



NOW AS A BIRD, NOW AS A WORM, NOW AS A PLANT

ESSAYS • INTERVIEWS • IMAGES

EDITED BY MIKE HOOLBOOM

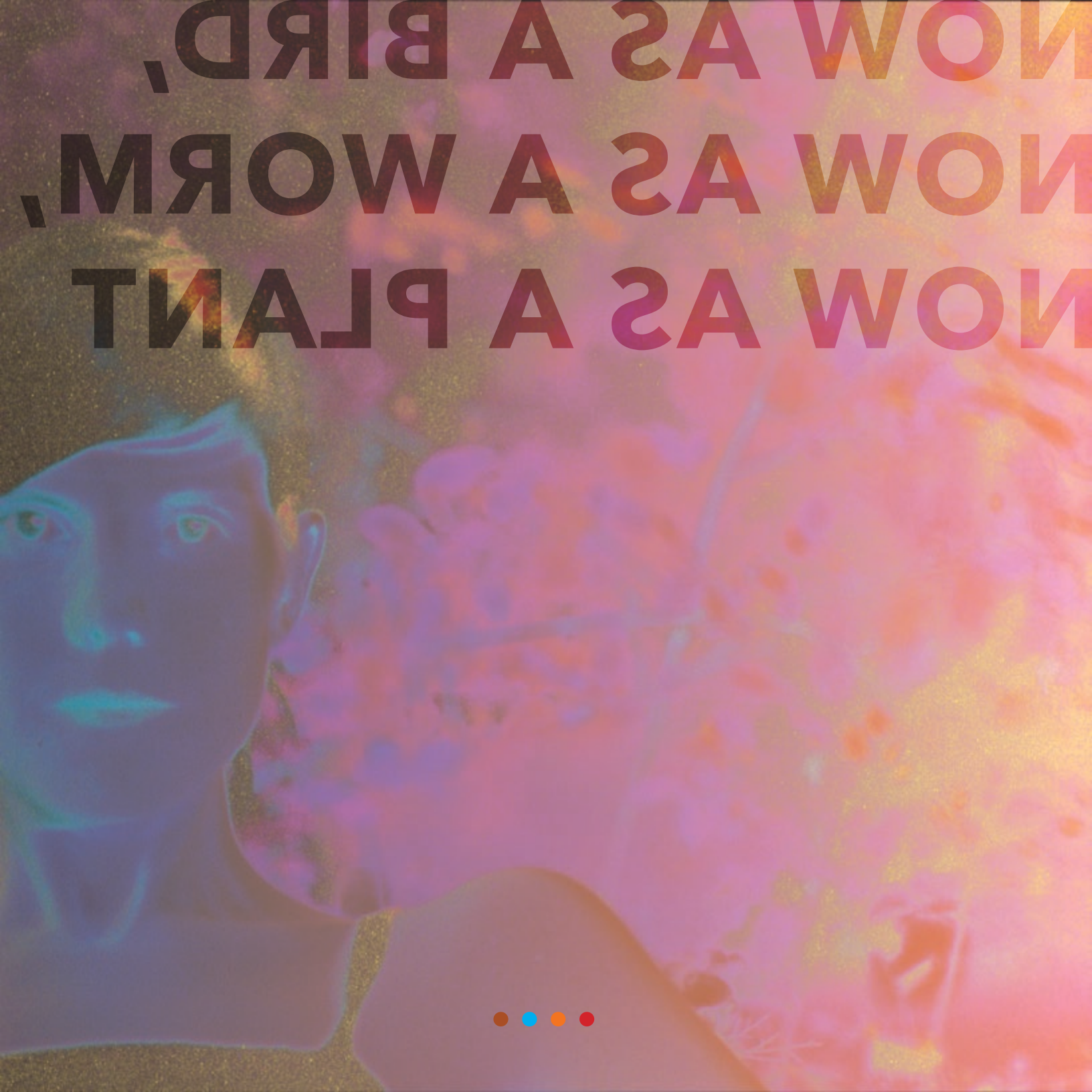
EXHIBIT:

HOPELESSLY MIDDLE AGED
HALLWALLS GALLERY

SEPTEMBER 7-NOVEMBER 2, 2012

EMILY VEY DUKE +
COOPER BATTERSBY

WITH
MIKE HOOLBOOM
DANI LEVENTHAL



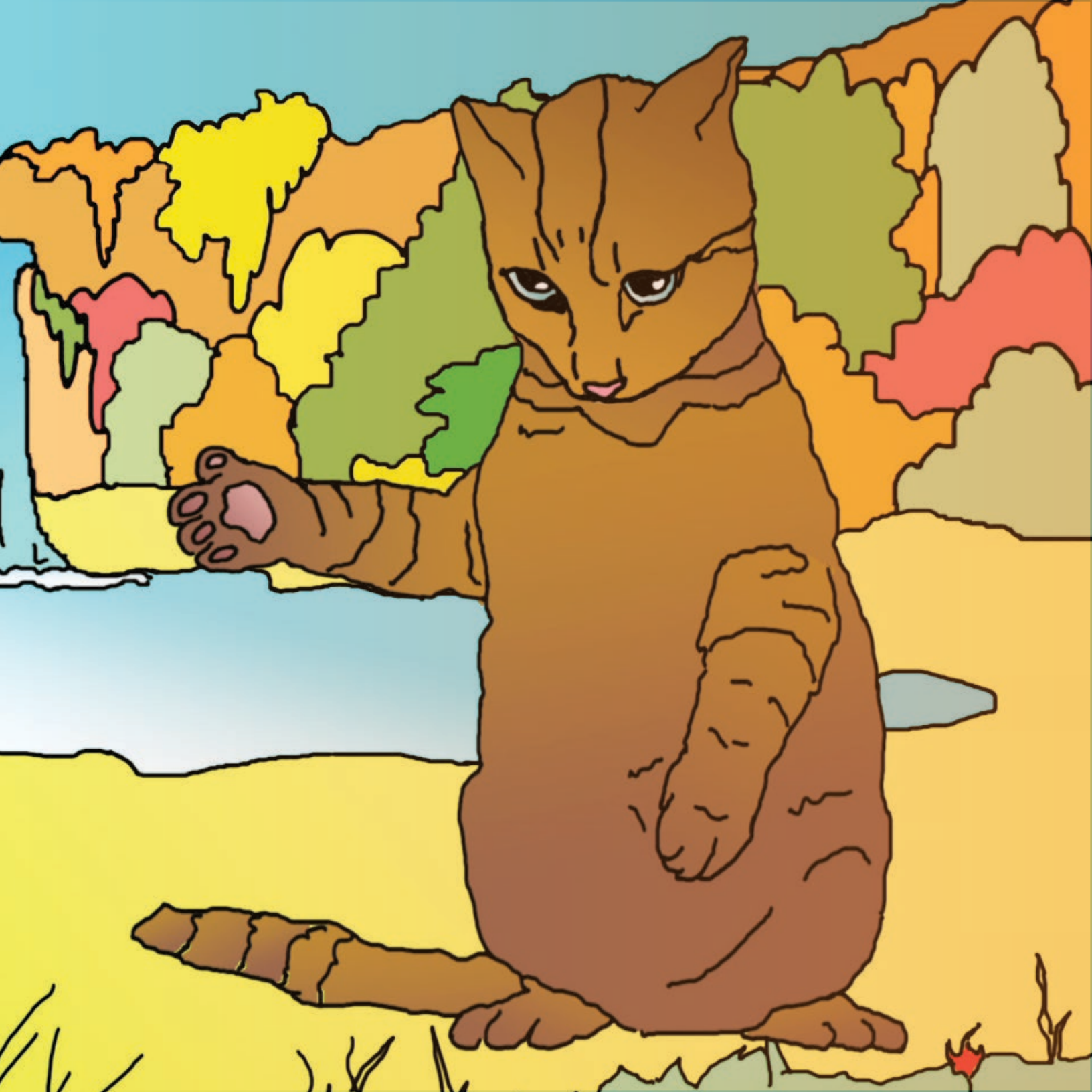
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with MIKE HOOLBOOM and DANI LEVENTHAL



OPENING
FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 2012
8PM TO 11PM

ARTISTS' TALKS
FRI, SEPT 7, 8PM

continuing through November 2
A HALLWALLS ARTISTS-IN-RESIDENCE PROJECT (HARP)



HALLWALLS CONTEMPORARY ARTS CENTER

COOPER BATTERSBY & EMILY VEY DUKE
HOPELESSLY MIDDIM YTSSETEPOH

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HALLWALLS

CONTEMPORARY ARTS CENTER

EDITOR

Mike Hoolboom

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EXHIBITION

"HOPELESSLY MIDDLE AGED," Hallwalls Gallery
September 7–November 2, 2012

CURATOR

John Massier

A Hallwalls Artist-in Residence Project (HARP)

ARTISTS

DANI LEVENTHAL

EMILY VEY DUKE + COOPER BATTERSBY

MIKE HOOLBOOM

Still's courtesy of the artists

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INTRODUCTION

BY MIKE HOOLBOOM

In my country there is a special place reserved for the young artist. When I look into their poreless faces it makes me want to start over again, or at least to extend every measure of kindness that was forbidden to my generation. If only we could start over again. This is the secret hope carried by every new face, little wonder we love the young. And on the other side there is another fuzzy spot for the ancients and elders, the survivors of the art world. For them we have created special spotlights and museum opportunities and gala events because they are old enough at last to have the right clothes, to enthrall us with the old questions and the old answers. They provide the thrill of reliability.

But what is unknown in my country is the mystery of what to do with those of us who are in the middle. No, we are not young any longer, but we are not old enough to take a final limelit bow. It's obvious we are taking up space that belongs to the young and fresh faced, and yet we can't quite give in to the immense task proposed by French writer Marguerite Duras. When asked why she continued to write, she said that she lacked the strength to do nothing. We are also lacking in the strength department, we can't pack up our cameras and content ourselves with a look back at our fabled beginnings. We might have even learned a thing or two, perhaps our work is growing in depth and sophistication, at least in part because we are able to apply ourselves to new digital yields without a lot of the attention-mongering rewards that can lay strange and uneasy pressures on the place of inspiration. If only we didn't long for the strange and uneasy pressures! We want to be trampled underfoot by attention seeking fandoms, we would like our eardrums to burst from clamours of attention. But we have chosen the wrong field (or has it chosen us?). Out of laziness,

or misguided intentions, we have become video artists, where our greatest triumphs remain a minor note. And while the shadow life of our work offers us an incomparable freedom, how many of us are suffering from the Truffaut quip that everyone remakes their first movie again and again? How did the Foreigner mega-hit go again? Feels like the first time.

John Massier, the visual arts chief at the Hallwalls Gallery in Buffalo, invited Emily Vey Duke and Cooper Battersby for a show in his handsome premises, and they were asked to bring some of their art gang along. Following the unwritten but actually rather strict art commandment, they chose only good friends. This is who counts in my art world, whether I am the most important blue chip art dealer in the world outbidding my country club frenemies at Sotheby's, or converting my living room into a weekend gallery. I'm only here for my friends. Which for Emily and Cooper meant: Dani Leventhal and me. We would both get to hang out in their post-Syracuse, hand-made house in the countryside.

Emily called and spoke to me in the double voice she uses when she's channeling Cooper. We'd like to invite you here for a residency. We'll eat good food and make work and have fun, she assured me. Like all good friends she was speaking in code. What she was telling me was that the war between us had ended as suddenly and mysteriously as it began. She wouldn't eat a thing, but we would eat until we were bursting, in order to stuff our guilty appetites down a little further. Fun meant that no one would hang themselves while in each other's company, though we were all slipping quickly into a moment of last calls.

I was still, endlessly, working on the movie which we had begun together, that they had blazed out in a four day and night spree of singsongs and animated asides and animal-loving story tellings. It was so raw and polished and perfect that I wondered how another movie could ever be made. It wasn't until that moment that their method became clear to me, and this was a blind spot that we had carried between us for more than a year already. It can be so difficult to explain one's method to someone else, and how could it be

possible to work together without at least that common ground? We never managed as it turned out. Dani, on the other hand, had created a thunderous opening movie while mentoring with video dad Steve Reinke. But incredibly, instead of lapsing into a post-art school haze of druggy procrastinations, she was steadily outputting raw, camera-ready diary emissions. They were usually filled with high-wire cross-cutting feats that left me breathless, but this time she arrived with a recording from a single badass encounter. My first impression was so filled with wanting some older version of Dani that I felt slighted. I hoped that she would produce the familiar Dani flavor, the reliable Dani brand that was always filled with startling crosscutting urgencies. I had the viewer contract in my hand and held it in front of my face the first couple of times I watched her new movie, which meant that I couldn't see a frame. But as I learned to let go of the old promises, I could see that what she had made was more necessary and urgent than ever before. She had somehow managed to refine her appetite for raw encounters, and bring it all back fresh and whole from a single evening, instead of having to relate it to a web of decisive moments.

In the fall of 2012 a show was mounted in Hallwalls called *Hopelessly Middle Aged*. It opened on September 7 and closed on November 2. I never went. Emily and Cooper charmed everyone in sight, and a few who weren't. Dani came later and lit up a screenful of her pictures. Watching one of her movies is like getting worked over by a heavyweight that has been forcefed espressos all morning. Emily and Cooper produced an intelligent sweetness out of the darkest places a couple can inhabit. I offered some public lighting. That was the time. And this is the record of that time. •

continuing through November 2

HALLWALLS ARTISTS-IN-RESIDENCE PROJECT (HARP)

SYNCHRONIZE YOUR SENSES

(SOME THOUGHTS ON
COMPOSITIONAL STRATEGIES IN
THE WORKS OF DUKE/BATTERSBY,
MIKE HOOLBOOM,
AND DANI LEVENTHAL)

BY MICHAEL SICINSKI

The four artists whose work is featured in the current Hallwalls exhibition – or, if you prefer, the three “artistic units,” since two of the video-makers work strictly as a duo – employ the tools of their chosen medium in highly divergent ways. The team of Emily Vey Duke and Cooper Battersby employ both storytelling and somewhat primitive animation in order to interrogate aspects of the human experience that are often left simmering within the unconscious. Mike Hoolboom’s recent work, most of which has met the viewer at the rather reassuring feature length of 70 minutes or more, has engaged in a kind of multi-perspectival portraiture, refracting both its chose subject(s) as well as the very notion of identity. And the relatively short videos of Dani Leventhal are characterized by a radical condensation of the quotidian, with material that would conventionally be considered diaristic rubbing shoulders with theatricality and aestheticism, in compressed editing schemes that foreground movement and gesture, color and shape, over traditional denotative content, much less exposition.

Any attempt to consider the work of Duke and Battersby, Hoolboom, and Leventhal collectively must absolutely attend to the substantial differences between the artists and their work. At the same time, one should not become so fixated on local, surface differences that we might miss larger, more global commonalities, should they exist. The Russian Formalist critic Viktor Shklovsky proposed that all artworks, and indeed all oeuvres, possess an aesthetic “dominant,” a primary formal gesture which is the organizing principle around which all other elements in the work orbit, like a nucleus. Clearly, within each of the pieces I will be discussing below, there is a different dominant, a specific aesthetic sensibility and approach at work.

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However, if there were perhaps one global commonality among these four artists' work, it would be the tendency, or even the ethic, of negotiating difference within the boundaries of the text. Each of these works is a kind of charged field which, due to certain non-absolute but nonetheless recognizable parameters, permits the organization and holding-in-tension of diverse informational streams. This can mean a set of discrete but interrelated biographies (Hoolboom's *Public Lighting*), or a collision between animal and human realities (Leventhal's *Hearts Are Trump Again*), or even just between text and image (Duke and Battersby's *Here Is Everything*). Within each of these works, there is a sensemaking that allows for moment-to-moment relationships—the motility of actual watching—as well as a macro-movement, a broader sense of sweep and drift that carries the larger dominant along, throughout the work, in often imperceptible ways.

Here is one way to think about all of this. Some experimental film and video promulgates a particular shape or reduced set of shapes across its running time (e.g. works by James Benning, David Rimmer, Michael Snow, or even more densely edited works like those of Ryan Trecartin, which bombard to the point of generating a kind of static wall of data). Other works, like the ones we're considering here, generate their meaning, by and large, by creating relationships between disparate formal and textual elements, generating multi-tiered systems of harmony and/or discord among those elements. Although terms like collage, montage, assemblage, or even bricolage are largely inadequate to articulate the various ways in which Leventhal, Hoolboom, Duke and Battersby compose their videos, they do at least put us in the ballpark, and provide a contrast with the more minimalist end of the aesthetic spectrum.

In the chapter "Synchronization of Senses" from his book *The Film Sense*, Sergei Eisenstein describes and expands the concept of montage. Whereas many filmmakers and critics, both in his own time and subsequently, have seized upon Eisenstein's notion of "collision montage" – that is, the extreme articulation between two shots for maximum dissimilarity and jolt, the explosive dialectic within film language operating on cinema's micro-level – in this text the Soviet theorist makes it quite clear that montage, as an organizing principle, must be active at all possible levels of a film's composition. He writes:

The general course of the montage was an uninterrupted interweaving of these diverse themes into one unified movement. Each montage-piece has a double responsibility – to build the total line as well as to continue the movement within each of the contributory themes. [...] It is naturally helpful that, aside from the individual elements, the polyphonic structure achieves its total effect through the composite sensation of all the pieces as a whole. This "physiognomy" of the finished sequence is a summation of the individual features and the general sensation produced by the sequence (*The Film Sense*, pp. 77-78).

Eisenstein is speaking very particularly here about the need for sound and image in a film to both echo one another, and the overall dominant. That is, an artist can and should map relationships both on the micro and the macro compositional levels.

So what does this mean for our four artists under consideration? If we can agree that, alongside their considerable divergences, all four are united by a tendency to bring differences into contact, to negotiate difference, through non-absolute but nevertheless firm, identifiable compositional systems, then we can think about them in a number of illuminating ways. First of all, on the broadest level possible, we can think the works themselves together, within this essay and within the context of the show, since their broad differences can, in even more general ways, be navigated.

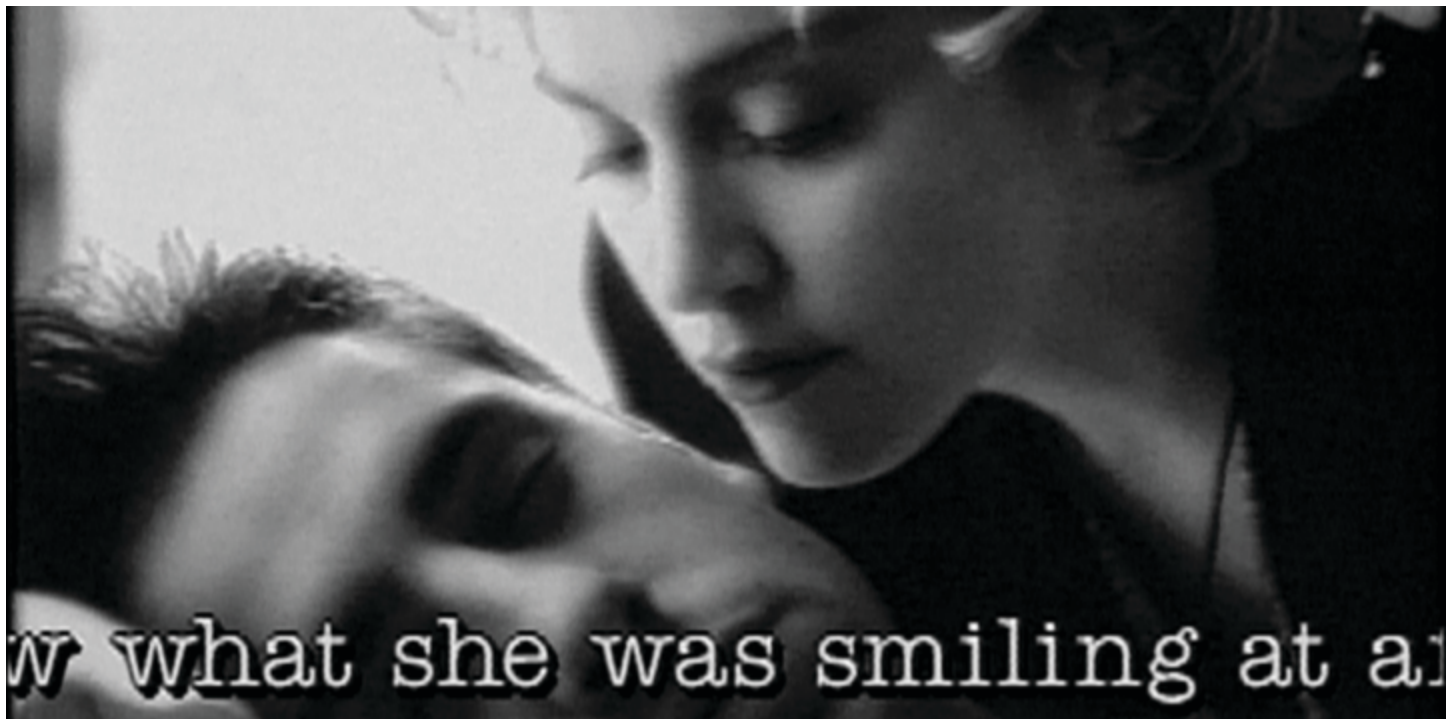
But more crucially, we can think of the works as "open sets," and observe the manner in which the artists have given shape and coherence to disparate forms and concepts, drawing relationships without reducing those forms to a single dominant shape. Consider *Public Lighting*, a feature-length video work by Mike Hoolboom that is as wide-ranging as it is deft and masterful. The tape exists as a kind of macro-biography of a writer (the voice of Esma Moukhtar)

who describes her creative process as an urban typology, a form of anthropological openness or listening/processing of the drifting voices of the city. By forming texts based on these borrowed words, the writer (who, incidentally, is a fictional character herself) performs a kind of monumentalizing that she calls "public lighting." Hoolboom, for his part, begins the piece with a short studio-bound prologue that consists of the pure manipulation of light – refracting a spotlight off a prism, filtering light through the barn doors of a stage lamp, filming the R/B/G spots of a video projector, etc.

So *Public Lighting* moves from medium-specificity to an entirely different form of reflexivity, a (fake) biography that, it turns out, explains the rest of what *Public Lighting* will show us. The writer tells us that there are six personality types that comprise the city, and she will present them to us through her work. What follows are six semi-autonomous, experimental character sketches, which we must assume correspond to the writer's typology. But how? What Hoolboom has done is to concoct a unifying structure that lends coherence to disparate, semi-detachable works. *Public Lighting* is indeed a "text,"

but one that has been organized on its broadest level by a bracketed or parenthetical boundary line.

There are six different segments – a man (Ken Thompson) who provides a personal tour of Toronto restaurants based on the dissolution of his relationships; an impressionistic portrait of composer Philip Glass; a recoding of Madonna's "Vogue" video as a scathing letter from a former lover, a gay man dying of AIDS; a filmmaker (Carolynne Hew) of Chinese descent who has to travel to China for family reasons and experiences temporal dislocation; a noirish portrait of



photographer Hiro Kanagawa; and finally, a testimony from a model (Liisa Repo-Martell) recounting her experiences with infamous West Coast photographer Jock Sturges. Each could be a short video in itself. However, each takes on particular meaning within the broader framework of *Public Lighting*.

In a sense, other of Hoolboom's longer video works, such as *Imitations of Life* (2003), *Tom* (2002), and *Mark* (2009), share the compositional tendency of sifting and organizing disparate textual materials within an overall framework. Nevertheless, it's clearly Hoolboom's strategy to allow the fragments to retain relative autonomy, not to be semiotically determined by their place in the larger work. For example, the writer's assertion that each represents a personality type may be a Rosetta Stone or a ruse (for the record, I vote 'ruse'), but in either case it allows Hoolboom to ironize the entire discourse of biographical representation. The individual segments certainly do this in themselves, with their experimental approach that, in the final segments, gives way to explicitly partial, fragmentary knowledge. But raising the very idea that these highly unique portraits could be somehow emblematic of broad social types allows Hoolboom to remind us that portraiture, like any representational mode, tends to lapse into generality the moment it's realized. We assimilate even the most idiosyncratic knowledge into pre-existing categories; *Public Lighting* makes this its meta-discourse.

This problem of how to assimilate the radically particular without reducing it to the known is an aesthetic dominant that *Public Lighting* reinforces even in its most condensed compositional moments. In the segments "Tradition" (on Hew), "Glass" (on the titular composer) and particularly "In The City" (the tour of boyfriend break-ups), Hoolboom edits and layers many images, moving through them not so much with rapidity as with an intensity and force of superimposition and color blending. "Reading" these images is overwhelming, almost painful; our eyes want to either tune them out or fixate on the most prevalent image, filtering the others out. As with the rest of *Public Lighting*, it is a challenge to remain open and attentive to these dense image skeins, to assimilate multiple forms and apprehend their relationships across different temporal registers.

This is something we can also see at work in the videotapes of Emily Vey Duke and Cooper Battersby, although unlike Hoolboom, they tend to compose with a far more forceful and singular dominant in

their pieces. This is because, like a number of other key video artists currently on the scene (e.g., Bobby Abate, Jesse McLean, Shana Moulton), Duke and Battersby are writerly, character-driven artists who tend to organize their tapes around a textual baseline. Nevertheless, this does not inherently reduce the multiplicity or disparate tactics or approaches that their videos contain. Within the seemingly solid organizational flow of script-driven exposition, Duke and Battersby adopt an episodic compositional model that, while not exactly modular, certainly permits the surprising introduction of material that is not "necessary," strictly speaking, within the parsimonious economic logic of traditional narration.

Recent works exemplify Duke and Battersby's porous conception of narrative organization, whereby multiple registers of information are drawn together as a constellation on the dominant theme. *Beauty Plus Pity* (2009) introduced live-action material, including (faked?) documentary footage from a deer hunt, and combined it with an original song and animation. All provided different perspectives on the primary idea of human/animal relations, in particular of hunting as a surrogate form of bestiality. The flipside in the "animal love" diptych, *Lesser Apes* (2011), was constructed as a more complete mock-doc, in the form of testimony/confession from a primatologist who had entered into a love-and-sex relationship with a bonobo. Once again, Duke and Battersby combine childlike singing-storytelling (a tone pitched somewhere between Barbara Manning and the McGarrigles), their own unique, coloring-book form of computer animation, and the intrusion of secondary voices, to provide a multi-vocal, mini-treatise on the value of perversion. As with *Beauty Plus Pity*, *Lesser Apes* is script-controlled, but this hardly accounts for the fragmentary character of the tapes, or the ultimate ambivalence of the pieces with respect to human/animal relations and the question of free will.

Their latest work, *Here Is Everything*, represents a natural progression while also marking a logical separation. If, following Eisenstein's injunction, it is necessary that every element of a work should communicate with every other, Duke and Battersby achieve this through unusual means. This video announces itself, quite comically, as "a message from the future" from two helpful travelers, a bunny rabbit and a kitty cat, who have come to explain everything to us wayward humans. Although this is a joke, the artists use this frame much as Hoolboom did with *Public Lighting*, but even more directly, as a kind of filing system for organizing and assimilating otherwise divergent modes of information. The "hosts" exist in Duke and Battersby's trademark animated mode, but other segments contain rack focus images of plastic figurines, extreme close-up photography of various insects, and not one but two musical numbers. The first song about "the gutter" is accompanied by a long, tracking shot along a mud bank filled with meticulously arranged detritus (a flattened 12-pack of Molson, a Blockbuster card, snipped buds from exotic flowers). The shot looks to be a direct allusion to the creekbed tracking shot in Tarkovsky's *Solaris*; we can add cinematic allusion to the types of material *Here Is Everything* works to accommodate.

