

# THE EXTRAORDINARY EVENT OF EVERYDAY CINEMA

## On the Films of Marc Lafia

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

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

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

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

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

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

I want to call his films a cinema of emergence, a cinema of the event, in which the very act of ubiquitous recording creates something new. The camera in this digital age — and in the hands of Lafia — is not a means of mediating an encounter or re-presenting reality. On the contrary, the camera is constitutive of the encounter. It doesn't just record something else happening over there; it forges events of which it is a player right here.

"Hi How Are You Guest 10479" explicitly takes on the always on camera of the social web as we watch a woman alone her in Manhattan apartment

seek intimacy and connection through adult chat rooms. At some point, it occurs to the viewer that there's no cameraman there. The incredible Raimonda Skeryte is not just the actor: she sets the scene and records herself — an elaborate Instagram selfie.

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

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

"Hi How Are You Guest 10479" is not a recording of the event of social media — as if Lafia were trying to put a finger on the pulse of the kids today. This is not old media capturing new media. What

Lafia does operate within the world of the always on camera, the camera that we first read about in Bergson's *Matter and Memory* and which, with the rise of the digital, became externalized: from our heads to the world and then, as Debord notes, back again.

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

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

This film, which becomes part of a trilogy along with "Hi Guest" and "Paradise," moves through and of the streets of New York with an intensity and intimacy. Thematically, it seems to be outdated — a radical performance artist trying to foment revolution with her S&M events. It feels very 20th century. But that, alas, is not what this film reckons.

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

demanding the camera's gaze at all times.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

There is much to be learned from Lafia's methodologies, his ideas, as well as from the kinds of reception his films have garnered. Obviously, after "Exploding Oedipus," his filmmaking has operated outside what can even be recognized by the festival circuit. He speaks a different dialect of cinema. And yet he doesn't make so-called art films à la Matthew Barney, Douglas Gordon, or Steve McQueen — even if the art world is more receptive to the kinds of demands his films make. Screenings have tended to be in discrete showings at local theaters or, for those not local, from desktop to flat screen, thanks to Apple AirPlay.

This new cinema — what I call everyday cinema but there may very well be a better name — still needs to be fleshed out. I see Lafia as neither an exception nor an institutional leader: he's an explorer and, lucky for us, at once a theorist and a practitioner. Questions remain: What are the limits of multiscreen films? How might we create practices that entail distributed filming? How can films be screened? What is the role of public viewing, a beautiful and important experience, for sure? What are the economics of such a practice?

But there will probably be no definitive answers. The computational is essentially plastic and the network is, well, decentered. Hard and fast structures such as studios and theaters are not the defining constructs of this cinematic experience. This new cinema is a cinema of questions as it relentlessly asks: What is cinema? How do we stand towards the camera?

How do we go with images? There may very well be as many answers as there are films.

by Daniel Coffeen, PhD



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

Georges Perec

How can we make the world unfamiliar so that we can see again, so that it can be again, so that we may consume it as the character in Georges Perec's novel does? In my films I have returned to this question again and again. But I hope never again in the same way, and yet, in the same way, but differently. I have tried as Perec's character does to learn how to experience again, anew, my taste, my thoughts, my schooling, my reading of and being in the world. It is this idea of world making that has consumed me as much as I have found ways to put new modes of consumption into play, into playfulness, into an event of perception into production that has drawn me to my films. They have made me find them and make them.

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

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

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

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

I studied philosophy up unto analytic philosophy, and then went into the theatre while studying art history, then photography at a class at Harvard summer school. It was then I became interested in film. Film had every thing; it was ideas and people, shapes, forms and colors. It was a beautiful form in which I could put all of myself. I went to the Nuart theatre on Melrose in LA where they screened double features. I would drive home in the warm air, thinking about so many things, I like Los Angeles. I like the

light especially in winter. Film was light, color movement. At the UCLA film school, I took more philosophy classes, experimental avant-garde film classes. I saw Michael Snow's wavelength and Peter Kubelka films. Film was a machine of duration, pulsating light. I had made a light box when I was 9. It was like a bass drum with transparent color paper on four sides. I loved punk and experimental music from the Sex Pistols, Bowie, Lou Reed to the Ramones then Schoenberg and Cage and Xenakis and Stockhausen, Einstein on the Beach. Light and sound. Film you could hold in your hand. I lived with an animator; each frame was just a small movement to the next. I did a class on the painter Frank Stella. Studying the black paintings. I was impressed with how he could do so much with slight variation.

Where my friends were making story films, I was seeing the movement of light. It seemed I was a cinematographer, an art director or an actor. The noted American filmmaker Shirley Clarke showed up one day and I took a class with her, first thing she said was to go into a room alone and film yourself. She was different. She was an artist who made films. I had written a play and done a lot of black and white photography to get into film school. Films started with writing and then you film. I just started filming things and was looking for the film. Writing in film. After a long time in school, it ended with me spending the last 2 years making a film from a short comic book. It was grueling and I just wanted to finish and I had to start working to make money. Over the next 5 years I was writing, screenplays - this was the way to make films. You wrote a script, some one liked it and gave you money. At the same time I was writing music video treatments for David Fincher, screen adaptations for different film studios for

books and comics, for Iron man, Judge Dread, Software and occasionally directing a commercial or music video. I was attempting to be in an industry, where I was to play a role.

In the mean time my sister was going to art school and I started to go to galleries and become aware of the LA scene with Mike Kelley, Paul McCarthy and others. Artists seem to have a unique voice. Film was an industry with a very defined role for the director filmmaker, a defined grammar, and a method of working. I was searching for an alternate grammar like William Burroughs, Kathy Acker, and Terry Riley. Artists made all the films I loved at the Nuart in a time when film was an art form. But in LA with the success of Jaws, The Terminator and Star Wars, Hollywood was the for the most part a producers medium. Experimental films were taken up by rock videos and game design. Hot rock video directors could make films for producers. I worked on many of these rock videos, maybe 10 for then commercial and music video director David Fincher, was introduced to Madonna wrote, Express Yourself for her, for David, meet Michael Jackson, many rock stars. I was an avaricious reader, trolling used book stores, going to shows, broke, always writing and imagining projects playing around with the VCR recorder, and would come up with video concepts very quickly.

I started to teach part time at Art Center College of Design. Everything had gone digital and the network was just upon us. This was the most exciting thing happening, to me. I spent 2 years bringing forward with two groups of design students the work I would leave LA with. Between CNN, the OJ Simpson trial, the violence outpouring from the Rodney King beating, working for producers and being a writer, it was like being in Nathaniel West's, Day of Locust. At 40 I left Hollywood broke and moved to San Francisco with my 2 demos and that one film script I still

wanted to make. That one script, Suitcase, Vincent Gallo, who spent an entire afternoon with me, early in his career, wanted to make, but no one was sufficiently impressed nor knew his recent work in a Claire Dennis film, at least those people I was taking to, to give it a green light. Meanwhile the digital and the network just forming allowed me to imagine an alternate space of time and representation, where through software, form and content would be uniquely articulated, and once created, the work on the network would be received, would be social. How the network played out is all part of this story.

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

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

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

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

Three decades ago Roland Barthes elegantly defined a cultural text as “a tissue of quotations”: “We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning (the ‘message’ of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centres of culture.” In software-driven production environment, these quotations come not only from the creators’ memories of what they previously saw, read, and heard, but also directly from the databases of media assets, as well as numerous other words that in the case of the World Wide Web are just a click away. (Lev Manovich | 1/2002, Models of Authorship in New Media)

We can say then, that today we can see a cinema that speaks to and is within a condition of an always being imaged environment, a cinema that is always on, always imaging, but not necessarily recording, a cinema that is so real time, so always on, it is not often recorded but simply as pervasive as the air.

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

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

Yet isn’t this condition a new event for the cinema, an event that grows out of the cinematic, as television did from film, is not the network a new cinematic apparatus. In the network the cinematic event becomes very new,

the event as constituted by the gaze, the shot, reverse shot, time, all this changes in the always-on always-recording environment we live it.

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

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

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

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

As the media landscape shifted towards the digital, the computational, and the network, my work began to ask new questions: In an age of digital proliferation, what becomes of an image that is always already reproduced to infinity, that is always already manipulated? What happens to individuality as we

collectively create and curate ourselves within the global network? As our world accumulates and proliferates images, and information, what new kinds of sense-making emerges? How do images go in this new world—their production, consumption, dissemination, their potency, their affective resonances, their possibilities?

