

IMPLICATIONS OF TRUTH: PERSPECTIVE OF A BARTENDER

by

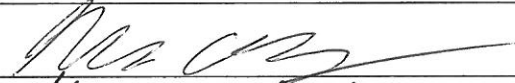
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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this to my mom and future husband Tavis Ross, both who still believe me to be completely brilliant.

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ABSTRACT

IMPLICATIONS OF TRUTH: PERSPECTIVE OF A BARTENDER

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George Mason University, 2013

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This thesis is an examination of the subculture in the alternative world of a dive bar through the perspective of a female bartender. The examination includes a collection of colliding expressions between memory and experience through narrative and actual recorded images. Within an occupation of the service industry, the bartender's perspective evolves into a repetition of transcendence. Collecting this experience and then expressing it through a *punk* aesthetic onto experimental film to provide evaluation, becomes an action for the search of a *truth*.

Dive bars are containers of unspoken truths, much as the cinematic still that carries an image from a passing moment in time. Deconstructing experience from an existential perspective allows an environment cluttered in chaos to become clarified. It is through the preservation of experience that allows humanity to capture its *essence*.

I am the voice of the “bar happening” and narrator of the film; which explores this subculture. Taking into account environment, movement amid space and accountability of time, I delve into the dark areas that others choose to deny. I pick at the brains of individuals who are in constant denial, attempting to understand the paths they chose, as to ensure against walking amongst them, down the same path to misfortune.

INTRODUCTION

Observation of human interaction in the environment of a dive bar is as much a subconscious reaction as the inability to look away from a car accident. A consistent cycle of bad decisions, overly emotive drunks, people in search for something lacking in their lives, it's a story as surreal as the occupation itself. It's a telling example of the hyper-reality of the human condition, the subculture phenomena of bar life that draws in an existential awareness. The perspective of this subculture is that of a female from the *other* side of the bar. "PubLife" the film, is a narrative, an investigation, a working class perspective, a punk effigy, a reality, taken from an actuality and modified through experimental film.

The bar is a contained environment, a subculture, whose dirty secrets are kept between the walls of the institution itself. Its patron's memories skewed and fleeting the only evidence of a prior nights happening is left to the only sober eyewitness, the account of the bartender. The story of this dark, usually unacknowledged, environment is in need of light. The experiences that have taken place within, the place of my employment are stories replete with valuable lessons.

To fully understand what the true driving forces are at work and what constitutes the dive bar's subculture, it is necessary to first deconstruct the occupation while examining the role of the bartender. Dig inside the interior and the exterior, spaces and perspectives that exist within the subculture. Move on to discuss some influential artists who have enhanced the meaning of this perspective, through their own work. Lastly, access the process for conducting the examination of the subculture as captured resulting in the film version, "PubLife." This explanation will be followed by conclusions drawn from the examination into this subculture through the film.

CHAPTER ONE: DECONSTRUCTING OCCUPATIONAL HAZARDS

It is a perspective that is over looked and under valued, the perspective of the bartender. It is an occupation stained by stereotype, classism, and a transparent ignorant consumer. We bartenders, as a group, are viewed as passive service industry employees, ones who don't have the educational skills to acquire a "real job." People who are economically better positioned; seem to make it their trade to let us know exactly where our placement in society is and in their minds, that placement remains ever to be so. They do this by running us "ragged" and then "stiffing" us for the show of monetary superiority, allowing us to work a 12 hour day making less than \$2 an hour, at the cost of their ego. Initiating friendships between us, but only inviting us to their dinner parties to work for them. Insisting that we smile constantly, defining us as "sweetheart," "beautiful," or "honey," while taking on the burden of their own demented realities. Then there are the people that just don't understand that what we do is indeed a *job*, and that we live off our tips. Those people justify their lack of payment through arbitrary rules they set within their own mindset.

I had a guy once tell me the reason he didn't tip me was because I didn't bring him a menu in a (whatever amount of) time he saw fit, so he paid his check in coins and left me

24 cents. How was I, as a server, suppose to know while running a full bar that, if this one guy didn't get a menu within a set amount of time, that I wasn't going to get paid?

There is a definite need to examine how patron's actions viewed by bartenders, affects the entirety of the human situation. Jean-Paul Sartre said "man is responsible for what he is...and to make the full responsibility of his existence rest on him...he is responsible for all men" (Marino 346). If people treat each other badly, and no one ever tells them, then how are they to know to stop? In the hope of changing the behavior of those bar patrons who often lack even a minimal amount of social grace, this work was established from the experience of dealing with their existence.

Working as the *Other*

When we are interacting there are two conversations taking place the one that is audible and the one taking place in my head. This is happening simultaneously without you even knowing, but I assure you the subject matter is quite similar. We just might be on different pages (Narration, PUBLIFE).

Certain abilities come into play as a service employee that allows my perspective to be a bit more pervious than others in studying human interaction. I can infiltrate a social interaction, weaving a presence and lack of presence at the same time. Because of my position I am viewed as a passive presence, the *Other*, from the existentialist point of view. The *Other* is the one that justifies the being-ness of another self (Marino 405).

I'm invisible except when someone needs something, like a table cleared, a new beverage

or their life to be recognized. And even then, they continue their activity without even identifying and or acknowledging my own presence of self. For instance many people walk into a bar and after being greeted by a bartender say things like, “Miller Lite,” without even recognizing the previous question as to “Hi, how are you today.”

Two simultaneous events are happening, continuously through the bar in correlation to the bartender/patron interaction. I am watching them, the patron, as they are watching me, the bartender. We observe each other. It is the action of two looks converging, the patron gaze into the bartender gaze. I am here for them therefor I exist in the accordance of their *being*. As bartender is the *Other*, we who are invisible yet present, are used as tools to benefit patrons. As if we were never present to begin with, patrons go on with their lives, interacting, socializing, conversing within the bar setting as soon as they get a drink in hand. They are freed by our interaction into doing what they want, because we fulfilled their necessity upon arrival. Our first use is to be an omnipresent service tool. Our second use is to be the recognition of his or her own existence. We signify our patron as subject of being as we are constituted to be the *Other*. There is a cyclical process of being seen by the *Other* in the *truth* of being the one seen (Marino 398).

When you're stuck in one place for a long period of time you begin to discover the nuances that most people overlook. What seems to be one thing at first really ends up being something completely different. The same happens with people. When you're around people long enough you start picking up on their own idiosyncrasies.

To everyone else it is an example of the *everyday*. For me, it is a life lesson on people, society, and social interaction. I see it as an existential outlook on how to treat your fellow man. My current occupation is more than a job; it is in turn a lifestyle. As one of my regulars coins it, I am a “nocturnal service employee.” He’s a retired CPA and he means it in the nicest way possible. More so, I am a performer, a psychologist, an adult babysitter, a maid, a slave, a bitch, an entertainer, a taxi, a storyteller, a concierge, and sometimes a friend. I’m accustomed to the life of the night and am in no way shape or form an early riser; I haven’t eaten breakfast in the morning hours for years. This alone defines my “alternative” lifestyle.

When I leave my job, there is no one else on the road. When I eat my dinner, the morning newspaper is usually already placed in my driveway. This is not an unusual occurrence for a bartender; we normally go to sleep as others wake. We go to work when the public gets off work; we work while they eat; they party at our job while we work, and we party while they’re asleep. Our hours are long and, depending on the place of employment, usually last until the early hours of the morning. When it’s still dark and no one else is out, we start to get back to ourselves, back to our own reality.

Most occupations aren’t driven through the changing hours of lifestyles; bartending is. From the beginning of a shift to the end of the night, so much more goes on beside serving and being “served.” The depths of humanity can be found burrowing at the

bottom of any dive bar, and the life lessons learned by those servicing that bar can become overwhelming. Dive bars serve so much more than deliberate destinations of deferment for their occupants. They give employment to those who need to work in the “off” hours of the day, in a non-stagnant atmosphere and allow patrons to relinquish their own attachment to reality.