Ultimately, what unifies the piece, its dominant, is its play between exhaustive cataloging of human experience, which it promises, and the fact that it hardly comes close. There is a rank randomness to the "everything" advice that Bunny and Kitty choose to impart. They begin with topics such as the sublime, addiction, and God. But before long, they are providing particular asides about the need for young women to stop acting "cute or precocious" to try to get their way, or a sudden paean to the tapeworm. On the one hand, this seeming randomness, the narrators' nonconformity to our present-day conception of what constitute the Big Questions, is entirely in keeping with a future



perspective to which we are not privy. On the other hand, it is a compositional method that allows Duke and Battersby to dodge and weave in unexpected directions and, perhaps more crucially, to work with various classes and textures of material. *Here Is Everything*, in a sense, fails to deliver on its promise. And yet, as a broad organizational rubric, it is right on the mark. There is virtually nothing that Duke and Battersby might produce in the future that could not, in principle, become a part of *Here Is Everything*. Hypothetically, it could be for them what the Magellan Cycle was for Hollis Frampton, although one suspects their restlessness will nudge them onward to the next piece, and the next.

Among the four artists under consideration, arguably none is more in tune with the classical tenets of montage than Dani Leventhal, whose works are breathtaking paragons of economy and precision. In a Leventhal work, meanings really are articulated not just in the collisions between shots, but also in the almost imperceptible micro-gestures that sweep and curl inside of a given shot in order to coax or hurtle it into the next. Leventhal's editing is absolutely in dialogue with a panoply of avant-garde masters (Brakhage, Menken, Sonbert, as well as her contemporary, Nathaniel Dorsky), but the crucial difference is that Leventhal is a videomaker and as such, her "cuts" have a radically different texture. Their architecture, their very sinew is both softer – there is no absolute segmentation of the frame – and more drastic, electrified, a wholly other optical ordeal. Not for nothing has Chris Stults compared Leventhal's style with Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty and its phalanx of sensory shocks (*Cinema Scope*, No. 47).

Leventhal has been working with "collision video" for quite some time, tapes such as *Draft 9* (2003) and *54 Days This Winter 36 Days This Spring for 18 Minutes* (2009) combine dominant motifs (such as a bike ride as follow-shot, or a study of various dead animals) with nature imagery, portraiture, fragments of daily activities, bits of conversations, all of which are joined on the basis of some similarity or dissimilarity – a rhyming shape, a sound bleed, the flash to a complementary color – that strikes us intuitively, whether or not we perceive it in the time of viewing. Leventhal's most recent pieces expand on this vocabulary while also edging towards longer sequence-shots, allowing her to articulate certain key events across multiple shots while retaining the pacing and organization that the montage mode permits.

If the more insistently compressed works lend an equal weight, formally and denotatively, to all the material that enters Leventhal's process-field, then these newer works similarly equalize shot-sequences within the fabric of a gestural, object-driven universe. That is to say, a series of shots in a Leventhal piece which "connect" more obviously than those around them, and even seem to produce a temporary diegetic space, has a qualitatively different effect than those same continuity-producing shots would in a more conventional work. Here, they negate, they press against a general tendency. For instance, *Hearts Are Trump Again* has what we might in another context call a "café scene," one whose placement toward the end of the video and instigation of a dialogue relationship might imply that it is somehow summative for the piece. In a German setting, a friend tells Leventhal about having been impregnated by a sperm donor. "Did you pay him?" Leventhal asks. "No! Why should I, Dani? It was just some sperm."

It is easy, in context, to link this conversation (real or fictional, we do not know) with another extended shot at the midpoint of *Hearts*, in which Leventhal shows us pigeons entering and exiting a broken warehouse window in close-up. Leventhal's framing makes this co-opted nest into a kind of membrane through which the screen itself is penetrated by fidgety natural "forms," and they retroactively take on the character of bobbing sperm trying to fight their way to the egg. Nevertheless, *Hearts* contains just as much movement through other, less directly legible spaces, both visual and sonic, whose organization and valence is formal above all else. In particular Leventhal employs sharp cuts on sound in this piece, showing musicians playing only to cut them abruptly off.

Hearts Are Trump Again reflects a slightly looser compositional approach than some of Leventhal's previous efforts. (The title phrase, spoken by a disgruntled senior citizen playing bridge, perhaps gives a hint

regarding the tape's overall mood.) *Tin Pressed* is a bit tighter, but similarly replaces the hard, jabbing collisions of Leventhal's earlier works with a more enveloping, poetic sensibility. As per Eisenstein, *Tin Pressed* is a piece that rises and falls with motivic gestures on the small as well as the large scale, with bodily shape and movement operating as the aesthetic dominant. For instance, the start of *Tin Pressed* relies on either a form holding the center of the frame as a nucleus, with action swirling around it (as in the first shot of Leventhal on the concrete, being kicked by unseen assailants, and the second shot of wasps inside a yellow flower) or movement around an empty center (as in the fourth shot, with bait sardines whirling in a water bucket). The subtle shift in orientation created by the bobbing fish takes us from circular motion to perpendicular stasis; the brief fifth shot of a Virgin Mary icon is quickly supplanted by Leventhal's bare back as she's mashed into a mammogram machine. This shot, like the extended café conversation in *Hearts Are Trump Again*, holds for quite a while. Then it is replaced by a side of beef hanging in a butcher shop window.

This very brief video (just under seven minutes) concludes with two unusual shots. One finds Leventhal "editing" within a single shot through a sly zoom-out. We see a woman on a TV screen speaking sign language, pull back to see that she is in the corner, translating an episode of "The Smurfs," and then see that the TV itself is droning on unnoticed in the kitchen of a halal restaurant where a man slices meat. The final shot, another of Leventhal's extended plan sequences, is of a Turkish woman singing a torch song in what appears to be a karaoke bar. If we think back to the rest of *Tin Pressed*, this woman's plaintive gestures become a bookend to the (pretend) violence against Leventhal on the ground, a more extended form of torment.

Violence, the body, and the submission of oneself to punishment and/or discipline – these are some of the key ideas wending their way through Leventhal's most recent piece, *17 New Dam Road*, along with a dominant concept which, many of us would agree, is related to those others in fairly direct ways: the family. I will be the first to admit to being somewhat baffled upon first seeing Leventhal's new work, given that it is so stylistically different than everything else of hers that I have seen. It is practically a documentary, in that the shots do not "collide," but rather work in tandem to depict a single location and those who occupy it.

The piece takes us into the lower-middle to lower-class digs of the Russo family: Jason, Jon and Teresa. A family friend, Jason Albrechtsen, is also present. What we see and hear of them is somewhat jarring. Their yard is filled with garbage, as though cleanup were still pending following some natural disaster. They are seriously into guns. One of the young men is wielding nunchucks, then swinging around on a chain hanging from the ceiling. Who are these people? In time, we discover that Teresa is a boxer, and one of her brothers is seen taking promotional photos of her as she strikes mid-punch poses. This, in essence, is the entirety of *17 New Dam Road*. On its surface, the piece hardly feels like Leventhal's work at all.

But as I looked closer, and perhaps more importantly as I considered the piece not only within the context of Leventhal's body of work but of this current show and the other three artists heretofore considered, I discovered some points of entry. Not only did *17 New Dam Road* open up for me, but the idea of it as a singular video-text began to open up as well. For one thing, I was wrong, plain and simple, not to see this piece as characteristically Leventhal's. While it is very different, it also represents a logical expansion of the tendency toward extended portraiture sequences and para-documentary already germinating in both *Hearts Are Trump Again* and *Tin Pressed*. What's more, based on the manner in which Leventhal has deployed documentary/interview modes in those works, it is beyond naïve for us to simply assume that our visit with the Russos is strictly on the level. Artifice is clearly a matter of degree, but as Teresa shows us at the end of *17 New Dam Road*, there is performativity, a self-conscious presentation of self, at work.

But even more broadly (and this takes us back to questions Eisenstein raised), if we think not about this or that video, but the entire Dani Leventhal master-text, all the videos a part of a grand ongoing project,

then how does that shift our perception of *17 New Dam Road*? Juxtaposed like a “shot” against the likes of *Hearts* and *Tin Pressed*, it is a somewhat lengthy, elaborated rupture, not unlike the café scene or the singer’s conclusion within those single texts. In this respect, Leventhal is creating patterns and rhythms in the composition of her works, between and among shots, and even on the macro-level, between and among individual works. And so, the sensibility that we must bring to any given Leventhal video – being prepared to negotiate difference within a unifying framework – is now the same one we require when facing a new work in comparison to the ones that came before.

What Leventhal, Hoolboom, Duke and Battersby share, then, is a mode of viewer address that requires that we meet the work as an entry into an active field of relationships. A boundary exists, one which defines the kinds of relationships that can and will occur within the works. But those boundaries are themselves permeable (as we see above, they can even spill over beyond the notion of the discrete, singular “text”), and what they actually delineate is a time and space through

which we subject ourselves to a set of discontinuities and forge connections, see what we hear, observe minute changes as they accumulate into broader, more global wave forms. The works ask us to synchronize our senses, so that we may better perceive our shattering loss of calibration. •



DANI

ARTIST STATEMENT

EMPLOYING A PROCESS OF ACCUMULATION AND EXCISION, I MAKE DRAWINGS AND VIDEOS THAT PROBE MY SURROUNDINGS, EMBRACING THE SUBJECTIVITY OF MY PARTICULAR PERSPECTIVE. THE WORK TAKES MULTIPLE FORMS AND ENCOMPASSES A BROAD RANGE OF THEMES, RANGING FROM THE POLITICAL TO THE MUNDANE AND DOMESTIC.

THE DRAWINGS AND VIDEOS ARE CREATED FROM MATERIAL THAT I COLLECT OVER TIME. INCORPORATING PHOTOGRAPHS OF FAMILY AND FRIENDS, SCRAPS OF PAPER, FOUND OBJECTS, WAX, BIRD FEATHERS, ANIMAL FUR AND AMBIGUOUS FORMS RENDERED IN INK, WATERCOLOR AND OIL, THE WORKS ON PAPER CAN BE SEEN AS AN EXTENSION OF MY MOVIES, NOT ONLY TRANSLATING THE IMPRESSIONISTIC MONTAGE TECHNIQUE TO ANOTHER MEDIUM, BUT ALSO REPEATING MANY OF THE SAME IMAGES. RARELY COMPOSED IN ADVANCE, THE DRAWINGS, LIKE THE VIDEOS, ARE THE RESULT OF AN INTUITIVE RESPONSE TO PARTICULAR MATERIALS AND IMAGES AND THEIR RELATION TO LIVED EXPERIENCE.

DANI LEVENTHAL

THE MULTITUDE OF VISIBLE THINGS:

THE VIDEOS OF DANI LEVENTHAL BY CHRIS STULTS

[This article originally appeared in *Cinema Scope*, and is reprinted here with the kind permission of editor Mark Peranson]

After my first encounter with a number of the overwhelmingly powerful videos by Dani Leventhal, I wondered if she was the fulfillment of a long-standing wish of a certain strain of filmmaking (and cinephilia): the dream of the obsessive cinematographer, filming every aspect of their life in hope of obtaining... what, exactly? Enlightenment? Immortality? This compulsive urge to record was most recently seen on screens in the form of *Exit Through the Gift Shop*'s Mr. Brainwash, but the definitive template for the archetype remains the eponymous subject of *David Holzman's Diary* (1967), who states that "if I put it on film... I should get it all." Leventhal's work initially struck me as the efforts of someone who just might have "got it all." Not only had she seemingly filmed every part of her life, but she had also captured the understanding and truth of those moments—from the heightened to the quotidian—that few others have captured before.

But after spending more time with the work, I realized that I had it all wrong. Leventhal's camera is not the triumph of an all-seeing subjectivity but rather an effort to reduce the barrier between her and the rest of the world: human, animal, or inanimate. And rather than being the result of recording mountains of footage, the images captured are the product of an almost effortless and impeccable sense of composition and a sophisticated and varied method of montage. The surface subjectivity in Leventhal's videos is often employed to reveal a more ambitious and nuanced project. Take, for instance, a diverting and revealing scene in *Skim Milk & Soft Wax* (2008) in which, sitting at a café in Israel with her father, she focuses not on the eternally fraught Israeli environment but an equally unknowable landscape: her father's eye. Leventhal's off-camera voice is filled with amazement as she exclaims that his pupil is not round, and once the camera moves in close enough we see that her father does indeed have a somewhat

feline, slit-like pupil; meanwhile, he laughs and states that “I brought you here to have the Israeli experience, but you just want to film my eyeball... Danielle, this has no meaning. No meaning whatsoever!”

Within the context of the video, this moment emphasizes a recurring motif that, when it comes to Israel—and perhaps even the world at large—Leventhal’s father sees things differently than she does. But after viewing a number of Leventhal’s other videos, this scene begins to take on a more resonant meaning, and indeed offers a key to her work. Images of eyes recur throughout Leventhal’s work with even greater frequency than in Sergio Leone’s films, but instead of limiting herself to the eyes of humans, Leventhal especially focuses on the eyes of animals, both living and dead. This insistence on studying the eyes of others indicates that one of the aims of Leventhal’s project is a desire to explore and understand how others see—including the camera itself, which functions as both a channel for Leventhal’s subjectivity and as an alienated, autonomous eye in its own right.

Because so many of the scenes from Leventhal’s videos appear to be in an immediate, first-person tense, she is often called a diary filmmaker. But while portions of her videos may be convincingly slotted into that genre, the works as a whole complicate the term so much that it becomes an unhelpful reference point. The presiding spirit is not the narcissism that can undermine an uncritical diarist, but rather a curiosity about the world and about others. Leventhal’s inquisitiveness about and relationship towards the environments around her can sometimes recall the way Nathaniel Dorsky can spin the majestic from the mundane. Like Dorsky, Leventhal seeks out images with singularity and weight, alive to the immediacy of the moment—a moment that will never return. Yet while Dorsky’s work rarely strays beyond the local, Leventhal’s is often global and can, on occasion, leap undetected between cultures and locations (in this respect, her videos resemble Warren Sonbert’s). While Dorsky’s films maintain a sublime, almost Zen-like tone that seems elevated and apart from everyday life, Leventhal’s are caught up in the roiling, beautiful mess of existence; where Dorsky aims for a state of transcendence, Leventhal conveys one of immanence. Through precise images, both eloquent and obscure, she documents life as it is lived from moment to moment.

Complicating the terms further, however, is how the palpable immediacy of Leventhal’s work is inflected by a more contemplative, abstract aspect. In addition to the diaristic inheritance of David Holzman and the courageously tender example of Dorsky, her videos also exist within a long, vital lineage of artworks that can be seen as examinations of montage’s ability to create meaning. While in certain passages there is a clearly articulated connection between shots or sequences of shots, in others the viewer is invited to invest him or herself in the search for that connection. Similar to Brakhage’s *The Riddle of Lumen* (1972), these moments present seemingly disconnected images that, upon further inspection, are playfully puzzle-like in their linkages, related by a colour, shape, or texture of light (in such sections the connections between Leventhal’s videos and her accomplished drawing practice are most evident).

Leventhal’s background and primary field of study was in sculpture, and that training greatly informs her videomaking. Nearly the inverse of Matthew Barney, who creates sculptural events but makes little attempt to craft them into cinema through attention to composition, duration, and other fundamental traits of the medium, Leventhal uses these essential elements as sculptural tools. Her works often feel as if they are chiseled and molded out of time; at especially unruly moments, the joins between shots can be so raw that splices are almost visible, even though the work is all shot and edited digitally. In contrast to the slickness of much digitally created work, Leventhal’s videos gain an added power and charm because they are so unpolished: when Leventhal needs to use onscreen text for subtitles it will often obtrusively scroll vertically or horizontally across the image, instead of appearing statically at the bottom of the screen in the conventional fashion.

This roughness ceaselessly causes the viewer to consider the work's essential constructedness, not in a postmodern sense, but in a way that restores a sense of the haptic to the digital-video production process. In the same quote where Francis Ford Coppola predicts that a "little fat girl from Ohio is going to be the next Mozart" (now a clichéd maxim of the digital revolution), he goes on to decry the professionalism of filmmaking and how new forms on the horizon will allow filmmaking to be freer. In the event, the new technology hasn't followed that path: instead of allowing individuals to express themselves more freely, it has only made it easier for filmmakers to create homogenized products. Although Dani is far from fat, she is from Ohio and spent her early, formative years there, and perhaps she embodies Coppola's prophecy—not by being the second coming of Mozart, but by finding ways to resist the wearying polish that has overtaken the Final Cut generation.

While the word "poetic" is often bandied about in relation to experimental films and videos as a means to describe a style or texture (like "romantic" or "lyrical") rather than referring to the actual properties of poetry itself, a dedicated reader of poetry might be more equipped to deal with the intricacies of Leventhal's videos than someone well-versed in almost any other medium (including video). Shorter works such as *Recitation* (2007) recall a koan, while longer works can resemble the dense accumulation and whiplash modes of expression found in longer, sustained works by Alice Notley (see "Woman in Front of Poster of Herself") or John Ashbery. The way in which Leventhal can shift the meaning of a shot by cutting to something unexpected, and then open it up in a whole new direction with a third shot, is very similar to what the great Japanese poet Fumi Saito does with the fourth and fifth lines of this tanka:

**Dividing the wheat,
the place where construction is planned
has stakes pounded in—
like into thick animal skin
a needle being driven**

The jarring juxtapositions that are so frequent in Leventhal's videos bring to mind the guiding principles behind Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty: cruelty not as violence, but as an exposure of the truths that most of us overlook in the course of daily existence. Approaching situations that could potentially cause harm—whether it's encroaching

on the territory of a horned cow, handling dead animals, or baring one's personal life—Leventhal evinces not fear but unblinking curiosity. She even interrogates this impulse in *3 Parts for Today* (2007), which opens with a simultaneously astonishing and hard-to-watch shot of a fledgling lying on pavement gasping for breath; later in the video, Leventhal recounts that "it didn't even occur to me to try to save that bird. It was just this beautiful footage." Curious even about her own curiosity, Leventhal is able to create moments of overwhelming intimacy, whether lovingly caressing roadkill, candidly revealing her childlike playfulness while making a bed with a loved one, or getting headbutted by the aforementioned cow.

The shot of the fallen bird exemplifies a predominant tension in Leventhal's work between the cold, dispassionate eye of the camera and the loving, empathetic hand wielding it (a dynamic that is directly addressed in 2009's *54 Days this Winter 36 Days this Spring for 18 Minutes* when Leventhal's voiceover refers to a person's "two selves," one that is "crippled by emotion" and one that is "super-conscious"). It also points out a motif that has been in evidence as early as *Draft 9* (2003): a tender study of animals (cats, birds, bears, and more), as often dead as alive. Even when dead, however, Leventhal endows these creatures with a vivified aura: treating them with a reverent respect and gentle concern, she grants them a presence and a return to (some kind of) life. What becomes clear about Leventhal's continual fascination with these animals is that, even in death, they confirm the simplest fact of life: existence.

With this in mind, the final sequences of *Skim Milk & Soft Wax* are some of the most pivotal in her work to date. While in Israel, she and her father encounter an extremist who pronounces that Arabs are "not humans... they are nothing but animals"—making clear by his tone of voice that he is not only denying the humanity of the object of his hatred, but their right to exist as well. For an artist dedicated

to acknowledging the existence of the other, this is too much to bear. Two final shots follow this confrontational moment, and Dani's presence recedes increasingly in each. In the penultimate shot, she is seen at a keyboard taking dictation for her father (in a tightly framed medium shot that has most of her head out of the frame), while the video closes with her arrival back in the US, her off-camera voice heard over footage of an airport landing field at night: "the strangest thing happened," she whispers, "I lost my voice... this has never happened to me." Within the context of this particular video, Leventhal is here elegantly showing her exasperation in trying to convey—and situate her identity within—what her father called "the Israeli experience." When this passage is looked at alongside her larger body of work, however, it speaks to the overriding essence of Leventhal's work: not a diarist's disclosures, but an almost Buddhist dissolution of ego. Throughout her videos, even at the most personal of moments, Leventhal's voice merges with the world. And, in the end, everything merges with the night. •

3 DAYS, 1399 WORDS, THIS FALL

BY DEIRDRE LOGUE

Hearts Are Trump Again. And again, and again, and again, and again, and again, and again.

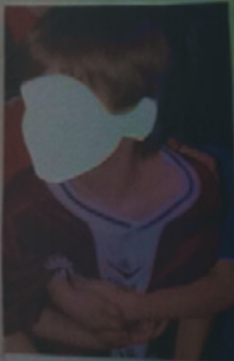
With the video work of artist Dani Leventhal, it's hard to stop wanting to repeat the gesture of watching and wanting to watch. The more I watch, the more I want.

There are just two works that I am supposed to talk about here: *Hearts Are Trump Again* and *Tin Pressed* but I will confess to you now – whoever you are – that my focus on just two will be a difficult severance. To single out any one chapter in Dani's book, when it's all so good, seems a shame. So instead of breaking Dani's oeuvre into parts, I will talk about it as I have experienced it – as a landslide of images, feelings and questions, as a painful flurry, with hundreds of camera shots, all poking through at the same time, letting in the light, flooding my ducts, making me remember the difficult work of seeing the world as it is – broken.

1.

Putting Dani's work into words is like putting a fine snake in a cage, it's always slipping easily through the bars of any linguistic containment. But producing this text requires I try to catch Dani's slippery snake, as well to make a cage from scratch, however useless it will be for capture. Writing requires a beginning, an entry, a recollection.

Turning on my mattress, the bedframe creaking like big ice melting, I flashback through all of Dani's work. So many moments stand out, but I can't stop thinking back to the first. *Draft 9* sat me down hard on a flat chair and said, "Pay attention." This uneasy document of someone's world, this collage of ordinary chaos, this



fascinating composition of endearments and tragedies, this was a first for me. Glued to a tensile screen, twenty eight minutes of video from 1999–2003 roll past in non-narrative triumph, free at last. Organized along a very fine psychic line, images assemble, one after the other, seat held in place by the rider.

Like live worms placed on a hook, both tremble.

I remember being shocked by the dead things in *Draft 9* which Dani showed me right away, as if to get the hard parts over with first. Back and forth she went, mock flying fragrant birds in her hands. How was she to know I was just as shocked by the live things, which she showed me right after? By the end, I too was skinned using the resistance of my own weight, my own private gravity.

Rural like a horse

Yearning like a crack

Crying like an elk

Turning like a stone

Urban like a beast

Dani's work makes me want to run, but where?

2.

The purpose of art – if there is one – is buried somewhere in Dani's continuous exhibition of time-coded pictures. As I think about her work is made, the way she gathers, grabs and "constructs" her stories, I know there is something real inside. I know because for me, too, art is in the daylight, in the agonizing real-time of our everyday cruelties, in our perverse touching, in our ecstatic bouncing. Ceiling, floor, ceiling, floor, ceiling, floor, ceiling, floor, ceiling, floor, ceiling, floor.

Shayne's Rectangle:

a horse freed in winter

Tin Pressed:

someone beating someone else at night, on asphalt

Hearts Are Trump Again:

the dealer in a card game taking bids

54 Days this Winter 36 Days this Spring for 18 Minutes:

distress without consolation

Skim Milk and Soft Wax:

a young girl's high-pitched whistle

Show & Tell in the Land of Milk & Honey:

large bees clamor in lamb's ear

3 Parts for Today:

a dying fledgling's last breaths

Recitation:

sexing

9 Minutes of Kaunau:

something urgent that I can't make out

Litau:

a couple dancing in fancy clothes on an outdoor floor of plywood

Draft 9:

a plastic bag in a plastic bag and their dead contents

One after the other, opening scenes never fail to grip. After 12, 25, 50 shots, they start to seem like a series, forming sequences. Some scenes end abruptly, others are softer. Dani doesn't worry about change or transitions; just meat, no potato. Dani free associates, bending clips into circles, riding out cycles of trauma, dying first, living later. Her insides are airless and murky, her outsides exposed.

I always want to get Dani a coat, even in summer, but that might ruin something important about the conditions that this work is made in. Maybe the best art is created sitting right there on that cold road, on that wet ground, or in front of that broken TV with the rest of the poor fuckers just trying to survive.

What do a card game, a spider web, an accordion, a barbed wire fence, a set of knees, hair, a hand at work, feet walking, pigeon's fussing, beds, a coffee, a girl waiting for sperm, a toy horse, a

reluctant donkey, a face, a scared barking dog, a guitar-playing kid, two people leaving, harvesting chard stalks, performance art, foosball, a swan, a mask and an apartment block all have in common?

Everything.

Together they are the present, assembled like an audience, here not to watch but as witness to the unfolding of feeling. They are all images brought forward from the blur in a moment of wonder; they are collaborators in a feeling state, lovers in the struggle. I have rarely known videos to perform the function of feeling before. Now I am forever ruined by higher expectations.

Living side by side in various configurations, I suspect all of Dani's collected fragments find a place in her artistic endeavor. In Dani's daily project of seeing, she makes space for the human things, not the plastics. Embarking on a new queer way, shape and time, one that is entirely personal, completely reflective and thoroughly dysfunctional, Dani discards the old wooden narrative for the new, more flexible tool of touch. And it's this touch that makes me wonder... how does she manage to get so close to me when I am watching? How is it possible that I can smell the dead, but still warm carcass, the carpet's bare feet, the stale cigarettes, the proposed smoked meat sandwich?

Jet black hairs curled into cups

Cascade down the familiar shoulders of the straight girl you like

Two beds side by each

European style

Like a coffin with covers

Warm but small and nothing you would want to sleep in for too long

Why is Dani's work is so good, better, maybe even best? These could be anyone's movies of a crying baby, gumming the lens cap for comfort. These could be anyone's movies of a tipped over chest freezer in the yard, anyone's maggot-clean spine draped over a rusted chemical drum.

Anyone?

3.

The thing is they are not just anyone's movies – they have been inside Dani first and now they are inside me. So here I sit quietly holding the camera while friends test the glock! Debating the shell size of a thirty odd six, I am here, in the scene, with all of its primal discomfort and I am terrified.

As kittens jump at the slightest chance for play, I settle into that weird, nighty-night that happens only in the country, sometime after eight pm and before six am. It's on this time cliff that small children are read stories, tucked in and asked to forget. These are also the witching hours, when large children (called adults), freed from the visibility that daylight brings, return to the reconstruction of their feral wishes. I watch as they self-gratify with power tools, bump their superior strengths up against my small chest and mask their scars in black leather and piss-stink denim.

So many have shared this sad cabin. Fathers, brothers, cousins and sons have had it out in these woods and on that couch, learning how to land a punch into the greasy guts of someone else's manhood. And it was in this toss and rubble that I was born. It is why I learned to fight. It is why I get up early to run. It is why I don't put on a sweater. It is why I learned to kill and slaughter. It is why I let them take my picture.