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

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

After years of doing new media work I return to narrative cinema presenting here 10 feature length narrative films made in as much time. Most of the films have been made with very small crews, committed actors and a very tactical pragmatic adventurous sense of filmmaking. Rather than starting from a place where we say we need this location, this actor, this amount of money, we ask ourselves what do we have, and the answer is simple, we have each other, myself the writer-director, a very carefully selected group of actors, a committed thoughtful assistant, an excellent camera and sound person (both film makers in their right) – that's really what we have and sometimes we have less.

So how can we make films, what strategies can we take and who will watch them.

To Perec one can only be intimate when one is rid of the familiar, when one

allows the strange to speak. And this allowance only comes from proximity, when one throws away the ready-mades and reaches for the world. Then, falls in. How does Perec do this, He is algorithmic, he has a generative approach -he creates new flora and fauna with new DNA, new instruction sets – new limits - think only of his novel the void where the entire novel is constructed with out the letter 'e'. This limit produces the uncanny breaks the natural routine of the author, forces her this way and that.

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

# Exploding Oedipus

From an early age I remember seeing my father's home movies, shot in 16m and his 35m-color reversal slides both projected. I can see the beam of light in the dark and hear the sound of the film moving through the gate and the fan's motor. Often in the slides I could see the deep blacks, and sumptuous colors, and projected, the image had a great presence.

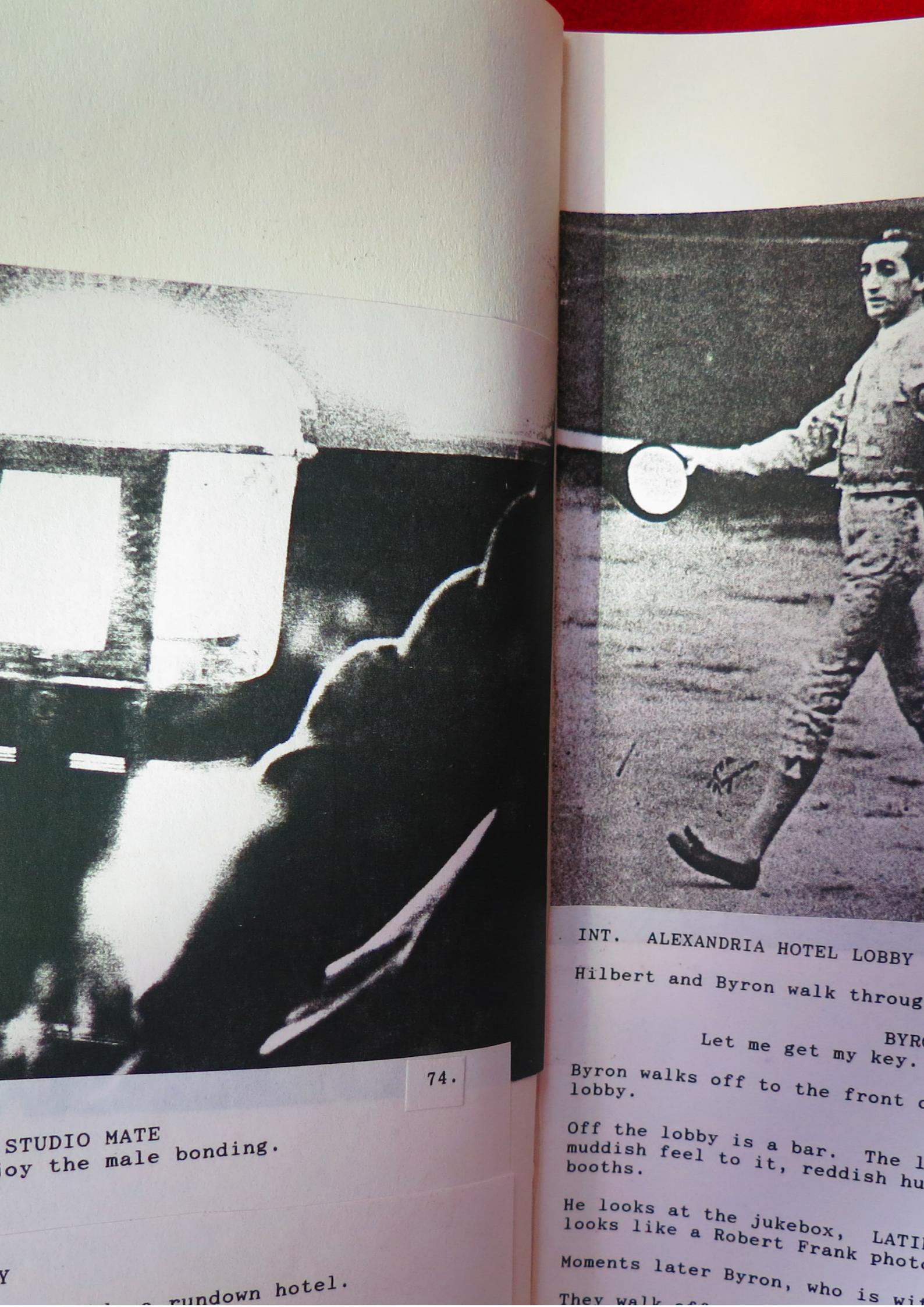
I was living in the American Hotel in the old manufacturing area of downtown LA. The hotel had a bar and punk band club on the 1st floor. I had a single room with a toilet and shower down the hall.

Between occasionally going to Propaganda Films the most cutting edge film music video production unit then in LA to write music video scripts, I was going to cinema houses and used book stores, reading all the time, and trying not to spent much money but have time. I had been writing spec film scripts, which has very rigorous demands. A script for me is a blueprint for

a film, a direction, not the film itself and besides telling everyone where to go and what's happening, it must continue to take on a life as it evolves with its cast and the very shooting of the film. So what can a script be with this idea that each page represents a minute and the film script needs to be 90 to 120 minutes? Why so many words. The film scenario can be a 3-5-page piece of writing, along with scenes and notes written along the way. This kind of understanding of working took me a long time, to in a sense hold the film inside me and to let it become what it wanted to, be because it will never be that which is on the page. A film cannot be known and then recorded it has to become an event of recording. It has to keep living and evolving.

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

Before the talking cinema, film had to create a form that could rely principally on image and live music accompaniment. The film, except for sparse dialogue, would unfold by what you saw and though there were inter-titles, not what was said. In the films of the French filmmaker of the twenties, Germaine Dulac, the essence of cinema was the visual, psychological and poetic. The logic, would be the visually associative, not the unfolding of plot



or story per se, but the rhythm of the visual. Bunuel, Eisenstein, many cineaste took this up. With sync sound the expressive form of cinema became literature and the theatre. privileging plot, story and language over picture and sound.

The more money to make a film, the more opinions, conditions, 'restrictions' made on the film – unlike many other forms, cinema, like architecture, requires capital, and capital requirements came to shape film in the form of producers and studios. Most all of that shaping is done in the script and script approval. The script becomes the accountable document for the production of the film. Not always, as there are certainly some strong filmmakers who make the films they want to make.



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



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

When I finished film school, I wrote screenplays, scenarios for music videos, directed a few commercials and in the evenings with my sister made the rounds of the burgeoning LA art scene. The screenplay is a very concise form with very rigorous rules, almost to the page, at least commercial writing is. I had a good go of it and did enjoy it, more so when I was hired and it would be my telling of the story I was hired to write, mostly adaptations. But in the end, it's not my kind of thing at all. I am more interested in new forms and new modes of recording that allow us to see ourselves imaged and narrativized.

After writing a number of film scripts, more and more I knew I wanted to make a personal film, to take accounting of things. The late 70's and early 80's presented for a brief moment this period where there was openness to explorations and experimentation in consciousness and sexuality. With the growing awareness of aids, gender and queer politics, things hardened to become more of an identity politics, where it was all about taking a position. Play and experimentation was what you did when you were young, a passing game. I did not get to make this film that really was to be a reflection on things in my early twenties until some 15 years later. It asks the question, how do we come to know ourselves, how do we love. It sees the cinema, image making as a mirror. What is the relation between the mirror, seeing, the law and violence, both to oneself and others? Sounds rather heady, but it was all filtered through the pop idioms of all the books, films, music I loved, to be a reckoning, a coming to terms.

