

**So I Know it's Real :  
an embodied understanding of performative authenticity**

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## ABSTRACT

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Through a series of performative documentary video works that interweave self-shot footage with found interviews in an approach informed by theories of chance and embodiment, this creation-as-research project explores 'authenticity' as a condition of labour in the production of pornography. In order to trouble the understanding of *authentic* porn as *ethical* porn and, further, the notion that there is a single 'truth' to sex work at all, I draw on a practice established by transgressive feminist documentarians and video artists of radical subjectivity as a tool of resistance. Through a process-driven recontextualization of audio and video in the style of assemblage, the nonfiction pieces produced in this thesis tell a nuanced story – not only of sex as work, but of the practice and potential of 'embodied editing' towards the advancement of 'radically subjective' documentary film.

Key Terms: authenticity, pornography, performance, embodiment, documentary film, video art, creation-as-research

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## NOTE ON LANGUAGE

While this thesis uses the terms ‘sex work’ and ‘sex worker’ to describe, at times, both porn performers and porn producers – as an acknowledgment of the many intersections of sex-as-a-job, as well as the collective stigmatization endured by all who work in sex – it should be noted that this project speaks *only* and *specifically* about pornography and pornographers. This work does not intend to investigate or speak to other additional forms of sex work, or its numerous, overlapping, and multiple modes.

I also want to acknowledge that ‘sex work’ and ‘sex worker’ are not terms that some people who do sex-as-work would use to describe themselves or their labour. As words, ‘sex work’ and ‘sex worker’ are limiting – in that they *delimit* the identity or categorization of the individuals to which they are applied – and while I use the terms in this project for ease of communication, there is nuance and contradiction in their application worthy of deeper study.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Montréal-based sex worker rights organization, *Stella*, has a helpful [info sheet](#) titled *Language Matters: Talking About Sex Work*, that helps unpack these nuances and explain the impact language-use has on individual identity.

# CONTENTS

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## MAPPING A TRAJECTORY

I am a video editor –

Both of documentary film, and of pornography.

Though seemingly disparate, or even antithetical to some, each type of editing shares a common, singular goal – *make them believe*.

In my role crafting documentaries, this is a narrative demand: to persuade the viewer toward some truth embedded in the footage. As a pornographer, though the nature of the fantasy-made-reality is different, the job is the same. This positionality has produced in me a unique relationship to authenticity, to performance, and toward a fluid intermingling of the two.

As a means of investigating these knotted kinships, I have produced this thesis, which takes the following discursive form –

- (1) I begin by outlining the issue which activates this thesis: an uncritical acceptance of ‘authenticity’ as *the* radical alternative to mainstream pornography, resulting in the formation of labour demands toward the production of an ‘authentic’ porn scene. This section is an effort in laying out the stakes – clarifying the concerns and implications which motivate the work.
- (2) Having established the *why*, I establish the *how* – by outlining the research questions of the project. These questions connect the *performance* of authenticity in pornography to that of documentary filmmaking. This explained,
- (3) I then provide a brief overview of the creative works produced for this thesis, each of which aids in examining these questions. This is done briefly, as it is my hope that these three pieces may speak, in part, for themselves.
- (4) In order to provide context for these pieces, I then introduce relevant literature in the fields of Porn Studies, feminist documentary film and video art, and performance – the three structural pillars of this thesis, which situate it within a larger discourse.
- (5) The theoretical framework which follows connects the work’s *context* to its expression through a particular *methodology*. Here, the practice of ‘embodied editing’ is introduced in conjunction with chance theory – the unification of which I propose as an alternative, ‘radically subjective’ approach to documentary filmmaking.
- (6) These concepts are not new, and have been utilized toward similar ends by other artists. I examine several of these parallel works here as a means of formulating *which* methodologies can successfully reproduce the theoretical framework I am attempting.
- (7) Informed by these works, I then outline my *own* chosen methodologies – situating several sub-methods within the larger creation-as-research practice of assemblage. Finally,
- (8) I examine what has been gained and lost in the creation of this thesis, as well as gesture toward future iterations of the work.

In attempting what I term a ‘radically subjective’ approach to documentary filmmaking, I feel it is essential, at the outset of the paper, that I explain what I mean in using these words.

In this work, I situate ‘radical subjectivity’ as a sum of parts –

Subjectivity, alone, refers to the quality of being a *subject*, insofar as one's internal thoughts, feelings, hopes, and desires are relevant and valuable in drawing 'true' conclusions about the world. This is in opposition to *objectivity*, or the quality of being *objective* – that is to say, factual, external, *not* influenced by personal perspective. A *radicalization* of subjectivity is a refusal of oppressive conditions which do not serve the subject or the process of subjectification. A project historically taken up by philosophers such as Herbert Marcuse and Immanuel Kant, I intend a more abstract, open, and *malleable* radical subjectivity than traditionally theorized. This is to allow for flexibility of application in new medias such as video, as well as leave room for illustrative metaphors to develop and inform.

'Radical subjectivity,' in this formulation, is a revolutionary acceptance of *all* thinking, feeling beings as subjects – including hidden identities, body parts, and facsimiles. It is a rejection of *objectivity* as the only valid means of reasoning and understanding. This subject values multiplicity, contradiction, and nuance as an alternative, radical practice of non-hierarchical knowledge-creation. It is a *collective consciousness* which recognizes its own, inner potential, in spite of and contrary to external constructs.

Within this thesis, radical subjectivity remains a bit unstable, undefined – as each creative piece experiments with the concept anew, what radical subjectivity is and what it can *do* expands. At its most basic, this work is an attempt to find and articulate an *aesthetic* which reflects this *radically subjective* philosophical core. While I believe the unification of embodied editing and chance theory come close to providing a frame for this aesthetic to emerge through assemblage, this is only *one* frame. If we truly commit to a radically subjective approach, a multitude of frames will emerge – each a new map, for a new trajectory.

*\*\*Please return to this map as needed during your reading of the work.*

## INTRODUCTION

As counterpoint to the objectification, the lack of representation and one-dimensionality, the overall '*fakeness*' that typifies what is 'mainstream' pornography, the alt genre of feminist porn – frequently self-labeled 'ethical' – has developed to showcase what is often framed as 'real bodies having real sex.'

Illustrating this distinction in her 2009 Ted talk, *Make Love Not Porn* founder Cindy Gallop – who has "helped define what we consider feminist porn"<sup>2</sup> – describes the difference between the 'Porn World' and the 'Real World,'<sup>3</sup> holding that, "If porn is the Hollywood blockbuster movie, MLNP is the documentary."<sup>4</sup> Prolific feminist porn performer and director Madison Young further clarifies this divergence, foregrounding 'authenticity' as *the* quality that makes feminist porn feminist. As she states in her work in the Journal of Porn Studies:

"Authenticity shatters one of the greatest dangers that sex workers face – stereotypes. In giving space for the authentic expression of self, we are creating space for performers to be valued and recognized as individuals."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Gigi Engle, "4 Ways to Guarantee There's More Feminist Porn in the World," Glamour, September 06, 2017, <https://www.glamour.com/story/cindy-gallop-how-porn-industry-can-become-feminist>.

<sup>3</sup> Cindy Gallop, "Make Love, Not Porn," TED Blog, February 05, 2018, [https://blog.ted.com/cindy\\_gallop\\_ma/](https://blog.ted.com/cindy_gallop_ma/).

<sup>4</sup> "Frequently Asked Questions," Make Love Not Porn, <https://makelovenotporn.tv/how-this-works>.

<sup>5</sup> Madison Young, "Authenticity and Its Role within Feminist Pornography," *Porn Studies* 1, no. 1-2 (2014): 188, doi:10.1080/23268743.2014.888250.



Echoing Gallop's comparison, Young goes on, stating:

"For me as a feminist porn director, I find that my job is to create safe space for authentic sexual connection and pleasure to occur. I document the authentic pleasure that I have facilitated space for. Essentially, I am a documentarian."<sup>6</sup>

And yet, these alternative approaches to producing pornography do not exist in a vacuum. When it comes to marketing feminist or ethical pornography, authenticity becomes a selling point. The *realness* exhibited in these scenes is what becomes desirable about them and, as such, what directors are motivated to capitalize on. In this way, rather than a means of revolutionizing the commodified sexuality peddled by the mainstream industry, authenticity becomes a *condition of labour* for porn performers.

While on set, in order to demonstrate the veracity of a scene, performers are often asked to participate in on-camera interviews as their *real* selves, personally develop a scene narrative that showcases their *real* sexual desires, and have sex at work 'the way you would at home.' These requirements result in additional on-set work hours, increased demand for affective labour, and an often taxing level of emotional and creative investment in a product whose revenue and legal rights typically belong to its producers rather than its performers.

Seen as an inherently liberatory practice for the *good* of workers, it is authenticity itself which obscures the labour it demands. After all, if you do what you love and love what you do, you'll never work a day in your life. Right? So, as a porn performer, does *loving the work* mean *being oneself*? Does *ethical production* equate to *authenticity*? Heather Berg articulates the significance of this point well in her work on labour and authenticity in porn, making clear that:

"Troubling authenticity asks us to take seriously the possibility that ideas posited as radical alternatives can themselves become disciplining. If authenticity is both a form of labor and a discourse that conceals labor, how might feminists rethink the idea of authenticity as a cure for the dangers of commercial sex?"<sup>7</sup>

This is not to say that self-labeled ethical and feminist adult films – such as those produced by Gallop and Young – *inherently* employ unethical labour practices. In fact, primarily *because* the content produced by these companies is indeed important and liberatory in its representation of a diversity of sex and bodies, the world of alt porn *deserves* and is made *better* by a troubling of its labour practices. As pornographer Vex Ashley points out, "Porn is not a monolith.... Does the pleasure on screen always have to be 'authentically' felt? Sometimes, yes. More often, maybe. Always, no."<sup>8</sup>

This distinction is a nuanced one, and necessarily so. With the recent wave of stories entering public discourse designed to 'demystify' this 'underground' profession, it has become increasingly important to provide space for the complexity within sex worker stories to inform, expand, and thrive. In spite of greater visibility, the experiences of sex workers are still largely sensationalized and oversimplified in articles and documentaries – made to conform to a single,

<sup>6</sup> Young, "Authenticity and its Role Within Feminist Pornography," 187-88.

<sup>7</sup> Heather Berg, "Porn Work, Feminist Critique, and the Market for Authenticity," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 42, no. 3 (2017), doi:10.1086/689633.

<sup>8</sup> Vex Ashley, "Porn – Artifice – Performance – and the Problem of Authenticity," *Porn Studies* 3, no. 2 (2016): 190, doi:10.1080/23268743.2016.1184481.

convenient narrative. The ‘truth,’ however, is that there is no single truth to sex work. Thinking that there is can lead to dangerously misleading understandings of the job that have *real* impacts on worker safety, contributing to the stigma that motivates a majority of discriminatory actions against sex workers.

As such, in asking performers to share so much of their *real* selves and experiences – as ‘documentary’ subjects both on porn sets and in the interview chair – it’s important to carefully and actively consider *how* we tell nonfiction stories about sex work and sex workers.

This point connects to the last in a series of research questions, each of which builds upon and informs the next. First: **(1)** When and why does ‘authenticity’ emerge in pornography, either as a concept or an aesthetic? **(2)** In what ways does performing authenticity – often towards feminist or ethical ends – create additional labour for porn performers on set? **(3)** To what extent can a radical embrace of subjectivity subvert and *resist* the labour of performative authenticity? Finally, then, **(4)** How might this ‘radically subjective’ approach inform the documentary filmmaking process (specifically during the edit), so as to shift how we create and understand nonfiction stories about sex work and sex workers?<sup>9</sup>

Primarily, this project is a contribution to the discourses of Porn Studies and documentary filmmaking, as well as – and in an equally important way – the field and practice of research-creation as an embodied methodological approach. Academic studies of pornography have long focused on the ‘sex’ aspect of the evolving understanding of sex-as-work, producing analyses largely focused on consumption, reception, and distribution of porn.<sup>10</sup> Even when these studies *do* incorporate discussions of labour, as porn performer Jiz Lee writes, “the performers themselves often remain elusive, removed from studies... that tend to only involve two stakeholders: audience and industry.”<sup>11</sup>

As such, while several Porn Studies scholars *have* identified authenticity as a site of troubling discussions of labour, there is shockingly little work in the field exploring what these issues truly *look* and *feel* like to the workers impacted. Furthermore, even fewer scholars have yet to establish and explore the connection between the labour of performing authenticity in porn and the labour of performing authenticity as a documentary subject or filmmaker – which is becoming increasingly relevant as more and more sex workers are asked to speak for and about their profession in mainstream media.

Therefore, in creating a work that is both a collection of nonfiction video pieces about pornography as well as a commentary on the documentary form itself, my thesis seeks to creatively examine and embody an existing gap in our understanding of how to share, tell, and approach sex worker stories.

