

MARTOS GALLERY

WE PRESENT

# Michel Auder — Intimate polaroids from a constantly-documented life

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WORDS  
Bruno Bayley



## MARTOS GALLERY

From 1969 to 1982 Michel Auder took thousands of Polaroids. Like his films they are a deeply personal record of his life. Bruno Bayley reflects on how Auder's works exist in the space where memoir meets documentary, combining to create a sort of cinéma vérité diary, punctuated by now-famous faces and diversions, unified by an eye for transient moments of beauty.



Photo of Michael. (color Polaroid, 10.8 x 8.9 cm) — \$4,000

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“They say it makes a man out of you, joining the army, but for me it awakened my political instinct. It made me a raving leftist.” Being sent to Algeria in 1962 having been conscripted into the French Army precipitated the first of two awakenings that the filmmaker, Michel Auder, credits with propelling him to move to New York City in 1969. The second awakening came during the tumultuous year of 68 when riots, protests and rebellions erupted around the world—with France particularly wracked by unrest. Auder, uninterested in “having his head cracked” by the police, was disappointed by politicians of all denominations. No longer aligned with the radicals and activists he’d once stood alongside, Auder’s political stance was now limited to the personal realm, “I decided to be political in myself, in the way I conducted my life.” His work became ever more personal too. His films and photographs were, and continue to be, primarily autobiographical. They trace decades of his life, family and friends, and these scenes are interspersed with less diaristic moments of fleeting beauty seen in the everyday.



Florence/Jack Youngerman's studio, Hamptons (color Polaroid ,10.8 x 8.9 cm) — \$4,000

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Not long after settling in New York, Auder met his wife-to-be, the Warhol Superstar Viva, who was walking through Chelsea with Nico in the early hours one morning. “I shouted, ‘Hey... Nico!’ and they took me to a party. I hooked up with Viva, and the rest is history.” Auder made his first widely-known project, a film about Viva’s daily life while working on Warhol’s Blue Movie titled “Keeping Busy.” Soon the pair would be living together at the famed Chelsea Hotel, fully ensconced in the neighbourhood’s now-fabled 70s scene.

Auder’s early adoption of video—a medium which allowed him to relentlessly document all around him—was to set the tone for a career marked by the welcoming of new tools and formats. “[Video] just made sense to me. These machines were instant. You didn’t have to deal with a lab or prints. From there there was no way to return.” While video presented him with a way to document his daily life intimately and instantly, it wasn’t without its drawbacks, “It was also my demise, in a way, because people thought I was a failure – using video to make film works. Now people think [the aesthetic] is cool, but at the time it was just seen as poor quality.”

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Florence at Jack Youngerman's Studio (color Polaroid, 10.8 x 8.9 cm) — \$4,000

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Like video, Polaroids were instant, accessible, and produced comparatively low quality images. “My instinct just drew me to use them. My Polaroids hold the same interest for me that my video tapes do... they are about my life, the people I was with, the things that were happening. They are autobiographical.” More often regarded as a filmmaker than a photographer, Auder doesn’t care for the distinction, the still and moving image are “purely parallel” for him. “I am a photographer. I am a filmmaker. Sometimes I take single images out of my films, when I think they are perfect. People call them ‘film stills,’ but they’re not, they’re photographs. There’s no difference. They are all connected.”

Auder revels in the technological innovations that have, over his decades long career, forced trusted tools into retirement. “With a painter, they start painting with paints and a canvas and they’re fucked: they have to do it all their life! But for me, I started with one thing, and then it was taken away, so I’ve had to change. From reel to reel, to video, to polaroids... whatever.” Whether he’s shooting on iPhone or a Sony Portapak, Auder’s interest in the world around him—in moments of singular beauty—is a constant. “A new tool changes my work, maybe changes my style or my way of picturing things, but it doesn’t change my *mind*. [A new tool] makes you new again.”

MARTOS GALLERY



Studio at 228 W Broadway (color Polaroid, 10.8 x 8.9 cm) — \$4000

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The proliferation of affordable and high quality cameras today—not least in phones—means that millions are now making films about their lives, charting their observations of the world just as Auder has been for over five decades. He's thrilled: "I was right on the money! Now everyone's a filmmaker. They're mostly bad ones, but there are also some great ones. It's amazing." For Auder the ubiquity of technology has allowed people to at last accept film's universality. "Now, finally, we have realised that film is not just this little window, it's not just Hollywood, it's the expression of the world. I'm embracing that. I look at Youtube, Instagram, TikTok... I see amazing work. It breaks all the rules, like I did in 1970," he says.

Auder's work is perhaps easiest imagined in aggregate: as a genre-defying library of images spanning formats and decades, allowing a viewer to see the life he's lived in the very particular way he sees it. "A good writer puts words together in a way that creates a style and a specific type of work. That makes it interesting. I am like a writer but with moving images. My style is the unifying factor... When I look at my photos together as an entity, I think it's valid. It's specific. It's true to how I see the world."





**E.A.T. / engadin art talks 2021 presents 12 hour virtual 'longue durée' of disruptive minds**



on saturday january 30, 2021, the 11th edition of the renowned **engadin art talks (E.A.T.)** — the forum for art, architecture, design, film, science and literature — takes place as a virtual tour de force featuring a compelling lineup of international speakers tuning in from home. free and accessible to all, the 'longue durée' program sees a 12 hour-long stream of artists, architects, designers, writers and scientists share their ideas, thoughts and projects around this year's theme.

**designboom is a media partner of E.A.T. 2021 and brings you selected projects, interviews and news from the event — stay tuned for our upcoming coverage, and read on for the full 'longue durée' program and list of speakers below.**



**‘longue durée’, which literally means ‘long duration’, is a view of history first introduced by french historian fernand braudel.** braudel’s ‘longue durée’ offers an interpretation of crises as opportunities for fundamental structural change, with art one way to re-imagine existing paradigms to accommodate new discoveries, and create new realities.

**despite these challenging times, the E.A.T 2021 lineup is as exciting as ever.** in commitment to sustainability and safety, the roster of speakers will tune in from afar, including some E.A.T. alumni, and swiss-based thought leaders contributing live from the engadin.

**the disruptive minds presenting their thoughts around the theme of ‘longue durée’ are** — etel adnan, ziba ardanan, michel auder, alexandra bachzetsis, tosh basco, daniel baumann, cristina bechtler, elisabeth bronfen, gion caminada, gabriel chaile, bice curiger, chris dercon, katharina de vaivre, manthia diawara, simone fattal, peter fischli, christina forrer, norman foster, dario gamboni, trajal harrell, fritz hauser, raphael hefti, emma hodcroft, claire hoffmann, luzius keller, jürg kienberger, ragnar kjartansson, alexander kluge, roman krzarnic, grazyna kulczyk, isabel lewis, ben moore, hans ulrich obrist, madlaina peer, griselda pollock, kate raworth, markus reymann, kenny schachter, merlin sheldrake, adam szymczyk, wu tsang, leo tuor, philip ursprung, rico valär, not vital, and stefan zweifel.

**13:45 | michel auder’s garage opera**

michel auder artist, FR/USA

adam szymczyk, curator, PL/CH

bice curiger, E.A.T. curator

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# Michel Auder.

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Interviewed by **EDUARDO GIÓN**  
Introduction by **JONAS MEKAS**  
Self-portrait courtesy of **MICHEL AUDER**

*In memory of Jonas Mekas (1922-2019)*

*Michel Auder is a poet, he isn't a realist. A poet of moods, faces, situations, brief encounters, tragic moments of our miserable civilization, the suffering. And yes, also human vanity, ridiculousness. Cities, people, animals, culture, nature – everything is reflected in Auder's continuous video. When I used to visit Michel at Chelsea Hotel, around 1970, a video camera was always there, always going, a part of the house, a part of his life, eyes, hands. It still is. A most magnificent love affair - no, not an affair: A life's obsession.*

**You started making movies in the mid-60s in Paris with independent artists, a group called ZanZibar. What was that creative moment like?**

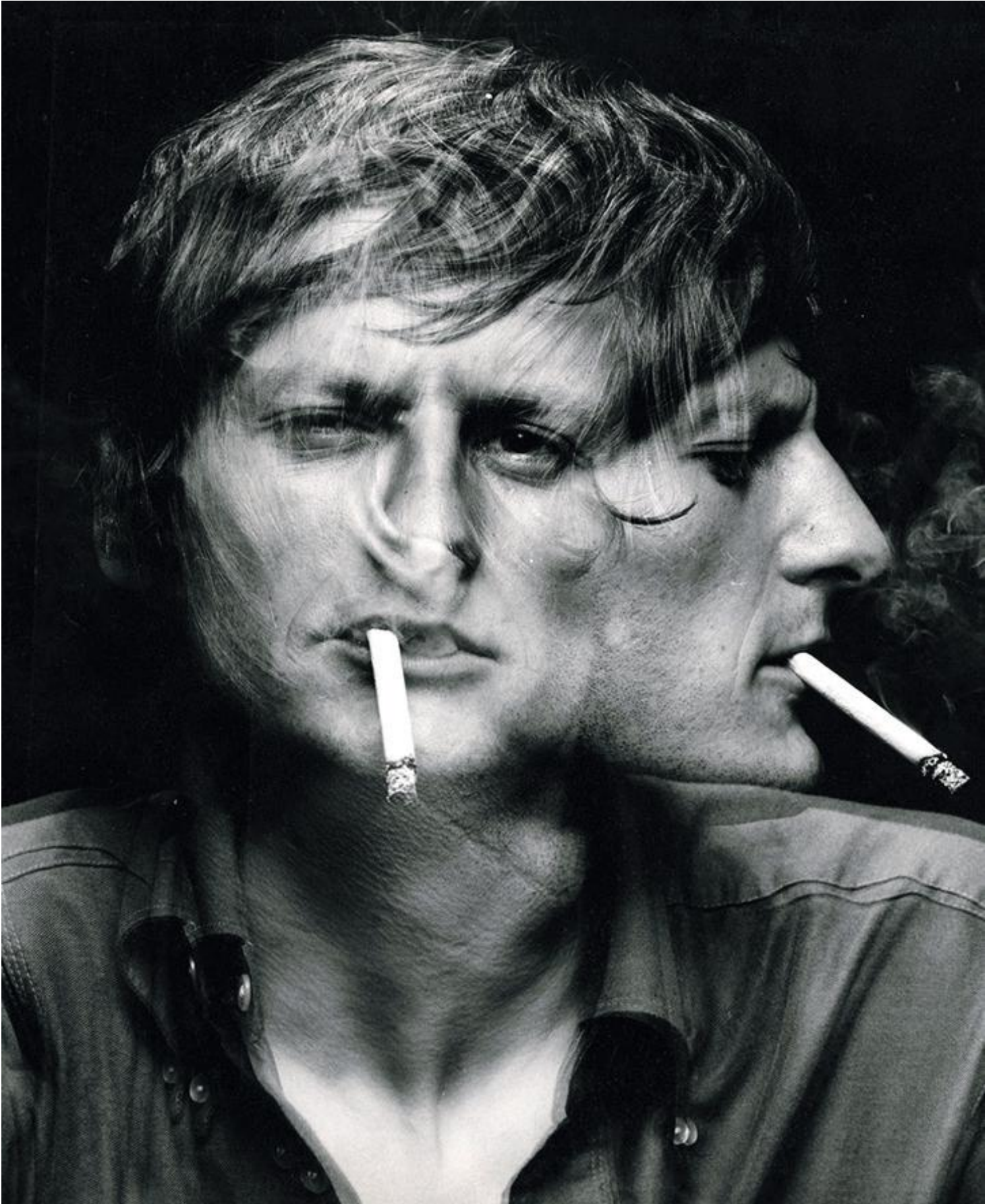
It was not easy! ZanZibar was funded & protected by Sylvina Boissonas, a generous, young *mécène*. She offered to produce my film *Keeping Busy*. It became the best day of my life up to that day in 1968!

**You shot your first film in France, *Keeping Busy*, with the artist from the Factory Viva. After that, you moved to New York and settle there permanently.**

*Keeping Busy*, 1968/69, was my first film with Sync-Sound starring Viva Superstar & Louis Waldon, it was mostly shot in Rome.

As I was shooting the end of *Keeping Busy*, Agnès Varda called for Viva to come to Hollywood to star in her new film *Lions Love*. I followed, we got married in Las Vegas in a church drive-in.

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When the shoot was over, we moved to New York and settled in the Chelsea Hotel for the next 5 years... It's 2019 and still in New York.

**Is it true that you met Viva in Paris one morning while she was walking with Nico?**

Just like that. 3.00 am, rue de Buci... Paris, 1968. Viva and Nico walking together... I recognized them! Me: "Viva! Where are you going?" [it was the first time we met]. Viva: "We are going to a party, come with us..." Me [following]: "Viva, I want you to star in my film" - I had just gotten some production money for *Keeping Busy*. The rest is history.

**Her films and audiovisual pieces really reflect the lives of people, without actors, with real people and not fictional characters. What do you want to demonstrate with that way of filming? Can we call it "Cinéma vérité"?**

I use the "Cinéma vérité" style and the "Documentary" style to gather the content then I re-configure these "materials" by melding fact and fiction, sometimes beyond discernment, to illustrate and

There can be no film or video artist without voyeurism. I see looks, peeps etc. through windows, curtains, doorways, TV screens... I like to be close, very close.

I achieve immediate intimacy with my "subjects." They don't stare at me with serious (or suspicious) faces: they laugh, they communicate, they play. This "sickness," this voyeurism enables me to see everything, to pick out little, invisible but essential details, like a tuft of grass on the edge of a roof, trembling in a winter storm, invisible and unimportant to everybody, maybe to the whole world – but not to me; to me it's of monumental importance.

**What differences do you see between experimental cinema, documentary or video art? Three concepts that are included in your work.**

I just make films from the 60s to the *now*... the film world, the TV world ignores me. The artworld and its artists paid attention to my works, they became my viewers.

My first official commercial exhibition was with the famous Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery in Soho, New York, in 1994. I was 50, that is maybe when I became officially an artist?

## I NEVER WORKED WITH ANDY, I JUST LOOKED AT HIM

describe my personnel-critical-subjective views and thoughts about our culture.

I feel closer to being a writer... to writing than being a filmmaker... but I use films and make films. Go figure.

**When I interviewed Jonas Mekas, he explained to me that he always carried a small video camera with him and recorded everything that happened. Do you also record film diaries every day?**

I use the "Diary" style, I don't do diaries.

I capture visual notes daily to be manipulated later to fit my partial observations... there is nothing wrong with diaries, especially if they are created by Jonas Mekas, the master of all diarists.

**I have read that you are obsessed with the television images that you record directly from TV, and then you use them for your work. What is for you television and that obsession with televised violence?**

Television is violent, not me. TV, to me, is just like any other reality – I totally change it.

I watch TV like a psychotherapist sees a patient. When TV arrives at my chamber, I automatically sift through the information.

It's like having a very narrow-minded, very opinionated patient, a great storyteller, a genius gone mad, there is nothing to believe or disbelieve... pieces of lies and truth laying all over the place... a broken mirror shoved into my face.

**You also document the lives of artist friends and their families such as Alice Neel, Larry Rivers or Cindy Sherman.**

**How do you prepare a recording of so many hours with these artists? Are you just a 'voyeur' camera that you are there but you cannot be noticed?**

My goal is to translate the appearance of my time according to my appreciation of it.

**How was it working with Andy Warhol?**

I never worked with Andy, I just looked at him. From the late 60s to the early 70s, he was confiding to Viva, my wife at the time. I became an insider by marriage and Andy became the subject of some of my films.

***The Feature* is a work that collects your works for 40 years forming the whole line of your life through them. How did the idea for this documentary come about?**

*The Feature* plunges into my memory bank, chasing down fleeting emotions, privileged moments, traces of faded experiences.

"Supplementary footage directed by Andrew Neel, shot on crisp high-definition video, frames this aching autobiography with a fictionalized portrait of Auder's present-day existence."

Fake news. Not a documentary. In *The Feature*, the "documentary" footage seems to be real, and is real, but is not real."

Not real, never was real, or no longer is it real?

**What will be the next of Michel Auder?**

More of not the same.

*Dear Jonas,*

*Thank you for everything*

*Your writings "I Had Nowhere to Go"*

*Your fantastic films "Letter From Green Point"*

*Your music*

*Your unwavering support for independent radical film making*

*Your Poetry "My Night Life"*

*Dear Jonas, you are the best!*

*See you soon :) xoxo*

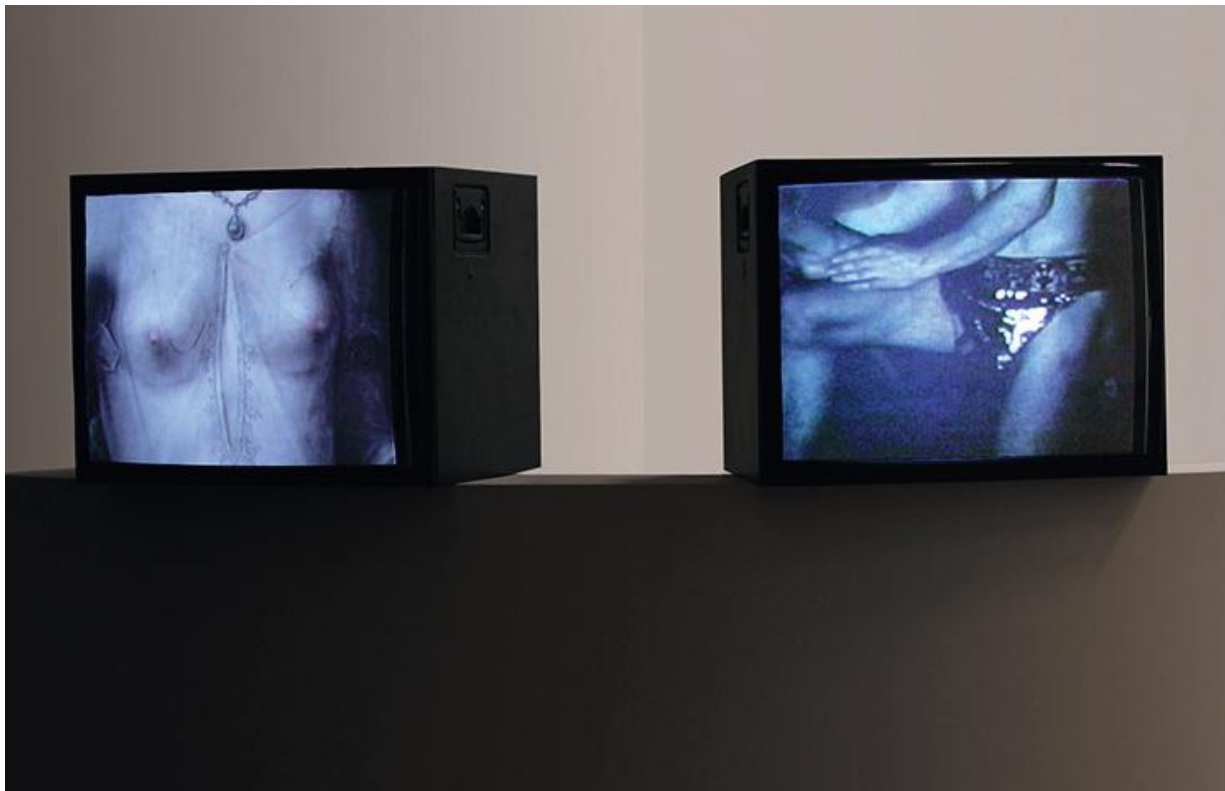
*"We do not need Perfection!*

*We need nervous breakdowns"*

*Jonas Mekas*

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*Do You Love Me.* Video installation. Scheibler Gallery, Berlin ©Michel Auder



P. Garrel, R. Mapplethorpe, L. Waldon, J.P. Aumont, A. Neel. Photographic composition ©Michel Auder

# Schengen Baroque Pasolini: an exhibition at Converso

Latin Baroque and Calvinist Baroque tell the values of contemporary society  
by meeting in the narration of the film never made by Pasolini

BY EDITORIAL STAFF



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A dialogue around the hypothetical. A philosophical conversation on the relationship between space and time that unfolds all around the concept of Baroque. But above all an exhibition event that investigates and brings to the surface the value roots (distorted or not) of Western culture. The Church of San Paolo in Converso, in Piazza S. Eufemia Milan square, is transformed into the theater where the exhibition, created by Converso, *Schengen Baroque Pasolini*, will be staged curated by Pierre-Alexandre Mateos and Charles Teyssou. The exhibition, conceived as a free adaptation of the film on San Paolo never made by Pasolini, will be an opportunity to weave a dialogue around the theme of the Baroque. Latin Baroque and Calvinist Baroque, egotism and self-affirmation as sides of the same coin that tells contemporary man and his story.

In the background, the narration of the film on St. Paul never made by Pierpaolo Pasolini: a reinterpretation of the hagiography of the saint who, having become a French bourgeois after the Second World War, converts to communism on the way to Barcelona and then dies amidst impersonal concrete and inhuman of a New York of the 80s. A contrast that generates narrative energy released by contact and contrast.

The Schengen Baroque Pasolini exhibition, with works by Armature Global, Michel Auder, James Bridle, Lili Reynaud-Dewar, Paul-Alexandre Islas Ken Lum, Gianni Pettena, will remain open from 10 January to 16 February 2019



## ARTIST TO WATCH

## 7 Artists to Watch in January 2019

By Artspace Editors

## MICHEL AUDER

Gavin Brown's Enterprise, New York

January 13 - March 1



Image via Interview Magazine

“There are so many things I like about Michel Auder’s work,” wrote filmmaker and Anthology Film Archives founder [Jonas Mekas](#) in a 1991 review, “that I don’t know where to begin... Auder has fun when he video tapes, he enjoys it... Next: Auder doesn’t educate, doesn’t teach, doesn’t inform. When he makes ‘political’ statements... they come from his heart.” Born in Soissons, France in 1945, the year World War II ended, Auder began making movies at age 18. His earliest influences were the French New Wave directors, especially Jean-Luc Godard. In 1969, Auder met and married Viva, one of [Andy Warhol](#)’s superstars. They moved to New York, and Auder purchased one of the first commercially available video cameras, which he used to make travelogues, diaries and informal portraits of friends, including [Alice Neel](#) and Annie Sprinkle. While Auder didn’t consider them “fine art,” he eventually began exhibiting them alongside scripted works. He would also divorce Viva and eventually marry [Cindy Sherman](#), another art-world heavy-hitter. Gavin Brown's Enterprise hasn’t posted any info about the show yet (as is their wont—it’s a way to build hype!), but if you’re a cinema fan or just curious about this former Warhol scenester, the show is worth checking out.

## What Warhol Tells Us About Art in the Age of Trump

Michel Auder's show at Martos, reminds us why, despite the optimists, art was never going to find its *raison d'être* under the current regime

BY ANDREW DURBIN



Certain members of the so-called Resistance, struggling for meaning in the wake of the 2016 election, once argued that art would rediscover its purpose under Donald Trump. Joyce Carol Oates tweeted that artists would 'thrive' under oppression, a point echoed by *Time* magazine. Art would only get better, we were told, much as it supposedly had under Ronald Reagan in the mythic 1980s, and find in these troubling times its *raison d'être*. Two years in, I'm still waiting.

The largest work in Michel Auder's second show at Martos Gallery, 'And virtually everything said has been said incorrectly, and it's been said wrong, or it's been covered wrong by the press', is a 2018 series of 91 photographs that shares its name with the subject of the show. (Guess who.) Pinned along a dark hallway, each image is a 33 x 48 cm c-type print, mostly depicting candid scenes from daily life, including men and women lounging, men playing in a river, a baby awaiting its diaper change, a bullet-ridden stop sign in the countryside. All are constituent elements of a domestic universe of deliberately uninteresting tableaux, set mostly within the obliterating confines of the woods – and far from the bonkers political landscape Auder has in mind, given the title is lifted from Donald Trump's assertion that he never saw an invoice from the porn star Stormy Daniels. Other images capture bits of cultural detritus across the art-historical spectrum, from classical fragments of male faces and

## MARTOS GALLERY

genitals to a shot of a computer playing Jean-Luc Godard's *La Chinoise* (1967) to Alice Neel's 1970 portrait of a shirtless Andy Warhol, with its transgendering emphasis on the artist's breasts. Sex recurs, sometimes to comic effect: a young Cindy Sherman stands alongside a giant photograph of a man's genitals, with Sherman's name inked across his protruding testicles. Auder, the gallery notes, 'embraces [image] saturation'.



Michel Auder, *Do Not Open Before Christmas*, 2018, c-type print mounted on Dibond, 2.1 x 1.1 m. Courtesy: the artist and Martos Gallery, New York

But I can only read in the work, which I like, what its quietude omits: the man who gave the exhibition its title and the protagonist of the film playing in the show's largest space, Donald Trump. *Trumped* (2018) is a slideshow of images of the president, various renaissance paintings, details of demons from tapestries and more scenes of home life, set to a low, droning soundtrack by Matthias

## MARTOS GALLERY

Grübel. In the film, Auder's subject – the dubious subject of 'our' 'politics' – fully asserts himself among images like those one might find in the exhibition; he is open-mouthed, he points, he rolls his squinting eyes. He takes up huge amounts of visual and mental real estate (the only real estate he ever succeeded in), peddling the only infinitely renewable resource known to man: his stupidity. Here, the peace afforded by the print-outs arranged in the hall leading to the film is disturbed, or rather, Trumped, and Auder reminds us that even in those private, delicate spaces we may describe as the 'Trumpvoid', when the president's presence in our lives goes unacknowledged by those privileged enough to not be in his administration's immediate sight, he is always there, lurking at or below the surface. And no, things – art or otherwise – are not getting 'better', nor were they ever going to.



Michel Auder, *TRUMPED*, 2018, HD video with sound by Matthias Grübel, installation view. Courtesy: the artist and Martos Gallery, New York

In Trump art did find, however, an apotheosis of the very strategies of performance and promotion it had developed over the last 50 years, particularly in his conceptual transformation from tabloid goon into totalizing event. (Quibble away.) It's no surprise, given this, that Trump adores Andy Warhol, whose presence in the show, via Neel's portrait, reads like a cue card; Trump frequently quotes *The*

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*Philosophy of Andy Warhol* on Twitter, and when Warhol was alive Trump repeatedly tried to commission a portrait of his Tower. From Warhol, Trump learned the greatest lesson of art in the 20th century: 'Good business is the best art.' And only business seems to be getting better.

*Michel Auder: 'And virtually everything said has been said incorrectly, and it's been said wrong, or it's been covered wrong by the press'* runs at Martos Gallery, New York, until 3 August.

*Main image: Michel Auder, TRUMPED, 2018, HD video with sound by Matthias Grübel, video still. Courtesy: the artist and Martos Gallery, New York*

July 14, 2018

[Art](#) [Reviews](#) [Weekend](#)

# Michel Auder's Images of Images

Jonas Mekas has called Auder a “voyeur par excellence.”

by Adina Glickstein



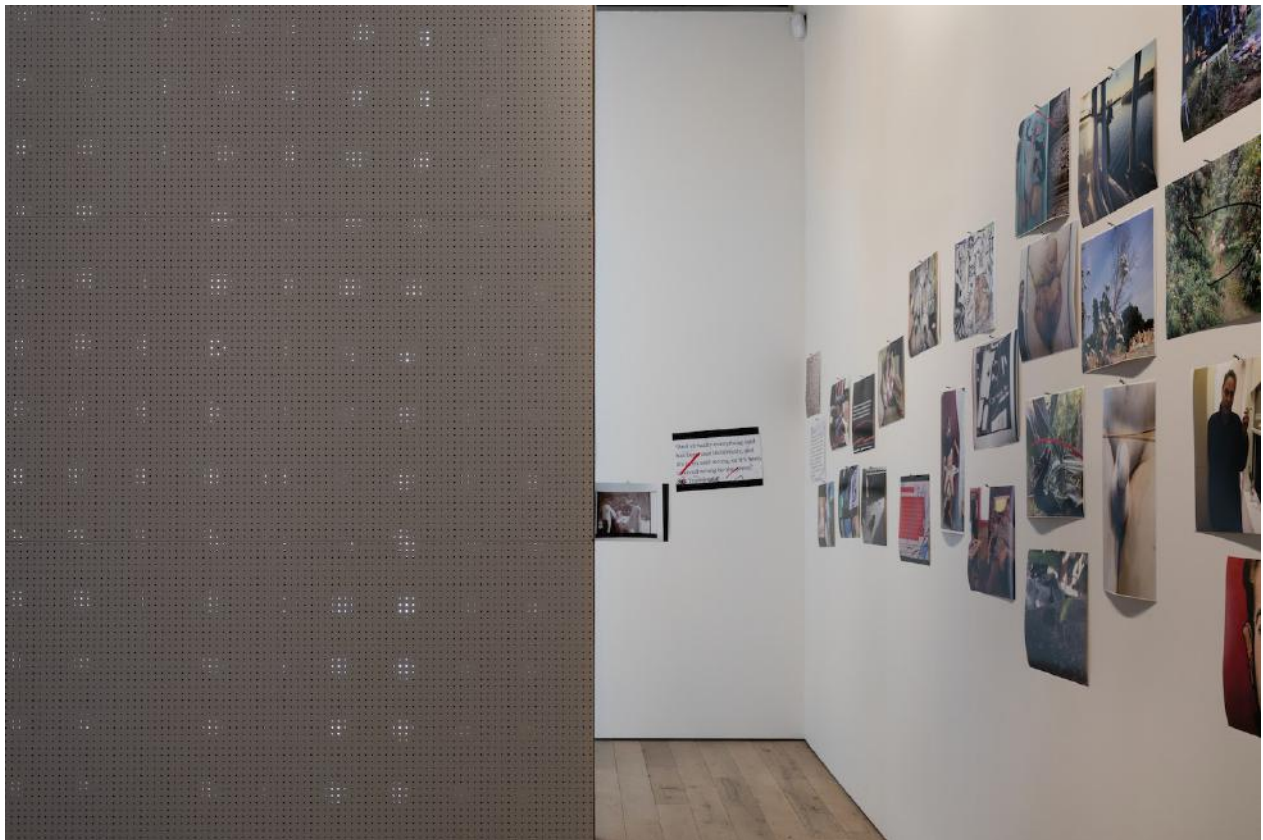
Michel Auder, *And virtually everything said has been said incorrectly, and it's been said wrong, or it's been covered wrong by the press* (2018), mural of 91 artist-printed photographs, dimensions variable; installation view (all images courtesy Martos Gallery)

The title of Michel Auder's current show at Martos Gallery — his second solo exhibition in the space — reads like stratagem for subverting criticism at the outset: *And virtually everything said has been said incorrectly, and it's been said wrong, or it's been covered wrong by the press.*

A warning shot in the form of a sheet of printer paper is taped to the door of the

## MARTOS GALLERY

Chinatown gallery: *This exhibition contains graphic images that may not be suitable for children.* Indeed, the series of C-prints ranging across the floating walls (built by Auder's former collaborator, the artist Servane Mary) cordoning off the show's central vestibule, are provocative not only in content, but in sheer volume. Secured crookedly by thumbtacks and arranged in conspiratorial clusters, these images resemble the pinned-up evidence collected by a frenzied detective, a motif reinforced by the floating walls' pegboard texture and the jagged lines and annotations that cut across the photos, sporadic markings from an inconclusive investigation.



Michel Auder, *And virtually everything said has been said incorrectly, and it's been said wrong, or it's been covered wrong by the press* (2018), mural of 91 artist-printed photographs, dimensions variable; installation view

These prints, presented as evidence, taunt you to find a connection among them: lush forests and a transcript of Eric Garner's last words; paintings in ornate frames and internet porn stars banging long into the night, alongside highlighted texts

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from Rimbaud and Hilton Als.

Somehow, the more information you take in, the harder it is to assemble any kind of coherent message; the only pattern that emerges is the lack of pattern. The prints that line the walls seem only to have one thing in common: they all reveal themselves to be mediated, images of images — photos of paintings and desktops and iPhone screenshots. Gesturing towards the questions of mechanical reproducibility that have nipped at the heels of image-makers since the advent of the printing press, Auder dares you to whip out your phone, snap a shot, and layer on to the mediation matrix.



Michel Auder, *And virtually everything said has been said incorrectly, and it's been said wrong, or it's been covered wrong by the press* (2018), mural of 91 artist-printed photographs, dimensions variable; installation view

The photos taper off. Respite? Comprehension? Not today. Stunned and slack-jawed, you find yourself ushered into a semi-enclosed screening room. Two benches jut outward from a floating wall, perpendicular to a massive projection.



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The odds are good that, at whatever moment you wander in, you'll be greeted by a larger than life-size still photo of our President's face, cropped and rotated at an unsettling angle, no doubt captured while accenting the wrong syllable of some racially charged invective. A title card in garish purple script announces the name of the video, which loops to a Matthias Grübel soundscape, reverberating through the gallery: *TRUMPED*.

