. Whereas with grainy, high-contrast film, you're more aware of the transparency of objects, looking into somebody or something.

A little more emotion. Yeah.

THE TIME WE KILLED (2004).

That's why reality TV is so perfect on basic, shitty video. It sort of emphasizes the shallowness of human beings in a way that makes them seem more shallow than people actually are. Or perhaps I just don't get to know all these shallow people. I don't know if I'm just lucky or what.

It's got to be a bitch now making a 16mm print these days. THE TIME WE KILLED (2004) was a nightmare to get finished. Black and white 16mm is very hard to get done well. Right now, I'm doing this WHEN IT WAS BLUE film performance, which is kind of related to THE TIME WE KILLED and some of these ideas that I feel, this love of film and 16mm film, which I've been working in since I started. The aesthetics (optical-printing and different film stocks I've used and how the grain blows up) I'm very attached to. But it's no longer the easy personal film medium, the manageable, affordable one. It's hard to show. I've had some problems with projection over the past year, and I guess 16mm has always had some projection problems. It's going to be hard to export and even harder to show than the feature…

Because you have so many different sources? It's because I'm doing it with live music. I feel like the first thing I can let go in 16mm is sound. Personally, it's hard for me to deal with anymore with that mono optical-track sound. I've always done a lot of sound montage and layering, not the typical realistic soundtrack but something that's more evocative.

Even when you've used music, you've adjusted it and fucked it up. And music is very related to the abstract film that I do because it works with the rhythm the way that light and darkness and color shift visually. My father was a musician, and I've always loved the abstract expression of instrumental music and the emotional aspect of it. It's a way to celebrate what I love the most about the 16mm image and let go of the 16mm sound. To have live music by these fantastic musicians and get back to the spontaneity of instant performance, instant communication, instant art-making. I'm using two projectors and they're not perfectly synched, so I'm basically editing on a light-box with a synchronizer and lining up high-contrast black and white film with hand-painted footage that I've done mostly in color, and creating different movement. Did I ever send you a copy of HE WALKED AWAY (2003)?

I don't think so. HE WALKED AWAY is the first film and music performance that I did. I performed it at Tonic in NYC and at the Toronto International Film Festival in 2003. WHEN IT WAS BLUE is a long version of that kind of piece. HE was seventeen minutes and WHEN is going to be approximately sixty. It's a major work.

Did you edit it together so it'll just play, or did you leave any room to screw around live? Right now, I'm actually looking at all the pieces hanging from my wall. With HE WALKED AWAY, I created two reels with maybe four or five points where I had to stop one or the other projector and then restart it and just choreograph it somewhat. Some people work loops or multiple reels and they're frantically changing the reels. To me, I want it to be somewhat composed so it's not random. I like the fact that it plays differently each time, in terms of the relationship between the two images. I'm either going to have a few reels

that stop and start. More likely I will place film leader where I need pauses between the reels. I think I like that better because I can sort of play with it without being too stressed or confused by running around with twenty different reels. It'll be easier to put on at different venues.

I also use filters. Some color filters, but sometimes just neutral density filters. That darkens one or both images, so it's a way of choosing which image is dominant at a particular time. I might at one point want the landscape photographic image or portrait of a person to be dominant, while the hand-painted abstract work that's going along with it is slightly muted. It's a way to create a kind of shifting between the two visual realms. It's also a way to respond to the musicians, because the musicians might pick up on a certain rhythm and emphasize something that I feel is echoed with a color of one of the two images on the screen or the rhythm of the actual movement. It's one of those things that's very hard to describe.

I like the idea of feeling colors, because it's not as simple as, "Oh, blue means sky." Introducing a new color at a certain point in the film is a form of drama. If you think of structuring an experimental film that won't have the typical narrative three-act structure, you basically think in terms of emotional experience or "drama" that you create by changing or introducing new elements or collisions. So in this one film, it's going to start out mostly black and white, and the way that colors are introduced become moments of transformation in the experience of the piece. It's a different way to work, but it's actually really powerful in the same way that in an orchestra, there will suddenly be an oboe solo and it will hit this different frequency.

And it's a choice instead of, "Well, this is here, so you can use it." I hope you can see this one. The end result of it after a year or a year and a half of performances, we'll probably make a DVD. There'll have to be a way to keep it out there. I used to be very against putting my stuff on video, so none of my early shorts have been distributed except for on 16mm. But I never felt like putting them on video and I never pursued getting them out in any other way. Being so in love with film projection. But now I feel like it's too much of a compromise to do all this work…

And not have anyone see it? I'll just be this forever-underground artist who's constantly broke. [laughs]

What's going on with your feature, THE TIME WE KILLED? Is that still showing at festivals? It's showing at festivals. It's nominated for a Spirit Award, the "Someone to Watch" award. Essentially, the film has gotten a ton of interest from well-known independent film distributors who've talked to me about it and said they were thrilled by the film, but say it has absolutely no marketing value. And there are no films that it's like, so you can't say, "It's the next blah-blah." The narrative bulk of the film is based on montage, which is normally used as just an interlude to show time passing between scenes. Maybe seventy percent of the film is montage and it's based on free-association of the mind. When you think and when you're in solitude like this main character, you can go anywhere. You can make all sorts of connections and you're mind can wander the same way that montage works.