## PROJECT OVERVIEW

In exploration of these concepts, I have produced two video works and one text –

<sup>9</sup> While ‘documentary’ falls under the ‘nonfiction’ umbrella, I mean to specifically address *documentary film* in this thesis. When I use the term ‘nonfiction,’ it is to refer to the larger concept of stories-based-on-fact – however, this is always in service of pointing to broader implications of a conclusion drawn *specifically* about documentary film. The purview of this project is limited, in that it doesn’t address the many other forms of nonfiction storytelling – text, photography, podcasting, etc. – or explore types of non-documentary nonfiction film. Still, the terms ‘documentary’ and ‘nonfiction’ are closely tied, and a non-documentary filmmaker may read and expand on this work to address other nonfiction forms in future.

<sup>10</sup> Jiz Lee and Rebecca Sullivan, “Porn and Labour: The Labour of Porn Studies,” *Porn Studies* 3, no. 2 (2016): 104-06, doi:10.1080/23268743.2016.1184474.

<sup>11</sup> Lee and Sullivan, “Porn and Labour: The Labour of Porn Studies.”

Though this outline – in preceding the *Literature Review*, *Theoretical Framework*, and *Methodology* – gestures toward concepts and processes yet-to-be-defined, I introduce these works here so that the reader may softly hold them in mind while navigating the forthcoming formulations and references. This is done in hopes of imbuing the rhetoric with a volume, force, and vitality, as well as confirm that what *you’re* seeing is what *I’m* seeing.

(1) *How to Edit (a porno)* – a short-form, multi-screen video art piece addressing research questions (3) and (4) through an examination of the language of editing. The work ultimately establishes ‘embodiment’ of the editing process as a pathway toward ‘radical subjectivity’ in documentary film production.

(2) *Aleatoric Exercises (for the video editor)* – a zine of text and images which addresses research questions (3) and (4) by exploring generative creative instructions and tools of chance.

(3) *How to Edit (a documentary)* – a long-form documentary assemblage that addresses research questions (1), (2), and (4) through the complex layering of found footage, voiceover, screen recordings, and performance. This film is the conceptual attempt at enacting a ‘radically subjective’ approach to documentary filmmaking, as well as investigating how authenticity is operationalized in pornography.

Each iteration circling closer and closer toward the nexus of a unified theory of embodiment and subjectivity, these three works, more than anything, are an effort in experimentation –

### *How to Edit (a porno)*

If *(a documentary)* is the creative attempt at a ‘radically subjective’ film, *(a porno)* provides the conceptual framework necessary to understand and produce that work. Comprising the primary media of the film is a short foot fetish scene, which I am both seen and shown in the process of editing. Running 7 minutes and 51 seconds, the film renders visible the unseen labour and ellisions of video editing, seeking to address research questions (3) and (4) in an effort to elucidate a ‘radically subjective’ approach to the consumption and creation of film and, more specifically, pornographic media.

At its climax, *How to Edit (a porno)* reveals – in polyptych glory – each layer of a film’s construction, demonstrating that every completed edit is not merely its polished, public face, but hides an inverted narrative containing all of the frames that ‘hit the cutting room floor,’ so to speak. Folded neatly in the crannies between each clip on the timeline,<sup>12</sup> this unseen film is physically exorcized in *(a porno)* through a re-embodiment of the editing process.

### *Aleatoric Exercises (for the video editor)*

The product of overflowing ideas, *Aleatoric Exercises* seeks to synthesize a future’s worth of chance- and rule-based exercises for the video editor. Organized as a zine, the work

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<sup>12</sup> For non-video editors, I want to clarify that ‘timeline’ refers to the area where clips are arranged and cut in non-linear editing (NLE) software programs such as Premiere Pro, Avid Media Composer, and Final Cut.

speaks to research questions (3) and (4), stretching the ‘mind and tools of the video editor’ toward the development of a ‘radically subjective’ approach to filmmaking and film-watching.

While similar sets of instructions – most notably as part of the avant-garde art movement, Fluxus – have been developed for performance art, theater, music, dance, and the all-around enactment of ‘happenings,’<sup>13</sup> video editing and, specifically, the advancement of non-linear video editing, offers its own, unique ‘tools of chance.’

In attempting each exercise, strange films will emerge, bad films and failures, but also revelatory connections – created in the linkages between sequenced clips, as well as within the body of the editor, itself a tool of chance.

### *How to Edit (a documentary)*

This is the attempt –

Part instructional, part experimental creative act, *How to Edit (a documentary)* is the culmination of thinking and dreaming in ‘radical subjectivity.’ Framed as *not* a documentary, but as a film that is ‘true,’ (*a documentary*) begins as a playfully satirical ‘how to’ de- and re-construction of a typical documentary film opening. With a runtime of approximately 35 minutes, the piece soon reveals itself as a kind of confessional, reflexive, and formally organized performative documentary assemblage exploring research question (1), (2), and (4).

A work of many layers, I will begin here by outlining the overarching conceptual goal of (*a documentary*). As addendum, the film’s constituent parts and source materials are more thoroughly deconstructed in *Appendix 1.1, A Poetics of Labour* –

At its core, (*a documentary*) is composed of interview clips selected from updates to Domain 2, an archive which dates back to the early 2000s.<sup>14</sup> Formerly an active channel on the multi-channel porn website, Domain 1, now a pared-back landing page with limited updates, at the height of its production, Domain 2 featured interviews with models and staff members (comprising the media utilized here), community event coverage, and on-set behind-the-scenes footage. It is intended as a true and real, documentary-style peek behind the curtains of a well-known porn studio.<sup>15</sup>

Seeking to allow the material and its subjects to speak for themselves, I did not select the included interview clips as a discerning filmmaker, but as an indeterminate *compression algorithm* – utilizing chance operations to relinquish editorial control of the narrative. The sequence that emerges is contradictory, fluid, and *true to the material*.<sup>16</sup>

Taken in whole, (*a documentary*), though reflexive in nature and clearly the product of an editorial hand, remains a testament to radically subjective nuance. In connecting and contextualizing the interviews presented through narrative voiceover and performative interstitials, this work serves to destabilize ‘truth’ as objective, as well as establish an aesthetic that can reflect this conclusion *appropriately*. What is real, what is fake, and why does it matter?

<sup>13</sup> Margaret Iverson, ed., *Chance* (Whitechapel Gallery and The MIT Press, 2010).

<sup>14</sup> I want to note here that all of the material comprising these interviews has been made publicly available, for free, in updates to Domain 2. In (*a documentary*) (which will not be shared or screened publicly), the faces of all performers featured in the interviews have been obscured, and their names redacted from the audio and captions.

<sup>15</sup> Domain 1 and Domain 2 represent the redacted names of the two websites which contribute material to this project. Domain 2 is a *subchannel* of Domain 1, which refers to the larger, umbrella entity.

<sup>16</sup> This discussion of chance – and its relationship to the editor – is continued in the *Theoretical Framework* section.

Rather than *delegitimizing* the piece as a ‘documentary,’ this approach suggests to the viewer: you have all the information, now it’s up to you to draw your own conclusions.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Breaking the questions posed by these works into their individual parts, several areas of inquiry and, thus, sources of relevant literature emerge: Porn studies (and, specifically, its relationship to Labour Studies), feminist documentary film and video art, and performance –

### *Porn Studies*

As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, the majority of the literature within Porn Studies addresses reception, consumption, and distribution rather than the production of pornography. Porn Studies, of course, is a newly established field in development and, as such, there are a number of understandable gaps in the discourse. Recently, however, several Porn Studies scholars have begun to explore what it means to *make* pornography, situating it within the capitalist, neoliberal economic framework.

Of these scholars, my work draws most extensively on Heather Berg, who addresses the performance of authenticity specifically, identifying it as a condition of labour as based on her ethnographic observations of the adult industry and extensive interviews with porn performers.<sup>17</sup> Berg works largely from a Marxist feminist perspective of labour, a discourse which identifies affective labour *as* labour, and, specifically, as labour that is commodified.

Alan McKee, in his work on *Pornography as a Creative Industry*, makes similar connections to Berg, though through a slightly different lens. Rather than situating authenticity at the crux of his examination of labour in the adult industry, McKee identifies a number of parallels between porn production and other creative industries. In his work, McKee suggests that pornographers and creatives are subject to a similar lack of creative control, both face challenges of nomadic labour, and operate within a structure that fiscally rewards producers over performers.<sup>18</sup> This is a critique of the ‘exceptionalist’ view of porn production, and is seminal for its evaluation of pornography within an existing, well-established discourse of labour.

A third key text to my thesis work is *Performing Labour: Ethical Spectatorship and the Communication of Labour Conditions in Pornography* by Karly-Lynne Scott. This work – while similar in subject to Berg and McKee – is unique for its discussion of the use of documentary evidence as a tool for demonstrating the ethical production of pornography, challenging its reception as an authentic account and suggesting, rather, that it is an extension of the pornographic performance itself.<sup>19</sup>

Also examining ‘realness’ and the labour of porn are a number of pornographers and performers, whose work is primarily autoethnographic or interview-based. This includes Jiz Lee and Lorelei Lee – key figures in the Bay Area porn community – as well as Vex Ashley, Gala Vanting, Shine Louise Houston, Tristan Taormino, and others, all of whom help ground the debate over what makes porn *feminist* or *ethical*, and what that means for workers. There are a range of opinions on this topic – many performers believe in the revelatory power of authenticity

<sup>17</sup> Heather Berg, *Porn Work: Sex, Labor, and Late Capitalism* (USA: The University of North Carolina Press, 2021).

<sup>18</sup> Alan McKee, "Pornography as a Creative Industry: Challenging the Exceptionalist Approach to Pornography," *Porn Studies* 3, no. 2 (2016): 107-19, doi:10.1080/23268743.2015.1065202.

<sup>19</sup> Karly-Lynne Scott, "Performing Labour: Ethical Spectatorship and the Communication of Labour Conditions in Pornography," *Porn Studies* 3, no. 2 (2016): 120-32, doi:10.1080/23268743.2016.1184475.

as *the* means of resistance to mainstream pornography, while others find the concept limiting or hypocritical. Of course, performers and their experiences are diverse, and there is no one way to produce porn well. This project seeks to embrace such multiplicity.

Though a departure from the specifically labour-focused work above, truly the vast majority of scholarship relevant to this thesis that currently exists within Porn Studies explores the discourse of authenticity as concept, and more broadly. Hannah Frith's work on the representation of the orgasm, Emily Crutcher's examination of *The Politics of Authentic Female Pleasure in Pornography*, Valerie Webber's discussion of mobilized authenticities, and Elizabeth Bernstein's text on authenticity and commerce all serve to illuminate the ways in which authenticity operates as a pornographic device.

## Labour Studies

A brief note on Labour Studies –

As brought out in the writing of Berg and McKee in particular, this thesis relies heavily on Marxist feminist theories of labour, an understanding which serves to contextualize related work on cognitive capitalism and cognitive labour and support a conversation around worker precarity in the gig economy and creative industries today. Within this system, workers have a lack of job security and benefits, and there exists an expectation to 'love what you do, do what you love,' which – like authenticity in porn performance – undercuts and elides the demand for improved labour conditions.

Supporting this dimension of my thesis are foundational texts from Silvia Federici, Kathi Weeks, Cristina Morini, and Andrea Fumagalli. While these scholars do not address the labour of pornography specifically, their work establishes an understanding of what it means to be a precarious worker today. As such, though the central focus of this thesis is labour *within* a Porn Studies context, I mention these writers here because their work forms the substructure supporting porn researchers who *do* take up questions of labour and production.

## Feminist Documentary Film & Video Art

Established in response to an oppressive and exclusive patriarchal demand for a particular 'truth,' feminist documentarians found lying "to be a transgressive site of unstable play, by definition always moving, always new, ever adaptive."<sup>20</sup> A subjective approach to documentary is unpredictable, and thus, uncontrollable – a threat to capital and the patriarchy. As Alexandra Juhasz, who writes extensively on feminist documentary, states:

"When they lie, women seek the same freedom [as men]. And the hybrid art video/documentary is just the form through which to enact the particular violence that is the destabilization of the truth. Instead of getting stuck demanding merely our fair share of men's hold on subjective authority (as evidenced in women's claim to standard documentary style), lying videos demand a flexible, mobile position from and style with which to speak about the complex self and her needs."<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Alexandra Juhasz, "Bad Girls Come and Go, But a Lying Girl Can Never Be Fenced In," *Feminism and Documentary* (1999): 95-116.

<sup>21</sup> Juhasz, "Bad Girls Come and Go," 112.

Importantly, “this is not to abandon sexuality, history, or identity... but to demand multiplicity, contradiction, and fluidity within the terrain of representation.”<sup>22</sup> Quoting the legendary visual artist Carolee Schneemann: “The real dance is with the material.”<sup>23</sup>

This is not to say, however, that *such* a radically subjective approach to documentary is the standard – even among its feminist practitioners. In her work on the history and aesthetics of feminist documentary film, Julia Lesage acknowledges a visible difference in the way feminist filmmakers utilize cinéma vérité, but holds that this is not to the exclusion of realism. Essentially, her position is that while feminist documentary film engages with a realist present, it simultaneously explores a subjective future. Lesage interprets this distinction through a political lens, establishing that:

“Clearly, the powerless will want power, especially once they specifically define the ways they have systematically been robbed of it. But women also want to imagine what that power would be if executed in a form commensurate with Feminist goals.”<sup>24</sup>

Diane Waldman and Janet Walker’s collection on *Feminism and Documentary* further grounds Lesage’s historical and aesthetic overview, contributing rich examples of feminist documentary in practice and highlighting the diversity of the ‘feminist documentary’ label.<sup>25</sup>

This is a label which overlaps extensively with the video artist. Guided by the tenants of feminist documentary practice, many experimental and avant garde filmmakers have found ‘video art’ to be the clearest expression of their message and aesthetic – a connection which is illustrated more deeply in the section on *Influential Works*.

