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Ayoto Ataraxia:
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Fotograf, Podcaster, Autor und Filmemacher Ayoto Ataraxia porträtiert in seinem Film «My Film with Andrei, Or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Document a Sex Party» eine Gruppe junger Männer aus dem Umfeld einer hedonistischen, sex-positiven Bewegung Berlins, die anlässlich des Geburtstags ihres Freundes Andrei eine Orgie organisieren. Doch «to be blunt, the orgy does not take place – at least not in this film» warnt Felix Ruckert in einer Rezension zum Film bereits vor: «Ataraxia's view of the confusion and forlornness of its protagonists is post-coital and marked by melancholy and desperation that sometimes turns into cynicism. Its heroines are both dramatic and banal, opulent and cheap, just like the cell phone cameras with which the whole film was shot.» Was hier zum Vorschein kommt, ist «Ataraxia's high art of endurance and compassion, his affection and tenderness for a masculinity in the process of detoxification, a masculinity that has lost and must eventually pass away.» Im Gespräch mit Regisseur Ataraxia wollen wir über neue Zwänge von sexueller Befreiung sprechen, über sein Zusammenleben mit den Protagonisten, das gewonnene Vertrauen, den distanzierten Blick seines Films, sowie über die Darstellbarkeit einer Orgie und deren Relevanz.

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It was the summer of 2021, we survived the first winter of the plague. Bitcoin mirrored the movements of the people with a retracement after an initial dip, hope was back in the air. Hope however, is a limited resource.

With the arrival of the pandemic, marked also the end of an era for me. I worked for nearly two decades in the realm of photography, fashion and advertising. I observed and constructed fantasies of existing and pervasive ideological codes. 2021 was also the year I gave up on my colonialist moniker, Paul Jung. The white conforming name started to create calluses like dead weight on my spirit. I came to realize that much of the work I've done before was nothing more than the obsessive mining of ideas, for capital. The recycling of concepts has reached a point where the wellspring of nostalgia has been long been dried out. A quote from Chris Marker's *Sans Soleil* [1983] echoes in my mind, He wrote: I've been round the world several times and now only banality still interests me.

As Foucault sardonically stated in 1976, tomorrow sex will be good again, but all the while, the modernizing society has been pushing towards liberation of every aspect, until we are reminded again by a great plague of existentialism. Unification of wills immediately are dissolved. Where does one stand between privacy and the free flowing? How do we democratically locate positive and negative powers between the individual and the collective? Where does the responsibility lie?

All the while, I've lost all prospects to work. I was recently recovering from Covid. The governments of the Global North encourages its citizens to stay at home without bleeding into totalitarianism, it borrows from the future to provide financial aid to its people. However, I came to discover that I belong neither here nor there. Too American for German social support, too Germany to receive American support, not dark enough for racial support, not queer enough queer support, lying on the wrong side of the gender spectrum, not normative enough for normative crowds. But it was the summer of 2021, those who have access to funds are looking for a place for security, and cryptocurrency is on the up tick. The promise of NFTs and ideas of Web 3.0 seems to be the last bastion of hope for some last minute speculation. One more visit of the Casino of Capitalism before it all crashes and burns. And those still high on hopium, are enthusiastic to take their money for another spin around the roulette table one more time.

Meanwhile, I lazed around forlornly, watching films, reading dead philosophers. Then Summer came. I decided one morning to Stop Worrying, and Document a Sex Party. That summer, people ventured outdoors cautiously, I caught up with some of my sex positive friends. Bitcoin might be recovering from its dip, but masculinity and patriarchy was still on the down swing. The functions and inner workings of "cis-men" becomes ever more elusive. In *My Film with Andrei, Or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Document a Sex Party* [2021], the cast I decided to focus on were that of a modern Dostoyevskian novel: Raul, a student of Theology, who has left the church. He's also a gardener, a food-bike delivery man. He was convinced by

fellow Romanian, Andrei, a student of political science turned self-improvement enthusiast. He sold the idea of van life funded through crypto day trading, to Raul. I was introduced to the pair of Romanians through Fabián, an outcast of sorts from a conservative Bavarian village, a carpenter and fellow van dweller, who happens to also be a crypto enthusiast. Fueled by youth, testosterone and lust, they agreed to participate in a week of documentation.