My goal was to get inside the head of the character in a much more radical way than showing flashback sequences where suddenly you're there and you can hear everything that everybody says really clearly. Essentially what I think makes the film really unique and strong and original is what makes it impossible to market. [laughs] At least for now.

What about university distribution? I'll be showing the film at Princeton soon. It's going to be the university circuit, festivals, and I think once it's on DVD it will have a pretty good life, because I think there's a lot of people out there that would be excited by something so different. Living in New York, I'm amazed that there's so much happening here, but I miss 95% of it because I'm busy working or whatever. It's so hard to get people to go to movie theaters when there's so much product and there's so many stars and there's so much money being poured into these larger films. It's impossible to compete unless you really have some marketing tool that's sort of built into the film.

How was the Flaherty Seminar? You went there last year with TIME. The Flaherty was an eye-opener, because some people at the Flaherty love to figure out what's wrong with something. At the Flaherty, there's a sense that you have to have a strong opinion, so I had a lot of strong opinions thrown at me from both sides. I had people that came up to me and hugged me and said that it was so amazing how I captured the feeling of depression in this incredibly sensitive, respectful way. Other people just came at me with what was wrong with it politically, that it didn't take enough of a political stance or it was bourgeois to be dealing so much with the individual.

THE TIME WE KILLED (2004).

All these strange criticisms. "Well, it's a film that I made because I'm interested in someone's internal life." They said, "How do you care about a morbidly depressed and self-isolated person?" Well of course you don't always like this character in my movie! I think a lot of the criticism came from people thinking that I was trying to make this character a victim and we should feel sorry for her and cut her slack, and it's not about that to me at all. If you've ever lived with depression or cared for somebody with depression, it's really frustrating. It can make you really angry. That discussion came out, which opened people up again, like, "Oh, I thought we were supposed to feel sorry for her." No. For Christ's sake, she lives in New York, she's got an apartment, she's got a job that she can sort of just live there and isolate herself from the real world.

She can go, she can make choices. She's still scared, but you don't have to be clinically depressed to be scared to do things. I think it's inertia built up. With this character, you learn that she was victimized when she was young, but that doesn't really account for her situation now. Depression is sort of an internalized feeling of victim-hood.

Since you've been working on it for a long time, how have your thoughts about the character changed? One of the many complicated things about the film is that I tried to implement the changes as I was working on the film. For the first couple of years, it was montage. The third year it was the character, and then the fourth year was all point-of-view apartment footage. It was starting with my life outside, traveling and living, then going to this fictional character inside, back to myself inside my apartment, shooting that as my life and the character's life. It's a very unusual way to make a feature, but I think my experience making shorts so long magnified the freedom you have with shorts.

In the end, the only way that I could pull the film together was incredible discipline because to get the story to adhere together and to make the character feel like a whole person took a lot of balancing. By the end, I didn't want to ever deal with a lonely character again. I don't ever want to think about depression or a woman who's suffering. I started to sort of detest my isolation in making the film, which made me sort of feel her self-hatred and her isolation even more.

And you, and everybody else on this level, are doing everything by yourself. Yeah, I wrote, edited, organized, shot everything. I had a co-producer named Randy Sterns who came on in 2002. She helped out with a lot of correspondence and administration. licensing and PR type stuff, more office production. She was actually on the other coast, so she did a lot, but it was mainly the stuff that she could do that didn't have to be local. I had an assistant editor who helped out a lot, and my boyfriend helped by doing some pick-up shooting and helped with some editing and design and a lot of the everyday stuff over the last six months.

WE ARE GOING HOME (1998).

For the first three years, I thought TIME was going to be a thirty minute short, but I didn't know what it was, it was just sort of happening. In 2002, if you look in my diary, it says, "Well shit, I'm making a feature, I don't know why. It's probably going to really suck, but I know that I have to just do it because I know that I won't be satisfied unless I try." One of the things that I've always been drawn to in avant-garde films is the fact that you don't have to shy away from complexities, the way you do in traditional film forms.