## Performance

Finally, a turn to performance. A significant subgenre in the sphere of feminist documentary and video art, performance in *action* and performativity as *concept* are core to this project in a variety of ways –

While this work, in its current iteration, is not performed live,<sup>26</sup> it nevertheless contains multiple layers of performance – addressing the performative nature of pornography *through* narrative told in the performative documentary mode. A presentation visibly and intentionally constructed by myself, an editor of both documentary and porn, these questions become particularly poignant when contextualized by the reflexive nature of this project.

Closely tied to the theories of embodiment and post-structuralism which comprise the theoretical backbone of this thesis, Amelia Jones, in her work *Body Art: Performing the Subject*, establishes the performative art practice as a particularly revolutionary kind of “intersubjective engagement” which dislocates the Cartesian subject – theorized by Descartes as rational, objective, and totally separate from the ‘body,’ or ‘object’ – in favor of a re-unification of

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 115.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 115.

<sup>24</sup> Julia Lesage, “The Political Aesthetics of the Feminist Documentary Film,” *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 3, no. 4 (1978), doi:10.1080/10509207809391421.

<sup>25</sup> Diane Waldman and Janet Walker, eds., *Feminism and Documentary* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

<sup>26</sup> Please refer to the section on *Afterlife* for a brief overview of future live-performed iterations of this work.

body-self.<sup>27</sup> Performance is a unique kind of confrontation, according to Jones, which has the power to “open out subjectivity *as* performative, contingent, and always particularized rather than universal.”<sup>28</sup>

In its preference for the particular, performance is *intimate, personal, and vulnerable*. Therefore, in order to more deeply and knowledgeably reflect on what it means to publicly share such personal stories, it is also necessary to touch on reflexive texts in the field of embodied and autoethnographic performance. To this end: Susana Pendzik, Renee Emunah, and David Read Johnson write in *The Self in Performance* about autobiographical or autoethnographic performance as a form of therapy and positive catharsis.<sup>29</sup> Offering a perspective on *Embodied Performance as Applied Research, Art, and Pedagogy*, Julie-Ann Scott delves into the ways in which performance can be mobilized as a research and teaching strategy.<sup>30</sup> Addressing the additional burden borne by the ‘other’ in performing an autobiographical piece, Dani Snyder-Young’s work, *Here to Tell Her Story*, is particularly adept at clarifying the vulnerability of sharing an experience with those who may not ever or fully understand the meaning of the performance.<sup>31</sup>

Lastly: contributing a documentary perspective to the performance discourse, Thomas Waugh’s work in *The Right to Play Oneself* situates both the filmmaker and subject as creating either a representational or presentational performative structure within a documentary work. While each structure constitutes a performance, the former hides and denies artifice while the latter exploits it. Tracing the use of these performative constructs through the history of documentary film, Waugh provides critical context to the multi-layered performances that this project examines and enacts.<sup>32</sup>

To these ends, the primary documentary mode employed by this project is the performative. The performative mode of documentary – established as one of six modes of documentary by American documentary theorist Bill Nichols – figures the filmmaker within the story, which is often abstractly told so as to connect the filmmaker’s own experience to a larger philosophical or political point. This mode of documentary does not attempt to persuade the audience, instead leaving narratives ‘as is’ – complicated and unresolved.<sup>33</sup> To a lesser extent, this work also references the reflexive and poetic modal traditions, the first of which comments on the documentary form itself, while the latter employs subjective storytelling through the creation of associations and patterns rather than exposition.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

If Porn Studies, feminist documentary film and video art, and performance are the three structural pillars of this thesis, then the framework of embodied editing and its submission to

<sup>27</sup> Amelia Jones, *Body Art: Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

<sup>28</sup> Jones, *Body Art*, 14.

<sup>29</sup> Susana Pendzik, Renee Emunah, and David Read Johnson, *The Self in Performance: Autobiographical, Self-revelatory, and Autoethnographic Forms of Therapeutic Theatre* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

<sup>30</sup> Julie-Ann Scott, *Embodied Performance as Applied Research, Art and Pedagogy* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2018).

<sup>31</sup> Dani Snyder-Young, “‘Here to Tell Her Story’: Analyzing the Autoethnographic Performance of Others,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 17, no. 10 (2011): 943-51, doi:10.1177/1077800411425149.

<sup>32</sup> Thomas Waugh, “Acting to Play Oneself: Performance in Documentary,” In *The Right to Play Oneself: Looking Back on Documentary Film* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 71-92.

<sup>33</sup> Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, 2nd ed. (USA: Indiana University Press, 2001).



chance forms the generative bridge that I use to walk between them, and *toward* a fitting methodology –

### *Embodied Editing*

*What is significance? It is meaning, insofar as it is sensually produced.*<sup>34</sup>  
– Roland Barthes

I'm a video editor. A slicer and dicer. Also, I hate computers –

The tools of post-production are visceral, physical – cut, slip, grab, stretch, trim – and I can feel them while I'm editing, each mouse click giving time to a modern dance routine being choreographed in my head. And, as 'haptic' has become the latest trend in editing software (a nod, perhaps, to its tactile origins on the Moviola),<sup>35</sup> I suspect I'm not the only one. This impulse is a muffled cry for help from the post-world. It says: my body is a tool and I want to use it.

Acknowledging the body as a tool renders visible the mysterious, hidden, and solitary process that is most video editing. A common joke among documentary video editors is that the director *thinks* they have the power, but really it's the editor who controls the story. The set of footage captured by the cinematographer holds within it many narratives, many meanings, many trajectories, and it's the editor who must decide which one will surface, and how. As such, in order to properly *read* film, one must understand what editors do and how they make choices. Every cut, trim, omission, or inclusion is a re-contextualization, and one whose almost ubiquitous obfuscation can produce dangerously 'truth-y' narratives, particularly in stories told about underrepresented or stigmatized communities.

As a means of resisting these ellisions, I propose an *embodiment* –

This 'embodied' approach to editing can look like dancing or sound like music, translating the digital tools of post-production into the physical world. Within this new language, a cut becomes a clap, raising one's arm increases or decreases the opacity of a clip, and footage is trimmed by the feet.<sup>36</sup> At its most pure, moving an object from one side of the room to the other is a kind of corporeal edit. In conceptualizing and manipulating a piece of video footage in the same way, the static and reliable narrator, 'Film,' is destabilized and recontextualized as an object to be *acted upon*. Brought to its conceptual conclusion in (*a porno*):

"As... a video editor, my body is a tool. This tool builds and it demolishes. Like a hammer. Except rather than constructing buildings, it constructs narratives. There are many ways for me to use this tool to shape the world around me."

Such a toolification allows for the composition of editing *scores* to be read and shared, reproduced and manipulated. As such, by *revealing* what goes into an edit, this embodiment simultaneously *democratizes* the edit. Everyone has a body, and that body can make story.

<sup>34</sup> Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975).

<sup>35</sup> For more information on the history of film editing and other technologies, I recommend Mark J. P. Wolf's work, *The Routledge Companion to Media Technology and Obsolescence*.

<sup>36</sup> Interestingly, though out of the scope of this project, a reimagining of the body as software also possibilizes a new set of *hardwares* – home, workplace, neighborhood – one's movements through space triggering the display of video and audio clips in a uniquely exploratory sequence. An idea for another project...

In addition to rendering the internal intricacies of the edit transparent and readable to an audience, ‘embodied editing’ speaks to an essential deepening of one’s own relationship – *individually* – to the edit. As it is “through our bodies that our actions, subjectivities and relations with others are realized, materialized and made visible,”<sup>37</sup> embodiment is an essential means of alternative knowledge creation. Artist Ivana Müller, in the work *Under My Skin*, invites guests to “step inside” her body, guiding them through a series of rooms, each of which “contains different body processes, accomplished by the body’s inhabitants.”<sup>38</sup> In the Mending Room, for example, seamstresses demonstrate “how body tissue can be repaired” by stitching together its cloth representation. I understand the ‘embodied edit’ as a similar impulse – it reveals an interior knowledge of a film’s constituent parts, illustrating *how* those parts come to be, and then *physically performing* them for the purpose of deeper understanding.

Deeply rooted in the contemporary arts<sup>39</sup> and practiced across the social sciences,<sup>40</sup> the *doing* and *feeling* of visceral experience communicates what distanced study cannot. What the mind fails to grasp, the body instinctively understands. Therefore, in *reconnecting* the perceiving subject to the activity of their experiencing body, the modernist Cartesian division between the two is shattered, resulting in an *objectification of self*. This is a portal through which myself-as-object (body) can *teach* myself-as-subject (mind) all that it *knows* but cannot *speak*.

### Chance Operations

Within this framing, it is easy to imagine how an ‘embodied editor’ might become drunk with power, so to speak. In control of the footage, of the narrative, such an editor is confronted with the capacity to cut, to create, *literally* in the palm of their hand. Alone, while the embodied edit does promote transparency, it may still be easily subsumed by a singular viewpoint or bias – that of the editor. Such power has the potential to reproduce the monolithic narratives that this project attempts to resist. Therefore, in order to properly wield the new knowledges possibilized by the embodied edit, a hierarchical *flattening* is necessary.

As a framework, chance requires a *submission* of the author to a power separate and greater than themselves: the material. Further muddying the subject-object dichotomy, chance embraces a “multiplicity, contradiction, and fluidity” (to revisit Juhasz) through the appropriation and recontextualization of media – not by the artist, but by the material itself. By emphasizing *process* over *product*, chance operations create connection and meaning through the use of rules and instructions to some unknown, indefinite end – independent of the filmmaker’s will. To this end, chance is *one* means of engaging the embodied edit *toward* a radically subjective intervention to truth and making.

Tracing the roots of chance operations in art, specifically, is an astounding business –

Popularized throughout the 1960s and 70s by the rise of Fluxus, a multidisciplinary avant-garde art movement, the employment of ‘chance procedures’ has been applied most recognizably in theater, dance, music, visual art, and the performance of ‘happenings.’<sup>41</sup> In its

<sup>37</sup> Torkild Thanem and David Knights, *Embodied Research Methods* (London: SAGE Publications, Ltd., 2019).

<sup>38</sup> Ivana Müller, “Performance Documentation 6: Under My Skin,” In *Anatomy Live: Performance and the Operating Theatre*, ed. Maaïke Bleeker (Amsterdam University Press, 2008).

<sup>39</sup> Sally O’Reilly, *The Body in Contemporary Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, Ltd., 2009).

<sup>40</sup> Here, I suggest a reading of Ben Spratz’s *What a Body Can Do* and *Blue Sky Body*, which, to quote the latter, chart “a course through more than twenty years of embodied, artistic, and scholarly research.” For a more philosophical discussion, Vivian Carol Sobchack’s work on *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* is brilliant.

<sup>41</sup> Iverson, *Chance*.

manifesto, as penned by George Maciunas in 1963, Fluxus suggests *flux* – defined as the “act of flowing” – so as to “promote a revolutionary flood and tide in art” based on its ability “to affect, or bring to a certain state, by subjecting to, or treating with, a flux.”<sup>42</sup> Flow, exchange.

While the Fluxus movement cites a number of creative influences – particularly Marcel Duchamp and Dada – arguably the most significant figure in the development of aleatoric art is John Cage. After beginning his life-long study of Zen Buddhism in the 1940s, Cage began exploring indeterminacy and chance as structuring tools in the development of his experimental musical compositions.<sup>43</sup> Indeterminacy “created the preconditions for a work... to be arranged by an artist without the artist knowing exactly how it would turn out,”<sup>44</sup> and, while the theoretical root of this concept is certainly Buddhist at its core, more closely informing the development of Fluxus and chance operations in art is its philosophical contemporary, post-structuralism.

Developed in France in the 1960s as a reaction to what was perceived as a limiting structuralist reasoning, post-structuralism is defined by Roland Barthes’ declaration of “The Death of the Author,” and, thus, the *birth* of the reader.<sup>45</sup> Similarly theorized by the psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan, as well as Gilles Deleuze, this speaks to the Fluxian understanding that “the radicality of the concept of indeterminate composition lies in its mandate that the artist intentionally give up control of the work’s outcome.”<sup>46</sup> This was seen to produce a more *realistic* representation of the world. Insofar as the world is *inherently* full of chance, to utilize chance operations is to *acknowledge* this truth by letting the material speak for itself – an arguably less ‘chance-y’ approach than relying on the biased, narrow perspective of a single artist.<sup>47</sup>

To this end, chance operations serve as a kind of generative creative frame, producing limitations and ‘rules’ so as to produce an unexpected, surprising result. This requires a *submission* of the editor. In overcoming the editorial desire to simplify, streamline, and clarify, a more ‘true-to-life’ contradiction, multiplicity, and redundancy may flourish. In this manner, *chance* teaches the embodied editor what radical subjectivity can *look* and *feel* like – i.e. multiple, non-hierarchical – and without which, the filmmaker would remain unilaterally powerful, limited in scope and perspective.