The photo of the video's eponymous subject is interspersed with images, moving and still, as confounding as those slapped along the walls: a distressed-looking cat fades to a windowsill strewn with dying potted plants, more iPhone screenshots, Insta-Thot nudes, and their equally naked precursors from art history. Surveillance footage seeps in for good measure, along with newsreels from the neo-Nazi descent on Charlottesville and disarmingly inoffensive home videos. You're narcotized before the slideshow's mesmerizing loop, inhabiting a media landscape that's eerily familiar: Auder has elevated the ickily banal hypermediation of any "relaxing" afternoon at home, online shopping and swiping through Tinder while CNN drones in the background, to the realm of fine art. In so doing, he leads you to a couple of conclusions: every image in the show is political — even the kids with the shark balloon, even the Instagram photos from Documenta — insofar as it indexes the vulgar ideological conditions of its production; the overwhelming experience of image saturation is a condition unto itself, not unlike a psychedelic trip.



Michel Auder, "TRUMPED" (2018), HD video, color, sound by Matthias Grübel, 8:55 minutes

Auder has been active since the early 1960s, long before the onset of infoglut. This is precisely the magic of his oeuvre: over years of imagining technological change, as the exhibition's [press release](#) puts it, as “an extension of his body” and “an ongoing archive,” Auder has developed a strategy for coping with the rapid change and ramped-up mediation that have now become causes for alarm. In 1991, legendary experimental filmmaker Jonas Mekas wrote an [appreciation](#) of Auder’s “magnificent love affair” with continuous recording, christening him a “voyeur par excellence.” But the voyeurism that Mekas ironically calls, complete with scare quotes, a “sickness,” is actually a form of play that enables Auder to achieve radical intimacy by revealing poetry of details that otherwise go unnoticed.

Whether the contemporary hysteria of image-mediation is a real signal of world’s end or just this generation’s apocalyptic imagination hopped up on Juul fumes and FourLoko, Auder’s work sketches out a coping mechanism that never veers into

## MARTOS GALLERY

reactionary territory or engages with the politics of caps-lock liberal outrage. Rather, it undertakes a far more valuable project: questioning how this saturation might be embraced, how the radical path might actually involve carving out spaces to frolic amid the madness.

Michel Auder: And virtually everything said has been said incorrectly, and it's been said wrong, or it's been covered wrong by the press *continues at Martos Gallery (41 Elizabeth Street, Lower East Side, Manhattan) through August 3.*

June 11, 2018

## 9 Art Events to Attend in New York City This Week

BY THE EDITORS OF ARTNEWS 

FRIDAY, JUNE 15



Exhibition image for "**Michel Auder**: And virtually everything said has been said incorrectly, and it's been said wrong, or it's been covered wrong by the press," 2018, at **Martos Gallery**.

COURTESY THE ARTIST AND MARTOS GALLERY

### Opening: Michel Auder at Martos Gallery

Michel Auder's second solo show with Martos Gallery is titled, in reference to a quote once uttered by Donald Trump, "And virtually everything said has been said incorrectly, and it's been said wrong, or it's been covered wrong by the press." The exhibition will present the artist's new film *TRUMPED* (2018), for which the Chinatown gallery will feature floating walls onto which the piece is projected, as well as a selection of new photographs. Past works by Auder, a veteran of the 1960s experimental film scene, have drawn influence from Jean-Luc Godard and Andy Warhol.

*Martos Gallery, 41 Elizabeth Street, 6–8 p.m.*

# MARTOS GALLERY

VISTAS

W O Y E U R

Since 1969, having shot thousands of hours of videotape that are a diary of his life and a time capsule of New York's downtown scene, MICHEL AUDER reformulates reality through a voyeuristic stance and a poetic style of editing. In this rare 1993 interview by CAROLE ANN KLONARIDES, reprinted here alongside an intimate newly-commissioned series of portraits shot by LULA HYERS in the artist's Brooklyn apartment, he explains his work as eavesdropping in on a universal stream of consciousness.

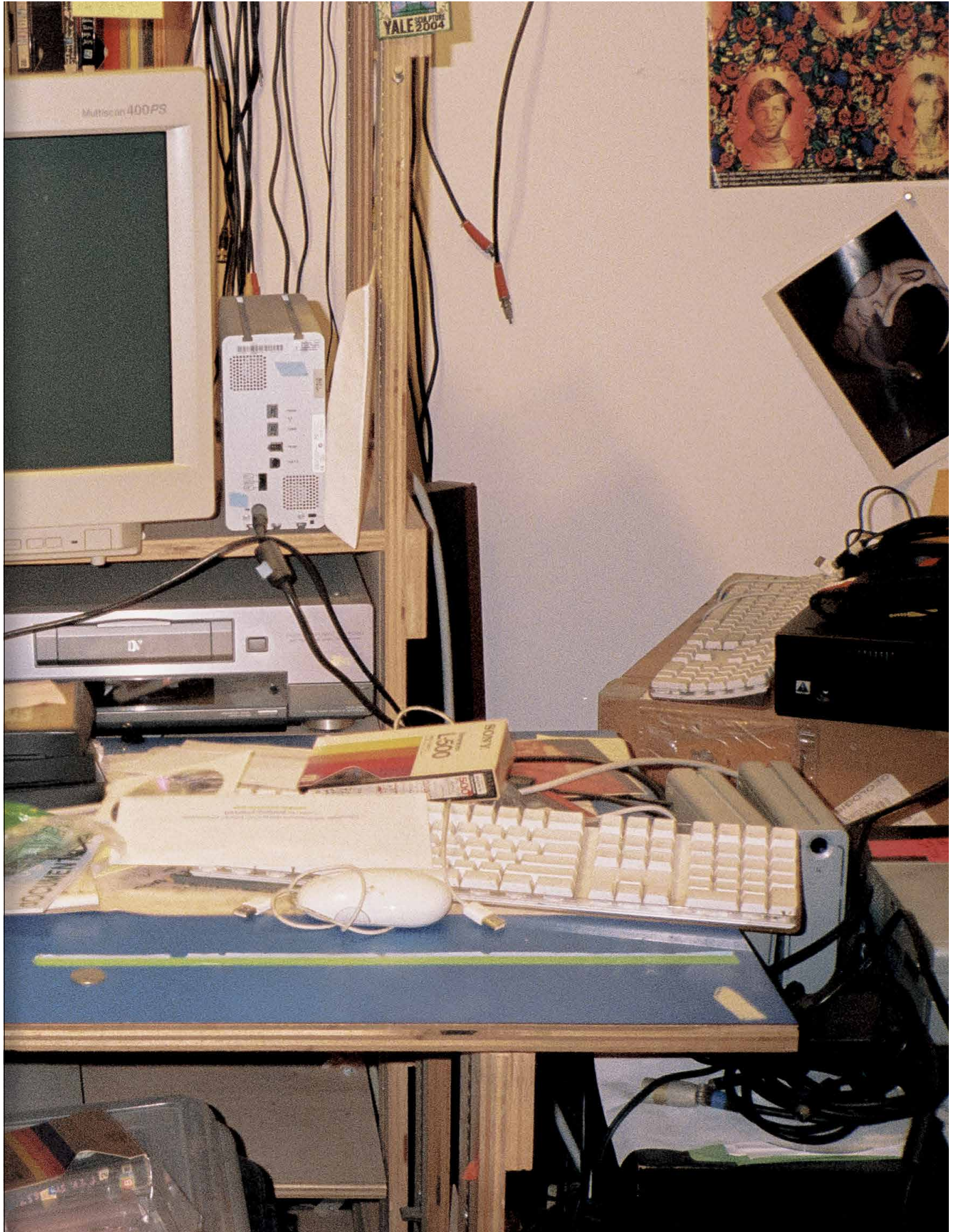
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VISTAS



December 27, 1993: 11:45 AM

Carole Ann Klonarides When you moved from film to video, you began to adapt a more, for lack of a better word, “documentary diaristic” style. Was that through Warhol? Or how do you see that occurring?

Michel Auder When I moved to New York, Warhol had already become a big influence for me. And then I got to be right in the middle of it, around all those people—Viva and the Factory group ... That’s when I started documenting everyone I knew.

CAK What year was this, about?

MA 1969, ’70, ’71, and on.

CAK That was a time when the media was starting to influence alternative film—the idea of *The Celebrity*, *Cinema Vérité*.

MA The Warhol group came to my home—but then other people came to my home too. My life became documented in relation to what I saw or what I didn’t see; I would catch just a little bit of the moment. Of course, you miss most of it. It was not in any way a documentary, not to be related as truth. The work reflects my own feelings. I only expose what I want—and of course, in the process, I also expose what I don’t want. The sum of everything is showing my character and my taste.

CAK Is that why you feel it’s more like writing than documenting?

MA Yeah. That’s where writing comes in.

CAK You told me that for many years, you carried around a camera, and you had it with you so often that people forgot your presence and your taping.

MA I have a camera out with me all the time. When people came to my home, they knew they were stepping into my studio. They’d know I would be shooting them.

CAK Do you see this process as a seamless continuum?

MA I call some of my tapes variations, like a piece of music—a variation of themes. Sometimes the variation is my vision of my world, and sometimes it’s of the world in general: what’s on television, nature, or people close and of interest to me. Those are the three main things I deal with all day long.

CAK By “what’s on television,” do you mean you shoot images off the TV?

MA Right. By shooting off television, I can record what is emphasized by the media at a certain time, what people want you to know. I receive and I shoot it, transforming it in my own way. I’m obsessed by all the violence. I record it and use it in my work.

CAK The media invades a person’s personal environment. The radio, the stereo, the television—they are in your home and a part of your life. What I noticed in your work is that you connect certain information shot off television to nature, and to the family, and to the personal.

MA I like to shoot TV images when I travel. When I go to a hotel, I put on the television, especially in other countries. During the war in Iraq, for three weeks I only worked with TV. I reshot it, took close-ups of things. I have ten hours of footage.

CAK Why do that rather than taping it with a VCR?

MA All my work goes through my camera. I believe that when I shoot something, I give it another life.

CAK Like Warhol, you’re silent. We don’t hear or see you in your tapes. How do you think you are identified through your work?

MA I like to be identified as a voyeur.

CAK You had an interesting mix of people on the tapes. They were poets, writers, actors. Kind of the downtown New York scene, but of a certain kind of that scene.

MA Yeah, the hardcore people.

CAK Now what do you mean by hardcore?

(BREAK IN TAPE)

MA I stopped going to school when I was 17. My father was gone. My reputation is from the streets. I’d go to bars and stuff ... I don’t know how to explain. There was a famous bar in St. Germain des Prés where all the best American jazz players would come and play. They jammed at this place called the *Chat qui Pêche*. The owner, who was always drunk, and a poet, took a liking to me. He tried to fuck me a few times; it didn’t work out, but he became my best friend. He helped me out. He was a father figure to me. If you have Rimbaud as your idol, then you see the kind of life he’s living. You know, Rimbaud was a great artist and a great poet, but he was really fucked up. So I got accepted for being like this myself.

CAK Do you consider that being a Romantic?

MA I did. The artists of the 19th century were my idea of how an artist should be. So I copied that a little bit—and then it caught up with me. By that time, when I was a teenager, everybody was using drugs like zombies, shooting up heroin. I wasn’t touching one fucking drug until I hit 22, you know. When I came to America, I was 25. At that time, I was smoking hashish and opium. I loved opium. In those years, everybody was lying down on the floor and puffing on pipes made of bamboo, smoking liquid opium wherever they got it, like wine. And we just did that all day long... dreaming...

CAK But sometimes you’d pick up the camera and you’d shoot.

MA Right. Shooting was my identity. That was my work. I was, and I am, absolutely convinced that that was and is my job.

CAK Over a twenty-year period, you’ve taped some of the same characters. For example, your daughter is on tape from her birth to college. How does that affect your work, recording something as personal as your own blood, kin? You’re seeing her grow and change through the lens of the camera. How has this affected her?

MA I think it has blurred her memory, and she might resent it sometimes. She has said to me a few times that it’s difficult to see all that past stuff. She believes that’s her life. But let’s face it, whatever I have on videotape of her life is about 2,000 hours. 2,000 hours in twenty-one years is absolutely nothing, time-wise. You know what I mean? It’s only a little drop in the bucket. That’s not reality. Nothing is real if it’s from the camera; context and editing change everything. I see it as a pointing light, inevitably fixed to the time the event was shot. I don’t deal with the material as soon as it’s made; it’s only years later that I can work with it. I store it up. I wait until I can look at it and say, “What was I doing?”

CAK Have any of your subjects resented your control, or the use of them in your work?

MA Not really. With my daughter, I’m releasing material slowly, because as time goes by, and she’s much older, it’s better. She’s on tape masturbating when she was three years old—I figure she can deal with it now. It hasn’t come to the point where I’m asking her permission. My daughter and I are having an interesting new chapter in our life. She’s just written a book, a novel, about me and Viva, her mother.

CAK Oh! She’s turned the tables.

MA Right. I don’t look too good in it.

CAK No? You’ve read it.

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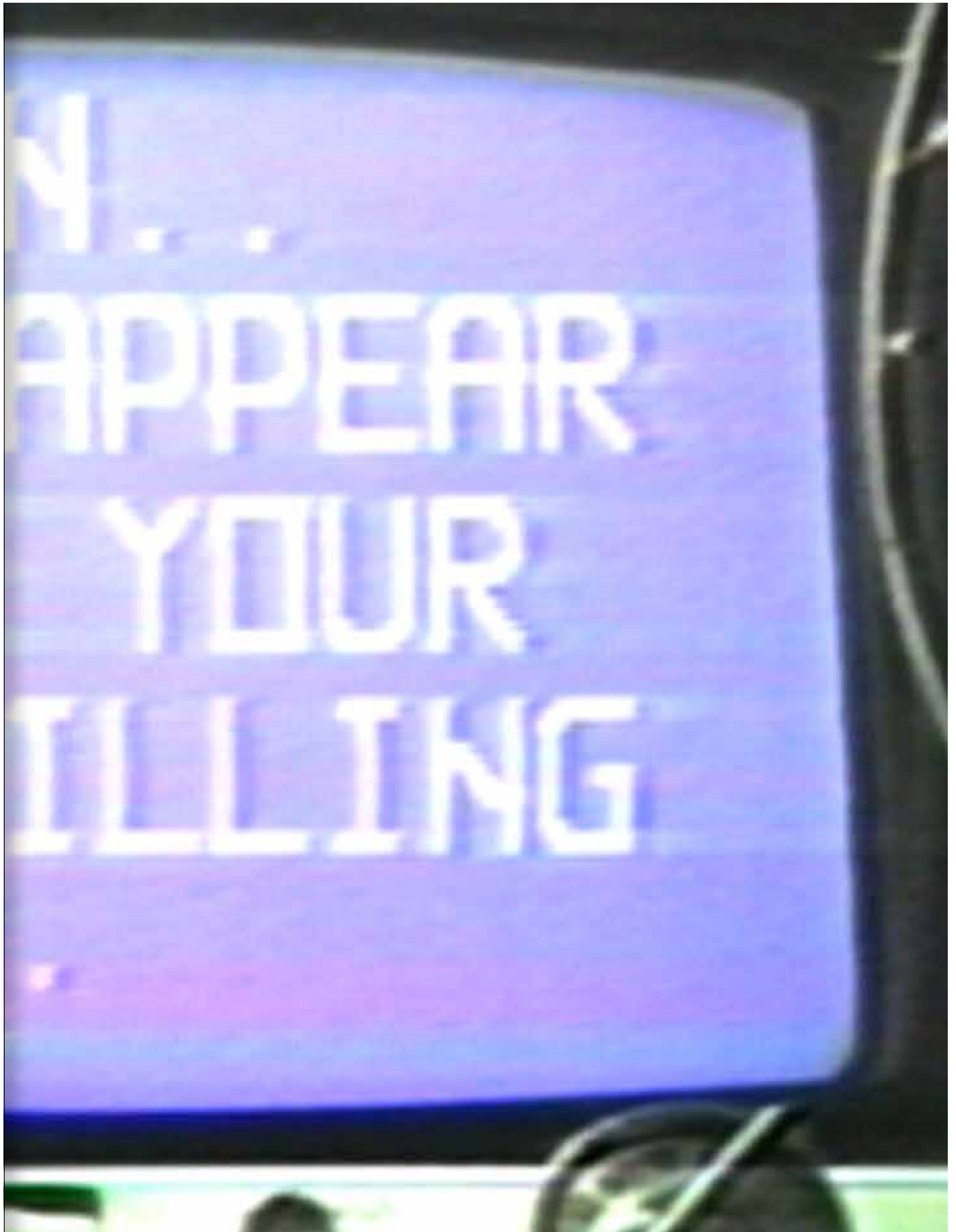




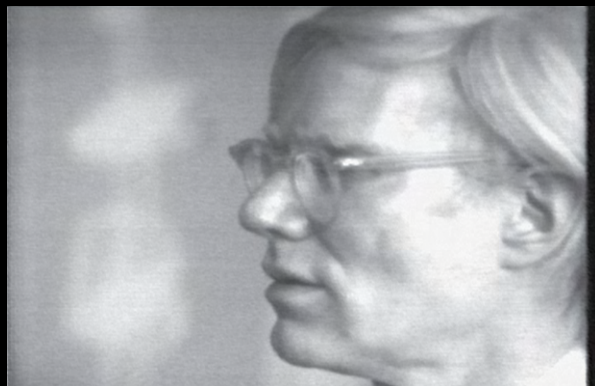
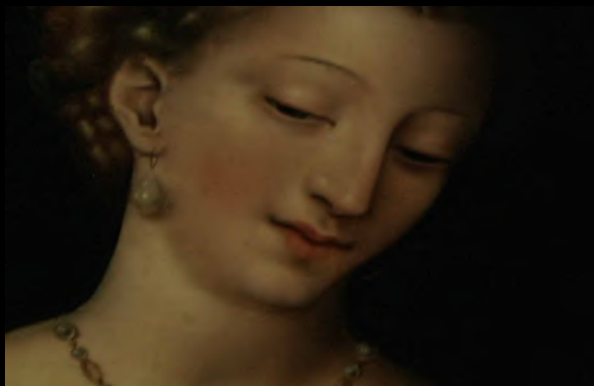
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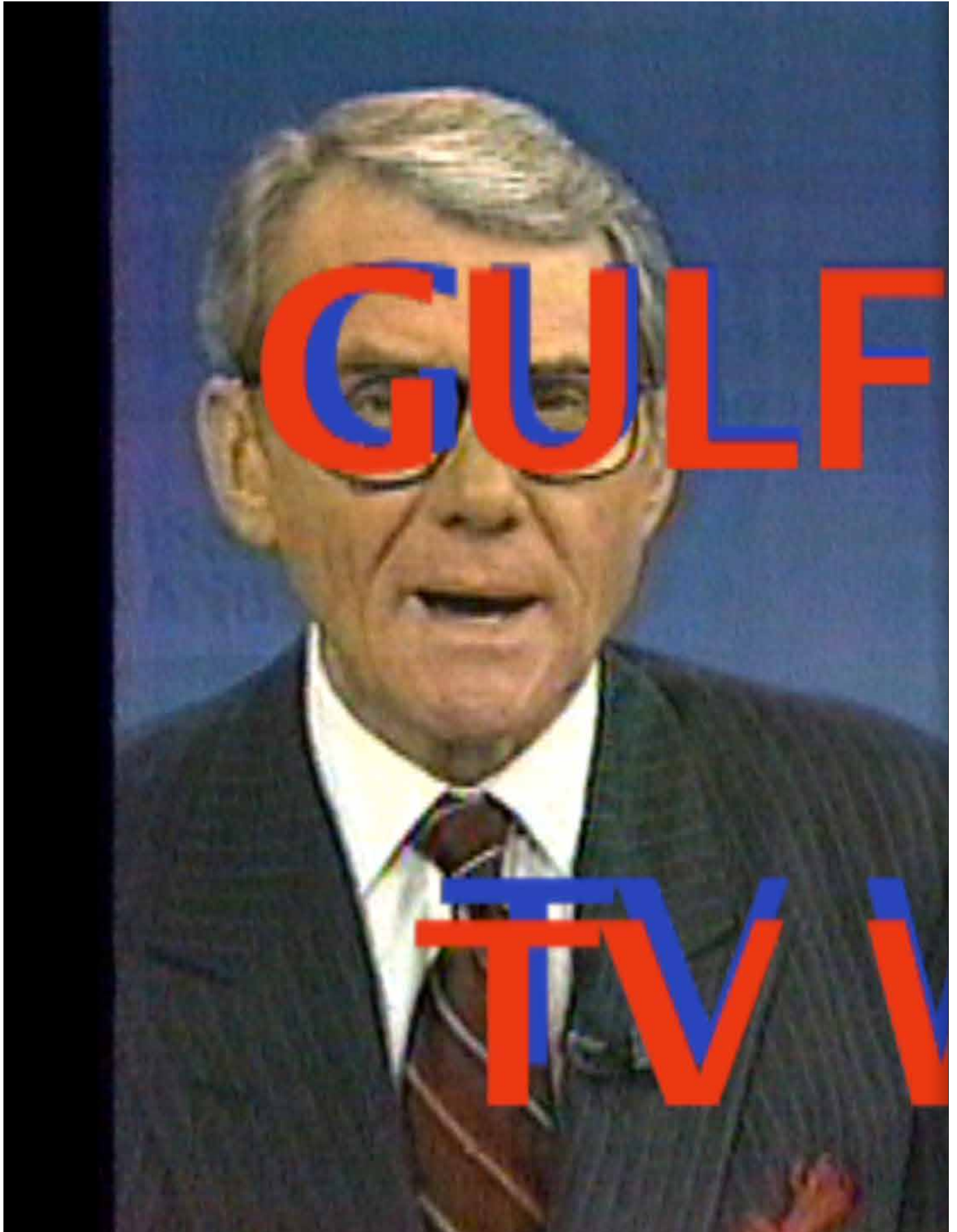






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MA Yeah. She gave it to me. She said “Dad, you’re the first person to read it.” It’s written as a fictional novel, but some of it is true!

CAK Do you see your work as psychological at all? Is it analyzing anything, or is it more, “If it happens, it happens”?

MA I am more like an anthropologist.

CAK What do you mean by that?

MA Well, I observe humankind. I observe man and woman in struggle. That’s the first part of my body of work, up to the taping of my daughter. My daughter is seen in the context of being “a child,” not specifically mine. I hope I reveal how kids behave when no one is looking at them. Because I can almost make myself disappear into the woodwork when the camera begins—

CAK And there was no direction.

MA I’m totally cooperating with her as the voyeur. I don’t tell them what to do. I’m watching them and catching them, like wild animals. It’s the same thing with the grownups. I don’t try to classify them as part of a story; they tell me the story, they talk to each other and look at the camera and say, “Oh that camera, is it on, or not?” Later, in the editing room, I manipulate the footage toward what I want to say.

CAK But some of your images are very beautiful and very aestheticized. I feel that there is an incredible intuitiveness about what you’re capturing of people, but there’s also something very deliberate about what you’re capturing with nature and the non-peopled scenes. When you’re shooting nature, you’re taking more liberties with the way you shoot, and with people, you let them speak, and then take creative license in the post-production. Then you have interviews with artists, where you interview a creative individual over a period of many years.

MA These artists are my friends—they have to be my friends—but I wouldn’t really call them interviews. Alice Neel is talking to me for real. I captured her over a period of six, seven years. I used to go and have breakfast with her at least once a week; I’d take the subway with my camera up to 107th Street and would spend the whole day with her: she would make lunch, or she’d be painting, and I just hung around. We talked about everything. She’d bring me back to reality. She always recharged my batteries, no matter how bad I felt, especially in those years when nothing was happening. I knew she was a great artist, and she would say the same thing about me. She put me in my place when I was complaining and whin-

ing. So friendship is a necessity in the work. I did one with Larry Rivers, but I haven’t put it out yet, it’s not finished. I was living with Larry for four years. And Cindy Sherman, my wife, of course. I’m just looking at her work and shooting things in her studio, but it’s already become a kind of document.

CAK You’re attracted to individuals who are creative in a very specific way. They are very extroverted in their work, and yet they’re kind of social misfits.

MA I need them. I need someone whom I admire, and think is really interesting. I need to be close to them.

CAK But doesn’t that put you in a position of people not realizing who you are and what you contribute, seeing you merely as one who uses these people, a sycophant?

MA I don’t worry about that.

(BREAK IN TAPE)

CAK Do you feel using video is being elusive?

MA I’m seeing something else in what other people see. I create a description of certain feelings that are not often brought up—what’s really going on in the world, what’s always in the back of our heads. What else is there to talk about but life? I don’t know what other subjects there are. I’m not an abstract person; I’m a reality person. So I formulate, and reformulate, and formulate it again in some way that I think exposes my personal views of this world we live in.

CAK You reuse a lot of images: snow, fire, birds. There are also many references to the body. How do you see these recurring images in your work?

MA I guess those are probably counterpoints. If you talk about birds, fire, and snow, those are moments that transform me, that take me out of this world, like when I used to take heroin. I see recurring images in patterns, obsessions. Like the birds—I have some kind of envy about flying. It is an interesting point of view that I’m missing on this planet. Then fire has always been my obsession. When I was growing up, we had a beautiful house; my father couldn’t afford the money to put the coal in the furnace, but there were fireplaces in all the rooms, so I would sleep with fire in the fireplace. I would peek from under my sheets and see the fire send big shadows onto the wall. So I guess that’s maybe where it comes from.

(BREAK IN TAPE)

**CAK** We were talking about the Moroccan tapes, which were done in a very stoned, kind of hippie time. You taped hours and hours of footage and then, twenty years later, went back and edited it into a piece. Of course, now that you're clean, it's a whole different perspective. Can you talk a little bit about the experience of going back and re-editing that material, compared to the experience of "being there" when it was shot?

**MA** I shot the material in 1971, did a first edit in 1976, then a re-edit in 1993. Some think I might be making a mistake by re-editing it from a different perspective, but I'm not destroying the edit I made in 1976. I keep it available. I'm just re-editing the material and making a new work.

**CAK** Recently, when you showed a tape shot in Morocco in the early '70s and re-edited in the late '80s to a student audience, you were criticized for recreating your experience into a homo-erotic piece to be sensational.

**MA** That's right! But I was with homosexuals at the time; they created the ambience, and I recorded it my own way. I focused on the most interesting person in the group, and he started to perform for me. He was the boyfriend (or perhaps the hustler) of a German artist, an extraordinary person. He acted out a whole fucking theme: first, by killing a seagull, gathering herbs and then cooking it in this instinctual way that is about survival; and secondly, by the on-camera seduction. I'm describing only their behavior, not mine.

**CAK** Does the theoretical deconstruction of culture and sexuality affect the way you tape and view things?

**MA** Hopefully it hasn't. "Politically correct" is only politically correct as the day goes by. It doesn't matter how correct one is, it won't be correct later. I'm politically correct only with myself. It's a readjustment day by day; there's no formula.

**CAK** Now the last tape you made, *Magnetic Notes: Voyage To The Center Of The Phone Lines* (1993), is video shot off a bluff, looking out at the ocean and nature where you were in rehab. The audio was collected for over a year from conversations on car phones. This is a very different tape from what you've ever made before.

**MA** Well, that description you just gave is not what happened at all. But I like that. I like that dream of rehabbing by looking out of my window. In reality, rehab is a hospital for thirty days with no views.



**CAK** I thought that's what you told me.

**MA** Maybe I did. No, I was coming out of rehab—we rented a house and it was my first day out. I got very lucky. I stayed in this beautiful house for two months, watching the ocean all day long while I tried not to think about using heroin again. I had done landscapes before when I was on heroin too, but it just so happens these landscapes were made then. But I like the way you describe it. I like people to project their own story when they see my work. The phone lines, the sound part of the tape, is pretty much the way I do my work. I set up my traps in the phone lines, like a photographer for *National Geographic* trying to take a picture of mountain lions. I'm just setting my nets and catching fragments of conversation that reveal something about people, about us.

**CAK** But these people are not invisible like you are.

**MA** I'm not trying to expose the individual, or their privacy. I'm eavesdropping in on a universal stream of consciousness: the fears, the sadness, the state of things, the darkness of people. I feel I'm close to them.

**CAK** Why did you use this as the audio track on the landscapes?

**MA** I kept playing with the audio tapes for two years, because I have a lot of them. I tried different images over them and nothing fucking worked. One day, I started working with landscapes. You know, nature is beautifully boring. Nature and electronic signals are

crossing all the time, but it's invisible and silent. You don't hear unless you have those trap machines, but it's all there around you. I felt that was the connection. And that's how it started. I scanned the phone conversation and recorded it on tape; I recorded thirty one-hour tapes and selected bits of conversation. It's mostly very sad, very intense.

**CAK** What about Warhol? Did he support you?

**MA** Andy was kind of taken aback by me. He was waiting to see if I would fail or survive. He saw me soaring in 1970—I got a movie produced and was in the press a lot. And then I smooshed myself up into almost nothing by 1975. He was always nice to me, and friendly. But Andy was always nice and friendly to everybody, so it's hard to tell what he thought. I was very close to him in the early '70s because of Viva. We used to see him almost every day. And then as life took its twists and turns, we had my daughter and went to Morocco for a year. By then, I had acquired my own identity, and I couldn't really get too close to him, because he would turn you into one of his minions.

**CAK** You've been involved with some pretty powerful women, too: Viva and then Cindy Sherman. How do you think that's affected your work?

