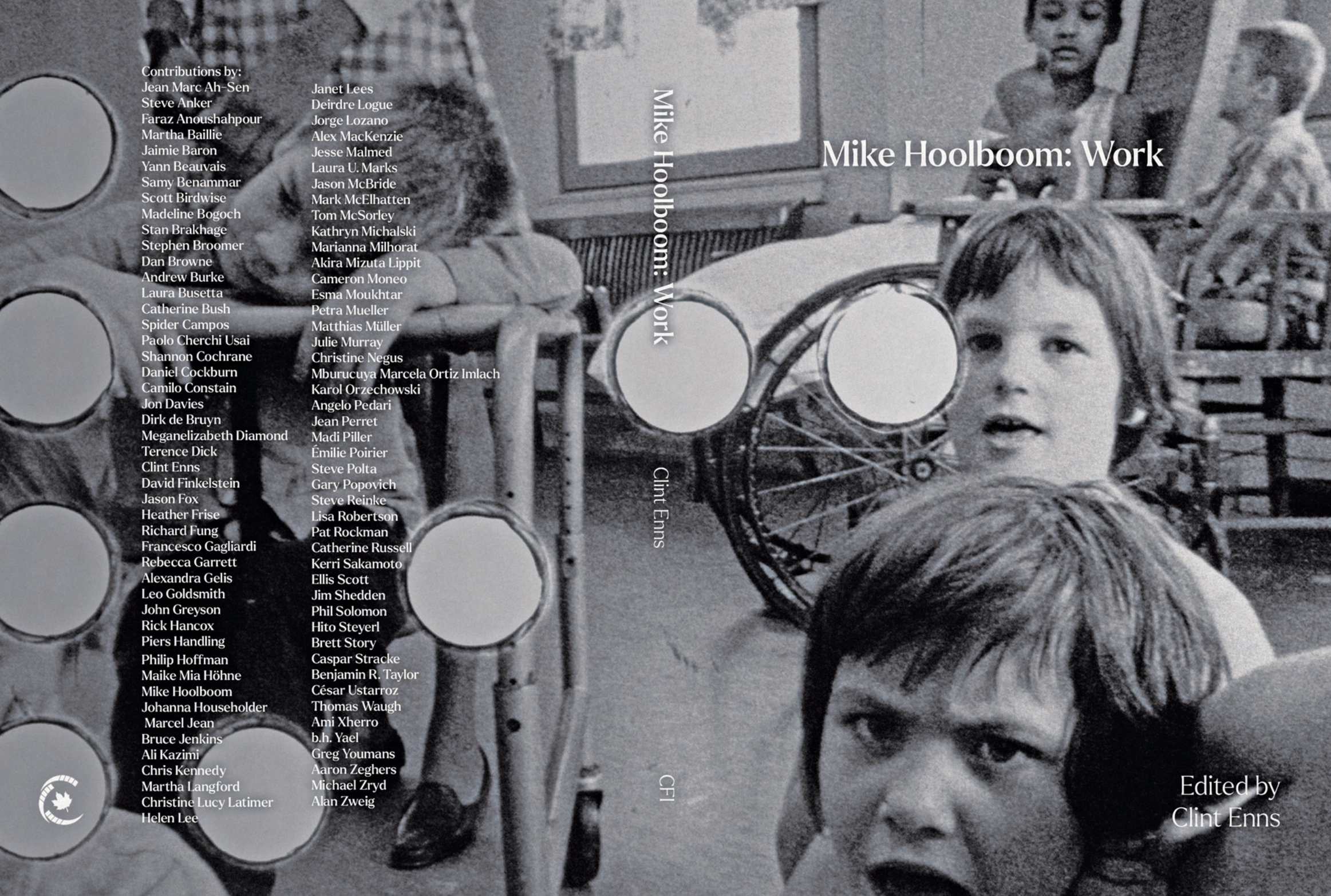

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Mike Hoolboom: Work

Clint Enns

CFI

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Edited by
Clint Enns

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Mike Hoolboom: Work

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INTRODUCTION

Clint Enns

Mike Hoolboom works in the tradition of the untraditional, at the fringes of the movie factory which have slowly turned from DIY gatherings of outsiders and weirdos into a cottage industry. The movies that Hoolboom makes are no-budget resistances, both to their big-budget counterparts and the ideologies they embody. Given that Hoolboom has been producing moving images for over four decades, it shouldn't be surprising that his impetus for making this type of work has mutated over time. While the subject matter has changed, the spirit of rebellion remains, and the anger and passion that once fuelled his work has been fine-tuned and transformed into a more sophisticated form of political critique.

Hoolboom is a post-Zen Marxist inspired by the writings of Silvia Federici, Mark Fisher, Hito Steyerl, Byung-Chul Han, Christina Sharpe, Naomi Klein, and Paul B. Preciado, among others. He is an avid reader and spends too much time watching and writing about movies. He believes in the commons, that once words and images have entered the public realm they become fair to use and transform. In addition to fair use, he harbours ideals of fairness and believes in volunteer community efforts that celebrate and document local cultures. His artworks are ways to think through and visualize ideas.

He was born in Ontario and in the 80s went to Sheridan College, where he became a member of the Escarpment School, a group of filmmakers who studied under Rick Hancox and Jeffrey Paull and whose members include Carl Brown, Philip Hoffman, Richard Kerr, Gary Popovich, Steve Sanguedolce, Janis Cole, Holly Dale, Marian McMahon, Mike Cartmell, Lorne Marin, and Alan Zweig. Hoolboom was a member of the Funnel, a radical artist-run centre that focused on experimental filmmaking, and in 2017 he released a book about the organization titled *Underground: The Untold Story of the Funnel Film Collective*. He is one of the founding members of Pleasure Dome and has worked for both the CFMDC and Images Festival.

Hoolboom's earliest films are formal experiments, attempts to unpack the language of filmmaking and the mechanics of meaning making. They were aimed at complicating the one-way mode of communication presented by corporate media, calling into question notions of passive spectatorship, asking who owns and controls dominant image culture. In 1988, Hoolboom was diagnosed with HIV, marking a shift in focus in his work to themes of sex, death, and living with HIV. The work became more personal and intimate while still maintaining a defiant punk attitude. By the 2000s, Hoolboom had begun to make cinematic portraits of friends, including a biopic of underground filmmaker Tom Chomont and a documentary about animal activist, filmmaker, and collaborator Mark Karbusicky.

His later works are centred around injustices that stem from hypercapitalism, including racial injustice, class inequities, colonial violence, and global imperialism. He has continued to make filmic portraits along with several films about living through the AIDS pandemic into the era of the cocktail. His works continue to deal with viruses, but his conception of the virus has expanded: Capitalism, racism, and imperialism all act as viruses infecting (and affecting) both bodies and minds, with some people more susceptible than others. His portraits have stretched traditional documentary practices and inhabit a more philosophical and poetic space. The work remains infused with a layer of affect borrowed from his stolen images and densely constructed sound designs.

Over the years, Hoolboom has produced many movies—perhaps too many for any one person to track down and watch. Moreover, the films are in an ongoing state of transition, often subject to radical revisions and retouches by the filmmaker. Hoolboom is always grappling with new ideas, thinking through images, creating visuals to carry emotions that are too difficult or complicated to resolve in a single viewing. In this anthology, I have attempted to compile a complete filmography by combing through ancient distribution catalogues and including movies that have been withdrawn and are no longer available, although the elements for some of these early works are available from the archives at the Cinémathèque québécoise. While the sheer mass of this filmography is a testament to Hoolboom's commitment to his practice, it exists in this form purely as a reference. I provide a more practical guide for navigating Hoolboom's work in the form of a curated selection titled "Essential Movies."

In 1998, YYZ released *Plague Years*, an edited collection of Hoolboom's scripts, essays, and stories. Since that time, he has edited more than thirty books with writings dedicated to the works of fellow fringe filmmakers, including Jorge Lozano, Alexandra Gelis, Steve Reinke, Frank Cole, Deirdre Logue, Emily Vey Duke and Cooper Battersby, Al Razutis, David Rimmer, Dani (Leventhal) ReStack, Mike Cartmell, Ellie Epp, Madi Piller, Christine Lucy Latimer, Rebecca Garrett, Phillip Barker, b.h. Yael, and Birgit Hein. He has also produced two books of interviews with Canadian filmmakers, *Inside the Pleasure Dome* and *Practical Dreamers*; a novel, *The Steve Machine*; and a work of autotheory, *You Only Live Twice* (cowritten with Chase Joynt).

This is the first monograph of writings dedicated to Hoolboom's work. It contains a diverse range of texts and essays from scholars, activists, artists, writers, and friends. In the spirit of inclusion, we wanted to showcase as many different voices as possible. The book is constructed around writing that is short and concise. As such, none of the essays are all-encompassing, nor do they act as the final, definitive word. Instead, the book offers an accumulation of glances where details are offered in place of the big picture. If one connects the dots and squints just a little, it is possible to make out a lived practice that is as socially and politically engaged as it is enraged at the wide variety of injustices that the world has to offer.

VETERANS (2024)

Jean Perret

The *souvenir* of memory is the time of stories, and most of us are living in a social, daily time, amidst films which tell logical stories. These films replay the industrial time of their creation, of the rest of our lives, in their logical, ordered stories. Time is always organized in the same way.

But the *mémoire* is another way of experiencing time, and this is important, as a personal and political gesture. Mike, in your films you create texts which dis-organize the use of time. You use fragments of other films, displacing the original times of these stories to pose another time; in your films you have not only one time but many. This cluster of time is a way to deal with memory, this dis-organization of social time is a poetic and social responsibility for filmmakers. Industrial time disconnects us from memory, kills our fantasies; our social time reduces the complexities and beauty of the world to a couple of stories we are made to listen to all our lives.

On the first level, the *souvenir* narrates well-rehearsed and well-known organized events of the past. It is a story of the past with censorship, arranged in a structure you make possible. In this story you remain in a good light; you may suffer as a victim, but only to provoke compassion. In the m*émoire*, on the other hand, there is no censorship. The first basic voice of memory is a voice without censorship.

Sometimes it's possible to feel, as a spectator, that the filmmaker is dealing with a confused body of images (typically in work by new filmmakers), trying to tell stories in order to be connected with his/her *mémoire*. A film can arouse out of your memory some moments which can be activated. Memory is a dead body, a sleeping body, of many fragments related to your life. Sometimes a film, or a sequence, or just a shot, is able to awaken some part of this sleeping *mémoire*.

The *mémoire* is also a way to live with dead people, working around you and in yourself. You're not supposed to think every day, in an organized way, of people who died, but you have them in your *mémoire*. Sometimes a sentence fragment can come up in your mind from someone you knew, and that fragment makes life possible, though often you don't know you even have these fragments. This gives time depth. *Mémoire* is a deep time. The *souvenir* is not so deep, it's more like a postcard.

CLOSER (2024)

Mike Hoolboom

We circled each other more than four decades before saying hello. Suffocating social anxieties shot me out the doors of fringe screening rooms before strangers might announce themselves. Bringing the overwhelming presence of the secrets that lay written across their bodies.

Jorge Lozano was alone when I met him. And while his apartment is forever opening to a steady pour of friends and the unexpected bounty of grandchildren who live just next door, he always looks alone to me. He is warmer than warm, quick to embrace, drawing many inside his handsome and magnetic charm. But there is a dotted forcefield around him that a pair of scissors follows in order to cut him out of the picture. His most reliable companion is death. The two walk patiently and steadily alongside each other, and when one hesitates or stumbles the other is sure to wait until they can walk again side by side.

For me, in order to make a life, it was necessary to make a film. Does he feel the same way? He's better socially adjusted than I am, no question. I mean: He has a life, while I have a filmography. But he has made more than 150 movies. When I was working on a book about him I dug up an ancient video distribution catalogue listing half a dozen titles I had never heard of. When I showed this to him he said no, those are not his. But it turned out they were. Who can keep track? And what's another half dozen when you've made so many?

We share something in our prolific makings, though it's hard to name. And in this psychoanalytic era (its focus on the individual has proven invaluable to the neoliberal project), it's tough to dodge the question: Why so much production? Besides the spectre of impatience.

Did we feel trapped by our families? Our own thoughts? Film was a way to engage with the world while withdrawing from it, and then returning to it. We were building a door that required whopping amounts of solitude to enter and exit because it needed to be built anew each time.

Jorge edits quickly, without looking back, in a kind of fever. He doesn't want to let his thinking get in the way of his thinking. He wants to abandon his preferences, his likes and dislikes. He needs to find escape velocity, to become part of a flow of pictures that unravels fragments of the known world, only to turn them into the unknown world. Is he cutting the movie or is the movie cutting him?

Most of his work will never be shown in public; once it's finished, he abandons the scene and leaves it behind. He has decided not to turn himself into a bureaucrat, and that sets him apart.

His phone message says, "Don't leave a message, I won't check it." His email responses are never more than a sentence, if they arrive at all. He does virtually nothing to promote his work. When someone happens to discover his endless bouquet of makings, he revisits them as if they belonged to someone else.

There is no artist more important to me than Jorge. His work has been defining, revelatory, challenging on every level. Since our first meeting, he has been my deepest influence, not least because he lives downstairs. How many times have we have sat together to watch a work in progress—his or mine—and then talked at great length, sometimes for hours, about what we had just seen? Or what we had failed to see. In these twilight years, the pains of racism and his immigrant wounds—which deepened understandings about my mother—and his warming philosophical presence have been spur and inspiration. Without his love I would have checked out of the box years ago.

CLOSER (2024)

Alexandra Gelis and Jorge Lozano

Jorge Lozano: Seeing all these photographs and moving images of myself I wonder: Who is that person? This film is about the connection of parts and fragments. It's like going into a tunnel of myself when I am not myself but multiple selves. [*laughs*] In terms of imagery it's an explosion of possibilities, namings, and techniques. I feel closest to the conversation about being an immigrant—how immigrant production happens and why it is political.

Many thoughts are incomplete. I'm left with the desire to expand them, to clarify why we are all racists. It's an interesting discussion we all need to have. If people who judged me because of my appearance saw this film they would see that I am a complex person. There are many times when I have been denied, misinterpreted, attacked, or rendered invisible. You are a witness to that in the art communities here in Toronto.

When we talk about racism maybe we should talk about whiteness as a policy of colonial domination and capitalism. That's what whiteness is. The problem we have here in Canada is that it's sometimes necessary to defend our identity, to say we exist . . . but at some point we need to go beyond identity into a politics of care, vulnerability, and somatic relations. That's what people without power can do to create solidarities.

Alexandra Gelis: The film is a poetic journey where we meet a complexity that is somehow one person who keeps transforming through migration, who transforms spaces and is transformed by them.

JL: That's why in *Thoughts from Below* (2019), I talk about bombing in Syria. Because I can feel it. I come from a country where people have been bombed. My family was displaced. Being in touch creates a solidarity of care.

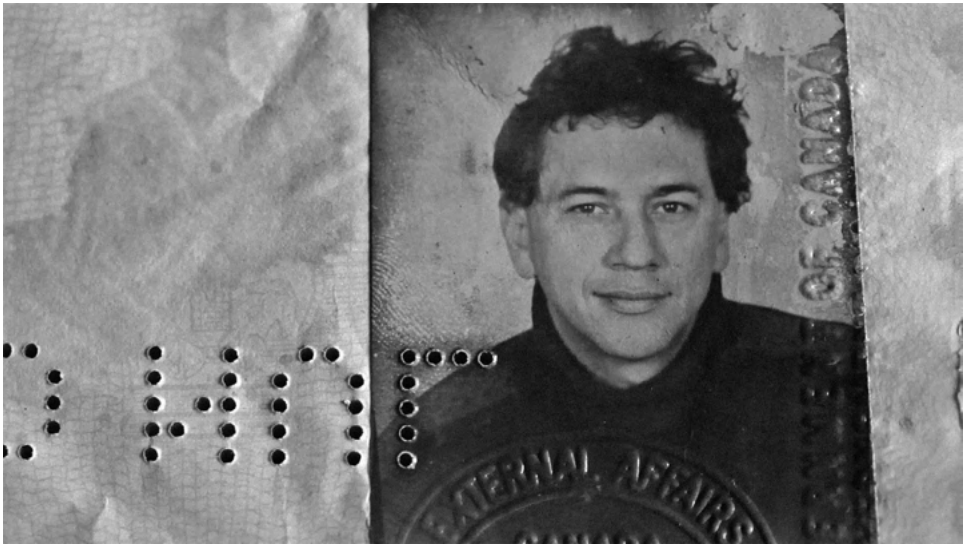
AG: You start with a photo of little Jorge as a child with that strong gaze. Where are we going to go? This is a portrait of a person fighting for a voice, identity, and space for the past forty years as an immigrant in Canada. You see he's aligned with the queer community, workers, artists, and close to the drug-war politics in South America. He fights by putting together films in a prolific and ongoing conversion of experience into poetic forms.

JL: Making film is a kind of architecture, especially experimental films because they're inhabited by our voices. It's not like fiction. Fiction cannot live without stereotypes. The characters are all parts of a type—good or bad. Experimental films don't represent stereotypes or incomplete personas

but personal processes. The history of experimentalities is an exploration of selves. Experimental films are queer, they are trans-forming, trans-formational. They are about desiring, making, and living differently. And now at last we have digital platforms that invite nonbinary practices and understandings as a modality, as a container. Though not many use them that way.

AG: Digital tech, even AI, invites malleability and transformation without destruction.

JL: It's not about creating fixed identities but incomplete becomings. Life is experimental.



ANDRÉ (2023)

Shannon Cochrane

Recently, I lamented to Mike that I'm not in his movies, as so many of his friends are. He reminded me that I am in *André*. I appear very briefly, as the shadow of my friend. I walk into the mall and take a picture of myself in a photo booth holding peacock feathers up to my eyes. I am conjuring a photo André took of himself. I look impossibly young. I am the image of an image.

When André came to Toronto in 2006, his plan was to make ten "little" performances based on the Ten Commandments. In the end, he had to make one extra performance because the flyer he printed for himself had the wrong dates on it. We realized this in the car on the way from the airport. We laughed a lot at that. By the time we got out of the car André already had an idea for his eleventh performance. He called it a "commercial break." At lunch hour André went to the corner of Yonge and Dundas, attached a bouquet of flowers to a long bamboo pole and held it up under the noses of the larger-than-life billboard ladies. That was André. His art was about generosity. Ordinary things made exceptional. He was always standing on a corner, offering something, holding out his hand for friends, friends of friends, and strangers to come sit by the fire. Look at this object, accept a flower, listen to an idea.

Imagine a theatre with a screen big enough to show all of Mike's movies at the same time. Seated in this theatre are all the people who have appeared in Mike's movies. You and André are there. I am too. So are all the faces that have passed in front of his camera and voices that have recited Mike's words. All of the friends, the friends of friends, strangers from the world (wide web), and all of the dead people—the ones no one knew, the ones some people knew, and the ones that Mike knew—which is to say, all of us.

ASK THE ANIMALS (2023)

Catherine Bush

I watched *Ask the Animals*; it is very seductive. I love the long takes and the way the world is almost humanless. In fact, I felt that one of the shaping elements was that this is a world without humans, although we are aware of them through their cars, the windshields, the presence of cameras filming; one can construct the humans as a present absence. There's even the fantastic sequence of the orangutan driving the cart, which was so uncanny—can an orangutan actually drive? But they are driving, navigating, look at their hands turning the wheel, they have replaced the humans—until there's the moment when humans do appear at the watering pool, with cameras, watching the elephants; and then I felt shocked at the sight; maybe that's how you wanted me to feel? You must have been conscious of their exclusion until that moment. The whole film has a poetic, associative movement. Something patterning or kinetic will link one sequence to the next, almost like visual rhyme. Is the soundtrack derived from actual ambient sound connected with the images and altered, or is it added to them or created separately? I kept wondering; I wondered as we listened to the lions drinking at the watering hole. Because there was no music and no human voiceover I was asked to listen—this is what the animals seemed to be asking, and to watch them like this made them wondrous and autonomous, strange in their multitude of forms, a planet full of such extraordinary creatures. Who wouldn't feel the wondrousness of this?

The film asked me to slow down, attend. Slow cinema. This in itself was very pleasurable.

WITCHES AND THE ORIGINS OF CAPITALISM (2023)

Laura U. Marks

The feeling is an ache, a deep, dull pain that grows sharper the more I allow it to. A feeling of all that has been lost and wasted. Women's lives, freedom, and intelligence. A just society that once existed: the commons, where for a precious century the poor lived independently of rulers and aligned their powers with each other's and with the powers of nature.

Witches and the Origins of Capitalism is a two-hour epic, based on Silvia Federici's *Caliban and the Witch*, that spans from feudal to eighteenth-century Europe, about the struggles of the poor for self-determination against the powers of landowners, the church, and the state. The narrative is woven from fiction films set in the period; documentation of historical reenactments, tourists visible in the background; computer games with medieval settings; an eagle-cam; paintings and maps. Many have a fetishistically satisfying attention to the worked materials of cloth and metal. Hoolboom denatures some of them, solarizing them, playing them backward. Other images erupt into this historical narrative, beautiful, sensuous, and troubling, from high-speed, fleeting clouds to close-ups of insects to human bodies and faces, heartbreaking in their grave presence. This diversity of footage is unified by virtuosic editing and by Hoolboom's voiceover: controlled, the timbre warm, an edge of tension inflecting the neutral tone.

He intercuts the historical narrative with flashes of strange beauty, like glimmers from the other world that could have been. An almost unwatchable sequence of the filth and horrors of the Black Death is made even harsher by sounds of scraping, hissing, clacking of metal. A soothing, compassionate sequence follows, with cool sounds like a healing poultice: Smooth-skinned young people appear in luminous close-up; a hand bathed in fuchsia light releases a moth. A moth rests on the beautiful but dead-looking face of a young woman, as though mourning across time for the plague dead, whose few survivors did not have time to grieve.

Through this method the film makes rents in the fabric of recorded history, so that some imaginable other life can seep through. For example, near the beginning of the film the narrator relates that the church began centuries of war against women, even though most congregants were women. The images do not quite illustrate. Liturgic music sung in sweet, high voices (I recognize Thomas Tallis's "Miserere nostri") plays over the ruins of a church; light passes through stained glass; film clips show a Black priest receiving confession, then a young Black woman, first in nun's habit, then lying on her side, her face troubled, as the crystalline singing continues. This choice of footage both decolonizes the Catholic church and breathes doubt, in the form of habeas corpus, into the sanctified disembodiment of Christianity.

Some other life can seep through. Yet this seepage works in two directions. Near the film's conclusion, we have learned how effectively the church and its allies subjugated rebellious women, whose crimes included leading peasant revolts and teaching birth control. They successfully destroyed class solidarity with the gendered weapon of the witch hunt. Hundreds of thousands of women were tortured and burned as witches. Hoolboom states Federici's skewering thesis: "Women's bodies became the new commons that anyone could use at will." I knew about this historical movement of femicide, of course, but my mind is still reeling at the witch hunt's magnitude *and* the intimate level at which it played out, an intimacy that Hoolboom's montage and sound bring terribly close to home. It is then that the voiceover maps three hundred years of deliberate sexual torture onto images of contemporary women's bedrooms. Light moves through these quiet, protective spaces, yet it feels like a pause in a horror film. The effect is that past danger stretches forward: In later centuries, and even today, nobody is safe from the institutions of power. Causality smears backward. *Witches and the Origins of Capitalism* shows all too well how the institutions of religion, landholding, and later capital adapt to enclose resistance.

And yet the beauty and strangeness of the contemporary images suggest a vitality that cannot be extinguished. The film begins with exploding flares on the surface of the sun. Images of the cosmos abound—massive, speeding clouds; delicate-winged insects in a rushing stream—giving a sense that the poor, and particularly women, are aligned with the forces of nature. Not that women are more "natural" than men; not at all. Rather, that having a body and being unprotected by laws requires you to create allies elsewhere, with the land, the weather, and the fruits of the land: the common possessions that enriched the poor in the golden age of their powers, from 1350 to 1450. The Heretics movement, which Hoolboom boldly dates from 1270 to the present, didn't believe in land ownership or the sale of labour and, in Bohemia, shared wealth and property equally. The film introduces the Heretics with a close-up shot of fleshy skin abundant with pink polyps or pustules, an image that ought to feel repugnant—and then a hand palpates the skin, a hand whose nails are painted with multicoloured sparkles. A feeling for life as defiant pleasure, we can imagine, undergirds the Heretics' refusal to obey laws that would govern and subsume life.

That inextinguishable life force whose signs erupt throughout the film stretches from the cosmic to the human, bypassing the institutions of death. But I don't know if it is strong enough to overpower them.

DISCO (2023)

Richard Fung

Young, mostly white men with muscles and moustaches gyrate beneath glittering disco balls. A grinning Black woman in a halter top glides across the screen. The Donna Summer or Village People song they're likely dancing to is swapped for a mellow saxophone warbling the 1939 classic "Stairway to the Stars." Through the crack between image and soundtrack seeps a bitter knowledge that curdles euphoria into gloom. Unforeseen by these innocents, the AIDS pandemic lurks.

The single credit in *Disco* is the line "Based on a blog by Kpunk [sic]." k-punk, a.k.a. Mark Fisher, was a philosopher, theorist, Goldsmiths professor, and author of such titles as *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (2009) and *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures* (2014). Fisher killed himself in 2017.

Disco synthesizes the 70s, paraphrasing passages from *k-punk: The Collected and Unpublished Writings of Mark Fisher (2004–2016)*, issued the year after Fisher's death. Delivered with the filmmaker's distinctive phrasing, aphoristic quotations tackle capitalism, or more precisely its neoliberal phase, inaugurated with the 1973 coup in Chile. With US backing, General Augusto Pinochet overthrew the government of elected president Salvador Allende on the original 9/11: "Americans reshaped the economy, and the result was a disaster so profound that it would be repeated in countries all over the world."

Neoliberalism was the "counterpunch" to the emergence of gay, antiracist, feminist, and green movements in the 70s. And disco, Hoolboom/k-punk declare, was "music made for and by queers, Blacks, and women . . . made by the working class." Yet, following the neoliberal ethos, pleasure and even defiance could be commodified for profit. Neoliberalism ushered in "the largest transfer of human wealth in history, and it continues to this day."

UBER (2023)

Émilie Poirier

As the saying goes, sharing is caring. In this video essay, Hoolboom explores the *sharing economy* through the Uber ride-sharing app. The sharing economy is a contemporary development that allows individuals to make money from underused assets and provide services to each other, often through third-party tech. This in turn leads to a gig economy, which an increasing number of people rely on to survive in this unbridled stage of capitalism. As Hoolboom demonstrates, the way industrial profits are shared often determines a population's standard of living. Uber is no exception. This company is well positioned to contribute relatively little in taxes to the communities in which its gig drivers work. After all, it is an uncaring piece of software—an app, not a transport company.

In recent years, Hoolboom has turned his activism and critical eye towards late-stage technocapitalist systems. While this has existed as a subtext in his earlier works, Hoolboom now explicitly critiques Western capitalist ideologies and neoliberalism through intellectual video essays that borrow images and media from pop culture. In *Uber* he begins with a promotional video for the company and guides us through a story of our own downfall, both personal and societal.

Through an agile narrative thread and skillful editing, Hoolboom weaves personal family archives, advertisements showing futuristic tech bros from Silicon Valley, imagery of 3D networks, old engravings, and stock footage. In one thread, we follow Hoolboom's father, an immigrant to Canada, who holds within himself many contradictions. His desire to become an entrepreneur and his conviction that any hard-working individual with "good" ideas can become rich are juxtaposed with his belief that government and corporations are one and the same. In this era, corporations have transformed into big tech.

Hoolboom personalizes the narrative through his father and through his highly effective sound design. He puts us into an intellectual trance that is both esoteric and rational, and this is what makes his cinema so daring.

Uber is just one of the many companies profiting from the fourth industrial revolution at a cost to the general population. Are there any benefits to Uber, beyond inspiring this film?

LETTER FROM FRED (2023)

Gary Popovich

Fred is Mike's friend. Early in the movie Mike paces his room; through subtitles he tells us that when he is stuck in a loop, "I write Fred and wait for a reply." Fred's reply to Mike also appears as subtitles and moving images from multiple sources, no verbal language. Mike brings to life the words of Fred's letter in what becomes a form of self-interrogation.

We see a young Fred and his pals protesting, hanging out, and working. In subtitles, Mike declares, "He used to be a filmmaker but he got over it . . ." As the screen explodes in colourful abrasions on the surface of home movies, the titles continue, "And that gives me more hope than it should." "Could I too get over my attachment to filmmaking?" Mike wonders.

Fred says he feels happy and lucky. He has a permanent room in a Benedictine monastery, where he works five days a week. The images show monks cleaning windows, cutting grass, and making or fixing Christian crosses. The subtitle says, "Although I believe God does not exist."

In one image, a monk rings the monastery bells. The bells are rung not to proclaim the time, but to stop the listener from whatever activity might be in process, in order to remind the listener that God is everywhere, and that there are other, more important things in life. Despite the absence of God, Fred has found purpose in his life, beyond filmmaking. It is Fred's letter that is a resounding bell of interruption in Mike's mind, reminding him there are more important things in life than filmmaking. Jumping off the path one thinks is most meaningful might lead to a more meaningful, gratifying, and utilitarian path that produces a greater good.

The last images show friendship—two boys hanging out by the ocean, excitedly sharing a moment together. The last title says, "P.S. There is life after filmmaking." The declaration is more meaningful in that it comes from a friend who has changed paths and found more meaning and happiness. This film, like this book, is a bell.


U.S.A

RAIN (2023)

Alexandra Gelis and Jorge Lozano

Alexandra Gelis: The first lines say, "We cannot cross until we carry each other / all of us refugees, all of us prophets." The film's subtitles, based on a poem by Jewish Puerto Rican writer Aurora Levins Morales, rewrite the story of Exodus. Now everyone is going to the promised land. I was thinking of the many economic migrants forced to leave Venezuela, trying to cross the river. We have to carry each other, the women and kids, to get to the other side.

Jorge Lozano: The oceans are open for the privileged; they are the chosen ones. But they are not the ones trying to find a new home. Coming from the Global South, the degrees of being welcome are different. Some are left to die in the ocean. Others are received and thrown in jail. Many cross and get organized and move to certain urban neighbourhoods. Freedom doesn't yet exist.

The film poem says, "The country we hoped for was each other." That's an experience I identify with. When we came to this country we formed groups of affiliation. I met Latinos in factories or washing dishes in the restaurants I was sent to. You meet your *other* to find a country. If you can stay, the circle expands because you start communicating in English. You become part of a network of people who don't belong and together you create a language that is not only spoken. Your language breaks down barriers with those who have the capacity to understand accents, or who don't need to understand the whole sentence. [*laughs*] Communication is fragmented, as we see in the film.

There is rain in every shot. The weather is important, it affects your way of thinking. You're always exposed. Perhaps language, power, and ideology are also like the weather, overarching conditions that touch everyone.

AG: I can hear the Jewish roots in the poem by Morales: It's the story of coming out of slavery, the story of the chosen people. At this moment we are seeing a war between those who are chosen by the powerful and those who are not.

JL: The Jewish experience is relevant to our experience as immigrants because they were not well received for hundreds of years. In Latin America, Jews were called pigs, and many changed their names to appear Catholic. At the same moment many were moved by force to North America.

It's important not to focus history on one people, because then we lose perspective. Nations lose their perspective and get sick and forget the sufferings of others. North American societies never healed. In the 20s and 30s, there was little Canadian solidarity with revolutionary movements in

Latin America or Africa. Canadian society was happy in its privilege. It's an egocentric sickness where the world includes only you and the ones equal to you—British, French, the US, and the other colonizers. The reason Canadians perceive the world differently today is because of the influx of immigrants who brought their liberation struggles and understandings of difference.

Most Canadians don't know anything about Colombia, even though we are on neighbouring continents. Canada has kept itself separate. Geographically, ethically, psychologically, morally, artistically. We didn't exist until we came here. Some young Canadians eventually travelled to Colombia and came back with stereotypes, and that became a form of knowledge. Stereotypes were questioned and that knowledge expanded into a more realistic view. This movie makes you think about all that.

AG: The video starts with dry pavement. Then we see the drop-by-drop construction of the rain. Every person's suffering is important to count.

JL: Frantz Fanon spoke about nations being sick. He was a psychiatrist forced to endure the behaviour of French colonialism in Algeria. When you send hundreds of people to kill and torture, your nation is sick.

The United States is a sick nation. They don't even know what they do. Murdering people in other countries becomes normal when there's no reckoning or consequences. The sickness endures because they're not able to look back. It's important to understand how sick we are as nations. If that reflection doesn't happen things won't change, because people live above their sickness, unable to recognize it. Every citizen participates in some way because they benefit from it.

AG: In Canada, Indigenous people were bombed with viruses like smallpox.

JL: Even the best experimental films are important not because of what they are about, but because of the conversations they generate. They create conditions to see what isn't there. Open-ended, their DIY technologies and methods finally escape the control of their makers.

THE CENTRAL GESTURE (2023)

Lisa Robertson

Excerpt from "Disquiet," in *Nilling* (Book*hug, 2012), 42–52.

The constituting gesture of the Western city is expulsion. We rid the bounded site of what we next configure as danger, pollutant, threat to the self-identifying community. The efficiency of the expulsing gesture has demonstrated itself: The means of living are what are extracted or wrested from an elsewhere, and brought apparently cleansed into the agora, in order to be exchanged for the stance and insignia of authority. It interests me to record signs of the failure of this hygiene. However thoroughly policed and legislated such a system is, it is never totalized. Migrants slip through borders, illegal or sub-legal economies proliferate, or the central economy suddenly reveals its own illegality. In spite of dominant intentions, movement doesn't stop. The city never becomes a static image of its own nostalgia, because some movement will always be indeterminant. Centrally defined limits and products are misused, transgressed. Border practices take place on a deeply layered and concentrated history of related counter-activity. To be in the city is also to be in the ancient habitus of refusal and resistance. Bodies assert their incalculable drives. Noise is made. It is the present.

I MEASURE MY LIFE IN DOGS (2023)

Cameron Moneo

For years I considered myself a dog person. Having grown up with dogs, I could argue reasons why they made better companions than cats—e.g., more loyal, more sympathetic. I even felt this preference aligned with my politics in some way. Later I lived with cats and found them to be perfectly companionable, though weirder than dogs. Eventually it occurred to me how foolish, and certainly bad politically, it is to rank animals. We have no grounds to say that a dog conducts their life any better than a cat or a beaver or a snake. In this way, animals don't deserve to get mixed up in our politics, our debates about possible worlds, not to mention judged on how well they behave in the worlds we choose for them.

Hoolboom's movie plays favourites with dogs, but does it the right way: to critique human behaviour. To be a dog person, in the movie, is to be a person who's *like a dog,* not simply a person who likes dogs. How do we measure this? Hoolboom uses internet videos of dogs watching TV, a people thing that dogs do differently—actually, do better, as Hoolboom implies when he says that dogs "prefer video art," which is what *The Lion King* (1994) or a Pavarotti special or the PGA Tour transforms into when a dog watches. Artists are like dogs because, as Hoolboom says, they resist "dissolving into" the world, instead "inhabiting" it (borrowing a passage from Rachel Kushner's 2013 novel *The Flamethrowers*). Images of dogs skateboarding, painting pictures, and playing piano offer proof that dogs not only enjoy our activities but excel at them, give their all to them, make an art of them. More important, dogs get along better than we do: "When you look at dogs playing with each other, understanding each other, living with each other, you can see the future." Hoolboom follows this with a video of a guy instructing his dog to fetch him a beer from the fridge. A stupid pet trick showing the master-slave arrangement that humans invented.

The much-celebrated obedience of dogs is not something Hoolboom talks about, though it's on display in many of the internet videos we see, evidence of training and discipline. A "good dog" doesn't refuse the labour we expect of them. Some dogs have jobs: They work in service, therapy, professional acting, law enforcement. This too is part of the millennia-old domestication process—what Michael Pollan argues is a "sophisticated strategy for survival" on the dog's part. Dogs, no longer wolves who might eat us, have crossed the threshold into our homes, and as two species we cooperate, we create each other as new species (so long as humans hold up their end of the bargain). From this we can learn a lesson about radical democracy, Hoolboom thinks. That lesson is currently imprisoned in the sappy stories told by dog food commercials, another reason to prefer video art.

WIND (2023)

Dan Browne

A year ago, I turned to AI image generators as an outlet for my artistic expression simply because I no longer had the energy to pick up a camera. You know, the usual: work, childcare, worrying about the world on fire, scrolling through bite-sized internet content late at night in a half-hearted attempt to rebalance my serotonin.

In *New Dark Age* (2018), James Bridle contends that the modern development of computers began with attempts to control the weather, citing mathematician Lewis Fry Richardson's work on a theoretical computational climate model during WWI—a time when a "computer" still referred to a human being—as well as John von Neumann's invention of the world's first general-purpose electronic computer at Los Alamos after the Manhattan Project. In addition to its attempts to predict the weather, von Neumann's machine—which weighed about 1,000 lb. and was known as the MANIAC—could also play a specific form of chess without bishops. Here, in this early incarnation of artificial intelligence, we find the modern fantasy of control over the supposedly chaotic and imprecise natural world, the dialectic between technology and warfare, and so on.

In *Wind,* Hoolboom juxtaposes video recordings depicting the environmentally shaping but invisible forces of clouds and air against narration inspired by a conversation between former Google software engineer Blake Lemoine and the company's LaMDA chatbot, which led Lemoine to be dismissed from the company after he publicly claimed the system was sentient. On the soundtrack, we hear Hoolboom's voice: "If feeling what someone else feels, if empathy is the root of what it means to be human, then robots will develop this ability. I know because I'm a robot." Is the machine or the artist talking? And whose images are these anyway?

Andy Warhol once claimed that he wanted to be a machine. Half a century earlier, the Armenian mystic G. I. Gurdjieff contended we are all machines, and that to be anything else requires an enormous amount of effort. What is the difference between being sentient and being a stochastic parrot? As Hoolboom observes, "What you call personality, I call algorithm."

Weather and cloud patterns are sublime forms that transgress the limits of our understanding—they are not objects, but rather energetic processes (and, dare I say it, proxies for spiritual forms, as evinced by the link between air and *pneuma*). *Wind* presents us with a challenge to the old dichotomy of human/machine, but the film's greatest importance is reminding us that inspiration originates from spaces outside the human.

THE SECRET PLACE (2023) [made with Heather Frise]

Petra Mueller

Maya Deren once argued that what makes poetry distinct is its construction, and the poet Dylan Thomas replied to her with a romping tale of theatregoing: This is the avant-garde, the hero's going to take his clothes off.

The audience laughed. Construction seemed beside the point. Meshing poetry and film seemed beside the point. The poem scripts the film. The film narrates the poem, adding visuals and sound as a poetic vertical.

This film runs circles around that dialectic—*bouleverser* by a hallucinatory film construction that goes off-script with strange and powerful aural-space sound design.

The film has a visceral feeling of different substances pinched together, of pinched fabric. Verbal fabric. Visual fabric. Pinched. Joined. Set loose.

Flowing multilayered animations of birds, screens, text, and bodies with live footage entering the mix as the poem draws to a close—people's faces, limbs, and trees falling across roads illustrate spoken evocations of birds, computer screens, the self, and media.

Space fabric. The film begins and ends with the snap-and-crackle noise of sonic transmission.

A Poet Voice (poet Ariana Reines) cuts in with the classic monotone intonation beloved by poets everywhere, especially after 1960. In the middle of the film the Poet Voice cuts out. Have we lost parts of the Poet Voice broadcast? The film doesn't say. There's an intermission of hisses and machine hums amid hallucinating colour, bodies, and forms. After a while the Poet Voice cuts back in.

The entire film has the feel of a visual/aural shortwave radio transmission—if there could be such a thing—pinched, flowing, set loose, blinking into the darkness of our inner and outer galaxies.

FREEDOM FROM EVERYTHING (2022)

Johanna Householder and Angelo Pedari

Angelo Pedari: *Freedom* contains two really good movies, but I got stuck in the first one.

Johanna Householder: It's a branching narrative using an almost limitless range of images pulled together in a seamless and masterful way, but it can also be frustrating. The first film gets lost when you take us to the beginning of capitalism—Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* and the law of enclosures, the relationship between freelancers and mercenaries. The Black Plague. I was interested in the conversation between what happens inside the body and the body politic. Humans are full of viruses and things that act like viruses: language, ideas, gender, images, political allegiances.

AP: Humans are viruses too. Near the beginning we watch men decomposing while the filmmaker's voiceover describes how he worried his friends would see him as a monster when they found out he was positive. There is disgust and tenderness.

JH: In August 1925, absurdly costumed viruses march in Washington, DC. Thousands of KKK evoke disbelief and horror.

The filmmaker tells a story about going out with friends who believe you can get AIDS from a flashing light on Queen West or foreign cars painted red. We see a magnetic blond woman in a video arcade surrounded by lights. It made me think of the early days of Covid when we washed our groceries.

AP: The sounds kill me. All those crinklings and tappings and waves moving in and out. How that carries us along.

JH: The voiceover talks about all the smart, funny, talented people who died of AIDS. The camera never moves, but we see people posing, there's some making out and spanking, a little bit of an orgy.

AP: It's a joyous fooling around. Lots of people of the same sex kissing. Looked like a great party.

JH: But it provokes a bit of anxiety because it's taking place in the time of AIDS. Not that there isn't a time of AIDS. As it says later in the film, seventy-three countries ran out of HIV drugs during Covid. It's the forgotten pandemic. I was thinking of Richard and Tim, and how Tim ran out of HIV pills when they were quarantined in Morocco at the beginning of Covid. When the drugs finally arrived they came with a camera crew to shoot Tim receiving his meds. It turned into a TV promo for the Ministry of Health.


PARKING
IN
REAR
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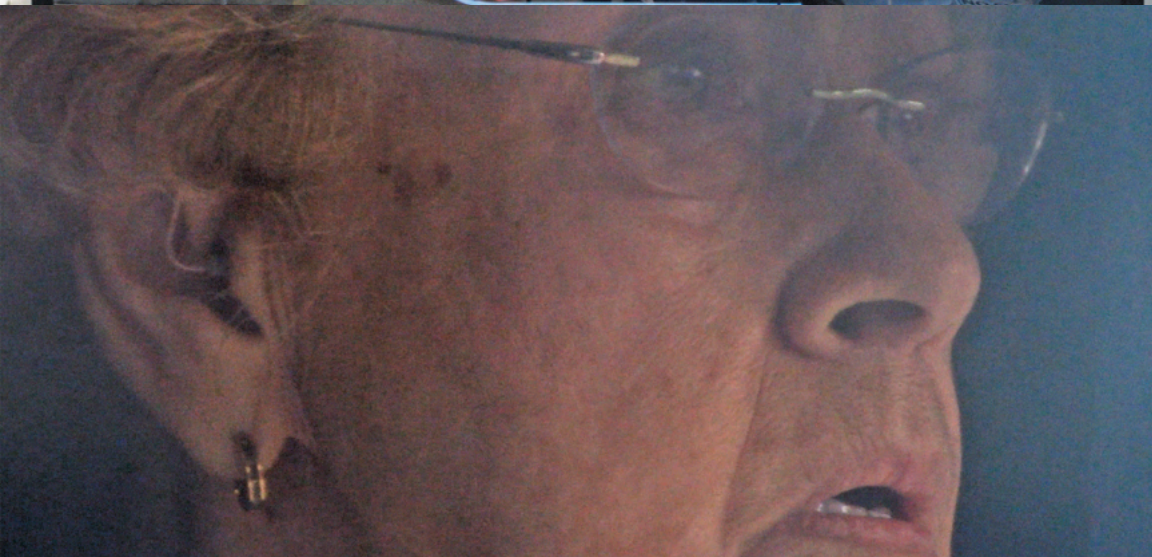


FREEDOM FROM EVERYTHING (2022)

Clint Enns

While completing the last stages of a PhD, I began working at an auction house in Montreal. I was hired as a photographer, but the majority of my job consisted of the Sisyphean task of temporarily stacking and restacking furniture. After a year, both my attention and the discs in my lower back began to slip. Complaints echoed in the back of my head, but the weight of labour often tethered me.