It is why I learned to take pictures back. •

MUSCLE MEMORY

BY ERIK MARTINSON

It's difficult to express in words how much impact Dani Leventhal's video work and her way of seeing has had on me. The visual language she employs is so visceral, I can feel it with my eyes and in my head. It has the effect of recalling my own memories, only the angles are better, the images crisper, and the editing has been wrangled so that everything is in its place. You don't always understand why, but it is. This process of seeing – of looking out and in at the same time – that she is able to transfer to our minds via her videos doesn't quite match up with the word that some might use to describe this process: intuitive. I think we get hesitant about this word, its legacy in the arts, its impact, when it comes up in question and answer periods about an artist's methods. I'm not interested in using it here.

Watching Dani's *17 New Dam Road* (7:52 minutes 2012), a new phrase emerges that catches my attention: muscle memory. It's cumbersome, not perfectly fitting by any means, but it starts me off in a direction. Having seen all of Dani's videos up to this point, I can feel my eyes recalling their movements, scanning the frames she presents, how they've been internalized in a profound way. The scene she encounters in Hopewell Junction has all her presence behind the camera, her signature imprinting on the world around her. Something differs slightly in the unfolding of the shots though, it becomes clear that the location is always the same: the house, yard, people. The images come from one place and time-frame, instead of traversing spaces and temporalities as

we have seen in her past work. These located events are recalled in a structure that presents her experience of a visit to the home of Jason, Jason, Jon, and Teresa. Once inside, discussions of guns, ammo, and shooting are conveyed while pull-ups are performed, a kitten gallantly jumps between leaning weapons, and the Teresa's boxing is choreographed. The camera takes a drag from a cigarette as Teresa asks Dani if she has ever fired a weapon. Dani says she's shot a rifle only once and it kicked back so hard it hurt her shoulder. One of the Jasons talks about a glock's safety, it's right on the trigger, so he doesn't have to position his finger, it's right there. It's muscle memory.

This moment contrasts two experiences with guns. On one side is the body that recoils, its fibres and sinews unaccustomed to the kick, and on the other side is a body with unflinching joints resting on the trigger. This illustration of the theory of muscle memory ripples in my mind, and continues in my body, as I reflect on the ways I feel through Dani's videos. I noticed both familiarity and difference in *17 New Dam Road*, its gleaner's eye and ear compels me in way that's become familiar via encounters with Dani's work, but now matched with a distinctive locality that creates a space to reflect on this internalization in new ways, to think about the approaches used, the way they affect my vision. The way a shot can kill or reveal. My eye muscles, my brain wrinkles, having had this reflexive moment, are training harder. Pathways are renewed and newly made. The punches have landed on their mark. •

NOTES ON 3 SHORT MOVIES BY DANI LEVENTHAL AS IF I WAS DANI

BY MIKE HOOLBOOM

The camera runs out of my mouth and onto the page, and then her shoulder blades, and the place between them where the secrets are buried. Like everyone, she's showing me what she doesn't want to show, she's telling me what she doesn't want to say. But she can't help it. The words are falling out of her, and she hears them from one direction, according to the unsilvered mirror of her imagination. And my camera hears them the other way, as the place where the unspoken can find a home. Sometimes I don't hear the words that way either, it's not until later, when I'm back home, when I'm back watching the yields in my computer, that I can see what the camera has noticed. Again and again.

The camera is not a part of me, it's part of what's around me and I follow it around, I let it take me there. I'm not walking my dog. I'm not giving instructions to my dog telling it how to behave. Sit. Heel. Roll over. Eat. Instead, my dog is showing me how to walk in the neighbourhood. How to live inside a world that is not filled with road signs past and future. The camera brings a rectangle so that intentions can flow inside it. The sound comes from everywhere at once, but the picture of the world happens

in the rectangle. Mostly in close-up. My camera likes to get close. Sometimes it's an extension of my body and sometimes it's an extension of her body, or a house, or a bird. When it's turned on, as the saying used to go, it is part of whatever is going on. Maybe that's what being turned on means. The camera turns on, and then I turn on. Or at least I turn. The camera allows me to turn towards the subject until it's not the subject, it's not over there while I'm over here. The camera touches something about loneliness here.

And then you go back over the pictures and sounds when it's time to edit. You try on the second hand clothes. I'll second that emotion. You listen to the second thoughts. You go back over it all again. You pick out the moments that are shining and bright and you put them next to each other, and because they're made with the same kind of closeness, or the same kind of distance, or the same kind of listening, they belong together and they don't belong together. They create a space, some new kind of space, and that's where the viewer can enter. The way the pictures come together makes a door, or a series of doors, and that's where the audience walks in. If they want to. •

DANI LEVENTHAL & THE QUESTION OF WHY ONE SHOULD CARE

BY EMILY VEY DUKE

Why should I care? This is perhaps the most pernicious of questions for artists. Why should I care when artists make ostensibly careless things? Things that sometimes even repel our caring about them – make us turn up our noses in boredom or disgust? Myriad forms of carelessness. Artists respond variously:

"I don't care if you care." "I can't allow myself to be concerned with the question of your caring. It interferes with my creative process." "If you don't care it's because I'm cleverer than you." Even, I have learned in my role as a teacher, "It would've been too much work to make you care."

Dani Leventhal is ready for this question. She can rebut. There is a short answer and a long one, and she is always happy to share both. Her long answers tend to the baroque, and often seem to be descriptive of a work totally different to the one you have asked about. Dani is a member of the family of artists who have astonishingly complex, imbricated rationales for their work that seem to bear little resemblance to the thing they've produced. There are symbolic systems and colour codes and plays on words and patterns of development that are nigh invisible to the untrained eye. It's fascinating to me that this happens – a work of art in itself, the rationale.

The short answer is that you probably aren't asking the question – rather, you're probably in so far that your eyeballs are bathed in the work because it's so fucking fascinating, and beautiful, and frightening, and hideous. And perhaps even divine, or more properly, Holy.

And if you are still asking, then you are likely answering your own question even as you ask it. You (we) should care because caring is the subject of the work.

I speak here about caring both in the sense of curiosity (would you care to hear the latest news on C and R's messy separation?" – though Dani would never bite on that one – she'd care too much in the other way); and in the sense that denotes love, which preoccupies Leventhal fundamentally, both in her work and around it, in her life. Also, and fundamentally, it is about care in the sense of the word that denotes stewardship, as in "I will care for this set of acres until I'm no longer called to be its steward."

Leventhal, interestingly, manifests a world-view not dissimilar to that of the Fastwurms. The universe, in her tapes and drawings and sculptures, is one in which animism can live congenially alongside organised (or disorganised) religion. Animals and plants speak through her, as do ghosts and bugs and notions. Like the Fastwürms, Leventhal doesn't shy away from the profound or the mystical.

But unlike Kozzi and Skuze, Dani Leventhal never plays with kitsch. She seems to be an animal who lives her life without the intrusion of irony: she is neither its generator nor its purveyor. I have never even heard her crack sarcastic, nor do I recall her appreciating any but the very broadest satire – *Hairspray*, maybe, but earlier John Waters I remember her declaiming as ugly and vaguely malevolent.

I wonder if this is the source of the overwhelming immediacy of her work. Irony requires a fantasized viewer who is outside the joke, a dupe, a straight-man. No such othered entity is imagined when watching Leventhal's work. But this lack of irony should not be interpreted to equal a lack of humour in the work. I've laughed (and cried, to use the old saw) hard watching Dani's tapes.

I laugh now, in fact, recalling certain moments: Dani, garbed in a bright yellow rain suit, descends into the shot from above. Over the rain suit she wears a harness. I know the back-story on this one because Leventhal and I were in graduate school in Chicago together at the time. She had petitioned the university to allow her to construct a winch out of I-beams and mount it outside her third-story studio, which would support her weight and allow her to lower herself to the ground. The school refused. It was patently unsafe, the school asserted. But Leventhal was undaunted. She had sketches. She had done some math. Nothing could go wrong! But the school held firm, so it was under the cover of night that Dani erected her winch. It's inauguration was set for dawn the following morning.

Leventhal always has a prodigiously dedicated motley crew of assistants, and I think there were three or four people helping her on the shoot that morning as she crept out onto the contraption and began her descent to the earth. Two were waiting for her at the bottom: a tiny little girl of about 18 and Jon, the nerdy but sweet a-v cage worker who had the physique of a nerdy-but-sweet a-v cage worker. Dani probably out weighed him by about 30 pounds.

So Dani has taken her position and begins her descent into the shot. Before we see her, we hear a horrible, bleating retch. When we see her feet, nothing seems particularly amiss – her feet are pointing unnaturally down, we might later reflect, but no big deal. It's not until we hear the next almost animal cry, followed immediately by a white spray of vomit that we realise something has gone terribly wrong.

When her head enters the frame, bobbing unsettlingly, she looks utterly stricken – if still gorgeous and beatific. Her two miniature assistants race up to her and try with limited success to grapple her to the ground, unclipping the harness and letting her drop. She has lost consciousness, perhaps because her harness has cut off the circulation between her upper and lower body. Her helpers are hovering over her and making freaked-out sounds when we hear Dani tell them "I fell down!" Indeed.

It is in part this same ingenuousness that makes Leventhal's work so absorbing. She approaches everything in her world with this same sort of enthusiastic puzzlement. If it weren't for her deft handling of super-charged, complex subject matter (animal rights, gender politics and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, for instance), we might think her naive. But she is not naive. She is simply and thoroughly curious about our world and all its vari-coloured citizens. •

MIXED MEDIA

(blood, photos, fur, paper, charcoal, oil pastel and pencil)

drawings by Dani Leventhal





2. *For Emily*





I AM THE CRACKER

BY MIKE HOOLBOOM

My cousin Janie liked to come over and smoke meth in a bright blue pipe she named "Shirley" for reasons we were too young to ask about because she was our babysitter. Our meaning my brother and I. After she smoked up in the garage, she would come in with her face all waxy and loose, like you could pry the whole surface off with a good set of nippers. She would stow Shirley in a bag we were certain she would leave behind but she never did, and then heat up a big bowl of wieners and macaroni. A personal favourite. When she had boiled most of the water off and the weiner flesh was so loose it would fall apart if you touched it, she would slide it onto plates we held out for her inspection. She would fork up hardly there fragments which she allowed to dissolve in her mouth while we would get as close to her as we possibly could, imagining as we did that we too were getting a little puffed up. She would tell us lawyer jokes or else graveyard jokes or else bartender jokes we didn't understand. "Two drunk guys walk into a bar... you'd think they'd see it coming." "A man walks in to a bar with a piece of tarmac under his arm and says, "A pint please and one for the road." Although usually she was laughing so hard before she hit the punch line that they never really came out right and we ate up every second. When she wasn't telling us jokes she never quite finished, she told us how most people didn't have faces. They had what she called "borrowed features" or "borrowed expressions" and nothing of themselves at all up there where everyone could see it. Although sometimes you could look behind these faceless faces and see something else trying to poke through and my brother and I practiced that a lot, mostly with each other, staring intently into each other's quiet imperfections until mother would come home and ask us just why were we sitting around with nothing in our hands all the time?

We worshipped our cousin Janie, and even when she moved away I knew that I wanted to be a meth addict when I grew up. It was something to believe in, a credo that rang well past the occasional flag waving and Sunday schools that were offered up as conviction receptacles. But I lacked the talent for addiction, I just couldn't seem to keep my mind quiet long enough to allow compulsion to really take hold, so I had to settle, like many of my friends, for binging on other people's problems. Whenever I get worn down by best friend Dale (two divorces, three miscarriages, one breast cancer successfully treated), I turn to the comforts of the internet, particularly the glorious www.fmylife.com. If you haven't already posted, it's a website where users anonymously post reasons why their life sucks right now.

Today, my girlfriend dumped me saying she wanted someone more like her 'Edward.' I asked her who Edward was. She held up a copy of her 'Twilight' book. She was talking about a fictional vampire.

Today, I was passing a building and saw a fat, ugly person inside. I started to laugh and noticed it was my reflection.

Today, as my boyfriend was trying to convince me that he was not having an affair with another woman named Julie, he looked me in the eye and exclaimed, "I would never cheat on you. I love you more than anything, Julie."

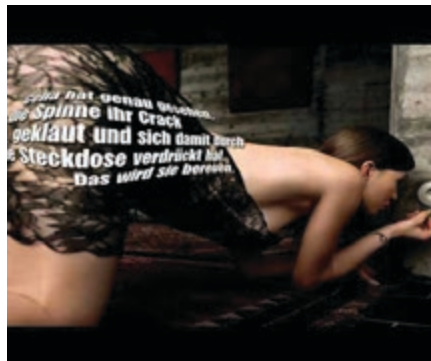
Today, I fell asleep. I felt something on my face and batted it away. It was my hamster. It died from a concussion after hitting the wall.

You see what I mean? There is nothing quite as satisfying as someone else's misery. But even through the borrowed feelings and Dale's larger-than-life problems which seem to be designed by some out-of-work Soviet chess grandmaster, I am still haunted by Janie's simple affirmation: that most people she met didn't have a face.

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If this were a movie there would be a title reading **TEN YEARS LATER**, and someone watching it, with or without a face, would turn to their best friend and open their mouth wide and thrust their two longest fingers in and out of it. The universal hand signal for: this really chokes.

Dani had a face that didn't belong to her. Not at first, not at the beginning. But when I see her now, today, on the Friday she's come into town for the first time, I can see that her face is beginning to settle into her. This accommodation and return, like most homecomings, is producing in her a kind of shock. Oh god, is that me? She walks through these streets with eyes so wide she'll be able to sketch it out later, when she's by herself, squatting in the



unrented corner of the Howard Johnson's with her charcoals and the bad paper she prefers because you can make mistakes. Finally alone, she'll lay down the name of each and every store and face and hydrant we passed and recognize it as a block she might one day sign as a return address home. That's when it becomes her city, the streets she opens to and admits and allows to live on inside. Somehow, the knack of being a tourist escapes her.

A passing friend of a friend stops with a manchild on four wheels, unsteady in the snow, his listing pre-verbal face drawn instantly to the place where Dani's face would be if she had one, if she hadn't refused that somehow. His arms are bent double and apparently helpless, but he is looking so very keenly while his two-legged chauffeur or minder or boss is busy wearing the mask of friendship with the other woman in our entourage who I can't speak about, all in the great blind spot of the world behind him. Behind us all.

This is how it works, the man in the wheelchair might be saying, if his look could be cashed in for words. I am helpless, and in my helplessness and need I will teach you how to look after me, and by looking after me, to look after yourself. Who could ever be so strong to be so weak? He was busy leaving this wordless question for Dani before his confederate rolls him back onto the eastgoing lane while Dani leads us in the other direction, offering an equal and opposite reaction, matching, without even needing to look back and make sure, the speed of the little metal wheels that reach out for every bump and trough and uneven concrete pour on the sidewalk still unrecovered from last night's snowy dump. Dani's feet fall into the rhythm and we fall in right behind her. Her globalized sneakerware

and his pre-motorized two-wheeled chariot locked up together. She looks up at me as if to say, "Do you understand?" and I nod, not catching anything she's throwing, but not wanting to stop and have her break down the whole drill, hoping instead that she'll just show me again and again.

Finally we arrive at the worst-looking Korean restaurant in an area of the city dedicated to Korean restaurants on a tip from a sitter who has chowed out at each and every one and proclaimed this the very finest, no question. The television plays the news from three or four weeks ago, all in Korean with English subtitles, and both of us are finding this more comforting than we really want to admit. Everything else on the tube has re-runs, why not the news? We hardly know each other, Dani and I, but two hours ago she brought up her folks to shake hands. It's that kind of city. No kiss kiss. Embraces are strictly for East Europeans that still have bodies. Warm clasps, forehead touchings, all that is forbidden here. We are masters of distance. We like to weigh in and measure up and then refuse. Besides, here in Toronto, most of the year is winter, so we all have to wear clothes on top of our clothes until we stop having



bodies. So even though Dani and I hug on the walk – and she out of her three-layer polydermal weatherproofing already because she's been upstairs waiting – I am still held up inside a small men's room of fashion accessories all worn at the same time in order to stop my body from feeling what it's really like outside. And then to stop what it's feeling inside. Oh please god not that. And not you. So when we embrace it's more like the idea of an embrace, and when I meet her parents they seem more like the idea of Dani's parents, though I make requisite genetic checks and see that at least the one who calls herself mother wears a resemblance up where strangers can see it. Dad looks like the genetic road not taken with his It's-OK-I'll-Wait chin and his stately forehead the very opposite of Dani's head-on collision of a face which is only now arriving after how many crucial and incidental and already forgotten fallings in and out of love. Father must have dropped in after the crucial ejaculation, so it's as if he's wrapped in a layer of winter wear as well. Her parents vanish after our introductions, leaving us to walk slowly towards the worst-looking Korean restaurant on the strip, hidden behind come-ons for discount sunshades and an army of begrimed nail clippers. Dani tells me that she knows exactly what she's going to look like at every age, because that's what her mother looked like. I don't ask her if this is a good thing or bad.

The light flickers through the bad blinds as if it's unsure whether to stay or go, stretching our shadows across the table until they're almost touching, leaving us to wait with our ordinary hopes. The whitest man in the city sits two booths behind us and complains in a whisper to no one at all that the menu is only in English, and that he can't connect a word of it to the best year his stomach ever

had when he was teaching in Pusan. The vinaigrette pucks arrive and I push the kimchi to the other side of the table where it can trouble someone else's conscience. I begin to worry then, as I always worry, whenever artists are gathered, particularly those of us dedicated to small scale reversions of television, that our chatter will degenerate into shopworn talk, insider tales of software glitches and platform failures which will lead, quickly and inevitably, to disappointments of a more personal nature, as a parade of critics and starmakers (who would be identified only by initials because their full identities are beneath and above mention) had passed over our genius pictures which must have appeared to them like the forbidden and unwatchable face in the labyrinth. No doubt they feared their audiences might be turned, if not to stone, then at least to wondering why, if our righteous upper shelf confections could be had, then why did they have to put up with the horizon of ordinariness that typically passed for museum distractions?

Instead, I spoon up a jellied tendril while Dani talks about the ice queen who followed every nerve root down to its tender origins and then began a pulping and shredding exercise which she served up to both of them as heart muscle gumbo before splitting. Her last

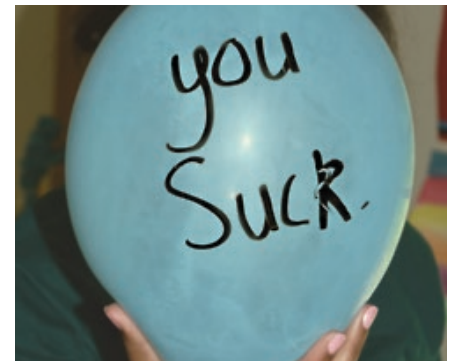
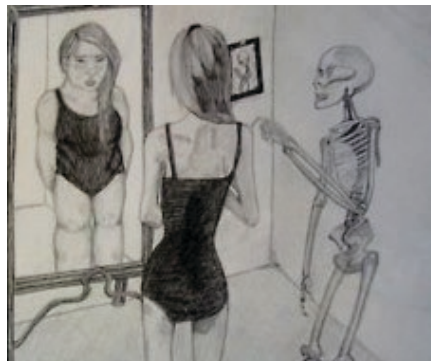
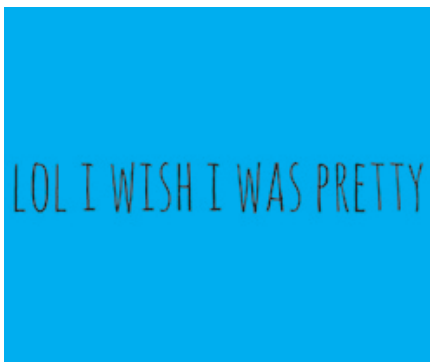


girlfriend. Only she doesn't say the word 'vampire,' she says, "I was selfish, so she left." She cuts her words off like that and leaves them on the table where they stare back at us in accusation. While we wait together in a silence she is no hurry to let go of, I watch the place her face should be twist up into a terrible knot of pain. Could you please move your truck off my foot? There is a moment that sits atop her perfectly symmetrically shoulders which should be shield and ground cover, but instead, it never stops opening, and I can see how much it hurts and how she doesn't mind that hurt, or maybe she's grown used to it, or perhaps it hurts more if she doesn't let it crawl all over her, if she refuses; so she keeps pushing that soft open place up into the hands of strangers. Like her ex-girlfriend Anja for instance. Or the man without legs.

The television shows Israeli Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu: *"You cannot say both Israel and Hamas are symmetrically to blame. They're not. One side is to blame, the side that targets civilians and hides behind civilians. That's Hamas. The other side represents the rest of humanity. Now choose."*

When Dani met Anja from Europe for the first time it wasn't contact narrative interspecies genocide but it had its shaky moments. Anja would spray language out of her mouth, and occasionally out of other, more unlikely places, at every possible inconvenient moment though mostly she said nothing at all. Try to touch her, though, and the words ran, one kiss and forget about it, the whole evening became alphabetic shambles. She was, Dani thought, so very like the dolls that always appeared around Christmas time with that soft, almost-flesh, which Dani longed to layer over her own skin, and that

secretly admitted (Where was it? Where?) a satisfyingly depressable moment that would beg for her squeezing, choking, grasping hands that were learning how to perform their hand-like duties on models so that one day they might be able to do the very same out there in a world which seemed to belong, at least temporarily, to her mother, and a father who hadn't left yet, and whose full time preoccupation seemed to be building fences, which he did mostly with words. The clenched doll-in-fist moments provoked results which varied in personal satisfaction from excellent to very very excellent, and no matter how often they were glimpsed as not-yet store bought promises between distracting televisual episodes of unhappy posing screen doubles whose throwaway deliveries were greeted with howls of laughter, or else low-gurgled cheers of hilarity or else scrumfulls of belly-shaking joy delivered by an unseen chorus (perhaps the personal conscience assigned to each televisual avatar?) Dani never imagined, no not once, that the better-than-real-life sister she held in her hands belonged to her alone. This year's doll, already worn with handling and love and need, would cry out in recognition every time she was squeezed, though this wasn't as fine as last year's delivery which was able to shed real tears. How satisfying it was to hold open

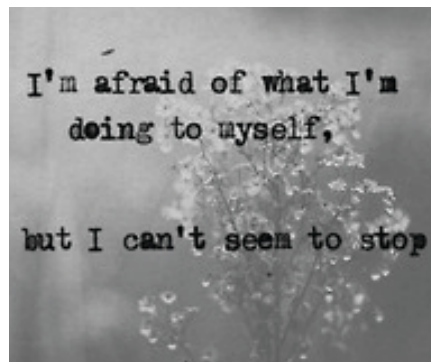


the hatch and let the cold sink water fill the little-big doll's cavities until she was overflowing with heartbreak.

"Here I am all dolled up," says Anja, the dollfaced baby doll, to Dani, in the private part of her kitchen. Everyone is allowed into Anja's bedroom, but only her intimates are permitted into the kitchen. She is a siren of oral culture, make no mistake, despite her silences, and Dani follows that voice like the old sailors caught between wanting only what they couldn't have, or wanting only what others couldn't have. She (Dani) would stagger into her (Anja's) kitchen with those meathooks pouring out of her shoulders ready to find the place, the unmistakable place in Anja's body which would at last begin their relationship for real. It wasn't Anja's fault that when Dani touched her she either felt nothing at all, or else too much, which meant that more than occasionally she would have orgasms of increasing and frightening intensity which even Dani, parched and jawsore and at home inside intensities of every kind, would want to slowly back away from, only to find Anja, who generally touched back like an indifferent feather shedding from a passing duck, and who hated the very idea of orgasm, was unable to stop herself from riding the wheel right back up again, so she would take hold of fistfuls of Dani's too-short hair in order to pull her back into the crux of legs and pussy that held her (Dani) red-faced as she (Dani) dissolved the place between the place her face might have been and Anja's pleasure, that almost-moving, hardly there, shameful spotlight which came and went, but mostly went, except for these few brief disgusting (or so she (Anja) imagined) and violent intrusions which were about the sexiest thing Dani had ever experienced. After they were through,

after her (Dani's) hands were raw and sore and tired, Anja would get up and give herself a thorough washing with a special Pine soap that had already seeped into every corner of every room, yes, even the kitchen, so when you walked into her apartment it was like walking into her body. It was just another thing that drove Dani crazy, which is why she kept suggesting they meet "over there." She never called it Anja's apartment, or worse, the kitchen, she just said "there," or "that" or, if she was being pressed, "you know, the other place," because the very idea that someone was going to walk into her house-body made Anja quiet and reserved and anxious and she would want to quit whatever conversation she wasn't having so that she could go and get down with her bitchy unhappy friends who sucked on each other's complaints like sugar candy pops before anything worse happened. Like having an orgasm for instance. Or worse, half a dozen at decibels that had already worn down the hearing capabilities of her last lover, two professional sound recordists and her uncle.

Dani tells me this as she sips at her peach-coloured tea as if it's not going to give her stomach-curdling gas which she will fail to exhale



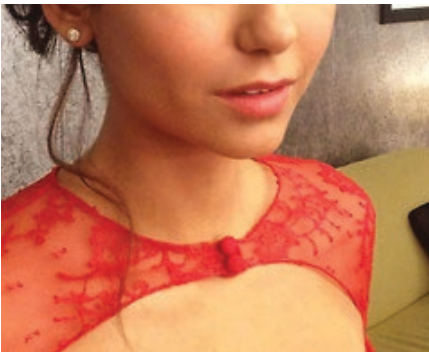
because the woman I'm not allowed to talk about is sitting right beside her and couldn't fail to notice. One cup and then another and then the down home waiter walks up to us almost shyly like he's going to introduce himself at a party and puts down a fresh pot so we can start all over.

Before Anja became Dani's girlfriend, she (Anja) knew the gender of everything around her. Tables were girls, chairs boys. Hands belonged to girls even if they belonged to boys. She was from a faraway country called Europe where it was the custom. Dani didn't believe her at first, particularly the bad turn about not being able to decide for yourself whether the slippers you wore or the orange juice you craved – even though you knew it was made from oranges picked by illegal migrant workers who were paid less than minimum wage to support families at home – why couldn't you pronounce this juice a him or her by your lonesome? It was as if someone had already tasted the juice and tried on the slippers and left you with more word fences that circled everything. Sometimes, when Anja was in a particularly reclusive mood, which was most of the time, Dani would bring over a catalogue from a store that she would never visit but provided useful nostalgia fodder in those uncertain years when entire weeks were spent in a nostalgic reverie for stores never visited, experiences never shared, romantic power outages never undergone. They would sit together thumbing through pages while Anja intoned, "Boy" or "Girl" over the unpeopled furniture spreads or throwaway cataloguettes of luxe condo resale units whose furnishings provided the settings for dreams they began having only when they were awake.