**MA** Greatly. When I met Cindy, I didn't realize she was so powerful. I guess she never realized it either. Or maybe she did. I don't know. You know, it's been ten years we've been together. There are few contemporary artists that I think are better than me, but she's one of the best. I aspire to reach her level. **K**

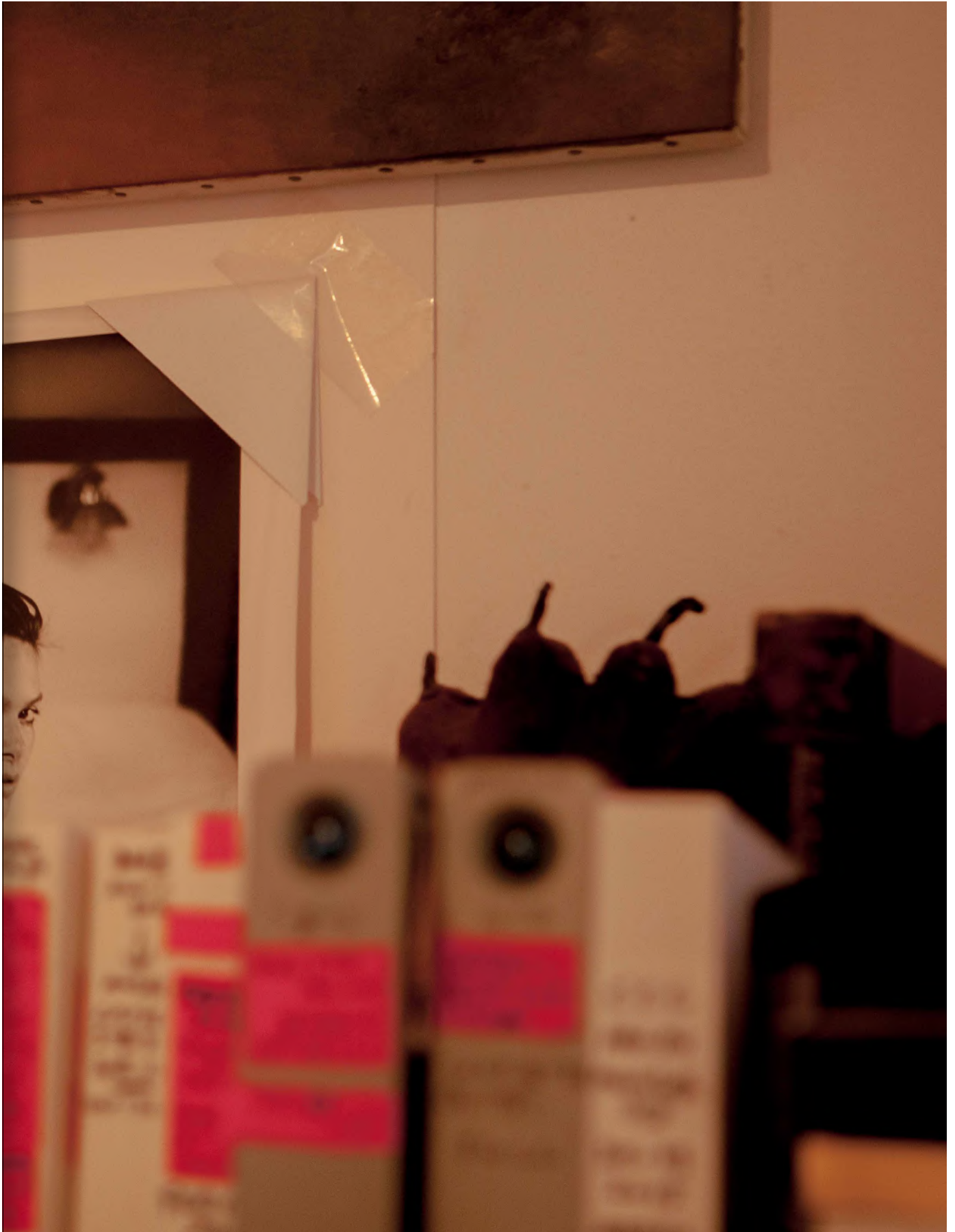


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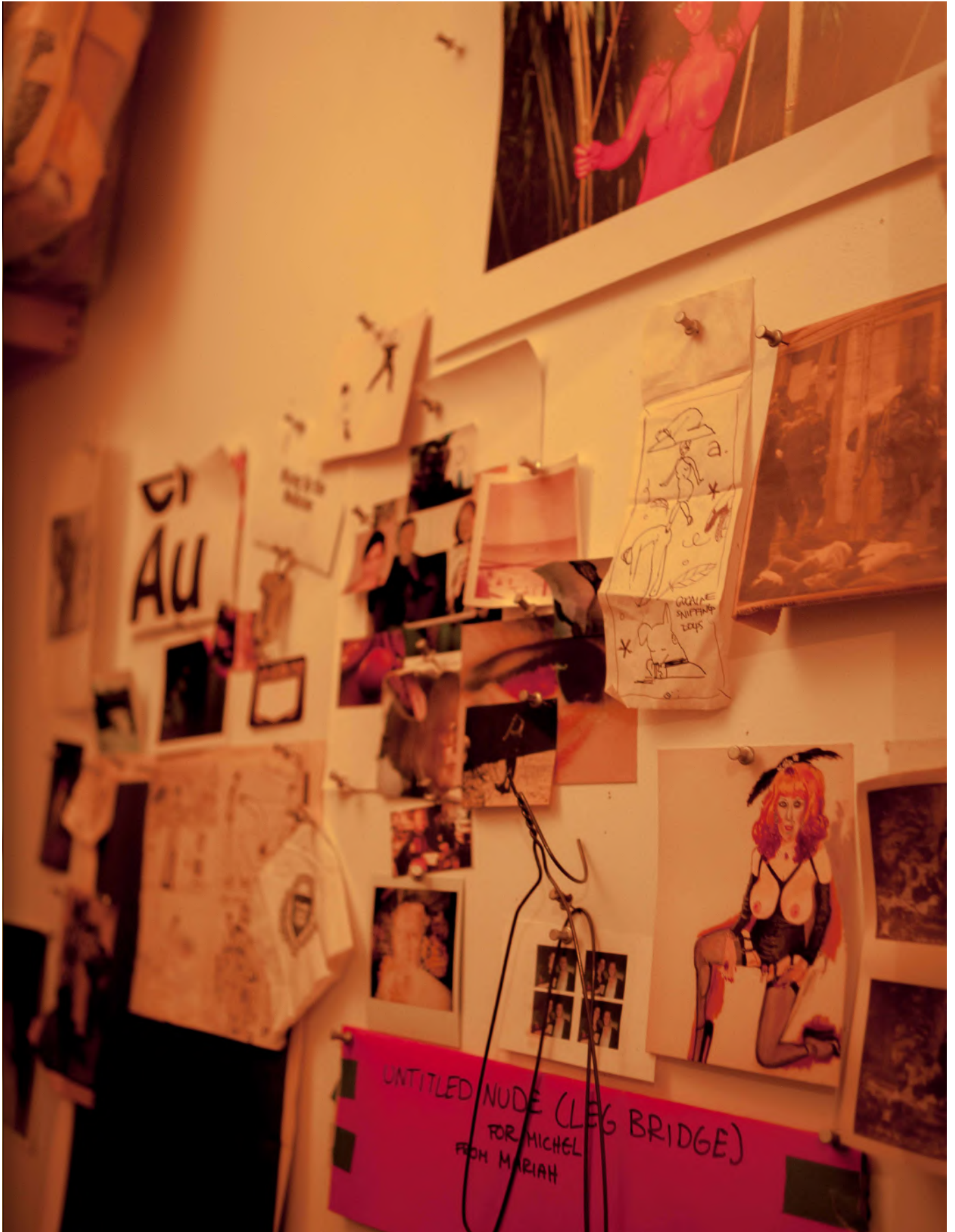








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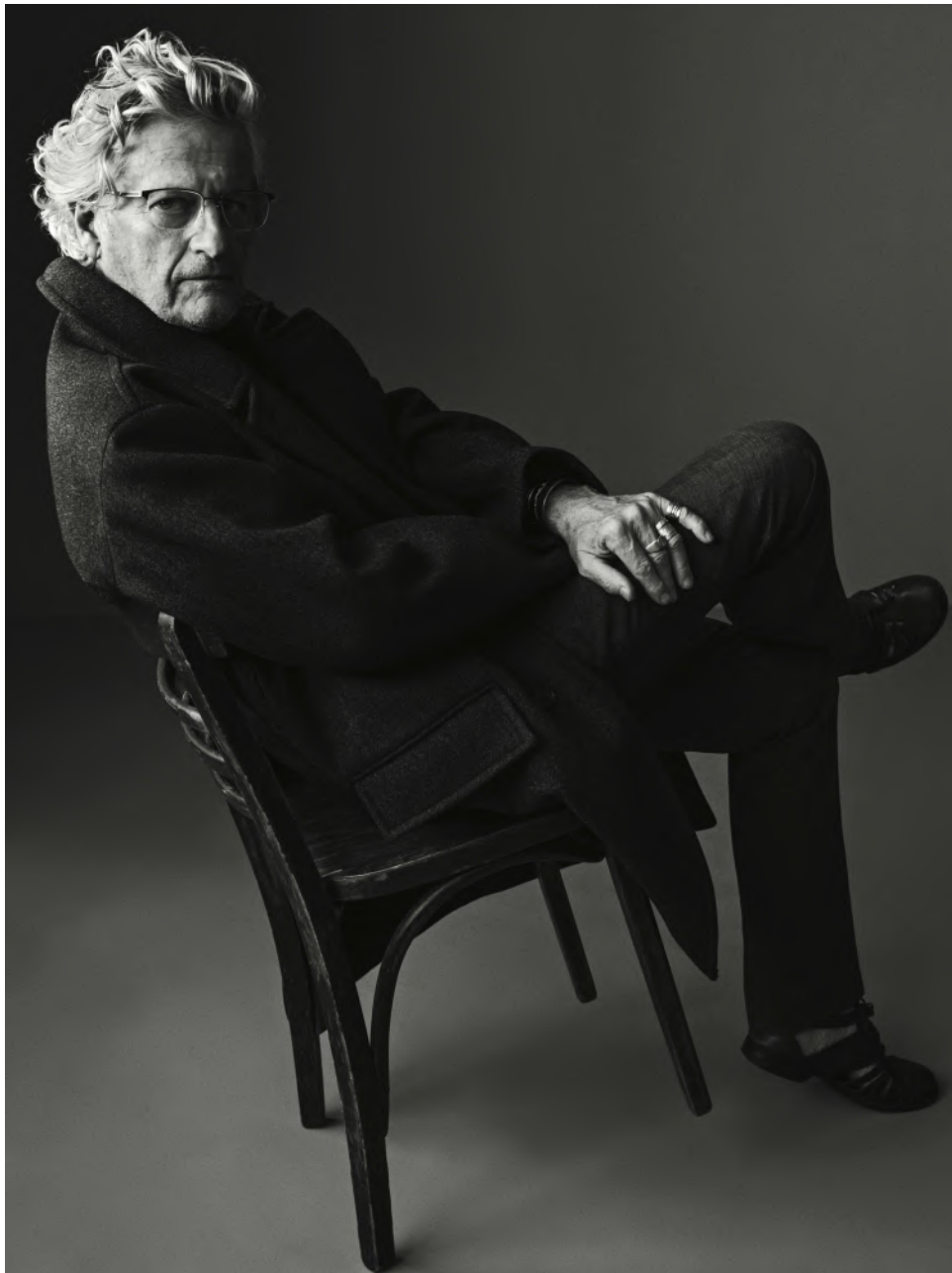
Interview

November 7, 2017

# The New York video artist who caught Warhol's Factory on tape

By **Lia Gangitano**

Photographed by **Sebastian Kim**



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Michel Auder has seen the world. Raised in the north of France (like in *Coal Miner's Daughter*, as he once described his solitary childhood), the 73-year-old artist began his career as a commercial fashion photographer in Paris. He spent a brief time as a combat photographer in Algeria before garnering support as a filmmaker from the leftist film collective Zanzibar Group in the late 1960s. But it was at a screening of Andy Warhol's *The Chelsea Girls* in 1968 where a meeting with the pop artist emboldened his own self-taught approach to multimedia art—and indirectly introduced him to the Warhol superstar Viva, whom he married in Las Vegas soon after.

Some of Auder's early works have been lost forever; many, however, have survived. In his experimental 1970 film *Cleopatra*, the Egyptian queen's zoo has been transposed into a pet enthusiast's room at New York's Chelsea Hotel; the desert is made of Manhattan snow; and characters speed by on snowmobiles. Filmed on 16mm and operatic in scale, Auder's version of the Cleopatra story foreshadowed his decades of making art out of his own lived experience. Another of Auder's early films, *Keeping Busy* (1969), responded to Warhol's blank, impassive filmmaking style with a celebratory "home movie" of superstars on holiday. The title suggests one of the artist's manic talents; together, his works create a cohesive structure out of a flurry of uncomposed moments, out of the disorder of time, out of all of the things that dissolve when you're living your life. Auder's works are records of doing just that.

When we met as Lower East Side neighbors in 1998, Auder was living at 188 Orchard Street, where he made a series of work by the same name; the *188 Orchard Street* (2001) photographs were meticulously culled from 40 hours of intimate scenarios shot on video by the artist in his own apartment. His photographic works, like his film practice, rely on rigorous editing from an extensive amount of material. Internalizing the influences of his early contemporaries, ranging from the reductive tendencies of Warhol to the naturalistic, intimate styles of Frederick Wiseman and Robert Frank, Auder developed a unique signature that fluctuates between closeness and distance, between insider and outlaw. Auder has, perhaps, always wanted it both ways, and found that it was possible using the medium of video in the late '60s and '70s: he could record everything around him and do something with it later. Maybe.

LIA GANGITANO: You just showed your latest work, *The Course of Empire*, at Documenta 14. The installation is a compilation of statements and texts you've been working on for a while, right?

MICHEL AUDER: I'd been working on it for a whole year. They gave me an abandoned train station in which to show the work, so the space was enormous. My idea was to use very big screens. And you have to come up really close to read the text. If you look at it from far away, it doesn't make the same sense. The main text is from the geographer and

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explorer Alexander von Humboldt. Basically, it's from his time exploring what is now South America, when it was still being colonized by the Spanish. He described how the slaves were being treated and the way the colonizers were acting, as well as the temperature of the ocean, the height of the mountains, all the animals he observed. The piece is a way of critiquing historical development and our moral or spiritual position in the world.

GANGITANO: Some might think this is a departure for you. There's a general misperception that your work tends to be observational or voyeuristic and that it comes directly out of your own life.

AUDER: I don't see my work as being all that personal. I've used my personal experience in the world, of course, or at least my way of looking at the world. But I think that's changed as I've gotten older. This piece is more a statement about "the course of empire," a title I took from the Hudson River School painter Thomas Cole. He did five paintings that trace the course of empire [*The Savage State* (1834), *The Pastoral or Arcadian State* (1834), *The Consummation of Empire* (1835-36), *Destruction* (1836), *Desolation* (1836)]. It was his way to criticize the time he was living in. In the last painting, everyone is killing each other. It was actually the curator of Documenta 14, Adam Szymczyk, who introduced me to Cole's series a few years ago. He thought there were a lot of similarities with my earlier pieces.

GANGITANO: Yes, like how your work goes back to 1968 when you shot the Sorbonne student protests [this footage has been lost]. A lot of people in the United States are in a state of shock today that their government suddenly hates them or wants them to die. But you've experienced that before. You've charted that course of mayhem.

AUDER: Yeah, but it's still frightening, the people who Trump has brought to the surface. That hatred has always existed in the United States, it's not something new, but now it's supported by the government. It seems like it's only going to get stronger and stronger.

GANGITANO: I've learned a lot about human nature from your work over the decades—sometimes even the less attractive aspects of certain people. Like your piece *Chelsea Girls With Andy Warhol*, where Viva has just had your daughter, Alex, and Andy doesn't want to visit for various reasons.

AUDER: Right. That was made starting in 1971 when my daughter was born, and we lived in the Chelsea Hotel. I was introduced to Andy through Viva. Andy would call Viva every day.

GANGITANO: And you were recording those phone calls.

AUDER: We would record them and so would Andy. We set up a scene where Brigid [Berlin] called Andy and said, "We're taping you, and Viva is here." Viva had just had the baby four days earlier, and there's a not-very-nice segment of Andy talking about her. But that's real life. You sometimes say things over the phone to friends that you don't really mean.

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GANGITANO: It's certainly not a glamorous view. But it does reveal an aspect of his personality, even if it's that Warhol, with his questionable views, was such a product of his time.

AUDER: He had a lot of questionable views. *[laughs]*

GANGITANO: But that was a big part of your work—you weren't seeking out material. It was there around you.

AUDER: Yeah, it flowed in. The ordinariness became, in a way, a revelation. It also shows how little people have changed from the 1970s to now.

GANGITANO: When I moved to New York in 1997, you were one of the first people I met. You, Rene Ricard, and Taylor Mead, who was living across the street on Ludlow. It still had that feeling of all these legendary figures being around in a really normal way. Do you feel like New York has changed a lot?

AUDER: Well, I hope there are young artists moving to the city and doing exciting things. Or maybe they're doing interesting things now in the corners of the dark web. I don't know. I'm 73, and I am not really looking to handle that world right now. I'm just trying to live the final years of my life. *[laughs]* New York has definitely changed, but the whole world has changed. It's almost like we're back in the Middle Ages, where people with money live in cities like they are these protected castles and only leave them to travel to the coast of Italy or a nice town in Mexico. I moved out to Brooklyn after living in Manhattan for 40 years. I remember being 19 or 20 and people telling me that the world wasn't like it used to be. And I'd be like, "Oh yeah, it isn't like it was during World War II!"

GANGITANO: One of the things that you capture in your work is how New York has physically changed. I'm thinking particularly of your video *Portrait of Alice Neel* [1976-82], in which you show everywhere from the mayor's mansion to the streets of Harlem.

AUDER: Alice and I became friends in 1975, which wasn't that long before her death. I used to visit her once a week until she got too sick. I filmed her all the time because she was an incredibly talkative person. She had so many opinions on an incredible array of subjects. And what was really special was that she allowed me to film her while she painted and while people were posing for her. We also went on vacation together to Bermuda. A collector who was the heir to General Motors or something was a friend of hers and he'd invited her down. I also accompanied her to a few of her talks in Maine and Philadelphia. I'm happy that film is getting a new audience these days.

GANGITANO: Was Alice encouraging of your work?

AUDER: She gave me the sense that I wasn't a complete loser because, first of all, she was interested in video. So she would watch a lot of my work. I'd bring video to her studio, and she'd watch it with interest. She also acted in some of my video work. She was encouraging at a time when I was extremely discouraged. I felt like I was going nowhere. There really



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weren't many outlets for video back then. Alice would always speak about how, in the early '60s, she sold her work on the street in the Village. It took her a long time to be taken seriously as well—and it really didn't happen until late in her life. In that film I did, you can see that her studio is pretty dilapidated. She was still just getting by, cooking on a burner while pigeons were crashing into her window. She lived in that apartment on 127th Street for 20 years.

GANGITANO: There was a different idea back then of what it meant to be a successful artist. It's interesting that you used the art world itself as your material.

AUDER: I'm in the art world so I use the art world a lot—or art world people as actors. I've also used television to criticize what I see on television. And now a lot of my work is made from the internet and a lot of it is made on my phone. I tend to use the technology that appears in my life, that is on hand and available to me. Technology changes so much that it has forced me to adapt. I remember I would have to scramble so much when I was working with reel-to-reel film. You don't have to scramble like that when you're working on digital. If the machines had stayed the same, I'd probably be more refined in my practice, the way a painter is. But I keep jumping along with technology.

GANGITANO: You're using self-obsolcescing tools.

AUDER: Some of what we have in 2017 I wanted desperately in 1970 because working with tape and those old machines would really slow me down. I would have to concentrate so hard to get the effect I wanted. It was painful. It's still painful. *[laughs]*

GANGITANO: One of my favorite pieces is *Viva Book Signing* [1970]. For that, you probably have a Sony Portapak or some large camera, and Viva is introducing you to people, and the camera is going up and down as you shake hands with people. You were basically using that large, heavy camera like an iPhone. The gesture is not so different.

AUDER: For me, it's more about how you put the footage together than the technology, because the filming is just the form. But, yes, putting that material together was not easy. Now when I go to an opening and pull out my iPhone, there are 20 other people right next to me with their iPhones out. I have to trust myself that I can bring something back home that I can use and that fits my vocabulary.

GANGITANO: In your early work, you tended to cast your friends—Cookie Mueller, Gary Indiana, Taylor Mead, Eric Bogosian—in loosely scripted roles.

AUDER: I always chose talkative people. And Viva, who was my first wife—we started making films together because she was extraordinarily creative. I was drawn to those people who tended to talk or act differently. The nice thing about using your friends as actors is they trust you. I wouldn't use footage of people that was destructive to them.

GANGITANO: I know you're doing the visuals for an upcoming play [*On the Royal Road: The Burgher King*, written by Elfriede Jelinek and directed by Falk Richter, at the

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Schauspielhaus Hamburg]. Have you worked in theater before?

AUDER: Not really. Not since maybe the '60s when I did some production work for an English theater group.

GANGITANO: Have you been going back through your archives?

AUDER: I've been trying to, but my studio isn't big enough to engage in too much at once. I need a bigger studio with two or three stations. I'm supposed to be working on this play, but I keep getting distracted by the archive. I actually have a piece up now for a show on Warhol in Munich. It's a work called *1967* [2015], which has four screens and plays this footage I shot in the late '60s that I recently found in my studio. There's footage of Andy filming in the Factory, and Brigid Berlin is making tit prints in our room at the Chelsea, and there's Viva in Morocco on vacation, and there's Pierre Clémenti. There are also parts from my film *Cleopatra* [1970]. *1967* is playing in a special room at the Brandhorst Museum with a guard at the entrance to keep the children away. [*laughs*]

GANGITANO: I guess re-sampling from your archive is built into your practice. Nothing is ever final or off-limits, like using pieces from *Cleopatra*.

AUDER: Right, except that the part I used from *Cleopatra* was actually cut from the original film because the Cannes Film Festival wouldn't let me show it. It's a scene where Gerard Malanga is masturbating. Cannes invited me and Viva to show *Cleopatra* in 1970, but when we arrived, they told us that scene was too graphic. So I took a pair of scissors and clipped that part out, rolled it up, and put it in my pocket.

GANGITANO: And that's the film you found? That's amazing. You never know what you're going to find in your clothes. So *1967* is comprised mostly of outtakes from your other works?

AUDER: I wouldn't call them outtakes, but they were left over from editing other works. It was all the stuff from '67, which is why I called it that.

GANGITANO: Didn't you make a work a few years ago based on James Baldwin?

AUDER: Yeah, in 2015. I'd known Baldwin since I was 17. He was in Paris and I was hanging around in the same places. We were both friends with a guy who ran a bar that was very famous for American jazz—free jazz it was called at the time. Baldwin hung out in the bar there. I didn't know him that well because he was fairly reserved, but I was always aware of his presence. So I finally made a piece about him where he's discussing how the American Dream was created at the expense of the "American Negro." It's from his debate with William F. Buckley Jr. in the '60s. I had text by him in *Empire*, too, but in the end, I went with Humboldt's description of the state of slavery in the 18th century. I did this other piece in Berlin recently where I play a "liberal American gentleman farmer." For that, we got guns, cows, chickens—everything. And then, suddenly, in comes that Leonard Cohen song "Everybody Knows." You know where he sings, "Everybody knows the war is

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over / Everybody knows the good guys lost ...” And then it cuts to a televised debate with Baldwin.

GANGITANO: Have you shown it?

AUDER: Only once, at midnight in the middle of winter at an enormous old-fashioned theater in Berlin. But I’ve never shown it again. Maybe it’s time.

*LIA GANGITANO IS A NEW YORK-BASED GALLERIST, WRITER, AND CURATOR, AND THE FOUNDER OF THE LOWER EAST SIDE ART SPACE PARTICIPANT INC.*



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## A Tale of Two Cities

On documenta 14 in Athens and Kassel

BY JÖRG HEISER



The jury of eight international museum directors that, in 2013, selected Adam Szymczyk as documenta 14's artistic director arguably chose him over his five competitors because he proposed that the quinquennial should take place in Athens as well as Kassel. In the wake of the Greek economic crisis, the pitch was bold and promising. Its ambition to expand to another country spoke to the documenta institution – a limited liability company funded by the city of Kassel and the state of Hesse, as well as the German Federal Cultural Foundation – and its image of itself as the world's leading exhibition of contemporary art. The pitch also warded off any anxieties the institution may have had about being provincial and reflected its desire to demonstrate a sense of having confronted Germany's past by reaching out to the world. This was not a new idea: Okwui Enwezor – director of documenta 11 in 2002 – held collateral events in numerous places, including St Lucia and Lagos, while Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, director of DOCUMENTA (13) in 2012, did the same in Kabul and Cairo.

All of these desires and anxieties dramatically culminated this April in Athens with the opening of documenta 14. At the press conference, Szymczyk spoke about the show's title 'Learning from Athens': 'The great lesson is that there are no lessons,' he reasoned, and went on to say that 'unlearning everything we believe to know is the best beginning'. Citing Gayatri Chakravorty

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Spivak as a reference in his essay for the documenta 14 reader, Szymczyk made it clear that he knows where the notion stems from. However, in her ground-breaking essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' (1985), Spivak's concept of 'unlearning' isn't a woolly one – it's very specifically about post-colonial intellectuals understanding 'their privilege as their loss'. The theorist believes that you have to learn to see your entitled position not as an advantage but as a hindrance if you want to speak to – rather than about – the people whose marginalization you seek to critique. In documenta's case, its privileged position allowed a €38-million German mega-art-show to descend upon a Greek city in such deep financial crisis that – until the exhibition arrived – it couldn't afford to open its recently built National Museum of Contemporary Art (EMST).

Although EMST was one of the main documenta venues, in the press conference, Szymczyk advised the audience not to 'go to the four main venues and make your judgment on the show' but to see the exhibition 'as a geography, by areas'. With 47 venues and a fairly useless guide, this was easier said than done. I inadvertently arrived two hours early for a performance at the small Archaeological Museum of Piraeus, but happily spent the time looking at their collection of breathtakingly intricate ancient bronze sculptures. Then, the performance began: *Collective Exhibition for a Single Body* (all works 2017 unless otherwise stated) was conceived by documenta 14's co-curator Pierre Bal-Blanc and choreographer Kostas Tsioukas. It involved inviting a dozen artists from the show to each suggest a small movement for one part of the body that was then performed by three dancers. With a kind of detached pathos, the performers made slow, exaggerated movements amidst the venerable statues – and, I'm sorry to say, it felt like a lazy Tino Sehgal rip-off.



Khvay Samnang, *Preah Kunlong (The Way of the Spirit)*, 2017, installation view at EMST, Athens, with live performance and choreographer Nget Rady. Courtesy and photograph: the artist

But at least I actually witnessed the performance: other sites and events were harder to find. The plea not to judge the show on its main venues turned out to be an excuse for the inexplicable slackness of a multimillion-euro institution, its artistic director and his international team of a dozen curators and curatorial advisers. Often, not even the most basic directions and information – such as the artist’s name or the title and date of the work – were supplied. With over 160 contemporary artists from around the globe showing both in Athens and Kassel, plus historic work by about another 100 artists, it was a lot to organize – but there were years to prepare for it. It might have been easier to accept such unprofessionalism if it had been the result of the documenta team’s energy being absorbed by creating experimental and lively collaborations with Athenians and their city. Instead, there seemed to be a real estrangement from the local art and intellectual scene. In a conversation published by *art-agenda* in June, the former Greek finance minister Yanis Varoufakis put it bluntly: ‘documenta supposedly came to Greece to spend, but

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instead they sucked up every single resource available for the local art scene. The few resources that Greece's private and public sectors make available to Greek artists, like the Aegean Airways sponsorship, went to documenta. The Athens municipality gave documenta a building for free. Many hotels donated rooms for free. Buildings at the Athens School of Fine Arts were made available for free.'

The Spanish philosopher and transgender activist Paul B. Preciado organized the extensive public programme. Entitled 'The Parliament of Bodies', it brought together hundreds of speakers, including great thinkers such as Jack Halberstam and Antonio Negri addressing anti-fascist and trans-feminist issues. From September 2016, talks took place at Parko Eleftherias (Freedom Park), in a small building which, between 1967 and 1974, under the far-right Greek junta, was the military police headquarters. In a second building behind it (which today houses the Museum of Anti-dictatorial and Democratic Resistance), countless people were detained and tortured. On the documenta website, there is some acknowledgement of this history, along with a statement explaining that the Greek architect and artist Andreas Angelidakis's *Demos* (2016) for the former military police headquarters was a response to it. While it remains unclear how 74 blocks of foam seating addresses a history of tyranny and torture, the title 'The Parliament of Bodies' raises further questions. As Preciado has explained on numerous occasions, it refers to the people who gathered on the streets of Athens in July 2015 to protest the Greek parliament's acceptance of an EU bailout, despite the results of a referendum rejecting it. Preciado's reference strikes me as politically naive. As the recent rise of nationalist-populist movements has proven, elected parliaments are exactly what are under attack from the far right and 'bodies' on the street are not automatically emancipative – what about far-right mobs? In her recent book *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (2015), Judith Butler explores the implications of street protest in the wake of the 2011–13 uprisings in the Middle East and Turkey: she discusses an 'assembly of bodies' and how their 'acting in concert' can call into question the powers that be. But what does it mean to adopt this kind of terminology for a space associated with state-sanctioned torture?

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Michel Auder, *The Course of Empire*, 2017, installation view at KulturBahnhof, Kassel; photograph: Jasper Kettner

Having been asked not to judge documenta 14 by the four main venues, it's ironic that the best works were displayed in them. In the Athens Conservatoire (Odeion), amongst the works of 49 artists shown, Hiwa K's video *Pre-Image (Blind as the Mother Tongue)* was a highlight: the artist retraced parts of the route of his flight from Syria to Europe via Greece while balancing a pole on his head, attached to which were downward-facing rear-view-mirrors: a simple, effective sculptural device allowing him to see himself in fragments. For her video *Manuscript* – which was screened in a narrow recess – the artist Eva Stefani paired historic film footage with a soundtrack that was often hilariously at odds with what was visible. For example, a silent film sequence of leap-frogging men is set to an eerie electronic soundtrack: it's an unexpected clash of elements that stimulates your mind and emotions. This was the opposite effect of trying to grasp the sheer volume of framed documents and vitrines on display: a seemingly endless array of photographs and musical and choreographic scores from the 1960s and '70s turned the very real liberations of bodies and eyes and ears, by figures such as composers Jani Christou and Iannis Xenakis, into muted examples of vintage expression.

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The exhibition at the Athens School of Fine Art – which included the work of 29 artists – raised questions about how the curatorial team actually worked together. Artur Żmijewski's intentionally offensive, silent, black and white film *Glimpse* (2016–17) involves the artist interacting with undocumented immigrants and asylum seekers in Calais and Berlin's Tempelhof airport. The artist finger-paints one migrant's black skin with white pigment and presents another with a new pair of shoes. As in many of his works, Żmijewski sadistically performs insulting acts in order to trigger the viewer's sense of guilt: it's a tired trick. In adjacent rooms were Olaf Holzapfel's blandly decorative straw and hay reliefs *Zaun* (Fence) and Bonita Ely's mildly entertaining fantasy objects from an ecologically dystopian techno-trash future (*Plastikus Progressus: Memento Mori*). If there was any method to this mess, it escaped me. It seemed as if the curators were less intent on creating meaningful narrative arcs or formal constellations than in fighting over which of 'their' artists might be shown in the best location. The result was a thick cloud of diffusion. What was sold as a clear intention – unlearning – simply came across as a lack of even the most basic grasp of good curation.

At the Benaki Museum – Pireos Street Annexe, the most arresting work of the 18 artists shown was the 70-minute documentary *Somniloquies* by Véréna Paravel and Lucien Castaing-Taylor. Blurry, slow, close-up shots of sleeping, naked bodies are set to original audio footage of the aspiring songwriter Dion McGregor, who found fame in the 1960s as a sleepwalker when he was recorded by a room-mate: in clear and witty queer argot, he recounts the kind of perverse scenarios that would make a Lacanian blush. The film struck a chord because here was desire itself, talking candidly and humorously, not (yet) corralled into exemplary representation and stratagems of self-positioning. A highlight amongst the works by 82 artists on display at EMST was Hans Eijkelboom's video *The Street & Modern Life, Birmingham, UK* (2014). As still images slowly move across the screen, it becomes apparent that Eijkelboom grouped his anonymous protagonists by their clothes and accessories: checked jumpers, animal motifs, holding a plastic cup, hijabs, etc. As each picture gives way to the next, this droll vision of street fashion thwarts the traditional categories of class, gender, race and age.



Marta Minujín, *El Partenón de libros (The Parthenon of Books)*, 1983, documentation of construction, Buenos Aires.  
Photograph: Marta Minujín Archive

In the audio-video installation *Interstices* (2001–03), by the great electronic musician and transgender activist Terre Thaemlitz, majestic waves of digital glitches fill the space. These sounds function like metaphors for the power of real ‘interstitial’ lives being lived between the dominant either/ors of identity. Queer identities are too frequently represented in the mainstream world of cable channels as a form of freak show dressed up as family therapy. But in Thaemlitz’s take, one moment you hear the voice of a patronizing TV doctor, the next you see a blowjob silhouetted against a bright pink glow. I imagine the late French philosopher and artist Pierre Klossowski would have liked this work, so presenting his 1970 collaboration with filmmaker Pierre Zucca nearby made sense. The latter’s black and white photographs of bourgeois sexual decadence are apt illustrations of Klossowski’s book *La Monnaie vivante* (Living Currency, 1970), in which he analyzes capitalism as a realm where fantasy and desire circulate.

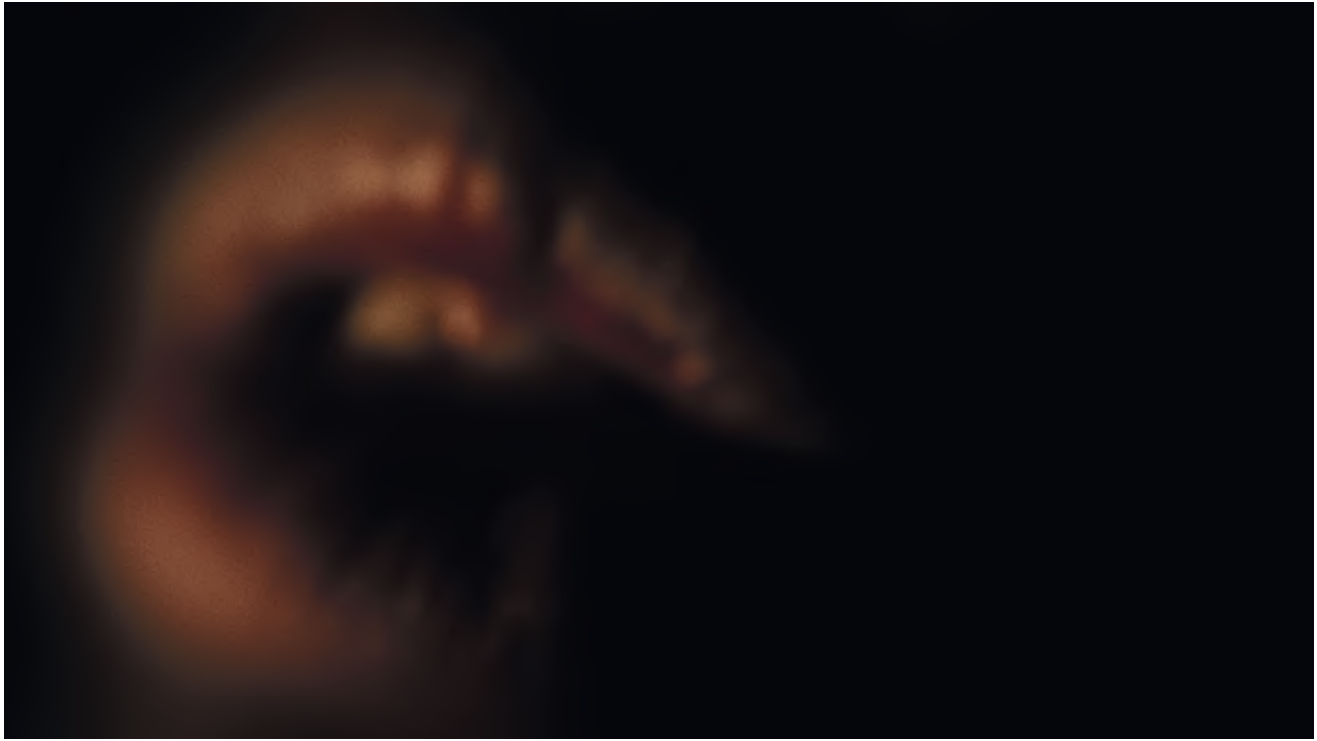
But this fiery constellation of Thaemlitz and Klossowski fizzled in the next galleries. Cecilia



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Vicuña's giant unspooled beads of red wool hanging from the ceiling (*Quipu Womb, The Story of the Red Thread, Athens*) bore no meaningful relation to the works it was grouped with: namely Khvay Samnang's *Preah Kunlong* (The Way of the Spirit) – 11 masks made of woven vines pinned on stands – and Olu Oguibe's *Biafra Time Capsule*, a freestanding walls-cum-vitrines display of book and magazine covers documenting the devastating effects of the Nigerian Civil War, which raged from 1967–70. To see *no* connection between these works was more bearable than having to assume some kind of ethno-representational simplification was at play, pairing ham-fisted symbolism (red wool as streams of blood?) with 'natural' masks and an unrelated war.

