Towards Infinite Light
An Interview with Isiah Medina

by Clint Enns

"Cinephiles are often more peremptory about the films they *think* are of the highest importance than mathematicians concerning theorems that they *know* have been demonstrated."[1]

Isiah Medina is a moving image artist from Winnipeg, Manitoba, whose movies poetically address the politics of everyday life. Medina defines his place within a *Godardian* tradition by engaging politically with mediated images and communication. His diaristic movies document his relationships with friends and family and address issues of violence, love, camaraderie, and play. At the same time, they explore the relationship between class, poetry, philosophy, and cinema while expanding cinematic form and its connection to thought. Medina also engages in a radical new form of re-mix through the continual re-editing of his own previously shot material and through the creation of subtle audio collages that effectively blend diegetic sound with poetry, rap, and classical music. His first significant work *Semi-Auto Colours*, 2010, critically is a technical and artistic achievement; he is currently finishing a feature film titled *88:88*.

This interview was compiled from conversations that took place on Facebook chat during the summer of 2014.

Clint Enns: How did you begin making films?
Isiah Medina: In 5th grade I read Dante's *Divine Comedy* with my friend Erik Berg. It was the first time I encountered form—the ababcbcdcded rhyming schema, 11 syllables per line, 33 cantos per division—that allowed thought to be transmitted eternally, a form that created eternity. That Virgil cannot go to purgatory or paradise because he was not alive when Christianity was created was always beautiful to me; the idea that creation invents new places, and that creation, even if you deny it, changes your relation to the world. I wanted to write poems, but chose to make movies. Later that year, I got my first camera as a gift and from that point forward made movies with friends, editing in-camera or with a VCR and PlayStation 2. Later, I began to edit digitally.

Right and following page: Isiah Medina, still from *88:88*, in production.

Philosophy and poetry, and their relationship to cinema, play a significant role in your work. How do you utilize theory in your practice?

If movies can show life, it is not a question of showing what is true-to-life, but what is a life of the True. Within a True life there is a non-dialectical unity of theory and practice. Philosophy and movies are the same thing twice. Philosophy is a great friend of the movies, someone to think with, since it is essentially the same repetitive act, as Althusser would say, the creative repetition of the same act. A cut appears the same, and the difference of the same is what makes it identical to itself.

You often re-use shots from older movies in your newer ones. Is this part of the process of creative repetition?

It is a question of iteration and contradiction, iteration of the philosophical act to present truth. There are truths here and now, and there are contradictions within the different truths themselves. I repeat shots to re-explore choice, to renew the form of iteration to think through the contradictions in what is lived. To repeat a shot, is to repeat a moment in life and to re-assert the cut. What is shown exists because there was a decisive cut which splits the image from itself. If every world is infinite, we have something like the axiom of choice that allows us to capture a fragment of eternity. These fragments only exist in regards to another world. For instance, a new truth that happens in life can change how we see an old image. To re-use an older shot, helps us to see what is truly new and allows us to create a new form of choice. Perhaps we can say in life it is a contradiction between iteration and contradiction, but in cinema, it is an iteration of iteration and contradiction.

Given your recent programming of Lav Diaz's *Ebolusyon ng isang pamilyang Pilipino (Evolution of a Filipino Family*, 2004) and Raya Martin's *Buenas noches, España*, 2011, at Plug In ICA, I am curious about your interest in Filipino cinema. Do you feel your work has been influenced by the new wave of cinema from the Philippines? In particular, filmmakers like Lav Diaz, Shireen Seno, John Torres, Raya Martin, etc.

Formally *Evolution* is incredible; the movie raises questions about the frame, the cut, political saturation, incorporation of found footage, etc. It was liberating to see only one frame of saturated colour in an 11-hour black and white movie. I think your question is missing something essential, that is, that true identification takes place through the invention of new forms, and it is not simply a linguistic or racial identification. I was excited that there were new forms in *Evolution* that I hadn't seen in Godard or in other European art house cinema. It was not in pure opposition to it, but like a new form of the cut it changes our non-relation to cinema that came before it. This reminds me of a famous anecdote about a visitor at the Institut des Hautes Études Scientifiques. When the visitor questioned Alexander Grothendieck, a predominant mathematician at the centre, about the poverty of the library; Grothendieck responded, "We don't read mathematics, here; we make mathematics." Similarly, I think this is true of cinema ... I think a great movie is at once a new negation of cinephilia and a new affirmation of cinema.

**Who are the people in your movies?**
My love, my crew, my comrades, my friends, and my family.

You seem to shoot on every format imaginable: 16mm, iPhone, screen capture, digital SLR, etc. How do you choose the mediums that you work with? Is it out of necessity or aesthetic?
Choosing mediums is a way to think through the medium of choice. If I work with film, there is a question of *chemism* along with mechanism, so we have internal and external immanence. If I work with digital, there are zeroes and ones. What is then achieved through cutting from chemistry to mathematics: How is the cut itself cut?

Top images: Still from *Time in the Sun*, 2012; **Bottom images:** *Semi-Auto Colours*, 2010.
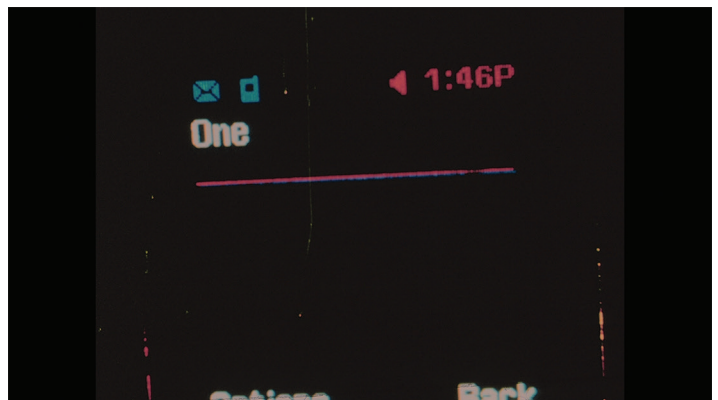
How does the form of our choices change? The movement from medium to medium is simply a chance to secure the very form of choice itself. Movies are materialist because they are a materialization of thought—the Idea—through the immateriality of the cut. Cantor describes infinity not only as endless repetition but also as the interruption of repetition via the cut and since there are infinite sizes of infinity, it is worth attempting to develop new forms of cuts.