With shorts, did you every worry about run time at all or did it just end up being what it was? I've always just ended them when I felt it was right. I started making shorts in '90 or '91, and there was no market. I didn't get into film for reasons of financial ambition, and at that time, it was like being a poet. If you decide to go into that, you know you're not going to make money. You don't think, "Oh, I better make it this long because then it'll be able to fit into this market or competition." So I was never concerned with that. I have to say that this past year, I feel like I've been at a kind of crossroads, because it has been nice to have bigger audiences, having a feature and having all this great feedback. More has been written on this film than any short I ever did, I'm feeling less isolated, I'm being pulled out into these discussions and festivals and meeting great filmmakers. I think having done the performances in 2003 and working with different musicians, and the pure difficulty of finishing the feature on my own, I'm more and more drawn to working with more people. Right now, I'm really trying to figure out how to collaborate more, but to maintain what I love about film, like creating complexity and layers…

What about adapting other writers' work? I'm always interested in women characters and also just political issues. I decided to do a bio-pic based on an autobiography, and it would be a logical stepping point from this one character that I made up to a real person writing about their own life. I'm thinking of Emma Goldman, but the more that I've been reading about her, I find out that she lived with depression, she would be out among people giving her speeches but also living an incredibly isolated life in exile, died miserable and couldn't live in the country that she loved. And the disappointment of getting excited about the revolution in the Soviet Union and going to discover that it was pure hell, just a dictatorship that wasn't about the people at all. Well, that project sounds difficult emotionally. I think I have to learn how to walk away from things.

With THE TIME WE KILLED, I almost gave up about fifty times, like, "I think this is one of those things where you just have to accept that it was a bad idea." I almost trashed it many times (and I did put it aside many times). It's been really, really strange to me, getting all this support from people for the film. On one hand, it really confused me, because I hadn't had those ambitions. It had seemed like a personal challenge that I had to fulfill, but suddenly I didn't know if I was doing this for other people. Then the harsh reality of financial loss. Some people would say that it's too early to call it a loss because it's not even a year old yet. I've won some awards, but if I could just win one award that came with some money [laughs] or it's going to help me get my next grant.

I have to really think hard and maybe learn new skills of financial planning. It's something that you have to start dealing with maybe in your thirties. In your twenties, you're just trying to find your voice and what you want to do and maybe hitting that

SKINNY TEETH (2001).

point where your hair is going gray and your body is falling apart. But I teach and I do other things to sort of scrape together a living.

You got to meet Brakhage. I knew Stan Brakhage briefly, he liked my early hand-painted films, and we spent some time driving around and talking during the last few years of his life. I fell in love with him in a way, because he's so kind and so supportive. I became friends with him around the time my father died of cancer, so he kind of felt like this guardian angel and father figure at the same time. And obviously his work had inspired me, and his perspective on life and his work and his dedication… the guy made his own work his whole life. He did what he had to do. He taught for a lot longer than he would have liked to and for a while had the world's worst commute. My God, can you imagine commuting by plane to a teaching job? It's hard enough for me to take Amtrak up to Bard. One thing that I feel happy about is that I think he'd be pretty proud of WHEN IT WAS BLUE. I think I've brought my hand-painted work to a new level and I think it shows a love of this world.

So how do you talk to classes after you were "Whispers" as a kid? My first two years of teaching, I was mortified. Seriously. I think teaching has helped me, as has showing my films. What's really a problem sometimes is the first year of one of my films, when I'm showing it to new audiences, I get very nervous. I've had terrible anxiety attacks, just thinking about speaking. The way that I edit, everything I cut, there's a reason for everything I do. I have so much I could say that I thought of actually writing a film book, just about filmmaking. I think teaching has helped me, because I can now just spew off my mouth. The first couple of years teaching, I would have a hard time sleeping and I would think, "Did I say the right things to my students? Was I too hard on this person?" Being that I was really shy when I was a student, I always worked really hard, but I would rarely meet with the teachers, and I wouldn't show much until the end of the semester because I was too nervous to talk about it, and I actually hated showing it at all.

What's great is that some of my students from the first two years I taught have stayed in touch with me or told me how much they loved my classes. While I was so morbidly nervous and ineffectual, there were students that were actually really responding. In teaching, you can keep talking around an issue until you get to it and it's like conversation. I think my next level will be to learn how to be more concise with the first sentence. That'll be like a new level of verbal communication.

Then your next film will be all dialogue. Yeah.

