

WORKING TITLE: *This is Modern Art* FORMAT: MiniDV / Super 8mm
DIRECTOR: Matthew Clayfield CAMERA: Matthew Clayfield
SOUND: Matthew Clayfield EDITOR: Matthew Clayfield
OTHER ROLES: N/A

THIS IS MODERN ART

WORKING HYPOTHESIS and INTERPRETATION.

I believe that people can make real and lasting connections with one another based on qualities that, despite the people's often contrasting personal histories and backgrounds, they share. My film will show this in action by exploring both the present similarities in sensibility and temperament, and the extreme differences of background and familial history, of my friend Pattavee 'Art' Viranuvat and myself.

I also believe that, in this new age of digital video and media democratisation, everyone has the potential to become their own content producer, consciously or unconsciously shaping the stuff of their lives and cultivating their own ideal images of and ideas about themselves in the process. I will explore this idea by allowing Art to interview himself in private with a digital video camera, while at other times shooting him myself on Super8. The film, therefore, will pivot, however implicitly, around Art's performative, constructed-for-the-camera idea of himself and my own images of and ideas about who he is or might be.

The film's main source of narrative conflict is the uneasy dichotomy that exists between Art's desire to be a filmmaker and his feelings of duty towards his parents who want him to be anything but. There is also conflict between Art's perception of himself and my perception of him, which is connected with the more implicit formal conflict between MiniDV and Super8.

My film's point of view will itself be subject to a similar sort of internal conflict, pivoting between Art's first-person discourse on himself and my third-person consideration of him.

I expect my film's structure to be determined by both Art's character arc, which will hopefully change as the questions he has to answer become more probing, and by my formal plans and concerns. The film should simultaneously appear loose, spontaneous and diaristic. The arrangement of Super8 and photographic material within the film is to be the result of random selection.

The subject and point of view of my film suggest a style that is experimental, to some extent unstructured, diaristic and in continual flux.

I ultimately want the audience to feel however they wish to feel about the film. I don't consider it my job to instruct or dictate an audience's emotions to them, but rather to give them something that they're free to take away with them to react to as they wish.

I ultimately want the audience to understand a number of things, though I don't want to make these things blatantly obvious to them either. I would prefer instead to let the ideas and themes emerge as a result of the participatory audience member's further thinking about the picture. The audience will, if I do my job correctly, have to think about what this film is about and what they think about the issues it deals with, not only in terms of the explicit themes of family and cross-cultural interpersonal relationships, but also about digital video, performance and our newfound, though often under-examined, freedom to create images.

TOPIC and EXPOSITION.

My formal preoccupations aside, *This is Modern Art* is to be about my friend, Pattavee 'Art' Viranuvat, a Thai student who has been in Australia for approximately three years and is studying film and television at Bond University. Art is a gentle young man with a keen photographic eye and an extremely strong desire to express himself through his filmmaking. Unfortunately, however, his parents (particularly his father, with whom he has, to my mind, an almost non-existent relationship) do not approve of him being at film school and expect that, upon graduation, he will attend business school in the United States and give up filmmaking altogether.

I am a couple of years younger than Art and was born and raised in Australia. I have parents who, for better or worse, have supported me in my filmmaking endeavours since I was twelve years old and have no familial expectations weighing down upon me other than the reasonable expectation that I'll be able to support myself after university. Also, it must be said that, in comparison to Art, my photographic skills are slightly lacking.

I first met Art (who was still struggling with his English skills) in my first week at Bond in 2004. I appeared, very briefly, in his autobiopic *Conk Out* (2004) and he was the behind-the-scenes photo/videographer on my short film, *Flushed* (2004). In late 2004 and early 2005, I decided that I would like for him to star in a short film I planning on making, *The Photographer*, though that project never eventuated. I saw - and see - in Art many of the same inner demons that I harbour; namely, a certain melancholic love-hate relationship with loneliness, which fuels our filmmaking exploits, but quite often leaves us lusting after human contact. We both put art before business and have trouble with compromise. I, however, will be able to continue my filmmaking after I have graduated from Bond, while Art, most likely, won't. Certainly, the majority of our differences can be put down to aspects of our individual cultures, but where do our similarities come from? Our mutual appreciation of and acknowledged understanding of one another? Indeed, our strange little bond?

ACTION SEQUENCES.

It is extremely difficult to outline any hypothetical action sequence for a film that is to be shot as a spontaneous diary film by two different people and then worked out, structured and arranged in the editing. It is even more difficult to do so when the entire film is ultimately to be the length of (if not shorter than) the average sequence in a film. Surely we are not to outline the all the action in an as-yet-unfilmed picture that's supposed to be a documentary?

For these reasons I have decided to focus instead on the more concrete aspects of *This is Modern Art*.

MAIN CHARACTERS.

Pattavee 'Art' Viranuvat is, for want of a better term, the film's protagonist. For more about Art's qualities and background please see TOPIC and EXPOSITION.

