



one

Being There

1979, 130m

Comedy, PG-13

Lorimar (U.S.)

I

Man, there is Karen. Close-up. Tight as you like. Humping her fist like a seahorse riding a warm current. Up and down she goes, her head thrown back in and out of frame. This is high-key, off-balanced, improv and it's Expressionist, I guess. *Cinema vérité*. My camera phone loves her. It absolutely does. It's like watching Rogers with Astaire, Kahn with Hank, Lassie with Joey. She sweeps away a cobweb which has floated down from the basketball hoop above the doorjamb. To which I say: "Nice. Real nice. Go on." I bounce over the duvet to catch her eyes which, momentarily but significantly, pause on me. She is Kim Basinger in *Nadine*, only smarter, of course. For a moment I have what is certainly eye-contact, an address to my phone, but in Karen's body not in any words. Then she's away again, doing her thing. Moonlight through the window, which is a bay but not a casement, moves in and out like a tide. Sallow and dusty, it moves softly in. What a romance! I'm planning all match cuts here. From me at the window shooting into the dark. To me in the kitchen, using a low-angle which elevates things considerably. To me, a breathless Cameron Crowe, Joe Dante, Gus Van Sant, Atom Egoyan, John Woo, bounding from bed to bathroom to bay window to bed. I

shoot all night in our flat above the Halfmarket while my camera phone seduces her in ways she has never heard of. She thanks me for coming up with the idea of making a film of her life.

This is not, well, the whole story. But the pleasure, nevertheless, is going to be all mine.

2

Below, the morning beach traffic mewls a steady aching spewm. It's sickening, hard-hearted and as pumpingly urgent as a drum . . . but it does not distract me from Karen who wakes shortly in the bed beside me, rolls over aglow with something that I can only describe as escape and points, with her pale and somewhat anorexic fingers ringed in Balinese silver she bought on vacation in . . . well guess?, Bali; and, here and there with Amerindian turquoise, toward my phone.

From my cane chair, I stand up to pan the room, which is shabby but large and solidly built. Langford Terrace, our building, a good-sized share on the Halfmarket, is Victorian in hardware but built as if it was put together by who? . . . Romans. All bathrooms and hand basins on the landings. Weird arched ceilings and these crazy cornices carved with roses and vines and so forth. Like in *Caligula*. Like in *Spartacus*. Like the great set design in *Spartacus* with these cracked domed roofs and marble doorsteps and the stores down below, right along the front. I love this building.

Karen dresses for work in an A-line skirt with back zip fastening, a short sleeve turtle neck sweater in purple, a pair of ankle boots with inside zip and strap detail, while I shoot her, dreaming of how my life fits me. How firmly and simply it fits. Like a glove, a form-fit platform boot. *Whatever!*

She says to the mirror that I have fixed with double-sided tape to the wall beside the toilet: "I'm in love"—subjective camera: Karen in the mirror watching Karen watching Karen in love, just a hint of me to the right side like a busboy waiting for some crum-my tip—"with my life."

Downstairs the mail arrives. I slip down to find it in the stairwell like Kleenex boxes discarded by who? Halfmarket whores possibly (probably), but none of this mail is ours. There is some for Alice who is studying social work, Cole who is in Archaeology, Piper who skis, Susan who slings sandwiches at El Monkey on Tuesdays and Thursdays and also is doing some sort of degree in History, for Kevin and Grace (straight above us), Sophie who drives a beach cab part time and doesn't attend Southport, Vern who apparently is a tutor but I don't know what in, Monika from Pencils and Colleen Donnelly who first met Karen when they both took Nightline Counselor training, Helen who's working this week in a stock broking firm on placement from her degree program, Fynella who is a new house officer in general surgery, Tony who is a flight attendant for Midland and can get cheap flights but not overseas actually, Kyle, who just moved in with Fynella, is a minor animation student, and works in the cafe, Candia, across the mall.

Is that groovy or what?

They do not, however, come to collect. Not in my phone film. They stay in their flats, on their own phones, eating Rice Krispies, Corn Pops, Hi-Fiber and watching Anne and John, Penny and Paul, Brian and Denise, Terrytoons, Street Sharks, Bear in the Big Blue House, Kickstart, or sleeping it off. My film shows none of this but that's not the point. It's suggested. It's there like an undercurrent of absolute mediocrity which in my film is what I'm trying to avoid.

I precede Karen downstairs, bracing my right arm with my left like I'm wearing a Steadicam, and film her from the shoulder emerging from the entrance with her head thrown back in the sunlight and her Side-Street tortoise-shell Ray Bans down on the end of her subtly angular nose. I'm actually using a Nokia G567, the 16x zoom GPS model (VMPS120). Hey, but so what, Rodriguez shot *El Mariachi* on beta tape with a wireless mic and one jib-armed dolly. And look what he got!

Karen lets her cranberry colored backpack slip down on her left arm and thumbs me from the right as she passes, grinning like Elsa Cardenas in *Fun in Acapulco*, though what I'm actually after, as I've explained to her, is kind of a homage (pronounced *hoe-marge*, naturally) to Schlesinger. Essentially *Midnight Cowboy*, with Karen playing Sylvia Miles to my Jon Voigt.

For fun, we call Helena McCabe from a payphone on the corner near Langford. The payphone is rancid and stuck with cab cards. I make a note to call Eve who has (quote) "the body of Uma Thurman." Brilliant. Karen explains the situation. If there's one thing about Karen it's that I can count on her to explain things better than I do. It is, notably I think, something to do with her substantial right brain ascendancy. She's also an Aries.

She says, brightly: "Hey Ms McCabe, it won't take too long."

I jump in with a simple and obvious explanation.

"Tell her," I say, "that we need back story."