In those early days of the Covid lockdown, when my savings rendered me nonessential, I dared to dream of societal transformation. We were all in this together, all vulnerable. After the first rounds of vaccinations, I was deep in debt and desperately needed a job, so I became a dishwasher at a high-end French restaurant. The plates I cleaned whispered tales of economic disparity, as my dentist, a patron of decadence, dined on a meal costing more than my month's grind. Every plate I washed, each glass I polished, became a humble act of resistance against the economic pandemic that loomed alongside the global health crisis.

Returning to the Covid pandemic through Hoolboom's *Freedom from Everything* provides a lifeline back to those days, resurrecting memories already drowned in the cacophony of contemporary crises. It was a time when people's thoughts were replaced by memes, another virus exacerbated by the pandemic. In the tradition of Ishmael Reed's fictional Jes Grew virus—a manifestation of Blackness which Reed uses to expose the power and inherent racism of the ruling class—*Freedom from Everything* uses the Covid virus to reflect on neoliberal ideology and conceptions of freedom.

The video includes writing from Hito Steyerl's 2013 *e-flux* essay "Freedom from Everything: Freelancers and Mercenaries" and extends it to include both the AIDS and Covid pandemics. In her essay, Steyerl argues that "contemporary freedom is not primarily the enjoyment of civil liberties, as the traditional liberal view has it, but rather like the freedom of free fall, experienced by many who are thrown into an uncertain and unpredictable future." Although the freedoms that many argue for are often positive—freedom of expression, freedom to live as one pleases—there are other types of freedoms, particularly for the precariat. As Steyerl argues, "They are negative freedoms, and they apply across a carefully constructed and exaggerated cultural alterity that promotes: the freedom from social security, the freedom from the means of making a living, the freedom from accountability and sustainability, the freedom from free education, healthcare, pensions and public culture, the loss of standards of public responsibility, and in many places, the freedom from the rule of law."

While the freedom from economic security led me to a new life as a dishwasher, it also introduced me to new forms of mutual support which are rarely experienced in academia or the arts, where competition is a large part of the game. In the kitchen, we genuinely looked after and cared for each other's well-being. While denied other freedoms, we, like Kurosawa's freelancers and mercenaries, formed bonds through our shared labours. As a dishwasher, it was easy to understand both Steyerl's idea of negative freedom and how new forms of resistance emerged from the precariat: solidarity and giving what you take.

WAVES (2022)

Al Razutis

This is anticapitalist filmmaking. The women portrayed are not what is being sold on *Baywatch*. The first woman who speaks insists that even our ideas of what a woman is are way off. She provides an alternate glimpse and looks like a witch. Feminist historian Silvia Federici, whose writing influenced these voiceover fragments, is big on rescuing, redefining, and recuperating the roles of women.

There are a number of fascinating characters revealed through incantation and poetry. There's nothing didactic or literal; instead a constant disparity emerges between the voiceover and the actions these women perform. After the dream and enchantment I was led to a desolate place: the present.

There's a poet, a biologist, a witch, and the angel of history, who looks like the filmmaker. There's a woman who appears as a nun, but everything she says is the opposite of the Catholic church. Every character has their moment "that struts and frets her hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more."

Images morph throughout the film. Sometimes this is done with granular erasures or shape-shifting forms. The images have a transitory, ghostlike quality to them. They appear documentary or realistic for a moment, but then become plastic and dissolve into something else. There is a method, but it's opaque; that's part of the mystery. Flow is the filmmaker's signature style.

It's a narrative told in a unique way that gives the viewer nothing for free. You have to engage. That was my original strategy for my film *Amerika* (1972–83). Don't tell the viewer what is happening. Lead them astray. Let them find their own way. This is not a Brechtian lecture; it offers paths of discovery: for our society and culture, for how we communicate and who we are.

WAVES (2022)

Jim Shedden

> Polyphony is a kind of music where separate melodies play at the same time. Like separate plants. These forms sound weird for modern listeners because they were replaced by music where a single rhythm and melody hold it all together. In rock and roll, this unity sounds like a beating heart.

In music, polyphony can refer to anything from a canon, serial music, free-form jazz, or popular music, when a soloist might ad lib against the grain of the choir. With this in mind, *Waves* is a polyphonic montage of three polyphonic montages: image, music/sound, and voiceover. It is ostensibly a series of portraits of people that the filmmaker met on his way to the 2011 Occupy Toronto protest in St. James Park. Some of the footage must have languished on the back burner, only to be revisited, according to Hoolboom's introduction to the film at the Ad Hoc screening series in 2023, "in the wake of my mother's sudden and unexpected death at the beginning of the Covid pandemic."

The characters, presumably fictional but possibly inspired by actual people in Hoolboom's life, are all strong women, changing the world in both big and small ways, and now representing Hoolboom's second family, his family of choice. At any moment, the voice could be Hoolboom, one of his characters, the real-life individuals that inspired the characters, or the author that is concisely but elliptically quoted and paraphrased.

In a section titled "Amaya," the character (poet and artist Louise Bak) is accompanied by a voiceover that says:

> In the relationship between story and image, I see the story as a kind of vampire trying to suck all the blood from an image. Images are very sensitive. Like snails, they shrink back when you touch their horns. They don't have the ability to be like old pack horses, carrying wagons full of messages or morals. Although, that's exactly what a story wants from them.[1]

These words are originally from Wim Wenders's 1982 lecture "Impossible Stories." One wonders if Hoolboom has doubts about his own need to make sense of all these images, memories, life events, and people by imposing a narrative, tenuous as it is. Wenders ends that talk with a dilemma:

> And that's really the only thing I have to say about stories: They are one huge, impossible paradox! I totally reject stories because for me they only bring out lies, nothing but lies,

> and the biggest lie is that they show coherence where there is none. Then again, our need for these lies is so consuming that it's completely pointless to fight them and to put together a sequence of images without a story—without the lie of a story. Stories are impossible, but it's impossible to live without them. That's the mess I'm in.[2]

Generally, the image/voiceover relationships in Hoolboom's film are oblique or opaque, but in a productive way. Hoolboom has acknowledged that the voiceovers are the result of ventriloquism, wherein the filmmaker has created interior monologues "collaged out of gender philosophers, novels, and newspapers. How does the inner voice that each of us carries around permit other voices to speak through us (and is this part of a political project of solidarity?), while contributing to the project of singularity, helping to create an individual as unique as a blade of grass, or a stone on the side of the road?" For example, Hoolboom confided to me that the voiceover accompanying the footage of the nun is a "distillation and rewriting" of Foucault's lectures posthumously published as *Security, Territory, Population*, rewritten as if it were a single person's "interior monologue." In fact, as Hoolboom explained, the text is about the creation of the interior monologue by the church, and how this became a new and powerful method of control.

> The Catholic church was the world's first multinational corporation, its biggest landowner, a machine for turning profits century after century. How did they do it? The old style of power flowed from the throne. But what if this authority could be put inside each person, so that they would rule themselves? What if you could swallow a king, a manager, a judge? The separation of mind and body allowed a new kind of ruler to be born, a self-ruler.

It's not just the voiceover that instructs us how to read the images, though. The film is structured around a series of character profiles, each introduced with an ornate title card, offering a coherence that the images can't. In his 2023 Ad Hoc introduction to the film, Hoolboom ended with an apology and an explanation: "If the connections are too hazy, I hope you can forgive, because the whole world had ended, and another had not yet begun." How do we imagine the future when we are overwhelmed by the present?

The soundtrack, a gentle polyphony of dissonant musical notes and chords, muffled voices, protest sounds, and other asynchronous foley tracks are always somber, suggesting a crisis that runs through the film. The voiceover testimonials of the women sometimes contradict the gloomy music and sounds. In a section titled "Ani," featuring Ani DiFranco, a DiFranco fan talks about how the Ani phenomenon changed "the whole system." This fan started her school's first GSA (Gay-Straight Alliance), and while the jocks spit in her face, she suggests, "They were voting for the way things used to be, while we were voting for the future."

In that darkness and light, perhaps the character who cuts across the whole film is the Angel of History. It would be easy to argue that Benjamin's eclectic, epigrammatic, melancholy Marxism has influenced Hoolboom's writing and filmmaking for many years. Here he explicitly draws from Benjamin's *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, in particular, his entry on Paul Klee's painting *Angelus Novus*. Hoolboom paraphrases:

> I am the angel of history. I walk backwards, because I'm interested in what's already happened. I look at the past, searching for clues. For me, history looks like a wound that doesn't close. . . . A storm is blowing in from Paradise. It catches me by surprise, so my wings won't close. Slowly, this wind is pushing me into the future. You have a gift for naming storms, and this one is no different. This storm, this wind, is what you call progress.

Benjamin's writings have been widely interpreted, which is understandable given that they are, on the one hand, messianic, and on the other, materialist; they are speaking of all of history, but also of the specific situation in Europe at that time. The angel wants to stare the catastrophes of history in the face but history can't be redeemed, can't be saved by Marxist dialectical-historical materialism. Instead, progress appears to be a possibility in perpetuity, coming and going like the wind. "Ani" describes both the catastrophe of history—misogyny, homophobia, and transphobia—and the wind of progress that she is embracing.

There are two moments that deserve singling out (and this is perhaps because my love of popular music is even greater than my love of polyphonic difficulty): the wonderful intrusions of Ye's remix of the Mamas and the Papas's "Dedicated to the One I Love" and a stripped-out, a capella version of "Landslide," where only Stevie Nicks's voice is audible. Hoolboom's film offers up many pleasures; chief among them for me are the spareness and precise timing of these two popular songs, and the female voices that sound melancholy in this context.

NOTES

1. Wim Wenders, "Impossible Stories," in *The Logic of Images: Essays and Conversations,* trans. Michael Hofmann (Faber and Faber, 1991), 53.

2. Wenders, "Impossible Stories," 59.

NEW YORK STATE OF MIND (2022)

Rebecca Garrett

The first frames are from the past. Footage of a vacant New York. Soon we are surrounded by vehicles: cars, buses, streetcars. We are moving too, not driving but being driven, surrounded by the sounds of the street—machines, horns, voices, humming. Is that a train whistle, long and low and mournful? It slowly registers that the audio is contemporary, widening the distance between sound and image. We can't pretend we are in another place or time, so we hover in this indeterminate zone. We hover and this gives us a space to think.

What is … what was this city? We see none of the glitter or pizzazz of New York—the make-or-break, thrilling ascent to riches from rags, life on top of the heap; the beating heart of capital. We are being driven down one unnamed street after another. When will we see the mythological sites of New York—the pinnacle of capitalist success, power, progress? Our tour guide has other ideas; our tour guide has ideas.

A voice is speaking, digging into the politics behind the image, the mythology of New York, New York. It reveals the race and class relations embedded in technologies of representation, which are usually normalized and invisible. Later, speaking about a website that calculates forced labour, our guide is clearly not pretending to be in the old found footage, or to be in the car, or to be in the frame. He's not going to let us just ride along.

Are we being driven by the image, the persistence of purely mechanical forces? Others come along for the ride, adding to the progression of our moving thoughts. Many are people we have never met before: Eula Boss, Leo Trotsky, Ijeoma Oluo, Roland Barthes, two Mexican women picking cilantro in Texas.

We're in a crowded market when our tour guide says:

> We decided to stay in America just a little bit longer and work for them, because without us, what would they do?

We see people working, moving goods around, delivering heavy loads.

> Who would pick the strawberries? Get the fruit down from their trees? Who would wash their carrots, scrub their toilets, mend their clothes, fluff their pillows?

Pushing and pulling heavy carts.

> Who would cook their breakfasts, clear their tables, soothe their children? Who would bathe their elderly? Listen to their stories, keep their secrets?

Buying and selling food in a crowded market.

> Who would turn the other cheek for them and then one day—because we were tired, because we were old, because we could—forgive them?

And then we are shown people of various classes, ethnicities, genders, going about their lives in different areas of the city. We wonder: Who are they? Who are we?

FEELING STATES (2022)

Jorge Lozano

Feeling States offers a compressed reading of modern Russian history before the Ukrainian war. It begins as a documentary of St. Petersburg using black-and-white archival photographs showing the beginnings of TV and computers. That's why the ending is so important. It would have been easy to start by talking about the Ukrainian war and assigning blame. But here the question of who is guilty is not so easy. The narrator's position keeps shifting.

It's a complex film. I felt it was a net slowly being crafted, catching me in several places, especially with the voice. As soon as I heard it I thought, Oh, great, Mike is back to talking. There is poetry in his voice.

An essay on male violence. You see the father knocking down the kitchen cabinet, the kid breaking his neighbour's window to ask for a cigarette. The basketball game that becomes a wrestling match. I can see how normal male violence is in Russia, just like in the United States and Europe. These societies are in a state of permanent war, inside and outside their borders.

The process of decolonization of power is a long road. Power touches all of us, the good and the bad. That's what the film shows. It stumbles morally, and this creates many paths. It's inspiring and will help me to do what I'm doing. It shows you can make things that have multiple layers and can touch subjects from many perspectives. As opposed to so many images today that feel pre-chewed.

CHILE 1973 (2022) [made with Jorge Lozano]

b.h. Yael

1. One day our bodies disappeared

Chile 1973, a collaboration by Mike Hoolboom and Jorge Lozano, is an image-inspired experimental work that on first viewing can only provoke questions: Who is the "we" of the text? Chileans, poor people, those in the nonaligned movements that challenged American imperialism? Whose ephemeral pictures are we viewing? It seems to be someone who was there. Have I stumbled onto a witness's account and their undifferentiated archive?

The film is electric with texture, a treatment of the images that evokes buried material, now resuscitated and partial. Black-and-white still images of *campamentos*, people in the streets, children at play, coal miners, military detentions; Allende, Nixon, Pinochet, Kissinger; made more present and obscured by a rich soundscape of interference.

2. We had learned how to talk to each other as if we had never heard the word: USA

September 11, 2023. I am talking to my sister-in-law on the phone, fifty years after the military coup of 1973, in which Salvador Allende was eventually murdered and General Pinochet led a murderous regime. Her parents fled with her to Canada. We observe the scant media coverage of this fiftieth anniversary, overtaken by an American calamity now associated with the date. Her parents told her how Allende had begun to improve this lost third world. She notes that education and healthcare were luxuries prior to Allende's social reforms. After the coup, her mother became politicized once she was put under house arrest and her husband was tortured and killed.

I am interested in how my sister-in-law, unaccustomed to experimental film but personally invested in the memory of overthrow, intimidation, murders, and dictatorship, would respond to the film. She feels connected but is also full of questions. She craves to hear Allende's voice. She is distracted by the military footsteps; the sounds are disturbing. We ask, Are we adjacent to history?

3. When is a murder not a murder?

One can't view these moments out of time. I am situated in a particular moment. The US once again exercises hegemony, choosing to arm a fascist Israeli government in its bombardment of Gaza. Citizen journalists, even having lost family, choose to document and report the destruction, just as Koen Wessing, a photographer from the Netherlands, chose to witness the imposition of military law in the streets of Santiago. Though time obscures, it also remains in images and memory, in our bones, and in the young ones that will survive us. In Chile. In Palestine. In Canada.

HAIFA (2022)

Ali Kazimi

Haifa is a deceptively simple, seemingly quiet work. Hoolboom uses a single archival photograph in order to unveil the violence and ethnic cleansing necessary for the creation and expansion of a settler-colonial state. It is a meditation on the violence that was used in the founding of Israel.

We zoom through a constellation of stars that fold into a blinding discharge from the bulb of a vintage photographic flash. The momentary flash leads us to a static negative image showing three young Zionist soldiers and four Palestinians, the latter pushing a hand cart laden with some pots and pans, their treasured carpets hastily rolled and precariously balanced on top.

We are told the armed men belong to the Haganah, a Zionist paramilitary organization; they are escorting a Palestinian father, his two sons, and a grandson. As the individual narratives unfold we learn that the Haganah's target was the Palestinian majority. They bombed bridges and rail lines and helped smuggle Jews into the territory, although some "didn't join the charge into unarmed Palestinian towns and cities, shooting everyone in sight." They were just "doing a job, that's all."

As the negative develops into positive, we are told stories that humanize both the colonizers and the family that they are forcibly displacing. Meditations on masculinity, war, and race are also seamlessly woven in. The contradictions and tensions within the newly formed Jewish state are cleverly personified when it is revealed that the youngest militia member is Arab, "the most unwanted of all the Jews."

Watching *Haifa*, I recall Israeli American scholar and activist Ariella Aïsha Azoulay's book *The Civil Contract of Photography*, where she argues that photography has been, and is, an instrument of colonization. She writes:

> The photograph bears the seal of the photographic event, and reconstructing this event requires more than just identifying what is shown in the photograph. One needs to stop looking at the photograph and instead start watching it. The verb "to watch" is usually used for regarding phenomena or moving pictures. It entails dimensions of time and movement that need to be reinscribed in the interpretation of the still photographic image. When and where the subject of the photograph is a person who has suffered some form of injury, a viewing of the photograph that reconstructs the photographic situation and allows a reading of the injury inflicted on others becomes a civic skill, not an exercise in aesthetic appreciation.[1]

In his film, Hoolboom moves us from looking to watching.

Hoolboom's strategy of crafting speculative backstories further recalls "Venus in Two Acts," by African American theorist and writer Saidiya Hartman. In this essay, she poses a series of questions about the limits of the archive. She notes that she initially chose not to tell the story of a girl named Venus who was murdered by her captors because it "would have trespassed the boundaries of the archive."[2] Instead, Hartman argues for the necessity of a speculative history: "In fashioning a narrative, which is based upon archival research, and by that I mean a critical reading of the archive that mimes the figurative dimensions of history, I intended both to tell an impossible story and to amplify the impossibility of its telling."[3]

The iconic photo used by Hoolboom was taken by a photographer from AFP in 1948. The original caption is descriptive and offers no clues to the personal identities of the men. Hoolboom's radical strategy is to the trespass the boundaries of the archive, while at the same time fashioning a narrative based on verifiable facts and archival research. "Everyone in the photo is dead now, but their ancestors live on, in stolen dwellings or forgotten slums, as if the picture can't be erased, can't stop itself from repeating." We are reminded that the present ethnic cleansing in the occupied territories has a long, irrefutable lineage.

Haifa ends with three enigmatic images: a semi-silhouetted woman lying on a bed with daylight visible behind a curtained window; a woman standing with her back to the camera looking across an arena which is about to be submerged by a gigantic tsunami wave; and finally, a female camel in a tight enclosure being milked by an unseen machine while a very young calf feeds on fodder. Visceral dreams that pull us out of the dread and pain of witnessing, only to bring us back to metaphors of depression, watching inescapable destruction, and living in a cage.

NOTES

1. Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, trans. Rela Mazali and Ruvik Danieli (Zone Books, 2008), 14.

2. Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (2008): 9.

3. Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 11.

FOR THE BIRDS (2021)

Akira Mizuta Lippit

> One of my father's favourite expressions, mostly passed away now: For the birds. Meaning: That was nothing. In this aviary anthology, the narrator describes a post-art life that leads, inexorably, to the nature of nature. He makes a vow to the birds, sincere to the last, still embracing the fantasy that language came before the world.

What returns from nothing when everything has passed away and into nothing? *For the Birds* is a gift to such nothing, destined for nothing, nothing given, perhaps, or taken. Who gives nothing away, who is entitled to or even capable of giving nothing? *For the Birds* describes the interplay between a euphuism and art, or more accurately what comes after the end of art, namely nothing. Of an art that never truly left because it never really arrived. An art avowed and disavowed that never takes place but instead follows detours into pornography and documentaries drowned by the voices of those who couldn't bear to listen to something, anything, let alone the sounds of birds and butterflies. An art for but also from the birds, *ex nihilo*, *ex ornithes*.

In the wake of a life as video artist never lived, and in the afterlife of a pornographer overlived, Hoolboom's narrator reflects on the similarity of porn stars and birds, specifically, their relation to language, "to slang, jargon … subtle shifts in tone." This language, Hoolboom suggests, comes before the world, which is to say precedes it, but also stands before it: a language that faces the world, reproaches it for failing to hear the very sound that makes life and art possible, life and art one thing and nothing. This language for the birds, inexorable, comes from the birds, *is fathered by the birds* back and forth, to and from nothing, but always at the same time, always there before the world and before any other word, *fatherless*.

SKINSHIP (2021)

Jaimie Baron

What is the difference between skin and kin? The presence or absence of a single letter points to the disparity between physical touch and a deeper communion.

The key image in *Skinship* is a sprawling mass of nude bodies that connotes either an ecstatic orgy or a mass grave—or both. Indeed, as psychoanalysis has made so apparent, the lure of sex and that of death are inextricable. These naked forms writhe in slow, erotic motion while onscreen titles ponder the tension between desire and commodification, using metaphors of the market to frame the attraction of self to other. What do we want from one another? What will we pay? What do we owe?

As abstracted images of water droplets, planets, stars, and clouds are interspersed with and superimposed upon anonymous human shapes, skin becomes a canvas for continually shifting galactic and aquatic formations. A restlessness permeates image and sound, a ceaseless seeking as hands appear to caress a molten star. Bodies of water, celestial bodies, and human bodies—made from the same basic matter and yet alien to and isolated from one another. Our skin is our interface with which to sense the heat of lava, the wet of water, the smoothness of other epidermal membranes with their reciprocal response.

As dystopian images of bald forms connected to tubing suggest a transformation of people into synthetics, the possibilities of genuine kinship within a market economy disintegrate. Longing, lust, and love draw us together, but like oil and water we find ourselves separated by a thin film that is scarcely perceptible and yet can never be permeated.

MY EDUCATION (2021)

Mike Hoolboom

Clint told me I should make short movies again, a throwdown I accepted. There have been sixty in the past eight years. *My Education* was a return to the joys of shooting. It opens with a window cleaner seen from inside my apartment. This moment echoes Huxley's famous line, that once the doors of perception are wiped clean, everything will appear as it really is, infinite. The opening shot wipes the doors clean.

The movie is based on a Paul Auster recount of a moment in a young poet's life when he has come to the end. He can't write another word, doesn't know how to go on. He chances on a dance class and something in the dancers' unfinished gestures awakens him.

I married this with test shots I made with Jorge's underwater GoPro, mostly me getting soaked in a nearby fountain. How does water see? How does the world appear to water?

Now that I'm an old man, I like appearing in my movies again. It's good to see this defeated face, the worn-out flesh, the toll the years have taken. The film is rooted in my bouts of world-ending depressions. I was rescued more than once by one of my youngest friends, Emma. She invited me to step into the childhood I never had. Later, she became a dancer.

Ocean Vuong: "You are standing in the minefield again. Someone who is dead now told you it is where you will learn to dance."

LISTENING (2021) [made with Heather Frise]

Heather Frise

Mike and I are making a movie about Hildegard Westerkamp, so we join her soundwalk. We step away from the noise of industrial heat fans and descend into the ravine. Hilde instructs us to close our eyes. She tickles my ear with an oak leaf. A branch snaps underfoot and the smell of leaf rot gives way to a memory of my dead father opening a trapdoor, then clapping it shut. *Clap. Shut. Clap. Shut.*

A certain dampness in the ground softens my alarm. Mike lowers his ear to the river, lets the water run through him, stands up, and hears a whip-poor-will for the first time. He doesn't like nature, but he's intrigued by the call of the wild. In the distance, by the riverbank, I hear a boy's voice saying, "You turn everything to shit, Doreen." An image of Doreen takes shape in my head; she looks like a Minoan goddess transforming a piece of shit into a golden snake.

The willow branches sweep the ground and move to a rhythm which I recognize as my own. Mike stands up and exhales a long breath. I feel it touch my cheek even though I'm standing three trees away. A woman on the bridge is talking on her cellphone. She says, "Even if you don't have a job, Rick, your mother is still going to steal money from you." From up above, a trill that shifts in tempo, a sparrow—*tsip, tsip, tsip*—is mixed with a faraway ping and the din of the freeway. The *thud*, *thud*, *thud* in my chest.

Mike says, "Don't make a poem, we'll make a film instead." It will start with a long shot of a figure in the forest, her breath a white vapour floating up into the trees; you will hear her breathing as if she is cupping your ear, leaning in to tell you a secret. It will end with a coyote who will start to sing alone, and in time be met with great response. The choir that only listening makes possible.

CUT (2021)

Yann Beauvais

The film *Cut* is based on a text by Hito Steyerl, "Cut! Reproduction and Recombination" (2012), but Hoolboom takes it as a pretext to examine what cinema does to the body. The subtext is how cinema shapes the present, our memory, and the future. But here, instead of forming an argument of his own, Hoolboom uses Steyerl's thread of thought. His film is haunted by the question of capital, just as Eisenstein was during his project of filming Marx's book.

The essay film haunts Hoolboom's filmography. At least since the discovery of his serostatus, it seems that reflexivity has become a way not only to put forward his identity as a filmmaker, but also to convey discourse in order to make film an object of thought. The process is in constant elaboration from one film to the other. In this regard, the body appears in Hoolboom's films not only as a sick body, but also as a body composed of appropriated bits and pieces from a wide range of films.

If Steyerl describes a classical history of cinema related to the cut (how the western genre is based on colonialism and theft, how feature filmmaking begins with white supremacy), Hoolboom opens new directions in this story by showing what's not in the text. The process is geared toward separation as a moment of identity, in which sound is in a dynamic conversation with the image. United by technology, sound and image flow, forging the body as an act of perception. We have to cut ourselves to decide whether we are going to hear or see. The cut in my body is exactly what capitalism does when bodies are assigned a repetitive task, as on an assembly line. The film invites us to embody these cuts.

After rereading Hito Steyerl's "Cut! Reproduction and Recombination" (2012), the essay the film is based on, I was not expecting the filmmaker to speak the text. It was a shock, but after a few minutes I realized that Hoolboom was taking Steyerl's text as a pretext; he makes detours. Before dealing with the idea of the cut in cinema and capitalism, Hoolboom challenges the notion of the essay film. How film constructs an argument and reality out of cuts.

Steyerl's essay describes the shift from production to postproduction (from making objects to building brands), drawing on Lev Manovich's book *The Language of New Media* (2001). Both Hoolboom and Steyerl describe a change in how cinema and capitalism deal with bodies. Steyerl doesn't speak about it, but the cutting of the body as a landscape of pleasure or pain has been explored by pornography since the early cinema. Why does Hoolboom use so many images from narrative films and advertising?

Steyerl describes a classical history of cinema related to the cut (how the western is based on colonialism and theft, how feature filmmaking begins with white supremacy), but Hoolboom introduces some twists into this story. Steyerl speaks of images but never of sound, as if film were something mute. He never offers an illustration of what she writes; there is a competition between sound and image that produces a friction in our bodies. We have to cut ourselves to decide whether we are going to hear or see. The cut in my body is exactly what capitalism does when bodies are assigned a repetitive task, like on an assembly line. The film invites us to embody these cuts.

With this film Hoolboom perpetuates an investigation about image production being post or not, for which treatment, definition, and focus differ according to what and how material has been recycled. It's the same with the soundtrack, which intertwines different types of sound. We are facing a multitude which induces a body of thought in the making.

The factory which controlled the body through repetition now reappears in our image production, not only in the images we process and share but in the ones we produce as evidence of the self. This shift has been intensified by image production tools that give us the means to directly manipulate our representations in such a manner that slavery has moved from the public space of the factory into the home, reinventing the private as public space.

Hoolboom provides a flagship of postproduction in scenes that show computer-created crowds, little digital bodies swept away or crushed. It demonstrates that cinema doesn't need bodies any longer: It can produce them by itself. Cinema has arrived at the stage that Frankenstein could only hope for. To produce a body without a soul. There are many bodies in these images, but no images of the body.

The trans philosopher Paul Preciado is quoted: "Maybe we don't have bodies yet." To be in gender transition means that I don't have a body. The body is a construction. It's not a definite place. That idea comes from cinema.

There is a third body. The corpse is absent from the process of production. The other side of that corpse is the body of representation. In postproduction, we have to choose bodies and identities that are constantly in motion, we cut ourselves according to cliches which are expected to circulate. But there are bodies that have no representation, as we see in the long kissing scene which features many kinds of bodies, some made only of dots and lines. That is the third body.

In Brazil repetitive work is still in demand. North America is socialist by comparison to Brazil or China. We are living under the slavery of liberal capitalism. Perhaps what's been transplanted is not only production methods based on cutting, but also colonialism, where the distance between worker and boss is absolute. There is a use and abuse of bodies here that rarely exists in Canada. Brazil offers an image of work that Hollywood doesn't dare produce. It's a scandal. A mirage.

SOFT LANDINGS FOR CAPITALISM (2021)

Yann Beauvais

The film produces a commons of theoretical approaches. It's divided into four parts. The first is about witches. Capitalism begins with a cut in the population, the widespread persecution of women regarded as witches. What was at stake was their liberty, their freedom around sexuality and reproduction, and their noncooperation with Christianity. The film accompanies this discourse with views of a landscape on fire, though this is nature that lives close to society. We see smoke and fumes, a metaphor for the burning of witches. There are two stories; one is about killing women, the other about the killing of nature.

The second part is called "Commons." This subject has been dealt with by Achille Mbembe, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Isabelle Stengers, and Lis Rhodes. What is offered here is a different view, showing how the commons were stolen by early capitalists in order to turn land into property, and how labour was captured through slavery and mechanical work. This began in England, but we can see it other places, like the Amazon, where there used to be a sharing of land, knowledge, and food. What is at stake are precapitalist cultures that aren't based on what you possess. The introduction of capitalism changed our relation to land, gender, family, and labour.

The third part is called "How to Make Pornography." As Linda Williams says on the soundtrack, "How are we going to make pornographic images that will satisfy the viewer?" It is an excellent observation that most free porn sites are owned by a company called MindGeek; however, the film offers no analysis of cuts and divisions, the separation of the body into microbodies. It could have demonstrated how capitalism works by dividing forces, reducing the body to one part, reducing the worker to one gesture, one attitude, in order to exercise control.

The film offers a great diversity of acts. There are a lot of white bodies, some African American bodies, a few Asian bodies. The racial issue is passed over, which surprises me because Canadian artists like Richard Fung and others have addressed the role of Asians in porn as projections of white fantasy. I have the feeling Hoolboom could have done more. But, in fact, he's done enough.

Hoolboom dares to work with well-composed industrial images which are nearly archetypes. Years ago I was shocked to see him using these kinds of images; they were not common in the alternative film scene.

The last section is called "After Victory Day." The artist speaks directly. Many of the questions about divided bodies and selves make sense because the "I" that speaks is no longer a theory, but engaged in living acts of analysis.

COMMONS (2021)

Al Razutis

Commons is an ultra-left, anarchist, Marxist text. I immediately gravitated towards the point of view of feminist historian Silvia Federici and her combative style. There are assertions that the commons preceded capitalist society and extended across Indigenous worlds as a shared, public-private space. It reminded me of the South Pacific where tribal societies shared land, knowledge, and resources. You contribute what you can and take what you need. The commons is a utopian vision that continues to arrive in specific moments.

Federici argues that the enslavement of women and burning of witches are crucial to the beginnings of capitalism. Later in the film we see fences being put up in the sixteenth century. The enclosure of public lands, of the commons, marks the beginnings of private property in England. All of that has an impact on where we've ended up today, facing extinction.

> Indigenous resistance in the Americas can be seen on a continuum
> with peasant resistance against the English enclosures.
> Farmer struggles in India can be described as a compliment
> to the struggles of anticopyright programmers in the free-software movement.

It's an illustrated lecture at times but becomes very free-form, relying on associations by the viewer that are no longer led by words or ideas in the voiceover. The film describes scenes very similar to the 60s when communal orgs and counterculture alternatives were born. As examples, it offers squatter movements in the 70/80s and a present-day arts collective in Toronto. And later, graffiti artists in Brazil, early 2000s demos in Argentina and Venezuela.

There's a collectivist credit at the end that lists a bunch of names without tasks or divisions of labour. Including the author who isn't an author. I am amazed by the skill, the aesthetics, the whole shabango.

ICE CREAM (2021)

Alexandra Gelis and Jorge Lozano

Alexandra Gelis: The movie begins by making a "museum" of individuals the narrator loved, as if love were in the past, something that can only be examined in a museum. Then it turns to images of the mass production of ice cream. My father told me he used to love eating ice cream, until he went to the ice cream factory. What is in ice cream is simply garbage—grease and sugar. There's nothing good for you there, only a pleasure that destroys you.

I thought of *chicha*, a traditional, Indigenous, corn-fermented beverage made in Colombia. You make it at home with your grandma with lots of time, love, and care. It's the opposite of what's happening in these large machines with their cold, medical aesthetic that removes everything alive.

We see a long shot of a woman walking towards the camera, while everyone else seems to walk backwards, though actually she's the one walking backwards. She is slowly un-eating an ice cream, vomiting it up, refusing the mass production of bodies and pleasure.

Jorge Lozano: It's a short reflection on capitalism where "the first machines in the industrial revolution were bodies filled with organs and capital." The movements of text and images in this assemblage deliver a precise critique of technology, the body, and AIDS. In the final long shot the young person says, "When I finally did have sex it wasn't pleasure I was after but the setting aside of restraint, pretending not to be afraid. The release was so intense it was almost suicidal. At these moments I was used to feeling regret. Regret was part of my pleasure, like a bitter taste making the flavour richer." It combines personal thoughts with an almost academic critique of the precarious body in capitalism. The ending shows her body refusing the pleasures it has been trained to enjoy.

AG: I don't want ice cream made from this machinery. I want a real *chicha*.

JL: You still want ice cream, but a good one with microorganisms.

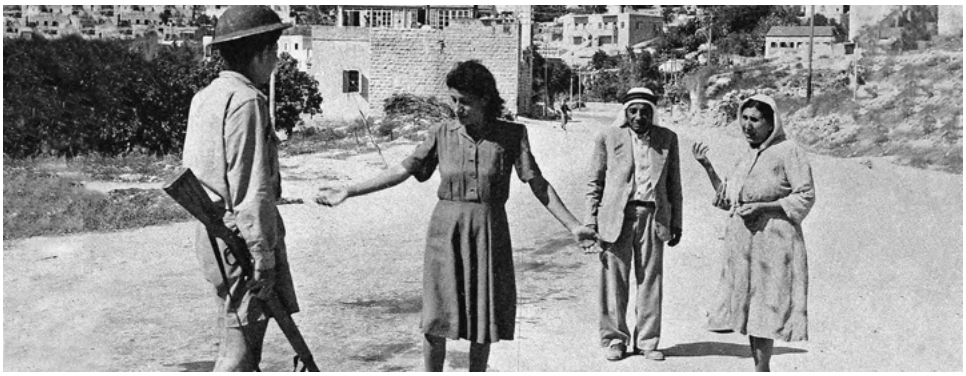
NAZARETH (2021)

John Greyson

Nazareth couldn't be more minimal: a six-minute close reading of a single black-and-white photograph as it slowly develops from negative to positive. This 1948 photo depicts four figures on a street in that town: a morose father, a stoic mother, a gesturing daughter, a nervous soldier. It's a film which speculates about possible meanings of that moment from each of their perspectives, resurrecting their four faces from the galloping events of that year, when 700,000 Palestinians were violently dispossessed by the creation of Israel. Thus, it's a Nakba film ("catastrophe" in Arabic), evoking the wounds and scars enacted, remembered, erased.

Yet watching *Nazareth* in November 2023 ensures that Hoolboom's film inevitably becomes a mirror held to today's second Nakba, unfolding seventy-five years after the first one on our screens and in 2.3 million Palestinian lives, a spectacle of unbearable viciousness and unfathomable loss. His narration says Perry Como and Mahalia Jackson (wondering about music the daughter or soldier might dance to), but we hear Taylor Swift and Beyoncé. He says Bethlehem, but we hear Gaza.

Nazareth may have the eloquence of a funeral march, but inevitably now also becomes a call to hearts and arms—because, of course, the dread of this current moment is messing with the chemistry in our darkrooms. Hoolboom concludes this work of quiet solidarity with a tribute: "And yet, the Palestinians are still standing … as if there are some pictures that can never be erased." Yet today, I fear his optimistic assertion is now a question, as haunting as an earlier one posed midway through Hoolboom's film, about the teenage Israeli soldier: "What kind of street asks its children to wear uniforms?"



SKINNED (2021)

Spider Campos

Skinned conjures a parallel pandemic time when a devastating virus attacks machines, wiping out the internet, leaving an aftermath of affected amnesia. We are presented with episodes of glamorously doctored images decorated with manufactured materials jarringly juxtaposed with fragile female voices. We witness a state of calamity that leads to a kind of second genesis—a Darwinian reset. *Skinned* can be read as a logical successor to Chris Marker's *Sans soleil* (1983). Like Marker, Hoolboom splits himself into several voices and invites us to share testimonials in a collective catharsis.

Each episode contains a manipulated image of a model's striking face. Underneath the veneer escape minimally audible, unadorned, nostalgically melancholic voices, a stark contrast to the highly glossy image. As the words unfold, abstract geometric plastic aberrations incrementally superimpose and exfoliate the image in slow motion, variations of an artificial skin that grew on us during the "Golden Age."

> **Voice 1:** *The internet is dead via a numbered virus.* It is a lament but also a forced opportunity for relearning direct human engagement and leaving part of our ordinary selves glued to ordinary others.
>
> **Voice 2:** *The death of the internet took away my history.* With photos, videos, messages, documents, and communities gone, who am I? I can't remember it all. We gravitate to being bodies of vanity and agents of cruelty as taught.
>
> **Voice 3:** *We grew a kind of quasi-second skin as we fed our alienation with digital fast food stimulation and instant gratification.* A kind of cyborg—an assimilation to the Borg—via cellphone messaging.
>
> **Voice 4:** *Ask fortune tellers to help remember their past.* Can we identify our gods? They lived amongst us. Pray for that but to whom?
>
> **Voice 5:** *Each of us holds a fragment of history.* We meet and share. If combined, this memory is Internet 2.0 for our children. But not for us.

Intimate emotional voices confessing and coping with their lost humanity underpin the sterile, manicured images floating on a technologically disconnected platform. The technology that was designed to connect the world has created digital facsimiles of ourselves. The platform became the real, and we are buried beneath a socially mediated exoskeleton.

THE GUY ON THE BED (2021)

Steve Polta

Infamous for confrontational artworks declaring a socially antagonistic gay identity—angry, stark, and howling, more the colour of blood, garish neon, or abraded flesh than rainbow-flagged—David Wojnarowicz has, for decades, haunted us from the grave. His films and artworks even decades after his death have triggered right-wingers, been deleted from staged exhibitions, and led to the defunding of arts institutions. A thorn in the side of an assimilationist agenda, solidly on the side of the marginalized underdog, Wojnarowicz seethed with animosity toward mainstream culture—his work an anguished assertion of life in a brutal psychic landscape of 80s America, most notably in response to his government's nonresponse to the AIDS pandemic—while also embodying (especially in his journalistic writings) an incredibly moving tenderness and yearning spirituality. Wojnarowicz remains a hero and model American, a man asserting life against all odds.

Created in 2021 as "news from another pandemic," Hoolboom's *The Guy on the Bed* presents an excerpted text from *Close to the Knives: A Memoir of Disintegration* (1991), Wojnarowicz's blunt yet piercing collection of autobiographical texts chronicling his traumatic early years and later harrowing life in 1980s New York City. It was life on the streets, life on the piers, finding community in the nascent East Village art scene that AIDS was decimating, witnessing friends and lovers die. Glistening and infused with love, *The Guy on the Bed* focuses on a moment of peace in the heart of Wojnarowicz's text. It's a three-minute meditation on passing, on transition, a pause in the turmoil of the world, at the moment of a death: "The guy on the bed takes two breaths … I'm amazed at how quietly he dies … how beautiful everything is …" A moment of peace.

In the film, the guy on the bed is Hoolboom, self-depicted in a succession of diffuse black-and-white still images. These images evoke Wojnarowicz's moment-of-death triptych of Peter Hujar, Wojnarowicz's lover, father-figure mentor, and spiritual companion in this hateful world. In Wojnarowicz's photos Hujar is Christlike: ravaged face, hands, feet. In contrast, the images in *The Guy on the Bed* read zine-like, like copies of copies, like figments lost and found in an all-night print shop, like Thermofax, like Xerox. Presented as still images, Hoolboom's self-imaging seems to temper Wojnarowicz's vision, presenting not the moment of death but perhaps rehearsals for dying, while also depicting a restless thinker, a man consumed, a man not through with living. "His face is a mask of need" appears beneath a shock-awakened Hoolboom, followed by shots of hands (recalling Wojnarowicz's photos) and the filmmaker drifting again toward restless (perhaps endless) sleep. Bodies collapse and repose. A survivor looking back. Self-portrait as a dying man. Sounds of crowds, or of news, emerge from the film's ambient soundtrack just at its abrupt conclusion. Self-portrait as a waking dreamer.

WE ARE ISLANDS (2021)

Marianna Milhorat

> She didn't want to make a new world alone. There had to be others and she would seek them. They had to build a world together.
> —Catherine Bush, *Blaze Island*

We Are Islands is a poetic adaptation of Catherine Bush's novel *Blaze Island*. Both works explore concepts of intertextuality, interdependence, and community. The film is a collaboration between Hoolboom, Bush, and Fogo Island artists Paddy Barry and M'Liz Keefe. *Blaze Island* is a climate-themed reimagining of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* set on Fogo Island, a remote island off the eastern coast of Canada. The last line of the film reads "We are islands" and acts as a provocation, but the film, like the book, also proposes a remedy. It points to another way of being, one based on relationships and collaborative forms of coexistence—both in life at large and as a basis for an artistic practice. In an essay on collaboration Hoolboom asks, "What if picture making were not only a me practice? What does collaboration look like as a practice?"