I myself, Matthew Clayfield, am also a character in the film, taking on a number of important guises. I am (a) what we might call a supporting character in Art's own story, being a friend and an important figure in his life here in Australia; (b) an arbitrary someone against whom the audience can compare and contrast Art's background and personality; and (c) the filmmaker whose ubiquitous presence is to be felt crafting and shaping the work and the images of both himself and Art we see within it.

It could be said that Art's father is the film's third main character, though his role is that of a structuring absence. His 'presence,' like that of 'Matt-as-filmmaker,' should be ubiquitous (though in this case unspoken) and will most likely be felt by the audience to be weighing down upon Art like a guilty conscience. Art's father is a structuring absence in Art's own life - a void he tries to fill with his films, which focus almost exclusively on fathers and sons - and there is no reason that his presence, or lack thereof, shouldn't be felt in this film as well.

CONFLICT.

Art believes he is isolated in a world that doesn't at all understand him - that he's in conflict with anyone and everything that threatens to prevent him from achieving and realising his dreams. He also believes, with an air of the defeatist about him, that he will eventually have to submit to this world, allowing it to overcome him.

In my mind, all of this ultimately stems from the conflict that exists between Art and his parents. This, to me, is the core conflict in Art's life; indeed, it is so overpowering that, as Art's feelings of isolation from the world suggest, it has dramatically altered his entire worldview. I ultimately hope that my interview questions will bring this conflict to the fore and force Art to really think about and confront it.

The other source of conflict in the film, of course, is to be the dichotomy of Art's ideas and images of himself and my own. This intensity of this conflict of images, which one might wish to call juxtaposition (though I think there's a little more to it than that), will gradually build to a point where there's a kind of formal climax or confrontation between Art's images and mine.

SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE.

This is Modern Art will show, using the relationship of Art and myself as an example, that our connections with one another need not rely on similarities of background, race or class. However, this said, it should also be noted that I have absolutely no desire whatsoever for the film to be pigeonholed as a 'social issues film' and will not at any point be expressing this idea explicitly (indeed, as I have hopefully made clear by now, my primary concerns as a filmmaker are formal). If people choose to take such a message away from the film then that will be a result of their choice to do so, not as a result of any pedagogy on my part.

MY MOTIVATION FOR MAKING THE FILM.

My reasons for wanting to make *This is Modern Art* are twofold. Firstly, I'm incredibly interested in cinematic form - exploring it, exploiting it and making more transparent its mechanics to an audience - and the film's reliance on such explicit dualities as the multi-format point of view split will allow me to practically explore some of my ideas in this area.

Secondly, I'm really just a huge fan of Art and wanted to be able to spend a little more time with him. I have always felt that we share some deeply seated personality traits and have always felt sympathy for him as regards what he believes to be his obligation to his parents, especially when someone like me has been so fortunate as to have parents who, despite their fairly valid reservations from time to time, have always supported me in my endeavours. One of my main reasons for making the film, therefore, was to learn more about and better understand Art's situation while simultaneously analysing to

some extent my own familial situation and why and how I've been so lucky.

AUDIENCE, ITS KNOWLEDGE AND PREJUDICES.

I have two intended audiences. The first is a film festival/art film audience that is, generally speaking, more upon to slightly more experimental work than other audiences (though they're not, it must be said, necessarily open to home video aesthetics, though that's another story). The second intended audience is an online audience that has been following and will continue to follow the development of *This is Modern Art* via my personal weblog,¹ which a high number of people subscribe to using a content syndication service called RSS.

I don't expect the film festival/art film audience to know anything about Art, myself or anything the film's narrative aspects deal with; the interest for them, I hope, will be the formal experimentation and the 'discovery' of Art, myself and so on. On the other hand, I can expect the online viewers (or at least those that have followed the film's production) to know at least something about Art and why I have chosen to make a film about him. Paradoxically, however, for them the formal experimentation will most likely be of little to no importance!

I do not assume any positive or negative prejudices on the audience's part and thus do not believe that there are any ideas, facts or feelings that I need to impose upon them other than those implicit in the film's thematic and formal projects.

TO-CAMERA INTERVIEWS.

INTERVIEWEE: Pattavee 'Art' Viranuvat
AGE: 23
GENDER: Male
PROFESSION: Film Student
ROLE IN FILM: Protagonist
INTERVIEW AIMS: To see:

¹ <http://www.esotericrabbit.blogspot.com>

- how Art chooses to shoot and interview himself (i.e. how he creates images of himself);
- what extent he performs for the camera;
- what version of himself he becomes and what idea of himself he chooses to convey.

STYLE.

I plan on using two documentary styles in *This is Modern Art*; namely, that of the essay film (à la *The Gleaners and I* [d. Agnes Varda, 2000], *Sans soleil* [d. Chris Marker, 1982] and my own "On Hyperlinkage and the Evolution of the Species" [2005]²) and that of the film diary (à la *Walden - Diaries, Notebooks and Sketches* [d. Jonas Mekas, 1969] and *David Holzman's Diary* [d. Jim McBride, 1967]). This will result, I think, in an aesthetically loose and seemingly freewheeling film that has, at the same time, a cohesive, if implicit, argument and which is at once both emotionally engaging and intellectually compelling.