## INFLUENTIAL WORKS, *Examples of Theory in Practice*

Theoretical by nature, the tenants of this project’s framework appear abstract until practically applied. Drawing influence from video, music, and text works, I have culled three exemplars from the pool of interconnected artists participating in the advancement of subjectivity and embodiment through experimental documentary storytelling and chance-based operations – Chick Strand, John Cage, and Yoko Ono. These artists show how the above theoretical framework actually *appears* in practice, how it is *actualized*. For a more extensive list of recommendations and influences, please refer to the *Mediography* at the end of this thesis.

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<sup>42</sup> George Maciunas, *Fluxus Manifesto*, 1963.

<sup>43</sup> Please refer to the *Influential Works* section for a further – and more specific – discussion of John Cage’s application of chance operations in *Williams Mix*.

<sup>44</sup> Julia Robinson, “The Sculpture of Indeterminacy,” In *Chance*, ed. Margaret Iverson (Whitechapel Gallery and The MIT Press, 2010), 103.

<sup>45</sup> Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” in *Image-Music-Text*, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (New York: The Noonday Press, 1977), 142-148.

<sup>46</sup> Robinson, “The Sculpture of Indeterminacy,” 103.

<sup>47</sup> Iverson, *Chance*.

### Video: *Soft Fiction*, by Chick Strand

Chick Strand is an experimental documentary filmmaker and video artist, working primarily out of California and Mexico throughout the 1960s, 70s, and 80s.<sup>48</sup> Utilizing techniques of superimposition and juxtaposition in an assemblage aesthetic, Strand's films challenge the objectivity of nonfiction through a seamless blending of documentary and the avant-garde. Somewhat unappreciated in her time – coming at “a historical moment in which American experimental film collected around two primary tendencies – the lyrical and the analytical”<sup>49</sup> – Strand's work received greater recognition in the 1990s and 2000s, paralleling an increased understanding of and appreciation for subjective artistry in documentary film.<sup>50</sup>

Arguably her masterpiece, *Soft Fiction* is a black-and-white, 60-minute, 16mm “tour-de-force assemblage of first-person interviews, found audio, performances and poetic imagery.”<sup>51</sup> While Strand is due an entire thesis-worth of attention, as space and time are limited, I recommend Marsha Kinder's work in *Film Quarterly* on *Soft Fiction*, as well as Rebekah Rutkoff's *Soft Fictions* in *On Women's Film* for a thorough overview of the work. Here, I will be brief –

Labeled by many a ‘personal documentary,’ *Soft Fiction* interweaves the deeply emotional stories of five, seemingly unconnected women. It is a sensual, intimate film – the frame full with closely-held faces, gestures, abstracted shadow and light. Three of the five stories are directly addressed to camera in long interview takes, one is read from a letter, and another is told in voiceover as the subject is seen preparing and eating breakfast nude. Performative interstitials, as well as a fictive intercut narrative, transition and link the women's stories.

As the title suggests, *Soft Fiction* blurs the line between the real and the imagined, questioning the ‘nonfiction’ expectation through Strand's obvious artistic manipulation and presence in the piece, as well as an embrace of the ‘unreliable narrator’ as valid, valuable. In the work's second story, Karen Amend, a (real) graphology expert, reads a letter written by a woman describing a sexual experience with a group of cowboys at a rodeo. The anonymous author is seen only briefly, her hands penning the story in closeup, before Strand cuts to Amend examining the text of the letter with a magnifying glass. This examination suggests a disbelief in the veracity of the letter, which Amend proceeds to read through smiles, sneers, side glances, and added commentary. In the retelling, it is unclear if Amend is admiring or shocked by the woman's sexual encounter, just as it is unclear to the viewer if the story itself is meant to be comical or terrifying.

Certainly, as Strand herself testifies in conversation about the film, it is never explicitly stated that the stories presented in *Soft Fiction* are entirely or even partly true. When asked if the piece is “related to documentary in any way at all?” Strand replies: “No, not really. I shoot documentary style... I don't know to this day whether one person's story is true or not. I mean, it has to do with memory.”<sup>52</sup> At the time, this narrative instability, coupled with the film's content, made screenings controversial, particularly among her feminist contemporaries. As Strand

<sup>48</sup> Maria Pramaggiore, “Chick Strand's Experimental Ethnography,” In *Women's Experimental Cinema*, ed. Robin Blaetz (Chapel Hill: Duke University Press, 2007), 188-210.

<sup>49</sup> Rebekah Rutkoff, “Soft Fictions,” In *On Women's Films: Across Worlds and Generations*, eds. Ivone Margulies and Jeremi Szaniawski (Bloomsbury Academic & Professional, 2019), 314-315.

<sup>50</sup> Pramaggiore, “Chick Strand's Experimental Ethnography.”

<sup>51</sup> Vera Brunner-Sung, “SENSUOUS ETHNOGRAPHY,” *Sight and Sound* (Dec 2015): 53.

<sup>52</sup> Chick Strand and Kate Haug, “An Interview with Chick Strand” *Wide Angle* 20, no. 1 (1998): 128-29.

recalls, “When I first started showing *Soft Fiction*, I’d get shit from some feminists as if I wasn’t supposed to show it – as if I was supposed to lie about it somehow.”<sup>53</sup>

Before her involvement in the avant-garde film movement, Strand was a student of anthropology. The distinctions she draws in her *Notes on Ethnographic Film by a Film Artist* situate the traditional ethnographic film as that which doesn’t “pay much attention to the heart and soul of a culture,” and, as a result, “aren’t objective, truthful, or holistic because they make everyone seem the same.”<sup>54</sup> Rather, Strand believes that “the people can reveal their culture in new and exciting ways if only they are allowed to speak for themselves” – lest they become “bit actors in a culture play.”<sup>55</sup>

As a documentary filmmaker, the care that Strand exhibits for her subjects – working to hear “what the people feel is important to their lives” instead of “what the anthropologist feels is important to show”<sup>56</sup> – resists the assumption or demand that every individual fit into a convenient, preconceived narrative. In assuming or demanding authenticity of porn performers, a similarly narrow picture is portrayed. Touted as a radical alternative, it is imperative that we consider if *realness* is ‘what the people feel is important to their lives,’ or simply what the consumer wants to be shown. Unexamined, we risk “passing by the richness in individual human experience in favor of mass behavior patterns... that we must assume holds true for all individuals in society because we are not told otherwise.”<sup>57</sup>

While the production of pornography is not the subject of Strand’s work, her subjective approach and complex, layered, and asynchronous aesthetic propose a new radical alternative, successfully showing us what an ambiguously fictitious documentary film actually looks like. This approach foregrounds *experience* over knowledge, *showing* rather than telling. It is a visceral pursuit which paves a clear pathway from the practice of ‘embodied editing’ to ‘radically subjective’ film.

### *Music: Williams Mix, by John Cage*

In 1952, John Cage composed a 4’15” work for eight tracks of ¼” magnetic tape, titling the musique concrète composition, *Williams Mix*. The original score, nearly 500-pages long, is a pattern for the cutting and splicing of sounds recorded on this tape. As described by Cage, this score is a “dressmaker’s pattern – it literally shows where the tape shall be cut, and you lay the tape on the score itself.”<sup>58</sup>

Originally conceived, these sounds fall into six categories: A (city sounds), B (country sounds), C (electronic sounds), D (manually produced sounds), E (wind produced sounds), and F (‘small’ sounds, requiring amplification). These sounds may be combined and recombined using chance operations<sup>59</sup> such that “someone else then could follow that recipe, so to speak, with other sources than I had to make another mix.”<sup>60</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Strand and Haug, “An Interview with Chick Strand,” 116-17.

<sup>54</sup> Chick Strand, “Notes on ethnographic film by a film artist,” *Wide Angle* (1978): 46-47.

<sup>55</sup> Strand, “Notes on ethnographic film by a film artist,” 47-48.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 48.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, 47.

<sup>58</sup> Richard Kostelanetz, *John Cage (ex)plain(ed)*, (New York: Schirmer Books, 1996).

<sup>59</sup> To compose *Williams Mix*, John Cage derived chance operations from the I Ching, or *Book of Changes*.

<sup>60</sup> Kostelanetz, *John Cage (ex)plain(ed)*, 73.

A tenant of his work, *Williams Mix* exemplifies Cage's "devotion to... accepting all sounds as equally legitimate,"<sup>61</sup> a non-hierarchical practice informed by his adherence to Zen Buddhism, appreciation of natural systems, and an anarchistic politic. This 'indeterminate music' (Cage's preferred term for the work) was "conceived to deny his [John Cage] intentional desires as completely as possible,"<sup>62</sup> an approach in keeping with his belief that art is "a process set in motion by a group of people" rather than "an object made by one person."<sup>63</sup> In this framework, which accepts that "music is everywhere, and everywhere *is* music," the role of the composer is in "teaching people to keep attuned to all the implicit music that their environment offers."<sup>64</sup>

As a documentary filmmaker, to approach a project with 'radical subjectivity,' one must appreciate and adopt a similar philosophy. Multiplicity of meaning flourishes in a non-hierarchical environment – all visual and auditory material is *equally* valuable, *equally* essential, and its meaning is created by *many* rather than one. Framed in this way, it is understood that there is no *one* truth, just as there is no *one* score, or *one* film. What is real, is subjective. Up to chance. A roll of the dice.

Importantly, the existence of multiple realizations of *Williams Mix* does not make any single version less authentic as a representation of the original score. If the authenticity of a determinate composition – what makes it, *it* – is contained in its unique arrangement of notes, then the authenticity of an *indeterminate* composition is, to some extent, a matter of chance as well. Authenticity, therefore, is unfixed, mutable. Introducing deep implications for both documentary film and pornography, the mutability of authenticity suggests that both truth *and* *untruth* can be authentic, and are *valuable* as 'implicit music' in the 'environment of sound' – broadly, life.

### *Text: Grapefruit, by Yoko Ono*

*Grapefruit*, written by Yoko Ono in 1964 and later republished with additional pieces and drawings in 1970, is self-described simply as "a book of instructions + drawings."<sup>65</sup> Akin to other instructional texts produced within and inspired by the Fluxus movement, *Grapefruit* is minimalist – direct, yet open-ended – containing a series of 'event scores' for imagined performance art pieces. The edition published in 1970 is divided into nine numbered sections: (1) MUSIC (2) PAINTING (3) EVENT (4) POETRY (5) OBJECT (6) FILMS (7) DANCE, (8) ARCHITECTURE PIECES dedicated to a phantom architect and (9) ON FILMS. There are Cloud Pieces and Conversation Pieces and a Painting to be Watered, ranging from one sentence imaginings to the hyper-specific:

TOUCH POEM FOR GROUP OF PEOPLE  
Touch each other.

1963 winter

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 79.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>65</sup> Yoko Ono, *Grapefruit* (USA: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

## WATERDROP PAINTING

Let water drop.  
 Place a stone under it.  
 The painting ends when a hole is drilled  
 in the stone with the drops,  
 You may change the frequency of the water-  
 drop to your taste.  
 You may use beer, wine, ink, blood, etc.  
 instead of water.  
 You may use typewriter, shoes, dress, etc.  
 instead of stone.

1961 autumn

Whimsical, serious, the significance of these instructions is not in the art they may hypothetically produce, but in the book's strict adherence to the 'hypothetical' as a methodological framework. In *Grapefruit*, the artist must relinquish control to the indeterminacy of material, of form, of participant, embracing the structure of rules in order to create opportunities for chance. Chance, in turn, promotes the 'happy accident,' a pathway to knowledge inaccessible from a held belief or existing perspective; it is the shattering of glass which produces the prism.

For Ono, this relinquishing is multi-layered. Explaining why she wrote *Grapefruit*, Ono states:

"I did it because it was so interesting to do an instruction piece. Why don't we do it in a way that you don't finish the piece but ask other people to finish it in their own way? And I thought: "Great." But you know what? It wasn't really that great because I was an old-fashioned artist, as well. And that part of me was saying, "I don't want anybody to even put a scratch on my work." That's how most artists felt. And I thought: "Oh, am I going to let somebody touch my piece and make it different?" And as soon as I thought that way, I thought, "That's why this piece is good. That's why we have to do that."<sup>66</sup>

Here, it is made clear that instructional media, *itself a work of art*, not only requires those who engage with the piece to release power over its products, but the artist composing the instructions, too, must acknowledge a vulnerability to transformation. The authorship of the work becomes shared and collective, adaptable to its practitioners and their individual desires or circumstances. *This* is a radical subjectivity. Flux, exchange.