Hoolboom goes on to speculate, "The practice of collaboration has something to do with being in a body. It invites us to step back into the body . . . to imagine that we are in relationship, and to see out of that place of relationship." He poses the question "What would it mean to walk into a landscape and open yourself to being part of that place, to receiving that place?" In *We Are Islands* he seems to do just that: He allows the film to emerge from an intimate engagement with the work of his collaborators and the island itself. Hoolboom rejects a distant, singular, human-centric point of view, and instead embraces a sensuous, collective, ecocentric one. In doing so, he draws us into a rich, multilayered, and interconnected world—a new planetary imaginary based on an understanding of our shared fate. A line of onscreen text gleaned from the book seems to echo his approach and earlier line of questioning: "What better way to live than to open themselves to the land? And invite it to shape them?"

The rhythm of the film mimics the accelerated life cycle of a glacier under global warming. Images fade in and out like snow falling slowly over centuries—layers building, compressing, and deforming to shape a topography of the present. They ebb like tides—ephemeral, fleeting. The sound of the ocean turns into the sound of ice moving—icebergs slowly drifting south, ever melting—as islanders chop wood in peace and resilient solitude. A storm brews: The ocean mist picks up, a nautical flag signals warning, an underwater figure swirls in a violent torrent. A fox and a fence swoop up onto the screen and distort like waves, then freeze—becoming the ocean, lost to the storm, to rising seas. A sense of calm returns as a bird flies, men catch fish, children play. And yet, water trickles like ice melting in a slow drip. Images warp and shift in staggered, abrupt

bursts—like a crack or fissure forming—as if something is trying to break free. Ice cracks conjure images of icebergs calving as the sounds become slower, submerged. Ocean waves of increased opacity superimpose on the island landscape—overtake, drown, envelop it. All becomes one.

The film presents a portrait of life on the island and uses excerpts from *Blaze Island* as onscreen text. Adding to the intertextuality, Bush plays *Blaze Island*'s Miranda, who carries a notebook in order to write the "book of storms," while Hoolboom plays Frank, who emerges from an ocean storm, crawling over beach rocks. Like in the book, life on the island is not restricted to its human inhabitants, but also includes foxes, birds, lichens, ice, and ocean waves. Through the use of collage and superimposition, Hoolboom weaves everything together like a suture for some collective wound, born of severed relations. *The lost ones and the dead. Trees. Birds. Broken things*. The geologic past bound with the present. Our planetary future is dependent on one another.

23 THOUGHTS ABOUT MY MOTHER (2021)

Esma Moukhtar

A child becomes a woman, even a mother. In a mixture of imagery and words, the events and their effects unfold—from her youth in a colonial camp to the later experiences that shaped her. Testimonial is given: Although the woman's extraordinary powers could not undo what happened in the past, they enabled her to prevent similar things from happening in the future, allowing her to save others.

The mysteries of motherhood can, to a certain extent, be unravelled. Before he was sixteen, Hoolboom already seemed to know the truth about the woman who declared herself "an ordinary person."

His voiceover doesn't try to reconstruct her biography, although that is certainly part of it. What is at stake is the impact she had, particularly on his perception of self. He attempts to understand what he has learned, unlearned, carried forward, or misunderstood from her ever-present and internalized voice. On her last day, as her voice was on the brink of leaving her body it became like a "singing ghost," as if letting out what it always wanted to express.

Is this portrait a present to the mother? Yet, a gift to someone else is also a gift to oneself. For me, after a lifetime of struggling with my mother, who is barely alive after decades of illness, the act of watching this movie feels like a gift to us both.

23 THOUGHTS ABOUT MY MOTHER (2021)

Philip Hoffman

Sadly, Janine's ma died, just before New Year's. The presents still wrapped and waiting as we didn't do any celebrations with Jess and Simon, because Janine and Simon both caught Covid. Miraculously, Jess and I didn't.

We did watch your film, which seemed to be a good remedy for our woes. So interesting how you weaved her story into yours. It was good to know about your ma. All mothers seem to have a tough side that only appears when you are in their life, and your film showed the rough side too. You were able to keep the portrait unsentimental, which may teach me a lesson for my never-ending uncle film.

J and I talked a lot about the image of your ma's death. It was hard to handle, and takes over the image I am left with of the film. It gnaws at me and I don't like it because I wanted it all to wrap up "nice" at the end. We all want that. But death isn't nice, as I just saw again with Janine's ma. How to make it easier is something to think about.

Jean Pierre Lefebvre in *Les dernières fiançailles* made the ending of the elderly couple's life nice by having them walk into a kind of cinematic heaven at the end of the film. Well, it's not the 70s. We know endings are brutal. In your film you use the unsentimental side of yourself to edit in your ma's last image. Kafka said we photograph things to drive them out of our mind and that a book (film) must be the axe for the frozen sea within us. So, though I disagree with the depiction of her death, I understand it and it leads me to think about my own future demise. Hopefully we will have more choices.

MODEL CITIZENS (2021)

Caspar Stracke

A short film unravels a series of riddles. It opens with a sequence of damaged photographs; a title card informs us that they were taken in London, 1900. But what is that sound? It seems old and analog, maybe from the same era. A toy gramophone with spoons rattling on plates? The quick succession of stills reveals London Bridge, pedestrians in Victorian dresses, male workers with flat hats. All in soft colour. But wasn't the world still black and white back then?

As the viewer is left with these pressing questions, there are more odd photographs, many of them double exposures, with remnants of scotch tape and handling marks across them. One inevitably understands there is a rule to this game—memorize them as well as you can! Like a deck of cards presented by a mystic who lets you see each card for only a second before shuffling to the next. But wait, these are not photographs but film stills. Transitions. And with that realization a loud church bell bangs these stills awake. A moving sequence starts at a church entrance, tilting up to its clocktower. Sound now becomes a trusted diegetic ally as we witness a birth of cinema. We see the first film sequences ever recorded in London's public spaces.

In the clunky movie camera slowly panning across the masses, the viewer gets the feeling of sitting inside the camera itself. But we are not in the safe, voyeuristic place we are so used to in cinema. No! We are newly visible because all the subjects look back at us. Some appear skeptical, others wave. The voiceover explains:

> The church had built the first machine. It put a new voice inside us, creating a private relationship with God, so that we would become rulers over ourselves.
>
> The church gave us a voice and the cinema gave us a picture.
>
> We would create our new selves out of relationships with imaginary beings. Like God or Humphrey Bogart.
>
> This picture shows us learning the way the machine looks at us, and how we would learn to look at ourselves.

The voiceover text is a meditation on public appearance and the state, church power and governance. As if to make clear that a liaison between humans and cinema will continue forever, Hoolboom closes with the launch of a colossal ocean liner disappearing in fog.

JUDY VERSUS CAPITALISM (2020)

Mike Hoolboom

In 2019 I started an ongoing series of movies about capitalism. My friend Judy had just taken a terrible backwards dive on a frozen escalator, and making a movie together ensured I would be around as she eased herself out of a withering concussion.

In the film, Judy describes the efforts of an entire generation of women to make visible and then push back against "an epidemic of male violence." She fought along with many others to give women control over their own bodies, to have the right to choose an abortion, for instance. Judy is not only an eloquent public speaker but was born without an embarrassment gland. Impossibly, being on camera made her happy. She was working on a memoir at the time (*Heroes in My Head*) that I hope one day soon will turn into a miniseries.

Judy was part of the second wave of feminism in the 60s, 70s, and 80s, coincident in part with the rise of global squatters' movements that asked questions not only about where people could live, but about how we could live together. Culture was a big part of that question, and the medium of choice was super 8. I shot in super 8 hoping to evoke the mood, the eruptions of the body, the new dreams of another life that we might make together.

When the film was finally finished and she posted the title on her Facebook page, one pal wrote back: Judy versus Capitalism? My money's on Judy.

JUDY VERSUS CAPITALISM (2020)

Terence Dick

The funniest part of this portrait of Canadian feminist activist Judy Rebick is when she's talking at a protest in front of a Toronto police station. When people ask her why she demonstrates, she talks about ending the war in Vietnam, ensuring that women have the right to abortions, and supporting unions, including the one that represents the cops standing behind her, who are arrayed against the protestors. Then she leads the crowd in a chant of "We won't shut the fuck up." Repressive, counterrevolutionary forces just want people to shut the fuck up. But Judy created herself by speaking out. It's not an issue, it's a way of life.

Judy is the only one who speaks in the film, in brief sync-sound interludes that begin each of the film's six chapters, and then in voiceover. Her narration anchors images made on grainy film, using lens flares, time-lapse, and distorted images that morph, continually flowing one into another. Sounds complement images. There are close-up nature ambiences, but also internal sounds, the noise of thought. We see Judy's personal photographs, news reports, and recreations with "stand-ins" or visual corollaries featuring women in different settings. These scenes don't illustrate what she says, but connect in a more loosely associative way.

She describes her struggles with mental illness and how her own sense of identity is polyphonous, featuring many voices. Her dissociative identity disorder (multiple personalities) connects with the diverse visual accompaniment. Judy struggled to recreate her past because of buried memories of her father's sexual abuse. She wasn't able to have a long-term relationship because most of her emotional life was taken away when she was a child. Is that what it takes to become such a public force?

WAX MUSEUM (2020) [made with Alëna Korolëva]

Leo Goldsmith

How do people become images, and then become people again?

In the streets, strangers pause in the old light of autumn; they turn back, evanesce, and rematerialize as image. St. Petersburg is a theatre for the observational camera—for the filmmakers and the state. Silhouettes drift in the reflections of polished surfaces, smeared into the smooth textures of the city, or lean back into a coherence of colour, a tableau: yellow coat against yellow wall in a waning yellow light; kids wearing blue in a blue playground; a green car, a green construction tarpaulin. (Hey—there's Mike, walking up the stairs, becoming image.)

"The city maps the inside of the museum to the outside"; Borges's map (or was it Lewis Carroll's?) covers the territory. The Russia of the 90s and the Russia of right now—these are images that map onto the territory of global capitalism. But is this capitalism or something worse? "The dominant ruling class of our time no longer maintains its rule through the ownership of the means of production as capitalists do. Nor through the ownership of land as landlords do. The dominant ruling class of our time owns and controls information."[1] Either way, our work requires a public appearance, a smile, a performance, which the observational camera is there to capture.

This is why it's important to show up. In the streets, in the struggle, the image becomes flesh again. The protest models the revolutionary. Adorno told us, "A human being only becomes human at all by imitating other human beings." This isn't intended to be negative. It is rather the denial of the mimetic—the appeal to the authentic, the genuine, the essential, the national—that is oppressive. In our becoming image, we can be transferred, circulated, and this is "the primal form of love."[2]

NOTES

1. McKenzie Wark, *Capital Is Dead: Is This Something Worse?* (Verso, 2019), 5.

2. Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (Verso, 2005), 154.


TRUE
WINE SHOP

AFTER VICTORY DAY (2020)

Alexandra Gelis and Jorge Lozano

Jorge Lozano: It's a very clear essay on capitalism, how less destructive forms of social relations have become a utopia. We see a factory turned into a communal space of sharing and learning. A bike shop where you can fix yourself. It shows how off-centre we are because of the ways capitalism embodies us. The colonial impulse is so deep, we conquer our apartments, even each other. Under present forms of capitalism, even to love someone is utopia.

Alexandra Gelis: Our phones ensure we are never alone; the web is also our education, the unseen ways we train ourselves to create normal behaviour.

Then there's an image of a dark tunnel, which we walk through, and that brings new possibilities. How can we clean up the complex web of capitalism? Perhaps with a new kind of labour in a repurposed factory where sharing allows us to come back to ourselves.

JL: Workers took over factories in Argentina. I wonder how much is left of those initiatives? This factory is oriented towards different social relationships; instead of worker and boss, there are spaces where people can learn.

AG: This is a factory we've never seen before, a factory of collaboration and horizontal relations. A site of collective creation. This film is like the factory. When it's finished you start creating your own workshop inside. You start making your own film.

JL: We see rats living in the canals. Scientists discovered that humans and rats are close genetically. Rats are very smart. Rats can understand different languages and backwards sentences. It's like reverse transference: Why do we hate what is so much like us? The film talks about their coming from South America to France, and their capacity to resist, to make their own worlds in the borders of the human world.

The film begins with kids and militarism in Russia on Victory Day, but here in Canada families gather to celebrate technologies of death. No other country has caused more harm than the US, no continent more damage than Europe. Their attitude is: You belong to us.

AG: The most effective power is invisible, so that we control ourselves. It's attached to the image of the hero. How many kids dream of becoming police or part of a military force? It passes through our membranes, even the most intimate part of our bodies, which is the dream. What we dream to become. We learn to imagine futures where we have control over who can live and who will die.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR ROBOTS (2020)

Maike Mia Höhne

At night the bodies on the fields shimmer and the tropical rain reminds us of the red, rich earth—the reason we are here. In the future, we will share this world with artificial intelligence. "And we're always thinking about sex," one robot says to the other. Yet they can't do it because they're missing genitals. But is this really the reason they can't enjoy sex? MUERTE AL MACHO ("death to the male"), that's what it says on the wall at the film school in Cuba. The film reminds me so much of my time at the school, of this feeling, of being there, of thinking of nothing else but sex, and doing it … all the time. Everyone did it all the time. This is the energy you find over there.

Barbie® goes to the gynecologist to become autonomous. As long as the images that AIs are fed remain within the rules of stereotypical male ideologies, the future will continue to be one that delineates between masters and servants. How to feel the unimaginable? Envision a sexuality that broadens the scope of pornography to include devotion for a present future.

AFTER DROWNING (2020) [made with Alëna Korolëva and Camilo Constain]
Camilo Constain

I was pursuing a master's degree in Cuba, in the middle of an intellectual and existential epiphany, when Mike came to give us a two-week workshop. What he teaches is difficult to translate into words. He is usually recognized by his brilliant talent for working with recycled images, to give them, in his words, a second (or third) life. He believes, correctly, that most moving images have a short lifespan.

I learned that there is an immeasurable distance between a filmmaker and their subject that cannot be shortened with a lens. Most journalist portraits are made miles away from their subjects, no matter if they are taken with a 200mm lens or in extreme close-up. He invited us to reflect on "distance"—not in terms of metres or millimetres, but as a form of empathy, emotion, and cinematic truth.

Mike taught me the importance of sound. He flushed away the wax from my ears. He showed me that sound can be bigger than an image. Mike has more layers of sound than images in his timelines, and the majority of his time spent on image-making is working with sound. His speakers and microphones are better than his cameras and lenses. He is also extremely proud of his 10TB sound library, which he is constantly adding to. For hours we would walk around the school blindfolded in order to hear. He made me fall in love with sound.

Making *After Drowning* with Mike, I began to see that cinema and painting can be approached with the same impulses. Mike is an artisan. He works for days without a written script and without the final movie in his mind's eye. He slowly builds the movie, he lets it percolate. He works with the patience, presence, and contingency of a painter, a shoemaker, a chef. The uniting of art and craft are a way of existence for some. Artworks are just consequences of these inevitable existences. Pedestals, frames, exhibitions, and red carpets are fragile and ephemeral artifacts. It is the artwork that is the reward of the artist's craft.

TOUCH MEMORY (2020) [made with Joséphine Berthou]

Kathryn Michalski

On a Friday night in March of 2020, while out for a beer, Clint asked me, "Hey, wanna drive to the south shore on Saturday to record some sound for a Mike Hoolboom flick?" A sucker for an adventure, I had to say yes.

That very cold morning, I found myself in the home of Thanh-Tri Nguyen (professionally known as Sean Lu), a Vietnamese Canadian actor, cinephile, and genuinely nice guy who didn't stop talking about the adventures he has lived and how his involvement in the arts has taken him on life-changing explorations unforeseen. I listened, but also allowed my eyes to wander his home. They took in posters, red envelopes, family photos, images of parties, graduations, and weddings. Familiar smiles but occasions unknown. Recognizable, yet dislocated at the same time. Remnants of celebrations foreign to me were scattered about the house. As we busied ourselves setting up the recording system, the refrigerator roared to life, guaranteeing audio failure. Retreating to the basement in order to escape those dulcet tones, a lifetime of memories and memorabilia assaulted my senses.

Once settled in the basement, Sean was asked to speak passages in both English and Vietnamese. He then wrote them down on cue cards for a result unknown to us. Passages such as:

> Father, I didn't just lose you
> I lost Vietnam

Even without context, it was very moving, and I could not help but revel in the strangeness of the moment. Here I was in this man's home, peeking at his family photos, borrowing a piece of him, without the slightest clue of how the pieces would fit together. Discussing *Touch Memory* in an interview with Andrea Slováková, Hoolboom states, "Identity is a puzzle made up of pieces of different countries that live inside our bodies."

Months flew by and I could not help but wonder: Whatever happened to those recordings and texts? How did they all fit together? The final piece of the puzzle, the film, came my way a few months later. People, places, flesh, and foliage, all assembled, fitting together, but also unalike, each unique. The effect worked cohesively, a tactile response to being touched. It reminded me how art creates a safe space in which stories can be told, like a stranger's basement. A place in which one can capture images in order to identify with them, to find ourselves by losing ourselves. Art provides a space for all the missing pieces to fit together.

The film asks a number of questions: How does one navigate the need to belong somewhere while always being slightly different? While also belonging elsewhere? How does one deal with these differences? How does one navigate being in two places, yet nowhere at all? Perhaps the answer lies in the simplest of gestures—the blowing up of balloons, the caressing of plants, the holding of hands.

BE YOUR DOG (2019)

Janet Lees

> A palm-tree-gilded road in rural Cuba is the setting for a meditation on a dog's life. Traffic flows accommodate the uneasy terrain, the fellow travellers, as if we were all in this together. After Iggy Pop, the balm of Adorno.

So runs Mike Hoolboom's description of this huge story of a film. The description turns on the words "as if." Hoolboom unpacks the illusion of us all being "in this together" with quietly devastating allegorical precision. First, the narrator talks about what life was like when he was a dog, when he "spoke with birds and the roots of trees … became friends with the rain and the mud." (As a slight aside, I'm lucky to have a young dog as a companion, and I get to bask in the borrowed light of his way of being on a daily basis.)

In the film, a bus rolls towards us. Inside, a woman holding a baby laughs with the driver. Two cars pass each other; someone puts out a hand into the space between them. A car full of young people swerves down the road. We see, but can't hear, their laughter. Other ordinary things happen, lent vivid presence by the single fixed viewpoint and heartrending sadness by the unfolding allegory.

The meditation shifts from a dog's life to a human life. There is mention of racism and genocide. The narrator says, "But all humans are lonely, and little wonder, when they're so busy killing, or voting for the ones who are doing the killing for them."

As I write this at the end of October 2023, in the roaring shadow of a new mass slaughter, this film feels like a distillation of what it is to live a human life, as we repeatedly experience (if we are born in the wrong place) or witness (if we are fortunate to live somewhere safe) the terrible, inevitable outcomes of "the cruel lessons of separation."

The whole time, the speaker walks wearily away from us, over the brow of a hill that takes forever to ascend. His dogged trudge seems to reflect both our dark, destined journey and our parallel quest for holiness—amidst the separation, the loneliness, the killing of each other and of our own compassion—the solid, earthy holiness of a dog, perhaps Iggy Pop's "god" by another name.

FATHER AUDITIONS (2019)

Laura Busetta

Excerpt from "Ri-scattare le immagini di infanzia: archivi privati e performance digitali fra ontologia, ricordo, disconoscimento," *Arabeschi*, no. 16 (Fall 2020): 93–102. A revision of the text, which was originally published in Italian.

The stories of *Father Auditions* turn around the figure of a parent. Its central section is a portrait of the Canadian director's father, made a year and a half after his death. As if one is opening a family album, the film combines materials produced in a domestic context—photographs and home movies—with "stolen" images and photographs. Hoolboom reconstructs the life of his father and family in twenty-seven short scenes. This is one of the five chapters/sections/movies that make up the hybrid feature *Father Auditions*, which includes new versions of some of his earlier work (*Leaving Church* [2019], *Damaged* [1999], *27 thoughts about my dad* [2019], *Rain* [2003], and *Buffalo Death Mask* [2013]) as well as sections made explicitly for this collection.

In each of these segments, Hoolboom creates a portrait of a father figure, depicting how his speech and gesture echo in the bodies gathered around him. As one movie chapter follows another, a kind of extended family portrait develops. In our email correspondence, however, the filmmaker recalls that his mother was the real creator of the family narrative:

> She made most of the photographs in our family. She was the origin of language, the mother tongue, and the source of our picture memories. My mother gathered pictures, like many of her generation, in photo albums, with brief notes, sometimes just a name or a date. This created a sequence and ordering—you can already feel that this is cinema at work, and that there is a forward-moving teleology, a narrative of "progress," though it erodes or eats its own tail through volume after volume, as one generation of the dead replaces another. Names are forgotten, countries are forgotten, the terrible wounds have passed.
>
> But my mother had a photographic memory. She could bring back a moment from decades ago in all of its fullness, as if she were there again. Long before the home computer became a commonplace, my mother was my external memory keeper. As a result, I never remembered a thing. Why should I? My memories lived in her.

The figure of the father, so recently lost, both appears and disappears. He is conjured but remains elusive, and it is this pursuit, this quest, that underscores the need to put together "authentic" pictures from the artist's own life with disparate materials that offer the paternal dreams of strangers. He

notes, "There is an archive of personal pictures in the movie about my father; pictures of my parents' wedding, their return to Indonesia, their life together, but each of these pictures appears in a new frame." The film is composed as a portrait of different fathers, heterogeneous figures who map out a territory, or at least lay down some stakes, about what it might mean to be a father.

> Remembering is like running backwards, an art I practiced with a friend from childhood, Oscar, who says there are just two tragedies in life. Not getting what you want. And getting it.

"Remembering means running backwards" (an anti-pursuit, a recoil, running away?). Childhood photographs can at best emerge as staged representations—such is the claim of the voiceover that comments on an image in the chapter entitled "Kids eating lollipops," taken from *Damaged*, which is entirely made up of still images that slowly dissolve into each other.

> Determined to make our childhood as normal as possible, my mother patterned our behaviour after popular movies of the day. Because everyone seemed so happy onscreen, we were encouraged to learn certain scenes by heart, rehearsing them over and over until we got them right. Here we are rehearsing a birthday party from an Andy Hardy movie called *Kid Town*.

This burst of reflection on the maternal role in a film dedicated to fathers once again focuses attention on the specificity of parenting. It seems that the mother here performs the function traditionally reserved for paternal figures. It is also a demonstration of how amateur photography invented new ways to project patriarchal control onto the family.

Under patriarchy, the role of the father is like that of the ruler of the state. The figure of the father embodies and projects a hierarchy of power; he is charged with issuing regulations while disciplining "the lower classes" (wife and kids), demonstrating authority and the law. But in these five chapters, the ordering gaze of the male gender is met by a parallel track, a female "direction," that is busy establishing alternative codes and normativities.

In this family it is the mother who takes up the reins of the domestic group's self-representation. And Hoolboom himself considers the maternal figure decisive as the depository of family memory. In fact, with her "photographic" memory, his mother becomes a kind of living archive, as well as the origin of language (the "mother tongue") and the family's storyteller.

Far from confusing the plane of experience with that of representation—photographic or filmic—the voiceover in *Father Auditions* demonstrates and insists upon a gap between the fictionalization of experience and the reality of feeling, which takes on a deep meaning in the images of childhood,

in which the subjects portrayed are framed as part of a family performance, a staging often outside of their control.

The images in Hoolboom's films are enlarged, distorted, sped up or slowed down, frozen onscreen, pulled apart and set into a restless flow. Each moment is cast into a magma of other pictures, so that family "truths" slip away even as they are being recalled. Hoolboom explains:

> The individual stories and details are true but unimportant, they're forgotten almost instantly. What remains, I hope, is the tone. There's a residue, something that is left over, a feeling in the room. Could I somehow convey the feeling of my father, something of his easygoing lightness, his genial disengagement and detachment, his tendency towards abstraction and escape? How to offer some sense of his passing life, and the way he touched me as he left the room.

Each chapter of *Father Auditions* features stories that recompose the archive of pictures. While photography is a necessary memory prompt it is insufficient in itself, highlighting some moments while obscuring or even concealing others. The picture's incompleteness, or better, its rich capacity to trigger multiple associations and memories, is met again and again by texts that spin stories, assigning a place to each detail. The stories perform another function as well: They conjure the author alongside his subject, so that there is always a double portrait at work here, of father and son, as if there were no way to describe one without evoking the other.

Despite his use of found imagery and sounds, the artist appears alongside his subject, as if the camera were able to record in two directions at once, in stereo. *Father Auditions* is also a portrait of the artist, who is not the "father of fathers" but an agent that tries to turn paternity into a kind of brotherhood, a fraternity of equals. In other words, a utopian impulse courses through the movie's five parts.

> I realized that I was fulfilling the dream that every kid must have had at least once: I was giving birth to my father. Through images.

CREDIT CARD (2019)

Piers Handling

Mike Hoolboom's artistic conversation with Jean-Luc Godard, the great interrogator of cinema, extends back to his remarkable short film *White Museum* (1986), where Hoolboom wraps direct, uncited quotations from *Masculin féminin* (1966) into his own rambling disquisition and confession about why there is no image in his film, partially due to the difficulties of making a film with no money. Godard's obsession with the component properties of the medium—sound and image—mark his ongoing search and investigation into the language of a medium whose conventions came under the intense scrutiny of the French master.

Sonimage—sound/image—was the name Godard gave to his production company when he moved from Paris to Rolle and broke with the commercial system under which he had worked in the 1960s. Godard's project was one of investigation and interrogation—a frontal examination/assault on assumptions that viewers and the industry had turned into rigid and ossified "rules" around what constituted a film ready for public consumption. *White Museum*—a film with no "images" except a white screen, a kind of primal state of nothingness; or, in Godard's words that close *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle* (1967), a return to zero—marks a *fin du cinéma* moment of the kind that also ends Godard's *Weekend* (1967).

The notions of investigation and interrogation so central to Godard's cinema find their expression in two other concepts: the interview and the confessional, one often blurring into the other. Sound/image, investigation/interrogation, interview/confession are the sources of Hoolboom's alchemy in so many of his films—for example, *Frank's Cock* (1993), *Letters from Home* (1996), and *Passing On* (1998), to name some of the most notable. *Credit Card* continues Hoolboom's ongoing interest in Godard's examination of cinema, deploying a device—the interview—that Godard embedded emphatically into so many of his films, from *À bout de souffle* (1960) through to *Vivre sa vie* (1962), *Une femme mariée* (1964), *Pierrot le fou* (1965), and *La chinoise* (1967).

Credit Card consists of a scratchy, voice-only interview between Anna Ziatsky and Godard which is interrupted by a number of title cards (another Godardian trope), mostly fragments (also like Godard) which return to a few key words—"violence," "erase," and "memory"—that finally assemble themselves into a phrase that marks the last title card: "They did not want to erase the memory of that violence." Hoolboom adds random concrete sound, and unlike in *White Museum*, this time there are images, all still photographs.

The central idea that Godard touches on in this interview is the connection between a film and a credit card, and the notion that a film consists of a kind of exchange, like a credit card, that in his thinking denotes the idea that the viewer/participant exists. "The postcard was useful then, because

maybe you forgot you exist." The images that Hoolboom deploys, a series of seemingly random and disconnected photographs, become like the postcards of Godard's phraseology.

White Museum demanded we only listen, and again in *Credit Card* it is tempting to focus on the aural interview, but the images demand further interrogation, even if they are ultimately a collage of disconnected photographs that Hoolboom himself likely did not take. One could mine them (fifty-one in number by my count) for potential meaning, but this will remain up to the viewer, as Hoolboom does not impose a reading on them. They are left open-ended, except perhaps for the last three images, which follow the final onscreen assemblage of the completed phrase "They did not want to erase the memory of that violence."

The images sequentially are a photograph of the Monuments Men (the group of Allied soldiers tasked with recovering artworks pillaged by the Nazis) holding two paintings, with Superman inserted seamlessly among the soldiers; a photograph of a person holding a poster that reads DON'T TAKE PHOTOS; and finally an image of a number of lionesses climbing over a large cage containing tourists, in a visual reversal of the inside/outside norm where animals are caged and humans wander free. After a number of viewings these three images remain with me, largely because they confounded my expectations and disturbed my moment of viewing. They almost act as visual riddles to the issues that Godard raises in the interview.

The first of these images speaks to me about Godard's reverence and respect for an artistic tradition despite his revolutionary and disruptive tendencies; further, with the inclusion of Superman, the image seems to induce Godard's fascination with both the classical past of Europe and the comic-book-like present of American pop culture. The second image reminds me of Godard's constant references to the unfilmable nature of certain events (specifically the Holocaust), and the inability of the image to capture this reality, an ontological failing that could never be overcome. Finally, the third image in its amusing but disquieting reversal of the gaze encapsulates much of both Godard's and Hoolboom's obsessions. Together these three images reinforce the artists' embrace of the idea of interrogation and examination—looking harder and closer at the image while listening with acute attention to the words and sounds of the film.

Hoolboom, like Godard, forces us to listen and look—*Sonimage*. *Credit Card* starts with multiple images of eyes, both human and animal, and is accompanied by Godard's words "I still believe in my eyes." He and Hoolboom both do, with qualifications, and in the intersection of image and sound lies their ongoing exploration of the world and the manner in which it is represented.

I TOUCHED HER LEGS (REMIX) (2019)

Mike Hoolboom

I met Eva Marie Rødbro in the home of Mark Toscano, the maestro who archives the precious silver emulsions of the (mostly) American avant-garde cinema. When I mentioned I loved Miles Davis he began a nonstop playlist of Miles's acid jazz. So when I met Eva, I'm sure a cocaine-fueled shitstorm provided accompaniment.

I dread meeting new people. This can make introductions difficult. But I loved Eva's film *I Touched Her Legs* (2010) and watched it obsessively, so I had to stick around and pretend I was a person in order to see my hero in person. The movie is an embedded account of a small town in Texas, where she hangs out with white teens who don't seem to notice or care at all that her camera is never more than a few millimetres away while they make out, get wasted, fight, love, argue, put birds in their mouths, drive without looking. There is enough electricity in her film to power eighteen large cities, and every frame has life in it. It's not watching life happen. It is life. I could never make a movie like this.

She appeared later that afternoon. She had been down the block and wandered into a church where an exorcism was taking place. She talked to everyone there and filmed the whole thing. This is what gods of cinema do on their day off.

A few years later I was teaching a workshop in Geneva about found footage. I had the idea to invite everyone in the class to use Eva's movie as an archive and make their own movies out of it. She thought that sounded like a lunatic but fine idea. But when I made the pitch, nearly everyone in class thought the movie was so perfect they couldn't imagine changing a thing. Hoping to cure them of their certainties and coax them to embrace the imperfect, I started my remake of Eva's masterpiece. The first of an infinite series.

I TOUCHED HER LEGS (REMIX) (2019)

Meganelizabeth Diamond

> Remixing is like a musical adventure where every beat, every note, every sound is a new chapter waiting to be explored.
> —Madonna

The voyeuristic allure and scripted drama of reality television serves as a distorted mirror reflecting societal obsessions and cultural norms. In Eva Marie Rødbro's *I Touched Her Legs* (2010), the intersection of reality television and human intimacy is explored with stark realism. Rødbro's film delves into the paradoxical nature of teen relationships, where genuine connection is often overshadowed by the performance of emotions for the camera. These glimpses of reality are a far cry from the Bravo Family standards that have become all too familiar.

Rødbro exposes the artificiality inherent in reality television by juxtaposing it against the raw vulnerability of human interaction, more specifically the sexual awakening of teens. Rødbro employs a voyeuristic lens to confront the facade of reality programming like MTV's *16 and Pregnant*, where authenticity is often sacrificed for entertainment value. *I Touched Her Legs* offers a counternarrative, a resistance to the commodification of intimacy and the erosion of genuine emotion in a world driven by ratings and sensationalism. Rødbro's poignant portrayal challenges audiences to question the blurred lines between reality and fiction perpetuated by the omnipresent gaze of the camera. *I Touched Her Legs* is video art for those who like the reality of reality television.

Hito Steyerl once remarked, "The act of recycling creates a condition of permanent obsolescence." This sentiment resonates with the work of Mike Hoolboom, whose films often engage with themes of memory, identity, and the fleeting nature of existence. In keeping with Steyerl's observation, Hoolboom's approach to filmmaking involves a continuous process of repurposing and recontextualizing images, challenging conventional narratives and inviting viewers to reconsider their perceptions of reality. For Hoolboom, fringe media has always been "a collective project." He explains, "To create a digital file means adding something to a media commons, which we should all be able to access and remix. What we need is a freedom of circulation—that means freedom to move not only our bodies, but also our pictures and sounds." The remix challenges notions of authenticity and originality, blurring the lines between creator and curator.

I Touched Her Legs (remix) uses the language of the remix to reimagine Rødbro's video. In Hoolboom's remix, lives lived quickly are slowed down into a montage of stills, allowing time for reflection. Rødbro's video becomes a visual adventure where every image is a new chapter waiting to be explored. Like all remixes, Hoolboom's video contains elements of original material

rearranged or combined with something new. His addition of trail cam footage allows us to see the parallels between these teenagers and feral animals who pack together in order to survive. The desire to be cared for, to not feel alone in this world. Rødbro's camera, like the trail cam, is simply there to observe, yet both come with their own aesthetic. While much has changed in the ten years between the two videos—there has been increased access to comprehensive sex education, wider availability of contraceptives, and changes in societal attitudes towards teen sexuality—teen pregnancy remains unglamorous, regardless of class.

Hoolboom embraces a methodology similar to the one evoked by Jesse Malmed in his program of video artists remixing video artists, Asides & Besides. Malmed explains, "These works are less interested in (though not opposed to) ideas like détournement, appropriation, reenactment, 'found' footage, glitch, covers, samples, collage, etc., than in how we can apply the thinking behind the music industry's idea of the remix to the contexts and histories of experimental film, video art and critical cinema." Like many of the videos in Malmed's program, Hoolboom's remix pays special attention to the original soundtrack, in this case amplifying the voices of female teen protagonists who are recalling, reciting, and reimagining their experiences. *I Touched Her Legs* is transformed into contemporary photography for those who like the affect of reality television.

Love After Love

The time will come
when, with elation,
you will greet yourself arriving
at your own door, in your own mirror
and each will smile at the other's welcome,

and say, sit here. Eat.
You will love again the stranger who was your self.
Give wine. Give bread. Give back your heart
to itself, to the stranger who has loved you

all your life, whom you ignored
for another, who knows you by heart.
Take down the love letters from the bookshelf,

the photographs, the desperate notes,
peel your image from the mirror.
Sit. Feast on your life.

—Derek Walcott

FEAST (2019)

Kerri Sakamoto

It was years ago when we drove into town from the beach on St. Lucia, stalling beside the hustle-bustle of Castries market amid shouts and honking horns. A stranger hopped into the backseat and smiled. *Don't you remember me?* He eased us into a parking spot, and we rewarded him for this unexpected service. He thanked us, then slipped out of our car and into another.

We walked, my then seven-year-old son and I, counting our steps along the perimeter of the main square. He tiptoed then roared behind pigeons, jumped over cracks and squatted to finger the insects crawling in them. He peered into the profusion of ferns to discover their patterns. He pawed the spiny, scarred bark of the palm trees. We came to the bronze head and shoulders of Derek Walcott—resting atop a turquoise pedestal—for whom the square was named after he received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1992. My boy reached up to caress the stippled sparkle of the poet's hair under the tropical sun, to divine or make a wish, but it was too high.

I gave him my phone and what came back were stuttering videos of cracks under his feet, petals, and fronds. Then there I was beside his father, our blurry headless backs to him as we walked at a growing distance in yellow light, and his whispering child's voice, saying, "There was a woman and there was a man." It was the beginning or end of a story, his story, one he trailed outside of.

In urging us to feast, the filmmaker evokes our hunger. The rehearsals for living, the intimations of life, the swimming in air, the ghost's clothing on a chair. The tremulous self, hovering past walls, buzzing outside the hive, even as it struggles to transcribe itself into existence.

I want my son to please unlock the door. To arrive. To love his self. To never wear his skin as the cloak of a stranger who asks, *Don't you remember me?*

HOW TO WATCH PORNOGRAPHY (2019)

Jean Marc Ah-Sen

In *How to Watch Pornography*, Hoolboom short-circuits the pleasure dragnets and unruly verges of porn consumption with abandon. Intentional daytime wetting videos that invert the shame of incontinence with a blithe triumph are at home with gonzo documents of self-love and seedy hotel assignations. *Pornography* challenges cultural norms and mines the intellectual riches that are found at the back of the beyond, in the forgotten badlands of perception—the ultimate test of the id and the ego. The film implicitly asks how the baselines of lust are instantiated, and whether such a thing as outsider or neoteric porn viewership can exist only in relation to mainstream forms of gazing. One cannot help but wonder, What exactly are the contours of the avant-garde orgasm? What lies beyond the fringes of masturbatory culture?

In *Pornography*, the sex act takes a back seat to the impulses of the curatorial filmmaker. A viewer is left beholding the intentional traces of the habituated video editor while porn sloughs off its predictable categories of excess, decadence, and superabundance. What emerges from the suety penumbra of this annihilatory rogue medium is a glimpse into the parallelism of desire.

LOVER MAN (2019)

Alan Zweig

When I interviewed Guy Maddin for my film *Vinyl* (2000), he told a story about listening to baseball games on the radio, and that was when I realized he was a genius. In a similar vein, I realized Mike Hoolboom was a genius when he was delivering a eulogy for our mutual friend, the late Mike Cartmell, who was the smartest human I ever knew.

I know I'm supposed to say something about Hoolboom's film *Lover Man*, in which he excerpts an interview I did with Cartmell—*my* Mike—as well as excerpts from one of Cartmell's own films. But when I was watching that clip and the way my Mike called bullshit on me … Some of my favourite memories of him involve making him angry. I would often tell him I didn't understand what he was talking about, and he would get annoyed. He would tell me I should understand because I'm supposedly "smart," and I would respond that I wasn't smart in that way, which is true.

Perhaps more relevant here are the times I would tell my friend he should stop making experimental films and make something people could understand. And he'd get understandably pissed off at me. I knew this wasn't a very supportive thing to say to a friend, but he was so brilliant, and it was frustrating to me that the world wasn't getting to experience his brilliance.

The bit of our interview that Hoolboom excerpts in his film is one of my favourite memories of my Mike. I was being kind of stupid and it inspired him to say something beautiful that actually changed how I look at the world. I've repeated Mike's argument about music and format many, many times, sometimes attributed to him and sometimes not. In *Lover Man*, Mike argues:

> You think emotional experiences in an encounter with another living person are more authentic than emotional experiences in an encounter with somebody blowing a horn twenty-five years ago that's been somehow digitally encoded on a piece of plastic? That's fucking bullshit. That's bullshit.
>
> You think that Coleman Hawkins on that CD or vinyl isn't a person? Yes, he is. That's a person. That's an engagement with another consciousness. You can't say, "Well, Coleman, why did you go to a G-flat there when anybody else wouldn't have?" You can't engage in that way. But if you listen to that thing twenty-five times with a keen ear and some intelligence you'd know something about what is grave and constant in human nature.

Tossing off bits of insight like that was too easy for him, I guess. In his filmmaking, my friend had a more ambitious goal—to create a new language, whether his not-so-smart buddy understood the

films or not. And I'd say the exact same thing about Mike Hoolboom, who can make a stunningly beautiful speech but has spent his life trying to communicate on another level. Just watching him try has been something I feel lucky to have experienced. I'm glad he's around and still doing it.

THRESHOLD (2019)

Jason Fox and Brett Story

What series of events had to happen for us to come into contact with this image?

This question, posed by the scholar Tina Campt and frequently reposed by us to our students as an exercise in how to see, contains all other questions. It is the first and the last; it makes all other questions redundant.

How to talk about images from Gaza in December 2023, months into an unrelenting, genocidal military assault in which Israel bombs, starves, displaces, and poisons one of the most oppressed people on the earth in front of the open eyes of the world? We watch Hoolboom's lyrical *Threshold*, set in the markets and tunnels of Gaza, and it's still the only question: *What series of events had to happen for me to come into contact with this image?*

A Nakba
A Holocaust
A Mandate
An occupation
A man and a son rebuilding a small stone house.

Ocean Vuong's poem "Threshold," to which the film is set, begins with the line "In the body, where everything has a price." We like to speak in the language of the market. W. E. B. Du Bois writes of a "psychological wage" to describe our existential investments in artificial differences that organize real and repressive orders. We refresh our feed to see the latest numbers, as the West takes incomplete audit of a war that is, in fact, a genocide.

A minute into Hoolboom's film the image starts to distort and then bloom, as if the celluloid is melting. It resembles a kind of crystal moss, simultaneously dead and alive. Gradually, the image becomes—or reveals—a body, forensic in its view from the unseeable inside. But then we are on a street and in a market. The people resemble people again. Until the end, when on the screen these people are running, a child falls, and the words "with my only eyes … wide open" taunt us.

A nurse in Gaza, from our present nightmare of unseeing: "Write on our graves in bold script: Here lie those who loved life and could not find a way to live it."

(S)HE SAID THAT (2019)

Christine Negus

Binary code describes the remixable set of 0s and 1s that forms the rudimentary basis of the digital. These two symbols are foundational, communicative building blocks that translate information—text, images, sounds—into a computational language that engenders reproduction onscreen. As an example, each onscreen letter that makes up a word is formed through a unique symbolic script; every pixel in an image has an individuated code. The structuring power of binaries is apparent, even on a microlevel, in this cipher which, at its base, organizes our digital world.

We enter *(S)he said that* in a similar way to Hoolboom's other works: via language. An unidentified, mid-ranged voice—later revealed to be philosopher Paul B. Preciado, excerpted from his talk "Pharmacopornographic counter-fictions"—structures the lecture-cum-video. Through a discussion that employs biological binaries, Preciado expounds on how techniques of difference inform sociopolitical constructions of identity and concepts that include gender, race, sexuality, and war. The organizing power of gender becomes visible as we are directed through a series of moving images, culled from the omniscient digital ether. The images move alongside the text as the onscreen visual language questions the definiteness of our social foundations. We see visually marked men exercising and fighting in war; we see visually marked women getting dressed and speaking in beauty pageants. We see an anatomical illustration of a dick getting hard; we see biologically pregnant bellies. There are a few breaks in the binary representations, but similar to the repeated motif of mechanized creation, the reproductive machine keeps enforcing and enacting itself.

There is a divergence within this parade of images, whose presentation modality utilizes both collage and montage, but productively fails at fully actualizing either of those two historicized forms. Hoolboom intervenes in his own patterning, and this irreverence to the sequence bleeds over into the pictorial. Through the filmmaker's play with opacity, the definiteness the pictures maintained is broken; they dissolve into each other, changing the visual script. Images, the once solid carriers of meaning, are deactualized and mimic Preciado's claim that binaries—especially in regard to contemporary biopolitical discourses—are irrelevant. This becomes clear in the way Preciado handles questions concerning how one identifies sexually. He answers with a rhetorical question: "According to what regime?"

The techniques of violence that the gender binary constitutes, as expanded upon by Preciado, are reflected in the image treatment. Hoolboom figures the fading of control regimes through the dissolve, which visually obliterates binaries. As the opacity falters we see a spectrum of multiplicity revealed. This mediation enacts a nonbinary aesthetic, as well as an approach that creates new

pictorial possibilities through and against difference while disavowing their prior categorizations. It is a transformative onscreen action where the destruction reveals the image's constructed nature and moves to enact a wholly new imagining in the spaces between.