Back story has a pretty annoying spiritual air to it actually and I repeat it with a touch of urgency to try and flush the thing right away. "Back story, tell her. . . You do know what I'm talking about?"

I hear down the line Helena jabbering about something to do with her plans, her job, her life, her, her, *her* until then, as I suspected, agreeing to meet us at Candia.

3

Incidentally:

The telephone is connected with two branches of science—acoustics and electricity. The veriest tyro in the former branch of science knows that sound is caused by the impinging of sound waves upon the ear, and that the kind of sound is dependent upon the velocity and length of the waves. Thus the ear-splitting shriek of the advancing railway whistle is caused by the sound waves being driven one upon the other and so shortened—for the shrill tone is caused by short waves of great velocity, whilst the deep base tones are caused by much longer waves of less velocity.

(Library Shelf: B02318: *The Engineer*, No.1, July 1877)

Go figure!

4

Now here's the back story I was talking about, but I'm not going to waste too much time on it because I, for one, am not convinced by flashbacks. Just a quick cut then, and save the ripple dissolve for Preminger.

For one thing, Helena McCabe (Irish parents, 25), who's on the way now, is cutting through traffic at the corner of Pitt and George in her Morgan (that's a Plus Eight, if anyone's interested. Though—Poke alert!—I'm not), works in an office, the office of Lystead and Wishhart, L&W, and has done since she left Roeford before even starting a degree here at USP, rented a place right out near the marina, overlooking the Aquarium, Aqua Park and Oceanarium, and started her stumble up the corporate ladder. L&W, that's Insurance, Life Policies, Pensions, Death, Destruction, Dental Plans, all the big words. She wears her hair in a short bob, because it's that thin hair that some people have, wispy kind of, and if those who are watching her pass with the top down and those optional dual airbags neat as flowers in the bud of her dash (to quote some modern *loove* poetry) mention that there's no reason to have her hair that way, that in this day and age she could have any damn hair she wants and, likewise, with a little Night Secret lose those frown lines already appearing around her otherwise shining eyes, she'll merely point out that in her profession a retro attitude pays its way. Today she wears a Happy Joe watch, in the rear tray there's two pieces by Maslankowski and one by Pauline Parson (don't know?) that she's picked at a house clearing that she found out about through L&W, but she isn't choosy (she's left at home in the glass mirror display unit a cheesy pewterware dragon on a motorcycle by Myth and Magic), and the one real memory I keep of her is that one of her tripping down the black marble stairs into the dim-lit foyer of Langford Terrace like some kind of baby giraffe while her boyfriend, Calum, who now lives in Lucaya running Guanahani's, or so he says, and claims to

have been the inspiration behind their papaya ginger pork, just taps away at his discman and swears he should never have missed *Edge of Darkness* to pay a visit to a place like this.

As to the business with Lystead and Wishhart—let me try and get this straight because, even though it frankly bores me brainless, there's no avoiding it and, by tomorrow every little suburban outcrop from Southport to Roeford will know that the University audit office is finding “inconsistencies” (read: “one of the bank accounts is missing”) in one of our quaint College arts festivals' accounts, a subject on which the University of Southport Arts Festival Committee will issue a statement denying there's any problem (“whatsoever.” Yeah, right.) followed by several long blasts out its collective artistic poke probably, and two senior charity managers at Arts for College Old Folks or The Arts 'n' Farts Foundation or whatever, who are probably, as far as I know, screwing each other like what?, minks I guess, really old minks, will eventually resign, and disappear in the direction of the Palais Schwarzenegger Hotel, Vienna, probably . . .

“They do a real nice green apple chutney, Harold.”

“Oh yes, Maude, so I see.”

The trouble with back story is that it is so incredibly trite, so totally stalled, so plain monkey-headed dull, that nobody in their right minds wants to watch. Back story's like some mopey foster kid turning up in a house of real cute brothers and sisters, and if it wasn't for the connection with the Festival of the Waters Film Festival I wouldn't mention it at all. The best thing to do is just to get on with your film—that is, with the forward movement of your film. But the connection's here:

The University of Southport “Festival of the Waters Film Festival” started way back. I guess in, what, 1967, or '69 maybe? Either way, it started when two guys from USP decided to screen at the Roxy, during the Waters Art Festival, some 8mm shorts they'd made on the beach that summer. The screening was a hit, and soon other USPites and film-makers from the beach and the Valley were wanting to screen their own films, both professional,

by that stage, and amateur. By the 1970s (bored yet?) the festival had become a noticeable Southport event. They launched a regular awards program, screened *Mondo Trasho* one year and, in the third year ('74, I believe), actually had both George Romero and Karen Black as guest presenters. Later that year the festival was taken over by the Arts Festival Committee as a formal USP annual event. Local council support was “thus forthcoming” (to quote the flyer); followed by such corporate sponsorship from the likes of: KB Beer, Mixx Surfwear, Monstrol Pharmaceuticals, Loon Bach clothing, the Mitsui Motor Company and, recently, One-Tech Supa-Phone Shops. Growth continued through the '80s and 90s to now “combining the best local talent with a varied program of major independent productions, new talent showcases” and the occasional first release studio slot. Everything is screened at The Roxy cinema.

End of History 101.

Down at Lystead and Wishhart, the office is buzzing as they're starting to comb through Christ knows how many University accounts (all very Miss Marple), looking for monies in, monies out, trying to pick up where the cash went so the College doesn't have to lose their government contract for overseeing this kind of big public arts spending, acting like nothing is happening, while the two senior charity managers (unknowing) are going on attending board meetings at Hycraft Concrete, the Montreal View Gallery, Donatii Constructions, the Festival of the Waters Film Festival, and the Board of Governors of the University of Southport. Before they leave, that is, for Greece to view the Mycenaean palace architecture in ancient Pylos.

