

**Application for funding:  
THIS FLEETING**

(originally entitled HOMILY)

In 1996 I was handed 22 ten-minute reels of 16mm home movies. They had been acquired by a couple I then knew who, among other things, purchase antiques at estate sales and resell them for a living. At this particular estate sale they had to purchase the entire contents of the house as a part of the deal. Among the many items they then sifted through were these reels of 16mm film. Having no use for them, but knowing of my keen interest in film materials, they gave the canisters to me. I was thrilled and excited by this acquisition, as I have for many years had not just an avid interest in ephemeral cinema, but also in genuine personal histories. After viewing the film several times and considering its content I was able to determine a number of basic facts, including the span of time these films covered (1948-1957), their maker's social class, and a lot about the leisure time and interests of this particular individual and his family. North American home movies of this era would have typically been filmed on Regular 8 film for most amateurs, while 16mm would have been reserved for the more advanced and committed amateur, and—given the expense of 16mm film stocks and cameras—the wealthier amateur. This is immediately in evidence in the content of some of the films - cruises to Alaska, trips to Europe and more exotic locales, fancy cars, etc. I have since screened them numerous times to friends and for the public in various configurations, both as a way of passing on my enthusiasm and intrigue around these films as well as a way to continue to examine their content and their construction. Shot on gorgeous Kodachrome and Black and White and all in immaculate condition (likely only ever viewed once by their original owner like so many home movies), the films are an incredible document of a time in history and a stunning record of people, places and activities.

During this same period, I have been developing strategies and methodologies of creative expression involving, among other things, the reinterpretation of found footage. By heightening and celebrating the original intention of a film "text" I am also injecting it with new meaning borne from the reconfiguring. This has been in tandem with an immersive interest in hand-processing and the manipulation of the physical film surface through scratching, colouring, tinting, toning and marking in various ways. German filmmaker Jurgen Reble and his performative work with the Schmelzdahin group (German for "melt away"), the live film presentations of San Francisco collective silt, the theory-based curatorial/16mm performance works of San Francisco artist Luis Recoder, the works of Toronto media artists Mike Hoolboom and Carl Brown, and local filmmaking friends and peers (Julia Burns, John Price, Julian Lawrence, Richard Reeves among others) have all been influential, impacted upon, and fed this ongoing fascination and focus. The result for me has been a performance-based body of film work developed over the past 5 years which includes HORIZONTAL FIX, I AM WATCHING, ESCAPE VELOCITY and NIGHTSKY. All of these pieces are by their nature in constant flux and "transformative" in nature. As the original

film content gets damaged, worn, scratched, and broken, the performance content changes to address these shifts and highlight the ephemeral, fragile and fleeting nature of the moving image medium.

With all of this in mind, and after much thought and analysis around the 16mm home movies in my possession and their content, I am now inspired to reinvent and retool meaning from these films.

Until now this retooling for me has meant a conscious highlighting of intended moments of spectacle, beauty and awe. With *HOMILY*, I will for the first time be exploring precisely the opposite.

With any pointing and shooting of a motion picture camera, the intention inherent in the choices of subject, framing, length and innumerable other subtle decisions are of central concern. In the home movie these choices involve a variety of levels of the personal: interest, obligation, social conformity (or non-conformity), boredom, and others. All of these factors impact on the choices made by the individual who is filming. It is this arena which interests me in regards to the home movies discussed. What choices are being made? What is motivating these choices? And what of moments—the most intriguing to me - that are unintentional, unplanned, and finally, undesired?

The home movie maker lifts the camera to his eye to film the passing action. Does he press the trigger too soon? Does he pan across to some other action with no regard for the pan? Or does the outside world interfere in his intentions? These subtle gestures and questions are what I am exploring and uncovering: the stories told that reach far beyond the superficial sheen of a holiday home movie. These are stories about personal interaction, about the imposition of the camera on a culturally determined situation, and about the sociological movement and physical gesture of a small group of people and their extended world over a period of ten years in the middle of the 20th century. This film then, is my exploration and a personal accounting of a few dozen reels of an anonymous life.

