



editorial team

DESIGN AND LAYOUT

zandra alexander
liz gibson-degroote
jordan kawai
michael kim

IMAGE EDITING

saman aghvami
jamie day fleck
julie gemuend
fraser hogarth
nadia marzouk

TEXT EDITING

simone estrin
sarah foy
jennifer lee
bindu shah

FACULTY SUPERVISOR

don snyder

COVER IMAGE

michael kim

introductions by

caitlin durlak
alexandra hill
natasa nuhanovic
ali weinstein

table of contents

INTRO TO MEDIA WRITING	005
PERSONAL STATEMENT	
intro	009
saman aghvami	010
zandra alexander	012
caitlin durlak	014
simone estrin	016
jamie day fleck	018
sarah foy	020
julie gemuend	022
liz gibson-degroote	024
alexandra hill	026
fraser hogarth	028
jordan kawai	032
michael kim	034
jennifer lee	038
nadia marzouk	040
natasa nuhanovic	042
bindu shah	044
ali weinstein	046
CRITICAL REVIEW	
intro	051
saman aghvami	052
zandra alexander	054
caitlin durlak	056
simone estrin	058
jamie day fleck	060
sarah foy	062
julie gemuen	066
liz gibson-degroote	068
alexandra hill	070
fraser hogarth	074
jordan kawai	078
michael kim	082
jennifer lee	084
nadia marzouk	086
natasa nuhanovic	088
bindu shah	090
ali weinstein	092
EXTENDED NARRATIVE	
intro	097
saman aghvami	098
zandra alexander	102
caitlin durlak	106
simone estrin	110
jamie day fleck	114
sarah foy	122
julie gemuend	126
liz gibson-degroote	132
alexandra hill	136
fraser hogarth	140
jordan kawai	146
michael kim	150
jennifer lee	154
nadia marzouk	158
natash nuhanovic	162
bindu shah	166
ali weinstein	170

intro media writing

alexandra hill

What follows is a compilation of the combined efforts of students in the Media Writing: Critical and Narrative Forms course with Professor Don Snyder. The course provided an exploration of narrative forms both through written texts and in documentary media. The materials studied and examples cited were as varied as the work contained within this publication. They represent the diverse interests and talents of this group of students, who were encouraged throughout this entire project to follow their passions by a professor who “wants people to write what comes out of their experience with the world.” Students came to this class with a wide array of interests and from a wide array of backgrounds. From film production to photography to public relations, students brought their own unique ambitions to the classroom. It ceased to function as a structured hierarchy and instead became a forum for students to explore their interests in an unmediated and uniquely personal way.

This book begins with the opportunity to get to know us all a little bit better, with personal statements that allow us to introduce ourselves through our art, our history and our own distinctive narrative.

The next section contains critical reviews in which each student provides their take on a movie, exhibition, website, play, or any other outlet for artistic expression. Students had the opportunity to examine a topic of particular interest to them and critically engage with it.

Finally, this book concludes with a collection of extended narrative writings. With the wide array of interests and talents within the group, students were given the choice to either bring in visual elements (from their own work or work that inspires them) to accompany their written work, or to write a longer narrative piece. The topic was completely up to the student’s own discretion and themes included family relationships, inspiring photography, corrupt government, travel, work and many, many topics in between. Students became authors, exploring notions of personal history, memory, nostalgia and experience, all while playing with notions of narrative format and structures.

Media Writing: Critical and Narrative Forms was a unique class that provided opportunities for students to think critically about art and other forms of media, while simultaneously developing a sense of personal experience and expression.



PERSONAL STATEMENT

intro personal statement

caitlin durlak

Can words clearly describe something visual? As creative practitioners it can be hard to write about what it is we do. A class of 17 students, we were asked to write a personal statement. Open-ended and loosely described, the essay's direction was purposefully short. Words like, "your practice", "personal discussion" and "investigate" were used. A challenge was posed. We were asked to stop and state what it was we were doing at this point in our lives; to use examples and be direct.

History is often the best way to understand where we are in the present. In the case of our class, we began with early memories – our childhoods, living through wartime, experiencing family shame, social oppression – these became places to start. In each individual's case, the past spoke about and guided us towards a truth we live by today. Looking back can provide an understanding of who we are now.

Sometimes our futures can be staring us in the face though we are unaware. Often we struggle to figure out what we want in life (or rather what we need), until one day it becomes painfully obvious. If we are lucky, our passions become the source to propel our personal stories forward. Many of my peers came to a sudden realization of their affinities; for one in particular it was made evident to them after a dream. After its reveal, a passion can become an obsession. This often leads to challenge, failure and success. Yet most importantly, it speaks to a larger picture. What we spend our time doing is an extension of who we are.

For many of the 17, storyteller best describes our occupations. Through the power of communication, be it visual, oral or written, we use story to understand our surroundings. Stories become tools for relating to and discussing the world around us. They become a place to experiment, to share something private or to build connections. As storytellers we are allowed to describe the human experience in any manner we see fit. Truth can be pushed and questioned; often we demand that it is. In the following 17 narratives you will find personal ideas on truth and life. These stories will inform and ask for personal reflection of the reader. This chapter took form in the shape of a challenge: we were asked to confront our present. In response to this confrontation, the writing will ask you, the reader, to do the same. Good luck.

saman aghvami

For some reason, photography was never on my list of possible future careers. I always knew I would be an image-making artist of some sort, yet photography was not on my career radar, even when I was taking a filmmaking program. I was a seventeen year old in Iran when I took this program that included a photography class (I remember the photography instructor disliked me since I was the least active student in that class).

I went on to study graphics in an art high school, where we were supposed to pass two photography courses in two semesters. It was then that I really discovered the potential of this medium and actually took pleasure in creating images using my AE-1 Canon and spending time in darkrooms. Gradually, photography became my main interest and I ended up applying for a photography program for my bachelor's degree. Although I had made up my mind and was absolutely sure about pursuing photography in the future, I was still struggling with the way I wanted to use this medium.

I thought of myself as an artist but I could never understand the "art for art's sake" mentality. In a century where human beings are struggling for freedoms and liberties, in a time where human *rights* are precious enough to be worth fighting for, I saw artists as people who have a great responsibility. Art, in my eyes, was not for the sole purpose of pleasure but also a tool to make change, to inform. Art wasn't meant for the skies and its divine habitants. Art (in any given form) was to address the people, real people and their real struggles and sufferings. Even my favorite artists were among those who chose this path.

My doubts about how I intended to use photography ended when a photo book caught my eye behind the front window of a bookstore in Tehran. I was a freshman in the photography program, when I saw and immediately bought "The Art of Seeing: The Best of Reuters Photography". The book was a compilation of stunning photographs of wars, sports, daily life, horrific atrocities, joys and horrors of life: photojournalism at its best. It was through this book that I discovered the power of photojournalism and found it to be the perfect platform for what I had in mind: to be a witness to and a narrator of what was happening around me.

I was soon able to find an unpaid photography internship in one of Iran's most prominent news wires: Iranian Students' News Agency (ISNA). After almost 5 months of internship, in 2003, I was hired by ISNA as a staff photographer. I was now a professional photojournalist. Through ISNA I was able to cover a variety of news events, sport events and also document social issues.

My background in graphics made me always look for eye-

catching patterns and visual forms in the compositions I used. Looking up to photojournalists like James Nachtwey and Sebastião Salgado made me try to make my images more dramatic and cinematic. Also, my interest in Iran's contemporary history and politics helped me to go beyond simply witnessing through my photographs, but also express an opinion, especially when photographing political figures.

This of course has limits in Iran, since the red line for criticizing those who possess power is a delicate and dangerous one. Even with these restrictions, I, along with others like myself, would eventually find a way to somehow show our opinion in our photographs. In my case, the use of humor and mockery was the ideal way to portray politicians. I usually tried to catch them in their awkward moments and that is how I first experienced the taste of my work being censored.

Iran is notorious for being the biggest prison for journalists. Any journalist who works in Iran is constantly facing the threat of being arrested and prosecuted with the accusation of "perturbation of public opinion". Photojournalists are no exception. Working in this environment made me conscious about freedom of expression and having the hand of censorship over my lens (sometimes literally) made me sensitive to the violation of this foundational right. To witness injustice and not be able to address it is indeed a frustrating situation.

Iran is a theocracy, run by *sharia* (the Islamic law). By using religion, Iran's rulers (mostly clerics) reserve to themselves the right to interfere in every aspect of peoples' lives. It can be as broad as what should be taught in schools, to what clothes should be worn in public. Being brought up in such a society shaped my opinion against the evil that religion is capable of, and later encouraged me to look deeper into faith and religion.

Since moving to Canada in 2011, I have tried to make use of the freedoms I had been deprived of in my country of birth. For my projects, I try to focus on human rights issues and perhaps explore more about faith and religion. Consequently, my current ongoing photo project focuses on various individuals from the Iranian community living in Toronto, who have been forced to leave Iran to avoid prosecution. The most common reasons that these people are in this situation is because of their political and/or social activism, homosexuality, belonging to faiths other than the four legal religions (Islam, Christianity, Judaism and Zoroastrianism), accusations of blasphemy, and in some cases, apostasy. *Home...* is a photographic observation of the presence of nostalgic places, as memory

and images, in the lives of those among Iranian diaspora deprived of access to their homeland.

My obsession with these issues stems from the oppression I experienced in Iran that has made me a free speech absolutist. The horrors and the atrocities committed using religious texts and filling the minds of small children with religious propaganda (which by all means is child abuse) have turned me into a militant atheist, especially when it comes to limiting freedom of speech. I see this anger and rage as the result of years of not being able to express my own views, (however simple and in certain cases unimportant they were), as well as the result of living in constant fear. I feel like a freed and no longer muted prisoner who needs to kick the oppressor (persons and thoughts) in the face out of frustration. I consider art the best boot for the deed.

zandra alexander

Communication seems obvious enough. Any active member of society communicates hundreds of times a day. Everything from the clothes on your body, to your body language, to how you say and what you say communicates something to the world around you, whether you want it to or not. Therefore, aren't we all communicators? Without getting too grandiose, the answer is of course yes. So when you tell people (parents, guidance councilors, old family friends) that you intend to study communications, you'll likely receive a condescending pat on the head or at the very least a quizzical, somewhat worried look.

Even the most academic of communications scholars have difficulty defining the study of communications. When asked about why I chose to enter the field of communications, my stock answer used to be "well, it doesn't close any doors..." and while it earned a few laughs over the years, I think it's worth returning to, in a more serious fashion. Communications doesn't close any doors, and the longer I immerse myself in the field, the more doors I'm finding open. Thus far, my studies and study-based work experiences have led to the public sector, where I tried to make recent immigrants to Canada aware of free language support services; to the private sector, where I travelled across the country on behalf of a construction materials company meeting with end users to learn about their views on the products they used every day; and finally back to the realm of academia, where I find myself asking (again) what is communication, and what do we do with it?

I tend to gravitate towards a linear narrative structure where possible, so I should probably start at the beginning: childhood. I believe I had a somewhat unique childhood. My parents were older than the norm and both hailed from different parts of the world to where they settled. As a result, I was exposed to many cultures and lifestyles from a young age, often poking over a parent's shoulder snugly encased in a backpack. This commitment to travel and exploration is something I have come to treasure, particularly as I grow older and see friend after friend entranced by the siren song of job security and home ownership. But I digress. Travel has sparked a lifelong fascination with learning about how others live and how they interpret things based on their own experiences. I believe a large part of successful communication practice, professional or otherwise, is putting yourself in your audience's shoes, and trying to understand how they may interpret your message. This may seem obvious in the realms of advertising and marketing, but it is incredibly relevant for interpersonal relationships as well. An ill-chosen word can deeply wound an otherwise working relationship, whereas a well-chosen phrase can solidify

one. Your friend may be thrilled to hear that they are looking “svelte”, but would be decidedly less happy to be called “scrawny”.

Given this fear of inadvertently insulting my friends and fellow human beings, I increasingly find myself gravitating towards written communication. Simply put, the written form allows me to express thoughts and emotions in a well-measured (and editable!) way that verbal expression does not allow. Indeed, the process of speaking aloud and formulating a coherent thought simultaneously has proven to be both terrifying and frustrating. Maybe it’s the waiting eyes, or the fear of saying the wrong thing, or even the simple worry of being misunderstood; communicating verbally can be an emotional minefield. Why else would magazines dedicate articles in issue after issue, year after year to the best methods of speaking to the opposite sex? Why would romantic comedies and television sitcoms trot out tired storylines about characters’ inability to say what they mean or share how they feel? Because for a good number of us, an inability to effectively verbally communicate is an all-too real shared universal truth.

Conversely, writing is often seen as the safer of outlets. It removes the crippling pressure of being put on the spot, and replaces it with the ever-waiting blank page. The page does present its own set of challenges (writer’s block, rules of grammar, accountability), but with these challenges comes freedom of form, topic and most importantly awareness. Writing allows the author to disappear into the topic or character in an attempt to see the world from that perspective. I find it an almost addictive experience. More writing means more perspectives, each providing me with a new lens with which to view my own life and the world at large. However, writing is not merely a one-way experience. The more I write and force my often-short attention span to dig through the recesses of my brain, the more I’m confronted with memories, regrets and unresolved issues from my own life. The experience can be surprisingly cathartic, which is why I suppose I find myself returning to it, time after time. Of course, not all writing is self-indulgent and not all of it comes naturally. This very piece you’re reading comes as the result of many painful hours staring at a blinking cursor. It certainly felt like the literary equivalent of pulling teeth.

However, if I leave you with one final thought, I hope it is one of reflection and exploration. The world is filled with more fascinating people, places and experiences than any single person could hope to engage with in a lifetime. Writing, in all its many forms, allows you to delve into another world, enriching your own life and the lives of your audience, whomever they may be. In a nutshell, that

is why I’ve returned to the study of communications, and why I’ve chosen to earn a living writing in some capacity. I can think of precious few other fields that offer the promise of an unexplored world on a daily basis. So while I’m sure a more socially/parentally acceptable field would’ve been the path of least resistance, sometimes a little resistance is necessary for an emotionally richer life.

caitlin durlak

we tell ourselves stories

I left my house to walk down the street, and there they were. A mother looking disappointed, her two children searching with their heads up staring into the branches of nearby trees with tears in their eyes, and standing close by with bird cage in hand, their father. His worried expression caught my eye. The devastated Indian family shouted in differentiating patterns, "Pidgy, Pidgy...Pidgy come home." I felt as if I had stepped onto a film set: the cast in brightly colored robes and slippers, light sprinkling through the tree leaves, a Wes Anderson kooky narrative moment unfolding in front of me. Reality mimicked fiction, in that instant I had to second-guess what was fact. The duality existing between fact and fiction is separated by few differences. I came to documentary because of my love for fiction. When my father told me he had cancer, I didn't believe him at first. I was sure cancer only occurred in others' families, not ours. As fast as the pain of this new reality came sweeping into my gut, it was evident to me that stories I had been told are indeed fact not fiction.

Stories are told for many reasons. In my life they have been the passing down of family history, they have been the retelling of an incident in a friend's life, or a means for establishing relationships with new acquaintances. Stories help us to find truth in what has taken place. They establish personal history. Joan Didion titled a collection of her stories and essays, *We Tell Ourselves Stories in Order to Live*. Proof of our existence, telling becomes a means for understanding. I am building a practice which is based on examining life. By exposing the lives of others we learn more about ourselves. I am a storyteller.

I've always had a hard time expressing myself with words on paper. I began with a stills camera as a way of side stepping this problem. Often working with a series of images to form a narrative, I knew no other way of working. Yet after an undergraduate degree in fine arts, two journalist internships, a few years working in Canada's largest photo studio, and another year in a contemporary gallery, photography exhausted me; I hit a wall. I knew making images for billboards and consumerism was not for me. Nor was making work only for an audience comprised of other artists or art enthusiasts the route I was happy to take. So I picked up a video camera.

After my father passed away, we were given the task to sort through his many belongings. My dad was a collector. His habit of constantly adding hobbies and gadgets to his life meant many hours of sorting. A few gems came out of the grueling work. Any thing related to video or photo was given to me look through. In the bottom of a white plastic bag filled with old *Hi8* tapes was an emerald. I recognized my dated handwriting, I had found it! – my first film, my first documentary. At age eleven, my twin sister and I

picked up our family's camera, hit "Record," and toured through our grandparent's house knowing it would be our last time there. I gave direction from behind the camera, made in-camera edits, and even hosted segments of the exposé. Not yet a teenager I knew how video worked; the medium had rules I recognized.

With video comes sound, the moving image, a theater, and most importantly the possibility for a larger audience: the general public. I tell stories because of an audience. How they interact with my work is of utmost importance. In a theater there are no white walls, gallerist's staring eyes, or an implied sense of how to interact with the work. Its plush seats and dimmed lights limit distraction, allowing the viewer to have immersion in a subject. In the theater, the spectator is given the chance to become a participant in the story unfolding. In this controlled environment, which has a predetermined set of guidelines, the filmmaker is able to lean on existing structures or build new ones. Eighteen years after documenting Grandma and Grandpa's house, I am ready to make my own rules.

I find myself coming back time and time again to the same story. Each time different characters are involved, a new setting displayed, and each time the same tale told. I first learned this tale in a small two-bedroom apartment in downtown Toronto. Having moved back to the city after five years of elsewhere, I sublet the second room of my brother's apartment. It was available for three months, as his girlfriend was out of town for an artist residency, and her studio would not be needed. Two months early Katie returned, and I learned what it meant to be truly passionate about something. After a week of not being able to paint in the room I occupied, I witnessed her utter pain and uneasiness, her inability to create. Katie only felt whole if she could work. It was her passion for a profession, whose unclear path and obstacles are numerous, that impressed me. Repeatedly I try to tell the story of this passion, each time with hope to reach a better understanding of what it means to the human body and mind.

My passion is telling stories. Visualizing other's personal narratives, they become my own. Their facts become my fictions. We tell ourselves stories. We tell them. The words on these pages seek to establish a point of view. My point of view. Like stories, this view point is ever changing and is now yours to do with as you please. Let me tell you one thing about why we tell stories; if I knew the answer to this question, I'd stop telling.

simone estrin

An artist can show things that other people are terrified of expressing.

-Louise Bourgeois

I have always been driven by a desire to combine my creative instincts with promoting social change. I also strongly believe that art is the most effective way to communicate a message and facilitate social awareness. This belief was reinforced when I studied abroad in Leiden, Holland, while completing my undergraduate degree. In Europe, I was fortunate enough to travel to many cities, documenting my experiences with personal photographs and videos. The sensation I felt creating my own work in new environments while simultaneously visiting galleries and seeing great art made by great artists made me feel incredibly inspired. I knew from that point that I wanted to spend my time using that inspiration to create something meaningful that could hopefully inspire other people.

What drew me to documentary media was a specific exhibition still resonates with me today: Fritz Eschen's photographs entitled, *Berlin Under the Makeshift Roof*, that I saw at the C/O Berlin gallery in the summer of 2011. Eschen's photographs of Berlin, taken right after liberation in 1945, showed me how important it is to document moments that might have seemed inconsequential at the time but are now considered critical. It brought home to me how much documentary media can captivate audiences by transforming everyday events into artistic narratives.

Today, my inspiration comes from Albert and David Maysles and their films about Christo and Jeanne-Claude's artworks. The films, especially *Running Fence* (1978), reveal the possibility that a great film can influence art appreciators, and as well, any viewer who watches it. When the film was made, the Maysles were well-established documentarians, known for their *cinéma vérité* films ranging in subject matter from bible salesmen in *Salesman* (1968) to The Rolling Stones in *Gimme Shelter* (1970). With *Running Fence*, what the Maysles manage to capture on film is the idea that the fence could bring people together, rather than divide them, as fences normally do. The documentary today is just as relevant as it was more over thirty years ago.

Running Fence is about the temporality of art. This is brought home memorably by (my favourite character in any documentary), Mrs. George Nicholson, a local Californian homemaker who testifies in defense of *Running Fence*. She says powerfully, "Some of the meals I prepare aren't much — the rest of all of you can say that,

too — but sometimes I go to a lot of work to prepare a meal that I think is art. It's a masterpiece! And what happens? It gets eaten up and disappears and everybody forgets about it!" This statement comes from a woman who has no previous background with art installations like *Running Fence*, yet can appreciate the value in supporting it by relating it to her own experiences. There is no way that anybody could watch this film and not understand that art has a very important function in society.

Being passionate about art has fed my desire to create my own documentaries about art. I am in the process of creating a film about *Shift*, one of world-renowned American sculptor Richard Serra's earliest site-specific works. The story of *Shift* is remarkable: in 1970, when Serra was merely 31 years old, he began creating this monumental sculpture composed of six concrete walls that zigzag across a field in King City, Ontario. Today, *Shift* sits tucked away in this remote Canadian field, rarely visited by the King City community, let alone the international art world. Its magnificence lies in the way that it enhances the rolling landscape as it dips and rises, bringing to life the exceptional relationship between the art and the environment. Today *Shift* is at serious risk. A development company owns the land it sits on and, currently, plans to build homes around *Shift* are underway. My own documentary will focus on what Serra's minimalistic artwork means for the King City community and on a broader scale, the international art world. Questions about the role of art in public spaces will be addressed and the viewer will be left with an understanding of the importance of (and repercussions of not) protecting Serra's exceptional *Shift*.

Not only is it a remarkable art object, but what *Shift* represents is everything to me: it unites people from different social and economic backgrounds, it places emphasis on the environment, and it highlights the importance of people working together for change. The loss of *Shift* would not only be a tragedy for Canada, but it would speak to greater issues of urban sprawl and society's inability to cherish what I believe is its essential heartbeat: the arts. This is what inspires me and what I hope to give other people through my own work. And, if I can achieve this, then I can call myself a true artist.



jamie day fleck

how it all began...

I am an American-born Canadian artist. I was born in Florida and was raised in Toronto. I come from a family that is very involved in the arts: arts administration, arts philanthropy and arts production. This influenced me from an early age and I always had a creative streak if not a medium of choice. When I was 12 years old I discovered the camera in a pinhole photography class I took at my Middle School in a suburb of San Francisco, California. The bug had bit. The next year I sought to do a project where I photographed my friends in candid portraits. This never came to completion because I left the school mid-year.

Back in Toronto, I picked up the camera for real when I was given a fully manual Nikon FE. I photographed everything at my high school: drama headshots, the dances, the sports teams, the fashion department, even school administrators. While on a school trip to Italy to study Classics, I fueled my interest in photography as fine art. With my engineering career clearly falling apart when I nearly failed chemistry, I took a look at photography as a career.

I attended Parsons School of Design in New York for my Bachelor's in Photography. More than the rigor of the curriculum or the illustrious careers of the professors, the city itself became an inspiration. New York is the city of unending culture and frenetic creative energy. But aside from the buzz, I had a feeling of loneliness that was aching inside. With so many people, how can you connect on an intimate level?

Then 9/11 happened. And things changed. I can't say that it was the sole inspiration or catalyst but it was an unquestionable influence. I started on my now decade-long project, *Night Portraits*, which looked at the beauty and isolation of urban living. The project was about the city. It was about the people. It was about the environments. This project continues to fascinate me today as I strive to show it in a more experiential manner, collaborating with other artists and building it up to a massive multi-media experience. We don't experience life on a two-dimensional plane, so why should art be so flat?

It's always been about people and their environments. A person's home or workspace can say a lot about who they are and what interests them. What do they surround themselves with? It is very telling. People don't live their lives in a white box like a studio. And that has always been the challenge: how to picture people better. Not more truthfully, just better. I use my whole toolbox of photo techniques to represent the person inside my frame: colour, lighting, composition, focus, cropping. Each one contributes to the whole effect created by the image.

I am enjoying pushing the boundaries of my comfort level with my foray into documentary film. Film is the ultimate collaboration, the ultimate challenge because as the director I must get all the seemingly disparate elements of sound, visuals, music, editing to work together. It is a quite a trick. But I am always up for a challenge. So my film, *Photos by Kirk*, excites, thrills and scares me as I push forward with production.

I have always wanted to utilize a more multi-media approach in my creative process. Poetry is a long-term frustration and love affair as I search for the proper outlet and medium with which to pair it. Writing is a side passion to photography but I have never felt adept enough at it or been able to find a good public forum to introduce it to the world. I hope to be able to combine images and text as a way to bring my poetry into public consciousness, either as an exhibition or photography and poetry publication.

The work informs the work. I don't over conceptualize the idea or the media. I fit the media and the style to the concept rather than forcing my "style" onto the idea. I have to trust myself and my intuition. I know, rather than think, that I am doing the right thing creatively. And if the final piece communicates to an audience so they can understand it, then I feel I have completed something of significance. I need only enough technique in order to produce that effect and an excess of technique or forced appreciation of the medium can destroy the message that work carries.

So the future looks bright with possibilities and ideas. It is not a problem of what to create work about, it is a problem of time and resources to get my ideas carried out. And only history can say whether the work is important. I know it is important to me that I create it and that is what matters now. My goal is to work towards infinite simplicity and eventually arrive at the infinitely profound.



sarah foy

On February 3, 2013, I walked across the international border in Niagara, NY/Ontario and officially landed in Canada as a “permanent resident.” This marked the end of a multi-year process for me. The process involved countless calls and emails with lawyers, multiple drafts of more than 10 governmental forms, notarized letters from family and friends, hundreds of pages of documents (e.g., photographs, correspondence, bills, receipts, lists of everything I’ve done since I was 18 years old), and a medical exam. I even had to secure clearance from the FBI!

I went through this process because I am an American, and because in 2009, I fell in love with a non-American. United States federal law does not recognize same-sex marriage, and it does not allow U.S. citizens to sponsor their same-sex partners for permanent residence in the U.S. For my partner and me, this meant that our only viable option was to leave the U.S. when her student visa expired in 2012. We left our home, our community of friends and family, and our jobs and professional networks for the hope of finding a permanent home together. The journey inspired my Dad to write a song, already immortalized in family lore.

Excerpt from “Sarah’s March or Crossing Niagara”

*The law back home it ain’t no good
It’s trouble on my mind
I’ll find a place where love’s the law
And governments are kind
I’ll pack my kit and journey north
And leave that shit behind
Oh, yes! I am marching o'er Niagara ...*

My most recent project, *Families Unrecognized: Portraits of Same-Sex Binational Couples*, is a web-based documentary project that tells the stories of other same-sex binational couples. Canada, because of its friendly immigration laws, is a common destination for same-sex binational couples who have a connection with the U.S., and therefore, the focus of *Families Unrecognized* is on couples who have found refuge in Canada. The project asks various questions about the impact of gay-unfriendly legislation on the lives of these couples. For example: What strategies have they had to employ to stay together? What are the challenges they face on a day-to-day basis? How did they come to find refuge in Canada? What impact did their moves to Canada have on their lives? How will their lives change if the laws change? Will they decide to return to the U.S., or will they remain in Canada? The project raises questions of policy and politics, immigration, equality, and human rights.



This project has obvious personal significance to me, and it aligns with my professional interests and experience as well. In the U.S. I worked as a staff member on political campaigns through two presidential campaign cycles. I wanted to change the world for the better, and I believed in the power of the political system to create change. I view *Families Unrecognized* as an extension of this work. I recognize that some might consider this a somewhat old-fashioned point of view about the role and significance of documentary work, but nonetheless, I believe that good photography and good storytelling can lead to positive change in the world.

This project comes at an important time in the same-sex marriage debate in the U.S. On March 26-27, 2013, the U.S. Supreme Court heard two cases involving the rights of same-sex couples. A ruling in each case is expected in June 2013. These rulings may, or may not, affect the status of same-sex binational couples in the U.S. It also appears that the U.S. Congress and the White House are committed to prioritizing comprehensive immigration reform. Current drafts of the legislation include provisions for same-sex couples to sponsor their foreign-national partners for permanent residence. This means that there will be two pathways to win equality for same-sex binational couples – judicial and legislative. 2013 is a crucial year for each. For these reasons among others, the timing of this

project is critical. The struggle for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer rights is one of the final frontiers in the struggle for human rights in the U.S. This project aims to increase awareness about issues faced by same-sex binational couples at a key point in the legislative and judicial struggle for equality. The project lives, not in a book or in a gallery, but online. It has the potential to reach anyone with an Internet connection. It is important for this project to have the maximum reach possible. Many people in the U.S. do not realize same-sex binational couples have trouble finding ways to stay together in the U.S.; few understand that getting married in a state that permits same-sex marriage (for example, Massachusetts, where my partner and I lived prior to moving to Ontario) does not permit the U.S. citizen to sponsor his or her same-sex foreign-national spouse for permanent residence. This project aims to educate more people about the current law and the necessity of reform.

Finally, *Families Unrecognized* aims to tell a story about Canada's role as a haven for same-sex binational couples. Canada has some of the most gay-friendly legislation in the world, and Canada offers more pathways for legal immigration than many, if not all, other countries that recognize same-sex relationships. This means that many binational couples with, unlike my partner and me, no prior connection to Canada end up finding refuge in Canada. Through *Families Unrecognized: Portraits of Same-Sex Binational Couples*, I intend to tell part of this story.

Chorus from “Sarah’s March or Crossing Niagara”

*Hurrah! Hurrah!
I sing the jubilee
Hurrah! Hurrah!
Together we will be!
Oh Canada, oh Canada
I'll sing a song to thee
As I am marching o'er Niagara ...*

julie gemuend

Last January I paid a visit to Vulture City, Arizona, a crumbling ghost town nestled into the Sonoran Desert landscape. The settlement, which was established in 1866, was developed to meet the needs of the Vulture Mine, one of Arizona's most successful goldmines. The town population quickly rose to 5,000 residents, forming a notorious reputation for its many public hangings. This rise to fame came as swiftly as its fall, however, and in 1942 the War Production Board ordered the closing of all non-essential gold mines to ensure that resources were focused on the war effort. The closing of the mine determined the fate of Vulture City and the town was abandoned shortly thereafter. Today, the decaying buildings stand precariously in the dry heat, brittle and bleached phantoms of a Vulture City past.

It was here, within these abandoned confines (the schoolhouse, the brothel and the saloon) that I explored the life and death of the deserted town by producing a series of nude photographs. I had been using a camera to make images for over a decade; at least, I thought I was making images. The desert has a way of exposing truths and smoothing those truths over with new, purposeful realities. In this sandy biome, I came to the realization that these past 10 years I have been making images, yes, but more importantly, I have been making performances.

This new awareness yielded a set of photographs that hold more power and certainty than much of my previous work. Once I had established that the centre of my art-making was actually performance, I was able to harness the energy from this environment and channel that energy into my movement and my breath. Some months after my experience in the desert, I came across an instruction from performance artist Marina Abramovic that illuminated my discovery in Vulture City. Abramovic suggests that there is a direct, outside energy available to us all yet we can only gain access to this energy when we are in a heightened mental state. Abramovic claims that reductive activities such as fasting will deliver us to this state. I was not fasting when I uncovered my own awareness, but I was fully immersed in the subtractive environment of the desert, one of quietude and clean air. Abramovic calls the locations where one can achieve this mental state *places of power*.

Many artists, Georgia O'Keeffe and Ansel Adams among them, have gravitated to the desert, perhaps because of this reductive power. Land artists of the 1960s were also drawn to the deserts of North America because of this sense of awareness that I too felt. In a 1977 essay about her earthwork *Sun Tunnels* (located in the Great Basin Desert in Utah), Nancy Holt writes of the desire to bring the vast

space of the desert back to human scale, to connect people with the land, to bring the sky down to earth.

My desert experience resulted in a new method of working that resurrected my own connection to the land, to the space outside myself. My emphasis flipped from the static perspective of a photographer to a sensibility that was rich and fluid with motion. Each day I would lace up my dust-covered boots and set off into the desert. These morning walks took the form of a mild meditation, for the space was not merely one I traversed but an environment that awakened a sense of presence. This consciousness was possible because the desert (the origin of the word derives from the term 'deserted') is inherently sparse, allowing one to see miles in any direction. Performance art is a state of mind and these walks inwardly prepared me to enter a world that seemed outside the parameters of time and space. This is where I was able to foster a new understanding of my practice. Inside these broken buildings was an extension of the desert itself. The schoolhouse, for example, provided a private and concentrated space for thought, yet because the structure was in such a state of decay the desert light, air and dust could flow freely through the open windows and the caved-in ceilings.

I steadied my tripod on the warped floorboards and fastened my camera to the head. Undressing became a ritual, a slow and methodical release. There was then no barrier between my body and the space and I was open to respond to the environment: a dusty wall to press my damp body against, a hole in the floor to hide my limbs within, cascades of light to distort my figure. The camera worked continuously to capture these performances at 12-second intervals. When I look back at these images now, I remember the performances as endless dreams of perpetual motion, strange, unforgettable moments that unfurled in a place stalled between the past and the present.

This spontaneous, unplanned movement marked a new trajectory in my practice. Prior to my breakthrough in Vulture City, the images that I made were all preconceived, carefully constructed surreal photographs that were heavily edited in post-production to emphasize the element of the fantastic. The Vulture City nudes still retained a touch of the surreal, for my natural disposition has always reflected a dream-like quality. Yet these performances were not inventions. Tremendously important in my development as an artist, the performances were lived and felt in the world outside rather than the world within, a gap I had been trying to bridge for some time. The resulting

photographs are sharp, crisp documentations of these otherworldly experiences.

The origins of performance art have been traced to Russian Constructivists, Futurists and Dada artists, who, in the early twentieth century began experimenting with sound poetry. Performance art has, because of its intangible and ephemeral nature, been contested as a form of art since its inception. In this respect, performance art has experienced a struggle similar to that of photography. Both forms of artistic practice share a long history of rejection by the world of traditional arts such as painting, drawing, and sculpture. It would seem then, because of their reputations, that pairing photography and performance art together may precipitate a weak combination, yet many artists have proven this a successful match. The Italian performance artist Vanessa Beecroft stages large-scale performances where photographs and video recordings are made and exhibited as documentation as well as separate works of art. Marina Abramovic, who made history in 2010 as the first performance artist to receive a retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art, also makes photographs of her performances, which now sell for upwards of \$50,000.

Making photographs of a performance or constructing photographs that represent a performance transforms the ephemeral into the permanent. In order for performance art to be accepted into the art world a transformation must occur. As it is, performance art creates a fleeting experience. This is why photography plays such an integral role in preserving that experience. In her book, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag explains that photographs have the tendency to transform. In this context, photography legitimizes performance art as a concept worthy of art world attention. Photography immortalizes a moment in a performance, but it does not compromise the integrity of the original performance.

Performance art came to prominence in the 1960s. Though at the time it was not considered an art form (even today few performance artists are given the recognition they deserve), an increasing number of artists including Joseph Beuys, Yoko Ono, and Carolee Schneemann all forged new forms of expression. The rise of performance coincided with the second-wave feminist movement and many female artists were using performance art as a way to rebel against a patriarchal society. When I open my *Art and Feminism* book, published by Phaidon, the pages are laden with violent imagery of broken glass, cigarette burns in flesh and loaded guns, hostile and corrosive attempts to gain recognition as female artists. The efforts of these artists have opened up a new space for women

today. In performance art, the body is the medium, but the days of subjecting that body to abuse, aggression, and pain have been put to bed. The pioneers of feminist performance art carried and buried that cross. Their sacrifice has provided an opportunity for women to now make work that celebrates the body and the experience of the body in this world.

“Documentary” and “surreal” are oppositional terms, but I believe it is conceivable to place them in the same arena. There is a special quality about the surreal in art that exudes a curious humour, an ethereal lightness; and if the atmosphere is right, the surreal can emerge from real life. Nothing ever seems to die in the desert, not in the way that things die and disappear in the city. The saguaros topple over and the sun bakes their bodies into a colourless mesh of their former selves. But they do not cease to exist. They remain, hardened into the landscape. Vulture City may have been abandoned, but there is a sense of life suspended in the lullaby of the air, whispering wordless dreams and memories of an altogether different place and time. In this desert, in this deserted town, the surreal permeates the real. It is my place of power, a place where photography and performance, static and motion, documentary and imaginary all collapse into each other. In one week I'll return to Vulture City. I will make art about the strange beauty that exists inside and outside of me. I will be in the desert. And the desert will be in me.

liz gibson-degroote

As early as I was learning to recite the alphabet and tie my shoes, I also began learning the importance of controlling exactly what parts of myself I share with others, deciding carefully who is allowed to access which bits of truth.

Holiday mornings when extended family or friends were due to visit were a high-pressure panic to tidy the house into a new and foreign home, the Holiday Home – one that would suit the family we wanted to portray. Although we were a family whose coffee table was daily lost under piles of unread magazines and unopened mail, it was unreasonable to suppose we could show this to our guests. We weren't just tidying for the comfort of our loved ones. There was an unmistakable quality of shame that drove the urgency of this effort.

It's a common practice, I assume, and probably no one suffers much in the long-term from hiding their shameful lack of organization. But there are more significant narratives in our lives that we protect, as individuals and as families. Restrained by shame and the tenets of polite etiquette, we might conceal what we see as our failings, our tragedies, our struggles. We might deny our addiction, our disease, our poverty, or our scandal. And through our public silence, we isolate ourselves and propagate our own (and others') marginalization.

For as long as I can remember, I've felt dissatisfied with the level of authenticity in everyday communication. I've wanted to know a more profound experience of others than was typically offered, connect to people on a deeper level. My own life has felt defined by those things I couldn't or wouldn't speak about, my relation to the world suppressed under a weight of restraint.

Art offers a means of communication outside of our standard interaction protocol, beyond social expectations of etiquette or comfort. Art is a venue to temper our privacy, an alternate space that claims cultural permission to address the otherwise silent parts of our lives. It is a public channel where human connection is fostered, and the secrets we release are diffused of their damaging power. In art, we are exchanging and reframing our narratives.

Through consuming art I gain access to the immense variety of human experience. My own perspective is altered, and intellectual and emotional understanding of the human condition is enhanced. Creating art, I am able to speak those unexpressed parts of my life and myself. My drive to art is rooted in a universal longing of the human condition: to truly know and be known.



alexandra hill

So you study communications... how many languages do you speak? Do you work for Rogers? Bell? Can you help me to understand what my daughter/boss/husband is saying? What is "communications" anyway?

As a communications student I have answered all of these questions with varying degrees of success, the last one always posing the greatest challenge.

I have a variety of short answers, each providing an easy one-word synonym for a very broad field: "public relations," "media relations," "marketing" and I have mentioned each of these fields when describing my future career, but none of them exactly sum up what communications is. Perhaps I am providing these brief answers in part because I'm not sure how to define communications myself. What I do know is that, in numerous positions and in a wide variety of fields, I have never found any other type of work that is nearly as much fun.

You know that gut-churning, knot-in-your-stomach feeling that comes right before you take to the stage/podium/microphone? The thing that most people reportedly fear more than anything else in the world? I love that feeling. All of my life I have only been sure of one thing that I want in my future career: public speaking. And while many careers can provide these opportunities, and I have considered most of them, a student position in the Communications Branch of Yukon Wildfire Management was the one job that actually delivered. I woke up every morning wishing for a forest fire — the bigger the better. With the fires came the media, the questions and the scrutiny. I loved writing press releases and then waiting for the follow up; invitations to radio shows and requests for interviews. The public wanted to hear what I had to say and I loved speaking to them.

For all those that loathe and fear public speaking, there are many others, like me, who find it exhilarating — a rush of feeling that you want to achieve over and over, almost like an addiction. Actors, broadcast journalists, stand-up comedians and even politicians, are most likely that unique breed of person that thrives from standing in front of a crowd of strangers to speak, joke or perform and, in all cases, captivate a crowd with their words.

A great public speaker can evoke emotions like that of a great painter or musician, can incite a movement or quell an uprising. A great orator is an artist in his or her own right, with a talent for telling a story in a way that brings it to life, or making a speech that goes down in history. Martin Luther King, Susan B. Anthony, Barack Obama are just a few of the people who can be considered

great masters of this skill, and whose speeches are a big part of the reason that we will or do remember them. As a child, I idolized Peter Mansbridge, and whenever the opportunity came up to read a passage in class, I strove to deliver my words with the same steady, measured tone that I respected so much in him.

Until that position at Wildfire Management, I vacillated between journalism, politics, acting, anything that I thought would land me in the position to speak for a living and have people actually listen. Communications, it would seem, was the career I had been looking for.

However, that job turned out to be the pinnacle, the high point that I have been striving to return to in the five years since discovering communications. And one business degree and numerous co-ops later, I have yet to find another communication role as exciting or demanding. In fact, what I have found is a hodge-podge of jobs, listed under a familiar title but as varied as different types of pie: they look similar from the outside but contain very different ingredients. The realization that communications wouldn't lead me to a clear career path, like a doctor, lawyer or artist brought on bouts of confusion and regret at my apparently misguided career choice. A short time later, however, I found myself on the Ryerson University Graduate School website where reading an elective list featuring courses in "Advanced Speaking and Presentation Technology" and "Crisis Communications" had me convinced, yet again, that this was the right career choice for me, and the public speaking opportunities I coveted could be found within it.

I am now almost finished with the program that drew me back to the field of communications after nearly abandoning it for clear parameters and a job title that other people understood... hell, a job title that I understood. And it has turned out to be exactly what I want, but hasn't let me off the hook for questions about my future career. This is because it was here, for the first time, that the question of ethics was brought to my attention.

Looking back on the speakers that inspire me, I have realized that their greatest public speaking moments come from times of trial and tribulation. The opportunities to communicate a message that the audience is actually interested in often arose due to the fact that the public is embroiled in a conflict or challenge, and that conflict or challenge provides the opportunity to speak. Considering this, is my desire for the spotlight treading into ethically dubious ground? How can one really wake up each day, wishing for a forest fire and not see the error in that sentiment? For me, it isn't the desire to be part of the

action that inspires me to speak about it, rather my desire to speak has me seeking out the action, and that action is often born from a crisis. This is a problem that many communications professionals face, as the most exciting positions often toe an ethical line, from representing pipeline companies facing massive opposition to governments trying to quiet a movement.

This question was brought up recently to a guest speaker who had been working in the field of crisis communication for over 20 years. He didn't give us clear parameters or advice for making the ethical decision; instead he explained that everyone draws the line somewhere, and you just have to find yours. And bad things happen to all companies, not just the bad ones.

So while the old adage "communication is key" may continue to confuse people about the exact nature of my career path, these are also words to live by when considering a career in communications. Because when things happen, good or especially bad, the public often has to know and how you get that message out can make all the difference. When I was speaking about a fire for Wildfire Management, I knew that it was information that the public needed, so why shouldn't I be the one telling them?

While I may never be able to give a perfect definition of what exactly it is that I do, hopefully I'll be able to eventually say, "turn on your TV/read this article/listen to this radio clip... that is what I do."

fraser hogarth

half-truths and altered perspectives

Most people are subjective towards themselves and objective towards everyone else, sometimes frighteningly objective - but the task is precisely to be objective to themselves and subjective towards all others.

- Soren Kierkegaard

We met on a train ride from Toronto to Montreal. Seated across from one another, I tried to engage him with small talk. However, he seemed much more content staring out the window at the world as it rushed by. I was without reading material and this was back in 2003, years before the smartphone was invented so that we would never feel bored or disconnected again. As a devout extrovert, it was shortly after Kingston that the idle silence grew unbearable and I became determined to break the ice.

"So what is so interesting out that window anyway?" I quipped, struggling to comprehend how this person could find old barns and farmers' fields more interesting than the human being seated in front of him.

"Well it's kind of silly, I was just doing something I used to do as a kid. On road trips I would stare out the window and imagine a ninja, running next to the highway at superhuman speeds, hurdling over vehicles, signs and power lines as we drove by," he replied.

"Wow, you have quite the imagination," I said with surprise, recalling once doing something similar.

"Yeah, I moved schools a lot early on and found it difficult to make friends. I guess that's how I kept myself busy," he said while awkwardly fidgeting with his hands.

"I see. Well, would you like to know what the trick is to making new friends?" I asked. He nodded so I smirked and gave my answer.

"You have to be interested in people. Or at least be really good at pretending to be."

"Oh, I am interested in people; it just seems so hard to get to know an individual when you can never truly access their inner thoughts and motivations," he replied.

"Well, perhaps the other is ultimately unknowable, but if you take the time and truly listen you can get pretty close," I said.

We continued to share our inner most thoughts and feelings for the rest of the journey, content with knowing that in all likelihood we would never cross paths again.



"Merci! Voici est votre monnaie."

After thanking the cashier, I grabbed my coffee and exited the café onto Rue Ste. Catherine. As I approached the door to my apartment building, a young man came rushing around the corner and bumped into me spilling half of my coffee in the process.

"Oh I'm so sorry, I didn't see you there," he said while briskly walking away.

I cursed under my breath, and watched as he crossed the street and entered one of the many currency exchange services in the area. He seemed on edge and I noticed that his large winter coat was bulging irregularly, as if he was concealing something. I continued up the stairs to my 3rd floor apartment and sat down next to my window to enjoy what was left of my coffee. I let my mind wander while gazing at the endless flow of people and cars below. It's amazing how simply changing your viewpoint can give you a totally different perspective on things; patterns and connections emerge that you may never see up close.

Out of the corner of my eye I noticed the very same man who bumped into me walk across the street and enter a second currency exchange service.

"That's odd," I said to myself, while grabbing a pair of binoculars off the table.

I focused the optics while aiming them at the shop front. He pulled out two large stacks of cash from his jacket and handed them to the cashier.

"Now why would he need to exchange so much money at multiple places?" I pondered.

To my amazement he then exited and continued half a block east to a third cashier. Convinced I was witnessing some kind of criminal activity, I switched the binoculars for my camera with a 600mm telephoto lens mounted. I panned the camera around the street searching for him in the tiny viewfinder. However the field of view was so small that I kept losing him in the sea of people and cars.

Frustrated, I put the camera down and finished the rest of my coffee at my office desk.

I placed the camera into the waterproof housing, applied a smear of silicone grease to the main seal, and shut it tightly. Today was the final dive for our underwater photography course and we would be exploring the *Tracy*, a rag boat sunk in 80ft of water. My dive buddy had experienced ear issues on his last dive, so we would be taking things slowly today. When our boat reached the wreck site we went through our pre-dive safety checks.

"Are you going to remember your weight belt this time?" My dive buddy asked.

"Yeah, I won't be making that mistake again. How's your reg flowing?" I replied.

"Flow is good! Are you ready?"

And with that we gave our final OKs and plunged into the South Florida Atlantic.

I've always suffered from an extreme fear of heights. Perhaps that's why I took to diving, as you are always at a negative elevation and there is nowhere to fall. My buddy found my vertigo-inducing fear quite amusing and would tease me by pretending to push me over railings or ledges at every opportunity.

We let some air out of our buoyancy compensators and slowly descended towards the wreck. Scores of tropical fish darted in and out of the barnacle-encrusted hull as we approached with cameras in hand. When we entered the belly of the wreck, I noticed that my buddy was pointing to his left ear indicating that he was having trouble equalizing to the increasing water pressure. After a moment we exchanged OK signs and continued our penetration of the wreck. The sensation of hovering weightlessly while carefully approaching sea-life makes underwater photography a particularly Zen-like experience. The calmer your breathing and movements are, the easier it is to get close and enter their world. I suppose it is the same with photographing people too. While inside the wheelhouse of the ship, I spotted a green moray lurking in a small crevice in the floor. I gently fluttered my fins and inched towards it with my camera ready to grab a couple of shots. Suddenly I noticed that my buddy was swimming frantically towards an exit point of the ship. Sensing trouble, I hastily pursued. I managed to grab him by a fin and prevent him from making a rapid ascent for the surface which would mean risking decompression sickness. His breathing was rapid and his eyes were darting around unable to focus on me. He tried to communicate with hand gesture, but his signals were erratic and I could not interpret them. All I knew is that something was wrong and it was time to end the dive. I guided him towards the rope that anchored our dive boat to the wreck and we began a slow and methodical ascent.

When we reached the surface my dive buddy immediately vomited.

"Shit, I think I ruptured my ear drum. I was spinning like a top down there." He said relieved to have his head above water.

The vestibular canals are located in the middle ear and are responsible for your sense of balance. If cold water gets past the eardrum the effect is instantaneous vertigo. This dizzying spinning sensation can be so severe that you no longer know which way is up or down, an especially hazardous phenomena during a dive where panic can equal death.

Despite the danger we had narrowly avoided, we later had a good laugh at the fact that he could finally relate to my fear of heights. He never pretended to push me off a ledge again.

Perhaps his departure was inevitable. He was from a completely different world than ours but he was a good kid, respectful and trustworthy, so I never minded him dating my daughter or even living in our house. They seemed to

PERSONAL STATEMENT

be in love, at least in that teenaged sense when the novelty of experience and emotion overwhelms you. However his upper-middle class, private-school upbringing had rendered him naive to the harsh realities of the world, realities I had subjected my family to all too often. His naivety was disarming, and perhaps that's why I was comfortable letting him get so close that he was practically part of the family. And I don't let anyone get close. There is a reason why I sleep next to a loaded revolver.