Sometimes, it was hard not to see connections. Rosalind Nashashibi and Lucy Skaer's 16mm film *Why Are You Angry?* – a reference to Paul Gauguin's painting *No te aha oe riri* (Why Are You Angry?, 1896) – is a modern-day portrait of the Tahitian women who Gauguin painted as inhabitants of an erotic Eden. Posing naked, just hanging around or smoking a cigarette with amused ennui, they remain silent objects for the camera. In the corridor, vintage photographs (1900–44) by Lionel Wendt portrayed daily life in what was then Ceylon, including boys and young men in different poses and states of undress. Wendt also narrated Basil Wright's documentary *The Song of Ceylon* (1934), which was shown on a monitor. The film and the photographs together intimated a traditional national heritage almost unbridled by the forces of technology and colonization (Ceylon remained a British colony until 1948), something which speaks to Western longings for the 'untouched'. It was odd to see this pattern of (re-)exoticization perpetuated by pairing Wendt with Nashashibi/Skaer, flattening any ambivalence between celebration and implicit critique into ethnographic kitsch.



Véréna Paravel and Lucien Castaing-Taylor, *Somniloquies*, 2017, film still.  
Courtesy: Norte Productions

After the Athens debacle, I had hoped that the 35 venues in Kassel would be an improvement. A life-size Parthenon – built from scaffolding and clad in books banned at some point in some part of the world – was built in the central Friedrichsplatz. Marta Minujin's *El Partenón de libros* (Parthenon of Books, 1983) was originally erected as a bold statement in the centre of Buenos Aires after the collapse of Argentina's military junta. In Kassel, this historic context has been replaced by a blunt symbolism evoking Athens in the idiom of tourist-board marketing. In a similar spirit, the Fridericianum – a museum that has been the beating heart of previous instalments of documenta – hosted the EMST's art collection. Quid pro quo: it is rumoured that the Athens museum was made available on the condition that it would get the Fridericianum in return. But the collection (of mostly Greek artists, with a number of international names thrown in) is frankly mediocre and came across as lazy resell museum programming.

After this anti-climax, the Neue Galerie – which included hundreds of artefacts and the work of more than 90 artists – felt dense: it was the one venue in this entire documenta that actually seemed thoroughly considered. Here, the task was spelled out clearly: let's look again at Western art history from the perspective of colonialism and slavery. The stone-cold heart of this

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endeavour was a 1724 copy of the *Code Noir*, the cruel document legally defining the conditions of slavery in the French colonial empire. It has to be said, though, that the argument – what kinds of symptoms of colonial othering, repression and violence can we (still) detect? – was weakened by the extended wall labels (which is ironic considering the Athens experience of little or no contextualization). For example, one text explained that André Breton compared French painter Yves Laloy's geometrical abstractions to the sand painting of the Navajo, quoting Breton's expressed interest in understanding the ceremonial meaning of these works beyond their visual qualities – but then declared Laloy's works 'indicative' of ignorant appropriation.

Serious claims were often made with surprising casualness. For example, first editions of books by the 18th-century pioneer of archaeology and art history Johann Joachim Winckelmann were accompanied by a text stating that: 'Winckelmann's interpretation of Greek antique sculpture as the ideal form, embodying Beauty and Truth, was underpinned by a cultural desire that was made even more phantasmatic by the fact that Winckelmann never actually set foot in Athens or Greece.' Wow! Yes, Winckelmann, son of a poor shoemaker, never set foot in Athens. Perhaps this was because travelling to Greece three centuries ago was a long and dangerous journey through countries devastated by war and occupation. Also, Winckelmann worked for many years in Italy, areas of which were, of course, once part of Ancient Greece. The historian's notion of beauty and truth as residing in fragments was not simply the outcome of some vague 'cultural' (i.e. colonial) longing but, much more specifically, an expression of homoerotic desire – he was openly gay, a fact commented on by both Casanova and Goethe. In other words: to construct Winckelmann as the original sinner of colonial ignorance is flawed, to put it mildly. This kind of absence of scholarly rigour does a disservice to important studies into how colonialism is inscribed in Western art history.



Lionel Wendt, *Portrait of Kandyan Dancer*, c.1935, gelatin silver print, 22 × 17 cm. Courtesy: Jhaveri Contemporary, Mumbai

The punch line of the argument, so to speak, was that philo-Hellenism – the idealization of ancient Greece – somehow led to Adolf Hitler's Germany. Evidence is given, for example, in the form of a kitsch painting by Alexander Kalderach, *The Parthenon* (1939). Indeed, the Nazis celebrated elements of Greek antiquity – but only as one ingredient amongst many of their bogus mythological mix. In any case, that line of argument more or less fell apart when the exhibition focused on the issue of looted and stolen Jewish property during the Third Reich. Maria Eichhorn's *Rose Valland Institute* (named after the Parisian art historian who secretly listed works looted during Nazi occupation), was set up to research 'orphaned property in Europe', i.e. Jewish wealth stolen not only by the German state, but also by private individuals.

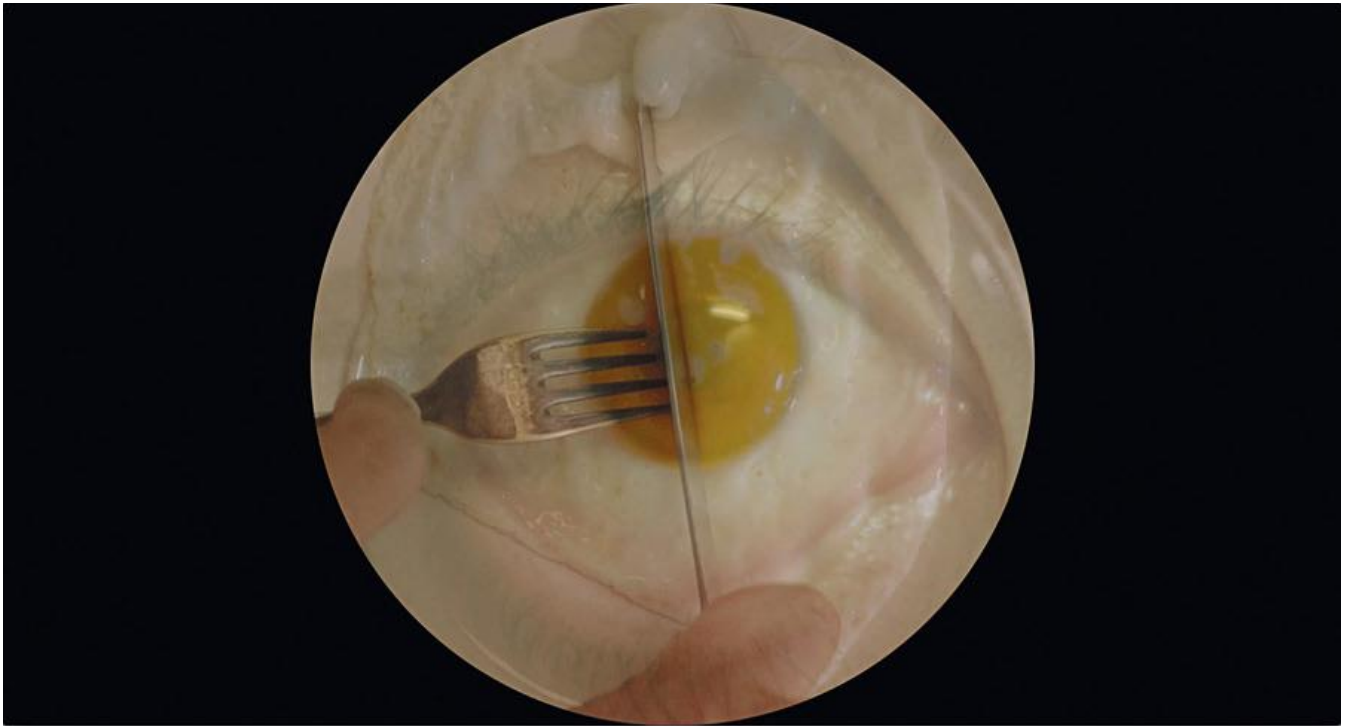
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Her research was manifested in a detailed display of documents, including a towering bookcase filled with volumes looted by Nazis and purchased in 1943 by Berlin's municipal library.

Restitution and provenance research is time-consuming and costly; numerous institutes, such as the German Lost Art Foundation in Magdeburg, are dedicated to the cause. It remains unclear how Eichhorn's institute, post-documenta, will continue its investigation. But perhaps the hope is that artworks create the kind of public awareness a scholarly foundation isn't able to generate.

It remains to be seen what Piotr Uklański's 'Real Nazis' is supposed to make us aware of. The series of framed photos includes – you guessed it! – real Nazis, such as Hitler and Hans Frank, but also alleged Nazis, such as the young Joseph Beuys in a Luftwaffe uniform. Which is, of course, no coincidence, since Uklański's work is hung next to Beuys's installation *The Pack (das Rudel)* (1969), which is permanently housed at the Neue Galerie. What 'Real Nazis' really made me aware of is that the only two living Polish artists included in documenta 14 are Uklanski and Źmijewski, both of who respond to evocations of historical guilt and contemporary failure with the sensibility of online trolls.

Being controversial doesn't, of course, disqualify an artwork's seriousness: Roe Rosen's video *The Dust Channel* (2016) at Palais Bellevue (where works by 18 artists were on show) is a case in point. It spins a crazy and hilarious tale about the connection between Dyson vacuum cleaners, cable TV, the restrictive immigration policy of Benjamin Netanyahu's government in Israel, singing and armpit hair. Less hilarious are the underlying ideological connections between xenophobic fantasies of purification and the sexual desire for the impure. Rosen's work made me realize that the tough truths about xenophobia and capitalism this documenta seeks to explore are best conveyed by works that are allowed the space and time to develop their own imaginative realm, rather than the ones used merely as forensic evidence.



Roe Rosen, *The Dust Channel*, 2016, film still. Courtesy: the artist

That said, one of the absolute highlights of documenta 14 is a piece that provides exactly that: forensic evidence. A Kassel-based NGO, The Society of Friends of Halit, is investigating the murder of Halit Yozgat by the NSU – the German neo-Nazi terrorist group uncovered in 2011 – in an internet café in Kassel in 2006. The initiative argues that the case is not an isolated incident but an indicator of widespread institutionalized racism. The group approached Eyal Weizman's London-based Forensic Architecture, which specializes in investigating events via 3D reconstruction. *77sqm\_9:26min – Report*, shown at the Neue Neue Galerie (one of the main venues; a former post office in which the work of 25 artists is shown), unfolds like a complex mathematical equation and with the visual clarity of a good educational children's programme. It is a powerful, convincing takedown of the testimony of one Andreas Temme, an agent of Verfassungsschutz, Germany's domestic secret service, who claimed in court to have been at the scene of the crime by coincidence only, and that he did not hear or smell the shots that killed Yozgat from where he sat in the next room.

Strangely, this important piece of investigative work into a crime that took place in Kassel itself was not awarded a central position in the exhibition. Instead, it is projected in a small space hidden behind a huge curtain by the Colombian artist Beatriz González. *Telón de la móvil y*

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*cambiante naturaleza* (Drop Curtain of Mobile and Changing Nature, 1978) is emblazoned with a pop-style rendition of Edouard Manet's painting *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (Luncheon on the Grass, 1863).

By contrast, Michel Auder's 14 flat-screen video installation is well sited in a former underground train station. It could be said that *The Course of Empire* sums up this document's probing of the current global hell and its historic resonances – minus its curatorial pretensions. It includes fast-paced video cut-ups of old master paintings of decapitations, contemporary media footage from war zones, Facebook threads of people exchanging views about genocides, images of softcore nakedness and excerpts from the German explorer Alexander von Humboldt's *Travels to the Equinoctial Regions of America* (1799–1804), in which he serenely describes encounters with snakes and sea turtles and comments on the cruel treatment of slaves. What makes Auder's work so strong is that the onslaught of imagery and words is silent – as if it was directly extracted from his cerebral cortex.



Olu Oguibe, *Biafra Time Capsule*, 2017, installation view at EMST, Athens.  
Courtesy: the artist

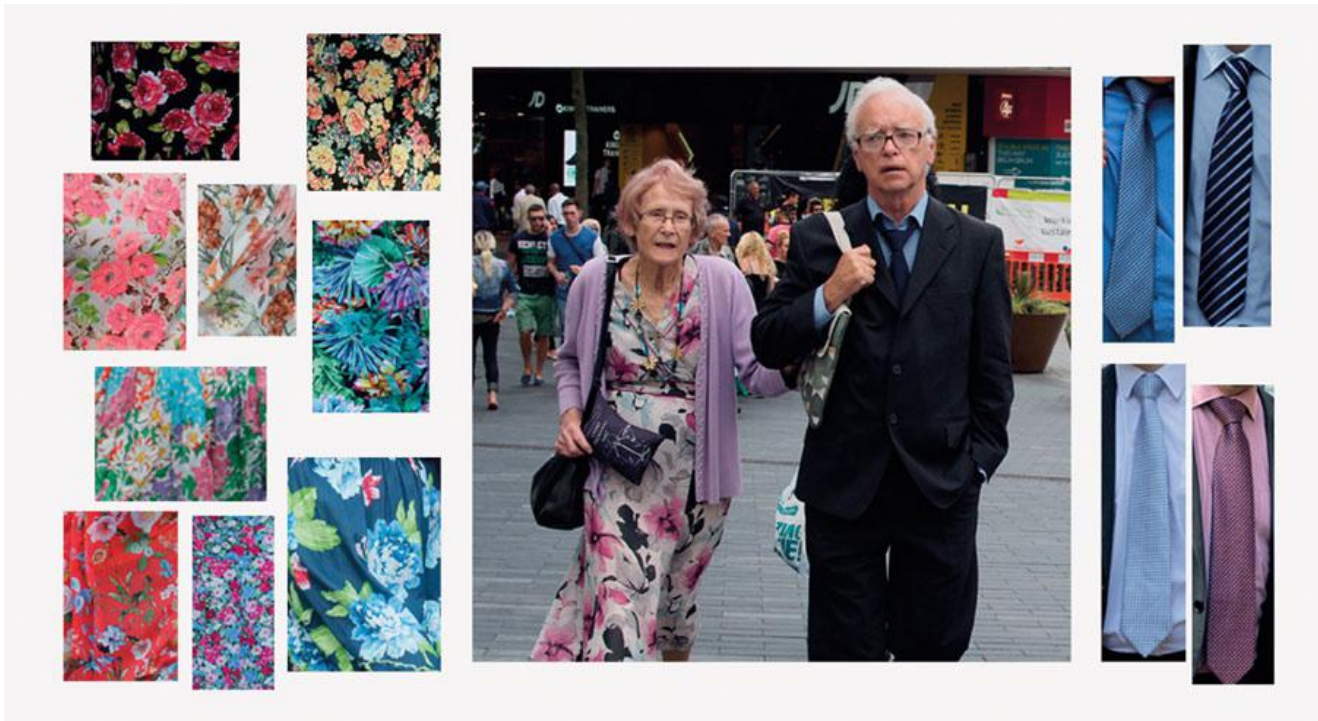
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If Auder's work has a messy but precise structure, the presentation at Ottoneum – Kassel's small natural history museum – has a highly questionable one. Here, a monumental video projection by Samnang features more masks made of vines, this time worn in a Cambodian forest (*Preah Kunlong*), outlines of boomerangs sprayed onto freestanding white walls by Brisbane-based artist Dale Harding (*Composite Wall Panel, Reckitt's Blue*), a video of Mongolian artist Ariuntugs Tserenpil eating moss (*Act*, 2013) and Nashashibi's *Vivian's Garden*. The latter is an intimate, 30-minute film portrait of the Swiss painter Vivian Suter and her 95-year-old mother, the artist Elisabeth Wild (who both have work in documenta). The camera gently observes them in their shared home – a former coffee plantation in Guatemala – as they chat and have meals, while their Mayan servants silently work around them. At one point, Suter recalls how, as a child, she was saved from a bee attack by one of the servants, who still works for her – the camera focuses on her elderly face. I appreciate the portrait of a mother and daughter, but I'm stunned that Nashashibi seems to take for granted that, as a filmmaker, she can perpetuate the silence traditionally reserved for Indigenous servants attending to white masters. It makes *Downton Abbey* look progressive by comparison.

Even more surprising is how a documenta team seriously engaged with decolonization could have allowed the Ottoneum presentation: it aggressively reduces artists in a natural history museum to being geographically defined representatives of an ethnographic world map – and a film romanticizing 'gentle' colonialism is simply the cherry on the cake. I had to stop and check: is this really the 21st century?



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Hans Eijkelboom, photographs from *The Street & Modern Life*, 2014.  
Courtesy: © Hans Eijkelboom and Dewi Lewis Publishing

Documenta 14 is the tale of two cities, Athens and Kassel: its earnest attempt to uncover how the cruelty of colonialism transmuted into the cruelty of contemporary globalized capitalism has produced the strangest lapses in rigorous thinking along the way. Its failures call into question the entire documenta institutional complex, which evinces an obsession with having *more* each time: more money, more visitors, more venues, more sites around the globe and more moral authority. I don't think the cure for this obsession is that the next documenta should be curated by an artist or by the people. I think it's enough to give the next team of curators the licence to work on the principle that, sometimes, less is definitely more.

*Main image: Marta Minujín, El Partenón de libros (The Parthenon of Books), 2017, under construction in Kassel as part of documenta 14. Photograph:*

© Rosa Maria Ruehling

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MOUSSE

March 15, 2017

# Michel Auder “Roman Variations” at Sant’Andrea de Scaphis, Rome



MARTOS GALLERY



# MARTOS GALLERY



Michel Auder "Roman Variations" at Sant'Andrea de Scaphis, Rome, 2017

Courtesy: the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York / Rome. Photo: Roberto Apa

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Shot during Michel Auder's one year residency in the Italian capital, *Roman Variations* (1991) is an epic film with Rome as its subject. The fifty-minute travelogue is an uncanny document of the eternal city at the dawn of the Berlusconi era.

Images of the Palatine hill under a bright blue sky or of the Campo dei Fiori market on a rainy day are alternated with erotically underpinned fragments of Italian television. Television and real life are blended as a visual of the city's immortal skyline, and forefronted by a close up of an electrical stimulation belt wrapped around a young woman's body.

The artist pays homage to Rome's magnificence, chaos and decadence capturing, with his sophisticated eye, the paradoxical expressions of this complex city.

A pioneer in experimental film, Auder began in the early 1960s as a photographer and soon explored video as an artistic medium to document his life and New York's bohemian underground. Over the years he has shot thousands of hours of film; much of this footage is edited by the artist many years after it was recorded and turned into video works ranging from sequences lasting just a few minutes to feature-length films.

at Sant'Andrea de Scaphis, Rome  
until 8 April 2017

# Week in Film: a Berliner Thriller and Rarely Seen Vids Shot By a Downtown 'Ethnographer'

BY NICOLE DISSER

## Michel Auder + Rebekah Rutkoff: *Sunsets and Other Stars*

Tuesday, Dec. 15, 7:30 pm at *Light Industry*: \$8 at the door

French artist, photographer, and filmmaker Michel Auder left France in the '70s for New York City, where he's resided ever since. He's maybe best known as Cindy Sherman's ex-husband (JK, but for real — how do you compete with Cindy Sherman?). Much of his video work (though **apparently** Auder “did not consider it fine art”) consists of ethnographic snapshots and sceney vignettes, the stuff of Auder's cool Downtown life amongst artists like Annie Sprinkle, Larry Rivers, Hannah Wilke, among others.

But another good chunk of his focus was deadly personal. Take *My Last Bag of Heroin (For Real)*, a 1993 piece which shows the filmmaker, who battled with heroin addiction for many years, breaking apart a glassine baggie of heroin onto a piece of aluminum foil and smoking the stuff. The video demonstrates the banality of drug use, often depicted as an explosively orgasmic experience, particularly in film.

For this event, Light Industry will screen some of his rarely-seen shorts including, *Polaroid Cocaine*, (a 1993 “meditation on photography, advertising, desire, and spectacle”); *Talking Head*, 1981 (Auder, obscured behind the leaves of a plant, films his kid as she recites a bizarre child-speak monologue); and *Multi-Screen 1967* (a collection of still images including ones of **Brigid Berlin** painting with her mammaries).

New York-based essayist/artist Rebekah Rutkoff will be reading from her new book, *The Irresponsible Magician*. In case you're unfamiliar, her publishers describe her as a Joan Didion-type writer whose work is “sharp, acerbic, and often humorous.” The book includes an essay on Michel Auder, one of many photographers and filmmakers who she spotlights among other cultural figures as diverse as Oprah Winfrey and the Kennedys.

October 9, 2015

# Make It Real: On Cinematic Autobiography, Part 1

By **Eric Hynes**

*There was no fine line between what is not film or what is film. And it seemed that he put himself in situations that become the subject of the film. And blood flows in and it becomes part of that scene. And that becomes part of his life. And as it goes along through the years it just seemed to happen like this.*

—Michel Auder, *The Feature*



*The Feature*

It's telling that director Michel Auder refers to himself in the third person in this quote from *The Feature*. He's referring to events he lived through, but in discussing films he made about and during those events, "I" becomes "he" to match the filmmaking alchemy that transforms an individual into a character. Complicating things further is the fact that *The Feature* is an avowedly fictional creation stitched together from decades of autobiographical footage, all of which was originally created using that hybridizing alchemy. Auder has been playing himself for a very long

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time, making the Auder we see on screen both naked (often literally) and invisible.

That many filmmakers use their own lives as source material for nonfiction movies isn't news, and neither is the notion that doing so can be (and in a sense always is) both a fictionalizing and documenting impulse. But to borrow from Auder's suitably neither-here-nor-there pidgin dialect, I'm enduringly interested in the different ways that one bleeds into the other, and in the effects and meanings behind those various tributaries. While hybrid filmmaking has received a fair amount of attention in recent years, the same can't be said of memoirist cinema, which, outside of a brief uptick during the arrival of iMovie and cheap DV (*Tarnation*), has mostly been absorbed by YouTube's new and democratic forms.

But between a formidable retrospective series playing now at BAMcinématek, bearing the suitably untidy title *Diaries, Notes, and Sketches: Cinematic Autobiography* (in which *The Feature* is featured), and three new movies currently screening at the New York Film Festival, it's a good moment to consider and appreciate the many varieties of cinematic autobiography. Films like Jonas Mekas's *As I Was Moving Ahead Occasionally I Saw Brief Glimpses of Beauty* (00) and Chantal Akerman's *No Home Movie* may have a memoirist impulse in common, but their differences largely outweigh any similarities.



*As I Was Moving Ahead Occasionally I Saw Brief Glimpses of Beauty*



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The Mekas film hews to a tradition, pursued during the late Sixties, of personal self-exposure signifying a radical political act. The personal is political, and thus any intimate divulgences carry the implied, and sometimes outright avowed, power of progressivism. And with Mekas, it goes without question that form will match content. As he says via voiceover early in the film, the organizing principle is that there is no organizing principle. Thus his 288-minute film, comprised of material recorded over a 30-year period, has been constructed not thematically or chronologically, but based on the order in which he rediscovered the 16mm reels. (And like the three-hour Audeer film, a long duration serves to represent a long chronological span.) Thus, though a lot of the material is very intimate—it's something like eccentrically shot home movies, heavy on cute kids, cat clips, and wedding pictures—it's treated as raw material, grist for an experimentalist's mill. The film plays like a box of photographs overturned, mixed around, and then tossed into the air. Meanwhile the filmmaker's voiceover, often recorded decades after the footage it accompanies, somewhat undercuts the radical-ness of the randomness by underscoring his purpose. "Disorder. There's some kind of order in it," Mekas says. And then, with the studied shambled cadence of his beloved Beats: "Image, sound, memories. Memories. Haha. No judgment here. Positive, negative, rude, bad, they're just images and sounds—very, very innocent in and by themselves as they pass through. Yes, people are bad. Cinema is innocent. Innocent. People are not innocent. They are not."

There's no shortage of philosophical musings in Laurie Anderson's *Heart of a Dog*, a valentine to and rumination about the artist's dear pet Lolabelle. (The film premiered at Venice, is currently screening at NYFF, and will have a theatrical release on October 21.) But where Mekas's voiceover is purposefully rough and spontaneous-sounding, Anderson's is deliberately performed, affectedly enunciated, and exactingly produced. Her imagery follows suit. There's an impressionistic, elliptical, even coy quality to their content and arrangement, but Anderson's design is far from random. Between a progression of observations about Lolabelle's life, illness, and absence, and potent diaristic asides about loss, Anderson's isn't building toward ratifying her own voice—though she's ever present on the soundtrack, she's rarely on screen—but toward understanding and coping with the absence of others. Yes, she's employing elements of her life to express something about her life, but she's also using it as a metaphor for things universal and philosophical. While Mekas's film insists on presence, Anderson's is preoccupied with absence.

Not dissimilarly, Chantal Akerman's *No Home Movie* is haunted by loss, even as the camera fixates on all that can be seen. The filmmaker's eye is often as fixed as a CCTV camera—on a tripod in

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her frail mother's hallway, or on the kitchen table, or steady on her shoulder as it records her laptop screen during a Skype chat. But rather than the perspective of a coldly invasive observer, the camera comes across as a tool of futility, trying to glimpse a ghost before it vanishes forever, before it rejoins all that's inherently ineffable. When her mother asks why she's filming their Skype chat, Akerman answers: "Because I want to show how small the world is." But instead of Meka's positivist claims for his art, Akerman's statement seems to be included ruefully, an idealistic claim otherwise contradicted by every subtly plaintive shot in the film, as well as by the continuation of that very scene, in which a poor Internet connection and her mother's hearing disability frustrate their communication.



*No Home Movie*

Akerman shares remarkably candid moments with the audience, such as a conversation about her mother's experiences in a concentration camp, and later, her mother's evident physical decline as Akerman and her sister try to lift her spirits and make the best use of their remaining time together. Yet she does so via various distancing tactics, such as placing of the camera outside of the room of action. We're constantly looking through doorways, around nearly closed doors, out windows, over shoulders. We're always there, but also never quite there. Yet what it yields isn't quite intimacy thwarted—it's closer to a painfully accurate representation of the inherent limitations of intimacy. Bringing us physically closer runs the risk of overestimating the possibility of emotional or spiritual closeness. Akerman's rarely on screen, and she's never the

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focus when she is. Her revelations aren't about what's seen, but rather about the complications, frustrations, and integrity of seeing.

As I'll continue to explore in next week's column, it's when filmmakers mine the gap between what can and can't be seen, between what can and can't be understood, between the mechanical objectivity of the camera and the subjective gaze of the person managing it, that autobiographical cinema can accomplish and express what other genres can't. From Ed Pincus's landmark *Diaries (1971-1976)* (80) to Manoel de Oliveira's posthumously released *The Visit, or Memories and Confessions* (82), the inward gaze can be both revealing and concealing, arrogant and generous, exhibitionist and voyeuristic.

"If you would take my 5,000 or so video hours and deduct from that what my life has been, it could be made in so many different ways and so many different takes could be offered," Auder says at the outset of *The Feature*, which is indeed a version of that life as created not by Auder, but by the film's editor (and *Breaking a Monster* director) Luke Meyer. "It seems to be real. And is real. And not real." In a way it's a game, and sometimes something of a self-serving and self-mythologizing one. But usually things don't get really interesting until the self-portraitist relinquishes some degree of control—be it to the interventions of a collaborator, the imperfect tools of expression, or the mercilessness of time.

March 2015

## Michel Auder/Józef Robakowski

FAHRENHEIT

I can see you. Perched near a window, looking down on the heat and honk of the sun-bright street or out to the night windows beaming like magic lanterns, you are easily observed. Looking out from their windows, Michel Auder and Józef Robakowski, who record private lives unwittingly played out in public, can see you, too. Close in age but shaped by dramatically different social and political contexts, these



Michel Auder,  
*Chelsea, Manhattan-  
NYC, 1990* (edited  
2008), Hi8 video  
transferred to  
digital video, color,  
sound, 6 minutes  
21 seconds.

artists, perfectly paired by Fahrenheit director Martha Kirszenbaum, keenly observe others with a speculative, subjective eye. Under another's lingering gaze, your most mundane acts acquire sinister shadows.

For more than four decades, French-born filmmaker and video artist Michel Auder, affiliated with New York's downtown avant-garde from the Factory years on, has put his camera in the service of recording both his exhibitionist and voyeuristic proclivities. Auder's great talent lies in harnessing the camera's unflinching stare and editing hard shards of time into *weird confluences* and *difficult intimacies*, sometimes many years after the footage was shot. Here, we have a trio of *videos in which the artist looks outward*.

Auder's car trawls the streets of New York in *Chelsea, Manhattan-NYC* (shot in 1990 and edited in 2008), with his camcorder pointed at the pimps and prostitutes who populated a sordid pre-Giuliani New York, now long since disappeared. In *Blind Sex*, 1983, two life-worn lechers stroll the daylight sidewalk among a flesh-baring prowl of street-walkers. Auder cuts to a nearby sightless woman who pauses on a street corner, cane in hand, seemingly oblivious to the illicit transactions surrounding her. In *Untitled (I was looking back to see if you were looking back at me to see me looking back at you)*, 2012/2014, the artist's camera peers through the windows of nearby skyscrapers, catching a single man mechanically spooning dinner into his sad-sack face dappled with TV light, a woman performing a post-shower toilette with thoughtless grace, a sweat-slicked lover mounting his partner from behind, a supine masturbator arching his back in orgasm, and two apartment dwellers on separate floors watching the same asinine program. And when he's not looking through the window, Auder records its interior reflection, revealing a little girl with a pair of binoculars scanning the city alongside him.

Artist-filmmaker Józef Robakowski surveils the spare concrete public plaza in front of his apartment building in Lodz, Poland, in *From My Window*, shot over a twenty-one-year period from 1978 to 1999. A veteran figure within the Polish avant-garde still relatively unknown in this country, Robakowski advocated for a "personal film" that stripped the medium of narrative in order to privilege a thrumming immediacy. Here, Robakowski's gruffly sardonic voice-over description (perhaps invented) of the intimate details of his neighbors' lives defines the arc of the film. Underneath his commentary on the purported homosexual encounter of his neighbor's dog (in fact an innocuous canine meeting), Robakowski intimates a dark joke about police informants and incriminating desire. Alongside these prosaic passings, he films the casual harassments of police shakedowns on the road and the increasingly tense May Day parades, all taking place in view of the artist's window during an era of increasing unrest and subsequent crackdowns.

Robakowski's recordings wryly mimic the police-state reality of his native Poland under Communist rule, in which everyone spied and was spied on. The film ends with this same public plaza videotaped in 1999, ten years after the collapse of Communism in Poland. In a sort of epilogue, he records the construction of a private luxury hotel being erected on the public square.

Auder and Robakowski hint at the impossibility of privacy (even before the sophisticated tracking facilitated by the Internet) and flirt with the temptation of illicit knowledge, probing the boundary where public and private clash and mesh. Now, of course, ever more advanced technology makes the past transgressions of these artists seem downright innocent, shot as they were in a time before our private lives and potential crimes were so thoroughly recorded and stored for easy retrieval, whenever the desire should arise.