If you explode the mirror and let yourself be abandoned, where are you, without mooring, without tether? One would ultimately need to find a boundary, a limit.





*The mirror*

*How do we come to shape ourselves, form  
the self in the mirror of the other. How the  
mirror through parenting, love, friendship,  
sexuality, hurt, despair, longing, desire gives  
us as much recognition and mis-recognition  
of our self. How there is no bottom to the  
image repertoire - chasing something that is  
not there. This is what this film would be.*



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

It staggered me to know I was composed of impurities.

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

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

I'm lost. Drunk. Impure, what a life.

Everything is true because everything is permitted

My courage consisted of destroying all the usual reasons for living  
and discovering others. The discovery was made slowly.

Whoever invented the fourth wall was the executioner  
of human empathy

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

the wall that separates me from my unknown neighbor,  
my possible savior,  
this wall I do not understand.  
This wall I pray would crumble and collapse/  
before my very eyes.

Then I could see my neighbor,  
my possible savior.

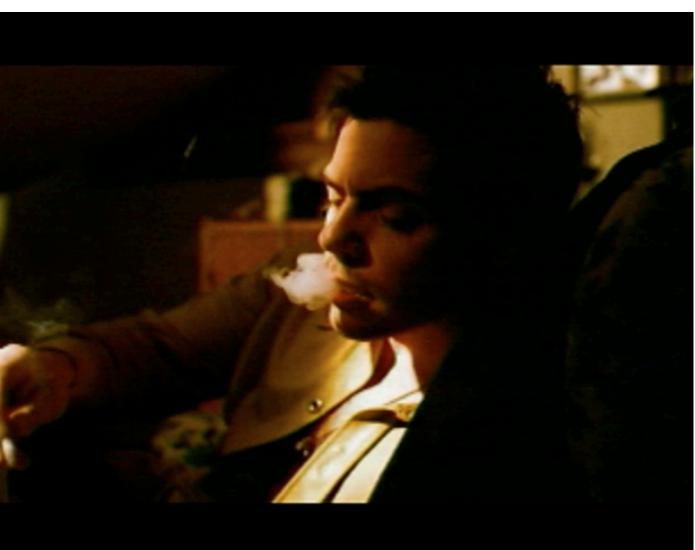
Maybe my neighbor, my possible savior  
Would know what to say to me



The tin star, the sheriff.  
I'll buy him a beer,  
Tell him a joke, he'll listen.  
He'll let down his wall  
Not like my father  
It's a good feeling  
Like I've known him my whole life  
I'll shoot you dead, dad.

A beer? Want a beer, dad?  
It's all right.  
I don't know  
Fucking Gary cooper

I'm awakened, my soul awakens, my emotions awaken  
I'm equipped with the anger to kill him  
He let down me, he let down Gary Cooper



The phallus is the law,  
The tin star, The sheriff,  
I can see how it was a fertility symbol, a cult  
object.  
It dictates our religion, our class, even our  
sexuality  
I chase a beautiful boy  
He follows me home; why not?

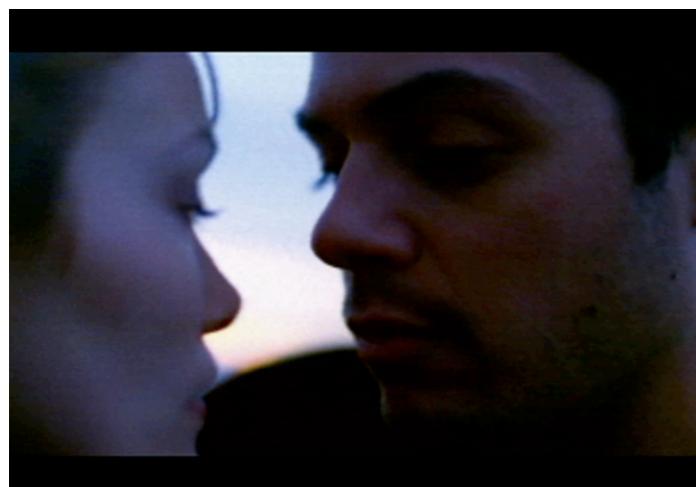
I guess I thought that love with a man would be different  
But it's not  
It's the same



It's still two hearts, two souls  
I had opened up something in me that was very private  
And I felt trampled on

After my mother slapped me,  
I ran past my father and hid in the closet  
Over and over and over again  
I kept saying: why didn't he protect me?  
He's my father; he's the law; he's the tin badge.  
He was supposed to be fucking Gary Cooper.

I know no end to desiring you  
I dream of killing you, I dream of becoming you  
I was you  
And the idea of suicide, a final separation,  
A final withdrawal, the beginning of a great travel  
The ultimate sacrifice.  
I can imagine so many other solutions,  
I can imagine so many other solutions  
By myself  
I'm ready to go back  
I'm ready to crawl back into the earth  
Let the worms eat my body, and return as a sunflower



I imagine that my mother's gone mad



That she's a lunatic and they've finally locked her away

Mother

Mother

Life is a vast embrace of enormous beauty

Mother, I hate you the most,

I hate you more than anything.

You're the reason that I hide behind this wall

I have to protect myself from you

I know what you can do to me

I know how much you can hurt me

We can consider any road valid,

If it helps us come closer to the object of our disgust

How do I come to know myself

To give shape to my life

It's been scattered in books

Once, if I remember well,

My life was a feast where all hearts opened and all wines \_\_\_\_\_

Unspoken desires, hopeful \_\_\_\_\_

One evening I seated beauty on my knees

And I found her bitter

You can't erase the images

You can't erase the past

I become the post Oedipal, trans-human, newly made man

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

My soul hangs in finest galleries



The greatest collectors each have a pound of my flesh  
I am marketable.

So I make a movie and cast my mom in the lead role.  
It's a post-modern oedipal spaghetti western  
Filled with dense symbolism and distantiation  
Art is making the invisible, visible.  
Kill me  
I needed to die  
And my mother is beautiful  
The return to the mother  
Sexy, my first wet dream, wonderful  
More charming than Sophia Lauren, Jean Moreau  
Mother I hate you the most  
I know what you can do to me

Self-loathing, disgust  
So I experience her  
as she experiences herself  
A unity of suffering  
My desire to love is my hope for her to love me  
I love you mother  
(I love you mother)  
It yearns so deep, so loud  
(I love you mother)  
within me

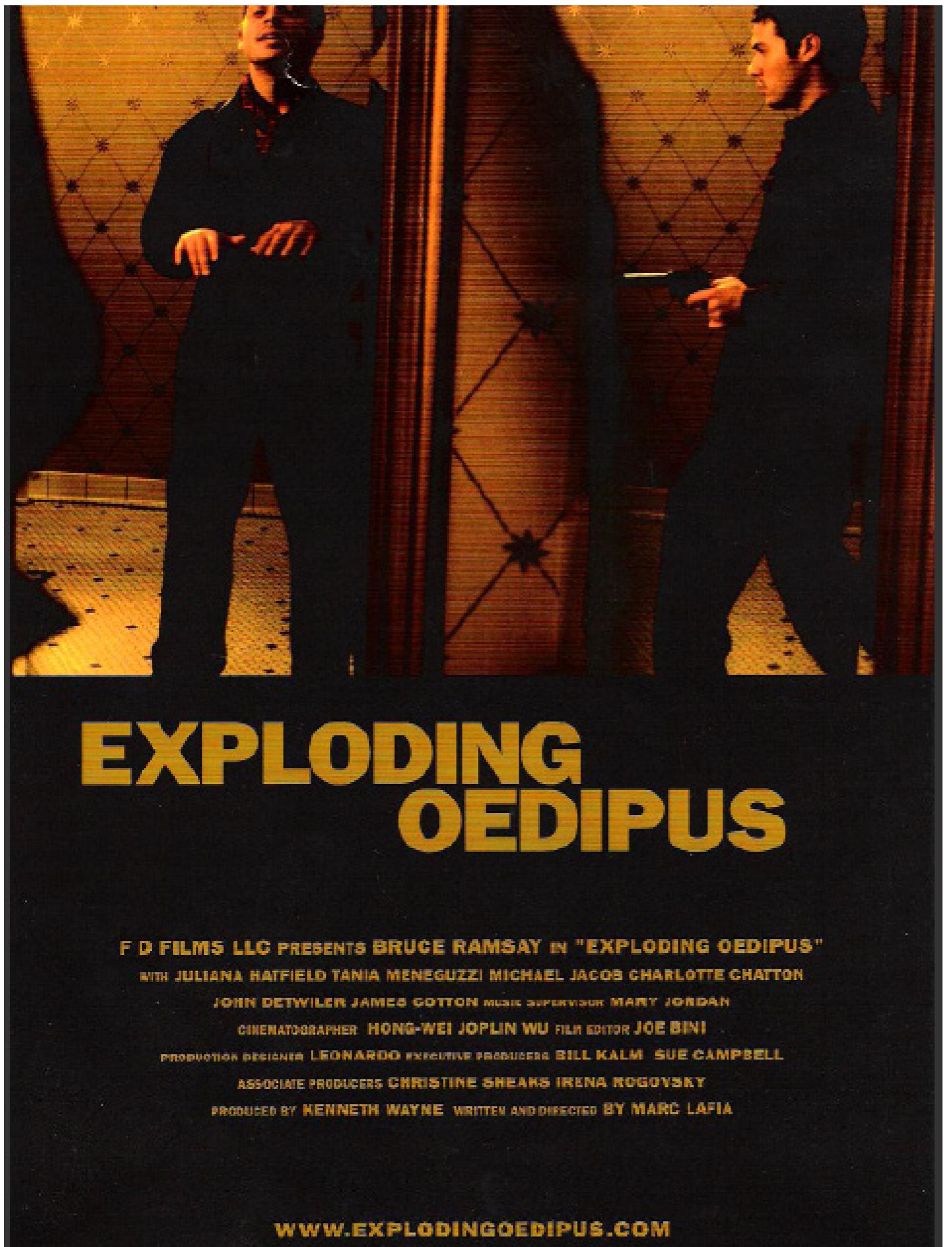
In this incest,  
Everything is suspended: time, law, prohibition,