To similar ends, the *Aleatoric Exercises* zine has been constructed to challenge limiting expectations, habits, and assumptions of the video editor, encouraging the material to assert itself as an equal author of the finished work, in tandem with the filmmaker. In applying this approach to documentary filmmaking, the perspective of the 'creator' is destabilized and challenged, opening the piece to opportunistic multiplicity, subjectivity, chance.

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<sup>66</sup> "Yoko Ono: One Woman Show: 1960–1971," MoMA, <https://www.moma.org/audio/playlist/15>.

## METHODOLOGY

The work of Strand, Cage, and Ono – through a creative application of the theoretical framework outlined in this thesis – illuminates generative methodological pathways towards the realization of an embodied, radically subjective approach to documentary filmmaking.

Tracing these pathways, this project employs a combination of methodologies – or bricolage – which I situate together within a creation-as-research framework. In order to generate the media that comprises the video works, I (1) collected found footage and (2) produced additional self-shot clips in the style of the performative, poetic, and reflexive documentary modalities. Once collected, this audio and visual ephemera was (4) re-cut through an embodied editing practice utilizing principles of chance-based operations to build a nuanced, complex, and open-ended narrative in the aesthetic of assemblage. Expanding on these concepts, I then (6) wrote and formatted a text- and image-based zine in order to encourage, guide, and inspire continued experimentation in the field.

### *Creation-as-Research*

I have employed what is best characterized as creation-as-research because of the emphasis that this project places on a simultaneous engagement with both theory and practice, such that each informs the other in a non-hierarchical, non-sequential manner. As such, the conclusions drawn at the close of this thesis are primarily those of process rather than product, because it is the act of creation itself that is “required in order for research to emerge.”<sup>67</sup>

By collecting a library of clips and then developing a language of editing to *recontextualize* those clips, my understanding of authenticity, labour, and pornography has been simultaneously built, transformed, and demonstrated. In this way, I see my work as “investigating the relationship between technology, gathering and revealing through creation, while also seeking to extract knowledge from the process” – a characteristic creation-as-research approach detailed by Owen Chapman and Kim Sawchuk in their work on *Research-Creation*.<sup>68</sup>

Considering the importance of technologies within the work as a creative and theoretical end in themselves, my project sits comfortably within the creation-as-research framework, and appropriately so. In order to explore the performative authenticity of porn and its relationship to documentary, I am best served by *performing* the *creation* of documentary work. Through this hands-on approach, I have been able to explore my research questions at another level of understanding: through an embodied engagement. Furthermore, on an ontological level, creation-as-research expands “what ‘is’ in the world by revealing new layers, permutations of reality,”<sup>69</sup> in much the same spirit and manner as my thesis questions propose.

By employing this approach, I hope to achieve and advance what is most revolutionary about creation-as-research, contributing to the methodology as “a form of intervention” which “contributes to knowledge in a profoundly different way from the academic norm.”<sup>70</sup> Within the scope of my project – which foregrounds a perspective rarely articulated within the Academy

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<sup>67</sup> Owen Chapman and Kim Sawchuk, “Research-Creation: Intervention, Analysis, and ‘Family Resemblances,’” *Canadian Journal of Communication* 37.1 (2012), 19.

<sup>68</sup> Chapman and Sawchuk, “Research-Creation,” 19.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, 21.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, 21.



and challenges traditional means of representing such a perspective – it is imperative that my *methodological* choice reflect and inform the intervention that is my *theoretical* choice.

## Assemblage

There is some degree of *assemblage* at every level of this project, and, as such, I figure it as the overarching methodological approach (within creation-as-research) toward which a number of sub-methods have been applied. Not only is the trio of creative works produced in this thesis *itself* an assemblage, the video pieces in particular – by incorporating and *combining* methods of the Compression Algorithm, Split-Screen and Sex Doll Surrogates, and a How-To framing – demonstrate a complex assemblage of both material and message –

‘Assemblage’ refers to the collection and recontextualization of disparate sources of visual and aural material – as well as, more theoretically, subjects, objects, authors. In dialogue with Claire Parnet, Gilles Deleuze offers the following as explanation of his conception of assemblage:

“What is an assemblage? It is a multiplicity which is made up of many heterogeneous terms and which establishes liaisons, relations between them, across ages, sexes and reigns – different natures. Thus, the assemblage’s only unity is that of a co-functioning: it is a symbiosis, a “sympathy.” It is never filiations, which are important, but alliances, alloys; these are not successions, lines of descent, but contagions, epidemics, the wind.”<sup>71</sup>

In methodological terms, assemblage – sister to the collage or ‘soft montage’<sup>72</sup> – involves the layering of media in order to *create* multi-layered meaning. Filipa César, an artist and filmmaker interested in the “fictional aspects of the documentary,”<sup>73</sup> offers a useful synonym: ciné-kinship.<sup>74</sup> In film, assemblage creates a *kinship* between unrelated media – allowing the material to speak across time, space, and theme, directly to each other. In (*a documentary*), this looks like an iPhone video of red squirming bugs next to found interview footage underneath a layer of abstract visuals and then ocean waves and then voiceover, etc. etc. – unrelated yet *relating*.

As an aesthetic, assemblage speaks of multiplicity, fluidity, the liminal –

“When you do not want to speak as a ‘knower,’ you talk with a lot of blanks and holes and question marks. Perhaps you have no desire to fix meaning, which may sometimes lead you to a place of nonsense. But, in language, even when you work with nonsense, people find meaning.”<sup>75</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 69.

<sup>72</sup> Harun Farocki, “Cross Influence/Soft Montage,” in *Harun Farocki: Against What? Against Whom?*, ed. Antje Ehmman and Kodwo Eshun (Berlin: Koenig Books, 2009).

<sup>73</sup> “Filipa César,” Video Data Bank, <https://www.vdb.org/artists/filipa-cesar>.

<sup>74</sup> Malini Guha, “Assemblage, Performance, Precarity,” *Feminist Media Histories* 7, no. 3 (2021): 82–103. <https://doi.org/10.1525/fmh.2021.7.3.82>.

<sup>75</sup> Trinh Minh-ha, interview by Erika Balsom, “‘There is No Such Thing as Documentary’: An Interview with Trinh T. Minh-ha,” *Frieze*, November 1, 2018, <https://www.frieze.com/article/there-no-such-thing-documentary-interview-trinh-t-minh-ha>.

Literally containing holes, openings, and portals as *questions*, the works produced in this thesis hold to the belief of renowned filmmaker Trinh Minh-ha, that “gaps could be manifestations of confusion but they also open up to new possibilities if we don’t try to fill them with the pre-known and the familiar.”<sup>76</sup>

This methodology is in harmony with the demand of creation-as-research that one remain forever a learner, rather than a ‘knower’ – so as to persist in openness to novel and unexpected discoveries in the process of *doing*. The assemblage method is also consistent with this project’s resistance to the reproduction of a singular, monolithic narrative of pornography and the porn star. No *one* frame or method could ever serve the multiplicity required of this work – it is only by embracing the overwhelming and contradictory *many* of assemblage that space is made for honest representation to emerge.

### *Compression Algorithm: The Death of the Author*

Unique to the assemblage created in (*a documentary*) is its adherence to a set of governing rules, in the form of the chance-based compression algorithm. In the interview-driven portion of the film, this algorithm does not determine the *arrangement* of clips, but rather which clips enter the language of the assemblage in the first place. As *one* technique of manufacturing assemblage, the compression algorithm connects the methodological approach of this project to the role of chance operations in supporting a ‘radically subjective’ embodied theoretical framework.

As (*a documentary*) explains, compression occurs at every level of the post-production process, resulting in both the removal and *literal fabrication* of data. Most video compression algorithms work by identifying relevant differences either between temporally adjacent frames (frame-to-frame) or spatially adjacent pixels (within a single frame).<sup>77</sup> These algorithms are categorized as inter- and intra-frame, respectively. Having identified these differences, the compression program can then *predict* or *eliminate* visual information in order to reduce overall file size, using smoothing motion as compensation to trick the eye and obscure its editorial hand.

As such, the selection and manipulation of the algorithm which controls this compression is an *art*, and reflects a series of intentional, creative choices which vastly impact the finished film. Applied more conceptually, video compression operates by ‘prioritizing’ one set of data over another – typically on the order of pixels and frames. If we extend this preference to operate, instead, on the order of *ideas* or *words* or *emotions*, the compression algorithm becomes a generative set of instructions, useful to the video editor as a tool of producing indeterminacy.

In this iteration of the project, the *algorithmic priority* dictated by myself-as-compressor is the word ‘authentic,’ as well as its synonyms and antonyms – such as real, fake, honest, illusion, true, perform, fantasy, dream, and others. Drawing on the set of interviews filmed for Domain 2, the algorithm highlights every occurrence of these words, *compressing* the total sum of footage into a selective group of clips.

The resulting sequence is an assemblage of disconnected, though unified statements – many seemingly inconsequential or contradictory, yet conveying deep meaning as a whole. Rather than editing *toward* a single narrative and *from* a single perspective, this method gives the

<sup>76</sup> Minh-ha, interview by Balsom, “‘There is No Such Thing as Documentary.’”

<sup>77</sup> By a ‘frame,’ I’m referring to one of the many still images that comprises a filmic moving image. For example, if a video clip is captured at 30 frames-per-second, that means there are 30 single still images in every one second of moving footage.

*audience* all of the answers. Therefore, if the question posed by the film is ‘authenticity,’ the viewer – made aware of how the editor has constructed the film and why – can draw their *own* conclusions from the array of equally legitimate responses presented. Put another way: by allowing *chance* to dictate the discursive core of the film, the author dies and the reader is born.

**\*\***As a tool of producing assemblage through chance, the compression algorithm is used to greatest effect in *How to Edit (a documentary)*.

### *The Split-Screen & Sex Doll Surrogates: Destabilizing Identity*

Split-screen is a tool of both disclosure and obfuscation. Utilized by special effects artists to seamlessly join two separate images, forming a single visual experience – enabling, for example, actress Hayley Mills to play twins in the 1961 film, *The Parent Trap* – the split-screen is also an effective means of collapsing time and space through the visible juxtaposition of image – used to great effect in *Requiem for a Dream* (2000) and *The Rules of Attraction* (2002). Made easier by the development of digital video technology and non-linear editing softwares, both uses of the split-screen – whether the viewer realizes it or not – signify a break in reality. In the latter formulation (disclosure), the split-screen visibly shatters the carefully constructed fantasy of linear film-time through unrealistic multiplicity. The former (obfuscation) attempts to *ellide* the construction of this fantasy, relying on ‘special effect’ to preserve a false reality that viewers have come to accept.<sup>78</sup>

Within this project, the split-screen operates as a tool of disclosure, conveying the simultaneous existence of multiple identities (or, alternatively, multiple truths about oneself) through the polyptych reveal of video editor *as* performer *as* a body which edits. It is *The Parent Trap* remake in which Hayley Mills is playing not only her own twin, but a set of triplets, or more – each child clearly, visibly the same actress, the replication of which the audience finds so disturbingly uncanny as to question the existence of a Hayley Mills at all.

The identity-destabilization of the split-screen in (*a porno*) is echoed by the self-shot performances in (*a documentary*), in which the artist is seen manufacturing and interacting with a ‘sex doll surrogate.’ The first of these dolls – taking the abstract form of a tentacled body pillow, complete with a suggestive pocket – is constructed from green-screen cloth so that one can *literally* project any set of fantasies, desires, thoughts, expectations onto its surface. This suggests a reprieve for the porn star: now that the doll can satisfy all pornographic demands, the *person* may be as they choose.<sup>79</sup>

Of the two performances which follow – both interactions between a live performer and a sex doll – similar questions are asked. Of the two bodies, one plastic and one flesh, are both performing? Is it possible to have a ‘real’ interaction with a sex doll? Deepening this inquiry, in the second of these performances, a flesh hand is seen stroking an exact copy of itself, reproduced in silicone. Does the nature of the interaction between sex doll and performer change when the ‘fake’ is a replica of the ‘real’?

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<sup>78</sup> Refer to Jim Bizzocchi’s work on *The Fragmented Frame: The Poetics of the Split-Screen* and Peter Matthew Ingrassia’s *The Split-Screen Aesthetic: Connecting Meaning Between Fragmented Frames* for a deeper examination of the split-screen as a filmic tool.

<sup>79</sup> Though not within the scope of this thesis, there is a fascinating connection to be made here to antiwork politics and the ‘refusal to work,’ as laid out in *A New Job to Unwork at: A Reader*, and theorized by Kathi Weeks in *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics and Postwork Imaginaries*.