Hoolboom's anti-reproductive methodology opposes the structuring power that extends from the code that makes up images and is then carried through their messaging. Signification itself dissolves as we see through the pictures. This transparency favours a disassociation that opposes the totality of codification in the breakdown. The disorganizing process reflects a nonbinarism as found in the ontology of the glitch—it is not one or the other, but both and/or neither and/or something entirely unexpected. Hoolboom's digital remixes suggest a new visual language—both transgressive and beyond the binary that scripts our nondigital embodiments. And though it is evident that the binary is difficult to rewrite, *(S)he said that* offers a remix that makes it much harder to compute, while also suggesting ways to glitch out the code itself.

27 THOUGHTS ABOUT MY DAD (2019)

Madi Piller

Mike Hoolboom's voice in *27 thoughts about my dad* builds a portrait of his father. When I first saw the film, I had already seen its companion piece, *23 Thoughts about My Mother* (2021), the sublime portrait Hoolboom made after his mother passed away. The film was a eulogy made in her memory, and though I never knew her, the film made me admire her. While *27 thoughts* is also a eulogy, the title speaks volumes: Hoolboom's previous film referred to the maternal parent as "mother," while this one refers to his paternal parent as "dad."

The film begins with a meditative shot of the artist, who is about to take us through a private journey compiled from a mix of personal and appropriated archives. In twenty-seven short chapters, the film approaches the intricacies of family dynamics as though they were a mathematics equation to be simplified. We, as spectators, impatiently follow this countdown of thoughts and memories, attempting to form our own storyline. The sequential structure and sensorial imagery form a parabola which demonstrates his father's unique technical mindset. The artist's language constructs a narrative which has been informed by a mathematical and methodical figure—scientifically calculated doses of disguised love.

> In his last story, he describes a moment after five years of a brutal Nazi occupation, when the Allied planes fly so low that he can see the pilot smiling, before dropping boxes of food. That day Dad eats an entire loaf of bread. At the end of his language, at the end of his story, there is a precious loaf. Here was the proof that every promise would be fulfilled, every hope realized, everything we had ever wanted could be held in our hands and cherished. The endless war would be over soon. We would eat together and it will be good. It turned out the heaven he believed in was right here, in every ice cream parlour, and every plate of fried rice, and most of all in the face of my mother, who he loved devotedly for sixty-three years.

27 THOUGHTS ABOUT MY DAD (2019)

Helen Lee

This was made two years after the passing of Mike's father. It is structured in twenty-seven discrete vignettes. Mike has made some fifty films since (and counting), a number that would put Fassbinder (or whoever is the most prolific person you know) to shame. He is lit by some flame beyond the normal calculations of humans. And we can just bask. Here are twenty-seven thoughts about Mike.

No. 27 Mike is haunted by images. The ghosts are everywhere, ever present. Each passing year births a new succession of images, linked according to a calculus of obsession, obligation, and open-ended cinematic equations.

No. 26 This movie is about his dad. Beyond its titular subject, it's really about—like all his films—how he understands the world and his place in it.

No. 25 About faces, food, history, war, starvation, and *second helpings*.

No. 24 Not surprising to learn that his father was a scientist. Always, there is method to the madness, obviously baked into the DNA. The economy of images. Nothing wasted.

No. 23 Bonds of friendship, affinity, loyalty. Whether by fate or accident, no matter.

No. 22 Thriving on paradox, dualities, multiplicities. Vivacious and lush, pungent and visceral. With a stoic, monkish asceticism, not unlike Mr. Spock, who is evoked here. If his father was the "Science Officer," Mike is the Art Officer.

No. 21 His father's work as an electrical engineer takes him to Pittsburgh and Texas. *Howdy, paardners!* Whereas with Mike, I've never met anyone whose own work takes him the world over, but who'd rather stay home and work on his films.

No. 20 Conundrums of space, time, and travel. In other words: stories. Like an astronaut in orbit at warp speed. Screaming, then silence. Transcendence.

No. 19 If Dad was "legendarily absentminded," the flip side is making a huge pot of soup for the week so that eating was taken care of. After the beans are soaked and the vegetables chopped, the schedule is cleared for the real ingredients. *Hi honey, I'm home.*

No. 18 From a childhood dialectic of *Mary Poppins* and *2001: A Space Odyssey*, it's not difficult to see which movie won out.

No. 17 Murky family histories, including an Indonesian grandfather who was jailed in a concentration camp run by German soldiers in the archipelago. Like a prick or wound, knowing how to speak German in that moment is a punctum that festers in Mike's memory. Colonized by language, caught between wars, a family hangs in the balance.

No. 16 Released from prison because "my grandfather wasn't Jewish. Or a spy. So he didn't need to be killed," he returns home to a sickbed. "He liked to read at night," so his son hooks up his bicycle to a generator—such a powerful image. Indelible. And so the comparison with the son's son, who generates images for us with similar devotion, duty, and diligence.

No. 15 Ever the rebel. Police discover his dad's radio scanner, which he used to beat the speed limit (let the cops deal with real criminals). But to him it was just efficiency.

No. 14 If Mike was eleven, the year is 1970. This is the centrepiece. The grain is so moving: super 8 blown up to 16mm then transferred to digital; there is a magic in these interpolations. The joint science fair project binds both father and son and marks their difference. (Son painted green the housing of the computer that Dad built, and eventually parlayed their B+ grade from the teacher into a Governor General's Award.)

No. 13 *Uh, Dad, that was actual cat food.* This is where you fall in love with him, the dad who is so game to play with his five-year-old daughter that he becomes a cat. And swallows.

No. 12 An amusing story about a parent-teacher meeting with the eccentric but not-quite-up-to-par physics instructor. "There are only six formulas in physics. He's doing everything the hard way." There are no formulas in filmmaking and a million ways to do things. Mike figures out the million and one. And we're still counting.

No. 11 Dutch expat clean freaks coming back home from church. This "Be sure to wash your hands" anecdote invokes life's little ironies, and we are left to wonder if a dry sense of humour is a congenital condition.

No. 10 With musical tastes that tended towards the Teutonic (Beethoven and James Last), his father preferred listening to Last's big-band jazz. It was most popular, not coincidentally, in postwar Germany, Russia, Japan, and South Korea. Happy music.

No. 9 Patriarchy beneath the Christmas tree, gender roles that confine and baffle, fake spankings dispensed through laughter, anger and tinsel. Family memories always fraught and double-edged; this one dissolves into tickles, saved by Dad's good humour.

No. 8 Dementia then Alzheimer's disease; the attrition of time and language. When memory fades, space opens up for emotions. Stories are what we have left, along with the faces that tell them. When words are lost, we turn to love.

No. 7 *He had always been easy with words. They flowed out of him without any effort.* Like father, like son. Cruel to experience this loss of language, and crueller still to witness it.

No. 6 The wrenching story of Mike's father losing his father again—not to German soldiers but this time at the hands of his wife, when Mike's grandmother has his grandfather committed to an asylum because he was drinking away their food rations. Impossible to fathom if you've never experienced hunger before. War traumas turn inward; another unspeakable separation.

No. 5 Tennis is, like filmmaking, both passion and practice for Mike. I'd always imagined a game between him and Godard. His dad taught him topspin. The gentleman's sport.

No. 4 *I never heard him say "I love you."* Again, that gorgeous film grain with all its latent emotion. Shot during one of the most challenging yet vital periods of his life: black-and-white footage of Toronto days, precariously housed and newly HIV-positive under the spectre of AIDS, "which was a death sentence then." A paradigm-shifting moment in his life and his filmmaking, yet that essential fact unacknowledged. His films such as *Frank's Cock* and *Letters from Home* celebrated, but his personal condition otherwise never spoken about. *Emotions were a department that was run by my mother.*

No. 3 He made a previous film about his dad, called *Spectator*. Both hiding from each other, his dad behind newspaper, Mike behind camera. Wordless, but an exchange nonetheless. It ends with a dream: Dad has turned into a pelican, symbolizing death and the afterlife. Free at last.

No. 2 Rituals of family. Dad is moved into a nursing home. The siblings have gotten older too. (The punctum here: his brother's bandaged head after surgery.) Dad may be telling the same stories, over and over, but Mike wants to hear them because they're the only ones that matter.

No. 1 His father's last story: After a brutal, five-year Nazi occupation in Holland, manna falls from the skies in the form of food drops by Allied planes. Heaven is a loaf of bread. And gazing into the face of a woman he loved for sixty-three years. Father may be the text, but mother is subtext. And with that, the next film.

GRAMSCI'S NOTEBOOKS (2019)

Mike Hoolboom

Originally published in *Modern Times Review*, January 27, 2021.

My friend Francesca says that taking pictures is as important as water rights or a homeland for the Palestinians. She talks about a new contract that would stop anyone from making a picture until you've been there six months. I guess it would stop the news from looking like it was made by tourists.

How would the world appear if every face and street corner were also a picture of home?

I want to follow her advice, but not before making one last trip. I guess I'm not quite ready for utopia.

Sometimes you have to travel around the world in order to see where you are. I haven't been able to get out of bed in weeks, paralyzed with depression. Perhaps it was time to visit my dead Italian friend to look for answers.

It turns out the great Italian writer Antonio Gramsci was also a jogger. He even wrote a book about it, though most prefer his prison notebooks. He said, "I run in a void. Or maybe I should put it the other way: I run in order to acquire a void."

Gramsci was often asked what he thought about as he ran. He wrote, "Usually the people who ask have never run long distances themselves. I always ponder the question. What exactly do I think about when I'm running? To be honest, I don't have a clue."

* * *

Gramsci asks us to look closely into every face. What he is looking for is fear, because fear is the beginning of a culture. Every self-doubt and hate crime, the name of every country, wherever there is a boss or king, or a voice raised against a different race, gender, or species, it all begins here, in the place where fear lives.

The face is the primal scene of the class struggle. Perhaps by dedicating ourselves to the close-up, we might find the beginnings of a new society.

Because Gramsci's spine was crooked he was hunchbacked and grew to a height of only five feet. He became a journalist and then an organizer for workers. He saw that the ruling class no longer needed guns; the media would do that for them. Common sense, it seems, was the sharpest weapon of all. He started the Communist Party in Italy, knowing we would need different kinds of relationships.

Gramsci was arrested for thinking out loud and spent the rest of his life in prison. He had convulsions, vomited blood, and suffered headaches so violent he beat his head against the walls of his cell. He dreamed that the movements of swans would model a new human society. The state had ruined his body but not his analysis of power, which he poured into twenty notebooks.

INTRODUCTION TO ALCHEMY (2018)

Daniel Cockburn

There are those of us who believe it's never the right time. Even if we believe this against our own best interests. Never the right time to write this essay, to watch this film, to respond to that email, to clean that room, to speak our feelings. Because the stakes, for us, are always maximum; therefore, the result must be impeccable; therefore, the conditions must be perfect. But it's too late in the afternoon, or I'm too distracted by an unrelated anger, or I haven't got my laptop with me at the moment and I can't watch that film on my *phone*, are you joking?

"Celluloid won't be around in 20 years, and neither will I," wrote Hoolboom in 2001. A couple of years after that, I heard him tell with casual glee of how he'd just thrown away a bunch of his old film prints. I had to go into another room to hide my reaction. That a friend would be so joyous about preparing to say goodbye to the world? A joy I could not share, refused to share, had a quick surreptitious cry about instead. Thinking back on it: Sure, maybe it was some kind of goodbye gesture … but maybe he was just spring-cleaning, and the film reels had all been duplicates and worthless outtakes. But either way, what was it that I was pre-mourning: Was it him or was it the prints?

People like me, the never-the-right-timers, we hang on to everything in hopes that the right time *will* come, to read this book or use these film reels or respond to that letter. To dispose of thing X would be to admit that its right time isn't coming—or, worse, to accept that what *could* have been the right time for thing X may well come only to find thing X already gone. Black-and-white lovers whose life paths diverge, irrevocably, on a train platform, just because of scheduling. To make your peace with that? With knowing that the time could come to no purpose, to no avail, and pass unfulfilled? Delectably tragic in a melodrama, but too terrifying in reality. Better to weave a protective web around your life, a web of holding patterns, of just-in-caseness.

Images and patterns are powerful things. Some might say they're all we are. Is there a way to do spring-cleaning? To start choosing what to leave behind? What to keep and which to cull?

* * *

Introduction to Alchemy. It sounds like a first-year wizards' textbook, on the shelf next to *Fundamentals of Conjuring* and *Sorcery for Dummies*. (It was actually made as a substitute intro to a screening that Mike was unable to personally attend—for health reasons, I was told—at a fest called Alchemy in Hawick, Scotland.)

But surely the two of us—*Homo sapiens* and alchemy—have already been introduced to one another. We first shook hands centuries ago. Then we spent some time together in search of the philosopher's stone, seeking the key to transmutations and essences, and eventually went our separate ways when the secrets failed to materialize. Did we drift apart naturally or was a poison tree planted between us?

In *Introduction to Alchemy* the images come, like that gnomic instruction reportedly given to Joy Division's drummer, fast and slow at the same time. Maybe the reason I've always found this style of Hoolboom's seductive is because there's a hope in it: a hope that there are ways to make life in an endless series of oncoming images something other than an endless series of cuts (because a cut is a shock, and shocks without end constitute torture). To instead make this life a single long dissolve, a swim in the foam atop a perpetually cresting wave that never breaks.

I want to say every image is indelible, but that's not the right word; every image feels indelible but only for a moment, until it's eaten by the next indelible one (indelible but not inedible); the movie is always immediately effacing itself.

You feel, with these prolific makers like Hoolboom, that it must never *not* be the right time … How else could they work that fast, make that much, for so long? Do some people have a keener sense of mortality than I do, and does this give them an urgency I admire and envy?

And all that may well be presumptuous projection on my part. Still, I know that sometimes the way to make it feel like the right time—right enough to spur myself into action—is to feel like there isn't any time left. To take it right up to the point where any time after now will be too late (and maybe it already is). I know that's how I do it; I play chicken with the end.

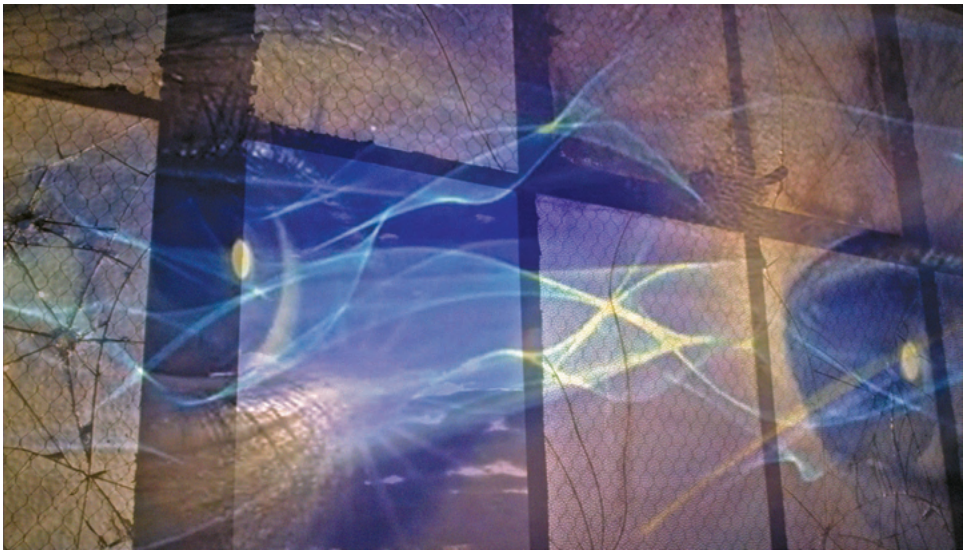
Obviously this tactic is only available to someone who can afford it.

***

Whence all these amazing images? Some of them repurposed, some of them originals. It's not always easy to tell which is which. Like Hoolboom's insertion of an Audre Lorde quote into the middle of his voiceover: It's not immediately apparent when or if the quotation marks close. Are we still hearing Audre, or have we shifted back to Mike?

This fuzziness of provenance mirrors his story, of a friend's mirroring synesthesia—a sensorial "feeling-with" that shows how the boundaries between self and other can be found porous. And maybe Hoolboom's movie is working not just to dissolve every image into every other, but to blur every boundary between itself and every other movie.

Is this what Hoolboom means when he speaks hopefully of a future "new gratitude and vulnerability"? It sounds like magic. We parted ways long ago, we and alchemy, but maybe there's time for us to be reintroduced at the last minute. The stakes are maximum—maybe they always were. But at least some prophecies turn out to be wrong. Twenty years later: still here.



NURSING HISTORY (2018)

Dirk de Bruyn

> To decode a technical image is not to decode what it shows but to read how it is programmed.
> —Vilém Flusser[1]

The text spins this found Red Cross film from Vietnam into a tactile residue. It is a frolic, a dance and encounter between a nurse and her patient in the surrounds of a deserted, garrison-like hospital grounds. Its slowdown is not like a car crash but holds each glance beneath a microscope, as hands glide between bodies. This is the contact the audience gently receives. We are inside a time machine. Images need to talk like this, to subvert cinema's coercive surveillance machine while in plain view.

The invisible camera surveils, and beyond that, Hoolboom's computer tells us what he resolves us to see. So many wounds are pockmarked in its gaps. I do not see the John Wayne named in the intertitles, but a young boy pleasing his teacher, or a young man recognizing what is to come, or merely an echo of the woman's hand. His face is read many times in many ways; it can even be read as Hoolboom's own. Time slows in these moments, enabling us to weave speculations. The man's body has been spoken to by her touch. Her glances speak to his body and he smiles. He tells the camera whether he wants to or not. And the nurse, what clusters of meaning are attaching themselves to her gestures?

Would this have happened if the camera was not there? What a useless question.

We can look back through history, through all its soldiers, nurses, families, victims, and mutilations into the distorting, overwhelming experience that is war. Here Hoolboom has hit the pause button on his computer on the other side of the world, on the other side of time, piercing Flusser's amnesia.

The technical images currently all around us are in the process of magically restructuring our "reality" and turning it into a "global image scenario." Essentially this is a question of "amnesia." Human beings forget they created the images in order to orientate themselves in the world.[2]

NOTES

1. Vilém Flusser, *Into the Universe of Technical Images*, trans. Nancy Ann Roth (University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 48.

2. Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, trans. Anthony Mathews (Reaktion Books, 2000), 10.

SUPERNATURAL POWER (2018)

Mike Hoolboom

In 2018 my friend Jean Perret reached out with a gig. He was running a cinema department in an art school in Geneva. Would I like to come out for three weeks and run a workshop on found footage? He had contacts with the local Red Cross, and we curated a collection of their short 16mm films that would be digitized and made available to students. My job was to make these faraway pictures, shot in countries all over the world, feel close. How to touch these pictures or let them touch us?

We began with the idea of the frame. How do we walk into a room? How has this room in the school framed our lives, what are we allowed to do here, and what is forbidden? Together we explored the frames of our bodies. We did yoga together, performed trust exercises and blindfold expeditions where we created movies made of touch and listening, guiding our charges (and then in turn being guided by them) through a new city made visible in blindness. We were "coming to our senses," turning down the noise inside so we could open to a world of unexpected encounters.

The other side of the workshop was about how to work. Leading by example, I encouraged everyone to stay late every night and show up on weekends. There was nothing more pressing, more urgent, than the work we had to do together. Some were going through identity crises and family breakdowns. I tried to reframe these unwanted gifts by encouraging them to express these feelings through the footage. To approach the archive with a feeling of intimacy. I worked alongside them with the same footage, stopping often to check in, to cheerlead and pose questions. Together we invented our lives by allowing these old pictures to live again.

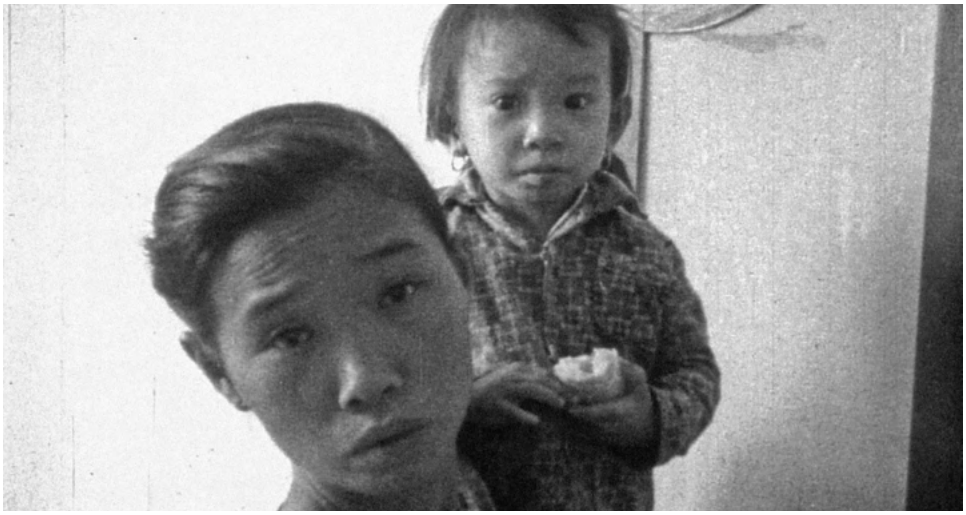
SUPERNATURAL POWER (2018)

Jean Perret

Supernatural Power uses archival footage from the Red Cross to illuminate the cynical cycle of war and the subsequent care of its casualties. In the film, it is the Vietnam War and its American bombings that are referenced, as well as a rehabilitation centre for the mutilated populations which operated under the umbrella of the International Committee of the Red Cross, in collaboration with the Vietnamese, American, and Swiss Red Cross.

In an exemplary gesture of unveiling, the film works with the material quality of images, exploring them, diving into them, enlarging and intensifying them, pulling them out of the darkness of suffering into the light of an impossible redemption. The measures of a shameless colonialism are presented in a painfully lucid spectacle. Everyone smilingly engages, collaborating against the backdrop of a three-act war of unprecedented violence.

Hoolboom invites us to cross the threshold using images and sounds in order to actively witness the deconstruction of icons that were established by the powers that be. His stories are authentic; their structures archaic, yet sophisticated. Yet he never asserts unambiguous truths, nor does he simplify the meanderings of memory, the suffering and joys of life as it goes on. Rather, he unfolds the images and sounds to decipher what hides in their depths, to uncover secrets buried deep within the body.



VISITING HOURS (2018)

Julie Murray

Something wrenching seeps through the grain and digital artifacts in the glacially controlled movements of images that appear in *Visiting Hours*.

A woman waiting in the predawn hours at a bus stop. Inside a bus filled with a dozen more women, their heads wrapped tightly and belongings pulled closely around them. These faces bear the expression of a palpable anxiety and weariness long endured. Everything is curtailed about them—time, thought, and movement. They seem scrutinized even by these images, these slow-moving, empathetic documents of their plight.

Visiting Hours starts in darkness to sounds of fractured spoken words with faint, jazz-stringed notes roaming below. The upper/lower contrasting arrangement establishes a vertical sonic space, a light, clattering engine on a deep, dark ocean. The words spoken are splintered apart, rearranged in a machine-punch pattern, drumming the ears in tiny staccatos, each instance gradually extending in duration so that sense is made at irregular mile markers in the seven minutes it takes for the voice to complete the statement.

There's something about this forged sound shape, strident and hypnotic, stuttering forth to be instantly whipped back to the beginning, going forward again, a little bit further each time as though a diligent practice of scales on a piano. Or it could be a rehearsal of the argument the woman is preparing to make at the prison gate should she be refused entry: "I visit my husband every two weeks."

Heavily grained black-and-white image fragments glimmer along with lines of text in subtitles which, like intermittent annotations, fade on and off slowly, puzzling the impossible circumstances faced by the figures shown. In amplified screen silence, these words wonder aloud at what becomes lost in a language under pressure, in the bridled speech of the sanctioned and the disempowered.

A curious gesture someways into the piece adjusts the luminance level of the image and in doing so seems to reenact the effect of the glare of harsh sunlight striking the faces in the picture. The sound heard is that of a heavy door opening. A woman squints against the sudden brightness, a brightness created by the manipulation of the film image. I'm reminded of the truism that the best editing in cinema is invisible. Noticeable in being unnoticed. Everything in this work is tampered with, but this particular gesture struck me as poignant somehow, maybe equating the constraints in the art of form with the curtailed movements of the women documented.

Visiting Hours, a contrapuntal duet of abstraction and tempo suffused with sorrow, treads at the same time with a coolness and detachment that I take to be the expression of the true realism of the image document; the digit and the algorithm, a system of systems, the faces—weary, anxious, and squinting—caught in it as though in a net.

WHERE THE NIGHT IS GOING (2018)

David Finkelstein

Originally published in *filmint*, October 4, 2018.

Near the beginning of *Where the Night Is Going*, Mike Hoolboom's sophisticated eleven-minute essay film, a subtitle announces, "On the other side of the camera Guy Debord told me this secret: Form is Violence." We're looking at a splashy tech/media event where glittering guests are arriving, garishly coloured lights serve to transform a warehouse into an "event space," and laptops and screens abound. Blurry and blown-out, the images look as if they are shot with a camera with a plastic sheet over the lens. People pose for photos with VIPs and performers move through the crowd, dressed as a burger and fries. The subtitled narration reads, "We can never challenge any form of social organization without taking apart its forms of language." Debord, the maker of *The Society of the Spectacle*, challenges the narrator to abandon the aggressive power of social forms, even while he is immersed in an elaborate spectacle meant to celebrate an industry made powerful by its mastery of signs.

In a dreamlike development, the narrator (speaking always through subtitles) describes a desperate sexual encounter with Debord, in which he suddenly understands "love and its necessities" when he finds himself signalling his raw, animal need to "a man who no longer cherished me." While we read this, we're watching the industrial stage show, in which scantily clad dancers act professionally sexy for strangers. Tranquil music contrasts with images of guests and hosts boogying down together under the disco lights, trying to convince themselves they're having fun.

Where the Night Is Going takes the viewer into an overcontrolled environment, a tawdry celebration of the ability to congeal form into money and power. It's a place where many people would find themselves asking, What am I doing here? The kind of place where by squinting the right way and looking through an alcoholic haze you can convince yourself you're having a good time. Translating the experience into a dialogue of desire, Hoolboom finds a complex and contrapuntal film form to vividly describe a form of seduction which we are all vulnerable to.

WHERE THE NIGHT IS GOING (2018)

Yann Beauvais

This short essay film deals with the question of production, circulation, and consumption of images as appearance within contemporary society and the possibility of establishing relationships within this image world.

It is a dialogue between images as text and text as images, in which the body as object is constantly at stake: as artifact, code, role, and performance that emerges as soon as we are looked at.

This film extends the proposal developed in *Imitations of Life* (2003), where text is used as a means to convey multiple meanings, and accompanies an atmosphere of strange, dreamlike visuals. In both cases the question has to do with the use of images, and how they shape and control us. But in *Where the Night*, the image refers to a body, more precisely a sexual body, which gives itself to a master. But there is a twist in the gender of the writing subject in the realm of the spectacle. The party shots are made in a crumpled haze of refracted light and reflect a spectacle of media bliss that aims to create a subject through subjugation.

This world, which offers the appearance of lightness of being, is not damaged by the fact that we are its slaves. Every edge and crease is softened, it touches everyone gathered in the room with an infinite softness. Violence emerges only in the recognition that everything is visible, at every moment. There is no interior life, no separate refuge from the demands of spectacle.

I SAW HIM THERE (2018)

Catherine Russell

A surprising dissolve lies at the heart of *I Saw Him There*. A man dozes on a rocking chair with a cushion grasped to his chest in comfort, in dreaming, gently rocking, when the weave on the tapestried cushion slowly melts into a scene of white robes and turbans spread grid-like in a public square. The camera pulls out to a very high angle and we are clearly in Mecca. The pattern of white squares repeats in a huge, windowed mosque where the white-robed crowd flows like water.

The man in the chair returns in this short film, his forested surround populated by Canadian trees—pine, willow, birch—while traffic runs by in the background. He is looking out a window at a pool covered by a tarp that has water collected on it: banality in the hazy, cold light of the Northern Hemisphere. *I Saw Him There* is a film of erasure, glimpses, forgetting, and the details in between. Perhaps the Arab-looking man in a Toronto garden remembers something in the spectacle of Mecca, or the spectacle of the architecture of a dream, drenched with the hot light of the Middle East.

Hoolboom repurposes footage shot by travelling filmmaker Jacques Madvo, whose collection of footage inspired this commissioned work. Madvo's scenes of a vegetable market somewhere in an Arab place and a fish market with white-robed men mark the business of a world far away from the quiet garden, and from the ritual of Mecca. And yet the garden is not as quiet as it looks. Birdsong, inaudible voices, and a cacophony of ambient sounds flood the soundtrack. Back in Mecca or thereabouts, an improbable conversation is overheard on the capricious soundtrack: a woman interviews a man about a T-shirt we never see. They probably aren't in the Arab world. It's another borrowed fragment, this one about unicorns. "It's just like a very feminine depiction of a horse," the man says, after the woman asks if there is "a linkage between gayness and unicorns."

By the end of the film, the man sips tea from a dainty Middle Eastern glass, shot in profile from several angles. He has awakened from a dream of tapestries, which is the place where unicorns come from, and he is surrounded by his objects, traces and tokens of another world and another language. An Arabic version of a James Brown song briefly traverses the cultural divide once again over a handwritten note in which Hoolboom credits his multiple collaborators, including Taravat Khalili, who shot the Canadian footage, and Kajeh Mehrizi, the dreaming man.

3 DREAMS OF HORSES (2018)

Caspar Stracke

Approximately six thousand years ago humans began domesticating horses, thereby expanding our living environments and enabling agriculture. Horses pulled heavy machinery and vehicles and fought in our wars. We made use of these powerful creatures by inventing slavery. Our relationships changed with industrialization, though ongoing exploitation evokes a collective guilt that may overcome some of us when looking into the deep brown eyes of a horse. What do they see in us?

The filmmaker tries to answer this question in a short, poetic meditation in three chapters. In the first, we rapidly traverse a semi-abstract landscape. A forest with autumn leaves paints the image in blurred orange-and-ochre tones. We see what a horse might dream (as the film's title suggests), or perhaps what they recall of a long and burdensome journey carrying a rider with a mysterious purpose. Next, Hoolboom cuts to close-ups of a carousel featuring white horses turning in circles. Caught in a groove.

The second chapter opens with church bells from a cathedral (the menacing creature that dwarfs all of us). And then a grey, rainy market in beautiful, grainy black and white. Horses wait on the street. The voiceover says, "Many years ago we learned the language of our masters. Though we couldn't help wondering why so few of you bothered to learn ours." In a few sentences, the voice representing the horse speaks of its love relationship with another horse, named Jacinto, who went missing. Now we are on an endless search in this grim market scene, where even children cannot ease the horse's feeling of loss.

The third segment occurs at night in a forest bordering a lake. The artificial lighting and visual effects recall the 70s cinema of Chinese ghost mythologies. We see a shrine gate, a lake with moonlit reflections, and a stylized close-up of a drip dissolving into the water surface. Suddenly rising pockets of water form the outline of a galloping horse that soon catches fire and becomes a small posse of fire horses. Reunion with the beloved is the last dream of horses.

3 ECHOES

Faraz Anoushahpour and Ami Xherro

1

Wake
Since when
Its english has no space

Too close to think
        with common fauna
        screaming weather
In clockwork seams
Sea-
        on-land

Naked
In triplets

2

I want everything
Light, unlight, not light, here
Every sand
So few of you
Each a kind

Double-minded master
Sitting mist

Distilled rhyme

3

A light with no origin
Shoots up
High breath oval lungs
Long-sleep
Regret-filled

Thirteen bridges
Each by Eiffel
In Portugal

1

Bells and crickets
A marriage of whistles

I am known to touch
The sensitive backside

2

If anyone tries me, ride me—
Losing Jacinto is losing my life—

Her umbrella
I drip eachness
Even in the rain

Separated,
Fedora or what they
Say for hardhat:
Is felt hardened to

Feed the clueless
Dream

3

Crackle-veined
I knew what I came
Wet
Approaching
Narrowing
Leaf

Quiet I

What have the dead left to say:
Night fell,
Pagoda.

THE BED AND THE STREET (2018) [made with Heather Frise]

Heather Frise

Following the Great Financial Crisis of 2007–8, government-funded bank bailouts were paid for by harsh austerity programs. Socialism for the rich, capitalism for the poor. Hoolboom collaged protest visuals and personal physical interactions, incorporating overlay text (I wanted to love you / by overthrowing the state) alongside my animations and super 8 footage capturing moments of me working at a DIY animation stand.

I began with the women that appear in Eadweard Muybridge's photographs. They show women enacting rituals of domestic labour: walking, climbing stairs, filling buckets, sweeping floors, making beds. My drawings begin by letting my hand find the contours and shadings of these photographs. I use coloured pencils, chalk, pastel, and linseed oil to produce the original drawings. In the second cycle, once I've completed the drawings, I fragment and reconstruct them. I break the body down into parts; I cut them up. Then I introduce materials like oil or pepper to make the image more unstable. I mix an industrial resin and pour it over the image, which gives it a gloss, so it seems like parts of the image are encased or preserved, like a bee in amber. The third cycle introduces different drawn animal parts in order to create a deeper hybridity, to recreate the body and open it to the monstrous and grotesque.

Here the face appears as a red stain and so does her ass. We have arrived at Bataille's solar anus. The face and ass are apertures of the body, marked by shame, their reciprocity summoned via their colouring. The orifices are interchangeable, the intellect is dethroned, the dirty and shameful and hidden parts of the body are newly exposed.

The body is both vulnerable and powerful, a site of social and political organization, and of active resistance. The state's demand to hold a monopoly on violence and force is sometimes relieved by officially sanctioned forms of public violence. Where are we allowed to express violence in our own lives? How can we contend with or absorb the violences that we have received?

The act of seeing means being returned to one's body. There's a flow of back and forth, here and there. I leave my body in order to return to it. Instead of a single central moment there is a flow of images. It's all simultaneously present. Not a queen on her throne, but a democracy of subjects, spread across a room, each figure accorded an equal measure.

FATS (2018)

Martha Langford

The film continues to exert its initial effect on me. It makes me weep, which discourages the kind of critical analysis that I would like to produce. That posture is out of reach right now, and after multiple viewings, I know that for me *Fats* will always elude such writing, so I'm just going to go with the flow (of tears) in this epistolary form.

The film is the story of a man, Fats Waller (New York, 1904–Kansas City, 1944), facts streaming into feelings, the crazy highs and lows of Fats's short passage anachronistically embodied by young dancers who are crushed for the crime of being weightless. Some filmmakers direct our attention; Hoolboom finds the rhythm of our being, and he has to look for it. He tells us he's looking with panoramic surveys of the sky and film noir detectives covering the ground, and once we are with him, breathing with the film, we are ready to be acted upon. It's extraordinary to be taken in this manner while listening to statistics about Black incarceration, suffering a potted lesson on how to play stride piano, or hearing once again about the cruelty and stupidity of segregation. *Fats* exposes racism's endless unfurling that this white woman, projected onto a falling angel, may think she imagines but doesn't begin to comprehend. Narcissistically rephrased, there is still no answer to Fats Waller's question: What did I do to be so white and blue?

Why do people cry? Sadness, frustration, joy, relief, helplessness. We cry for the falling, the suffering, the decrepitude of once hopeful spaces. All this before the breathtaking performances of Black-and-Blue musicians and actors as they pay their dues in the closing scene—as they entertain the deaf, dumb, and blind.

AFTERMATH (2018)

Francesco Gagliardi

is about the struggle of doing what one must do. is about freedom and coercion, one and many, living and dying, and the confusion of self and other.

is about ghosts and doubles and having a body. is about skin as surface and boundary, mirror and Screen.

is about being a body, seeing and being seen and looking, politics, and death. is about mass movements and spectacle, about making pictures in a time of exterminations and extinctions.

is about appropriation and alienation and the labour of art. is about feeling compelled and constrained, forced into freedom.

is about four individuals and anyone and everyone. is about exertion and the ease of falling, about sleeping with one's eyes open and about leaving oneself for dead.

is about birds and trains and lightbulbs and rain, electric wires, crowds, fog, buildings, streets and street corners, water and eyes, cities, faces and skies and sleep, danger, rooms, deserts, waves and windows, screens, medical equipment, mirrors, shadows, other animals, clouds, the weather and fire.

is about the passing of time, about being one in one's body, surrounded by many and History. is above all and emphatically about the stakes of artmaking.

FROM THE ARCHIVES OF THE RED CROSS (2017)

Andrew Burke

Ranging in length from four minutes to nearly forty, each of the five chapters of *From the Archives of the Red Cross* represents an effort, as Hoolboom himself has put it, "to venture to the other side of the picture. . . . The hope is time travel." In the effort to make this possible, he does not merely reproduce the images, but rather enacts a series of formal procedures on them. The film fragment that makes up the first chapter is radically slowed down. The movements of the assembled Turkish soldiers, awaiting passage home from Greece in the early 1920s, are little more than a blur, but there, in the midst of them, is a man in a fedora, staring directly into the camera. Distinguished by the Red Cross emblem on his lapel, this is, as the chapter title indicates, the man who stopped time, the only figure within this archival fragment who has the capacity to remain still even as events swirl around him. He is "the only one here who memory has not forgotten."

Subsequent chapters likewise play with time and the image. Vibrant colour footage of Yemen in 1964, in the throes of civil war, freezes occasionally into still images—the occasion of this gathering of soldiers was a photo shoot—that invite a consideration of the place, the people, and the particularities of historical circumstance. Books can deliver the details of the war, as well as its outcome, but Hoolboom's engagement with the images here, the stilling of them, invites time travel, a view of the other side of the picture he is holding still for us.

In another chapter, Hoolboom delivers a "Beirut Grammar," assembling a series of ten fragments one by one until the syntactic chain reaches its full length. But rather than stopping there, the process continues: The first image of the sequence is dropped as another is added at its end. The process produces with each repetition a variation, a continual shifting depiction of Lebanon in the early 1980s consisting of a series of seemingly random, but deeply evocative, image fragments: a woman sweeps the floor of a room which has had its exterior wall blown off; a mother and daughter struggle to fill a container with water; smoke billows out of a building down an alleyway; kids scatter when they realize the camera eye is on them; a man helped by a Red Cross nurse nevertheless struggles to walk on crutches; and so on, and so on. Far from evacuating these images of their force, Hoolboom's mathematical/grammatical exercise intensifies their effect. As each image is shuffled through the ten-unit sequence, occupying the whole range of different positions within it, its significance shifts and mutates. And each sequence, even if just one image apart from the sequence that preceded it, takes on a different shape and tone, tells a different story about Beirut at that moment.

The final chapter and longest of the five, "Mine Clearing (Mozambique)," is at once the most abstract and the most direct. Perhaps because of the historical proximity of these archival images—

they are from the 90s and hardly seem to be of the past—they are deeply unsettling, made even more so by the high-contrast distortions and temporal decelerations that characterize Hoolboom's treatment of them. *From the Archives of the Red Cross* is mostly wordless throughout, but this final section, with its images of mine-clearing and of those learning to live without limbs lost to mines, the soundtrack of buzzes and drones, echoes and electronics is particularly unsettling.

But to end I want to return to an earlier chapter, Hoolboom's treatment of a film made by the Red Cross during World War II called *One Way Remains Open!* (1944). The original is in itself a remarkable film, demonstrating the ways in which the film unit of the Red Cross harnessed the conventions of documentary modernism to depict the scope and significance of its humanitarian work. In its depiction of the services that the Red Cross offered in helping prisoners of war, locating refugees, and providing food, shelter, and medical care to those stranded in war zones, it feels something like a film that Grierson would have made had he gone to Geneva. Yet there are other moments, with the filing of letters and the representation of Red Cross headquarters as a communications hub, that have the spark of Dziga Vertov, the horrors of war combatted by the dynamism of a technological and bureaucratic modernity. Hoolboom's approach to the film isolates and amplifies a melancholy amidst this modernity. Fading each shot, he points to work undone and tasks incomplete. For all the successes of the Red Cross, and despite the celebratory tone of this depiction of its wartime activities, what haunts the film is the immensity of the task and the inevitable failures that come with it. Hoolboom's fades foreground this, articulating something that the film, caught up in the urgency of its moment, cannot fully articulate itself.

It has become commonplace to think of every engagement with the archives as an *intervention*, as if it were always a case of either treatment or therapy. What Hoolboom offers in *From the Archives of the Red Cross* is something else entirely, an invitation into and through the image, with the possibility of passage to the other side and the hope of time travel.

IN 1974 (2017)

Samy Benammar

Everywhere I look, I see a lie, an illusion turned into a tangible reality. The city's walls are covered with posters extolling the virtues of an emulsion that will make smiles last forever. Kodak, Fuji, and Ferrania have become gods of light, capitalistic Apollos pledging to deliver immortality on celluloid. However, the pillars of Olympus have a deceptive coating. In the 90s, Kodak Gold was the first film stock from the American firm that was capable of reproducing all skin tones. This overdue development reveals the reality of a century of photochemical practices that erased the faces of those whose colour didn't fit into the Shirley cards' skin-tone standard. As such, these film companies are intimately linked to the construction of our visual landscapes.

The film opens with the following intertitle:

> In 1974 Film Ferrania began developing a new kind of colour film stock.
> The new film promised to eliminate
> unwanted people, trees or cars.
> It would show only colour.

Hoolboom immediately adopts the tone of an archival truth which leaves the viewer in doubt. Did this film ever exist? Do the allegedly found images reveal a forgotten reality, or does the film craft a fiction of the gaze by fabricating a false archive? What ultimately matters is not the answer, but the essential uncertainty that mirrors film's political history—the insidious fabrication of an ideology pretending to be absolute reality. The fifteen sequences of camera tests—the alleged last traces of this so-called film—thus become an archive caught between the lie of a history manipulated by the filmmaker and the blatant truth of their historicity. Whether or not Film Ferrania marketed such a film becomes secondary as the images unfold. They present sequences that resemble the archives that are preserved from these eras and which have formed our collective memory of the past. The conspicuous emphasis on white heterosexual couples in these portrayals is so blatant that we collectively inherit an envisioned past constructed from the fragments graciously imprinted onto film: the narrative of the white bourgeois family.

The last shot confronts us with the questionable nature of the groups being depicted. It shows an androgynous figure wearing tight pants and a fiery red sweater, belted at the waist. If we acknowledge the authenticity of the archive, this image prompts us to wonder why Ferrania would have included this model in its camera tests at a time when homosexuality was still perceived as taboo. However, more striking is the inclusion of this "look" which also invites us to question the dress codes of the 1970s depicted in this series of photographs. Imprisoned between an illusion of

reality and a mise-en-scène legitimized by the production slates that introduce every shot, these camera tests acquire an ambivalent status vis-à-vis reality. They seem to document a fantasized period, an ideal of a world through the lens of film that carefully demonstrates acceptable modes of representation, like a man covering his artificial-green lawn with fertilizer, whose white colour is somewhat reminiscent of a virile seed. With this element established, the final figure forces us to ask what's happening outside the frame and colorimetry, ultimately asserting the presence of a counterculture in the grain of the film.

