THE URGE TO RUN A LAP

LESLEY LOKSI CHAN

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER IN FINE ARTS

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN FILM

YORK UNIVERSITY

TORONTO, ONTARIO

December 2017

ABSTRACT

THE URGE TO RUN A LAP is a 14-minute experimental fiction film about a middle-aged woman who goes back to visit the maternity home where she lived as a pregnant teenager. Told through text, images of the quotidian, found objects and assemblage sculpture, this work challenges dominant representations of "teen pregnancy" and reflects on contemporary experiences of self-representation and ways of remembering.

I began this research project with the broad intention of producing a hybrid documentary film exploring the diverse experiences of pregnant young women living in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. As the method of production was process-based, the approach, focus, and aesthetics have been reshaped a number of times over a two year period, but the subject matter and the underlying concerns regarding cultural representations and subjectivities have remained consistent.

The final result of this project is a film, but the significance of the project rests more in its process, its rearrangements. Therefore, this support paper attempts to trace the phases the project went through, not as a way to illustrate how the final decisions I arrived at were the "right" ones, but rather, as a way to offer multiple possibilities for thinking about and practicing filmmaking. In the first half of this paper I discuss issues of representations in relation to teen pregnancy and I also include thoughts on three experimental documentary/ethnography films that informed my process. In the second part of this paper I discuss the narrative and visual/audio treatment of *THE URGE TO RUN A LAP*.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my thesis supervisor, Brenda Longfellow, and my thesis reader, Phil Hoffman, for their kindness, encouragement and assistance on this project; John Greyson for always championing my work with such enthusiasm and care; Tereza Barta for the stimulating conversations and for inspiring me to learn more about Greek mythology; Laurence Green for his thoughtful attention and support for my process; Seth Feldman for introducing me to new films; Jon Hedley for being equally helpful and cool; and MVP Kuowei Lee for his wicked sense of humour, patience and hard work behind the scenes – we all owe you big time. Finally, I would like to thank my friends and family for being friends and family.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF IMAGES

.

.

.

INTRODUCTION

Take an object / Do something to it / Do something else to it. [Repeat.]
- Jasper Johns, sketchbook note, 1964

And when the coral-colored leatherette banquette stuck to the backs of your legs, did you mind?
No.
- Rebekah Rutkoff, *Studio: Transcript of an Un-Made Video*, 2015

Image 1. Screenshot. *Who are you?*

THE URGE TO RUN A LAP is a 14-minute experimental fiction about a middle-aged woman who goes back to visit the "maternity home" where she lived as a pregnant teenager. Told through text, images of the quotidian, found objects and assemblage sculpture, this work challenges dominant representations of "teen pregnancy" and reflects on contemporary experiences of self-representation and ways of remembering.

The plot of the film is told through narration and dialogue in the form of text. These multiple "voices" of text are juxtaposed with multiple types of images to create overlapping senses of what Charles Baxter calls the "derangements of meaning."[1] This literary technique forms the foundation for the film's overall aesthetic and approach to fictionalization, a work that seesaws on representations of the actual and the imaginary. Even though some elements in the film are autobiographical, the construction of a linear narrative and the experimental use of imagery work together to create a film that is fictional. The final result of this project is a film, but the significance of the project rests more in its process, its rearrangements. Therefore, this support paper attempts to trace the phases the project went through, not as a way to illustrate how the final decisions I arrived at were the "right" ones, but rather, as a way to offer multiple possibilities for thinking about and practicing filmmaking.

I began this research project with the broad intention of producing a hybrid documentary film exploring the diverse experiences of pregnant young women living in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. Grounded in personal experience as a once "teen mom" myself, and an ongoing commitment to community-based arts education, my intention was to facilitate and document arts workshops for young women who are currently living in a prenatal residence. This was meant to be an exercise to expand the visual representation and critical dialogue surrounding "pregnant teens." As the method of production was process-based, the approach, focus, and aesthetics have been reshaped a number of times over a two-year period. What started off as a hybrid documentary eventually became an experimental fiction enacted by sculpture and ephemera, but the

[1] Charles Baxter, Burning Down the House: Essays on Fiction (Saint Paul, MN: Graywolf Press, 1997), 34.

subject matter and the underlying concerns regarding cultural representations and subjectivities remained consistent.

My original intention was to document the everyday activities of a group of young pregnant women currently living in a prenatal residence; to record their lived realities in a naturalistic, observational style; and to record them sharing their thoughts and experiences through audio interviews. This naturalistic footage was to be intercut with non-representational/hand-processed film images created collaboratively, building on participatory film methodologies. Conceptually, the premise was to interrupt the figurative with the abstract in order to hybridize them, in other words, to generate a dialogue between these different modes of seeing and thinking. I have worked in other hybrid modes in previous films: *By May* (2014) combines documentary/fiction/magic realism; *Curse Cures* (2009) combines oral history with overhead projection animations of found photography; and my early student work combined stop-motion animation, live action, hand-processed footage, archival photographs with fiction. Even though the character of these hybridizations is different, a recurring aim is to use hybridization as a way to enhance the shape of the narrative or 'story' of the film. For this project, I felt that a film that combines the observational and the personal could speak to the relationship between the collective and the individual experiences of the young women.

In the first half of this support paper, I will describe how studying experimental documentary/ethnography films influenced my fiction work. Even though I did not produce a documentary in the end, the preparatory work that I put into thinking about these films greatly informed the choices I made for *THE URGE TO RUN A LAP*. Performing a closer reading of these three films allowed me to think through a network of

ideas and issues related to my film, especially issues of representation of marginalized peoples in contemporary documentary. In the second part of this paper, I discuss the production and post-production phases, including the narrative and visual/audio treatment of the final film.

As the title suggests, the lap is an important metaphor in the film and for the project as a whole. Any dictionary definition of "lap" offers a long list of ideas of what this metaphor might mean, but a long list of metaphors is also a reminder that there is something unsayable at work here. Both the narrative and the form of *THE URGE TO RUN A LAP* come from a contemporary moment when we seem to be inundated with ample opportunities and platforms to speak about teen pregnancy, but are there still unsayable matters about our personal and collective experiences of then/now, before/after, inside/outside, again/again?

Image 2. Screenshot. *I used to live here.*

THE URGE TO RUN A LAP: PART 1

Silence, Noise: Representations of Teen Pregnancy

From the get-go this project aimed to 1. critically examine and challenge prevailing stereotypes of pregnant young women in mainstream culture; 2. broaden the existing range of visual representations of teen pregnancy, subversive girlhoods and identities; 3. explore the multiple knowledges and current subjectivities of young pregnant women in a particular socio-historical context. Deliberately rejecting the quirky tone of the popular film *Juno* (directed by Jason Reitman and written by Diablo Cody, 2007) or the sentimental and sensationalist MTV reality-show *16 and Pregnant* (created by Lauren Dolgen, 2009-2014), this project was meant to be a space for approaching teen pregnancy in a more polyphonic, reflective and nuanced manner. In her article, "Sensationalizing the Sentimental: National Culture and Futurity," Melanie Anne Stewart performs a critical investigation of dominant representations of teen pregnancy and notes that sentimental culture, which is often concerned with mug shots, celebrity and scandal, is problematic in its focus on the regulation of sexuality and citizenship in the name of protecting the child, family life and national image and futurity. Stewart argues that sentimental culture is built around normative ideas of family life and reproduction and is magnified by sensationalized media cultures:

> The driving force of contemporary sensational national culture is the media and technology's centrality to everyday life. Within sensational national culture, there is a strong connection between more traditional forms of media, such as television, film and magazines, and newer forms of media, typically dubbed 'social media,' such as Twitter, Facebook, and a variety of online discussion spaces. The combination of traditional media genres and social media serves to

> fuel a national culture obsessed with celebrity, image and public displays of humiliation and controversy.[2]

The production of *THE URGE TO RUN A LAP* was a critical and creative response to this need for alternative, unsentimental representations that foreground the voices of women who often face discrimination and marginalization for being young and pregnant. Moreover, I wanted to approach the subject matter in a way that was neither moralizing nor celebratory. This project not only questioned normalizing notions of motherhood and family, it attempted to portray pregnancy in a way that recognizes how different experiences require different forms and styles.