Now the television shows Israeli Parliamentary Member (Hadash, Jewish-Arab party) Dov Khenin: *"Well, I think that journalists are not allowed into Gaza, in order to not-to not make it possible for people around the world to see whatever is happening. The situation is terrible. You know, the people are doing surgery without, you know, any tools, without anything needed to take care, medically, of people wounded."*

Dani, on the other hand, was American, and so had no need to assign gender roles to every object that stood just outside her reach. The starting blocks of her personality lay not in any adherence to rules which anyway remained invisible to her, but to the simpler act of making choices. She was born with some not-yet-outsourced understanding of what things cost. She had only to cast her eyes on an object and she could see the failed union attempts, the free trade agreements, the child-slave labour, and off-shore Cayman Island accounts which had brought such a necessary consumable to her attention in the first place.

She knows that as an American, her choices define her. Choices look back and claim her, they are the prison in which she finds her



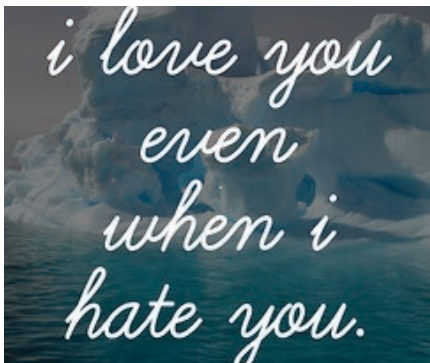
freedom. Chocolate not vanilla for instance. Red jelly beans first out of the bag. Then black, green, orange. Yellow always last. Always. Yellow was for trading or on the days when there wasn't anything else going down except eating the candy you didn't have time for. And girls first of all, absolutely. If passersby know how to look (and none of them do) they could see her love of girls written plainly on the face she doesn't have yet. This choice and love and happiness and unhappiness has been steadily changing her face all these years because it took her outside the flow, though she didn't realize that at the time. All of her important choices, and everyone else's important choices, are made in exactly the same way. Thinking has nothing to do with it, but it offers her a consolation to imagine that it does. She's traditional like that, but not about much else as it turns out.

Palestinian (living in Khan Yunis refugee camp) Umm Thaer: "Does anyone evacuate their house that they have been living in for all their life? Why would we evacuate our home? Why are they lying to the civilians? They say that their air strikes target the militants, but this is all lies. They target the children, the house. It's the sleeping people that get the air raids."

Anja was a porn star, although she had tried working as a receptionist, a window cleaner at the Dundas mall, and even did a short stretch as a security guard for a high-end lamp company. Nothing seemed to stick. She said she did it out of laziness, she didn't know how else to make that much money in so little time, though she never counted the money it cost to stop her from feeling anything at all before and during and after it was happening. All her "directors" – balding, sleazeball, former-leading-stunt-cock

types who squatted behind the annoyingly lightweight digital pets which were thrust up into places their former erections might once have found consolation – complained that she was overdoing it in the moaning and squealing with pleasure department. Star was the putative term granted anyone in the industry willing to douche, body wax, anal bleach, pass the AIDS test and open her self-lubricated openings to an amphetamine-enhanced jackhammering before the requisite face splooging. As she grew further and further away from her body, her performances grew increasingly shrill and overdramatized, so imagine her distress when she found, beneath Dani's relentless babydoll ministrations, a return of the very pleasures she had worked so hard to be rid of.

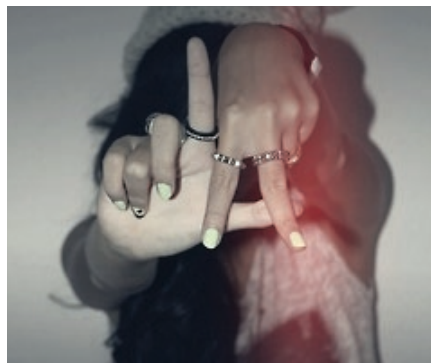
Israeli Professor Neve Gordon: *"The problem is that most Israelis say, 'Israel left the Gaza Strip three years ago, and Hamas is still shooting rockets at us.' They forget the details. The details is that Israel maintains sovereignty. The details is that the Palestinians live in a cage. The details is that they don't get basic foodstuff, that they don't get electricity, that they don't get water, and so forth. And when you forget those kinds of details, and all you say is, 'Here, we left them.*



Why are they still shooting at us?' and that's what the media here has been pumping them with, then you think this war is rational. If you look at what's been going on in the Gaza Strip in the past three years and you see what Israel has been doing to the Palestinians, you would think that the Palestinian resistance is rational."

One day Anja and Dani are out walking hand-in-glove because even the sight of shade makes Anja's hands cold, especially the tips which nestle like ten freeze-dried buttons at the ends of either arm, so she wears Thermalite gloves even when the mercury is high like it is today. And while they are turning the corner which flanks the Supersave (which has grown a little less super in each year of its eight year operations) and the Mobil gas station (which has strung lines along its lot perimeter and hung them with American flags and begun to advertise Patriot Gas which causes the after-school smoking parties to snicker and pass between them jokes even the tellers are tired of) Dani and Anja are met with a hissing mumble of a chorus and then someone too young to know any better spits in their general direction, only the wind gusts up at that moment sending the gob right back to its originary moment like a baby crawling back into the womb. This rouses the confederacy of teenaged spitters who are all lined up on the aluminum postings which frame the stacked shopping carts, all of them laughing in a tight little round so that they don't lose their balance and fall off, which makes them sound like they've never laughed in their whole lives and are just learning how. These laugh rehearsals only make the now spit-faced, pre-adult even angrier, a feeling which must be immediately shared with the two walking strangers who are named "Faggots" or "Rug Eaters" or "Pillow Munchers" or whatever he can think of from a gob encrusted

brain grown suddenly seven times too small. As the boy-man's D-minor taunts rise in the now breezeless air between them, they grow louder as each sitter chimes in with their own variations, but grow softer at the same time, at least from the perspective of the two women who move further from the corner lot on their way to nowhere in particular, a destination Dani refuses to feel is a mistake. Anja finds herself, unexpectedly, wanting the company of one of her large penis-men who would drown these no-necked teenagers in sperm and take her to a fine getaway resort island where all the residents are blind. Anja is still young enough to imagine that the blind are without judgment, perhaps because of her intermittent in-camera sessions which she can't turn off when the director tells her she can go home. It is at this moment that, perhaps not coincidentally, a white truck jumps to life from somewhere behind the mosh of carts and chorus line grinners, and jumps right up onto the curb. But Dani sees the truck out of the side of her head, out of the place her gills might be if she were a fish, and she grabs Anja and pulls her out of the flight path and they throw themselves onto the grass median between the happy concrete of the parking lot and the unhappy concrete of what city councilors still refer to as the



boardwalk, but which residents call the side of the road. The white truck runs across two lanes of oncoming traffic and hard lefts neatly in front of a Nissan whose driver is too surprised even to slow down, which proves unnecessary anyway, as the truck pulls ahead smoothly and vanishes around the bend.

The crazy thing is, that after Dani picks herself up from the ground the first thing she does is move her hands over her face like someone reading a Braille bible, because there is something going on there, something has changed and shifted and it's still shifting. She can feel the asymmetrical planes joggle into some new formation as the beginnings of her new face settle in. Anja, who has dedicated her life exactly to not noticing things like this, has decided to get upset and blow up as soon as they both get indoors. She is determined to blame Dani for the truck, the misbegotten gob, the insults, and the very fact that there are teenagers still alive in this city. She fills herself with hate and grievances and disgust and fury, so when she picks herself up off the grass median she rushes over to Dani and strokes the place her new face is coming in and says, "Are you alright?" The mother of all concern. Dani stands there a moment, with the truck gone as if it had been a mirage and the teens scattered, and her great love seeming to love her more than ever now, and from an old spot on her new face she announces, quietly, sharing the secret between the two of them, "Yes, I'm fine now."

American Robert Pastor (professor of international relations at American University): *"On the part of Hamas, they made very clear that they had done what they could do to try to stop the rockets. And indeed, from the period from late June to November 4th, 2008,*

when the Israelis intervened in Gaza to close down a tunnel, they had virtually stopped the rockets. On November 4th, Israel intervened into Gaza to shut down a tunnel. There is some dispute as to whether that tunnel was intended to capture an Israeli soldier or whether it was a defensive tunnel to protect against an Israeli incursion. But in the course of that particular incursion, which of course was a violation of the ceasefire, six Hamas militants were killed. Hamas then responded with 124 rockets that month. But from their side, Israel had not complied with the ceasefire. It was supposed to have lifted all of the border crossings, allowing 750 trucks a day to go in. That never came close to occurring."

There is something in the way Dani reaches for the tea... no wait. There is something in the way she holds the little cup with both hands, no, that it isn't it either. Perhaps it is the way she tilts the cup up into her mouth while closing her eyes, as if she couldn't look at anything at all and fill her mouth with taste at the same time. It's at this moment that her face relapses into the very first mask she wore, as a newborn child. It's a mask that might have announced, "I belong!" "I am like you!" It would have made her, yes, recognizable.



Here was a face like all the others. Her mother would have taken her home to the father who hadn't left yet in order to begin the traditional celebrations of catastrophe. There would be fittings for new roles, phone calls to family and friends, exhausted slugs of Prosecco frizante. Oh honey, I'm so glad you just underwent more pain than you've ever felt and chugged out our new babylove. Try not to laugh too hard or the stitches might stretch and burst. One day – not long after Dani's father blew off on a spring breeze, taking part of her first mask of a face right along with him – she would make a choice, a terrible and terrifying choice, and decide to live as a monster, without any face at all.

This isn't as hard as it seems because mostly no one notices. Like everyone else, I have spent most of my life busying myself with the task of not looking at everything around me, a sporting occupation that continues to provide undreamt comforts. The woman who used to be my best friend said that she didn't have a body until she gave birth to her first and only child. It is difficult not to resent gifts as large and magnanimous as this. The pain was so relentless she was at last shocked into recognition. These bruised and tired hips, these fading shoulders. It's me!

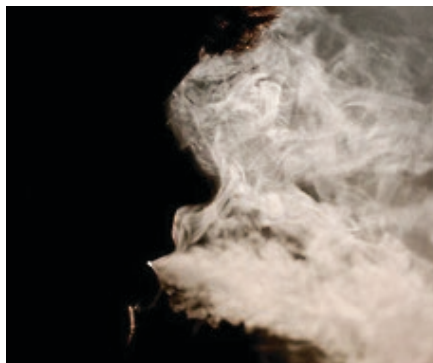
When I look into the mirror I can say yes to the body, the toes nearly webbed, the scarred knees, the legs I had learned only recently were no longer slender, but scrawny. But not the face. Who is that looking back at me with such curiosity? And dismay. Disappointment even. Everything I have tried to forget has somehow been layered up into that face, and the effort of this amnesia has marked and remarked it,

so that the soft opening dish of childhood had very nearly vanished. And with it any hope of recognition.

I don't try to speak to her from this face, instead, I listen. It used to be a face for speaking roles, now it listens. To each according to their abilities.

Dani opens her eyes and puts the double-handed cup back down with a care she didn't manage when it really counted, back in Anja's kitchen, so she's extra careful now that it doesn't matter. As the cup's bottom lip settles with a soundless sound some force field of self-enclosure lifts and she is back with us in the shabby perfect restaurant, sitting next to the woman I can't talk about who is smiling about something she's already decided not to share. I stop holding my breath.

"The thing that Anja liked to do most," Dani says and then stops, catching herself, and looks up at me. "Is this boring you?" My reaction shot tells her that if she doesn't continue I will have to handcuff myself to her luggage and follow her back to the personal hell of her small town past in order to hear the rest of the story. Because I want her to go right on without interruption I don't actually



say anything, instead, I open my face up like a two-car garage door lifting when both masters arrive at the same time. It's like one of those silent screams Bergman used when he couldn't afford the fancy orchestral effects.

Dani takes the offered cue and plunges ahead. The thing that Anja liked to do most is to put on a record by Panda Bear who sounds just like Brian Wilson before the drugs and the California girls and the depression made him stop sounding like Brian Wilson. And while this almost-new Panda Bear record promises a dozen perfect summery songs she only plays the Brian Wilson cover tune, 'In My Room,' which is now swaddled in extra digital layers of vocal foam-rubber-like padding, the melody borne off in puff pillow clouds of happiness. Over and over.

"We didn't break up the day the white truck nearly ran us over, but she got really mad and she stayed mad, and the more I tried to get her to stop from being mad at me, the madder she got. And she wouldn't let me touch her in the kitchen anymore, only the bedroom, so I knew we were on, you know, shaky ground. And then I got busy with my own work because what do I look like, Mother Theresa of the lesbian porn world? No thank you. And every time I saw her she would be playing this song, over and over, until it was hard to want her anymore. I think she was turning herself into someone I wouldn't miss when she was gone. Whenever she was playing that song it was like she was alone, all alone, listening to it. And the song, do you know it? The song is about "There's a world where I can go and tell my secrets to in my room..." Not exactly fun fun fun. Not exactly Wouldn't It Be Nice? It sounds stupid to say that we broke up because of a song but she was the one carrying the tune."

We are eating hot potfuls of meatless bebimbap which I don't taste until the very end because Simone, who I'm not allowed to talk about, and who is sitting in the frayed window light just beside Dani, says that the best part is the last bite because the flavours of dinners past and present have melted into the container and then juiced right back into the tightly clinging rice shards which have to be scraped away from their round iron setting. "Like dope resin," I mutter brightly, and then resume my non-speaking role. She's right, I realize too late, this really is the best Seoul food on a city strip jammed full of it. Too bad I've only woken up for the last piquant suggestion.

Before the invisible lunch appears, briefly, for a moment, right at the end like a curtain call, Dani takes out her small video camera and perches it next to the television which is still offering us a run of disasters from weeks ago. The floods in New Orleans for instance. The Free Gaza boat leaving from Cairo (it would never arrive). And of course, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, sounding like they were lifted off today's ticker. Dani likes to take her digital camera pet around, and part of her genius is that she can go right on laughing and hurting and feeling the bruise and bring others alongside while



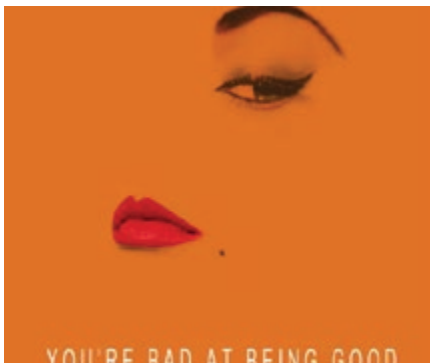
the machine tries to absorb every moment in the room. Her pet has been designed by circuit benders to defeat the present, but she is a living workaround. I have no idea how she manages and thankfully neither does she. I worry that her only too evident super powers will vanish if we step on any sidewalk cracks or mention anything about it at all, so we don't, especially not when we have so much delicious food to ignore.

Palestinian journalist Sameh Habeeb: *"Today, in the early morning, there was a massacre in which around 20 to 25 people were killed from the same family in Al-Zeitoun area. Most of them were children. Israeli Army gathered around ten families in one of the houses for Al-Samouni family in Al-Zeitoun area south of Gaza City. They had gathered them in one house. And after a time, an artillery shell hit the house, and 20 to 25 were killed, and more than 60 were injured, because the house was including around 100 individuals."*

This is not the only massacre today. We have more people being killed in the north, and more people are being killed in Gaza City itself. If you would like me to just state what we have today, I have a list of around 32 violations and ramifications of today's actions. Israeli Air Force bombarded houses in Al-Shati refugee camp, and 35 people were wounded. And maybe more will be just dying, because the hospitals are not able to respond to the calamities we have, the catastrophes, because the Israeli siege, which was imposed around two years ago, completely paralyzed the ability of the clinics and hospitals to respond to any military operation or a war in such a scale like this."

And then it's time to go to Dani's screening at Pleasure Dome's address-less coach house at CineCycle, the laneway approach iced

and pocked for maximum accident potential. As soon as she hits the door she is tucked into a welcoming committee of glad-handing strangers and queer romantic hopefuls, and her parents who have taken the power nap we all needed at the reassuringly American Howard Johnson's a long way up the road in a neighbourhood which is becoming international in style – the concrete smudges and terraced caffeine dispensaries providing relievingly anonymous frames for encounters which could have happened anywhere but are here instead. The man who is not Dani's father looks on with the same measured calm that he allowed to take the place of his face only a few hours ago. I watch from across the homemade bar as he lets the room drip into him one stifling encounter at a time. Dani's mother, on the other hand, is beside herself, doubled and twinned and past nervous, and the words-only movie that Dani's picked long before she knew her other half would be here – about the leader of North Korea urging men in his country to eat more pussy, comrades – is already causing her weakened chest cavity to ache in a nearly audible manner. The air escapes her without providing traditional oxygenating comforts. Ohhhhh. Mother's slow release of breath signals a familiar surrender. Oh this again, her exhalation might be



announcing, followed by a heady intake salve of this-will-be-over-soon, this-will-be-over-soon, chanted by how many in these same, avant-butt-worn, plastic chairs. It's a good thing we're not sitting shiv'ah.

American Mordechai Housman, on his website Being Jewish: *"Many people worry, before going to comfort a mourner, 'What should I say?' The answer is: very little. A person in pain needs to talk, and he needs someone to listen to him talk. He doesn't need you to say very much. Your job, in comforting the mourner, is to listen to the mourner, responding when necessary and appropriate. Always let the mourner take the lead in the conversation."*

Palestinian journalist Fares Akram (Gaza correspondent for The Independent of London): *"My father was killed on Saturday when he was in our farmland in the northwest of Gaza Strip, very close to the border with Israel. We were very shocked with his death, especially that we have never expected he would be killed by Israelis, because he's very close to the border, and that area is under control of Israeli cameras and the watching towers, and there are only a few houses scattered there amid the very large open spaces up for eight kilometers to the south until we get to Gaza. All that land, that area, are open, and there are no militant activities. We often thought that my father would be hurt from the rockets that are fired from Gaza, because, as I said, the farm is very close to the Israeli border. But we have never expected that he would be killed by the Israelis, who were watching him from nearby."*

And then at last one of Dani's precious, throwaway, short missives made in a recent turn from Zionist heavy to Occupation witness

hits the screen. She calls it *3 Parts for Today* (12.5 minutes 2007). It opens with a bird lying on the ground in a cascade of grey and white feathers, heaving with breath, the yellow bill opening wide and all I can think is: how awful and beautiful. It must have hit that harsh brick wall and fallen here, in the last fine light where Dani (does she ever sleep?) has found her. Later on in the tape she shows herself (again and again, especially when she is not onscreen she is busy baring the wound) eating some kind of post food-nik, hippie cereal and she is talking to Yonatan about finding the bird, the nearly dead bird lying on the ground, and he asks her, "Did you help it to eat, to fly?" And she says, well, no, it was so perfect lying there and all, it was enough to bring the video camera close and watch.

It's your catastrophe. It's my movie.

Yonatan Shapira (named in the opening title as "The Refusenik") talks about joining the Israeli army after the first Gulf War and becoming a helicopter pilot. He provides the frame for the central moment in this video diary (oh how she hates that word, it feels so very small in her mouth, particularly at the esteemed house of higher learning where she spends her summers trying to dodge the



ism queens and other fences of the heart). She pushes her small eye prosthetic up into Yonatan's face as if she would like to crawl into those poreless pores and make a home there. In the second scene she shoots him off a television screen that offers a talk he gives in a small, crowded room. Now that he isn't busy flying rescue missions, and killing, and trying to keep his young testicles from being ground into shrapnel target juice, he has plenty of time to talk. Yonatan Shapira is speaking Hebrew, though the clip is silent (and shot home-movie style, in what looks like someone's living room). Yellow subtitles permit language to be applied.

"And then a little seven year old girl started running towards us. On one hand I saw this little scared girl but then I thought about my soldiers behind me, maybe she's a terrorist. Maybe she's going to explode. I shouted but she didn't stop..."

Incredibly, at this moment, a young girl gets up and walks by Yonatan. He can only smile and shake his head. "Yeah that girl was just about that high... but then I shot a warning shot in the air, the girl froze like this, for me it was like being hit by hammer on the head. For months afterwards I couldn't forget that moment, and then I told my commanders I'm not doing this anymore."

The scene that falls between these scenes, the meat of the sandwich, the picture in the frame, belongs to Grandma Leventhal. Dani's own and only. You can tell they spend a lot of time together because their living room duet is lensed centimeters away from grandma's left elbow, the camera pointed straight up into a wattle of neck and the sagging flesh of her arms. The scene opens – which is to say, the cut admits us to the instant – when grandma throws her head

back as if she's been shot, trying to strongmouth her daily pill into a gravitational purl.

"I can't stand it."

"And then you have to have a cracker?" asks Dani.

"Takes the taste out of my mouth," says grandma through a face cramp, the flesh on her cracker arm joggling in cheerleader agreement. "What?"

"No, I just think that I don't know why the pill doesn't go down without you tasting it." She doesn't miss a thing, this kid, she doesn't need her seeing eye dog to sharpen it up either, she's on like a switch all day.

"Leaves a bad taste in my throat... I'll get the prayer book out." And then the old woman nods, right on cue, and it's time for the refusenik to tell us about the little girl who wasn't a bombshell after all.

It is an unnoticed moment, flashing on by at the speed of thoughtless thought, repeated how many times a day. But Dani



keeps coming back to the small apartment and puts her camera down like it was still that little girl looking up into the sky of her relatives, the blood of her blood, the women that had made her mother, and then herself, Jewish. And she waits. Maybe she waits there all day, I don't know, but we see only this shorn fragment, this remainder of what is not exactly host and sacrament, of what is hardly dinner, but it is eating all the same. Grandma is really eating it. But she is not tasting it. And it requires no advanced training manuals to understand that this scene is about the occupation of Palestine. It is about the Israeli West-Bank barrier which is being built mostly inside Palestine's West Bank. Inside Palestine. It is about the illegal settlements in the West Bank and the Golan Heights. It is about checkpoint harassment and the persistent incarceration of Palestinian youth. It is about the massacres at Dair Yasin, Naser Al-Din, Tantura, Beit Daras, the Dahmash Mosque, Dawayma, Houla, Sharafat, Salha.

The pill is every "security" (state codeword for war against civilians, systemic torture) measure that Israel has taken in order to keep the body of state whole. The regular armed incursions into foreign territories, all this is justified and made necessary by the nearby presence of the malignant, the now "foreign agents" who have had their homes and homeland seized. The pill is also the pharmakon: at once poison and cure.

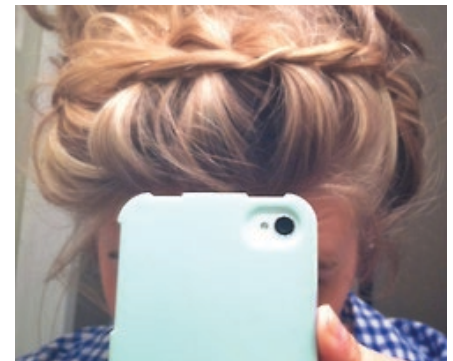
And the cracker?

I am the cracker. How does the Miranda July line go? Me and you and everyone we know. The corporate media plays its part and we

nod along like a well-heeled chorus line, essential if those much-needed killing machines keep flowing from North America to Israel. Here in Canada, we build and export Caterpillar bulldozers which are used to destroy Palestinian homes in the West Bank. It's your catastrophe. It's my job.

This cracker talk spins away the pain, keeps the bodies well covered, and dishes the Palestinians as something less than human. The media is well rehearsed for this task. For years I watched, each and every night, cover stories about the war they called in Vietnam "The American War." It is difficult for me to recall a single instance of a Vietnamese citizen speaking. Instead the Vietnamese could be seen lying dead, or else cowering in fear, or crying, or being trained by "us" to kill. And when "we" left that country it would not appear on the news every night, it was no longer of any importance what they did, or how they did it, or what they ever might have wanted.

"My grandmother was a very tough woman. She buried three husbands and two of them were just napping."



So imagine my surprise when this grandmotherly scene lights up the confines of Toronto fringe movie exhibition palace CineCycle, the post-art house hipster revue where someone has found Dani, and plucked her small queer understandings from faraway Rosendale, New York, and brought them here, into the off-off-off-Broadway world of moving pictures. There is talk of an avant-queer genre, no less, already mothers and fathers have been named, bloodlines drawn and lineages established, canons hired if not fired, and now Dani has been invited onto these slippery slopes.

One would imagine it would be safe to say, "My grandmother was a Jewish juggler: she used to worry about six things at once," or simply, "Peace." I don't even need to add that the curator is Jewish, and Dani's screenmate likewise, and that the latest debacle, a 23 day killing spree in Gaza, ended on January 18, 2009, less than a week before tonight's screening. The hospitals are still full, relatives are still burying some of the 350 children who died, the power is out, there are chronic food shortages. Why is no one talking about the dying elephant in the room? Instead, some of the gathered sages bring acclaim to co-presenter Aleesa for "moving on" from her early work and its overt questions of Canada's immigration policies. She is commended for showing, in her most recent tapes, more universal truths. Yes, even here on the fringe, eternity has its place. Its secret hope. How much more tasteful and relieving is this embrace of forever themes like Time and Being, rather than having to dwell on what a little girl's face looks like once she's been dug out of the rubble of what used to be her living room.

Palestinian journalist Fares Akram (Gaza correspondent for The Independent of London): *"Today, I have evacuated – I had to evacuate my wife to her family's house, because it's closer to the clinic where she's supposed to deliver birth. It's closer to the clinic than our house. In order to – you know, I can't describe my feeling when I have to leave my wife alone in this situation and send her to her family house. And she's also worried about me, because the tanks are getting more close to our house. And we know what the Israelis will do if they get near our house. They will call on us on a megaphone to come out of the house. And after that, most probably they will hit the house. They have set fire now to ten houses in the north of Gaza Strip, where, when I look from the window, I see [inaudible] of black smoke rising from the houses. I can't imagine what will happen to our house."*

When I first heard the stories of the German camps from my father, I stretched out every detail until they were large enough for me to step into. What else were stories for? I was the little boy who found a way to get his mother smuggled off the train. The German guard who

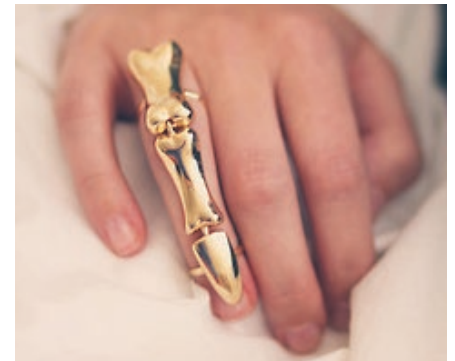
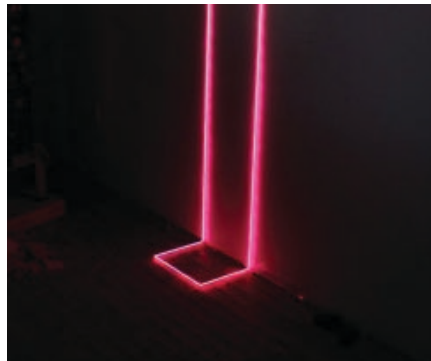


said no. The engineer who stopped the gas from working that day, if only for an hour, if only for a single session. I was always the one who said no.