All desires are abolished  
Nothing is exhausted, nothing is wanted,  
all our embraces mother  
Through my mother's embrace I see myself anew  
Loved, lovable  
All our embraces mother  
I will persist in wanting to rediscover them

Life is a vast embrace of enormous beauty  
This beauty is sometimes piercingly cold  
Or torridly hot.

We can consider any road valid if it helps us come closer  
To the object of our disgust  
The heroic male  
The gunslinger  
I cast my father as the villain.  
On the horse  
And we hunt each other down like we used to  
Navajo  
And he lets me kill him  
Landscape  
Finally he lets me kill him  
The Trojan horse, Stagecoach, john ford, \_\_\_\_\_ cowboy  
Andy Warhol, cemetery in the middle of nowhere  
Now I'm the sheriff, I'm Gary Cooper, and I leave town in the  
stagecoach.  
I'll shoot you dead, dad



Why didn't he protect me?  
I'll shoot you dead, dad  
I want to be Gary Cooper  
This time, he lets me kill him.

My father  
Reason based on the calculation of interest  
I don't give a fuck for the phallus,  
For father, for convention,  
For continuation,  
I'll shoot you dead, dad

I become the post Oedipal, trans-human, newly made man  
Full of love and radiance, open to the healing energy of the world  
My soul hangs in finest galleries  
The greatest collectors each have a pound of my flesh  
I am marketable.

**Exploding Oedipus: Related Videos**

DAVID HOLZMAN'S  
**DIARY**

David Holzman's Diary

CHAPPAQUA

Chappaqua

From the Director of LIGHTING LADIES  
the loss of sexual innocence

The Loss of Sexual Innocence

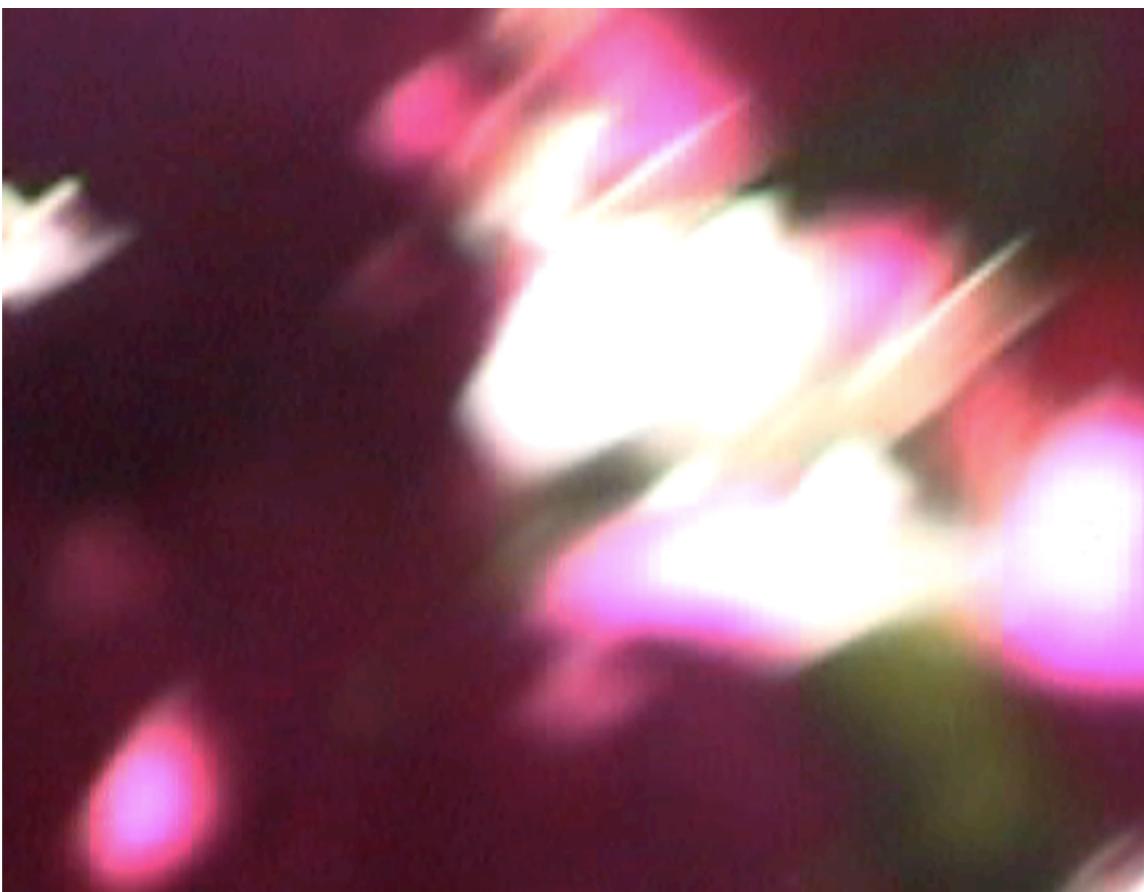
From the Director of LIGHTING LADIES  
**REQUIEM FOR A DREAM**

Requiem for a Dream

# Confessions of an Image

After *Exploding* with all the financing and producing problems I had, something I thought would be so pure, well, at this time final cut pro came out and I decided to make a film entirely myself. It took on a very special pleasure. It is made mostly of still images each lasting as long as 5 seconds,

In making *Exploding*, there were many delays, money problems, control issues – so finding a way to make films took time to find a way to go forward. I turned my attention to writing again while at the same shooting more and more things with these newer and newer small digital photography cameras that you shoot video with.