—Andrew Berardini

30 January 2015

## Michel Auder and Józef Robakowski *Fahrenheit* / Los Angeles



Michel Auder "Blind Sex" (1983) Courtesy of the Artist and Office Baroque, Bruxelles



Michel Auder "Blind Sex" (1983) Courtesy of the Artist and Office Baroque, Bruxelles

The exhibition "Street Life" brings together four works by filmmakers Michel Auder and Józef Robakowski. Concerned with renovating the language of cinema, both artists use the camera as a tool for documenting the life of their cities with a neutral eye. The films shown here collectively address the relationship between public and private space during two dissimilar political phases. By combining this selection of works from the artists' prolific careers, the show touches the core of its subject, arriving at a more complex treatment of the theme than a mere formal approach.

In *Blind Sex* (1983, edited 2009) and *Chelsea - Manhattan, NYC* (1990, edited 2008) Auder reports on the ritualistic behavior of sex workers and clients in the streets of a big Western urban center, whereas in the recent *Untitled (I Was Looking Back To See If You Were Looking Back At Me To See Me Looking Back At You)* (2012-14) he delves into the realm of semi-voyeuristic pleasure by recording domestic scenes from nearby buildings. Situations witnessed by Auder mirror a social background in which solitude is omnipresent, despite the illusion of freedom.

Robakowsky's *From My Window* (1978-99) narrates the life of a desolate square of concrete in Lods, Poland. The artist uses an ironic, omniscient tone to compile a precise visual diary of purely functional actions happening every day. Public space turns into a space of oppression; one can only imagine unseen private spaces as a zone of resistance, the only territory where individual life is thriving. Although this aspect is not overtly exposed by Robakowsky, the viewer is informed by what is projected in the adjacent room screening Auder's work. When the participants of the ritual May Day parade march in the opposite direction of the previous years, it's in anticipation of a transformation that will bring the collapse of the Eastern bloc. The square will become a five-star hotel, and the worlds portrayed by Auder and Robakowsky will eventually meet to become one unified global village.

**Art & Culture** Michel Auder at De Hallen Haarlem

# Iconoclasms and tempests

Michel Auder is one of the first artists to use video as a kind of visual diary. It is art that you can let happen to you, without it being a problem if you miss something because your reality is different from that of the creator.

**Jan Postma**

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**Polaroid Cocaine** lasts about five minutes. Michel Auder's film opens with a photo that has slowly yellowed or has once undergone a sepia treatment. The face we see consists mainly of two large black eyes, eyes that have seen something terrible or seem to suspect something more terrible. The title appears in decorative letters across the face, and as the image fades to black, we hear chanteuse Ingrid Craven, in a voice that sighs slightly under a French accent, saying: *'Another song by Jean Jacques Shuhl: Polaroid Cocaine.'*



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First there are images of ruins, some probably the result of slowly passing time, others perhaps of short, intense bombardments. The destruction is accompanied by a piano that seems pregnant with disaster. Then guerrillas, children picking up ammunition from the street, human skulls with holes where eyes used to be and holes where a blunt object landed, the holes become eyes, the eyes become diving goggles and suddenly a romantic scene on a jetty: somewhere the sun is setting and the sea glitters as far as the eye can see. Eyes, lips, hands, legs: the entire film is made up of still images, careless images too. Of course, consciously chosen and placed in an order with care, but every individual image is also replaceable. The result is a visual poem that moves back and forth – sometimes swaying, sometimes wildly swinging – between suffering and longing, between distress and longing.

Shuhl, whose text is sung, may have won the Prix Goncourt, but the sound is damn loud.



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The old-fashioned picture tube that shows *Polaroid Cocaine* (1993) is located with eighteen of its kind in the Vleeshal of De Hallen Haarlem. As busy as it is outside at the Haarlem Saturday market, it is just as quiet inside. It would be quiet, if it were not for the tangle of sound coming from everywhere and nowhere, a background noise that is clearly recognizable to the good listener as 'several video art installations that just barely manage to drown each other out'.

I could be wrong, but it seems to me as if there is a strange paradox about video art. While moving images in everyday life are often associated with laziness, preferring the news to the newspaper, preferring the film to the book, in museums and galleries – and increasingly on the Internet – it often seems to be the other way around. Video art, consciously or unconsciously, often seems even more elusive. And with a little imagination you can understand the way in which much video art is presented – played in a loop, and therefore with an almost invisible starting and ending point – as the medium itself going the extra mile to avoid being too easy to understand. contain.

Flowers, a clock, fruit, a split second in which someone is run over by a dirt bike

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*Made for Denise* (1978) is shown on the same TV as *Polaroid Cocaine* and although there was a fifteen-year gap between the making of the two films, the choice is an obvious one. Both films are somewhere between a video clip and a poem. *Made for Denise* is a bit shorter, with a running time of three minutes, and in the same way, although this time the reason is not cocaine but an obsession. The music is by Philip Glass and in the background the voice of a man appears to be addressing a crowd: *'Two lovers on a park bench!'* he almost shouts. The image shows a palm clasp a photo of a young woman. The hand closes, very slowly, but it is not clear whether this slowness is caution or sadism. Will the photo, the young woman, be destroyed or protected? The image shifts to a controlled destruction of a large building played backwards, the sermon makes its way back to the foreground, past Philip Glass: *'You are the light of my life, my sun, moon and stars. You are my everything!'* Then the building still collapses: a cloud of gray dust, shaking because of the violence of the explosion and because the images seem to have been copied endlessly from video format to video format. *"Without you I have no reason for being,"* says the preacher. Someone smokes a cigarette while a trickle of blood slowly runs down his forehead. Flowers, a clock, fruit, for a split second a fragment of someone being run over by a dirt bike, a voiceover shouting excitedly: *'He's hit! He's leg run over!'* And then it's over.

What can be said about it other than that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts? Just as in a poem the meaning often seems to lie between the words rather than contained within them.



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**Michel Auder** was born in 1944 in Soissons, one of the oldest towns in France – even Julius Caesar was reportedly aware of its existence – about a hundred kilometers northeast of Paris. He is still a teenager when he packs up his bags and moves to the capital, where he apprentices as a photographer. In 1961 he ended up in New York for the first time, the city he would call home about ten years later. That first time, after his two-week visa has expired, he stays there until he is deported. Back in France he is conscripted, as a member of the photo and film division of the French army he is stationed in Algeria for some time. Once freed from military service, he focuses on filmmaking. He is inspired by the great innovators of the moment, Godard, Pasolini, Warhol. Since 1968 he has been part of the so-called Zanzibar group, which consists of a dozen young filmmakers who are convinced that cinema is the medium par excellence to 'record actions and emotions and transform them into history', according to art historian Ondine Chavoya, in a text that accompanied a retrospective of Auder's work in 2004.

Also in the revolutionary year of 1968: Auder sees Andy Warhol's first major commercial success: *Chelsea Girls*. Not much later, when he sees one of the stars of the film, Nico, walking down the street in Paris, he speaks to her. Nico is in the company of Viva, one of Warhol's other 'superstars'. (Viva was seen in *Blue Movie*, the film that was initially going to be called simply *Fuck* .) Long story short: Auder and Viva get married in Vegas, move into the legendary Chelsea Hotel and make films together. When Auder's film *Cleopatra* is destroyed before its release by one of the financiers (who only put money into the project based on Viva's fame, and was disappointed in Auder's work, to say the least) he finally turns his back on the film world and he focuses on a new technique: video. Auder is one of the first to use video as a kind of visual diary. The new technology, more direct, less focused on the aesthetic and more focused on the experience of experiencing it up close, fits him like a glove. Fellow avant-garde filmmaker Jonas Mekas put it this way in 1991: 'When I visited Michel in the Chelsea Hotel, around 1970, the video camera was never far away, part of the house, part of his life, eyes, hands. Still. It's a beautiful love affair – no, not an affair, an obsession.'

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**Five hours**, ten minutes and 21 seconds of footage can be seen downstairs in De Hallen. Upstairs, in a cinema setting, a different, often longer film each time. In mid-November, for example, the beautifully titled *Untitled (I Was Looking Back To See If You Were Looking Back At Me To See Me Looking Back At You)*, from 2012.

But today *Chelsea Girls with Andy Warhol 1971-1976* is showing. That big name may be tempting, but somehow it still feels as if the film is mainly interesting as a historical document. Not necessarily something you'll sit down for an hour to watch if you're not an obsessive fan.

And if you want to see a historical document, you better sit downstairs for *Cindy Sherman* from 1988. After his time with Viva, Auder also worked with the famous photographer for a long time and in this film you see little else for 45 minutes. his lover at work, you see how she gets ready for one of her self-portraits, the voice of Freddie Mercury sounds in the background, you see how she carefully cuts her negative strips into pieces and how she builds a set before she puts herself in it photographs, you hear her say: *'Just shaving my nose.'*

It all requires a little income, or a willingness to fall into something without being able to grasp it immediately. Associative iconoclasm and storms, mounted one after the other but without an immediately clear substantive line. Sometimes the museum texts written in a *matter of fact* tone on the signs next to or on the TV are enough guidance, sometimes you can do without. The nice thing about the excess is that you can quickly and without much regret abandon the hope of seeing through it all, of understanding it completely. It is art that you can let happen to you, without worrying if you miss something because the distance between your own reality and that of the artist who made the work is too great.

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A wordless indictment of Ronald Reagan; an uncanny peek at pimps and their prostitutes, prostitutes and their customers, in a raw and raunchy New York; the 'gorgeous ladies of wrestling' whose bodies, suffering and effort are pure 'mantertainment'; the 1984 Olympic Games, captured from behind the television, with the video camera zoomed in so far that there is often little more to see than a pair of pixelated shorts, the image of a cross in which a penis happily swings back and forth before the diver actually takes off , sticks around. It all lingers.

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*Michel Auder: Large as Life , until November 30 in De Hallen Haarlem*

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*Image: (1) Michel Adler, Polaroid Cocaine , 1993. (2) Michel Auder, Endless Column , 2011. (3) Michel Auder, Untitled (I Was Looking Back To See If You Were Looking Back At Me to See Me looking BACK At You) , 2012. (De Hallen Haarlem Collection).*

**Portrait of the Marauder:****Michel Auder in Conversation with Adam Szymczyk**

Adam Szymczyk: Video and, less so, film are both handy formats in which to record material and then use it later. Yet how did you manage to keep going over the years without having solid backing?

Michel Auder: That is probably why I went in the direction that I did. In the seventies it did not seem like I was able to, or was interested in, finding money the traditional way: to have an idea, to write it down, and to present it to someone in the film business. All those steps never came about, except with the last film I made, *Cleopatra* [1970]. Video is a way to actually make the films and not make it. You just do it and then it is there. At least you are doing something; you are making a work.

AS: Keeping busy.

MA: Making film is vital for me: explaining what I am seeing or how I feel about what is around me. The material question about having backing, I cannot answer. I am a very lucky and determined person to have managed to make all those films without any funds. It is kind of a miracle.

AS: With *Cleopatra* you were trying to go into something that was more like regular film production, right? Did you pitch it to people who had funds to produce your film?

MA: In 1969 I was featured in the *New York Times* with my first wife, Viva. There was a long article that said, among other things, that I was ready to make a new film. The *Sunday Times* was so popular that I got called up by producers. They asked me about my project and I said that I was going to remake *Cleopatra*. I did not have a script or anything. I took a history book for schoolchildren and made up a script. I found a producer that was willing to make the film, using Warholian actors such as Viva, Taylor Mead, Louis Waldon, Ultra Violet, and Ondine. These actors possessed a talent to make up stories. I put them in different environments and told them: You are Caesar, you are Cleopatra, and they started to improvise who they were and who they would become.

AS: Was it scripted?

MA: It was more a choice of different situations, environments, and places. I would say: This is the queen's summer palace in the wintertime, and then we went to Rome and visited Caesar in his winter palace. Everyone would more or less improvise their lines. It was about the political aspect of power. Nobody did anything, really, they would just hang around and act like politicians, more and more abusive, self important and make fun of things.

AS: Would you go as far as to say that this was a film that rose out of disillusionment of a certain kind? It was 1970, so this is the moment when the summer is over, so to speak.

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MA: Over and over again the same things happened, wars and everything else, showing the arrogance and incompetence of the governing classes. Cleopatra is about the behavior of the politicians controlling the world in general but, of course, it is not precisely that. And the film is degenerated in a good way. The actors are taking drugs but they are acting like they have so much power: they have whims, slaves, etcetera. The actors that I chose were very smart and through their way of expressing themselves one can feel almost like it is the end of the world.

AS: How long were you busy with that production?

MA: A couple of months. I wanted it to be my last film, and I upset the producers so much that they destroyed the negatives as far as I know. Only a cheaply made work copy was left. We agreed that I would make the movie if they gave me carte blanche. They said yes, and then I pushed the envelope. They finally sent some supplemental crew to help me, like spies, and they reported that I did not know how to make films. Then I was invited to the Cannes Film Festival by Henri Langlois. The film was in the process of being edited, I felt it was fine, so I took it and brought a copy to the festival. They said you cannot do that, it is not finished; I said no, I know when it is finished and I know when it starts. They sued the festival and told them they owned the film. And then I played the bad guy, and then they also started to play the bad guys. Some powerful lawyer came, a friend of a friend, and he talked them out of suing me. They said if I gave them the footage, they would drop the lawsuit. It became a childish game of me saying I do not give a fuck about you, and of them saying I do not give a fuck about you.

AS: It sounds almost proverbial, this brush with the powers of industry that take from you the fruit of your work. That sounds like a film in itself.

MA: Yes, and I wanted it to be my last film.

AS: You wanted to make your last film in 1970, which in some sense was the beginning of your career. In your work there is the issue of time and of time delay, and calling certain moments last moments that happen very late or very early. It sometimes seems like time is falling apart slightly. In films like *My Last Bag of Heroin (For Real)*, which was shot in 1986, and released in 1993, there is the issue of double-dating; and then this titular statement that something is going to be the last thing but then, is it really? And then there are also the first things, for example in *My First Pipe of Opium Since 1973 (Mexico Nov. 2004)*, which was edited in 2005. I am interested in these different timelines in your work, and how you declare one of your first films your last film. It is the last one, yes, but after that you made a lot of films. You started making films with your last film.

MA: Cleopatra was my last film where I would deal with the system. Up to that point I made a few films and I was thinking they would go into movie theaters proper, not into the art world.

AS: Until 1970 you were aiming

MA: Being an independent yet mainstream filmmaker. Since '63 or '64.

AS: When did you arrive in the US?

MA: I settled there permanently in '69.

AS: So already in France you had made some films.



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MA: I made a couple of movies there that are lost, because I didn't really have a home in France. The films were very cumbersome and heavy, and I left them with someone that wanted to include them in a festival in Switzerland in early 1969, just before I left for the US. And then I never returned to France. The films were the black-and-white, 35mm *Anne vad des saisons* [1963]; the 16mm, color *Krylon* [1966]; and *Lune X* [1968], also 16mm and color. Years later when I became interested in getting my films back, I could not remember the name of this man nor of the festival.

AS: I am sure that they are still in Switzerland. When did you first put your hands on a video camera?

MA: At the end of 1969, with my friend, the filmmaker Shirley Clarke, who also lived in the Chelsea Hotel in New York. Woody and Steina Vasulka had bought a Sony Portapak. We heard about it, and became interested. They lived in a loft in dark SoHo. Only artists lived there at the time; it was desolate at night. We went to their studio and experimented with their equipment. I had received some of the money from *Cleopatra* it was a big budget, like \$200,000 dollars, which would be almost a million dollars now and I bought this video equipment: a camera, the deck, and tapes. And the rest is history.

AS: How would you cut material?

MA: I did not have editing equipment for many years. Home-editing equipment didn't exist. You would have had to go into a television studio, hire an editor, and it was too expensive. The only way to edit was to transfer between two decks. I would have one tape running on a player that was connected to another player/recorder. I would hit the record button when I liked a scene from the original footage. It was on-the-fly editing and recording. My invention.

AS: So you didn't begin shooting video because of Andy Warhol and the fact that he was getting video equipment to experiment with.

MA: There was no affordable, portable, color-video equipment until around 1977. There was only black-and-white television up to late 1960, then America began having color television.

AS: Speaking of television: Do you remember when you first filmed a TV screen and used it in a film?

MA: Right away. If a television is there I enter it like anything else that I film. TV is presenting me with an image and I reframe it. In my hotel right now in Basel, *Les Trois Rois*, there are forty-three channels available. Two nights ago I arrived at one in the morning, and at five in the morning I was still filming television. I did not realize so many hours had gone by; I just went on like crazy entering images and sounds into my phone.

AS: Ferdinand Kriwet, an artist living in East Germany, did films that exclusively used television imagery. He did one with the coverage of the Apollo landing [*Apollovision*, 1969], and one about the Nixon election [*Campaign*, 1972/73]. It is a very fast montage of aggressive images and sound from American television in black and white. Your works fucked with television in a much less formally rigid way, so somehow they were more free in changing the parameters of the images that you worked with. But the interests are not dissimilar: the political message, the ability of television to actually fabricate an event, be it the moon landing or the election of a new

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that tells you what you are going to do.

MA: Right. I could not explain it better than you just did now.

AS: This narcoleptic person is a central organizing metaphor or device of your film, and the rest gets organized around it. From there you can imagine to build

MA: A world.

AS: A world from different building blocks that you have at hand, or that you invent, or find in the making. Which is a complete reversal of the traditional process of making a film, which usually begins with an idea of where you want to get to, and then preparing everything to reach this final image.

MA: Yes, absolutely.

AS: But you start right from the entrails of this.

MA: I go back to the trail. Narcolepsy became a sort of voyage through sleeping.

AS: One could say that these ideas of travel or voyage in your work have something to do with progress, exploration, and reaching unknown lands, but I have the feeling that the way you use these metaphors is very much about a reversed movement. You have these titles *Voyage to the Center of the Phone Lines*, for instance and various other films in which this movement is not going to somewhere, but is more an inward trip of a kind.

But your titles often point to your position. And that's why I would like to get to this staking of the position of the author, this idea of self-portraiture, in your films. There are a couple of films and more—

AS: Yet you often break through the shell of the pop-cultural stuff into something rather existential, which operates via symbols and allegories, and which reaches into the inner of the human being, be it people that are close to you or those you only met through the camera lens.

MA: I did not ever formulate the way I started making films. I just always felt that I looked at things differently. I have my kind of style of vision and I have the feeling. I always understood that I could make different films, not the traditional ones, but films by other methods. But I also think that it has to do with having been raised in a world of poetry. I start with a vague idea, and then I add images and sound, one after the other, and it becomes a piece that becomes a title that sums it up or not. I begin without thinking about what it is or will be. And then I enter all the bits that I have filmed, that are in my head, and put them together. One of my last films, *Narcolepsy* [2010], occurred because of that woman I shot. She was always sleeping in clubs it started the whole idea for the film. I think it has more to do with poetic license.

AS: For me this has to do with the power of the image, which makes you follow or explore it. If you say that this film, for instance, started with the image of one who repeatedly falls, then this is not an image that is at the end of the process, not an image you construct, but a found image that tells you what you are going to do.

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But your titles often point to your position. And that's why I would like to get to this staking of the position of the author, this idea of self-portraiture, in your films. There are a couple of films that begin with the word *My* like *My Last Bag Of Heroin (For Real)* [1986], *My Last Buck* [1972], *My Love* [1980], *My Nerves are About to Snap* [1979]. It is a very confessional thing. And then there are the films that are dedicated to someone, like *Made for Nicole K.* [1994] and *Made for Denise* [1977]. So there seems to be, apart from this interest in the world at large beginning with poetic images found somewhere out there, also another rapport between you and your subject, which is a very intimate one.

MA: Making portraits of people interests me. Suddenly I gain access to a person who becomes my friend and trusts me, and does not pay attention to my filming. They will just converse with me and let me do. At first we have to be friends; I have to gain their trust. Then the door is open and I am almost invisible. But in some way self-portraiture is also prevalent in my work, especially when *My* is involved in a title. I see my entire body of work as some kind of self-portrait. Friends, the places where I live, my choices of images, of moods, and of subject matter: the sum of it all is a portrait of the maker, me.

AS: In *Made for Denise*, there is a man quietly bleeding in front of the camera as he lights up a cigarette.

MA: This was an accidental shot. It's Peter Beard, who was in that video thing I was making with Larry Rivers in 1976; some video of a model that he had brought over for a collector, who he was making a painting for. So we put some lights on, somebody caught his foot in a cable, and the light fell on Peter's head and cut him. I was filming at the time and he said to keep filming, that it was fine, and then the blood started running. It stayed in my mind; I have this image of a man bleeding, and then suddenly it fell perfectly into this work, *Made for Denise*.

AS: How do you work with the images that you collect? How do you bring them together?

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MA: They have a great power in my head, those images, those sounds, and depending on the context, they carry on different meanings. They are my vocabulary, my words, my phrases, my great library. And if I choose to, I can use them later and forever in any of my video works; they are my new language. It is like a book and I look into it and I tear words out. This man bleeding, this character, his name, is not important. Who he is and how it happened is just fun gossip. In these kinds of works that I make, it is just the image of a wounded man. Is that what you are asking me?

AS: I was asking more specifically about the iconography. In art history, iconography and iconology deal with meanings of images, and historians try to put these images in certain categories; in more primitive iterations it is about finding out about what a painting should tell us. But there are more interesting ways of setting signs in motion and putting them to work. I am thinking about the way Aby Warburg constructed his Mnemosyne Atlas [1924-29], in which he brought together gestures that have the power of reappearing over many different periods and contexts, with slight modifications. There is something in the persistent reappearance of images in your films that makes me think about these kinds of uses of power of memory in order to find out about the sources of images, which is the Mnemosyne.

MA: But I work the opposite way. Warburg is making history, a story about what images are about, which is very interesting. But I do not go to see films in movie theaters because they could corrupt my thoughts and my practice of filmmaking; they are insidious, they teach me bad things. Maybe I do the same mistakes, but it is totally non-intellectualized, it is genetic.

AS: Oh, no, no. Of course I read a critique of a certain type of dry intellectualism in what you are saying now, but there is a difference between not being overly intellectual, and being intelligent or making intelligent use of the methods developed elsewhere. I think that you betray yourself at a certain point, for instance in the film in which you are tearing out pages of an art-history book. Basically you are doing two things there. One, you are bringing our attention to certain images and their importance to you; and two, you are doing it with these images and to them. There is this ambivalence between admiration and aggression, a way of showing that this is too beautiful for me, I have to destroy it, which is also a very beautiful act. In your films destruction is often positively connoted. There is a lot of tenderness, but there is also a lot of violence.

I thought about Warburg cutting pages with art-historical motives for his atlas of Mnemosyne, and his history of the evolution of gesture in art" gestures were what interested him, and they are also exactly what interest you. The gesture of a finger touching the wound for instance: one would find at least fifty such images in your films. And many less art-historically codified gestures that are specific to your body of work. Then you look at them closer and they reveal certain parents in the history of the image. I was thinking of decaying fruit, wild flowers. As the viewer you think: Why is this guy interested in all of this? Then you think: It is vanitas. In that same film you show a little skull that is trembling. You guide in wild ways your viewers through the iconographic landscapes of your films; you show them how to look at film by showing them the way you work. In that sense I appreciate what you say about the wholeness of poetic image on the one side, and the idea of making films as if using a certain image vocabulary to build phrases or entire poems on the other.

MA: Painting is very important to me. I have looked at painting since I was a kid; that is how I educated myself. I have a connection to still lives and the horror of imagery. Under the pretense and obligation of making religious painting, painters have expanded their subject matter critically, painting things that are sexy, horrific, and more horrific than the original subject matter.

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The Flemish, for example, are quite amazing at adding these painted comments. They're very important for me. I take a lot of inspiration from that but I do not think about it.

AS: You seem to be fairly immune to the imagery of cartoons. The sixties and seventies were a lot about popular imagery. Yet you seem to have these very classic references.

MA: I grew up without television. I used to hang around the Louvre when I was sixteen, seventeen, eighteen. I just went in and checked out the paintings for hours at a time. I was fascinated by their wealth of information about food, weaponry, clothing, jewelry, landscape, war, sex, murder, greed, beauty. These are the only visual clues of those times.

AS: And writing? You said your starting point was poetry.

MA: And photography. It is hard to talk about how my life was. You know people talk about their past and how they were raised in a very authoritative way it is weird every time I hear myself talking about my past. It's never the same as the last time I described it. So I will give you this version: When I arrived in Paris I was seventeen. I had not much, my parents kind of disappeared on me, and I fell into Le Chat Qui che, a famous free jazz bar. There was this guy running the bar, who was a poet, Patrice Cauda. He became a very good friend. He had tons of books and through him I met Ren Char and Marcel Jouhandeau in reality, as well as Rimbaud, Verlaine, Shakespeare, Flaubert, Baudelaire, Artaud, Proust, Camus, Robbe-Grillet, and others through their writings. Some of these characters were very influential on me. I tried to emulate Rimbaud I mean, the behavior. I read a lot about their personal lives and I thought it was great although they suffered a lot. And I became more rebellious, more political, because of these poetic encounters.

AS: Were you aware of the Situationists in Paris?

MA: No. In 1967 I was asked to show my 16mm films Krylon and Lune X in a Lettrist hangout, a bar in Paris, and they actually looked at them. It was the first time I felt an interest in my work. It took me a long time to figure out that Maurice Lematre was Maurice Lematre. Their behavior was so strange to me. They were cool, but it was hard for me to get into their world. They were totally interested in my films. But I did not get them exactly.

AS: Did you see Guy Debord's films? La soci du spectacle [1973]?

MA: Yes, but much later, in New York. I saw it fully by 1978, when I started to get bootlegged stuff and things on VHS.

AS: So you had this moment when you got exposed to a lot of good writing, poetry and prose, not only French but also translations. And then you moved to the US.

MA: I first went to America in 1962 by myself. I took a container ship from Hamburg and went to New York. I was a part-time assistant to a fashion photographer for Harper's Bazaar in Paris, and I was really good at helping and loading films, so he would call me during the collections and say, Why don't you come to New York. So one day I just took a boat and went there. I arrived in New Jersey, and I thought it was New York. I stayed for a year until I had to leave for overstaying my visa. When I got back to France I had been drafted; the French authorities were looking for me to go to the military because I was nineteen. My father, when he was around, talked about

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Russia; he thought it was the best country. For some reason I took America. Then, later, in 1969 in Paris, one late night I met Viva in the street with Nico. I had raised some money to make my film *Keeping Busy*. And I said to Viva: I want you to star in my film. I went with her to Rome, shot the film, we became lovers. And then Agns Varda called Viva and asked her to star in her film *Lions Love* [1969] in Hollywood. Viva said: I am not going without my boyfriend. So Agns had to pay for my trip to LA in order for Viva to come to her. And then, after the movie was done, we went to New York and stayed at the Chelsea Hotel for the next four years.

AS: You made *Roman Variations* in 91, and it seems Rome was an important place for you, one of those cities you like to return to. Your journeys, they often lead to the south.

MA: I think that I choose these places because I judge them to be less changed by the Western world. Morocco in the seventies was still very traditional. In Afghanistan it was like that, before it was destroyed. You step back a hundred years or more. Bolivia is eighty-percent indigenous people; they live the way they did a thousand years ago. And they chew coca leaves. It is a nice kind of drug, not like cocaine. It keeps you up a bit and not hungry, and it is good for traveling in the High Andes mountains, by yourself. You know, I am always by myself when I travel to these kinds of places.

AS: What about Vanuatu?

MA: The same thing. Vanuatu was returned to its indigenous people after it was plundered by the French and the English at the beginning of the nineteenth century until the 1960s. There is not much to be exploited there except the coconut trees planted during the past colonial era. No one uses much of that oil commodity anymore, so the country was kind of returned back to the islanders. Most of these islands are very isolated. Of course, a lot of Westerners have been there, but you can step into places where there still is a vision of things that brings you far back. And that beauty is interesting to me, as is being able to make a video recording of my experiences. It is also the physical part of being there: no restaurants, no hotels.

AS: Rome and New York are explainable within this logic: they are capitals of empires. So you are also interested in the opposite side of this pastoral state, which is the decaying empire, which makes me think of Thomas Cole's *The Course of Empire* [1833-36], five paintings that show the empire's savage and pastoral states before the catastrophe and then the ancient world falling apart from earthquake, deluge, fire, and all kinds of apocalyptic scenarios. But it is not the wrath of God; it is humanity meeting its end, quite inevitably, because of its many faults. Similarly, there is a certain moral statement in your work that I think has to do with this confrontation between the dark side and some other side, which is not the light side, but maybe the life side, which also includes death. I was just thinking how it was for you to work quite consequently for so many years in New York, which is not an easy place to survive, particularly in the seventies and eighties.

MA: I should title my 45 years of video *The Course of Empire*. Even now, not much has changed for me since the seventies, though the city has become more modern. New Yorks my headquarters, my address where my bills are sent, where my studios have been for the past 43 years. At some point in my four-hour film *Vanuatu Chronicles* [1998], I said that even though I am here on that pristine spot, on the island of Ambrym, I have to live in the falling empire. Even if I go to the countryside in upstate New York, I cannot live there all the time. I need a place where

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all my videotapes are and everything can happen really fast. If you want something, some information, some object, it is there, much faster than in Europe. I am used to having my headquarters in New York, to making films, and to depositing what I have taken. It is just a place that works well for me.

AS: I understand the practicalities and the habit of living there, but still, as a scenery, as a subject matter for the films

MA: I have exhausted New York in my films. I did a new work about the city recently, called Untitled (I Was Looking Back To See If You Were Looking Back At Me To See Me Looking Back At You) [2012]. I filmed for a year from my windows, filming the buildings, the streets, all the different actions going on in NYC. Well, I have not exhausted New York, apparently.

AS: In your films, you see it very much as a closed city; there are a lot of walls and cells. You film people in small interiors. There are not many open vistas. Sometimes there is sky but the sky is empty.

MA: I have filmed all the facets in this city. The open vistas of New York are a whole new work that I am putting together, a full installation, in fact. The people are my actors and the cities are my sets. People I know suddenly do something interesting, or I am in a certain situation and I feel I can record some of that. Wherever I am I can figure that out, but it turns out it happens in New York too.

AS: But there are many more people you do not know at all, and whom you probably never will get to know. These are the people you film from a distance, looking into their rooms, looking at their behavior in a way that often reminds me of the naturalist's point of view, as somebody who is curious of a species. You look at people as if you are looking at animals. There is John Berger's book *Why Look at Animals?* [1980/2009], and it describes how we can learn from animal behavior the behavior of people. But you seem more interested in reading animals in people, not in the expression of their individuality, but more as a divided herd. I am thinking about these passages in the *Chronicles Morocco* [1971-72], where donkeys are scattered

MA: In a parking lot.

AS: Having sex, jumping around.

MA: They are waiting for their bosses, their owners.

AS: Doing whatever. And people are doing very similar things in your films. I think one of the large arches in your work is the leveling of the animal world and the human world, and maybe even the object world. There is a drive behind the eye that looks at all these different phenomena as somehow very much of the same kin.

MA: Yes, I have often said that during the making of Cindy Sherman [1988], the method I used is the one for filming wild animals; you set up your camera near the spot where they go to drink from the river everyday. In the case of Cindy, the river is her studio where she goes drinking.

AS: You seem to be very interested in non-events.

MA: Dead time, you mean? But it is not really dead to me; there is a lot going on. I think even

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some writers, Alain Robbe-Grillet, for example, go into describing almost nothing. I feel that there is something there that is important. To be engaged in that time when there is almost nothing.

AS: People just hanging out, looking at things, passing by, scratching, things like that. It brings you to the animal kingdom. The difference would be that animals do not get bored, while humans get bored easily. You bring animal qualities to humans. It always strikes me that you do not seem to portray people who are too stressed out about something; instead, they have an almost royal laziness or carelessness about time passing.

MA: It is against my morals to use people under stress, but there is plenty of stress described in many of my films.

AS: You also do portray people who are obsessively busy with something, or running somewhere after something: fame, for instance, or drugs. Sometimes there are very strong and intense characters and you can go crazy when you listen to them. Nevertheless, in your films I often sense sympathy for your human subjects.

MA: I do not like to exploit people. I think I have not done that up to now, unless our politician's morals are changing again, which they are. You are not supposed to look at people; there are all kinds of laws about that now. When I am editing I make sure that if I have recorded someone that doesn't know that they have been recorded, that I do not feature them in a situation that would be upsetting for them, or a situation in which they would be recognized. They are just people; you cannot really tell who that is on the windowsill.

AS: The excessive care about people's rights to privacy and to their image is a part of biopolitics today, in which the state defines relationships between people. What we are witnessing, in the US even more than in Europe, is a form of virtual imprisonment of human beings who are theoretically walking free. The unregulated space of human relations shrunk drastically and was superseded by the current corporate fiction of the Totally Safe Western-European and US-American World. And this is something that your films speak very passionately against, and they do it right from the start, with a prophetic intuition, if one remembers that the footage we are talking about might be coming from the year 1970.