The way I figure it, it's always possible to reject the performative ineptitude of some crimes and still gaze on their beauty—to quote Truffaut who does it, after all, in *La Mariée était en noir*. And really, having said all that, who gives a shit? He also says: “All you need to make a movie is a girl and a gun.” Or was that Godard who said that? Anyway, it's relevant.

“Candia O Candia,” Karen sings.

I go in first and phone film her from behind the Kencaf machine, entering through the cafe doors whose glass is partly covered by such things as STUDENT UNION APRIL 3: GOMEZ, TICKETS HERE and THE GAY CHRISTIAN ALLIANCE WANTS YOU and FENDER BASS FOR SALE, CHEAP. She does not know why she sings and is embarrassed to have done it. She laughs and apologizes. Karen's laugh enters my soundtrack like . . . the scent of cinnamon, a pinch of vanilla, some sweet cake shop. She reveals that she may have done it because she is happy at having been accepted to do a master's degree in English Literature, and has taken a job in Supa-Video on the Halfmarket, overlooking the beach.

The mall is already cranking up and glaring and the traffic follows a curve, like some kind of giant knee raised abruptly into downtown, and pedestrians, mostly office bods and shop assistants from places like Linens n Things and Best Buy, Target and Big Shoes, alight from the buses which, at this hour, having access to the entire street, growl and smoke and give off heat which hangs in the air.

As Karen sits down next to me, I say, pulling back to keep her in full frame: "So here-- voice over-- we have Karen Munson who is writing a thesis on Joan of Arc. . . sorry, I mean representations of Jeanne d'Arc."

She takes a lip liner from her pocket and gets ready to do her lips. "Well thank you, Mr. Droste," she says, to my phone, "and I believe your own work is coming along a peach on Love and Death in the films of Roman Polanski? Or is it Dreams and Nightmares in the Hollywood Blockbuster? Better still: What Ever Happened to Farley Granger?"

"The latter," I say, thinking Karen may not know that Farley Granger is still alive and appeared in *The Whoopee Boys* in 1986, and also thinking that Karen is obviously planning to let her hair grow out so that she looks like Ingrid Bergman.

She orders the Viennese coffee, medium ground. I order a brulot of the medium ground Costa Rican, along with some Honey Madeleines.

Candia is quite full for breakfast. I figure it's because this week is Freshmen Week and also because there's that upcoming local event called the USP Arts Festival for which step vans and floats and electricity company trucks are passing in the direction of the beach, and which would be pure poke if not for the Festival of the Waters Film Festival, which is attached to it. I decide also, in the same moment that I decide a medium long shot will give a sense of depth to what is feeling at this moment like a very narrow and hard place to tone, that I might write something on the films of Sam Raimi, being as Wes Craven has been all done to death and nobody really seriously believes he will ever do anything better than *The Hills Have Eyes*. I might also join the Student Film Society, though I hear they're all into Gandhi and what Antonioni likes best and spend most of their time talking about what Harry Dean Stanton did to Nastassja Kinski in *Paris, Texas*. . . . like it's not obvious!

The food arrives. My Madeleines look like something from a tomb, the clear amber they find in Egypt, I mean.

Karen says: "Considerable!"

She points at the wall opposite and says: "That's In the Car by Roy Lichtenstein." But she doesn't stop there, pointing one by one. "Person Throwing a Stone at a Bird by Miro. Something by Hockney. Uh. Uh. That's . . ."

"Sigourney Weaver," I say, "In *Gorillas in the Mist*." admiring the cinematography of John Seale and Alan Root for which neither of them, I might add, was nominated for an Oscar. "You're very artistic these days, Karen," I say ironically, but she doesn't bite.

We unwrap the cutlery which is wrapped in red paper napkins, though neither of us is planning on using it; but before I've even started my brulot, Helena walks in.

“Film what, did you say?” she asks Karen, kissing her on a cheek in a manner I can’t help noticing. Karen is her best friend and once when they were temping (she told me in confidence, but what the Hell) Karen slept with her when they shared a flat on The Corso and Helena was dabbling in film, acting, running and so forth and Karen was a USP freshman . . . though Karen may have been totally lying and just trying to get a reaction from me. Then it didn’t happen at all. It’s difficult to tell.

Karen looks up in my direction. I phone shoot them both in American shot, shaking their heads and grinning like juveniles, and then I call out from behind the Kencaf: “Hi, Helena.”

“What’s got into you, Ciaran?”

I don’t bite at this and just go on filming until the waitress, who reminds me of Drew Barrymore, comes over to take Helena’s order.

“You won’t believe this,” says Helena, “but what I really want is the moussaka, but I know it’s like impossible. So I guess I’ll just have the *au lait*—a Kenyan—and, by the way, is it okay to use the . . . ?”

Drew Barrymore points her out through the bead curtain (Candia is, to my mind, a cross between ’70s retro and a place done over with nice white enamel touch of Zanussi) and Helena, first lighting an MB Light Tar, then leaving it smoking in foil ash-tray on the table, sidles out.

For some reason Karen has her face dipped into her Viennese, which she has half drunk, staring at me, and I think it’s just lucky that Candia serves decent sized coffees or she wouldn’t be able to do whatever she thinks she’s doing. I try to ignore her and, looking out into the mall where maybe a hundred people are now sliding past in the direction of The Eastside and Grantham which have not yet opened but which have turned on their music which sends into the mall Sex and Candy by Marcia Playground and also The Daddy of The All by The Space Monkeys which really surprises me, I describe to her for no good reason the differences between J. Lee Thompson’s *Cape Fear* made in 1962 and starring

camera phone

Robert Mitchum and Mark Scorsese's *Cape Fear*, made in 1991 and starring Robert de Niro. This is basically the difference between Polly Bergen and Jessica Lang and just how good Juliette Lewis really was. Personally, I think Gregory Peck had no range.