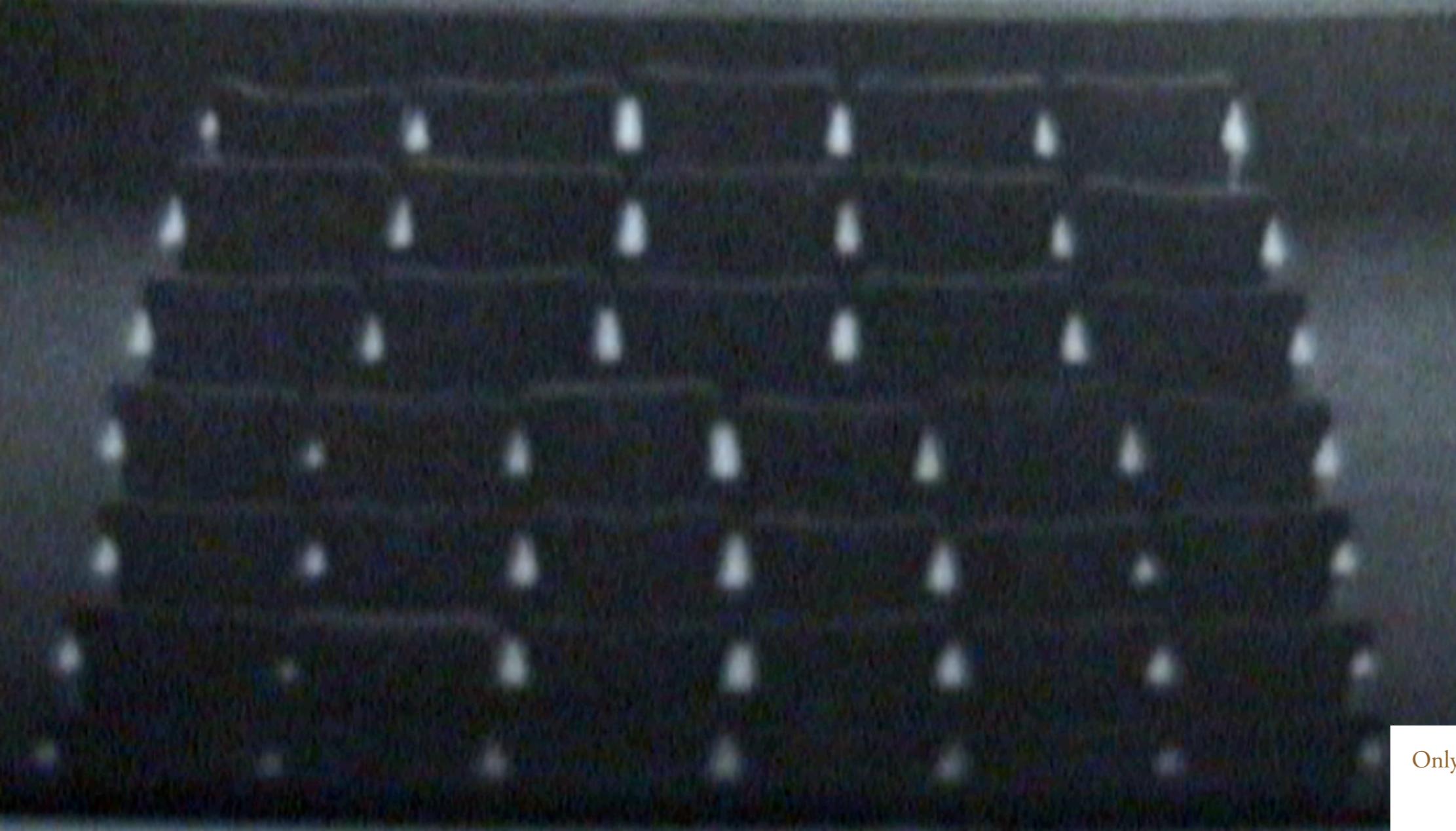


In *Confession of an Image* I ask what is it to make an image, what is this realm of the image and imaging, what happens when incandescent light becomes electromagnetic light when everything becomes seen and imaged?

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

Confessions was my end of cinema as a medium essay. It is a series of 21 visual essays, about the image, cinema and memory, written, filmed and edited by himself.

The making of the world is inevitably a becoming precisely because it is happening anew before our very eyes.



Where do we begin?

With the great luminosity of the sun

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

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

Our images where a celebration and awe of this terrific force

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

Only in darkness could we see

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

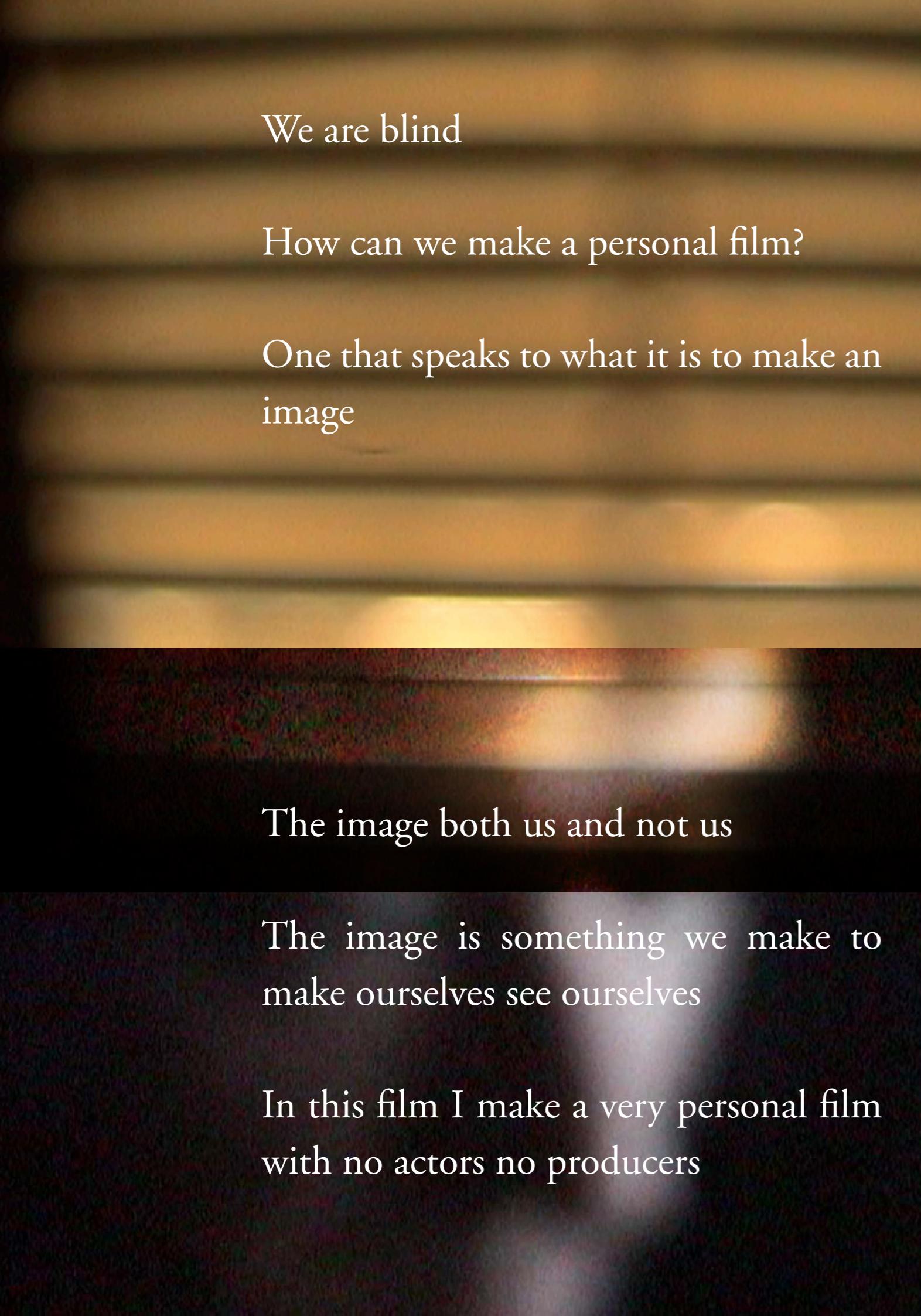
Projected light has been now replaced with electronic information

Information is now part of the equation of energy and matter

This is the story of this transformation

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

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



We are blind

How can we make a personal film?

One that speaks to what it is to make an image

The image both us and not us

The image is something we make to make ourselves see ourselves

In this film I make a very personal film with no actors no producers

An image has no inherent meaning

The image records and tells us something about how we see ourselves

How do we know the story of ourselves?