## STRUCTURE

The film is centred around a number of formal guiding principles which lends it a distinct structure and aesthetic while still allowing for reasonable interpretive latitude. Nearly every canister of film has some kind of labeling on it, some extremely rudimentary ("fight") and others more detailed (Paris nightclubs, summer 1949). Each of these titles function as headings throughout the film, and so each reel plays a role: twenty-two rolls of film, twenty two "sections". Each section consists of material extracted from the corresponding roll and ranges in length from a few seconds to several minutes, depending on the content and exploration involved. Footage is re-presented in a variety of ways, including optical printing (slowing movement, freezing moments, repositioning the footage onto smaller areas of the frame), hand-processing (colour and black & white), and some physical

alteration of the film surface (scratching). I am interested in applying formal elements generally associated with a Structural Film strategy to open up emotional and philosophical discussions. The final look of the film is that of a series of short dense chapters, spaced by black leader. The images build upon one another as the film unfolds, creating a cumulative effect and impact where the viewer seeks and finds meaning only to be quickly thrown into a whole other site of potential. This potential - personal, political, textural and sociological—is as wide ranging as the content of the films themselves, approaching with equal interest the invention of personal history and strategies for self-reflection.

## EXAMPLES

Here are a few examples of scenes within just a few of the reels of film that are used in the body of the film.

The first segment is a reel entitled AUTOMOTIVE PARADE, DETROIT "50TH ANNIVERSARY" and involves the examination of a completely innocuous pan - it is evident that it is unintentional, possibly through the error of leaving the camera running: the pan is angled as if the camera is being turned with the body of the filmer and away from his eye while he drops it to his chest. While initially a seemingly empty gesture, by reworking it (slowing it down, repeating it, in a sense studying it) there is a rendering of meaning away from the parade in the rest of the shot and an increased interest and intrigue in the panning camera gesture. What is he choosing not to film here? How does our interpretation of the images photographed shift when the camera is not controlled?

In the reel entitled "DANCING GIRLS, ON STAGE NIGHT OF STARS", I am interested in playing with the portion of the title "night of stars" and the photographic rendering of memory. Herein, a man is filming a vaudeville show of dancing girls on a small stage in a Parisian club. When a flashbulb goes off it almost entirely erases the image he seeks to capture. Through a manipulation of this flash moment and the seconds leading up to it and following it, frames that were lost are emphasized and shift from being empty to drenched in an entirely different meaning and potential. Surface - normally considered a cosmetic concern - moves into the place of meaning wherein scratches, dirt and aging evident on the white light-bleached surface of the celluloid transform its potential.

In "ALASKA 1951 - VANCOUVER HOUSES", there is a striking unintended moment wherein the man filming turns his camera on fellow passengers. While these passengers gather in front of the camera, a non-participant barely visible in the background meets the camera's gaze in the upper left corner of the frame and then quickly averts her eyes. In presenting this whole moment and then moving in on the background action we uncover a far more interesting relationship between camera and eye than the intended subjects have to offer.

## SOUND DESIGN

Sound design for this piece is extremely sparse. Most sound appears in the darkneses between visual elements as counterpoint. By and large, images remain silent with a few exceptions. Sound elements will be produced both in the field and by manipulating existing sound snippets with software on the computer. All of my sound thus far has been created this way, either in collaboration with others (Owen O'Toole for A CURRENT FEAR OF LIGHT, and Claudio Cacciotti for I AM WATCHING WHILE PARANOIA FOLLOWS and HORIZONTAL FIX) or by myself, as with my most recent pieces ESCAPE VELOCITY and NIGHTSKY. The sound will differ significantly in its focus on restraint. Environmental urban and technology-based sounds will continue to be primary, evocative of a time and place as well as invented space.