CHAPTER TWO: INTERIOR versus EXTERIOR PERSPECTIVE

DECONSTRUCTING MY OWN REALITY: The Introspective

My perspective of humanity may be far different than yours. I've observed humans in their darkest hour, and aided them in celebration upon their happiest of times. My occupation allows me to interact with people in their most vulnerable states of mind. Granting me access to the inner workings of their subconscious mindset. We are the nocturnally employed regulators of legal drinkable drugs. Drugs which allow the filters to come flying off and the sharing to begin. In the simplest of terms we pour drinks and contain psychological and physical chaos. If we make it look easy that's because we've been doing it for a long time. Our every movement is an after thought. We coordinate the boundaries of people to act free, but where one person's freedom begins, another's end. As servers of a trade in which people lose their bearings on reality we are the sober stable safety net leading them to their cabs at night. (Narration, PUBLIFE)

A better understanding of people allows for a broader outlook on life, and an ever-changing view of ones' own relevant existence. For everyone the answer is different with all coming to different conclusions based on a singular life experiment. Some existential philosophers believe that the singular life experiment, the singular perspective is the driving force of a meaningful life. They believe that the action of one man is what defines him; that his actions towards others affect the entire human race. For this reason

I choose to deconstruct my work through an existential point of view (Marino ix). It is within experience that man's domino affect of human interaction leads to an altruistic significance. If you treat me bad as the server you must treat everyone else bad as well. This will in time come in conflict with everyone else you come into contact with. As the *other*, I remind you of your own existence (Marino ix). Perhaps this is why, bartenders are treated poorly.

For the most part I believe people to be good. I believe there are, like in any other life setting, extremists who ruin things for the rest of society. They take their anger out on the world by being rude, verbally abusive, physically violent, overbearing and all over mean-natured; because sometimes that is all they know. The full spectrum of each of these personas enters into the bar on a daily basis. All of which at a particular time I've had the ability to become intimate with, on a purely psychological level. I like to think of it in terms of tourism of the brain. I get to "try on" different focal points, different occupations, differing beliefs, and differing traumatic situations. Each becomes self-reflective, because they always want to know what I would do? And in return have to put myself in their place, mentally.

As much as they don't want me in their head, they eventually do. They want someone else to know who they are, what their position in life is and to have a realistic ability to access their situation from an outside perspective to be seen and re-established as beings.

An example of this would be the 22-year old pre-school teacher, who after sucking down 5 long-island ice teas, a drink made solely from every clear liquor behind the bar, sobbingly confessed she had just found out she was pregnant. So instead of going to an authority of guidance, an institution of knowledge, a spiritual organization or even a parental unit, she came to me. She asked me for help, as a bartender.

Her dilemma was as follows: The teacher had been dating a guy who waited tables down the street from the bar. He stole some credit cards while waiting tables and became incarcerated for the next 5 years of his life. The pre-school teacher shared her situation to with the newly convicted felon, who in turn begged for her to stay with him. He wanted her to have the baby and to raise it by herself, making less than \$20,000 a year. This was not a predicament I took nonchalantly. When she asked me to help her, I did.

The girl, being on the brink of an emotional meltdown at the time, was lost. She simply didn't know what to do. So I sat with her for over an hour, and helped her map a plan of action. I first gave her water, and asked her what she wanted. Over a three hour time span she sobered up, called people in her life that would help her emotionally get through this complicated time in her life, and got in touch with a women's health organization. Being an active presence in helping this girl, I had the ability to ask myself, what would I do in this situation.

We are employed with the power to manipulate life in motion, a performance that lasts all night and into the wee morning hours. The hours are long and tedious, the constant movement exhausting. Taking on the problems of the world can tire out the body and the soul. The depths of our abilities, to skillfully juggle tangible wants with psychological needs are the basis of this occupation. Many times our duties go beyond the feeble actions of mixing cocktails and pouring beer. We, like our clientele, transform but consciously. Adapting to each patron differently, we translate implied desires, like to be heard, to socialize, by morphing into the friend, the psychologist, and the advice columnist. We listen to the same stories over and over again, each time pretending to have heard it for the first time. I've seen this guys new dog picture 20 times now, but I'm still smiling in agreement of its adorability. I don't want to hurt his feelings, and take away his happiness of owning a dog or infer that he's getting old because he's forgotten I've already seen this same picture for the last 3 weeks. The same thing happens with children, disease and weddings. We've heard the stories so many times, we could probably tell them ourselves. Even if told by different people, there seems to be 7 stories, each story only changed by locations and names, but the experiences are similar the outcomes much the same (NARRATION, PUBLIFE).

It is within the crowd that I see myself. I identify with just about every personality, and have had the privilege of bouncing back and forth through the heads of a very diverse crowd. Our audience is varied therefore my perspective is varied.

It's an occupation of constant humbling, of understanding humanity in its weakest of hours. It's an occupation that intellectually keeps one on his or her toes, that keeps your body and mind in constant motion.

DECONSTRUCTING ENVIRONMENT AND SPACE THE EXTERIOR WORLD

Imbedded between the capitalist consumer complex of Tysons Corner, as well as the military-industrial complex and political epicenter of Washington D.C., situated in a suburban shopping center down the street from the CIA, lies a Chinese dive bar in, McLean, Virginia. Having a 22101 zip code is like living in Beverly Hills. To most this means nothing, but to the community of McLean it is "kind of a big deal," or so I've been told. The community of McLean is one of the wealthiest counties in the United States of America, with a median household income of \$170,000, far surpassing the national average median income of \$51,000 (U.S. Department of Commerce). It houses some of the most prestigious and powerful families in the world, from Saudi Princes to Supreme Court Justices to the Kennedys to professional athletes of all sports. With great wealth and great power comes great arrogance. There is a certain elitist divide to this town, classism in its finest definition. "People in McLean feel they are entitled," said a local shop owner who has lived here his whole life. This financial divide emerges within the boundaries of the local "watering hole," the local bar scene. Politics, money and power are a hot topic among the drinking clientele.

This isn't the bar where you start your night. This is where you come for the last drink, for last call. This is the place you come at the end of your outing, always knowing full well we are open. This is where you come to play the fool, to act out all your inner commotion. This is the place where you come to be autonomous, to leave your pre-existing conditions at the door. This is the bar you come to puke in the urinal, fall asleep under the table, have sex in the alley, lock yourself in the bathroom, let all your drama unfold. This is the bar with the last ditch effort to find someone to take home with you, the place you come when you're so completely totaled your friends need to carry you out. This is the place where you bump into people you haven't seen in years. This is where you start fights, find rides home, break bottles, spill beer, and ash on the floor. This is the place you won't even remember having been the next day. This is the place where you know we'll take care of you. (Narration, PUBLIFE)

INSIDE THE DIVE

It's been a painfully slow night, and painfully slow is the worst of all working situations. Working and not making money is a travesty. What other occupation entails showing up, working 12 hours with no break, no food and not getting paid? Not too many. I've listened to a couple of sob stories tonight, but can't concentrate because there is a rancid smell lingering throughout the bar; even through the heavy foggy smoke filled room the over powering smell seeps into my nostrils tickling my gag reflexes. They smell it too, as they puff through cigarette after cigarette chain smoking away trying to forget the putrid smell that permeates the air, trying to forget that they have to work

tomorrow. They complain that it is coming in all directions; it seems to be everywhere, and nowhere at all. I search for its creator. It can't be natural. The floor has been bleached, trash taken out, sinks emptied of any residue. Its culprit, most likely the 30 year old bar sludge growing up the side of the cooler, protruding from deep under the bar counter, encroaching upon the dark crevices of areas untouched for years. We've asked our boss to get rid of the smell, but only after 20 complaints will he lift a finger. So we tell the few patrons who can stand the stench to complain. Unfortunately, there are only 5 people in the whole bar, not nearly enough to get anything done. The smell endures (Narration, PUBLIFE).

MOVEMENT AND TIME

This bar is the antithesis of its surrounding environment and is a classic example of a dive bar. Its very existence within this microcosm of “mini-mansions” and parking lots filled with extravagant cars is an irony. Lacking in modernity, it is the nature of the dive bar to exude a subtle ruggedness. Dive Bar motif is orchestrated to allow comfort in a mostly, non-judgmental atmosphere. Usually drowned out by dark and dingy backdrops, dive bars tend to have cavernous qualities to their structure and very little light. There are no windows to this bar, only a glass door covered by a second wooden interior door. The outer windowed door decorated only by the word PUB, painted in dark dingy green paint, foreshadowing the darkness to follow inside. I usually keep the second door closed to invite the curiosity of would-be patrons to step inside and to keep out the signs of daylight, which allows visuals to the passing of time.

