

# **Experimental Film Society**

## **Statement**





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by Rouzbeh Rashidi

Jean Cocteau called cinema 'death at work', and it is this aspect of the medium that I am chiefly concerned with here. Filmmaking itself becomes a ritual act, trapping images, re-arranging them (montage) to tap their inherent powers and then unleashing them in this concentrated form (the projection of this material into light).

I happened to start making films at the beginning of the millennium, in the year 2000. From the very first day, I thought of only one concept and that was the discovery of what cinema is in this new era. This question has pushed me to continuously experiment and investigate in the laboratory of my filmmaking.

The films one makes are nothing but the haunting shadows and light of the films that one has seen in the past. There is no original film, except for the very first ones by the medium's pioneers.

In both my feature films and my on-going short film series, "Homo Sapiens Project", I have been formally experimenting with deconstructing and decomposing film genres. I have radically minimalised genre elements, attaining what could be described as a ground zero of drama through the systematic removal of narrative structures. What this has achieved is a series of experimental films that foreground mood, atmosphere, visual rhythms, the nature and subjectivity of the image and the gaze that engenders it, the permeability of the borders between documentary and fiction, and the role of architecture and landscape as palimpsest of hidden histories.

All of this emerges in the ambiguous context surrounding the circumstances of the moment of shooting in contrast to what is assembled in editing. As Donal Foreman says "each image is a single event" and "cinema is a dialogue between will and reality". In this way the edit is also part autopsy, and the series of filmed events full of life, colour and movement lie frozen in the frame, dormant. They are scrutinised, examined, explored then reassembled soon to become light, shape and rhythm once again but as spectres among the living. This amounts to the idea of film as an 'undead' medium- any given moment refers to a 'dead' moment filmed in the past, yet behaves as if 'alive' due to being replayed and edited.

Godard/Gorin once stated that the distinction between documentary and fiction is false, however I would go with Donal Foreman's suggestion that the distinction between documentary and fiction is meaningless. Once something is filmed it becomes a fiction, whether it is your fiction or my fiction depends on where you put the camera; "the camera is always part of the scene" (Foreman)

Raul Ruiz said that "In narrative cinema---and all cinema is narrative to some degree---it is the type of image produced that determines the narrative, not the reverse."

'Form' in my view, is the most important and vital part of the 7th art. When you conceive a unique form, the narrative, drama or story can be articulated with it. Or you can simply have the form itself, which is amazingly expressive in its own right.



To my mind the filmmaker should, as Foreman said, “be, not illustrate”.

"Cinema is not an illustrative or descriptive tool. You have to build images and things have to exist within them. There are more and more filmmakers who show a thousand trees and in the end you feel as you have not seen a single oak during the two hours. Image has to stand on its own, the image is not something arbitrary. A finished image does not describe anything, it is its own entity, it does not describe." - Jean Marie Straub & Danièle Huillet

It is widely believed to be impossible to envision a film without a screenplay; the script is still secured as the cornerstone of filmmaking. It is thought of as the collected information of all that is seen and heard; but nothing is seen, nothing is heard. Of course scriptwriting is an art unto itself but it has very little to do with filmmaking. One mysterious synopsis is enough to make an entire feature length film. Mysteries can be preserved while petty details are dispensed with, exciting and activating the mind. For example this synopsis for Bela Tarr's "Kárhozat" (1988)

“A penniless drifter's relationship with a nightclub singer is put under strain when he offers the woman's husband a smuggling job.”

And as Godard expressed recently in an interview: “...the ideas come gradually, and there is no screenplay. At the beginning, I thought we had to have a screenplay [...] And then I realised that the screenplay came not only after shooting, but after editing”.

The most enjoyable part in cinema, apart from watching films from the history of cinema, is the actual craft of filmmaking, shooting/gathering the material and editing/montage, both heavily technical processes. After that there is a feeling of

loss and nostalgia, each film when it's done is an absolute death although the film behaves as if it is alive. That is why cinema is all about ghosts and shadows in my view. In this process, if you are lucky, you may find great collaborators and as a result of this you don't have to endure this feeling alone. Everything else is waste of time for me!

We, at EFS, treat all formats, devices, and cameras, including celluloid and video, as equal and don't have any sentimental attachment to them. The 21st century filmmaker uses any image-recording device to make his/her film and as Orson Welles said “a film is never really good unless the camera is an eye in the head of a poet”. Cinema is 100% reliant on the technology of its time and the way in which you make films and screen them is entirely up to the nature of that technology. Technology of our time is digital and many filmmakers must embrace it fully in order to express themselves and advance cinema. As much as cinema is about the past, it is about the future too.

Our films are about images and the progression of images. When there's sound or music, they're about the interaction of sound and image. Cinema itself is always the subject, experimenting with its forms. Not necessarily pushing its limits, because I believe the limits of cinema have already been reached by Structuralist filmmakers like Sharits, or by Garrel's early films, for instance. You can't go beyond that. But if a filmmaker's experiments are true to his or her perception and personality, the medium's possibilities are constantly renewed.

“... in a time when every film has been made. But the energy persists and the images keep moving, moving in darkness, ceaselessly linking the body and the night in a multitude of shifting rhythms.”  
Maximilian Le Cain