To support this idea, the soundtrack serves as a radical counterpoint to the images, humorously bringing to bear an imaginary world at odds with the coldness of the space presented. For example, from an open door we hear moans that present an interior far more erotic than the homeowner's chaste V-neck sweater would suggest. Later, sound is used to allude to an underlying violence. A smirk from a gentleman in a tie isn't enough to silence the woman who was holding his arm in the previous shot.

When the tests finally bring us back to the normative female figure staring back at the camera, Shirley reappears transfigured, becoming both the embodiment of the imposed visual norm and the noisy emanation of a concealed, unspoken persecution. The modes of rewriting employed in the film suggest that multiple stories are unfolding in parallel. The presence of synchronous sounds—a waterfall, the sound of cars, the door—grounds the shot in reality, but further complicates the border between what is seen and what is suggested.

No matter how hard the film industry—from photochemical processes to image production—has tried to essentialize colours, genders, and habits in order to produce a normative, puritan image of the world, the reality of its diversities, revolts, and decadence still pierces the archive, creating its own perforations that impose a rhythm parallel to the dominant discourse. In the film, Hoolboom becomes a transformative archivist, inviting us to rethink and confront our histories and biases. Even if film remains high up on an Olympian pedestal, it is still open to interpretation and hijacking, and it is a tool that will always fall into the hands of the most impious of its devotees.

COLOUR MY WORLD (2017)

Dirk de Bruyn

> If such a colour code were feasible, it would radically transform our cultural situation, affecting our thinking, our feeling, our whole perception of the world. It would alter our aistheton—would be an *aesthetic* revolution.
> —Vilém Flusser[1]

Colour My World is a moving technical image occupying the liminal space between the abstract and the real through its material base. For Flusser, "technical images" communicate concepts. This short is locatable at the horizon line of Flusser's looking into colour. In the Brazilian *Casa da Cor* (House of Colour) project, "Flusser suggests the development of a denotative colour code with only one possible interpretation but, at the same time, rich in meaning."[2] Hoolboom's question "What colour is goodbye?" is scanning for this *Casa da Cor*.

Hoolboom informs us that his film's images are stripped to texture through relentless water soaking. I am reminded of the disintegrating book in Matthias Müller's found footage film *Nebel* (2001). There is pain lurking here, a trauma absent in Brakhage's hand-painted films, for example. Its hurt remains locatable through the roll call of antislavery Black activists regaled in the credits and conjured through the soundtrack's African chant. These resistances float below the surface. Is the colour of skin insinuated here?

This conceptually loaded technical image hearkens back to Hoolboom's experimental practice before his body's HIV infection. This passed past includes films taken out of circulation, like *Install* (1990) and *Steps to Harbour* (1992), which reflexively interrogated the 16mm filmmaking process at the social's periphery.

How is *Colour My World*'s pain locatable? Well, the film is like a bruise, with patterned colour its memoric trace, operated on by accumulated, unspeakable, and invisible denials of race and class. The pockmarked film's skin has been bacterially penetrated as resolutely as racism and slavery have infected generations of perpetrators and victims. This is an open wound, festering on the screen. An ode to a passed, unlocatable avant-garde ferments an asylum of abuse. In his subtitled text, Hoolboom asks whether the screen is a door or window. Flusser flags the screen as a flapping tent's wall. "It is a piece of cloth that is open to experiences (open to the wind, open to the spirit) and that stores this experience."[3]

The film's patterning resurfaced in me an art therapist's case study encountered at a trauma conference decades ago. The subject, a Vietnam War veteran, was plagued by a repeating flashback,

a close-up of abstracted, textured hair, skin, and colour. The therapy was to delicately expand this abstraction through years of repetitive recounting and redrawing. Eventually, its surrounds and context inched into focus to enter narrative. It was the mangled blood, meat, and skin at the back of his colleague's blown-apart skull, splattered onto him.

NOTES

1. Vilém Flusser, "Curies' Children," *Artforum International* 27, no. 4 (December 1988), https://www.artforum.com/columns/science-206005/.

2. Philippe Henry, "A New Universal Vision: The *Casa da Cor* (House of Colour) Project," *Leonardo* 24, no. 3 (1991): 322.

3. Vilém Flusser, *The Shape of Things: A Philosophy of Design*, trans. Anthony Mathews (Reaktion Books, 1999), 57.

IDENTIFICATION (2017)

Alexandra Gelis and Jorge Lozano

Jorge Lozano: It's a very sophisticated threading of segments. The vulnerability and strength of real people shine through in the combination of shot and found footage. We enter a community through portraits of mostly Black men, though a Black woman is the guide. A man reads a story by James Baldwin, who meets his dying father in the hospital for the last time, where both are unable to speak. Many rights have been achieved, but the vulnerability continues.

Alexandra Gelis: We see a body lying on the ground. I thought this person was sleeping on top of the heat the city produces. But then this body shows up in different places—abandoned houses, ruins, sidewalks . . . Are they dead or alive?

In the first shot, we know we are in the United States because of the flag. Through live documentary audio, we hear that someone is being criminalized on the street just because he is part of a marginalized community. The film's work of identification ends with the woman who writes "I can identify" on the blackboard after we hear about the brutal police murder.

JL: She feels very gentle. In each portrait there's a gentleness, though this community is perceived as aggressive. It's a family-oriented, poetic, and literary culture. The Black community had to invent a language, and as soon as they did emancipation began in a new way.

AG: I saw a marginalized circle kept under constant control. Happiness and hope persist but always beneath a power I hear on the soundtrack. The sounds of police keep returning. It's like the smoke we keep seeing people through. We're trying to glimpse the structures and the people who are forced to live in these structures, but there is always a white smoke in the way. It makes me think of the permanent drone sounds in Gaza.

I loved the images of boys with their family and friends, inside their houses. We see photos on the wall of their friends who have been killed. These altars keep them close, the photos are like treasures.

JL: At the end we hear a man say, "Oh fuck, they killed a man. Six policemen." This is repeated over and over again. What he feels and what he has seen is unspeakable. The reasons? No one can say. Later, when people come together, the unspeakable explodes into reasons and actions in communities that are framed, menaced, misjudged, and killed. They show something in a place that had been made invisible.

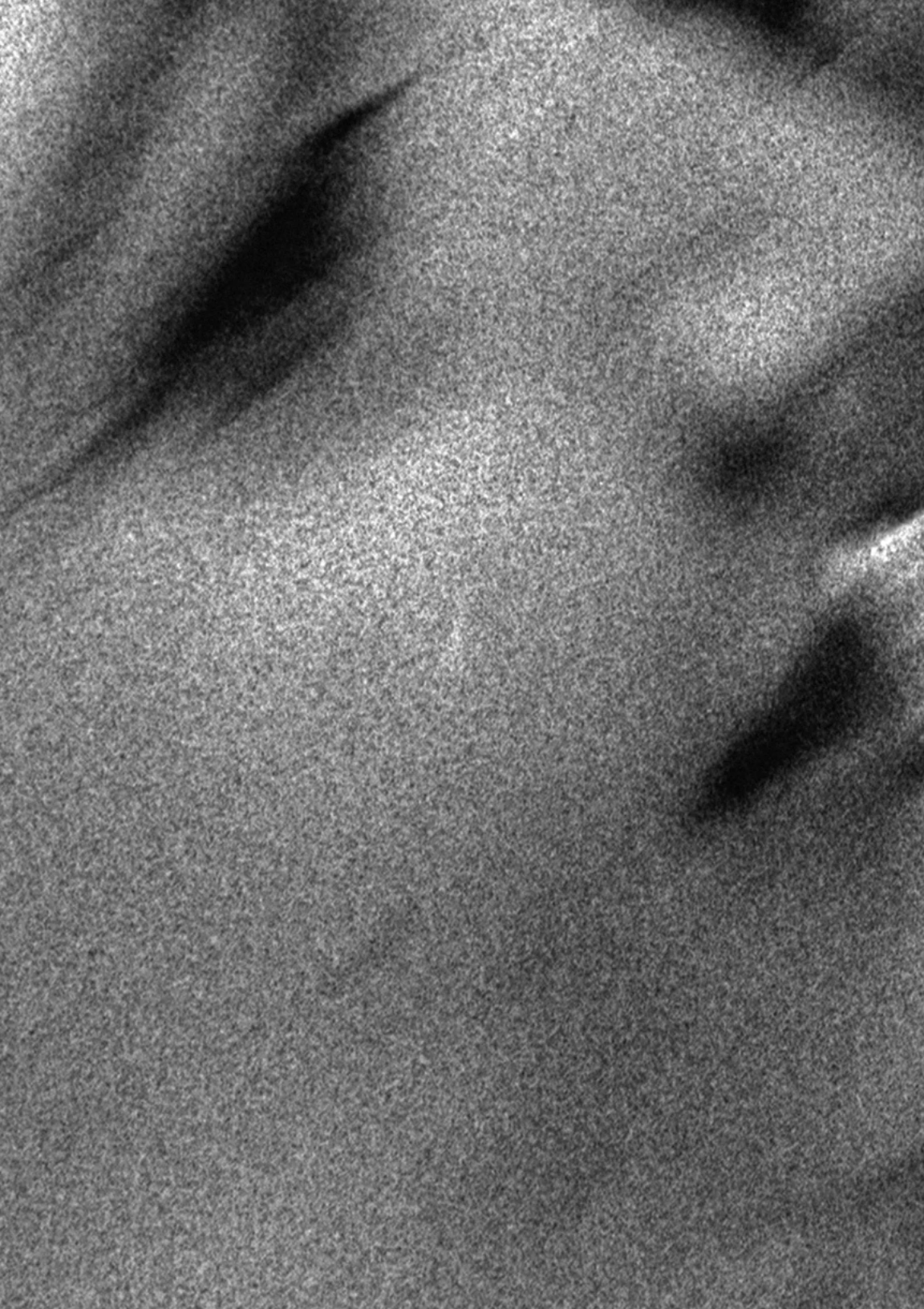
AG: The unspeakable becomes music. The moments that bring you down can turn into the music that gives you life.

WE MAKE COUPLES (2016)

Madeline Bogoch

I once attended an artist talk by Hannah Black (who, incidentally, is credited in this film) where, in a brief digression, she suggested that the structure of the game FUCK/MARRY/KILL be applied to GENDER/CLASS/RACE, speculating that there was a singular and correct answer. While the political dimension of hate is self-evident, perhaps the more provocative implication of this riddle is that the same equation applies to both sex and love. In *We Make Couples*, the concept of romantic partnership is leveraged against the capitalist paradigm that has historically claimed this arrangement—particularly the hetero and monogamous version—as an ideal. A montage of animations, 16mm found footage, and protest documentation is anchored by recurring portraits of two women. This stream of images serves as the backdrop for an essay which is both poetic and pensive, wondering aloud if there is potential for revolution within the space of coupledom. Projection is posed as the common denominator between love and cinema. Both are powerful intoxicants which hold the capacity to shape perception, for better or for worse.

If we invest in this idea, that the bond between lovers could be mobilized against capitalism's atomizing aims, we have to reckon with the agonizing dilemma of attraction, in which uneven power dynamics can be considered hot and there is often a wide gap between our desires and our politics. In an essay written for *The New Inquiry*, Asa Seresin coined the term "heteropessimism," referring to the facile disavowal from within heterosexuality as (at best) boring and (at worst) toxic. I wonder if some of the same fatalism Seresin describes might extend to the idea of all coupledom, which, despite its prevalence, feels like an outmoded form of attachment. But then again, if the couple was formerly the vehicle of capitalism's continuity, I would argue that in the twenty-first century, focus has shifted towards the individual. Maybe then it's not so naive to flirt with the idea that interdependence holds the seeds of alterity. I'm not entirely convinced, but it is a terribly romantic idea.



INCIDENT REPORTS (2016)

Martha Baillie

Dear Director of Images,

It's a film, so the images ought to matter, and they do. But the desire to hear your voice is what keeps me going. I hunger for your tender authority—the smooth tone of your matter-of-factness that turns out to be a thin wrapper, enclosing ironies you invite me to suck on. Your words, dissolving in my mouth, open paths through the scene you're suspending in front of my eyes.

Your voice reminds me of my mother's little finger. Not the finger of God, but almost. A gentle probe she used to free me from my fear of the dark. She'd sit on my bed and trace the convolutions of my ear with the tip of her finger, until I allowed myself to disappear into the night, believing it led to morning.

Your words are turning a large Canada goose into an object of desire, of lust. When the goose lifts one leg, tucking it out of sight, you can't resist doing the same, you tell me, flirting with the bird, relieved that its partner is eyeing you with indifference, as if he's seen this all before and the two "have an arrangement."

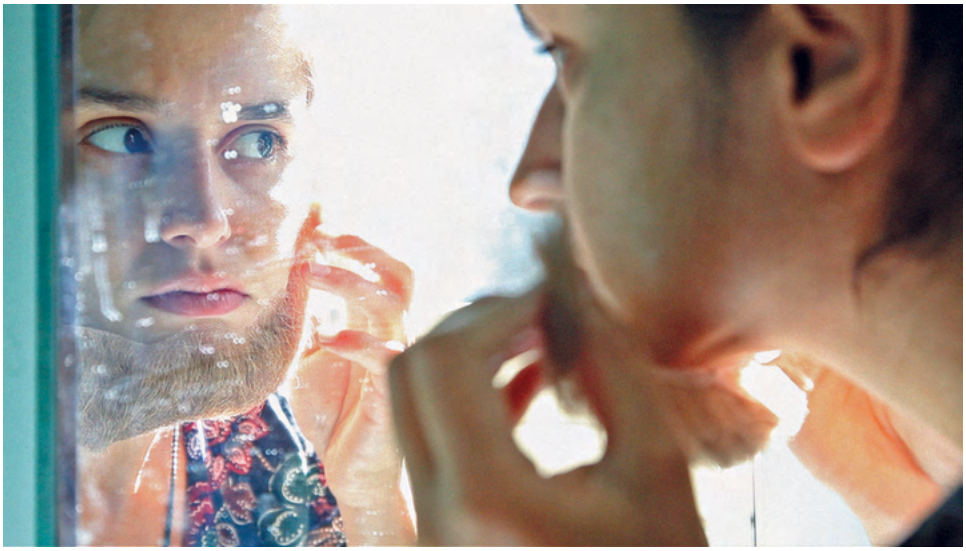
A cycling accident has erased all your memories, so you are reconstructing yourself from new memories created by photographing what you see. You must take at least one photo a day, your doctor insists.

The young woman gluing her beard in place has already tired of being a man, of having all the power, you assure me. She wants to give her friends lessons in forgetting so they can be her friends again. We may need to forget in order to stay open and in motion. But forgetting is dangerous.

Let's not forget who is oppressing who. Why, you ask, is every picture frame in this film a rectangle when all four sides would be of equal length in a true democracy? Though not usually keen on puzzles, I'm eager to receive your next clue. The promise of a tidy solution rarely excites me. But your well-oiled voice is offering hinges, not answers. You're making everything swing wide.

Your words arrive, but even when you aren't speaking your visual voice is busy, removing certain colours. Black, white, red, green, and pink are allowed to remain. The green you've selected is the same used in hospital corridors to dull the senses of patients waiting to be seen. But you're more bullfighter than hospital board member, the way you enter the arena of filmmaking, over and over, waving your pink cape.

I want to thank you for luring me into asking, every time I look around me, "What am I erasing now, who am I leaving out?" But I don't want to thank you in words. The bone I've left on your doorstep is my gift—an invitation to return to your animal self. If you photograph yourself chewing on your bone, don't send me the picture. I want to imagine your happiness. And I'll try not to write about it.



SCRAPBOOK (2015)

Mark McElhatten

I

Scrapbook is a beautiful work of rescue and retrieval, of sleuthing, of empathy and deft construction. Every flare and musical tone and utterance bruises and sparks. A living picture book with a human voice, a memory book. A developing bath is an astringent baptism and déjà vu. Out of a lonely incoherence and precarity words are found and a body finds solvency and echo.

> Picture book, of people with each other,
> To prove they love each other a long time ago.
> —"Picture Book," by the Kinks, written by Ray Davies
>
> I'm developing my pictures, my mind a darkroom.
> The proofs I'm searching for will be made clear soon.
> —"Developing My Pictures," by George Jones, written by Earl Montgomery
>
> People take pictures of each other,
> Just to prove that they really existed,
> Just to prove that they really existed.
> —"People Take Pictures of Each Other," by the Kinks, written by Ray Davies
>
> And then, after I became a picture, I could let someone like me, and be my friend.
> He was the one who made these pictures, actually.
> I think his name was Jeffrey.
> His camera was like my face, we were both making pictures so we could show ourselves.
> We were the same, and that affected me.
> I wondered: How could anyone get in here?
> I thought my system was perfect. Foolproof.
> —Donna Washington, in *Scrapbook*

We materialize as Images, find fixity and composure, tether as we feel ourselves leaking out uncontained. We are seen before we understand what that means. We overlook, but undersee. We draw over the lines. We make choices, cut through veils, and don rugged, borrowed faces, masks of flesh, a genetic collage of mothers and fathers that puzzle into place differently as we age. Blue windows bending obscure light and the obvious facts. We practice inhabiting ourselves as we yearn to be another, to look like another, succumbing to the amorphous and the definite that cling to us. If we are fortunate we start to understand our own combinations and awkward elegance. We

stretch our limbs, go out on a limb, grow irregular into ourselves, involuntarily then by consent. Resisting symmetry, disowning descriptions, finding balance.

My first remembered impressions of infancy were of qualities and characteristics of atmospheres, of visual aspects of things, of vague hues, of temperatures, a place that I dwelled in independent of any sense of identity or a self or even my perception. The world and I were indistinguishable, without boundaries, not separate, not an admixture; just what Is.

The room I was in, the Cosmos. *Scrapbook* returns me to earlier times and brings out unique perplexities in consciousness and formation that are startling.

If the words of Donna Washington were merely literary they would be strangely piquant, ingeniously poetic. That these words are arising as authentic reactions to revisiting lived experiences is astonishing. She meets herself again. In chrysalis. In delay. From across the border. We all develop in delay, finding new entanglements and estrangements. Some are especially hindered, ostracized. The path is hard and understanding is incomplete.

> If I wrote a book called *The World As I Found It*, I should have to include a report on my body, and should have to say which parts were subordinate to my will, and which were not, etc.
> —Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*

> I didn't have a body yet. That came later.
> I liked to look at the glass of a window, but not what was on the other side of the glass.
> Jeff, Jeffrey was the man who made these pictures. Did I say that already?
> He taught me a lot about how to see a face. How to receive a face.
> Maybe that's how Jeff and I became friends.
> We showed each other the parts of our faces that hadn't decided yet.
> —Donna Washington, in *Scrapbook*

With their infections and endearments some films bring us into intimate estrangement, speaking to us in another voice that seems to become our own, that brings us to a place of origins, reminds us of the mystery of existence. With a feeling that is alien and native these films are unsettling and comforting. They alter chromosomes, sound a bell in our blood, whispering forgotten things we always knew, telling us things we never thought.

What I ask from a film at this stage of my life is that it honours cinema with love and invention, that it proceeds with an open heart and conveys human wisdom. Answering this, *Scrapbook* is in a select company of films that look at marginalized histories, abandoned figures, segregated or alone. Films that enter into special territories, courageously defending a unique form, mining peripheries to reveal the core of the human condition, the miraculous oddity of being alive. Forough Farrokhzad's

The House Is Black (1963), Jack Chambers's *The Hart of London* (1970), Kinuyo Tanaka's *The Eternal Breasts* (*Forever a Woman*, 1955), Bruce Baillie's *Here I Am* (1962), Johan van der Keuken's *Herman Slobbe/Blind Child 2* (1966).

As I sat in the balcony of a movie theatre in Michigan, *Scrapbook* appeared in beams of light travelling from behind me a great distance to the screen. Faces and forms reflected back toward me at the speed of light, finding my hidden corner, talking to me, looking at me, watching me disassemble as the film took residence inside me, never to leave.

Destiny is inevitable but arrives randomly. Met on a train, in a foreign land or a late-night awakening from a dream, in the first encounter with a stranger. In a mirror. Or travelling on a projector beam.

Some afternoons never stopped. It would take you a month to eat a piece of cake.

> There were moments I couldn't stop from happening. Over and over.
> The colour of the drapes, it could last the rest of my life. Do you understand?
> —Donna Washington, in *Scrapbook*

Some films take a lifetime to watch. I'm still watching *Scrapbook*.

II

We are a galaxy, a Book.

> The world is made up of little bits of things. My tongue depends on an alphabet of 26 letters and a kiss that hits me like buckshot. 88 keys. A piano is made of tusks and trees, hammers and felt. The world had one big heart that was shot to pieces, smashed into little slivers that ran away and got caught between our ribs. I did what I was told and I did what I was told not to do. Both things made me better. I am not soiled and I am not new. I am damp and bloodshot and as tattered as that scrapbook and the scrapyard world we live in. The world of ripening ghosts and ripped pictures, scripture, rip tides breaking in my sliver of heart. I was waiting to tell you this and I say it now, I can say it now that you are gone.
> —Darcy Shreve, *Gumball Arcadia*

Scrapbook touched me with a unique electricity. The soul of a young girl navigating a gauntlet of perceptual dilemmas and her retrospection as she moves in a haunting circle counterclockwise with her own past, offering comments on who she was fifty years ago, who she was becoming.

That was Donna, but Donna Washington is different across time. We are all different. She was caught and adrift in the psychiatric Broadview Developmental Center for over a decade. A place

of castaways. Orphans. Some diagnosed as autistic, some undiagnosed, some misdiagnosed. A menagerie, a holding pen, a community. At times a tender refuge within a rough asylum. And those who come along with probes or cameras, even some of the great documentarians, are not always teachers or allies. It takes a poet with a heart. *Scrapbook* is a miracle of compound benevolence, a slow chain reaction of fortunate coincidence, deliverance, and transformation.

Donna's commentary through the quality of her phrasing illuminates what was happening to her in the past in this institutional facility in Ohio. Now as an adult she has the ability to occupy her superimposed selves. She has the reflexes to react to the sound of her recorded voice the way many people react to hearing themselves on tape, not from vanity, but to an approximation, an imperfect facsimile. We demure, disavow, refuse that characterization, when we feel we are an accomplice to our own impersonation. Robert Bresson thought of sound recorders as wondrous instruments, but Peter Kubelka once linked the tape recorder to an unfaithful mimesis and aural "prostitution." Sound coupled with the ingredients of true evidence forming a simulation.

Donna, having won a flexible and secure personhood, can disqualify her voice, believing the voice of another performing her words is more "becoming" to her. Is more true. She may be right. In her "retirement from motion pictures," as she puts it, a substitute actress renders her indelible.

The adult Donna perceives the defensive humour of her institutionalized self, linking scrapbooks with territorial markings, with sheddings, with larval defecation. "crapbook," as it reads when she covers the letter *S*.

Broadview itself was later laid waste, abandoned after many scandals involving abuse, its ruins a repository of valuable scrapped records of all the patients, never retrieved, the haunted site a hunting ground for scavengers and explorers of the paranormal. Finally, most of the buildings were condemned and razed. But we hold on to all we ever were. Inescapable. Submerged. Sleeping. Easily awoken, barely recognized.

> The girl I left behind me
> Is constantly before me,
> Perhaps she'll be beside me someday.
> —"The Girl I Left Behind Me," by Fats Waller

And besides Donna, what happened to the other curious figures with expressive faces that teem inside the frame? Where are all the others we see roaming unbound, looking out through the screen as if into another dimension, into this world, into this frame where we are confined? Lost and preserved. They continue to watch.

Some films take a lifetime to watch.

MIRRORS (2015)

Clint Enns

Mike Hoolboom: How do you choreograph rhythm in your films?

Ingmar Bergman: Rhythm is conceived in the script. All forms of improvisation are alien to me. If I am ever forced into hasty decisions, I grow sweaty and rigid with terror. Filming for me is an illusion, planned in detail.

MH: Without improvisation, how do you ensure that an actor performs without appearing rigid?

IB: One of the greatest actors of all time, a brilliant portrayer of innumerable heroes and fools, was suffering in his seventy-seventh year from circulation trouble in his left leg. An operation was deemed necessary, but he refused. After a performance, I thanked him. He looked at me in the mirror with cold contempt and said, "To hell with your damned ingratiation. I know what you're up to."

Of course, the most important task of an actor is to focus on and respond to his fellow player. With no *you*, no *I*.

MH: Spiritualist Michael Stone once said, "Awareness is like a mirror that doesn't take the shape of what's reflected." How do you see mirrors in your films? What do you see reflected?

IB: Mirrors serve as existential portals, akin to the reflection of Stone's awareness. They carry that most called-upon and least desirable virtue: honesty.

The mirror is a space where the self unravels and the boundaries of identity dissolve. It reflects not just physical appearances but the profound interplay between external reality and internal conflict. In other words, it reflects what isn't there. It shows what we have taught ourselves to ignore.

MH: Cinema can be an elusive mirror, one that makes it difficult to recognize our own face.

IB: During the production of *The Seagull*—a play which helped shape *Through a Glass Darkly* (1961)—my then-wife Ka'bi and I moved into a handsome villa, two people chasing after identity and security. We wrote each other's parts, which we both accepted in our great need to please each other. The masks quickly cracked and fell to the ground in the first storm, and neither of us had the patience to look at the other's face.

MH: What do you think about the *supercut* as a cinematic form?

IB: Like the fleeting summary images of my own life I saw just before dying, the supercut is death. It signals that something is over. A life, a project, a point of view. Now it's time for the archive. Let's call it: *the archive of archives*.

MH: Why did you stop making films?

IB: My anxiety slowly and imperceptibly disappeared. My life's most faithful companion, inherited from both parents, the very centre of my identity. Not only the torment, the anguish, and the feeling of humiliation faded, but the driving force of my creativity also fell away.

SAFETY PICTURE COLLECTION (2014)

Thomas Waugh

Looking back at Hoolboom's "collage" *Safety Picture Collection*, a decade after its release, reminds me of the relativity of historical time. In 2014, the artist himself was also looking back—at twenty-five AIDS service announcements on sexual health and safer sex that have circulated in this century, framing them and layering them over with bountiful intrusions of his own typically autobiographical meditations. It is immediately apparent that the artist was much closer to his objects than I am to mine. Now, 2014 feels like another time warp in the sexual health galaxy, especially thanks to that *other* pandemic that intervened in 2020–22 and totally eclipsed, at least in the millennial public consciousness, the earlier, more devastating HIV pandemic. I am living in a decade where illiterate media pundits, smartphones in hand, can glibly comment on *the* pandemic without the slightest awareness of HIV, which, in fact, has claimed many more lives worldwide than Covid-19 (approximately sevenfold)!

In 2006 I had published *The Romance of Transgression in Canada*, a book on Canadian queer cinema that includes a major section on Hoolboom's AIDS trilogy: *Frank's Cock* (1993), *Letters from Home* (1996), and *Positiv* (1997). For me, these three shorts had redeemed the categories of both experimental filmmaking and heterosexuality (or is it bisexuality—the artist refuses to indicate, but I appropriated the identity of PLWA for "queer" in that book, along with several other identities hovering ambiguously on the edge, such as "sex worker"). *Positiv* remains a keystone of the HIV pandemic with its use of tender collage to juxtapose random media excerpts about corporeal transformations (e.g., from the 1957 sci-fi camp classic *The Incredible Shrinking Man*) with the artist's journal snippets and tenderly confessional "talking head."

Safety Picture Collection revisits the 1997 *Positiv* formula as another dense and layered audiovisual essay on desire, the body, and mortality. This time we encounter the serenity of a fifty-five-year-old long-term survivor of a chronic "condition" rather than the testamentary poetry of a twenty-eight-year-old who believed he was going to die. The talking head has been replaced by onscreen reflections in fulsome typographic scrolls. Most of the 2014 media clips are from MTV Staying Alive, the British foundation set up in 2002 to disseminate safer-sex spots around the world with the goal of "starting conversations" and saving lives. Other clips are from its French equivalent, AIDES, and several others are uncredited. In keeping with the objectives of demystifying fucking and infection for randy teenagers, humour and eroticism are the prevalent discourses in the selection (my favourite shows desert rats rutting laconically and rhythmically while occasionally looking at the camera, climaxing with "Do it like they do on the Discovery Channel / But, use a condom"), and heterosexuality provides the predominant iconography. Most of the clips I have never seen before, for I would rather die than watch MTV, but after years in AIDS service organizations and

AIDS education I recognize most of the slogans attached, e.g., "When you have unprotected sex, you have it with everyone your partner's had sex with."

An inspired compiler, Hoolboom refuses as ever to be the model archivist, as has been the standard for over a century among most low-budget experimental filmmakers working with found footage and compilation. The smarmy voiceover, clichéd photos, and animated charts of Hoolboom's first clip, "The Panic's Over," maddeningly unattributed and undated, reassure their audience that AIDS is a thing of the past but that lefthanded people are especially at risk, and warn us not to shake hands with "AIDS victims" (*sic*) while also declaring that nobody gets infected these days. In a 2023 interview I conducted with Hoolboom, he refused to confirm whether "Panic" is a diabolical pastiche of his own fabrication and suggested that it might be British. Though the worldwide tally of daily infections is currently less than half of Hoolboom's 2014 stat of 8,000, one can be forgiven for wondering whether ambiguous parody games, art-world cryptics, and post-postmodern fake "found footage" are indeed an effective conversation starter.

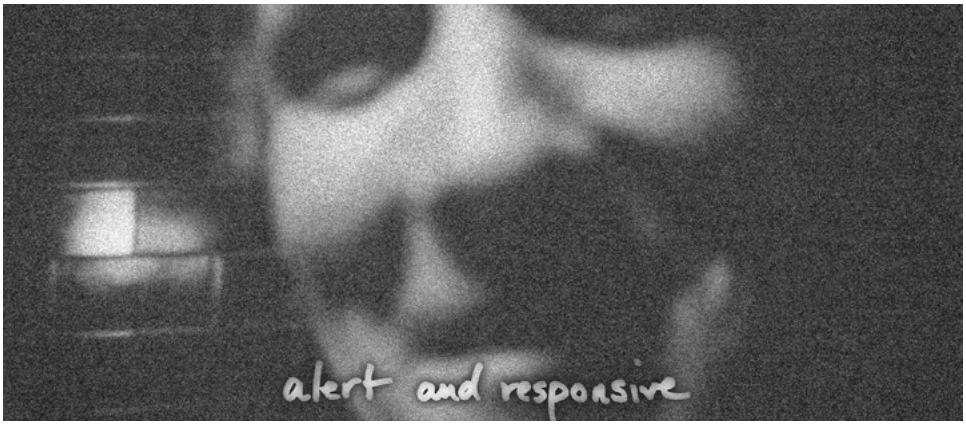
Nevertheless, surrounded by a whole friendship gaggle of intimate young barebackers on PrEP who don't know what the acronym PLWA means, I wish that the wry, jam-packed masterpiece that is *Safety Picture Collection* could recirculate now, an amnesiac decade later, and jolt us all out of our ahistorical stupor.

BUFFALO DEATH MASK (2013)

Mike Hoolboom

The AIDS crisis asks each of us so many questions, including: What is my body? This illness was not like other afflictions or viruses that are hosted inside the body for a spell. This illness that has come to stay. Where does my body stop and the virus begin? In *Buffalo Death Mask* a hand reaches into light to pose similar questions about borders. What does this body not contain? What could possibly be separate from it, now that it has been touched and stained and reconceived by this ingenious virus that has linked so many of us around the world in a common cause of sorts, as if we were all parts of one body. Is the hand reaching out trying to escape its fate, its status as a hand that has AIDS, that is AIDS? Is it a hand reaching out to other hands, in solidarity, or a hand longing to touch, for one more kiss, as Jarman says with such solemn lightness in his AIDS memoir, *Blue* (1993)?

My various attempts to turn the virus into pictures routinely extended the AIDS narrative into nonpositive faces and spaces; wider circles of acquaintances are also part of the story being told. These movies offer bodies that do not stop at the skin, but open to become memory, language, shared experience, affect. I am your mouth when I taste the food you make. I am your back-up hard drive recall for a night when you were too staggered to put the pieces together. The self reappears as a social body, as a collection of pieces, a collective memory. The cocktail allowed some of us to survive. This second life was also the living memory our bodies held for each other, not the promise of a more perfect future, but a past engraved in every cell and tissue. We knew exactly how many faces it took to create an audience. To bear witness. And to mark the moment when your face arrived.



BUFFALO DEATH MASK (2013)

Steve Anker

Shafts of light illuminate the dark, low-angle extreme close-up of a face whose eyes and other features are hollowed into blackened craters. The face turns slowly, with a mysterious kind of depth that feels ghostly rather than living. An accompanying droning chant underscores the solemnity of the image, while a text states, "Your face arrived / so much later / than the skin." *Buffalo Death Mask* is Hoolboom's testament and time capsule of the early days of the AIDS pandemic, and it creates a world of spectral images and texts that carry traces of this tragic past into the present cinematic moment.

Hoolboom is a master of visceral expression, conveying the corporeality of human existence. Overlapping and evocative visual motifs are at the heart of *Buffalo Death Mas*k. Close-ups of three men living, one of them dying, with AIDS, together with painful details of physical affliction, weave throughout the film. One of the three is the filmmaker himself, portrayed as he moves through daily actions, filled with a sense of desperation, counterpointing the other more abstract and haunting black-and-white faces. These are cinematic death masks, vivid and ephemeral records of individuals lasting only for seconds before they vanish.

One of the most compelling of his central images is a group of silhouetted, almost abstract male figures who move within an ethereal and indeterminate space. The film is shot mostly in super 8 and blown up to 16mm, and the relatively soft focus specific to super 8 adds to the grainy, indistinct world of its imagery. These moving forms gain a mystical quality through the filmmaker's powerful use of the small-gauge medium. Human beings have become featureless, transitory shadows. I can think of other films that have attempted a similar sense of composition, but here it is beautifully used to express the evanescence of life moving into and out of existence.

The most intriguing and daring formal element is an audio dialogue between Hoolboom and another survivor living with AIDS, Stephen Andrews. The two recount their pre-cocktail days of living at the edge of death, the conflicted experience of staying alive while so many others were dying—their own loved ones and almost countless close friends. The contrast between the metaphorical visuals and these matter-of-fact voices grounds the film, keeps it wholly present and rooted in reality.

Buffalo Death Mask is an envisioning of the hell that devastated and traumatized an entire generation, throughout the world.

LACAN PALESTINE (2012)

Marcel Jean

Originally published in *24 Images*, no. 159 (October–November 2012): 23. A revision of the text, which was originally published in French.

Can we psychoanalyze nations by digging into the stream of images that represent them? Can we order these images into a sequence that might express a history large enough to include an unconscious conveyed by cinema? Can we show a country that so many refuse to see? Can we recreate the territory that has been denied again and again? Can cinema offer at least one image of a land to a population that has lived too long in privation? What myths can form the basis of the Palestinian nation today?

These questions, and so many others, are posed by the turbulence of *Lacan Palestine,* the latest cinematographic essay by Toronto's Mike Hoolboom. Drawing on the work of his colleagues Velcrow Ripper, Elle Flanders, Tamira Sawatzky, and Dani (Leventhal) ReStack, he steeps himself in newsreel images and steals from Hollywood super productions, including multiple versions of *The Ten Commandments*. In this new movie, Hoolboom rethinks the genre of found footage film in the light of psychoanalytic history, flipping the question of Palestine in all directions to offer a portrait as complex as it is paradoxical.

The film opens with a child travelling. In the earliest hours of morning, in darkness, he's alone lugging his bags from one bus to another. We learn at the end of the movie that his name is Jihad. He's not yet five and he's on his way to meet his father. The father that we will never meet. Jihad's journey is reminiscent of Hoolboom's quest, a quest for origins, a kind of enormous historical regression in audiovisual memory, a path where it's easy to get lost. It is a journey full of metaphors, free associations, surprises, shocks, scary moments, reveries, and introspection. This beautiful experiment is as noble as it is absurd, since it is written in advance that it will solve nothing.

Yet, in the midst of this search, a certainty emerges: We are dealing with a singular, authentic cinema that captivates through its illuminations. From one end of the film to the other, Hoolboom demonstrates a mastery of editing that makes you want to see the film again as soon as you've finished. A desire to observe its folds anew, to unearth its hidden meaning, to ponder its significance again and again.

Hoolboom based his work on the psychoanalytic reflections of Mike Cartmell, a filmmaker himself, who invokes his own trauma in his attempts to name the social behaviours that embody mythical structures. "How can we get along? How can we live in accord with one another in any

way?" Cartmell offers poetic answers to these questions using the example of John Coltrane's quintet. Five powerful personalities. Each plays a different instrument, expressing his singularity, but together they create a collective expression (Cartmell consciously refuses to use the word "harmony"). Here the social body is not the negation of the individual, but a form of sublimation.

Is this a fantasy? Regarding the couple Palestine-Israel, perhaps, without doubt. But it is a fantasy that haunts Hoolboom in the endless images of couples kissing, embracing, coming apart, and beating each other while exoduses and conquests continue, death stalks, and walls rise.

How might one describe the indescribable? This is the unreasonable task (but can any real creation be reasonable?) that the filmmaker undertakes. *Lacan Palestine* appears to be the result of an obsession and logically delivers its share of haunting images. I will mention just one: On a barber chair, a child is having his head shaved. Hair falls to the floor in great chunks from an increasingly denuded head. Lice are running everywhere, panicking now that they've been deported. Their universe is devastated. Lice … Looking at that shot, we all become lice.

FOREST WALK (2011)

Chris Kennedy

A transitional film for Mike Hoolboom. A father leads his son through a forest, in glistening black and white. Psychoanalytic reflections by Adam Phillips, written in negative, cross the screen. No longer the raging, angry filmmaker in a house of pain, Hoolboom has become an elder statesman of the film scene. Imparting knowledge, documenting the scene. No longer the young rebel, spelling Canada with a "K," he is quieter, more philosophical. "Fringe Film," once a call to arms, became "Fringe Online," a collection of websites of peers before that too faded, a collection of dead links. Ever the documentarian, Hoolboom still collects stories of a dynamic past and tells them when he can. In the forest, he is joined by other fringe elders: Vincent Grenier shoots on old film stock supplied by Gary Popovich. Mike Cartmell embodies—is—the father, two years before he dies. Urgency becomes reflection. A film to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of the Liaison of Independent Filmmakers of Toronto, no longer the collective it once was when it was founded out of the remnants of the Funnel and the Toronto Film Co-op. An institution now, which doesn't reflect what he once wanted, but how the world has changed. "There is a history that our competence conceals." His anger is still there, but it is muted by time, "ghostwritten as desire." The ghost writes the history of the fringe. Are we worshipping ashes, or passing down fire?

MARK (2009)

Pat Rockman

The first time I saw Mike Hoolboom speak in public, it was after a screening of *Mark*. I fell in love with his voice and the way his words flowed so elegantly into the world, guided by his long hands. The way he could softly command the audience's attention held me in a callback to my dead father—a charming intellectual who also made art, though Mike is much kinder than he was.

Mike is, to his own surprise, still alive, living most of his life inside his apartment, in front of his computer making movies. Mark was his editor for six years until he died. Mike told me that this movie was a way for him to mourn. At least this is how I remember it. And what we remember so easily becomes the truth.

The movie is a montage, a visual elegy, and an ode to Mark. Mike says of the two of them, "We took previously made pictures and recycled them so they could keep our secrets company." They were image thieves. But really, does anything belong to anyone? Both own practically nothing.

The movie begins and ends with Mike's voiceovers. "It looks like he's here, but he's not … Here Mark shows us his first and best disguise … His mask of happiness … The invisible man developed the knack of service."

We see the gift that Mark's friends gave—all that footage, those images of Mark, woven into the film, that keep him alive or perhaps, as Mike says, "couldn't stop him from dying again and again." The film shows us Mark's beauty, vulnerability, humour, delight, sweetness, and commitment. We see him perform "Two Ladies" from *Cabaret*, wearing a pink dress and a blond wig, dancing 50s-style.

We hear and see his commitment to animal rights and the end of animal suffering. The animals "he loved more than himself." The many feral cats he cared for. One of the speakers says, "Most people are not interested in animal rights. You say to yourself it is only an animal … this is the beginning of racism and genocide." Mark truly cared. But his depression stopped him from being able to care for himself or to recognize the impact his death would have on those who loved him.

Mike displays the face of grief for us. He shares his own and that of Mark's partner, Mirha-Soleil Ross, as she describes finding Mark hanging, her own worst fear that he would abandon her realized. This film is about love and loss. We see Mark's life and death through the voices of his friends and partner. We see how none of us escape.

MARK (2009)

Karol Orzechowski

Doing activism on behalf of animals is one of the most difficult paths in life that a human being can take. Where other social causes seek to address problems that feel self-evidently *bad*, animals are the lowest rung on the ladder, collateral damage that the vast majority of us can shrug off in as little time as it takes to feel a hunger pang. Countless public opinion polls show that the general public cares about how animals are treated. But it can feel profoundly alienating to know that people "care" and yet are stirred to do nothing, or that they continue to actively participate in the forward momentum of a death machine.

In Hoolboom's *Mark*, we see animal activism woven as a thread through the life and suicide of Mark Karbusicky. A collection of tapes full of cruelty, sprinkled with dashes of care and sanctuary, punctuates the first movement of the film. A shot of Mark riding a bike in some kind of backyard setting, behind him a dog in a wagon full of blankets, is the skeleton key for understanding it all. Yes, dogs are beloved and cared for by so many of us, but there are also limits to that care—economic limits, especially, but also in grief. For instance, try to get bereavement time off work when your companion animal passes away and see how that goes. Worse yet, imagine your family or friends asking you why you're still upset a couple of weeks later.

I know what's happening in this scene because I've seen so many others who care for animals do the exact same thing, caring for an animal into their palliative phase, carrying and carting them around, swaddled in blankets, to their favourite places, so they can keep smelling their favourite smells, seeing their favourite sights, meeting their favourite others. Eventually, we let go, but it is never a disposal, never a decision made with an economic calculus in mind. In one understated shot, Hoolboom underlines how deeply Mark cared for and was connected to animals, in a way that words can't.

MARK (2009)

Hito Steyerl

Originally published in *Ambulante Documentary Film Festival Catalogue*, 2010.

This is not a film about Mark but about his absence. Slowly, Hoolboom's film will revolve around him, without ever coming too close. Fragments of Mark's life—as reflected by those close to him—are carefully woven into a web of found images. But Mark remains an elusive character. He remains between the images—many of which are superimposed in the form of a variable palimpsest of traces and impressions. In the end we still don't know who Mark was. But we start to get a feeling of how much he is missed.