I looked to feminist research practices and artistic modes of experimental autobiography, diaristic film and auto-ethnography because these works have effectively called attention to the interrelatedness between the personal and the political. As Sarah Brophy and Janice Hladki assert:

> Visual autobiographies elicit visceral responses to multiple embodiments – and to the ways in which they are pathologized, regulated, and surveyed. In turn, visual autobiographies frequently demand and reflect on the necessity and the difficulty of "ethical spectatorship"… [they can] agitate heart, head, and gut, making it possible for them to incite what, we argue, are newly critical modes of learning and remembrance.[3]

Inspired by such potentials, my plan was to visit the prenatal residence where I attended twenty years ago and facilitate a series of workshops (including photography, film/video) as a way to encourage participants to produce autobiographical works. In doing so we would produce a collective group-portrait of sorts, a layered exercise in self-

---

[2] Melanie Stewart, "Sensationalizing the Sentimental: National Culture and Futurity" in MTV and Teen Pregnancy: Critical Essays on 16 and Pregnant and Teen Mom, ed. Letizia Guglielmo (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2013), 99.

[3] Sarah Brophy and Janice Hladki, eds., "Introduction" in Embodied Politics in Visual Autobiography (Cultural Spaces), (University of Toronto Press, 2014), 6.

representation based on the notion that increased visibility of marginalized people and inclusion of silenced voices is key to social transformation. Given the historical reality that teen pregnancy has been considered a "condition" to be hidden and "maternity homes" were created as clandestine shelters, this plan may still have been impactful in certain ways; however, taking into account the increased access to imaging technologies, social media and the ubiquity of the selfie, issues of self-representation are more complicated at this particular moment in time. Simplified formulas of self-representation = empowerment = social transformation are now less straightforward, if not naive.

Digital and online cultures are continually changing the politics of in/visibility in relation to teen pregnancy and in ambivalent ways. On the one hand, many online resources and communities such as #NoTeenShame and everydayfeminism.com challenge stereotypes about teen pregnancy and advocate for young parents in ways that have new, far-reaching effects. More young women are able to speak out and share their experiences because they have the platforms to do so. On the other hand, conservative sites and comment-culture continue to perpetuate shaming and guilt on many fronts. But to further complicate matters, pride-based or empowerment-based narratives may be co-opted to reinforce anti-abortion politics and religious restrictions. This complicated cultural condition is only addressed slightly in *THE URGE TO RUN A LAP*. At the beginning of the film, the main character hopes to encourage the young women she meets to resist silence, that is, to speak for themselves before others speak about them/for them (to "burn their own ears before they get burned by someone else") but at the end of the film, she is told that they have already spoken in the form of posting their own pictures and videos on the internet, though the content of these images is not revealed. What does

"resisting silence" mean in an age of noise?

Given contemporary realities of the selfie era, the hunger for the sensational, and the growing number of online resources and platforms, the changing meanings of self-representation continue to shift and multiply in ways that made me question my initial approach. And while the final film does not address these complications directly in the narrative, paying deeper attention to our cultural context and the debates surrounding it prompted a series of questions that informed a change in methodology. What are the relationships between a selfie, self-representation and the history of self-portraiture? What are the multiple and sometimes contradictory meanings of self-representation given the debates around selfies as gendered, selfies as empowerment, selfies as self-surveillance? How is the current culture of self-obsession and the attention economy changing the politics of in/visibility, self-representation and "the personal film"?

Hybridity and Documentary, Observational and Performative

During my research period, three documentary/ethnography films influenced my approach. Stylistically, they do not resemble my final film, but these films provoked me to think differently about the representations of marginalized realities. While it would be false to say that these films led me to shift towards fiction, I would say that these documentaries made me think about fiction differently. Inspired by the methodology and care of Sharon Lockhart's *Rudzienko* (2016), moved by the courageous sensitivity of Khalik Allah's *Field Niggas* (2015), and perplexed by Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Véréna Paravel's *Leviathan (*2012), these films urged me to question what was at stake in

these experimental styles of documentary filmmaking. I also viewed these films in relation to ideas of hybridity; while hybrid film tends to be seen as a dialogue between different modes (for example, fiction and documentary), hybrid film could also be seen as a dialogue *within* an idiom (for example, documentary and documentary). *Rudzienko*, *Leviathan* and *Field Niggas* are vastly different in terms of subject matter and aesthetics, but what these films do share in common is that they seem to be working at the intersection of what Bill Nichol's called "The Observational" and "The Performative" in order to arrive at a distinct perspective on reality. According to Nichols, the observational documentary has been characterized as almost antithetical to the qualities of the performative documentary; the deliberately unobtrusive, fly-on-the-wall style of the observational mode versus the performative's foregrounding of the filmmaker's involvement and overt participation and subjectivity in the film. The performative mode:

> …emphasizes the subjective or expressive aspect of the filmmaker's own involvement with a subject; it strives to heighten the audience's responsiveness to this involvement. Rejects notions of objectivity in favor of evocation and affect… The films in this mode all share qualities with the experimental, personal, and avant-garde, but with a strong emphasis on their emotional and social impact on an audience.[4]

I am interested in how these films seem to combine the observational and performative as they further our understanding of how the creative treatment of actuality can be expanded beyond normalized aesthetics. Combining traditionally oppositional formal strategies can generate hybrid forms of filmmaking, but what ideas and meanings do such hybridizations generate? What are the implications of each particular kind of hybridization? What can hybrid observational/performative films tell us about the

---

[4] Bill Nichols, ed. *Introduction to Documentary 2nd ed.*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 2010), 32.

possibilities and limitations of defying conventional filmmaking strategies and ways of knowing?