MA: My entire attitude not consciously is about disregarding the authorities, to a certain extent. There is always some limit to all this stuff. The forces are very powerful and they can stop you. Still, I can work within the parameters and turn around all those things that people are trying to impose on me. That is the power of film. That is what some comedians do on stage: they manage to be very aggressive within the parameters. For instance the film *The Aristocrats* [2005] proved that point. That is the beauty of language.

AS: What do you teach your students?

MA: To open their eyes, which means to make their eyes notice more than education usually is inclined to do, namely collecting and assembling facts as Josef Albers has said, which is like how I make films. I do not show mainstream films they can see those whenever they want to. I carefully orchestrated my own film history and what can be done with sound and image. I am lucky to have a film collection that has been built up over the past 15 years. I then carefully rearranged and remixed segments, like a DJ, so they can be dealt with in a three-hour class at



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Yale University's School of Art. I often show artists talking about themselves. For instance, last semester I showed Damien Hirst, among many others. On his website there is a film that he made about himself. Not that I like it, but it is an interesting example of using a film for self-promotion. It is very boringly well made.

AS: You know the film where John Chamberlain is cutting his sofa? It is called *The Hersey Couch* [1976].

MA: He made one for me and *Viva in the Chelsea Hotel*, with his big knife. I have great footage of him in the countryside. There is a film of him cutting it?

AS: In an apartment in a hotel or residential building in front of Central Park, an apartment of a rich person, like a collector. There are tons of people around. Some guests appear and snort coke as he is cutting and drinking; it takes ages, and nothing happens. It is great. But back to the students. I wanted to address this one question: One popular saying today is that we live in a world that is saturated with images and that there is an overflow. But when one looks at your work one comes to the conclusion that you totally enjoy the fact that the world is saturated with images. You are just working through them.

MA: More words that come into my grasp.

AS: It is amazing to see how you manage the images. I understood it when I looked at *Endless Column* [2011], where you are typing images. You hear clac, clac, clac, and the images go very fast, but you, the viewer, do not get tired. Instead you get hyper-excited to the point when it is almost more than you can take. It keeps you on a highly responsive level towards the images. It is a practical demonstration of the fact that we are perfectly capable of handling a lot of images, thinking logically between them, and then when there is no logic in between, to fill it up with associations. Psychology jumps in and makes connections. There has been a lot of image critique. Cindy Sherman, for instance, and the artists of the Pictures Generation decided to look into how we construct images. They created strong and immobile images. It reminds me a little bit of going to the Museum of Natural History, where you have stuffed animals.

MA: Solidified things.

AS: Well, and the way you work with images is like working with living animals. In your films the images are like living currency, not like dead signs. I am not surprised that you seem to be quite excited by the iPhone and that kind of direct extension of the hand, rather than maybe only of the eye. Maybe it is one of the first devices where you are not supposed to look into some kind of viewer, but you just point at something. It is the gesture of the hand that captures and determines what will appear on the screen for the viewer.

MA: I hate to say iPhone, but I think the phone is a great tool. Because everyone has one there are a lot of thoughts about it. I do not have to think about it, though, because that is what I do: I use the smallest tools available to record. For the first two years I had a phone I did not realize that I was making work with it. *Endless Column* is made with a phone, *Narcolepsy* is too, and there are more coming up.

AS: As we've already discussed, a couple of your works introduce literary genres: chronicles, diaries, confessions. We also have a conversation, a portrait

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MA: And then there are titles with references to film. A Coupla White Faggots Sitting Around Talking [1980], Seduction of Patrick [1979], Chasing the Dragon [1987], The Feature [2008]. They are all put together soap-opera-style.

AS: Soap opera in the costume of religious drama. Seduction of Patrick sounds almost like the martyrdom of Jeanne d'Arc. It has a high religious tone that gets perverted over the course of the film. A Coupla White Faggots Sitting Around Talking indeed sounds like a comment on soap, but also rings of Debords film On the Passage of a Few Persons Through a Rather Brief Unity of Time [Sur le passage de quelques personnes Å travers une assez courte unit de temps, 1959], and one of its opening lines: ur camera has captured for you a few glimpses of an ephemeral micro-society. Apocalypse Later [2003] that is a clear biblical and cinematic reference. And then there is The Feature. The title sounds like the most generic thing imaginable...

MA: I was thinking of making something out of all my footage. A new work, going into everything. The filmmaker Andrew Neel, who is the grandson of my friend Alice Neel, has a production company and we talked for a few years about making a film. Finally, in 2006, we started The Feature. We worked with Luke Meyer, a great editor. I usually edit myself but we figured that if I started editing this film, I would have become distracted by my own footage and not follow the idea we had planned. We spent two years making it.

AS: So it is special in some way.

MA: Yes, in the sense that it is not the way I usually work.

AS: You do not often collaborate. You do most of the editing yourself. Actually, the piecing together is a key part of your work.

MA: Sound, editing, and filming are all equal. It is important in my work to personally control them. But for The Feature, it was important for someone else to collaborate on it and edit it with me.

AS: What does the title mean? Does it relate to the length?

MA: Yes, this is a feature film: it is three hours. The first thing I said at the Berlin Film Festival was: I think the title is wrong, it should have been called The Trailer. Comparatively, the length of the film that we made from the existing footage is about a trailer-ratio.

AS: One could say Cleopatra was also a feature film. What would be the difference in approach?

MA: Cleopatra is wilder; I filmed most of it myself. Also I had a crew. The Feature uses my archives as source material and new, hyper-cinematic scenes, shot by my co-director Neel. I perform in it some kind of an artist that has access to all kinds of things, a composite person on top of the food chain in the art world. It is not based on one artist in particular. When artists make millions selling their work they often become strange; it is a complex thing that is happening. Newly rich, they act like Hollywood superstars, and suddenly they just recoil into walls. That is what money does, or power. You cannot really hang around in the street anymore. I play that kind of character in the film; it's kind of a comedy. Then a few months later Andrew Neel came back asking me to tell my life story, and he recorded it with a tape recorder. I made up some stuff, and some things are real. All along the film you hear that voiceover. Sometimes I say I sometimes I say he it is not to hide anything: My life is on film everywhere; my behavior is

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totally exposed. It was more about the confusing power of film. The viewers then think it is a real story, and often I have been asked if I am going to die, because at the beginning of the film I am supposed to have a brain tumor. Because we tried to make it like a film, there is a beginning and there is an end. That is why we got invited to film festivals they could relate to it.

AS: Because it has this narrative pretext, and that should be enough to qualify.

MA: Yes. And suddenly they became excited. Inside all of that you can see a lot of extracts of my works. There are a few articles about it, by serious people, which are pretty interesting.

AS: You know this documentary on Chet Baker [Bruce Webers Lets Get Lost, 1988]?

MA: I have never seen it. I knew Chet. I thought it was a film.

AS: He is not very well in it. He died soon thereafter. He is being driven in a car, in Cannes and LA and other places that he had visited before. They brought him to Cannes; he is hanging out with girls. I was wondering how you managed, over so many years, to avoid over-stylization. For instance, this Baker film is all about contrast, very black-and-white, like early nouvelle vague or Cassavetes.

MA: That is why I did not look at it, because it looked like film noir, it kind of scares me. Cassavetes is awesome.

AS: It is pretty beautiful and very sad. You seem to rather work with what a medium offers. The quality of the image is the result of a given medium that you use, but without any extra tricks.

MA: I use it in the simplest way possible.

AS: Differences come from the fact that you use different formats: several types of video, different characteristics of digital material, creating an aesthetic out of dissonances, instead of one unifying tenor.

MA: If you look at Antonioni or Bergman, they always use the same cameraman. They really have a vision: they play with the light. I like to look at that. I think I have a style; you can recognize it. The aesthetic comes from the way I handle the camera. I know exactly what it does when I use it, and I do not make too many mistakes. Actually, I can make beautiful light in the work, because I know how to adapt with the tool. There is a lot of thinking about how things have to be done.

AS: But mostly using a natural setting.

MA: Mostly using existing light and trying sometimes to put the object into bare light.

AS: Still it is working with the circumstances and not creating a show with studio lights, a setting. Which could be also done with simple means.

MA: My whole idea is to have as little as possible to make films. A Coupla White Faggots it was so difficult to make that film because no one had any money including the downtown actors. I did bring some lights but then the film kind of degenerated by being copied on some lower equipment. And it's fine anyway; no regrets.

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AS: Did you sometimes re-shoot?

MA: I cannot remember re-shooting anything, ever. If it does not work I just move on and replace it with something else.

AS: How is your image bank organized? How do you find things there?

MA: My image bank is constantly sharply floating in my head. The styles you see in my work are different because they are different formats; the tapes look physically different. So already, visually, on my shelves, I can go straight to the seventies because they look so different. But most of the tapes have been digitized. So now with titles and numbers you just go back and forth, and you can scratch through a lot of stuff very fast. I also have a list with descriptions of 1700 tapes, organized by key words. The other part is the software it is kind of a miracle. The work still has to be done, still has to be good. But it is a help; it permits me to travel through all the things that I am looking for and to hear sounds that I never heard before because they are in a corner of the tape. It is a fantastic improvement.

AS: You have soundtracks separate?

MA: Sometimes I forget that I have them. I have tons of them.

AS: Do you use physical tapes anymore?

MA: I cannot even play the tapes. I only look at digital. I have 300 videotapes that are not digitized, and that are becoming a bit of a problem.

AS: What do you do with those?

MA: They are there on a shelf. If I could find some funds, they could be digitized.

AS: What kind of material?

MA: Half-inch reel-to-reel. There are not any players anymore. And they stick to the drums. They have to be put in some kind of a bath. I am sure there are a few good things that could be done. It is from the early seventies.

AS: But it is material, not works.

MA: There is material and definitely there are works that is why I kept all my tapes, because they are works in general. At the beginning, I wrote notes on every tape. I have tons of notebooks with the written content of the tapes: Bridget is there, blah, blah, blah, Andy is there, and then we are in the Hamptons, another good shot of breast pump

AS: Did other people use your material for their work?

MA: People often ask me. I am not a good lender of my work. I have done it a few times for friends. People want to make their own film with pieces of my films, they want to see Gregory Corso, Warhol, Sherman, some cliché or whatever. But everybody wants everything for free and I really cannot afford it. I want good money for my footage. Fuck it. If they do not want to pay for it I am not giving it. I spent my entire life making films and I do not even have a net below me.

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But it is fine, I am an expert at this. I have a home in the countryside, a car, my studio in Williamsburg. I live well. Look, I am talking to you at the Les Trois Rois in Basel tonight.

Recorded in March 2013.  
Transcribed and edited March 2013 through January 2014.

## Michel Auder's Machinic Documents of Bohemia

Justin Lieberman

"That's how the films ended, you know? In a puff of smoke."

—Michel Auder

Michel Auder's films and videos depict a bohemian world of excess inhabited by artists, writers, junkies, prostitutes, and the idle rich. Throughout the '70s he produced a number of short films that seemed to evince a desire to break down the boundaries between art and life, recording unscripted events as they unfolded among a group of his friends and acquaintances. These films are often rife with provocation, transgression, sex, drugs, and emotional outbursts, and Auder himself tends to take a central role even when he does not appear on the screen. *The Feature* (2007), made in collaboration with Andrew Neel, presents a dramatic rupture in this oeuvre, one that posits, but also alters, its meaning. The scope of *The Feature* is massive, encompassing a period of time no shorter than 40 years, yet it is an extremely focused film, one that drives at its point directly and without hesitation or moral compunction. In this, it is an act of autobiographical documentary filmmaking with little or no precedent. It has been said of *The Feature* that it shows us a man whose life is more interesting than his art. <sup>1</sup> This is a view that presupposes that what is being presented to us is an accurate account of the details of his life. It is an incorrect view, but not for the obvious reason. Here, I would like to discuss the particular way in which Auder's art actually precedes what we might think of as his life, while simultaneously creating a space in which a life-as-art might emerge.

Auder often uses old footage and old photographs in his work. These aged materials seem to invoke a kind of authenticity, almost shamelessly parading their access to a past reality. Why is this the case? Theodor Adorno refers to this phenomenon in an essay regarding the phonograph. The more audible the technology itself (the scratchier the record), the more "present" the speaker. The more accurately the original sound is captured and reproduced, the more alienated and distant the speaker becomes. <sup>2</sup> Is this not also the case with successive generations of video recording equipment? As the image quality becomes more clear and crisp up to and including current high-definition cameras and monitors, we become more and more skeptical of what it is we are seeing. It is not the patina of age that lends mechanical reproduction its convincing qualities, but rather the willingness of the machine to disclose itself as mediator. In *The Feature*, obviously staged footage shot with new equipment is interspersed with "real" footage from years ago. Our first reaction is to see the recent footage as a fictional framing device for the older work, which was "true" and unmediated by staging

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and intention. (Staging and intention are of course the locations to which we displace our need for mediation in the absence of the palpable presence of technology.) We might think of this as a process of fictionalizing one's own autobiography. If we approach it in this way, we find that within the film there are events that are "lies" and events that are "true." But what determines this difference has little or nothing to do with the events as they happened, only with the particular technology used to represent them. From this standpoint, it is easy to imagine footage shot recently with an old camera, and inserted into the "true" sections of the film. These would then be no more or less truthful than the others like them. What this reveals is not that everything in the film is now false and/or unreliable. Instead, it presents a picture of truth *as appearances*.

Auder has occasionally been compared to Nan Goldin, a photographer whose images seem to hinge on their unmediated access to real people, situations, and emotions. This is a mistake. Goldin's work posits the real as being solidly located in the human body. Her themes of sex, death, and relationships are expounded in ways that are unquestionably direct. We may see people role-playing, but what we are being shown is not the role but the humanity of the player as it occurs in this or that person's corporeal form and its attendant fragility. Goldin tears away the mask, and, in doing so, the body becomes a sort of fetish object onto which meaning is projected.<sup>3</sup> This is a far cry from Auder's work, in which there is no "human subject" behind the role being played. In *The Feature*, it is the role itself that is human, and this is what makes the work so difficult to confront. Because when we look too closely at these subjects, they simply disappear. In Auder's videos, the surface behavior is the true location of each subject. A human body as shown in *The Feature* may, in fact, *be* the character, and the subjectivity the characters possess may, in fact, *be* produced by these bodies, but it *cannot* (as opposed to Goldin) be located there. In *The Feature*, the self of the subjects is like a ghost in the machine. This means that the truth of Auder's subjects is not that they are limited, finite beings who, once dead, will be only rotting remains, but instead that they are infinite beings, their subjectivity transferred from one machine (their bodies) to another (the video). No substantial loss takes place in this transference. While this may initially sound like a McLuhanism, a key factor is that no substantial gain takes place either. There is no transcendence in the transfer. No digital ecstasy accompanies it. The subject Viva does not become a saint, nor Michel himself. They do not become more or less real. They continue on as they were.

Throughout the film, Auder returns to moments from his past, inserting intentions, reasons, free choices and, along with Neel, coherent narrative structure into a life that might otherwise be an unwatchable chaos of thousands of hours of recorded events in real time. Indeed, the tapes, films, and hard drives sitting on his shelves are just that. But *The Feature* is not a life-size map of reality, laid over reality, as in Jorge Luis Borges. Here Auder's work diverges from that of his contemporaries Jonas Mekas and even Harry Smith, who sought to obliterate certain boundaries between art and life entirely. With *The Feature*, what we are seeing is the

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emergence and unfolding of the mechanism of consciousness. The collaborative retroactive positing of coherence into the narrative of Auder's existence is perfectly analogous to the way in which consciousness asserts itself<sup>4</sup>. Auder's life exists only insofar as it appears to itself, and it does this in full view of the public through the film. Likewise in public, Auder assumes the responsibility for his life. In this way we can see that *The Feature* is not confessional per se, in that Auder is not involved in "revealing" himself or what he thinks of himself. Everything in the film might or might not have been subjected to revision, but we can only ever take this revision as the truth.

There is another way in which Auder structures his own existence, and this has to do with bohemia. Bohemian existence and its relationship to artistic production is constantly reaffirmed. So much so that it begins to take on the structure of a belief system. Auder himself seems to play the role of "the guy with the camera" in the various bohemian communities he inhabits. Here it would seem that Harry Smith and Michel Auder converge. Both continually align themselves with fringe elements of society (junkies, artists, prostitutes). Both document these milieus so that they might be preserved, with a sincere belief in their value. But while Smith assumes an ethnographic role (albeit one that is highly complicated by the way in which he posits himself as an other through the particularly modern ways in which he frames his subjects), Auder rejects even this minimal distance. We might say that while Smith's work presents conflict between multiple iterations of the modern, Auder's insists upon the modern as singular and himself as a practitioner. Unlike Smith, whose bohemian position and ethnographic take on the similarities between the modern and the pre-modern affords him a privileged position in relation to both, Auder's work evinces an almost impossible belief in the modern from the standpoint of a participant in the ongoing project of its construction. This is the key that explains the odd things Auder's documentary practice seems to take for granted in dealing with such highly documented subjects as Andy Warhol, Cindy Sherman, Eric Bogosian, and Harry Smith himself. He does not strive for an accurate or even systematic representation of these subjects. They appear on the screen only insofar as their presence serves the narrative. It is interesting to note that the films are staked neither on the obscurity nor the recognition of their subjects. In fact, despite their celebrity, this recognition-of-subjects adds little or nothing to our understanding at all. In the face of so many highly individualistic personalities all playing themselves, this would seem nearly impossible. But the feat accomplished via the folding of the bohemian (the social relationships which produce divergent narratives within a group) into the modern (singularity of narrative with regards to the group as an ensemble) creates a situation within the film that also has the effect of folding each individual into the whole. The film assumes the role of the singular historical account of the individuals it portrays, and in each and every scene it is this account that takes precedence, rather than the individuals.

Here is where we might enter into an understanding of the structure of the film's climactic "final decision," which appropriately does not belong to Auder. Cindy Sherman decides to end



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their marriage, and once again we experience Auder's permissiveness with his subjects in allowing events to take place. Auder is extremely careful with his editing in these final scenes, allowing us to see no more than we need to in order to understand. Michel has moved from inhabiting a series of squalid apartments shared by various drug addicts and fuck-ups to a perfect example of a sophisticated Manhattan bourgeois interior inhabited by a celebrity working professionally within the culture industry. This is nearly all we see of his marriage to Sherman. Michel the character walks through the halls of the apartment, and the shiny stainless-steel appliances are shown in a sequence that also includes a small electric-chair painting by Warhol (or is it a photograph by Lawler?), hung in a tasteful salon arrangement along with other well-known artworks. Might Auder have been there when it was made? It is the world that has changed here, and the character refuses to adapt. The reality of the situation is a historical one. It is the passage from the down-and-out bohemian art world of the '70s to the "professional bohemianism" of the '80s; from an unspoken solidarity among individuals to a new world of competitive individualism reaffirmed by financial success. The beginning of the Reagan era signaled the ultimate subsumption of Bohemia into the mechanism of capital. This is a nearly insufferable loss to Michel, who can only respond to this desublimation of individualism with a kind of petulance.

This refusal on the part of the character of Michel is his final free act of the film. Here we can see the way that a free act must necessarily be structured as a confrontation and dismissal of one's own desire. Had Michel continued on with this existence and accepted the objects of his desire, these objects would have then lost their meaning, and this would have been a far greater loss than the objects themselves. The wife and the apartment would have become part of a stable unchanging landscape rather than a moment within an ongoing narrative of struggle. Michel the character recognizes the falsity of his situation. And so he sacrifices these things, along with his marriage, precisely in order that he might be rewarded with their loss. Like every free act in the film, the drastic nature of the refusal is twofold. At its base level, it is a refusal by the character Michel directed at himself, a personal decision made so that he might be able to live with himself. But it is once again at the level of the universal that the act finds its true meaning when the filmmaker Auder retroactively posits it. It is the radical refusal of an individual directed towards a society caught in the loop of its own self-congratulatory monologue.

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Still from *The Feature* (2008, dir. Michel Auder and Andrew Neel, 180min). Courtesy of the artist.



Still from *The Feature* (2008, dir. Michel Auder and Andrew Neel, 180min). Courtesy of the artist.



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Still from *The Feature* (2008, dir. Michel Auder and Andrew Neel, 180min). Courtesy of the artist.



Still from *The Feature* (2008, dir. Michel Auder and Andrew Neel, 180min). Courtesy of the artist.

**Endnotes**

1. See J. Hoberman, "Michel Audez's *The Feature*," *The Village Voice* (March 18, 2009). ↵
2. See Theodor W. Adorno, "The Curves of the Needle," trans. Thomas Y. Levin, *October* 55 (Winter, 1990), pp. 48-55. ↵
3. I owe this insight to John Miller; see "The Body as Fetish: an Open Letter to My Would-Be Compatriots" in *Aperto '93: Emergency/Emergenza, XLV Biennale de Venezia* (Milan: Giancarlo Politi Editore, 1993). ↵
4. See Slavoj Žižek on Hegel's "Positing the Presuppositions" in *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006) ↵

January 2013



Michel Auder, *A Coupla White Faggots Sitting Around Talking*, 1980, video, color, sound, 65 minutes.

LISBON

## “Portrait of Michel Auder”

CULTURGEST

Rua Arco do Cego, 50

February 8–May 19, 2013

Curated by Miguel Wandschneider

Michel Auder edits his intimate video diaries out of more than five thousand hours of footage shot since the late 1960s. Ranging in length from ultrabrief to a few minutes to epic,

Auder’s videos collectively constitute a dispersed autobiography—with a voyeur’s stratagem of picturing the self through others—chronicling demimonde adventures, rocky marriages to Viva and Cindy Sherman, as well as his own heroin addiction. Culturgest presents a generous selection from this ample oeuvre, including screenings of *Chelsea Girls with Andy Warhol* (1971–76/1994), *Portrait of Alice Neel* (1976–1983/1999), and *A Coupla White Faggots Sitting Around Talking* (1980), among many other works; meanwhile, more “nonnarrative” pieces will be installed in its galleries. This June, Kunsthalle Basel opens a corresponding show, producing, with Culturgest, an appropriately voluminous catalogue of essays, synopses, and transcripts.

— Ed Halter

**purple MAGAZINE**  
— *F/W 2012 issue 18*

**MICHEL AUDER**

**the thoroughly documented, marginally fictional life of Michel Auder, artist**

**text by ANDREW BERARDINI**

**portraits by ANNABEL MEHRAN**

Michel Auder is not the first person to edit his life for the sake of art, but his is surely one of the grandest of such projects. Minute-by-minute, hour-by-hour, the truth is that reality can be boring. Even during sleep, a cavalcade of mostly mundane thoughts shove and prattle for space, filling the silence, occupying the gaps in consciousness. Our prayers and worries, petty envies and quiet castigations, the tongue-bitten complaints and heart-crumpling concerns, hopes, loves, obsessions, and lusts all scrape against each other in the long hours. Yes, you have regrets. The word "regret" floats through you like an autumn leaf, back-and-forth in gentle arcs, down and away. But one thing leads to another. Real time is unsettling from the outside looking in.



Can you play it all back? On the screen of your blinkered eyelids, all the mornings, evenings, afternoons, all the quotidian and extraordinary triumphs and transgressions that occur in a single life? Can you reorder these events in your head, isolating one kind or another? Does it all come through like some distant transmission from a planet you traveled to long ago and to which you never wish to return? Or is it like you are living it all now? The memories more real than the present moment, so transporting that you can smell the invisible lilacs of decades past, more floral and pungent than real flowers could ever be.



Life, and this may be stating the obvious, isn't what actually happened but how we remember it happening, the subtle edits we make from moment to moment. People have always retold their slanted tales, and history is proverbially written by its winners. But what about our own anonymous stories?

In the most literal sense, Michel Auder is as much a historian

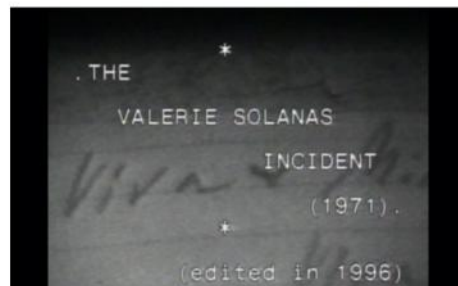
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as an artist. He is his own recording angel, both seeing himself and seeing from himself, the camera almost always handy, over four decades of creative activity. The shots he records are of himself, his lovers, his bad behavior as well as his moments of grace. There is an intense and gruesome beauty captured in his casual affairs and long stares through open windows. There are images of drugs, sex, varieties of self-abuse, arguments, portraits of working artists, performers and occasional porn stars, yet more sex, vacations, torsos, cigarettes, boredom and sunsets. There is the stream of life, the fiction of the everyday extended, shot with intimacy, languor, and emotionally exposed. The material can be degrading, with the nostalgic atmosphere of a home movie, but edited, always edited.



The truth is that each of our lives is filled with a collection of moments that, when strung together carefully, is capable of revealing the profound depth and power of all existence: tragedy and farce, rhythm and joy, terror and bravery. Few of us, however, have – for art or ego – revealed our lives so nakedly as Auder. Or so oddly and compellingly.

Auder's career took a fortuitous turn when he purchased his first portable video camera (a Sony Portapak, the first portable video camera). With that, he let the film roll incessantly on what seems an extraordinary life, and by many measures it is. The litany of Auder's allies and collaborators, subjects and lovers, shows him to be a kind of nexus of the social and artistic change happening all around him. He recorded everything from the May '68 riots in Paris to Andy Warhol's Factory in downtown New York City; from his drug misadventures with Eric Bogosian to his amorous relationships with the actress Viva, and the artist Cindy Sherman. There are also personal portraits of his friends, including Alice Neel and Annie Sprinkle.



These boldface names and collaborators are an essential component of his work. Yet in addition to capturing his glamorous milieu, Auder accumulated over 5,000 hours of raw footage taken from his private life, his interests and observations. What's most important artistically is his ability to reassemble and interpret all this footage. The friends and lovers, the situations and historical moments are merely conditions and contexts for imagination. Auder transforms himself from documentarian to artist only when he shuffles the material around, concentrating equally on what is being seen and the eye that is seeing it.

Lines blur. Since his life experiences are the material of his work, it becomes difficult to separate the two. One is left with the sense that he may even find it difficult to do that. In the trailer for The Feature (2008), the film of his life that he made with Andrew Neel, Auder appears framed by flowers, a bunch of bananas lying on the table in front of him, and waxes philosophic about his work:





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"If you take five thousand or so video hours and deduct what my life has been, it could be made in so many different ways and in so many different takes. I could come out like a total asshole, like a monster, like a great poet. My life is based on my video works. I was attracted to making movies out of what was already around me. The idea of making film constantly out of whatever was around me. I don't need actors, I don't need sets. I'll take the sets and the actors from what's around me."

Piece by piece, with a view through a chink in the edited hours, to look at Auder's work is to look at his life, thoroughly documented and marginally fictionalized. But how does one arrange all these events: by their chronology or by the chronology of his edits?

Chelsea Girls with Andy Warhol, 1971-76, an 88-minute video, may have been shot in the '70s, but Auder left it unedited until 1994. Here he observes and learns from Warhol the simple genius/stupidity of letting a camera run unattended for hours: "Q: So all pictures are good that come from a camera? Warhol: Yes." Somehow, the mundane becomes heroic with repetition and time, and the simple act of capturing one's era without fuss takes on its own weird charm. Warhol, who was the center of the social machine that burnished Auder's reputation – and from whose talent the latter was constantly drawing – comes across in Chelsea Girls as a kind of empty vessel. After the film was shot, his reputation waxed and waned while the footage sat stuffed on a shelf or in a box somewhere for 20 years. Auder found other projects.

There was Chasing the Dragon (an old Chinese metaphor for opium use), the 43-minute video he made with Eric Bogosian, which more or less follows Bogosian as he bumbles around getting high, his sense of story bleeding between the fictive and the real. The film was made between 1971 and 1987, and one can easily imagine Auder over that sixteen-year span simply not being done, getting distracted by something else, constantly tweaking his footage, finally letting it go into the world and perhaps even then not letting it be over.

The focus of Auder's work isn't always on his immediate life, but on the strange things he sees. In 1984, for example, he recorded a number of Olympic events, when the games were in Los Angeles, directly from the television screen. Like a good swathe of his work, even the Olympics become salacious. Of course, the games are always about bodies, but Auder makes a special effort in this 25-minute video to concentrate on athletes' crotches, the folds and bulges tightly wrapped in synthetics and cotton, spread-eagled and arched in fantastic configurations. You also glance at their parts, briefly, tastefully, trying not to appear too concupiscent or sleazy. This work is a second level of mediation. Maybe Auder is critiquing TV's reduction of humans to



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mere bodies; maybe he's just turned on. Perhaps it is both. The apparent lust, coupled with the irony of the Olympics as a couch sport for the viewer, locates the work inside Auder and his particular desires.

In both *Voyage to the Center of the Phone Lines* (1993) and his more recent work *Untitled (I was looking back to see if you were looking back at me to see me looking back at you)* (2012), Auder finds himself peering into other people's lives without their permission. In the first case he taps cell phone conversations. In the second, he is peeping from his window into other peoples' apartments. The intimacy of the phone conversations captured in *Voyage* can be bracing. It would be off-puttingly intimate if it didn't bring out the voyeur in me. I find myself feeling guilty, even as a procession of sunsets and nature shots complements these often furtive conversations. A part of me does wonder if these are real exchanges. They must be. But then again, does it even matter? Do we depend on the film's documentary fact for the project to fully work?

In the latter video, Auder is shooting circumstances it would be difficult to fake, and often he's implicated in our watching him watching them: his reflection in the window glass (as well as what appears to be his granddaughter), the sounds of TVs maundering in the background. The acts we witness together are both sexy and mundane. Why is it always lonelier to watch people eating by themselves, especially when they are watching television? Why are we so curious about how others move, fight, fuck when we're sure that they think no one is watching? Auder seems to be breaking some social codes in regard to privacy. Are we also implicated? Or are we cleared because, at least in the case of his own life, we have been invited to watch?

In Auder's short video *My Last Bag of Heroin (For Real)* (1986), which is perhaps one of his best, you know he's full of shit. You hope he's not for his own sake, but this film depicts Auder at his lowest, a junkie desperate to stop. Auder the actor reveals himself to be an untrustworthy narrator. The general rule of "Don't trust junkies" is of course always in effect, but here it can also be seen as a commentary on his entire oeuvre, a moment of revelation: everything should be regarded as art – not documentary – with the demands of concept and aesthetic overriding fact. It's just that here the fiction he's constructing is drawn from an archive that once, on some level, reflected reality.

Like much of Auder's work, the archive is so big that the artist's work of documenting and re-editing will only be finished when he is, too. Five thousand hours, if he's telling the truth, is over two hundred solid days of footage, the value of which is found less in the sheer length of the project than in the additional time Auder has invested in rearranging it. It is Auder the human artist who animates his work through subjective choices.



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While watching Auder's oeuvre, I find myself wishing that I had a recording of every sunset I paused to watch, every lover's face dissolving into orgasm, every mistake, every noble deed, every act of cowardice and flight of poetic monologue. I wish I could see it indexed and reordered, a series of unfortunate events and a building of glories, each a different edit of the same small existence. A life seen only through passenger windows, the acres of book pages, the years of screens. To reorder it, to make it make sense, to document, not to cement fact, but to enliven imagination – to return back to wherever that was. A madeleine, perhaps.

I don't know if I could handle my own collective cruelty, the careful documentation of myself at my weakest, most fearful, the abyssal plunges. Would I be brave enough as an artist to expose what a selfish prick I've been in life? Or would I choose to expose only the moments of self-aggrandizement, of profound generosity and hard-fought bravery? Setting aside the day-to-day rhythm, the form of fact, would I be brave enough to reveal the truth? In this light, I feel lucky to have Auder.

END



## Michel Auder in Etablissement d'en face projects

Caroline Dumalin

Edition 157

May-June 2012

The Brussels collective Etablissement d'en face looks back on the forty-year career of Michel Auder. This French video artist achieved cult status through the raw documentation of his eventful private and social life in *downtown* New York from the late 1960s onwards. Initially active in politically charged Paris as a fashion photographer and filmmaker with the Zanzibar group, he underwent the influence of the *Nouvelle Vague* filmmakers. Through a rash marriage to *Factory girl* Viva Superstar, he ended up in the direct sphere of influence of Andy Warhol. His introduction to Warhol's non-narrative, purposefully annoying films and the Sony Portapak, the first easily portable video camera available on the market, marked the beginning of an almost compulsive urge to record the world as he experienced it in all its immediacy. At Etablissement, these earlier and longer productions are mainly discussed in the evening program (every Wednesday and Thursday evening), although visitors can also use a *video-on-demand* option during the day. Shown include *Keeping Busy* (1969, 67'), *Cleopatra* (1970, 154') and *Chelsea Girls With Andy Warhol* (1971-1976, 88'), in which Viva always figures as a *leading lady*, but also portraits of Cindy Sherman (Mrs Auder in the 80s and 90s, who surprisingly hated being filmed), sex guru and performance artist Annie Sprinkle and painter and best friend Alice Neel. While Warhol adopted the aesthetics of the machine as much as possible, Auder distinguished himself in his early work by his emotional involvement. He leans more towards the autobiographical-poetic videos of Jonas Mekas, who was an ardent defender of Auder's work. Auder likes to see his subjects and tries to get close to them, albeit always with a camera in between.

