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THE FAMILY ALBUM. DIARIO DE TRABAJO. SELECCIÓN 1985-1986

THE FAMILY ALBUM. WORK JOURNAL. SELECTED ENTRIES 1985-1986



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May 2, 1985

2:10 am

It feels good to finally begin this film again.

A gargantuan task.

Each day I will attempt to get a little bit closer—will absorb a little bit more. The key to memory is to break things up (or is it down) into manageable bits. Unfold a little bit every day. A bird building its nest twig/dust by twig/dust.

I got a very short haircut today...something to grow into.

May 4, 1985

2:30 am

I'm going to use the small red notebook given to me by Anya to notate the many, many bits of ideas, inklings, gleanings, mutterings, and connections that occur to/in me as I work. Just tonight, I have 5 or 6 scratch pads screaming with barely legible fragments of today's "noticings."

Editing is the consequence of noticing.

Everything gets written down—every spark of thought (even bad ideas)—so that nothing, no matter how ephemeral escapes future consideration.

May 7, 1985

3:30 am

The inevitable is happening. As I stay up and work later and later each night, I am shifting irrevocably into a nocturnal being. I'm not really tired now—fatigued and slightly disoriented but not sleepy tired. I presume that as I continue to work, my tolerance for staying awake and working later and later into the morning will increase. Is there a point of no return? Who cares. There'll be time for proper rest and normal sleep some other time.

Today I (...) finished the evening by listening to the tape of an anonymous Long Island family at a holiday gathering with family and friends. This tape, like many others that I have assembled, I bought for spare change at a garage sale. There are some very intriguing sections.

Much of the language of the men is very crude, full of cursing and drunken ribald. The section that thrills me tonight is when a man, in an apparent attempt to do a "sound check," continues to blow air into the microphone in such a way as to create the sound effect of a plane crossing the sky—or perhaps a motor boat zooming past. I'd like to use it somehow.

May 9, 1985

3:00 am

Sometimes it's all running away from me.

Sometimes I'm right on top of it.

Today was day 1 of phase 2. I opened up the film, inserting and removing pieces of image and sound, gingerly looking to do nothing more than put like things with like things—searching out and listening for zones of affinity. The structure of the film is still a loose web.

I took Joshua G. out to a Japanese dinner this evening. He was impressed he said, by the stability, the calm, and the order of my editing room.

July 7, 1985

2:27 am

Slowly the work becomes something based on what it excludes—what it cannot be—what the editing process cannot absorb.

Quotations from *Time Frames: The Meaning of Family Pictures*, by Michael Lesy

"...Pictures like frozen dreams whose manifest content may be understood at a glance but whose latent content is enmeshed in unconscious associations, cultural norms, art historical cli-

ches, and transcendental motifs. Pictures that are both cliches and archetypes, vulgar and miraculous, fact and fiction."

"...when a camera is raised to the eye of a friend, a lover, or a parent, it becomes the symbol of a judgement, attention, and insight even more intense and scrutinizing than that which ordinarily characterizes such intimate relationships. Its presence transforms the people it beholds into actors, standing in sets, posing with symbolic props, the whole scene a private allegory of love, defined by the edge of an imaginary proscenium stage. Often the snapshot is a picture puzzle in which everything manifest is only a fraction of what is revealed."

"Years after such puzzles have been made, they inevitably fall into the hands of children, whose pasts are made accessible to them by images, which provoke questions never before asked or never before answered. Once the puzzles have been worked, they reveal to children that they have been standing in a place—until now invisible—where four rivers of time converge: their own, private, secret time ("Who is that baby? Is that me?"); their family's time ("Is that when we live in St. Louis?"); their country's time ("Is that when Daddy was in the army?"); and mythic time, the common poetry of the human family ("Is that when you and Daddy were in love? I mean, before you got married and had babies?").

July 12, 1985

1:00 am

I showed a very, very, very (that's three verys) rough draft of the film to Bernie Stone tonight. His response to the work was rather subdued—it certainly didn't knock him out. His advice was that I be "ruthless", his way of telling me that the film is too long and obviously not working. I not only need to make some re-visions, I need to do some re-thinking.

Fire Island

August 2, 1985

6:00 pm

Q: Can a lot of sun and swimming ultimately serve to help the film?

A: You bet.

1.The soundtrack provides the anarchy to the film, both in the way it comes and goes, voice to voice, texture to texture, content to content and the way its relationship/perspective to the image continually shifts.

23.Should I continue music under "Black Baseball?" I am reluctant to introduce traditional documentary convention—music under (the voice over).

29.Did you know that someone name Berliner invented the first gramophone?

August 21, 1985

3:15 am

Feel the blunt edge of this hammer.

Why?

Why must all of this take so goddamn long? Why must outside forces, unmanageable time pressures and the peculiarities of technical process control me?

Am I in charge here?

Was I ever?

Am I afraid to finish?

Do I dare doubt?