Erasures: filmmakers, filmmaking, fishermen, fishing

Leviathan challenges the edges of observational documentary. It unsettles us on multiple fronts, a loud and layered destabilizing experience that is often attributed to its bold formal strategies coupled with its conceptual capacity. It pushes conventional ideas about documentary into new ground, visually and conceptually. The filmmakers of *Leviathan* make it clear that they are not concerned with objectivity rooted in traditional discourses of science and ethnography and this stance is illustrated by their use of a wide range of film strategies that are associated with experimental film rather than ethnography, most notably the un-tethered camera, free-form composition, and even details such using a highly stylized gothic font for the opening quote from Book of Job and closing credits; all of these gestures tell us this film does not claim to be that of a traditional ethnographic voice. As Michael Metzger observes:

> …few films in recent memory have achieved such a remarkable parity of formal innovation and philosophical ambition. The former marries elements of avant-garde cinema to ethnographic film; the latter seeks nothing less than the redistribution of agency across species lines. Both proceed by rejecting human subjectivity as the primary measure of experience.[5]

But what are the consequences of this post-humanist shift away from human subjectivity as the point of reference for ethnography? Metzger's questioning is helpful in shining a

[5] Michael Metzger, "Leviathan's Labors Lost, or: Who Works After the Subject?" *Millennium Film Journal*, no. 61 (2015): http://www.questia.com/read/1P3-3749757121/leviathan-s-labors-lost-or-who-works-after-the-subject.

reminder on the possible dangers of entering such territory, specifically, territory that involves a radical shift towards a post-humanist perspective which erases human experience. The absence of language is a strategy that serves to render for viewers a more simplified and closed-ended reading:

> The film's totalizing insistence on the incompatibility of language and embodied experience in the documentation of shared lifeworlds may confer upon it enormous aesthetic and rhetorical power, but by excluding a potential source of knowledge, it also compromises the epistemological claims upon which, as ethnography and as academic field work, it tacitly depends. This begs the question: what kind of ship is Leviathan? Is it a 'show boat,' a technological demonstration, a flume ride into the maelstrom? Or is it a research vessel, attempting to chart unexplored waters, to bring back unsettling and illuminating knowledge? If the film truly contains multitudes, should it not have a multitude of uses, should it not speak in a multitude of voices and symbolic registers?[6]

Metzger reminds us to pay attention to which sources of knowledge are being included and excluded and to ask why. As a documentary/ethnography, *Leviathan* offers us the experiential and illustrates the cinematic concerns of the filmmakers, but it does not offer us the traditionally expected "ethnographic knowledge" about the fish, the fisherman, the social/historical context of the expedition, the "information and knowledge, insight and awareness" that has become expected of the genre, according to Nichols.[7] In its focus on the sensorial experience, there is an erasure of a particular type of knowledge that has become associated with documentary and ethnography. Definitions of film are elastic, but what is at stake when working in documentary and ethnography is the representation of actuality within the frame. In her insightful piece "Reading the Mind of the Ethnographic Filmmaker: Mining a Flawed Genre for Anthropological Content," Carol Hermer says that performative documentary of the 1980s and 1990s had the potential to change

---

[6] Ibid.
[7] Nichols, 40.

ethnographic film from a work *about* other cultures to an expressive depiction *of* that culture. Films that stress subjective aspects of experience, as opposed to objective discussions, could allow for affective experiencing of another culture without fixing it under a Western gaze, but she also warns that creative approaches to ethnography can become overly stylistic and lack context.[8] In other words, performative aspects of documentary have the potential to offer a creative treatment of actuality, but the emphasis on subjectivity is not an assurance of the real, of criticality or of subversiveness.

In the case of *Leviathan*, the performative aspects overshadow the observational, and consequently, the subjectivity of the filmmakers overshadowed the subjectivity of the fishermen. Building on post-humanist philosophies, the human subjects are meant to be erased as the film's focal point, but in the end, we are still left with the recognition of the filmmakers' work, at the expense of a deeper understanding of the fisherman's work. To be clear, there is nothing inherently problematic about shifting away from human subjectivity or sentience, but in this case, given the larger context of classist tendencies to obliterate and dehumanize working class labour, the film seems to further obscure the already invisible condition of the fishermen while drawing attention to the already privileged condition of the academic/filmmaker. The fishing labour as it is represented in the film becomes a backdrop for a formal exercise about post-humanism. How can cultural productions concerning invisibility and marginalization be made without generating *further* erasure? And when we attempt to "make visible" the invisible, how do we avoid practices of voyeurism and intrusion?

---

[8] Carol Hermer, "Chapter 6: Reading the Mind of the Ethnographic Filmmaker: Mining a Flawed Genre for Anthropological Content," in *Viewpoints: Visual Anthropologists at Work*, eds. by Mary Strong and Laena Wilder (U of Texas , 2009), 133.

Anonymity, Facelessness, Privacy

Khalik Allah's *Field Niggas* was shot in the streets of East Harlem, at East 125th Street and Lexington Avenue, an intense and urgent work about the brutal effects and consequences of drug addiction and homelessness. Though the subject matter is harrowing, the form is a seductive montage; a series of images of destitute people high on drugs layered with voice-overs of people's lived experiences of being on the streets. The visuals are shot in an unobtrusive manner and have a quality of almost being photographs in which the subjects are allowed to "just be." These observational qualities border on an ethnographic approach and are executed in sensuous slow motion, tightly framed close-ups, night lights glistening on ravaged skins magnified in handheld high-definition. Allah's skillfully observational strategies lie in the film's building of a visual sensitivity and patience, drawing our attention to the relationship between the individual and the collective in a way that cannot be denied. The observational quality of the visuals is so raw that, as a result, we cannot deny the desolation of the subjects.

The voice-overs consist of non-synchronous audio fragments of monologues and conversation that lace their way in and out of the images. The voice-over is also where Allah brings his own point of view directly into the film. The visuals are informed by observational film strategies whereas the audio draws us into the performative. The film oscillates between these two modes in a way that enhances its different lineages (as opposed to collapsing them as *Leviathan* does), and in effect, the film becomes a powerful work that speaks directly to a highly invisible lived experience. Where *Leviathan* denies the importance of human subjectivity, *Field Niggas* brings us face to

face with it.

The bold and striking title, *Field Niggas,* references actual social and political events, but the details of these real life connections are not spelled out explicitly in the film and require the viewer to be informed or do their own background research in order to assemble a fuller context. As Charlie Shmidlin explains:

> The title stems from the Malcolm X speech "Message To The Grassroots," referring to the forgotten black masses that weathered every measure of punishment, and the ethnographic film similarly breathes a heavy exhaustion. Despite the allusions, Allah leaves history to others. Viewers may link the intersection to Velvet Underground lyrics, or news items on drug use and homelessness, but the director keeps his subject matter—the mostly black, impoverished people living on the streets and nearby—present without context.[9]

There is little context provided in the film and this could be due to the fact that it was originally a video installation in a gallery in which didactics would have given viewers the contextualization regarding time, place, geographic location, and an artist statement would have offered clues about intent and rationale for methodology. The lack of context tells us about the difficulties of migrating work meant for gallery into cinema, the incomparable experiences of venues, but there a number of other ways that this potentially de-contextualizing effect is created. Firstly, the subjects remain anonymous; there are no titles telling us the names of the individuals. Again, Shmidlin points out:

> Names of those we meet are rarely spoken, and instead we observe their interactions and immediate thoughts. There are the snippets of a man explaining the benefits of synthetic weed K2 over your average drug, a group of spoken-word poets, two police officers patrolling the block. Allah lingers on the stark details, too: the pizza crusts and McDonalds fries, slicked-down streets, and a number of startling images — something as simple as a woman's chin wound is as disturbing as it needs to be.

---

[9] Charlie Schmidlin, "AFI Review: Khalik Allah's Documentary 'Field Niggas' is a Hallucinatory Nighttime Document" *IndieWire,* November 10, 2015. www.indiewire.com/2015/11/afi-fest-review-khalik-allahs-documentary-field-niggas-is-a-hallucinatory-nighttime-document-106042/

While the choice of maintaining the subjects' anonymity runs the risk of creating an impersonal and random relationship to the viewer, I would argue that, in this case, anonymity serves as a gesture of care and privacy. For vulnerable folks, the permanence and exposure of such an act of naming is quite complex. Naming names is not a neutral act. This complexity is important to note precisely because this is a documentary that urges us to think about such issues differently. *Field Niggas* is a film that reminds us that different circumstances require different approaches.