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REDCAT
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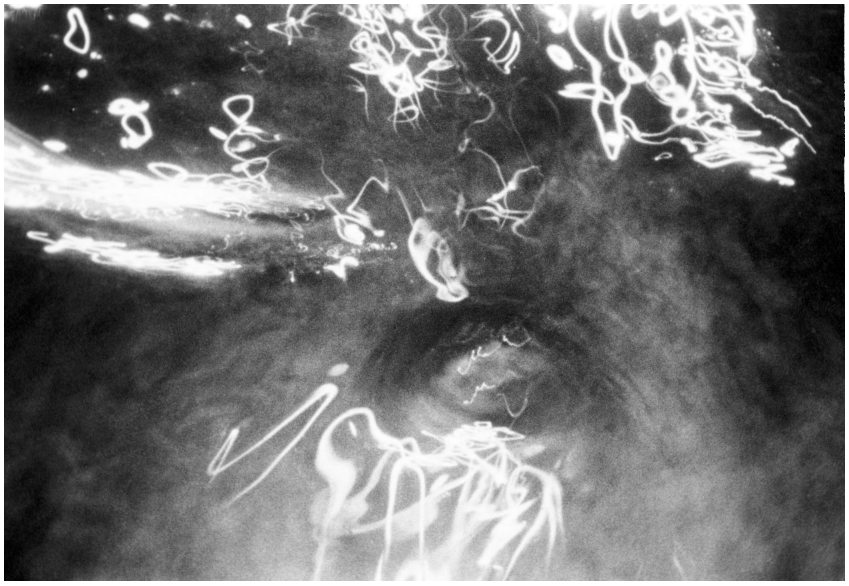

Betzy Bromberg's A DARKNESS SWALLOWED (2004).

Making a truly independent film is difficult. But whether its a documentary, has a lack of star power or is considered "experimental," it is even harder to get audiences to see the film. One of the more brave outlets in Los Angeles to show new, innovative, and obscure film is the REDCAT theater in the downtown Disney complex. The films are curated by veteran programmers Steve Anker and BERENICE REYNAUD. I spoke with Reynaud, a longtime critic, historian and theoretician, on her background and the philosophies of showing films.

CINEMAD: Was curating film programs something that you set out to do in the first place, or did you think you'd be making films?

BERENICE REYNAUD: I don't curate "instead of making films", but as an extension of my writing about film. I made a film once, when I was very young. It was not very good, but it was important for me. Not only did it give me a first hand experience on the materiality of making films (I have looked in a viewfinder and in a light meter, held 16mm footage in my hand, cut film etc...) but it also made me realize the nature of my desire concerning films: I wanted to write about them, I wanted to show them, but I wasn't particularly interested in making them. My mentor in film criticism was Serge Daney. He had started writing for *Cahiers du cinéma* in 1964 when he was 20, and became the editor-in-chief in 1974. In 1981, he moved to the left-wing daily paper *Libération*, and, in 1991, toward the end of his life (he died of AIDS in 1992), he founded the quarterly magazine *Trafic*, to renew the codes, forms and conventions of film criticism. He was one of the most profound thinkers in terms of film criticism in France, and, even though very little of his work is translated into English, his influence is felt in US and Canadian film circles. There was recently a "Daney conference" on the East Coast. He influenced generations of filmmakers and film critics because what he said about cinema was so insightful. He fostered vocations -- I was one of the people he encouraged to write, and he published some of my texts in both *Cahiers* (where he had retained a powerful influence) and *Libération*. He had also made a film when he was young and had realized that this is not what he was good at.

I sometimes feel sorry for film critics who reach middle age and they suddenly realize, "Oh my God, what I really wanted to do was to make films." Serge had the highest opinion about film criticism. It's a craft you have to constantly perfect. It's a calling. It's a real job. It's not something that you do "in between" because you're hoping to shoot your movie next year or you're doing this because you couldn't do something else. It's something that you do because you want to do and you're good at it, hopefully. That's one of the things that I never forgot.

There is an aspect of French film criticism as it has been practiced by the *Cahiers du cinéma* people that has been unfortunately translated by people like Andrew Sarris as "the author theory." We actually never talked about "the author theory" -- the original phrase was "la politique des auteurs" which literally means "the authors politics" or "the politics of authorship". It was a polemical tool, originally used against the "literary" kind of film criticism that praised a scenario-driven, psychologically or sociologically oriented "serious European cinema." It was a tool used by the Young Turks of *Cahiers du cinéma* in the 50s and 60s (Godard, Truffaut et al.) to redeem their love for Hollywood (considered as "trash" by intellectuals of the time) and decipher, how, within the constraints of genre filmmaking and the studio system, so-called commercial filmmakers (starting with Hawks and Hitchcock) could express an original, sophisticated, complex and highly personal vision of the world.