Several films were provided the roadmap as well as inspirations to this venture. One that stood out was the story of Frederick Wiseman, which in 1967, produced and directed the seminal film, *Titicut Follies* [1967], which set off a series of studies on social institutions, hospitals, high schools or police departments, displaying social structures at play. His works inspired filmmaker Nick Broomfield, together with Sandi Sissel, produced *Chicken Ranch* [1983], which documented a brothel in Nevada. The film was a turning point for the direct documentary genre, where the subjective director, would be in a way, objectified by the camera, as we observe him, observing the subjects. On my first viewing of *Chicken Ranch*, Broomfield continues the tradition of Wiseman, invisible, pure subject. However, the film includes a director's commentary, providing an insight, to the entire process. Subsequent films of Broomfield, provides this signature ingredient, where we observe Broomfield himself, directly in the gaze of the film. We witness him struggling after his subjects, chasing the object in question, often failing to grasp at the truth.

I thought about these men whom I've met. I wanted to document their quest, their lives, and their stories. Especially at a time, where the discussion of sexuality and masculinity is questioned. But the point of view of these characters, are precisely the most taboo. But furthermore, I wish to localize and contain their expression, through the gaze of my observation. Where do I situate my own gaze and failure, within a post colonial subjectivity? I found no appetite, nor reaction, nor interest, nor audience, in pursuing the ideological parroting of my peers. With the rise of the plague, it is also the time where anti-Asian hate crimes was spiking. With this, in conjunction with #metoo, Black Lives Matter, there was an interest of works like Cathy Park Hong's *Minor Feelings*, or Ocean Vuong's *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, or Lee Isaac Chung's *Minari* [2020]. However, the common thread amongst all these works, are a creation of a victim narrative that forces the diasporic Asian population into one unifying story. The result is a dead end construct, where individual experiences and future experiences are overshadowed by the need to conform to the grand victim narrative of a hegemonic past.

As a racialized individual, feeling constantly Sartre's shame of objectification, and through sublimating the experience through pride and owning the objectification, I found the only way through, was to do the impossible. To objectify my own subjectivity, which became this film. This is my attempt of what Sartre claimed as impossible, to be the subject and object simultaneously. I combined both behind the camera and

before the camera, I traded places with Andrei in our documentation. I wished to return the gaze, for representation of radicalized minorities in film which does not ever translate to displacing the white supremacy structure, because the subjective master remains invisible. Here with My Film with Andrei, Or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Document a Sex Party [2021], I am the racialized minority, now the ethnographer, who has learned the tools of subjectivity of his master, and is now gazing back.

The title of My Film with Andrei, Or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Document a Sex Party is an amalgamation of two films, My Dinner with Andrei [1981] and Kubrick's film, Dr Strangelove, or How I learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb [1964]. Regarding My Dinner with Andrei, the two opposing viewpoints carves out the morphology of our society, whereas in Doctor Strangelove, we see the fictional fantasy of the moment right before the apocalypse before nuclear winter. My Film with Andrei, Or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Document a Sex Party takes places within the two extremes: are we witnessing the end of times, or the beginning of a new dialectical synthesis?

Agnès Varda made the film Documenteur [1981], featuring a young French woman, separated from her lover, tries to find a home in L.A. for herself and her son. This film provided much of the self objectification as backdrop. What does it mean for a woman to take back her own objectivity? To objectify oneself, not from the lens of the other? How does one look at the difficulties and frustrations of oneself, without the lens of victimization? And as I come to terms with the observation of racialized asian men in diaspora, together with racialized black women, being at the bottom of dating statistics, how should I understand that within the larger society?