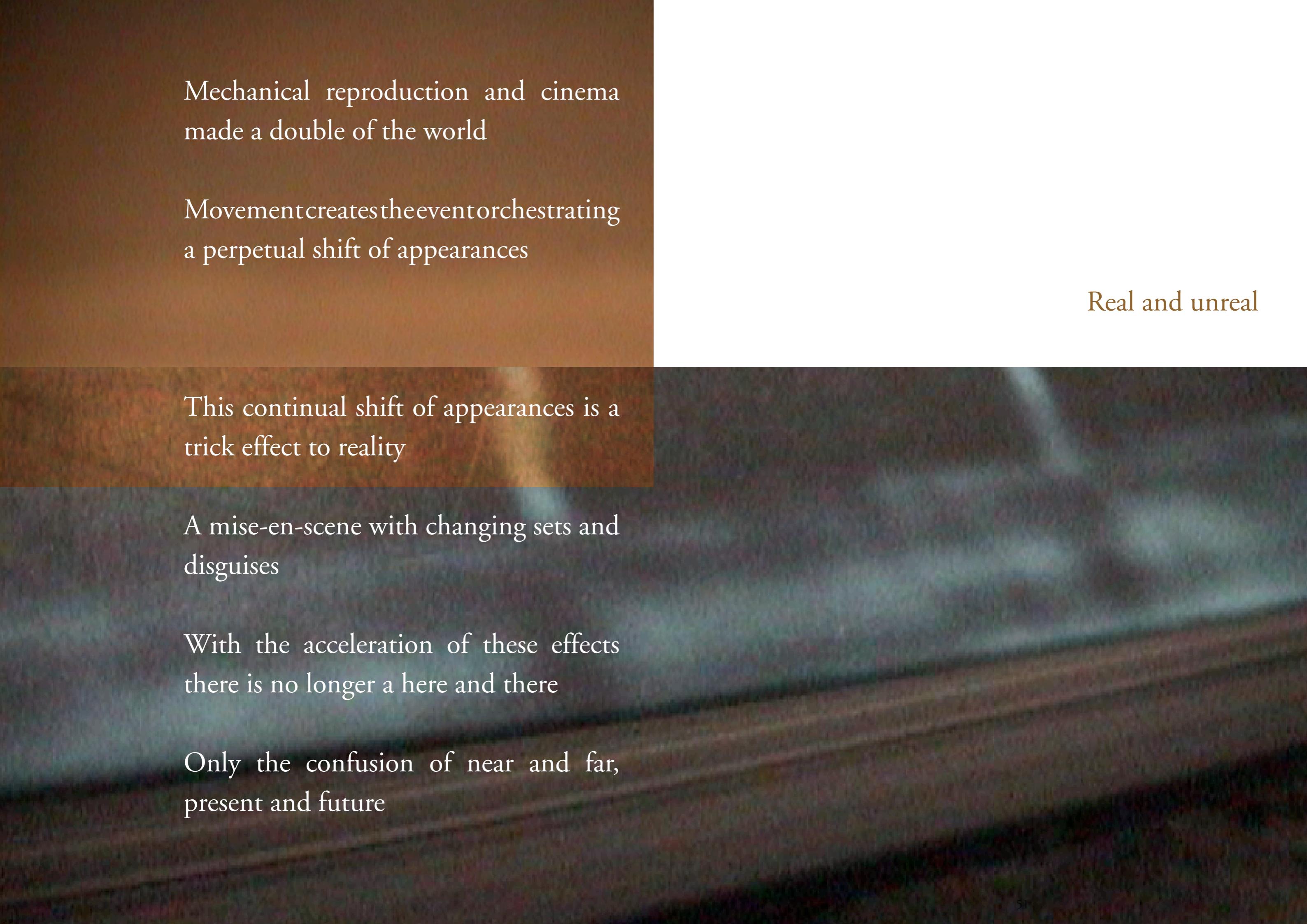
All memory is a construction. All of our sense of ourselves is, in some sense, as much made of truth, as it is a kind of fiction.

I believe that the spirit constructs the image in constancy with an idea of love.

How then to create the image that is a space, a space and a mind, a spirit and a soul and a being of someone that allows for the resonance of what it is we feel towards ourself being

We exceed the image

All of us are in the process of a disappearance

The background of the slide is a landscape painting by Claude Monet, depicting a path through a field with haystacks in the distance under a cloudy sky.

Mechanical reproduction and cinema  
made a double of the world

Movement creates the event or orchestrating  
a perpetual shift of appearances

Real and unreal

This continual shift of appearances is a  
trick effect to reality

A mise-en-scene with changing sets and  
disguises

With the acceleration of these effects  
there is no longer a here and there

Only the confusion of near and far,  
present and future



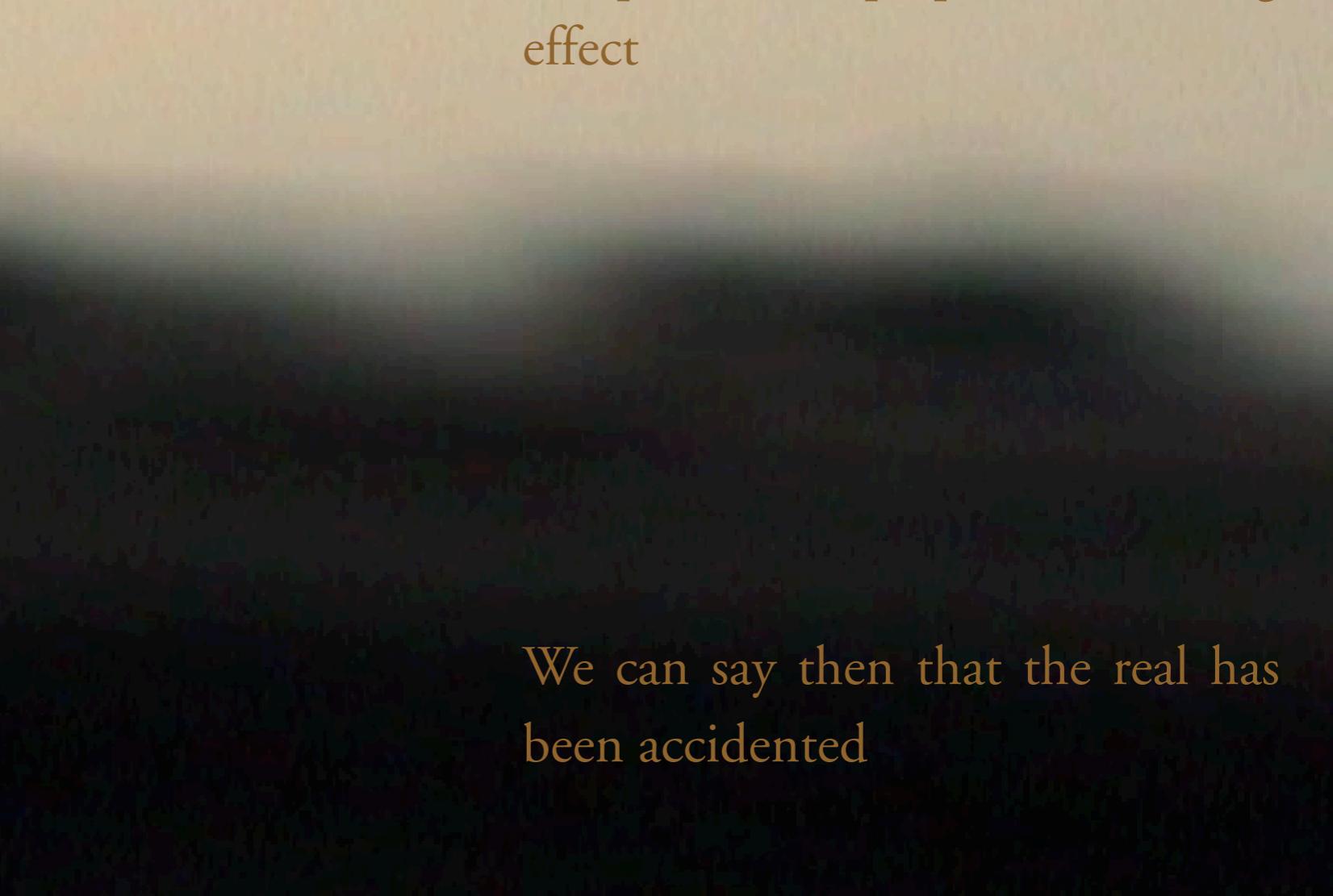
A mix of history, story and the hallucinatory utopia of communication technology

It is the illusion of things occurring in time

It is a paradox of appearance where the greatness of the universe is compressed in a perpetual shrinking effect



**Live from Cape Town, South Africa.**



We can say then that the real has been acciden<sup>ted</sup>



Cinema is a machine to forget  
It is a history of disappearance  
This is the story of the disappearance of astro physical luminosity,  
as it becomes the pulse of electronic signal of total vision  
Our vision has been absorbed such that we can no longer see  
We are blind

As such the world becomes image  
And the world is imaged and arranged for us  
As the world is arranged so are the people  
Constructed as a subject of image  
The arrangement of image gives construction to a worldview  
We no longer go to the world but the world is brought to us  
through image

We now move to the organization of our sight

in mise-en-scene we move along a relay of the gaze and the author arranging the gaze for us

we now see through others eyes



Cinema becomes an instrument of artifice

The camera is an instrument in the construction of suspense, mystery, and melodrama



Cinema is a mirror

Who is it that we see in this mirror

Cinema is an illusion

And yet every illusion has its truth

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

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

What responsibility do we have in making an image?