Issues of naming and anonymity are also surfaced by Sharon Lockhart's *Rudzienko*. This film was born out of the collaboration between Lockhart and artists, writers, a philosopher, a movement therapist and a theatre director who worked with a group of "troubled" teenage girls in a series of workshops. Together they experimented with forms of thinking, movement, writing and performance, encouraging teens to articulate their individual perspectives. Collectively they created the script for *Rudzienko* and choreographed a set of scenes in which the girls' conversations and gestures interact with the surrounding landscape. Sharon Lockhart employs ethnographic methodology that produces an aesthetic that is observational yet deeply humanizing. Both *Rudzienko and Field Niggas* are films that hold on their subjects for long durations, creating a feeling that reminds us of what it is like to look closely at a photograph. This *holding* generates a particular experience for the viewer that shapes how we will view the people in the film.

> Through her precise films and photographic works, Lockhart explores the relationship between still and moving images and the productive space between the choreographed and natural gesture. Known for her collaborations that unfold over extended periods of time, Lockhart rethinks ethnographic curiosity as a project of exchange: working together with her subjects to understand and depict

> their worlds. Her characteristic aesthetic combines a cinematic eye with long-take fixed frames, employing duration in service of an ethics of slow looking, asking spectators to move beyond first impressions.[10]

Here, Linda Norden points out how Lockhart's formal strategies are tied to *an ethics of slow looking* and how form can ask us to pay attention in a certain ways. In other words, Norden is underscoring how formal strategies can be tied to different modes of understanding others and the world around us. While *Rudzienko*'s slow-holding images are coupled with scrolling text (edited transcriptions of the girls' conversations), *Field Niggas*' slow-holding images are coupled with voice-over (director's conversations and viewpoints), and these specific combinations of formal techniques guide us towards a spectatorship of care and empathy.

Reading *Rudzienko, Field Niggas* and *Leviathan* against each other shows us that notions of "exposure" and "visibility" are complex matters given our larger cultural context of the ambiguity of images. In Hito Steyerl's "Spam of the Earth: Withdrawal from Representation," she suggests that resisting representation could be considered a form of transgression:

> Warhol's prediction that everybody would be world-famous for fifteen minutes had become true long ago. Now many people want the contrary: to be invisible, if only for fifteen minutes. Even fifteen seconds would be great. We entered an era of mass-paparazzi, of the peak-o-sphere and exhibitionist voyeurism. The flare of photographic flashlights turns people into victims, celebrities, or both. This is why many people by now walk away from visual representation. Their instincts (and their intelligence) tell them that photographic or moving images are dangerous devices of capture: of time, affect, productive forces, and subjectivity. They can jail you or shame you forever; they can trap you in hardware monopolies and conversion conundrums, and, moreover, once these images are online they will

[10] Linda Norden, "Rudzienko" (Toronto: Gallery TPW, September 8 - October 29, 2016), Exhibition Brochure.

never be deleted again.[11]

Seen in this light, Allah's omission of naming can be seen as offering us a new way of thinking about "knowing others." Through this particular combination of observational and performative tactics, Allah offers us *close* images of marginalized individuals that are layered and complex; the framing is predominantly done in close-ups, yet I cannot easily accuse them of being intrusive or exploitative. Jordan Hoffman of *The Guardian* notes, "This movie is foremost an ethnographic exercise, and whether it is a rallying cry or poverty porn is for the viewer to decide."[12] Though the risk of this common trap certainly exists, the film also seems to operate on a different level which underscores the problem and the importance of trying to be near someone rather than keeping a distance, especially when there is fear and hatred towards such individuals in dominant society and mainstream culture. The closeness that is put upon us here is a difficult closeness, a difficult intimacy. We are not brought to closeness with humans who are drug users in order to glorify or romanticize the effects of drug use. We are brought to closeness in order to see the real consequences that touch people, detrimental and otherwise.

Despite the observational visual approach, Allah does not hide his political stance when it comes to his voice-over. In fact, his voice-over makes his thesis plain and clear. Charlie Shmidlin suggests that this takes away from the poetry of the film:

> Peculiarly, the presence of Allah's *s* voice in the film actually saps away from its effect. As he speaks to subjects, he describes his intent and concepts for the film, and in doing so grinds down its poetic atmosphere into cut-and-paste themes. 'These streets is rough. I don't see nothing positive,' Allah says in one scene. It's

---

[11] Hito Steyerl, "Spam of the Earth: Withdrawal from Representation," e-flux Journal 32 (2012), www.e-flux.com/journal/32/68260/the-spam-of-the-earth-withdrawal-from-representation/

[12] Jordan Hoffman, "Field Niggas Review: Hallucinatory Portrait of New York Street Life." *The Guardian*. October 15, 2015.

> a scene made trivial by every instance around it proving that already.[13]

Similarly, Jordan Hoffman cautions us about the filmmaker's presence, and even calls it a "misstep" but then seems to forgive it due to the realization of the importance of visibility and representation:

> It does, however, take an unexpected turn in its final section that is something of a misstep. Though he is only seen in occasional glass door reflections, eventually one of the recurring, floating voices emerges as that of the film-maker himself. By the end of the movie, he's stating his director's thesis ("we're all one") and referring to previous short films that, he feels, led him to this. It's one thing to let the subjects ramble; it's quite another to do so yourself. Still, Field Niggas' success depends on its chronicler's clear lack of judgment. The vagrants are ready to open up to him by and large without facade. Those of us who live in cities see these people every day, but how often do we listen?[14]

Both Shmidlin and Hoffman are correct in pointing out that Allah's statement is direct, but this is precisely what keeps the film from slipping into a purely visual and aesthetic exercise that could fall in to exploitative territory. The danger of exploitation as a result of decontextualization is a characteristic of all the films discussed here. At the risk of being criticized as heavy-handed Allah states his thesis clearly and seems to be more committed to political subject matter than formal inventiveness, though it has its own form of grace and tenderness in its courage to confront and hold on to those faces from which we are taught to look away.

It is not untrue that we lose the individual identity of the subjects when they are unnamed, but there is something to be gained by this choice to unname as well. By omitting names, we get an overall impression, a collectivized experience, rather than a particularized or individualized one. It is a group portrait. The value of a group portrait is that it conveys a shared experience, a shared identity. Could these films be considered

---

[13] Schmidlin.
[14] Hoffman.

group portraiture just as much as documentary? What happens when we read these films as a form of group portraiture, rather than a documentary film or a combination of both? According to the Tate's glossary of art terms:

> Portraiture is a very old art form going back at least to ancient Egypt, where it flourished from about 5,000 years ago. Before the invention of photography, a painted, sculpted, or drawn portrait was the only way to record the appearance of someone. But portraits have always been more than just a record. They have been used to show the power, importance, virtue, beauty, wealth, taste, learning or other qualities of the sitter.[15]

Reading these works in relation to the long traditions of portraiture in art history, rather than a history of documentary, help to situate it in the lineage of film works like Andy Warhol's 16mm *Screen Tests* instead. In fact, there have been suggestions that *Field Niggas* should not be considered documentary. In Glen Kenney's *New York Times review he* compares Pedro Costa's films to Allah's film, stating:

> None of these faces and bodies belong to actors, but it won't do to call this powerful film a documentary. From the opening shots, there is an evident affinity with the Portuguese director Pedro Costa, who structured a trilogy of dramas around the lives of residents in Fontainhas, a poor section of Lisbon. In Mr. Allah's film, one image of a young African-American woman, front-lit with what could be taken as an almost heavenly radiance, calls to mind Mr. Costa's strategy of mining beauty from subjects and objects merely by depicting them with pinpoint clarity. Mr. Allah toys with focus quite a bit throughout his parade of close-ups, but when he comes in sharp, the details of skin textures, the whites and pupils of the eyes, and more, are always startling. But unlike Mr. Costa's films, Mr. Allah's cinema is on the fast side; this hour long movie is a kind of montage, with some shots lasting only a second or two; the longest rarely go beyond 30 or 40.[16]

What interests me is the idea that a film's fast-sidedness is a detraction of documentary value. The comparison of Allah's work to Costa's is significant because Costa's approach

---

[15] *Tate Art Terms*, *s.v.* "portrait," accessed November 2017, www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/p/portrait.