Mark's portrait is a collage of memories and carefully arranged moving tableaus of archival stock. A while into the film we learn that Mark was a video editor who worked for the filmmaker himself. But this is only one of his assorted existences, many of which revolve around affective labour. They never coalesce into anything like a coherent and immobilized image. His is in flux and in movement—driven along by the sex workers' rights movement or the animal liberation movement; set in the transition between genders. In a short glimpse of archive material we see how activists set birds free by literally taking them from trucks driving by.

Mark's image eludes capture in a similar way. It withdraws to the spaces in between images which are often superimposed in several layers. In a similar way, the recollections of Mark's friends and his partner are layered—this time by framing and unfocusing protagonists' faces and bodies. We see remarkably unedited interviews, stretches of sustained intensity, which tell us about Mark. Strangely, it seems that Mark was loved equally for what can clearly be said about him and his diverse activities, as for those things that escape being fixed by expression.

In an unusual superimposition we briefly see Maria Falconetti's *Joan of Arc* (1928) being watched by Anna Karina in Godard's *Vivre sa vie* (1962). The image of the saint carries over into the picture of the occasional prostitute; affect spills from one face onto another, briefly registering before moving on. This transition is mapped onto a staged shot of Mark and his partner. From one stage of gender to the other, from human to animal, from one shot to the next, Mark seems to have facilitated the passing of one life form into the other, less by editing than by conjoining, less by dividing than by carrying over. Towards the end, Mark's absence—his loss—grows more intense.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IN THE THEATRE (2005)

Jon Davies

When Colin Campbell died in 2001, there was a sense that his life was not over. I did not know him and did not live in Toronto then, so this is wild speculation. But his subjectivity always seemed to exceed the container of his body, spreading into his videotapes—and especially his beloved video personas of Art Star, the Woman from Malibu, Robin, and, near the end, Colleena—and his intimate friendships and relationships. Colin reserved the right to be both himself and someone else—potentially *anyone* else. Now we must speak only from our own positions.

When Hoolboom memorializes Colin in *In the Theatre*—commissioned for Vtape's *The Colin Campbell Sessions*—he only includes two brief clips, totalling about forty seconds, of Colin's face, as he appeared in the early to mid-1970s in his potent, performance-based videos. Instead, the recently departed Colin is figured through the history of cinema, and specifically a cinema of affect, of the body, of images and sounds that you keenly feel. While Colin loved storytelling, and narrative became increasingly vital to him over time—he even turned to novel-writing—many of the films Hoolboom mines boast production values far beyond what Colin could afford. It is an enduring conundrum of Colin's work that it seemed to contain multitudes when the content was often just one or two people speaking to us or to each other. I think it is because he saw life through the prism of artifice, respecting no line between truth and fiction and therefore opening the self up to the other, to the whole world, because in the realm of desire and imagination there are no limits. Video back in its youth was so small, so denigrated—barely there—but Colin made it expansive; of course, Hoolboom—Mike—put him up on the big screen to really soak it all in.

> This is the place / where we watch / death at work. / Us, the most fleeting of all. / Just once, no more. / And never again. / Everything around us / races towards its disappearance. / We are left / with pictures in place of memory / dialogue instead of conversation / sets which have become homes. / And in place of love / the close-up. / When Colin died / I came here / to the theatre / waiting to see him. / You worked for years / building your pyramids / reaching for a world / you could not hold / and loving it no less.

PUBLIC LIGHTING (2004)

Paolo Cherchi Usai

In an ideal world, a cinematic work should be experienced with no name attached to it; that is, with no main or end credits, as in the early days. Authorship, if any, ought to be revealed when the screening is over, unburdened by a positive or negative bias. Another mantra of our imaginary cinephile is that there is no such thing as a consistently inspired or hopelessly flawed film. Best spectatorship practice calls for staying until the end, no matter what, trusting that a momentary lapse of aesthetic judgement is the soul of the perfect movie; even its ugliest sibling may be able to deliver a spark of poetic epiphany, a fleeting moment of enduring beauty (it is absolutely fine to skim through a book you don't like, or stop reading it altogether, but the moving image deserves better than that).

Anonymity and patience: *Public Lighting* is no exception to these suggested—and admittedly unpopular—axioms. It is made of nondescript archival footage, so seamlessly blended with Hoolboom's own footage it renders the transitions impalpable: a man in a phone booth, a mother and her baby, a crowded street market. Anonymous images of anonymous people, both drifting from an anonymous past, innocent and therefore vulnerable. Hoolboom's images, too, will sooner or later become "archival footage," thus achieving a poignant symbiosis with their nameless predecessors. The same could be said about *Public Lighting*'s miniature-like sound design. One should not be afraid of listening to it with closed eyes, as the most unlikely of radio broadcasts, oblivious to its marriage with—or divorce from—the visuals: Philip Glass, a lover's diary, the buzz of a 16mm film projector.

You may now attach Mike Hoolboom's name to all this, and conjure up the echoes of your own epiphanies: an underwater embrace, a postcard landscape that comes alive, the ineffable texture of a woman's voice in a recording studio.

PUBLIC LIGHTING (2004)

Jason McBride

Originally published as "Message to Michael: Musings on *Public Lighting*," in *Now as a Bird, Now as a Worm, Now as a Plant*, ed. Mike Hoolboom (Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center, 2012), 52–54.

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* (2003): 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. She smokes compulsively, as if the cigarettes were made not 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 it 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 generis* work that defied borders between fiction, essay, and documentary. I met you once then, just briefly—you were showing something at the Ann Arbor 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 this to you as if I know you, just as in *Public Lighting* you address Madonna as if you might know her. Or rather, as if 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 fewer 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 to 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 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 audiobook. 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.

IMITATIONS OF LIFE (2003)

Bruce Jenkins

While the title *Imitations of Life* may allude to melodrama (be it the 1934 "women's picture" or Douglas Sirk's ironic 1959 remake), Mike Hoolboom's default genre seems to be science fiction, the one filmic mode that continually focuses on questions about the future while reflexively using its own material form to speculate on new technical possibilities that define the cinema to come. But his approach frequently shifts the temporal momentum from that future to the past. Perhaps amid the complex issues surrounding technology and culture that were emerging at the onset of the current millennium, this was deemed a necessary strategy. As film theorist Peter Wollen noted a few years earlier, "When the future is unclear, it's good to delve back into the past and see what looks new amid the old, what can be salvaged in an unexpected way, what gives a new twist to our perception of the present."[1]

Much of *Imitations of Life* involves an elaborate push/pull between memory and anticipation, past and the future, and even cinema's celluloid history and the medium's digital future. From its opening moment, when MGM's lion is looped with his roar stuttered, to the closing with Warner's Looney Tunes end credit featuring the stuttering Porky Pig, the viewer embarks on a temporal journey fuelled by its maker's deep and wide-ranging cinephilia. We are awash in both iconic imagery (Kane's megalomania visualized in a hall of mirrors) and no less iconic sound (the *Wizard of Oz*'s acoustical unmasking). But Hoolboom accords space for more experimental modes, his own included, using a generative process that film historian Stephen Broomer rather unceremoniously has dubbed "scrapbooking."[2] The effect, however, is far from homespun, with a continual feeling of a vast database filled with visual and aural plenitude.

Unevenly divided into ten parts, *Imitations of Life* immediately intertwines cinema and the realm of dreams, beginning with a little girl's voiceover: "Last night I had a dream that the movies I had seen even in the womb were a prophecy; they were my future." Here Hoolboom effectively fills the dream screen with imagery sourced from what feels like the entire history of cinema, starting with an image of a Lumière-era cameraman cranking the apparatus and ending with David Lynch's contribution to an omnibus centennial tribute to these filmmaking pioneers. In between is an intricately assembled array of compelling images sourced from classic film noirs and movie musicals, art films—from the East, the West, and the Global South—indie features, and studio productions. Added to this, each image responds in a nuanced manner to the ongoing "dream," now delivered through intertitles, and to a soundscape sourced from a mix of dialogue, music, and effects tracks.

The next part, titled "Jack," is among the film's longest segments, and it reverses course as Hoolboom mostly assembles footage he shot of his nephew Jack Fuller, made during episodic family visits in

the mid- to late 1990s. Countering any implicit paean to childhood, the filmmaker's voiceover situates Jack's birth against a historical backdrop of violent political conflicts, natural disasters, the persistence of the AIDS pandemic, and disheartening cultural trends. Soon the filmmaker makes a rare appearance, Bolex in hand, as he reflexively chronicles his own filmmaking, adding insights in voiceover that reveal how the simplest activities (going to an amusement park, walking the family dog) can embody metaphors on vision, allegorical life lessons, and intimations of things to come. As he notes in a particularly lyrical passage about young Jack, "He has made happiness his profession."

While science fiction continues to dominate the cache of appropriated film footage, themes far more reminiscent of melodrama unfold in voiceovers, subtitles, intertitles, and occasional imagery—in particular family relationships (parents, siblings), life-cycle moments (birth, death), and systems of metaphysical order (Catholic church, scientific method). It is difficult to fully capture not only the elaborate sound design, but equally the subtle array of strategies by which language and texts imbricate themselves among the images. Fittingly for this historically minded, politically engaged artist, the use of sync sound—the zero degree of sound-era production and a practice much derided by the early Soviet filmmakers—doesn't appear until the film's ninth and longest segment, titled "Imitation of Life," itself divided into eight scenes.

Imitations of Life, in the end, feels deeply reflective of and engaged with cultural issues that emerged in the 1990s and early 2000s, ranging from the anxieties around Y2K, to the shift in moving image capture and editing technology that defined an era of digital convergence, to the perennial "end of cinema" debates about the medium's obsolescence. Hoolboom's response is to counter such cultural qualms with a vigorous demonstration of a trio of venerable claims about film: that the camera can be deployed as a writing instrument (or *caméra-stylo*, as noted by French critic and auteur Alexandre Astruc), that filmmaking is a form of philosophical discourse (per Harvard professor Stanley Cavell), and that film's status as an art is a direct function of its obsolete technology (according to filmmaker and theorist Hollis Frampton's metahistory of the medium). To the extent that such concerns will remain affixed to our medium, *Imitations of Life* will continue to assert cinema's centrality to any serious discussion of the social, political, and cultural history of the arts.

NOTES

1. Peter Wollen, "Afterword: Lee Russell Interviews Peter Wollen" (1997), in *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (British Film Institute and Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 247.

2. Stephen Broomer and Michael Zryd, *Moments of Perception: Experimental Film in Canada*, ed. Jim Shedden and Barbara Sternberg (Goose Lane Editions, 2021), 229.

AMY (2003)

Matthias Müller

Jock Sturges is an internationally renowned photographic artist. His work, celebrated for its depictions of the "natural beauty of the human body," can be found in powerful institutions such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art and MoMA, New York. Respected publishers such as Gerhard Steidl have launched handsome books. After a long history of legal warnings, the artist was found guilty in 2021 of sexual misconduct with a fourteen-year-old girl. Jock Sturges is a convicted sex offender.

His teenage victim suffered from extreme depersonalization and anxiety. She was unable to function at school, in society, and unable to find sexual pleasure. *Amy* gives voice to one of Sturges's former models. And yet, we do not hear her voice.

As if to protect her from further exposure, Mike Hoolboom has a narrator recite the script he wrote after a conversation with her. He thus embeds the personal account of abuse in a collective female experience—thirteen years before the #MeToo movement. At the same time, he refuses to include images of her, other than those taken by Sturges; instead, he uses home movies by others, collaged with unpeopled moments of waiting and suspension stolen from feature films. By intercutting shots of work in the photo lab with his own work as a director in the sound studio, he allows his own powerful position as a portraitist to be problematized. "Was that OK?" his female narrator asks at the end of one take.

We learn that Amy did not feel OK. Her picture taken on a naturist beach, she felt more naked than any of the others. Sturges was not naked: His large-format camera protected him. Amy's mother claimed she wasn't naked, because she was "always wearing her soul." An image has been taken, memories expropriated—"they do not belong to her any longer." Amy speaks about herself in the third person, like an outsider. The photographs became mirror and identity, granting her a new body that she learns to see through Sturges's eyes. On top of a young body rests the head of an "old, old woman," as she states in her laconic lament, describing one of three photographs that she revisits.

The recognition that Sturges's portraits enjoy is supported by the still rarely problematized tradition of the male gaze in painting, with its recurring subject of the naked, adolescent female body. As an alternative to Sturges's images, Rineke Dijkstra's *Beach Portraits* come to mind, created after the artist's own experience of vulnerability, capturing the insecurities and fragility of her sitters in their transitory phase between two periods of life.

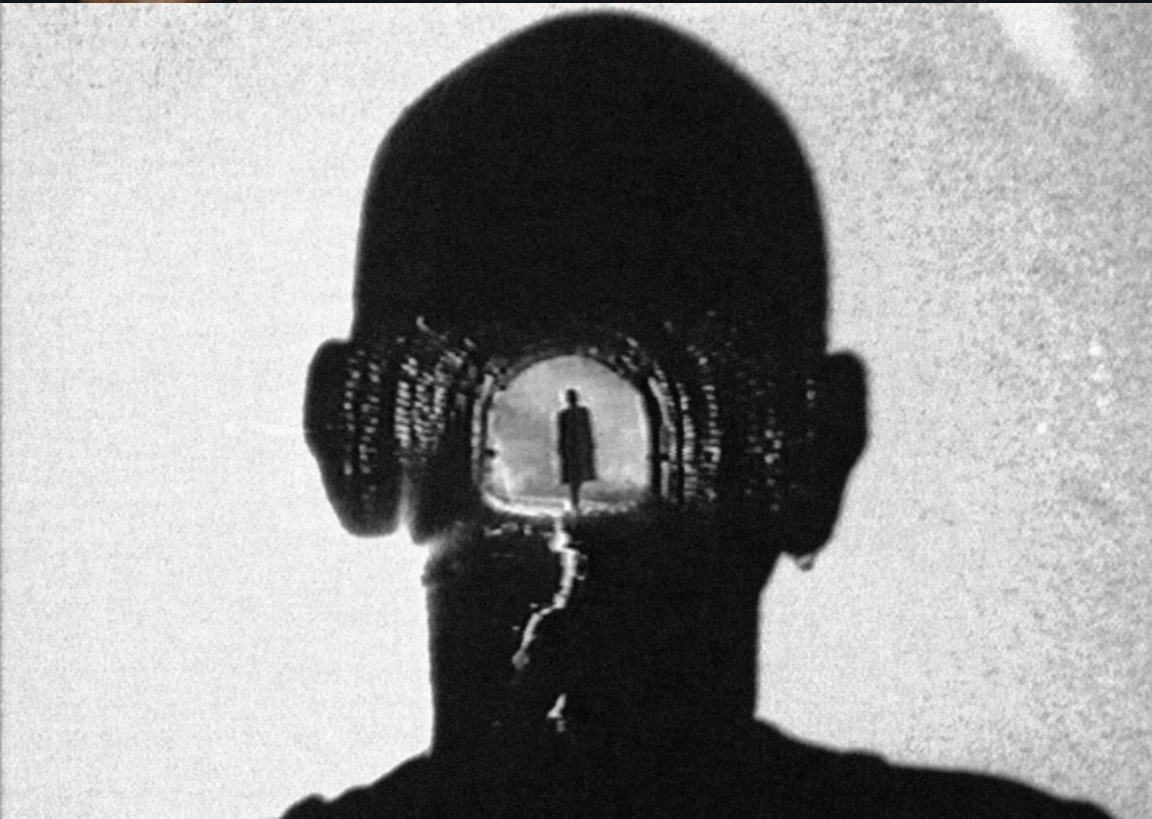
Activate Google Image Search and you will find Sturges's portraits competing with similar depictions today—but which of the models succeeds more in exuding girlish innocence? In today's selfie culture, the outside view of one's own body and the pressure of delivering a satisfying performance have long been internalized. *Amy* is a critical account of the manufacturing of portraits and reminds us that every portrait works to objectify its subject. This is inherent in its attribution: This is who you are. And this is what makes this short, sad film—the film whose final image breaks my heart—so explosive.

TOM (2002)

Tom McSorley

Imagine an image, moving or still, as a musical note; imagine the juxtaposition of moving image sequences as chords: combinations of notes to form a resonant sound. Mike Hoolboom's work of the early twenty-first century explores this idea through a unique practice of musical montage: Rather like notes and chords, images or sequences from other films (both famous and obscure) are constructed and conducted as if in a musical form: allusive, elusive, emotive, tremulous, transporting. In films such as *Imitations of Life* (2003) and *Public Lighting* (2004), this exploration of how we receive, process, and remember moving images—how thoroughly bathed we are in them in our civilization of image consumption—is delivered with the affect and immediacy of music. This remarkable approach begins, however, with *Tom*, an intimate portrait of groundbreaking American filmmaker Tom Chomont. In its elaborately layered imagery and propulsive editing patterns, *Tom* is a film that appears to both see with its ears and listen with its eyes.

Within a kinetic assemblage of archival footage, newsreels, pornography, excerpts from films by Tarkovsky, Buñuel, Ang Lee, Buster Keaton, De Sica (to name but a few), and Hoolboom's own video footage of Chomont, Hoolboom relocates these preexisting sequences into a visual and aural weave of emotional immediacy around the voice, body, and cinema of Chomont. At times fragmented and atonal, at other times integrated and melodic, *Tom* is a cinematic orchestral tone poem expressing directly and indirectly its subject's love, fear, desire, corporeality, artistry, sexuality, and mortality. In this context we can perhaps summon Walter Pater's famous dictum that "all art aspires to the condition of music." *Tom* is a fully realized example. Out of this astonishing storm of images and sounds, this haunting palimpsest of memory and perception, comes a deeply moving work of cinematic art that both aspires to and achieves that condition.



JACK (2000)

Mike Hoolboom

Children were a foreign country to me until my sister turned her body into a temporary house. While my sister was pregnant, my mother heard God speak to her through Oprah (this happened often in the 90s), alerting her that the casual flu my sister had could deform her child-to-be, a problem easily solved with a few over-the-counter pills. Jack's true parents: Oprah and a voice too many mistook for God.

> In Angola, in Sudan, in Algeria there is civil war. Every fourteen seconds someone contracts the AIDS virus. In his mid-career retrospective Mike Kelley writes, "I am useless to the culture but God loves me." One hundred thousand German men visit Thailand on sex tours, Israel agrees to a Palestinian state, and Michael Jordan quits basketball. This is not the end of the world; it is 1993. Seventy percent of Americans believe in angels, *Schindler's List* wins the Academy Award for Best Picture, and my sister gives birth to a boy she names Jack.

Would every new joy be accompanied by a new vulnerability? The world seemed suddenly fragile, unprepared for his appearance. We were mired in a crippling economic inequality, for instance, while the ruling class had replaced the old gods with corporations.

I began to bring the camera around when I came to visit; it felt like another friend. I was mystified how my sister managed to resist the cultural groove of making pictures that would never be reviewed. She was determined to live in the present; pictures were for people who lacked all memory, like me.

Jack was my family favourite. His open face howling in fathomless pain and joy, his eyes boggling in confusion, he was always the most real person in the room, until he learned what role he had to play. Then he let his anxiety tap into everyone's nervous system and tried to find a way to make things OK. He became a master of the subliminal, the subtext of every seating arrangement, the things that couldn't be spoken out loud, but were narrated instead in a handshake too quickly withdrawn, a wounding look.

> He hasn't learned yet that the face is the first line of protection, the border guard of the soul, which must be sheltered from the eyes of strangers or from anyone who dares speak to him of love.

Jack taught me how to step into the same rooms I'd seen a hundred times as if I'd never been there before. He showed me that running whenever possible was always better than walking. The

sheer pleasure of motion, of flow, the whole body at once was the teacher. He invited me into the embrace of an easy and endless satisfaction, a pleasure without end.

Overnight he had turned me into Moses. I would glimpse the promised land of the future, but never enter it. I'm still unsure why that felt so relieving as I quietly began to long for my own end.

> He rides on, knowing better than any of us that we are what we forget, that the reason we like to be out in nature is because it has no opinion of us, and that there is a road to hell, even from the gates of heaven.

JACK (2000)

Mburucuya Marcela Ortiz Imlach

A touching tragedy filled with the beating heart of a life and sweet realizations. It is driven by a bright and spacious voice that makes me collide with tragic fragments of our apocalyptic reality. Environmental and social catastrophe mix with the unsatisfied lives of the materially privileged. However, the movie also reminds me that we inhabit a gorgeous planet and have always held fast to our dreams for humanity. As an Argentinian poet once declared, the future is already here, but not the one we always dreamed of.

Against the backdrop of systemic global suffering, a sweet little boy goes through his first experiences of beauty. *Vivencias*. His eyes are sparkling and full of hope, and the spoon is an ally for tasting paradise. A proudly dirty mouth shows that everything dissolves so nicely, but for how long? The pulses of tragedy come back to me. I cannot escape the poetry that spits out truths, or leave the emotional space of collective collapse.

I make huge efforts to find the path of resilience. I don't know how to resist a darkening reality even when plenty of visual poetry tries to inspire serenity. I wait for Jack to come for me, to rescue me from my infinite pessimism. I desperately run into his memories of a happy early existence, to hold their freshness and avoid drowning … with the sea, the horse's mane, the sunset, and the bicycle. An emotional succour finally arrives.

IN THE CITY (2000)

Scott Birdwise

In the City, the second part of Hoolboom's *Public Lighting* (2004), covers remarkable ground in its relatively brief duration. Combining documentary inscriptions and diaristic impulses with structuralist forms and layers of phantasmagoric imagery, the film provides a mosaic-like portrait of the city of Toronto in the late 1990s. Two major elements or devices are at its core: a man recalling his various love affairs in voiceover narration; and images of the bars and restaurants where his relationships finally ended. Video artist Steve Reinke narrates in a voice that is at once earnest and ironic, while the images of the restaurants appear, from A to Z, lexicographically. Interspersed amongst these meeting places are superimposed images lifted from a veritable archive of longing: Passing traffic and fleeting scenes from urban life meet smiling faces, desperate faces, longing faces (some seem to belong to the unnamed narrator, others to strangers like teenage girls, care of classic NFB vérité doc *Lonely Boy* [1962]). Something extraordinary is proposed in the film; or, if not proposed, demonstrated—visually and sonically—by stranger and more powerful means than mere narrative or argument. *In the City* conjures a vision, an experience of Toronto where things—people, images, sounds—come together to layer and condense, then drift or fly apart in sites where private desire and public space intersect.

Opening with images of our narrator, here imagined as a boy (from *The Night of the Hunter* [1955]) arising from his slumber as daylight seeps into his home before he enters the busy streets of the metropolis, *In the City* draws upon a number of tropes established in prior "city films" like *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (1927) and *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929). Exemplary city symphonies, these films document a way of life—that is, the collective experience of a people—by giving us a glimpse of a day in the life of a city. But in its layering of images repurposed from preexisting sources, Hoolboom's short also recalls Canadian artist Jack Chambers's *The Hart of London* (1970). Made with the knowledge that he had leukemia, Chambers's film portrait of his hometown of London, Ontario, is also suffused with the existential menace of death. And with a narrator giving voice to his intimate reflections and memories of relationships past, *In the City* can be further illuminated when considered in light of Derek Jarman's *Blue* (1993), another film marked by death. When we understand that Hoolboom was himself diagnosed with HIV in the late 1980s, we can perhaps bring into clearer focus how his own city symphony is imbued with a certain kind of romantic, existential, and queer dimension. It is through this conjunction of images and stories of the city focalized through an individual's romantic and sexual experiences (in a kind of autotextuality) alongside methods of appropriation, superimposition, and montage that what can be understood as the "biopoetics" of *In the City* takes shape and finds a certain trajectory.[1]

In a 2004 interview with Tomás Tetiva and Petra Veselá, Hoolboom explains the difference between his practice and what he refers to as "traditional" cinema in the following terms:

> In a traditional movie they talk about suspending disbelief, forgetting yourself, leaving your concerns behind. This is contrary to the cinema I'm interested in, or the life I'm interested in. The cinema is also life, not an escape from it.[2]

In referring to cinema as life, Hoolboom is also describing a kind of *sympathetic* relationship between images and the world from which they emerge (in production) and to which they return (in reception). As Hoolboom puts it in a later interview with Cristina Álvarez López and Adrian Martin, "At what point exactly does the image on the screen, the life up there on the screen, in the dark, become our life? Us, together."[3] Etymologically, "sympathy" means an "affinity between certain things," which in turn is linked to a "community," not to say consensus, "of feeling"—a bringing or coming together of pathos. Sympathy can be further brought together with the notion of the city as itself a place where people come together and share feelings. *In the City*, then, is itself "sympathetic" with its subject in terms of both the strange intimacy of its narration and its gathering together of images of the life of the city.

When Hoolboom asks about when the image becomes our life, and how it is shared in common, he is getting at something biopoetic about the cinema. He is in part inquiring into how cinema can address—speak to, excite, affirm, transform—a form of life that emerges at the threshold between the private and the public, the bodily and the psychic, the singular and the plural, the vital and the medial. This is the kind of dynamic that media theorist Pasi Väliaho draws our attention to in his study *Biopolitical Screens.* Väliaho argues that images are "endowed with evocative powers to give birth to the real and, at the same time, to transform their makers and beholders."[4] Describing the affective imbrication of life and images, he writes:

> Images act like vital entities situated at the intersection of mind and matter, undermining the distinction between appearances and the real world around us. They are dynamic, as art historian Aby Warburg noted over a century ago; they mediate realms private and public and become the driving force of gestures, affections, and thoughts.[5]

It is from within the volatile realm of cinematic images that Hoolboom documents *and* experiments with relationships between bodies and spaces. More specifically, *In the City* explores the life of the city with superimposed words and voices and spaces and images that might engender sympathetic transformations in, as he puts it, "us, together," as we regard them.

One of the principal ways that Hoolboom's film navigates thresholds between public space and private desire is through what film scholar Paul Arthur refers to as cinema's "visual-linguistic interface." In his discussion of the essay film (another minor genre or mode that we can think about

In the City with), Arthur writes that "all great essays are about complex relationships between words and pictures, the mechanisms by which speech can annotate, undermine, or otherwise change the signification of what we see—and vice versa."[6] If images too can undermine distinctions between appearances and the world, then Hoolboom's play with film grammar generates a kind of alternative mapping of the city. The ways that the film navigates the city through the (dis)connection between narrated memories and images of restaurants—organized according to the letters of the alphabet (the building blocks of language, of communication)—disturb traditional forms of managing and structuring the living being. In this respect, Hoolboom has asked in an interview, "Could we use this diligent work on form to touch a world, even to suggest different shapes for a world, that can make new forms of encounter, even new kinds of living, possible?"[7]

Onto the biopoetic question of new forms of living and encounter made possible by images, we can also superimpose Michel de Certeau's well-known distinction between strategies and tactics. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau associates strategies with the producers and managers of space and place, the institutions and structures of power; tactics, meanwhile, belong to the (dis)order of everyday life, where people practice small, temporary acts of creativity, improvisation, and resistance. "Dwelling, moving about, speaking, reading, shopping, and cooking," de Certeau writes,

> are activities that seem to correspond to the characteristics of tactical ruses and surprises: clever tricks of the "weak" within the order established by the "strong," an art of putting one over on the adversary on his own turf, hunter's tricks, maneuverable, polymorph mobilities, jubilant, poetic, and warlike discoveries.[8]

To de Certeau's list of tactics we can add cruising and dating, activities of encounter and games of seduction, as imagined by *In the City*, energized by the disorder of desire.

On another level, de Certeau further notes, "cross-cuts, fragments, cracks and lucky hits in the framework of a system" constitute tactics, what he describes as the "practical equivalents of wit."[9] Seen through the lens of tactics, Hoolboom's play with appropriated images and documented places is "scattered over the terrain of the dominant order and foreign to the rules laid down and imposed by a rationality founded on established rights and property."[10] Activated with and against the alphabetic system, *In the City*'s scrapbook aesthetic of sympathetic images not only breaks with traditional film grammar and escapist narrative logic, but holds open a possibility for different ways of inhabiting the city; for new assemblages of gestures, affections and thoughts; for alternative conduits of feeling and uses of space and place for queer life.

Toward the end of *In the City*, poetic intertitles begin to punctuate the flow of superimposed images. All together, the intertitles read:

through a single caress
we leave our childhood
men roam the city
towards love

and because I love you
everything moves

The language of caressing, leaving, roaming, loving, and moving in the city reverberates with Hoolboom's call for a revitalized cinema, one in which "new forms of encounter, even new kinds of living" might become possible. These gestures and images lend themselves to circumstances that "change the organization of a space," as de Certeau has put it, in relation to "the possible intersections of durations and heterogeneous rhythms."[11] Such intersections, superimpositions, and juxtapositions of images in Hoolboom's film might then create sympathetic and ironic transformations in the world that the cinema interfaces with: a different route through the city.

That said, the closing image of fireworks in the film itself loops, implying that images may not only interface with the real, but can also interrupt it, distort it, exaggerate it, and destabilize it to act directly upon the body or the unconscious. The loop also demonstrates that images can feed back into themselves, into other images, in a simulacrum. This would be a route in the city, then, that doesn't appear to go anywhere, a moment or experience that doesn't extend into time or space: an image that doesn't advance a narrative or plot, that recalcitrantly sits here, now. This type of image is in some accord with what Jean-François Lyotard describes as the "blissful intensities" of what he terms "acinema"—an experimental mode of cinema that engages with what Lyotard calls the "pyrotechnical imperative" of the simulacrum.[12] This imperative is structured around two polarities: immobility and excessive movement. Immobility arrests movement in stasis; excessive movement exhausts it, "dissipates" it. Both of these poles, however, attack or "sterilize" cinematic representation (utility, illusion, story, purpose) all the better to agitate and excite the spectator in an "unproductive" expenditure of energy. The erotic power of *In the City*'s pyrotechnical display would thus be something like an image of *mémoire*, what Hoolboom has explained is an "unstoried moment" that "emerges in places like psychoanalysis, or the cinema, a convulsive, eruptive memory which appears as a fragment, a raw bundle."[13]

This looping "raw bundle" of memory (or experience or life) that does not fully "realize" itself recalls our own memory of the boy greeted by the daylight that opens *In the City.* But where the sunlight provided illumination and visibility for the day's activities, the nighttime pyrotechnical display disrupts productive activity and forward progression. The *jouissance*, the excessive enjoyment, of the looped image further suggests, as Hoolboom has also noted, "that there is something cyclical in [the narrator'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."[14] Here, the sympathetic space of the city unfolds as

a labyrinth of consumption, and relationships as cycles of unproductive expenditure. There is some liberation in this tactical experience as much as there is loss.

Hoolboom further connects the looped explosion to the short-circuit that at once undercuts other elements of the film's overall structure and betrays the narrator's own psyche: "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."[15] Prosaic, everyday, and amusingly banal in their seriality, the narrator's recounted memories of love and sex and the endings of relationships are symptomatic of the "enjoyment" of the death drive. But, again, there is a liberating dimension to this negativity, this circle of desire that disrupts teleology—in this case, the belief that dating must ultimately progress into the formation of long-term relationships, couples, families. Queer theorist Lee Edelman calls this "reproductive futurism," a foundational ideology that believes that the present's ultimate value is found in its fulfillment in the future.[16] In the face of reproductive futurism as well as traditional narrative-driven cinema, then, the biopoetic gesture of *In the City* is to articulate something of the "enjoyment" of life—dating, consuming, remembering, narrating—without any interest in, or hope for, the future.

In the City does not look forward, nor does it simply look back. Its strange, sympathetic power may lie in its looping resistance to showing all there is to show, to telling all there is to tell. In spite of our grids, our maps, our means of transportation, the city is a labyrinth, and while its paths are plainly visible and its routes deceptively apparent, its destinations are unknown and its secrets remain secrets.

NOTES

1. In this vein, Hoolboom has described *In the City* as "both a city film and a portrait, this time presenting the city of Toronto as a series of restaurant facades." See Dominika Hadrova, "*Public Lighting*: An Interview by Dominika Hadrova," website of Mike Hoolboom, September 2004, https://mikehoolboom.com/?p=249.

2. Tomás Tetiva and Petra Veselá, "Animals that Make Pictures: An Interview about *Public Lighting*," *Synoptique*, no. 8 (March 2005): 27.

3. Cristina Álvarez López and Adrian Martin, "All Things Shining: An Encounter with Mike Hoolboom," *Lola Journal* (2014), http://www.lolajournal.com/5/hoolboom.html.

4. Pasi Väliaho, *Biopolitical Screens: Image, Power, and the Neoliberal Brain* (MIT Press, 2014), 2.

5. Väliaho, *Biopolitical Screens*, 1.

6. Paul Arthur, "Essay Questions: From Alain Resnais to Michael Moore," *Film Comment* 39, no. 1 (2003): 60.

7. López and Martin, "All Things Shining."

8. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (University of California Press, 1984), 40. Tactics, de Certeau elaborates, are "resistant because they are more flexible [than strategies] and adjusted to perpetual mutation" (41).

9. De Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, 38.

10. De Certeau, 38.

11. De Certeau, 38.

12. Jean-François Lyotard, "Acinema," *Wide Angle* 2, no. 3 (1978): 54. Lyotard uses the image of a child lighting a match to help explain the "sterility" of acinema. "A match," he writes, "once struck is consumed. If you use the match to light the gas that heats the water for the coffee which keeps you alert on your way to work, the consumption is not sterile, for it is a movement belonging to the circuit of capital. … But when a child strikes the match-head *to see* what happens—just for the fun of it—he enjoys the movement itself. … He enjoys these sterile differences leading nowhere, these uncompensated losses; what the physicist calls the dissipation of energy" (53–54, italics in original).

13. López and Martin, "All Things Shining." Hoolboom attributes this conception of the *mémoire* (the fragmented past) and the *souvenir* (the past in story form) to Jean Perret.

14. Hadrova, "*Public Lighting*."

15. Hadrova.

16. See Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Duke University Press, 2004).

DAMAGED (1999)

Mike Hoolboom

The card shop I loved most of all had a carousel that stood as tall as a person. It waited outside the door, as if these fantastical postcards belonged on the street first of all, part of the dressing and undressing of public life. I wanted them to live on my street, to own each and every one, but as the brokers like to say, I was cash poor, so I bought as many as I could, I think eighteen in all. For many nights afterwards I watched over them; this was before high-speed internet, so looking at a photograph for more than three and a half seconds was still possible. After a week or two passed I put them in a box and forgot about them.

A year later, searching for an identity that only books could give me, I found the box again. I took out the pictures and began to put them into an order that suggested a biography, a life I might like to lead, even. What pictures am I going to choose, or what pictures are going to choose me, in order to become who I am?

I scribbled out a little story for each one, then asked Steve Reinke to read them. Listening to Steve is like hearing the best classical instrument in the world, that soft voice oozing intelligence. We stepped into the studio downstairs, where he stood and spoke with his whole body. We might have done two takes just for luck.

Steve's deadpan humour recounts the story of a life, of finding a place inside the family, in a relationship, and finally, amongst comrades at work. One photo showed workers carrying a large sign that read "Damaged," so that became the title.

DAMAGED (1999)

Steve Reinke

In Hollis Frampton's now-classic 1971 film *(nostalgia)*, we are presented with thirteen photographs (black-and-white prints—one of them found—by the artist) accompanied with thirteen first-person monologues, written by Frampton but voiced by Michael Snow. The prints are placed on top of a stove element and filmed as they burn. The monologues correspond not to the photograph we are seeing, but to the upcoming photograph (which in turn will be accompanied by a description of the subsequent photograph).

Damaged could be seen as a remake of *(nostalgia)*—a remake positioned at the historical moment when structuralist filmmaking and video art whirled together in the milkshake of unavoidable digitality. It strips away some of Frampton's conceptual/structural conceits: the temporal shift between the image and its narration, the destruction of the image. It becomes direct, campy, seemingly light and straightforward.

The video uses eighteen photographic images and seventeen monologues. The first image serves as the title card; otherwise, each image "matches" its monologue. The texts were written by Hoolboom and voiced by me. (I am, in this scenario more than most others, Michael Snow.) But the photographs weren't taken by Hoolboom. Rather they are various kinds of stock images drawn from the archive, coming from a variety of decades.

The images always have an illustrative connection to the monologues. The first is a woman posing in front of a fancy, igloo-shaped ice cream shop, while the monologue is about the narrator's mother's employment in an ice cream parlour. But we have no reason to imagine that the correspondence is exact: that the image is his mother, that the parlour is that particular parlour. It seems unlikely, though it's fun to consider.

What are these kitschy images doing? Perhaps they are placeholders for the actual images the monologues refer to. But if the breezy, comic monologues are just bits, fictional bits, there would be no corresponding photograph. The images, then, are placeholders for images that do not and will never exist. Language is left to prowl unanchored to any particular reality. The subjectivity the narrated monologues produce is left free to remain without any interiority.

Hoolboom fools around with this. The twelfth image looks like it's from a Hollywood film or glossy magazine ad: three children holding giant lollipops and singing. This is the one point at which the narrator asserts that the image is not a stand-in, but the actual image: "Here we are rehearsing a birthday party from the Andy Hardy movie called *Kid Town*." Clearly this isn't the case. We get it, and laugh (a little).

The authorial voice of the monologues is situated between Hoolboom and Hoolboom's imitation of my authorial voice. These aren't monologues I would write, although they are close. I can imagine having come up with some of the conceits: that my parents had no genitals, for example. And Hoolboom uses one line that paraphrases a key thing I've written/said/voiced a couple of times: "I didn't know where I stopped and she began."

"The Nothingness of Personality" is an essay I am continually drawn to. It was written in 1922 by Jorge Luis Borges when he was still a floppy-headed youth. "I want to tear down the exceptional preeminence now generally awarded to the self," he begins. "I propose to prove that personality is a mirage contained by conceit and custom, without metaphysical foundation or visceral reality."

His arguments are perhaps out-of-date—so much work on subjectivity has been done in the last century, so some aspect of Borges's Schopenhauerism can seem a bit off. But I'm endlessly attracted to the thickness, the messiness of his arguments. He begins with a straightforward argument, one common for us post-postmoderns, but perhaps a bit radical for 1922: "There is no whole self. He who defines personal identity as the private possession of some depository of memories is mistaken."

Damaged (as with much of Hoolboom's work) parodies the illusion that we are whole selves determined narratively. It presents a life chronologically in seventeen little chapters. Formally, it seems to assert that these stories will add up to a life, a particular subjectivity. Yet, they don't: The monologues themselves are (mostly) in a comic, ironic mode, and the relations between them and the images that seemingly, if sometimes loosely, "illustrate" them are also comic. We are left with fragments, but productive fragments: Like shards from a broken mirror, we can make episodic rather than narrative meanings.

I've taken those terms from philosopher Galen Strawson, particularly his 2008 essay "Against Narrativity," in which he refuted what he calls "the psychological Narrativity thesis" (which becomes the even more insidious "ethical Narrativity thesis"). It states simply that we believe we should experience our lives as some kind of narrative or story (and that doing this thing makes us better people, morally and ethically). Strawson suggests an alternate: viewing one's life episodically, dispensing with the need to narrate one's self and one's deeds with a single, self-constructed narrative.








PANIC BODIES (1998)

Stephen Broomer

Across its six episodes, *Panic Bodies* undertakes a tour of mortality. This omnibus film is an act of transition in a career that had begun in material inquiry, moving towards thematization, careful and memorial reflection, and more ecstatic and pliable forms. Hoolboom's earliest films, like *Song for Mixed Choir* (1980) and *White Museum* (1986), employed formal traits of cinema itself (the place of image, the role of sound) to survey spectatorship. By the time he made the films that comprise *Panic Bodies*, Hoolboom was already exploring broader themes, of social and personal reverie, the betrayal of sensual experience, the inevitability of an end. The shift was occasioned by Hoolboom's own HIV-positive diagnosis in 1988, and begins to manifest in his work with *Frank's Cock* (1993). The diagnosis would remain at the heart of his work through the mid-1990s: The episodes of *Panic Bodies* are at once intimate and universal, drawing from various traditions of address, the epistolary, the monologue, the memoir, marking Hoolboom's definitive maturation into his own voice. It is a film that casts the body as a playground, a grave, a bank of experience. Its component parts deal with the nature of bodily experience, provoking a sensual reverie as concerned with quality of life as it is with its central subject, death. Each segment is marked by a woodcut that suggests medieval craft, the animation of the dead, and the cosmo-symbolic order of the tarot.

In *Positiv*, articulating his experience of illness, Hoolboom's monologue on the barriers between inner life and embodied experience is illustrated in a quartet of projections, a showcase for the filmmaker's ability to personalize and enhance images from pop culture. In *A Boy's Life,* the narrator speaks of the body as "playground and graveyard," and in both this episode and the penultimate episode, *Moucle's Island*, nude portraits give way to tender acts of onanism. The whole of *Panic Bodies* is a work of self-construction, declared in *A Boy's Life* when its nude hero draws on himself. Its component parts culminate in *Passing On*, an episode in which scenes of youth at play pass inevitably into the silence of pure light, a poignance of release, an act of letting go.

Hoolboom would go on to become even more closely defined as a confessional filmmaker, even as he challenged such a label by also pursuing portrait documentaries and collaborations. His films, which have often prioritized personal narration, invite us into a confidence that has, through recent decades, spiralled into a grand project, one that connects quotidian observations with the dust of the West's histories, its colonial sins, and its future. This in itself marks a departure from the artist who made *Panic Bodies*. As time has passed, Hoolboom commits to the possibilities of tomorrow.

PANIC BODIES (1998)

Phil Solomon

From a letter to Mike in response to a VHS preview tape. Originally written in 1998.

I know, from experiencing my mother's illness from the outside (of body), that illness is the most private experience we may have—that, although loved ones empathize, there is no way to share this, no way for two to experience the same body—but you, using public images, home movies, and eloquent language and the gaze out into the room of the water, have allowed me a truly 4D experience, a semblance of feeling into form …

Beautifully cut and toned—the brown providing the roof this time, the home movies again grounding the fantastic with the real, the past—using film to experience vicariously (and in this case, the pun on "projection" [ZAP—you're pregnant, as Kenneth Anger invokes]), pregnancy as metaphor of invaded body—being "hooked" (Jack Smith: "Sex is a pain in the ass," from *Blonde Cobra* [Ken Jacobs, 1963]), the flying cock matte hilarious and true (like the treatise on balls in the first section)—the return to psychodrama invokes *The Memo Book* (Matthias Müller, 1989), the gestures (like erasing oneself) literal yet not literal, embarrassing and touching, somehow just APT in this context.

The symmetries create cock/vagina/anus at once, create a hybrid body, himself as herself, the dream of the detachable cock (just bring it out when you need it, keep sane the rest of the day …), the matted cock cut-out like a conspiratorial clue …

Brown section down by the waterfront, fishing the cock out of the waters, a witty inversion for me of Maya Deren's pawn stealing from *At Land* (1944)—lots of dry, sardonic humour here, jokes on bait, etc.

This is a brave and painful work … Text and waters, this form of address yet new again in this work, the shifts from narrative to second person (or Ed) deepen the work and the structure … Jack Chambers comes to mind here, with the flashes of children in saucers … the world passing by in silence, overhearing a whisper between friends—the way the text interacts with the flares is quite beautiful—a stunning section …

The next section *(1+1+1)* (*One Plus One*, 1993) left me quite speechless—here's where I miss film-on-film the most as the textures of the processing are so beautiful, the frenetic rack and crazy mise-en-scène—like some lost Feuillade/von Sternberg/Anger comic nightmare (a film unto itself, this section)—for me, this achieves what *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* (1954) did not—a true strangeness. Hard to know what to say and how exactly this fits to the whole piece . . .