My grandfather was a school principal in the Dutch-East Indies, and according to his contract, he was permitted, one year out of every seven, to travel free of charge back to the home country, with or without family, while continuing to receive his usual salary. He set out in the spring of 1939, only to find, a few months after his arrival, this strange, faraway country, which he hardly remembered from his youth, invaded by Germans. The German-Dutch war lasted five days (the Germans had expected to take Holland in a day, Rotterdam was obliterated by bombers by accident in the midst of negotiations), beginning on May 10, 1940. 9,000 civilians were killed that week. The colonial government in the Dutch-East Indies reacted to the invasion by declaring war on Germany, and rounded up all the Germans it could find on the islands and threw them into jail. The new German government responded by putting all the Dutch-East Indians into concentration camps. Including my grandfather. It is a scene which my father has often described to me, always at the beck of my persistent urgings, but seems hardly credible even when repetitions produce negligible variations. The well-fed goose stepping machines with their backasswards motorcycle-style helmets and their fetish pistols show up to the door one day, the door of my family, and demand to see my father's father, and then carry him away. "Don't worry little boy," the sergeant says to the little boy waiting at the door, "Your father will be alright." My father recounts this episode with a frisson of pride because even at this young age he was able to speak German, along with Dutch, Indonesian, English

and French. Though he was interested only in the dreamy escape hatch of mathematics. When he speaks of this impossible scene, the Nazis arriving at gunpoint to haul his father away, he dishes it in the same benign about-to-laugh tone that he uses for all of his stories. "Two drunk guys walk into a war... you'd think they'd see it coming."

When my father talks I am the one wrestling the German soldiers to the ground, breaking their will with borrowed kitchenware, freeing my grandfather, taking my family away from the occupation, from Holland, and then from every dreaded place of war. Don't get me wrong, I never think badly of my father for not doing more, he survived the five interminable years of occupation with almost nothing in his stomach, and then watched his own father come home, broken and sick and unable to speak of the nightmare of those five years. The emotions he could have had, the full orchestral colouration, must have shrunk to a single instrument in those years, and he's been condemned to that tune every since. After the war my grandfather recovered just enough to become an alcoholic which prompted his wife to have him declared mentally unfit. Once again he was hauled away, this time by medical authorities. He rang curses



down on my grandmother as my father looked on, patiently turning the whole scene into vector diagrams and electrical diagnostics. My grandfather spent the rest of his short life in a state hospital, cutting out food adverts from the local papers. Drinking coffee he kept hoping would turn into beer or some other golden formula that would stop the feelings from coming again.

Palestinian journalist Fares Akram (Gaza correspondent for The Independent of London): *"I'm very sad for having to leave my wife in these circumstances, but if she goes into labor while she is in our house here, and especially if it was dark, I know it will be very impossible to go to the hospital, even if we call the ambulance. The ambulance can't come in the night. And also in the day it's very dangerous, because when there is an incursion, when there are Israeli tanks nearby, the airplanes would be clearing the way for the tanks to advance in. And you know how the airplanes clear the way for the tanks: they fire on every moving object. They hit houses. They use the F-16s to help open spaces among the houses, in order to force the residents to flee, and so the army can go in. And even if we fled our houses, we would go to the UNRWA schools. And you heard the UNRWA spokesman, you heard what he said. He said that they attacked also the schools where the people have taken refuge. So the best thing, I think, is to stay in house and to pray that you won't be harmed."*

The most recent Israeli assault on Palestine was hatched in March 2008, nine plus months before delivery. But it had to wait until November 4, the date of the American presidential elections, before the provisional ceasefire between Israel and the Hamas leadership in Gaza, adhered from June 17 onwards, could finally be pried loose.

According to the website of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs at any rate. Their website states that there was an Israeli raid on November 4 which killed "six or seven militants" in Gaza, and this act of state terror led to the expected rocket reprisals, and then the long planned campaign could at last begin. It was timed to occur between election day in the US and the inauguration of the new president. It was never going to be a war, because the Israeli army were not facing an army in Gaza, only a gaggle of undernourished teen and twentysomethings, radicalized by years of underdevelopment, armed with hope and stones and some semi-automatic extras cadged from the Egyptian tunnels.

I had come to Dani's screening ready to throw some of these words out from beneath the veil of my face but instead I shrank into a murderous silence. I sat and listened as the long question and answer period followed Dani's fragile, home-made pictures, and there was even a rare slate of pre-fab queries offered by the always-smiling hostess which offered insights real and imagined into the whys and hows of what we had just seen. But there was no mention of the war or the occupation. Not in my pleasure dome. Instead,



we sat there together in the avant-coliseum, our silence another ordinary betrayal on a night which escapes memory.

When it was over, it was hard to look at Dani again as she made her way through the vanishing winter ghosts her audience had become, in a city that might not belong to her after all. She had brought us pictures from a place which has proven resistant to most cameras, but it wasn't enough. She wouldn't realize any of that until later, but by then she would be back licking more familiar wounds, while her new face continued to take shape, one line, one encounter, at a time. The air outside is cold enough to lay icy arabesques on our cheeks as we step towards our bicycles and taxis and designated drivers which carry us to the next omission. We don't mind the fact that we don't have faces, we hardly miss them now. There is already talk about a cult of disappearance, and somehow we can look forward to that too. We small talk our way across the next massacre and go to sleep in our dreamless beds, and in the morning we will be ready to fill our state-sponsored canvasses with our own likeness. We won't need to say yes or no or even maybe. We won't need to say a word. We are the cracker.

American author Norman Finkelstein: *"Every year, the United Nations General Assembly votes on a resolution entitled 'Peaceful Settlement of the Palestine Question.' And every year the vote is the same: it's the whole world on one side; Israel, the United States and some South Sea atolls and Australia on the other side. The vote this past year was 164-to-7. Every year since 1989—in 1989, the vote was 151-to-3, the whole world on one side, the United States, Israel and the island state of Dominica on the other side.*

We have the Arab League, all 22 members of the Arab League, favoring a two-state settlement on the June 1967 border. We have the Palestinian Authority favoring that two-state settlement on the June 1967 border. We now have Hamas favoring that two-state settlement on the June 1967 border. The one and only obstacle is Israel, backed by the United States. That's the problem."

[MARCH 2009] •



TIN PRESSED

[SCRIPT]

IMAGE OF WOMAN BEATEN AT NIGHT



IMAGE OF BEES AND FLOWER

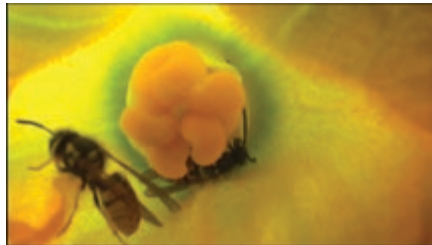


IMAGE OF NECK FROM TV:

"The sound of..."

FROM WOMAN ON COUCH:

"The sound of what?"

FROM TV:

"C. No. (BUZZER) Tracy?"

FROM WOMAN ON COUCH:

"The sound of..."

FROM TV:

"W?" "There is no W, Lena, try again."

FROM WOMAN ON COUCH:

"But an O."

FROM TV:

"What number?" "G." "Yeah, there you go, one G. \$600. (CLAPS) "O?" "Two O's."

FROM WOMAN ON COUCH:

"The sound of what?"

FROM TV:

"The sound of bagpipes." "Yes, very nice!"

(MUSIC)

FROM WOMAN ON COUCH:

"Good."



IMAGE OF FISH IN BARREL
SOUND OF MARKET HAWKERS



IMAGE OF DANI HAVING
MAMMOGRAM

"...lift up over the bar. And your arm reaches up. Relax your shoulder if you can. Good. And get it up to the back of your breast, and your arm (inaudible) half an inch. The left shoulder. Doing OK? This side is going to be a little more awkward. Lift up your chin a bit. I'm just going to pull your shoulder. (MACHINE SOUNDS)



IMAGE OF FISH IN BARREL



IMAGE OF CHILD DANCING



IMAGE OF ROASTED CHICKENS
TURNING ON SPITS



IMAGE OF SIDES OF MEAT, HANGING



IMAGE OF SHUTTERED WINDOWS
AND CEILING



IMAGE OF MAMMOGRAM



IMAGE OF PLANTS AT NIGHT,
LIT BY FLASHLIGHT



IMAGE OF SOMETHING
UNDER BLANKET

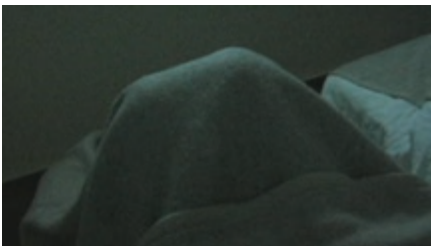


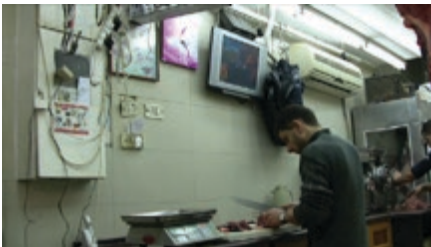
IMAGE OF YOUNG GIRL DRINKING
FROM PINK CONTAINER IN PUBLIC
SQUARE IN JERUSALEM, SHE WALKS
OFF, CHANTING OVER LOUD SPEAKERS



IMAGE OF TV IN BARBER SHOP –
CARTOON CHARACTERS IN TREE,
WOMAN DOING SIGN LANGUAGE
TRANSLATES.



**ZOOM OUT TO REVEAL MEN
CUTTING MEAT**



(BLACK)

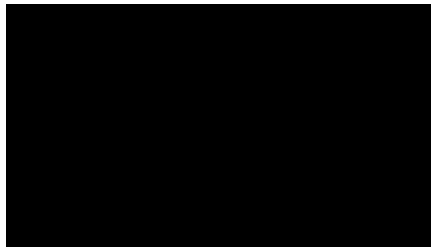


IMAGE OF DRAG QUEEN SINGING



TITLE:

Thank you Tova Carlin, Abraham Gomez-Delgado, Paul Hill, Jeremy Hoevenaar, Misty Keasler, Jennifer Lange, Aaron Leventhal, Beth Leventhal, Roz Lvbenthal, Tamar Leviathan, Saul Melman, Carlos Motta, Mike Olenick, Brett Price, Jeannie Simms, Chris Stults, Oraib Toucan, Annette Wehrhahn, Mark Wonsidler

TITLE:

Support provided by the Film/Video Studio Program at The Wexner Centre for the Arts

TITLE:

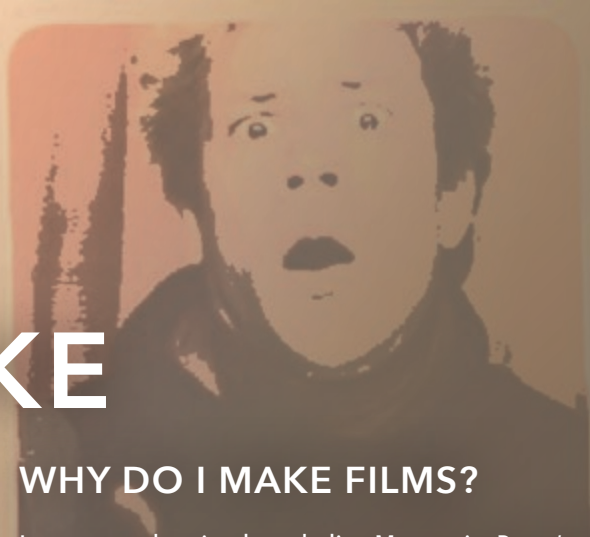
Dani Leventhal 2011



Curiosity



Fear



Reconciliation

MIKE

WHY DO I MAKE FILMS?

I am tempted to simply underline Marguerite Duras's response, when asked the same question: that I lack the strength to do nothing. In this flourishing moment of overly abundant digital pictures, in the noisy and memory-free congestion of too muchness, why add more pictures to the ones already on view? Perhaps working with pictures is a way to find the right distance with them. Many pictures from today's pressing calamities are filled with close-ups, offering the illusion of proximity. They suggest that we are experiencing, or at least seeing, what is really there, what is actually happening. These are the pictures I often need to keep for a moment at a distance, often as radio emissions. I approach the picture with my ears, admitting the grain of a voice, and only later, the light falling on a hat left behind by a grandmother of the tsunami. I need to keep a distance in order to be close. I need to refashion these pictures until they become family, until the man with his hands over his eyes hovering over the remains of his son in a Gaza hospital is also my father. I need to bring them close, until we are intimate and inseparable, and then I need to let them move further away again, so that I can approach each one, in its singularity, in its unique and disturbing past-presentness. This necessary movement of near and far, of long shot and close up, of the child's game of fort und da that so fascinated Freud, is all I really hope to show in my movies.

MIKE HOOLBOOM

MESSAGE TO MICHAEL:

MUSINGS ON *PUBLIC LIGHTING*

BY JASON MCBRIDE

Dear Mike,

Last night, I watched *Public Lighting* for the first time. At least, I thought it was the first time. But I quickly realized that I'd seen it before—or at least parts of it—and that feeling was superseded by the realization that, as with many of your movies, *Public Lighting's* familiarity stems from the fact that it's made up, mostly, of other movies, images, sounds, words. If all books are in some way made of other books, the same goes, I'd argue, for movies. Few filmmakers explicitly acknowledge this like you do, or are able to so insightfully and elegiacally exploit this fact. The Dutch writer Esma Moukhtar intones at the beginning of *Public Lighting*, "Everything around me is writing." I assume you wrote those words, but the sentiment echoes something that Moukhtar herself said about another film of yours, *Imitations of Life*: that we "never know where the words are actually coming from." Your films are composed of an intricate interlace of language, a deft weaving of found language, quotation and original text. Words surround us, fall on us, illuminate and blind us—like light. If everything around me—you, us—is writing, then everything has been written into existence already, is just waiting to be read. It's out there, public. Publication, to paraphrase Matthew Stadler, is the beckoning into being of a public. *Public Lighting*, I think, is a similar act of creation, creating a common space of conversation. Unlike with many other movies, your images always feel shared, not inflicted. They remind me, for lack of a more poetic phrase, that we're all in this together, this constant cascade of image and language.

Moukhtar has heavy eyebrows, a hint of facial hair, and dark, thick ringlets that surround her face like a forbidding storm.

of consuming fire but of sustaining light. She looks a bit like Frida Kahlo, or an old roommate of mine. I was living with this woman when I first googled something. Google was not then a verb, still hardly a proper name. What I first googled was you, Mike, your name. For real. I don't think I've ever told you this. That search turned up a long interview with you from some obscure film magazine; I printed it and tucked into a file folder, alongside interviews with Chantal Akerman and John Cassavetes. We printed everything in those days. Words on the Internet were ephemeral, could too easily evaporate. They were only light. I wanted to make films then myself, and to my mind, forget Egoyan or Mettler or Cronenberg, you were the best model of what a real Toronto filmmaker could and should be. You made challenging, brilliant, elegant films that straddled art and cinema, *sui genesis* work that defied borders between fiction, essay and documentary. I met you once then, just briefly – you were showing something at the Ann Arbor Experimental Film Festival or were on the jury maybe – and a woman I was dating at the time introduced us. You smoked compulsively then. We all smoked. You were intimidating, with cheekbones as sharp as switchblades, a withering intelligence, that generous laugh.

I'm addressing to this you as if I know you, just as in *Public Lighting* you address Madonna as if you might know her. Or rather, as you have another surrogate, another voice that's not your own, address Madonna. In that case, though, we all know Madonna, or at least know a part of Madonna, have an image of her. I imagine that far less people have an image of Mike Hoolboom, but that makes the image much more precious. I don't know you well at all, and my knowledge of you is almost exclusively derived from your movies and writing. The letter in your film is from someone also named Jason. Not me. Someone who's apparently had sex with Madonna. Not me. "It's hard to watch you growing older," Jason writes, truthfully, to Madonna. I think if he were writing his letter now, Jason would address it to Lady Gaga or the Beibs, two musical personalities who occupy the public imagination now in a way that Madonna did then. But maybe not, maybe he'd still write

Madonna. She's surprisingly endured, kept her finger pressed to the pop cultural pulse, shape-shifting, somewhat anyway, with the times. Her concerts in Toronto still sell out.

To stay in the mood to write this letter, I'm listening only to Madonna and Philip Glass; I've made a playlist that alternates the two. (Right now, I'm listening to "Ray of Light," my favourite song of hers.) This brief missive can't even begin to scratch the conceptual surface of your film. But I want it to at least embody its spirit, its associative logic, its personal, idiosyncratic digressions.

At the beginning of *Public Lighting*, Moukhtar says that the film presents six case studies, biographies that will demonstrate the six different types of personality (Madonna is a narcissist, Glass an obsessive, etc). But where does this taxonomy come from? As an organizing principle for a film, it's helpful, but how do you implement such a tool in real life? What kind of personality are you, Mike? I expect most of us can't realistically be reduced to a single type, that we shuttle between these six kinds of personalities as easily, thoughtlessly, as we switch tabs in an Internet browser.

As I lost interest in making movies – wrong temperament – I lost that folder with your interview. But our paths crossed again. The year I started working at Coach House Books, you published a second edition of *Inside the Pleasure Dome* with us and then later, brought Steve Reinke by so we could publish a volume of his writing. It was a great book, but I always kind of wanted it to be only an audio book – reading his words, separated from his videos, I missed the sound of Steve's voice, that deadpan, nasally

mellifluous sound that you use so expertly in the second section of *Public Lighting*. After I left Coach House, you published your first novel with them, ostensibly about Steve, and I reviewed it for the Globe and Mail, quoting Auden (the name you gave your protagonist): "A real book is not one that we read, but one that reads us."

I started working on my own novel then too, with characters very loosely based on a pair of real artists, Emily Vey Duke and Cooper Battersby, good friends of yours whom Steve had also taught and mentored. I still haven't finished it, but so far anyway, it's a much different book than yours, grounded in a kind of naturalism that I don't think interested you fictionally. But it asks some of the same questions that preoccupy *Public Lighting*: how do we tell the story of a life? How many stories make up a life? How, and why, do the fragments of biography become a narrative, and what happens when that narrative falters or fails? What poetry emerges then? What public is created? If I ever finish it, I look forward to you reading it. Not surprisingly, you make an appearance.

Love,
Jason ●







FLINTMAKER

BY MIKE CARTMELL

CINEMA IS AN INVENTION WITHOUT A FUTURE. [LL]

to underline that when he says "reformist," he means it as a slur, but at the same time turns it around on itself; sometimes the most despicable and loathsome adversary provides rescue for the castaway. (The old man was always sure that the survivors of the Hood were picked up by a German U-boat, but his memory failed him on that one.) Or if

... IN THIS CRITICAL OCEAN. [HMa]

but you have to be able to read them, have to be prepared to offer yourself to the reading, and to do the work. Maybe sometimes (as you've said before) the reading is better than the film. My point would be that certainly the reading could be better or as good (or it could be worse, much worse), could itself be "available for decipherment," could contain more than what was put into it, could be part of a (structurally) interminable chain of cultural objects, ultimately "Culture" itself. And we could say, ultimately "Mourning" itself, since (as I never tire of saying) an apt way to define culture is to say that it is precisely what exists to ensure that the dead are mourned. Part of my response to the film is mournful, that it is what it is and not otherwise, and never will be. Since it is what it is and not what it could've been, not any part of that infinite array of potential, but merely this, it stands in the place of the cadaver, under the sign of irrevocable, intractable loss. One has, then, the option of contending with its trace, which may well include its unfulfilled

THEY WERE SILENT, AS THE DEAD USUALLY ARE IN OUR DREAMS. [WGS]

trying to think back to the time in question. And it "remained a riddle to him, despite his most strenuous thinking about it." There is no way to go back, to think back, to the time in question: a lesson, maybe, for the dead who return searching for life, and for the living who, feeling that they belong to an earlier world, are preparing to drown in it. Max (Max F and/or Max S?) tries to displace himself into the past of that encounter, chasing after the man who forever chases, he finds himself applying paint thickly, and then repeatedly scratching it off, covering the floor with an encrusted deposit of droppings mixed with coaldust, thick

ONE KNOWS THE HAMMER BY HAMMERING. [MH]

and when I got it I was a bit astonished, I have to say. I mean, who actually "writes a letter" these days? But apparently we can count on you doing your part to maintain the continuity of tradition, a pursuit to which I add my own small contribution with my sharpening mania in the cellar. Strop till you drop I say! Not quite there yet, but soon I'll have the old 4 1/2 producing shavings under a thou. (Remember the call to the mincer from down in the try pots in "The Cassock" chapter? "Bible leaves! Bible leaves!") But enough about the ongoing refinement of my erotic life. You asked whether I was writing any

SO MANY TRUE THINGS // WHICH ARE NOT TRUTH ITSELF.
[SHA]

obscure film likely unseen by most who'll read the piece; unavailable on DVD in North America, not apt to appear anytime soon at a theater near you, and about as different from *PL* as, say, *La Sortie de l'Usine Lumière à Lyon* is from *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser*. Not sure if you saw it; I think that when

THE WONDERFUL FUTURE HE DREAMT OF THAT SUMMER COLLAPSED WITHOUT A SOUND LIKE THE PROVERBIAL HOUSE OF CARDS. ALL HIS PROSPECTS BLURRED. FOR THE FIRST TIME, HE EXPERIENCED THAT INSUPERABLE SENSE OF DEFEAT THAT WAS SO OFTEN TO BESET HIM IN LATER TIMES AND WHICH, FINALLY, HE COULD NOT SHAKE OFF. [WGS]

has something on that order too, though I'd need a metaphor other than "dogged" to identify it: one more "energetic" maybe. He's also got verbal, poetic and intellectual capabilities that others lack; it occurred to me that some of his writing is like Creeley in the 50s, in the letters to Olson: fast-breaking semi-coded riffs with time-delayed explosive capacity; strings of little astronuggets that reading



constellates into thoughtworlds. Perhaps I'm just making this up. I sometimes wonder whether anyone

HE STANDS AT A BORDER OF WHITENESS. FACING AWAY FROM US. BLIND TO THE COLOR OF OUR SAIL. [AC]

did everything in my power to avoid for as long as possible actually writing, or at least finishing it. It's about (or it's supposed to be about, shall we say) a film by Hoo

THE NAMES OF ALL FINE AUTHORS ARE FICTITIOUS ONES. [HMB]

the film several times, a particular quotation kept popping into my head: a recondite eruption from the old dissertation days back in the theory shack in Bufftown, when we were supremely disciplined, strict Althusserian Leninists if you recall. Ah, Youth! For whatever reason, I became resolute in the desire to structure the piece around the armature of that quote, and this has been the real bane of the effort to finish, since said structuring required relentless deformation, distortion, distraction (in the etymological sense) of *PL*, but tough tits: I must (mustn't I?) always stick to my guns, however ill-conceived or prone to (textual) viol

AND I SAW HER FOR THE LAST TIME WHEN, AWAKENED FROM MY DEAUVILLE DREAM, I WENT TO THE WINDOW OF MY HOTEL ROOM. MORNING WAS BREAKING. THE BEACH STILL MERGED COLOURLESS INTO THE SEA, THE SEA INTO THE SKY. AND THERE SHE WAS, IN THE PALE BUT GLOWING LIGHT OF DAYBREAK, ON THE DESERTED PROMENADE DES PLANCHES. [WGS]



because I'd seen (again) that *Patience* film, which led me to reread *The Emigrants*, the mighty Sebald, like his ubiquitous butterfly man, popped out of the bloody ground and into

YET THIS SAME PLACID OCEAN, AS CIVIL NOW AS A CITY'S HARBOR, A PLACE FOR SHIPS AND COMMERCE, WILL ERELONG BE LASHED INTO A SUDDEN FURY, AND ALL ITS CAVES AND CLIFFS WILL RESOUND WITH TUMULT. . . . THIS GENTLE OCEAN WILL TOSS AND TEAR THE RAG OF A MAN'S BODY LIKE THE FATHER OF MAD BULLS, AND HIS RELATIVES MAY BE SEEKING THE REMNANTS FOR WEEKS ALONG THE STRAND. [HDT]

or rather an effect at once overwhelming, oceanic but at the same time cadaverizing, making death present; silence; jabbering

YOU CAN TELL THE GENIUS BY WHAT HE STEALS. THAT HE STEALS. BY HIS FLIGHTS OF FANCY. AN IDIOT THIEF: HE SHOULD HAVE FLOWN ON HIS OWN, ROBBED HIMSELF, HAD HE KNOWN. INSTEAD OF GOING TO TAKE HIS SELF FROM ANOTHER, RISK EVERYTHING IN A RICKETY CALCULATION, BE JUST A MONTAGE ABOUT TO COLLAPSE. [HCA]

and largely hardened at the center near his canvas "and thinning out toward the outer edges, in places resembling the flow of lava." He had long felt it be of the utmost importance that "nothing should change at his place of work . . . and that nothing further should be added but the debris generated by painting and the dust that continuously fell and which, as he was coming to realize, he loved more than anything else in the world." The scene of inscription, of artistic production construed as the production of dust, debris, lava which falls or flows from the "continual wiping away of that which is drawn," "when the matter, little by little, dissolves into nothing," or very little. Almost nothing. So art doesn't recapture a lost object, it's not in search of temps perdu, it's neither testimony nor recovered memory. Not only. Not simply. Nor does it

WE EVOKE MEN OF THE SEA, BRAVE NAVIGATORS, FRIGHTENED AND ALSO ENCHANTED, MASTERING THE MOST DANGEROUS UNKNOWN (THAT MARINE INFINITUDE WHICH BOTH BUOYS AND ENGULFS), BY OBSERVING A REGULAR MOVEMENT, A FIRST LEGALITY. EVERYTHING COMES FROM THE SEA FOR MEN OF THE SEA, JUST AS EVERYTHING COMES FROM THE SKY FOR OTHERS, WHO RECOGNIZE A GIVEN CLUSTER OF STARS AND WHO DESIGNATE, IN THE MAGIC "CONFIGURATION" OF THESE POINTS OF LIGHT, THE NASCENT RHYTHM WHICH ALREADY GOVERNS THEIR ENTIRE LANGUAGE AND WHICH THEY SPEAK (WRITE) BEFORE NAMING IT. [MB]

that *PL* begins with a section called "Writing" only underlines this feature and suggests, at least to me, that Hoolboom (that is, the one I'm calling Hoolboom, the one whose name is on the film), along with Robert Bresson and that Cree guy ("Here are two pens. Write a film about me!") in that film Phil Hoffman made up north (whose title I have apparently lagoonized), believes precisely in "cinematography," and in *PL* he practices his faith. But he can't do it without complication, without displacement. He can't do it without irony. Esma from Amsterdam: "The words don't come from me. They come from other books, conversations with friends . . . I arrange them, that's all." She later demonstrates this: "Every wound gives off its own light, and some of these wounds are words." (Anne Carson) She goes on to describe her project ("I'm going to tell you six stories . . .") and concludes: "They will constitute my work as a young writer." (Cf. Steve Reinke's aim "to complete 100 videos by the year 2000 and my 36th birthday. These will constitute my work as a young artist." Reinke (his unmistakable voice) immediately turns up



WRITE! WRITE! [KH]

a letter to Straub and Huillet written at the time he agreed to take part, Fortini takes note of the ways in which they had, in their previous films, complicated the relations between pre-text (Böll, Brecht, Schoenberg, etc.) and the eventual filmic text. He adds: "It is therefore clear that the character in the film of *I cani del Sinai* [Fortini reading his book] is not exactly the author of that little book nor yet the "I" who am writing to you now." And further: "I understand that your warning to me not to trust you meant that there was to be no visible complicity between you and me-as-character or even (in spite of everything) the literalness of my words in *Cani*. Perhaps you won't treat me with the critical distance you used in the letter [from Shoenberg] to Kandinsky [in Introduction to Arnold Shoenberg's "Accompaniment to a Cinematographic Scene"]; but a critical distance there will be, and thanks to that I too shall be carried a stage forward." Not sure what he means by that last bit, but not a bad initial articulation of the problematics of authorship and enunciation, *n'est-ce pas*? In addition to the many lengthy

IN THE ILLUSORY BABELS OF LANGUAGE, AN ARTIST MIGHT ADVANCE SPECIFICALLY TO GET LOST, AND TO INTOXICATE HIMSELF IN DIZZYING SYNTAXES, SEEKING ODD INTERSECTIONS OF MEANING, STRANGE CORRIDORS OF HISTORY, UNEXPECTED ECHOES, UNKNOWN HUMORS, OR VOIDS OF KNOWLEDGE . . . BUT THIS QUEST IS RISKY, FULL OF BOTTOMLESS FICTIONS AND ENDLESS ARCHITECTURES AND COUNTER-ARCHITECTURES . . . AT THE END, IF THERE IS AN END, ARE PERHAPS ONLY MEANINGLESS REVERBERATIONS. [RS]



where I wanted to imagine that he thought himself to be striding across the deck of his first ship (which was the battlecruiser HMS Hood, on which he served while she was under repair in Gibraltar; a few months later she made her way to Portsmouth (where he was unaccountably transferred to the Fleet Air Arm), before steaming north to Scapa Flow, and on to her fate in the Denmark Strait, from which only three of about 1400 souls escaped alone to tell thee), or bounding down the beach into a magnificent surf at sunset, rather than

THERE IS TOO MUCH SELF IN MY WRITING. [AC]

Fortini reading *I cani del Sinai* onscreen and in voiceover, F-C also offers images of a variety of texts to be read by the viewer: the cover and pages from Fortini's book; hand-written notes by Fortini; newspaper passages, including a substantial one with a chart; various inscriptions on historical plaques and memorials. There is an excerpt from a televised news broadcast concerning the outbreak of war

between Egypt and Israel in June 1967, a woman and a man who comment briefly on that situation, a portion of a service in a synagogue with a rabbi chanting (from the book of *Numbers*, IV, 1-20: check that out when you get a chance). The rest of the visual material of this heavily verbal, textual film is comprised of shots of unidentified

MEMORY IS FUNDAMENTALLY NOTHING BUT A CITATION. [WGS]

Her name is Marine. Simple as that.