"So Ciaran," says Helena, returning, "what's your film going to be about anyway?"

I think that maybe I would like to phone film her in a thunderstorm on the beach with the sea the color of gunmetal like something out of *Apocalypse Now*, but put this aside and answer (lying a little):

"Actually Helena, it's about Karen."

Karen smiles, finishing her coffee, and Helena, who tips two packets of NutraSweet into her *au lait* which has arrived, pulls her white gloss lips into a shape which resembles one moon smothering another:

"Koo-key!" she says, lighting another cigarette, inhaling. "You're one weird guy Ciaran."

5

I think this is totally relevant:

Photography implies that we know about the world if we accept it as the camera records it. But this is the opposite of understanding, which starts from not accepting the world as it looks. All possibility of understanding is rooted in the ability to say no.

Also this, more accurately:

Whereas the reading time of a book is up to the reader, the viewing time of a film is set by the filmmaker and the images are perceived as fast or as slowly as editing permits.

(Library Shelf: T055589, Susan Sontag,
On Photography, Farrar, Straus & Giroux 1977, 23, 81)

So fab!

In the video shop where Karen works there are four other assistants. Neve Campbell, Liv Tyler, David (Duchovny, possibly) and Denise Richards. The place is owned by Nic Cage. I mean, seriously.

Now I know this sounds crazy but you can make of it what you will. I figure everyone has a role model and, to be honest, they could do worse. Also, I just want to set the record straight that I don't have a thing about Gwyneth Paltrow. Not even when she was going out with Brad Pitt and starred in *Mrs. Parker and The Vicious Circle*, which was filmed in three weeks using three Bolex's, I'm told, did I have a thing about Gwyneth Paltrow. The fact is, I can take or leave Gwyneth Paltrow and felt exactly that way when she was interviewed by *Film Mania*—or was it *Cine-Ma?*—and said, and I quote, “I need to express every emotion that I have, the second that I'm having it, which is bad.” Actually, I think she should have kept her hair long, too. But, of course, they can do something about that with hair extensions and thinking that she had better hair in *Sliding Doors* than any other film is no indication that I have a thing about Gwyneth Paltrow. It's just that very few women look like her. Hell, Karen is trying her best to look like a younger Ingrid Bergman, and she does (enough anyway)!

I crouch in Modern Film Classics while Karen, coming in from the backroom, and from the left, ten minutes after opening, makes some comment about some writer or another looking like Rene Russo. To which I call out: “O, right, who exactly?”

I phone shoot her in medium shot with a wall of films by Scorsese behind her.

I believe the world's most perfect car is a white 1968 Corvette Stingray convertible. That also is a classic. A Scorsese classic is like that. Definable—to the knowledgeable—by its parts. The '68 'vette has a large block V8 developing a maximum power of 339 bhp at 4800 rpm. The nose style is straight, zippered, like an Empire fighter from *Star Wars IV*. The motor is blueprinted

and the wheels, naturally, are deep dish alloy. There's a gauge for oil pressure, battery, and a tachometer which redlines at 6000. The instruments are heavily cowled (meaning, they are set back in circular slots). The upholstery is cowhide, in white. I would fit, personally, a twelve disc CD auto-changer or more probably use the MP3 from my phone and plug that into an amp, probably a Class D Monoblock Premium Digital Amplifiers Series Amplifier, though I'm also partial to Kenwood. But that's another story, and as long as it has dynamic base control and a joystick remote changer then that's fine by me.

Things seem to go well this morning. Supa-Video is down below the street and, at first, there's no one much coming in, just a woman of about one hundred and twenty who seems to be looking for a doco on natural dietary fiber and then changes her mind and stands with her wheely bag in front of a dump bin full of 3 for the price of 1's. I try to defocus dissolve her but for a long time no one else enters and the shelves impose too much contrast of a kind I'm not happy with and I decide on editing the sequence so that when three GI Janes walk in down the stairs I'm ready for some light relief and give them considerable gravity as they move between the bright of the street and the dark of the shop.

"Cast your eyes," whispers Karen to David Duchovny, with whom she is now loading shelves from a box marked RETURNS, because she can see that the Janes are not from any known university but from the community college, Machin College (named, apparently, after some local poke who discovered, sometime around the last pass of Haleys, the reason why Saturn has its rings and Mars its Martians). They wear zip pocket skirts, strap vests, black, fetish shop pvc, KA boots.

"What are these three looking for," says Karen to David, "the life and times of the New York Dolls?"

Duchovny, in close-up, begins to sing in a voice which is a mere whisper but certainly masculine and the words that come out are the lyrics to Alison by Elvis Costello. Duchovny was born, as this confirms, in 1960. "This world is killing you. Al-li-son"

and all the while he keeps his eyes looking straight at Karen, with a intensity which can't have just come out of nowhere."—your aim is true."

Meaning that Karen must know what's true. Karen kind of chirps, and dives into the box so quickly that she drops two of the DVDs on the carpet and there burst open, then has to spend a minute picking them up (which I film in ECU to capture her eyes which are relentlessly flickering, as if she's lost a diamond earring she's bought but hasn't yet paid for, and I hope the red tinge of the blush that spreads up her neck from that hollow in her breast bone actually comes out). Until, finally, the Janes make their move downstairs where no doubt they locate Soft Core and Indie Classics and spend some time discussing how good Divine was in *Shampoo* (not the Travolta version, right?).

Duchovny says, with his hands in his pockets and his head craned back so he can look out the windows, which shows the lower part of the street: "It's like looking into another world from down here."

Oh, reeally! . . . Dare I say: Poke alert!