I felt so much guilt that night the police raided our vacation home in the Bahamas. Even if you are not actively engaged in criminal activity, your past has a way of following you to the detriment of those you love. Early in the morning the Bahamian drug squad barged through the doors, sub-machine guns in hand. They handcuffed me, my wife, my daughter, and her boyfriend before lining us up against the wall. My family had been through this before when the RCMP busted me for conspiracy to import a very sizable amount hashish in the mid-90s, but this was a completely alien experience to my daughter's boyfriend.

This time the cops had the wrong man. They would find nothing, save for the remnants of a smoked joint or two in the ash tray, but that didn't stop them from subjecting all of us to the full extent of their legal process. They threw the four of us in the back of a black Suburban and drove to the police station for questioning. En route my daughter unleashed a tirade of verbal harassment and teenaged nagging upon the arresting officers. If there is any lesson she has learned from me it is a healthy contempt for the police. Her boyfriend sat there both dumbfounded and subtly amused at the situation he had suddenly found himself in. When it was his turn for interrogation, I was a little worried as I was unsure how he would react to the stress and pressure. He knew full well how I earned a living, but he also knew his rights and that complete silence was the appropriate course of action.

After our interrogations we were transferred to a jail in the courthouse basement to await our hearing with the judge. We were separated and locked into separate cells. The air was thick with moisture and the smell of urine, and rats would occasionally scurry by the decaying concrete walls. The other Bahamian prisoners were clearly amused at the presence of a jailed white family, and their responses ranged from benign jokes at our expense to the suggestion of impending physical violence. There we waited for several hours and my thoughts drifted from guilt over my sordid past subjecting my family to this, to how much better the prison conditions were back in Canada at Millhaven penitentiary.

In the end they were able to produce no evidence for their

suspected drug importation scheme and I was ordered to pay a fine for the small amount of marijuana they found in the apartment. Shortly after this incident things began to unravel between my daughter and her boyfriend and within a week he was on a plane north to move back in with his family.

All I knew was that I had to leave. I was listless, without direction and whatever I was searching for could not be found in the familiarity of home. So I sold my car and purchased a one-way ticket to Thailand. I had a job lined up at a university 150km south by southeast of Bangkok which would provide food and shelter once I arrived - ironic given my status as a recent university dropout. That job lasted about a month before the rigid structure and academic environment became unbearable. My anxious wanderlust grew, and I simply had to venture out and explore.

I was 20 years old and would be alone in a strange and beautiful country until my savings ran out. Over the next three months there would be no agendas or plans, just constant movement through space and time and openness to new experience. It sounds cliché, but in hindsight I realized that I had been in an existential crisis, and I had to be both alone and far away from everyone and everything I knew in order to find myself.

I hopped on a bus north by northwest back to Bangkok. It is amazing how a city can be so chaotic and avoid imploding and grinding to a halt. Beneath the surface there must be a hidden and beautiful logic which keeps the wheels of life and society spinning. I don't think any one person could ever hope to truly understand something so complex, but sometimes for just a moment its mysteries reveal themselves and to behold it is wondrous. After a week of wandering through the maze-like of streets of Bangkok I was ready for a change of scenery, so I decided the next direction I would head was north.

I purchased a second-class ticket for an overnight train ride to Chiang Mai. It was Christmas Eve, and it would prove to be the strangest one I've ever had. It quickly became apparent that the air conditioning unit in my passenger car was malfunctioning making it unbearably cold. Unable to sleep, I spent the entire night in the dining car getting magnificently drunk with a uniformed police man, a gentleman with one eye, and a stewardess wearing a Santa hat. Despite the inebriation and language barrier we managed to play poker for countless hours. By the time the sun was rising on Christmas morning the stewardess and I were stumbling between the train cars while singing slurred

renditions of Christmas carols to the sleepy and bewildered passengers.

The following day when the hangover had mercifully departed, I was ready to continue my explorations. From Chiang Mai I rented a motorcycle and spent weeks biking through the sublimely beautiful mountainous countryside of Northwest Thailand. I spent a lot of time in remote villages that tourists seldom visit, places where people work very hard for very little, and yet they are happy with what they have and to have each other. How is it that so many people, myself included, could have so much and take it for granted?

In much of the country ornate Buddhist temples dot the landscape, and on a particular occasion I decided to enter one and sit. After 20 minutes of quiet reflection I was approached by a monk dressed in flowing ochre coloured robes. In perfect English he asked if I would like to join him for tea, and of course I obliged. I followed him to a bamboo hut and over tea we spent a couple of hours discussing the nature of life, sitting in silence, and sweeping his hut. His words were loaded with wisdom but free of judgement, and I couldn't help but feel I was in the presence of someone who was truly enlightened. The experience was profound and something changed in me that day. I began to realize that for the last few years I had been running away from myself, always seeking something more and never being content to simply exist within the present moment. The moment is all there is, everything else is uncertain. Even the past is in flux as it is filtered through imperfect memory and new experiences. I would have many more memorable experiences wandering around Thailand over the next couple months, both good and bad. But when I got home I was filled with renewed purpose and interest in life, gratitude for what I had and to those around me, and the desire to seek out the moment.

jordan kawai

"As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect...what has happened to me? he thought."

I have always felt a strange connection to Kafka's *Metamorphosis*. Never have I been the sole breadwinner of my family nor have I ever been a salesman, or sprouted numerous legs for that matter. But I do feel alive inside both Gregor and this style of storytelling.

I will not argue that becoming a storyteller was a sudden transformation; rather, I will say it was a realization. The occurrence may not have been as cinematic as pupation or as grandiose as the acquiring of an exoskeleton, but my acceptance of this sudden realization followed Gregor's subtle reaction exactly.

Having begun my undergraduate studies in economics with a keen interest in business, it always confuses my conversation partners when I tell them I switched from a world of numbers and graphs to a world of images, stories and creative narrative. However, like Gregor and the various guests of the Samsa household, this switch was most strangely accepted, without question, discussion, or thought, as if it was expected to have happened. The process itself was even the same dream and all. I fell asleep one evening, mid-semester of my second year in economics, and dreamt I was the chief cameraman on a shoot in the Himalayas capturing the rare hunting patterns of the snow leopard. Then woke up, realized I was meant to be creating non-fiction films, questioned it once, accepted it fully and realized I was late for work.

To say it was a sudden experience may not be entirely true. Although my course load truthfully changed overnight from macroeconomics and calculus to history of cinema and video production, a passion for artistic creation have always been a part of me.

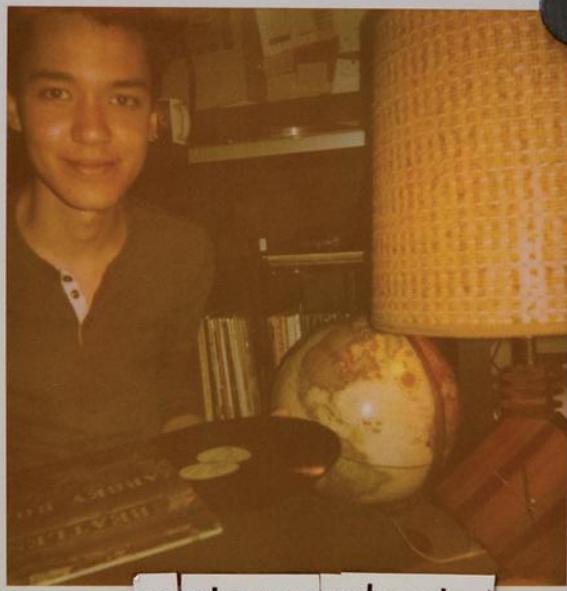
Music and storytelling have always been major players in my life. My fascination with music was my entrance into the world of art when I first got my hands on a Fender Stratocaster. I was overwhelmed by the musical potential of a simple apparatus of six strings, magnetics and an amplifier. The fascination with rock music took its course as I'm told it normally does: exhausting three chords and a couple of basic melodies in an unimaginable number of 'originals'. My listening tastes began to change, as did my own compositions. Influenced by the power of simplicity, works by such composers as Philip Glass and instrumental post-rock group Explosions in the Sky, directed my attention to the idea of minimalism.

At first I shied away from the use of the word minimalism, in fear I was using it improperly and that true academics or the well-read would cringe because of my inaccurate perception of its meaning. But as the years went on, this term that shall not be named became what I secretly felt was at the core of all my creative works. Soon I began to feel more comfortable with associating my work with this term, as long as I could develop my own definition of what minimalism meant. Quite simply (no pun intended), when I produce a musical or filmic work I aspire to use only the necessary tools or components while encouraging blending and dynamic. The back to basics process is meant to be raw, simple and organic, but I welcome any complex result.

As a musician the adoption of minimalism was a simple reference to the already established and recognized genre of minimalist composers. In the world of film, and more specifically, documentary film, a minimalist approach is harder to illustrate. I have recently regarded cinema verité as my personal adoption of a minimalist documentarian approach to filmmaking. Although I would not suggest that cinema verité is in itself a form of minimalism, the process of producing such a film resonates with me for its single priority of expressing a basic emotion or experience with a reduced use of the elements of representation.

The art of showing versus telling in verité film means keeping the visual expression in the single voice of observation, and allowing for one clip to harmonize with another after another. Like minimalist music's use of consonant harmony and repeated phrases and motifs, verité excels without the presence of narration, and benefits from the observational clips from the film harmonizing and building off of other observational clips, while avoiding any potential dissonance with a juxtaposed voice of god.

The form of my filmmaking has been revealed by my growing relationship with music, but of equal importance is the content of my work that has been shaped by my relationship with my grandfather. As a Japanese-Canadian and a natural storyteller, my grandfather always shared stories of the importance of community and relationships during his time in a Japanese internment camp in western Canada. He spoke passionately and strongly about what it meant to be a Japanese-Canadian after the war. This fueled my passion to illuminate the stories of voices unheard. In spirit of the small things that make a big change in our lives, it is in Robert M. Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* that I find a way of illustrating what minimalism, cinema verité and the importance and



beauty of voices of the lesser-heard mean to me, through the metaphor of driving a motorcycle on a backcountry road:

On a cycle the frame is gone. You're completely in contact with it all. You're in the scene, not just watching it anymore, and the sense of presence is overwhelming...Secondary roads are preferred...where people look from their porches to see who it is, where when you stop and ask directions or information the answer tends to be longer than you want rather than short...these roads are truly different from the main ones.

I feel most alive when I hear a good story. The complexities of an experience told are what takes us to places real or made up and leaves room for us to get lost. The way I see

it is: the more stories there are in the world, the more chances there is to be part of something, and I want to be part of it all. Like Gregor, I choose not to get wrapped-up in metamorphosis because the absurdity of life is fast-moving, with giant changes and, at the end of the day, it is the small thoughts, the minute details, that illuminate the wonder in it all.

michael kim

It was the experience of going out in the middle of the night with an old camera my father had purchased in Japan in the '70s that opened up a new world of art-making. I spent hours taking pictures of the silent, empty city and was captivated when I watched the photographs come alive in the darkroom the following day. The process of making contact sheets was a thoroughly invigorating experience. It was fascinating and near-magical to watch the images appear in the developing tray. I loved having the ability to manipulate tones, shadows, and highlights immediately. Unlike painting, this was excellent for someone, like myself, who wanted quick results.

Edward Weston was a huge influence for me when I first got into photography at the age of seventeen. When I stumbled across his still life photography, it was something I had never encountered and I was excited to try it myself. The objects he photographed were familiar, everyday objects, such as vegetables and fruits, but he somehow found a way to bring out their beauty. He isolated, enlarged and sliced these objects to reveal patterns and irregularities in nature. His use of lighting to highlight the subjects and manipulation of negative space, tones, and lines, all came together in the 8 x 10 contact print format. Some artists find still life dull and unimaginative; however, I see it quite differently. Still life gives freedom to the artist to compose and design the subject within the frame, unlike landscape or portraiture. It is a process of creating a perfect composition of both the isolated subject and the subject within the frame. It takes a tremendous amount of attention to detail: you must be able to manipulate the subject you are working with and be able to use light to create drama in the photo. In the commercial industry, I see still life as a constructed reality as many of these objects do not appear the same in real life.

While studying photography at Ryerson University, I had many opportunities to experiment. However, I found myself drawn to still life once again. It eventually led me to commercial photography, which I found attractive as it provided new and exciting challenges. Observing and studying the effects of nature and recreating these in the studio was a fascinating process. For example, real condensation begins to form with fog on glass that becomes mist, which builds sweat and water droplets. Recreating these different stages of effects of nature was quite challenging, but when it looked just as good or better than natural condensation, it delivered a sense of achievement. I used a combination of water and glycerin to spray the glass for mist and added additional sprays of this mixture so it accumulated and formed into beads of water. Also, being able to control placement or the size and shape of these water droplets gave me a sense of power as I cannot

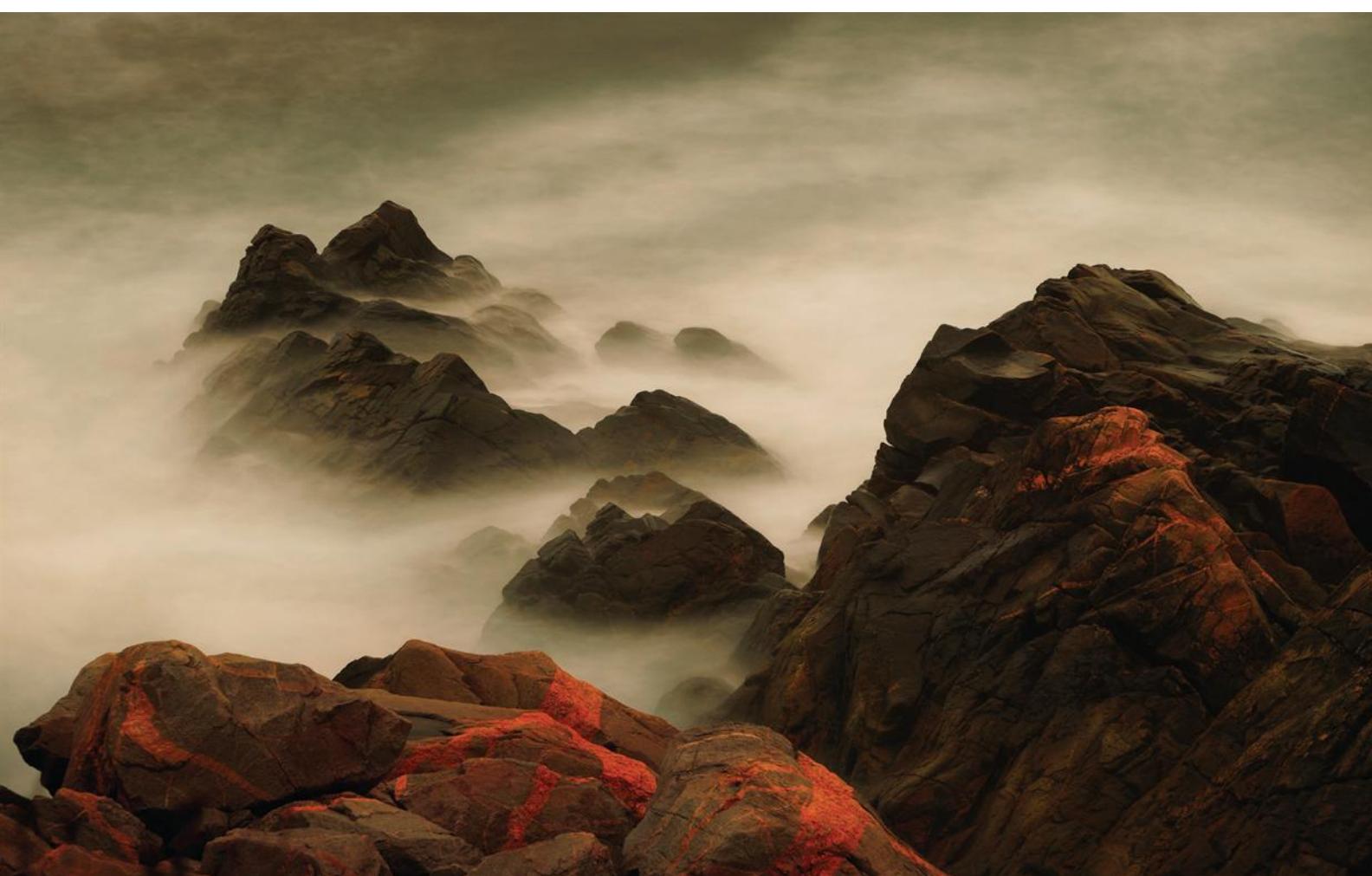
control these elements in nature. As much as re-creating special effects in the studio, I truly enjoyed working with different art directors and being able to collaborate to create the best visual language for each project. When our ads were published in magazines, bus shelters, and billboards there was immense satisfaction, as I know I had an input in that communication process. After all, advertising is about communicating and changing the perception of feelings and experiences.

After two years of working as an assistant photographer and four years of freelancing as a commercial photographer, I came to the realization that commercial photography was beginning to negatively affect my creativity. I was losing my ability to express myself and create something new. There was no expression and little intuition involved in commercial photography. Though I liked being involved in creating a polished ad for a client, I gave all credit to the creative art directors and writers who came up with the concept. My creativity within the project was limited to figuring out how to photograph in a certain style or to execute the idea for the art directors through my technical skills in the studio. Even though I was receiving credit as the photographer on set, I was feeling distant from the title of "photographer" and my original goal of becoming an artist.

Projects for a client always had a tight timeline. It became all about creating something in a short amount of time for the sake of branding and imaging. Sometimes the final product was great in the view of the art directors, but would be rejected by the clients even though it was finalized and ready to go to print. At the end of the day, the clients had to be satisfied even though the art directors and I disagreed with their final decision. I felt I had no control of my medium in terms of what I wanted to do with my subjects.

The biggest difference with my own personal work is that there is no time constraint. I have all the time in the world to come up with a concept and experiment with how I would create that concept on film. Furthermore, I do not have to adhere strictly to the rules for color or language. I could walk around the house looking at everyday objects and come up with ideas to play with that fitted my own vision. Having the freedom to express and explore ideas rather than being restricted and confined by the boundaries of commercial photography distinguished my personal work from assigned work.

As I was dissatisfied with the commercial industry and myself as an artist, I took a hiatus from photography in 2011. I had lost my passion and drive to pick up my camera and was no longer sure of myself or what to make



PERSONAL STATEMENT

of this medium that felt unfamiliar. I had lost the eye to see things differently and my creativity was suffering. I decided that the only way to regain control over my medium was to take a completely different route with my photography. I took off on a road trip to the east coast in May 2011, spending most of my time in the parks and conservation areas rather than the cities that dotted my journey. Hiking the trails of Cape Breton Highlands National Park, I started to let go of unnecessary thoughts and threw myself into nature and the world around me. After several days of being completely alone in nature, it brought new thoughts and ideas and perceptions that I had never thought about before. It was an opportunity for me to let go of past experiences and reconnect with the natural beauty of my surroundings. I began to appreciate every small thing I came across. For the rest of the trip, I spent hour after hour photographing nature and started to come to the realization that *less was more*. I realized that I needed to start following my instincts and allowing myself to be inspired by the “banal” and “mundane” things that shaped Edward Weston’s work.

It was a turning point for me. It was an opportunity for me to explore and get back into creative art-making. At first it was a challenge to have so much freedom again as it felt almost burdensome. I did not know where to start, what to photograph, or how to be creative again but the trip allowed me to enjoy the freedom and take the time needed to wait for that moment to come organically. Slowly, I began to “look” again and redevelop the “eye” needed to see things differently.

In retrospect, I have gone through many transitions with my photography. My first fully manual camera, passed on from my father, can be seen as my first experience in photography. Every photograph was carefully composed and every adjustment on the camera was made with careful thought and consideration. However, as I upgraded to more sophisticated cameras, it was indeed faster and more efficient, but having the function of shooting in automatic mode drew me away from being more thoughtful when taking photographs. In the commercial industry, I switched to a fully digital camera which provided instant results and gave me the opportunity to retouch the images in Photoshop. I found myself pressing the shutter more than ever which just felt like thoughtless acts of photography. I plan to figuratively return to that old ‘70s manual camera that I started with long ago. Though I will not be physically using the manual camera, I want to start shooting like I am — considering every exposure and composition before I commit to the shutter button. Every frame has to be taken with care, thinking about what to include and what not to exclude.

Remembering that *less is more*, I need to return to the basics of photography and being more precise with my vision.

I cannot confidently say that I am fully free. It will always be a struggle to be creative and to challenge myself. However, I plan to commit to the lifelong practice of searching, observing, listening and presenting my artwork in a way that connects with my viewers.

jennifer lee

on writing and the use of language

I don't think there has ever been a time when I stopped writing altogether. It has always been with me, a little outlet, an excuse to put pen to paper, a time for contemplation and self-reflection. I first started writing when my dad bought me a small pocketbook purchased at a friend's corner store in Chinatown. I brought the pocketbook wherever I went, the blue-patterned silk cover bent oddly out-of-shape after numerous trips to elementary school and back, jostling around in the side pocket of my jean jacket. I also had a small pencil, a short Snoopy pencil, which I kept in the right pocket of my jeans. Sometimes I wrote down little descriptions of places I've gone to or things that I've seen. My grade-two handwritten print filled two lines per page.

When I turned 19, I took an expressive writing course at the University of Toronto. During my first day of class, I sat and listened and took absolutely no notes – a contrast to my chemistry and calculus courses, where I sometimes wrote to the point that my hand felt numb. In this class, I felt completely at ease listening to the professor talk about writing styles, forms and why we write. Then I went home and wrote a story from beginning to end.

It was also the first time that I realized writing is not just about writing. It's about listening. It's about learning from others and listening to yourself, producing your own style and asking yourself why you chose to write a phrase a certain way.

Whether we do it consciously or subconsciously, the use of language can tell us a lot about ourselves, our intentions, our needs. It's not surprising that there have been many books written about therapeutic writing. Psychiatrists have used therapeutic writing to help trauma patients, whether it's post-war trauma or someone going through physical or mental health difficulties. An article in the Observer (July 22, 2002) shows that therapeutic writing "...has been shown to boost the immune system.... There are no side-effects and it is available to anyone of any age, pretty much anywhere." A very close friend of mine, a physiotherapist, uses it to counsel her patients. Her patients, usually suffering from arthritis, multiple sclerosis or mobility issues following an accident, oftentimes develop symptoms of depression or anxiety. Their daily journals, written in the first person, tap into their concerns and also provides a outlet for their inner feelings and concerns that they may not share with a family member or close friend. The most natural form of writing is first-person narrative. By using the first-person, we have ownership of our feelings; we are the dominant writer. It builds confidence for these patients. They feel empowered by their own words and creative use

of language, while reflecting on their own thoughts and emotions.

I am also very interested in how we use language subconsciously and how it develops in a child. The other day, my three-year old son ran into the kitchen and said, "Mommy, the lamp has fallen." I looked at our sad IKEA lamp, tilted upside down. The base leaned against the couch, the light bulb pressed the crumpled paper lamp shade against the floor.

"What happened?" I asked.

"I donnow," said my son, the tone of his voice rose up at the end of the sentence. I went over and placed the lamp upright, smoothing the paper lampshade with my palm.

"Did you push the lamp over?"

He looked down at the ground, circling the carpet with his big toe, and in a soft, muffled voice, said, "Yes."

Of course, I didn't get mad at my son. He's only three and accidents happen. But what fascinated me was his natural use of the passive voice. Brendon somehow subconsciously used the passive voice to deny ownership. He was afraid I would get mad if I found out that he pushed the lamp over. So instead of saying, "I pushed the lamp over," he said, "The lamp has fallen." It's interesting how, at such a young age, he already knows how to use the passive voice subconsciously. Language holds so much psychological meaning that, as much as we learn the active and passive voice in school, it's already in us. In fact, a three-year-old has already unraveled it.

At night, I read books about dinosaurs and trucks to my son. Then I put the books away and we tell our own stories. This is my favourite time of the day. Sometimes we are drifting on a boat, looking at the moon in a starless sky. In reality, it's the streetlamp reflected against his bedroom ceiling. Other times, we are camping under the sheets, whispering, so as not to wake the great bear from his slumber (dad in the next room). For my son, it's a chance to use his imagination, to creatively apply what he has learned from listening to the stories he hears in school and at home. It doesn't surprise me that there's a flying dinosaur or a rusty old truck nearby. For me, it's a moment to bond with my son, to learn how he thinks and to help him stretch his abilities and apply what he has learned to another situation.

Storytelling is the earliest form of education. My grandmother, with only an elementary school education,

can weave tales about her experiences growing up in Shanghai in the midst of the First World War. Her stories kept my brother and I listening intently until two in the morning. Storytelling cuts through cultures and class status, it brings together writing and listening.

The store in Chinatown, where my dad bought me my first pocketbook, has since turned into a hair salon and now an organic sandwich bar. I still have the pocketbook, tucked away in the basement somewhere, which I hope to pass to my son. Maybe one day, he will write his own stories of flying dinosaurs and rusty old trucks.

nadia marzouk

We realized that the important thing was not the film itself but that which the film provoked.

—Fernando Solanas

When sitting down to define myself as an artist, I could not help but go blank although I have always had a thorough understanding of what I hope my work can do for those experiencing it and why I am making it. I am still in the process of grounding myself as an artist and it feels like a title I am not yet a hundred percent worthy of. So, I will tell you what I stand for, and about the artist I hope to become in the coming years.

“Reality” and the elasticity of this term has always fascinated me. It is one that is completely open to interpretation, forever changing and dependent on perspective – so in other words, one can repeatedly question what it is. That, in a nutshell, is the core of my inspiration. With that in mind, it is easy to remember that possibilities are endless. My works in the past have been fairly straightforward activist motivated films that expose audiences to a people, or situation in the most honest light I can offer them. For me, honesty becomes the definition of reality. There is not one film I have made that does not have a counter opinion that is just as valid as the one I documented and that is something I wholeheartedly welcome. When thinking of the similarities in my work to date, it is clear, I am driven by who and what I find needs a voice because of being underexposed or misunderstood through a specific aesthetic approach. Consequently, I have underlying messages I aim to express, although these messages are never solidified until my subjects expose them. Should subjects never express the messages I had in mind, they do not surface in any of the work.

A common theme in my work is to focus on various types of oppression (political, social, emotional) and the counter solutions people believe may work towards abolishing it. I do not want to bombard an audience with problems, issues, injustices or any strand of darkness without offering a potential route that will turn that darkness into light. In the last decade, the world has experienced an attack I have witnessed for the first time in my life, and its height, lets hope, has hit the us in the last two or so years. Of course, this is not the first, and it would be too utopian to say the last. Additionally, some feel it first hand more so than others, depending on their location and interest in the happenings around the world. I am referring to the following: the Middle East being in the midst of a complete identity change, the unrest in Latin America, and the United States economy keeping the world on edge, to name a few. With the globalization

of the world as we know it and the birth and excess of instant communication, the issues across the world from ones community are in almost all cases, interconnected. Globalization has led to a shared responsibility to keep this world moral. There is no doubt that there is content that needs to be documented and mass media is not going to do it any justice. Only through exposure to the core issues through the people, for the people can this attack be controlled. My contribution to gratifying them is mostly with my camera in hand and a collective voice that expresses and reveals as much as possible while seeking a solution.

My aesthetic approach is still in the midst of taking its true shape. I hope to work with experimental visuals more in my future work. During my undergraduate education in film, I dove into the realm of video art extensively and still love the endless possibilities and interpretations it offers. As the years have gone on, my fascination with “reality” has led me more into the standard documentary world. But as mentioned above, given my belief that reality is not universal, video art offers an approach in which I do not need to show my audience how it is with literal images but rather can use flashes of color and abstract visuals to create a feeling that is inline with the tone and emotion of my subjects/topic.

I choose to work with video because I find it has the ability to record a reality that may never be accurately observed in the time period in which it happens ever again. Both sound, moving and still images are rich in their own ways and able at times to paint a complete picture individually. With video you have the option to use all of them simultaneously, or in different combinations to create the most effective moment. Photography for example is a medium I have a great deal of love for, but for documentary purposes I find video offers more to work with enabling me to document more successfully. I am not trying to tell you a story and leave it at that. I am telling you what is happening next door through the voice of your neighbor and how to make it better. I do not just “document.” My objective is to educate by summarizing complete events. The activist in me drives my work, yet the activist in you may disagree with my motives and beliefs and once the conversation begins, the first level of my impact has been conquered!

There is a thin line between an activist’s film and a documentarian’s film, and I tend to play with that quite a bit. An example of this is my last film, *Egyptian Expression – Post Mubarak*. In this film, I explored the freedom of speech and content artists in Egypt were for the first time in decades, arguably history, able to play

with as a result of the revolution and the thirty-year dictatorship of Mubarak’s regime stepping down. I have spoken a great deal about my activist core and its role in my filmmaking, but it is important to state that it is what drives me, yet not solely in the “politically” way that appears on the exterior of this world. Everything we know and feel has been socialized. Those socializing this world from a high level are politicians, and corporations and so in that regard, everything is politically impacted, and I am quite the anti-politician! Our emotions, interactions with other, and ideas of happiness have become polluted on the surface and it is important to always keep people digging deeper within themselves to know what is true and just. Experimental documentary media more than any other genre can lead audiences to do that.

Regardless of the fact that the presence of the camera alters situations, some more so than others, I thrive to make it as invisible as possible when shooting. The audience needs not agree with the content of my film, but if their emotion is altered in some shape or I have managed to initiate a dialogue, I feel like I have done something right.

These battles may appear to be very personal at times, but the greater cause of the issues and the journeys of revealing them turn into the guts of my work. I believe that aspects of our existence are relatable to others who have a completely different reality, but they may not see it if it is not presented in a light that emphasizes the core of the occurrence. Everything comes down to one of the very few things. These include happiness, sadness, suffering, contentment, fulfillment, or the lack of it, betrayal, or a right of passage to name a few. I can only hope that as my filmmaking progresses that my work will motivate audiences to be more aware of something they were not or chose to ignore prior to viewing. Part of me will forever be a dreamer, and I suppose my motives and goals are reflective of that. Life and dreams are not that far from one another anyhow, for all we know, the dreams could be real and our lives, as we know them, the dreams.

natasa nuhanovic

In my own life, circumstances forced me to learn different languages in order to survive, but still I felt like I was not really communicating with others at that more meaningful level of understanding. So I began by trying to understand my own story better. I felt that perhaps by doing that, I could better understand other people's stories and connect with them through a language that cannot be so easily taken away or misunderstood. I suppose writing poetry was my first attempt to arrive at that language of understanding, and then I turned to film.

I was born on April 3, 1984 in Zagreb, Croatia. We lived on the 10th floor of a building until I reached the age of eight. One of my first memories is when I decided to walk down and up the stairs, and I wanted to do it alone. It intrigued me to look at and read the writings on the walls, find things like crumpled pieces of paper on the floor or threads from someone's shirt or pocket. I do not think I made up stories of their lives, as much as I focused on the emotion and the mood it evoked in me.

And then: the war. I didn't experience much except not going to school and hearing bombs in the far distance. At that time, everything was quieter than usual, as the beginning of the war usually seems, because suddenly, you notice everything you never noticed before. Then, it gets too loud. That was when we left for Germany in 1994. Here, I refused to speak for almost a year as I felt that I had lost my language. I spent my time in the woods thinking about the house we lived in and how it helped a Jewish

family survive the Holocaust. This felt more interesting to me than sitting in the classroom. And then: the “end” of the war. We had to leave Germany since unlike other European countries, Germany was sending people back home once the war ended. So we came to Canada. I lost my language again.

When your every-day life crumbles before you as a little child, and you see people you love changed or separated by war; when you see the incredible horror the human being is capable of, yet also the incredible strength there is in the human being to still hold on to love and compassion, you are faced with a choice: to harbour this pain or to somehow transform it into something that can have a positive effect, even if it is a small one. I feel that everything that I create, even if it is not directly linked thematically, stems from the latter very strong impulse.

As far as my aesthetic, I am interested in portraying atmosphere and emotion more than delivering facts and objective information. My own experience of the world has been one where I feel I am constantly moving between the real and the imagination. It is this space of the surreal that, for me, has come to define reality more than anything else that I feel will be a big part of anything that I create, even though I do also believe in a part of reality that is objective.

bindu shah

From the age of eight, I knew I wanted to dance. Everything about Indian dance fascinated me: the costumes, the music, the rhythm, the intricacy and the attention. I started learning it from one of the few teachers teaching dance in the 60's in Nairobi — my birthplace. As my passion for dance grew, so did my parents' rejection of it. There was a stigma attached to dance. In India, this was a time when it was thought of as a dance of the courtesans and girls from respectable families couldn't be associated with it. I had to stop taking dance classes.

When I was ten, my sister returned from the UK after completing her degree in Literature. The Western world liberated her way of thinking to the point that she became a misfit in our close-knit community. She encouraged me to dance and wanted me to do everything that she did not have an opportunity to do when she was growing up. She defied my parents' instructions by taking me out with her and taking me to my dance classes. We did not return until my classes ended, so that they would not find out!

After a few years, my parents succumbed to letting me dance. My dad rather enjoyed coming to my performances, but my mum was not interested. As long as she was apathetic and not controlling, it didn't bother me.

Dance is a unique art form that encompasses the mind, body and spirit. It is an art form that requires you to focus on all parts of the body to create intricate rhythmic patterns in sync with each part. Indian classical dance consists of three genres: pure dance, expressive dance and dramatic dance. These allow the dancer to use body gestures to tell stories through expression. On a personal level, it has been a form of meditation and was instrumental for my spiritual growth. It has helped me stay grounded during challenging times. The dances I learned were mostly from Hindu Mythology accompanied by traditional music and song. Having this sound knowledge of the dance vocabulary, I was able to create and choreograph new and experimental works, which allowed me to express myself creatively as an artist.

Over the years, my studies took me to the UK and back to Nairobi, but dance stayed with me. I studied Nutrition at the University of Cardiff and was lucky to have an opportunity to continue my dance with performances and teaching. My students were local Welsh people and people from the Indian diaspora who were slowly growing in numbers in Cardiff.

I met my husband while I was on vacation in Kenya and, after my studies, I returned to live there before establishing my Dance School. I established the school

shortly after attending six months of intensive dance training in India. Having been born and brought up in Nairobi, I was familiar with the community and the dance world there and people also knew me so, it was not too hard to start a school there. I was able to work as a performer, choreographer and a teacher. We got married in 1983, had 2 children and moved to Canada when my daughters were 2- and 4-years-old.

We arrived in Toronto on July 26th 1991 to find posters of abducted children posted at the airport and my heart sank as I held my girls close to me. Fear was now added to the pot, along with the anxiety and the excitement of coming to a new place and a new life. Canada was in the midst of a recession and we hardly knew anyone. Since the Internet didn't exist for most of us, we didn't have an opportunity to Google "Toronto" or "Canada" before arriving. Our knowledge was confined mostly to what our geography textbooks described: we didn't do was associate the snow with the bitter cold and if we had read about it in school, we had forgotten about it until we experienced our first winter, which was one of the coldest ones that Canadians had seen. My husband wore a monkey hat even to bed!

Life in Nairobi was comfortable. We had house help, lived in an extended family household where roles for men and women were quite defined, the surroundings were familiar with friends and family and we never had to look for a baby sitter. But all that was familiar came to an end in Canada. There were many reasons for our move. Like most immigrants, one of them was the hope for a better future for our children and I was also looking for academic growth, which was limited in Kenya at that time.

I struggled to keep up with my dance, bring up the children with no extra help, adjust to a new country, look for a job and deal with a husband who hated being in Canada. After ten years of trying to make it work between starting and growing a business in educational school supplies and dancing, one thing had to give and unfortunately it was dance. But my love for dance never left and I knew I would come back to it one day.

I have always considered myself an artist at heart and am happiest when I am creating and working in an expressive environment. Running one's own small business can zap the creativity out of people, by being bogged down by the most mundane things that a small business requires on a daily basis. Six years ago, I became sick and passive and spent a lot of time sitting in front of the TV. And I thought to myself, "if I were to die tomorrow, would I be okay?" And my answer was "no," I wanted to do something more

than being an entrepreneur. I wanted to tell stories about people that I was not seeing much of on T.V.: stories about women (especially South Asians), about immigrants, about dancers, about Indian dance, about human struggles and stories of inspiration. I wanted to tell real stories that would inspire people. Considering I was watching so much TV, film seemed to be the logical medium to tell these stories, but I had no experience and the best way was to go to school and learn.

After a post graduate diploma in Television Writing and Producing at Humber College in 2010, and still not fully equipped to make documentaries, I realized that the world does not look upon too favourably at people who want to have a mid-life career change. To make a smooth transition, you either have to know your field very well or have the gift of gab, and I had none of that. The skills I could bring to the table were sincerity, passion for storytelling, inquisitiveness, willingness to learn and good work ethics, so I gathered all these and decided that I must become very good at the art form to be taken seriously in this industry. I knew that documentaries were the genre I wanted to tell my stories in and I had always wanted to do my Masters so I applied to Ryerson University for an MFA program in Documentary Media.

By the end of the program, I hope to obtain the skills to tell compelling stories through film, photography and new media. Because of my background in dance, and living it for so many years, it would only be fitting to start the career with a documentary about dance. I have therefore chosen to document the subject of dance and its healing affects for those suffering from trauma. I hope that this will link me back to the world of dance and the use of the visual medium to dissipate knowledge about Indian Classical dance to mainstream audiences. The course has also inspired me to look at the possibility of creating installation work using Indian Dance in the future.

Coming back to school after 30 years, poses many challenges that I had not considered before, such as being the eldest in the class and not having peers of my age to connect with. Having left the world of academia for many years creates challenges in a program that is geared so much on theory. Over the years, the system of learning has changed and new jargon or fashionable terms have to be learnt and understood. These are some of the things that younger students and those who are already in this industry, may not understand. Also, the reality of obtaining a new career let alone a job at a mature age really hits you.

The program and the networking have allowed me to see beyond traditional filmmaking, opened up a lot of venues for creating interesting and experimental works and think outside the box. The academic courses have helped instill a love of reading, writing and research, and something that I would like to pursue after my degree. Once out of school, I hope to have gained enough skills to create and work in this field as an independent filmmaker. I know that I will have to put in more effort than my classmates in order to be taken seriously. Having worked as an entrepreneur, I have the skills and experience that will be advantageous to me in this industry and, in spite of the challenges of school, it has made me strong and working my way to also become thick skinned—a required trait in this industry of Documentary filmmaking.

ali weinstein

In a Chinese town known as Shangri-La, near the border of Tibet, I met a group of young boys playing basketball. But they weren't ordinary young boys. Their heads were shaved, and they wore deep wine-coloured robes while they played in a court outside a temple. They were little monks. As my friend and I watched them play, they glanced at us coyly. When the game was over, my friend, a jock who speaks Mandarin, talked to the older, more outgoing monks about their basketball heroes. If I could have spoken their language, I would have asked them why they had chosen to become monks. I wanted to know whether this was a calling these children intended to pursue for the rest of their lives, if they had gone to the temple out of necessity, or if this was simply a rite of passage to bring honour to their families. What was it that moved these boys to step onto a higher path?

My first film is a reflective portrait of three people who are utterly devoted to God. I come to this topic from the perspective of an atheist who grew up essentially without religion. My mother's family is Greek Orthodox and my father's is Jewish, but I was never christened or bat mitzvahed, and I never went to church or synagogue. I am fairly innocent when it comes to religious piety; but one thing I do understand is the desire to escape the senses of monotony and banality that at times creep into our lives.

In his pre-monastic journals, Trappist monk and author Thomas Merton wrote about the idea of entering the monastery: "It fills me with awe and desire. I return to the idea again and again: 'Give up everything, give up everything!'" I wonder whether these voyages into simplicity, like those of Merton and the child monks, are incomprehensible to the masses or are in fact a lot more understandable than we might at first think. In sacrificing worldly pursuits and pleasures, do the devout tap into a different type of desire that we all inwardly harbour?

To understand ourselves is, in my opinion, entirely impossible. However, the act of trying to understand is something I'm perpetually compelled to do. I make this film in the hopes that I will come to learn something about the way other people perceive their existences and the goals that they have for their lives. I don't want to explain or teach for I am not an expert or a teacher. Filmmaker Peter Mettler has stated that he tries to use cinema as an "experiential tool" rather than an informational exercise. I think film can be used for nothing more profound than to convey our personal experiences and feelings to one another. Spaces of understanding and communion are important to me. In our society, I don't believe we have enough of them.

I do not speak the language of the young monks in China who collect alms and live high in the mountains. Yet if it is expectations that they follow, I relate to them completely. If they are pursuing happiness as they travel down the road to Enlightenment, then I think we all do. (“And what is not pleasurable about meditation?” another young monk recently challenged me.)

I do not believe there is a more meaningful moment in life than when, over a glass of wine or moonshine, the story that your companion is recounting to you suddenly makes all the sense in the world and you realize that you understand; no, more than that, that you've actually been there yourself. Because beneath it all, there is a shared human experience that is greater than the vast oceans of water and ways of knowing that separate us. The same powerful emotions can be wrought through the movies; over a bag of popcorn in a dark theatre, the characters on screen can tell us stories that are ours as well. Through cinema – in the unique marriage of sound and imagery that it enables, and in the camera's ability to move in close to the subject of our gaze – I believe that a radical communication is possible. Film theorist Carl Plantinga has written about the way in which cinema often exploits the human face in order to transmit the same emotions seen by the viewer to the viewer. Perhaps there is more than emotional manipulation at play here, however. By creating empathy with the subject, maybe there is room to actually learn something about another person via the heart rather than solely the mind. Exploring, meditating, both cerebrally and emotionally, I look at the human face: a face that communicates in a primal manner, before language, and, turning my camera on it, I try to understand.



CRITICAL REVIEW

intro critical review

ali weinstein

Enter these pages and you will find a tantalizing assortment of portals into contemporary culture. These critical reviews were written by a group of media- and tech-savvy storytellers in their own rights. They each examine, at times lauding and at others criticizing, a vast range of artworks that run the gamut from the filmic to the musical, the photographic to the journalistic.

These critiques look at some of the most diverse cultural phenomena presently out there. Assessed within these pages are events as classical as the opera to media as new as the now-ubiquitous Buzzfeed list. Some reviewers have tackled topics very close to home: art made by others but about experiences that they, too, have had. Herein, we find reflections on maps, meditations on recent documentaries, and explorations into photo exhibits and books. In each case, these writers have addressed art that incites their imaginations, awes and compels them, and in some instances, infuriates them. The level of thought and insight displayed within the following pages is impressive to say the least. The writers of several of these reviews actually went so far as to correspond directly (and in one case actually sit down) with the makers of the work they analyzed. It is apparent that the goal of each of these reviewers was to achieve a better understanding of the aims of the artist discussed, and to assess their own relationship with the work at hand. We have here 17 contemplative, poignant critiques of artworks by artists.

These reviews are not only about contemporary art; the writing herein is also about the future. All of these analyses address important artwork that has, in one way or another, contributed to the evolution of its medium. We look at the challenges that these artists have faced – the issues of representation and truth-telling, of shifting platforms and changing modes of storytelling, of psychological trauma and political censorship – and see the possibilities that they open up for the world, and perhaps also the doors that we would prefer to shut. As we examine current fine art, music, journalism, film, and photography, we simultaneously look ahead to where these media are going. We learn from the artists we admire (as well as those we abhor), for we are the ones who will help move these art forms forward.

saman aghvami

homework

film, 1988

A few days ago, I watched Abbas Kiarostami's 1988 documentary *Homework*, probably for the tenth time. Even after seeing this film numerous times, I still had to wipe tears away as the ending credits were rolling. This eighty-six minute documentary, as simple as it may seem in production, is a powerful masterpiece touching on universal topics such as lying, oppression and child abuse while also showing hidden layers of an enigmatic society like Iran.

This film does not touch me only through its artistic qualities, brilliance and wit, but it also brings back bittersweet memories of my own school years. Like the children in the film, I was born during Iran's baby boom in the nineteen-eighties, while the country was engaged in a bloody war with Iraq. By the time it was our turn to fill the classes, there weren't enough schools for all of us. This meant we had to study in classes of forty other kids, if not more. Also, the schools had to run in two shifts of morning and afternoon. These very tough circumstances decreased the performance and efficiency of teachers, and as a result the education in general. Moreover, the newly established revolutionary Islamic regime had replaced the contents of textbooks with its desirable ideologies and added mandatory subjects like "Religion Studies" and "Quran Studies".

Up until the late nineties, Iran's education system was very much (and in some ways still is) a retarded and outdated one. It consisted of an overwhelming amount of dictations, repetitive duplicate writings and the theocratic propaganda of the authoritarian regime. Memorizing was and still is a great part of this test-driven, creative-killing system.

A great concern to authoritarian regimes is children and what they are taught in school. This is because they are the most vulnerable sector of society and can be easily manipulated and brainwashed for the benefit of the state's goals and plans. Therefore, it comes as no shock that the morning exercise at the school depicted in the film is mixed with religious content and war propaganda against Saddam Hussein, with whom Iran was at war for eight years.

What motivated Abbas Kiarostami to touch on this subject (as his voice-over indicates in the film's opening scene) is the problems his own son was having with his homework. Kiarostami sets out to execute "visual research" in a form of a documentary. When taking his film crew to a boys' elementary school (as all elementary and high schools are gender-segregated in Iran), Kiarostami conducts interviews with the students by asking them about their views on homework.

At first, *Homework* may seem a simple film, but it doesn't take a lot of effort to discover the different layers of not only the children's mentality, but also that of their parents and the Iranian society in general. The boys are asked fairly simple questions: *do you finish your homework, why don't you finish your homework, do your parents help you*, and finally, *which do you like more: cartoons or homework?* If you think the answer the kids give to the last question is obvious, think again. Unanimously and without hesitation the children tend to pick the latter. There is no doubt they are lying. It becomes evident when, after a couple of "easy" questions about themselves, they forget their initial answers and talk passionately about their favorite cartoons with an honest smile on their faces. The reason for this lying becomes clear when they answer a question about the meaning of punishment - they all have one answer: getting beaten up with a waist band. Answers to the meaning of encouragement, on the other hand, are far from unanimous. They either simply don't know, or they are happy with a cookie or two, or the words "good job!". These working-class children without exception are victims of physical punishment by their illiterate parents and older siblings. They all have accepted this as the norm and most of them confess that they will pass this practice on to their own kids.

The children are terrified (even those who are trying not to show it) not only by the fact that they are being questioned about their schoolwork, but also because of the environment in which this questioning is taking place. Kiarostami is seated across them, behind a desk, wearing his usual dark glasses, accompanied by a camera man with his camera gazing directly towards the young interviewee. Adding the direct light, which lights the child, immediately resembles an interrogation scene with the interviewer/director playing the part of the authority. This is very much akin to the ruling theocratic regime.

In one of the most moving scenes of the film, children lined up in the schoolyard are forced to recite and perform a religious ceremony. The boys, even though they are pretending to be involved, have little interest in it. They prefer, like most young boys do, to play around and joke with classmates and simply not do what they are commanded to do. This effectively makes for what is a very serious matter to the teachers/regime seem even more ridiculous to the point that the director mutes the audio to "observe the reverence". The silent images are still a powerful (and for obvious reasons, not too controversial) display of how pathetic and impotent an authoritarian regime can be when it comes to opposing human nature. Once observed as a bigger picture, the scene (and in a way the whole film) perfectly implies that even though the regime thinks the people agree with it,

the truth is that they are lying, just like the children do during the interviews.

Homework might be a film about Iran's educational system on the surface but it is not hard for the viewer to see the links to the Iranian society and the culture of fear and deception. The children's half truths, and (in some cases humorous) excuses on why they weren't able to do their homework vary from the amount of the work, parents inability to help due to their illiteracy and the teasing siblings and busy older ones, allow the audience to imagine the domestic environment that each child is living in. And by the end of the film, the mental status of a whole nation. Through their stories and this information, one can easily see the oppression rooted deep into the country's collective mentality, where each person transfers their suffering to the weak, on whom they have authority; and children happen to be at the end of this brutal chain. *Homework* is a perfect mirror of a nation terrorized by tyrannical kings and rulers throughout its history.

However, *Homework* does not directly address what is wrong or what is right. Kiarostami deliberately avoids judging and commenting on the situation and rather leaves it to the viewer to interpret the different layers the film is addressing. He once said: "To me a good movie is not the one that keeps you on the edge of the seat and you forget about it as soon as you walk out of the theater. I would rather make a film that even if it bores you in the theatre, keeps on living in your mind days and weeks after you have seen it." *Homework* is a very successful example of this method. It is a film that will not easily leave your memory and it keeps on playing in your head long after the ending credits.

zandra alexander

human rights human wrongs

exhibition, 2012

As an often self-proclaimed cultural capital, Toronto is home to a great many galleries and museums. However, the recently opened Ryerson Image Centre (RIC) attempts to carve out a place for Toronto on the international stage. Located in the heart of Ryerson University's downtown campus, the freshly renovated Centre brings students, professors and artists alike to gather and devote themselves to all aspects of photography and visual expression, including research, study, teaching and public exhibition. The renovations were sparked in large part by the donation of the iconic *Black Star Collection* archives, a collection of nearly 300,000 black and white images that document the turbulence of the 20th century around the world.

It was with great excitement and anticipation that the Centre announced that images from the *Black Star Collection* would finally be featured at their new home. It seemed only fitting that an exhibition curated from such a prominent archive would draw on global locales and universal themes. Indeed, all four exhibitions launched in January grapple with issues of human rights in some manner, with the featured *Human Rights Human Wrongs* exhibit the largest in both size and scope.