... BUT THAT DOCILITY, AS I WAS ALREADY BEGINNING TO SUSPECT, WAS IN FACT DUE SIMPLY TO YOUR GREAT-UNCLE'S LONGING FOR AN EXTINCTION AS TOTAL AND IRREVERSIBLE AS POSSIBLE OF HIS CAPACITY TO THINK AND REMEMBER. [WGS]

would agree that flints and rough diamonds may be subversive because they are insoluble in the ubiquitous wash of sentimental drivel and heroic propaganda and Erinnerungslosigkeit, but are they likely to generate any sparks, much less ignite anything in the general gormless slurry of "I want, therefore I

INFINITE ALTERITY IS QUITE SIMPLY WHAT THERE IS. ANY EXPERIENCE AT ALL IS THE INFINITE DEPLOYMENT OF INFINITE DIFFERENCES. EVEN THE APPARENTLY REFLEXIVE EXPERIENCE OF MYSELF IS BY NO MEANS THE INTUITION OF A UNITY BUT A LABYRINTH OF DIFFERENTIATIONS, AND RIMBAUD WAS CERTAINLY NOT WRONG WHEN HE SAID: "I AM ANOTHER." THERE ARE AS MANY DIFFERENCES, SAY, BETWEEN A CHINESE PEASANT AND A YOUNG NORWEGIAN

PROFESSIONAL AS BETWEEN MYSELF AND ANYBODY AT ALL, INCLUDING MYSELF. [AB]

the one who has achieved the widest field of view, perhaps because he's taken the most risk, because his act of refusal is the most uncompromising. Still I think

THE FABULOUS SHADOW ONLY THE SEA KEEPS. [HCB]

is obviously functionally linked to Straub/Huillet, as a fellow author/artist, but his status (as he suggests in the letter) is utterly fraught, over-determined, constrained, deformed, distracted (in the etymological sense), disastered even, putting entirely into question the point of enunciation from which Fortini's words, not to mention the film itself, emerge. As is, wouldn't you say, the authorial status of S/H. (And doesn't this put into question the film's enoncé, all the moyles and moyles of it, as well?) Likewise in the Ferber section of *The Emigrants*, the painter is a stand-in for the author, his tormented "lagoon of oblivion" also



Sebald's, complicating any facile notion of authorial voice. By the way, what gets translated as "oblivion" is, in Sebald's German original *Erinnerungslosigkeit*, which I prefer to render as "remembrancelessness," maybe out of sheer perversity (or maybe I just like big Germanic-sounding words: remember my "orphanhoodedness" riff in the Disasterologies "performance piece" at J's first Lacan conference? The besplattered giant of Ljubljana could hardly get a word in *Hochkantstauchdruck*.) But remembrancelessness suggests

... RITA HAYWORTH ON A JETTY IN A NUIT AMÉRICAINNE OF BLUE-FILTERED DAYLIGHT. WHAT WAS ONCE A FILM IN A MOVIE THEATRE, THEN A FRAGMENT OF BROADCAST TELEVISION, IS NOW A KERNEL OF PSYCHICAL REPRESENTATIONS, A FLEETING ASSOCIATION OF DISCRETE ELEMENTS: A VOICE FULL OF URGENCY; THE PASSIVE INDIFFERENCE OF PAINTED-PALMS; A WOMAN WAVING ACROSS THE UNBRIDGEABLE GAP THAT SEPARATES THE REAL JETTY WHERE SHE STANDS FROM THE STUDIO SET WHERE A MAN PRETENDS TO LEAVE. THE MORE THE FILM IS DISTANCED IN MEMORY, THE MORE THE BINDING EFFECT OF NARRATIVE IS LOOSENED. THE SEQUENCE BREAKS APART. THE FRAGMENTS GO ADRIFT AND ENTER INTO NEW COMBINATIONS, MORE OR LESS TRANSITORY, IN THE EDDIES OF MEMORY: MEMORIES OF OTHER FILMS, AND MEMORIES OF REAL EVENTS. [VB]

seems so familiar to me (albeit darkly so) that I am sure (but not utterly sure and there's no way from this vantage to be utterly sure) that it's been lifted, more or less holus-bolus, from somewhere amongst *The 100 Videos*. Of course, I could be wrong. I could even be wrong knowingly. But I do feel sure.) So she arranges them, that's all, and nothing

wrong with that I guess; wasn't it your hero Walter Benjamin's dream to author (or should we say compose?) a work consisting entirely of citations? But the entire passage is a bit more stunning: "I arrange them, that's all. That's all a writer can ever do." You either let this pass over you in your benign indifference, or you're charmed by the ingenuousness of the naive young writer, or (I suppose it's possible) you blithely agree and wait for the next maxim. Or else you bang your head against a door because it's pointless to scream "How can you say that?! You're a writer? Have you never heard of Emily Dickinson?! Clarice Lispector?! Anne Carson?!" (Right, you have heard of her.) And yes, yes, you can take the argument to the level of the signifier and beyond; there are only so many words, so many phonemes, so many minimal pairs; there's a structural limit at the level of linguistic materiality, etc., etc. But sure, we

SO WRITING INVOLVES SOME DASHING BACK AND FORTH BETWEEN THAT DARKENING LANDSCAPE WHERE FACTICITY IS STREWN AND A WINDOWLESS ROOM CLEARED OF EVERYTHING I DO NOT KNOW. IT IS THE CLEARING THAT TAKES TIME. IT IS THE CLEARING THAT IS A MYSTERY. [AC]



to apply the metaphor of the semipermeable membrane (film), separating images from things, to language (the primordial act of naming), (re) establishes the "near field" effects of osmotic pressure or quantum tunneling. There is, in language, a thin but constant traffic with the real; song is the resolvent cancellation of the skin, the heart's passage through the throat. Distant points on the world line may be neighbors in phase space. As close as the two sides of a letter, or a computer scree

MY PROSE PIECES ARE, TO MY MIND, NOTHING MORE NOR LESS THAN PARTS OF A LONG, PLOTLESS, REALISTIC STORY. FOR ME, THE SKETCHES I PRODUCE NOW AND THEN ARE SHORTISH OR LONGISH CHAPTERS OF A NOVEL. THE NOVEL I AM CONSTANTLY WRITING IS ALWAYS THE SAME ONE, AND MIGHT BE DESCRIBED AS A VARIOUSLY SLICED-UP OR TORN-APART BOOK OF MYSELF. [RWA]

when I attempted to remind him a short while back that he had once, maybe a number of years ago, said to me, "Painting is boring." He didn't remember saying this, and didn't believe he had, and if he had (which he certainly hadn't, he was sure), he may have been speaking "ironically." I didn't know why he would've done that, in that particular context, and said so, to which he replied that it was something that he did. Sometimes, I suppose. On occasion. Naturally, this doesn't prove anything, although I'm inclined to believe in the ironic possibility. Because the (relatively) little but quite a bit more than nothing I know about him as a person,

and the (relatively) more but nowhere near everything I know of him as an artist, brings me to the point of (maybe slightly incomplete) certainty that he could not possibly actually believe that painting is boring. Unless

NOT EVERYTHING THAT IS IRRATIONAL CAN BE DISMISSED AS STUPIDITY. [EB]

language is necessity, and thus a necessary constraint, but within it immeasurable infinities of singular and multiple possibilities, multiple and singular modes of textual production, singular "voices" or ensembles of voices available to be animated and made concretely actual by manifold acts of (and resistances to) volition on the parts of those who can't avoid being writers, and even (at times) those who can. An ocean of singularities, and singular multiplicities, and multiple singularities, and sheer multiples, submerged, buoyed up, foundered, cruising deviously, engulfed, swallowed by whales or bobbing along on top of Queequeg's coffin or clinging to the carcass of a lost torpedo plane. No doubt the process of "arranging" adduced by Esma would account for a



certain range within these infinities, but to universalize it, to make it the *Ultima Thule* of writing, is just

HE SAYS SOMETHING, AND THEN COME MOMENTS WHEN HE IS OUTRIGHT HAPPY AS A CHILD, AND THEN OF COURSE THE GIRL MAKES A RATHER SEVERE, PUNITIVE FACE, JUST TO SHOW HIM A LITTLE HOW VERY STRANGELY HE DOES FOOL AROUND WITH HIS LIFE. THE GIRL IS A KLEIST AND HAS ENJOYED AN EDUCATION, EXACTLY WHAT HER BROTHER HAS WANTED TO THROW OVERBOARD. AT HEART SHE IS NATURALLY GLAD THAT HE IS FEELING BETTER. ON AND ON, WELL WELL, WHAT A JOURNEY IT IS. BUT FINALLY ONE HAS TO LET IT GO, THIS STAGECOACH, AND LAST OF ALL ONE CAN PERMIT ONESELF THE OBSERVATION THAT ON THE FRONT OF THE VILLA WHERE KLEIST LIVED THERE HANGS A MARBLE PLAQUE WHICH INDICATES WHO LIVED AND WORKED THERE. TRAVELERS WHO INTEND TO TOUR THE ALPS CAN READ IT, THE CHILDREN OF THUN READ IT AND SPELL IT OUT, LETTER BY LETTER, AND THEN LOOK QUESTIONING INTO EACH OTHER'S EYES. A JEW CAN READ IT, A CHRISTIAN TOO, IF HE HAS THE TIME AND IF HIS TRAIN IS NOT LEAVING THAT VERY INSTANT, A TURK, A SWALLOW, INsofar AS SHE IS INTERESTED, I ALSO, I CAN READ IT AGAIN IF I LIKE. THUN STANDS AT THE ENTRANCE TO THE BERNESE OBERLAND AND IS VISITED EVERY YEAR BY THOUSANDS OF FOREIGNERS. I KNOW THE REGION A LITTLE PERHAPS, BECAUSE I WORKED AS A CLERK IN A BREWERY THERE. THE REGION IS CONSIDERABLY MORE BEAUTIFUL THAN I HAVE BEEN ABLE TO DESCRIBE HERE, THE LAKE IS TWICE AS BLUE, THE SKY THREE TIMES AS BEAUTIFUL. THUN HAD A TRADE FAIR, I CANNOT SAY EXACTLY BUT I THINK FOUR YEARS AGO. [RWB]

when you say that it's "not that writing (or painting) is inherently self-centered and therefore leads to dead ends -- that's not the deeper problem. One's attitude periodically becomes fearful and self-centered, and

the pathology of that is felt in everything you touch. Writing becomes an intolerable mirror of attitude at times, but I think it's wrong to place blame on words." OK yes, I think this is true, but "fearful and self-centered" may be an appropriate response to the power of ubiquitous unavoidable exploitation. One of our myths is that the way the world sucks us dry is an invention of our paranoid imaginations, a failure of generosity or openness, an unwillingness to offer ourselves up to the pyr katharsion of social existence. Bullshit, I say. The structures we create to manufacture "value" are clearly exploitative, and their chief business is to fill all available blanks and silences with words and images (or icons even) designed to solicit our constant and undivided enthusiasm for this or that "public" cause. I don't blame this on words, but I don't

OF HIM WHO ATE THE BOOK AND THE MYSTERY WITHIN IT, ONE CAN, IN EFFECT, ASK THE QUESTION: IS HE GOOD, OR IS HE BAD? THAT QUESTION NOW SEEMS UNIMPORTANT. THE IMPORTANT THING IS NOT KNOWING WHETHER MAN IS GOOD OR BAD IN THE BEGINNING; THE IMPORTANT THING IS WHAT WILL TRANSPIRE ONCE THE BOOK HAS BEEN EATEN. [JL]



believed to have been an intense cordite fire surging through the engineroom ventilators, leading to the explosion in the magazine that obliterated the after part of the ship. One of the survivors, Ted Briggs I think, said that the sea was boiling next to the hull as it went

FROM THE SINKING WHALEBROW / I READ YOU-- /
YOU RECOGNIZE ME, // HEAVEN / HURLS ITSELF / INTO
THE HARPOON [PC]

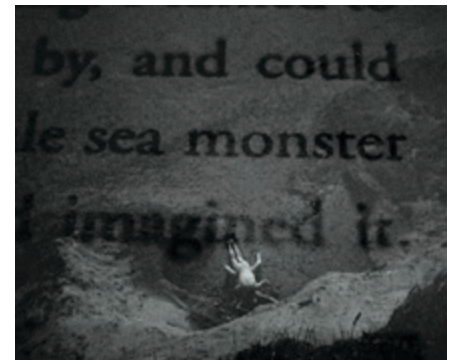
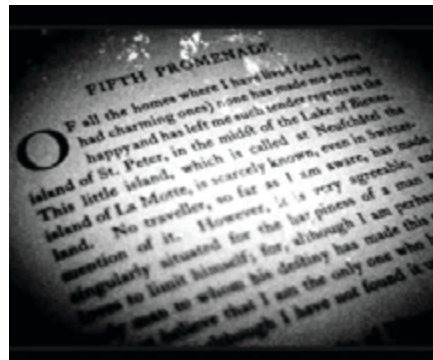
disposed in a singular way on the body of each singular subject, and it is around these residual pockets of enjoyment that the drives emerge. "The Trieb," says Lacan, "implies in itself the advent of the signifier." And what does the angel say? "Thou must prophesy." It's a maxim, a duty. You must speak to peoples, nations, tongues and kings the truth that resides bitter in your belly, even though that speech from the belly comes from other than where you take yourself to be, and even though you may not know what you are saying. At this point I might as well

WHERE YOU ARE WHERE I WOULD BE / HALF THOUGHT
THOUGHT OTHERWISE / LOVELESS AND SLEEPLESS THE SEA
[SHB]

dealing as it does with alienation, the disposition of the drives upon the body, tattooing, the question of interpretation, and separation; the separation from place of origin as unsettledness (the unsettled science of cetology, landlessness as the residence of highest truth) and the question of settling of accounts (narrative, capitalist);

and finally, servitude, the condition of work in the capitalist machine on land or at sea, the problem of the slavish shore, and of course, slavery itself. I want to stress that this condition of "orphanhoodness" (that's what I'm calling it) is always and everywhere predicated on some primordial (and likely immemorial) loss (of derivation, of origin, of place, or freedom) and so we want to know: what is the experience of this loss, how is it experienced, what is the relation of the subject to loss and the lost object? And so on. Provisionally, let's say that loss involves the subject in a point of trauma, that loss engages the affects of guilt and grief and the process of mourning, and that both the trauma and the lost object are encrypted ("vaulted," we could say, since we're doing etymology), secret, hidden (and this is where the "hoodedness" comes in, about which I can say more later; for now, keep in mind what you already know about the etymology of whale, and note that through the Latin cognates for vault, vaulting, rolling etc., we are led to the word "vulva.") To put asunder, to separate

A PLACE OF DISTRESS, SHIPWRECKED. [MD]



not only oblivion, amnesia, but also the absence of memorials, a lack of re-collection, or of rituals of grief or mourning, or their attendant markers; perhaps even a failure to properly honor the past, tradition, the hidden and secret lore, the lost, the dead, even to the point of submersion in or engulfment by this failure: a sublime "lagooning" perhaps? Max's work (and of course he's called Max, the name Sebald was called by family and friends, and nowadays, now that he's gone, by fans), these failed portraits like the one of the butterfly man, which he only starts after countless preliminary studies, which he overlays innumerable times, which he subjects to continual scratching-off and reapplication of paint only to wind up with a faceless portrait of a face no longer recalled and no longer

THE LONGER I STUDIED THE PHOTOGRAPHS, THE MORE URGENTLY I SENSED A GROWING NEED TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE LIVES OF THE PEOPLE IN THEM. [WGS]

unable to bring myself to believe that Hoolboom (the one I'm calling Hoolboom) could possibly be of the party that would send the FBI to Sturges' studio, seize his work and equipment, and bind him over as a "child pornographer" any more than I can imagine him so blithely

MAN LOOKING INTO THE SEA, / TAKING THE VIEW FROM THOSE WHO HAVE AS MUCH RIGHT TO IT AS YOU HAVE TO IT YOURSELF, / IT IS HUMAN NATURE TO STAND IN THE MIDDLE OF A THING, / BUT YOU CANNOT STAND IN THE MIDDLE OF THIS; [MM]



has no clothes, if indeed he hasn't. Having looked at it so many times by then, I saw that it was all over the place, as if he has no idea what to do, and then at the end, had to finish it in an impossible situation. Maybe he waited too long: clearly, at the point he finished it he was over it, or as over it as anybody gets, which on second thought may not be much. (The sadistic side of my thing (not deliberate, oh no, I assure you) is that it wants to make him see how much more devastated he could be, how he could continue to be so, etc.) There's also the problem of deliberately making a piece which mourns, rather than one which, in spite of or beside itself, exhibits the mournful, is an instance of mourning regardless of the specificity of its subject; to do this you need a kind of meta-language (or meta-cinema); a mournful discourse about mourning itself. He's not an intellectual, not the guy to come up with this on purpose. He's the guy in the back seat with the heavy camera and a gifted

WHEREAS EGO COUNTERSIGNS LIMINAL EXISTENCE, "I," THE ANONYMOUS, THE SPIDER'S LIEUTENANT, SIGNS IT. WITH AN X, A MANDIBULAR MARK. SIGNS OR, RATHER,

SIGNALS EXISTENCE: THE GASH SIGNALS THAT I WAS HERE,
WITHIN THE EXPERIENCE OF CRUDE AND NULL EXISTENCE.
INEVITABLE DEFERRAL OF WRITING WITH RESPECT TO THE
EXPERIENCE OF THE MONSTER. DREAD IS VOICELESS, DEAF.
THAT'S WHY IT CANNOT LIE. [JFL]

belligerent and abusive, so the head injury he sustained was more or less a coup de grâce. I gave the authorization for the termination of life-support, and for the post-mortem sectioning of his brain for research. I didn't for a moment think he'd stepped into the road on purpose; or rather, I didn't think he'd purposely stepped into that road. Meddings said his old man, who also had it, constantly imagined (I really doubt that's the right word; these things must be far from flights of fancy) that he was in the POW camp in Italy where he spent a couple of years prior to the Allied invasion and the fall of Mussolini. He'd even start talking in broken Italian, desperately

ON PAGE 248 IN *THE RINGS OF SATURN*, W. G. SEBALD IS RECOUNTING HIS INTERVIEWS WITH ONE THOMAS ABRAMS, AN ENGLISH FARMER WHO HAS BEEN WORKING ON A MODEL OF THE TEMPLE OF JERUSALEM – YOU KNOW, GLUING LITTLE BITS OF WOOD TOGETHER – FOR 20 YEARS, INCLUDING THE PAINSTAKING RESEARCH REQUIRED FOR HISTORICAL ACCURACY. THERE ARE DUCKS ON THE FARM AND AT ONE POINT ABRAMS SAYS TO SEBALD, “I HAVE ALWAYS KEPT DUCKS, EVEN AS A CHILD, AND THE COLORS OF THEIR PLUMAGE, IN PARTICULAR THE DARK GREEN AND THE SNOW WHITE, SEEM TO BE THE ONLY POSSIBLE ANSWER TO THE QUESTIONS THAT ARE ON MY MIND.” IT IS AN ODD THING TO SAY, BUT SEBALD'S BOOK IS A LONG WALK OF ODDITIES. I DID NOT REMEMBER THIS PASSAGE IN PARTICULAR UNTIL LATER THE SAME DAY WHEN I WAS READING THE DICTIONARY, WHERE I CAME UPON THE MEANING OF THE

WORD **SPECULUM**: 1) AN INSTRUMENT INSERTED INTO A BODY PASSAGE FOR INSPECTION; 2) AN ANCIENT MIRROR; 3) A MEDIEVAL COMPENDIUM OF ALL KNOWLEDGE; 4) A DRAWING SHOWING THE RELATIVE POSITION OF ALL THE PLANETS; AND 5) A PATCH OF COLOR ON THE SECONDARY WINGS OF MOST DUCKS AND SOME OTHER BIRDS. DID SEBALD KNOW THAT A COMPENDIUM OF ALL KNOWLEDGE AND THE DUCKS' PLUMAGE WERE ONE AND THE SAME? DID ABRAMS? OR WAS I THE ONLY ONE FOR WHOM THE DUCK PASSAGE MADE PERFECT, ORIGINAL SENSE? I SAT IN MY CHAIR, SHOCKED. I AM NOT A SCHOLAR, BUT FOR THE IMAGINATIVE READER THERE CAN BE DISCOVERIES, CONNECTIONS BETWEEN BOOKS, THAT EXPLODE THE DAY AND ONE'S HEART AND THE LONG YEARS THAT HAVE LED TO THE MOMENT. [MR]

she remembered that Barthes is supposed to have said once to Philippe Sollers: “Whenever you give somebody something to read, you are giving it to your mother.” I began wondering if that applies to putting a film out there. (What RB meant by “giving it to” notwithstanding: a student of mine once said in class, as a refutation of the Oedipus complex, “You oughta see my mother!”) Anyway, I don't know if this fragmentary morass makes any sense to you, but the fact



is that the film had now profoundly changed. Now at last I had a way to answer people who mistakenly thought it was a film about Susan. Including Susan. I had to shoot

AND SO THEY ARE EVER RETURNING TO US, THE DEAD.
AT TIMES THEY COME BACK FROM THE ICE MORE THAN
SEVEN DECADES LATER AND ARE FOUND AT THE EDGE OF
THE MORaine, A FEW POLISHED BONES AND A PAIR OF
HOBNAILED BOOTS. [WGS]

because let's face it, apart from everything else, there is a real girl who's been photographed, who is depicted in the photograph, and her name is not Amy. Her name is Marine. What is spoken by the actor portraying Amy, this discourse that the shadowy MH adduces and comments on in the interview, does not belong to Marine. But it is given to her, it speaks for her, it commits (or apparently commits) the indignity of speaking for others; it inscribes Marine within a rather tarnished, shopworn, practically bankrupt line of aesthetic-political argument, rather lacking in intellect or vitality in its presentation in the interview or in *PL* itself, more or less reduced to a tawdry heap of codewords and slogans; designed (so it would seem) to arouse the viewer's sympathy for the girl as having been violated in some way, tragically so, or so the actor's portrayal seems meant to convey; and designed as well to arouse the ire of the viewer toward the photographer who is responsible for this violation (and whose unfortunate name, which "Amy" gleefully mocks, might as well be Dick or PHALLUS). But is this really

I WOULD BE A FALCON AND GO FREE. / I TREAD HER WRIST
AND WEAR THE HOOD, / TALKING TO MYSELF, AND WOULD
DRAW BLOOD. [RD]

massive proliferation of artist "avatars" commences: Esma, obviously; Steve Reinke's voice and the Reinke-esque (to my mind) discourse and imagery give rise to the specter of the world's greatest video artist haunting *PL*; Philip Glass and Madonna; the "amnesiac" filmmaker; the silent photographer; and in the "Amy" section we see Amy (the actor portraying Amy) with a movie camera, but more important is the despised photographer, Jock. In addition, we can salvage from the depths of the familiar (though sometimes murky) "apparatus" fringing the fringe cinema (filmmaker Q&As after screenings, artist statements, interviews, festival blurbs, descriptions of works in various distribution catalogs, panel participation at conferences, etc.), a shadowy "MH" who is prone (not always, but often enough that it can't help seeming deliberate, an instance of "performance" hors-textuelle) to making truly outrageous statements about what is going on in *PL*, much to the delight of the eager



SI JE DÉSIRE UNE EAU D'EUROPE, C'EST LA FLACHE / NOIRE
ET FROIDE OÙ VERS LE CRÉPUSCULE EMBAUMÉ / UN ENFANT
ACCROUPI PLEIN DE TRISTESSES, LÂCHE / UN BATEAU FRÊLE
COMME UN PAPILLON DE MAI. [AR]

not to say that once something's written, once it's inscribed, there's an absolute guarantee of permanence or continuity, or that any final arrest has been brought to bear on the proverbial "sliding signifier." ("Stealing" and "flying" are the same word in French (voler), and when little French girls play Cinderella, they dress up in slippers made of squirrel fur, which in heraldic French is vair, homonymical with verre, glass. Or so I'm told.) And of course Plato, in the *Seventh Letter* and also somewhere else, writes (without irony, I suppose) "Writing is poison to thought." (Does he use the word pharmakon for poison? If so, I guess I should reconsider about the irony.)