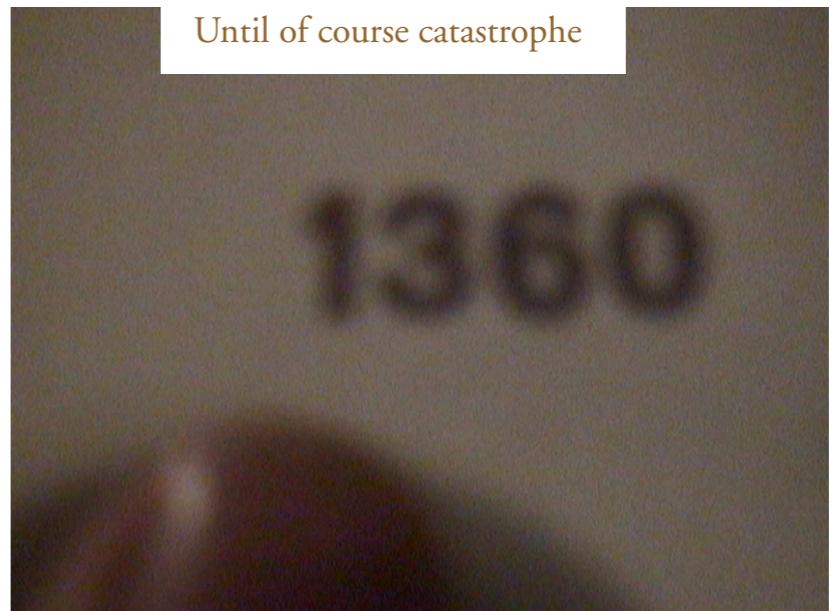
Perhaps images for a moment give us the illusory perception of stability

This stability is the stability of time itself

Cinema a motor an engine to see the world

It now enacts the world and replaces it

Until of course catastrophe



Each singular book now becomes one book

Each one electronically interconnected to the other

Each discrete text as spoken to by contemporary philosophy

Is a the organization of a series of fragments of other books

No work stands alone

Each book here isolated individual

Each book a book of books  
Is this our memory?  
Our story  
When does knowledge become lived? And a living force  
When does knowledge become understanding?  
When it becomes feeling  
When we are one with understanding  
That is when knowledge is felt  
When knowledge is innately one invisible with the process of life  
And so this innate curiosity to understand  
To give our selves a sense of being  
It is the struggle to tell the story of ourselves

Every thing in  
process

Every thing  
changing

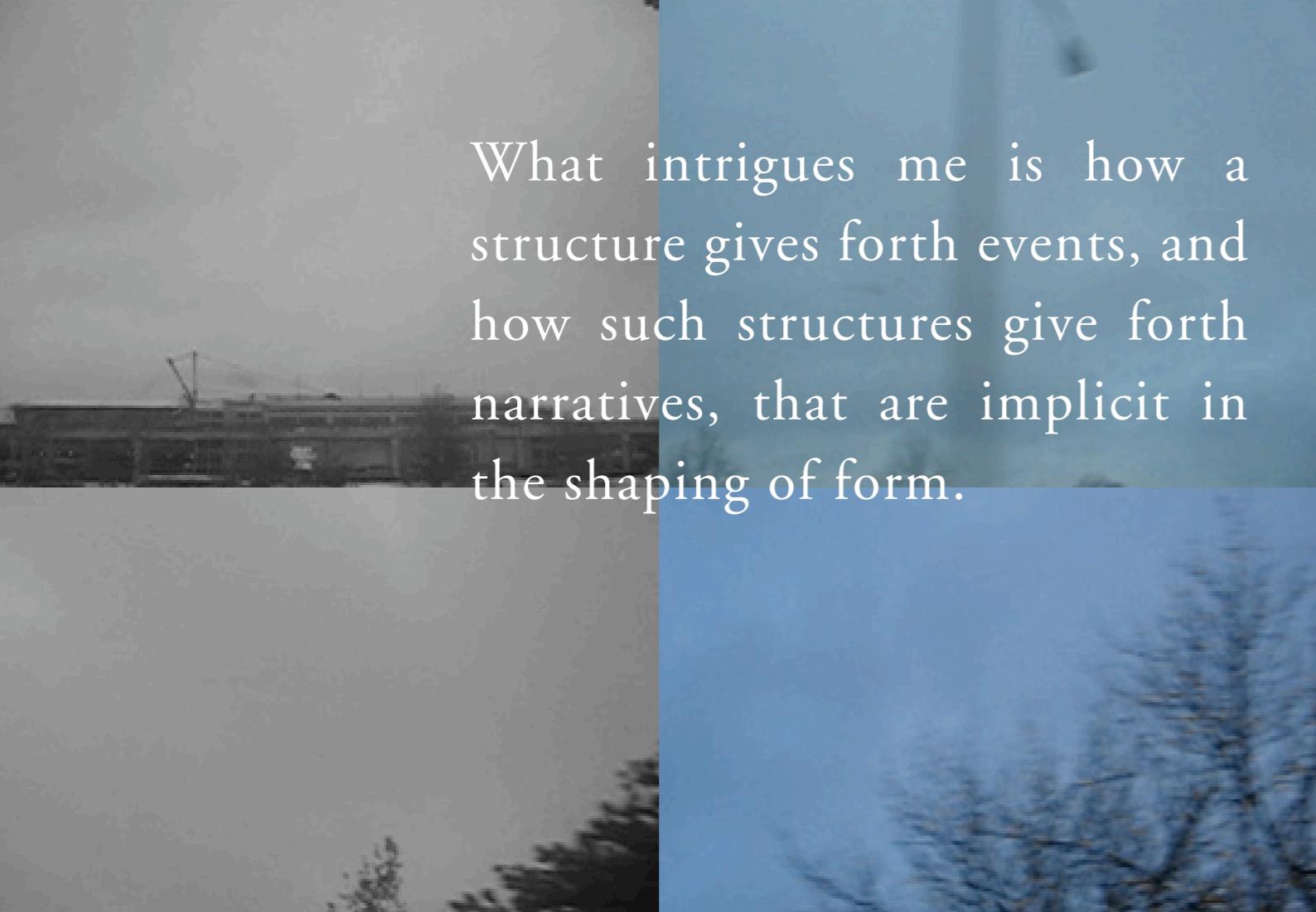
Open to re-  
engage and  
immerse our  
selves in being

# Permutations

## 1. Why the rules?

*Becoming the agent of the image*

There are rules:



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

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

But why rules?

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

## 2. Why these rules?

*Imaging and the rise of the banal*



What is the status of the day in this production?

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

Just look at them.

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

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



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

And image is an assemblage of sense-affects.

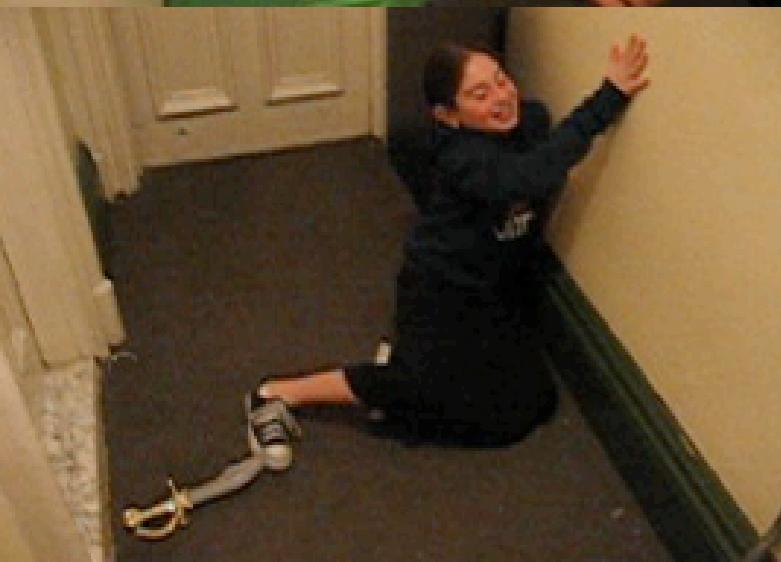
The camera—and perhaps we're all cameras—does not look behind the world happening.