Within the parameters of the "politique des auteurs", film criticism became a conversation, an open letter between a critic and a filmmaker. Because of that, it had to be personal. Not confessional, but personal. Daney said, "In a way, when you write film criticism, you are writing your own diary." Most people who write film criticism don't have this luxury, but one of the things that having a job at CalArts gave me, in spite of "taking time away from writing", is a certain kind of financial security. When I talk to some young critics who write for left-wing weeklies, I realize how "trapped" they are by the necessity they have to write to make a living. There are some films they have to write about. And it's even worse for the people who write for the local dailies in Mid-America. They can't even afford to say they don't like a movie the majority of their readers dig. They might lose their jobs. I don't have to deal with these constraints. I can write about what I goddamn please because I'm not making a living doing that. Maybe there's an edge or something that's taken out of me, but at the same time, I'm much freer. Since we all have to work for a living, we all lose something when we work. I highly respect my colleagues who manage to maintain their ethics and their dignity while writing for dailies. I hope they respect my position: I spend more time educating future young filmmakers than in screening rooms.

Anyhow, the other thing that Daney told me is that the nature of my desire concerning films was that I wanted to show them. I was a young, insecure writer at the time -- eager to make an impression on him and convince him that film criticism was my vocation, so I was somewhat horrified when he told me that. I thought that he meant that I wanted to show films more than I wanted to write about them. In fact he had perceived, way before it happened, what was to become the main articulation of my life -- the intricate connection between writing about films and showing them.

In my early twenties, I moved from France to the United States and I very quickly became involved in the American avant-garde, experimental cinema, independent cinema -- and, as Asian-American media were becoming an important component of the independent scene, I became passionately interested in this as well. Meanwhile, I was sending articles to publications, and soon realized that I was writing about films that people hadn't seen. If I wanted to continue writing about these films, I had to show them to people. It happened very

Wang Bing's WEST OF THE TRACKS (2002).

naturally. The writing and the curating, very early on, started to feed each other, and I cannot envision one without the other, actually.

Of course, it's a very different kind of work. With curating, you're in touch with people, you're on the phone, you supervise print traffic, you take care of the publicity, of a myriad of details. When you're writing, you have to go within yourself. You have to lock yourself in your room, reach a certain state of void and isolation, and concentrate. I'm the kind of writer who needs to be home a lot, but also needs the constant stimulation of the outside. I can't just write about the wall in my room. I think this is something that every writer has to negotiate to and fro between the inside and the outside.

And then I started writing more and more for American publications. Meanwhile, in the mid '80s, I became very involved in Asian cinema, and it was a time when very few people in American had seen Asian films. I started traveling, going to Hong Kong, China or Taiwan at least once a year, and, very naturally, I started to bring films or videos to show in Europe or America.

I was one of the first people in both America and France to get involved with the New Documentary Movement in China, and I also wrote extensively about it. In 1993 I organized an exhibition of some of these works at the Galerie Nationale du Jeu de Paume in Paris, but it got very few reviews and attracted only a small number of spectators. People weren't ready for that yet. For example, I remember attending a screening of the first real masterpiece of the New Documentary Movement, Wu Wenguang's 150-minute long THE LAST DREAMERS (AKA Bumming in Beijing, 1991) at the Vancouver Film Festival in 1991. Tony Rayns has had the foresight to program the piece -- but I was sitting by a very important film curator, and he was yawning because it was "too long" and he finally left before the end. I thought it was the beginning of something very important. He was wrong, I was right [laughs]. The show of "New Chinese Videos" I organized at MOMA in 1997 was much more successful audience-wise, and now, with the attention gathered by Chinese videos in many international film festivals -- including Sundance where Weijun Chen's TO LIVE IS BETTER THAN TO DIE (2002) was shown in 2003 -- and all the prizes awarded to Wang Bing's WEST OF THE TRACKS (2002), Chinese documentary video is recognized as an important component of the contemporary media landscape.

I was very lucky on several accounts, because I went to Hong Kong and Taiwan in the winter of 1989 for the first time. It was still relatively "unchartered" from the point of view of journalists and critics, so the filmmakers hadn't developed an "attitude" yet. They were very open to me, and generous in granting me interviews. I interviewed Tsui Hark, who is now extremely difficult to approach, but he just gave me an appointment like that, and spoke, very relaxed, from the couch of his production office. I had a contact to the star/filmmaker Sylvia Chang, and she gave me an interview on the set of the film she was making at the time, on the pier of the Star Ferry. She was playing opposite Chow Yun-Fat, and he saw me with my tape-recorder and said, with a big smile "You don't want to interview me too?" I thought I was going to faint -- especially because after the interview he kissed me on both cheeks -- but I got very good material from the interview, in spite of his-then limited English and my non-existent Chinese [laughs]. During the same trip, in Taiwan, I interviewed absolutely everybody in the film industry -- from Hou Hsiao-hsien, Edward Yang, their screenwriters, producers, actors and friends to lesser-known filmmakers,

journalists, government officials and film technicians. When I managed to spend more time in China, I was also able to meet dozens of people, who all agreed to talk in my tape recorder, often with the help of a translator friend they graciously provided.