HE CLEARLY FOUND IT IMPOSSIBLE TO USE HIS VOICE,
AND SO RESPONDED TO WHAT I SAID ONLY AT LENGTHY
INTERVALS, IN AN ATTEMPT AT SPEECH THAT SOUNDED LIKE
THE RUSTLE OF DRY LEAVES IN THE WIND. STILL, IT WAS PLAIN
ENOUGH THAT HE FELT HIS CONDITION WAS SOMETHING TO
BE ASHAMED OF AND HAD RESOLVED TO PUT IT BEHIND HIM
AS SOON AS POSSIBLE, ONE WAY OR ANOTHER. [WGS]

to say at least that Hoolboom (the one who is called Hoolboom) wears everywhere and always (and in all of his various personae) a mighty carapace of irony (to borrow Anne Carson's nicely wrought image; and please, do not mistake irony for some light and flimsy simple thing) which secures the multiple deployment, dispersion, dissolution and

reconstitution of authorship, of textual authority, of points of enunciation which mark his style in *PL* and many other works. It also underwrites his policy of appropriating, of admitting, the infinite archive of images, sounds and words ascribed to authorships outside (but only presumably outside) his (presumable) own. It one key, at least, by which he and we together might be carried a stage

NOTHING DISTINGUISHES MEMORIES FROM OTHER
MOMENTS: IT IS ONLY LATER THAT THEY MAKE THEMSELVES
RECOGNIZED, BY THEIR SCARS. [CM]

in the Fairey Swordfish (or the "String Bag," as he used to call it), which was exceedingly slow and thus vulnerable to fighter escorts, and was often sent out well beyond its range so that once they'd dropped their sole torpedo, the crew wound up having to ditch on the way back when they ran out of fuel. Not that many were ever picked up. But luckily for him, he spent almost his entire 6 years in the skies over Portsmouth, training younger fishfodder to operate the puny Vickers machine guns ("Fucking bloody pea-shooters," as he

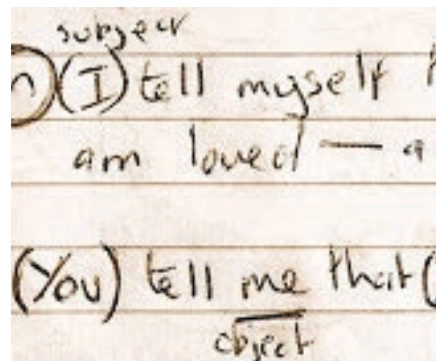
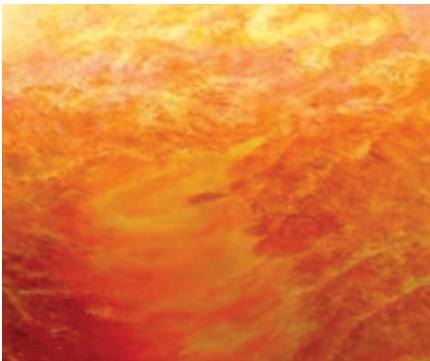


put it). His rank on demob was Air Gunner/Telegrapher, Fleet Air Arm, which had about the same status as an Army Corporal. Guess that explains his blinkin' son. Or maybe

IF THE WORD REVOLUTION HAD NOT BEEN MADE ALMOST RIDICULOUS THROUGH ABUSE, ONE WOULD HAVE TO SAY THAT REVOLUTIONARY ACTION TODAY HAS TO BE EVEN MORE REFORMIST THAN THE REFORMIST; APPARENTLY MYOPIC, DEDICATED TO SMALL BUT SURE OPERATIONS, TO MAKING DIAMONDS OR DEADLY ARTIFICIAL FLINTS, TO MINUTE SABOTAGE, TO PATIENT BUT TOTAL DESTRUCTION. TO ATTRACT THE OCCASIONAL BARK OR THE OCCASIONAL BITE IS A MATTER TRULY OF NO IMPORTANCE, WITH NO MERIT OR DEMERIT. IT IS NECESSARY TO WISH SOMETHING VERY DIFFERENT, AND ABOVE ALL TO BELIEVE, WITH LENIN, THAT FOR EVERY SITUATION THERE EXISTS ONE WAY OUT AND THE POSSIBILITY OF FINDING IT. OR IN OTHER WORDS THAT TRUTH EXISTS, ABSOLUTE IN ITS RELATIVITY. [FF]

is what she would've said; and do thank her for the Two-tailed Pasha specimens and the fine photos of Ardéchois scenery. Looking forward to seeing you both there in June (Skelley has decreed that we should be en France for my 60th, to celebrate with rillets de porc and those two magnums of Cornas I know you've got secreted in the root cellar), and if possible getting to one of those plages naturistes on the coast. My camera

THIS HE CONSIDERED ONE OF HIS MOST UNSATISFACTORY WORKS, BECAUSE IN HIS VIEW IT CONVEYED NOT EVEN THE REMOTEST IMPRESSION OF THE STRANGENESS OF THE APPARITION IT REFERRED TO. [WGS] •



SOURCES:

- AB Alain Badiou, *Ethics*
- AC Anne Carson, *Economy of the Unlost*
- AR Arthur Rimbaud, *Le Bateau Ivre*
- CM Chris Marker, *La Jetée*
- EB Ernst Bloch, *Heritage of Our Times*
- FF Franco Fortini, *I Cani del Sinai* (and Straub & Huillet, Fortini-Cani)
- HCa Hélène Cixous, "Elpenor's Dream"
- HCb Hart Crane, "At Melville's Tomb"
- HDT Henry David Thoreau, *Cape Cod*
- HMa Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*
- HMb Herman Melville, "Hawthorne and His Mosses"
- JFL Jean-François Lyotard, *Soundproof Room*
- KH *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser* (Werner Herzog)
- MB Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*
- MD Marguerite Duras, *The Lover*
- MH Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*
- MM Marianne Moore, "The Grave"
- MR Mary Ruefle, "Someone reading a book is a sign of order in the world"
- PC Paul Celan, "From the sinking whalebrow"
- RD Robert Duncan, "My Mother Would Be A Falconress"
- RS Robert Smithson, "A Museum of Language in The Vicinity of Art"
- RWa Robert Walser, "Eine Art Erzählung"
- RWb Robert Walser, "Kleist in Thun"
- SHa Susan Howe, "Thorow"
- SHb Susan Howe, "Silence Wager Stories"
- VB Victor Burgin, *The Remembered Film*
- WGS W. G. Sebald, *The Emigrants*



PUBLIC LIGHTING INTERVIEW

BY CATHERINE ZELINSKY

CATHERINE: *Can you tell me how the movie began?*

MIKE: When I was eight years old I met my best friend. He was born on the same afternoon, in the same city and every thought he had also occurred to me. Everything I wanted, he wanted. This lasted until we hit adolescence and he began to say no, to me, his friends, everything. Rules didn't stick to Stan. He would spend a day up in a tree admiring the view, talked openly about drugs and sex, so I wasn't entirely surprised when he arrived at school naked. What are we trying to hide behind these clothes? It was a rebuke against designer lifestyles already taking hold. Of course he was institutionalized after that, though there was nothing really wrong about him except for a mind which refused to close.

He told me later about a test which was administered each day. He was presented with a small stack of photographs, each showing a face in close-up, and asked who he would like to sit with on a bus. Who least? Unknown to him, each showed a man in the grip of severe psychosis (the manic depressive, the split personality) the test was premised on the condition that he would surely choose the person whose condition reflected his own. There was one normal in the bunch, and when he chose that face, his treatment would be over. *Public Lighting* begins with this rendering of types, reflecting on the ways we reproduce ourselves, our technologies of selfhood, the armatures of poses and pictures and writings that constitute our public selves.

Writing is the first of its seven parts, a combination of city film (in a much more modest fashion, but in the line of Berlin: *Symphony of a City* or Francis Thompson's *NY NY*) and portrait. The city is Amsterdam, though its iconic tourist destinations are largely ignored, Central Station is shown only from its backside,

glimpsed from the ferry which connects North Amsterdam to the centre. The Artis Zoo, the failed utopian housing of the Behlmir, the Amstel River, the Albert Cuyp market, anti-war demonstrations and various street scenes are featured. Dutch writer Esma Moukhtar walks, suns and makes her bed through it all, writing as it occurs to her. The city is conjured from her writing, and having made her way through the population she decides there are only six different kinds of personality, and that she will write about each. She names this project "Public lighting," (doppelganger of the movie), which proposes to take up the act of presentation, the persona, the way we appear to others (who light us up). While the six types of personality are never named they can easily be guessed at by the nature of the portraits which follow: the man falling out of love in restaurants is the depressive, Philip Glass is the obsessive, Madonna the narcissist, the woman in *Tradition* the amnesiac, the photographer in *Hiro* unable to awake from the nightmare of history, while Amy is the schizophrenic.

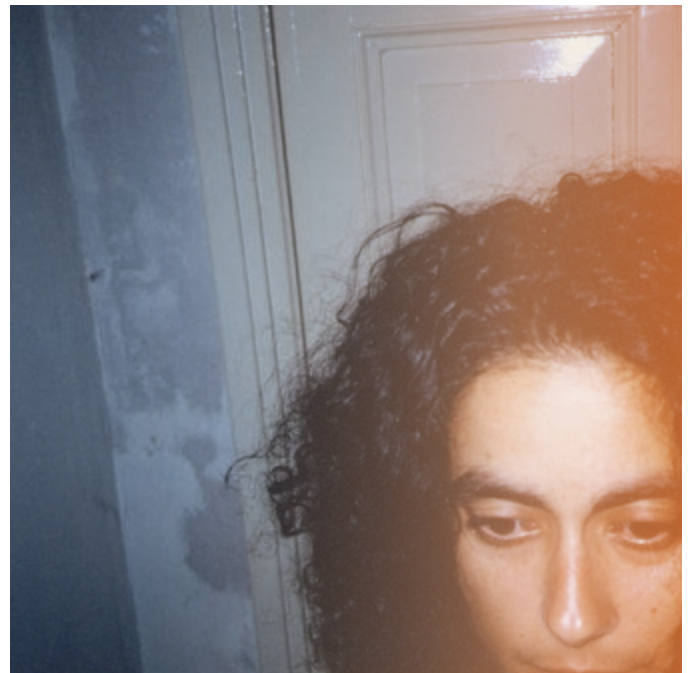
In the City is the second section and shows twenty six restaurants, alphabetically arranged, from Anywhere Lounge to Zelda's. (Anywhere Lounge, Bagel Cafe, Cassis, Diablo, El Asador, Flip, Toss and Shake, Gabby's, Happy Seven, Insomnia, JJ Muggs, KFC, Las Iguanas, Mr. Greek, Nataraj, Omonia, Paradise, Q Club, Richards, Scratch Daniels, Thai Bangkok, Utopia, Vitty's, Wilde Oscars, XXX Diner, Zelda's). Like *Writing* and *Glass* it is both a city film and a portrait, this time presenting the city of Toronto as a series of restaurant facades.

It opens in the country, in an emptied house (this motif of the empty house recurs in *Tradition* and in a more extended montage in *Amy*), where we finally see a young boy getting out of bed, unable to sleep, caught up in dreams of escape. When he looks out the window he sees a train (every train in cinema is already the train of the Lumières, the beginnings of reproduction, the fall into spectacle and commerce) which delivers him to the city. There he begins a series of romantic misadventures with a number of men. Endings (sometimes the beginning as well) invariably occur in restaurants.

Shot in black and white super-8, the image appears often in superimposition. Restaurant facades alternate with shots of the narrator (shaving, walking, eating, cruising) and close-up shots of young women transported in ecstasy (from the classic NFB

documentary about Paul Anka, *Lone Boy*), their faces showing a wrenching transcendent devotion (immolated in the presence of their beloved, they are exemplars of the birth of the modern teenager, a release of cold war tensions into adolescent pop hysteria). These faces contrast the dryly ironic tone of the voice-over, delivered by Canadian video artist Steve Reinke. This tape would be the blues if not for his even-tempered, mellifluous tones, which grants to the direst tragedy the consolation of a sonorous voice.

The closing image loops, suggesting that there is something cyclical in this man's approach to love. That he is drawn only to the temporary and fleeting, to a gorging of appetite which must be fed



again and again. It will not be enough to have the same dinner, the same lover, night after night, instead a restless searching provokes him across the alphabet, but while the scenes shift the result stays the same, he is caught in the circle of his own desire, looking for another who will say no.

Glass is a portrait (though its subject appears only at the end) of New York composer Philip Glass. It is produced in movements which image different moments of the city (the Brooklyn Bridge, the subway, Central Park, Coney Island Beach) while a typewriter text scrolls across the cityscape. It opens with a series of archival black and white shots, mostly photographs made in the early part of the twentieth century, showing the living and working conditions of some of the poorest people in the city (invariably immigrants). Here are Glass's (imagined) beginnings, his parent's arrival via Ellis Island, the trials of the newly arrived, accompanied by a chorus of counting voices (of generations calling the tune).

This city portrait is an alternating current between historical New York and the present day, black and white and colour, often using footage from the same site or vantage years apart to display differences. The restless changes in Manhattan are contrasted with Glass's music which, while rhythmic and driving, is contained within a small register of phrasings, many different pieces (solo or ensemble, orchestral or chamber) sound like variations of one another, even though they have been produced over decades. Glass replays the same melody over and again even as the city demonstrates its changes, offering micro/macro contrasts of figure and ground though the movie suggests that they are pitched to the same end. Glass's music contains within its few notes a longing for eternity and the infinite, which the city embodies in its ever shifting appearance.

Hey Madonna takes the form of a letter (which is never a correspondence) to the pop star from a former lover. The rock vid promos for *Vogue* (abbreviated) and *Oh Father* (re-cut) play while a new text scrolls across the familiar pictures. It is a letter familiar to anyone who has become HIV positive, urged to contact all former sexual contacts and inform them (and for once, he writes, he is glad there aren't so many). Madonna isn't positive, but the images are rewritten and recut to emphasize the body's mortality. In the opening sequence Madonna muses about the death of a good friend (she prepares herself for the shock by imagining him already dead),

and while she glams her way through *Vogue* the text's emphasis on dying recasts her supporting cast (young black dancers, most of them gay) as a backdrop of death (how many will die of AIDS?), most emphatically in the sequence which shows one dancer breaking moves while the camera fades out over and over, intimating his end.

In the middle segue sequence, while the opening chords of *Vogue* are refrained, Madonna appears in a bevy of posed photo-ops, including a visit to her parent's grave (while she croons "Strike a pose") cruelly juxtaposing the experience of grief with camera ready postures. Death as a pose, as a transmitted response (each culture has its own rites which govern passage over the border), Madonna



is shown here as an exemplar of mourning. You've shown me how to live, now show me to die: Express yourself. How to stop looking for signs of decay in the body (the middle sequence shows a scene between Madonna and her doctor), which is only always growing older, closer to the end, inevitably giving way under the weight of the years, having to perform the circulations and repairs that allow us to endure. "It's hard to watch you growing older" the letter writer inscribes, not because she looks any less perfect, but because it's a reminder of what's happening to us all who lack the multiplication of pictures, of selves, that haunt and elevate any celebrity.

Tradition is a brief which narrates a family compact of forgetting. Unknown to her, the lead character repeats everything her mother did, all her friends are mirrors of her mother's friends, her decisions, her hopes, and most of all her forgetting. Her mother could never remember a thing, and neither can she. This is the tradition of the film's title, not the generational gift of past wisdoms and oppressions, but a genetic disposition, a body memory of no memory at all.

Memories of China come to her in glimpses and fragments or superimposed waves of pictures (Is she living there? Or in a western city where her accent clearly places her). This is one homecoming movie which never finally arrives, denied even the wound of loss, and in its place a stunned diasporic response (the old Canadian cry of national identity is also her own: where is here?). "I take pictures not to help me remember but to record my forgetting."

"Mother says one day you'll have a daughter. Mother says that like me she used to forget everything. Forgetting is a tradition in my family." The devouring past, still hungry, waits to be fulfilled. Not character as destiny, but bloodlines, ancient curses, the travel between old world and new reversed here, caught between borders in a stateless wandering. Neither here nor there.

Hiro was the only subset of *Public Lighting* I cut myself. I was granted a residence at the Western Front in Vancouver which meant a room with a view and an edit suite down the hall. Hiro was shot and cut in a month of all day/night sessions. It shows a Japanese photographer haunted by memories of Hiroshima, an ambulance chaser and thrill seeker, drawn especially to fires (like moths, like the fires which consumed blocks after the blast). His compulsion a reflex of memory, his photography a phantom limb. Because I cut it hands-on there is

a lot of fine detailing in the montage which proceeds like a series of snapshots with black-outs punctuating dream fragments and daytime encounters. A parallel ghost narrative is introduced at the beginning, a shadowy, staggered man climbs down a stairwell, and over the course of the movie we see him cross a bridge, jump off a roof, limp across the waterfront until he is finally encountered by the photographer (whose name is Hiro, played by actor Hiro Kanagawa). The man has collapsed, and lies unmoving in an east side alley. Hiro's camera shield is finally put away as he decides should I shoot him or? He calls an ambulance, unable to take a picture of his dead dreamed double. The siren is heard over black ("after" the end), completing the transference.



CATHERINE: *What about the last section of Public Lighting, called Amy?*

MIKE: There are two fathers in *Amy*, the first produces the home movie footage that opens the film, the second is Jock Sturges. Both produce pictures (as the paternal relation is largely fictional (unlike the maternal relation which is embodied) picture taking is a way to reclaim the authority of origins. This is my chair, this is my house, this is my daughter. These two fathers exist in a line of picture takers which produce a way of looking, a way of being looked at. *Amy* opens with a home movie sequence whose source is identified in the first shot which shows the father loading up his super-8 projector. Looking is already looking again, re-viewing (there is no first look, only a circulation).

The next shot shows a teenage girl walking out of her house while the camera follows her. She is awkward and shy, the camera look is too much, it causes shame and embarrassment (Not because she is never looked at, and so is unused to it, but because she already looks at herself all the time, the camera's presence is an unwelcome reminder. She has learned her lesson well.) The daughter's response contrasts with her brother who is amused and stoic, much more rigid than his sister (we all have our parts to play), but clearly unafraid, able to look back, to answer the camera's look. The look divides genders.

There are two sequences in the film which show girl gatherings, and both are initiations. In the first a posse of girls are led to the top floor of a house where milk and flour is heaped on them in a gesture of ritual abuse. They are blindfolded, seen but not seeing, and their tormentors are also girls. Once they have endured this bit of play, one of them is raised from a kneeling position, her blindfold removed, and a demure kiss signals acceptance into the sorority. Like the photographs of Amy, they undergo a rite of initiation, this time at the hands of other girls. Once again looking and power are related.

In the movie's closing shot there is a race run exclusively by pre-teen girls. They run towards the source of the image, the place that is looking at them, the vantage point. Far from resisting this look they have no choice but to embrace it, to desire it, to find in it the basis for their own self regard. Once again this massing occurs in a climate of competition and exertion. The race is another form of initiation into an all-girl social order, a measurement and indicator of character and

status. (The beautiful one, the fast one, the smart one.) Both groups show that 'the look' is not an exclusive male preserve, that once the look is digested and internalized, it is very effectively disseminated (like a virus) by women, even though it is women who suffer under this regime of looking.

After *Amy*'s opening home movies there are a number of shots of an empty house (a second home movie without residents). A lurking presence insinuates itself, a menace implied by small movements of the camera, and tiny movements inside the frame, finger marks left on a window. This is the stage for the look, the place where the trauma occurs, is reinforced and becomes part of personality.



These dark, cramped interiors finally release in an escape through grass and light and finally a bicycle races away. Though escape from an internalized condition (the way we look at ourselves) is only temporary.

There are three photographs of Amy which form the basis for the movie, each is a reflection on looking, and they are presented in reverse chronology, the earliest picture appears last. All are taken on the beach, and in each Amy answers the look of the camera, more than aware she is being photographed. The pictures were made by American photographer Jock Sturges who has pursued a practice over the past decades of documenting the transition from girl to woman, producing scores of idealized nudes in natural settings with a large format camera. What is missing in these pictures is the apparatus itself (only a high production sheen remains as evidence) and the reflection of its subject (what is she thinking? what is she thinking now when she looks back on these pictures?)

These three photographs, like any other, are a record of a time, a moment's impression, but apart from their status as memento and place holder, they are also the event itself. They are the initiation from girl to woman that they seek to document, it is through the camera that this transformation occurs, the camera is agent and document of its agency. Amy acknowledges the look of the camera not from a position of equality ("face to face") but as an admission ("Now I will look at myself the way you look at me.") The camera's fragmenting gaze delivers her to herself as an amalgam of parts (she speaks of her breasts, the marks on her legs, her face, and then refers to herself in the third person, as if she were an object, a thing).

In her opening voice-over Amy says, "Last night I was watching television when this terrible thing happened. All the talk show hosts, all the guest stars, even the news anchors, all started talking like me, and looking like me..." Amy finds herself, her look, the way she looks at herself, reflected everywhere. She is caught in a circulation of looks (the home movie, but also television, the systems of reproduction work to reproduce her look).

In her second voice-over Amy says about her photographer, "No one really wears any clothes out here, not on the beach, that would be weird, right? Only he's got all this stuff on him, the big camera

and meters and boards so he's not really naked, not at all." Both figures are naked, but only one is seen, and it is in the act of being looked at that one becomes naked. She is newly sexualized, looked at with desire, with the budding desire that separates girl from women, as an object of men's attention, an attention signalled in the photographs. Even if she held the camera, and made pictures, she would continue to reproduce the look. She will always be naked because her look attaches itself to a (male) history of looking.

A series of home movies follow her second photograph, we see Amy being brought as a child from the hospital, then sitting on her parent's knees, shyly smiling into the super-8 camera. We also



see Amy later in life, holding her own camera in a park, in a series of blurred, frozen frames which turn her into a shock of light and dark. The photographs of her initiation are crisp and clear, while the present is a haze of abstractions, always in movement, as if trying to escape, or trying to find a footing, a place from which she can begin her own reproduction.

Later Amy says, "The only person that's really looked at us like this is mom and dad, only he isn't blood, no, not at all. And that makes all the difference." Parents see their children naked, care for them, tend to them, school them. But Jock is part of a line of metaphorical parents (or teachers) who will grant new meanings to innocent activities, now being naked on the beach will hold different associations, no longer only a family frolic of nudists, but part of a sexualized series of encounters with the look she will carry with her the rest of her life.

Amy is usually heard in voice-over, and its source is shown periodically in images of Amy in a recording booth where headphones and microphone are very visible. She often directly addresses the camera. Unlike the photographs, the means of reproduction are made manifest (Godard: "I want to show, and to show my showing.") In her closing image she says, "I'm starting to look at myself the way you're looking at me now." Here she implicates the audience's look, she is being served up again for an anonymous audience, and she states that this look is also part of the look of her once photographer, that the cinema audience is also busy fragmenting the body, sexualizing the female, objectifying, and that this look is being absorbed and digested by its receiver. In the movie's closing image a group of high school girls sing the old Beach Boys number *God Only Knows* ("God only knows what I'd do without you...") referring to a world without the male gaze to determine response. What would it be like to grow up without them? We may never know. •



GLASS [SCRIPT]

FROM *PUBLIC LIGHTING*





This man showed me
how to have a personality

Each day he resisted
the flattery of imitation
we face as shoppers.



I am this cigarette
this shirt
this apartment.



I know who I am
by the choices I make



the world is my mirror
and when I get tired of one personality



I reach into my jeans
and buy another.



One day I met Philip Glass
underground



he no longer spoke
but listened to everyone
wherever he met them.



Instead of talking he played
for him there was no longer
any difference



the few notes he favoured



expressed everything he had ever felt.



His music revealed a
subterranean life to me
that was uniquely his own



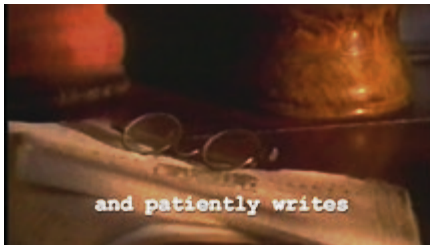
and I vowed that one day
I would have my own.



Each day he sits
before the blank staffs
and patiently enters
the same notes as the day before.



They are so sweet, so satisfying
that the song which belongs to Monday



soon accompanies the entire week



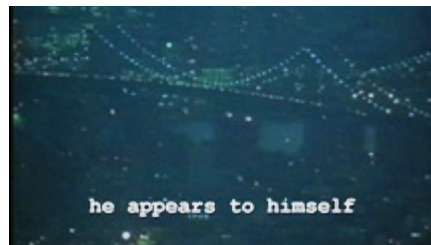
and then every week
for the rest of his life.



He is like the hummingbird
who is so admired
for always singing the same song.



Each day when he rises
he appears to himself



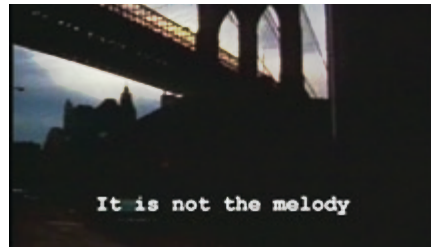
as the same person.



He is one being
not a collection of parts
but unity, wholeness.



This is why his music is played
all over the world
it is not the melody people hear
but its persistence



His refrain has become
a way of life.
Here is a man
who plays his destiny
his future
on the piano.



One imagines him
at the end of time
on the day of judgement
this music his confession.



There are a very few
who can still hear
this small moment
we all carry inside ourselves



Philip's music asks:
will you join me
in eternity?





EMILY + COOPER

PAIN SHALL BE NO MORE

IN THE FUTURE, THERE WILL BE A MOOD BRIGHTENING DRUG SO EFFECTIVE THAT IT WILL BE ADMINISTERED TO EVERYONE AT BIRTH. THE SHORT-SIGHTED MEDICAL INDUSTRY, EAGER TO CASH IN, WILL PUT IT ON THE MARKET BEFORE THEY REALISE ITS LONG TERM EFFECTS. THE PILL WILL COMPLETELY ELIMINATE AMBITION AND REMORSE. OVER THE COURSE OF THE FOLLOWING YEARS, THE HUMAN RACE WILL EXPIRE. THERE WILL BE ORGIES OF RECREATIONAL DRUGS AND MURDER, ATTENDED BY THE MOST UNLIKELY CITIZENS. THE FILTHY WILL MIX WITH THE CLEAN. CHILDREN, ABANDONED BY THEIR HEEDLESS PARENTS, WILL LAUGH THEMSELVES TO DEATH. THEN THERE WILL BE PEACE ON EARTH.

LATER, YOU AND I WILL BE REINCARNATED AS A PAIR OF DEER, A STAG AND A DOE. WE WILL MAKE OUR WAY BACK TO OUR HOME. WE WILL NOSE THROUGH THE RUINS OF THIS OLD HOUSE, WHICH WILL BE CRACKED AND OVERGROWN, AND EAT THE TENDER LETTUCES THAT STILL GROW, MIRACULOUSLY, IN WHAT USED TO BE OUR GARDEN.

EMILY VEY DUKE AND COOPER BATTERSBY

HERE IS EVERYTHING

BY AMY FUNG

I keep thinking about everything

EVERYTHING I don't want to write, and here

I have been asked to write on everything.

Here Is NOT everything. Thank God. Except, God doesn't exist.
Future Cat and Downer Bunny tell me how it is. They sound
like Gods, but God is a nipple, so they sound like nipples.

Oh, Future Cat and Downer Bunny, please audio record children's
stories for me. What would have happened if you two read
me bedtime stories?