Guest-curated by Mark Sealy, director of the London-based Autograph/The Association of Black Photographers, *Human Rights Human Wrongs* gathers 316 images representing human disasters and triumphs from the latter half of the 20th century. Sealy was initially approached to create an exhibit highlighting the American civil rights movement, but he convinced Doina Popescu, Director of the RIC, to broaden the scale of the show after spending the summer delving into the Black Star Collection. This decision, while admirable in its scope, would eventually prove to be overly ambitious.

The exhibit itself is stunning—displaying its many images in numerous cases and in large, open rooms with minimal explanatory text. Select walls are saturated in a bold purple hue, the only colour aside from black and white used extensively in the exhibit. The dominance of the purple is far from soothing; instead it serves to highlight the graphic nature of the violence seen in many of the images. In certain areas, the effect is nearly cave-like, especially in contrast with the stark white walls seen elsewhere.

Upon arrival, visitors are immediately faced with a massive, floor-to-ceiling display of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights, with the individual articles placed at ceiling height around the first room, giving the impression that these articles are mere observers of the images and certainly not active role-players. It serves to

remind the viewer of the lofty ideals of peace and equality promised after World War Two, soon to be twisted and ignored in conflicts that followed.

The exhibit encompasses nearly fifty years, from 1945-1994, although the chronological structure is unclear as is given little priority in the layout. Images jump from decade to decade and from country to country in a jarring fashion. Juxtaposition appears to be a favoured technique of Sealy, as famous images of movement leaders in the prime of their life are glimpsed beside nameless corpses, their victim or villain status unclear. In one startling example, a female body in the Warsaw Ghetto is directly opposite a woman photographed triumphantly in front of the Israeli flag. Sealy has claimed that his placement decisions are not deliberate, a decidedly strange statement from a curator, who by definition decides which images are to be displayed and where they are displayed within an exhibit.

Regardless, it is evident that Sealy is attempting to express his belief that history occurs as a series of interconnected events, not on a clear linear path (as some American civil rights historians may suggest). This is a valid goal of any historically-based exhibit; however in this particular instance, the overall direction is too haphazard to make any meaningful connection beyond the frequency of violent struggles in the last half of the 20th century. In one of the more confusing decisions, images of Martin Luther King, Jr., appear outside the doors of the exhibit, inside in the form of video footage of the iconic "I Have a Dream" speech, then again in photographs across the back wall. The voice of King echoes through the cavernous gallery and seems depressingly hollow when heard against the backdrop of hundreds and hundreds of images of brutality and suffering. Photographic exhibits need not be laid out in precise chronological order or act as a history lesson to be effective, but in this case, the multiplicity of narratives coupled with a lack of informational text leaves little in the way of cohesive messaging or deeper meaning. The subject matter is certainly not geared towards sole "enjoyment" of the medium, but there is simply too much variation in content to inspire the type of audience engagement that Sealy is seeking.

Further contributing to this confusion is the addition of take-home miniature cards for certain images in the exhibits. It is unclear why some photographs were deemed worthy of replication and others weren't, but either way treating a graphically violent image of a human being's last moments on earth as if it were a collectible sports card feels wrong, no matter the context. The purpose of these cards proves elusive in this situation—even after long periods of reflection, it seems unclear if they are

meant as miniature memorials or mere fridge décor. Is the audience meant to return to these selected images days later and continue their engagement with issues of human rights violations? The inclusion of these cards versus other forms of interactive media stands out as a bizarrely superficial decision in an otherwise somber exhibit.

However, that decision is rectified somewhat upon viewing the accompanying exhibition catalogue. Here, the photos are clearly displayed chronologically, with sidebars of text outlining the significant political or cultural events of each year. Presented in this manner, the global connections between human rights achievements and human atrocities become far more apparent. The linear nature of the catalogue framework, versus the non-linear layout of the exhibit itself, allows the audience to better understand the larger web of events that were spurred in some fashion by the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. The catalogue also features an essay written by Sealy exploring the historical context of the Black Star collection and his motivation and influences in creating the exhibit. It is here where the audience learns about the thematic importance of Article 6 (“everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person above the law”) of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, and how Sealy attempted to demonstrate this Article through carefully chosen images of resistance. Sadly, a visit to the exhibition without immersing yourself in the catalogue will not provide these insights, a necessary component for further exploration and discussion.

Nonetheless, I am cheered by rumors of the possible inclusion of an audio tour. This is a promising development for the exhibit, as it will allow Sealy to contextualize his exhibit as the audience experiences it, as opposed to hoping that they purchase the catalogue or missing the opportunity entirely. Hopefully, this would encourage audience to ask their own questions and draw their own parallels, rather than getting bogged down in trying to comprehend the sheer mass of images, themes and juxtapositions they are met with in the exhibit. For example, the first room of the exhibit highlights four issues of LIFE magazine, including the May 7, 1945 issue featuring photographs from a Nazi concentration camp. In an interview with the Jewish Tribune, Popescu notes that many consider these photos as the driving force behind the 1948 Declaration of Human Rights, which is displayed on the surrounding walls of the room. However, it seems unlikely that the average audience member would make such an important connection without supplementary information.

Human Rights Human Wrongs simply cannot be fully tackled in one viewing. Audience members should plan on making multiple trips, or at least experiencing the exhibit in different permutations—whether that be through catalogue or audio format. While that is a demanding task for the average gallery visitor, the importance of the subject matter and quality of images are worth such a sacrifice of time. Sealy has painstakingly chosen 316 photographs from a collection bordering on 300,000 of some of the most iconic images of the 20th century. In doing so, he has created the framework of a critical space in which to explore universal themes of human rights, human wrongs, and the area that falls between. Perhaps the lack of context is too much burden for an audience, but attempts should still be made to critically engage.

This critique is not meant as an indictment of the exhibit as a whole. Rather, there are a great many successes and areas of immense achievement found throughout. Sealy clearly has a knack for mixing the familiar with the unfamiliar and unearthing new angles of even the most well trod of events. As *Toronto Star* arts critic Martin Knelman notes, the chosen images do much in linking the human rights advances in the United States with the violence and atrocities in Africa and Asia. Indeed, *Human Rights Human Wrongs* does leave a lasting impression on its audience, but that should be attributed to the power of the images themselves, not to the manner in which they are presented. Sealy presents the makings of some truly profound and nuanced statements about human rights, especially in the sections addressing the banality and the normalization of violence found in many oppressive regimes. However, a further edit and streamlining of the other areas is required to raise the coherence of the exhibit as a whole.

Sixty years of photography is an intimidating task for any curator to tackle, especially when the topic is as broad as human rights. Sealy should be commended for his desire to expand knowledge of the struggle for human rights beyond that of the American Civil Rights Movement, but his goals for the exhibition were undermined by the sheer volume and complexity of the task. His approach is to shock and awe his audience, not inform and share, which does not bode well for continued dialogue on the subject. Nonetheless, while *Human Rights Human Wrongs* may fall short in achieving its curator's many objectives, it does succeed in shedding light onto some of the more overlooked and shocking elements of the 20th century. That alone is reason enough to attend.

caitlin durlak

getting into the mood, saying goodbye to amour

film, 2012

As I sat waiting with my partner in the Bell Lightbox theatre in Toronto, I began to notice the pattern of audience members around me. My fellow viewers sat two-by-two, one couple after another, like us, waiting to see *Amour* by Michael Haneke. I wondered, had they been enticed by the title, looking for a romantic screening, or were they ready, like me, to be emotionally gutted by the end of a love story? As the lights dimmed I squeezed my partner's hand, not because of the romance in the air but because my fear was mounting.

Amour begins at a piano concert; the camera is set on the audience rather than the spectacle the audience is there to see. Right from the introduction we, the viewers, are left to think about the scene we share with the characters on screen; staring at an almost mirror image of ourselves for about two minutes. Rather than being absorbed by music, bright colors, costumes or plot we are confronted with reality, aware of our position as spectators sitting in a theater, as if Haneke is asking us to get ready for what is about to unfold.

As the lights dim for the actors on screen, the keys of a piano are hit as the first piece in the film's piano-only soundtrack, Schubert's "Impromptu No. 3," begins. After greeting Anne's former piano student backstage, Anne and Georges end the evening in their Paris apartment, where the rest of the film takes place. Introducing us to their space, the camera records long takes accompanied with diegetic sound of the uninhabited rooms that comprise the apartment. We are left alone to examine and understand what it means to be in the elderly couple's private space. The apartment becomes a dominant character in this film, as the things housed within it display their history and the space signifies the private world shared between them.

The private life of Anne and Georges is kept guarded. They are faced early on in the plot with Ann's recent health issues: a stroke that cannot be corrected in surgery and is implied to be the cause of her inevitable death. The couple struggle with what personal information is to stay between them and what is to be shared with family, friends and neighbors. Only asking for help when needed, often lying to outsiders about the severity of their situation, we watch as they shut out their public life, and we become the only ones allowed to fully participate in their defended personal lives. An intimacy between the audience and the couple is established as we feel privileged to witness their personal lives. Their daily routines become a key source of character development, as dialogue is sparse and the audience is left to fill in many blanks.

The small apartment and equally small cast reflect the limited amount of information Haneke conveys about our subjects. We are led to learn about them through their sparse dialogue, physical interactions and limited visual cues. For example, when Anne tests her electric wheelchair for the first

time, Georges watches closely with hesitation and concern, but his mood changes quickly when she takes control and chases him down the hall and together they laugh. One of their daily routines is to share meals together. The first is prepared by Anne and interrupted by her initial stroke. As her illness takes over so does Georges in the kitchen. He begins cutting her meals into bite-size pieces, and by the end of the film, he is left to feed her in bed with a spoon. Her once dominant position is lost as their roles reverse, and she becomes more dependent on Georges. Through the use of repetition, the progression of death and power dynamics are made evident. Yet Anne's disabilities do not stop her from voicing how she wants to die. Anne fails a suggested suicide attempt half way through the film because she is interrupted by the early return of Georges, who finds her sitting on the ground near an open window. He asks her to imagine what it would be like for him after her death and she responds by saying, "But imagination and reality have little in common." After this heart-wrenching conversation the camera cuts to a 25-second take of Anne awake in bed. We are left with her to contemplate what we would do in this situation and to wonder what she is thinking. It is through this unusually long take that Haneke forces us to engage, making us active participants in the couple's personal drama.

Often preventing the viewer from seeing the central action, the camera will stay in a room after the characters have left it or will stay with a character who is waiting for another character to arrive and the main scene to take place. It is in these moments that we are allowed to contemplate; the editing follows a pattern of action and reflection. The film is made up of tiny vignettes of the daily lives of Anne and Georges. We watch them eat, exercise, bathe, share stories and fight. The transitions between each brief episode demonstrate Haneke's understanding of empathy. For example, in one scene we see the nurse walking a debilitated Anne through the steps of putting on a diaper. The camera cuts to Anne with full physical mobility playing a complicated song on the piano, making apparent the contrast between it and the last scene. From there the editor takes us to Georges, who is sitting on a chair staring as Anne's piano playing continues. After 15 seconds of listening with Georges, he leans over and turns off the stereo, and we are meant to believe Anne's mastery was only his imagination at play.

Anne's health deteriorates as she faces another stroke, and she becomes bedridden. Eventually, she is only able to repeat one word, "Mal"-- "hurt". Having pushed away his only family, a self-absorbed daughter, Georges is left in anguish to decide how he will see Anne's life through to the end. As a viewer we recall important facts; a short conversation that took place following Anne's initial diagnosis where Anne stated she did not want herself or Georges to suffer, which was then



followed by her attempted suicide. It becomes challenging to not wonder as a witness of their love and intimacy what Georges will do or rather what we would do. It is Haneke's overall mastery that makes it virtually impossible for the audience to not become an active participant.

The film ended in silence and the anticipated soundtrack to be played over the credits was not heard. I sat in the utterly still theater unable to move or even take a breath. I was sure that the couples around me who had been seeking a Hollywood love story were in greater shock than I because I had been previously warned. I was prepared. As the lights eventually rose and we made our move to exit the theater, I knew I was not ready to speak to my partner, as I was still lost in *Amour*. On the street, inhaling fresh air together, I thought our inevitable conversation would lean towards me because I had recently lost a close family member.

Surprised, my partner began relating for the first time his experience of being with his grandmother as she died of Alzheimer's. Loss of a loved one is universal. Haneke made me aware that our personal experiences of death can and should be shared. *Amour* is difficult to watch, and like love, it is worth the pain.

Amour

**Written and Directed by Michael Haneke
Released in Germany December 20th 2012
Starring Jean-Louis Trintignant,
Emmanuelle Riva and Isabelle Huppert**

simone estrin

la clemenza di tito

opera, 2013

The Canadian Opera Company's *La Clemenza di Tito*, February 3, 2013: a provocative production that defied expectations and as a result failed to inspire clemency in some very vocal audience members.

While enthusiastic audience members at the Canadian Opera Company's opening performance of Mozart's *La Clemenza di Tito* stood in applause as the cast took their bow, others felt compelled to boo when the creative team came on stage. I have attended countless operas at the COC over the last 15 years, and this was the first time I had ever heard a Toronto audience boo. Very un-Canadian, wouldn't you say? At first I was completely perplexed about why the audience was upset. Optimist that I am, I could not believe that they were serious. As it turns out, they were seriously unhappy with the production. After talking it through with my partner, we agreed that the singing was nearly flawless, so the dissatisfaction must have been about the stage directions and costumes.

Whenever an opera is modernized (which continues to happen more and more at the COC) and includes overt sex or violence, I wonder how the audience feels. While director Christopher Alden modernized *La Clemenza di Tito* to a certain degree, there was no overt sex or violence. So I anxiously awaited the reviews, wondering what made certain audience members compelled to boo during the curtain call. But in the meantime, I had to come up with my own hypothesis: what distressed the audience so much was not the performance by the singers or the orchestra, but rather Alden's interpretation of the opera.

Mozart wrote *La Clemenza di Tito* in 1791 but set it in ancient Rome. Like any other opera written hundreds of years ago and set in another time period, the director would be tempted to adapt it for a contemporary audience. After thinking critically about each of the elements involved in the production, it struck me that the creative team purposefully combined props, costumes and sets from distinctively different time periods in order to challenge the expectations of audience members. The problem is that many members of the audience were confused by the contradictory messages.

The set, which was composed of a massive, off-white, marble wall engraved with Roman lettering, made it appear that the opera was taking place in ancient Rome. However, the costumes and props told you otherwise. To begin with, the central character, Emperor Tito, was wearing purple silk pajamas for much of the opera, with a gold laurel wreath printed on the shirt. While the pajamas added a modern touch, the wreath served to add a layer of commentary on the Roman aesthetic. Tito later came out in a lavishly embellished gold suit of armor with a similar laurel wreath crowning his head. Sesto, Tito's friend who betrays him in an

attempted murder, was the most Roman-looking character. He wore a flashy royal blue silk toga, with a gold belt and black gladiator-inspired boots. Sesto's friend, Annio, looked like a 1970s tennis player, wearing a thick teal headband, a teal toga-inspired garment, large framed glasses and, to top it all off, black running shoes. The chorus' costumes were the most confusing element. They were dressed in drab peasant clothes with *commedia dell'arte* white masks covering most of their faces. And if that was not enough, the props were also mismatched in time period. There was a stainless steel modern-day garbage can, a red rotary-dial telephone, and even red carpet stanchions. They really did not fit in. But I was not put off. In fact, each of these elements intrigued me.

I read three reviews of the opera online, with the following headlines - from *The Toronto Star*: "COC's *La Clemenza di Tito*, a mess of visual contradictions saved by brilliant singing," from *The Globe and Mail*: "*La Clemenza di Tito*, Fine performances make this imperfect production worthwhile;" and, from *Musical Toronto*: "*clemenza di Tito* sounds great but tough to watch." These reviews point out that while the creative team mixed their messages representing the story, the immaculate singing saved the show. I think that this "hodgepodge" was an attempt by Alden to make the opera relevant for a contemporary audience by adding a dimension of light-heartedness to this *opera seria*. However, in doing so, Alden undermined the expected seriousness of an opera seria like *La Clemenza di Tito* by using certain props, costumes and gestures traditionally found in an *opera buffa* like Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*. Therefore, Alden's transformation of style is where the discomfort arose for some audience members who were expecting a traditional production.

A couple of weeks before I saw *La Clemenza di Tito*, I had the pleasure of hearing director Peter Sellars speak while he was in town to direct the COC's *Tristan und Isolde*. His words were profound and inspiring as he stressed that art can be a place to simply speak the truth. This, he said, is not an easy task. At the end of the talk, a member of the audience asked Sellars, "Do you think there is still a place in an opera companies' repertoire for the more traditional productions, or should they continue dragging the audience kicking and screaming into the 21st century?"

Sellars' brilliantly answered, "For me there is no difference between old and new, only between good and bad. There is good-old and bad-old and there is good-new and bad-new. It's like judging someone by what they look like ...I want to know who they are. It's not about what [the production] looks like, it's about deeper things – what it feels like, how profoundly engaged are the artists in what they are doing... The form itself is not that important."

La Clemenza di Tito addresses fundamental elements of humaneness and compassion, exploring how a political leader can use his power for good. This is a theme that has always been relevant and issues surrounding power are especially relevant today. In keeping with Sellars' ideas about what a good or bad opera is - as opposed to an old or new opera - the most important question I had to consider is: *was this production good or bad?* Sellars also explained that the definition of a masterpiece is that it continues to mean new things to different people. What is not a masterpiece, he explained, is something that has to be done in its own period under very specific circumstances.

And so, being inspired by one the greatest living directors, I believe that the critics and some of the audience were too harsh in their judgment of this production. While I can appreciate that audience members' expectations were defied, the singers did a superb job of portraying the conflicting emotions of the characters, each yearning for power but in the end, overcome by love. The comic elements did not take away from the story and rather added a level of absurdity, which worked to modernize *La Clemenza di Tito*. Alden's vision, while not necessarily convincing for all, was more than appropriate considering that most serious operas do not have such happy endings in which all the characters live and everyone is able to reconcile. Mozart wrote the opera to celebrate the coronation of King Leopold II and, indeed, this performance was fit for a king.

jaime day fleck

stories we tell

film, 2012

Sarah Polley, the illustrious Canadian actress and director, decided to tackle a sometimes formidable subject, her own family, in her newest directorial feat, *Stories We Tell*. The film premiered at the Venice Film Festival in August 2012 and showed at the Toronto International Film Festival before its theatrical release in October.

Polley has long been the “sweethart” of the Canadian film scene, a term I am sure she wishes to shed due to her obvious professional maturity. She has produced thoughtful and not mainstream or profit-driven work. The term auteur comes to the mind when talking about her work as a director.

Stories We Tell looks at the oral history of her family. Through the characters of her siblings, her father and those close to her family, Polley attempts to connect with her mother, who died of cancer when she was 11 years old. As the film unfolds, the viewer sees that the seemingly simple story divulges unknown complexities. The narration by her father has a certain poignancy that ties the whole film together and gives it an authentically personal feel.

A modern audience is trained to salivate at the thought of hearing salacious personal details about familial relationships, especially such a delicious story as misunderstood parentage through an extramarital affair. I found it more palatable and less invasive because Polley was the director, so I did not feel like I was encroaching on her privacy. It was predigested, censored within her comfort level. But due to her understanding of probing into uncomfortable zones as part of the art-making process, I did not feel I was missing out on the salient points.

She neatly lays the story out so that the juicy details are not revealed until the end. At this point she reveals that some of the scenes of “archival footage” are actually re-enactments. This shatters the illusion, which makes you question all the assumptions you made during the earlier half of the film. She shows the behind-the-scenes footage to deconstruct the filmmaking illusion. We see that she is always watching, directing, listening, observing and digesting the information given by the subjects. In actuality the film is about her. She is the subject. That fact is all the more reason why it is captivating to see her interactions with the characters and to see her reactions, however understated they might be. This self-reflexive awareness and her dissection of documentary depiction is the most impressive facet of *Stories We Tell*. It is about just that: the way we tell stories and the truths we believe no matter how much they may depart from fact. Truth is a subjective not an objective reality and she makes this abundantly clear by not just rupturing her own preconceptions about her parents and familial relationships, but by shattering the audience’s belief that she is presenting authentic representations of reality. You see her directing



the onscreen personas of her parents in what previously appeared to be home videos showing her actual mother in real situations. As Polley further expounds:

“I think the thing was there were so many stories in this story and so many versions, and in fact there’s so many people, and it just felt so wrong to me that this story would be only one person’s, whether that be mine or Harry’s or my dad’s or my siblings. It felt like the only story that felt ethically okay to me to put out to the world is one that included all of us and included the mess of it. So I was just disturbed by the idea that one version of this story would be told exclusively, and I think that was a lot of the motivation for me to make this film.”

This revelation of the illusion allows the audience to draw their own conclusions on whether the film is truthful and what are the facts of the story. It also forces us to reflect on the artifice and constraints of the documentary filmmaking process. The techniques she uses to do this include reenactments, old family home movies, present-day interviews, behind-the-scenes footage of Polley herself making the film, as well as voiceover. Polley explains,

"What became really interesting to me and captivating was the way we were so attached to narrative and how desperately we need to create this narrative to make sense of events that were a little bit bewildering to us."

There is the aura of an authentic Canadian experience and aesthetic in the film based on the locales, descriptions and the perpetual depiction of winter in scenes like her playing in the snow with her father. I do not know what the Americans made of all this: the Montreal and Toronto comparisons, Toronto named locations, even the ubiquitous image of snow. As a Canadian, the imagery seemed consciously nostalgic and purposeful in striking all the right emotional chords. One scene that clearly showed this was when Polley goes to meet her biological father for the first time. He is shown bundled up in a winter coat and boots shuffling down a street in Montreal.

While the film challenges the entire genre of documentary, it is not a perfect documentary. There are several filmmaking choices that range from mildly annoying to completely grating. The film is certainly trying to impress a certain type of audience, dare I say, the intellectual, hip and cinematically attuned audience. It is not for your run-of-the-mill moviegoer who thinks the new James Bond film, *Skyfall*, was the best movie ever made. It was for an audience that would see the subtle nuances in cinematic storytelling and see Polley deconstructing narrative. In other words, she wants to look cool to the people that matter to her.

The music selection at the very beginning of the film threw me right out of the story. The sound track is at times overly loud and jarring with the visuals being portrayed and then at other times it is completely in sync with the visuals enhancing the experience.

The editing techniques use transitions and visual manipulation which draws unnecessary attention to the editing, usually an invisible art. By putting attention on such techniques as twirling the image upside down and around in a counterclockwise direction, I am thrown out of the narrative and forced to pay attention to how she is showing the visual material. It seems contrived and over-analyzed instead of letting the film come together organically.

Most of the reviews of Polley's films were complimentary except a very pointed contrast from Rick Groen of *The Globe and Mail*. He talks about the sometimes self-conscious nature of Polley's directing, "Truly resonant stories show us, they don't tell us." He is referring to Polley's father's remark

that "This is a great story." If it is a great story, you do not need to be told. You will know it by the end. But Polley chooses to leave lines in the film that direct you to think about the film in a certain way instead of feeling it for yourself.

The other annoying facet was Polley's ubiquitous visual presence but lacking verbal contribution in the film. She makes no personal comment on the situation, allowing her family and silent responses to do most of the talking. Her absence of commentary does seem strange in that it is a film about her. Polley is an accomplished actress and I was often left wondering how many of her glances and Mona Lisa smiles were the calculated reactions of an actress or the candid responses of the filmmaker.

I also had trouble appreciating the film without peering through the Canadian media's largely glowing reviews of Polley in films as an actress or director. The industry media clearly adores her. And I want to like her work because I like what she brings to the Canadian film climate. But going into a film wanting to like the director, or feeling you should, definitely colours the experience.

There is no question that I left *Stories We Tell* feeling impressed. Her storytelling acrobatics challenge the assumptions of the documentary genre. It feels like the type of film that I would want to make: intelligent, character-driven and complex. It is a film as much about the practice of documentary as it is about Polley's family. She shows how oral truths are not always factually true even if they are subjectively true. She does this through seamlessly blending family 8mm footage with current reenactments and interviews as well as behind-the-scenes responses. Despite some of the artifice and at times grating aspects, the film is an excellent dissection of both her family and the art of documentary storytelling. Polley is clearly assuming her status as one of Canada's directorial talents and one of our ambassadors to the cinematic world.

sarah foy

an american index of the hidden and unfamiliar

publication, 2008

It might not be obvious to a casual observer what a Braille edition of *Playboy*, a transatlantic sub-marine telecommunications cable, and a vial containing live HIV have in common, but photographer Taryn Simon makes the connection for us in her 2007 book, *An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar*. Simon spent five years researching and documenting “that which is integral to America’s foundation, mythology, and daily functioning” but which few people have the opportunity to see in person. Simon worked on this project in the years following September 11, 2001, a period in which the U.S. government was obsessed with finding hidden sites and information. Simon decided not to turn her lens outward to the rest of the world, but to turn it inward to the U.S. She wanted “to confront the boundaries of the citizen – self-imposed and real – and confront the divide between privileged and public access to knowledge.” Simon’s photographs become a point of access, the vantage point from which we can observe some of the strange realities of the world in which we live.

Like all Steidl publications, *An American Index* is an object to behold. The book itself is designed to look like a folder. The cover is wrapped in a dark gray cloth, and on it, a black “label” is affixed. The font used for the book’s title and the author’s name, an all-caps “typewriter”-style font, resembles that which you might find labeling a folder buried in a library or government archive. This design element serves to emphasize the fact that 1) the book is a package of secrets that one can open to reveal truths in the present, and 2) the book is an archive that will document or “index” the “hidden and unfamiliar” for the future. Simon has said that the meaning of photographs depends on context, and as we move away from the Bush Administration and its search for “weapons of mass destruction” that did not exist, the book becomes more of a time capsule. It was a smart decision on the part of Simon and Steidl to make the book look like an actual archive of evidence.

In her index, Simon includes 57 locations or case studies of the hidden and unfamiliar, which span an intentionally broad range of spheres (e.g., government, entertainment, security, religion, medicine). Generally she includes one photograph per case study; although in seven cases (presumably those where she was able to secure exceptional content or access), she includes two photographs as double-spreads on a single subject. The photographs in the book are presented in a uniform manner. All of the photos are the same size, and all are positioned in the same spot on the page – generally on the pages to the right of the seam, except in the cases of the double-spreads. The presentation on white paper produces an almost gallery-like effect.

Perhaps the signature aspect of *An American Index* is its use of text to accompany the images. Many photographers use text in their books, but few have used text in a way that makes it equal in importance to the photographs themselves. Simon’s text is dense. It is filled with rich description and precise information about the subject of each of the case studies. For this reason, the reader trusts Simon. The text sits beneath each of the photographs and occupies almost half of the space on the page. Simon provides no explicit political interpretation in the text, but an implicit interpretation of many of the photos – their reason for inclusion, their substance – can be surmised. For example, she includes a photo of the Imperial Office of the World Knights of the Ku Klux Klan in Sharpsburg, Maryland. The caption beneath the photo describes the history of the KKK and lists, among other things, the “10 steps to a better America” which the KKK advocates. All of the information presented in the captions is fact-based and relatively uncontroversial. Simon is most interested in “an invisible space between a text and its accompanying image, and how image is transformed by text and the text by the image.”

Each case study – i.e., photo + text combination – in *An American Index* stands as a self-contained story, so rich in substance that each could be the subject of an entire book. (In fact, one of the case studies in *An American Index*, the U.S. Customs and Border Protection’s “Contraband Room” at John F. Kennedy International Airport in Queens, New York, became the subject of one of Simon’s subsequent projects, *Contraband*. It was published by Steidl in 2010.) But when the case studies are combined with the other case studies in the book, a collective story emerges. Despite the “intentional chaos” (Simon’s term) of the flow from one seemingly-unrelated subject to the next, it is obvious the collective story is about “stretching the limits of what we are allowed to see and know.”

The photographs themselves are impressive. Simon used a 4x5 camera for the project, except in cases when the restrictions imposed on her would not allow it. (When she photographed the testing of a warhead on an Air Force base in Florida, she was required to use a government-assigned camera.) Some of Simon’s renderings are realistic – i.e., in some cases, it is obvious what she has photographed (e.g., an explosion), even when the specifics or circumstances are not obvious without her text (e.g., the who, what, when, where, why of the explosion). [See figure 1.]

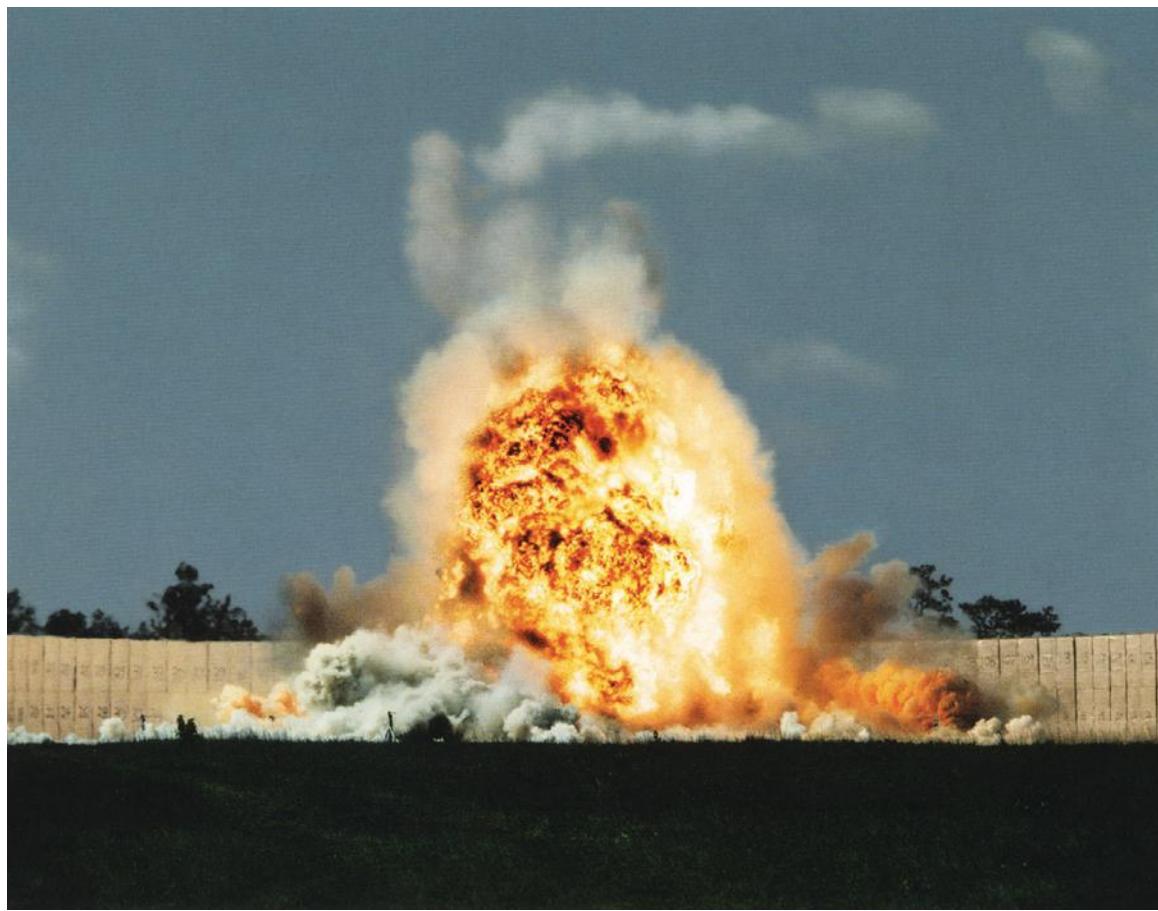
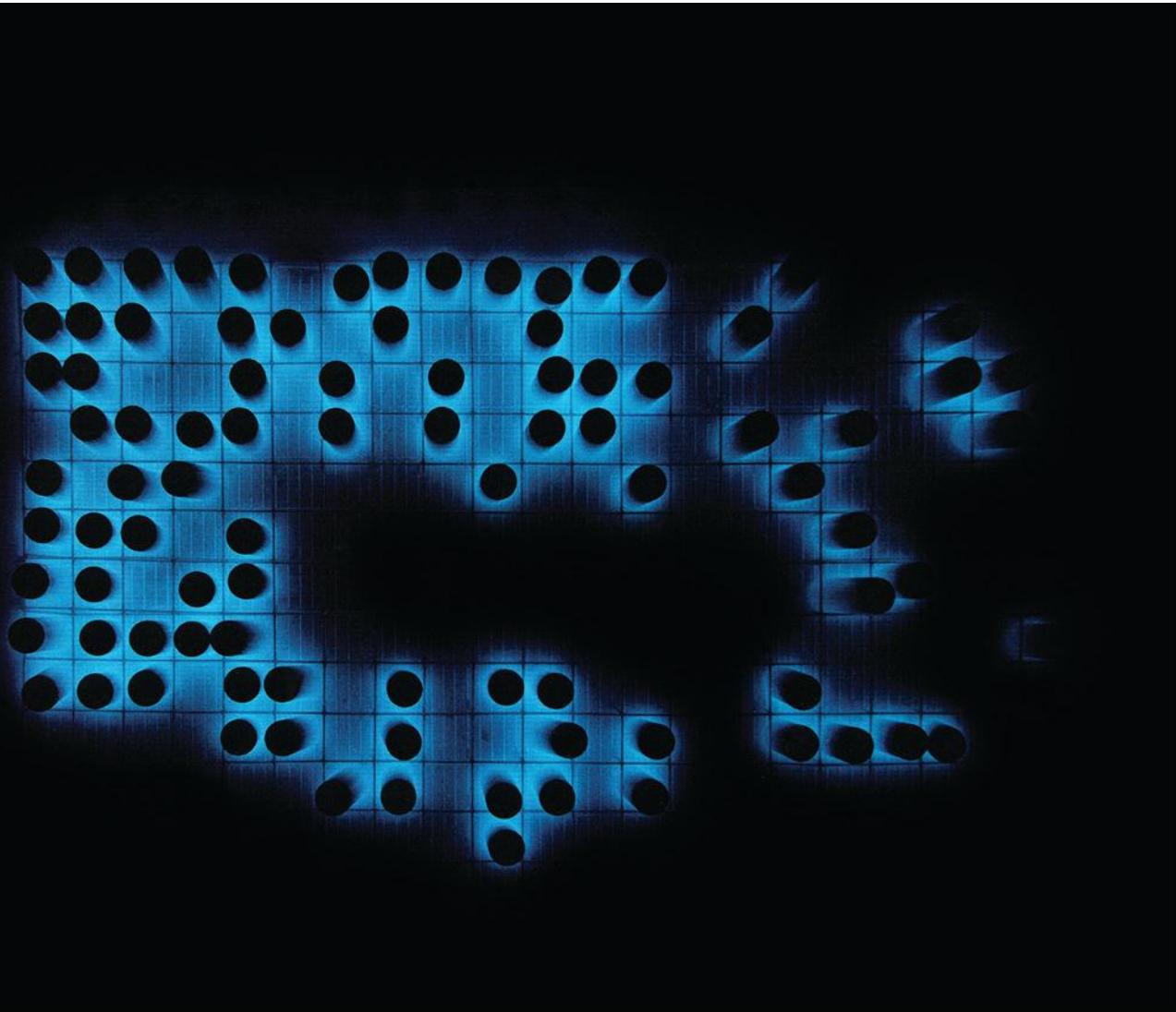


Figure 1

Figure 2



But many of Simon's strongest renderings are abstract. One of the best examples of this is her photograph of the Nuclear Waste Encapsulation and Storage Facility in Southeastern Washington State. In this example, it is impossible for an ordinary viewer to determine what she has photographed without the text beneath. [See figure 2.]

This image and others like it "float away to abstraction and multiple truths and fantasy" until the reader connects with the text which functions as a "cruel anchor that nails [them] to the ground."

The most remarkable aspect of *An American Index*, especially for the decade in which it was produced, is Simon's ability to navigate problems of access. Simon has said that about 90% of her time working on photography projects is not spent with her camera; she spends it researching, making connections with people who can provide leads and other information, talking with experts, and embarking on phone, email, and letter-writing campaigns to get the permissions she requires. As Salman Rushdie says in his Foreword to *An American Index*, "Her powers of persuasion are at least equal of her camera skills." Virtually every image presented in the book represents months, if not years, of work. Of course Simon did not gain access to everything she wanted to photograph for the project. She included, for example, the following excerpt from a fax response from Disney as a sort of postscript to the collection of photographs presented in *An American Index*: "Especially during these violent times, I personally believe that the magical spell cast on guests who visit our theme parks is particularly important to protect and helps provide them with an important fantasy they can escape to." But in this case, Simon's rejection from the fantasy world of the Disney theme parks is as revealing as the photographs she was able to secure.

Simon is a master at conducting research and at determining how to present her findings in a way that is visually revelatory and compelling. She does this in *An American Index*, and she does this in her other projects as well. With *The Innocents* (2003), Simon locates and photographs men and women who were wrongly sentenced to death or to live without parole, and with *A Living Man Declared Dead and Other Chapters I-XVIII* (2008-2011), Simon attempts to locate and photograph all the living ancestors and descendants of a particular person or animal. With each of these projects, Simon encountered obstacles – people who were difficult to locate, people who didn't want to be photographed – but she persisted. She came up with strategies to show that which she was not allowed to show. For example, she made the decision to photograph the clothes of the descendants of a Nazi war criminal, rather than abort the project when the descendants said they themselves did not want to be photographed. It

seems to me that this tenacity is the crux of what makes Simon's work so special. In the digital age, documentary work will be increasingly about distilling the abundance of information available into meaningful images (or non-images) and text. This is Simon's strength, particularly as evident in *An American Index*. This is also the challenge for documentary-makers of the future.

julie gemuend

the cosmic in a cosmos

exhibition, 2012

Located on the Bowery in New York City, the New Museum is exclusively devoted to promoting contemporary art from around the world. The metal mesh façade evokes the colour of moonlight and the composure of feminine elegance, fitting quarters to house the exhibition, *A Cosmos*, a collection of work by Cologne-based artist, Rosemarie Trockel. On view from October 24, 2012 until January 20, 2013, the exhibition archives approximately 90 works created by the artist over the past 30 years and occupies three of the museum's seven floors.

Trockel's artworks form a collection of craggy ceramics, austere photographs, knit paintings and found objects, all of which share the space with artifacts that belong in the natural history arena. These companion pieces were initially created by practitioners as didactic tools for scientific research but are recognized today for their aesthetic charm. Many of Trockel's contemporaries have also implemented and repurposed pedagogical instruments in their practice. Hiroshi Sugimoto, for example, creates his own mathematical models. In 2006, he produced pure aluminum sculptures by inputting mathematical equations into a computer. In 2007, Julian Schnabel introduced his *Navigation Drawings*, a series of framed nautical charts partially covered with the artist's slapdash brushstrokes. In both cases, the artists are altering the original form, whether a map or an equation, and calling the work their own. In *A Cosmos*, however, Trockel displays artifacts intact and unmodified alongside her own work. The intention of Trockel and New Museum curator Lynn Cooke is to present an exhibition that fully encompasses the artist's career by not only showing her work, but also the work of artists and practitioners who have been a source of inspiration. These artifacts illuminate Trockel's own work, providing a map of her aesthetic interests and paying homage to her inspirations. During the press review, Lynn Cooke explains that Trockel was uninterested in the idea of a traditional retrospective, preferring the hybrid approach of blending her artwork with the work of those she considers "kindred spirits."

Rosemarie Trockel emerged from a male-dominated, postwar generation of German artists. Her work offered an alternative to the authoritarian and absolutist approach of her male colleagues. From 1974 to 1978 she studied at the Werkkunstschule, Cologne, which was then heavily influenced by Joseph Beuys. She created her first knitting pictures in 1985 by stretching threads of wool across canvas or wood in monochrome or patterned abstractions. These unique works position the traditionally feminine occupation of knitting in a context of mass production and straddle the border between fine art and craft. The scope of Trockel's art traverses a vast expanse from the surreal to the abstract through to craft and design. As reflected in this exhibition, Trockel has proved herself a polymath. Her influences, which

include Hannah Höch, Anni Albers and Sigmar Polke, are as wide-ranging as her practice.

The exhibition sweeps the second, third and fourth floor of the museum. My option is to approach the show from the bottom up or the top down. I choose the latter and enter the exhibition from the fourth floor, which is primarily devoted to Trockel's glazed ceramic works. The longer I look at these crystallized formations, the more I see exploding stars frozen in time and space. I can really feel the cosmic in *A Cosmos*. The third floor holds Trockel's noted knit paintings accompanied by the yarn sculptures of the artist Judith Scott. These artworks are responsible for Trockel's rise to fame in the '80s but the work lacks the intrigue of her ceramics on the floor above.

The main gallery space on the second floor is a deep, dark, galaxy-purple atmosphere that evokes a certain seriousness despite some of the anomalous objects contained within. The room is imposingly large with a gothic sensibility. I wander through a collection of objects that appear, at first, only to be connected by their proximity to each other in the space: the skeleton of a 27.5 lb lobster cooked in 1964, three abstract paintings by Tilda the orangutan, a dead moth on velvet, two large vitrines filled with misfit dolls and other curious objects.

The exhibition winds around a corner where a smaller version of this main space is revealed. Here I encounter *Park Avenue* (2001-2006), a series of slides projected across a short and narrow corridor. The installation forces me to walk in between the projector and the wall on which the images appear; the dark, familiar smudge of my shadow interrupts the floral procession. Beyond *Park Avenue* hangs *Florence* (2010), a billowing flower painted in acrylics and graphite. "I die for you" is finger-painted onto the canvas, reiterating the theme of nature's demise in the wake of human evolution. Next to *Florence* is a work titled *Picnic* (2012), a wooden display cabinet filled with dead plant matter. A displaced birdsong spills in from the adjoining room, encroaching on the grave silence of these departed leaves. The experience is uncanny and delivers a heightened sense of the living, the dead, and our role as human beings in the life cycle of the natural world. The birdsong summons me to the light.

I cross the threshold into this white-tiled room. The light blinds and the song seduces. All the heaviness from the main space evaporates. This small room is the heart of the exhibition. Harkening back to the cabinet of curiosities of Renaissance Europe, the room creates a bleached-out awareness of the self, the space and the relationships between the objects housed inside: a small, black and white reproduction of Courbet's *L'Origine du monde*, refashioned with a strategically placed tarantula; a wall-mounted white ceramic; an inverted plastic

palm tree hangs heavily from the high ceiling. The source of the birdsong comes from a sprawling, ornate birdcage containing two motor-operated birds that move in a delayed and rudimentary path forward and back again. A counter table bell inside the birdcage abruptly rings every few minutes, perhaps signaling our culture of convenience (at any cost) or our deep preoccupation with our own existence. Once I've made my round, I come to see that the second floor is thematically readable as most works address the question of our impact on the natural world.

This theme can be cast loosely over the exhibition, however, the unity of the collection is not obvious enough to please the critics. Yet, the critic's refusal to acknowledge Trockel's approach can be seen in a positive light if illuminated by John Cage's insight: "I was the son of an inventor. The fact that people weren't accepting what I was doing indicated that I was inventing something. In fact, I developed the opinion...that if my work is accepted, I must move on to the point where it isn't." Trockel's attempt to tell more by showing less of her work (in conjunction with artifacts and artworks belonging to a range of practitioners) creates a nebulous collection, defined not by similarities but by the differences between the objects on display. The exhibition is less a body of work and more a space filled with (precious) objects, many of which appear not to be born from or belong to the artist at all, but seem to come from an eclectic collective with competing aesthetics and ideas. The addition of scientific artifacts and the artwork of unknown, self-taught artists heighten this divide in form and content.

Trockel delivers a new art experience, a refreshed perspective on what it means to be an artist in an age plagued by postmodern skepticism. The exhibition has been described by critics as "opaque" and "dull," but this is not the case. Trockel has been punished by the media for discarding the traditional retrospective format and refusing viewers an easy, cohesive art experience. Art enthusiasts are brought up to embrace the neatness of concepts and series. Yet art is meant to reflect life and life is not neat. Trockel's work reflects fragmentary human nature. I am, for example, open and closed, dynamic and boring, coherent and confused. Trockel brings life to art in this exhibition where one can experience a heaviness and buoyancy; playfulness and the macabre; some success and some failure; Trockel and non-Trockel. *A Cosmos* represents the fullness and emptiness of life curated by an artist who refuses to be categorized, defies the rules, and embraces a method of working that has the potential to change the way the world is seen.

Exhibition: Rosemarie Trockel: *A Cosmos*, New Museum, New York, New York

liz gibson-degroote

the ugly subtext in *avatar*

film, 2009

James Cameron's *Avatar* holds the title for the highest grossing film of all time. Following its 2009 release, the nation's leading film critics celebrated the film as a technical breakthrough and cinematic masterpiece. Audiences loved it. It was labeled environmentalist, anti-imperialist, and anti-capitalist by enthusiasts from the left and opponents from the right. In reality, *Avatar* is a shallow and racist blockbuster, undeserving of all the moral accolades it received and due more close examination. It should rightly be praised as nothing more than an impressive exercise in CGI technology.

The plot is a basic representation of Joseph Campbell's monomyth that has been racialized into white-savior cinema. A white man enters a tribal culture that is completely alien to him. He learns the local ways quickly and becomes so adept at the skills the native people have been cultivating for unknown lifetimes that he rivals their best warriors and steals the love of the princess character from the most eligible local man. Predictably, he then saves their entire noble-savage existence.

While the main human characters in the film are all played by white actors, the native people of Pandora, the Na'vi, are played exclusively by people of color. They are a clear stand-in for the foggy Western notion of all native peoples from everywhere. Their environment, appearance, accents and culture are a lazy mix of various stereotypes of nonwhite cultures — Native North and South American, Amazonian, Caribbean, and African — with animals, specifically wild cats. They are first presented in a way that propagates what current culture has deemed an unacceptable stereotype, the aggressive savage. The arc of the movie then works to dispel that stereotype and replaces it with the now-popular but also damaging stereotype, that of the mystical, wholly pure and innocent race of magical beings so in tune with nature that it is unclear where they end and the land begins.

The fact that so many audience members completely miss the excess of racist subtext is a sad reminder that on a continent with such a monstrous history of race-related atrocities and (ongoing) oppression, most people are not taught or encouraged to critically consider and discuss notions and representations of race. In dominant North American culture, no one is held accountable to necessarily even understand what racism is.

The environmental and land rights issues raised in the film do not translate to the real world in any meaningful way that could further social change. In actuality, the industries and individuals that threaten nature and community are not necessarily and obviously composed of clearly racist, money-hungry thugs. They are neighbors, friends, and relatives. They are often viewed as job creators and national economy

heroes. They have the budget of global corporations and the persuasive power of our political figures feeding sophisticated media initiatives aimed at winning our support.

The moral of *Avatar* champions land rights for the native people based on their own impeccable morality rather than the simple fact that the land is theirs. It reinforces that we, and a white man embodying all the highest-esteemed American values — our hero — can only respect the rights of a foreign culture if that culture earns our paternalistic approval. Following that logic it is unfortunate that no native communities anywhere in the world will ever live up to the mythical beings depicted in the film. They are distinct cultures from one another and as they are exclusively human, unlike the Na'vi, they contain the full diversity of individual human failings. Additionally, they frequently face negative stereotypes predominant in white culture.

Cameron spent hundreds of millions of dollars to produce such a pedantic, clichéd presentation of a binary conflict that it would seem most suitable for children, if it weren't for the humiliatingly persistent racism. At best this film offers a titillating visual fireworks display and a pat on the back for all of us who can recognize good and evil when it is laboriously spoon fed to us.

This is the greenwashing of cinema. In denying the problematic messages of *Avatar* in favor of enjoying the incredible triumph of visual technology, we deny exactly those cultural problems that the film claims to address and we become complicit in their maintenance. As Daniel Bernardi writes, "...race in cinema is neither fictional or illusion. It is real because it is meaningful and consequential. We learn about other people, other cultures, ourselves by watching Hollywood films over and over again—all too often without questioning what we see. Hence, we do not escape reality when watching cinema uncritically; we perpetuate real ideologies when we think of cinema as 'only the movies.'"



alexandra hill

the best of buzzfeed

website, 2012

The traditional news media is facing a crisis: newspapers are cutting their circulation and journalists are being laid off in droves, media conglomerates are struggling to find new ways to entice readership and the Internet has been cited as both the source of the problem and the solution to it. With newspapers moving online, stories are now deemed successful based on hits and “sharability.”

Aside from making content more accessible, journalists are also making it more entertaining. The “best of” list is one such device that has been around for years, allowing writers to repackaged reviews and accolades into the entertaining and easily digestible formats. This style of reviewing can be found in publications of all sizes, in print and on the Internet, filling the pages of media giants such as *The New York Times*, *Rolling Stone*, and *Reuters*. The Internet hosts a variety of independently produced lists as well, with many websites dedicated to compiling the best and worst of any given genre. But are these lists actually something to consider when choosing a new restaurant or selecting a film, or do they just provide journalists with an easy way to repackaged work and attract readers who are drawn to the familiarity and simplicity of the “best of”?