[16] Glen Kenny, "Review: 'Field Niggas' is a Meditation on Life on the Streets of East Harlem," *New York Times,* October 15, 2015.

is clearly different in approach and intention, but they are simply being lumped together by virtue of subject matter: humans living on the margins. Costa works with non-actors in order to produce fiction. The comparison of Costa's work to Allah's is more telling of broader assumptions of what documentary "should" look like, or, what working with real people who are struggling should look like.

Leviathan, *Field Niggas* and *Rudzienko* attempt to deal with the truths and realities of those living on the margins to varying degrees and in different ways. Even though that is not the main intention in *Leviathan*, humans are still part of the film's ecosystem. This is a detail that is hard to ignore. How can we continue to represent humans in meaningful ways in a world that is increasingly seen and conceptualized as post-human? The intersection of the observational and performative creates in these films a unique opportunity for a simultaneously *closed* and *open* experience and lay the groundwork for new ways of thinking and making documentary involving the representation of humans.

The sets of questions I have posed throughout this first section formed the backdrop for my decision to take a few different turns: to move away from figurative representation in order to make truth claims about lived realities; to be careful of focusing on form and style at the expense of marginalized realities; to work with anonymity and facelessness as a deliberate strategy for privileging privacy and protectiveness of vulnerable individuals; and to contemplate what "withdrawal from representation" might mean to those who have historically been hidden because they are deemed to be outcasts of society. These questions combined with my actual experience visiting the prenatal residence again (see below), prompted me to lean towards fiction.

Two sentences about visiting the residence twenty years later

Is it enough to say that when I visited the residence I met with the current staff, teachers and young women living there, and even though I am so grateful for all their generosity and so honoured that they gave me permission to film them, I could not bring myself to take out the camera? Probably not.

THE URGE TO RUN A LAP: PART 2

Narrative

We don't create a fantasy world to escape reality. We create it to be able to stay.
- Lynda Barry, *What It Is*

That is really all there is to the story. Why do I feel I have told it all wrong? Perhaps because I am not the one to tell it.
- Kathleen Collins, *The Happy Family*

Image 3. Screenshot. *THE URGE TO RUN A LAP*

The main character of *THE URGE TO RUN A LAP* is an unnamed adult woman. She is not portrayed by a human, but by an assemblage sculpture consisting of a round fan, funnel and a flower pot. As a matter of fact, none of the main characters are portrayed by humans; the only human that is seen in the film is an unidentified person whose hands busily manipulate props/objects throughout the film, such as fans, a

weathered block of wood, small paper furniture and other ephemera. The face of this human is never revealed and their role is never clearly identified in relation to the plot.

The film marks the passing of time and aging by the generic labels of the stages of life: “kid,” “teenager,” and “adult.” The film begins with a sequence that describes the main character as a child, when she sees a picture of alpacas and she wants to start an alpaca club, but because she is fast, she is encouraged to participate in track and field instead. We then move into a montage of a closed shoe store’s window displays, where the shop windows are strewn with toppled shoe racks, shelving, and shoes. During this montage, the narration describes how the main character would slow down during races in order to run side by side with her competitors. The next sequence is a montage of cigarette butts and the narration describes how, as an adult, the main character runs laps around the parking lot on her lunch break. One day she breaks her ankle and must get an ankle-ultrasound. There, she recognizes the ultrasound technician as the same person who gave her an ultrasound when she was pregnant. This coincidence triggers her memories of living in a prenatal residence as a teenager and she decides to go back to visit the old residence. She wants to go back to tell the young women that they should not let others talk about them, that it is important to speak about oneself before others speak about you.

When she arrives, she is greeted by three residents in the form of assemblage sculptures made of paper fans and wooden furniture legs. When she asks the three residents, “What is it like to live here now?” they ask her to tell them her experience first. What ensues is a series of details of what it was like to live there in the past: she lived with five other teenagers, they went to school in the basement, they had two teachers and they watched television together. One of the stories includes an anecdote about a woman

who came to visit the residence when she was a teenager and this story is told against an image of a large cracked swan vase transforming into a small smooth swan vase. By the time she finishes telling them about her experience living there, she realizes they have fallen asleep so she goes for a walk. The next day she transforms (just like the morphing of the visiting lady swan vase from her past), the brown fan of her body changes colour to black, and she returns to ask the residents again, "What is it like to live here now?" They tell her that it is different from when *she* lived there; and furthermore, if she wants to know she can see pictures and videos that they have posted about themselves on the internet. After hearing this information, the main character looks at the pictures and videos then returns to the prenatal residence again to ask if they want to go on a field trip with her. Some say "yes" and some say "no." The film ends with a montage of alpacas in the snow, presumably from the field trip, or perhaps from a memory of a field trip from the past or a fantasy of one from the future.

Image 4. Screenshot. Alpaca.

The Posture of Voice: Text as Image, Text as Speech

Image 5. Screenshot. *SHE WOULD SLOW DOWN.*

The film's story is told through two types of written text: omniscient narration is presented in the centre of the screen while the dialogue between characters is presented at the bottom of the screen. Text is treated as image and the placement of it within the frame serves to underscore the conceptual and material divisions between public and private discourse. The placement of these two types of voices points to the constructed separation between types of cultural knowledge, with the omniscient narrator's voice often taking a centralized position. The stance of authority is augmented with the use of ALL CAPS, a strategy that is often used to communicate a louder message or an official message, though in this context, this convention is undermined by the sparse and mundane content and tone of the narrator's voice - there really is nothing much to be loud or adamant

about. Additionally, when the text is read in relation to the visuals, the juxtapositions generate multiple or ambiguous meanings instead.

The characters' dialogue remains in the bottom of the frame (the "subtitle" position) until the end of the film when the last lines of the main character's dialogue ("Do you want to go on a field trip with me? Do you want to go outside?") move to the centre of the frame to signal a shift in position. This shift is not meant to be an advancement or improvement; it is neither "good" nor "bad," rather, it is a shifting of one's mind, *a change of plans,* based on listening to the others and gaining a new perspective on the circumstances. This shift in text placement is subtle, maybe even unnoticeable, rather than a grand signaling of an epiphany. As Charles Baxter has pointed out, "To line up with the anti-epiphanic is to withdraw from officialdom. Officials, and official culture, are full of epiphanies and insights and dogmas. One is free to be sick of that mode of discourse."[17] Asking us to resist writing stories, especially stories of oppression and trauma, with a sense of too much tidiness, Baxter suggests that a story's messiness "gives back to its events the dignity of their own complexity... It shrugs off portentous declamations and in general resists the earthshaking masterpiece tone, meant to impress and terrify. It sets before us, instead, the fictionality of all insight."[18]

While the text content, position and capitalization in the film serve to mark the difference between the characters and their voices, the use of the generic Helvetica font for all of them is an attempt to unify them in a small way. The narrator's perspective is just as subjective as the dialogue; the narrator is also a character, rather than a conveyor of an objective viewpoint. The posture of the text is a posture of the voice. Positioning of

[17] Baxter, 69.
[18] Ibid, 71.

the text within a frame generates meaning. A much more important film that uses the position of text as a formal strategy is Joyce Weiland's *Solidarity* (1973) in which she holds a single, bold word, "SOLIDARITY," superimposed on the centre of the frame for the entirety of the film. Like its subject matter, the workers' strike at Dare, the text takes a stance and makes its declaration by standing strong throughout the film while shaky images of various labour protesters' marching feet continue to change behind it.