So I had accumulated these hours and hours of interviews, some of which have not been entirely transcribed (I still have them on tape, as I think they are an important element of Chinese film history.) Then I decided that I needed to start showing these films and video as well. In addition to the shows I curated independently, I was contacted by a number of film festivals to be a correspondent which is not exactly being a curator but an advisor. It put me in a position to continue seeing a lot of films -- producers grant me access to screenings that "regular" film critics are not invited to -- and to bring a number of them to Europe. Last year, I had 7 Chinese indies and 5 US indies at the Viennale in Austria, and to San Sebastian I brought Xu Jinglei's LETTER FROM AN UNKNOWN WOMAN (2004) which ended winning the Best Director Award. I also used to do the same kind of work for the Créteil International Women's Film Festival in Paris, the biggest and oldest women's film festival in the world, but we parted ways a few years ago.

I've been curating on and off for twenty years, I would say. It's never been my main profession, it's not a way of making money, but writing is not a way of making money either. I don't define myself as a writer or as a curator, but curating been a dimension that's so essential in my life that I can't even think of not doing it.

It's becoming more and more difficult, not only to bring artists but also to be a curator for a non-profit organization. In the last couple of years, I have witnessed the development of a very dangerous trend, which, if unchecked, could significantly damage "alternative" screening situations in the US. Some European distributors (some have the most interesting Asian or Latin American films in their catalogue) are now asking for 1,000 euros for a single screening -- and you also have US distributors following suit and asking between $750 and $1,000, which is something that none of us can afford.

So what's the balance there in order for the filmmaker to make something from the screening but to keep everybody in business? Non-profit organization can usually afford between $250 and $350 for a one-time film rental. What becomes complicated is when the distributor and the filmmaker are not speaking the same language. The filmmaker wants money and the distributor wants money, so in addition to the speaker fee, we have to pay a rental fee. We can't pay $1000 for a film rental. I am very concerned about it and I'm not the only one. We completely realize that the filmmakers and the distributors want to make money, but wanting too much money for one screening is counter-productive. In some cases, I could help the filmmaker get three or four bookings at $250 each night, but because the distributor want 1000 Euros or nothing, they get nothing and the film is not shown. The filmmaker might not be particularly happy about that, but once you sign your rights to a distributor, that's it. The distributor doesn't make money and there's less of this kind of movie being shown in the United States right now. It's very worrisome.

There was one film that we really, really wanted to show at REDCAT. The filmmaker is a friend of mine and she was very interested in showing her film and coming to Los Angeles. We offered the distributor a decent rental price plus a round-trip plane ticket from Europe to Los Angeles for the filmmaker -- but the distributor wouldn't even take my calls. I had to speak to an assistant who had no power of decision herself. I asked her "How many times has this film been shown in the United States?" "Only once," she replied. So I said, "This film is three years old. You are bemoaning the fact that the filmmaker is not better known in the US. I offer you a chance. Do you realize what you're doing to this film?" And then she said, "Well, the people who showed it two years ago agreed to pay a thousand Euros for it." Fine -- but nobody else was going to pay that much money again -- and as a result my friend's work is still virtually unknown in the US.

Jia Zhangke's THE WORLD (2004).

Have you seen the outlets change since 1985? Is it becoming more of a festival and university screening circuit for this type of work? Aside from festivals, you have different kinds of outlets for non-commercial screenings. You have multi-media art centers like LACMA or REDCAT or The Walker Art Center [in Minneapolis], in which film programs are always more or less treated like a poor relative. You have film archives, that, in this country, are usually tied to universities -- such as the UCLA Film and Television Archive, the Pacific Film Archive, or the Harvard Film Archive -- so their funding depends, at least partially, on the finances of the universities. When the UC system is struck with a post-Enron financial crisis, that does affect these archives as well. Or you have places like the American Cinematheque (that, in spite of its name, is not an archive at all) that do year-round programming, but they have to compete with what is happening in the world of commercial release. And even that has changed. Publicity expenses have grown exponentially. You can't launch a film if you don't have the publicity. The best movies in the world are, more often than not, not seen by American audiences. The public is there -- the films are there -- but they are not connecting. This is something that I am very, very concerned about.

So what we have to do for a place like REDCAT or Los Angeles Filmforum is start rolling up our sleeves and do it grassroots. Send emails, send reminders, make phone calls, because we can't afford half a page in the LA Times. We have to make sure that we maintain an alternative film culture in Los Angeles, which is even more difficult than maintaining an alternative film culture in the United States in general because people in LA think that they know everything that there is to know about film. The entire film culture revolves around Hollywood and maybe a few European art films. This is such a waste. Why isn't information circulating more? Why aren't we doing more? I feel like there's an invisible wall separating Hollywood film culture and world film culture, and it's becoming more and more acute as time goes by. The most exciting films are now made outside of the western world.

