

# SAUL LEVINE

## Artist statement

I have been a filmmaker since 1965, before that I was attempting to be a writer. I also went to the movies a lot. I would sometimes think I wanted to make films but even though I loved movies there was nothing I was seeing that I wanted to make. A friend of mine who worked for Yale's AV department showed me three films that changed my life. Maya Deren's AT LAND, CHOREOGRAPHY FOR THE CAMERA, and Viking Egging's SYMPHONIE DIAGONAL. From Deren's films I saw that cinema's ability to represent figures in time and space poetically could be a paradigm of consciousness; Egging showed me that nonfigurative shapes could evolve and change musically. I saw that I could use film to understand the world around me directly. I could also use editing to make relationships between what I was seeing in front of the camera and what was going on in my mind. I stopped making editing decisions based on story and started making them based on shape, memory and association.

The first film I made that I was happy with SALT OF THE SEA came about when I was out sailing with friends. I had brought a regular 8mm camera with me and started filming. One of my friends jumped from the boat to a buoy climbed to 8ft top of it and said "Saul you could get some great shots from here." So I jumped didn't make it and sunk into the water clutching my camera. The water was warm compared to the air since it was a cold fall day. It was like being embraced by the sea. I thought I was dead. However I wound up bobbing to surface clambering onto the buoy still clutching my camera and was able to jump back into the moving boat. Cold, humbled, my camera ruined I returned home and sent the film to be processed. I wrote a script intending to have actors reenact the event but couldn't find any one willing to jump in the ocean. The footage came back and was mainly abstract images of swirls of magenta and turquoise which I spent a month editing. I edited in terms of rhythm, shaping the abstractions by cutting. There were glimpses of sun, sea, and sky moving finally toward an image of my friend on top of the buoy, shot from the moving boat and then whiting out. I felt it was much closer to making use of the experience than the 16mm narrative film I had written.

During this period I evolved a film practice in dialog with other filmmakers and artists I was seeing and meeting such as Stan Brakhage, Carolee Schneemann, Andy Meyers, Tom Chomont, Marie Mencken, George Landow, Marjorie Keller, Jack Smith, Andy Warhol and many others. I worked very inexpensively mainly in regular 8mm and made non narratives, formal, silent films. I tried to film what was going on around me and value it as much as the heroics of the big screen.

In 1968 I started a series of films, which is still ongoing, The Notes. The first of these was NOTE ONE, a black and white portrait of my parents with in camera superimposition. My mother knitting, talking on the phone, sleeping, my father reading the newspaper, ending with my mother lighting the Sabbath candles. The last one completed WHOLE NOTE, a b/w portrait of my father in the last days of his life; sleeping, watching television, playing cards, with my Aunts and ending with him putting on Tefillin. All shot with overlap dissolves so you see the beginning of actions before the end of the prior activities. Both the NOTES are very personal portraits and silent visual meditations on the ordinary.

The series includes NEW LEFT NOTE, a portrait of the late 60s early 70s movement against racism, sexism, and imperialism. NOTES OF AN EARLY FALL super8 sound in which I use duration and repetition. NOTES AFTER LONG SILENCE in which the sound and images are cut rapidly and rhyme as frenetically based on shape, visual and verbal puns. I collage jackhammers breaking ground, with sexual intercourse, with BBKing solos, with ducks on a pond, with helicopter machine gunners, and with children at play.

In the early 70s I worked on Marjorie Keller's documentary on welfare rights and her experimental documentary of a birth, MISCONCEPTION, this experience made me want to work with sound mainly to record speech. When I was five years old my first criticism of the media was that no one in the movie or TV spoke or even looked like my family and community did. As an adult I was happy to discover the pure visual joys of film and work completely silently, I was tempted by sound because I wanted to include speech in portraiture. I made a sound film, which focused on speech, DEPARTURE, where as a professor gave a speech during the takeover of the administration building at Binghamton where I taught. I talked about how the cut back we were protesting meant the elimination of speech therapy courses which trained people whose work allowed me to speak at all. I used super 8mm sound to extend my film practice because it was a media I could use by myself. When Kodak stopped making super 8mm sound film it was like having my tongue ripped out. Eventually I replaced it with mini DV.

In the last seven years I have continued to make NOTES. And have started a series of films called the LIGHT LICKS. These are a series of films that are made frame by frame by flooding the camera with enough light to spill beyond the gate into frames left unexposed. LIGHT LICKS are ecstatic flicker films inspired by jazz and mystic visionary practice. I have completed 8 of these and am currently working on two more. The LIGHT LICKS extend my interest in the ways film can be a media of visual improvisation. It also has allowed me to find new ways of using the camera to make images. The last two films also use figurative images to explore the post 9/11 world. LIGHT LICKS BY THE WATER OF BABYLON IN

THE HOURS OF THE ANGELS was filmed partly in Boston and partly in New Jersey looking at the New York City skyline and the river traffic. LIGHT LICKS BY THE WATERS OF BABYLON JAMMING includes the 2004 demonstrations in NYC at the National Republican Convention. Super 8 remains a viable media for me, in my film work I am challenged after over forty years to find new ways to explore its formal possibilities and find myself still entranced by film's light rhythms and shape-shifting.

Around the time I started the LIGHT LICKS I started to work in miniDV I made one collage video SAD GUN on the Avid using rapid cutting, layering of sound and image, and other digital effects. Most of my video work uses real time recording, very little cutting and synch sound as it is recorded. I have mainly done portraits of people talking sometimes to each other and just to me. I know this is unusual in the current era when they're so much emphasis on short sound bites but I am interested in how people speak and how they look when they are thinking about what to say. As someone who once couldn't speak at all, I am driven as a film/video maker to be a medium for others speech. This has been the impetus for much of my recent work in video.

On September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2005 a former student, old friend, and a colleague, Mark Lapore took his own life. I responded to this and my grief by video taping people close to him, recounting their dreams and visions of him. I recorded them using an old b/w Panasonic Studio tube camera using a miniDV deck as a video and sound recorder. The camera softens the edges and often makes trails and ghosts when people move. This gave me the opportunity to make a series of portraits of how people appear when they're looking inward to call up an emotionally charged dream. When I show DREAMS AND APPARITIONS OF MARK LAPORE (2006 - 2007) either publicly or privately I have been surprised at the intensity of the emotional response. People who never met Mark are drawn into the work and want to talk about their own dreams and personal loss. I feel good about having made a piece that gave others a voice that will be evidence in the future of how some people spoke and felt today.

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