"This," I say to myself, "I just got to get." So I come over closer, behind Documentary and Foreign. But Duchovny, who actually knows exactly what I'm looking for here, stares up at me as if I'm trying to assassinate The President.

"Don't get any closer with that thing, it's libel to go off," he says dumbly. I imagine him shot in Panavision with the colors all saturated and the balance wacked. Deep purples. Hard reds. Bug greens. Frozen blues. All primary colors.

"Yep," says Duchovny, staring up into the street again, "it really is like we're integral to the street down here."

Jesus!

"Excuse me," I whisper desperately, "but this is not a genre film."

Holding the box, with which I somehow get stuck, I sit my phone on the top of the display for Polanski's *The Ninth Gate*, but without a clamp (which worries me, but what choice do I have?).

Then I move along next to the two of them while knowing what I'm probably getting, entirely for Karen's benefit, is completely offset framing and no headroom; but I'm thinking of Hitchcock's fixed camera in *Rope*. I'm thinking that Hitchcock did it in *Rope*, and so maybe something will come of it. Maybe something good will come of it.

Karen is passing along the shelves of Rom-Coms, Thrillers, Sci-Fi, slotting in this DVD and that one, BLU-RAY, old skool, each one, alphabetically!

She says: "I feel like I'm replacing the thoughts of the people in the street."

I refuse outright to react to this.

Slotting into place a copy of Scholondorff's *The Handmaid's Tale*, she says: "When Margaret Atwood did this it was a great piece of feminist literature, but this. . . ."

"This is crazy," I'm telling myself. "My film's going to be a comedy if I'm not careful."

"It's like axing the last fingers off the statue of the Venus de Milo," Karen says, picking up a copy of *The Naked Lunch*.

It's occurring to me—because all of a sudden I realize that my film's being directed by me and I shouldn't be expecting anyone else to know how it should be composed and, certainly, it's up to me because I'm directing it and I'm also technically directing it. I'm set designing it, I'm engineering it, I'm mixing it, I'm propping it, I'm lighting it, I'm booming it, I'm vision controlling it and I'm FX-designing it—it's occurring to me that what I have actually been doing is shooting myself.

"Well. Well. Well," I say, standing there replaying what I've done.

And there I am. A cameo. I'm to the left of frame with the light from the street catching my face equally on the left side. I'm wearing a Futori denim floral shirt, a pair of Evisu jeans and a neck tie from Angels. My hair is cropped now and looks black though really it's dark dark brown like the hair on that pastel-loving guy (Christopher Marciello) in the Explorer Sandal ad. In

the center is Karen and she looks, to be honest, absolutely brilliant. She's wearing a pink Etam satin slip dress and a pair of black flat-fronted trousers from The Dispensary. Her hair is pinned in three places so it hangs over her right eye, but is bunched up over her left ear. She has on buff colored lipstick which makes her lips look like pure skin, like her lips just pick up where the rest of her leaves off.

Karen calls: "So, Ciaran, how is it looking?"

"Awful," I lie. "It's looking awful. Too much red."

"Oh, God," I think, "I can't stand this." Every shot visually brilliant. Pans. Zooms. Dollies in and out. Trucks. Arcs. Elevates. All having to be in the right place now. Everything properly paced. Height. Body position. Every frame matching every frame. Seamless continuity. All the possibilities covered. And *verité*. Very very *verité*. Overmodulated sound. Cutting on my movement. Just lingering now and then on one thing or another. The sequence disordered but every message clear. Karen. Duchovny. Campbell. Tyler and Paltrow. And now Nicolas Cage, who is coming into the shop wearing three days of facial growth, a black suit, a bad shirt (bamboo pattern, Fijian), and a look like he's going to eat the gherkin right out of your bun, leading in Holly Hunter, who is not his wife, and followed by, and this I do not believe, Woody Harrelson. I mean, that is Woody Harrelson isn't it? I see Detective Rick Santoro, Jack Singer, H.I.McDonnough, Smokey: the whole Cage oeuvre playing out right in front of me. I could get it wrong any second. And then what? My film will be nothing more than daytime TV. It will be no better than *Quantum Leap*. No better than *The Six Million Dollar Man*. My film will be nothing then.

"When's lunch?" says Karen, abruptly.

Duchovny smoothly checks his Heuger. "Now," he says. "Now . . . if you want."

Cooking a meal on a small student budget doesn't have to be a problem. Under any Financial Aid options, it is still entirely possible to construct something interesting, tasty, and also nutritious. Take for example this recipe, among others:

Andean Mountain Bread

(10 Servings) To be served with meals or combined with ale to give that keeping the cold out winter boost. The cardamom seeds are optional but are authentic, and the whole thing should be served on a rough cloth if possible. A sweater can work, if it comes down to it.

400 ounces cornflour, plus extra for dusting
1 tablespoon of salt
2 tablespoons of cardamom seeds
1 tablespoon pumpkin seeds
1 tablespoon caraway seeds

Cooking Time: 25–35 minutes

1. Combine the flour, salt and seeds in a bowl. Add, at steady slow pace, 15 fl oz of tap water, mixing all the while until the texture is soft but firm. Knead for 30 minutes. Form a smooth ball. Put it under cloth for 30 minutes
2. Split dough into 10 equal balls. Smooth and flatten into pancake style. Cover with cloth.
3. Bring griddle pan to warm on a medium heat. Put two breads at a time in a griddle pan. Pat down with palm of hand. Do not allow seeds to burn. Turn each over and over until brown (2 minutes). Remove from the heat and place on woven mat. Keep covered with cloth.
4. When all are cooked serve immediately, while still warm.