It seems that class isn't being addressed in contemporary experimental cinema. Can you talk about the role of class in your movies?
This is a huge question. When I make movies it is not always altogether clear that what I am living through nor what movies even are. In the end, as Frank Ruda observes, in civil society poverty exists and there is always the latent possibility of being poor. Retroactively, we all will have been rabble. My money often disappears into banks or collection agencies, but I can recollect my agency via the cut. They can cut my electricity, but I will find a way to cut my own movies. I like what Pedro Costa said about writing love letters on the back of a cheque, "your work is to continue trying to write love letters, and not cheques. Sometimes people don't notice your work, of course. Well, we resist and we keep going to the bank to write love letters."

Are the guns real in *Semi-Auto Colours*, 2010? Is the convenience store robbery a reconstruction/re-enactment?
I would simply like to say that we live and do things and if we see something worth repeating, I will capture it. All the events in the frame have happened. It's all true. After *Time is the sun*, 2012, there is no fiction at all. Only the internal consistency matters.

Guns exist. It is easy to say no guns in movies, but there are

police in real life. Violence is always complicated. There is no necessity of guns since systemic violence can exist without guns. There are prisons and other forms of systemic violence—let's just say I have never seen a fake gun.

Can you speak about your newest work, *88:88*?
88:88 (or --:--) appears if you cannot afford to pay your bills, demonstrating that people who live in poverty live in suspended time. For this movie, I am mostly shooting with my comrade and cinematographer Nic Kriellaars' RED camera, so there are forced utopias in class contradictions. For instance, there are moments when we are using this camera in a home without electricity or water. To think through the suspension, we must reproduce what suspends our own process. Through cinema we work through these ideas and contradictions together—we suspend the suspension. Ideas cut across class—they suspend class distinctions. Dante showed us a poetic paradise with Beatrice among the planets. Hilbert said we

would never be banished from the paradise Cantor has created for us with the transfinite. Cantor would claim there are infinite paradises, infinitely new forms of the cut (the mark of infinity, the end of repetition), in the finite images of our world. Working on *88:88* has been paradise. Through it, I am hoping to show what we lived.

Clint Enns is a video artist and filmmaker living in Toronto, Ontario. His work primarily deals with moving images created with broken and/or outdated technologies, and has shown both nationally and internationally at festivals, alternative spaces and micocinemas. His writings and interviews have appeared in Millennium Film Journal*, and in* Incite! Journal of Experimental Media *and* Spectacular Optical.

Notes:
1. Quentin Meillassoux (translated by Alyosha Edlebi) from "Decision and Undecidability of the Event in Being and Event I and II" (Parrhesia Journal, Australia, Number 19, 2014.)
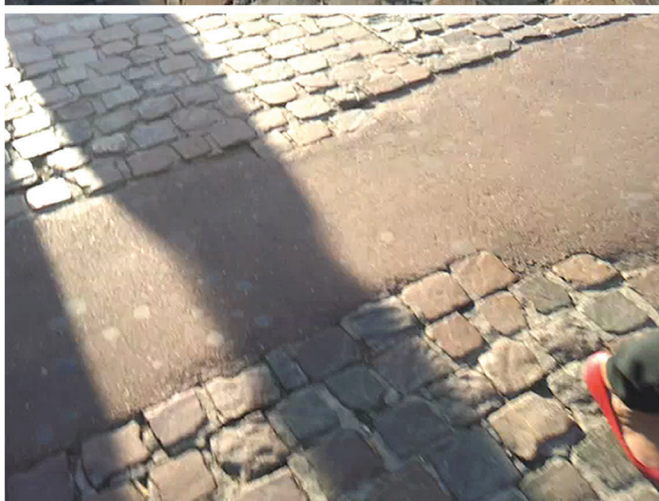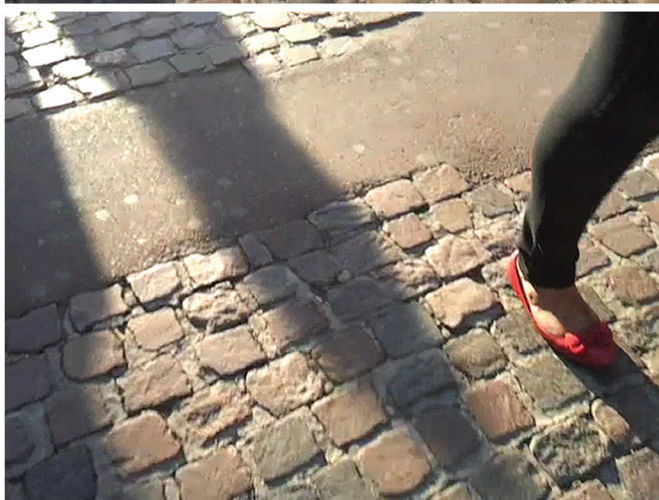
All images: Ellen Moffat, *she i her*, 2012-2104. All images courtesy the artist. **Right:** Composite video stills, 2012-2014.