Why are the Best the Best?

Many readers take the “best of” list as law, but who is it behind those pages, directing our movie choices, favorite songs and clothing preferences? And if those writers get to determine what these preferred items, books and movies are, how do they come to those conclusions? Some lists clearly state that it was a jury of specialists or an online poll that lead to their rankings, but research into the creation of the majority of these lists came up suspiciously blank. It seems as though many of the ranking institutions would rather readers didn’t know exactly how they came to their conclusions. *Reuters* columnist Jack Shafer writes in his scathing article “The Best of the Year in Review!” that “the judgments are beyond arbitrary” when creating a “best of” list and that what these lists actually represent is lazy journalism. He goes on to argue that these lists “can be whipped up as fast as a bowl of instant pudding — all writers need do is download their clips (and their colleagues’ clips) and give the mess a fast edit”. While I would argue that some organizations certainly put a lot of research and thought into the creation of a heavily anticipated list, it still seems that even the most highly regarded lists follow a noticeable format of choices. Shafer refers to this tendency as “balancing” the list, leading one to question if these are really the best or just a cross section of the available? Yet these lists continue to be very popular with readers, and consequently with advertisers, who appreciate both the traffic lists bring in and the free publicity when their product or service elicits one of those coveted spots. And no

publication has realized the profit-driving potential of the “best of” list better than *BuzzFeed.com*.

BuzzFeed Lists: from Cutest Kitten to Best Supreme Court Nominee

BuzzFeed.com is a self-described “social news” website that you have most likely encountered on your Facebook newsfeed or Twitter stream at one point or another. The site, founded in 2006, is famous for its lists, from “The Most Important Cats of 2012” to “15 Hillary Clinton-Inspired Crafts You Can Own” and almost anything in between. In the “About” section, the site is described as “...intensely focused on delivering high-quality original reporting, insight, and viral content across a rapidly expanding array of subject areas”.

“Viral” may be the key word in that description because *BuzzFeed* is one of the rare websites that drives the majority of its incoming traffic from social media, rather than from search engines. And the model seems to be working for them, as website traffic has been cited at between 10 and 25 million unique visitors per month. The site has been described as “the millennial’s news outlet of choice,” and like most social media sites, the primary demographics are teenagers and young adults, many of whom are students. In addition to students and social media aficionados, *BuzzFeed* has courted advertisers and journalists alike over the past few years, leading to some seemingly contrary trends in the site’s recent development.

From a journalistic standpoint, *BuzzFeed* has been making significant changes over the past few years. As Ki Mae Huesser of *Adweek* described, *BuzzFeed* is “tockpiling journalists — serious ones”. Ben Smith, a political journalist of the popular blog *Politico* joined the team at the beginning of the 2012 U.S. election year and helped to make *BuzzFeed* an important player in election coverage. In addition to politics, *BuzzFeed* also added a section for technology and a business column is anticipated. These changes haven’t gone unnoticed in the journalistic community, where *BuzzFeed* has been called “The defining media outlet of 2012”. It seems that while *BuzzFeed* is arguably one of the most innovative news sharing websites, they have now set their sights on being taken more seriously in the journalistic sense as well, delivering more serious content to an audience less likely to find it from traditional news sources. In fact, a recent poll by *Reuters* “found that people aged under 25 are twice as likely to find their news through social media as they are through a search engine”. *BuzzFeed* readers may not initially be drawn in for the political news or tech coverage, but may find their way to that content after arriving at the site via some of the more fun, lighthearted topics. As Huesser writes: “readers have to get used to seeing listicles about 23 animals

defying gravity alongside serious stories about, say, President Obama’s nomination for Secretary of Defense”.

Despite this foray into more traditional journalism, we aren’t likely to see a decline in those “listicles” or best of lists any time soon. The lists have proven to be some of the most successful stories on the site, attracting the most views and shares among readers. This is the content that drives visitors to the site, which also makes it important to maintain for advertisers. As it turns out, in the advertising model used at *BuzzFeed*, lists aren’t only important to advertising, often they are advertising. The site is notoriously lacking in traditional ads, and this is because *Buzzfeed* has been a huge proponent of the “advertorial — sharable ads that look similar to its traditional content. “...The most popular and successful, according to case studies on *BuzzFeed*, is the list post”. The goal is for *BuzzFeed* clients, such as Toyota and Virgin Mobile, to advertise without it seeming like advertising, and hopefully create something interesting enough that their audience will want to share with others/

While this model has meant considerable success for *BuzzFeed*, providing the site with profits and industry kudos, what does it mean for their lists? And for that matter, all “best of” lists? If advertising is threaded throughout *BuzzFeed*’s lists with little to distinguish it, what is to say that it has not also played a contributing role in the “best of” lists released by traditional outlets like the *Globe and Mail* and the *New York Times*? And if *BuzzFeed* is striving towards more serious journalism, what *does* this strategy do to their credibility? Can they marry the website’s casual style to more serious issues, and if so, will we question their motives in doing so?

Combining Content and Style: Best of Gun Control

“The Hippest Coolest Gun Control Ads of the Last 15 Years” presents as a fascinating case study when considering all of these questions. This list, released on January 29, 2013, combines a serious topic with a “best of” format. Despite there being no clear indication of sponsored content, the article is obviously anti-gun at a time when the gun control debate is at the forefront of our collective consciousness. Could this list, in fact, be one of the best gun control ads in recent years, or is it a way for *BuzzFeed* to bring its readers into a more serious political conversation?

The political climate in the United States following the tragic shooting of 20 children and seven adults at Sandy Hook Elementary School on December 14, 2012, undoubtedly served as inspiration for the unique list of “The Hippest Coolest Gun Control Ads of the Last 15 Years.” Waiting long enough to be sensitive, but reacting quickly enough to contribute to the conversation, this article is fitting in its

release five weeks after the tragedy, and is one of many recent articles from media all over the United States to consider the issue of gun control. This list takes no consideration of the “balance” that Shafer identifies in his article, and the piece is clearly written for the known *BuzzFeed* audience, one that is young, tech-savvy, and most likely liberal. *BuzzFeed* does not provide a counter article with advertisements promoted by the NRA, but clearly shows the organization’s position on this issue, from the title to the suggested anti-gun and pro-Obama stories at the list’s conclusion. If this list is intended to drive audiences towards the website, then *BuzzFeed* is clearly aiming to attract a specific kind of reader.

The list itself is a compilation of video and print ads; some good, others bad; some altruistic, others capitalistic; many memorable, few truly impactful — at least according to the author of this list, Mark Duffy. The author questions the influence that these well-created ads have on the attitudes of Americans, most of whom, he argues, already have an unwavering stance on this issue. Duffy, whose column discusses advertising and marketing, also notes that this may not deter advertising agencies, many of which are happy to provide pro-bono material for the chance to work for an exciting and often glamorous cause.

The ads in this series are, for the most part, edgy, creative and artistic pieces that any ad agency would be thrilled to add to their portfolio. The problem of this piece, however, lies in its organization. The article lists nine ads, rather than selecting 10, which would make more sense in the typical format of a best of list. It also draws on advertisements from a variety of mediums, and the two video clips featured seemed out of place among the series of print ads. That being said, I think that the two videos, one by the *Peace on the Streets* campaign entitled “Stop The Bullets. Kill The Gun” and the other by the *Coalition to Stop Gun Violence*, featuring a spliced up NRA commercial with Congressman John Barrow, were the strongest ads in this piece. MTV’s “Rock the Vote” ad and the two Kenneth Cole ads ran into the same problem of feeling out of place. These however were out of place for content rather than style, because while both featured gun related messages, gun control was not the primary objective in either of these advertisements. Overall, despite some interesting observations and impressive ads, this series seemed disjointed and forced.

The recent shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School was clearly the impetus for reopening the gun control debate in the U.S., but it seems that in their haste to join the conversation, writers at *BuzzFeed* crafted a poorly executed compellation of other peoples messages in an attempt to convey their own. This list follows *BuzzFeed*’s tested and true formula, but attempts to tackle a much more serious issue

than the site’s bread and butter of cute cat photos and heart warming moments. As a “best of” list, I think that “The Hippest Coolest Gun Control Ads of the Last 15 Years” falls short, due to a lack of organization, cohesion and just being generally ill conceived. But as a hook to draw readers into the political section of this site (one of several places the article could be found) or even a cleverly designed advertisement by an anti-gun organization, this list is considerably more impressive. So this list begs the question: when considering “The Hippest Coolest Gun Control Ads of the Last 15 Years” is *BuzzFeed* doing “best of” lists poorly or advertising well?

BuzzFeed is changing the way young people consume news, and the way that advertisers reach them. The site has been both revered for its ingenuity and mocked for its silliness and lack of depth. But journalism is changing too, from traditional top-down paper media to “infotainment” and Internet subscriptions; and the media must evolve to stay afloat. The “best of” list has long been a tried and true hook for publications and an eagerly anticipated and heavily sought out source of reading material for customers. But given the reach and scope of these lists, don’t they call for examination of how exactly the top spots were awarded and what influences may have contributed to their formation? Should we really consider “best of” lists when so many of these lists are lacking in accountability demanded of journalism and simultaneously under pressure to be entertaining, balanced, and appealing to advertisers? Probably not, but they are certainly a good way to start a conversation.

fraser hogarth

streetfinder

exhibition, 2013



The map has been defined in many ways over the years, partially because mapping can adopt many different forms and be employed for many different purposes. Maps traditionally have three basic attributes: scale, projection, and symbolization. However, given the recent integration of computer technology with society, interactivity has emerged as a fourth attribute. In the map-making process each of these attributes introduces a degree of distortion from the three-dimensional reality which the map represents on a flat surface. Despite this there is a popular assumption that the map accurately depicts reality as it actually exists out in the world. This implicit truth claim is reminiscent of the old adage in photography that a “photograph can never lie”. There are many similarities in the ways in which both maps and photographs represent information about the world, and I felt an analysis of Sara Graham’s current exhibition of *StreetFinder* at MKG127 would provide an interesting venue for their discussion.

Sara Graham’s work has been primarily concerned with the issues and ideas of the contemporary city, and mapping has long been a central tenet of her artistic practice. Over the past several years she has created a series of diagrammatic drawings and sculptural models that describe and represent urban networks, traversing the space between real and imagined geographies. Graham continues to explore these themes with *StreetFinder*, which is comprised of eleven 121cm x 81cm photographs of physically modified Rand McNally map books of Canadian cities. On each page of the map books, Graham has surgically cut away the majority of the map except for a single series of roads. When the book is closed, these roads are layered on top of one another, revealing a complex and abstract latticework of road networks.

While I was viewing the exhibition, the curator offered me a glimpse of the original map books which Graham photographed. They are impressive works of art in and of themselves. The layering of pages creates an appealing sense of texture and depth that is absent from the exhibited photographs. The photographic process has stripped the altered map books of this quality by rendering them on a flat plane, just as the original maps have done to the urban centres they represent. In doing so the map books are transformed into an object that is both photographic and map-like. None of the cities are labelled in the exhibition, though in viewing the work one inevitably attempts to analyze the unique patterns of road networks in order to ascertain which city is represented by each image. This encouragement of an imaginative interpretation of the city provides a welcomed respite from the traditionally objective and functional use of maps.

Rand McNally only published 11 Canadian city map books, and for Graham this pointed to the social and economic agendas behind commercial mapping. By physically altering these types of maps, Graham is attempting to subvert the authoritative logic of the map and construct an alternative geography based on the flow of urban road networks. Before the revolution in digital mapping, ordinary road atlases were among the best-selling paperback books of any kind. These user-friendly maps homogenize and simplify the landscape into a network of highways and essential services for easy navigation. In doing so all context is stripped away as the world is rendered as a generic and placeless maze which invites little exploration outside of the major throughways. Consider the effects that these mass-produced images have had on our perceptions of the world around us. *StreetFinder* amplifies the conventional street map’s simplified depiction of the world and re-presents us with a new, flow-based perspective of the city.

However in the information age the street map as a physical object is quickly becoming a thing of the past. Technology is enabling new ways of viewing both photography and geographic information, and artists have begun to create work that both utilizes and reflects on these technologies. In *9-Eyes* Jon Rafman has begun appropriating images from Google Street View and displaying them in an art context. Street View images are created by vehicle-mounted cameras which are programmed to capture a panoramic image of the street every 9-15 feet and then map these images by their geospatial location. As of June 2012 Google had more than 5 million miles of user navigable road imagery. The massive scale of this project, its mapping context, and even the banal and pixelated nature of the images, all contribute to a heightened sense of realism in the imagery. However, for Rafman the individual Street Views are like photographs that no one took and memories that no one has, an interesting interpretation given that a Google algorithm blurs all visible human faces contained in these images. While some deride this work as being un-artistic, the creative act of navigating the virtual landscape of Street View, framing the scene, and selecting an image bears a similar resemblance to conventional street photography. This creates a tension between a cold and automated approach to photography and a human being navigating a virtual world seeking meaning. In this way both Rafman’s *9-Eyes* and Graham’s *StreetFinder* are responding subjectively to an objective map-based way of viewing the world.



Just as conventional street maps once did, Google Street View is altering how we perceive the world around us in addition to our conceptions of space and distance. This brings us to a core question raised in the work of both Graham and Rafman. Do maps represent reality or create reality? At their basic level, maps are representations and yet it is not an overstatement to suggest that when they represent space well they also draw us in imaginatively and emotionally. When I was young I would spend hours exploring the contours of maps and allow my imagination to wander in far off places. Undoubtedly these imperfect representations have had a profound impact on my perception of the world, but to what degree have these perceptions impacted my actions as an embodied human being interacting with the world?

One of the most commonly encountered map types is that which is based on the Mercator projection. Many grew up with Mercator maps adorning their classroom walls, though cartographers now generally agree that this type of projection is unsuitable for general maps of the world. The projection was designed for navigation because lines of a constant compass bearing appear as straight lines. This however introduces a large degree of distortion that has the effect of magnifying the size of landmasses closest to the poles. For example Greenland appears to be as large as the entire continent of Africa, when in reality Africa is 14 times larger. It has been claimed by some, such as cartographer Arno Peters, that this reinforces a sense of superiority among the powerful regions in higher latitudes (such as Europe), while diminishing the importance of typically marginalized regions in lower latitudes (such as Africa). The Mercator also received propaganda use during the Cold War by U.S. political groups which were fearful of the threat of communism. The Mercator greatly increased the size of the USSR (which would often be coloured in a symbolic red) in relation to the size of the US in order to illustrate the size of the threat that communism posed. If the Mercator helped make colonialism in Africa an easier pill to swallow for Europeans or magnified the perceived threat of communism for Americans, then this would suggest that maps can influence reality in their imperfect representation of it.

So what is the nature of the reality created in *StreetFinder*? With the visual complexity inherent to *StreetFinder*, I didn't find myself navigating an imagined space in the same way as I often do with conventional maps. Instead I found myself focusing on the aesthetic patterns of highway flow and attempting to infer their geographic origins based on my own mental geographies of Canadian cities. These activities point to both the art and cartographic context of the work. Though mapmaking is often considered to have an "art" component by cartographers, visual communications theorists tend to think of maps as diagrams which create a similitude of

reality. The images displayed in *StreetFinder* are presented as art and read as art, though they are inherently map-like by virtue of their source material, and as a result a perception of "realness" is inevitable. Like maps, photographs can also be thought of as similitudes of reality. However both are certainly capable of shaping our perceptions, and consequently our actions, depending on how we read them. For this reason both maps and photographs have a history of being wielded as instruments of socio-political power and propaganda due to their central role in making social imagery a concrete part of the "real". The work of Graham and Rafman both attempt to collapse the border between the map and the photograph and asks questions about how we navigate and perceive visual representations of the world, and given the inherent similarities between these two representational forms they are both quite effective at doing so.

jordan kawai

superimposition: a layered visit

exhibition, 2013

Superimposition, a collaborative exhibit at the Ryerson IMA Student Gallery, features artists Stephen Broomer and Dan Browne exhibiting a mixture of time-lapsed video, soundscape and print. Their works are unified by the shared aesthetic of superimposition.

Daunting by design, Broomer and Browne's exhibit is associated with such loaded catchwords as "experimental," "avant-garde" and "superimposition" itself. However, the artists' embrace of fragmentation results in a successfully delivered intimate experience of memory and time. Broomer's *Brebeuf* and Browne's *memento mori* presents a welcome overload of the sensory experience. Poetically overwhelming and open-ended in form, the exhibit gives rise to the superimposed byproduct of chaos — a shared feeling in dealing with the works' themes of mortality and memory.

Broomer's *Brebeuf* and Browne's *memento mori* are compositions of layered imagery. On each still of both artists' work, each layer on a single frame harmonizes aesthetically as well as conceptually with its neighboring layer. This attention to a melodic visual, as well as a strong focus on rhythm and dynamic, as the images move from one to another, suggests these two artists are visual musicians.

The American experimental filmmaker Stan Brakhage instantly comes to mind when I walked through *Superimposition*. Brakhage's 1963 film *Mothlight*, with fast cutting, provokes a montage quality and appears to have influenced Browne's *memento mori*, which shares the same quality of musical inspiration. Brakhage's opening words in his book *Metaphors on Vision* act as an almost perfect introduction in understanding the imaginative concept of Broomer's and Browne's *Superimposition*:

Imagine an eye unruly by manmade laws of perspective, an eye unprejudiced by compositional logic, an eye which does not respond to the name of everything but which must know each object encountered in life through an adventure of perception.

Broomer and Browne have both attempted to make Brakhage's imagined eye of boundless perspective come to life through the exhibit of *Superimposition*.

Upon first entering the exhibit, the gallery space itself is a constrained physical environment, raising the issue of a fragmented experience. This feeling must be shared by Browne who altered *memento mori* from its original work of cinema state to cater to the specific space of the gallery. The gallery is a single room housing three walls of prints and one wall displaying projected HD video. Seats lined up in front of the projected video at the centre of the room create an outlining parameter for gallery travel.

In its original form, *memento mori* is a 28-minute, colour HD video capturing a lifetime of images. This experimental video, on loop as one enters the exhibit, casts itself immediately as the initial focal point due to its pulsating surge of vibrant light, colour and shapes and due to the slowed-down dissonance of the soundscape filling the gallery.

The film opens with a quick and rushing stream of stills, varying in subject and content — from cityscapes to candid snapshots to portraits — all of which just barely holds in frame to commit to recognition before advancing. The effect is a sensation of carefully selected textures and colour that stimulate your thoughts as quickly it does your eyes.

The first 45 seconds of the time-lapsed video create a feeling of blending paints; free-flowing in an equal state of velocity as one imagines, with colours pouring onto a painter's pallet,— swirling, spiraling, and mixing with the same grace and dynamic.

Rhythm is of equal importance in the soundscape as it is in the visual presentation. The hypnotic looping of the audio soundtrack mimics the youthful enticing sounds of a merry-go-round or ice-cream truck. However, the audio and visual simultaneously seek dissonance in the tempos in which they unfurl. The slow, relaxed yet unsettling feeling of a looped carnival soundtrack makes the viewer feel mimicked or menaced as it is in complete contrast to the beautifully chaotic swelling of the visual stream — evoking this feeling of being lost, left behind in time, or in the dust of the momentum that is the fast-paced rush of life and infinite absurdity of memory-generating.

With the ending of the looped carnival theme, both visual- and auditory-scapes take a darker turn. A crescendo of discomforting rumbling fills the soundscape while the images become less recognizable, more abstract and literally darker in terms of exposure. The fading of the carnival soundbyte and the growth of this multi-medium of darkness imitate the haunting aesthetic of a carnival ride ending in an unsettling house of mirrors as reminiscent of the final sequences in Orson Welles' *The Lady from Shanghai*. Beginning as a joyous ride, reliving the twists and turns of memories throughout time, but ending in an odd moment of reflection; where the person left reflecting feels lost amidst their own image. It is here that *Superimposition*'s theme of death and mortality emerges.

In its original form, Browne's work is a piece of cinema. Presenting the work in a gallery, Browne altered the work by slowing down both the visual and audio tracks. This decision was Browne's response to the anticipated fragmented experience of viewers entering and exiting throughout the playback of the work. Browne welcomes this variation

presented in gallery form, adding that it enhances *memento mori*'s connection to still photography and allows for more adequate appreciation of the layered images.

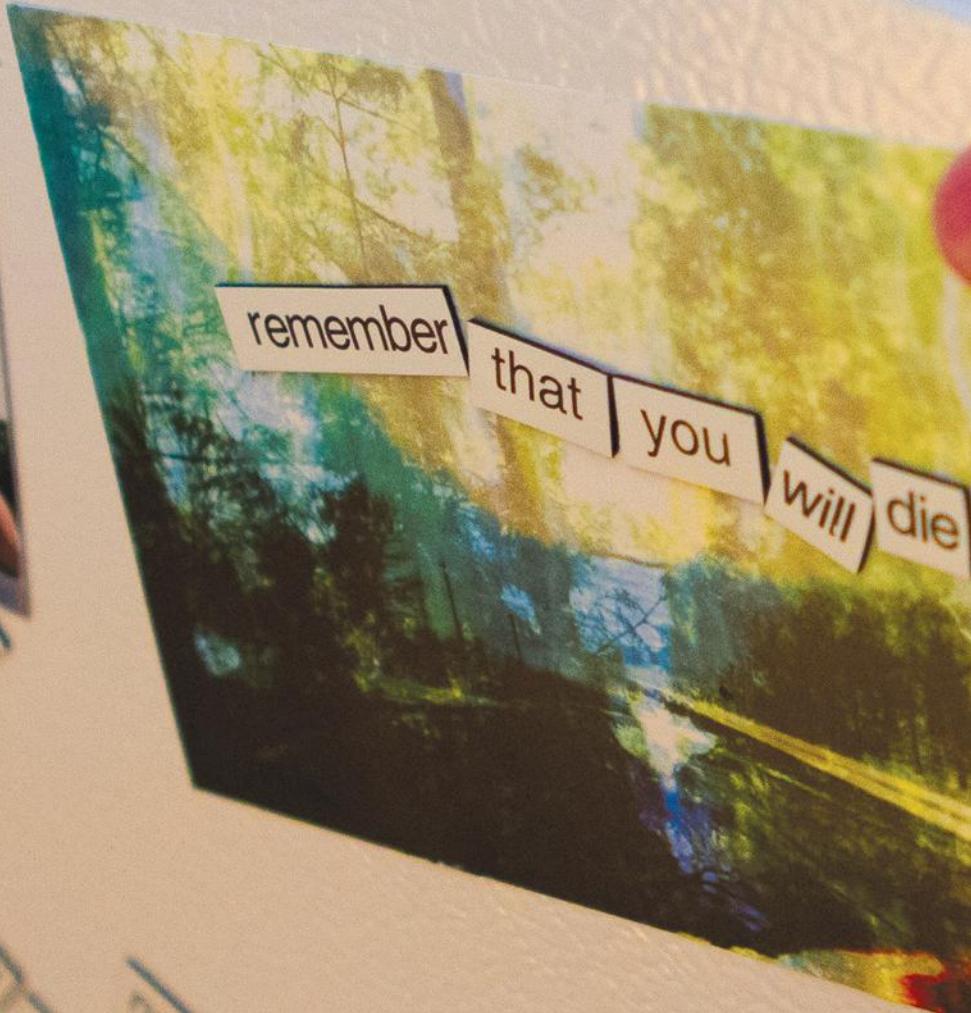
Once past the hypnotic flare of the video, Broome's prints, portrayed uniformly in glass framing with black border and white matte, ignite a second narrative. However, the soundscape from the video piece bleeds into the experience of Broome's work. This convergence exposes the problematic selection in gallery space; but once acquainted and familiarized with the thematic pairing of the artists, the gallery space itself is acknowledged for its successful creation of a third fully collaborative body of work in which superimposition is literally illustrated amongst (seemingly, but obviously not, accidental) merging artistry.

Broome's work is encapsulated in a series of images displayed around the space. These images depict similar tones and feelings of form and layering as illustrated in Browne's moving images. The feeling of being frozen in a composed layered frame is a refreshing break from the up-tempo time-lapse journey displayed on the adjacent wall, furthering the sense that not only do these two separate projects share the characteristic of superimposed aesthetic, but they, too, share a conceptual framework of blurring time and memory.

Broome and Browne present a visual fantasia composed with familiar tunes of memory and death while flirting with the topics of rebirth and reincarnation through the photographic capsule. Brakhage's poetic illustration of the endless artistic potential of the camera eye practically serves as an ode to *Superimposition*:

Oh transparent hallucination, superimposition of image on image, mirage of movement, heroine of a thousand and one nights, you obstruct the light, muddle the pure white beaded screen with your shuffling patterns.

The theme of mortality and immortality in *Superimposition* is endless. We see the words and ideas of one of the most important figures of experimental film, Brakhage, reincarnated in the works of Broome and Browne. *Superimposition* is a layered journey through time and space, an "electric reflection" of one's past, and most importantly a metaphor on vision that captivates the eye as much as the mind.





michael kim

superimposition

exhibition, 2013

Superimposition is an exhibit presented at the I.M.A. Gallery in Toronto by Stephen Broomer and Dan Browne, PhD candidates in the Communication and Culture program at Ryerson University. Superimposition emphasizes the aesthetic characteristics of Stephen Broomer and Dan Browne's work — layering a myriad of images over each other to create a new, re-contextualized story. Broomer exhibited five photographic prints, each piece approximately 32" by 40" with a printed area of 22" by 30", originating from 16 mm motion picture film. Similarly, Browne's film was also shot on 16 mm but was later digitized, altered, and then returned to the 16 mm format. It is composed of multiple layers of images including as many as a dozen or more individual photos within a single frame per second. The success of Browne and Broomer's collaboration stems from the similar visual aesthetics of their images, which presents a strong cohesiveness between their works. Both of their works consist of multiple images layered on top of another and the content in their work is based on their personal experiences and places they have visited. The collaboration of the two artists added to the experience of their exhibition; Browne's soundtrack and pulsating images were reflected on to Broomer's work, which resulted in an unintentional superimposition. As a result, my initial impression was that Broomer's photographic images and Browne's film were created by the same artist.

Dan Browne's film, *memento mori* is utterly fascinating. It is an experimental film, 60 minutes in length, which captured the poetry of a documentary by playing with multiple images and abstract sounds. *memento mori* can be read as a poetic documentary because it is focused on mood, rhythm and tone, rather than the bombardment of information or acts of persuasion. It is an ensemble of images of the world recorded from Browne's past. Additionally, the film lacks a narrative of events that develop through the film. It consists of patterns that involve constant rhythms and juxtapositions of imagery. The images used in the film are his own photographs mixed with images brought in from old family photos. In fact, he brought in every photograph that existed in his digital archive, including old 35mm film still photography, which was scanned and used in the first sequence of the film. The fragmented images and abstract sounds can be read as representations of memory and the passage of time.

Browne's work is a visual and audio overload of information and sound. The entire film is composed of still images, with some individual frames stacked with as many as 12 to 15 still images except for a short scene towards the end of the film showing Browne skating with his father when he was a young child. Throughout the film, the viewer is engaged with images that can be placed into three distinct categories. First, some images are representative of Browne's surroundings in the city; including buildings, windows, traffic lights, power

lines, and overpasses. Second, photographs are shown of family, especially his younger brother as a child. Lastly, the aforementioned photographs are juxtaposed with images from nature — lakes, trees, trails, grass, leaves, mountains — creating a contrasting overlap of meaning and intent.

The content of the film comes from different aspects of Browne's life that are difficult to trace and, without narration or text to contextualize the film, remain very abstract. With the intentional juxtaposition of overlapping images within a single frame challenging the viewer's perception, it can be considered a highly experimental film.

The use of images from family photos and home video adds another layer to this film. It made Browne's film quite personal by opening a window to his memory. The inclusion of such personal photos gives the sense that *memento mori* is a remembrance of his past, including his childhood and many significant moments in his adult life. These memories can be a particular summer at a cottage or a specific drive that he had taken. *memento mori* encouraged me to search for memories within myself, recalling moments with my own family that are no longer vivid in my mind.

Dan Browne describes his film, "a memento that reminds one of death...something that Andre Bazin notes in 'On the Ontology of the Photographic Image'...I suppose I took the farthest conclusion I could reach". This film is an attempt for Browne to recall his life experiences, similar to the experience of opening up an old photo album and recalling lost memories, then realizing the how time passes quickly. Browne recently screened his work at the Rotterdam Film Festival, which is one of the largest audience-driven film festivals in the world, focusing on innovative filmmaking by talented newcomers and established auteurs. The curators at the Rotterdam Film Festival accidentally misprinted his description on the film to state it was a "meditation on immortality." He found this accidental misprint wonderful, "How art can preserve life indefinitely in some sense just as it passes away... and how photographs and archive simultaneously extend and limit our vision and memory."

The soundtrack for the film is a cacophony of sounds, creating a sense of rhythm that complements the stream of pulsating images. It consists of thumping beats, bird cries, tonal buzzing, and a voice that is unrecognizable due to increasing and decreasing audio speeds. The combination of sound and the endless flashing images is incredibly hypnotic, encapsulating and drawing the viewer into the film. As a result of staring at the screen for a duration of time, the viewer can conclude that Browne's film is a time-lapsed exploration of his life, which also represents the passage of time through the changing of the seasons, evident in the coloured foliage seen

in the photographs. With multiple images layered on top of one another, it is difficult, at times, to deconstruct the visual images in the film. At moments, images are soft in focus and vibrant in color, which creates an atmosphere similar to a dream. It evokes that feeling of not being able to recall everything accurately, as if gazing into one's fading mind and fighting to remember. His intention is to stack as many layers as he can to create a textured experience that would be more felt with the body than seen by the eyes.

In constructing this response paper, I visited Dan Browne's website and noticed the difference in play speed of *memento mori*. It seems that the film on his website is playing at what could be described as a 'normal' speed, totaling 28 minutes in length, while the film at the gallery was playing at half the speed or even slower. Most of what I assumed was abstract sound in the gallery version is narration and can be clearly heard in the version on his website. This can change the viewer's interpretation of the piece. I still believe this is a poetic documentary of his memory but being able to hear this dialogue in the audio adds another layer of meaning to this film. Browne says that his work is "viable to continue within new contexts and subject to a potentially indefinite number of remixes and permutations." This returns to the notion that what is archived can be manipulated through editing. Thus, the constant change of meaning and interpretation is in the hands of the artist, as seen in the documentary *The Atomic Café*, which uses news footage, government produced films, and advertisement to demonstrate the silliness of public nuclear propaganda between the 1940s to 1960s.

After exchanging emails with the artist regarding different playing speeds of the film at the gallery, I was able to gain some insights into his decision. He thought it was important to translate *memento mori*, which is originally a work of cinema, into a gallery setting. Presenting his film in the gallery was a challenge due to viewers entering and exiting at any given time and competing with other auditory works that were sharing the same space. He also slowed down the speed of the film "to draw out the connection of still photography, and make it easier to appreciate the images in the work, which are otherwise more ephemeral." Simultaneously he altered the sound so that it became more "environmental for the gallery and less figurative." The original soundtrack has an implicit story about death, transformation, and rebirth through the narration of the voices.

I truly enjoyed the aesthetic theme of *Superimposition* by Browne. It is fascinating how one can push imagery in many different directions. The artist successfully experimented with layers of photographs, audio, and motion to create a poetic documentary embedded with fragments of his personal experiences to create a narrative within the film.

This film brought back many of my own personal memories. In the process of recalling a particular memory or event, you are forced to recall other memories that lead to or even resulted from that event. All our senses — sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch — become layers of memory that assist in recalling an event. However, our memory is always diluted by the passage of time. Browne concludes, "In trying to reach any single memory, one finds it embedded within larger context of other events and impressions."

jennifer lee

between father and son: a conversation in *echolilia / sometimes i wonder*

publication, 2010

Timothy Archibald is a commercial and editorial photographer from San Francisco whose personal projects have appeared in exhibits in Hong Kong, Australia and New York. Having discovered photography as a teenager, he uses the photographic lens to explore subjects through a curious and humanistic perspective. He portrays his subjects in a range of emotions and settings—sometimes ironic, sometimes sarcastic.

Archibald's most recent work, *ECHOLILIA / Sometimes I Wonder*, tells an intimate story of the relationship between father and son. I first noticed excerpts from *ECHOLILIA* in an article by Jessica Samakow in the *Huffington Post* (June 28, 2012). I was captivated by images of Archibald's son, Eli. In one photo, Eli (then six-years-old), curiously places one end of a vacuum cleaner hose to his mouth and the other end against his right ear. His eyes are closed and he is whispering, listening to his own voice. In another, he peers through a red funnel, his face barely noticeable against the rims of the plastic cup. Flipping further into the photo gallery, I see a photo of him contained, fully undressed, in a narrow, transparent plastic bin. He's channeling a red ball in another photograph as he places it intimately against his face, the light behind the red ball glowing like an orb. I am almost embarrassed to invade his space, this private moment between father and son. It is as though one has tip-toed into this father-son world, careful not to disturb it, but watching quietly, in awe, at something so wonderfully intimate and sweet.

Through the use of natural light and carefully placed objects, we see a delicate innocence in Eli, his "objects of wonder," and his father, Archibald. It is only when I read the text that accompanies the photographs that I find out Eli was diagnosed with autism soon after Archibald began his project. Archibald uses his photographic lens to understand and make meaning out of his son's actions. *ECHOLILIA* began as a personal project and is now an award-winning book published in June 2010, which includes a series of photographs, narratives and an interview between Archibald and Andy Levin of *100 Eyes Magazine*. The book, currently sold out on Archibald's personal site (<http://timothyarchibald.com/blog/>), can be seen through excerpts posted on various websites, most noticeably on *TIME*'s photo gallery (<http://www.time.com/time/photogallery/0,29307,2027433,00.html>), which includes photos with accompanying text, written by Archibald.

TIME's photo gallery shows a number of excerpts from the book and is the only online photo gallery that includes both the photos and Archibald's accompanying text. However, the way *Echolilia* is framed on *TIME*'s photo gallery confuses me. The title: "ECHOLILIA: A Father's Photographic Conversation with his Autistic Son" falls short on the central

meaning of the project. *ECHOLILIA* is not about autism, but rather how a father and son connect, communicate and make meaning out of their relationship. Also, it is not just about Archibald's conversation with his son, but rather his son conversing with his father, a two-way dialogue with the camera lens as the medium.

In one scene, Archibald describes Eli's sensitivity to electronic noises. "The beeping of a garbage truck when it is backing up, the sounds of an engine shifting into high gear, the beeping of a microwave oven: The sound is very loud." Eli wants his dad to turn the sounds down, but his dad responds that he can't control the sounds: "That is the volume that the machine creates." The photo above the narrative shows Eli with a dented, mesh garbage can over his head. The scene is witty, even ironic, but most of all, it is a father portraying how the world may seem to his son. Although he cannot change it, he wants to understand it from all perspectives, and connect and embrace it.

The relationship between father and son is a complex and perennial theme. There's an unspoken level of expectation between Willy Loman and Biff in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*; a desire to understand and respect his father's experiences before and during the holocaust in Art Spiegelman's *Maus* and *Maus II*; and the conflicting need to hang on and let go as the narrator watches his son grow up in *A Perfect Night to Go to China*, by David Gillmore.

Canadian journalist Ian Brown's book, *The Boy in the Moon*, plays on a similar theme in an honest and complex way. The book culminated from a series of feature-length articles and videos for *The Globe and Mail*, where Brown's sympathy, and brutal honesty about his son with cardio-facio-cutaneous (CFC) syndrome resulted in the British Columbia National Book Award for Canadian Non-Fiction. Brown's son, Walker, was born with CFC, a rare genetic disorder that only affects about 300 people in the world. In recent genetic research, scientists found that one chromosomal abnormality can result in delayed mental growth, skin abnormality, heart malformations and delayed speech. Walker has a moderate form of CFC and cannot speak, but like Eli, he is fascinated with light and sound. A folk song on a guitar will bring him within inches of the guitar strings. He will make his way to flashing lights hanging on a Christmas tree before noticing guests at the door. But CFC is more extreme. Often times Walker will have bouts of frustration, hitting himself or tearing out his hair. To keep him from hurting himself, Walker has braces placed over his arms and requires 24-hour care. In an online video, Brown converses with Walker through their own private language — a series of "clicking sounds." He uses a clicking pattern to say "good morning," or "how are you today?" to his son. Walker replies in clicks.



"That probably doesn't sound like much of a conversation, but if you never get to speak to each other in a normal way, that's a pretty important conversation," said Brown in an interview with *Globe and Mail* (December 1, 2007).

In both instances, we see a father reaching out in every possible way to communicate with his son through sound or photography. Underneath, Brown feels guilty and constantly wonders, with the advancement of modern medicine, if he is doing more harm than good to Walker and his family. Walker's arm braces are constricting, resulting in hours of cries of pain and frustration. He cannot swallow, but is tube-fed through a hole in his sleeper that runs into a valve connected to his stomach. Brown and his wife never get a full night of uninterrupted sleep. In his book, Brown wonders if it is all worth it; if all the pain and fatigue will culminate into something worthwhile and meaningful in the end. Brown ends with a dream he had, where his son is married and happy. And although he cannot speak in full sentences, he has made progress. Walker nods to his father, as if freeing him from the pain and guilt that resulted from his father's decision to keep him alive. It is this feeling of responsibility, of tough-love, a need to provide in unknowing ways that portrays the father-son dichotomy.

Autism has a wide spectrum of characteristics. In many cases, researchers find it difficult to define it in one sentence. In *ECHOLILIA*, Archibald finds ways to understand and amuse his son who enjoys being in front of the camera. The title of the book, *ECHOLILIA*, is a play on "echolalia," which refers to the copying of sounds and sound patterns, a fascination for autistic children. Archibald embeds his son's name, Eli, into the title, perhaps to convey that autism is innately part of his son and this book is about his son's world and how a copy of that world might be portrayed through Archibald's words and photographs.

Brown's title, *The Boy in the Moon*, is a play on the classic poem: *The Man in the Moon*. We look for a man in the moon as a way of searching for something in ourselves, something we can relate to. Brown, too, is searching, within himself, for a way to relate to his son.

In both instances, the artists are working through distance, space and sound to not only find a connection, but to understand their son's world. As parents, we often seek a reflection of ourselves in our children, to make sense of their actions, to know what makes them the way they are. So, too, do Archibald and Brown as they break through boundaries, looking for meaning, and themselves, in their sons.

nadia marzouk

searching for sugar man: a worthwhile journey

film, 2012

Rodriguez always loved playing the guitar and making music. He was discovered in 1969 in a little bar, named "The Sewer" in downtown Detroit, where two music producers heard him play and shortly after offered him a record deal which he accepted. Rodriguez completed two albums both completely flopped...so he thought! Meanwhile, across the world in South Africa, he was bigger than Elvis. For decades, he had no idea of his fame, or his millions of admirers.

Searching for Sugar Man is a refreshing experience in which the story of Sixto Rodriguez's distant and unknown fame is revealed through the investigation of two fans, Steven Seegerman and music journalist Craig Bartholomew-Strydom. This documentary was successfully executed in terms of narrative. As the film begins, the audience is intentionally and momentarily misled to believe that they are about to be introduced to a man who died in a public and "grotesque" manner. As the documentary progresses, the story continuously surprises in the most pleasant of ways. It gives the initial impression of a dark story as you get a flash of stormy, gloomy Detroit, Michigan, yet transforms into a story of light, love, and a kindhearted modest man. This in turn leaves you grateful to have watched the film.

You will find yourself wondering where Rodriguez has been all your life. The viewer is taken on a journey that results in giving recognition where it was genuinely deserved and teaches a lesson of true humility. This journey takes off when one of Rodriguez's daughters responds to an online post by a fan, seeking any information about her father. These crucial points could have been made more climactic, but for the rhythm of the primary subject's personality, it was done just right. The humble and humanistic aspects of Rodriguez's essence are one that he was successful in passing down to his daughters, which will surely impact the viewer- one must hope in a long-term respect.

Directed by Malik Bendjelloul, *Searching for Sugar Man* is a clear reminder that the story is what really matters. A story is revealed that makes you a fan of somebody you had been introduced to just short of an hour and a half earlier. It stands as a true reminder of karma, and an inspirational tale which is solid enough to restore hope, and the right prioritization of values in life. As stated by Clarence Avant, former owner of Sussex Records, "Bob Dylan was mild to this guy." Dylan was a visionary in the music world right around the same time Rodriguez was in the shadows, yet what this documentary shows, is how those in the shadow sometimes hold the greatest of lights. With due respect, I must state that Dylan's voice is hardly comparable to the clarity and talent of Rodriguez. This is a truth that even the greatest of Dylan's fans would likely admit, unless denial was to overwhelm them.

For an audience of music lovers, and narrative enthusiasts, the documentary is complete and touching. It must be said that there were some instances in which the filmmakers appeared to be off track when defining the aesthetic approach. For instance, there are bits of animation inserted in the film which invades the viewers and pushes them out of the smooth cruise they were experiencing. Should the story not have been as solid as it was, the re-entry into the narrative would have been tremendously difficult.

Many rock documentaries focus on the nitty-gritty facts, which are at times superficially rooted. This film was a refreshing exception. I walked away feeling being grateful for the story it enhanced my life with. We frequently hear criticism by rock fans that "they don't make music like they used to." These are the music lovers who likely do not listen to anything produced after the mid 80's. Many in this population may not know of Rodriguez and for that they are losing out!

Associating or comparing *Searching for Sugar Man* with other documentaries is no easy task. There are a few avenues one can venture down when comparing it to other films or Rodriguez to other musicians, but we can always try. I believe that there has never been a story quite like this one. If we look at the documentary, *No Direction Home: Bob Dylan*, it is a success in its own way and truly penetrates an audience who already knows the artist and is directed by the popular Martin Scorsese. The sense of sheer interest is not birthed from the film itself, but rather from their music, or those involved in the making. A documentary's success is directly proportional to the story it unravels. The reality of the fact is that some stories are better told, while others are better untold. Rodriguez's story is a piece of gold just mined and shined. The fact that he has become known in North America as a result of this film is a unique route that most careers do not take, but he himself and his work were worthy enough that it has.

If one opens the pool of documentaries to those focused on musicians of any genre as their primary subjects, there is one film that comes to mind that was not quite as inspiring as *Searching for Sugar Man*, yet there is a similarity in terms of the level of inspiration projected. That film is *Marley*, a documentary about Bob Marley, his life, his music, and his journey through life. The plot is far more complete, considering that Marley passed in 1981, but his genuine core is one that the film introduced viewers to. The difference between the stories is that Marley is a world renowned reggae singer and song writer and Rodriguez's story stemming from the fact he was the opposite of renowned. He shared the profound qualities Rodriguez had in always putting

an emphasis on living in simplicity, and never letting his fame overwhelm his solid character. Although the kindness and even-temper Rodriguez possesses were not said to be qualities Marley preserved.

The story of an artist is one that usually intrigues; yet this was above and beyond. You will have love for Rodriguez once watching this film. You will also ask yourself what is important in life, and it will help you in knowing how to answer that elusive, yet fundamental question on a deeper level. *Searching For Sugar Man* is a must see to say the least. This film provides a notable introduction to Rodriguez, a complete unknown with a rich, soothing voice. Last but not least, the soundtrack is a solid investment that I am sure will bring you peace and keep you company for years to come. I have no doubt that much more of Rodriguez will flood us resulting from the exposure *Searching for Sugar Man* has offered and I welcome all of it with open ears.

natasja nuhanovic

krivina

film, 2012

Igor Drljaca's film-debut, *Krivina*, currently playing at The Royal theatre, is an experimental approach to depicting the after-effects of war. The story is about a young man, Miro, who has immigrated to Toronto in 1999, and goes back to Bosnia to find an old friend, Dado, whom he has not seen for twenty years. However, this movie is much more about depicting an atmosphere and state of mind, rather than following a narrative told through a more traditional, i.e. plot-based, approach. After sitting down for a piece of cake on Queen Street West with it's main actor, Goran Slavkovic, and discussing the film with him, I realized that one of the director's aims was to create this disorientation and an uncertain identity through both linguistic use in the script itself and through directorial strategies.

From the beginning on we are drawn into a sort of meditative state. The film starts with a long shot of the Bosnian landscape. The viewer is then placed right behind the main character, Miro, and we slowly follow him along on his journey that ends up feeling like a long, never-ending, exhausting, pilgrimage.. The young director positions the viewer so closely to the protagonist that, along with the very long shots and the engrossing music, we really start to feel that we are right there with the character. This meditative state takes us to a level of awareness that transcends what we see right in-front of us and reveals to us something behind the reality that is so obviously perceived. In a way, Drljaca's film *Krivina* is a translation into filmic language of the fractured nature of someone's mind who has been through such shock and trauma as a war. The film reads like a echoes of one's home crumbling, one's friends and loved ones changed by war and one's every day life disappearing.

Drljaca shows this fragmentation by creating a non-linear structure. We follow the character as he visits various friends and acquaintances in Bosnia and tries to piece together the information that he hopes will lead him to his friend Dado. Yet, whenever he wakes up, there is a sense of disorientation and a discontinuation of what happened during the prior day to what he sees the next morning. Simultaneously, the jumping back-and-forth between Miro's quest in Bosnia and his life in Toronto creates further disorientation that Drljaca captures in this film. Of course, the viewer faces this very feeling as we start realizing that perhaps Dado and Miro are the same person and, indeed, they are.

Rather than being linear, this film presents a very refreshing and unique approach to telling the story of the after-effect of the Balkan war. The director himself has lived through part of the war and immigrated to Canada as a young boy. Like its predecessors, this film could have been a plot-driven movie where a young boy is shown leaving Bosnia during the war, growing up in Canada, and developing a tension of

identity and definition of home as an adult. Drljaca instead chose to portray a state of mind. I believe that this approach is powerful as it creates an emotional connection with the viewer through a very direct, transcendental, immediate and intimate experience. There are no characters we, as the viewer, watch from afar and get to know. From the beginning, we are thrown into the story and our mind slowly enters an altered state of perception as Drljaca takes us on this journey of disassociation and disorientation.

This emotional representation of the after-effect of war is also powerfully achieved in the film through the use of sound. Along with the long images that linger in the viewer's mind just like memory of a war does, the sound is continuous and repetitive, yet subtle. This is sometimes what the sound of war feels like. It is not loud grenades or snipers going off in one's head, but rather, those subtle sounds of the war itself or life itself that somehow one becomes more sensitive to as the result of such trauma. The film creates in the viewer a sense of heightened awareness; it awakens a survival instinct that is activated in extreme circumstances. The repetitive sound and length of the sound also recreates a certain exhaustion that is created during the war and also remains with one long after it.

The exhaustion is also exhaustion with time itself. After experiencing war, it is difficult to live in only one reality. One's life becomes a collection of instances that contain the past, present and the future. The film overlays different chronological realities and experiences of an almost eerie magic-realism. Miro visits an older gentleman, who once knew Dado. The two of them are sitting at a table inside the gentleman's house. The lighting of the scene is warm, welcoming, yet something about it is askew. The objects are too neatly organized, and few signs of life lived in the house are seen. When the next morning arrives, we find out that this friend Miro spent the evening speaking with has been long dead. The viewer, just as much as the character, has trouble distinguishing between actuality, memory and hallucination.

The film is like an exploration of our own subconscious. It is not only Miro's subconscious that we experience, but the film leaves enough space for us to explore our own subconscious and our own trauma. The long shots that resemble a distant memory in themselves, sometimes of only a landscape and sometimes lacking specificity of character by placing the viewer behind Miro's shoulder. This creates the distance necessary for us (as the viewer) to reflect on our own life. While the film clearly depicts a Bosnian landscape, it does not portray (at least not explicitly) war-damaged architecture, nor does it show anything that clearly defines the country (either by showing language or culturally specific objects). Also, we often see Miro from behind, so he could be anybody; he could

be us. Whether this was a conscious directorial choice or not, a lot of the film's power lies in being able to evoke a personal reaction in the viewer, a reflection on his own experience of life and, as such, compassion. This may also help awaken a collective responsibility to act more aligned with furthering the good of our common humanity rather than using our energies for destructive purposes.

Goran Slavkovic tells me that one of his most rewarding experiences of post-film production is the Q&A period that happens after every screening. He tells me of the polarized reactions. On one occasion, an older gentleman also from the former Yugoslavia came up to him and told him impulsively, "You can't do this kids! You cannot just even out everyone's identity in the film. You are erasing identity and in doing so taking away the blame." What he is referring to is that in the film, the characters each speak with different accents from various regions in the Balkans. Miro often listens to songs from other regions of the Balkans than the accent that he speaks. The people he encounters once he goes to look for his friend Dado, also each have slightly different dialects, sometimes not very definable. There is no clear point that Drljaca makes about any of the regions that were involved in the war. This lack of position is what angered the older gentleman. No position, no view, no identity, no resolution. This was his view.