(Library Shelf: Z03478: Nitinia Lugushi, *Warm Tastes from Down South*, Condominium Books, 2006)

I can't believe they made me cut that right where they did. I can *not* believe I'm not now shooting five guys around a brass cof-

fee table, upstairs, using a cuke, while Bridget Neilson is in the corner dressed in white fox, a shit load of AmatyL caps which have been hidden in dug out copies of Patricia Craig's *International Cookery Bible*, now opened on the table; but instead I'm sitting here in El Monkey, overlooking the beach, ordering the Inam Bayildi, a banana cake and coke while Harrelson and Cage are three tables away with Holly Hunter and someone new, whom I'm positive is Milos Forman, and they're talking about spending a cool \$60,000,000 on a new film of *Starsky and Hutch* while I look Colleen Rumsey right in the center of the lens. Colleen who is also doing an MA in English literature, the subject of which escapes or, frankly, doesn't interest me, and who is asking Karen if she can come with us this afternoon when we register with our supervisors. And Karen says, before going over to the counter to get a Lucosade:

"Cool!"

Alone, I try to smile at Colleen who is probably, I decide, dating a McDonalds' trainee manager. Captain Big Mac or someone. She wears Sportif sunglasses but I can see her eyes behind them racing each other from side to side. A McDonalds' trainee manager who also goes fly fishing at weekends, has a father named Errol and drives a silver blue '82 Town Car, a 3.8 V6 auto quite incidentally. I send her in and out of focus and I'm thinking I might use Body Bumpin' Yippie-Y-Yo by Public Announcement as a background here. I'm thinking I might cover whatever it is she is now saying that I am not listening to with a full three minutes of Body Bumpin' Yippie-Y-Yo. She orders the Reuben Sandwich.

"So Ciaran," she says, "you know Christopher Isherwood was an honorary graduate of Southport?"

"And?" I say.

She raises her eyebrows which are not plucked but spring up like moustaches above her thoroughly forgettable glasses. She seems to think I don't understand what she said: "Isherwood. Christopher Isherwood, the writer, is an honorary graduate of this university. Didn't he write the screenplay for *The Loved One*?"

Because I have no intention of answering she goes on: “You know. *The Loved One*. Evelyn Waugh?”

“Yes,” I say, defeated. “Yes.”

“I suppose you’re a member of the USP Film Society?”

I dig my fork into my Inam Bayildi, pull out a small round union and slice its heart open. “Those planks?”

I can see her eyes behind her sunglasses have fixed on me.

“They’re into Gandhi,” I say, stating the obvious.

“So?”

This, obviously, is pointless.

“So what are you into exactly . . . Freddy Krueger or something?”

For some reason, now taking up my phone, I zoom in on the Mexican Beans with Chorizo and Chilies sitting on the table next door. I’m picking up in tight shot the pinto beans which are oily and black and then the *guajillos* which are red and thin. I’m finding the macro setting is very useful. I’m wondering how low the battery is by now but the warning symbol isn’t showing in the window so it’s probably fine. I’m picking up the chorizo sausage, thickly sliced, the onions, the garnish of coriander.

“My supervisor’s going to be Heather Rebane,” says Colleen, like a voice-off. “Rebane.”

“Listen . . .” I say, but now I notice Karen is coming back.

Colleen continues, whispering: “How is that Karen ended up with Krotow? I mean, I know he does body theory or . . . medieval bodies. But he is not a woman.”

Colleen is our terrace’s resident “theorist,” our Sigmund Freud, our who? Mary Ann Down, Doon, Doane, our Kris . . . Kristina Kristoffa, our . . . lady of the . . . Oracle.

Only now Karen is stopping because Milos Forman has spotted her and, lifting the index finger on his right hand, which I notice is short and thick, he is actually calling her over to his table.

Colleen continues: “R.E.B.A.N.E. . Rebane, the installationist. The . . . art animator, you know?”

“Listen,” I say, composing myself and raising my voice so that Karen can certainly hear it where she’s sitting. “I’m making a film here. Okay? I’m making a fucking film here. Do you understand that?”

Karen turns and mouths across the cafe: “We should go.”

I swear Forman smiles at me. He whispers in Karen’s ear and then he smiles at me. If anyone knows, he knows. Milos Forman knows.

9

At the university Karen will not tell me what Milos Forman said. She will not even admit it was him. All she says is:

“Get off my case, Ciaran.”

“Well, like, *excuse me!*”

I would persist, except I figure she’s far too strung out about two things. Firstly, her meeting Professor Julian Krotow, who’s most famous works, *Bodies of Sacrifice: The Anatomy of Medieval Martyrdom* and *Entertainment in the Era of Jeanne D’Arc*, were Book Club bestsellers. Secondly, my decision to go against her advice and agree to have as my film project supervisor: Dr Steven Milroy.

Steve Milroy whose book *The Film Revolution: Independent Cinema and the Hollywood Machine* was featured in last month’s *Clips* as “a book to warm the hearts of all true cinema lovers” and, when it comes out in paperback (date so far unknown), will be on the top of my private shopping list.

More importantly, Steve Milroy who directed last year’s Festival of the Waters Special Category winner *Judgment Days*, a film which struck me, actually, as not only reminiscent of John McNaughton’s early work, *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer*, before he went on to make the truly crap *Normal Life* then recovered with the ink-black comedy *Wild Things*, but is also excellent in its own right. Captures that same terrific pace that McNaughton got in *Serial Killer* and, even though the cast is unknown, has never probably been in a film before, wouldn’t even know a geared head from a zoom motor, really does work.