Physically the bar is an actual divider as it is a metaphorical divide. It divides work from pleasure, audience from performer, patron from server, it is a divider of sobriety, survival, struggle, passivity it becomes a reflective involvement (Bell 97). The bar is a stage for acting, a platform for assertion. It can also be an imprisonment of social class. Either way it, keeps one side from the other and vice versa.

The establishment's sole purpose is to transport people from the outside world, creating a parallel universe in which they can get lost and/or search for distraction which usually becomes the main agenda. Knowingly they walk into this environment, some with more cash than others, but it's the ones who are ready to spend and forget that make the ultimate patron. To disrupt the realities of what is really going on in their lives, they continue this crusade of dipping into the darkened room of forgotten responsibilities.

Every bar is set up to be inviting, some more than others. The inclination to patronize a dive bar is that there is a bit more freedom than the average corporate establishment. For example, in Friday's, a well known after work drinkery, if patrons become too rowdy the first proclivity of a bartender is to boot them from the establishment immediately. At a dive bar, there is a deeper connection to patrons than in a corporate bar. We know our patrons for the most part on a more intimate level; therefore, we care for them in a much different manner. Instead of throwing a drunk person into the street, we like to first attempt to sober them up by either feeding them water or food, and then make sure they

have a way to get home safely. This is not a concern for the corporate bars, which are backed by lawyers and multiple patrons. There is a huge difference between small business and corporations when dealing with the bar scene. Where one sees great freedom, another sees a way to impede on another's freedom, such is that in a small family owned bar.

The beauty of this bar is it's dichotomy, the ability to become what it creates. The pub is an entity all of its own, and it assumes no responsibility for last nights transgressions. Only its bartenders do. Like that of the self loathing alcoholic drunk, who blew up last night verbally dismantling everyone in her path. Because she can't remember the errors of her ways, she has none; no blame for her brutal resistance to agreement. No memory of slapping her boyfriend in the face or calling me a whore. It must be so comforting to wake up everyday to no accountability; every day a new day to self-destruct and do what you want all over again. There are good people that turn into bad drunks; there are bad people that turn into fun drunks; there are even good people that turn into psychotic drunks. There are drug-addicted drunks, there are cheap drunks; and there are calm people that turn into neurotic drunks. This drug alters the personality allowing what's going on inside to come out. People, who know they are bad drunks, usually stop drinking altogether. They may have forgotten what happened last night, but there are other people that remember and remind the bad drunk of his or her destructive behaviors. They leave behind a trail of hurt and regret. I don't know why anyone would

WANT to knowingly turn into a monster. I call this the Jekyll and Hyde effect. Where a perfectly prudent human being has a couple of alcoholic beverages and within a scope of mere seconds turns into a blaring brute. I see it all the time, on small scales and grandiose. For some, the Jekyll and Hyde effect only works with certain beverages types, different liquors, whiskeys, vodkas, bourbons many times tequila will draw out the inner demons, Other times its all or nothing. All alcohol will turn the beast on. The reactions are the same, but the outcomes are much more different. Young men usually become barbaric and want to fight, while women tend to yell, scream and hit. Even people that I really think have it all together will become blathering idiots. (Narration, PUBLIFE)

The Pub itself is adorned with dart league memorabilia from the 80's; cigarette stained torn pictures from earlier decades. One of my regulars describes the pictures as "before you were even in the constellations." There are haphazardly hung mirrored plaques marketing beer we don't even sell and have never even heard of. The ceiling use to be white, but after years of tobacco rising to the ceiling turned yellow, and has since been painted the same green as the exterior PUB sign, accentuating the darkness. Mirrors litter the interiors refracting year-round hung Christmas lights, liquor bottles, dingy nicotine soaked glasses as well as patrons' gazes on the opposite side of the room. Thirteen welcoming upholstered stools line the bar front, while 6 dark wooden booths with each seating 4 sit opposite on the wall. The set up is to allow the flow of social interaction amongst guests, small enough that bar patrons can carry on conversation with booth

patrons. Small enough so people at the end of the bar can yell their drink orders to whoever is hard at work that day.

Simplistic in nature, our bar only has 2 draft beer taps, tapped with the most mild of American beers; most Europeans call it “piss water.” Our system so archaic we use calculators to add up handwritten checks, which are checked off after every pour and a cash register from the 70’s for our monetary exchanges. There is only one credit card machine, which is in the other room, so every credit card transaction enables us to leave the bar, making it quite vulnerable. It has very little connection to the modernity of the outside world, yet preserves the sanctuary of those seeking refuge from changing of time. Wood paneling, wooden booths, wooden adornment from the 80’s esque era, dramatically insinuate the age of the bar’s own existence; it is within itself a time capsule.

Our establishment is open 365 days a year, every night until 2 am. We are open on every major holiday, through snowstorms, tornados, and massive power outages. We are always open. We work in the dark. We work in the cold with no heat. We work in the heat with no ac. Every day there is always someone, working. I’ve never in 8 years not seen someone work a night (Narration, PUBLIFE).

BAR AS THEATER: OF THE ABSURD

I’ve worked quite a few a Christmas Eves and Christmas days, throughout the years. It’s usually a really good time to make a lot of money in a small amount of time. People

come home for the holidays. They gather together as a community in a really good mood to celebrate being off of work and done with shopping. Nothing is more fun than getting happy people drunk, and watching them have a good time. They let themselves go from the stresses and problems of everyday life. I was working Christmas Eve a couple years ago, thinking it was going to be much of the same. We usually get really packed with all the family coming to town. People usually want to visit the old watering hole where they use to drink illegally as teenagers, remembering the times that seemed to be better than they are now. The first half of my shift was pretty much on cue. I was steadily busy but not too crazy. People were finishing dinner with their families, and coming out of midnight mass. Later in the night, when most of the bar was in a state of complete celebratory tranquility, a large group of people showed up crying. There was a really awkward duality, taking place. Half the bar was drunk and ecstatic, while the other half was totally depressed and mourning. There was a distinct separation between the two parties. Sometime in the night, a local guy well known by our regulars, committed multiple murders in Mclean and Great Falls, and then killed himself. All the people crying were associated either by the assailant or the people murdered. The situation was so jarring people were in shock. They were drinking heavily and wailing at the same time. It stayed like this for a while, the two parties stuck in their own emotional temples. Then all of the sudden they started immersing themselves within each other, the happy people were cheering up the sad people, and the sad people were reminding the happy people why they were celebrating life in the first place. There was a really cool harmonious vibe throughout the bar. Even people coming in afterwards, whether they

were with the happy party or the mourning party started sharing the same emotion. Like they were transferring themselves into each other to make one big thankful celebration. It was a really cool day to be an observer.

In every bar there is seating, and the bar area is the focal point. It allows patrons to know exactly where to go to get whatever they need. Watching a film is similar in set-up; there is an audience and a focal point. Both are centered on movement, physical as well as visual. Just as some existentialist view the human condition as absurd, so is the condition of the dive bar patron. He or she sits on the stool or in a booth and either puts on a performance for the rest of the audience or watches the performance of others (Haney).

Just as man faces the absurdity of existence, that is, man is born, lives then dies without really knowing why he is here in the first place, so the bar patron knows that something drew him or her to the dive bar, they drink and then leave without really understanding why they were there in the first place. Just as man creates different meaning for life, so the bar patron creates different justifications for hanging out at the bar. Both man justifying life and the bar patron justifying a visit to the bar face the same problem. What they are doing is just absurd, however, it is too difficult to accept absurdity so both continue to search for meaning. For man, it is the meaning for existence. For the bar patron it is a justification for getting drunk.