The assumed distinction between subject (flesh) and object (plastic) becomes blurrier during the final performance, in which the hands that both *are* and *made* the sili-clone are shown extracting it from the mold, slowly carving away as if statue from stone, a birth. As the live hand adoringly cradles its silicone counterpart, it is clear that an objectification has occurred, and that it is *self*-inflicted. Reinforcing the radical potential of self-objectification, what is relevant about these performances is their destabilization of the distinction between the subject and the body. The philosophical investigations of French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty are poignant here:

“When I press my hands together, it is not a matter of two sensations felt together as one perceives two objects placed side by side, but of an ambiguous relationship in which both hands alternate the roles of ‘touching’ and being ‘touched’.”<sup>80</sup>

This is in keeping with the multiplicity-of-identity demanded by the framework of this project, insofar as a ‘radical subjectivity’ is that which refigures the subject not as fixed entity, but as multi-dimensional, and, potentially, in two different bodies or times or *screens* at once. Among other opportunities, this makes possible the practice of ‘embodied editing’ – in which the editor must be understood not only as self (subject) but as tool (object).

Embedded in this process are collisions and collusions of subject-object at every level. *What* is the subject? *Who* is the tool? Just as a subject may be *objectified*, what does it mean to *subjectify* an object? This is a step closer to radical subjectivity.

\*\*Each accomplishing a destabilization of identity, the split-screen methodology is used to greatest effect in *How to Edit (a porno)*, while the sex doll surrogates are operationalized in *How to Edit (a documentary)*.

#### *How-To: Do as I Say, Not as I Do*

As a frame, the ‘how-to’ structure is fairly common amongst video artists. Akin to the instructional impulse of a chance- or rule-based practice, the ‘how-to’ frame has proven useful in this project as a means of expressing a seemingly *true* thing while simultaneously suggesting that that thing is *false*.

First, an illustrative example –

In her 1975 work, *Semiotics of the Kitchen*, Martha Rosler – adhering to a strict formalist aesthetic and structure – demonstrates how to use an A to Z list of kitchen tools, becoming progressively more exaggerated and confrontational in her movements throughout the piece. At top level, this work is a simple instructional on the domestic arts; more deeply, it is clear that Rosler is commenting on gender oppression, expressing her concern that women are embroiled in a “system of harnessed subjectivity.”<sup>81</sup>

The effectiveness of this work is in the expectation of the instructional as a reliable resource delivered by a knowledgeable, trustworthy figure. After all, instructions are meant to tell you either how to do something for the first time, or how to do something *better*. Therefore,

<sup>80</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (New York and London: Routledge, 1962 [1945]), 106.

<sup>81</sup> “Semiotics of the Kitchen: Martha Rosler,” Video Data Bank, <https://www.vdb.org/collection/browser-artist-list/semiotics-kitchen>.

when Rosler delivers a multi-layered message, it is read as *insider knowledge*, and is subversive for its appropriation of what is considered important information to convey.

In both (*a porno*) and (*a documentary*), the work is framed in the same way. As ‘how-to’ instructionals, these films hook the viewer into *one* lesson on film editing, then deliver another. In (*a documentary*), for example, the mock open suggests to the viewer that they will learn how to put together a compelling documentary – and they *do*, but not the one they expect. Instead, the deeper message conveyed about the form of documentary editing is that, as a construction, it can be *obscured* and *obscuring* – to potentially damaging ends.

The ‘how-to’ seemed the best way to deliver this message because it, inherently, *deconstructs* in order to instruct – revealing all the constituent parts of the whole so as to make visible the hidden process of video editing. Furthermore, because this framing suggests a reliable narrator, it felt destabilizing to then allow that narrator to reveal their work as non-objective, or something less than true. This destabilization is in keeping with the blurry division between fiction and nonfiction suggested by this work, as well as its demand for meaning-multiplicity.

**\*\*While *Aleatoric Exercises* is constructed in a similarly instructional spirit, as a method of assemblage, the ‘how-to’ is used to greatest effect in *How to Edit (a porno)* and *How to Edit (a documentary)*.**

## Iteration

Core to the development of this project is the practice and philosophy of iteration. To iterate is to repeat, to loop, to return to and revise as a means of generating alternative knowledges. As articulated by Samuel Thulin in his work on *Looping Research-Creation*, the flexibility of looping is “a way of avoiding getting paralyzed by an impetus to move in a straight, pre-defined path.”<sup>82</sup> A foundational process within the research-creation methodology, I mention it again here for emphasis, as the ‘loopiness’ of iteration has proven uniquely essential to the development of this project in particular, and points the way toward its future.

At every stage of this thesis, progress has been made unexpectedly, through experimentation and surprise. In (*a documentary*), for example – before even conceiving of the visual and structural narrative, I filmed the series of performative attempts at manufacturing a ‘sex doll’ that now appear in the second half of the video. I didn’t know, at the time, quite what they meant – as surrogates, as mutable bodies – but in the process of producing those clips, I came to more deeply understand the relationship between embodiment and performative authenticity.

This naturally strange quality of the loop to fold-in on itself speaks to the iterative process of oscillating success and failure as one that is both finite and infinite. To some extent, I have been iterating on the ideas presented here my entire editorial career. And, while this thesis is the flower on which my fickle intellectual butterfly may come to rest – if only for a moment – all the ideas presented here are destined to pupate, dissolve, and remerge somewhere else.

## CRITICAL REFLECTION

Therefore, in the spirit of iteration, a moment of reflection –

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<sup>82</sup> Samuel Thulin, “Looping Research-Creation,” *NMC/MEDIA-N Journal of the New Media Caucus* 11, no. 3 (Fall 2015).

Before articulating what this project did, I will articulate what it did not: go as planned. Upended – as most things were – by the onset of the global pandemic at the beginning of 2020, what was originally intended as a *live* performance was adapted to a performance of *material*. Frankly, I couldn't be more grateful. Though a difficult pivot, I learned more, and *more deeply*, about the intersections of authenticity and pornography by physically *embodying* the editing process than I would have gained by producing the work in front of an audience. However, because *embodiment* was an insight gained during the experimentation done in adapting this work, I still don't fully understand what it means, or the extent of its potential as a theoretical approach.

This, I think, is a slight failing of the project – I *feel* so much more that the 'embodied edit' can be, but I'm not quite able to articulate it yet. The same is true of radical subjectivity – it is so *huge* and *abstract* and *powerful* an idea that, though I attempt to approach it from a specific angle, it bulges and leaks into under-researched and over-extended areas of interest. I recognize that this project is complicated, and perhaps a touch *too much* – and yet, I stand by that. In keeping with its subject of inquiry, this thesis is *multidimensional* and *contradictory* and *fluid* (to reference Juhasz one final time). Mapping connections is an inherently messy business, because, ultimately, *everything* is connected to everything else. This presents, however, a communication challenge. It is my intent that future iterations of this project start *smaller* – building out multiple pieces more thoroughly, carefully so as to come *together* to produce a whole.

The videos themselves – particularly (*a documentary*) – suffer a similar fate. The balance of (*a documentary*) gives too much weight to the interview portions, and does not pause long enough to acknowledge the self-shot performances. In trying to keep to the indeterminate rules of the compression algorithm, I did not cut out any of the interview clips selectively culled from the found footage. Ultimately, the algorithm did not compress the data into a small enough package, and its message is muddy. In revisiting this project, I may devise more appropriate rules, or perhaps not commit to them so indiscriminately.

Additionally, (*a documentary*) draws on what is ultimately a limited archive. Though useful in its application to this work as a proof-of-concept, the ideal raw media for producing an embodied, radically subjective documentary film is self-filmed interviews. As an editor – though I am in control of how I *manipulate* the footage – in utilizing material from the Domain 2 archive, I must accept the manner and intent with which the interviews were conducted. In this case, though I am familiar with the practice and ethics of the company, all of the interviews were conducted *at work*, while interviewees were *on the job*, and often in the presence of those making hiring decisions. Interviewees were also made aware that the interviews would be posted on a satellite site of Domain 1, and must curate their brand accordingly. This, of course, introduces interesting questions to a study of authenticity in pornography, but also colors how all answers must be read and interpreted.

As a deep and dated archive, I am also unable to individually contact each of the interviewees who appear in (*a documentary*). Therefore, though the found footage is freely available online – I will not be sharing or screening the edited work publicly. In future iterations, it is my intent to build a library of interview material in which the interviewees are aware of the aim and methods of the project, as well as the manner in which the work will be published and distributed. Again, this is a limitation exacerbated by the pandemic. Before the world shut down, I began conducting my own interviews to serve this purpose. Unable to take the trip I had planned to complete this work, I opted instead for the media presented here. Offering its own

unique treasures, the Domain 2 archive is fascinating, deep, and wide – it serves its purpose well, but I know I can do better by my community in future.

All the same, this project represents a *significant* advancement in my own understanding of who I am as an editor, and what this positionality can uniquely communicate and contribute to the world of documentary, of video art, of academic research, and more. Though much remains to be refined, I understand now *how* and *where* this refinement is necessary.

In reflecting on the purpose of this project, I return again and again to the quotidian, the grind, the stigma, the *work*. This, I remind myself, is why conversations about authenticity in porn matter. Authenticity is not solely a question of reception, of audience, of what *looks* real and why that sells – I have no interest in reproducing studies of what porn ‘looks’ like – rather, the operationalization of authenticity has *tangible* impacts on the day-to-day experience of porn performers on set, as well as the greater understanding of what sex work *is* and who sex workers *are*.

## AFTERLIFE

I proudly consider this work a proof-of-concept. Due to extenuating circumstances, as well as, more deeply, the natural and winding path of process, this project never achieved its final, planned, or desired form. And perhaps it never will; the concepts introduced to me through the realization of this thesis will be a life-long pursuit. Never complete. Always transforming, always repeating.

The next iteration of this work will come closer to the stated goals of my original proposal: in June of 2022, I will perform a live-edited VJ set at the Genoa Unconference. Organized by the Radical Film Network, this performance will employ the same ‘radically subjective’ filmmaking techniques I’ve explored in my thesis, with an added *liveness*.

Taking seriously Berg’s challenge to ‘trouble authenticity,’ as “ideas posited as radical alternatives can themselves become disciplining,”<sup>83</sup> the performance will explore *alternative* radical alternatives, examining the porn film festival as a site for radical alterity. Drawing on a queer understanding of film festivals as spaces for marginalized communities to organize, express, and identify to personal, social, and political ends,<sup>84</sup> the porn film festival may similarly provide room for the creation and appreciation of a radical approach to pornography that values the labour of performed authenticity from a divergent, instructive position.

The VJ set, performed using projection mapping and live-editing techniques, will feature an ephemeral layering of audio and video, drawn from a *new* set of media inspired by this one. In addition to an accompanying talk, this performance will be held with an in-person audience.

This is the next, natural step in the development of an embodied editing practice. To perform editing not only *in-my-person* but *in-person* is to more deeply perceive the body’s role as a tool in both filmmaking and porn-making. When I, as editor, create a cohesive film from disparate parts ‘[before your very eyes](#),’ you may come to understand why stories are told, and *how*. The building is a useful visual metaphor: if you witness the assembly of a house brick by brick, you will always know where the bathroom is, even as other passerby will perceive only a (relatively) two-dimensional manicured façade.

Beyond this, I envision progress only through process –

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<sup>83</sup> Heather Berg, "Porn Work, Feminist Critique, and the Market for Authenticity."

<sup>84</sup> Theresa Heath, "Saving Space: Strategies of Space Reclamation at Early Women’s Film Festivals and Queer Film Festivals Today," *Studies in European Cinema* 15, no. 1 (2018), doi:10.1080/17411548.2018.1432924.

My goal is to continue performing and honing the ‘embodied’ approach to video editing as a means of expanding on ‘radically subjective’ documentary filmmaking as a whole. For me, this looks like a diverse and deeply informed application of chance- and rule-based tools to my editing practice. Having only skimmed the surface, I see great possibility in the idea of an ‘aleatoric documentary,’ unifying embodiment and nonfiction in an attempt to come closer to a liberatory truth as non-truth – permission to be an authentically unreal self. It is my hope that, as a first step, this thesis finds solid footing.