Interestingly, it was in one of Milroy's early films that Helena McCabe once starred (a short, maybe fifteen, maybe twenty minutes, about a girl that gets lost in a harborside warehouse and the things that assail her in the dark, the way the imagination brings to life inanimate things, gives them the power to change lives, distress, live I guess). The lead in *Judgment Days*, however, was Leesa Kennedy, whose mother is the artist, Heather Rebane, dropped out of USP to helped run the Film Festival, shot in shadows mostly, kind of Gwyneth Paltrow, in cheesecloths and florals, is excellent. I'd love to cast her as Lavonia in a remake of *Beneath the Valley of the Ultra Vixens* or feature in a documentary about children with famous artistic parents—Sophia Coppola would be another obvious choice, of course.

Turns out to be entirely true that Milroy once worked as 2AD for Brian G Hutton (*Ryder*, *Night Watch* etc). Before that he did locations for Alexandre Rockwell (*Four Rooms* and so on). These things I checked with the press office at Universal who, though not prepared to give full details—in fact were pretty damn cagey about providing any information at all, even though I explained again and again who I was and what I wanted—confirmed that a Steve Milroy has definitely worked for Universal and, yes, he has been paid by them.

Why Karen thinks she can comment on any of this, actually, why she thinks she can insist that “you and Steve, Ciaran, is not a good idea” when she's chosen to abandon her undergraduate interest in film (majoring in performance, in fact) to concentrate at postgraduate level on literature is beyond me.

She says she knows Steve Milroy pretty well—which maybe she does. Says he's a '70s freak, likes blaxplo films, Tobe Hooper, rubbish about . . . rock-n-roll road trips. She says he was one of first people she met at Southport. That Helena introduced him to her. She says that, if she hadn't needed the money, she would never have met him at all, never have acted in one of his stupid films, though I've never seen this film, and she's never offered to show it to me . . . Certainly, though she says she loves film no less

now than she did when we met, I think this new anti-film attitude of hers is an issue building up between us.

These things considered, I decide to wait until we're alone in our flat. Then I'll press her about Milos Forman.

Instead, I stand on the balcony of the Griffith Building, with the leaded glass windows of the professors' rooms behind me, and I phone film the whole undergraduate body swarming onto the front lawn like a sea. I film them like I'm Cecil B. DeMille. I sweep across them from what must be 100 feet in the air.

"Like a sea," I say to myself, and I think of that sequence in the Peter Weir drama for Silver Screen Partners IV/Touchstone, *Dead Poets Society*, when church bells ring, the sun shreds the sky in oranges and pinks, a flock of birds (which I notice are mostly plovers or something) rises in a parabolic arc from a lake which is back lit, and the boys come down the wooden school stairs while Mr. Pitts, first name Gerald, played by James Waterstone, comes up the stairs telling them to slow down. And the whole sequence (8 minutes 23 seconds) summarizes the film in . . . in 8 minutes and 23 seconds. Though Weir, to my mind, fails in a number of important areas. For instance: it is well known that masturbation is rife amongst boys of that age, and Weir knows of it. I would also have thought *Dead Actors Society* was a more appropriate title in that for the most part it's nothing to do with poetry and everything to do with acting.

I wait outside Dr Milroy's office and phone shoot Karen, two doors down, sitting on a steel chair outside Krotow's room, looking accusingly in my direction, willing me not to go into Milroy's room, but to follow her. The shot I use is a low, shallow focus, knee shot. The corridor recedes with her on the right so that the shot favors her side and runs out of frame. She is the first to go in, so I do decide to follow behind her, holding my phone at shoulder height, hoping to God the battery will last, and keeping the angle level to give the effect of an ever filling, unbalanced three-shot.

Krotow says: "What's this?" as we're entering; but Karen, who is so very nervous as to be showing an eye tooth on the left

side which is clamping down firmly on her bottom lip, where it's leaving a red mark like a cold sore, is quick to reply:

"Professor Krotow . . ." she says.

Julian Krotow, who is obviously not just a Joan of Arc specialist but also a Blues Brothers fan; he is obviously a Blues and '60s freak, loves the The Doors for example according to the poster on the wall (Jim Morrison, left) and Jefferson Airplane (who knows? right), pulls his wiry terrier hair back into a knot. His face covered in what is a clipped white growth and his lips are fleshy like they belong to John Belushi. Like Belushi didn't die via speed ball, leaving Dan Aykroyd to screw up the sequel, also starring John Goodman, with Aretha Franklin returning from the original. And Krotow—who I don't know personally because my last university was Roeford and here in Southport I don't know anyone except Karen who is also a Roeford graduate—I close up on.

Though he isn't saying it in so many words, I personally can hear him say to my phone: "Don't take any notice of all these old books, I'd rather be listening to 'My Baby Must be something something' by, uh, Puff Adder."

I hear him say, I'm sure: "I'd rather be smoking something stronger than Marlboro Lights, off the record, and listening to . . ." who? ". . ."Rod Stewart!"

"Well, as long as it doesn't turn into a circus," he says aloud.

"No sir," I say, propping in the corner beside some sort of ancient lance and his red academic gown with white fur collar hung on a hat stand. "No. It's a film. Director's rules! Definitely."

He slumps down into his chair. It is strangely low backed and wooden. There is, I now notice, something said to be "A Fragment of the Thigh Bone of Jacopo di Ronc" in a silver framed glass case on his desk. There is a statuette on the window sill of a naked guy, draped partly in what looks like a toga and labeled Vesailus. There is a collection of brown plastic half cups from the Cafe-bar. There are exam papers in pink piles on the floor around the room. There's the smell of wet wool, an open packet of Anadine

on the floor, a briefcase with its clasp twisted and a sticker worn across it with a picture of a screaming child, looking like Kenny in *South Park*, in a red crossed circle like something out of Ghostbusters. Being very anti-noise, anti-child or anti-child-abuse; I can't work out which.

"Geez," I say, involuntarily.

He adjusts his tie, which is blue paisley to his jacket's bleached grey, and asks Karen to explain what it is that she wants to do.