How could it?

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

### 3. Sound, Space, Sequence

*and the Architectonics of Film*

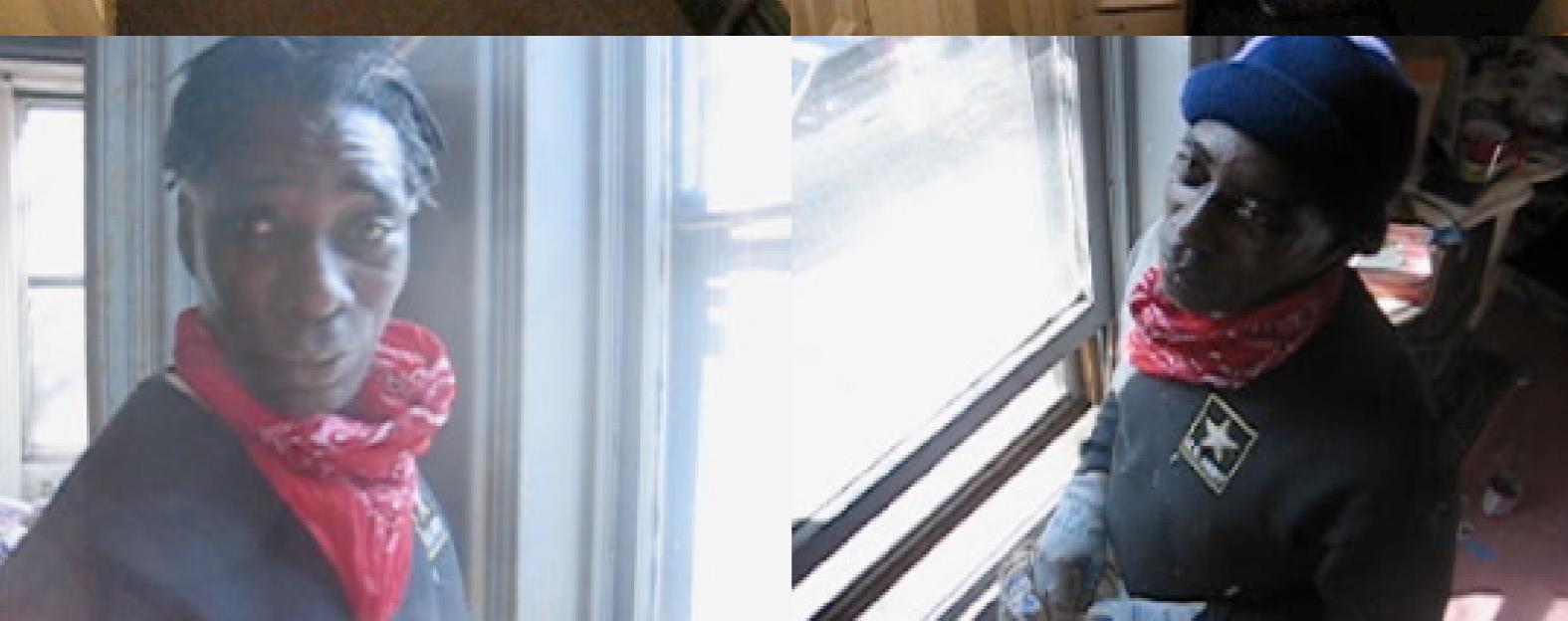


It is a mistake to assume that the image is visual.

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

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

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



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

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

If the stitch between images in most movies stems, if from nothing else, from the movement of the film through the projector, the stitch in *Permutations* between the different images stems, if from nothing else, from the sound.

*Permutations* radically recast the architectonics of film.

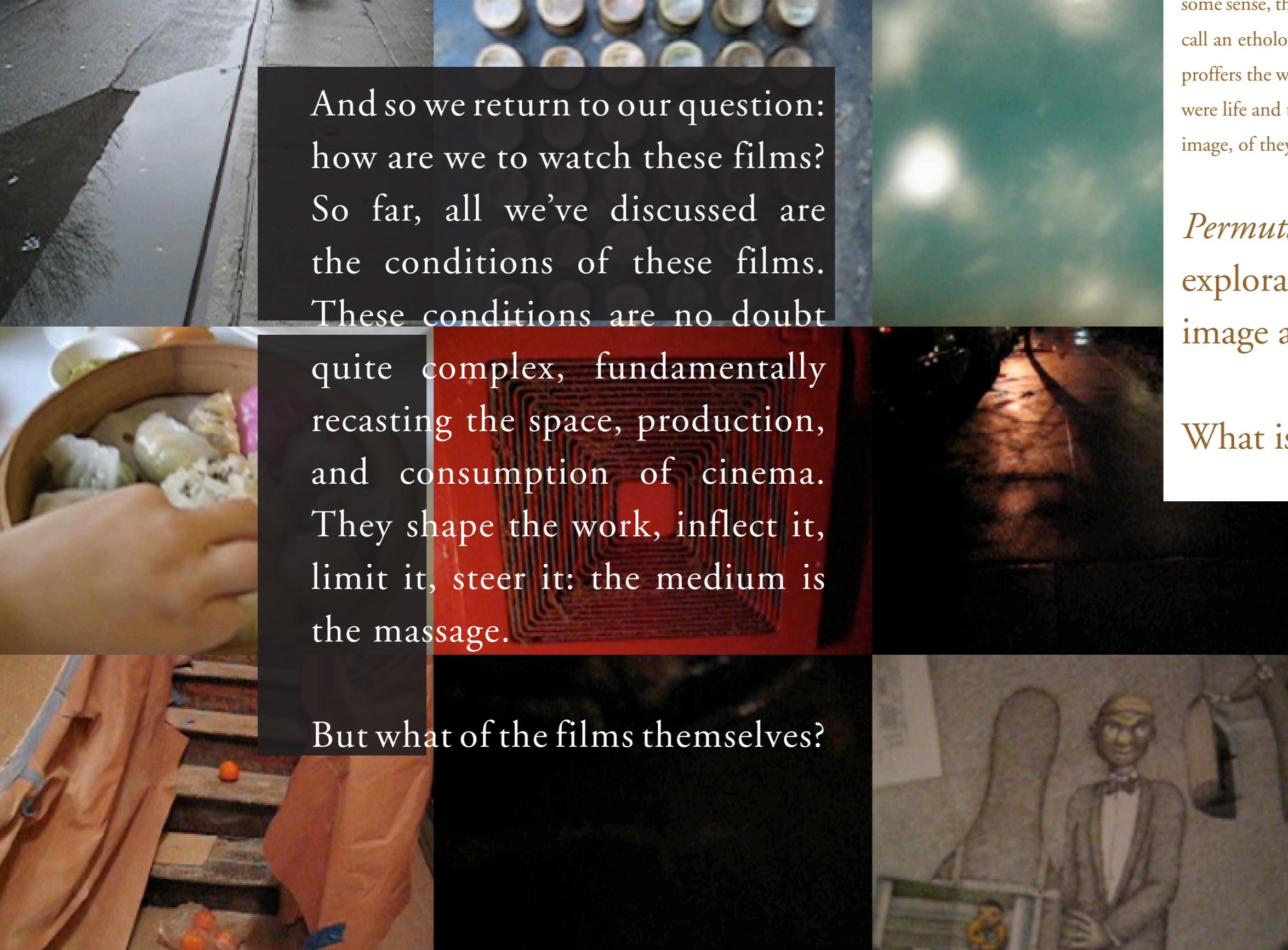
We are not confronted with a linear time, with a contiguous sequence but with a spatialization of the moving image (the phrase is the artist's). The reel has been consumed by the computational and splayed.

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

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

## 4. Permutations

*or Towards an Tropology of the Image*



And so we return to our question:  
how are we to watch these films?

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

But what of the films themselves?

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

*Permutations* is an on-going exploration into the limits of the image as it asks:

What is an image? How can it go?