Am I amidst hexagram "Youthful Folly," showing inexperience in handling both the rigors and disciplines of this painful fun? I have let the process of making this film flow through and intertwine with my life process—both daily and long term. I have allowed the working procedure to humanize itself, no rigor for its own sake, no musts, allow for distraction, let the sails flap and glide with the whims of my daily breath. I have, for all my meticulous note-making and note-taking, yet to attempt any sort of schedule, any completion date. Recognizing that there would be stages, levels of refinement, I savored them as "plateaus",—I never thought about or imagined how many such plateaus would be visited.

I was extremely anxious today. My evolving headache was sign and signal. This morning I began to putter with the film, moving this here, this there, that here, that there... and attained a grand incoherence; a physical metaphor for my frustrated psychic knot. Acting nervously and indeed impulsively, I actually made a terrible mess of the film, one that will take considerable effort (and time) to rectify. I suppose this is just another phase along the way.

June 23, 1986

3:44 am

Finally.

I opened the patient. I touched the film.

The first cut I made, one that I have had planted in the back of my mind for months, ever since I saw the shot of the large balloon and three children running in the meadow—was to place this balloon shot immediately after the boy who blows bubbles into the air and then points to the sky. It is a truly graceful (and satisfying) juxtaposition.

July 2, 1986

2:51 am

This brings me to the problematic of pursuing the completion of a work stretched over many years. As I recall, as I reconstruct, as I reread my (and I am grateful that they are careful and copious) notes, I see that last summer was an amazing example of engaged creation. I lived the process of making the film—I was that process. Time not actually spent working at the Steenbeck was given to conscious germination and/or unconscious fermentation of ideas—always around storytelling problems and/or in study of the work. It didn't matter where I was or what I was doing.

Of course I didn't finish the film, and I stand by that decision both intuitively and with the cold clarity of hindsight. With the fortuitously come upon (and EXPENSIVE) additional footage that I have assembled over this past year, I hopefully have a bunch of new images to fill gaps and augment sections needing further development. Already, just the additional baby footage gathered this past year now highlights the paucity of footage that I was relying upon, and furthermore, tells me why I was struggling so much over the opening section of the film.

I cannot attain the creative and psychological landscapes of a year ago. The water feels cold now. I simply have to trust my belief that dedication, enthusiasm, discipline, the fact that I'm a year older, and the distance that time gives—call it perspective—will all make it feel like this is (finally) the right time—THE ONLY TIME—to finish the film.

July 12, 1986

12:27 am

I kept putting off work. It was a mixture of feelings:

- overwhelmed by the sheer amount of work
- not sure how to solve the problems
- not sure how to GO ABOUT solving the problems
- and then not even knowing where to begin.

Which brings me to a lesson I have just this evening brought to bear: It is important that when I close shop for the night, that I set up a project, a task (however minor), some small investigation that waits for me the next day. That bit of continuity can be enough to bridge my energy and focus across the divergent rhythms and metabolisms of a long, warm serene night of working that—SUDDENLY—wake up to the cooler, more anxious feelings at the start of a new day.

July 13, 1986

2:11 am

I realize that I am burdened by the accumulation of four years worth of work, of PAPERwork, of tens of thousands of images—some 50 hours or more (or is it 60, or even 70?)—of sound recordings, not to mention expectations, demands, (both inner and outer) and the fatigue of trying to keep all of the monster within my grasp. I sometimes feel like this is the final leg in a relay race. I've been assigned the task of bringing the baton across the finish line—but I feel so weighted down, carrying all of this "stuff" on my shoulders.

July 14, 1986

3:45 am

It seems so crazy yet feels so right.

The hours from say eleven thirty on into the deep night are very pure for me. Very serene. It's as if I reach a certain level of attention; am able to attain almost magical moments of clarified concentration during the darkness of night into early morning.

The world around me is asleep—and so I sit—no temptations, no sun, no traffic noise, no telephone calls, no baseball games, no movies, no evening news. No distractions. The only room with a light on (awake) in this entire building right now. Alone in my urban cave.

I wonder how much different I, and consequently the film would be if I were to work in the daytime—to go to an office, a studio—unable to avoid the interruptions, the annoyances, the pushes and pulls of my quotidian personal universe. What tension and resistance would I feel from them as they preyed on my absolute compulsion to constantly be working. I've always been reluctant to work during the daytime hours. Don't forget that I wake up generally at or past noon anyway so that a good portion of the waking day is already behind me. And by the time I have breakfast, or is it lunch...?

Perhaps I am unwilling to lend/to give the film to my daytime inhabitant—do I find him less trustworthy, a bit lazy... not as sharp? "Why not," I always rationalize to myself, "wait until much later on in the evening, when the real smart guy goes on duty?"

I'm sure it's all bio-rhythms.

August 5, 1986

3:52 am

It feels like I'm taking many chances, many risks with the film. What is included is almost as poignant as what is excluded—after all, the processes of growth, of maturation, of the cycle of life have as many variants as there are people to live them. That this film sticks close to the "traditional" story line (of socialization) is a finely honed ambivalence rooted in the home movie source material itself. I'm interested in how the pervasive and convenient fictions of our culture (the way we read images) substitute for the pains of real life. Home movies are lies. I want the view from here—living in what these anonymous home movie people would call "posterity"—to see their forced smiles.