If you look at THE WORLD (2004) by Jia Zhangke, that's the most important movie to come out of China this year. It's about globalization, but it's about globalization in a way that's so quintessentially Chinese, globalization that affect the minds and consciousness and hearts of young Chinese people. It's a new way of looking at the issue, that is different from the way an American or a French filmmaker would approach it. It's very profound, very disturbing. But films like this are confined into "specialty release" by the trade papers -- which is supposed to mean, I suppose, "not really important".

A lot of filmmakers that are making difficult work are struggling to find places or distributors, they don't hear about festivals like Ann Arbor and CinemaTexas or Canyon Cinema distribution, so part of it is going out and finding this work. You've got to think outside of the US. There's Rotterdam, there's Vienna which shows tons of American indies, Lorcarno, Vancouver... If you want to show your work, there's

Thom Anderson's LOS ANGELES PLAYS ITSELF (2003).

places. Of course, some work gets rejected, but it's not like there's a dearth of places where some kind of work can be shown. I think for American indies, Europe is less welcoming than it used to be, just because of the anti-Americanism right now, but it's also true in reverse. I don't think every important European work is getting shown in the US.

How does the press affect your shows? Sometimes [co-curator of Film at REDCAT] Steve Anker and I argue about whether or not we should show a film, but has already been shown in Los Angeles, at the IFC Festival or Outfest for example. It would be tempting to do so, but press-wise, it's the kiss of death for a nonprofit organization to show a film that's already screened in Los Angeles within the last two years -- for chances are the press won't review it. Thom Andersen's LOS ANGELES PLAYS ITSELF (2003) is a brilliant exception: it keeps playing to sold out audiences here and there. It's feeding on its own fame, but nowadays, when you show it, it doesn't get an article every time. We need at least a mention in an article in the LA Weekly to attract audiences. A mention in Kevin Thomas's LA Times Thursday column is even better -- but he does not always has the space to do it, and of course, he's a critic, who knows what he likes and does not. It's a pity there's basically one person at the LA Times who's interested in alternative screenings, since Manohla Dargis left.

As you know, the LA Weekly has reduced its cover of alternative film events for a number of reasons that have nothing to do with the goodwill of the film editor, Ron Stringer, who's in general very supportive, but with the general policy of the paper. A few years ago, I organized a showing of short films by French filmmaker Alain Guiraudie at Los Angeles Filmforum. Holly Willis had written an article about it, and at the last minute, there was a fuck up and the article didn't get printed. I found this out on a Thursday when the LA Weekly came out and the show was on that Sunday. One of the films, CE VIEUX RÊVE QUI BOUGE (This Old Dream that Moves, 2001) had a very clear gay subtext. I spent Thursday afternoon sending e-mails to all my gay and gay-friendly friends in Los Angeles, and we had a really big turnout. This is how I realized the power of the Internet and the role of grassroots outreach to publicize alternative screenings.

So email and the Internet have helped out a lot. Is there any other type of grassroots that works? That's the one that works best. We have very limited help at REDCAT in terms of publicity because the publicist is responsible for all the programs presented by the space -- from theater to dance, music and art. So Steve and I work with her to coordinate the sending of the press releases, and the administration of REDCAT publishes brochures a few times a year -- but we do everything else. We write the copy for the press releases and the program notes, we take care of the listings with the help of an assistant, we send e-mails, we do most of the personalized follow-up with journalists (even though the publicist does some of it with the journalists she knows). However, we both have full-time academic responsibilities, so there's a limit to what we can do.

Chantal Akerman's FROM THE OTHER SIDE (2002).

But look at Paolo Davanzo [curator of the Echo Park Film Center in Los Angeles]. He doesn't get articles because he usually does not know far enough in advance what show he's going to have. His mode of programming reminds me a bit of what used to happen in the old days of the Cinémathèque Française in Paris: people would drop in with a print under their arms and they would get it shown. To keep the culture alive, we need screening spaces with this kind of spontaneity, energy and flexibility. So Paolo publicizes his screening through e-mail. And he does get an audience. Do you know what happened to him recently?

The rent went up. Yeah, so he started an e-mail campaign and got people to write letters. And he won! The landlord yielded and agreed to let them stay at a reasonable rent -- for the time being. So Paolo is the master of grassroots organizing and I really admire him for that. I think the Echo Park Film Center is such an important element in the landscape of Los Angeles. Also, I go to a place called Flor Y Canto on Figueroa Street in Highland Park where I live. They show political movies and videos, as a tool for community and political organizing. It's not the pristine screening situation you can find at REDCAT or the UCLA Film and Television Archive, but there's an audience for this way of sharing movies in the community. Paolo is somewhere halfway in-between, because he does show political films, but he's also into film as art and experimental media. Filmforum is also an interesting kind of situation. Since Adam Hyman took over, they've been really developing, but they are more dependent on the press than Echo Park is, even though they are also working through e-mail. I'm on the board of the organization and we're trying to think of ways that we can further our outreach.