Meanwhile, Goran tells me that his response to the gentleman was: "I am sorry, mister, if what we did angered you. But maybe this response in you is exactly one of the emotions we are trying to bring out, rather than repress." After thinking about this response some more, I agreed with Goran. This uncertainty of identity in the film brings out strong emotional reactions that maybe need to be addressed, rather than ignored. Goran told me that the older gentleman remained in touch with him and after he had calmed down, he said that his initial reaction was so strong because he does feel this uncertainty and anxiety of everything just hanging in the air. This is the reality of how a lot of people who were involved in the Balkan war feel. The film does not make a moral judgment about whether this is conducive to healing or not, but it simply shows one aspect of reality. At least maybe the awareness of the state of mind, rather than the repression of it, is one step towards healing and finding common ground in the common experience.

Goran tells me of the directorial approach that Drljaca took. "Me and the crew were so lost while shooting some scenes, because Igor didn't let us see the whole script. We never knew how one piece relates to the other. We were left trying to figure out the story ourselves." This "hovering in the air" and not knowing of how all the pieces fit together is exactly the atmosphere *Krivina* depicts. It is not about clearly tying

the story together. The story of the Balkan war (i.e. how it happened and how things are now) is not yet neatly tied together, and probably never will be. *Krivina* shows this. Some people will be angered. Some will be horrified. Some saddened. Some comforted. And most will probably feel a mixture of all of these.

The generation that experienced the Balkan war as children is just now becoming full-grown adults. As such, their voice is a unique one that could reveal to us a very important perspective and experience of the Balkan war that ended just a little short of twenty years ago. Drljaca's *Krivina* is one of these voices. It is one that recreates for the viewer the effect of seeing everything one is used to disappear through such violence, horror and hate.

bindu shah

secrets we love to share

film, 2012



Stories educate, persuade, impassion, anger, appease, and manipulate us. There are almost no stories that are as important as the stories we tell about ourselves. With so many films showing about families and relationships at present such as *56 Up*, *Amour*, *Silver Linings Playbook* to name a few, it is appropriate to say that most of us are happiest when we are allowed to talk about our families, our life and ourselves. But then we also don't have the guts to show our family secrets to the world on the big screen unless we happen to be Sarah Polley. And even if we did, we could not have done it as deftly by bringing the story to life as she did in *Stories We Tell* which she wrote and directed in 2012 using her skills as an accomplished filmmaker.

The documentary film that took 5 years to make, explores Polley's personal life as a tribute to her mother and a search for her real father. She is the detective in the film who goes on a search to reveal truths about her mother who had died when she was only 11.

The story revolves around Sarah's immediate family, opening with a eulogy of Diane, Sarah's mother. This is played in flashbacks by Rebecca Jenkins. The story shifts to her marriage to Michael Polley, raising children, working as an actress, to becoming sick and dying of cancer. The plot thickens when Sarah seeks out to learn more about her mother and finds out that Michael is not her real father. Sarah's half brother John Buchan brings humour and lightness to an otherwise heavy film by his laughter, making light of the situation and by always asking if he looked presentable for the camera.

The story is woven together through interviews with siblings, friends and relatives, filming on location and "old" footage. Super 8 mm film made to look like home video is used to show footage of her mother in her young days with her family and friends, showing her different personalities from the life of a party, to a great mom, to a disaster prone woman. Polley herself plays an active role on screen and is seen with a camera or managing the sound.

Michael Polley, who is Sarah's non-biological father in the film and in real life, teaches us a lesson or two about forgiveness by being nonjudgmental about his wife and her lover even after finding out that Sarah was not his biological daughter. And in fact reflects deeply upon why it was not her fault for the way things turned out. His positive character also showed through, having all her family in the same room during the interviews and holding it all together in spite of the hardship of finding out about Polley not being his real daughter. Being a writer in his younger days, he wrote a memoir for the film that he reads on the screen.

Stories We Tell is her third directorial debut and her first for documentary. One can see Polley's experience in making fictional films translate into making this film as each resonates with the other. Strangely, the stories also speak to one another, in both her films, *Away from Her* and *Take This Waltz*, she explores intimate relationships at different stages of life. In *Away from Her*, the character suffers from Alzheimer's and loses memory of her husband and develops a relationship with another patient at the nursing home that she resided and in the latter film, the female character questions her five-year marriage and develops a new relationship with an artist who lives across the street.

Guy Lodge from *Variety* said, "The film could have become lurid and self serving if it had been guided by a heavy hand but watching the loving brood peel back their non nuclear roots is profoundly moving to witness." The bond between her families also comes through in the film clearly. We get to see a loving interaction in one scene where Polley is playing in bed with her nieces and nephews.

Since the film was really about her, viewers should have been treated to more of her on the screen especially interacting with her siblings and fathers. It would have also been interesting to see the interaction between both her father and her real dad to judge if the image portrayed of Michael Polley rang true.

In an age of transparency through social media such as Facebook and Twitter, talking and knowing about each others life and family has become mainstream, but the way she talks about hers by visually creating a narrative around the story makes the film stand out as an Oscar contender for 2014 and not 2013 as it will have its cinematic release in the U.S. later this year in July.

The film challenges the notion of documentary with the diverse characters with different personalities creating so much drama, and the reenactments done to make the videos look like old home movies using actors making it look like a fictional film, making it more of an experimental or contemporary documentary.

The re-enactments made the story visually more interesting and held our interest rather than having only talking heads narrating which could have made the film tepid. Maybe the film creates a paradigm for other traditional documentary makers who shy away from re-enactments thinking that they take away from the movies' authenticity. Seeing her on screen directing the film, allows the viewer a sense of being "in" the film rather than a voyeur.

In spite of Diane's infidelities, we leave the film feeling empathy for her, Michael and her lover. *Stories We Tell* speaks to us on many levels by being bold, beautiful and honest. There is also a humbling way in which the story is told. We get to reflect and question stories about our own families on a universal level and that our dark secrets may not be that dark after all and there might a Sarah Polley living inside all of us.

ali weinstein

what makes sugar man so sweet?

film, 2012

The commonly known fact that people do not watch the Oscars to applaud the documentary film industry is being put to the test this year, and that is because of one film that has captured the hearts of its North American audience. *Searching for Sugar Man* has so far won 18 awards, including audience awards at Sundance and Tribeca as well as the Best Documentary award at BAFTA. It has grossed over three million dollars in the US alone, placing it within the 50 top-grossing documentaries of all-time. *Searching for Sugar Man* has clearly seized the attention of moviegoers; but what is it exactly that has us so intoxicated with this story?

South African writer and director Malik Bendjelloul carefully weaves a remarkable tale of the search for one nation's lost idol found in another nation's trash. Told years after the hunt for Sugar Man occurred, the film retains all of the suspense its subjects must have felt as the events were unfolding. *Searching for Sugar Man*'s great reveal is hinted at from the beginning and finally exposed midway through the film. Surely with all the hype it has received, you know, even if you haven't yet seen it, what that surprise consists of. However, if you've managed to maintain your innocence about *Sugar Man*, and would like to reap the fruits of the search yourself, you should not read on.

The film opens and we are driving down a South African highway, blasting sweet seventies tunes sung by a singer named Rodriguez: "Sugar man / won't you hurry / cause I'm tired of these scenes...." A disembodied South African-lilted voice informs us of how important this music was to his generation; how it changed his life and the lives of many others. But then, shockingly, we're informed by the same faceless voice that this idol, much to the horror of his fans, long ago committed suicide on stage after an unsuccessful show. Story over?

Not that quickly. From here we are transported to Detroit, Michigan where it is dark and snowy and steam billows from the roads. We hear from men who knew Rodriguez early on, and who each paint a cryptic picture of him: Rodriguez, we learn, was a fantastically talented musician and songwriter ("Bob Dylan was mild to this guy," proclaims Motown Records chairman Clarence Avant) who performed in smoky clubs with his back to the audience. We see grainy, dark photographs of a man of ambiguous race wearing long hair and large sunglasses.

From the testimonials of the interviewees who knew his music, and from the beautiful folk songs that serenade us sorrowfully while we watch, we believe that Rodriguez was worthy of recognition. Yet we're told that this man, to the bewilderment of his producers, never made it in America. Producer Steve Rowland claims that Rodriguez was his "most

memorable artist"; but this assertion, repeated by everyone else, stands in direct contrast to our knowledge that nobody had ever heard of him. "The record sold maybe six copies: me, my wife, my daughter, no, she wouldn't have bought it...", jokes Avant. Just ten minutes into the film, Bendjelloul successfully has his audience rapt with wonder: how can a musician whose music is so good it sounds familiar, as if we *ought* to have heard it before, remain so completely unknown?

Interwoven with this sad tale is a story of the adoption of an American singer into South African mainstream culture in the 70's and 80's. Interviewees speculate as to how the first Rodriguez album made it across the Atlantic and eventually into the movement that defined a generation and changed the world. No one knows for sure. Yet, there he was: Rodriguez, singer of anti-establishment anthems, who inspired the first Afrikaans anti-Apartheid band and became musical fodder for a generation of South Africans yearning for change. So popular was he that one interviewee claims if you checked the record collection of a South African household in the mid-70's, you would most certainly find the Beatles, Simon & Garfunkel, and Rodriguez. It was only when a visiting American mentioned to record shop owner Stephen "Sugar" Segerman that she couldn't find *Cold Fact*, Rodriguez's first album, anywhere in the U.S. that Segerman had the first inkling of the uniqueness of Rodriguez's success in South Africa. They had all assumed, he attests, that this American singer, who was so extraordinarily popular, would surely be even *more* famous in his home country of America. Suddenly fixated on trying to find out who this person was and what had happened to him after he produced the two albums they knew and loved, Segerman began a search in the late-90's. That search introduced him to music journalist Craig Bartholomew-Strydom, and together they wrote articles, posted appeals for information online, made phone calls, and even travelled to Amsterdam (a city named on one of Rodriguez's tracks), all in the quest to find their old hero.

When the pair find Mike Theodore, Rodriguez's first producer, and ask to be told the story of how Rodriguez really did die, both they and Mike are equally stunned; he's *not* dead, Mike informs them, but alive and kicking in Detroit. If you were to turn around at this point, you would see the audience rapt, smiling, incredulous at this news. Segerman and Bartholomew make contact first with one of Rodriguez's daughters and then Rodriguez himself. The climax of the film occurs as we watch home video of a 1998 South African concert in which Rodriguez is united with his sole, yet wholly devoted, fan base. This man of mystery, who has worn those same dark shades and long hair while living paycheque to paycheque doing hard labour is suddenly a real rock star, and he seems to be at home. He appears as if he was made to be there; as if he was suddenly "who he really was", one

daughter observes. Here, another moment of wonder: how did Rodriguez maintain his star persona for so long without living in the type of environment that would normally foster a rock star? A sense of predestination and miracles pervades, even for the cynics in the audience.

Funnily, after the sold-out concerts and after the true realization of what he is in South Africa, Rodriguez goes back to Detroit and continues to live the same life in the same humble home he's lived in for 40 years. He meets questions of what this journey has been like for him with shrugs and near-silence. He hardly utters a word throughout the film, always maintaining his air of quiet, stoic mystery. This is not a rags-to-riches tale. This is not the story of late-to-the-stage soul singer Charles Bradley (whose documentary was featured at Hot Docs last year); nor is it the story of small-town-boy-turned-superstar Justin Bieber (whose documentary ranks #3 in box office returns). This is a unique and fantastic tale; "It is a grandiose story!" proclaims Rodriguez's own daughter when reminiscing about her father's journey. The surreal nature of this story, a quality not always welcomed by documentary audiences, is, in fact, what beckons us in. For the appeal of this film really lies in its documenting our own ignorance. In an age of collection, specialization, and globalization, the fact that an ocean still has the power to divide culture and politics in such a way is astounding. We are in awe of the fragility of our own systems of knowledge not when we search for *Sugar Man*, but when we find him.

The film is by no means unflawed. It suffers from a lack of artistic cohesion; odd interjections of animation that do not make any narrative sense make us wonder about the filmmaker's taste a couple of times. Similarly, titles that are far too stylistically prominent – washed away by the incoming tide in one establishing shot, and half-hidden behind interviewees in others – lean more towards cheesy than metaphoric. Furthermore, if we shake ourselves out of our mystification, we might wonder about certain connections made during the search that were entirely skipped over in the story-telling (how Segerman and Bartholomew linked Detroit producer Mike Theodore to Rodriguez, for example, which is perhaps the critical moment in their search). However, I find myself puzzling over these minor moments only when pausing to carefully analyze the making of this film. Bendjelloul does well in crafting a story that is true to the mystery and wonder that has been Rodriguez's life. *Searching for Sugar Man* in the end provides a sweet escape from the average rock star story, and its virtual impossibility awes us.

While listening to *Cold Fact* (which no doubt many new Rodriguez fans have been doing since the release of this love letter of a movie), you will hear a track called "Forget It" in

which Rodriguez entreats a lover to appreciate their time together and then let the relationship go. At the very end of the last track on the album, we hear Rodriguez state once again, serenely, with the same voice he uses in the film, and as if speaking to the world that forgot about him for so long, "Thanks for your time, and you can thank me for mine, and after that's said, forget it. Bag it man." Rodriguez seems to have prophesized his own fate in the decades that he lived in isolation and apparent anonymity. But, to the wonder of the world, he was not forgotten. The first thing Rodriguez says to his South African audience lets us know how he feels about that: "Thank you for keeping me alive." The wonder normally reserved for fictional films that comes to life in this documentary has a lot to do with its ability to touch us so deeply; and that hint of the surreal, the miraculous, that sometimes actually does exist in the real world is the key ingredient that will undoubtedly secure the Oscar for *Sugar Man* on February 24.



EXTENDED NARRATIVE

intro extended narrative

natasa nuhanovic

What is it that makes human beings human? What we all ultimately long for is a more meaningful and deeper connection to others and an experience of life that is genuine, honest, caring and will transcend beyond mere politeness, customs and norms. Without a curiosity for life, the days and nights that we spend on this planet begin to sound hollow; they all begin to resemble each other and we do not reach beyond only caring for our own lives. It takes great strength and courage to be curious about the world we live in, our lives and our selves. After all, what we find may be difficult to face. However, if we are willing, capable and strong enough to face the difficult aspects of ourselves and the world we live in, it means that a more profound happiness and more sincere relationship to ourselves, the people in our lives and our world as a whole is ours to embrace.

Each narrative is a deeply moving testimony of a longing to understand, to stretch boundaries and to truly experience life. The vehicles for getting there are what is unique, and that in itself is a treasure; we are exposed to multiple ways of getting to that deeper place of understanding. The stories reveal different content. They are about family members lost, dear friends or family affected by a unique condition, being forced to leave one's home behind, performance art as a gateway to a deeper consciousness, an exploration of alternative lifestyles, an experience of a massive event about self-expression and about an unconventional and temporary community, the appreciation of art, a meditation on the Internet, experiences with the limitation and injustices of politics and information flow, hierarchy in the workplace, taking the chance to fulfill one's ambitions despite circumstances.

The thread that ties the stories together is this curiosity to expand one's understanding of oneself, each other and the world and step beyond preconceived notions of what one's experience of life should be. There is a desire for more open relationships, more awareness of the world we live in, more humane interactions. These stories are each an inspiring account of the common desires, hopes, fears, longings and trials we face on the personal, social and political level and our strength to face them, understand them and transform them into something positive.

saman aghvami

the photographer king

Naseroddin-Mirza, the thirteen-year-old crown prince of Persia, did not have the slightest idea of what he was going to face when the court servants started to dress him up with a jeweled cloak and hat. It was mid-December 1842. The Emperor of Russia had sent his father, Mohammad Shah, a gift: a daguerreotype camera. The Russian delegate, Nikolai Pavlov was trained to execute the new invention in the presence of the Shah and became the first person to capture the very first photographic image in the kingdom, only three years after photography was first introduced to the world.

Naseroddin was among the first of the royal family to have his image recorded on the daguerreotype plate. The realism of the image had a deep impact on the young prince's heart and mind. After few more shooting sessions, photography became one of the future king's primary obsessions (along with hunting and women) which lasted for the rest of his life and his fifty-year reign, turned him into a great patron of this art. This affected Iranian photography to a greater extent than any other nation in the region precisely due to the Shah's interest.

Naseroddin Shah ascended the Peacock Throne in 1848 as the fourth Shah (king) of the Qajar Dynasty, which had ruled over Iran since 1785. His very long reign was contemporary with the rise of modernism and industrialism in Europe, which caused the gap between the West and the East to become evermore visible. The rise of reformist movements during his final years caused by the country's intellectuals' observations of the West and the Shah's despotism led to the Constitutional Revolution in 1905, a decade after his assassination.

Thanks to his capable 'grand vizier' Amir Kabir, the political unrest and tribal conflicts that had swept the country away during the first years after his coronation, were put to an end. The following years were ones of calmness and order, during which the art-loving Shah was able to spend time on some of his favorite hobbies: drawing, poetry, calligraphy, and of course photography. Perhaps one of the main reasons for Naseroddin Shah's passion for photography stemmed from his love for drawing and the fact that he could capture the surrounding world with perfect accuracy, without the time-consuming practices drawing required.

Through his ambassador in Europe, Naseroddin Shah hired and brought the French photographer Francis Carlhian to Iran to work as a photography teacher and to start a training system for the medium. Without a doubt, Naseroddin Shah had learned the wet collodion process (either directly or indirectly) from Carlhian, although

there is no mention of how the Shah learned photography or other art mediums for that matter. The extreme respect of Iranians for the kings and their "inherent perfection" automatically prohibited mentioning of the Shah learning. Naseroddin Shah's early photographs are mostly images of his numerous wives in the harem. Not all these photographs have captions to show the date or the photographer, but the fact that the subjects (the Shah's wives) are in very intimate situations, topless in cases, indicates that the photographer could not have been anyone but the Shah himself. These were the very first photographs of the Iranian woman. Throughout the long history of Iran there are very few images showing famous women or the kings' wives, and they have only appeared in paintings as dancers and entertainers. Up until Naseroddin Shah's time and well after, the depiction of women's faces was strictly prohibited due to religious prejudice and social norms of the time. The fairly easy process of photography, comparing to painting, which required the presence of a painter, was a great motive for Naseroddin Shah in photographing his wives and many other women present in his harem. This practice inspired other women of the Qajar royal family to have their photographs taken in later years.

A great deal of the Shah's photographs are self-portraits; either alone or accompanied by a number of his wives, who occasionally acted as assistants in the studio. For many of them he had an assistant to release the shutter for him, usually one of the harem's eunuchs or one of his young servants who were allowed to be in the 'andaroon' (the interior of homes). And in some cases the shutter release cable can be seen in the Shah's hands. When photographing himself alone, the Shah is usually seen with or on a chair. On the other hand, whenever his wives are in the frame he is standing most of the times and has them seated, perhaps to indicate a sense of proprietorship.

In 1877 and for not very clear reasons, the Shah's photography practice went on a seven-year hiatus. But this did not mean that he would not act as the greatest patron of photography in Iran. From his first encounter with the camera, the young king did not see the medium as a simple hobby. In 1850 he assigned the naturalized Iranian Frenchman Jules Richard to make a photo album of the ancient structures of Persepolis near Shiraz. Richard did not go further than Isfahan and returned to Tehran due to what he described as "shortage of travelling budget". But the order itself coming from a teenage king (he was nineteen years old at the time) is considered creative and indeed progressive. A decade later during the war with Turkmen, Naseroddin Shah commissioned the French photographer H. de Couliboeuf de Blocqueville



to document the war in photographs. The heavy defeat of the Iranian army not only stopped de Blocqueville from photographing, but he ended up being captured by the Turkmens. Despite these failures to document significant places and important events, it is hard not to praise the young Shah's creativity and imagination for commissioning these expeditions and founding documentary photography in Iran.

During the seven-year hiatus, Naseroddin Shah established photography as an official department in the government, with an independent building and bureaucracy and Agha-Reza, the first Iranian professional photographer as its head. The department's main duties were to document the royal trips and to photograph the country, presenting them as photo albums to the Shah and to keep in the department's archive. Today these albums are considered as historical treasures for historians and anthropologists. Some argue that the increasing number of talented and professional photographers was perhaps one of the reasons the Shah's interest in taking photographs himself gradually faded.

Naseroddin Shah had a great interest in writing captions for the photographs he himself or others took. These captions not only provide the information about the identity of the people in the photographs but also are excellent in identifying historic places. It is from the information provided by these texts that the evolution of different photographic processes used by either the Shah himself, or other photographers in those days, along with significant events can be traced and observed. Like many other of the Shah's habits, this valuable practice was also imitated by other members of the royal family and courtiers via their own photographs and photo albums they possessed.

After seven years of not touching the camera, in 1884 he resumed photographing. But this time with a significantly improved visual literacy. In the second period of the Shah's photography, his compositions are more structured and aesthetically based. These improvements were the direct result of years of observing the works of other photographers, especially those of the European photographers whom he met in the course of his trips to the West. It is in this period that he tries to explore and experience fresher points of views in his photographs. His famous self-portrait among his wives taken in a mirror is a perfect example of his attempts to go beyond the ordinary in his photographs.

In 1868, as photography had turned into a fashionable hobby among the noblesse and the royal family, Naseroddin Shah ordered the first Iranian public



photography studio to be opened in Tehran; the tyrant king had democratized photography. The popularity of photography grew so rapidly that other photography studios started to open at great speed. Soon there were tens of studios in the capital city and many more across the country, especially in the cities of Tabriz, Isfahan and Mashhad where each have lengthy and detailed histories of photography and great photographers.

Perhaps what Naseroddin Shah did not predict was the effects that photography could have on public opinion. Through photography, people saw what went on in the

luxurious lives of the wealthy and the courtiers, while the great percentage of the population were relatively poverty-stricken. Photography informed people of the way the rest of the world was living and thus reformist and liberal ideas gradually began to appear demanding the rule of law rather than that of an individual. It will be an underestimation of the efforts of many brave revolutionaries and thinkers to say that photography was the beginning of the 1905 Constitutional Revolution, but it certainly acted as a fuel to ignite the cause.

Epilogue:

The history of photography in Iran is just three years shorter than that of the world. There were Iranians, albeit few, learning photography academically when other nations of the region had contact with the medium only through western photographers who travelled to their countries. Yet this advancement had little to do with the Iranians themselves or their possibly special talents. In a land where the ruler has complete control over not only the land but also whomever that dwells in it, even the spread of something like photography depends on his majesty's desire. If it weren't for Naseroddin Shah's love for photography and his exceptionally brilliant support of the medium, Iranians would have had to wait decades to see professional photographers among their compatriots.

Irony is probably the most interesting aspect of history. The very art/craft was brought to Iran directly by the head of state - it was not only spread and popularized by the ruler, but it was practiced by him - what is ironic is that today, in the view of Iranian leaders, photography is considered something to be cautious of. After the controversial presidential election in 2009 and the massive protests that followed, photojournalists were among the arrestees for the crime of photography! This was the first time in Iran's history that photographers were arrested and assaulted by large numbers for the sole reason that they were practicing their profession. Many of the news and documentary photographers fled the country, a great number of them turned to commercial photography and some are waiting to be tried. Documentary photography is watched carefully and photographers have to be careful what subjects do they point their cameras at. Eventually carrying a camera on the street has become a reason for the police to stop and question people; what was once advocated and even practiced by those in power, is now being heavily monitored and restricted.



zandra alexander

the intern

Location:

Cubicle-based

Region:

Toronto, downtown core

Class:

Homo sapien

Order:

Studiosum

Scientific Name:

liberum studiosum opus

Distribution:

The Intern is highly visible for four-month intervals, before usually returning to campuses of local universities or local coffee shops.

Food:

The intern sustains itself on a scavenger-based diet. Caffeine in all forms is a dietary staple. Indeed, the intern's brain activity will rapidly diminish when deprived.

Development:

Naturally shy creatures, the intern will become more social through offerings of caffeine, alcohol or event invitations. While often more technically proficient than many of its superiors, the intern often begins lacking specific industry knowledge and will be expected to expand that knowledge throughout its development.

Threats to Survival:

The intern faces many threats to its survival including other interns (especially those who are funded by parents) the economy, human resources departments and budget cuts.

Observational Journal

Day 1: The Beginning

The intern is spotted. The sheen of her freshly washed hair does little to distract from the poorly ironed shirt and lint covered skirt, but overall the look remains polished. She has arrived early, too early. Public transport, the intern's primary mode of transport, possesses the uncanny gift of ensuring the intern's inability to arrive on time for even the most ceremonial of events. Her face is lit by a slight sheen, caused by the half-jog-half-run undertaken from the subway station. Perhaps other interns would have pre-planned their route, but that is a regret best saved for another day.

She paces the heavily carpeted lobby, drawing the eye of the security guard who sits passively behind a desk; any and all authority gleaned solely from the uniform. Flustered, the intern knows it is time for her to make her first approach. One final check of the iPhone (the intern's accessory of choice) and its time to begin.

She greets the receptionist, the first hurdle in her journey. The receptionist's mask slips, just for a second, and the intern catches a look of disdain in her direction as she struggles to slip off her winter jacket. Looking back, the cheerful, empty smile returns, but the intern knows she has been found wanting. She matches the empty smile with one of her own and sinks into one of the leather couches scattered about the perimeter of the room.

She waits and waits some more. This is her new home.

Day 4: Settling In

The intern has joined her designated team, and a casual observer might think that she had settled in. However, a closer look reveals cracks in the façade. The intern has limited interaction with her team, and has yet to learn the language. The words are instantly recognizable, but what to say, and when to say in this environment is not a skill easily developed. Conversations stop and start in jittery, unfamiliar patterns, crossing over each other in ways that cannot be described as acoustically pleasing. Yelling is commonplace, either from the desk or down the hallway. The intern associates yelling with bad news, so the frequent bouts of increased volume has made her both edgy and prone to running around the office.

Questions. The intern has many. Yes, she is "educated" but it turns out those years in the classroom did not speak to this particular experience. Yet as an "older" intern, (read: anyone past the ripe age of 21) there are expectations she should fulfill. Instinctual survival skills have begun

to kick in. She cannot reveal herself as inept in these early days. No one wants to self-identify as the weakest member of the herd. Her questions remain silent as she turns to the internet in hopes of struggling onward.

Day 6: The New Arrival

Breaking news. There is another. The intern has been joined by another, but this one is different in every way. The interloper comes aboard with preexisting relationships, friends from a previous life. She is experienced, with previous placements under her belt. But perhaps most dangerously, this new arrival is working four days a week to this intern's two. She will learn the lay of the land twice as fast, and she will contribute twice as much. The intern pushes these creeping thoughts to the back of her mind and tries desperately to determine the possibility of friendship. She knows that alliances will be the key to her success, as medieval as that may sound.

Day 8: The Project

The intern is thrilled. Cheeks flushed, there is a spring in her step as she returns to her desk. She has been assigned her very own project, something she can go above and beyond on and demonstrate something resembling skill. She is unsure why her boss has entrusted her with such responsibility, but chooses to exert little mental energy on the reason why. These opportunities should not be wasted.

She begins meticulously, carefully filing away every tidbit of information as if it were spun from gold. She checks her scribbled notes constantly, desperate not to miss a single element of the assignment. Hours go by, and the day rapidly fades into darkness, but the intern remains at her computer. This pattern repeats for weeks, as the intern rushes through her daily tasks and smaller projects to return to the looming project. However, the intern remains happy throughout. She has a sense of purpose, something to contribute. It is still early days, but the intern can't help think about the future. Maybe this would be the missing piece to make her feel at home at the place where she is spending countless hours.

Day 11: Project Completion

The project is finished. The intern reads it over twice, three times. She starts a fourth time before a rush of adrenaline hits and she clicks send. It's gone. She gets out of her chair and begins the long walk to her boss's office (with windows, of course). He begins by informing the intern that while it was a good start, there were many changes to be made. Crestfallen, the intern picks up her notebook and prepares to have her work shredded. After a few minutes, the intern realizes that the changes are only

superficial at best. Underline here, bold there. Later she will recognize this move as a power play, where the boss asserts dominance over underlings solely to remind them of their place in the office hierarchy, akin to monkeys puffing their chests in a display of power.

She rushes back to her desk, still eager to make a good impression. The changes won't take long to implement, and she can get it back to her boss within the hour. This time, it will be perfect.

Day 13: Hierarchy

The intern rushes into the office. Her project had been submitted to the client and used publicly in a variety of media channels. Intern or no intern, it was an exciting task. She knocked quickly at her boss's office door, perhaps too loudly in her excitement.

"How did it go?!"

Her boss continues typing. "How did what go?"

"The (client name extracted) media tour?"

He slowly turns in his desk chair, eyebrow raised quizzically. "Oh, that. It was great. Went really well."

The intern, hungry for details, pressed on. "Well, what about the schedule, did it go according to plan?"

"Of course it did, why wouldn't it. I planned it." His tone was a well-practiced indifference, saved for occasions just like these.

"Well, of course, of course. What ab-uhh, what about the questions I prepared?"

"Oh! It was perfect! They used all of MY questions. Word for word. That hardly even happens. All of mine! I'm so glad I prepared properly."

The intern's jaw dropped, if only for a moment. She expected her boss to take credit for the project to the rest of the team, she knew that happens in much of the working world. But taking credit for her work directly to her face was an entirely new level of egotism. Yet, this was a fight she could not start, much less win. Not if she wanted to turn the internship into something beyond an internship. So the intern, like many an intern before her, ignored the screaming voices in her head, smiled and headed back towards her cubicle.

Day 15: Check-in Day

Officially, today is an important day. It was the half-way point of the internship, where traditionally a sit-down meeting is had with a higher up. In this case, the intern nervously prepares for an afternoon meeting with the Vice-President of the team. She was nervous for a variety of reasons, but most of all she knew her direct boss was not the type to comment on her progress, and she had not worked with the Vice-President in any context. Therefore, the VP's perception of the intern would likely be fueled primarily by rumours and offhand comments. Certainly not a place of strength on which to enter a meeting. The intern had pored over websites and blogs hoping to find some sort of guidance in approaching such a bizarre scenario, and the common consensus was to enter the meeting guns-blazing. You'll be sure to impress with your interest in the team. Ask questions, especially if you're not getting the feedback you need. Remember, internships are meant to be mutually beneficial experiences. The intern felt that advice pounding in her frontal lobe as she entered the office. After exchanging pleasantries, the VP offered some vague compliments on the intern's dedication and work ethic. Sensing the moment was slipping away, the intern boldly asked if she could ask a question or two.

"Oh of course, what's on your mind?"

"Well, as you know it's my first time working in this industry and this environment, and I am so grateful for the opportunity to learn first-hand."

The VP nodded sagely, acknowledging the familiar dance seen when a request is forthcoming.

"I just want to make sure that I'm contributing to the best of my ability, and that the work I'm producing is helpful to the team. I'm just finding that there is a lack of feedback regarding the work I'm doing, so I wanted to ensure that it's meeting the standards of the team." The intern leaned back in the chair, satisfied that she had finally done something that "good" interns do, at least according the blogging experts.

The response was not what the blogs had led her to believe.

"Well, that's really your responsibility."

The intern felt the blood draining from her face. Poker faces had never been her strength. If her expression could talk, it would say, "misfire".

"Yes, see you've got to take the initiative to make sure that you're getting what you want out of this experience. Its up to you to ask for it. Everyone is really too busy here to be doling out feedback all the time. But hey, if you're not

being told it's bad, then it's probably good right?" The VP smiled at her own remark with the satisfaction that only job security brings.

The intern felt that familiar "flight or fight" pang in her stomach and knew she had to backpedal, and backpedal quickly.

"Of course, of course...I suppose I lacked confidence before, but now I know that I can just ask for it the future." The intern knew her words were ringing hollow, but social convention dictates they must be said nonetheless. Figuring this was her only chance, she threw caution to the wind and asked about her future at the firm. Normally, interns avoid this move like the plague, especially at the halfway point, but given that she had just been told to ask questions, it was time to take a more active role in her own fate.

"Now, as you know I'm still in school technically until September, but I am learning so much, and everyone is so busy—I just wanted to let you know that I am entirely willing to stay and help out over the summer."

It wasn't the most elegant of proposal, but the intern was relieved that she managed to put the possibility out there.

Day 20: Friendship

The intern appears relaxed, finally. When not at her desk, she can often be found out at the desk of a full-time employee, similar in age and temperament. What began as necessity, with the intern helping a quiet but massively overworked member of the team, has blossomed into a full-fledged friendship. Their conversations are dominated by work-related talk, but having a safe area to ask the less-thought-out questions and perhaps even blow off some steam has proven to be incredibly helpful for both parties.

However, the intern worries about the groups forming within the team. This fragmentation has produced ignored lunch initiations, strange work delegations and a lack of cohesion within the team as a whole, not to mention jealousy and hurt feelings. The team does not work together, but parcels out tasks on a piecemeal basis, making any sort of schedule planning nearly impossible. The high school-esque nature of these cliques makes the intern edgy—there are jokes she doesn't get and terms she doesn't use. She overcompensates by jumping in and talking a mile a minute, and then instantly regrets the verbal barrage and retreats back into long periods of silence. Her overactive brain seems to be both her best skill and her worst enemy in this environment. She has brief moments of fleeting glory, where she garners an invite, or a laugh from the group at large, and clings to the memory of these small victories.

Day 24: Uncertain Future

The intern has but days left in her contact and still no idea as to her future. Her workload certainly suggests that there is a need for her to stay. Like a great many other interns, school pressures are piling up and her part time job would like an answer as to her summer availability. The lack of answers either way has left the intern perpetually frazzled. Desperate to prove her commitment to the company, she stays late to complete tasks early, which means that her time spent at the library falls later and later. The intern has taken a day-by-day approach, which usually results in coaching herself out of bed. Extreme tiredness and an overreliance on caffeine are some of the more traditional intern characteristics, seen especially at this point in the life cycle of an intern.

In a moment of candor around the printer, the other intern lets it slip that she has been offered the holy grail of internships, a full-time position, to begin immediately. The intern swallows audibly and offers her congratulations. She knows this spells the end of her own placement. The chances of two interns joining the same team at one time are basically nil. The intern is wounded, but tries to remember there were circumstances beyond her control that contribute to such a decision. Nevertheless, she can't help but naively feel that this is the first time in her life where hard work and dedication didn't win over circumstance. It's a bitter pill for anyone to swallow, but disappointment is something all interns must cope with. This intern just wasn't ready for it.

Day 26: Decision Day

The intern checks her email to discover a meeting request from the vice president. The end of term summary meeting. She knows that this is a mere formality at this stage, but she mustn't appear jaded. Not yet. She sits primly, legs crossed, notebook balanced on top, ready to take notes on from a discussion on herself. The intern takes a moment to ponder the strangeness of such a thing, but again, the blogs say to always, always attend a meeting with a notepad, so here she was.

"You've been such a great addition to the team, everyone loves having you here. You fit in so well. It's such been such an easy match. Some interns don't fit in, but you did right away, how lucky we are to have you."

This barrage of compliments unleashed by the VP signals to the intern that the "but" is soon approaching.

"But," There it was.

"But, we just can't bring you on at the moment. HR just won't let us- the numbers aren't there."

The intern nods, she's heard about this tactic: when in doubt, blame human resources.

"But you're at the top of our list. Once we have something, we will call you first! But I suspect you'll be snapped up by someone before then."

The intern nods firmly a second time. The parting reassurances, aimed at softening the blow. She thanks the VP for the opportunity, and sees herself out of the corner office.

She considers telling the team individually, then abandons the idea. Rumours spread quickly around the office, and the intern is not willing to fuel her own quite yet. She stops at her boss's office to confirm who he wants her to pass her tasks off to. He seems momentarily surprised, more than she knew before he did, and says nothing further on the subject.

"Oh well, I guess I'll have to make sure it gets done." The skill of turning every single statement about oneself is an impressive feat the intern will somewhat miss seeing on a weekly basis.

She makes one final stop at her friend and colleague's office. Her friend is upset, but makes a triumphant cry that they will start their own company together in the same manner one would tell a heartbroken friend that there are plenty of fish in the sea. The intern assures her that she would love nothing more, but is quick to remind her that the balances of the inner-team cliques have been thrown off, and she must watch her own back.

The intern continues down the long corridor. Soon she will pack up her desk, the tech department will shut down her email and telephone and it will be like she was never there at all. For a short time, this was her home, her chosen habitat. But it is not her home anymore.

caitlin durlak

love jerry. your dad.

When I was 15 my mom let it slip in a car ride to my father's house. She told me my father had another wife before her. It came as a complete shock; no one ever spoke of her, there were no photos, there was no evidence of her existence. When I confronted my dad with my new knowledge, he responded with "you never asked." I was confused. What else was he not telling me?

My parents separated when I was young. They decided to get two homes in the same town and every other week my brother, sister and I would switch houses. After learning about my father's first wife, I wondered what else he wasn't telling me. I began to imagine that my father had a whole other life the week we weren't with him; he had another family he kept secret. The weeks I was with my mom I would find myself peering in stores or neighboring car windows thinking I might catch him and his other children.

All my life my father told me stories about his past. He studied to be a priest, lived in Costa Rica where he worked with the locals. He trained to take over factories in Thailand during the Vietnam War. He received three university degrees in three different fields. He did all of these things before the age of 30. In 2010 my father died after fighting cancer for seven years. Three months before his death we sat down together and compiled a chronology of the places he lived from birth to his early thirties. I knew that if I didn't organize his history while he was alive I would never be able to visualize the whole picture. I wanted to have something to grasp onto.

Some stories I know well; I have heard them many times. My dad was born in 1939 in Chicago, Illinois to Walter and Theodosia Durlak. When he was 17, he was in seminary school until one day while roller-skating my dad had to make a decision on his future. Showing off to a group of girls outside of the seminary, a priest caught my dad and called him over. An ultimatum was made very clear: "You either pick God or that," said the priest pointing to the group teenage girls. The only knowledge I had of my father and Catholicism was of him falling asleep at church or if that failed he would read the book he had brought to keep him occupied during mass. Over the next 60 years of his life he would marry three women and have two daughters; women were a big theme in his life.

In 1961 my dad finished his first degree at Notre Dame University in comparative literature – German, English and Spanish. When I was young I understood his education as the random insertion of German phrases in conversation or the odd song sung in Spanish around the house. Two years later at age 24 he completed basic army



Jerome Durlak, age 26 (center), San Ramon Sur, Costa Rica 1965.

training at Fort Ord in Monterey, California. He said he learned how to throw a grenade and shoot a rifle, but the biggest skill he learned was how to peel a potato. When I was fifteen this part of his past meant I got to sport a cool vintage army jacket with my last name stitched onto the chest.

In the summer of 1965, my father was 26 and living in a small village called San Ramon Sur in Costa Rica. He was working on a project called "Communication and the Diffusion of Innovation." According to my notes he had gone there the fall before to set up "punch machines" and was asked to come back in the summer to work for the computer science department. He had just finished his second degree from Stanford University in Latin American studies. Prior to heading down his professor told him about a "wild thing woman" who was living there with her parents and working for the Rockefeller Foundation. My dad first spotted Elizabeth Brandt -EB for short- speeding in a Jeep, down the country road, with dark sunglasses and hair blowing in the wind (or so he said). They were married in 1968 and stayed together for about three years.

My grandmother made very apparent her disapproval of EB and my father's marriage. I'm not sure of the exact reasons why, but I think it had something to do with that fact that she was from an upper-class family and that came across as her having a "snooty" personality. When they divorced my grandmother cut her face out of all the family photo albums. I don't think EB was stuck up; she just knew what she believed in. Once my father and EB were in the car driving through countryside when she spotted a hurt bird on the side of the road. My father kept driving despite his wife's demands to stop and help the bird; he felt there was nothing that could be done. This made EB so upset she rolled down her window and threw her wedding ring into the adjacent field they drove past. The ring was never found, but they did go back to help the bird.

Looking back on this chapter of his life, my father must have felt hurt by his mother's disapproval and perhaps rebellious for the decisions he was making. He was about the same age that I am now, with a wife, a PhD in international communication research, and for the first time was looking for a full-time job. Little did he know that he would never leave post-secondary education; he would spend the next thirty years as a professor in Toronto. He moved to Canada in 1970 and spent the rest of his life teaching communications, technology, and new media. He married my mother in 1979, gave birth to my brother nine months later, and my twin sister and I came four years after that.

The chronology we crafted together stopped in 1976 and so did most of his stories from his past life. Shortly after that our histories began to overlap. When I was growing up my dad was the guy with whom I shared salmon lovers sushi combo, the man who drove me to dance lessons, he showed me how to shoot a left-handed hook shot in basketball, and he was the one who exposed me to hundreds of films. In the last years of his life our time together was often limited to within the walls of his apartment. We would photograph his vintage robot collection, sort thousands of articles he had collected for the book he was writing, indulge in a Hollywood blockbuster, or once when feeling risky, he let me drive his car with my learner's permit and we escaped to the country for the day (I've have never seen him so nervous.) When he was sick it was hard to think beyond the present, it was hard to remember the totality of our life together.

When my father shared his old stories with me they were added to the pre-existing notions of his identity that I had constructed over our lifetime together. These stories were not fixed, they are evolving and not because every time he repeated them small details would change but rather because how I understand them has changed over time. As I experience life, and reach ages and experience parallel to my father's, I breathe into them a new understanding of what they mean. I add a new chapter to who he was. With our parents we tend to have a fixed idea of who they are- in control, wise, adults and so on. As we age, their histories become new ways for us to see them.

Now with technology how we remember has changed. One year after his passing I found a voice recorder that was his. I needed it to record sound for a short video I was making. I fiddled around with it, recorded some material and put the memory card in my computer for play back. The first track wasn't what I had expected. It started with fumbling, and then I heard my stepmother's frustrated voice, "Is it working...just admit you don't know how to use it," and then my father's, "Is that true?" and then the track ended. What? I played the second track and there it was again, my father's voice only this time singing, "Tip toe through the tulips, one, two, three four five, six, seven, eight, nine ten!" Immediately I could feel his presence, he was there in the room with me, happy. I hadn't heard his voice in so long, the veracity of it felt better than looking at a photo. In the next track, his voice was louder and with more rhythm, "Zip-a-dee do da zip-a-dee day, my oh my what a wonderful day. Plenty of sunshine plenty of rain, zip-a-dee do da zip-a-dee day!...." at this point my step mother cuts in, "It either works or it doesn't!" and my father continues in song, "There are blue birds on my shoulder!" and the track ends.

My dad was very logical; he always asked me what my one-year and five-year plans were. I think he did this because he saw the importance of thinking ahead and planning one's future. I also think he asked because he wanted to know I wouldn't be lost after he was gone. The truth was I didn't have a clear path marked out for myself. I was lost. In 2011 I started a documentary video web series. I used equipment my dad had bought but never had the chance to use. I felt as if he knew this is what I would do and had secretly bought all the tools I would need as preparation. I wanted to tell him that I had figured part of my plan out; I will tell stories for a living.

In 2012 I began an MFA at Ryerson University in Documentary Media. At the start of the fall semester I was looking for an email sent to me from Ryerson about one of my courses. I did a quick subject search with the word Ryerson. At the bottom of the short list was of emails was one from my dad dated January 8, 2007. I opened it. It was a forward and at the top my dad wrote, "I thought you might find this interesting -- Love Jerry. Your Dad." Attached was a call for applicants, a new master's program that focused on non-fiction storytelling was being introduced, Documentary Media at Ryerson University. I was shocked. He had already approved of my decision; he saw my future before I did. My reply to his email was rude, "Hey dad, the program at Ryerson sounds very interesting, but you may have noticed that all the work I have produced while at Concordia is FICTION and based in that type of narrative. I don't think I will be making documentaries any time soon. Thanks for the forward, sounds cool, but not where I'm headed right now. Love, Cait."

simone estrin

“Certainly the history of public sculpture has been disastrous but that doesn’t mean it ought not to continue and the only way it even has a chance to continue is if the work gets out into the public. If it doesn’t there’s no chance at all.”

Richard Serra, 1993

Is Toronto Ready to Fight for its Hidden Archer?



Reading David Macfarlane's Arts and Culture column from The Toronto Star last weekend, I was reminded that it has been almost 50 years since Henry Moore's renowned sculpture *Three-Way Piece No. 2* arrived in Toronto. The sculpture quickly became better known as *The Archer* due to its abstract shape resembling a figure with an outstretched bow. I'll never forget the countless trips I took with my family to see it as a little girl, which has left me feeling personally attached to it. But I know I'm not the only one who considers it to be the city's most important public sculpture.

The sculpture stands proudly on a plaza in Nathan Phillips Square, right in front of Finnish architect Viljo Revell's equally distinctive city hall. In the winter months, people merrily skate on the plaza's ice rink in front of the sculpture, and in the summer months, they enjoy soft-serve ice cream from the ice cream trucks that surround it. As Macfarlane recalls, *The Archer* did not always rest so peacefully. He describes the controversy that ensued around the artwork's arrival in 1966. The story is one of clashing perspectives about the role of public art in the city. After Revell won the design competition to create Toronto's new City Hall, construction began in 1961 and the building was finished in 1965. During the completion of this strikingly modern building, which still stands out 50 years later, Revell had asked British artist Henry Moore to create a piece that would complement his architectural design. Revell's intention was to show off just how sophisticated Toronto really was -- by hiring the world's greatest living sculptor. It is worth noting that Moore's sculpture was the first piece of abstract art to be installed in a public place in Toronto. It also turned out to be the most controversial.

Tragically, Revell unexpectedly died in 1964, during the completion of the building. Consequently, Moore completed his work without a commission. It was Toronto's mayor at the time, Philip Givens, who spearheaded the movement to purchase Moore's bronze piece for \$100,000. Unfortunately, because its meaning was incomprehensible to most Torontonians, the community and City Council rejected the sculpture, leaving Givens to his own devices to raise the money through public donations. Moore personally donated the \$15,000 installment fee, but still, City Council did not give in. They even tried to move the location of the sculpture out of central view. After much debate, finally Council agreed to place *The Archer* in its intended spot in the square, but only after it was treated as a gift to the city.

When the sculpture was unveiled on October 27, 1966, it was regarded with outrage. Thousands of visitors came to

see *The Archer* that week, but not many of them appreciated the meaning of its curved lines and conceptual shapes. While this can be expected with any art object on public view, what is important is the fact that the sculpture was installed in Toronto in the first place, and as a result, set a precedent for the city's public spaces. Even though Givens used only donation money to pay for the sculpture, his fight to support the artwork came at a personal price, and he was defeated during the next municipal election.

The Archer, which has become a defining landmark for the city, is not the only incident of public art that had to be fought for. The most famous case of a public art scandal from the past century is unquestionably Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc*. It was erected in 1981 in New York City's Federal Plaza as a curved steel wall, 120 feet long and 12 feet high. After complaints that its large size and shape, which divided the public plaza in half, made people uncomfortable, it was ruthlessly removed and destroyed in 1989. *Tilted Arc*, like *The Archer*, was commissioned by a city as a sculpture for a specific public square. But as soon as *Tilted Arc* went up, people began protesting it. After a public hearing, people spoke out and voted Serra's monumental work to be taken down. This event resonates beyond this single sculpture, as a comment on how our society treats public art, especially when it is funded by the government.

Like Moore before him, Serra is considered to be the greatest living sculptor of his time. While Moore's work was more suggestive than Serra's, they share a great deal in common: their large-scale abstract sculptures present new ways for viewers to interact with the space they occupy, allowing viewers to reassess their preconceived ideas of the space. I strongly believe that each artist has contributed to art in revolutionary ways.

Today, unknown to most people, Toronto is currently experiencing an *Archer* - style controversy. One of Serra's earliest sculptures is sitting in a field in King City, Ontario, just north of downtown Toronto. In 1970, art collector Roger Davidson commissioned the large-scale cement work on his family's farmland, but soon after its completion in 1972, he sold the land to the development company Hickory Hill Investments. Unfortunately, serious actions are currently being taken to develop homes on the land immediately surrounding *Shift* and today, it is at serious risk. The physical sculpture itself, as well as the story of its inception differ significantly from *The Archer*, but the debate around the protection of Richard Serra's *Shift*, can be directly seen in relation to the debate around the lack of support for Moore's *The Archer*.

While this land-art sculpture sits neglected on private land, marked off by a no trespassing sign, it is considered to be one of Serra's seminal works. Toronto does in fact have another work by Serra in Toronto's Pearson Airport. But, due to its placement, past security in the international terminal, only those bound for far-away destinations are able to immerse themselves in this grand piece of art. As a result, *Tilted Spheres* is just as inaccessible as *Shift*. But its future is secure. What is crucial to understand with *Shift* is that here, in Toronto, we actually have another exceptional Serra piece in our own backyard but sadly, its future is precarious, threatened by creeping urban sprawl.

Shift must not share a similar fate to *Tilted Arc*. It seems to me that in order to protect *Shift*, we need people like Givens to step forward and put their beliefs on the line. I felt validated when I read Macfarlane who writes,

“Mayor Philip Givens could see that *The Archer* was a fine idea. Which was why so many people disagreed with him. Spend \$100,000 on art? Spend \$100,000 on art when there are hospitals to build and schools to supply and roads to repair? Was he crazy? Well, no, actually. What he was, was a bit of an elitist. Lots of people were.”

Here, Macfarlane draws attention to something that many people tend not to recognize. I will be the first to admit that my investment in protecting *Shift* comes from a place of privilege -- that is, a place in which I have been able to not only study the history of art and contextualize Serra within it, but as well the privilege to have experienced many modern art sculptures and understand their value. So yes, one could argue that in fact it is elitist to value art -- but nonetheless, among many other things, art represents personal expression and freedom of speech, without which, what are we left with?