CHARACTERS ON INTERACTION

We are a magnet for crazies. I don't know if it's a mixture of environment and situation with alcohol, or the absence of good oxygen in an overly smoky room, but we've had our fair share of what I like to call special characters. I had a lawyer that's a regular of our establishment tell me one time that it was illegal to serve people who are mentally unstable or crazy. I looked it up, and it wasn't true. And then I thought about it for a while. I usually can't tell if people are crazy until maybe 3 drinks deep. After the third drink everything pours out into the open and by then its already too late. I don't like to prejudge people. I've learned throughout the years that people in general are very similar, but there are a few that will totally blow your mind. I like to give people the benefit of the doubt, but as soon as you make my job more complicated I'd just rather throw you out. I banned this lady, newly divorced crazy, claimed to be ex- lawyer (a lot of people claim to be lawyers, I don't know why?). I don't really know if she was or not. She was a regular around town, every bar use to see her pop up every once in awhile. For the first year or so she was just trying and cheap. She'd run you around like you were her personal servant, and then cheaply dismiss you as lower class. That was her act. They all have acts, and character summaries. Her character summary entailed drinking white wine in the car before going into the bar. We couldn't figure out for the longest time, why she'd come in eat some food, have 2 white wines and fall over drunk, all for a whopping \$16.69 tab. She'd leave \$2 no matter what the tab was. For a while I would just give her water, because I could never tell what state she was in. Then one day she did it, what you should never do to a bartender. She came in crying, ordered a white wine, and then proceeded to become completely unhinged of the tangible world, totally

an emotional wreck. She was upset because her younger husband was leaving her, which wasn't a surprise to me. I'd seen her screwing around on him gallivanting about town. I wrestled her keys from her, which is slightly illegal, the whole time she was yelling and crying at me, I made her sit in the back booth until she either sobered up enough to drive home or got into a cab. People often turn murderous when you offer them a cab, but I have to. I want people to get home safely. And if someone leaves my bar and gets into an accident, I couldn't live with myself. So like a little kid in timeout, she sat and sulked with her water. This wasn't her first offense with me, but I felt sorry for her. Something bartenders should never do, never mix feelings with work. It'll fuck you in the end, especially if you start empathizing with people who don't deserve your empathy. I had already lost \$60, to this uptight broad. I paid her cab fare so she could get home safely, and the crazy bitch would take the cab around the block and then get into her car. This time I had her keys, she tried all kinds of ways to get them back from me, but I wasn't going to let her kill other people in her detachment from the rational world. Keep in mind I had a full bar I was running at the same time this chick was ruining my tips the longer I dealt with her. Our last battle together involved her losing her glasses, which I had to stop working and help her look for them. Another customer found them in the parking lot, that and in the front seat of her car an open bottle of white wine. That's when I knew I was banning her. Except, this time she was too drunk to realize she was being banned.

As with the man with the crazy bed hair who hands me 6 different credit cards and asks me to run all of them until his \$6.56 tab is met. He looks like he just got out of bed, and is wearing half a tracksuit and half pajama pants. Our interaction started with him asking me how much everything was, and not like how much a beer is? Or a mixed drink? Oh no....he 31 flavored me, asking me how much every individual bottle of liquor was. He proceeded to go down the bar stacked with hundreds of different liquors. I didn't know what his cut off number was, so after awhile I just started making up numbers, until he decided he wanted a call scotch. On the inside I am laughing, but only because it is slow and this guy is kind of entertainingly quirky. I knew this guy was going to be a scotch drinker; I had a bet going on in my head while listing off the prices. Scotch drinkers are the most uptight about their beverages. After the 3rd credit card run, I split the \$6.56 tab into 2 separate credit cards, I feel sorry for this guy, and I've been seeing this a lot lately. Credit cards declined and less and less cash coming into the bar. It's partly the economy, but I've seen this guy before. And he was pulling the same act last time too, except he stiffed me. Last time I didn't hold back on my internal conversation though. That's why I'm giving him the benefit of the doubt this time. Last time he had a couple of draft beers, openly stiffed me and told me he had to put his daughters in college. Told him, I'm putting myself through college and to go fuck himself. So I smile, hand him his receipt, about to walk away from the whole fiasco when he asks me to fish the ice out of his beverage, because its hurting his teeth. Continuing to smile I take my dirty hands, fish out the ice and throw it in the trash. I've spent 20 minutes with this guy and made \$1.

These 3 Arab girls come in every once in awhile; one works at a convenience store, one works at a real estate agency and the other is unemployed. We rarely chat with one another, unless it is about their tab, and how many drinks they think they didn't really have. Pretty much like clockwork, they come in and do the same routine over and over again. They live at home with their parents and are in their late 20's or early 30's. One has a boyfriend, the other 2 do not. They always have separate checks, constantly ask what their check total is, and ask about the prices of every beverage we carry. Usually they have 2-3 beverages each, lots of water and diet cokes on the side, lots of lemons in those waters, more ice, less ice. Each order comes one at a time. I maybe take 3 trips to their table just to accommodate one person. They sit for hours sipping on one drink, waiting for boys to come in and buy them drinks and eventually leave. To me, I make maybe \$3 off of them; the house makes maybe \$30. They constantly stiff me, and annoy the shit out of me, but our female to male ratio on clientele is bad, so I humor them with good service. It behooves us not to be mean to everyone, no matter how far gone they are. Otherwise we wouldn't have any clientele. The Arab girls come in one night; it's a slow and steady night. They open their performance with asking for one tab, which is highly unusual for them. I dismiss it, and serve them their first round of rum and cokes. Everything else is pretty much on schedule though. They run me ragged all night...diet coke, more ice, lemon for diet coke, limes for rum and cokes, shooters. Doing the same thing they do every time. One girl is drinking a wee bit more than the others though; she keeps ordering shooters that the other 2 don't want and then drinking

them. They've drank double what they usually do, been her doubly longer than they usually stay, and bought shots for other people which they NEVER DO. After cutting off the one girl drinking who has been ordering drinks that no one wants, they ask for their tab. Before I even hand it to them, I tell the whole bar that something big is about to happen. Because we have done this before, we've danced this dance and it never ends well. But this time, something is different and I already feel it in the air. Their tab is a little over \$100; they ordered food, a couple of mixed drinks and some shooters. They want me to split it the tab, but not equally, OF COURSE. They grab a marker and circle what each girl wants to pay for. It takes them nearly half an hour to so, and the whole time they're talking shit about me. I'm laughing, because I can already see exactly what is about to go down. I run their tabs, staple the half torn checks that's been split so many ways you can barely make out what goes where. One girl is paying \$63; the others are paying about \$20 each. The girl with the \$63 dollar tab writes in my tip at 63 cents. The others leave me \$4 bucks each, \$8.63 on a \$100 tab....typical. I ask them if they want a cab. They decline, but continue to sit and drink their left-over spirits. A couple of guys walk in, and the girls decide they want another round of drinks. In my head I'm laughing hysterically, because I know what they want. I know they're about to freak out and I can't wait to get this over with. The drunkest girl, 63-cent girl asks me for a vodka and soda. I smile and tell her I'm not serving her. She starts yelling, "How you gonna do me like that?? How you gonna do me like that?" I tell her calmly the same thing back "How you gonna do me like THIS?" Holding up my 63-cent tab I rip into her like no one's talk to her before. I tell her she has been her approximately 7 hours, I have made about 30 trips

to her table and she left me 63-cents. HOW YOU GONNA DO ME LIKE THIS?? Then both her girls start getting in my face. They tell me they're gonna call her boyfriend to come kick my ass. Their demeanor turns totally ghetto all of the sudden, they start getting closer, pointing their fingers in my face. "Bring it," I say. The whole bar is watching this transpire. My boyfriend is even sitting at the bar just watching. He knows I can take care of myself and that I don't need anyone to jump in and save me from being verbally berated by these sub-par people. I turn around and point to my favorite sign in the bar; I reserve the right not to serve. I smile and calmly walk away, as they continue to yell. Eventually they tire themselves out and leave (narration, PUBLIFE).

My boss, who is allergic to any confrontation whatsoever, says, "Your shift, you're in charge. What you say goes." Once in awhile he'll make an attempt to renege on his gracious allowance of power, but we've worked here too long to give it up. And we know what's REALLY going on, he doesn't. He always buys the worst person in the bar a drink. He has absolutely no basis for determining who really spends money and who doesn't. If you buy a cheap person one drink, they'll only have one and leave and most likely stiff us. If you buy someone who you know is going to spend money, they'll stay there all night and not even notice if you buy them a drink or not. Which is the number one rule to bartending. Never buy anyone anything; if you do they'll expect the same and even more the next time they come around. Soon after that your patrons run you, and you have no control over your patrons. They'll lose respect for you, and tip you less and less, because they're not getting free drinks. Some people are tricky though. They want

free food. They want free drinks. In fact people want free stuff all of the time. They think that we can just give everything away without any repercussions. If we don't make money for the house, we have NO JOB. People are so stupid sometimes. They will even try these crafty little ways to try to manipulate us because we're bartenders. We're the HELP, obviously stupid. I had a lady once order Spring rolls, \$4.10, and then pretend to have an allergic reaction. The menu said the spring rolls had shrimp in them, but she ordered them anyways. She waved her hands at me and started screaming that she was having an allergic reaction to the shrimp. I told her the menu said they had shrimp in them, but there was no rationalizing with her, she was just crazy. I went back into the kitchen and asked the chef about the shrimp in the spring rolls. He said they changed the recipe a couple years ago and forgot to change the menu ingredients. There was no shrimp in the spring rolls, but this lady claimed her throat was closing up, that she couldn't breathe and her face was getting puffy. She flailed her arms in the air and made a big scene, yelling at me, saying she was going to get me fired. Since she seemed fine to me I just kind of laughed at her. I think she was looking for a lawsuit, but I just compensated her for her \$10.50 check instead. She felt completely embarrassed and left quite abruptly, stiffing me of course.