There are dark things looming in the horizon that we'll have to overcome if we want to maintain film curating. Sadly -- and humbling for the likes of me -- film criticism is going to play less and less of a role in the decision made by people to attend a screening. Publicity is much more important. It's been proven through market studies that people don't go see a film because of a good critique. Criticism mostly play a negative role: you can "kill" a film (at least an unknown, difficult little film) with a nasty article -- but a good critique is often not enough to drive people into the theaters. Criticism is only one element of what we need to do if we want to uphold an alternative film culture. We have to find new solutions. I also believe this has to be tied up with larger cultural issues. Recent events have proven how divided America is. However, cultural divisions and political divisions do not always coincide. It is still difficult to explain to people that content follows form, that you can't pour new wine into old bottles, that if you follow the format used to present the concepts of the ruling ideology, this is going to affect, and even corrupt and undermine, the radicalism of what you're trying to say. We all know a lot of very smart left wing people who only love big Hollywood movies.

You share the REDCAT with other non-film events. How is it co-curating a theater when you don't have many open weekends in the first place? Arm wrestling? We sometimes argue, but I can't remember a single fight. I think we both acknowledge that we have different areas of expertise. I completely acknowledge that Steve is much more knowledgeable than me in certain types of avant-garde and certain forms of American experimental cinema, which I am interested in, but at a certain point in my life, I started to look at different kinds of films. I am following Asian cinema (mostly Chinese) -- but I know very little about what's going on in Russia right now, for example. So Steve is the one who programmed Ken Jacobs's STAR

SPANGLED TO DEATH (2004), which I didn't know and would probably not have thought of programming, but watched in total rapture. On the other hand, Steve wasn't familiar with the work of Japanese filmmaker Naomi Kawase, but when I told him I wanted to bring her he trusted me (and ended up liking her films). It's not like "You get five shows and I get five shows," but a dialogue, a double-headed way of managing screening ideas and opportunities. I have to say this has been a very happy collaboration. We don't fight, and I totally respect his choices and his vision of cinema.

Of everything that you've showed at REDCAT, is there something that you've pulled off that you're really thrilled about? Yes -- and it was a screening I had worked on with Steve, but couldn't even attend because I was at the Vancouver Film Festival at the time. One of the most exhilarating shows we programmed was Betzy Bromberg's premiere of A DARKNESS SWALLOWED (2004). It was probably the ideal show we could have. It is an experimental feature which beautifully and emotionally reworks the texture of the film medium -- made by a local Los Angeles filmmaker who's also a great woman, a friend, an educator. A truly avant-garde venture, a labor of love and a work in which each component is masterfully, exquisitely, rigorously

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crafted, it took several years to complete, so many people in the community had been waiting to see it for a long time. It was a sold-out screening, and everybody lucky enough to attend is still talking about it.

The Chantal Akerman series was also very successful. There is in particular a bold programming decision on my part which paid off. In the first part of the evening, I showed one of Chantal's loveliest narrative piece, PORTRAIT OF A YOUNG GIRL FROM THE LATE SIXTIES IN BRUSSELS (1993). Technically, the film is no longer available due to some copyright problem. I eventually got the right to show it, at the condition that no admission would be charged for the screening. I got the idea to pair it with a totally different kind of work, which her gallery in Paris had lent me for free -- so it made sense to me to show it without charging admission either. In Kassel's Documenta, Chantal had reworked some of the footage of her documentary on the US-Mexican frontier FROM THE OTHER SIDE (2002) -- into an installation called A VOICE IN THE DESERT (2003). She looped the footage and projected it on a screen in the Arizona desert. As the light changes from pitch-black at night to the sun rising in the morning, the relationship between the screen and its environment change -- the central image becoming bleached and eventually invisible. It's a very minimalist, austere work, and it may not have been "a good idea" to put it in the same program as a narrative character study. In-between, I inserted a short piece Chantal had shot for Amnesty International, AGAINST OBLIVION (1991) about the murder of a Salvadorean union organizer.

Indeed a few people walked out -- but only after seeing a few repeats of the loop, after understanding what the whole thing was about. The majority stayed. This was the only time A VOICE IN THE DESERT had been shown in a film theater, rather than in a gallery situation. It was risky -- I could have fallen flat in my face, but I did not. Ultimately, it pays to bet on the intelligence of spectators. This was very gratifying for me.

www.redcat.org