It is noteworthy that even though Givens may not have had a background in art, as Macfarlane writes, “Givens was inclined to believe that great architects knew about architecture. And great sculptors knew about sculpture.” He goes on to explain, “*The Archer* would capture a new, dynamic spirit that the city was just beginning to embrace. It was as if the strong, firmly centered form was pointing toward what the city could become.” This potential for what Toronto could become is still as relevant today as it was then. King City, and by extension, Toronto, has the world’s greatest living sculptor’s work literally lying in a field. The only obstacle is the fact that the land is privately owned. Why has nothing been done to permanently secure *Shift*? This sculpture represents what

Toronto still could become if it would only find it in itself to realize how lucky it is to have this work. I don’t mean to overlook the challenges that this presents, namely finding the money to buy off the developers and then figuring out a way to make *Shift* more accessible to the public, but the city has faced similar problems, as proven by *The Archer*. This is what we *need* to do: spend money and protect *Shift*. Maybe this makes me and everyone who wants this an elitist, but, as Macfarlane emphasizes, “How right the elite [can] be sometimes.”

Because of Toronto’s commitment to Moore’s artwork, Moore donated hundreds of artworks to the Art Gallery of Ontario. Today, Toronto has a Henry Moore Sculpture Garden that we can boast about internationally. It has made Toronto a major center for contemporary sculpture. Why not continue the tradition? In fifty years, *Shift* will no doubt be marveled at in the same way that *The Archer* is today, a landmark that represents Toronto’s growing population, not only in the number of people, but also in the number of people appreciating and valuing the arts.



jamie day fleck

beauty + isolation: the night portraits project



Koji, New York 2001

Where and how you live says a lot about what type of person you are. The Night Portraits project depicts individuals at night in urban environments. The project was initiated in 2001 and is ongoing. I utilize the environment of the subject allowing them to provide areas of interest within their surroundings. The photographs are both documentary and fiction due to the constructed nature of the photograph contrasted with the non-orchestrated components like location and styling.

The Night Portraits project started in New York. I had moved to New York to study at Parsons School of Design for a Bachelor's of Fine Art in Photography. More than the program being challenging, it was the city that first excited me and then assaulted me with the unending steam of sensory stimulation. After a year of living with mismatched roommates and what they call big city living, I came back to Toronto exhausted.



John, New York 2001



Jess, Toronto 2010

The Beginning

In the beginning of my sophomore year, the fateful day of September 11th, 2001 happened. America and the world were blindsided and filled with a mixture of emotions such as: anguish, anger, sadness, solidarity and many other indefinable combinations. I was staying midtown at a friend's apartment and we spent an hour walking uptown with the hoards of people outside only to sit in front of the television hoping that the event would somehow be explained to us. Of course, it never was. Not clearly. What was shown on the television that we huddled around was the horror that we just witnessed again and again as if the reality of the day was not real enough.

This event created an indelible impression on me which would be interpreted in the work to come. Not even two months later I began on a project of portraits that were to

recreate characters on the streets of New York, based on the stock characters of Film Noir movies from the 1940's and 50's. I began enlisting my friends and dragging them out onto the well lit night streets, getting them to don cabbie hats or brooding expressions. But after a few weeks of going to neighbourhoods I was not acquainted with, I found that my friends were enough characters without having to impose anything more. The bright lights and neon signage, the street lights and headlights of passing cars, created enough atmosphere that I did not need further imposition of mood or mystery. It was all right there. And that was the real start.

The Process

They were two-hour sessions that started off as one roll of medium format film and then progressed into two or more rolls. With a Mamiya 7 Rangefinder, I would spend these almost classic portrait sessions with my friends getting them to turn this way and that, always holding the pose for sometimes several seconds but usually around $\frac{1}{2}$ sec. The photographs were not location scouted and were not styled letting the youth culture of the day seep into the photographs through the models chosen dress and their aptly gritty surroundings. Being a student in New York is not a high-paying gig, and their apartments looked commensurately busted.

This was a year of shooting quite a bit. Shooting in Brooklyn, East Harlem, uptown and downtown Manhattan; I drank up the city. Themes began to emerge and a constant aesthetic of black against bright lights. I still could not verbalize what I was doing, but I knew I was onto something.

In 2004, I graduated from Parsons with my Bachelor's in Photography. The Night Portraits project was exhibited in the window of the gallery looking onto 5th Ave. These photos definitely have an element of "grittiness", which I am not sure whether to attribute to my view of the world at the time or just the views of New York at the time. The pictures showed the filth on the sidewalks or the dirt that creeps into your pores as you walk through New York. The city inspired me and pushed me but I also knew it was draining me as I craved for intimacy and friendship amongst a sea of transients. The city was a temporary locale for so many aspirants that finding true interpersonal connections was challenging if not impossible. The hustle and bustle had gotten to me. I was hardened and alone amongst a sea of strangers. That is what I saw in the photographs.

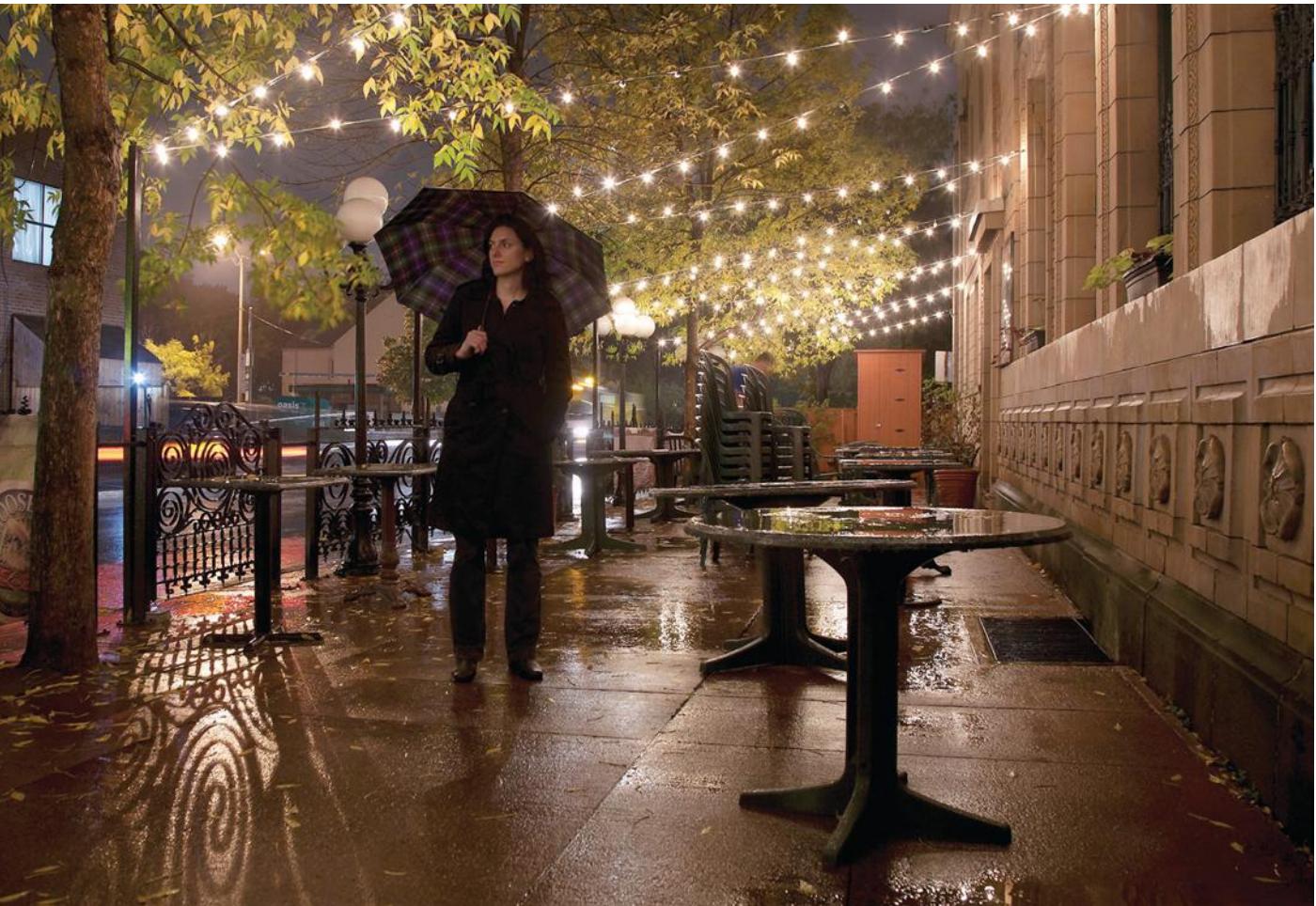
Now I shoot digitally which allows me more freedom as far as number of exposures and seeing the final photograph while I am still shooting. Also, the photographs have changed. They are less lonely. I can see that the photographs are more deliberate and I am aware of important themes. The compositions are now more rooted in the traditions of painting composition than in purely photographic or cinematic traditions.

When I began, I looked to cinema for inspiration and photographers like Gregory Crewdson and Philip Lorca DiCorcia. But as the project progressed and with the more current photographs, I realized it was more based on the

paintings of Edward Hopper. Hopper's paintings mostly in Chicago touched on the new style of city living where interpersonal dynamics were visible through how people occupy spaces. How does a husband relate to his wife based on the space between them? How do they sit or hold their body? He also focused on those in-between moments of solitude in familiar settings: the laundromat, the theatre, the Chinese restaurant. His paintings were contextualized within portrait painting and street scenes of French and Dutch painters, but touched on a completely American experience.

Someone once asked me, "What do you look for in a model?" And I replied, "Someone that is willing." I find most people incredibly interesting just as they are. People are unique. In a world of mass manufacturing and uniformity of experience, it is an anomaly that people are different, one from the next. There are always similarities in culture, dress, mannerisms, likes/dislikes, but each person is a unique composite of all the parts. So all I need to start on the picture-making process is a truly willing person that contributes but also understands direction. I feel privileged to be able to spend two hours with a friend or stranger to hear a new story, new outlook on life and to peek into their world for a while.

I am one of those people who enjoys walking down a house lined street and peering into the un-curtained window to see how people are living. Not to spy but to look into another person's world. What art do they hang on their walls? What colour are the walls? How do they decorate the interior? Is it bright or dark? Incandescent or fluorescent?



Composition

In the Night Portraits project, the person often became a placeholder, or someone to give the rest of the scene context. In the Wild West, photographer Timothy O'Sullivan, used a person to give scale so you knew how big the vista was. I use models in a similar way, making them the focal point or the place where the viewer would first rest their eyes giving a sense of scale. We naturally connect to the human elements in art because it is the thing which is most relatable. I also wanted to focus on the mundane, not the fantastical, and by directing the viewer to focus on some alleyway, some parking lot, some diner, he would see it newly and in a different way. That is why the photographs are familiar and mysterious at the same time. You recognize the locale as somewhere you might have been. You look at the model as someone you could know. But it is not normal somehow. And it raises questions. Why are they standing there at night? Who is this person? What has he/she just done? What will he/she do right after the photo? There are so many maybes and so many unanswered questions. I direct the viewer's attention, now the viewer has to ask, "What am I looking at?" But I won't tell them. That is where they have to work. It is not a full story like a movie; it is just implied drama. The viewer has to fill in the rest and connect the dots. I can't answer the questions because they different answers for different people.

I use the compositional techniques to create the look of the photos. When I first started the project, I made clear compositional and aesthetic choices: I want the models to look heroic. I want them not smiling. The photos are all horizontal to mimic cinema. I wanted to make them as compositionally strong as possible. I would use a low camera angle to give them height, and a wide-angle lens to include as much of the scene as possible. I also did not want them to look directly at the camera so that the illusion was not broken. This kept the feeling that the action in front of the camera was real.

I get asked a lot, "Did you just find that or was it set up?" Anyone that knows a little bit about photography knows that you cannot have a long exposure with tricky night street lighting and just fall upon it before the moment is gone. Also the photos look too well composed, too centered, too thought out. But they still ask because the model seems a bit unaware of the camera.

I do not use much additional lighting than the "found" lighting within the environment. This started mostly as a logistical concern because I was working alone and did not want to enlist an assistant. It places the emphasis on the city lighting versus my own constructions and I found it gave the photographs a more documentary approach.

Themes

As I continued to work on the project, definite themes surfaced. The main theme was the beauty and isolation of urban living. While we live parallel lives, often one on top of the other, we can go years without meeting one's neighbor and possibly a lifetime without making meaningful contact with them. It is a saddening paradox that there are so many people in a city and yet people can feel alone, isolated and alienated. I became increasingly aware of my anonymity and insignificance while living in New York. I could disappear tomorrow and the city would not cease or slow at all. I became aware of how beautiful a city can be at night. One can only appreciate a sight like Times Square or the strip in Las Vegas at night. The city can be seen when it is removed from the expanse of the sky or trees and the lights of the city come into their own.

Another theme is the ubiquitous nature of typography and advertising. Typography in the form of lit billboards and neon signage have become a constant element in our daily lives and while we may not be intimately connected with the brand or the message just by being photographed next to it makes one somehow connected to its design, content and connotations. Ed Ruscha, famed word painter, said, "Sometimes found words are the most pure because they have nothing to do with you. I take things as I find them. A lot of these things come from the noise of everyday life."

Through globalization, I am struck by the universality of urban living. Cities are concentrated hubs of production and industry. More and more people are living in apartments or condominiums. And like the homogenization of consumerism, there is a uniformity of lifestyle. By photographing people in various cities these similarities become apparent. The language and food may change, but the basic experience is the same. We live lives where we walk down the same streets or take the same routes seeing the same signs every day. However, these are actually dynamic climates. Stores open and close. Signage is replaced. Vehicles are upgraded. That adds a documentary element to a fictional photograph by documenting an urban location at a certain time with a specific person at a particular point in their life. I do not focus on tourist locations because that is not where inhabitants of cities go. I lived in New York for seven years and I never went to the top of the Empire State Building. I went to the Statue of Liberty once. It is like that in all cities. The people who live there do not frequent the tourist hot spot. They have their favorite local café or bar or restaurant. They go to work. They come home. That's their life.





Harry, Toronto 2012

The Future

So far the project has shown in group and solo exhibitions in: Toronto, New York and Miami. I see the project evolving into a multimedia show enlisting other artists to produce an exhibition in a warehouse setting. Recruiting musicians, graffiti artists, video artists, dancers and perhaps other visual artists. I love collaborating with other talented individuals to create something which is much larger than a sum of its parts. I also envision taking the project to other cities, using models of different ethnicities and more exotic locales. I do not want to do this because I feel that the project needs more exoticism or excitement. I would do this more to emphasize the similarities in urban experience.

sarah foy

a trip home

On February 10, 2011, I got an instant message from Gretchen. She was at work, and I was too, but it wasn't all that unusual for her to ping me during the work day to run something by me. "Hello?" she said. "Hello hello," I replied. And with no additional lead in or build up, she continued in a single line of the chat, "I just bought your xmas prezzie. 1 hot ticket to Burning Man."

Gretchen and I have been friends since late 2008, which didn't make her an old friend by Christmas-in-February 2011, but she has been a best friend from almost the beginning. We met at a yoga studio, a place we both frequented more days per week than not, and within a few times of hanging out outside of class, it was obvious we'd be friends for life.

I remember when "G" first told me about Burning Man; it must have been very early on in our friendship, because you can't know Gretchen very well without knowing about her love for costumes and the week she spends in them every summer in the Nevada desert. We had ordered take-out and brought it to her house for what I'd imagined would be a night of watching bad television on her unreasonably comfortable couch. But on this night, we never managed to turn on the TV. Before I knew it, we were watching YouTube videos of explosions and "art cars" and sculptures and dance parties and searching through digital photo archives of Camp Touch This in its various incarnations. I was hooked.

But instinct told me that I should not invite myself along. G appeared to value the separation between her Burner world and her Boston world, and the more I learned about Burning Man, the more I understood what a potentially huge responsibility it would be to bring along a first-timer. But by 2010, G was convinced I'd be fine, and she encouraged me to get a ticket. I really wanted to go, but it didn't seem to fit with the rest of my life. My vacation plans were established with the primary consideration of out-of-town family. And here's an odd, but true, confession: I couldn't reconcile how a trip to Burning Man would fit with a career in politics. G must have realized that she'd have to buy me a ticket to keep me from coming up with reasons why it wouldn't work to get one myself.

So I was anxious for a variety of reasons when G told me she bought me a ticket. (To provide a sense of the scope of "variety": I had just found out my only sister sibling was having a baby, her first, due less than a week before Burning Man was slated to begin.) But pretty soon, I was mentally committed to making it work. By March,

I had booked my frequent-flyer ticket, and by April, G and I were scouring Boston thrift stores for tutus and gold pants.

You don't spend any money once you make it to the Playa, but you sure do have a lot of things to buy before you get there: a Camelbak, a bike (if you already own one, trust me, it's not the one you want to bring with you to the Playa), bike lights, an LED headlamp, a tent, extra long rebar stakes, an air mattress, ear plugs, a dust mask, goggles, stuff to dust-proof cameras and lenses (which is ultimately impossible, but the combination of gallon-sized Ziploc bags, scissors, and gaffers tape will help a bit), rain gear (yes, it can rain in the desert!), faux-fur coats (yes, it can be cold in the desert!), and all the battery-powered Christmas lights and EL-wire-lined clothing you can reasonably squeeze into your vehicle. This is, of course, not to mention the two+ gallons of water per person per day and all of the food and other personal items you would need for a week off the grid. Oh, and costumes! Did I mention that you don't wear jeans and a t-shirt in the desert?

Fortunately by way of my connection to Gretchen, I fell into an established camp. This meant that I didn't have to worry about stuff like shade structures, tables and chairs and couches, carpeting (to keep down the dust in the living area), coolers, camping stoves and pots and pans, solar shower bags and shower stalls, and generators (lots of generators!). Other people in Camp Touch This had already built or scavenged or purchased this stuff in years prior, and it was stored for the other 51 weeks a year in a combination of friends' warehouses in Oakland and Truckee, California. Camp Touch This is a predominately Tahoe-based group, which, at only a three-hour drive from the Playa, is among other things convenient. G got me to ship my Burning Man-related online purchases directly to Clare in Truckee so, even before I really knew Clare, she was sending me emails like, "The Super Soaker is a bit on the small side but I guess that will make it easier to sneak up on folks."

Burning Man is always the week before Labor Day; it begins on the last Monday of August and ends on the first Monday of September. So the week before The Week Before Labor Day is a scramble. If you want to get a sense of what the people who go to Burning Man are like but can't actually imagine making it to the event itself, go to Reno, NV or Truckee, CA on the second-to-last weekend of August. You will find entire aisles of the local grocery stores devoted to bottled water. You will find grown men

walking down the street carrying fluorescent furry frog knapsacks while pulling wheelbarrows. And you will find long lines of hot, packed cars at gas stations. But the difference between this weekend and every other weekend of the year is that the people in the cars are not annoyed to be kept waiting.

Unfortunately I missed a lot of the final prep and excitement that happened on the West Coast. Because my niece was due to make her entrance into the world on August 20-something in Philadelphia, I had scheduled my flight to Reno for as late as I could possibly schedule it without missing my ride into the desert with G. Of course at the time I booked my flight in March, I did not consult with Hurricane Irene about her schedule. Molly Foy Heenan arrived just three days late on August 23, mere minutes after the Great East Coast Earthquake of 2011, leaving me just enough time to experience my first-ever earthquake, meet the first member of the next generation in my family, get back home to Boston to swap suitcases, and, because of the impending storm, change my flight to depart a day earlier than I'd planned. (I got especially lucky with respect to that last item since everyone else with airline reservations on the East Coast was trying to do the same thing.) My new flight was one of the last flights to get out of Boston before Irene shut down air traffic in the Northeast for 36 hours. The adventure had begun.

Meanwhile people in California were hard at work on my behalf. G and Brad drove across the Sierra Nevadas to Oakland to get Brad's 1955 Spartan Royal Mansion trailer, which would form the backbone of our camp. Fred assembled the shower stalls to make sure no parts had gone missing or broken since the last year, and then he disassembled them so they could be packed safely and economically onto one of the camp cargo trailers. Aaron, Kevin, Dave, Bryan, Glenn, Greg, and others inventoried and organized the bikes, furniture, and supplies to tally what we still needed to locate and create plans for fitting it all onto or into one of the vehicles heading out to the Playa. I think everyone made last-minute trips to Ace Mountain Hardware for something or another. I had never heard of zip ties before Burning Man 2011, but let me tell you, they are essential.

Clare spent a day doing food prep for a smaller subset of CTTers who would be sharing food. This meant that she cooked a bunch of meat and vegetables and eggs and made – I kid you not – over 100 burritos, which was supposed to be enough for 5 of us to eat 2-3 times a day for 7 days plus a few extras to share with others when spirit or necessity called. She then wrapped the burritos

individually in aluminum foil, clearly labeling each one “breakfast” (meaning “with scrambled egg”), “for Sarah” (meaning “she’s the only vegetarian of the group so don’t you dare eat this or she might not have enough food to eat by the end of the week”), etc., and she froze them. I soon learned that some people go all out and prepare gourmet dinners or cook something different every night (gasp!), but we at CTT keep it simple. Burritos, hard-boiled eggs, cold cuts, string cheese, fruit, nuts, yogurt, Cheez-Its, flavored ice pops, and tequila. The perishable items don’t spoil because we keep them covered in ice. Yes, believe it or not, it is possible to procure ice in the desert. Black Rock City has it all.

Black Rock City is the name of the city that the people of Burning Man create. It is in the Black Rock Desert, which is approximately 100 miles north of Reno in Nevada. It is an actual city – there are streets (Google Map it! CTT sets up at 2:20 and D), street signs, street lights, speed limits, medical facilities, post offices, newspapers, radio stations, waste management facilities, park rangers, state police, restaurants, bars, coffee shops, tea shops, movie theaters, hair salons, nail salons, massage (heck, ice cream!) parlors, art galleries, libraries, recreation facilities, dance clubs, strip clubs, bike repair shops. You name it, I assure you, it’s there. The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration even certifies an airport in Black Rock City (imagine, an airport rebuilt and recertified by a federal agency every year!), and Black Rock City organizes its own “Department of Mutant Vehicles” which inspects and authorizes motor vehicles, a.k.a. “art cars,” to drive on the “open Playa” (the part of the desert beyond the main structure and streets of the city). For one week per year, Black Rock City is the second largest city in the state of Nevada. In 2011, the event sold out for the first time in its 25-year history. The population was capped at 50,000. This shouldn’t surprise you by now, but Black Rock City has a Census Bureau too.

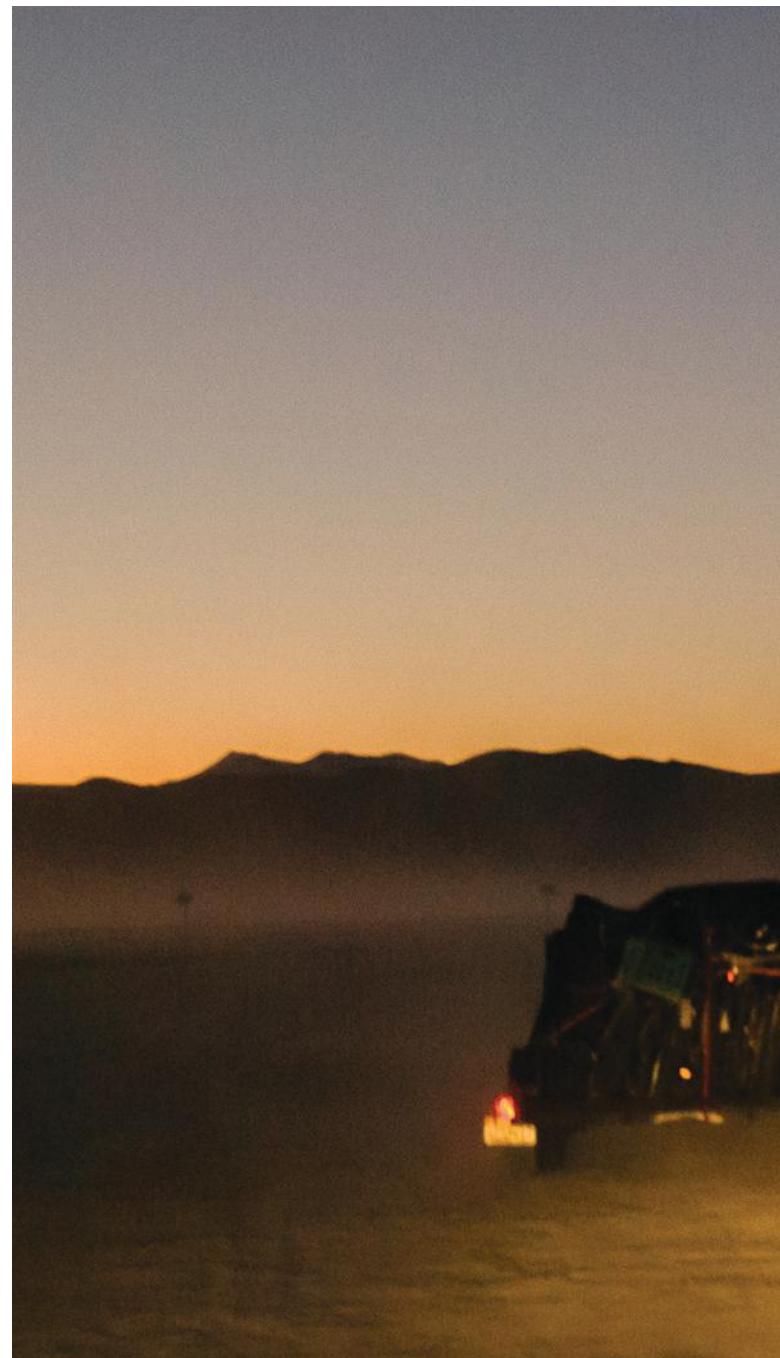
An important thing to know about Burning Man is its “leave no trace” philosophy – kind of like the Boy Scouts’, but the Boy Scouts don’t camp in groups of 50 thousand. For starters, it’s a good idea to equip your bike with a basket, which can dub as a receptacle for your trash, or for that matter, a holder for all of your belongings when the spirit moves you to ditch your bike and dance to music streaming from some of the best sound systems in the world. Feathers, glitter, and sequins on costumes are discouraged because they lead to “MOOP,” or Matter Out Of Place. It’s not uncommon to see someone slam on the brakes of her bike at the sight of a stray candy wrapper. (Imagine if this were the norm outside of Black Rock City! It is a beautiful sight to behold.) But in addition,

just because it's inevitable for a few things to float away, the Burning Man organization, which employs a year-round staff of 30+, installs a temporary "trash fence" way on the outskirts of the Playa to collect anything that tries to pass unnoticed. They then organize a team of volunteers to stay in Black Rock City (now more like a village?) for weeks after the Man and Temple burn for the express purpose of combing the desert to make sure no MOOP is left behind. So by the time Fall arrives, all that will remain is a footprint on the earth where the city once stood. A close reading will tell you which streets were most practicable, which installations were most pondered, and which dance clubs were most popular.

There are very specific rules about when the gates to the city open. Of course some people are permitted to go out early to help survey the city and position the infrastructure, and some people are permitted to go out early to help set up major theme camps and art projects, but the majority of people have to wait their turn. Our caravan of one old-school Land Cruiser and two pickups toting trailers left Truckee at 1am on Monday, August 27, really what most would call "Sunday night." We all rendezvoused at a truck stop off of i-80 East, and despite the hour, it was soon obvious from the lights on the highway that we were not alone. Once we got to NV SR-427, the two-lane road that runs north off of i-80 for the final 80ish miles of the trip to BRC, the vehicles were bumper to bumper. The line of taillights that extended in front our truck at 4am as far as my eye could see, combined with my new appreciation for all of the preparation, coordination, and plain ol' good luck that had gotten me and all of the people in my caravan to this point on the road, helped me to understand that which G could have never conveyed to me through YouTube videos and photo albums alone: the essence of Burning Man is the confluence of this energy. Burning Man is not for everyone, but if you go there, this is the one thing you can't possibly miss.

The closest town to Black Rock City is Gerlach, NV. It's a tiny little place in the middle of nowhere, and from the masses of people in line at the last actual vendors most will see for a week, you get the sense that its economy generates more money on two particular Mondays than it does on the other 363 days of the year combined. We reached the final miles of the trip, the stretch just beyond Gerlach where you drop off of the paved State Route onto a path marked only by waves of dust and orange traffic cones, around the time the sun was beginning to emerge. It was my first real glimpse of the dramatic landscape, the stage on which the adventures of the week would unfold. I had seen pictures of the Playa of course, but once you see it in person, it's hard to imagine that Burning Man could

exist anywhere else. And it's at around this point in the journey that Burning Man veterans like G turn to others, especially "virgins" like me, extend a right hand, and say, "Welcome Home."





julie gemuend

vulture city

I am going back. I take the streetcar to the subway to the Toronto bus terminal. The bus drives me around the lake. I arrive in Niagara Falls. This is the city where I was born. I learned to ride a bike here on a shaded suburb street in the summer time. I reversed into a streetlamp and dented the bumper of my parent's van. I went to school and studied art. I discovered things.

I walk to Cathryn's from the bus depot. Downtown Niagara isn't much of a hub for anything but broken dreams and half-fulfilled promises. We drink tea in her apartment and talk about ghosts. The night grows toward the light. Cathryn drives me to my parent's house.

A cab arrives to take me to the Buffalo airport. I have all my favourite things with me: my Leica, the notebook I bought in Rome, books upon books. The driver tells me of his former life as a cruise boat captain. He claims to have seen the world over. "The most beautiful country is Italy," he says to me. "Italians understand how to live; they have quality of life." I believe him.

I tip the driver five dollars and with long strides bridge the frozen gap of February air between the cab and the revolving doors. The airport is as full of people and as empty of spirit as it always is. The security line moves quickly and in no time at all I find a space to sit down near my gate. I'm flying to Phoenix, Arizona. The flight time is four hours and 55 minutes, and the time change is two hours behind. I have a window seat (my preference). There is a little girl sitting in the seat next to me. She's curious, uncertain and blushing. I want to talk to her, to remember what it's like to be ten or so, but I can't come out of my shell. Not yet. We strike up a brief conversation about animal cookies and video games. I alternate between sudoku and my books. I write down a shot list for the video I intend to make on this trip: close-up of spine, child's pose with lace, dry hands, ear pressed to wall, butterfly arms, breast behind chair, disappearing behind corner.

The plane descends into an atmospheric hush. My parents are picking me up in Phoenix. I can hardly wait to see them. I made this trip one year ago and have impatiently waited to return to the desert and let it resurrect me. It's hard to remember what I can be when I live in a city like Toronto. The city makes me forget that there is another version of myself; a freer, full of feeling human being. I like this version much better than my city-driven self.

My parents arrive in a blue bubble of a rental car, and we drive north-west, windows-down, through the thick landscape of the night. It takes one hour and ten minutes to drive from the airport to our destination: Vulture Mine,

a gold mine and abandoned settlement in the Sonoran desert of Arizona. The drive is restorative. The limitless presence of the desert permeates me. All past and futures are reassigned to someone else. I am only the now. As we approach the mine, my dad slows the car to pause in front of a wide, silver swing-gate. There is a code to get in. The air is soft and cool and the stars are so many. I can't remember having been so awestricken at the sight of the night sky. But I have seen these stars before from the eyes of the girl I was one year ago.

The sun glows behind the blinds of the trailer. I am ready to wake up. I deflate the air mattress and fold the bed into a couch. This is my parent's fifth trailer. It's called Big Country, the most elaborate of the bunch. Previous trailers carried names such as Starcraft, Prowler, Terry and Egg Camper. We would drive from Niagara Falls to Orlando, Florida every March break of my childhood. Now that my parents are retired, they camp all over the warm states in the winter, though they still spend most of their time in Florida. They have season passes to Disney World.

I make a cup of tea, pack my gear, lace up my boots and enter the day. I grind the sand beneath my feet as I walk. I let my hair tangle in the wind. I feel the canvas straps of my backpack rub my shoulders. My body feels instantly leaner, cleaner, and lighter. I walk into the desert. I can hear the distant drone of the drills at the mine behind me as I walk toward the sun and the open space. I can see for miles. This allows me to grasp the vastness of the place I am in and my relationship to it. The walk is leisurely but it is an important part of my process. I am here to test my mental potential through performance art and to capture experience with video. I am the maker and the subject. This walk unpacks all of the clutter in my brain and empties it out into the desert. The wind blows sand over the imprints I leave behind me, revealing new, purposeful realities. Now I have a fluid space inside to concentrate on my awareness, my presence, my being.

I circle the abandoned airstrip, which is undetectable in its state of neglect, and start toward the schoolhouse. Vulture City was established in 1866. The settlement was developed to meet the needs of Vulture Mine, one of Arizona's most successful goldmines. The town population quickly rose to 5,000 residents. This rise to fame came as swiftly as its fall, however, and in 1942 the War Production Board ordered the closing of all non-essential gold mines to ensure that resources were focused on the war effort. The closing of the mine determined the fate of Vulture City and the town was abandoned shortly thereafter. Today, the decaying buildings stand precariously in the dry heat, brittle and bleached phantoms of a Vulture City past.

There are two schoolhouses. The dark, red wood of the original school absorbs the light. This building was erected in 1888. A second schoolhouse was built adjacent to the original in 1930. This building multiplies the light. For this reason, I have chosen it as the location for my work. The first time I came to Vulture City I investigated the brothel, the saloon, the assay building, and the former sleeping quarters of the men that worked the mine, but the schoolhouse was where I spent most of my time. I was drawn to the light inside, the dove whites and muted greens of the walls keep the secrets of lives lived before mine. Performance artist Marina Abramovic published a book called Cleaning the House in 1995, a deeply personal scrapbook of places, people and texts that inspire and motivate her practice. Abramovic believes that there are places which have a certain energy that draw us to them again and again. These mysterious places hold a cryptic meaning that can be recognized by some but understood by very few. Abramovic calls them places of power. In this schoolhouse, in the desert, with the light and the sand and the colour and me all touching, I believe I have found one of my places of power.

I set up my flimsy tripod and balance the heavy camera on the head. I don't know what I'm going to do once the camera rolls, but I am ready to do it. The space is empty and bright. I press the shutter button to begin recording and walk into the frame. Am I in focus? I return to the camera and check the playback. I'm in focus. Back in front of the camera, I look into the lens. I imagine that I'm looking into my own eyes. This encourages me to be calm, to be unafraid of immobility. A trace of discomfort flashes across my face as I unbutton my jeans. I take my clothes off and begin. I lie on the wooden floor and cover my body with two meters of lace fabric. I grow up from the floor. I push my hips into the air. I uncurl my spine. Again and again. Growing up, growing into the space, filling the space. The lace disguises and reveals me. I balance on my knees. I balance on the tips of my toes. I lose my balance. I fall, shaking the floorboards and the tripod. I curse. I crawl. I press. I drag. I open. I close. I open again. I forget what I look like. I forget about the limitations of my body. I forget the camera. I forget that Vulture Mine has been forgotten. I only know the presence of my self in the space.

I spend the next three days working in this manner. The mornings are for walking. I record the sounds of the birds, my footsteps, my breath. I spend the afternoons bathed in the light of the schoolhouse. My body changes from the colourlessness of winter to the palette of the desert, sand, and sky. I find a pile of dead bumblebees. A hummingbird taps on the window of the schoolhouse. I record the movement of a loose rope catching the breeze,





the collapsing playground, the low and sprawling tangle of purple and yellow flowers.

It is my last morning here. My flight is scheduled to depart in the early evening. I zoom around in the quad and let the elements burn into my new skin. I want to remember who I am in this place when I leave. I'm not afraid that I will forget even though I know I will.

The airport is a non-place. There is nothing to feel here. I reflect on my visit to Vulture City and harness the energy from my memories. I feel heartbreak leaving the desert as if I'm leaving the self that I love behind. How strange to think that I feel the most honest essence of my being when I'm performing. Performance art is tangled up in the mind of the public as something insincere and limited in what it has to offer. However, what most people don't understand (and I was once among them) is that what is important about performance art is less what one does than the state of mind one does it in. It takes incredible effort to access this state of mind in the cities of the Western world. Perhaps some will never know this state. Others will discover their places of power as I have mine. In Vulture City, I was able to empty my body and mind, which allowed me to harvest a connection with the fields of energy around me. Western culture is entirely disconnected from this energy. The purpose of my work is to make this connection possible. Performance art of this nature is feared because it contains an energy that cannot be rationally understood.

Performance artists prepare, by the way they live and transform themselves, an art that can be completely mentally developed. Through patience and practice, performance artists achieve a state of mind that can be shared and actively absorbed by the viewer. Painting and sculpture deliver art to the viewer but performance art delivers the viewer to a state of mind. I believe that the art of the future will be an art without objects, because in the communication of pure energy, the object appears as an obstacle.

Now I am back in the city. I edit the video that documents my experience in the desert. The city is a hard, impenetrable shell. It takes as much energy from me as Vulture City gives. As a performance artist, it is important that I experience both the city and the place of power, to know both ways of thinking. The energy that I collected in the desert remains preserved within me so that I may create, with my brand of performance art, a bridge between these experiences for the public.



liz gibson-degroote

our inevitable end

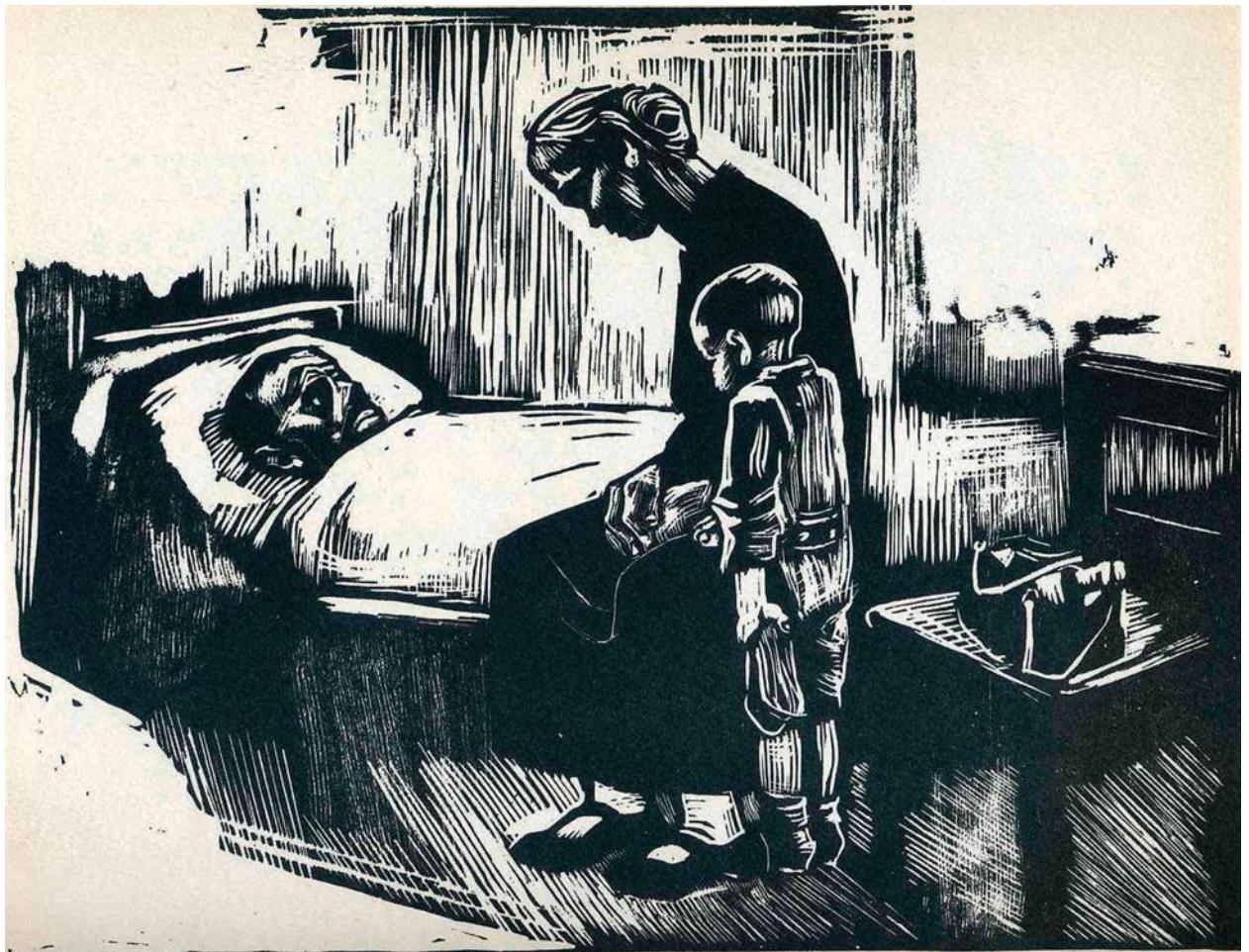
My father died in the night. He'd been ill for years and in the hospital for weeks. After my mother woke me and told me, I went back to sleep. I was thirteen and it was summer and I slept late. When I finally rose that afternoon I went on like all the days before. I showered and got dressed and left home to see friends, to get drunk, to avoid being awake. I didn't mention my father's death to anyone.

I ignored my father's death so fervently that days later on the afternoon of his memorial service, I was downtown hanging outside the grocery store where a friend worked. I saw two kids from school and asked them casually for a ride to the church. I was hoping they wouldn't ask me about it, but they did. When I told them about the service, they offered to come and I felt indifferent. They stood at the back of the church during the service, these two random boys that went to my high school. They were the closest friends I had there.

I'm still considering why I would not talk about my father's death. He'd been dying in the maroon armchair in our living room for nearly three years, so it wasn't unexpected. But I'd been fiercely suppressing my experience of it for all of that time. No one in my family talked about it. I kept not talking about it for another sixteen years.

As bizarre as I now consider this reaction, it was very complementary to the contemporary treatment of death where I grew up in New England. Contrary to so many points in history, death is now a ruthlessly private affair. Not only are the dying removed from sight, tended to in hospitals by unknown professionals, spared whatever shame we've attached to dying, but public grieving is not considered appropriate. We've shoved death into some tiny black margin of our awareness that we somehow never expect to go, even as death is the single most universal and inevitable part of life.

A friend I grew up with and his wife have two children. Like most parents, my friends are careful of what world content the kids are exposed to. The children are not allowed to watch the news or adult movies, shouldn't see their parents smoke or hear them swear; all the "bad" content of life is filtered out for them. When their kids were very young, maybe two and four years old, the family cat had three kittens. The mother cat stayed mostly outdoors, half-wild and half-kept, so the kittens were nested in the garage. The kids were fascinated by them. When one kitten died, their parents had a short crisis of communications before resolving to move forward pretending there were only ever two kittens born. Death is bad content.



Kathe Kollwitz *Hospital Visit* 1923

In past centuries in New England, death was daily content, as naturally regarded as birth. In fact, the significance of death was emphasized in a Puritan effort to encourage good living. Images of memento mori ('remember you will die') including winged skulls, hourglasses, and skulls with crossbones were common, reminding people of their own coming demise. Not only was the concept of death an ever-present reality in life, but people came into intimate contact with death regularly. Dying most often occurred in the home, and the deathbed was surrounded by community as family, friends, neighbors, physicians, and clergy members crowded around the patient during this crucial period. Upon death, a coffin would be constructed specifically for the deceased, often by a family member

or neighbor, sometimes by a local carpenter. The body would be washed, dressed, and laid out in the coffin by family members, then kept on display in the home for up to three days, under constant surveillance and often surrounded by social activity.

Today when a loved one dies it is possible to never even see a body. After my father died in hospital, his body was transported for cremation. When we received him again, he was just a grey sand, powder and pebbles. We took his ashes home to Scotland and released them to the wind over Loch Lomond from the beach. The ashes blew white all over my black boots, and it could have been any ash, scooped from a campsite fire pit. For many

years I dreamt my father was somewhere else in this world, alive and secretly keeping a new life away from our family. I magically supposed I might catch a glimpse of him someday in a bus terminal or some such anonymous place.

When our grandmother was dying in 2006, my brother and I flew to Scotland, hoping to see her before she passed. We didn't make it there in time, or she went too early and when we did see her, she was lying in an open casket in a windowless room of a funeral home. She had been heavily "prepared" and was waiting for her final reveal later that day. She looked awful to us. She looked tiny, frail, fake, horrible. She looked like a corpse. Meaning she looked like a doll in a haunted house. She looked like Halloween. My brother and I felt awkward, laughed nervously because we didn't see her and it seemed so absurd.



Vincent van Gogh *Churchyard in Winter* 1883

When I say she looked like a corpse, I mean it as simile. I am comparing two dissimilar things, employing “like” to signify their essential separation and create a conceptual bridge between them. Even in the retelling, as I contemplate my language, I cannot mentally resolve the ideological distance between corpse and my dead grandmother’s body. Corpses are anonymous and grotesque. They can only signify either the vast devastation of war or the eerie fantasy of horror stories.

Part of protecting ourselves from death includes sanitizing the language we use to describe it. Coffins are now caskets, a corpse is the deceased, tombstones are monuments, and people no longer even die, they pass away. We remain familiar with coffins, corpses, tombstones, and death, but mostly during the month of October when Halloween celebrations and decorations remind us to indulge the thrill of being horrified, watch scary movies and eat candy.

Images of corpses in popular entertainment are more and more prevalent. Zombies enjoy an incredible celebrity in pop-culture. But with all of the images and messages of death in the media, none treat it as the natural and unavoidable process it is. Death is portrayed as the fantastical intervention of life, imaginary or worst-case scenario. The unlucky die. There is little connection between our increasing exposure to graphic death and our sober acknowledgement of our own mortality.

The silence surrounding death actually reached a peak during the first half of the twentieth century and has been declining in certain ways since the 1970s. Researchers and scholars began paying more attention to the subject and much literature has been published in the last forty years, but socially, societally, politely, we keep quiet. Conversation related to death is shunned and dismissed, labeled morbid. Morbidity suggests disease, is unhealthy and unwholesome. Meanwhile our obsessive death denial isolates the dying and the bereaved, robs them of communal support, and encourages damaging suppression above healthy and full emotional processing of these exceptionally significant human experiences.

Over the last two years, Death Cafes have been starting in many cities across Europe and North America. Started in Switzerland by sociologist Bernard Crettaz, the cafes are not permanent spaces, but organized meetings hosted in homes, churches, and coffee shops. These cafes are not some dark underbelly scene of alternative culture. Nor are they support groups for the terminally ill or bereaved, although all those are welcome. They provide a place where people can comfortably discuss matters relating to

death and dying while enjoying tasty snacks and authentic company. The cafes are facilitated, but maintain an open and respectful environment that allows all guests to come to their own conclusions. Participants frankly discuss their fears, wishes, questions, and experiences. Topics can run from the existential possibilities of afterlife and communion with the dead to practical preparation for our own demise, to candid expressions of grief following loss. The aim is to increase awareness of death to add positive dimension to people’s lives.

There is also a home funeral movement growing in North America. What common knowledge and practice have been hiding is that it is perfectly legal in most places to care for your own dead. More and more people are opting to return to the old familial way: constructing coffins, washing, dressing, and laying out the body, even sometimes burying the deceased at their home. Some of the motivation might be to avoid exorbitant modern funeral industry costs, now easily reaching \$6,000 to \$10,000 per death, but those who choose this way of caring for their loved ones are additionally finding an increased feeling of closure and acceptance of the death. There is a satisfaction in knowing the body was handled with love by those who cared for them in life, and the process, time spent with the dead body helps people to deeply know and process their loss. Slowly people are recognizing the benefits of dealing with death in the same intimate manner that humans did for thousands of years prior to our time, treating it as the natural partner of life.

I’ve seen an internet greeting card, part of the dark humor new wave of greeting cards in the 21st century that reads, “When work feels overwhelming, remember that you’re going to die.” It’s funny in its disregard for the taboo of death, mildly shocking or naughty. But this facetious one-liner offers a powerful philosophical exercise. Set against the acknowledgement of my own irrefutable death, certain and approaching, all aspects of life momentarily come into clear perspective. Immediately I am compelled to evaluate the importance of every minutia from the vantage point of my imagined deathbed, and the resulting upheaval in outlook is immense and refreshing. Worries and anxieties that regularly hold my brain and muscles hostage suddenly release. I see they just don’t matter and I can physically feel the reclaimed space they’ve been occupying. It doesn’t actually remove any daily responsibilities, but it reassesses what I care about and positively informs my decisions. Living with a vague notion of immortality corrupts our perspective. The truth is that we and everyone we love are dying right now. We should live with that.

alexandra hill

“thank you for not talking”

News is something someone wants suppressed.

Everything else is just advertising.

-Lord Northcliff

Imagine opening your newspaper to find that all of the important information, key players and identifying records were blacked out, revealing a story filled with endless holes and reeking of censorship. While this is the reality in many parts of the world, in Canada, freedom of the press is at very least touted, if not always observed. Journalists are the ones tasked to fill in those blacked out pieces and complete the whole story. It isn't always easy and the challenges of this kind of writing are both what drive some people to this career and what drives others away. But the challenge of writing a story without all of the pieces may be something that Canadian journalists increasingly face, especially those on the political beat.

