

David Jhave Johnston / INTERSTITIAL



Screen shots from *Interstitial*, 2006

Interstitial is a work which deals with the fundamentals of existence: life and death. It does not attempt to sentimentalize nor deconstruct these issues. Death is death; life is life.

Interstitial art, any work of art whose basic nature falls between, rather than within, the familiar boundaries of accepted genres or media

Equanimity is strived for: witnessing that neither alters nor demands anything of its subject, an impartial passionless gaze that allows abstract form to disentangle matter from context. In other words, if a dead cat floating in shallow shore water conventionally evokes repulsion, rejection, withdrawal and disgust, this work attempts to circumvent normal cognitive responses, and see the decomposing cat as a fluid undulant field of phenomena distinct from its actual existence or its death or the ongoing process of its decay.

Spatial formal principles of the video composition are distinct from its content. Sunlight falling through water and swaying limbs is simply beauty. *Interstitial* cognition emerges in the presence of the unknown. Empty mind is nowhere.

The subjects of the film fit into 3 broad categories:

1. A dead cat decomposing on the edge of the St-Lawrence river in the centre of Montreal, Canada, filmed over a 10 day period from soon after its death to its inevitable disappearance into the current.
2. A black cricket metamorphosing into a newborn dragonfly on a loaf of bread over a two hour period at an urban picnic.
3. Micro-landscapes from inter-tidal pools in the vicinity of Vancouver focusing on the anatomy and innate beauty of inert materials immersed in the viscid swirling oscillations evoked by tides.

Taboos

Physical decomposition is inevitable for all physical forms; death simply is. What arises decays. All times have known death, most of us have thought of it, yet most of us have rarely examined the actual changes that bodies undergo after death. Putrefying corpses are not considered compost for high culture; our unease with the actual impermanence of existence exiles physical rot to folk legends of ghouls and comic book zombies dripping flesh. The reality is much more mundane and sensual; it is us who rot: sheaths of our form slowly dissipating into other forms.

Taboos against death are widespread; the first autopsies were considered heretical and obscene desecrations; corpses are hidden beneath mounds of earth or consumed in flames. At the same time cultures are territorial, burial spaces are considered sacred land. Since long before Freud delineated the conjunction of eros and thanatos as central prohibitive tendencies in the psyche, humans have avoided decaying flesh of humans; it physiologically evokes repugnance. Yet in the Dzog Chen literature spiritual practice of Tibet, spiritual practitioners are advised to spend time in the charnel grounds, among corpses, in order to arrive at a still clear equanimity in the face of death. Bodies are envisioned being chopped to bits or cooked and roasted; sutras recited to corpses. In this sense the work is a spiritual purative work, seemingly in contrast yet somewhat in harmony with Plastination.

Interstitial fluid, in biology

Constraints

The filmmaking process:

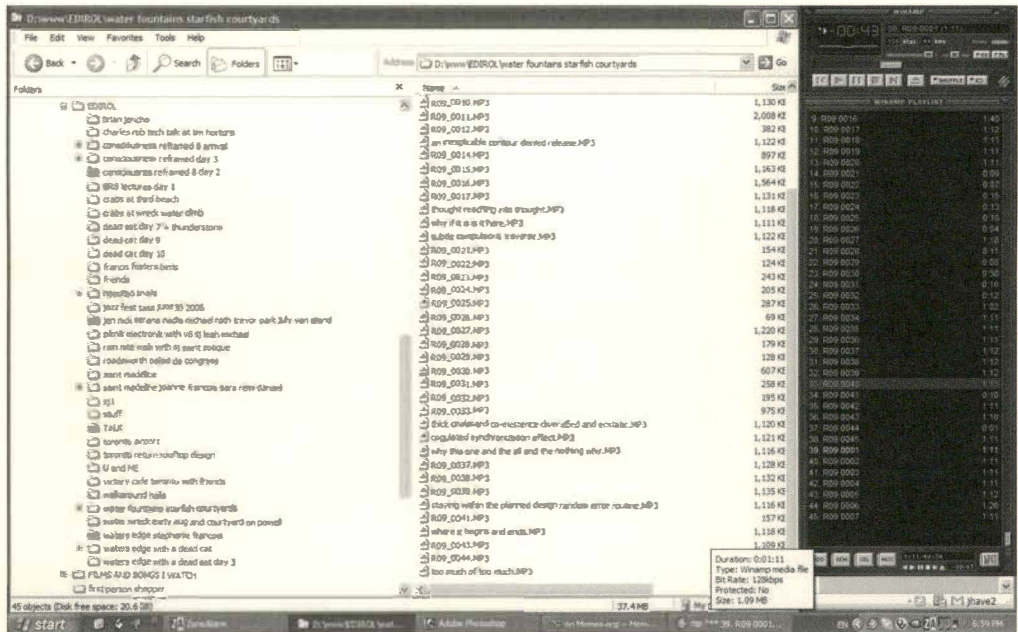
1. The equipment needed to fit into my pockets; and to be discrete, instantaneously usable, yet of sufficient quality for online viewing.
2. The subjects of the film (the objects, insects, and animals) were not to be manipulated in anyway, but simply witnessed.
3. No external/artificial lighting.
4. No changing any details of the context or setting.
5. No post-processing.

The web-design:

1. The work is generative from an archive of material (400 AV files, action script.)
2. No interactivity. The work is simply viewed.
3. No special effects. The only transition is a cross fade.
4. No end. Endless loop: once begun the website streams: sequentially then in stochastic variations ad infinitum...
5. Only the rhythm of the editing changes (as breath changes). This is controlled homeostatically by bandwidth and cpu power.

Digital poetics occurs at a computer, but instead of pulling out a feather and quill or a moleskin and a fountain pen, and instead of opening *Notepad* or *Word* or whatever processing software normally allows access to writing, alternative methodologies exist:

- step 1. record a lot of little distinctive audio/video files
- step 2. import, sort and open in a viewer/player
- step 3. slip clear and resiliently concise into empathic logic
- step 4. rename the audio files if words occur in your mind
- step 5. upload
- step 6. display file names on website during playback



Screenshot from "Interstitial"

Poetic Method

I am a poet
Or at least I call myself one
Even though I rarely write in verse

I am a digital poet
In naming files and displaying those phrase-like named structures
Concurrently with the images or sounds or films that they name
Poems emerge