In *THE URGE TO RUN A LAP,* the writing of the text/voices fluctuates between specificity and ambiguity, a form that is appropriate to the expression of memory. The recent "vidoodles" of Midi Onodera are a strong influence on my writing style, especially the on-screen text in her series-based projects, including *365, Movie a Day* (2008), *Movie of the Week* (2009), *Baker's Dozen* (2010), and *Lonely Videos* (2017). These delightful and introspective works are full of humour and poetry. The deceptively simple tone coupled with a refusal to speak directly about things is a refusal of completeness and closure and opens up the possibilities of interpretations for viewer.

Image 6. Screenshot. *JUST ENOUGH.*

Types of Fiction with Multiple Endings: Visual and Audio Treatment and Trash

Image 7. Screenshot. *THIS IS A TYPE OF FICTION.*

Junk culture (junk food, junk shows, junk toys, junk games, junk apps, junk sites, junk ads, junk etc.) is often seen as negative and destructive in its loudly distracting, mind-numbing and addictive qualities, but how can junk culture be repositioned or appropriated as a tool for storytelling or a form of resistance in media art? How can artists engage junk culture towards to social, political transformation? How can certain works lead us to think about junk culture in a more critical and nuanced way? My film does not answer these inquiries in a direct way, but these questions did inform my process and in the film I use many images of the ephemeral or the overlooked: pictures gleaned from Google Images (ears, ankle-ultrasound), video and photography footage of everyday objects (shoes, vase, lampshades), closed storefronts (permanently closed or

closed for the day) and litter (cigarette butts).

Image 8. Production Still, June 2017. Sculptures and found objects in the studio.

In Lawrence Alloway's tracing of the use of junk culture in Western Art History he brings us back to Dadaism, most notably, Duchamps' Readymades.[19] *THE URGE TO RUN A LAP* draws from the Dada lineages, the offshoots of Surrealism, Neo-Dada, Nouveau Realisme and Arte Povera, particularly the techniques of assemblage and the use of junk culture. Artists associated with these movements used junk in similar and different ways and for various reasons: Surrealists often blended unlikely combinations of found objects to create surprising and unsettling sculptures that addressed dreams states of the unconscious; Neo-Dadaist such as Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns'

[19] Lawrence Alloway, "Junk Art" in *Imagining the Present: Context, Content, and the Role of the Critic: Essays by Lawrence Alloway*, ed. Richard Kalina (New York: Routledge, 2006), 78.

use collage, assemblage and found materials as a way to forward their anti-aesthetic agenda; Nouveau Realisme artists' works ranged from torn and shredded posters, wrapped objects, and accumulations of found objects to assemblages of junk materials and urban detritus; Arte povera (literally 'poor art') explored a wide range of ordinary materials in order to move beyond the traditional ones associated with art such as oil paint on canvas, bronze, or carved marble and aimed to disrupt the values of the commercialized gallery system. This awfully brief genealogy of junk in art is an acknowledgment that *THE URGE TO RUN A LAP* owes much of its aesthetic choices to these artists' courage and inventiveness. Their work in western art history is what allows contemporary artists to include found objects in their work and to use banal activities as instruments of social and aesthetic critique. In the case of this film, though, assemblage is also used as a technique to address the narrative and its subject matter, processes of subjectivity and memory, and to allow for metaphorical readings and open-ended interpretations.

One work that greatly influenced my visual treatment of the teacher characters was Meret Oppenheim's *Object (Le Déjeuner en fourrure)* (1936), the well-known Surrealist fur-covered cup, saucer, and spoon. When she made this work, Oppenheim's use of the teacup and fur created a feeling of absurdity. In *THE URGE TO RUN A LAP*, such surrealist imagery is not only about aiming to create feelings of bizarreness and sensuousness, but also about finding ways to represent humans in non-figurative ways. Concerned with issues of privacy and anonymity, I worked towards an aesthetics of facelessness, and subsequently, this film portrays characters as assemblage sculptures made from what is considered garbage or useless. Besides the obvious gesture of

reclaiming junk, the sculptures of the characters are deliberately constructed by materials that are both ephemeral and permanent, light and heavy, speaking to the state of pregnancy, a period of time that is temporary yet can have long-lasting effects.

Image 9. Production still. Teacher #1.

Alloway makes a number of points about Junk Art (works that employ elements of junk culture) that are useful in helping us to think about the implications of junk culture in relation to cinema and media art. Firstly, Alloway states that Junk Art has the potential to attack the assumed hierarchy and the purity of media.[20] In terms of film and video, by employing a hybrid approach of including multiple mediums and resolutions this could challenge the hierarchy and purity within an industry that privileges high-resolution video. (At the time of writing this 8K is the highest UHDTV.) As Hito Steyerl

[20] Alloway, 76.

states in "In Defense of the Poor Image" (2009), "The contemporary hierarchy of images...is not only based on sharpness, but also and primarily on resolution." She goes on to say that, "A high-resolution image looks more brilliant and impressive, more mimetic and magic, more scary and seductive than a poor one. It is more rich, so to speak."[21] Steyerl points out that richness is tied to high-end economies of film production anchored in systems of national culture, capitalist studio production, and often conservative in their structures. Resolution is fetishized and this fetishization of resolution perpetuates the hierarchy of images.

In Steyerl's video *Liquidity Inc.* (2014)[22] she uses multiple types of resolutions and creates an underlying tension between existing resolution-types. The video's refusal to stick to one consistent resolution speaks to this critique of the hierarchy of images. The video begins with a very pixelated work screen that is digitally building water, which cross-dissolves into a higher resolution video image, then a lower resolution television shots of MMA fights, then higher-resolution, stylized images of a man, who we find out is an MMA fighter. Steyerl also uses the screen-within-screen (digitally and physically) to underscore the significance of resolution. There is a moment when a man is sitting at his desk and a video of Bruce Lee's well-known interview in which he urges us to "be like water" is literally placed as his backdrop, a digital water screen that forms a different layer of resolution behind him. Of course, mixed resolutions in documentary films is a very common occurrence (news footage is often intercut with original footage), but the use of mixed resolutions in *Liquidity Inc.* becomes a deliberate metaphor and creates a

---

[21] Hito Steyerl, "In Defense of the Poor Image," e-flux Journal 10 (2009), www.e-flux.com/journal/10/61362/in-defense-of-the-poor-image/

[22] *Liquidity Inc.*, directed by Hito Steyerl (2014), video.

visual interchange between the meanings and cultural valuation of resolutions/images.