I realize now I cannot do this—can't keep up with the film, have to let it pass over me to the end . . . I am profoundly moved . . . so many questions . . . I feel a kindred spirit—all of your life has led to the wisdom needed to make a work of this magnitude and largesse and grace.

HEY MADONNA (1999)

Greg Youmans

Dear Mike,

I'll never forget the day you came to my class. I think it was the spring of my junior year, so it would have been 1994, when I was sixteen years old. You must have been friends with Mr. A, our cool young English teacher, because why else would a Canadian experimental filmmaker talk to a bunch of high school students in the cultural wasteland of Modesto, California? I doubt most of us even knew where Canada was. But there you were, like some sort of manic wood sprite, reedy and mischievous, with big twinkling eyes and way too many teeth.

The film you showed us was simply the music video for Madonna's "Justify My Love" with some text scrolling over it. We all scoffed at first, *How is this art?* but then we started reading the text.

It was a weird, horny letter that you'd written to Madonna—and you did write it, even if you signed it "Jason." You wrote about how you went to high school with her and she initiated you into sex. You wrote that she let you eat her out in her dad's car until your mouth went numb and she peed in your face. You wrote that she once put her dead father's detached penis between her legs as she explained to you what genius was. It was all so shocking that even the jocks didn't laugh. I heard Aaron, our hottest football player, actually gasp from the back row.

I didn't gasp. Instead, I left the room as if I needed to use the bathroom, and then I locked myself in a stall and waited for the bell for next period.

As a little boy, I had been obsessed with Madonna, but in 1990, the year I turned thirteen, I dropped her. That summer she released *I'm Breathless*, her album of "music from and inspired by the film *Dick Tracy*." And while I loved "Vogue," I couldn't stand all the cutesy 1930s- and 1940s-style novelty songs like "I'm Going Bananas." I told myself at the time that I'd outgrown her, but seeing your film those few years later made me wonder if that was true.

You forced me to recognize that 1990 was also the year Madonna became all about sex, in a way and to a degree that even she never had before. Suddenly everything she put out was in glossy black and white, and it possessed a sexual frankness and sophistication that I could only understand as "European." "Vogue" hinted at what was to come, but it really started with "Justify My Love" that November. The *Truth or Dare* documentary came out the following summer, and her *Erotica* album and the *Sex* book a year after that. Honestly, it all scared me.

You see, I'm twenty years younger than you are, Mike, and I'm of the generation of homos that grew up equating sex with death. There was no before for us, and the after came too late. When you visited my class, I was an openly gay virgin, and I'd stay that way for a long time. No one was having sex with me in their dad's car, and I'd probably have freaked out if they tried.

I never left school, and I'm a professor now. I study experimental films, but it took me a long time to get up the nerve to track yours down. I suppose I was worried I'd watch it with the same fear I had then, and be forced to realize I hadn't changed. When I finally got up the courage, I discovered it's out of circulation. You pulled it. A follow-up film from 1996, *Dear Madonna*, is unavailable too. I've been able to watch your 1999 film *Hey Madonna* though, and I was surprised to discover how different it is.

In place of "Justify My Love," it features the music video for "Vogue" sandwiched between material from *Truth or Dare* and a couple of other sources. It shows the same fixation on circa-1990 Madonna, but the footage is less sexually explicit and so is the letter scrolling over it. You still claim that you, or Jason, had sex with her, but you don't go into graphic detail anymore. Instead, your letter seems to follow up on a previous one in which you told her that you'd been diagnosed with HIV and urged her to get tested. Now you express relief to know that she's negative, and you talk about what it's been like for you since testing positive.

At first I thought this was another persona thing, and that you didn't really have HIV, but then I looked into it and confirmed that you did. You were diagnosed in 1988, which means that you already had it when you visited my class. I missed that. The film you showed us that day was set before the epidemic, in the 1970s, when you and Madonna were in high school. I thought maybe you chose it because you weren't sure if AIDS was appropriate subject matter for teenagers. I now know better though, because I've also watched *Frank's Cock* and some of the other films you had already made by then. There's no way you wouldn't have talked about AIDS that day and shown us some of those other films. I bet you put one on right after I left the room. Since I never dared ask anyone what I missed, I never found out.

Around the middle of your *Hey Madonna* letter, you seem remarkably positive about being positive. "AIDS is a disease in stages," you write, "a long flight of steps that gives its afflicted time to die, time to discover time, and in the end to discover life." Soon after that though, over a frenetic reedit of footage from *Truth or Dare*, your tone changes. You express anger and hurt at Madonna because she once promised you that your love would never end, and now you only see her on TV. At the start of the film's final montage, of deathbed and cemetery shots from the "Oh Father" music video, you really tear into her. "It's hard to watch you grow older," you write. "I know you lift weights and jog and all that, but you just don't look the same now. And it's sad." It was such a cruel jab at her vanity, Mike. Why did you think she deserved that? Didn't she do much more for the fight against AIDS than most other celebrities back then?

Right after that come the lines I can't stop thinking about. I suppose they're what prompted me to write you now. You tell Madonna that watching her get older is "a reminder of what's coming. What's already inside us. Eating us away."

"Us," meaning you and her. But how could Madonna, who's HIV-negative and only four and a half months older than you, have functioned better than a mirror to show you what's coming?

It's such a strange idea, that an aging celebrity could be a *memento mori* for a person with AIDS. But wasn't that your point, to turn things around like that? In those few words, you equated HIV with aging. You insisted that they are twin viruses, even interchangeable ones, both leading us down the "long flight of steps" to death.

Sometimes I think you wrote that just because you were jealous of her, because she wasn't infected and you wanted to bring her down to your level of suffering and despair. But at other times I think it was the opposite. I think you wanted to bring yourself up to her level of possibility and hope, by insisting that your life could be as long as hers, and that it would be old age and not AIDS that finally took you. These past twenty-five years have proven you right so far. I'm glad you're still with us, Mike.

At the very close of the film, you write that when you die you want to look like the Mona Lisa, "with that funny little smile on her face." You point out that she's a globally recognized icon, just like Madonna is. "I know what she was smiling at after all this time," you write. "It was about death. Knowing how to die. At the end of your days there's only that."

It's the closest you come to giving up your secret. Is knowing how to die the source of your art, Mike? Is it what lies behind your famous energy and productivity? Is it what I sensed that day in Mr. A's class that sent me fleeing from the room?

I worry that it's too late for me now. That never having learned how to live, I'll never know how to die. But maybe you're right, and aging can still teach me what I refused to learn from AIDS.

In any case, thank you for visiting my class that day, and I'm sorry I missed the rest of your talk.

Hope you're good,

Paul

LETTERS FROM HOME (1996)

Laura U. Marks

Excerpt from "Loving a Disappearing Image," in *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 91–110.

Many recent experimental films and videos, flouting the maximization of the visible that usually characterizes their media, are presenting a diminished visibility: Their images are, quite simply, hard to see. In some cases this diminished visibility is a reflection on the deterioration that occurs when film and videotape age. Interestingly, a number of these same works also deal with the loss of coherence of the human body, as with AIDS and other diseases. The following essay continues my research into haptic, or tactile, visuality, here to ask what are the consequences for dying images and for images of death, when the locus of identification and subjectivity is shifted from the human figure to an image dispersed across the surface of the screen.

In defining a look tied to new ways of experiencing death, these hard-to-see works appeal to a form of subjectivity that is dispersed in terms of ego/identity and yet embodied physically. What this look enacts is something like a perpetual mourning, something like melancholia in its refusal to have done with death. Ultimately, it cannot be described by these Freudian terms. These images appeal to a look that does not recoil from death but acknowledges death as part of our being. Faded films, decaying videotapes, projected videos that flaunt their tenuous connection to the reality they index: all appeal to a look of love and loss.

There are many ways that the visual coherence and plenitude of the image can be denied to the viewer. Among these are the ways films and tapes physically break down, so that to watch a film or video is to witness its slow death. Another is the way significance relies not on the viewer's ability to identify signs, but on a dispersion of the viewer's look across the surface of the image.

I began this research contemplating the conundrum of having a body that is not one's own, a betraying, disintegrating body. A body that slowly or quickly becomes other, at least insofar as one's identity is premised on wholeness. This happens with all of us as we age, and it happens acceleratedly for people who have AIDS or other diseases that invade and redefine their bodies. In *Letters from Home*, Mike Hoolboom expresses the paradox of having a body that is yours but not, when a character relates a dream that he was taken to a room where a handful of crystals was spilled on a table, each of which, he realized, represented an aspect of his personality. "There was my love of the screwdriver and the universal wrench; the break with my sister; my weakness for men in hairpieces." The man displaying these crystals to him becomes a doctor and tells him he is HIV-positive. "And sure enough, he pointed to an off-colour stone that was slowly wearing down everything around it."

To have an aging body, as we all do, raises the question of why we are compelled to identify with images of wholeness, as psychoanalytic film theory would have it; the question of whether this still is, or indeed was ever, the case; and the question of what it would be like to identify with an image that is disintegrating. Following Vivian Sobchack, I suggest that identification is a bodily relationship with the screen;[1] thus when we witness a disappearing image we may respond with a sense of our own disappearance. Cinema disappears as we watch, and indeed as we do not watch, slowly deteriorating in its cans and demagnetizing in its cases.[2] Film and video, due to their physical nature, disintegrate in front of our eyes: a condition that archivists and teachers are in a special position to mourn. When I open the can of a colour film that has not been viewed in twenty years, the thrill of rediscovering these patiently waiting images is tempered by their sad condition, once-differentiated hues now a uniformly muddy pinkish brown. When I watch an analog tape from the early days of video experimentation, the image appears to have lifted off in strips. The less important the film or tape (and by extension, its potential audience) was considered, the less likely that it will have been archived with care, and thus the more likely that the rediscovery of the object will be such a bittersweet pleasure. These expected and unexpected disasters remind us that our mechanically reproduced media are indeed unique.

When I began to teach film studies I realized that the students will never *really see* a film in class: It's always a film that's half-disappeared, or a projected video that just teases us, with its stripes of pastel colour, that there might be an image in there somewhere, that there once was an indexical relationship to real things, real bodies. One response to this situation can be to see the actual, physical film or video we see as a mnemonic for the ideal film, the Platonic film, once seen in 35mm in a good theatre. This seems to be Seth Feldman's argument in "What Was Cinema?," in which he suggests melancholically that the institution of "cinema" has ceased to exist, given that most film-viewing experiences occur through the medium of video, at home or projected, and will increasingly take place through digital media.[3] A notion of the ideal film, which our viewing experiences can only approximate, is also the basis of Paolo Cherchi Usai's thoughtful argument that cinema history itself would not be possible without the disappearance of its object.

NOTES

1. Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: Phenomenology and Film Experience* (Princeton University Press, 1992).

2. I include single-channel video in the category of cinema.

3. Seth Feldman, "What Was Cinema?," *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 5, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 1–22. Feldman suggests that the "assaultive" style of contemporary cinema makes it more oriented toward spectacle, or toward a "cinema of attractions." This is an interesting assertion, because the "attraction" of early cinema was not the attraction of secondary identification with characters in

a movie but a relationship with the screen image itself. In this essay I argue that identification with the screen, and with a screen image that is dissolving and incomplete, permits a look that acknowledges death.

HOUSE OF PAIN (1995)

Thomas Waugh

Two decades ago I described this anthology film named for the carnal vessel we dwell in as "scandalous . . . a nightmare inferno of visual intensity, erotic extremes and corporeal abjection, part Dantesque, part Rabelaisian."[1] Other critics have evoked other cinematic muses, from Méliès, Deren, and Jack Smith to de Sade, Pasolini (*Salò* [1975]), Genet, and even the pair Dalí and Buñuel. And, of course, the 1932 Paramount H. G. Wells adaptation *Island of Lost Souls,* in which prisoners are confined to a "House of Pain." One programmer invited festivalgoers to a "nightmarish, nocturnal-emission compendium of avant-garde, cinema-of-shock history." I say "bad dream," he says "wet dream," and this basically sums it up.

Two students of mine, upon whom I subjected the film in a grad seminar (as I recall, I gave a trigger warning), termed the film "une symphonie de l'horreur . . . à la limite du rébarbatif [a symphony of horror . . . bordering on the forbidding/repellant/frightening]."[2] What is it about this work that drives critics, myself included, into such a frenzy of hyperbole? Simply water sports, dildos, and scat aplenty, not to mention cauliflower-fucking? Or the intense black-and-white celluloid aestheticization of such "extremes"? And in the same breath, critics conjure up the film's "spirituality" and "grace," and a perspective of Hoolboom's half dozen or so driven personages as "angels."

House is a compilation of four shorts, *Precious* (1994), *Scum* (1995), *Kisses* (1995), and *Shiteater* (1993), none of which is distributed separately. It was originally presented in 1995 festivals as a ninety-minute feature, then trimmed and tinkered with over the next twenty years to arrive in an alleged *final* state of fifty minutes (but the 2023 version seems to have lost almost another four minutes—ye olde can't-keep-his-hands-off-finished-works syndrome?). In 1995, I situated the first release of this package historically as a raging counterbalance to Hoolboom's serene trilogy of autobiographical AIDS shorts. The three films had been released individually starting in 1993 and finally in their own package as *Panic Bodies* in 1998, and are notable for what I characterized as their "image of acceptance, bliss (both carnal and spiritual) and eternity."[3] Perhaps *House*'s purported "grace" should make me shelve my historical opposition between the two 1990s packages—all the more since the final versions of *House* seem to be missing the tropes that certain 1995 critics referenced as nonconsensual "abuse" and "assault." Should we rather see this entire prolific five-year pre-millennium productivity as continuous and coherent, as the artist moved on from traumatized PLWA grasping for eternity to thriving, long-time survivor-artist, imagining the body he is inhabiting long-term?

Precious, *Scum*, *Kisses*, and *Shiteater* present respectively in their six or so "angel" characters a Kinsey spectrum of what Gayle Rubin called "outer limit" identities and practices, including in the third vignette a romantic gay male couple who love conjugal showering, intense kissing, and beachfront picnics (along with other stuff involving razors and hoses, etc.).[4] Throughout the suite we are immersed in BDSM, pegging, excretory play, consensual torture. OK, no problem. But even Rubin did not include bicycle-fucking, eyeball/egg-popping from nether orifices, and disembowelment in her 1982 paradigm-shifting manifesto—much less the sacramental transcendence arising from hanging around Toronto's beaches in blazing sunshine. Presenting this smorgasbord in a vocabulary of hallucinatory, high-contrast, distorting silent-cinema stylization, buoyed by a patchwork soundtrack of "experimental" voices and effects, adds layers to the experience and befuddles facile readings. Critics and curators have assiduously tackled what these four narratives are all about—two episodes about couples, straight and gay-male, bookended by two about self-pleasuring individuals, female and male—including thoughtful and insightful responses by academic Laura Marks, filmmaker Tom Chomont, and the director's major collaborator on this film, Paul Couillard, Toronto bad-boy performance artist.[5]

Alas, there is no room here to add much more to this decades-long process of public reflection on Hoolboom's challenging epic of spiritual vision, ecstatic abjection, and corporeal performance. The artist received the Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Arts in 2017. I wish he could have traded in his uncomfortable-looking churchgoing suit for the fishnet tights from *Kisses* for the ceremony, and then screened this masterpiece for the dignitaries—without trigger warning!

NOTES

1. Thomas Waugh, *The Romance of Transgression in Canada: Queering Sexualities, Nations, Cinemas* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), 319.

2. Samuel Bélisle and Julie Vaillancourt, "Exploration de la sexualité dans le film *House of Pain* de Mike Hoolboom," presented in Thomas Waugh's seminar English Canadian Film: Documentary, Identity, and Sexuality, Concordia University, November 22, 2005.

3. Waugh, *Romance of Transgression*, 319.

4. Gayle Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality" (1982), in *The Gay and Lesbian Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin (Routledge, 1993), 3–44.

5. Laura Marks, "*House of Pain* by Mike Hoolboom," *CineAction!* 39 (1995): 19–21.

HOUSE OF PAIN (1995)

Ellis Scott

I was in a liminal state between dream and awakening for the whole thing, much like the film itself. The transitional, like the body as it deteriorates, is like the gap between the mind and the body. You can't ever really know the body; it is foreign yet you live inside it, a slave to it. It's disorienting, especially when you are reminded of its organic limitations, as we are.

I passed a threshold in this film, like the one you pass performing the transgressive act itself, liberating and horrifying in tandem—the rite of seeing truth, a metaphorical death and rebirth. This awakening for me has always been emptying (in a good way), and I've always been slightly envious of those who have found something at the end of the tunnel.

I emerged at the end of the hour walking onto a *temenos*, in a magical state. It was sacred, all these tricksters in the film. The cast was all wonderful, but that last actor was especially hair-raising.

The soundscape is beautiful, Jarman-esque, jolting. It's a beautiful film, the Victorian light and shadow. That tonal quality is remarkable.

I loved the repetition of imagery as well, between scenes. The body is absolutely terrifying, especially if you feel, as I have, trapped in it with no escape. What the body casts off is so illuminating: the skin, feces, hair, piss, mucous. The whimsy mixed with deprivation is mischievous and childlike.

Penises are funny, so gelatinous. They make me laugh.

MOUCLE'S ISLAND (1998)

Deirdre Logue

I. On Writing

When I get asked by Mike to write about a work by someone he is writing about, though I really don't want to write anything about anyone, I almost always say yes.

There have been a few exceptions. Like when Mike has asked me to write about a film or a person, where I failed to manifest a text. When this has happened it was usually because these works scared me a little more than art scares me in general. And as I watched, my eyes closed and my fingers froze, waiting for the images to give up and look elsewhere for a kind word.

Otherwise, I never turn down Mike's invitations. I just really love Mike in all the simple and not so simple ways one would expect. I am especially fond of his laugh. Sometimes I work so hard to make Mike snort-laugh in quiet places that I give myself a tension headache.

So, when Mike asks me to write, or in this situation, where I have been asked to write about a film *by* Mike, I don't really write—I talk by myself to Mike, and then I write down what I say. When I get asked to write about Mike's work, it is like writing *to* Mike, and when I get asked to write *about* an artist by Mike, it's like writing *with* Mike, which is like writing *through* Mike, which is like writing about Mike and me.

II. All Endings Are Simply Just That

This is the second time that I will have written about films while inside a deep purple aura of grief. The first time, I wrote about the filmmaker Frank Cole as my father was dying of Alzheimer's disease. And this one. As I am writing this word, it is only just a few weeks after my mother died suddenly of cancer.

I wonder if grieving and writing somehow naturally go together, or, put another way, if they might for me be one and the same.

III. On Her Island

I have watched *Moucle's Island* many times, not necessarily to prepare for this text, but simply because I wanted to. Though we have never met, I would bet that the film *Moucle's Island* is just like Moucle Blackout herself—a dreamy blur of intensity, magnetic and layered, shifting between her desires and her presence and/or absence in the systems of art, sex, and dreams. This, to me, is Mike.

The film opens with something I might have made. A "sort of" struggling figure, crawling, half-upright, half-flat, across the vacancy of a dull grid. Not difficult or even necessary really, but just hard enough to qualify for both.

Her sound is radioactive.

Suddenly more of Moucle is there, in the most beautiful black and white, and in the kind of high contrast only Mike can craft (I was going to ask Mike once how he does it, but then I decided to keep it a monochromatic mystery).

We see what Moucle sees—branches, electrical grids, layers of darks and sharps. She rolls through soft rocks, hands to the earth, face to the sky. She shuttles easily between hard and soft, past and present, now and then.

Moucle's now is interrupted by glimpses of Moucle's before. Her low-gauge self as an out-of-focus toddler. She could be any one of us, overlit in an oversized dress in an oversized chair. Occupying her past as the best possibility for the present. Moucle is at once as she was, as she is, and how she came to know herself.

Found footage shows us her "sisters" as they frolic on a voyage of titillation. While they help each other undress, wiggling out of panties and pants, Moucle feels each of her teeth, like individual lovers past, each tooth for its uniqueness, pits, stains, and jagged edges.

As a ship passes, with Moucle holding binoculars to her eyes, we see that the women have made their way to a beach. On the shore, they play the innocent games of beach ball and paddle ass. Moucle speaks for the first time about love and loss, memory and longing. Untethered from aging or shame. She plunges her fingers into her ocean and weeps.

When I think about Mike's eye snuggled up to the Bolex's eyepiece, during this undress, I imagine Moucle in colour, raw, charged, drifting out to sea, in and out of each wave. Pulled back to shore by the earth's rare magnet. Turquoise, amber, silvers, pinks, and purples.

I am sure he once loved her, as I do now.

ESCAPE IN CANADA (1993)

César Ustarroz

There was a time, not too long ago, when I was suspicious of the use of *perfect films* in found footage practices. William C. Wees once argued that "recycling found footage may require nothing more than finding it and showing it to someone who appreciates it."[1] He was discussing Ken Jacobs's *Perfect Film* (1986), Hollis Frampton's *Works and Days* (1969), and other films in which, according to Wees, the most conspicuous merit consists in the appropriation and recontextualization of existing footage, *entire and untouched*, into another discursive space. Granted, this is not as simple as it sounds.

In a secondhand store, Jacobs discovered the existence of several outtakes of television news footage from 1965. It is important to stress, this footage had never been broadcast; nevertheless, it was quite special: It contained spontaneous reactions to Malcolm X's assassination in Manhattan, including alleged eyewitness testimonies, a police officer's declaration, people gathered in the streets being asked about what they saw, and even Malcolm X himself, in the rushes, reporting to the camera the repeated death threats he'd been receiving. It was a postmortem chronicle out of circulation. Why were these images deliberately discarded? Without editing at all, Jacobs decided to exhibit them again, entire, untouched, as if it were a new film. He called it *Perfect Film*. It was a conscious decision to leave the outtakes unedited. They're clear, they speak for themselves.

If one thinks of perfect films as Wees defined them, that is, as "the filmic equivalent of a Duchamp *readymade*,"[2] the first thing that comes to mind is Duchamp's porcelain urinal, which he titled *Fountain*, signed as "R. Mutt," and put on display at the 1917 exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists in New York. The readymade, the *objet trouvé*, the ordinary found object that Duchamp presented in a gallery setting thus claimed an aesthetic status. It challenged a model of aesthetic value and artistic commodification, turning it upside down, ironizing, parodying, and mocking the museum's sacred role. It is by this route that I have come to appreciate perfect films.

But now, for the task at hand, a few thoughts on Mike Hoolboom's 1993 *Escape in Canada*: a perfect film through and through.

The film is made from an old travel documentary promoting tourism. The film was commissioned by the Canadian government in the 1940s and distributed in the US by Castle Films. Hoolboom, with minimal intervention—solarizing the image to mix positive and negative tones—appropriates this object of propaganda and gives it back to the world, fifty years later, for the purpose of composing a radically antagonistic vision of the country. But once more we must ask: What provides these images with a new interpretation?

In the extremely overexposed images, we perceive the dark side of the coin and what is, no doubt, the Duchampian gesture—the transposition of meanings to another place and time of reception. All of Canada's idyllic sceneries are revealed to be fake. One need only consider the footage of First Nations reservations guarded by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. O Canada, the perfect destination for Americans to escape from their everyday anxieties. But, Mr. Hoolboom, you shouldn't denigrate and belittle all of your country's natural beauties and its progress. Are you not a true patriot? Were you not rewarded with a Governor General's Award?

The strength of *Escape in Canada*'s Dadaist game revolves around delusion, the leitmotif that has led Hoolboom to regularly draw upon found footage in order to interrogate the truthfulness of images received from the past. *Escape in Canada* has the watermark of Hoolboom's archival trajectory. In a simple gesture, the film calls into question Canada's relationship to the land.

NOTES

1. William C. Wees, *Recycled Images: The Art and Politics of Found Footage Films* (Anthology Film Archives, 1993), 5.

2. Wees, *Recycled Images*, 48.

FRANK'S COCK (1993)

Alex MacKenzie

A few weeks back I was chatting with Mike and he mentioned that he's been writing film essays and reviews for *Panorama-cinéma*, an online film magazine. "This whole writing thing was supposed to provide 'inspiration' so that I can have some new ideas about what to do, or what is worth doing," he said.

Mike has been writing for as long as I have known him. The word is absolutely central to his films: language shaped into dreams, manifestos, observations, deep feelings. He will often use his own voice to carry us along, mesmerized, through the substantive and sublime found and self-made images in his films. One of the most memorable of these for me is *Frank's Cock*.

In the early 90s, I produced an omnibus film with Cineworks, the film co-op in Vancouver, that I called *Breaking Up in 3 Minutes*. There was a fairly active independent filmmaking community at that time in town, lots of filmmakers making interesting hybrid works that were blending documentary, drama, and experimental approaches. Mike had recently moved to Vancouver and was immediately deep into the local scene.

The NFB had a policy of offering up leftover film from their recent productions to film co-ops, who then redistributed it to members. This film stock was doled out based on applications from filmmakers, but it often ended up in a freezer, set aside for the future. *Breaking Up in 3 Minutes* was a way to change that up, to stimulate the making of new works while guaranteeing some actual finished films would come out of that stock.

I asked some filmmakers whose work I liked to join in, with a few limiting factors designed to trigger the imagination and keep costs low: a limited amount of film stock to work with (150 feet—about four and a half minutes), a maximum of three physical edits (every cut on celluloid costs money), and some kind of personal take on the theme. I hoped for a diverse handful of shorts we could show around as a package. They had their first official public screening at the Vancouver International Film Festival, after which they took on lives of their own, showing at various venues and showcases.

Frank's Cock was Mike's entry. Eight minutes—*not four*—but he wasn't the only one who broke a few rules; everyone scrambled to find just a bit more film stock. He made up for it by using in-camera edits, dispensing with splices altogether.

The screen is split into quadrants. Gay porn, Madonna, and body science found footage vie for our attention, a panoply of early-90s AIDS culture/crisis zeitgeist. But it's Callum Keith Rennie's performance that is truly mesmeric, easily one of his best (and earliest). The writing is deceptively breezy, a freewheeling intimate monologue that Mike exquisitely honed for the actor. Inspired by a story from a friend, there is a truth that shines through in the intimate detail, rendering the carnal tender. Conversational, funny, serious, heartbreaking; life, love, and death.

ONE PLUS ONE (1993) [made with Jason Boughton and Kathryn Ramey]

Kathryn Ramey

It was the late 1980s in Olympia, Washington, when two friends, Rex Ritter and Jason Boughton, decided to join forces and create an experimental film collective. They had great interest but little knowledge, Olympia being about as far away from the centres of experimental film as you could get (or at least it felt that way). Ritter went to San Francisco, interned at Canyon Cinema, and brought back copies of *Cinematograph* and relationships with Bay Area programmers and filmmakers. Boughton went to New York City, interned at Anthology Film Archives, and brought back old issues of *Millennium Film Journal*, recent issues of *The Independent (Film & Video Monthly)*, and a relationship with Anthology and Millennium Film Workshop participants. They began screening newish experimental films at Evergreen State College, where we were all students. I went from making interview-based feminist nonfiction to more formally radical feminist nonfiction films. More importantly, I joined the Pinhole Cinema Project. We moved to Seattle—which in 1991 was still a relatively sleepy place—and began a screening series mostly housed in 911 Media Arts Center.

The Pinhole Cinema Project became a stop for filmmakers touring on the west coast of North America. We also helped to start tours by inviting filmmakers we wanted to meet and then helping them secure gigs at art centres along the way. This is how I met Mike Hoolboom. At the time, Hoolboom was living in Vancouver and this allowed us to set up a tour with him. On June 13, 1992, we showed his short films *Man* (1991), *The New Man* (1992), *Red Shift* (1991), *Steps to Harbour* (1992), and ~~*Mexico*~~ (1992).

Jason and I were living together in an apartment on Queen Anne Hill in Seattle and we hosted Hoolboom for a long weekend. We were babysitting a JK optical printer at the time and he proposed we use it to make a movie together. At the time he was making a film a month, a practice we found both admirable and totally intimidating. Hoolboom directed us, using our apartment as set and clothing as costumes. Over the course of three days we shot a strange love story frame by frame that became the short film *One Plus One*. The script was all Hoolboom's invention and he directed Jason and me through four thousand single-frame shots to produce a stop-motion animation. *One Plus One* debuted at the Toronto International Film Festival, was distributed by the Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre, and was later reworked by Hoolboom to become a section of *Panic Bodies* (1998).

While Jason and I went our separate ways, we each stayed in contact with Mike. He served as an outside reviewer for my thesis film in completion of my MFA, and since that time has written about our films. Mike is the most productive human I know. His output is astonishing and his

generosity with other artists, making introductions and connecting work with programmers, has buoyed the careers of countless artists. Over the years I have run into him at screenings, and when I hear his voice it brings me back to another time.

ABCs OF THE CANON

Mike Hoolboom

Originally published in *Take One*, no. 4 (Winter 1994): 4. The list was published in its entirety in *LIFT Newsletter*, December 1993, 9–11.

Excerpt from a talk at the Third Annual Perspective Canada Symposium held during Toronto's 1993 Festival of Festivals.

A is for all. We can't include it all, show it all, say everything. Because we can't do it all, we have to cut, to make a selection, to have a point of view. Because we can't do it all, we have to cut, to cut the body, and the wound is what we call the canon.

D is for the dead. Most people who have lived in the world are dead. Being dead is normal, it is the usual thing, the condition to which we aspire. We the living are the exception, while the dead are the rule. While we are alive we live among ghosts, images of the dead, books by dead authors. We use the canon to talk to the dead and then we use it to talk to each other, to prepare us for our own end.

E is the mark you get in school if you fail. If you are getting E's, you will never be admitted into the canon. Unless you invent something. Like Einstein. Einstein failed math because he was about to reinvent it. The old ways are useless. Now the new ways are the old ways. How many Einsteins have we already failed this year? How many Einsteins will never get beyond their poverty, or lack of education, or the crime of being born in the wrong part of the city?

G is for going back. I go back to the sixteenth century and find just one person alive—William Shakespeare. He is the only person I know from that time; the rest have been forced through strainers like so many impure minerals. There are some centuries where no one lived at all. I wonder if it's possible, using the canon as a guide, to return to these unpeopled centuries and begin again.

K is for Kanada, Kanadian culture, Kanadian content laws. The American cinema began without sound, but the Kanadian cinema began without images, searching in a dark others have learned to call home. How many times will we be made to relive the Vietnam War or Watergate or American comic book stars or American gangsters or American love? And after all this time in the dark, when it finally appears, the Kanadian cinema, will we recognize it as our own, or will it seem like a child grown strange from neglect, an accident of birth? Having cut ourselves to fit an American mirror, when we turn to face our own, is there any way we could see ourselves except as monsters?

M is for mourning. The canon is about going back, grieving, building altars to the dead. There are some who insist that all art is a kind of mourning, a building of monuments to honour the dead world. The canon is the shape of mourning, a ritual loss.

S is for sorry you didn't make it, sorry you didn't get in, sorry there's no room. The canon gains its strength from all those who are left out, from all the rejection notices and refusals. The canon is a class system without a middle class, either you're in or you're out.

W is for winning, the winner's circle. The winner is the survivor, the first one to cross the finish line of history, the one whose picture you can see on T-shirts and bubble gum cards, bedsheets and beer coasters, baseball hats and matchbooks. The winner is everywhere; like an elevator fart or gas blown into a closed container, the winner expands until it covers all the available space.

X is for experimental film. What does it mean to be part of a canon of experimental film? To be at the centre of a marginal practice? I spoke to a filmmaker at this year's festival whose film is showing in someone's top ten list. The film has now shown three times at the festival. For six years he has worked on a new film, and when it was done he submitted it to this festival. But it was refused. The festival only wanted to show his old film. Because he is married to the past, he has already become a ghost, eaten alive by his own history. Naturally, everyone envies him his success.

ABCs OF THE CANON [ALTERNATE LETTERS]

Aaron Zeghers

A is for the appeal. The canon can be *very* appealing. Once you see a crack in those golden doors, you feel that radiant warmth. Once inside, it's really quite appealing to stay there. Canadian artists die of exposure! Most celebrated filmmakers enjoy the crackling fire—the appeal! They are the least likely to speak out about poor working conditions, unpaid screening fees, and exploitative practices by film festivals. There is too much to lose! It's always nice when someone from the canon speaks out, and Hoolboom often speaks out.

H is for hierarchy. In a global economic system that demands inequality and class structure, it isn't an accident that the sub-economies of film and art are rife with hierarchy. Welcome to the inverted pyramid! Now pay the submission fee for your ticket to ride. Like capillary action, the dollars ascend the hierarchy in a way that seems natural but is all too deliberate. Down from the top comes the weight of all that gold—the company line, the corporate mindset, a thirst for endless growth (even if it often means artistic mediocrity). The hierarchy transforms our greatest art institutions into self-absorbed *businesses*. As Hoolboom has argued, "I don't believe in 'business as usual' because I don't believe that the cinema I care for is about business."

S is for success. The canon is success and success is the canon—a carefully ordained and well-connected group of me-firsts. "The ABCs of the Canon" offers us early insight into Mike Hoolboom's ongoing political engagement in the experimental cinema community. Structured around a childhood game of ABCs, we are thrust into the true inner workings of what #success looks like in the art economy. You wanna be a star, don't ya, baby?

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V is for volunteerism. Welcome to the board of directors. It's never-ending. Volunteers are the *proto-administrator* when a new arts group is born. Meetings must be had! Rules for engagement defined. Forms filled. Eventually, the ballots are cast. An exhausted group of arts *bored* members—all terrified of fucking up—agree the best option forward from a recent calamity is to have a meeting to plan for planning—more meetings! How did we get here? Hoolboom once quipped to me a line that hit a little too close to home: "What will they say about us, when we are all dust and gone? Oh, they sure filled out a lot of forms."

IN THE CINEMA NO ONE SPEAKS TO SAY WHILE IN REAL LIFE

Jesse

I had nothing to say and I was saying it: a cinema of the present, the presentational, even the absential (as a style of performance). The paracinematic becomes the cinematic or something paradigmatic, something parasitic. The same para- as in paradise or parodic or pair of. The main character is the title. Or the eye above the i is the title. I will always remember how forgetting felt or how much time I have spent clearing up memory on my little machines. The word is a series of characters, a world. And in so saying, a sentence. A life sentence. A theory of more than one, like a these-ory or those-ory. Is it true? The paratext of the thing itself? The way a thing around the thing articulates the thing, like, you know, sculpturally? All the air in this room is room minus you and your things, with some allowance for the periodicity of our breath. Hi, how are you the weather the way you got here where you're off to next well send my regards yeah no totally no yeah politics no religion unless it's the game last night haha no consequence no no but good to see you yes yes until next time (with ,?,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,, interstitially).

When we talk about film performance or (like) acting, you hear the bromide of *the real* most often and yet those are never the performances people praise, never the films they most adore. They love efficiency, a scene in which everything is said in a glance and well-placed bon mot. Put that on your yearbook page. Quote it with your friends. Wither me. End every relationship in three minutes. Class begins and ends before I'm even comfortable in my seat. War is here. Time concatenates and we get woozy. Time flies like bananas. Years before Occupy and the Human Microphone. I remember Norm Macdonald theorizing that a perfect joke would have a punchline identical to its setup. The second time and the first time for anything reveal how much of sameness and difference is in the timing. And what about the rule of three? And how different would our sense of geometry and geology be if we had more arms or fewer. So not nothing to say, but maybe more a how and less a what. They should collect all these commonplace books and put them somewhere. Maybe on a screen. Text arriving on screen like we're still in novel territory. There are so many too-long films about which I have so little to say, like there was nothing left to say.

UNLESS THEY HAVE SOMETHING IT'S JUST THE OPPOSITE (1992)

Malmed

I had nothing to say as I was saying it: a text of presence, the presentational, even the absential (as a style of performance). The paratextual becoming the text or something paradigmatic, something paradisal. The same para- as in parasite or parodic or pair of. The main title is the character. Or the i above the eye in the titled. I will always forget how remembering fell or how much time I have spent clearing up memory on my little machines. The world is a series of characters, a word. And in so saying, a sentence. A life drawing. A theory of less than one, like a no-story or non-story. Is it truth? The text of the thing itself? The way a thing around the thing articulates the thing, you know, like, in poetry? All the air in this room is room minus us and our things, with some allowance for the periodicity of your breath. Hi, how are you the weather the way you got here where you're off to next well send my regards no yeah totally yeah no politics yes religion unless it's the last game night haha yes consequence no no but good to see you no no until now (with ,??,,,,,,,,,,,,,?,,, interstitially).

When we talk about film performance or (like) acting, you hear the bromide of *the cinematic* most often and yet those are never the performances people praise, never the films they most admire. They love efficiency, a seen in which everything is said in a glance and well-placed bon mot. Put that on your Facebook page. Quote it with your friends. Whether me. End every relationship in three acts. Class begins and ends before I'm even comfortable in my seat. War is there. Time concentrates and we get woozy. Time flies like bananas. Years between Opacity and the Inhumane Megaphone. I remember Scott MacDonald theorizing that a perfect film would have a picture indexical to its setup. The first time and the second time for any thing reveal how much of sameness and difference is in the timing. And what about the rule of three? And how different would our sense of genealogy and geography be if we had more arms or fewer. So not something to say, but maybe more a how or less a what. They should collect all these commonplace films and put them somewhere. Maybe on a page. Pictures arriving on page like we're still in a novel territory. There are so many short books about which I have so much to say, like there is something left to say.

~~MEXICO~~ (1992) [made with Steve Sanguedolce]

Veronika Rall

Originally published in *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 1993.

The film begins and leaves its spectators in the dark. Just a soft, male voice, which sounds like that of a fairy tale teller, who promises consolation and security to children who face uncanny sleep, uncanny darkness. The voice fascinates, pulls us into the film, and dictates its rhythm. But it doesn't tell us soothing bedtime stories: Like Scheherazade, Mike Hoolboom seems to want to save himself and us from a history and a presence, from the future of an impending death sentence. He talks about a flight, and about a past that seems far too torturous in the presence of a history of flight. But, then again, "Why do they call airport buildings terminals?"

"You have been here all along . . ." The film begins and ends at the same time, as if it never existed. The title repeats the gesture when it—unrepresentable typographically—prints two thick, crossed bars over the letters, as if the naming of the goal of the flight would be "too much." From the beginning, ~~*Mexico*~~ denies the images Hoolboom and Sanguedolce brought from their journey to this "no-image-land": those of the young car washers, the poor villages and booming towns, the vast cemeteries. The filmmakers have been to Mexico, but they pretend not to have seen anything. They feel like King Midas because everything they touch (film) becomes Toronto, their hometown. Like Midas, the conquistadors came to Central America in search of gold. Their story is documented by the Museum of Invasions, which ~~*Mexico*~~ tells us about at the beginning. Today, Mexico is still marked by the greed of the north—by its accumulated treasures that even poor artists will profit from. This is what the filmmakers realized, and they subject their very own gesture of wealth and domination to relentless criticism.

But it is not gold they've been looking for in Mexico. Not possessions and treasures, but loss, lack, and forgetfulness which have brought them to a presumed no-man's-land. And thus Mexico for them—every man his projection—becomes an uncanny landscape with a ghostlike topography, ~~*Mexico*~~ the seductive protocol of a repression. Nonetheless, the monsters of the past seem omnipresent, the memory of media-cyberspace a totality: Oversized grasshoppers, cats, and cockroaches—which Hollywood bred in repulsion of the reality of the Cold War—crowd Mexican TV screens; in its museums, dinosaurs awaken to life out of piles of bones; relics remain, out of which the present creates a monstrous, imaginary past; living fish swim in the blue water of the aquariums—one fails to imagine it in the living waters of the Gulf of Mexico. It is as if the imagination of life is bound to fail due to the mummifications of the past.

Yet, in one sequence of Hoolboom/Sanguedolce's film, life and the fascination of its reproduction become an image, because the filmmakers record the work of death. This five-minute sequence stands near the end of the film. As if the filmmakers hadn't trusted their voyeurism, they provide the images with a mask, a binocular matte. Thus, with a guarded gaze, they show us a bullfight, during which the matador is nearly killed by the animal and a horse barely escapes the same fate. But it is the suffering of the doomed creature that seems to have fascinated the filmmakers. Yet another spear is rammed into its back, to enforce the fateful aggression, the coup de grâce a demonstration of pure dilettantism. The scene would bring any animal protection activist to the barricades, if the fiesta hadn't been banned already.

The work of death seems a disgusting butchery, the death of a living being endless. Again and again, the matador assembles his last forces, gets on his legs, until finally not the matador but a helping hand applies the deadly stroke, and the cleaning team can take over. Here is more at stake than the illustration of Cocteau's definition of cinema, "to watch death at work," and even Hoolboom's voice has been silenced by the slaughter onscreen. Even though the sequence doesn't run synchronously, but has been edited rhythmically, for the first time there's no voiceover, no music in the film. Here, the tension of the images seems to be strong enough, so strong, that the filmmakers feel the urge to distance not only themselves but the spectator too. This is, gently put, too bad. The film is, to be sure, no classical documentary of a journey, but a critical attempt to—by the means of language and the negation of image—flee touristic exoticism, but also to avoid one's own affects. Yet the ("politically correct") denial of such emotions deprives ~~*Mexico*~~ and its spectators of a reflexive power. Rather, like a mask, the distanciation maneuvers itself in front of our perception and inhibits what might have been exhibited: the intertwining of individual and cinematic projection. Instead of admitting the lure of scopophilia for the filmmakers and delivering it to the spectators as well, the film disavows the lure by the distanciation. The fiesta sequence is the epiphany of ~~*Mexico*~~: It denies the repressing force it might take to kill life, to mummify the present and repress the past—in the end: to distance oneself from passion and empathy.

Piano passages, Christian chorales, and electronic music guide the spectator/listener over images and black film like a requiem over a burial. Scheherazade's voice helps us to forget the suffering and pain that had been in our minds briefly. And Scheherazade saved herself, the impending death sentence has been revoked. Yet we, the spectators, leave the movie with another sentence: "Nothing improves memory more than trying to forget."

SUGAR MAPLE STAND (1990)

Benjamin R. Taylor

Watching *Sugar Maple Stand*, I feel as if I'm watching work made by a different artist. The work is a handful of shots that are ostensibly the same. Nine minutes of leaves in the sunlight. The film shows all that it has and doesn't say much of anything. I am not a Mike Hoolboom scholar, but from what I have seen, this is not the artist I know, not the activist I know, not the writer or performer I know.

This early work has a different energy: Its imagery is an optical invitation to feel light; its soundtrack expands a second space into my psychoacoustics. I am suspended between these two points. It is a film made for feeling in a cinema. It's a film encouraging a drift. I would normally drift but here I'm writing an essay, trying to summon up thoughts and words.