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The exhibition at Etablissement mainly focuses on the later, relatively unknown work. A special discovery are the two longer, unconventional travelogues from the 1990s that are displayed in the basement. In *Voyage to the Center of the Phone Lines* (1993, 55'), Auder has retreated to a beach house, alone (on rehab, or so the open secret goes), with nothing to film but his sea view. For an hour, the waves lap, the trees blow and the sun sets undisturbed to a 'soundtrack' of secretly tapped, confidential telephone conversations; from sweet conversations between mother and child to embarrassing *break-up calls* and ideologically charged discussions. Less moving, but visually all the more compelling is his *Roman Variations* (1991, 50'), in which the Eternal City is read both through its renowned ruins and through the trivial activities of its unsuspecting inhabitants, which Auder watches from his hotel room. In addition, he focuses his blatantly eroticizing gaze alternately on the genitals of mythological statues in the city and the nude models on television, and he confronts explicit representations of violence in baroque paintings with gory news footage of local shootings.

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In the actual exhibition space on the ground floor, a selection of Auder's shorter videos, mainly from the last two decades, can be seen. The space has been converted into a comfortable cinema room, including carpet; The aim is a viewing experience that approaches the intimacy and voyeurism of Auder's video work. The fact that the reviewer tended to doze off while viewing the exhibition was, for once, not a bad side effect. The recent *Narcolepsy* (2010, 22') focuses precisely on inducing such a buzz. The recurring opening image of a woman sitting upright and napping mixes with close-ups and ambient sounds of picturesque mountain landscapes, crackling fireplace flames, red-painted toenails, swimming torsos, running taps, white rabbits and the wolf that catches them. Originally intended as an installation with five monitors, the different parts now follow each other in one visual sequence. Just like the sleeping woman, the audience is invited to take a passive position and be carried away by the atmospheric and sensual images that Auder shot off the cuff with a simple digital camera, underwater equipment and mobile phone. However diverse their original context may be, Auder always allows one fleeting image to shine through behind another. Taken together, they suggest a *stream of unconsciousness* that wipes away all contrasts: the wildness of nature is just as much in our heads; There is also rarely a storyline in our dreams, we make the associations ourselves afterwards.

For the *found footage* fragments that mainly form the building blocks of his later video montages, Auder frequently drew from his own extensive archive. This includes, for example, a gem such as *Talking Head* (1981, released in 2009, 3'), a short film fragment in black and white that Auder recently dug up, but fortunately left untouched. A young girl (presumably his daughter) talks in complete isolation about something that was nothing, that never came back and was missed by everyone. That thing was a person, that's all we find out. Without interruption, she continues her monotonous and melancholy story, unconcerned with plot, ending, or moral.

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The photo works and objects displayed in the display room on the street side are somewhat out of place. The first thing we find is an enigmatic composition of plaster hands tied with cords above a gold bottle and a watermelon. In a strict sense, the work turns out not to be by Auder, but by the Norwegian artist collective DOR (Deadly Orgone Radiation). The trio, consisting of Sverre Gullesen, Steinar Haga Kristensen and Kristian Ø. Dahl, settled in Brussels in 2011 and opened the Gallery DOR. On the occasion of the inaugural exhibition, the Norwegians asked Auder to give them instructions for the execution of a work of art. In addition to the sculpture, the result also included three stills from Auder's early videos – including an explicit bedroom scene with Viva – which were framed, hung at an angle and irregularly described with, among other things, the tagline 'Situation as Object'. Although these works provide a useful link to the concurrent exhibition that Auder curated at Gallery DOR, they are a very misleading introduction. Not least because Auder has always considered himself a *loner*: 'No one has ever asked me to make work. 99% of it comes from obsession.'

- Michel Auder, until May 26 at Etablissement d'en face projects, Antoine Dansaertstraat 161, 1000 Brussels (02/219.44.51; [www.etablissementdenfaceprojects.org](http://www.etablissementdenfaceprojects.org)).
- *Halo Africa* (curator Michel Auder), with work by Sam Anderson, Gunhild Dahlberg, Michael Stickrod and Rona Yeffman/Tanja Schlander, until May 27 in Gallery DOR, Merodestraat 11, 1160 Brussels ([www.dor.org](http://www.dor.org)).

# ARTFORUM

## MICHEL AUDER

By Amy Taubin ☒

**I FIRST ENCOUNTERED** Michel Auder's video work in the early 1980s. The tape that left an indelible impression depicted Auder's daughter Alexandra at age five or thereabouts watching a video of her own birth. Auder was not the first artist to record moving images of his wife giving birth; that honor almost certainly goes to Stan Brakhage. Unlike Brakhage, however, Auder did not set out to make the home movie into a high-art form. He did not mull for months, as Brakhage did, over the problem of "aesthetic distance" and whether it would evaporate if he showed explicit images of the birth process. (It was specifically the image of the afterbirth in *Window Water Baby Moving* [1959] that troubled Brakhage.) Auder simply found the most informative angles for his video camera—one shot was indeed of the placenta being expelled. Another was a head-on view between the bent legs of his wife Viva, revealing the baby crowning in her vagina, part of the sequence that Alexandra was watching when her father videotaped her years later. What makes Auder an extremely interesting moving-image maker—one who intuited almost immediately that the inevitable ubiquity of video cameras would transform social relations and individual psyches—is not that he thought to shoot his daughter's birth and to use the footage in one of the many diaristic videos he has produced over the past forty years. No, it's that he would consider *reusing* that footage, redefining it in terms of who is looking at it. One has to think about what it means for a child to witness her own birth on a TV screen—what divisions between public and private, clarity and obscurity, known and unknown, parent and child, were breached at the moment in which that follow-up, but by no means secondary, video-within-a-video image was recorded.



## MARTOS GALLERY

Born in the small French town of Soissons in 1944, Auder began his career as a fashion photographer in Paris, worked with the experimental Zanzibar film group, and met and fell in love with Viva when she and actor Louis Waldon came to Paris in 1969, the two of them notorious for their hard-core coupling in Andy Warhol's *Blue Movie* (1968), the sweetest, most touching movie Warhol ever made. Auder shot a film (using both 16 mm and 35 mm) with Viva and Waldon titled *Keeping Busy* (1969), which, like his earlier work on film, is probably mostly lost. He then followed Viva to New York and moved in with her at the Chelsea Hotel, where he met the experimental narrative filmmaker Shirley Clarke. That same year, he and Clarke bought a Sony Porta-Pak, the first widely marketed consumer-grade video recorder—the legendary, heavy, clumsy, analog progenitor of today's HD models.

Among the most significant aspects of Auder's extensive body of work (reflected in his current retrospective at Lunds Konsthall in Sweden and in a three-gallery minisurvey in New York this past spring at Zach Feuer, Newman Popiashvili, and Participant Inc) is that it encompasses the entire history of the branch of video technology that was intended for use outside the network-television industry. One room of the small Bushwick studio where Auder has worked for the past eleven years is crammed with outdated hardware: Porta-Pak, three-quarter-inch Numatic, Betamax, Video8, Hi8. Auder keeps the stuff around not just for sentimental reasons but because he needs it to look at work he has not yet upgraded to digital. Early in the decade, he digitized four thousand hours of video, loaded it onto hard drives, and installed Final Cut on his computer. Auder says that for several years he hardly shot any new video, spending most of his time working with what was already "inside." When he again turned his eye to the outside world, it was mostly through mobilephone cameras.

## MARTOS GALLERY

The combination of precise, sophisticated editing technology and low-end cameras has yielded a twenty-two-minute piece unlike any of Auder's work I've seen before. Titled *Narcolepsy* (2010) and shown in New York at Newman Popiashvili (Auder used some of the same footage in his installation *Dinner Is Served* at Krabbesholm Højskole, Skive, Denmark, earlier this year), the video revolves figuratively if not quite literally around the image of a young woman, fast asleep, sitting upright on what might be a restaurant banquette. The piece is made up of multiple layers of superimposed imagery and twelve layered tracks of sound. The low-res picture recalls Super 8 film, but the colors are softer without appearing washed-out. The texture of the image, particularly in the close-ups of the woman's face, evokes the cracked, varnished surfaces of old-master paintings. Superimposition was used extensively by avant-garde filmmakers in the '50s and '60s, sometimes to economize (it was cheaper to roll back the film in the camera and record two or three times on a single strip) and partly to counteract traditional film linearity. But whereas film superimpositions yield a flattened space, Auder's swirling images seem immeasurably deep and vertiginous. Opposites attract: A pet rabbit bounding across a bed is paired with a wild rabbit dangling from the jaws of a wolf loping across the snow to join its pack. The four elements are forces to be reckoned with, but water dominates—pouring from faucets, condensing on windows. A group of naked men clamber from the sea onto a rocky shore. Toward the end of the piece, two little girls venture alone into a stream, the camera dipping with them into the shallows. On the densely mixed audio track, where such anxiety-producing factors as sirens, closely miked rushing water, and gasping breaths converge, the last thing we hear is Auder's urgent voice calling to them, "Come back!"

## MARTOS GALLERY

*Narcolepsy* fits squarely into the avant-garde genre of film-as-dream, but no other cinematic dreamscape in film or video looks quite like it or mingles the fierce and the ephemeral in such a quietly unsettling manner. And though its control and polish distinguish it from Auder's previous work, *Narcolepsy* carries on the videographer's undeviating strategy of adapting new technology to his personal vision. When Clarke and Auder bought their Porta-Pak, they intended to use it to make narrative features, but they quickly discovered that even in the world of underground film, the softly defined black-and-white images yielded by this primitive apparatus were considered inadequate to their ambition. Auder had already shot a second feature on film, the Viva vehicle *Cleopatra* (1970), but lost control of it in a dispute with the producers. The Porta-Pak, however crude, gave him autonomy, and he began to carry it everywhere, just as the avant-garde film diarists (Jonas Mekas, Warren Sonbert, and Andrew Noren, among many others) were doing with their 16-mm cameras. He recorded his daily domestic life and his extensive travels, made portraits of close friends, and entered into collaborations on quasi fictions with underground writers and performers. He spent months shooting anonymous passersby from his window (e.g., *Rooftops and Other Scenes* [1996] and *Blind Sex* [2009]), and he turned his camera on his TV set to record the Olympics when he was denied direct access (*The Games [Olympic Variation]* [1986]). Over the forty years that he has treated his video recorders as naturalized extensions of his eyes and ears, using them to navigate the world, his basic method has remained the same: He collects images and sounds, then files them away, waiting months, years, decades to shape them into pieces—works of art. His most recent videography lists close to one hundred titles running anywhere from three minutes to three hours in length. Much like Mekas's film diaries, they constitute a history of the underground and downtown art world, but Auder's predilections took him into a not unrelated sex-and-drugs demimonde where Mekas never ventured.

## MARTOS GALLERY

Until the 1990s, Auder's work was shown only in alternative-media spaces, and there only sporadically. His first solo exhibition in a commercial gallery in the US was at Nicole Klagsbrun in New York in 1994. That show's centerpiece was one of Auder's most incisive and moving pieces, *Voyage to the Center of the Phone Lines* (1993). In it, Auder juxtaposes intercepts of anonymous mobile-phone conversations with a seascape— sand, water, the sun, the moon, wandering birds, not a human in sight. The images evoke an accepted universality, the timeless natural world; the audio evokes something perhaps no less timeless: the human psyche. People fret obsessively to one another about their sex lives, their children, the frailties of their bodies, the anxiety in their voices revealing their inchoate sense of mortality.

There are several ways to account for the growing interest in Auder's work over the past fifteen years by the museum/gallery/art-fair system. The ascendancy of video has led to an expansion of the parameters of "art video" beyond the formalism and structuralism that were institutionalized in the first decades of the medium. Auder accounts for his current relative success from a diametrically opposite position, citing television's relaxation of technical standards as changing the kind of images that everyone—not just the art world—is willing to accept on video screens. And, like Warhol, who makes several notable appearances in Auder's diaries, including an extremely creepy one in *Chelsea Girls with Andy Warhol* (1971–76), Auder is a visionary for the age of webcams and cell-phone cameras.

## MARTOS GALLERY

If his oeuvre is in part a public history, it is also an autobiography, as he makes evident in *The Feature* (2008), a three-hour narrative directed by Auder and Andrew Neel, grandson of the painter Alice Neel (Auder's close friend and the subject of several of his most complex and caring video portraits). The movie's presumptively fictional framework—the sixty-five-year-old Auder is shown to have brain cancer and is given but a few months to live—motivates him to review his life and work, primarily his marriages to Viva and Cindy Sherman, his relationships with his daughters and with his current lover, and his long friendships with Neel and Waldon, among others. Among the many purposes of this thoroughly engrossing though occasionally awkward movie are to demonstrate that there is no lensed fiction that is not a documentary and vice versa; to act as a highlight reel of Auder's digitally spiffed-up videos; to allow the artist to reflect on his life through his own representations of it; and, disconcertingly, to allow him to write his own epitaph while he is still very much alive and kicking up a storm of work at home and abroad.

*"The World Out of My Hands," a retrospective of Michel Auder's work, is on view at Lunds Konsthall in Sweden through November 14.*

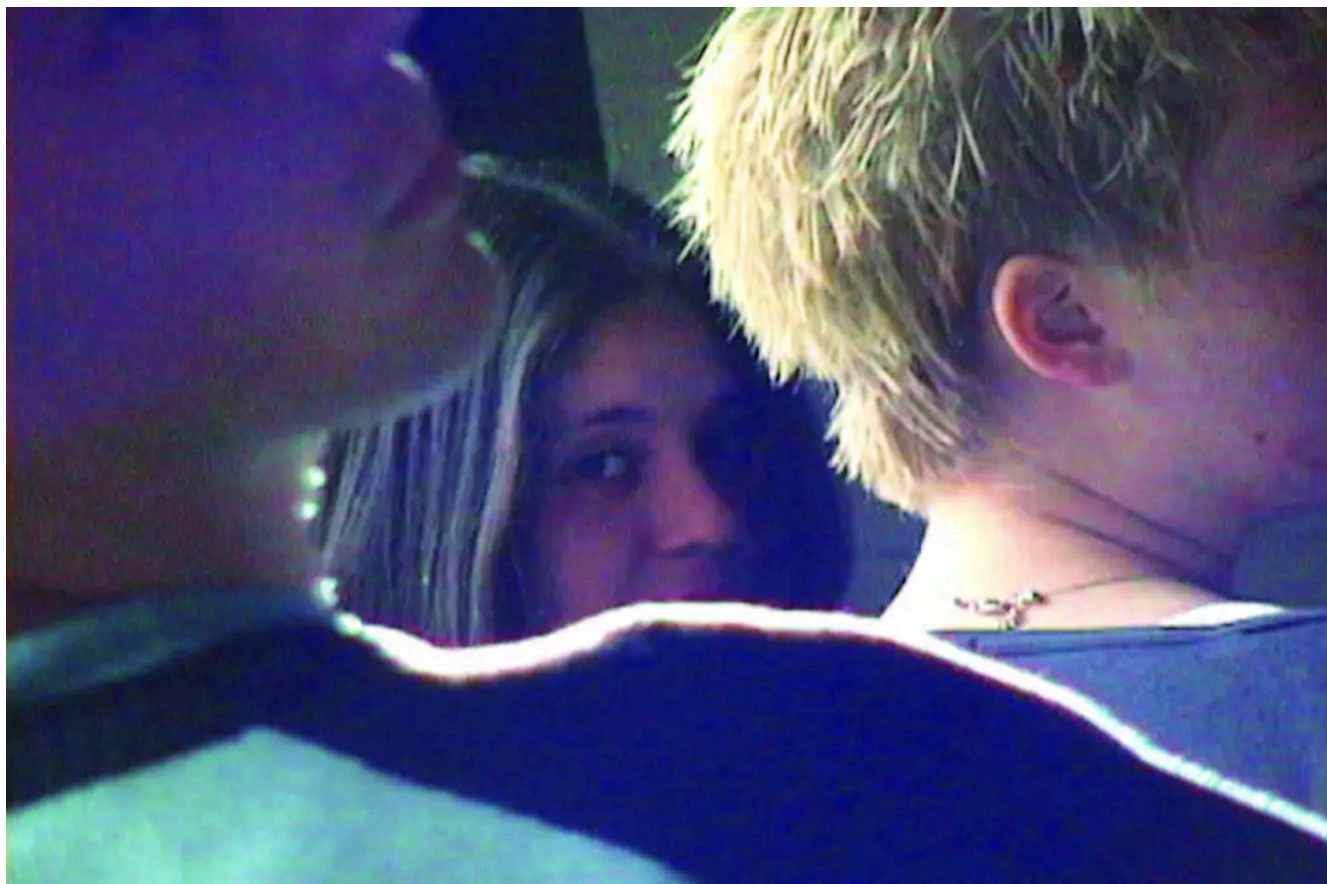
*Amy Taubin is a contributing editor of Film Comment and Sight & Sound.*

MARTOS GALLERY

# Art in America

## Michel Auder

By *Casey Ruble*  October 7, 2010 11:24am



What do prostitutes trolling the Bowery, paintings by Brueghel and the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles have in common? They all have been captured by [Michel Auder](#), who has exhaustively recorded the world around him ever since he purchased a Sony Portapak in 1969. Consisting of some 5,000 hours of raw footage, his personal archive includes events that range from momentous to mundane, titillating to tender: drug-fueled debaucheries among Warhol Factory denizens, a visit to a museum of Flemish paintings, Viva Superstar—to whom he was once married—giving birth to their daughter, a TV weatherman reporting the forecast. Influenced by Warhol and the French New Wave, with its aversion to tidy plotlines, Auder plumbs this archive, often years after the material was shot, to link fleeting moments in poetic, loose narratives and montages oddly removed from, yet submersed in, the experiences of life.

## MARTOS GALLERY

The vastness of Auder's work begs for a survey exhibition, which [Newman Popiashvili](#), Zach Feuer and Participant Inc. delivered with the chock-full "Keeping Busy: An Inaccurate Survey of Michel Auder." (Concurrently, a fourth segment of the show was on view at Volume 2 in Los Angeles, and New York's Anthology Film Archives screened his 2007 *The Feature*, co-directed by Andrew Neel.) At Participant Inc., a constellation of monitors presented various works, from the Dionysian *Cleopatra* (1970)—which features a cast from Warhol's ensemble and is an improvisational, low-budget takeoff on Mankiewicz's 1963 Taylor-Burton film of the same name—to more recent videos shot during trips to Bolivia and Rome. At turns captivating and tedious, *Chelsea Girls with Andy Warhol* (shot 1971-76, edited 1994), part of a series chronicling the New York downtown art scene of that era, was projected on a side wall; feature-length pieces were available for screening on demand.

Among the work at Feuer were projections of two seminal midcareer pieces: *Rooftops and Other Scenes* (1986) and *The Games: Olympic Variations* (1984), the latter shot off television and edited to emphasize the erotic potential of the footage. Newman Popiashvili showed new montages on five monitors, which included double exposures of a narcoleptic woman and dreamlike shots of a wolf killing a rabbit and water running in a sink, set against ambient sound.

Auder's work has been described both as autobiographical and voyeuristic, but it really exists somewhere between the two. Auder as an individual largely remains absent, even in the rare instances when he appears in the frame; what is offered instead is a pan of the circumference of a life that could belong to almost anybody. Although it often appears deceptively nonexistent, the editing of these pieces plays a crucial role. Declining grand statements, Auder gracefully sutures minute details: similar gestures, expressions, camera angles, moods. #78 *Heads of the Town* (2009), shown at Newman Popiashvili, includes a series of three-quarter-profile views of people gazing at or near the camera, filmed just before they speak (as Auder informed me in a phone conversation). Paradigmatic of Auder's work as a whole, this sequence captures the suspended, replete moment before what you say pins you down and eliminates all other possibilities.

*Photo: Michel Auder: #78 Heads of the Town, 2009, video, 12 minutes; at Newman Popiashvili.*

## Feature Presentation: Michel Auder

*By*

March 25, 2009



*Michel Auder in The Feature.*

If you had shot homemade footage obsessively for the last 40 years, perhaps your movie would be as exciting or as beautiful as that of artist and filmmaker Michel Auder's. Then again, maybe not. Auder is the former husband of both "superstar" actress Viva of the Factory and photographer [Cindy Sherman](#), which itself promises some memorable footage. With co-director Andrew Neel, he's selected choice moments from the 5,000 hours of archival footage in order to create *The Feature*, a three-hour homage to his life—some of it fact, some of it fiction. Auder probably doesn't know the difference. Narrating his life with his heavily French-accented English, Auder guides us through frolicking beach scenes, orgiastic sexual pursuits, and drug-fueled nights. *Interview* sits down with Auder to discuss how he made the film, his life in New York, and making movies without actors.

**ADAM KLAPPHOLZ:** You moved to New York more than thirty years ago?

**MICHEL AUDER:** 1970, so thirty-eight years. I don't even remember; it was too long ago. I started to make films in France, and I was always obsessed with America, but I came here by accident. I made a film in France with Viva, who became my wife, who was an Andy Warhol superstar. I met her in Paris, and I had a little money to make a film called *Keeping Busy*. She was starring in it with another Warhol star that she introduced me to, who was Louis Waldon, who is also in my film now, forty years later. I came to New York and then I got some money to make another film called *Cleopatra*. Suddenly, we were married, and then suddenly we had a baby. We were living in the Chelsea Hotel, and then things happened, and I'm still here.



# MARTOS GALLERY

AK: Did you go to the Factory a lot?

MA: I was on the outside observing, and visiting the Factory every once in a while, but I never worked with Andy or was in his films. He was around a lot because he was the confidant—he and my ex-wife Viva talked to each other every day. Until 1971/72, we were going out, dinners, stuff like this. People have a tendency to think I was part of Warhol's Factory—I never was. I've always been independent.

AK: You began filming in the 60s, when camcorders were just being developed. What prompted you to start documenting your life?

MA: I didn't document my life. I see the world as my set and people as my actors. Rather than make films in Hollywood and hire those people and think about a scene, I figured I could do it with real people—somebody crying, somebody fucking, somebody laughing, somebody dying.

AK: You edited 5,000 hours of footage to three hours for *The Feature*. How did you even begin to edit that much footage?

MA: It's not really editing down 5,000 hours of video. I shoot a lot of stuff that people do but then they erase, or they don't want to show it. And I kept those things. But it's not really editing 5,000 hours down into three hours. It's actually creating a new work taken out of those hours. Some of it I missed because you can't go through 5,000 hours, and so I just started to improvise.

AK: You referred to *The Feature* as "The Trailer" because you have a full eight-hour version. What's missing in the three-hour version?

MA: Most of my work is okay to look at on a TV screen or a flat screen, but this is actually much better in a theatre. First we made a twelve-hour version. Then we made a seven-hour version, or eight-hour version. We tried to cut it to an hour and a half, but then we decided it would ruin everything to have an MTV thing of a trailer and not have any feeling about it or anything. It came to be three hours. Which wasn't planned.

AK: Of the remaining three hours, is there a particular moment in the film that you like the most?

MA: When people ask me what's the best thing I like, my head starts scrambling and I just can't think of anything. Depending on the day, I might say this or that. I really don't have any specific thing that I like better than others.

AK: Three hours is still long. How have audiences responded?

MA: Well, it was chosen by the Berlin Film Festival, and London, and Copenhagen. I didn't make a film to attract a large audience. If I wanted to, I probably could make a film out of all those hours and rework that would attract large audiences. It's possible to make it.

AK: Is there anything in particular you want the audience to take away from *The Feature*?

MA: If you're not perfect, you may be able to feel things, as you see my film. You may be able to feel things that have stressed your life and made you happy and stuff like this. So, the film is a film that's pretty complete, and so I don't know. I have to say that many people talk to me about it and seem to be emotionally connected to it in many ways.

*The Feature* just wrapped a run at New York's Anthology Film Archives. The film will show again at MoMA on April 20, as part of the "Modern Mondays" screening series.

**Michel Auder**

FONTI

Via Chiaia 229

January 19, 2007 - March 30, 2007

By Eugenio Viola



“Dope and Narcotica Series” is the first show in Italy by French-born, New York-based artist Michel Auder. A pioneer in the field of video, Auder began his career as a filmmaker, looking to Jean-Luc Godard and Andy Warhol for inspiration. Auder has often used the medium as a form of personal expression, and most of his works are live recordings or fragments taken from his immense archive, which he often recomposes decades later to form an “archaeology of the present.” Auder’s work is consistently autobiographical and characterized by a “diaristic” approach; he has relentlessly subjected his private life to the camera, focusing largely on his addiction to drugs, as well as on his marriages to Warhol Factory star Viva and artist Cindy Sherman. In *Dope*, 2006, Auder creates a video collage, collating frames from a 1971 black-and-white film with footage from 2004. The two periods are joined by the reiteration of the same gesture, sniffing cocaine. In *My Last Bag of Heroin (For Real)*, 1986, sequences depicting the preparation of a dose of the drug are narrated by the artist, who provides a dramatic first-person account of the experience. Auder’s intention is not pedantic: His is a “phenomenological,” observational gaze, distinguished by an unflinching voyeurism, allowing him to dwell on small details that evolve into the essential particulars of his poetics.

*Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.*

## Michael Auder

Sextant et plus

By Claire Moulène ☞

“Auder is a poet of moods, brief encounters, tragic moments of our miserable civilization. When I used to visit him at the Chelsea Hotel, around 1970, the video camera was always there, always going, a part of his house, a part of his life, eyes, hands. It still is. A most magnificent love affair: a life’s obsession.” These words, written in 1991 by Jonas Mekas, the other pope of the cinematic diary, confirm the importance of Michel Auder, today an illustrious unknown in France, an artist who in New York attained mythic status without ever becoming famous. Now reparation has been made with a retrospective showing most of his videos, films, and photographs.

Born in Soissons, France, in 1944, Auder moved to Paris in his late adolescence and worked there as a fashion photographer. He then became associated with the Zanzibar group, a collective of experimental filmmakers led by Philippe Garrel. Auder was fascinated by the New Wave and the films of Pasolini, and eventually with Andy Warhol’s *Chelsea Girls* (1966), which jolted his vision of cinema and convinced him to produce films that followed an aesthetics of marginality. At the same time, he crossed paths with Nico (the Factory muse who would go on to sing with the Velvet Underground) and even more consequentially with Viva, the Warhol “superstar” whom Auder would marry in Las Vegas in 1969. A series of films followed, including *Keeping Busy* (1969), fictionalizing Viva’s social and sexual escapades and modeled on the nonnarrative vérité diary. Auder ultimately moved to New York in 1970, settling into the Chelsea Hotel and putting out a new “trash” version of *Cleopatra* (1970), shown at the Cannes Film Festival, where even in a bowdlerized version it caused a scandal.

# MARTOS GALLERY

This adventure would definitively mark Auder's orientation toward a more diaristic and mobile medium, the antithesis of Hollywood: video. An amateur and assiduous chronicler in the Mekas tradition, Auder films everything: his private life with Viva, their daughter's first steps, a garden party at John and Yoko's, but also the most ordinary activities—eating, kissing, calling people on the phone. At the heart of the triangular system in which he is not only “Viewer and Participant,” as the exhibition title has it, but also documenter, he archives and captures candid and painful moments that can then be arranged into a collective autobiography. Often described as the quintessential voyeur, Auder defends himself by systematically implicating himself in the environments he films and by using the camera as a tool for social interaction. At the same time, he establishes quasi-systematic distance between the events filmed and their reuse years later, as in the magnificent *My Last Bag of Heroin (For Real)*, 1986/93.

Several of Auder's projects of the '80s, when he kicked his habit and met his second wife, Cindy Sherman, involved television both as subject and material. This collection of remixes chronicling an epoch—specifically, the Reagan era—is composed of small gems, like the video about the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles, *The Games: Olympic Variations*, 1984, with its simultaneous eroticization and mechanization of the body. Auder's work unfolds as a great intimate and social fresco punctuated by stolen moments, ordinary instants—and it's all the more fascinating for that.

—Claire Moulène

*Translated from French by Jeanine Herman.*

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# Dear Video Diary

by ED HALTER

June 10, 2003

An embedded reporter within Andy Warhol's pocket world of eager exhibitionists, Michel Auder recorded endless video diaries after acquiring an early portable camera in 1969. Over subsequent decades, he continued to tape his own life, which included marriages with Factory superstar Viva and Cindy Sherman, as well as a long-standing heroin addiction. Video allowed him to shoot obsessively, downloading a chronicle of the world as it unfolded around him. From these image banks he created discrete works that range from under 10 minutes to several hours, some formed completely in-camera, others edited years later. Collectively, they provide not only an intimate portrait of the New York art world, but a form of autobiography: a means of documenting the self through others.

In the late '60s, Auder filmed two features with Factory regulars. One is included in Anthology's series: *Cleopatra* (1970), a lolling *Lonesome Cowboys*-style epic, shot in Rome and upstate New York with Louis Waldon, Nico, Taylor Mead, Gerard Malanga, and Viva as Egypt's queen. Like the Mankiewicz movie it camps, Auder's *Cleopatra* courted production disaster, and exists today as a scratchy work print transferred to DVD—a record of its own failed making.

Auder abandoned film for video, in the process creating his own sui generis art form: looser than cinema, but more engaging than contemporary video art performance tapes. One does not simply watch Auder's diaries; one enters them, like a secret sharer in a social circle whose members have long since been apotheosized into cultural mythology. *The Cockettes, New York City 1971* (edited 2002) shows the San Francisco troupe's arrival in a flurry of glitter and drugs, shocking airport passersby. *Chelsea Girls With Andy Warhol* (1971-76, edited 1994) begins with some déjà-vu—Brigid Polk rapping impromptu philosophy in a Chelsea Hotel suite, then speaking with Andy on the phone; the rest displays Warhol in various settings: a Lennon-Ono party, a Larry Rivers interview. *Chronicles/Morocco* (1971) and *Morocco 1972: The Real Chronicles With Viva* (edited 2002) are both crafted from a trip Auder took with his then-wife, complete with Paul Bowles-ish teen-Adonis native guide. The first edit removes Viva entirely; the second restores her. *The Vanuatu Chronicles* (1998) provides a latter-day coda, with Auder traveling alone, following his divorce from Sherman.

Not all are art-world family movies. *TV America* and *The Games: Olympic Variations* (both 1984) remix Reagan-era television; the latter zooms in on a collection of androgynous crotches and chests from the Los Angeles games. *Voyage to the Center of the Phone Lines* (1993) sets pirate recordings of cell-phone conversations to romantic images of landscapes and sunsets. Yet both continue Auder's larger autobiographic project: They are likewise portraits of the artist as consummate listener and voyeur.

MARTOS GALLERY

# The New York Times

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 1998

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ART GUIDE

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## Galleries: Chelsea

**MICHEL AUDER**, AC Project Room, 453 West 17th Street, (212) 645-4970 (through Nov. 28). An old movie and a new video by a French avant-gardist. The 80-minute "Keeping Busy" (1969), a disjointed collage featuring the Warhol superstar Viva in a seedy parody of jet-set life, is tedious but hard to walk away from. "Excerpts From the Vanuatu Chronicles," a haphazard video record of the artist's trip to the former New Hebrides in the South Pacific, is similarly boring yet mesmerizing (Johnson).

MARTOS GALLERY

# The New York Times

FRIDAY, MAY 2, 1997

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**Michel Auder**

*AC Project Room  
15 Renwick Street, near Canal  
Street  
South Village  
Through May 17*

For nearly three decades, Michel Auder has toted around a video camera the way other artists carry sketchbooks, casually recording scenes that attract his mind and eye. These might include the frolics or quieter moments of friends, family or even unwittingly cooperative neighbors, the evening news or other bits of broadcast life, images clipped from magazines or scenes of the places he has visited.

The results of Mr. Auder's peripatetic image making are under constant editorial consideration and are sometimes reformulated into new pieces: scenes from a trip to Bolivia that constituted the whole of his last solo show in New York City figure again into his latest effort, "Five-Ring Circus," in which five monitors sit in a row, each playing a different 54-minute tape.