The film's dualistic and multi-format point of view means that shooting style will be effected by who is behind the camera at any given moment. Art has a very unique and very personal aesthetic style that I don't doubt will come through in his self-shot interview sequences and I have my own aesthetic preferences (namely for handheld and long lenses; call it the Cassavetes influence) that will no doubt be apparent in the footage shot by myself. Point of view will not effect the editing of the film in any major way, suffice to say that it'll be me who's cutting the picture and my own subjectivity will obviously come into play.

There is to be narration, which I will write and possibly record; as yet, I am still unsure about this. The alternative to this is that I write the narration in third-person and have an anonymous female narrator record it for me. Basically, I wish to be present and not present at once in the film; I adore Marker's use of the anonymous female narrator in *Sans soleil* for it seems extremely humble. Detaching himself from self-centred words like 'me,' 'my,' 'I,'

² <http://www.archive.org/download/hyperlinkage/hyperlinkage.mov>

Marker is a modest filmmaker. Although my experiences are as important to the film as Art's insofar as they are required for comparison, I myself am not the main character of the film and do not wish to make the film about the narrator's first-person 'me'. However, unlike another documentary I am currently working on, *firelight*, the nature of *This is Modern Art* may ultimately require a first-person narration track.

My own segments of the film are to use natural, practical and available light sources only. I cannot speak for Art, however, upon whom I am placing no aesthetic constraints.

There is to be no music in the film, so the film's rhythm is to be based entirely on the visual and spoken elements of the film. As someone who grew up in an age of handycams and VHS-C, I am - to the chagrin of many purists! - a huge believer in the aesthetic richness of consumer-level home movies and the rhythms that occasionally emerge somewhat organically and unconsciously from them. I also believe in the poetry of spoken language and always try, in both my written essays and my narration, to create a flow of words that is almost musical (though I make no claims at actually being able to do so). The goal, therefore, is to create a very structured, near-musical rhythm out of spontaneously captured images and written narration.

There will be intercutting between the main narrative line, which is to be made up of comparisons between Art's story and my own, and a kind of subplot, which is the making the film itself and the fact that I've asked Art to record his own interviews, which I must then review and pass judgement on as a filmmaker.

As I have hopefully made abundantly clear by now, *This is Modern Art* is to pivot around a significant number of dualities, both narrative and formal, all of which are, by definition, inherently juxtapositional. For this reason I needn't discuss my plans for the use of juxtaposition in the film any real depth.

TONE.

The film's prevailing tone is to be quietly inquisitive, progressing through states that will tonally and formally resemble memory (hazy, timeless and unstructured), investigative thought processes such as those used in logic and scientific enquiry (inquisitive and seemingly objective), home video (spontaneous and instinctual) and anthropology in the vein of Jean Rouch.

STRUCTURE.

As regards time, Art's self-conducted interviews are to take place over a seven day period in real life, though this is not to be made explicit to the audience (unless Art mentions it in the interviews himself). The film's action and narration are to be presented 'out of time' and specifics (dates, years etc.) are to be avoided. Time won't really 'progress' in the film in any narrative sense, but will instead be a bit more like time as it is in the mind, where past and present intermingle with one another. In some ways, we may call this a memory film; more like 'thinking' than 'storytelling' (à la *Sans soleil*, *Mirror* [d. Andrei Tarkovsky, 1975] and *Ulysses* by James Joyce).

As already detailed to some extent, the film's point of view is split between Art and myself and whatever stories or narrative emerge from it will do so through both or either one of us.

The structure of the film will not be dependent on narrative causation but on emotionally, intellectually and formally logical digressions and associative connections. The only way I can really sum this up is to cite Kubrick's jump-cut from bone to space station in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) and to say, "Imagine a film where such associative match-cutting takes place not only between images, but between ideas and emotions as well." All important information in the film will emerge in this way and with relatively little fanfare: "invite the audience to dinner, don't throw pies in their faces"; i.e. subtly is the best policy.

The film's climax will be multifaceted; in part it will involve, hopefully, Art discussing his parents and, at the same time, Art's

images and my own reaching a point where they seem to presenting a different person. If, indeed, that is what actually emerges from the footage; after all, it may well be that something else entirely eventually becomes the film's focus.

Given *This is Modern Art's* length, it is unlikely that there will be many, if any, full sequences following the film's climax and providing its falling action; instead, there will be but one shot and a little bit of narration, both of which discussed at greater length in the following, final, section.

REVELATION.

The last image of the film is to taken from the rushes of my abandoned short film project, *The Photographer*, of which Art was the lead actor. It is footage I took just before calling action; just before, in other words, Art assumed a role for the camera. He is looking to the right of frame, lighting a cigarette; it is a complex, perhaps even perfect, image of someone consumed, for the briefest moment of time, by an irrelevant and transient task, allowing his essence to become, for a fleeting instant, capturable by the camera. There's more truth, I believe, in this image, which is better than everything else I shot for that film or will likely shoot for this one, than I can tell or put into words. And for this reason I just like to look at it instead, sort of wishing that someone else had shot it and that I'd been its unconscious subject as opposed to its all-too-conscious creator.