Finally, Michael Rubbo was funded by the National Film Board of Canada to make a film about Fidel Castro, titled Waiting for Fidel [1974]. The film set out to bring two Canadians, a socialist, former premier of Newfoundland Joey Smallwood and a capitalist, the broadcaster Geoff Stirling, to travel to Cuba on a private jet, to discuss with Fidel Castro about the Cuba-United States relations. It contained the Hegelian desires of bringing a communist and a capitalist together, with the hopes and synthesizing the Cold War dialectic. The film title takes after Samuel Beckett's play, Waiting for Godot, as Fidel never shows up for the agreed interview. The entire film was a failure from the standpoint of its original goal, to discuss these topics with Castro himself. However, the film successfully captures a slice of Cuba, during this moment in time, that has never been documented.

My Film with Andrei, Or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Document a Sex Party is a film made under the financial and monetary constraints, filmed seven days leading up to Andrei's birthday, where the people in the film seek to orchestrate a sex party, after the first summer of the pandemic. The film hopes to follow in the footsteps of Waiting for Fidel, to ultimately fail in capturing the promised land of liberated sexuality. But in all its excess, it attempted to touch on the truly invisible and taboo.

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In “My Film with Andrei Or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Document a Sex Party”

director Ayoto Ataraxia portrays a group of young people around Berlin’s hedonistic bubble and sex-positive movement, who are about to organize an orgy on the occasion of their friend Andrei’s birthday. Shot between two lockdowns in the socially cautious summer of 2021, we observe Andrei, Raoul, Fabian, Charlotte, Jenny, Mathilde – and often also the author himself – hanging in their shared kitchens, bedrooms and mobile homes, fooling around at small festivals in the green surroundings of the city and strolling on the expanses of Tempelhofer Feld.

To be blunt, the orgy does not take place – at least not in this film. Ataraxia’s view of the confusion and forlornness of its protagonists is postcoital and marked by melancholy and desperation that sometimes turns into cynicism. Its heroines are both dramatic and banal, opulent and cheap, just like the cell phone cameras with which the whole film was shot. Despite or perhaps, because of the simplicity of the technique and stylistic means, the author succeeds again and again in creating powerful and vivid images that often tell more than the strained and often seemingly endless monologues of the protagonists. Ataraxia offers them a welcome stage on which they present unfiltered reflections on love, life, the general state of humanity and, in particular, their specific situation of young males in a post-feminist, neoliberal Europe, devastated by the plague. Amorous relationships, sexual constellations, orgasm frequencies, party locations, as well as various life styles models are discussed in detail. The young men who mostly conduct these monologues are both touching and disturbing. They are beyond conventional masculinity, yet still enjoy all of its privileges. Handsome, educated and financially independent thanks to Bitcoin and digital nomadism they struggle between narcissism and nihilism, between hope and fear. They are of system-compatible flexibility and availability, although at the same time they cultivate the attitude of rebels and dropouts. But the achievements of emancipation, such as the company of financially and emotionally independent companions and seemingly unlimited sexual freedom, also seem to have made them losers, at once liberating and robbing them of sense and sensuality, reducing them to find meaning – and childlike pleasure – in counting orgasms.

With this generation, the patriarchy is certainly drowning, but there is still no promised land in sight. The most touching moments in the film are the question marks at the end of the sentences, the moments of silence and pause, often accompanied by somber string sounds. (Also created on Ataraxia’s laptop, who also draws as a musician and composer). In these uncertainties and instabilities lies the power of the film, showing Ataraxia’s high art of endurance and compassion, his affection and tenderness for a masculinity in the process of detoxification, a masculinity that has lost and must eventually pass away.

Ataraxia, Ayoto: Material for Critical Fridays, 2022.

Ruckert, Felix: Sense Surfing. URL: <https://www.ayotoataraxia.com/projects/my-film-with-andrei-review-by-felix-ruckert/> [01.09.22]