CHAPTER THREE: BORROWING IDEAS FROM MODERN INFLUENCES

As a filmmaker, writing, directing, shooting and editing my film from my perspective is important to the authenticity of my work. It's an act of independence to control every aspect in a piece of art. The nature of this production was completely controlled by one singular person, which has enhanced its focus and honest portrayal.

Mark Cousins opening lines to *The Story of Film: An Odyssey*, a documentary on the history of film, is that filmmaking is “a lie to tell the truth.” I see the “lie” as the process and the “truth” as the idea. To put together a film is to break down the meaning of what the film is attempting to express to its audience. Every word and every photograph still needs to be meticulously edited in time, to create meaning, between the dialogue and the soundscape, to the visual and sequence order. This very process is not a reality. It is a pre-made actuality, and an attempt to justify its purity of meaning. Defining a piece as documentary is another attempt at seeking truth, which in turn becomes a contradiction to what it is even trying to become. Behind every book, every story, every narrative, every film is an idea, and it is the idea that is the purpose.

Jason Silva

Jason Silva is a contemporary documentary filmmaker and philosopher that centers on idea-based micro-documentaries. Using bright, always moving still images as well as animated ones, he montages fragmented sequences through the movement of his visuals as he speaks about what is being illustrated in a hyped up almost prose-like rap manner.



Figure 1 *The Biological Advantage of Being Awestruck*

Coining his pieces as *cinematic espresso shots*, he uses bright fast paced visuals depicting everything from ideas jumping out of the human mind, to the floating of the Hubble telescope in space. Without even taking a breath, he narrates at a fast pace, spouting off ideas of evolution, technology and the human mind (Silva 1). He constantly quotes scientist, philosophers and anthropologists, to back up his electric tirades, using Albert

Einstein, Jean-Paul Sartre, even contemporary physicist like David Deutsch the author of *The Beginning of Infinity*.

Silva describes his aesthetic relevance with big ideas. “My mode of presentation is a short-form video basically I create fast cute, impassioned ‘idea explainers’ that explode with enthusiasm and intensity as they distill how technology is expanding our sphere of possibility” (Silva). In *Radical Openness*, Silva explains that artist and science will work together. They will create as much of an important impression on humanity as the classical artists throughout history. His shorts are about culture, linguistics, technology and imagination. He rambles on about how technology is part of human evolution. When humanity began to speak it stopped biologic evolution and started an evolution of cultural phenomenon. Silva’s micro-documentaries are a positive reinforcement of intellect mixed with a world of imagining the creation of new possibilities (Silva).

To take an idea and highlight it through a visual composition of language and aesthetic can be a powerful tool, especially when done in under a couple of minutes. Packing so much information into small films shows that he has an understanding of the attention span of his audience, even exposing the screen as a teaching mechanism within his own work.



Figure 2 The *Biological Advantage of Being Awestruck*

It is the idea-based film that I identify with in Silva's work. His work is extremely obsessive about teaching people to think beyond what they already know. It is this idea based film exposure that permeates my own work.

Exploring a different way of viewing something that is mundane and everyday is what draws me into the works of other *independent* filmmakers like Jem Cohen and Sadie Benning. Differing from the subject matter of Silva's *cinematic espresso*, they take ideas and without telling you the entire story allow the audience to create their own dialogue between film and viewer.

Sadie Benning

As a chronicle of personal expression, Sadie Benning's work uses a diarist approach to narrative film as an independent filmmaker. Accenting a frustration of the exterior world

through performance, writing and photographing with the use of a Fisher-Price Pixelvision 2000 toy camera, Benning's view from an isolated perspective gives meaning in the search of personal identity of a young lesbian woman (Horrigan 26).



Figure 3 Still from *It Wasn't Love*

Using a toy camera to capture her inner complex dealing with identity awareness makes complete sense from the view of an adolescent girl searching for answers through a quarantined state. She directs, narrates, shoots and edits her melancholic pieces to distinguish her experience as someone who is in the *otherness* of society, the outsider perspective (Benning). Her work being described as “a kind of narcissism-in-hiding, a

paradoxical retreat through exposure that precisely matches the emotional tone of these tapes, which continually seek to strike an uneasy balance between secrecy and candor, shyness and angry assertion,” by American film critic Jonathan Rosenbaum (Horrigan 28).



Figure 4 Still from *Me and Rubyfruit*

Benning's film *Living Inside*, shot from her bedroom when she was only 16, conveys through fragmented language and constant interruption of visual broken sequences, a girl who is lost. The language she uses sounds like random pieces of writing from a young girls diary, not always making sense, especially layered onto a shot of an eye just blinking over and over again. This abstract sandwich of visuals, placed with words both

handwritten as visuals and spoken, allows the viewer to create his or her own story of what is going on in the scene. She gives just enough detail for the audience to identify with the mood and the turmoil being expressed, but doesn't lead the viewer to a direct conclusive literal interpretation. In the film, Benning talks about how she is suppose to be some place else, doing something else but instead she, and through insinuation of a trash covered floor, is doing nothing. Her collection of film tapes is consistently black and white. They are dirty, gritty and filled with grainy shots of her eyes, the simplistic motions of blinking, her hands or indistinguishable body parts, sometimes panning over objects in her room or blurry television shots, perhaps the only implications of the outside world (Benning).

Talking about dealing with her anger through her work she says, "Things that bother me the most are when other people are trying to control my life or telling me how I can live, or passing judgment over me. The best way to fight that kind of anger is to continue to create work and voice myself. That's when I'm happy. The most revolutionary thing is to just love yourself and love what you do (Yablonsky)." I can identify with her frustration, with her anger and her ability to change that anger into a voice. In my own work I have days of anger. I write about the anger and then try to redistribute them into an arena of meaning....one in which *my* perspective can be heard.

It is the abstract layering of text with image that as a filmmaker I search for in my own work, as well. Using a similar system of narration over moving image, I too attempt to

allow my viewer to create his or her own connection to the ideas I have set forth visually and literally. Also the play on the *otherness* perspective that Benning constantly presents is what I find fascinating. Not coming from the same world as Sadie Benning, I still empathize with her cause throughout her films. It is that *less is more*, story-telling connection that I attempt to employ in my own work.

Jem Cohen

It is the belief that I share with Jem Cohen though that instills the ideas I feel most intensely about as a film creator. Cohen, a New York based filmmaker, has his hands in everything that isn't Hollywood to include a broad bank of *independent* films that consist of documentaries from following musicians around, to landscape film portraits through cinematic essays.

His aesthetic is cheap, gritty and simplistic, maybe even a using a little *punk aesthetic*. Cohen's tools consist of small-gauged, inexpensive, instruments for recording visuals of banal activities, with a Super 8 camera to the use of 16 mm film. This is a stylistic choice, which adds to the visual complexities Cohen puts forth on the screen. Like in his film *Lost Book Found*, grainy, sepia and fragmented images of New York City dance upon a screen giving the film a feel of nostalgia. The Super 8 captures the simplicities of the city and Cohen regenerates it as emotion sequence that lasts for almost a half-an hour.

Documenting the *everydayness* of New York City for 4 years, Cohen filmed, recorded and organized a cinematic essay from the perspective of a pushcart salesman. Cohen

specifies that he is not his film, but the experiences that he once had are implied within his film.