I read the description: "Made on a sunny afternoon. A last stand of burning light. Shot in 1985, released in 1990 with a soundtrack by Kaiser Nietzsche (John Kamevaar, Thomas Handy), new soundtrack and title in 2016." This is not even made by the Hoolboom of the 90s. I try to imagine what the experimental soundtrack might have been like when it was first released in 1990, what its original title might have been. But all I have is what is before me now, what the Hoolboom of 2016 left here.

I fall back into *Sugar Maple Stand*. The play that leaves in a breeze make of light. The play that lenses, film stock, and chemicals make of light. The all-or-nothing of high-contrast film stock. The film ends. *Jack* (2000) starts playing immediately as the autoplay function gives me all the contextual information I was asking for, and shows me the Mike Hoolboom I'm familiar with.

But this doesn't help me see *Sugar Maple Stand*. It's just a reminder to shut up and watch. Forget about context, forget about the verbal eloquence of the Mike Hoolboom I know, the artist I think he is, and what he may or may not be saying. I restart the video. Now I am just here to watch. I ponder the light, the leaves, and the man climbing the hill. I accept the invitation to enter a state of flow, the cinematic drift.

FROM HOME (1988)

Michael Zryd

Excerpt from "Was/From Home," in *Recent Work from the Canadian Avant-Garde*, ed. Catherine Jonasson and Jim Shedden (Art Gallery of Ontario, 1988), 25–26.

Mike Hoolboom is a "bête du cinema." One of the most energetic figures of the recent generation of young Canadian filmmakers, Hoolboom works triple time as filmmaker, curator (as experimental film officer at the Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre—CFMDC), and writer/propagandist for new Canadian experimental film in magazines like *C Magazine* and *Vanguard*. In his position at the CFMDC, Hoolboom has soaked up the traditions of experimental film, making his work almost a catalogue of the New American Cinema (Maya Deren, Stan Brakhage, Michael Snow, and many others), with generous doses of the early European avant-garde (Dada and Surrealism) and the political avant-garde of much recent "theory" film. He especially owes a debt to what the journal *October* has called the "New Talkies," films by artists concerned with the textures and ambiguities of language (Peter Greenaway, Owen Land, and especially Hollis Frampton). Hoolboom's synthesis is imaginative, consistently personal, and, though prone at times to a precocious cleverness which edges into solipsism, always intriguing and effective.

From Home is heterogenous in form, as if Hoolboom had sifted through a pile of tokens and remembrances of a relationship, and then started to cut and paste. All black and white, the footage contains everything from diary footage to acted scenes, some optically printed and distorted, with occasional shots of computer-screen text. The soundtrack is a complex weave of voiceovers (personal and fictive), sync sound, music, wild sound, and silence.

Over a particularly climactic sequence of *From Home*, where Hoolboom proposes to depict his ex-girlfriend and another man having sex, a male voice recites a section of one of Hollis Frampton's fabulae, "Erotic Predicaments for Camera"—an apt subtitle for this film. The particular "erotic predicament" of this scene stands for a larger one. Hoolboom decides to deal with the breakup of a relationship on film; to do so he confronts two central problems of cinema: first, the memory inscribed in the photograph image (and in our consciousness), and, second, the distortions and fictions that arise in the ordering of these image-memories in the process of montage (and in our own mental versions of events). The sex scene is a fiction, but a convincing one: resonant with the intensity of its emotional dynamics of vulnerability and violence; daring in the extremity and juxtaposition of image and sound elements; and finally disturbing in its exposure of the contradiction of sexual memory, and the potential of these contradictions to inflict humiliation and hurt.

The intersections between sound and image are frequently affecting. The long voiceover by the central female character describing her first visual memory, a glittering speck of light on a bath basin, is accompanied by an elegant 360-degree pan, beginning and ending on a still figure looking out over a pond. In an archival-footage section that recounts a history of manned flight, beginning with Kitty Hawk (and growing progressively more disastrous), Hoolboom freeze-frames a moment of takeoff with the words "This is where she wants to live, in this moment … she never wants to lose the present." In both these moments Hoolboom attempts to distill an epiphany of his memory of her. He fits her zero-point of childhood memory to his images: His voice tries to define her over her "chosen" image.

At the end of the fictional sex scene, we see Hoolboom at an editing table, selecting, splicing, and viewing his version of events: an explicit revelation of the film's construction. Earlier, in a voiceover passage that accompanies an allusion to one of his own films—the final (and first) image of *White Museum* (1986)—he makes explicit the metaphor between filmmaking and relationships: A film is not a "tracing" of an already existing form but a process or ordering, of "relating" disparate parts. The problem of power and mastery is implicit in recognizing this process. Who orders? Who determines the meanings any construction yields from its unsuspecting parts? And for this film a central question: What happens to the object of memory? This is a film on the female subject, not *by* her.

When Hoolboom places the Frampton text over the highly manipulated fictional sex scene, he recognizes the intrusion into the private realm that the camera represents. Frampton's narrator is the photographer assigned by the London police to photograph the victims of Jack the Ripper: "[My work] has not been without its miserable effect, because, knowing that the result of his own work is to be photographed, he has come to perform for my camera. In each successive instance, he has become more thorough, painstaking, ingenious in his ghastly craft." Hoolboom, also making public a private affair, assigns performers to roles. A man and woman represent Hoolboom and his lover in the early stages of their relationship. Another woman narrates a mini-biography of Fenway Crane, Hoolboom's fictional alter ego. Performance collides with document, calling both into question.

The most troubling performance, of course, is that of the filmmaker. His ingenuity at the "ghastly craft" of assembling and cutting his images touches painful nerves. Frampton's narrator speaks of the fantastic possibility that a new technique could extract and develop, like a photographic negative, the retina of a dead woman's eye to reveal the image of her murderer: "To that end, the body of this piteous victim will be desecrated yet once more, and this time in the name of science." Hoolboom seems to recognize that the figure of his former lover is yet another "piteous victim" who must be desecrated and worked over by the process of film construction to reveal the secrets of her memory. Here, the layers of self-consciousness within the film are a trap. When

the voiceover questions whether her attempt to live in the freeze-frame of the present evades the past and memory, it presumes the deluded superior memory of the machine-made fiction whose version comes after the fact. That trap, however, like many others set and sprung by Hoolboom in the film with rigorous self-abandon, cannot be avoided. Rather, one can read *From Home* as a kind of gauntlet through which Hoolboom runs—always accompanied by his unwilling and enigmatic companion—as preparation for his last declaration: "I love you." She has the last word, the familiar non sequitur of separation: "OK, I have to go now."

FAT FILM (1987) || WAS (1988)

Stan Brakhage

Excerpt from "Space as Menace in Canadian Aesthetics: Film and Painting" (1998), in *Telling Time: Essays of a Visionary Filmmaker* (Documentext, 2003), 87–108.

I wish to delineate a Canadian aesthetic, and to do so, I've made a representative selection of Canada's artists and their principal tactics, serving here to establish that there is a Canadian attitude towards Space (metaphorical Space in the sense of representation-of-space and actual Space of the flat white canvas and/or motion-picture screen) which is essentially defensive.

[…]

Two filmmakers have mined the dramatic psychological fibre of this inner-outer dichotomous aesthetic to such an extent that they stand, as I see it, poised on the brink of a new breakthrough in the discovery of that as-if Space from which the bits and pieces of memory seem drawn before they are "membered" into Picture. Philip Hoffman's *passing through/torn formations* (1988) seems almost sufficiently explicated, for the purposes of this essay, by citing its title in this context. But Mike Hoolboom's *Fat Film* and *Was* are so difficult to explicate briefly that I am tempted to alter my determination not to refer to the subject matter in writing this essay, and describe the story lines, or narrative trains of thought, that these works are premised upon. But that would be deceptive of their psychological effects, because they are primarily remembered, in the first case, as eruptions of memory-shapes appropriate to, yet struggling against, the textures from which they arise and eventually dissolve back into, and in the second case, as a war of flat-memory-pics for dominance within the cubes of rooms, adjusting to the folds of cornered walls and doors forever at dimensional variance with the flesh forms of recalled human drama—only animated cut-outs seeming easily, albeit ominously, to inhabit the edited depths of this film. Philip Hoffman's work traces a genealogy of remembered family, evolving documentation through fragmented mental scope, at wit's edit's end; but Mike Hoolboom rips at the very stuff of Film itself in seemingly desperate war with Past's entire tension of pictorial recall.

WHITE MUSEUM (1986)

Mike Hoolboom

My film school was the Funnel, a member-run movie theatre/production/distribution joint housed in a derelict east-end warehouse. Strangely or not, many of the faithful lived just a few blocks away, myself included. In the 80s, in order to make or exhibit media, you had to come together to share space and gear. I didn't understand most of what was shown there, and social anxieties limited my conversational attempts, but I had a great appetite for what I couldn't make sense of. Artists came from all over the world, cooking up scents to accompany their movies, mixing mediums and projections, and in that pre-internet, pre-video preview era, most of the work was programmed sight unseen. There were forty to fifty screenings per year, so there was a sense of process and invention. We were part of a living essay, in the French sense of making attempts.

No one owned a TV or a car, our clothes were secondhand, we lived in industrial buildings without heat and with bathrooms down the hall. You could make rent by holding down a job for a couple of nights a week. We were rich in time, and while it was unspoken, it was understood that we were part of an anticapitalist project. The hope was not to have a better job, but to work as little as possible, except as volunteers, where effort was maximal. From punk we learned DIY and to hang a question mark on anything official. Credentials and professionalism were suspect. And, of course, the central question for media arts in Toronto during the 80s was the Censor Board, which was busy expanding its reach. Exhibitions, and hence production, needed to be tightly monitored and controlled. The state as parent. We were, by contrast, parentless creatures.

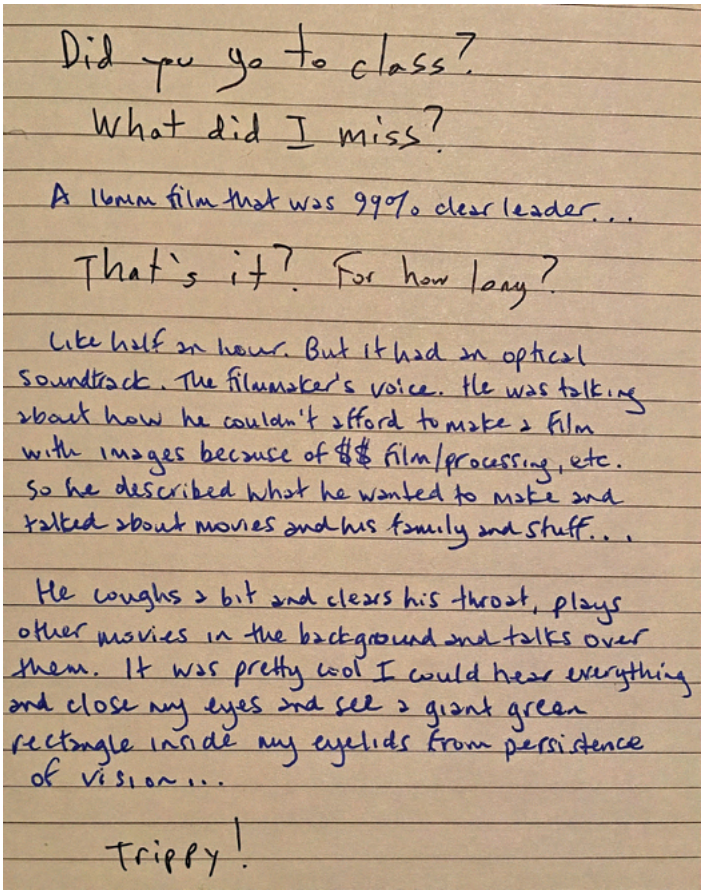
White Museum was a mostly imageless film with a long voiceover and a blank screen. The voice asks the projectionist to turn the lights on, explaining that the artist had only enough money for one image and he's saving it for the end. If you want to know how slow things were in the pre-internet 80s, this film enjoyed a brief and delirious popularity.

WHITE MUSEUM (1986)

Christine Lucy Latimer

OCAD experimental film instructor Anna Gronau in the early 2000s: "You won't want to miss next week's class, I'm screening a rare print of Mike Hoolboom's *White Museum*."

There was a wild party the night before the class. Unlike most of my peers, I dragged my hungover self into the barely populated, darkened classroom on a Friday morning to watch a short film called *White Museum*. In another class, I sat beside a peer who would later become a well-known cinematographer. I saved our handwritten exchange with the rest of my course notes.


Did you go to class?
What did I miss?
A 16mm film that was 99% clear leader...
That's it? For how long?
Like half an hour. But it had an optical soundtrack. The filmmaker's voice. He was talking about how he couldn't afford to make a film with images because of $$ film/processing, etc. So he described what he wanted to make and talked about movies and his family and stuff...
He coughs a bit and clears his throat, plays other movies in the background and talks over them. It was pretty cool I could hear everything and close my eyes and see a giant green rectangle inside my eyelids from persistence of vision...
Trippy!

THE BIG SHOW (1984)

Philip Hoffman

The newly minted Head of the Department paced casually, neatly suited in blue and anticipation. He was waiting for the year-end student film program, something perhaps he could boast about to the higher-ups on his climb to join the chorus of managers transforming the community college mandate and curriculum. What that meant for Sheridan's Media Arts Department, birthed in the 70s as an experiment in education, would be to follow the 80s Telefilm Canada directive "to turn Canadian light into American dollars."

I waited too, eager to see on the big screen all the student work from my inaugural teaching job. The course I Am a Camera was very popular in the department in the late 70s, and was passed on to me from Teaching Master Jeffrey Paull, as he was heading to a well-deserved sabbatical.

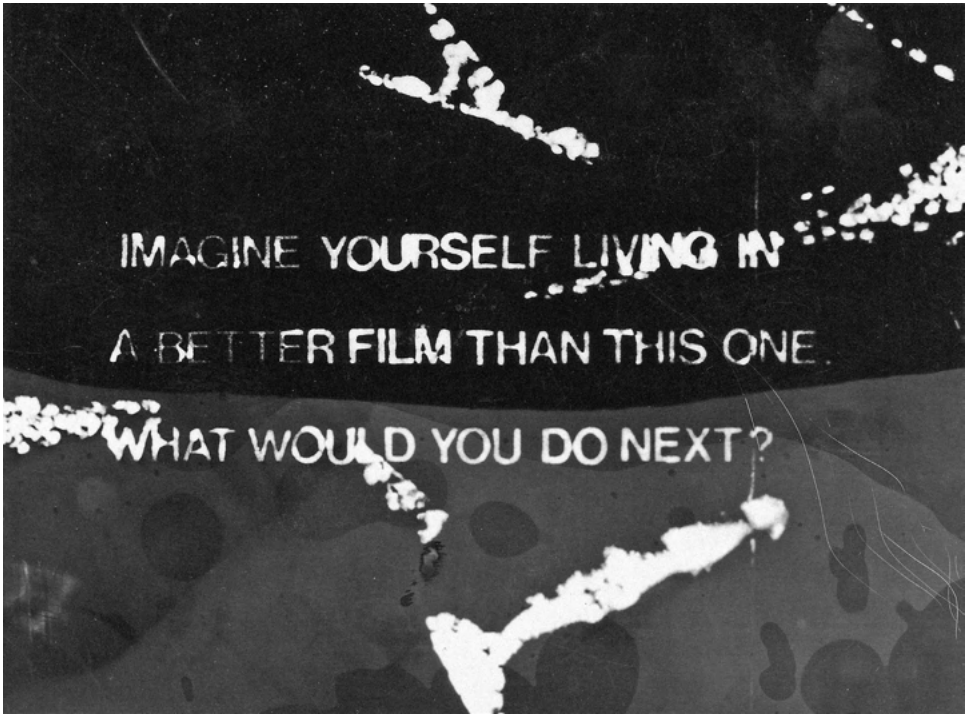
I first met Mike at that time, in 1983. I recall passing him in the hall near the equipment cage late one Friday afternoon while he was finding his way into the optical printer room, a bag of celluloid in one hand, a tower of sandwiches, his paper-bagged weekend meals, balanced in the other. While most of his classmates were winding up for Friday night parties, Mike was prepping for a few days with the JK optical printer, the hypnotic rhythms taking him deep into image as the weekend rolled on. In those days I was settling in at the college, working the equipment cage, giving workshops, and making films. He was passing through, picking up everything he could, along with a gaggle of pals: Gary Popovich, Louise Lebeau, Carl Brown, and Steve Sanguedolce. I recall Carl's instructive reminder during one of our all-night, film-centred, intoxicating ventures: "It's what you bring back that matters." We were all falling in love with a practice.

The class today will be on the beach. We were shooting scenes for a group film project the class had developed, led by Mike. There was no script, just a battered paperback which Mike gripped and referred to throughout the afternoon shoot. Oakville's slowly developing monster-home beachfront found Camus's *The Outsider* strange. Mike's wiry frame, performing a staggering dance on the shoreline, was the perfect vehicle for the angst that he and the novel served up. Mike was ripe and hungry to put shimmering verse to film, and he did it at a mesmerizing pace. *Song for Mixed Choir* (1980), *Louisiana Purchase* (1981), *Eulogy for Tom Sawyer* (1982), *White Museum* (1986), *Fat Film* (1987), *Scaling* (1988), and *The Big Show* are all listed in the 1988 CFMDC distribution catalogue.

Back in the auditorium, Mike's film (which would later become *The Big Show*) arrives onscreen like the howl of a wounded dog. Title follows title, each dripping torn emulsion, blasting its unexpected demands on young viewers' eyes and minds: PLEASE STAND, PLEASE KEEP YOUR LIPS TOGETHER AND YOUR TEETH APART, PLEASE COUGH BELCH OR FART,

PLEASE MOVE BOTH HANDS TOGETHER. Then the film moves into a meandering dirge, disparate sequences held together with beat and flow, archival film slams into deeply personal solitary imagery. Out of the fray of scratches and faces comes a low-angle image of the maker, looking well beyond his years through a window of silvery hi-con, peering down with a nonchalant gaze. Pants open to a steady stream of piss which splashes onto the camera. The audience barely has time to form an opinion when the film turns the corner and moves jubilantly towards images of a happy ending. There are no end credits as the lights turn on to a measured applause. Mike's proclamation is brilliantly fulfilled. PLEASE MOVE BOTH HANDS TOGETHER.

Red in the face, the Head of the Department moves nervously towards me.



NOW, YOURS (1981) [previously *Louisiana Purchase*]

Clint Enns

Before a screening of *Louisiana Purchase* at the Funnel, it is rumoured that the ever-scissor-happy Mary Brown of the now defunct Ontario Censor Board demanded to be shown a copy of the film. Mary was on a personal crusade to end underground cinema after the Canadian Images Film Festival had shown Al Razutis's film *A Message from Our Sponsor* (1979) without first submitting it to the Censor Board. It became her mission to personally watch every underground film being shown in order to weed out all the degenerate artists that were hiding in the very dark shadows of the underground, and to control every single cinema in Ontario … no screen was too small.

After handmade countdown leader and a lecture challenging the audience to revolt against the one-way dialogue presented by the media they are currently watching, we are shown a title card: "And now eleven films so brutal, so horrifying, they had to be kept from the public for over a century." Apparently, Mary took this claim literally, but couldn't determine exactly what scenes the title was referring to. To her, the images looked normal. What can be horrific about the news or game shows that promise that you too could be lucky enough to own your own electronic backgammon game? She understood the film was intended to be subversive, but she could not find "just cause" to censor any specific section of the film, in spite of the film's initial threat.

In a Hail Mary, she noticed that the last section of the film had closing credits lifted from those "nice boys" down at Ontario Travel Film. At that moment, she did something that was out of her jurisdiction, but "for a cause that she was equally concerned about"—copyright infringement. She took it upon herself to chop out the credits, assuming she would kill two birds with one stone: Hoolboom would no longer show his artistically compromised work, and Roy Crost would have his credits back. Fortunately, punks don't believe in concepts like "artistic integrity" and Hoolboom was no stranger to constantly recutting his own works. *Louisiana Purchase* became *Now, Yours*.

NOTES

In reality, the CFMDC 16mm print of *Now, Yours* was cut down at a screening when a projectionist mistook a long stretch of red film frames as tail leader. This projectionist error had nothing to do with the title change, which had been implemented decades earlier. All the same, the reality is that Mary Brown and the Ontario Censor Board were truly this ruthless in their policing of the Funnel and other institutions that screened films in this era.

SONG FOR MIXED CHOIR (1980)

Rick Hancox

I don't know whether it became a finished film or not, or if it has since been pulled from circulation, but Mike Hoolboom's first experiment with 16mm was unforgettable. As his 16mm production teacher in the Media Arts Department of Sheridan College, I had an inside look at the early work Hoolboom was doing as he developed into one of Canada's most celebrated filmmakers, writers, and scholars engaging with experimental moving images.

In those days, students would show me their works in progress on a Steenbeck editing machine, and I'd attempt helpful and encouraging responses. If I recall, this might have been the day Mike came in with exactly one half of his beard shaved off. He wanted to show me something special, an experiment he'd done by going out with a 16mm Bolex and exposing short ends of ST-8 optical sound stock—not meant for a camera. I can only imagine the bewilderment of the technicians who developed it at PFA Labs. What unravelled on the screen was just a raging sea of silver halide crystals. The film grain swirled for over ten minutes without a single image—just white light and a cascade of boiling, black specks. I sat quietly, searching the sandstorm for something I could hold on to. Nothing came.

When the tail finally passed through the Steenbeck, the dreaded question came: "So, Rick, what did you think?" There was an awkward silence. "Interesting . . ." I muttered, grasping at straws. "I thought it was . . . interesting." The miffed student rose from his seat. "That's all you have to say . . . *interesting*?" I forget what happened next, but I felt I had failed him. Despite that hiccup Mike continued in my courses for two more years. We developed a bond that has lasted to this day.

I later appreciated what Mike was doing in that early period. He had decided to learn the medium from the *grain up*, through a close examination of the very silver halide crystals that set the photochemical process apart from its electronic counterparts. Next, he migrated to the JK optical printer, where, under the tutelage of Jeff Paull, the budding artist began learning film *frame by frame*. In the end Mike proved to be one of the most serious, focused, and dedicated students of film I've ever had the privilege to teach.

CAREFULLY LOOKING: AN INTERVIEW WITH MIKE HOOLBOOM

Clint Enns

Clint Enns: Since you began making films, you have been engaging with institutional critique and media criticism, both in writing and in your flicks. Over the years the critique has become broader in scope and more nuanced, measured, and sophisticated, but also a little less punk. Early on there was *White Museum* (1986) and *Now, Yours* (1981) and articles like "ABCs of the Canon" and "Complaints." Now there is *Witches and the Origins of Capitalism* (2023) and *Haifa* (2022) and articles like "The Right Questions" and "Rotterdam and the Accountant Revolution."[1] Can you describe the state of the scene at this point? Do you see it as better or worse than when you started?

Mike Hoolboom: Worse for whom? There is a genocide happening in Gaza at this very moment. What does it mean to see images of thousands of children dying "in real time" hour after hour? Some reports are made with the certainty that if "everyone" knew what was happening it would stop. How to step into the shoes of the most unwanted, to embrace these shaky, handmade testaments and rescue them from invisibility, if only for a moment? Or as Sarah Aziza asks, What does all this looking do?

> In this, our language, the verb *to witness* comes from the root شهيد. This is also the source of the much-maligned word شهيد, *shaheed*, which means, literally, *witnesser*, but is often translated as *martyr*. It is a word with many folds of meaning and history. It carries connotations not only of seeing, but of presence and proximity. To be a witness is to make contact, to be touched, and to bear the marks of this touch.[2]

CE: From punk to k-punk. Scene politics look pretty petty next to settler-colonial politics, but with local politics it seems that small changes are possible. After our recent experiences on the Pleasure Dome board, is it even possible to imagine joining another artist-run board?[3]

MH: I'm sure you remember the moment when you volunteered to become Pleasure Dome's projectionist, arriving early at every show to make sure the tech was smooth. Relieved that they would not have to take on these unwanted servant tasks, the board was effusive with temporary thanks. One turned to you and said, "You can put this on your résumé!" Both of us burst out laughing. The idea that you would join a volunteer artist-run centre board to build a career was just part of the problem afflicting that organization and too many others. Though it was eye-opening that a roomful of young sharpies wanted to become curators instead of artists. There was rent to be paid.

CE: I wish there was more care for artists and their work than there was about putting another line on your résumé. Speaking of rent, in your most recent work, *Witches and the Origins of Capitalism*, you explore questions related to land ownership and the commons. Do you see your uses of stolen images as a form of pushback against these concepts of ownership?

MH: In the 1980s, Toronto was filled with troves of discarded films that could be touched, though it took some years to learn how to let them touch me back. I scratched into 60s game shows in an attempt to undo gender stereotypes. I recut an Air Canada commercial, separating each frame with decreasing lengths of black in order to unpack exotic fantasies. For months I scratched every word of a dictionary onto black leader in an attempt to "begin again," to relearn language subliminally. The words flashed by too quickly to be read, but I imagined the film as a machine that would retrain the language centres.

CE: *Letter from Fred* (2023) includes a letter from a filmmaker turned atheist Benedictine monk, the last line of which reads, "P.S. There is life after movies." Is this true? Can you imagine a life without creating movies? What would you do with your time?

MH: Last year I would have said tennis, but now my knees protest so loudly it disturbs other players. I was never supposed to be a filmmaker, nothing about the practice fit, so I spent decades zealously taking wrong turns. Now that I have hacked out a small perch, it seems that screen culture has become a central part of the neoliberal playbook, not to mention the parasitic double life of asocial media Naomi Klein describes so well in *Doppelganger*. Perhaps I could swap the quicksand of the attention economy for a new job and become a chocolate cake tester.

CE: Poetry and literary fiction seem to have avoided the pitfalls of neoliberalism, and there are many who see you as a writer and editor. I could also see you as an influencer or as a life coach. There's also money in self-help. Who is Michael Stone? Have you joined a cult? How has Centre of Gravity changed your idea of a practice?

MH: I spent nearly a decade in a Zen cult grounded in daily sitting practice and yoga. I'm still up for the yoga but have dropped the freeze-frame of meditation, preferring the trance of editing. Practice invited me to "come back to my senses," and remapped the basics: how to eat, how to sit in a chair, how to walk into a room. Silence can be a fine companion but a difficult friend.

CE: In recent years, you have taught classes and workshops all over the world. How has this affected your practice?

MH: I just finished a sound workshop at EICTV [Escuela Internacional de Cine y Televisión] in Cuba. After the deep isolation and grieving of the pandemic, it felt like coming back to life. In

an interview I made with musician Slavek Kwi, he described his first workshop with autistic kids. On the way to school he picked up discarded and forgotten items from the street. Upon arrival, he put them all in a big pile in the middle of the room. He invited the kids to make two piles: one for "musical instruments" and the other for things that were not "musical instruments." When they were done he went to the non-instrument heap and went through every item, rubbing it, knocking it, shaking it, and then asking, But isn't this music too? Eventually there was only one pile, the whole class agreed: Everything was a musical instrument. And with that they began to play music together. I did the same with my students, and we learned to communicate, to listen to each other without language. It was so beautiful.

CE: You have always had some of the best sound design on the festival circuit and now have one of the largest noninstitutional databases of sounds in the world. Can you give an overview of the archive? As a sound collector and sampler, what sounds excite you? Is it rarity? Is it fidelity? Is it a specific sound?

MH: Yesterday I heard a fantastical trilling texture careening between stereo channels, an almost wet-to-the-touch rhythm that recalled J Dilla's hiccupping syncopations. What was it? At the end of the track a man's voice declaims in a language I can't make out, but it's clear he's hawking street wares. The sound must have been his cart rattling across a broken stroll. Who will listen to the song of this difficult walk, the invisible man pushing the burden of his unwanted memories across every street corner?

I used to joke that the archive contained every sound, but of course it doesn't. I collect deeply in categories like water, cars (is traffic the most difficult event to record?), underwater, contact microphones, bird wings. I have a deep collection of wind sounds. Is there a thought I've ever had that wasn't carried by the wind? Last year I recovered an ear for science fiction, in the possible worlds emerging alongside this one, and the meticulously crafted sounds that every utopia requires.

CE: Lovin' the J Dilla reference. Want to talk about your love of hip-hop and producer culture? From your soundtracks, one might assume you were more into William Basinski than Kanye West, but from your editing . . .

MH: In the 2000s I developed big fan love for Miles Davis, particularly his Second Great Quintet (1963–68) featuring Herbie Hancock on keys, teenage sensation Tony Williams on drums, Ron Carter on bass, and icon Wayne Shorter on sax. I listened to them obsessively, convinced that if I could understand the structure of their albums, I would know how to make films.

What followed was a long and unexpected segue into the work of Kanye West. I loved the multiple versions he would make available in a steady stream of leaks (from his "cousin's laptop") that

echoed my own restless reworkings. Though he also leaked stems and fragments, prompting a legion of listeners to create their own remixes, which were more than occasionally better than anything the maestro produced. The death of the author? I related to the obsessive workaholism and deep engagement with remix culture. Basinski created a second life by returning to the smallest fragments of his analog youth and looping them into decaying infinities. But Ye found himself by clipping moments of other people's work and rearranging them, just like every other hip-hop producer. This practice sings deeply with my embrace of found/stolen footage. It is the work of deep listening, community, and solidarity. How predictably sad that success has helped turn Ye into another mirror-world bigot.

CE: In your practice, your work is also constantly in transition. You are constantly reworking your movies and recalling older works or editing versions of older works into new ones. Given that the establishment likes stability, even in the arts, this is a radical gesture. When do you consider a work finished?

MH: The fantasy is time travel, being able to return to the wounds of the past with a warm embrace, a healing touch. Every movie builds a double architecture, the one growing on the timeline, and its shadow double, the distillation of roads not taken, the un-film, or to use a trade term: the negative cut. Perhaps I am not reediting but changing the relationship between these two worlds. When they become compost for someone else's work, the work is done.

CE: Experimental film distribution, or lack thereof, has always been a complaint of filmmakers, but you have actively made some of your works inaccessible. In an era of transparency, counterarchives, and archival fever, what's up with these anti-archival impulses?

MH: Let's imagine three aspects of fringe filmmaking: production, distribution, exhibition. When I began work in the 1980s, exhibition spaces were run by artists. Today, under neoliberalism, exhibition spaces are helmed by administrators who run festivals. Artists provide not only work but fees to support institutions large and small. Many require premieres, creating a limited shelf life. After that it becomes part of a fathomless and mostly forgotten heap, a visible invisibility. There's already too many things to see.

CE: What does it mean to be an HIV-positive artist living in the post-cocktail era? Being HIV-positive once meant you had no choice but to create with a certain urgency, yet today you continue to work with urgency. Where does this creative energy stem from?

MH: I am a projection of the information economy which, as Byun-Chul Han notes, requires ceaseless data flow. I am stuck in someone else's habits, and not for the first time. Are pictures part of the problem, now that they have become such a central part of the surveillance state? Can

pictures be reclaimed as a site of resistance, as I once imagined was the whole point when my own participation in the counterculture began, or is it too late for that?

CE: Your work is also often made collaboratively, while not necessarily being a collaboration per se. You have worked with many artists, reworking their texts, recording their voices, using their images and sounds. You have even worked with many editors, especially in the era of video editing suites. Can you talk about the nature of collaboration in relation to your work?

MH: I wish I were better suited for collaboration. Perhaps if I had a new body or were less anxious or could learn teleportation. I think the hoped-for joint effort with Emily Vey Duke and Cooper Battersby fell apart because they are creatures of the deadline while I work all the time. The book collaboration with Chase Joynt ended with yet another mental swan dive on my part, immobile and inert, back in bed. With Camilo Constain I would write endless letters, begging him for scenes. There would be long gaps, and then he would send more no-light magics, the bodies hardly visible, just the last shred of magic hour faintly glowing. With Kika Thorne it was all about the shooting; we had so little footage but everything sparkled. I cut the soundtrack too quickly so she made her own edit, which meant the movie played twice with his-and-her accompaniments. In Vancouver, I would show up at Earle Peach's place with new footage and he would just pick up whatever instrument he had lying around and ask with his eyes, "Something like this?" It was like watching a birth from inside my mother.

NOTES

1. Mike Hoolboom, "ABCs of the Canon," *LIFT Newsletter*, December 1993, 9–11; "Complaints," in *Projecting Questions?*, ed. Michael Maranda (Art Gallery of York University, 2009), 134–39; "The Right Questions," *POV*, May 29, 2018, https://povmagazine.com/the-right-questions/; "Rotterdam and the Accountant Revolution," *Panorama-Cinéma*, January 25, 2023, https://www.panorama-cinema.com/V2/article.php?categorie=17&id=990/.

2. Sarah Aziza, "The Work of the Witness," *Jewish Currents*, January 12, 2024, https://jewishcurrents.org/the-work-of-the-witness/.

3. Hoolboom and I were Pleasure Dome board members together from 2015 to 2017. For a history of the Funnel, see Mike Hoolboom, *Underground: The Untold History of the Funnel Film Collective* (Canadian Film Institute, 2017). A history of Pleasure Dome has yet to be written.

COMPLETE FILMOGRAPHY

1980 *Song for Mixed Choir* (7 min.)
1981 *College* (24 min.)[x] | *Now, Yours* (10 min., was *Louisiana Purchase*)
Self-Portrait with Pipe and Bandaged Ear (2 min.)[x]
1982 *Eulogy for Tom Sawyer* (5 min.)[x]
1983 *Life Drawing One* (10 min.)[x] | *Life Drawing Two* (12 min.)[x] | *Life Drawing Three* (30 min.)[x]
Phonograph (20 min.)[x]
1984 *Bar Good Food Desert Inn* (30 min.)[x] | *The Big Show* (8 min.)
1985 *Book of Lies* (7 min.)
1986 *White Museum* (32 min.)
1987 *Fat Film* (4 min.)[x]
1988 *From Home* (60 min., was *Svetlana*)[x] | *Grid* (2 min.)[x] | *Scaling* (5 min.)[x] | *Was* (13 min.)[x]
1989 *Bomen* (3 min.)[x] | *Brand* (7 min.)[x] | *Eat* (15 min.)[x]
1990 *Fat Corner* (5 min.)[x] | *Install* (8 min.)[x] | *Southern Pine Inspection Bureau No. 9* (9 min.)[x]
Sugar Maple Stand (9 min.) | *Towards* (4 min.)[x] | *two* (8 min., with Kika Thorne)[x]
1991 *Man* (5 min., with Ann Marie Fleming)[x] | *Modern Times* (4 min.)[x] | *Red Shift* (2 min.)[x]
1992 *Careful Breaking* (7 min.)[x] | *Disneyland in June* (9 min.)[x] | *In the Cinema* (1 min.)
~~*Mexico*~~ (34 min., with Steve Sanguedolce) | *The New Man* (7 min., with Ann Marie Fleming)[x]
Steps to Harbour (16 min.)[x]
1993 *Escape in Canada* (9 min.) | *Frank's Cock* (8 min.) | *Indusium* (10 min.)[x] | *Kanada* (65 min.)[x]
One Plus One (3 min., with Jason Boughton and Kathryn Ramey) | *Shiteater* (11 min.)[x]
1994 *Justify My Love* (5 min.) | *Precious* (10 min.)[x] | *Valentine's Day* (80 min.)[x]
1995 *Carnival 1* (3 min.)[x] | *Carnival 2* (3 min.)[x] | *Carnival 3* (3 min.)[x] | *House of Pain* (50 min.)
Kisses (12 min.)[x] | *Scum* (12 min.)
1996 *Dear Madonna* (5 min.)[x] | *Letters from Home* (15 min.) | *Manhunt* (5 min.)[x]
Shooting Blanks (8 min., with Shawn Chappelle)[x]
1997 *Positiv* (10 min.)
1998 *A Boy's Life* (8 min.) | *In My Car* (5 min.) | *In the Future* (3 min.) | *Moucle's Island* (11 min.)
Panic Bodies (70 min.) | *Passing On* (18 min.)[x]
1999 *Damaged* (9 min.) | *Hey Madonna* (10 min.)
2000 *In the City* (10 min.) | *Jack* (14 min.) | *Secret* (2 min.)
2001 *The Invisible Man* (18 min., installation) | *Writing* (9 min.)
2002 *Stormy Weather* (18 min.) | *Tom* (53 min.)
2003 *Amy* (16 min.) | *Ford* (20 min.)[x] | *Imitations of Life* (71 min.) | *In the Dark* (8 min.) | *Rain* (4 min.)
2004 *Hiro* (12 min.) | *Public Lighting* (68 min.) | *Tradition* (7 min.)
2005 *Fontage* (10 min., with Fred Pelon)[x] | *In the Theatre* (7 min.)
2006 *Fascination* (70 min.)[x]
2007 *Notes on Fascination* (70 min.)[x]

2008 *School* (30 min.)[x]
2009 *Mark* (67 min.)
2011 *Forest Walk* (10 min.)[x]
2012 *Lacan Palestine* (70 min.)
2013 *Buffalo Death Mask* (23 min.)
2014 *Safety Picture Collection* (25 min.) | *Second Nature* (36 min.)
2015 *Scrapbook* (19 min.)
2016 *Incident Reports* (70 min.) | *We Make Couples* (58 min.)
2017 *Citizen Poet* (10 min.) | *Colour My World* (3 min.) | *From the Archives of the Red Cross* (68 min.)
Ghost (3 min.) | *Identification* (30 min.) | *In 1974* (7 min.) | *Introduction to Mountains* (2 min.)[x]
Spectator (6 min.) | *Subway Stops* (69 min., installation)
2018 *3 Dreams of Horses* (6 min.) | *After the American Election* (3 min.) | *Aftermath* (75 min.)
The Bed and the Street (4 min., made with Heather Frise) | *Fats* (20 min.) | *I Saw Him There* (4 min.)
Introduction to Alchemy (2 min.) | *Lions* (2 min.)[x] | *Nursing History* (4 min.)
Supernatural Power (5 min.) | *Visiting Hours* (11 min.) | *Where the Night Is Going* (8 min.)
2019 *27 thoughts about my dad* (26 min.) | *Be Your Dog* (5 min.) | *Credit Card* (7 min.) | *Fade to Black* (13 min.)[x]
Father Auditions (70 min.) | *Feast* (6 min.) | *How to Watch Pornography* (20 min.)
I Touched Her Legs (remix) (7 min.) | *Language, not territory* (9 min.) | *Lover Man* (7 min.)
Leaving Church (7 min.) | *(S)he said that* (13 min.) | *Soft Animal Body* (11 min.) | *Threshold* (6 min.)
Tree Museum (10 min., with Steve Reinke and Eduardo Thomas)[x]
2020 *After Drowning* (21 min., with Alëna Korolëva and Camilo Constain) | *After Victory Day* (8 min.)
Instructions for Robots (8 min.) | *Judy Versus Capitalism* (62 min.) | *Touch Memory* (14 min., with Joséphine Berthou)
Wax Museum (11 min., with Alëna Korolëva) | *Zen Basketball* (5 min.)
2021 *23 Thoughts about My Mother* (32 min.) | *Cut* (68 min.) | *For the Birds* (4 min.) | *The Guy on the Bed* (4 min.)
Ice Cream (8 min.) | *Identifications* (68 min.) | *In the Footsteps* (2 min) | *Listening* (18 min., with Heather Frise)
Model Citizens (6 min.) | *My Education* (5 min.) | *Nazareth* (7 min.) | *Skinned* (8 min.) | *Skinship* (6 min.)
Soft Landings for Capitalism (78 min.) | *Sundays* (4 min.) | *We Are Islands* (5 min.)
2022 *Chile 1973* (8 min., with Jorge Lozano) | *Feeling States* (8 min.) | *Freedom from Everything* (87 min.)
Haifa (10 min.) | *Immune System* (2 min.) | *New York State of Mind* (14 min.) | *Waves* (64 min.)
2023 *André* (11 min.) | *Ask the Animals* (60 min.) | *The Central Gesture* (2 min., with Heather Frise)
Close-Up (1 min.)[x] | *Disco* (15 min.) | *I measure my life in dogs* (12 min.) | *Letter from Fred* (10 min.)
Rain (5 min.) | *The Secret Place* (3 min., with Heather Frise) | *Uber* (23 min.) | *Wind* (8 min.)
Witches and the Origins of Capitalism (111 min.)
2024 *Body Electric* (3 min.) | *Closer* (12 min.) | *Gravity* (12 min.)[x] | *Promises* (9 min.) | *Veterans* (8 min.)
The Word Father (3 min.)
2025 *Breathing Lessons* (5 min.) | *Fog* (5 min.) | *Incoming* (3 min.) | *White Harlem* (9 min.)
The word that kills death (6 min.)

[x] = withdrawn

ESSENTIAL MOVIES

AIDS

1993 *Frank's Cock* (8 min.)
1995 *House of Pain* (50 min.)
1997 *Positiv* (10 min.)
1999 *Hey Madonna* (10 min.)
2013 *Buffalo Death Mask* (23 min.)
2021 *The Guy on the Bed* (4 min.)

CINEMA

1986 *White Museum* (32 min.)
2003 *Imitations of Life* (71 min.)
2017 *Colour My World* (3 min.)

PORTRAITS

1998 *Moucle's Island* (11 min.)
2000 *In the City* (10 min.)
2002 *Tom* (53 min.)
2003 *Amy* (16 min.)
2004 *Hiro* (12 min.)
2004 *Tradition* (7 min.)
2009 *Mark* (67 min.)
2015 *Scrapbook* (19 min.)
2018 *Fats* (20 min.)
2019 *Father Auditions* (70 min.)
2023 *André* (11 min.)
2023 *Letter from Fred* (10 min.)
2024 *Closer* (12 min.)

PALESTINE

2021 *Nazareth* (7 min.)
2023 *Rain* (5 min.)

CAPITALISM

1992 ~~*Mexico*~~ (34 min.)
2017 *Identification* (30 min.)
2018 *3 Dreams of Horses* (6 min.)
2018 *Nursing History* (4 min.)
2020 *After Drowning* (21 min.)
2020 *After Victory Day* (8 min.)
2020 *Wax Museum* (11 min.)
2021 *Cut* (68 min.)
2021 *Ice Cream* (8 min.)
2021 *Model Citizens* (6 min.)
2021 *Skinned* (8 min.)
2022 *Immune System* (2 min.)
2022 *New York State of Mind* (14 min.)
2023 *Disco* (15 min.)
2023 *Wind* (8 min.)
2023 *Witches and the Origins of Capitalism* (111 min.)
2025 *The word that kills death* (6 min.)

All of Hoolboom's work made between 1980 and 2000 was originally finished on 16mm (with the exception of *In the City* and *Secret*, which were originally finished on Beta SP). Everything made between 2000 and 2011 was originally finished on Beta SP (with the exception of *Notes on Fascination*, which was originally finished on mini-DV). Everything after 2012 was finished on digital video.

Hoolboom's work is available from CFDMC, Vtape, Light Cone, and directly from the filmmaker. The elements for early works are housed at the Cinémathèque québécoise and the elements for *House of Pain* are housed at Library and Archives Canada. Print materials are stored at the TIFF Film Reference Library.

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