THE URGE TO RUN A LAP includes the use of multiple resolutions: images downloaded from the internet, original still images (shot on iPhone and Canon T3i), original HD video (shot on Canon T3i). All the technologies used were consumer-level and the audio track is also comprised of "canned" sound effects from a consumer-level audio library. In other words, I used resources that are accessible to non-professional makers. Alloway's note that central to mid-century Junk Art was a non-hierarchic approach, "the acceptance of mass-produced objects, just because they are what is around, not because they issue from idolatrized technology"[23] is relevant here. The concept and practice of filmmaking that uses what is available to us (rather than what is hard to reach or even out of reach) is significant because it opens up doors that might otherwise be closed due to social, cultural and economic barriers. Resisting the idolization of technology is even more urgent as the fetishization of technologies is becoming increasingly magnified day-by-day in both consumer and professional industries.

Furthermore, building on Steyerl's idea of the rich image and the poor image, this film integrates the aesthetic of the film scratch into the narrative, using this effect during moments associated with the main characters's memories of the past such as the shots of the ears and the stores at night are scratched. The scratch is considered to be a mistake in conventional filmmaking language, a defect or a flaw to an image to be avoided, and these visual metaphors lend themselves to a parallel exploration of the way in which teen pregnancies are often associated with being a mistake. In the film, the scratch is

[23] Alloway, 78.

repositioned or reclaimed as a layer of memory.

Following this line of thought, the film's soundtrack is partially comprised of reclaimed sounds, the generic sound effects and ambient tracks provided by a consumer editing software's audio library. I chose to work with "canned" audio as it is often considered the junk of professional industry standards (or perhaps like the "poor image", it can be considered the "poor audio" of filmmaking) but the familiarity of these sounds take on new feelings when juxtaposed with text and images. Many of the sound effects that are normally mixed at low levels or tucked into "background" are foregrounded. This "bare" sound effects strategy is combined with two pieces of music by Jameszoo, *Lose* and *Tooth*, from his 2016 studio album *Fool,* whose richly layered songs combine disparate sounds from multiple genres. Jameszoo' s layering of old and new jazz, pop, hiphop sounds, creates a combination of the improvisational and structural precision that complements the narrative content and assemblage aesthetic.

Image 10. Screenshot. Ear.

Collected Photos as Found Montage

Image 11. Screenshot. *I only went out at night.*

There are a number of photo-montages in the film, accumulated pictures of the same type of object: montage of cigarette butts, montage of ears, montage of thrift store window at night. I use these montages to create a sharp divide between sections of the story. They create an interruption in the flow of the narrative, but interruption is the core of the narrative and they also serve to enhance the meanings of these sequences as well. Some of the photos were found images, while others I shot myself. The photos of ears were found/collected from various ear-related websites, usually medical sites about ear health or hearing products. In Teju Cole's "Finders Keepers" he discusses the technique of contemporary artists who create work from found photos, "old" photographs or digital

images downloaded from the internet:

> Photographic work of this kind - radically dependent on context - can be unsettling for those who take 'photograph' to have a straightforward meaning: an image made with a camera by a single author with a particular intention. This is where collector-artists come in: to confirm that curation and juxtaposition are basic artistic gestures.[24]

The "curation and juxtaposition" process describes well my attempt to hold together the images I have collected/downloaded. The juxtaposition of these collected/downloaded images with "original" photography and video and with text/narrative serves to recontextualize collected/downloaded images in order to make new meaning with them. Appropriated-images can set us off on a series of questions about use and rights, use and originality, but Cole brings us further to focus on the importance of *use* and *resonance*:

> What are the rights of the original photographers, the "non-artists" whose works have been so unceremoniously reconfigured? And how can what is found be ordered, or put into a new disorder, and presented again to give it new resonance? And how long will that resonance itself last? The real trouble is rarely about whether something counts as art - if the question comes up, the answer is almost always yes - but whether the art in question is startling, moving, or productively discomfiting. Meeting those criteria is just as difficult for straight photographers as it is for appropriation-based work. After all, images made of found images are images, too.[25]

Inserting appropriated images of ears in the form of montage into the narrative creates an experience of abrupt divergence, a sudden series of flashes, sharp cuts of the past enter the present, which works to portray the experience of the character when an image or experience triggers memory. Found images of ankle ultrasounds are appropriated to create a fragmented stop-motion portrayal of the ultrasound, which serves to create the character's disjointed experience.

---

[24] Teju Cole, "Finders Keepers" in *Known and Strange Things: Essays* (New York: Random House, 2016), 178.

[25] Ibid, 180.

The other photo-montages in the film are not made from found photos, but the subject matter is of the vernacular kind. The cigarette butts are part of an ongoing project that I started about three years ago and the stores are part of a larger series I made over the last two years. The accumulation of images serves to reveal multiplicity and difference over time as collecting/collections are always tethered to the temporal and selectivity. In experimental film, the technique of "variations on a theme" is common and is often associated with the work of James Benning, most notably, *13 Lakes* (2005), *10 Skies* (2005), and *20 Cigarettes* (2011). In these films, Benning presents his chosen subject matter (waterscapes, clouds, people smoking) in a series of long takes, asking viewers to contemplate the subtle changes over the course of each take, which can last minutes. In *THE URGE TO RUN A LAP*, though, the series of takes are extremely short (some shots of the cigarettes butts are only 6 frames long) and so the effect comes from experiencing the quantity of images, from the abundance of frames in addition to what is happening within them. In the film, the presentation of the collected photos become a montage, that is, these collected photographs take on new or added significance as they are inserted in the narrative and inserted via montage. What is partially produced by this accumulation of frames is a feeling of being overwhelmed. Like the ears, the butts and windows are presented as a series of abrupt cuts, and, in effect, this cutting takes on its own rhythm. This generated rhythm speaks to the way in which disruption, when accumulated, can be lulled into repetition, into a pattern, into a lap.

ENDINGS

Image 12. Screenshot. *WITH MULTIPLE ENDINGS.*

THE URGE TO RUN A LAP is a narrative work that attempts to hold in one place multiple and eclectic forms and styles. It is rooted in an interest in combining the documentary notions of the observational and the performative, but to employ these modes or sensibilities towards a fictionalized work. It is also a film that comes from a particular moment in time when contemporary forms of self-representation are further complicated by the digital age and are constantly changing in ambivalent ways. While the story details the experiences of an adult woman who was a pregnant when she was a teenager, it is also about how the ways we make sense of things (the past, the present, ourselves, others) can change over time. The use of an assemblage technique, assembling disparate elements from everyday moments and materials, is fitting for the subject matter

of the film, for exploring notions of memory-making and acts of remembering. Approaching memories and the idea of memory indirectly, abstractly, conceptually, allows for its complexity. Assemblage has been a way to hold undone things together in order to undo them all over again. As Jan Zwicky says, "To try to make sense of one's life is to gather one's own and the community's memories in an attempt to produce some kind of fit, some kind mutual accommodation. But this project is continually undone by the world, by deep, open attention to the world."[26] The simultaneous acts of doing and undoing is a motif of the film, most noticeable in the use of fans to represent humans, objects that can be opened and closed to different degrees. The fan is a foldable object and representing the characters as figures of enfoldment is way to address their mutable subjectivity, to address how our relationships to others and ourselves are not fixed. The film uses several formal and narrative elements to explore the relationships between the fixed/the unfixed. Which people, images, moments are considered unfixed, unfixable? Through the use of assemblage, montage, text and narrative, *THE URGE TO RUN A LAP* works to question the idea of fixed positions (and fixed endings) for young pregnant women and tries to make room for more changeable and unpredictable ones.