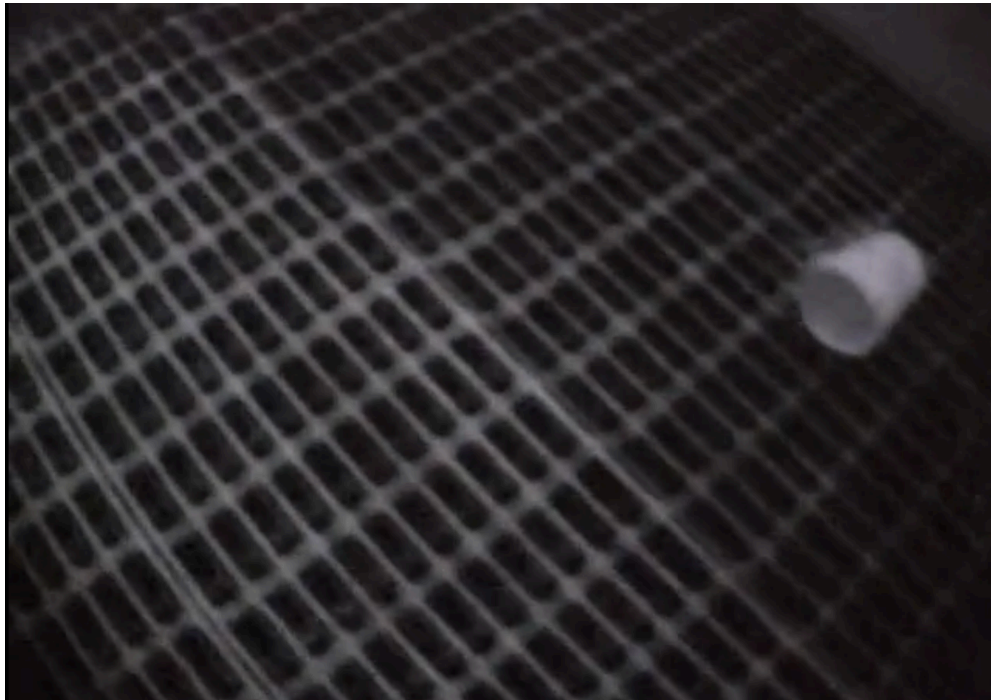


Figure 5 Still from *Lost Book Found*

Using fragmented sequences of ordinary happenings, Cohen pieces together, along with a mellow soundscape and dull voiced narrator, an event that seems as tedious as a commute throughout a city. He breaks down the ordinary into such a particular way he almost deconstructs the city through its graffiti, through its trash, through the multitude of passer-byers; whittling away at the bare essence of meaning within objects and objectification.



Figure 6 Still from *Lost Book Found*

“On a broader level, I often describe how punk rock gave me a model for operating independently outside of an industry that I couldn’t connect with” (Graham). Here, Cohen describes the punk aesthetic, also known as *Punk Cinema* used throughout his films. A raw aesthetic built from the need to be DIY or “Do It Yourself,” production format. From the use of his Super 8 camera, to darkened distorted footage capturing the everyday perspective, his intentions directly correlate to something that doesn’t feel Hollywood. He doesn’t create films for the intentions of becoming famous or making lots of money, he does it because he wants to. He does it to have a voice of his own that isn’t intercepted by a big production studio (Thompson 47).



Figure 7 Still from *Lost Book Found*

His attitude though is honorable. “I don’t believe in the distinction between art film and popular film. What I do believe in is the distinction between honest and dishonest film. And the more crap there is out there, the more you have an obligation to try to offer something different.” I agree with this belief most of all. When art is honest it has a distinct implication on preserving meaning. Cohen denies all connections with large mass media outlets. Instead he insists on doing things the way *he* wants to do them, which allows his films to “get to the heart” of whatever idea base he is working with at a certain time (Said 2).

CHAPTER FOUR: CONSTRUCTING WORK

My film is an evaluation, a reaction to the daily dilemmas and triumphs of being a working class citizen in the service industry. I want to prove that we, as bartenders, are more than just fetching a drink for the parched lips of alcoholics. We are multi-tasking super heroes that deal with more than our monetary rewards would indicate. In an attempt to make my perspective relevant all efforts to remain as realistic and true to the subject matter were taken into consideration in the course of executing this project.

COLLECTION

Thought is sometimes found in the *process* of putting together a piece of art. Some artists strive to create rules that govern their works. Such rules drive the process of creating notable works, which later become part of the work in its entirety. Part of my process as artist is to collect data from experience and then organize it into a meaningful piece of art.

Meaning is located in the realm of thought. In order to create something meaningful, what is being created should invoke thought. This is an important element when putting together a project. As an artist I want to create work that is thought provoking, that instigates an inner dialogue with self, beyond the actual work. This is how I feel art stays alive and ever present. I have this need to prove that I lived and survived this or that

experience. I want to share that experience and allow someone else to resonate with it. I want to give an actual detailed encounter of an involvement, a second life being revisited and explored by its happening through a realistic situation that has taught individuals something outside their ordinary nature.

Unconsciously, I began collecting “data” 6 years ago. I neurotically wrote down everything that would happen almost daily when I worked. Collecting this *evidence* in notebooks, I would bring them with me to work, sometimes writing down the occurrence right after its very happening. Throughout the years my collection has turned into volumes of first person accounts of experience; written stylistically as diarist, memoirist, psychological deconstructionist, or sometimes prose. All handwritten, I dated some things and wrote down actual names of *characters* in others. Every six months I buy a new book and continue to collect my stories, covering every page.

Last week a regular told me I'm too removed from death to fear my own mortality. I think he's just afraid to die.

The older they get, the earlier they come in. When they stop showing up ^(it's) their most likely dead, probably because

Our clientele is about 80% male 20% female; 75% are regulars; the rest are lost or staying at the Hotel next door.

The old timers come in early afternoon; they sip draft beer, tip in coins, and bitch about how times have been better.

Figure 8 Documentary Photograph

I not only collected stories I also collected receipts, notes, pictures, business cards, letters to other people, poems, songs, numeric calculations, stories, and drawings created out of need to document or boredom. Many of the notes in my collection are addressed to me, some containing phone numbers asking me out, while others just rantings, “I LOVE YOU.” Some notes left by patrons would just say good-bye, because I most likely was in the other room when they had left.

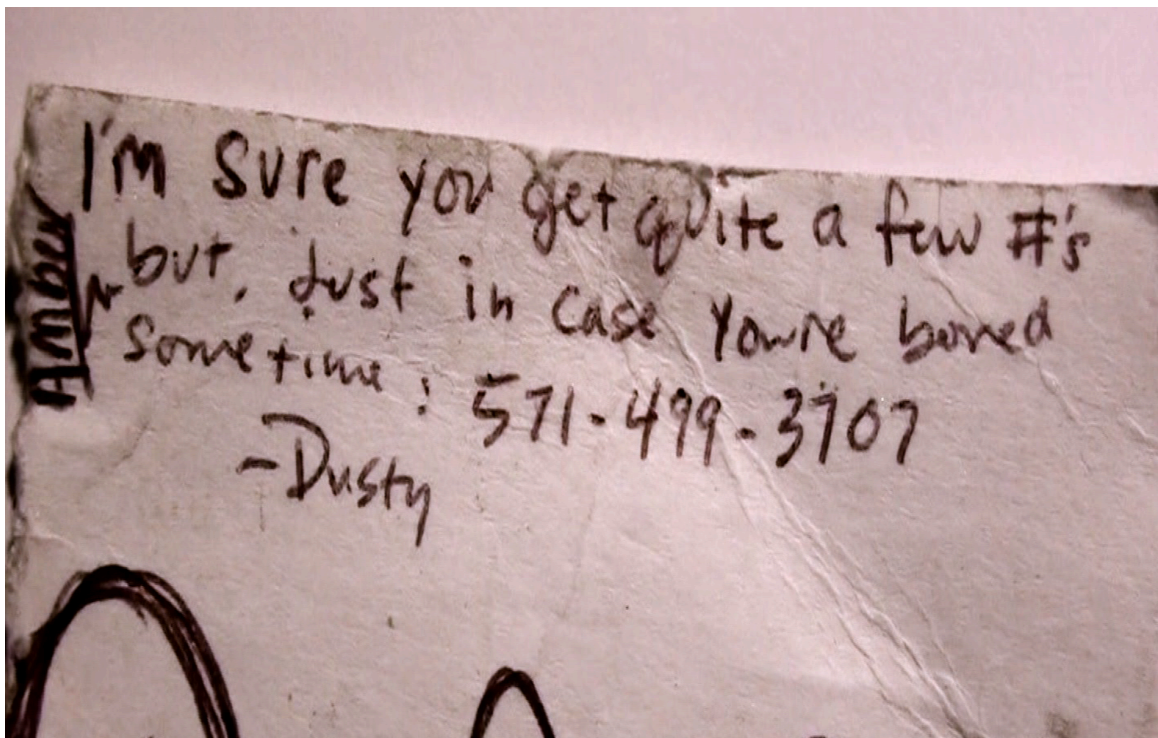


Figure 9 Still from *PubLife*

Through this collection I could piece together who these people were without really even knowing them. I could figure out if the guy who stiffed me was really poor, or just another cheap, rich, businessman. I could splice together what people did for a living

based on their scribbles and doodles of bar napkins. I collected their pent up aggression alleviated in bar trash. For instance, I would find bank statements, work schedules, post cards. Sometimes I would find scraps of paper where someone was asking about buying drugs. Besides the interaction between patron and server, I could figure out what was really going on, even when I wasn't looking.