"To the camera," he says, "if you want." And I notice his lips when he smiles are cracked and pale and that his teeth are bone white behind them, but unevenly collapsed onto each other, and the highpoints of his cheeks, which are pinkish, are positively glowing.

Using the light from the window as backlight, which is fairly atmospheric, I catch the left side of Krotow, and Karen full frontal. I turn Krotow into a silhouette and Karen's nervousness, which has spread into her fingers which now barumbas across the synopsis she has brought with her, I tilt myself towards.

I keep saying to myself that basic rule: "Form follows function. Form follows function . . ."

I film the two of them like it's *Basic Instinct* (in which the cinematography of Jan De Bont is truly a treat, I might add), while Karen reads from the synopsis she's prepared on two sheets of legal paper she typed up last night, by the bay window in the pale moon light (this, of course, only being suggested).

I think to myself: "There are things you can do in a situation like this to increase the tension. Scorsese says: 'Don't split the screen.' He says: 'Don't go flying with the Rolling Stones.' 'Don't crash cut. Never.'" But then again Scorsese also made *Kundun*, so what would he know?

Now I'm catching bits of conversation.

Karen is saying, somewhat tonguingly, I think: "What was that stuff again about Joan of Arc and the butterflies?" (something like that).

To which Krotow comments: “Oh, Karen! Babe you are Madonna, you know. You are that famous singer whose name is Madonna.”

Okay, so maybe I don’t hear this at all; but the battery warning symbol is showing and I have other things to worry about. Namely: is the battery running out before I get back to our flat for a new one? Like: I am supposed to be a professional here and this shouldn’t happen. Like: I bet this never happened to Rodriguez, ever. The light flickers red, indicating my time is nearly up.

I notice, suddenly in my panic, a Roxy Cinema flyer for the Festival of the Waters Film Festival, pinned up right on the wall behind Krotow.

9

Goethe once wrote (and Professor Alton of the USP Department of Languages, Cultures and Civilizations quoted it, photocopied)—that’s Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), the famous poet, novelist, playwright, natural philosopher and diplomat, author of *The Sorrows of Young Werther*—Goethe once wrote:

What a man notices and feels about himself seems to me the least part of him. He is more inclined to see what he lacks than what he has, to remark what worries than what delights him and enlarges his mind. Soul and body forget about themselves when things are pleasant and happy, and they are only reminded of themselves again by something unpleasant. A man writing of himself and his past will therefore mostly note what is cramping and painful.

(Library Shelf: Short Loan: Lecture Notes—A. P.
Alton “An Introduction to European Philosophy”)

10

As we leave Krotow’s office, me tracking back, Karen is happier than she’s been all day. She says she doesn’t want to wait around while I ruin my life. She says this quite brightly, I think. She says

if I want to get hooked up with Milroy, and won't listen to her, then she just can't wait around to watch it happen. She says:

"You know, you're wrong about Julian Krotow. I happen to know he's treasurer of the Film Festival Committee. So he's hardly 'anti-film,' Ciaran, or whatever you say. If that's what you're thinking."

"Whatever," I say.

But then she says she wants to go to the library to meet Colleen and then to the Student Union where they'll plan Satanic rituals and choose the people they want to sacrifice.

Of course, I don't actually catch all of this, but my camera phone is capable of picking up undercurrents, sub-surface things that would otherwise go unnoticed, and I tell Karen I'll see her in the bar at two, and if she wants to bring Colleen then that's her business, but to my mind she is no more than an extra and should probably get on with her own life.

I stop at Steve Milroy's door (on which I note, a little ominously I admit, there is a poster of Gérard Depardieu), and I knock loudly.

When behind the door a voice seems to say "Hi! Hi!" I think I'll just forget the whole thing and go out onto the front lawn where a band is now playing "Solved" by Unbelievable Truth, though it's not Unbelievable Truth only a band that wants to sound like them. But, figuring this is just being spooked by Karen's increasingly anti-film, anti-life, anti-us attitude, I don't go.

Instead, I turn around so my phone is catching the corridor receding behind me and I go into the office. Backwards.

The effect (though I'll have to check this in the rushes) is that the whole film seems to be disappearing into a new scene, a new low key, without cutting at all. And I think:

"I should have thought of doing this earlier!"

The corridor becomes bright and hard. Keeping it in focus, I catch the edge of the door with my left shoe, and push. The door sweeps across the frame from right to left. And slaps closed. The

venetians are half open. The shot looks dark over all, with a few highlight areas (see: Michael Ribager: *On Directing*).

“Dr Milroy?” I ask.

I’m continuing to phone film the back of the door, which is quite grainy actually, and on which there is a dimly lit cute calendar from Pete’s Pets featuring a muppet (name unknown), a rainbow colored scarf that hangs down to the floor, a peeling sticker for Classic Coke, a poster of Jean Harlow.

I pan slowly to the right. A half turn. Then left. The bookshelves provide a rapid line of composition, leaving behind the door in the direction of the window and passing such absolute winners as *An Introduction to Communication* by Gerhl and Wesserman, past *Radical Underworld* by Iain McCalman, then his Festival of the Waters Special Film Award, shaped as it is like a bronze wave, then several novels by John Updike, *Modern Myth in the Films of Jesús Franco*. Light reading, right? until I’m meeting the glow through the venetians straight on, which is splitting the frame into seven identical widths, and I can make out Milroy.

There’s an obvious flaw in all this which I cannot immediately pinpoint. I think perhaps I have done something wrong. The linearity of the thing. The way the action rises. The sense of thematic purpose. But for the moment there’s Dr Steven Milroy: his head thrown right back as he lies collapsed in his chair, his head in a clear plastic bag, his neck in some kind noose hung from the curtain rail, and completely buck naked.