The nonstop collage that results feels both random and carefully orchestrated, and it is surprisingly effective. At times it is lyrically seductive, especially when Mr. Auder concentrates on landscape scenery. But at other moments there is so much going on that the eye boggles. Mr. Auder's young daughter mugging for the camera in the early 1970's shares time and space with the Palio in Siena, a riot in South Africa, Neil Armstrong's walk on the moon and prostitutes on 10th Avenue in Manhattan; color alternates with black and white, moving with still.

In the end, "Circus" offers a random accounting of the kinds of images that bombard you, orchestrated into something resembling a self-portrait of the artist as father, traveler, voyeur, diarist and restlessly observant citizen of the late 20th-century.

ROBERTA SMITH

INTERVIEW

## Michel Auder

"Well, I observe humankind. I observe man and woman in struggle. And that's why I feel like an anthropologist."

JULY 1, 1994



All images: Stills from Michel Auder's *Chronicles: Magnetic Notes*, color video, 1986–87. Total running time: 42 minutes.

Having shot thousands of hours of videotape over the past 24 years—during which time he was virtually never without his portable video equipment—Michel Auder has compiled a nearly comprehensive diary, a library of his life from which to extract his art. The protagonists of his tapes are some of the most conspicuous and illustrious personages of the New York downtown art/theater scene, making the collected body of work a time capsule of alternative styles. Auder's presence as the creator of the diaries is subtly felt through the manipulated television segments, his characteristically poetic style of editing, and in the audio track, a mixture of live sound and music taped from the radio. Preferring the stance of a voyeur to that of a sage, Auder creates his own intimacy through his choice of experts. These become the "words" that make up his "sentences;" this "vocabulary" is reused over and over, each time creating a new chapter to his ongoing diary.



# MARTOS GALLERY

December 27, 1993: 11:45 AM

**Carole Ann Klonarides**

When you moved from film to video you began to adapt a more, for lack of a better word, “documentary diaristic” style. Was that through Warhol? Or how do you see that occurring?

**Michel Auder**

When I moved to New York, Warhol had already become a big influence for me. And then I got to be right in the middle of it, around all those people—Viva and the Factory group . . . that’s when I started documenting everyone I knew.

**CAK**

What year was this, about?

**MA**

1969, ’70, ’71, and on.

**CAK**

That was a time when the media was starting to influence alternative film—the idea of The Celebrity, Cinema Vérité.

**MA**

The Warhol group came to my home. But then other people came to my home too. My life became documented in relation to what I saw or what I didn’t see. I would catch just a little bit of the moment. Of course you miss most of it. It was not in any way a documentary, not to be related as truth. The work reflects my own feelings. I only expose what I want and of course in the process I also expose what I don’t want. Because the sum of everything is showing my character and my taste.

**CAK**

Is that why you feel it’s more like writing than documenting?

**MA**

Yeah. That’s where writing comes in.

**CAK**

You told me that for many years you carried around a camera, and you had it with you so often that people forgot your presence and your taping.

# MARTOS GALLERY

**MA**

I have a camera out with me all the time. When people came to my home they knew they were stepping into my studio—they'd know I would be shooting them.

**CAK**

Do you see this process as a seamless continuum?

**MA**

I call some of my tapes variations, like a piece of music, a variation of themes. And sometimes the variation is my vision of my world and sometimes it's of the world in general: what's on television, nature, and sometimes it's people close and of interest to me. Those are the three main things I deal with all day long.

**CAK**

By "what's on television" do you mean you shoot images off the TV?

**MA**

Right. By shooting off television I can record what is emphasized by the media at a certain time, what people want you to know. I receive and I shoot it, transforming it in my own way. I'm obsessed by all the violence. I record it and use it in my work.

**CAK**

The media invades a person's personal environment. The radio, the stereo, the television—they are in your home and a part of your life. What I noticed in your work is that you connect certain information shot off television to nature, and to the family, and the personal.

**MA**

I like to shoot TV images when I travel. When I go to a hotel I put on the television, especially in other countries. During the war in Iraq, for three weeks I only worked with TV I reshot it, took close-ups of things. I have 10 hours.

**CAK**

Why do that rather than taping it with a VCR?

**MA**

I believe that when I shoot something I give it another life. All my work goes through my camera.

**CAK**

Like Warhol, you're silent. We don't hear or see you in your tapes. How do you think you are identified through your work?

# MARTOS GALLERY

**MA**

I like to be identified as a voyeur.

**CAK**

You had an interesting mix of people on the tapes. They were poets, writers, actors. Kind of the downtown New York scene. But of a certain kind of that scene.

**MA**

Yeah, the hardcore people.

**CAK**

Now what do you mean by hardcore?

*(BREAK INTAPE)*

**MA**

I stopped going to school when I was 17. And my father was gone. My reputation is from the streets. I'd go to bars and stuff . . . I don't know how to explain. There was a famous bar in St. Germain des Prés where all the best American jazz players would come and play. They jammed at this place called the Chat qui Peche. The owner, who was always drunk, and a poet, took a liking to me. He tried to fuck me a few times, it didn't work out, and then he became my best friend. And he helped me out. He was a father figure to me. If you have Rimbaud as your idol then you see the kind of life he's living. You know, Rimbaud was a great artist and a great poet, but he was really fucked up. So I got accepted for being like this myself.

**CAK**

Do you consider that being a Romantic?

**MA**

I did. The artists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were my idea of how an artist should be. So I copied that a little bit. And then it caught up with me. By that time when I was a teenager, everybody was using drugs like zombies, shooting up heroin. I wasn't touching one fucking drug until I hit 22, you know. When I came to America I was 25. At that time I was smoking hashish . . . and opium. I loved opium, I thought it was really great. In those years everybody was lying down on the floor and puffing on pipes made of bamboo, smoking liquid opium wherever they got it, like wine. And we just did that all day long . . . dreaming . . .

**CAK**

But sometimes you'd pick up the camera and you'd shoot.

# MARTOS GALLERY

**MA**

Right. Shooting was my identity. That was my work. I was, and I am, absolutely convinced that that was and is my job.

**CAK**

Over a 20 year period you've taped some of the same characters. For example, your daughter is on tape from her birth to college. How does that affect your work—recording something as personal as your own blood, kin? You're seeing her grow and change through the lens of the camera. How has this affected her?

**MA**

I think it has blurred her memory. And she might resent it sometimes. She has said to me a few times that it's difficult to see all that past stuff. She believes that's her life. And let's face it, whatever I have on videotape of her life is about two thousand hours. Two thousand hours in 21 years is absolutely nothing, time-wise. You know what I mean? It's only a little drop in the bucket and that's not reality. Nothing is real if it's from the camera. Context and editing change everything. I see it as a pointing light inevitably fixed to the time the event was shot. I try not to deal with the material as soon as it's made. It's only years later that I deal with the material. I store it up. I wait until I can look at it and say, "What was I doing?"

**CAK**

Have any of your subjects resented your control? Or the use of them in your work?

**MA**

Not really. With my daughter, I'm releasing material slowly because as time goes by, and she's much older, it's better. She's on tape masturbating when she was three years old —I figure she can deal with it now. It hasn't come to the point where I'm asking her permission. My daughter and I are having an interesting new chapter in our life. She's just written a book, a novel, about me and Viva, her mother.

**CAK**

Oh! She's turned the tables.

**MA**

Right. I don't look too good in it.

**CAK**

No? You've read it.

# MARTOS GALLERY

**MA**

Yeah. She gave it to me. She said "Dad, you're the first person to read it." It's written as a fictional novel, but some of it is true!

**CAK**

Do you see your work as psychological at all? Is it analyzing anything or is it: If it happens, it happens?

**MA**

I am more like an anthropologist.

**CAK**

What do you mean by that?

**MA**

Well, I observe humankind. I observe man and woman in struggle. And that's why I feel like an anthropologist. So that's the first part of my body of work, up to the taping of my daughter. My daughter is seen in the context of being "a child," not specifically mine. I hope I reveal how kids behave when no one is looking at them. Because I can almost make myself disappear into the woodwork when the camera begins—

**CAK**

And there was no direction.

**MA**

I'm totally co-operating with her as the voyeur. I don't tell them what to do. I'm watching them and catching them. Like wild animals. And the same thing with the grownups. I don't try to classify them as part of a story . . . they tell me the story, they talk to each other and look at the camera and say, "Oh that camera, is it on, or not?" Later in the editing room I manipulate the footage toward what I want to say . . .

**CAK**

But some of your images are very beautiful and very aestheticized. I feel that there is an incredible intuitiveness about what you're capturing of people, but there's also something very deliberate about what you're capturing with nature and the non-peopled scenes. When you're shooting nature you're taking more liberties with the way you shoot, and with people, you let them speak and in the post-production take creative license. And then you have interviews with artists where you interviewed a creative individual over a period of many years.

# MARTOS GALLERY

**MA**

These artists are my friends. They have to be my friends. I wouldn't really call them interviews. Alice Neel is talking to me for real. I capture her over a period of six, seven years. I used to go and have breakfast with her at least once a week. I took the subway with my camera up to 107th Street and I would spend the whole day, she would make lunch, and she'd be painting. I just hung around and we'd talk about everything. She'd bring me back to reality. She always recharged my batteries, no matter how bad I felt, especially in those years when nothing was happening. I knew she was a great artist. And she would say the same thing about me. It put me in my place when I was complaining and whining. So, therefore, friendship is a necessity in the work. I did one with Larry Rivers but I haven't put it out yet, it's not finished. But Larry, I was living with him for four years. And Cindy Sherman, my wife, of course. I'm just looking at her work and shooting things in her studio. But it's already become a kind of document.

**CAK**

You're very involved and attracted to individuals who are creative in a very specific way. They are very extroverted in their work and yet they're kind of social misfits.

**MA**

I need them. I need someone whom I admire, and think is really interesting and I need to be close to them.



# MARTOS GALLERY

**CAK**

But doesn't that put you in a position of people not seeing who you are and what you contribute, but as one who uses these people, a sycophant—

**MA**

I don't worry about that.

**CAK**

You don't?

**MA**

Why should I, these are the people I'm close to.

**CAK**

So your identity is mingled in with these people, as your friends, as your subjects, but you also feel that something else emerges?

**MA**

Completely. I have my own life. I need somebody I think is greater than me to be able to learn from them.

*(BREAK IN TAPE)*

**CAK**

Do you feel using video is being elusive?

**MA**

I'm seeing something else in what other people see. I create a description of certain feelings that are not often brought up, what's really going on in the world, what's always in the back of our heads. What else is there to talk about but life? I don't know what other subjects there are— I'm not an abstract person. I'm a reality person. So I formulate. And reformulate. And formulate it again in some way that I think exposes my personal views of this world we live in.

**CAK**

You reuse a lot of images. Snow. Fire. Birds. And there are many references to the body. How do you see these recurring images in your work?

**MA**

I guess those are probably counterpoints. If you talk about birds, fire, and . . . what was that other one?

**CAK**

Snow.

# MARTOS GALLERY

**MA**

Snow. Those are moments that transform me, that take me out of this world, like when I used to take heroin. I see recurring images in patterns, obsessions; like the birds—I have some kind of envy about flying. It is an interesting point of view that I'm missing on this planet. Then the fire has always been my obsession. When I was growing up, we had a beautiful house, but my father couldn't afford the money to put the coal in the furnace. But there were fireplaces everywhere, in all the rooms. And I would sleep with fire in the fireplace. I would peek from under my sheets and see the fire send big shadows onto the wall. So I guess that's maybe where it comes from.

*(BREAK IN TAPE)*

**CAK**

We were talking about the Moroccan tapes, which were done in a very stoned, kind of hippie time. You taped hours and hours of footage and then, 20 years later, went back and edited it into a piece. Now, of course you're clean, it's a whole different perspective. Can you talk a little bit about that? The experience of going back and re-editing that material compared to the experience of "being there" when it was shot.

**MA**

I shot the material in 1971; did a first edit in 1976, then a re-edit in 1993. Now, how do I feel about it? Some think I might be making a mistake by re-editing it from a different perspective. But I'm not destroying the edit I made in 1976. I keep it available. I'm re-editing the material and making a new work.

**CAK**

Recently, when you showed a tape shot in Morocco in the early '70s and re-edited in the late '80s to a student audience, you were criticized for recreating your experience into a homo-erotic piece to be sensational.

**MA**

That's right. That's right! But I was with homosexuals and they created the ambience and I recorded it my own way. I focused on the most interesting person in the group and he started to perform for me. And I was right, he was an extraordinary person. He acted out a whole fucking theme: first, by killing a seagull, gathering herbs and then cooking it in this instinctual way that is about survival; and secondly, by the on-camera seduction. He was the boyfriend or the hustler of a German artist. I'm describing only their behavior, not mine.



# MARTOS GALLERY

**CAK**

Does the theoretical deconstruction of culture and sexuality affect the way you tape and view things?

**MA**

Hopefully it hasn't. Politically correct is only politically correct as the day goes by. It doesn't matter how correct one is, it won't be correct later. I'm politically correct only with myself. It's a readjustment day by day, there's no formula.

**CAK**

Now the last tape you made, "Magnetic Notes: Voyage To The Center Of The Phone Lines" is video shot off a bluff looking out at the ocean and nature where you were in rehab. The audio was collected for over a year from conversations on car phones. This is a very different tape from what you've ever made before.

**MA**

Well that description you just gave is not what happened at all.

**CAK**

No?

**MA**

But I like that. I like that dream of rehabing by looking out of my window. In reality, rehab is a hospital for 30 days with no views.

**CAK**

I thought that's what you told me.

**MA**

Maybe I did. No. I was coming out of rehab—we rented a house and it was my first day out. And I got very lucky. I stayed in this beautiful house for two months watching the ocean all day long while I tried not to think about using heroin again. I had done landscapes before when I was on heroin too, but it just happens these landscapes were made then. But I like the way you describe it. I like people to project their own story when they see my work. The phone lines, the sound part of the tape is pretty much the way I do my work. I set up my traps in the phone lines, like a photographer for National Geographic trying to take a picture of mountain lions. I'm just setting my nets and catching fragments of conversation that reveal something about people, about us . . .

# MARTOS GALLERY

**CAK**

But these people are not invisible like you are.

**MA**

I'm not trying to expose the individual, or their privacy. I'm eavesdropping in on a universal stream-of-consciousness. The fears, the sadness, the state of things, the darkness of people. I feel I'm close to them.

**CAK**

Why did you use this as the audio track on the landscapes?

**MA**

I kept playing with the audio tapes for two years because I have a lot of them. I tried different images over them and nothing fucking worked. One day I started working with landscapes, I have many tapes of landscapes. You know, nature is beautifully boring. Nature and electronic signals are crossing all the time, but it's invisible and silent. You don't hear unless you have those trap machines. But it's all there around you. I felt that was the connection. And that's how it started.

**CAK**

That's a nice analogy, you used, casting a net. They do say "capturing an image" don't they?

**MA**

I used this scanner; it's like a camera. I scanned the phone conversation and recorded it on tape. I recorded 30 one-hour tapes and selected bits of conversation—it's mostly very sad, very intense.

**CAK**

What about Warhol? Did he give you any support?

**MA**

Andy was kind of taken aback by me. He was waiting to see if I would fail or survive. He saw me soaring in 1970—I got a movie produced and was in the press a lot. And then I smooshed myself up into almost nothing by 1975. He was always nice to me, and friendly. But Andy was always nice and friendly to everybody. So it's hard to tell what he thought. I was very close to him in the early 70s because of Viva. We used to see him almost every day. And then as life took its twists and turns—we had my daughter and we went to Morocco for a year. By then I had acquired my own identity and I couldn't really get too close to him because he would turn you into one of his minion.

# MARTOS GALLERY

## **CAK**

Well you've been involved with some pretty powerful women, too. I mean Viva and Cindy Sherman. How do you think that's affected your work?

## **MA**

Greatly. When I met Cindy I didn't realize she was so powerful. And I guess she never realized it either. Or maybe she did. I don't know. You know it's been ten years we've been together. She's one of the best—there are few contemporary artists that I think are better than me. I aspire to reach her level.

MARTOS GALLERY

# The New York Times

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 1996

## Art in Review

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### Also of Note

*Critics' choices of some other  
Manhattan art shows:*

**ARIANE LOPEZ-HUICI and MICHEL AUDER, AC Project Room, 15 Renwick Street, South Village (through Feb. 17).** Michel Auder's 1976 video of the artist Hannah Wilke talking on the phone and performing a wryly narcissistic striptease captures a moment when video, feminist art and Mr. Auder's own gentle voyeuristic style were young. By comparison, Ariane Lopez-Huici's recently minted video of her naked self interacting with a weight-training machine is something of a throwback. More arresting are her photographs of an obese naked woman proudly and unaffectedly striking a series of Venus-like poses (Roberta Smith).

SPRING 1981 ISSUE

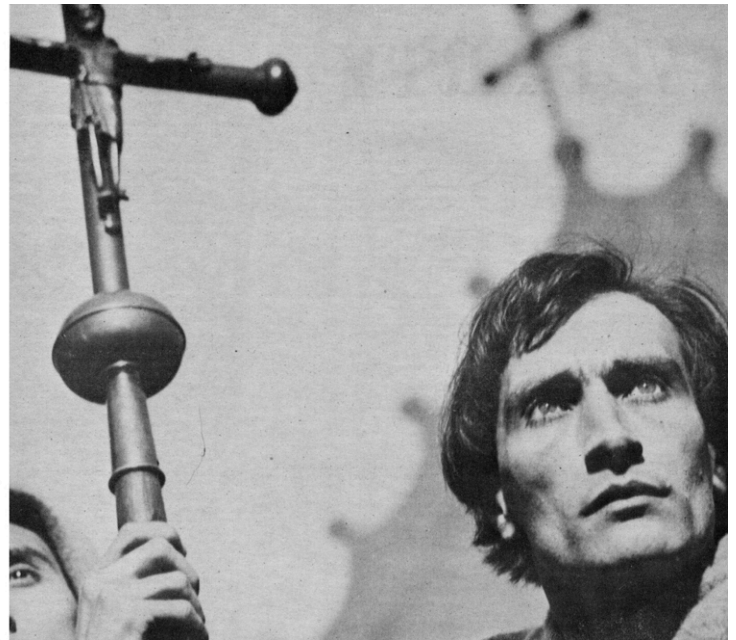
FICTION

## Black Moon

"The Russians will swallow Europe," a visiting Californian asseverated at dinner, vigorously masticating a morsel of calamari.

BY GARY INDIANA

APRIL 1, 1981



Artaud, in a detail from Dreyer's *Joan of Arc*.

"The Russians will swallow Europe," a visiting Californian asseverated at dinner, vigorously masticating a morsel of calamari. "First they'll seize the Persian Gulf. Then push into Pakistan. Then India, see? The Domino Theory was an underestimation, if anything."

It was the year of a black moon, a year when Mercury went retrograde on an average of once a week. The new one beginning had every appearance of kicking off with World War III. Have you ever tried debating with anyone whether or not the human race will be eradicated in the immediate future?

"I don't think they'll do it," one says. "I mean I just don't think it would happen."

"Yes," insists the other, sounding even more stupid, "But what if it DOES?"

The Californian reminded me of my father, whose impromptu glosses on History had suffused the late hours of my childhood when, after drinking most of a fifth of Chivas, he perceived the diabolical nature of World Communism with preternatural clarity.

# MARTOS GALLERY

"This is the greatest country in the world," he would say, his eyes burning as if they suddenly beheld the Antichrist. "Just go over to Russia and see what the Red Communists call freedom."

Freedom, nuclear destruction, and the moral iconography of the Catholic Church were the principal ideological features of my childhood. The horrors of godless Communism were lavishly illustrated in the cautionary lectures of Sisters Mary Bonaventure and Timothea, the Kafkaesque brides of Christ who taught my second and third grade classes. In China, the yellow Reds drove spikes through the skulls of our missionaries, nailed slivers of bamboo under their fingernails, tied them to bonsai crosses and left them to rot in the rice paddies ("long fallow under Communist rule"). These, truly, were the martyrs of the modern world, "who will one day be recognized by the Holy Father." That meant Canonization, which at that time I imagined involved firing first and second class relics of the departed Saint from a canon a la Ringling Brothers. (First Class Relics are actual bits of the body, Second Class Relics a shred of the saint's apparel. A Third Class Relic is merely some object touched by him or her in the course of Good Works, hardly worth bothering with.)

For fifty cents—piously reserved from our allowances—we could redeem a pagan baby through the sacrament of Baptism. Each time you redeemed a pagan baby in China, you received a brightly colored picture of Jesus, the Blessed Virgin, Pius XII or some other favorite religious personality. Especially devout children in my school collected them and traded them like baseball cards.

# MARTOS GALLERY

My father began building a cement bomb shelter in our basement in 1958. Your home shelter was supposed to be hermetically sealed off from the outside world, which would soon be completely destroyed by ballistic missiles. One day, three out-sized manila envelopes arrived from Civil Defense. These contained phials of water purifying tablets, khaki-green tins of dehydrated, radiation-proof food, booklets on decontamination and Defending Your Bomb Shelter—one indispensable ingredient was a shotgun. In a real nuclear “conflict,” it was thought, imprudent neighbors who had frivolously failed to build their own shelters were likely to drop by on the pretext of borrowing a cup of sugar. If they did, you were supposed to blow their heads off.

America, Love It Or Leave It. Finish your plate, there are kids starving in India. It’s the Russians that want a war, not us. I’m not saying Hitler was right but I’m not saying he was wrong either. They smell funny. Stevenson will hand the country over to the Reds. If Kennedy’s elected he’s going to build a secret tunnel to the Vatican. Next thing the Pope will be running the country. When the Pope opens the envelope the Virgin gave Bernadette, he’ll know the date of the end of the world. Death means nothing to them. That’s why they want a war.

And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour.

Motto in day-glo above the stairway of the Mudd Club:  
NUKE EM TILL THEY GLOW!

I never believed in God. Never.

My mother “lost her faith” when her brother died, a horrible death from cancer of the thyroid.

My father says he gave up praying when he realized he only did it when he was afraid of death.

Perfect faith means doing good out of love of God and not from the fear of Hell.

# MARTOS GALLERY

My stepbrother returned to the Church after a brief, half-hearted lapse, the faith of the convert being always more intractable than that of the Catholic-born. (A born Catholic knows there is no escape from the Church. A convert only suspects it.) Visiting him in St. Louis in 1977, I was amazed to find the walls of his modern house decorated with stylish icons and an iron crucifix acquired in Japan.

"The new Mass in English is something really relate to," he told me. "They have a Sunday folk mass we take the kids to. And the priest gives everybody the Kiss of Peace after Communion now, instead of just waving the cross in your face." On the TV, Martine Marratt's videotapes of gang war in the South Bronx were playing, part of a CBS Special on Violence. In my brother's house the South Bronx was an immense, spectral landscape, unimaginable except through the miracle of television. "You should go," he added skeptically.

Viva and I were sitting in the Greek Gardens on 8th Street when Danny Fields came in.

"The Pope just went by."

"Was that what all those umbrellas were? The Pope?" Viva said. "I can't believe we've been sitting here for an hour and the Pope went by less than ten feet away and we missed him."

"He was wearing a pink plastic slipcover," Danny Fields said. "In an open car."

"I just can't believe we missed the Pope."

"Yesterday he said a Mass for Young People at Shea Stadium, and at one point, you know, he began making this strange noise into the microphone, it was like, 'wuuu-wuuu, wuuu-wuuu.' And the TV commentators couldn't figure out what it meant, 'wuuu-wuuu, wuuu-wuuu,' like that, over and over, it was like a Polish mantra or something."



# MARTOS GALLERY

“Wuuu-wuuu?”

“Yeah, Wuuu-wuuu. Wuuu-wuuu.”

“Maybe it means, ‘Peace Be With You’ in Polish.”

I trace the phases of the moon in the cover of Ted Berrigan’s *Red Wagon*, wait for you to call like an idiot. For a month I succumbed to the tender miseries of love, knowing the whole time that eventually it would be me or you staying in, turning down invitations, being rude to friends on the phone so they wouldn’t tie up the line.

This week I have a vivid oblong scar on my forehead, just above my right eye—one night, trying to go to my bedroom noiselessly, I walked into the air conditioner. Of course everyone thinks you hit me. I wish you had.

Florence Lambert and Michel Auder show me their video collage, *Jesus*, a ravishingly photographed survey of religious images and testimonials from former Catholics about the mystery of Jesus. (What I so much value in Michel’s work is its organic necessity, the way it arises naturally from his life—also his courtliness towards his material.)

In the tape, Tina L’Hotsky explains that Jesus was an alien from outer space, sent here to take over everyone’s mind. Diego Cortez describes how he and some friends made six hundred dollars swiping pocketbooks at a revival meeting. Taylor Mead, dressed as the Bishop of Tribeca, blesses the fire hydrants and the cars, is then attacked by a Devil brandishing an enormous rubber penis.

“Take and eat of this, for this is my body,” Alice Neel quotes. “To me, that’s pure cannibalism carried over.”

Every Tuesday, Father Hathaway gave religious instruction for the boys at St. Thomas Aquinas. You had to ask him what was a sin, what wasn’t, in an endless attempt to rid your soul of venial and mortal offenses.

# MARTOS GALLERY

Was it a sin to masturbate, Gerard Papillon wanted to know.

"If you did it before you knew it was a sin, no," Father Hathaway assured everybody. "But now you know, it is."

At the height of the Hostage Crisis, Iranians marched through Tehran whipping themselves with chains as part of an annual religious frenzy.

"See?" A cab driver told me excitedly. "They're totally insane. You don't know what they'll do next. They aren't brought up like us. They're not Christian."

James Nares invites me to his place on 37th Street to see *No Japs At My Funeral*, a video interview with an ex-IRA officer named Jackie. This is a very polished, precise work, with a minimum of shot changes and extraneous material. The thing that's striking about Jackie—besides his sincerity, his moral attractiveness, his good humor—is that his relationship to the source of his oppression is direct, visceral. The Left, here, was denied this relationship in the '60s. Sartre said in *Saint Genet*, "Evil is the systematic substitution of the abstract for the concrete." When the Left existed here—and it doesn't now, since Marxism itself has undergone a fatal crisis—it could only rally itself against a life full of color TV, Pontiacs, and McDonald's hamburgers, the very things the rest of the world ardently craves. And when the Left went bust, its leaders turned to one or another version of Jesus, transcended reality, dropped out of the moral universe to panhandle for ten-year-old Korean gurus.

I decide to take you at your word, that you don't want me to stay in just because you might call. So I linger after an editorial meeting, agree over the phone to join friends at a film. When I get home, there's an angry message that you called and I wasn't there.

# MARTOS GALLERY

There's a direct relation between religion and nuclear war. Even some reasonable people believe that Nostradamus and the last chapters of the Bible foretell everything, that the mushroom cloud produced by an atomic explosion corresponds in all particulars to the fires in the Apocalypse. Even the Marxist religion, in the Gospel According to Engels, predicts a messy end for late capitalism on its regressive swing back to savagery.

For Catholics, at least, there's always Heaven after the last ICBMs and MIRVs have shot their wads. But Catholic Heaven isn't everybody's idea of a day at the beach—as a Chinese doctor at the 29th Street VD Clinic invariably tells his patients, “No sex, no alcohol, no spicy food for one week.” Catholic Heaven is a lot like Switzerland, but without Godard and Alain Tannier.

You tell me you're afraid to die, that we should “go to an island somewhere.” (We're already on an island, somewhere, but never mind.) I tell you I'll go with you, just to make you happy. You tell me you'd rather be alone. Sometimes, when you're particularly contrary and stubborn, I think there's a slight possibility that you secretly love me. Is that why you're usually accommodating, easy?

So I was working in this insurance office with this Lithuanian woman named Anna. She was really straight laced, uptight, very Puritan. She only spoke to me once, in the lunchroom, about how her family “escaped to freedom” during the last war. So I said, “How did you ever get to America in the middle of the war?” and she said, “We didn't go to America, we moved to Dusseldorf.”

I can't tell if everyone I encounter is afraid because the kind of people I'm friendly with are the kind likely to be afraid right now, or if people are, generally, truly afraid. The news makes my skin crawl, frankly. Whenever they start displaying maps you know something unpleasant is happening in the world.

# MARTOS GALLERY

But something unpleasant is always happening in the world, and someone is always afraid. Florence Lambert and I take a large dose of MDA and go to the Bleecker to see *Alien*. The film: a small crew of space travellers lands on an ugly, mist-shrouded planet where they find a space ship resembling a large dead cockroach. Inside the cockroach they find an egg. The egg spurts open and something like egg foo yung shoots out, landing splat in the face of a hapless Space Explorer. The egg foo yung turns into this disgusting slime all over the guy's face, something like a soft-shell crab with the tail of a garter snake that wraps itself around his neck. Doctors on the space ship try to snip its legs off, but its blood is this gooey yellow acid that eats through five thousand tons of metal. Then the Alien disappears and this horrible thing with three rows of teeth pops out of the guy's stomach at space dinner time, ruining everyone's appetite.

The Alien grows inexorably and hides in dusky passages of the ship. The MDA transforms this creature into a fat drag queen. The women crew members find their lipsticks, face powders and heels missing. On their mission of extermination through the twilight guts of the space vehicle the astronauts are constantly encountering a blob-like form in a ratty blonde fright wig, its tentacles clapped provocatively to its hips, the sequins of its purple chemise sending laser like flakes of light down narrow, high-tech corridors. Its sinuous lips part suggestively, revealing the triple row of killer teeth. Surprise, the alien is Mae West in outer space. Is this how the world ends? Not with a bang, but with Mae West?

—NYC, January 1980

MARTOS GALLERY

# The New York Times

SUNDAY, MARCH 23, 1980

## Poetic View of TV

By HELEN A. HARRISON

**A**S early as 1930, when television technology was being developed, David Sarnoff characterized the infant medium as an art form, capable of broadening horizons of esthetic perception and appreciation. Since then, television has seldom lived up to this lofty ideal.

In the last dozen years, however, there has been a resurgence of interest in television as art. The first generation of experimenters established the validity of the creative use of video, although one wonders if their abstract concepts and synthetic images were quite what Mr. Sarnoff had in mind.

The current video installation at the Firehouse Gallery of Nassau Community College is appropriately entitled "Video Vis a Tergo" in an effort to identify this artistic approach as a "force from behind," an alternative to the commercial and theatrical vanguard. It is described by the gallery's curator, Curtis Crystal, as a second-generation show, with little evidence of the psychedelic color distortions and spacial flights of fancy so prevalent a decade ago.

The tapes, all made within the last three years and ranging in length from one to 60 minutes, are shown on four monitors lent by the Sony Corporation and Harvey Sound of Woodbury. The entire program lasts nearly four hours.

Although there is no unity of either style or content, the show's overall focus seems to be subjective and poetic, rather than formal or purely visual. Many of the tapes use written or spoken interpolations rather than dialogue or straight narration. Even the pieces that could most fairly be described as documentaries are highly personal and make little attempt at objectivity.

Michel Auder's "Portrait of Alice Neel" is far from a straightforward conversation with the irrepressible and calculatingly outrageous artist. The camera cannot resist straying to the background landscape or focusing on wisps of her delightfully unkempt hair, using these interpretive clues to heighten the impact of her spoken revelations.

What begins as a documentary on the

life and customs of the primitive and violent Yanomami Indians of Venezuela evolves as a personal odyssey by Juan Downey. His desire not merely to record but to confront and ultimately be consumed by his subject results in an uneven but disturbing and provocative piece.

In "Mothers Are Always Daughters," Joan Logue has created a deeply moving portrait of herself and her mother with minimum contrivance. As the two women sit almost silent and motionless before the camera, concentrating on their own images in an unseen monitor, they make contact through the very medium that records their reactions. As we and they watch, self-consciousness becomes dialogue, introspection and emotion. The artist adds a temporal dimension to portraiture and exploits the unique capacity of video to allow the subjects to see and be seen simultaneously.

Compared to this innovative work, "Watch," the short study of a television viewer by Kit Fitzgerald and John Sanborn, seems slick and contrived.

Quite the opposite is true of Alan Sondheim's "South-Western Tape," a study of cultural dislocation expressed through words, images, sounds and scenic changes that emphasize the artist's theme of lost contact with the collective "way."

Davidson Gigliotti's journey across the Minnesota landscape in a hot-air balloon concentrates on the abstract qualities of the region's agricultural terrain and is at its best when the artist zeroes in on the fields, lakes and even the rooftops of suburbia. The longer shots, more documentary in the objective sense, unfortunately break the piece's dominant mood of heightened perception.

"Plural Bells," by an artist who calls herself "Anna Livia," is the closest thing to pure formalism in the show. An introductory text from "Finnegans Wake" precedes a series of seductive close-ups of objects shown briefly and then at greater length. As in the James Joyce quotation, rhythmic relationships are essential ingredients.

"Video Vis a Tergo" runs through March 27. The gallery is open Mondays through Fridays from 11 A.M. to 4:30 P.M. and Wednesday evenings from 7 to 9 P.M. Further information may be obtained by calling 222-7165. ■