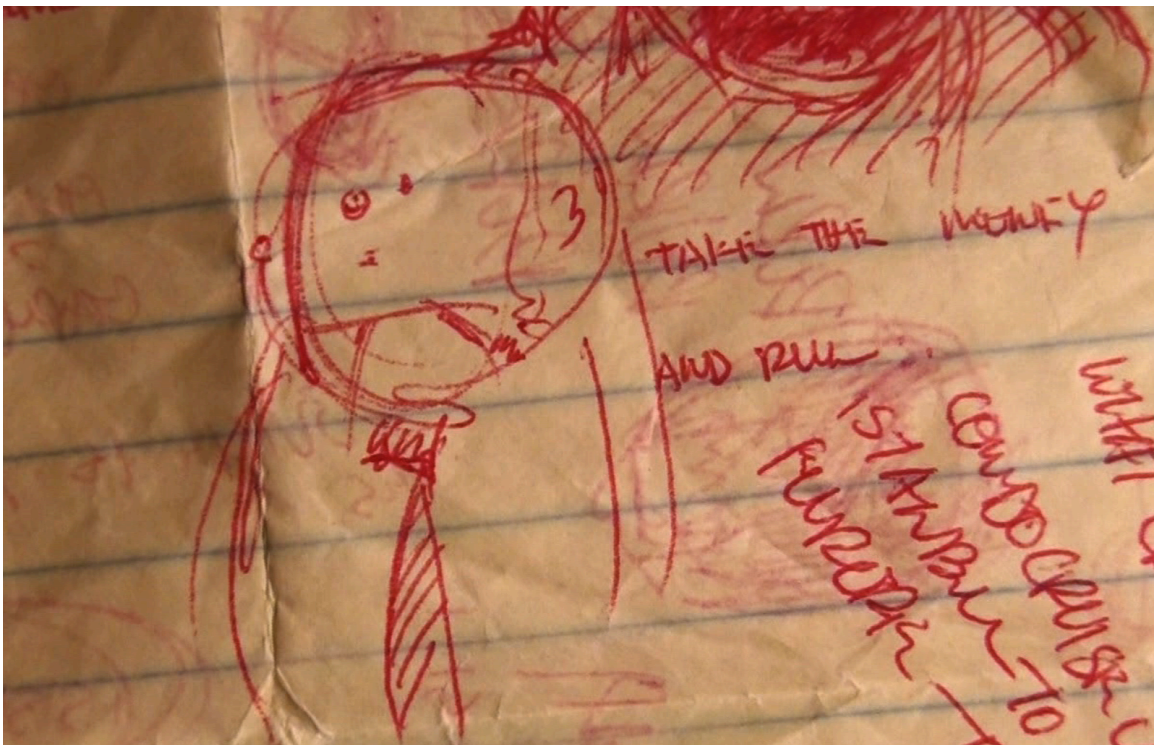


Figure 10 Still from *PubLife*

PROCESS

REDISTRIBUTING MEMORY: COLLAGED FRAGMENTATIONS

No memory is completely true. Even though we are capable of knowing what is happening in the very moment of time, nothing that is passed through our gray matter is indelible. Conclusive evidence of studies on the brain show the workings of long-term

and short-term memory, indicating the ability to remember, is concurrent to what is happening at a particular time in a particular place and the importance of such a happening. The human brain is so intricate that the slightest short-term memory, if remembered and recounted routinely, often enough, turns into long-term memories, only hindered by emotion, emotion of the time happening or the time being remembered (Ackerman, 100-101).

When I start a shift my regulars seep onto their bar stools and the first question of the day is always “what happened last night?” There is always a certainty that something out of the ordinary happens late at night, when the crowd becomes larger, younger and more intoxicated. Drama unfolds and as those who did not make it into the wee hours of the morning are still intrigued as to what may have occurred the night before, and with whom. So I am constantly telling the same stories over and over again. The more I tell the stories, the more I realize I need to leave in some parts and edit out other parts.

As a bartender it is difficult to be honest with my clientele as I am performing at work. My main concern is to make money through tips, and if one is constantly berating and complaining to the people who pay you, you will never make money. So when agitated by the consumer I shut my mouth and stew in my own anger toward said happening and vice versa if it's a good encounter. In turn, this allows me to go over in my head the exact play through of the actual account.

Every time you tell a story that story becomes more engrained in your memory. The more that memory sticks, the more truth there becomes of that memory. Because my narrative is based on autobiographical chronicles, I feel this process to be important when recounting past happenings. It is my main intention to explain to my audience what this occupation really entails, and that the actions of consumers affects other people, and many times it's the people who are serving you, and not the ones relishing in the profit from their spending.

I take this into consideration while writing narrative and editing video. Since writing from memories seems to be riding on emotions lending itself to the ability to change an actuality, I like to write down an account as soon as it takes place (Ackerman, 78). When I am working and something happens that angers me, I write it down almost as soon as it happens. Sometimes I even recount the story to other regulars, because A) they like the drama and B) it helps me to remember the account in question. Even though I go back through my notes and create a narrative that linguistically flows, I still want to stay as true to the actual occurrence as possible. Collecting data, my process and rules I have set forth within my work help to keep this aspect of my story free from sensationalizing the experience.

She walks the biggest bitch,
dressed to the nines,
because she's sucking the
big pussy dick. The
attitude comes from being
poor, pretending to be
of worth. She's too good
to acknowledge my
questions: would you like
something? It's like I hadn't
even spoken. She continues
her conversation about her
prada bag; she took it
in the ass for last night
shit these people.
They clock me on the
outside; with their
cooker-cutter shapes; their
expensive cars, attached to
loans they can't afford
you roll your eyes at
me you cunt ass bitch.
The fact that you're drinking
here for this not infected
syndrome speaks volumes.
So come on, in your
gucci pumps, the same
you'll be sunbathing on
your dirty ass porch

Figure 11 Documentary Photograph

SEQUENCING THE EXPERIENCE

Every artist creates rules throughout their artistic process. The rules are what make the art effective, creative, singular and meaningful. One of the first rules I set for myself

throughout the process of capturing video was to not produce re-enactments, or have visuals that were set-up or staged. Instead I wanted to document the *real* visual nature of the bar itself. There are so many different visual elements taking place in the bar at all times, even when it's dead and no one is there.



Figure 12 Still from *PubLife*

From the cockroaches scurrying across the floor, to the smoke eaters annoyingly loud hum even when *nothing* is happening, something *is* happening.

Capturing fragmented visual sequences of natural bar events, I edit them in their entirety to establish the natural flow of the bar environment. Attaching cameras to myself, placing cameras in cups, on trays and situating them around the bar for hours at a time, I was attempting to capture the essence of the environment and analyze its meaning.



Figure 13 Still from *PubLife*

When one is placed in a particular area for what seems to be an eternity, one begins to look at said environment differently. You begin to recognize the nuances of that situation, the cracks in the linoleum, the mold growing in the cooler, the horrific smell coming from the old dirty pipes, the graffiti covering the bathroom walls. It all seems to work in unison, the meaning behind the driving forces of people and their environment. Why do these people continue to come here? How can they stand that stench and consume food at the same time? It all seems to be interconnected. I was in search of that interconnectivity that drives this bar, this environment and the people that fill this establishment. It is this interconnectivity that turns into a cyclical bouncing perspective from all angles.



Figure 14 Still from *PubLife*

From the beginning of my shift to the end of my shift, there is the calm before the storm, the storm and the aftermath, then a recycle of all events. A collection of fragmented sequenced images, I video taped life in continued motion, sometimes this motion is stagnant, while other times so gratuitously jarring it mimics the feeling of being drunk. Compiling 4 years of fragmented happenings, constructing an entire day within my translated environment, I coalesce them into one long film that seems a repetitive banal action in and of itself.