## MEDIOGRAPHY

*Instructional texts created by artists engaged with a chance- or rule-based practice:*

George Brecht, [\*Motor Vehicle Sundown \(Event\)\*](#) (1960)

Sheila Heti, [\*From My Diaries \(2006–10\) in Alphabetical Order\*](#) (2022)

La Monte Young & Jackson Mac Low, [\*An Anthology\*](#) (1963)

Yoko Ono, [\*Grapefruit\*](#) (1964)

*Musical artists developing chance- or rule-based work for sound:*

John Cage, [\*Williams Mix\*](#) (1952 - 53)

& Larry Austin, [\*Williams \[re\]Mix\[ed\]\*](#) (1997 - 2001)

La Monte Young, [\*Compositions 1960\*](#) (1960)

John Zorn, [\*Cobra \(from Game Pieces\)\*](#) (1984)

*Visual artists and performances who utilize instructions, rules, chance, limitations, or some other set of constraints as a creative, generative tool:*

Marina Abramović, [\*Freeing the Memory\*](#) (1976)

Vito Acconci, [\*Following Piece\*](#) (1969)

John Baldessari, [\*Script\*](#) (1974)

Walead Beshty, *Fold (45 degree directional list source)* (2006) and *FedEx* (2008)

Reneé Green, [\*Some Chance Operations\*](#) (1999)

Miranda July, [\*A Handy Tip for the Easily Distracted\*](#) from *The Future* (2011)

[\*Shigeo Kubota\*](#)

Charlotte Moorman, [\*Answering Machine Message Tape\*](#) (1971)



Charlotte Moorman performing Yoko Ono, [Cut Piece](#) (1982)

Martha Rosler, [Semiotics of the Kitchen](#) (1975)

Nancy Holt & Richard Serra, [Boomerang](#) (1974)

Keith Tyson, *Geno/Pheno* and *Primordial Soup Paintings*

Jennifer West, [Marinated Film](#) & the [making of](#)

[Jud Yalkut](#)

*Though I hesitate to define 'documentary' as a category exclusive of the other works contained in this mediography, the following represent artists and works employing a more explicitly document-motivated approach. All works either embrace a radically subjective approach and aesthetic, or employ chance- and rule-based practices – as most closely demonstrated through a kind of textual remix:*

Alan Berliner, [Letter to the Editor](#) (2019) & [The Family Album](#) (1988)

Stan Brakhage, [L... Dreaming](#) (1988)

[Filipa César](#)

Abigail Child, [Is this what you were born for?](#) (1983)

Cheryl Dunye's [Dunyementary](#) or "[Do-Your-Own-Mentary](#)" works

Mindy Faber, [Delirium](#) (1993)

[Su Friedrich](#)

Joan Jonas, [Volcanic Saga](#) (1989)

Trinh Minh-ha, [Reassemblage](#) (1982)

Nam June Paik, in collaboration with Charles Atlas, Merce Cunningham, and Shigeko Kubota, [Merce by Merce by Paik](#) (1978)

Marlon Riggs, [Tongues Untied](#) (1989)

Chick Strand, [Soft Fiction](#) (1979) & [Fake Fruit Factory](#) (1986)

John Wilson, [How to With John Wilson](#) (2020)

*Additional video artists, performance artists, and pornographers, whose aesthetic and approach – particularly around sexual expression and the body – has done much to inform this project:*

Vex Ashley, [\*Four Chambers\*](#)

[Maria Beatty](#)

[Ximena Cuevas](#)

Hermine Freed, [\*Two Faces\*](#) (1972)

[Vanalyne Green](#)

Shine Louise Houston, [\*CrashPad\*](#)

[Joan Jonas](#)

Barbara Rubin, [\*Christmas on Earth\*](#) (1963)

[Carolee Schneeman](#)

[Ellen Spiro](#)

Andy Warhol, [\*Blow Job\*](#) (1964)

[Elizabeth Vander Zaag](#)

*Promotional and documentary media on Lost Film Fest, a traveling DIY stage show organized and led by VJ Scott Beibin which blended subversive nonfiction video with live performance. Beibin's work is an inspiration for the afterlife of this project:*

"LOST FILM FEST WITH VJ SCOTT BEIBIN." *The Next Hope*.  
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## APPENDICES

### 1.1 A POETICS OF LABOUR, *Process per piece*

As a means of further illuminating my methodological approach, this section contains a technical overview of my formal approach to each video piece, including a breakdown of their constituent parts. To the same end, I will also briefly address practical aspects of the zine's creation.

*How to Edit (a porno)* –

The formal construction of *(a porno)*, edited in Adobe Premiere Pro, is as follows:

- (1) Embodied Editing, the language
  - (a) Video & Audio: The footage of the 'Embodied Editing' instructional performance was shot using a Canon C100 camera and accompanying tripod. Synchronous audio was recorded in-camera.
  - (b) Text: Created using PP's Legacy Title maker.
- (2) Inverse-Film, the coin metaphor
  - (a) Video:
    - (i) The video of my face was captured while editing, and was recorded using Apple's PhotoBooth app.
    - (ii) During the editing process, I created a screen recording using Quicktime's Screen Record function.
    - (iii) The foot fetish porn scene was shot using a Canon C100 camera and was edited from the RAW camera files.
    - (iv) All of the above I synced on the timeline before beginning the edit, ensuring that I could align the various sources as necessary.
  - (b) Audio:
    - (i) The voiceover heard here was recorded using a Zoom H1n audio recorder, and was written out in a script prior to recording.
    - (ii) Mouse clicks were recorded and added separately.
    - (iii) Snippets of in-scene conversation can be heard, as well. This audio is synchronous with the foot fetish video clips.
- (3) Embodied Editing, a translation
  - (a) Video:
    - (i) The creation of the multi-screen polyptych is a simple, but tedious resizing and rearrangement of the layered individual clips within PP's Motion window.
  - (b) Audio:
    - (i) Here, the various audio sources (porn, voiceover, and embodied editing) are layered and mixed to narrative effect.
- (4) That is How a Porno is Made, a conclusion
  - (a) Video: Same as (3ai). The individual clips fade out sequentially, suggesting that it is the porno that ends before the editor stops editing – this reflects the relative durations of a finished video clip and the time it took to edit.
  - (b) Audio: Same as (3bi).



No footage was transcoded for this piece, everything was imported into Premiere in its original codec. The completed film was exported to the following specs: H264 1920x1080, 23.976 fps, uncompressed audio.

*Aleatoric Exercises (for the video editor) –*

Inspired primarily by a reading of *Grapefruit*, by Yoko Ono, *Aleatoric Exercises* was first written in Apple's TextEdit program, before being transferred and reformatted using Adobe InDesign. The images in the zine were created using a reductive clip art approach. The fonts featured are: Source Sans Pro (body and headers) and Source Serif Pro (page numbers).

*How to Edit (a documentary) –*

The formal construction of (*a documentary*), edited in Adobe Premiere Pro, is as follows:

- (1) Documentary Opening 1, an instructional
  - (a) Video:
    - (i) All footage in this section was self-shot on an iPhone 6 and iPhone 8 between 2018 and 2021.
    - (ii) The PP effect, Warp Stabilizer, has been applied to the latter section of ocean footage, as described in voiceover.
  - (b) Audio:
    - (i) Voiceover: recorded using a Zoom H1n audio recorder, and was written in a script prior to recording.
    - (ii) Synchronous environmental sound: recorded per-video on iPhone.
    - (iii) Music: the track is titled 'Cinematic Documentary Background Music,' and was downloaded from a royalty free music website, where each track is licensed to the Creative Commons.
- (2) Documentary Opening 2, the 'cold open,' and an introduction to the language of the film
  - (a) Video: This section features a recording of my computer screen captured using QT's Screen Record function, on which the Apple Notes app has been opened, and text can be seen writing to the screen as I type.
  - (b) Audio: Voiceover. All keyboard sounds and mouse clicks were recorded and added separately.
- (3) Cold Open, a confessional
  - (a) Video: The video shown here, of legs and a camera on tripod, was self-shot on an iPhone 8.
  - (b) Audio: Voiceover +
    - (i) [Text redacted.]
    - (ii) To create the layered audio, I stacked each clip in ascending audio tracks on the timeline, and exported the media as a single .wav file for ease of use. For the purposes of this text, I will refer to the resulting clip as the 'layered audio.'
- (4) Compression, an instructional
  - (a) Video:
    - (i) [Text redacted.]

- (ii) To create the layered video, I stacked each clip in ascending video tracks on the timeline, auto-adjusted the opacity to 5%, retimed each clip to match duration with the longest film in the group, and then ‘nested’ the media to improve ease of use.<sup>85</sup> For the purposes of this text, I will refer to the resulting clip as the ‘nested overlay.’
  - (iii) Another QT Screen Record is used to capture typed text in the Apple Stickies app.
  - (iv) Illustrative compression algorithm diagrams and charts are pulled from a Google image search. This subsection also includes several clips of Domain 2 footage.
- (b) Audio: Voiceover
- (5) Synonyms for ‘Real’ and ‘Fake,’ an archival interview montage Part 1
- (a) Video:
- (i) On top, the nested overlay is visible – on which a circular mask has been applied in PP’s Opacity window.
  - (ii) All found interview footage is culled from the Domain 2 archives. To construct the interview sequence –
    - 1) I organized all of the interview footage into a single timeline,
    - 2) exported an audio-only capture of the full sequence,
    - 3) then uploaded that sequence to the auto-transcription tool, Otter.ai,
    - 4) which transcribed the audio, with timecode, into a downloadable .txt file.
    - 5) Using cmd + F to find words and phrases in a text document,
    - 6) I searched for all synonyms and antonyms of the word ‘authenticity,’
    - 7) then returned to the original PP timeline, isolating each segment in which the buzzwords appeared and
    - 8) cutting, then copying those segments into a *new* timeline.
    - 9) Working now with only the relevant media, I arranged the clips in a loose narrative arch intercut with several clips of self-shot iPhone video.
    - 10) This sequence was placed underneath the nested overlay.
    - 11) I then adjusted the size and placement of each interview clip to fit within the masked circle.
  - (iii) At the bottom of the screen, I’ve included subtitles. To create this rolling text:
    - 1) I transcribed the finished audio of the piece using the automatic online transcription tool, Otter.ai.
    - 2) I then edited this text in TextEdit, correcting all misspellings and organizing the material by speaker.
    - 3) Then I resized the TextEdit box to reflect an appropriate closed captioning bar, and

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<sup>85</sup> By ‘nesting’ a set of media, Premiere Pro collapses any set of multiple video or audio clips into one, single clip, such that *all* of the media that a ‘nested’ clip contains can be manipulated as a unified entity.

- 4) using QT Screen Record, captured myself scrolling through the text while listening back to the audio of the finished film, so as to match the timing.
- (iv) There are also several self-shot interstitials which appear in this segment –
  - 1) Footage from *The Bachelorette*, Season 18 Recap – self-shot on an iPhone 8 while watching the episode on an iMac. While capturing, I had the Instagram app open, which applied a dissolve effect to the footage.
  - 2) Footage from *Kiki's Delivery Service* – self-shot on an iPhone 8 while watching the movie on an iMac. Both the computer cursor and reflection of myself and my environment are visible at several moments in the clip. The scene has been re-cut slightly in PP.
- (b) Audio:
  - (i) Synchronous audio with interview clips – all mixed to a normalized, consistent decibel level.
  - (ii) Subtle, but present, the layered audio track fades in as the interviews begin. The track which is heard in this section is slowed down to 1%, and a Highpass filter has been applied, such that the only audible sound is that which falls within the human voice range – averaging around 130 mhz. The combination results in a static-like sound.
  - (iii) As transition in and out of interstitials, a static effect downloaded from freesound.org is used, which is licensed to the Creative Commons.
- (6) Realistic Pleasure is Depicted, informational
  - (a) Video:
    - (i) The majority of the footage in this section was self-shot on an iPhone 6 and iPhone 8 between 2018 and 2021, then reframed and layered in PP.
    - (ii) For the three websites selected – Lust Cinema, Make Love Not Porn, and Bellesa Films – QT Screen Record was used to capture each website landing page.
  - (b) Audio:
    - (i) Voiceover +
    - (ii) Synchronous sound, attached to self-shot footage and recorded by the iPhone.
- (7) Puppet Boy, interstitial performance
  - (a) Video:
    - (i) The footage for this section was shot using a Canon C100 camera and accompanying tripod, set up overhead a small table.
    - (ii) The sewing machine featured is an old Singer, and I purchased green fabric, thread, and stuffing from a local craft supply store.
    - (iii) Upon completing the shoot, I arranged the video clips consecutively in the timeline, nested the set, and then increased the speed until it matched the duration of the music clip.
    - (iv) In order to achieve the final 'green screen' effect, I then -
      - 1) Exported the finished video,
      - 2) imported that video in Adobe After Effects,

- 3) applied the Keylight, Key Cleaner, and Advanced Spill Suppressor effects in order to remove the green areas.
- 4) I then exported the clip with *both* the RGB & Alpha layers, such that the keyed green segments would appear transparent in PP.
- 5) After importing the keyed clip,
- 6) I layered a zoomed-in clip of close-up porn underneath the keyed performance. Voilà.
- (b) Audio: This music is *Puppet Boy* by DEVO. I ripped the audio from a YouTube video using the desktop tool, 4K Video Downloader, and then edited it down for time in PP.
- (8) Synonyms for ‘Real’ and ‘Fake,’ an archival interview montage Part 2
  - (a) Video:
    - (i) This section features three other attempts at manufacturing ‘sex dolls’ –
      - 1) The first was shot using a Canon C100 camera on a tripod. I made a mistake programming the settings, and the camera recorded a series of still images rather than video clips. Embracing this mistake, I refigured the performance as a stop-motion piece, and repeated specific groups of frames in order to repeat and highlight certain movements. Behind the reframed performance footage is a background of the same footage – zoomed-in to the point of abstraction.
      - 2) The second and third clips both feature a silicone hand. The first of these clips was shot in the same way and at the same time as the clip above. The zoomed-in background of the first performance continues to play.
      - 3) The second of the hand clips is a single, uncut shot of the hand’s creation –
        - a) [This hand was manufactured in Smooth-On clear silicone using a mold produced from the Alja-Safe Lifecasting Alginate Plaster Casting kit.](#)
        - b) After the hand was cast and molded, I set up the C100 camera on a tripod, and began to cut away the mold to reveal the silicone hand inside.
    - (ii) The subtitles reappear – created through the same process as described in (5aiii).
  - (b) Audio: Same as (5b).
- (9) Documentary Closing 1, the ‘bookend’
  - (a) Video: After the final ‘sex doll’ performance comes to an close, there is a hard cut to the same ocean footage that opened the piece, creating a visual bookend and formally linking the beginning and ending of the film.
  - (b) Audio: The layered audio returns, rising to meet the synchronous sound of the crashing waves as the visual shifts.
- (10) The film ends with a hard cut to black.