Political communications in this country has been changing, and changing in a way that doesn't seem to fit into the transparent, democratic nation that Canadians expect. It is no secret that journalists can be the bane of existence to politicians, but because they are asking the questions that society wants to hear (the same society that put those politicians in their position of power), politicians are forced to play nice and smile for the cameras. However, Prime Minister Stephen Harper made it clear early in his leadership that the game was going to follow his. It took just four months from the time he was sworn in as Prime Minister on February 6, 2006 for the press to become fed up with the strict communications strategies of our new leader. On May 23 of that year, journalists staged a protest by walking out of a news conference before the Prime Minister had even arrived. This was in response to the Prime Minister's and Communications staff's attempts at restricting press freedom by having reporters sign up in advance to ask questions and then allowing the Prime Minister to pick and choose who would actually have the opportunity to speak. Unfortunately, this protest (like many others) didn't seem to scare Harper into a more cooperative frame of mind because eventually the journalists, in need of a story, on a deadline and assigned to the political beat would be forced to accept this new press conference style – if they were to get any access to the Prime Minister at all. And they didn't end up getting all that much anyways, as the first year of Stephen Harper's leadership included a seven-month dry spell of press conferences and media scrums.

To further solidify his unfriendly feelings for the press, the Prime Minister refused to attempt the annual press gallery

dinner the following year, despite a long held tradition of Prime Ministers sucking up any hard feelings and playing nice. And if that wasn't a clear enough message, at the last minute the Harper ordered Cabinet Ministers to also pull out of the event, sending a clear message to the press that the friendship, however contrived, was over.

With that clear and hostile message to the journalistic community, it was apparent to media all over the country that government information through interviews would no longer be as forthcoming as it once was, and while the easiest way to find the information you are after is going directly to the source, now it seemed that the source was being rather tight-lipped.

But while tight-lipped politicians are disappointing, they are not the media and public's only source for relevant information about the inner workings of government – there are press releases, Hansard reports, Throne Speeches, among a host of other options. But perhaps most important of all, to anyone interested in what happens behind parliaments' closed doors, is the Access to Information Request (ATI/FOI).

I submitted my own Access to Information (ATI) Requests for the first time on March 18, 2013. I intended to use the information I received as part of the research for my major paper on the Residential School Apology. Knowing that as a Canadian, I am legally entitled to access to details on how taxpayer dollars are spent, I figured why not go right to the source for my information? I filled out and printed eight requests total, then sent them to four different Federal Departments: Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada, Truth and Reconciliation Commission Canada and the Privy Council Office.

I carefully wrote out eight separate cheques and off they went. I was naively excited about what I might receive in return.

Apparently this naivety is something that I share with many Canadians, a fact that would provide me some small bit of comfort when I began to realize that I might have been overly auspicious in my expectations of the government.

My research supervisor was the first person to warn me of my misplaced expectations, in the form of an article

in my inbox from Rabble.ca. The title was “Harper government using ‘slash-and-burn tactics’ to reduce online information” and it described the numerous ways that the current administration is reducing our access to government information online. Most intriguing to me was the author’s details of his own attempts to access information through the Treasury Board of Canada. His experience was pretty disheartening, from outrageous fees to multiple delays. Just a little bit of further Internet research uncovered a sea of the similar complaints. How could this be the case in Canada where providing access to information had been a legal obligation of the government for almost 30 years?

My intense desire to see the documents that I had requested was what kept me optimistic despite mounting evidence that my requests would be denied, blocked or delayed. It was only when the news came straight from the source that I realized what I was going up against.

On March 27, less than 10 days after submitting my requests for information, I struck out with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. But where I was expecting (somewhat pessimistically) bureaucratic excuses and run around, I instead received a surprising amount of information.

The man on the phone introduced himself as Tom McMahon, Chief Council for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). That was the first surprise. I hadn’t expected an actual phone call when my requests were denied, much less from someone so high up in the organization. Perhaps it was due to the fact that I was starting down a path that the commission had already been on and, as it turns out, a path that didn’t lead anywhere.

McMahon explained that the commission would not be able to provide me with any documents, not because they didn’t want to, but because they also didn’t have any and not for lack of trying. They too had requested documents pertaining to the creation of the Residential School Apology and despite being tasked by the government with documenting the history of the Residential School System and actually being an arms length Federal government organization, this request was still fought and eventually denied. Then, perhaps most surprising of all, this important government employee asked ME to contact HIM if anything came of my other requests. Here was a lawyer for the TRC and an employee of the Canadian government asking me for the same information that I was looking for from him. It just seemed too bizarre. How was it possible that an organization mandated to document the history of the

residential school experience wasn’t allowed access to documents about the reconciliation efforts in relation to this tragedy? How was it possible that someone with a considerable amount of power in our federal government was asking a student with no power at all for help? How was it possible that this could be the state of information sharing and transparency in this country?

While this response might come as a shock to the average Canadian, it would be no surprise to Robert Cribb, a Toronto Star investigative journalist who has been submitting ATI requests since 1994 and is well known for stories related to government corruption. He is also an instructor in the Master of Journalism program at Ryerson University where he teaches a course in Investigate Journalism. As part of his course, Cribb has all students submit an ATI request because he describes this process as “one of the very few ways to access government public records that are not routinely released”. Or at least, that is the theory. Cribb makes no illusions that the process is straightforward and as he describes it “The typical FOI (another acronym for Access to Information Request) experience in Canada for sure is one of adversarialism, with bureaucrats who are trying to figure out how to not give information as opposed to how to give it”. So Cribb’s students are tasked with not only submitting a request, but also fighting for the information that we as Canadians are entitled to.

Tara McInnis is a second year Master of Journalism student at Ryerson University and a student in Cribb’s Investigative Journalism class. She submitted several requests this term and had quite a bit of success. She was one of the more fortunate students in that sense, and she knows it. “We all talk about where we are at with FOI’s and I’ve heard some really shitty stories”. She and Cribb both recalled the experience of one student who received a mound of paper with all but a total at the end blacked out. “So someone in that FOI office just sent him a bunch of nothing,” McInnis says. Cribb notes that sending back heavily blacked out information is one of the most common ways that the Federal government skirts requests. Other common tactics include exorbitant fees and endless delays, which are particularly effective when responding to journalists. “It is very typical for them to say we need another 90 days or three months or eight months...which is a very effective strategy (). They know who they are dealing with, they are dealing with journalists who are working on time sensitive issues”.

The Freedom of Information and Privacy Act of 1983 may have always been an idealized version of what would actually take place in government, especially

when information had the potential to make them look bad, but in recent years things have been getting worse. When asked his thoughts on the current state of Access to Information, Cribb responded, “it is getting harder I would say...there is a story in the Toronto Star today suggesting that... Well, the information Commissioner is saying that delays are getting longer and the bar to access is getting higher”. Cribb among others points directly to the current government as the source of the problem for journalists seeking access to information. “Certainly under the Tories there’s a...well I guess you call it what it is, there is a greater contempt for journalistic inquiry,” says Cribb. And that contempt for journalism translates to contempt for the rights of all Canadians. As Cribb so poignantly notes, “at the heart of all that is a culture of secrecy...that undermines the publics right to know”.

As it turns out, all of that secrecy has provided something else for journalists to write about, and the media backlash on this topic has been strong and fierce. Cribb notes that he too has reported on this very phenomenon. Headlines like “Canada’s ‘no comment’ Conservative Government” in the *Globe and Mail*, “Stephen Harper’s war on transparency: Editorial” in the *Toronto Star* and “Harper’s hitlist: The media and the Access to Information Act don’t matter” at *Rabble.ca* fill our newspapers and websites, while embittered journalist reeling from one failed ATI request to another find a story within the rejection. The media commentary on the Harper government extends beyond just ATI request refusals to all facets of journalism, from interview requests to the scheduling of questions and cherry picking of reporters known to be in the government’s good graces. In fact, the *Toronto Star* even compared the current situation to something out of a sci-fi novel, stating “indeed, some alarming aspects of George Orwell’s “Ministry of Truth” as described in his classic novel, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, are the all-too-real truth for Canadian journalists whose role it is to hold the Stephen Harper government to account”. W.T. Stanbury, a former professor of Commerce and Business Administration at the University of British Columbia, wrote an article for the *Hill Times* online in June 2009 that detailed all of the ways that the government denies Canadians access to important information. Following that article came the Review of Free Expression in Canada, put out by a non-profit journalism organization dedicated to freedom of information and expression, which gave the Government of Canada an F- for Access to Information. On a particularly disheartening note the review begins by saying “We gave the Federal government a failing grade in this area last year and now face the dilemma of how to recognize the fact that its record has worsened”. The report is titled Like sheep to the slaughter, an ode to George Washington’s famous quote “... the freedom of speech

may be taken away—and, dumb and silent we may be led, like sheep, to the slaughter”. This review issues a strong warning to Canadians that our access to information is vital in the protection of our rights and democracy, all of which is being threatened by a government with a clear preference for secrecy and order. The report goes on to examine some “sobering statistics” including the “44% of ATI requests not met in the 30 day time limit, 21.3% that took longer than 60 days to fulfill and 395 days as the average number it takes to resolve an ATI complaint”. And with all of these statistics piling up, the media is outraged, and they are writing about it. The problem is, Canadians don’t seem too worried.

The Harper government has been in power for the past seven years, through two prorogations of parliament and one vote of non-confidence that lead to an election where we saw the Tories come out on top once again. Despite all of these reasons, the 2011 election, the one born out the Conservative government being held in contempt of parliament, the Harper Government came back stronger than ever. That majority win seemingly reaffirmed that Canadians aren’t concerned with holding the government accountable, and the government’s communication policies recognize that. By the time Canadians elected Harper for the second time, the media and news reading public was well aware of the secretive nature of this government. As Kevin Page of the *Toronto Star* writes, this election was “a victory that has served as positive reinforcement for their modus operandi of obfuscation”. Considering that at this point, the CFFE had released their damning report on the government’s blockade of Access to Information and numerous stories had appeared nation wide detailing the injustices of the current administration, it seems that secrecy was not an issue Canadians took to the polls.

While the majority of Canadians may not yet be concerned about the Harper Government’s culture of secrecy, that doesn’t mean that journalists are the only ones crying foul.

The rumbles of displeasure are coming from the one place that we might not have expected it – from within the government itself. From elected officials to bureaucrats to members of the extensive communications team, it seems that the secrecy and control are staring to wear down some within the government’s vast domain. As the *Globe and Mail* describes in the recent commentary titled, “Canada’s “no comment” conservative government,” “The communications people are on the shortest possible leash. They say only what the centre authorizes. Civil servants, who actually know things, are gagged. Formal contacts are verboten; informal contacts with media or

interest groups are discouraged". Communications staff has long been recognized as responsible for carrying out this secrecy, but with the PM recently having hired his seventh Communications Director in seven years, it would seem that it is job that no one really wants (MacDougall now heading Harper's communications team, 2012). And if writing about their own challenges with the ATI process ever begins to get mundane, journalists seem to have more and more potential interview subject from within government on this same issue. The Information Commissioner Robert Marleau, who was appointed by Harper, said to CanWest News services in 2009, "A lack of leadership at the highest levels of the Conservative government has contributed to a 'crisis of information management' that has slowed the disclosure of public records to a trickle". More recently the first ever Parliamentary Budget Officer, (and soon to be ex-budget officer) Kevin Page has taken part in a yearlong court battle in an attempt to access documents about budget cuts and financial decisions. His story of trying and failing to access documents is not unique, even for those within the federal government. I was surprised to learn that even my own failed ATI request to the TRC was born from the same issue. When I inquired into why the Truth and Reconciliation Commission didn't have the documents I was after, their Chief Counsel Tom McMahon replied "the reason is because Canada refuses to give them to us... and the important thing to note is that the Ontario supreme court agree that Canada is not required to give them to us". He then pointed me to an Ontario Supreme Court decision stating just that, that the Federal Government was not required to turn over documents related to the official apology to the TRC. These are the same documents that I am requesting. And if someone within the Federal government's employ can't access these documents, I'm not feeling great about my chances either.

It has been 24 days since I submitted my ATI requests for Federal government documents related to the Residential School Apology. From feeling hopeful when mailing my letters to worried after speaking with my supervisor to hopeless after receiving a call from Tom McMahon at the TRC (peppered with moments of perseverance, spurred on by the occasional call to clarify a section of my request or a letter acknowledging receipt of my forms), this access to information "battle" has been wrought with emotion and it has only just begun. In the last few weeks I have created my research proposal, and at the urging of my supervisor, research methods professor and other faculty, I switched to my contingency plan for document collection. It wasn't without a struggle and eventual loss of faith that I came to this conclusion, and my complaints of the injustice of it all didn't fall on deaf ears. "This is

a real problem" and "it makes me sick" were sentiments that echoed across the desk with every conversation that eventually lead me to abandoned my lofty goals of government-sourced research. The trouble was, that with every person troubled by this phenomenon, there wasn't one that said, "We really need to do something about this."

So the truth is that we know what is going on, we read about it in our newspapers and talk about it in our classrooms. We criticize the government, but few seem very interested in actually doing anything about it. Canadians have long been viewed as a docile cousin to the United States, somewhat socialist, less critical and not about to bite the hand that feeds us. Though many Canadians would raise their voice in protest of this stereotype, we see it carried out in real life far too often. Recently Rick Mercer discussed the Federal government's attempts to "muzzle" a team of Canadian and American scientists working in the high arctic. When presented with a form requiring the researchers to go through a "political staffer in Ottawa" before discussing their findings in public, as the stereotype would have it, the Canadians signed on the dotted line. Not so for the Americans who "went ballistic," as they do. "Freedom of speech this and freedom of speech that" is how Mercer described it, but not to worry because "it's not like scientists are the only ones being told to shut up in this country. No, it's everyone". And it looks like now; it is me too, or at very least the people that I want to talk to. Perhaps it is time to talk a page from the American book on this one. Maybe we need to be screaming "freedom of speech" just a little bit more and perhaps be a little less content with what we do get. Because if a win here means something can be compromised there, like a healthy economy over our environment, or a Prime Minister who loves kittens and sings Beatles songs but promotes a culture of secrecy that tramples on our rights to transparent and fair government, then how can our country remain one of the best places in the world? We can demand more, and strive for the country, politicians and future that we really want, or we can accept the path we are on, and listen to one journalist and political commentators final thought on subject, "This is the new Canada, thank you for not talking".

fraser hogarth

the internet in a box





Where is the Internet located? If you started following the cable from your modem into the wall where would it eventually lead? The short answer is that the Internet is comprised of an interconnected network of datacenters which are scattered worldwide. How big is the Internet? There is a massive amount of data stored in and moving through these datacenters. Former Google CEO Eric Schmidt once estimated the size at roughly 5-million terabytes of data (5 trillion megabytes). There are around 155 million websites out there, each one containing a number of web pages, however this number fluctuates over time as web sites are constantly added, altered, or removed. In response to the constantly changing nature of online content, The Internet Archive has been crawling through websites across the Internet and saving them into an archive. The Internet Archive is a non-profit digital library which was formed in 1996 with the lofty mission statement of “universal access to all knowledge”. Using their Wayback Machine you are able to type in a web address and view a snapshot of that webpage over the years, and currently there are over 240 billion pages dating as far back as 1996. Interestingly, in 2009 the Internet Archive announced that the datacenter containing the Wayback Machine’s data was housed inside of a standard 20-ft intermodal shipping container, the very same kind used to ship goods overseas. Why do such a thing? Internet Archive founder Brewster Kahle was interested in the possibility of shipping containerized copies of his archive to strategic locations around the world in order to avoid the fate of the ancient Library of Alexandria, which was burned to the ground shortly after Caesar’s siege of the city in 48 BC. This way, in the event of a political or natural disaster there would always be a redundant archived copy of the Internet somewhere else. Building the required datacenters inside of shipping containers and shipping them overseas would be quicker and more economical than building new ones from scratch. Being able to point to a standardized metal box and say: “That is the Internet, and it contains a massive wealth of human knowledge” is astounding. The fact that moving something across the planet that weighs 50,000 pounds is more economical than building it in-situ is equally astounding. How did we get to this point?

Prior to containerization the tried and true method of shipping was through break bulk cargo. Longshoremen would manually load and unload goods housed in barrels and crates on and off of ships individually. This method is highly labour intensive and also requires additional infrastructure in a port to store, transport and load goods. In 1937 the owner of a small North Carolina trucking firm grew frustrated while having to spend days at the New Jersey port waiting for his load of cotton to be placed onto a ship for export overseas. Why couldn't an entire truck simply be hoisted onto a ship and then loaded onto another truck at the other end for delivery? His name was Malcom McLean and by the 1950s he had grown his trucking company into one of the largest in America. With a bank loan of \$42 million, in 1956 McLean bought two World War 2 tankers and retrofitted them to be able to transport containers both on and under the ship's deck, and the following year his company began shipping goods in this way. A 1958 New York Times article compared the productivity of one of McLean's ships with that of an equivalently sized conventional ship. It took 42 dockworkers 14 hours to unload McLean's ship, whereas the conventional ship required 126 workers to labour for 84 hours. Around the world the shipping industry took notice of the incredible cost savings and increased productivity, so other companies quickly followed suit. This would prove revolutionary and the ocean would no longer be an economic barrier to commerce. The seeds of globalization were sown.

Today more than 90% of the world's goods travel by standardized intermodal shipping containers which can be easily transferred from truck, to ship, to train. Around 17 million containers flow in and out of a global network of ports annually. As a result the costs of moving goods around the world has become incredibly cheap. For example it costs only \$1.50 to move a DVD player from China to the U.S. This has leveled the global economic playing field, and manufacturing has moved from developed countries to developing countries where labour costs are much lower. This has been key to the global integration of world economies. However, trade deficits now exist in countries that consume more imports than they produce for export. For example the total value of goods that travel from China to the U.S. is four times that of those that make the return trip. With so many full containers arriving in developed countries and comparatively few leaving, businesses have found that it can be more cost effective to sell these containers rather than pay to ship them back empty. This has created a market for used shipping containers and people have been finding creative uses for them. Container architecture is one example of this. People are interested in building

modular structures out of containers due to their relatively low cost, structural integrity and abundant supply. Small temporary structures, homes, and offices around the world have been built using them. Art installation and sculpture has been another use, pointing to the shipping container's status as an icon of globalization. Finally, many technology companies have recently begun building data centers inside of shipping containers, enabling the rapid deployment of computing capacity in an increasingly information hungry world. Given the transformative effects that both computing technology and the shipping container have had on the world, perhaps it is natural that the two be united.

Both the Internet and the global shipping network are quite alike. They are both globally distributed networks that consist of nodes and lines used to transport stuff around the world. The digital counterpart to the shipping container is the IP packet, which contains a chunk of data in addition to its destination information. This is much more efficient than transmitting data as individual bits or characters, though just as containers are occasionally lost at sea (several thousand per year), packets can also be lost due to network congestion. While these systems can still be improved, both have transformed the space and time between the places they connect. The Internet has enabled cheap, instantaneous and multiple media based tools of communication, which like containerized shipping has also played a large role in the global integration of economies and culture. Music, video, and other cultural media can rapidly be shared around the world. E-commerce has enabled us to summon products from anywhere on the planet to our doorsteps at the click of a mouse. Anyone in the world can access the same unimaginably vast pool of information at all times, and collaborating with people across the globe has never been easier.

A key difference between the Internet and the global shipping network is that despite their structural similarities, the nature of the stuff being transported is fundamentally different and has to be quantified and thought of in different terms. For example, the throughput of the global shipping network can be measured by weight, and in 2011 this number was 8.7 billion tons. But what was the weight of the information moving through the Internet? Believe it or not, there is a minute weight to this information and it can be calculated. Electronic data does have a mass as bits are embodied and manipulated as electrical voltages, and electrons have a mass. If we go back to Schmidt's estimation of the Internet being 5-million terabytes in size, then the weight of the electrons contained in this data would be approximately 0.2 millionths of an ounce.

Of course this is a preposterous way to measure the massive power and potential of the totality of ideas and information being transmitted throughout the world by the Internet, but it does highlight its intangible nature and suggest a secondary reason for placing an archived copy of the Internet inside of a shipping container. Perhaps it is a way of giving weight and form to something that is deemed important yet is essentially immaterial. We are evolutionarily wired to interact with physical objects and perhaps we find it reassuring having something discrete and tangible to represent something as omnipresent as the Internet, rather than have it exist solely in a virtual or mental space. I would also like to think that this desire helps explain where the human creative urge comes from, a need to take ideas from inside our heads and give them a tangible form such as a painting, sculpture, or novel. As we become more reliant on technology we are having to

adjust to interacting with non-physical objects on a daily basis. Books are giving way to e-books, photographs have become digital, and an increasing amount of time is spent absorbing information about the world through screens. After a couple decades spent virtualizing tangible objects, perhaps we are beginning to see the value in giving physical forms to the virtual. With the Internet Archive physically located inside a metal box we can rest assured that the Internet is a concrete part of the “real” and will be around for future generations to glean wisdom from. Alternatively, perhaps a future generation will unearth a shipping container housing the Internet Archive, see the irony in fusing the two most potent forces of globalization into a single object, and proclaim it to be a piece of sculptural art.







jordan kawai

the mistaken hanoverian horse

I plug in the hard-drive, the sound of the miniature motor starts, and just like that 141.2 hours of a single family's life are neatly arranged in tiny blue folders in a grid-like formation. Catalogued by year, over two decades of home video capturing the lives of the Des Brisays sits on my computer. I have been a friend of the family for as long as I can remember, spending countless summers and after school hours at their cottage, on their trampoline and just growing up with their sons. I click through the video clips, as I begin another film about their son, Tommy, and I cannot help but feel both overwhelmed at the beauty in the details of family life and puzzled by commonly held aspirations to cure autism.

I catch myself explaining to people that what drives my interest in making these films is the desire to counter the media discourse of the common portrayal of the autistic person. And sure that would be true to some degree. I am truly disturbed by the idea that every time I mention autism the response is usually comprised of some arrangement of keywords including Dustin Hoffman and "Rainman." And I am disturbed that unjust correlations between autism and violence are being introduced in such examples of the Connecticut school shootings, linking the gunman's Asperger's syndrome to the horrific event that took place. But that is not the complete reason as to what brings me to telling the stories of someone like Tommy. It is Tommy's creative interpretations of the world around him that attract me. Making sense of these stories is the closest I can get to understanding why autism is one of the best lenses through which to see the world.

We, the neuro-typical, have granted ourselves some status of privileged "normalness" and we celebrate it. Our choice of naming and phrasing for all variances in the human condition exposes this desire to highlight and ostracize difference. For example, an inefficiency to visualize proper colours is called "colour-blind" inferring that despite seeing colour, an inability to see the exact schema of colour equates to a form of blindness, or as I see it; normative blindness. Questions of why are we so consumed with promoting and seeking monoperspectives amongst ourselves furthers my attraction to such people as Tommy.

Tommy, now 21, demonstrates no acknowledgment of a normative desire; no signs of a priority to adhere to any social code that limits creativity or puts boundary on the verbal expression of the wandering mind. I remember sitting around a campfire and Tommy attempting to convince his brother that a "mistaken Hanoverian horse" had sharpened the wrong end of his marshmallow stick.

Or driving quietly one evening late at night, canopied by trees through one of the windy roads in the Gatineau Hills in Quebec, when Tommy whispered "no smoking in the moon forest" while looking out the window. The endless possibilities of Tommy's visions amaze me.

Too many introductory writings on people with autism begin by listing characteristics that are often considered lacking. Of these, common features include lack of social interaction and lack of imagination. This discussion on autism and imagination often ends in semantic discussion between the differing factors of imagination and creativity, highlighting that imagination brings into consciousness things that are not present, whereas creativity is the act of implementing something imagined in a meaningful way. Tommy possesses both imagination and creativity. The roots of Tommy's imagination are linked to his development in language skills and dealings with a non-verbal childhood. On the other hand the growth of his creativity is connected to his use of imagination to interact in social settings and make sense of the complexities of day-to-day life.

Born in 1991, Tommy was diagnosed with autism at the age of two-and-a-half. Tommy was non-verbal and at the age of five, professionals had explained to the family that Tommy was unlikely to ever speak. Tommy's written word came first with his keen interest and interaction with computers and technology. Soon after, Tommy began to speak at the age of seven. Hearing this story gives me goose bumps and viewing this moment caught on video is surreal. The off-centered framing of the camcorder on the tripod, the pixilated buzzing of the image zoomed in past its comfort and the hum of the audio recording immediately appear crystal clear for those two seconds in which Tommy recites his first words, "give me juice."

Tommy's attraction to Disney fueled his imagination at an early age. Despite the experts' advice to the Des Brisay family to avoid giving in to their son's repetitive behaviour and extreme fixation on certain things, MaryAnn and Peter did not comply. This choice to encourage Tommy to embrace the things that made him happy, despite if that meant the acquiring of every Disney film ever released or re-released, no matter how obscure the edition or version, was a life-changer for Tommy's language development.

It is important to understand Tommy's relationship with the works of Disney. My personal favourite story begins with Paul, Tommy's older brother, and myself. One fall evening we had invited a few classmates over to the Des Brisay's home. Still in elementary school, MaryAnn

usually introduced Tommy by mentioning a few of the things that made Tommy so interesting. Often this would include demonstrations of Tommy's memory and ability to tell people what day of the week they were born based on the year and date of their birth. Next, Tommy's love for Disney would be tested by a handful of Disney trivia questions. An array of questions including reciting Disney songs, full character names or Disney dialogues would often be pitched. I remember once when Tommy was asked to list the seven dwarves. I looked at Paul, his eyes rolling: piece of cake. To our surprise, rather than hearing the names Happy, Grumpy, Bashful, Doc, Sneezy and so on, Tommy replied with a sequence of names like Roy Atwell, Otis Harlan, Pinto Colvig, each name followed by a series of dates. Completely confused, the guests looked puzzled and almost sympathetic as if for a second they had doubted Tommy's ability to complete the party trick. MaryAnn's first reaction was to hop on the nearby computer and "google" the names. It would turn out that these names were, in fact, the full names of the voice actors to the animated dwarves, along with the release dates of other films they have starred in. We all laughed while Tommy continued to watch the Jungle Book.

At the age of eight Tommy discovered subtitles. MaryAnn often explains this period of Tommy's life as "the Eureka moment." A simple fluke, Tommy had clicked a button on the television remote that had enabled subtitles to appear at the bottom of his all-time favourite film "The Jungle Book." From then on, the subtitles remained for every film he would watch and the tiny script marked the beginning of the biggest development to his language, while simultaneously serving as a textual annoyance to his older brother.

The subtitles encouraged Tommy to read and recite his favourite Disney sequences over and over again. However, the presence of the subtitles proved a problem when the family would go to the theatres to see a film. The story goes that upon the introduction of a new Disney film, in the opening credits Tommy began to loudly shout, "The big white read! The big white read! The big white read." He was obviously referring to the subtitles. Since subtitles never made their way into the children's cinema experience, the family would avoid theatre going for a while. What always grabs my attention about the "big white read" story, is the creativeness in the selection of a basic language set. The ability for a person with autism to communicate, especially when seven years of their life had been non-verbal, is daunting and hard to comprehend. MaryAnn once explained it to me: imagine that you were

picked up and dropped in a country where no could speak your language. Now imagine not only being unable to communicate in a specific country, but not being able to speak the same language as anyone in any place. Tommy's use of problem-solving to communicate with the basic words he knew resulting in collections of key words like "big," "white" and "read," is an example of a form of creativity not celebrated nor acknowledged by us, the neuro-typical. This ingenious use of the basic English language illustrates Tommy's creativity in communicating with others. Some of my favourite examples of Tommy-lingo include, "the cold food cupboard," referring to the fridge; and my number one Tommy-lingo: "arm tunnels," which are commonly known as sleeves.

This level of creativity does not seem available or exercised by the non-autist community. Is it that it is not in our reach or that we are discouraged from the full freedom of creative expression? "Normalness" is even cultivated in writing. Structure and form seem to be of more concern in the curriculum of the classroom than content and ideas. We seem to understand one another with a reduced use of the basics of language that we choose to exercise and practice. It would seem that there is a completely beautiful and untapped use of basic language and creative expression, blockaded by an insistence on sameness and a value structure emphasizing form, not imagination.

The mere thought of curing autism is enough to make me throw a cold food cupboard at any unorthodox biomedical practitioner (those who strive to cure autism). However, I am once again inspired by Tommy to turn a blind eye to the controversies that muddy the waters of what is important. A story written by Tommy in December of 2005, when he was fourteen years old, reminds me that the best teachers are anyone who have an imagination big enough to wheel a thought into a story that leave you changed after you hear it. Tommy's story titled, "This Week's Pirate Story" borrows a combination of characters from various stories as Moby Dick, Treasure Island, Jack and the Beanstalk, The Jungle Book, as well as guest appearances from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. It is in the concluding scene in which Davey Jones, Captain Ahab, an African donkey, King Louie, eight zebras and Cruella De Vil get in a confrontation with a dragon, where I see imagination take shape in the tool of creativity:

Then they found the bubble gums and had an idea. They chewed the bubble and made a huge bubble and they floated away far up into the sky. They floated and floated so far that they disappeared and were gone forever. Then the dragon was very sad because they were all gone and

he didn't have anyone else to swallow. He thought "Maybe I should have been a nice dragon and not swallowed them and then I would not be all alone."

The dragon decided that from then on he would be a good dragon and he lived happily ever after.

If we could all learn lessons as easily as Tommy and creatively turn them into stories full of imagination and didactic principle, then we could be as inspirational as him. I am not saying that we are all dragons with an appetite for fantastical creatures, but it might do us some good to let our imaginations take priority over our need to fit into a normative box and realize that learning can happen in all directions, even from teachers like Tommy. No person with autism needs a cure; all they need is a patient friend and someone to listen.



So Cheese
Manchego 12 month
Pasteurized sheep's milk

THE B-OO



michael kim

in memory of my grandfather

There is a beautiful garden that sits between the two houses that my father has built. This garden is full of flowers, trees and vegetables. Within the garden, there is a small picnic area covered by a canopy with grape vines that wrap around to create natural shade for the hot, humid summers in Daegu, Korea. On the south side of the garden, there is an artificial watermill that is often used to water the plants in the garden. My parents and grandparents use the garden daily to grow vegetables, spend time together and relax.

For as long as I can recall, this was the first time my parents lived close to my grandparents. Prior to building the two houses in Daegu, my parents were in Vancouver with my two sisters and me. My grandparents were born in 1926, and they were 79 years old by the time they moved into the house my father had built. It was a great opportunity for my parents to spend time and take care of my grandparents while living next door to each other. Being the traditional first son in the house, my father always felt responsible for taking care of my grandparents more than our other relatives.

My parents roughly recall that 2006 was when my grandfather started to “talk nonsense.” He often told stories of people hiking on trails when water rushed in, washing people away as if he was telling his dreams from the night before. His strange stories were followed by the repetition of a single question over and over. On my grandmother’s birthday, my mother had prepared a lot of traditional Korean dishes for dinner. When he saw the prepared meal, my grandfather would exclaim, “There is a lot of food on the table. What’s the occasion?” and my parents would remind him that it was my grandmother’s birthday. During dinner, he continued to repeat the same question three or more times. This period of repeating the same questions lasted for about five months.

For a long time, my grandmother and my parents didn’t realize he was showing symptoms of Alzheimer’s disease. But by 2008, he was tested for Alzheimer’s, diagnosed and started taking medication. The medication did not help him with the disease. He showed no signs of improvement and was starting to forget daily routines. His memory was deteriorating and it was starting to affect his daily routines, such as remembering where the washroom was in the house. He started to speak differently to my mother. In the Korean language, there is the “formal form” and an “informal form.” A “formal form” is used when meeting new people or conversing with people who are older than you to show respect. Even though my grandfather had known my mother for many years, he had forgotten my mother and started speaking to her in the “formal form.”

He thought of my mother as a friendly neighbour who often visited him, rather than a dear relative.

In 2009, my grandfather became very protective of my grandmother. He would follow her everywhere in and outside of the house. There were many occurrences when my grandfather would get angry at my father or relatives because they were having a conversation with my grandmother. He didn't want anyone to be close to or be friendly with my grandmother. Often he would ask my father or relatives who came to visit, to leave. For him, these were strangers entering his house, which made him uncomfortable. As these incidents occurred more frequently, my parents started to feel distant from my grandfather and my grandmother, as well, due to his over-protective attitude. These moments put my parents in a difficult position because they wanted to help, but was often asked to leave.

My grandfather would normally spend most of his day in the garden, planting and taking care of the flowers and vegetables. Unlike before, he began to only take care of plants that he recognized. He would pull out the rest of the plants as if they were unwanted weeds in the garden. He started to over water the plants inside the house and watered the plants in the garden when it was raining. As a result, my parents divided the garden into two halves: one side for them and one side for him.

My grandmother was hospitalized for a stroke in April 2011. She had high blood pressure throughout her life, but taking care of my grandfather became too much for her to handle. Prior to her stroke, my parents discussed taking my grandfather to a hospital or a nursing home because it was getting too difficult for them to take care of him. However, they felt that many facilities treated patients with Alzheimer's disease poorly by isolating patients in a room and not looking after them very often. Both of my parents and grandmother felt it was not the right choice to make at the time.

My grandmother had a difficult time accepting his condition and letting him do what he wanted to do. Like a child, he would often bring rocks from the garden into the house to decorate. When incidents like this occurred, she would try to persuade him to return the rocks which triggered an argument of some kind. These frequent arguments raised her blood pressure and her health declined. There was a constant struggle to keep up with conversations with my grandfather and keeping an eye on him at night. He would often wake up in the middle of the night and walk around. My grandmother would worry that he would leave the house at one point and get lost. As

a result of taking care of my grandfather day and night, my grandmother experienced high levels of stress and led her to a stroke. The stroke left her with some paralysis on right side of her body.

After my grandmother was hospitalized, my father started to live with my grandfather to take care of him. He said my grandfather constantly looked and asked for my grandmother. At this point, I don't think my grandfather was looking for his wife, but that person who he had been with for most of his life. After spending a few months with my grandfather, my parents and relatives searched for a place where my grandfather could get proper care and assistance. My aunt suggested a private home run by her friend, which took care of elderly people. They decided that it was a trustworthy place for my grandfather and liked the fact that my aunt volunteered at this home once a week.

In July of 2011, my grandfather moved to the nursing home. It was especially difficult for my parents. The thought of dropping him off at an unfamiliar place with complete strangers made them incredibly uncomfortable. This nursing home was about a two-hour drive from my parent's house. On the day of the move, my grandfather was unaware of where he was going. When he arrived at the nursing home, he wanted to leave the place with my parents because he was uncomfortable being at a strange place with people he did not recognize. As he struggled to leave with my parents, people at the nursing home had to distract him in order for my parents to leave quietly while he was preoccupied. My parents quickly got into the car and drove out of sight. Then they pulled over to the side of the road and broke down crying. They were heartbroken by the fact that they brought my grandfather to a nursing home and left while he was unaware. They felt the act was inhumane and disrespectful, but knew it was the best thing to do for everyone involved. The nursing home recommended my parents not to return for at least 3 months so that my grandfather would have time to settle and adjust to the new place. After three months, my parents went to visit my grandfather and found him very healthy and content. He had adjusted well with the people at the nursing home and their daily routines. My parents were relieved to see him peaceful and they were able to tell that he was well taken care of through his interaction with the people, as well as his facial expression. Though he still no longer recognized my mother, he seemed to respond well to my father, suggesting some signs of remembrance.

In April 2012, I had arranged to visit my parents in Korea. Prior to the trip, my parents reminded me that my

grandfather will no longer recognize me. I knew about his condition because I felt the increasing distance every time we spoke on the phone. A few years ago, I was able to have a regular conversation with him; however, with time, it was as if my grandfather was pretending to know me on the phone. I tried to keep a conversation by encouraging him to respond to my questions, but he didn't know what to say. Eventually, I could overhear my parents or my grandmother constantly reminding him that the person on the phone was his me, his grandson. In that moment, all I could do was wish him well and that I will visit him soon. I started to imagine what it would be like to see him and have him not recognize me. My feeling towards a close family member being unable to recognize me hadn't actually sunk in. I didn't want to believe or accept the fact that he wouldn't remember me because I have many memories of us spending time and laughing together and it was difficult to believe all that precious memory had disappeared.

One incident that is still vivid in my mind is just after our family of five — my mother, father, two sisters and I — moved to Canada. That following summer, my grandparents came to visit us. We rented a cottage at Galiano Island, B.C. and spent a week there fishing and relaxing. I remember a few days into the trip, my grandfather and I took a small canoe out to paddle on the lake. We followed the coastline enjoying the scenery, when we decided to stop and rest on a bed of rock. My grandfather manoeuvred the canoe so that I could hop onto the rocks. Then I held the canoe waiting for my grandfather to hop off, when he suddenly lost his balance and fell into the water. He swam out of the water safely but was drenched from head to toe. He said, "Let's keep this a secret between you and I. If anyone asks, a big wave had come and hit the rocks and that's how I got wet."

This was the first memory that came to my mind after hearing that he would no longer recognize me. I felt that this shared memory I had, a secret that I kept for twenty years, should be shared with the rest of the family to keep this memory alive. I called up my parents and told them of this secret I had between the two of us. My parents and sisters laughed. My father questioned why he would ask me to keep that as a secret. I assume that my grandfather tried to hide the truth, because if my grandmother found out what really had happened, he would be in trouble for being irresponsible for putting his grandson in a potentially dangerous situation. This was a story that I could laugh about with our family and there was something sincere about it. There was something sincere about my grandfather asking me to keep a secret and a nine-year-old holding on to that promise for twenty years.

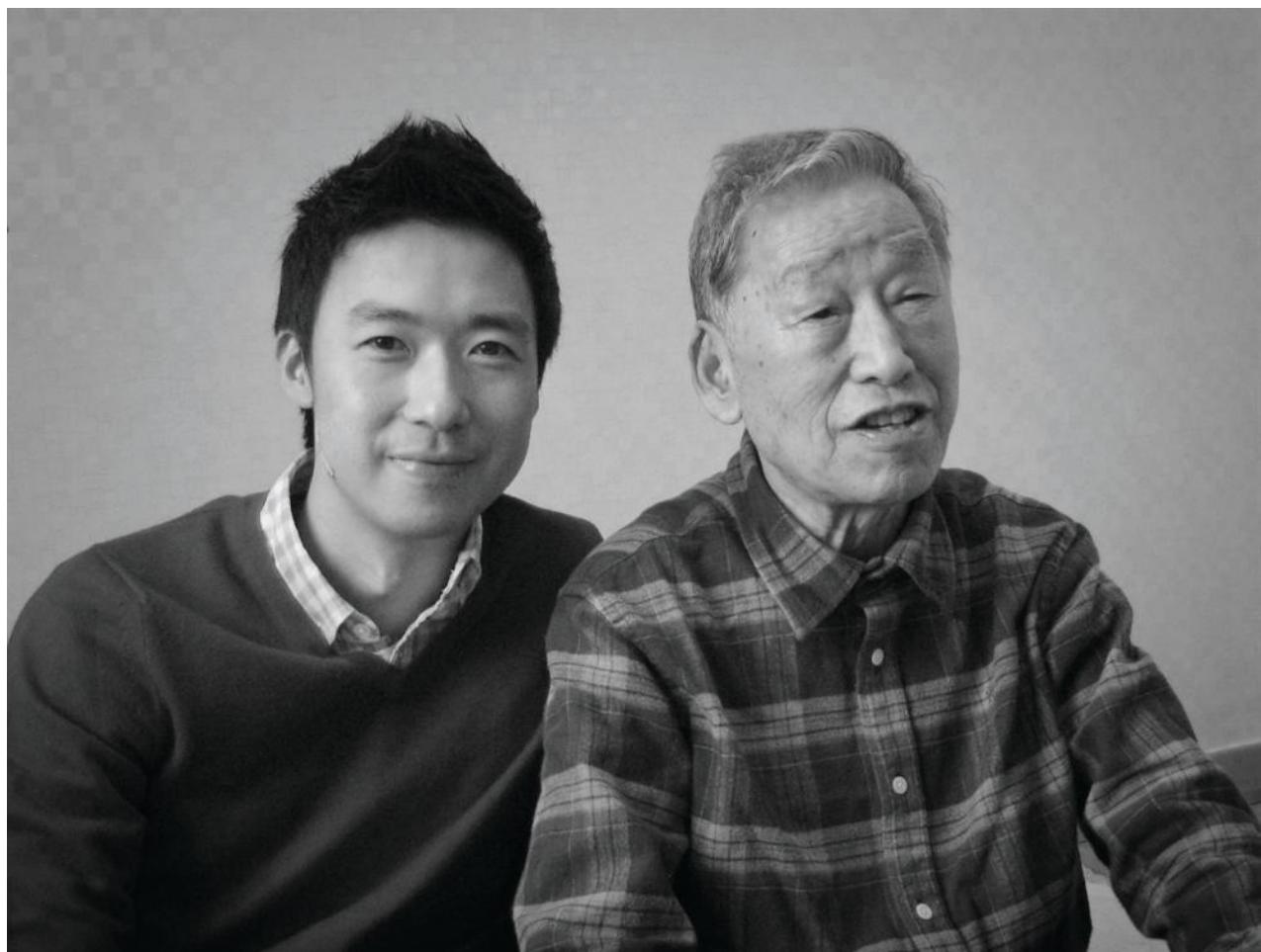
Reminiscing about my grandfather made me want to bring a photograph or a letter, hoping that it would assist him in remembering me and reminding him that our family and relatives love him. I thought about what I could say to help him remember me or what I could say to comfort him because I knew he wasn't comfortable with strangers. Finally, the day arrived when I would visit him with my parents. When I walked into his room, he had not changed a bit since five years ago, which was my last visit to Korea. Physically and emotionally, he seemed very healthy and had a bright expression on his face. He was content and made conversations with the people who took care of him. Even though his speech was not as good as before, he was able to communicate his thoughts well. One thing I noticed was that he was avoiding eye contact with unfamiliar faces, one of them being me. I sat next to him while I was there, making conversations about his daily routines and his health. I tried to offer him fruits and snacks to get his attention. I observed and listened to what he was saying. I was not able to make sense of everything because he was slurring his words and his words did not form proper sentences. At one point, he started to speak Japanese, which he had learned in his twenties. Not being able to communicate with him properly kept me silent for awhile. I just watched and listened, trying to take in this moment of being with him. We took several photographs together, and as he slowly got comfortable with me, he began to make eye contact. My visit didn't last very long, but for a fraction of a second, I think he remembered me. He asked, "When did you grow up so much?" then he looked away. When it was time to say goodbye, our family left the room one at a time. I was the first to leave his room. I stood up, walked out the door, turned around, waved at him and told him that I will come and visit again. He waved back with a smile, telling me to be safe. Then my father joined me outside followed by my mother. I had this feeling in my chest, which I cannot explain in words. It wasn't sadness or emptiness. But I was sure of one thing: it was good to see him healthy and content, even though he may not remember his family members who miss him a lot.

In July 2012, my grandmother had moved into the same nursing home where my grandfather stayed. My grandfather did not recognize my grandmother. They spent a lot of time away from each other because my grandmother needs to get a lot of rest as well as rehabilitation. My grandmother is showing some improvement with her mobility and has less on her mind now that my grandfather is there with her and being taken care of properly. Even though they do not see each other very often within the home, my grandmother tells the caretakers what my grandfather likes to eat so that they care prepare dishes that he enjoys. Recently my parents

visited my grandparents and have shared the secret I kept for twenty years with my grandmother. She laughed and told my parents that she misses me.

It is already 17 degrees in Daegu. My parents are back in the garden planting new flowers and vegetables. This garden is full of memories and traces of my grandfather. When I look back at the garden, it is like a metaphor of my parents' experience of dealing with my grandfather's condition. A well-maintained garden, blooming with flowers, was enjoyed by the family but divided into two separate gardens as feel distance grew between my grandfather and my parents. Now that my grandfather has settled into his new home, with my grandmother there as

well, my parents feel relieved. My father is saddened by the thought that they can no longer live together again, sharing the garden, sharing their memories and looking back at the life they lived. My parents are working hard on bringing the two halves into one whole garden again. The traces of my grandfather are visible, but slowly disappearing in the garden as time passes and seasons change. With time, the limited memory of my grandfather has become obscured. As seasons change, flowers bloom and wither away, pollen is blown away to begin another life. I share my memories of my grandfather with the rest of the family in hopes to never forget how sincere and good he was to us.



In Memory of Gi-Ho Kim, 1926-2013

jennifer lee

confessions of a 30-something student-mom

I had always wanted to go back to school and complete a graduate degree. I wanted to since I was 23, travelling and working in China after finishing a four-year bachelor's degree at the University of Toronto. But student debts crept up and I was offered a pretty good job when I returned to Toronto the year after, working as an editor and publications coordinator for an environmental organization operating out of City Hall. My boss, a Manhattan advertising executive-turned grassroots environmentalist, was not only a mentor to me, but a friend. I travelled to conferences in Berlin, Copenhagen, Athens and Ann Arbor (Michigan). My job at City Hall allowed for enough vacation time for any girl in her mid-twenties to visit family and friends in Singapore, Malaysia, Italy and France. And every December, there was our annual drive down to a city in the U.S. where me and two other best friends from high school would borrow my parents' Volkswagen for a long drive that ended up in some central U.S. city. We were giddy girls, often making decisions on the fly, a night out dancing in Soho, New York or sitting in a jazz bar in Chicago, trying some new Cuban drink at some low-end youth hostel in Boston or smoking bad weed.

At 26, I got into a Master's program at Simon Fraser University but I wasn't sure about leaving my job. My best friend-mentor-boss passed away from cancer, a shock and disappointment to everyone she touched. Her church choir, where she was the lead soprano, gathered at her funeral singing the most beautiful rendition of Amazing Grace. I can still hear it when I think of her. Her husband gave me a gold bracelet that she once wore at her New York City advertising firm. "She would have given it to you herself," he said.

Work was extremely rushed that year as me and my team tried our best to continue in her spirit and keep up with the sophisticated advocacy and design work that made our team so important for the organization. I received a small raise — as much as an NGO could provide in 2005 — and deferred my admission. Then I met Steve.

I met Steve at a fencing club in Toronto because my high school friend, Connie, insisted that we try a new sport that year. "Something different — not too geeky, but looks cool," was her idea. The thought of stabbing someone was never one of my strengths, but learning how to hold an épée blade and doing lunges was a greater workout than I had expected. After class, I often bumped into Steve on the streetcar ride home. He walked, while I limped. Soon he was waiting for me after class. He lived in a co-op apartment just across the street from mine. As Connie explained, the first six months is the "honeymoon phase" — we met for lunch, for dinner, went to movies, met our

families. Everyone said we were made for each other. When Simon Fraser called about re-admission, I rejected their offer. "Are you sure?" they asked. Yes. Life was good and I didn't want to move.

Then it started to unravel. In less than five months, my environmental organization lost funding and our head office in Freiburg, Germany, decided to cut jobs. Their first target: my team. It was 2006, jobs were starting to wane and so was Steve. After sixteen months of being unemployed, he decided he needed to "find himself." And "find himself" he did after I came home one day and called his apartment only to discover, through his roommate, that he had flown to Tunisia. "Not sure when he'll be back," said his roommate. "He said something to do with whenever he can get a discount ticket back home. Maybe two or three weeks?"

When Steve returned, I had accepted a contract position at HotDocs. I took whatever I could take to make ends meet after a month of unemployment. My biweekly pay cheque was just enough to meet my monthly rent. The six-month honeymoon was over.

Steve gave me a bag of perfume and spices from Tunisia, perhaps to make up for his sudden disappearance. When I showed my roommate, she said, "the perfumes smell like 'old lady'." After some tears, Steve and I parted ways.

Another attempt to rethink my career path brought me back to considering journalism at Ryerson and Carleton. In 2006, Carleton had a unique 1-year Masters program in Journalism and Ryerson had a BAA program. Getting the master's degree was my first choice and after meeting the program director and touring around Carleton, I was excited. But they only accept 10 students a year, the program director stressed, and you need a strong portfolio.

"I've written lots of international case studies on environmental management, freshwater management and sustainable building development," I said.

"I'm sure they are nice case studies," she fluttered her eyes, "But journalism isn't technical writing." I applied anyway, paying full fee through OUAC and sending pleasant letters to professors at the University of Toronto to get my required reference letters. In the end, I received a 1-page rejection letter from Carleton. After reading the letter, I turned the page over and used the blank side to write my grocery list for the week. Then I threw it out.

When May came along, my contract at HotDocs finished and I received a phone call for a job interview in

Ottawa. It was a steady government position in health communications. Although the French Canadian HR lady cringed when I tried to speak French during the interview, they offered me the job and a moving package.

On my 30th birthday, Jim came to visit from Calgary. He was an old acquaintance I met when I travelled and worked in China. In 1999, he was on a school exchange from the University of Calgary while I taught English in Beijing. We met at "Sammie's," a little diner in the western district of Beijing. The diner was founded by a Montreal, Canadian who wanted to introduce the submarine sandwich to China. When I left, Sammie's had opened two other locations nearby.