[26] Jan Zwicky, "Lyric, Poetry, Memory" in *A Ragged Pen: Essays on Poetry & Memory.* (Kentville: Gaspereau Press, 2006), 94.

WORKS CITED

Barry, Lynda. *What It Is*, Montreal: Drawn & Quarterly, 2008.

Baxter, Charles. *Burning down the house: Essays on Fiction*. Saint Paul, MN: Graywolf Press, 1997.

Brophy, Sarah an Janice Hladki, eds., *Embodied Politics in Visual Autobiography (Cultural Spaces)*, University of Toronto Press, 2014

Cole, Teju. *Known and Strange Things: Essays*. Random House: New York, 2016.

Collins, Kathleen. "The Happy Family." *Whatever Happened to Interracial Love? Stories by Kathleen Collins*. New York: Harper Collins, 2016.

Dictionary.com, *s.v. "lap,"* accessed November 21, 2017, http://www.dictionary.com.

Hermer, Carol. "Chapter 6: Reading the Mind of the Ethnographic Filmmaker." *Viewpoints: Visual Anthropologists at Work*, edited by Mary Strong and Laena Wilder, 120–139. University of Texas, 2009.

Hoffman, Jordan. "Field Niggas Review - Hallucinatory Portrait of New York Street Life." *The Guardian*. October 15, 2015.

Jameszoo. *Fool.* Brainfeeder Records, 2016. Digital music file.

Kenny, Glen. "Review: 'Field Niggas' is a Meditation on Life on the Streets of East Harlem," *New York Times,* October 15, 2015.

Metzger, Michael. "Leviathan's Labors Lost, Or: Who Works After the Subject?" Millennium Film Journal, no. 61 (2015): 38+. www.questia.com/read/1P3-3749757121/leviathan-s-labors-lost-or-who-works-after-the-subject.

Nichols, Bill. *Introduction to Documentary*. 2nd ed., Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 2010.

Norden, Linda. *Rudzienko*. Toronto: Gallery TPW. September 8 - October 29, 2016 . Exhibition catalogue.

Shmidlin, Charlie. "AFI Review: Khalik Allah's Documentary 'Field Niggas' Is A Hallucinatory Nighttime Document" *IndieWire.* November 10, 2015. www.indiewire.com/2015/11/afi-fest-review-khalik-allahs-documentary-field-niggas-is-a-hallucinatory-nighttime-document-106042/

Stewart, Melanie Anne. “Sensationalizing the Sentimental: National Culture and Futurity.” *MTV and Teen Pregnancy: Critical Essays on 16 and Pregnant and Teen Mom,* edited by Letizia Guglielmo, 93-108. Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2013.

Steyerl, Hito. “The Spam of the Earth: Withdrawal from Representation.” *e-flux Journal* 32. February, 2012. http://www.e-flux.com/journal/32/68260/the-spam-of-the-earth-withdrawal-from-representation/

Rutkoff, Rebekah. *The Irresponsible Magician: Essays and Fictions*, South Pasedena, CA: Semiotext(e), 2015.

Zwicky, Jan. “Lyric, Narrative, Memory.” In *A Ragged Pen: Essays on Poetry & Memory*, edited by Robert Finley, Patrick Friesen, Aislinn Hunter, Anne Simpson, Jan Zwicky. Kentville, NS: Gaspereau Press, 2006.

FILMOGRAPHY

3 Lakes. Film. Directed by James Benning, 2005.

10 Skies. Film. Directed by James Benning, 2005.

16 and Pregnant, TV Series. Created by Lauren Dolgen, 2009-2014 .

20 Cigarettes. Film. Directed by James Benning, 2011.

365, Movie a Day. Videos. Directed by Midi Onodera, 2008.

Baker's Dozen. Videos. Directed by Midi Onodera, 2010.

By May. Video. Directed by Lesley Loksi Chan, 2014.

Curse Cures. Video. Directed by Lesley Loksi Chan, 2010.

Field Niggas. Video. Directed by Khalik Allah, 2015.

Juno. Film. Directed by Jason Reitman. Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2007.

Leviathan. Video. Directed by Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Véréna Paravel. The Cinema Guild, 2012.

Liquidity Inc. Video. Directed by Hito Steyerl, 2014.

Lonely Videos. Videos. Directed by Midi Onodera, 2017.

Movie of the Week, Videos. Directed by Midi Onodera, 2009.

Rudzienko. Video. Directed by Sharon Lockhart, 2016.

Screen Tests. Films. Directed by Andy Warhol, 1964-1966.

Solidarity. Film. Directed by Joyce Wieland. CFMDC, 1973.

Appendix A

In Place of a Screenplay: What is a Lap?

lap¹

noun

1. the front part of the human body from the waist to the knees when in a sitting position
2. the part of the clothing that lies on the front portion of the body from the waist to the knees when one sits.
3. a place, environment, or situation of rest or nurture: *the lap of luxury*
4. area of responsibility, care, charge, or control: *They dropped the problem right in his lap.*
5. a hollow place, as a hollow among hills.
6. the front part of a skirt, especially as held up to contain something.
7. a part of a garment that extends over another: *the lap of a coat.*
8. a loose border or fold.

lap²

verb (used with object), lapped, lapping.

1. to fold over or around something; wrap or wind around something: *to lap a bandage around one's finger.*
2. to enwrap in something; wrap up; clothe.
3. to envelop or enfold: *lapped in luxury*
4. to lay (something) partly over something underneath; lay (things) together, one partly over antoher; overlap
5. to lie partly over (something underneath).
6. to get a lap or more ahead of (a competitor) in racing, as on an oval track.
7. to cut or polish with a lap

8. to join, as by scarfing, to form a single piece with the same dimensions throughout.
9. to change (cotton, wool, etc.) into a compressed layer or sheet.

verb (used without object), lapped, lapping.

10. to fold or wind around something.
11. to lie partly over or alongside of something else.
12. to lie upon and extend beyond a thing; overlap.
13. to extend beyond a limit.

noun

14. the act of lapping.
15. the amount of material required to go around a thing once.
16. a complete circuit of a course in racing or in walking for exercise: *to run a lap*
17. an overlapping part.
18. the extent or amount of overlapping.
19. a rotating wheel or disk holding an abrasive or polishing powder on its surface, used for gems, cutlery, etc.
20. a compressed layer or sheet of cotton, wool, or other, fibrous material usually wound on an iron rod or rolled into a cylindrical form for further processing during carding.

lap[3]

verb (used with object), lapped, lapping.

1. (of water) to wash against or beat upon (something) with a light, slapping or splashing sound: *Waves lapped the shoreline.*
2. to take in (liquid) with the tongue; lick in; *to lap water from a bowl.*

verb (used without object), lapped, lapping.

3. to wash or move in small waves with a light, slapping or splashing sound: *The*

water lapped gently against the mooring.

4. to take up liquid with the tongue; lick up a liquid.

noun

5. the act of lapping liquid.
6. the lapping of water against something.
7. the sound of this: *the quiet lap of the sea on rocks.*
8. something lapped up, as liquid food for dogs.
9. lap up, a. *Informal.* to receive enthusiastically: *The audience lapped up his monologue.* b. to take in (all of a liquid) with tongue; drink up: *The cat lapped up her milk and looked for more.*

lap[4]

verb, *Archaic.*

1. simple past tense of leap.[27]

[27] Dictionary.com, *s.v. "lap," accessed November 21, 2017, http://www.dictionary.com/browse/lap*