No footage was transcoded for this piece, everything was imported into Premiere in its original codec. The completed film was exported to the following specs and uploaded to Vimeo: H264 1920x1080, 23.976 fps, uncompressed audio.

Lastly, a gesture toward the material. Why use footage from Domain 1? There are plenty of other porn sites to choose from –

[Text redacted.]

Therefore, while the Domain 2 footage serves as a generative first iteration of this work, it would be fascinating to see the same approach applied to other sets of media, or using a *different* compression algorithm. As the film states, every iteration creates a ‘portal to new understanding.’

## 2.1 HOW TO EDIT (A PORNO), *Script*

Today, most video editors use computers to edit media.

Video editing, however, was originally an embodied practice involving the physical cutting, sequencing, and taping of film.

Here I am getting ready to edit using the non-linear editing system, Adobe Premiere Pro.

There – you can see the program in-process.

Every film – whether it’s fictional, non-fictional, or porn – actually contains two final edits: what you see on screen, and what you don’t. The former is the “Film” itself, and the latter is its inverse – what hits the cutting room floor, so to speak.

Here is the inverse. It can be either longer or shorter than the film proper, but it always starts first.

Here is the film. As you watch it, remember that you are not just consuming the film itself, you are also consuming its inverse. And vice versa. Think of the film and its inverse as two sides of the same coin. While one side is visible, the other is invisible, but the coin you are holding is still the same.

Each j-cut, each cross dissolve, obscures just as much as it reveals.

Because of this, the *way* a film is made has an impact on what that film is communicating.

This is the same film you have been watching. It has been translated using the language of ‘embodied editing.’ ‘Embodied editing’ brings the process of cutting and taping back into the body of the editor, producing a danced ‘score’ akin to printed music.

As a video editor... my body is a tool. This tool builds and it demolishes. Like a hammer. Except rather than constructing buildings, it constructs narratives.

There are many ways for me to use this tool to shape the world around me.

If, today, you saw only this film, what would you think?

What if you only watched its inverse?

Or bore witness only to the editing process itself?

Side by side – or taken as a whole – these films communicate a different meaning than they do individually. Really, though, they are all the same. The same coin. The same film. Made using different tools.

That's how a porno is made.

## **2.2 ALEATORIC EXERCISES (FOR THE VIDEO EDITOR), *Text***

### **TITLE PAGE:**

*Aleatoric Exercises (for the video editor)*

### **PAGE 1:**

“The dice which are thrown once are the affirmation of *chance*, the combination which they form on falling is the affirmation of *necessity*.” – Gilles Deleuze, 1962

### **PAGE 2:**

From the Latin word *alea*, meaning "dice."

### **PAGE 3:**

What follows is a series of exercises to stretch the mind and tools of the video editor.

### **PAGE 4:**

Each exercise is a set of instructions. Follow them, or break them. You are in control.

### **PAGE 5:**

Exercise 1

Edit a film.

Print a single still image from each of the video clips you have cut in sequence.

Gather the printouts into your hands and toss them into the air - the pattern in which they fall determines the new sequence of clips. Re-edit the film.

This action can be performed with any set of still images: slides, photographs.

## **PAGE 6:**

### Exercise 2

Assign each “editing action” a physical movement. For example – to “cut” is to clap, and a “fade in” is signified by spinning in circles. Now, perform a dance using only this set of physical movements. Record this performance and use it as the score to edit a film.

Complete this same exercise using vocalizations. Sing yourself a set of instructions to edit by.

Do not determine what you will edit before performing these actions.

## **PAGE 7:**

Cut an interview with no nouns.

Only include clips with something blue in the frame.

All eyes must be closed.

All eyes must be open.

Edit 5 minutes of footage in 5 minutes.

Record video of yourself editing video. This recording is the film.

Make a recording of your computer screen while you edit video. This recording is the film.

Every one visual must actually be two.

Only laughing.

Only crying.

Only bloopers.

What is a blooper?

Objects as people or people as objects.

No words, only in-between vocalizations such as “uh” or coughing.

Words as images. Images as words.

What is the difference between time and duration?

All of the above, but in public.

### **PAGE 8:**

Exercise 3

Edit a film.

Collect all of the footage you did not include in the final edit and use it to edit a new film.

### **PAGE 9:**

Exercise 4

Rearrange all of your furniture.

This is the film.

Invite someone into your home.

Ask them to rearrange all of your furniture

This is the film.

### **PAGE 11 - 12:**

Exercise 5

Collect 20 video clips, with or without audio.

All clips should be at least 60 seconds in length.

Assign each of these clips a number, 1 through 20.

Shuffle the set of instruction cards below.

Draw cards one at a time from the top of the deck, performing each instruction on the card as you draw.

- Assume that each new instruction begins and ends with a cut.
- If a clip is too short to complete an instruction, use blank video to cover the time.
- As necessary, use a self-selected chance operation to determine which section of a clip should represent the time suggested by an instruction. This operation should determine, for example, *which* 20” of clip #4 should run in Instruction #1.
- Audio edits should reflect video edits, with a cross-dissolve (3”) applied between each audio transition.

Re-shuffle the deck as necessary to achieve your desired duration.



### Instruction Cards:

- 1 Fade in on #4 (2'') / #4 runs (20'')
- 2 #2 runs (5'') / Cut to #15 / #15 runs (10'') / Cut to #2 / #2 runs (5'')
- 3 #3 runs (75'') & #16 runs (75'')
- 4 #7 runs (30'') / Record a voice over for this clip & play it while #7 runs
- 5 Using #6 #19 and #3, edit a 2' sequence that communicates loss or gain / Play in reverse
- 6 Close your eyes while you complete the next instruction.
- 7 Fade out on #10 (5'') / Fade in on #20 (5'')
- 8 #8 runs (2'10'') / Cut to #5 / #5 runs (23'')
- 9 Delete a 10'' segment 37% into your timeline
- 10 Make yourself a snack
- 11 Go to Youtube / Select the first suggested video on the Home page / Select the top suggested video on the right sidebar / Rip that video / Assign it #21 / #21 runs (45'')
- 12 #1 runs (75'') or #14 runs (75'')
- 13 Using #13 and #9, edit a 1' sequence that communicates something true
- 14 Using #13 and #9, edit a 1' sequence that communicates something false
- 15 Complete the next instruction without using your hands.
- 16 Reduce saturation of #12 to 0 / #12 runs (13'') / #17 runs (13'') / #12, #17, & #18 run (2'14'')
- 17 #11 runs (1') / Cross-dissolve to #6 (1') / #6 runs (1')
- 18 Cut between #1, #20, & #3 (1'' between each cut, 30'' total duration)
- 19 Watch the last segment you completed with another person / Record their reaction in voice over & play it while that segment runs
- 20 Delete the last segment you completed

Perform this exercise multiple times.

Play all versions of the film together, in small boxes across a screen so that all may be viewed simultaneously.

### PAGE 13:

#### Exercise 6

Open your preferred editing software.

Randomize the keyboard shortcuts.

Edit a film as you would using your usual keyboard shortcuts.

Reflect on muscle memory.

This is the film.

#### Exercise 7

Edit a film.

Delete all of the footage that you used to edit that film.

Relink the offline clips to new media.

Watch.

**PAGE 14:**

## Exercise 8

Edit a film.  
Delete that film.

Edit the same film you just deleted, attempting to replicate it exactly.  
Reflect on muscle memory.  
Delete the film.

**PAGE 15:**

## Exercise 9

Edit a film.

Export an XML of that film.  
Open this XML in a text editing software.  
Using the find-&-replace tool, replace all occurrences of the letter “B” with the letter “P”.  
Import the altered XML into your editing software as a new sequence.  
This is the film.

**PAGE 16:**

## Exercise 10

In 1952, John Cage composed a 4’15” work for eight tracks of ¼” magnetic tape; its 192-page score is a pattern for the cutting and splicing of sounds recorded on this tape.

As described by Cage, this score is a "dressmaker's pattern – it literally shows where the tape shall be cut, and you lay the tape on the score itself."

Originally conceived, these sounds fall into six categories: A (city sounds), B (country sounds), C (electronic sounds), D (manually produced sounds), E (wind produced sounds), and F ("small" sounds, requiring amplification).

Prepare a performance of this musique concrète composition, titled *Williams Mix*.

Using the same categories outlined by Cage above, replace all usages of magnetic audio tape with magnetic videotape.

The duration of each segment should range from approximately 20 to 90 seconds, averaging around 60 seconds.

Approximately 600 segments are necessary to make a version of this piece.

**PAGE 17:**

Tools of chance –

coins  
 dice  
 selecting torn strips of paper from a bowl (eyes closed)  
 roulette wheel  
 deck of cards  
 sticks or straws  
 online randomization tools (distrust)  
 nature  
 strangers (uninformed)  
 yourself (uninformed)  
 centrifugal force (?)  
 gravity  
 spirals  
 repetition  
 collections  
 translation (medium to medium)

**PAGE 18:**

Exercise 11

Create your own exercise.

Roll the dice.

**2.3 HOW TO EDIT (A DOCUMENTARY), *Script*****PART 1:**

First, choose an establishing shot.

Ideally, it is mysterious.

Stabilize the shot, so it doesn't look like I shot it on my iPhone without using a tripod.

Crop the image to make it look as seamless as possible.

Download some "Cinematic Documentary Background Music" without getting a computer virus.

This is where the voiceover should start.

Slow, at first.

As the music rises, show someone traveling somewhere.

Don't always cut on the beat of the music.  
That's too obvious.

Remember, movement tricks the eye.

Icons, symbols are useful.

Layering audio and video distorts time and space.  
The same is true of shapes, colors.  
Everything is a bridge to somewhere else.  
Or a book that can be read left to right, right to left.

Anyway, you get the idea.

Time to stop this awful music.

Of course, you could start with a cold open instead.

## **PART 2:**

To be honest,  
I don't know how to start this film...  
because it's not a documentary,  
but it is supposed to be true.  
Or at least as true as possible.  
And even if it's not true,  
I still want you to believe me.

## **PART 3:**

[Text redacted.]

At every stage of the post-production process, some level of compression takes place.

Before editing a feature film, all the high resolution 4K footage shot by the cinematographer must be transcoded into a lower resolution “proxy” file using one of a variety of compression algorithms.

This is done to make the files more playable, requiring less computer processing power – easy to edit.

The compression algorithm selected also determines the *codec* of the file – a portmanteau of compression-decompression. Codecs are considered either “intraframe” or “Long GOP” – pronounced “long gop.” Here, GOP stands for “group of pictures.” Video playback on the Long GOP codec is taxing to the computer – its algorithm looks at a group of frames, bunches those frames together, and then applies a compression to them collectively. Intraframe codecs, rather, apply compression to frames individually. Video files transcoded to intraframe codecs are preferred by video editors and required by certain editing softwares.

Compression also happens at the *end* of the editing process. Anytime a video is exported for screening, each of its individual parts are compressed to produce a single whole. During the edit, one clip may have 60 frames per second and another 23.976 - so exporting the full film at 29.97 frames per second will require the *addition* of frames to one clip and the *removal* of frames from the other. Your choice of compression algorithm will determine *where* those new frames come from, and *which* are removed.

As such, every level of compression is a creative choice made according to some set of internal priorities. Including, of course, which video clips are included in the edit in the first place.

[Text redacted.]

Operating as a human compression algorithm, I have culled through the archive of Domain 2 interview footage. My algorithmic selection priority is the word “authenticity” and its synonyms – real, true, honest – as well as its antonyms – fake, illusion, pretend, perform, fantasy. The documentary that follows represents the series of frames resulting from this compression. And, perhaps, a portal to new understanding.

#### **PART 4:**

[Text redacted.]

#### **PART 5:**

“Realistic pleasure is depicted.”

This is one of four requirements that makes porn ‘feminist,’ as defined by the *Feminist Porn Awards*, an annual event started in 2006.

More recently, in 2021, Glamour published an article titled *Porn for Women: 15 Feminist Porn Sites You’ll Really, Really Enjoy*. With the subheading: “No more degrading videos made by men for men.” Sites listed in the article include:

- > Lust Cinema, which “aims to challenge the porn industry standards by promoting...a realistic representation of human sexuality and sex.”
- > Make Love Not Porn, claiming that “we are not porn – porn is performance.” Instead, the site is meant to show real people having real sex.
- > And Bellesa Films, which captures “real, unscripted sex. Sex that they’re [the performers] having for themselves, rather than for the camera.” The site states that “this distinction is both palpable and powerful.”

In these examples, what does the term “real” compress? What are its algorithmic priorities?

[Text redacted.]

#### **PART 6:**

[Text redacted.]