Jim showed up at my birthday party with a bottle of red wine and a card. My friends immediately took a liking to him, except for Connie who thought his pink striped shirt was "a bit off." After my friends left, we talked until we closed down the Wheat Sheaf Pub, catching up on old stories about our trips around China and the friends we made in Beijing. "Sammie's closed down, you know?" said Jim.

"Why?"

"I heard it was food poisoning. Sammy ended up selling his shops, got married and moved back to Montreal."

When I drove Jim to his hotel, where he was staying at for a government conference, we both realized we were starting new jobs in Ottawa.

"Look me up," he said, "There's lots of great hiking spots in Gatineau." From my side mirror, I watched Jim toss his backpack over his shoulder and wave goodbye, jokingly walking backwards into the rotating doors of the Ramada Hotel.

The day before I left for Ottawa, I received a phone call in the midst of packing my boxes. "Congratulations, you got into our Bachelor of Journalism degree," said a young girl on the other end of the line. Her voice squeaked and she sounded more excited than me. I thought for a moment and remembered that I had applied back in the fall. The thought of going back to complete another bachelor's degree didn't appeal me. "Thanks," I said. I checked off "no" on the admission letter and sent it back in July.

Ottawa was beautiful although deathly cold in the winter. My coworkers were all family types — reporting to work at 8 am and marching out at 4 pm. I met friends through Jim and a local rowing club where I learned to scull. After a few months, Jim and I moved into the second-floor

unit of a heritage house on Crichton Street, one block west from Rideau Hall. On weekends, we took long drives through rural Quebec to Thousand Islands Parks and into the States. At one point, we somehow ended up in Boston.

We got married over the summer, in the same park where my parents were married 50 years ago. On the way to our wedding ceremony on Sussex drive, our car was cut off twice by my parent's car. I imagined they were too busy reminiscing about their wedding day to even notice. When we arrived at Rockcliffe Park and the violinist started to play Pachelbel Canon, my dad emerged from his car, starry-eyed and grinning.

A few months later, we had to say goodbye to Ottawa as Jim was offered a management position at a regional office in Toronto. I thought about applying for graduate school again, but soon found a steady job as a technical writer at an engineering firm in Mississauga. At the back of my mind, I kept thinking, "there will always be an opportunity to go back to school."

Then one day, I woke up and realized I was 33 years-old with a 2-year-old son.

It was one of those days when I woke up, changed Brendon's diaper and didn't look in the mirror until close to noon and realized I had poop smeared along my forehead. Shortly after I returned to work from maternity leave in 2010, the engineering company let go of 25 percent of its employees during the peak of what they called "the fiscal downturn." As a union employee, those with seniority were able to 'bump' employees with less seniority. Since I was only with the company for 2 years, I was bumped by a 52-year-old single mother of two. She had started with the company as a high school co-op student in 1978. On my last day, she took me out for pizza.

"You'll have no problem finding another job, honey," she said as she blew cigarette smoke into my face.

In the midst of doing my taxes and looking up papers for my severance package, I came across my admissions letter from Ryerson for the bachelor of journalism degree. Brendon ran into the room, grabbed the paper and quickly drew circles on it using an orange crayon.

"Mama, look, a barroon!"

"That's nice sweetie." After doing some searching online, I settled on a 1-year master's degree in communications at Ryerson. It was a new program started by a professor whose name I recognized from the University of Toronto

Writing Program. And most importantly, it could be completed in one year. I realized that over the years, I had accumulated a pretty strong portfolio that would help me get into the program. My undergraduate marks weren't stellar, but I know I could get some good references and pull a strong personal statement together. By April, I received an acceptance letter and celebrated it with a brief "happy dance" with my son in tow.

Now going back to school as a mom had some challenges:

#1) My parents, from their steady income days as a baby-boomer, thought I was crazy to stop work and go back to school. Then, once they accepted my decision, they kept asking me if I needed lunch money.

#2) The natural response from friends was "why?" followed by "how?" followed by a sympathetic look to my husband who will be the sole breadwinner for a year.

#3) Other mommies, whom I befriended at parks and local community centers during my days off, wondered why I was going back to school and how I was going to pull off being a full-time student while taking care of a child. "For purely selfish reasons and there's daycare," was my answer, followed by their strict looks of judgment.

#4) And, finally, the mother-in-law. Now if I were to do this again, I would never have told my mother-in-law that I was going back to school because her immediate reaction was: "My son!" Followed by: "My grandson!" Followed by phrases that contain the words "money," "sleep," "cooking meals," "nurture," "motherhood," and "nutrition," in which case, constant phone calls and reassurance where required to calm her throughout the year.

Within my first week of graduate school, I noticed that the student world had changed in the last decade. Students preferred to text message instead of sending an email, flare out pants were long gone, the Spice Girls are considered as "Classic Rock," and twitter speak was in. After an activity in our second week of class, a classmate remarked that my design looked "sooo profesh." I nodded and said "thanks?" in which case she laughed and then I realized she meant "professional." While students typed on their laptops, I still preferred handwriting my notes. And when someone asked me if I wanted to go to "90s night," I thought, "but weren't the 90s just yesterday?" and then I realized how fast the years have flown by.

I sit at my computer right now, realizing that the floor needs to be mopped and the dirty dishes are overflowing in our kitchen sink. I still need to read a chapter on

Critical Theory and the Public Sphere, but it can wait. It's 8 pm and Brendon needs to go to bed.

"Mama," Brendon places his hand against my cheek, "tell me the fire truck story." I start with the story; the one he wants to hear every night. Brendon drives a fire truck and his best friend Ethan sits beside him. Together they drive through the city to put out fires and save kittens in trees... I stop and look at Brendon. His breathing slows and his eyelids grow heavy. His hand, resting against my cheek, grows limp and falls to the side. By the time I finish the story, Brendon is asleep. He breathes, long and steady.

"Brendon may not know it now, but I think he will be proud that his mom went back to school to do what she's always wanted to do," said Jim, leaning against the bedroom door. Brendon turns to his side, sighs, and continues breathing steadily. With red marker smeared against the back of his hand, I listen to Brendon breathe long and slow, then pull his blankets over his shoulders and switch off the light.

nadia marzouk

In 1923, my great great step grandmother and aunt through marriage, Hoda Sharaawi, founded the Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU). She was an instrumental woman in giving Arab females a voice at a time when it was far from present. Prior to the founding of the EFU, she helped organize the first women's protest in 1919 during the revolution at the time. The union was active for a bit over thirty years until Sharaawi passed away in 1947. Due to the depth of the political state of the country and lack of a strong leader the EFU dissipated. When Sharaawi inceptioned the EFU, women did not leave their homes unless veiled, it was a time in which a harem system existed and the lives of Egyptian men and women were quite secluded from one another.

A very symbolic and influential action of Sharaawi's work towards breaking down a portion of the "harem society" was the removal of her veil in public after returning from a women's conference in Italy. Some women followed in removing their veils right after her daring move and they multiplied in the following decade.

There was no question Sharaawi was way ahead of her time and offered a window view to the future women deserved. Some of the goals of the EFU were equal access to educational opportunities, the reformation of marriage laws, the abolition of polygamy and the right for women to vote, which was granted in 1956. Although the first round of the EFU was short lived, they had a number of substantial successes.

Prior to the Egyptian revolution of 25th of January 2011, whenever I would be there visiting and asked why don't I live there I always stumbled in how to answer. It was hard to respond without implying that the Western – and sadly more capitalistic – world struck me as more livable. Primarily I was never motivated to live in Egypt because as a woman, life was infused with judgment, the burden of societal reputation and the constant emphasis on somehow being a second-class citizen.

In October of 2011, the Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU) re-launched. The motivating factor leading its resurrection was to support women in being active in the political realm which was reintroduced at the time. This included encouraging women to run for parliament and partake in the revolution as active citizens. There is no doubt that the timing of the re-launch was on the cusp of being over due yet still right on time. The need for the EFU began to augment and became more crucial as time progressed. With the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) now holding office, the potential oppression for women in Egypt has reached dangerous levels.

I decided to seek out individuals of the present EFU and

was disappointed to find that since the re-launch, they have failed to be active within the public territory. Hoda Badran, the new chair person of the EFU has been on track with her intentions and awareness of oppression as she made clear in an interview with the paper, The Egypt Independent, surrounding the reactivation of the union:

"Egyptian women have won some rights since the 1950's, including the right to vote in 1956, but compared to their male counterparts, they remain less educated, underemployed, politically unorganized, underrepresented in government and experience more extreme rates of poverty. Women make up only 1 percent of parliament's members. We have to defend whatever rights we have, and we have to go forward to equality and equity," said Badran. "Women should have a say if any public issue or decision has to be made."

Since the EFU is not actively supporting women on a daily basis, my search in the activist world for associations that are making a difference continued and I was introduced to a few females from the Organization Nazra.

Nazra for Feminist Studies is an association that aims to build an Egyptian feminist movement, believing that feminism and gender are fundamental sociopolitical issues that affect freedom and development in all societies. Their main goal is to conventionalize these values in both public and private sectors. Nazra's team includes driven, passionate men and women who believe that integrating gender equality and feminism can be achieved through the efforts of believers in the validity and the necessity of these values. Their chief concern is incorporating the children, who struggle with gender-related problems, in the society. "And so Nazra generally works to provide all actors who strive to achieve these gender-related causes with all forms of support needed. They specifically focus on supporting youth groups who strive to achieve these causes. The variety of programs, initiatives and activities they use as they appear on their website are:

1. Working on production of knowledge based on research, documentation, monitoring and analysis of methodologies.
2. Producing and developing Arabic terminologies, to form a glossary of the issues we work on.
3. Supporting Women Human Rights Defenders through legal and psychological interventions.
4. Supporting women in the political arena.
5. Strategic litigation for gender legal cases

- locally, regionally, and internationally.
- 6. Advocacy to integrate gender issues in the political, legal, social and cultural context.
 - 7. Networking with movements and stakeholders to build a strong feminist movement.
 - 8. Using artistic tools in the context of gender and feminism issues.

In my opinion, it's people like these who are capable of making a difference and I hope there would be more initiatives like Nazra to help Egypt in its post-revolution transition.

To delve more into the subject, I conducted an online interview with Yara Sallam, one of the program directors at Nazra.

Hi Yara, thank you for the time.

Hi Nadia, you are most welcome, your topic is very interesting.

Thank you. To start off, could you fill me in on your involvement with Nazra?

Sure. I am the Women Human Rights Defenders Program director, but I'm leaving Nazra at the end of this month.

Where are you off to next?

I'm still not sure, but in the human rights field and I'll still be based in Cairo.

How did you feel as a women during the revolution?

I wasn't present during the 18 days, I was in Gambia working. I came back on March 2011 and it felt confusing at the beginning. It took me a while to engage with the protests. I can say that the first time I really took the streets was in November 2011 during Mohamed Mahmoud clashes. I stayed in the streets for a couple of days then there was a need for volunteer lawyers to attend the investigations with the detainees from the clashes so I went. Then I started to participate more often in the protests.

I generally felt safe amongst the protestors, although a couple of times people were asking me to stay away from the frontline, but I ignored them.

How would you describe the presence of women in the protests?

It wasn't till June 2012 when the mob sexual harassment started in Tahrir square that I felt insecure.

Women's presence was equal to men. I never attended a protest where women's numbers was little. I saw many women leading the chants and using drums

How would you compare the voice of women in comparison to that of men in Egypt right now?

Things started to feel insecure starting from June 2012, then November, December 2012, then January 2013 happened the gang rapes.

Compare in which sense?

I think due to the state of militarization that Egypt lived under during SCAF time, and the lack of security in the streets, the streets are becoming more hostile in general, and more hostile and dangerous to women in particular.

Why women specifically?

Because women are more subjected to violence in such times, and more likely not to report the incidents due to feelings of guilt and shame, as well as family pressure.

How would you summarize some of the greatest obstacles for Egyptian women right now?

The greatest obstacle is the rise of a new dictatorship with a religious flavour to it. The second obstacle would be the escalation of sexual violence and the general impunity that is not helping in putting an end to it.

Do you feel less safe walking around than before the revolution?

Yes...people are more aggressive and hostile than before, and I understand that because there is a bigger frustration now, and the social conditions and the violence that we've been living for the last 2 years contributed to that status.

Do you believe that the Muslim Brotherhood and women's rights can succeed in the same place?

No, I don't think the MB and any rights can succeed, and minority rights and women rights are the worst. But if



Omar Cherif ©

you mean to compare with Mubarak's time, Mubarak and Suzanne were not concerned with women's rights, they only wanted to look good for the western communities, to say that we are good to women, so they were doing legal changes that had no real impact on the social level for women.

I know there are likely a very few, but were there any specific instances since the MB has taken office that has confirmed they support peace and human rights?

So if you take for instance the criminalization of FGM, the government did a huge campaign from the upper level, so the practice didn't change, only the law.

The history of the MB in power is a black one. Filled with appointing their own men, ignoring human rights demands. And participating in human rights violations. They need to leave, not only for women's rights sake but for the human rights situation and democracy as a whole

I am wondering if there have been any specific instances in which they have openly ignored human rights and if you could mention one or two that you might have witnessed.

The clashes in front of Al Itihadeya Presidential palace is a major incident where their supporters detained and tortured anti Morsi protestors. I believe it was in December 2012 (or November).

Did the MB ever address it?

Officially as a party, they said that it's the protestors who were attacking Morsi's supporters.

So, from what I am understanding, the solution is the get rid of the MB?

The solution is for Morsi to step down, have a government from all the political parties and conduct another presidential elections. We also have a problem concerning the constitution.

Can you expand on that problem?

The constituent assembly was dominated by the Freedom and Justice party (the MB political party) and al Nour party (the Salafist), and they rejected many suggestions that protect human rights.

Has the Egyptian Feminist Union been active since it's re-launch?

Not really.

I was surprised to hear about the re-launch and then nothing else, do you know why not?

No. I attended the launch, but I never felt they are moving really.

If there were a message you could spread to feminists around the world, what would it be? Let's say Arab Feminists.

Keep an eye on the situation in Egypt, we need solidarity and support, but also listen to us because there is no country like the other, so we will not turn into another Iran or Pakistan, we will have our own journey but feminist solidarity is what can keep us going.

What motivates you in the realm of human rights activism?

I want my life to have a meaning, my skills to be used in a good cause, and to be able to touch other people's lives. What motivates me is the hope for justice.

I think we all have a role to play.

Agreed! How would you describe yourself in 3 sentences in respect to your involvement with human rights? Just a few more questions!

I've been concerned with human rights since I was 16 years old, and I've been raised in a family that believes in equality and being useful to your society. I'm involved in human rights work cause this is where I see I can best contribute to a better future with my skills and experience, and this field is providing me the space to give back to people.

When did you involvement in human rights begin?

In 2000 I started volunteering in a child rights organization called al Nossour al Saghira (which was the Egyptian branch of a Swedish child rights organization). I stayed with them for around 3 years then the organization closed down.

Then during my colleague years I was involved in students activities.

And as soon as I graduated I worked in a research center

on a research on women's rights, then in EIPR on religious freedom.

Where you at AUC (The American University in Cairo)?

No, I was in the French section of law school at Cairo university - the same as Sanaa.

Can you restate how Nazra joins art and feminism?

Nazra does work on arts and feminism through different topics: feminist graffiti, feminist comics, story telling sessions...we provide a space and ideas to artists who want to work on issues of feminism with their talents.

Could you summarize the program you have put together while at Nazra?

Sure!

The Women Human Rights Defenders Program (WHRDP) is an initiative established by Nazra for Feminist Studies in July 2011 as a reaction to the urgent need that arose since the revolution of 25 January 2011. The Program produce knowledge, monitor and document WHRDs situation and offers to WHRDs legal, psychological and medical support.

For more information: <http://nazra.org/en/programs/women-human-rights-defenders-program.com>

Great! Thank you. Is there anything you would like to add to the interview as a whole?

I think we covered it all, thanks.

Ok, once again, thank you for your time.

You are most welcome. Best of luck.

Thank you, same to you.

The interview took a little more than an hour, and knowing that people such as Yara and organizations such as Nazra exist left me with an optimistic tone. Their job isn't easy, especially in a developing country with an ongoing revolution, but they sure are on the right track.

natasa nuhanovic

taxi ride from bosnia to germany

Ride details

Date: August, 1993.

Starting Point: Lukavac, Bosnia

Destination: Dattenfeld, Germany

Path: Bosnia-Croatia-Slovenia-Austria-Germany

Distance: 1074.63 Km

My age: eight

getting ready

Most of the time, I feel like I left my own home in a way that felt as if I wasn't really going anywhere. Or if I was, it was only for the day. It was a field trip of some sort and I would surely be returning to my own bed before it was time to go to sleep, which was around 10:30pm, though my parents always let me stay awake for as long as I wanted anyway. And some of the time, I feel like I skipped ahead from the eight year old kid and became an eighty year old lady within a day. She knew what was happening around me and just because I did not have a suitcase packed, it did not mean that we were not going away for a very very long time.

The months leading up to the day that I would get into the yellow car and leave my home were what would remain with me for years to come, even if I was not aware of it then. I took all of those months with me inside that little car.

What I remember most about the beginning of the war is not any kind of dramatic event, whether through traumatic and horrific images or sound. It is the in-between sounds, the echoes and the unsaid, that has ingrained itself most in my being. I remember not so much the sounds of the bombs, grenades and snipers, but the steps of someone walking. Not of someone walking faster, but slower, more carefully, more cautiously, as though hiding. I remember noticing each sound much more distinctly, much more uniquely. I could tell by the sound of my mom's slippers against the floor exactly where she was. If I heard a door close, I knew exactly which one. I felt like I suddenly heard every single sound the neighbours made. I could almost even hear someone resting their head on their pillow.

It seemed to me like each dust speck transformed into a tiny amplifier - and it is not the sounds of the war that they responded to, but the sounds of the most every-day human life. It is only later on I realized this and that I understood why. What becomes louder is that which you fear to lose, and not that which threatens to take it away from you. At least I can say that it was that way for me.

I remember not having to go to school. I was not happy about that as I probably would have been if I hadn't sensed that something is very very wrong. Every morning when the time came that I would usually go to school, I walked to the window and looked at the road I always took. Both sides of the street were lined up with huge oak trees whose roots were pushing against the asphalt and creating bumps in the road. Some of them managed to escape. Sometimes I would walk and step on the roots of the trees and sometimes I would bike over them. In both cases I felt like the trees wanted to go somewhere and I would tell them (though probably not out loud) that at least if they are stuck somewhere, this is a good place to be, and that I will always visit them. I felt sad that I could no longer visit them every day and wondered who would protect them now. I even imagined that maybe now, after seeing what us humans are inflicting on each other, the trees will receive their final strength and simply walk away. But they remained and I was the one who left.

This is where I have a bit of a memory gap. Somewhere between my regular visits to the window, and my collecting of every detail of human life that I did not want to lose, a yellow car appeared and blocked my view of the street that looked like a very old arm with protruding veins. It was only my father's friend in his car, but he was to become our taxi driver.

I heard the mixture of my parents' and my father's friend's voices:

"You will pick us up in a few days?"

"Yes. Pack what you can. This is not going to end any time soon."

"...."

"....to Germany."

"...dangerous..."

"We have to try."

The day before the day we had to leave came and even though I knew the yellow car would wait in front of my window, I fell asleep just like on any other night. It was my last night in my old room in my old bed, but I pretended that it was a night just like any other night.

time to go

Even today I can feel the texture of my shoelaces in my hand, though I do not recall what they look like. I just recall my mother telling me to hurry up and not to stall, as though it was just any other day and I was trying to procrastinate going to school. To me, my mother was my

mother and my father was my father. They were both from the same country. It did not matter what country they were from to begin with. But to my (our) country, suddenly they were not from the same country. My father was born in Bosnia and my mother in Serbia. I was born in Croatia. We were in Bosnia when the war started. The sides were now at war. Croatia and Serbia both wanted to take parts of Bosnia. My father would have the most difficulty to escape as Bosnia was surrounded by Croatian and Serbian militia and Bosnians were not allowed to leave.

The taxi-ride we were to embark on was a dangerous one. We had one bag and four passports. One of them did not belong to the person we pretended it belonged to. It was my father's. He had borrowed a passport from his friend who was born in Croatia. If they were to uncover us, my father would have at best been sent to a work-camp and at worst, killed. When I finally finished putting my shoes on, my father handed me my jacket and said jokingly, "go on, our personal taxi is waiting for us". There was no taxi sign on the roof, but I did not want to ask my father where it went. It would have been too difficult to leave my home this way.

inside the taxi

There was no counter inside this taxi, either. Maybe my parents did not want me to see how far away we were going or maybe my parents did not want to see the high price we would all pay for leaving. Or maybe there was simply no way to describe how much it costs to leave behind the place you come from and the people you love. It would be too much for anyone to bear.

The taxi itself was a Fiat 101, manufactured only in former Yugoslavia. It was a car the country was proud of and given the nickname, "Stojadin", the literal meaning being "a hundred and one ones". If we had the strongest and best car in the country, we simply had to make it, I thought. It was like being in a race and coming in first. Inside, it looked cozy and welcoming. It had soft seats and a very warm atmosphere. My mind was eased.

My father and I were sitting at the back. We had cards, snacks and everything one would take on a longer family vacation. We had several borders to cross to get to Germany. Our taxi was to take us from Bosnia to Croatia to Slovenia to Austria to Germany. The toughest one would be the border from Bosnia to Croatia as it was guarded by the Croatian and Serbian army. The safe point was Austria. Nobody would send us back from there.



If there was any music playing inside our taxi, I do not remember it. It was only the voices of the adults speaking about what to do once we are at the border. "Refik, why don't you play some cards with Natasha", my mother said to my father. It was not a question. I did not feel like playing cards at all, but felt that I should. My mother's tone was different when she said it and I felt I should listen. We were nearing the Slovenian border and I could sense my father's nervousness. I could also see it because his lips form differently whenever he is sad or anxious. He was.

Smajo (my father's friend and our taxi driver) slowed down the car, rolled down the window and for a moment, I remembered my own window back at home from which I could see the trees with the pulsating roots. In this moment, I knew that I would not see them for a long time. As he came to a full stop, he passed our four passports to the lady at the counter. My eyes were glued to her, even though I was nervous and shy and barely looked at any stranger for a very long time. I felt that I needed to this time. She opened the first passport and closed it very fast. The same happened with the second one. The third one was another story. She looked at the passport, then at my father for what seemed to me like a very very long time. My father has brown eyes. His friend in the passport has blue eyes. My father's lips started shaking some more. Probably unnoticeable to anyone who did not know him well, but to me, the waves in his movements reminded me of the waves in the asphalt created by the roots trying to escape.

At last, the woman's gaze drifted over to me for what seemed like even longer. She closed her eyes for a moment, closed the passport, gave all four passports back without even looking at the fourth one, and waved with her hand that we are free to go. I could not stop looking at her. I cannot know, but I am certain that she knew this man in the picture was not my father. I suppose she simply did not want to hold us up for much longer as she knew that the invisible meter in the taxi was running out and we could not afford to lose even more than we already had.

All the other borders went smoothly and nobody even opened our passports. How this happened, I do not know. It was almost like the woman at the first border opened up all the other borders. After we crossed the border to Austria, we finally took a detour and found a nicely placed restaurant overlooking a river. It was a beautiful, sunny day. As our taxi pulled into the parking lot of the restaurant, another one with two bikes strapped to their roof was pulling out. I took a peek inside the car and it was a family with a dog. For a moment, I wondered where

they were going for their vacation and, where they came from.

I thought about my bike back at home and all the bumpy rides to school. I felt an incredible wave of sorrow. My parents, however, seemed to feel the opposite. They were relieved and the moment they stepped out, the adults hugged each other. I did not want to ruin their mood, so I smiled, but I did not know where we were going and only wanted to go back to my trees and the street that I knew so well. I realized that our car was different than the one that just drove away and that we were not going on a vacation.

After all, who goes on a vacation in a taxi?

Stray Dog and Cactus

By Natasa Nuhanovic

Nothing remains of my past home
except my bare neck, hairless as a cactus
who chose to belong to no one.
He is the president of my imaginary country,
exiled once he started believing
his skin was never meant to grow needles.

I want to make a nest far from the helmet
of the soldier trying to tear down
a fortress of his own medals.
And I limp through the highway inside the asphalt flute
with too many exit holes.

I got hungry on my way to the country
where cacti are shaped like dog smiles
laughing at the map inherited from wolves, my ancestors
who died before showing me the right path.

I finally admitted I would never be a guide dog
leading the blind gardener to the wire fence
where cactus flowers grow,
where the sound of the flute escapes
through more than one hole.

Walking the highway to my new nest on my new paws
and singing old songs about wolves,
I feel the breeze on my collarless neck,
where only one hair remains.
Still I am a cactus
in full bloom.

bindu shah

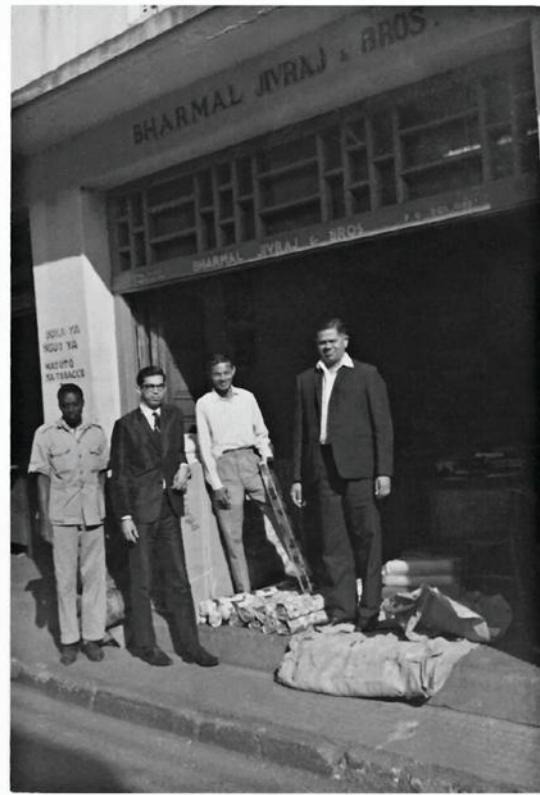
nostalgia

Devouring shrimp curry with rice and a glass of wine while watching a movie on my computer a few days ago, brought memories of my dad and how he would have disapproved of my lifestyle. Our family was Jain and I was brought up with strong family values and here I was, defying all that I had been brought up with. I frequently have private conversations with him and reminisce about the life we had, or life as it is now, many a time with a lump forming in my throat.

Being a Jain meant that harming any living being, let alone eating meat, fish or eggs is taboo. Foods grown below the ground such as onions, potatoes and garlic are also avoided because they have a high bacterial count. My mum would walk away when ever any of these taboos were shown on T.V. since there was no way of changing channels. I remember secretly buying some eggs to put in my hair as I had heard that it made your hair silky. I hid the eggs in my cupboard, but was caught when I left the shells in the bathroom. It was a huge deal for my mother who found them, and told my dad who ended up explaining the logic behind abstaining from eating eggs (I still agree with most of them) and said that I must never do this again. I got away with a lot being the youngest child and the “darling of the family.” My dad was very protective of me and unfortunately I never learned to bike when I was young because he feared that I would fall and hurt myself.

I had never heard about wine and having a black and white television set didn't exactly put the drink into perspective when the characters had it on the screen. Eating together as a family was the norm and not something we thought much about. If, on a rare occasion, someone was late, the others simply waited. Together with my parents, the seven of us included my three sisters and my brother. Dad ran a fabric shop in town with my uncle. The city closed down from 12:30 to 2 pm, and it was normal for everyone to go home for lunch. They would close shop, pick the younger school children up from school, drop my uncle and my cousins' home and then come home for lunch. He valued his siesta and never missed one but would be up sharply at 1:40 pm to be at work for 2 pm again. We had a constant stream of visitors. To my mum's dismay, my dad would bring home impromptu visitors, so she always had to cook for a couple of extra people just in case. These visitors were usually customers from Up Country and dad loved having company over and feeding them.

In the beginning, we ate on the floor in the kitchen while mum would serve us hot “chapatis” before she took her food. Lunch was the main meal of the day. Our meal



consisted of a typical Gujarati diet, consisting of one or two vegetable curries with chapatis, salad, pickles, papadam and a sweet. The meal ended with rice with pigeon pea daal — all washed down with lassi. This was all served in steel crockery. Today, this “thali” is popular and available in all Indian restaurants.

Groceries were made up of fresh fruits and vegetables, which were bought daily from the “mama bhoga,” the women hawkers who carried the fruits and vegetables from their farms in a basket over their head and their back. Sometimes there was a child tucked within their goods. Little were we aware then that these products were organic and how much this phenomenon would impact our lives in the future. They were illiterate but entrepreneurial in spirit and skilled businesswomen. The women from their homes would all come out and gather around them. What amazes me even today was the haggling that went on although the same produce was bought every week and the prices were known to all. The women made this into an art form and each would practice this form to the best of their ability. Everyone would know what each family

was having for lunch or dinner that day. As kids, we had the privilege of going and eating at the neighbours' house if we didn't like what our mothers made.

During harvest season, bushels of lentils, wheat and rice were bought. The women in the neighbourhood would get together and work as a team to clean, husk, split and grind the grains. I believe this was a cathartic experience, as the work would happen while gossiping, singing, advising and being a therapist for one another. We lived among Hindus, Jains and Muslims and no one talked about their differences. The different rituals were all celebrated together.

We made weekend trips to the "ration shop" to buy imperishables, such as sugar, lentils and flour. In the early days, there was no fridge and food was kept cool in a "pinjru" which was a wooden cupboard with a net to keep the bugs away. We also had a "store room" which was essentially a walk-in pantry storing all the bulk foods.

Mum locked it in the afternoon while she was napping so that I would not go in and nibble at snacks at odd times or that the servant did not help himself to the food.

Food, spirituality, friends and family were the hub of our life, and family time was very precious to my dad. Sunday was our special day. In the morning, my dad would go and buy sweet spiral jalebis and ganthia, made from chick pea flour, with dhokri which were like savoury sponges for breakfast. He then took my cousin and me to religious school and, while we were there, he would take my mum for shopping. He spoilt her frequently with a visit to a sari shop or the goldsmiths. After lunch, dad took a longer nap and then, at about 4 pm, we would wear our Sunday best and walk to the famous Uhuru park with my uncle's family. There were about 20 of us. The men played cricket, while we ran around or played hide and seek. Then we would buy delicious spicy boiled potatoes, roasted cassava, peanuts and corn and popcorn balls, which were essentially popcorn mixed with jaggery



and made into balls all wrapped up in newspapers. I loved cakes and, although we didn't have an oven, mum made a large eggless one in a charcoal stove to take with us. The flavor was like none found today.

We lived in a three-bedroom flat on the first floor of a large building housing 10 other families. Each flat was arranged in a linear fashion — the bathroom, kitchen and store continued in a straight line and extended to the neighbours flat. There was a long open passageway with bannisters, where we could stand, pry and talk to all the neighbours since the flats were symmetrical and open enough to see everyone. In the centre, there was a huge courtyard where the kids played together and the women had their gatherings. We shared a sunken toilet with our neighbours. It happened to be at the end of the corridor by their house. Squatting helped the leg muscles stay strong and the process go faster. With the wholesome vegetarian foods we ate, constipation was not an issue. Bathroom reading was unheard of so sharing a squatting toilet was not hugely inconvenient, although it was a trek for us to go in the middle of a cold night and Nairobi, being a highland, got frigid temperatures to about 5 degrees Celsius at times. The main problem was the women who argued over which family used the toilets the most and who should clean it more. This made it difficult for us kids to play together as our mums would not be talking for periods of time.

Dad worked hard, was a savvy and shrewd businessman and we slowly aspired to a better way of life. When I was about 6 years old, we got a dining table and many people came to see it. Then, we got a television and they came again, and again when we got a fridge.

Dad had no formal education and didn't know English. If it bothered him, he didn't show it. I always wondered why he loved Perry Mason and Bonanza so much when he didn't know English. He sold imported fabric and had had agencies for some large international manufacturers. Once, he was invited to Hong Kong to see the factories and he decided to go. Even as a child, I worried about how he would manage without knowing English, but he managed. On his return from Hong Kong, he gave me a little package wrapped in a silver wrapper and was soft to touch. He told me that it was given to him as part of his meal on the flight and brought for me instead of eating it since it was chocolate. I was excited and opened it quickly and put this white chocolate into my mouth only to spit it out immediately. It tasted awful! I later found out that it was processed cheese and I had never seen or eaten cheese in my life before. This was an experience I will never forget.

I admired Dad very much. I used to think he knew magic. Every time I asked him the time, he would say it accurately to the minute without looking at his watch, or so I thought. And I still wonder whether he called my bluff every time by looking at his watch conspicuously or could he really look at the sky to determine the time? I will never know, but I like the magical version better.

He loved trying new foods and experiences and appreciated life. It showed. To put it politely, he had a larger built than most. He loved the arts and watched every Indian movie and play that came to town.

In 1976, Dad got a massive heart attack, which took us all by surprise. Although he survived it, he was never the same. Small procedural surgeries like ballooning, angioplasty or stents were not heard of then. His food habits changed and he became more subdued. He reduced his diet immensely and stopped eating in the evenings. He passed away in 1983, at the age of 62 when I was only 24. When I see some of my friends' parents still alive, I feel cheated of a parent whose time with me was so short.

I take another sip. The memories are still vivid as if they happened yesterday. I look at the wine in the glass and my gaze turns hazy. It never fails to do that,even though it has been 30 years. Our conversation today was about the food scarcity in Kenya and GMI foods. I wonder if he really understood what I was talking about.



ali weinstein

a new social dharma experience: excerpts from my skype date with a monk

One July night, three summers ago, I made a very unlikely friend. I was at a party, sitting around a campfire, when I noticed amongst the attendees a Buddhist monk in orange robes. He was an odd fit amid the plaid-wearing hipsters roasting marshmallows and drinking tall cans. It hadn't been so long since I'd returned home from an extended backpacking trip around Asia, where I had learned a thing or two about Buddhism. Immediately upon seeing this robed man with his head shaved, I began to fixate on his behaviour; he was eating from the grill, and I, feeling somewhat affronted, decided to do something about it. Being more precocious back then at just 24 years of age (or was it the beer?), I walked straight up to him and demanded, "Aren't you a Theravada monk?" (I was educated enough to know that Theravada was the school of Buddhism that matched the colour of his robes, which were pumpkin.) "Yes, I am." He seemed surprised. I didn't want to rain on his parade, but it was quite clear, even to me, just some white Canadian atheist, that he was breaking the rules. "Shouldn't you have stopped eating at noon?" I pointed at his half-eaten hot dog. The monk smiled coyly and took another bite. "Don't tell anyone." I was perplexed. The monks that I had met in Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand woke up at the crack of dawn every morning, collected alms (gifts of food from local merit-seekers), with which they made breakfast and later lunch, and then were not permitted to eat anything else until the following morning. It seemed an impossible restriction, of course, and I had heard that many young monks were apt to wander into town at night to indulge in some surreptitious sweets. But this monk was older, and more importantly, he was the only monk at a party of laypeople; he was the sole representative of his religion to this group of drunk twenty-something-year-old Torontonians. Surely a little religious obedience was required?

The monk asked if I wanted to sit with him on a park bench a little ways off from the party. I followed him, expecting an explanation about his late-night hot dog indulgence. (As if it was his duty to answer to me.) But instead, he patted the space next to him, inviting me to sit down, and proceeded to ask me question after question about myself while staring deep into my eyes: Who was I? What were my passions? What did I desire? Flummoxed, I stumbled over my answers: I liked travelling, I guessed. He stared harder. I was interested in religion, too, I supposed. Probably because I had grown up devoid of it, now that I came to think of it, with two atheists for parents. Oh yeah, and movies...I liked movies. Documentaries especially. He loved documentaries, too! He asked if I had any ambitions to make one. Actually, yes, I would love to someday. It

was eerie how he was able to tap into my aspirations so quickly, and it felt strange confessing this untold wish to a stranger, a very peculiar stranger at that. I emphasized that I didn't know when I was going to get around to my documentary-making ambitions; at the moment I was pretty busy with my menial office job and goofing off with my friends. Ignoring my hesitancy, he informed me that he had *tons* of great documentary ideas, and that we should definitely collaborate on a film about religion. I laughed. He was serious. "Maybe in another lifetime," I thought, as I said, "yes, let's do it. That would be great!"

When I turned on my computer that night, there was a pending friend request from a certain internet-savvy monk. Over the next weeks and months, my new friend invited me to meditation events and lectures. For various reasons, I was never able to attend any of them. If I'm honest with myself, I think I was also a little bit afraid of the intense and mysterious monk. Eventually, the invitations grew sparser. I didn't see him again, but I would occasionally notice his cryptic status updates, which always seemed to defy all my expectations of a monk, and be reminded of what a puzzling yet compelling person he was.

I find myself now, suddenly, about to embark on a filmic journey into questions of devotion. I came back to these inquiries for my master's thesis project: a documentary about people utterly devoted to God. It is the film we had talked about in the abstract that night on the park bench. I decided that I should get in touch with my friend the monk once again. He doesn't live in Toronto anymore. Since he completed his master's degree here, he has moved to Estonia where he works as a lecturer. I messaged him on Facebook, and arranged a Skype date with him. As someone who has never known God, I wanted to try to understand how anybody could commit so wholly to a single spiritual path. I wanted to understand why my monk friend initially chose to enter life in a temple, and how he reconciles his relentless rule-breaking with his monkhood.

When we made contact across thousands of kilometers and kilobytes, he answered, "Hey, beautiful." I had forgotten just how cheeky and irreverent this particular monk was. We talked for an hour and half, and he patiently (and at times not-so-patiently) answered my many questions. By the end of our Skype date, I don't think I was any closer to Enlightenment; even surrounding my interviewee's motives and beliefs. As much an enigma to me now as

ever, I wonder if I will ever understand why this monk wears his robes or, for that matter, why anyone does. Below is part of our conversation.*

So, this is your kitchen?

Yes, it's my kitchen. (He turns his computer to the left:) And my bed. It's pretty amazing. For the first time in my life, I have independence, privacy. I can bring anyone: boys, girls, whatever, I don't categorize. I can bring anyone I want. And I bring people.

You do? Sounds like Estonia is a lot of fun.

Yeah, Estonia has opened me up to different kinds of social dharma experiences.

In what way?

I just said: independence, privacy, so many things; whatever I want to experience. I can have all of them here. I never had that in Canada except that summertime I met you. Because I was always surrounded by other monks. There's more freedom here; no one to tell me what I should do, and what I should *not* do.

What is a monk allowed to do?

What is a monk *allowed* to do? Or what is a monk not allowed to do? That's probably your real question. (Laughs.)

OK, so what are you not allowed to do?

Well, I break all those rules.

Why?

Maybe...because I love to.

But do the rules matter to you?

At one point, yes, but I think probably not now.

Are there rules you believe in and rules that you don't believe in?

Yeah, definitely. We have over 227 rules in Theravada Buddhism.

And can you tell me all of them? I'm joking.

(Laughs.) No, no, definitely not. I don't want to know because if I knew, I'd feel bad if I didn't follow them. Ignorance is bliss. If you're a good person, someone like me, then if there's a conflict between my feelings and what is 'right', then I'd rather leave that there.

That's interesting. But isn't that what a layperson is supposed to do? Just be a good person? Isn't that the distinction between a monk and a layperson?

OK, let's be serious now. No more fun.

Sorry.

You can write this down: a group of monks wrote the meaning of 'vinaya'. Vinaya are the rules and regulations for monks and nuns. 'Dhara' means a person who holds those texts, which means only the monk who is a 'vinaya dhara' knows every detail of these monastic rules, regulations, behaviour, whatever. Likewise, there's a group of monks called 'dhamma dhara'; or, in Sanskrit 'dharma dhara'. These monks hold the 'dharma'. They know more about 'dharma' than the 'vinaya', than the monastic texts. These are the traditions that carry out right from the beginning of Buddhism, right from the Buddha's time, up until now...well, not up until now; now, everything is digital. I have my hard drive; I don't need to memorize all this dharma, all this vinaya. (Laughs.) It's all in my sexy computer. So these 227 rules are divided by gravity or the highest to the lowest level. So the four highest levels are: 'no sexual activity whatsoever' – the first rule. And the second rule is 'no killing'. And the third one is...ok killing, lying, oh I forgot it. Definitely not lying...that's very funny, especially because just last week I taught a class on sexuality and gender in Buddhism...

Are you saying that the 'no sexual activity' rule is above 'no killing'? It's more important than not killing?

Yes.

How is that possible? Isn't killing the worst thing that you can do?

No, I get your point. This is why I disagree. I disagree with my own tradition. I'm ok with you, yeah? What is wrong with a little sex?

(Distracted by a Facebook chat notification:)

Wait, who wants to chat with me?

You're a popular monk.

Oh, yeah. (As he types:) "I'm having an interview with a beautiful woman, don't disturb me."

Now you're a flattering monk.

(Laughs.) Yeah, I was very famous in Canada: "mischievous monk".

Do you like to challenge people's perceptions of what a monk should be?

Well, I do constantly.

Yeah, I know you do.

Look at my Facebook. I don't think any monk would be brave enough to say what I say. I mean you can see me writing romantic things, all this crazy stuff, posting these crazy pictures. Other monks may do it secretly. People don't know that. Don't think that monks don't have sexual interest or imagination, they might even have relationships with other people in secret, but I like a more public form. I do. Why should I hide? Yeah, I don't need to hide that.

Does it make you happy when people are taken aback? When people say, "wait a second, this is not what you're supposed to do"?

No, I think I've overcome that emotional complex about what people think. I don't do bad stuff. It's true I hang out with girls. Why should I lie? If I like someone I should say something, if I see someone I like I should say so. Nothing wrong with that.

Yeah. But what about acting on those things?

Like what?

Like having sex? Is it too personal a question to ask whether you...

No, you're not the first person who has had an interest. Recently, I was at my friend's house and I met two girls. I don't understand Estonian, but I could *feel*, I could sense what they were talking about. And then around midnight, one girl, she was really drunk, you know what she asked me? She came next to me and, pointing at her own boobs, she said, 'if you see a woman who has big boobs and a beautiful butt and is half naked walking down the street, what do you feel?' And I said, 'you want to know if I...' Because there were five other people, too, who were

watching, curious. They're all kind of focusing their attention like I'm Obama speaking. Everyone is looking at me, waiting for my answer. I didn't answer, but I said something like, 'do you want to listen now here, or do you want to listen somewhere else? Because I don't want to lie to you. And I don't want to tell you now.' (Laughs.) And then she had a full range of questions; whether monks watch pornographic films, whether we have sexual desire, the whole thing. So what was your question?

Well, I don't know if you want to answer it now.

If it's not part of your documentary, I can answer it.

(Laughs.) Well, then I guess we should talk about something else. Where did you grow up?

I grew up in three different orphanages in Bangladesh. After becoming a monk, I went to study in Sri Lanka, Burma, America, and Canada.

How old were you when you decided to become a monk?

Probably around 16 maybe.

Why did you make that decision?

I didn't make that decision. In the Thai/Burmese tradition, there is what you call 'temporary ordination'. They believe each man should become a monk at least once in their lifetime. After my mother died, when I was three years old, and my stepmother came in, I was out. I went to an orphanage. And then my father died when I was probably 16 and according to the Theravada tradition, if one parent dies, the son has to become a monk. It's temporary, not for your whole life. And I did it. It's about creating good karma and producing merits. It gives you good merits so that your parents will have a better reincarnation. By becoming a monk, the good things I do during those seven days can transfer to the dead person. It's called 'transference of merit'. That's how I became a monk. So I did one week, and since I had no place to go – I didn't want to go back home where it was abusive, and I didn't want to go back to the orphanage, where it was the same thing – I became a gangster at the orphanage probably by the time I was 13 – I decided to extend for another week. And I kept on extending. I kept on extending up until now. So, yeah, for a long time. And I'm going to end very soon.

Really?

Yeah. Maybe get a girlfriend, maybe get a wife, maybe

have a family.

Can I ask how old you are?

Fifty.

(Laughs.) No, really. How old are you?

Yes, really.

Is that your spiritual age?

Maybe, yeah. In terms of maturity. In terms of life experience – the way I experienced it right from a child. Once I finish my memoir you'll see so many ways that I was challenged in my life; with no parents, orphanage life, sexual abuse, all this, you know, gangster guy, and suddenly becoming a visiting lecturer in Europe. So that's an amazing life. And receiving scholarships from America and Canada to go to university, that's a big, inspiring life even though I had all these tormenting experiences, too. Yeah, so anyway, I don't know how old I am. I've never had a birthday celebration to be honest with you. No birthday. I have a passport, but the birthday on the passport is not an actual one. It's something that we made up. So I don't know how old I am. But I would guess maybe 28, 29, maybe 30. Considering I have three MAs, yeah definitely considering that...

Do a lot of monks leave the temple to do other things in their lives?

I don't know how common it is. Some quit. Of course, if you have the desire to have a family, that's ok. For me, I don't know, sometimes I do desire to have a family. Maybe I will. Sometimes when I think of this human inimitable drama, the family, relationships, watching my friends breaking up, this and that, and I have been through a breakup just two months ago. That was really painful so I'm really scared of any closeness including you.

(Laughs.) How long were you dating your last girlfriend?

I don't think we were really dating, but the thing is that, as you know, I never had privacy, I never had independence or anything. I never spent a lot of time with any girl except her. Ok so I'm not projecting that she's bad or something. It's an emotion I have to deal with. It's understandable. She's older than me. She's 48 or 45, she has her own son. Obviously she's gone through this human drama of

relationships with so many people. For me, it's like the first time. Obviously I'm more attached to her than she's attached to me. I felt really, really bad then to be honest. She was the woman that I knew most intimately. I talked with you, with any other woman in Canada, but it was not the type of relationship that I had with her. And not only that, we had all the physical intimacy also. I was in her place, I was in the same bed, this and that, and suddenly she doesn't want to talk! Then obviously you feel miserable. So it was really big, big. Yeah. I don't want to talk about this now, but it was really bad.

I'm really sorry to hear that. That's sad.

Yeah, so I don't want to re-experience that.

Yeah, that's something that everybody goes through, but it's interesting because I understand that when you try to reach Enlightenment you're supposed to stop experiencing suffering, but in my mind, if you are going to get rid of suffering, you're also getting rid of pleasure, right?

Mm-hmm.

Is that true?

Ok, ok, go ahead ask your question.

Well, that was my question. OK, in Theravada Buddhism, what is the ultimate goal?

Theoretically, in Theravada Buddhism you have to give up everything including both pain and pleasure. That's our thing. But at the same time, Nirvana is the destruction of negativism and the development of positivism. So what is positivism then? Is it about pleasure? What kind of pleasure? Are we talking pure meditation? But that is still pleasure. It is. And nowadays, neuroscience talks about sexual orgasm and meditation being the same thing. So whether you enjoy meditation or whether you enjoy having sex, it's the same thing. You're following the same rules, the same principles. Nothing wrong with that. To me, Nirvana is like a human imaginative construction of something that doesn't exist. Nirvana is a concept of the human imagination. I'm sorry to miss the Buddha, but that's what I think. But at the same time, for Buddhists, it's a subjective reality. A subjective reality: this is how people experience it. Nirvana is about elimination of human greed, anger, jealousy. The *real* experiences of these. It's not about something in the imagination then. You can see why I don't know what I believe.

What does Buddhism mean to you?

What does Buddhism mean to me? Totality of experiences. This I would say because, I mean, it's a kind of very old, very boring question everyone asks me, 'so what is Buddhism?' It's the same question. I mean you are reformulating the question, 'what is Buddhism?' It's the same question that I've been hearing every day. So I find it a very boring question to answer. This is why I ask whoever asks that question: instead of asking 'what is Buddhism', why don't they ask me what Buddhism does?

What does Buddhism do?

Yeah, that's more interesting. To look at the sociology of Buddhism, the anthropology of Buddhism, the politics of Buddhism, the philosophy of Buddhism. So I still think Buddhism for me is the totality of experiences. It gave me the freedom to experience myself. For example, when I have an emotional week, it's allowed me to look on a deeper level at who I am, what I'm experiencing, reassess my emotions and reconstruct myself. This is what Buddhism has given to me. I might not be categorically called a Buddhist because I don't fit into the model of the traditional way of practicing, but at the same time, I would identify as a Buddhist. Maybe I'm an agnostic Buddhist, but I'm happy with that. And I will promote Buddhism regardless of what I believe or not.

Why would you promote Buddhism?

Because I love it. It's based on human compassion. It's a very compassionate, loving, nurturing human connection. So why shouldn't I promote it? As I promote other stuff, too. Buddhism has given me the meaning of my life. If I was not a Buddhist monk, I don't know, I would be in prison, I would be in jail. So Buddhist meditation and spirituality has given me the meaning of my life. It's made me who I am now so I should respect that and I should promote it in a way.

(We are disconnected, and then reconnected.)

Did you hear everything I said?

Yeah, you were talking about how Buddhism has shaped you, how it's been the experience of your life, and how it's helped you.

Yeah. Basically. And I'm happy with that actually.

*This interview has been condensed and edited.