It's a paradoxical world where time melts, the people are changing sometimes transforming morphing right before our very eyes, but the actions, the movements, the motions, the situations remain the same. What happened last night hasn't carried over into the present day, there may be words exchanged, but everything is dropped,

dismantled and forgotten. What were last night's quandaries have turned into today's liquidated memories, if even remembered at all. A rebirth, after every opening, a new day is a new start. This is an isolated event only happening in the existence between these walls, and between these people with shared experiences. People die, life continues on, and the same stuff that happened the night before will happen again, just with different people and at different times. So goes the evolution of the bar business (Narration, PUBLIFE).

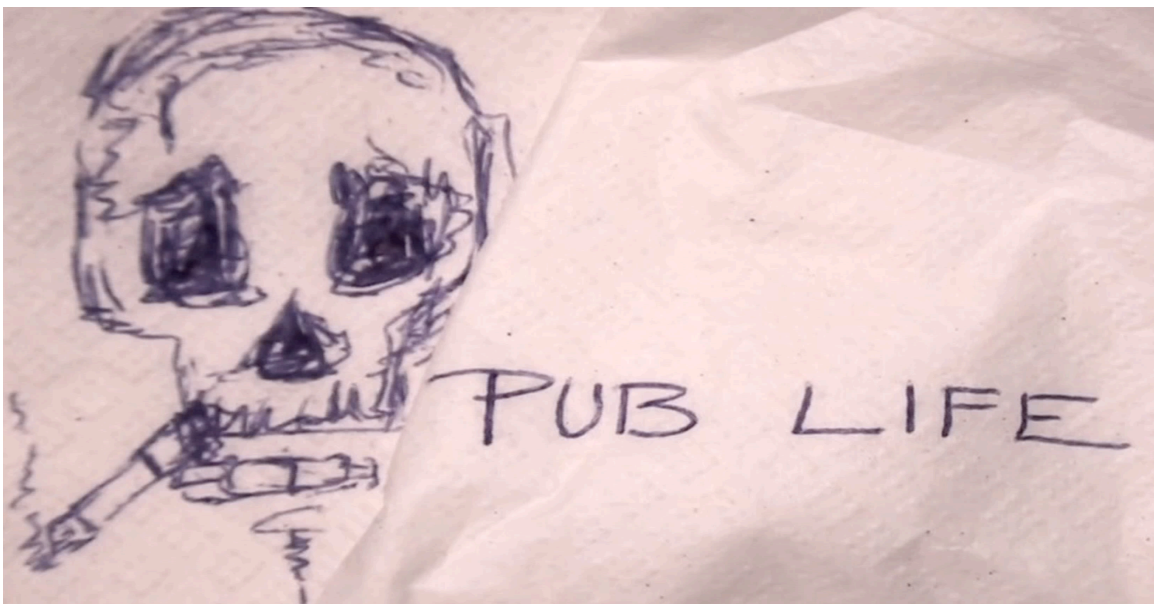


Figure Still from 15

EVALUATING EXPERIENCE

Film and memory have many converging parallels from the way they both capture moments in time, to their way of documenting an experience, whether realistic or set-up (imagined). The brain takes in clips of experience and then pieces together information

of the in-between, of what isn't always a full recollection memory. It fills in what is missing. It does this with sight as well, connecting the light into one solid image. The consciousness of film editing works in a similar manner. Photographing movement, motion, moments in time through frames per second, the camera picks up every other moment and it is the conscientious editor that pieces them together to make a sequence of film meaningful.

Through film I feel this necessity to capture and record the trivial actions of *everyday* life. I take into account the perspective of the active and passive participants within a particular scene, situation or setting. I set up cameras from the viewpoint of my regulars, which provides a somewhat voyeuristic feel to the footage of the bartenders. As well as placing cameras around the bar to in turn capture a parallel voyeurism of my patrons. In a bar setting this can be tedious work. I want the characters to act "natural" so without telling anyone, I record their movements throughout the space. The space is small and dark, and so the quality of the film mirrors this reality. Working with very little light to begin with, the film goes in and out of darkness to light, to complete dark to crisp light and back to darkness, the visuals sometimes ending grainy this implying chaos and structure. The characters at the bar sometimes merge into mere silhouettes, assisting my narration in the idea of transcendence.

I've chosen to work with this subject matter because it has become my life for almost a decade. What I have learned in this business is priceless when it comes to learning about

people and life. Try comforting someone who has just been told they have 3 months to live, as they drink their martini, and you will have perhaps half an ounce of understanding when it comes to dealing with humanity and its fight against mortality.

The ever-changing environment is ironic, because the sameness in situation. In order to capture this dichotomy both visually and authentically, the use of film layered with narrative initiates a layering of many ideas coinciding into one cinematic piece. Edited through a montage of ever changing frames, the narration is what connects the visual movement to the storyline, while sometimes using confusion through imagery with words that don't make sense together or are conflicting, attempts to make the viewer think about what is happening. This targets the concepts at play within the piece, adding a focal point to what is the singular importance of meaning between the two, the visual and the literal.

What better way to bring visibility to an underground culture than to blow it up and place it on a screen? The act of taking images from a dark, small space and then expanding it onto one field of view to be spectated, as they who were once filmed were the spectator. It's a reversal of power, recording spectators watching the bartender, while the bartender is filming *her* audience.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

It simply needs to be said. This in its most basic form in the reasoning behind all of my work, I emit honesty like alcoholics drink, to the point of fault. Most people like this, some detest it, as bartender my patrons tend to forget it. As artist it aids me in dealing with the world around me, with dealing with my own universe. Which is why I consistently stick to my gut and just tell it like it is. When you're honest with people they respect you more, they understand your position better, no matter what your social class. It's a trait that embodies the ability to speak to everyone, honestly.

In a culture torn by the inability to tell the difference between an actual happening on YouTube or a set-up happening in Hollywood, I feel this is an important endeavor to translate, into an honest perspective. As my film opens, it begins with footage of my future husband getting punched in the face while escorting me to my car after getting off of work. It wasn't the first time he's been assaulted at or because of, my bar, and it probably won't be the last. But it was an intuitive instinct to film it. In part because the last time it happened the assailant was freed by the injustice of *the* system and its ability to help people with money, but mostly because I wanted to prove the happening occurred.

Knowing how exaggerated stories can turn when they occur inside the bar community. I see this opening segment as a tribute to reality and an insinuation of truth that bartenders deal with things on a daily basis that the average person couldn't possibly understand. That sometimes our work flows into our personal lives, beyond our control. That what bartenders go through on a regular basis is a test of sanity, patience and sometimes understand.

With a visual world stuck on a false sense of pre-made over produce crap, we as audiences have become complacent with things that aren't real. It is a driving force to tell my story, of experiences that really have taken place. To pass on the information about the perspective of the bartender as it is an embodiment of all walks of life. It can be identifiable with social outcasts, with the working class, it can be understood by anyone who has ever worked hard and not been respected.

Choosing to do a long narrated film on the everyday happenings of a dive bar was a search for honesty and a different kind of *truth*; an implication of something that most people don't notice or don't see out right. It highlights a mutable occupation, one where our voice is almost never heard. In my mind the bar is mapped out into a psychological manipulation, adding drunk people to this equation deepens the distortion of the "everyday," and furthers the investigation into the psychological nature of the "barfly" to a hyper-reality.

It is within the hyper-reality that the human condition becomes the central focal point, from the perspective of the bartender. We have nothing else to look at besides the *other* side of the bar, and it's on that *other* side

Everyone is an outsider at one point in time. The human creature is so diversified by situation, experience and societal influence; there is no *one* person who is totally accepted all of the time. From this *Other* placement one has the ability to step out of the actual happening and see other events at play.

Like the anger and frustration found in Sadie Benning's work, I want to transform my frustration into a viable voice. One in which creates a dialogue between others on the subject matter I display. Instead of getting mad at the situation at hand, I would rather take that experience and blow it up into something reflective towards me, and my audience.

I don't know if I'm a terrific narrator, or an amazing liar, but people always ask me if I'm telling the truth? "There is no reality except in action," an existential declaration, it's the action of transferring an experience into another's actuality, to show people a new and or different perspective (qtd Marino 355). To learn from other sides of life is what art is about it's what life is about. It's that ultimate search for truth and meaning upon one's own singular experiment.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

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