I listened to 23 rolls of sound today. My ears hurt. I hope that I'm not doing any damage to them. For the latter part of this day I paid special attention to playing the sound much lower than I usually do. I listen so loudly. Gotta watch that.

I still have over 50 reels of sound to listen to. Slowly and/but surely, I will be left with only "select reels" to deal with, a function of closing in, in drawing ever finer and finer circles around the materials. Eliminating the massive input. Of changing the scale, and hopefully creating a psychological environment necessary for the transformation towards closure—satisfying myself that I have thoroughly digested everything that is available to me and not looking back with either uncertainty or regret

August 20, 1986

4:12 am

I have been trying (if you haven't noticed) to create the necessary psychic mindset to actually attempt to finish the film. It means a direct arrow is imposed upon the process. It means deadlines and priorities. Also, and most importantly...

A LETTING GO

... that this film is but one film in a personal history of work. It is as if I must now transpose my aesthetic focus into CALENDAR TIME—coming in, coming home, after wandering for so long amidst the enchanted whims of intuition in PSYCHOLOGICAL TIME...or at least make the two schedules overlap, coincide and form a tension, a dialectic.

August 30, 1986

5:11 am

I seem very much inside myself these days. I have no grip on my image in the mirror. I am to a very large extent a stranger to myself. I seem to thrive in this self-imposed and glorious solitude.

I suffer it too. I long to go to sleep at a human hour on a daily basis. I long to ease myself of the burden of this project, its physical toll, its psychic drain. I am scared to see what level, what degree of imperfection I settle upon; what state I leave the film in before simply saying "that's it." Quite simply put, I am very much out here on the edge. This late night or should I say late morning solitude has me trapped—I am a captive of my nocturnal existence. And yet the sound of this room right now at 5:15 am, the hisssssssss of silence is soothing and calm amidst my sheets of scribble and raucous brain waves. My only hope is that I am not doing physical harm to myself by living this experiment. I am alone, alienated from, from, from,... everything that isn't this experiment. How I will ever be able to go back to work as before is incomprehensible. And to think that I have generated this much energy, this much push, this much filmic gesture in really what amounts to a little over two months is really mysterious.

September 20, 1986

3:53 am

(...) *Children of All Ages* seems to have faded, its sense of pertinence, its focus and its excitement for me have faded out. I started reading a few titles from my old notes, my inexhaustible lists of buzz words and lexicons, phrases and idioms. Nothing seemed ... simply put ... appropriate. And then I pulled out what I had always felt in my hip (or was it my back) pocket—my roll of actual home movie inter-titles. The second inter-title on this roll and obviously the opening title for some family's film was, *The Family Album* with a picture of a baby doll in the background.

And suddenly it occurred to us that this simple understated little familiar phrase embodied all that makes my film so moving. It is simply a matter of looking and responding to pictures; to pictures of family and friends. This is the quality that cuts through all the many levels of critical analysis applicable to the film, from the sociological to the psychological.

And so it will be.

And I will make use of the homemade title card itself.

Imagine that.

It was there all along.

Did I know it all along and ignore it, suppress it, deny it?

OR

Is it always a matter of timing, of waiting for the appropriate moment, the meaningful coincidence of search and solution?

September 22, 1986

4:01 am

It's official.

I've got a mix date.

October 9th. Trans Audio with Rick D'or.

Everyday now becomes precious.

Everyday now becomes pressure.

I must not lose focus, lose perspective.

I am making my final arduous pass through the select reels of sound. It's like fishing in a pond with little promise of any catch, but one can never be absolutely sure. It is also of course, the final procedural necessity of pulling up my flanks behind me as I move toward my final destination.

Lots of little details to coordinate. I need the benefit of good fortune to allow the urgency and tension of my deadline to feed the impulse toward perfection and not destroy it.

November 12, 1986

2:29 am

As for the film itself, the experience of locking had a (why does it always seem to) frenzy and haphazard feel. Some minor decisions took too long to make. Some major decisions were made too quickly and under unwelcome pressure. Time and finality and the anxiety of separation all took their toll.

I have this image of the film kind of like a ceramic object—soft and malleable in the summer heat—everything—all materials, all decisions, all elements and choices open and fertile with possibility—a creative cauldron—a soup getting tastier every day as I continually add, subtract, and re-proportion or should I say refine the recipe. The contour of the film's locking paralleled the onset of autumn, of a cooler climate—hardening my hand-built film-thing into permanent shape—the wet and shiny veneer evaporating to a drier, crusty surface.

All the pictures, sounds, the playful factory of daily editing no longer dance before me, no longer tantalize me with horizons of possibility and the lure of discovery—the prospect that I can make the film better each and every day. It's finished and I have to face it. I must let go—there is no more, ultimately, I can do.

And yet...

Even now...

I see cracks in never saw before.
I see shots that could be shorter.
I hear sounds that could be louder.
I see frames....

There will be other films.
Let go.