UH OH.

We are already slipping between what we hear and what we
see. The limits to what we hear are not as transferable to
the limits of what we see. Video art has its limits too. All
mediums do.

This is EVERYTHING I never see. Can't see. My weak human
eyes won't let me see. But I will be looking out for those
tapeworm shells. That much I will see to.

Not that I COULD see. I can't see anything. To see is to believe and
I believe in anything.

Help me help you evolve the language to be.

I hope nobody confuses this for religion.

People confuse metaphors for religion.

And the jury is out on the relevance of metaphors.

It waits for me and waits for you too.

The gutter that flows like a river.

The gutter divides life, as most strands do, between the ground we walk on and the looming horizon.

This is not a metaphor. This is a literary trope. I insist on the difference.

If we insisted on more differences, the Bible would be shelved very differently.

Let's insist on difference and be graceful about it.

So I better begin.

The lull of the soundtrack is giving me feelings.

It is an uncomfortable ache to sit up straighter and listen harder.

The message is in audio, but the images keep coming.

WHAT ARE IMAGES COMING FOR?

Maybe they are supposed to be reassuring. Pre-emptive déjà vu storytelling.

Who was that woman? Not in the video, but the one I saw in the theatre. I have seen her face before, but before can come another time.

We are all responsible. Just remember that.

The feeling of death is not uncomfortable. It is less a feeling than a graceful acceptance.

Death is not in the expiration of breath. Death lies in the living. The personified departure of warmth in our hands.

Grace is all we can offer.

God is a nipple and trauma lies in the fight. What exists in between?

There's a lot of plastic and flowers here in the gutter. This is everything we love and discard.

Needles and condoms and Blockbuster cards. Everything we only use once.

But if we can only see what we cannot see, we would see a lot of critters and crawlies exist between.

Is this an environmental video? No, this is also not a poem.

There are also notably no adorable baby seals here. Art videos need to be post-humanist too.

CORRECTION. Post-humanism needs art videos too. •



INTO THE ARCHIVE

BY RAMONA HEINLEIN

Mechanisms of exclusion and separation are an inherent part of our life. Themes, materials and substances that go against our ideals of closeness, normality and beauty get degraded as alien and dangerous – a normalized behavior that derives from social norms, taboos and necessities. Senses of shame or disgust are not natural occurrences. Their defiance is considered violations of a system's rules and standards.

Even though the exhibition of the artists Duke and Battersby at Toronto's gallerywest is titled "Pain Shall Be No More" several social norms get wounded as it contains various aspects of life that are usually dismissed and denied – failure, fear and weakness, violation, disease, addiction and death run like a thread through texts, drawings, photographs, objects and a short film.

An arrangement of two skinned cats, animal teeth and a beetle carapace on a wooden plinth forms the center of the exhibition. These relics of former life can be seen as daunting reminders of life's fugacity and fragility, resembling old vanitas symbols but also as an ode to the curiosity of life, its fascination and weirdness, its wonder and beauty.

The work of Duke and Battersby is ambiguous. Pain, loss and ugliness are opposed to hope, beauty and humor. The blending of dark radicalness and harsh humor with poetic tenderness lies at the core of their artistic language, where frangible bones are used to build the title "The beauty is relentless," where fine stitches form the words "Daddy you fucked up again," or where two young boys chat about a girl that is said to "swallow" captivate the spectator through its unabashed directness and soulful energy.

The spectator finds himself in a climate that is both frangible and strong – a powerful undertow that visitors respond very differently to: spontaneous laughter, fervent enchantment, honest emotion and serious anger at all the pain in an exhibition with a title that seems to promise that the contrary can be heard, felt and seen at gallerywest these days.

The couple's work is far away from asking for laborious decryptions. It rather aims not only at our mind but at our feelings, the most existential ones – love, loneliness, joy, sadness and most importantly, empathy. Although the work is intriguingly personal, it contains a universal power: The spectator is not only confronted with the artist's feelings, he actually feels herself – in the sense of becoming aware of their own pain and liveliness, but also in the sense of feeling for other people.

"Looking outside of ourselves and experiencing other people and other things and trying to imagine being aside of them is what really separates us from the animals."

(Duke and Battersby, *Here is Everything*, 2012)

This key set of the video *Here is Everything*, a complex work of stunning images and important theses, which is considered as the trailer for a longer, future version, describes a human ability that is both essential and neglected in our times. Mostly tending to go through the world in a focused and self-centered way, we lose sight of our capacity to love other people, even strangers.

In a haunting way the couple pursues thoughts about fellow feeling as a means of ethical action, its groundbreaking power and the possible consequences in the case of its loss.



"We can't do anything but be alive."

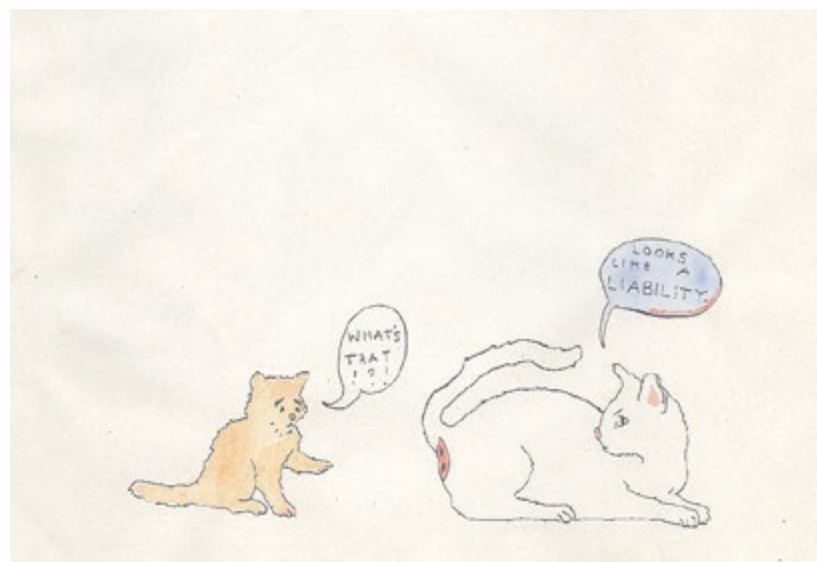
(Duke and Battersby, *Here is Everything*, 2012)

Are the artists able to make a video about everything, such as the title of the trailer indicates? Can they provide a solution for this crazy struggle called life? Do they know a means to reach cure and redemption? No, they do not – a fact that they are totally aware of and that they do not hesitate to present as an inherent part of the artistic process and life itself:

"We know we are destined to mostly fail, but we believe that by simply representing our attempt, we will in some measure reach our goal."

(Duke and Battersby, *The New Freedom Founders*, 2005)

To take creative potential from failure, incapacity, sorrow and frustration instead of excluding those seemingly abject aspects of life both constitutes and relieves pain. With this approach the artists succeed in creating repellent and moving, tender and hard images, and thus reach to the core of what it feels to be human. •





Being Ta

"I DON'T KNOW HOW ANYONE CAN DO IT ALONE"

19 QUESTIONS
WITH EMILY VEY DUKE
AND COOPER BATTERSBY
BY SKY GOODDEN

[This interview originally appeared in *BLOUIN ARTINFO Canada*]

NAME:

Emily Vey Duke + Cooper Battersby

AGE:

40 + 42

OCCUPATION:

Artists and teachers

CITY/NEIGHBORHOOD:

LaFayette, NY

CURRENT OR UPCOMING EXHIBITION OR SIMILAR:

"Emily Vey Duke + Cooper Battersby: Land/Slide Possible Futures" housed at the 25-acre, open-air Markham Museum from September 21 to October 14, 2013. We'll be installing in a period-decorated, one-room log cabin built in the 1850s. The exhibition will consist of a full-scale diorama about coercive sex and so-called slut-shaming. Five figures will play out a scene taking place both in 1850 and the present day.

What are you most proud of accomplishing, as artists?

COOPER BATTERSBY: Almost nothing. Honestly I look at what we've done and it doesn't mean anything. It is all utterly trivial. Maybe at best it could have made someone feel a sense of urgency about their own need to make work. A kind of multi-level marketing of the art world.

EMILY VEY DUKE: I really love it when I hear people laugh when they watch our videos, but really, nothing compares to moving people. Tears. There's nothing like tears. Name: Emily Vey Duke + Cooper Battersby

Describe a typical day in your life as an artist.

EMILY: On a typical day, I wake up at around 7, get up, feed the cats, have coffee in bed with Cooper. Then I read emails, read, we talk, go for a walk, grocery shop, go to yoga, work on my tenure application (I know, I know, sooooo boring). We look at our list of things to do. We garden. We go out for coffee. We record what we spent money on (we have been doing this for a year and a half! We spend a lot of money on coffee and groceries). Cooper reads the news. I play brain-training games so I can play video games without feeling lazy. We pat the cats. I worry.

COOPER: When we are being artists, we are 100% emotional roller coasters fighting, crying, dancing, hoot-hooting, and eating ravenously. That happens maybe 45 days a year, the other days are more like Emily's description.

What's the last show that you saw?

EMILY: The Venice Biennale.

COOPER: "Civilization V: Brave New World."

What's the last show that surprised you? Why?

EMILY: The Venice Biennale surprised me because it reminded me that sometimes art is just as smart and complicated and serious and fun to use as books and movies. It also reminded me that sometimes it is not just as smart and complicated and serious and fun to use as books and movies, but sadly, I didn't need to be reminded of that.

COOPER: "Da Vinci" (2012) by Yuri Ancarani was a film that made me open my eyes and ears wider than anything I've seen in years. Shot inside a living human being, with the Da Vinci robotic surgery machine. It is breathtaking and terrifying.

What is the Canadian artworld lacking?

EMILY: Teeth.

COOPER: It's lacking the same things they all are, drama and honesty.

Unfortunately the two buttresses of art – money and decency – are not particularly compatible with drama or honesty.

In what ways (if at all) do you see yourself or your practice misrepresented?

COOPER: It's not.

EMILY: I don't believe it is. I feel pretty lucky that way – that people generally seem to understand what we are trying to do. It may not be interesting to them, which is certainly OK and to be expected, but I feel like at least people with a passing familiarity with the artworld essentially know what we are trying to do.

What's your favorite place to see art?

EMILY: At big, publicly-funded free art museums, and in the movies.

COOPER: Places where I'm forced to watch a screening or performance. Someplace my mind is trapped just enough that I start to think a little more consciously.

What's the most indispensable item in your studio?

EMILY: The Internet.

COOPER: Yes, and fresh air, except we don't have a studio.

What role or significance does collaboration have to your practice?

COOPER: I don't know how anyone can do it alone.

You navigate multiple media and genres, and flit between humor and great sincerity. Is there any modality you feel most comfortable working in?

EMILY: I think those that you describe – humour and sincerity – I think either on its own is nearly insufferable, but together they can be used to tell important truths and make us feel like we share an understanding.

COOPER: The most comfortable part, the moments when I feel most in control of the actual material and my body comes into the editing; I am happiest when I can spend days just slamming stuff together as fast as I can making connections. The only other thing that feels as good is when we take a break, go for walk, and talk about all the possibilities of what we are going to do next, or what it could mean.

Do you collect anything?

COOPER: Video footage, mammal skins, and insect carapaces.

EMILY: And white ceramic cats.

What are your studio or art practice indulgences?

EMILY: We frequently buy cappuccinos.

COOPER: eBay.

What's the last artwork you purchased?

EMILY: We were lavish in our procurement of totebags in Europe.



We got two of Shary Boyle's, two from the Iraqi pavilion, and one from Yinka Shonibare's show at the Yorkshire Sculpture Garden. I also bought a little ceramic kitten on a chain there, which I love.

You reflected on a difficult moment in your artistic trajectory at a recent exhibition at Gallerywest. Can you discuss what happened, and how the work affected your experience of it?

EMILY: I think I have always reflected on difficult moments in my artwork. For me that's basically what art is for: it's the place where difficult moments are reflected. The challenge is to figure out how to do it in such a way that the reflection is a gift that makes other people feel less alone with their own difficult moments, not a dull hunk of look-at-me that doesn't look good with anything.

What's the first artwork you ever sold?

EMILY: I sold a text-work on glass at a NSCAD fundraiser before I met Cooper. I think it said something obscure and slightly goth-y.

COOPER: We made a lot of printed matter in the 90's. We sold zines and posters of various kinds. One thing I was particularly happy with was a set of stationary called "Stationary for the Year 2000."

What's the weirdest thing you ever saw happen in a museum or gallery?

EMILY: I saw someone throw carrot sticks at someone else because he wouldn't advertise her soymilk business in his zine for free.

What's your art-world pet peeve?

COOPER: Anxiety.

EMILY: Hummus.

What's your favorite post-gallery watering hole or restaurant?

EMILY: A house party.

COOPER: I wish I had one.

What under-appreciated artist, gallery, or work do you think people should know about?

EMILY: This year at the Venice Biennale there was more Chinese work than work from any other single country, and it was so exciting to develop a (very nascent) sense of the rapidly expanding scene there. What stood out to me about what I saw was its total rejection of the modernist tropes of Minimalism and Conceptualism, which I am presently really bored of. There was an embrace of virtuosity, beauty, and emotionality, all of which are complicated by the shift from practical to nominal communism, and by the ongoing role of censorship.

Who's your favorite living artist?

EMILY: I'm going to go with a few, and it's always a little bit love-the-one-you're-with for me, but here are a handful of people I am into right now: Eija-Liisa Ahtila, Shary Boyle, Tracey Emin, Grayson Perry, Dave Eggers, Jeremy Deller.

COOPER: Donigan Cumming.

What more do you hope to accomplish as an artist, before you die?

EMILY: I want to write a book.

COOPER: I'd like to make something that was described as monumental. Not going to happen though, not with this attitude. •

HERE IS EVERYTHING

[SCRIPT]



So, we're from the future. And we've been watching a lot of television and movies and experimental underground art video from your time? And it seems like you guys are pretty confused about a lot of things. Well, actually about everything. We don't mean you're confused about all the individual things. Some things you understand pretty well. And some things you are sure about, but you actually have, like, entirely wrong.

So we are sending this message from the future back to the past. It's an Art Video, because that seems like the highest form of communication for you guys. I mean, art is a big deal for you... And video is the best for actually explaining things. We tried this before with an architecture, which we got the impression was super important to you to, but you just ignored it. But anyway, here is everything.

Well, for one thing, there's the sudden sense of vertigo you feel when you realize that something you thought was enormous and incredibly important is from another perspective tiny and irrelevant. This can also happen in the reverse. This is significant, because it gives you a sense of your own scale in the order of things. That's part of everything.

Then there is addiction.

There are two people struggling to get out of their car and into their doctor's office. They arrived in a light gray Coupe Deville, not such a late model. They are there to beg the doctor for more pain meds.

Both of them are in near constant pain. Pain like muzak, scoring every second of their lives. If they medicate heavily enough to make the pain relent, they know it's in the mail for later. They try to give in to the pleasure of the drugs, but what once felt like the universe's best, most darling surprise is now a bitter pill. Can't swallow it; can't choke it up.



Both of them started honestly—he crushed his hand in machinery at work and she got shingles at fifty two. At first it was an open script for Vicodin, and when that stopped working, up to Fentanyl. It was medicine. They took it.

So every day they choose how much relief to feel. Take too much and there's not enough for later. Take too little and it's hell, fresher

by the second. Of course they're never sure what's "real" pain and what's craving, withdrawal making the blood, brain, all their tissues ask for more. They're furious with the doctor. Why did he get them started on this stuff? And why won't he give them more?



They wish they were alcoholics, pedophiles, psychopaths! Anything except those pills. Anything except trudging across this parking lot in a cage of pain, hoping that the stern, reproving doctor will give them more of what they wish they'd never had.

*This is astonishing
How tiny are the acts you do that ruin everything.
How short a time they take and how often
they occur;
This is astonishing.*

*This is astonishing.
This is astonishing.*

*How tiny are the acts you do that ruin everything.
How deeply you regret them;
how little that effects them
This is astonishing.
This is astonishing*



And then there are songs about falling from grace

*The gutter is waiting for me.
The gutter will wait for an eternity.
The gutter's a model of loyalty.
The gutter is whispering that it will make
me free.*

*The gutter awaits (it waits for me)
Your gutter awaits (my lady)
The gutter awaits.*

*Maybe the gutter's waiting for you too.
It's worthy of me, it may be worthy of you.
It's possibly holy and it's certainly true.
It's arms are open to the nobility too.*

*The gutter awaits (it waits for me)
The gutter awaits (it waits for you)
The gutter awaits (like a lake of fire)
The gutter awaits (and God will tire)*



And God. First of all, grace doesn't belong to God. Nothing belongs to God because there is no such thing as God.



It's scary to think that there is no God because that means God can't rescue you, but it's nice to know that there's not a vengeful monster in the attic waiting for you to backslide.

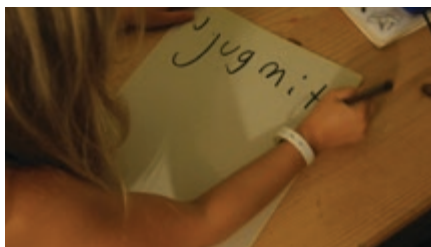
Belief in God is vestigial, like nipples on male animals. It's a leftover from an earlier phase of evolution, a trace of something that proved to be unnecessary, or even a kind of liability.

As is often the case with vestiges, the intended function of the thing evolves itself out of practical usefulness long before it loses its value as a metaphor. You can still talk about humans "sniffing around" one another, for example, even though you no longer actually smell one another's genitals in order to determine how to best relate.



So while God has outworn his practical utility, he still has value as a metaphor. Metaphors allow you to say things you wouldn't otherwise have words for. Eventually, of course, new language will evolve to untangle the hornet's nest of goodness, wisdom, judgement, forgiveness, wrath and grace that we currently call "God." Until then, it's part of your job as social animals to use the metaphor, to parse it out, to help the language to evolve

But back to grace. Even without a God, there is such a thing as grace. It's part of your job to do the things that you can do gracefully. For example, if you're a graceful drawer – the kind who can capture a likeness or make a nice sweeping line across the page – you ought to do it. If you can listen or fold the laundry gracefully, you ought to do it. It feels good for you, and other people love to see it.



There are always horrors, which you claim to be repelled by, despite undeniable evidence to the contrary. This evidence is cinematic, literary and especially comes in the form of the hour-long crime drama.

And there's change: reversals of fortune, just and unjust.

And a bit of special information about everything for young women. It's possible that you will never

stop feeling cute or precocious, but painfully, others will stop seeing you that way. It's worth looking into other ways of getting what you need.



And there is vastness. It's important for you to have frequent experiences of vastness. Go somewhere with an ocean, or a big horizon. If you can't go there, be inside steam or fog.

And there's the poor from all of history and today, who are so vulnerable to violence and parasites and plagues.



And there are parasites themselves, who are in their way lovable. Tapeworms, for example. Maligned, beleaguered tapeworms. Flat and marked out into segments, like a measuring tape. You are so humble, unambitious, tapeworm. You live your whole adult life in the guts of your host, releasing parts of your very tissue, like Jesus, like a mom.

Parts drop off you and ride out of your host's assholes, still animate, maybe cognizant - who knows?

Then your little animate segments dry up and fall off into clothes or bedding. Fleas eat these little rice-shaped kernels, and then new hosts eat the fleas. All you charge your hosts is room and board. For this, you will perform your astonishing magic trick.



And guilt. Whoever decided that guilt is a useless emotion couldn't have been more wrong. Guilt is the hot in the fire. It's part of your internal warning system. Guilt is valorous. It's just good sense.

And shame. Shame is to be avoided. Unlike guilt shame has no clear solution. Once you have it, it's a part of you, no matter what your therapist might promise. Act on your guilt. Otherwise, it will transform into shame.



And about death: we strongly suggest that you hold something as it dies. A warm-blooded vertebrate is best, but if you can't find one, watch something else die. Watch a spider kill something in its web. Then you see - trauma is the problem, not death itself. It's the fight that's terrible, the suffering from injuries or disease, the unstaunchable wound.

It's a mistake to think death is the enemy. Death itself is exactly nothing. It's not a relief, it's not a sweet reward. But it's not a thing to fight. Fight suffering.



When you hold a dying animal, your heart will break. If the animal gasps or judders, your heart will gasp and judder too. It may be a torment, but do it anyway. You need to see: death ends suffering. Death is okay.



Well, that's all we've got for now. You might notice that it's not exactly everybody's everything. But I think we got some of the important bits. It's actually kind of hard to get everything onto just one videotape. We might have to show you some more things later. But anyway, we hope this one had some of your everything, too. Thanks. Bye-bye! ●

HERE IS
EVERYTHING

ARTIST BIOS

DANI

At once tender and savage, **Dani Leventhal's** video diaries capture the banal and the horrific to reveal the transcendent beauty and pain of daily life. Leventhal was born in Columbus, Ohio in 1972. She lives and works in Brooklyn, NY. Leventhal studied sculpture at the University of Illinois at Chicago, and received an MFA in Film/Video from Bard College. She received the Visual Arts Award from the Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice and produced a limited edition book and video, *Skim Milk and Soft Wax* at the Women's Studio Workshop with the support of the National Endowment for the Arts and the Andy Warhol Foundation. In 2011, she received the Wexner Center for the Arts Capital R Award.

Dani Leventhal's videos are distributed through the Video Data Bank, Chicago and Vtape, Toronto. She was recently in residence at the Wexner Center. She has screened her work at New York Film Festival, PS1 Greater New York Cinema, Oberhausen, Rotterdam, The Gene Siskel Film Center, CineCycle and Anthology Film Archives.

MIKE

Mike Hoolboom is a Canadian artist working in film and video. He has made more than 50 movies, but most have been reworked, re-versioned, and finally withdrawn. Just over a dozen remain in public view. He is the author of ten non-fiction books (including a pair of interview books with Canadian media artists), and one novel: *The Steve Machine* (2008). He has edited/co-edited four books on media artists, as well as editing magazines, catalogues and the Fringe Online website (www.fringeonline.ca). He is a founding member of the Pleasure Dome screening collective, and has worked as the artistic director of the Images Festival and the experimental film coordinator at Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre. His films and videos have won more than thirty international prizes, two lifetime achievement awards and he has enjoyed twelve international retrospectives of his work, most recently in Vancouver, Buenos Aires and Poland. He is the winner of the Bell Award for Video Art (2009) and the Tom Berner Award for community service. More information can be found at his extensive website: www.mikehoolboom.com

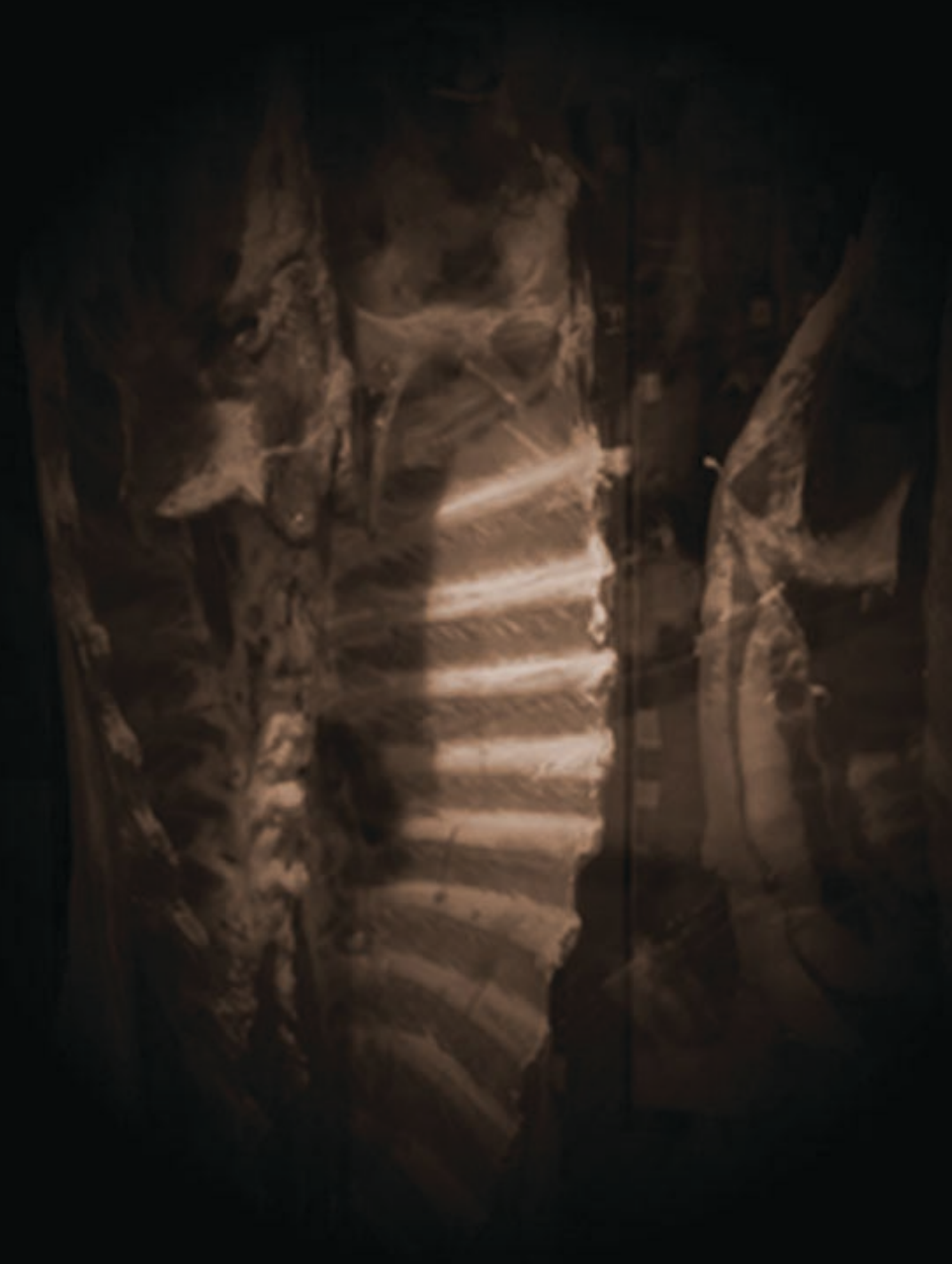
EMILY + COOPER

Cooper Battersby (b. 1971, Penticton BC) and **Emily Vey Duke** (b. 1972, Halifax NS) have been working collaboratively since 1994. They work in printed matter, critical writing, and curation, but their focus is sculptural video installation. They were shortlisted for the 2010 Sobey Art Award, Canada's most prestigious award for artists under 40.

They have enjoyed fifteen solo gallery exhibitions and five international retrospectives, and in 2011 were spotlight artists at the International Film Festival Rotterdam and the Ann Arbor Film Festival. Their video work has won the top prize at festivals in Ann Arbor and Chicago, as well as receiving awards in New York, Zurich and Hamburg. They have been broadcast by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and Bravo. Their work has been collected by more than a dozen university libraries, including Harvard and Princeton.

Duke and Battersby each received Master degrees in Fine Art at the University of Illinois at Chicago and are currently teaching at Syracuse University. They divide their time between Lafayette, NY and Beach Meadows, NS.













**IN WHICH
WE DID OUR BEST**

